

Beloved

Planning

Theme Call and response

Three weeks in which we see the stimulus for Jesus' ministry and destiny emerge from the Gospel readings. Read more about the theme on page 5 and in *Month by month* on the [WEB](#).

Week 2 of 3

Beloved Matthew 3.13-17

After the visit of the Magi and the exile in Egypt, Matthew turns straight to the proclamation of repentance by John and Baptist and Jesus' baptism. His ministry is affirmed by a voice declaring 'This is my Son, the Beloved'.

This week's reading provides an opportunity to:

- explore the story of Jesus' baptism
- identify signs of God's affirmation.

Other Bible readings for this week

RCL Epiphany 1 Year A, Isaiah 42.1-9, Psalm 29, Acts 10.34-43

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Week by week

Bible notes
Prayers
PostScript: up-to-the minute comment
Bible Study
Children's Sheet
Templates for craft activities
Further resources: film, website and book suggestions
Links to other materials for this week

Prepare your session

Read **Matthew 3.13-17** and the *Bible notes* on page 12. Choose from the materials to suit the age range, length of session and preferences of your group. Integrate prayers and singing at appropriate moments.

For shorter sessions, use the story opposite and pray *A prayer of blessing* below.

Prayers

Additional prayers can be found within this weekly material. All prayer text is on the [WEB](#).

A prayer of obedience

In remembering Jesus's baptism we see you, God, in all your glory. We see the Son obeying the Father, we hear the Father acknowledge the Son, and we watch the Holy Spirit bring God's presence to earth.

As we remember and respond, help us also to:

obey our Heavenly Father,
know that our Father loves us
and values us,
and help to bring God's presence to earth.

Amen.

A prayer of blessing

(All stand in a circle)

As Jesus came out of the water, he heard God's voice, saying 'This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'

Can we hear you speaking words of blessing to us, Lord God?

What if we listen to one another?

(Turn to the person to your left, take their hands, if appropriate, or give them something to hold, e.g. a candle)

Be loved, be blessed.

(Then turn to the person on your left and do the same, around the circle. When it comes back to you, say:)

As we have given your blessings to one another, now may we truly accept these blessings for ourselves.

Amen.

A prayer of service

How would we feel, Jesus,
to come face to face with you?
How would we feel, Jesus,
to wash you in the river?
How would we feel, Jesus,
to share in the Father's delight of you?
How would we feel, Jesus,
to serve you in this way?
May we live and serve others
as though we are serving you,
and know the Father's delight
for ourselves. **Amen.**

Music

See [WEB](#) for key to abbreviations.

Sing

He's got the whole world in his hands
I'm special because God has loved me (JP, KS, RSJ)

Jesus went into the river (SB)

Jesus, you're the king (KS)

John came a-preaching by the Jordan river (SS)

One more step along the world I go
Spirit of the living God

Why join a large and noisy crowd? (SB)
Wide, wide as the ocean

Gather

Prepare the space

Spread out a large blue cloth for the River Jordan. On this add a bowl of water, a picture of a dove or a white feather, a symbol of love, e.g. a red heart.

Gathering activity

Ask the children to remember a time when they have been really thirsty, then give them each a cup of cold water to drink. Talk about the importance of keeping clean and teach them the six-step handwashing technique (see *Further resources* on the [WEB](#)), using a bowl of warm water, anti-bacterial handwash and a towel.

Gathering prayer

As Jesus came in obedience to be baptised and begin his ministry, so we now come, ready to learn how to serve you better. As Jesus heard your voice of affirmation, so we now come, ready to hear of your love for us. **Amen.**

Open the Word

Based on Matthew 3.13-17
Bible notes are on page 12.

With very young children

A chance to explore Christ's baptism.

You will need: a blue cloth to represent water, two toy figures (John and Jesus), a dove template [WEB](#), shells, toy fish and water creatures. (Optional – a bowl of water with splash mat, towels and plastic figures.)

Share this short paraphrase and actions.

John pushed Jesus under the water to baptise him. (*push hands down*)

When Jesus came up out of the water (*lift hands up*)

heaven was opened, (*spread hands wide*) and the Spirit of God came down like a dove. (*flutter hands down with thumbs linked*)

A voice from heaven said: (*put hand to ear*)

'This is my dear son (*hug yourself*) I am very pleased with him.' (*nod*)

Repeat so the children can join in.

Invite the children to play with the 'water'. Help them to retell the story using the toy figures and the dove.

With children

Explain that the story takes place in a river. To enhance the experience, tell the story using a parachute. Invite half the children to lie down quietly and close their eyes beneath the parachute, while the other half gently wafts the parachute up and down above them. Release the parachute on the word 'dove'. Ask the children to change places and tell the story again.

Talk about

After reading the Bible story to your group, gather everyone on top of the parachute and use these discussion points.

- What might it feel like to go under the water and come back up again?
- How do you think people felt before and after they were baptised?
- How do you think John felt when Jesus asked to be baptised?

With young people

Ideas to explore the Bible reading are on page 12.

Jesus came down to the water

based on Matthew 3.13-17

People came down to the river, down to the river they came.
People came down to the river, to say sorry to God for their sins.

John said, 'Come into the river!' so into the river they came.
John said, 'Come into the river, to show that you have changed!'

So into the water people came, people came into the water,
into the water people came: fathers, mothers, sons and daughters.

Jesus came into the water, into the water, he came.
Jesus came into the water and John was quite amazed!

'Why have you come to be baptised? Why, Oh why have you come?
I should be baptised by you! You've never done anything wrong!'

I've come to do God's will, John, so let God's will be done.
I've come to do God's will, so let God's will be done.

So Jesus went under the water and out of the water he came.
Jesus went under the water to show he would live God's way.

A voice came from the heavens: 'This is my son, the one that I love!'
And down came the Spirit of God, the Spirit of God came down like a dove.



Bible study and response with young people

- Beforehand, read **Matthew 3.13-17**. Read and print out a copy of the Bible Study sheet for each group member. There are additional Bible notes on the [WEB](#).
- In the session, read the Bible passage together, look at the *Bible notes* and *Make connections* sections. Use this conversation spark to provoke first reactions from the group:
What different gifts do noisy and quiet people give us?
- The *Explore* section guides individuals through the passage to discover what it might reveal to them.
- Encourage people to respond to their discussion, using the response activity below or the options on the next page.

Respond

Origami wristbands

YP 10 MINS

Make paper wristbands as a reminder that we are all loved by God

You will need: origami (white on reverse), or two colours of paper and glue, origami instructions [WEB](#); sticky tape, felt pens.

- Invite the young people to make an origami bracelet. Download the illustrated instructions for each person from the [WEB](#) or share the following presentation: <http://en.origami-club.com/accessories/bangie/anime-bangie/index.html> with the group.
- When they have completed their origami bracelet, the young people can add a slogan to it, e.g. BELOVED or another reminder that they are loved by God.

Live in faith

Knowing that God loves you and affirms who you are, look out for ways of affirming others this week by thanking, praising or encouraging them.

Beloved Matthew 3.13-17

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

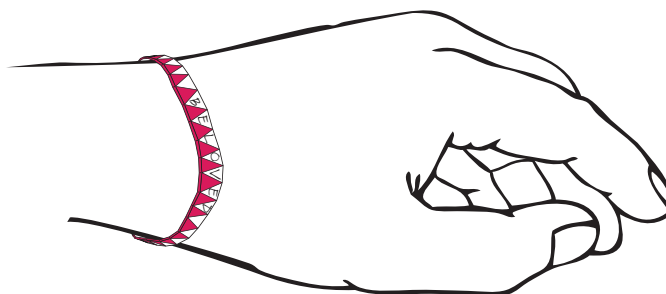
Read the passage and the notes above and discuss.

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.



Respond to the Word

Based on Matthew 3.13-17

See p.11 for ways of presenting the Bible reading.

Splash Water play



Experience the sensation of water for pouring, cleaning and baptising

You will need: a washing-up bowl, warm water, plastic plates and cups or containers, a cloth, a plastic doll, a towel; aprons (optional).

- Let the children have free play with the water.
- Model pouring, washing the dishes and baptising a baby so they can have a go themselves.

Make Dove door hangers



Make door handle hangers as a reminder of God's love for us

You will need: a door hanger and dove template printed on stiff white card for each child (WEB); scissors, felt-tip pens, glue.

- Ask the children to cut out their door hangers and dove (WEB), or pre-cut these for younger children.
- They then write their own name across the dotted line.
- Invite the children to add words to the dove to remind them that God loves them.
- Now attach the dove to the door hanger. Position the dove body so that its tail feathers overlap the curved edge of the door hanger, then carefully glue each wing in place, tucking the wing edges underneath the dove body so they spread out each side of the dove. Finally, glue the dove body in place on the hanger.
- The children can decorate the rest of the hanger using colour and pattern.
- Invite them to take their door hangers home.

Gather Umbrella prayers



Remember the voice of God from above

You will need: a garden parasol, a golf umbrella, a gazebo or similar, cloud shapes, string; stickers and a marker pen.

- Beforehand, hang lots of cloud shapes from the spokes of the garden parasol (or similar-shaped item). Prepare stickers with the phrase 'You are my child, I am pleased with you'.
- Invite the children to lie under the canopy. They might need to take turns if you have a large group or a small canopy.
- Encourage the children to settle quietly.
- Ask them to look up at the clouds and imagine God speaking to them from above. What might God want to say to them? What might they want to say to God?
- Naming each child in turn, ask a leader to speak from above the canopy saying, 'You are my child, I am pleased with you'.
- Give each child a sticker as they come out from below the canopy.

Make Baptism bunting

C 15 MINS

Decorative bunting with symbols of baptism

You will need: coloured card, pennant shapes (WEB), baptism symbols (WEB), string or fabric ribbon, glue and stapler, sticky tape or drawing pins.

- Print pennant shapes (WEB) on coloured card and cut these out. Give each child one pennant.
- Invite the children to look at the baptism symbol examples (WEB) then choose one symbol to draw on each side of their pennant card. Children can do more than one pennant each, depending on group size, space and time constraints.
- Space out the finished pennants along the ribbon and staple or stick these on to create the bunting.
- Hang the bunting around room using sticky tape or drawing pins.

Pray Creative prayer using water

C + YP 5 MINS

A practical way to experience forgiveness and be affirmed by God

You will need: some dirty stones or pebbles from the garden or beach, a bowl of warm water, kitchen towel.

- Sit everyone in a circle round the bowl of water and let each person choose a stone or pebble.
- Give everyone time to handle the stones and think of what they have done wrong and what they would like to say sorry to God for.
- Let them wash their stone in the water, one at a time (change water between people if necessary), as a way of letting go of their wrongdoing.
- Encourage them to dry their stone on some kitchen towel, then reflect on how it feels to have a clean stone and to be forgiven.
- Afterwards, the leader turns to the person on his/her left and says to the group: 'This is [name of person] the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased.'
- That person then introduces the person on their left in the same way. Continue until the leader is the final one to be introduced.

Send out

Live in faith

Suggest to the children that, every time they have a drink of water or wash their hands this week, they remember the story of Jesus' baptism and God's love for them.

Pray

As each person would have left the River Jordan changed that day, so may we leave here, changed by our encounters with you, Lord Jesus.

Amen.