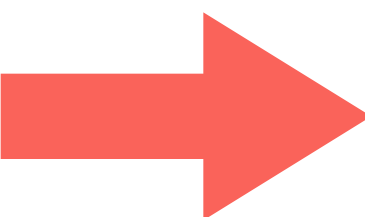


Stories of Christianity

Learning Objective:

To find out about Christian baptism through the story of John the Baptist.





**Have you ever
seen anyone getting
baptised?**

**What does
the word 'baptism'
mean?**

Baptism is a Christian rite of passage which involves water being used as a symbol of purification and regeneration. In some churches, babies are baptised to welcome them into the church family. Holy water is placed in a baptismal font. The priest or minister will then sprinkle water on the baby's head.



In other churches, baptism is used once a person is old enough to decide for themselves that they want to become a Christian. Adult baptism usually involves the person being totally immersed in water, either in a baptismal pool or outside in a lake or sea.



**Why do you think
Christians do this? Where
do you think this tradition
comes from?**

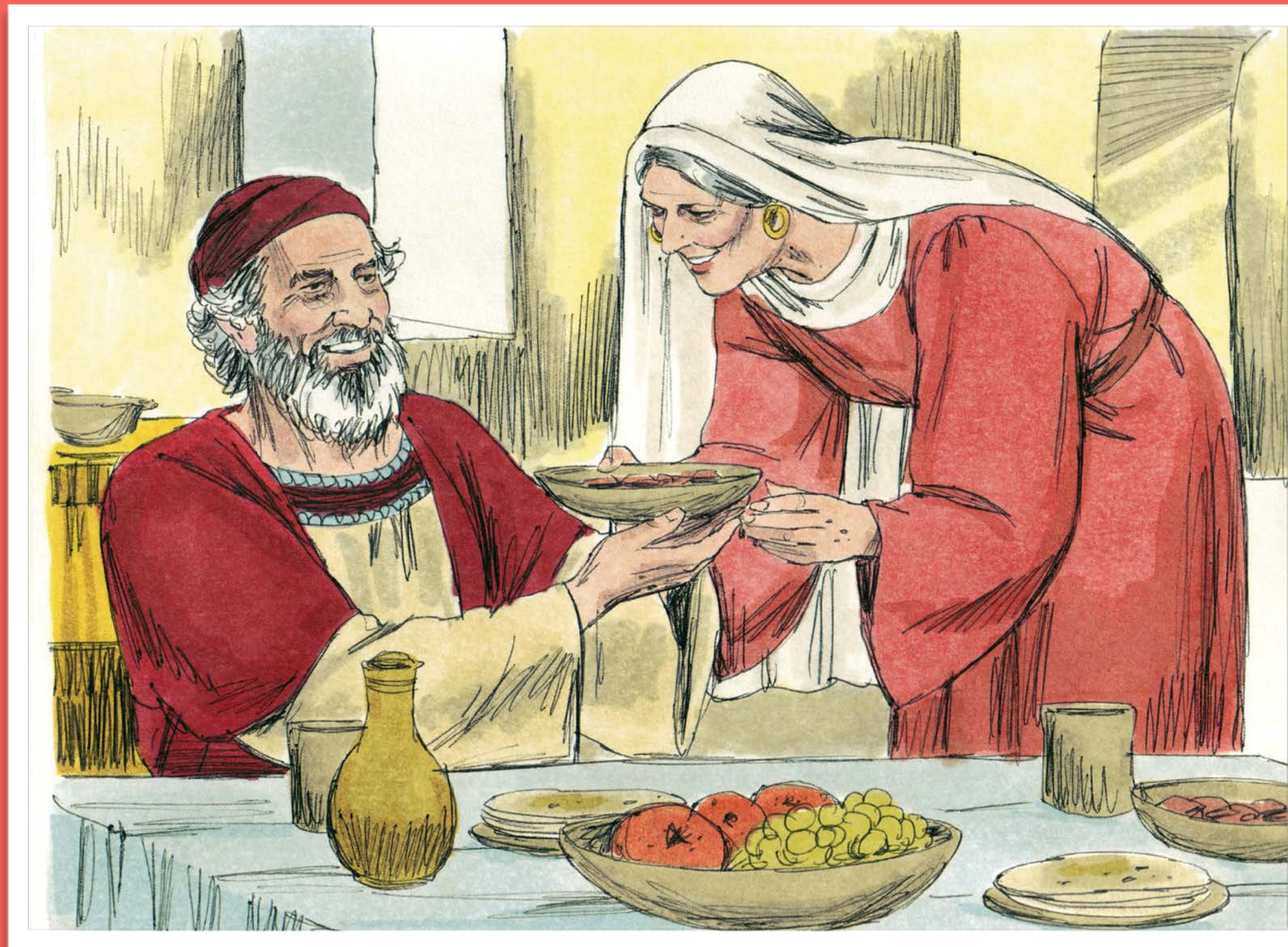


Today we are going to be reading the story of a man called John who became known as John the Baptist. John was the first person in the Bible to perform the rite of baptism.

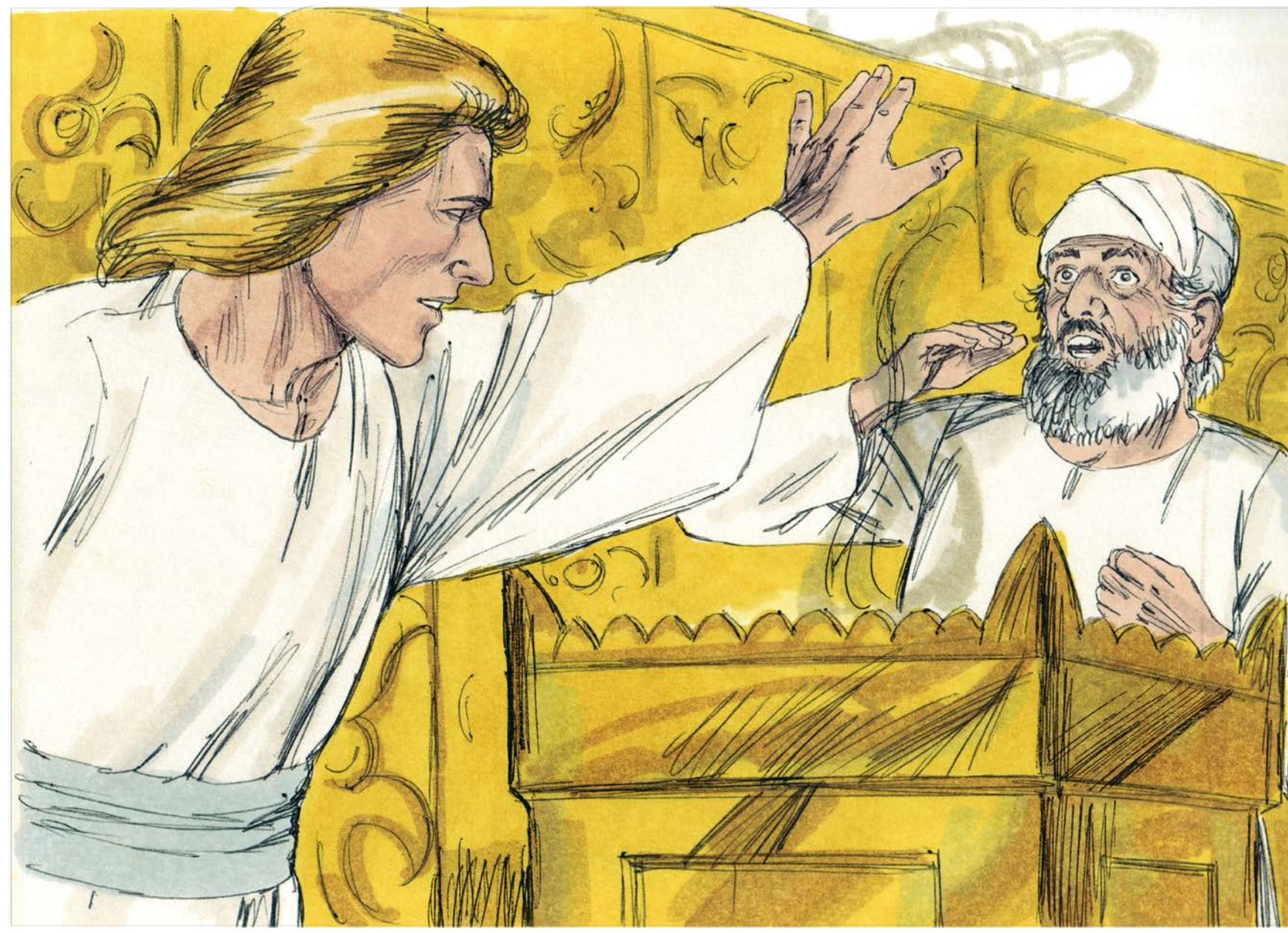


**Jesus said, “Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.”
Let’s read about this man and what made him so special...**

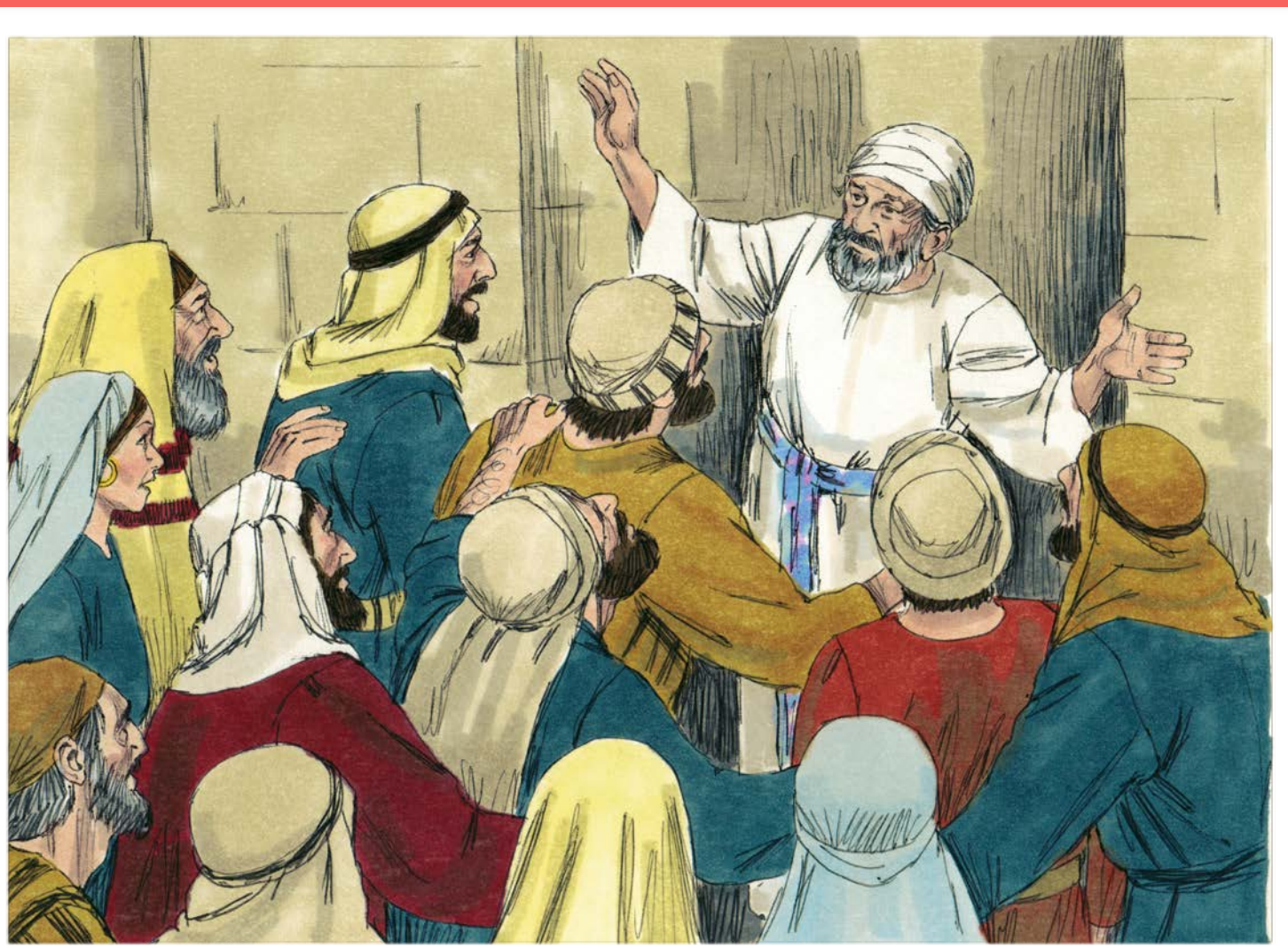
During the rule of King Herod of Judea, there lived a priest called Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They had both wished for a child but had never had any children of their own. Now they were old and had lost hope of ever having a baby. Nonetheless, they were both righteous people and followed all of God's commandments.



One day, Zechariah was in the temple performing his duties when an angel of the Lord appeared to him. When Zechariah saw the angel, he was overcome with fear. “Don’t be afraid,” the angel said. “Your prayers have been heard and your wife will have a baby. She will give birth to a son and you will call him John. John will prepare the way of the Lord and will lead people back to God.”

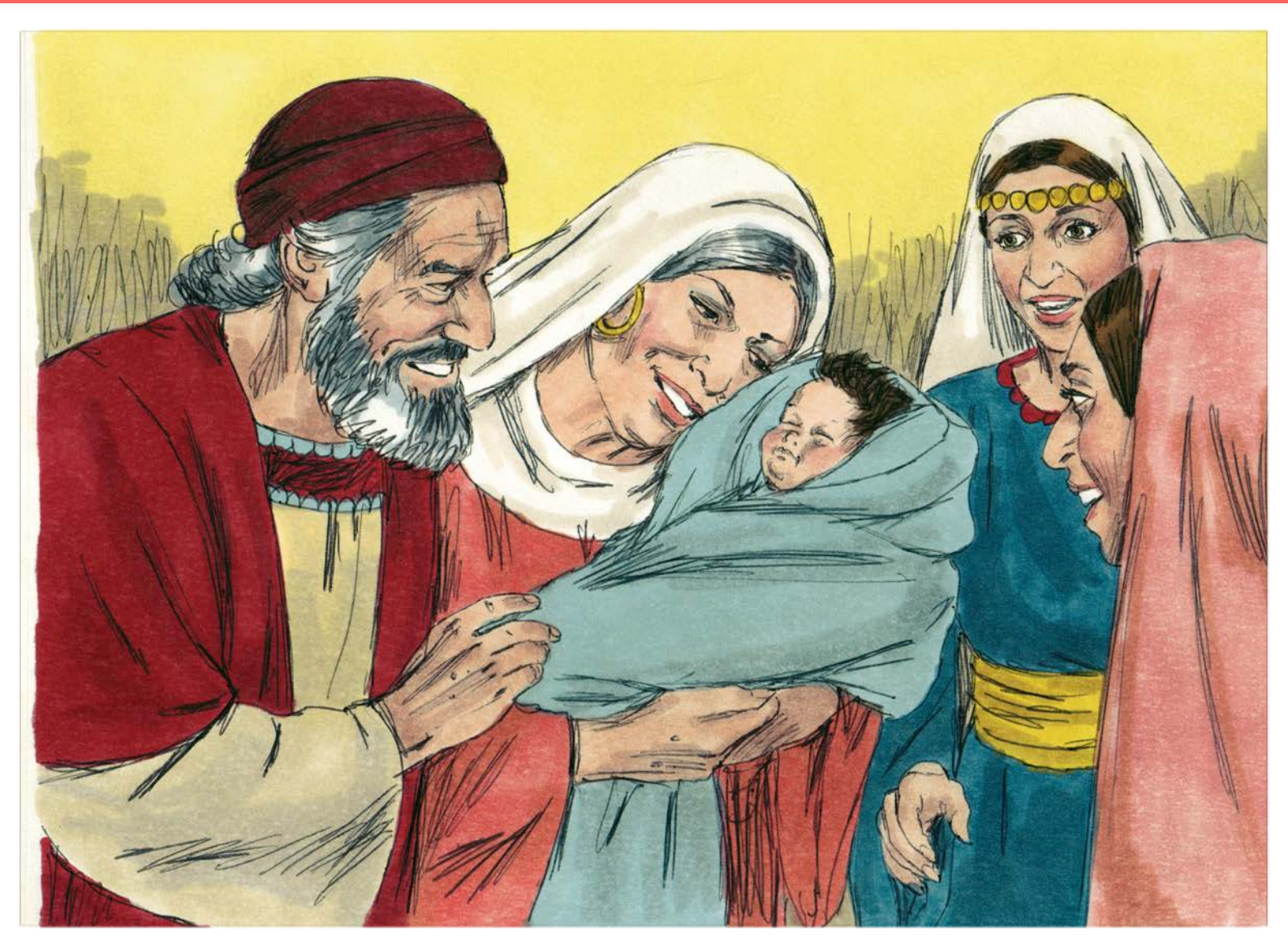


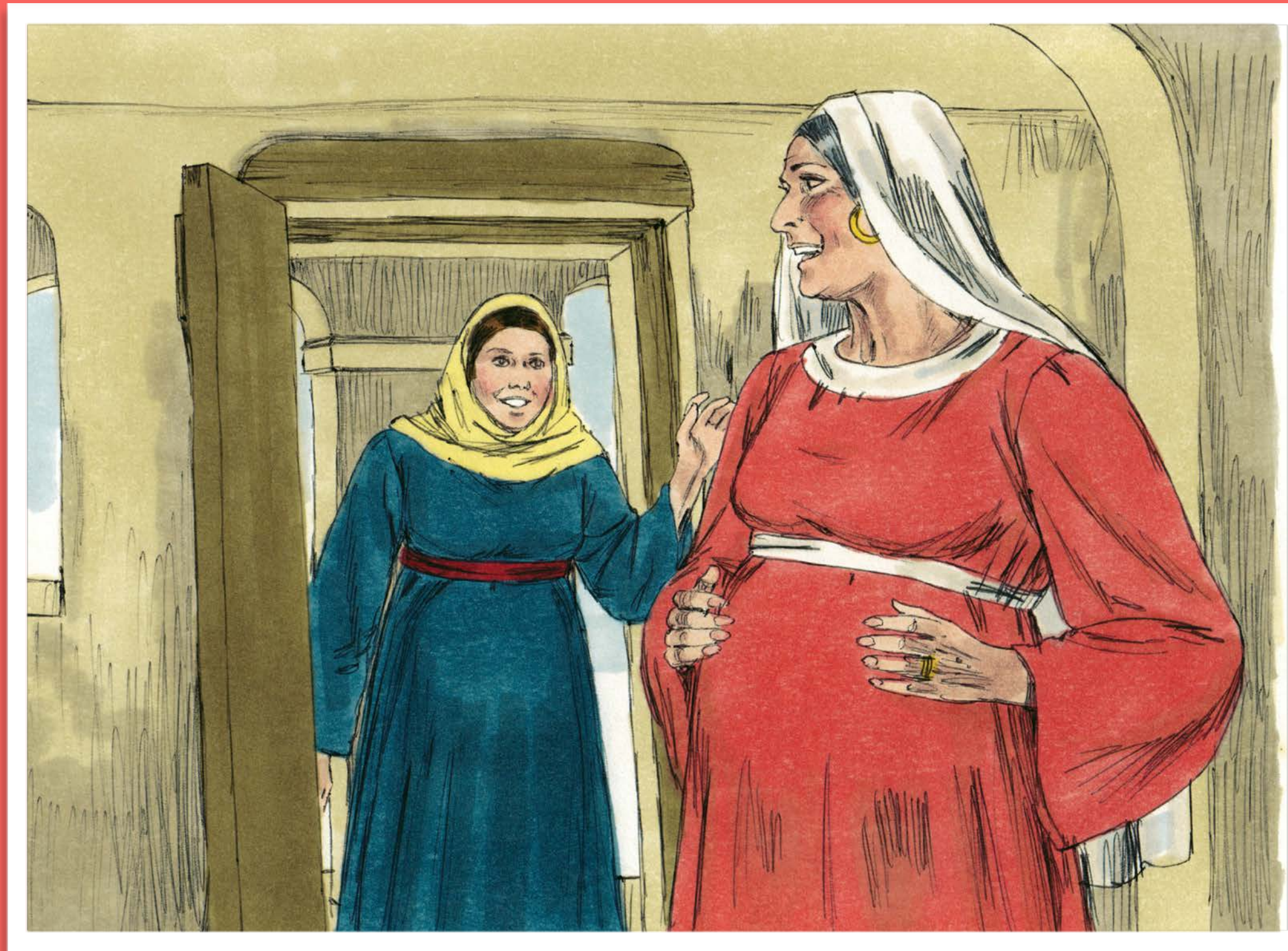
“How can this be?” asked Zechariah. “Elizabeth is too old to have children.” But the angel said, “I am a messenger of God and these things will happen. However, as you did not believe you will remain silent, unable to speak until the day these things happen.”



When Zechariah left the temple, he tried to tell the people outside what had happened but he was unable to speak. They realised that he must have had a vision in the temple.

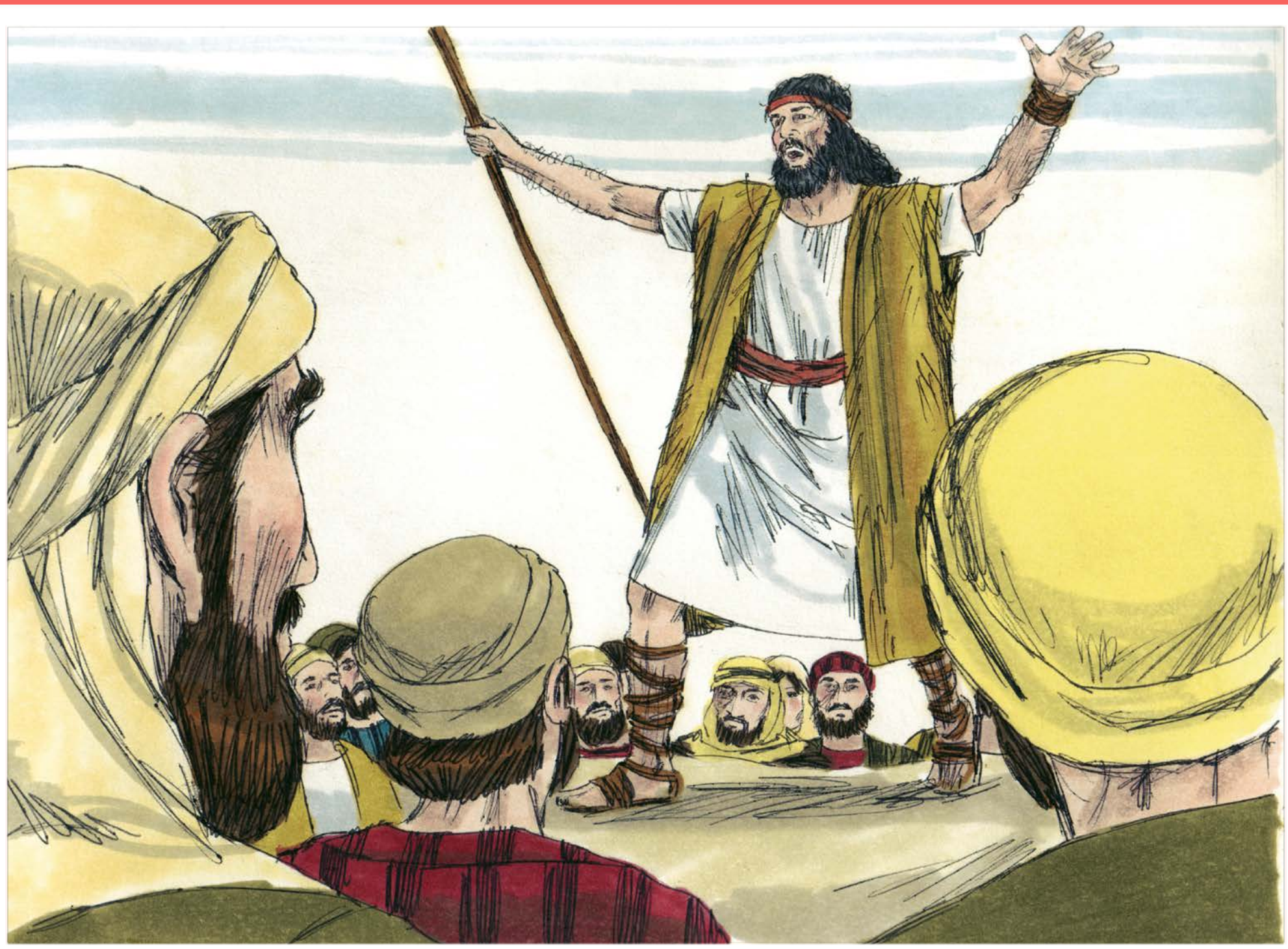
Just as the angel had said, Elizabeth had a baby boy. Everyone rejoiced with them for finally having a child. They wanted them to name the baby Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth refused. “I shall name him John,” she said.





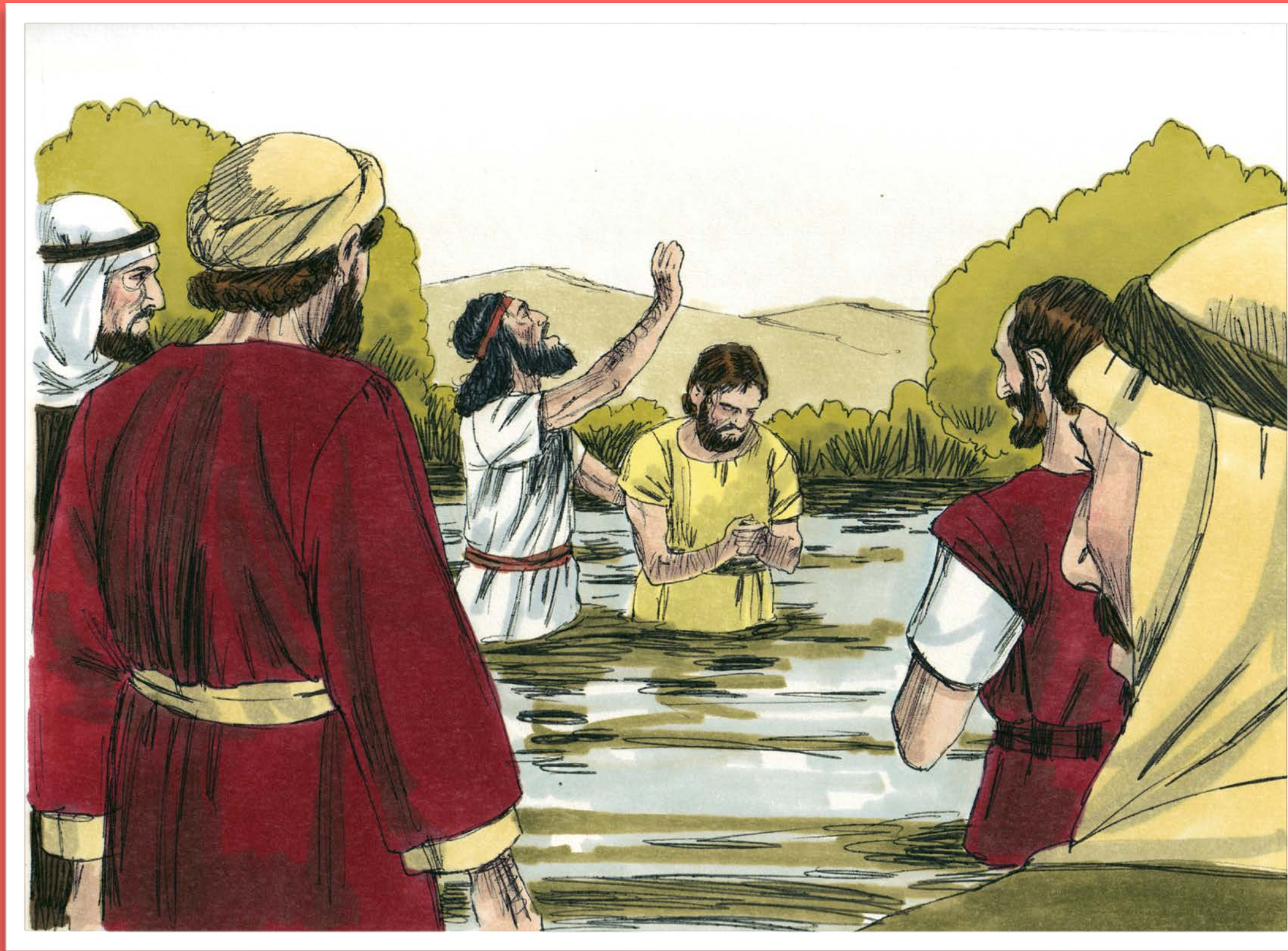
While Elizabeth was pregnant with John, a relative of hers called Mary was also visited by the angel. Mary was told that she would have a baby even though she was not yet married to Joseph. He would be a very special baby and his name would be Jesus. Jesus and John the Baptist were born about six months apart.

John grew up to be a man of strong character. Instead of serving in the temple like his father, he lived in the desert where he wore clothes of camel hair with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. His only wish was to help people get ready for what was going to happen.



**To everyone he met, he said,
“Change your heart and your minds!
Here comes the kingdom of heaven!”
He wanted people to realise that
Jesus was soon coming and that they
should be ready. He encouraged
people to turn away from doing bad
things and turn back to God.**

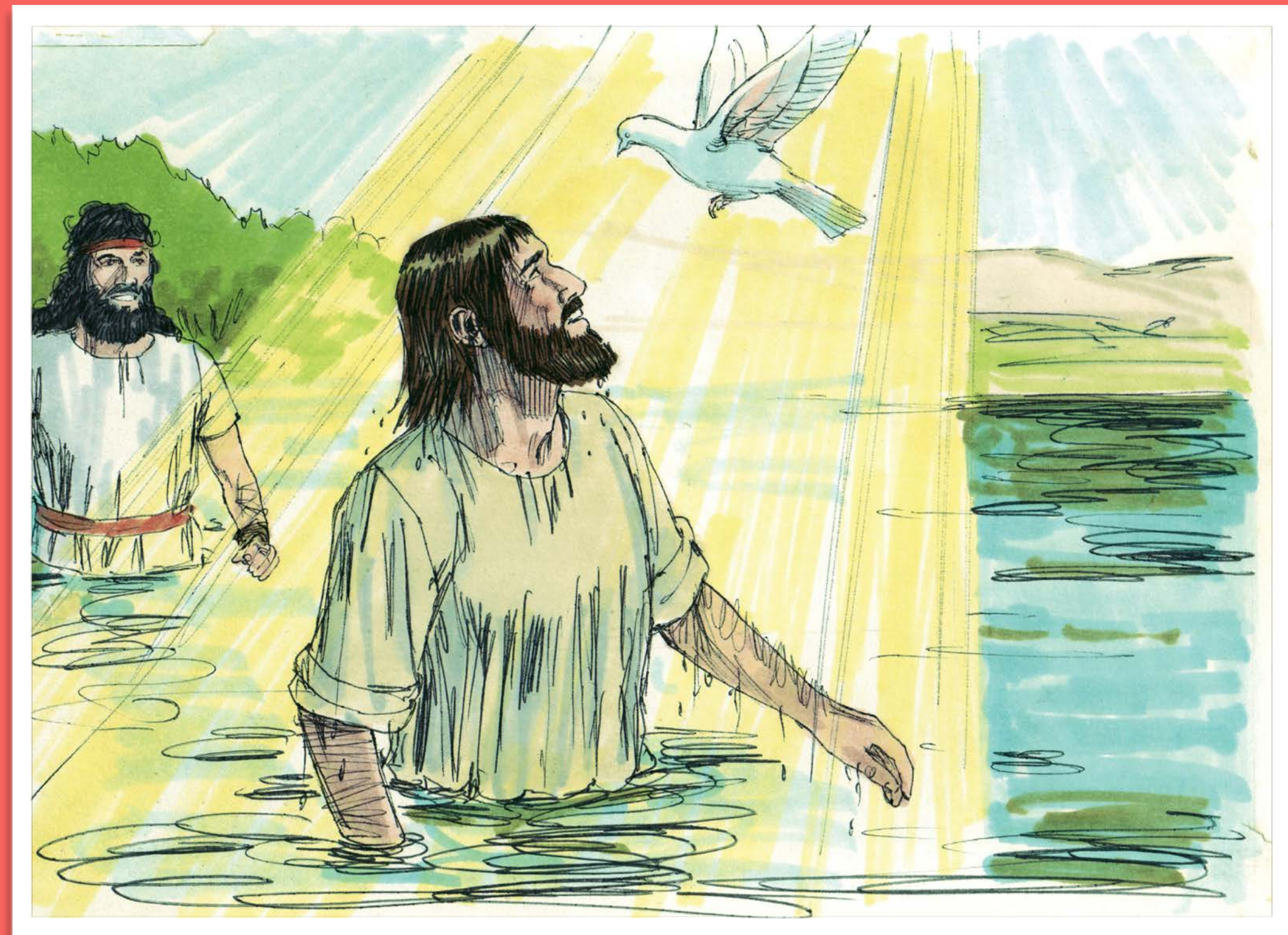
John started baptising people in the River Jordan. He baptised people who had turned away from their old ways and recognised that they had done wrong. Those who wanted to become right with God were washed clean by the baptism so they could start their lives again.



Some of the Pharisees didn't like what John was doing. "Are you the Messiah?" they asked. "I am not," replied John. "Then why do you baptise people?" John answered, "I baptise with water. There is one coming who is greater than me. I am not worthy to even untie his sandals."

When Jesus was ready to start his public mission, he went to John at the River Jordan. Lots of people were there listening to John talk. When Jesus reached the river, he asked John to baptise him. John didn't recognise Jesus. He baptised Jesus as he had asked and as he did so, he saw the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and resting on Jesus.

When John saw this, he knew that this man was the Messiah he had been waiting for. Over the next few days, he told his followers who Jesus was. Some of the people who heard him started following Jesus. These men became the first disciples of Jesus.





**John the Baptist
knew that he had a special
mission from God. Instead of thinking
of himself as a very important man, he
lived a very simple life and always made
sure people knew someone much
more important than him was
coming.**

**What role do you think baptism
played in making sure people were
ready for the coming of Jesus?**

The rite of baptism is symbolic. The water represents being washed of your old life and being born again to a new life with God. However, different churches have different ways of baptising people with different customs and traditions.

**Today you
will be finding out about
some of these different
traditions and practices.
Who's ready?!**

