

St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church
Formation in Faith Lectionary
2018

January 7

Baptism of Jesus

Luke 3:1-22

John the Baptist appears in the wilderness, proclaiming that the prophetic promise that God has made to his covenant people is about to be fulfilled. Through repentance and baptism, God's people can turn their hearts and prepare for his coming. At this moment of great hope and expectation, Jesus himself arrives to be baptized, and to inaugurate the arrival of the new reign of God.

Questions for Discussion:

The chapter opens with a list of the rulers and religious leaders in power at the time. On the one hand this serves as a time stamp – at this moment, when these leaders were in power, God entered in to history. What else might this say to us about the rule of men versus the rule of God?

Luke links John's arrival to the prophecy of Isaiah, that a voice would cry out and herald the coming of the messiah. How do you think Isaiah's words relate to John's ministry of baptism and repentance?

John calls the crowds a brood of vipers and suggests that their motives for coming out to him were suspect. Nevertheless, he urges them to "bear fruit worthy of repentance." If repentance is to apologize for our sin and to turn back to God, what might the fruit of repentance look like in our lives?

Jesus comes to be baptized by John, yet our faith tells us that he had no sin to repent. Why might Jesus have come to be baptized? Was it to stand in solidarity with humanity before God?

In the culmination of the passage, the heavens are opened and the Holy Spirit descends as a dove. The voice declares, "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." What do think about the significance of this moment? If Jesus was baptized in solidarity with humanity, what might this statement from God mean for us?

January 14

Temptation in the Desert

Luke 4:1-13

Immediately after the glory of Jesus' baptism, he is led by the Holy Spirit out into the desert to be tempted. After forty days of fasting and temptation, a period meant to reflect upon the forty years Israel spent in the desert during the Exodus, the devil offers three final challenges. In answering Satan's questions, Jesus shows that he will remain faithful to God amidst the temptations that plague humanity.

Questions for Discussion:

Luke links this story of temptation closely with Jesus' baptism and the declaration from heaven that he is the beloved Son of God. Why do you think that temptation comes so soon after the start of Jesus' ministry?

In the first temptation, Satan challenges Jesus' fast by suggesting that he turn stones into bread. In a society that often focuses on material gain, what does Jesus reply that "one does not live by bread alone" mean to us? What liturgical season does this forty day period of fasting remind us of?

In the second temptation, Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if only Jesus will worship him. But Jesus refuses to turn away from true allegiance to God. In a society that often focuses wealth and power, what does Jesus' reply mean to us? In each temptation Satan tells Jesus, "If you are the Son of God" he should seize power in some way. What does Jesus' humble refusal to seize power say about what it means to be Son of God?

In the final temptation, Satan urges Jesus to throw himself off of the temple, since God would send angels to catch him rather than let him be harmed. Jesus refuses, as we are not to test the promises of God. In a society that often challenges Christians to prove the existence of God, and asks us to produce signs of his power, what does Jesus' refusal mean to us?

In each of the temptations, Satan uses passages from scripture to try to tempt Jesus. Jesus responds with scriptural citation and interpretation of his own. What does this tell us about how scripture can be misused, and how that misuse can be combatted?

January 21

Calling the Disciples

Luke 5:1-11

Jesus comes to the Sea of Galilee at the start of his ministry, teaching and preaching before large crowds. At the lakeside town of Capernaum he encounters Simon Peter and several other humble fishermen working on the lake. Despite their labors they have not been able to catch any fish. Getting into the boat, Jesus offers some advice that will change their day and change their lives forever.

Questions for Discussion:

Having endured temptation in the desert, Jesus has now begun his public ministry and is drawing large crowds. They have come to be healed by him and to hear him speak "the word of God." Imagine what it must have been like to stand by the lakeshore and hear Jesus speak. How would you feel? Out of all of these people crowding in, Jesus chooses humble working fishermen. What does it say about God that Christ calls the humble?

Jesus gets into the fishing boat and tells them to put out their nets. Peter knows that they have so far had no luck catching any fish, yet he agrees to listen to Jesus' advice to try again. Why do you think they listened to Jesus? Have there ever been times in your life when you wanted to give up, but felt that God was telling you to try again?

The fishermen listen to Jesus and let down their nets. This time they catch so many fish it almost sinks the boat, and are forced to call for a second boat to help them. Have you ever been fishing? How would it feel to be overwhelmed by such an abundance after having failed for so long?

Peter falls at Jesus' feet saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" He does not feel worthy of Jesus' attention. Have you ever felt unworthy of God's love or of God's call? What is Jesus' response?

Jesus then asks the fishermen to leave everything they have and follow him. They will no longer catch fish, but catch people. How would you feel if Jesus asked you to leave everything behind to follow him? What does it mean to catch people? Do you feel that God is calling you today?

January 28

Healing the Paralytic

Mark 2:1-12

Jesus is teaching in a crowded house when four men come, bringing with them a man suffering from paralysis. With no room to bring him in, they dig a hole through the mud and thatch and lower him down through the roof. Moved by their faith that he will be able to help their friend, Jesus challenges traditional ideas about illness and reveals the healing and forgiveness that God offers the world.

Questions for Discussion:

Mark tells us that the house is so crowded the paralyzed man's companions must dig a hole in the roof in order to lower him down to Jesus. They must have truly believed Jesus could help, as this would have been difficult and dangerous. What would you do to help a friend who was dangerously ill? In what ways do you bring those you love to Jesus?

When Jesus sees their heroic efforts to help the paralyzed man, he is moved by their faith and declares that his sins are forgiven. Later he tells the man to get up and walk since he has been healed. How have you shown your faith? In what ways does Jesus offer you forgiveness and healing?

The scribes and Pharisees are offended by Jesus' declaration and question his authority to forgive sins. In their view, forgiveness comes only from God, and only after a long process of ritual cleansing. What does Jesus seem to be saying about himself, and about God's offer of forgiveness?

In the ancient world many people believed that sickness was caused by sin, as a punishment from God for bad behavior. Jesus repeatedly challenges this idea, yet in this story the man's paralysis seems to be symbolic of what sin does to us. In what ways are you paralyzed by life? In what ways are you paralyzed by sin? What healing does Jesus offer you?

In this story Jesus offers both forgiveness of sins and healing from illness. Both are a kind of restoration. What does it mean for us to be healed? What does it mean for us to be forgiven and reconciled to God?