The Ark and the Tent

Background

Focus: God’s presence in the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31, 35-40)

There are two Hebrew words that we translate into English as “ark.” One word refers to the giant boat that Noah built. The other word refers to the ark of the covenant. This latter was a box or chest that contained at least the tablets of the commandments, and, according to some traditions, the rod of Aaron and a vessel of manna.

Moses experienced God’s presence on the mountain, but also in the tent of meeting. In addition, God’s presence was in – or more likely seated on – a throne above the ark of YHWH. The two traditions of the tent and the ark came together in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was so important that it was described in detail twice, first in Exodus 25-31, as what, on Mt. Sinai, God told Moses to make, and secondly in Exodus 35-40, as a description of what was made following the directions given to Moses.

Material

The basket for The Ark and the Tent is on one of the Old Testament shelves.

It contains:

- 15 People of God figures
- the ark of the covenant
- the tent
- 4 tent coverings: blue linen, goats’ hair, red cloth, and tanned goatskin
- basket containing:
  - incense altar
  - 7-branched lamp
  - table
  - altar
  - basin

You’ll also need the desert box.

Movements

Bring the desert box to the circle. Go to the shelf and get the Ark and the Tent basket.

Words

Watch where I go to get this lesson.
Place the ark in the middle of the desert box.

When God gave the people the Ten Best Ways to live, they loved them so much that they wanted to have them always with them. God told them to build a box called an ark to keep them in and to cover the ark with gold. It had two golden angels on top. And it had poles on the sides so the people could always carry it with them wherever they went.

Place one of the people in the sand and move it toward the ark, then away again.

You can't just walk up to something as precious as the Ten Commandments. You need some way to get ready. They wondered what they could do.

Put down the altar of incense to your left of the ark.

God told them to put an altar of incense in front of the ark. They could burn the incense to make a good-smelling cloud of smoke.

Move the figure through the imaginary smoke, past the altar of incense, to the ark and then move the figure back to its original starting place.

You could walk through the smoke and smell its aroma. That could help you get ready. But that was not enough.

Put down the table of bread and the seven-branched lampstand.

God then told them to put a table with twelve pieces of unleavened bread on one side and a seven-branched lampstand called a menorah on the other side.

Move the figure between the table and the menorah, through the imaginary smoke, past the altar of incense, to the ark and then move the figure back to its starting place.

People would walk between the table with a piece of bread for each of the twelve tribes of Israel on one side and the menorah on the other side. That could also help them get ready, but that was still not enough.

THE FURNISHINGS OF THE TENT (STORYTELLER’S PERSPECTIVE)
Next they decided to put the walls of a tent around the ark, the incense altar, the table, and the menorah to keep this place set apart, to help get ready to come close to God’s presence.

Inside the tent they made a place called the Holy of Holies.

Over the roof they put four coverings. One was linen, with purple and red figures of cherubim woven into it. Another one was made from goats’ hair. The third one was rams’ skin dyed red, and finally the outer one was tanned goatskins. But that still was not enough.

Now only the priests could go inside.

Next they put in front of the tent an altar covered with bronze for sacrifices. They also made a huge bowl of bronze that the priests could wash in to get ready for prayer, and put that in front, too.

Then outside the whole tent and courtyard they put a fence made of cloth that could be rolled up and carried with them when they traveled. It marked the whole special area called the tabernacle.
Point to the figure in front of the tent.

This was not all. The priests began to wear special clothes to help them get ready inside this special place.

When all the tabernacle was finished, Moses blessed it. Aaron and all his sons were made the priests, and they took the tent and the ark wherever the People of God traveled. The Levites helped them care for the tabernacle and conduct the worship there.

God gave Aaron and his sons these words to bless the People of God: “The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his face to you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

Sit back for a moment and enjoy the whole layout of the tabernacle. Then begin the wondering.

The children, especially the girls, may already have spoken out, because the boys were the only ones who could go inside the tent. If they have not, leave plenty of room and feel the permission for them to speak, but let them make the discovery and reflect on its fairness. They will.

When the wondering is finished, take the tabernacle apart with care and place it in the basket. Return the basket to the shelf, and take the desert box back to its spot. Return to the circle and help the children decide what work they will get out today.