

Meet John the Baptist

John 1:6-42 & Mathew 3:1-12

Lesson Highlights: John's an odd sort of guy to our contemporary ideas, but he's also a lot of fun to think about when it comes to how people get ready to welcome God and whatever God wants to do.

STORY

(Leader Reads):

Who are you anyway?

It's not like they didn't know the answer at all. He was John. His mom was Elizabeth, his dad was Zachariah. His mom was cousins with Mary, who was married to Joseph and were parents to Jesus. They knew who he was.

But they also did not know who he was. Because John was acting...strangely. Like living out in the wilderness. Eating bugs called locusts and honey. Wearing camel fur outfits. And it seemed like it all meant something important. What did his strange words and actions mean about who he was?

Who are you?

Why are you acting like this?

What the religious leaders really wondered was this: are you the promised messiah?

To which John said, clear and simple: nope.

Not the messiah.

"I'm the one sent first to help you all get ready for the messiah to arrive."

How could people get ready?

John said “Repent—turn around. Turn away from the things that don’t give life at all and turn towards God again. After all, God’s kingdom—where it all works like God dreams—it’s coming. Here. Soon!”

As a symbol of turning towards God and away from anything not-God, John baptized people. He’d stand in a river, and someone could join him there, where he’d dunk them in the water and bring them back out again.

Down and up. Like a cloth that needs washing—into the water where dirt is cleared away, and out again all clean. Or like the last step when someone takes a bath—rinsing everything off.

John was taking a ritual the people already did and understood—it was called ‘ritual washing’—and adding a new layer to what it meant. It was a way to say that someone was ready and looking forward to the kingdom of God. Here. Soon.

John’s baptism was like the rally in the stadium right before the big game got started. People coming together to say, “Yes. I’m here. I’m ready. I’m excited to watch what God is going to do now!” And it sure was going to be exciting. Jesus was going to get started.

WONDER QUESTIONS

1. I wonder what a locust tastes like? Did you know some termites taste like peanut butter?
2. I wonder which part of God’s kingdom John was most excited about. What about you?
3. I wonder how do we prepare for something important we haven’t seen yet?
4. I wonder what other ways you get ready for what God is going to do next?
5. I wonder what it looks like to prepare with our **actions, hearts, or attitudes?**

ACTIVITIES AND CRAFTS

Here are two games you could play that focus on the fact that **John wasn’t the Messiah**, but he was preparing people for Jesus’ arrival and the beginning of His ministry. John was describing and pointing people toward God, but how did he help people understand what to expect or how to prepare?

These activities invite kids to explore how we learn about things we do not see. Can we identify something that is described to us without actually seeing it?

Activity #1: Mystery Bag

How to Play:

The leader places a random object into a paper bag or box without anyone seeing what it is. One person from the group then puts their hand into the bag or box and feels the object without looking (you can also play a version where the clue giver is allowed to look at the object).

The child then describes the object as best they can.

- **Ages 3–6:** Use one word at a time (soft, hard, big).
- **Ages 7–12:** Give 3–5 descriptive clues without naming the object.

The group begins guessing what the item might be. After a set amount of time, stop and see if anyone guessed correctly. If you are playing the version where the clue giver has seen the object, the round can end as soon as someone guesses correctly.

Activity #2: Guess the Person

How to Play:

- Everyone writes **three lines about themselves** on a card.
- No names.
- No obvious giveaways (hair color, exact age, clothing).

Collect all the cards and mix them up.

One leader (or volunteer) reads a card out loud, one line at a time.

After all three lines are read, the group points to who they think the description is about.

The person being described confirms whether it is them.

Activity #3: Welcome Song or Sign

Big Idea:

John the Baptist prepared people for the coming Messiah. This was a big deal—it meant someone very important was arriving.

Option 1: Write a Welcome Song or Cheer

Just like in the story, can you write a song or cheer to welcome Jesus?

- What would be important to include?
- Could you add actions?
- Could there be moments for audience participation?
- Could there even be an action that requires turning around?

Think about songs sung at sporting events or school cheers.

Option 2: Make a Welcome Banner

If you don't want to make a song, create a welcome banner or sign instead. What would your sign say to welcome God?