

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
FEBRUARY 15 2025

one of a kind

Scripture Story: Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 1:5-23.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 10; 11.
Key Text: Matthew 11:11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Ellen G. White summed up the importance of John the Baptist's ministry best when she stated that the responsibility given him was the greatest ever entrusted to a human (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 100). Is there any work on earth more important than preparing the way for the world's Savior?

The birth of John the Baptist was orchestrated by God. An angel delivered the news to Zacharias as he ministered in the Temple. The angel noted: "He will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).

God created him for a holy purpose, and He did the same with each of us. As Ellen White writes, John's diet and manner of dress were meant to draw a distinct contrast with the intemperance and rampant materialism of his day. Teenagers today are struggling greatly in these two areas. Standing for God will cost them much, as it did John. But isn't Jesus worth it?

Emphasize the power and clarity of John's call to repentance. "Baptism is much more than a lifeless ritual. It is a deeply spiritual symbol of complete, total commitment to Christ, the burial of the old life and a resurrection to a new life in Christ." "Baptism is a symbol of spiritual cleansing. The water of baptism itself does not save us, but it does signify that we accept the blood of Christ, which does save us" (Mark Finley, *What the Bible Says About*, pp. 313, 319). This is the same message that will herald Jesus' second coming, and we are called to give it. We have the unique privilege of doing a special work for God, and we, like John, must seize the moment.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discover that God calls each of us to a special ministry for Him as a result of our conversion experience. *(Know)*
- Sense the blessing of the Holy Spirit as they accept God's call to be baptized and to serve Him. *(Feel)*
- Dedicate themselves to living a life that points to the soon return of Jesus Christ. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Baptism, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no 15: "By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance

of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Give students an opportunity to share their responses to the *What Do You Think*? activity with the class. The emphasis of this activity is to explain what baptism symbolizes and its significance to spiritual life. Go over the answers with the students and summarize the biblical teachings about baptism at the end of the activity.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"Not too many years ago newspapers carried the story of Al Johnson, a Kansas man who came to faith in Jesus Christ. What made his story remarkable was not his conversion, but the fact that as a result of his newfound faith in Christ, he confessed to a bank robbery he had participated in when he was nineteen years old. Because the statute of limitations on the case had run out, Johnson could not be prosecuted for the offense. Still, he believed his relationship with Christ demanded a confession. And he even voluntarily repaid his share of the stolen money!" (*Today in the Word*, April 1989, p. 13).

This story reminds of Zacchaeus and his radical change after his encounter with Jesus. What produces such a radical transformation in a person's life after meeting the Savior? Why is a sinner's repentance a necessary part in the process of transformation that only Jesus can accomplish in the heart of the believer? How can we apply to our experiences Jesus' call to repent and surrender our hearts to Him?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

There is no freedom like knowing all our sins are forgiven and we are in a right relationship with God. Before John the Baptist began preaching this message, Jewish believers suffered under the yoke of a faith that offered only empty formalism, which distorted the picture about God with their focus on human-made rituals and traditions that men and women longed for truth. Truth was on its way in the form of Jesus, but before the Truth was made manifest, God called people to confess their sins, repent of them, and reform their ways. God spoke this message through John. This message was part of the preparation needed to receive Christ into their hearts and lives.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Consider this: Why didn't God tell John the Baptist to go and preach to the people in the cities and towns where they lived? Why did John preach in the desert of Judea? Did the distractions of the city have anything to do with this?
- What is the diet of God's end-time people? Does one's diet affect their spirituality?
- Why was baptism such a central focus in the ministry of John? How did this fit the message that he came to give? What is the role of baptism in the Christian's life?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12, 13.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **Repentance Now.** The first call of God's kingdom is repentance. This is the starting point of any walk with God. The love of Christ draws us (Jeremiah 31:3), but the closer we get to God, the more our spots begin to show. When they do, we are confronted with a dilemma.

   Biblical repentance has three distinct parts: (1) a renunciation of all sin,

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Use the Technology

Perhaps your students are technologically savvy, and they have an attention span to match. You may share illustrations and material that contrasts the repentance John preached about and the repentance we see in our society. Most of the time people repent only when they are caught and can find no way out.

Using technology to illustrate lessons can break up the monotony of the usual flow of the class. Be careful not to allow the media to obscure the message you are attempting to share.

a reversal in the direction of our lives; (2) submission to God's divine leading in our lives; and (3) a continual willingness to be shaped and molded by God through the process of sanctification.

Acts 3:19 states, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Notice the prerequisite for the times of refreshing. In a very real way, John's message of repentance was a prerequisite for the outpouring of God's refreshing through Jesus Christ. We can be filled with the life of Jesus—through the Holy Spirit—only to the degree that we give up all for Him.

2. **The Kingdom Is Here.** Matthew 3:1, 2 states, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is recorded more than 130 times in the New Testament, and more than 100 of those happened during the ministry of Jesus. The kingdom of heaven was the central focus of the ministry of Jesus. In His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5–7) Jesus lays down the constitution of His kingdom to draw a distinct contrast between the kingdom of this world that is ruled by Satan and the kingdom of heaven that is ruled by God.

When John refers to the kingdom in Matthew 3:1, 2, he is talking specifically about the coming of Jesus, the Anointed One who would break Satan's hold on fallen humanity. The kingdom was near, because the King of the kingdom was near.

3. **Far From the Crowd.** Consider the following quote from Ellen G. White and its implications for us today.

"In the natural order of things, the son of Zacharias would have been educated for the priesthood. But the train-

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Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

ing of the rabbinical schools would have unfitted him for his work. God did not send him to the teachers of theology to learn how to interpret the Scriptures. He called him to the desert, that he might learn of nature and nature's God.

"It was a lonely region where he found his home, in the midst of barren hills, wild ravines, and rocky caves. But it was his choice to forgo the enjoyments and luxuries of life for the stern discipline of the wilderness" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 101).

John's simple upbringing sharpened his perception of sin. He was not desensitized by sin.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Distribute pencils and 3" x 5" cards to your students. Ask each student to make a list of people in the Bible who suffered because they obeyed God. Some examples are Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, the disciples, Paul, etc.

Ask one or two of the students to share the people they chose and how they suffered for God. After the students have finished sharing, lead the class in a prayer of dedication to God—even when that dedication may cause us to be unpopular.

Allow one minute for silent individual prayer; then close the activity with prayer.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Jesus uniquely understood the ministry of John the Baptist. We know this because He told His disciples that of those born to women, there has never been anyone greater than John (Matthew 11:11).

From his miraculous birth through his public ministry, John the Baptist modeled what it means to be a servant of God in the way that he lived his life and in the power and clarity of his message. He was called by God to swim against a tide of sin and self-destruction, and he accepted this calling willingly. It was not without a cost, however.

John's message was a constant rebuke to the Pharisees who plotted his death, and to the political elite of his day, led by Herod. The power of the Holy Spirit that filled him harkened back to the anointing resident in the life of another man of God who was called to give a difficult message—Elijah. As was the case with Elijah, some listened and changed when they heard the message while others continued in sin.

Whether greeted by well-wishers or detractors, John remained faithful by calling people to repentance and baptizing those who were willing to commit their lives to God, John prepared the way for the coming of the Savior. Jesus began His ministry among a people who were prepared to receive Him. We must herald the coming of Jesus so faithfully that men and women will be prepared when He comes again.

You may introduce to the students the Global Youth Day initiative on March 15, 2025. This is a global initiative when young people from around the world participate in a community service project to make a difference for Christ. Start planning with your students what you can do to "BE THE SERMON"!

To learn more about Global Youth Day you may visit www.gcyouthministries.org. You may also want to download the Global Youth Day app on your smart phone for information about this event.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*),* chapters 10; 11.

*A special adaptation, *Humble Hero*, has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 1:5-23.
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keytext

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

(Matthew 11:11)

flashlight

" 'And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.' Before the birth of John, the angel had said, 'He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.' God had called the son of Zacharias to a great work, the greatest ever committed to men" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 100).

what do you think?

What does baptism symbolize?
Now let's take a look at what the Bible says about baptism. Match the statements with the corresponding Bible references:

Christ's death and resurrection _____
Being dead to sin _____
Being alive to God _____
Consecration to Christ's service _____
Covenant relationship with God _____
Entrance into Christ's spiritual kingdom _____

Romans 6:11; Galatians 3:27-29; Mark 10:38; Colossians 2:12; Matthew 3:11; John 3:3, 5.

did you know?

Now John [the Baptist] also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized' (John 3:23).

"Why did John the Baptist choose this particular place for his work of baptizing the people? The Bible tells us that it was 'because there was much water there.' But there'd be no reason to require a place where there was 'much water' if a mere sprinkling or pouring were the method used. Multiple Bible references to baptism throughout the New Testament show plainly that immersion was the one method used in the days of Christ and His apostolic church. Considering this matter from the point of view of language, the very word 'baptism' is from the Greek word *baptisma*, derived from the Greek verb *baptizo* meaning 'to dip' or 'to immerse' " (Mark Finley, *What the Bible Says About*, p. 315).

INTO THE STORY

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight."'

"Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?'

"But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him.

"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' "

(Matthew 3)

OUT OF THE STORY

What is the central message that John the Baptist is communicating?

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_____
_____

What is significant about baptism? Read the following Bible passages that offer more insight into the meaning of this symbolic act that represents a person's commitment to God: Mark 1:9-11; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37, 38, 41; Acts 8:36, 37; Romans 6:3, 4; Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:5; Matthew 28:19, 20. What important elements concerning baptism can you apply to your personal life?

_____
_____
_____

What lesson(s) will you take away from this lesson about baptism?

_____
_____

If you could share one point about baptism with a friend, what would you share?

_____
_____
_____

When did you come to know Jesus and how would you describe your personal conversion story? Have you sealed your commitment to follow Jesus through baptism?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" **(Matthew 5:20).**

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" **(Proverbs 28:13).**

"Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" **(Luke 6:46).**

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" **(Acts 1:8).**

further insight

"In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 98

Sabbath

Read Romans 6:1-6.

By any measure, John the Baptist was one of the most interesting figures in the entire Bible. He looked different, dressed differently, and preached a unique message. (See Matthew 3:4.)

Consider the importance of the message that John the Baptist preached. How was his calling people to repentance and baptism a part of John's mission to prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus?

_____

_____

How is the conversion experience related to baptism?

_____

_____

"Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit" (Baptism, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 15).

Think about your conversion experience. When have you accepted Jesus in your heart? How has your life changed? How does baptism represent the conscious act of committing your life to Jesus and following His example to start a new life in Him?

Sunday

Read Matthew 3.

Read the *Into the Story* section, then complete the *Out of the Story* questions. What are the requirements that God desires us to meet before baptism?

Acts 2:38: _____

Acts 8:36, 37: _____

Matthew 28:19, 20: _____

Monday

Read Galatians 3:27.

Read this week's *Key Text*. As compliments go, this is one of the best ones in the Bible. Jesus recognized the special role that John the Baptist played in preparing the way for His ministry.

How do you prepare the way for the second coming of Jesus? Are you taking seriously your preparation for heaven? How are you helping someone else to prepare for Jesus' soon return? _____

_____

Tuesday

Read Luke 1:80.

In today's *Flashlight* quotation Ellen White notes that John the Baptist grew up far away from the city—actually, in the desert. She also noted about the education that is most favorable for character development: "The more quiet and simple the life of the child,—the more free from artificial excitement, and the more in harmony with nature,—the more favorable is it to physical and mental vigor and to spiritual strength" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 74).

Why do you think God chose such simple environments both for the upbringing of John the Baptist and for Jesus?

_____

_____

How did John's simple upbringing help him recognize and resist temptation and sin?

_____

_____

Wednesday

Read Romans 5:8.

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week.

John was calling people to repentance and was baptizing them. However, it was the work of the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin and help them to live a new life through Christ.

How do the believers who are being baptized need an extra measure of God's Holy Spirit?

_____

_____

Have you experienced the influence of the Holy Spirit in your life in an abundant measure? Ask for the Holy Spirit so that He may enable you to live a new life for Jesus.

Thursday

Read Acts 22:16.

This week you have been studying about the life and ministry of John the Baptist, the man chosen by God to prepare the way for Jesus' public ministry. Why do you think it was necessary for John to baptize Jesus publicly?

_____

_____

Have you been baptized? If you have not, what's stopping you?

_____

_____

Friday

Read Mark 16:16.

Ellen White wrote of John the Baptist: "John was to go forth as Jehovah's messenger, to bring to men the light of God. He must give a new direction to their thoughts. He must impress them with the holiness of God's requirements, and their need of His perfect righteousness" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 100).

What impression are you leaving on those who know you?

How can you inspire in someone the desire to commit his or her life to Jesus through baptism?

_____

_____

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 10; 11.

**Humble Hero* is a special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companionbooks#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.