



Jesus' Baptism

Goal: To explore the meaning of baptism today.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Mark 1:1-15

John the Baptist was “calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins” (v. 4, CEB). Jesus came, and John baptized him. When Jesus emerged from the water, he saw the heavens opened and “the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness’” (vv. 10–11). Then Jesus began to preach: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (v. 15).

Jesus' baptism is meaningful for us today. It shows Jesus is God's Son, the one in whom God is “well pleased” (v. 11). In Jesus, we experience God.

Jesus proclaimed God's kingdom has come—now! In Jesus, God is establishing God's reign for everyone. The result is that all should follow the message of John and Jesus: “Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news” (v. 15, CEB). The good news is that God reigns and forgives sins. We receive forgiveness, we follow Jesus, and we live as God wants. For God's grace in Jesus, we live in gratitude!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

The story of Jesus' baptism offers a great opportunity to talk with the children about their own baptism or baptisms they have seen in worship. If there is a baptism this Sunday in your church, invite the children to talk about what they will see. Help them remember that a baptism involves a person or a child, the parents and caregivers, the minister, and the congregation. Parents and caregivers, children, youth, and adults in the congregation make promises to tell the one being baptized about Jesus and God's love.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you talk with the children about their baptisms, be aware of those in your group who may have been dedicated or blessed and are not yet baptized. Some parents and caregivers prefer to wait for a child to make her or his own decision about baptism. As you tell the story of Jesus' baptism, you can connect that story with their lives. Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his ministry, and so too with the children. The moment when they were baptized or blessed/dedicated was the beginning in their life of listening for God and following Jesus.

O God, you told Jesus that you love him. Help me hear those same words and be grateful. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 6, 6a, 6b, 26,
28

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

white cloth

blue fabric (or fabric
scraps)

blue crepe paper

blue tablecloth

containers of water

bath and hand towels

biblical costumes

smartphone or digital
camera (optional)

Responding

Celebrating

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, sculpting
materials

Praying

watercolor paints, white
construction paper,
containers of water,
newspaper

Offering

white ribbon, **SCM 6**

Extra

copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you, *(Name)*.” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite the children to help prepare the worship space with a candle, a Bible, a white cloth, blue fabric (or fabric scraps), blue crepe paper, and a blue tablecloth. Ask them to arrange the tablecloth, fabric, and crepe paper to look like water. If space allows, invite them to tape the crepe paper to a wall to create a river that flows down.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities, and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Ask some of the children to put a small table in an out-of-the-way area of your space with towels underneath it to catch spills. Place several containers of water on the table. Provide extra towels for children to dry their hands.

Direct the children to the water and encourage them to run their hands through it. Get your hands wet and talk together about how it feels, why water is important to you and the earth. Ask questions such as:

- ▼ What is your favorite thing to do with water?
- ▼ What do we use water for?

Singing

Gather the group together in the worship space. Play and sing “God’s Love for Us Is Truly Amazing (El amor de Dios es maravilloso)”—**MM 29**; **SCM 28**.

Praying

Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence with us. Allow for a few moments of silence. Invite children to close their eyes and to imagine the sound of water as they take a few deep breaths. Then pray:

God of the waters, water is vital to our life. It quenches our thirst. It washes us clean. It is a part of our bodies. Thank you for the gift of water. We are grateful for your goodness. Amen.



Some children may mention that they have not been baptized. Be sensitive to those who have not been baptized (or do not know if they have). If children express a desire to be baptized, encourage the parents/caregivers to contact the pastor.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Preparing to Hear the Story

Display **SCM 6a**. Invite children's responses to the question: What do you imagine Jesus is doing here? Allow for all responses.

Then call attention to **SCM 6b**; explain that this is what the Jordan River really looks like and that this is where Jesus was baptized.

Invite conversation on baptism:

- ▼ What do you know or remember about celebrating a baptism in our church?
- ▼ If you have been baptized, what do you remember or what have you been told about that day?

Hearing the Story

B L

Invite a child to find Mark 1 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Read **SCM 6**. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Provide each child a length of blue crepe paper for each hand. Explain that when they hear the words *water* and *river* during the story, they may wave their crepe paper as though it is moving water.

Read the story again from **SCM 6** or listen to the story audio.

Reflecting on God's Grace

LG B C

Invite the children to form a tableau, a frozen scene from the story as a way to dive deeper into the story. Provide biblical costumes if desired. Encourage creativity in setting up a few of the following scenes:

- ▼ John the Baptist in the wild, eating locusts and honey.
- ▼ John on the bank of the Jordan River, talking to people.
- ▼ John baptizing the people one by one.
- ▼ Jesus coming to the river.
- ▼ Jesus being baptized by John.
- ▼ The Holy Spirit (dove) coming to Jesus.
- ▼ Jesus hearing God's voice.

As the children form the scenes, ask what the people in the scenes might have been feeling, saying, or wondering about.

Consider taking pictures of the tableaux to share with families or your congregation.

B *Children with behavioral issues (and even some without) may struggle with a long list of complicated directions. Keep guidelines broad and simple, such as: try your best, respect others, be polite.*

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing together "A Child of God"—**MM 21; SCM 26**. Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.



Celebrating God's Grace

TD C

Before the session, set out sculpting materials such as play dough, aluminum foil, pipe cleaners, bendable wax craft sticks, and so forth.

Hand out copies of **GN 1**. Wonder together what each symbol is. Point out the sculpting supplies and allow the children to choose what medium they want to work with. Suggest that they make one or more of the symbols using the supplies. While the children are making their shapes, discuss how the symbols might be found in today's story or when the item is used during a baptism service.

- ▼ Shell—used for the outward sign of baptism, the actual pouring of the water on the head
- ▼ Water—sign of purity and cleansing from sin
- ▼ Cross—symbol of Christianity
- ▼ Dove—depicts the Holy Spirit
- ▼ Candle—signifies moving from death to life in Christ

TD *Some children who have tactile sensitivities find working with clay or play dough unpleasant. Other materials, such as pipe cleaners, may feel very prickly. Consider providing an option such as drawing. You may also choose to include the child in the discussion and then let them sit out the sculpting portion of activity.*

Praying God's Grace

A C T

Play contemplative music as the children work. Invite the children to use watercolor paints to paint a picture of the Jordan River. Cover your table or work space with newspaper. Provide white construction paper, demonstrate how to wet the brush with water before brushing in the paint, and explain that they need to remember to rinse the brush in the water container before changing colors. Assure the children that there is no wrong way to paint! They may simply use their imaginations to paint the scene of Jesus' baptism.

Lead conversation while painting; comment on their creations and on why they've chosen to include what they have. Ask the children to imagine what it was like for Jesus when he came to the river to be baptized. Wonder how he might have felt as he entered the water.

T *Cleaning up and washing hands can take time! Waiting in line for the sink may make some children anxious. Devise a routine for your group so they know what to expect. Use a song, movement poem, or physical activity to match the time required.*

Encourage working collaboratively for this project. Some children may protest when asked to give up the painting they have begun. This is a normal reaction.



Offering God's Grace

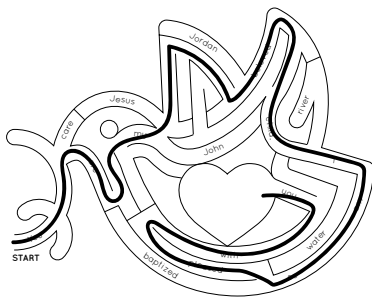
A SD

Invite children to close their eyes as you read the last part of the story from **SCM 6**, starting with, "As Jesus came out of the water . . ." and continuing to the end of the story. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, and Jesus heard God say he was loved so much. Jesus' baptism prepared him to tell others about God's good love. We are invited to share in baptism and in telling others about God's love just as Jesus did. Ask children to consider one person they want to remind that they are so loved by God.

Let each child cut a length of white ribbon to be used as a reminder of the Holy Spirit like a dove and to tie around that person's finger or wrist. Ask them to use markers to write "God loves you" on the ribbons and to offer them as a gift and a blessing, letting the recipient know about God's love. Ask them to sit quietly as they write the words on their ribbon and to offer a prayer for the person they will give it to.

GN 2 Solution:

You are my beloved child.
I am so pleased with you.



Extra Activity

LG M LD

Provide copies of **GN 2** and pencils. Invite the children to find their way through the maze to the heart. Have the children write the words in the spaces below as they encounter them along the path. Younger children may need a little help getting started. Some children may finish quickly; encourage them to help children who are struggling a bit. Allow time for all to complete the puzzle before revealing the answer.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

Remind the children that, in his baptism, Jesus rejoiced in God's love. His baptism prepared him to tell others about God's good love.

Invite the children to think of ways they can tell others about God's love, and encourage them to say them out loud.

Have the children spread out around your space, and lead them in a guided prayer:

Bow your heads.

Offer a silent prayer of thanks to God for the gift of baptism.

Offer a silent prayer of thanks to God for God's perfect love.

Lift up your head and look heavenward.

Take a deep breath.

Open your arms wide.

Leave, knowing that God loves you and is happy with you.

Say, "Amen."



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

