

“Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord”

Lesson

4

Matthew 3–4; John 1:35–51

Purpose To inspire class members to draw near to the Savior by repenting of their sins, keeping their baptismal covenants, and withstanding temptation.

- Preparation**
1. Read, ponder, and pray about the following scriptures:
 - a. Matthew 3:1–12. John the Baptist preaches repentance and baptizes, preparing the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b. Matthew 3:13–17. Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist.
 - c. Matthew 4:1–11. Jesus withstands Satan’s temptations in the wilderness.
 - d. John 1:35–51. Some of John the Baptist’s disciples decide to follow Jesus.
 2. Additional reading: Mark 1:1–13; Luke 3:1–22; 4:1–14; John 1:19–34; 2:1–25; 2 Nephi 31; Bible Dictionary, “Baptism,” 618–19; “John the Baptist,” 714–15; “Repentance,” 760–61.
 3. If the following pictures are available, use them during the lesson: John Preaching in the Wilderness (62132; Gospel Art Picture Kit 207) and John the Baptist Baptizing Jesus (62133; Gospel Art Picture Kit 208).
 4. Suggestion for teaching: Use class time wisely. Plan what you will discuss and how much time you want to spend on each part of the lesson, but then let the Spirit guide you. Do not end a meaningful discussion just so you can cover the entire lesson. It is more important for class members to learn and feel the Spirit than for every point in the lesson to be discussed.
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Suggested Lesson Development

Attention Activity As appropriate, use the following activity or one of your own to begin the lesson. Write the following on the chalkboard, and ask class members if they know what it says:



Explain that this is the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means anointed. The Jews had waited centuries for the coming of the Messiah, who, according to prophecy, would be their anointed King and Deliverer. The Greek word for *Messiah* is *Christ*. Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Messiah, and John the Baptist was the prophet sent to prepare the way for him.

Scripture Discussion and Application

Discuss how the teachings in the following scripture passages can help us draw nearer to the Savior. Because it would be difficult to ask every question or cover every point in the lesson, prayerfully select those that will best meet class members' needs.

1. John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read and discuss Matthew 3:1–12. Display the picture of John preaching, and share the following background information in your own words:

Centuries before John's birth, many prophets foresaw his ministry and testified of his greatness as the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3; 1 Nephi 10:7–10). In preparation for John's ministry, the angel Gabriel announced John's forthcoming birth (Luke 1:13–19), Zacharias prophesied on the day of John's naming and circumcision (Luke 1:67–79), and an angel ordained eight-day-old John to his mission (D&C 84:27–28). The crowning statement of John's greatness came from the Savior himself, who said, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7:28).

John was born about six months before Jesus. Shortly after Jesus' birth, Herod, feeling threatened by the announcement that a new king of the Jews had been born, "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Matthew 2:16). To protect Jesus, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and directed him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt (Matthew 2:13–15). To protect John, "Zacharias caused [Elisabeth] to take him into the mountains, where he was raised on locusts and wild honey" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 261). John began his public ministry many years later, first preaching in the wilderness and then in Jerusalem and "all the region round about Jordan" (Matthew 3:5).

- What was John the Baptist's mission? (See Luke 1:76–79; 3:3–4.) Why do you think it was important that someone prepare the way of the Lord?
- What message did John preach to prepare the people for the coming of the Savior? (See Matthew 3:1–2.) What does it mean to repent? (As class members discuss answers to this question, list on the chalkboard some aspects of repentance as shown below. You may want to invite class members to read the accompanying scriptures.)
 - a. Feeling godly sorrow for sin (2 Corinthians 7:9–10).
 - b. Confessing and forsaking sins (D&C 58:42–43).
 - c. Making amends, where possible, for wrongs done (Luke 19:8).
 - d. Obeying the commandments (D&C 1:31–32).
 - e. Turning to the Lord and serving him (Mosiah 7:33).
- How does repentance help us prepare to dwell with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ? (See 3 Nephi 27:19.) How does repentance help us draw nearer to them each day?

- The Pharisees and Sadducees witnessed baptisms performed by John but chose not to be baptized (Matthew 3:7; Luke 7:29–30). John rebuked them, urging them to “repent . . . and bring forth fruits meet for repentance” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 3:35; note that the word *fruits* refers to results and that the word *meet* means worthy or appropriate). What are the fruits of repentance? (See Moroni 8:25–26.)
- John baptized “with water unto repentance” and promised that Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). What does it mean to be baptized “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire”?

We are baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire when we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands (D&C 20:41). “The gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to have, whenever one is worthy, the companionship of the Holy Ghost. . . . It acts as a cleansing agent to purify a person and sanctify him from all sin. Thus it is often spoken of as ‘fire’” (Bible Dictionary, “Holy Ghost,” 704).

2. Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist.

Read and discuss Matthew 3:13–17. Display the picture of John baptizing Jesus.

- Why was John hesitant to baptize Jesus? (See Matthew 3:14.) Why did Jesus need to be baptized? (See Matthew 3:15; 2 Nephi 31:6–7, 9–11.) Why do we need to be baptized? (See 2 Nephi 31:5, 12–13, 17–18; D&C 20:71; 49:13–14.)
- What covenants do we make when we are baptized? (See D&C 20:37.) How should these covenants affect our daily actions? (See Mosiah 18:8–10.)

3. Jesus withstands Satan’s temptations in the wilderness.

Read and discuss Matthew 4:1–11 (see also the footnotes to Matthew 4:1–2, 5–6, 8–9, and 11, which contain the Joseph Smith Translation of these verses).

- Soon after Jesus was baptized, the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be with God (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 4:1). How do you think this experience prepared Jesus to withstand Satan’s temptations? How do fasting, prayer, and being “led . . . of the Spirit” fortify us against temptation?
- To what desire did Satan try to appeal when he tempted Jesus, who had been fasting, to turn the stones into bread? (See Matthew 4:2–3. He tried to appeal to the desire to satisfy physical appetite.) How does Satan tempt us to give in to physical appetites? How can we recognize and resist these temptations?
- Satan tried to appeal to pride when he tempted Jesus to cast himself down from the pinnacle and prove that he had the power to be saved by angels (Matthew 4:5–6). How does Satan try to appeal to our pride? How can we recognize and withstand temptations to gratify prideful desires?
- What did Satan offer if Jesus would worship him? (See Matthew 4:8–9.) How does Satan tempt us with worldly riches and power? How can we recognize and resist these temptations? (See Matthew 4:10.)
- What was false about Satan’s offer to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world? (See D&C 104:14.) What are some false offers Satan makes today to entice us to sin?

- Jesus responded to each of Satan’s temptations by quoting from the scriptures (Matthew 4:3–4, 6–7, 8–10). How do the scriptures give us strength to withstand temptation? (See Helaman 3:29–30.)
- Satan twice questioned whether Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 4:3, 6). Why do you think Satan raised this question? How does he raise this question in the world today? When we face temptation, how does it help to know that we are children of God? (See Moses 1:12–22.)
- How can it help us to know that Jesus, the Son of God, faced temptations similar to those we face? (As class members discuss this question, you may want to have them read Hebrews 4:14–15.)

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin said: “The Lord is well aware of our mortality. He knows our weaknesses. He understands the challenges of our everyday lives. He has great empathy for the temptations of earthly appetites and passions” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 46; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 34).

4. Some of John the Baptist’s disciples decide to follow Jesus.

Read and discuss selected verses from John 1:35–51.

- When Jesus began his mortal ministry, what did John the Baptist encourage his own disciples to do? (See John 1:35–37.) When Jesus saw two of John the Baptist’s disciples following Him, what did He do? (See John 1:38–39.)
- When Andrew heard and recognized the Savior, what did he do? (See John 1:40–42.) After receiving a witness that Jesus was the Messiah, how did Philip answer Nathanael’s doubts? (See John 1:43–46.) What can we do to invite others to “come and see” the Savior?

Conclusion

Testify that the invitation to “come and see” the Savior is extended to each of us. Explain that we can accept that invitation by repenting, being baptized, keeping our baptismal covenants, and withstanding temptation.

Additional Teaching Ideas

The following material supplements the suggested lesson outline. You may want to use one or more of these ideas as part of the lesson.

1. Insights from the Savior’s baptism

Review Matthew 3:16–17.

- How does the account of the Savior’s baptism show that baptism should be performed by immersion? (See Matthew 3:16; see also John 3:23; Romans 6:3–6; 3 Nephi 11:23–26; Bible Dictionary, “Baptism,” 618, which explains that the word *baptism* is “from a Greek word meaning to *dip* or *immerse*.”)
- What did John see after he baptized Jesus? (See Matthew 3:16.) Whose voice did he hear? (See Matthew 3:17.) What does the account of the Savior’s baptism teach about the nature of the Godhead? (Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are separate beings.)

2. Video presentation

If the videocassette *The Savior: Early Years* (53163) is available, you may want to show a brief excerpt from part 3, “Baptism, Temptation, and Rejection.”

3. Jesus shows respect and love for his mother

Explain that after Jesus was baptized, he and his disciples attended a wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1–11). When his mother told him that there was no wine for the feast, he replied, “What wilt thou have me do for thee? that will I do” (Joseph Smith Translation, John 2:4; see John 2:4, footnote 4a).

- What did Jesus’ words to his mother reveal about his feelings toward her? What did he do to help her? (See John 2:6–11. Point out that this is Jesus’ first miracle recorded in the New Testament.)

4. Jesus shows reverence as he cleanses the temple

Have class members read John 2:13–17, which contains an account of Jesus finding merchants and money changers desecrating the temple. If the picture *Jesus Cleansing the Temple* (62163; Gospel Art Picture Kit 224) is available, display it. Point out that Jesus showed respect and reverence when he “drove them all out of the temple, . . . and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables” (John 2:15). Explain that reverence for our Heavenly Father includes more than merely sitting quietly in Church. It includes demonstrating by our actions that we love him and that we acknowledge his power.