



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 15 JOHN THE BAPTIST

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

John the Baptist appears in Judea to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven. He warns the people to repent of their sins in order to prepare for the Lord's coming. He also talks of the one who will baptize the people "with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

KEY CONCEPTS

- Advent
- Baptism
- Preparing the way for the Lord

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Matthew 3:1-12

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's stories are told in church on the following Sundays:

Year A: Second Sunday of Advent



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

More than two hundred years after the end of the Exile, Israel is under Roman rule, with limited sovereignty. The Romans agree essentially to leave the Jews alone to practice their religion if they don't make trouble politically.

Has the Exile taught the people any lessons? John the Baptist thinks not. John may have come from a sect near the Dead Sea that separates itself from the rest of the society to retain their purity of righteousness. But John emerges from this community in order to put the people through a baptism of repentance. He comes to "prepare the way of the Lord" by urging people to make themselves right with God before the coming of the kingdom.

John's message closely resembles Jesus' later apocalyptic warnings in Matthew 24–26: "Be prepared, for you do not know when the master is coming."

Matthew's focus is on the kingdom of heaven, and how Jesus comes as a fulfillment of the law and of the prophets. During Advent, we are preparing for Jesus just as John the Baptist calls for us to do.



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

Because of his role as forerunner of Jesus' ministry, calling people to repent and to "prepare the way of the Lord," John the Baptist holds a significant place in Christian tradition.

John's baptism of Jesus is mentioned in the Thanksgiving Over the Water (*BCP*, p. 306) in the Rite of Holy Baptism. And it is prominent in many of our hymns, not only in those that are sung at Advent, but also those that are sung at Epiphany when we celebrate the baptism of our Lord and during Lent when we recognize "John, the Bridegroom's friend, [who] became the herald of Messiah's name" (#143, *The Hymnal 1982*, New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1985).

We observe the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist on June 24.



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to "check in" with group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- advent wreath with Advent candles or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. If you are using an Advent wreath, light the appropriate number of Advent candles.

Ask one of the members to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room.)

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- We gather here, O God, to prepare for your coming in the form of your Son Jesus Christ. Help us to prepare the way by turning our hearts to you as we hear your story of John the Baptist, the one who calls for us to wait for Jesus to come. This we pray in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the scene:

Instead of starting this session in the usual classroom, arrange to meet your group at the Baptismal font. For a few minutes, ask them what they know of John the Baptist and why he is such an important part of our history and traditions. Return to your meeting space for the story.

This story is easily told in your own words. Remember that John was not only a *preacher* but also a *baptizer*. Both of these aspects should be in your story.

At this time you do not need to explain or discuss the story. This is the time for the youth to hear the story. For now, simply let them absorb it in their minds and in their hearts. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*
- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a group member to act as *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- Why do you think God sent John the Baptist?
- What can we do to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in the participants' own words.



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the participants leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin: Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in righteousness and holiness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* (BCP, page 254)

End the lesson with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The participants respond

- Thanks be to God.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus to preach and teach. John encouraged people to

get right with God, to seek forgiveness and turn away from what was keeping them from being God's beloved community.

Part of being in community is seeking to right the relationships with those whom we have wronged. By acknowledging our wrongs and sincerely seeking forgiveness, we are able to repair the relationships we have broken, even with God.

- Have you ever hurt someone? How did you seek their forgiveness?
- Has someone hurt you? How did you forgive them?



Weaving God's Promises

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Participants identify how they can put the promises made in the baptismal covenant into action in their daily lives.

Materials:

- copies of “A Time for Action” worksheet (pp. 7-8), 1 per participant
- pens and pencils
- copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*

Preparation:

Make copies of the “A Time for Action” worksheet (pp. 7-8), 1 per group member.

Directions:

Before handing out the worksheet, turn to pages 302-308 in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Take a few minutes to review the prayers, questions, answers and oaths made in the baptismal service.

Discuss:

- What do you think? Are these things that you can do?
- Are you being asked to do too much?
- How realistic are these promises?

When the discussion is over, hand out the worksheets and tell the group to answer the questions posed. Allow about 10-15 minutes for this portion of the activity.

Close:

- Ask volunteers to share their answers with the group. Invite group members to take their papers home and to post them in their bedrooms.

A TIME FOR ACTION

Fill in the blanks or answer the question after each quote.

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Something I have done to accomplish this goal: _____

Something else I could or will do to accomplish this goal: _____

Do you put your whole trust in God's grace and love? _____

Something I have done to accomplish this goal: _____

Something else I could or will do to accomplish this goal: _____

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? _____

Something I have done to accomplish this goal: _____

Something else I could or will do to accomplish this goal: _____

So far, I think I'm doing pretty well with _____

I'm getting better at _____

Right now, I am not so good at _____

One thing I can start doing today is: _____



Weaving God's Promises

PRACTICING OUR FAITH BY “PRACTICING” BAPTISM

This is a great activity for children of all ages. Team up with other group leaders for a simulated baptism.

Materials:

copies of the *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979)

copies of *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing, 1985)

copies of *Wonder, Love, and Praise* (New York: The Church Pension Fund, Church Publishing, 1997)

baby doll

optional: video or digital camera

Preparation:

Arrange with your priest or a deacon to demonstrate a baptism for the group.

Select one of the hymns (see below) for the group to sing after the baptism.

Invite the organist or pianist to play one hymn for you after the demonstration.

Directions:

1. Ask volunteers in your group to act as *parents, godparents* and/or *sponsors* for the purposes of the demonstration.
2. Ask one or more to record or take pictures of the “baptism” for review later.
3. When the “baptism” is finished, sing one or two verses of the hymn you’ve chosen. Some suggestions for hymns are: #767 from *Wonder, Love, and Praise* or any of #294-300 in *The Hymnal 1982*.
4. If younger children are taking part in the activity, you might want to sing a simpler song like “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”



Weaving God's Promises

BAPTISM TRIVIA

Participants “test” their knowledge of the sacrament of Baptism and review the baptismal covenant through a trivia game.

Materials:

- buzzer buttons (one for each team)
- computer with slide show of trivia questions
- timer
- TV to project game
- candy/prizes for winners
- Optional:* Books of Common Prayer for students to refer to during the game

Preparation:

Use the questions and answers provided to make a slide show for the trivia game.

Directions:

1. Explain that students will be competing to see how much they know about Baptism
2. Remind group members that most or all of them were infants when they were baptized and cannot be expected to remember the rite! However, they should have learned the basics of the sacrament during their time in Sunday school.
3. If your group is big enough, divide into teams.
4. *Optional:* have students answer in the form of a question, similar to a popular trivia show.
5. *Optional:* have students write down any other questions they have about Baptism and ask a clergy person to answer them before the next class.

Questions:

1. When someone is baptized, what words does the clergy person say as they are pouring/sprinkling water onto the person's head?
2. What is the basin (usually made of stone) that holds the water called?
3. Who baptized Jesus?
4. What is sometimes given to the parents and/or Godparents of the baptized as a gift and symbol of Christ's light in the world?
5. Who stands in place of the infant being baptized to say the prayers?
6. Who can perform a baptism?

7. What is the oil called that is placed in the sign of a cross on the forehead after someone is baptized?
8. What does water symbolize in baptism?
9. True or False: Only babies can be baptized.
10. True or False: All baptisms must take place in a church.
11. True or False: We are adopted by God through the sacrament of Baptism
12. True or False: If a person is baptized in a different denomination, they do not have to be baptized again to be considered a member in the Episcopal Church.
13. True or False: When a baptism is held during a service, the entire congregation pledges their support.
14. True or False: Baptisms involve making 5 promises.

Answers:

1. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"
2. Font
3. John the Baptist
4. A candle
5. Godparent
6. Priest or Bishop
7. Chrism
8. Washing away of sins
9. False
10. False
11. True
12. True
13. True
14. False (there are 6)



Weaving God's Promises

“PREPARE THE WAY” BANNER

Group members design and make a banner to be displayed during Advent

Materials:

Note: Ask church members who sew for donations of supplies!

large piece of solid fabric, preferably blue or purple, cut into 3" x 4" pieces

felt squares or additional fabric for making letters (white or off white)

optional: iron-on transfer letters (found in craft stores)

fabric glue

scissors made for cutting fabric (not children's craft scissors)

iron and ironing board

thread and needle

safety pins (medium to large)

sturdy dowel, one cut to 4', the other to 5'

stencils, 3" or 4"

optional: tassels, fringe, cording, etc.

Directions:

1. Invite the group to decide what they want the banner to say. It should include part or all of the day's reading: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight:" (Matthew 3:3).
2. Fold over the top of the banner fabric so you end up with a 2" - 3" hem. Glue or sew this hem leaving a pocket through which to insert the longer, 5' dowel.
3. Make smaller hems at the bottom and on the sides if desired.
4. Draw and cut out all of the necessary letters.
5. Arrange them on the fabric *before* you glue them to make sure they all fit.
6. Glue the letters on to the banner.
7. Slide the longer dowel into the top pocket of the banner and the shorter dowel into the bottom pocket of the banner.

Close:

- Arrange with the priest to have 2 of the group members carry the banner in a procession during Advent.
- Ask that the banner be displayed until Christmas.



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BAPTISM REMEMBRANCE BOXES

Group members make Remembrance Boxes to be given as gifts to the newly baptized.

Materials:

medium sized cardboard or metal boxes with lids (can be purchased at craft stores)

Tacky[®] glue

plastic knives; matting knives

small smooth pebbles

small-medium seashells

white candles, at least 4" in length (has to fit in the box)

scissors

optional: sheets of decorating wax

optional: wax decorating pens or paint pens

decorative paper (like scrap booking or wrapping paper) to cover boxes

tape

card stock

fine point pens and markers

stapler

optional: origami paper

copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*

copies of the "Baptismal Prayers" sheets (pp. 16-19), 1 per participant

Preparation:

Plan on more than one session for this activity.

Gather the supplies together.

If you have time, make a box as a sample.

Copy the "Baptismal Prayers" sheets (pp. 16-19).

Directions:

1. Decorate one of the boxes using the available supplies.
2. Cut a card stock into 4" x 6" pieces.
3. Copy one or more baptismal prayers onto the cards.
4. Decorate the candle with decorating wax and/or decorating pens.
5. Make an origami dove (see http://www.origami-world.de/tr_taube.gif) for instructions.

Each box will contain:

- at least one baptismal prayer
- a candle
- a shell
- a dove

BAPTISMAL PRAYERS

You are sealed by the Holy
Spirit in Baptism
and marked as Christ's own for
ever. *Amen.*

We receive you into the
household of God.
Confess the faith of Christ crucified,
proclaim his resurrection,
and share with us in his eternal
priesthood.
Amen.

Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized
into the death of Jesus Christ your Son
may live in the power of his resurrection
and look for him to come again in glory.

Amen.

Almighty God, who by our baptism into the
death and resurrection of thy Son Jesus Christ
dost turn us from the old life of sin: Grant that
we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in
righteousness and holiness all our days; through
the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who
lives and reigns with thee and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

You are no longer strangers and
sojourners, but citizens together
with the saints and members of the
household of God. *Amen.*

—Ephesians 2:19

This is the day that the Lord has
made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Amen.

—Psalm 118:24

It is glory enough
That we should be your servants;
It is grace enough
That you should be our God. *Amen.*

—Traditional Muslim prayer, public domain,
(*Chapel Service & Prayers 2005*,
St Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire)