

Mental



✓ Prepare in Advance

Facilitator: In advance of the session:

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the *Bible Background Video* ready to view.

✓ Explore

As you begin, ask the following introductory questions:

- This time of year, we can view our culture's popular image of Jesus – a silent baby in a picture-perfect stable.
- Why is it dangerous to “leave Jesus in the manger?”
- Why is it dangerous to take him out?
- Have someone read Luke 3:7-18 out loud and show the *Bible Background Video*.

✓ The Baptism of Fire

- This isn't a feel-good kind of scripture passage that we usually associate with Advent and Christmas! What does this have to do with Advent's goal of preparing for Jesus to come?
- Looking at the end of this passage might help us understand the beginning. How does John describe the coming Messiah? What will he do? What do you think John might mean by the “baptism of fire” (v. 16)?
- In an individual sense, what does it mean for us to be baptized by fire? How does the Holy Spirit's work in our lives separate the wheat (usable) from the chaff (unusable)?

✓ The Fruit of Repentance

- In light of this (wheat/chaff image), what do you think John means by “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (v. 8)?
- How is repentance like separating the wheat from chaff in our own lives? What needs to be removed from our lives? What needs to be kept?
- Some of the Jewish people trusted in their ancestry and religious practices to make them righteous before God (children of Abraham, v. 8). If John were preaching to Christians today, how do you think he might re-phrase this warning for us? What social,

ethnic or religious statuses do we cling to? Why are they not enough?

- John offers specific instructions for tax collectors and soldiers. If he were speaking to someone in your profession or stage of life, what might he say about righteous living?

✓ Closing

God, sometimes we would rather leave Jesus in the manger. His coming heralds challenge and sacrifice... but also joy and peace with God. As we lift up Christ this Advent and Christmas, give us courage to lift up the True Messiah who baptizes with fire and the Holy Spirit!

By Jon Parks

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