



## On your marks

It's no accident that we begin each new year by reminding ourselves of the story of Jesus being baptised in the River Jordan. This was the beginning of his ministry and the moment when he is assured that God is pleased with him, even before he tells his first parable, heals the first leper or goes to the cross. Everything starts and is grounded in the knowledge that God loves him first and foremost. And this is true for us too. This storytelling idea could be used in a Messy Church celebration, within an all-age worship service or with a children's group at the beginning of the year or a term.

## Get set

You will need:

- a long flowing piece of blue fabric - to represent the River Jordan

You can find the story in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22.

## Go!

### A way to tell the story

Today's story is a noisy story...

Today's story is a mysterious story...

Today's story is an amazing story...

Today's story involves lots of water...

*Produce the long piece of blue fabric and stretch it out with some help. Let it rise and fall several times and encourage everyone to join in with a 'splash' sound each time.*

Today's story also involves a beautiful bird, hovering and fluttering: a dove flying down from high in the sky...

*Invite everyone to make a bird shape with two hands and join in with a 'coo coo' sound effect.*

Today's story also involves a voice - but not just any voice: the voice of God - the voice that can change everything...

*Invite everyone to exclaim a long, loud 'wow'.*

Are you ready for today's story? For the noise? For the mystery? And for the amazing voice?



In the beginning of this story there was a baby named Jesus – and Mary was chosen to be his mother. Mary was chosen to become the mother of God! Did you hear that? Mary was chosen to become the mother of God!

Mary rocked the baby, kept the baby warm and gave the baby everything it needed to grow. And the baby grew.

*Rock an imaginary baby in your arms as you tell this part of the story.*

The baby became a child... the child became a teenager... and the teenager became a man.

When Jesus was about 30 years old, he went down to the waterside where there were lots of people...

*Invite another rise and fall of the fabric and a 'splash'.*

... including his cousin John, who was a noisy, wild man. Listen to him shouting:

CHANGE YOUR WAYS. GET READY FOR THE KING.  
CHANGE YOUR WAYS. GET READY FOR THE KING.

*Invite everyone to pick up this chorus and shout it out loudly a few times.*

A lot of people were going into the river to be splashed with water as a sign of making a new beginning. It was a way of saying they wanted to change their ways and get ready for the king. They were being 'baptised' in the river by John. And there was a lot of splashing...

*Invite more rising and falling of the fabric and 'splashing'.*

Then Jesus went up to his cousin John and said: 'Splash me with water too. Baptise me.'

John looked at Jesus and said: 'I can't baptise you. You are the new beginning. You are already clean. You are the one come from God, sent to rescue everyone and put everything right. You should be baptising me.'

'No', said Jesus. 'You come first. Baptise me.'

And so John took Jesus into the water to be baptised. And it was the biggest splash ever!

*Lift the fabric high and then count down: 3... 2... 1...SPLASH.*

The splash was so big that it was as if the splash wasn't just for Jesus but for everybody in the whole wide world.

When the noise of the splash had died down, everyone could see a bird fluttering down from heaven – a dove hovering above Jesus.



*Invite everyone again to make a bird shape with two hands and join in with a 'coo coo' sound effect.*

Then everyone heard a voice that said: 'This is my son. I love him and I am pleased with him.' (*Cup your hands around your mouth to give an echoing quality to these words.*)

And the crowds went 'wow'.

*Invite everyone to join in with the 'wow' each time.*

And John went 'wow'.

And everyone who heard this story went 'wow'.

And we all went 'wow'.

Why? It was because this biggest splash ever wasn't just for Jesus... and the mysterious words weren't just for Jesus either.

It was God saying to every single person in the world: 'You are my child. I love you. And I am pleased with you.'

Does this mean we don't have to do something spectacular to earn God's love?

Does this mean we don't have to be rich for God to love us?

Does this mean we don't have to be clever to be loved by God? Or be super famous? Or be especially talented?

YES... GOD LOVES US JUST AS WE ARE.

Jesus made the biggest splash ever for everyone, so we can all hear God's voice and know just how much God loves each one of us.

This was the biggest splash ever.

This was the most mysterious voice ever.

This is the best news ever.

God loves us just as we are and that is the most important beginning for everyone, everywhere.

### **A prayer idea**

Invite everyone to suggest as many new beginnings that the next few days or weeks might bring for them. For example: starting school, starting a job, starting a new piece of work, starting a new project, starting a new diary, starting a new friendship and so on.

Now take each of the suggestions in turn and invite everyone to remember the fact that God loves them even before the beginning of each of these new things.



Perhaps you could look upwards to God, make a heart shape with your two index fingers and thumbs for love, and touch your heart for yourself. For example:

*Thank you that at the beginning of each new day - God loves me*

*Thank you that at the beginning of each new job to do - God loves me*

*Thank you that at the beginning of each new conversation - God loves me*