

Kids' Chronicle

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BY JOE SARNICOLA

John baptizes Jesus

When Herod was king, a religious man named Zechariah was burning incense in the temple one day during an hour of prayer. The temple was suddenly filled with light, and an angel appeared. Zechariah was afraid and started to run away.

"Wait!" said the angel. "My name is Gabriel. Do not be afraid. God has heard your prayers. Even though you are old and have no children, God will send you a son. He will be great in the Lord's sight, and he will bring you happiness. You will call him John."

Not long after the angel's visit, Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, was expecting the child promised by God. One day, Elizabeth's cousin Mary came to visit and said that she, too, was expecting a child.

Elizabeth said, "You are blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear."

The two women soon had their babies. Elizabeth named her son John, and Mary named her son Jesus.

John grew to be a strong, handsome man. He wore a coat made of camel's hair and a leather belt. He ate mostly locusts and wild honey. John was also a bold preacher, and people came from all over Israel to hear him and to be baptized by him.

"Repent, repent!" he would shout. "Turn from your sins and be baptized, and God will forgive you."

"Who are you to make this claim?"

asked one of the religious officials.

"I am the man Isaiah spoke of when he said a voice will cry out from the wilderness and say, 'Clear the path for the Lord, who is coming behind me.'"

One man who had been baptized by John asked him, "Are you the messiah?"

John shook his head. "I baptize with water, but there is a man coming who will baptize with fire. I am not even worthy to tie his sandals."

Many people feared the Lord because of the things John said. They lined up by the thousands to repent and be baptized. And God forgave their sins.

When John went to Galilee to preach and baptize, Jesus came down to the river to be baptized by him. When John saw Jesus, he said, "You have come to me, Lord, but it is I who should be baptized by you."

As John baptized Jesus, the heavens opened up. A dove landed on Jesus' shoulder, and a loud voice said,

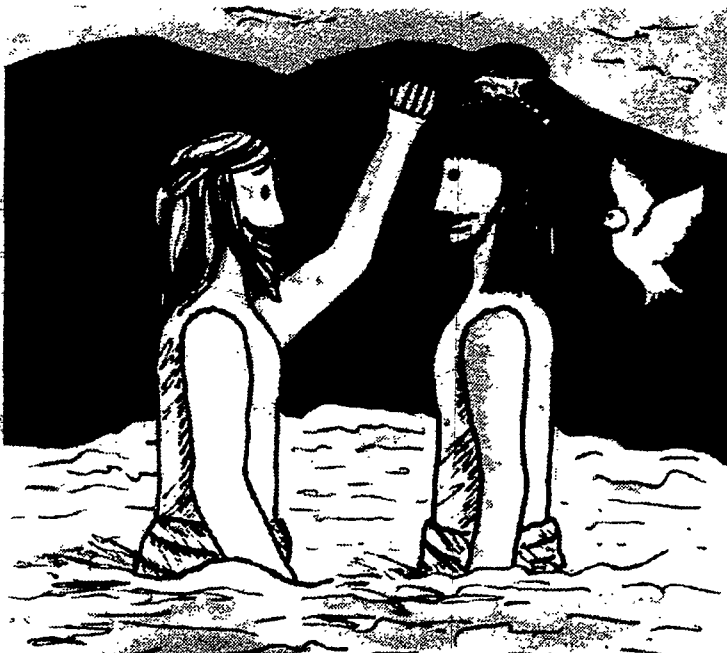


Illustration by Kathy Welsh

"You are my own dear son, and I am pleased with you."

Jesus went directly into the desert. John, however, was arrested because he had criticized King Herod for doing evil things. Later John was executed while still in prison. Jesus said of him, "John is greater than any man who ever lived."

Q&A

READ MORE ABOUT IT: Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8

1. Who told Zechariah he would become a father?
2. Where did John meet Jesus?

The game of Dreidel

Dreidel is a traditional Jewish game played during Hanukkah. The dreidel is a four-sided top that has a letter of the Hebrew alphabet on each side. The letters tell the players what to do on their turns.

Each player starts with 10 coins or nuts and places three of them in the center, called the pot. Players spin the top and either do nothing, place a coin in the pot, take half the pot, or take the whole pot. If the whole pot is taken, the game ends, and the player with the most coins or nuts wins. A regular die may be used in place of a dreidel, according to the directions below.

DIE	DREIDEL	DIRECTIONS
3,4,5	⚀ (nun)	do nothing
6	⚁ (gimmel)	take the whole pot
1	⚂ (hay)	take half the pot
2	⚃ (shin)	put one coin in the pot

Kids' Club

You can win a \$50 savings bond by writing an essay (100 words or fewer) that answers this question:

John's message was that Jesus was coming. What can we do to preach that same message today?

Send your essay — including your name, home address, telephone number, school and grade — to *Catholic Courier*, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Deadline for entries is December 23, 1993. The winner will be notified by phone and receive the savings bond by mail. In addition, the winner's essay will be published in an upcoming issue of *Kids' Chronicle*.

Last month's winner was Sarah Madison, a seventh-grade student at Horseheads Middle School. In response to the question "Which parable is your favorite and why?" she wrote:

My favorite parable is one called "The Net of Fish" (Matthew 13, 47-50). I like it because it relates so well to what will happen to us. Jesus said that just as the fishermen separated the fish — good from bad. He will separate us — good from bad. The good will go to heaven and be in peace with God. The bad will go to hell and suffer for all eternity. This parable helps me understand what will happen on Judgement Day.

Bible Accent

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights

Almost 2,500 years ago, the Greek king Antiochus IV claimed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and all of its treasures as his own. He wanted to build a huge army to conquer the world. He erected statues of the Greek gods in the temple and ordered the Jews to worship them.

One Jewish man, Matthias, and his five sons refused to obey the king. They hid in the mountains and formed an army. They called themselves the Maccabees, or the "hammers."

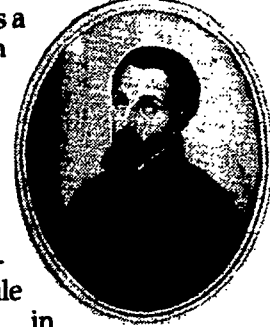
The Jews won many battles and, after Antiochus died of an illness, they took their temple back. They destroyed the Greek statues and rededicated the temple in a ceremony called a "hanukkah."

The temple lamps were always supposed to be kept burning, but there was only enough oil for one day. By a miracle, the lamp burned for eight days, until fresh oil arrived. Jews today remember this miracle with the festival of Hanukkah, which lasts eight days — one for each day the temple lamp burned.

Spotlight on Saints

St. Francis

Xavier was a Spanish missionary who has been called "The Apostle of the Indies." While working in



Italy in 1537, he was ordained a priest and later helped to found the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Five years later, King John III of Portugal asked Francis to visit the Portuguese colonies in India.

After spending time in India, he also ministered in Japan and converted many people to the Catholic faith. He planned to sail to China, but died before he was able to go. He was only 45 years old, but he had gained a reputation as one of the most famous missionaries to the Far East. His body is buried at a shrine in his honor in Goa, on the Malabar coast in India. His feast day is December 3.

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