

John the Baptist: Preparing the Way

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“He must become greater; I must become less” (JOHN 3:30, NIV).

Read Luke 1:5-25, 57-80.

List five unusual things related to John’s birth:

- Luke 1:7 _____
- Luke 1:11-13 _____
- Luke 1:21-22 _____
- Luke 1:59-64 _____
- Luke 1:67 _____

What five things did the angel foretell about John?

- Verse 14 _____
- Verse 15 _____ and _____
- Verse 16 _____
- Verse 17 _____

How did the neighbors respond when John was born? (v. 66) _____

When Zechariah prophesied at John’s birth, about whom was he talking? (Luke 1:68-75) _____

To whom was he speaking in verses 76-77? _____

John’s birth was an incredible event. It had been hundreds of years since there had been a prophet in Israel. The Jewish nation was hungry for the Messiah to free them from the iron rule of Rome. The Scriptures said that Elijah, the great prophet who had disappeared into heaven in a chariot of fire, must first come back to usher in the messianic kingdom. Could this baby be the one that would prepare the way for the Messiah? Was he the Messiah? John’s birth had been foretold by prophets and was promised by an angel to his father serving as priest in the Temple Holy Place.

When the miracle boy was 8 days old, everything the angel foretold was accomplished. His mute father named him “John.” Then the old priest, now a new father, was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy incredible words (his first words in a year) over his newborn son. News spread like wildfire throughout the country. What was God going to do through this baby? And when?

Instead of the city life of Jerusalem, the robes of a priest or a rabbi, and the power and position that he could have inherited, he chose to live in the desert. He looked, dressed, ate, talked and even smelled like Elijah! Both Roman and Jewish leaders must have watched this guy carefully to see what he was up to and how he might challenge their establishments.

Read Matthew 3:1-15; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-20; and John 1:6-9, 19-39.

All four of the Gospel writers carefully described John and his message. Write a concise but complete description of John combining the details presented in all four passages.

Who came out to hear John’s message and how did they respond? (*Mark 1:5*) _____

What was John’s message to the Pharisees and Sadducees? (*Matthew 3:7-10*) _____

What was his message to soldiers, tax collectors and ordinary citizens? (*Luke 3:10-14*) _____

What was his message to Herod? (*Luke 3:19*) _____

What did John say about himself? (*John 1:19-27*) _____

What did he say about Jesus? (*John 1:29-30*) _____

John is a unique character in the Bible—the human link between the Old and New Testaments. His mission was simple: Prepare Israel for the Messiah. He preached repentance and announced Jesus as the Lamb of God and Savior of the world. He spiritually awakened the entire nation as huge crowds went out to the middle of nowhere to camp out, listen to the prophet and respond to his call to righteous living. He was a phenomenal revival preacher and a living legend.

What was John’s attitude toward Jesus? (*John 1:24-27, Matthew 3:13-14*)

What was Jesus’ attitude toward John? (*Matthew 11:7-15*)

What effect did Jesus have on John’s followers? (*John 1:35-42*)

What did John mean when he said, “*He must become greater; I must become less*”? (*John 3:30*)

John the Baptist understood his mission—pointing people toward Jesus. He wasn’t distracted by his own popularity or impressed by his own credentials. And he never allowed others to make him into something God didn’t want him to be. John didn’t hold on to what belonged to his Master. His focus was on Jesus. Even when he languished in jail wondering why Jesus was not filling the role everyone expected of the Messiah, he sent his questions to Jesus and continued trusting Him (*Matthew 11:1-6*).

Matthew 14:3-12 and Mark 6:17-29 tell the story of John’s demise. (Charles Spurgeon once joked that John was the first Baptist preacher who lost his head over dancing.) Faithfully and unselfishly pointing people to Jesus does not always lead to happiness and happy endings in real life. But it always brings glory to God and exalts the worthy Lamb of God.