

Isa. 43:1–7

Ps. 29

Acts 8:14–17

Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

Claimed and Named

Goal for the Session Youth will explore God’s claim on their lives and consider how this claim leads to actions of faith.

■ 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

Part of the developmental process for young people as they grow toward adulthood is their exploration and internalization of their own sense of identity. Often this is done by trying on different looks or personas, relating to certain identity groups, or discovering areas of talent or passion. In his baptism, Jesus was claimed by God and identified as God's Son, the Beloved. Through Christ, young people are also claimed by God and marked as one of God's own. Take a moment and think of those young people who need to hear God's affirmation as part of their own sense of identity.

O God, make your claim real in my life. Through my teaching, may these young people hear your voice calling them "beloved" as well. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- small table
- white cloth or placemat
- bowl of water
- sea shells
- paper
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 and 2

For Responding:

- option 2: pipe cleaners

For Film Connection:

- The Lion King* (1994; G) and movie-viewing equipment

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a small table in the center of your meeting space and arrange a white cloth or placemat on it. Set a bowl of water on the cloth and arrange shells around the bowl.

Distribute paper and markers. Ask participants to draw a stick figure to represent themselves in the center of the page. Then, around the stick figures, have them draw symbols of people and groups who have a claim on their lives, such as family members, school organizations, employers, and sports teams. When all are finished, ask youth to show their drawings and tell about the claims upon their lives. As participants listen to the presentations, invite them to add additional claims to their drawings.

Put your hand in the bowl and scoop up some water as you explain to the group that today's session will explore how God claimed Jesus through Jesus' baptism.

Pray:

God, help us recognize the ways you claim our lives as we learn from your Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Read aloud in unison Luke 3:15. Have a volunteer assume the role of John. Gather the group together as if they are a crowd listening to John the Baptist. Ask:

- ✪ Why are you filled with expectations?
- ✪ What questions do you have in your hearts?

Give the participant portraying John a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (John's Speech). Have the participant portraying John read aloud the speech on the page.

Then, finish the story by reading aloud in unison Luke 3:21–22. Explore the following questions:

- ✪ How did God make an appearance in this scene?
- ✪ What does the voice from heaven say that affirms and identifies Jesus?
- ✪ How did God claim Jesus in this story?
- ✪ What actions and words does our faith community use to convey our identity and purpose?

Explain to the group that, like Jesus, God has claimed them and that this claim leads to actions of faith.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Making Music** Participants will create a song or rap about God's claim that leads to actions of faith. Form pairs of participants. Have each pair create a song or rap about how God's claim on their lives leads to actions of faith. Encourage the participants to name specific actions of faith in their songs or raps. Suggest that it may help to set their words to a familiar tune. When all are finished, give pairs an opportunity to present their songs or raps to the rest of the group.
- 2. Pipe-Cleaner Sculptures** Participants will sculpt ways that God's claim on their lives can lead to actions of faith. Make pipe cleaners available to the participants. Have participants sculpt a response to the question, "In response to God's claim on your life, how can you put your faith into action in the coming week?" When all are finished, give participants an opportunity to show and explain their sculptures to the rest of the group. Arrange them around the bowl of water.
- 3. Act It Out** Participants will act out situations in which God's claim leads to actions of faith. Form groups of two or three. Have groups create and present skits that depict situations in which teenagers put their faith into action in a contemporary setting such as school, youth group, band rehearsal, or sports practice. Have the groups be clear in their skits why the actions of faith are being done—because of God's claim on their lives. After all of the skits have been presented, ask: In response to God's claim on your life, how can you put your faith into action in the coming week?

EASY PREP

If you have fewer than four participants, have the entire group work together to create a song or rap.

CLOSING

Gather the participants around the bowl of water in the center of the meeting space. Have each participant pick up a shell and dip it in the bowl of water. Tell participants to take the shells home as a reminder of God's claim on their lives through baptism and as a reminder that this claim leads to action of faith.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Closing Litany). Read the litany together.

Send the participants with this blessing:

You are God's own children, the beloved ones; God is pleased with you. In response to God's love, put your faith into action.

■ E N H A N C E M E N T

FILM CONNECTION

The Lion King (1994; G) is about a lion cub named Simba who runs away from his responsibilities after the death of his father, the king. In the film, Simba discovers his identity and purpose in a deep, new way. If your church has a viewing license, watch together the scene where Simba is told to remember who he is (1:03:35–1:08:00). Then, discuss:

- ✿ How did Simba's understanding of his identity shape his sense of being called to a greater purpose in life?
- ✿ What are the occasions in your life when your identity and calling have been affirmed?

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Youth
Resource Sheet 1

John's Speech

“I’m baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”

—Luke 3:16b–17



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Youth
Resource Sheet 2

Closing Litany

One: Through the waters of baptism, you call us to be your children.

All: Thank you, O God, for your claim on our lives.

One: You call us by name.

All: Thank you, O God, for your claim on our lives.

One: You call us into service in the name of Jesus Christ.

All: Thank you, O God, for your claim on our lives.

One: In response to your love for us, you call us to perform actions of faith.

All: Thank you, O God, for your claim on our lives.

One: As we leave this place, challenge us to be Jesus' disciples and put our faith into action every moment of our lives.

All: Amen.

