

The Birth Of John The Baptist

Luke 1:39-80

MEMORY VERSE

LUKE 1:50

“And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A 5' piece of tape in a straight line in the middle of the room.

A chair (one or two pillows from home optional).

Several pieces of paper with the phrases “I’m afraid,” “Help, I can’t find my way,” “Oh no, what am I going to do,” etc. printed on them.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

“Jump for Joy”

Have the children line up single file at a line of tape on the floor.

Have each child do a “standing broad jump” from the tape as far as they can. As we study the life of John the Baptist we are going to see the “jump” from the Old Testament to the New Testament. John the Baptist is the last of the prophets and appears for the first time in the New Testament. He was chosen by the Lord to be the one to go before Jesus to announce His coming.

LESSON TIME!

Today we are going to see how Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary praised God for the fulfillment of His promises and His work in their lives. We read that Mary went to live with her cousin Elizabeth for a time. It's possible she sought to escape the whispers of those who were suspicious of her. Although she knew that her baby was a very special baby from God, it appeared to the people around her that she was having a baby without a husband. She could have tried to explain her story; but no one would have believed her.

LUKE 1:39-44

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,

and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

"But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

"For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

Six months have passed since the angel told Zacharias about the baby who would be born to Elizabeth and him. Elizabeth was at

home cherishing in her heart the fact that God was giving her a child and that he would be the forerunner of the promised Messiah. Elizabeth was quietly waiting and Mary was traveling in haste.

Sometimes it is hard to wait upon the Lord to fulfill His promises in our lives. We want everything to happen now. But God has a perfect plan, and He will accomplish it in His perfect timing. We can learn about waiting from Elizabeth and Mary.

The “Rest and Haste” Game

Pick one child to sit in a chair in the middle of the room and encourage the child to be as comfortable as possible (you may want to bring a couple of pillows from home).

Pick another child to run in a tight circle around the chair as many times as he can before you say “stop” (give each child about 15 seconds).

Repeat the process with several pairs of children. Compare the difference between “resting” in the chair and “making haste” by running around. Which one wears you out? Which one is relaxing.

Then they met! Elizabeth was not expecting Mary; her visit was a surprise. When Elizabeth greeted Mary with joy, her baby leaped inside her. Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she knew that Mary was going to give birth to Jesus, the Messiah, even before Mary had told her.

Elizabeth began to praise God. God loves music and poems that express His beauty and goodness. Elizabeth’s song recognizes the greatness of Mary’s privilege to be the mother of Jesus, but her main reason for singing was out of love for the Lord. Mary then sings her song because she knew that **God is worthy of our praise.**

Sing Praise to the Lord

Ask the children if they know any praise songs.

Allow several of them to share titles until one or two are mentioned that you know.

Lead the children in one or two acapella praise songs explaining that **God is worthy of our praise.**

LUKE 1:45-56

"Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord,

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.

And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.

He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,

As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

We see from Mary's song that she knew the Bible very well. She loved it and memorized it, and her song is full of scripture. Mary starts her song with pure praise. Her spirit was rejoicing in God the Savior. She understood how special her baby was in God's great plan, and she was expressing it in this song. Her song was a song of praise and worship. **God is worthy of our praise.**

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months before she went home. The Bible does not say much about that time except that her betrothed husband, Joseph, protected her.

LUKE 1:57-66

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.

When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.

So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias.

His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John."

But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name."

So they made signs to his father; what he would have him called.

And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God.

Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea.

And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

What was Elizabeth's baby to be called? Verse 63 says, "His name is John." Remember, God makes possible what seems impossible. God enabled Elizabeth to have a baby even though she was too old. God had a purpose for baby John and would use him to prepare the way for Jesus, to be His forerunner. Who remembers what a forerunner is?

When Zacharias obeyed the Lord and named his miraculous son "John," the Lord opened his mouth so he was able to speak again. The first thing he did was praise God. We can learn an important lesson from Zacharias here. We should always praise the Lord and give Him thanks for the work He does in our lives.

Breaking the Silence

Ask for a volunteer to stand quietly before the class for about 30 seconds.

At the end of their time, have them say the very first thing that comes into their head (preface with older children that only edifying statements are allowed).

Repeat the process with one or two more children. Talk about what it must have been like for Zacharias to receive his ability to talk again after 9 months.

The first thing Zacharias did was to sing a song! Zacharias worships God in his song too. John's name means "the grace of God." Grace is when you get what you do not deserve: forgiveness for our sins and a place in heaven! Zacharias' song is celebrating God's grace because he knew that **God is worthy of our praise.**

LUKE 1:67-79

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began,

That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant,

The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:

To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,

In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,

Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;
To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Zacharias said, "His name is John," and his song explains the name, "grace." God had shown grace to people all through history, and now his greatest gift of grace was about to be given: Jesus, coming to take our punishment for sin, coming to give us an eternal home with God in heaven. That's grace!

When God sent Jesus, He thought of everything we would need. God leaves nothing out. Zacharias' song tells us three things God has given us in Jesus:

1. Forgiveness for sin - In Jesus, we are forgiven and cleansed of all of our sin.

2. Spiritual light - Without Jesus, the world is full of the darkness of sin, but when we come to know Jesus, God gives us indescribable light! God knows that we are all under the power of sin and death, but when Jesus died for us, He conquered death and freed us from the bondage of the fear of death. Everyone will die one day, and death is scary without Jesus. Without Jesus death would separate us from God forever. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." When Jesus comes into our lives, we do not need to be afraid of death anymore because He promises us eternal life with Him. Death becomes a door to our incredible new home in heaven!

3. Peace - In Jesus we find peace. When everything in our world is scary, we can have peace. When we are in the middle of the world's crazy confusion, we can walk with peace in our hearts.

Peace in a Worried World

Have the entire class sit on the floor fairly close together.

Give them directions to act worried by either pretending to cry, or shout various phrases of concern. For example, you could have them say the following: "I'm afraid," "Help, I can't find my way," "Oh no, what am I going to do," etc. (you may want to write some phrases on small pieces of paper for older children).

Direct one volunteer to walk carefully through the "worried" group very peacefully. Have the peaceful child tap a "worried" child on the shoulder causing that "worried" child to become a peaceful child also. Now have both peaceful children to continue to tap other until the entire group becomes "peaceful."

This is how God's peace is in our lives. The Lord comes to us and reminds us that in Him we have peace and can be peaceful even in hard situations.

We find out in Zacharias' song that Jesus was born to take a way our sin, to be our light, and to be our peace.

Luke 1:80

So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

John grew as all children do. He grew into an adult. He matured into a man and was taught by his parents about the Lord. The Lord called him into the desert for a while before. He stayed there until it was time for him to actually begin serving God as herald and forerunner for Jesus.

Before the Lord used John he had to go through the desert. The desert is one of the hardest places to be because it is hot and dry. Sometimes God will allow us to experience hard times or trials because He knows it will make us stronger and prepare us for the work He desires us to do. We should worship the Lord always, even when we are going through a desert or a hard time because Jesus went through a hard time for us on the cross that we might live with Him. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." **God is worthy of our praise.**

We are now at the end of one story and the beginning of another. God had been preparing men for the coming of the One who would save them, and He is about to come.

The Edge Game

Using the same tape as used in the “Jump for Joy” game, have one or two children stand on one side of the tape with their toes on the edge.

At your signal have the children fall over onto the other side of the tape (let them be dramatic and silly, but use your attention getting signal to regain control of the class).

Explain to the class that John was the last of the Old Testament type prophets who were used by God to communicate to His people. After John the Baptist, God chose to speak to each of His people directly through His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God’s old covenant was finished and His new covenant was just beginning with Jesus. John was on “that” side of the tape; we are on “this” side.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving because **God is worthy of our praise**. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity to do so.