

STORY

The Ministry of John and Baptism of Jesus - Matthew 3:1-17

(Note: the focus is on the baptism of Jesus and less so on the work of John the Baptist)

(Also see for John's ministry: Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-8; John 1:19-28;)

(Also see for Jesus' baptism: Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34)

TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Father in Heaven, in this world today many teach that people can be saved by any religion. Yet at

the Baptism of Jesus, you proclaimed that Jesus is Your Son and that He is the only Savior of the world. Only Jesus kept the law perfectly in our stead, then suffered the punishment of our sins to purchase our forgiveness. Help me to teach the students in my care to trust only in Jesus for forgiveness, the One You have declared to be our Savior. In Your name I pray, Amen.

VOCABULARY

John the Baptist - He was the first one whom God authorized to baptize. If the students get this confused with "the Baptists", you might refer to John as "John, the one who baptized" or "the Baptizer". You may need to distinguish between John the Baptist and John the Apostle, the inspired writer of 5 books of the New Testament.

Baptize - literally means "to apply water". The method of baptism isn't clear in scripture beyond that meaning. Apparently Jesus was in the water of the Jordan River for His baptism (cf v 16) but nowhere

are we directed to immerse for a proper baptism.

Pharisees and Sadducees - Two groups of religious leaders of the Jewish people of Jesus' time. They are often portrayed in scripture as leaders who falsely claimed they kept the laws of God perfectly and expected perfection of the people. They became enemies of Christ, eventually orchestrating His crucifixion.

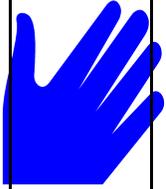
Brood of Vipers - very poisonous, dangerous snakes.

Repentance - Sorrow over sins and faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

Winnowing fan, purge, chaff - At harvest time, grain was purged (cleaned) by hand using a method called winnowing - to separate the kernels of grain from the chaff, husks, and extra leaves that were thrown away. The winnowing fan was used to pick up the mixture of grain and other items to throw it in the air so the wind could blow away the chaff, while the grain fell back down to the threshing floor.

Messiah - (the term is not in the scripture itself but used in the Inner Aim.) the Old Testament word for the New Testament Word "Christ". Both words mean "Anointed One." Anointing was the symbolic ceremony used to place a person into an official office: Prophet, Priest, or King. Jesus served in all three of these offices.

Triune - The special quality of our God of being three distinct Persons in one True God.



OUTER AIM

Jesus was baptized to publicly begin His ministry as our Savior.

INNER AIM

God declared Jesus to be the Promised Messiah, our Savior.

BACKGROUND

(Rupprecht Bible History References Vol.2, pp. 64-74 and pp. 75-78)

When Jesus was thirty years old, it was time for Him to begin the public journey that would lead Him to the cross. The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His ministry (His service for us) and identifies Him as the promised Messiah. Review the story of the birth of John and what it means that he was the forerunner of Jesus, i.e., to prepare the way for Jesus.

*** John's ministry ***

(Note: Because the focus of this lesson is on the baptism of Jesus, the notes for John's ministry are only based on the account from Matthew 3:1-17 and not other references.)

Matthew 3:1

This verse marks the beginning of a new time period, the beginning of the ministries or public service of John the Baptist and (about 6 months later) Jesus. Jewish law didn't allow men to publicly teach or preach until they were 30 years of age or older.

v. 2

- ▶ John preached both the Law and the Gospel.
- ▶ The Law shows the people their sins, calling them to repentance and preparing their hearts for Jesus, their Savior.
- ▶ The Kingdom of heaven is God's ruling activity over our hearts and lives through the Good News of Jesus, Who was already on the scene.

v. 3

- ▶ Isaiah proclaimed God's promise that God would send a messenger who would preach in the wilderness to prepare the way for God Himself to come to people's hearts.

v. 4

- ▶ John's clothing and food showed the simple, humble life he led as one whom God had dedicated to the special mission of preparing people to meet their Savior.

vs. 5-6

- ▶ People from a wide area around the Jordan and Southern Palestine went to hear John's message.
- ▶ God blessed his ministry so that the people not only heard but responded to his important message.

v. 7

- ▶ Scripture in various places exposes the Sadducees and Pharisees as hypocrites who acted holy but were not truly holy.
- ▶ John's harsh words were meant to break down their trust in their own holiness.
- ▶ They needed to repent of their sins and seek forgiveness so they wouldn't be condemned by God's anger against sin.

vs. 8-9

- ▶ The Pharisees and Sadducees often trusted that because they were descendants of Abraham, God would forgive them their sins.
- ▶ John told them that true repentance with faith shows itself in works that demonstrate genuine sorrow over sinfulness and faith in God's forgiveness.

v. 10

- ▶ This was a picture of how God condemns to the fires of hell those who do not repent of their sins through faith in Jesus.
- ▶ True repentance and faith show themselves with the good works.

v. 11

- ▶ John here spoke of Jesus coming among them.
- ▶ John's work was to prepare people to know Jesus when He came.
- ▶ In humility John realized that he did not deserve to serve Jesus in even the simplest way because Jesus was greater than John.
- ▶ Jesus would bless the people with the Holy Spirit and powerful faith.

v. 12

- ▶ (see vocabulary) The wheat God would keep, but the chaff or waste from the winnowing process would be gathered for burning.
- ▶ This pictures God separating the repentant believers from unrepentant unbelievers, sending the former to heaven and the latter to hell.

*** Jesus' Baptism ***

v. 13

- ▶ Galilee was the northern region of Palestine where Jesus spent a good part of His ministry.
- ▶ John was baptizing along the Jordan river east of Jerusalem. See a map.

v. 14

- ▶ John recognized that Jesus was the Son of God.
- ▶ John knew his own sinfulness and need to repent and be cleansed by Jesus, so John questioned why Jesus wanted John to baptize Him.

v. 15

- ▶ John's baptism was a Means of Grace that bestowed the forgiveness of sins, similar to the baptism later instituted by Jesus.
- ▶ Jesus was without sin, and did not need the forgiveness offered by baptism.
- ▶ Jesus urged John to permit Him to be baptized because it was the right thing to do.
- ▶ When Jesus explained that it was intended to "fulfill all righteousness", John baptized Jesus.

v 16

- ▶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, some amazing events followed that marked the beginning of Jesus' public service or work for us.
- ▶ Luke 3:21 mentions that Jesus was praying when the events took place.
- ▶ The heavens were opened in a way that scripture leaves to our imaginations, not giving distracting details.
- ▶ Both Jesus and John (and others probably) saw the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) in the form of a dove (see Luke 3:22) descending and landing on Jesus. (cf. John 1:32-34 also: Acts 10:38, Luke 4:18ff, Is 49:8,9; 61:1,2).

v. 17

- ▶ And at the same time, a voice from heaven (God the Father) announced that God was well pleased with Jesus, His beloved Son.
- ▶ This was God's public stamp of approval on Jesus as the Messiah and Savior at the beginning of His ministry.
- ▶ Compare also Jesus' transfiguration (Lesson 16).

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us that through His baptism Jesus is Your Son sent to be our Savior. Help us to picture in our hearts Jesus' baptism and how He kept the Law for us to be our perfect Savior. When we sin, call us to repentance and faith that Jesus Christ, Your Son, washes us clean from all our sin, just as our baptism reminds us. We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

PRESENTATION

Note: Whole sermons are preached on the work of John the Baptizer. In this story, time constraints may require you to summarize John's work and mission. God sent him to prepare people's hearts for Jesus. He did that by preaching the law that showed people their sins, calling for them to repent with words and deeds. John also preached the Gospel when he pointed them to Jesus as their Savior. The focus of the lesson will be on Jesus' baptism which marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as our Savior.

APPLICATIONS

1. Why was Jesus baptized? Jesus was baptized to obey the Law of God perfectly for us because we are not able to do that. He was acting in our place in order to be able to be punished for our sins in our place. How does your baptism compare? Our baptism cleanses us from sins through faith that Jesus forgives us our sins because He suffered for them already on the cross, although Jesus was not guilty of any sin.
2. God told us at Jesus' baptism that Jesus was His Son so that people then and now would know He is the Savior whom God sent to save the world from sin. There is no one else like Jesus!

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Middle any of the above and...

1 John 1:7, 9 - The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Upper any of the above and...

Ephesians 5:25-26 - Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.

Galatians 4:4-5 - But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman,

born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

HYMN CHOICES

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry" (TLH 63 1-3)

"God Loved the World so that He Gave" (TLH 245 1,4,5)

"He That Believes and is Baptized" (TLH 301 1-2)