

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by

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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

- Read and discuss the story of Zechariah being told that he's going to have a son
- Explore why Zechariah did not immediately accept this message
 - He may have thought he misunderstood the message
 - Sometimes "thinking you know something" (aka being an expert) can get in the way of accepting new information about that thing

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Some way to play and show movie clip on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Admission*)
- A pencil and piece of paper for each person in the class
 - *Optional:* A hard surface for each person to write on
 - You might want a second piece of paper for each individual in case the class wants to do the activity again at the end of class

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 ACTIVITY

- Today, we start a new session. We are moving away from Old Testament prophets and pivoting to New Testament prophets.
- Namely, John the Baptist.

- Today's story is actually *before* John the Baptist is alive. In it, his dad learns that he's going to be father to John the Baptist
- Except, what we'll see in the story is that dad isn't very cooperative in the conversation.
- So, that's where we're going to start – with an opening activity about communication where it seems that cooperation just isn't available.

EXPLAIN / DO ACTIVITY

- Everyone gets a piece of paper and a pencil and something to write on
- Write your name in small print at the bottom right of the page.
- Next, write a sentence at the top of your paper. It can be something you are an expert in. It can be random, true, false or abstract, from a song lyric or a movie. In other words, just write *something* that makes sense.
- Everyone done? Good. Now, everyone pass your paper to your right
- Now, what we're going to do is draw a picture that attempts to create a visual representation of the the sentence that's on the paper.
- Draw the picture below the sentence
- Once you are done with the picture, fold the top of the paper down so that the sentence can't be seen, but the picture still can be
- Then, everyone passes their papers to the right
- Now, everyone should write a sentence below the picture, describing what you see
- Then, fold the top of the paper down so that only your sentence shows
- Pass the paper to the right.
- Now, draw a picture of the sentence.
- We'll keep following that pattern until our own pieces of paper are returned to us, then we'll open up the page and start reading our written/drawn game of "Telephone"

DO ACTIVITY

ASK

- Is the last written line on your paper the same or similar to the line you wrote at the top of the paper? (Most likely not)
- What reasons do you think account for the differences between the first and last sentences? (bad drawings, incorrect understandings; possibly purposeful misunderstandings)
- Do the misunderstandings bother you or did you find them funny?

TRANSITION to scripture story

- Keep these reasons for why misunderstandings occur as we read today's scripture story.

- **[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 the time of this story, 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*)

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [*to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, "yep, that's interesting" or a, "Yeah, I find that to be weird, too" works*]
- Verse 7, do Elizabeth and Zechariah have children? (No)
- Verse 7 still, does it seem likely that they'll have kids (No, because of their age)

- Verse 9, what does Zechariah get to do? (he's picked to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense)
- Verse 11, what happens while he's in there doing his task? (an angel appears)
- Verse 13, what does the angel tell Zechariah? (that he's going to have a son and he's to name him, "John")
- Verse 16, what will John do? (He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.)
- 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)
- 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)
- Verse 20, 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)

TELL

- The thing that Zechariah was doing was going into the holiest space in the Temple where only the one person who was picked could go, and the only time that person went into that space was once a year.
- So that's quite the honor Zechariah receives
- And in the midst of the actual doing of that honorable task is when he receives the good news about having a son
- So the question becomes, why doesn't he trust or believe what Gabriel was telling him?
- Possibly because the news was too good to be true.
- But still, it's his *job* to be in touch with God. To trust whatever contact is made with God.
- But when that moment happened for him, he didn't trust the experience.
- Another one of the reasons why Zechariah didn't trust the experience is because he thought he knew how things worked and the information that was being given to him didn't fit with the new information he was receiving
- Instead of trusting the new information, he trusted his old information.
- Let's watch a movie clip that highlights this same scenario.

TRANSITION to MOVIE CLIP

- 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 Princeton, as well.

- Let's see what happens when all this knowledge comes together in the same room.

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- So, did the students seem to know a lot about Princeton? (yes)
- Do you think they knew *everything* about Princeton? (no)
- 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)

TELL

- In some ways, Zechariah is a lot like the kids in the movie clip. The little bit that he does know stops him from being able to hear more.
- The gift in the story, though, is that he is muted.
- That might seem strange, but let me explain.
- By being muted, Zechariah is being given some "sheer silence" time (remember that from the Elijah story a few lessons ago?) to be able to hear what God is telling him with less distraction (mostly his own words).
- What I like about this story is that it is a reminder that however much we may think we know, God always has more for us to learn and understand about life, ourselves, and God.
- But, that we need to be open to that learning, because otherwise, we might block out the information that's being offered to us.

CLOSING PRAYER

If there's extra time, do the writing/drawing activity again