

BAPTISM: PEOPLE IN COVENANT

Session 4

Baptized People Make Promises

FOCUS

People who are baptized make promises to God, and they know that God makes a promise to them. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the living presence of God with all baptized people. The learners should be able to tell one or more promises to God that are made at baptism.

GETTING READY

The sacrament of Holy Baptism happens only once for each of us. But every time a new member is baptized into the Church (the Body of Christ), the whole congregation responds to this invitation: “Let us join with those who are committing themselves to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant” (BCP, p. 303).

The Baptismal Covenant is at the heart of the service. It reminds us of our responsibility to live in the world as persons of faith who love God and our neighbors.

The concept of making a solemn promise, with the intent of keeping it, can be understood by primary-age children. It is important for them to be introduced to baptism as a covenant—a bond in which promises were made on their behalf by members of the congregation.

God makes several important promises in the Old Testament, especially to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. To Abraham, God decrees that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. God also promises to make Abraham's future son, Isaac, a great king of nations.

God makes a similar promise to Isaac. God tells Isaac that his descendants would live in an alien land, but one day they would return to their homeland and rule as a mighty kingdom.

To Jacob, God promises that his offspring will be like the dust of the earth. Many nations would come from Jacob and his descendants.

God makes a different covenant with Moses. God chooses Moses to lead the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, the land of “milk and honey.” A new covenant between God and the people of Israel is summed up in the Ten Commandments.

God makes a promise to us when we are baptized that our sins will be forgiven and that we will have the gift of God's presence with us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

O God, you prepared your disciples for the coming of the Spirit through the teaching of your Son Jesus Christ: Make the hearts and minds of your servants ready to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit, that they may be filled with the strength of his presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For Those About To Be Baptized
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 819

TEACHING TIP

In this session, be alert to the learners' concepts of what it means to make promises and keep them. Primary-age children can be very vehement about promises. Link the promises made in baptism with the learners' seriousness about promises in general. For instance, note the rituals and actions connected to promises children make as members of clubs, teams, or other groups.

GATHERING

Write the word “promise” on a sheet of paper or a chalkboard. As the learners arrive, invite them to write or illustrate a promise they have made recently.

When all are present, gather the group and say the Apostles' Creed (using Poster No. 11 in the Teacher's Packet):

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth. . . .
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 96

STORYTELLING *(Time: 10 minutes)*

Open the Bible and show the learners where to find *Acts 2:38b-39*. Read aloud verse 39:

“For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”

Finish with the words: The word of the Lord.
The learners respond: Thanks be to God.

1. Describe baptism as a sacrament in which promises are made. Review the story of a baptism in your congregation told in the last session. Focus on The Baptismal Covenant (BCP, p. 304) as a time when promises were made by all who were there.

2. Mention briefly the questions of the Covenant, putting each one in your own words.

3. Talk with the learners about promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. He promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars or the grains of sand on the seashores. God promises that Isaac's descendants would rule over a mighty kingdom. God tells Jacob that his offspring would be like the dust of the earth. God's promises to Moses were much more formal. God gave Moses the law as a binding covenant between God and the people of Israel.

4. Explain that God also makes a promise to us when we are baptized. We are promised that God will forgive us when we do wrong and ask for forgiveness. God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism.

(The learners' book, *God's People Are Baptized*, chapter 4, describes the kinds of promises made during baptism. Remind the children that they can read this story at home.)

CREATING *(Time: 15-20 minutes)*

Option 1. New from Old

Baptism is a time for the Church to welcome new members to the community. In addition to the booklets made last session, the learners could decorate baptismal candles to be given to the person or family of the newly baptized.

Bring enough 12-inch white taper candles for each learner. Talk about baptismal symbols that could be used in decorations by looking at Poster No. 4 in the Teacher's Packet and the Take-Home Cards. Ask the learners to draw the symbols and cut them out. Attach them to the candle with two-sided tape. Invite the learners to write a brief message or draw a picture to give to the newly baptized along with the candle.

Option 2. My Promise Book

Each learner can make a book of coupons by stapling strips of paper together. On the strips, the learners write or draw pictures of promises they will make to members of their families. Examples: I promise to hang up my clothes without being reminded. I promise to clean my room next Saturday. I promise to help with the dishes on Sunday. Suggest that they include several “stewardship” coupons of promises they will make to the Church. Examples: I will give ___ of my allowance to the offering. I will sing in the children's choir.

EXPLORING THE STORY *(Time: 10-15 minutes)*

Option 1. Game, “Promises, Promises”

Print, in large letters, the word “promises” on newsprint or a board. Make a line or square under each of the eight letters. On eight index cards, use a marker to print each of the letters in the word. Form teams, and distribute the cards evenly among them.

The teacher asks questions about promises made in baptism. Teams take turns to answer. A correct answer permits a team to tape one of the cards under the letter it matches. Encourage teams to help one another until all the cards are posted. (If the group is large, two boards and two sets of cards can be used.)

Here are some sample questions to ask:

At baptism, what do we say we believe about God the Father? (Answer: that God made/created heaven and earth.)

What do we say we believe about Jesus Christ? (Any phrase from that section of the Creed would be an acceptable answer.)

What else do we say we believe in? (Several answers are acceptable: the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.)

What do we promise to do about attending the Church's services?

What do we promise to do about evil (wrong)?

What do we promise to say to others about Jesus?

How do we promise to treat other people?

Option 2. Puzzle, “Promises of Baptism”

Use Puzzle Sheet III.4 titled “Promises of Baptism.” Make copies for everyone in the class. Directions are given on the sheet.

This can be a class or small group activity, or learners may work independently.

Option 3. The Baptismal Covenant

The baptismal covenant, which is central to our faith, can be understood at every age level. Invite the learners to talk over the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant, from *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 304. Suggest they express these promises in their own words. (The final paragraphs in Chapter 4 of the learners' book, *God's People Are Baptized*, may be helpful.)

TALKING IT OVER (*Time: 10-15 minutes*)

Begin by asking the learners: When you join a special group (Brownies, Cub Scouts, school clubs, and others), what do you promise to do? Why do you think these promises are important? Ask learners to describe how these promises are made. Is there a special ceremony?

Talk with the learners about what happens when promises are broken. Why does this happen? How can we help one another to keep the promises we make? How do group members help you keep promises?

INQUIRING (*Time: 10-20 minutes*)

Invite an active member of the congregation to visit the class. Talk with this visitor about the promises made at baptism and how Christians work together to keep them. The learners could prepare interview questions based on the questions of the Baptismal Covenant, such as: How do you take part in the Church and its services of Holy Eucharist? What helps you to live a Christian life? What do you tell other people about your faith in Jesus? How do you serve and care for other people? What do you do to work for justice and peace?

IMAGINING (*Time: 10-20 minutes*)

Share a story starter: “At a service of baptism, people make promises. I try to keep promises by . . .” Invite the learners to use their imaginations and discuss how they keep their promises.

Individual response. The children can write their own endings or draw pictures. Encourage the learners to express their own thoughts. Avoid giving the impression that there is a “right” way to finish the story.

Group role play. Play a version of “Charades” by dividing the class into teams. Each team thinks of a promise from either the Bible or their own lives. (Be prepared with suggestions for younger learners, who may need help.) The teams then take turns acting out promises for the others to guess.

MUSIC (*Time: 10-15 minutes*)

Listen again on the *Children Sing!* tape to “Descend, O Spirit, purging flame” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 297; *We Sing of God*, 50). Invite the learners to

create their own stanza that tells about the promises we make to God, and God's promise to be with us always.

CONTINUING ACTIVITY *(Time: 10-20 minutes)*

Baptismal Banner. Add details to the banner, using the trimmings and smaller pieces created for the design.

TAKE-HOME CARD

Card 22 has a picture of a baptismal scene showing a young girl with a candle, a Scripture verse, facts about baptism, and a question to think about. Remind learners to add this card to their collection at home.

CLOSING

Close the session with the following prayer:

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this
life.

We give you thanks for the promises made
at baptism.

(Add additional thanksgivings)

We will exalt you, O God our King;

And praise your Name for ever and ever. Amen.

From The Prayers of the People, Form VI

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 393

All stand and say:

Teacher: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Learners: Thanks be to God.

TEACHER'S REFLECTION

Primary-age children are able to make promises and are very much aware of promises made to them. To what extent did the class members grasp the concept of the promises made to us by God? How can this understanding be reinforced in the coming sessions?

LOOKING AHEAD

The next session looks at the roles of godparents, parents, and members of the congregation in the lives of the newly baptized. Consider how you have carried out one of these roles. Who has been a Christian role model for you?