

Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.facebook.com/OtsellicValleyCentralSchool/photos/pcb.4091168124325146/4091151684326790>

How do (did) you get to school? <Let them respond>

Once you get (got) to school, are (were) you done with what you have (had) to do for the day?

<Let them respond>

What else is (was) expected? <Let them respond>

Why would you do it? <Let them respond>

What would please your teachers? <Let them respond>

If you do (did) not learn anything in a day at school, are (were) you any worse off for having shown up? <Let them respond>

- † Kids today get fed at school, so even if they do not learn anything, they benefit from showing up.
- † Showing up to the church building, we are no worse off than if we did not show up, and we are connected with a social support family.
- † When people got baptized by John the Baptist, they got a little cleaner even if nothing else changed about them.

But what is the real intent of proclaiming our faith and getting baptized? <Let them respond>

What could we do at church that would please God?
<Let them respond>

Listen to today's Gospel reading. It describes the epiphany at the baptism of Jesus. I want you to pay attention to what Jesus did after getting baptized and how God responded to it.

Gospel lesson



background picture (without words)
from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rock_dove_-_natures_pics.jpg;
photo credit Alan D. Wilson,
www.naturespicsonline.com

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

(NRSV)

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."

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when

Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,

²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart" UMH #500>

Message: Well Pleased



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-home-for-christmas/second-sunday-after-christmas-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-christmas-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Beloved Savior, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That You may be well pleased with us. Amen.

We begin a new worship series this week, "Love Never Ends: Being the Body of Christ," which will emphasize the lectionary progression through 1 Corinthians during this season of Ordinary Time.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/love-never-ends-being-the-body-of-christ/epiphany-baptism-of-the-lord-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/epiphany-baptism-of-the-lord-year-c-graphics>

However, today we focus on “Well Pleased” from the epiphany in the **Gospel**.

“Epiphany is about the revealing of the light to the world. Not all see it, of course; this is why Jesus frequently said, “let those who have ears to hear, hear.”

Even we have moments where we aren’t so sure that we have seen that light. Yet, we who gather for worship have caught a glimpse of something, and we come to celebrate and to lean into that hope.”



picture from personal creation

When I was first married, my mother-in-law taught me how to cross stitch. When expecting my son, I started a birth sampler for him. I cut a piece of cloth, selected colors, and carefully followed the pattern. I completed the frame, but then I had my newborn and set the sewing aside.

I had come close to doing what I intended all those years ago. But because I did not focus on it, my son missed out on years of enjoyment and pride (and probably mostly ignoring it as it collected dust on a shelf) that he might have had from the personal keepsake made with love. The border was tucked away, almost lost, certainly not of much use while unfinished and hidden.

I think many people in the world today may feel like a cut piece of cloth, wondering what their purpose is, living through the design being stitched in. They may not see beyond where they live, may not realize the pattern coming into shape throughout their lives.

We go through a lot of life experiences, some of them feeling like the needle going through us, and others feeling like a pretty color snugly becoming a part of us to impress the world. As the cloth, we might not understand the completed piece we are to be, but we are called to have faith in God's handiwork.



picture screencaptured from
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omdRd6XGptQ>

Certainly the Israelites struggled to understand what God wanted of them. From the exiled people in Isaiah to those questioning John the Baptist, they could not see what God intended for them. They did not know how

to connect with God. They got baptized, a good first step. Then Jesus came to show them how to live.

With cross stitching, the cloth should be clean before stitches are sewn in, or the soil is much harder to remove. But just getting clean does not make a final project; it is just the start of the work! Similarly, our coming to church and getting baptized is not the end of our faith, but just the start of our faithful living.

Did you catch what Jesus did after he was baptized? He prayed. Our lives should be a constant prayer to God, seeking to connect with our creator, to understand the threads we need wrapped into our lives so that we can develop into something beautiful.

When I cross stitch, I am protective of the work I do. I take care with it, keeping my hands scrupulously clean so that I do not soil it; I store it where it will stay clean and dry; and I work in the threads with careful attention to detail for the pattern to come out right.

If I am that careful with a cross stitch piece, how much more careful is God with each of us? Isaiah proclaims that we are precious in God's sight, called by name and loved by God. The Almighty, described in the psalm as making mountains skip like young calves, is taking great care with each of us.

And Jesus, demonstrating how we are to seek out our relationship with God, was proclaimed “Beloved,” with whom God is “well pleased.” But Jesus did not sit back on those praises – instead, Jesus applied God’s direction to life, taking time to study with the Spirit in the wilderness, and then starting His countryside ministry to teach everyone how to live in God’s love.

God wants us to seek out what is good for us, what is right in God’s eyes, and to apply it in our daily lives. We should have joy in serving God, like that of a little child feeding a duck: delight at being able to do it and at the response to our work.

And just as any parent takes pleasure in watching their happy child doing what is good, God will be well pleased with our humble and sincere efforts to share God’s love throughout our lives – or even if we just start doing so from now on.



picture from personal creation

I rediscovered the almost-finished cross stitch piece about twenty-five years later and thought, “I should finish this, he might want it.” I carefully stitched in Jonathan’s name and birthdate. It looked great!

There was just one problem. I had started it for my older son, Timothy. Now I was faced with doing a second one for him because it is not fair to do a birth sampler for only one of two sons.

When I asked Tim if he wanted the same design for his own, he told me to do whatever design I wanted but, since he had just gotten married at the time, to do it for a grandchild instead of him (I am still hoping for any news on that front).

I had delayed doing as intended, and my life circumstances had changed, so the task changed accordingly. God does that with each one of us, adjusting how we might serve our Lord according to what our current circumstances are.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/love-never-ends-being-the-body-of-christ/epiphany-baptism-of-the-lord-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/epiphany-baptism-of-the-lord-year-c-graphics>

So do not just sit back on what you have already earned. Remember your baptism, pray and seek to be closer with God. Instead of going through motions that only get you into the church building, challenge yourself to actions which help you focus on learning and sharing God's love.

Let the greatest teacher of all be well pleased with you.

<Confession and Pardon

BOW #475>

Let us pray:

Almighty God, we confess that we are often swept up
in the tide of our generation.

We have failed in our calling to be your holy people,
a people set apart for your divine purpose.

We live more in apathy born of fatalism than in
passion born of hope.

We are moved more by private ambition than by social
justice.

We dream more of privileges and benefits than of
service and sacrifice.

We try to speak in your name without relinquishing
our glories, without nourishing our souls, without
relying wholly on your grace.

Help us to make room in our hearts and lives for you.

Forgive us, revive us, and reshape us in your image.

Amen. (Lydia S. Martinez, Hispanic, U.S.A., 20th Cent., Alt.)

The Lord God is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us remission
of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life,
and the grace and consolation of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer, U.S.A.)

Having confessed our sins and reassured by God's
grace, let us affirm our faith with

The Nicene Creed

UMH #880

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day He rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in the one holy catholic* and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism **universal*
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of new beginnings, as we move into this new year,
stir in us the feelings of expectation!

Kindle our hearts and minds to see possibilities for
our world and for your kingdom.

Help us to believe that the world we have can be
better: more loving, more just, more compassionate,
and looking much more like the world you've imagined
for us.

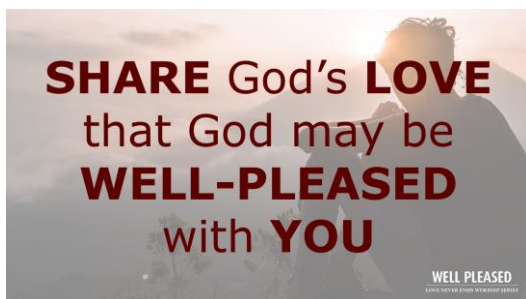
- Lord, please help {these whom we lift up} with
healing touch and comfort:
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -

- Thanks for
 - -
 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "When Jesus Came to Jordan" UMH #252>

<Benediction>



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Go now in peace,
sharing the love of God with all whom you encounter,
that God may be well pleased.
Amen.