

Leader Devotional

Equip

Born in the hill country of Judah to Elizabeth, a relative of Mary the mother of Jesus, John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. He came preaching in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). In a sense, John the Baptist bridged the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

John's first testimony to who Jesus was came before his birth. When Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, came into the room, John leaped in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41). This foretold what lay ahead for John's future. His life's goal and mission would be testifying to who Jesus was.

Taking the Nazarite vow, John was set apart to God. He wouldn't drink wine or strong drink, cut his hair, or go near a dead body. His unique appearance and dress added to his likeness to Elijah. Jewish tradition holds that after Elijah's death, his mantle was stored in a small chamber in the golden altar in the temple. Hundreds of years later, when John was born, this tradition tells that Zechariah, John's father, took the mantle for his son to wear during his ministry.

John paved the way for Jesus by calling people to repent and be baptized as a symbol of turning away from their sin. Multitudes flocked to the wilderness to hear the message of John. When Jesus, too, came to be baptized, John acknowledged that this was indeed the Messiah Israel had been waiting for. Even in the face of death, John maintained his witness to King Herod. In Luke 7:28, Jesus described John as the greatest man who had ever lived.

The faithfulness of John reflected the faithfulness of our God. John provided a witness to the coming of God's Son, and John took the responsibility of fulfilling that mission.

Support

Each of us has a sense of what it means to prepare. Preparation requires planning and considering various possibilities. This week, as you're preparing to welcome children to learn more about The Big God Story, consider how God has been faithful in your life. Look back at His promises and how He has worked in ways both expected and unexpected. You may want to make a list of each category to help remind you of His faithfulness in the past.

Then, look ahead. What is He calling you to do in the future? In your home? At church? In your community? How can you be a light and a voice that directs people to Jesus?

Take time to share what you're hearing from God with someone you trust. Ask that person to pray for you and encourage you in the days and weeks ahead. 1 Thessalonians 5:24 says, "The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it." Watch together as He works in your life and the lives of those around you to accomplish His plans, in His timing and in His way.

Kinder - 3rd Grade Lesson

Date: May 23rd

Series: God Is

Topic: God is Faithful

Intro: 15 Minutes

Welcome kids as they arrive. They are allowed to play with toys, color, or play group games.

- **1st Service:** Begin at 9:30am
- **2nd Service:** Begin at 11:15am

Worship Focus: 10 minutes

Lead children in a Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds. Have them put their hands on their heart. Encourage them to picture a throne on their heart. Ask them who is sitting on it? Remind the students that when we worship, we are removing ourselves from the throne of our heart and putting God in His rightful place - King of our Heart. Encourage them to express their worship with their voices and give them permission to raise their hands as they feel led.

When you feel they are ready, play the two worship songs:

- Do It Again - Elevation Worship
- Yes and Amen - Maverick City Music

Bible Focus - Main Lesson: 15 minutes

Intro: Today, we are going to learn about a man named John, who we know as John the Baptist. What do we know about him? *Pause for response.* Well, before we learn more about our friend John, let's learn some backstory.

Hold up a Bible. **What is this book?** That's right! **It's the Bible, also known as God's word, our guidebook for how we should live our life, and the BIG God Story.** This book is split into two parts. **What are the first 39 books of the Bible called?** *Pause for response.* Yep! **The Old Testament. And what comes after the Old Testament?** *Pause for response.* **The New Testament.** Every word in this book is God-breathed, which means every word was spoken to the prophets by God, they just wrote His words on paper.

Now, let's dive in a little deeper. **What is the difference between the Old and New Testament?** Essentially, the Old Testament is filled with stories that lead to a Promised Savior, the Messiah, that God would send to save His people. **Who is the Messiah, the Promised Savior?** *Pause for Response.* **Yes! Jesus!** Now, the beginning of the New Testament tells the story of Jesus, the Promised Savior, who was sent by God to die on the cross to save us from the bondage of sin, and who rose again three days later, defeating death once and for all. We call this the Gospels. In addition, the New Testament also consists of the establishment of the Church and tells us how we should behave as followers and disciples of Jesus.

Each book in the Bible is from God, spoken to the prophets. However, there was a time between the Old and New Testament, where God didn't speak to His people through prophets for 400 years! It was a dark time for God's people while they waited for Him to speak again. But even though it seemed dark, God hadn't gone anywhere. God still remembered His promise to send the Redeemer. He was waiting for just the right moment in history to fulfill His promise in bringing Jesus to earth.

The prophet Isaiah spoke about how this would happen. **What's a prophet?** *Pause for responses.* **That's right: A prophet shares God's message with His people.** Let's take a look at one of these messages. Invite children to grab a Bible and turn to **Isaiah 40:3** in their Bibles. Ask for one to three volunteers to read **verses 3-5** to the class.

God spoke to the prophet Isaiah, saying, "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level ... And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together'" (Isaiah 40:3–5).

This message said God's Son would be revealed so everyone could see Him. It also said someone's voice would cry out to prepare the way for Jesus. That's where John the Baptist comes in. His story is told in the New Testament. God used him for an important job in The Big God Story. God led John to tell people about His faithfulness as John prepared the way for the Messiah, Jesus! Let's watch this video to learn more about John the Baptist!

Bible Story:

Play Video - God's Story: John the Baptist

Recap:

Now that we learned more about our friend John, let's review his importance in the Big God Story.

Where did John live for the first part of his life? (The wilderness) **What did he eat?** (honey and locusts) Maybe John seemed strange to some people, but God used him to deliver a message to His people for the first time in 400 years—a message that brought light to the darkness! *Tech: Dim lights.* **Turn on a flashlight and shine it around the room.** The Bible says John "came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe" (John 1:7) .

Did you know that Jesus' name means "God saves?" Jesus came into the world to save people from their sins and invite them to be a part of The Big God Story. **Shine flashlight across the audience** God wanted His light to shine on everyone through His Son, Jesus. So God sent John to help tell people the Messiah had come ... and to prepare their hearts to receive Him. *Tech: Turn on lights as the leader turns off the flashlight.*

Crowds of people came to hear the message God told John to share. Some people walked at least 20 miles to hear John speak—a long way! In Matthew 3:2, John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." **Does anyone know what *repent* means?** *Pause for responses* **To repent means to turn away from doing wrong and to turn toward Jesus.** God said, "To all who ... believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). This means that when we trust and obey Jesus, we become a part of His family!

When a person chose to repent, John used water to give an outward sign of that. This is called *baptism*. John wanted the people to know that he wasn't the Messiah himself—no way! And only the Messiah can save people from their sins. John just baptized people to help them prepare their hearts for Jesus. John said, "After me comes the one more powerful than I ... I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7–8).

God promised a long time ago to send the Redeemer, Jesus, to restore mankind's relationship with God. And even though thousands of years had passed, God kept that promise because He is faithful. God made the way for us to be forgiven of our sins and to be with Him forever. **Share a personal story about God's faithfulness in your life.** Repeat after me: GOD IS FAITHFUL!! Again, GOD IS FAITHFUL!! **End in Prayer.**

At this time, split the children into two smaller groups: Kinder & 1st, 2nd & 3rd. Bring one group upstairs to the empty classroom closest to the main exit of the hallway (what used to be the old nursery). The other group will remain in the K-3rd classroom. Focus on Activity #1 first. After 10 minutes, switch locations and focus on Activity #2.

Activity #1: 10 Minutes | What Would You Bring?

What You Need: scissors, bowl, What Would You Bring? Cards (cut and folded)

Relate: Today we heard about a man named John. John did things pretty differently from others. He ate locusts, or bugs kind of like grasshoppers, wore

clothes made out of camel's hair, and lived in the wilderness. But God used him to give a very important message to Israel.

Would you ever want to live out in the wilderness? *Invite responses* If I spent time in the wilderness, I would really need to bring some supplies! Even though you and I don't live in the wilderness, we still need to be prepared when we go places. Let's see if we can think of some supplies we might need for different kinds of situations.

What To Do:

1. Have the children form a circle and place the bowl in front of you.
2. Pull out one card at a time, and read the category aloud.
3. Then have the kids brainstorm what items they would bring with them in order to be prepared for that activity or event.
4. Discuss why they would need each item and what issues they might face if they didn't have that item.

Activity #2: 10 Minutes | Purified

What You Need: *water, clear drinking glass, small disposable cups (1 per child), food coloring, spoon, bowl, trash bag, hand towel*

Relate: Every time we cry out to God, He responds. Even though others may not hear us, God always hears us and responds to our cries for help. Because God loves us, is good, and knows everything, He responds with what is best for us.

What To Do:

1. Invite the children to sit in a circle and put the bowl in front of you.
2. Pour water into the drinking glass and mix three or four drops of food coloring into it so the water becomes dark.
3. Give each child a small cup of water.
4. **Say: When we repent and turn from our sins, God promises to cleanse us and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). When God fills us with His Spirit, He replaces the sinful, dark areas of our lives with His light and righteousness.**

5. Hold the drinking glass full of darkened water over the bowl, and invite kids to take turns pouring their clean water into the darkened water. As the kids pour the water, it will dilute the darkened water and cause it to lighten and overflow into the bucket below.
6. If the water isn't completely clear by the time all of the children have poured their water into it, pour more water into the darkened glass until the water is clear.
7. **Say: When we trust and obey Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and helps us become more and more like Jesus. The Bible says that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). God is faithful to keep working in us every day until Jesus returns.**

Ending:

*Return to the K-3rd classroom and let kids play until parents arrive. K-3rd is **not** allowed on the playground at this time.*

As parents pick their children up, tell them the main points we talked about today and the activities we did. Please make sure kids take home all the things that they came with (ex. Jackets or toys) and any crafts they made in class.

After children are gone, please wipe down the chairs and tables and put supplies back so they can be ready for the next service.