



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

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 7, 18, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white cloth

small bowl of water

white candle

Baptism Promises by
Carol Wehrheim

digital voice recorder

Responding

Claiming

card-stock copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

Praying

GN 2, small bowl of
water, small stone for
each person

Extra

copies of **GN 3**

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

Obtain *Baptism Promises* by Carol Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), pcusastore.com.

“Praying God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

A B M L

Play “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the Morning”—**SCM 21**—as children arrive. Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt the response, “And also with you.”

Invite the children to help set the scene. On a table, place a white cloth, a Bible, a small bowl of water, and a white candle to signify the light of Christ. Explain to the children that, even though green is the color for the season after Epiphany, we use white today because the story is about the baptism of Jesus, the color for which is white.

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

Engage the children in a conversation about baptism. Ask them what they know about baptism, what they have seen, and if they have any personal experience with baptism. You may wish to read *Baptism Promises* by Carol Wehrheim to the children, up to the suggestions for prayers.

Singing

L LG

Play “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the Morning”—**SCM 21**—as the children listen. Help the children learn the first stanza and sing with confidence. If they would rather rap the stanza, let them lead.

Praying

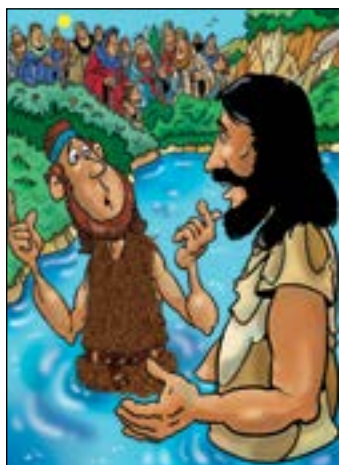
C L

Turn on the candle. Take time to show gratitude for God’s gifts. After each line, prompt the children to respond, “We thank you, God.”

For shining light into the world,
we thank you, God.
For the gifts you give us,
we thank you, God.
For grace and peace,
we thank you, God.
For showing us how to live in your way,
we thank you, God.
Amen.



If the children are not familiar with baptism, take time to tell them about baptism in your church.



Luke's version of 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.

- C** Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.

Preparing to Hear the Story

C

Ask the children to name times they have used or seen water. Wonder aloud why water is important.

Comment that water was important in Jesus' time too. Maybe that's why they used water in baptism. It cleans and refreshes us, and is like starting again.

Comment that baptism is also about belonging. It reminds us of God's grace in bringing us into the church family.

Hearing the Story

LD L C

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

Ask the children to consider the sounds from the story that they could dramatize. Wonder together what sounds might have been heard during Jesus' baptism, and how the children can make these sounds. Some ideas might be: water, people talking, splashing, cheering, sighing, heavens torn apart, wings flapping, Spirit descending, a voice from heaven.

Read the story again slowly, inviting the children to practice adding sound effects to the narration.

Using a digital voice recorder, record the story and the sound effects. Play it back for the children to hear their recording.

Consider sharing the recording with your congregation, either in worship or on the church's website.

Reflecting on God's Grace

MS C

Engage the children in conversation about the word *beloved*:

- ▼ What do you think the word *beloved* means?
- ▼ Why do you think God called Jesus his beloved son?
- ▼ When might someone use the word *beloved* today?
- ▼ How are we God's beloved children?

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play, listen to, clap, and sing "Take Me to the Water"—**SCM 18**.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God's Grace

TD

Comment that water and a dove are symbols for baptism. Give each child a card-stock copy of **GN 1** and scissors. Invite them to use the following directions to make a dove mobile, which will help us remember who we are in baptism:

- ▼ Cut out the dove pieces and water drops.
- ▼ Assemble the dove using the picture provided and taping the wings to the back of the bird body.
- ▼ Color the water drops blue.
- ▼ Punch a hole at the top of each drop and where indicated on the wings.
- ▼ Tie a length of yarn connecting each hole in the wing with a water drop. You may use varying lengths of yarn.
- ▼ Punch a hole and tie an additional string to the top of the dove to hang the mobile.

Encourage the children to take their mobiles home and share the story of Jesus' baptism with their families. If a child expresses an interest in being baptized, let the pastor know so she or he may follow up with the family.

Celebrating God's Grace

TD B

Tell the children that they are going to be the river where John baptizes people.

Ask the children to stand up and make a line, holding hands with one another. Put yourself at the head of the line and point out that, together, you look like a flowing river. Play "Music Over Water." Move slowly around the room, moving your bodies like a slow-flowing river. Some children may want to have a turn leading the river. Remind them that this is a gentle time for this river, and they need to lead slowly around the room, like soft ripples.

Change the pace of the river. Play "Take Me to the Water." Invite the children to respond with how the river might move to this song.

Tell the children that the river reminds us of the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized. In baptism, we are claimed as God's beloved child.

TD *For children who have tactile sensitivities, stimulations like body contact—that most people do not particularly notice or are not bothered by—could cause extreme reactions that may be interpreted as bad behaviors.*



Praying God's Grace



Repent is a word children probably do not use or understand. They will, however, recognize the feeling involved in acknowledging sin or wrongdoing, feeling sorry, asking for and receiving forgiveness, and trying not to repeat the sin. You do not need to avoid the word. Part of the baptism liturgy acknowledges that we turn from sin (*repent*) and turn toward God. Help the children learn the word *repent* and its meaning.

Tell the stories on **GN 2**. Ask the children to consider the situations and decide what each person needs to do to repent, or change the ways they treat people. Then invite the children to tell about times they have repented. Ask:

- ▼ How did you feel when you repented?
- ▼ How did you change what you had been doing?
- ▼ What did the other person do?

Give each person a small stone. Have the children hold their stone and take a minute to think of one thing they have done for which they feel sorry. Wonder aloud about some ways God might be inviting us to change our lives to be more like Jesus.

Invite each person, in turn, to place their stone in the bowl of water.

As each person does this, the group says together, “(Name), you are God’s beloved child.”

Extra Activity

Make a spinner as a reminder of Jesus’ baptism. Cut copies of **GN 3** in half and give each child a half-sheet.

- ▼ Color the dove, Jesus, and the water.
- ▼ Cut the rectangle along the solid lines.
- ▼ Fold along the dotted line.
- ▼ Tape a pencil or drinking straw in the center of the back of the dove side.
- ▼ Fold the Jesus side over the pencil, and glue or tape all sides together.
- ▼ Using the palms of your hands, twirl the pencil or straw and watch the dove appear above Jesus’ head.



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).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

TD

Ask the children to help clean the space.

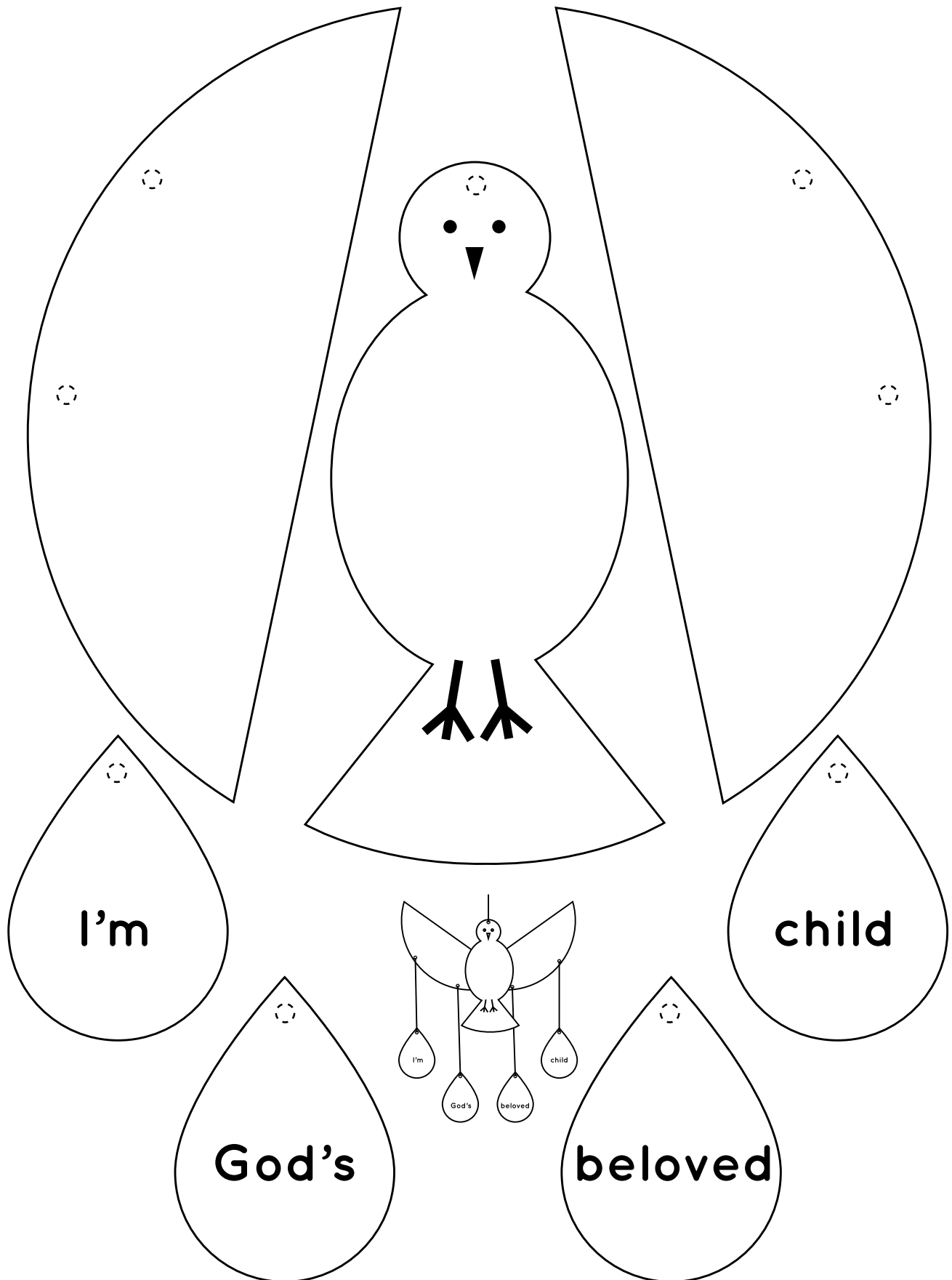
Invite the children to place the tips of their fingers in the bowl of water and:

- ▼ touch their heads, and say: “May God bless my thoughts”;
- ▼ touch their lips, and say: “May God bless my words”;
- ▼ touch their hearts, and say: “May God give me a desire to do God’s will.”

Remind the children that they are beloved children of God and part of the church family. Encourage them to welcome others.

Send each child with a blessing, “(Name), you are God’s beloved child. Go in God’s grace.”

Remind the children about the free e-book and challenge them to read the story during the week.



Chelsea and Lauren had become good friends at school. Yet Chelsea teased Lauren, calling her by her middle name. Even when Lauren asked her to stop, Chelsea continued to tease her. Finally, the teacher had a talk with the whole class, explaining how teasing could hurt someone's feelings. Chelsea had not understood that Lauren's middle name was the same as her grandmother's. Lauren's grandmother had recently died. The teasing made Lauren especially sad.

If Chelsea repents, she will . . .



Roberto and Carlos are brothers. They are constantly fighting because Roberto borrows Carlos's things without asking. Carlos went into the room they share and found gum in his baseball glove and mud all over his new jacket. In addition, Roberto had accidentally dumped a box of Carlos's baseball cards in the closet. Carlos was so mad that he yelled at his mother about Roberto. He also decided to get even by messing up Roberto's things.

If Carlos repents, he will . . .

If Roberto repents, he will . . .



Katie and Travis were playing catch in the backyard. Travis threw the ball wide and it crashed through the basement window. His parents were visiting neighbors, so they didn't hear the window break. They also didn't go into the basement very often.

If Travis repents, he will . . .



Kia had gotten in trouble at school for lying to her teacher. The teacher made her promise to give a note to her parents. Kia "accidentally" lost the note on the way home.

If Kia repents, she will . . .





