

2 Sam. 7:1–11, 16
Luke 1:46b–55 or
Ps. 89:1–4, 19–26
Rom. 16:25–27
Luke 1:26–38

The Wonders of God

Goal for the Session

Children will marvel at how God works through Mary and consider how God might work through them.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 1:26–38

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Lewis R. Donelson

Then Gabriel gets to the heart of his message. Mary will conceive and bear a son. The series of messianic images in 1:32–33 concerning the destiny of this son forms the christological heart of the passage. Each image in these verses is fundamental to Luke’s story of Jesus. Jesus is portrayed as the Davidic messiah, who as the son of David sits on David’s throne and whose rule, astonishingly, will never end. There is no hint here, as there is in Matthew, of the coming crucifixion and the historical irony of these promises. Jesus is also named here as “the Son of the Most High.”

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Cynthia L. Rigby

Gabriel reminds Mary that to be incapable of conceiving in and of ourselves is not the end of the story, that “nothing [is] impossible with God.” The best discussions of Mary’s response recognize the pitfalls inherent in rendering Mary either a passive participant, who has no choice but to submit to God’s will, or an autonomous individual, who can choose differently than to bear God to the world. The doctrine of Christian vocation offers clarity. Mary’s obedience is neither optional nor forced. Mary acts freely when she offers herself as a servant of the Lord. To embrace her identity as the Mother of God is the only choice that is true to her calling, because it is consistent with who she actually is.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Ashley Cook Cleere

The angel Gabriel overturns Mary’s dubiousness by explaining that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her. The angel then underscores God’s incomprehensible capacity to accomplish wondrous aims by telling Mary that her relative Elizabeth had conceived a child at an advanced age, and explains, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” This refrain conveys support, comfort, and courage for those confronting overwhelming expectations. Her response to the annunciation is exemplary: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Mary comprehends that her life, and not only hers, but the whole world’s, is about to be rearranged.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Kimberly Bracken Long

It is tempting to imagine that the human predicament, whether we define that as the state of our warring world or the state of our broken lives, can never be healed or overturned. Yet Luke tells us that not only is redemption possible; it has already happened. Because of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the holy continues to break into our lives, to bring us closer to the completion of creation and the already-and-not-yet reign of God.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26–38

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ poster board
- ☐ marker
- ☐ purple or blue cloth
- ☐ Advent wreath
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ offering basket
- ☐ matches
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ Color Pack 5

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: newsprint or board, marker, copies of Resource Sheet 2, pencils, crayons
- ☐ option 2: self-hardening clay, slips of paper, pencils, small plastic bags
- ☐ option 3: newsprint or board, marker, small glass or plastic jars, Christmas stickers, glitter glue, paper, pencils, computer and printer (optional)
- ☐ option 4: copies of Resource Sheet 3 on card stock, tissue paper, scissors, glue or tape, markers, ribbon

Focus on Your Teaching

Just days remain until Christmas, and the children are excited and restless. Perhaps this story of Mary and Gabriel, so infused with wonder, will awaken the natural awe of children. But don't be surprised if some children question the existence of angels or liken Gabriel to an angel they have seen on a TV show. It may help children to know that the word *angel* comes from the Greek *angelos*, which means "messenger of God," and all the angels named in the Bible are male.

Holy God, prepare me with patience and quiet to meet the onrush of the children's energy and excitement. Let their excitement infuse me as well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you have not done so, print the Advent ritual on poster board and underline the children's parts. If you already have the ritual on poster board, change *love* to *joy* and replace *third* with *fourth*. Place a bookmark at Luke in the worship table Bible.

As the children arrive, invite them to arrange these items on the worship table: purple or blue cloth, Advent wreath, Bible, and offering basket. When it is time to begin, play "God, We Sing" (track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Explain that today is the fourth and final Sunday of Advent, the season that begins the church year. Light four candles on the Advent wreath. Show the learners the Advent ritual on poster board. Explain that they will say the underlined lines. Lead the ritual or invite a child to lead it.

Leader: On this fourth Sunday of Advent,

Everyone: we remember the joy that God gives us.

Leader: And we pray:

Everyone: God of joy, we gather today to prepare for the birth of your son. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candles.

Invite the group members to review what they know about Advent. Some children may recall that the season contains the four Sundays before Christmas and that during this time the church prepares for the birthday of Jesus. Encourage them to tell how they celebrate Advent in their homes. Summarize their answers so the information above is clear. Clarify that this is the last Sunday of Advent.

To introduce the theme for this session, ask:

- ✂ When have you been asked to do something special that was really hard?

Explain that today's Bible story is about a hard request to someone.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Read or invite a volunteer to read the name of the book. Ask:

- ✂ Is this book, Luke, in the Old Testament or the New Testament?
- ✂ How did you decide?

Once it is established that Luke is one of the Gospels in the New Testament, tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (A Surprise Visitor). Tell the group that the title of the story was "A Surprise Visitor." Ask:

- ✂ Who was the surprise visitor?

Invite the learners to show with their bodies how Mary felt when she first saw Gabriel. Show Color Pack 5. Ask:

- ✂ What part of the story is shown in this picture?
- ✂ What made Mary feel differently about Gabriel?
- ✂ What special thing did God select Mary to do?
- ✂ What might God select you to do?

RESPONDING

If possible, provide two options so children have a choice. Select one that is more challenging for children who are able to work on their own.

- 1. Christmas Prayer** A way that children can respond to what God wants them to do is to pray with their families. Talk with the group members about how praying with their families is a way to be close to God and to listen for what God might select them to do.

Ask:

- ✂ What might families pray for at Christmas?

List their ideas on newsprint or board. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Our Christmas Prayer) and pencils. Help the children write their prayers as needed. Also write a prayer for your family. If there is time, the children can color the angels on the sheet. Encourage them to take their prayers home to pray them with their families on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Some children may know this story, but encourage them to think more deeply about Mary and how difficult this might have been for her.

Help prereaders by lightly penciling the words for them to trace, or suggest that they draw pictures of what they are praying for.

**EASY
PREP**

God, We Sing

1. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope*
anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
Bring *hope* into our hearts
today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.
2. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *peace*
anew; . . .
3. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *love*
anew; . . .
4. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *joy*
anew; . . .

2. **Prayer Bowl** The prayer bowl will hold prayer requests the children pray with their families during the Twelve Days of Christmas. Prayer is an important way for them to connect with God and be alert to what God has selected the children or their families to do. Give each child a ball of self-hardening clay about the size of a walnut. Have the learners squeeze the clay until it is soft and pliable. Then they can shape a simple bowl as they think about what God might select them and their families to do. When the bowls are finished, provide slips of paper and pencils for the children to write some of their ideas. Assist children who need help writing or thinking of things to write. Provide directions for hardening the clay, if necessary. Place everything in a small plastic bag for easy transporting.
3. **Serving Jar** These jars will provide suggestions for children and their families to do during the Twelve Days of Christmas. Each child will need a small glass or plastic jar, with or without a lid. Provide stickers or glitter glue for the children to decorate their jars. As they work, ask them to think of ways they or their families can do acts of kindness after Christmas. Write their ideas on newsprint or board. If possible, type them into a computer and print copies for the children. Have each child select or write twelve ideas on slips of paper to place in their jars. Explain that families can take one slip of paper each day beginning on Christmas and do what it says.
4. **Angel** The children can be messengers of God's love. Provide copies of Resource Sheet 3 on card stock and scissors for the children to cut out the angels. They also need to cut out the sections inside the angels. Cut tissue paper slightly larger than the open sections to glue on the back of one of the angels. Glue or tape a ribbon hanger to the top of the angel. Glue the other angel to the back. Children can print a Christmas message of God's love on the angel. Suggest that they think of someone who would like this ornament with a message of God's love.

CLOSING

As the children gather at the worship table, play "God, We Sing" (track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Light the candles on the Advent wreath that were lit earlier. Explain that one candle represents the hope that comes from God, the second one represents the peace that God provides, the third one stands for God's love, and the fourth one reminds us of the joy of Mary. Sing the first, second, third, and fourth stanzas of "God, We Sing."

Pray:

God of joy, we are filled with joy that Jesus will soon be born. We want to learn about him and your ways. In Jesus' name. Amen.

As each child leaves, say: "(Name), go with joy in God. Prepare for the birth of Jesus this week."

A Surprise Visitor based on Luke 1:26-38

In a town in Galilee named Nazareth lived a girl, Mary. Mary was going to be married to a man named Joseph. On this day, an angel came to Mary and said, "Hello, Mary. God looks kindly on you."

Mary had never been spoken to by an angel before, and she was surprised, confused, and a little frightened. Then the angel, whose name was Gabriel, said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. I have come with a special message from God."

I'm not sure that knowing the message was from God made it any easier, but Mary listened carefully.

"God has chosen you to have a baby boy. You will name him Jesus. The baby boy will grow up to be a king in the household of David. But his kingdom will never end," continued Gabriel.

"But how? I have not married Joseph," said Mary.

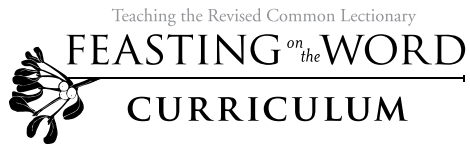
The angel spoke quietly to Mary, "God's Holy Spirit will come over you. Your baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God. Remember, nothing is impossible for God."

Still a bit confused, Mary said, "I am a servant of God. I will have this baby, this Son of God."

As soon as Mary agreed, the angel Gabriel was gone.



December 20, 2020
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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

Our Christmas Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, at Christmas.
As we celebrate his birthday, hear our prayer:

Amen.

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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 3

Angel Ornament

