

CHILDREN'S STORY HOUR

John the Baptizer tells the people to change

By Janaan Manternach
NC News Service

"I can hardly believe what that wild man called me!" the well-dressed man gasped. "No one ever dared speak to me like that in all my life."

Joshua was deeply hurt. He was angry; and, he thought, with good reason. He was standing beside the Jordan River. In fact, he had his shoes off and was ready to step into the gently moving waters. He was going to be baptized by an unusual man named John, whose nickname was "the baptizer."

John glared at Joshua and his friends. They were powerful. They had come all the way to Galilee to see this strange man everyone was excited about. Now Joshua wished he had stayed home.

John pointed right at Joshua and at the crowds: "You snakes! You brood of vipers! Change your lives! Don't boast about your heritage. God can raise up children of Abraham from these stones. Repent! Reform your lives!"

"Who is this man to tell us to change our lives?" Joshua thought to himself. "My friends and I are probably the most important people he has ever met! Who is this John? Just look how he dresses — a rough camel's hair shirt, an old leather belt. People say he eats grasshoppers."

John the Baptizer calmed down a little. He then said, "I baptize with water as a sign of reform.

But someone will follow me who is still greater and more powerful. I'm not worthy even to carry his sandals.

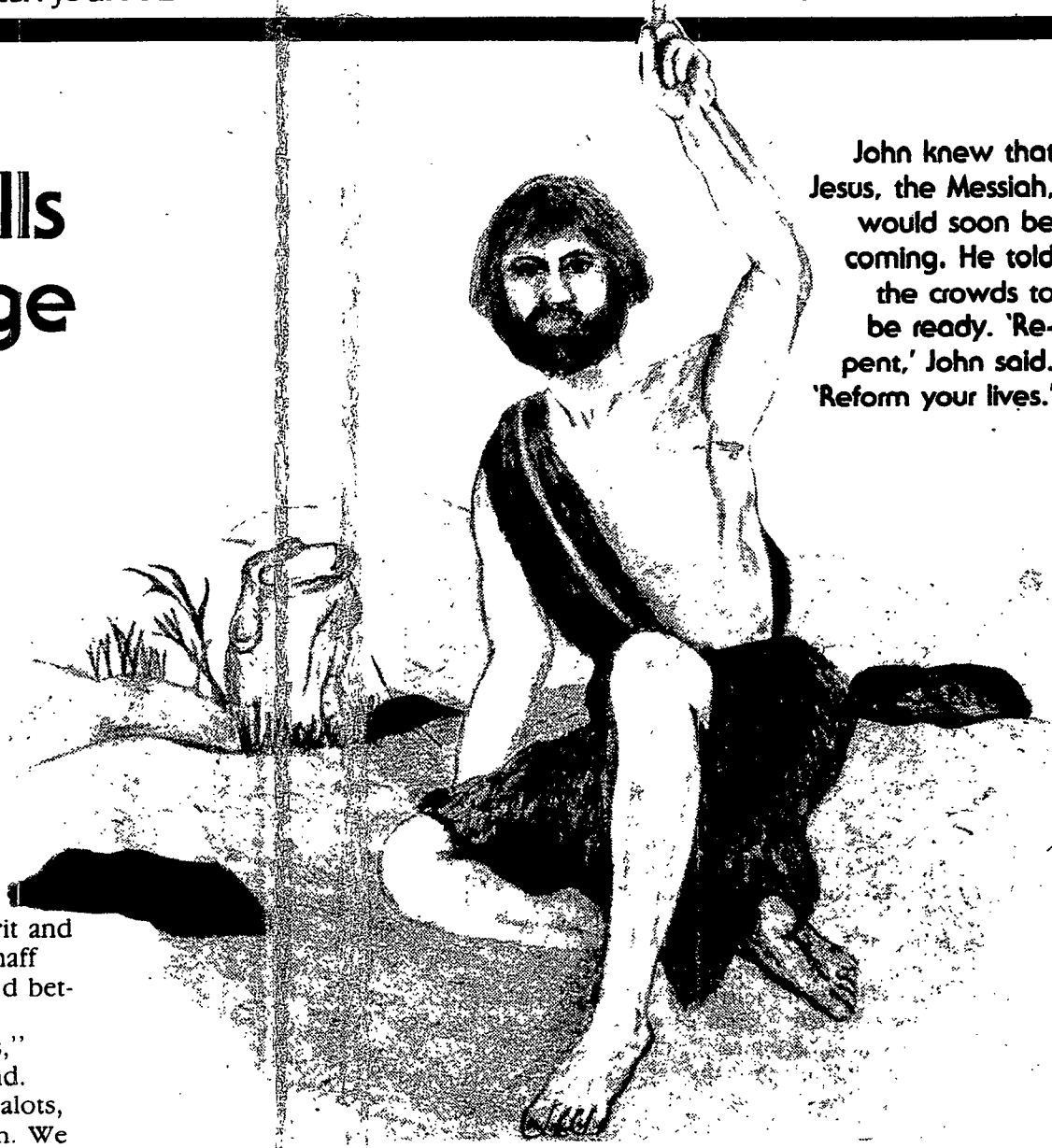
"The one who will follow me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will separate the chaff from the good wheat. You'd better be ready!"

"The fellow is dangerous," Joshua whispered to a friend. "He must be one of the Zealots, eager to stir up a revolution. We know how they hate us because of our friendliness with the Romans."

"Maybe so, Joshua," his friend whispered back. "But what John is saying has a ring of truth to it also. He sounds a lot like the great prophets of olden times — Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah. I wonder if the one he says is coming after him is the Messiah foreseen by the prophets."

Story Hour biblical quotes — this week from Matthew 3:1-12 and Luke 3:18 — are paraphrased.

(Ms. Manternach is the author of numerous catechetical books and articles for children.)



John knew that Jesus, the Messiah, would soon be coming. He told the crowds to be ready. 'Repent,' John said. 'Reform your lives.'



Healing

Bringing Holy Communion to an 85-year-old shut-in in the poverty-ridden backwoods of southern Missouri is one way Sister Mary Claudia Wissman, D.C., serves God.

Because she is a registered nurse, Sister Mary brings medical assistance to a deprived people who rarely see either a doctor or a hospital. She serves with two other sisters who are religious education and social services experts.

Supported by a grant from the Catholic Church Extension Society, they work as a team to heal the spirit and bodies of people who will never realize the American dream. Their

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HOW ABOUT YOU?

- Some people think John the Baptist is one of the most interesting people in the Bible. After reading our story this week, what do you think he was like?
- Put yourself in the shoes of Joshua in the story this week. How would you have felt if John the Baptist had spoken to you the way he spoke to Joshua?
- Do you know what Lent is? What special things will people in your parish do during Lent?

Children's Reading Corner

John the Baptist stood out from the crowd. He had strong convictions. And he was courageous at encouraging people to change their lives. He did special things because of his love for God and for people.

"The Christian Heroes" series tells some interesting stories about people who did special things because of love for God and people. The series includes books that tell of people like Joan of Arc, Damien and the lepers, and Tom Dopley, the jungle doctor. (Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, Minn. 55403. Paperback, \$1.50 each.)



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