John the Baptist

In a temple in Jerusalem, there lived an old Jewish priest, Zechariah, who lived with his wife, Elizabeth. They had no children because of Elizabeth's age. This was thought to be disgraceful.

One day, Zechariah was in the temple praying when suddenly, the Angel Gabriel appeared to him. Zechariah was filled with fear but the angel said, "Do not be afraid. Your wife will have a son and you are to call him John. He will be a great man and lead many people to the Lord."

Because of his wife's age, Zechariah could not believe it. The angel explained that it would happen because he had been sent by God. However, because Zechariah had shown no faith, he would be mute and deaf until the child was born.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was one of Elizabeth's relatives and the two women were pregnant with their babies at the same time. Mary went to visit Elizabeth and the baby in Elizabeth's womb 'leapt with joy' when it heard Mary's voice.

When Elizabeth had given birth to her baby boy, the neighbours and relatives asked what she was going to call him. She replied, "John." They replied, "But no one in your family is called John. He should be named after his father."

Zechariah wrote on a wax tablet the words, 'His name is John.' Immediately, he was able to speak and hear again so he prayed to God to thank him.

twinkl.co.uk

John grew to be a strong and obedient man. He knew he had been born to be 'set apart for God' so he completely devoted his life to encouraging people to repent their sins and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. The word 'Messiah' means 'The Lord'. He wore a tunic of camel hair with a leather belt around his waist. Living alone in the desert wilderness of Judea, he ate only a diet of locusts and wild honey.

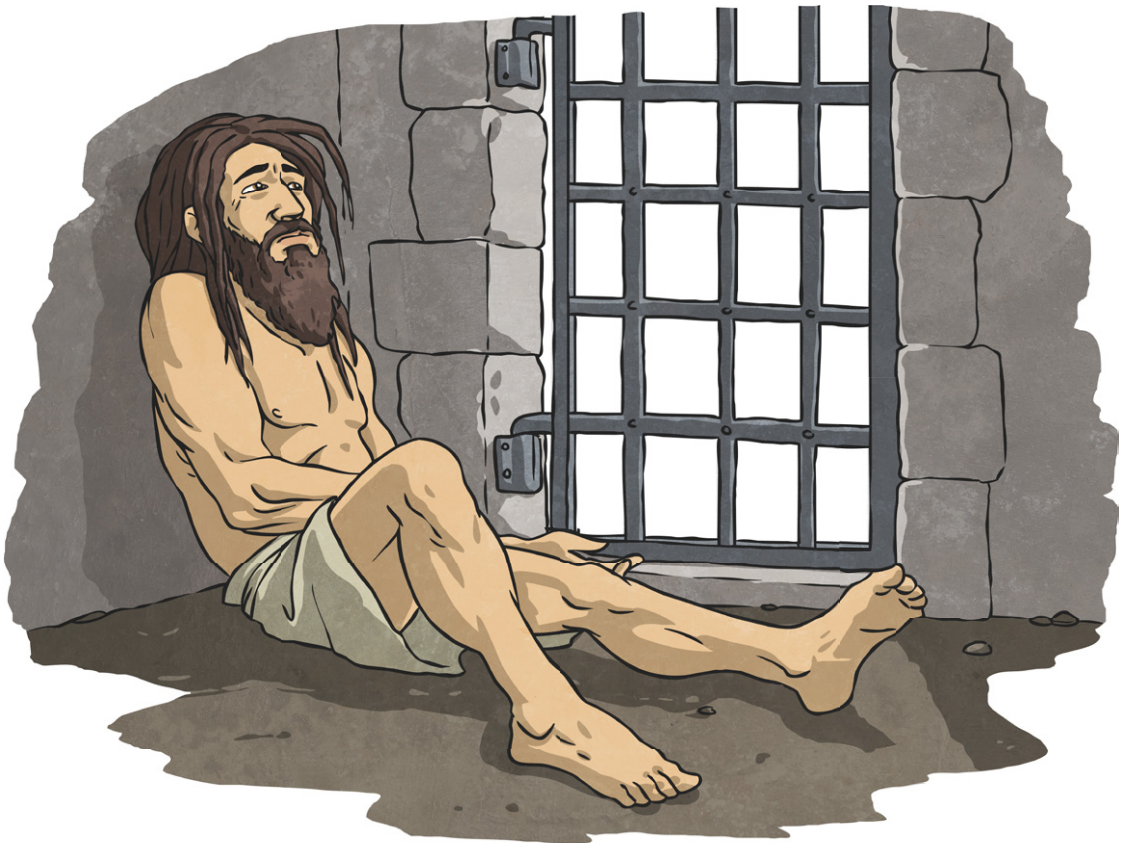
John was not afraid to say what he thought. He had a voice of authority when he spoke and he used it to tell people to turn away from sin and be baptised as a sign of repentance. People flocked to be baptised by him. He said, "I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

One day, Jesus came to the River Jordan to be baptised by John. John did not feel he was qualified to do such an important thing and he said, "I need to be baptised by you."

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."

John finally agreed and baptised Jesus.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he came up out of the water. Suddenly, Heaven opened and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove. A voice from Heaven said, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Jesus was baptised for a few reasons. He was confessing to sin on behalf of all the people, and by being baptised, he was setting an example to his followers. He was trying to show others how to repent themselves. He was also announcing the start of his ministry. He was cleansing himself before starting to preach to the world.

On Herod's birthday, his wife's daughter danced for him. He thought she was so wonderful that he gave her an oath saying she could ask for anything and he would give it her. Encouraged by her mother, she said she wanted the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Because Herod had made this oath in front of many guests, he had to agree. John was then beheaded in prison. His head was taken to the girl on a platter and she victoriously gave it to her mother.