

“Selected Gospel Sections”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 1

“John the Immerser”

Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:6-28.

Objective: To understand the message of the Gospel accounts in their context within each work independently and then to compare the accounts to each other to seek understanding of emphasis and focus. The goal is then to apply this message to our time and context in order to understand the message’s call on our lives.

Materials: To use the Greek, Syriac, and other ancient translations in order to help us understand the message of these Gospels. We will also examine the writings about these passages in journal articles, commentaries and other sources.

Procedures

1. To first translate each text from Greek and then compare it to other ancient translations
2. To identify issues of importance within the texts and to explore possible meanings as they applied to the original audience.
3. To take the meaning for the original audience of the Gospels and to understand it how applies to our modern context and cultural situation.
4. To explore ways that these text call the disciples of Jesus to live their lives as faithful followers.

Matthew 3:1-12: ¹In those days John the Immerser appeared, in the wilderness of Judea, preaching ² [and] saying “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has become near.” ³ For this is the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke, saying, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of *YHWH*, make straight His paths.” ⁴ And John had the clothing from camel hair, a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea went out to him, and all the surrounding region of the Jordan, ⁶ and they were cleansed in the Jordan River by him admitting their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his

Mark 1:2-11: ² Just as it has been written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger (*ἄγγελόν*) before the face of you, who constructs the way for you. ³ A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘prepare the way of *YHWH*, make straight His paths.’” ⁴ John the immerser appeared in the wilderness and was preaching an immersion of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And the whole Judean countryside and all the ones of Jerusalem went out to him, and were immersed by him in the Jordan River, admitting their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed in camel hair and had a leather belt around his waist, he was eating locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he was preaching saying, “The one coming after me is more powerful

Luke 3:1-20: ¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was Tetrarch of Galilee, Philip his brother was Tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachontis and Lysanias Tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came upon John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went unto all [the] region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ just as it had been written in the scroll of the words of Isaiah the prophet: *A voice crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of YHWH, make straight His paths.* ⁵ *Every valley will*

John 1:6-28: ⁶ There was born a man, with the name of John having been sent from God. ⁷ He came to testify concerning the light, in order that everyone might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but to testify concerning the light. ⁹ The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, and the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came unto his own, and his own did not accept him. ¹² But as many as received him, he gave to them power to become children of God. ¹³ Who are born not out of blood neither out of the will of the flesh nor out of the will of man, but they were born out of God. ¹⁴

washing, he said to them, "Offspring of snakes! Who informed you to flee from the coming wrath." ⁸ "Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not suppose to say in yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father; for I say to you that God is able out of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰ Already the axe lies at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree not bearing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. ¹¹ I cleanse you in water unto repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than me; I am not sufficient to carry His sandals. He will cleanse you in the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and will

than me, I am not worthy to bow down and loosen the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I have immersed you in water, but he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit." ⁹ And in those days it came about that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was immersed in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰ And immediately coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens being split apart and the Spirit descending as a dove upon him. ¹¹ And a voice came out of heaven, "You are my beloved Son in you I am well pleased."

be filled and every mountain and high place will be humbled, and the crooked will be straight and rough roads smooth. ⁶ And all flesh will see the salvation of God. ⁷ Therefore he said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit worthy of repentance and do not begin to say to yourself we have Abraham as father. For I say to you that God is able out of these stones to raise up children of Abraham. ⁹ The axe is already lying at the root of tree: Therefore every tree not producing good fruit is being cut down and cast into the fire." ¹⁰ And the crowds were asking him,

The word became flesh and pitched a tent among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as the unique one from the father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testified concerning him and having cried out saying, "He who comes after me whom I said, 'The one coming after me existed before me, because he was before me.'" ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we all received grace upon grace; ¹⁷ for the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has at any time seen God. God the unique one, the one being at the Father's side, that one has interpreted Him. ¹⁹ This is the testimony of John, when the Jews out of Jerusalem,

gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff will be burned up with unquenchable fire.”

“What then should we do?”¹¹ He answered saying to them, “The one having two tunics must share with the one having none, and the one having food must do the same.”¹² And even tax collectors came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?”¹³ He replied to them, “Do not collect more than your are assigned to collect.”¹⁴ Soldiers also said to him, “What about us?” He said to them, “Do not extort or falsely accuse anyone, and be content with your wages.”¹⁵ The people were filled with expectation and they were all wondering in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ.¹⁶ John replied to them all saying, “I immerse you with water, but the one coming is more powerful than me, I

the priests and the Levites, they asked him, “Who are you?”²⁰ And he confessed and did not deny that, “I am not the Christ.”²¹ They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” And he said “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” And he answered, “No.”²² They said, “Who are you? Because we must give an answer to the ones sending us. What do you say concerning yourself?”²³ He said, “I am a voice crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of *YHWH*, just as the prophet Isaiah said.”²⁴ And those being sent out from the Pharisees²⁵ asked, “Why do you immerse if you are not the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet?”²⁶ John answered, saying, “I immerse in water, one

am not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.”¹⁷ The winnowing fork in his hand cleans out his threshing floor and brings together the wheat into his storehouse. But he will burn up the straw with unquenchable fire.”¹⁸ With many other words he exhorted proclaiming good news to the people.¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch was being criticized by him concerning Herodias the wife of his brother, and concerning all the evil Herod had done.²⁰ He added also this to all his evil deeds: he shut up John in prison.

greater stands among you, who you do not know.²⁷ The one coming after me, who I am not worthy to loose the strap of his sandal.”²⁸ This encounter took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan where John was immersing.

As we begin this study it is important for you to know that one of the criterion for selecting passages for this study was that there are passages that have connections with at least 3 of the gospels for each of those chosen. A great many of those selected have connections in all 4 Gospels. Theoretically, this would seem to indicate that such accounts conveyed information that was considered important to the proclamation of the Gospel message in the early church. It seems reasonable to then expect that those same passages would be critically important for us today in our proclamation of the Gospel. At times there is the need to unlock some of the background in order to gain the insight necessary for understanding the message that will have been conveyed to the original audience. It is also important to recognize that times have changed and to get the same impact in today's world may require creative imagination on the part of both the teacher and the audience. Imagine hearing the words of Jesus for the very first time.

The introduction of the coming of John the Immerser begins focusing on different aspects in each of the Gospel accounts, and yet it is quite clear that they are all recounting the same event about the same man yet with each emphasizing aspects of the story and using that account to impact their audience in unique ways. It is perhaps in the things retained, and in the differences, that there is much to learn about the focus of each author and the perceived need of the audience. The focus perhaps gives us pointers as to what is

central in the message and what is seen as critical for the particular audience. It is in the midst of the uniformity, and in the diversity that we find indications of what was viewed as essential to the message and perhaps that which will prove beneficial to us in communicating with a modern audience.

I have tried to select translation options that move us away from more traditional readings that will not impact us in ways that the original audience was impacted as these words were first spoken. Where an Old Testament passage is quoted and uses the actual covenant name of God (*YHWH*) I have used the covenant name of God *YHWH*. Where there are Anglicized Greek words such as to *baptize* I have sought to use actual translations of those words that express the original meaning of these words rather than the Anglicized form which can take on a multitude of modern meanings. This may seem awkward, but hopefully it will add a freshness to your reading of these accounts that generates new and deeper understandings of these very familiar readings. The title for “John the Baptist” becomes “John the Immerser.” I have also placed key Greek words after their English translations to add clarity and to provide additional tools for those capable of reading Greek.

As you will notice there is considerable variance between the length of the accounts in the four Gospels with Luke’s being the longest, followed by John’s account, then Matthew’s and the shortest account

is Mark's. Matthew begins with a rather matter of fact introduction while Mark focuses on the prophecy of Isaiah, Luke will anchor his introduction in the Roman calendar as occurring during the reign of Tiberius. John on the other hand begins by grounding the coming of John as a person being sent from God. There is much controversy regarding John's usage of what have been seen by some as Greek terms, such as the term *logos* (word - *λόγος*). Some have seen this as a word that should be attached somehow to Greek philosophy, while others have seen it as more closely to be aligned to more Jewish concepts, such as Wisdom,¹ the *Memra* (Aramaic for Word) and the *Shekinah* that are prominent in the Aramaic Targums. Certainly, over time, the term (*logos* - word - *λόγος*) came to be attached more to Greek philosophical ideas as the growing Gentile audience would have been far more familiar to the readers of John's Gospel. Though it is highly debatable that this was the original intent of John as he wrote this Gospel account. It seems more likely that John will have focused more on the Jewish understanding of this idea and associated it more with wisdom, the *Memra* (Aramaic for "word") and perhaps the divine manifestation of God described as *Shekinah* (God's manifested glory, or presence).

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 369-385.

Keener will place the most likely place of origin for John's Gospel in Roman Asia (likely Ephesus, or Smyrna), though certainly with a Jewish influence that seems to come from the region of Galilee. He believes that the document came to be accepted late (it was the last Gospel to be accepted as canonical). He believes this may be the case due to the fact that it was written in such an isolated place within the empire and therefore it would perhaps not have been as widely known, or disseminated as it might have been if it had been composed in one of the major metropolitan areas.²

Each of the Gospel writers is communicating the gospel message to a different audience and they each emphasize different things. It is proposed that Matthew's Gospel was composed at Antioch around A.D. 80-90. After A.D. 70 the church at Antioch would have been severed from the more conservative umbilical cord of the church in Jerusalem, and James, the brother of Jesus. By this time most Jews had rejected the Christian Gospel and it had been accepted by a great many Gentiles and this raised many questions concerning the connection of the Christian Gospel to its Jewish roots. Matthew seems to focus on

² Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, Vol. 1, pp. 142-149.

synthesizing and compromising with the competing concepts and competing traditions that were inherited from the first generation of Christians.³

There is a great deal of uncertainty with regard to exact circumstances for the writing of the Gospel of Mark. Mark will focus a great deal on the suffering of Jesus as well as the fact that those who truly follow Him will also be expected to suffer. It may even be the case that the believers in Jesus to whom Mark addressed his account were in danger of persecution, and therefore they needed to be told that this did not mean that their faith in the Jesus was misplaced. Mark is far more interested in solving theological problems than he is in providing a historical account.⁴ Mark has a message to convey to his audience concerning Jesus and history is only relevant as it serves his primary purpose of conveying an understanding of who Jesus is.

Luke was a gifted storyteller and his writing is filled with short vignettes with each acting to draw the reader into the world conveyed by Luke in his Gospel account. Luke is an apologetic historian of a very particular sort. He sets the task for himself of continuing the biblical story, not to defend the Christian

³ John P. Meier, "Matthew, Gospel of," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4 (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 622-641.

⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, "Mark, Gospel of," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4 (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 541-557.

movement. He seeks to powerfully demonstrate that the story of Jesus is rooted in the story of Israel. Luke seeks to assure his, primarily gentile, readers that they can have confidence in God's word to them.⁵

John's purpose in writing his gospel is explicitly stated in 20:31⁶, which is nurturing the faith of the readers that they might have life. There is some debate regarding the exact purpose for the writing of this Gospel, whether it was focused on evangelism, or more directed toward an established Christian community in order to strengthen their faith in the midst of a critical situation. Many put forward the idea that the expulsion from the synagogue, either after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, or a later time is the occasion for the writing of this Gospel. The writer is seeking to help his readers deal with their self-identity and Christian life in a minority situation that is experiencing some oppression. The dates proposed for the writing of this material vary greatly depending upon which of these situations is proposed as the background for the composition.⁷

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, "Luke-Acts, Book of," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4 (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 403-420.

⁶ **But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.** CEB.

⁷ John Kysar, "John, The Gospel of," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 912-931.

As we move onto examine our texts, Matthew seems to focus on repentance and the fulfillment of prophecy, while Mark focuses on the fulfillment of prophecy, Luke seems most interested in giving a historical account while John, initially will focus on John the Immerser as a man sent from God, with the purpose of revealing Jesus into which John will inject grandiose and spectacular context. Certainly the Jewish people were expectant at this time, but what about those that lived in other lands, and followed other gods, were they too looking and expectant? Perhaps it is an inherent trait that when people suffer they look for something better, something more than their current situation to bring light and hope into their lives. Matthew will tap into this expectation on the part of his audience and begin to challenge them to recognize that a great change has come with the preaching of John and the immersion of Jesus. This seems to be something shared by all: **things will never be the same again**, the one who is coming **will change everything forever**.

All four gospel accounts will come to refer to the prophecy of making straight the way of *YHWH*. Why would this message be so important, or have such meaning to those hearing this proclamation from this wild man crying out in the wilderness? The people of Israel longed for a better life: a life where freedom prevailed and they dreamt of the day that God would begin to fulfill His promises to Israel. In many ways this

same type of thing can be seen in Christians today as they long for heaven. There are lots of questions that could be explored here. The question is, “What is better?” For many in Judaism, it would be to be free from the Romans and really to replace the Romans as the dominant world power with Israel becoming the dominant world power, to bring God’s justice, God’s laws, and the Jewish way of life to the forefront of the world. These Jews living in the first-century Roman Empire wanted a better world and they defined that better world in the terms that they conceived would be better. They also knew that there was no way they were going to have the power as a small nation to do what needed to be done in their own power, or strength so they looked to God and prayed to Him for deliverance from their affliction as their ancestors had (the exodus, the return from Babylonian captivity, and the Maccabean revolt).

In the world today, with news from so many sources we are constantly bombarded with tragedy after tragedy, injustice after injustice. In all of this, it is really easy to recognize that the problems of this world are too large for us to handle on our own. Our despair searches for signs of hope and light in the midst of the hopelessness and darkness. The words concerning John the Immerser call on us even today to believe there might be hope, as they did almost two thousand years ago in the wilderness of Judea along the Jordan River. We hope that our world will one day be cleansed of all that which brings chaos, disorder, death, disease and



disaster. A place devoid of all these things has for many Christians become their vision of heaven, or at least as heavenly. John will actually describe the one proclaimed to be coming after him as “The True light that shines on all people.”⁸

The contrast and focus of the various presentations of the Gospel writers is astounding. Matthew focuses on the need for repentance, and the coming of the Messiah. Mark focuses on the fulfillment of ancient prophecy regarding the coming of *YHWH*, and the coming of the Messiah. Luke chooses to set his account in the context of history in a manner that is far more familiar to us in the West, but he too seeks to anchor Christianity within a Jewish historical context. His account is longer than all the others; he not only focuses on the prophecy of Isaiah, and repentance, he wants his audience to understand the imminence of the coming judgement and he connects this with the coming of the Messiah. John on the other hand grounds his account in the context of cosmic proportions, light and darkness, divine wisdom, becoming children of God, God living in the midst of His people, the Messiah and His true identity, all being the fulfillment of prophecy, all of this coming true in the Jesus as Messiah.

⁸ John 1:9.

In John's Gospel the coming of the Messiah is cast as a singular event that is the beginning of the realization, not just of the hopes and dreams of humanity, but portends more, in that it is not simply the imagination of human beings that is fulfilled, but the plan imagined by *YHWH* Himself, through the "Word" (*logos* - word - *λόγος*), the very embodiment of divine wisdom. What was hoped for by the ancient Israelites was far less than what God hoped for His people. In their wildest imaginations the people of Israel could not conceive of the what God was going to do for His children. Still today, even with the full account of the coming, life, death, burial, and resurrection human beings still struggle to comprehend the magnitude and the nature of what God did through Jesus Christ and what He calls forth from His children.

God does not send simply an agent, a servant, but He sends His own precious Son, the Word, the divine agent of creation. The Messiah was far more than the imaginings of people who thought peace came through strength and power, not through love and loyalty. Still today, people forget this as they have throughout the history of the Church. The weapons of the Church to oppose evil are not the force of arms and the power of great strength, but the things so often neglected and traded in the heat of the moment and in the name of resisting evil, love, loyalty, trust, and the pursuit of peace. To resist evil with evil is to become that which is to be opposed, evil. In the midst of conflict often what is first lost are those things that are so often seen as



the small things, the less important things, love, faith, hope, and trust. The love called forth by the heart of God is based in the truth of who God is and the calling of that truth is to be reciprocated in the hearts of His image-bearers, the children of God. As we have the beginning of the story of God's good news we are challenged to reexamine our understanding of the calling of God for our lives.

Knowing the lengths to which God is willing to go to reach those who no longer stand in relationship with Him the question is what does that mean for us? So often we intend to proclaim over ourselves the title "Christian" with the meaning that we are disciples of Jesus Christ. However, do we truly seek to comprehend what it means to be a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ? Being a disciple means seeking to be like, to think like, to act like, Jesus, to become a duplicate of Jesus. People should not simply have to read about what Jesus looks like, they should be able to see Jesus in the lives of each disciple. Each disciple should be a living representation of their Master, Jesus. Jesus not only lives in the far off realm of heaven, but in the life of each disciple, in their actions, in their attitudes, in the way they conduct themselves in each and every interaction with others.

The coming of Jesus calls forth hope from the heart of humanity, but so often the focus of that hope has been based in the context of our individuality and has focused on personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus

calls us to reflect on God and to envision Him in new ways. Michael Battle challenges us with these words regarding our vision of God: “The vision of God surpasses the ability of every creature, and it is impossible to attain it except by God’s gift. God attaches God’s self to the intellect as an intelligible form that allows our sight of God. But does not become the intelligible form of a created intellect unless the created intellect participates in God. This participation is necessary in order that the divine that the divine substance be seen.”⁹ God called Israel as a community to Himself, He did not just for individuals to come to Him. As individuals we are called to, in our individuality sacrifice that individuality for the benefit of the other, to be part of a community, a community of faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

In the West we have focused so powerfully on the needs, wants, and desires of the individual that we have failed to comprehend that the message of the Gospel is a message of calling into community. Jesus as the divine *logos* comes and lives a life of sacrifice to call others to join together and become the community of God. This is a calling of focus on the other, the weak, the poor, the orphan, the powerless, and to accept a different reality of existence other than a pursuit of power, individual fulfillment, and personal glory. The call of the authors of these four accounts begin their accounts calling for us to imagine something new,

⁹ Michael Battle, *Heaven on Earth* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), p. 108.



something different, to recognize that nothing will ever be the same again. The Kingdom of God has come and it has broken into the reality of earth and for those that answer the call of Jesus, as His disciples, all things are changed. The call of Christ is a call to transformation of all things on earth to become as they are in heaven.

Synopsis

A basis for the selection of passages for this study is found in them having some connection in three or more of the Gospel accounts. This would seem to indicate a universal, or foundational aspect to the information in those accounts to the core of the Gospel message. Sometimes we are so familiar with texts as they have been traditionally translated in English that we fail to feel the impact that these texts will have had on their original audience. I have provided translations in this lesson to try and bring some of that impact back to us by choosing alternative ways of translating familiar texts and by actually translating anglicized words with their meaning rather using their anglicized form.

In this first lesson I have provided a short background for each of the Gospel accounts. John was likely written in Roman Asia Minor and is likely intended primarily for that audience. The world of the first century was a world that was searching for a reason to hope for something better. For wealthy members of the Roman world life was likely not too bad, but for the majority of people life was hard and justice was scarce and hard to obtain for the average person. Matthew's Gospel was likely composed in Antioch and



focuses on things that would help Gentile Christians to understand their place within Jewish roots. He seeks to help his audience find their way in the midst of the fact that most Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

The Gospel of Mark focuses on the suffering of Jesus and makes it clear that those who would be His disciples can expect to suffer too. They needed to understand that suffering was not a sign that they were wrong, but the opposite, that they were on the same path as Jesus. The focus is upon Jesus and who He is.

Luke was a great storyteller and he will use this gift to convey the Gospel message within the context of history in a manner that will ground what Jesus did in the context of history in a manner quite different from the other Gospel accounts. Luke seeks to assure his audience, of primarily gentile readers that they can have confidence in God's word.

John is perhaps the most explicit in giving us his purpose in writing his Gospel account as a statement at 20:31: that goal is for the nurturing of faith so that the readers might have life. By the time John is written most Jews have rejected Jesus as the Messiah and John writes to reassure his audience who are experiencing some level of persecution.

The goal of each account appears to be to ground the faith of these believers in the context of the Old Testament and to challenge the people to understand that the path of Christ is a path of suffering for others



and hope for something better because of what God is doing. In the sending of Jesus we see something more of the true nature of God and the way that He seeks to transform the world into a place for Him to share in true community with that creation, especially with those that bear His image, human beings.

Questions

1. Why do you think it is important for Christians to believe that the coming of Jesus was prophesied beforehand?
2. What do you understand to be the meaning of the word “repent?”
3. Why do you think it is important for us to understand that Jesus was a historical figure?
4. Why do you think people were interested in what John the Immerser preached in the far off wilderness of Judea?
5. When you think of light breaking into darkness what images are generated in your imagination?
6. When you think of the word “wisdom” what are some images that this word brings to your mind?
7. How do you think the words given in these four gospel accounts might strengthen the faith of believers?
8. How do you see the message of these Gospels as a relevant message for the world of today?
9. What are some of the things that you can imagine would be better in our world with God dwelling right in our midst? Why?
10. Why do you think it is helpful to have the message of Jesus Christ set in history?
11. Why do you think it is important that the proclamation of John is seen as the answer to Old Testament prophesy?

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12. What do you see as the most unjust aspect of the world today?
 13. What do you see as the most compelling thing that draws you to hope for God in your life?
 14. Why do you think repentance is seen as an important part of the Good News?
 15. What are some of the ways that love and loyalty act as weapons against the forces of evil?
 16. How does the fact that God was willing to send His Son to earth to pursue relationship with us challenge the way we perceive God?
 17. When you recognize that God has lived in all eternity in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit what do you think it means to us as we are called to join with Him in the community of His church?
 18. As you think about God transforming the cosmos, what excites you most about that?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that God has dreamt of and planned for the redemption of mankind and all of His creation from all eternity. The prophecies of the Old Testament speak of what God will do and provide hope in His redemption. God has not given up on His creation. He continues the process of redemption that was initiated by His Son and He will bring that process to completion. Why do you see “hope” as being an important element of life?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words calling people to Himself. In the sending of Jesus we have God continuing to communicate with us as His children, pursuing relationship at tremendous personal cost. In Jesus we see the true nature of God displayed in such powerful, yet gentle and loving ways. God seeks to generate an understanding among people of His nature and His ways. What are some ways that your understanding of Jesus changes the way you see God?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The words given in the Gospel accounts are not merely meant to convey information, or data: these words are meant to initiate change. The change is to be a change of more than just actions though: the change is meant to run to the core of our being, our heart, and our attitudes. God wants us to be like Him, loving, loyal, trustworthy, and passionate about relationships. Life is a place where hearts can undergo transformation in the here and now to prepare them for life in the presence of God. What aspect of the story of Jesus challenges you most to change your heart?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to recognize that so many of our ideas about who and what God is are wrong. God calls us, in Jesus, to see that God is not who and what we thought. He is far more loving, loyal, and relational than we understood before the coming of Jesus. Certainly He is concerned about justice, but always that pursuit of justice is tempered by the love and loyalty of God. What are some ways that we can demonstrate to others the nature of God in our daily lives?