



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, 7a, 21, 22

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white cloth

white candle

medium-size bowl

pitcher of water

Responding

Celebrating

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Praying

watercolor paints
and paintbrushes,
containers of water

Offering

video recorder
(optional)

Extra Activity

card stock copies of
GN 2, coat hangers

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.

Welcoming and Preparing

Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace be with you, beloved child of God.” Prompt them to respond with the same words.

Ask the children to set up the worship space with a focus on baptism. Include a Bible, pitcher of water, bowl, white candle, and white cloth. Ask the children to set up the worship space with a focus on baptism. Invite the children to draw baptism symbols to add to the table such as candles, water, shells, fish, crosses, and doves. Provide a copy of **GN 2** as reference. Post **SCM 7a**.

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 children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities.

Singing

Invite the group to sit around the worship space. Admire the efforts of the children to create it.

Sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me.” As you sing, point out the words on **SCM 22** so the children can sing along. Invite them to create movements for the words *live*, *work*, *pray*, and *sing*.


Praying

When the children have gathered, turn on the candle. Pour the water from the pitcher slowly into the bowl.

Invite children to recall what they have seen and heard during baptisms in your church. Demonstrate how to use two fingers to scoop up water and let it fall back into the bowl.

All together, encourage children to put two fingers into the bowl as you lead them in an echo prayer:

We gather today in the name of the Father, / (*all scoop water*)
and the Son, / (*all scoop water*)
and the Holy Spirit. / (*all scoop water*)
Help us grow as your beloved children, O God. Amen. /
(*all raise hands above head*)

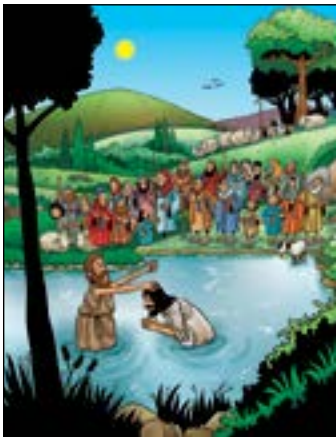
 *A child with learning disabilities may be no less able than other children; they just receive, process, and/or respond differently. If writing or reading is difficult for a child, allow them to participate verbally.*

Preparing to Hear the Story L

Tell the children that today's story jumps ahead to a time when John, Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, and Jesus are grown up. Explain that John and Jesus were related through Elizabeth and Mary, Jesus' mother, so they probably would have spent time together and known each other. Wonder together about what Jesus' and John's childhoods might have been like. Fill in some background on John.

- ▼ He became known as "John the Baptist" because he was baptizing people.
- ▼ Baptism was a sign of repentance, or changing the way one lived to follow God's way.
- ▼ The water represented washing one clean of their sins.
- ▼ John said that he baptized with water but that there was one coming who was more powerful and would baptize with the Holy Spirit (send God's Holy Spirit upon people).

Seeing where the story is found in the Bible reinforces the importance of this book for the church.



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.

Explain that in today's story we will hear about what happened when John and Jesus met at the Jordan River.

Hearing the Story M L

Invite a child to find Luke 3 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 7** or use the story audio. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again using **SCM 7** or the story audio. If you read it, communicate the emotions of the story with your voice, expressions, and gestures. Each time you read a reference to water, invite a child to dip one hand in the water and let it drip back into the bowl.

Reflecting on God's Grace

Comment that the children heard the word *beloved* in the story. Ask:

- ▼ What does *beloved* mean?
- ▼ Who was called *beloved* by whom?
- ▼ Why do you think Jesus was called *beloved*?
- ▼ How does *beloved* make you feel?

Wonder who has seen a baptism. Ask the children to describe what happened, who was there, and stories they have heard about baptism.

After Jesus' baptism, he began to visit many places to teach God's Word and to care for people who were hurting. When we are baptized, we know that we are God's children and that we are loved. In baptism, we are called to do God's work too. Wonder together what part of God's work each would like to do.

Singing

Read the words to “You Are My Own Dear Son”—**SCM 21**. Invite the children to tell how the words remind them of the Bible story. Listen to the song. Play it again and invite the children to sing along. Turn off the candle.

LG *Providing opportunities for children to welcome others, offer help, and express generosity helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Celebrating God’s Grace **TD FM**

Tell the children that they will make a baptism candle as a reminder that we are God’s beloved children. Encourage the children to ask their families about their own baptism. If they have not been baptized, the candle may be a reminder of Jesus’ baptism. The second Sunday of January is when Jesus’ baptism is usually celebrated.

Use the following directions to make a baptism candle to take home:

- ▼ Give each child a copy of **GN 1**.
- ▼ Talk about the baptism symbols while the children color them.
- ▼ Read aloud the prayer on their sheet.
- ▼ Color the flame orange or yellow.
- ▼ Cut out the shapes.
- ▼ Provide a toilet paper tube for each child.
- ▼ Tape or glue the rectangle around the toilet paper tube.
- ▼ Tape the stem of the flame inside of the tube.

Encourage the children to take their candles home. Encourage the children to lead the prayer on the candle with their families.

Praying God’s Grace **C**

Ask the children to imagine what it was like for Jesus when he came to the river to be baptized. Wonder what it means to the children to be called God’s beloved.

Invite the children to pray, using watercolor paints to illustrate Jesus’ baptism and what it means for them. Have the children paint to express their feelings about baptism, about being called God’s beloved child, and/or about being part of God’s big family. Tell them that they can paint feelings in their own way or paint a picture of Jesus’ baptism. Play quiet music while the children paint.

When they are finished, invite the children to put their paintings all

If a child asks about being baptized, give that information to your pastor or another church leader who can follow up with the family.

cross: Jesus
water: new life, growth
dove: Holy Spirit
seashell with three drops
of water: the Trinity
fish: Christian, follower of
Jesus

in one place, such as on a table or hung on a wall. Gather around the paintings and pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing.

Thank you God, for water, for its ability to wash us clean and make us new. Thank you for calling us your beloved children, part of your big family. Thank you for Jesus, for showing us how to live as beloved children of God. Amen.

Offering God's Grace LG

Using words below from the *Book of Common Worship*, encourage the children to create a welcome for your congregation to use when someone is baptized. Encourage the children's creativity. The welcome can be a skit, song, silent motions holding written words, and so forth.

With joy and thanksgiving,
we welcome you into Christ's church to share with us in his
ministry,
for we are all one in Christ.

As a gift to your church, have the children offer their welcome during worship.

Extra Activity LG

Invite the children to make baptism reminders for the congregation to see and remember their baptism. Tell the children that for centuries people have used the shell, dove, and fish as symbols for baptism.

Give each child a copy of **GN 2** on card stock. Invite the children to color the symbols with crayons and then cut them out. On the blank side of each card, suggest that they write one of the following words or phrases:

- ▼ beloved
- ▼ child of God
- ▼ God's family
- ▼ claimed
- ▼ waters of baptism

Punch a hole in the top of each symbol. Tie a length of yarn through each hole. Give each child a coat hanger. Demonstrate how to tie the yarn to the coat hangers at varying lengths to make the mobiles.

Hang the mobiles in a hallway or gathering space where folks can see them and be reminded of their baptism, that they are beloved children of God, part of God's family, and claimed in the waters of baptism.

Consider videotaping the children's welcome and sharing it on your church's website or keep it to view at future worship services celebrating a baptism. Make sure photo release forms are signed before recording or playing the video for the congregation. A sample photo release form is available under Leader Helps on www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

B T

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

Sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”—**SCM 22**.

Give each child a blessing. Invite the children to gather around the bowl of water. Ask each child to think of an action to do while saying his or her first name. (For example, jump up and down, bow after saying the name, clap with each syllable.)

Choose one child to begin. After the child has spoken his or her name while doing the chosen action, the rest of the group repeats the name and action and then says in unison: “You are God’s beloved child!” Continue until each child has had a turn.

As you did at the beginning of the session, scoop water with two fingers and say:

We leave today in the name of the Father, (*all scoop water*)

and the Son, (*all scoop water*)

and the Holy Spirit. (*all scoop water*)

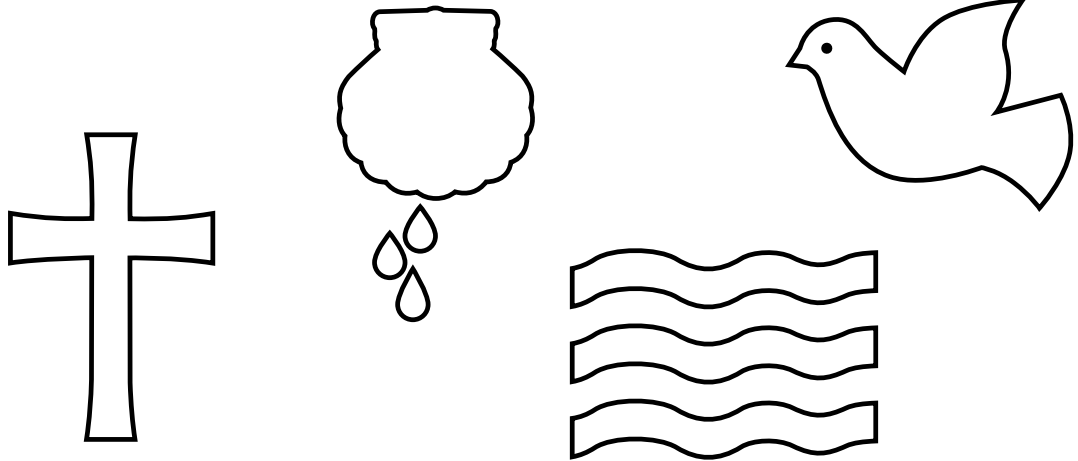
Help us grow as your beloved children, O God. Amen.

(*all raise hands above head*)

Send each child with this blessing: “(Name), you are a beloved child of God.”

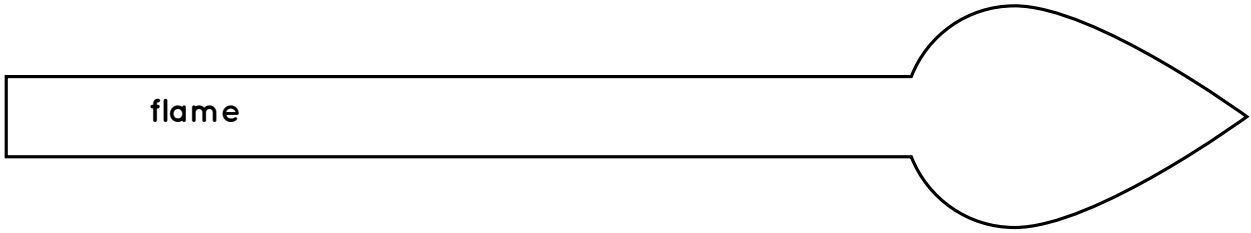
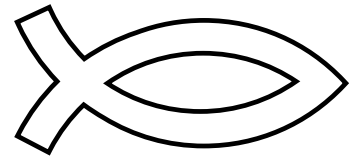


Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).



Say the prayer on this baptism candle to remind you of God's grace and love.

Holy God, giver of all light and life,
thank you for sending us Jesus Christ,
the Light of the World. Amen.



flame

