



You Are My Beloved

Goal: To explore baptism as the beginning of our lives of faith.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 3:1-22

After Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, "the Holy Spirit came down on him in bodily form like a dove." A voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness" (v. 22, CEB).

The dove and the voice from heaven were God's ways of indicating that Jesus was following God's will and that the Holy Spirit was with him. Baptism was a sign of Jesus' commitment to do as God desired. The Spirit and the voice from heaven confirmed Jesus' mission to live and communicate God's ways to God's people.

Our baptism indicates our commitment to be followers of Jesus Christ. In baptism, God gives us grace to be part of the people of God and to receive the Holy Spirit as our constant companion throughout life. In baptism, we receive all the benefits of what Jesus has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection. Baptism marks our lives as children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ. In baptism, we receive God's grace in Christ. We rejoice in being brought into the family of faith by God's reaching out to us. Baptism marks our commitment to Christ and our grateful lives in serving Christ.

Baptism seals our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It also seals our relationship with all people, including the most needy. John connects baptism with providing for the needs of those who are hungry and without clothes, treating people with justice, and putting others' needs ahead of our own. Baptism is a call to ministry.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Today's story provides a great way for you to help children make connections with the baptisms they see in worship. Since Jesus' baptism, the church has recognized baptism as a sacrament that marks our beginning of a life lived in response to God's love. Children can understand that their baptisms are the beginning of their lives of faith. God's promise to love each of us is realized at our baptism surrounded by God's faithful people.

Help the children recall baptisms they have seen and remember Jesus' baptism with water in the presence of God's Spirit. It marked the beginning of his ministry.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Some parents and caregivers prefer to wait for their children to claim their own baptisms. Those who have been baptized may want to share stories they have been told about that day, which could provide a nice entry point into the story of Jesus' baptism. This story, combined with those from the children, will help them identify unique ways each of us lives in response to God's love, marked with water at our baptisms. As each child leaves today, give him or her this baptismal blessing: "You are a child of God, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever."

Dear God, help me invite the children to know your grace, available to them in the water and in the remembrance of baptism. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 7, 15, 22

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blanket or mats

pictorial church
directory (optional)

snack (optional)

Guided Play

choice 1: large basin of water, tennis ball, metal toy car, shape cookie cutter, rock, leaf, sinkable items, blocks

choice 2: storybooks about baptism, pictures of people being baptized, **SCM 7a**

choice 3: magazines with pictures, copies of **Grace Notes (GN) 1**

Exploring

choice 1: blue fabric or plastic tablecloth

choice 2: different size cups, large plastic tub

choice 3: copies of **GN 2**

choice 4: copies of **GN 3**

Book Suggestions:

- *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim, pcusastore.com
- *Baptism Promises* by Carol A. Wehrheim, pcusastore.com

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **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, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

"Exploring God's Grace" choice 2 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play

TD **LD** **FM**

Greet the children by name and with the words "Grace and peace to you." Prompt them to respond, "And also with you."

Introduce yourself to the parents/caregivers who you do not know personally. Explain to them that the children will hear a story about baptism and about the cousins, Jesus and John, as grown-ups.

Invite the children to choose a guided play activity to start:

1. Playing with Water—Provide a large basin of water and common items such as a tennis ball, metal toy car, shape cookie cutter, rock (about the size of a golf ball), leaf, sinkable items, or blocks. Let children take turns dropping the items into the water. Talk about which items float and which ones sink. Ask the children if they've ever been underwater. Let children take turns scooping up water and gently pouring it over the hands of another child. Comment that the minister pours or sprinkles water on a person's head at baptism.

2. Reading—Provide storybooks about baptism and pictures of people being baptized. Provide **SCM 7a**. Have extra helpers on hand to read to children from books of their choosing or invite children to browse the books and pictures.

3. Making a Poster—Provide magazines with pictures of babies, men, and women that represent a variety of cultures, scissors, crayons, glue sticks, and copies of **GN 1**. Invite the children to choose pictures in the magazines of people that they would like to cut out and glue on **GN 1**. Remind the children that all the people that are in the pictures are beloved by God.

T *Children can get confused and frustrated by too many stops and starts. Try to keep the flow of the session predictable to lessen those feelings.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “God Is with Me”—SCM 15. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate.

He Grew and Grew



Invite the children to help create motions to the following poem:

Jesus was a baby. But guess what? He grew and grew
and grew.
You were a baby. But guess what? You grew and grew too.
Jesus went to the temple; it was his church.
You go to church too.
Jesus learned and listened there.
You learn and listen too.
Jesus’ teachers were proud of him.
I am proud of you!

River Jordan



Sing to the tune of “Down by the Station.” Encourage the children to do the motions with you:

In the river Jordan, *(make a wave motion with one hand going across the front of your body)*
John baptized Jesus. *(pretend to dip someone)*
The Holy Spirit came *(make small circular motions with one hand going up to the sky)*
like a dove from the sky. *(cross hands over each other, link thumbs, and move hands like wings flapping)*
God said, “You’re my Son, *(use index finger to point)*
“you are the beloved. *(hug self)*
“Jesus, with you, I am pleased.” *(clap and smile)*



Hearing the Story

C L

Open the Bible to Luke 3 and point out that the story comes from the Bible.

Read **SCM 7**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Show the children the picture on **SCM 7**. Ask them to find John and Jesus. Then ask them to tell you about the picture. Wonder what the people in the picture are doing. Wonder what John is saying. Wonder how John explained to the people that God loved them.

Take this time to help children learn the word *baptism*. Help them understand that Jesus was baptized with water and we also are baptized with water. When Jesus was baptized, he understood that he belonged to and was loved by God.

Tell children that baptism is a way of becoming part of God's family in the church.

Ask them to name some of the people in your church family. If you have a pictorial directory, show it to the children. Ask children to tell you some of the things these families do together. Tell about some things you do with your church family.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Act it Out

MS F B C

Invite the children to act out the story of Jesus' baptism. Tell the children that they will have a chance to take turns with the different roles. Choose two people to be the Jordan River. Invite them to hold a large piece of blue fabric or blue plastic table cloth between them and pretend to be the river. Choose a child to be John and a child to be Jesus and stand behind the river. Instead of dipping another child, suggest that the child playing John pretend to pour water over the child playing Jesus. Choose a child to be the dove and flutter their hands like a dove. Invite a child to be the voice of God and say, "You are my beloved Son. I am so pleased with you." Set the scene in place and invite the children to act it out. Repeat letting the children take turns with the different parts.

F *Notice and listen carefully to children's concerns about inclusion and exclusion. Discuss different aspects of fair and unfair situations, helping children to form strong ideas of fairness.*

2. Pouring Our Thanks B L

Put different sizes of cups inside a large plastic tub. Place it where it is easy for the children to reach. Fill some with water, but make sure that some are empty. Invite the children to practice pouring the water from the cups that are full to the ones that are empty. Allow time for them to experiment and experience. Have conversations about what we use water for and things we pour water on. Make sure to end the conversation speaking about baptism and how the pastor sometimes pours water on a baby or adult's head to baptize them. This means that we belong to God and that God loves us. After the activity, end with a simple litany (teaching the response that will be used throughout):

For rivers, fountains, and oceans:

Thank you, God, for water!

For rain that makes plants grow:

Thank you, God, for water!

For a drink when we are thirsty:

Thank you, God, for water!

For being God's children:

Thank you, God, for water!

3. Making Baptism Cards LG FM

Using **GN 2**, invite the children to make welcoming cards to give to those who are baptized throughout the year. While the children are decorating their cards, remind them that baptism is a way of becoming part of God's family. These cards will help those being baptized feel welcomed into the church and the family of God.

4. Coloring Page FM

Hand out copies of **GN 3** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation as they color by using the following wondering questions.

- I wonder, "What did the people think when they saw John baptizing Jesus?"
- I wonder, "How many people did John baptize on that day?"
- I wonder, "What did Jesus do after he was baptized?"

FM *To help children build fine motor skills, encourage enjoyment in activity participation instead of focusing on a "successful" outcome such as whether a drawing actually looks like a star or a person.*

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wonder questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

FA

Encourage each child to put away one toy or object. Invite the children to sit around a table or on the floor.

Sing “You Are My Own Dear Son”—**SCM 22**—to remember God’s words for Jesus while you serve the snack.

Say the following litany and ask the children to respond with “Thank you, God”:

Thank you, God, for baptism. (*Thank you, God.*)

Thank you, God, for John, who helps us know God’s ways.
(*Thank you, God.*)

Thank you, God, for Jesus, who calls us to belong to the church. (*Thank you, God.*)

Help us to share your love with others. (*Thank you, God.*)
Amen.

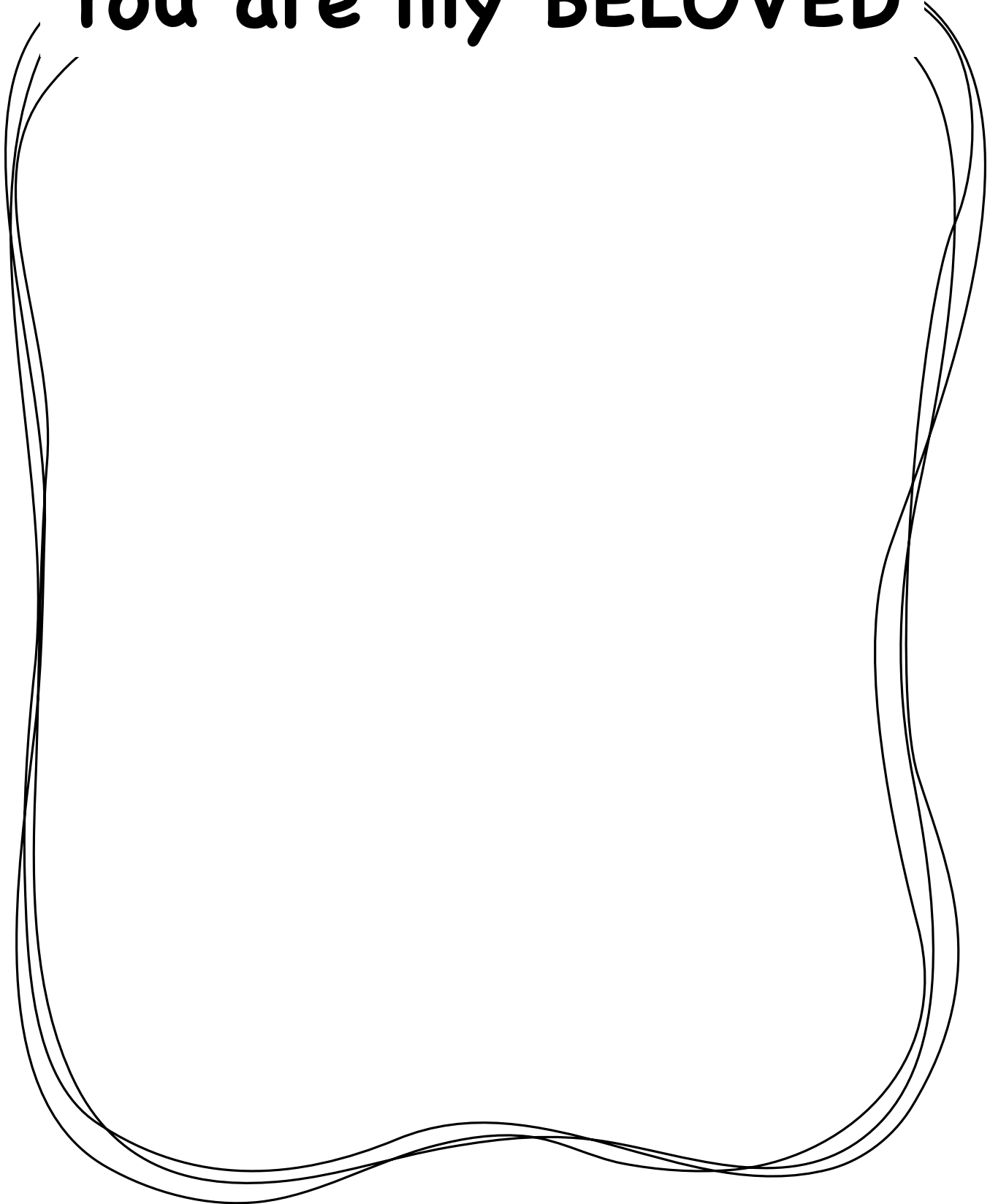
Encourage the children to find ways to share God’s love with others.

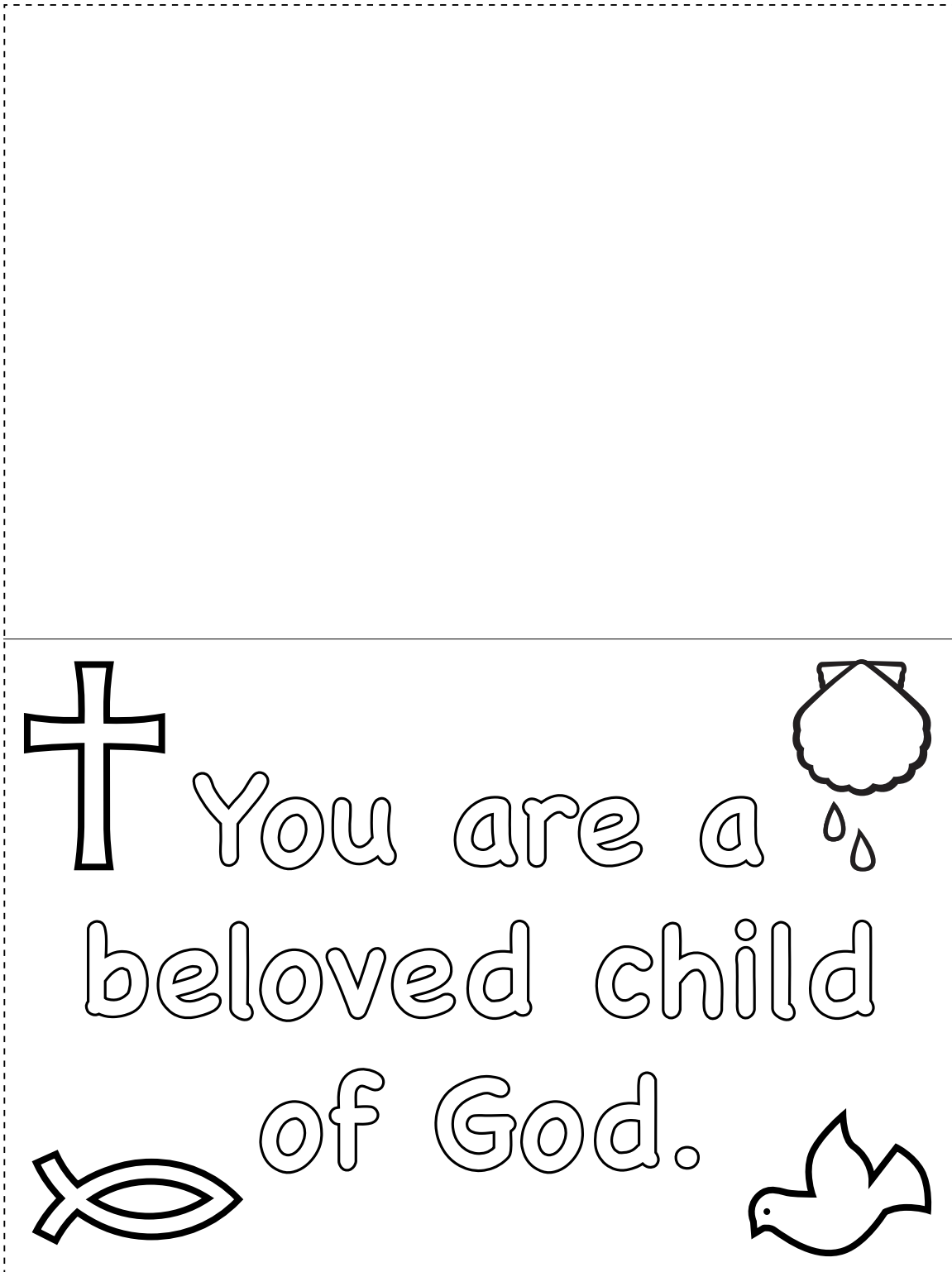
As the children leave, bless each one: “(Name), you are a beloved child of God. The grace of God is with you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

You are my BELOVED





You Are My Beloved



John baptizes Jesus. God is pleased.

