



John the Baptist's Story



(John is seated under a tree beside the River Jordan. He is relaxed, reflective.)

Now the day ends.
Now the poor retreat
to the safety of their
squalid shelters, and

the snakes slither back to their dens. Day after day they come out to me—the pathetic and curious, the furious and frenzied. They are drawn out from the corners of their unhappy lives. Drawn by a spirit of longing they can vaguely remember, but cannot name. Drawn to the prospect of a life worth living. Drawn into the water that washes clean. In the moment they rise up from the water and gasp for breath, I watch their eyes.

There are those whose eyes are clouded still. Their desperate lives have been so crippled by poverty, their families dismembered by violence, that their lives have already left their bodies.

There are eyes that flash with terror. They try to conceal who they really are, what they have done, as if the sacred cannot see what is done in secret.

There are those who rise up from the water with eyes open wide, filled with suddenly remembered memories, memories of who they used to be. Out here, long ago, these people were shaped by the wilderness and defined by life-giving covenant. Out here, they remember and they repent.

There are those with cold, snake-like eyes—the look of treachery and betrayal. Shedding their skin will never be enough. Only those whose hearts are truly open and ready, only those who turn and walk in the way of love and justice can enter the kin-dom of God.

And then there were *those* eyes—unlike any I've ever seen. As he came up out of the Jordan and his eyes met mine, I saw something I have never seen before—hope. Here at last was evidence of the love that can transform life and bestow true joy. Here at last was the hope that empowers you to be fearless.

I may baptize with water and words, but the one whose love is fearless will baptize with spirit and fire!

Unwrapping John the Baptist's Story

Help to prepare the way of the Lord.

ACTIVITY 1: Prepare the Way!

Ages

All ages

Supplies

Encourage each family to bring a special item, story, or treat that reflects their heritage or cultural background and is usually included in their preparations for Christmas; have available *Gifts with Vision* catalogues (www.giftswithvision.ca).

Activity

- Gather together for a Preparation Party and share the items that families have brought.
- Then discuss how John invited people to prepare by providing clothing and food to those in need, and by acting to stop cheating and bullying. Invite people to share contemporary examples of action for social justice, especially in your area.
- Review the UCC's *Gifts with Vision* catalogue (or online at www.giftswithvision.ca). As a community, choose to support an action that reflects John's invitation to prepare.

ACTIVITY 2: Prepare with Food**Ages**

All ages (adult supervision is needed)

Supplies

Oven and frying pan; ingredients for “Bugs ‘n’ Honey” (at right)

Discuss

The Bible tells how John the Baptist survived in the wilderness on a diet of locusts and honey.

Activity

a Explore **entomophagy**, the consumption of insects. Thousands of people eat insects every day. Insects have lower levels of fat and higher levels of protein than beef. Plus, it takes 16 pounds of grain and thousands of gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. If we raised insects instead of cattle, we could cut greenhouse gas emissions between 20 and 60 percent. Discover more, e.g., read “U.N. Urges Eating Insects; 8 Popular Bugs to Try” (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130514-edible-insects-entomophagy-science-food-bugs-beetles/>).

b Bugs ‘n’ Honey**Ingredients**

¼ cup Butter
1 cup Freeze-dried crickets
pinch Salt
1 tsp. Aleppo pepper
2 Tbs. Honey

Method

Heat oven to 200°F.

In a frying pan, melt the butter over a medium heat.

Add the insects and sprinkle salt on top. Stir until the crickets are well coated with butter (about 10 minutes).

Thoroughly mix the pepper into the honey.

When the crickets appear crispy (like bacon), drizzle the peppered honey over them and stir a little more.

Spread them on a lined baking sheet and bake for around 10 minutes.

The crickets should be crunchy, but not too gooey.

ACTIVITY 3: Prepare with Music

Ages

All ages (especially 10+)

Supplies

Sheet music; instruments; rehearsal time; hymn books

Activity

a In Luke 3:3–6, John is in the wilderness using the words of the prophet Isaiah to warn the people to turn from their wrongdoing and to prepare the way of love and justice. The musical *Godspell* sets these words to music in a short, easy-to-learn song that provides a wonderful way to call people to worship during Advent.

On YouTube: “Prepare Ye The Way Of the Lord (Godspell) - Hallelujah Broadway” (<https://youtu.be/qzLrs3eKbXk>)

On YouTube: “GODSPELL (Broadway) - Medley [LIVE @ Letterman]” (https://youtu.be/L52Z_Ybg8yQ)

On YouTube “Godspell Flash Mob in Times Square – Official Video” (<https://youtu.be/AgQOivT42yg>)

b “There’s a Voice in the Wilderness Crying” (*Voices United* 18, *The Hymnary* 244) was written by James Lewis Milligan for the inauguration of The United Church of Canada in 1925. Milligan was a lay preacher in the Methodist Church and from 1922 to 1925 he handled public relations for the three denominations (Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational) as they prepared to amalgamate into The United Church of Canada. He was a one-hit wonder as this was the only hymn he wrote. It is a paraphrase of Isaiah’s (and John’s) words, and Milligan hoped it would express the stated goals of the new denomination.

- What do you think? How do these prophetic lyrics relate to the life and witness of The United Church of Canada or your community of faith?
- What is your favourite song based on John the Baptist’s story? Why?

c Write a theme song for John the Baptist. It might be rock or rap; it might be serious or silly! Share it on social media using hashtags #UCCan #AdventUnwrapped.

ACTIVITY 4: John the Superhero**Ages**

All ages (especially 7+)

Supplies

Storyboards; pens and paper

Activity

a If John had a superpower, what would it be? Create a comic strip based on the story of John the Baptist. There are websites that provide templates for comic strips, e.g., “Comic Pages – Printable Paper” (www.printablepaper.net/category/comics) and “DonnaYoung.org Printables and Resources – Printable Comic Strip Layouts” (www.donnayoung.org/art/comics.htm).

b Share your comic strip on social media using hashtags #UCCan #AdventUnwrapped.

ACTIVITY 5: John the Prophet**Ages**

All ages (especially 12+)

Supplies

John the Baptist is considered an important prophet in many religions, including Islam. In the Quran, he is mentioned as one of the 25 Prophets. Ahead of time, do some research and bring the materials for the group to share, including the United Church resource *That We Might Know Each Other*.

Activity

Plan an Advent gathering for Christian and Muslim neighbours, inviting community leaders to share the story of John the Baptist from their various perspectives.

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