

Lesson Plans That Work
Year B – First Sunday After Epiphany
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

This Sunday is also known as Baptism of our Lord as it is the day on which we remember Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer.

Note: This is the first of a four-part series on The Episcopal Church's refugee resettlement program through Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). We begin this 4-week conversation about refugees and immigration with the promises we make as Christians and Episcopalians through our Baptismal Covenant.

Theme: Recommitting Ourselves to Our Baptismal Promises

Before: The Baptismal Covenant is on pages 304 -305 of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). Make sure you either have a sufficient number of BCP's or make copies of the pages so that every participant can read along. If possible, review and queue up the following video for use in your discussion:

- Episcopal Migration Ministries – Advancing a Legacy of Welcome (<https://vimeo.com/51561972>)

The Episcopal Church has been engaged in loving service and advocacy on behalf of and alongside refugees for 75 years, dating to the late 1930's, as Jews and other groups fled Nazi Europe. The international legal definition of "refugee" was codified in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees:

[A refugee is a person who,] owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Today there are more than 50 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide, the highest number since World War II. Durable solutions for refugees include return to their home country when it is safe to do so, to integrate into the country of first asylum, or resettlement to a third country. Resettlement is the option pursued when the other two solutions are not possible. Less than 1% of the global refugee population will ever be resettled. The United States is the global leader in refugee resettlement, resettling more refugees each year than all other resettlement countries, combined. In fiscal year 2015, the United States will resettle 70,000 refugees. Of this number, Episcopal Migration Ministries, one of only nine refugee resettlement agencies in the US, will resettle more than 5,000 refugees from places like Syria, Nepal, Burma, Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, and many other countries. Episcopal Migration Ministries works through a network of affiliate partners, who, in turn, work with the local community to ensure

successful resettlement and integration of new refugee neighbors. Schools, hospitals, employers, landlords, public transportation, law enforcement, community organizations, communities of faith and Episcopal congregations are all vital partners in resettlement.

If you would like to learn more about particular groups of people The Episcopal Church and other resettlement agencies resettle, you can find up to date statistics on the status of refugees in the world using this link: <http://www.unrefugees.org/>. Finally, if you have time, research the status of refugees in your community. Use the EMM network affiliate map to identify a resource in your area: <http://bit.ly/1swkPif>.

If you have questions, feel free to email or call Allison Duvall, EMM's program manager for church relations and engagement, at (212) 716-6027 or aduvall@episcopalchurch.org. She will be happy to assist you in enriching your lesson plan with information about Episcopal Migration Ministries and refugee resettlement.

Beginning: Welcome everyone as they enter.

Opening Prayer: Loving God, you gave us the sacrament of Baptism so that we may be reminded of our commitment to your loving service and to being a people of reconciliation. Be with us as we renew this commitment and discover new ways to live into the promises we have made through our own baptisms. Amen.

The Story: Mark 1:4-11

Invite someone to read Mark 1:4-11. Next remind everyone that today is the Sunday on which we celebrate Jesus' baptism. Through the reading of the story we remember our own baptism and the promises we make in the Baptismal Covenant.

Next, invite someone to read the Baptismal Covenant on pages 304-305 in the Book of Common Prayer.

Ask everyone to reflect on their Baptismal Covenant as they watch the 2-minute video on The Episcopal Church's work in refugee resettlement through Episcopal Migration Ministries: <https://vimeo.com/51561972>

Share a few statistics on refugees. If you were able to find local resources on refugees, share the statistics you found.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you think John means when he says, "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our Christian faith?
- In the promises we make in our Baptismal Covenant, what stands out to you as compelling given the status of refugees in our world? In your community?
- Do you believe that Christians are called to work with refugees to ensure they are safe, housed, and fed? What is our responsibility as people of faith to "preserving the dignity of every human being"?

- If you reflect on the plight of refugees for the next 7 days, I wonder how you might feel called to engage this ministry.

Closing: Instead of a traditional closing prayer, read the promises of the Baptismal Covenant inviting participants to respond with “I will, with God’s help.”

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God’s help.

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

People I will, with God’s help.

As they are leaving, remind participants to reflect upon their Baptismal promises over the next week.

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Written by Wendy Johnson

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MIGRATION MINISTRIES

Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the refugee resettlement agency of The Episcopal Church, welcomes thousands of refugees each year from conflict zones across the globe. Working in partnership with offices and groups within the church as well as with governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), and a network of 30 affiliate offices in 26 dioceses, Episcopal Migration Ministries provides vital services for thousands of refugee families upon their arrival in the United States.

In 2015, Episcopal Migration Ministries is celebrating 75 years of refugee resettlement in The Episcopal Church through the year-long #ShareTheJourney campaign. #ShareTheJourney is a multi-media effort to educate, form, and equip Episcopalians to engage in loving service with resettled refugees and to become prophetic witnesses and advocates on behalf of refugees, asylees, migrants, and displaced persons the world over.