



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

LESSON 15

John The Baptist

Summary of Today's Story

John the Baptist appears in Judea to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven. He warns the people to repent of their sins in order to prepare for the Lord's coming. He also talks of the one who will baptize the people "with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Where You'll Find Today's Story

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Matthew 3:1-12

In Children's Bibles

If you plan to use a children's Bible for storytelling, write the page numbers of today's story in the space below.

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sunday:

Year A: Second Sunday of Advent



Weaving Our Story with the Biblical Story

More than two hundred years after the end of the Exile, Israel is under Roman rule, with limited sovereignty. The Romans agree essentially to leave the Jews alone to practice their religion if they don't make trouble politically.

Has the Exile taught the people any lessons? John the Baptist thinks not. John may have come from a sect near the Dead Sea that separates itself from the rest of the society to retain their purity of righteousness. But John emerges from this community in order to put the people through a baptism of repentance. He comes to "prepare the way of the Lord" by urging people to make themselves right with God before the coming of the kingdom.

John's message closely resembles Jesus' later apocalyptic warnings in Matthew 24–26: "Be prepared, for you do not know when the master is coming."

Matthew's focus is on the kingdom of heaven, and how Jesus comes as a fulfillment of the law and of the prophets. During Advent, we are preparing for Jesus just as John the Baptist calls for us to do.



The Episcopal Thread

Because of his role as forerunner of Jesus' ministry, calling people to repent and to "prepare the way of the Lord," John the Baptist holds a significant place in Christian tradition.

John's baptism of Jesus is mentioned in the Thanksgiving Over the Water (*BCP*, p. 306) in the Rite of Holy Baptism. And it is prominent in many of our hymns, not only in those that are sung at Advent, but also those that are sung at Epiphany when we celebrate the baptism of our Lord and during Lent when we recognize "John, the Bridegroom's friend, [who] became the herald of Messiah's name" (Hymn 143, *The Hymnal 1982*, New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1985).

We observe the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist on June 24.



Gathering

As children enter the room, begin an entry activity that will help get their attention

focused on the Advent theme. Light the Advent candles. If you have a Jesse Tree in the classroom, you might have the children add new ornaments. (You'll find directions for making and hanging Jesse Tree ornaments on pp. 15-16 in the activity section at the end of Lesson 13.) If you have a class Advent calendar, use it to count down the days until Christmas. On page 11, you'll find a Gathering Activity to use if you wish.

As an option for the older children, you might offer a brief fellowship time, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, develop friendships and build community.

After all the children have arrived and had a few minutes of activity or fellowship time, gather them together and say a simple opening prayer, such as:

- We gather here, O God, to prepare for your coming in the form of your Son Jesus Christ. Help us to prepare the way by turning our hearts to you as we hear your story of John the Baptist, the one who calls for us to wait for Jesus to come. This we pray in Jesus' name. *Amen.*



Telling the Story

Read aloud today's story from a children's Bible, showing the pictures, tell the story in your own words, or read from the version of the story we provide, found on pages 8-10.

This story is easily told in your own words or even dramatized. You might dress in fur to become *John the Baptist* and tell the story from his perspective. Remember that John was not only a preacher but also a baptizer. Both of these aspects should be in your story. You may even incorporate the children into the story as Israelites being baptized. You'll find other ways to bring the story to life for the children on pages 2-3 in the Appendix on the Website.

After telling the story, move on to Prayer without discussion. Reflection on the story of John will be more appropriate later, after the children have had time to absorb the story in their minds and hearts. Later, when having snacks or doing an activity, you can bring up the story again and invite the children to talk about it.



Prayer

Set up a small worship center in your classroom.

Materials

- small table with a cloth to cover it
- 2 candles
- Advent wreath with Advent candles or 1 large Christ candle
- matches
- Bible
- cross
- optional:* flowers (real, fake or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles. If you are using an Advent wreath, light the appropriate number of Advent candles.

Read one or two verses from today's scripture to help the children connect the story that they just heard with the Bible. If working with older children, you might expand the reading to several verses.

Suggestions for the reading:

For younger children: Matthew 3:1-2

For older children: Matthew 3:1-3

Help familiarize the children with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew:
(*Read the selected passage.*)

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Ask for prayers of thanks for God's saving presence in our lives during the past week.
- Welcome any prayers for others or for God's help for themselves or their families.
- Ask if anyone has had a birthday or celebrated a special day during the past week and give thanks for these special times.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.



Sharing

Pass out snacks and say a simple grace, such as:

- For the good food in front of us, and for the hands that prepared it, we give you thanks, that you nurture us so that we can nurture others. This we pray in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

This is a good time, while sharing a snack, to encourage the children to talk about the story. The character of John the Baptist and his place in the story of Jesus is fascinating. You may wish to look up the different stories of John the Baptist in Mark and in Luke to give the children a sense of his imposing personality and his rock-solid integrity.



Memorization

There is no new memorization for this lesson, but continue to encourage the children to work on the memorization of previously assigned passages.



Weaving Our Faith

Before the closing prayer, take a few minutes to help the children think about today's story and what it teaches us about God by asking questions such as:

- What was the story about today?
- What did John talk about?
- Why do you think that God sent John?

Remind the children of these key themes and words: *Baptist, baptize, repent, prepare.*



Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing. The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Lord God, send us now back to our homes and to our families and friends in your love and mercy, so that we can spread your love to them and to the ends of the earth. Thank you for staying here with us today, in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

End the class with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The children respond:

- Thanks be to God.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

MATTHEW 3: 1-12

John the Baptist was just born John. We call him *John the Baptist* because, when he was older, he would baptize people in the Jordan River. But first, he is just “John.”

John is born in the hill country, not in a town or a city. Zechariah and Elizabeth are his parents. He is Jesus’ cousin, and he is six months older than Jesus.

We don’t know anything about how John grows up. We meet him when he is already grown up, and he comes out of the hills like a strange man indeed. He doesn’t dress like the other men. For clothes, he wears camel’s hair instead of cloth. He ties up the fur around him with a leather belt, which holds it together. And John doesn’t eat like everybody else, either. Everybody else eats bread, olives, plums, apples, melons, grapes, cucumbers, beans, fish, meat, and eggs. John eats wild honey—and bugs! Locusts!

One day, John shows up in the wilderness and stops at the Jordan River. He looks strange, but when he speaks, the people listen.

These are hard times. The people are poor. They don’t know what God wants them to do. They don’t want someone to come to help them, to save them from whatever they are doing wrong. They want someone to come and make everything right with God. They have heard that someone *is* coming—a savior, a *Messiah*, they call him. He will come to make everything right. But who is this savior, and when is he coming?

Then John comes. He is not the savior, he says. But he is here to help the people get ready for this savior, and for the kingdom of God that this savior will bring.

“How do we get ready for God?” someone asks.

John says, “You need to turn away from your sins and be forgiven. When you turn away from your sins, I will baptize you in the Jordan River and the water that you are dunked in will be a sign of forgiveness.”

The word spreads to the whole countryside. Someone is getting us ready for the coming of God’s rule! We must get ready! We must go to see him and hear him speak!”

So people from all over the countryside flock to hear John. Here he is, in his tunic of camel hair and holding a handful of locusts—his lunch. He is near the river, calling people to be baptized by him.

Someone shouts to him, “Are you the one?”

John says, “I am not the one. The one who is coming is much more powerful than I am. I will baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. While mine is a baptism of water, his will be a baptism of fire! But I will help you to be prepared for his coming.”

Lots of people ask John to baptize them in the river. Farmers and merchants come. Soldiers and fishermen come. Tax collectors come. Rich people, poor people, important people, people who have nothing ... all come.

“What should we do?” they ask. John says to the tax collectors, the ones who take money for the government, “Just don’t take more than you should. Don’t cheat people.” To the soldiers, he says, “Don’t keep asking for more money. Be satisfied with what they pay you.” And to everybody else, even the poor people, he says, “If you have two coats, and you see someone who doesn’t have any coat, give him a coat. Then both of you will be warm. And if you have plenty of food

and you see someone who is hungry, share with him some of your food. If you have two fishes to eat, eat one and give the other one to someone who doesn't have any food."

"Good," think the people. "I can do that." So one by one, and then in bunches, then a big mass, people start to get into the cold Jordan River. As they stand in the river, John comes to them one by one, hears them confess their sins, and tells them how to get ready for God. Then he pours water over their heads and baptizes them.

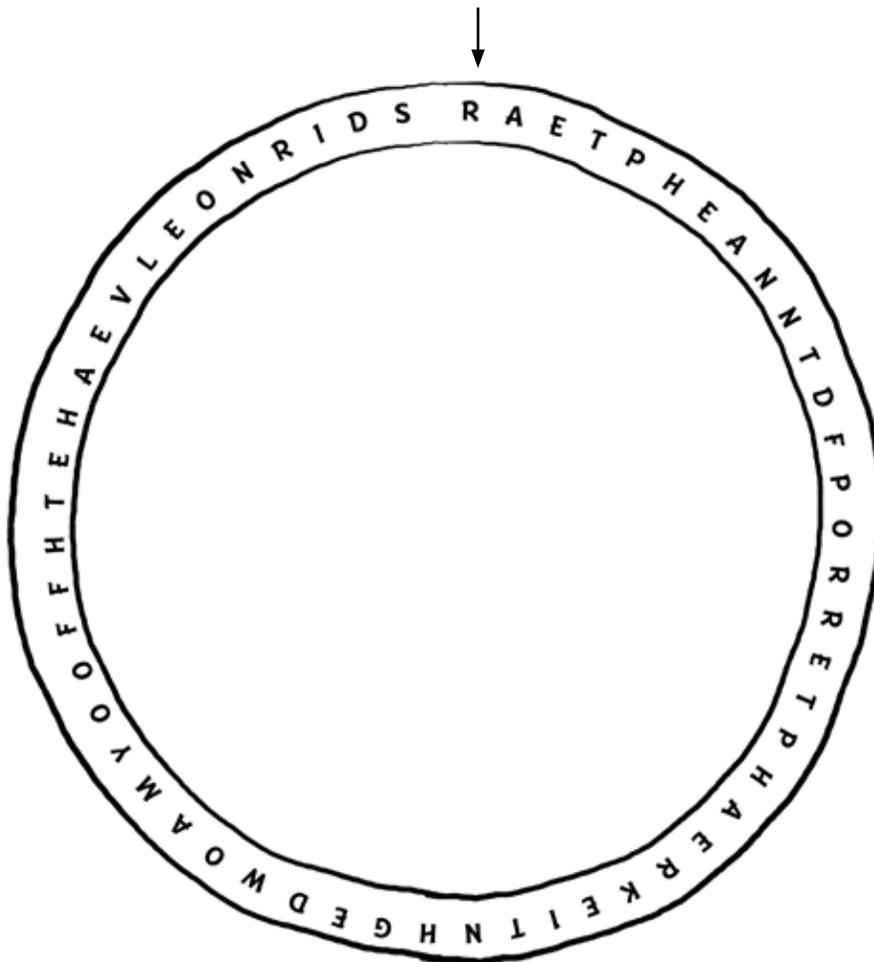


WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

GATHERING ACTIVITY: JOHN THE BAPTIST

What does John the Baptist have to say to us? Use the wheel to find out. Begin at the arrow and write down *every other letter* in the spaces below until you get to the end. For example, after the first letter *R*, the next letter is *E*. To get the whole message, you will go around the circle two full times.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

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STRAIGHT PATH MAPS

for Intermediate

John the Baptist talks about “making straight a path for our Lord.” Children make treasure maps with paths showing ways that they hope will allow God into their lives.

Materials:

newsprint, brown wrapping paper, or ivory paper
pencils and markers, or colored pencils
scissors
ribbon

Directions:

Invite each child to make a treasure map. Give the children these directions:

1. Gently wad your paper to create a wrinkled effect. Open the paper. Carefully tear the edges here and there so that the paper looks old and worn. This is your treasure map.
2. *You* are the treasure. Draw yourself as a treasure in the middle of your map.
3. In pencil, fill in the rest of the map with pictures that show ways that you hope God can come to you. For example, you could draw different roads to you symbolizing love, friendship and other things that you care about. Houses or inns along the way could represent various events in your life, particular people or pets, important parts of you, etc.
4. Include road signs and landmarks that might mark the way.
5. You could draw obstacles in the road representing problems, doubts or worries—things that might keep God from coming close to you.
6. Color your map with markers or colored pencils.
7. Roll up your treasure map and tie it with a piece of ribbon.



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FINGER PUPPETS

Preschool, Primary

Children make finger puppets and act out the baptisms that John the Baptist performed in the Jordan River.

Materials:

heavy paper
scissors
crayons
Puppet Patterns (p. 14)
optional: blue tissue paper

Preparation:

Copy the *Puppet Patterns* on heavy paper and cut them out, making one John figure and one child figure for each child. Cut out the finger holes.

Directions:

Hand out the cut-out figures and invite the children to make finger puppets and act out baptisms.

1. Ask the children to color their puppets, then show them how to put their fingers through the holes to make legs.
2. Invite the children to use their finger puppets to act out the story of John baptizing people in the Jordan River. As a prop, you might spread blue tissue paper on the table to create a "river."



PUPPET PATTERNS





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FLYING DOVES

for Preschool, Primary, Elementary

Children make flying doves, symbols of God's Spirit.

Materials:

- glue
- Dove Pattern* (p. 16)
- white construction paper
- crayons or markers
- scissors
- yarn
- pencil and ruler (for marking dotted lines)

Preparation:

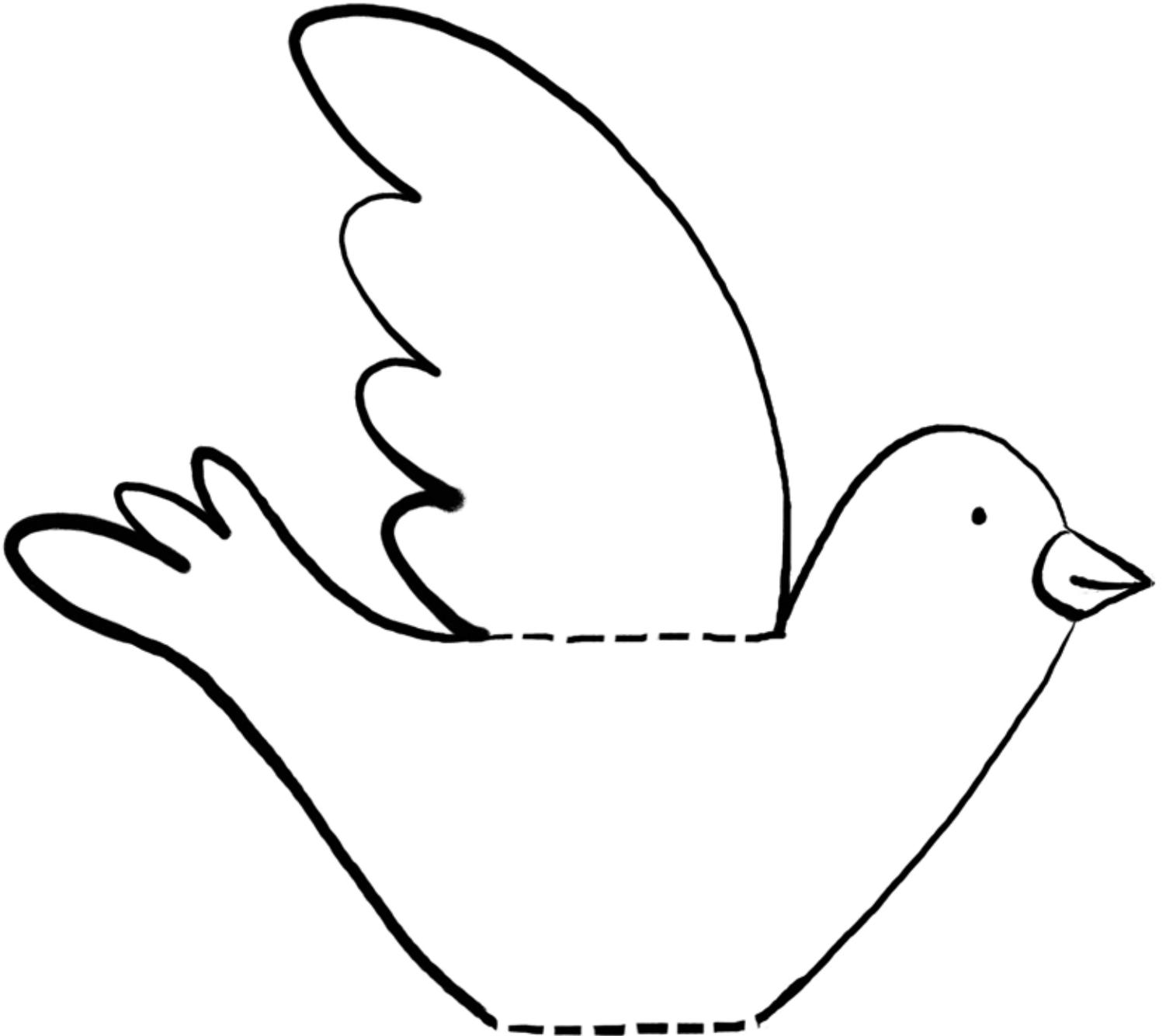
Cut out the *Dove Pattern* and trace around it onto a folded sheet of white construction paper or poster board and lightly mark the dotted lines. Make one tracing for each child.

Directions:

Hand out the folded paper with dove tracings and invite each child to make a flying dove. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children the following instructions:

1. Cut out the dove and color it with crayons or markers. Be sure to color both sides of the bodies and wings.
2. Fold the wings on the dotted lines.
3. Glue or paste the bodies together.
4. Attach a piece of yarn to the top part of the body. The dove may be tied to a hanger or dowel, tacked to the ceiling or hung from a window sill.

DOVE PATTERN





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BAPTISM REMEMBRANCE BOXES

for Primary, Elementary

John baptized many people in the Jordan River. Children make this box that reminds them that they, too, were baptized.

Materials:

- small cardboard or metal boxes with lids (for example, jewelry boxes, mint tins or little boxes purchased at craft stores)
- Tacky® glue
- plastic knives
- small pebbles (natural pebbles or colorful aquarium pebbles)
- small seashells
- small white birthday candles
- What We Say at Baptism* (p. 18)
- scissors

Preparation:

Make a copy of the *What We Say at Baptism* quotes (p. 18) for each child.

Directions:

Distribute the copies of the *What We Say at Baptism* quotes and invite each child to make a baptism remembrance box. Give the children these directions:

1. Take the lid off the box and spread the top of the lid with glue, using a plastic knife.
2. Cover the lid with pebbles. If using colorful pebbles, you can make a design. Let dry.
3. Cut out the quotes from the *Prayer Book*.
4. Inside the box, place a small white candle (a reminder of your baptism), a small seashell (a reminder of the shell used to pour the water on your forehead) and one or more *What We Say at Baptism* quotes from the *Prayer Book*.

WHAT WE SAY AT BAPTISM

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism
and marked as Christ's own for ever. *Amen.*

We receive you into the household of God.
Confess the faith of Christ crucified,
proclaim his resurrection,
and share with us in his
eternal priesthood.

Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized
into the death of Jesus Christ your Son
may live in the power of his resurrection
and look for him to come again in glory.

(from *The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 308, 308 and 306)



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JOHN THE BAPTIST'S RIVER SQUOOSH BOOKS for Primary

Children make river scenes in plastic bags.

Materials:

- 1-pint plastic zip bag
- 1-quart plastic zip bag
- corn syrup
- blue food coloring
- pebbles, small seashells, and sand
- stapler
- optional:* small plastic fish, or confetti fish

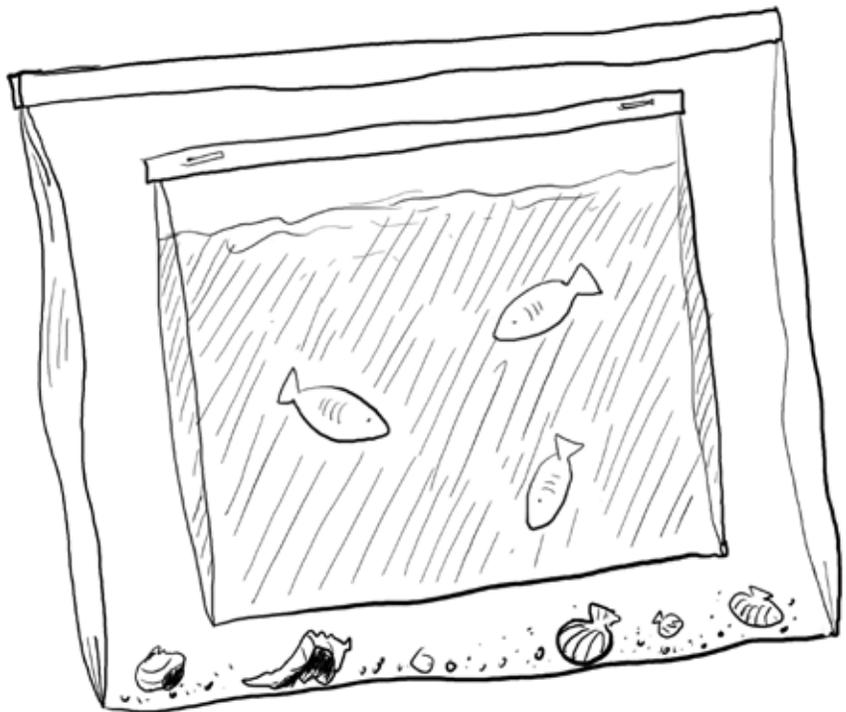
Preparation:

Put a little sand, pebbles, and seashells into a large zipper bag. Make one bag for each child. Set the bags aside.

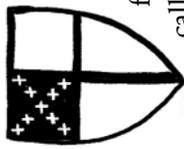
Directions:

Invite each child to make a river scene squoosh book.

1. Ask each child to hold a small zipper bag open. Put in the plastic fish, if you have them.
2. Pour 5-6 tablespoons of corn syrup into each bag. Add 1-2 drops of blue food coloring.
3. Zip the bags completely and have the children carefully squish the color around so that the "water" turns blue.
4. Help each child put the small bag carefully into the large bag and staple it inside. (Staple the large bag above the zipper of the smaller bag and below its own zipper.)



LESSON 15: JOHN THE BAPTIST



We Believe . . .

Because of his role as forerunner of Jesus' ministry, calling people to repent and to "prepare the way of the Lord," John the Baptist holds a significant place in Christian tradition.

John's baptism of Jesus is mentioned in the Thanksgiving Over the Water (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 306) in the Rite of Holy Baptism. And it is prominent in many of our hymns, not only in those that are sung at Advent, but also those that are sung at Epiphany when we celebrate the baptism of our Lord and during Lent when we recognize "John, the Bridegroom's friend, [who] became the herald of Messiah's name" (#143, *The Hymnal* 1982).



Words of Faith

Baptist—the name given to John, because he was known in his ministry to baptize people

Baptize—to briefly submerge (immerse) in water as a sign of initiation, cleansing and rebirth

Repent—to turn away from sin and wrong-doing; to be sorry for our bad actions and to pledge to do better next time

Prepare—to get ready

We are called to prepare our hearts to receive Jesus.



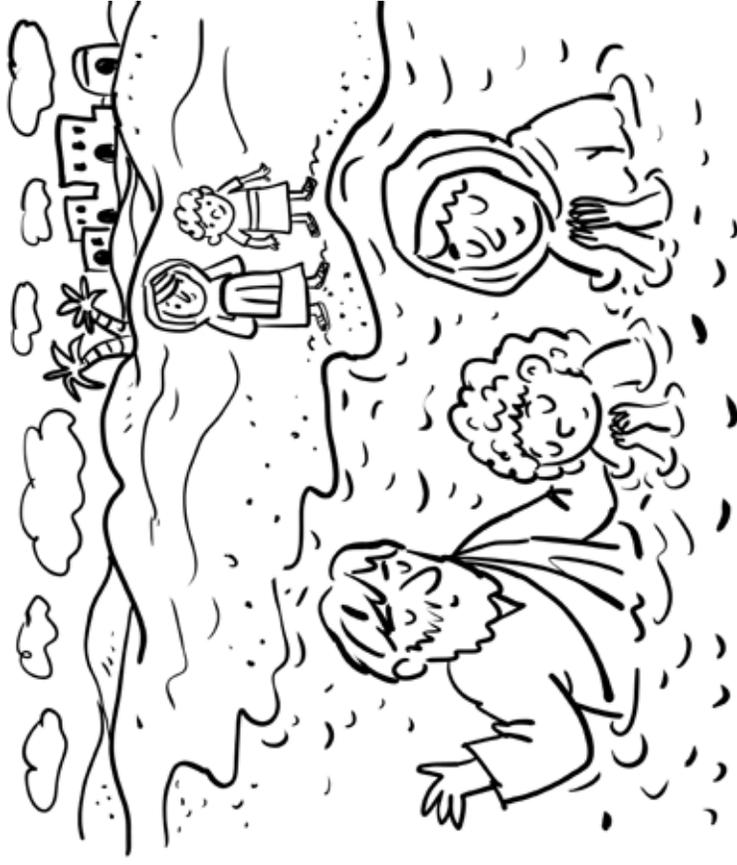
Today's Story:

Matthew 3: 1-12

More than two hundred years after the end of the Exile, Israel is under Roman rule, with limited sovereignty. The Romans agree essentially to leave the Jews alone to practice their religion if they don't make trouble politically. Has the Exile taught the people any lessons? John the Baptist thinks not. John may have come from a sect near the Dead Sea that separates itself from the rest of the society to retain their purity of righteousness. But John emerges from this community in order to put the people through a baptism of repentance. He comes to "prepare the way of the Lord" by urging people to make themselves right with God before the coming of the kingdom.

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Matthew's focus is on the kingdom of heaven, and how Jesus comes as a fulfillment of the law and of the prophets. During Advent, we are preparing for Jesus just as John the Baptist calls for us to do.





Sharing

This story is easily told in your own words or even dramatized. You might dress in fur to become *John the Baptist* and tell the story from his perspective. Remember that John was not only a preacher but also a baptizer. Both of these aspects should be in your story. You may even incorporate family members into the story as Israelites being baptized.

The character of John the Baptist and his place in the story of Jesus is fascinating. You may wish to look up the different stories of John the Baptist in Mark and in Luke to gain a sense of his imposing personality and his rock-solid integrity.

Reinforce the idea that, like John the Baptist, we too are getting ready for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.

WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

This Week at Home

- **Talk about sin, forgiveness and baptism, all themes in John's story.** How do household members understand these three concepts? Look these words up online or in a dictionary.

Find these words in the Rite of Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 299-314), which talks about these concepts as well.

- **Interview John the Baptist.** Recruit someone to play *John the Baptist*. One or two other household members can play the *interviewers*. To get started, simply encourage the *interviewers* to wonder, "If you saw him at the river, what would you ask him?" *Sample questions:* "Where did that camel coat come from?" "What do wild locusts taste like?" "How do you catch locusts, anyway?" "How many do you have to eat to be full?" Think of lots of questions that would help you get to know John the person.

- **Have an "Ask JBap" advice column session.** John gave advice to soldiers and tax collectors. Have family members put themselves in the place of someone in society—teacher, garbage collector, doctor, lawyer, bus driver. Rotate being *John* and have each person introduce themselves to *John* and ask for his advice. What advice would *John* give to each person, to get ready for the Messiah?

- **Prepare and share a John-the-Baptist meal.** Get all household members involved. We know John ate honey and locusts; the honey you probably have, but locusts are hard to locate around the holidays, so what could you prepare instead? Ants-on-a-Log are made with raisins stuck to celery sticks using peanut butter or cream cheese. Use dried cranberries and you have Ladybugs-on-a-Log. And don't forget gummy worms! Can you create other edible bugs? (Tip: search online for "edible bug recipes for kids.") Once the honey and "bugs" are ready, pack them up and head into the "wilderness" to enjoy your snack (the backyard? a nearby park?). As you eat, share what you know of John the Baptist and his role in the story of Jesus.



Household Prayer

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water to drink, to swim in and to be baptized in. And we thank you for people like John, who called us to be good people and prepare ourselves for the coming of our Savior. Whenever we touch water, we can remember all the gifts that you give to us, like water, people who love us and your Son Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

