All Saints' Day: Remembering Who We Are

All Saints' Day is a special time in the church when we remember those who have died and give thanks for the ways they shared God's love with the world. For Lutherans, this day is not only about looking back with gratitude, but also about celebrating God's promise that nothing can separate us from God's love. In this milestone, children will remember the saints in their lives and discover that all baptized Christians are part of God's family.

Supplies:
Gather photos of loved ones who have died (optional), a candle (one large candle, or one for each child), paper, crayons or markers, and a children's Bible.
If you would like an additional children's book to use, *The Name Quilt* by Margot Apple is excellent and focuses on the importance of stories to keep us connected with others.

Set up the space:
Create a quiet gathering space. Place the candle(s) in the center and, if desired, arrange photos of family members, friends, or other important people around it.

Milestone

Opening prayer:
Dear God, thank you for the people who have taught us about your love. Thank you for family members, friends, teachers, pastors, and all the saints who have helped us know you. Be with us as we remember them today. Amen.

Scripture:
Today we remember the saints. In the Bible, saints are not just famous heroes of faith. Saints are all God's people who trust in God's promises. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who encourage us in faith. Read Hebrews 12:1-2a. Then, say something like: **I wonder who has helped you learn more about God. I wonder who has shown you kindness and love, courage and patience. I wonder what stories other people might tell about the ways you share God's love.** As you wonder with your child, you are not looking for "right" answers. This is a time for thoughtful reflection.

Say something like: **Sometimes when we hear the word "saint" we think of a super-Christian. Someone extra-ordinary. But Martin Luther taught us that every single baptized child of God is a saint. We are saints not because we are always good, but because God always loves us. And God is always good. Saints help us see God. I wonder who some of the saints in your life are.** Perhaps share about your own saints. This is a great time to invite stories, especially of loved ones who have died. **I wonder what you remember about (loved one.) I wonder how they shared God's love with you.**

Activity:
Light the candle(s) together. Say something like: **The light reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world. It also reminds us that God's love continues to shine through the lives of the saints.** If appropriate, name people being remembered. After each name, everyone can respond: "Thanks be to God."

You may choose to leave the candles lit or blow them out gently. Give each child paper and crayons. Invite them to draw a picture of someone who has helped them learn about God or of a favorite memory of a loved one. Allow a respectful silence as they draw.

As your time together draws to a close, or as children get antsy, say something like: **All Saints' Day helps us remember all the saints who have ever lived, especially the saints we have loved. It also helps us remember that "saint" is who we are. It is part of what it means to be a child of God.**

Closing Prayer:
Dear God, thank you for all the saints who have shared your love with us. Thank you for the people we remember today and for the stories they leave behind. Help us follow Jesus, trust your promises, and share your love with others. Keep us in your care until we join all your saints in praising you forever. Amen.

Incorporating the Milestone in Congregational Life:

Children can be invited to help create a "Cloud of Witnesses" display for your congregation's All Saints' service. They can arrange pictures, join the processional into service and set their pictures up for display, participate in candle lighting, or ring the bell after names are read.

If children have not already been taught how to make the sign of the cross at the baptismal font, this is a good time to teach this.

All Saints' Day helps us not shy away from talking about death with little ones, but helps them to see that even in death we are connected–through our baptism–to those who have gone before us.