



# 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](http://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

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

## Responding

### Claiming

invited guest, **SCM 7a**

### Praying

watercolor paints  
and paintbrushes,  
containers of water

### Offering

video recorder  
(optional)

### Extra

copies of **GN 1** on card  
stock, 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.

“Claiming God’s Grace” requires more prep.

### 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. 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 1** as a reference. Post **SCM 7a**.

Ask the children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Today’s Scripture reading is a bit lengthy. Ask for several volunteers to practice reading the Scripture passage from the Bible or from **SCM 7**.

### 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

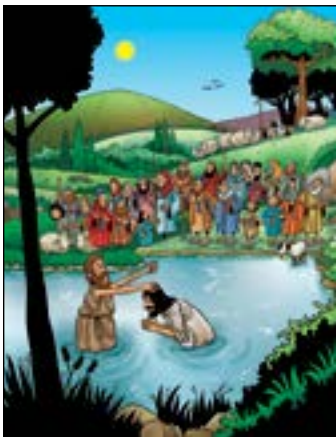
When the children have gathered, light the candle. Pour the water from the pitcher slowly into the bowl.

Invite the 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*)

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](http://www.pcusastore.com).

## 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).

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 the several volunteers you recruited during "Welcoming and Preparing" to read Luke 3:1-22 or **SCM 7**. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship table.

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. Ask: What part of God's work would you 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.

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



### Claiming God’s Grace



*Before the session, invite a pastor or worship leader to speak with your group about baptism and what it means in the Reformed tradition. Be sure to inform the speaker about the ages and interests of the children.*

Recall that Jesus was baptized in today’s Bible story. Show **SCM 7a** to the children. Explain that different churches have different ways of baptizing people. Ask them to point to the kind(s) of baptism used in your worship.

Introduce your speaker and explain that he or she is going to talk with the group about the meaning of baptism and how people are baptized in your church. Encourage children to direct their questions about baptism to the speaker.

Following the speaker’s talk, encourage the children to write or draw thank-you notes, using words and images of baptism. Deliver the notes following the session.

### Praying God’s Grace

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 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.

If a child asks about baptism for himself or herself or a family member, take care to give this information to your pastor or other church leader, who can follow-up with the family.

Consider videotaping the children's welcome and sharing it on your church's website or keeping 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 at [pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads) under "Leader Helps."

### 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.

**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, then switch feet. 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.*

### Extra Activity

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 1** on card stock. Invite the children to color the symbols with crayons, then cut them out. On the blank side of each card, suggest that they write one of the following words:

- ▼ 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 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.



## 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, or 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](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads), where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

