

First Reading *Isaiah 11:1-10*

A descendent of Jesse will usher in a time of peace.

Responsorial Psalm *Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17*

The Messiah will bring justice and peace to the nations.

Second Reading *Romans 15:4-9*

Both Jews and Gentiles glorify God for the salvation found in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Reading *Matthew 3:1-12*

John the Baptist appears in Judea preaching a message of repentance.

Background on the Gospel Reading

In this week's Gospel Reading and next week's, our Advent preparation for Christmas invites us to consider John the Baptist and his relationship to Jesus. In this week's Gospel, Matthew describes the work and preaching of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist appears in the tradition of the great prophets of Israel, preaching repentance and reform to the people of Israel. In fact, the description of John found in this reading is reminiscent of the description of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). In this reading, John directs a particularly pointed call to repentance to the Pharisees and Sadducees, parties within the Jewish community of the first century.

John marks the conversion of those who seek him out with a baptism of repentance. Other groups in this period are thought to have practiced ritual washings for similar purposes, and John's baptism may have been related to the practices of the Essenes, a Jewish sect of the first century. John's baptism can be understood as an anticipation of Christian baptism. In this passage, John himself alludes to the difference between his baptism and the one yet to come: "I am baptizing you with water, for repentance . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11).

In this reading, John makes very clear that his relationship to the Messiah yet to come (Jesus) is one of service and subservience: ". . . the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals" (Matthew 3:11). In the context of Matthew's Gospel, today's passage is followed by Jesus' baptism by John, an event that is attested to in all four of the Gospels and appears to have been the start of Jesus' public ministry.

John's preaching of the coming of the Lord is a key theme of the Advent season. As John's message prepared the way for Jesus in the first century, we, too, are called to prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming. We respond to John's message by our repentance and reform of our lives. We are also called to be prophets of Christ, who announce by our lives, as John did, the coming of the Lord.

Lesson Plan for Sunday Scripture Readings

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Come Lord Jesus, make room in our hearts for you.

Help us get ready to welcome you on Christmas.

We pray in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10 (In Lectionary)

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm (In Lectionary)

John the Baptist warned the people to repent and to show that they have really given up their sins. He baptized them with water but predicted that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Materials Needed

- Diagram and directions for a model car or airplane and a sample of the item fully assembled

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Show a diagram and directions for putting together a model car or airplane. Then show the assembled item.
2. Say to the children: **From the diagram, can you tell what the item will be?** Discuss the benefits of having the directions when trying to put the model together.
3. Then ask: **Since the diagram and directions are so helpful, would you rather just have them? Or would you prefer the finished model?**

4. Then tell the children that this is how it was when John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, came before Jesus. Say: **John's job was to tell the people that Jesus was coming. He was like the diagram and directions. He was important because he instructed the people how to prepare for Jesus' coming. But he was not as important as Jesus was. Some people were thinking that John was so good that he was God's son. But listen to the Gospel to hear what John told these people.** Read today's Gospel.
5. After reading the Gospel, ask the children what they think it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Then ask: **Were you baptized with water or with the Holy Spirit?** [Explain to them that though the priest uses water to baptize, we also receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism.] Say: **The Holy Spirit helps us to live as Jesus did while he was on Earth.**
6. **How can we prepare a path for the Lord?** [By turning back to God and asking forgiveness for our mistakes.]

Profession of Faith

Read parts of the Nicene Creed listed below and have the children affirm their belief with the phrase "We do."

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus, who loves you and who died and rose to give you new life?

Children: *We do.*

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and makes you holy?

Children: *We do.*

Leader: Do you want always to try to live the way your loving God wants you to live, by avoiding what is bad and trying to do what is good?

Children: *We do.*

Leader: Do you believe that we are all children of God, that we are all brothers and sisters, and that God loves us all?

Children: *We do.*

Leader: Do you believe that God forgives us and calls us to forgive one another?

Children: *We do.*

Leader: Do you believe that because of Jesus we will live forever and ever?

Children: *We do.*

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Children: *Amen.*

Prayers of the Faithful

As brothers and sisters in one loving family, together let us pray to our heavenly Father. [*Show a hand sign, and have the children repeat the response, **Lord, hear our prayer.***] Encourage them to contribute prayer intercessions as well.

Leader: That people everywhere will follow a straight and loving path through life, we pray to the Lord. (*Show the hand signal and have the children respond.*)

Leader: That with our help, the homeless and hungry receive the shelter and food they need, we pray to the Lord. (*Show the hand signal and have the children respond.*)

Leader: That we share in the joy of God's love with everyone we meet, we pray to the Lord. (*Show the hand signal and have the children respond.*)

Leader: That we prepare a welcome for Christ in our hearts and homes, we pray to the Lord. (*Show the hand signal and have the children respond.*)

Leader: Knowing our heavenly Father is listening, let us pray for those we know who are in need of prayer (*Invite the children to pray out loud for anyone they know of that needs prayer*).

For all of these prayers and for all the intentions we hold in our hearts, we pray to the Lord. (*Show the hand signal, and have the children respond.*)

Loving Father, hear our prayers and guide us along straight paths which will lead us to you. Grant this through Jesus our Lord. Amen.