

Jesus' Baptism

Lesson At-a-Glance

Scripture Reference
Matthew 3:13-17

Lesson Focus
Baptism is for all people, even Jesus!

Bible Memory Verse
"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'" Matthew 3:17

Gather (10 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Arrival Activity Kids will create baptismal instruction manuals with steps and drawings.	Spark Activity Pages, Spark Coloring Pages	White paper, markers, masking tape, colored pencils
Circle Time Kids will be introduced to Jesus' baptism story.	Spark Song CD, Spark Songbook	Music source
Opening Prayer Kids dip fingers from bowl to forehead during a prayer.	None	Bowl of water

Open the Bible (15 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Jesus' Baptism Story Kids will read and act out the Jesus' Baptism story and learn the Bible Memory Verse.	Spark Story Bibles Spark NRSV Bible	None
Why Do We Use a Font? Kids will do a color-by-number to learn one reason not everyone baptizes in rivers.	Leaflets	Pencils, colored pencils

Activate Faith (15 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Baptism or Bust Kids will play a board game about trying to get to a baptism.	Leaflets	Dice, game tokens
Heads, Love Wins; Tails, Sin Loses. Kids play a simple coin-toss game to show that God's love always wins.	None	Quarter, water spray bottle

Send (5 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Closing Conversation Kids will review the lesson and check out Faith on the Go! options.	Leaflets	None
Closing Prayer Kids will dip fingers in water and make the sign of the cross on another's forehead.	Spark Family Pages	Bowl of water

Bible Background

Matthew's Gospel moves quickly from the birth of Jesus, to the visit of the wise men and Jesus' family fleeing to Egypt, to approximately thirty years later when John the Baptist arrived on the scene. Preaching the nearness of God's reign, John called people to repentance to ready themselves for it. He spoke of purification by both fire and water. His hearers would have recognized this concept from ancient commands to purify tools of battle: those that could withstand fire would pass through the fire; those that could not withstand fire would pass through water. Humans, of course, cannot withstand fire, so baptism was a safer path of purification. John recognized Jesus as the "kingdom of heaven...come near," (Matthew 3:2) and, naturally, hesitated to baptize him.

Why This Story Matters

From the very start of his life and public ministry, Jesus was identified with outsiders and sinners. Kids might not know the meaning of *righteousness*, but they know what it feels like to mess up and what it feels like to not be included. This story can remind them that Jesus came with love, not punishment, and he came for all people.

Gather (10 minutes)

Arrival Activity

If some kids arrive earlier than others and you need a lesson-based activity, make copies of the Activity Page and Coloring Page and set them out for kids to try.

As kids begin to arrive, give them large sheets of white paper and markers. Tell them the pastor has asked for them to write instructions and draw pictures of how to baptize a baby. Ask kids to work together in small groups, pairing non-readers with older kids as they arrive. Share "instruction manuals" when finished, and post in your room.

Spark Resources

Spark Activity Pages
Spark Coloring Pages

Supplies

White paper
Markers
Masking tape
Colored pencils

Circle Time

Keep in mind when discussing baptism that some of the kids may not have been baptized yet. Others may have been baptized as infants and not know much about it. Some may have been baptized as older kids or with other family members.

Welcome! Who has seen someone being baptized at our church? What was it like? Give kids a few minutes to talk about what they remember. **Who has been to a baptism at another church? Did they do it pretty much the same way or was it different? Some churches have a baptismal font that is quite small. Other churches have a large font that might have water in it all the time. Other churches have immersion fonts where the person being baptized goes into a**

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook

Supplies

Music source

tank of water. It is called a “baptistry” and it can look like a hot tub or a small swimming pool! Can anyone name other places to be baptized? One or more of the kids may have been baptized in a hospital if they were born prematurely. **Some people are baptized in hospitals. A pastor or chaplain often keeps a shell on hand to fill with water in a hospital room. Some baptisms are done at a lake or a river! No way is better than the others; some are just more practical and appropriate for different situations.**

MUSIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Song 1: “I Am a C (H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N)” (tracks 9 and 26 on Spark Song CD, page 50 in Spark Songbook)

Song 2: “Down to the River to Pray” from the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack.

Opening Prayer

As I pray, we’re going to stand around the bowl of water. Take turns dipping your fingers into the water, then touch your fingertips to your forehead. Let’s pray:

Dear Jesus,

At the waters of the Jordan,

You saw your cousin John.

He had been preparing the way for you,

Telling everyone to get right with God,

To wash themselves in the waters of baptism.

But you surprised him by asking to be baptized too!

Amen.

Open the Bible (15 minutes)

Jesus' Baptism Story

Invite kids with Spark NRSV Bibles to each find and sit with a buddy with a Spark Story Bible. **Today we’re going to hear about a baptism in the River Jordan. It is a beautiful river that runs between modern-day Israel, Syria, and Jordan. Let’s find it on the map on page M16 of the Spark NRSV Bible.**

Let’s open the Spark Story Bibles to page 242. Invite some older buddies to read it aloud to the group. **Please huddle with your buddy and tell him or her one thing that surprised you about that story.** Give kids a moment to share thoughts with one another.

Let’s read the NRSV version as well. Matthew 3:13-17 begins on page 1060 in the Spark NRSV Bible. **Can I get two volunteers to act out the parts of John and Jesus?** Read it yourself or ask a kid to read.

Spark Resources

Spark NRSV Bibles
Spark Story Bibles

Supplies

None

Now that is interesting, isn't it? What is most interesting to me is that baptism was a way to "wash away" a person's sins. John told people to wash their sins away to prepare for Jesus. But Jesus wasn't walking around sinning, so why would he want to be baptized? From the words in the Bible, we think that Jesus was baptized because it was a way for us to know that he could relate to us. And since he came to make us clean, he's kind of like the soap in the waters of baptism!

Bible Memory Verse

"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'" Matthew 3:17

Let's learn the Bible Memory Verse! Try it a few times together, then try it going back and forth:

Older buddy: **And a voice from heaven said...**

Younger buddy: **"This is my Son..."**

Older buddy: **"...the Beloved,..."**

Younger buddy: **"...with whom I am well pleased."**

Why Do We Use a Font?

Did you ever wonder why different churches baptize in different ways? To find out why some churches don't baptize in a river like when John baptized Jesus, complete the color-by-number on the front of your leaflet. Answer: Some rivers get really cold and freeze!

Invite kids to fold their leaflets in such a way that they will glide in the air, like a dove. The finished product might look less like a dove and more like an airplane. Have a contest to see which dove glides the longest amount of time when tossed in the air.

Invite kids to read and discuss the Bible Bits together.

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Pencils, colored pencils

Activate Faith (15 minutes)

Baptism or Bust

How many ways are there to be baptized? There are many options; the only requirements are water and the Word of God!

Let's pretend we're on our way to a baptism and see who can get there first. On the back of your leaflet, you'll find a board game for you and your buddy. Grab two game tokens and one of the dice. Take turns rolling, and see who can be the first to arrive at the baptism!

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Dice
Game tokens

Ask for volunteers to read the Did You Know? items aloud. Invite kids to place a sticker or special mark next to the item they find most interesting.

Heads, Love Wins; Tails, Sin Loses.

Invite all the kids to stand up. **We're going to play a really simple game. I've got a quarter. I'm going to flip it, but before I do, you have to pick "heads" or "tails."** Show youngest kids the head and tail side of a quarter. **If you pick "heads," place your hands on your head. If you pick "tails," put your hands on your lower back. If, when I flip the quarter, the side that lands up matches what you chose, you keep standing. If your guess didn't match the flip, then you sit down. We'll play until there's only one person left, and you can't play again until you go through the cleansing bath, the purifying waters!** Hold up the squirt bottle. Spray it in the air on "mist" setting, not directly at kids.

After the game, explain to kids. **This game has a funny name: "Heads, Love Wins; Tails, Sin Loses." It's from an old trick. If there was one piece of cake and you and I both wanted it, I might suggest we flip for it. But if I said, "Heads, I win; tails, you lose," what happens?** Flip the coin a few times to show kids that you will always win by these rules. **The name of the game reminds us that when we do everything just right, God loves us. But when we do everything totally wrong, God still loves us and forgives us too.**

Spark Resources
None

Supplies
Quarter
Water spray bottle

Send (5 minutes)

Closing Conversation

What's your favorite part of the Jesus' Baptism story? Answers might note the Spirit descending like a dove, Jesus surprising John by wanting to be baptized, or imagining Jesus getting dunked in the water. **What funny questions do you have? I wonder, for instance, if someone had towels!** Invite kids to ask any questions they have, even if you can't answer them.

Take a look at the Faith on the Go! section in your leaflet. Which are your top two this week? Which ones will your family like?

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
None

Closing Prayer

Distribute Spark Family Pages to kids. **Check out the Live It section. Maybe you and your family could come up with a secret family handshake or hand slap this week! For our closing prayer we are going to stand around the bowl of water again, but this time, dip your fingers in the water and draw the sign of the cross on the forehead of the person to your right.** Show kids what it looks like to draw a cross on another's forehead and begin passing the bowl of water.

When everyone has finished, offer this prayer:

God, thank you for water and for reminding us of your love. Help us love other people as Jesus taught us. Amen.

As you say goodbye to kids, make sure they take home their leaflets and Family Pages.

Spark Resources
Spark Family Pages

Supplies
Bowl of water