



Imperial Academy Bible Lessons



Preparing the Way for the Messiah

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Many prophecies in the Old Testament pointed to the same great event: the coming of the Messiah. This Messiah would come once to die for the sins of mankind, and would later return to rule the Earth. The Old Testament also prophesied that before the first coming of the Messiah, a messenger would prepare the way for Him.

In this lesson, you will learn who prepared the way for the Messiah, and how the prophecies of a Messiah were fulfilled by a man named Jesus, who is also the Christ. You will learn how Jesus Christ qualified to replace Satan the devil as the ruler of the world. You will also learn how a man like the ancient Elijah prepared the way for Jesus Christ's first coming, and how a modern-day type of Elijah was prophesied to prepare the way for Christ's Second Coming.

You will need your Bible and a pencil so you can fill in the scripture blanks as you study these incredible truths!

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

In special instances, God chooses a person to fulfill a specific purpose before he is even born.

Fill in the blanks below using Jeremiah 1:5 to see how God ordained Jeremiah a prophet before he was born: "Before I formed you in the _____ I knew you; and before you came forth out of the _____ I sanctified you, and I _____ you a _____ unto the nations."

God also chose John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah before he was born.

In 5 B.C., God sent the archangel Gabriel to an elderly priest named Zacharias with a message: His wife, Elisabeth, who was also very old, would soon become pregnant with a son. This son would have a special role in preparing the way for the Lord.

Fill in the details of what Gabriel said to Zacharias from Luke 1:11-17: "And there appeared unto him an _____ of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was _____, and _____ fell upon him. But the _____ said unto him, _____, Zacharias: for your _____ is heard; and your wife _____ shall bear you a _____, and you shall call his name _____. And you shall have _____ and _____; and many shall _____ at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy [Spirit], even from his _____. And many of the _____ of _____ shall he turn to the _____ their _____. And he shall go before him in the _____ and _____ of Elias [Elijah], to turn the _____ of the _____ to the _____, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make _____ a people _____ for the _____."

When Gabriel said John would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," he was referring to an Old Testament prophecy, recorded in Malachi 4:5-6. The prophecy describes a messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

Zacharias had wanted a son for many years, and now God said He would answer his prayers, making him the father of the one who would prepare the way for the ministry of the Messiah. But Zacharias knew it was physically impossible for his wife to bear any children, so he lacked the faith to fully believe Gabriel. He asked the angel for a sign that what he had said would come to pass (Luke 1:18).



God knows how important the role of parents are, that's why He took special care choosing the parents for John and Jesus.

“I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God; and am sent to speak to you, and to tell you glad tidings,” the angel responded. “Behold, you shall not be able to speak until the day these things are performed.”

In that moment, Zacharias lost his ability to speak. And, as Gabriel had said, Elisabeth soon became pregnant with Zacharias's son. About nine months later, the boy was born. God was working with Zacharias all this time.

ZACHARIAS UTTERS A PROPHECY

On the day of John's circumcision, Elisabeth's relatives tried to convince her that the boy should be named after his father. But Gabriel had told Zacharias to name his son John. When his relatives asked him what he would name the boy, he took a tablet and wrote, “*His name is John.*”

At this moment, Zacharias's speech returned to him and the power of God inspired him to speak a prophecy (Luke 1:67-79).

Read verses 76-78 to fill in the blanks below about the prophecy Zacharias spoke: “And you, _____, shall be called the _____ of the _____: for you shall go before the _____ of the _____ to _____; To give _____

of _____ unto his people by the _____ of their _____, Through the _____ of our God; whereby the _____ from on high has visited us.”

John was specially chosen to prepare the way for Jesus Christ's ministry by turning people back to God. God's commission for him was to lead people to repent of their sins, turn their hearts to God, and start living according to God's laws. He also taught them about the coming Messiah.

God specially chose Zacharias and Elisabeth to give John the necessary training to fulfill his commission. The Bible records that John “waxed strong in spirit” (verse 80). It also notes that he became an outdoorsman, living in the wilderness until the day his ministry started, wearing a tunic of camel's hair, and eating locusts and honey (Matthew 3:4; Luke 1:80).

THE START OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

In the 15th year of the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, the power of God came on John in the wilderness and inspired him to start preaching. John traveled throughout the Jordan River Valley, preaching repentance for the remission of sins. He also practiced a new religious custom: baptism. He told all who would listen that they should be immersed in water as a sign



Even though He had never sinned, Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan River to set an example for us.

of their commitment to turn away from evil and live anew in obedience to God's laws. For this reason, he is known as John the Baptist.

Turn to Luke 3:7-8 to read some of John's preaching: "Then said he to the _____ that came forth to be _____ of him, O _____ of _____, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore _____ worthy of _____, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have _____ to our _____: for I say unto you, That _____ is able of these _____ to raise up _____ unto _____."

Many of the Jews of John's time acted like they should receive special favor from God just because they were the descendants of Abraham. But John warned them that just as every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and burned, so every person who refuses to repent would perish. Many people were pricked in their conscience. So they asked John the Baptist, "What shall we do then?"

Read verses 11-14 for John's reply: "He answered and said unto them, He that has _____, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has _____, let him do likewise. Then came also

publicans [tax collectors] to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, _____ no more than that which is _____ you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do _____ to no man, neither _____ any _____; and be content with your wages."

John the Baptist taught people not to kill, steal and lie. He taught them that they must keep God's Ten Commandments. He also taught them that they must repent of their sins.

Some people thought that John might be the Messiah who was prophesied in the Scriptures. But John told them that he was only preparing the way for the real Messiah. "I baptize you with water," he said. "But one mightier than I is coming, the laces of whose shoes I am unworthy to loosen. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." John meant that all people would eventually have to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, or be burned up in a lake of fire. (It is important to note that John said that He, Jesus Christ, who would come after him, John, would be the one who would baptize with the Spirit and with fire.)

John's message had quite an effect on the Jews because they were familiar with the prophecies. John

proclaimed that the Messiah, the Christ, was coming to lay the foundations of a new world government. In order to receive an inheritance in the Messiah's Kingdom, people first had to repent of their sins. People did begin to turn from their wicked ways and to embrace God's way of life. Some of them became Jesus Christ's first disciples.

MEMORY TEST

Circle the letter next to the correct answer.

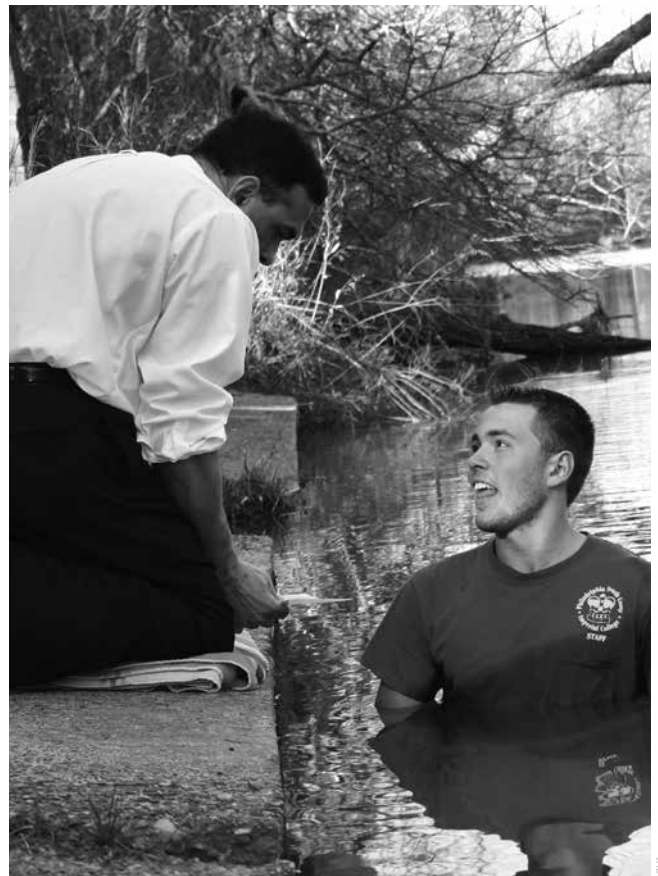
1. Just like God chose John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah before he was even born, who else does the Bible say God ordained before he was even formed in his mother's belly?
 - a. The Patriarch Abraham
 - b. The Judge Gideon
 - c. The Prophet Jeremiah
 - d. The Apostle Peter
2. When the archangel Gabriel announced John the Baptist's birth, what did he say John would do?
 - a. He would be great in the sight of the Lord.
 - b. He would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.
 - c. He would come in the spirit and power of the Elijah.
 - d. He would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.
 - e. All of the above
 - f. None of the above
3. John the Baptist prepared the way for:
 - a. Jesus Christ's first coming.
 - b. Jesus Christ's Second Coming.
 - c. Jesus Christ's third coming.
 - d. All of the above
 - e. None of the above
4. John the Baptist began preaching in the 15th year of the reign of:
 - a. Romulus.
 - b. Julius Caesar.
 - c. Tiberius.
 - d. Marcus Aurelius.

JESUS CHRIST'S BAPTISM

Jesus Christ began His ministry on Earth at about age 30 in the autumn of A.D. 27. Before He could begin preaching, however, Jesus had to be baptized. Even though He had possessed an immeasurable amount of the Holy Spirit since birth, He needed to set an example for His followers. He chose to be baptized by John the Baptist, who was also His cousin.

Read Matthew 3:13-15 for John's response to Jesus's request: "Then came Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John _____ him, saying, I have need to be _____ of _____, and come you to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becomes us to _____ all _____."

John felt he was unworthy to baptize Jesus, but Jesus explained that it was necessary for Him to be baptized to keep His Father's command. So John baptized Jesus by fully immersing Him in the Jordan River. As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, God the Father sent a special sign showing that He was indeed the Son of God.



True followers of Jesus Christ are baptized, following the example He set.

The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, and a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This was the sign that God had told John to look for.

Turn to *John 1:32-34* to read John’s account of this miracle: “And John bare record, saying, I saw the _____ descending from _____ like a _____, and it abode upon him. And I _____: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom you shall see the _____, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizes with the _____ [Spirit]. And I saw, and bare record that this is the _____ of _____.”

TITANIC BATTLE OF THE AGES

Jesus Christ came to Earth as a human being for many different reasons. Most people who believe they are Christians know that Jesus came to die to pay the penalty of sin for all mankind. Many people also know that He came to establish the New Testament Church. But far fewer realize that He had to qualify to replace Satan as the ruler of the world. That is why



It was in the Judean wilderness where Christ qualified to be the Redeemer of mankind.

immediately after being baptized, the Holy Spirit led Christ into the wilderness.

There He fasted 40 days and 40 nights, eating no food and drinking no water. Christ had to draw spiritually close to God the Father in preparation for His battle with the devil. Christ spent these 40 days preparing for this titanic battle. He prayed, meditated and, if He had access to an Old Testament manuscript, studied. At the end of 40 days, He was physically weak but spiritually strong. Even though Jesus was extremely hungry, He knew that His focus on the spiritual battle ahead was more important than food.

Turn to *Matthew 4:3* and fill in the blanks about how Christ’s battle with Satan began: “And when the _____ came to Him, he said, _____ you be the _____ of _____, command that these _____ be made _____.”

Satan tried to simultaneously attack Jesus’s vanity and His physical weakness because of hunger. By using the word “if,” Satan cast doubt on whether Jesus was the Son of God. Then he tempted Him with food. Satan knew that if he could get Jesus to obey him in anything, then Jesus would be disqualified to replace him as the ruler of the Earth.

Read verse 4 to learn how Christ responded: “But he answered and said, It is _____, Man shall not live by _____, but by every _____ that proceeds out of the _____ of _____.”

Christ quoted a scripture from Deuteronomy. He knew the Holy Scriptures are like a two-edged sword to be used to battle Satan (Ephesians 6:17). Quoting this scripture aloud helped Him exert the willpower to resist the temptation.

Satan didn’t give up after one try though. He took Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. There he quoted verses 11 and 12 from Psalm 91 in an attempt to deceive Jesus. “If you be the Son of God,” he said, “cast yourself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone.”

Satan quoted the passage correctly, but he misapplied it. He was trying to get Jesus to act on vanity and jump off the building to prove that God could save Him. But Jesus again quoted a verse from Deuteronomy, saying, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord your God.” Even though God



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Jesus Christ didn't give in to Satan's offer of ruling the world immediately.

promises to care for His people, He tells us not to tempt Him by doing foolish or selfishly inspired things to try to force God to fulfill a promise.

Satan made a third attempt to lead Christ to sin. He took Him to the top of a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. "All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me," Satan offered. He was offering to give Jesus rulership of the world right then instead of having to suffer and die to receive rulership. Jesus did not deny that Satan controlled these kingdoms and could give them to Him. But He knew that Satan's way always brings misery and unhappiness. Jesus was not remotely tempted by these offers because He was close to the Father and loved Him so much that He would never do anything against His will. He was on Earth to please the Father, not Himself.

Fill in the blanks from Matthew 4:10 and see how Christ responded: "Then said Jesus unto him, Get you hence, Satan: for it is written, You shall _____ the _____ your _____, and Him _____ shall you _____."

Defeated, Satan left. Jesus Christ had won the battle and qualified to replace Satan as the ruler of the world!

After this event the good news of the coming Kingdom of God could be announced to the world.

But Satan did not give up. The Bible says he only left for a little while (Luke 4:13). Even though Christ had qualified to become the ruler of the world, He still had to continue resisting Satan until the end of His physical life.

FIRST DISCIPLES

While Jesus was battling Satan in the wilderness, John the Baptist continued to spread the word about the Messiah.

Fill in the blanks from John 1:35-37 to see what John said when Jesus returned from the wilderness: "Again the next day after John stood, and _____ of his _____; And looking upon _____ as he walked, he said, Behold the _____ of _____! And the _____ heard him speak, and they _____."

When Jesus noticed the men following Him, He invited them to the house where He was staying. They

stayed with Jesus the rest of the day. One of the men, Andrew, ran to find his brother Simon. When he told Simon that he had met the Messiah, Simon wanted to meet Him as soon as possible. These men knew the Old Testament scriptures and were looking for the fulfillment of the prophecies of a Messiah.

Fill in the blanks using verse 42 about Simon's first encounter with Jesus: "And [Andrew] brought [Simon] to Jesus. And when Jesus _____ him, he said, You are Simon the son of Jona: you shall be called _____, which is by interpretation, A _____."

Jesus returned to Galilee and stayed in the town of Capernaum (Matthew 4:12-13). While there, He met a man named Philip and told him to become His disciple (John 1:43). Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Simon Peter, and probably knew them. Philip decided to follow Christ, and went to tell his friend Nathanael about the Messiah.

Nathanael was skeptical. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" he asked Philip.

"Come and see," was Philip's positive reply. So Nathanael went to meet Jesus.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

Confused, Nathanael asked, "How do you know me?"

Jesus explained that He had seen Nathanael sitting under a fig tree. Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree that morning. This was all the proof Nathanael needed that Jesus was the Messiah!

Shortly after this, while Jesus was teaching by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew in a fishing boat.

Read Mark 1:17-20 to learn what Jesus said to them: "And Jesus said unto them, Come you after me, and I will make you to become _____ of _____. And straightway they _____ their _____, and _____ him. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw _____ the son of _____, and _____ his _____, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he _____ them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and _____ _____."

Jesus was calling His first disciples so He could establish a Church to help teach God's way of life. After calling Andrew, Simon, Philip and Nathanael, He called two brothers, James and John. Then He called a tax collector named Matthew. Many of these disciples had been prepared to receive Jesus's message by the preaching of John the Baptist!



Christ called His first disciples at the Sea of Galilee.

MEMORY TEST

Circle the letter next to the correct answer.

- Why did Jesus Christ have to be baptized?
 - To demonstrate that He had repented of His sins
 - To set an example for future Christians
 - To please His cousin, John the Baptist
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
- During the great battle against Satan, Jesus Christ:
 - gave all His disciples eternal life.
 - defeated the devil once and for all.
 - qualified to replace Satan as the ruler of the world.
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
- Which of the following disciples were brothers?
 - Philip and Nathanael
 - Philip and Andrew
 - Simon and Andrew
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
- What convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the Messiah?
 - The fact that Jesus grew up in Galilee
 - The fact that Jesus had royal blood
 - The fact that Jesus saw a vision of Nathanael sitting under a fig tree
 - All of the above
 - None of the above

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

After calling His first disciples, Jesus was invited to a large wedding in the city of Cana (John 2:1-11). Here, He performed his first public miracle by turning water into wine. This miracle showed the power of God and caused the disciples to believe in Jesus even more. Christ preached the gospel across Galilee all winter, before traveling back to Jerusalem for the spring holy days.

When concerned disciples of John the Baptist told him all the things that Christ did, John told them to rejoice.



John the Baptist held on to the vision of the coming Kingdom of God, which will heal the world physically and spiritually.

“You yourselves are my witnesses, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent ahead of Him,’” John told them. “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine has been made full” (John 3:28-29).

John was in prison for criticizing King Herod Antipas for committing adultery with his brother’s wife. John sent two of his followers to Jesus to ask if He was indeed the Messiah. They asked, “Are you He that should come, or do we look for another?”

Jesus answered these men, saying “Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Matthew 11:1-6).

Read verses 11-15 to see what Jesus said after John’s disciples left: “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are _____ of _____ there has not risen a _____ than _____ the _____: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of _____ the _____ until now the kingdom of heaven suffers _____, and the _____ take it by _____. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, this is _____, which was for to come.”

John was the messenger sent in the spirit and power of the Prophet Elijah to prepare the way for Christ's first coming.

Not long after this was King Herod's birthday. The woman he had married, who was formerly his brother's wife, hated John for telling people that her relationship with Herod was adultery. Knowing how to manipulate the king, she had her daughter dance for him at his birthday party. The dance pleased Herod, and he promised to give her anything she asked for. Doing as her mother instructed, she requested the head of John the Baptist. King Herod regretted his

promise, but kept it: He ordered John the Baptist to be executed.

When messengers told Jesus that John had been beheaded, Jesus went by boat to a desert to be alone. The multitudes, however, followed after Him, eager to learn more about the coming Kingdom of God.

END-TIME ELIJAH

Some time after John the Baptist was executed, Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain and showed them a vision. In this vision, Jesus shone like the sun and stood next to the prophets Moses and Elijah. After



Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was used by God and came in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ's Second Coming, similar to how John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah in the first century.

the vision ended, Peter asked Jesus why the scribes say that Elijah must first come.

Fill in the blanks for Jesus's answer from Matthew 17:11-12: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, _____ truly shall _____, and _____ all _____. But I say unto you, That _____ is come _____, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed [or pleased]."

Peter knew that the Prophet Malachi said Elijah would prepare the way for the Messiah to come and rule as King of kings. But Peter had not realized that John the Baptist also fulfilled the Elijah role. Just as John prepared the way for Christ's first coming, another Elijah would come to prepare the way for Christ's Second Coming in the end time. Only this end-time type of Elijah, Christ said, would RESTORE ALL THINGS. John the Baptist was not used by God to restore all things in his day.

This end-time Elijah Jesus spoke of was not literally the same person as Elijah the Tishbite or as John the Baptist. Those men are dead and waiting to be resurrected. But someone would come in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ's return.

Turn to Malachi 3:1-2 to learn more details: "Behold, I will send my _____, and he shall _____ before me: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the _____ of the _____, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of _____? and who shall stand when he _____? for he is like a _____, and like _____."

This passage can only apply to Jesus Christ's Second Coming. We know this because Jesus Christ did not come to judge all those who did not fear Him at His first coming (verses 3-5), and His appearance was like that of any ordinary Jewish man. But He will fulfill these scriptures at His Second Coming.

Jesus promised His disciples that the end-time Elijah would restore all lost doctrines to God's Church (Matthew 17:10-11), with a special emphasis on the family (Malachi 4:5-6). Like John the Baptist, he would preach a message of repentance, telling people to worship the true God and to turn away from the

carnal "get" way of life to God's "give" way of life. Once this end-time Elijah preached the good news of the coming Kingdom of God in all the world for a witness unto all nations, Jesus Christ would return within one generation (Matthew 24:14-34).

Today, the end-time Elijah has come already. We will learn about him and the work God used him to accomplish in a future lesson.

MEMORY TEST

Circle the letter next to the correct answer.

1. Why was John the Baptist arrested?
 - a. For preaching a message of repentance
 - b. For criticizing King Herod for adultery
 - c. For doing the Work of God
 - d. All of the above
 - e. None of the above
2. How did John the Baptist die?
 - a. Of old age
 - b. In a prison cell
 - c. On a cross
 - d. By being beheaded
3. Which two individuals did Peter, James and John see standing next to Christ in a vision?
 - a. Noah and Abraham
 - b. David and Solomon
 - c. Moses and Elijah
 - d. All of the above
 - e. None of the above
4. The Bible foretold that the end-time Elijah would:
 - a. come in the spirit and power of Elijah.
 - b. turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.
 - c. restore all things to God's Church.
 - d. prepare the way for Jesus Christ's return.
 - e. All of the above
 - f. None of the above

BIBLE MEMORY

Malachi 4:5-6

Matthew 17:10-13

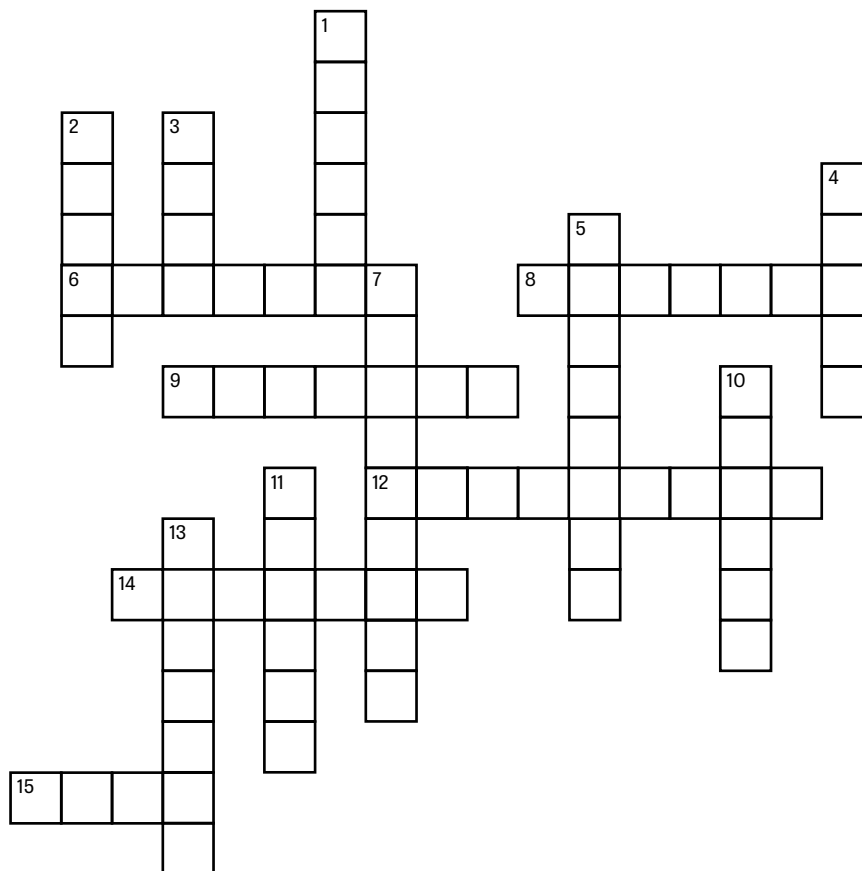
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Preparing the Way Crossword



Across

6. Christ was baptized as an _____ for us.
8. The gospel is the good news of the coming _____ of God.
9. Many prophecies in the Old Testament pointed to the coming of a _____.
12. Mr. _____ was the prophesied end-time Elijah.
14. The messenger sent to Zacharias
15. Christ will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with _____.

Down

1. Good news
2. Simon's new name
3. Where Christ did His first public miracle
4. The disciple John's brother
5. Christ began His _____ in A.D. 27.
7. Mary's elderly cousin who had a son in her old age
10. Satan was appealing to Christ's _____.
11. John the Baptist baptized in the _____ River.
13. The disciple who was a tax collector