

Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

Background

As in Advent, when we went inward to prepare to go outward with Christmas and Epiphany, in Lent we again go inward – in preparation. In the first two Sundays of Lent, Mark, brilliantly succinct, reveals the preparation Jesus experienced. During the next three Sundays John adds shimmering lights on Jesus' ministry before we plunge into the Crucifixion, where we watch, from wherever we are, what Jesus must go through in order to give us Easter. These six vignettes invite us to take a closer look at the choices we are making in our lives and what we might choose to jettison, correct, or add.

The gospel for the First Sunday in Lent (Mark 1:9-15) reads much like the one we had the First Sunday after Epiphany (Mark 1:4-11), and the Second Sunday in Lent has the identical lesson as we had two weeks earlier for the Last Sunday after Epiphany! Lent provides us with different lenses, lenses that see the cross in the distance, while reading the same text.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Jesus is Baptized, the Spirit descends on him "like a dove," and he hears the affirmation: "You are my Son, loved, and pleasing to me." It appears that he is affirmed and ready for ministry. Yet, immediately the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he must spend 40 days taming the temptations that come with power. Only then is Jesus equipped to proclaim the good news. And so we too are invited to notice the temptations that are pulling us off course, diverting our energy, and impeding our ability to proclaim the good news.

Theme: Temptation and Prayer

Preparing for Lent: Depending on what is compatible with what is happening in your church, you might want to incorporate an extra activity during Lent. If your church has indicated a special offering for Lent, you will probably want to participate in that effort. Notice that for some people Lent calls for “giving up” something (possibly something that should be given up anyway and possibly something that is not intrinsically bad, but provides a good discipline by abstaining for a time). For some, Lent calls for adding something – extra time at prayer, financial contributions, or outreach activities. You may choose to include an age-appropriate “extra” for the children such as learning one of the prayers said during the Eucharist or memorizing brief portions of Scripture. Some suggestions are made in the body of these lessons.

Lent brings a dynamic change in mood from the festive Christmas/Epiphany season. To the extent you are able to “decorate” in your classroom, you might want to keep this leaner perspective in mind. Put a simple cross in the center of your table, for example. If you have a worship space, a purple cloth covering it would help children notice the change in colors. (A roll of purple crepe paper streamer could do the trick.) A simple wood cross, about 4 feet high could be constructed and the children invited to use sandpaper to smooth the cross. (They can work on smoothing it all the way through Lent. On Easter, it can hold pictures the children make of the Easter stories they will hear.) If you choose memory work, as they learn the portions, copies of what they have learned could be posted. Today, for example, very young children could learn the last half of the quoted verse at the end of the story. Slightly older children might want to learn the entire sentence.

Also, if your church does anything different for Lent in the way of decorations (purple cloth on the altar?) or anything to simplify the décor (no flowers, for example), be sure to check it out so you can help the children notice.

Before Class: You will need a cross made from rough, unfinished lumber. The cross could be as tall as 4 feet – or smaller if storage is a problem. You will

also need a significant supply of sand paper so the children can take turns sanding the cross. You will need white paper, access to a photocopier, paper for the children to draw on (copier paper will work), an assortment of crayons or felt markers, glitter, and glue – or glitter pens. You may choose to make small crosses using twigs and twine or chenille (pipe cleaner) stems. A simple cross could stand on your table, and coverings in purple (cloth or even crepe paper streamers) would help.

Beginning: Greet the children, invite them to observe anything you have added to or taken away from the classroom, and then ask them to be seated. Ask the children if they noticed anything different in the church. Different colors? The children can help you make your classroom look a bit like Lent. If you have brought in a simple wood cross and sandpaper to smooth it, the children can smooth away as you talk.

With your Bible open to today's passage (Mark 1:11b), read: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Ask the children if they know who the Son might be. And who might be talking to Jesus? Tell them today's story is about God getting Jesus ready to do the work he will need to do.

Praying: Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to help us notice just how very much you love each of us. Amen.

The Story: We heard part of this story a few weeks ago when we were just starting Epiphany. Jesus knew it was time to stop helping Joseph make smooth furniture out of the wood in the carpenter shop. It was time for Jesus to go do the work God wanted him to do. He knew that the first thing he needed to do to get ready for his new work was to go find his cousin, John, and ask him to baptize him. So John and Jesus walked into the river and John baptized Jesus. While they were in the water, they heard these words: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

But Jesus had more work to do. He had to go into the desert to figure out what he was going to do and – more importantly— what he was NOT going to do. While he was there he had to think about a lot of things. Shall I get fancy clothes and a fancy horse and live in a fancy house? Don't think so.

Shall I do magic tricks so people will like me? Don't think so. Shall I be a big boss and make all the people do just what I tell them to do? Don't think so.

When he had figured out what it was that he was supposed to do, he came out of the desert. This is what he said: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news."

Special Offering: If you are going participate in a special offering, this would be a good time to introduce the materials. The children could illustrate an aspect of the Lenten Offering materials.

Smooth the Cross: If you choose to work on the smoothing of the cross throughout Lent, that activity could begin. As the children sand they could repeat -almost like a mantra - all or part of the phrase: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news."

Making Crosses: Collect sturdy twigs and fashion crosses for the children, fastening the two branches into a cross and tying them with a bit of twine or chenille stems. The crosses tell us that Jesus figured out that his life work would be difficult. Display the crosses throughout Lent.

Art Activity: The children could draw what they heard from the story (Jesus being baptized, Jesus in the desert, Jesus coming back out of the desert.) The children can choose.

Getting Closure: If you have chosen to talk about "giving up" something or "adding" something, talk with the children about what that might be. One little boy decided that during Lent he would not ask to go into toy stores nor ask for a new toy! Perhaps instead of spending money on candy or gum, the money could go into the Lenten offering. Adding something could mean doing chores without being nagged, or doing extra work around the house (setting the table when it is not even your turn, for example).

Closing Prayer: *Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to learn how to do his work and show us how to do ours. Amen.*