

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

KEY POINT

Jesus is proclaimed
as the Son of God.

Jesus is revealed to
be from God and is
anointed as such.

The power of the
Holy Spirit descends
like a dove and a
voice from heaven
proclaims Jesus to be
the Son of God. His
power is foretold and
affirmed by John the
Baptist. Through our
baptism, we are
commissioned to go
into the world and
proclaim the
revelation that Jesus
is the Messiah.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 3:1-22

(Psalm 51:6-17)



OPENING PRAYER

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of love, you sent your servant, John out of the wilderness to proclaim the message about the coming Messiah. Send us, too, into the world to care for others and share the good news of your Son, the Beloved. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen!

READ

Luke 3:1-22

ABOUT THE STORY

Today's story begins with a list of emperors and rulers. This may seem strange, but it has two purposes. First, it situates the story in a specific place and time—the dates that Emperor Tiberius reigned, for example, is well documented: he was in power from 14 to 37 CE. Second, beginning with all these powerful rulers provides a stark contrast to the two figures that will appear next: John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. He was described as receiving the word of God "in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2).

The account in the Gospel of Mark further describe John as eating a diet of locusts and honey and clothed in camel hair with a leather belt (Mark 1:6). This is a stark contrast to the common images of emperors and rulers in their grand palaces, fine clothes, and expensive foods. Jesus, too, is in stark contrast to these rulers, having been born in the rural town of Bethlehem and being laid in a feeding trough for animals (Luke 2:1-7).

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness along the River Jordan. His birth had been miraculously promised to Zechariah (Luke 1:5-25), a priest in the holy temple. John proclaimed that something new and grand was coming, and that all people should turn from their sins and make a public affirmation (through washing in the river) of their intent to follow John's message of radical repentance and love for neighbor.

John proclaims that one more powerful than he is to come. The story then gives a brief foreshadowing of what is to come: John will be arrested, and later killed (Luke 9:7). The story ends with a description of Jesus' baptism by John with the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove and a voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

John's proclamation of the one to come was fulfilled in Jesus. Both of these figures are quite unlike the Roman leaders. John's message is one of hope, repentance, and care for the neighbor. Jesus' message, as we will see in the coming weeks, is also one of care for the most vulnerable in society. Through John's proclamation, Luke gives us further proof that Jesus is the Messiah.

SHARE

- Do you remember your own baptism if you were old enough? Or perhaps the baptisms of your children or grandchildren? What do you remember from those events?
- "Repentance" in Greek literally means "turning around." When have you last had to completely turn around to get something right?
- It is a huge thing for John to say that ancestry is not important. What is important instead?

PRAY

Pray this or another prayer aloud together:

Today, do a popcorn prayer: Have someone begin the prayer, thanking God for this time. Then, invite others to join in as they feel led to add their own petition. When everyone has had the chance to pray, the person who began the prayer says, "And all the people of God said," to which everyone responds, "Amen!"

BLESS

Share this verbal blessing with one another: "Remember your baptism and be blessed."

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- We can remember our baptism every day—every time we wash our hands or face, we can remember that we have a chance at a "turn-around" and a fresh start. While washing your hands, offer a prayer of thanks for the opportunity to repent.
- Sing or read through a favorite hymn about water, such as "Baptized in Water," "Shall We Gather at the River," or "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."
- This story refers to the Holy Spirit as a dove. What other images are used in the Bible to describe the Holy Spirit? How do you visualize the Holy Spirit? Draw a picture or journal your thoughts.

