AT THE JORDAN RIVER

GOD PREPARES HEARTS TO RECEIVE JESUS.

MEMORY VERSE

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

Word of the Week: Repent—

Repent means to be sorry for the wrong things you have done and seek forgiveness for your sins. To repent is to change directions, away from sin and toward God—like making a full U-turn on the road. Once a person has repented, they will live peacefully with God and other people.

This week's lesson is based on Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:6-34; *The Desire of Ages,* pp. 97-113; *The Story of Redemption,* pp. 197, 198; and *Seventh-day Adventists Believe,* p. 181. **Extra Reading:** *The Bible Story,* vol. 7, pp. 93-108.



SUNDAY

A Tiny Baby, A Big Job

While Jesus was growing from baby to boyhood, from student to teacher, another special baby boy was also growing up to do incredible things for God.

Elizabeth cuddled baby John as she pondered the angel's words to Zacharias: "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God" (Luke 1:16). Such an important job lay ahead for this tiny baby boy. Mother Elizabeth knew she had a big job too. She cuddled John closer and quietly committed to sharing God's love with him.

When John was big enough to listen to stories, Elizabeth and Zacharias told him about the miracle of his birth. He heard how the angel Gabriel had suddenly appeared to Father Zacharias, telling him they would have a son. The faithful parents also told John about the miracle birth of his cousin Jesus, around six months later, who was growing up in Nazareth. In the days when people traveled by foot, Nazareth, in Galilee, was far away from the village in Judea where John was born. Though he likely never met his Cousin growing up, John learned all about Him. His parents taught him that Jesus was the promised Messiah whom John was to tell everyone about.

John would have help to do this important job for God. The angel had told Zacharias that John would be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15).

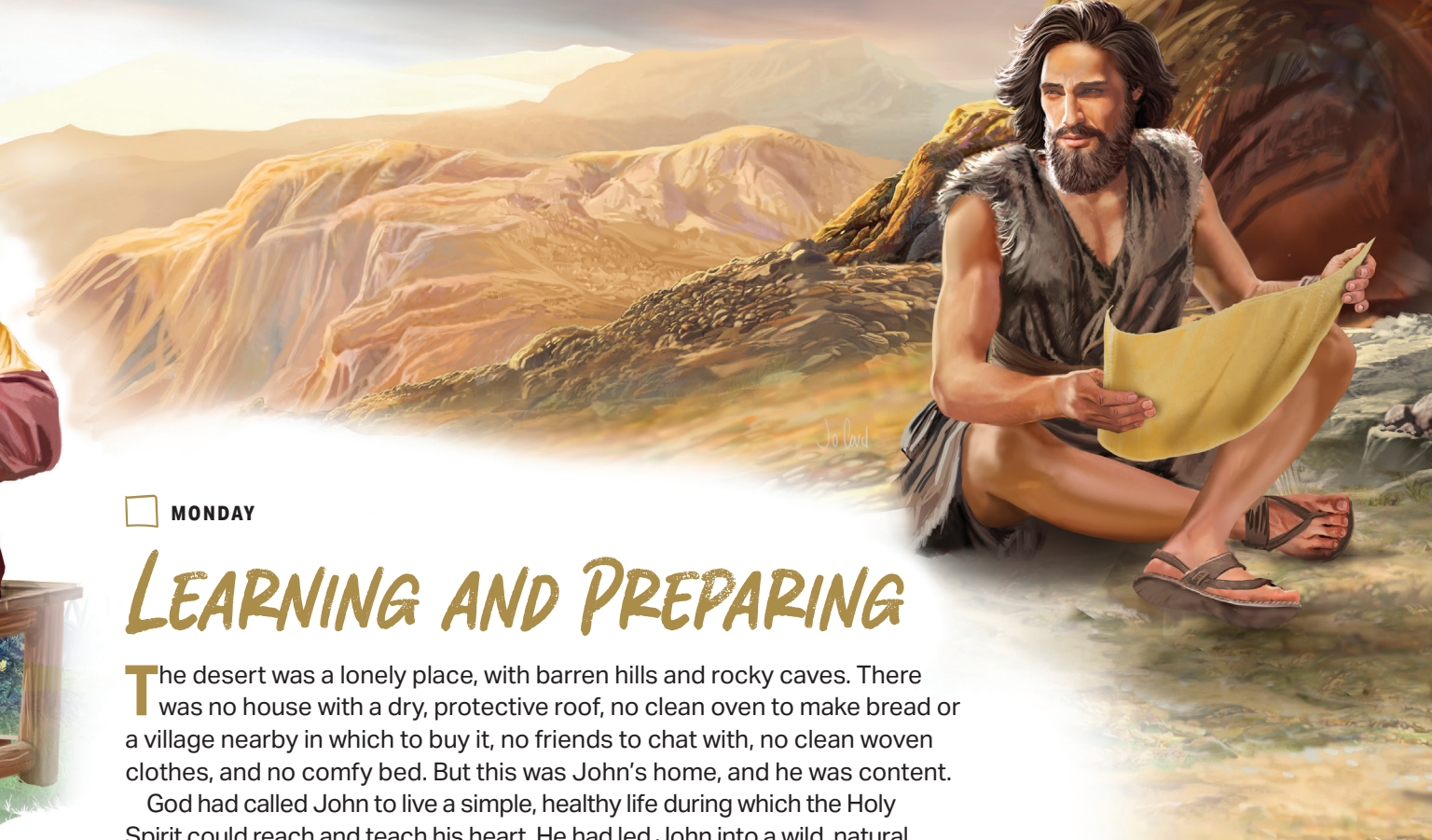
Just as He did for John, God fills our hearts with His love and gives us His Holy Spirit so that we too can do what He asks us to do. "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *How would you feel if God called you to an important work? How would you respond?*

Do: Being a parent or caregiver is a big job—think of all the arguments they settle, food they prepare, clothes they wash, hugs they give, and jokes they tell! Why not surprise your parents or caregivers by doing something special to thank them? You might help with jobs around the house, do a job without being asked, or make them something.

Pray: Thank God for loving you and giving you the Holy Spirit.



MONDAY

Learning and Preparing

The desert was a lonely place, with barren hills and rocky caves. There was no house with a dry, protective roof, no clean oven to make bread or a village nearby in which to buy it, no friends to chat with, no clean woven clothes, and no comfy bed. But this was John's home, and he was content.

God had called John to live a simple, healthy life during which the Holy Spirit could reach and teach his heart. He had led John into a wild, natural place. John knew that the wilderness was the best place to learn from God's creation and the Bible scrolls. Why do you think this is?

In the peaceful desert, John searched the Bible scrolls day after day. He learned all He could about the promised Messiah. He also had plenty of quiet time to pray and listen to God's voice. John could do God's work only with His help and the mighty power of the Holy Spirit.

Read about John's work in *Isaiah 40:3-5.* This description of road building was Isaiah's creative way to illustrate John's mission. Malachi 4:5, 6 says that John was called to help parents and children love each other more, and to help disobedient people learn to love and follow God (Luke 1:17).

Sometimes John left the desert to spend time in the towns so he could study people's characters and learn how to reach their hearts. He prayed for them and about the important work ahead of him. He wanted *everyone* to listen to Jesus when He began His great work.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *How has God prepared your heart to love Jesus?*
- *What might it look like for you and your family to love each other more?*
- *Do you need to "switch off" any distractions to make time for God? What distractions might you need to switch off to make time for God?*

Do and Pray: Take your Bible to a quiet place away from distractions. Think about how God taught John in the quiet wilderness as you read **Ephesians 3:17-19**. Thank God for preparing your heart to love Jesus.

☐ TUESDAY

Preaching to Prepare Hearts

John's voice boomed across the wilderness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2).

With mighty words, a strong voice, and the power of the Holy Spirit, John cried out to people to change—the Messiah was coming! Dressed in his camel-hair clothes and calling out his message, John looked and sounded like a prophet. Some of the people thought he was an old-time prophet, raised from the dead! Some even wondered "whether he was the Christ or not" (Luke 3:15). But John told them firmly, "He who is coming after me is mightier than I" (Matthew 3:11).

John had everyone's attention, and that was exactly what God wanted. He knew that John's simple and powerful words would wake them up so that they could see and understand how bad their sins were, and how very far from God they really were. Over and over John earnestly preached about repentance and the Messiah who would appear very soon. What made John keep preaching? Read the second half of **2 Peter 3:9.**

At first John's message shocked the crowds who flocked to hear him. But then many *did* repent, for they realized his words were true. They *were* sinners in need of a Savior, just as John had said. They decided they didn't want to keep sinning anymore. When they repented, all of heaven was happy, for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

Our loving God knows that we all make mistakes sometimes. But those mistakes never stop Him from loving us. He patiently calls us to repent and come back to Him again and again. His Holy Spirit gives us an uncomfortable feeling in our hearts when we've done something wrong. That feeling prompts us to say we're sorry to the person we've wronged, and to ask God for forgiveness. Then, forgiven by God, it's as if we had never sinned.

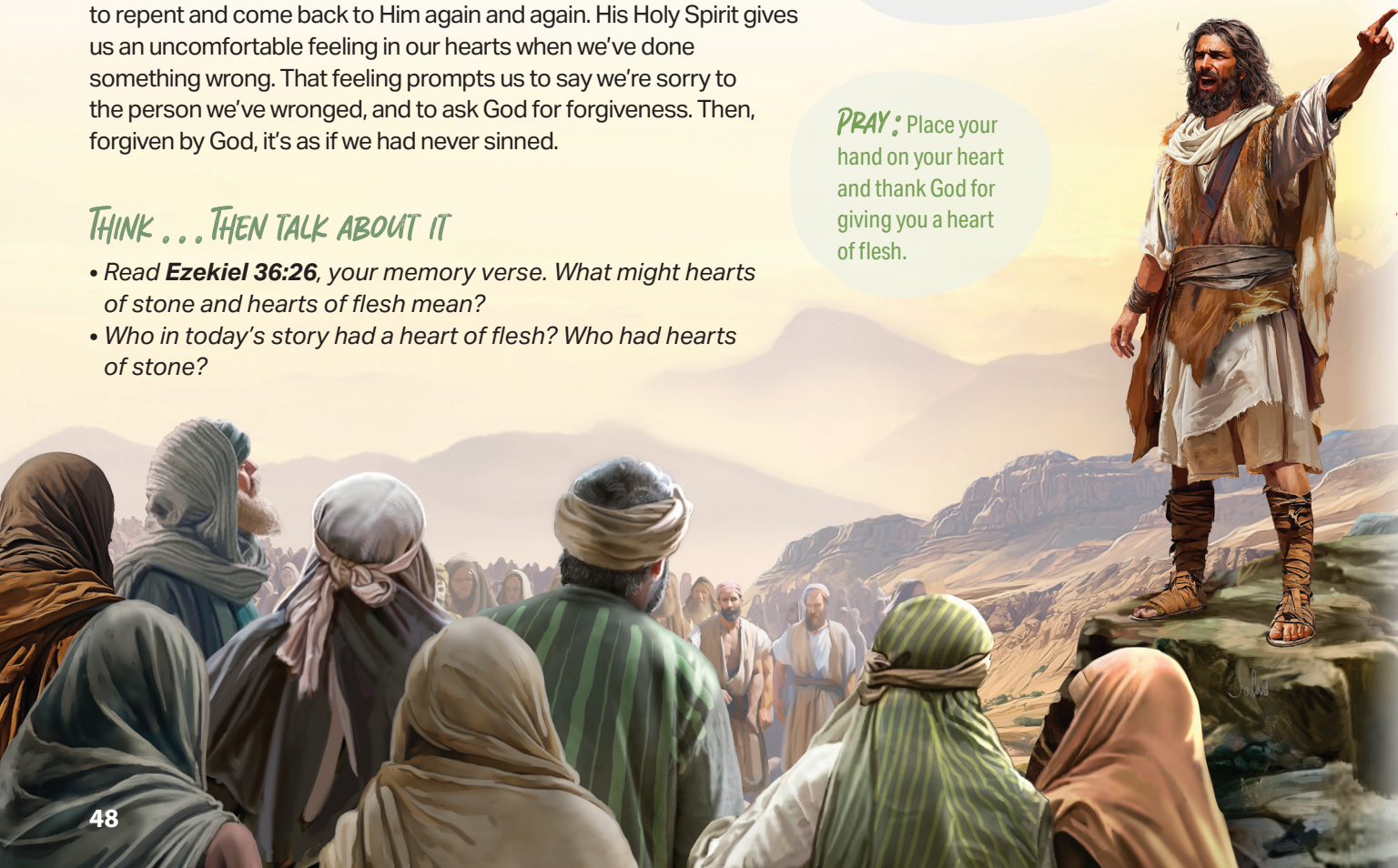
Mission Challenge: You have a chance to contribute to your Sabbath School class gratitude gift to be given to people who serve others in your community. What could you make this week? You might make a thank-you card, illustrate a note, or create your own cool craft.

Do: John preached "all over the area around the Jordan River" (Luke 3:3, ICB). Look at this area on a Bible map. Specifically find Judea (Matthew 3:1) and Bethabara (Bethany beyond Jordan) (John 1:28).

Pray: Place your hand on your heart and thank God for giving you a heart of flesh.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *Read **Ezekiel 36:26**, your memory verse. What might hearts of stone and hearts of flesh mean?*
- *Who in today's story had a heart of flesh? Who had hearts of stone?*





WEDNESDAY

The Excitement Spreads

The hot midday sun sparkled on the Jordan River as more and more people came to listen to John's powerful words. *"Repent,"* he cried to the people (Matthew 3:2). That word stuck in many people's hearts like a sharp arrow in a target. *Repent*. God was helping them realize their hearts were selfish, proud, and full of sin. They didn't want those rotten hearts anymore, so what did they do? **Read Matthew 3:6.**

They decided to respond to God by saying they were sorry and letting Him take away their sins. To show their need for Him and faith in His power to forgive, they dipped under the waters as their "old" selves and came up spiritually "new." Imagine how happy they were after that!

Some of Israel's wealthy rulers and teachers came to be baptized too. But God showed John they didn't really mean it. They were fakes who thought they could continue to be proud, selfish, and cruel. John told them, "You must do the things that show that you have really changed your hearts and lives" (Matthew 3:8, ICB).

The truly repentant people wanted their baptism to be the start of a beautiful life with God, not just an act. God was working in their hearts to change them, and they responded in faith. They asked John, "What should we do?"

John replied, "If you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that too" (Luke 3:10, 11, ICB). He told the tax collectors not to be greedy, the soldiers not to be violent, and the grumblers to be happy with their pay.

God had led the people to repent. They had listened to John the Baptist, and the Holy Spirit had prompted them to feel sorry for their sins. They had asked God for forgiveness and been baptized. Now they wanted to live kind and good lives, sharing God's love.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *If you had been there, what would you have most liked to see from today's story?*
- *Make a list of any questions you have about baptism and bring it to Friday night worship or Sabbath School.*

When we repent, we let God into our hearts so He can take away the power of sin in our lives.

Fast Facts: In 2018, 1,262,998 people committed their lives to Jesus and were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

https://www.adventist.org/articles/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2018/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zo8BywxNuQ

Pray: Ask God to keep you close to His heart today.



THURSDAY

A Very Special Baptism

Parent Faith Talk: Share your baptism experience, showing photos if possible. Talk sensitively with your child about their choice to be baptized one day.

News about the straight-talking preacher in the wilderness spread like wildfire. Soon it reached Jesus in the carpenter shop in Nazareth, and He knew what He had to do. He put away His tools, said goodbye to His mom, and followed the crowds all the way to John.

Glancing up the hill, John spotted Jesus making His way toward the river. For months He had been telling people to get ready for the coming Messiah, and now the Holy Spirit had shown him that He was here! Excitement pulsed through John's voice as he cried, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

John wanted *everyone* to notice Jesus.

Pray: Thank God that you are His beloved child.

Jesus smiled as He came to John to be baptized. Jesus is so holy that John didn't feel that he, a sinner, was worthy to baptize Him. He said, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14). But Jesus urged John to baptize Him in the Jordan River right away.

After His baptism Jesus stepped from the water and knelt on the riverbank. He prayed for power to reach hard-hearted people with His love so they would accept His gift of salvation. He asked for proof that God had accepted Him as His Son on earth. And in a flash God answered!

Dazzling light from God's throne surrounded Jesus. He looked up. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a beautiful white dove, came down on Him. While many saw this amazing sight, only John and a few others understood this miracle. Everyone stood silent as Jesus glowed with holy light. Then God spoke from heaven. What did He say? **Read Matthew 3:17.**

Those wonderful words warmed the people's hearts and made their faith grow. Those words are for everyone. *Everyone*.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *Read **Matthew 3:17** again. Can you imagine how happy God was when He said those words?*
- *You are also God's child! Read the verse again and imagine God naming you as He says it.*

When the people watched Jesus' beautiful baptism, their faith grew, and their hearts were prepared to love Him. When we see others repent and choose baptism, our faith can grow too.

☐ FRIDAY

Bible Baptism

As Jesus grew up, His heart always belonged to God. He had lived a perfect life (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus had never sinned and never needed to repent, because He did nothing wrong. He chose to be baptized by John for very different reasons.

When John felt unworthy to baptize God's Son, Jesus said, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus was baptized as an example for us to follow. He wanted to show us that His life was committed to God, just as our lives can be. When we are baptized, we also commit our lives fully to God to show others that we now belong to God.

Baptisms are special times when people show that they have given their hearts completely to Jesus and want to belong to His family. They are letting others know they are serious about asking Jesus for His power to help them trust and follow Him always.

God's family will celebrate with you when you choose to follow His example and be baptized one day.

Think . . . Then talk about it

• *How does Jesus' baptism show His great love for sinful people?*



Friday Night

Share and praise

- Say or sing your memory verse for your family. Share what it means to you personally.
- Explore the words of hymn no. 287 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, "Softly and Tenderly." If it is known to your family, sing it together.
- Have an adult lead a short Bible study on baptism. Look up the Bible texts in the book of Acts, then discuss the important points from each.
  - Acts 8:36-38
  - Acts 2:38
  - Acts 16:33-36
  - Acts 22:16

Family Journal

- What has this story taught you about repenting for your sins?
- What things in this story would have made God smile?

Pray

Thank God for the way He works to prepare hearts to accept Jesus, especially yours.

☐ SABBATH

Sabbath Celebration

Celebrate Sabbath in a special way to suit your family and climate this week.

Walk

If you live near a body of water, go for a walk there. Sit down to rest and imagine Jesus getting baptized by John in the Jordan River. Thank God for preparing your heart to be baptized.

Craft Activity: Make a Dove Mobile

1. Draw a simple dove shape on a piece of cardstock and cut it out.
2. Trace around it 11 times and cut out the doves. (You will have 12 doves in all.)
3. Write "[Your name] is My beloved [son/daughter]; in You I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).
4. Attach the doves to strings and tie the strings to a coat hanger.
5. Hang the mobile in your room to remind you of this beautiful truth.

Object Lesson: Jesus Forgives Our Sins When We Repent

You will need: a pen or water-soluble marker; a permanent marker.

Do: Write several mistakes you have recently made on a piece of paper using the water-soluble markers. Put the paper into some water and watch the words disappear. Think about how Jesus will forgive your mistakes whenever you ask Him.

Use a permanent marker to write "Jesus loves me" on another piece of paper. Immerse it in the water. Think about how Jesus' love for you can never be washed away.

For You, Parents: You are God's beloved child! Pause and soak up these beautiful words: " 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. 'He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.' Eph. 1:6. The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113).