Preschool–Grade 6

John the Baptist

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: John was a voice that pointed away from himself to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Repentance shows up in everyday life, and a true witness says, "He must increase, but I must decrease."
Bible passage: Matthew 3:1–12, Luke 3:2–20 and John 1:19–42. Students read them out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." *John 1:29 (KJV)* and "He must increase, but I must decrease." *John 3:30 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Matthew 3, Luke 3:1–20, John 1:6–42 and John 3:26–30. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses.

1. Opening game: Who Gets the Credit? (5–10 minutes)

Ask: *A team wins a big game. The player who passed the ball doesn't get on the news; the one who scored does. How would you feel if you were the one who passed?* Let students talk. Then ask: *Is it hard to help someone else look good?* Write their answers on the board. Say: "Today we will meet a man crowds came to see, and he spent all his time pointing away from himself."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Matthew 3:1–11. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **repent** (3:2): turn away from sin; **at hand**: very near; **Esaias** (3:3): the prophet Isaiah
- **raiment of camel's hair** (3:4): clothes made of camel's hair; **leathern girdle about his loins**: a leather belt around his waist; **meat**: food
- **confessing their sins** (3:6): telling God the wrong they had done
- **generation of vipers** (3:7): family of poisonous snakes, a strong warning to proud religious leaders; **flee from the wrath to come**: escape God's coming judgment
- **fruits meet for repentance** (3:8): a changed life that fits a changed heart
- **mightier** (3:11): greater; **not worthy to bear**: not good enough even to carry

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Read out loud: Luke 3:2–6 and 3:10–16. Old words in this passage:

- **brought low** (3:5): made level; **all flesh** (3:6): all people
- **impart** (3:11): give; **publicans** (3:12): tax collectors; **exact no more than that which is appointed** (3:13): don't collect more than you're told
- **do violence to no man** (3:14): hurt no one; **accuse any falsely**: tell lies about anyone; **content with your wages**: satisfied with your pay
- **mused in their hearts** (3:15): wondered; **latchet** (3:16): the strap of a sandal

Read out loud: John 1:19–23 and 1:29–42. Old words in this passage:

- **Elias** (1:21): the prophet Elijah; **denied not** (1:20): did not hide the truth
- **seeth** (1:29): sees; **behold**: look; **taketh away**: takes away
- **preferred before me** (1:30): ranked above me; **he was before me**: He existed before me
- **Messias** (1:41): the Messiah, the Christ, God's promised Savior

Then read **John 3:30** together.

Teacher note: Luke 3:19–20 says that when John told Herod he was wrong, Herod "shut up John in prison." Read it with preteens if it comes up, and say no more than the passage says; leave it out for younger classes.

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Crowds came from Jerusalem and all Judaea to hear John (Matthew 3:5). Why would someone so popular say, "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20)?
2. John called himself just "the voice" (John 1:23). What is the difference between a voice and the message?
3. When people asked, "What shall we do then?" John talked about coats, food, money and honesty (Luke 3:10–14). What would "fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8) look like at your school or home?
4. John pointed his own disciples to Jesus, and they left to follow Him (John 1:35–37). What does John 3:30 say about how John felt?
5. Andrew heard John, followed Jesus, and "first findeth his own brother Simon" (John 1:41). Who is your "Simon"?
6. Where is it hard for you to let Jesus "increase" and yourself "decrease"?

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4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Explain the words: in John 1:29, **seeth** means sees, **saith** means says, **behold** means look, and **taketh away the sin of the world** means removes the sin of all people. In John 3:30, **increase** means become greater and **decrease** means become less. Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say John 1:29 this week; John 3:30 is short enough to learn today too.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "John said Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). John promised that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:11), and Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

Teacher note on John's baptism: John preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3), telling people to believe on the One coming after him, Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4). After Jesus rose, Peter preached baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), and when Paul met disciples who had only John's baptism, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). Jesus said, "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). If students ask, read Acts 19:1–5 together and say no more than it says.

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6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. John asked people to make crooked things straight (Luke 3:5, 3:10–14). What is one crooked thing in my life I need to turn away from?
2. John and Andrew both pointed someone to Jesus (John 1:36, 1:41). Who could I point to Jesus, and what would I say?
3. Write a short prayer asking God to help you let Jesus increase this week.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: do one thing that helps someone else without taking the credit. Then tell one person something true about who Jesus is.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Help us turn from the crooked things in our lives. Help us point others to Jesus, and let Him increase in us. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks, "Was John Elijah?": John said, "I am not" (John 1:21). Keep it short and come back to the story: John's job was to point to Jesus.
If a student asks why John called Jesus a lamb: a person who sinned brought a lamb for a sin offering (Leviticus 4:32). We are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

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