



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.

INTRODUCE THE STORY
(10–15 MINUTES)

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TEACH THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)

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APPLY THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)

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

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.

Note: Be sensitive to kids who may have difficult family backgrounds.

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 discuss things that make their parents happy.

SAY • One thing that parents really appreciate is obedience. Kids can do many things to make their parents happy, but obeying them is definitely near the top of the list. Today we will learn about something Jesus did to obey God. How do you think God responded to Jesus?

Activity page (5 minutes)

• "Descending Like A..." activity page.
1 per kid
• pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the "Descending Like A ..." activity page. Kids will draw lines connecting the dots in numerical order to reveal a picture of a dove.

SAY • In our story today, we will hear about a time the Spirit of God came down onto Jesus. The Bible says He came down like a dove. When do you think this happened, and why? We'll learn more soon.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Paper dove-planes

Provide each kid with a sheet of paper. Challenge the kids to make paper airplanes that will stand in for doves. The goal for each kid is to make an airplane that takes longest to “float” to the ground.

SAY • Great job on those paper doves. They really looked graceful floating to the ground! Today we will hear about a time the Holy Spirit came down from heaven like a dove onto Jesus, and God the Father spoke! We’ll hear the whole story soon.

OPTION 2: Pom-pom bugs

Provide pom-poms, chenille stems, googly eyes, and glue sticks. Encourage the kids to make their own unique bugs using the pom-poms as the abdomens and chenille stems as legs. You may provide scissors for kids to cut the legs into shorter lengths.

SAY • Those are some cute bugs! Today we will learn about John the Baptist. He lived in the wilderness and ate locusts, which are basically very large grasshoppers. Our bugs wouldn’t be very tasty, but then again, a locust probably wouldn’t be either! We’ll learn why John was called “the Baptist” and about a special man he baptized.

**LOW
PREP**

· paper

· pom-poms
· chenille stems
· googly eyes
· glue sticks
· scissors (optional)

Transition to teach the story

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: Decorate the stage to look like a road construction site. Set up traffic cones around the stage and use caution tape to separate certain areas of the stage from other areas. You may 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
- reflective vest
- hard hat

[Leader enters wearing blue jeans, a T-shirt with a reflective vest, and a hard hat.]

LEADER • Careful, friends! I haven't seen y'all around here before, and construction sites can be dangerous. As long as you don't cross the caution tape, you should be fine without hard hats. We've been digging up the old roads so we can lay the foundations of the new roads.

Yeah, it really used to be pothole central around here. Thankfully, the city finally ponied up the funds to fix the streets. My job last week was running the jackhammer to break up the old, run-down

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

pavement. My buddy would then gather the chunks into a wheelbarrow and carry them to a pile where the dump trucks would collect the debris to carry away.

It's a lot of work to fix up a road, but it's worth it to have a smooth, easy trip around the city. We prepare the way so people can come into our great city without too much trouble. In a way, that reminds me of a Bible story. Before Jesus started His ministry on earth, a man named John prepared the way. Let me tell you more about it!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • For the next few weeks, we'll be looking at a big picture question that will help us better understand the stories we learn. *Why did Jesus become human? Jesus became human to obey His Father's plan and rescue sinners.* We'll see in this story that everything Jesus did was to obey and glorify God. Jesus stepped down from His rightful place in heaven in order to live as a human and make the way for humans to live forever with God.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

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

LEADER • In the beginning, God created a perfect world and had a perfect relationship with Adam and Eve, the people He created to live in His world. When they chose to sin, it broke their relationship with God and messed up everything in creation. God still loved them though, and He had a plan to fix

everything. God raised up a nation—the Israelites—and promised to send a Rescuer through them.

After thousands of years, the time had come, and Jesus was born into the world. He was fully human and fully God, and He grew into a man. When the time was right, He began His public teaching and ministry by being baptized. I'll tell you about it.

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

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 • In those days, baptism was used as a symbol to show that you needed to be cleansed of your old sinful choices so that you could obey God better. John told people to repent, or turn away from, their sin and be baptized.

John’s job was to prepare the way for Jesus. John reminded people that the Messiah would come soon. John’s preaching was getting people ready to meet Jesus and hear from Him. He knew that Jesus was the most important, and John wanted people to know that too.

When Jesus showed up, John knew who He was. Jesus’ request to be baptized shocked John. Jesus had no sin to repent of. But Jesus knew baptism was part of God’s plan. **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized**, and Jesus’ baptism led to God’s announcement of Jesus’ identity as His Son. The Holy Spirit rested on Jesus, and God’s rescue plan entered a new phase.

- Bibles
- “Jesus’ Baptism” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Story Point Poster

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. It reminds us that when we trust in Jesus, we turn from sin and start a new life—a life lived for Jesus. Baptism also shows the world that we are part of Jesus' family.

When a person has decided to love and worship Jesus as her Savior and King, she will choose to be baptized to show the world outwardly the change God has done inside her heart. Going into the water and coming back out shows a picture of Jesus' burial and resurrection. The Bible teaches us that believing in Jesus means we “die” to our old lives and are raised to life as new creations.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided 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 baptism is important. Guide them to discuss questions they may still have about baptism.

• “Unit 20, Session 1” Questions from Kids video



Missions moment (3 minutes)

Play the “Introduction to MAF” missions video.

LEADER • Some villages are very hard to reach by car and would take days to hike to on foot. That's where the Mission Aviation Fellowship comes in. Pilots who love Jesus and want to tell the world about Him can fly small airplanes into these faraway villages. We know that **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized.** Many people have heard about Jesus and chosen to be baptized because of MAF.

• “Introduction to MAF” missions video

Say a prayer for the MAF pilots and any missionaries your church supports.

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. Sing “He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease (John 3:30).”

LEADER • This key passage comes from the Gospel of John, but it was spoken by John the Baptist, a different John than the man who wrote that book of the Bible. John the Baptist was reminding people who had followed him that he was not the most important. John’s job was to prepare people for Jesus. With Jesus around, John wanted to become less important and let Jesus get the glory and attention He deserves.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “Jesus Messiah” song

LEADER • Jesus is the Messiah. He perfectly obeyed God and died a death He did not deserve so we could be rescued from sin. He deserves all our praise.

Sing together “Jesus Messiah.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Thank You, God, for sending Jesus to save us. Thank You that He perfectly obeyed You in all things, from baptism even to death on the cross. Help us obey You through our love for You. 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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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

Tip: Consider using sign language to increase inclusivity.

Work with the kids to develop hand motions that go with the key passage. Say the key passage multiple times using the hand motions to help kids remember the passage. You may use the suggested motions below.

Suggested motions:

- He [*Point up towards heaven.*]
- must increase [*Move hands apart.*]
- I [*Point to yourself with both thumbs.*]
- must decrease [*Move hands together.*]

SAY • This key passage is short, but very important. John the Baptist spoke these words about Jesus when many people who were following John began to follow Jesus instead. John knew that his job was to point people to Jesus, not to take glory for himself. That's our job too!

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

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

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help them find Matthew 3. Remind the kids that Matthew is the first book in the New Testament in the Gospels division. You may use the New Testament Israel Map to show where Galilee is. (C5)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. Who was John the Baptist? (*the one Isaiah prophesied about, the voice crying out in the wilderness; Matt. 3:3*)
2. How did John respond at first to Jesus' request for baptism? (*John tried to stop Jesus at first, Matt. 3:14*)
3. What happened after Jesus was baptized? (*God spoke from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove; Matt. 3:16-17*)
4. Does baptism save us? *Guide the kids to understand that baptism is important, but it is only a symbol of what Jesus has done for us. A person is baptized because she is saved, not in order to be saved. Suggest an analogy, such as dressing like a doctor versus being a doctor. Dressing the part can suggest you are a doctor but cannot make you a doctor if you are not one.*
5. Why is baptism important? *Help kids understand that God has commanded believers to be baptized, and Jesus provided an example of baptism for us to follow. We do not obey God to earn our salvation, but we want to obey Him out of love and worship. Baptism is a beautiful picture of our sinful lives dying with Jesus and our new life beginning when we are "raised" from the water. It shows the world we trust Jesus and identify with Him.*
6. When should someone be baptized? *Discuss with your kids whatever policies your church has in place regarding baptism. Remind kids that baptism is a way to show they have trusted Christ; anyone who has not trusted Christ should not be baptized. Direct kids to continue the discussion with their parents to decide if or when they should be baptized.*

SAY • Jesus obeyed God by being baptized. When we trust Jesus for salvation, we obey God this way too.

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

LOW PREP

- “Welcome to MAF” printable
- crayons or pencils

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

- small toy cars
- long cardboard track
- small obstacles (paper wads, cotton balls, and so forth)

Activity choice (10 minutes)



OPTION 1: The Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) Give each kid a copy of the “Welcome to MAF” printable and crayons or pencils. 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 decoded 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.

Ask parents or church members to donate travel-size toiletry items for a mission project included in Session 3 of Unit 20.

OPTION 2: Prepare the way

Hold a length of cardboard at a slight incline to serve as a track for the toy cars. Place small obstacles like paper wads, cotton balls, and so forth on the track. Let kids predict how long the car will take to reach the bottom. Then allow a kid to remove the obstacles before sending the car down the track again.

SAY • The toy car was able to make it to the bottom much more easily when the obstacles were removed. When we “prepared the way,” it rolled down better. In a similar way, John’s job was to prepare people for Jesus by telling people the Messiah was coming and by preaching about repentance and God’s kingdom. When **Jesus obeyed God by being baptized**, God proclaimed that Jesus was His Son, and the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus like a dove. The people could remember what John had said and see that Jesus was

the Messiah that God had promised long ago. When we show people love and teach them about the gospel, we are preparing the way for the Holy Spirit to change their hearts to love and worship Jesus.

Reflection and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper to each child. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure to send the sheets home with kids alongside the activity page so that parents can see what their kids have been learning.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

• pencils and crayons
• paper
• Bible Story Coloring 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.