

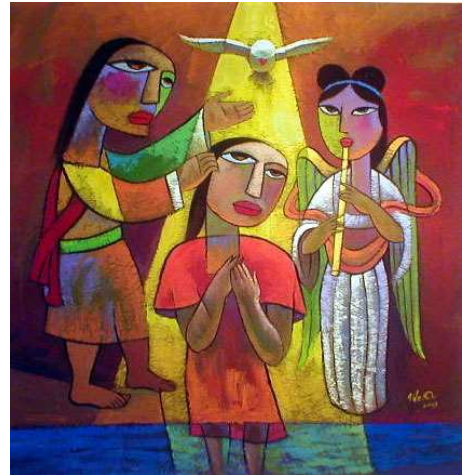
## John the Baptist

*John spoke about him and shouted, "This is the one I told you would come! He is greater than I am, because he was alive before I was born." Because of all that the Son is, we have been given one blessing after another. The Law was given by Moses, but Jesus Christ brought us undeserved kindness and truth. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is truly God and is closest to the Father, has shown us what God is like.*

*The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and temple helpers to ask John who he was. He told them plainly, "I am not the Messiah." Then when they asked him if he were Elijah, he said, "No, I am not!" And when they asked if he were the Prophet, he also said "No!" Finally, they said, "Who are you then? We have to give an answer to the ones who sent us. Tell us who you are!" John answered in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I am only someone shouting in the desert, 'Get the road ready for the Lord!' "*

*Some Pharisees had also been sent to John. They asked him, "Why are you baptizing people, if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?" John told them, "I use water to baptize people. But here with you is someone you don't know. Even though I came first, I am not good enough to untie his sandals." John said this as he was baptizing east of the Jordan River in Bethany.*

*The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said: 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I told you about when I said, "Someone else will come. He is greater than I am, because he was alive before I was born." I didn't know who he was. But I came to baptize you with water, so that everyone in Israel would see him. I was there and saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven. And the Spirit stayed on him. Before this I didn't know who he was. But the one who sent me to baptize with water had told me, "You will see the Spirit come down and stay on someone. Then you will know that he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I saw this happen, and I tell you that he is the Son of God'.*



John 1: 15-35

Have you ever walked into someone's house and wiped your feet? It is even the appropriate custom in many homes to remove shoes and a sign of courtesy. You honor your host by respecting their customs. Your act of respect enables you to be a worthy guest in their home.

## **Background**

John the Baptist was a prophet. Israel had not seen a prophet in some four hundred years. John arrived proclaiming God's message. The role of prophets is often misunderstood. Prophets did not place a heavy emphasis on predicting the future. They were primarily people who spoke God's message openly to others. The word "prophet" is used 300 times in the Old Testament. These were people "who announced" God's message.

John was God's messenger. He was concerned about preparation. He led a very disciplined life. From birth he was dedicated to be God's special servant. We discover from the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah that he was probably a "Nazarite". These were people who made a special commitment of spiritual discipline. Samson, the prophet Samuel, and the Apostle Paul all made Nazarite vows.

The "vow of the Nazarite" is described in Numbers 6:1-27. It was a voluntary pledge by which people were consecrated to the Lord. During this time of separation, the Nazarite was bound by three absolute restrictions;

1. They could not consume anything derived from the grapevine including all alcohol (v. 4).
2. No razor could be used on their head. Their hair grew long (v. 5).
3. They could not go near a dead body. They even avoided family funerals (v. 6-8).

John was a character bigger than life itself. He wore clothes of camel skin and leather. His diet was locusts and wild honey. He lived off the land and was not given to fickle fashions. On the banks of the Jordan River he spoke with a booming voice and taught repentance (which means a complete change "of heart" or "life direction").

John the Baptist's ministry prepared the way of the Lord. He summoned everyone to a life of righteousness. His emphasis was celebrating the positive moral standards of God. He condemned the wrongdoers and challenged them to follow a higher standard, a closer walk with God. John sought to cleanse the nation.

John also shared the special gift of baptism, a traditional Hebrew ceremony for the cleansing of sins. This baptism enabled people to have a right relationship with God and others. John's baptism by water also helped prepare people for the Savior's spiritual baptism.

The Gospels make it clear that John was not the messiah or the light of the world. He was a witness to the light. John stated, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals" (Matt 3: 11). This statement is an indication of just how great John considered Jesus to be.

King Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, later imprisoned John for criticizing his scandalous marriage to his brother's ex-wife. John's actions were compared to Elijah's courage when he condemned King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's corruption. Neither prophet was frightened of the mighty rulers of their day. Herod's wife, Herodias, was offended by John and plotted revenge against him. She encouraged her very own daughter to seduce (her husband) Herod with a sensual dance to obtain a deadly promise. John was executed. Jesus remarked, "I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28).

## **Reflections**

John teaches us the importance of setting priorities in our lives. God warns us not to get too attached to the ways of the world. This world is not our home. We are only here for a short time and should use that time for accomplishing God's will and preparing ourselves to spend an eternity with God.

John also teaches us the importance of spiritual separation. We don't all have to move to the desert to make appropriate choices in our lives. John understood that success in God's kingdom is different from the ways of the world. At times we need to distance ourselves from those things that would separate us from God.

God's faithful can make decisions to insure a safe sanctuary (a separate holy space) for themselves and their loved ones. We can make the right choices in our lives concerning friends, activities, music, movies, television, and other forms of entertainment. What would Jesus do?

We can be selective about our food and drink. John ate healthy food and cut himself off from those things in his life he considered a temptation. Certain things can be a like a poison to our bodies. We are a special gift from God. We should protect and care for our bodies, minds, and spirits.

A divine irony about the ministry of John the Baptist was that in spite of teaching us about the benefits of separating ourselves from the ways of the world, he shared with us that special gift that binds us together. Baptism is that special event by which we are cleansed and united with others. We become brothers and sisters together as the family of God.

God calls us into community to share communion's common cup and to communicate the gospel of Christ with all God's children.

### **Strength Finders talent: Belief**

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252170/belief-theme.aspx>

Individuals with this talent are known for their reliable core values. Belief is sometimes understood as "having faith". They are not the same. Faith can inform your decisions, but it is "belief" that motivates a person to do something about it. Belief is part of the executing domain. This strength enables us to do than talk the talk; in results in walking the walk.

It is often the case that this person will be consistently family oriented, spiritual, takes responsibility is dedicated to an ethical life. John demonstrated these attributes in all that he said and did. He helped to show many a better way. He challenged those who exhibited hypocrisy or immoral behavior. John even put himself in danger when he openly criticized a corrupt national leader.

This talent must be exercised with a generous heart. There is something very powerful when a person that shares benevolent belief can be a true inspiration to others. Many of our historical heroes exhibited these same attributes.

Many declared that John was the promised messiah. He humbly acknowledged Jesus as the true savior. He said he

## **Enneagram connections: Six**

Sixes are very intelligent and always alert. They protect themselves and others. They are particularly loyal to family, faith, and community. They are also known for "contrarian thinking"; they do not automatically accept authority; they are skilled at finding inconsistencies or problems with "new" solutions from others.

John saw the "new" ways that religious leaders of his day were changing their values and beliefs to accommodate others (the Romans). John knew it was wrong. He moved to the wilderness to find clarity and purity. Sometimes we need to "get away" from it all to find a place of peace to contemplate and see the big picture. A healthy six will cease surrendering power and authority onto others and own it more themselves. A healthy six has courage.

Sixes can sometimes be quick to doubt. John proclaimed that Jesus was the "Christ" (*messiah, savior*) but he later had doubts while he was imprisoned by King Herod (Herod the Great's weak son). This was a time when he needed to find "trust". Jesus comforted John by reminding him to pay attention to his actions; *"And Jesus answered, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them". Luke 7:22.*

The virtue of a healthy six is courage. John had the courage to set a new course for his life when he sought out the wilderness. He had courage when he preached of repentance. He had courage when he spoke out against the immorality of the Israel's corrupt leader.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-six>

## **JOHN THE BAPTIST**

*Repent! repent! repent!  
For the kingdom of God is at hand,  
And all the land  
Full of the knowledge of the Lord shall be  
As the waters cover the sea,  
And encircle the continent!*

*Repent! repent! repent!  
For lo, the hour appointed,  
The hour so long foretold  
By the Prophets of old,  
Of the coming of the Anointed,  
The Messiah, the Paraclete,  
The Desire of the Nations, is nigh!  
He shall not strive nor cry,  
Nor his voice be heard in the street;  
Nor the bruised reed shall He break,  
Nor quench the smoking flax;  
And many of them that sleep  
In the dust of earth shall awake,  
On that great and terrible day,  
And the wicked shall wail and weep,  
And be blown like a smoke away,  
And be melted away like wax.  
Repent! repent! repent!*

*O Priest, and Pharisee,  
Who hath warned you to flee  
From the wrath that is to be?  
From the coming anguish and ire?  
The axe is laid at the root  
Of the trees, and every tree  
That bringeth not forth good fruit  
Is hewn down and cast into the fire!*

*Ye Scribes, why come ye hither?  
In the hour that is uncertain,  
In the day of anguish and trouble,*

*He that stretcheth the heavens as a curtain  
And spreadeth them out as a tent,  
Shall blow upon you, and ye shall wither,  
And the whirlwind shall take you away as stubble!  
Repent! repent! repent!*

CHRISTUS: A MYSTERY, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1872

**Subtitle: “Life is a Temporary Assignment”**

*Read: John 1: 6-34*

### **Questions**

1. Charles Coffin wrote this famous hymn. He was denied a Christian burial due to a human disagreement about “God’s grace”. Why do some religious people think they know everything? How can we prepare to hear Christ’s message?

On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry. Announces that the Lord is nigh;  
Come, then, and hearken, for he brings. Glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every breast from sin; Make straight the way for God within;

Prepare we in our hearts a home. Where such a mighty Guest may come. (1736)

2. What does your Baptism mean to you? How is Baptism both an event and a way of living?

3. John showed great courage. How do we reveal the courage of our convictions? How do we speak out in our words and our deeds? Is anyone listening?