

PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE KING Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **Matthew 3:1-2**

Additional texts: Luke 1 & Isaiah 40

I. The Ministry of John the Baptist

II. The Message of John the Baptist

Getting to Know You

1. What is the strangest food you have ever eaten?

Into the Bible

2. The comparison between John the Baptist and Elijah is a theme that will come back two more times in Matthew. The story of Elijah is one of the longest narratives in the Old Testament: 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2. Focus on chapters 17-19 and skim through the story for the highlights. List some of the ways that Elijah and John were similar, both in lifestyle and message. Discuss with your group how those similarities are related to the similar situations that God placed them in.

3. Matthew 3:11-12 and the parallel passage in Luke 3:17 declare the Messiah's baptism to be with water, fire, and the Spirit. Water, as John's baptism indicates, is linked biblically to repentance and cleansing. Read Malachi 3:1-6. What are the two divine uses of fire that might be linked to the baptism practiced by the Messiah? What are some of the sins of the scribes and Pharisees that John and Jesus confront in this fiery baptism?

Application

4. John's message involves preaching that "the kingdom of heaven" is at hand. How does life in a kingdom differ from our life in a democratic republic—the U.S.? What significance does this have for our lives as Christians when we respond to authority? Where does the king get his authority from?

5. Look back at the list of sins that you made in question 3. Now look into your own life honestly. How often do you think and act like a Pharisee or scribe? Spoiler alert: remember that in chapter 5 Jesus is going to say that the thought is just as wrong as the action.

For Families

6. Explore with your children what true repentance looks like. How is it different from just saying, "I'm sorry."?