

Stanford on Soar St John the Baptist

John the Baptist



heritage learning welcome

Aim: To explore the life of John the Baptist, focussing on the baptism of Jesus

Objective: Pupils will learn about the life of John the Baptist.

Curriculum links:
KS2 Teaching and authority

Activity: Children will read the story of the baptism of Jesus and think about how different people present would have reacted and felt. Some children will act out the baptism scene, and others will have the opportunity to question the characters over their thoughts and feelings.

Resources: Worksheets (one copy of each), pens/pencils
Possibly name badges for the characters of items of clothing for them to dress up in



Information for Leader

This lesson is based on the story of the baptism of Jesus. You will use the images of John the Baptist in church to help the children begin to imagine what happened that day.

You may need to adapt the introduction depending on the weather.

Introduction (10 mins)

- Meet the children outside and look at the statue of John the Baptist above the main door. Look at what he is wearing and his feet. What is he carrying? Ask the children to think about why he has a halo round his head. What is he doing? From what they can see, what sort of man do the children think he was? Explain that he is John the Baptist, the church is named after him and they are going to find out a bit more about him when they go inside.
- Move into church, and after the children have taken off their coats, ask them to walk round and see if they can see any other images of John the Baptist.

Activity (25 mins)

- Look at the images of John the Baptist in church, particularly on the font – John and Jesus as children, on the window at the west end – John preaching, and on the reredos – John baptising Jesus. Use these to briefly tell the story of John's life until he baptises Jesus.
- Divide the children into five groups (the school staff may help with this). Each group is going to consider the story of John baptising Jesus from a different viewpoint. Give each group a different sheet, which has their 'character' named on it, and the story. Give the groups 10 minutes to read the story, decide how their character might have felt and what they might have been thinking at different points in the story, and to choose one person who will represent the group and the character when you all come back together. Explain that when you come back together they will be acting out the story, but they will be able to ask each other (the characters) questions about what they are thinking and feeling, so they need to prepare for this. It will help to have an adult with each group to encourage the group and remind them what they need to do. Send the groups to different parts of the church to prepare.

- While the groups are working wander round and listen in to some groups. If necessary give a warning when the time is nearly finished.
- Bring the group back together. Ask the children who are representing the characters to come to the front, and say who they are. You could make name badges for them (John, Jesus, etc. or give an appropriate item of clothing to help you remember who is who). Explain that if at any point the rest of the children want to ask one of the characters a question, they can call out 'freeze'. All the characters then freeze and the child asks one of the characters a question. The character gives an answer, and can call on the rest of their group for help. Encourage the adults to ask questions as well. You may want to ask one fairly early on to set the example. You could also freeze the action and add some of the additional information given below.
- Read the story and encourage the characters to mime appropriately.

Plenary (10 mins)

- Allow each of the characters to say what was important for their character when Jesus was baptised.

Extension

- Back in the classroom children can research ways in which the baptism of Jesus has been portrayed in art. (use your search engine and enter Baptism of Jesus painting or Baptism of Jesus icon to get a wide variety of examples. How accurately do these portray the scene?

Story	Additional information you might like to add
John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were very old when they had John, and they knew that he was going to have some very special work to do for God when he grew up.	
John became a preacher and walked around the area near the river Jordan. He told people that they had to change their ways and begin living better lives. John said that someone else was coming who was much more important than he was, someone John thought was so important that John would not be worthy to do even the tiniest thing for, like tying his sandals.	John had gained quite a following. He lived a simple life in the Judean desert, wearing clothes made from camel's hair and eating honey and locusts (the food available in the desert.) He wouldn't have known what Jesus was going to teach, or what would happen to him later in his life.
When people came to John, and said they wanted to try and live better lives he would dip them in the water of the river. (Baptism is another way of saying dip in water.) Hundreds of people had come to John to be baptised.	Baptism was a common practice at the time of John the Baptist, It was sometimes used, as here, for washing away wrongdoings and starting afresh, and sometimes symbolically to show when a person had converted to Judaism. The word baptism, is the same one as was used for dipping clothes in a tub when dyeing them.
One day, while John was baptising people in the River Jordan, Jesus came up to John. John and Jesus were cousins, so John recognised Jesus, but he also recognised that Jesus was the one he had been teaching about – the one who was much more important than John, who was going to do God's very special work. At first John refused to baptise Jesus, he didn't feel he was good enough to do something so important to Jesus. He also thought that Jesus didn't need to be baptised, he was already doing things the way God wanted them. Jesus said, "John, I want you to baptise me. God wants me to begin my work now, and this is how he wants me to begin."	His baptism was in a sense the first step to the cross for Jesus. The people were expecting someone from God, but would not have been expecting him to start like this.
So John took Jesus into the water and dipped him in, making sure the water went right over him.	
When Jesus came out of the water, a dove flew above him and God said, "You are my son. I am pleased with you."	These words echo Psalm 2:7, 'You are my son, today I have become your father' and Isaiah 42:1, 'the one I have chosen, with whom I am well pleased.'