

**SOC Adult Sunday School  
Matthew (2007-2008)**

**Lesson 4 – Matthew 3:1-12  
John the Baptist: Herald of Good News**

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**Text: Matthew 3:1-6**

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" 4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

**The Bible tells us that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. The apostle John reports that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the "parakletos" (counselor, comforter, helper alongside). Accordingly, JTB was equipped of God to be a help to his people, an example, and a counselor (some for comfort and some for rebuke). Paul (2 Cor 1:3-4) praises "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (*paraklesis*), who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."**

**Along with Matthew 3:1-4, read Luke 1:11-17, 76-80.**

**What helps, comforts, and encouragements did John the Baptist receive from God and pass along to others through his ministry? [e.g., from parents, scripture, etc.]**

**What helps, comforts, and encouragements have you received from God? How are you passing these along to others in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?**

**John was "in the wilderness of Judea." He dressed unusually. He ate unusual food. How could these distinctive things have helped people receive John's call ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.")? How could they have hindered?**

**Text: Matthew 3:7-10**

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

**In Luke 3:7-9, John's challenge is identical but is addressed to "the crowds that came out to be baptized". Robertson says that "coming to his baptism" in verse 7 is "coming for baptism." How would you relate being a "viper under God's wrath" to the need to confess oneself "a sinner in need of God's grace."**

**In verse 8, John the Baptist calls for all to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Apply each of the following passages from Luke 3 to present day opportunities to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance."**

Luke 3:10-11 And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" 11 And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."

Luke 3:12-13 Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."

Luke 3:14 Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

**Compare Matthew 3:9-10 to John 1:12-13. What category of false hope from John 1:13 does John the Baptist speak of here?**

**Text: Matthew 3:11-12**

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

**Together with Matthew 3:11-12, read Acts 18:24-26 and Acts 19:1-5.**

**From all these verses, it is clear that "John's baptism" and the "baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire" that Jesus would perform are not equivalent. How would you describe the relationship between repentance and salvation?**

**Before Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, almost all Jews had wrong expectations of what the coming Messiah would do. They expected a King to restore Israel's national preeminence, not a Suffering Servant to bear and atone for sin. Today, we await Jesus' second coming, when he will not again bear sin, but will come in his glory as King. How well prepared do you think God's people are today for this second coming? What elements of popular American culture make this preparation difficult?**