

JESUS BEGINS HIS FIRST YEAR OF PUBLIC MINISTRY

Matthew 3:1 - 4:11; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 3:1 - 4:13

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jesus and John the Baptist

Key-locations: Jordan River and the desert

Key-repetitions:

- Desert (Mt 3:1; 4:1; Mk 1:3-4, 12; Lk 3:2).
- Baptism (baptizing and baptized).
- John the Baptist gave counsel: to all (Lk 3:7); to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 3:7-12); to the tax collectors (Lk 3:12-13); to the soldiers (Lk 3:14-14); to his disciples (Jn 1:38).
- John prophesied about coming judgement: the coming wrath (Mt 3:7); non-fruit-bearing trees will be burned (Mt 3:10); husk will be separated from wheat and burned (Mt 3: 12).
- Holy Spirit: John prophesied about one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16); the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus at his baptism (Lk 3:22; Jn 1:32-34); Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and was taken to the desert by the Spirit (Lk 4:1); Jesus came back from the desert in the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:14).
- During his temptation, Jesus told Satan, "It is written" (Mt 4:4, 6, 7, 10).

Key-attitudes:

- The simplicity of John the Baptist.
- The hardness of John the Baptist's preaching.
- John the Baptist's resistance to baptizing Jesus.

- John the Baptist's admiration of Jesus.
- The humility of John the Baptist.
- God the Father's pleasure in his son Jesus.
- The antagonistic conflict between Jesus and the Devil.
- Jesus' physical vulnerability when Satan came to tempt him.
- The provocation of Satan, insinuating that Jesus was not the Son of God.
- The trust that Jesus manifested in the Scripture.

Initial-situation:

The Bible is silent about Jesus' life after his childhood until he was twelve years old. Then it tells about Jesus staying in the Temple without his parents' knowledge. From the time he was twelve until he was thirty years old, the Bible doesn't narrate facts about his life. During those years, Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth, worked as a carpenter and was unknown outside of his home town.

Initial-problem:

John, the son of Zechariah, was in the desert country of Judea when he received a message from God.

Final-situation:

After being tempted by the devil, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

BIBLE STORY

John the Baptist Prepared the Way Mt 3:1-10; Lk 3:1-14

Jesus was about 30 years old when John, son of Zechariah, was in the wilderness desert country of Judea. There John received a message from God. He went into all the country around the Jordan River, preaching and baptizing. John preached, "Repent! Turn to God and change the way you think and act, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Isaiah the prophet described John when he said, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare for the Lord's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight'" (Mt 3:1-3; Lk 3:1-6).

John's clothes were made from camel's hair. He wore a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem, Judea and the countryside around the Jordan River. They confessed their sins and John baptized them in the Jordan River (Mt 3:4-6).

John told the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You poisonous snakes! Repent! Produce fruit that shows that you have turned to God and changed the way you think and act."

The crowd asked John, "What should we do then?"

John answered, "Whoever has two coats should give one away to the person who has none. Whoever has food should share that, too."

John told the tax collectors who came to be baptized, "Don't collect any more taxes than you are required to by law."

John told the soldiers who came to be baptized, "Be content with your pay. Don't force people to give you money with threats or blackmail" (Lk 3:7-14).

John told the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to be baptized, "You poisonous snakes! Who warned you to flee from God's coming wrath? Produce fruit that shows that you have repented. Don't say to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' God could make children for Abraham from these stones. The ax is ready to cut the roots of the trees. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt 3:7-10).

John proclaimed to all, "I baptize you with water to show that you have repented. But the main character in this drama comes after me. He is greater than I am. I am not good enough to remove his sandals. He'll baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to separate the good wheat from the husks. He will gather the wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the husks with a fire that can't be put out" (Mt 3:11-12).

Baptism of Jesus Mt 3:13-17; Lk 3:21-23

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John objected, "I need to be baptized by you, not you by me!"

Jesus replied, "Do it now; this is the right way for us to do everything that God requires of us." Then John agreed to baptize Jesus.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Suddenly, heaven opened, and Jesus saw God's Spirit descending and landing on him like a dove. A voice from heaven declared, "This is my Son, whom I love; I am very pleased with him" (Mt 3:13-17; Lk 3:21-23).

Temptation of Jesus Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River (Lk 4:1). The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert where he was alone with wild animals and where the devil tempted him for forty days (Mk 1:12-13).

Jesus ate nothing for forty days and forty nights; then he was very hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are God's Son, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus quoted Scripture (Deut 8:3), "It is written, 'A person does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The devil took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on the highest part of the Temple. The devil said to Jesus, "If you are God's Son, jump." The devil quoted Scripture (Ps 91:11-12), "For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will carry you in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus countered with a citation from Scripture (Deut 6:16), "It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

For another test, the devil took Jesus to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "I'm in charge of them all and can give them to anyone I wish. All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus answered, "Go away from me, Satan!" He rebuked the devil with a quotation from Scripture (Deut 6:13), "For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

After the devil had tempted Jesus in every way, he retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity. Angels came and helped Jesus (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What counsel did John the Baptist give to different groups of people who came seeking baptism?
2. What were some of the predictions John the Baptist made about Jesus?
3. What happened during Jesus' baptism?
4. What happened during Jesus' temptation?
5. How did Jesus depend on the Holy Spirit and Scripture during his temptation?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. True repentance brings changes that prove that the person has repented. John the Baptist told the religious leaders to do things to prove they had repented from their sins (Mt 3:8).
 - Jesus, the Son of God was baptized;
 - God the Father spoke;
 - the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus.
2. Jesus is holy and just. He demands punishment for the unrepentant sinner. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as somebody who has the fork in his hand to separate the wheat from husk, with the purpose of burning the husk (Mt 3:12). The winnowing fork was a long fork of wood, used by the threshers to throw the wheat into the air, so that the heavier grains of wheat would fall to the ground while the husk was blown away by the wind.
3. Jesus identified with sinners when he was baptized. He was not baptized because he repented from his sins; he had no sins. He was baptized along with other people to manifest his identification with repentant sinners. Jesus' baptism was the beginning of his road to the cross; because, in his baptism he identified with sinful mankind, for whom he finally died.
4. The three persons of the Trinity participated in Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16-17):
 5. Jesus faced stronger temptations than other people; however, he did not sin. Satan is the tempter who struggles against God and his will. Satan tempted Eve in the garden in the presence of abundant food, and she yielded (Gn 3:1-7). Satan tempted Jesus in the desert, in the absence of food (Mt 4:2), and he resisted (Heb 4:15).
 6. Temptation can be won with two resources: the Holy Spirit and by using God's Word in the correct way. Jesus used the two resources available to everyone:
 - At Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus (Mt 3:16). The Spirit drove Jesus to the desert (Lk 4:1) and accompanied him in his fight (Mt 4:1). Jesus left the temptation place in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14).
 - In each one of the three stages of the temptation battle, Jesus used the Word of God as a weapon against Satan. He answered each temptation with words from the Bible (Mt 4:4, 7, 10).