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# 3

## *Come and See*

### **Background from the Author**

In this session John the Baptizer makes another declaration about who Jesus is and then temporarily moves off the stage. A comparison of how John is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel with the Synoptics makes clear just how pointedly the Gospel writer is limiting John's prominence in this Gospel. It will be useful in this session to explore in more detail the way the Gospel writer uses the material pertaining to John the Baptizer. In doing so, it will become clearer to the participants that writers of Scripture do indeed pick and choose what they include in order to make specific points. It is important to see the four Gospels as separate works, each with its own theology and point of view. Help the participants to respect what the author of John is doing. When they are able to look at the Gospel writers as writers of theology, they will gain more from a reading of each work.

The call of the disciples provides a way to begin the discussion of what following Jesus may mean to each participant. The challenge is to be able to let go of the status quo in order to move in a new direction. The first disciples had to let go of John the Baptizer. Nathanael had to let go of his prejudice. This session may help individuals to begin to think more deeply about what it is that they must let go of—and what they must embrace—in order to follow Jesus.

This may also be the place to begin the discussion of the nature and purpose of the church. Nowhere in the New Testament is the church seen as optional, and certainly not in John!

Jesus' words, "Follow me" are marching orders not only for individual Christians, but for the church. Begin to explore with the group the reasons that Jesus forms a community instead of simply giving individuals his teachings. The importance of the church will come to prominence in later sessions, but the idea should surface here.

The Wedding at Cana is the first "sign" that Jesus performs in John's Gospel. Here is a place to look more closely at the difference between a "sign" and what many people call a "miracle." For John, signs are means of seeing the presence and nature of God at work in Jesus. This first sign may be one of the hardest to interpret since it is probably tied to Jesus' superseding or fulfilling the Jewish festivals. Here water for purification becomes the wine of the new age.

Signs are not treated consistently in this Gospel. Jesus generally takes a negative view of "sign faith," but the Gospel writer has some positive comments about them (see 20:30), and the people depend on them and on occasion argue Jesus' case based on them. At one point Jesus urges faith based on signs (works) in 14:11. Help the people to determine what it is about Jesus that brings them to faith.

Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus is shown juxtaposed to the festivals of Judaism in such a way as to suggest that he is replacing, or, perhaps better, fulfilling their true meaning. John sees in Jesus a movement away from shadowy partial truths to the full truth displayed in the clear light of Jesus. The deeds of Jesus deepen and make clear the meaning of all that went before in God's dealings with his people.

The allusions to the Old Testament may be too subtle for participants whose knowledge of the Old Testament is limited. Point up along the way those places where Old Testament symbolism and persons are referred to. One of those places may be where Jesus refers to angels ascending and descending (John 1:51). If this is an allusion to Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12) then Jesus is here being described as the very "house of God" or gateway to God. In this session, Jesus also cleanses the temple with the authority of the temple's "owner," that is, God himself. The more people see Jesus' ties to the Old Testament, the richer this Gospel will become for them.

Finally, the workings of the members of the Trinity begin to be seen early in the Gospel. John does not give a definition of the Trinity or a formula for how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are related. John does what is probably far better: he shows the work of each and lets them interweave in a complex relationship which he does not attempt to explain. Do not get caught up in trying to explain the workings of the Trinity. It is much more useful simply to keep pointing out the interworkings that John describes. It is probably better to postpone a deep discussion of the Trinity until Session 11.

There is a great deal in each session that could be profitably studied. In John's Gospel topics come up again and again. It may be enough to excite the participants' interest in several areas, being aware that they will be touched on again in future sessions.

## **SESSION PLANS**

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### ***Learning Objectives***

This session is intended to enable the participants to:

1. Describe how John uses material, such as the John the Baptizer narratives, to make his points.
2. Look more closely at what it means to be called by Jesus.
3. Explore the relationship between Jesus and Judaism.

### ***Resources You May Need***

Chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and markers

Worksheet A, "John the Baptizer"

Bible dictionaries

Commentaries on the Gospel of John

### SETTING THE STAGE

1. **Opening.** Welcome everyone and open with a prayer.

**and**

2. **Overview.** Ask the participants to open their Bibles to John 1:19-2:25. Outline this text by letting the group discover the different topics. The material can be divided like this: 1:19-42, John the Baptizer; 1:43-51, the call of the disciples; 2:1-12, the wedding at Cana; 2:13-22, cleansing the temple; and 2:23-25, sign believers. Ask the group members to identify what they see as the main ideas in each section. Discuss briefly.

### EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

1. **John in the Synoptics.** Hand out Worksheet A, “John the Baptizer.” Have the group work on it in teams. Make sure the teams understand that they are to split up the work on the worksheet. Call the group members back together and briefly discuss their findings. Briefly discuss the importance of hearing not only what the Gospel writer relates, but also the Gospel writer’s own theology as part of the message.

**or**

**Lecture.** Give a minilecture on the role of John the Baptizer in the Synoptic Gospels and in John. Be sure to discuss the importance of hearing not only what the Gospel writer relates, but also the Gospel writer’s own theology as part of the message.

2. **Signs and Miracles.** Hand out good quality Bible dictionaries and commentaries on John to each team (more than one per team, if possible). Make sure that each dictionary has an article on “signs” in John’s Gospel or an article on signs and miracles. Have teams with commentaries look up John 2:1-12. At tables, have the team members read aloud the information they find in the Bible dictionaries and

commentaries about signs. Have them look also at paragraph four under “The Wedding at Cana” in the *Resource Book*. Have someone on each team jot down the most important information to share with the whole group.

Bring the group back together and let the teams share their information. Discuss briefly with the group the meaning and purpose of signs in John’s Gospel.

Then have the group turn to John 2:23-25. Let one person read it aloud. Here is a group who believes in Jesus because they have seen signs. Jesus does not trust himself to them. They are “sign believers,” those who believe because they see Jesus do something that they cannot explain. Compare them to those who believe (the ones who are already disciples) in 2:11. What is the difference in the disciples’ faith and that of the crowd in verses 23-25? Highlight the fact that for Jesus “sign faith” is not the depth of faith that he is looking for in people. It may be a place to start, but it is not a place to end.

**and/or**

**Signs and “Believing.”** Put the following texts from John on the board or on newsprint:

2:23-25; 3:1-3; 4:46-48; 6:2, 14; 6:26; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47-48; 12:37; 20:30-31

Ask various class members to read each text aloud. After each text is read, ask the group whether this is a positive or negative statement about signs. What does it say to them about the relationship between signs and believing? Ask the group what, at this stage, they think “believing” means for John. Add that the term “believing” will be an important one throughout the Gospel. Note that the use of the term “sign” is not consistently negative or positive. You may want to add the information to the chart you began in Session 1.

- 3. Jesus and Judaism.** Have the participants individually skim John 1:19-2:25 to find Old Testament references and mention of people or events from the Old Testament, (priests, Levites, the Messiah, Elijah, the prophet, Isaiah 40:3, Lamb, Moses, the law and the prophets, King of Israel, angels of God ascending and descending, Passover, temple at Jerusalem, Psalm 69:9). Call the group together and list the items that they have noted. Add any that they have missed.

Ask the group what this list says to them about the importance of Judaism in defining Jesus. Discuss with them John's understanding that Jesus surpasses or, better yet, fulfills all that God had done and promised the people of God to that point. That John sees this as important attests to the importance that John gives to Judaism. Help the group to see how Jesus becomes the completion of what the Jewish festivals celebrate. Remind the group that John's negative comments about "the Jews" are not directed toward Judaism or toward Jewish people, but toward the Jewish synagogue leaders.

**and/or**

**The Temple.** Give a minilecture about the importance of the temple for worship in Jesus' day. Be sure to include mention of how verse 19 might have had special significance for those who lived after the destruction of the temple (70 AD).

**and/or**

**Jewish Festivals.** Give a brief overview of the Jewish festivals found in the Gospel of John. The Access Bible with the Apocrypha (Oxford University Press, 1999) has such an overview on page 154 of the New Testament (hardcover edition). Remind the group that throughout the Gospel Jewish festivals will appear as the settings for some of Jesus' sayings about his nature and purpose. John may here be showing Jesus as the fulfillment of what the festivals celebrate.

4. **“Come and See.”** Ask the group members how new people come to find their way to their churches. Is there an Evangelism Committee or like group that is charged with “bringing people to Jesus”? If approximately one half of the people in a town or city are not currently attending a church, how many people does that mean in each member’s town or city? How are they being invited by each congregation to “come and see”? Look together at John 1:35-37 and 43-46. Who are the people who have come to Jesus in these passages? What was the catalyst that brought them to Jesus? How could a congregation find multiple ways of bringing people to Jesus?

**and/or**

5. **Evangelism Techniques.** Divide the participants into two groups. Assign one group the task of putting together a skit showing the wrong way (or several wrong ways) to attempt to bring people to Jesus (assuming that they will be “introduced” to Jesus by what the church says and does). If the group needs help, suggest such things as belittling the people’s current beliefs, telling them they are condemned unless they come to church, that they are terrible sinners who need to repent, etc. Have the other group put together a skit showing what they believe to be good ways to encourage people to come to Jesus (such things as showing genuine care about others, respecting their beliefs, making them feel comfortable, sharing what the church has meant to the members, the members’ willingness to come with the people and introduce them to others, etc.). Have each group choose “actors” and present its skit to the entire group. Briefly discuss what it means to “bring people to Jesus.” Read John 1:35-37 and 43-46 aloud.

**and**

**Definition.** As a group, write a definition of the mission of the church.

CLOSING

**1. Scripture.** Read Isaiah 40:3-9.

**and**

**2. Prayer.** Close with a prayer.

***Looking Ahead***

The idea of being “born anew” or “born from above” is introduced in Session 4. You might want to begin investigating some of the alternative interpretations of this concept in a good Bible dictionary.

Exploring the Scripture #2 in Session 5 asks you to distribute copies of your church’s liturgy for Holy Communion. You may want to ask your minister for a copy now so you have time to review it and make copies for each participant.



## Worksheet A

### John the Baptizer

This worksheet is to be done by a team. Each team member should pick one or two texts from the Synoptic Gospels and one or two from John's Gospel. When all on the team have completed their assignments, share the information and together answer questions 1 through 5 at the end of this worksheet.

Read the following texts. In the space provided after each text note what John the Baptizer is doing and/or saying. Also write down what is being said about John the Baptizer and by whom.

1. Luke 1:8-17

2. Luke 3:1-20

3. Matthew 14:1-13

4. Matthew 11:1-15

5. Matthew 17:10-13

6. Mark 8:27-29

7. Luke 20:1-8

Read the following passages from the Gospel of John. Next to each text, note what John's subject matter is or what is being said about John the Baptizer and by whom.

1. John 1:6-8

2. John 1:19-28

3. John 1:35-37

4. John 3:27-30

5. John 5:33-36

6. John 10:40-41

Questions:

1. What things are said about John the Baptizer in the Synoptics? Who says them?
2. List the topics John the Baptizer talks about in the Synoptics:
3. What things are said about John the Baptizer in the Gospel of John? Who says them?

