

# Theophany

**Objective:** The students will be able to explain how each member of the Trinity was revealed at Theophany.

## **For the Catechist**

The students should be very familiar with the record of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan since it has appeared in the "Observances" unit of the Kindergarten and Grade 1 texts. In this lesson the students are made aware of the broader story: the encounter between John the Baptist and Jesus, John's statements of unworthiness, and his finally agreeing to baptize Jesus. The lesson highlights the on-going theme of Grade 2, namely saying "Yes" to God as did John the Baptist, so God can work through us. In the previous lessons, the students learned that the Trinity was revealed when Jesus was baptized. For this lesson they are asked to give more details of the revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## **Background Reading**

*(Direct quotations from the sources noted.)*

### **The Theophany Icon**

"At the top of the icon, the opening of heaven is symbolized by the segment of a circle. This circle signifies God's presence and witness at the event. Emanating from the circle are rays of light surrounding the Holy Spirit, depicted in the figure of a dove descending upon our Savior Who is being baptized in the Jordan by John.

"Present in the icon are Angels with their hands covered. Their heads are bowed as an indication of their role of service to God and their reverence for Him Whom they serve" (CBL 43).

### **Theophany Recalls the Baptism of Jesus**

"A second cycle of feasts in the Church year is called the *Immovable Cycle* because these observances are kept on the same date each year. Chief of these are the feasts of Christmas and the Theophany. *Christmas* (December 25) remembers

## **Lesson Plan Overview**

**Opening:** All You Who Have Been Baptized"

[Refer to the "Liturgical Prayers According to Jurisdictions" in the section "Introduction to Grade 2" for the correct wording to use in your parish.]

**Introduction:** Who was John the Baptist?

**Need:** stick, flashlight

**Read Text Aloud:** Have students read text aloud.

### **Activity Tracks:**

Choose a basic, group, or craft activity to reinforce the lesson (detailed on the pages that follow).

- *Basic:* The Trinity Revealed
- *Group:* "Theophany" Memory Game
- *Craft:* "Theophany Icon" Wax Resist

**Closing:** All You Who Have Been Baptized

## **Come Bless the Lord Icon Packets:**

Packet I: Theophany of Our Lord  
Packet II:

## **Teaching Pic:**

#F4 Epiphany (Theophany)

the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. *The Theophany* (January 6) remembers the baptism of our Lord in the River Jordan by the holy prophet John. They are closely connected because they celebrate the 'appearance' of our Lord in the world. They are a development of our understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ. When He was recognized as Son of God by His resurrection (Rom 1:4), early Christians also began to appreciate this mystery of His incarnation in the Gospel events of His birth and baptism. His birth is described in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke with wise men from 'the East' recognizing Him as Messiah and King and with angels proclaiming Him as such to shepherds. At His baptism John recognized Him as the great Prophet who was to come; the Father from Heaven declared Him to be His Son; and the Spirit came upon Him revealing Him to be the Messiah" (*LLII* 41).

### **All Water Is Sanctified**

"In Egypt the rising of the River Nile was of particular importance for the harvest and the life of the country. The Christians there chose the beginnings of the Gospels of Mark and John as the basis for their feast. These two Gospels begin the story of Jesus with His public life through baptism in the River Jordan. The sanctification of this river was seen as a model for the sanctification of all waters, representing life, particularly the River Nile" (*LLII* 43).

# The Lesson Plan

## Opening

[Gather the students at the icon corner.] *Today's lesson is about the feast day of Theophany. Do you know what we remember on the Feast of Theophany? [Allow responses.] (We remember the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. We also remember that the Trinity was revealed.) On this feast day we sing the hymn "All You Who Have Been Baptized." That will be our prayer today.*

## Introduction

*Do you remember the name of the man who baptized Jesus? (John the Baptist) John the Baptist is very important. We see his icon on every icon screen. Why is he so important? Let me tell you the story of how he was born.*

*God wanted someone to prepare the way for Jesus. He chose John the Baptist. Before John was born, God sent an angel to John's father, Zechariah, to tell him he would have a son. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were too old to have children, so Zechariah doubted God. The angel said, "You will be speechless until the day these things happen because you did not believe me." Indeed, after nine months Elizabeth gave birth to a son. When the baby was born, the people wanted to know what to name him. Zechariah wrote "John" on a tablet.*

*So you see, St. John the Baptist was a special person from the moment of his conception. Now, to understand why St. John the Baptist was so important, I brought something with me. I need you to close your eyes for a few minutes. [If possible, turn out the lights.] Keep your eyes closed tightly until I tell you to open them. [After a minute, turn on the lights at the same time as you say:] Okay, open your eyes. [Students should be blinking as their eyes adjust to the light. Allow responses to the following:] Was it hard to have light after your eyes had been closed? Did your eyes have to adjust to the light? What situations have you been in where light hurt your eyes?*

[If you can't turn the lights out, you can improvise with having some students come forward as volunteers, having them close their eyes, and shining a bright flashlight close to them, perhaps on a wall, so they experience their eyes adjusting when they are opened.]

*In our lesson on the Nativity and earlier this year as well, we learned that Jesus is the Light of the world. But, as we just saw, bright light can hurt our eyes if we aren't expecting it and especially if we are in darkness. Think about Jesus' teachings as a bright light. What were Jesus' teachings? He taught us how to live united to God. People were not expecting that. So, God sent St. John the Baptist to prepare the people for Jesus. John asked people to change from their bad ways. This prepared people to hear Jesus' lessons on how to live united to God.*

*St. John said of himself, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight (or prepare) the way of the Lord." St. John went ahead of Jesus and prepared the way for Him. That is why St. John is so important.*

## Theophany

When Jesus was about 30 years old, His cousin John was living in the wilderness. People came to listen to John. John told people they had to change their ways or repent. John baptized people in the Jordan River.



Some people came to ask John, "Why do you baptize if you are not the Christ?"

John replied, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who is coming after me. He is more important. His sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

One day Jesus went out to the wilderness. John saw Jesus coming. He said to those around him, "This is He of whom I said 'One is coming after me who is more important than I.'"

John continued, "The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'When you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, it is he who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit.' Now I have seen for myself and testified that he is the Son of God. (John 1:22-34).

## Reading of Text

As the children read aloud, help them interact with the text using the comments or questions below which are keyed to the text phrases (in bold type).

### John baptized people in the Jordan River.

John was teaching the people about God. What did he tell them they had to do? (Change their ways or repent) What was the name of the river where John was baptizing? (Jordan)

[Read the story slowly pausing to ask:]

### **His sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.**

What was John saying when he said, "His sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." (Jesus was very important, much more important than himself.)

### **"...he is the Son of God"**

Whom did John say Jesus was? (The Son of God)

Jesus was sent to lead us to God. John was sent ahead of Jesus to prepare people for Jesus' teachings. John the Baptist is also called the "forerunner." A forerunner is one who comes before another. John the Baptist, the Forerunner, was given that special part to play in our salvation.

John the Baptist didn't want to baptize Jesus. When Jesus asked to be baptized, John argued and said, "It is You who should baptize me." Jesus told him to go ahead with the baptism. John said "Yes," and a special event occurred.



Let's look at the icon of St. John the Baptist. Do you see that his cloak is made from animal hair? His hair is not very neat, either. He lived in the wilderness.

### John the Baptist, the Forerunner, was given that special part to play in our salvation.

What is a "forerunner"? (One who comes before another) Why was John sent? (To prepare people for Jesus' teachings)

### John said "Yes," and a special event occurred.

Here we have another example of someone doing what God wants them to do, and wonderful things happened. Do you know what comes next in the story? (Jesus is baptized and the Trinity is revealed.) Let's read on.

**The Holy Spirit appeared above Jesus in the form of a dove.**

*Who is the Trinity? (The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)  
 How was the Son present? (In the river Jordan) How was the Spirit present? (In the form of a dove) How was the Father present? (His voice was heard when the heavens opened.) The Trinity was revealed in a very special moment. Can you close your eyes and imagine that you are there? In your mind see John the Baptist on the bank of a large river. See Jesus step into the water. See the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus as a dove. Hear the Father's voice say, "This is My Beloved Son. My favor rests on Him."*

*Let's finish our lesson now.*

**On the Feast of Theophany, we remember how the Trinity was revealed.**

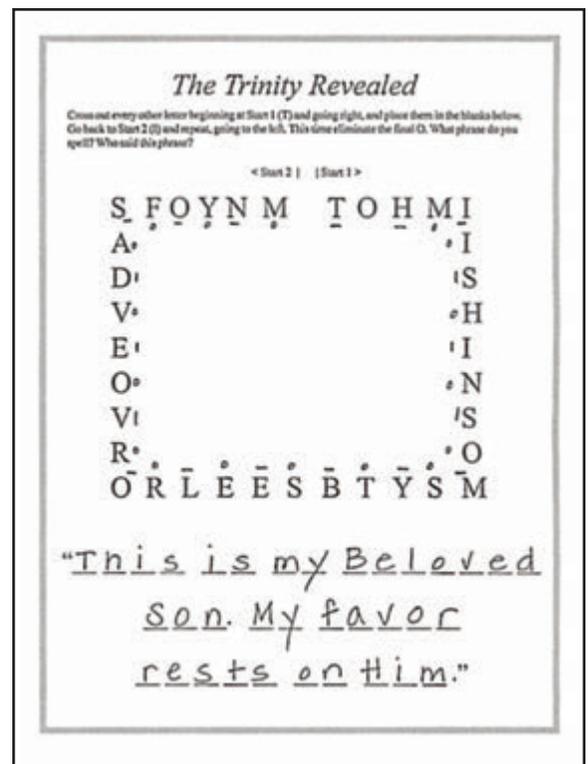
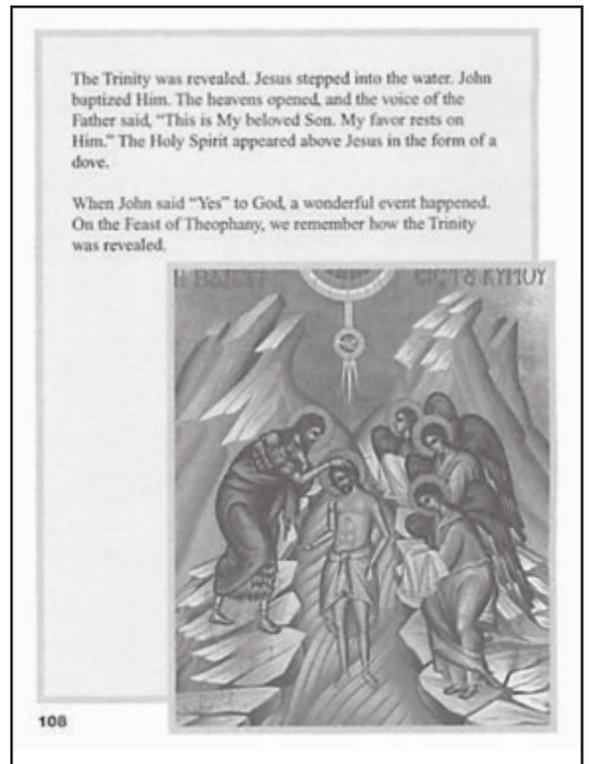
*Do you know what special blessing occurs on the Feast of Theophany? Water is blessed because Jesus blessed the Jordan and all other water when He was baptized. [If done in your parish, say, "Father may come to your home to bless it and your family someday soon."]*

**Let's review:** *What feast day celebrates the revealing of the Trinity? (Theophany) How were all three persons of the Trinity present? (The Son was present in the river Jordan; the Spirit was present in the form of a dove; the Father was present when He spoke from the heavens.)*

**Activity Tracks**

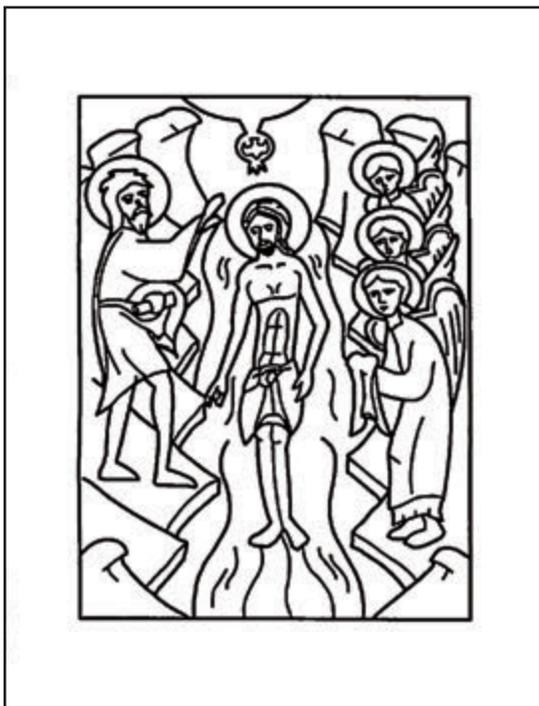
**Basic:** : The Trinity Revealed

*Our worksheet today is a puzzle. There is a secret message in these letters. Let's read the directions, and then you can try the puzzle.*



**Group:** "Theophany" Memory Game

*Our prayer for this lesson is the Troparion for Theophany. We hear this hymn not only on Theophany, hut on other special feast days, for example on Pascha. It is also sung when we are baptized. Let's see if we can memorize the verse by playing the zap game. This is how we'll play. We'll form a circle. The first person will say the first word of the troparion, the next person will say the second, and on and on. We won't repeat three times; we'll say "Alleluia" at the end of the verse. If someone makes a mistake, we'll begin with the first word of the troparion again with the next person in the circle. I know we can do this. [Review the words of the troparion (one line plus the "Alleluia" is sufficient) and let the game begin. After the students have mastered the Troparion, you may wish to begin another round with the phrase of the Father from the Theophany story: "This is My beloved Son. My favor rests on Him."]*



**Craft:** "Theophany Icon" Wax Resist

*Materials:* Theophany icon worksheet copied onto heavier paper, crayons, water colors, water, paint brushes.

*[Have sample ready to show children.] Today we learned that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. I have copies of the icon for us to use for our art project. The art we'll do today is called "wax resist." First, color with heavy strokes all of the icon except the Jordan River. When you're done, paint the Jordan river blue; you can paint over Jesus because the paint won't stick to the crayon. After you've painted the Jordan River, you can lightly water color other areas of the icon even if you've colored them first.*

**Closing:** *Let's gather and pray the Theophany Troparion. ["All You Who Have Been Baptized"]*

