

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday after Epiphany
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Because in the mystery of the Word made flesh, you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts, to give the knowledge of your glory in the face of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
(*Book of Common Prayer*, page 378)

Accept the light we have received and shine it forth! It is not about shining the light in other's faces, blinding them, but holding the light in open hands.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Power. What power do we call upon to do the work we have been given to do? And where do we defer to a person with greater power? Jesus honors the sphere of John the Baptist's authority and then accepts the power now clearly his after baptism. He is the beloved.

Theme: Anointed with the Holy Spirit and With Power

Before: The song "This Little Light of Mine" is suggested for the Sundays in Epiphany. It has several tunes so use the one most familiar to you or you can teach different tunes throughout the season.

The craft for today is a candle. You will need paper tubes (like the tubes Christmas wrap comes rolled on, paper towel tubes, or toilet paper tubes.) If you don't have access to any of these, simply roll up a piece of construction paper. The tubes need to be cut into lengths and covered with construction paper, a bright yellow piece of construction glued at the top to make a flame. You will also need glue, transparent tape, or staples. The candles can be taped to circles or squares of construction paper, so they will stand up.

Beginning: As you greet the children, tell them that we are beginning a new season in our church, a season with a funny name: Epiphany. They can say the word along with you; Epiphany. If they wonder what the word means, tell them it means something special has happened and we want to tell people about it. What do they think is the something special that has happened? Who is the special person who was born on Christmas? (Yes, Jesus.) Jesus came to tell us that God loves each and every one of us. One way to tell people about something is to sing about it. Ask the children to sing along with you as each of you holds up your hands, index finger sticking up:

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. (Sing it again, if the children are just learning it.)

Praying: Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to remind us of your light and love. Thank you for stories about Jesus. Amen.

The Story: Today we have a story about Jesus getting baptized. (If there has been a baptism at your church today and especially if the children will be there, be sure to make the connections.) Have any of you been to a baptism? What happens at a baptism? What happens if it is a baby? What happens if it is a grown up?

Jesus was baptized in a different way. John the Baptist was the person who was baptizing people. He did not have a pretty church, or a pretty place for the water. John the Baptist baptized people by taking them by the hand and walking into a river, dunking them in the river, and then pulling them up. So, Jesus went to John the Baptist and said: “I need to be baptized by you.” “Wow!” said John. “Who me? I need to be baptized by YOU because you are the one I have been waiting for.” “No,” Jesus, said, “it’s your job to baptize people, so I want you to baptize me.” So John and Jesus walked into the river. As soon as Jesus was baptized, everyone heard the voice of God coming from heaven and God said: “This is my Son; I love him; I am very pleased with him.”

Activity: Invite the children to act out this story. One child can be Jesus, another John the Baptist, and the rest of you can be the voice of God calling out. Suggest that John take Jesus’ hand and gently lead him into the water, holding his hand while Jesus goes down under the water, and when he comes up again, wiping the water off his face. When he comes up again, all the rest of you call out: “This is my son; I love him; I am pleased with him.” Re-do the play as often as needed so each child gets to play whichever part appeals.

Activity: Show the children how to make candles so each can take one home to remember that each of us has God’s light in us. Either cover cardboard tubes with construction paper, or simply roll up construction paper squares, fasten with transparent tape or staples and then fasten the tubes to a piece of construction paper so the candles will stand up. A bright yellow or orange construction paper “flame” can be taped to the candle. Ask each child to make two candles — one to take home and one to leave here for next week.

Getting Closure: Sing “This Little Light of Mine” while holding your candles high in the air.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for Jesus and for loving all of us. Help us remember to shine your light in the world. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday after Epiphany
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

Because in the mystery of the Word made flesh, you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts, to give the knowledge of your glory in the face of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
(*Book of Common Prayer*, page 378)

Accept the light we have received and shine it forth! It is not about shining the light in other's faces, blinding them, but holding the light in open hands.

A Notation for this Week's Gospel

Power. What power do we call upon to do the work we have been given to do? And where do we defer to a person with greater power? Jesus honors the sphere of John the Baptist's authority and then accepts the power now clearly his after baptism. He is the beloved.

Theme: Anointed with the Holy Spirit and With Power

Before Class: You will need to have enough copies of the scripture/script below for each child. You may want to bring a dictionary to class so the children can look up the word Epiphany. You will need something for them to take notes on for the next five weeks. It could be a set of 4" by 6" cards or sheets of paper cut in fourths. An envelope for each child or a sheet of construction paper folded in half with paper clips to secure it will work. The idea is for the children to be taking notes on what constitutes a person they would choose to follow.

Beginning: Tell the children what you have planned for the next few weeks. Tell them that this season is called "Epiphany" (and if you have brought the dictionary invite someone to look up the word and read the definition.) Invite the children to come up with their own definition of Epiphany. (Some hints: "something's up," "something's happening," "ah-ha moment" etc.) Give them the cards or sheets of paper and invite them to write down the definition they like best. They do not have to share if they do not want to do so. Then describe which of the options you have chosen for this five-week set of sessions. (Option One: looking at some things a person must be like in order for us to choose to follow that person. Option Two: choosing also to look at the characteristics Jesus describes in The Beatitudes.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending Jesus who came for all of us. Help us see the ways in which he shows us the way to follow you. Amen.

The Story: Ask for volunteers to read the different parts: The narrator, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the voice of God.

Questions:

- I wonder why John didn't think he should baptize Jesus? (John knew that his job was to get people ready for Jesus, so he thought his job was done.)

- Why did Jesus come to John for baptism? (It had been John’s job to baptize people and Jesus wanted to recognize John’s authority in this matter.)
- John did not have a baptismal font nor pretty silver dishes, so how did he baptize Jesus? (They walked together into a river. John plunged Jesus down into the water, and then helped him up.)
- What did they both see when Jesus came up from the water? (something “like” a dove)
- And what did they hear? (a voice from heaven)

Activity: Invite the children to pretend they had been standing on the banks of the River Jordan as all this was happening and are now trying to figure out how to describe what they have just seen so they can tell you about it. Tell them they do not have to use “Bible” language but instead use words they would use to describe what they saw. When they are ready, invite them to tell you about it.

Ask the children to make some notes for themselves, on the paper you have provided, about the way John exercised his power. (He was authorized to baptize, he consented to baptize Jesus.)

How did Jesus exercise his power? (By honoring John’s power and asking him to perform the baptism.)

I wonder what Jesus saw in John to make him authentic enough to follow? (If they get stuck: Jesus recognized that John was probably the last in a long line of prophets. John knew the stories of previous prophets and used their messages in his talks.)

What, then, did John see in Jesus, to choose to follow him? (John knew that the Messiah, the Son of God, was coming and this man had all the attributes he expected in a Messiah.)

Ask the children if any of them have ever had the experience of suddenly just knowing something. An: “I got it!” kind of a moment. Ask them to try to describe it. Is it hard to find the exact words to describe what happened? What if you were watching someone else have an “I got it!” moment? In what ways would it be hard to describe what happened to them? Ask them to try to identify with the author of today’s Gospel who was not an eyewitness to the event and yet still had to describe it.

Tell the children to save their notes and we will have opportunities to add to them each week. These notes can help us when we are choosing who to trust and when we are seeing what is involved in following Jesus.

Getting Closure: Ask for volunteers to offer qualities of people we would choose to follow that we read about today. You may want to write these up on a whiteboard or easel paper so you can refer back to them in the coming weeks.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for John who helped Jesus begin his ministry. Help us hear your voice telling us that we are your beloved. Amen.

Matthew 3:13-17

Narrator: Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by John. John would have prevented him saying,

John: ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come from me?’

Narrator: But Jesus answered him,

Jesus: ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.’

Narrator: Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said,

God: ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday after Epiphany
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

Because in the mystery of the Word made flesh, you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts, to give the knowledge of your glory in the face of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
(*Book of Common Prayer*, page 378)

Accept the light we have received and shine it forth! It is not about shining the light in other's faces, blinding them, but holding the light in open hands.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Power. What power do we call upon to do the work we have been given to do? And where do we defer to a person with greater power? Jesus honors the sphere of John the Baptist's authority and then accepts the power now clearly his after baptism. He is the beloved.

Theme: Anointed with The Holy Spirit and With Power

Before Class: You will need copies of the scripture today and if you choose to read the scripture as the script is written below, you will need enough copies for each person.

Beginning: Ask the group to think about what the word "power" conveys. What are some of its negative attributes? What are some of its positive attributes?

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the power you give us to do the work we have been given to do. Help us to listen for your voice and use the power you give us wisely. Amen.

The Scripture: Ask for volunteers to read the parts in today's passage: Narrator, John the Baptist, Jesus, and God.

Questions:

- I wonder why Jesus believed he should be baptized by John the Baptist? (Jesus chose to authenticate John's ministry by responding to John's call.)
- Describe John's hesitancy to baptize this man whom he had been proclaiming. (John must have felt inadequate or at least in awe that Jesus would come to him.)
- How could we paraphrase Jesus' response to John? (God had been calling God's people for baptism by John. Jesus being baptized by John fulfills this calling.)

Option: Invite the group to imagine themselves viewing the scene of Jesus' baptism.

I wonder what it would have looked like if you were a jaded reporter? What if you were a person who had been baptized by John and was eagerly awaiting this person John described? I wonder how we would have felt if we were in John's place in this story.

Let the group choose who they want to “pretend” to be. Then, ask them how they would describe what they saw and heard, bearing in mind that the author was clearly searching for words to describe such a powerful event. How do they think this event affirmed the ministry that Jesus was discovering as his?

Getting Closure: Tell the group that the season of Epiphany is bracketed by these words: “This is my Beloved.” We will hear them again on the Last Sunday after Epiphany, the Transfiguration of Jesus. I wonder what those words might mean for each of us as we approach this season?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that you empower us to do the work you have given us to do. Help us hear your voice telling us that we are your beloved. Amen.

Matthew 3:13-17

Narrator: Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by John. John would have prevented him saying,

John: ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come from me?’

Narrator: But Jesus answered him,

Jesus: ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.’

Narrator: Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said,

God: ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’

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