

# John the Baptist

**Key Verse:**  
**“John replied... I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ “**

John 1: 23

**Extra:** What do you think the Key Verse means?

**Level 5 lesson 41**

**Read: Luke 1:25; 57-66**

**Further Reading: Malachi 3:1-5**

The times in which John the Baptist was born and lived were important but difficult days for the Jewish people. As subjects of the powerful Roman Empire, they were under the rule of the ‘puppet’ King Herod. He was a thoroughly wicked man who imposed harsh demands and allowed corrupt tax-collectors to burden the people with heavy taxes.

For centuries, the Jewish people had awaited their ‘Messiah’ and as the Roman occupation went on, the desire for someone to free them from their oppressors increased in some quarters. John the Baptist of course, was sent to prepare the people of Israel for their Messiah’s coming. But as John grew up, he soon realised that these were bad days of shameful, godless behaviour, even among the rulers and religious leaders of the people. Yet these were the days in which Jesus was appointed to be born. It is therefore sad, but not entirely unexpected, to see the misguided attitude of the nation when He did come. Most people did not really listen to John’s message.

Despite the general condition of society around him, John was born into a home where God was honoured. The Bible commends his parents Zacharias and Elizabeth as being “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments” and living “blameless” upright lives before God and their fellow-men. If you have such a home, it is something for which to praise the Lord. Make sure that you fully appreciate it and, if possible, share it with others!

John the Baptist’s parents were too old to have children, but like Isaac and Samson, he was a miracle child, a special gift to his parents from the Lord. This gave special significance to his life, right from the beginning.

We have read how the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias as he was serving in the temple, and announced to him, “Your prayer is heard! Your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son and you shall call his name John. He will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah... to make ready a people, prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

Zacharias was afraid when the angel appeared (and we can understand that) but he failed to believe Gabriel’s words. Because of his unbelief, the angel said to him, “You will not be able to speak until the baby is born” (v20)! This was a sobering illustration that those who are without faith have no real testimony to give. While he waited through the following months, Zacharias’ inability to speak would be a constant reminder to him of his unbelief, another picture-lesson for us as Christians. Faithlessness, or unbelief, affects our service for God, as well as our testimony to the world, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Zacharias certainly had time to think and repent. So remember, that even though sin and unbelief in a person’s life bars the way of communication with God, repentance opens the door to true fellowship with Him!

Of course, there was much rejoicing at the birth of John and many thought the young boy should be named after his father. Zacharias though, in obedience to God, took a tablet and wrote, “His name shall be John!” This ended further arguments and instantly, his speech miraculously returned! Yes, those who believe God will always have plenty to tell others. There is nothing like faith to loosen the tongues of Christians to speak of the Lord!

God used Zacharias to speak the wonderful prophecy recorded in Luke 1:67-80, and verse 76 says, “You, My child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him.” John was to be a prophet (a man who gave God’s messages to people) and a forerunner of the great Messiah; the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour whom God sent into the world.

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

1. Give 2 facts from the passage that you have learnt about Zacharias and Elizabeth.

.....

2. What was the condition of the Jewish nation at the time of John’s birth?

.....

3. How were the births of Isaac and Samson similar to John’s? (see Genesis 17:17 & Judges 13)

.....

4. What have you learnt from the experience of Zacharias about faith, or belief in God?

.....

5. What was the purpose of John’s birth and life?

.....

My Name is ..... Age .....

# A Voice in the Wilderness

Key Verse:

**“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ “**

John 1:29

Extra: Why is “Lamb of God” a good title for Jesus Christ?

Level 5 lesson 42

## Read John 1:6-37

### Further Reading: John 3:22-36

Although John the Baptist was obviously a very forthright and passionate preacher, he remained a humble, gracious man. He had a great heart for his God-given task; to announce to Israel, the coming of the Lord Jesus, their Messiah, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 40:3-8). Two distinct things stand out about John’s important message: 1) What he says about himself; 2) What he says about Jesus Christ.

More than anything else, John the Baptist was a witness sent from God to testify about Jesus (John 1:6-8). When the Pharisees asked him who he was, he replied, “I am NOT the Christ!” He went on to explain, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert,” which they instantly recognised as quoting from Isaiah 40:3. John the Baptist’s task was only to announce the Christ; he was the voice, but Christ was the Word (John 1:1). The Word needs a voice to make it known, but the voice is of no value without the Word, and the Word is infinitely greater than the voice. It is our privilege too, to be a ‘voice’ for Him.

For John, it was vital that people looked towards the One he announced. He didn’t want the attention. Rather, he was acutely aware of his own unworthiness. In contrast, Jesus was the Son of God, absolutely Holy, righteous, and pre-eminent over all creation! John considered himself unworthy to even untie the Lord’s sandal! John’s only desire was that people would hear his message and look right past him, to Jesus, the Saviour. He knew the time would soon come for him to retire into the background, so that the Saviour might be seen.

We see this clearly in John 3. As Jesus began His active ministry and the people were turning to Him, John the Baptist gladly announced, “He must become greater, I must become less.”(3:30). These words could be written as an epitaph for John because they sum up his attitude to his God-given ministry. They also provide an essential lesson for all who would witness for the Lord Jesus today.

We should cry out, “I’m only the messenger; don’t look at me, look at HIM!” This must be the whole aim of our testimony as Christians, to make sure that people are pointed to Christ. They must see beyond us to the Saviour; our witness is wasted if they only see us.

Let’s look now at the things John said about Christ. “He who comes after me has surpassed me, because He was before me” (1:15). Naturally speaking, as a man John was older than Jesus, for he was born before Him. But Jesus was far more than just a man and He existed even before time began (John 17:5,24). Also, even though John had become a famous prophet in Israel, he knew that Jesus would far surpass anything he had accomplished. With the insight of God’s Holy Spirit, John could say, “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (1:34)! When Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist was willing to retire into the background because the ‘REAL THING’ had arrived. (Read 3:31-36)!

Before we end our lesson today, we should look at John 1:29. As Jesus approached one day, John the Baptist made this hugely significant statement about Him. “Look! (take notice of) - the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” To understand the full significance of this statement, we must remember that for centuries prior to this, the Israelites had been sacrificing lambs as payment for their sins, as God had instructed them through Moses. Each lamb was killed as a substitute and its blood shed as a covering for the sins of the people. But those lambs were only pictures, or types, pointing forward to the fact that, “God would provide Himself a Lamb” (Genesis 22:7-8), who would actually take away sin.

Now here, as the New Testament opens, John’s statement sounded out like a trumpet blast to the Jewish people! “Here is the One: God’s Lamb!” Jesus was going to be the final sacrifice, sufficient for the sins of the whole world! However, as John clearly spelt out, only those people who accept His sacrifice on their behalf and receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour, are actually forgiven (John 3:36). John could tell them of their sins and call them to repentance, but only through belief in the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, can sins be forgiven and God’s righteous wrath avoided.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What kind of person was John the Baptist?	.....
2. What was John’s mission in life?	.....
3. What desire of John’s shows him to be a true witness?	.....
4. Give 2 things John said about Jesus that describes His character.	.....
5. What was the difference between the Old Testament sacrifices and the ‘Lamb of God’?	.....

# A Puzzled Prisoner

Key Verse:  
**“Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.”**

Matthew 11:6

Extra: What should you do when you have doubts and fears about life?

Level 5 lesson 43

## Read Luke 3:19-20

### Further Readings: Matthew 11:1-19 and Matthew 14:1-12

Reading Matthew 11, we find John the Baptist in prison. He had fearlessly reproved King Herod for his evil behaviour, in particular, for having an adulterous relationship with Herodias (his brother Philip’s wife). Rather than listen to the message and repent of his sin, Herod responded by getting rid of the messenger. He threw John the Baptist into prison (Luke 3:19-20)! In fact, Matthew 14:5 reveals that Herod wanted to execute him immediately, but he feared the response of the people who held John in such high regard as a Prophet. This seems a sad predicament for such a fine witness to the Lord, but there was certainly no fear, favour, or failure in John’s testimony!

The public ministry of Jesus began after John the Baptist was thrown into prison (Matthew 4:17). From this point on, John fades into the background and there is no further need of the herald when the King Himself has come! Compare chapter 3:2 with 4:17 and you will see that the Lord Jesus began to preach using almost the same words as John, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near!”

However, locked up in prison, John had plenty of time to ponder his dire position and the circumstances surrounding his work as the messenger of the Lord. It appears he began to question whether Jesus was really the Messiah. Perhaps he had been mistaken? John desperately needed reassurance! So he sent his disciples to Jesus, and asked Him directly, “Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (11:3) We can sense his uncertainty.

Notice how considerate the Lord Jesus was in replying to John’s disciples. He did not rebuke or condemn John and add guilt to his troubles. Remember, when we are perplexed and troubled, we need never be afraid to bring our worries to the Lord Jesus. He cares and understands: even if it seems that God has forgotten us, He is able to reassure us.

The Lord simply replied, “Tell him the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them!” He knew that John would instantly recognise this as the fulfilment of Isaiah 35:4-6 (a Messianic prophecy). In other words, the evidence was plain for all to see. Who else, but the Messiah, the One sent from God, could do all these things?

Then the Lord Jesus added a very telling sentence, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.” What did He mean? I believe Jesus was saying to John, that whatever his circumstances were and however much he was baffled by his sufferings, the way of happiness was to remain confident in the Saviour. We’ve considered John’s wonderful testimony concerning Christ; now the reality of his witness was being tested! God sometimes allows this to happen to us. Very often the worth of our witness is tested by the things we have to suffer. Our words are challenged by circumstances and we have to show our confidence in the Lord.

The Lord Jesus went on to publicly commend John the Baptist and assure him of His confidence in him. Read verses 7-19 carefully. He spoke of him as a Prophet, actually “much more than a prophet”! Here was one sent from God to prepare the way for the Messiah, Himself! The Lord Jesus also paid tribute to his preaching of the message of God. Jesus finished with the wonderful tribute to his place in history at that time, “Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (v11)!

John was humbly conscious of his own unworthiness; how great then, to see the Lord’s high regard for him (compare with 1 Peter 5:6)! This is true of all who serve the Lord faithfully. We can be sure that the Lord Jesus values His servants and commends their service for Him. This is why it is so important to make it our aim to please the Lord in all that we do. John was indeed a puzzled prisoner for a time; yet in presenting his doubts to the Lord Jesus, he not only received the assurance he needed, but also the encouragement of knowing the Lord’s appreciation for him as a valued servant.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was John the Baptist put in prison?	.....
2. Why did John send messages to Jesus?	.....
3. How would John know, from the answer he received, that Jesus was the Messiah?	.....
4. What did the Lord Jesus say that gave tribute to John?	.....
5. What do you consider was John’s greatest characteristic?	.....

# The Saviour's Birth

Key Verse:  
**"...the virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and will call His name Immanuel."**

Isaiah 7:14

Extra: Why was this the most important night of all history?

Level 5 lesson 44

## Read Luke 1:26-38

### Further Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Once again this Christmas we consider the great event of our Saviour's birth in Bethlehem. Of course, there were several important roles played by various ones in connection with this most sacred and marvellous event.

**GABRIEL, THE ANGEL:** Firstly, Gabriel the arch-angel appeared to Mary and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." He proceeded to tell her of the miraculous experience she would have. "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus" (Luke 1:30-31). Next, Gabriel appeared in a dream to Joseph, the young man to whom Mary was engaged to be married. "Joseph, son of David," he said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21!)

Later, when the Lord was born, the angel announced the glad news to the shepherds in the fields. And of course, that enormous choir of heaven's angels appeared with him, singing praise to God, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14 KJV)

**MARY, THE VIRGIN:** This young woman was indeed highly favoured by God in that she was chosen to bring into the world the Saviour of mankind. Never has such an honour been bestowed upon any woman. When the news was first told to her by the angel, she could barely comprehend it all. She humbly enquired, "How can this be, seeing I am a virgin?" Having heard the angel's explanation that this was to be a miraculous work of God Almighty, she spoke the beautiful words, "I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said!" Mary's faith, piety, and purity were truly exemplary, but let us not exalt her to a position greater than what Scripture does.

For example, we should not refer to her as the 'mother of God' or the 'Queen of Heaven.' God Almighty has no mother or father; Mary was simply the mother of Jesus, God in human form. The 'Queen of Heaven' was in fact, a title given to an ancient heathen goddess whom we read about in Jeremiah 7:18!

Also, Mary was not 'immaculate' or sinless; she herself recognised this when she said, "My spirit rejoices in God MY Saviour" (Luke 1:47). In saying this, she acknowledged her own sin and need of a Saviour. Further, it is wrong to sing hymns or to pray to her; we are to worship ONLY God (the first commandment) and not bow down to any image of anyone or anything (Exodus 20:3). Mary, a wonderful woman that she was, was still only human; she cannot hear our prayers or help us in any way. We are to worship and pray ONLY to God, in the name of Jesus Christ, for "there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5)! We tell you all this so that you will not be led astray by false teaching that gives Mary an unscriptural place of honour.

**JOSEPH, THE CARPENTER:** This godly man willingly assumed his responsibility to marry Mary after receiving the angel's explanation and instructions. Upon waking from the dream, Joseph did exactly as the Angel of the Lord told him, and took Mary as his wife, although he did not have any union with Mary until after the Holy Child was born. It seems though, that during our Lord's lifetime, very few people really appreciated the fact that Joseph was not His actual father.

**GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT:** The third Person of the Trinity was really the key in relation to the birth of our Saviour. It is through His amazing, miraculous work that Mary became pregnant with child (while still a virgin) - a miracle only God could perform! In this wonderful way, Jesus was truly the 'God-Man' - born of a woman' (a virgin), yet conceived of the Holy Spirit. As John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and lived among us." Yes, Jesus was truly God and truly man - anything less than this and He could not have been our Saviour! But it is not by His birth that we can be saved. NO! Jesus took on human form so that He could go to the cross and save us, by paying for the penalty of sin, which was death. What a wonderful Saviour! Do you know Him as YOUR Saviour and Lord?

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Name all those the angel announced the birth of Jesus to.	.....
2. What did Mary say when she learned she was to be the mother of the Lord Jesus?	.....
3. What did Mary say that shows she was not sinless?	.....
4(a) Can Christ's birth save us?	(a) .....
4(b) What was necessary for Him to do to save us?	(b) .....
5. Tell us what this saving work means to you personally. (Write to us if you need any further help).	.....