

Heaven breaks through

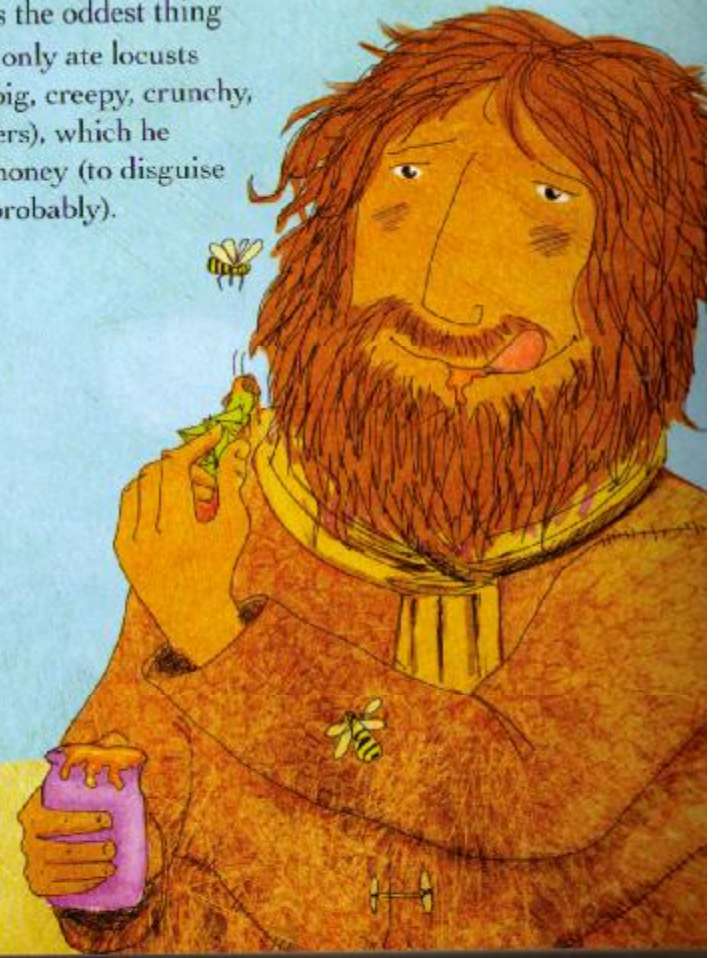
The story of John the Baptist, from Matthew 3, Luke 1, 3; John 1

ABOUT THE SAME TIME Jesus was born, another baby was born. His name was John, and God had a special job for him. John was going to get everyone ready for Jesus.

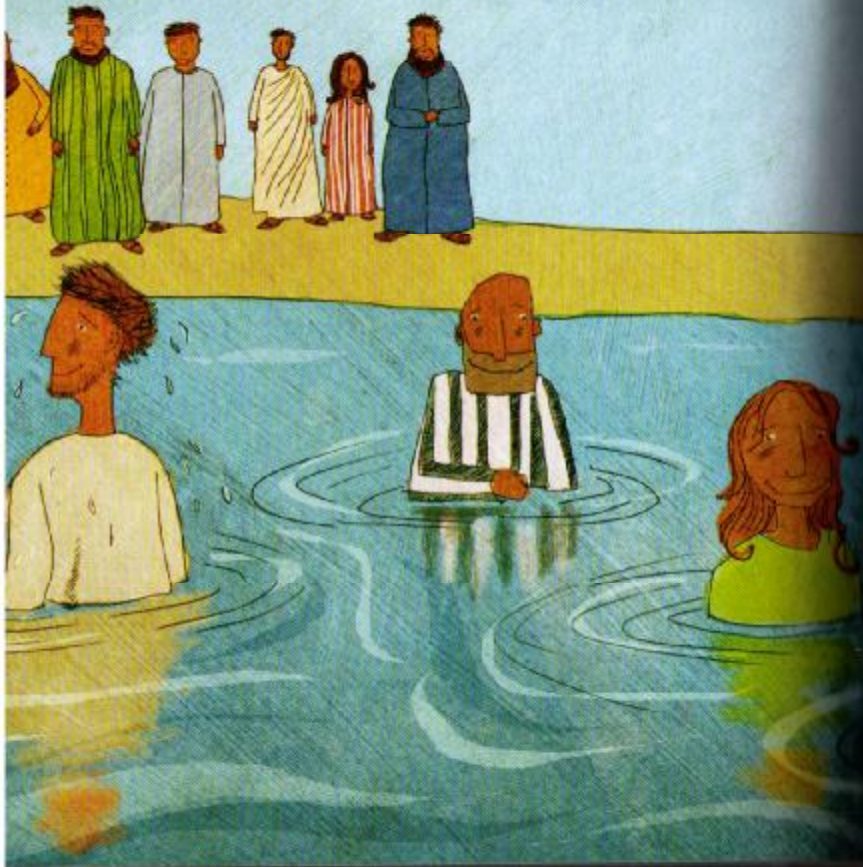
The day John was born, his dad knew God's promise to Abraham was coming true — God was sending the Rescuer. And he was so happy he sang a song:

Because God loves us with a Never Stopping,
Never Giving Up, Unbreaking,
Always and Forever Love —
Heaven is breaking through!
He is sending us a Light from Heaven
To shine on us like the sun
To shine on those who live in darkness
And in the shadow of death
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

So John grew up and — well, to tell you the truth, he was a bit unusual. He lived in the desert. He wore itchy-scratchy outfits made of camel hair. He had a big, big, bushy beard and long, long, scraggly hair. And here is the oddest thing of all — he only ate locusts (short for big, creepy, crunchy, grasshoppers), which he dipped in honey (to disguise the taste, probably).



But God sent John to tell his people something important: "Stop running away from God and run to him instead," John said. "You need to be rescued. I have good news — the Rescuer is coming! Make your hearts ready for him. Yes! Get ready, because your King is coming back for you."



Great crowds listened to John. They were sorry they had sinned, and they wanted to stop running away from God. They wanted to be rescued. So John baptized them — which means he plunged them in and out of the water. It showed that they wanted to follow God and begin a new life.



One day, John was baptizing people in the Jordan River as usual when he looked up and saw a man walking down to the water's edge.

God spoke quietly to John, "This is the One!"

John's heart leapt. This was the moment he'd been waiting for all his life.

"Look," John said, as Jesus came down into the water. But his voice came out as a whisper. He couldn't make

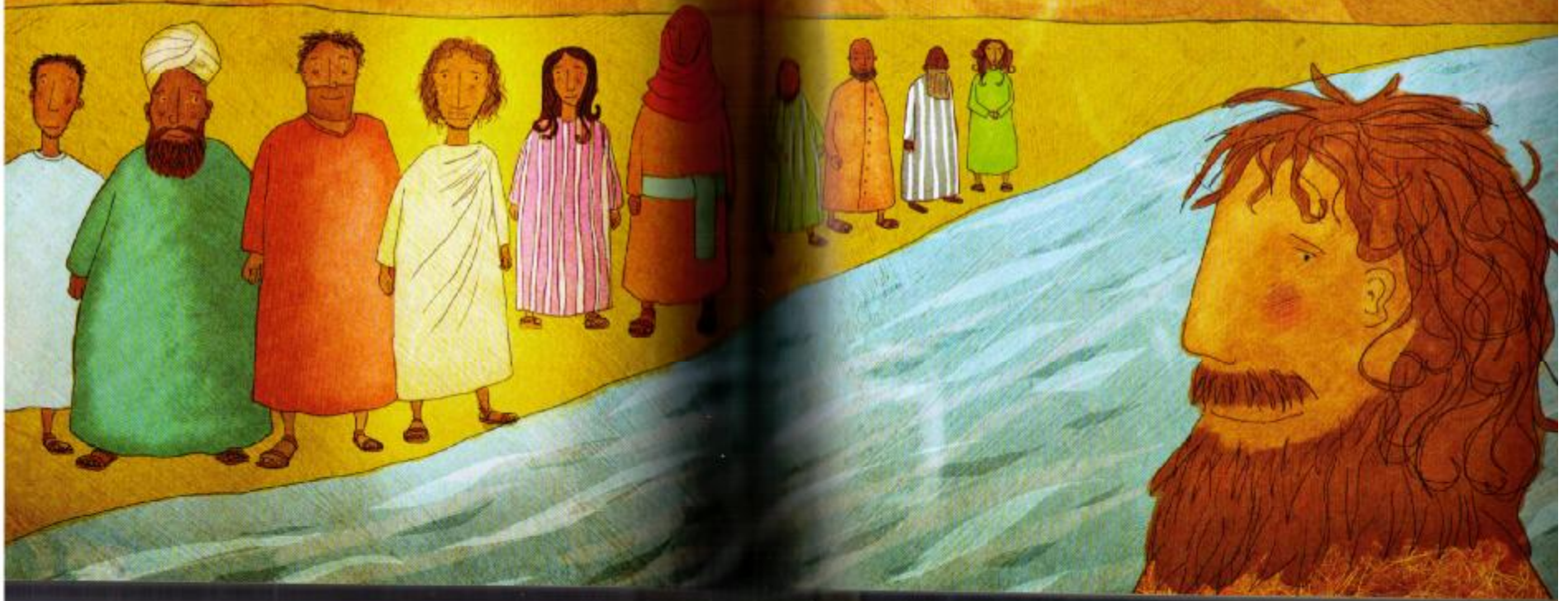
it any louder. It was all he could do to even speak. "The Lamb of God ... God's best lamb ... who takes away the sins of the whole world."

"Will you baptize me, too?" Jesus asked.

"Who am I," John asked, "to baptize you?"

"It's what God wants me to do," Jesus said.

So John baptized Jesus.



Suddenly, it was as if someone had drawn back curtains in a dark room, as if heaven itself had opened, because a beautiful light broke through the clouds and shone down on to Jesus, bathing him in gold. Beads of water glittered and sparkled like tiny diamonds in his hair.

A white dove flew down and gently rested on Jesus.

And a voice came down from heaven. It was clear and strong and loud so everyone could hear. "This is my own Son. And I love him. I am very pleased with him," God said. "Listen to him."

Heaven had broken through.

The Great Rescue had begun...

