

Session 5

Crossing the Jordan

The sea took Israel out of slavery; the Jordan brings Israel home.

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the Jordan crossing completes what the Red Sea began (out of slavery, into inheritance), that God's presence and the water pair up for the fourth time, and that when the New Testament opens the story of baptism, it deliberately opens it at this exact river.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catechism names tonight's type in so many words: Baptism is prefigured in the crossing of the Jordan River, by which the People of God received the gift of the land promised to Abraham's descendants, an image of eternal life (CCC 1222). Exodus and entry are two halves of one rescue, and Baptism is both.

What You Need to Know

Tonight completes a shape. The Red Sea was the water of exit: out of Egypt, out of slavery, out of the old life. But nobody is saved merely *from* something. Forty years later a new generation stands on the bank of a flooding river with the promise on the far side, and God parts the water again. The Jordan is the water of entry: into the land, into the inheritance, into rest. Baptism, the Church teaches, is both crossings at once: it takes a person out of slavery to sin and *into* something: the Church, the covenant, the life of grace, with heaven as the true promised land it points toward (CCC 1222 calls the land an image of eternal life).

Read Joshua 3 with your group's eyes open for the choreography. At the sea, the wind drove the waters back. At the Jordan, something better leads the way: *the ark of the covenant of the LORD*, God's own throne-presence among his people, carried by priests into the riverbed, and the moment the priests' feet touch the water, the flow from upstream stands and rises in a heap (Joshua 3:15–16). God's presence enters the water, and the water obeys. Count the pairing with the group: Spirit over the deep, *ruach* over the flood, cloud with the sea, and now the ark in the Jordan. Presence plus water, a fourth time, and a people passes through into new life.

Two treasures hide in the details. First, Joshua 3:16 says the waters rose up in a heap far off, *at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan*. The waters that blocked Israel's entry into the promise are cut off all the way back at a place called Adam: on the literal level, simply a town near Zarethan. The wordplay that follows is the Christian reader's reverent delight, not the narrator's stated point, and it is delightful: where is the blockage between humanity and its inheritance dammed? At Adam. Second, the man leading them in is named Joshua, in Hebrew *Yehoshua*, the LORD saves, and in the Greek Old Testament his name is written exactly as the New Testament writes the name Jesus: *Iēsous*. Moses, the lawgiver, could not bring the people into the promise; that was given to a man named Jesus. The early Church never got over this, and neither should we.

Then 2 Kings 2: the Jordan parts twice more in a single chapter. Elijah strikes the water with his mantle and crosses on dry ground; he is taken up; and Elisha, having asked for a *double share of your spirit*, takes up the fallen mantle, strikes the same water, and crosses back as a prophet in the fullness of that spirit. Watch the shape of the story: he will not turn back before the crossing; he passes through the water at his master's side, and on the far shore receives the spirit he asked for. The water did not confer it; God did. But the shape proved suggestive to Christian memory, and it grows more suggestive still at a certain riverbank in Session 9. Hold it as suggestion, never as a rule, and say only that much.

Tonight's steelman is aimed at our method again, and it is the honest question a careful reader should ask: Peter connected the flood to Baptism; Paul connected the sea; but no apostle writes *the Jordan crossing is a type of Baptism*. Are we now doing the freelance pattern-hunting we forswore in Session 3? The answer has real content: Scripture itself yokes the two crossings as one act of God (Psalm 114: *The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back*), and the New Testament does something better than comment on the Jordan: it stages the entire opening of baptism's story there (John's baptism of repentance, not yet the sacrament, as Session 8 will carefully distinguish). When God wanted baptism preached, he sent the Baptist to that river, of all the rivers on earth. Location is theology. And the Church's liturgy has prayed the Jordan into the font's family tree since the patristic age. We will also be honest about grades of evidence: an explicit apostolic identification (flood, sea) is the gold standard; a type the Church reads by the apostles' method, anchored in the Gospels' own staging, is solid silver. Teaching the group to weigh evidence honestly is itself formation.

Pastoral note: tonight's imagery is homecoming, and in a mixed parish room that word lands on tender places: people estranged from family, people who left the Church and returned, people grieving someone who died away from the sacraments. Let the Jordan be gentle. The promised land on the far side of the water is exactly for exiles.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

and the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap far off, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan... and the people passed over opposite Jericho.

Joshua 3:16 (RSV2CE)

Then Elijah took his mantle, and rolled it up, and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

2 Kings 2:8 (RSV2CE)

And when the New Testament opens the story of the sacrament, it chooses its river with the whole Old Testament in mind:

Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Matthew 3:5–6 (RSV2CE)

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory Nazianzen • *Oration 39*

St. Gregory the Theologian, preaching on the feast of the Lord's Baptism, teaches in substance that salvation history is strung together by baptisms: Moses baptized in water, in the cloud, and in the

sea, as a figure; John baptized unto repentance, a bridge; and Christ baptizes in the Holy Spirit, the perfection. The crossings of Israel were the schoolroom in which God taught the world what he would one day do at a font.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory of Nyssa • *Sermon on the Baptism of Christ*

The other Gregory, preaching on the same feast, teaches in substance that the Jordan's story was always pointing forward: Israel did not enter the promise until Joshua its guide had brought it through the Jordan's passage, and the twelve stones Joshua set in the stream anticipated the twelve disciples, the ministers of Baptism; while Elisha, washing Naaman the Syrian clean in this same river, clearly indicated what was to come. The river's history, for Gregory, is prophecy written in water.

Leader note: Yes, two Gregorys tonight: friends and contemporaries (Nazianzen and Nyssa, with Nyssa's brother St. Basil, are the Cappadocian Fathers). A fun aside for the group if energy is high.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

Origen of Alexandria • *Homilies on Joshua*

Origen, whom the group met at the Red Sea, teaches in substance that the book of Joshua is the Christian's own itinerary: having left Egypt through the first water, the soul must still cross the Jordan behind the true Joshua, Jesus, to enter the inheritance; the first crossing lies behind; the inheritance still waits across the second river, behind the true Joshua.

Leader note: Same honest caveat as Session 3: Origen is a towering early interpreter, not a saint, read by the Church with discernment and gratitude.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1222 is tonight's charter, and it is remarkably specific: Baptism is prefigured in the crossing of the Jordan River, by which the People of God received the gift of the land promised to Abraham's descendants, an image of eternal life; and it adds that the promise of this blessed inheritance is fulfilled in the New Covenant. The paragraph does the session's work in one sentence: Jordan, land, inheritance, eternal life, Baptism.

Keep CCC 128–130 in your pocket from Session 3 if the method question resurfaces: typology rests on the unity of God's plan, practiced by the apostles and the Church after them. Tonight's steelman answer leans on exactly that distinction between apostolic identifications and the Church's faithful extension of the apostles' method.

Paragraphs for this session: 1222, with 128–130 held over from Session 3

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Why water? (master thread): tonight's datum is entry and inheritance. The water is not only what you are saved out of; it is what you are brought home through. Two sessions remain until the unsealing; do not resolve.

Presence plus water, instance four: the ark of the covenant standing in the riverbed. By now several participants should be counting unprompted. If someone recites the whole chain (Spirit/deep, *ruach*/flood, cloud/sea, ark/Jordan), let the room enjoy it, and say only: one more is coming, and it is the one everything else was practice for.

Joshua is named Jesus (planted tonight, resolved Sessions 9–10): plant the name, do not preach it yet.

Water, then spirit given (developed tonight via Elisha's double portion, resolved Session 9): note the order once and move on.

At Adam (tonight only, light touch): a textual jewel, not a doctrine. Present it as the text's own poetry; do not build weight on it.

Session Goals

1. The group can state the two halves of rescue: the sea takes Israel out of slavery; the Jordan brings Israel into the inheritance; Baptism is both.
2. The group has watched the ark enter the water and can name the fourth instance of presence-plus-water.
3. The group has met the name: Joshua and Jesus are the same name, and the lawgiver did not lead Israel home; Joshua did.
4. The steelman (no apostle names the Jordan a type) has been answered honestly, including an honest grading of kinds of evidence.
5. The group has seen that the New Testament opens the story of baptism at this river on purpose (Matthew 3).

Timed Plan (85 minutes)

5 min • Welcome and opening prayer

10 min • Win questions

20 min • Build: Joshua 3:7–17; the ark in the river; at Adam; Q1-Q3

10 min • Build: 2 Kings 2:6–14; Elijah, Elisha, mantle and spirit; Q4

10 min • Live discovery: Matthew 3:5–6, 13; the story opens at this river

15 min • Steelman: is the Jordan our invention?

5 min • Send questions

10 min • Live It, memory verse, closing prayer

If you must land at 75 minutes, cut: Q4 (Elisha) can be compressed to a two-sentence leader summary, and the Dig Deeper box. Never cut the ark's entry into the water or the discovery of Matthew 3.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord God, you did not rescue your people only to leave them wandering; you brought them home. We come tonight as people still on the road. Part what stands between us and the life you promised, and lead us through behind Jesus, our Joshua. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Win • open the room

QW1. Describe a homecoming you have known: a return after a long absence, a place that received you, a door that opened. What made it home?

QW2. Forty years passed between the sea and the Jordan. Have you ever had a long wilderness between being freed from something and actually arriving somewhere? What kept you walking?

Build • into the text

Set the scene: the Exodus generation has died in the wilderness; their children stand at the Jordan at flood stage (Joshua 3:15 notes the river overflows its banks in harvest). Moses is dead. A man named Joshua leads. Have two readers take Joshua 3:7–13 and 3:14–17.

Q1. At the Red Sea, wind drove the water back. Here, what enters the water first, and what happens the moment it does?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The ark of the covenant, God's enthroned presence among his people, carried by the priests, and the instant their feet touch the water the river stops flowing and stands in a heap. God's presence enters the water and the water yields. This is the fourth time we have watched presence and water paired at the birth of a new chapter: Spirit over the deep, *ruach* over the flood, cloud with the sea, ark in the Jordan. The pattern is no longer a curiosity; it is the Bible's signature.

Q2. Joshua 3:16 records exactly where the waters were cut off: far upstream, *at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan*. The narrator did not have to tell us the town's name. Why might this detail have made the early Church smile?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Because the thing standing between God's people and their inheritance is dammed *at Adam*. On the literal level it is geography: a real town near the crossing. Christian readers, noticing the name, have loved the wordplay: the flood of separation between humanity and home dammed, of all places, at Adam, while a man named Jesus leads the people through. The connection is the reader's reverent delight, not the verse's stated claim; hold it lightly, a smile rather than a doctrine.

Q3. The leader's name: Hebrew *Yehoshua*, the LORD saves; in the Greek Bible it is written *Iēsous*, exactly the name the New Testament gives Jesus. Moses, who carried the Law, died outside the land. What is the Old Testament teaching us by *who* gets to lead the people into the promise?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The Law by itself brings you to the border; a man named Jesus brings you home. The early Church read this with awe: the first Joshua led Israel through the water into the earthly inheritance, and the true Joshua leads the new Israel through the water of Baptism toward the inheritance the land only pictured. (One sentence, then hold: we will stand on a Jordan bank with the true Joshua in Session 9.)

Q4. Now 2 Kings 2:6–14. Trace the order of events for Elisha: what does he ask for, what does he pass through, and when does he actually receive it?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He asks for a double share of Elijah's spirit; he passes through the parted Jordan with Elijah; and only on the far side, after the crossing, taking up the mantle and striking the same water, does he walk back demonstrably carrying that spirit: the company of prophets says, the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. The water did not convey the spirit; God gave it, after Elijah's taking up. But the story's shape, through the water and then the spirit received, proved suggestive to Christian memory. Hold it lightly, and keep watching.

LIVE DISCOVERY

The hunt. Tell the group: when the New Testament finally opens the story of baptism itself, it could have begun anywhere: the Temple courts, the Sea of Galilee, a city fountain. Find where it actually begins. Give them **Matthew 3:5–6** and **Matthew 3:13** and ask: which river, and who comes to it?

Let them say it: John baptizes in the Jordan, and Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized. The story's overture is staged, deliberately, at the river of entry.

STEELMAN • PRESS THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

Tonight's objection is our own Session 3 rule, pointed at us, and it deserves full strength: Peter explicitly linked the flood to Baptism. Paul explicitly linked the sea. No apostle anywhere writes that the Jordan crossing prefigures Baptism. So is this session not exactly the freelance pattern-hunting we renounced? If the method is *follow the apostles' explicit links*, we have just left the trail, and *the water parted here too* is not an argument; water parts in lots of stories.

Q5. Be honest first: what is the difference in the kind of evidence we have tonight versus Sessions 2 and 3?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Concede the difference plainly, because it is real and the group should learn to see it: an inspired apostle writing *this corresponds to Baptism* (flood, sea) is the gold standard, and tonight we do not have that sentence about Joshua's crossing. If that were all we had, the objection would win.

But we have three things. First, Scripture itself refuses to separate the two crossings: Psalm 114 sings them as a single act of God: *The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back*. The apostolic identification of the sea, in other words, arrives already yoked to the Jordan by the Bible's own poetry; Paul certified the pattern, and the psalm had long since put both rivers inside it. Second, the New Testament does something stronger than comment on the Jordan: it stages the story's opening there. Of every water in Israel, God sends the Baptist to the river of entry, and the Lord comes from Galilee to this river to be baptized in it. When the director sets the decisive scene on a famous stage, the location is part of the script. Third, the Church, reading with the apostles' method, has prayed the Jordan into the font's lineage from the patristic age to tonight's Catechism, which states the type outright (CCC 1222). So our claim is honest and graded: the flood and the sea are apostolically identified types; the Jordan is the Church's certain reading, anchored in the psalmist's pairing and the Gospels' staging. Teaching ourselves to say *this is explicit, and this is the Church's sure extension of what is explicit* is not a weakness of the method. It is the method.

DIG DEEPER • OPTIONAL

For a strong group: Joshua 4, the twelve stones taken from the riverbed and set up at Gilgal, *that this may be a sign among you, when your children ask in time to come, What do these stones mean?* Ask: what are our twelve stones? What objects, dates, and habits has the Church given us so that children will ask about our crossing? (Baptismal candles, certificates, godparents, anniversaries: the Church still builds memorials on the far bank.)

Send • out of the room

QS1. Baptism is exit and entry: out of slavery, into inheritance. Which half is harder for you to believe about yourself right now, that you are really out, or that you really belong?

QS2. Elisha would not turn back before the crossing. Where is God asking you to keep walking toward a promise this season instead of settling on the near bank?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, read Psalm 114 aloud, ideally outdoors: sixty seconds of the Bible's own theology of the two crossings.
- Do one act of homemaking in the Church this week: greet a stranger at Mass, or return to a parish habit you have let lapse. You are not a visitor there; the Jordan is behind you.
- If you know a catechumen or a family preparing for a baptism, pray for them by name at the riverbank of your evening prayer.

Memory Verse

The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back.

Psalm 114:3 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Father, you parted the sea to bring your people out and the river to bring them home. Bring home everyone we love who is still in the wilderness. Stand your presence in the middle of whatever floods against us, and teach our feet to trust the dry ground you make. Through Jesus, our Joshua, who leads us into the inheritance. Amen.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Joshua 3:7–17 • The ark enters the Jordan; the waters stand; verse 16: at Adam

Joshua 3:15 • Leader framing: the river at flood stage

2 Kings 2:6–14 • Elijah and Elisha part the Jordan; the double share of spirit after the crossing

Matthew 3:5–6, 13 • Live discovery: the sacrament's story opens at the Jordan

Psalms 114 • Steelman answer and memory verse: sea and Jordan as one act of God

Joshua 4:1–7, 20–24 • Dig Deeper: memorial stones on the far bank