



You Are My Beloved

(based on Luke 3:1-22)

Zechariah (zeh-kuh-RAI-uh) and Elizabeth's little boy, John, grew up. He lived in the desert. His clothes were made out of camel's hair. He ate honey and grasshoppers.

John loved God. God told John to speak to God's people. John walked through the desert and preached.

John said words like these: "Stop doing the wrong things you are doing. Stop doing the things that make God sad. Turn to God and do the things God wants you to do. God always forgives us for the wrong things we have done."

The people asked John, "What should we do? What does God want us to do?"

"Share your clothes with people who do not have any clothes," John answered. "Give food to people who do not have any food to eat. Help people whenever you can. Be baptized to show you are sorry for what you have done."

John went down to the Jordan River. John stood in the water and called out to the crowds of people who were waiting for him. Many people wanted to be baptized. They said they were sorry for the wrong things they had done. John dipped them in the water and said God forgave them. That was their baptism. Because John baptized people, he was called John the Baptizer.

"We feel washed clean!" they cried. "God has given us a fresh, clean start."

One day, John was baptizing people as usual. Jesus came down to the river and joined the line of people who were waiting. God was calling Jesus to start something new. He had been sent to live and teach God's ways of love to everyone he met. Now it was time to answer God's call, so Jesus went to be baptized. When it was his turn, he waded out into the river. John said a prayer, helped Jesus go under the water, and lifted him up again.

Jesus stood up and paused to say a prayer. At that moment, something amazing happened. A dove came down from the sky and landed on Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit. Then a voice from heaven spoke: "You are my beloved Son. I have marked you with my love. You make me very happy."

In that moment, everything changed. Something new had started. God's grace was going to change everything. It was time for Jesus to tell everyone about the good news of God's grace. It was going to be a big job, but God was with Jesus every step of the way.



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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your child—imagine and wonder.
- Set the scene before reading the story again as a play. Use sofa cushions or pillows for hillsides and rocky riverbanks. Spread a blue towel or piece of fabric between the riverbanks to be the Jordan River. Ask someone to be John the Baptist, calling people to be baptized; Jesus, answering the call to be baptized; and the Holy Spirit, coming down from heaven as a dove.
- God called Jesus to start something new, to show God's love, and to live as God's blessed and beloved. Invite everyone to think of one new thing God may want him or her to do, such as make a friend or try a skill. Plan to do that new thing this week.



Responding to God's Grace

- Research and reminisce about each person's baptism. If you have items such as baptism certificates, letters, photos, or baptismal gowns, enjoy looking at them together. Talk about what you remember about individual baptisms, such as special people who came and how you celebrated.
- Make a thin layer of crispy rice cereal and marshmallow treats on a cookie sheet. Cut out cross, dove, or waterdrop shapes. Enjoy the treats as a family.
- The Holy Spirit came as a dove to bless Jesus. Invite everyone to hook their thumbs together and spread their hands to resemble bird wings. Bless each person in your household by flapping your dove hands over him or her and saying, "You are called by God."

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Invite everyone to use crayons to draw pictures of their own or Jesus' baptism. After the drawings are complete, paint over the entire scene with blue watercolor. When they are dry, hang the pictures in windows or on walls as part of your baptism remembrance celebration.
- In celebration of God's call and promise, place a bowl of water near the door. Encourage everyone to dip their fingers in the bowl and to touch their foreheads with the water before they leave each day, as a reminder that God marks them as beloved children and promises to be with them.
- Pray the following prayer each day this week:

God, thank you for baptism as a fulfillment of your promises. Amen.