



January 7, 2018

First Sunday after Epiphany

## Jesus Observes the Rites of His Faith

*Old Testament:*

### **Genesis 17:9-13** (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>Throughout 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. <sup>13</sup>Both 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)

<sup>2</sup>Speak 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. <sup>3</sup>On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. <sup>4</sup>Her 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. <sup>5</sup>If 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. <sup>6</sup>When 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

<sup>21</sup> 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

<sup>41</sup> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Assuming 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. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After 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, Adults: Jesus follows their faith traditions.*

### **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.

## I. Objectives

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

1. draw from Jesus' example of learning in the temple in their learning in church;
2. describe the forms of liturgy that help in the understanding of the Christian faith;
3. demonstrate respect and tolerance of the different ways of learning the Christian faith among the members of the church; and
4. share one's insights on the specific liturgy that helps them in understanding the Word.

**II. Concept:** Jesus follows their faith traditions.

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

## 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 for the traditions of our faith so that these traditions will be included in our liturgy. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.
3. Opening song:

### B. Getting Ready

Tell the class that this Sunday's celebration is also on Christian unity. Ask the adults to share their thoughts on how unity is achieved in the church. Let them name some of the ministries that they have been involved and how their involvement helps in unifying the church members.

### C. Learning Time

1. Divide the class into three groups, assign each group the biblical texts, and discuss the following points.
  - a. Group 1: **Genesis 17:9-13**
    - 1) Covenant between God and Abraham

- 2) A sign of God's covenant with them
  - 3) Benefits of abiding by the sign the covenant
  - b. Group 2: **Leviticus 12:2-6**
    - 1) Traditions to be practiced
    - 2) Purification rite of the Israelites
    - 3) Benefits of keeping the rite or tradition
  - c. Group 3: **Luke 2:21, 41-46**
    - 1) Jewish traditions that Jesus' parents followed
    - 2) Reason why Jesus is brought by his parents when he was 12 years old
    - 3) Reason why Jesus stayed behind in the temple
2. Have each group share the highlights of each text.

*E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

Say: "Jesus follows the traditions of his faith." Ask: "Why do we observe the traditions of our faith?"

*F. Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Let the class discuss some of the faith traditions of the UCCP. Tell them that these faith traditions are chief symbols of faith deposited and reenacted in the liturgies used by our churches.
  - a. Use of the Holy Bible
  - b. Formal study of the Word
  - c. Liturgy of the Word as read, sang, or delivered in the message
  - d. Baptism
  - e. Lord's Supper
  - f. Congregational singing
  - e. Symbolic articles and crafts
  - h. Adherence to the UCCP Statement of Faith, Constitution and By-Laws
2. Encourage the adults to describe their roles as parents or significant adults in their respective families to abide by the faith traditions and practices.

*G. Closing Worship*

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "The Baptism of Water" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 248)
3. Closing prayer (Involve one of the attendees to lead the class in prayer. Remind them about Jesus as a model of manifesting the significance of adhering to the faith traditions.)

January 14, 2018

Second Sunday after Epiphany

## **Simeon and Anna: Witnesses to the Appearance of the Messiah**

*Old Testament:*

**Isaiah 40:31** (NRSV)

<sup>31</sup> 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

<sup>22</sup> When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.' <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup> Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' <sup>33</sup> And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' <sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

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

*Key Concepts:* **Adult. The Bible remains a faithful witness to the unfolding of God's plan of salvation.**

### ***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. realize that God uses people who will witness God's revelation of God's salvation plan;
2. tell the significance of the witnessing of Simeon and Anna about the appearance of the Lord's Messiah;
3. search one's heart in order to decide to witness for the Lord;
4. pray for God's leading in choosing the appropriate ministry of the church that one can get involved; and
5. accept God's plan for one's life and do every effort to fulfill it through service.

**II. Concept:** The Bible remains a faithful witness to the unfolding of God's plan of salvation.

**Materials:** The Holy Bible (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, heart-shaped paper

## III. Learning Experiences

### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: Dear God, we raise our eyes in praise and bow our heads in gratitude for your love for us. Guide us today as we determine the right path to take. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.
3. Opening song: "Worship the Lord, Worship the Father" (HFJ #314) first three stanzas

### B. Getting Ready

Ask the adults to get ready to look for verses in their Bibles without looking at the Table of Contents. Tell them that the exercise is to find out how familiar each in

finding given verses. Consider the following verses:

1. John 3:16
2. Matthew 20:28
3. John 21:18
4. Psalms 86:6
5. Proverbs 2:6
6. Isaiah 40:21
7. Luke 2:22-38

### C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read the OT text in unison. Then have them share what they think of these phrases: wait for the Lord; mount up with wings like eagles; shall



run and not be weary; and shall walk and not faint.

2. Ask the class to do a responsive reading of the NT text. Then ask them to compare Simeon and Anna in accordance to their stay in the temple, their age, their long wait of God's promise, and their attitude when the promise is realized. (If possible, employ reading through a speech choir or presenting the text through a role play.)

#### *D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time*

1. Discuss the lesson.
  - a. What was the event when Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem?
  - b. Who is Simeon? Who is Anna?
  - c. What were their pronouncements about Jesus?
  - d. Were Anna and Simeon ordained to be witnesses of Jesus?
2. Tell the class to discuss in their own words the assertion of Anna and Simeon.
3. Ask the class to share their thoughts on the following:
  - a. The Bible is a faithful witness of the revelation of God in Christ. Every Christian should be available to be a witness of God to humanity.
  - b. God uses Simeon and Anna in revealing God's plan of salvation. God uses us to reveal this plan.

#### *E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

Ask: "Studying the Bible is knowing the great plan of God." Ask: "How can we use the Bible to become a faithful witness to the unfolding of God's plan of salvation?"

#### *F. Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Make a chart of the different ministries of the church (children/youth/adult/ Sunday school, visitation, outreach program, clean and green, Bible Study, choir, preaching) and let the class write their name under the ministry where they want to get involved.
2. Distribute heart-shaped pieces of paper. Let them write their affirmation and commitment to submit themselves to God by joining or participating in the different Church ministries.

#### *G. Closing Worship*

1. Offering
2. Reflective action: Tell the students to share the reason for choosing a specific ministry where they want to get involved. Let them offer this commitment to the altar as a seal of privilege.
3. Closing song: "Worship the Lord, Worship the Father (HFJ #314) last two stanzas
4. Closing prayer: Dear God, once more we are thankful for giving us the opportunity to affirm our faith. Help us to live by your word in our daily living. Bless us even as we continue to worship you in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

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. <sup>2</sup> The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. <sup>6</sup> The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. <sup>7</sup> My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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

<sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, <sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: <sup>18</sup> '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

<sup>19</sup> When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, <sup>20</sup> "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." <sup>21</sup> Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup>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 Concepts, Adult:* **God intervenes to fulfill the mission of the Messiah.**

#### *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. tell how the hand of God works to send urgent warnings to His people in the case of Joseph and his family leaving for Egypt;
2. describe the significance of the advice of the wise men and the warning of the angel of the Lord for the family to leave for Egypt immediately; and
3. relate the happenings of the urgent flight of Joseph and his family to present-day struggles of Christians towards the road to the Kingdom.

## II. Concept: God intervenes to fulfill the mission of the Messiah.

**Materials:** *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), song chart map, crayons, pencils

## III. Learning Experiences

### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Dear Lord, help us to discern and obey your message. We know that this is a way of leading us to overcome forces of evil. In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!"
3. Opening song: "With Gifts That Differ by Your Grace" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 245)

### B. Getting Ready

1. Tell the class to listen to a testimony. Ask the oldest among the group to share his or her experience that is related to obedience or disobedience to God.
2. Say: "Listening and comprehending God's message is a way of discerning God's message to us."

### C. Learning Time

Tell the class to read the biblical references and present the following outline to serve as a guide:

1. Hosea 11
  - a. The love of God in the past (vv. 1-4), in the present (vv. 8-9), and in the future (vv. 10-11)
  - b. The exile for the rest of the people (vv. 5-7)
  - c. The sin of deceit (v. 12)
2. Matthew 2:13-23
  - a. The flight to Egypt (vv. 13-15) to protect Jesus from King Herod as warned in a dream and the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy
  - b. The killing of the male babies and fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15 (vv. 16-18)
  - c. The return to Israel particularly in Nazareth and the prophecy of Jesus being called a Nazorean is fulfilled (vv. 19-23)

#### *D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time*

Ask the following questions and encourage the class to share their thoughts.

1. How does the hand of God work in protecting God's people in the following situations?
  - a. During the time of Hosea
  - b. During the time Joseph and his family escaped to Egypt
  - c. During the time Joseph and his family returned to Israel
  - d. During the time of the killing of the male Israelites 2 years old and below
2. How does the warning of the angel of the Lord to the wise men and Joseph become significant to us today?
3. How similar are God's people in the past with God's people in the present?
4. How can present-day Christians benefit from the struggles of God's people in the past?

#### *E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

Say: "There are many obstacles/struggles in our life as Christians. But we need to use our listening and comprehending skills in order to discern the message of God to us." Ask: "Do you agree that God continually intervenes to fulfill God's mission here on earth? How can discerning God's message help church members?"

#### *F Applying the Biblical Truth*

1. Say: "The flight of Joseph and Mary is the same as our flight from hunger, unemployment, sickness. We live in a critical, broken, and sick world. These issues concern us as members of the church."
2. Ask: "What do you think is the role of the church in addressing these critical issues?" Encourage the class to list down possible church programs in their local church by which these issues can be addressed.

#### *G. Closing Worship*

1. Offering: As the offering plate is passed, tell the class to place their list of possible church programs that will help address the critical issues that have been discussed earlier.
2. Closing song: "With Gifts That Differ by Your Grace" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 245)
3. Closing prayer: "Dear God, thank you for everything. Thank you for teaching us always! Thank you for leading us. We pray for your continuous guidance to do what is right and pleasing in your sight. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen."

January 28, 2018

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

**John the Baptizer: Preparing the Way of the Lord**

*Old Testament:*

**Isaiah 40:3-5** (NRSV)

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup>as 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. <sup>5</sup>Every 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; <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." <sup>7</sup>John 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. <sup>9</sup>Even 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.' <sup>10</sup>And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' <sup>11</sup>In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' <sup>12</sup>Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' <sup>13</sup>He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' <sup>14</sup>Soldiers 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.' <sup>15</sup>As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>John 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. <sup>17</sup>His 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." <sup>18</sup>So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. <sup>19</sup>But 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, <sup>20</sup>added 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, Adult:* **Like John the Baptizer preparing the way of the Lord, the church prepares the world for the coming of the Kingdom.**

### ***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. point to the lines in the biblical references that can help make people repent of their sins;
3. explain how John presented himself in relation to Jesus; and
4. make a choice of how one gets involved in preparing the way of the Lord.

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

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

### **III. Learning Experiences**

#### *A. Opening Worship*

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: Gracious God, give us the strength to do your will as we study your Word. You have given the task to proclaim Your Gospel. Help us to do it with diligent hearts and minds. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.
3. Opening song: "Living for Jesus" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 289)

#### *B. Getting Ready*

Ask the class about their thoughts about baptism, preparation, and repentance.

#### *C. Learning Time*

Let the students read the two biblical references and tell them to take down notes. In reading, let them ask themselves the question: "What does this text mean to me?"

1. *Isaiah 40:3-5*. These verses foretell the messenger whose ministry is to call Israel to repent from their sin of disobedience to and mistrust in God. In doing so, they will prepare the glorious coming of the Messiah.
2. *Luke 3:1-20*. These verses are a fulfillment of the words of Isaiah.
  - a. When John preached
  - b. To whom is John's preaching
  - c. What John preached (Genuine repentance manifested in kindness, generosity, and honesty.)
  - d. Situations where repentance is shown
  - e. The confusion of the hearers and the clarification made by John about Himself and

his relation to the Messiah  
What John did to the hearers who believed in the Messiah

**D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time**

Discuss the lesson and ask these questions.

1. How did John explain the meaning of repentance? How can we obey the repentance model proposed by John in our daily life?
2. When John baptized the believers, what was he actually doing in relation with Christ?
3. What verses tell about the relation of John to the Messiah?
4. Paraphrase this: "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. (Luke 3:16b)
5. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

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 of preparation.

**E. Discovering the Biblical Truth**

Ask: "Do you agree that like John the Baptizer who prepared the way of the Lord, the church can also prepare the world for the coming of the Kingdom? Why or why not?"

**F. Applying the Biblical Truth**

Let the students make a reflective action showing their participation in preparing the way of the Messiah. After finishing the exercise, have them share their thoughts with their seatmates. Tell them to use this format:

Place	Detailed Action
1. Home	
2. Church	
3. Community	

**G. Closing Worship**

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Living for Jesus" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 289)
3. Closing prayer: "God of mercy, thank you for giving us the ability to change our ways and be of service to others especially to the weak and helpless. Lead us to become like John the Baptizer who prepared your way. 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

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

<sup>2</sup>The 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. <sup>3</sup>His 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; <sup>4</sup>but 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. <sup>5</sup>Righteousness 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

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

The Temptation of Jesus

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

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

### ***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 how the religious heritage and personal history of Jesus helped him realize his messianic destiny;
2. share one's religious reflections that help us become instruments of Christ in his salvation plan for all; and
3. express one's commitment to do one's part in doing things that will help promote Christ's messianic destiny.

### II. Concept: Reflecting on his religious heritage and personal history, Jesus realizes his messianic destiny.

**Materials:** *The Holy Bible* (NRSV), hymnal, activity sheet, pictures of people in need, UCCP statements such as: UCCP Stands on Issues (Children in Prostitution, Teenage Pregnancy,



Abused Migrant Women, LGBT, Extra-judicial Killings)

### III. Learning Experiences

#### A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the learners with your warm smile.
2. Opening prayer: "We thank you, our parent God, for gathering us again to learn more about you. May your Spirit be with us in understanding and applying our lesson for this day. This we ask 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. Prepare the class to play the game "Stay Away, Sin!" Form two groups and make them face each other. Get a ball and paint half of it red and half of it white. Hold the ball so that one side of the class sees the colored part and the other group the other side of the ball. Ask each group what color of the ball do they see. Expect two different answers.
2. Process the activity. Ask these questions.
  - a. Why are there two different answers? (Each group sees a different side of the ball.)
  - b. Can both groups be correct?
  - c. If I show the other side of the ball, would you still have the same answer as before? (No)
  - d. Why are we sometimes tempted to segregate people who have different characteristics? Which should we emphasize, commonalities or differences?

#### C. Learning Time

1. Form three groups. Assign each group specific biblical passages. Have each group discuss their assigned text. Then let the leader of each group present to the class their report one by one.

Group 1: *Isaiah 11:1-5*. Isaiah warns the people of Israel of their sin of complacency and reminds them of their historical roots as represented by the stump of Jesse. This prophecy is fulfilled with the coming of Jesus whose lineage comes from David whose father is Jesse.

##### Group 2: *Matthew 16:13-16*.

- a. The word messiah is defined as follows:
  - 1) A messiah is a person who God sends to save people from their troubles.
  - 2) Christ is a Greek word for Messiah which leads us to understand that when we say Jesus Christ, it also means Jesus the Messiah.
  - 3) 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.
  - 4) 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.

- b. There is a dissenting perspective in the way Israel sees the Messiah from the real Messiahship of Jesus.

<b>Messiah</b>	<b>Popular Thought</b>	<b>Jesus' Messiahship</b>
Knowing	Jesus knew it from the very start. It is already programmed since birth	Consciousness emerged gradually from his experiences.
Doing	Power to perform political and economic miracles. He has the power to overthrow the Roman Empire and establish a free and prosperous Israel that will rule over nations. He has the power of invincibility to fight	Son of Man will suffer, rejected and be killed
Being	Reigns in glory and honor	Suffering Servant

Group 3: *Matthew 4:1-11*. This event is seen as the start of Jesus' ministry and the emergence of his Christhood.

#### D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Ask these questions.

1. Why is the stump of Jesse significant?
2. Why is the dwelling of the Spirit in the stump of Jesse significant?
3. How will this stump of Jesse rule among his people?
4. Why is Peter's declaration of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ significant?
5. When Jesus was led by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, which truth did he mention? Match the insight or insights with Jesus' answers to the three temptations.

complete dependence on God	supremacy of God
providence of God	discerning God's wisdom
obedience and submission to God	

- a. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."
- b. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."
- c. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

#### E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How did Jesus' religious heritage and personal history help him in realizing his messianic destiny? How will the Messiahship of Christ prepare us in doing what is right?

#### F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Divide the class into three groups. Let each group identify a person or a family in their

community that they want to help. Allow them to define what help they can extend for that person or the family.

2. Present this format of an action plan.

Action Plan

Life's Mission Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Recipients: \_\_\_\_\_

(Sample: Giving Love and Care for Mannix, the community's Taong Grasa)

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Method: \_\_\_\_\_

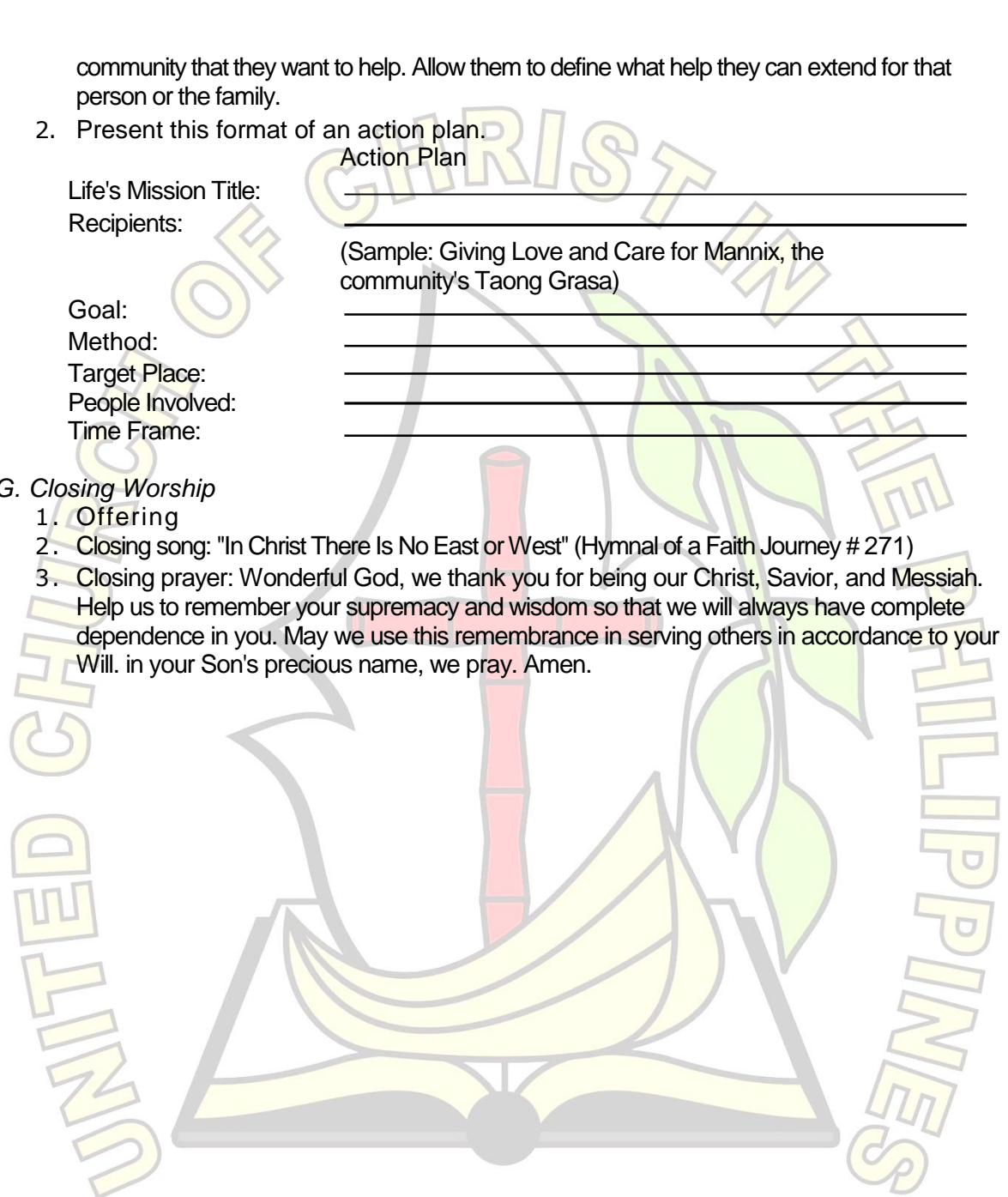
Target Place: \_\_\_\_\_

People Involved: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Frame: \_\_\_\_\_

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "In Christ There Is No East or West" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 271)
3. Closing prayer: Wonderful God, we thank you for being our Christ, Savior, and Messiah. Help us to remember your supremacy and wisdom so that we will always have complete dependence in you. May we use this remembrance in serving others in accordance to your Will. in your Son's precious name, we pray. Amen.





February 11, 2018

Transfiguration Sunday

**Moses, the Lawgiver and Elijah, the Prophet**

Old Testament:

**Exodus 19:3-6 (NRSV)**

<sup>3</sup>Then 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, <sup>6</sup>but 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

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now 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. <sup>33</sup>Just 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. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

<sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' <sup>36</sup>When 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, Adult: **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. relate the transfiguration story with the resurrection of Jesus;
2. describe the significance of the words of affirmation of the Sonship of Jesus by God and the disappearance of Moses and Elijah; and
3. explain how the transfiguration story points to Jesus as the Messiah.

**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

**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*

1. Ask the class to recall an advertisement showing how dirty clothes are made clean and white using the advertised soap.
2. Have the children compare their dirty and clean clothes. Discuss the role of the soap in changing clothes from dirty to clean.

*C. Learning Time*

After reading the biblical references, discuss the significance of these texts in relation to Jesus' transfiguration.

1. Exodus 19:3-6. These verses tell what God told Moses when he was on the mountain:
  - a. God reminds Israel what God did to the Egyptians who pursued them and how God took the Israelites as children
  - b. God reminds Israel to obey God's commands and honor their Covenant
2. Luke 9:28-36. The story of Jesus' transfiguration and its significance
  - a. Jesus went up the mountain top to pray. His disciples Peter, James, and John were with him.
  - b. The disciples witnessed these events.
    - 1) The glory of Jesus when his appearance changed as he shone and his clothes became dazzling white
    - 2) The appearance of Moses, the Lawgiver and Elijah, the Prophet and the significance of their conversation with Jesus

" 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.

3. Say: "As members of the Church, the Body of Christ, we should show Christ's character and will in all the ministries that we do, become dependent solely on Him, and recognize that all our efforts would be in vain unless it is our heart that we give to Him in service."

*D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time*

Discuss the lesson and ask these questions.

1. What happened to Jesus while was praying? (Jesus transfigured.)
2. When we are in the presence of God, can our faces can radiate God's holiness? Why or why not?
3. When the disciples realized that Jesus is the Son of God, how did this recognition of the light of God help them in their work as Jesus' disciples?
4. How can we relate the transfiguration of Jesus with his resurrection?

*E. Discovering the Biblical Truth*

Ask: "How did the Law of Moses and the prophecy of Elijah point to Jesus as the Messiah?"

*F. Applying the Biblical Truth*

Tell the students to make a plan of manifesting God's righteousness in their homes, places of work, and in the communities where they belong.

*G. Closing Worship*

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