

John the Baptist



Luke 3 : 1-18

After a time of preparation spent in the desert, John returned to be among the people so that he could prepare them for the coming of Jesus, the Redeemer. He preached clearly, in simple terms, and baptized souls in the river Jordan.

Thus the promise of the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled: There is a voice of him that cries in the wilderness which says: "Prepare the way of the Lord!" On many people he made such a profound impression, that they believed him to be the promised Messiah. But John pointed out to them: "I can only baptize with water. The one who comes after me, is mightier than I. He shall baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

The children are taught to understand how God prepared the way for his Son on this earth, thus fulfilling his promises.

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efore Jesus became known, John the Baptist preached and baptized at the river Jordan. Many people listened to him. Let us picture a young workman of the day and listen to what he could have experienced in those days: Ben locks up his workshop. Today he does not want to work until dusk, he has planned something of great importance. Friends have told him about John the Baptist: he wants to go down to the river Jordan and look for this John the Baptist. Ben has heard that John lived in the desert for a long time. As he walks down to the river, he tries to imagine the life of deprivation and hardship in the desert: The scorching sun by day, the icy cold at night, the constant, tormenting thirst and the wearying search for food. What would John have eaten? Dried pods, wild honey, locusts? It is not a pleasant thought! Still, Ben can somehow understand why John lived in the desert. It is only in the silence of solitude that one can hear and understand God. Ben knows this from experience.

1

Trees and shrubs grow alongside the river. He sees John standing in a clearing. Although he is surrounded by many people who have gathered from far and near, Ben recognizes

him immediately. He makes a wild, rough impression. The sun has parched and dried his skin so much that it looks like leather. A garment of camel-hair covers his gaunt frame. But his eyes are alight with a fire which indicates great strength. He calls with a loud voice: "Better your lives! God wishes to establish his kingdom. The Redeemer comes soon! We must be prepared! God only wants people who repent their sins!" Ben asks himself the question: "Could John be the preacher sent to prepare the way for the Redeemer as foretold by the prophet Isaiah such a long time ago?"

2

"What should we do then?" some of the listeners ask John. He looks at them searchingly and has the right answer for each one. To one he says: "You must share. Whoever has two garments, should give one to a person who has none." To another he says: "Do not keep all the food for yourself!" To a soldier his advice is not to be violent or unjust and not to take anything away from anyone. He urges all to start leading a new life. He baptizes them in the water of the Jordan. Ben notices how some people follow John to the river. They walk into the river fully dressed and allow themselves to be baptized by John. They return to the river bank looking very happy. "Now we are ready when the Redeemer comes," they say.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God

Not all those who listen to John want to change however. Some consider themselves pious enough and feel that they do sufficient good. They have only come out of curiosity. These people do not please God and John speaks to them very frankly: "Better yourselves! When the Redeemer comes, he will throw up the wheat and the chaff to separate the good from that which is useless. Then you will be blown away and discarded as you will be of no further use other than to be burnt!"

Listening to all this Ben is convinced that John is a great prophet. He cannot imagine a greater prophet. This man has such power over his audience that no one can remain indifferent. He commands everyone's attention.



Ben thinks: "Perhaps he is the Redeemer for whom we have waited so long." Courageously he walks up to John and asks him straight out: "Are you the Redeemer, the King, for whom we have been waiting so long?"

John replies: "No! I am not the Redeemer. I am only a servant and messenger preparing the way for him. I am not even worthy to tie his shoelace, as he is much greater and mightier than I. I baptize with water. The Redeemer shall baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

2/3



John prepares the faithful for the coming of the Redeemer. Many people want to start a new and better life. John baptizes them.

- 1 What happens today? Where and when can we hear God? (In the divine services/in Sunday-school/in prayer. We do not, therefore, have to go into the desert to find peace. Often we are so preoccupied by other things that we do not understand what God wants to tell us).
- 2 The Lord had promised that a prophet would prepare the people for the coming of his Son (Isaiah 40 : 3-5). Did he fulfil that promise? (The story gives the answer. The Lord always keeps his promises!)
- 3 We look at the picture with the children and let them describe what is portrayed there. John prepares the people for the coming of the Redeemer. He admonishes them to change their lives, to do good. He baptizes them in the Jordan.