

Zeph. 3:14–20

Isa. 12:2–6

Phil. 4:4–7

Luke 3:7–18

Metanoia

Goal for the Session

Youth will acknowledge the materialism of our culture and explore how John's call of metanoia beckons us to selfless lives.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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

Focus on Your Teaching

At the river Jordan, John the baptizer calls us to metanoia: a radical change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion. Status won't result in change, neither will just showing up. When asked, John says that we must turn from a life of materialism to one of fairness and generosity. Through the Internet, television, and movies, youth are exposed to a culture of excess and greed. These media send the message to young people that more is better and that wealth leads to power. In this session, youth will hear the call of metanoia and be challenged to lead selfless lives of generosity.

Loving God, help me see that my possessions, gifts, and blessings are not meant for me, but are meant to be extravagantly shared. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth or placemat
- Advent wreath, 4 blue or purple candles
- battery-powered votive or tea light candles
- newsprint
- magazines and newspapers
- scissors
- glue sticks
- lighter
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2

For Responding:

- option 1: newsprint, marker

For Video Connection:

- How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1966; unrated) and video-viewing equipment

If you have a small group, have participants read multiple roles in the script.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place four purple or blue candles in the holders of an Advent wreath. Place it on a blue or purple cloth or placemat. Use the color that your church uses in worship during Advent. If you do not have an Advent wreath, place the candles in holders in the center of an artificial evergreen wreath or simply arrange them on the cloth.

As participants arrive, make available the magazines, newspapers, scissors, and glue sticks. On a posted sheet of newsprint, have participants create a collage using words and images from the magazines and newspapers that depict materialism. When all are finished, give participants an opportunity to present and explain the words and images that they added to the collage.

Explain that the Scripture reading today offers a response to materialism.

Gather the group around the Advent wreath. Have a participant light three candles and pray:

God of all things, help us to feel your Spirit working in our lives as we continue on our Advent journeys by studying your Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Have participants find the Gospel of Luke in their Bibles. Introduce Luke 3:7–18 by explaining that this Scripture passage follows the proclamation of John the Baptist that was explored in last week's session. Read together Luke 3:1–6 so the participants understand that John was preparing the way for Jesus.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Script). Lead the participants in bringing Luke 3:7–18 to life by reading together the script on the page.

Explore the following questions together:

- ✧ How do you react when someone accuses you of being inauthentic or fake? How would you react if John called you a “brood of vipers”?
- ✧ How is claiming status of “Abraham’s children” not good enough in John’s eyes? How is status or title not good enough for repentance?

Have participants find Luke 3:7–18 in their Bibles. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Where Is God?). Read the information on the page together. Then, have participants search for where metanoia appears in Luke 3:7–18.

Discuss:

- ✧ What kind of change was John asking of the crowd?
- ✧ How would being generous demonstrate repentance more than status or appearance?
- ✧ What is the significance of John’s interactions with the tax collectors and soldiers?

Have participants reread John’s interactions with the tax collectors and soldiers. Discuss:

- ✧ How are John’s instructions to the tax collectors and soldiers counter to their professions?
- ✧ How does John’s call for people to be generous differ from the way many people react to those in need?
- ✧ How does fairness, honesty, and generosity differ from what our culture says we should do?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Other Roles** Help participants imagine what specific instructions John might have given them based on their roles in life. On a posted sheet of newsprint, have participants list some of their current roles in life. Roles could include son/daughter, student, basketball team member, band member, and youth group participant. Challenge the group to list as many roles as possible. Then, for each role on the list, write down one or more ways that John might have responded to a person in that role. Have each participant circle one of the responses on the newsprint to which he or she can commit to doing in the next week.
2. **Act It Out** Participants act out specific ways in which they can live selfish lives. Form groups of two or three. Have groups create and present short skits that depict three or four instances of teenagers living selfish lives. Once everyone has presented their skits, have participants revise and present their skits so the selfish acts are turned into selfless acts. Ask: How can you live more selflessly in the coming week?

EASY
PREP

- 3. Advent Mission Project** The participants continue with the giving tree project for your congregation. Ask the group how the collection of donations is going. Review the list of participants who will be helping with the collection this week and next week. Make plans to deliver the items to the selected local mission agency after church next Sunday.

CLOSING

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Give each person a battery-powered votive or tea light candle. Have each participant name one selfless act that he or she can perform in the coming week. After each act is named, have participants light their candles and place them around the wreath.

Close with this blessing:

Go into God's world with a light shining in the darkness. In response to Christ's love, find ways to live selflessly as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Extinguish all candles. Save them to use next session.

■ ENHANCEMENT

VIDEO CONNECTION

How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966; unrated) is a classic tale about a creature who loathes Christmas and wants to ruin it for the town of Whoville. On Christmas Eve, the Grinch dresses like Santa to “de-Christmas” the town. Despite his stealing all of the presents, decorations, and food, the residents of Whoville sing out with joy, welcoming Christmas Day. If your church has a viewing license, begin at the scene where the Grinch anticipates the sound of wailing in Whoville on Christmas morning and watch through the end.

Discuss:

- ✪ What happens when the Grinch realizes that Christmas comes anyway?
- ✪ How does this video clip connect with Luke 3:7–18?
- ✪ How is one's life different when his or her heart grows three sizes? How can this transformation affect the world?

Script

Roles Needed:

Narrator
John
Crowd
Tax Collectors
Soldiers

Narrator: Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him,

John: You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.

Narrator: The crowds asked him,

Crowd: What then should we do?

John: Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same.

Narrator: Even tax collectors came to be baptized. They said to him,

Tax Collectors: Teacher, what should we do?

John: Collect no more than you are authorized to collect.

Narrator: Soldiers asked,

Soldiers: What about us? What should we do?

John: Don't cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay.

Narrator: The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. John replied to them all,

John: I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out.

Narrator: With many other words John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.

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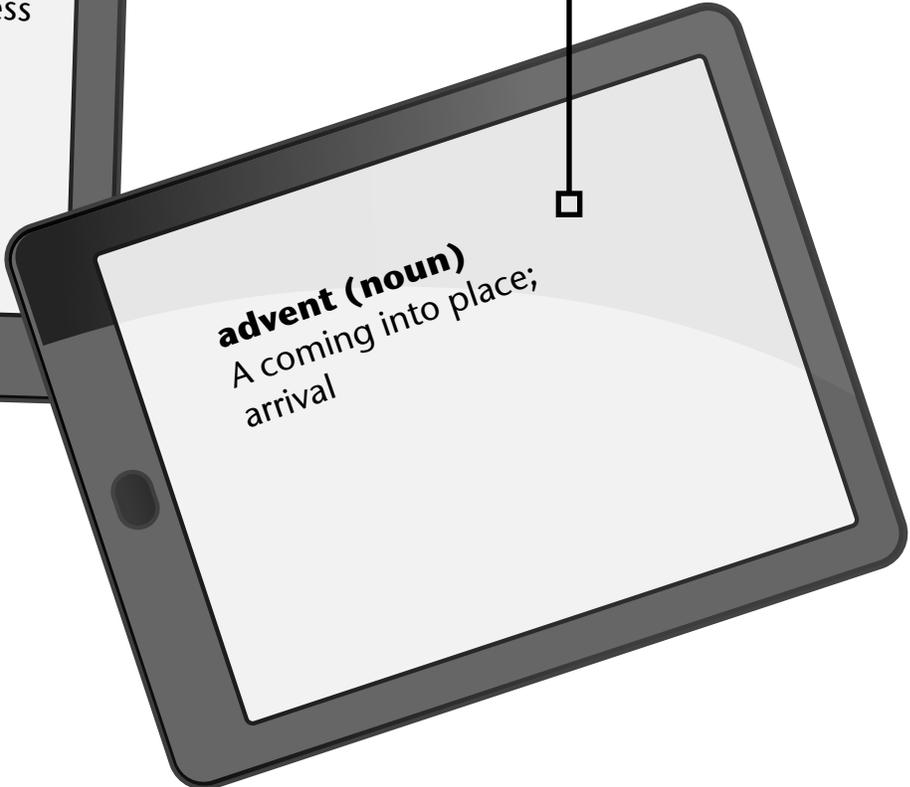
Where Is God?

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.

—from “Where?” excerpt



metanoia (noun)
(Greek, “Change of mind”)
A New Testament term for repentance that indicates sorrow for sin and turning (conversion) from sinfulness to righteousness through Jesus Christ.¹



advent (noun)
A coming into place;
arrival

1. McKim, Donald K.
*Westminster Dictionary
of Theological Terms*
(Louisville: Westminster
John Knox Press, 1996),
pp. 172–173.