

Notes

Please note that this document contains 3 different versions of the "Exploring the Word" worksheet. Each version contains the same Gospel texts, Reflection and questions, but with a different configuration of "alternative views". The suggested activities are applicable to a variety of age ranges. Some activities may not be suitable in all circumstances.

Activities

- Each member of the group writes down on a slip of paper a generous act that could be performed by another member of the group. These are collected and distributed either randomly or members select which act they would like to do. Set a time limit to accomplish these acts and set up an opportunity for group members to report back on the outcomes of their act. (A twist on this with an older group might be to indicate a generous act that could be done for yourself and then again they are distributed either randomly or by selection.)
- Identify ways in which you can support a welfare group, a family or individual this Christmas – perhaps donate a gift to a 'Giving Tree' or put together a hamper of food that could help a family in need.

Gospel Journal



How do you think the crowd, tax collectors and soldiers reacted to John's words to them?

Have you ever experienced a real 'change of heart'?

Apart from charitable giving, how can generosity be expressed?

In what aspect/s of your life do you need to adopt a more generous spirit?

What does it mean to you to be 'baptised in the Holy Spirit'?



Gospel Lk 3:10-18

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

Reflection

Is it any wonder that there was a growing sense among the people that John might be the Christ? His teaching in the first part of this week's gospel might just as easily have come from the mouth of Jesus. It demonstrates for us just how much John was preparing the way for Jesus: even his teaching was in line with what Jesus would later say. In this instance, the people gathered around John (presumably having been baptised by him) are asking how they should live out their new-found conversion of heart. John's response to the three groups is about the need for generosity and justice. It is about not taking more than your share when someone else does not have sufficient. To the crowd of people, he instructs them to give away a second tunic to someone who doesn't have one at all and to share their food with those who are hungry. To the tax collectors, he cautioned them to collect no more than what they were supposed to. Tax collectors made their profit by overcharging taxpayers. Together with the fact that they worked for the Roman occupiers, this made tax collectors one of the most despised groups in society. John's caution to them is to be just in their dealings. He also cautions the soldiers against intimidation and extorting money from the people to supplement their pay. The themes of justice and hospitality that will echo throughout the gospel of Luke are clearly evident in this episode with John. When the people start to talk about him being the Christ, John is quick to point them to the one who is still to come; the one who will share with them more fully the love of God and the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Focus

Baptised with the Holy Spirit

John makes clear to his audience the difference between himself and the Messiah who is still to come. His ritual of baptism will pale in comparison with the baptism with the Holy Spirit that the Christ will offer. Compared to a symbolic action of baptism, Jesus will offer the people a tangible experience of life in the Holy Spirit. He will give them not only a glimpse of the reign of God, but an invitation to enter fully into it. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a lived experience, not just a ritual action.

Have you Thought?

A change of heart

The baptism that John preached and practised was a baptism of repentance. What he called on people to do was to recognise the areas of their lives that were unbalancing their relationship with God. There was a strong recognition that unless they were in right relationship with one another they could not be in right relationship with God. In recognising the need for change in their lives, John challenged them to also make a change of heart: to approach their lives differently. This is why they were questioning him about practical ways of living out their new commitment.

- Q. *How do you think the crowd, tax collectors and soldiers reacted to John's words to them?*
- Q. *Have you ever experienced a real 'change of heart'?*
- Q. *Apart from charitable giving, how can generosity be expressed?*
- Q. *In what aspect/s of your life do you need to adopt a more generous spirit?*
- Q. *What does it mean to you to be 'baptised in the Holy Spirit'?*



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Living the Gospel

Generosity of spirit

John's words to the crowd, the tax collectors and the soldiers are about adopting a spirit of generosity and a generosity of spirit. A generosity of spirit can be expressed simply in the attitude with which we approach other people: a positive, hope-filled and generous attitude will often turn around a potentially negative situation. As we approach the Christmas season, there is a need for practical actions of generosity as well. Those in need can approach Christmas with dread rather than joyful expectation. It can be the hardest time of year for struggling families. Acts of generosity can make all the difference.

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