

John Baptizes Jesus

(Matthew 3:1-17)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Teacher, invite your students to think of a famous sports figure they wish would visit their home. What might they do to prepare for his or her visit? Challenge every student in your class to give a different answer. Consider preparations such as cleaning, painting, redecorating, fixing fancy food, getting nice clothes to wear, etc. List answers on the board.

Then ask students to imagine that Jesus is coming to visit their home. What might they do to prepare? Would they do some of the same things they did for the sports figure? Would some preparations not be as important? What would be important if Jesus were coming to visit? What if He were coming to stay? Discuss how a clean, willing heart gives Jesus the best welcome of all into a person's life.

Opening Prayer

Father, help us to want to be more and more like John the Baptist, whose job it was to point the way to the coming of Jesus. I pray that we will realize this morning that you want each and every one of us to be eager to tell someone about how wonderful You are. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:16)

Lesson

Alternative Lesson Plan

Invite a guest speaker to dress up as John the Baptist (beard, sandals, rugged clothing including some sort of animal skin) or dress up as John the Baptist yourself. Have your guest read Luke 3:1-38 in preparation for the dramatic, first-person account of the events of Luke 3. Make sure that your special guest includes the following events from this chapter:

- John preached that people should be baptized to show they had turned away from their sins to God (Luke 3:1-3).
- John preached, "Prepare the way for the Lord." His ministry was to prepare people for the Messiah (Luke 3:4-6).
- John warned the crowds not to be baptized for the wrong reasons (Luke 3:7-14).
- John denied that he was the Messiah: "One more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." (Luke 3:15-20)
- John baptized Jesus. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. God announced His favor for His Son. Jesus was ready to begin His ministry. (Luke 3:21-23)

Make sure that your special "John the Baptist" guest speaker explains baptism. It is a public expression of salvation and a desire to follow and obey God. Jesus did not need to repent or be forgiven of sins (He had none) but He desired to obey His Father. He wanted to publicly express His desire to follow God, so He was baptized. Tell students about your own salvation and baptism experiences. Allow children to tell of their own salvation and baptism experiences.

Teacher, ask why sin is such an important issue to God. Why does He care? Why doesn't He simply overlook some of the small things people do? Discuss the holiness and perfection of God.

Regular Lesson Plan

[Teacher, review with the children, who John the Baptist was...] An angel had appeared to Zechariah and told him that he and his wife, Elizabeth, were to have a special son and his name was to be John. John would be just a little older than Jesus. Although they were cousins, they had grown up in different parts of Israel and they had never seen each other.

God had a special job for John to do before Jesus started His ministry. God wanted John to point the way to Jesus. And, God wants us to point others to the Lord Jesus, too. God wants each one of us to be a witness and an evangelist for Jesus.

Many years had passed since John and Jesus had been born. Now they were both young men. And, God had important jobs for each of them. John's job was to prepare people to receive Jesus.

John went into the desert where he could be alone with God and study the Scriptures. He knew that God was sending the Messiah, the savior of the world, and that it was his job to prepare the people's hearts to listen to the Messiah when He did come.

One day John began to preach.

Matthew 3:1-3

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, (2) "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." (3) The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming! Clear the road for him!'"

John's message was simple and direct. He told the people to turn from their sins and ask God to forgive them. John told people to get ready because the savior was on His way! The One who would die to save them from their sin was soon to appear. This One was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

What would you do if you knew Jesus was on His way? [Teacher, let the children respond.]

Many people realized that God was not happy with the way they were living and were deeply sorry. John led them into the Jordan River to baptize them.

Matthew 3:5-6

People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. (6) And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

How many of you have been baptized? Why did you get baptized? [Teacher, discuss the significance of baptism with the children.] Baptism shows people that you are sorry for your sins and that you believe that when Jesus died on the cross He took the punishment for your sins.

John was helping people prepare their hearts for the coming of Jesus. Then at last, Jesus traveled from his home out to the Jordan River where John was baptizing people. [Teacher, point out the locations on the map.]

John 1:29 [Teacher, read...]

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

The people looked where John was pointing. There stood the Lord Jesus Christ! John was telling them that the Christ, the promised Savior, had come.

Matthew 3:13-14

Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. (14) But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

John knew that Jesus was God the Son, Who had never done anything sinful in His life. John was trying to tell Jesus that he was

unworthy to baptize Him. Why do you think that Jesus allowed John to baptize Him? (As an example for other people.)

John baptized God the Son! When Jesus came up out of the water, something marvelous happened!

Matthew 3:16-17

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. (17) And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

John helped people get ready to meet Jesus. God wants you and I to do the same thing. Many people today do not know about the Lord Jesus. God wants you to point others to Jesus. Our world is full of pain and misery and evil because of sin. People need to believe in the Lord Jesus so they can have their sins forgiven and live for God.

You can allow God to use your life so that others can know Jesus. You can be a good example for those around you. They will notice something different in your life when you don't use bad words or when you are honest, kind, and loving. Then you can tell them about the Lord Jesus and what He did on the cross to forgive their sins. You can point them to Jesus by sharing your testimony. Can you think of some ways you can point people to Jesus? [Teacher, allow children to discuss ways they can witness.] God wants us to share the wonderful news that Jesus can forgive our sins!

Closing Prayer

Father, light our hearts on fire so that we cannot keep our mouths shut about what a wonderful Savior You are! Give us a desire in our hearts to tell everyone we meet that you are a great God, Who loves us and forgives us and is preparing a place for us in Heaven. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen

Learning Activities

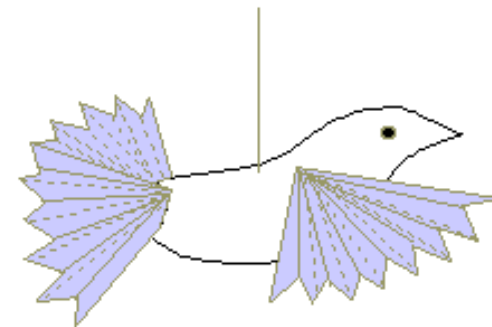
Lesson Review Activity

Make a path in your room with a long rope. Put lots of bends, twists, and curves in the path. Have the children take off their shoes and walk on the "tightrope." When the first child is several feet along the path, have the next child begin. After everyone has walked the path, straighten the rope, and have the children walk along the path again. Then, gather the children and ask:

- Was it easier to walk along the crooked path or the straight path?
- Why did John ask the people to straighten the road?
- How can we straighten the road today?

To straighten the road for Jesus means to get ready for his coming. We can get ready for Jesus by looking at our lives and by getting rid of the things that keep us from following Jesus. Then we'll be able to welcome Jesus with our whole hearts.

Craft Corner



Supplies needed:

- White construction paper or card stock
- White tissue paper, 6"x10"
- Ribbon
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Clear tape
- Optional: markers, glue, glitter, wiggly eyes

Procedures:

1. Cut the body out of stiff white paper.
2. Make a slit in the body for the wings.
3. Fold each piece of tissue like an accordion, ½" folds.
4. Insert the folded tissue paper (wings) into the slit in the bird's body.
5. Punch a hole and thread it with the ribbon to hang it up.
6. Optional: decorate the dove with markers or glitter or wiggly eyes.

Game Center

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. Who did God send to prepare a way for the Messiah (Christ)? (John the Baptist announced that the Jewish Messiah would soon come.)
2. What did John do to prepare the Jewish people for the Messiah? (John preached about Repentance for the forgiveness of sins and baptized people in the Jordan River when they did repent of their sins.)
3. What did John the Baptist mean when he called Jesus "The Lamb of God"? (Jesus was the one who would be sacrificed for their sins.)
4. What does "repent" mean? (Repent means to STOP a bad attitude or action, and to START a good one. It means "change directions" or "turn around.")
5. What did John the Baptist use water for? (Baptism)
6. Who was John preparing the way for? (Jesus)
7. Why did John want people to be ready for Jesus? (so they would listen to Him)
8. How can we prepare our hearts to love Jesus? (turn from our sins)
9. Why did Jesus get baptized? (Jesus was baptized to set an example for us of obedience to God. Or, He was baptized to mark the beginning of his public ministry.)
10. How did God show he was pleased with Jesus' obedience? (God spoke out of Heaven and the Spirit of God descended upon Him.)
11. Name at least one special thing that happened when John baptized Jesus. (The Holy Spirit came down as a dove and remained on Jesus. Heaven was opened; God spoke audibly.)
12. What does it mean to you that "the kingdom of heaven is near?" (Jesus is coming again!)
13. What would you like to change about your heart and life?
14. What can you do to be like John the Baptist and "prepare the way for the Lord"? (be a witness and an evangelist)
15. How can you prepare your heart for Jesus? (I can repent, confess my sins, be baptized, etc.)

16. Why is baptism important? (God commands us to be baptized; it is a sign of our death and rebirth in Christ; it shows the world that we are followers of Jesus.)

