

Read

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Luke 1:46-48, 49-50,
53-54

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28



REFLECTION

Have you ever talked to a new person and thought they seemed familiar? Inevitably the question comes up, "Have we met before? How do I know you?"

In today's Gospel, we encounter the wild man of the desert, John the Baptist. People are confounded and amazed by this man. He stands out in an unforgettable way, so much so that people thought he might be the messiah. John was not the savior of the world, but he was pointing to him. While everyone was looking at John, he was trying to show them who the real savior was. Jesus had already been born and would soon start his public ministry, but the people didn't notice that God was already among them.

The truth is, God is all around, even now, but in our very noisy and crowded world it is hard to notice his presence. We need modern-day John the Baptists to help us see that Jesus is already here among us, in our lives and our hearts.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Who are the people that point out the presence of God in your life?
- ❖ How can you prepare the way for the Lord in the lives of your friends and family?

LIVING THE WORD

Third Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2023

ACTION

This week, take some time to write a list of ways and places that you encounter God. Find a quiet place in your home where you can meditate and pray. Reflect on your past week. Think about when you felt loved or most at peace with yourself. What was happening at that time? Was it with another person? Were you doing a particular activity? Write a detailed description of that experience. Then think about how you have shown love, friendship, or mercy this past week. Write about that experience as well.



This short, guided meditation will help you prayerfully reflect on your day:
<https://pray-as-you-go.org/player/prayer%20tools/examen-p-1>



December 17, 2023

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #8B

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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 Gospel is similar to last week's, but this time it is from the Gospel of John. It may be helpful to clarify for the teens that John the Baptist is not the same as John the Gospel writer. (This is not an autobiographical story.) The interesting difference between Mark's and John's account is that John focuses much more on how different people interacted with John the Baptist. Rather than simply highlighting those who came to him for baptism, we also get to hear how religious leaders received his message. While we can't know the hearts of these people, we can assume that some may have been hopeful believers, while others were skeptical or even outright hostile to his preaching. In either case, John responds by always pointing toward Christ.

Q FOCUS: *John demonstrates the challenges that we might face when we proclaim Christ.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent, otherwise known as Gaudete Sunday. It gets this name from the entrance antiphon at the beginning of Mass, which begins with the exhortation "Gaudete," meaning "rejoice." Many people teach about the symbolism of the Advent candles representing faith, hope, joy, and love. But it's important to distinguish that this Sunday is not just about joy but *rejoicing*. The difference is that it is not simply a passive emotion we experience, but an active expression that we live

out. Normally this Sunday is considered the halfway point of Advent, but with the unusual nature of this year's calendar, we're actually just over a week away from celebrating Christmas! That proximity to the Nativity can make the rejoicing of this Sunday feel even more justified than in other years.

Church Teaching Connection

"John the Baptist undertook a *long journey* to come to bear witness to Jesus. The journey of joy is not a walk in the park. It takes work to always be joyful. . . . [T]he Baptist is a model for those in the Church who are called to proclaim Christ to others: they are able to do so only by detaching from themselves and from worldliness, by not attracting people to themselves but directing them toward Jesus" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, December 13, 2020).

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

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

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

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him

to ask him, "Who are you?" he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert, / 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' / as Isaiah the prophet said.*" Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

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:

If today's Gospel reading sounds very familiar, that's because it is a similar account to what we heard last week, from a different Gospel writer. Last week we heard from Mark; this week's is from John. While both last Sunday and today we hear this story of John preaching and baptizing, there are some differences that are worth paying attention to.

In today's Gospel, we hear that the religious leaders in Jerusalem, upon hearing of John's preaching, sent people to question him. Clearly, they were skeptical of John. After all, John's strange behavior, especially his humble clothing and diet, would seem to match some of the radical behavior that prophets of the Old Testament might have demonstrated. The religious leaders in Jerusalem were nothing like John. While he wore camel's hair, they wore fine linens. And where he survived on locusts and wild

honey, they dined on good foods. And while he was out preaching and baptizing in the Jordan River, they stayed in comfort on the temple grounds in Jerusalem. John was nothing like these so called "holy men." Perhaps they felt threatened and sent people to question him, possibly to discredit him or to uncover reasons to condemn him, just as they would later do to Jesus.

► **How does our culture treat outward appearance? Is it a significant factor in how a person is viewed?**

To his credit, John received this questioning gracefully, being honest about the fact that he is not the messiah, but also doing whatever he could to proclaim the approach of Jesus. In this way, John embodied exactly what he was called to do; what we are all called to do. As the Gospel states, "He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." Believe *through him*, not *in him*. John shows us some incredible humility and commitment to the mission by doing whatever he can to point away from himself and toward Christ. When asked if he is Elijah (a prophet from the Old Testament), he continuously denies his own greatness in favor of Christ. And the Pharisees ask him why he is baptizing when he is not one of these important figures. And once again John points to Jesus by stating that his own baptism with water was simply preparing the way for Jesus, who John knew would be baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

► **How does our culture treat people who act with humility? Can you think of examples of people who are praised for their humility? How about people who are mocked for their humility?**

John gives us a great model of what it is to live with humility while still doing great things. Humility in this case is lived out by pointing away from yourself and toward someone else. In John's case (and all of ours) the correct choice is to give all glory 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 92.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ, both in his preaching and his baptizing.

Like Jesus would, John faced challenges and questioning from Jewish religious authorities.

John lived out his calling by always seeking to point toward Christ and not himself.

Act on the Word

Mistaken Identity

For this activity, you will need enough scraps of paper to write each individual participant's name.

Share with the teens that the purpose of this game in which they will try to guess someone's identity is to help us practice emulating John the Baptist by pointing away from ourselves and toward another. Begin by writing each participant's name on a slip of paper. Gather all of the slips of paper and hand them out or have the teens draw them from a basket. They should keep their drawn name a secret from other participants. If they draw their own name, they should return it and draw another. (If you have a large group and the young people may not know each other well, it may be helpful to have them draw names from existing small groups in which the teens would know each other well.) Then explain the following rules.

"The goal of this game is to have someone correctly guess the name you are holding. Here are the rules of the game. First, you will always interact with one other person directly, not in groups. Then, to begin a guess, one person asks, "Are you (insert the

name of the other person)?" The other person will respond with, "Not I, but someone who . . ." and complete the sentence with characteristics of the person who is written on the slip of paper. These should not be physical attributes like height or hair or clothing. Instead, they should be positive characteristics or personality traits like, "Someone who is generous." You can add more specificity, but you must keep your response to a single sentence. The person who is guessing will get two guesses. Regardless of correct or incorrect guesses, the roles reverse, and the process starts over. At the end of the process, if the names were not guessed correctly, then each person finds a new person to partner with. This continues until all names are guessed correctly.

Closing Prayer

*Lord of heaven and earth,
the world depends upon you for its
very existence,
yet we often take our lives into our
own hands.
When we forget you,
draw our eyes and hearts back
to your Son,
the perfect revelation
of your eternal and all-powerful love.
Through Christ our Lord.
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.