



Our faith is not just something we check in with on Sundays, our faith is how we live lives of meaning and purpose everyday, if we will learn to notice and respond to how God is moving. But this awareness, like anything worthwhile, takes practice. Which is why a weekly discipleship practice of Reading, Reflecting, and Responding to scripture in the context of community is so important. The following devotions have been written with this practice in mind. Use them with friends or family to help you deepen your experience of faith.

Week: First Sunday after the Epiphany
The Baptism of our Lord

Adult and Littles

Read - Acts 8:14-17

Reflect - The apostles (other followers of Jesus) heard that people in the town of Samaria had accepted the word of God. They were excited! They sent Peter and John to help the people learn more about God's word and Jesus. Peter and John stayed with them, prayed with and for them, and asked for the Holy Spirit to fall upon them. The Samaritans who accepted God's word had all been baptized (which is an outward sign of their commitment to God), but they were waiting for the Holy Spirit (as Jesus had promised to send his followers when He went back to heaven). When Peter and John prayed for the people, God honored their prayers and sent the Holy Spirit to the people. Can you imagine the joy they had once they received the Holy Spirit?

Respond - Have you ever prayed for someone? It is a very special and kind thing we can do for others. Ask a parent or an approved adult to help you write down two names of people to pray for. Then, take a few minutes and pray for both of them.
- Quantrilla Ard

Adult and Middles (Elementary)

Read: Luke 3:21-22. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and 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."

Reflect: Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. Although many people are baptized when they are babies, Jesus wasn't baptized until he was about 30 years old. Jesus was baptized by his cousin John the Baptist, who was given that name because he baptized people. John was a man of strong faith in God, and he had many followers. In fact, some people believed that John was the Messiah, the son of God who had come to save them. But in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, John tells the crowd that Jesus is the savior. John says that he is not even worthy to tie the laces on Jesus' shoes!

Respond: John uses water to baptize Jesus, and we still use water today as an outward sign of our baptism. What is so special about water? Name some interesting things you know it. (Water can be a liquid, gas, and solid. The solid form (ice) floats in the liquid form. Many things can dissolve and become a part of water – think of Kool-Aid or Jell-O. It can become snow or hail or rain). You can also go on a scavenger hunt for different forms of water in your house (find ice and liquid water. For vapor, either boil a pot of water on the stove or you run hot water in a shower).

One of the most important things to know about water is that all living things need water to survive. Water is essential to life. The water of baptism is essential to our new life in Jesus. When we are baptized, we are born anew, committing our life to following Jesus (or, if we were baptized as babies, adults who love us made those promises on our behalf).

You might consider trying an experiment. Set two similar small plants on a windowsill or table. Water one plant as directed, but do not water the other plant. See which one survives. Talk about how this experiment relates to following Jesus. What do we need to do to "water" our lives of faith?

- Richelle Thompson

Adult and Bigs (Youth)

Read: Isaiah 43:1-7

Reflect: Your reflection; How do you know your family loves you? When I was your age, I was not convinced that my parents would do anything for me the way God would. According to this passage from Isaiah, God knows you by name. God protects you. God is always with you. Now that I'm a mom of older kids like you, I understand that my parents did love unconditionally. They showed their love in countless ways that didn't always feel like love but was. Perhaps these words from Isaiah can speak for us and remind you that we try to love you as much as God does. No matter what you're going through, no matter how you feel, no matter what you think, God loves you, always.

Respond: With as many family members as possible, share stories and pictures that show love - baby pictures, just before birth photos, holidays, or everyday moments. How does your family's love for you compare to the love God feels for you in this passage? What do your grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other family members say about your parents as babies and kids? Listen for the many ways that your family cares for each other and you.

-Miriam McKenney

Adult and Adult

Read: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Reflect: The crowds were eager to know if John the Baptist was the Messiah. John responded with humility indicating that someone else would come who was "greater than [he]." The Messiah would come. He would baptize the crowds "with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Before Jesus the Messiah could baptize anyone, he needed to receive baptism first. He allowed John to baptize him with water. When the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him, Jesus heard God call him Son. We cannot give what we do not have. We cannot share what we do not believe in. The image of Jesus receiving his baptism shows how even the Son of God had to earn his right to impart cleansing and a renewed life on others. Baptism is a covenant that we share with God. All who are baptized into God's name are one with this covenant.

With such strife in the world, how can we continue to honor our baptismal covenant? It begins with *I will*. Are we willing to step into the light of hope? Are we willing to confess, seek, and continue the work of peace?

Respond: "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being" (*Book of Common Prayer* 305)? This week, write down all the ways you can strive to promote peace and justice in your community. Your community can include those around you, in your church, or on social media. In what ways do you need to be re-baptized or

- Carolina Hinojosa -Cisneros

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