



Stories on the Way: Lesson Plans for Small Sunday Schools

The Baptism of Jesus Matthew 3:13-17

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The Baptism of Jesus

John the Baptizer (or Baptist) was a prophet who lived at the same time as Jesus. He travelled around, telling people that they needed to change their lives – to stop sinning and to start living the way God wanted them to. He also told people that God’s chosen one was coming soon – the one who would change the world and bring all the people who follow God’s ways into the perfect world of God

One of the things John did was baptize people in a river called the Jordan River. Being baptized was a way of showing that you were going to change your life. The person who went under the water was not the same as the person who came out of the water – their sins were forgiven and they tried not to sin anymore.

One day, when John was busy baptizing people in the Jordan River, Jesus came to him and asked to be baptized, too. John knew that Jesus was special. He said, “I shouldn’t be the one baptizing you! I need you to baptize me”. Jesus knew it was necessary, though, and he said, “No, at this time, you must baptize me.”

John eventually agreed and he went with Jesus into the river. John put his hands on Jesus’ head and pushed him down into the cold water. When Jesus came back up, he saw the heavens open up and the Spirit of God flew down like a dove and sat on him. A Voice from heaven said “This is my beloved Son. I am very pleased with him.”

(Matthew 3:13-17)

How did the River Feel?

(The Baptism of Jesus Lesson 1)

Subsequent lessons on Jesus' Baptism will address the themes of baptism. This lesson introduces a technique for Bible study that emphasizes imaginative engagement with a story in order to gain deep and personal insights into the Word of God as expressed in the story. The technique is not, by any means, my own invention. It has a long history that reaches into many different strands of the Christian tradition and has served countless people well in their journeys. It also nicely connects to the themes of Epiphany.

This very simple lesson may be much needed after the rush of Christmas.

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

Christmas is over. Does anyone know what we call this time of year in the church calendar?

It's called Epiphany. Epiphany is from a Greek word that means to shine a light on something – to make something visible or known. So the season of epiphany is when we think about the ways that Jesus is made known to us – the ways in which we can see Jesus and know that he is God's Son.

The Bible is an important way in which we see Jesus. For thousands of years, people have been learning about Jesus and getting to know him by reading the Bible. One way they have found to be helpful is to use their imaginations to really get into a story – to be able to see the sights, smell the smells, hear the sounds, and feel the feelings. We're going to practice this today while we read about Jesus' baptism. Listen carefully and really use your imagination.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

What was John doing? Why was he doing it?

Where was John baptizing people?

How did it feel to be in the river? To be baptized?

What did John do when Jesus came to him? How do you think he felt?

What happened after Jesus was baptized?

How do you think that made Jesus feel?

The two main characters in the story are Jesus and John but there were other characters, too. Who else was there? What about non-people? (make sure the river,

the dove, and God are mentioned).

We're going to read the story again. This time, I want you to think about those characters – everyone and everything except John and Jesus.

Read the Story Again (see page 1 again)

Introduce the Activity

What did the River Jordan/Dove/God/riverbank/bystander see? Hear? Feel? Think?

Recap how Jesus and John felt, if necessary.

Assign roles, including the non-person roles. Students can take on more than one role at a time.

Now we are going to act out the story. I will read it and, when your character is mentioned, you act out what they are feeling or thinking. You can make noises, too.

Entering Into the Story

Read the story and help the students interject as appropriate. They may need help with what exactly they should do. You/they may also want to repeat the activity after they have settled on their acting strategy or in order to allow them to play different roles.

Regrouping

Which role did you like playing best (if they played multiple roles). Why?

Which character do you like best. Why?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for showing us Jesus in the stories in the Bible and for giving us imaginations to help us get to know him better. Amen.

This is My Beloved Son ***(The Baptism of Jesus Lesson 2)***

The second lesson on the Baptism of Jesus turns to baptism. I've supplied the questions regarding what happens in a baptism service but I haven't supplied the answers so that you can make the lesson fit your church's practice. See storiesontheway.wordpress.com for a tip sheet on including children in baptism services.

Things to know about this lesson:

- You will need to print and cut out at least a couple of the doll stencils, which can be found at the end of the lesson.

Materials

- construction paper
- scissors
- tape
- crayons/markers
- doll stencils

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

(If this is your first lesson in Epiphany, you may want to read the introduction to Epiphany in *How Did the River Feel*.)

Have you ever been to a baptism?

Who was baptized?

What happened to them? (elicit the features that are part of your tradition's practice of baptism)

We are going to read about Jesus' baptism, today – a time when God tells us very clearly how special Jesus is.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

Why was John baptizing people?

How did he baptize them?

What are the differences between the way John baptized people and the way we do it?

What are the similarities?

What happened after John baptized Jesus?

What happens after we baptize someone?

When we baptize someone, we say that they have a new life in Christ. Their sins have been forgiven and they are members of God's family. They are also God's beloved sons and daughters because we can see Jesus in the newly baptized person.

It is not always easy to see Jesus inside other people. People can be mean and thoughtless. We can be mean and thoughtless, too. But Christians are supposed to work hard at seeing Jesus inside everyone, no matter what.

Introduce the Activity

What are some things we could use as symbols – things to remind us of – Jesus' baptism or (our/our friends') baptisms?

What are the things in the story? (water, dove, river, etc)

What are the things we use in our church services? (water, candles, etc.)

We are going to make special paper dolls today to remind us that Jesus is inside everyone. We'll decorate one doll to look like a person – it could look like you or like another person you know or like someone you imagine. The other doll will be decorated with symbols of Jesus and baptism. Then, we'll attach the dolls so that the person covers up Jesus but so that we can still see Jesus underneath.

Make the Paper Dolls

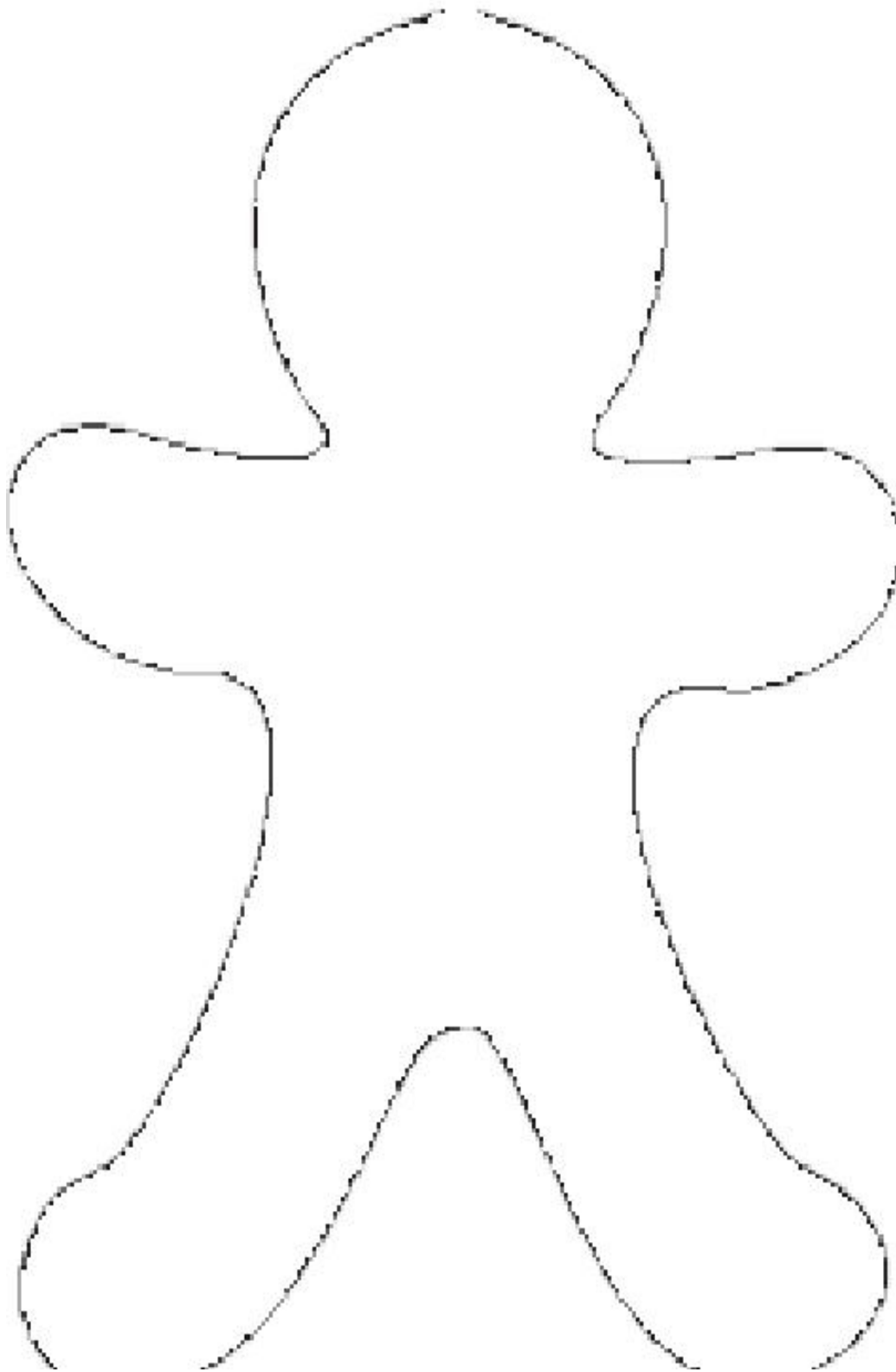
Distribute construction paper, stencils, scissors, and markers/crayons. Direct students to trace the stencil on one piece of construction paper and then to cut dolls out of two pieces of paper at the same time. After the dolls are decorated (as described above), help the students tape the dolls together at the top of their heads or at the end of one of the hands so that you can flip the person doll up to see the Jesus doll underneath.

Regrouping

Ask the students to think of a person – without saying the name out loud – who they have a hard time seeing Jesus inside of. Challenge them to work harder at it this week.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the gift of baptism and for making us part of your family through your beloved Son, Jesus. Help us always see Jesus inside one another. Amen.



The Waters of Baptism

(The Baptism of Jesus Lesson 3)

The third lesson continues with the topic of baptism and introduces the idea of a sacrament through the symbol of the waters of baptism.

Materials

- a pitcher of water
- a large bowl
- one glass/person
- a small ball

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

(If this is your first lesson in Epiphany, you may want to read the introduction to How Did the River Feel.

Have you ever been really thirsty? What did it feel like? How did it feel once you had a drink?

Have you ever been really dirty? What did that feel like? How did you get clean? How did it feel to be clean?

Today's story, about Jesus' baptism, takes place in a river – clean, flowing water that the people who lived there could use to drink, water their plants, and clean their bodies and their things. Let's listen to the story.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

How was Jesus baptized?

What do we do with water, besides baptize people? (drink it, clean with it, play in it)

How does water make us feel? (clean, refreshed, energized)

Why do you think people are baptized with water?

Because water makes us think about being cleaned and refreshed – it is a symbol. In baptism, water shows us on the outside what God is doing inside us. This is called a sacrament – when we do something physically as a sign of what God is doing spiritually, to our hearts and minds and souls.

Hold up the pitcher of water

Water is a good sign because we can see it (if your pitcher is not clear, let the kids look into it); we can hear it (holding the pitcher up high, pour the water into the bowl); we can feel it (invite kids to touch the water); and we can taste it (pour and distribute small

cups of water). It is also a good sign because it is part of our everyday lives. Whenever we see it or hear it or touch it or taste it we are reminded of the new life that God makes inside baptized people.

Introduce the Activity

Our game today is about all the things we can do with water. When the ball is tossed to you, you have to act out something you do with water. You can make sounds but only the sound of the water. The rest of us will guess what you are doing. When somebody guesses right, we'll all say "Amen!" because using water can be like a prayer. Then you toss the ball to another person and it's their turn.

Water Charades

Arrange the group in a circle and toss the ball to someone to begin. You may need to offer suggestions once the obvious ones are taken.

Regrouping

Retrieve the ball and congratulate everyone on their creativity. Invite people to talk about their favourite water uses. Were there any that surprised them? What will they do with water when they go home today?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the gifts of water and baptism. Help us remember to say "Amen" whenever we take a drink or have a bath or run through the sprinklers. Amen.