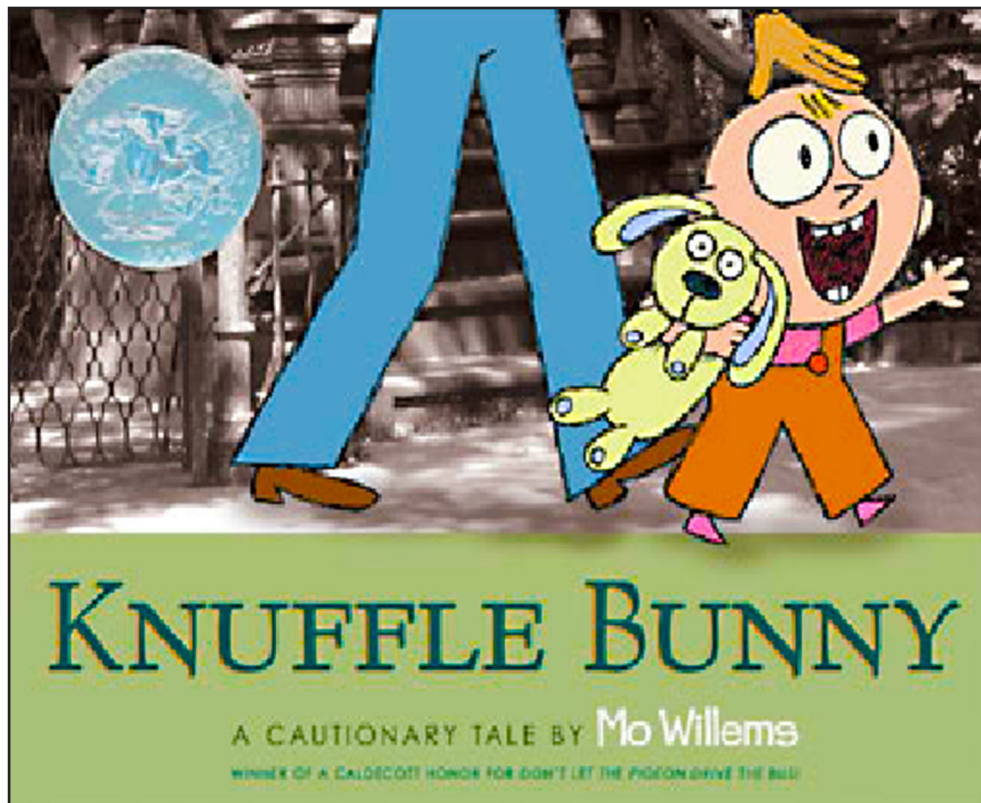


# Living Grace

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
CYCLE C

“GIVING OUR ALL TO BRING PEACE ON EARTH”



*In **Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale**, an outing with Daddy to the laundromat goes wrong when Trixie realizes that Knuffle Bunny has been left behind. Though she can't yet talk, Trixie cries and babbles to let Daddy know that she has a very important message. It's only when they get home and Mommy realizes what the problem is that the family can fix it - creating peace in their world!*



*NEON MUSIC SIGN*

*Artist unknown, Image by Nevit Dilmen ~ 2006*

### EXPLORING THE ART:

We can probably all agree that we do not usually think of "neon signs" when we hear the term "sacred art"! However, neon signs, with their shining lights and bright colors, can be seen as a modern day example of the exuberance of the spoken words of the Prophets as they proclaimed the coming of the Jesus Christ all throughout Salvation History. The attention-grabbing characteristics of neon signs - shining and bright - are a great visual expression to illustrate the great measures that were taken by the Prophets to communicate God's message. Just as the bright and colorful lights of a neon sign appear even brighter against a black background, the message of the Prophets shined even more brightly as a beacon of hope in the darkness of a world without Jesus.

### LOOK OVER HERE!

While neon signs had come to be known as a tacky and outdated way for commercial businesses to grab the public's attention, they have recently re-emerged as a favored artistic medium in pop culture, due in large part to nostalgia for 1980's. Neon signs are constructed from bent glass tubes with different colors being obtained by neon gas that glows with light when an electric current is sent through it. In addition to actual neon signs, neon colors and effects are also now a popular trend in today's digital design.

# Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



## **ABIDE IN ME**

*Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts*

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.*

*~ John 7:7-9*

Read-aloud video link:

**[KNUFFLE BUNNY: A CAUTIONARY TALE](#)**

Written & Illustrated by Mo Willems

# Sunday Gospel

LUKE 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,  
when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,  
and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,  
and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region  
of Ituraea and Trachonitis,  
and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,  
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,  
the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.  
John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan,  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,  
as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*A voice of one crying out in the desert:*

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,*

*make straight his paths.*

*Every valley shall be filled*

*and every mountain and hill shall be made low.*

*The winding roads shall be made straight,*

*and the rough ways made smooth,*

*and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*

# Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

**SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO COMMUNICATE IN EXTREME MEASURES AND ACTIONS TO WAKE UP AND CAUTION THE PEOPLE AROUND US THAT ALL THEY VALUE IS AT STAKE.**

John the Baptist is a very important person in Salvation History. He is a cousin of Jesus, and like Jesus, had a miraculous birth and a unique call and mission from God. Both of their comings were announced by angels to their parents. They came into the world in similar ways, but they had very different roles to fulfill in Salvation History.

John was very clear on their distinctly different roles. John said that he is the one who has come to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus the Messiah. John, as a prophet of God, was given the ability to see God's plan and his own purpose within that plan. He could see that his job was to get people ready for the most significant event in human history, and he was to use all of his abilities and skills, his persuasive voice, and his actions. He approached this mission with all of his being. His goal was to get this important message across to a people who were spiritually deaf, blind, and hard hearted. The spiritual condition of a "hardened heart" makes us unable to see the presence and action of God in the world. This is what Jesus means when he says, "You look but you do not see, you listen but you do not hear." The people's hearts were hardened. How will John get their hearts softened - receptive and ready - for the coming of the Lord?

In our children's story today, we can see an example of how difficult it can be to have an important message to share, but do not have the language to communicate that message! Like Trixie in our story, John the Baptist, engages in many extreme behaviors - living out in the desert, eating only locusts and honey, and wearing funny clothing - to get everyone's attention. John the Baptist is trying with all his might to fulfill the mission that God has given him - calling people to "wake up", to turn around and go the other way. He calls us to go toward what is most valuable - our relationship with the God who made us, and who is the source of our love, life, blessing, and abundance.

Peace is restored when Trixie and Knuffle Bunny are reunited. In the same way, through humankind's reunion with God, peace on earth is also restored. This is a big message to communicate! We are called to be like John and Jesus - people with a mission from God, to be able to "hear" and "see". May we be among those that bring about the redemption of the world.

# Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** Have you ever had a toy that you took everywhere with you? Did you ever lose it? How did it feel? Did the adults around you understand how important it was to you? Can you understand Trixie's challenge? Have you ever felt like something was so important to you, but no one could really understand? What did you do about it?

**THE CHILDRENS' STORY:** What did Trixie do to try to get her dad's attention? How did her mom help? How does Trixie's mom help her dad understand the mission to save Knuffle Bunny?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** Do you know much about John the Baptist? What were some of the things he did to get people's attention? Did it work? What does John the Baptist do to get help? Does Jesus help him? How does it help people to "see" Jesus by John the Baptist having already woken them up?

How can you, like John the Baptist, help to wake people up to the real meaning of Advent and Christmas? What are your own special gifts from God? How can you use these to get people ready?

# Biblical Background

LUKE 3:1-6

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** In the prologue to this Gospel, Luke reveals that he has done thorough investigation from the beginning, so that he can accurately record the narrative for Theophilus in an orderly manner. We see this orderliness in the opening lines with specific details outlined. Luke introduces his readers to John the Baptist, the son of Zechariah. He states clearly, that the word of God came to and through John, to those who came to be dipped under the water of the Jordan River. John appears on the eastern side of the Jordan River calling out to those who cross that they need to repent (literally “turn around and come back”), so that they can be baptized (“dipped”) under the coursing waters of this river, so rich with Biblical memory and miracle. Baptism by John was a way to show the desire to restore a relationship with God, and relationships with others, that might have been broken by sin.

**TERMS: Prophet** A prophet is a person who speaks the words of God. Luke identifies John as a prophet which is an accolade of the highest honor. Later in this Gospel, Jesus will also refer to his cousin, John, as a prophet and so much more. John is a critical historical character in the Salvation History. He knows that he is the one that the Prophet Isaiah had in mind when he spoke about a predecessor - a voice of a man crying out in the wilderness, who would arrive in advance of the true Messiah in order to help others prepare the way for the Lord. As the Gospel moves forward, Jesus’s role increases while John’s decreases. First, however, it was John’s call to turn around and prepare for the arrival of the Messiah, that paved the way for the appearance of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry in Israel.

**Repent** The Bible defines sin as a condition of alienation and separation from God and others. We move away from God, God does not move away from us. This separation can be categorized in degrees of seriousness, from simple acts of alienation and separation, to those more serious and even to a final stage that could imperil our mortal soul. When we repent, our sin is forgiven, and the debt incurred by sin is erased. We come back to a loving God. John the Baptist’s call to repent is an invitation, an invitation to restored fellowship and communion with God and others in the community of faith. John works to invite healing of the community’s hardened hearts, so that they will be able to “see” and to “hear” the mission of Jesus.

**Salvation History** Salvation History is the story of how God has worked with his people to free them from the slavery of sin and to bring them into the fullness of life, love, and friendship with God and each other.

**CULTURAL INSIGHTS:** Luke makes mention of six unique historical characters who were on the scene when John first appeared in the Judean wilderness to dip men and women in the moving waters of the Jordan River. Luke writes that John appears baptizing in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar who would rule the Roman world as Emperor until his death in 37 AD. Luke wants his readers to know that all of these historical characters were alive and active during the public ministry of both John the Baptist and Jesus. Luke wants the Gospel to be locked securely in history with the mention of these New Testament influencers.

**INSIGHTS INTO MEANING:** John was a prophet of God whose voice was clarion and clear. Whose voice carries the same weight today in your life? In the life of your faith community? Advent is the perfect season to listen for that call to repentance and restoration. Use the weeks of Advent to prepare your way back to the Lord. Fill the valleys and lower the hills in your life. Make the winding ways straight so that your journey back will be easy, and so that it can be a witness to others about how much they, too, are loved by God. In the Lord’s Prayer we ask the Lord to provide for us our daily bread and that God forgives our sins (this assumes that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us). This theme of the forgiveness of sins is central to the message of John the Baptist and the healing of the hardened heart.

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** What concern do you have as a family that you want to wake people up to? What steps might you take to do so? What are positive and respectful ways to be "heard" in today's society? How does the example of John the Baptist teach us to "speak up"?

**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** GIFT OF VOICE  
ACTIVE LISTENER

**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** 1) Create Megaphones and noise makers with messages on them to help kids be like John the Baptist - getting people's attention to get out an important message! 2) Learn about the hardened heart by doing a water and soil experiment: See how applying water can loosen up hard soil so the nourishment can get in. Talk about why we have to protect our hearts from becoming hardened. How can God's grace work (like water) to open up our hearts (the hard soil) so that growth can happen? Discuss how God's love and grace are the nutrients to be received into our hearts and lives.