

January 7, 2018

First Sunday after Epiphany

Jesus Observes the Rites of His Faith

Old Testament:

Genesis 17:9-13 (NRSV)

⁹ God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. ¹³Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant."

Leviticus 12:2-6 (NRSV)

²Speak to the people of Israel, saying: If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean for seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. ³On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. ⁴Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed. ⁵If she bears a female child, she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days. ⁶When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt-offering, and a pigeon or a turtle-dove for a sin-offering.

New Testament: Luke 2:21, 41-46 (NRSV)

Jesus Is Named

²¹ After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

General Concept: The rites of the church embody its historic faith.

Key Concepts: Youth: Jesus observes the traditions of His faith.

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The process of circumcision is the physical manifestation of the covenant entered into by God with Abraham. This is an agreement which Abraham is bound to keep in order to manifest his faithfulness to the covenant with his God. Circumcision is the cutting of the excess skin of

the male sex organ which is necessary to make one clean or hygienic in the Hebrew tradition. Being clean is a requirement of the special relationship which the Jewish people had entered into with their God. This account of Abraham's circumcision and the legal provision on circumcision in Leviticus is deeply rooted in the priestly tradition of the Jewish community. The priestly writers are very particular in the practice not just because it has become a tradition but because in the practice of circumcision itself is embodied the principle of being loyal to their covenant with God. In being loyal to the covenant through this practice, the Jewish community is also able to assert its own unique and distinct identity amidst the diversity of peoples and nations that surround them which generally do not engage in such a ritual practice. It is a practice that somehow assures them that they will always be recognized as a covenanted people of God and each individual is a valued member of this covenanted community. The mark of circumcision also provides each male member with a consciousness of their rootedness in their rich and moving history as a people specially chosen by God as initially demonstrated in the story of their great ancestor, Abraham: a person who embodied great loyalty to God and to God's promise. This particular ritual indeed, has become the mark of their covenant loyalty, the mark of their distinct identity as a people called to a special relationship with God who had been so gracious in caring for them and the mark of their being rooted in a history they can always be proud of.

The text presents Jesus undergoing the required rituals of the Jewish community. This text demonstrates how Jesus had been rooted in the community where he belongs. He has the clear mark of identity as a Jew and he also has the mark of being a member of a covenanted community having undergone the requirement in the Jewish law. Here, it is important to see that Jesus has not defied nor was he exempted from the requisites of the Jewish community, rather the story demonstrates the importance of a member going through the required rituals and practices of his community. Thus, the text also shows the reality of the Jewish people who became marginalized in other societies in the course of their practicing the requirements of the law. It could be that the understanding of those who became marginalized because of their zealous observance of the law has become different than those who are in the center and pinnacle of society. Deeper understanding of how the law was understood in this context is discussed in the following narrative when Jesus was presented in the temple, again, to fulfill the requirement of the law. It is important to understand that the text did not mention who was doing the circumcision. It could be the parents but in the case of the gospel writers, if the subject had been missing in the statement, it also implies that God himself is the one at work. Again, God remains at work as a covenant partner from the days of Abraham towards the days of Jesus. This means that the covenant has not been forgotten and neither are those in the margins forgotten by God, neither does the marginalized Jew forget God's promise for people like them. The mark of circumcision will always remind them of the gracious, loving God behind this ritual who had always stood by them even in their most critical moments of their history.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Liturgy is the employment of the church's sacred symbols— Scriptures, creeds, objects and ritualistic gestures— into forms appropriate for worship. It makes use of music, literature and the arts as vehicles for conveying the symbols with the participation of the congregation.

These symbols capture the primordial sources of faith like time capsules that release streams of meaning that are rendered in contemporary forms across time. Liturgy serves to keep the contemporary connected to its origin and the passage of time. For that reason, it contains very old elements as well as new ones just emerging in the present.

Liturgical symbols provide a unique medium of the gathered community to and from the Spirit as they have the power to communicate and evoke meanings too deep to be articulated in the common language. It is in the very nature of faith that its most profound contents can only be preserved and shared through symbols. There is something of the faith that is and will remain a mystery until its final revelation at the end of time. At the apex of the Christian mystery is the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Next to that is the main symbol of God, the mystery of the Trinity and then the mystery of bodily resurrection and the *eschaton*, the end of the present age and the beginning of a new one. The chief symbols of faith are deposited and reenacted in two aspects: the liturgy of the word, the reading and preaching of the Scriptures, and the liturgy of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Protestantism which emerged in the late medieval period and the onset of modern intellectual and spiritual culture has had an ambivalent regard towards liturgical reform. At one end, it sought to overcome the church's sacramentalism that stood as a wall separating the clergy from the laity by making worship truly an act of the whole church with emphasis on preaching and singing of hymns in the people's dialect and translation of the Scriptures into the common idiom. At the other end, there was a concern to preserve the liturgical heritage of the church accumulated up to the medieval era. This liturgical tension remains to this day in the Protestant world, including the UCCP.

1. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. explain how Jesus learned more of the Jewish faith;
2. elicit the reason why Christians go to church;
3. describe some forms of liturgy being used by the church; and
4. express one's conviction to participate in the different forms of liturgy observed by the church.

II. Concept: Jesus observes the traditions of his faith.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, song, 2.5 x 5 inches colored meta cards, masking tape

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: Eternal God, grant us the growing desire to study your word. Guide us to search the hidden treasure of your truth and righteousness as we journey in our faith life. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.
3. Opening songs
"Who is the Man of the Fa Fa Faith?"
Who is the man of the lo la love?
Who is the man of the ho ho hope?
Who is the man of the gra gra grace?
Who is that man I want to shake his hand?
Because He gave His life and He died for you and me.
Deep diriririp, diriririp, diririp (2X).

"Halinal Sama-sama"
Halina't sama-sanna purihin natin Siya.

Halinalit sama-sarna awitan natin Sya.
Ipalakpak ang iyang kamay, itaas at ikaway.
Lahat ay magsabing Diyos ay buhay. (Ulitin 3x)

"May Galak"

May galak, may tuwa, may saya sa piling ng Diyos.
Na hatid ng pusong pinagpala N'yang lubos
May awit, may sayaw at papuri para sa Diyos
Sapagkat hirap ng puso ay naglalaho.
Handog N'ya ay kapayapaan, handog N'ya ay kagalakan.
Handog N'ya ay kalakasan, sa bawat pusong napapagal.
Kaya ang awit ng papuri, awit ng pasasalamat
At ang awit ng pagsamba ay para lang sa Kanya.

B. Getting Ready

1. Tell the class to prepare to play the game "The Singing Battle Game".
 - a. Group your class into 3 groups. Let each group sing songs of praise one after the other. The group that is able to sing the most number of songs is the winner. Remind the group that they cannot repeat the song that is already sang.
 - b. After the game, ask: "What did you feel while doing the game? Did you enjoy the game?"
2. Say: "Songs are very important in our faith tradition. This is the language of our soul."

C. Learning Time

1. Let them read consecutively the texts of the Bible by verse. Maintain the groupings. Assign each group the three texts and let them paraphrase the verses. Each group will report in the class and tell what they have discovered in the text. Instruct each group to use the given guide questions.

Group 1: Genesis 17:9-13

- a. What is the covenant between God and Abraham?
- b. What do the Israelites need to do as a sign of God's covenant with them?
- c. What are the benefits of abiding by the sign the covenant?

Group 2: Leviticus 12:2-6

- a. What are the traditions to be practiced?
- b. What is the purification rite or tradition that the Israelites should follow?
- c. What are the benefits of keeping the rite or tradition?

Group 3: Luke 2:21, 41-46

- a. What were the Jewish traditions that Jesus' parents followed according to this text?
- b. Why did Jesus and his parents have to go to Jerusalem when Jesus turned twelve?
- c. What do you think did Jesus stay behind in the temple?

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss further the lesson. Say: The Jewish people have their own faith traditions.
Discuss the different faith traditions that you know.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How did Jesus observe the traditions of his faith?

F. *Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Discuss the memory verse: "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." (Luke 2:46)
2. What Christian faith traditions are similar to that of the Jewish faith that your parents taught you to observe? (Going to the synagogue, studying the Torah, listening to the teachers of the law, etc.)

3. Prepare metacards and present them to the class and let them say how these practices can help them to learn about the Christian faith. Let the learners emphasize the tradition of the church and their related experiences.
 - a. Going to Sunday school or attending Bible study
 - b. Using technology gadgets
 - c. Listening to the message of the pastor/lay minister
 - d. Listening to the message of the choir
 - e. Fellowship with peers
 - g. Joining medical missions, sports festivals, family oriented activities
 - h. Others
4. *Group activity.* Let learners make a Sunday service liturgy based on what they like most about their church worship experience. Challenge them to lead the Sunday service during CYF Sunday using the liturgy service they have created. Suggest the following forms of liturgy:
 - a. Traditional worship
 - b. Worship used by indigenous people
 - c. Worship in places other than a regular church building
 - d. Liturgy for a retreat/camp/workshop
 - e. Youth ministry/CYAF/UCM/CWA

G. *Closing Worship*

1. Reciting of the memory verse by selected learners
2. Reflective action: I will participate actively in the liturgy during the Sunday service.
3. Offering
4. Closing song:
5. Closing prayer: Lord our God, thank you for giving us wisdom and guidance through the Holy Spirit that we may understand the traditions of our faith. May this knowledge nourish us physically and spiritually so that we will serve you better. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

January 14, 2018

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Simeon and Anna: Witnesses to the Appearance of the Messiah

Old Testament:

Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)

³¹ but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

New Testament:

Luke 2:22-38 (NRSV)

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

²² 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 ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.' ²⁵ 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. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided 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, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' ³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then 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 ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' ³⁶ 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 for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At 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.

General Concept: **Waiting for God's deliverance requires perseverance and patience.**

Key Concepts: **Youth: The Bible tell us the covenant relationship between God and people.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

This text is part of a later edition of the Book of Isaiah which came out of the Babylonian exile. It speaks clearly of hope and strength amidst the times of hopelessness and despair. It also anticipates the coming end of their captivity. The writer speaks of an imminent historical event when the Babylonian empire would soon be defeated by the rising Persian army. The opening verse of chapter 40 already proclaims messages of comfort and assurance of restoration to the exiled people. The whole chapter 40 reflects so much the spirit of hope and excitement as it envisions the imminent fulfillment of the promise of God where they will be liberated from their captivity. There is a tone of renewed strength and revival of the spirit of being a unique covenanted people of God, reasserting and reclaiming the distinct identity of a religious community bound historically to a covenanting God. This is a powerful reassurance from the prophet addressed to a people who may have been losing their hope already of ever returning to

their homeland. The prophet strongly asserts that in the midst of a growing sense of hopelessness and despair in the midst of their captors, they should never give up their faith and their hope in Yahweh. For no matter how much the people may have gone down to the depths of sorrow, loneliness in a foreign land, and utter despair, their God remains faithful to those who will remain steadfast and loyal to their covenant God. They will be sustained even in the most difficult and trying of times until the day when the Lord will deliver them once again from their captors and restore them back to their beloved homeland. Their God remains a God who hears and responds to the cries of the despairing and the helpless. This is the faithful witness of the prophet which has become an enduring proclamation and statement of faith in the rest of the Scriptures.

Following required ritual of circumcision, it has also been the practice and tradition of the Jews to dedicate the first born. It is required in the law that every first born should be set apart (Lk. 2:23). To be set apart means being the first choice. The practice of dedicating the first born and even offering the first fruit or livestock is a clear message of giving priority to God. Simeon has discerned a strong implication of this act of Jesus being offered and presented at the Temple. With this act, Jesus becomes the expression of one who is taking in his life the prioritization of God and all matters and concerns of God now becomes the priority of Jesus when he grows up. This is what Simeon has clearly seen in this act of the child being offered and presented to God at this moment. That is why he has to tell what he has discerned to the mother of Jesus: "This child is destined for the falling and 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." This rather cryptic prophecy of Simeon will actually set the pattern for the rest of the life and ministry of Jesus, something that the rest of the gospels faithfully testifies to. After being dedicated to God, his life now becomes dedicated to a kind of ministry that will be opposed by the powers that be, but also one that will give hope and new life to the once hopeless in his society. But what eventually happens to him on the cross will certainly pierce the heart and soul of his mother Mary.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

The basic posture of the Christian believer is that of waiting in hopeful anticipation of salvation. It waits upon the surfacing of the unknown to the realm of the known—the revelation. Hence, the basic virtue of Christian piety is patience and perseverance. Giving life to it is the Spirit-inspired power of discovery and discernment. If you don't have it, you have not known the joy and pain, the agony and ecstasy, of being a Christian.

For the Christian believer, this future is not simply wishful thinking which is characteristic of religious infantilism. Rather, it is based upon an objective rock of faith — the revelation of God in Christ according to the witness of the Holy Bible. There in the holy book is drawn up the architecture of a reality that is emerging from the present realities. As in music, it is the overture that carries within itself the whole symphony that is yet to unfold. This is how faith is defined: "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

The personal and social consequences of faith in the Biblical sense are astounding and far-reaching. Astounding because it crosses the bounds of reason and far-reaching because it draws the believer to overcome the limits of the possible. Faith is able to explain miraculous change from one kind of personality to another, and fundamental social change that reverses the established order of a political economy into one that follows a new logic. The "assurance of things hoped for" and the conviction of things not seen" render a seemingly

indestructible status quo puny and evanescent. The same holds true of personal transformation. The Apostle Paul's exhortation "not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds" is a testimony of faith.

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. explain the significance of Simeon and Anna's declarations in relation to who Jesus is and what His role in human history was going to be;
2. scrutinize the physical characteristics of the Bible, its two important parts and its 66 books;
3. support the spiritual significance of the Bible and its divinely inspired writers in proclaiming God's covenant relationship with his people; and
4. make a commitment to regularly read the Bible in accordance to one's willingness and ability to read it in order to understand God's Word and to apply it in real life.

II. Concept: The Bible tells us the covenant relationship between God and people.

Materials: The *Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, song chart, Bible reading guides, pre-prepared KWL chart

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer
3. Opening song: "Worship the Lord, Worship the Father" (HFJ #314) first three stanzas

B. Getting Ready

Introduce the KWL Chart. This activity is used to connect a student's prior knowledge to what they are actively learning.

1. Present the Bible as the subject matter.
2. Create a table with three columns and two rows— one row for the headings and one larger in which to write. Label **the** first column with a "K" for what I **know**, the second with "W" for "What I **want** to know," and the third with an "L" for what I **learned**.
3. Brainstorm things of what they KNOW about the Bible, (let them write on the first column). Next would be brainstorming what they WANT to know about the Bible. The third column will be reserved for realization or reflection later.
4. Collect the chart and use the data written by the students.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the students to read the Biblical references in unison.
2. Let them list down the qualities of God's relationship with people as described in the texts. Have two or three students share their list in the larger group.
 - a. Isaiah 40:31
 - b. Luke 2:22-38

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Have the learners discuss the lesson in small groups of 3.

- a. What inspires you about the texts we just read?
 - b. What does the Luke 2:22-38 text tell you about Simeon and Anna's relationship with God?
 - c. Who is Jesus according to Simeon's declaration in the temple?
2. Have the class come together after 10 minutes of small group discussion.
 - a. The Bible teaches us to *wait* patiently. The prophet Isaiah reminds us to wait patiently for the Lord and this was affirmed in the NT through the lives of Simeon and Anna.
 - b. The Bible is a faithful witness of the revelation of God in Christ
 - c. The Bible tells us that when we wait patiently for the Lord, we shall be rewarded like Simeon and Anna.
 3. Discuss the following points and elicit from the students their ideas:
 - a. The Bible is a library. It is a collection of different books. It is made up of 66 books. The 66 books consist of the Old Testament and New Testament.
 - b. The Bible is written by different authors in a span of many years yet it is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's covenant relationship with God's people.
 5. Distribute the KWL Chart. Let the class fill-up the third column.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How should we rejoice knowing that Christ came to restore His relationship with us?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "... but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)
2. *Reflect on this:* Say: The Bible tells us the covenant relationship between God and people. Ask: What must you do/What lifestyle or schedule adjustments must you make in order to read the Bible regularly?
3. Prepare some Bible reading guides and distribute to the class. Tell the students that they should read the Bible every day so that they will grow in wisdom and knowledge about God. Ask them to share his/her testimony of reading the Bible regularly and the impact this has had in his/her growth in the faith. Inform them there are a variety of reading guides that they can follow and they can choose which reading guide is appropriate for them.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Reflective action: Let the students read what they have written on the third column of the KWL Chart. Let everybody say they promise to read my Bible every day.
3. Closing song: "Worship the Lord, Worship the Father" (HFJ #314) last two stanzas
4. Closing prayer: Choose one student whose answer in the third column of the KWL chart is in a prayer form and have him or her use it to the class in prayer

January 21, 2018

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Escape to Egypt, Return to Israel

Old Testament:

Hosea 11 (NRSV)

God's Compassion despite Israel's Ingratitude

'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ² The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. ³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. ⁵ They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. ⁶ The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. ⁷ My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. ⁸ How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. ⁹ I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. ¹⁰ They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. ¹¹ They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD. ¹² Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One.

New Testament:

Matthew 2:13-23 (NRSV)

The Escape to Egypt

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

The Massacre of the Infants

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

The Return from Egypt

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'

General/ Concept: **There were powerful forces that threaten the mission of the Messiah.**

Key Concept for Youth: **Jesus' family obeys God and overcomes the forces of evil.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

This chapter of the book of Hosea speaks of a prophet who is very concerned about the destiny of the people of Ephraim who are about to suffer the terrible consequences of their stubbornness and refusal to return to God. This prophetic pronouncement reflects the voice of a prophet who is settled in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The tone of the Prophet Hosea reflects the time and context in the period following the death of king Jeroboam II in 745 BCE who earlier had presided over a stable and long reign of about 40 years. After him, there were a series of kings who succeeded one after the other usually in a very violent fashion of bloody takeovers and assassination.

Hosea sees the situation as sliding into chaos and near anarchy. This is just a few more years before its capital Samaria will fall into the hands of its conqueror Assyria in 721 BCE. Hosea describes this situation as a result of the greed for power among so many of those in the ruling elite of the land. In their lust for power they have all but ignored and forgotten their responsibility and accountability before God. According to Hos. 7:7, "All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their own rulers. All their kings have fallen; none of them calls upon me", says the Lord." In Hosea 8:4, he also states: "They made kings, but not through me; they set up princes, but without my knowledge. They made idols with their silver and gold for their own destruction."

Now the prophet expresses God's own extreme sadness and frustration over what is happening to God's own people whom he had been nurturing like a parent since they were brought out of Egypt. God had loved Israel so much like a deeply caring parent, nurturing them like a child so as to make them a people enjoying the life of freedom and prosperity in the Promised Land. But God was so frustrated over what God had been seeing about the ongoing state of affairs in the nation where their return to a seemingly enslaving experience this time under the Assyrians is now inevitable. They will suffer the logical consequence of their abandoning the Lord and God's ethical covenant demands. Yet God feels the pain and agony of such imminent disaster for God's people. "My heart recoils within me, says the Lord" (v. 8). Even God, like an ordinary loving parent just cannot bear the thought of the imminent death of the nation God created and gave birth to. God was in pain and there was divine hesitancy to proceed with such punishment and desire not to destroy anymore God's people Ephraim. "For I am God and no mortal, the Holy one in your midst, and I will not come in wrath" (v. 9).

Hosea reveals the most distinct and unique character of God being Holy, that this unique Holiness of God is revealed most perfectly in God's remaining so full of compassion and pity even to a people who deserves to be punished and even destroyed. This God feels what it feels like to suffer destruction in the hands of a foreign tormentor.

God knows and feels the pain of being uprooted from one's homeland, from the security of one's home and then brought to a completely strange land, powerless, nameless as a people. God always intends for God's people to live the lives intended for them right at the very beginning, a people living in freedom, abundance, stability, security, with joy and a sense of fulfillment under the protection of their covenant God.

This divine will of God continues to be God's will for all other peoples. God desires nothing but the good of everyone and of all creation. It is never God's intention to punish and destroy a people and their world whom God had so lovingly created and blessed. God will be in pain seeing the disastrous consequences of people's foolish and irresponsible and unjust ways. This is a most amazing truth about our God which should always drive us towards a life of humility, repentance and continuing commitment to share this powerful and truly transforming good news.

The narrative in Matthew 2:13-23 is about the escape of the family of Jesus from Judea to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. But they returned to Nazareth right after the death of the king. This story may be paralleled by the story of the massacre of the Israelite babies during their time in Egypt where Moses was protected by escaping through the basket and the river thus reaching the palace of the Egyptian princess who raised him until such time when he decided to return to his Israelite roots. Matthew also used other prophetic books to point the validity of Jesus' action to fulfill the necessary narrative of a Savior. Herod carried out an evil and unwelcoming action to the One who is now seen and interpreted by the church community as the Messiah long awaited by the Jews; the one who was to bring forth change and a challenge to the social and cultural values of the Roman empire. Herod's action represented a hostile reaction to those who are about to fulfill the task of a Messiah who had been awaited for so long by the people; to serve and proclaim their liberation and salvation.

In this story, we see the real agenda of those who are in power and who always desire to stay in power so that they can continue enjoying the perks and prerogatives of their power while abusing and exploiting to the hilt their own people. They will resort to all means, even the most violent ones just to try to eliminate those who will represent an alternative order and who will proclaim and witness to an alternative message. This story, rooted also in the story of Moses and the Exodus, will provide the template for the kind of mission and ministry that Jesus will carry out in the name of God who wills nothing but the liberation and transformation of God's people and the rest of creation. This is the mission for which he will also lay down his life, for which he will also be experiencing the most extreme of pain and suffering just like His loving Father in heaven.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

In Greek drama, the plot takes a sudden twist through the operation of a *deus ex machina* whereby a totally unconnected event descends from above in order to bring a resolution to an otherwise insolvable situation. This is not how God's messiah accomplishes his mission. The messiah must face human obstacles and finds ways of overcoming them through human efforts without the benefit of a *deus ex machina*. The evil King Herod could have nipped in the bud Jesus' mission if not for the wily Wise Men whose warning persuaded Joseph to hurriedly escape to Egypt. The road to the kingdom of God is not smooth and straight for easy travel. There are always Herods and other dark forces that are opposed to God's reign of justice

and will not spare any means to thwart God's plan. God works out our salvation by partnering with us under the conditions of freedom taking into account our weaknesses and limitations. There are no magical shortcuts to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Fanatical beliefs that God's warriors against evil are invincible would only give the Herods of history opportunity to decimate the forces of righteousness.

In partnering with God to establish a reign of justice via the conquest of the reign of wickedness, we grow in wisdom, courage and strength even as we mature in the faith and grow in holiness. This is the way by which we shed off the outer layer of wickedness to the end that we may shine forth with the brightness of the new life. This kind of change is a prefiguration of the resurrection that is yet to come.

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. trace the flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt and back to Nazareth;
2. discuss the relation and significance of this flight to Egypt and back to Nazareth to prophecies made before;
3. deduce the urgency of the advice of the wise men and that of the angel of the Lord in relation to understanding and obeying God's call in one's life; and
4. explain God's ways of sending messages to God's people and its application to one's life.

II. Concept: Jesus' family obeys God and overcomes the forces of evil.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), song chart, map, crayons, pencils, scissors, cartolina, Pentel pens, ballpens, pencils, balloons

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Dear Lord, help us to discern your message and obey you. Be with us to overcome forces of evil. Amen."
3. Opening song: "With Gifts That Differ by Your Grace" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 245)

B. Getting Ready

Tell the class to do the game "Up-Under Relay". Use this game to start the lesson. Let the learners follow the following procedure.

1. Divide the class into two teams and let each team form one line.
2. The first persons in both lines are the first players. Give the balloon to the first player. He or she then passes it to the next player behind her/him downward without turning around. As the next player receives the balloon, he or she passes it the next player downward until the balloon is passed on to the last player.
3. The last player will pass on the balloon to the one in front of him or her. This time the action is upward and the receiver will not turn around to get the balloon. The player will do this until the balloon reaches the first player.
4. All the players who successfully passed the balloon downward or upward to the next player without turning around are declared winners of the game.
5. After the game, discuss how the players felt as they passed the balloon to others without turning around to see the next player. Then draw from them the importance of listening and comprehending instructions to be able to do the game correctly.

C. Learning Time

1. Motivation. Say: "Listening is one of the skills in discerning the message of God to us. Trusting and understanding God's message is a virtue we must nurture."
2. Tell the learners to count 1 and 2. Tell those whose number is 1 as the first group and all those whose number is 2 as the second group.
3. Ask the first group to read Hosea 11 and prepare notes to answer the guide questions.
 - a. Who are the characters of the story? (The speaker, Ephraim, Judah and the other people)
 - b. Who is the speaker in the text? (God)
 - c. How did He show his love for the people? (Refer to verses 1 to 4)
 - c. How did the speaker describe his feelings towards his people? (Refer to verses 5 to 8)
 - d. What did the speaker in the text promise He will do for His children if they obey him? (Refer to verses 9 to 12)
 - e. What will happen to those who do not obey? (Refer to verses 5 to 8)
4. Tell the second group to read and study Matthew 2:13-23. Let the learners prepare note to answer the following questions.
 - a. Who are the characters in the story? (Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Herod)
 - b. Why did they have to leave Bethlehem and go to Egypt? (Herod wanted to kill Jesus)
 - c. What was the first message of the angel of the Lord to Joseph? (Escape to Egypt)
 - d. What was Joseph's response to the angel's message? (He heeded the message and fled to Egypt.)
 - e. What was the second message of the angel of the Lord to Joseph? (Return to Israel)
 - f. What was Joseph's response to the angel's message? (He heeded the message and went back to Israel)
 - g. What do you think would be the implications of the killing of the Jewish boys 2- year old and below?
 - h. What prophecies were fulfilled in Matthew 2:13 to 23?

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Tell the first group to share their notes to the class by answering the guide questions. Instruct them to present their answers through a choral reading.
2. Say: The prophet Hosea preached in the northern kingdom of Israel during its troubled time. Hosea was especially concerned about the idolatry of the people, their disobedience and their faithlessness toward God. Yet in the end, God's constant love for his people would prevail and he would win the nation back to himself and restore the relationship. This love is expressed in the moving words; "How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you...? My heart will not let me do it. My love for you is too strong." (Hosea 11:8)
3. Ask: In what ways did the obedience of Jesus' family overcome the forces of evil? Let the second group form three small subgroups and have each subgroup act out in 2-minute skits what would have happened if: (1) Joseph did not heed the angel's message to flee to Egypt, (2) Joseph brought his family back to Jerusalem instead of Galilee, and (3) The wise men went back to Herod.

4. After the short skits, explain to the students the significance of Joseph's obedience in going to Egypt and in going to Galilee instead of going back to Judea. Also explain the significance of the wise men's decision to disobey Herod and instead ensure Jesus' safety, the promised King.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Say: The Gospel according to Matthew tells the good news that Jesus is the promised Savior, the one through whom God will fulfil the promise He made to his people in the Old Testament. The good news of God's redemption is not only for Jewish people, among whom Jesus was born and lived, but for all peoples of the whole world. Our particular text was the story of how God through the angel talked to Joseph in order for Jesus to be free from danger. Joseph's obedience to God's message through the angel was pivotal in overcoming the evil forces that sought to undermine God's redemptive plan for the whole world through Jesus Christ. By protecting the child Jesus from danger, Joseph became instrumental in the unfolding of God's plan to redeem the world.

Ask: "Like Jesus' family who obeys God and overcomes the forces of evil, how can we overcome our present challenges in life?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Tell the class to trace the journey of Jesus' family using the map on the activity sheet. Let the class to discuss the importance of full obedience to God as shown by Joseph in order that the promised Messiah is protected from danger.
2. Ask them to write in the boxes the events using these guide sentences.
Joseph takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape from King Herod.

Joseph is visited by the angel of the Lord to tell him to escape to Egypt to protect Jesus from King Herod.

Jesus is born in Bethlehem.

Joseph and Mary set off to Bethlehem to take part of the census.

Once King Herod dies, Jesus is safe to go back to Israel. Joseph takes Mary and Jesus back to Nazareth.
3. Let the class realize that God is continually sending warnings for us to be saved from danger by discerning His message.
4. Ask the class to write some decisions they have made to use God's message for them in their lives.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering: Let the learners offer the decisions that they have made in applying God's message for them.
2. Closing song: "With Gifts That Differ by Your Grace" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 245)
3. Closing prayer: Dear God thank for everything. Thank you for speaking to us and always teaching us your ways. Thank you for leading us. We pray for your continuous guidance. As we offer our lives to you, help us to be obedient always to your Will. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

January 28, 2018

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

John the Baptizer: Preparing the Way of the Lord

Old Testament:

Isaiah 40:3-5 (NRSV)

³A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

New Testament:

Luke 3:1-20 (NRSV)

The Proclamation of John the Baptizer

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." ⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' ¹¹In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' ¹³He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.' ¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

General Concept: **Like John the Baptizer preparing the way of the Lord, the church prepares the world for the coming of the Kingdom.**

Key Concepts, Youth: **John the Baptizer calls for the repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

This prophetic proclamation is a clear announcement of the coming liberation work of God among the people who were in exile and captives of the imperial rule of Babylon. The intention of the prophetic voice is to announce a radically new act of God that is about to take place in the history of God's people. God has now decided to end their captivity and bring them back to their homeland. But in bringing this about God will now be working through a rather unexpected historical agent to become His instrument to liberate the captives in Babylon.

The Persians, led by king Cyrus is now considered as that historical instrument of God who will prepare the way of the Lord for the restoration of God's people in their homeland. The signs are now clearly manifesting such as the continuing stream of victories that Cyrus has already achieved on the way to becoming the new imperial power. His military achievements are now pointing to the imminent collapse and destruction of the once mighty Babylonian empire (cf. Is. 41:2-4, 25; 45:1-3).

Clearly, this prophetic proclamation is a sign of hope to those who are held captives. It is a clear sign of God's working out the liberation of God's people right through the events of history and using concrete and powerful but unexpected historical agents. This act is very consistent with the nature of their God who is also their liberator in the time of their slavery in Egypt and now in their captivity in Babylon. It also echoes the voice of the prophets that God is with those who are in need of salvation and freedom from whatever captivity they may be suffering from. Luke presents a clear and vivid picture of a prophet, John the Baptizer. Being a cousin of Jesus, he is presented with his being part of Israel not just by blood but by the faith tradition that is rooted in the Mosaic laws and interpretation (vv.10-14). John the Baptizer serves as the preparation or prelude to the Messiah. John's presence and appearance comes as a clear call for the people to prepare for the Messiah's arrival. This may be parallel to the Isaiah account in using an instrument to prepare the way. In the case of Isaiah, it is the Persians led by Cyrus, but in the case of our Lukan text which reveals a context where the Judean community is completely dominated and ruled by the Roman Empire through local puppets such as Herod, it is John the Baptizer. The preparation also gives an abstract of what Jesus will do in his public ministry. This becomes a message to the Church to prepare the way of Jesus Christ in the same way that John has reminded his own people what to do. This is exactly what the Church is also being asked to do.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

God called John the Baptizer to prepare for Jesus ministry. The message of repentance that John preached was to prepare the people for the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. Following John the Baptizer's execution, Jesus came out to the public preaching exactly the same message. But Jesus' message wasn't simply a repeat of John's but only to introduce himself to the public scene. In relation to the message of repentance and the imminent arrival of the kingdom, Jesus life, work and crucifixion embodied God's judgment as well as his offer of salvation.

It can be said that even if the Lord would return today to establish God's kingdom, the people may not want to enter for lack of understanding and appreciation of it. This is illustrated in the experience of the Hebrew people during the Exodus. Fresh out from Egypt, they were worshippers of other gods. When Moses offered to them a new God by the name of Yahweh, at one crucial point in the journey they created a golden calf representing the old religions. It took the whole of forty years to mold a new community of faith to occupy Canaan.

The world needs to be prepared for Christ's return as judge so that everyone would be fit to inherit the kingdom. Otherwise, the world would in turn judge him as a harsh and unforgiving

judge instead of a merciful savior. The church does not rejoice when a single soul is lost and thrown to eternal condemnation. Like Jesus, it rejoices when a sinner returns to the Lord to seek his forgiveness. It is the mission of the church to preach the message of repentance in order to prepare the people for the coming of the kingdom. Since no one knows when it will happen, every moment is a time for preparation.

One must also be prepared to believe and follow Jesus. The quick-fix, instant brand of evangelism negates the importance of preparation. During the period of the ancient church, proselytes or candidates for baptism underwent a process of preparation that included instruction in the new faith, a new ethics and responsible membership in the church. Protestant Reformer Martin Luther spoke about the harshness of the law like hammer blows to break a heart hardened by sin before grace may work out its benefits. A form of evangelism that uses gimmickry and psychological manipulation in fact does violence to the gospel. Let the gospel find in a person a ready and compliant heart.

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. define the meaning of repentance;
2. list some of the things advised by John in order to prepare the way of the Lord; and
3. express ways that the advice of John can be used in contemporary times.

II. Concept: John the Baptizer calls for repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, crayons, pencils

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer
3. Opening song: first stanza of "Living for Jesus" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 289)

B. Getting Ready

1. Form three groups. Assign the term **baptism** to the first group, the term **preparation** to the second group, and the term **repentance** to the third group. Give each group a concept map. Allow each group 5 minutes to discuss among themselves on ideas that they think are related to the main concept/word given. Tell the students to refer to the activity sheet,
2. After the discussion, have the students share to the big group their concept web.

C. Learning Time

Let the students read the two biblical references. After reading, discuss the highlights and draw from the class the following insights:

1. *Isaiah 40:3-5*. Say: "This prophetic proclamation is a sign of hope to those who are held captives. It is a clear sign of God's working out the liberation of God's people right through the events of history and using concrete and powerful but unexpected historical agents. This act is very consistent with the nature of their God who is also their liberator in the time of their slavery in Egypt and now in their captivity in Babylon. It also echoes the voice of the prophets that God is with those who are in need of salvation and freedom from whatever captivity they may be suffering from."
2. *Luke 3:1-20*. Say: "Luke presents a clear and vivid picture of a prophet, John the

Baptizer. Being a cousin of Jesus, he is presented with his being part of Israel not just by blood but by the faith tradition that is rooted in the Mosaic laws and interpretation (vv.10-14). John the Baptizer serves as the preparation or prelude to the Messiah. John's presence and appearance comes as a clear call for the people to prepare for the Messiah's arrival. This may be parallel to the Isaiah account in using an instrument to prepare the way. Luke's selection of stories reflects his own warm interest in people, especially the sick and helpless, the poor, the women, the children and the social outcast. Our text connects with the Isaiah text; John is preaching of the coming of the Messiah. Genuine repentance shows itself in daily life—in kindness, generosity, and honesty."

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Talk about John the Baptizer's story. Ask these questions.

1. Who is the main character of the story? (John the Baptizer)
2. Who is his father? (Zechariah)
3. What was the work of John the Baptizer? (He preached the coming of the Messiah)
4. What message did he preach? (Do good, make the way of the Lord straightforward.)
5. If you were present during John the Baptizer's time, what would you feel listening to his preaching?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: "What could be the reasons that John preached the message of repentance? What could we do in order to prepare the way of the Lord?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verses:
 - a. "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." (Luke 3:11b)
 - b. "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." (Luke 3:13b)
 - c. "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." (Luke 3:14b)
2. *Graphics organizer.* Present the concept webs for baptism, repentance, and preparation in the activity sheets. Form three groups and assign each group to complete any one of the given concept webs. Expect the following thoughts and insights from the class.
 - a. Repentance means to return or go back to the right path with sorrow after doing wrong/sinning. It also means to change one's mind, heart, and behavior about something. This process must be done in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. We need to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus.
 - b. John the Baptizer includes the kingdom-values namely, generosity (v.11), kindness (v. 14) and honesty (v. 13).
 - c. John the Baptizer's 3 advices for preparing the way of the Lord—generosity, kindness, and honesty.
 - d. Preparing the way of the Lord include three simple steps—(1) identify one teaching they can apply, (2) name the person they will talk to, and (3) prepare the message/words they will share.

Example: "I used to think that my food was only for myself; I am sharing some food with you because God helped me realize I can be a blessing in my own little way.
3. After finishing the group work, have the students share to the big group their concept web.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Living for Jesus" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 289)
3. Closing prayer: "Dear God, we pray that you will find us your instruments of preparing your way through our engagements this coming week. In Jesus' name, we pray.
Amen.

February 4, 2018

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

The Emergence of Jesus' Christhood

Old Testament:

Isaiah 11:1-5 (NRSV)

The Peaceful Kingdom

¹A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

New Testament:

Matthew 16:13-16, 4:1-11 (NRSV)

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

The Temptation of Jesus

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you', and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

General Concept: **Reflecting on his religious heritage and personal history, Jesus realizes his being Christ and his messianic destiny.**

Key Concepts:

Youth: **Personal experiences and constant reflections lead Jesus to know his call to be Christ, the Messiah.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The account is a reflection written by the prophet during Israel's (Northern Kingdom) time of exile to Assyria where the prophet witnessed the northerners' hardship, suffering and much agony, with the exiled ruling elite of Samaria longing for their land while hopelessly living in a foreign land. The writer discerns in this tragedy of the Northern Kingdom a divine warning coming also to the people and rulers of the Southern Kingdom in Judah who were living with much air of confidence and sense of assurance regarding their future. The prophet wanted his own people to be more conscious of their covenant responsibility. The only way for the people to remain secure is for them to humbly remember what God has done for them in the past and in the midst of present challenges, to look forward to the savior who will emerge to restore Israel's glory. The writer understands the need for the people to reaffirm the historical roots that trace their lineage to the stump of Jesse, the father of David to whom God made a promise that his descendants will rule forever to establish justice and peace all over the land. Holding on with faith and trust in this historic past as the paradigm for what will yet come in the near future is the source of assurance that God will continue to act to save and uphold God's people even in the face of the greatest crisis they may be facing both in the present and in the future.

In the Gospel texts, Jesus was asking his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" This implies that Jesus has not yet assumed his messianic identity. Jesus wanted to confirm from the persons whom he expected to know him the most who they think he is. The question needed to be raised because his claim as the messiah has always been challenged and tainted with doubts even after the many miracles he displayed because of his personal history. In fact, the book of Matthew started with Jesus' genealogy tracing his roots to the Davidic lineage, precisely to respond to this kind of doubts and questions being raised about the real identity and roots of Jesus. Thus, the opening text of Matthew aims to present Jesus as the messianic "stump" described in Isaiah 11 who will bring salvation to the people. Peter's confession "You are the Christ" validates his messianic identity, affirming his messianic destiny.

The temptations of Jesus that came after his introduction as the Son of God during his baptism suggest the onset of his messianic journey. The emphasis now shifts from his personal history to his personal destiny as the messiah. Jesus overcoming his temptations show his capability and authority over all kinds of trials and ordeals that will confront him in his journey toward the fulfillment and realization of his messianic destiny.

Jesus' understanding of his messianic identity came from his many encounters with people and from various circumstances he engaged with in different times and places. Though his messianic nature is embedded in his being, his realization of the task he needed to undertake slowly unveiled in him as he witnessed different struggles of his people starting in his own hometown. His personal history and religious heritage helped him see what he needed to do that led to his realization of his messianic destiny allowing him to endure the temptations in the wilderness, persevering amidst persecutions and to stand firm in his mission as the messiah of God. All this points to him as the awaited savior, the remnant or the stump from the Davidic lineage that will give the people hope and restore the glory of their nation.

Peter's confession "You are the Christ" affirmed his messianic identity. Though Jesus' messiahship did not require any affirmation yet he needed acknowledgment from his circle to complete his identity. After the affirmation of the disciples, they gradually began to understand the purpose and mission of Jesus as they learn and participate in his works and ministries. For this, the disciples later on were able as well to understand their own mission and realized their own destiny as they obey their master and Lord.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Jesus' messianic consciousness emerged gradually from experience. This is to say that it wasn't an idea that was implanted in Jesus right at his conception. Neither did Jesus just wake up one morning knowing that he was going to be God's messiah to save the world. Rather, it's likely that he went through a typical childhood in the specific context of his time and place, learned the traditions of his faith, took his place in society as a worker and family provider; saw what was going on around him, heard great tales about contemporary heroic figures and got involved in serious discussions and analysis with others about the situation, and weighed his various options carefully. He brooded over them through many nights and at the end he made up his mind: he was going to leave home to become an itinerant preacher of the kingdom of God as John the Baptist was. He would start in his home town of Nazareth. It was a modest start and may have raised only a few eyebrows. The day that sealed Jesus' destiny passed largely unnoticed even by his own family and town mates.

The temptation in the wilderness may have been his moment of truth. As in Job, Satan acts as the Tempter or Teaser who seeks to win Jesus' loyalty in exchange for the things that every patriotic and devout Jew aspires for — the power to perform miracles, sovereign authority over kingdoms and physical invincibility. With all these, one can truly be Israel's liberator to restore David's kingdom in all its glory. Of course, the Devil cannot be trusted to be true to his promise but many a good man with the noblest desires are willing to parley with the Devil for a higher cause. But Jesus is not merely a good man. He is the messiah whose mission is from God. Discarding the better side of reason, he chooses to be loyal to God — to hell with the Devil!

But it's one thing to think of oneself as messiah; it's another thing to be recognized as such. In order for him to complete his messianic identity he needed to be confirmed by his followers. Jesus started like John the Baptist or the prophet Elijah when he selected and called the disciples. But as they continued to learn from Jesus and participated in his work, a new awareness came upon them. They saw him cut a different figure never revealed to them before. Peter's confession came out from a vague intimation that dawned into a decisive declaration: "You are the Christ!" That may have served as a pact that bound the disciples with Jesus in a great adventure of faith.

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. describe the personal experiences and reflections of Jesus that led to his Messianic call;
2. relate personal experiences and reflections that helped them listen to and understand God's call;
3. express appreciation for knowing the experiences of Jesus as they help us learn how to answer his call.

II. Concept: Personal experiences and constant reflection led Jesus to know his call to be the Messiah.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, pictures of people in need and UCCP's Stand on Issues (street children begging for food, differently-abled persons, LGBT, Extra-judicial Killings), pen, paper, song chart

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the learners with your awesome smile. Choose 2 students per Sunday where you can have a brief chat concerning them.
2. Opening prayer: We thank you, our Parent God, for gathering us again to learn more about you.

May your Spirit be with us and grant us wisdom to understand and apply our lesson for this day.
In Jesus Name. Amen.

3. Opening song: In Christ There Is No East or West" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 271)

B. Getting Ready

1. Got Props Game. Group the learners into two teams. Identify 3 learners who will serve as the judges that decide which of the two teams is more creative and funnier than the other. Identify 5 props to be used in the game it could be comb, glass, flower vase, etc. Each team has to select a prop and the facilitator will assign a biblical scenario (e.g., Feeding the 5,000, Healing the Blind Man, and any biblical scenario the facilitator can think of). In 1 minute, each member of the team will use the single prop to make funny Biblical Scenarios given by the judges and pass it to other team members. The team which has the most judges' likes wins.
2. Who's Who? In a small sheet of paper, let the learners write one sentence or phrase that best describes themselves. Collect the papers and read it aloud. Let the whole class guess who the person being described is. Check the answers of the students and discuss them in the next session.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the male students to read Isaiah 11:1-5 in unison. Ask the group to discuss the prophecy of the peaceful kingdom due to the following:
 - a. Significance of the stump of Jesse
 - b. The spirit of the Lord that shall rest from Jesse's stump
 - c. His judgment, righteousness, and faithfulness
2. Have the female students read Matthew 16:13-16. Let a leader of the group explain what the people say about Jesus
 - a. Some say Moses. Some say Elijah.
 - b. Significance of Peter's answer: "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."
 - c. Meaning of the word Messiah and its relation to the word Christ
3. Present the activity sheet and let the class read the temptation of Jesus found in Matthew 4:1-11.
 - a. The fasting of Jesus for 40 days and 40 nights
 - b. The temptation of Jesus by the devil
 - c. The triumph of Jesus over the devil
 - d. The caring of Jesus by the angels
 - e. The beginning of Jesus' ministry as the Christ

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson. Ask the following questions.

1. On *Isaiah 11:1-5*.
 - a. What prophecies in the OT reading were fulfilled by Jesus?
2. On *Matthew 16:13-16*. Tell the class to say the following sentences in their own words to affirm what Peter declared about Jesus, the Messiah.
 - a. A messiah is a person who God sends to save people from their troubles.
 - b. Christ is a Greek word for Messiah which leads us to understand that when we say

Jesus Christ, it is also means Jesus the Messiah.

- c. Historically, Messiah is God's anointed one who will deliver and save Israel from foreign domination. He can be king and lead the whole nation into prosperity and well-being.
 - d. Some Jews do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah when he came. They still await the Messiah; the one who will come again to rule over God's kingdom forever.
3. On *Matthew 4:1-11*.
- a. Who led Jesus to the wilderness? (Spirit) Why? (To be tempted by the devil)
 - b. How did Jesus answer the temptation of the devil for Jesus to change the stones into loaves of bread? (It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.")
 - c. How did Jesus answer the temptation of the devil for Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple if he really is the Son of God? ("Do not put the Lord your God to the test.")
 - d. How did Jesus answer the temptation of the devil for Jesus to kneel and bow down to the devil in order to have all the glory of the world? ("Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.")
 - e. After Jesus was tempted, who came to care for him? (The angels) What is the significance of this happening to our lives?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

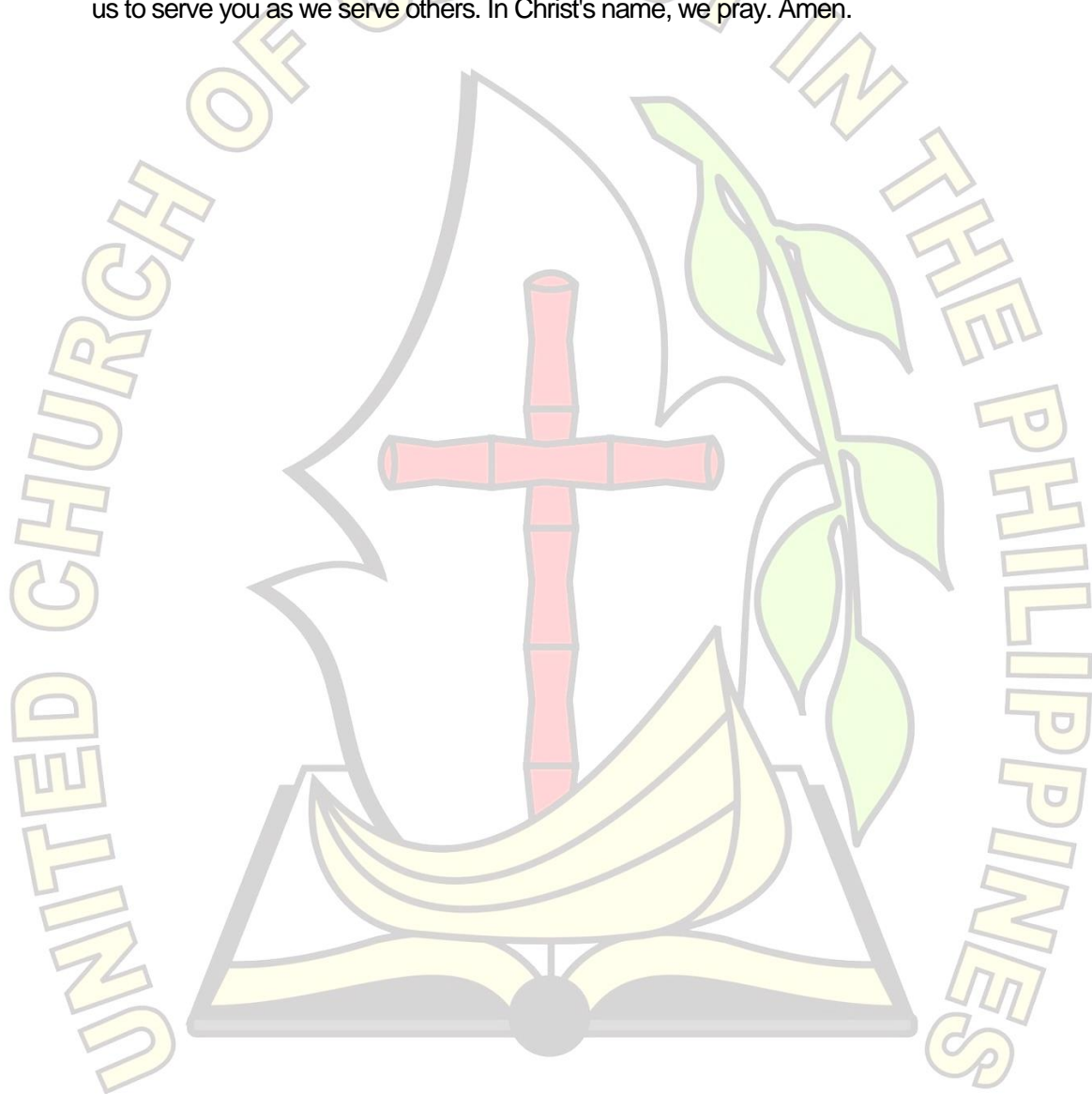
Say: "Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Ask: "How can you live your life as someone who professes that Jesus is your Messiah?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verses:
 - a. One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:3)
 - b. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." (Matthew 4:7)
 - c. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." (Matthew 4:10)
2. Present pictures of or share stories about any of the following. Then discuss the question: How can I be God's partner in God's plan of salvation? Let the class choose any two and write an action plan on how they can help as believers of Christ.
 - a. A classmate who doesn't have money for the school field trip
 - b. A neighbor who has special needs or has physical disabilities
 - c. A gay classmate or the class nerd
 - d. A friend whose parents have separated
 - e. A cousin who lost his/her scholarship
 - f. An elder in the church who no longer has relatives who can look after him/her
 - g. A newcomer to the church's Bible study group or Sunday school class
 - h. A sick uncle/auntie/teacher/pastor
 - i. An overworked mother or church worker
 - j. A teammate in your sports club who is struggling with learning the new skill the coach taught
 - k. Street children begging
 - l. A gay classmate (Present the UCCP Statement on LGBT)
 - m. Parents fighting
 - n. People who are displaced from their homes (Present the UCCP Statement on Stop Killing Lumads!)

G. Closing Worship

1. Reflective action: Let the class gather around in a circle and read their plan after saying, "I thank you, Jesus, for being my Messiah."
2. Offering: Put a basket offering at the center and instruct the learners to bring their plan of action to be God's partner in God's plan of salvation. After the offering, tell the class to sing a song of thanksgiving.
3. Closing song: "In Christ There Is No East or West" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 271)
4. Closing prayer: Loving God, may we always remember your personal experiences that led you to become our Messiah. May we use them as our model in seeking you and in inspiring us to serve you as we serve others. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.



February 11, 2018

Transfiguration Sunday

Moses, the Lawgiver and Elijah, the Prophet

Old Testament:

Exodus 19:3-6 (NRSV)

³Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 'Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.'

New Testament:

Luke 9:28-36 (NRSV)

The Transfiguration

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.

³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

General Concept: **Moses and Elijah representing the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus as the Messiah.**

Key Concepts, Youth: **Moses and Elijah representing the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus as the Messiah.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The text is part of the whole wilderness journey experience of the Israelites after God freed them from slavery in Egypt. This is the third month of their journey in the wilderness traveling toward the Promised Land. After a long journey the Israelites reached the desert of Mt. Sinai and camped there while Moses went up to the mountain to meet God who called him. There, on top of the mountain Moses encountered God and received the instruction and God's plan to establish a covenant with them. But, God's covenant plan with Israel is conditional. It will require the people's decision to fully obey God and in return they will become God's chosen people, God's treasured possession. God's relationship with Israel is premised on a big "if": "If you obey my voice and keep my covenant", only then shall they be considered as God's special, treasured possession. Disobedience and rejection of God's laws and instructions will only result in the negation of this relationship with its own disastrous consequences. God's covenant then with the Israelites is sealed and proclaimed to the

people in the succeeding chapter through Moses who acted as the lawgiver. First, he presented to the people the 10 commandments—the basic instructions that will govern and guide the Israelites in their daily living as a community of God's liberated people. These laws along with the rest of the covenant laws are instructions and core teachings that will provide the framework for the establishment of a truly liberated community, distinct and set apart from all the other nations that surround them. Their life as a community will be a witness, a sign of an alternative way of life that should be lived by a people liberated and set free by God for generations to come and throughout their history.

Like Moses, Jesus and his disciples encountered God in the mountain. But eight days prior to that experience there were a series of events in which Jesus displayed marvelous works of healing. It is then followed by the confession of Peter that Jesus is "The Christ of God." The transfiguration account of Jesus who was standing with Moses and Elijah witnessed by his disciples serves as the final revelation of Jesus' true identity as the messiah. This is then succeeded by Jesus teachings on the cost of following him.

The 10 commandments that Moses received in Mt. Sinai has become the guiding principle that both judges and uplifts the actions of the Jewish people. For centuries, it has become the basis of the prophets like Elijah in proclaiming what is right and unacceptable in the eyes of God. All throughout the history of the Jews, the law or the Torah served as the foundation on who will receive God's blessing and punishment. Moreover, the authority of the Torah continues to define who is righteous, who is cursed even until the time of Jesus.

The presence of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration account symbolizes the convergence and unification of the authority of the law and the message of God in Jesus as the messiah. Jesus now becomes the authority and model of true righteousness and in him comes the message that brings people to God. However, the transfiguration account of Jesus should not be interpreted as Jesus departing from the old faith nor the authority of the Torah, instead it serves as a reminder to believers not to ignore the abiding authority and value of the Old Testament because Jesus himself was nurtured by the old faith. He was nurtured in the traditions of the Torah and the Torah continues to provide guidance and wisdom that the church needs even today in discerning the truth, what is right and wrong and knowing what is really acceptable to God.

Meanwhile, the gospel of Jesus presents a rather opposite view and interpretation from the Law of Moses. Contrary to the assumptions of the old faith, Jesus highlights faith or loyalty to the God who gave the Torah as the source of God's grace and salvation. Salvation, not even righteousness can be experienced in the literal obedience to the law. It still provides the basic principles by which an alternative community of freedom and justice may be established by the followers of Jesus. Jesus however liberates the people from the chains of the old faith and laws that has made people assume that they can gain favor from God through their strict observance and literal obedience to their provisions when in fact, they are supposed to be undertaken only as a matter of joyful and thankful response of the people for what God has already done for them.

The Transfiguration of Jesus depicts transformation in the presence of Moses and Elijah whose images fade while Jesus remained, a transition from the old, enslaving assumptions of the law towards the gospel of Jesus which now embodies the very essence and spirit of such law. With Jesus embodying in himself the fullness of the law as a gift of God's grace, the community of disciples can still continue establishing the kind of alternative community of freedom and love which had been envisioned and the very goal of the law itself.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

In the Transfiguration, Jesus let some disciples see a preview of his resurrection. Of course, they would not understand it but that occasion should help them prepare for his death and

resurrection. The appearance of Moses and Elijah at Jesus' side and their subsequent disappearance leaving Jesus standing alone, symbolize the paradoxical nature of the Christian faith: it emerges from the womb of Judaism and at the same time opposed to it in a most fundamental way.

The Hebrew Bible was adopted and made part of the Christian Scriptures, referred to as the Old/Older Testament. The church affirmed that the gospel of Jesus Christ stood out from the Jewish ground. The Law and the Prophets constitute its pre-history, so to speak. But the faith of the Old Testament is more than pre-history. It continues to illumine and guide the church towards breaking new grounds for the understanding of the gospel. It also helps set the boundaries of interpretation that would keep the church from falling into errors that would taint the purity of the gospel. The old faith in which Jesus was nurtured has served and continues to serve the church as the gospel's midwife, nurse, mentor and critic, companion and guardian.

On the other hand and at the same time, the gospel of Jesus Christ stood out opposite the Jewish faith. It subverts the Law of Moses by positing God's grace through faith rather than compliance to the law that brings salvation. The burden of saving shifts radically from the sinner to God. It must be stated, though, that the essence of the gospel was already anticipated by the Old Testament, notably Hosea and Jeremiah. A case can be made that it was already there hidden somewhere in the Law but got lost in the complex labyrinth of legalistic interpretations. Nevertheless, the gospel of Jesus Christ cuts through what has become a solid wall that has kept people away from God. God's final word is, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" as Moses and Elijah fade away.

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. retell the Transfiguration story of Jesus;
2. describe the disciples who witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus; and
3. explain the significance of the presence of Moses and Elijah during the transfiguration of Jesus.

II. Concept: Moses and Elijah representing the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus as the Messiah.

Materials: The Holy Bible (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, crayons, pencils

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer
3. Opening song: "Be Thou My Vision" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 275)

B. Getting Ready

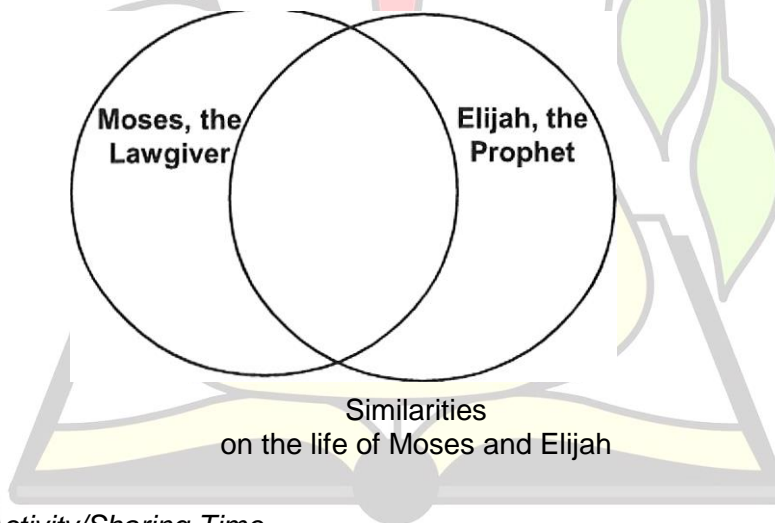
Pre-test. Prepare the following questions. Let the class answer these questions with true or false. Tell the class to set aside their work and be ready to bring them out when asked by the teacher.

1. The Bible is a faithful witness to God. (true)
2. The meaning of transfiguration is transformation. (true)
3. Jesus took Peter, Simon, John to the hill to pray. (false)
4. Transfiguration is a preview of the resurrection of Jesus. (true)
5. The Jewish faith in which Jesus was nurtured has served and continues to serve the church as

- the gospel's companion and guardian. (true)
6. Jesus changed His appearance and his clothes became dazzling white in the transfiguration. (true)
 7. Moses was the law-giver, married to Jethro's daughter and led the Israelites to freedom from slavery in Egypt. (true)
 8. Elijah was a brave prophet, who anointed kings. (true)
 9. Moses and Elijah being Old Testament characters have no connection to Jesus the Messiah. (false)
 10. A voice said from the cloud "This is my Son, whom I have chosen—listen to him." (true)

C. Learning Time

1. Let the students silently read the biblical references, Exodus 19:3-6 and Luke 9:28-36, using their own Bibles.
2. Ask them to read aloud in unison the verses again. Ask them: "What event in the OT text is similar in the NT text?" (Moses in the OT went up the mountain to pray while Jesus and some of his disciples went up to the mountaintop to pray.)
3. Start retelling the story. Then ask the students one by one to continue retelling the story until the part where they heard the voice from the cloud.
4. Group work. Divide the class into two groups. Instruct them to do research. Tell the first group to describe Moses and the second group, Elijah. Encourage them to add more information using other texts from the Old Testament. Have one group work on Moses and the other group work on Elijah.
5. Class work. Let the students use their research work and fill up the Venn diagram. Let them share what they know about each character by filling up the differences and similarities on the life of Moses and Elijah.



D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Discuss the lesson. Ask these questions.
 - a. Who are the characters of the story? (Jesus, Peter, John, James)
 - b. Where did Jesus and the disciples go to pray? (on the hill)
 - c. What happened when they were on the hill? (Moses and Elijah appeared)
 - d. What did Moses and Elijah talk about? (Jesus' departure)
 - e. What did the voice from the cloud said? (this is my son whom I have chosen—listen to

him.)

2. Tell the class to put out their pre-tests. Call selected students and tell them to explain all their false answers by citing the story and other information that they have gathered.
3. Processing of previous activity. Say: "The law was given to Moses while Elijah was one of God's great prophets performing great miracles and proclaiming to Israel their need to repent and return to God. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law given to Moses in the Old Testament. He is also the fulfillment of the prophets calling people to return to God and worship God alone. Our memory verse reminds us to listen to Jesus, the son God sent, that we might understand how the law and the prophets are fulfilled in Him."

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: "What is Moses famous for? What is Elijah famous for? Why do you think it was Moses and Elijah who appeared at Jesus' transfiguration?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verse: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35b)
2. Tell the students to complete the following open-ended phrases and explain their answers before the class.
 - a. I decide to follow the example of Moses and Elijah through:
(Share a way you can follow Moses or Elijah's example.)
 - b. I believe in the resurrection of Jesus and I will be an agent of transformation by:
(Share a way you can be an agent of transformation this week)
 - c. I believe the presence of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration of Jesus point to Jesus as the Messiah. I can share that to others by:
(Share a way you can share Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets)

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Be Thou My Vision" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 275)
3. Closing prayer