

Unit 20: Session 1 - Jesus is Baptized¹

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-17

Introduction (10 minutes)

READ

For the last four hundred years, the people of Israel had no prophets, no clear direction, and no word from God. Just silence. And in those four hundred years, the people drifted away from clinging to God as Father and began to cling to the rules of religion. For generations, the people lived in bondage to religious practices that God did not ordain and that were made up in order to fill the silence. Now out of the silence, here comes the loud voice of John the Baptist declaring that the kingdom of heaven has come near! What the people of Israel have been so desperately longing for has finally come. The Messiah is coming.

ASK

- Similar to how we are currently staying home in isolation due to the coronavirus pandemic and are forced to wait to meet with others, so also Israel sat in silence, waiting for God to meet them and speak His word.
- How does being in isolation help you understand what the Jews felt waiting for the Messiah to come?
- How do you think the Jews felt upon hearing John's message?

Teaching Plan (15-20 minutes)

Read the Scripture passage below one section at a time and ask the corresponding questions within each section. Feel free to use your own Bible or follow along with the text below (the translation used is from the CSB).

READ

Matthew 3:1-6

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" **3** For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight! **4** Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, **6** and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

ASK

- What did the prophet Isaiah say about John and what he came to do (see verse 3)?
- John called the people to repent (verse 2). What is repentance, and why do you think John the Baptist emphasized the need for personal repentance?

READ

Matthew 3:7-12

7 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 coming wrath? **8** Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. **9** And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. **10** The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. **11** "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the

¹ From The Gospel Project for Students, Leader Guide, Vol. 7, pgs. 48-55.

Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.”

ASK

- Why wasn't it enough for the Pharisees to rely upon the faith of their fathers when it came to their own lives?
- What was different about Jesus' baptism compared to John's? Why do you think Jesus' baptism is better?

READ

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14** But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” **15** Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized. **16** When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

ASK

- Why was it necessary that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist? What did His baptism confirm about Jesus' identity (v. 17)?
- Why do you think it is important for us to see Jesus' ministry begin with a confirmation of His identity?

Our Mission (10 minutes)

For application, ask the following questions divided into sections head, heart, and hands, to help students think through how God's story connects with our own.

HEAD

The word “repentance” in Greek literally means “a changed mind.” Why do you think repentance begins with a changed mind?

HEART

What can we learn from the Pharisees when it comes to thinking that going through the motions (attending church, doing good deeds etc.) is enough?

HANDS

How does Jesus' identifying with us in His baptism and allowing us to identify with Him in baptism change how we see our personal identity?

Prayer

Pray together to close, taking prayer requests if desired. Encourage students to spend some time journaling the following questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about myself?