

BELOVED, BELONGING, AND DELIGHTFUL

MATTHEW 3; MARK 1; LUKE 3; JOHN 1

Yokhanan is also called John. Yeshua is also called Jesus.



UNLIGHT COMBED THROUGH DATE PALMS AND olive branches, striping the lazy waters of the Jordan River. Below the surface, the catfish swam, dipping and darting past the ankles of the man above. Yokhanan (John) was a familiar shadow to them. He was a friend of God and a relative of Jesus. He lived in the wilderness, that place of quiet closeness, and spoke true words to God's people. His voice echoed above the water, calling—always calling—for God's people to get ready.

"Something new is happening!" he called. "A rescuer is coming! Come, wash off those untrue names you've believed and trust God's good names for you. Repent! Turn from your sins and return to God, where you belong."

And many people did. They came and dunked under the water and put their hope in God. John reminded them that trusting God's names should change their actions too. "Be a blessing! If you have two cloaks,

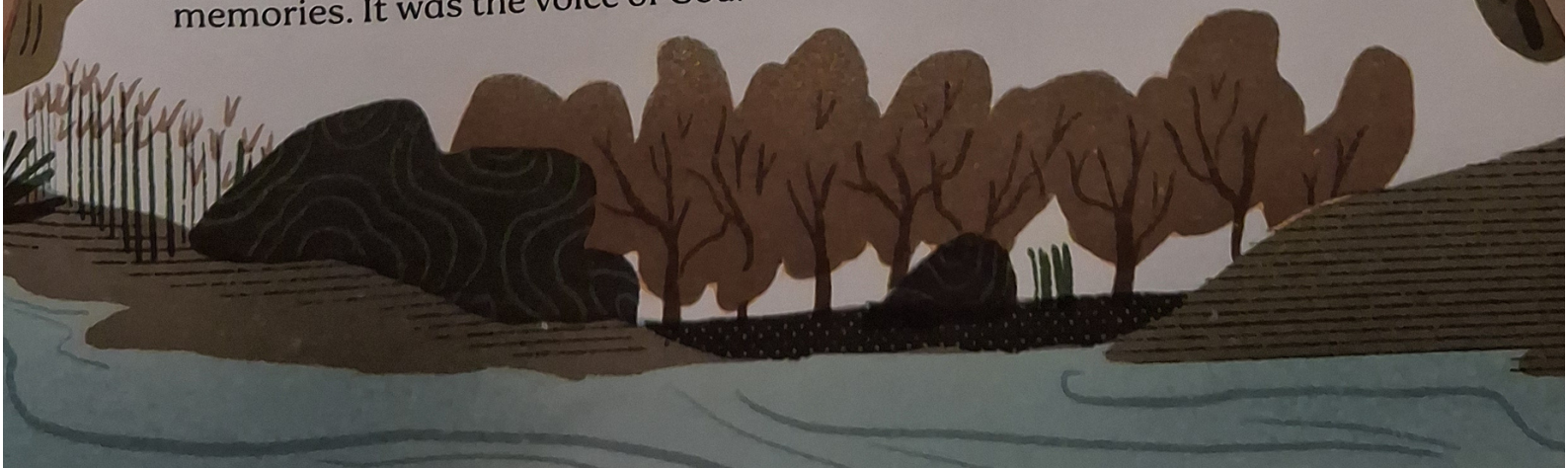
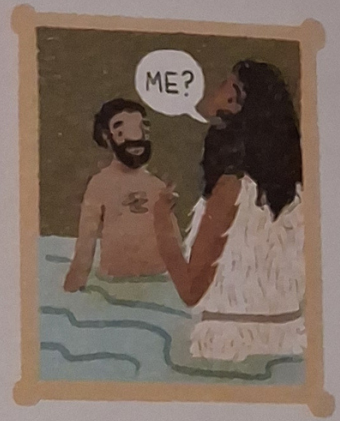


give one to someone with none. Do the same with your food!" "Don't use your power to harm! Don't cheat or steal!"

One day, a man stepped into the water to be baptized. John gasped—he knew this man. It was the baby the angels and shepherds had celebrated, all grown-up. The Great Rescuer. It was Yeshua (Jesus). *But what is Jesus doing here?* John wondered. "I should be coming to you for cleansing!" John sputtered. "Why would you come to *me*?" But Jesus assured John that it was all part of God's dream of belonging. So John trusted Jesus, and into the water Jesus went.

Dunking under for a moment, Jesus was gone, beneath the water with the catfish and quiet. Along the riverbanks, the people watched and waited. But Jesus burst to the surface again, and suddenly it was as though the world around him split open. It was as if the date palms and olive branches and riverbank peeled back to show a glimpse of heaven: God's world. Like a grin breaking open with joy, like a door creaking to reveal a room full of wonders. Light and love poured out.

God's Spirit emerged and, like a bright and beautiful dove, shimmered and settled upon Jesus, seeming to light him from the inside. As the crowd looked on with gaping mouths, they heard a noise that filled the horizon, calmed the waters, and danced among their cells and sinews. It was warm and familiar like all their very best stories and memories. It was the voice of God.





“This!” the voice sang out. “This is my beloved Son, who delights me.” The voice of God rumbled across the ripples and eddies, beyond the river, echoing through the canyons.

It was a special moment. One that John would play over in his mind for the rest of his life. He didn’t know the full story of God’s dream, but he was right: Something new was happening. God’s world—God’s kingdom—was bumping up against the human world, spilling over. That peeled-back glimpse into God’s world never quite closed again, and the Spirit stayed aglow in Jesus. It shimmered and settled and echoed through God’s words.

“This child Belongs. This child is Beloved. This child is a Delight.”