



Note from Grace Lutheran—Pastor Nolting

Because of Covid-19 we are unable to have our normal Vacation Bible School. The following materials are graciously provided by Redeemed Reader LLC. The original materials were designed for a six-week summer reading program but have been modified to fit into six daily lesson presentations. You will not have time in one evening to do everything suggested, so you will have to pick-and-choose...or spend more than one day per lesson! You may wish to spend a week on each lesson and do, as a family, more of the Activities.

Introduction

It is our hope—and prayer—that these materials may be a blessing to your church in these uncertain times. We are calling our program "Hope on the Horizon" because we know there is hope in the gospel, even as we feel adrift at sea. Devotionals are written by **Janie B. Cheaney** (one of our team, and a long-time contributor to **World Magazine**). These devotional portions may be used on their own at home; the activities and hymns/songs can easily be adapted to a group setting, should groups be allowed to gather in person.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

These devotionals are designed to explore God's word with families or small groups. The unifying theme is water as created and used by God, both as a physical property and as a symbol in the great story of redemption. Successive lessons present water as the key element in Creation and in Judgment, water as providing for Deliverance (Exodus) and Trial (Jonah), water as redeemed by Christ in His many "signs," and water in the new highway for the spread of the Gospel.

The devotionals are written at a fifth-grade level, but can be adapted to younger ears, while the discussion questions may provide food for thought even for grownups. Each devotional consists of a brief introduction, a scripture passage to be read together, a key verse to memorize (time permitting), five or six discussion questions, and three or four suggested activities. We've included more discussion questions than you'll have time to cover, so different groups can select those most appropriate to the age groups in their homes or church groups. Some activities are simple games, others are writing suggestions or art projects. Some can be done as a group in a single session while others are best done individually and over time. Participants are free to use any or all of them, to adapt them to particular requirements, or to use these ideas as inspiration for their own.

We've included prayer suggestions rather than written prayers. A leader might pray for the group (including requests) or open up to sentence prayers with a prompt related to the last lesson's theme.

A single family could extend the reading and discussion questions over several days, choosing appropriate activities for the children (and grownups!) for a "family night" toward the end of a week and so extend the Vacation Bible School over several weeks. In such cases small church groups might meet one evening per week (perhaps in different homes or backyards) to read and discuss the passage together. A designated leader or host for the evening could guide the discussion with selected questions, allowing time for refreshments and appropriate activities. (Wrap up the series with a giant water-balloon fight!)

Lesson 1: Out of Water (Creation)

Lesson-at-a-Glance Scripture

- ❖ **Passages:** Genesis 1 and 2
- ❖ **Key verse:** Darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Gen. 1:2)
- ❖ **Hymn/Praise Song:** “Eternal Father, Strong to Save” (Naval Hymn – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDjwUzUnNpU&t=10s>)

Introduction/Commentary

In this lesson we’re casting off on a summer journey through water. We’ll be like early explorers sailing into the unknown on wooden ships, following the stars at night, trimming their sails by day, and making discoveries along the way. Though we’ll be recommending books throughout the journey, our greatest discoveries will be in the Book of Books. And of course, we’ll begin at the beginning.

Did you know that well over half of your body is made up of water? The percentage is usually greater for kids than it is for grownups, and the older we get, the more our bodies “dry up,” but the average for adult humans is 60% - 65% water. For kids, it’s more like 70% - 75%. For babies, it’s as much as 78%!

You’ve probably heard that most of the earth’s surface is covered with water. That percentage is 71%. Interesting, isn’t it? Depending on how old you are, your percentage of water content corresponds quite closely with the earth’s. You’d almost think somebody designed it that way, and you are right!

On Day Three of the creation story in Genesis 1, God brought dry land out of water. From that day on, most human activity would take place on land: cities built, gardens planted, empires rising and falling, people living and dying. Land would be the “stage” on which the story of the Bible would be told.

But as we’ll see over the next six lessons, water is vital to that story, beginning with the sea. Like everything God made, the vast body of water that covers the earth is good. It provides food, oxygen, clouds for rain, and a means of traveling from one body of land to another. But water has its limits. In Job 38:11 God says to the sea, “This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt.” In other words, God sets boundaries on the oceans that they are not allowed to cross, except by His permission. That’s a good thing if you happen to own a beach house!

All creatures, including people, have their limits too. We’ll be talking more about those limits this week and next week. We can give thanks to God for bringing solid ground out of the rolling, shifting, restless sea and providing us with such a beautiful place to live, build, and grow.

Read Genesis 1 and 2, together or independently.

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 95:5

Psalm 104:24-25

Psalm 146:6

Revelation 14:7

Discussion questions

1. Did God create water, or was it already there? Read the first two verses of Genesis again and give reasons for your answer. (Also see the additional scriptures, above.)
2. Find all the passages where water is mentioned in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.
3. Genesis 1:2: What is “the deep”? Why do you think the Spirit of God is “hovering”?
4. Genesis chapter 2 goes into more detail about the creation of human beings. How is the creation of the first man different from the creation of all the other animals?
5. All created things, even the mighty ocean, have limits that God has set. What was the limit that He set on the first humans?
6. In contrast to limits, what did human beings have the power and the opportunity to do? Do you think the limits help us to make the most of our power and opportunity, or are they more of a hindrance?

Prayer Suggestions

Thank God for water in its many forms and for its many benefits. Thank Him also for separating land from water, so that humans can build stable lives. Ask Him to help us be aware of our own limits and be obedient to the boundaries He has drawn.

Activities

- ❖ As a family or group, divide into two (or more) teams and have each team list as many names for naturally-occurring forms and bodies of water as you can. Creeks, rain, and icebergs count; snowmen and fountains don’t. After a set time limit (5 minutes should be enough), the team with the longest list gets to shoot the other team with water guns (or water balloons or another reward of your choosing, such as going through the dessert line first).
- ❖ Make a chart with three boxes arranged in two columns. In the first column, draw or write what God created on days 1, 2, and 3. In the second column, draw or write what He created on days 4, 5, and 6. Do you see a relationship between the two columns? [Column 1: domains. Column 2: inhabitants.]
- ❖ Learn the names of the “seven seas” (i.e., the seven major oceans). How many smaller “seas” can you learn, such as the Baltic, Mediterranean, Arabian, and Coral?
- ❖ Do a little research on the water cycle and make a poster showing how the seas play a crucial role in it.

Lesson 2: Judgment by Water

Lesson-at-a-Glance

- ❖ **Scripture Passages:** Genesis 6-9
- ❖ **Key Verse:** The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually . . . and it grieved him to his heart. (Gen. 6:5-6)
- ❖ **Hymn/Praise Song:** “It Is Well With My Soul” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0>)

Introduction/Commentary

The first humans stepped over the one boundary God had clearly set, and they were judged for it. Their penalty was death. Even though Adam and his sons and grandsons lived for hundreds of years, they eventually died. So has almost every human since Adam: God gives us all a number of years to live, and then we die. Today we don't always see God's judgment, and it's risky to say that a flood or hurricane is God punishing people for any particular sin. The thing to remember, though, is that God has a right to judge, and will judge. Early in Earth's history He judged the whole world for its sin and wickedness.

Have you ever owned a toy play set of Noah's ark where you marched the animals up a ramp into the little boat? That was fun. The real flood wasn't fun. Think how terrifying it must have been to watch the water rising over the doorsteps, over the shrubs, over the trees, over the roofs and hills, until there was no place left to stand. It was like creation in reverse—just as God brought land out of water, now He sent water back over the land. He removed the limits He had set on the sea (remember Job 38:11). God's power can destroy as well as create (see Psalm 29). The universe is His creation, and He has every right to do as He pleases with it. But God not only has the right to judge. He is right to judge. We'll talk more about this, but for now, our readings this week will show us why and how God judged the earth by water, along with almost everyone in it.

As we learned in our last lesson, the vast body of water that covers the earth is good. It balances the earth. But from the time of the flood, and throughout the Old Testament, the sea will become known as a place of chaos, disorder, and even terror. The sea is perpetually restless, with no place to stand or build, no way to measure or map. It's as if, once God used water as a means of judgment, ancient peoples feared the sea as much as they relied on it.

But God will use water to show His mercy also, as we'll see in weeks to come.

Read Genesis 6-9.

Additional Scriptures

II Peter 3:3-7

Psalm 29

Discussion Questions

1. In our last lesson we began God's great story, told in the Bible. Every story has a hero, or *protagonist*. There's a flip side to this: every story usually has a villain, or *antagonist*, too. This is the character who works against the hero to thwart his plans or desires. If God is the protagonist of the Bible, who is the antagonist? (Many people would immediately say, "the devil." But does Genesis 6:5-6 suggest another candidate?)
2. How is Noah described (Gen. 6:9)? Compare the description of Noah with that of Enoch, one of Adam's grandsons, in Gen. 5:23-24. Why shouldn't God just "take" Noah as He "took" Enoch, and be done with the human race?
3. The word "ark" doesn't actually mean "boat." It means something more like a box for preserving important items or treasures (see what was in the Ark of the Covenant, Hebrews 9:4). So Noah's ark was a sea-worthy box. What treasures did it hold?
4. In Genesis 1:28 God gave Adam and Eve a mandate, or instructions, about what they were supposed to do. In Gen. 9:1 God gives Noah and his sons another mandate. Compare the two and notice how they're alike and how they are different.
5. God makes an agreement, or covenant, with Noah in Gen. 9:8-17. Who are the parties involved in this agreement? What does each party agree to do?
6. God has promised not to destroy the world by water again. But does He retain the right to destroy what He has made? (see II Peter 3:3-7)

Prayer Suggestions

Praise God for His righteousness in always judging correctly. Thank Him for His mercy in not judging you for the ways in which your thoughts and behavior dishonor Him and ask for wisdom and discernment to help you walk closer to Him.

Activities

- ❖ Genesis 6:22 says the earth was "corrupt." Usually this word implies something that was once good but has gone bad. Gather some food items (such as bread, fruit, lettuce, bits of meat, cheese, etc.) and place them in a box on a windowsill. What happens to them? Why? Could there be any exceptions? How is this similar to the way humans become "corrupt"? (It's interesting that the presence of water aids corruption. Foods that are dried and sealed don't become corrupt.)
- ❖ We said earlier that God has a right to judge. But most people don't really believe that. Or they might believe that God should judge that guy, but not me. Write (or tell) a brief history of Genesis 6-9 from the viewpoint of a rebellious man or woman of Babel who believes God acted unjustly by sending the flood. Then rewrite (or re-tell) the story from God's point of view, considering these questions: Why does He have a right to tell us what to do? What does He provide for us? Are His demands unreasonable? Why is it important that He judges sin?

- ❖ In a group setting, stage an impromptu debate or “trial” of God’s ways, with one, two, or three people to act as accusers, and another to speak for God. Give each side time to defend His case and respond to challenges.
- ❖ Noah’s ark was the first documented floating vessel in history. Since then, humans have designed and built many different kinds of seaworthy vessels, known collectively as “boats.” Do a little research into various kinds of boats and design one you’d like to have for yourself. If you have time and inclination, build a model and see if it floats. You might even stage a boat race with friends or siblings!
- ❖ Try building a simple boat out of paper, cardboard, duct tape, and other materials you can find around the house. Will it float? How much weight can it hold? Can it carry a stuffed animal around the bathtub or a backyard pool?

Lesson 3: Deliverance by Water

Lesson-at-a-Glance

- ❖ **Scripture Passages:** Exodus 14-15
- ❖ **Key Verse:** The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. (Exodus 15:2)
- ❖ **Hymn/Praise Song:** “I Will Sing Unto the Lord” (also known as “The Horse and Rider Fell Into the Sea” – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d8l3INhWHY>)

Introduction/Commentary

We’re skimming through Bible history on a speedboat! In the first lesson, we talked about how God built a world. Last week, He judged a world. This week we’re in Egypt, about 600 years later. One of Noah’s descendants, Jacob, had moved to Egypt and settled there with his twelve sons. Those sons all had sons and daughters, who had sons and daughters of their own, until Jacob’s descendants were so many that the King of Egypt, or Pharaoh, feared they would take over the land. To keep that from happening, he made slaves of them. Their burdens became so heavy that they cried out to God. God heard their prayer, as He had promised their ancestors 400 years earlier. He sent a man named Moses to confront Pharaoh with God’s demand: “Let My people go!”

You’ve probably heard how Pharaoh refused God’s demand—not once, but over and over. In response, God sent ten plagues on the land of Egypt, and the first one struck the water that was vital to life in Egypt: the Nile River turned to blood. After each plague, Pharaoh promised to free the Israelites, but then changed his mind. In the last plague, an Angel of Death struck down every firstborn child of every Egyptian. After that, the people now known by their ancestor Jacob’s other name—Israel—were released from their slavery and free to travel to the land God had set aside for them.

But a great test loomed up before them, namely a large body of water they had to cross. This is known as the Red Sea, or the “Sea of Reeds,” and the Israelites came upon it at precisely the wrong time: just as Pharaoh, who had changed his mind again, caught up to them with his horses and chariots. Of course, with God there are no “wrong times.” It was the right time for Him to deliver His people in a very spectacular way, and they were overwhelmed with praise.

That didn’t last long, though. Shortly after the Israelites began crossing the desert that would lead to their promised land, they faced a problem less dramatic but equally serious: deserts are dry, and the people needed water. Their physical needs overcame their trust in God, and they were actually complaining to Moses that they were better off in Egypt! God again provided deliverance in a miraculous way, and the people continued on their journey.

Read Exodus 14 and 15

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 105

Psalm 106:1-13

Discussion Questions

1. What's with these Israelites? One minute they're praising God for miraculous deliverance through the water, and the next they're complaining about no water to drink. Hebrews 3:8-12 and 4:2 gives us a clue. Did the Israelites have a "sinful, unbelieving heart"? What does it mean that they did not combine what they heard with faith?
2. Parents, can you share a time when you felt like you were backed into a bad corner and God provided deliverance? How has it built your faith and confidence?
3. On the flip side, even though you can remember times of deliverance, do you still worry and fret when hard times loom ahead? Are we that much different from the Israelites?
4. Read I Corinthians 10:4. What do we have to sustain our faith that the Israelites did not understand?
5. During the COVID19 lockdown this spring, Americans were accused of hoarding supplies like toilet paper. "Hoarding" is when you take more of something than you need at the time just in case you'll need it later. What's the difference between hoarding and preparing for a possible hard time? When is it good to prepare, and when is it better to trust God to supply what you need?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God for the many times He has provided deliverance for you. Thank Him also for providing you with the daily necessities of life, including water that is cheap and easily available. Ask Him to give you confidence in Him during rough times and challenges, rather than trying to rely on yourself.

Activities

- ❖ Think of a time you were in need and God provided deliverance. Write a Psalm of praise on the model of Exodus 15. This is more fun if you do it as a group, with everyone contributing a line or two about his or her own experience of deliverance. Then break out the tambourines and harmonicas and make a joyful noise!
- ❖ Research how long a person can live without water. What is "dehydration," and what are the signs of it?
- ❖ The Red Sea incident has been reproduced in movies several times. On YouTube, look up film clips of "parting the Red Sea" from The Ten Commandments (1923 and 1956), Prince of Egypt (1998), and Gods and Kings (2014). Which versions are the most realistic? Which are closer to the Bible narrative?

- ❖ Create a “diorama” or scene of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. Use LEGO people, stuffed animals, construction paper, and whatever else you can find around the house. You can also act this out as people if you can round up blue sheets or blankets to act as “water” and let people walk between them!
- ❖ In Exodus 6:2-8, God summarizes the whole book of Exodus. Make or print a copy and underline what He says He did in red. Circle what He promises to do in blue.

Lesson 4: Trial by Water

Week-at-a-Glance

- ❖ **Scripture Passages:** Jonah, Psalm 107:23-38
- ❖ **Key Verse:** Salvation belongs to the LORD! (Jonah 2:9b)
- ❖ **Hymn/Praise Song:** “Isaiah 43” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHtbgyPk3cw>)

Introduction/Commentary

“Jonah and the Whale” is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible, but we don’t always stop and consider what it’s really about. It’s not about whether a man can survive for three days inside a big fish. It’s about God’s purposes for the earth and the people in it. And how every square inch of this earth belongs to Him, He has complete control over it, together with all its creatures, and He wants all people to repent and learn to know of His love.

God’s people, the Israelites, didn’t always understand that. Like the pagan nations surrounding them, they sometimes slipped into the pagan view of local gods and goddesses who watched out for their own little domains. The pagan view said that every body of water, from river to lake to sea, had its own god who controlled it. Every nation, from Assyria to Phrygia, worshiped its own set of deities. In the same way, the people of Israel regarded Almighty God as “their” deity, who watched out for Israel alone.

By this time in human history, small ships are busily sailing up and down the coastlines, carrying goods and passengers. They seldom venture out to the open sea, which is still regarded as a fearful place. When the prophet Jonah receives a mission from the LORD that he doesn’t want to undertake, he seems to imagine he can duck his duty by simply getting out of God’s sight, and how better to do that than take to the sea? But there are two things he doesn’t understand: one, that God’s presence is everywhere (He is omnipresent), and two, that God’s concern stretches out beyond the nation of Israel, even to people who have never heard of Him.

God will use the sea—Jonah’s escape route—as a way to test him, and also teach him.

Read Jonah 1-4

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 107:23-43

Psalm 139:7-10

Discussion Questions

1. The book of Jonah mentions two groups of “foreigners,” or non-Israelites. Who are they? How does God feel about them? (See 4:11) How does Jonah feel about them?
2. In Jonah chapter 1, Jonah tries to escape through water. What is his destination? Why do you think he imagines he can flee “from the presence of the LORD”? (Hint: Do you recall from Lesson 2 what the sea represents in the Old Testament?)

3. When the sailors who threw Jonah overboard saw that they were saved, why did they worship? Do you think they were worshipping the true God, or another kind of idol?
4. Have you ever been so glad you escaped some scary thing—even in a dream—that you immediately thanked and worshipped God?
5. Read aloud Psalm 139:7-10. Is there any place where God is not present in some sense—even hell?
6. How does God turn Jonah's escape route into a trial, or "teaching moment"? Parents: can you share a trial in your life that God used to teach or correct you?
7. Jonah prays two prayers in the story: chapter 2 and 4:1-4. What's the gist of each prayer? Do you think these prayers are sincere? Are they godly?

Prayer Suggestions

Praise God for His omnipresence and that nothing can be hidden from Him. Thank Him for His loving correction of you in times past and ask for the discernment to tell a test from a punishment.

Activities

- ❖ Fish Belly! If your kids love to get icky, turn a small wading pool into a fish belly and have them load it up with stuff from the yard, such as grass clippings, mulch, leaves, etc. Let them act out getting swallowed and rescued when the "fish" vomits them out onto dry land.
- ❖ Read Psalm 107:23-32 and work up a presentation, with a reader (or readers) and others to act out this dramatic sequence.
- ❖ Make a banner out of this week's key verse.
- ❖ Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 contains some very vivid imagery. Using words, shapes, and pictures cut out of magazines or printed off the internet, make a poster collage of the prayer.

Lesson 5: Living Water

Lesson-at-a-Glance

- ❖ **Scripture Passages:** John 2:1-11, Luke 8:22-25, Matthew 14:22-33; John 4:4-14, 7:37-39
- ❖ **Key Verse:** “Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7:38)
- ❖ **Hymn:** “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vUhwjydk8A>)

Introduction/Commentary

In the beginning, the world was created by Him and for Him (Col. 1:16). Noah preached His righteousness (II Peter 2:5), Moses predicted Him (Deut. 18:15), Jonah and the other prophets anticipated Him.

Who? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who pulled together all the prophets had said about judgment and blessing and suffering and eternal peace—and created something entirely new.

In this lesson we’ll be looking back as well as forward, to the ways that God the Father’s actions in the Old Testament were echoed by God the Son’s in the New Testament. Instead of one reading followed by discussion questions, the reading is divided into five sections, each with its own questions. The unifying theme, of course, is water.

#1: Read John 2:1-11

The writer, John the Apostle, identifies turning water into a wine as the first of the “signs” (we call them miracles) that Jesus did to prove He came from God. Here, in the beginning of His ministry, He’s creating out of water, just as His Father did “in the beginning.”

There’s an important difference, of course: He’s not creating wine out of nothing. But He’s using what His Father provided at creation: the water inside each grape, as it grows plump and purple and sweet. Wine is almost entirely water, added to natural sugar that ferments and produces alcohol. In his book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis wrote that with this “sign,” Jesus is only doing quickly what God does over a long natural process that He created.

1. In John 5:19, Jesus says, “The Son can only do what the Father does.” Can you think of other things Jesus did during His ministry that copied the Father? (Hint: how does healing and multiplying loaves and fishes echo God’s creative work?)
2. Is God the Son less important or less powerful than God the Father?

#2: Read Luke 8:22-25

Don’t you wish you could have seen Jesus speak to a raging storm, and the wind suddenly fall quiet—as though the very wind could hear Him? Well, that part would have been truly awesome, but you wouldn’t have enjoyed being tossed around in a boat with waves as

high as mountains. Jesus' disciples were terrified—they could have capsized any minute and probably would have drowned. The Israelites at the Red Sea felt the same kind of terror before the Red Sea—a fearful barrier that threatened to throw them back into the clutches of the Egyptian army. The Lord provided deliverance from that disaster by raising the waters up. Jesus provided deliverance by making the waters lie flat, and like the Israelites, His disciples were astonished!

1. Why do you think Jesus was sleeping calmly in the boat?
2. How was the disciples' response in Luke 8:25 like and unlike the Israelites' response in Exodus 15:11?

#3: Read Matthew 14:22-33

This would have been an amazing sight: a solid, flesh-and-blood Man walking on a substance that is not designed to hold Him up. Again, the disciples are afraid, but it's a different kind of fear. During the storm, they feared for their lives. At the appearance of Jesus walking toward them on water, they probably feared for their souls. This is not a natural phenomenon like weather. It's unnatural, like . . . a ghost. They know that their Master is an extraordinary Man blessed by power from another world, but what if He Himself is from another world?

He is testing them, as Jonah was tested when he tried to escape from God. Jonah doubted God's power to stop him. When Simon Peter takes a bold step out on the water himself, he suddenly doubts God's power to hold him.

1. Can you think of a time when you were fearful and the Lord provided for your need? If He asked, "Why did you doubt?", what would you say to Him?
2. How was the disciples' response in Matthew 14:30 and 33 like and unlike Jonah's in Jonah 2:2 and 9?

#4: Read John 4:4-14, 7:37-39

This is a very ordinary scene: the sun is high, the day is hot, a Man has stopped at a well to rest. Someone comes to draw water: a woman, of the sort that no respectable Jewish man would even notice, much less talk to. But Jesus starts the conversation first, simply by asking for a drink. It's one of the longer conversations in the Bible, and an important one, for He uses it to identify Himself with the God who provided water out of a rock in the desert.

He makes the same claim later in His ministry, not in a small town in Samaria but in the bustling city of Jerusalem. Not to a lone despised woman but to a crowd at a feast. The "living water" is the Spirit, promised to all who believe and follow Him—not from an outside source, like a spring or a well, but a presence living within each person who comes to Him.

1. Read I Cor. 10:4, Isaiah 55:1, and Revelation 22:17. What's the common theme of all these verses? How do they tie together and complement each other?

2. In what ways is the Holy Spirit like water?

#5: Read John 5:22-27

We missed something from the Old Testament—what about judgment? The story of Noah and the flood taught that God has the right, and is right, to judge everyone who ever lived. A final judgment will come—but before then, God has provided a way for helpless sinners to repent and come to Jesus, who paid the penalty for their sins with His own blood.

1. While you live on this earth, is Jesus more like your judge or more like your defense attorney? (See Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.) Why is that a good thing?

Prayer suggestions

Praise the Lord for Jesus, who fulfilled all the promises about Him and every day offers us “living water.” Ask Him to bring us nearer to Jesus every day as we seek to follow Him.

Activities

- ❖ Consulting a physical map, make a salt-dough map of Palestine, recreating hills, valleys, and bodies of water. Paint the deserts brown, the fertile areas green, and the waters blue. With toothpick flags, mark all the places where Jesus performed his water miracles and talked with the Samaritan woman at the well.
- ❖ If you have a big cardboard box lying around (or can get one from an appliance store), let it be your boat and act out the dramatic scene of Jesus calming the waves. (Make sure no one falls overboard!)
- ❖ Research how wine is made from grape juice. Speculate on the ways Jesus shortcut the process.
- ❖ With the aid of a freezer and a camp stove or hot plate, demonstrate the three forms water can take, depending on temperature: ice, liquid, and gas. Here’s another opportunity for speculation: What might it take for Jesus to walk on a liquid? Would He have to alter the composition of His body, or of the water? And what does this indicate about His divinity?

Lesson 6: Born of Water and Spirit

Week-at-a-Glance

- ❖ Scripture Passages: John 3:1-8, Acts 27
- ❖ Key Verse: Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)
- ❖ Hymn: “How Firm a Foundation” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTqRiP2w0_8)

Introduction/Commentary

In Lesson 5 we mentioned that Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about Himself, and at that same time created something entirely new. In this lesson we'll look more closely about what that is.

As you remember, Jesus spoke of Himself as “living water,” and promised that anyone who believed in and followed Him would be blessed with a spring that would never run dry. Living water is the Holy Spirit—the very same Spirit of God who hovered over the waters in Genesis 1:2 now lives within every believer. The Spirit cannot die. And Jesus promised that we who have His Spirit will never truly die, either.

But first we must be “born again,” or “born from above.” When a person is led by the Holy Spirit to truly believe that Jesus died for his sins and rose again from the dead, never to die again, it's as if that person has begun a brand-new life: a life as God the Father's own adopted child, who will rise again after death, just as Jesus did. That's what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus that he must be born of water and the Spirit: water represents cleansing from sin, the Spirit gives new life.

Read John 3:1-8

When Jesus returned to heaven, His followers experienced even more blessings of this new birth for themselves. The Spirit of God within them gave them the power to do what Jesus told them to do: to go out and preach the gospel to every nation. You've probably heard how a man named Saul hated the very name of Jesus—until he met Jesus. Then Saul's life was changed, because the man himself was changed, into a “new creature in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17). Saul even became known by another name: Paul. The book of Acts relates many of his adventures. Toward the end of the book, we see Paul boarding a ship to sail to Rome, which was at that time the center of the world.

In the Old Testament, remember, the sea was largely understood as hostile to mankind: a place of chaos and disorder. But notice how God is making things new: now the sea has become a highway to spread His message of forgiveness and salvation! The book of Acts is only the beginning. For the next two thousand years, missionaries like Paul will travel to the ends of the earth to carry the gospel of Jesus, just as He promised they would do in Acts 1:8. For almost all that period of time, the sea would carry their ships and bear their message.

Read Acts 27

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Jesus calmed the storm on the lake of Galilee when His disciples begged for help. Do you think Paul might have begged the Lord to calm the storm when he was being tossed about in a wooden ship for two whole weeks? If so, why do you think the Lord let the storm go on?
- ❖ In what ways was Paul's life in danger during this voyage? (See verses 10 and 42.) How could he stay calm?
- ❖ How many people were on board the ship with Paul? How many lives were lost?
- ❖ Have you ever experienced a "storm" in your life that you felt would never stop? How did you get through it?
- ❖ What have you learned about water (especially the sea) in the Bible? Review together the part that water has played in God's story.
- ❖ Have you experienced the new birth? When did that happen? In what ways are you a new creature in Christ?
- ❖ Revelation 21:1 pictures a new heaven and a new earth, ". . . and the sea will be no more." There are many ways to interpret this puzzling verse--what do you think it means?

Prayer suggestions

Thank God for His eternal plan to take His message of salvation to the entire world, by land and sea. Ask Him to increase your faith to help you weather the "storms" in your life.

Activities

- ❖ Using the narrative in Acts 27, write a radio play depicting these dramatic events. Radio plays depend on sound alone, so you'll have to create some characters besides the few that are named and be sure to add sound effects. Then record it! (If time is limited, just choose a few paragraphs from the narrative and dramatize those.)
- ❖ Chart the course of Paul's voyage on a modern map of the world.
- ❖ Make a list of the many details about ships and sailing in this story, then research seafaring in New Testament times. How many facts in Acts 27 are corroborated by outside sources?
- ❖ Look up lutheranmissions.org and count the number of countries in which our Church of the Lutheran Confession is doing mission work. If you have time, read some of the stories of mission work provided on the website.