

Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

Background

Epiphany means several things: a gift is received; the gift must be shared. Jesus appears to be suggesting a rhythm, a balance to our lives. We go inward to be with God, to receive; we go out in the world to share what we have been given – still with God. We are called to balance the pouring out of our love with the resting in God. We are called to heal by just showing up, by laying on hands, by sharing what we have. This good news that was for the few people who heard it up close and personal is ours because they reached out and shared it. It will belong to those who have not yet heard, if we accept our call to share the story by how we live out our lives and as St. Francis said, “with words, if necessary.”

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

The baby Jesus is now a man; a man beginning his ministry. Perhaps he is still trying to sort out in his mind what he is being called to do. He looks for validation and turns to his cousin, John. John, meanwhile, has been faithfully calling people to prepare, turn around, start over. He is pretty sure he will recognize Jesus, but he has not yet met him. When Jesus shows up, John goes into the water with him to baptize him, and both of them hear a voice from heaven. Jesus now knows he will be able to figure out what it is that he is being called to do.

Theme: Receiving the Gift and Offering the Gift

Before Class: If there is to be a baptism in your church today and if it would be possible for your children to attend, you may need only a small portion of the lesson. If you will be in the classroom the entire time, you might want to bring in a couple of towels for costumes.

On a sheet of paper either type on your computer using a large clear font or write in large print letters in the center of the page:

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen.

Make a copy for each child. If the children can write their names, invite them to write their own name on the line. If they are not at this stage, you may print the child's name. An art activity suggested in today's lesson requires colored chalk (one small box, the pieces broken in at least two) a small bowl of water, and a tablespoon or two of sugar.

Beginning: We've heard stories about Baby Jesus and where he was born. What can you tell me? (Accept what they remember, jogging memories if you wish with questions such as, "Were there any angels? Tell me about them. Shepherds?")

Praying: Thank you, God, for Baby Jesus, the angels, the shepherds, (and anything else the children have remembered). Thank you for giving us all this -- because you love us. Amen.

The Story: Today we have a story about a grown-up Jesus. Today Jesus gets to meet his cousin, John. John's work was baptizing people and getting them ready to hear Jesus' message. Jesus has not been baptized. So he comes to John and asks him to baptize him. Well John had a different way of baptizing. He went right into the water in the river. Jesus went into the river with John. And when Jesus was baptized, both John and Jesus heard God say: "I am so glad you are my son!"

Reflection Questions:

- Has anyone here seen someone getting baptized?
- How do we do it in our church?
- What does the priest do?
- What do the parents and god parents do?

Baptism Activity: Do you like to go swimming? Is there a pool near your house? Has anyone gone swimming in the ocean? Has anyone gone swimming in a river?

OK. Let's pretend. Let's pretend that right here in the middle of our room is a nice big river. It is only sort of deep – not over anyone's head, not over mine, not over yours. Let's take turns being Jesus and take turns being John. Let me show you. I'll pretend to be John, who will be Jesus? OK, let's walk into the middle of the river. Oh! It's cool – but not cold. Now, Jesus, hold your nose, and I am going to gently push you down into the water, until it is over your head, covering all of you. Then, I'll gently help you back up. And when you come up, the other children will say with me what God says: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

OK, now let's walk out of the water and get a towel to get dry. Take turns until each child who wants to gets to be Jesus and John.

Baptismal Prayer Activity: *Give each child a sheet you prepared with the Baptismal prayer in the middle. Read to the children what is written on the paper. Tell the children that the priest says this prayer to each newly baptized baby – or person – as soon as they are baptized. Ask the children to say it with you, phrase by phrase. Then offer the children several pieces of colored chalk. Show them that when we dip the chalk in the water it creates a pretty texture on the paper. They can draw Jesus being baptized, or a picture of them being baptized, or of someone they have seen – whatever they want.*

Getting closure: If you have time, and the children you work with are at least 4 or 5 years old, you might want to link your time with the children with the theme of the season: "Receiving the gift and offering the gift." As you draw with the children, you could explain that Jesus did very few things all by himself. He asked others to help him. John helped Jesus today. Jesus is telling us that he is loved by God, and so are we. How could we show other people that they too are loved by God? What if we all, this week, looked for

people who seemed kind of sad and we smiled at them until they could smile back?

Closing Prayer: *Thank you, God, that John could help his cousin by baptizing him. Thank you that we, too, can help Jesus. Amen.*

Say together the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark 1:4-11

Narrator: ⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed,

John: 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Narrator: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven,

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