



God Sends John the Baptist

Luke 1:5–25, 57–67, 76–80



LESSON GOAL

Students will understand that God sent John the Baptist to prepare Israel for the coming of Jesus.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- John's birth was a miracle.
- Many people wondered what the miracle meant.
- God sent John to prepare the people for Jesus' coming.

KEY VERSE

"He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the LORD" (Luke 1:17).

APPLICATION

- Be ready for God to fulfill His promises.
- Trust that God can and will do what He says.
- Worship God as Zacharias did.

NEXT WEEK

The Wise Men Worship Jesus
Read Matthew 2:1–18.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

The Old Testament makes many references to the coming of the Messiah. As we have seen over the past few weeks, this Messiah would be the Son of God (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2). He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and He would rule the nations (Gen. 49:10). But there is another prophecy that ties to the coming of the Messiah. That prophecy is about one who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

It was common for a king to send a forerunner to prepare for his visit to a part of his kingdom. The forerunner would remove obstacles from the roads and tell the people to be ready. God intended to do this in a spiritual manner in preparation for the Messiah.

God gave this ministry of preparing for the Messiah to John the Baptist. This can be seen in a quotation of Isaiah 40:3–5 in Luke 3:4–6: “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the hearts of the people, and he did this faithfully. He was always mindful of his minor work compared to the One before whom he was going: “‘I am not the Christ’, but, ‘I have been sent before Him’....He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:28, 30). Though John was not the One, he prepared the way for Him.

John truly was a miracle baby. His father, Zacharias, was a temple priest. Zacharias helped make the appropriate sacrifices throughout the year on behalf of the people. Incense was constantly burning in the temple. Each day, a priest had to go into the holy place and light new incense. There were thousands of priests in Israel, and most of them would never get to perform this act of worship. It was customary to cast lots to see which priest would go into the holy place. By God’s providence, the lot fell to Zacharias.

While he was there, an angel appeared to him. Fear gripped Zacharias. The angel comforted him and told him that he was going to have a son. This was a surprise because Zacharias’s wife, Elizabeth, was too old to have children. Furthermore, she had been barren all her life. The angel told him that his son was going to prepare the way for the Messiah. Zacharias could not believe it. He questioned the angel and did not believe what he said. The angel responded by confirming his words, but he struck Zacharias with muteness. He told him that he would not be able to speak until after his son, John, was born.

Because Zacharias was taking so long, the people knew that something important must be going on inside. When he came out, he made motions to them but could not speak. They could tell that he had seen a vision. When he was finished with

Additional Reference Materials

The MacArthur Study Bible by John MacArthur

his time of service, he went home, and, indeed, Elizabeth did conceive. She rejoiced that God was going to give her a baby.

John was born about six months before Jesus. His birth drew a lot of attention. Not since Sarah and Isaac had anyone seen something like this. Many people gathered for the circumcision. They all thought the boy should be named after Zacharias. But Elizabeth insisted that his name should be John. During the months of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Zacharias had been able to explain in writing what the angel had said. The people asked Zacharias to write down what he wanted the boy's name to be. When Zacharias wrote, "His name is John" (Luke 1:63), his speech came back. All the people there marveled, wondering what God was going to do through this boy. Already, God was preparing them for the coming of the Messiah. Zacharias knew that John was going to announce to the world the coming of the Savior. He rejoiced that one day soon the people would be delivered from their sin. He rejoiced in God's rich mercy.

The circumstances of Jesus' arrival (that is, the arrival of the Messiah) among the Jews should not have come as a surprise because the ministry of John the Baptist preceded Jesus' ministry. John was preparing the way by "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3) and making it abundantly clear to those who heard him that he was not the one they, the Jews, were waiting for.

Later, in Luke 3:15–17, John gave the people further indication of who was to come. While the people were in a state of expectation, and all were wondering in their hearts whether John might be the Christ, he answered and said to them all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

The miraculous circumstances surrounding John's birth were another confirmation that God was going to fulfill His promise. All the pieces were being put into place for the King of the universe to come to earth. Christmas is a time to celebrate the miraculous and awesome ways of God.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth" (Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

What angel came to talk to Mary, and what did he say?
Gabriel came and said that Mary would have a baby. That baby was going to be the Son of God and would one day rule the earth.

What did Joseph want to do when he first heard the news?
He wanted to end the engagement.

Why did Joseph change his mind?

An angel of the Lord told him to marry Mary. Mary was going to give birth to the Savior, the Son of God.



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The Need for a Savior

Bring in newspaper articles, advertisements (for medical needs), magazines, or books showing sadness, hurt, or things associated with sin. Ask the students what life would be like without sin. Remind them that God created Adam and Eve in a perfect garden. Discuss how, after sin entered the world, man's punishment was to be death. But God sent Jesus (as a baby) to earth to die for all our sins so that we can have life forever with Him. God sent Jesus as a gift to us. That gift is our salvation.



These Little Lights of Mine

Plug in a string of flashing Christmas lights, and ask the students whether they have Christmas trees with lights on them at home. Read John 8:12 and explain that Jesus called Himself the light of the world. Tell them that in today's lesson, they will learn about John the Baptist, who was a special prophet sent by God to bear witness of the light, Jesus.



Jesus Is Our Treasure

Find a treasure box (something that looks like a treasure box or a box that you have decorated). Put in copies of Scriptures prophesying Christ's coming, as well as items that represent John the Baptist, the word *joy*, and some of Christ's promises. Ask the students, "What is something you treasure?" Then ask "Why is it a treasure?" Then ask more specifically, "What is a treasure?" Try to elicit that a treasure is something of value. Tell the students that you are going to show them some treasure. Pull out the various items, and show them or read them to the students. When you have talked about each item, ask the students why they might treasure these items. (Answer: These are all things that point us to Jesus.) God promised us a Savior, and He has given us other promises that we can believe and reflect on. These promises are treasures for all mankind. Explain that in today's lesson, the students will learn that Jesus is the Promised One. We should value Him above all else because He is our greatest treasure.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

In the past three weeks, we have seen how God promised to send a Savior. Last week, we learned that the Savior’s name would be Jesus, and He would save the people from their sin. The people thought mean, selfish thoughts. They did mean, selfish things. They did not want to do the right thing.

Today, we will learn about some other people in the New Testament. (Turn to the book of Luke.) We are going to read from the book of Luke. Do any of you know someone named Luke?

There was another prophecy in the Old Testament. That prophecy was about a person who was going to get people ready for the Messiah to come. Today, we are going to learn about that person. His name was John. We know him now as John the Baptist. Today, we are going to learn about his birth. It was amazing.

There was a man in Judea whose name was Zacharias, and he was married to Elizabeth. Zacharias was a priest who took his turn working in the temple in Jerusalem. Zacharias and Elizabeth loved God. They obeyed God because they wanted to do what was right. They were old, and it made them very sad that they never had any children. The Most High God had a big surprise for Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth. One day, while Zacharias was doing his work in the temple, an angel named Gabriel came to him. Angels are God’s messengers who do God’s work. Zacharias was startled and gasped with fear.

Then he heard the angel say, “Do not be afraid! I have good news for you. You and Elizabeth will have a son, and you will name him John. He will be a great man. He will help get people’s hearts ready for the Holy One of God who will soon be born. John will help turn people from sin and turn to doing what is right. John will help prepare people for God’s Son.” Zacharias could hardly believe his ears. The Holy One, the Savior promised by Isaiah was coming! Zacharias would have a special son who would get people ready for the Savior. But wait—Elizabeth was too old to have a baby! Zacharias said to the angel, “How can I know that what you have said is true?”

Gabriel said, “God has spoken this good news, and it will happen. Nothing is too hard for God. But because you did not believe God’s Word, you will not be able to say any words until after baby John is born.” When Zacharias left work that day, he could not talk! He made signs with his hands to try to tell the people that he had seen an angel. He tried to tell them, “The angel brought me great news. The Holy One is coming. The Savior is coming! Nothing is too hard for God!”

A little while later, the angel Gabriel appeared to another person. This time Gabriel had a message for Mary. Mary was a Jewish girl who loved God with her whole heart. She lived with her parents in a town called Nazareth.

Gabriel said to Mary, "Greetings! The Lord is with you. God has a special plan for you!" Mary had a puzzled look on her face. She was afraid and wondered what was happening.

But the angel said, "Do not be afraid! The Most High God is sending the Savior, and you will be His mother." Mary shook her head, wondering how this could happen. She was not even married yet. How could she have a special baby?

Gabriel said, "The Holy Spirit of God will give you the most special baby in the whole world. He will be the promised Savior. Nothing is too hard for God to do."

Mary was amazed and surprised! She probably had a huge smile on her face. Maybe she wanted to leap for joy! Whatever she did, Mary believed God's Word. She said, "I am the Lord's servant. I will do whatever He wants me to do." Gabriel said, "Your relative, Elizabeth, will have a baby, too. Nothing is too hard for the Most High God." God did do what He said He would do. He put a baby in Mary. The baby was God's own Son, the promised Savior, Jesus. Mary put on her coat and walking sandals and hurried over the hills of Judah to Elizabeth's house. They were so glad to be together. They gave big hugs, and you could hear happy voices greeting each another.

Before all the excitement was over, Elizabeth said, "God has given you a special gift. Your baby will be the Savior! The Spirit of God told me that your son would be God's Son." They were both glad about the babies they were going to have. Mary was so happy in her heart that she sang a song of thanks to God. Both Mary and Elizabeth were willing to follow God and serve Him, doing what He said was right. They wanted to follow and serve God so much that they sang about it.

If you read in the Bible that God wants you to obey your parents because that is right, what will you do? If your parents ask you to eat all the food on your plate, what do you do? God always knows what is best, and His Words for us are right here in the Bible. He is our best helper because nothing is too hard for God. If you have a hard thing to do, like saying you are sorry to a brother or a friend, ask God to help you say it and mean it. Remember, Mary and Elizabeth were willing to follow God, doing what was right with His powerful help. Nothing is too hard for God.

Soon the day came for Elizabeth to have her baby. She had the baby boy whom God had promised. Nothing is too hard for God. Elizabeth rejoiced with all her friends, who were very happy for her. When it came time to name her baby boy, Elizabeth said the baby's name would be John.

The people there said, "John? No one in your family has the name John. You should name him Zacharias Jr."

Then the people went to Zacharias and asked, "What do you want to call your son?" Zacharias still could not speak, so he asked for something to write with. He wrote, "My son's name is John." Immediately, Zacharias could speak words again! That is exactly what God's angel said would happen. Zacharias began singing and worshiping God! "What a great and mighty God I serve. Nothing is too hard for God! He is sending the Savior, the Holy One of God, and my son will be His prophet. My son will tell others about Jesus' coming. What a powerful God Israel has!" Zacharias and Elizabeth loved their son and took good care of him. John grew bigger and stronger. He made right decisions to follow God's right ways. He learned to do right things by obeying his parents. God would use John when he grew up to help people get ready for the Savior, Jesus. God was keeping His promise to bring a Savior to His people.



Lesson Questions

Who were Zacharias and Elizabeth?

Zacharias was a priest who served in the temple. Elizabeth was his wife. They were both old and could not have babies.

An angel visited Zacharias in the temple. What did he say?

He said that Elizabeth was going to have a baby. That baby would tell people about the Messiah.

How did Zacharias respond and why?

He did not believe the angel. He thought he and his wife were too old to have a baby.

What did the angel do to Zacharias?

He made it so that Zacharias could not speak.

What did they name the baby when he finally was born?

John.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces to present with the lesson.



Zacharias Can Speak No More

Ask a person who knows sign language to be Zacharias, pretending that he cannot speak. He can try to explain about the angel and the baby John by using sign language. Sing a song as he signs the words of the song.



Zip Your Mouth

Tape the Zacharias coloring page to a wall. As you explain to the students how God took Zacharias's voice away because he did not believe Gabriel, select a student to tape a picture of a zipper over Zacharias's mouth. Explain that as soon as the baby was born and Zacharias wrote the baby's name on a tablet, he got his voice back. Then select another student to remove the zipper from Zacharias's mouth.

Praise and Worship

Joy to the World!

Praise the Name of Jesus

Silent Night (third stanza)

Trust and Obey



John the Baptist

John the Baptist was sent by God, so he might
(Hold palms together; lean palms to one side in a dunking motion.)

Tell everyone about Jesus, the Light.
(Broadly sweep arm from one side to the other; point up.)

John himself was not Light; he was the witness,
(Shake head back and forth; hold up right hand.)

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness.”
(Hold hands at sides of mouth.)

When you see a tree full of twinkling lights,
(Open and close hands for flashing lights.)

Remember the true Light is Jesus Christ.
(Point to temple; point up.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



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Promises Fulfilled Ornaments, Week Four

Cut out colored construction paper in the shape of a Christmas ornament. Give each student a pair of preprinted verses, one with a prophecy and one with its fulfillment. The following are suggested verses:

The Lord’s messenger—Malachi 3:1 with Luke 7:24, 27

Prepare the way for Jesus—Luke 1:17 with Luke 1:76–77

Instruct the students to glue a verse on each side of their ornaments. Then supply the class with glitter, glue, stickers, and markers or crayons, and have them decorate the ornaments. Finally, punch holes in the tops of the ornaments, and tie ribbons through the holes for hanging.



“Nothing Is Impossible with God”

On a piece of construction paper, glue a picture of Mary on the right side of the page and a picture of Zacharias on the left side of the page. At the top of the page, glue the picture of Gabriel. These pictures are found at the back of the lesson. Glue the title “Nothing Is Too Hard for God” to the page. As the students talk about what happened in the Bible lesson, talk about the good news that Gabriel brought from heaven. Gabriel told Zacharias and Mary not to be afraid, because God had special students for them. John would be a great prophet, and Jesus would be the Holy One, the Savior whom God had been promising. At first, Zacharias was not sure whether Gabriel was telling the truth about God’s power, so God would not let him speak until after the baby was born. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph



trusted God to do what He said. They wanted to serve God however they could. When we believe God's Word and trust Him, we are not afraid either. We know that nothing is too hard for God.

Let Your Fingers Do the Talking

Tell the students that their lips have been buttoned shut, just as Zacharias's were, but that they can still communicate by using their hands. Have them say the following words or phrases using just their hands.

Hello! (Wave)

Great job! (High five or thumbs up)

Stop! (Hand up, palm facing front)

Come here! (Beckon with index finger)

Quiet! (Finger in front of lips)

Goodbye! (Wave)

You can also have the students quietly imitate animals, such as bunnies or kittens. Reinforce the fact that Zacharias did not believe God's promise to him at first. We should believe and obey God's Word the first time we hear it.



Pin the Blanket on the Baby

Play this version of Pin the Tail on the Donkey this week or next week to remember the births of John and Jesus. Attach a large square of felt to a wall. Use a permanent marker to draw a baby on the felt, or cut out a baby pattern from felt and attach it to the felt square. Give each student a piece of felt (a "blanket") to cover the baby. Attach a piece of masking tape to the edge of each felt piece. Blindfold the students one at a time, and have them try to cover the baby with their blankets. The other students may offer directions to help the blindfolded child find and cover the baby. After each student has a turn, all the students can say the memory verse together.



John the Baptist Is Born

Materials: colored construction paper, scissors, and glue

Directions: Give each student a piece of colored construction paper and a copy of the craft sheet at the back of this lesson. Instruct students to cut out "JOHN" and glue the letters to the center of the construction paper (landscape). Cut out the remaining picture and Bible verse to decorate the construction paper.

Coloring Sheets

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.



MEMORY VERSE

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23).

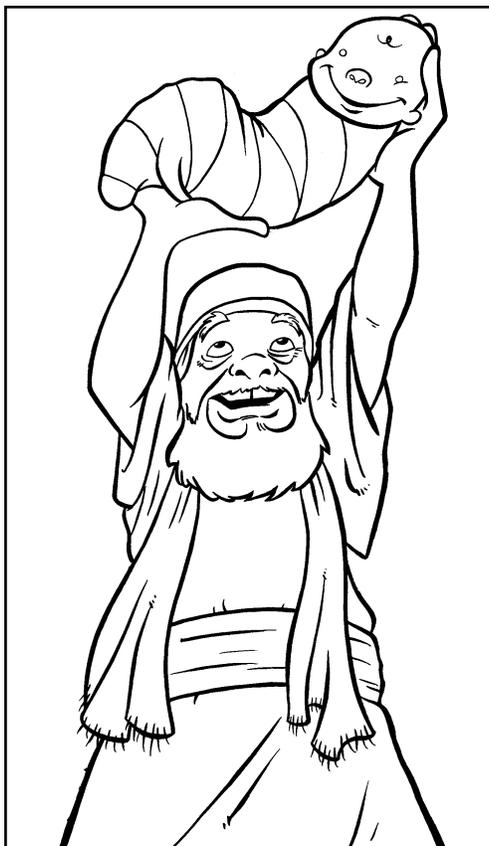
Nothing Is Impossible with God



Mary



Gabriel



Zacharias

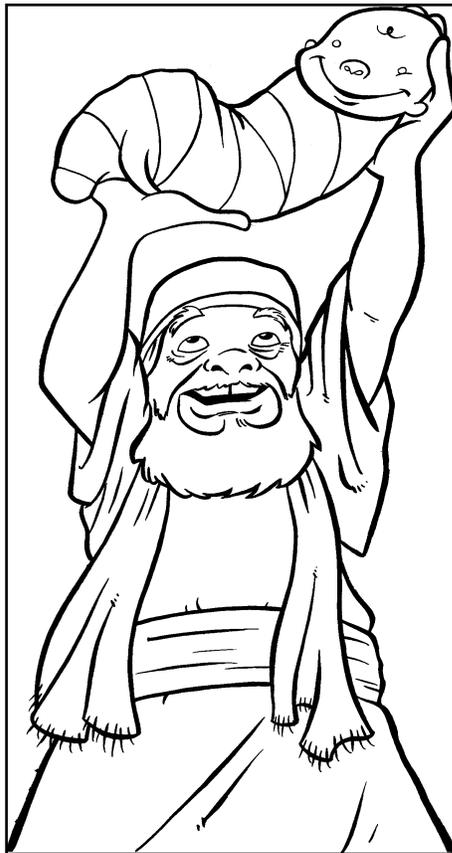
John the Baptist Is Born

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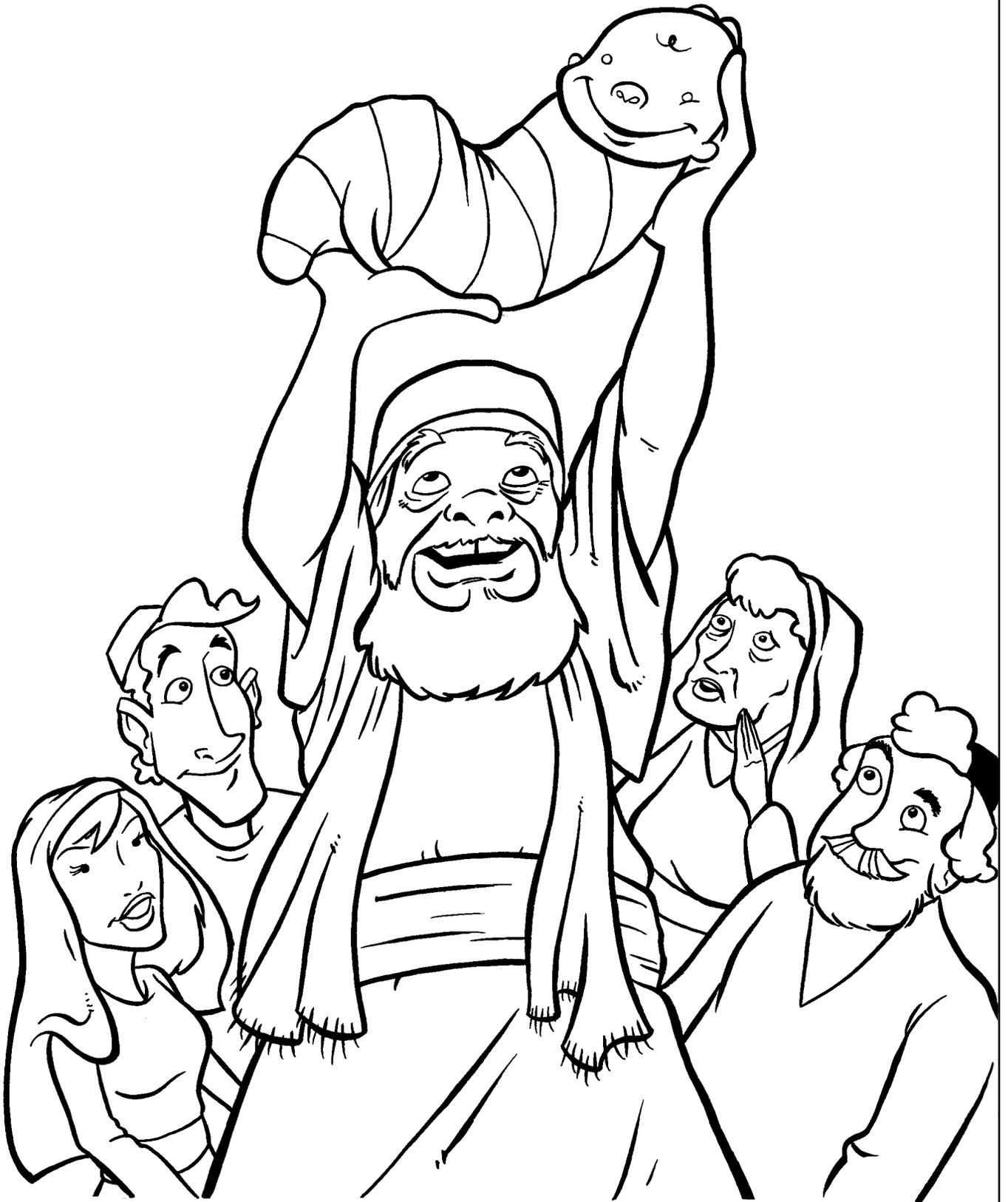
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“And he [Zacharias] asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, ‘His name is John.’ So they all marveled” (Luke 1:63).



Zacharias said, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the LORD to prepare His ways" (Luke 1:76).



“Then an angel of the LORD appeared to Zacharias...[and] said to [him], “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John” (Luke 1:11–13).

