



# John Baptizes Jesus

**Goal:** To celebrate the grace of God through baptism.

## RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Matthew 3:13–17

Baptism is one of the sacraments of the church. It is a very important action, whether administered to infants or adults. All baptisms remind us of God’s grace in bringing us into the fellowship of faith, into the church as the people of God.

Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist was a key beginning to his ministry. In it, Jesus identified with the people he had come to save. He became one of us. In baptism, we receive forgiveness of sins. Jesus was sinless, so his baptism was not for forgiveness. But in his baptism, Jesus was expressing his dedication and commitment to obeying God’s purposes for his life and ministry. He was equipped by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and sanctioned by God through a “voice from heaven” that said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (v. 17).

Baptism in the church is a great celebration of God’s grace. It enacts God reaching out for us—sinful as we are—to open a new life of faith. Baptism is our response, in deepest gratitude, for God’s grace. Baptism marks our commitment to serving God as disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

### . . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Jesus wanted to begin his work with God’s people by being baptized by John. Whether a child has been baptized or blessed or dedicated, help all know that this act means that they are different and something is expected of them. Children thrive by being both supported and challenged as they grow. Children can understand and be aware of ways they can respond to God’s love by loving others. You can remind them that it is easy for them to respond because they are surrounded by their family at home and their family at church.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you tell the story of Jesus’ baptism, you can help children engage by asking them to tell about a baptism they have seen at church. Some may know stories about their own baptism. Be aware of children in your group who may have received a blessing or dedication instead of having been baptized. Be prepared to explain the difference—that some parents bring their child for baptism and others delay baptism until the time of decision. In all the stories, help children see that the same things are present: water, the one who baptizes, the one who is baptized, and God’s Spirit.

*God of all creation, help me see signs of my baptism daily and  
remember your saving grace and love. Amen.*

## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 7, 19, 22

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

blanket or mats

snack

## Guided Play

choice 1: large plastic  
bin with water,  
nonbreakable cups and  
containers, towels

choice 2: **SCM 7a**,  
storybooks about  
baptism such as *Baptism  
Promises* by Carol  
Wehrheim, pictures of  
people being baptized

choice 3: copies of  
**Grace Notes (GN) 1**,  
plastic sheet, water, dish  
soap, blue food coloring

## Exploring

choice 1: lightweight  
blue fabric, small white  
fabric

choice 2: invited guest,  
camera; bowl of water  
and towel (optional)

choice 3: card-stock  
copies of **GN 2**, coffee  
filters

choice 4: copies of  
**GN 3**

## 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,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

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

Set up an area for playing with water for “Guided Play” choice 1. Place a plastic tablecloth on the floor for spillage. Have several towels on hand.

Obtain *Baptism Promises* by Carol Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), [www.pcusastore.com](http://www.pcusastore.com).

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1 and choice 2 require more prep.

### Welcoming and Guided Play


Welcome the children by name as they arrive and say, “You are God’s beloved child.” Prompt the response, “Amen” or “Thanks be to God.” Be sensitive to any children who might be visiting for the first time. Explain to the parents/caregivers that the children will hear a story about John baptizing Jesus.

Introduce the guided-play activities, explaining that everything they will be doing has to do with water and baptism:

**1. Water Play**—Invite the children to play at a water table, scooping up and pouring water.

**2. Storybooks**—Provide storybooks about baptism, such as *Baptism Promises* by Carol Wehrheim, and pictures of people being baptized. Provide **SCM 7a**. Invite children to browse the books and pictures.

**3. Bubble Painting**—Spread a plastic sheet on a table. Mix ¼ cup of water, 1 teaspoon of dish soap, and 10–15 drops of blue food coloring in a small plastic cup. Give each child a drinking straw. Invite them to take turns blowing into the liquid to make bubbles, reminding them to not inhale. As the bubbles come over the top of the cup, show them how to place **GN 1** facedown over the bubbles to paint the water. Provide crayons for the children to finish their pictures.

 Consider setting up a quiet space as a great way to limit auditory, visual, and other input. It can be as simple as a pillow or comfortable chair off to one side of the room. Children can use the space to regroup and calm down.



## Transitioning to Story Time

When the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Hello, Hello! How Are You?”—**SCM 19**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

### Jesus Has a Family

M MS A

Invite the children to follow the motions as you sing to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

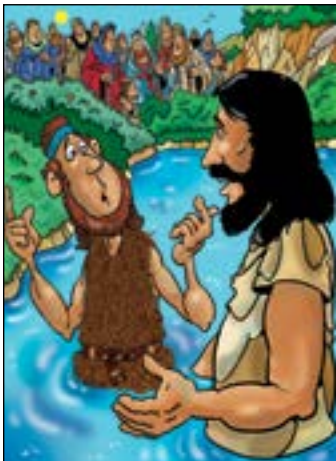
Jesus has a family, *(move arms in a wide circle)*  
Abraham to you and me. *(point out, then at self)*  
All belong to God above. *(point up)*  
All are joined by family love. *(hug self)*  
Just like you and just like me, *(point out, then at self)*  
Jesus has a family. *(move arms in a wide circle)*

### Jesus Grew and Grew

M MS A

Invite the children to help create motions to the 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!



## Hearing the Story

L C

Open a Bible to Matthew 3, so that the children know the story comes from the Bible. Comment that we read the Bible to hear stories about God’s people. Today, we’ll hear a story about Jesus’ baptism when he grew up to be a man.

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.”

After you have told the story, show the children the picture on **SCM 7**. Challenge the children to take turns telling the story. Start by saying: “Jesus went down to the river. What happened next?”

Encourage them to take home their pictures from “Guided Play” choice 3 and tell the story for their families.



## EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE



### 1. Playing with the Story

M MS TD B

Show the children the blue fabric. Together, shake the fabric slowly and then quickly and notice the difference in the way the fabric looks.

Invite them to help make the fabric look like different bodies of water: a calm pond, waves on a lake, a rippling river, and so forth.

Have the children stand at each end of the fabric and stretch it out lengthwise, then bunch the ends to make the fabric look like a river. Help the children standing at one end lift up the fabric and then pull it down to make it look like a river flowing.

Lay the blue cloth on the floor and invite the children to pretend to get into the water. Together, act out different things to do in the water, such as swimming, bathing, splashing in puddles, and so on. Encourage the children to share their ideas.

Have children take turns pretending to be Jesus and John while others help retell the story. Pretend the blue fabric is water. Ask volunteers to hold the fabric. As John and Jesus go into the water, they hold the fabric higher and higher. Finally, Jesus crouches down and the fabric briefly covers him or her. When Jesus comes up out of the water, have someone take the small piece of white fabric and flutter it down onto Jesus' shoulder like a dove.



### 2. Visiting the Sanctuary

M MS A B

*Before the session, ask your pastor or another church leader to meet the group in the sanctuary and talk about baptism.*

Travel to the sanctuary to see the baptismal font, to talk about baptism, and to explore the worship area. Talk to the children about what is said and done during a baptism. While you are visiting the sanctuary, look for symbols of baptism in banners, stained glass, or art, such as doves and shells.

If you have a camera, take a picture of the class standing around the baptismal font.

*Option:* If you cannot visit the sanctuary, invite your pastor or other church leader to come to the classroom and talk about baptism. Have a bowl of water and towel available to show what is said and done during a baptism.

### 3. Making Doves

TD A

*Before the session, cut out card-stock copies of the doves on GN 2. Cut along the dotted line to make a hole for the wings.*

Remind the children that, when the dove appeared, God said, "This is my beloved Son. I am pleased with him." Tell the children that God loves us too. Explain that they will make doves to remember Jesus' baptism.

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

Say a personal word to each child. It might be no more than “I’m glad you were here” or “I’m sorry you have such a bad cold,” but let each child know you paid attention to him or her today.



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

Give each child a dove body, a 12-inch length of string, and a coffee filter. Help the children fold the coffee filter accordion-style. Crease the filter and insert it into the slit of the dove body. Pull the folded filter halfway through and open the wings. Have the children tape one end of the string just above the wings.

Play “Music Over Water.” Suggest that the children slowly fly their dove like the Holy Spirit descending from heaven as they listen to the gentle music.

As the children are flying their doves, go to each child and say, “(Name), God loves you.”

#### 4. Coloring Page C

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

- ▼ I wonder, “Why does John look surprised?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What did John and Jesus talk about?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What were the people on the riverbank thinking?”

**T** *Activity during times of transition can lend focus to children. Challenge them to lift one foot and balance. See how long they can stand on that foot and then switch feet.*

### LOVING AND SERVING GOD FA LG

Call the children to snack time, singing “Thank You, Jesus”—**SCM 22**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

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

Sit in a comfortable position and tell the children to find a comfortable listening position. Breathe deeply and sit up so everyone can see every other face. Say: “When we pray, we tell God about what makes us happy and what makes us sad.”

Mention something that makes you happy and something that makes you sad (perhaps a recent event in your community or the world). Ask the children what things make them happy or sad. After your conversation, pray together.

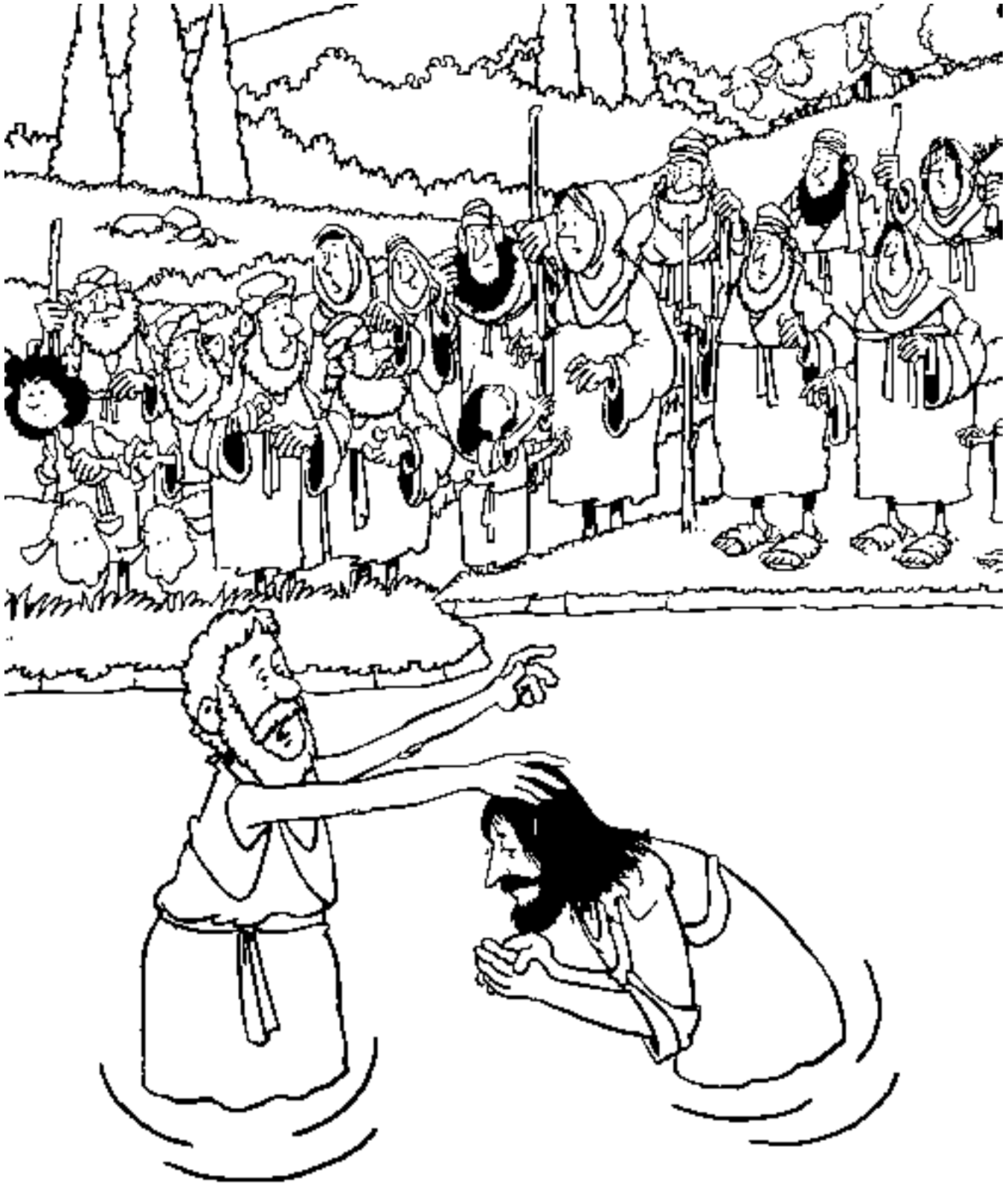
To conclude the prayer, you might say:

Thank you, God, for John and Jesus. Thank you for making us a part of your family at church. Amen.

Enjoy a snack.

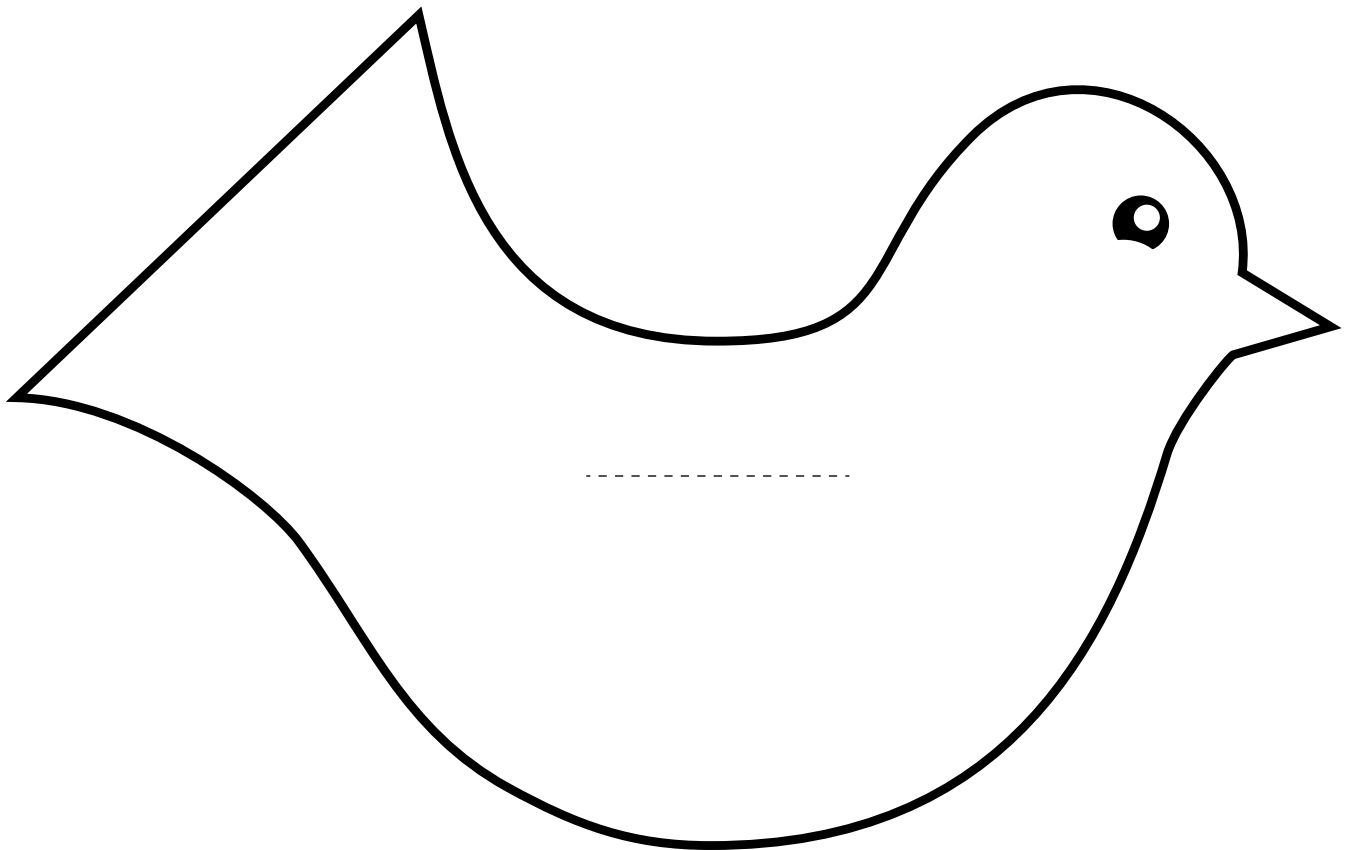
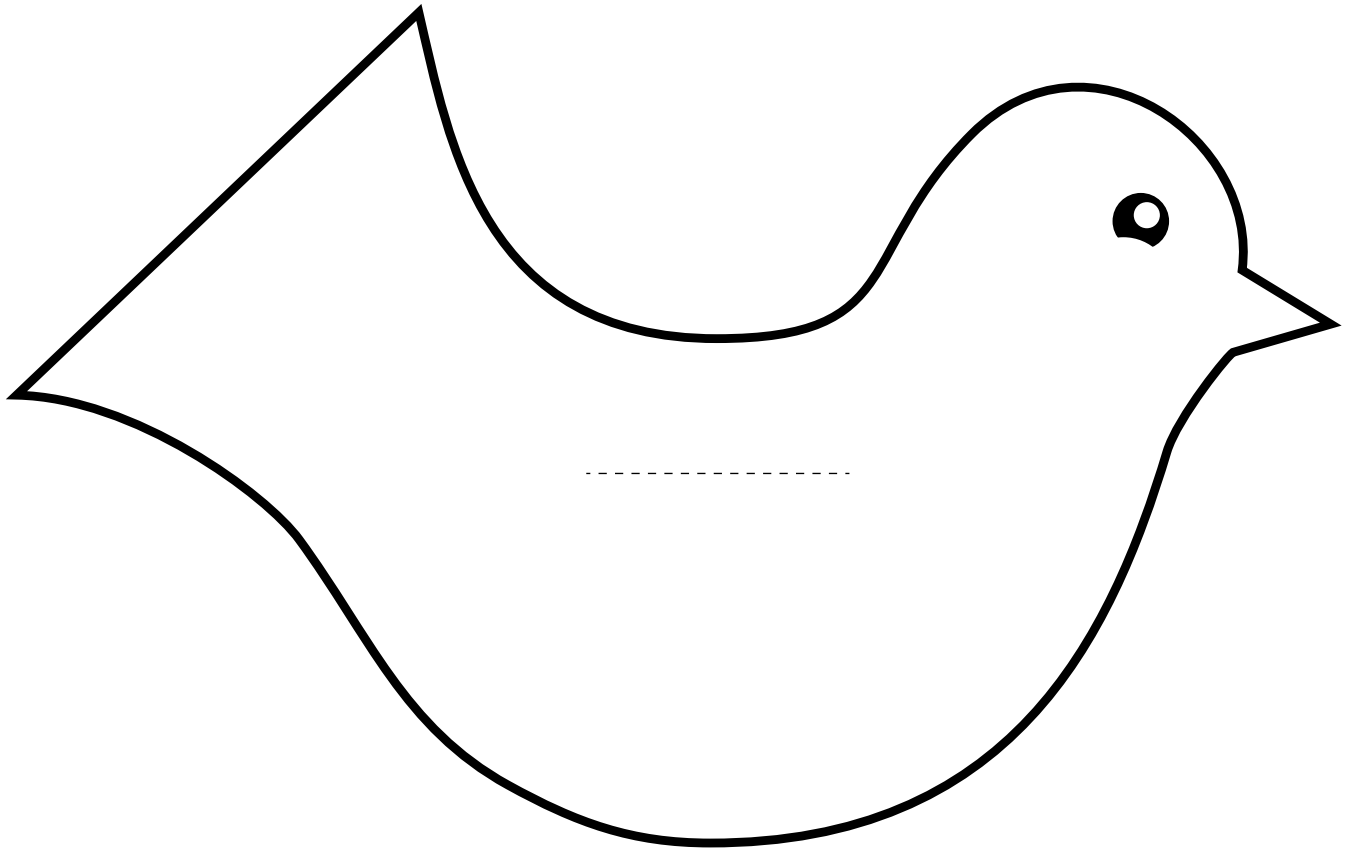
As the children leave, bless each one of the children: “(Name), you are a beloved child of God. Find ways to share God’s love with others. The grace of God is with you.”













## John Baptizes Jesus



John baptizes Jesus in the river.

