

# Biblical Background

LUKE 3:10-18

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** John the Baptist appears at one of the three crossing points along the length of the Jordan River. The Jordan River runs through the middle of the Jordan River valley, dissecting the valley that is seven miles wide. This popular crossing point offers the perfect location to address the large numbers of pilgrims who would need to cross the river, travel to and through Jericho, and then continue on their journey to Jerusalem some seventeen miles to the west. The Jordan River runs north to south and ends at the Dead Sea. The river lies at the lowest place on the planet, some 1200 feet below sea level. The journey from this crossing point to Jerusalem would require a great effort to gain the 3500 vertical feet needed to arrive in the Holy City Jerusalem.

**TERMS: "I am not the Christ"** This statement is repeated by John many times in this Gospel passage. The Messiah was the expected savior of Israel who many believed would drive her enemies into the sea. The fact that John insisted that he was not the Messiah of God, suggests that others thought he would be God's agent of vindication over the Roman Military and its occupation force. John stood his ground in his criticism of the King of the day, Herod who had taken his brother's wife to be his own. In this direct confrontation with the King, John enjoyed the esteem of all the local people who thought he might be their long awaited deliverer.

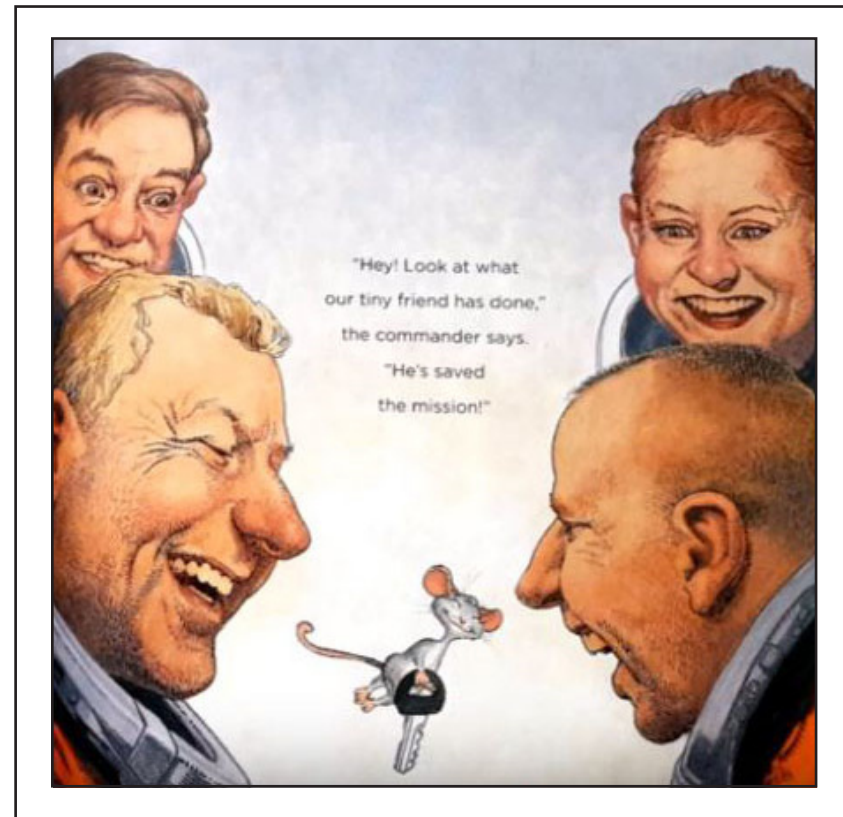
**Baptize** To baptize means "to dip" and this would have been connected to the Jewish tradition of ritual bathing in advance of bringing an offering to the Lord in Jerusalem. Everyone who was going to Jerusalem would find time to ritually bathe in anticipation of the offering presented to the Lord on their behalf. They could do it in the Jordan River or in a ritual bath called a Mikvah in Jerusalem. Most wanted to wait until their journey was over to bathe, but John called upon them to express their desire to be clean in advance of their sacrificial offering, and it seems that the people were responding in great numbers.

**CULTURAL INSIGHTS:** Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet – in Jewish religious tradition these were the big three. The Christ means the Messiah or the "anointed" one. Elijah was the prophet of God who rode a chariot of fire into heaven without having to taste the bitterness of death (he was assumed into Heaven). The Prophet was none other than Moses himself. Moses promised the Jews that one day another prophet, like himself, would arise. This was understood to be a promise of the appearance of the Messiah. John is honored by these associations but removes himself from Messianic consideration by telling the religious leaders that he is a simple herald of the coming Messiah.

**INSIGHTS INTO MEANING:** John must decrease and his cousin, Jesus, must increase. John knows that his role is to announce the coming of the Messiah, and when he next sees Jesus, he directs his followers by calling Jesus the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world. This gospel helps us understand that although John was an amazing prophet of God, and esteemed and honored by all the people, he was not the Messiah. John would point out the Messiah, Jesus, to any and all who would listen. Our role as disciples is to point others to Jesus as well.

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** During the Christmas Season the whole Christian world turns toward the magical way of children. How can our children wake people up to the true meaning of Christmas this year?

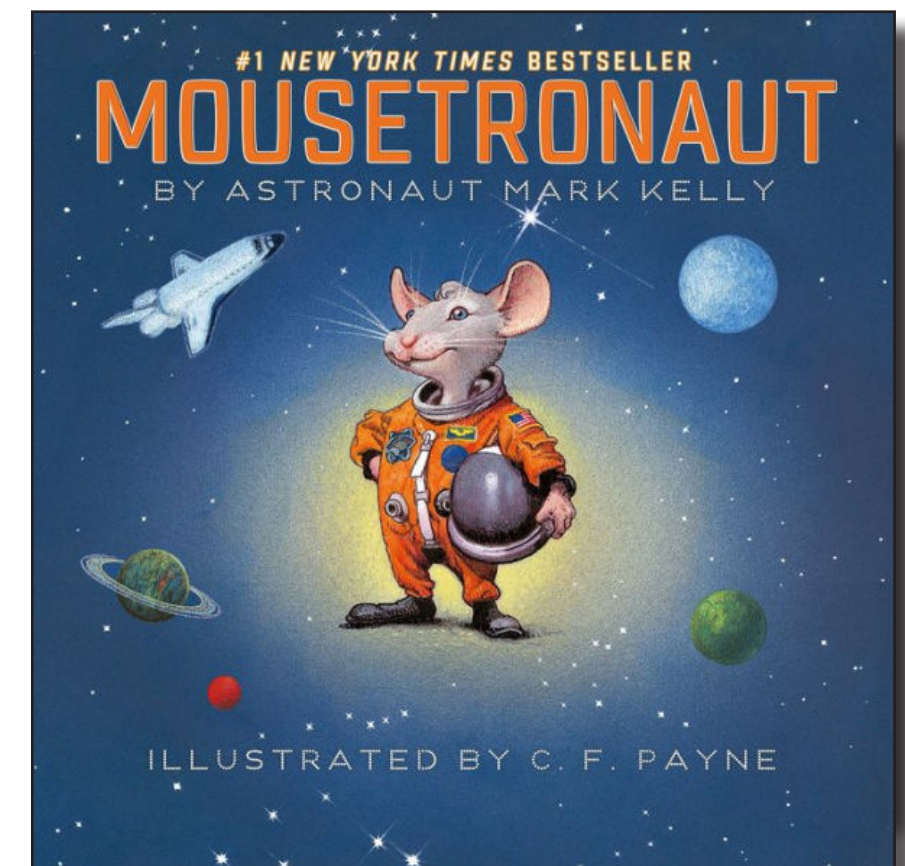
**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** TO BE FAITHFUL IN SMALL THINGS  
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**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Find an organization that helps to celebrate children's contributions. Encourage your children, and help them realize how important their specific gifts and voices are. Help your children give a gift of themselves that makes a difference for some people in need.

3RD SUNDAY  
ADVENT, CYCLE C

# Living Grace

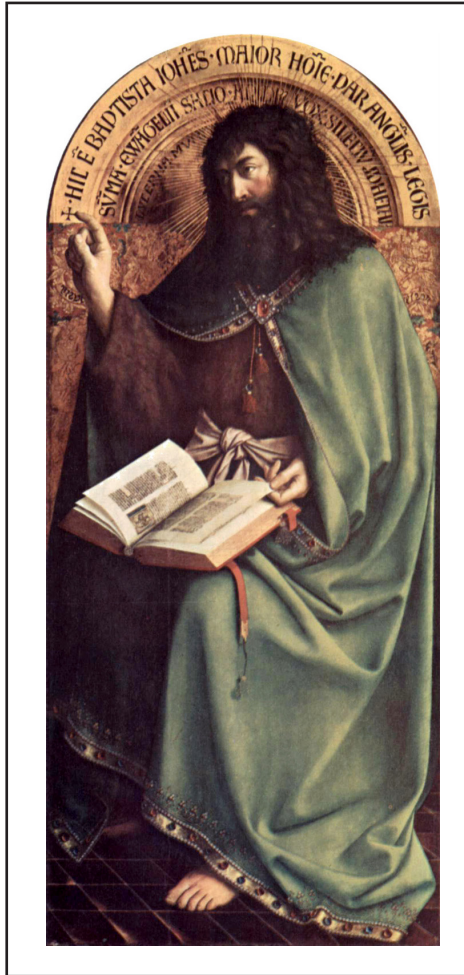
"SUPRISINGLY MADE FOR MISSION"



*Mousetronaut* is the heartwarming tale of the power of the small, from bestselling author and retired NASA astronaut, Commander Mark Kelly. Mark Kelly flew with "mice-tronauts" on his first space flight aboard space shuttle Endeavour in 2001. Here he tells the story of a small mouse that wants nothing more than to travel to outer space. The little mouse works as hard as the bigger mice to show readiness for the mission . . . and is chosen for the flight! While in space, the astronauts are busy with their mission when disaster strikes - and only the smallest member of the crew can save the day. This is a tale of perseverance, courage, and the importance of the small! (Fun Fact: The author, Mark Kelly, is now a U.S. senator from Arizona, and his identical twin brother, Scott Kelly is also an astronaut! They are the only siblings to have both traveled in space.)

# Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION  
OF SACRED ART



JOHN THE BAPTIST, ALTAR OF THE MYSTICAL LAMB ~ GHENT ALTARPIECE  
Oil painting by Hubert & Jan van Eyck, 1426-1432  
Saint Bavo Cathedral ~ Ghent, Belgium

## EXPLORING THE ART:

## WAR, THEFT & INTRIGUE

The above image of John the Baptist is one of the main panels of the Ghent Altarpiece in the St. Bavo Cathedral. The entire altarpiece is the size of a barn door, weighs more than an elephant, and is one of the most famous and coveted paintings in the world. The Ghent Altarpiece is made up of twenty individual panels painted on both the front and back sides, linked together in a massive hinged framework that is opened and closed at different times of the liturgical year. Other panels include paintings of The Annunciation, Adam and Eve, the Virgin Mary, and a crowned Christ. The images are painted in such detail that you can pick out individual hairs in a beard or dirt on a pilgrim's foot!

The altarpiece has been dismantled, stolen, and damaged many times over through six centuries of war and intrigue. It was finally reassembled, cleaned, and restored after World War II, but one panel that was stolen during WWI has never been found - an unsolved mystery to this day...

# Sunday Gospel

LUKE 3:10-18

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire  
The crowds asked John the Baptist,  
"What should we do?"  
He said to them in reply,  
"Whoever has two cloaks  
should share with the person who has none.  
And whoever has food should do likewise."  
Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him,  
"Teacher, what should we do?"  
He answered them,  
"Stop collecting more than what is prescribed."  
Soldiers also asked him,  
"And what is it that we should do?"  
He told them,  
"Do not practice extortion,  
do not falsely accuse anyone,  
and be satisfied with your wages."*

*Now the people were filled with expectation,  
and all were asking in their hearts  
whether John might be the Christ.  
John answered them all, saying,  
"I am baptizing you with water,  
but one mightier than I is coming.  
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.  
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.  
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor  
and to gather the wheat into his barn,  
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."  
Exhorting them in many other ways,  
he preached good news to the people.*

Read-aloud video link:

**MOUSETRONAUT**

Written by Astronaut Mark Kelly & Illustrated by C. F. Payne

# Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

## SMALL ACTS PREPARE US FOR BIG THINGS TO HAPPEN.

John the Baptist's mission was to prepare the way of the coming of Jesus Christ. He made it very clear that while he had a role to play, it was a small one. John's message was for this world. The one to follow him would have a mission that would be "out of this world". Jesus came to build a bridge for all humankind from heaven to earth. In our children's story, Meteor was the least likely to be chosen, but he ended up being the most important creature on that expedition. If Meteor hadn't gotten the key, the astronauts wouldn't have been able to fulfill their larger mission.

The whole world looks to children at Christmastime. God himself came into the world as a small and vulnerable child. The people of Israel expected a Messiah who would be a mighty king, a great warrior - anything but a baby graced by God to redeem the world. Advent prepares us to expect the unexpected. Children, like John the Baptist and Meteor the mousetronaut, have powerful gifts to share in pointing the world to the deeper values of faith, hope, and love. How might we help our children to use their small ways to participate in great things?

Advent is a time of making room for the coming of the Christ Child into our hearts in a fuller way. How can we use this season to create readiness in the hearts of our families for the true meaning of Christmas? This 3rd Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete (Joy) Sunday. Meteor did something small that saved the space mission, and he found great joy in being brave and true, using his God given abilities.

**Following the unique mission that God has created for each one of us is our best path to joy. This Advent Season, let us take time to listen to the call of God in our hearts, to not be hindered by our perceived limitations, but to trust that God has given us all that we need to do the work for which we are created.**

# Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** Have you ever had a toy that you took everywhere with you? Did you ever lose it? How did it feel? Did the adults around you understand how important it was to you? Can you understand Trixie's challenge? Have you ever felt like something was so important to you, but no one could really understand? What did you do about it?

**THE CHILDRENS' STORY:** What did Trixie do to try to get her dad's attention? How did her mom help? How does Trixie's mom help her dad understand the mission to save Knuffle Bunny?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** Do you know much about John the Baptist? What were some of the things he did to get people's attention? Did it work? What does John the Baptist do to get help? Does Jesus help him? How does it help people to "see" Jesus by John the Baptist having already woken them up?

**How can you, like John the Baptist, help to wake people up to the real meaning of Advent and Christmas? What are your own special gifts from God? How can you use these to get people ready?**