

**Isa. 42:1–9**

**Ps. 29**

**Acts 10:34–43**

**Matt. 3:13–17**

# Named and Claimed

**Goal for  
the Session**

*Adults will explore the baptism of Jesus and reaffirm their own baptismal identity and purpose.*

## ■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

### Focus on Matthew 3:13–17

#### WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Troy A. Miller

Evident at Jesus’ baptism is an ironic tension that remains constant throughout his entire earthly ministry. Jesus’ uniqueness is known in and shouted from the heavens—a higher authority, there is not!—but his own baptism and ministry are characterized by a consistent and conscious submission to those for whom he is bringing the gospel. It may well have been this type of paradox that led early Christians to sing the Christ hymn in Philippians (2:6–11) in celebration and worship of Jesus’ utter humility, which God affirmed as the way of righteousness in the coming kingdom through exalting him.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Steven D. Driver

Jesus was not just a paradigm or generic representative of us all; he was also an individual who lived at a particular time and in a particular place. By becoming a particular person, the Son of God showed us not only how to be human beings, but also how to be particular men and women. Living as one before the fall, Jesus offered us a glimpse of what God intends for us, if only we can embrace those intentions. Born into a fallen world, Jesus sacrificed himself for others and took on their sin and pain. Thus, in the incarnate Son of God, in the man Jesus of Nazareth, we catch a glimpse of what it means to be fully human, and in baptism we are offered the possibility of embracing our humanity.

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

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Rodger Y. Nishioka

In Matthew’s text, the baptism of Jesus is not the ending of his ministry. In Matthew’s text, the baptism of Jesus is the *beginning* of his ministry. It is his launching. It is his commissioning to begin the public ministry for which he was created and to which he was called. To be sure, the baptism of Jesus named his identity, and this is crucial. Identity, however, is not a static thing. One’s identity grows and deepens, as did Jesus’ identity throughout his public ministry. His identity is as much about purpose as it is about personhood.

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

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Greg Garrett

This scene contains a clear showing forth of God’s power and beauty, what we might call a *theophany*. In the Hebrew tradition, God often appeared at significant natural locations: mountains, springs, rivers. How did God reveal God’s self to God’s people in the Scriptures? Do we sometimes have trouble recognizing how God might be moving in the world today? How might God appear—or be speaking—in your community today?

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Matthew 3:13–17**

## Focus on Your Teaching

How often do you think the members of your study group consider their baptism? Many churches are incorporating baptismal images and language more often in worship, such as moving the baptismal font to a more prominent place and using it during various parts of the worship service such as the assurance of forgiveness. The baptism of Jesus provides adults an opportunity to remember and renew their own baptism. If anyone in your group is not baptized, be prepared to talk with them about the process and how to proceed if so desired.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Guide my thoughts and words that they may give you honor and glory and guide others into your ways. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- newsprint or board
- marker
- bowl with water
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 19, 2020

**For Responding**

- option 1: index cards, pens
- option 2: worship books or copies of the service of baptism
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens

## ■ L E A D I N G T H E S E S S I O N

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, if using option 2 in Responding, bring worship books or copies of the service of baptism for your church, including the questions asked of those being baptized (or their parents) and the congregation.

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Form pairs and have the adults tell what they remember or have been told about their baptism. If they don't remember their own baptism, have them tell about a particularly memorable baptism they have witnessed and what special meaning it had. Ask volunteers to briefly tell their experience and then tell the class that today is the Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, an opportunity to consider baptism. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Loving God, we are your beloved ones, baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May your Spirit rest on us and guide us as together we seek new understandings of your word. Amen.*

### EXPLORING

Explain that today's lectionary text is Matthew 3:13–17 but for purposes of study verses 11 and 12 will be included. Read Matthew 3:11–17 aloud. Discuss the meaning of repentance, including the definition of *metanoia* in the sidebar. Invite the group to sit comfortably for the following meditation:

Imagine yourself at the banks of the Jordan River, near where John the Baptist is preaching and baptizing. The sun is warm and a soft breeze blows across your face. You hear John say, "I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

The Greek word *metanoia*, used in Matthew 3:11 (translated repentance) to explain what is happening when John baptizes people, suggests transformation and turning rather than simply being sorry for our sins, as the Greek is often translated.

Wonder about this one who is coming after John. How will you recognize him? What will he say? What will he do?

As you are lost in thought, a man appears at the Jordan River and steps into the water to be baptized by John. You watch as John steps back and says, “I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?”

You watch and listen carefully, wondering what is going on. You hear the man say, “Allow me to be baptized. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.”

John baptizes this man. When the man comes up out of the water, something like a dove comes down upon the man. You hear a voice from the heavens, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him.”

Then it is over and the man leaves. All the way home, you ponder what you saw. Turn to a neighbor and tell about your experience at the river.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Matthew 3:13–17) and read the “Where?” excerpt and continue to talk about what this incident tells us about Jesus. Ask:

- ❖ What do we learn about Jesus from this baptism account?
- ❖ What do we learn about God?

Have a volunteer read the “What?” excerpt. Read Philippians 2:6–11 aloud.

- ❖ How did Jesus’ humble act of seeking baptism by John the Baptist display how he understood who he was and what he was to do?

Explain that another lectionary text for today comes from the book of Acts. In it, Peter gives a summary of Jesus’ life from his baptism to his resurrection. Ask two volunteers to read aloud Acts 10:34–43, alternating verses. Ask:

- ❖ Based on the texts and discussion so far, what is the purpose of baptism?

Read the “So What?” excerpt. Ask:

- ❖ What does this excerpt add to your understanding of baptism?
- ❖ What are some acts of ministry that followed Jesus’ baptism?
- ❖ How did Jesus’ identity grow after he was baptized?

As a transition to Responding, ask the participants to think quietly about ways that their baptism has given them identity and ministry.

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Remember Your Baptism** This activity will help adults to remember their baptismal identity and purpose daily. Tell participants that in his preaching and his writing, the protestant reformer Martin Luther emphasized the importance for followers of Christ

**EASY  
PREP**

A resource to prompt conversation about the congregation's promise is *The Baptism of Your Child* by Carol Wehrheim (Geneva Press).

to remind ourselves daily, "I am baptized." Ask adults to think about this question: "How and when do you remind yourself of your baptism?" Distribute index cards and pens or pencils. Invite each adult to write a note on one side of the card about what baptism means to them based on today's discussion, centering on their own baptism. On the other side of the card, have each person write: "Remember, *(name)*, you are baptized!" Encourage participants to tape the card to a bathroom mirror at home to remind them of their baptism each time they wash their face or brush their teeth.

2. **The Baptismal Covenant Community** Through this activity, adults will consider the important role they have in baptismal services in your church. Distribute worship books or copies of the baptism service used in your church. Ask volunteers to read aloud the questions asked of adults being baptized in your church, and parents of children being baptized (if your church baptizes infants). Then read the question asked of the congregation. Discuss: How does the church and each member of it live up to this promise to the child and family or newly baptized believer? Form groups of three or four to discuss:
  - ❖ How do we, as a congregation or as individuals, fulfill these promises and help others to fulfill them? What else can we do?

To conclude this activity, decide how to take this conversation to others in the church, including congregational committees.

3. **Circles of Life** Our baptism makes a claim on us that can transform every part of our lives. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Circles of Life) and pens. Have the participants read and follow the directions there. Form pairs and ask adults to discuss their circles with each other, also mentioning anything that particularly encouraged them in each instance: a mentor, a Bible text, a prayer, and so on. Then, invite each person to select an area from the resource sheet where they want to give extra energy. When it is identified, have them write a prayer asking for God's help to transform that part of their life.

## CLOSING

Gather participants around a bowl of water. Dip your hand into the water and touch the forehead of the person on your right, saying, "You, *(first name)*, are a beloved child of God. Serve the Lord and others with humility." Have that person repeat the procedure with the person on his or her right and continue around the circle until everyone has received the blessing. Conclude with this prayer or one of your choosing:

*In baptism, you call us by name to live for you and your purpose. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we may respond to the good news of your claim on our lives and live more fully the purpose you have for us. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 19, 2020, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage class members to read the focus scripture and resource sheet before the next session.

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## Circles of Life

In each circle, write an example of where you will take an action in that part of your life based on following Jesus (transformed living) rather than your own wishes.

