

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Third Sunday of Advent
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11

The school year began months ago; New Year's Day is over a month away. Yet here we are, beginning our new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent invites us to risk pushing on through the world's weariness to expectant hope. Something's coming we proclaim! Immanuel: God With Us in the form of an infant. We celebrate what happened 2000 years ago while we look to the promise that Jesus will come again. We are also called, as we live in this parenthesis time, to look for messages God continues to send: what has happened, and will happen again, is also happening now: right here.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

John the Baptist has been calling people's attention to their skewed priorities and baptizing them when they got the message. Now, confined to prison for his preaching that made the authorities uncomfortable, John sends this plaintive question to Jesus: "Are you the one?" How do we answer the question? How do we choose to live out our answer?

Theme: Are You the One?

Before: You will need white paper and crayons. A drama is suggested so be thinking about what would serve as a jail for John the Baptist.

Beginning: Tell the children you are going to tell them a story, and they can make a play out of it when you finish. But first, begin with your Advent Wreath and light 3 candles, adding the pink one this time (pink for Mary), or color the third candle on the paper wreath.

Praying: Thank you, God, for John the Baptist, who told people about Jesus. Amen.

The Story: Remember John the Baptist who was baptizing people in the river? John had been telling people to get ready. He told them to tell God they are sorry for the bad stuff they have done. John told people to keep on praying to God and do what they are supposed to do.

What things are **we** supposed to do? Brush our teeth? What else? (Accept what the children offer. If they cannot think of things, ask them if they pick up their toys, make their beds, help set the table, etc.)

Some people did not like what John was saying so they got John thrown into jail. While John was in jail, he wanted to be sure he was telling people the right thing. So he sent a message to Jesus. Maybe he whispered in the ear of someone who came to see him in jail. The message got to Jesus: "Are you the one?" Jesus sent John a message back, maybe by whispering in the ear of someone who could take it to John. Now, John knew that Jesus was the one.

Activity: Tell the children you would like them to act out the story. We will need someone to play the part of John, another to play the part of Jesus, and someone to be the messenger. We will also need to make a jail. (A table turned upside down? Chairs dragged into a circle?) John can show how sad he is in jail. A messenger can hear his whisper: “Ask Jesus: Are you the one?” The messenger can go to where Jesus is sitting and whisper the message in the person’s ear. The message Jesus gives, the messenger takes back to John who now feels better. If children want to change roles, or other children want to play the parts, keep going until all have had a chance.

Activity: Give the children paper and crayons and ask them to draw the story. If they like writing words, write in big printing: Are you the one? They can include it in their picture, if they want.

Getting Closure: Bring the children into a circle and, if they drew pictures, ask them if they want to show their picture and talk about it. If you only had time for the play, tell them you are going to whisper something in the ear of the child next to you, and that child can whisper it in the ear of the child next to that child — and so on until each person hears the whisper. The last one will whisper to you, so you can say out loud what was whispered. The message: “Jesus is the one.”

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for all the messages you send us that Jesus is the one. Amen.

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Year A – Third Sunday of Advent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11

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John the Baptist has been calling people's attention to their skewed priorities and baptizing them when they got the message. Now, confined to prison for his preaching that made the authorities uncomfortable, John sends this plaintive question to Jesus: "Are you the one?" How do we answer the question? How do we choose to live out our answer?

Theme: Are You the One?

Before Class: Two options are suggested for activities; choose which one you will use. For the crayon activity you will need a black crayon for each child, an assortment of other crayons, and white card stock (even manila folders cut into squares will work). A tissue for each child will be needed. For the code activity either bring in a suggested code (a code letter for each letter of the alphabet: z for a, y for b, x for c etc. for example, or a number code: 26 for a, 25 for b, 24 for c, etc.), or involve the children in developing a code using a scheme you all agree upon. You will need Bibles.

Beginning: Ask the children if they can think of a situation where someone was put in jail for something that did not seem wrong. (Be ready with a story, perhaps a person jailed for protesting a law they found unjust, political persecution, etc.) Ask if anyone has a story of unjust punishment (having to stay after school for something they did not do, etc.) Tell them we have a story today of John the Baptist who was thrown in jail because the people in charge did not like what he was doing or what he was saying.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the courage John the Baptist found to do the work you gave him to do. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 11:2-11 You will need three readers for the Narrator, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Questions:

- Why was John in prison? (By John telling people to go out of town, listen to him, and be baptized (instead of worshipping in the Temple) the authorities thought he was dangerous.)

- I wonder why John needed to know the answer to the question he asks in verse 2b? (The pain of being imprisoned would be more bearable if he was sure that what he had been preaching was really true: Jesus was the one.)
- I wonder why Jesus gave John the answer that he did? (John would have known the Isaiah passage he quotes as the sign of the coming of the Messiah. If time permits, ask the children to find the passage — Isaiah 35:5-6.)
- Who does Jesus tell the people that John the Baptist is? (A prophet who can help people see what they need to do)
- I wonder why Jesus says that John is the “greatest” [verse 11a] and yet the “least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”? [verse 11b] (Jesus is saying that when we choose Jesus it is no longer about who is the greatest and who is the least.)
- What would we say is the “kingdom of heaven?” (It is the heaven we will go to when we die and it is also the choosing to see God in our lives right here and now.)

Option: Tell the children that sending a message out of jail could have been dangerous. Perhaps John simply whispered to a trusted disciple, perhaps he sent the message in code, for Jesus’ response is clearly a code answer. Either show the children the code you have developed or, if time permits, invite them to create a code so each letter of the alphabet is coded. A code for the question mark is also needed. Then, once the code is agreed upon, ask the children to write: “Are you the one?” using the code.

Activity: Instead of the code, another way to send a message is to write it in a bright colored crayon and then cover the entire page with dark black crayon. To read the secret message, you take a tissue and rub off all of the black crayon. They can write: “Are you the one?” in the bright color and then cover the message with black crayon.

Getting Closure: If the children have displayed their artwork showing God’s messages for church members to see in the past two weeks, they may want to post their code or crayon drawings. If so, decide where to place them.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for messages you send us. Help us to see your prophets and hear Jesus’ voice as we seek you this Advent season. Amen.

Matthew 11:2-11

Narrator: When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him,

John the Baptist: ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’

Narrator: ⁴Jesus answered them,

Jesus: ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.’

Narrator: ⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John:

Jesus: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.’

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Third Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11

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Theme: Are You the One?

Before Class: You will need enough Bibles or copies of the scripture for today for everyone.

Beginning: Invite stories of breaking away from the tyranny of our "To Do" lists. What sanctuaries of silence have we encountered? (See First Sunday in Advent for more information.)

Opening Prayer: Loving God, be present with us and guide us as we continue to prepare for the coming of The One. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11 Invite two people to read: The first will read verses 2-4a and second will read verses 4b-11 (which is Jesus speaking.)

Questions:

- Invite the class to pretend they are the religious authorities, and talk among themselves about the threat to the disciplines of their faith that John the Baptist poses. How would the authorities have reacted to John gathering people out on the edge of town, away from the Temple, preaching and baptizing in a muddy river?
- Then, ask the class to pretend they are disciples of John, believing in his message yet afraid that his politically incorrect message is going to land him in jail. What might they have advised him?
- Now, have them picture themselves jailed for the breach of orthodoxy. Imagine the musings of John the Baptist. Did I really break God's law? Are the authorities right and I am wrong? What if I did not get it right, that Jesus is not the ONE? How can I know? How can I find out if Jesus IS the ONE? Then, when John receives the message from Jesus (verses 4b-6) how does he interpret it?

- Then ask them to imagine they have just heard Jesus (verses 7b-11) and are trying to unpack the message. What did they go out in the wilderness to see when they listened to John the Baptist? (Prophets are usually not found in fancy robes in fancy places, but in simple clothes and in simple places.) Who is this prophet? (The last in the long line of Old Testament prophets — no one was greater than this one.)
- What in the world does Jesus mean in verse 11: “yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he?” What do we think “the kingdom of heaven” means? (People had thought it was something you had to earn your way into, obeying strict rules, following precise ways of worshipping. Jesus brings the “Kingdom” as a gift. Jesus turns things upside down and downside up).

Getting Closure: Invite the group to discuss what this reading has to do with our lives today. How might we ask Jesus, “Are you the One?” What answers might we hear, see, or experience? (You can do this activity with the whole group or in smaller groups.)

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for your prophets and the gift of the kingdom of heaven. Be with us as we seek you and come to know you more deeply as The One. Amen.

Matthew 11:2-11

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples³ and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’⁴ Jesus answered them,

‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.’⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

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