

dwell<sup>®</sup>



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Dwell

Wonder (Grades 2-3)

Year 1, Unit 1: Wonder . . . About God's Amazing Plan

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## Welcome to Dwell!

Split-second images, fast-food dinners, instant messages, and intense competitions are part of daily life for the school-age kids who walk through the doors of your church each week. What if children’s ministry was different? Not more of the same, but less? What if kids had the opportunity to press “pause” on their fast-paced life so they could “be still and know that I am God”?

*Dwell* is more than a curriculum—it’s a place where kids and leaders pause to wonder . . . imagine . . . marvel . . . and dive into God’s story. Developed out of a desire to provide kids with less noise and more time to experience God, *Dwell* creates an environment where kids are offered opportunities to enter God’s story, and then live into and live out of it together.

For information on the big things in *Dwell*, including the age-level characteristics of the kids in your group, the scope and sequence at each level, and the curriculum goals and values, visit [www.dwellcurriculum.org](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org). Meanwhile, here are some questions and answers you might find helpful when using *Dwell*:

### **What’s in it for me?**

You’re a leader, but you’re also a learner. So we added something just for you to every session. “Reflections” are short devotionals designed to take you deeper into the story with background information, wondering questions, and teaching suggestions. Reading them will help you prepare to teach . . . and grow!

### **What are “wondering questions”?**

Wondering questions invite learners to dwell in God’s story as they consider the people in the story, the choices they made, and how God was at work in their lives. They aren’t a test—in fact they have no right or wrong answers! Wondering questions let you pause and reflect on God’s story longer, allowing it to take root and grow faith. We’ve provided you with wondering questions for every story. Depending on the ages and attention span of your particular group, you may want to pause and wonder during the storytelling or wait until after the story is finished to ask them—feel free to tailor the session to work with your kids. And be sure to ask what they wonder about too!

### **How do I tell stories in a way that connects with kids?**

Kids know the difference between a story told from the page and one that’s told from the heart. The best way for you to prepare is by reading the story out loud several times at home. (Try doing so once a day for the week leading up to your session—you’ll be amazed at the results.) When you tell a story we’ve provided, keep it nearby for a reference but aim to know your story well enough that you can make eye contact with your audience and use your voice and face to express emotion.

### **Does theology really matter in a children’s curriculum?**

Just because a children’s curriculum contains Bible stories doesn’t mean it is designed to teach kids what they need to know. The Re★formed tips you’ll find throughout this guide are your *guarantee* that every story is taught from a *Reformed, God-centered perspective*. It’s a perspective that views the Bible as a story about God—not about biblical heroes or morals or us—and considers every story as part of the one big story of God’s redemption and restoration of this fallen world through Jesus Christ. The Re★formed statements are your assurance that we take what your kids will be learning seriously; they explain our approach in every story you’ll be teaching.

### What do I need to know about “Faith Modeling”?

It’s important to *tell* kids God’s story, but you’ll make a bigger impact when you *live into* God’s story together. One of the ways to do that is by sharing your faith with the kids in your group. Throughout the leader’s guide you’ll find “Faith Modeling” tips to help you do that.

### What do the multiple intelligence icons have to do with how kids learn?

Studies have shown that people learn differently. If *what* we teach is going to impact kids, we need to pay attention to *how* we teach. Each activity in *Dwell* pays attention to the ways kids learn. The icons (see p. 5) are there to let you know which learning styles each activity taps into the most. For more information on learning styles—and a fun quiz you can give your kids to find out how they learn best, visit [www.dwellcurriculum.org](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org).

### What are “story symbols”?

Each Bible story in *Dwell* has its own story symbol (you’ll find a complete set you can download for free at [www.dwellcurriculum.org](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org)). By providing kids with a pictorial timeline, these symbols help them see how all God’s stories fit together in one big story. Each symbol is also found in the God’s Big Story cards that families will be using at home, so that the learning that begins at church can continue at home during the week!

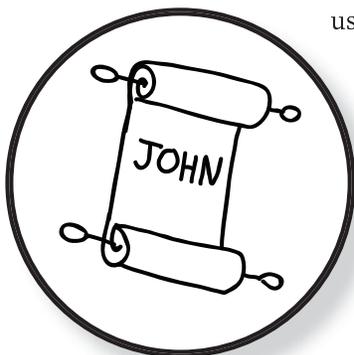
**Tip**  
Rearranging the symbols and having kids re-hang them is a fun way to review the stories you’ve told!

During the sessions you’ll use the story symbols to review where you’ve been in God’s story and to wonder about where you’re going next. Here are some suggestions to display your story symbols: hang up a new one each week to form a border that runs along the wall; attach each new symbol to form a “patchwork quilt” on the wall; or clip symbols to a “clothesline” that runs along one wall.



### How does *Dwell* help me partner with parents?

When families open their God’s Big Story set, they’ll find 165 cards that connect directly to every single story taught in the Imagine, Marvel, and Wonder levels of *Dwell*. Each story card in the set features a Bible passage and the symbol that matches the one kids saw when you told that Bible story at church. On the back of each card are six ways a family can respond to that story. Easy and fun to use, the cards encourage kids and adults to talk about their faith and wonder about God’s story together.



In addition to the God’s Big Story cards that families will be using at home, we’ve provided you with a simple way to send families a message about what’s going on in your group. You can either print and distribute a reproducible letter to families or use an online customizable e-message at [www.dwellcurriculum.org](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org).

You’ll also want to point parents to [www.nurturekidsfaith.org](http://www.nurturekidsfaith.org), where they’ll discover practical tips for Christian parents and recommended resources.

### A few notes about music . . .

For the Imagine (grades K-1), Wonder (grades 2-3), and Marvel (grades 4-5) levels we've put together two CDs called DwellSongs, one for each year of curriculum. On each DwellSongs CD you'll find songs that connect with the stories taught at each level as well as Scripture songs chosen to help kids remember specific verses and/or phrases of Scripture. We've also made all the songs available for a downloadable purchase at [www.dwellcurriculum.org/music](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org/music). (We think the whole family will enjoy listening to DwellSongs—you can purchase them for your families or direct parents to them at [www.faithaliveresources.org](http://www.faithaliveresources.org).)

You'll find lyrics for the songs for each unit at the back of your leader's guide. The Scripture song lyrics can also be found in the Bible! (While the translations used in the recordings may differ or may use particular phrases from the Scripture passage rather than the entire verse, we're confident that all the Scripture song recordings offer you and your children a wonderful way to hide Scripture in your hearts!)

Dive! (middle school) kids are an eclectic bunch—they have a wide-ranging (and ever-changing) taste in music, and their willingness to sing and dance may vary. Where possible we've provided you with suggestions for songs at this level. Invite your kids to bring in their favorite God-glorifying music to enjoy together!

# Tailoring Your Sessions to the Ways Children Learn

How do children learn? The answer to that question can be almost as varied as the children in your group. Some learn best through words. Others through music. Still others through nature or through movement.

Sessions in *Dwell* curriculum try to respect the many ways children learn. Dwell sessions include a wide range of activities that speak to children with the following types of intelligence (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Within each session, the icons below highlight the learning styles represented by each activity. As you teach, you'll begin to get a sense for how the children in your group learn best. Children who are

 **Word Smart**  
learn best through verbal activities (listening, reading, or speaking), including discussions, worksheets, writing, reading, storytelling, and word games.

 **Number Smart**  
learn best by exploring patterns and relationships through activities such as problem solving, logic puzzles or games, making charts and graphs, or putting things in sequence.

 **Picture Smart**  
learn best by visualizing concepts. These kids enjoy viewing maps, slides, pictures, videos, and diagrams; making jigsaw puzzles; and expressing their ideas with shape, color, and design.

 **Body Smart**  
learn best by using their bodies, acting things out, using puppets, moving— anything hands-on.

 **Music Smart**  
learn best through sound, music, and rhythm—playing musical instruments, writing their own songs and raps, listening to recordings, singing, and so on.

 **People Smart**  
learn best through doing things with others, cooperating and working in small or large groups, role playing, conversations, brainstorming, and other interactive exercises.

 **Self Smart**  
learn best by working independently through such things as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, and reflecting.

 **Earth Smart**  
learn best through activities connected to living things and natural phenomena, through nature walks, examining plants and animals, nature experiments, and activities that focus on ecology.

—The ideas on this page are based on material from the following resources: *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, © 2000, and a chart prepared by Donald L. Griggs, Livermore, California.

# 1

# The Birth of John the Baptist

## Scripture

Luke 1:5-25, 57-66, 80

## Focus

God surprised Zechariah and Elizabeth with the promise of a special baby.

## Faith Nurture Goals

- Imagine Zechariah's and Elizabeth's surprise at the angel's news.
- Sense that our God is able to surprise people with good things.
- Share our delight in God's daily surprises in our lives.

## Memory Challenge

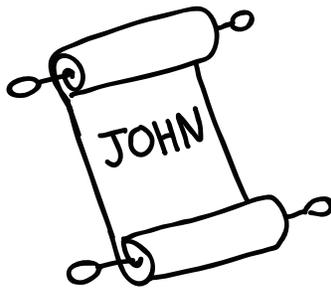
Luke 2:8-14

## Reflection: Getting into the Story

So often in the Bible, when God inaugurates a new era of his saving activity, look for a dead end situation (barrenness) and a surprise baby. Abraham and Sarah, Hannah, and now Zechariah and Elizabeth, all "barren" couples (of course the woman was blamed), were promised a surprise baby despite their doubts.

Here in Luke 1, God's biggest saving act of all is about to happen with the gift of his Son. God wants someone to prepare the way by stirring up a sense of need and fostering a renewed hope. So an angel visits old, childless Zechariah in a very strange place.

Luke paints a vivid scene of Israel's life and worship. Zechariah is one of a cohort of priests who were chosen by lot (only once in a lifetime) for the daily sacrifice of incense in the temple at Jerusalem (the sweet-smelling smoke of the incense symbolized the people's prayers ascending to God's throne). The chosen priest placed incense on glowing coals and prostrated himself before the altar in prayer. When the people outside saw and smelled the smoke from the incense, they prayed, "May the merciful God enter the Holy Place and accept with favor the offering of his people."



In the middle of this solemn act, an angel appeared and spoke to Zechariah about a special promised child who would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Perhaps feeling annoyed at the interruption, Zechariah expressed his understandable doubts. To which the angel responded with a strange sign: Zechariah went mute.

He was expected to emerge from the temple with a word of blessing for the gathered people, and, as Zechariah was delayed by this bizarre conversation, the crowd grew restless. Finally he stood there helplessly gesticulating without a word to say. (I think we're meant to at least smile at the scene.)

Zechariah goes home. Although Elizabeth, his wife, begins to bulge with pregnancy, Zechariah remains wordless until he fulfills the words of the angel and indicates the child's name will be John (meaning God's gracious gift).

Luke makes it clear that God's startling new thing isn't brand-new, but is woven into the fabric of Israel's history and worship. The old and the new fit snugly side by side.

This story has the seemingly contradictory elements of surprise and preparation. No doubt Zechariah and Elizabeth are surprised by the angel's announcement. On the other hand, God doesn't just plunk Jesus down into the world. He prepares the way with John. He makes

sure the world and his own people are as ready as they can be for the most surprising intervention of all.

### Wondering

- Why does God often do new things with dead-end situations?
- When has God done something new out of a dead end in your life?
- Why did the angel appear at this moment?
- What did Zechariah feel like when, surprised by the angel, he flubbed this most important moment in his career?
- Is there any wisdom for the church today in the overlap of the old and new in this story?

### Teaching

- There's a lot of vivid detail you can add to the story that kids this age may find fascinating. How about searching the web for more?
- If preparation is important even for God . . . well, you get the point.

#### General Materials

Each session of *Dwell* includes specific materials you'll need for teaching it, such as printable pages or props to use for telling the story. In addition, you'll want to keep a stash of the usual church school teaching supplies: Bibles, scissors, markers, crayons, board or newspaper, and the like, including a CD player or MP3 player.

### Session at a Glance

Steps	Time	Activities	Session-Specific Materials	Multiple Intelligences
Gathering for God's Story	15	All about us Praise and prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> Baby book or online search of names, optional <input type="checkbox"/> Song: "Joy"	Aa 
Entering the Story	8-10	Story	<input type="checkbox"/> Story symbol, session 1 (printable page 56)	Aa  
Living into the Story	10-15	Story drama	<input type="checkbox"/> None needed	  Aa 
Living Out of the Story	10	Talk time Good things pictures Wrap-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Show and Share papers, session 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Dear Family letter (printable page 53 or email version from <a href="http://www.dwellcurriculum.org">www.dwellcurriculum.org</a> ), one per child	 Aa 

## Step 1 Gathering for God's Story

It's a big day for you and your group—they are arriving curious about expectations and activities and you are arriving prepared to share and experience the wonder of God's love. That's exciting! As you prepare for your time together, be sure to read the Bible story (p. 9) out loud several times so you'll be able to maintain eye contact with your group while telling it.

As your kids arrive, make eye contact and welcome each one with a big smile. Learn their names as soon as possible and be sure to tell them your name too.

Use one or both of the following arrival activities to welcome your children.

#### Tip

If your kids will be entering at different times, you might like to use the nametag activity found under Easy Extras (p. 12).

### Tip

If you have a very small number of children in your group, have each one tell their first and middle name or two things they like to do.

- Learn each other's names and the significance behind them. Invite each child to tell the group their full name and also something they know about one of their names such as what it means or why it was chosen for them. ("My mom liked it" is a fine reason too!) You may want to bring in a baby name book (available at the public library) and look up the meanings together or, if you know the name of all your kids in advance, do an online search for the meanings and bring in the results.
- Sit in a circle and begin by having one child say his or her name and something they like to do or are interested in. For example, "My name is Kailey and I like to play basketball" or "My name is Sam and I'm interested in spiders." The child next to that person must then repeat what the person said and then add her own name and interest. The third person says the name and interests of the two previous people and adds her own. This continues around the circle until it gets to you—you'll have to say all the names and interests before adding your own!

Gather your kids around you and tell them how much you've been looking forward to getting to know them and to spending time together today—and in the future—meeting with God and learning more about God from the Bible.

### Tip

Play music as kids enter and as they work on projects. It sets a positive tone and kids learn the songs just by hearing them!

Share that every six weeks all of you will be learning some verses from Scripture together. Point out that it's a good idea to memorize verses from the Bible and ask if anyone has any ideas about why. (*So we can call upon them when we need reminders of God's promises or presence in our lives; so we can easily share Scripture with others to encourage and teach them.*)

Tell your group that one of the best ways to memorize something is to sing it—and that's exactly how you'll be learning most of the Memory Challenge verses this year! Read kids the verses they'll be learning—Luke 2:8-14—and cue the Scripture song for this unit, "Joy." Before it begins, invite kids to imagine the story unfolding as they listen to the song. Listen to it together once—or twice if you have time—and try to sing along.

After singing, invite your group to join you in prayer, praising God for being greater than all things and thanking God for surprising us with good things every day—things like wonderful weather, great-tasting food, and fun friends.

## Step 2 Entering the Story

Open your Bible to Luke 1 and tell your kids that today's part of God's big story comes from the book of Luke. Share that the book of Luke is named after the person who wrote it. He was a doctor who lived a long time ago and loved to tell others about God.

### Tip

The best stories are shared informally and naturally in conversations with friends and family. Tell a Bible story the same way—from the heart! Read the story in Scripture and read the leader's guide story aloud several times. Then use our version as a framework, adding your own personal style.

Show kids the story symbol for today's story. Explain that each story you'll be learning together for the next year will have its own special symbol to help them remember the story. Wonder aloud if your group will be able to remember all the stories and put the symbols in order at the end of the year! Show the special place you'll be posting all the symbols and hang this one up.

Explain to your kids that as you tell the story you don't just want them to listen to what happened—you want them to imagine it happening. As they hear the words, they should try to think about what it would have looked like if they were really there. Let them know that after you tell them the story, they get to tell it back to you!

Teach kids the following call and response as a way to enter the story together:

*Storyteller: And now it's time—*

*Listeners: for God's big story!*

*The story follows:*

Once there was an old man named Zechariah. Zechariah and his wife, an old woman named Elizabeth, had loved and served God for all of their lives. They were happy to be part of God's family. One thing made them very sad though—they had no children. For many years they had prayed for a child, and for many years they had waited for God to send them a baby. But that had not happened.

**I wonder how Zechariah and Elizabeth felt as they waited and waited for God to answer their prayers.** *(Pause for responses.)*

Zechariah was a priest in God's temple. On the day today's story begins, he was very excited and maybe a little bit nervous because he'd been chosen to be the very special helper at the temple. While everyone else waited outside, Zechariah got to go into the Most Holy Place in God's temple and pray to God all the prayers of God's people.

**What do you think Zechariah might have prayed about that day?** *(Pause for responses.)*

While Zechariah was praying in the quiet of the Most Holy Place, God surprised him. All of a sudden, an angel appeared right near where he was standing! Zechariah was terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah. God has heard your prayers. You and Elizabeth are going to have a baby—a baby boy. And you must name him John. He'll bring joy to you and many other people. Your son will be great in God's eyes, and he will help God's people get ready for the Savior to come."

Even though Zechariah had dared to ask God for a baby, he didn't dare to believe God's promise. Zechariah said to the angel, "How can that be true? Elizabeth and I are already very old."

The angel answered. "I was sent from God to bring you this surprising news—so you should believe it! Because you don't believe me, you won't be able to talk until the day the baby is born. Every word I said will come true in time—God's time!"

It was just as the angel said—when Zechariah finally came outside of the temple, he couldn't say a word. The people who had been wondering what was taking him so long in the temple now wondered why he wasn't speaking!

Zechariah was full of surprising news about the special baby who would be born to help God's people get ready for the Savior. From the way he was moving his hands, the people could see that he was trying to tell them something, but they couldn't figure out what it was.

**Can you imagine how Elizabeth reacted when Zechariah came home and told her—without talking—that God was going to surprise them a baby?** *(Pause to give kids time to wonder about this.)*

Everything happened just as God had promised. Even though they were very old, Zechariah and Elizabeth had a baby boy. Friends and relatives came from far and wide to celebrate. They all figured the baby would be called Zechariah—just like his dad. Everyone was surprised when Elizabeth told them, "No. He is to be called John."

"John?" they said. "No one in your family is named John! What is Zechariah going to say about that?"

### Tip

Story symbols are an important part of Dwell. Each week you'll be using them as picture reminders of God's stories and forming a picture timeline. Each story symbol can be found in the God's Big Story cards kids will be using at home with their families and on every Show and Share paper they receive. If possible, choose a central place on your wall to hang today's symbol—and the ones to follow throughout the year.

### Re★formed

While it would be easy to teach this story as a cautionary tale about always believing messages from God, the focus of this story is not Zechariah's doubt but God's careful preparation and gracious gift—to Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the whole world.

Zechariah heard them talking and he motioned for something to write on. They gave it to him and he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately Zechariah's voice came back. And the first thing he did was praise God!

The baby John grew up and pleased God, just as the angel had said he would. God surprised Zechariah with the gift of John, and John got people ready for another big gift from God—the Savior, Jesus.

Guess what? God loves you and will surprise you with many good things in your life too!

## Step 3 Living into the Story

Tell kids that you're going to tell the story again—only this time they'll be in it! Like Zechariah, they won't be able to speak; instead, as you say the words, they're going to show with their bodies what happened.

Prepare by reviewing and imagining the different story scenes together. Ask your group to tell you what happened first in the story. What happened next? Then what? As kids name different story parts, encourage them to include how people might have felt or responded in each.

If desired, list their ideas on a board or sheet of newsprint. Your story scene breakdown might look something like this:

Zechariah and Elizabeth were sad because they had no children.

Zechariah was excited to be the special helper in the temple.

Zechariah prayed to God in the temple.

Suddenly an angel appeared. Zechariah was scared!

The angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth were going to have a baby.

Zechariah came out of the temple and tried to show the people what had happened.

Zechariah went home to Elizabeth and showed her they were going to have a baby.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were so happy to have a baby.

Zechariah wrote, "His name is John."

Zechariah got his voice back.

Zechariah praised God.

Once you've discussed all the scenes, invite your kids to stand up and get ready to act. Read each story scene description, filling in extra details as necessary and pausing for everyone to silently mime what happened.

When the story ends, invite kids to give themselves a round of mimed applause (show them how to clap without actually letting hands touch) and then gather them around you on the floor.

### Tip

If you are short on time, omit having the kids provide you with a scene breakdown and use the ones listed here instead.

### Tip

If possible, position actors so they can see you but aren't in direct view of each other.

## Step 4 Living Out of the Story

Reaffirm that God is so good! God surprised Zechariah and Elizabeth with the wonderful gift of a baby, and God surprised all the people in the story with the exciting news that the Savior was coming soon. God surprises all of us with good and loving gifts too!

Invite kids to think about and share some of the ways God blesses (and surprises!) them with goodness. You might want to make a list of their suggestions and watch it grow as you

continue to add new ideas. Use every opportunity to reiterate the theme of today's session: God surprises us with good things.

End this time with prayer. Make it a popcorn prayer by pausing in the middle so kids can jump in and thank God for some of the good things they've received or experienced. Your prayer might go something like this:

**Loving God, you sure surprised Zechariah and Elizabeth with your gracious gift of a baby! We know you surprise us with good things too, and we'd like to say thank you for those. Thank you, God!** *(Pause for kids to add their own thanks.)* **We love you, Lord. Amen.**

As time permits, invite kids to the craft table to illustrate their surprises from God. Distribute paper and markers or coloring pencils and ask the children to draw a picture of one of God's good gifts to them. Encourage those who wish to do so to add a descriptive sentence to their drawings. Be sure to join the group, illustrating a good thing with which God has surprised you.

Before kids leave, pass out their Show and Share papers. Explain that they are called Show and Share papers because they are for *showing* someone at home and *sharing* today's story!

Ask someone to point out today's symbol on their paper. Find the Memory Challenge verse together. Finally, show kids the "On the Way Home" list on the front page. Explain that on their way home today they have a special job to do: look out the window and see how many good things from God they can find. Make sure everyone has something to write with before they go. (Hand out some old crayons or pencils they can take along if necessary.) Challenge them to tell everyone else who is traveling with them to join in and shout out all the things they see too!

If you've printed a Dear Family letter, be sure to give those to family members as the children leave; if you prefer to email families the information, tell them to check their inboxes this week for important information about the coming year with their child.

### Faith Modeling

Share with the children one way in which God has surprised you with goodness and love recently. Tell them how you were reminded of God's great love for you, and how you responded to God's gift of love with praise and thanksgiving—just like Zechariah did!

### Tip

Add your phone number or email address to each Show and Share page and encourage kids (with parental permission) to call, email, or text you when they get home to tell you what they saw!

## Easy Extras

### 1. Arrival Activity: Nametags Aa 1

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Materials:** blank note cards, markers or colored pencils

If your kids arrive at different times, invite them to work on personalized name tags. Prepare in advance by drawing a 1" (2.5 cm) border around a large blank note card for each child. (If you'd like kids to wear their nametags, punch a hole in each top corner and add a length of yarn.) Each child will use colored pencils or markers to write their name in the center of the card; they can fill in the border with pictures of their favorite things or people. Make one for yourself as well, and take a few moments at the beginning of the session to share your favorite things with each other.



## 2. Story Scenes

*This activity can be used in place of Step 3: Living into the Story.*

**Time:** 15 minutes

**Materials:** paper, colored pencils or markers

Talk with your kids about all the different things that happened in the story and print a description of each “scene” on a separate sheet of paper. (See Step 3 for a list of story scenes you might use—if desired, print each one on a sheet of paper before class begins.) Pass out colored pencils or markers and one story scene page per child. Invite kids to illustrate their scene. When everyone is finished, have kids gather in the order in which each scene occurred in the story. Tell the story together by having each child describe what is happening in his or her illustration.

## 3. Freeze!

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Materials:** music CD and CD or MP3 player

For this waiting game you’ll need to play music as the kids move around the room. When you turn off the music everyone must freeze into position—and hold that position as long as they possibly can or until you turn the music back on.

## 4. Role Play

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Materials:** props as described below

Bring a bag of props (a baby doll, a large sheet for the angel, a notepad and pencil for Zechariah, enough towels or small scarves to provide each child with a head covering) and invite kids to act out the story. Select actors to play the angel, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the people. Look for creative ways to position furniture to form a temple and/or an altar where Zechariah can pray and meet the angel. Stand back and see what your group can do!



# 2

## The Angel's Message

### Scripture

Luke 1:26-38, 46-56

### Focus

God surprised Mary with the promise of a baby—Jesus, the Messiah.

### Faith Nurture Goals

- Imagine how Mary felt when the angel appeared to her.
- Sense that Jesus' coming is God's greatest gift to us.
- Join others in thanking and praising God for the gift of Jesus.

### Memory Challenge

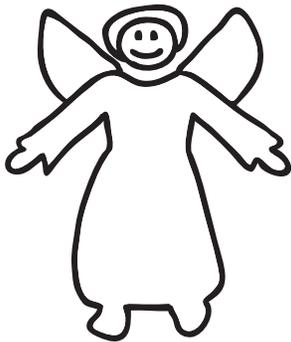
Luke 2:8-14

### Reflection: Getting into the Story

When it comes to Christmas, Nazareth gets short shrift next to Bethlehem; the annunciation stands in the shadows next to the manger. Maybe it's because Protestants tend to be a bit squeamish about how to handle Mary, the mother of our Lord (the angel's opening words to her are the same as in the famous "Hail Mary" prayer). But you can't understand Bethlehem until you first watch this amazing scene of a young girl visited by an angel.

A young girl she is. Scholars who know this period tell us that fifteen or sixteen was a common age for a girl to be betrothed. Imagine this mere girl suddenly accosted by a bright shining angel (as I imagine it), who announces that she, of all people is "highly favored"—or, to put it another way, "You're a very special girl, and the Lord has something in mind for you."

Angel visits always seem to happen before great movements of God. Just off the top of your head you can probably think of half a dozen. Angel means "messenger," and that's exactly what they do in all these cases.



In this case, the message is monumental. God is about to make his great promised move, sending his own Son as Messiah, and Mary will be the one who gives birth to him.

Read through the angel's announcement. The angel reiterates, "You have found favor with God." Make no mistake, this phrase means "God really likes you, and therefore wants to cooperate with you in the greatest invasion of all history." What an astounding thing for a young girl to hear!

As the angel continues, it's practically a mini-course in theology within three sentences: "Jesus," "Son of the Most High," "throne of David," "house of Jacob," "his kingdom will never end." All deeply important words and concepts about which volumes have been written. Add it up and it means that this promised child, this astounding event, involves the "hopes and fears of all the years," and it all comes down to this young girl God really likes in the backwater town of Nazareth.

Of course, there's the small question of how this will take place since Mary is a virgin. The angel explains it as much as possible, but one thing is clear: this is the holy One, the very Son of God. And then, echoing the words God spoke to a doubting Sarah long ago, the angel concludes, "Nothing is impossible for God."

As the eyes of all longing, hoping people throughout the ages are fixed on her, we await Mary's answer. It was an announcement, of course, but it could not happen without her consent. And she said, "Yes! Let it be to me according to your word."

Here, Mary is a picture of every believer and of the whole church. We are called to say yes to God's transforming work in our lives, and yes to the transforming work God wants to do through us.

### Wondering

- How do you imagine Mary in this scene? Her physical demeanor, the look on her face?
- Was she excited, scared, mystified, honored, or all of them together?
- Have you ever felt that God had looked on you with favor, that God really liked you, as the angel announced to Mary? (Think about your baptism in the light of what God said to Jesus in his baptism in Luke 3:22.) Any time God asks us to serve him in some way is an indication of his favor toward us.

### Teaching

- You don't have to explain the mystery of the virgin birth. No one really can. It's enough to say with Mary, "How can this be?" and marvel at it.
- The story's climax is not the angel's announcement but Mary's "Let it be." It culminates in faith and obedience, as this young girl willingly becomes a part of the greatest story ever told. In some small way, we all confront an announcement of God's will and purpose in our life, and are asked to consent to becoming a part of it.

### General Materials

Each session of *Dwell* includes specific materials you'll need for teaching it, such as printable pages or props to use for telling the story. In addition, you'll want to keep a stash of the usual church school teaching supplies: Bibles, scissors, markers, crayons, board or newsprint, and the like, including a CD player or MP3 player.

### Session at a Glance

Steps	Time	Activities	Session-Specific Materials	Multiple Intelligences
Gathering for God's Story	10-15	Match and Snatch  Praise and prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> Game cards (printable page 59), prepare two sets <input type="checkbox"/> Song: "Amen"	Aa   
Entering the Story	10	Story time	<input type="checkbox"/> Story symbol from last time <input type="checkbox"/> Story symbol, session 2 (printable page 56)	Aa 
Living into the Story	10	Story mime	<input type="checkbox"/> None needed	Aa  
Living Out of the Story	15	Bible bookmarks	<input type="checkbox"/> Bookmarks (printable pages 61-62; make double-sided copies) <input type="checkbox"/> Colored stickers <input type="checkbox"/> Song: "Joy" <input type="checkbox"/> Show and Share papers, session 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Memory Challenge posters (printable page 54 or 55)	Aa   

## Step 1 Gathering for God's Story

As you begin this second session, welcome your kids with an air of expectancy—great things are about to happen! Greet them by name with a warm and friendly smile. As you go through the session, reinforce the habits and traditions you set last week. Then enjoy your time together as you share the love of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, with your group.

After welcoming the kids, introduce yourself again this week just to be sure that everyone knows your name too!

Use the following arrival activity to welcome your group:

Invite kids to play “Match and Snatch.” Ahead of time, print two sets of game cards. Show them one matching set of cards from the deck, pointing out that each card shows a way of sending a message to someone. Then shuffle the cards together and lay all of them face down, four rows across and four rows down. Divide the group into two teams and have each team stand on opposite sides of the playing area. Kids take turns turning over one card and then another to see if they can make a match. If so, the player snatches up the matching cards and holds them for his team. Then a player from the other team may take a turn. The team with the most matches wins. The winning team high-fives each other; the runner-up team low-fives each other. Have each team tell what the actual message of their matches might be.

### Tip

If you are short on time, instead of playing the matching game in teams, give one card to each child and invite kids to tell what an actual message might be.

Bridge to the story by telling the kids that today’s story has something to do with messages.

When you’re ready to begin your time of praise and prayer together, gather your group around you and take a few moments to share news with each other, asking kids if there is anything they are looking forward to or worried about. Once everyone has had the opportunity to share, bring

their joys and concerns to God together in a simple prayer, beginning as follows:

**Dear God, we’re so glad you are with us wherever we go and whatever we do. We’ve been talking about some of things that are happening in our lives, Lord, and we want to tell you about them too. . . .**

Introduce the song “Amen” to your kids. Explain that like the song you learned together last time (and will be singing before your time together ends today!) this song is also about Jesus’ birthday. The part they’ll be learning today is easy—the word “Amen”! Sing it together once.

Conclude your praise and prayer time with an echo prayer. Ask kids to echo each sentence after you say it, including the amen. Begin with eyes closed and hands folded. Use simple sentences thanking God for bringing you together, for this time of worship, for this church, for each person, and asking that God will bless your time together.

## Step 2 Entering the Story

Invite someone to point to last week’s story symbol (hanging on the wall somewhere in your room). Ask kids to tell you what the symbol reminds them of and briefly review the highlights of that story together—the angel bringing God’s promise of a special baby to Zechariah and Elizabeth and that baby being born. Conclude that God kept that special promise. Show today’s story symbol—the angel. Wonder out loud what another story about an angel might be about. Leave the discussion brief and open-ended, so that kids are still wondering what the actual story will be.

Open your Bible to Luke 1. Tell kids that this true story follows right after last week’s story. Invite them to listen carefully because they are about to find out the story behind the angel symbol. Remind kids of the call and response you taught them last week and then use it together:

*Storyteller: And now it’s time—*

*Listeners: for God’s big story!*

*The story follows:*

It had been years since God’s great big, important promise of a Savior. Not just a few years—but a lot of years! God’s messenger Isaiah first announced that God would send the Messiah—Jesus—who would save people from their sins. The people told their kids about the promise, and then those kids told their kids and grandkids. Everyone waited. When would the promise come true?

**I wonder what the people were thinking when the Savior still hadn’t been born and they’d been waiting so long.** *(Pause for responses.)*

Of course God hadn’t forgotten the promise—God never forgets! One day God called his messenger, the angel Gabriel, and gave him the very important job of announcing that it was time—God was ready to send the Messiah. God gave Gabriel very specific instructions about how this would happen, and who he should talk to.

**How do you think Gabriel, being an angel, felt about going to earth to bring this big, important news to a human?** *(Pause for responses.)*

Gabriel went to the town of Nazareth, to the house of Mary, a young woman who was getting ready to marry Joseph. He found Mary alone in the house. Perhaps he took a deep breath because this was the big moment for the big announcement! Gabriel said, “Greetings, Mary. God really likes you and wants you to do something very special. The Lord is with you.”

**I wonder what Mary thought when she saw the angel and heard his words.** *(Pause for responses.)*

Gabriel could see that Mary was confused about what was happening and what he had said, so he continued, “Don’t be afraid, Mary, God is very happy with you. Soon God will send you a baby, and you will name him Jesus, a name that means ‘the Lord saves.’ He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will make him King, and he will rule forever.”

**I wonder what Mary thought after hearing what the angel told her about God’s plans.** *(Pause for responses.)*

You can believe that Mary’s mind was full of wondering questions. The most important thing she was wondering about at the moment was how she could have a baby when she wasn’t even married yet. And so she blurted out, “How can that be? A baby must have a father!”

Gabriel knew the answer to that question because God had explained it to him. “God will be his Father. The Holy Spirit will do this for you, because the baby will be God’s Son. God can do anything, Mary! Do you remember your cousin Elizabeth, Zechariah’s wife? She’s so old—who would have thought that she could still have a baby? But God can make that happen too. God can surprise people in wonderful ways. Nothing is impossible for God!”

Mary looked right into Gabriel’s eyes. Quietly and humbly she said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen just as you have said.” Then Gabriel disappeared.

**What do you think Mary did after the angel left? What would you have done?** *(Pause for responses.)*

**I wonder if it took her a long time to fall asleep that night and what kind of things she thought about.** *(Pause for responses.)*

### Tip

Today’s story has two enormous surprises that you will want to convey to your group. Use your voice and facial expressions to give wings and power to your words: wide-open eyes, whispering, pausing, slowing down the pace. Your kids will remember the story in vivid detail long after the words have left your tongue.

### Re★formed

Tell the story of Gabriel’s interaction with Mary for all its wide-eyed wonder, but remember that the focus is on our promise-keeping God, who is announcing that the promised Messiah, Jesus, is about to be born!

## Step 3 Living into the Story

Tell kids that you shared God’s story with them using words—now they get to tell it back to you using actions! Divide the group into two acting teams and have each team sit down in a different side of the room. One side of the room will represent Gabriel, and the other half will be Mary. Explain that as you retell the story, they should do the actions you describe without speaking. (You might also have them repeat any words after you.) Tell them that you will point to them when it’s time for them to act out their part. That will also be the signal for the other group to FREEZE into position until their turn comes again. Point out that they’ll need to listen carefully to find out what actions their group should do. (Be sure to pause as necessary to give kids time to do the actions appropriately.)

*Point to the Gabriels:*

Gabriel walked into Nazareth.

He stopped occasionally to look at shops he passed.

He may have scratched his chin now and then, thinking about the strange things people on earth have.

He probably shook his head a time or two, watching people and wondering what they were up to.

When he arrived at Mary’s house, he walked through the open door and took in a big breath—it was time for the big announcement!

*Point to the Marys:*

Mary was in the kitchen, putting away the dishes she had just washed and dried—

plates over on the table,

silverware in the tray under the water basin,

and glasses up on the high shelf.

She turned around to see an angel standing there. She was surprised!

*Point to the Gabriels:*

Gabriel took a step back. He held out his open hands to calm her. He spoke, slowly walking toward her. “Greetings, Mary. God is pleased with you. The Lord is with you.”

*Point to the Marys:*

Mary’s face showed surprise—and confusion—and fear.

She looked this way and that for a moment.

*Point to the Gabriels:*

Gabriel stepped back a few steps because he saw that Mary was troubled.

He held out his hands toward her as he said, “Mary, don’t be afraid. God has chosen you because he is pleased with you. You will have a baby and you will name him Jesus.”

*Point to the Marys:*

Mary looked at the angel, her face full of questions.

Her forehead was wrinkled in confusion and she held out her open hands.

She shrugged her shoulders and then blurted out, “How can this be? The baby needs a father and I’m not married.”

*Point to the Gabriels:*

Gabriel smiled because he knew the answer to that.

He walked right up to her and said, “The Holy Spirit will be with you. God will be the baby’s father. Nothing is impossible with God!”

*Point to the Marys:*

Mary quietly said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen just as you say.”

Give yourselves a round of mimed applause—clapping without making a sound—for your efforts.

## Step 4 Living Out of the Story

Don't let time escape today without spending a few minutes talking together about the good news of Jesus' birth and what it means for us. Express to your group your own joy at the promise of Jesus' birth—a promise that tells you how much God loves you.

Ask if anyone can recall the meaning of the name Jesus. Give your group a hint—Jesus' name means what he came to earth to do. Pass out the bookmarks that you've printed out ahead of time (note that you need to print on both sides) and read the meaning there—"the Lord saves." Give kids a few moments to decorate their bookmarks with coloring pencils or markers. Point out that the location of this month's Memory Challenge is on the back of the card and encourage kids to tuck the card into that place in a Bible at home. (If you're aware of any children who may not have a Bible at home, quietly arrange to get one for them.)

### Faith Modeling

Share a time or experience when having Jesus in your life gave or still gives you joy. It's a great way to encourage kids to watch for those moments or experiences in their lives too!

As kids finish their bookmarks, invite them to come up to you and say to each one, "Jesus came for you too, [name]." Then attach a colored sticker to each child's shirt, explaining that it's a mystery sticker—you'll tell them more about it later. Once everyone has received a sticker, gather kids around you. Explain that the stickers are called "mystery stickers" because people might ask what they are for. When they do, tell them that it's there to remind you to share some good news—that Jesus came to save them!

Be sure to save time to learn the Memory Challenge for this unit by singing the song "Joy" together. Before singing, ask if anyone can remember what the Memory Challenge verse you're learning is about. (*The angel's message to the shepherds.*) Show kids the Memory Challenge page they'll be taking home today. Encourage them to decorate it and hang it up somewhere they'll be sure to see it. Hold up the page so you can read the verse together and listen and sing along to "Joy."

Close with a circle prayer. Have kids stand close together, interlocking arms with those on each side, and then folding their own hands in prayer. Point out that interlocking arms when we pray reminds us that we are linked together as members of God's family. Offer a simple prayer thanking God for the promise that Mary will bring Jesus, God's Son, into the world.

Before kids leave, distribute their Show and Share papers. Ask them if they can recall why the papers have that name. (*They are for showing to someone at home and sharing the story.*) Point out the "On the Way Home" activity on the front page. Challenge kids to invite others traveling home with them to participate in the activity, giving ideas about what things Mary would need to get to be ready for her baby boy to arrive. (If possible, set out a box of crayons and invite kids to take a crayon so they are ready to roll!)

## Easy Extras

### 1. Arrival Activity: Big Surprises Aa

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Materials:** paper, markers

If your kids arrive at different times, ask them to think back over the past week about a surprise they may have had. Or have them think about the biggest surprise that they have ever had. Hand out paper and markers and invite kids to draw or write about that surprise; you'll be sharing them with each other later. Be sure you draw one to share too!

## 2. Circle Story Aa

*This activity can be substituted for Step 3: Living into the Story.*

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Materials:** none needed

While seated in a circle on the floor, have kids retell today's story as a group. Explain that one person will start the story with the first sentence, the next person will add a sentence telling what comes next, and so on, going around the circle. Point out that it's all right to go around the circle more than once. Challenge kids to remember all the details.

### Tip

Spice it up by adding a “body smart” activity to each of the story problems: (1) kids sit on one hand while solving the problem; (2) kids hold one ear while solving the problem; (3) kids sit with one hand on their heads while solving the problem.

## 3. Story Promise Problems

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Materials:** none needed

Challenge kids to sharpen their math minds because you have three story problems (see below) for them to solve—problems about how long people would have to wait for promises to come true. Point out that the problems start out easy and work up to hard. Remind kids that solving them is a group activity. They should talk together and come up with one answer. Do the problems one at a time.

- Austin just had his eighth birthday. While he's happy to have a birthday, he's already looking forward to his ninth birthday because that's when Aunt Josie has promised to give him \$10 for each year he's been alive.

**How long will Austin have to wait to get the money?** (1 year)

**How much money will he get?** (\$90)

- Mr. Perez was thirty when he promised his children something special when he died, something that was the most important thing in the world to Mr. Perez, and he hoped it would be to them. Each child would receive the same thing. Mr. Perez died at the age of eighty-seven.

**How many years did his children have to wait?** (57 years)

**What do you think he gave them?** (Encourage discussion, and then tell kids that he gave them each a Bible.)

- Margo's grandma promised her that if she learned her Memory Challenge verse she would give Margo a penny for every word in the verse. The verse is the same one we have this month.

**How much money will Margo receive when she learns the verse?** (Have the verse handy so the kids can say the verse and count the words.)

**How long do you think it will take her to learn it?**

Conclude by pointing out that everyone gets promises in their lives. Some aren't so important, and others are very important. But no promise is as important as God's promise that he would send Jesus into the world—and God kept his promise! Jesus is our Savior, the Messiah!

## 4. Mixed-up Messages Aa

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Materials:** none needed

Ask the group to sit in a circle. Have each person think of, but not say out loud, a message a mom might give her kids, teachers might give their students, or a police officer might tell kids. When everyone is ready, have one child begin by whispering his message to the person on his right, who will whisper it to the next child, and so on, around the circle. Have the person at the end report the message he heard. Then have the person who started it tell what the message was. Enjoy the mixed-up messages!

# Song Texts

## Amen

*Note:* use the following call and response format below for each of the verses.

*Refrain*

Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen.

*Leader:* See the little baby

*Response:* Amen

*Leader:* lying in a manger

*Response:* Amen

*Leader:* on Christmas morning.

*Response:* Amen (*5 times*)

See him at the temple (Amen)

talking to the elders (Amen)

how they marveled at his wisdom. (Amen) (*5 times*)

See him at the seaside (Amen)

preaching and healing (Amen)

the blind and the feeble. (Amen) (*5 times*)

See him in the garden (Amen)

praying to his Father (Amen)

in deepest sorrow. (Amen) (*5 times*)

Then they crucified him, (Amen)

Jesus, our Savior, (Amen)

and he rose on Easter. (Amen) (*5 times*)

Words: African-American spiritual

## **Joy (Luke 2:8-14)**

*Verse:*

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby  
Keeping watch over their flocks at night  
An angel of the Lord appeared to them  
And the glory of the Lord shone around them  
And they were terrified. But the angel said to them  
Do not be afraid. I bring you good news

*Chorus:*

Of great joy that will be for all the people  
Joy that will be for all the people  
Today in the town of David  
A Savior has been born to you  
He is Christ the Lord  
He is Christ the Lord

*Repeat verse, then go to Chorus 2.*

*Chorus 2:*

Of great joy that will be for all the people  
Joy that will be for all the people  
Today in the town of David  
A Savior has been born to you  
Joy that will be for all the people  
Joy that will be for all the people  
Today in the town of David  
A Savior has been born to you  
He is Christ the Lord  
He is Christ the Lord

*Bridge:*

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths  
And lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host  
Appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*Chorus 3:*

Glory to God in the highest  
Glory to God in the highest  
Glory to God in the highest  
And on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests

*Repeat Chorus 3*

And on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests

Words: Jason Houser

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Dear Family,

Like us, kids are busy. Their lives are filled with split-second images, fast food dinners, quick conversations, and extracurricular competitions. This year we're going to give kids less noise and more time to experience God as we dwell in God's Word together each week. Your child's group is called "Wonder"—every time we meet we'll be entering one of God's stories, and then living into and out of it together. For the next six weeks we'll be learning stories about the events leading up to and including Jesus' birth, as well as his early years on earth.

Each week your child will bring home a Show and Share paper designed to help kids show and share what they've learned at church with you at home. Every story we learn has a story symbol that will help your child recall the story and see it as one part of God's big story. You'll find that story symbol on the Show and Share papers and also inside the God's Big Story cards you can use each day at home.

In addition to singing songs of praise, we're going to be learning verses from Scripture by singing them! (You may purchase your own copy of DwellSongs at [www.faihaliveresources.org](http://www.faihaliveresources.org). Individual songs can also be downloaded at [www.dwellcurriculum.org/music](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org/music)—just ask me for the titles!)

We're excited to begin a new year of children's ministry and can't wait to begin this faith journey with you and your child! Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

P.S. Check out [www.nurturekidsfaith.org](http://www.nurturekidsfaith.org) for practical Christian parenting tips, recommended resources, and more! If you want to learn more about Dwell, visit [www.dwellcurriculum.org](http://www.dwellcurriculum.org).

## A Royal Announcement . . .



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

—Luke 2:8-14, NIV



## A Royal Announcement . . .

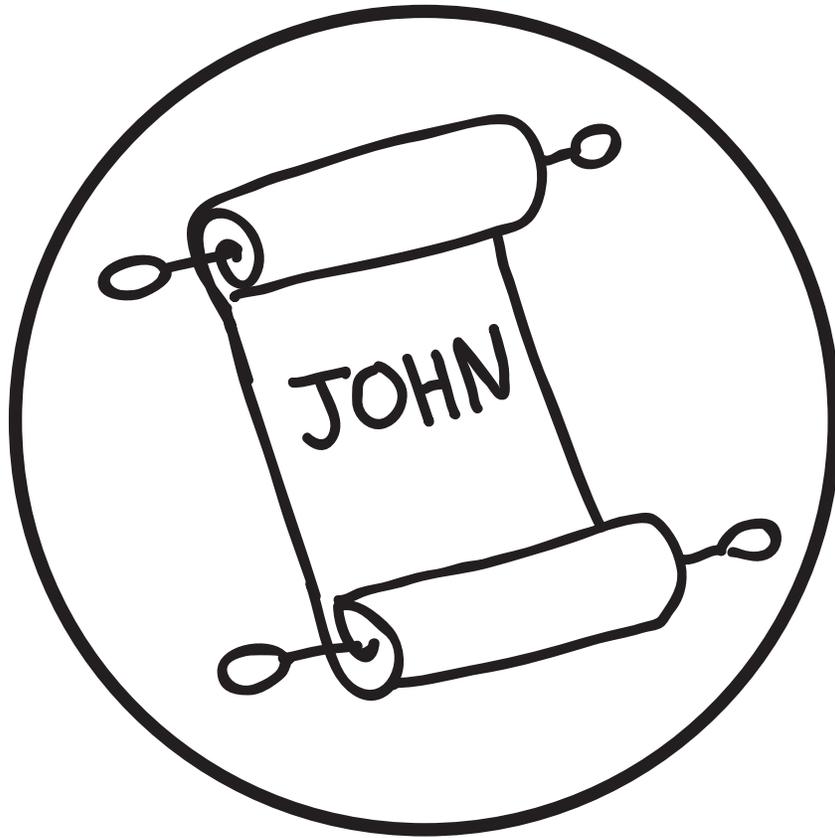


In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

—Luke 2:8-14, NRSV

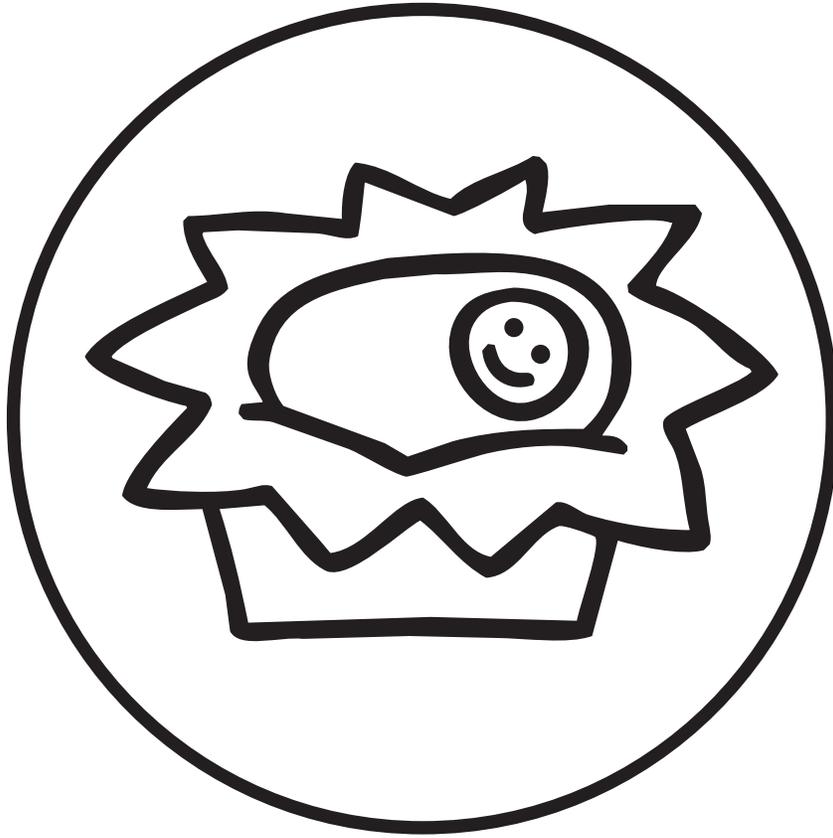




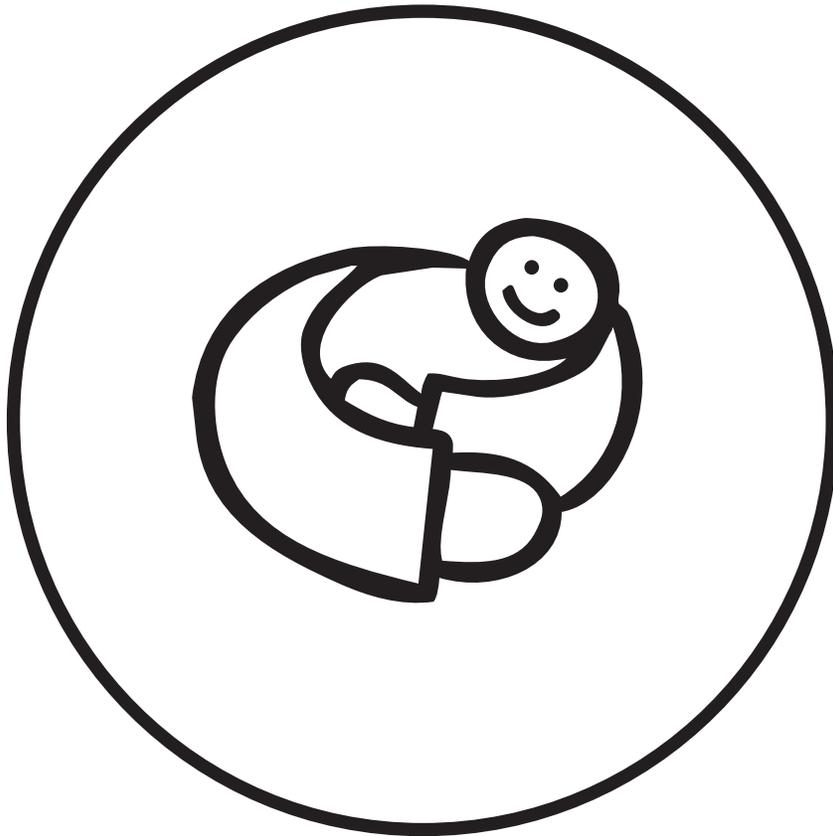
Year 1, Unit 1, Session 1



Year 1, Unit 1, Session 2



Year 1, Unit 1, Session 3



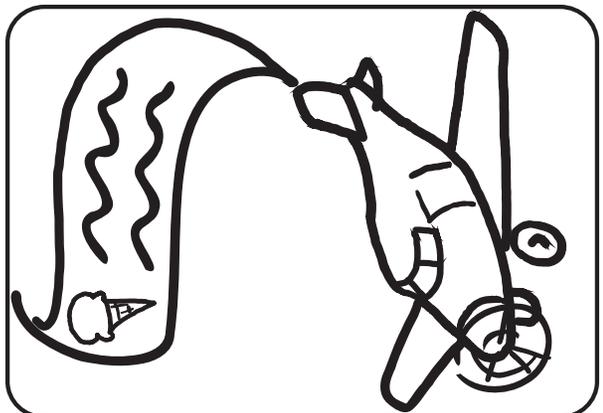
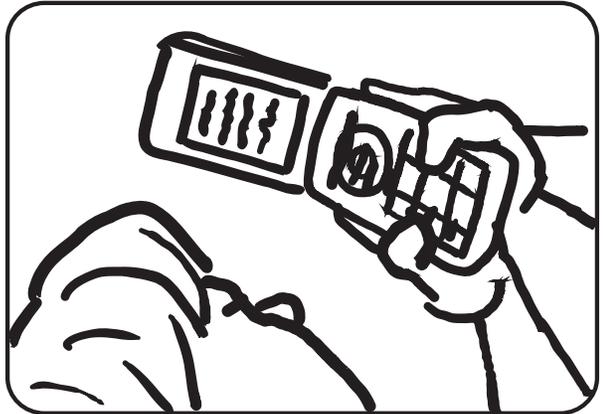
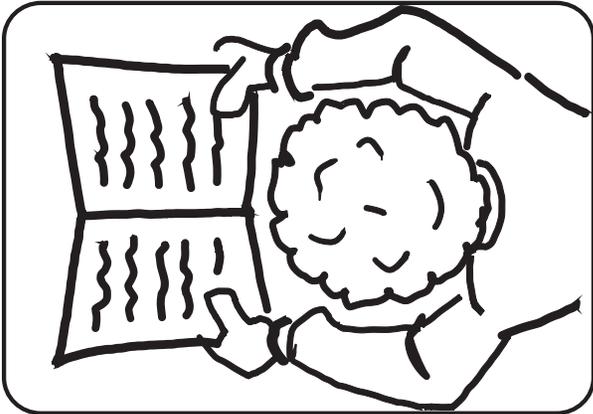
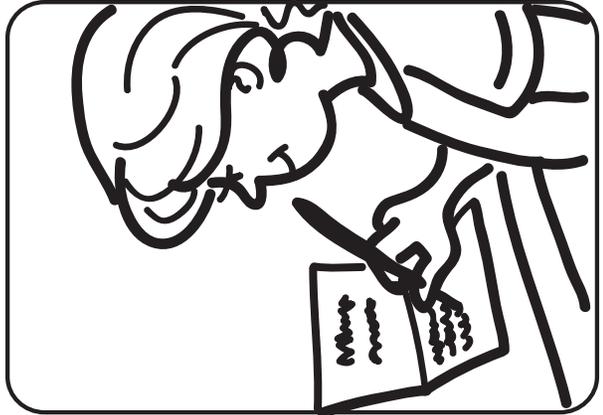
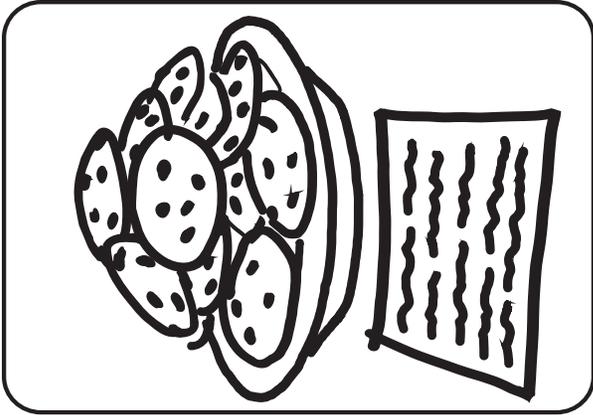
Year 1, Unit 1, Session 4



Year 1, Unit 1, Session 5



Year 1, Unit 1, Session 6





Find the  
Christmas story  
in the Bible

Luke 2:8-14

Find the  
Christmas story  
in the Bible

Luke 2:8-14

Find the  
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in the Bible

Luke 2:8-14

JESUS  
The  
Lord  
Saves

JESUS  
The  
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Saves

JESUS  
The  
Lord  
Saves



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**Year 1**

**Unit 1** Wonder ... About God's Amazing Plan

**Unit 2** Wonder ... About God's Daring Mission

**Unit 3** Wonder ... About Jesus' Surprising Power

**Unit 4** Wonder ... About Jesus' Loving Care

**Unit 5** Wonder ... About Jesus' Incredible Love

**Unit 6** Wonder ... About the Holy Spirit's Life-Changing Power

**Year 2**

**Unit 1** Wonder ... About God's Never-Ending Love for Creation

**Unit 2** Wonder ... About God's Growing Family

**Unit 3** Wonder ... About God's Extraordinary Plan for Ordinary People

**Unit 4** Wonder ... About God's Wonderful Plan

**Unit 5** Wonder ... About God's Surprising Protection

**Unit 6** Wonder ... About God's Growing Kingdom



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