

Read

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12,
13-14

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8



REFLECTION

The Gospel of Mark opens with John the Baptist announcing the coming of Jesus and the need to prepare, repent (seek forgiveness), and be baptized. John's announcement was a big deal because the Jewish people had been waiting hundreds of years for a messiah to come. John the Baptist's message is not about the coming of Jesus as an infant but is about Jesus beginning his ministry as an adult. Still, the Church includes this Gospel reading during Advent because this message, that the time to prepare for the savior is now, is one we need to hear as we get ready for Christmas.

We normally focus on reconciliation more during Lent, but the words of today's Gospel remind us that any time is the right time to seek forgiveness and repent so that we are ready for Christ. As we think about celebrating Christmas with loved ones, it is important to keep this repentant spirit in mind. We should make an effort to reconcile with those we are upset with and to seek forgiveness for the things we have done that have hurt others. Asking for forgiveness and offering forgiveness will help our spirit be ready to celebrate a new beginning at Christmas.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What do you think is the most challenging part of forgiving someone?
- ❖ What do you think is the most challenging part of asking for forgiveness?

LIVING THE WORD

Second Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2023

ACTION

Reflect on who you have wronged or who has wronged you. After prayerfully considering this, write a letter to someone in your life who you want to reconcile with. In your letter, you can share with that person some of the reasons why you are seeking reconciliation with them. If it is appropriate, be sure to also communicate your desire for a repaired relationship and what he or she means to you. Send the letter and wish that person a blessed Christmas!



Learn more about how
God helps us to forgive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ck5rtxhl6E>



December 10, 2023

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #5B

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Psalms 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's reading marks the beginning of the Gospel according to Mark. It is the shortest Gospel and Mark doesn't include any story about Jesus' birth or young life. As this passage shows, Mark's Gospel opens with the account of Jesus as an adult coming to the Jordan River to be baptized. Why would Jesus need to be baptized? He had no sins to renounce, so what was the purpose? As John tells those around him, Jesus would soon baptize them not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. John's purpose is to announce the coming of Jesus, not only through his words, but also through his baptizing. By offering the baptism with water for repentance, John was preparing everyone for Jesus' baptism which offers redemption.

Q FOCUS: *John points us toward Jesus.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On this second Sunday of Advent, we've only been in Advent for a week. Yet, it might feel like Christmas is right around the corner since this year we are experiencing the shortest Advent that can happen. Because the season is measured by the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, and because Christmas falls on a Monday this year, we're already only fifteen days away from Christmas. This proximity to Christmas can make it more challenging for us to focus on the emphasis Advent places on repentance and the need

to prepare our hearts. The readings of Advent help to remind us of our need for this preparation and invite us to wait for Christ with joyful hope.

Church Teaching Connection

"Jesus did not need to be baptized, but the first theologians say that, with his body, with his divinity, in baptism he blessed all the waters, so that the waters would have the power to confer baptism. And then, before ascending to Heaven, Jesus told us to go into all the world to baptize. And from that day forward up until today, this has been an uninterrupted chain" (Pope Francis, Homily, January 12, 2014).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:1-8

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: / *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; / he will prepare your way. / A voice of one crying out in the desert: / "Prepare the way of the Lord, / make straight his paths."* John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants

of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Today's Gospel reading can seem very foreign to our own lives. Here we have this man, John, who even by the standards of his time was considered unusual. The reading tells us that his clothing was made from camel's hair and he ate locusts and wild honey. He sounds like a survivalist trying to manage out in the wild, and in a sense, that's exactly what he did. Despite his odd appearance and ways, people were drawn to what he was saying.

► **Why do you think people were drawn to John the Baptist? How would you have reacted?**

John was reminding people that a savior had been promised. The prophets had told of this messiah, and the people of Israel were eager for this savior. They followed John because they wanted to know more about this promised messiah and were eagerly awaiting his arrival. By sharing his message about the coming messiah and baptizing people who acknowledged their sins, John prepared the way for Jesus' arrival.

When Jesus arrived on the scene (in the verses that come after today's reading), he was baptized by John as well. Jesus was without sin, so there was no need for him to receive this symbolic baptism from John. Instead, Jesus' baptism is a turning point. John can point to Jesus and help people reform their ways by professing their sins, but he is not Jesus. Jesus *is* the messiah and *does* take away sin. He is not just a symbol of salvation; he is our salvation. We believe that when we enter the waters of the sacrament of baptism, we are changed because Jesus made it a sacrament of our salvation, and cleanses us of our sins.

► **Do you remember your baptism or know stories about it?**

► **Who in your life has been someone who points you toward Jesus?**

Last week we focused on readying ourselves to receive Christ within our own hearts. This week, we can reflect on the ways in which we receive Christ outwardly. John offers an incredible and challenging example for us: not only to live a life that is counter-cultural in its zeal for Christ, but also to live with a spirit of humility, proclaiming God's praises instead of our own. John's greatest example is to show us that anything we do should point away from ourselves and toward the glory of God. How can our actions lead others to Christ?

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 88.

People came to hear John preach about the promised messiah.

John never claimed to be the messiah, but always worked to prepare the way for him.

John's entire life was directed toward pointing to and glorifying somebody besides himself.

Act on the Word

Pray the Word to Live the Word

For this activity, you will need a candle (or an electric candle), matches, and space for the students to spread out comfortably.

Begin by sharing this with the teens:

“This activity is based on the practice of *lectio divina*, which means divine or holy reading. This form of prayer reaches all the way back to some of the earliest Christian monastic communities and is still prayed regularly in both individual and group settings to this day. This contemplative practice helps us to open ourselves to hearing God’s Word within our hearts. In order to begin this prayer, please find a place and posture where you are comfortable, but not so comfortable that you become drowsy or distract others.”

Pause briefly to light the candle while the students find themselves a prayerful space. Then instruct the teens to listen carefully as you read today’s Gospel again, listening for a word or phrase that stands out. After you’ve read this passage, allow for a few moments of silence, and then invite the students to share aloud the word or phrase that stood out to them. No explanations are needed. After this period of sharing is complete, read the passage aloud again. Give some additional time for silence before asking students to expand on the word or phrase that struck them. Why did this particular line speak to their heart today? What does this mean for them in their life? After this round of sharing, read the passage one final time.

Once the process is complete, invite the students to share with a partner or small group how this experience can help them in their witness of Christ. How does praying with God’s Word prepare them to share that Word with others? Finish the activity by inviting the teens to share with the group any prayer intentions they have for others. Use the closing prayer below to conclude your time together.

Closing Prayer

*Gracious Father,
you are unchanging in your love for us.*

*Help us to answer your call to grow
in holiness*

and to mirror your love to others.

*May each day bring us closer to the
perfection of your love within us.*

Through our Lord Jesus

Christ, your Son,

*who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,*

God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.