

# Youth Teaching Resources

January 12, 2020



## Season after Christmas (January 5)

Now Appearing

John 1:1-9, 10-18 – “The Word that Reveals”

## Epiphany (January 12-February 23)

**Matthew 3:13-17 – “A Son Who Pleases”**

John 1:29-42 – “A Lamb Who Leads”

Matthew 4:12-23 – “A Preacher Who Calls

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# A Son Who Pleases

*Matthew 3:13-17*

## YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### PARENT PREP

At baptism we invite the Holy Spirit to live within us. As our students enter their teenage years, they will be more responsive to you if they invite you into their lives. The more you push, usually the less you get out of them. This doesn't mean be absent, but the opposite; be present, be around, just don't pry. They will seek you out and let you in. When they do, be there and be supportive.

### TEACHING THE LESSON

#### Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip "You'd Like to Let Me In" from *Jessica Jones*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize the clip to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How does he get into the apartment?
- 2) Is he truly invited into the apartment?
- 3) How is he received by the hosts?
- 4) When you have been invited into someplace you weren't expecting?
- 5) How do you invite people to your house?
- 6) What invitations are made in regards to your faith?

## Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Matthew 3:13-17. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What kind of reputation did John have with the people of Israel?
- 2) Why was John shocked when Jesus showed up to be baptized?
- 3) Why did Jesus choose to be baptized?
- 4) How was Jesus' baptism an introduction to the people of Israel?
- 5) What kind of language does God use to proclaim who Jesus is in relationship to God?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What was John's name?
- 2) What is Epiphany?
- 3) What does Elijah have to do with Jesus' baptism?
- 4) Why was Jesus baptized?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Was Jesus immersed?

## Transformation

Conclude your session by creating small groups of three students. Within these groups, have each person share about their baptism; share the who, what, when, where, how, and most importantly why. After everyone has had their opportunity to share, ask if anyone would like to share their story with the larger group. Allow these stories to be an invitation to others in the group who have not made the decision to be baptized.

Close with a prayer thanking God for John and Jesus and their humility to follow in the ways of Christ to know God more personally.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**John the baptizer**—I’m aware, as are you, that the more common name for John is “John the Baptist.” I prefer the term “John the baptizer” for two reasons. The first is that the word translates a participle that means “one who baptizes” or “the one baptizing.” The second is that “Baptist” has come to mean something entirely different. It refers to a broadly diverse denomination that (for the most part) believes in practicing baptism by immersion, but “Baptist” means many other things. It’s not appropriate to hang a label on John that implies more than it means.

Although Landmark Baptists contend that the Baptist denomination started with John the Baptist, that is a false and unfortunate view. The John who immersed Jesus was a baptizer, but not a Baptist.

**Epiphany**—Church tradition holds January 6 as the date of “Epiphany” and the beginning of the season of Epiphany. The word “epiphany” means “appearance” or “manifestation.” Epiphany was originally associated with the visit of the Magi, and celebrates the public manifestation of Christ. The season of Epiphany is observed between the seasons of Easter and Lent in the church year.

**Elijah**—John’s rugged appearance and rustic dress reminded contemporaries of Elijah because the crusty prophet’s appearance was so distinctive that anyone who had seen him remembered it. King Ahaziah of Israel once injured himself and sent messengers to inquire of the god Baal-Zebub whether he would live. Elijah intercepted the messengers and sent them back with this word: “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but shall surely die.”

When this was reported to Ahaziah, he asked, “What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?”

The servants answered with a description: “A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.”

And the king probably groaned as he said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.” (2 Kgs. 1:1-8).

## Digging Deeper *continued*

### **Bethany Beyond the Jordan**—The

Jordan River has shifted its course over the years, partly due to earthquakes – it runs through the northern part of the Great Rift Valley, which extends into Africa.

The remains of two ancient churches (under modern shelters), along with steps leading down to the former water level, testify to an early belief that this now-dry channel was the place where Jesus was baptized at “Bethany Beyond the Jordan,” and where early pilgrims came to be baptized in the same place.



**John’s preaching, and us**—John’s language was just as shocking and graphic as his appearance. He used strong words and striking images to explain just how serious the matter of repentance was, especially to those who already considered themselves to be the most religious, the Pharisees and Sadducees (compare Luke 3:7, where the same message is addressed to “the crowds”).

In verses 7-12 John used sharp images, accusing even those Pharisees and Sadducees who came out for baptism of being like snakes squirming away from imminent danger. Being children of Abraham wouldn’t save them, he said: God could raise up children from river rocks. He spoke of an ax slicing into the very roots of those who called themselves God’s people, clearing them away so that those who were truly repentant might take their place. He pictured a farmer’s winnowing fork that throws threshed grain into the air so that the grain may be saved and separated from the worthless chaff, which finds its fate in the farmer’s fire.

John called for change, but many people don’t like change. Herod and his wife did not want change, so they took John’s head off and served it up on a platter. They were happy with the *status quo*. They did not want anyone threatening their security or their self-image.

But, multitudes of others came out to hear John preach, because they were hungry for change, and even John’s fiery preaching was good news because it offered hope.

Few things are harder than change. We get stressed out over change. Changing jobs, changing houses, changing schools, changing churches. Change causes all sorts of alarms to go off in our heads. But the hardest change to make is precisely the one that takes place right there – in our heads – and in our hearts. The hardest change to make is a change in our self-image, a change in the way we think, a change in our personal behavior, a change in our lifestyle.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

People cannot begin to change unless they first believe in the possibility of change. This was John's message. Everything about John, from his weird appearance to his shocking sermons, was different. That difference in John symbolized the truth that we can also be different.

**Jesus and baptism**—Why did Jesus choose to be baptized by his cousin John? John baptized with water, utilizing the power of symbol to indicate the need for sinners to repent and have their sins washed away. Like an Old Testament prophet, John called members of the established religion to account for their failures. The gospels suggest that many people were convicted by his preaching, and they sought John's water baptism as a symbol of cleansing, as a way of declaring their intention to turn away from sin and turn toward God.

Jesus, however, reportedly lived without sin. The Bible (Heb. 4:15) and church tradition insist that Jesus, though tempted as humans are tempted, did not sin. Thus, John's baptism would hardly be necessary. Jesus had no need of liquid lustrations to symbolically wash away sins that did not exist.

Why, then, did he pursue baptism? John himself wondered, insisting that he was more in need of Jesus' baptism than the other way around (Mat. 3:14).

It is often suggested that Jesus chose to be baptized as a way of expressing solidarity with humankind. Although he did not need to be baptized as a symbol of repentance, perhaps Jesus desired to be baptized as a sign of both humility and humanity. As he did not think his divinity was something to be exploited, but "emptied himself" (Phil. 2:6-7), so he did not regard himself as "too good" to be baptized.

Jesus came to his baptism with the recognition that he was Israel's long-expected Messiah. In a way, the act of baptism served as Jesus' public ordination to the ministry that lay ahead. The messiah was to be identified with his people, and Jesus' baptism was a clear mark of identification with humankind.

In submitting to John's baptism, Jesus also endorsed John's work and showed that he was not in competition with him. John's call for repentance was appropriate. Jesus brought an entirely new dimension to the gospel, but repentance would remain important. Jesus began his preaching ministry by calling on others to repent and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15).

The most important reason Jesus chose to be baptized, however, may be found in his own words. When John objected, Jesus said "Let it be so now; for it is proper for *us* in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (Mat. 3:15). "To fulfill all righteousness" means, ultimately, to do God's will. Jesus believed it was the will of God for him to experience baptism, and it was the will of God for John to perform the ceremony. "It is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus not only submitted to God in his own life, but challenged John to do likewise, even though the desert preacher might not have understood why it was necessary.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Doves and pigeons**—The word translated as “dove” was also used to describe the common pigeon, but translators have uniformly preferred to speak of a dove. An old joke asks: “Do you know the difference between doves and pigeons?”

“Doves have a better agent.”

**Surprise!**—I still recall an observation Frank Stagg made 50 years ago, when he observed that the appearance of the Spirit as a dove may have been a surprising revelation to John. John’s proclamation about Jesus was laced with terms of judgment: the ax was at the root of the tree, and the winnowing fork was prepared to sort the wheat and the chaff. John predicted that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and with fire (Mat. 3:14-15).

The Spirit, however, appeared in the form of a dove, a symbol of peace. Judgment would come, but not before mercy. Jesus would call others to repentance, but his ministry would be marked primarily by acts of compassion and mercy (“Matthew,” in the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969], p. 95).

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Was Jesus immersed?

Paintings of Jesus' baptism rarely show Jesus beneath the water or even dripping wet, but many people – especially Baptists – assume that John dipped Jesus beneath the water and brought him up in the manner common to their tradition. Most Baptists lean the candidate backward into the water during the rite, though I have known some who push the candidate face down into the water (which is easier, though lacking a bit in symbolism). Orthodox Catholics who come to the Jordan River for baptism dip themselves three times by simply squatting down into the water, with or without the help of the priest's hand on their heads. But how strong is the evidence that Jesus was immersed?

The first part of v. 16 (along with the parallel in Mk. 1:10) provides one of several texts often cited as arguments for baptism by immersion: "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water ..." Baptists have traditionally interpreted the phrase as an indication that Jesus' body had been completely under the water, and that the Spirit of God descended like a dove just as John brought him up out of the water.

Grammatically, however, "as he came up from the water" could also describe the action of Jesus walking out of the water and onto the shore. Indeed, that is the most natural meaning. The Greek verb translated "came up" normally carries the sense of walking or climbing, as in going up a hill or going up to a certain place. The preposition *apo*, translated "from," also suggests the idea of "away from" rather than "up from" or "out of." That meaning is best conveyed by the preposition *ek*, which is used in Mark 1:10. It can mean "out of" or "out from."

The point of this discussion is not to argue that Jesus was not immersed, but simply to point out that the text does not demand that interpretation. The Greek verb could be used in a literal sense to mean "dip" or "immerse," or in a more figurative sense to describe a religious ritual or initiation. It is quite possible that John invited persons to come and stand in the river while he scooped up handfuls of water and poured it over their heads. But, baptism by pouring or sprinkling could have been done almost anywhere. The fact that John characteristically baptized in the river suggests the need for more (or deeper) water, which implies that he practiced immersion. Likewise, Paul's later analogy of baptism to the act of burial and resurrection best fits with the act of immersion (Rom. 6:3-5, Col. 2:12).

Jews of the day commonly practiced self-immersion in special pools (not unlike baptismal pools) as a purification rite before worship. Although John's baptism symbolized spiritual repentance rather than ritual purity, his hearers were accustomed to the idea of dipping themselves in water.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

Some years back, archaeologists excavated the remnants of a small cave that had been incorporated into an early church. The cave contained symbols associated with John and with baptism. It is located near the possible site of “Bethany beyond the Jordan,” which John 1:28 cites as the place where John was baptizing. Early Christians believed that had John lived in the cave at some point, and converted it to a chapel or memorial to him. A later monastery built at the site contained two apparent baptismal pools.