

## WEEK 6: JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

### HIGH SCHOOL

#### GOALS

Who is St. John the Baptist?  
What is Theophany?

#### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** Icon, Bible, worksheet

**Extended Learning Opportunity for Teachers:**

*The Gospel of Matthew: Torah for the Church* by Fr. Lawrence Farley, pgs 43-50

*The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew* by Blessed Theophylact, pgs 32-37

*Homilies X - XII on Matthew* by St. John Chrysostom

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“REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!”

The Judean wilderness, where St. John the Baptist lived, had minimal resources in the way of food or shelter. It was largely a desolate desert. Within this wilderness, the Jordan River flowed. The river provided life giving water to the area and allowed plants and wildlife to line the banks.

St. John the Baptist lived a humble life eating the food that God provided him in the desert. He also wore incredibly simple clothing provided by the hide of a camel and a leather belt holding it onto him. He focused every day on God and not of the things of this world.

In this chapter, Matthew reminds us of the prophecy of Isaiah, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’ ” In ancient times, the roads were not maintained in the same way that we take care of our roads today. Whenever the king was going to travel somewhere, the people were expected to repair the road - clear away branches, plants, fill in potholes, smooth out bumps, etc. Matthew is explaining to us that St. John the Baptist is preparing the way for the coming of the King - Jesus Christ. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” He was encouraging the

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people around him to fix their paths in life and make them straight by repenting and seeking forgiveness for any wrong they had done - for the Messiah was coming soon to rule over Israel! We, as well, need to repent and seek forgiveness! As Orthodox Christians, what are some ways that we repent and seek forgiveness? (Think about the sacraments, the Sundays of Great Lent, how you would apologize to someone, etc)

The people listened to St. John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River as a way of repentance and seeking forgiveness. There was some controversy though with St. John baptizing people in preparation of Jesus Christ. While the Jews were familiar with ritual cleansing, they did not understand why they needed to be baptized along with the Gentiles. They felt insulted by this because they were the chosen people of God, while the Gentiles were not. Surely, they were more prepared for the coming of the Messiah than the Gentiles. This is something we need to be careful about as Orthodox Christians. We cannot assume that just because we have the right faith, that we will be saved by default. We need to repent and seek forgiveness as well.

Next we see Jesus coming to St. John and He asks to be baptized by him as well. St. John initially argues with Jesus and tells him it should be the other way around! Jesus assures him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." And then St. John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. This event is one of our major feast days as Orthodox Christians - known as Theophany. Theophany means "appearance of God" and we celebrate this feast day every year on January 6th.

**Directions:** Your teachers will separate you into groups. After reading today's lesson, illustrate four scenes (stick figures are completely fine) and then add a caption for each scene. Look for the main points of this lesson for each scene.

SCENE 1:	SCENE 2:
CAPTION:	CAPTION:
SCENE 3:	SCENE 4:
CAPTION:	CAPTION:



## WEEK 6: JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

#### GOALS

Who is St. John the Baptist?  
What is Theophany?

#### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** Icon, Bible, worksheet

**Extended Learning Opportunity for Teachers:**

*The Gospel of Matthew: Torah for the Church* by Fr. Lawrence Farley, pgs 43-50

*The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew* by Blessed Theophylact, pgs 32-37

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“REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!”

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St. John the Baptist lived a humble life eating the food that God provided him in the desert. He also wore incredibly simple clothing provided by the hide of a camel and a leather belt holding it onto him. He focused every day on God and not of the things of this world.

In this chapter, Matthew reminds us of the prophecy of Isaiah, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’ ” In ancient times, the roads were not maintained in the same way that we take care of our roads today. Whenever the king was going to travel somewhere, the people were expected to repair the road - clear away branches, plants, fill in potholes, smooth out bumps, etc. Matthew is explaining to us that St. John the Baptist is preparing the way for the coming of the King - Jesus Christ. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” He was encouraging the

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people around him to fix their paths in life and make them straight by repenting and seeking forgiveness for any wrong they had done - for the Messiah was coming soon to rule over Israel! We, as well, need to repent and seek forgiveness! As Orthodox Christians, what are some ways that we repent and seek forgiveness? (Think about the sacraments, the Sundays of Great Lent, how you would apologize to someone, etc)

The people listened to St. John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River as a way of repentance and seeking forgiveness. There was some controversy though with St. John baptizing people in preparation of Jesus Christ. While the Jews were familiar with ritual cleansing, they did not understand why they needed to be baptized along with the Gentiles. They felt insulted by this because they were the chosen people of God, while the Gentiles were not. Surely, they were more prepared for the coming of the Messiah than the Gentiles. This is something we need to be careful about as Orthodox Christians. We cannot assume that just because we have the right faith, that we will be saved by default. We need to repent and seek forgiveness as well.

Next we see Jesus coming to St. John and He asks to be baptized by him as well. St. John initially argues with Jesus and tells him it should be the other way around! Jesus assures him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." And then St. John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. This event is one of our major feast days as Orthodox Christians - known as Theophany. Theophany means "appearance of God" and we celebrate this feast day every year on January 6th.

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SCENE 1:	SCENE 2:
CAPTION:	CAPTION:
SCENE 3:	SCENE 4:
CAPTION:	CAPTION:

## WEEK 6: JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

3RD & 4TH GRADE

### GOALS

Who is St. John the Baptist?

What is Theophany?

### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** Icon, Bible, handouts

**Extended Learning Opportunity for Teachers:**

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*Homilies X - XII on Matthew* by St. John Chrysostom

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“REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!”

What does it mean to have a patron saint? (*Our patron saint is an example to us for our own lives.*) We each have a personal patron saint and we celebrate our nameday on the day we remember our patron saint. For example, if your patron saint is St. Nicholas, then you would celebrate your nameday on December 6th. You would try your very hardest to go to liturgy that day and read about the life of St. Nicholas. Then you could think of ways you could help people who are poor, just like St. Nicholas did, and then work with your parents to help them.

The patron saint of our church is St. John the Baptist. We can see his active role in our parish every year when we have a large group of people being baptized or chrismated on Holy Saturday. Our patron saints are active in all of our lives as they pray on our behalf to God.

Let's learn more about our parish's patron saint:

(*Show photos while telling the kids about St. John the Baptist:*) The Judean wilderness, where St. John the Baptist lived, had minimal resources in the way of food or shelter. It was largely



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a desolate desert. Within the valley next to this wilderness, the Jordan River flowed. The river provided life- giving water to the area and allowed plants and wildlife to line the banks.

*(Share honeycomb and show locusts)* St. John the Baptist lived a humble life eating the food that God provided him in the desert. He also wore incredibly simple clothing provided by the hide of a camel and a leather belt holding it onto him. He focused every day on God and not of the things of this world.

In this chapter of the gospel, Matthew reminds us of the prophecy of Isaiah, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’ ” In ancient times, the roads were not maintained in the same way that we take care of our roads today. Whenever the king was going to travel somewhere, the people were expected to repair the road - clear away branches, plants, fill in potholes, smooth out bumps, etc. Matthew is explaining to us that St. John the Baptist is preparing the way for the coming of the King - Jesus Christ. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” He was encouraging the people around him to fix their paths in life and make them straight by repenting and seeking forgiveness for any wrong they had done - for the Messiah was coming soon to rule over Israel! We, as well, need to repent and seek forgiveness! As Orthodox Christians, what are some ways that we repent and seek forgiveness? (Baptism, going to confession, participating in vespers on Forgiveness Sunday during Great Lent, asking for forgiveness when we have hurt someone)

The people listened to St. John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River as a way of fixing the poor choices they made in their lives. Can you tell me examples of when it would be a good time to say sorry and ask God or someone else to forgive you?

This chapter also tells us about Jesus coming to St. John and asking to be baptized by him. St. John initially argues with Jesus and tells him it should be the other way around! But Jesus reassures St. John that this is the right thing to do and then St. John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River as well. This event is one of our major feast days as Orthodox Christians - known as Theophany. Theophany means “appearance of God” and we celebrate this feast day every year on January 6th.



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This is the Judean wilderness where St. John the Baptist lived. The Jordan River provides life-giving water to the area and is where St. John the Baptist baptized Jesus.



Hoshviliim, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons



Jeanne Griffin, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Camels are used for carrying items across the desert and for traveling. St. John the Baptist wore a camel hair cloak because that is a material that would have been available to him. They didn't have stores like we do today to go pick out clothes. They used the materials they had near them.



Merdal at Turkish Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, via  
Wikimedia Commons



“Now John himself was clothed in  
camel’s hair, with a leather belt  
around his waist; and his food was  
locusts and wild honey.” Matthew 3:4

Top: honeycomb

Bottom left: swarm of locusts

Neil Turner, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia  
Commons



## WEEK 6: JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

1ST & 2ND GRADE

### GOALS

Who is St. John the Baptist?  
What is Theophany?

### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** Icon, Bible, handouts

**Extended Learning Opportunity for Teachers:**

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*Homilies X - XII on Matthew* by St. John Chrysostom

### CLASS ROUTINE

Continue routine - move photo, light candle, venerate icon, prayer before beginning lesson

### ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

We each have a personal patron saint and we celebrate our nameday on the day we remember our patron saint. For example, if your patron saint is St. Nicholas, then you would celebrate your nameday on December 6th. You would try your very hardest to go to liturgy that day and read about the life of St. Nicholas. Then you could think of ways you could help people who are poor, just like St. Nicholas did, and then work with your parents to help them.

The patron saint of our church is St. John the Baptist. We can see his active role in our parish every year when we have a large group of people being baptized or chrismated on Holy Saturday. Our patron saints are active in all of our lives as they pray on our behalf to God.

Let's learn more about St. John the Baptist:

He lived in the wilderness (the desert of Judea) and ate the food that was available to

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him - wild honey and locusts. He wore a cloak of camel's hair and tied a leather belt around his waist. He lived simply and spent his days encouraging others to prepare for the coming of Jesus. He also baptized countless people in the Jordan River.

## THEOPHANY

Eventually, Jesus came to see St. John the Baptist at the Jordan River and asked to be baptized by him. St. John argued with Jesus at first because he thought Jesus should baptize him instead! Jesus explained to St. John that He needed to be baptized as well and this is one of our major feast days - called Theophany. We celebrate every year on January 6th.

Show icon and ask the kids to find:

- Where's Jesus?
- Where's St. John the Baptist?
- Why is Jesus in the water? What is the name of the river Jesus is standing in?
- The Holy Trinity is represented in this icon. Jesus is the Son of God and is being baptized in the Jordan River. How is the Holy Spirit represented in this icon? How is God, the Father, represented in this icon?
- The angels are present to receive Jesus as he comes out of the water and also to sing praises.

## LORD, HAVE MERCY

Continue practice singing, "Lord, have mercy" in multiple languages



The original uploader was Effib at Hebrew Wikipedia., CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

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Hoshvilim, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons





Jeanne Griffin, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

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locusts and wild honey.” Matthew 3:4

Top: honeycomb

Bottom left: swarm of locusts

Neil Turner, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia  
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## WEEK 6: JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

PRE-K & KINDERGARTEN

### GOALS

Who is St. John the Baptist?  
What is Theophany?

### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** Icons, Bible

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Let's learn more about St. John the Baptist:

He lived in the wilderness (the desert of Judea) and ate the food that was available to

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him - wild honey and locusts. He wore a cloak of camel's hair and tied a leather belt around his waist. He lived simply and spent his days encouraging others to prepare for the coming of Jesus. He also baptized countless people in the Jordan River.

## THEOPHANY

Jesus was baptized by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Let's look at the icon showing Jesus' baptism!

Show icon and ask the kids to find:

- Where's Jesus?
- Where's St. John the Baptist?
- Why is Jesus in the water? What is the name of the river Jesus is standing in?
- Where are the angels?

## LORD, HAVE MERCY

Continue practice singing, "Lord, have mercy" in multiple languages



This is our icon screen (iconostasis) in front of the altar.

- Where is St. John the Baptist? (Hint: There are two icons of him. One because he's the patron saint of our church and one because he's also always next to Jesus on the icon screen.)
- Where's Jesus?
- Where's the Theotokos?
- Where is St. Mary Magdalene?
- Where is St. George?
- Where are the Archangels Michael and Gabriel?



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