



Community of Christ

# COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

3 DECEMBER 2017 — 11 FEBRUARY 2018

# COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS



Lifelong Disciple Formation in Community of Christ is the shaping of persons in the likeness of Christ at all stages of life. It begins with our response to the grace of God in loving community and continues as we help others learn, grow, and serve in the mission of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, discipleship is expressed as one lives the mission initiatives of the church through service, generosity, witness, and invitation.

We invite you to use these lessons for your class, group, or congregation.

**Lectionary-based:** The weekly lessons connect the *Revised Common Lectionary* for worship with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

**Quick, easy:** The lessons are designed for approximately 45-minute class sessions with two to three pages of ideas, discussion starters, and activities. Additional preparation help may be found in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament* (with focus on the gospel according to Mark).

Lessons are available for three age groups. Recognizing each age group represents multiple stages of development, the instructor is encouraged to adapt lessons to best meet the needs of the class or group. When possible, optional activities are provided to help adapt lessons for diverse settings.

**Children (multiage, 6–11):** Help children engage in the Bible and introduce mission and beliefs with stories, crafts, and activities.

**Youth (ages 12–18):** Engage teens in scripture study and provocative questions about identity, mission, and beliefs.

**Adult (ages 19 and older):** Deepen faith and understanding with reflective questions, theological understanding, and discussion ideas.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Bible scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (HOPE)

LESSON 1  
3 December 2017

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 13:24–37

**Lesson Focus:** Keep awake!

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- understand the relationship between waiting for the second coming of Christ and waiting for the coming of the Messiah.
- understand what it is we are hoping for as we wait for the second coming of Christ.

- relate the active waiting called for by this reading to the hope found in this Advent season.

## Supplies

- Bible (NRSV)
- Pens, pencils, paper
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Mark 13:24–37/13:38–55 IV in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 18–19, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the Advent of Hope. What is hope?

Share with the group or the person next to you what hope means to you.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

We begin the season of Advent celebrating hope. Advent is about the coming of a person or event in the lives of the people. The Advent season encourages us to prepare for Christmas, to take hope in the coming of Jesus into the world.

However, we find ourselves confronted by a different kind of coming in this scripture passage near the end of Mark. The setting is just before Jesus is crucified, and Jesus shares the promise he will come again. This passage in Mark comes right after Jesus’ prediction of coming persecutions for his followers.

- How might this passage about Jesus’ return give his disciples hope?

The Advent season is a celebration of the coming of Christ in the form of a baby. At the time of his first coming, people were waiting with longing for the coming of a Messiah to set them free. But their idea of freedom took a very specific form. They were hoping for a king like David taking up arms and marching against the Roman Empire. These expectations prevented them from seeing Jesus as their Messiah.

In today’s scripture passage, we have a new prophecy of Christ’s return. Just like the Jews of Jesus’ time, we read our own times into it. We fail to understand the universal nature of the events Jesus lists. We see these events

reflected in our own world. We ignore the “no one knows... but only the Father” in Mark 13:32, confident that we know. We ignore the warnings to watch, to stay awake.

- In what ways do these warning signs of Christ’s coming seem to apply to our world today?
- How do you understand Mark 13:32?
- This waiting involves action. We are not passive waiters. We are to watch and prepare; we are not to be caught sleeping. What do you think you are supposed to be doing as you wait for Jesus’ coming?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

The Community of Christ story offers many suggestions how to actively wait for Christ. Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a–f describes how active waiting works in daily life, connecting these actions to the Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives of the church (highlighted in italics below):

1 a. Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ’s mission.

b. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God’s nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ’s love and mission.

c. *Lovingly invite* others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

d. Undertake compassionate and just actions to *abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace* on and for the Earth.

e. Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for *personal, societal, and environmental salvation*; a fullness of gospel witness for creation’s restoration.

f. Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional *innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting*

*groups of disciples and seekers* are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

Our Enduring Principles are intertwined in the waiting: we enter the Kingdom of God together. Our mission on Earth until then is to be active participants in bringing it about. We are responsible for our brothers and sisters. We are concerned for the people and environment God left in our care. We wait actively, caring for the part of creation we are gifted and called to serve. In this way, we have hope in Christ and share that hope with others.

This echoes the Community of Christ Basic Belief on salvation: “As we yield our lives to Christ in baptism we enter Christian community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of salvation. We experience salvation through Jesus Christ, but affirm that God’s grace has no bounds, and God’s love is greater than we can know.”

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 15

One Enduring Principle of the church is Blessings of Community. “We are called to create communities of Christ’s peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation” (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14).

How do the Mission Initiatives, Basic Beliefs, and Enduring Principles of the church give you hope? Share your hope with the class in a word, a phrase, or a sentence.

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

Sit quietly a minute, thinking about ways you can actively wait for the coming of Christ. After a moment, share with the group a word, a phrase, or a sentence illustrating ways you can actively wait.

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Gather into a circle, holding hands if comfortable doing so. The leader will begin a prayer of hope. Then each person, in turn, will share a one-statement addition to the prayer. If the person wishes to make his or her statement silently, he or she may do so, and then gently squeeze the next person’s hand to signal they are finished. When the prayer returns to the leader, he or she will finish the prayer.

# LESSON 1 RESPONSE SHEET

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

3 December 2017

Mark 13:24–37

<sup>24</sup>“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup>and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup>Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup>“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup>“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

We begin the season of Advent celebrating hope. Advent is about the coming of a person or event in the lives of the people. The Advent season encourages us to prepare for Christmas, to take hope in the coming of Jesus into the world.

- How might this passage about Jesus’ return give his disciples hope?

- In what ways do these warning signs of Christ’s coming seem to apply to our world today?

- How do you understand Mark 13:32?

- This waiting involves action. We are not passive waiters. We are to watch and prepare; we are not to be caught sleeping. What do you think you are supposed to be doing as you wait for Jesus’ coming?

The Community of Christ story offers many suggestions how to actively wait for Christ. *Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a–f* describes how active waiting is lived out in daily life, connecting these actions to the *Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives of the church* (in italics).

1a. Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ’s mission.

b. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God’s nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ’s love and mission.

c. *Lovingly invite* others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ.

Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

d. Undertake compassionate and just actions to *abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace* on and for the Earth.

e. Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for *personal, societal, and environmental salvation*; a fullness of gospel witness for creation's restoration.

f. Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional *innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers* are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

- **How do the Mission Initiatives, Basic Beliefs, and Enduring Principles of the church give you hope? Share your hope with the class in a word, a phrase, or a sentence.**

# SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)

LESSON 2  
10 December 2017

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 1:1–8

**Lesson Focus:** Prepare the way of the Lord.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- understand the call of John the Baptizer in Mark's Gospel.
- examine John the Baptizer's understanding of Christ's call.
- look at the introduction of the Trinity in this opening scripture passage in Mark.
- look at the origin of the church's sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

- link this message with the Advent of Peace.

## Supplies

- Bible (NRSV)
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, or copies of the Basic Beliefs of the church concerning God, Jesus Christ, and The Holy Spirit
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)* (optional)
- Pens, pencils, paper
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 1:1–8/1:1–6 IV in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 20, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the second Sunday of Advent, the Advent of Peace.

- What does peace mean to you?
- Do you have a favorite word you like to use instead of the word "peace"? What is it and why do you like this word better?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

We open our study today with the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. The people who compiled the scriptures called this book "The Gospel according to Mark." The word "gospel" means "good news." But Mark himself does not call his book just good news. The name Mark gave his

Gospel is in Mark 1:1. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

From this point, Mark launches us into an adventure laden with Jesus' teachings, miracles, joys, and tragedies. Mark is assuring us in the very first line that this is only the beginning! The end of this story is not the end of the good news, but continues in the lives of those hearing Mark's story.

- What does the title Mark gives his book tell you about the message he wants to share?
- Why do you think Mark calls his book "the beginning" instead of just calling it "the good news" as the compilers of the Bible called the book?

The importance of the story Mark tells is soon revealed as the fulfillment of hundreds of years of prophecy:

Mark 1:2–3

"As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.'"

Scripture study reveals this passage is not just from Isaiah, but a combination of texts from Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3. As a common practice of first-century Jewish writers, it affirms, "This is a prophetic saying from way back." Giving credit to Isaiah puts emphasis on the importance of the message about to be shared. The source of this voice is the voice of God.

- Who is this messenger God is sending? What is the messenger supposed to do?

In Mark, John the Baptizer appears. There is no story of John's birth and the only relationship to Jesus is in that prophecy from God, "See, I am sending a messenger." Similarly, Jesus appears to John for baptism. Mark presents no biography for either man.

This reflects the remainder of the gospel and the secret nature of Jesus' mission in Mark's eyes. Jesus' power to work miracles, perform exorcisms, and teach with the power of God is presented in the first half of Mark's Gospel. It is only in the second half, as Jesus approaches his crucifixion, that we encounter the humanity of Jesus. It is only in the Resurrection we find the good news.

- Why do you think Mark presents John without a biography? Why would this be important to Mark's story?

The scripture passage goes on to describe John's appearance. This is the same description given for Elijah, the prophet, in 2 Kings 1:8. In Mark's Gospel, John the Baptizer is the prophet heralding the coming of the Messiah. Mark's readers know who Jesus is before the characters in the story do. John the Baptizer is the turning point, the last prophet of the old covenant and the first prophet of the new.

He begins to preach about a powerful one who is coming, one who is greater than John. While John baptizes with water for the forgiveness of sins just as they do in the Temple, he speaks of someone coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

- If there were no other Gospels to give us further details about John, who would you think John the Baptizer was?
- What is new about the powerful one of whom John preaches?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

This text in Mark introduces us to the Trinity, a basic belief of the church. The Trinity is comprised of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Read the Basic Beliefs of the church about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 14.

While God is spoken of frequently in the Old Testament and the Messiah is prophesied often, it is in the Gospels we encounter the Holy Spirit. This is a change from the old ways of understanding God as the jealous and angry One to a loving and understanding community of three persons. We meet a Messiah who is not a warrior in the way we thought, but an agent of peace and truth. Then we are given a Helper, the Holy Spirit, who sustains creation, bestowing on God's people many gifts so they can be transformed into disciples.

Amid this introduction are two sacraments of the church. First is a reinterpretation of baptism to cleanse from sin as needed to a baptism cleansing us once and for all. And confirmation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is presented.

Christ's mission of peace on Earth is barely mentioned at this point in Mark. The hearers of Mark are not yet aware of this call of the Messiah. However, the door has been opened to the New Testament relationship through which Christ brings us to God by presenting us with the Holy Spirit. The blessings to be found in such a community (an Enduring Principle) are awaiting discovery.

Eight verses into Mark, and the adventure begins! Imagine you are in a synagogue hearing the Gospel of Mark for the first time. It is the only Gospel you have ever heard. Have someone read Mark 1:1-8 as it would have been read by a great storyteller with all the excitement of wanting to share Christ's story and message. What do you hear that could create excitement in the hearers of this message? Share your feelings with the group or your neighbor.

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

The active waiting of Advent has begun. We are called to join in preparation on the way to Jesus' birth. We have hope in Christ's message. We are amazed to find that message is one of peace. The call through today's scripture passage is a call to join in that new testament of a God who sends an emissary of peace to us.

Sit quietly for a moment and think about how you might share the peace of Christ in your world this week. Share your insights in a word, a phrase, or a sentence with the class.

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Have a volunteer share a prayer for peace, or read or sing "Let There Be Peace on Earth" CCS 307.



# LESSON 2 RESPONSE SHEET

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)

10 December 2017

Mark 1:1–8

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; <sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The word “gospel” means “good news.” But Mark himself does not call his book just good news. The name Mark gave his Gospel is in Mark 1:1. “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

- What does the title Mark gives his book tell you about the message he wants to share?

- Why do you think Mark calls his book “the beginning” instead of just calling it “the good news” as the compilers of the Bible called the book?

- Eight verses into Mark, and the adventure begins! Imagine you are in a synagogue hearing the Gospel of Mark for the first time. It is the only Gospel you have ever heard. Have someone read Mark 1:1–8 as it would have been read by a great storyteller with all the excitement of wanting to share Christ’s story and message. What do you hear that could create excitement in the hearers of this message? Share your feelings with the group or your neighbor.

# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (LOVE)

LESSON 3  
17 December 2017

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 1:6–8, 19–28

**Lesson Focus:** Testimony of John the Baptizer

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- discover the testimony of Christ from John the Baptizer as presented in the Gospel of John.
- examine John the Baptizer's understanding of Christ's call.
- connect with the Advent of Love.

## Supplies

- Bible (NRSV)
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, or copies of the Enduring Principles Worth of All Persons, All Are Called, Unity in Diversity, Blessings of Community, and the Basic Beliefs on Discipleship
- Pens, pencils, paper
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 1:6–8, 19–28 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 21–22, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, the Advent of Love. We come today to celebrate the life-giving message Jesus presented to the world: God, Jesus' Abba, loves us. God is not a vengeful, wrathful being, but our Creator who longs for our peace and wholeness.

Open this session by sitting quietly a few seconds, reminding yourself even the strongest person can be weak, and all are children of God. At the class leader's direction, sing or recite together "Jesus Loves Me."

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to him belong. We are weak, but he is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.

Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.

—Anna Bartlett Warner, CCS 251

Reflect on the significance of the words. Share with the group or a neighbor how you learned about God's love through Jesus Christ.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

The Gospel of John is addressed to committed Christians. One can tell this by the assumptions made about its hearers. For instance, John the Baptizer is addressed as only John. The Gospel is written for insiders of the Christian community who may hold some erroneous beliefs. One of these beliefs is that John the Baptizer is equal to Christ. To challenge this understanding, the baptism of Jesus is not the central story in John's narrative. What is emphasized is John the Baptizer's status as witness, as a voice of warning to prepare people for the one whom he is "not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals."

Unlike the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Gospel of John does not claim John the Baptizer is Elijah. The Baptizer also rejects the idea he is "the prophet" (John 1:25). This is a reference to Moses. There were those among the Jews who thought Moses would be returning.

After removing all prophetic titles, John is allowed to proclaim himself to be a voice, testifying of Jesus. John is the "voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make

straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said" (John 1:23).

John understands Jesus' calling. Further along in the chapter, one would find John sending his own disciples to follow Jesus. John tells the disciples of the dove descending upon Jesus after his baptism, but this is a narration by John the Baptizer and not a part of the story as found in the other Gospels.

Read John 1:6–8, 19–28 and mark the verses that reveal what John says he is here to do.

What does this passage say to us during the season of Advent? It tells us we are like John in that we, too, are witnesses of Christ. We share with John a testimony of one who stands among us but we "do not know" him. But John knows the Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit. We know this, too. We can, like John, testify to the love that is revealed in Christ, blesses us with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and shepherds us to God.

When did you know Jesus was the Son of God, or do you struggle with this as the people of Jesus' day did? Who led you to Jesus? Share your testimony with a neighbor or the class.

### **3 RESPOND**

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

How do we respond to this witness of John the Baptizer in the Gospel of John? John witnesses to the importance of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. John baptizes with water, but another more important than John baptizes with the Holy Spirit. In the following scripture passages are further testaments of the importance of baptism. Jesus is baptized by John and confirmation comes in the form of a dove.

Sit in silence a moment and reflect on a sacrament you witnessed or participated in that had a profound impact on your life and discipleship. What about it made it so special to you? Share it with the class or your neighbor.

When we are baptized and confirmed into the church as the body of Christ, we enter into a covenant relationship with God and the community in which the sacraments take place. This community is made up of people who come

from diverse backgrounds and cultures. However, when we accept the Holy Spirit into our lives, we become new creatures. We are unified by the Holy Spirit in a community of brothers and sisters in Christ. We find that each one is a valuable addition to that community, realizing all have a role to play.

This is the foundation on which the Enduring Principles of Community of Christ is built. When we are open to the Spirit, we find all people have value in our community (Worth of All Persons). We find everyone has a purpose to fulfill (All Are Called). We experience Unity in Diversity. From these Enduring Principles are born the Blessings of Community.

How have you found blessing in the community in which you live through these Enduring Principles?

One of the Mission Initiatives of the church is Develop Disciples to Serve. Remember how your discipleship was developed. Who helped you grow into who you are today? Is there anyone you can help grow, perhaps as a mentor or spiritual companion?

### **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

The Advent of Love is celebrated today.

As we enter this week, focused on the love of God for us, spend a couple of minutes thinking of the people in your life who would appreciate knowing you love them. Is there anyone outside your community who needs the blessing of a community? Plan to invite them during this Advent and Christmas season.

### **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Join hands in a circle and stand together reflecting with a silent prayer of gratitude on the blessings you receive from this community. End the prayer by repeating after the leader, "Thank you, Lord, for loving us and giving us this community."

# LESSON 3 RESPONSE SHEET

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (LOVE)

17 December 2017

John 1:6–8, 19–28

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

<sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." <sup>21</sup>And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." <sup>22</sup>Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup>He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. <sup>24</sup>Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup>They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" <sup>26</sup>John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup>the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." <sup>28</sup>This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

- Mark the verses that reveal what John says he is here to do.

- What does this passage say to us during the season of Advent?
- When did you know Jesus was the Son of God, or do you struggle with this as the people of Jesus' day did? Who led you to Jesus? Share your testimony with a neighbor or the class.
- How do we respond to this witness of John the Baptizer in the Gospel of John?

John witnesses to the importance of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. John baptizes with water, but another more important than John baptizes with the Holy Spirit. In the following scripture passages are further testaments of the importance of baptism. Jesus is baptized by John and confirmation comes in the form of a dove.

Sit in silence a moment and reflect on a sacrament you witnessed or participated in that had a profound impact on your life and discipleship. What about it made it so special to you? Share it with the class or your neighbor.

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)

LESSON 4  
24 December 2017

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Luke 1:26–38

**Lesson Focus:** The birth of Jesus is foretold.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- visit anew the calling of Mary to be the mother of Jesus.
- examine the prophecy of the angel Gabriel concerning Jesus.
- experience the Advent of Joy.

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke 1:26–38 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 23, available through Herald House.

## Supplies

- Bible (NRSV)
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, or copies of the Enduring Principles Worth of All Persons, All Are Called, Unity in Diversity, Blessings of Community, and the Basic Beliefs on Discipleship
- Pens, pencils, paper
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Advent of Joy. We come together today, the day before Christmas, to remember the joy we have in this great gift God gave us: Jesus, the Christ.

Sit quietly a few moments, reminding yourselves of how this gift has changed your lives. Read or sing the first stanza of “Joy to the World” CCS 408. Share with the class or a neighbor phrases in this stanza that are meaningful to you.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Today our scripture passage is part of the story of the Nativity. Because it is familiar to many, we may neglect the depth of the meaning in it. If you are hearing this story for the first time or hundredth time, listen prayerfully.

Read Luke 1:26–38, the calling of Mary to be the mother of Jesus. Pause silently for a moment and reflect on what you have read or heard.

After a couple of minutes of silence, read it again. Listen for a word or phrase you have not noticed before or one that

captures your attention. Hold it in your mind. If another word or phrase speaks to you, hold it in your mind as well. When finished, sit silently, thinking about the words or phrases that captured your attention.

Sit quietly as the passage is read once more. Listen again for the words or phrases that touch your mind and heart. When you feel ready, write or depict these words or phrases. As you write, pray about why these are speaking to you today. Note any insights you receive. Spend four to five minutes with this exercise.

If you are comfortable doing so, share your thoughts with the class or a neighbor

### **3 RESPOND**

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
*(35% of total lesson time)*

In our scripture passage today, we find an example of the Enduring Principle All Are Called as a young peasant girl in the small town of Nazareth is called to be the mother of the Son of God.

- What do you think Mary felt? Share with the class your thoughts.

This may remind you of a call you received. Maybe it was a call that startled you or made you question your ability to respond. This may have been a priesthood office or a responsibility you had not anticipated or felt you did not have the qualifications to handle. Maybe you are in such a situation right now. How did or will you handle that call? Did or will you accept? If so, what influenced you? If not, why? Would you decide differently today? If you are comfortable doing so, share your insights with the class or a neighbor.

One of the Basic Beliefs of the church is that revelation continues today. The calling of Mary to be the mother of Jesus fits the church's vision of what constitutes revelation. The Basic Belief of Revelation says, "We affirm

the Living God is ever self-revealing. God is revealed to the world in the testimony of Israel, and above all in Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit, we continue to hear God speaking today. The church is called to listen together for what the Spirit is saying and then faithfully respond."

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 15

Sit quietly for a moment reflecting on these statements. How have you experienced the movement of God through the Holy Spirit in your life? Share with the class as you feel comfortable doing so.

### **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Today is the Advent of Joy. Tomorrow is Christmas. For many this is a time for joy. For others, it will be a reminder of loved ones who are no longer with them for various reasons, and so an occasion for sorrow. Others will be lonely.

Take a moment to think of someone who may need a place to be for Christmas. Pray for God's guidance in bringing someone to mind. Think about how you can share the joy of Christ with those who are longing for a spiritual home.

### **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Join hands in a circle. Beginning with the leader and moving around the circle, share with the class a word or statement of praise about Christmas that gives you joy. If you do not wish to share, simply squeeze the hand of the next person to signal you are finished. Ending with the leader, sing or read again the first stanza of "Joy to the World" CCS 408.

# LESSON 4 RESPONSE SHEET

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)

24 December 2017

Luke 1:26–38

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

- Read the scripture passage. Pause silently for a moment and reflect on what you have read or heard.
- After a couple of minutes of silence, read it again. Listen for a word or phrase you have not noticed before or one that captures your attention. Hold it in your mind.

- Sit quietly as the scripture is read once more. Listen again for the words or phrases that touch your mind and heart. When you feel ready, write or depict these words or phrases. As you write, pray about why these are speaking to you today. Note any insights you receive.

In our scripture passage today, we find an example of the Enduring Principle All Are Called as a young peasant girl in the small town of Nazareth is called to be the mother of the Son of God.

- What do you think Mary felt? Share with the class your thoughts.

This may remind you of a call you received. Maybe it was a call that startled you or made you question your ability to respond. This may have been a priesthood office or a responsibility you had not anticipated or felt you did not have the qualifications to handle. Maybe you are in such a situation right now. How did or will you handle that call? Did or will you accept? If so, what influenced you? If not, why? Would you decide differently today? If you are comfortable doing so, share your insights with the class or a neighbor.

- How have you experienced the movement of God through the Holy Spirit in your life? Share with the class as you feel comfortable doing so.

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

LESSON 5  
31 December 2017

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Luke 2:22–40

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus in the Temple

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- review the story of Jesus' presentation at the Temple and what it tells us about Jesus' life.
- examine the powerful prophecies made about Jesus.
- prepare for carrying the joy, hope, love, and peace of this season into the new year.

## Supplies

- Bible (NRSV)
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Pens, pencils, paper
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Luke 2:22–40 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 25, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas and the last day of the year.

Many of us are reviewing where we have been this past year and making promises to ourselves to make changes in our lives during the year to come. Some people call these promises resolutions. Some of us are discouraged by the failure of last year's promises. Some no longer make promises because of this discouragement.

As we begin a new year, we focus on a scripture passage that is all about endings and beginnings. It includes prophecies about the years to come and what is in store for the key players of this drama.

Have someone offer a prayer for the class and for the endings and beginnings before us.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Luke begins this story by setting a stage: Joseph, Mary, and their new baby, Jesus, are in the Temple fulfilling the rituals called for by the Law of Moses. Luke is telling us Jesus' parents are devout and obedient Jews, not rebels challenging the law.

Luke tells us something else about them. The Law states the firstborn must be redeemed by the sacrifice of a lamb. This law contains a poverty clause: if people couldn't afford a lamb, they could offer two turtledoves or two pigeons instead. Joseph and Mary offer two doves for Jesus' redemption. Luke is telling us Jesus, who will later say he is bringing "good news to the poor," is himself one of the poor.

Jesus will be raised in his father's profession of carpentry. He will live several years as an itinerant preacher supported



by his followers. He will only have one coat as his possession at death. He will be buried in a borrowed tomb.

Think about Jesus' life of poverty for a moment. How does this compare to the message of the "prosperity gospel" we hear preached so often in today's world? How does Jesus' life of poverty speak to us today?

Next are the prophecies of Simeon and Anna. Luke calls them righteous and devout as he does many of the key players in Jesus' life. Both have been coming to the Temple for many years.

Simeon came each day to the Temple to search for the Messiah, for he had been promised he would not die until he saw him. The Spirit guides Simeon to Jesus. He takes Jesus in his arms with an expression of thanksgiving at the fulfillment of this promise. Then he speaks this prophecy over him: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too" (Luke 2:34–35).

Imagine you are Mary and Joseph. Read the words of Simeon and ponder them in silence. How would you feel if you were Joseph? If you were Mary? What do these words say about the life Jesus will live? Share some of your responses with the class.

Anna was married for seven years until the death of her husband. She spent the rest of her life in the Temple worshiping, praying, and fasting. The scriptures tell us she never left the Temple. As a widow at that time, it could be she had nowhere else to go following the death of her husband. She was 84 years old and considered a prophet. She, too, was drawn to Jesus by the Spirit, "and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

This phrase in Anna's prophecy, "redemption of Jerusalem," is a phrase used in the prophecy of Isaiah. The Jews of that day would have recognized it. It refers to the final salvation of God's people. This context is both unexpected and inclusive of more than the children of Israel. It is used in the dedication of a baby and refers to both Jews and Gentiles.

Imagine you are a Jew at the Temple that day and hear Simeon's and Anna's prophecies. What would your first thoughts be? How would you respond? How do you respond today to the messages they share with us? Why is this message important today?

## **3 RESPOND**

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

In this story from Luke, we find ourselves immersed in the sacred story of Jesus' life. It is surrounded by devotion, obedience, and prophecy of a future that does not seem

all that bright for the child and his family, but seems exceptionally bright for the people of God. Jesus' early life began in the nurturing faith of the church and its rituals. One basic belief of the church is the importance of nurturing our children and families. To be part of such a blessed community is an Enduring Principle of Community of Christ.

We have heard the words, "It takes a village to raise a child." How has that been true in your life? Who, besides your immediate family, had a hand in nurturing you? What does this say to you about the Enduring Principle Blessings of Community?

The dedication of Jesus recalls the sacrament of blessing of children. This is a powerful ministry that calls on God, the family, and the community to assist in nurturing the child.

Have you ever witnessed or participated in a baby blessing? How did you feel about it? How was the feeling different if you were a congregation member? A relative? A parent? One of the ministers? What responsibility did you feel at that moment?

## **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

We are nearing a day when we will be celebrating the change from the old year into the new. Maybe you will attend a party. Maybe you will spend the time quietly at home with family or a few friends. Maybe you will spend it alone in meditation, reflecting on the year that has been and praying for the year to come. However you plan to spend this day, begin it by reading together the words of Simeon from Luke 2:29–32:

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Reflect on how these words are true for you.

## **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

End this class by singing together the first stanza of "Now in This Moment" CCS 96.

Have someone offer a prayer for the coming year.

# LESSON 5 RESPONSE SHEET

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

31 December 2017

Luke 2:22–40

<sup>22</sup>When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup>“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” <sup>33</sup>And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” <sup>36</sup>There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. <sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Simeon came each day to the Temple to search for the Messiah for he had been promised he would not die until he saw him. The Spirit guides Simeon to Jesus. He takes Jesus in his arms with an expression of thanksgiving at the fulfillment of this promise. Then he speaks this prophesy over him: “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too” (Luke 2:34–35).

- Imagine you are Mary and Joseph. Read the words of Simeon and ponder them in silence.
- How would you feel if you were Joseph? If you were Mary?
- What do these words say about the life Jesus will live? Share some of your responses with the class.

We have heard the words, “It takes a village to raise a child.” How has that been true in your life? Who, besides your immediate family, had a hand in nurturing you? What does this say to you about the Enduring Principle Blessings of Community?

The dedication of Jesus recalls the sacrament of blessing of children. This is a powerful ministry that calls on God, the family, and the community to assist in nurturing the child.

Have you ever witnessed or participated in a baby blessing? What were your feelings? How was the feeling different if you were a congregation member? A relative? A parent? One of the ministers? What responsibility did you feel at that moment?

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, BAPTISM OF THE LORD

LESSON 6  
7 January 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 1:4–11

**Lesson Focus:** Discipleship calls us to repentance for choices that separate us from God.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- investigate the scope and purpose of the Gospel according to Mark.
- explore the connection between the prophets Elijah and John the Baptizer.
- consider how repentance and discipleship are connected.

- expand their understanding of sacred relationship.

## Supplies

- Projection equipment for downloadable video
- *Of Water and Spirit*, available from Herald House
- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copies of the Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Mark 1:4–11 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 29–30, available through Herald House. Preview and download the video overview of Mark, *Read Scripture: New Testament Mark (RS)* at <https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/?category=&q=Mark>. This video is 9:29 long.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Today is the first Sunday after the Epiphany. Epiphany is a Christian celebration on January 6 that commemorates the appearance of the Magi (Gentiles) as a manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah to non-Jews as well as Jews. The word also means “intuitive discovery” or “revelation.” The Gospel according to Mark invites us to witness Jesus and decide for ourselves who this Messiah is to us.

Open the class with a prayer of gratitude for our scriptures that give us insight into Jesus’ life and our role as his disciples.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Review the description of the Gospel of Mark from a reliable study Bible or show the video referenced above, at least the portion labeled Act 1.

Read together Mark 1:4–11.

John the Baptizer is the first character introduced in this book. His dress, diet, and demeanor are similar to the Hebrew prophet Elijah. He wears rough, scratchy garments as a reminder of his need to repent of his violations of the Law. His simple but nutritious diet consists of raw or

roasted locusts and likely the gum of the tamarind tree, typical of a person who lived in the wilderness.

Discuss:

- Why would Mark use an unusual character like John the Baptizer to first proclaim Jesus?
- In what ways are Elijah and John the Baptizer similar?
- How would you respond if John the Baptizer wanted to preach repentance and declare Jesus in your congregation?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Review the definitions of repentance and sin found in *Of Water and Spirit*, p. 49.

Repentance: the act of expressing regret and turning from sin. Its linguistic roots point to its theological meaning of a change of mind and life direction as evidence of repentance (Greek: *metanoia*).

Sin: God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency individually and collectively. We take the gifts of creation and of self and turn them against God's purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and one another. We are in need of divine grace that alone reconciles us with God and one another.

In Community of Christ we baptize by immersion. This sacrament is available to anyone 8 years of age or older.

In small groups, partners, or on your Response Sheet, respond to these questions.

- Why were you baptized?
- In what ways is immersion a symbol of repentance?
- How does baptism change the relationship we have with God?

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

Invite each one to recall his or her baptism.

In small groups, partners, or on your Response Sheet, respond to these questions.

- How have you grown in discipleship since your baptism?
- When have you experienced repentance and grace?
- What connections do you understand between baptism and the Lord's Supper?

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Dwell in the words of "On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry" CCS 391. Offer a prayer of hope that comes from our sacred relationship with God.

# LESSON 6 RESPONSE SHEET

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, BAPTISM OF THE LORD

7 January 2017

Mark 1:4–11

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

- Why would Mark use an unusual character like John the Baptizer to first proclaim Jesus?
- In what ways are Elijah and John the Baptizer similar?
- How would you respond if John the Baptizer wanted to preach repentance and declare Jesus in your congregation?

Sin: God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency individually and collectively. We take the gifts of creation and turn them against God's purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and one another. We are in need of divine grace that alone reconciles us with God and one another.

In small groups, partners, or on your Response Sheet, respond to these questions.

- Why were you baptized?
- In what ways is immersion a symbol of repentance?
- How does baptism change the relationship we have with God?

In small groups, partners, or on your Response Sheet, respond to these questions.

- How have you grown in discipleship since your baptism?
- When have you experienced repentance and grace?
- What connections do you understand between baptism and the Lord's Supper?

Definitions from *Of Water and Spirit*, p. 49

Repentance: the act of expressing regret and turning from sin. Its linguistic roots point to its theological meaning of a change of mind and life direction as evidence of repentance.

# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 7  
14 January 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** John 1:43–51

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus invites people to become disciples, but people must respond to the invitation.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- consider the stories of Jacob (Israel) and Nathanael and their responses to God's invitation.
- remember how personal struggles with doubt often cause spiritual maturation.
- practice inviting others to Christ through personal testimony.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Markers or pencils
- Plain paper for drawing

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for John 1:43–51 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 31–32, available through Herald House. A dramatization of the story is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7ZZfSDWR44&t=2](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7ZZfSDWR44&t=2). Review the story of Jacob and his interactions with God in Genesis 28:10–17 and 32:22–30.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Read "The Summons" CCS 586 as a choral reading. Have one person read stanza one, and then the class read stanza five in response; have someone read stanza two and have the class respond with stanza five. Do the same for stanzas three and four. Spend a few moments in silence pondering the words of stanza five.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

"God calls whomever God calls" (Doctrine and Covenants 165:4a). We believe all are called according to the gifts they have been given (see *Sharing in Community of Christ*, p. 13). Relate Jacob's struggle (and promise) as he wrestled

with his calling (see Genesis 32:22–32). Then read together John 1:43–51 with emphasis on Nathanael's remark that "nothing good comes from Nazareth."

### Discuss

- How are these two stories similar?
- In what ways is your struggle with calling similar to Nathanael's and Jacob's?
- How much did you know about Jesus when you felt your call?
- Take a moment to draw a picture illustrating a struggle you had with God. Share your story.

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Read together Doctrine and Covenants 4:1, 119:8b, 156:9b, and 161:4b.

These revelations have come to the church through four different prophets.

- What is the common message you hear to the church, to your congregation, and to you in these readings?
- What is God's call for you at this time? Your congregation? The church?

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived

*(10% of total lesson time)*

Jesus approached each of his first disciples differently when he called them to discipleship. Discuss why he did so.

- In what ways did you discern your calling?
- How did you get through the struggle that accompanies calling?

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

*(5% of total lesson time)*

In light of the class discussion and new insights into the scripture passage, reread "The Summons" CCS 586.

# LESSON 7 RESPONSE SHEET

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

14 January 2017

John 1:43–51

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” <sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” <sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, “Where did you come to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” <sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, respond to the following questions.

- How are these two stories similar?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In what ways is your struggle with calling similar to Nathanael's and Jacob's?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How much did you know about Jesus when you felt your call?

- Take a moment to write about, or draw a picture illustrating, a struggle you had with God. Share your story.

### All Are Called

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God's purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God's call.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 13

...therefore, if ye have desires to serve God, ye are called to the work... (Joseph Smith Jr., 1829).

—Doctrine and Covenants 4:1

All are called according to the gifts of God unto them; and to the intent that all may labor together, let him that laboreth in the ministry and him that toileth in the affairs of men of business and of work labor together with God for the accomplishment of the work intrusted to all (Joseph Smith III, 1887).

—Doctrine and Covenants 119:8b

I say to you now, as I have said in the past, that all are called according to the gifts which have been given them. This applies to priesthood as well as to any other aspects of the work (Wallace B. Smith, 1984).

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:9b

Be reminded once again that the gifts of all are necessary in order that divine purposes may be accomplished (W. Grant McMurray, 2000).

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:4b



In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- What is the common message you hear to the church, to your congregation, and to you in these readings?
- In what ways did you discern your calling?
- What is God's call for you at this time? Your congregation? The church?
- How did you get through the struggle that accompanies calling?

# THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 8  
21 January 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 1:14–20

**Lesson Focus:** Becoming a disciple requires risk taking and commitment to sharing the gospel.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- identify priorities that might interfere with total commitment to Christ.
- examine how personal giftedness is used in ministry.
- develop and practice invitation.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Index cards and pencils
- Mission Prayer
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Mark 1:14–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 33, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,  
prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

Dwell in the words of “You Walk along Our Shoreline” CCS 598.

- What images or words stand out to you?
- What is God’s invitation to you in this song?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Read together Mark 1:14–20.

The Greek term for gospel, *evangelion*, used by Mark portrays Jesus as both the one who declares salvation and the one in whom it is found. Jesus’ role is proclamation through teaching, healing, and actions. His call to “Follow Me” is an invitation to reprioritize our lives and put God and God’s kingdom first.

- If Jesus asked you today to follow him and said you could bring three things, what would you bring? Write each answer on an index card, and then share with others. Compare answers. What does this say about our priorities?
- What personal gifts of invitation, welcome, and hospitality do you possess?
- What skills would you like to develop to become invitational?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from  
hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

We know from biblical accounts and from the presence of Christianity today, that Jesus’ disciples did respond to Jesus’ invitation to spread the gospel message. This radical approach to life as portrayed in Mark was challenging to understand and to live. It required risk-taking on the part of those early followers.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- Why do you follow Jesus?

- What would it look like for you to leave everything behind to proclaim the gospel?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much of a risk taker are you? Explain.
- What would it take for you to risk something new and more fully embody the concerns and passions of Christ?

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Read together the Mission Prayer:

God, where will your Spirit lead today?  
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.

Grant me courage to risk something new,  
and become a blessing of your love and peace.  
Amen.

- What testimonies have you heard regarding this prayer?
- Develop and practice an invitation you could use to invite others to Christ.

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise,  
blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Sing together "Jesus Is Calling" CCS 578.

# LESSON 8 RESPONSE SHEET

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

21 January 2017

Mark 1:14–20

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

### Mission Prayer

God, where will your Spirit lead today?  
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.  
Grant me courage to risk something new,  
and become a blessing of your love and peace.  
Amen.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- If Jesus asked you today to follow him and said you could bring three things, what would you bring? What does this say about your priorities?
- What personal gifts of invitation, welcome, and hospitality do you possess?
- What skills would you like to develop to become invitational?

- Why do you follow Jesus?
- What would it look like for you to leave everything behind to proclaim the gospel?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much of a risk taker are you? Explain.
- What would it take for you to risk something new and more fully embody the concerns and passions of Christ?
- Develop and practice an invitation you could use to invite others to Christ.

# FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 9  
28 January 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 1:21–28

**Lesson Focus:** Jesus uses his authority to serve.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- compare the authority of Jesus with fleeting human authority.
- acknowledge how names have power, both today and in the ancient world.
- understand how this scripture passage ties together reconciliation and healing.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Mark 1:21–28 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 34–35, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson  
(15% of total lesson time)

In the ancient Mediterranean world, names had power. Knowing someone’s name gave a person power over them. Jesus was a newcomer to preaching and teaching in the synagogue, yet people recognized his authority and called him “the Holy One of God.” God calls us by name and hopes we will respond.

Sing together “I Have Called You by Your Name” CCS 636.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction  
(35% of total lesson time)

Read together Mark 1:21–28.

In Jesus’ day the teachers of the law would reference the source of their teaching by saying “according to the scripture” or “Rabbi X said...” Authority for teaching came

through another person. Jesus did not claim authority through another person; rather, he spoke with his own authority. This was recognized by those around him, including the man in the scripture passage who was possessed.

In small groups or pairs consider these questions.

- What is something meaningful to you about your name?
- How is your personality reflected in your name?
- How do we use names or name calling to control people in today’s world? What does this suggest about the brokenness of today’s world?
- Think of some of the names Jesus is called in scripture. How do they describe Jesus’ character and calling?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

In Jesus’ day people believed illness indicated unforgiven sin. Evil spirits were everywhere. Healers used a variety of incantations and rituals. But Jesus removed the spirit with his words. He didn’t scream at it or create a scene.

Afterward he didn't boast about his authority, but used it in servant ministry. He taught, healed, and called people, never insisting on loyalty as a condition of his love. Jesus' message was about reconciling God's creation and bringing wholeness to life.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions.

- What authority does Jesus have in your life? Why is healing so important to Jesus ministry? Share a healing story with the group.
- How is reconciliation an essential practice of discipleship?
- What relationship do you see between reconciliation and healing?

## **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived

*(10% of total lesson time)*

Read together paragraph five of the preamble to Doctrine and Covenants 152, 156:5a–c, 161:2a, and 163:8a.

- Which of these passages best describes reconciliation and healing to you? Why?
- How can the sacraments move us toward the blessing of reconciliation and healing of the spirit?
- What will you do this week to participate in reconciliation or healing?

## **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

*(5% of total lesson time)*

Ask each person for a prayer word or phrase describing the hope they find in Jesus. Offer these as praise and thanksgiving in a closing prayer.

# LESSON 9 RESPONSE SHEET

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

28 January 2017

Mark 1:21–28

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup>and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup>They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup>At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions.

- What authority does Jesus have in your life?
- Why is healing so important to Jesus' ministry? Share a healing story with the group.
- How is reconciliation an essential practice of discipleship?
- What relationship do you see between reconciliation and healing?

Read the following passages from the Doctrine and Covenants and respond to the questions that follow.

The grace of God is recognized in that he loves us even when we turn from him, and the call to

repentance and reconciliation is accompanied by the renewed assurance of divine blessing.

—Doctrine and Covenants 152 preamble, paragraph 5

The temple shall be dedicated to the pursuit of peace. It shall be for reconciliation and for healing of the spirit.

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:5a

It shall also be for a strengthening of faith and preparation for witness.

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:5b

By its ministries an attitude of wholeness of body, mind, and spirit as a desirable end toward which to strive will be fostered.

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:5c

Become a people of the Temple—those who see violence but proclaim peace, who feel conflict yet extend the hand of reconciliation, who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a

The Temple is an instrument of ongoing revelation in the life of the church. Its symbolism and ministries call people to reverence in the presence of the Divine Being. Transformative encounters with the Eternal Creator and Reconciler await those who follow its spiritual pathways of healing, reconciliation, peace, strengthening of faith, and knowledge.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:8a

- Which of these passages best describes reconciliation and healing to you? Why?
- How can the sacraments move us toward the blessing of reconciliation and healing of the spirit?
- What will you do this week to participate in reconciliation or healing?

# FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

LESSON 10  
4 February 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 1:29–39

**Lesson Focus:** Even with the demands of Jesus' teaching and healing, he maintains connection with God through prayer.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- examine how loving touch has impacted their lives.
- discuss sacraments involving touch.
- share experiences with the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick.
- identify or develop a personal Rule of Life.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- *Of Water and Spirit*
- Pictures of hand-holding in various situations and among different ages (search Google for free images)
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 1:29–39 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, pp. 36–37, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,  
prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

In ancient Mediterranean culture there was a difference between illness and disease. An illness was something that disengaged a person socially—like leprosy, blindness, or demon possession. It was linked to sin. Jewish people with these conditions would undergo rituals seeking restoration of status. The disease of Peter's widowed mother-in-law had caused a fever. A healer risked his life to heal disease because failure could mean his death. Healers would rather talk about disease than try to heal it. Jesus was the exception; his touch could heal.

Read "O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come" CCS 544 as the opening prayer.

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Read together Mark 1:29–34.

Show the pictures of people holding hands and discuss the emotion captured in each picture.

Review the sacraments that involve use of the hands.

In his April 3, 2016, Address to the Church, President Veazey discussed the aspects of ministry present in each of our sacraments.

- Tangible sign or symbol of God's grace revealed in Christ
- Spoken words of blessing and petition, articulation of the covenant involved, and related opportunities, responsibilities, and promises



- Spiritual anticipation and preparation in a worship setting
- Grounded in the ministry of Jesus Christ
- Performed by eligible priesthood

Properly termed “laying on of hands for the sick,” Community of Christ uses the symbols of oil and hands in this sacrament. (This sacrament has also been called “administration” or “administration for the sick.” This terminology is difficult to translate in a meaningful way outside of English-speaking countries and refers more to business practices.)

Discuss:

- How is each aspect of ministry listed above present in this sacrament?
- What has been your experience with this sacrament?
- How have you experienced blessings through touch?

## 3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
(35% of total lesson time)

Read Mark 1:35–39.

Frequently in the scriptures we read about Jesus going off to pray alone. Think about the demands of travel, teaching, and healing made on him. The human Jesus was likely exhausted and needed to recharge himself in

conversation with God. His prayers led him to continue his ministry in other places.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions.

- Why do you think Jesus left Capernaum with so many still wanting healing? What does this tell us about Jesus’ mission?
- When have you discerned a time to change your ministerial focus?

## 4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
(10% of total lesson time)

A Rule of Life, or a daily prayer routine, helps us develop a regular connection with God. It can provide peace, energy, direction, comfort, and rest.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider these questions.

- What would a Rule of Life look like for you?

## 5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
(5% of total lesson time)

Thank God for the loving touch of the Spirit in our lives.

# LESSON 10 RESPONSE SHEET

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

4 February 2017

Mark 1:29–39

<sup>29</sup>As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup>Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup>He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup>That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with de-mons. <sup>33</sup>And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup>And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup>In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup>And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup>When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup>He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." <sup>39</sup>And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

- Why do you think Jesus left Capernaum with so many still wanting healing? What does this tell us about Jesus' mission?

- When have you discerned a time to change your ministerial focus?

Properly termed "laying on of hands for the sick," Community of Christ uses the symbols of oil and hands in this sacrament.

- How is each aspect of ministry present in this sacrament?

- What has been your experience with the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick?

- How have you experienced blessing through touch?

A Rule of Life, or a daily prayer routine, helps us develop a regular connection with God. It can provide peace, energy, direction, comfort, and rest.

- What would a Rule of Life look like for you?

# LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

LESSON 11  
11 February 2018

**Focus Scripture Passage:** Mark 9:2–9

**Lesson Focus:** Peter, James, and John witness God's declaration of Jesus' divinity.

## Objectives

*The learners will...*

- identify how God has declared Jesus' divinity.
- consider how personal and community "mountaintop" experiences relate to mission.
- develop a missional plan for themselves and their congregation beginning with Lent.

## Supplies

- *Community of Christ Sings (CCS)*
- Copies of Response Sheet (optional)
- Paper and pens or pencils

**Note to instructor:** In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Mark 9:2–9 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year B: New Testament*, p. 45, available through Herald House.

## 1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge,  
prepares and motivates for lesson

*(15% of total lesson time)*

Read together Mark 8:27–36 to provide context for the experience of Peter, James, and John. Notice how Jesus was preparing these three disciples for the trip up the mountain with him. Mount Tabor, generally accepted as the mountain in this story, can be seen throughout southern Galilee. Jesus went into the mountains to spend time with God on multiple occasions. Clearly Jesus wanted three of his disciples to share this experience.

Think about times when you have been intentional about seeing or hearing God. What happened?

## 2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration  
and interaction

*(35% of total lesson time)*

Read Mark 9:2–9 as a drama. Choose class members to speak as Peter, God, and a narrator.

During their time on the mountain, the three disciples have a vision which begins as the radiance envelops Jesus and continues as Elijah and Moses appear. More detail is given in Matthew 17:1–8 and Luke 9:28–36. Moses represents the Torah and Elijah the prophets. God declared that the disciples should pay the most attention to Jesus, "the Beloved Son."

Jesus does not allow the disciples to remain on the mountaintop, but takes them back to proclaim the gospel and remain silent about Jesus' identity.

Discuss:

- When in your life have you been closest to God? How was that a mountaintop experience? What was revealed to you?
- How did this experience affect your faith and your sacred story?
- How can you go to the mountaintop when your faith is at a low point?

## **3 RESPOND**

Takes the learners from hearing to doing  
*(35% of total lesson time)*

Mark identifies Jesus in the beginning of his book and a centurion identifies him in the end. In today's passage God names Jesus and tells his followers to listen to him.

Discuss:

- How can you become a better listener to God?
- What can your congregation do to be sure they are hearing Jesus' message and discerning God's will?

## **4 SEND**

Explores how the lesson might be lived  
*(10% of total lesson time)*

Jesus warns his disciples not to tell about their experience until he had died and been resurrected. Since then, modern disciples have the instruction to testify of Jesus and his ministry, his mission.

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- What responsibility do you have to share your testimony?
- How do you express your faith in a risen Lord to others?
- How does your congregation share the love of Jesus outside its walls?

## **5 BLESS**

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope  
*(5% of total lesson time)*

Have each class member write a question to God. Ask each to spend time with God during the week listening for an answer. It might not come as a voice, but through an opportunity—a conversation, an opportunity for service, a poem, a door opened, a person encountered, or an "aha" moment. Be mindful of how God answers you and be prepared to share your story with the class next week as we begin the Lenten season.

# LESSON 11 RESPONSE SHEET

## LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

11 February 2017

### Mark 9:2–9

<sup>2</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

### Mark 8:27–36

<sup>27</sup>Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” <sup>28</sup>And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” <sup>29</sup>He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” <sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>31</sup>Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>34</sup>He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

In small groups, pairs, or on your Response Sheet, consider the following questions.

- Think about times when you have been intentional about seeing or hearing God. What happened?
- When in your life have you been closest to God? How was that a mountaintop experience? What was revealed to you?
- How did this experience affect your faith, your sacred story?
- How can you go to the mountaintop when your faith is at a low point?
- How can you become a better listener to God?
- What can your congregation do to be sure they are hearing Jesus’ message and discerning God’s will?

Write a question to God. Spend time with God during the week listening for an answer. It might not come as a voice, but through an opportunity—a conversation, an opportunity for service, a poem, a door opened, a person encountered, or an “aha” moment. Be mindful of how God answers you and be prepared to share your story with the class next week as we begin the Lenten season.