A PUPPET PLAY IN ONE ACT

On the Wings of a Dove

Based on Matthew 3:13–17 · Written by Carrie Elderberry



SUITABLE FOR
Ages 5 and up

PERFORMANCE TIME
10–12 minutes

CAST SIZE
5 puppets

PROPS REQUIRED
Green foliage and/or a blue cloth for the Jordan River

MAIN THEME

Baptism shows the whole world that we've chosen to let Jesus be in charge — dying to our old sin-nature and rising to a new life, following the example Jesus himself set at the Jordan River.

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To print just the play on its own, print pages 5–9.

PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

Synopsis

CHILD 2 is about to be baptized, which makes CHILD 1 nervous (what if the water's cold? what if you can't hold your breath?) and totally mystifies CHILD 3, who has never heard of baptism at all. The three watch a scene-within-the-scene: two DOVES perched above the Jordan River, puzzling over why Jesus — who's never done anything wrong — would ask John to baptize him, and marveling as the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove. When the children return, CHILD 1 decides to go ahead with the baptism after all, and CHILD 3 asks to borrow a Bible to find out more about “your Jesus.”

Spiritual Concept

Jesus wasn't baptized because he needed to repent, or be cleansed — he knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was baptized by John, of a high-priestly family, so that as our high priest (see Leviticus 8) he shows the way for everyone who would follow him. For us, going under the water and coming back up pictures dying to our sin-nature and being raised to a new life with Jesus in charge. The two doves, watching in wonder, help make that theology visible and concrete for young viewers.

Age Suitability

Best for ages 5 and up; the breath-holding game and silly dove banter play well for younger kids, while the sin-nature explanation in the source's own Hints gives leaders a simple way to go deeper with older children.

Performance Time

10–12 minutes

CAST & TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Characters (in order of appearance)

CHILD 1 — A modern child, a believer in Jesus but young and not yet ready for baptism — nervous about the water at first, but decides by the end that he/she is ready too.

CHILD 2 — A modern child, perhaps a bit older, who has just decided to be baptized and calmly walks the other two through what to expect.

CHILD 3 — Not yet a follower of Jesus, but friendly and genuinely curious — has never even heard of baptism, and asks to borrow a Bible by the end.

DOVE 1 — Watches the baptism of Jesus from above the Jordan, puzzling with Dove 2 over why Jesus would need to be baptized at all.

DOVE 2 — Watches alongside Dove 1 — a little more anxious (hides her eyes at the thought of Jesus “dying” under the water) but just as amazed by what she sees.

Prop Options

- Green vines or a leaf garland to represent the banks of the Jordan River in the dove scene.
- A chime or bell sound effect to mark the shift back in time to the Jordan River.
- If you have a top bar, the doves can perch above the stage to watch the baptism scene.
- A blue cloth can be spread on the arm-rest bar for the river.

PERFORMANCE NOTES FOR PUPPETEERS

New to puppets? General prep, technique, and voice tips live at gospelpuppets.org/getting-started.

Character Notes

Take real time with the breath-holding bit — the source's own hint says to inhale and exhale noisily and let the puppets “make faces.” It's a running gag that pays off when all three children hold their breath together near the end.

Dove 2 hiding her head when she thinks Jesus might “die” under the water is a comic beat, but it's also doing real theological work — don't rush past it.

Staging

A fun way to include more people, especially pre-readers eager to help, is to have a hand-held “curtain” ready for the scene change. Helpers can run up and screen the center stage for a moment while chimes are rung and the puppets switch places.

The children exit to the sides (or step out front) to “watch” the dove scene, framed as a flashback — keep them visible and attentive throughout, per the source's note.

Add the foliage prop for the dove scene and remove it when the children return.

Reading the Script

CAPS = volume/intensity.

Ellipsis (…) = the author's pacing notation.

ON THE WINGS OF A DOVE

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(Enter CHILD 2. Sit quietly. Enter CHILD 1, bouncy and ready to play.)

CHILD 1: Hey! What are YOU up to?

CHILD 2: Hi! Not much, just thinking.

CHILD 1: What about?

CHILD 2: I just told my family I am ready to get baptized. They said OK, and now are calling the pastor to tell him.

CHILD 1: Wow, that is pretty SCARY.

CHILD 2: Why?

CHILD 1: Well!… I saw Julia get baptized, and the pastor pushed her head right UNDER. I can’t swim very well, and the water might be cold!

CHILD 2: I know, I asked Julia about that. She said the pastor held her carefully, and her head was only under for a second maybe. She said she just held her breath.

CHILD 1: Like this? (suck in noisily and hold breath)

CHILD 2: Yeah!

CHILD 1: *(breathe out)* Whooo!

(Enter CHILD 3.)

CHILD 3: Hi! What are you guys doing?

CHILD 1: I’m practicing for my BAPTISM! Watch!

(CHILD 1 holds breath again and breathes out.)

CHILD 3: Bap— WHAT?

CHILD 2: Baptism. We are talking about what to expect.

CHILD 3: What is baptism?

CHILD 1: You get DUNKED! Under the water!

CHILD 3: Why would you want to do that?

CHILD 2: You never even HEARD about baptism?

CHILD 3: No, never. Why would you do that?

CHILD 2: When you believe in Jesus, and you decide to give your life to him, and FOLLOW him, you get baptized, so everybody knows.

CHILD 3: OK, but what IS baptized?

CHILD 1: I just told you! You get dunked under water!

CHILD 3: OK, you already said that, but WHY? Why get dunked?

CHILD 1: I'm not sure, but that is what Jesus did, and that is what he told US to do.

CHILD 2: I have an idea. There are some other puppets that can explain it better, and we can watch. OK?

CHILD 3: Sure, I love a puppet show!

CHILD 2: It's back in time. Let's make room for them!

(Children exit to the sides (or step out front) to "watch." Stay alert and focused. Start a chime or bell sound effect for the time change. Add the foliage prop and/or a blue cloth to represent water. Enter two DOVES watching Jesus get baptized — if you have a top bar, they can perch up above.)

DOVE 1: This is so exciting, seeing all these people getting ready for our Lord Jesus. Look, there is John, the baptizer.

DOVE 2: Yes, by going under the water, and then coming up again, they are showing that they are ready to live a new life.

DOVE 1: That's right! In the kingdom of Jesus! And from now on they will live for HIM.

DOVE 2: I'm kind of glad DOVES don't have to be baptized.

DOVE 1: Haha! No, that water looks cold, and I can't swim.

DOVE 2: They don't stay under long, though.

DOVE 1: I'm sure they can hold their breath.

DOVE 2: I'm going to try that! (breathe in and out noisily) Whoo…

DOVE 1: Look! Look! Here he comes! Our Lord Jesus!

(They tip their heads to look.)

DOVE 2: Wait… John is looking very confused… I can't hear what he is saying. Can you?

(Tip heads again as if listening.)

DOVE 1: No, but I can tell that the Lord Jesus wants to be baptized.

DOVE 2: Looks like John is trying to stop him!

DOVE 1: Yeah.

DOVE 2: Why IS our Lord Jesus getting baptized?

DOVE 1: He doesn't really need to…

DOVE 2: He's never done ANYTHING wrong.

(Tip heads again.)

DOVE 1: It looks like he is telling John, "Do it anyway."

DOVE 2: Oh, I know! He's doing it because he has come THIS time as a man. A HUMAN being…

DOVE 1: That makes sense. Baptism represents putting to death their sin-nature. Glad we don't have that!

DOVE 2: Ohhh, is he going to die right NOW? Under the water? I can't look.

(DOVE 2 hides head.)

DOVE 1: No, no, you can look, he is coming back up already.

DOVE 2: But why does he have to DIE?

DOVE 1: That is the only way to break the power of death.

DOVE 2: Oh, OK. Well, HE knows best.

DOVE 1: Yes. And he will save them from their sin-nature.

DOVE 2: Really! I love him SO much.

DOVE 1: Jesus is showing them the way.

DOVE 2: And if any of THEM want to follow him, they will get baptized too, right?

DOVE 1: Right. It shows the WHOLE WORLD that they have chosen to let Jesus be in charge. Oh! Oh! Look!

(Both DOVES look up.)

DOVE 2: The heavens have opened!

DOVE 1: God's Holy Spirit! He is coming down— like a dove!

DOVE 2: This is so awesome! Wow… doves are going to be so famous, after this.

DOVE 1: People will always think of doves differently, after this.

DOVE 2: But hush, listen! GOD is speaking!

(They tip heads to listen.)

DOVE 2: He said “This is my Son, my beloved Son. I am pleased with him.”

DOVE 1: When the humans are baptized, they will be showing the whole world that THEY belong to Jesus forever, DYING to sin, and alive to a NEW life.

DOVE 2: Love it! We had better let the children come back now, and see if they understand.

(Exit DOVES. Remove foliage and water props. Enter CHILDREN.)

CHILD 3: That is an amazing story. But Jesus lived so long ago! How can we know it’s true for us NOW?

CHILD 2: Well, the doves are just puppets, of course. But the story is true. It was remembered, and saved by GOD.

CHILD 1: Yes, friends of Jesus wrote it down for us.

CHILD 3: Where? I want to read about it.

CHILD 2: There is LOTS more, too. It’s in a special book, called the Bible.

CHILD 3: I’ve heard of that.

CHILD 2: I just finished reading a part of the Bible called “Mark.” A man named Mark. He lived back in that day.

CHILD 1: I think I need to get baptized too!

CHILD 2: But— I thought you were afraid?

CHILD 1: Well, not so much, now. I know I can hold my breath long enough. Let’s see who can hold their breath the longest! 1, 2, 3!

(ALL hold breath.)

ALL: Whooo!

CHILD 3: But what about following Jesus? Letting Jesus be in CHARGE?

CHILD 1: Oh that’s OK! I gave my life to Jesus a while ago. I love Him, and I know He loves me!

CHILD 3: Can I borrow your Bible? I need to find out more about your Jesus.

CHILD 2: Sure. But he wants to be YOUR Jesus too, you know.

CHILD 3: Well, we’ll see. And can I come to watch your baptism?

CHILD 2: Sure. But don’t expect any doves for mine!

(Enter DOVES at the sides.)

CHILD 1: Oh, look!

DOVES: Coo, coo!

CHILD 3: Hello doves!

DOVES: Coo, coo!

CHILD 2: Do you doves know, the Holy Spirit looked like YOU, when Jesus was baptized?

(DOVES nod their heads.)

DOVES: Coo, coo! Coo!

CHILD 1: They look like they wish they could talk. Would you doves like to help with the ending?

DOVES: Coo!

ALL: And that’s all for today! You can find out more about baptism in the Bible. Goodbye!

THE END

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Discussion Questions

1. Why was CHILD 1 nervous about getting baptized? What helped him/her feel ready?
2. The doves wondered why Jesus would get baptized when he'd never done anything wrong. Why did he do it anyway?
3. What does it mean that baptism shows the world we've "chosen to let Jesus be in charge"?
4. What happened when Jesus came up out of the water?
5. CHILD 3 asked to borrow a Bible after hearing the story. What questions would you want to ask if you were CHILD 3?

Related Bible Passages

Primary Text: Matthew 3:13–17 — Jesus comes to John to be baptized in the Jordan; the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and God speaks from heaven. (Full account — reference only.)

Additional Scripture:

- Romans 6:4 — “For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.” (NLT)

Song Suggestions

- “Down to the River to Pray” — Alison Krauss — https://open.spotify.com/track/79x6uDDP9EAT5c35zOZhXv
- “Wings of a Dove” — Ricky Skaggs and The Whites — https://open.spotify.com/track/2uB9RR0p5h39UZEkMfafel

Ministry Context

A natural choice for a baptism Sunday, or any series on new life in Christ. The breath-holding game gives kids (and nervous baptism candidates in the audience) a light, physical way into a topic that can otherwise feel intimidating.