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INTRODUCTION: USING THE STORIES

When high school students are taught about Catholicism, they learn details about church history and belief and also, we hope, develop a personal connection to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They become more aware of the complexities of our multicultural society—from issues like abortion, drugs, and lifestyles to a compassionate response to poverty and war—which demand both a moral and a merciful response.

By now most of these students have been confirmed. They will soon be voting, going to college or technical school, heading off to a full-time job, and living on their own for the first time. In order to cope well with this new independence, Catholic young people need to deepen their awareness of the Good News, to see that it is relevant for them in the twenty-first century.

The stories in this book cannot hope to cover all the issues raised in *Jesus of History, Christ of Faith*, but they can help students enter into the life and times of the Gospel and encounter Jesus himself in a new, more mature way. Of course, the stories are one author's imaginative look at the Gospel stories and characters. The stories are not intended to improve on the Gospels themselves.

We recommend that you not simply read the questions in this leader's guide to the class or group. Rather, use the questions to prepare for leading the discussion, but allow the process to flow organically. Begin with open-ended questions, such as these:

- What message did this story have for you?
- What did you like or dislike about the characters?
- What surprised you?
- What would you do differently in this situation?
- Have you had a similar experience?

Feel free to take your discussion in another direction; you know your students and can address issues of interest to them. Commentary in this guide is provided in brackets and italics, but it is not intended to be the single right answer. The same is true for the Scripture connections. The first refer-

ence gives the location in the Gospels from which the story was written. Other references highlight different aspects of the story. If you read the passages ahead of time, you may be able to incorporate them into your discussion.

We hope this guide will be a springboard for discussion, journal writing, sharing, and group activities such as role-playing or writing new endings for the stories. The stories may raise more questions than they answer. Some endings are ambiguous, leaving part of the conflict unresolved. Likewise, some questions in the guide do not have easy answers. As the group leader, how should you handle this? Bravely lead your group into the thick of the questions. Help the young people think deeply about how Christ is present in their lives. You will not answer all their questions, but you may open doors for them to find the answers.

As *Jesus of History, Christ of Faith* says on page 310:

The question posed by Jesus in the Gospels almost two thousand years ago is put to each of us today: "Who do you say that I am?" . . . As you search out your own answer to Jesus' question, you are invited to do so with others in the church who can share that journey with you.

GUIDE FOR "THE MIDWIFE," "THE YOUNG WOMAN," AND "THE DAY LABORER"

Theme. Chapter 3, "The World of Jesus," and chapter 4, "Daily Life in Jesus' Time"

Background

It is easy for us, living so many centuries after Gospel times, to forget that the people who lived then were as real and human as we are. Their lives and worldview were quite different from ours. Yet they were truly human, experiencing joy, confusion, frustration, and love just as we do today. This trio of fictional stories gives a brief glimpse at three people who could have lived during Gospel times.

Use the photos, drawings, and descriptions in the textbook, as well as the Bible itself, to enter imaginatively into Jesus' time. The more we understand the details of Jewish life at this time, the more significance Jesus' words can have for us today. Please note that many parts of this chapter can be used with other stories, including "The Teacher's Wine" and "God Saves."

Questions and Notes

Daily life: the typical house. In "The Midwife," Tamar describes how twin sisters gave birth in the same room at the same time. Why did they do this? *[The house had only one room where there were no animals.]* In "The Young Woman," Esther describes sharing her bed with her little sister. And Isaac, in "The Day Laborer," talks of eight people in a squalid, leaky, one-room house near a smelly tannery.

Most of us today have much more privacy and less overcrowding. What was life like for people in such close quarters? Why do overcrowded conditions make life more difficult and dangerous? *[Crime is more common in poor living condi-*

tions, and disease can spread rapidly in overcrowded quarters.] Isaac, the day laborer, says, "What misery life is." Discuss why Isaac feels this way.

What good things might you be missing by living less communally? *[Esther, the young woman, is very close to her sister. And she has known Moses all her life. The midwife knows everything about the families of Bethlehem. Those who live in close communities feel connected to one another.]*

The Jewish family: a community of faith. In "The Young Woman," thirteen-year-old Esther portrays her feelings about entering a new stage of life. What does she expect married life to be like in her community? *[She will have adult responsibilities for her husband and children, and she will have social standing as a wife and a mother.]* How has Esther's life prepared her for marriage? *[Her parents are good role models of a loving marriage. She has witnessed the way they care for each other.]*

Tamar speaks not of her family, but of her long history with the people of Bethlehem. How does this history help Tamar in her work? Can you think of anyone in your life who has as much knowledge of people as Tamar likely did? For Isaac and his family, the love and companionship demonstrated in the other two stories seem largely absent. Why do you think this is so?

Betrothal and marriage. Esther's parents arrange her marriage to Moses. It may be difficult for us to conceive of people being happy in arranged marriages. What would be the difficulties of arranged marriage? *[If parents make the choice simply to gain status and riches rather than to find a good mate for their child, the result could be unhappy. In society today, we believe in falling in love with someone before marrying. For us, living with someone we do not know well would be difficult.]* Esther's parents have an intimate knowledge of her personality. What did they likely consider in making this decision? *[Compatibility of temperament, mutual affection, contentment, security.]*

Men and women in ancient Jewish society. Modern North American culture strongly condemns patriarchal systems as being oppressive to women. We must be careful,

however, to avoid condemning all Jewish men of Gospel times as unkind, and portraying all Jewish women as subjugated. How does each story portray women's lives? *[Esther and Tamar live within communities that seem to support them. Isaac and his family are on the fringes of their society and are ill-treated because of their poverty. Isaac mistrusts his wife and assumes the worst about her motives.]*

Like us, Tamar, Isaac, and Esther think about the future. What are their attitudes? *[Isaac has little hope. Tamar sees herself as old at fifty-six, but she seems contented. Esther has mixed feelings about marriage, but she takes delight in Moses and can envision a happy home with him.]*

Social classes in the world of Jesus. Isaac's life is difficult. How does poverty affect him? *[Isaac is bitter about his poverty, his exhausting labor, and the hovel he lives in.]* Can you think of ways Isaac could change his life for the better? *[Isaac could love his family and treat them with respect. He could return the purse to the rich man or, if he keeps it, he could give some of the money to the beggar as he said he would.]* Do you think Isaac would be more capable of love if he were shown love and respect?

Discuss your own encounters with poverty through first-hand experience, such as a parent losing a job, or through visiting poverty-stricken areas. How would Isaac react to Jesus' message? How would the wealthy and powerful respond to Jesus' strong words about money? (It would be helpful to revisit this chapter when discussing the story "What Must I Do?")

Scripture Connections

- Proverbs 31:10–31 (the ideal wife)
- Matthew 19:1–15 (Jesus' teaching on marriage, blessing children)
- Matthew 18:23–35 (the unjust servant)