



John Baptizes Jesus

Goal: To celebrate the grace of God through baptism.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 3:13-17

Baptism is one of the sacraments of the church. It is a very important action, whether administered to infants or adults. All baptisms remind us of God's grace in bringing us into the fellowship of faith, into the church as the people of God.

Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist was a key beginning to his ministry. In it, Jesus identified with the people he had come to save. He became one of us. In baptism, we receive forgiveness of sins. Jesus was sinless, so his baptism was not for forgiveness. But in his baptism, Jesus was expressing his dedication and commitment to obeying God's purposes for his life and ministry. He was equipped by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and sanctioned by God through a "voice from heaven" that said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (v. 17).

Baptism in the church is a great celebration of God's grace. It enacts God reaching out for us—sinful as we are—to open a new life of faith. Baptism is our response, in deepest gratitude, for God's grace. Baptism marks our commitment to serving God as disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Jesus wanted to begin his work with God's people by being baptized by John. Whether a child has been baptized or blessed or dedicated, help all know that this act means that they are different and something is expected of them. Children thrive by being both supported and challenged as they grow. Children can understand and be aware of ways they can respond to God's love by loving others. You can remind them that it is easy for them to respond because they are surrounded by their family at home and their family at church.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you tell the story of Jesus' baptism, you can help children engage by asking them to tell about a baptism they have seen at church. Some may know stories about their own baptism. Be aware of children in your group who may have received a blessing or dedication instead of having been baptized. Be prepared to explain the difference—that some parents bring their child for baptism and others delay baptism until the time of decision. In all the stories, help children see that the same things are present: water, the one who baptizes, the one who is baptized, and God's Spirit.

God of all creation, help me see signs of my baptism daily and remember your saving grace and love. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2019–2020

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 7, 18, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

e-book or story audio
(see p. vii)

white fabric

small bowl of water

white candle

digital voice recorder

Responding

Claiming

Grace Notes (GN) 1,
small bowl of water,
small stone for each
person

Celebrating

copies of GN 2–4

Extra

copies of GN 5

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post SCM i–ii, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See SCM iii–iv for the key to icons (for example,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Claiming God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

Play “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the Morning”—MM 19—as children arrive. Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt the response, “And also with you.”

Invite the children to help set the scene. On a table, place white fabric, a Bible, a small bowl of water, and a white candle to signify the light of Christ. Explain to the children that, even though green is the color for the season after Epiphany, we use white today because the story is about the baptism of Jesus, the color for which is white.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Ask for a volunteer to practice reading today’s Scripture passage.

Engage the children in a conversation about baptism. Ask them what they know about baptism, what they have seen, and if they have any personal experience with baptism.

Singing

Play “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the Morning”—MM 19; SCM 21—as the children listen. Help the children learn the first stanza and sing with confidence. If they would rather rap the stanza, let them lead.

Praying

Turn on the candle. Take time to show gratitude for God’s gifts. After each line, prompt the children to respond, “We thank you, God.”

For shining light into the world,

we thank you, God.

For the gifts you give us,

we thank you, God.

For grace and peace,

we thank you, God.

For showing us how to live in your way,

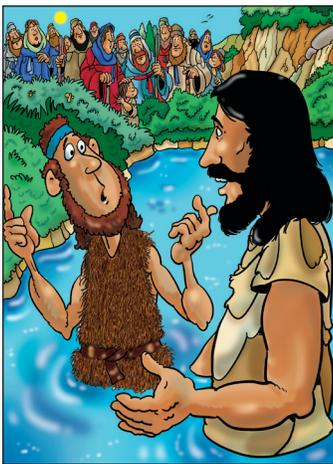
we thank you, God.

Amen.

 Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.



If the children are not familiar with baptism, take time to tell them about baptism in your church.



Luke's version of today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), pcusastore.com.

Preparing to Hear the Story C

Ask the children to name times they have used or seen water. Wonder aloud why water is important.

Comment that water was important in Jesus' time too. Maybe that's why they used water in baptism. It cleans and refreshes us, and is like starting again.

Comment that baptism is also about belonging. It reminds us of God's grace in bringing us into the church family.

Hearing the Story LD L C

Invite a child to find Matthew 3 in the Bible. Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 3:13-17. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Read **SCM 7** or listen to the story audio.

Ask the children to consider the sounds from the story that they could dramatize. Invite volunteers to be Narrator, John, and Jesus. Wonder together what sounds might have been heard during Jesus' baptism, and how can the children make these sounds. Some ideas for sounds might be: water, people talking, splashing, cheering, sighing, heavens torn apart, wings flapping, Spirit descending, a voice from heaven.

Have the volunteers read **SCM 7** slowly, and have the other children practice adding sound effects to the narration.

Using a digital voice recorder, record the story and the sound effects. Play it back for the children to hear their recording.

Consider sharing the recording with your congregation, either in worship or on the church's website.

Reflecting on God's Grace MS C

Engage the children in conversation about the word *beloved*:

- ▼ What do you think the word *beloved* means?
- ▼ Why do you think God was claiming Jesus as God's beloved?
- ▼ How do you think God claims us as God's beloved through baptism?

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play, listen to, clap, and sing "Take Me to the Water"—**MM 12; SCM 18**.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.



Claiming God's Grace

B C LD

Repent is a word children probably do not use or understand. They will, however, recognize the feeling involved in acknowledging sin or wrongdoing, feeling sorry, asking for and receiving forgiveness, and trying not to repeat the sin. You do not need to avoid the word. Part of the baptism liturgy acknowledges that we turn from sin (*repent*) and turn toward God. Help the children learn the word *repent* and its meaning.

Form four groups and give each group one of the scenarios from **GN 1**. Ask the children to consider the situations and decide what each person needs to do to repent or change the ways they treat people. Then invite the kids to tell about times they have repented.

Ask:

- How did you feel when you repented?
- How did you change what you had been doing?
- What did the other person do?
- How does it feel when someone forgives you? When you forgive someone else?

Give each person a small stone. Have each person hold his or her stone and take a minute to think of one thing he or she has done for which he or she feels sorry. Wonder aloud some ways God might be inviting us to change our lives to be more like Jesus.

Invite each person, in turn, to place her or his stone in the bowl of water.

As each does, the group says together, “(Name), you are God’s beloved child.”

B *Providing opportunities for children to act in front of others can be a fun way to learn from each other and can build children’s confidence. However, it can also provide opportunities for unwanted behavior such as bullying or fidgeting. Help children focus on respecting others and being polite.*



Celebrating God's Grace



Before the session, cut apart the letters on **GN 2-4** (if you choose to do multiple stations, you will need copies of **GN 2-4**).

Scatter the letters on the floor or a large table. Invite a volunteer to read the clues below or read them yourself. Have the children work together to make a large crossword puzzle. All letters must be used. For a little more challenge, set up multiple stations and encourage the children to work in pairs to solve the puzzle.

Simply say *across* or *down* and let the children decide where the word fits.

J
 B E L O V E D
 H O
 S O N V
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 B A P T I S M
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Across: God spoke to the crowd and said you are my ____ son.
(*beloved*)

Down: Who baptized Jesus? (*John*)

Across: God said that Jesus is God's _____. (*son*)

Down: God's ____ came and rested on Jesus. (*Spirit*)

Across: Jesus came to the river for his _____. (*baptism*)

Down: God's Spirit came in the form of a _____. (*dove*)

Across: People followed John into the ____ where he baptized them. (*river*)

Across: John knew ____ was important to God. (*Jesus*)

Offering God's Grace



Help children make a poster to show their unique identity as individuals and their common identity as children of God. Distribute white paper and have them trace one hand. Invite them to cut out their handprints and to color them, showing their individuality. Ask them to write their name somewhere in the handprint.

Display a large sheet of blue craft paper and have the children glue their decorated handprints around the blue paper, creating a border. In the center, have the children write, "We belong to God." Display it in the church as a visible reminder of their common identity in God.

Extra Activity

Wonder with the children how news traveled in the time of Jesus. Have the children discuss how news travels today. Hand out copies of **GN 5**, pencils, and markers. Invite the children to work individually or in pairs to create their version of a blog post for a news site about Jesus' baptism by John. Encourage them to fill in all the areas. Allow time for the children to share their blogs with the group.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit gracesightings.org. Remind the parents and caregivers about the e-book and story audio (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

TD

Ask the children to help clean the space.

Invite the children to place the tips of their fingers in the bowl of water and:

- ▾ touch their heads, and say: “May God bless my thoughts”;
- ▾ touch their lips, and say: “May God bless my words”;
- ▾ touch their hearts, and say: “May God give me a desire to do God’s will.”

Remind the children that they are beloved children of God and part of the church family. Encourage them to welcome others.

Send each child with a blessing, “(Name), you are God’s beloved child. Go in God’s grace.”

Remind the children about the free e-book and challenge them to read the story during the week.

Chelsea and Lauren had become good friends at school. Yet Chelsea teased Lauren, calling her by her middle name. Even when Lauren asked her to stop, Chelsea continued to tease her. Finally, the teacher had a talk with the whole class, explaining how teasing could hurt someone's feelings. Chelsea had not understood that Lauren's middle name was the same as her grandmother's. Lauren's grandmother had recently died. The teasing made Lauren especially sad.



If Chelsea repents, she will . . .

Roberto and Carlos are brothers. They are constantly fighting because Roberto borrows Carlos's things without asking. Carlos went into the room they share and found gum in his baseball glove and mud all over his new jacket. In addition, Roberto had accidentally dumped a box of Carlos's baseball cards in the closet. Carlos was so mad that he yelled at his mother about Roberto. He also decided to get even by messing up Roberto's things.



If Carlos repents, he will . . .

If Roberto repents, he will . . .

Katie and Travis were playing catch in the backyard. Travis threw the ball wide and it crashed through the basement window. His parents were visiting neighbors, so they didn't hear the window break. They also didn't go into the basement very often.



If Travis repents, he will . . .

Kia had gotten in trouble at school for lying to her teacher. The teacher made her promise to give a note to her parents. Kia "accidentally" lost the note on the way home.



If Kia repents, she will . . .

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