

Messy Church – November 2020

John the Baptist

The activities are:

- 1 Birth of John – Zechariah and Elizabeth
(Luke chapter 1)
 - a. Do you know where your name comes from, are you named for someone in your family?
 - b. Wordsearch
- 2 John in the desert, baptising and preaching (Luke 3: 1 – 19, or Matthew 3: 1 – 12)
Make the scene edible
- 3 Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3: 13 – 17)
Craft activity – make a dove
- 4 John's arrest and death (Matthew 14: 1 – 12 or Mark 6: 14 – 29)
Craft activity – make paper chains

Stories and Activities

1 Zechariah's vision and the baby's name

Zechariah was a priest, a descendant of Levi. He was old, the bible says, which probably means in his fifties, and his wife, Elizabeth, was a similar age. They had no children.

There were so many priests that they had a rota for Temple duties. One day, when Zechariah was on duty in the sanctuary (the inside part of the Temple, where the people worshipping could not see him), an angel appeared to him and told him his wife would have a son, and they were to call him John. Zechariah said his wife was too old to have children, and the angel said that in that case he, Zechariah, would be unable to talk until after the child was named.

Zechariah came out of the sanctuary, and he couldn't talk! The people were very puzzled, but the Temple authorities sent Zechariah home to his wife. She became pregnant, and in due course the baby boy was born. When he was eight days old, the naming ceremony was held. Elizabeth told the people that the baby's name was John. They argued with her, saying that no-one in the family was called John. They said they would not call him John unless they knew that Zechariah agreed. Zechariah had to write "His name is John" before they would name the baby. When the ceremony was over, Zechariah could talk again!

1(a) What does your name mean?

Either use a book of name definitions, if you have one, or use the internet to find out what your name means. If you are joining in the on-line Messy Church, you could ask Clive and Tina to look your name up.

Ask your parents if you were named for anyone in particular in your family.

1(b) John the Baptist wordsearch

See the separate pdf file.

Talk about: what names mean and why that might be important in your family.

2 John in the desert

John was about 6 months older than Jesus. We know how old Jesus was when he was baptised, so we know how old John was then, but we don't know how long he had been preaching when he met Jesus.

At some point in his late twenties, John went to live in the Jordan valley, in the area called the Judean wilderness, he lived on what he could find where he lived – locusts (which are like large grasshoppers, and apparently a healthy thing to eat), and honey produced by wild bees who built their nests among the rocks. He wore rough clothing made from camel hair, held together with a leather belt. He started talking to the passers by. Well,

talking to them is possibly an exaggeration – he may have shouted at them, like street preachers do today. People came to listen to him, and to watch the other people who came. John told them what they were doing wrong in their lives, and how to put it right, because, he said, the Messiah was going to come soon, and they should be ready to meet him. People who were really sorry about their bad lives, and said so, would be baptised in the Jordan, by John. (Baptism was a ceremony where one person (John) ducked the person who was being baptised completely under the water, to represent them being washed clean from their sins.) If he didn't believe they were sorry, he wouldn't do it. He was really aggressive to the Jewish leaders

You will need: ready to roll icing, or marzipan, icing sugar, food colourings, jelly babies for people, paper or other plate.

Make the banks of the river Jordan from yellow or light brown icing or marzipan. Use a little icing sugar on your hands to stop the icing paste sticking to you as you shape it. Between the banks, make the river by adding icing sugar to a little blue colouring, so it is not too thick. Put a crowd of people on one bank, with one representing John in the river, and perhaps one other for him to baptise.

Take a picture of your scene, and send it to Clive.

Talk about: why people will listen to someone talking in the street, how crowds react.

3 John baptises Jesus

People, especially important people, like the priests and the pharisees, wanted to know who John was. According to Jewish tradition, there would be a great prophet telling people when the Messiah was about to come, so people wondered whether John was that prophet, or even the Messiah. John said he was neither, he said that he was not worthy even to undo the sandals of the Messiah, who would come soon.

One day while John was talking to a crowd of people, and baptising them, he saw Jesus coming to join the crowd. We don't know whether he recognised Jesus as his cousin, or just realised that this was the Messiah. When Jesus asked to be baptised, John said that Jesus should be baptising him, John, but Jesus persuaded him to do his usual job. As Jesus came out of the water afterwards, John and others saw a shape like a dove hover over him, and heard a voice from heaven saying "This is my own dear son, with whom I am pleased."

You will need: a print-out of the dove outline, another sheet of paper, scissors, and pens, pencils or crayons if you want to colour your dove.

Cut out the dove, including the slit in the middle of the body. Concertina fold the second piece of paper, and push it through the slit in the body so that there is the same amount of paper on each side. Spread out the folds to make wings.

Talk about: the meaning of a dove: peace, love, God.

4 John's arrest and death

John wasn't just rude about the scribes and pharisees and how they behaved. He was also rude about the King, whose name was Herod Antipas. Herod had married his brother's divorced wife, whose name was Herodias. John was quite certain that this should not have happened – Jewish law said that marrying one's sister-in-law was not lawful. When John kept on saying that the Herod's and Herodias' behaviour was illegal, then Herod got very cross, arrested John and put him in prison.

[He didn't want to kill John, because he thought that would cause trouble with ordinary people, who believed John to be a prophet. He also was afraid of John, because he knew that John was a good and holy man. He liked to listen to John talk, but Herodias wanted to kill John, because he said that she was wrong to have married Herod. At last Herodias got her chance. On Herod's birthday, her daughter danced for Herod, who promised her a gift. At her mother's prompting she asked for John's head. Herod was too proud to say no, so John was killed.]

You will need: strips of paper (coloured if possible), glue, scissors if you need to cut the paper.

Glue one strip into a circle, and further strips through each other to make a chain.

Talk about: being in prison – unable to do what you want or go where you want. Think about the difference between prison, and lockdown.

Celebration

Today's messy church has been all about John the Baptist. He came to tell people that Jesus was coming, and to persuade them to get ready for Jesus. So we'll start off by singing the song:

Make way, make way <https://youtu.be/tK6XuYhL7JI>

Now, the Story of John the Baptist starts like this. His mum, Elizabeth, and his dad Zechariah enough didn't have any children and they weren't very happy about that, and they were both quite old.

Now one day it was Zechariah's duty to appear in the temple and to be to conduct the special act of worship in the special place where only the chosen priest could go. While he was in there at all the worshippers were outside praying. An angel appeared to him. Now Zechariah was really surprised when that happened; wouldn't you have been. Zechariah was afraid but the Angel said to him: "now don't be afraid, Zechariah, your prayers been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, is going to have a baby boy and he's going to be a joy and a delight to you and he's going to help a lot of people learn about God. He's going to be filled with the Holy Spirit and he'll do great things

But Zechariah asked the angel: "how can I be sure of that? How can I know? I'm old and my wife is old as well." Well, the angel said to Zechariah: "I'm Gabriel and I stand in the presence of God and I've been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news; so as a sign, from now until this

good thing happens you not going to be able to say anything. You won't be able to say a word.”

Outside the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering what had happened. When he came out and he couldn't talk to them, they realised he'd seen something special. He kept making signs, but he couldn't speak. In due course, the baby was born and there came a time for the special naming ceremony and people wanted to know what the baby was to be called. Well it wasn't much use trying to get Zechariah to tell them so they asked Elizabeth, and Elizabeth said: “he's going to be called John.” and they said “what, not Zechariah after his father?” “No, John.” Well, they didn't think a lot of this, so they asked Zechariah, and he asked for a writing tablet and on it he wrote “his name shall be John”, and as soon as he done that he could talk again and everybody was really surprised.

Many years later John went into a bit of the desert near the river Jordan. He started to speak to people to tell them to stop doing bad things and to get ready for the Messiah who God was going to send to make things right. Soon, crowds of people started to come to hear him. The ones who really wanted to change went to him, and he took them into the river, and pushed them under. He wasn't trying to drown them, he let them up quickly, but this was to show that the bad things were being washed away from their lives. This is what the Jews understood by “baptism” and it's why John was called “the Baptist”. One day Jesus came and asked to be baptised. John recognised that Jesus was the special person sent by God, and thought that Jesus should baptise him, but he agreed to baptise

Jesus. Afterwards, the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove.

If you tell people they are doing wrong things they're not going to like you, particularly if they are the people in power. John told Herod that he was wrong to marry Herodias, who had been his brother, Phillip's wife. Herod locked him up for it. However, Herod liked talking to John. Herodias, on the other hand really hated John, so she got Herod to kill him. Herod made a promise that was too open, and couldn't back down on it without losing face. So John died, a sad end to his life, caused by someone else's pride.

John was a good man, and he helped get people ready for Jesus. Many of the disciples started following Jesus because of John. But he was also humble, and didn't try to make himself important.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for people who help others find Jesus, like John did. Help us to find Jesus, and, like John, show him to others.

Amen

Sing Our God is a great big God.

<https://youtu.be/8Hi8jW1qYsw>

Enjoy our celebration.

Then have tea or a treat if it isn't tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don't want shared, just tell me. I'll only share the one's you're happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

Last month we managed the YouTube, and I hope you enjoyed it. This month, as well as the YouTube, we'll have a Zoom meeting open so that you can talk back to us. Our end of Zoom will be what is going on YouTube, but we won't put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos