

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 4: Session 4 – Advent and Jesus

Class 11: Luke 3:1-14, 21-22 – Baptism

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Read and discuss the story of John the Baptist and Jesus being baptized
- Highlight / discuss / illustrate the meaning of the word “repentance”
- Discuss how baptism is a symbol of repentance

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *The Hunger Games (the second one)*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. For activity
 - You’ll want a set of 12 plastic cups for about every 4 people (12 students = 48 plastic cups. If you have a smaller class, you can do 24; if you have a larger class, you might want to consider increasing the number to 60 or 84)
 - You mostly want to use hefty plastic cups (like those red solo cups)
 - You need to poke 4 decent-sized holes in the bottom of the cups so that the air doesn’t get trapped inside of them and create a vacuum when you try to unstack them (be sure to practice this at home to make sure the holes in the cups are large enough)
 - To make the holes, I used the tip of a sharp knife to make the hole and then spun the knife to make the hole larger. Depending on the length of the knife, you could possibly do two or three cups at a time. Note: It was a slow process for me – took a good hour of prep.
 - You’ll want to practice the stacking pattern (see PDF that is attached to lesson) a few times before explaining how to do this with the class

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.

- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- 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:* Let's say tomorrow is going to be an opposite day and that you get to choose one thing that people usually do during the day that they instead will automatically do the opposite of? What would you choose? (*Note:* When I asked this question, I was surprised at the lack of playful/creative answers I received – until I jumped in and started naming things like “Drinking liquid from a cup,” “Brushing their teeth,” “We might want to avoid all things regarding eating and the digestive process.” I recognize every group of students is different, but wanted to give you heads up with this one so you might be prepared to help them warm up to the question).

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- Last week we started a new session about Advent and Jesus
- Advent simply means “to prepare” -- and we use the word to describe the season just before Christmas (the 4 weeks before Christmas, to be exact).
- The idea is that we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus as well as prepare to live into what the birth of Jesus represents: That God is and wants to be at work -- in us and through us
- In today's scripture reading, we will see how John the Baptist prepares the people for Jesus' arrival.
- And then we see how JESUS prepares for Jesus' arrival
- Part of today's story is about baptism
- So to help us prepare for thinking and talking about baptism, let's watch the following movie clip from the Hunger Games (the second movie in the series)
- In it, some of the “contestants” of the Hunger Games are running away from a poisonous fog that attaches to their skin and burns (nice, right!?)
- In case you don't know, this is not a funny or light-hearted movie clip (sorry about that)
- Let's see what happens

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- Did the contestants run towards the fog or away from the fog? (away)
- And after they got away from the fog / were protected from the fog, what did they do to recover from the fog? (bathed in the pond)
- And what happened when they bathed in the pond? (the lesions/wounds from the fog came off)
- Did their skin and overall sense of health seem to be restored afterwards? (yes)
- Was this because the pond water was somehow magical or special? (it may have been, but it seems more likely that the poisonous fog was water-soluble)

TRANSITION to Scripture Story

- So last week we talked about Mary being told that she was going to have a baby boy
- And, as we discussed, this announcement was quite the dangerous interruption in her life
- So she went and stayed in a safe place for awhile with her relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth
- Elizabeth was also pregnant -- with John the Baptist
- So, in today's story, we see that baby Jesus and baby John the Baptist were, indeed, both born AND that they have indeed both grown up

- Let's see what they are up to...

READ Luke 3:1-14, 21-22 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" 7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin 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. 9 Even now the ax 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." 10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" 11 In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." 12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" 13 He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." 14 Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

ASK

- Verse 2 and 4 – where was John the Baptist doing his ministry? (in the wilderness)
- Verse 4-6 – what pattern do you see in those verses? In other words, *what* is being made into *what*? (curvy to straight, low and high made into level, rough made smooth; taking what *is* and making it into a better, opposite thing – note: this will be a difficult question for the students to answer; be prepared to give them the answer – to help them see it)
- Verse 7-9 – does John the Baptist speak kindly to the crowd? (nope, not at all)
- Verse 10 – does the crowd get offended and leave due to John's not kind words? (nope, not at all)
- Instead of getting offended and leaving, what does the crowd ask John? (they want to know what they can do differently)
- Verse 11, 13 and 14 – What does John tell the people to do? (if you have extra food or coats, give them away. If you charge too much, give back the extra; if you get paid to protect people, don't steal from them)
- In other words, John is telling the people to do the opposite of what they are doing
- In verse 21 – What have all the people had done? (they were baptized)
- Also in verse 21 – who then is also baptized? (Jesus)
- Is that odd to you that Jesus would be baptized?
- During / after his baptism, what happens to Jesus? (he receives God's holy spirit)
- *Optional:* So...what kind of spirit do you think Jesus had before he received God's holy spirit? (*Note:* with this question – just let them answer; no need to get in arguments with them about Jesus' state before he was baptized)

TELL

- First, let's talk about the word "repentance" that shows up once or twice in the story
- The Hebrew word for "repentance" simply means, "turn around."

- In other words, “repentance” is about what direction you are moving
- And that’s exactly what we see John the Baptist telling the people to do, right?
- Not only does he tell them “Turn around,” he also gives them specific things to do that would reverse their daily direction
- He tells the people to share, not hoard. He tells tax collectors to only take what they are supposed to take. He tells the soldiers to protect the people, not steal from them. In other words, he’s telling them to do the opposite of what they’ve been doing – to go in the opposite direction
- John the Baptist would’ve loved to have answered today’s opening question for us – and tell us the kind of things we might consider undoing / doing the opposite of.
- But don’t confuse “doing some opposite things” as John’s point, here.
- The reason for repentance is so that the people will be better prepared and ready for what Jesus will talk to them about and offer them.
- Repentance is just step one.
- And the people’s baptism, then, is a symbol of their agreement to do step one, to do the opposite of what they’ve been doing
- This is similar to the movie clip, then, where the water does the opposite to the contestants’ skin than what the fog did
- And even though in the movie clip the water is very helpful, we also noted that there’s probably nothing magical about the water itself – and the same is true for baptism as well. It’s not that the water is magical – what’s important is the choice to reverse direction (that the water represents) that’s important.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- So why and how does repentance help prepare the people for Jesus?
- If we think about how repentance is about changing direction, the idea, then is that without repentance there’s all these actions and things in the way that keep us from really being able to hear and know that Jesus is saying and sharing.
- I know that might not make too much sense, so let’s do an activity that might help us think about how the more things we do in one direction, the more things there are, then, between us and where someone else might want us to be.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- So we’re going to do some cup stacking competitions
- We’ll start by learning what that means (see pdf that is attached to this lesson on the rfour site for more instructions)
- The first type of stack is the 3 stack.
- You start with a stack of 3 cups, face down on the table
- On “go,” using both hands, you build a cup pyramid of 2 cups on the bottom and one on top
- Then you put the three cups back into one cup stack
- The second type of stack is the 6 stack.
- You start with one stack of 6 cups, facedown
- On “go,” using both hands, you build a cup pyramid of 3-2-1 cups and then you put the cups back into one stack.
- I’m going to pass out 6 cups to groups of two of you so that you can practice doing both the 3 and 6 stack.
- We’ll then have a “stack-off” where we’ll race to see who can stack a 3-6-3 pattern the fastest.

- What that means is that you'll have a three cup stack, and 6 cup stack and a 3 cup stack. You'll have to build all three pyramids and then re-stack all the cups back into three stacks.
- This is just a fun, meaningless activity – that you might just win if you're fast at this sort of thing

PRACTICE and then DO ACTIVITY

Notes to teachers:

- Best way to do the competition is to have a round-robin 1v1 type of competition (Winners play winners and losers play losers) – but you could just do a regular tournament where if you lose, you're out (if you take this approach, maybe do a best of 3 approach).
- Whenever a race ends, then the people who weren't stacking get to race next – so on and so forth
- Keep track of scoring (or don't) however you wish (or let the students figure it out)

ASK / TELL

- So what took longer? Doing the three cup stack or the six cup stack? (six cup)
- And the reason for this, of course, is because with the six cup stack you had more cups unstacked that then needed to be re-stacked
- Or, to use the language from today's story, the more cups you unstacked, the more cups you then had to repent...
- Ok, maybe that line didn't make quite as much sense as I had hoped – but you get the idea
- And here's the thing about repentance and today's story: Jesus is doing the same thing as the other people did.
- He's doing what John the Baptist said to do: Jesus is getting prepared. He's getting his cups stacked and in order. And maybe there were a lot of cups to get in order or none – we don't actually know.
- But what we do know is that because he did that repenting, we then see the end result. We see what is possible when room is made to receive God's Holy Spirit
- The other thing this story helps us think about is that choosing to be prepared for Jesus' invitation to follow him takes some ... preparing. Some work, even.
- So – why would you want to do that work is a question you might.
- One answer to consider is this one: Because you see who Jesus was and what he did and it makes you think, "You know what – that looks like an attractive, better way to live."
- Something to keep in mind, anyways, right?
- And to help you better know who Jesus was and what he did, the next number of sessions will be all about Jesus and what he did and taught.

CLOSING PRAYER