

BAPTISM OF THE LORD/ FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

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JUSTICE ISSUE: FAMILY

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 3:13-17
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶162, The Nurturing Community, A.
OBJECTIVE:	Students will gain awareness of nontraditional family structures. Students will be able to reflect on the values that create chosen family.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Paper and craft supplies for students to make a creative family portrait.

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Take a moment to do a loving-kindness meditation. A sample script can be found below:

Say: Imagine a person you really love sitting across from you and that string connects you heart to heart. Connect with the feelings of affection and warmth you have for that person.

Next, slowly focus on the phrase, 'May I be well, happy, and peaceful,' feeling the warmth of loving-kindness filling your body.

And send these feelings to your friend. 'May you be well, happy, and peaceful.'

Remember to breathe naturally and imagine the white light between you becoming a circle of light around you both.

The light is bathing you in the warmth and peace of loving-kindness that you radiate

NOTES

Loving-Kindness meditations can be very long or very short. Think about your students and how they might best engage in meditation. Consider switching up the scripts to fit their needs (The article cited below has four scripts to consider if you are unsure where to begin.)

(Adapted from: Jo Nash, Ph.D. "What Is Loving Kindness Meditation? (Incl. 4 Metta Scripts)." PositivePsychology.com, June 10, 2025. <https://positivepsychology.com/loving-kindness-meditation/>.)

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out to your surroundings.

Including all beings, from the smallest insect to the largest animal ... and out into the universe.

May we be well, happy, and peaceful. May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful.

As you continue to bathe in the warmth of loving-kindness, turn your attention to your body and notice your feelings and sensations. Notice 'what' is observing your body and recognize that awareness ... a peaceful, still part of you, that witnesses everything, without judgment.

Breathe naturally. And slowly open your eyes.”

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Read Matthew 3:13-17 (you can read the passage or have someone volunteer to read.)

Say: The baptism of Jesus shows a nontraditional family dynamic playing out. First, Jesus comes to his cousin, John the Baptist, with a strange request- baptism. John fully knows Jesus as Lord, and they go back and forth a bit on why Jesus needs to be baptized at all. When John consents, he baptizes Jesus, and the heavens open. God's presence descends through the form of a dove, and God's voice booms- “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Two men and a dove certainly serve as an odd picture of family to us, especially when the nuclear family has been so lifted up (a mom, a dad, two children, white picket fence). However, I bet there are so many people around you who have nontraditional families. Do you know someone who lives in a “nontraditional” household?

Pause for responses.

Say: Despite the good intentions of family structures, many times they are complicated! One of the many complicated family systems is the foster care system. In foster care, children are separated from their family of origin and placed with a foster family. Many times, these children move to multiple placements, and they also maintain some sort of relationship with their family of origin. Our Social Principles remind us that “We

NOTES

You can find out how many children are in foster care in your area by going to <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/>.

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recognize that families come in a variety of sizes and forms, and acknowledge their significant role in nurturing the physical, moral, and spiritual development of children, youth, and adults...Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We lament that in some instances, birth parents are unable or unwilling to fulfill their caregiving obligations. Under these circumstances, we applaud the willingness of extended families and foster and adoptive parents to step in as primary nurturers.”

This passage reminds us that no matter what our earthly families look like, God claims us, as a loving and proud parent. This is important not only for us to remember, but to apply the same logic to our friends who may be living with very different parental and familial relationships. Let's take a second to pray that all of the children in our area are reminded that they have a loving family in Christ and pray also that they find loving and caring families on earth.

****Example prayer**** Lord God, we humbly ask that you would cover your children with your love and protect them with your power. We ask for safety for our friends and neighbors, and we ask that loving families show them the same love that you do. Amen.

Ask: Many times, children that have complicated family situations have “chosen” family, or people that they have adopted to be their makeshift family. Who is your chosen family? It's okay if it looks funny, Jesus' family portrait at his baptism is his weird cousin wearing camel's hair, and his parent as a bird. What would your family (chosen or biological) look like?

Pause for responses.

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Make a family portrait! With the version of family Jesus exemplifies, we know family can come in a variety of ways! Who do you consider to be part of your family? Make a family portrait depicting them. You can take this super seriously or make it funny based on the group. Make sure you save time for students to share their creations!

Once everyone has presented, consider the following questions:

- What qualities earn someone a spot in your “chosen” family?
- How does it feel to know that God has chosen you to be part of God’s family?
- Think of the people in your chosen family- what role do you see God filling for you? (grandparent, father, mother, sibling, the friend always at your house, etc)

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Close in prayer, particularly thinking of those in your community who:

- are single parents, or being parented by a single parent
- are mourning the loss of a family member
- are involved in the foster care system
- are considering being a foster or adoptive home
- live really far away from the rest of their family
- might be ostracized for being a nontraditional family

NOTES

Look online to see what the recent craft trends are! Make the portraits fun by having students use finger paint, do it as a collage, or make an abstract construction paper portrait.