



PREPARING

THE WAY
FOR
JESUS



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THE time had come when the people of Israel were to have a more wonderful experience than ever before. As I have already told you, the Israelites were the family of Abraham. God promised Abraham that one of his family was to be a great king who would rule over all the earth. Jesus was this great One whom God had promised to Abraham, and the time had come when Jesus was to make himself known to the people of Israel.

How grand that was! Hundreds and hundreds of years had gone by, and now one of God's wonderful promises was coming true!

God knew, though, that the people of Israel would not be ready for this promise to come. Many of them had almost forgotten about God, and they no longer did what God wanted them to do. Well, they needed help, didn't they? They needed to be told about God, and the things that God wanted them to do. So there had to be someone

to do this. And who do you suppose it was? Why, it was a man by the name of John.

That's a good name, and easy to pronounce, too.

John was six months older than Jesus. The Bible tells us that God's Spirit was upon John. That means that God's power was upon him. When the Bible tells about God's Spirit, it means God's power. Do you think you can remember that? Because God's power was upon John he was able to be a wonderful worker for God; and the work God gave him to do was to tell the people of Israel that they were not doing right, and that they should remember God and do what God wanted them to do.

Those who believed John and were sorry for all the wrong things they had done, and who said that they wanted to love God again and do what he wanted them to do, were baptized in the river Jordan. I suppose you want to know what it means to be baptized. Why that means to be lowered down into the water until you are entirely covered, and then to be raised up out of it again. John thus baptized all the Israelites who said they were sorry for their wrongdoing. It was as if he washed away their sins.

Wrongdoing is sin.

Of course, the water did not really wash away their sins, because sins are not something on the outside of us that can be washed away with water. To be baptized in water was like a picture, or sign, of washing away sin. That is what John was doing for all the Israelites who asked to be baptized. Because of this work he was called John the Baptist.

John didn't do this work in the cities, but went out into the country. The Bible says it was a wilderness. John went out into the wilderness, and a great many people followed him because they wanted to hear what God told him to say.

I hope you have read my story, "Crossing the River Jordan." If you did, you know something about the river Jordan. Well, the river Jordan went right through the wilderness near the place where John the Baptist was preaching, and it was in this river that he baptized all those who were sorry they had done wrong.

After John had been telling the people for several months what God wanted him to tell them, Jesus came out from the city to the wilderness one day, and met John by the edge of the river. Jesus asked John to baptize him, but John didn't want to do it. John knew very well that Jesus had always done what God wanted him to do. The only ones John was baptizing were those who had not done what God wanted them to do. So you can see why John didn't want to baptize Jesus, can't you?

But Jesus told John that it would be all right to baptize him. Jesus knew more about it than John did, and he knew that there was another reason some should be baptized in water other than showing that they were sorry for their sins. Sometime I'll tell you about that other reason.

And then something wonderful occurred.

As Jesus came up out of the water, John saw a beautiful dove come down from the sky and it perched right on Jesus' head. John understood this to mean that God's Spirit had come upon Jesus. Then, as they were both standing there, they heard a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was the voice of God!

One of God's angels had told about the birth of Jesus. God had protected him from being killed by the wicked King Herod. Now it was time for him to start doing the work God wanted him to do, and God's power came upon him so he would be able to do that work in the way God wanted him to do it.

QUESTIONS

- What was the name of Jesus' cousin, and what work did God give him to do?
- Where did Jesus' cousin do his work, and why did Jesus go to him?
- How did John know that God's Spirit, or power, had come upon Jesus?