

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: MATTHEW 3:1-12, LUKE 3:1-18



John announced the ministry of Jesus with a call to repent.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

Isaiah foretold John's ministry - In Isaiah 40:3 we read, "A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord." Isaiah was speaking of a day when a voice would cry out in the wilderness to the people. John the Baptist was that voice. John ministered outside of the city, and his voice cried out to a people hopelessly lost apart from the grace of God through Jesus. John spoke of the coming of the kingdom of God-- the very theme of Jesus' ministry. Soon the King was revealed. Jesus once spoke to the crowd about John the Baptist. He said that John was a prophet, but more than a prophet. Jesus said that among those born of women there was no one greater than John. He also said that from the days of John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing (see Matthew 11:7-12).

John's baptism was one of repentance - John called the Jews to repent of their sins and be baptized. John brought them a prophetic message of repentance. The fact that they could trace their lineage back to Abraham was no guarantee of faith or obedience in their hearts. John told the religious leaders that God could raise up children of Abraham from the rocks. No one can receive salvation simply by virtue of being born a Jew or by being born into a Christian family. Salvation comes to each person by God's grace, through individual faith and repentance.

Malachi 4:5,6 had prophesied the return of Elijah, who would turn the hearts of the fathers and children back to one another. This was first attributed to John by the angel who visited John's father Zechariah (see Luke 1:17). Jesus confirmed that John the Baptist was the return of Elijah (Matthew 11:14), for he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Finally, after about 400 years without a prophet (from the days of Malachi), God had sent another prophet to Israel.

Jesus would also baptize - John prophesied that Jesus would also baptize. John's teaching came with authority. Many thought he might be the Messiah himself. John was quick to correct them, saying he was unfit to even untie the sandal of the Messiah soon to come. John said that he baptized in water, but the Messiah to come would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus did indeed pour out the Holy Spirit upon men. John's baptism could not change hearts. When Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit on a person's heart, that person is made alive again, transformed and changed. And God's law is written upon the person's heart.

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WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

John the Baptist was very clear to indicate that men were sinful, in need of a Savior. In the Gospel of Luke we learn that John the Baptist quoted a larger portion of Isaiah than is indicated in Matthew. Luke 3:6 includes Isaiah 40:5b: "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God." John was not merely introducing a great prophet; he was introducing the Lord Himself, who would bring salvation to all people. This would come through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

ON THE ROAD TO EMMANUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

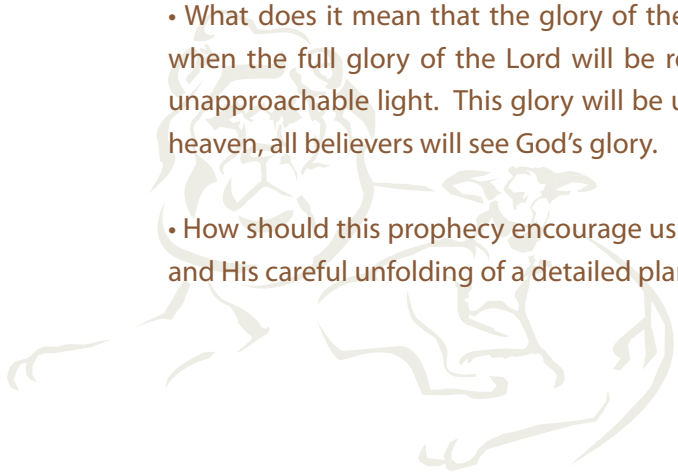
Bible Passage: Isaiah 40:1-5

Connecting the passage to Christ:

Matthew attributes this section of Isaiah 40 to the ministry of John the Baptist. John was the one whose voice called out in the wilderness to announce the coming of the Lord. When you make a road, you need to level the ground, cutting the high hills and filling in the valleys. John's message was designed to announce Jesus, figuratively making a road on which Jesus would travel. John did so by introducing Jesus as the one who would pour out His Spirit and gather up His people to Himself.

Questions for reflection:

- What does it mean that the glory of the Lord will be revealed? (Because of Jesus, a day is coming when the full glory of the Lord will be revealed. God's glory is His marvelous splendor, purity and unapproachable light. This glory will be unveiled at the second coming of Christ. With new bodies in heaven, all believers will see God's glory.)
- How should this prophecy encourage us? (The prophecy shows God's amazing control over all things and His careful unfolding of a detailed plan. We are all a part of God's plan.)



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SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

REPENT!

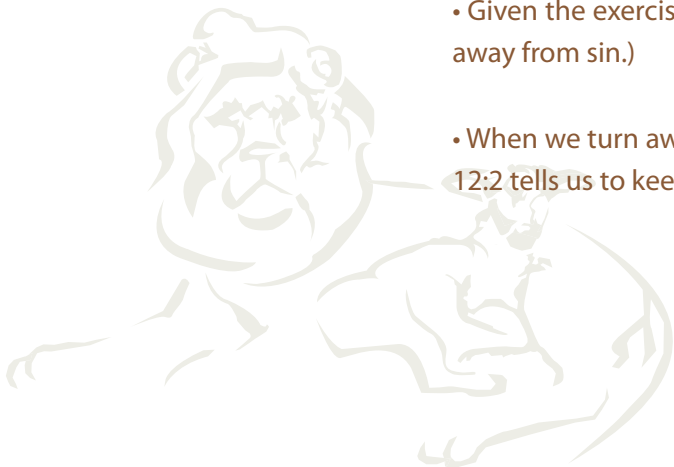
Supplies:

a big sign that says "SIN"

Explain to the class that you want them to understand what repent means and to do so you are going to do a little marching exercise. (If you have someone from the military who knows marching commands you could ask them to be your guest to help you with this exercise.)

Prior to class, hang the "SIN" sign in the middle of your largest wall and clear the chairs to allow for a marching drill. Have all the children line up facing the wall with the sign on it. Tell them that you want them to march (Left, right, left) toward sin. When you shout the command repent they should immediately turn around away from sin, (now at their backs). Then give them the command to sin left and then sin right. This will leave them facing "sin" again. Once again shout the command "repent." Do this until they all work as a team. Then ask the following questions:

- Given the exercise what do you think the word repent means? (Turn around and away from sin.)
- When we turn away from sin, who should we move towards? (Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 tells us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.)



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BAPTIZE WITH FIRE

This is a silly skit to teach the children that Jesus' baptism with fire is a reference to the judgment of God which Christians do not need to fear.

Teacher 1 walks in with a fire extinguisher, very anxious about everything, constantly turning and getting ready to use the extinguisher.

Teacher 2 watches trying to figure out what is going on until finally Teacher 2 asks what Teacher 1 is doing.

Teacher 1 explains that he or she read Luke 3:16 last night that Jesus was going to baptize with fire and they just want to be prepared so they don't get burned. (Ham it up a bit and see if you can't get the kids laughing.)

Resolve the skit by explaining that fire stands for God's judgment.

Have Teacher 1 respond with even greater fear giving Teacher 2 a chance to share the Gospel and how Christians do not need to fear God's judgment because Jesus already took it for us.



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FILLING THE VALLEYS AND MAKING THE MOUNTAINS LOW

Supplies:

white board and markers

Draw a line across the board which shows high mountains and then comes back down into valleys. Ask the children what construction workers do when they want to make a road.

Help them understand that there are special crews that fill in the valleys and cut down the mountains before the paving crews come. That makes the road smooth and easy to travel. Then read Luke 3:1- 6. Explain that God was using the idea of making a road to explain what John the Baptist was doing. John was helping the Jews realize they were sinners in need of a Savior. That way they would be prepared to receive Jesus as their Savior. Unfortunately most of the Jews rejected Jesus.

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

AN ACTIVITY

Supplies:

pencil and paper

Have the children draw a picture John the Baptist preaching.



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FOR THE OLDER GRADES

Compare the rebuke of John the Baptist in Luke 3:7-9 with the rebuke of Jesus in Matthew 12:33-37. What is the message to the Jews and their religious leaders?

The Jews trusted in their Jewishness. They thought they would be saved just because they were Abraham's children. Both John and Jesus tried to point out that this was not the case.

Calling a group a brood of vipers was a serious insult in Jesus' day. Baby vipers were believed to bite their way out of their mother, killing her. So Jesus and John were comparing the Jews to poisonous snakes that killed their mothers. This was likely a reference to how they killed God's messengers, the prophets (see Matthew 23:33-34).

A LITTLE BIT MORE

The Jews would baptize Gentiles who wanted to join the worship of God and become a part of the community of Israel. John called the Jews to humble themselves and participate in the same baptism given to the Gentiles. He recognized the sin rampant in Israel and understood that the good works of the people could never remove the sin in their hearts. All of Israel needed a Savior.

