



Jesus and John the Baptist

Revelation of the Son of Man

About the Story

Today's story begins with a list of emperors and rulers. This may seem strange, but it has two purposes. First, it situates the story in a specific place and time—the dates that Emperor Tiberius reigned, for example, is well documented: he was in power from 14 to 37 CE. Second, beginning with all these powerful rulers provides a stark contrast to the two figures that will appear next: John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. He was described as receiving the word of God “in the wilderness” (Luke 3:2). The account in the Gospel of Mark further describe John as eating a diet of locusts and honey and clothed in camel hair with a leather belt (Mark 1:6). This is a stark contrast to the common images of emperors and rulers in their grand palaces, fine clothes, and expensive foods. Jesus, too, is in stark contrast to these rulers, having been born in the rural town of Bethlehem and being laid in a feeding trough for animals (Luke 2:1-7).

The Point:

Jesus is proclaimed as the Son of God. Jesus is revealed to be from God and is anointed as such. The power of the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and a voice from heaven proclaims Jesus to be the beloved Son of God. His power is foretold and affirmed by John the Baptist. Through our baptism, we are commissioned to go into the world and proclaim the revelation that Jesus is Messiah.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness along the River Jordan. His birth had been miraculously promised to Zechariah (Luke 1:5-25), a priest in the holy temple. John proclaimed that something new and grand was coming, and that all people should turn from their sins and make a public affirmation (through washing in the river) of their intent to follow John's message of radical repentance and love for neighbor. John proclaims that one more powerful than he is to come. The story then gives a brief foreshadowing of what is to come: John will be arrested, and later killed (Luke 9:7). The story ends with a description of Jesus' baptism by John with the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove and a voice from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).

John's proclamation of the one to come was fulfilled in Jesus. Both of these figures are quite unlike the Roman leaders. John's message is one of hope, repentance, and care for the neighbor. Jesus' message, as we will see in the coming weeks, is also one of care for the most vulnerable in society. Through John's proclamation, Luke gives us further proof that Jesus is the Messiah.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, the infant Jesus was brought to the temple to be dedicated to God and was recognized and named as the savior by two prophets, Anna and Simeon. As a child, he returned to the temple and amazed the teachers with his wisdom. Today's lesson, John the Baptist foretells the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is baptized and a voice from heaven confirms that Jesus is the Son of God. Next week, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth to proclaim that the salvation prophecies are fulfilled for all people, receiving violent reactions there.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of love, you sent your servant, John out of the wilderness to proclaim the message about the coming Messiah. Send us, too, into the world to care for others and share the good news of your Son, the Beloved. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen!

Into the Story

Go around the group and discuss your answers to the following questions: When did you last see a baptism? Who was being baptized? What words, symbols, and images were used? Do you remember your own baptism if you were old enough? Or perhaps the baptisms of your children or grandchildren? What do you remember from those events?

Learning the Story

John the Baptist proclaims the coming of the Messiah. Soon after, Jesus is baptized and a voice from heaven confirms that Jesus is the beloved Son of God.

Read Luke 3:1-9 – The Beginnings of Baptism

- ❓ Why does the writer of the Gospel of Luke list all these political and religious powers? What is the point?
- ❓ "Repentance" in Greek literally means "turning around." When have you last had to completely turn around to get something right?
- ❓ Where does the prophet Isaiah say this? What is the prophet predicting in his own time?
- ❓ It is a huge thing for John to say that ancestry is not important. What is important instead?
- ❓ Why do you think John was so angry with the crowds?
- ❓ What does it mean to you to "bear fruit"?

Read Luke 3:10-22 – John's Teachings to the Crowds

- ❓ Is there a theme in John's instructions to the crowd, the tax collectors, and the soldiers? What similarities do you see?

- ❓ Name three groups common in your world today—one might be politicians, for example. What do you think John would say to them?
- ❓ How would you describe John's depiction of the coming Messiah?
- ❓ What kinds of "chaff" (useless or wasteful) things do you think John witnessed in his day? What do you see that is wasteful in your own world, even in your own life?
- ❓ What is the good news that John is proclaiming?
- ❓ If baptism is about turning one's life around, why do you think Jesus chose to be baptized?

Living the Story: Worship

For today's Living the Story activity, the group will celebrate a remembrance of baptism. A remembrance of baptism reminds us of our being claimed as children of God and our connection to our Christian family. If you have not yet been baptized, feel free to participate in the activity, reflecting on what baptism means to you or the image of Jesus being the water of life (John 7:37-39).

Supplies

- ✝ Bowl of water
- ✝ Towel

Form a circle. Choose one person to begin the activity. That person dips their finger into the bowl of water and then makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the person to their left (or hand, if they prefer), saying these or similar words: "Through water you have been redeemed. Remember your baptism, child of God!" or "Jesus says, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:38). Then, the person who just received the blessing does the same to the person on their left until everyone has both given and received the blessing.

Closing Prayer

Form a circle and hold hands. Choose one person to begin the prayer, then, go around the circle and say a prayer, gently squeezing the hand of the person next to you when you are finished (feel free to pass if you would like). When everyone has had the chance to pray, the person who began the prayer says, "And all the people of God said," to which everyone responds, "Amen!"

Bible Connections

- ✝ John the Baptist borrows the words of the prophet Isaiah when he proclaims, "Prepare the way of the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3-5).
- ✝ The baptism of Jesus occurs in all four of the Gospels: Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, and indirectly John 1:19-42.
- ✝ In Genesis 17:1-8 God promises to bless all nations through Abraham. John the Baptist speaks of extending this Abrahamic blessing in Luke 3:8, where he says that God can and will raise up children of Abraham to bear fruit.

At Home

- ✝ We can remember our baptism every day—every time we wash our hands or face, we can remember that we have a chance at a "turn-around" and a fresh start. While washing your hands, offer a prayer of thanks for the opportunity to repent.
- ✝ Sing or read through a favorite hymn about water, such as “Baptized in Water,” “Shall We Gather at the River,” or “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.”
- ✝ This story refers to the Holy Spirit as a dove. What other images are used in the Bible to describe the Holy Spirit? How do you visualize the Holy Spirit? Draw a picture or journal your thoughts.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Gospel

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus' birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection. Yet a Gospel is more than a biography—it is an announcement of good news! In the first century, "good news" was the phrase Roman emperors used to declare their accomplishments and to herald their arrival in a province. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament took this political and religious term and applied it to a surprising new "king" and "kingdom."

Luke is passionate about proclaiming Jesus as Savior, meaning both "one who saves" and "one who heals." Luke's Gospel will lift up stories of miraculous healings, lavish meals, compassionate teachings, and a focus on the outsider. All of these, the writer of Luke declares, are truly "good news!"

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Luke 3:1-22

Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. A voice from heaven declares Jesus to be the beloved Son of God. Say a prayer for all who are newly baptized.

Monday—Read Malachi 3:1-4

The prophet Malachi describes the coming messenger of God. Say a prayer for your pastor and other worship leaders.

Tuesday—Read Acts 19:1-7

Paul baptizes new disciples in the name of Jesus. Invite a friend to church for this coming Sunday.

Wednesday—Read Ephesians 4:1-7

Paul writes about the importance of baptism, declaring that there is one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. What do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in baptism?

Thursday—Luke 3:23-38

Luke gives Jesus' genealogy. How many of the names do you recognize? What does it mean that Jesus is related to all of these biblical figures?

Friday—Luke 4:1-4

Jesus is tempted in the wilderness. Say a prayer asking God for forgiveness, trusting that God has already forgiven you.

Saturday—Luke 4:5-13

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness continues. Do a good deed for a stranger today.