

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

LIVING THE WORD

Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020



REFLECTION

How often do you think about Baptism? Even if we do not intentionally think about this first sacrament of our Christian life, the radical reality of Baptism permeates our entire Christian life. We must be transformed by our Baptism, and our everyday conversations and interactions with others must be daily renewals of our Baptism. Our lives, like John the Baptist, must be living testimony. But what exactly are we testifying? Do our lives testify to the light of Christ, living and active in our world? Do our lives shine as beacons of hope and life and love? Do our actions speak for inclusion and peace? We hope so, but if we are honest with ourselves sometimes our lives testify to things that are not of God. Our choices can be self-centered, and instead testify to hatred, selfishness, and lust, among so many others. During this season of Advent, strive to be especially mindful of what and who you testify to.

ACTION

Spend some time in prayer this week reading and reflecting on the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed, both of which are professions of our faith. As a community of faith, we acclaim our faith at every Mass by professing one of these creeds. As you read through these statements of faith, consider how you live out these beliefs in your daily life. Does your life give witness to your belief in God?

***"Be who God meant
you to be and you will
set the world on fire."***

—St. Catherine of Siena

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What words or images come to mind when you think of John the Baptist?
- ❖ How can you help others prepare for the coming of Christ?



December 13, 2020

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

John the Baptist prepared others to receive Christ and recognize him as the Messiah. John spent his entire life in service to God and asked for nothing in return. He did this because he knew God's deep and enduring love, which was made manifest for the salvation of the world in Christ. Our lives are transformed so that we may point others to Christ by our witness of God's love.

Q FOCUS: *John the Baptist lived his life in service to God so that others would know Christ.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

The familiar Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," is based on the "O Antiphons" that are used during Advent in the Liturgy of the Hours. The Liturgy of the Hours is an ancient daily prayer practice based on the Psalms, used especially by men and women religious, to consecrate all work and time during the day to God. The O Antiphons are short phrases that speak to the aching that the people of God bore as they waited for God's promised Messiah. They help us to recall the ancient longing for the Messiah to come, as we await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. The words of the antiphons are illustrative reminders of Jesus' lineage and his identity as Son of David and Son of God.

Church Teaching Connection

"The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world—the Cross—and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. . . . In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord" (*Deus caritas est*, 35).

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:

God's tremendous and powerful love for his people and his faithfulness toward his people is evident from the beginning of creation. Even as the first humans committed their sin, God loved them. God's love and compassion for us does not mean our sin is without consequences, rather, it means that God makes a way for humankind to be reconciled to him. Both before and after that original sin, human beings are created in God's image and likeness. This means that we are uniquely connected with God and belong in relationship with him. Through Christ, who was both human and divine, our sins are overcome, and we enter more deeply into relationship with God.

► How do you know that God loves you? What in your daily life points to this love?

In all the years before Jesus was made flesh and dwelt among humanity, God promised that he would send the Messiah to save humanity from their sins. Through the prophets, like Isaiah, he reminded the

people that this savior would come to them. The people waited for the Messiah, each generation hoping to see the Lord's anointed one. John the Baptist was the last of these prophets. Wholly and utterly dedicated to preparing the way for the Messiah, John spent his life living out this mission. People questioned who he was, wondering if he was God's Chosen One. In the accounts of the Gospel, we never hear of John falling short or seeking his own glory; he always pointed to the one who was yet to come. In today's reading, John made clear the fact that his baptism and Christ's would have different purposes; this clarification also notes the stark line that John draws in reminding followers that he, John, is not the Messiah.

► What would it be like to live your life in complete service to another—not in slavery, but out of love for that person?

John was humble and he never sought to glorify himself. His entire life was at the service of God, so that he could help prepare the way for the Lord. The concept of allowing Christ to increase as we decrease is a concept that John the Baptist exemplified (see John 3:27–30).

► How do we allow Christ to increase in us? Do we lose ourselves entirely in that process?

► How might this attitude of allowing Christ to take precedence in your life affect your actions?

Through Christ we are a changed people; we are transformed in him and through him. John the Baptist understood that Christ was coming and that he would transform his people. By his ministry, John helped the people to be ready for this transformation. We allow God to transform our lives when we approach his will with humble hearts and an openness to conversion.

► How are you readying yourself for the coming of Christ? Where has Christ transformed your life already?

► Have you witnessed Christ's transformative love in others?

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 84.

John helped the people ready themselves for the coming of the Messiah and prepared the way for him.

Through Christ, we are a transformed and renewed people.

With humility and faith, we cultivate Christ's transformation in our lives.

Act on the Word

Lectio Divina

Before beginning this activity with the teens, it might be helpful for the catechist to read this background information on lectio divina from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/word-of-god/upload/lectio-divina.pdf>.

Lectio divina is a Latin term that means "divine reading." Practice of this prayer form has long been a part of the Church's tradition because it is rooted in Sacred Scripture. There are four primary steps of this prayer practice: reading, meditation, contemplation, and prayer. In this activity, the catechist will lead the young people in this practice.

Describe the steps of *lectio divina* to the teens. You may want to use the handout referenced in the direction to provide more information. Explain that the Scripture will be read three times, while they

- ✧ meditate on any words or phrases that stand out to them,
- ✧ contemplate why the Holy Spirit inspired this word to resonate with them at this moment in their lives,
- ✧ and finally, offer a response of prayer to God based on their insights from this time of reflection.

There should be a brief time of silence between each reading (perhaps a minute or two) to give them time for this reflection.

To begin, ask the teens to find a comfortable spot in the room. Tell them to relax and calm their minds so that they are ready to experience God's holy word. You may want to have them close their eyes or lower the lights to foster a prayerful atmosphere. Then read the following passage (John 1:26–27) three times, following the instructions above.

✧ "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."

After you have finished *lectio divina*, gather the students back together to discuss their experience. Encourage conversation about these topics by asking the students why something was particularly engaging, how they felt, and what it makes them realize about their faith. This might be a new prayer practice for some of them. If they are willing, they can also share any insights they might have had during the prayer.

Closing Prayer

Lord God,
give us the humble heart of John the Baptist,
so that we may prepare the way for the
coming of Christ with words of truth and
deeds of love, knowing that all good things
flow from you.

We ask this 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.lit.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.