



Church of God Sunday School

THE FORERUNNER OF CHRIST

Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

Many years ago, in the days before radio, telephone, and the internet, important news was sent from place to place by word of mouth. When a king was planning a visit to another city or country, he would often send out a runner to announce his coming so that people could prepare for his visit. This runner was called a forerunner.

When God was ready to send His Son, the King of Israel, to this earth, He also sent a forerunner. This forerunner was to tell people that the King (Jesus) was coming. He was to prepare the way. Today's lesson is about this forerunner.

In the days of King Herod, there lived a priest named Zacharias. Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth both lived very righteous lives, obeying all of God's commandments. They had been unable to have children, and now they were both old.

One day, while Zacharias was taking care of his priestly duties in the temple, he received a visit from an angel of the Lord. When Zacharias saw this angel, he was afraid, but the angel told Zacharias, "Fear not . . . thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son."

The angel told Zacharias to name his son John. This child was to fulfill a very special purpose—he was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." He would be the one to tell people that the Savior was coming soon!

This news was hard for Zacharias to believe. So he asked the angel, "Whereby shall I know this?" The angel told Zacharias, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings."

The angel said, "Thou shalt be . . . not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words."

Just as the angel foretold, several months later a baby boy was born to Elisabeth and Zacharias. The neighbors and cousins rejoiced with Elisabeth. They thought the baby should be named Zacharias, after his father.

Elisabeth told them, "Not so; but he shall be called John." When Zacharias was asked what the child should be named, he asked for something to write on. (Remember, he could not speak since his visit from the angel.) Zacharias wrote, "His name is John." Immediately, his tongue was loosed, and he could speak again. He gave praise to God and prophesied.

The next time we read about John in the Bible, he was preaching, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John was "clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin . . . and he did eat locusts and wild honey."

Many people were baptized by John "in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins." People began to follow John, but he told them, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear." Of whom was John speaking? He was speaking of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

John did not want people to follow him, but to follow the One he was pointing to—Jesus. John said, "He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).



If you were to point at a picture, would you want people to look at what you are pointing *with* (your finger) or what you are pointing *at* (the picture)? Just as John pointed others to Jesus, we should live in such a way that our lives point people to Jesus. He is the only One who can save them.

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

—Matthew 3:2

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It's Time to Name the Baby

(Unscramble the letters to see what Zacharias wrote)

S I H

A N E M

S I J H O N

JOHN the BAPTIST



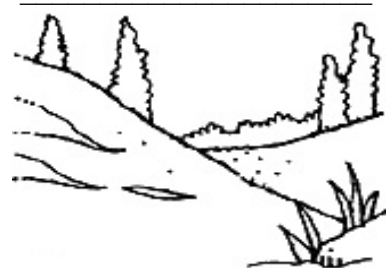
What were his clothes made of?



John ate _____



Who was his father?



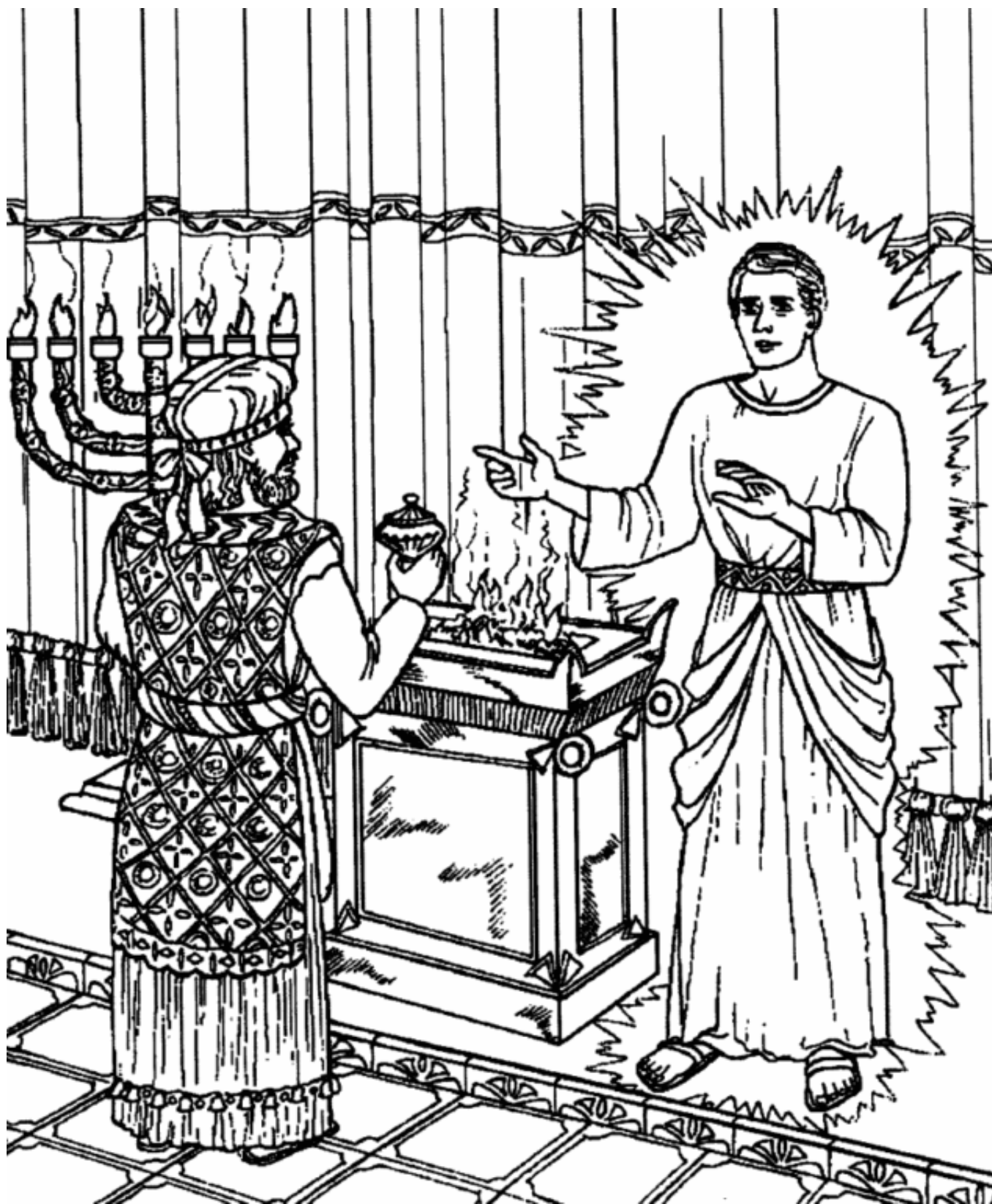
John preached in the

Word Bank

- camel's hair
- baptized
- Zacharias
- locusts
- wilderness



John _____ **people in the wilderness**



Zacharias Sees the Angel Gabriel