



Use Week of:

Unit 20 • Session 1

Jesus' Baptism

BIBLE PASSAGE:

Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1

STORY POINT:

Jesus obeyed God by being baptized.

KEY PASSAGE:

John 3:30

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father's plan and rescue sinners.

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Additional resources are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit ministrygrid.com/gospelproject.

LEADER Bible Study

Zechariah's son, John, grew up in the wilderness. His ministry began when God's word came to him, and he began preaching near the Jordan River. John worked to get people ready for the coming of Jesus, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy, "A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness" (Isa. 40:3a).

John called people to repent of their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River. John also instructed people on right living. (See Luke 3:10-14.) Some of the people suspected that John might be the Messiah, but John insisted, "One who is more powerful than I am is coming" (Luke 3:16).

Before His ministry began, Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan River. But John was calling people to a baptism of repentance. Jesus never sinned (see Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21), so why did Jesus come to be baptized? John recognized this when he said, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" (Matt. 3:14).

Commentators' ideas vary about why exactly Jesus was baptized. Perhaps He was affirming John's work. Maybe He was identifying with sinners or showing them how they would be saved—through His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus answered John, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Jesus completely obeyed God, and God audibly confirmed His sonship.

As you teach, allow time for kids to ask questions about repentance, salvation, and baptism. Emphasize that baptism is not what saves us; baptism is a way we show that we have been saved. Baptism reminds us that when we trust in Jesus, we die to sin and come into a new way of life—a life lived for Him. (See Rom. 6:3-4.)

The BIBLE Story

Jesus' Baptism

Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1

John the Baptist lived in the wilderness. His clothes were made out of camel's hair and he wore a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. **John began telling people, "Repent and be baptized because God's kingdom is almost here."**

Some people asked John, "Who are you?" John said, "I am not the Messiah."

John also said he wasn't Elijah, and he wasn't the Prophet that God had promised to send after Moses.

"Who are you, then?" they asked.

Long before John was born, the prophet Isaiah said, "Someone is shouting in the wilderness. He says, 'Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!'" Isaiah was talking about John. John had a very important job. He was supposed to get people ready for Jesus—God's promised Messiah.

People started to repent; they turned away from their sins and turned to God for forgiveness. Then John baptized them in the Jordan River. Baptism was a picture

that the people's sins had been washed away.

John preached, "Someone greater than me is coming. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. I baptize you with water, but He will



baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

By this time, Jesus was an adult. He went to see John the Baptist at the Jordan River. When John saw Jesus, he said, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Jesus told John that He wanted to be baptized. But John didn’t think he should baptize Jesus. “I need You to baptize me,” John said. “Why do You want me to baptize You?” John was confused. He baptized people who confessed their sins; Jesus never sinned!

Jesus said, “Allow Me to be baptized. God says this is right.” So John agreed, and he baptized Jesus.

Jesus immediately came up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens opened and Jesus saw the Holy Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. God’s voice came from heaven. “This is My Son,” the voice said. “I love Him, and I am very pleased with Him!”

Christ Connection: Jesus never sinned, but He obeyed God and was baptized like sinners are baptized. Baptism reminds us of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It reminds us that when we trust in Jesus, we turn from sin and start a new life—a life lived for Jesus.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Use gestures:** Hold up your arms when speaking John’s dialogue.
- **Display art:** Show the Bible story picture and point to elements of the scene at appropriate points in the story.

INTRODUCE the Story



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KEY PASSAGE: John 3:30

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father's plan and rescue sinners.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to share things kids can do that would be pleasing to parents.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Baptism Words" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "Baptism Words" on the activity page. Challenge kids to list as many words as they can think of that they can form using the letters in the word *BAPTISM*. Lead kids to share their lists.

SAY • Great job! The letters in the word baptism can be rearranged to spell words like *stamp*, *past*, *maps*, *sit*, *spa*, and so on. Can anyone tell me what *baptism* means? [*Allow kids to respond.*] Today we will learn more about what baptism is and who should be baptized.

**LOW
PREP**

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Special handshakes

Invite each kid to make a personalized special handshake with you. Suggest kids incorporate high-fives, fist bumps,

hand-clapping, and other moves. Practice each handshake a few times. Then lead kids to line up and demonstrate their handshake with you or their group members.

SAY • People all over the world shake hands as a greeting. It's a sign to say, "Hello, nice to meet you." What other actions do we do that communicate messages without using words? (*waving, bowing, hugging, saluting, crossing your arms*) What do they mean?

In the Bible story we will hear today, we'll learn about baptism—a symbol that shows what it means to follow Jesus.

OPTION 2: Circle crossing

Instruct kids to stand or sit in a circle. Stand in the center and say, "Cross the circle if you ... [*announce something you can do or have done*]." (Examples: if you have brown eyes, if you have ever danced in the rain, if you have bowled a strike, can bake a cake, and so on)

Players who can also do or who have also done that thing should cross the circle and sit in the seat of someone else who crossed the circle. End the game with these two prompts: if you have ever sinned, if you have ever been baptized or seen someone else be baptized.

SAY • In the Bible story we are going to hear today, Jesus was baptized like sinners are baptized. But Jesus never sinned! Listen closely to our story to find out why Jesus was baptized.

Transition to teach the story

Tip: If your group is large, form smaller groups and instruct the kids in each group to formulate a handshake to do with one another.

TEACH the Story



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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father's plan and rescue sinners.

- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Simulate a road construction site by setting up traffic cones at the front of the room. Use markers and orange poster board to create traffic signs that say *ROAD CLOSED* or *WORK AREA AHEAD*. Position a wheelbarrow, push broom, and shovel at one side. Consider hanging black poster board as a traffic message board. Cut letters from yellow paper and change the message each session. You may also display the theme background slide.

Countdown

- countdown video

Show the countdown video as you transition to teach the story. Set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- stop sign
- message board

[Leader enters wearing khaki pants, a reflective shirt or vest, and a hard hat. Leader carries a stop sign made from poster board attached to a tall broomstick. A traffic message board reads HIGH WATER.]

Tip: If you prefer not to use themed content or characters, adapt or omit this introduction.

LEADER • Hi, everyone! I'm [*your name*]. It's nice to meet you. I'm going to have to ask you not to approach the construction area. You see, some work crews have been repairing a bridge and for the last several days it

has rained and rained. Now the water from the creek below is almost covering the road. So they hired me—a traffic control specialist—to stand here and make sure no one crosses behind the barriers. Did you know that many cars will float in just 12 inches of water? A couple of drivers have come by here insisting they can make it across the bridge safely, but I tell them, “Turn around; don’t drown!”

As you might imagine, standing here all day can get kind of boring. So when there’s no traffic, I’ve been telling myself stories that I remember reading in the Bible. Can I share a story with you?

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • This story is about a couple of guys—John and Jesus—who went into a river. One of them even went under the water! But don’t worry; this story has a happy ending. First, can any of you tell me who John was? And who is Jesus? [*Allow kids to respond.*] Jesus is God the Son. He came to earth as a human. As you hear today’s story about Him, think about this big picture question: ***Why did Jesus become human?*** Listen carefully to the story to see if you can figure out the answer.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review. · Giant Timeline

LEADER • Today’s story comes near the beginning of the New Testament. Before this, the stories from the New Testament have been about Jesus’ family line, the birth of John the Baptist, the birth of Jesus, and

Jesus' childhood. Today's story took place almost 20 years after Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, which Jesus called "My Father's house" (Luke 2:49).

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

- Bibles
- "Jesus' Baptism" video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Story Point Poster

Open your Bible to Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "Jesus' Baptism."

LEADER • John's job was to get people ready for Jesus. He told people that Jesus was coming, and he told them to repent and be baptized. Can anyone tell me what it means to repent? (*to be sorry for your sin, to turn away from your sin, and to turn toward God*)

John baptized people in the Jordan River as a picture that their sins had been washed away. While John was baptizing people, Jesus came to the river. Jesus told John that He wanted to be baptized. John was confused. He had been baptizing people who confessed their sins. But Jesus never sinned. What did Jesus tell John next? Look at Matthew 3:15. [*Allow kids to read the verse and respond.*]

Jesus said it was the right thing to do, so John baptized Jesus. Jesus wasn't baptized as a sign of repentance but as a way of fully obeying the Father. **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized.** Let's say our big picture question and answer together: ***Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father's plan and rescue sinners.***

When Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened and God's Spirit came down like a dove.

Think about the sound of water dripping off of Jesus' body. Then a voice came from heaven. What did the voice say? Look at Matthew 3:17. [*Allow kids to read the verse and respond.*]

Christ connection

LEADER • Jesus never sinned, but He obeyed God and was baptized like sinners are baptized. Baptism reminds us of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus died on the cross for our sin. After three days, God raised Him from the dead. Baptism reminds us of Jesus and what He did to save people from sin. When we trust in Jesus, we turn from sin and start a new life—a life lived for Jesus.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided on page 93 to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Questions from kids video (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 20, Session 1” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to think about why people are baptized. Guide them to discuss a time they saw a baptism or share any questions they have about baptism.

• “Unit 20, Session 1” questions from kids video



Missions moment (3 minutes)

LEADER • It's time to learn about an exciting missions organization called Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). Some villages are hard to reach by car and would take days to hike to on foot; however, missionary pilots can fly small airplanes into these villages. We know that **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized**. Many people have heard about Jesus, have trusted in Him, and were baptized because of the work of MAF.

• “Introduction to MAF” missions video

Play the “Introduction to MAF” missions video. Then

pray, thanking God for missionary pilots and their work in spreading the gospel.

Key passage (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- “He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease (John 3:30)” song

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together John 3:30.

LEADER • John the Baptist spoke these words to His disciples when they asked him about Jesus. Many people thought John might be the Messiah. He had increased as people began to follow him. So John made it clear: Jesus was the One they were waiting for. John knew he had a role to play, and he could not distract people from the Lamb of God—Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Lead kids in singing “He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease (John 3:30).”

Sing (4 minutes)

- “Take It to the Lord” song
- Bible

Open your Bible and read aloud Psalm 99:2-3.

LEADER • When we trust in Jesus, we turn from sin and start a new life—a life lived for Jesus. He is great and exalted above all. Let’s praise His name together.

Sing together “Take It to the Lord.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Lord God, we don’t have to clean ourselves up before we come to You. Thank You for the blessing of baptism and the reminder of death to sin and new life in Christ. May You receive glory. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

APPLY the Story



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KEY PASSAGE: John 3:30

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father's plan and rescue sinners.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- dry erase board or large sheet of paper
- marker
- eraser

Display the key passage poster. Lead kids in reading aloud John 3:30. Then write the key passage on a dry erase board, leaving blanks for several of the words. Challenge kids to fill in the blanks. Play again with more blanks, working up to kids filling in all the words from memory.

SAY • In today's Bible story, **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized.** John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Later, when John's followers asked John the Baptist about Jesus, John said these words to his disciples.

This is the same attitude we should have about Jesus, that He should increase and we should decrease. Work on memorizing this verse during the week.

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Story Point Poster
- Small Group Timeline and Map Set (005802970)

Distribute Bibles. Guide boys and girls to open their Bibles to Matthew 3. Explain that the Book of Matthew was written to show that Jesus is the Messiah God promised. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 3:16-17.

SAY • **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized.** Jesus' obedience pleased God. When we obey God in faith,

our obedience pleases Him too. One way we can respond to God in obedience is by being baptized.

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. What message do we declare when we are baptized?
Emphasize that when someone is baptized, that person follows Jesus' example by showing others that he or she has confessed Jesus as Savior and Lord. Lead kids to connect going under the water in baptism as dying to sin and coming up from the water as being raised to new life—a life lived for Jesus. Point out that Jesus' baptism symbolized what would come: His death, burial, and resurrection.

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Rom. 6:4.)

2. Where do we see the Trinity—the three Persons of God—in today's Bible story? *Help kids recognize God the Father speaking from heaven, God the Son on earth as a man, and God the Spirit appearing like a dove. Emphasize that there is one God, and He exists as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Acknowledge that the Trinity can be hard to understand; no one is like God!*

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Eph. 2:18.)

3. Why does obedience to God bring Him glory? *Lead kids to share their ideas. Prompt them to think about how obeying God shows that we trust Him and submit to Him as Lord of our lives. In a similar way, God is glorified when we live like Jesus—loving God and loving others, obeying His commands, and remaining in Him.*

(Option: Choose a kid to read 1 John 3:23-24.)

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

LOW PREP

- “Welcome to MAF” printable
- crayons

Tip: Use this activity option to reinforce the missions moment from Teach the Story.

- “Origami Dove Instructions” printable
- construction paper or origami paper
- scissors
- markers

Activity choice (10 minutes)



OPTION 1: Learn about MAF

Give each kid a “Welcome to MAF” activity sheet. Ask a volunteer to read the story at the top of the page aloud. Help kids unscramble the words (*airplanes, world, love, people, villages*). Then ask another volunteer to read the coded message aloud.

SAY • The missionary pilots and the other MAF workers are able to share Jesus’ love with people whom no one can reach! They can deliver food and medical supplies, transport people to hospitals, and most importantly, they can teach people about Jesus.

Because we have died with Christ and have been raised to new life through Him, we call on others to repent of their sin, trust in Christ, and be baptized.

Note: Consider asking parents or church members to donate travel-size toiletry items for a mission project included in session 3 of this unit.

OPTION 2: Origami dove

Before the session, use the instructions to form an origami dove as a sample.

Print a copy of the origami dove instructions for each kid. Provide origami paper or cut construction paper into 4- to 6-inch squares. Lead kids in following the origami instructions step by step. Encourage them to draw eyes on the dove when they finish.

SAY • What part did a dove play in today’s Bible story? [*Allow kids to respond.*] **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized.** When Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened and Jesus saw the Holy Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. God’s voice came

from heaven: “This is My Son. I love Him, and I am very pleased with Him!” Say our big picture question and answer with me: ***Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father’s plan and rescue sinners.***

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, thanking God for His Word and for Jesus’ example of obedience through baptism. Pray that kids would trust in Jesus and follow His example in baptism. Thank Him for new life in Christ.

As time allows, lead kids to complete “Tell the Story” on the activity page. Kids should find and read the Scripture references in their Bibles and then write out in their own words what happened in the Bible story.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- “Tell the Story” activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week’s *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.