

Scripture

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The Baptism of Jesus

**We explore God's call to Jesus and us in baptism.**

- ◆ Today's gospel tells the story of Jesus' baptism, marked by God's voice naming him beloved child.
- ◆ This is the most powerful message of the gospel: God calls each one of us, "Beloved child."
- ◆ In today's core session, we enact the words and gestures of baptism, exploring both the baptism of Jesus and the sacrament of baptism today.

Question of the Week

What might we do to celebrate Jesus' joyous presence with us?

Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started (*bowl, pitcher of water, smocks, finger paints, dishpan of water*)
- ◆ Gospel Story: Jesus Is Baptized
- ◆ Action Rhyme
- ◆ Praying Together

Enrichment

- ◆ Discover the Good News
- ◆ Singing Together (*optional: blue-silk or crepe-paper streamers*)
- ◆ Baptismal Play (*bowl of water, pitcher, plastic doll, sea shells*)
- ◆ Music and Movement: Sosa's "El Cielo Canta"
- ◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- ◆ Info: Sosa's "El Cielo Canta"
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Baptizing with Water and the Spirit

✓ Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Gather children around an empty bowl and a pitcher full of water.

Slowly pour the water into the bowl as you ask:

- ◆ What can we do *with* water?
- ◆ What can we do *in* water?

Then invite children to use finger paints to imagine water scenes. Use the discussion to introduce a simple definition of baptism—going in and out of water.

Ask the children:

- ◆ What's the most water you've ever seen? (*Encourage several answers to this question.*)

Use the children's answers to talk about the sizes, colors, sounds and movements of different bodies of water: ponds, lakes, rivers and oceans.

Invite the children to paint pictures of water. Dress the children in paint smocks. Give each child a piece of wet paper—dip the paper in a dish pan of water—with blobs of blue and green finger paint.

You can show the children how to use their fingers to make ripples and waves. You can also invite the children to make soft water sounds as they paint.

After the children are finished with painting and clean-up, gather them together in the storytelling area.

Ask again:

- ◆ What can we do *with* water?
- ◆ What can we do *in* water?

Affirm all the children's answers. After sharing some ideas with the children, say:

- ◆ One way we use water in church is when we baptize people.
- ◆ When we baptize someone, we put them in and out of water.
- ◆ Someone gets baptized in today's story: someone goes in and out the water. Listen and tell me who.

✓ Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Jesus Is Baptized

Jesus says, "It's time to be baptized." Jesus walks to the water. John is standing in the water.

"Hello Jesus," says John. "Should I baptize you?"

"Yes," says Jesus. "It's time for me to be baptized."

Jesus walks into the water. John baptizes Jesus. John puts Jesus in and out of the water.

When Jesus comes up from the water, he hears God.

God says, "Jesus, you are my special child. I love you."

✓ Action Rhyme (5-10 minutes)

Children learn the words and movements to this rhymed version of today's story about the baptism of Jesus.

Gather the children in a circle. Ask each child to hold hands with a partner.

John in the water; Jesus comes, too. (*Step forward with right foot, then left foot.*)

"Jesus, shall I baptize you?" (*Face partner and put hands on each other's shoulders.*)

In the water. (*Stoop.*) Out the water. (*Stand.*)

Hear God say: (*Cup ear with one hand.*)

"Jesus, you're my child today." (*Hug self.*)

✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Stand with the children in a circle. Turn to the child on your left and say:

- ◆ You are God's child. God loves you.

Help this child pass the message along to the next child. Continue until all the children have heard themselves affirmed as God's children.

Pray:

- ◆ God, thank you for baptizing Jesus and us. Thank you for making Jesus and us your children. Thank you for loving us. *Amen.*

Note: If you use *At Home with the Good News*, either distribute this week's papers to the children before they leave or e-mail the papers to their families.

□ Discover the Good News

(5-10 minutes)

On page 1 of today's *Discover the Good News* you'll find a seasonal prayer of thanksgiving to share with the children.

Children can extend this activity by drawing pictures of things for which they are thankful on page 2.

□ Singing Together

(5-15 minutes)

From *Singing the Good News* you and the children can sing together:

- ◆ "Jesus Went to be Baptized" (p. 32 of the songbook)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Winter-C *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Singing the Good News*. You could also sing these words to the traditional children's song, "Go In and Out the Window":

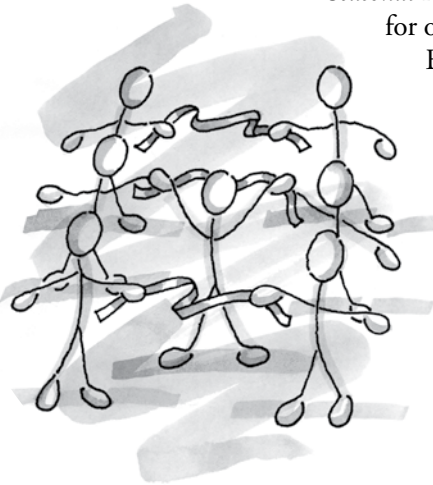
*Go in and out the water,
Go in and out the water,
Go in and out the water:
It's time to be baptized.*

For a movement activity to accompany this song, divide the other children into two groups and have them line up facing each other several feet apart.

Distribute blue-silk or crepe-paper streamers so that each child is holding one end of a streamer, the other end of which is held by a partner in the facing line. Show the children how to move the streamers slowly up and down to make waves of "water."

Ask children to make waves as they sing the song above: "Go In and Out the Water."

As children wave the streamers and sing, ask a volunteer to be "baptized" by going under the streamers, coming up in the middle and going under and out the other side. Repeat with other volunteers.



□ Baptismal Play

(5-15 minutes)

Gather children around a bowl of water. Show children what you mean by a baptism by using a plastic doll as a model.

Follow these steps:

- ◆ First we bless the water. (*Touch the water in the bowl and say, "Thank you, God, for water."*)
- ◆ Then we pray for the child who will be baptized. (*Hold the doll and pray, "God give your Spirit to [name the doll]. Amen."*)
- ◆ Then we put the child in and out the water. (*Hold the doll over the water and use the shell or scoop to dip water over the doll's head.*)

Invite children to take turns "baptizing" the doll. Help each child remember the three steps you used.

After the activity, set up a center in the room where children can play freely with the water, bowl, pitcher and sea shells. Allow two children at a time to explore the materials at this center. If time and space allow, you can take children to the baptismal font of your church. See the ideas for a *Baptismal Tour* attached to this document.

□ Music and Movement

(5-15 minutes)

Sosa's "El Cielo Canta"

Read aloud for children these words from today's gospel: "Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him...And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my own dear Son.'"

Invite children to imagine they are gathered at the river where Jesus is baptized, when the heavens open. Play for them the song "El Cielo Canta." (Open your Winter-C *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.) The lyrics in English begin, "Heaven sings with joy."

Ask children to show you how they would move when the heavens open and sing with joy. You can also distribute blue-silk or crepe-paper streamers to the children, and invite them to use the cloths freely as they move to the exuberant music.

INFO Young Children and the Gospel

After the celebration of the infant Jesus Christ in earlier sessions, we now encounter the adult Christ as he faces another moment of beginning: his Baptism in the river Jordan.

In today's session we explore with children the sacrament of Baptism. The Church's sacraments function as signs of God's acts, in history and in human life today. In Baptism, we encounter a powerful sign of new life shared among God's people.

For young children, the first step in exploring the sacraments is simple observation. Have they seen a Baptism? What happens in Baptism? What happens at the font? What happens with water? Encourage children to share their stories of what they have seen and heard, knowing that they will want to enter more fully into the meaning of the sacrament in the years to come.

INFO Sosa's El Cielo Canta

Since 1975, Pablo Sosa, an ordained Methodist minister, has served as Professor of Choral Conducting at the Carlos Lopez Buchardo National Conservatory of Music in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His passion for sacred music that reflects Latin American culture has greatly influenced the nature of church music in both South and North America.

Sosa wrote "El Cielo Canta Alegria" in 1958 for a picnic of theological students. It celebrates the joy of community found in the Body of Christ. The lyrics in both Spanish and English invite us to joyful meditation. We share the first verse here.

*El cielo canta alegría,
¡Aleluya!
porque en tu vida y la mía
brilla la gloria de Dios.
¡Aleluya! ¡Aleluya!
¡Aleluya! ¡Aleluya!*

*Heaven is singing for joy,
Alleluia!
for in your life and in mine
is shining the glory of God.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

"El Cielo Canta" by Pablo Sosa. Copyright © Choristers Guild.
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INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
 - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
 - A *Baptismal Tour* activity you can use in today's session, if your church layout allows, to invite children to explore the setting and gestures of the rite of Baptism.
 - A copy of today's *Gospel Story* to hand out to children or e-mail to their families.
 - This week's *At Home with the Good News* to hand out to children or e-mail to their families.
- ◆ Open your Winter-C *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
 - Information on Winter-C's *Models of the Faith*.
 - An article for catechists and/or families exploring Jesus' role as *The Messiah*.
 - An article for catechists and/or families exploring *The Creed in the Christian Tradition*.
 - An article for catechists and/or families titled *Learning through the Visual Arts*.
 - The *Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten* for **Living the Good News**.

More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings invite us to respond to God's call in baptism. Isaiah suggests that God chooses and gathers us to bring compassion and justice to a suffering world. Peter and John spread the good news of Jesus beyond their comfortable social and ethnic borders. In today's gospel, Jesus is baptized, and we are invited to acknowledge him as God's "Son, the Beloved."

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Today's reading is the first of four "servant songs" in Isaiah (the others are 49:1-6, 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12). It is not clear whom the author intended the servant to represent. The servant could stand for a collective identity: the people of Israel as the historical nation, as a faithful remnant or as an idealized body.

Others believe that the servant represents an individual such as the king, a prophet or a future ideal figure, such as a messianic ruler. Christians have always identified the servant as Jesus.

The song in today's reading is a recognized formula for the king's designation of a court official. The servant is presented, his power is attested, his mission and manner of accomplishing it are defined. He will "bring forth justice to the nations" (v. 1) by bringing all people, particularly the oppressed, into the covenantal relationship with God and one another.

The depiction of the servant forms an important element in the Church's understanding of Jesus' mission, especially as presented in accounts of his baptism.

Acts 10:34-38

Today's reading is a selection from Peter's speech to the pagan centurion Cornelius and his household. Cornelius was a "God-fearer," a Gentile who worshiped God but had not adopted all of the Jewish religious practices. Peter's sermon is an example of the basic preaching of the early Church.

Including Gentiles into the Christian community was a divisive issue in the early church. Some rejected and feared the possible inclusion of Gentiles, but the passage makes it clear that Peter's willingness to consider including the Gentiles is not something he came to simply on his own. Peter acted under the direction of the Holy Spirit (1:8).

Cornelius's conversion marks an important turning point in the outreach of the early Church. But even more it marks a distinctively Christian insight into the inclusive attitude of God. Through his dream Peter learns that creating human barriers that hinder persons from relating to God is not the way God acts. Because God is inclusive, so must we be!

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Like Mark and Matthew, Luke records John's denial of his own importance. It is the mightier one who is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus is baptized along with "all the people," identifying himself with sinful humanity.

As Jesus was praying (in Luke, often a prelude to major events), the Holy Spirit descends upon him. With the title formerly applied to the nation, to the king and later to the Messiah, Jesus is now openly identified as the Son of God, dramatizing and confirming what was implicit in his conception (1:35). Thus Jesus is anointed for his mission.

Reflection

The gospel gets off to a rolling start, describing “a people filled with expectation.” We know that feeling of standing on tiptoe when we await a special holiday, or yearn for the arrival of someone we love but haven’t seen in a long time.

In the spiritual life, we must also wait expectantly, knowing that we cannot go it alone, that we desperately need a redeemer. Do we long for God—or can we be easily satisfied with a new car, a restaurant meal? In the sixteenth century, St. Ignatius of Loyola asked each seeker the same question: “what is your deep desire?” It’s not a bad question to ask ourselves, and it can’t be answered quickly or superficially.

Jesus models how to wait: praying and together. He enters the waters with the rest of the community, not setting himself apart. The outpouring of the Spirit which he then receives awaits us too: the voice affirming us as beloved child, God’s delight. From his baptism flow all the other graces of his life.

What remains for him—and for us—is then to live out of that blessing. It takes him forty days in the desert to internalize the message, which fires all his subsequent ministry. What is the foundational experience, the fundamental grace in our lives?

The Scriptures and the Catechism

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord reminds us that our response to Christ’s call to follow the way of discipleship is formalized in our baptism (*CCC*, #1213–45). Jesus’ baptism included both the confirmation of his identity as God’s Son (the voice from heaven) and his empowerment for the ministry that will now begin (the Spirit descending like a dove). So likewise our baptism seals our identity as Christians and empowers us to continue the saving work begun with Jesus (*CCC*, #830–56). Baptism transforms us into “Christ” for our world.

The World of the Bible

Baptizing with Water and the Spirit

For the early Christians, there were two great signs of God’s saving activity that would bring a new life: the resurrection of Jesus from death to new life and the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit on the community. John likens his purifying washing with the equally cleansing action of the Holy Spirit and fire.

The outpouring of God’s Spirit (the power of life associated with breathing) in a baptismal washing not only purifies the person but signifies one’s desire to change one’s ways and be more closely united with God’s saving activity. Once empowered by the indwelling of God’s holy presence, the baptized will be able to carry on the mission and ministry of God in our world.