

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

Scripture: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Background

Advent means “coming.” The coming of the baby Jesus, God among us in human flesh. The coming of Christ again “the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. In between those two great comings is God’s constant longing for each of us to come to God, to love God, and to let God love us. “Be alert.” Notice. Listen. Watch. For what? For the ways God will choose to get our attention this season. For those moments when we notice that our ways are not in alignment with God’s ways. For those shimmering glimpses of the Kingdom of God.

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

The Gospel of John tells the story of John the Baptist from a slightly different perspective. Who is this John? John understands he is a messenger of the light – not the light itself. Those in charge of keeping the faith are confused. Who is this man? Is this the long-awaited Messiah – or Elijah – or a prophet? John sees his mission as baptizing, and pointing to the one who is coming after him.

Theme: Who are You?

Beginning: Greet the children as they arrive. Has anyone seen lights? Christmas trees? What else have they seen? Gather in a circle around the Advent wreath.

Today we can light three of the candles. Christmas is almost here! Ask the children if they know what the word “messenger” means. A messenger is someone who tells us something – maybe something we did not know.

Opening Prayer: Thank you that we can be here this day. Thank you for (name each child). Thank you for sending messengers. Amen.

Either blow out the candles in your Advent wreath or place the wreath in a safe place until the end of class when you blow out the candles.

The Story: Here is a paraphrase of the story for young children:

Remember that last week we had a story about a man named John the Baptist? (Be open for anything they care to add about John.) Last week we learned that many people came to John the Baptist to be baptized. We talked about baptisms that take place today and the cross that is made on our foreheads. Today we will learn that John the Baptist was also a messenger. His job was not to be the teacher, but to point to the teacher, Jesus. People asked him: “Why should we listen to you, if you are not the teacher?” But John’s job was to be a messenger. (Print the word “messenger” in big print letters on a piece of paper and put it where all can see.)

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder if you have ever been a messenger for someone else?
- I wonder what it is like to be a messenger?
- I wonder if it is hard to pass on someone else's message?

Messenger: Have the children sit in a big circle – as big as the space allows. Tell them “God uses lots of kinds of people to be messengers. God even uses you and me. Let’s practice being messengers. I will be the first messenger and whisper a message to one of you. That person will go across the circle and tell the same message to another person. That person will tell a person across the circle and we will keep on until each of us gets to hear the message and each of us gets to be a messenger. Then the last person receiving the message will tell the whole group what the message is.” The message whispered to the first child is “Jesus is coming!”

After everyone has had a chance to give and receive the message, the message should still be, “Jesus is coming!” If it is not, ask the children if the message told to the group by the last child is still the same message, or is it different. Ask them why they think it changed. Ask them how they think they could keep the message from being changed.

Whether the message has changed or not, ask the children what is important about being a messenger. What is important about today’s message, “Jesus is coming!” Why is it important that we give the correct message of Jesus to others?

Jesus is Coming!

Using large sheets of paper, invite the children to print the words "messenger" and "Jesus is coming!" Then invite them to illustrate the page however they want. If you have very young children, perhaps not writing yet, offer to put those words on the paper for them. Then you, too, sketch on your paper. Maybe draw a wild-looking John the Baptist. Or a shed way off in the distance that can become a manger. Feel free to add some angels flying about or some shepherds and sheep. This activity time also invites the children’s sharing. Why are there Christmas trees all over the mall and we don’t have one here in our church? Answer: Well, Christmas has not quite gotten here yet. We’ll have a tree then.

Getting Closure: As children leave, be sure they take their pictures with them and tell them they are messengers to their family and other people they will see today in church. Ask them what message they will tell.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for messengers like John the Baptist. Thank you that we can be messengers, too. Amen.

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

Scripture: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Background

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Theme: Who are You?

Before class: You will need copies of the Scripture in script form. (see below) You will also need paper, pens or pencils, and art materials for the “Who are you” response time.

Beginning: If you have children who were in class last week, and the mural they made of John the Baptist is still available, have the children describe their John the Baptist to children who were not there. If all were there last week, did they get interesting responses from the congregation?

The Story: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Before you begin, ask the children if they know what a Pharisee is. Pharisees were a religious group/political party who emphasized the importance of the rites and laws set forth by Moses.

Invite children to read the parts of John, Levites, and Narrator.

Reflection Questions:

- Who did those sent by the religious authorities think John might be? (Christ, the expected Messiah, or Elijah, expected to return to prepare people for the Messiah. See 2 Kings 2:11 and Malachi 4:5, and Deuteronomy 14:15.)
- Who does John say that he is? (John 1:23)
- Who does the writer of the Gospel of John say that John the Baptist is? (John 1:6-8)
- Why do you think God needed John the Baptist to prepare or “make straight the way of the Lord”? To stay awake, be alert, be ready?

Interview with John:

To reinforce the message that John the Baptist understood his mission as being a messenger and that the Pharisees could not make him fit their expectations, consider turning this passage into a TV interview. A reporter can interview John and an assortment of Pharisees. Work with the children until they can come up with paraphrases of the passage that seem to make sense to them.

Who are You?

The Pharisees sent Levites to ask John all these questions and they are trying to understand who John is and how he relates to the Messiah. They ask him: “Who are you?” This is an important question for all of us to think about and understand.

Discuss with the children how they would answer the following questions:

- Who am I?
- Who has God made me to be?
- If a group of people were asking me this question, how would you answer?

After you have discussed it, invite the children to draw a picture, write a poem, or find a creative way to answer these questions to show others their answer/answers.

Getting Closure: In a few words, what would we say to others about Jesus? In what ways can we be messengers to someone we know about meeting Jesus? Do we want to add something more to the New Year’s resolutions we wrote the first week in Advent?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for the messengers you send. Thank you for inviting us to be messengers, also. Thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus, and for John who brought the message. Amen.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Narrator: There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him,

Levites: “Who are you?”

Narrator: John confessed and did not deny it, but confessed,

John: “I am not the Messiah.”

Levites: “What then? Are you Elijah?”

John: “I am not.”

Levites: “Are you the prophet?”

John: “No.”

Levites: “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John: “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

Narrator: John was quoting what the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

Levites: “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?”

John: “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”

Narrator: This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

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

Scripture: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Background

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Theme: Who are You?

Beginning: Gather and discuss the past week and getting ready for Christmas.

Opening Prayer: Help us, Dear Lord, as we struggle to balance the demands on our time and our desire to pull within and just be with you. Help us to see in the Scripture what you have for us today in our community. We ask this through your blessed son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Scripture: John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Invite one person to read aloud the entire passage. Then pause for questions.

If people are not sure about what a Pharisee is (and they get pretty bad press) it might be helpful to think of them as religious leaders committed to keeping their religion pure – letting no false teaching corrupt it. Notice their struggle to find something orthodox about this John the Baptist.

After questions have been addressed, ask yet another person to read the passage aloud and move on to the reflection questions.

Reflection Questions:

- What stands out for you in this passage?
- What adjectives would you use to describe John as revealed in this passage?
- How would you describe the Pharisees?
- What would it be like if you were a Pharisee. Think about how it might feel to be protecting the faith from what appears to you to be heresy.

- How might it have felt to have resonated with John’s message, and realize the risk that following him would entail?
- If someone asked you, “Who are you?” how might you describe yourself? As a Christian, how might you answer that question?

Getting Closure: During Advent, the theme we are reminded of is staying awake, alert, and ready. There is a sense of joyous expectancy. We are caught between the first coming and the expected second coming of Christ. In what small way might we prepare ourselves, keep alert, and not be distracted?

Closing Prayer: Some people may remember the gospel for today was once called the "post-communion gospel" (John 1: 1-14). Close by having someone read that portion. Or you could close with spontaneous prayer.

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

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