

Lesson Plans for Younger Children

Scripture: Acts 10:44-48

Background

Alleluia, Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Easter is nearing a close but we continue to celebrate with the same enthusiasm because Jesus was raised! We've walked with Jesus through the wilderness into Jerusalem and to the grave. Easter is a season of 50 days in which we name and claim our identity in Christ as an Easter People. Easter is a season of baptism and rebirth. Many of the Scripture passages we will hear are about baptism or about Jesus' sacrifice for us. Many churches use this as a season for baptisms and receptions into the church. It is the season when we re- explore our identity as Christians as it is the key to our faith tradition: that Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose to new life again from the grave. In doing so, Jesus has opened the pathway to everlasting life for all of us. Thanks be to God!

A Notation for This Week's Scripture

Today our Scripture passage is a continuation of the preaching we heard from Peter in the lesson from Acts on Easter Day. You'll remember that on Easter we heard the story of Peter preaching the Good News to the Gentiles at Cornelius' home. (For more detailed background read Acts 10:34-43 and/or the "Notation for This Week's Scripture from the Easter Day Acts lesson on LPTW.) Today's passage picks up from where we left off. Peter has preached the birth, baptism, teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection of our Lord when, suddenly, the Holy Spirit interrupts him by giving the gift of belief to all who were hearing the Word. As Peter and his followers who accompanied him witness this beautiful exchange of the Spirit they are taken aback, because they have witnessed the Spirit giving of itself freely to Gentiles, just as with the Jews. At this realization, Peter asks the key

question: “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” Thus, the people at Cornelius’ home are baptized on the spot.

Theme: Baptism is for All

Before Class:

- Set up the room to look like a sacred space. You will be enacting the Liturgy of Baptism for the activity today so all of the materials listed below are for the classroom to “become” a church hosting a baptism. Remember, not all baptisms happen in churches! Make your space feel special and holy – that is what matters.
- Read through the liturgy for young children (provided as an appendix to this lesson) to familiarize yourself.

Supplies needed:

- Pitcher of warm water
- Large mixing bowl (to be used as the baptismal font)
- White Sheet (to use as an altar cloth)
- Hand Towel
- Chrism (the oil used to anoint the newly Baptized)
- Candles
- Matches/Lighter
- Candle sniffer
- Baby doll (optional)

Beginning: Start by telling the children that today you are going to act out the baptism service. Next, tell them a short story about a baptism that was important to you as a means of introducing the personal nature of this activity. Ask if any of them have a memory of baptism that was special or

important to them. When all who have a desire to share have had a chance, open the lesson with the Easter Acclimation we've been using each week during this season:

Celebrant/Teacher: Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

People/Students: The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Opening Prayer: *Wonderful God, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit and for the baptism you invite us all into. Amen.*

The Story:

Today's story continues the story we heard on Easter Sunday. We'll start by remembering a little of that story and then we will add on the new pieces at the end of the story for today's lesson:

Acts 10: 44-48

One time, Peter was teaching a man named Cornelius, and his family, all about Jesus. Peter told Cornelius and his family that God loved the whole world and sent Jesus to share God's love with everyone. Peter told Cornelius about Jesus' birth and baptism and teaching and even about his death on the cross and resurrection at Easter.

Then, while Peter was still talking about Jesus, the Holy Spirit of God interrupted what Peter was saying. Suddenly, all of the people in Cornelius' house felt the Holy Spirit in their hearts and they started to believe in Jesus.

Peter was amazed. He thought the Holy Spirit could bless only people who already knew about God. But these people, who didn't know about Jesus before Peter told them, were blessed just like the people who had followed Jesus for a long time.

Just then, Peter understood that all of the people in the world could become followers of Jesus. He said, "We should baptize these people

because they love Jesus in their hearts just like us!” So Peter’s friends, who also followed Jesus, helped to baptize all of Cornelius’ friends and family who came to know Jesus that day.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder how Peter knew the Holy Spirit was there with the people.
- I wonder what it would feel like for the Holy Spirit to be in your heart.
- I wonder what the people thought when Peter suggested they all be baptized.
- I wonder what you thought the most important part of this story was.

Activity

Today we are going to act out the baptism liturgy from our prayer book. We talked about some of the special baptism memories we have at the beginning of class today. Do any of you have a favorite part of the baptism service? (Some churches have their own special traditions that are part of the baptism service – the children might ring bells, the priest may invite a child to pour the water, etc. While these traditions are not in the prayer book, they are part of our local experience. This could be a good opportunity for your students to learn which things about the baptisms they witness at church are from the Episcopal tradition and which are from your local tradition.)

In order to act out our baptism today we need to enter into Holy Time. Have the class sit in a circle on the floor with the font in the middle. Alternatively, put the font on a low table in the middle of your space and have the children stand in a circle around the table. Once the children are settled, show them the baby doll you have brought and explain that you are going to learn more about baptisms today by pretending to baptize this baby. Before a baby can be baptized, they need a name. Could you help name the baby? Now that the baby has a name it is time to begin. We need to enter Holy Time so we quiet our bodies and then we can light the candle/s (or invite a children to help do this as an “acolyte.”) Finally, say a short opening prayer:

Dear God, be with us as we learn more about baptism. Amen.

Baptismal Liturgy Outline for Use with Younger Children

1) Explain to the children that the first part of the liturgy is for the parents and godparents to name or present the child to be baptized. Now, invite the children to say, "I present _____ to receive the sacrament of baptism."

2) Next, the parents and godparents make promises to love Jesus, follow God, and listen to the Holy Spirit in their lives. They promise not to let the devil tempt them and they promise to ask God for forgiveness when they do something wrong. They promise to treat everyone with kindness and try to make sure everyone knows that God loves them. Can the members of your class promise those things? In church we make the promises by responding to the priests' questions saying, "I will with God's help." Invite the children to try on using that phrase. For example, ask them:

Do you promise to love God, follow Jesus, and listen to the Holy Spirit? "I will with God's help!"

3) Next, everyone in the church prays for the person being baptized. Invite the children to pray for the baby being baptized. (They could pray that the baby grows up strong and healthy. Pray that the baby knows God loves him/her. Etc.)

4) Now, invite a child to help pour the water into your font. More than one child could help with this. If it splashes around that is great! The water of baptism is special for all of us to enjoy.

5) Tell the children that the next part of the service is when the priest to pray for God to bless the water. Say a brief prayer over the water:

"Dear God, thank you for water. Water is important and helps to nourish our bodies and the earth. You made the water when you created the world. Make this water Holy. Amen"

Help the children to understand that the way God blesses things is by sending the Holy Spirit to them. You can remind them that in the story of Jesus' Baptism, the Holy Spirit was sent by God in the form of a dove to show everyone how holy that was.

6) Now that the water is blessed it's time to baptize the candidate. Let each child have a turn. When the baby is baptized you put water on the baby's head 3 times saying: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

After baptizing the doll, you could allow the children to see how it feels to have water placed on their head too. I would have adults lead this part if you choose to do it so that the children don't get overzealous with the water!

7) Next it is time to anoint the baptized person with holy oil. Open the oil and let each of the children smell it. What does it smell like? Tell the children this is special oil that is blessed by the bishop or priest. We use it to invite the Holy Spirit to bless the people it touches. After letting the children smell it you can anoint the head of the doll by placing your thumb in the oil and making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the doll. As you do this say, "Insert Name you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own, forever."

After anointing the doll you can ask if any of the children would like to try anointing the doll or you could ask if the children would like to take turns anointing one another.

8) Next, we all pray for the person baptized. "Thank you, God, for welcoming _____ into your family through the water of baptism. Help _____ to follow Jesus. Amen."

9) After the baptism everyone says, "Welcome to our family!" and everyone can clap.

Getting Closure

After the liturgy has been completed, ask the children how it felt to baptize the baby. How did it feel to get the water on their head? Invite the children to smell the holy oil... what does it smell like? Did anything surprise them about the experience? Are there any final thoughts they would like to share about the experience?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for meeting us in the waters of baptism. Amen.

Celebrant/Teacher: Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

People/Students: The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!