

*Zeph. 3:14–20*

*Isa. 12:2–6*

*Phil. 4:4–7*

**Luke 3:7–18**

# Good News to the People

**Goal for the Session**      *Children will explore ways to answer John’s challenge to change.*

## ■ 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 3:7–18

#### **WHAT is important to know?**

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” *Mariam J. Kamell*

Ultimately, Luke summarizes John’s message as good news (*euangelizō*), thereby including it within the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, John’s is not a separate message from that which Christ preached. Before one can receive the Spirit, before one can understand that Christ is Messiah, one must repent from self-sufficiency. Repentance is defined as humble obedience, the natural result of meeting with God and accepting the truth of the gospel. Consistently throughout Scripture, God called his people to repent, a call still resonating. John, as prophet to Jesus, teaches that repentance entails a life characterized by honesty and concern for those in need.

#### **WHERE is God in these words?**

— From “Theological Perspective,” *Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen*

The Advent passage reminds us of the strange figure of the Baptist, who took the advent of the Messiah so dead seriously that nothing less than complete *metanoia* with an ethical U-turn was required. At the same time, the Advent passage presents to us the desert preacher who tied the advent of the Messiah to the eschatological advent of God. To that context belongs the promise of the baptism with the Spirit and fire. It is going to be an eschatological Spirit baptism. Whatever else the Spirit baptism may mean, in this passage it is a judging and cleansing act.

#### **SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?**

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” *Wesley D. Avram*

John calls the good works that make hearers worthy of their baptism “fruit” borne from the tree of their lives. It is not enough lazily to claim oneself the fruit of Abraham (or of the Roman army). It is not enough to presume that because one is a child of the church, a “good citizen,” or a person of status one is secure before God. Don’t confuse sitting on the limb with being either the tree or its fruit. For the tree might not be so strong or fruitful as one thinks.

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” *Kathy Beach-Verhey*

The preacher might ask fellow worshipers, “Can anyone tell, by observing our lives, that we bear the mark of Christ and are living as his faithful disciples?” We must, according to John, live the faith we claim to possess. Authentic Christian living always has that challenge. “It’s your *life* that must change, not your skin. . . . What counts is your life” (vv. 8–9, *The Message*). While this may not be the challenge worshipers have come to hear in Advent worship, it is what John the Baptist offers.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Luke 3:7–18**

**YOU WILL NEED**

- blue or purple cloth
- artificial evergreen wreath
- 4 battery-powered candles
- offering plate
- Bible, bookmark
- Color Pack 3, 4, 5, 27
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- 1" x 8½" blue or purple paper strip, paper chain started Dec. 2
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: clear ornaments, scissors, copies of Resource Sheet 1, church publications, brightly colored paper, curling ribbon
- option 3: Color Pack 27; *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player
- option 4: copies of Resource Sheet 2, art materials

## Focus on Your Teaching

What child is not counting the days until Christmas or the last day of school before the break? Your calm presence can set the tone to counter their excitement so it is not overwhelming. Their curiosity about what gifts they will receive is probably reaching new heights. Therefore, it may take extra effort to turn their thoughts from what they want to what they can give. Here is where John's teaching about giving to others can be used as an advantage, because children feel sympathy for people in need.

*Gracious God, open my heart and soul so that I might give from the depths of my faith to the children in my group. Amen.*

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

Greet each child. Ask the children about their week and Christmas preparations. Invite early arrivals to help you set up a worship space with a blue or purple cloth, the wreath with four candles inside it or around it, the paper chain started December 2, an offering basket, and a Bible open to the Gospel of Luke. Place a bookmark at Luke 3.

Gather the group around the worship space. Find out what they remember about Advent. Summarize that Advent ends on Christmas Day and is a time to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Lead this litany:

**Leader:** Prepare the way for God!

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

**Leader:** Today we light three 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)

To help the children turn from what they want to receive for Christmas to what they might give to others at Christmas, ask:

✧ When have you given someone a gift?

✧ How did you feel when you did that?

✧ What gifts are you going to give this Christmas?

Conclude this conversation by noting that John tells people about giving to others.

## EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Explain that the story of John the baptizer continues. Help the group recall what took place in the story of the previous week, using Color Pack 3, 4, and 5 to help their memory. Ask:

- ✪ What do you remember about John?
- ✪ Where was he?
- ✪ What was he doing?
- ✪ Of whom did John remind the people?

v. 4: Cup hands around mouth like a megaphone.

v. 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.

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

Read aloud Luke 3:4–6 and lead the group in the motions in the sidebar.

Proceed to prepare the drama on Resource Sheet 1 (Luke 3:7–18: A Drama). A leader can read the part of John, but assign the other parts to children. Nonreaders can say the parts assigned to all, tax collectors, and soldiers, if prompted by a leader or an older child.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1. Go through the drama as a rehearsal and then repeat it.

After the second presentation, ask:

- ✪ What do you wonder about John?
- ✪ Who do you think the man who is more powerful than John is?
- ✪ What does John want the people to do?

Point out that John was telling each one to give to someone without expecting something back from the person. Explore how that kind of giving is different from exchanging gifts with a friend or family member. Ask:

- ✪ What do you think John would say to us if we went to the Jordan River to be baptized?

## 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. **Christmas Ornament** This option combines a preparation for Christmas with spreading John's message. Provide scissors for the children to cut up the used copies of Resource Sheet 1 and paper from other ways your congregation spreads the good news of Jesus (e.g., worship bulletins, newsletters, other printed material). Have them cut some strips from brightly colored paper, too. Show them an empty ornament. Explain that the pieces of paper must be small enough to fit inside the ornament. Help learners as needed to remove the ornament top, stuff it with bits of paper, and replace the top. Tie a length of curling ribbon to the hook at the top. Curl the ribbon with scissors. The children can take the ornaments home or give them to someone else.

Option: The children can make extra ornaments to give to church members or others who are home- or hospital-bound. Plan a way for the ornaments to be delivered.



# FEASTING on the WORD

## CURRICULUM

Good News  
to the People

EASY  
PREP

### 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!

- 2. Giving Game** After a brief discussion of the final question in Exploring, this game can help the children think more about what they might do to give without expecting something back. The children are asked to complete a sentence that begins: “If you have (*two toys / two coats / two backpacks / a lonely neighbor / a sick friend*).” After a few answers, have them complete the sentence by acting out what they could do.
- 3. Advent Song** Play the Advent hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Color Pack 27; track 13 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019). Read the words to the children. Talk together about how the people of Israel might have felt about another country ruling them. Explain that Emmanuel means “God is with us” and is used to talk about the savior that God would send to help them. Sing it together. Ask:

  - ✧ How do these words remind you of what John the baptizer said and did?
  - ✧ Why is this a good song to sing during Advent?
- 4. Ongoing Advent Project** Any ongoing Advent project surely connects with John’s message to give to others. Since December 23 is the last Sunday in Advent, give the project a special push today. Have the children create notes using Resource Sheet 2 (Advent Project Reminders) or symbols to take home to remind families to participate in this mission project. For example, make and decorate small paper socks or mittens to symbolize a sock or mitten tree.

## CLOSING

Gather everyone at the worship space. Light three Advent candles. Recall that the first Advent candle reminds us of encouragement or hope; the second candle, to get ready for Jesus; and the third, to give to others. Add a blue or purple paper link to the church year chain.

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.”

## Luke 3:7-18: A Drama

**All:** John, John, we want to be baptized.

**John:** You snakes! You posers! Did you hear it was the “thing to do” to come and be baptized? Did you think that you should be baptized so that other people will think well of you? Did you think that being baptized would save you from God’s judgment? Change your lives and turn back to living in God’s ways! Do something good and worthwhile with the gifts that God gives you. You are so cocky because Abraham is your ancestor. Well, God can take these stones and create children of Abraham—big deal! What God expects is fruitful lives. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

**All:** What do you mean? What should we do?

**John:** If you have two coats, give one of them to a person who doesn’t have a coat. If you have plenty to eat, share your food with people who are hungry.

**Tax Collectors:** Teacher, what should we do?

**John:** Collect only the taxes that are legal to collect. Don’t cheat people!

**Soldiers:** What should we do?

**John:** Do not threaten people and take their belongings. Do not falsely accuse people. And be satisfied with the money you earn.

**Person 1** (*to others in crowd*): Who is this man?

**Person 2:** He says amazing things.

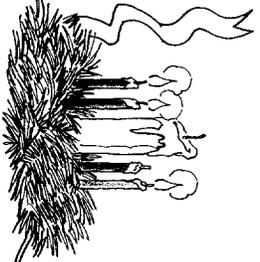
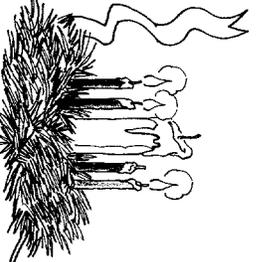
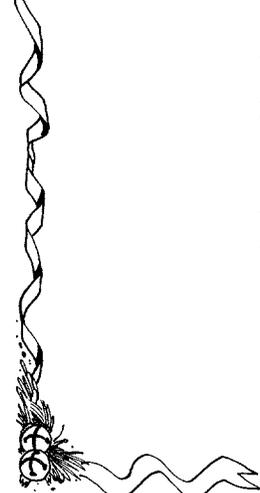
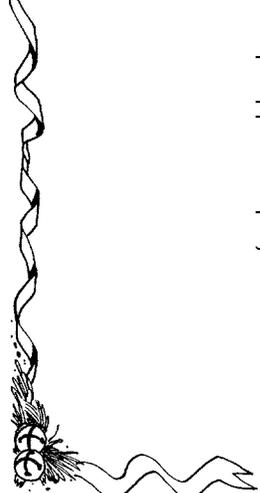
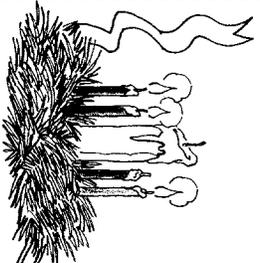
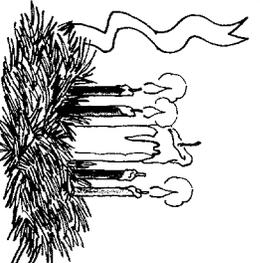
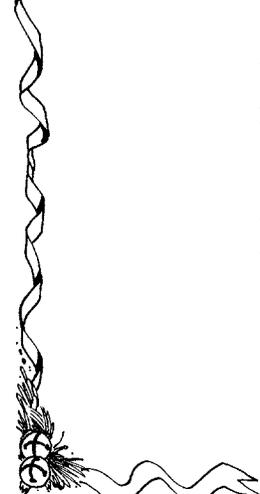
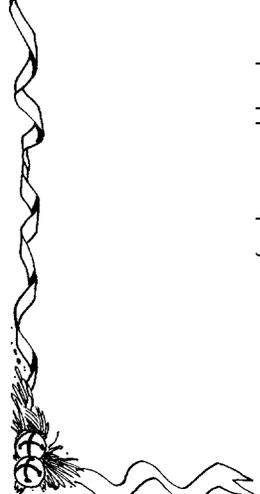
**Person 3:** He sort of looks like one of the prophets from the old days . . . like Isaiah.

**Person 1:** He sounds like a man from God.

**Person 2:** I wonder if he could be God’s Promised One, the Messiah.

**John:** I only baptize you with water. There is another man coming who is more powerful than I am. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, changing you from the inside out. He will make things right between God and you. He will gather you up like a farmer harvests wheat. He will take your sin and get rid of it forever, just like a farmer separates the chaff—the worthless husks—from the kernels of wheat and burns it.

## Advent Project Reminders

 <p>How to help support our project:</p>	<p>Name of project</p>	 <p>How to help support our project:</p>	<p>Name of project</p>
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