

# Beloved

## BAPTISM OF THE LORD

**You will need:** a copy of the Bible passage; optional: some props for the role play, in *Explore*.

After the visit of the Magi and the exile in Egypt, **Matthew 3.13-17** turns straight to the proclamation of repentance by John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism.

*This is the second of three Bible studies in which we see the stimulus for Jesus' ministry and destiny emerge from the Gospel readings.*

## Bible notes

John the Baptist is a noisy and rather rough character, getting angry with people who don't seem to realise how urgently they need to repent of their sins and turn towards God. Jesus, by contrast, is quiet and gentle. He doesn't shout or even speak to the crowds queuing up eagerly on the banks of the River Jordan. He simply and humbly asks John to baptise him. John clearly feels uncomfortable about this.

Even though he doesn't greet him as a cousin, John knows there is something special about Jesus; that Jesus is the one he has been preparing the people for. Jesus' baptism is a public act and marks a new beginning for the carpenter's son from Nazareth. His identity as God's son hasn't changed, but he has a new role: to preach the good news of repentance and God's forgiveness of sins. As Jesus comes up out of the water, God takes this opportunity to bestow his Holy Spirit on him in the form of a dove, and says in a voice that the people present can hear, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'. This relationship is made clear.

## Make connections

Water is essential for life. It quenches our thirst and helps keep us clean, but it can also be frightening. Extreme flooding, a raging sea or being out of our depth in water can all be terrifying because of the risk of drowning. Jesus' baptism is symbolic of all three aspects of water. Although as God's son he was sinless and didn't need to be baptised, Jesus did it on our behalf so that we might be cleansed of our sins and forgiven. His total immersion under the water is like dying, as we know he will on the cross, but his rising again from the water is also like his resurrection – our promise of new life after death. Jesus also represents the water of life as when we are spiritually thirsty, he can satisfy us like a long, cold drink.

## Explore

Read the passage and the notes above, and work in a group.

Four people need to volunteer to be the characters John, Jesus and two imaginary characters, Miriam and Jacob, who are both in the queue behind Jesus.

Note: the girl is positive about what she saw and heard and the boy is negative. You might ask a group leader to take on a role if needed.

Spend a few minutes thinking about your character and what they might say. Each character then takes a turn to be interviewed by the rest of the group. Group members think about things you might like to ask the characters. All should stay in role for the duration of the interview and then remember it is a role play.

Discuss what you have learned.