

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

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

Background

Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, “with words, if necessary.”

A Notation for This Week’s Gospel

The baby Jesus is now a man; a man beginning his ministry. Perhaps he is still trying to sort out in his mind what he is being called to do. He looks for validation and turns to his cousin, John. John, meanwhile, has been faithfully calling people to prepare, turn around, start over. He is pretty sure he will recognize Jesus, but he has not yet met him. When Jesus shows up, John goes into the water with him to baptize him, and both of them hear a voice from heaven. Jesus now knows he will be able to figure out what it is that he is being called to do.

Theme: Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift

Before Class: If there is to be a baptism in your church today and if it would be possible for your children to attend, you may need only a small portion of the lesson. If you will be in the classroom the entire time, you might want to bring in a couple of towels for costumes.

On a sheet of paper either type on your computer using a large clear font or write in large print letters in the center of the page:

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism
and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen.

Make a copy for each child. If the children can write their names, invite them to write their own name on the line. If they are not at this stage, you may print the child's name. An art activity suggested in today's lesson requires colored chalk (one small box, the pieces broken in at least two) a small bowl of water, and a tablespoon or two of sugar.

Beginning: We've heard stories about Baby Jesus and where he was born. What can you tell me? (Accept what they remember, jogging memories if you wish with questions such as, "Were there any angels? Tell me about them. Shepherds?")

Praying: Thank you, God, for Baby Jesus, the angels, the shepherds, (and anything else the children have remembered). Thank you for giving us all this -- because you love us. Amen.

The Story: Today we have a story about a grown-up Jesus. Today Jesus gets to meet his cousin, John. John's work was baptizing people and getting them ready to hear Jesus' message. Jesus has not been baptized. So he comes to John and asks him to baptize him. Well John had a different way of baptizing. He went right into the water in the river. Jesus went into the river with John. And when Jesus was baptized, both John and Jesus heard God say: "I am so glad you are my son!"

Reflection Questions:

- Has anyone here seen someone getting baptized?
- How do we do it in our church?
- What does the priest do?
- What do the parents and god parents do?

Baptism Activity: Do you like to go swimming? Is there a pool near your house? Has anyone gone swimming in the ocean? Has anyone gone swimming in a river?

OK. Let's pretend. Let's pretend that right here in the middle of our room is a nice big river. It is only sort of deep – not over anyone's head, not over mine, not over yours. Let's take turns being Jesus and take turns being John. Let me show you. I'll pretend to be John, who will be Jesus? OK, let's walk into the middle of the river. Oh! It's cool – but not cold. Now, Jesus, hold your nose, and I am going to gently push you down into the water, until it is over your head, covering all of you. Then, I'll gently help you back up. And when you come up, the other children will say with me what God says: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

OK, now let's walk out of the water and get a towel to get dry. Take turns until each child who wants to gets to be Jesus and John.

Baptismal Prayer Activity: Give each child a sheet you prepared with the Baptismal prayer in the middle. Read to the children what is written on the paper. Tell the children that the priest says this prayer to each newly baptized baby – or person – as soon as they are baptized. Ask the children to say it with you, phrase by phrase. Then offer the children several pieces of colored chalk. Show them that when we dip the chalk in the water it creates a pretty texture on the paper. They can draw Jesus being baptized, or a picture of them being baptized, or of someone they have seen – whatever they want.

Getting closure: If you have time, and the children you work with are at least 4 or 5 years old, you might want to link your time with the children with the theme of the season: "Receiving the gift and offering the gift." As you draw with the children, you could explain that Jesus did very few things all by himself. He asked others to help him. John helped Jesus today. Jesus is telling us that he is loved by God, and so are we. How could we show other people that they too are loved by God? What if we all, this week, looked for people who seemed kind of sad and we smiled at them until they could smile back?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, that John could help his cousin by baptizing him. Thank you that we, too, can help Jesus. Amen.

Say together the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
for thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark 1:4-11

Narrator: ⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And 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. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed,

John: '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. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Narrator: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven,

God: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

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Year B – First Sunday after the Epiphany
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

Background

Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, “with words, if necessary.”

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The baby Jesus is now a man; a man beginning his ministry. Perhaps he is still trying to sort out in his mind what he is being called to do. He looks for validation and turns to his cousin, John. John, meanwhile, has been faithfully calling people to prepare, turn around, start over. He is pretty sure he will recognize Jesus, but he has not yet met him. When Jesus shows up, John goes into the water with him to baptize him, and both of them hear a voice from heaven. Jesus now knows he will be able to figure out what it is that he is being called to do.

Theme: Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift

Before Class: You will need copies of the script (found below) for each child. You will also need a 3 x 5 card for each child and bright markers, newsprint or a large piece of paper. You will also want to have copies of the Book of Common Prayer available.

Beginning: Describe the way you are going to read the scripture today: different people reading different parts. Then, ask for volunteers to read each part. (The voice of God could well be said by all the children – and you – together, to give it more power.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you for the stories we will have in this season of Epiphany. And thank you for each of us here today. Amen.

The Story: Mark 1:4-11 Our theme for today is "Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift." Be looking for signs of this theme in our story from the Bible. Today's reading is Mark 1:4-11, but we will focus on only the verses 9 - 11. Read the passage, with each part read by a different child. When you get to the voice of God, read it together.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what it was like for John to baptize Jesus, his cousin?
- I wonder what it was like for Jesus to be baptized.
- I wonder why we do baptisms in our church and why it is usually babies who get baptized?

- Has anyone here been to a baptism at our church and remember anything that happened?
- Who usually does the baptisms?
- Where do the baptisms take place?
- What is a godmother or godfather?
- I wonder what baptisms tell us about being people of God?

I am Sealed by the Holy Spirit: Pass out copies of the Book of Common Prayer. Ask the class to turn to page 300, then to page 304 and 305, and look at some of the promises. Then turn to page 308. Give each child a 3 x 5 card and ask them to pick a colored marker and copy the sentence in the middle of the page, writing "I am" instead of "N., you are," so that it reads, "I am sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever." Invite the children to take the card and find a place at home to put it. (A bookmark? By their bed? Whatever they choose.)

Gifts: The theme for the season of Epiphany is "Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift." What do we think this means? (Perhaps the children are familiar with the concept: "Pay it Forward", which was a book and then a movie they might have seen.) Some may have seen the bumper sticker that invites people to practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of generosity.

Let's see if we can figure out things we could do to make something better or someone happier – and do it secretly. Could we do these things in ways so no one will know? See what the children come up with. (Example: get a big trash bag and pick up junk at the park and toss the bag in the trash. Unload the dishwasher when no one is looking – and it is not your turn!) We can use this piece of newsprint and list ideas, then fold the paper up so no one can see it when we are not together.

Getting Closure: Ask the children to take a minute and think of one word that has caught their attention in this time together. Invite them to share.

Closing prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon us your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised us to the new life of grace. Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us an inquiring and discerning heart, 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.* (adapted from the Book of Common prayer, page 308)

Mark 1:4-11

Narrator: ⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And 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. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed,

John: '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. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Narrator: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven,

God: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year B – First Sunday after the Epiphany
Lesson Plans for Adults

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

Background

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Theme: Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift

Before Class: You will need an easel and easel paper or a whiteboard and markers. For the “Getting Closure” activity, you will need copies of the Book of Common Prayer for everyone.

Ways to Begin: Read to the class the overview of the season. Or give copies of it to everyone so they can be thinking about it as we go through the season: noticing gifts, looking for opportunities to give in return.

Creating the Setting: Mark is the principal gospel for the entire year. If this group has been together since last fall when Matthew was the Gospel, they are probably beginning to notice a distinct difference in voice. Invite the group to make observations on the passage for today: note that Mark is succinct, uses just the facts. Notice how Mark begins the gospel – no stories of the Advent or the birth of Jesus, and no childhood stories.

Epiphany is the season we have just begun. Ask the group what the word “Epiphany” means to them. (It has at least two meanings: the “ah-ha!” moment when something dawns on you, and a showing forth. On the newsprint write other suggestions people offer.)

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for the clear concise voice of the writer of the Gospel of Mark and for this time together to explore what this book will say to us and what it will invite us to do. We ask you to help us open up the meaning you intend for us. Amen.

The Scripture: Mark 1:4-11 Today's passage sets the tone for the season of Epiphany. Invite four different people to read the distinct portions of the passage. (See below.)

Reflection Questions:

Make two columns on the newsprint, one titled "John the Baptist" and the other "Jesus the Christ." Invite the group to come up with words to describe each.

- What is the relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus? (They are cousins.)
- What do we know about him so far? (He's a humble prophet, clear about what he is called to do and what he is NOT called to do.)
- Why do we suppose Jesus came to John to be baptized? (Could be he was struggling with a call and needed someone to discern along with him. He believed in the power of baptism and chose to authenticate it. Jesus thought John might help him get a bit more clear about what God was calling him to do.)
- Who was God's message in 11b for? (Jesus, yes. Could it also be for us?)

Getting Closure: Make sure each person has access to a Book of Common Prayer. Looking at the Baptism service, focus on pp. 304-305, the promises made at Baptism.

Notice what we promise and what it might mean.

Brainstorm to come up with ideas about what our church would be like – and our lives together – if we really focused on these promises. (Write ideas on newsprint to honor each contribution.)

Closing prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon us your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised us to the new life of grace. Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us an inquiring and discerning heart, 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.* (adapted from the Book of Common prayer, page 308)

Edited by The Rev. Shannon Kelly

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