

TEXT Luke 3:1-18

OBJECTIVE The students will be able to explain that John the Baptist's purpose in life was to introduce Christ to the world. As Christians today, we must recognize that this is our calling as well, to make Christ known to the world.

KEY VERSE FOR ANSWER Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. — John 1:29

KEY VERSE FOR SEARCH In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. — Matthew 3:1,2

**ANSWER
TITLE:** **John the Baptist**
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REFERENCE INFORMATION

John the Baptist was the immediate forerunner of Jesus, sent by God to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. John was of priestly descent through both his parents. His father Zacharias was a priest of the course of Abia, while his mother Elisabeth belonged to the family of Aaron. They are described as being righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of the Lord, blameless (Luke 1:6). John was born in a city in southern Judaea about six months before the birth of Jesus. His parents were quite old. His birth had been foretold by an angel to Zacharias while he was serving in the Temple. As a child and youth he lived in the desert as a Nazarite and he was filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. His early ministry was in the wilderness of Judaea and in the Jordan Valley. Although Jesus and John were cousins, John did not know that Jesus was the Messiah until he saw the Holy Spirit

descend upon Him at His baptism (John 1:32-34). Jesus' ministry began in Galilee after John was put into prison. The Gospels tell that John met his death because of the hateful attitude of Herodias whose sin of living in adultery with Herod, John had denounced. John's death came about when Herodias' daughter, Salome, requested his head as a reward for pleasing Herod by her dancing. See Mark 6:17-20,25,26.

Forerunner — Rulers, intending a visit, often sent advance agents to prepare the way for their reception. John the Baptist was the forerunner of our Lord (Isaiah 40:3; Luke 3:4-6). The word *forerunner* is used for Jesus, who has preceded us into the visible presence of God to ensure our personal access to God (Hebrews 6:20).

YOUR OPENER

John the Baptist

TEXT: Luke 3:1-18

KEY VERSE: In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. — Matthew 3:1,2

RESPONSES

1. God alone commissioned John to preach the Gospel. The word of the Lord came to John in the wilderness. He had a message that prepared the way for a new dispensation—the Kingdom of Christ under Grace.

2. Your students may come up with several answers to this question. These may include the reports of others, because the people were interested in seeing him baptize, or because they had heard he was a unique character. Help your students see that while these answers may be partially right, it was the content of his message, and the Spirit of God that anointed it, which were the real attractions. The message of John stirred the expectations of the people, and he was faithful to point them to the coming Messiah.

3. Allow time for your students to respond. Ask your students what types of obstructions might hinder the spread of the Gospel in our day. Obstructions suggested may include false teachings, hypocrisy, and lack of interest. Christian efforts may include preaching sound doctrine, living a true Christian life, and witnessing to others.

4. It was John's desire to see the evidence of repentance in the lives of the people. In the real sense, believing in Christ and obeying Christ are almost synonymous. Have the class talk about the change that comes through salvation. Many people in the world profess to believe in Christ, but there has been no change in their way of life. Today, as in John's day, there is evidence of a real change of heart and life when one repents and believes in Christ unto salvation.

John the Baptist came as forerunner of Christ, preparing the way before Him by calling men to repent and turn their hearts to God. No other prophet or preacher held the unique position that John had at that time in history. His mission in life was to introduce Christ to the world.

1. John was not a part of the accepted religious hierarchy of the day. By whom and under what condition was John commissioned to preach the Gospel?

2. What might have attracted the people to come to see John and hear his message?

3. In early days it was customary for kings, when on journeys, to send some men before them to command the inhabitants to clear the way. In rough countries this was a necessary precaution, for there were no public roads. Verse 4 of our text refers to this in John's message to "Prepare ye the way of the Lord. . . ." How can Christians "prepare the way"?

4. What is the meaning of John's admonition, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance"? What is the difference between believing in Christ and obeying His Word?

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

5. John's message was a message of judgment for those who would not repent. How did he explain this judgment?

6. How did Isaiah describe the personage of John the Baptist, and what was the implication regarding John's importance? See Isaiah 40:3.

7. Cite an example in John's life, proving that he was not one to compromise his message. See Matthew 14:3-10.

8. In what words did John express his unworthiness?

9. What was Jesus' appraisal of John? See Matthew 11:9-11.

10. What are the various ways in which Christ commissions us to introduce Him to the world today?

5. Our text indicates that "Every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Luke 3:9). As your class discusses this fact, direct them to the knowledge that God requires fruit in the lives of Christians (John 15:2). This should be a part of our Gospel message to others.

6. Isaiah described John as a voice crying in the wilderness, implying that John would maintain an attitude of humility regarding his position of heralding Christ. What portions of our text reveal that John had every opportunity to take upon himself the praise of men and make a name for himself? Some even thought he might be the Messiah, but John kept his place as only a voice. Refer your students to John 3:30, where John simply said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

7. John had stated that it was not lawful for Herod to have his brother Philip's wife. This cost him his life. Ask your students why it is important that Christians not compromise the truth today. They should realize that God's Word is unchangeable, and being God's witnesses in this world, it is vital that Christians take the same, uncompromising stand as John did.

8. John said One was coming Who was mightier than he, One whose shoe latchets he was not even worthy to unloose. The preeminence of Christ can never be overemphasized. Why is this just as true in our day as it was in John's day? John knew he could not save anyone, but he pointed to the One who could. This is also our mission today.

9. Jesus said that John was the greatest among the prophets. Use this question to lead into a discussion of how much better it is, in the sight of God and man, for one to be small in his own eyes and let others praise him, if there is any praise. Someone has said that the more fruit there is on the tree, the closer it bends to the earth.

10. After the students have discussed their answers, they should conclude that everyone is called to introduce Christ, but the ways in which they do it may be different. Refer to Ephesians 4:11,12. As a conclusion to your lesson, you may want to discuss with your class what Romans 11:29 means.

YOUR WRAP-UP

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

Why do you suppose John the Baptist was so different from other people?

How did John the Baptist prepare people for the coming of Jesus? In what way do Christians today have the same commission?

Why do you think the people came to hear John the Baptist preach?

What qualities of John the Baptist would you like in your own life?

Could someone else have preached John the Baptist's message? Why or why not?

How did John the Baptist feel when his disciples left him to follow Jesus?

John's purpose in life was to introduce Christ to the world. How can we as Christians introduce Christ to the world?

In our ANSWER story, what was Jesse's response to hearing John the Baptist's message of repentance?

THINGS TO DO

Articles needed: A bottle of iodine, a tall glass filled with water, a brightly colored scarf or remnant of material large enough to cover the glass, and Polident powder (denture cleaner). Try this at home before presenting it to your class. Procedure: When we are born we are born in sin. (Place the glass of water with one drop of iodine in it on a platform high enough for all the children to see.) With each sin we commit, the heart becomes darker and darker. (Name some sins of children, such as lying and stealing. With each sin named, add more iodine until the water becomes very discolored.) We usually try to cover up our sins so that no one can see them. (Drape the glass with the scarf or cloth.) When we ask Jesus to come into our heart, He forgives us, and cleanses our heart from sin. (Pour in the Polident powder. The water should become clear again.) Is your heart full of sin or has Jesus cleansed it?

Hot Seat Game: First divide the class into two teams. One child at a time from each team is equipped with the lesson book and Bible. They sit at the front in the designated "Hot Seats." Make up a list of questions and rate them from two

to five points according to their difficulty. To start, ask a question. The first child to say, "memory," has the floor, and must quote the answer. If they happen to forget, or neither of the players know from memory, they must say, "Book," indicating their source. They then race to find the answer, and read it. This familiarizes them with their Bible, their lesson book, and the answer. The catch to using a source other than their memory is that only one point is received when the question is answered from the Book.

Discuss with your class the job of an "advance man." (The person who prepares a town for the arrival of the President is an example of an advance man.) Have a couple of your students act out the part of being advance men for Jesus Christ. How would they prepare a town to receive Jesus? What would they do to make a good impression? These are some of the questions to ask your class before acting out the roleplay situation.

Answers for ANSWER

I'll Be a Messenger Too!

Match the symbols to the correct letters of the verse below and find out what John the Baptist told people about Jesus. We should also tell people of Jesus and His love.

A B C	J K L	S	W
D E F	M N O	T U	X Y
G H I	P Q R	V	Z

REPENT YE FOR THE
 □□□□ > < □ □ □ □ > □ □

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
 □

IS AT HAND.
 □

MATTHEW ^{3:2}
 □

Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 are two verses that tell what Jesus said we should do. Look them up and write your favorite one on the lines below.
