



On your marks

One person who certainly made a splash for God when he appeared in the Bible was John the Baptist! His special day is celebrated on 24 June. He was a second cousin to Jesus and God used him to get people ready for him. The Bible describes John as 'a voice crying in the wilderness'. He had certainly spent time in the desert before he began his work and wore some pretty strange clothes. You can read all about this in Luke 3:1-22. John's message was very simple: *Get right with God. Turn away from what you know is wrong (repent) and as a sign that you want to be different and start again be 'splashed' all over with water (baptised)*. John was certainly keen that people quite literally made a clean start!

Get set

For props you will need a blue sheet and something camel-coloured for John to wear and a simple drape for Jesus.

Go!

1 Gather the children in a circle but with a good clear space in the middle where the action will take place.

2 Introduce the story by laying across the circle a blue sheet folded into a long, thin strip. Lead in to the drama with the words - *'something strange was happening down by the river. Someone was shouting at the top of his voice.'*

3 Ask for someone to play the part of John - someone with a good shouting voice(!) and teach them this line *'Change your ways - get ready for the Rescuer'*. Practise this several times loudly and as each new piece of the drama is added, return to the character of John to hear this message shouted again.

4 *'All sorts of people heard that something strange was going on down by the river and so they all came to see for themselves.'*

You will now need five groups of people (of whatever numbers you can manage given the size of your group). Introduce each of these groups, one at the time, and make sure they each establish their actions and words before the following group is introduced. Don't forget in between each group to return to John to hear him shouting his message for everyone.

Group 1 - The Soldiers. These should march around the circle using the chant *'Left, right; left, right; do what we tell you'*.

Group 2 - The Tax collectors. They should creep around the circle using the chant *'Money from him, money from her; all the more for me'*.

Group 3 - Ordinary people. They should walk around the circle shaking their heads selfishly with the chant *'This is mine and not for you; I'll keep it for myself'*.



Group 4 - The Pharisees. This group should walk tall and proudly around the circle to the chant of *'We're God's chosen; so listen to us'*.

Group 5 - The King and his court. This group should stay in one place and keep their distance from John with the chant *'I'll do what I like: so go take a hike!'*.

The leader should introduce the arrival of each group punctuated by the shouting from John. Build this up so it becomes a real chorus of chants and shouting. Something very strange was going on by the river!

5 *John demanded that each group should change their ways.*

Ask the children left around the circle how they think each of the groups could change their ways. What might John have said to them? Perhaps it might have been something like 'Don't bully others'; 'Don't be greedy'; 'Don't be selfish etc.'. Ask the children to suggest what things John might have said.

6 *Some of the people did change their ways.*

To show this, take one or two from each of the groups up to John in turn and then they should bow down and be covered by the blue sheet for a short moment, while they are 'baptised' as a sign that they want to change and be different. John could say the words *'Be baptised and get ready for God's rescuer'*. Some from each of the groups should be baptised but the group around the King do not get involved. You might mention that the King was so angry with what John was saying about him that eventually he arrested John and put him into prison.

7 *While these baptisms were going on something else very strange happened. John's second cousin Jesus appeared (introduce someone playing the part of Jesus), who went right up to John who was standing in the water. He asked John to baptise him. John was shocked because he recognised that Jesus was God's rescuer - the one he was talking about. John told Jesus that he should be baptised by Jesus. But Jesus said that it should be the other way around for the moment.*

Jesus bends down and is covered by the blue sheet of water as he is 'baptised'. Describe to the children what was heard and seen when this happened. *There was a voice from heaven ('this is my beloved Son with whom I am pleased')* and also something like a dove came down above Jesus. You could emphasise this with some appropriate actions for the dove and cup your hands around your mouth to make a 'microphone' for God's words.

Jesus was indeed God's rescuer. He was very special. The people nearby saw this and began to follow Jesus rather than John. John had done his work.

8 *Christians sometimes say that they should be like John, helping others to come to Jesus and then stepping out the way so that Jesus then takes centre stage.* Ask the group what they think John felt as he baptised his second cousin. Ask them what the crowds might have made of the voice and the dove? And what John was thinking as he saw people now go off following Jesus and not him.

9 For another version of this story done as a poem see [The Gospels Unplugged](#) (page 24).

For further ideas for Saints' days in June see [Stories of Everyday Saints](#), where there are ideas for St Peter, St Paul and St Alban, whose special days all occur in the same month.