

Mal. 3:1–4
Luke 1:68–79
Phil. 1:3–11
Luke 3:1–6

Prepare the Way

Goal for the Session *Children, after hearing John’s proclamation, will begin preparations for celebrating Jesus’ birth.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Luke 3:1–6

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Mariam J. Kamell

This baptism is one of preparation for the impending judgment, an acceptance that repentance alone—not status, blood, or ritual—can bring about forgiveness when the judgment arrives. In Luke’s setting, then, John’s baptism is the preparation for the ministry, life, and death of Jesus, because those who accept John’s call show themselves humble before God and willing to submit to God’s word, ready to acknowledge the Messiah of the Lord. The first step in preparing for the coming of the Lord is repentance from sins, a message that reverberates from the Hebrew prophets and is highly relevant to the Advent season.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

The Advent Sunday message is linked with the final advent of eschatological salvation, which includes not only the chosen nation but also the nations. At the day of Pentecost to which our text also points, the Spirit was poured out on “all flesh” as an anticipation of the final salvation. A key theological theme in Luke is the inclusion of all in God’s salvific invitation and reaching out: both men and women, poor and rich, Gentiles and Jews. This Advent Sunday is a great place for us to be reminded of that.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Wesley D. Avram

The warrant for John’s ministry, from Isaiah 40, reinforces this imperative in its own way. The voice in the wilderness cries out for the way of God to be prepared with relentless urgency. This urgency can be heard as a call to rhetorical sensitivity among those who proclaim the word of faith. Here is dramatic imagery for making connection, for finding available means to communicate so that God’s desire for creation might be known: straightened paths, valleys and mountains made into plains, rocky ways made even (Isa. 40:4–6).

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Kathy Beach-Verhey

John did understand how a people ought to welcome their God. His challenging words called people to self-examination, along with a “to do” list, if they were going to be ready to receive the one coming after him. John’s prophetic message called people to get ready to receive Jesus. John’s challenge is to repent and prepare. True repentance (*metanoia* in the Greek) means literally to change one’s mind, turn around, reorient oneself. John calls all people to turn to God and from sin, to seek God’s forgiveness, and to prepare the way of the Lord.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 3:1–6

Focus on Your Teaching

The excitement about Christmas builds in children weekly as Christmas Day approaches. Their lives may be busier than usual with special school, church, or family events and preparing for Christmas. Or they may be excited about the prospect of travel or guests. One way they will be helped to prepare for the busyness and the celebration in this session is through the practice of meditation. They can then share that practice with their families.

God, who is with us through all preparation, keep me aware of your presence and your love as I, too, am pressed with more tasks than I think I can complete. Calm my mind and soul to prepare for the birth of Jesus. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth
- artificial evergreen wreath
- 4 battery-powered candles
- offering plate
- bookmark
- Bible
- Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 3, 4, 27
- 1" x 8½" blue or purple paper strip, paper chain started Dec. 2
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

For Responding

- option 2: purple or blue felt, white or yellow felt, marker, stapler and staples or needle and thread, fabric glue, scissors, Resource Sheet 2, yarn, dowel
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 3
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a bookmark at the beginning of the New Testament in a Bible.

Invite early arrivals to set up the worship space with a blue or purple cloth, an evergreen wreath with four candles inside it or around it, an offering basket, the paper chain started December 2, and the Bible. (If you don't have a wreath, arrange the candles in a circle on the cloth.)

When everything is ready, have the children sit around the worship space. Note that last Sunday began a new church year and a new season, Advent. Review that Advent ends on Christmas Day and is a time to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Point out the blue or purple cloth as the color for Advent. Lead this litany:

Leader: Prepare the way for God!

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: Today we light two candles on the Advent wreath.

And we pray,

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: The waiting seems long and we cry out,

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: Show us your path, God. Teach us your ways. You save us, and we wait for you all day long. Amen. (paraphrase of Psalm 25:4–5)

Select a child to collect the offering and place it by the candles.

Say that Advent is a time to get ready. Ask:

✠ What is your family doing to get ready for Christmas?

To help the group connect with the theme for this session, note that the Bible story is about someone who helped the people get ready to meet Jesus.

The introduction of a focus scripture from a different book of the Bible is a good time to work on Bible literacy with the children.

EXPLORING

Have a child retrieve the Bible and open it to the bookmark. Read or ask a child to read the title page for the New Testament. Explain that the New Testament contains the stories about Jesus and the first Christians. Have a child turn the page and read the title for the first Gospel. Explain that the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are called Gospels, which means “good news.” They tell stories of Jesus. Have a child turn to Luke 3. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Who Is This Man John?).

After telling the story, invite the children to pretend they were at the Jordan River with John. Say this sentence, an adaptation of Luke 3:2b, and have children add themselves:

The word of God came to John the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and today it comes to: *(each child says name followed by the name[s] of parent[s] or caregiver[s]).*

Read verses 4–6 from Resource Sheet 1 as you demonstrate these actions:

Verse 4: Cup hands around mouth like a megaphone.

Verse 5: Lock fingers together; bring elbows up and hands down to create a valley.

Slowly raise your hands, fingers locked, so elbows and hands are in a straight line, even with your shoulders.

Verse 6: Form circle with each hand, and hold up to eyes like binoculars.

Do this several times as you read the verses until the children copy them smoothly. Ask:

- ✎ What in these words tells us that this is an important message from God?
- ✎ Why do you think some people would remember these words when they heard about John?

The last question above will be a stretch for younger children, but older children can begin to connect how preparing for the king in Isaiah’s words and John’s actions match. To conclude Exploring, ask:

- ✎ What can we do to get ready to welcome Jesus on Christmas?

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.

1. **Action Prayer** This prayer can help children understand repentance. Remind the children that John told the people to change their ways and turn back to God as they prepared for the Messiah. This is called repentance. When people repent, they turn away from hurtful actions and back to God’s loving ways. Have the group stand in a circle, facing out. Ask:

- ✎ What are some hurtful things that people do?

After several answers, invite the group to follow your directions:

Without speaking, think about a time when you acted badly or did something wrong. *(pause)* Silently ask God to forgive you. *(pause)* Ask God to bless the person who was hurt by what you did. *(pause)* Repeat this prayer after me: *God, give me*

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PREP**

strength and courage / to be kind and loving. Amen. Face into the circle. Repeat after me: God, I am ready to follow Jesus / and to live in your ways.

2. **Advent Banner** This banner is a visual reminder of Advent. “Get ready” is the simplest form of John’s message. Decide where to hang the banner, and cut a piece of purple or blue felt of the size needed plus 3" for a pocket for the dowel. The basic design is cutout letters for “get ready.” See Resource Sheet 2 (Banner Letters) for patterns. Cutouts of an Advent wreath or four candles can be added. Cut letters and decorations from felt. Glue them to the background. Sew or staple a pocket across the top and insert the dowel. Tie one piece of yarn to each dowel end for hanging.
3. **Guided Meditation** A time for meditation can prepare children to welcome Jesus and escape the holiday rush. Ask:
 - ✿ What do you hear at church that tells you that Christmas is coming? At home? In the community?

Make copies of Resource Sheet 3 for children to take home for families to meditate together.

After their answers, suggest that this noise makes it difficult to remember that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus. Tell them that they can prepare for Christmas by taking some quiet time to think about Jesus each day. Invite them to get comfortable, sitting or lying down. Read the selection on Resource Sheet 3 (Meeting Jesus: A Guided Meditation).

4. **Song** During Advent, the church prepares to welcome Jesus, using hearts to help others, souls to be close to God, and minds to learn about following Jesus. The song “You Shall Love the Lord Your God” (track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019) summarizes this preparation. If the song is new to the children, sing the first and third lines and the children can echo by singing the second and fourth lines. After they know the song, part of the group can sing the first and third lines, and the other part can be the echo. Invite learners to suggest various ways to sing the song.

You Shall Love the Lord Your God

You shall love the Lord your God, alleluia!
 You shall love the Lord your God, alleluia!
 With all your heart and soul and mind, alleluia!
 With all your heart and soul and mind, alleluia!

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come,
 Emmanuel,
 And ransom captive Israel,
 That mourns in lonely exile here
 Until the Son of God appears.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
 Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

CLOSING

Gather at the worship space. Light two Advent candles. The first Advent candle is a reminder of encouragement or hope, and the second is a reminder to get ready for Jesus. Add a blue or purple paper link to the church year chain on the worship table.

Sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Color Pack 27; track 13 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019). Pray aloud:

God, teach us your ways. We wait for you all day long. Amen.

Invite the children to respond: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

Say good-bye to each child with this blessing: “(Name), live in God’s ways this week.”

December 9, 2018
Prepare the Way

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1

Who Is This Man John? based on Luke 3:1-6

You may remember the story about the birth of John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. The angel Gabriel came to Zechariah when he was on duty at the temple. Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby boy and they were to name him John. Zechariah found this hard to believe because he and Elizabeth were too old to have a baby. Because Zechariah didn't believe they would be parents, he could not speak until after John was born.

When this surprising baby boy was born, Elizabeth said, "His name is John." The people there didn't believe her. They thought the baby would be named after his father or some other family member. Zechariah, who still couldn't speak, wrote on a clay tablet: "His name is John." And so it was. John was a surprising and special baby.



When John grew up, he lived in the desert wilderness near the Jordan River (*show Color Pack 3*) until the word of God came to him. John had an important task. John was to get the people ready for the Messiah, the one God would send.

When the time came for John to begin this important task, he went to the Jordan River. He needed to be where there was a lot of water because part of John's important task was to baptize people. In those days, baptisms were at a river, not in a building.

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." Perhaps some people recognized John as the one described in the book of the prophet Isaiah. Maybe they remembered these words:

- ⁴Someone is shouting in the desert:
"Get the road ready for the Lord;
make a straight path for him to travel!
⁵Every valley must be filled up,
every hill and mountain leveled off.
The winding roads must be made straight,
and the rough paths made smooth.
⁶The whole human race will see God's salvation!"*



People did come to John. 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.

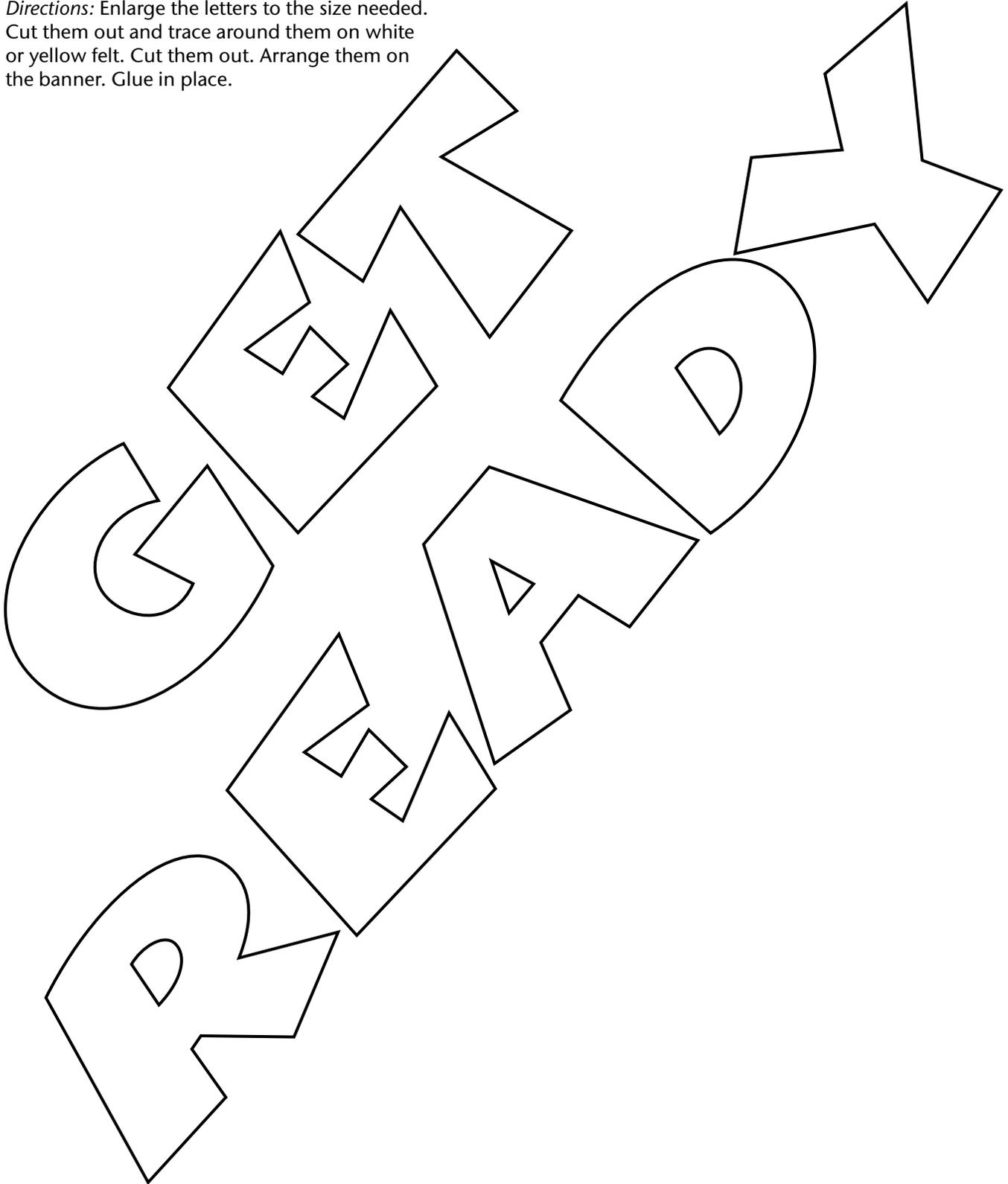
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December 9, 2018
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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

Banner Letters

Directions: Enlarge the letters to the size needed. Cut them out and trace around them on white or yellow felt. Cut them out. Arrange them on the banner. Glue in place.



December 9, 2018
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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 3

Meeting Jesus: A Guided Meditation

If your family could use some quiet time to remember that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, do this guided meditation together. One person should be chosen as the reader. Have everyone sit or lie down in a comfortable position. You can play some instrumental music softly, if you wish. The reader should read slowly and quietly, pausing after each paragraph.

Reader: Close your eyes and take some slow, deep breaths. I will read to you and pause for you to think quietly about what I have read. Please don't speak during this time. When I say "amen," slowly open your eyes.



Imagine you are on a walk. You meet John, the one called John the baptizer, who baptized people in the Jordan River. John invites you to get ready to meet Jesus. Think of one thing you will do to get ready to meet Jesus.

Imagine that you are doing that one thing to get ready to meet Jesus.

Now, imagine that you are meeting Jesus face-to-face. Jesus smiles at you. Jesus welcomes you and calls you by name.

Jesus says, "Whenever you feed people who are hungry, you feed me. Whenever you give water to people who are thirsty, you quench my thirst. Whenever you give clothing to people who have none, you clothe me. Whenever you do something kind or loving for someone else, you do it to me. Go in peace and serve God."

Take some deep breaths. Listen as I pray: Jesus, we want to be ready to celebrate your birth at Christmas. Teach us to love God and give us strength to be loving and kind to everyone we meet. Amen.

Perhaps your family would like to talk about the meditation and what they thought about during it. If this is the first time you have tried meditation together, you may have had difficulty staying on the topic. That is normal. Your concentration will improve the more you meditate.