

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – First Sunday After the Epiphany
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Epiphany: Shimmering glimpses of the abundance of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps we, too, noticed a star and followed it. Or maybe someone led us to the gift of faith. Now we take the Light – the Good News – out into the world. Will others see the light shimmering in us? Will they risk taking a journey into faith with us?

A notation for this week's Gospel

"I have called you by name, you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1) Jesus had probably heard these words before seeking baptism from John the Baptist. As Jesus comes up out of the water, we have a hint of the working of the Trinity – a true ministry of collaboration. Jesus prays, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove, and the Voice calls him by name.

Theme: Called by name

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible or copies of the lesson found at the end of this lesson, copies of *The Book of Common Prayer*, a packet of 3 x 5 cards, and enough sandwich-sized plastic bags so each person may have a bag.

Beginning: Tell the group that you have a "dictionary" definition of Epiphany and you want their collaboration in coming up with the class' definition. A dictionary definition is: "A revelatory manifestation of a divine being – a spiritual event in which the essence of a given object or manifestation appears to the subject – a sudden flash of recognition."

Ask the group, how we might give this a more accessible interpretation?

During this season of Epiphany, we are going to record, for our own eyes only, "epiphanies" that come to us through the Gospel readings. Each Sunday we will jot down our "epiphanies" on a 3 x 5 card and put it in a plastic bag between two "cover blank cards." The group leader will collect the bags (the cover cards will have only the name of the person on them) and bring them back -- unread -- for the next session. That way, people do not have to remember to bring their set back each week. At the end of the Epiphany sessions, the cards will go home with the authors of each set. Instead of a time set apart to record notes, people can simply make a note as something occurs to them.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, Isaiah heard you say, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.' Thank you for this promise. Help us to be your servants. Amen.

The Scripture: Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22. Suggest that three voices be used for this reading. The first is the narrator, the second is John the Baptist (verses 16a and 17), and the third is the voice of God (verse 22 b). Read the passage through, allow a moment or two of silence, then ask a different reader to read, again, verses 21-22. There is a script for this below.

Questions:

Ask the group to come up with a composite description of John the Baptist – who he was and what his mission was. They may wish to look back at Luke 3: 1-6 for additional clues. (A bridge from the Old Testament Prophets, a man driven to preach, the one called to prepare the way, a man with a passion for calling people to repentance, a man many thought might just be the Messiah, etc.)

Then ask the group to listen for the thinly veiled clue of the Trinity in verses 21-22 and invite yet a different person to read verses 21-22.

Allow a moment or two of silence before asking how they heard the Trinity in this passage. (How is Jesus described? In what form does the Holy Spirit appear? And is God manifest?)

What are the "epiphanies" we discover in this passage? (Some things might be that Jesus did not have a fancy, private baptism, but was baptized with a bunch of regular people. It is as Jesus prays, that the Holy Spirit descends. As Jesus prays – we can assume for guidance, but possibly simply in gratitude for abundance – he hears the voice of God and receives affirmation for who he is and for the choices he has made. The "operating style" of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is clearly one of collaboration.)

Option: If parents of "older children" are in this group, you may wish to inform the group that the children will be looking, throughout the weeks of the Epiphany season, for "clues" as to WHO this Jesus is. Parents might want to draw out thoughts from their children at home, continuing the discussion begun in class.

Getting Closure: The additional aspect of the season of Epiphany is that we are called to take the good news we have received and discover appropriate ways to offer it to a world that has not received this good news. How can we offer this to people who may have received such a distortion of it that they have turned away? Increasingly, people show up in our lives who have never heard the word -- at all.

Closing Prayer: Help us to be ever on the lookout for 'epiphanies' – examples of your abundant love in our lives. Amen.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Narrator: As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying,

John: ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

Narrator: Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven,

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

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