

Matthew 3:13-17

Aim of Lesson

To show how Jesus declared his complete commitment to his Father's will, and demonstrated the importance of baptism.

Background study

Matthew 3:1-12. This lesson occurs twice in the Junior syllabus, in years 1 and 3. Where this lesson does not follow the "John the Baptist" lesson in the syllabus (in year 3), see also the notes on the latter.

Suggested outline of lesson

If the children have not just learned about John the Baptist, a brief outline of John's work and mission should be given. He was a unique character who caused quite a stir among the people. Many, out of idle curiosity, went to see and to mock him, thinking he was just a poor simple man, but instead they found a man with a burning zeal and with a strong message - "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Repentance is a word that needs an explanation. The great mission of John was to declare the coming of the Messiah, and to motivate people to feel sorry about their sins so that they might turn from their old ways to a new and more godly way of life. John understood his role to be that of a herald, who would prepare the ground (people's minds) for Jesus' own ministry. A large number of people, who recognised their need of forgiveness for all kinds of wrongdoing, went to John to be baptised.

Into this scene stepped one who had never done wrong, the one for whom John and many others had longed. Jesus had grown to manhood, laid down his carpenter's tools, and had come to hear the preacher whose fame had spread through Judaea. Instead of asserting his authority as the Son of God, Jesus simply joined the group who were confessing their sins and asked to be baptised. Throughout his life Jesus had served God. At the age of twelve he had declared his loyalty and dedication to his "father's business", but now at the age of thirty he was ready to undertake the special work that God had planned for him. In humble obedience, he identified himself not only with the nation of Israel but with each individual sinner.

John, upon recognising his cousin whom he knew to be the future saviour of the world, was reluctant to baptise him, since only sinners needed to be baptised. John felt unworthy to perform such an act for Jesus whom he knew to be far greater than he, and the only man who was sinless. The children will readily understand John's feelings in this situation, but the conversation between the two will need to be put in a modern idiom, in order to show Jesus' determination to do everything that was right. His obedience was an example for all to follow.

Make sure that the children appreciate that baptism means total immersion. The occasion could be used to show the children a baptismal bath, and to explain the procedure.

Show how God distinguished, by two clear signs, the baptism of Jesus from that of the other baptisms conducted by John. Firstly there was a visual sign: the descent of a dove, representing the investing of Jesus with heavenly authority and power. Secondly there were divine words of approval and power, declaring Jesus as the Son of God, the recipient of his love and pleasure. It is important to think of the effect of these signs first on Jesus himself - it was from that moment on that Jesus began to preach and perform miracles. The baptism of Jesus marked a turning point in John's life also. He realised that his mission was accomplished, and that the people must no longer follow him, but be directed to follow Jesus. In addition, the people who witnessed this remarkable incident had to decide how they would respond to the presence of the Son of God amongst them.

Relevance to the children's lives

Jesus was determined to do everything to please God, because he loved his Father so much. You see, loving our parents does not only mean being nice to them and saying "I love you"; it also means doing what they ask us to do and obeying them. What sort of things must we do in order to obey our parents?

Worksheets

Year 1: God said 'This is my son, whom I love; I am very pleased with him'.

Year 3: These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, just as Jesus loved and obeyed you, please help us to be loving and obedient. Amen.

Memory verse

"And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased...'" (Matthew 3:17).