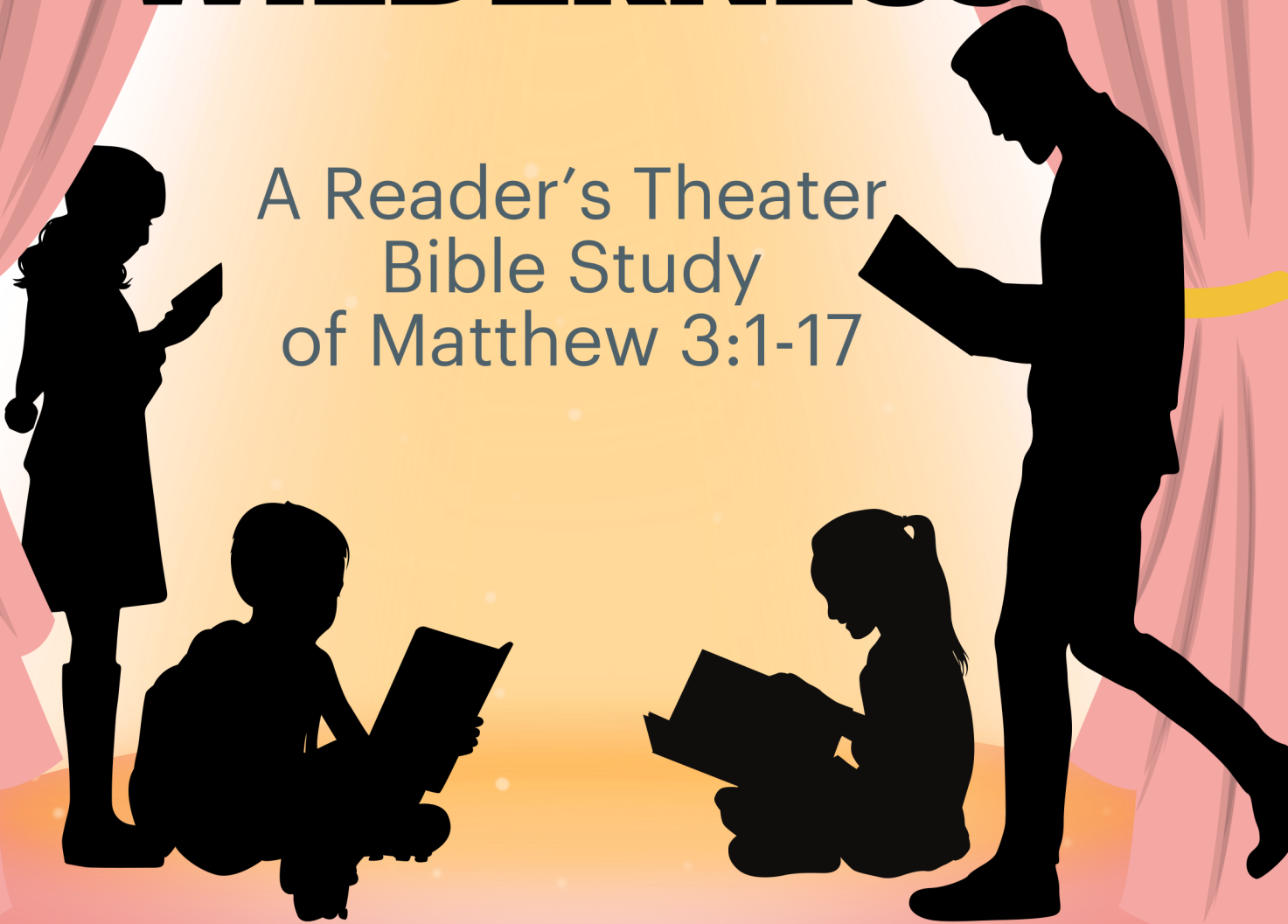




THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

A Reader's Theater
Bible Study
of Matthew 3:1-17



1 LESSON | LEADER GUIDE + STUDENT WORKSHEET

Leader's Guide

Ready...set...action! Reader's theater is a creative way of inviting students to immerse themselves in the story of Scripture. Not only is it a fun way to read, it also helps readers (and listeners) hear and see the story with greater clarity. You can sit around a table or a living room and simply read it, or you can choose to stand and act it out. Either way works!

After reading the script aloud, follow the discussion guide to explore the story to your desired level of depth. Note that this guide won't be providing "answers" to the questions. Rather, the questions invite you to enter into the story and see what you discover. Your group will have more unique insights than this guide could possibly include. The goal isn't application but rather response. Each story invites us to respond to God.

Before you begin, print out scripts for every member of your group. Decide if you want to print the optional worksheets.

Part 1: Reader's Theater

1. Assign a **role** (or roles) to each person in the group. Note that the roles are different for each story.
 - The number that appears in parentheses after each role lets you know how many lines of script the person filling that role will be reading. This doesn't indicate how many *times* they will speak, but rather how is a measure of how much they'll be reading. If someone in your group struggles with reading, you can give them a role with a smaller number of lines.
 - If you have fewer people than roles, the scripts also note which roles can be easily combined. If you need to further combine roles, consider using simple props and more exaggerated voices to help differentiate them.
2. After you have assigned roles, give everyone a copy of the script and ask them to circle or highlight their parts. You may also want to ask them to read through their parts first and see if there are any words they need help pronouncing or defining.
3. Decide if you want to sit and read or stand and act it out.
4. Before you begin reading, remind everyone to have fun with it!
5. Say "Action!" and enjoy the show!

Part 2: Discuss

Discussion can take place with or without the worksheet. If your students are visual or need something to keep their hands busy or their minds focused, the worksheet can play that role. However, it may be that they engage better through simple conversation. Experiment with it!

1. Help orient students with the setting of the story by asking two questions:
 - **What time is it?**
 - Explore where this story takes place within the larger story of the Bible. If you are using the worksheet, look at the ups and downs of that larger story and what they've all been building to. The stories in this series travel up that steep hill that Jesus is standing on. Anticipation for God's Kingdom is ramping up and there is a sense of desperation.
 - Are there any other markers of time in the story? For example, Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days. Are there any other stories in the Bible where someone was somewhere for 40 marks of time? You might discuss the similarities.
 - **Where are we?** Explore the physical location of where this story took place. Did any other notable stories take place in this location? For example, did any other stories in the Bible involve 40 marks of time in a Wilderness? Are there any connections between those stories?
2. Help students explore who is in the story and what they are doing.
 - **Who is here?** Identify all of the characters in the story, including those who didn't have speaking parts. Have we seen them in other stories? Do you notice any behavior patterns? Remember to point out that God is the main character in every single story, whether He speaks or not.
 - **What do we see each character doing?** What are they like? Most of the time, the people in Bible stories are not playing the role of "hero." Rather, their story acts like a mirror to show us how normal people act. So how are they acting? Are they complaining? Are they suspicious? Are they desperate for something? Ask what you have in common with the characters in this story.
3. (optional) Consider running through the script again at this point.
4. Connect with God.
 - **What is God doing in this story?** What do you see Jesus doing? How is he connecting with the people in the story? If you were in this story, how might he want to respond to you.

If your students have OneStory's Bible Binder, they can file the scripts and workbook pages in the Gospels section.



Reader's Theater: The Voice in the Wilderness

Roles: Narrator 1 (7), **Narrator 2** (5), **Narrator 3** (4), **John** (11), **Isaiah** (2),
Sadducee (1), **Jesus** (1), **God** (1)

(The following parts can be combined: Narrator 2 + Sadducee + Jesus, Narrator 3 + Isaiah + God OR Isaiah + Sadducee + Jesus + God)

Narrator 1: In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

John: Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

Narrator 1: For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying,

Isaiah: The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make the way of the Lord ready! Make his paths straight!

Narrator 1: Now John himself wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. Then people from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Narrator 2: But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them,

John: You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance! Don't think to yourselves,

Sadducee: We have Abraham for our father

John: for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

Narrator 3: Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan[b] to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying,

John: I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?

Narrator 3: But Jesus, answering, said to him,

Jesus: Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.

Narrator 3: Then he allowed him.

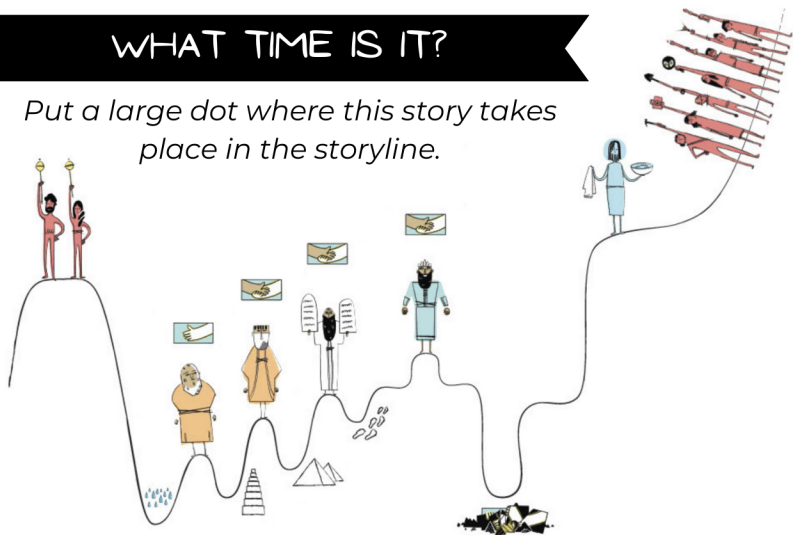
Narrator 2: Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said,

God: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

The Voice in the Wilderness

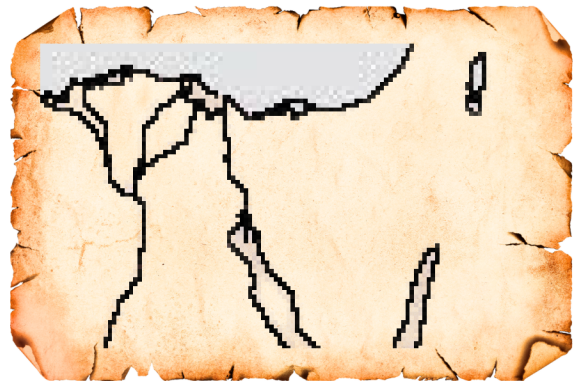
WHAT TIME IS IT?

Put a large dot where this story takes place in the storyline.



WHERE ARE WE?

Draw a 📍 to show where this story takes place on a map.



WHO IS HERE?

Draw or name the characters in this story.



LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Write or draw what you see people doing. Then circle what reminds you of yourself.



WHAT IS GOD DOING?

Write or draw what you discover about how God is meeting with people.