

Isa. 43:1–7

Ps. 29

Acts 8:14–17

Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

Beloved

Goal for the Session

Adults will prayerfully discern the implications of God’s baptismal pronouncement of “child” and “beloved” upon Jesus and—through Christ—upon us.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Linda McKinnish Bridges

Luke’s special focus, however, is on prayer. Luke carefully notes that Jesus prays after he is baptized (3:21). Luke intentionally adds this important feature to the baptism ritual, which is missed by the other Gospel writers. For Luke the act of prayer will be the most important feature of the baptism and will clearly indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and ultimately the believer. In other places of Luke’s Gospel, prayer is the focus of Jesus’ ministry (5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28ff.; 11:1; 22:41; 23:46).

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Carol Lakey Hess

John the Baptizer understood that Jesus would surpass him, and so he did. By accepting John’s baptism, Jesus refuted John’s dualism between the wheat and the chaff (v. 17). In fact, this led to accusations of his being a glutton and a drunkard, a friend to tax collectors and sinners (7:34). Perhaps this is a major sign of holiness: that we see ourselves as part of an interconnected web and that we are accused of being deeply enmeshed in that web.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Robert M. Bearley

Luke uses very few words to share with us the baptism of our Lord. But those few words lead us to very deep wellsprings of joy in the faithful ministry. To identify with all people, to depend upon God in prayer for the strength to live and to love, and to hear the affirmation of your God as the source of your calling and purpose in life are the most enduring joys of life. These are the blessings of our life together in Christ as the church.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Ernest Hess

We can also fruitfully explore the power of such affirmations in our lives: “You are my son, my daughter.” “You are Beloved.” “I am well pleased with you.” When we experience this kind of honest affirmation from a parent or other significant person in our lives, we are strengthened in identity, will, and ability to act from that secure identity. Without it, most persons will struggle with low self-esteem. The good news is that in Christ we are all the Beloved.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

Focus on Your Teaching

By what names have you or the adults in your group been called this past week? Given names and surnames will likely have been the norm for friends, strangers, and coworkers. Other names, like “Mom” or “Dad” or “dear,” give voice to very particular relationships. Think also of the effect of other names placed upon us—or by us. Pejorative names employed over time constitute abuse as clearly as a slap in the face. Then again, encouraging “namings” lift up possibilities for who we are we and who we can become because of the love and support of others.

God, remind me of my naming by you: in grace, with love, for service, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- pens
- newsprint and colored markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 20, 2019

For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Resource Sheet 1
- option 3: Resource Sheet 1

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome adults and introduce any guests or visitors.

Lead the adults in the following guided meditation. Speak slowly and loud enough for all to hear.

Close your eyes and take several deep breaths. Breathe in the awareness of God’s Spirit. Breathe out any distractions from that awareness. *(pause)* Recall an important experience where someone said or did something that expressed appreciation of you. *(pause)* Why was that important to you at that moment? *(pause)* Why is that important enough for you to still remember it? *(pause)* In what ways has that experience changed how you view yourself or others, and how you act accordingly? *(pause)*

Ask the adults to open their eyes and take another deep breath.

Note that today’s story relates a powerful expression of God’s valuing of Jesus in the wake of his baptism—a valuing that embraces us as well.

Move among us, O God, through words of Scripture and one another’s presence, that you might fashion and shape us as your beloved children. Amen.

EXPLORING

Note the passage of time involved between the close of last week’s passage, when the magi sought out the child Jesus in Bethlehem, and the opening of this week’s passage (according to Luke 3:23, Jesus was now about thirty years old). Discuss:

- ✪ What kinds of things might you expect Luke wanting to affirm in the first appearance of the adult Jesus in his Gospel?

Ask participants to keep those ideas in mind as you enter today's text.

The lectionary omits verses 18–20, which tell of John's imprisonment by Herod. They get John "offstage" before Jesus is baptized. John's work is done. Jesus' work is just beginning. The arrest of John adds a somber note of personal cost to the Gospel's proclamation.

Invite the group to envision what they hear as you read aloud Luke 3:15–17, 21–22. (Decide at this point whether you will include verses 18–20 in the reading and following exercise. If you do, share the information in the sidebar with the group.)

Next, form small groups, assigning each one of the verses from the focus scripture. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and set of marking pens. Explain each group is to create a storyboard or "cartoon" based on their verse. Captions may or may not be used to accompany the illustration of the events and emotions of their verse.

Allow adequate time for groups to complete their assignment.

Post the storyboards or cartoons in order of the verses. Invite adults to do a second "reading" of the whole text, using only the storyboards/cartoons to tell the story. Invite comments or questions, and encourage each group to share what they sought to portray in the illustration of their verse.

Note that today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday in the church year, and that every year the lectionary calls for the reading of one of the accounts of Jesus' baptism. Have adults read Matthew 3:11–17 and Mark 1:4–11. Compare and contrast these accounts with today's passage from Luke, identifying what is unique to Luke. Possible issues to highlight:

- ✪ The significance of Luke saying Jesus' baptism was with "all the people"
- ✪ The role of "expectation and questioning" in terms of what brought people to John
- ✪ The role of the Holy Spirit

Have the group read in unison the words of the heavenly voice at the end of verse 22. Ask:

- ✪ What function do such words serve, set as they are before Jesus' public ministry?

Have the adults turn to Luke 9:35. Note the context: Peter has declared Jesus to be the Messiah (9:20) and Jesus has spoken for the first time of his death and resurrection (9:21ff). Compare and contrast the words spoken by the voice at baptism with those spoken by the voice on the mountain.

- ✪ What role do these words serve in this context?

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 and read the "So What?" excerpt, and in particular its three affirmations about what is involved in faithful ministry. For silent reflection:

- ✪ How do you experience these "blessings of life together" in this congregation, and in your personal spiritual practices?

The words spoken by the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism are repeated at the transfiguration story's end in Luke 9:35 with one important exception. Instead of "With him I am well pleased," the voice from the cloud says, "listen to him!"

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. “You Are”** The “naming” of Jesus at his baptism becomes the “naming” of those who live in Christ. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (“You Are . . .”). Read over the directions given for the activity with the group, and then allow time for participants to carry it out. Afterwards, offer a time for silent prayers by the participants that bring to God the reflections generated by this exercise.
- 2. Part of the Whole** To be called a child of God is to enter into familial connection with all the children of God. Read the “Where?” excerpt, with special attention to its final sentence on our “interconnectedness.” Note that a similar point is made in the third sentence of the “So What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Discuss how your congregation encourages those connections in practical and tangible ways with “all” the children of God—and not simply with other members of the church. Since Jesus got into trouble later on for some of the connections he made with “all” the children, what connections might you and your congregation need to make, even if it rocks the boat?
- 3. Affirming Another** God’s affirmation of us as beloved intends to lead to our loving affirmation of others. Draw attention to the “Now What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Ask each adult to silently identify someone they know who struggles with a lack of self-esteem, and/or is facing a situation that will be demanding much of them. In light of today’s passage’s affirmation of Christ and of us, encourage the participants to make time this week to offer a word or action of affirmation to that individual. Let them know they are valued, that they do not stand alone, that they are loved of God.

CLOSING

If you did option 1 in Responding, have adults look over their responses on Resource Sheet 2. Lead the adults in a sentence prayer, inviting participants to offer one or two of those responses as an act of thanksgiving and commitment to God. Affirm that anyone not comfortable disclosing what was written may remain silent. Begin the prayer yourself, and conclude it by praying together the Lord’s Prayer.

If you did not do Responding option 1, ask adults to lift their arms as they are able. Invite them to hear the words spoken to Jesus at his baptism as spoken now to them. Say aloud: “You are my child, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Invite adults to be in a time of silent prayer, as they consider what gift those words might bring to them.

Form a circle and explain the following benediction. You will turn to the person on your left and say, “*Name*, you are God’s beloved child.” That person then turns to the left, offers the same commissioning, and so on until all have received and offered the benediction.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 20, 2019, or e-mail it to the participants early in the week, so that they have adequate time to reflect on the Scripture passages and the excerpts throughout the coming week.

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Linda McKimish Bridges

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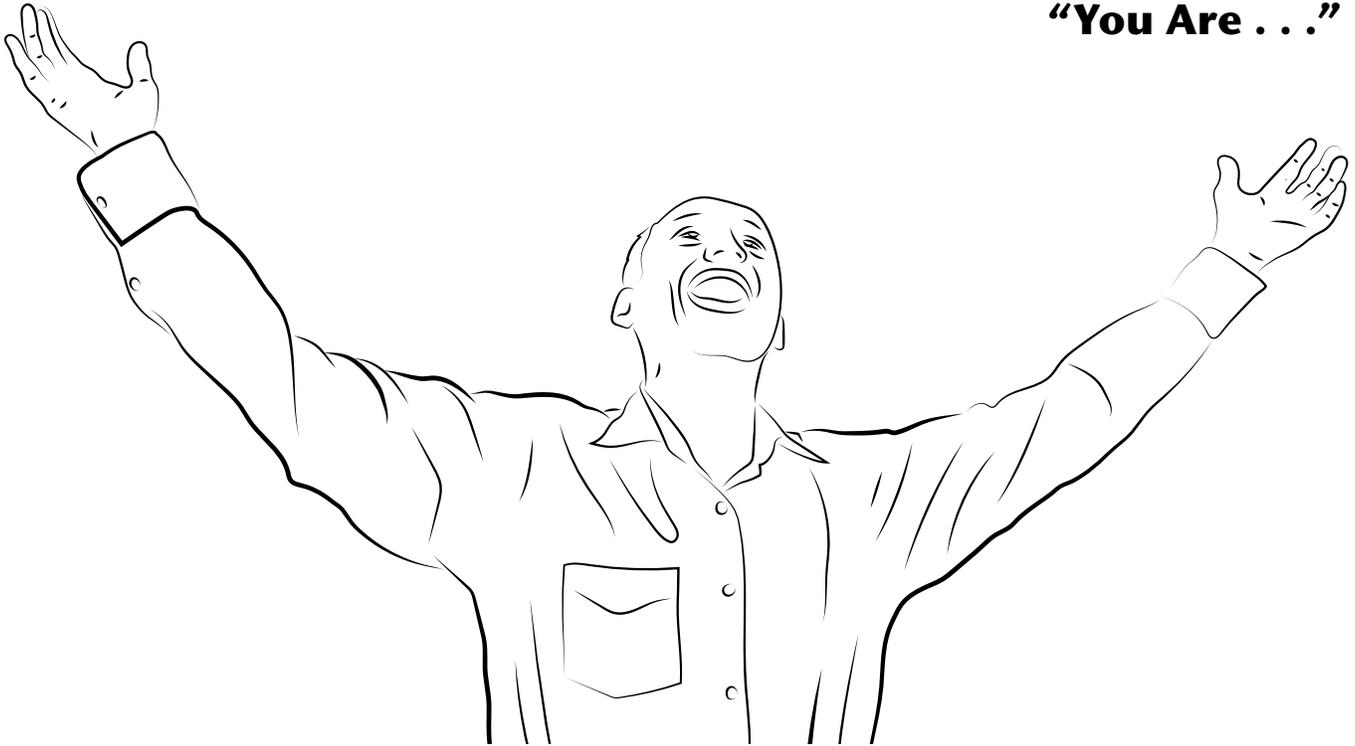
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January 13, 2019
Beloved

Adult
Resource Sheet 2

“You Are . . .”



You are my child, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

For a moment, lift up your arms like the figure in the image above. With arms upraised, take in the “light” that pours over you as God speaks to you the words voiced at Jesus’ baptism.

Then, in the space below, prayerfully write a response for what it means for you to be so named: not only in terms of how they make you feel, but what they would lead you to do as a result.

You are my child!

You are my beloved!

I am well pleased with you!
