

Adult Teaching Resources

January 10, 2021



Season After Christmas

Ephesians 1:3-14—"Where Hope Belongs"

Season of Epiphany

Mark 1:1-11 (RCL 1:4-11)—"Jesus, the Beloved"

John 1:43-51—"Jesus, the Convincer"

Mark 1:14-20—"Jesus, the Summoner"

Mark 1:21-28—"Jesus, the Healer"

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“Jesus, the Beloved”

Mark 1:1-11

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline 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.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask each person to find a partner. Ask everyone to share their baptism story with their partner.

What is your baptism story?

What were you told about baptism and its meaning?

What did baptism mean to you before you were baptized?

What does baptism mean to you on the other side of baptism?

Give everyone time to share. Then, open the floor for volunteers to share their stories. Discuss the differences in methods and ages of the baptisms. Talk about what baptism means for each person.

Reading the Bible

What is this the beginning of? (the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God)

What prophet wrote the words that Mark quoted? (Isaiah)

Who appeared in the wilderness? (John the baptizer)

What did he proclaim? (a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins)

What was going out to him? (people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem)

What happened to them? (they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins)

How did John look? (clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey)

What did John say? (“The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”)

What did Jesus do? (he came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What happened when he came out of the water? (he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him)

What did the voice from heaven say? (“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”)

Making Connections

What do you consider to be good news? What do you consider to be the good news?

When was the most recent time you were introduced to someone or some group? Who introduced you? What did that person say about you? Did their words accurately describe you? Why do you say that?

When you imagine Jesus, what age/form/image comes to mind? For example, is Jesus an infant, a teacher, a friend, on the cross, etc? Why does that image most often come to mind?

Who is the most dynamic and memorable preacher in your faith journey? What made that person so memorable?

What does “repent of your sins” mean to you? Is that a phrase you use often? Is there another, or better, way to say that in modern language?

What is the significance of “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins?” Why did John preach that, specifically?

What has been your experience with altar calls? Why do you think they are a part of many preacher’s worship plans?

Our Lesson Writer says, “For John, the only prerequisite for baptism was the confession of one’s sins, for confession is the beginning of repentance.” What prerequisites do you think are necessary for baptism?

In verses 7-8, John is recorded as saying, ““The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me,” John predicted, “I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” What do you say about Jesus? What do you say about Jesus to someone who has not heard of him?

How many different methods of baptism can you name? Is one mode of baptism “better” than the others? If so, which one? Why do you say that?

Why do you think Jesus asked John to baptize him? What does Jesus’ baptism mean to you?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Even as Christ proclaimed his humanity, God the Father declared Jesus’ divinity.” What does it mean to you that Christ proclaimed his humanity and God declared Jesus’ divinity?

So What?

Ask each person to get back with their partner from the beginning of the lesson.

Share with everyone the words from our Lesson Writer, “Jesus’ experience reminds us that baptism is an important step in the life of faith. When we remember our own baptism, we are reminded of John’s challenge to repent, and of Jesus’ challenge to follow—not just on baptism day, but every day.”

Ask each couple to think about the other “important steps in the life of faith.” What, other than baptism, is important in our life of faith? What are those “rites of passage” we go through? What do you think is important to do/experience as you grow in faith?

Give each couple time to think and share with each other.

Then, ask them to consider this question:

When we remember our baptism, we are reminded to repent and follow—what else in your religious experience reminds you to repent and follow Jesus?

Give each couple time to think and share with each other. Then, open the floor for large group sharing and conversation.

The Challenge

This week, whenever you wash your body, take time to pray. Repent of your sins and pray for forgiveness. Let your time of getting clean remind you of your time with the baptismal waters.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the wild, radical, John the baptizer who prepared the way for Jesus. Thank you for those who have gone before us to prepare the way. Thank you for the baptismal waters we share with Jesus. May we always be reminded to repent and follow Jesus. Amen.

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.

Baptist or baptizer?—John is commonly called “John the Baptist,” but Mark uses a participle, meaning “one who baptizes” or “baptizer.” Matthew and Luke use a noun form, but it still means “baptizer” or “washer,” though “baptist” is an option. I prefer to follow Mark and call John “the baptizer” instead of “the Baptist” to avoid confusing the biblical baptizer with the Baptist denomination. Despite the claims of Landmark Baptists and their so-called “Trail of Blood” (<http://history.landmarkbiblebaptist.net/BloodChart.html>), the Baptist denomination cannot be traced back to the first church in Jerusalem.

Year B and Mark—The gospel texts for Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary are taken from the gospel of Mark, with occasional texts from John, as in other years.

John the wild man—Ben Long’s portrayal of John at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church (at right) expresses just how unconventional John was. Dressing and acting in the mode of Elijah, John was a most memorable character.

Good news—The word typically translated as “gospel” is *euangelion*, a compound word that means “good news.” The prefix *eu-* means “good,” while *angelion*—the root of our word “angel” (messenger)—means “message.” In secular Greek, *euangelion* was used to proclaim the good news of military victories or to announce the emperor’s birthday. In scripture, it is the good news of salva-tion in Jesus Christ. It is because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John declare such good news that we call them “gospels” rather than “biographies of Jesus.”

English words like “evangelism” and “evangelize” are derived from *euangelion*.

Epiphany—This week’s lesson marks the first Sunday of Epiphany, a church season that focuses on Jesus’ early appearances. The word is from a Greek root (*epiphaneian*) meaning “appearance” or “manifestation.” The season traditionally begins on the twelfth day after Christmas as a celebration of Christ’s manifestation to the Gentiles, symbolized by the visit of the magi. Despite the frequent depiction of wise men at the manger, they probably did not arrive until long after Jesus’ birth, when his family was apparently still in Bethlehem, but living in a house. When Herod learned of their arrival and their mission, he reportedly ordered the killing of all boys two years old and under, indicating that it could have been up to two years after Jesus’ birth



Digging Deeper *continued*

A weird wordsmith—John’s appearance certainly attracted attention. His dress was that of a bizarre desert hermit. Camel hair garments held together with a leather belt were more rustic and coarse than ordinary dress, typically made of much softer cloth. “Locusts and wild honey” sound like a diet of desperation, but both were fairly common elements of a nomadic diet, providing both carbohydrates and protein.

Honey, though rarely collected in the wild, remains a popular sweetener. In some parts of the world, insects related to locusts are commonly eaten. On the back roads of Cambodia, for example, one may see rows of cricket traps: upright sheets of plastic about three feet wide and four feet tall, with fluorescent lights at the top to attract the insects. When crickets fly into the plastic they drop into a pool of water below, where they drown and are collected, then deep-fried as snacks.

On the edge—Ted Smith, in *Feasting on the Word*, offers an intriguing description of John:

John’s dress marks him as the new Elijah, whose coming some believed marked the arrival of the end times (cf. 2 Kgs. 1:8). His appearance in “the wilderness” recalls Israel’s long wandering in between deliverance from slavery and entry into the promised land. In wilderness time the powers of sin and death have been broken, and the covenant has been kept, but the people of God still wait to receive the fullness of redemption. John baptizes people in the Jordan, the border between the wilderness and the land of milk and honey. He is not just any sort of radical, but the kind of witness who stands right at the edge of the reign of God and invites people to live into the now–and–not–yet reality of it. (*Feasting on the Word*, Year B, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 1 of Accordance electronic ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], paragraph 2841.)

Real confessions—Readers of a certain age will remember when a magazine called *True Confessions* enjoyed widespread popularity. People are drawn to the idea of hearing details of others’ seamy past or odd habits. Today one can Google “confessions of” and come up with entries on “confessions of a shopaholic,” “confessions of a dangerous mind,” “confessions of a teenage drama queen,” and others.

John, of course, had in mind the confession of sins and shortcomings. As a personal exercise, consider writing your own “true confessions” covering the past week. Where have you come up short? How would you like to do better?

How many baptisms?—Pastors often hear a request from someone who desires to be re-baptized because they have strayed from the path and wish to recommit their lives to Christ. Visitors to Israel or Jordan, though baptized years before, often wish to be baptized again in the Jordan River, seeking spiritual renewal. On our tours of Israel we do this gladly, though we emphasize that it is a ceremony of renewal and change the words from “I baptize you . . .” to “I challenge you to remember your baptism.”

Digging Deeper *continued*

Whether we go to the extent of re-entering the baptismal waters, we all can benefit from periodically remembering our baptism and the challenge it puts upon us.

Baptizing with power—Mark has John say that Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit” (1:8), but Matthew and Luke quote John as saying Jesus would baptize “with water and with fire” (Mat. 3:11 and Lu. 3:16). Since both Greek and Hebrew can use the same word for “wind” and “spirit,” some scholars postulate that the word “Holy” was a secondary addition to “spirit” in Mark, and that the original intent of John’s saying was that Jesus would baptize with “wind and fire.” The combination may be an indication of judgment, but is particularly reminiscent of Pentecost, at which the coming of the Spirit was marked by the sound of wind and by “tongues of fire” above the heads of the disciples (Acts 2:1-4). Pentecostal believers often speak of a baptism in the Spirit as a second baptism.

Temptation—Although it stretches beyond today’s text, we should not overlook the significant conjunction of vv. 11 and 12. Through the Spirit, God declared love for and approval for Jesus. Immediately afterward, however, the same Spirit “drove him out into the wilderness” to experience a trial of temptation. God’s love for Jesus did not preclude doing what was necessary for Jesus’ continued growth and preparation for ministry.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Was Jesus baptized by immersion?

This question is hard only because we can't know for sure. Neither this text nor the accounts in Matthew and Luke provide specific information about the mode of John's baptism. They relate that it took place in the river Jordan (1:5), and that Jesus was "coming up out of the water" following his baptism when the Spirit appeared as a dove (Mark 1:10 and Matt. 3:16, though Luke 3:21-22 says Jesus had been baptized and was praying when the Spirit became manifest).

Baptists typically assume that John practiced baptism by immersion, but the vocabulary used does not require that understanding. The present participle form of the verb (*anabaino*) means "coming up," and the preposition *ek* means "from" or "out of." In this context, the combination could have the sense of "coming up from (beneath) the water," or "coming up out of the water," largely depending on perspective—whether one thinks of Jesus' torso coming up from beneath the water, or of Jesus wading back to shore from the water.

Through the years, artistic representations of Jesus' baptism have often depicted John and Jesus standing knee-deep in the river, as John poured water from a shell over Jesus' head. Even so, most Baptists prefer to imagine a baptism by immersion, which would also be more in keeping with the Jewish practice of immersing Gentile proselytes who wanted to become Jews as a ritual of purification. Observant Jews in the first century also practiced frequent lustrations in pools called *mikvehs* (outdoor baths with water flowing both in and out) to keep themselves pure. For archaeologists, one identifying sign that ancient towns were inhabited by Jews is the presence of *mikvehs*.

We cannot be certain that Jesus was baptized by immersion, but Paul spoke of baptism as a symbol of death (being buried beneath the water) and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4), which supports an ancient understanding of baptism as being by immersion.