

Day 1

May 7



Pray | For the Holy Spirit to guide your steps today.

WHO WAS JOHN the Baptist?

His birth was foretold by the angel Gabriel, who said he would be great in the sight of the Lord and filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. His parents were both of priestly descent from the line of Aaron. Isaiah had even prophesied of his ministry hundreds of years before his birth (see Isaiah 40:3-4). Quite a pedigree, right? Yet rather than a regal, scholarly priest, we find a man who has spent most of his life in the desert wilderness, dressed humbly in camel hair and eating simple meals of locusts and honey. In God's upside-down kingdom, who better than John the Baptist to prepare the people for Jesus – the humblest of kings?



Read | Luke 1:5-17; Matthew 3:1-4



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Take a moment to reflect on the verses you've just read. Can you think of any ways that John the Baptist's birth story is similar to Jesus' birth story?

The angel Gabriel said that John the Baptist would be "filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born" (Luke 1:15). What do you think that means? How does being filled with the Holy Spirit affect our lifestyle and our choices?

God had revealed John's part in God's great plan long before John was even born – to prepare people's hearts for the coming Messiah. God has revealed to us in his Word that his great plan is to turn the hearts of all people back to him. How can you play your part in his plan?

Day 2

May 8



Pray | Repent of your sins.

BAPTISM AS TRANSFORMATION

John the Baptist was radical in more than just his camel-hair clothes and locust lunches. His message, especially the way he delivered it, was radical. The Jews were used to hearing the words of the Old Testament prophets, who usually spoke to them as a nation rather than as individuals. The Jews participated in religious rituals of cleansing or purification to obtain God's blessings on them as a people group. But John made it personal. He called for a change of heart: for each person to confess their sins to God, repent and ask for forgiveness. When he baptized, he associated the baptism with a transformation of the person's heart, a personal commitment to turn from sin from that point forward.



Read | Matthew 3:5-6; Luke 3:2-6; 1 John 1:8-10



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

John the Baptist was called by God to prepare the way for Jesus. How does John's message of repentance prepare the people for Jesus' ministry?

The Old Testament prophets exhorted the Israelites to repent so that God would show mercy to them as a nation. How does John's message of personal repentance and heart change open the door to evangelism of all people, both Jew and Gentile?

Why is it important for us to confess our sins to God when he already knows everything we're going to say?

Day 3

May 9



Pray | For God to search your heart for self-righteousness.

YOU MAY BE a Pharisee if...

Most Christians don't aspire to be more like a Pharisee; just wait until you read John's harsh words to them in today's verses from Matthew! But we are all vulnerable to some degree of self-righteousness and legalism by virtue of our sinful nature. It's worth your time to evaluate the state of your heart on a regular basis. Do you take too much pride in your knowledge of the Bible? Do you catch yourself silently judging certain people at church? Have you made an effort to meet your neighbors? Do you say all the "Christian" things about caring for the poor, the orphaned and the widowed yet never actually spend any time with them? Consider what you spend your time on and what that says about what you truly value. Does it line up with what God values?



Read | Matthew 3:7-12; Galatians 5:22-23



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

John's message of repentance and forgiveness changes into a warning of coming judgement when he speaks to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Why do you think his words become so harsh in tone toward these religious leaders?

The Pharisees assumed they qualified for salvation due to their status as descendants of Abraham – that they were justified by who they were, not by who God is. In what ways are you justifying your words and actions rather than relying on God?

Spend a moment meditating on the verses from Galatians. Have you been producing good fruit lately?

Day 4
May 10



Pray | Give thanks to Jesus for His incredible love.

JESUS IS BAPTIZED

Jesus didn't need to repent and be baptized. He had no sin, yet he went to John and asked for baptism in the Jordan River. His stated reason was to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Jesus affirms John's ministry of baptism as divinely ordained and, at the same time, demonstrates his incredible love for us. He who had no sin subjects himself to a baptism for sinners in order to identify with us – a people who do need to repent. Jesus shows us that he is prepared to become our substitute, to identify with us to the point of taking on our sin and dying on the cross so that we may be set free from sin and death.



Read | Matthew 3:13-17



Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

If you have been baptized, what do you recall of the circumstances, meaning and emotions surrounding the event? If you haven't been baptized, is there something holding you back? Consider discussing this with a Christian friend or relative or a pastor.

How can baptism be a blessing and an encouragement for both the individual and the community of faith?

In what ways does baptism provide a picture of salvation through Christ? Reflect on the symbolism of immersion into the water and being submerged, then rising up out of the water, newly cleansed.

Day 5

May 11



Pray | For deeper understanding of God's love for you.

JESUS ACCEPTS HIS CALLING

As Jesus comes up out of the Jordan River, the heavens open, and the Spirit of God descends upon him. God speaks over Jesus with the words that every child longs to hear: “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Jesus is about to begin his ministry on earth, which, as he already knows, will end with his excruciating death on the cross and miraculous resurrection. At this moment, God provides Jesus with everything he needs for his mission: the power of the Holy Spirit, a confirmation of his identity in relation to God and an affirmation of the love of his holy Father.



Read | Matthew 3:16-17; Isaiah 42:1; 1 John 3:1



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

The words God spoke over Jesus at his baptism are also true of us, as we read in 1 John 3:1. You are a beloved child of God. How might your life look different if your words and actions fully reflected the truth of God's love for you? If you don't yet know God, take a moment to imagine being the object of an incredible, unconditional love; what would that mean to you?

God says he is “well pleased” with Jesus; other translations say “delight of my life”¹ or “I take delight in Him”² (Holman Christian Standard Bible). How does it make you feel to know that God also takes delight in you? How does this manifest itself in your life?

God has given you everything you need to fulfill his purposes for you here on earth: the power of the Holy Spirit, a confirmation of your identity as his beloved child and affirmations of his love for you. Let these truths sink in while you consider how to serve God today.

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¹ *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, translated by Eugene Peterson (Carol Stream, IL: NavPress 2002), <https://www.biblegateway.com/passages/?search=Matthew+3%3A15&version=MSG>.

² *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers 2004) <https://www.biblegateway.com/passages/?search=Matthew+3%3A15&version=HCSB>.