

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Second Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

The school year began months ago; New Year's Day is over a month away. Yet here we are, beginning our new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent invites us to risk pushing on through the world's weariness to expectant hope. Something's coming we proclaim! Immanuel: God With Us in the form of an infant. We celebrate what happened 2000 years ago while we look to the promise that Jesus will come again. We are also called, as we live in this parenthesis time, to look for messages God continues to send: what has happened, and will happen again, is also happening now: right here.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

The Prophet Isaiah could see the day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of God." John the Baptist saw clutter blocking the way to God. John pointed to the truth that through Baptism, we are called to seek knowledge of God, get rid of the clutter, and smooth the path on which we walk.

Theme: I Will, With God's Help

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible or copies of the scripture for this Sunday and *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Beginning: Ask the group if anyone wants to tell about anything that happened this past week as we looked at our priorities (see First Sunday of Advent for this activity). If you have something to offer, feel free to share it. Remind them that this is not a contest, and it is not about getting the most points, but to help us as we get ready.

Opening Prayer: Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us inquiring and discerning hearts, 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.

Option: Tell the group that your prayer is a portion of the prayer said over newly baptized persons, a word or two changed. The complete prayer is found at the top of page 308 in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

The Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12 Invite four readers to read verses 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, 11-12.

Questions:

- What was the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus? (John and Jesus were cousins, John about 6 months older than Jesus; John heard the call from God to prepare the way for Jesus.)

- Who were the Pharisees and the Sadducees? (The religious leaders of the time: Pharisees deeply concerned with obeying all the laws of their religion yet open to the possibility of the resurrection; the Sadducees were equally strict but not open to the resurrection).
- Contrast the lifestyle, clothing, and food of John the Baptist and the Pharisees and Sadducees. (The religious leaders were easily recognizable by their flowing robes, shawls, tassels, etc. Verse 4 describes John's outfit and diet.)
- I wonder why John the Baptist was so harsh to the Pharisees and the Sadducees? (He saw them as self-absorbed, closed, over-confident that they had all the answers and not at all ready to risk repentance)
- What do we think was the importance of baptism to John the Baptist? (It provided a clear opportunity for people to notice what they were doing wrong, release it and ask God's forgiveness, and then know, through the washing away of the sin, that they were in a right relationship with God and thus able to hear Jesus' message.)
- Since so many of the baptisms we participate in now involve infants, how is this theology different, how is it the same? (Sponsors of infants promise to walk along with the infant, helping the child to figure out what is right and how to ask forgiveness for those times we do things that are not right.)
- We believe Baptism to be necessary only once. How do we deal with times we know we have "blown it?" (It can be as simple as owning the sin, genuinely repenting and asking for forgiveness, and then going on with our lives to seeking serious pastoral guidance from a priest; the form on pages 447-452 of *The Book of Common Prayer* provides a process.)
- Discuss how else the Covenant of Baptism might be a helpful resource for us. (Reading through it offers an opportunity to examine our priorities and make necessary changes.)

Getting Closure: Read together the five "will you's" at the bottom of page 304 and the top of page 305. Then, if the group resonated to observing a moment or two of silence, invite them, again, into the silence, using the method suggested last week.

Closing Prayer: Help us, God, to always remember that we are 'sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever.' Amen.

Matthew 3:1-12

3 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.”’

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume 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. ¹⁰Even now the axe 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.

11 ‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2013 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.