

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

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

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

The Prophet Isaiah could see the day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of God." John the Baptist saw clutter blocking the way to God. John pointed to the truth that through Baptism, we are called to seek knowledge of God, get rid of the clutter, and smooth the path on which we walk.

Theme: I Will, With God's Help

Before: If the idea of making cards for people (refer to the prior lesson for the First Sunday of Advent) holds the children's attention, or if there are children with you this Sunday who were not there last week, consider making time to generate more cards. Have ready the sandwich-sized plastic bags with zip-type closures, construction paper cut to fit the bags, and art supplies you have on hand to complete the cards.

An activity to look at how we use water at baptism is suggested for this week. The point of the activity is to see up close what is done at baptism, so it does not matter whether each child has been baptized. You will need a bowl, a pitcher of water, and a small towel. Have ready sheets of paper and crayons so the children can draw.

Beginning: Ask the children if they got to give anyone their cards. Who did they give their cards to? Can they tell you anything about it? (They may not remember, even if they did give away cards.) If you have an Advent wreath, help a child light two of the candles today. If you are coloring a wreath, invite the children to color the second candle, the flame, and any greenery you drew on the paper.

Praying: Thank you, God, that you send people to show us that you love us. Amen.

The Story: When Jesus was just starting to do his work, his cousin, John, was helping people get ready for Jesus' message. John kept saying: "God loves you and wants you to do the right thing. Tell God you are sorry when you do dumb stuff. Tell God! Then, come and let me baptize you." At baptism, people tell God they are going to try not to do bad things and they are going to try to

do good things. They say: "I will, with God's help." (If you have two candles burning, this would be a good time to blow them out.)

Activity: Ask the children if they have seen a baptism. If they remember one, get them to tell you what they remember about it. If they cannot remember, tell them we are going to show them something that is done at a baptism. Pour some water into the bowl you brought. Tell the children that if they were being baptized, they would lean over the bowl of water and the priest would take a little water and put it on the child's head saying: I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Ask the children to say with you: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Then, invite the children, one by one to dip a finger in the water, make the sign of the cross on their head, while all of you, together say: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Keep going until each child who wants to has dipped fingers in the water, making the sign of the cross.

Option: Give the children paper and crayons and ask them to draw a baptism picture. They can draw themselves making the sign of the cross, the bowl of water, or whatever they want.

Option: If it seems appropriate, invite the children to make some more cards to give away. Offer the supplies you have, so the children can make cards.

Getting Closure: Ask the children to bring their pictures with them as you make a circle. Invite the children to tell you about the pictures they have drawn.

Closing Prayer: We say thank you to you God, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Second Sunday of Advent
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

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

The Prophet Isaiah could see the day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of God." John the Baptist saw clutter blocking the way to God. John pointed to the truth that through Baptism, we are called to seek knowledge of God, get rid of the clutter, and smooth the path on which we walk.

Theme: I Will, With God's Help

Before Class: The suggested activity for today is to draw a huge John the Baptist — the size of the angel the children created last week. You will need a large piece of brown Kraft paper (the kind sold to wrap packages for mailing), felt markers, some dried beans, and a small jar of honey. Bring washcloths or paper towels to clean hands. You will also need Bibles or copies of the scripture for today and copies of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Beginning: Tell the children that today we have a story about a prophet. What do they think a prophet does? (Explain that a prophet tells it "like it is" and helps people notice what needs to change.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the messengers you send us to help us figure out what we can do. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 3:1-12 Invite two children to read the parts of Narrator and John the Baptist (see the script below).

Questions:

- When is this happening — what are "those days?" (Jesus had just begun his ministry and was probably about 30 years old. John the Baptist was his cousin, born about 6 months before Jesus.)
- Describe John's outfit and his diet. (Verse 4. If the children are grossed out at the idea of eating "locusts" tell them that some translations refer to his food as "beans".)
- Where was John preaching? (Verse 1 – the wilderness, out away from the town.)
- Who came out to hear John? (Verse 7a)

- Who were the “Pharisees” and the “Sadducees?” (The religious leaders.)
- I wonder why John had such harsh words for them? (They had gotten pretty sure of themselves and didn’t think they needed to tell God they were sorry about anything.)
- Who is the person John the Baptist is referring to in verse 11? (Jesus)
- John the Baptist was out in the wilderness — how did he baptize people? (He led them into the Jordan River and baptized them there.)

Activity: Invite the children to imagine what John the Baptist looked like and then draw him on the large piece of paper you have brought. Since John probably spilled honey on his clothes and the beans stuck to the honey, suggest they incorporate honey and beans into their depiction of John. When they have finished, allow it to “dry” until the end of your session when it can be placed next to the angel they created last week. Provide washcloths or towels for clean up.

Option: If time permits, look at our Baptism service (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 299-307). Invite them to follow along as you read the five “Will you’s” at the bottom of page 304 and the top of page 305 suggesting that all of you say together the people’s response: “I will, with God’s help.”

Getting Closure: Go with the children to position the poster of John the Baptist where the people who go to your church can see it.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for John the Baptist who showed people how to “prepare the way of the Lord.” Amen.

Matthew 3:1-12

Narrator: In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.”’

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them,

John the Baptist: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

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

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

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

The Prophet Isaiah could see the day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of God." John the Baptist saw clutter blocking the way to God. John pointed to the truth that through Baptism, we are called to seek knowledge of God, get rid of the clutter, and smooth the path on which we walk.

Theme: I Will, With God's Help

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible or copies of the scripture for this Sunday and *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Beginning: Ask the group if anyone wants to tell about anything that happened this past week as we looked at our priorities (see First Sunday of Advent for this activity). If you have something to offer, feel free to share it. Remind them that this is not a contest, and it is not about getting the most points, but to help us as we get ready.

Opening Prayer: Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us inquiring and discerning hearts, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.

Option: Tell the group that your prayer is a portion of the prayer said over newly baptized persons, a word or two changed. The complete prayer is found at the top of page 308 in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

The Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12 Invite four readers to read verses 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, 11-12.

Questions:

- What was the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus? (John and Jesus were cousins, John about 6 months older than Jesus; John heard the call from God to prepare the way for Jesus.)

- Who were the Pharisees and the Sadducees? (The religious leaders of the time: Pharisees deeply concerned with obeying all the laws of their religion yet open to the possibility of the resurrection; the Sadducees were equally strict but not open to the resurrection).
- Contrast the lifestyle, clothing, and food of John the Baptist and the Pharisees and Sadducees. (The religious leaders were easily recognizable by their flowing robes, shawls, tassels, etc. Verse 4 describes John's outfit and diet.)
- I wonder why John the Baptist was so harsh to the Pharisees and the Sadducees? (He saw them as self-absorbed, closed, over-confident that they had all the answers and not at all ready to risk repentance)
- What do we think was the importance of baptism to John the Baptist? (It provided a clear opportunity for people to notice what they were doing wrong, release it and ask God's forgiveness, and then know, through the washing away of the sin, that they were in a right relationship with God and thus able to hear Jesus' message.)
- Since so many of the baptisms we participate in now involve infants, how is this theology different, how is it the same? (Sponsors of infants promise to walk along with the infant, helping the child to figure out what is right and how to ask forgiveness for those times we do things that are not right.)
- We believe Baptism to be necessary only once. How do we deal with times we know we have "blown it?" (It can be as simple as owning the sin, genuinely repenting and asking for forgiveness, and then going on with our lives to seeking serious pastoral guidance from a priest; the form on pages 447-452 of *The Book of Common Prayer* provides a process.)
- Discuss how else the Covenant of Baptism might be a helpful resource for us. (Reading through it offers an opportunity to examine our priorities and make necessary changes.)

Getting Closure: Read together the five "will you's" at the bottom of page 304 and the top of page 305. Then, if the group resonated to observing a moment or two of silence, invite them, again, into the silence, using the method suggested last week.

Closing Prayer: Help us, God, to always remember that we are 'sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever.' Amen.

Matthew 3:1-12

3 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.”’

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 ‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

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