

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by



Year 3: Session 3 – John the Baptist and Jesus

Class 7: Luke 1:5-22 – Birth story of John the Baptist

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Zechariah, soon-to-be John the Baptist's dad, is the high priest for the year. Here is someone who is in the holiest of holy places, and then when he encounters the divine, he is unbelieving of what's happening. Which then turns him speechless.
- Zechariah's unbelief foretells the challenge that Jesus will face when sharing the good news with the people of Israel. Jesus is going to have an uphill struggle with getting people to believe what he's saying.
- Verse 17: *With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* In today's story, we are reminded that Jesus was given a co-worker. Someone who helped make a way for Jesus/prepared the people for Jesus. That person was Zechariah's son: John the Baptist.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Movie clip from Admission movie
- TV and player to show the clips
- One marble per every two students and one marble per teacher
- Tape
- A grocery bag
- One modified 8.5 x 11 piece of paper per individual in class (and two per teacher)
 - Paper should be rolled so that the tube is 11 inches long
 - The tube should be about 1 and ½ inches in diameter
 - Use the tape to keep the paper rolled up.
 - If there are any loose ends of the paper that would keep the marble from rolling, tape those ends down as well.
- Some sort of string/rope or cones to mark a starting point

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- Here's the opening question for today's class. One of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, the teacher will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- Here's this week's question: *What's something that you think you know a lot about? That you might even consider yourself to be an expert about?*

TRANSITION to Video Clip - Nathanael

- In today's video clip, there's going to be all sorts of "experts."
- The first person that we'll see is Portia (said like the car company, Porsche) and she is an admissions officer from Princeton. She has lots of knowledge about the college and wants to share that knowledge with potential students.
- She is speaking to students at an alternative high school who appear to be very knowledgeable about college, as well.
- Let's see what happens when all this knowledge comes together in the same room.

Watch Video Clip from "Admission"

ASK

- So, did the students seem to know a lot about Princeton? (yes)
- And what did they know about it? (that it mostly wasn't a place that they liked or wanted to go to)
- Since they knew so much about Princeton, did they really want to hear what Portia (the admissions officer) had to say about Princeton? (no, not really)
- So at one point, Portia is going to leave because they don't want to hear what she has to say, but then she decides to stay. Why does she stay? (because one student said he wanted to hear about Princeton and then everyone else stopped talking long enough to listen)

TRANSITION to scripture story

- So we start a new set of stories about John the Baptist and Jesus with this lesson.
- **[Say only if you used previous lessons]:** *In previous lesson sets, we've been talking about prophets (Samuel, Elijah and a little bit about Elisha). Jesus and John lived about 800 years after Elijah and 1000 after Samuel.*

- Although there is a King of Israel (King Herod) at this time, Israel is not its own country. It has been conquered and is ruled by the Romans.
- So in today's story, neither John the Baptist or Jesus are born, yet. But we learn a little bit about Zechariah, John's soon-to-be father.
- Zechariah is a priest, which means he's a bit of an expert about God.
- And as a priest, he gets to do a special job in today's story.
- While Zechariah is doing that special job, a messenger shows up to tell Zechariah a little bit more about God and to let him know he, Zechariah, is going to become a father soon.
- Let's see what happens:

READ LUKE 1:5-22 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. 8 Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. 10 Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16 He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." 18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." 19 The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." 21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. 22 When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.

ASK (*answers are in parenthesis*)

- Between verses 5 and 11, do you understand what's being explained there? (Zechariah and Elizabeth are married, but they have no kids. Zechariah is a priest who is selected for a very special once-a-year custom: The incense offering. And then while he is in the Temple doing this incense offering (where no one can see him – he's all by himself), an angel appears)
- What is Zechariah's response to the angel in verse 12? (fear – lots of fear!)
- What does the angel tell Zechariah? (that prayers are going to be answered and that Zechariah is going to have a baby boy!)
- So this is good news, right? (yes!)
- And in verse 17, what does the angel say their child will do? (will make the people ready for the Lord)

- What do you think “Make ready for the Lord” means? (basically it means John the Baptist will help prepare the Israelites for Jesus’ arrival/ministry/message)
- In verse 18, does Zechariah sound convinced that the angel is right about what is going to happen? (no, not really)
- Why do you think Zechariah is hesitant to believe the angel? (his age; and what the messenger is saying sounds a bit...outlandish – like too much)
- What does the angel say/do to help Zechariah be more convinced about the message? (The angel says, “I stand in the presence of the Lord” and then Zechariah is muted until John is born)
- Why do you think Zechariah is muted? (we don’t REALLY know, but one likely reason is so that he’ll stop talking about what he thinks he knows and start listening to the information that’s being offered – like what happened in the video clip. Sometimes even the experts need to be quiet and listen)

TELL

- In some ways, Zechariah’s response is a lot like the kids response to the admissions officer in today’s movie clip. What Zechariah knows gets in the way of his being able to hear new and improved information.
- So by being muted, Zechariah is given some “sheer silence” time (remember that from the Elijah story a few lessons ago?) so that he can listen better and think with less distraction about what is being told to him.
- Which is a helpful reminder to us, too, that no matter what we may think we know about God, God always has more for us to learn and understand.
- So, let’s now talk a little bit about what was said about John.
- In verse 17, there is a reference to Elijah – did you catch that? And now that we know a little bit about Elijah (from previous lessons), what kind of person do you think John the Baptist is going to be? (a powerful, not-to-be-messed-with type of character)
- And John’s job will be to prepare the people for Jesus. Basically, John will be a co-worker of Jesus.
- John will prepare the way by reminding the people that their way of life is not God’s better way and that in order to live God’s better way, they need to choose it.
- And then, once John has driven home his message, he will then point the Israelites’ attention to Jesus, who will show them what the better way of life looks like and how to live it.
- In short, it’s sort of like a relay race: John’s job is to tell the people that the Israelites’ way of living needs improvement. Then he’ll hand them off, like a baton, to Jesus, who will show the people how to replace their “wrong way” with God’s better way.

TRANSITION to Activity

- We usually don’t think of Jesus as having a co-worker.

- But he did have one...which made his ministry much more effective.
- And in today's activity, we'll see why that is.
- We'll see how two people can be more effective at a relay race than one person is.

EXPLAIN MARBLE RELAY ACTIVITY

- Each of you will be given a rolled-up piece of paper
- Some of you will then be given a marble.
- You must transport that marble from the start line (marked by cones/string) all the way over here and into the paper grocery bag that is sitting on this chair.
- You will transport your marble by rolling it through your piece of paper and then transferring it into your teammate's rolled up piece of paper.
- You may not touch the marble with your hands
- You may not walk when the marble is in your piece of paper.
- If you touch the marble with your hands, or if the marble hits the ground, you will have to start over.
- This IS a race. But don't be too concerned about your classmates.
- Because you will be competing against one of the teachers, who will be trying to transfer the marble and moving it all alone, all by him/herself.
- The teacher will do this by using one rolled up piece of paper PER hand and moving one foot in front of the next every time s/he moves one hand in front of the next.
- [NOTE to teacher: The best approach is to do this sideways. Point one shoulder toward the paper bag and then crabwalk your way to it as you transfer the marble between the rolls of paper. REMEMBER you are **supposed to lose** and feel free to look a little foolish while doing it.]
- Any questions?

DO MARBLE RELAY ACTIVITY

ASK/TELL

- So who won? (the students!)
- And who lost? (the teacher!)
- And why did the teacher lose? (because relay races are often much more difficult when you do them by yourselves)
- If Jesus had to spend half of his time telling the people that they were living a way that wasn't the best for them, then it would've been more difficult for them to hear the good news about God's better way from Jesus.
- But because John the Baptist was able to share that part of the message, then Jesus was able to spend most of his time teaching the people the Good News: That the kingdom of God (i.e. God's better way of living) was at hand.

CLOSING PRAYER