

SESSION 5

The Anointed One

Luke 3:21-22 • John 1:32-34 • Luke 4:16-21

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Last session ended with Peter's riddle: God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit, yet no oil appears anywhere in the Gospels. Tonight participants solve it themselves. They find the anointing at the Jordan: the heavens opened, the Spirit descending in bodily form and, in John's crucial verb, REMAINING on him, the Father's voice claiming him. Then, in the Nazareth synagogue, they hear Jesus read Isaiah's anointing text and declare it fulfilled, today, in himself. The Christ turns out to have an anointing scene, and its shape, water, Spirit, and a word spoken over a beloved son, prefigures what God would do over every Christian.

Catholic Touchstone

The baptism of Jesus is his acceptance and inauguration of his mission; on him the Spirit whom he will pour out on the whole Church comes to rest (CCC 536). What took place over Christ in the Jordan reveals what happens in Christian initiation: the Spirit descends and the Father's voice declares a beloved child (CCC 537). The descent of the Spirit and its remaining on Jesus is the sign that he is the Messiah, the Anointed (CCC 1286).

What You Need to Know

Guard against one wrong turn. Jesus did not become the Son of God at the Jordan, and he did not become holy there; he is the eternal Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, holy from the womb. The ancient error that God adopted a mere man at the baptism is called adoptionism, and a bright candidate can wander into it innocently by asking "so he got the Spirit here?" The careful answer: the Jordan is not where Jesus acquires the Spirit; it is where the Spirit's resting on him is revealed, and where Jesus publicly accepts and begins his mission as Messiah (CCC 535-536). The anointing is his commissioning, not his upgrade. Have this distinction ready in your pocket; do not lecture it unless the question comes.

Why baptized at all? John's baptism was for repentant sinners, and Jesus had nothing to repent. He gets in the sinners' line anyway, on purpose, putting himself where the guilty stand. The Fathers loved the reversal: he goes into the water not to be cleansed by it but to sanctify it, blessing the waters for all who would follow him in. Expect a parent to ask this; it is the most common adult question about the passage.

The verb again. Session 3's hinge was Isaiah's promise that the Spirit would REST on the shoot of Jesse. John the Baptist reports that promise landing: "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him" (John 1:32), and adds that this remaining was the sign he had been told to watch for. Be precise if asked: Isaiah's Hebrew verb (nuach, rest) and John's Greek verb (meno, remain) are different words in different languages saying one thing: the promised abiding arrives. On this man, the Spirit stays.

The dove. Scripture never explains the dove, so hold interpretations loosely and say so. Two echoes are old and strong: the Spirit hovering like a bird over the waters of creation (Genesis 1:2, with St. Basil's

brooding image from Session 1), and Noah's dove over the flood waters, announcing that judgment is ending and a renewed world is beginning (Genesis 8). If a participant surfaces either echo unprompted, Thread A is paying interest; receive it warmly and confirm nothing beyond "that echo is really there."

For the parents in the room. Tonight's Live It practice asks parents to tell their child the story of the child's own baptism. For some parents this will be effortless and delightful. For some it will surface complications: they cannot remember, the photos are lost, the family situation then was painful, or the candidate was baptized late amid some difficulty. Frame the practice gently and give an out: what matters is not producing a perfect story but the candidate hearing "we brought you, and God claimed you." A parent who can only say that one sentence has done the whole assignment.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Isaiah 11:2 ("the Spirit shall rest upon him") is fulfilled in John 1:32-33 ("it remained on him"). The group memorized the promise two weeks ago; tonight they watch it land.
- Isaiah 61:1-2 ("the Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me") is the scroll Jesus unrolls at Nazareth and applies to himself: tonight's live discovery.
- Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 8:8-12 (Spirit and dove over the waters) echo underneath the Jordan scene: creation and new creation both begin with the Spirit over water.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (*Against Heresies, Book III, chapter 17*)

St. Irenaeus taught that at the Jordan the Spirit descended on the Son of God made Son of man, and in him began growing accustomed to dwelling in the human race. What the Spirit practiced on Christ, Irenaeus says, he intended for us: having learned to rest on one man, he would come to rest on mankind, renewing us from our old ways into the newness of Christ.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Hilary of Poitiers (*Commentary on Matthew*)

St. Hilary taught that everything that took place over Christ at his baptism was a lesson about ourselves: after the washing with water, the Holy Spirit comes down upon us from the gate of heaven, and we are bathed in the Father's voice declaring us his children. What happened over the Jordan, Hilary says, is the pattern of what happens over every Christian.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Oration 39, On the Holy Lights*)

Preaching on the baptism of the Lord, St. Gregory Nazianzen said that Christ comes up out of the water carrying the world up with him, and he urged his hearers: Christ is bathed in light; let us also be bathed; let us go down with him, that we may also rise with him. The feast, for Gregory, was never only about what happened to Jesus; it was an invitation with our names on it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 536.** At his baptism Jesus accepts and inaugurates his mission; he allows himself to be numbered among sinners, and the Spirit whom he will give to the Church rests on him.
- **CCC 537.** Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Christ in the Jordan: the Spirit descends, and we become sons and daughters in the Son.
- **CCC 1286.** The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, and the Spirit's remaining on him, was the sign that he was the Messiah, the Anointed One.

Thread Watch

Thread C: The Oil. Develops decisively tonight: the group discovers that the Messiah's anointing was not with oil but with the Spirit himself, at the Jordan, with water and a word. The messianic and liturgical anointings of the old covenant foreshadow this. Do not say where the oil re-enters the story; chrism belongs to Session 14.

Thread A: The Breath. The dove over the water is Genesis 1:2 harmonics; if the group hears them, celebrate briefly and move on. "Remained" also closes the loop on Session 3's verb hinge; make sure Isaiah 11:2 gets recited from memory tonight when John 1:32 is read.

Session Goals

1. Participants have solved Peter's riddle themselves: Jesus' anointing is the Jordan, with the Spirit rather than oil.
2. Participants can say why Jesus, sinless, stood in the sinners' line to be baptized.
3. Isaiah 11:2 has been recited from memory alongside John 1:32-33, and the group has registered that "remained" fulfills "rest."
4. Participants have found the Nazareth scene themselves and can say what Jesus claimed by reading Isaiah 61 and saying "today."
5. Each household has taken home the tell-the-baptism-story practice, with its gentle framing.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 75 minutes. To land at 60, make these cuts and no others: drop Win question 2 (keep question 1), skip the Dig Deeper box on Noah's dove, and present the steelman objection yourself in one minute rather than building it with the group. Never cut the Jordan scene questions, the Isaiah 11 recitation, or the Nazareth discovery; those carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: *Come, Holy Spirit. You hovered over the waters at the beginning, and You descended over the waters of the Jordan when the Beloved Son stood in them. Open the heavens over this room tonight. Show us the anointing we have been hunting for, and let us hear the Voice that calls sons and daughters beloved. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win: Opening Questions

Parent and candidate pairs. Two minutes each question, then a few pairs share with the table.

1. Has anyone ever spoken words over you that stuck with you for years, good or bad? What were they?
2. Tell your partner about a moment you knew, without being told, that you belonged to your family.

Build: Into the Text

Scene One: The Sinners' Line (Luke 3:15-22)

Households read this at home. Have it read aloud now, verses 15-16 and 21-22.

Question 1. Start with the awkward part. John's baptism was for people repenting of their sins. Jesus has no sins. Why is he standing in that line?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Let the group work before helping. The direction: Jesus gets into the sinners' line on purpose, shoulder to shoulder with the guilty, because his whole mission is to stand where we stand and carry what we carry. He is not cleansed by the water; the Fathers loved to say it the other way around: he goes down into the water to bless it, sanctifying the waters for everyone who would ever follow him in. The sinless one begins his public life by refusing to stand apart from sinners. That is the Messiah the rest of the Gospel delivers.

Question 2. Luke gives us three things happening as Jesus prays: name them. Now think like Session 3: an anointing marked someone as claimed for an office, with a sign and a word. What is the sign here, and what is the word?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The heavens opened; the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, as a dove; and a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The sign is the Spirit himself, visibly descending; the word is the Father's own voice, claiming him. Samuel poured oil and spoke over David; here the Father speaks and the Spirit descends. This is an anointing scene with the oil upgraded to the Reality the oil always stood for. Do not yet say the word "anointing" for the group if they have not; the discovery is theirs to finish at Nazareth.

Question 3. Have someone read John 1:32-34, the Baptist's own account. John says he was told to watch for one specific detail as the identifying sign. What is it? And can anyone recite what we memorized in Session 3?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sign is not the descent but the staying: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend AND REMAIN, this is he." Then the memory verse: "And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him" (Isaiah 11:2). Rest; remain: two languages, seven centuries apart, one promise landing. Every Spirit-coming this study has walked until now rushed and left; the Baptist was told to look for the one man on whom the Spirit would land and stay. The era Isaiah promised opens here. Give this its moment of quiet; it is the hinge of five weeks of work.

Scene Two: Live Discovery

Do not announce the passage. Read the clue and let the tables hunt. Allow three or four minutes; if they stall, tell them it is in the same Gospel we have been reading tonight, one chapter later.

DIG DEEPER

The clue. *"A man comes home to the town where he grew up and goes to the synagogue, as usual. They hand him the scroll. He does not read whatever comes next; he FINDS one particular paragraph, about the Spirit and an anointing. He reads it, rolls up the scroll, hands it back, sits down, and with every eye on him says one word that changes everything: today. Find the scene."*

When found, have the discovering table read Luke 4:16-21 aloud.

Question 4. Jesus deliberately finds and reads Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me..." Then: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Put the pieces together across two sessions: Peter said God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit, and no oil appears in the Gospels. What has the group just solved?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The missing anointing scene is the Jordan. Jesus reads "he has anointed me" and says "today" because it has already happened: the Spirit descended and remained on him at his baptism, and Nazareth is where he says so out loud. Peter's sentence in Acts 10:38 is simply the apostolic summary of what the group has now assembled from the sources: God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Mashiach, christos, the Anointed One: anointed not with the sign but with the Thing Signified. The group did not get told this; they found it. Say so, and congratulate them.

Question 5. Look at what the anointing is FOR in Isaiah's text as Jesus reads it: good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, liberty for the oppressed (Luke's reading weaves Isaiah 61:1-2 with a clause of Isaiah 58:6). Compare Session 2's rule: the Spirit is given for a task that serves others. Does the rule still hold at the top?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Perfectly. Even the Messiah's own anointing is not for his private glory; every clause of the job description spends the Spirit's power on someone else: the poor, the captive, the blind, the crushed. The pattern from the seventy elders to Gideon to David holds all the way up to the Anointed One

himself, which means it will hold all the way down to every anointed Christian. Nobody in this story, including Christ, receives the Spirit as a decoration.

The Push-Back: One Bath, No Second Step

Build the objection at full strength before answering it. Ask the group to make it as strong as they can with you.

The objection. Look at the pattern tonight proves: for Jesus, water and Spirit came together, in one event, at one river. Baptism and the gift of the Spirit are a single package. So the Christian pattern should match: when a person believes and is baptized, they receive the Holy Spirit, fully, then and there. Scripture even says so: "you have heard the word of truth... and have believed in him," and so "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13); no second ceremony in sight. A separate, later ceremony to "give" what Baptism already gave divides what Christ's own baptism holds together. Confirmation splits the Jordan in half.

Question 6. Careful: a lot of this objection is true, and Catholic teaching agrees with more of it than people expect. Sort it out: what should we concede, and what does tonight's text actually show about the structure of the Jordan event?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Concede the biggest piece first, loudly: Baptism truly gives the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church teaches exactly this; a baptized baby is not Spirit-less, and Confirmation is not the Spirit's first arrival. Any version of Confirmation prep that says otherwise deserves this objection. But now look at the structure of the Jordan event itself: Luke says that when Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heaven opened AND the Spirit descended as a distinct, visible act with its own sign and its own word (Matthew and Mark add that he came up from the water). One event, yes; but an event with distinguishable moments: bath, then anointing, then voice. The ancient Church's initiation had the same shape: the washing, and with it the anointing and the hand and the word, distinct gestures of one whole. Whether those distinguishable moments amount to distinct sacraments cannot be settled from the Jordan alone, and we will not pretend it can. The question that settles it is what the APOSTLES did when they gave the Spirit, and that evidence is exactly where this study goes in three weeks. Hold the objection open; it is owed a real answer, and it will get one from the Acts of the Apostles.

DIG DEEPER

Genesis 8:8-12. If time allows: Noah's dove, sent out over the floodwaters, returning at last with the olive leaf as the waters receded (Genesis 8:8-12). Christians have long heard an echo at the Jordan: a dove over the waters as the sign of judgment ending and a renewed world beginning. Scripture never explains the Jordan dove; the echo is a traditional reading, and a lovely one, held as such.

One Last Glimpse

Read John 16:7 aloud yourself, without introduction.

Jesus, on the night before he died, tells his friends: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. Say only this, and then stop: the man on whom the Spirit rests without measure says that his leaving is somehow better for us than his staying. That should sound impossible. Next time, he explains himself.

Send: Closing Questions

1. At the Jordan, the Father's voice said "beloved" before Jesus had preached a sermon or worked a miracle. What would change this month if you actually believed God's first word over you is "beloved," not "prove it"?
2. Jesus stood in the sinners' line on purpose. Who is someone you tend to stand apart from, and what would standing with them look like?

Live It This Week

For every household, parent and candidate together. Sometime this week, parents: tell your candidate the story of their own baptism. Who was there, what the day was like, what you remember feeling. Get out photos or the certificate or the candle if you have them. If the memories are thin or complicated, tell what you can and finish with the one sentence that is the whole point: "We brought you, and God claimed you." Candidates: your only job is to ask one question about that day.

Closing Prayer

Leader: *Father, over the waters of the Jordan You tore the heavens open and named Your Son beloved, and the Spirit came down and stayed. Thank You that at our own baptism You did not whisper. Prepare these candidates for the day Your claim on them is sealed, and let every one of us hear again the first word You ever spoke over us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." (Luke 4:18)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 5, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **Luke 3:15-22** (Build, Scene One: the baptism of Jesus; read at home this week)
- **John 1:32-34** (Build, Scene One: the Spirit descends and remains)
- **Isaiah 11:2** (recited from memory alongside John 1:32)
- **Luke 4:16-21** (Build, Scene Two: live discovery, the Nazareth scroll)
- **Acts 10:38** (recalled from Session 3: God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit)
- **Genesis 8:8-12** (Dig Deeper: Noah's dove over the waters)
- **John 16:7** (One Last Glimpse: it is to your advantage that I go away)

Catechism: CCC 536, 537, 1286 (and 535-536 in your pocket for the adoptionism guard).

Voices: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Against Heresies III, 17); St. Hilary of Poitiers (Commentary on Matthew); St. Gregory Nazianzen (Oration 39, On the Holy Lights).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 5, one per household, with the baptism-story practice and its gentle framing.