

St. John the Baptist

At that time John the Baptist came to the desert of Judea and started preaching. “Turn away from your sins,” he said, “because the kingdom of heaven is near!” John was the man the prophet Isaiah was talking about when he said,

“Someone is shouting in the desert, ‘Prepare a road for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!’ ”

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair; he wore a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. People came to him from Jerusalem, from the whole province of Judea, and



from all over the country near the Jordan River. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan.

John said to the many who came to him: I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is much greater than I am; and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals.

At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. But John tried to make him change his mind. "I ought to be baptized by you," John said, "and yet you have come to me!"

But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires." So John agreed.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and lighting on him. Then a voice said from heaven, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased."

Matthew 3



5. *Homework Assignment:* Finish identifying the figures in the picture and show it to your parents.
6. Closing prayer and dismissal.

Note: Next week's activities include a diorama. Have students each bring in a shoebox or be prepared to provide them yourself.

Session 2—John the Baptist

Key Concepts

1. John the Baptist came to proclaim Jesus.
2. John the Baptist lived a life of humility.
3. John baptized Jesus.

Objectives

Students will

1. Discuss the story from Matthew 3.
2. Create a diorama on the baptism of Jesus.

Background for Teacher

Matthew 3.

Materials Needed

- Shoebox for each student
- Scissors
- Construction paper
- Glue or tape
- Inserts from student activity packet
- Paint

Procedure

1. Welcome students. Opening prayer. Remind students of the baptism of Jesus and the appearance of the dove. Recall with the children that the immersion in baptism is a sign of what is happening to the soul—it is being cleansed from sin. Ask: "But isn't this strange? Why should Jesus, who was sinless, need to be baptized? John the Baptist asked the same question, in a way. He said to Jesus: 'Lord, it is I who should seek baptism from you.' Jesus answered this by telling John it was something that should be done. What Jesus probably meant by this was a reminder to John that though he was God, he also was a man and wanted to do what men should do. Jesus was being very humble." (At this point, make sure that the students know what the word "humble" means. Simply, it means not pushy, not proud, not trying to let everyone think you're special.) "John the Baptist must have been a very special person to be the one asked to baptize Jesus. But John said that he should be asking Jesus' blessing. Do you think John was humble?" Discuss. (10 min.)
2. What do we know about John the Baptist? There is actually a great deal, and what we know comes from the gospels. First, have students repeat his

Armenian name, Soorp Hovhannes. Read what St. Matthew has to say about St. John the Baptist on pages 114 and 115 in the student text.

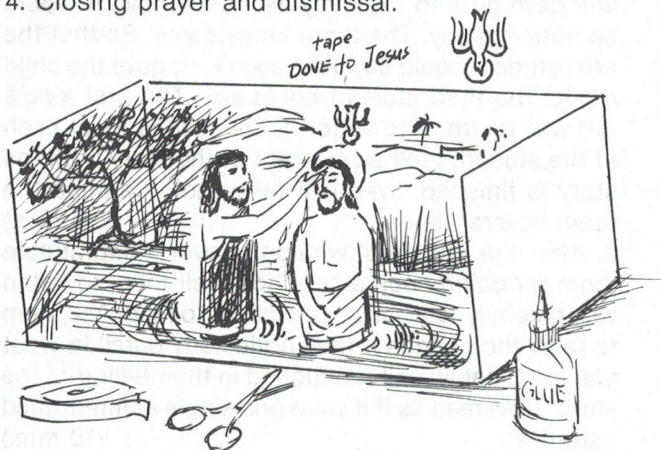
Point out to the students that this isn't all Matthew says about John the Baptist, but it is enough for us to get some idea of the kind of man John was. What kind of man was he? Suggest that students read "John the Baptist" aloud; stop to ponder any words or thoughts that seem difficult or strange. You may want to relate John's preaching to the sort of thing prophets do: calling for repentance as a message from God. Then, after reading what Isaiah says, explain that it is exactly what John is saying and doing.

After the reading, review the story by playing "round robin." Have one child start the story with a sentence; the next child continues, and so on. If a student doesn't remember what comes next, pass on to the next person. And if no one can clearly tell the story, help out. Stop at appropriate times and ask children:

- What was John like? What kind of person was he? How did he dress? What did he eat?
- What was he doing in Judea at the River Jordan?
- Whom was he proclaiming (talking about)?
- What happened when Jesus came to the River Jordan? (20 min.)

3. For the remaining half hour, distribute shoe boxes, inserts, and paint. Have students cut and paint the background, dove, and figures of Jesus and John the Baptist. Help them tape down figures as per the diagram below. Keep dioramas for display purposes until the end of the school year (only two weeks away). Review story with students individually, as it seems appropriate. (30 min.)

4. Closing prayer and dismissal.



Session 3—The Birth of Jesus

Key Concept

The birth of Jesus is recorded in Scripture and has changed the world.