

Called to Prepare the Way

Bible Background • MATTHEW 3

Printed Text • MATTHEW 3:1–12 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 1:19–34

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will RECOGNIZE the reality of sin and the necessity of repentance, IDENTIFY with John the Baptist in his call to prepare the way for Christ, and REPENT of their sins and bear witness to this repentance through their deeds.

In Focus

From center stage, Quentin practiced with his gospel band. They were good—really good. However, Quentin was concerned about their drummer’s attitude. Adrian liked being the center of attention. When they had started the band, it wasn’t a big deal, but now that they were trying for a serious career, Adrian’s antics diminished the band’s ability to minister. “Adrian, you’re drowning us out,” Quentin yelled yet again from his position at the mike. Oblivious to Quentin’s rising frustration, Adrian continued to drum fast and loud. The rest of the band stopped and glared at him until Adrian finally noticed.

“I’m sorry, Adrian,” Quentin said, “But you can’t play at our next engagement. You seem unaware of the difference between ministry and performance. We minister through music to prepare the way for people to receive Christ. I want you in the band, but your attitude has to change. What do you say?”

“I say this is bogus. I quit!” Throwing down his drumsticks, Adrian stormed out. A half-hour later, he returned looking apologetic. “I was wrong. Please forgive me. All this is not about me, but about being a ‘voice in the wilderness,’ like John the Baptist was. Can we all worship together?”

Working in any community requires a willingness to repent and a commitment to community purposes, guidelines, and leaders. What difficulties do leaders face when going into a new phase of the community, like when John the Baptist led the people of God into the church age?

Keep in Mind

“The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, ‘He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him!’” (Matthew 3:3, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Wilderness (Matthew 3:1) eremos (Gk.)— An uninhabited, deserted place

B. Repent (v. 2) metanoeo (Gk.)—To have a changed mind; to think again

Say It Correctly

Malachi. MAL-uh-kie.

Judaea. joo-DAY-uh.

KJV

Matthew 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,
6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.
7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:
9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire
12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

NLT

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was,
2 "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."
3 The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the LORD's coming! Clear the road for him!"
4 John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.
5 People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John.
6 And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.
7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?"
8 Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.
9 Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.
10 Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.
11 "I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
12 He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with neverending fire."

The People, Places, and Times

John the Baptist. John was a miracle child, born to childless, elderly parents—the priest Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth (Luke 1:5–25). While still pregnant, Elisabeth received a visit from her cousin Mary, who also had been divinely chosen to bear a child—Jesus. The baby in Elisabeth’s womb jumped at Mary’s voice (Luke 1:44).

John was the prophesied forerunner of Jesus even before his birth. The public reception of John’s ministry was tremendous (Mark 1:5). John took no credit for the response to his preaching but properly relegated himself to the role of messenger, rather than savior.

Wilderness. In the Old and New Testaments, the wilderness served as a place God chose to meet with, chastise, and revive His children. The wilderness was also the place where Jesus endured a forty-day fast, encountered Satan, and overcame temptation (Matthew 4:1–11). We often think of wildernesses as deserts, because the wilderness the Israelites wandered before entering the Promised Land is in an arid region. The word, however, merely refers to a region with a low population, a place of solitude. Because John did not venture into the cities to preach, people had to come out of those cities into the wilderness to hear him.

How have places of solitude been important in your spiritual journey?

Background

After a long prophetic silence, John bursts onto the scene. This sudden appearance further emphasizes the silence the Israelites have been enduring from God. The last time God had spoken to His people was through the prophet Malachi, around 400 BC. Fittingly though, Malachi was the very prophet to foretell the ministry of John (Malachi 3:1; 4:5). There is also a long lapse of time between the end of Matthew 2 and the beginning of Matthew 3. Near the end of Matthew 2, we leave Jesus as a young child growing up in Nazareth (see Matthew 2:21–23). By the time we reach Matthew 3, John, who was born only several months before Jesus, is a grown man “preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.”

John’s ministry was preaching and baptizing ministry that anticipated the ministry of Jesus. John’s ministry called people to a confession of sins, to repentance, and to the acknowledgment of the coming one who cleanses us from sins and provides the Spirit who enables living right (Matthew 3:6–12). John’s baptism was a public affirmation that the repentant and now-baptized participants were positioned to receive God’s saving grace and presence. They had repented, been cleansed, and were ready to follow the imminent Messiah.

If you have been baptized, what did it symbolize to you? How is baptism viewed in your church?

At-A-Glance

1. Preaching the Kingdom (Matthew 3:1–4)
2. Baptizing the Repentant (vv. 5–6)
3. Rebuking the Dishonest (vv. 7–10)
4. Prophesying the Messiah (vv. 11–12)

In Depth

1. Preaching the Kingdom (Matthew 3:1–4)

The people recognized John as a prophet. God had promised to send Elijah before the coming of the Day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). When John came dressed in camel's hair with a leather belt, he even appeared like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). John's ministry being in "the wilderness of Judaea" fulfills a prophecy of Isaiah, and again links John to Elijah, who often spent time in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:5–7; 19:4, 15).

John's ministry had two emphases. First, his ministry called people to repentance. John was intent on calling people to turn from their old ways and pursue God's righteousness. Second, his ministry announced the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. God's kingdom coming soon further urges people to repent, but also gives hope of forthcoming improvement. The coming of God's kingdom on the Day of the Lord is a time of judgment. The Jews would desire to make themselves pure so they could pass God's judgment.

2. Baptizing the Repentant (vv. 5-6)

People responded to John's message and came from all over the Jordan Valley. When they confessed their sin, he baptized them in the Jordan River. While we cannot be certain of the source of John's practice of baptism, it is likely based on various common purification rituals of the time. It is obvious from the context that his baptism was offered as a public sign that those being baptized had received and accepted his message. Despite John's rough clothing and limited diet, people were attracted to John because of the quality and content of his preaching. There is a lesson in this for today's church. We like to have beautiful worship facilities, hopefully as a sign of our honor to God, rather than a show for ourselves. Ultimately, though, our beautiful buildings or fashionable dress is not what attracts people to Jesus Christ. Real Christian disciples are made as a result of clear and perceptive handling of the Gospel.

3. Rebuking the Dishonest (vv. 7-10)

While John's ministry was successful, it did not go unchallenged. Even though the Pharisees and Sadducees had their differences, they were united in their opposition to John's ministry. In return, he calls them "vipers" and questions their sincerity. The religious leaders are in danger of God's judgment, as John reveals in his metaphor about the ax and tree. Their aim is solely to escape God's punishment for sin, rather than demonstrating a commitment to abandon their evil behavior and lead righteous lives.

John the Baptist also questions their pride in their religious heritage. He reminds them that God could easily turn something as commonplace as a stone into a faithful follower. Rather than automatically conferring a holier status on the Jews, being a child of Abraham means they have a clearer revelation of how God expects them to act.

How can we be sure to produce "good fruit" and avoid God's punishment?

4. Prophesying the Messiah (vv. 11–12)

John is emphatic about the relationship of his ministry to that of Jesus. John's purpose is to call people to repentance. Jesus' purpose is to save us all. In other words, John awakens people's desire for righteousness. Jesus provides the righteousness of God to those who believe and empowers us to live righteously through the Holy Spirit (Romans 3:22; Acts 1:8). Both ministries are needed even today. If the unchurched are to accept Christ and live righteously, they need someone to awaken within them the desire for righteousness.

John uses the pictures of fire and the threshing floor to explain Jesus' ministry. Fire suggests the purification of metal, which must suffer extreme heat to burn away its impurities. Sometimes as we go through hard times, God is using them to purify our characters. On a threshing floor, harvested wheat is tossed into the air and the breeze blows away the lightweight, useless chaff, leaving the heavy grain to fall to the ground. The farmer then

stores the wheat and burns away any chaff that remains. Likewise, God will diligently and easily separate His true followers from the hypocrites.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was John the Baptist’s primary message (Matthew 3:1–2)?
2. What did the people do before John baptized them (v. 6)?
3. According to John, how would Jesus baptize (vv. 11–12)?

Discuss the Meaning

John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance only. His baptism was to prepare people’s hearts for the coming of the Messiah. Several Scripture passages talk about the baptism of John being insufficient after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (for instance, see the story of Apollos in Acts 18:24–26). Read Romans 6:4 and discuss the symbolism of Christian baptism and how it goes beyond simple repentance. Discuss your understanding of the meaning of baptism when you were baptized. Can you think of ways to make baptism more meaningful at your church?

Liberating Lesson

Given the ever-present temptation of sin and evil, the church still needs John’s kind of preaching ministry. Moral standards must be set and people need to be reminded of their potential for growth in the things of God. The message of repentance, forgiveness, and the call to live right can revitalize and bring spiritual renewal to people. The ministry of sharing our testimony and giving witness of Jesus Christ is the call and responsibility of every believer. Like John the Baptist, we too are to seek to awaken in people a desire for righteousness. We are to do this in the confidence that when desire is awakened, God will grant salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and convey righteousness by the power of the Holy Spirit to all who will believe.

Application for Activation

While the desire to avoid divine retribution may be a motive for right living, it is not the best motive. We should desire to live right because it is the right thing to do in response to God’s love for us. It is far better to pour one’s energies into bringing forth fruit suitable for repentance to glorify God, rather than to pour one’s energies into merely avoiding the wrath to come. God is concerned about right motive, as well as right behavior. Repentance that is acceptable to God results in right behavior that is sustained not by a fear of hell, but by unconditional love for God.

This week, examine your reasons for following Christ and doing the work of the church. Are you motivated by your love for God or by fear? If you feel any fear—whether of rejection, failure, or inadequacy—meditate instead on God’s great love for you and see how that can change your motivation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

While Jesus is growing up in Nazareth, preparing for His role as the Son of God, a major new development occurs with the appearance of John the Baptist. John was a prominent prophet. He had his own ministry and a significant group of followers. Moreover, John's ministry continued for some time after his baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan (see Matthew 9:14; 11:2-3). In important ways involving preview and prototype, John's ministry anticipates the ministry of Jesus. Matthew often shows the cousins' similarities: (1) The two men say similar things (compare Matthew 3:2 with 4:17; 3:7 with 12:34; 3:10 with 7:19); (2) Matthew introduces them in similar fashion (compare 3:1 with 3:13); (3) the Pharisees and Sadducees oppose them both (compare 3:7–10 with 23:33); (4) Both men act on God's authority (21:23–32); (5) The people understand that both men are prophets (11:9; 14:5); (6) John and Jesus are rejected by officials and executed as criminals (14:1–12; 26–27); and (7) Both John and Jesus are buried by their disciples (14:12; 27:57–61). Despite these similarities, as we shall read later, John understood he was not Jesus' equal (3:11–13).

Matthew 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

Matthew leaves the narratives regarding Jesus' childhood and begins to talk about John as a grown man involved in a vital preaching ministry. Our best understanding of the phrase "in those days" is that it refers to the time Jesus resided in Nazareth (2:23). With this phrase, Matthew leaps many years. Since Jesus comes to John as an adult, a whole generation has passed since Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Nazareth. The location of John's ministry draws on the biblical tradition of end-time renewal in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:33–38; Hosea 2:14–23). The word "wilderness" (Gk. *eremos*, ER-raymos) means "an uninhabited place," a place which is deserted, though not necessarily a desert. John the Baptist positions himself away from the distractions of everyday life. While traveling in the Sinai wilderness, God had first begun to reveal His will to the Israelites. While hiding in the wilderness, Elijah saw the presence of God revealed in a still, small whisper (1 Kings 19:11–13). Now in the Judean wilderness, John the Baptist called the Jews to turn to God in repentance and baptism and experience His forgiveness anew.

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

John's message of repentance places him within the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. Again and again, God commissioned prophets—from Moses to Malachi—to call God's chosen people to turn back to Him. Given God's anticipated judgment and redemption, responding to the call to turn one's life around and live righteously is the only sane and responsible thing to do. Like Malachi said he would, he warns that repentant people would avoid the coming judgment. "Repent" is *metaneo* (Gk. *meh-tah-NOE-oh*), meaning "to have a changed mind," similar to the English word which literally means "to think again." This change in internal thought should naturally lead to a change in external action. The apostle Peter summarized beginning the Christian life as laying aside the sin in a person's life (1 Peter 2:1).

"Is at hand" translates a Greek single word (*eggizo*, eng-EED-zo) which means "to be close by." Even though the English translation uses a present tense "is at hand," the Greek uses the perfect tense, more literally translated "has come near." The perfect tense indicates a past event that has a continuing effect in the present. John implies that he is not just announcing the Kingdom is here, but that its presence will affect our lives.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

This verse describes John's prophesied function as a mouthpiece for God. John's role is referenced in Isaiah 40:3, which Matthew quotes in his continued goal of showing that Christ's coming was predicted and confirmed by the Word of God. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all relate Isaiah 40:3 to John, the one whose ministry is to prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah.

Old Testament prophecies can be fulfilled multiple times, especially when revealed to be Messianic prophecy. God will let His people see the fulfillment of His words, and then the Messiah will unexpectedly fulfill the prophecy again to a greater degree. This verse is no different. Isaiah spoke of a rejuvenation of Jerusalem after the exile in Babylonia. The prophet spoke of the Almighty God's imminent arrival and exhorted the people to prepare a road for Him through the wilderness. God's coming would bless Jerusalem and put all other nations to shame. This happened as the Israelite state was renewed through the work of Nehemiah and Ezra. The Gospel writers saw this prophecy coming true again with the Messiah. God through Jesus was literally coming to Jerusalem. John the Baptist declared the place to prepare for Jesus' coming was in their individual lives, through repentance, which was then confirmed by baptism.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

John's description indicates that he lived roughly and simply. His "leathern girdle" was a strip of hide worn at the waist and used to hold a garment in place. There is an implied comparison here with the prophet Elijah's clothing (2 Kings 1:8), again pointing to John being a type of Elijah, the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah. John's diet of honey and locusts parallels his simple apparel. Levitical law names locusts as the only winged insects not to be treated as unclean (11:20-23). "Wild honey," produced without beekeepers' assistance, is mentioned in the Old Testament as nourishment (Judges 14:8; 1 Samuel 14:25-27; Deuteronomy 32:13). This verse does not mean to imply that these were the only things that John ate, simply that they were the staples of his diet.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan.

Matthew wants his readers to know the extent of John's influence. The imperfect tense of the Greek verb *ekporeuomai* (ek-por-YOOoh-my) indicates that they were repeatedly coming out over a period of time to hear John. Although Matthew does not attach a specific number to indicate how many people were attracted to John's ministry, the implication is that, in spite of some opposition, there was a great and unusual response. The Jewish historian Josephus also emphasizes John's great reputation and influence over the people. Besides what is given in the New Testament, the primary source for biblical scholars of information on John the Baptist comes from Josephus. John's influence leads Herod Antipas to fear John would incite a rebellion, which Josephus gives as the reason behind Herod's execution of John the Baptist. Josephus describes John's practice of baptism as purification of the body by water following the purification of the spirit by righteousness.

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. It should be noted that these baptisms took place in connection with the people's confessions of their sins. Essentially, people could come to John confess their sins in his presence and, because John was acting as God's representative, they could be assured that through the act of baptism God accepted their confessions.

Christian baptism, anticipated in Matthew 28:18, develops out of John's practice of baptism. John baptized people in the Jordan River, though we do not know where along the river's 156-mile length he did this. It is believed that John's practice of baptism grew out of Old Testament practices involving the use of water. Those rituals were concerned with purification and sanctification for service rather than cleansing of sin and guilt. However, that idea does emerge in the Old Testament with suggestions of calls for self-washing or washing by God (Psalm 51:7-9; Isaiah 1:16-17; 4:2-6; Jeremiah 4:14; 33:8).

Ancient bathing practices frequently involved pouring water on someone (known as "effusion") or partial immersion. While some scholars believe that John baptized by sprinkling, other scholars believe he used immersion, since *baptizo* (Gk. *bap-TEED-zo*) means "to dip" or "immerse." The apostle Paul uses several metaphors to explain the theological importance of baptism, including dying and rising, walking under a cloud, and walking through the sea (Romans 6:3-6; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2). But these are metaphors, and as such, they

lack the specific informational elements that would prove helpful to us in discussions of how water was used in ancient baptisms.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

It is doubtful that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to be baptized. The message of repentance was offensive to the two major Jewish parties, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were a sect that preached strict adherence to the law of Moses, plus stricter laws just to make sure they kept Moses' laws. The Sadducees were generally wealthier and more politically connected. Therefore, both groups were confident that they were good enough in God's eyes and had little need to repent (Luke 18:9-14). Possibly Jewish leaders sent emissaries to hear John, apparently not because of interest as much as to investigate and evaluate the threat his popularity posed to them (John 1:19-22). Matthew's careful language supports this when it says they came "to his baptism" rather than came "to be baptized."

John has a keen perception of God's prophet and harshly questions their motives. In essence, John asked: "Since you show no signs of repentance, why are you coming to this place of baptism?" His statements in verses 8 and 9 provide a logical challenge.

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

The intent of John's harsh comment is clear. The Pharisees and Sadducees cannot escape the judgment of God by hiding behind their father Abraham's religious legacy. If He chooses to do so, God can "raise up children unto Abraham" from cobblestones. As Moses reminded the Israelites in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 7:7), there is nothing innate about being an Israelite that attracts God to them. He could remake the entire nation of Israel in a moment just from common rocks on the ground. It is a humble and contrite heart that draws God's approval (Psalm 34:18; 51:17), not one's family heritage. After all, the grace of God extends beyond Jewish and family borders. Like everybody else, the Pharisees and Sadducees have a decision to make and they must make it quickly. For while the kingdom is drawing near, so is God's judgment. Both the kingdom and God's judgment are imminent. John uses the metaphor of an unfruitful tree to talk about the consequences of an unrepentant life. Fruit-bearing trees that bear no fruit are cut down, a message which Jesus Himself will exactly echo in His own ministry (Matthew 7:19). In like manner, people who were created to live for God, but who refuse to do so will ultimately encounter God's retributive justice.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

John does more than preach, point out people's sins, and baptize; he foretells the coming of Christ and His baptism of the Holy Spirit. John realized that his ministry was much less significant than the ministry of Jesus, just as John was so much less important than Christ Jesus. The difference in status between John and the One to come is highlighted by the phrase "whose shoes I am not worthy to bear." Any true minister of the Gospel must point to our Lord and not to self.

John says a greater baptism is to follow his. It is the baptism of God's conveyance of His righteousness by the Holy Spirit, which enables us to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God (Micah 6:8). God's act is concurrent with one's repentance and continues to empower and purify those who live in obedience to God's will.

John's prophecy concerning Jesus' baptism is both a promise and a threat. Although at the time of John the Baptist there was not a complete understanding of the Holy Spirit, Jews were familiar with Old Testament

prophecies, such as when God told Ezekiel that He was going to put His Spirit in His people (Ezekiel 36:26–27). But as a prophet speaking God’s words, John said that the Messiah was coming and that He would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Baptism by the Holy Ghost functions as purification experienced by those who respond to John’s call to repent. Fire carries a destructive purpose experienced by those who reject it. John said that Jesus would baptize with fire, indicating a purifying process to those who receive His Word. John was telling people to repent because Jesus was coming and would not tolerate sin. He is holy, and He is God.

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John uses the agricultural metaphor of threshing wheat to describe the process of the final judgment. The “fan” was a shovel-like tool used in the winnowing process to separate the wheat from the chaff. The verbs here are intense: the winnowing process will not just purge, but “thoroughly purge”; the chaff will not just burn, but “burn up.” John leaves his audience with this frightful image to call them to repentance. Just as the witness of John the Baptist helped to awaken a desire for righteousness in his day, so also can our faithful witness awaken a desire for righteousness in our day.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Voice Cries, “Comfort My People”
(Isaiah 40:1–5)

TUESDAY

John the Baptist Is the Greatest
(Matthew 11:2–15)

WEDNESDAY

The Baptist’s Testimony of Faith
(John 1:19–34)

THURSDAY

Jesus, the Father’s Beloved Son
(Matthew 17:1–8)

FRIDAY

In John, Elijah Has Come
(Matthew 17:9–13; Malachi 4:4–5)

SATURDAY

John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan
(Matthew 3: 13–17)

SUNDAY

John Prepares the Way for Jesus
(Matthew 3:1–12)