Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Older Children
Advent 3 (B)
New Testament: John 1:6-8, 19-28

BACKGROUND
Advent means “coming.” The coming of the baby Jesus, God among us in human flesh. The coming of Christ again "the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. In between those two great comings is God’s constant longing for each of us to come to God, to love God, and to let God love us. "Be alert." Notice. Listen. Watch. For what? For the ways God will choose to get our attention this season. For those moments when we notice that our ways are not in alignment with God’s ways. For those shimmering glimpses of the Kingdom of God.

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK’S READING
The Gospel of John tells the story of John the Baptist from a slightly different perspective. Who is this John? John understands he is a messenger of the light – not the light itself. Those in charge of keeping the faith are confused. Who is this man? Is this the long-awaited Messiah – or Elijah – or a prophet? John sees his mission as baptizing, and pointing to the one who is coming after him.

THEME
Who Are You?

BEGINNING
Greet the children as they arrive. Has anyone seen lights? Christmas trees? What else have they seen? Gather in a circle around the Advent wreath.

Today we can light three of the candles. Christmas is almost here! Ask the children if they know what the word "messenger" means. A messenger is someone who tells us something – maybe something we did not know.

OPENING PRAYER
Thank you that we can be here this day. Thank you for (name each child). Thank you for sending messengers. Amen. Either blow out the candles in your Advent wreath or place the wreath in a safe place until the end of class when you blow out the candles.

THE STORY: JOHN 1: 6-8, 19-28
Here is a paraphrase of the story for young children:

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Remember that last week we had a story about a man named John the Baptist? (Be open for anything they care to add about John.) Last week we learned that many people came to John the Baptist to be baptized. We talked about baptisms that take place today and the cross that is made on our foreheads. Today we will learn that John the Baptist was also a messenger. His job was not to be the teacher, but to point to the teacher, Jesus. People asked him: "Why should we listen to you, if you are not the teacher?" But John's job was to be a messenger. (Print the word "messenger" in big print letters on a piece of paper and put it where all can see.)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- I wonder if you have ever been a messenger for someone else?
- I wonder what it is like to be a messenger?
- I wonder if it is hard to pass on someone else's message?

ACTIVITIES

Messenger

Have the children sit in a big circle – as big as the space allows. Tell them "God uses lots of kinds of people to be messengers. God even uses you and me. Let's practice being messengers. I will be the first messenger and whisper a message to one of you. That person will go across the circle and tell the same message to another person. That person will tell a person across the circle and we will keep on until each of us gets to hear the message and each of us gets to be a messenger. Then the last person receiving the message will tell the whole group what the message is." The message whispered to the first child is "Jesus is coming!"

After everyone has had a chance to give and receive the message, the message should still be, "Jesus is coming!" If it is not, ask the children if the message told to the group by the last child is still the same message, or is it different. Ask them why they think it changed. Ask them how they think they could keep the message from being changed.

Whether the message has changed or not, ask the children what is important about being a messenger. What is important about today's message, "Jesus is coming!" Why is it important that we give the correct message of Jesus to others?

Jesus is Coming!

Using large sheets of paper, invite the children to print the words "messenger" and "Jesus is coming!" Then invite them to illustrate the page however they want. If you have very young children, perhaps not writing yet, offer to put those words on the paper for them. Then you, too, sketch on your paper. Maybe draw a wild-looking John the Baptist. Or a shed way off in the distance that can become a manger. Feel free to add some angels flying about or some shepherds and sheep. This activity time also invites the children's sharing. Why are there Christmas trees all over the mall and we don't have one here in our church? Answer: Well, Christmas has not quite gotten here yet. We'll have a tree then

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GETTING CLOSURE

As children leave, be sure they take their pictures with them and tell them they are messengers to their family and other people they will see today in church. Ask them what message they will tell.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for messengers like John the Baptist. Thank you that we can be messengers, too. Amen.

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