

Isa. 43:1–7

Ps. 29

Acts 8:14–17

Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

Beloved

**Goal for
the Session**

Children will grow in faith as they know themselves beloved by God, as Jesus was.

■ 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

Many children may remember the story of the baptism of Jesus from previous years. However, the affirmation of being loved by God is so central to this event that children can benefit from this knowledge year after year. Children who are more involved in group activities, such as scouting, sports, or music groups, already have an idea of what it means to be part of a group and accepted by it. Those children who feel uncertain that they belong anywhere may find some reassurance in this session.

YOU WILL NEED

- white cloth
- white battery-powered candle
- offering plate
- Bible
- Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 3, 4, 13, 14, 28
- 1" x 8½" white paper strip, tape, paper chain started Dec. 2
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player; rhythm instruments (optional)

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: art supplies (optional)
- option 3: white construction paper, stapler and staples, pencils, thread, needle
- option 4: Color Pack 28; *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player; rhythm instruments (optional)

Ever-present God, may my actions toward each child support your words of acceptance to them. It is through these words that I know that you love me too. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, for option 2 in Responding, invite the pastor or a church leader to visit and explain baptism; suggest that he or she bring a doll, if possible. For option 3, cut white construction paper into ½" by 12" strips, three strips for each child.

Greet each child. Invite early arrivals to help you set up the worship center with a white cloth, a white battery-powered candle, the paper chain started December 2, an offering plate, and a Bible open to Luke.

When everything is ready, have the children sit around the worship space. Point out the white cloth and say that today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday. Explain that this day is celebrated every year and the color is white. Light the candle and lead the following litany:

Leader: Jesus has come.

All: Rejoice, rejoice!

Leader: Today we light the white candle, a symbol of Jesus.

All: Rejoice, rejoice!

Leader: We want to follow Jesus,

All: Rejoice, rejoice!

Leader: We pray for the light of Jesus to show us the way. Amen.

Ask a child to pass the offering plate and then place it on the worship table.

Show Color Pack 13. Ask:

- ✂ How do you think this adult and child feel about each other?
- ✂ What in the photograph makes you think that?
- ✂ How do you know when someone really likes or loves you?

Suggest that they listen for how love is expressed in the Bible story.

EXPLORING

Have a child retrieve the Bible from the worship space. Remind the group that the Bible was opened to the Gospel of Matthew for the previous session. Point out that it is open to Luke today. Ask:

✧ What story did we hear from the Gospel of Matthew last week?

In Exploring, the children “hear” the Bible story in three ways: listening, reading art, and acting it out. The more ways they encounter the story, the more they will understand and gain from it.

This question opens the way for a quick review of the story of the magi (Matthew 2:1–12). Recall that Jesus was still a child and living in Bethlehem then. In the story for this session, Jesus has grown up and has been living with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. Help them recall the stories of John the baptizer (December 9 and 16, 2018) so they recognize John in the story.

Tell the story about Jesus’ baptism on Resource Sheet 1 (Dearly Loved). Have Color Pack 3, 4, and 14 ready to show during the story.

After the story, invite the children to look more closely at Color Pack 14. Artists think carefully about what to include in a painting. Ask:

✧ What did this artist include?

✧ How do those details help tell the story of the baptism of Jesus?

Acting out the story helps children remember it and take it in more deeply. Form pairs, trying to match an older child with a younger child. The child whose birthday is closest to today’s date will be Jesus; the other child, John. Read Luke 3:15–16 and 21–22. Pause for the children to act out their parts, particularly in verses 21 and 22. Then ask:

✧ What did the voice from heaven say that told Jesus that God loved him?

✧ How do you know that God loves you, too?

RESPONDING

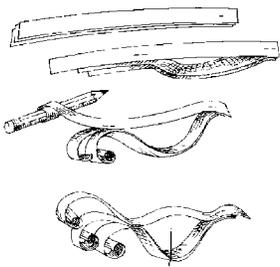
Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

EASY
PREP

1. Breath Prayer For centuries, Christians have felt close to God and God’s love through various kinds of prayer. The breath prayer is suitable for all ages, and children especially like to have a way to pray anywhere and anytime. To fashion an appropriate breath prayer from the story of Jesus’ baptism, paraphrase a portion of Luke 3:22, such as: “I am God’s child / and dearly loved.” See Resource Sheet 2 (Breath Prayer) for directions. Make copies of the resource sheet to send home with the children so they can practice this type of prayer with their families.

2. Baptism Today The story of Jesus' baptism provides an appropriate week to learn about baptism in the church today. Invite the pastor or a church leader to visit the class. Have him or her explain baptism in words the children will understand. If the children are not in worship regularly to observe this sacrament, ask the guest to demonstrate on a doll what happens in a baptism. If a baptism is scheduled in the next several weeks, the children can draw pictures of Jesus' baptism as a present for the family.

3. Dove In each account of Jesus' baptism in the Gospels, the dove descends as the Holy Spirit. Have the children make a paper dove to serve as a reminder of God's love as known through Jesus' baptism. Stack three strips of paper and bring the top strip forward about 1/2 inch. Staple the strips together about 1 inch from that end, which will be the head. Stagger the other ends of the strips so that the top strip forms the curve of the back and the other two the bottom of the back. Staple about 2 inches from that end. Curl the tail strips around a pencil. Hang by a thread through the middle of the dove's body.



4. God's Love in Song Singing a familiar song in light of this Bible story can infuse it with new meaning for the children. Singing joyfully in the knowledge of God's love for them adds to the significance of Jesus' baptism story. Provide rhythm instruments, if available, or gather kitchen utensils (wooden spoons, pot lids, plastic plates) for children to use to add joyful sounds as they sing "Dance and Sing" (Color Pack 28; track 4 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019).

Dance and Sing

Dance and sing, for God
 will be with you,
 Glory, hallelujah!
 Dance and sing, for God
 will be with you,
 Glory, hallelujah!

Chorus:

Dance and sing for joy,
 Glory, hallelujah!
 Dance and sing for joy,
 Glory, hallelujah!

Repeat verse and chorus (1x)
Repeat chorus (3x)

CLOSING

Gather around the worship space. Add a white paper link to the church year paper chain. The color for Baptism of the Lord Sunday is white.

Play the song "Dance and Sing" (Color Pack 28; track 4 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019). Encourage the children to sing along and accompany their singing with rhythm instruments, if available.

Pray aloud:

God, thank you for your love. Help us to remember that you are with us each day. Amen.

Invite the children to respond: *Thank you, God.*

Say good-bye to each child with this blessing: "*(Name)*, you are dearly loved by God."

January 13, 2019
Beloved

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1

Dearly Loved
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22



John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, heard the word of God in the desert wilderness where he lived. (*Show Color Pack 3.*) God had an important task for John. John was to get the people ready for the Messiah, the one God would send.

To do this, John went to the Jordan River. John was to call people to turn back to God's ways and be baptized. In those days, baptisms were at a river.

Along the Jordan River, John called to people to be baptized. "Come," John called. "Tell God you are sorry for all that you have done wrong and be baptized. Show God that you want to change your hearts and lives."



All kinds of people came to the Jordan River to be baptized and show God that they wanted to change. (*Show Color Pack 4.*) So many heard about him that he was called John the baptizer.

People wondered who John was. Perhaps John was the Messiah, the one God would send to save them. How exciting that would be! When people asked John about the Messiah, John said, "I only baptize you with water from this river. Another man is coming who has more power than I do. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit from God. You will be changed by this Spirit so that everything is right between you and God. You will be rid of your sin." Every day John told the people about God's love and urged them to be baptized.



One day as John was doing this, Jesus showed up. John baptized Jesus just like he baptized everyone else. (*Show Color Pack 14.*) As Jesus prayed after his baptism, the Holy Spirit came to him in the form of a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son. I love you dearly. You make me happy."

This happened when Jesus was about 30 years old.

Breath Prayer

Prayer as Listening

We often say that prayer means talking to God. But prayer is also listening to God. How might we listen for God's voice?

Listening in Stillness

For centuries, Christians in different parts of the world have practiced listening to God by becoming very still and quiet. When you become very still, you begin to notice your own breath.

Listening to Your Breath

- Are you breathing through your mouth? If you can, try to breathe only through your nose.
- Are you breathing shallowly? Try to breathe more deeply, but without gasping.
- Are you breathing quickly? Try to slow your breath down.
- Are you breathing unevenly? Try to make each breath more like the last one.

Practice taking five deep, slow, even breaths through the nose.

Listening to God

One way to prepare to listen for God is to remember God's words at Jesus' baptism. They remind us that God loves us and is with us. Try this:

- While inhaling, pray silently, "I am God's child . . ."
- While exhaling, pray silently, "and dearly loved."
- Close your eyes. Silently pray these words several times in a row, paying attention to your breathing. After a few times, stop thinking the words and just keep breathing and listening. God's Spirit may have something to say to you today!

