

LUKE'S First CHRISTMAS



A four part programme
for 3-11 year olds

Mustard  Seeds

faithful • creative • effective

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Since 1993 TnT Ministries has been resourcing and equipping people to teach the Bible to children and teenagers more faithfully, more creatively and more effectively.

Our comprehensive range of printed material covers the entire 18 month to 18 year age range. It is used right around the world in over 27 countries and has been translated in part or in whole into twelve different languages.

We have conducted live children's ministry training throughout the United Kingdom, South Africa, Singapore, Dubai, Hong Kong and Uganda.

Mustard Seeds is our new range of electronic material and will ultimately be a comprehensive four year syllabus for 3 to 11 year olds.

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We firmly believe that the Bible is God's word to mankind and that it contains everything we need to know in order to be reconciled with God through faith in Jesus Christ and live in a way that is pleasing to him. Therefore, we believe it is vital to teach the Bible accurately to children, being careful to teach each passage's true meaning in an age-appropriate manner, rather than selecting a 'children's message' from a Biblical passage.

We are grateful for our gospel partnership with the Co-Mission group of churches. Six of these churches across London 'road tested' this material and we value the suggestions made by a committed group of volunteers who are passionate about teaching Jesus to children.

CO-MISSION
A PASSION FOR PLANTING... FOR LONDON... FOR CHRIST

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LUKE'S FIRST CHRISTMAS

Week 1	God's Gift to Zechariah	<i>Luke 1:5-25, 57-66</i>	<i>pg. 6</i>
	Aim : To feel the excitement that God's rescue plan is under way: John's birth means that the King is finally coming.		
Week 2	God's Gift to Mary	<i>Luke 1:26-45</i>	<i>pg. 18</i>
	Aim : To teach that Jesus is both God and man and that he is the Forever King of God's Kingdom.		
Week 3	God's Gift to the Shepherds	<i>Luke 2:1-20</i>	<i>pg. 26</i>
	Aim : To understand the staggering truth that Jesus Christ came into the world as a normal baby to rescue normal people.		
Week 4	God's Gift to Simeon	<i>Luke 2:21-35</i>	<i>pg. 35</i>
	Aim : To teach that Jesus is the one who allows us to see how we can be in God's family. Some choose to push him away.		

Series Aims

- To understand the wonder of Christmas – God the Son became a man.
- To understand that Jesus came to earth to be our Saviour and that he will always be the King of God's Kingdom.
- To understand that the momentous news that Jesus is the eternal King will be accepted with joy by some, but rejected by others.

Series Context

Only Matthew and Luke give an account of Jesus' birth. Both accounts contain limited details about his birth, early life and the family of Mary and Joseph. This helps to prevent human interest from overshadowing the central aim of the gospels. Their aim was not to write a biography, but to tell of the arrival of the long-promised King of God's Kingdom.

Luke has a particular emphasis on bringing the 'outsider' into the family of God. He does this by not only showing us who Jesus is, but how people have responded to the news that Jesus is the King.

Series Overview

This series looks at the first Christmas as Luke has faithfully recorded it. Three of the stories are about angels bringing wonderfully exciting news to ordinary people. These include: Gabriel's visit to Zechariah to tell of the coming of John the Baptist, Gabriel's visit to Mary to tell of the birth of Jesus and the angel's appearance to the shepherds to announce the actual birth of Jesus.

The final lesson is about Jesus' visit to the temple as a baby and the warm reception he received from an elderly, but very godly, Simeon who spoke of the mixed response that Jesus' kingship will receive.

Overview Visual

An advent calendar style overview visual is provided on pages 10 and 11. These pages can be enlarged and decorated as required. The gifts from page 10 should be cut out and overlaid in their places on page 11 using Blu-Tak. Each week one gift is 'opened' to reveal a key visual that summarizes the lesson, they are as follows:

Lesson 1
Prepare for Jesus.



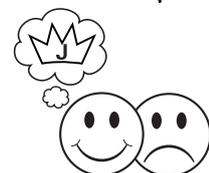
Lesson 2
Jesus is the King forever.



Lesson 3
Jesus is the Saviour.



Lesson 4
Some saved, others reject.



Activities and Craft

As this is a special event programme there are no worksheets for older children. We have created some basic activities for younger children and an 'added value' craft for older children. The idea is that the four Christmas decorations being made over the four weeks will be used on Christmas trees at home and become discussion starters.

You may choose to do the Christmas tree decorations with younger children as well, but they will require a lot more help to complete the craft.

Quick Craft

This is provided on page 12 for those who don't want to spend more than five minutes on craft work. It is also suitable for all ages.

Memory Verse

Luke 2:11 – *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* [NIV84]

Using This Resource

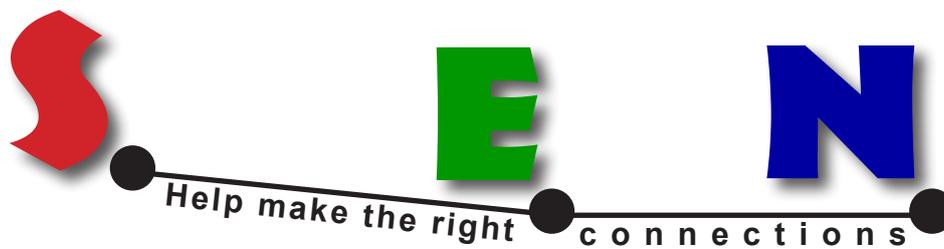
This programme is designed to be adaptable. We are conscious that many churches run with limited numbers of volunteers over the Christmas season and are often forced to run a more general, all-age ministry for children.

Text in blue is generally applicable to younger children (3-7 years), green text is aimed at older children (7-11 years) and black text is applicable to all age groups.

Leaders are encouraged to engage with the study material in a devotional manner, seeking to apply God's word to their own lives before attempting to teach others. We trust that you will be blessed as you do that. We also hope that once you have done that, your application of God's word to the lives of the children entrusted to you will be more deliberate and relevant.

Note: All page numbers in this document are hyperlinked – simply click on the number to jump to the page.





A child with special educational needs (SEN) may provide some challenges to your group. It is therefore essential that you are well prepared for your lessons and that you have carefully thought about how to include all the children. You may need to make some changes to your existing programme to make it accessible for everyone.

A key principle to consider is that, as with all children in your church, each child is an individual and will have different needs, strengths and weaknesses. It is important that you get to know the children you teach as well as possible and that you make an effort to build a relationship with them.

In terms of the lesson itself, you may need to consider the following:

- A child with SEN may need to have an additional adult to support them.
- Consider the environment in which you teach and try to eliminate potential distractions. Where you are seated and where the children are seated, the temperature of the room and noise levels all affect the sense of calm and orderliness of the class.
- Think about the class size and ratio of adults to children.
- It may be appropriate, at times, for a troubled or disruptive child to be accompanied by an adult and to be moved away from the group to a quiet area. Here they can engage in something related to the lesson which is calming and quiet.
- Use clear and child appropriate language.
- When giving instructions; tell them to the whole group, demonstrate, then check that the child with SEN understands what needs to happen.
- Balance the amount of open ended and closed questions you ask.
- Be careful of rhetorical questions; the child with SEN will want to answer them.
- If a child wants to ask too many questions, which may distract from the lesson, tell them that for now we are going to listen and that later you will come back to their questions. **Make sure that you do spend some individual time with the child going through their questions.** You may find that by the time you go back to them,

their questions have either been answered or forgotten or they are not that important anymore.

- Break up your lesson into different sections; short, sharp sections work best as this keeps children engaged and therefore able to manage their behaviour.
- Children with SEN like structure and routines; you may like to start the session with the same song or greeting time or keep the structure the same each week. For example; start with a song, a recap from last week, a short introduction to the new lesson, a song, the Bible story, a craft, the application and then a game for consolidation and further application.
- Use repetition (chants or songs with simple tunes to teach main Bible truths).
- Use lots of different kinds of aids to teach your lesson (movement, pictures, multimedia, props, music, textures, drama, etc.). Consider different learning styles.
- Use simple pictures (too much detail can be distracting).
- Think about how much reading and writing you are expecting the children to do; too much may cause the child with SEN to become anxious and distressed about failing.
- On worksheets, consider making them accessible by asking children to draw some of the answers, rather than write them. If there is a lot of writing or reading required, pair up the SEN child with an adult or with a more able peer. You can also write the answers on a board for them to copy down.
- Children with SEN may find it more difficult to think about application as this requires them to put themselves into a situation which is, at times, hard to do.
- For a child who is non-verbal, find out what their communication is from parents and try to use these as much as possible in your lessons and interaction (Makaton or BSL signing, eye gazes, communication switch boxes, symbols, photos, pictures, objects of reference, etc).

–Toni Edmonds-Smith
Special Needs Teacher

God's Gift to Zechariah

Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

Big Idea : God promises to give a godly, but childless couple a son. They were to name him John and he would be used by God to prepare the world for God's King.

Aim : To feel the excitement that God's rescue plan is under way: John's birth means that the King is finally coming.



Leader's Study Notes

Read Luke 1:5-25, 57-66 using the following notes to help you.

The stories of the birth of John and Jesus are intertwined. There are some remarkable similarities in the two accounts, but also significant differences – some which will be explored in Week 3.

The overall sense of this passage is one of intrigue. An unusual pregnancy announcement followed by an unconventional name suggest that John is no ordinary child.

Exactly what role he would play is yet to be seen, but those who witnessed his birth were keen to find out – "What then is this child going to be?"

1:5 1:36 tells us that Mary and Elizabeth are relatives.

1:7 Childlessness was thought to be a disgrace (1:25). In the Old Testament God often used faithful, childless people to give birth to special babies – think of Sarah with Isaac (Genesis 21:1), Rachel with Joseph (Genesis 30:22-23) and Manoah's wife with Samson (Judges 13:2-3).

1:8-9 The tribe of Priests (Levi) was divided into twenty-four divisions. Zechariah was in the one called Abijah.

The priest chosen to do this was chosen by lot, and it was such an honour that he could only do it once in his life. It was on this once-in-a-lifetime occasion that God revealed his plan to Zechariah.

The Holy place stood in front of the curtain that separated it from the Holy of Holies; the place where God dwelt.

1:13 John means "God is gracious".

1:15 Gabriel mentions two marks that will show that John will be different from other Jews – set apart to perform God's purposes: a lifetime abstaining from alcohol and the

Holy Spirit from birth. Remember that before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was only given to particular individuals to perform particular tasks (eg Each of the Judges in succession and David for his role as King – 1 Samuel 16:13).

1:17 For the reference to Elijah see Malachi 3:1 and Malachi 4:5-6. Elijah's visit signals the arrival of the Messiah. John will be this "new" Elijah.

1:18 Despite praying for it (1:13), Zechariah can't believe God can actually give him a child.

1:20 The punishment fits the crime. Zechariah didn't believe Gabriel's words, so he won't be able to speak any words.

1:62 The relatives made signs to Zechariah – he had probably also been struck deaf.

1:66 Clearly God was at work and was about to do something amazing through this child.

Zechariah was a priest and his duty was to offer sacrifices for the sins of Israel and to do so repeatedly. He would have been keenly aware of the promise of God about the coming of the Messiah.

What a privilege to know that the child he had been longing for would be the one to prepare the way for the King of God's Kingdom! It meant that the Messiah would come in his own lifetime – he would witness the dawn of the new age.

Reflect

- Think about the people in this story and their anticipation about the wonderful thing that God was about to do. We can't relive that first Christmas, but do you share their enthusiasm about God's plan in sending Jesus? If not, why not?
- Zechariah and Elizabeth are examples of God using godly, but very ordinary, people to accomplish his purposes. How does this affect your view of God and your enthusiasm in serving him?



Plan

Introduce this week's lesson with the introductory idea. As this is the first lesson of the series you will need to set the scene. Over the next four weeks we are going to be learning about the very first Christmas.

We are going to see four 'Christmas' presents to people. We will discover what they meant for those who first received them and what they mean for us today.

For many churches this series of lessons will be taught to a wide age range at the same time. If that is the case then you should generally follow the lesson plan as it is and provide small discussion groups for older children while the younger children do their craft work.

Add some drama to this story by using the script on pages 13 and 14. You could perform this drama in front of all of the children before splitting into more age specific groups. Some of the following props and costumes might also be helpful:

- Costume for Zechariah should cover almost all his bare skin as he was going into the Holy Place, so all in white, arms covered to the wrists, a white turban and proper shoes – no sandals allowed.
- Have some sort of barrier between Zechariah and the people outside the Holy Place so they can't see what's going on. They need to be able to hear the conversation though. Perhaps get the crown to shout, "What's going on?", "Who are you talking to?", "Why are you taking so long?"
- Zechariah could have some joss sticks for incense.
- Zechariah was afraid of Gabriel, so a more manly angel without wings is probably better.
- Gabriel could have the pictures from page 14 enlarged and mounted on sticks to illustrate 1:15-17. John will be different in two ways – abstained from alcohol (no alcohol symbol) and

he had the Holy Spirit (flame) from birth. He also had two jobs – "turn the people to the Lord" (u-turn for repentance) and "prepare the people for the Lord" (athlete ready).

- Have a writing tablet. There will be a buzz of anticipation as John writes on his tablet and then reveals what it says.

For older children – if you are only teaching older children, you still want to thrill the children with this story – the script on pages 13 and 14 will help you. This age group will enjoy being involved. In advance, plan how you can use more children than the script allows.

1:15-17 are the focus of the story. Questions to ask/answer might include some of the following:

- What clues are there that this baby is special?
- What two things will mark him out as special?
- What special tasks will he perform?

Optional extra for 9-11's – look at Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 and explore their relevance.

Leader's Note: Elijah was an Old Testament prophet at a time when many people had turned away from God and were worshipping idols. It was Elijah's job to call the people back to the worship of the One True God (1 Kings 18:21). John also wore similar clothing to Elijah (compare 2 Kings 1:8 and Mark 1:6)

- ✓ **Play the game** to reinforce the lesson aim.
- ✓ **Revise** the introductory questions.
- ✓ **Discuss and apply.**
- ✓ **Uncover the first gift on the overview picture** (page 10 and 11) the gift addressed to Zechariah. The picture of the athlete getting ready is a summary of what Gabriel told Zechariah about John – can the children remember what this represents?
- ✓ **Introduce the memory verse.**





Introductory Idea

Because the Christmas story is so familiar to many, the challenge of this entire series is to try and capture the awe, wonder and mystery of what it really means that God the Son has come into this world in human form to rescue mankind.

Be imaginative and energetic as you introduce this series and this lesson – God was about to do something truly extraordinary!

Option 1: Talk about a baby's arrival. You could answer the following questions for a "normal" baby and return to them at the end to answer them for John.

1. Who tells Mum and Dad that they're expecting a baby?
2. How do they pick a name?
3. What changes are there in a home before the baby arrives?
4. What might your hopes be for a baby?

Option 2 (for younger children): Talk about getting ready for a big party. How do you get ready for the beginning of an amazing party?

- Write invitations.
- Tidy up the room.
- Invitations through doors.
- Put up balloons and banners.
- Put on special clothes.

Involve the children in doing some of these things in your venue. The hope is that after all that, the children are excited and ready for the main event.

Note to leader: John was sent to make sure people were ready for something truly amazing.

Option 3 (for older children): Split the children into groups of three or four. Each group must prepare and perform an advert or trailer to get the audience excited.

Give each group the title of a film, a forthcoming national event (eg. a sport tournament) or an imaginary event that will thrill them (eg. a Hollywood star visiting their school or a chocolate eating competition).

Don't let the children spend more than three minutes preparing this and each performance should be less than twenty seconds.

prepare

In today's true story from the Bible we are going to hear about the arrival of a baby. The baby would one day get people ready for an amazing event. The children must listen carefully to discover:

- What would the baby be called?
[John (Luke 1:13)]
- What was special about this baby?
[He had the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15)]
- How would this baby get people ready?
[He would prepare the people to meet Jesus (Luke 1:17)]



Game Idea

Option 1 (this game reinforces the lesson aim): Divide the group into teams of no more than eight per team. Use a length of rope or masking tape on the floor to create two safe zones on either end of the room.

The teams start in the safe zone and must all make their way across to other safe zone by using 'stepping stones'. These are A4 sheets of paper (scrap paper is a good option). Between the two 'safe zones' there should be a few obstacles, like a table to go under and a chair to go around.

One child is the leader who sets the course, putting down 'stepping stones'. The children may only step on the sheets of paper and never on the floor outside of the safe zone. If any child does step on the floor, the entire team must return to the safe zone and start again.

Play this game a couple of times with different leaders and different obstacles.

Remind the children that in today's true story from the Bible the baby was John. His job was to go ahead of Jesus and prepare the people for when Jesus would come. He did this by telling them about God and their need to turn back to him.

Option 2 (this game reinforces the lesson detail): As Zechariah was struck mute (and deaf), games where the children have to act out or draw clues work well.

Draft a list of words that children will either act out or draw. They may not speak while drawing or acting.

Draft a list of words and split the group into teams. Each team sends a representative to learn the word they must act out or draw. Once the group has guessed correctly, the next child from the group goes to learn the next word, and so on until the list is complete.

Each team will either need a different list or the teams must be given the clues in a different order to stop them from 'poaching' clues from the other team.

For younger children – use only 'concrete' objects like spoon, cat, dog etc rather than abstract words like love, happy etc.



Discuss and Apply

Having thought through the reflection questions in your preparation, discuss and apply the lesson to the children's lives.

It's tempting to teach Zechariah's response and his feelings, but that isn't the main point. The focus needs to be on the special task that John would perform in preparation for the coming of Jesus.

For younger children – ask them to share what sort of preparations they normally make in their homes for Christmas?

Using the three images for John (flame, u-turn and athlete), ask the children how John got the people ready for Jesus.

Help the children to think of ways that they can get ready for Christmas:

- What would God love us to be excited about this Christmas?
- Could we help our friends get ready for Christmas? Perhaps your church is running a special all-age event that the children can invite their friends to attend?
- What could we pray for ourselves? Help the children to respond to God in prayer.

For older children – ask them to share what sort of preparations they normally make in their homes for Christmas?

Using the three images for John (flame, u-turn and athlete), ask the children how John got the people ready for Jesus.

Ask them if they have ever thought about preparing their hearts for Christmas? At Christmas we celebrate Jesus coming into our world. What sort of preparations might we need to make to get ready for Jesus? Why is Christmas so exciting according to this story?

Help the children to think of ways that they can get ready for Jesus. Point them to John for how he was going to people ready for Jesus.

- How do we want to feel about Christmas?
- What do we want to do this Christmas?
- What shall we pray as we prepare for Christmas?
- How can we help our friends to prepare for Christmas?



Activity

For 3-5s – print page 15 onto paper for each child to colour in. Can the children use the symbols in Gabriel's speech bubble to remember what he said about John?

For 5-7s – print page 16 onto paper for each child to colour in. Can the children draw or write what Gabriel said about John in the speech bubble?

For 7-11's – make a gift box Christmas tree decoration.

Print page 17 onto card for each child. You might want to print on a variety of different bright colours (red and green are most effective).

Score along all the dotted lines before cutting along all the solid lines. Do this before the lesson to save time during the lesson.

The children decorate the gift box using glitter, sequins and ribbon.

Secure a loop of thread to the box lid at point 'x'.

Fold and glue the tabs – tuck the angled tabs into the box and the square box lid tabs outside the box.



Quick Craft

A quick craft suitable for all ages is provided on page 12. This is meant to be a simple alternative to the activities above.

Print page 12 onto card for each child. The page contains one gift tag for each of the four weeks in this series. You may choose to print onto a variety of bright coloured card.

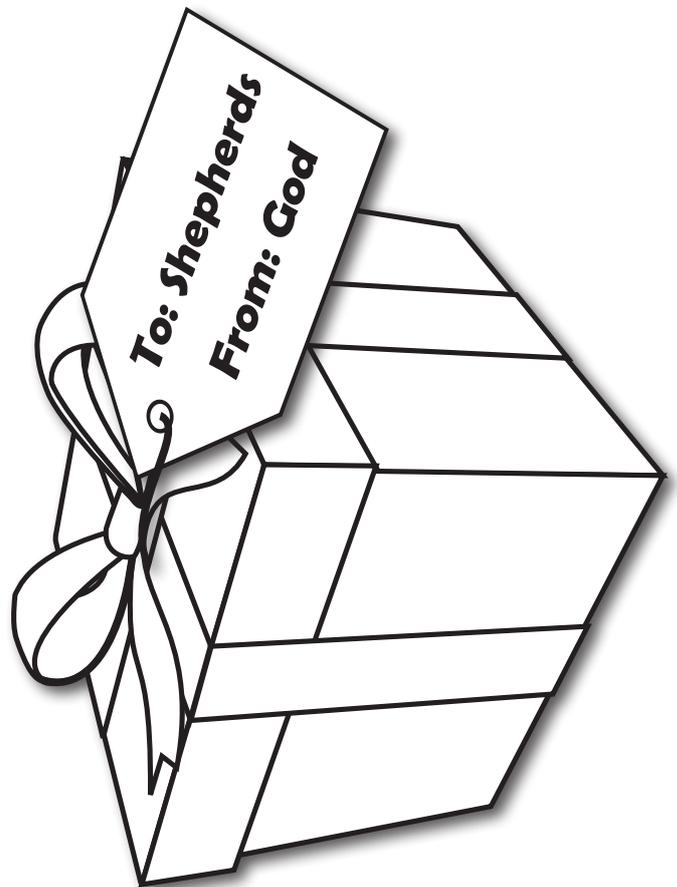
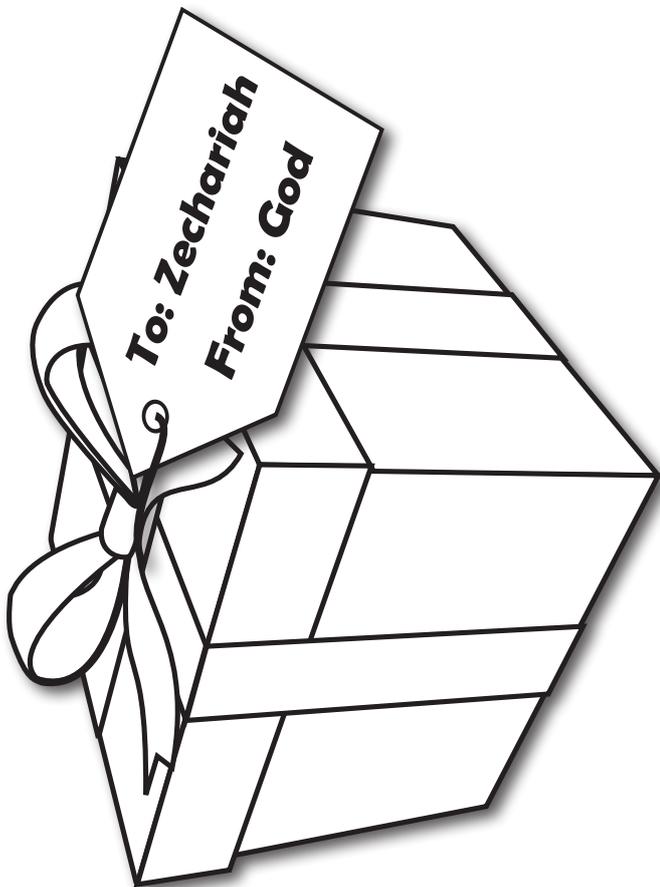
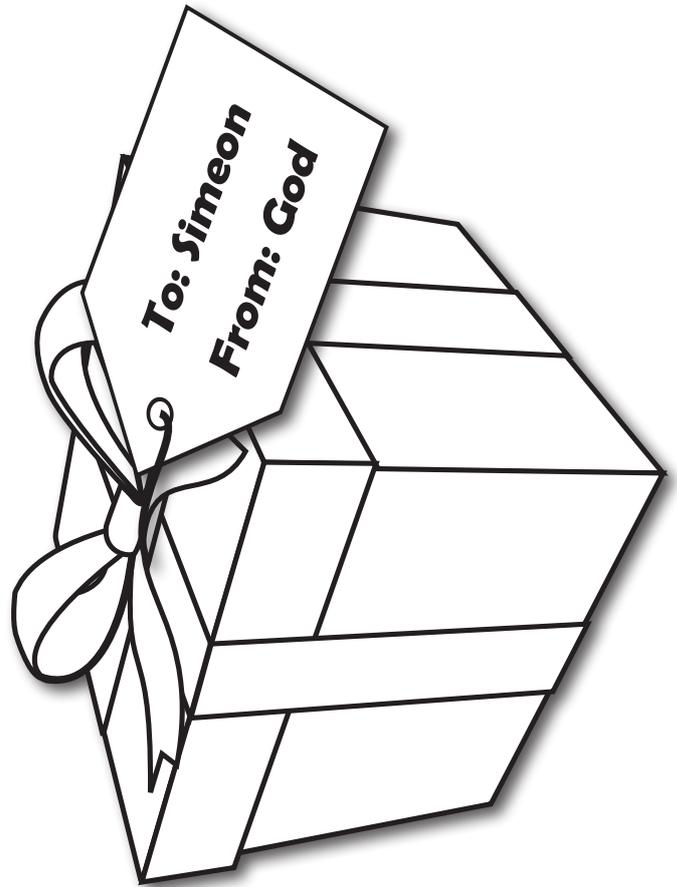
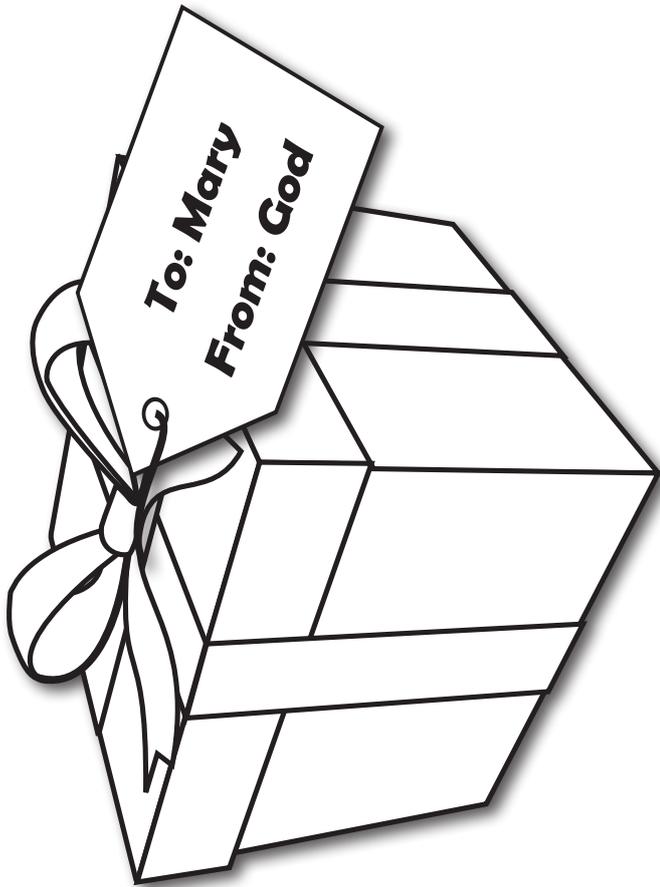
The children simply decorate the tag with glitter, sequins and any other suitable materials.

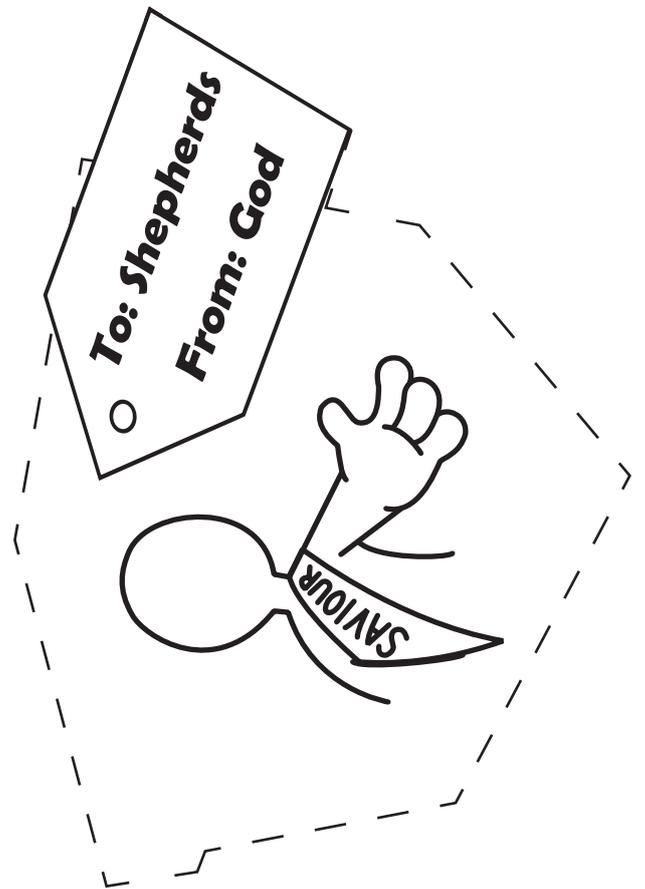
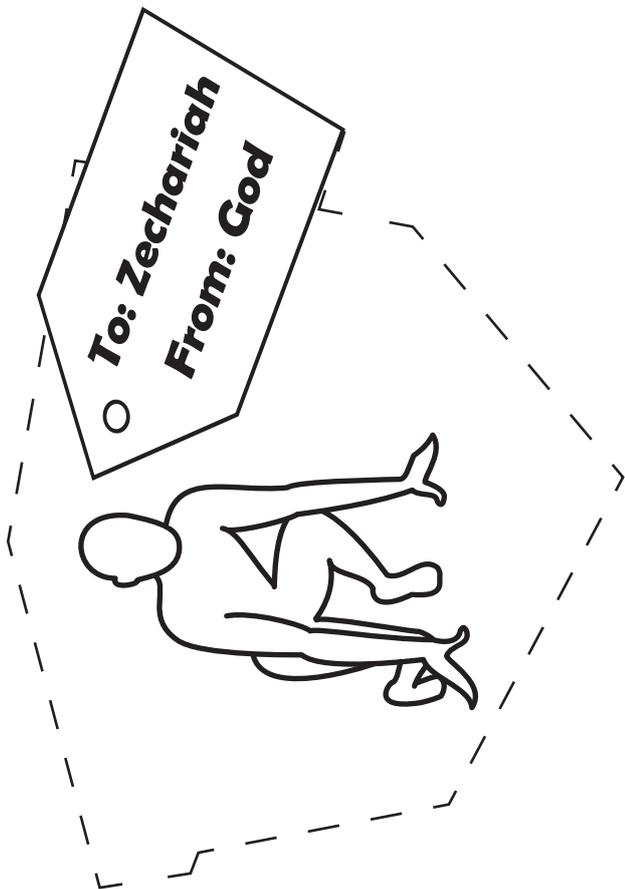
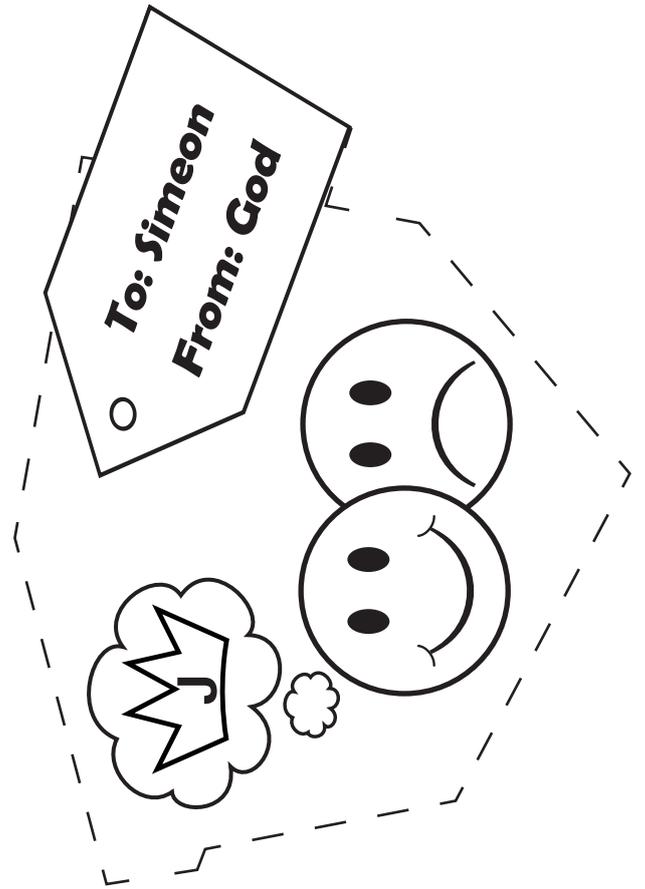
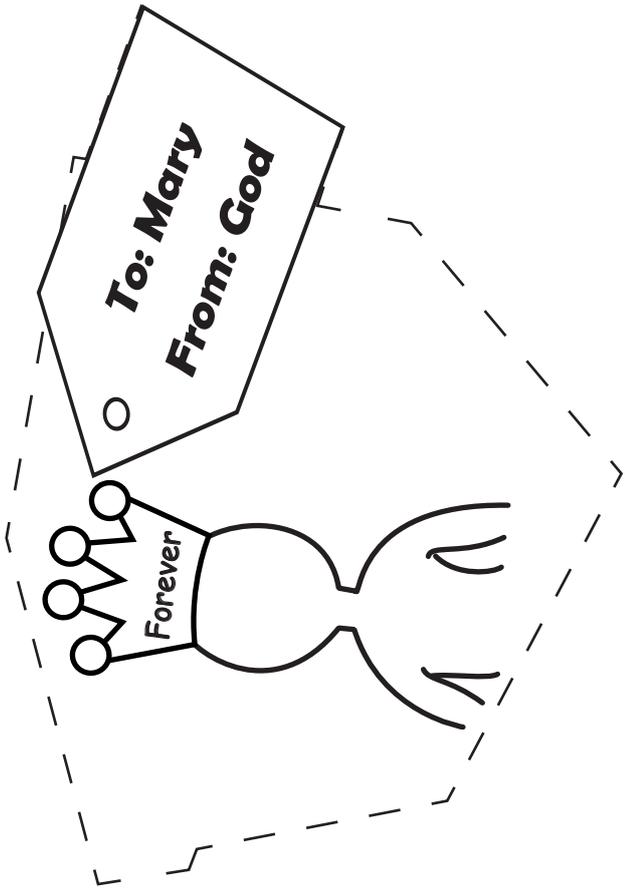
Attach the gift tag with a piece of ribbon to a foil covered chocolate Christmas tree decoration. The children can hang these on their Christmas trees at home.



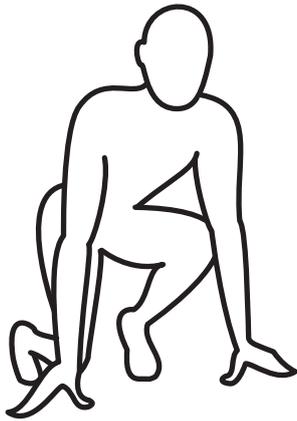
Memory Verse

Luke 2:11 – *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* [NIV84]



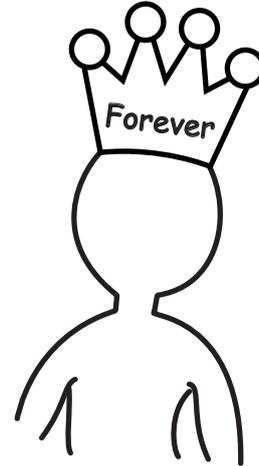


God's gift to:
Zechariah



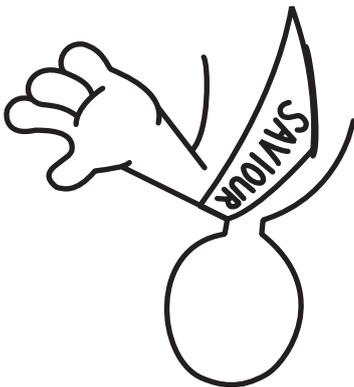
He will go on before the Lord...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
Luke 1:17

God's gift to:
Mary



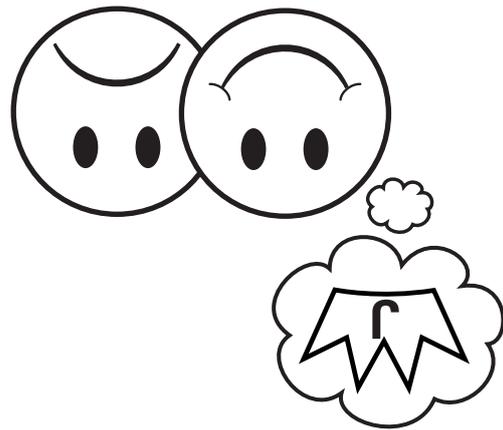
So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God
Luke 1:35

Today in the town of David
a Saviour has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.
Luke 2:11



God's gift to:
The Shepherds

This child is destined to cause the
falling and rising of many.
Luke 2:34



God's gift to:
Simeon

The whole room are going to pretend to be the crowd of worshippers in the temple. The front row will be Priests. Zechariah will be one of the children in the front row. Elizabeth can be one of the other children.

There is a hidden section of the room to be the Holy Place. An 'angel' hides behind there until it is his turn to speak.

Narrator: Today's true story from the Bible is at the very beginning of the book of Luke. It is the first story in Luke's Gospel. Let's meet the characters

This is Zechariah. *[Zechariah stands up where he is sitting].*

This is Elizabeth. *[Elizabeth stands up where she is sitting].*

Let me tell you what we know about them

They're married and they're old. *[Perhaps put some wigs on them!]*

They don't have any children, in fact they can't have any children, which back then was a very big deal.

They loved God and did their very best to serve him. They did all they could to obey God in every way. And so God was very pleased with them.

One more thing ... Zechariah was a Priest. So he served in the temple.

On that day, the day that Luke tells us about, Zechariah is in the temple.

And just like every day, they needed one priest to go into the holy place to light the incense to keep it smelling nice. You see God's special place had to always be perfect – polished, clean, sparkling, looking perfect and smelling perfect.

They needed one priest to go in. And a priest only got to do this special job once in his life. So it was a big honour. They picked who it would be by drawing lots. So each priest would have taken a piece of paper, and the one who had the special bit of paper would get to burn the incense that day. *[Get each 'priest' to take a piece of paper, and fix it so that Zechariah gets the special bit.]*

Zechariah got it. It was his turn. Happy days!

He had to put on special clothes, because you couldn't wear just anything to go into God's special place. Everything was white – to show that he was clean enough to go into God's presence.

He would have worn white trousers, and a white shirt, and even a white hat, so that really the only part of him you could see, would be his face. *[Zechariah puts on special clothes (bed sheets and pillow cases would do!)]*

He was ready.

He picked up his incense. Checked he had everything and...in he went, leaving everyone else outside. *[Zechariah disappears out of sight].*

Just as he was about to do the business with the incense, a terrifying angel appeared out of nowhere. Gleaming white. Shimmering in a haze. Zechariah fell to his knees. He just froze in total terror.

Angel: Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and a delight to you...

Narrator: Zechariah could barely listen he was so scared. But the angel had more to say.. *[Narrator could hold up a visual and stick up the big points during this speech. Angel needs to speak slowly.]*

Angel: ...Many will rejoice because of your son's birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. But listen, he is special, so you must make sure he grows up special: He must never drink any wine or beer, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

Narrator: Holy Spirit from birth? That's not normal. This baby must be really special.

Angel: He will bring many Jews back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, just like Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous *[slow, loud and careful]* to make ready a people prepared for the arrival of the Lord."

Zechariah (or Narrator): How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is just as old. We can't have a baby!

Angel: *[a little angry]* I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until his birth, because you did not believe my words, which will come true.

Narrator: Outside the people were working out where Zechariah had got to. It didn't normally take this long!

Then he came out. *[Zechariah walks out]*.

He couldn't speak to them.

They realized he had seen something from God in the Holy Place.

He kept making signs to them but he couldn't speak.

When Zechariah had finished his temple work, he got changed and went home. And sure enough, Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months didn't see anyone.

She just kept saying to herself...

Elizabeth: The Lord has done this for me. He has been kind to me and taken away my shame.

You could play a game here to break up the story. Perhaps charades?

Narrator: When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

All her neighbours and friends were delighted for her.

When the boy was 8 days old, it was time to name him.

The neighbours and friends were going to name him Zechariah after his father but his mother spoke up and said,

Elizabeth: No! He is to be called 'John'.

Narrator: No one understood because normally you'd call a child after someone in your family, and there wasn't anyone in the family called 'John'.

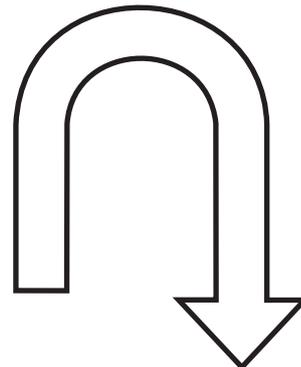
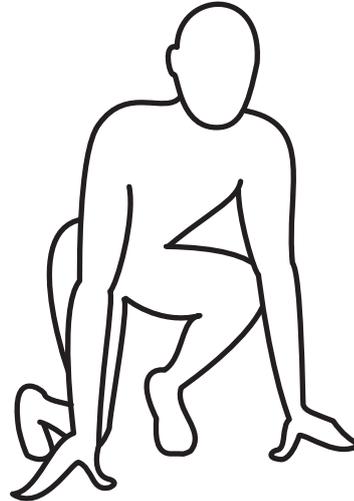
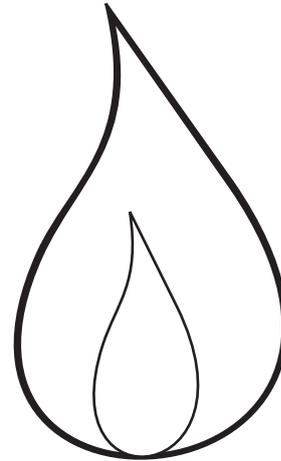
So they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet

[Zechariah writes on a writing block and then shows everyone what he has written. "His name is John"]

Narrator: Everyone was amazed. Suddenly Zechariah could speak again!

Zechariah: Praise God! He did this. An angel appeared to me and told me everything

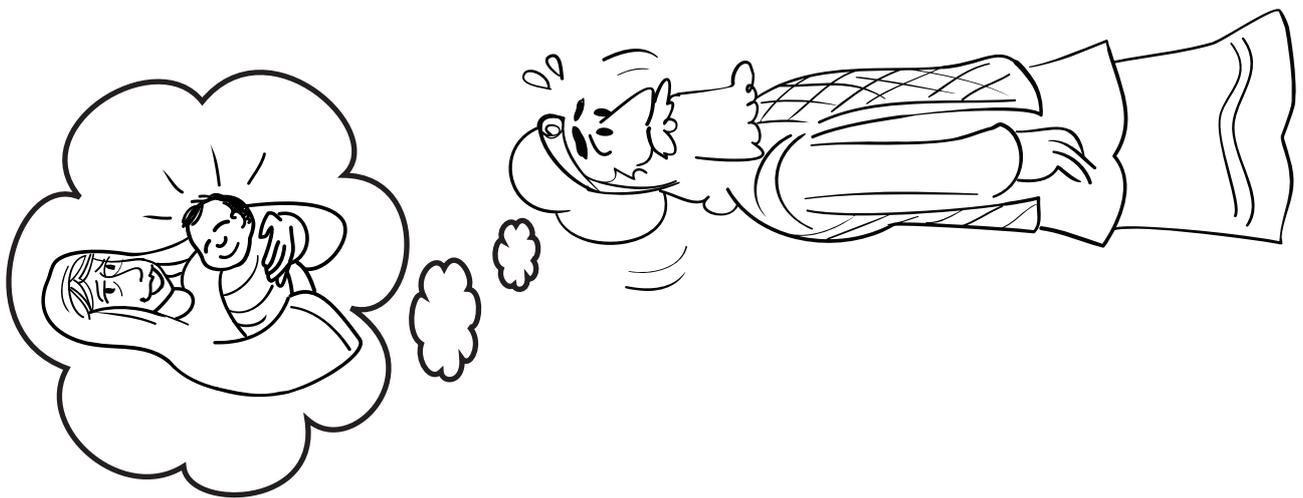
Narrator: The neighbours were completely amazed, and everyone in the towns and countryside were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What is this child going to be?"





His name will be John...he will go on before
the Lord...to make ready a people prepared
for the Lord.

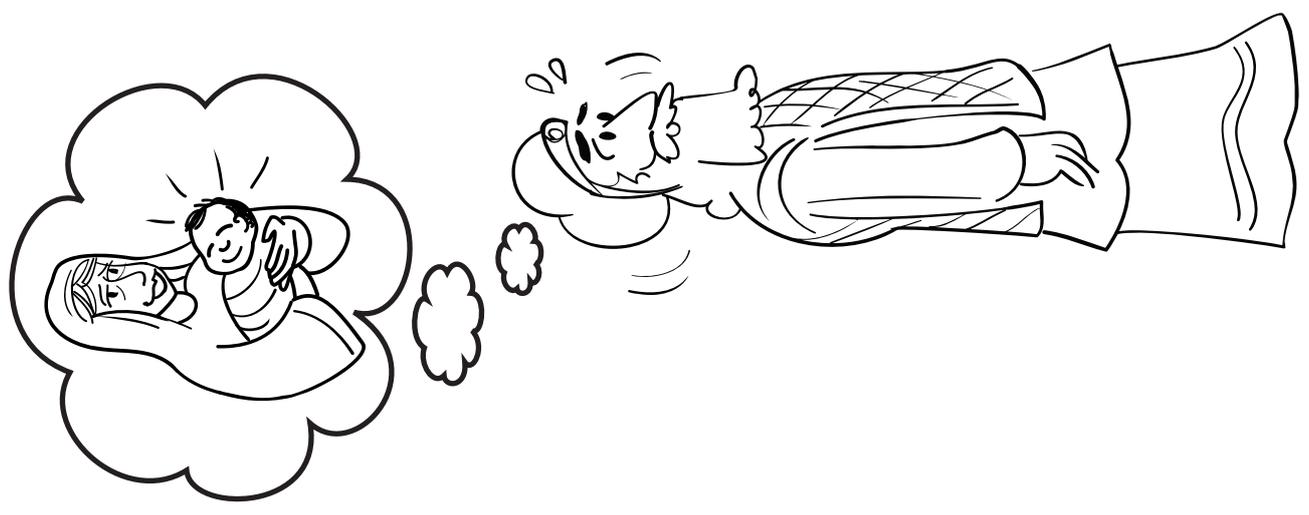
Luke 1:13-17





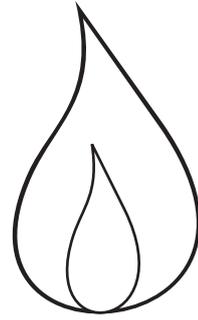
His name will be John...he will go on before
the Lord...to make ready a people prepared
for the Lord.

Luke 1:13-17





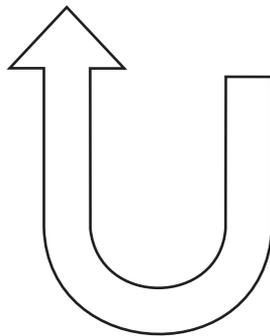
John



The Angel Gabriel told Zechariah that he was going to have a son. He said,

- You are to name him 'John'.
- He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.
- He will turn the hearts of the disobedient back to God.
- He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:13-17



x

God's Gift to Mary

Luke 1:26-45

Big Idea : God tells a young woman that she is going to have a son. He will be both God and man and his kingdom will never end.

Aim : To teach that Jesus is both God and man and that he is the Forever King of God's Kingdom.



The Story So Far

Week 1

- The Angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his old and childless wife was going to have a son called John.
- John would be the one who would prepare the people for the longed-for arrival of God's final King.



Leader's Study Notes

Read Luke 1:26-45 using the following notes to help you.

Luke's birth stories for John and Jesus are similar but different! The angel Gabriel appeared to both childless women. Both expected children are given names and Old Testament promises.

But the announcement to ageing Zechariah takes place in the solemn grandeur of the Temple on one of the most important days of Zechariah's life as a priest while Gabriel now appears to a very ordinary young, unmarried woman in the privacy of her humble home in Nazareth.

1:26 The sixth month refers to Elizabeth's pregnancy (see 1:36).

1:27 'Pledged' – this was as binding as marriage and could only be broken by divorce. It was in no way like modern day engagement. The concept of virgin birth is unique to Christianity; it is both biologically impossible and culturally unacceptable.

1:29 Mary is troubled not so much by seeing the angel but by what he has said, that she has been graciously chosen by God. Unlike Zechariah, she does not question it, she just humbly wonders.

1:32-35 Jesus is both Son of God (Son of the Most High) and son of man (of the line of David). He is conceived by the power of God yet born a child. See Romans 1:3-4 for Paul's explanation.

1:34 She understood what Gabriel said, but did not understand how it could have happened.

1:38 Mary says she is God's servant and shows her complete obedience. This is amazing. She would probably be rejected by her family and community, but she accepts God's will and is prepared to trust him.

1:39 The angel seems to have directed Mary to Elizabeth so that Mary could share her joy, both natural and supernatural.

It must have been wonderful to be with the only other person in the world who could understand her unique situation.

1:43-45 'My Lord' shows that Elizabeth recognises Mary's child to be the Messiah.

It is very important that we correctly understand who Jesus Christ is. Firstly, he is the Son of God – the second person of the Trinity who has always existed.

Secondly, he is a human. He will forever be fully God *and* fully man. This is *the* great mystery of Christmas – that God came to earth as a man.

The focus of this passage is that Jesus is both God and man. He has been chosen by God to be the ruler of his kingdom for all eternity.

Reflect

- Many people think that Jesus was just a man. Why does it make a difference that he is also God?
- What, for you, is the most wonderful thing about the fact that God has walked this earth in the person of Jesus?
- Give thanks to God that Jesus will reign over God's Kingdom for all eternity as a man, but also as the Son of God.



Plan

Review last week's lesson. Refer to the overview picture on page 11 and see if the children remember:

- Who was going to have a baby?
[Zechariah (Luke 1:13)]
 - What was special about this baby?
[He had the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15)]
 - What would this baby one day do?
[He would prepare the people to meet Jesus (Luke 1:17)]
- ✓ **Introduce** this week's lesson with the introductory idea.

Teaching this story to children today is made more difficult because of their perception of the miraculous and what it means.

Their daily diet of comics, television and computer games is fantasy and the supernatural. We need to ensure that they understand that Bible stories are fact not fiction.

The familiarity of the story can also lessen its impact on us as teachers. The reality of the holy Son of God coming into our sinful world, 'taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men' (Philippians 2:7), is staggering.

It is *the* pivotal event in world history. It's not surprising, therefore, that Mary was overwhelmed when she realised she was to play a crucial role in this story.

Vocabulary – virgin birth. Be sensitive to the levels of understanding of the children you are teaching. Emphasis should be on the fact of life rather than the facts of life!

Visual Aids – there are five key ideas contained in the text.

- A baby boy will be born to Mary.
 - He must be called 'Jesus'.
 - He is the Son of God.
 - He is a man: in the family of King David.
 - As a result, he will be God's King to rule forever.
- ✓ **For 3-7's** the drama of this story is almost entirely in the words spoken by the angel. So, a drama of this story is less effective for this age group. Instead you could use a children's story book Bible for the pictures. There are also video clips and animations on the Internet which use the exact Bible text.

You could use the visuals on page 22 to emphasise the big idea of this passage. To help the children understand this big idea, you could explain it like this:

This baby is the Son of God (show Son of God visual), he will come down from his home in heaven and live amongst us – he is God.

But he was born as a baby (show baby visual). Mary was his mother. If you had seen him, he would have looked like a normal baby, just like you used to look.

Mary was from King David's family (show David's throne).

Because Jesus is God and also a man, he could be the 'Forever King' (show the crown visual).

- ✓ **For 7-11's** remind the children of the well known setting of this story.

1:30-33 are packed full of amazing information. You could write this text onto a big sheet of paper so that you can highlight key words and phrases.

Can the children identify which words show Jesus is human and which show that he is the Son of God. Prepare the text carefully, but be ready to say that the miracle of Christmas cannot be fully understood by us – that's what makes it a miracle!

You could do something similar with 1:35-37, but you probably will not need to.

- ✓ **Play the game** to reinforce the lesson aim.
- ✓ **Revise** the introductory questions.
- ✓ **Discuss and apply.**
- ✓ **Uncover the second gift on the overview picture** (page 10 and 11) – the gift addressed to Mary. The 'Forever' crown is a summary of what Gabriel told Mary Jesus would be – can the children remember what this represents?
- ✓ **Revise the memory verse.**

forever



Introductory Idea

For younger children – before they enter the room place a number of different items under a sheet. These might include a football, a tennis ball, a tennis racket, a shoe and apple or orange etc.

Point to the various objects in turn while they are still under the sheet. Can the children identify them?

Some will be easier than others and some will be harder to work out because they look similar to other items (orange and tennis ball). You could even let the children come up and feel the object through the sheet.

When they correctly identify an object ask them other questions about the object, things that they would never be able to tell without removing the sheet. What colour is ball? How many strings on the racket? etc.

Explain that you can't know everything about an item just by looking at it. Use the link and the introductory questions below.

For older children – play a few rounds of 'Cereal Top Trumps'. To do this you need a number of different breakfast cereal boxes – preferably ones that your children are familiar with. Divide the group into two or three teams and give one cereal box to each team.

The teams take turns to call out one nutritional fact from their cereal box. They should choose the category they think will win. If the category is 'Vitamin A' the child will declare the category and state how much their cereal contains.

For each round the child with the highest figure in that category wins and is awarded one point. The leader will need to decide how many rounds the game will go on for, but don't let it go on for too long as this is merely an introductory idea.

Tell the children that because they cannot tell everything about the cereal just by looking at it, the only way for them to know what it contains is to trust what we're told on the box.

Today's true story from the Bible is about a baby who is about to be born. His mother was told what he would be like – no-one could have known this, just by looking at him.

The children must listen carefully to discover:

- What was the baby's name?
[Jesus (Luke 1:31)]
- What made the baby special?
[Both God and man (Luke 1:32)]
- What would the baby do when he grew up?
[Reign forever over a never-ending kingdom (Luke 1:33)]



Game Idea

For younger children – play any game where one child is the king sitting on a throne. The other children have to compete to become the king for a short time. There are many options for this:

- Play grandma's footsteps where the children creep up behind the king. The first child to touch the king without being seen moving, becomes the king. The rest of the children all move back to the starting point a distance away and the game is repeated.
- The king is blindfolded and a crown is placed under the throne. All the other children sit in a circle around the throne. The leader picks one child at a time to creep quietly up to the throne and take the crown without being pointed out by the king. If the child gets back to their place without being noticed, that child becomes the new king.
- The king stands on a bucket in the middle of the room holding a bat. The other children stand in a circle around the king and are given a soft ball. They take turns at throwing the ball at the bucket. The king can hit the ball away. If a child hits the bucket, they become king. The bigger the ball, or the further away from the bucket, the harder it is to become the king.

For older children – Divide the group into two teams. Each team appoints a 'king'. Have a chair in the middle of the room to be a throne.

To determine which team's king will reign on the throne, team members need to gather items that have been scattered on the floor – dried butter beans or uncooked pasta are good options.

To play, the leader announces that the children have fifteen seconds to gather as many items as possible to ensure that their king will reign on the throne. The leader counts down loudly from fifteen. The children must not gather more beans after this time!

Each team places their items in a bowl. The items are then counted to determine the winning team (using a kitchen scale to weigh the beans instead of counting them will speed the game up).

The winning team's king then sits on the throne. The items are scattered over the floor again and the game is repeated. The aim is to keep the king on the throne.

You can:

- Vary the time allowed to gather the items.
- Keep score of which team keeps their king on the throne for the most consecutive rounds.
- Make a cardboard crown for the king!

Remind the children that human kings and rulers don't reign forever, they keep changing. But Jesus is the king of God's kingdom and he will reign forever.



Discuss and Apply

Having thought through the reflection questions in your preparation, discuss and apply the lesson to the children's lives.

We want to explore with all children the difference it makes that the baby born at Christmas is the King who will always reign. This particularly changes our thoughts and emotions, so this discussion will be hard to ground in everyday life.

You could start by asking what aspects of Christmas change, either year by year, or as we get older. Then discuss what about Christmas stays the same year after year.

Remind the children, using the visuals, that because Jesus is both man and God, he can rule as King forever. Christmas celebrates the birth of the Forever King. His rule never changes. There is nothing else in the children's lives that never changes or diminishes.

You could explore with the children some of the following ideas:

- What difference would it make if parents, chocolate, summer or holidays lasted forever? Or ask the children what they would like to last forever [We know that if holidays lasted forever we'd get bored. That is not the point we want to highlight].
- Can the children think of the things they will outgrow as they get older? How do they feel about never outgrowing Jesus' rule? Is that boring, annoying or exciting? Why?
- What difference does it make that Jesus is king forever?
- For younger children – it may be enough to reassure them that Jesus will always lovingly rule over them. Christmas celebrates this.

Pray through the application with the children.



Activity

For 3-5s – print page 23 onto paper for each child.

The children – colour the picture.

- The bib identifies Jesus as God's Son
- The throne tells us that he was from King David's family.
- The crown tells us he is the 'Forever King'

For 5-7s – print page 24 onto paper for each child.

The children – colour the picture and write over the dotted words.

- The bib identifies Jesus as God's Son
- The throne tells us that he was from King David's family.
- The crown tells us he is the 'Forever King'.

For 7-11's – make an Angel Gabriel Christmas tree decoration.

Print page 25 onto card for each child.

To save time, you may choose to cut out the pieces before the lesson.

The children decorate the Angel Gabriel.

Fold the arms at the wrists and shoulders along the dotted lines.

Roll and glue the supporting tube as marked.

Glue the arms onto the back of the body so that the fold lines of the shoulders fit snugly against the body.

Remind the children that Gabriel told Mary that the son she was going to have would be king forever. Encourage them to place Gabriel on the top of their Christmas trees at home.



Quick Craft

A quick craft suitable for all ages is provided on page 12. This is meant to be a simple alternative to the activities above.

Print page 12 onto card for each child. The page contains one gift tag for each of the four weeks in this series. You may choose to print onto a variety of bright coloured card.

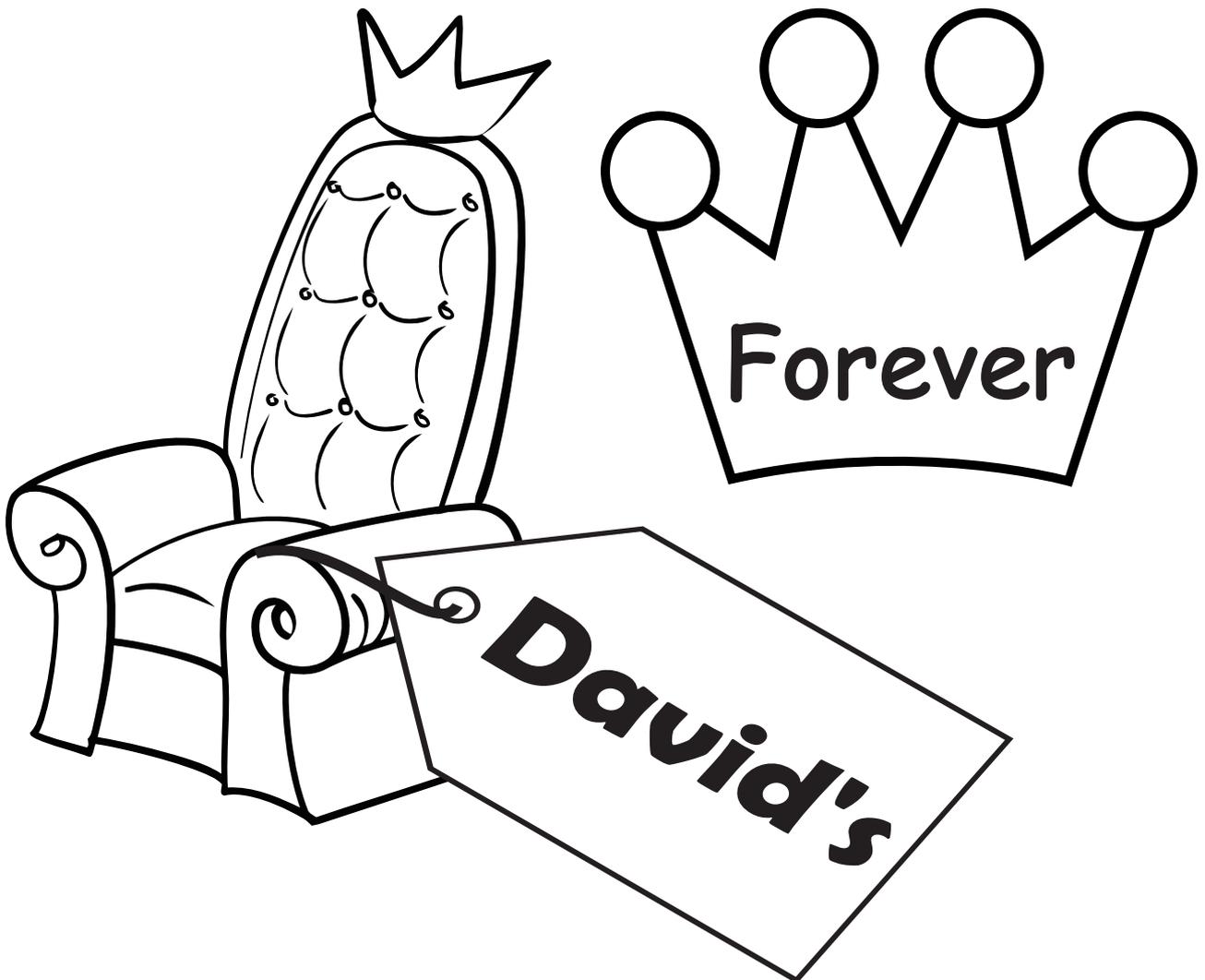
The children simply decorate the tag with glitter, sequins and any other suitable materials.

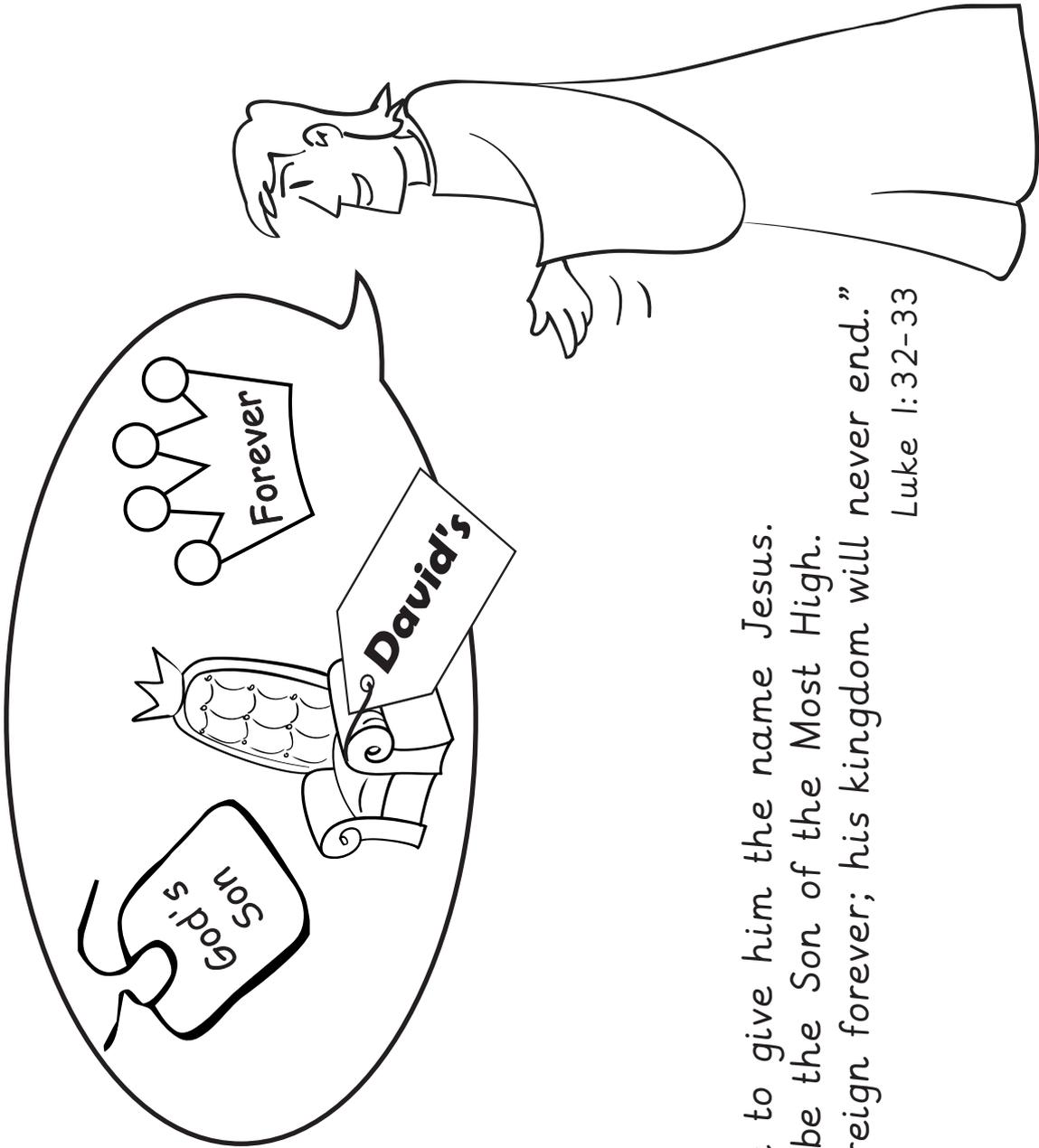
Attach the gift tag with a piece of ribbon to a foil covered chocolate Christmas tree decoration. The children can hang these on their Christmas trees at home.



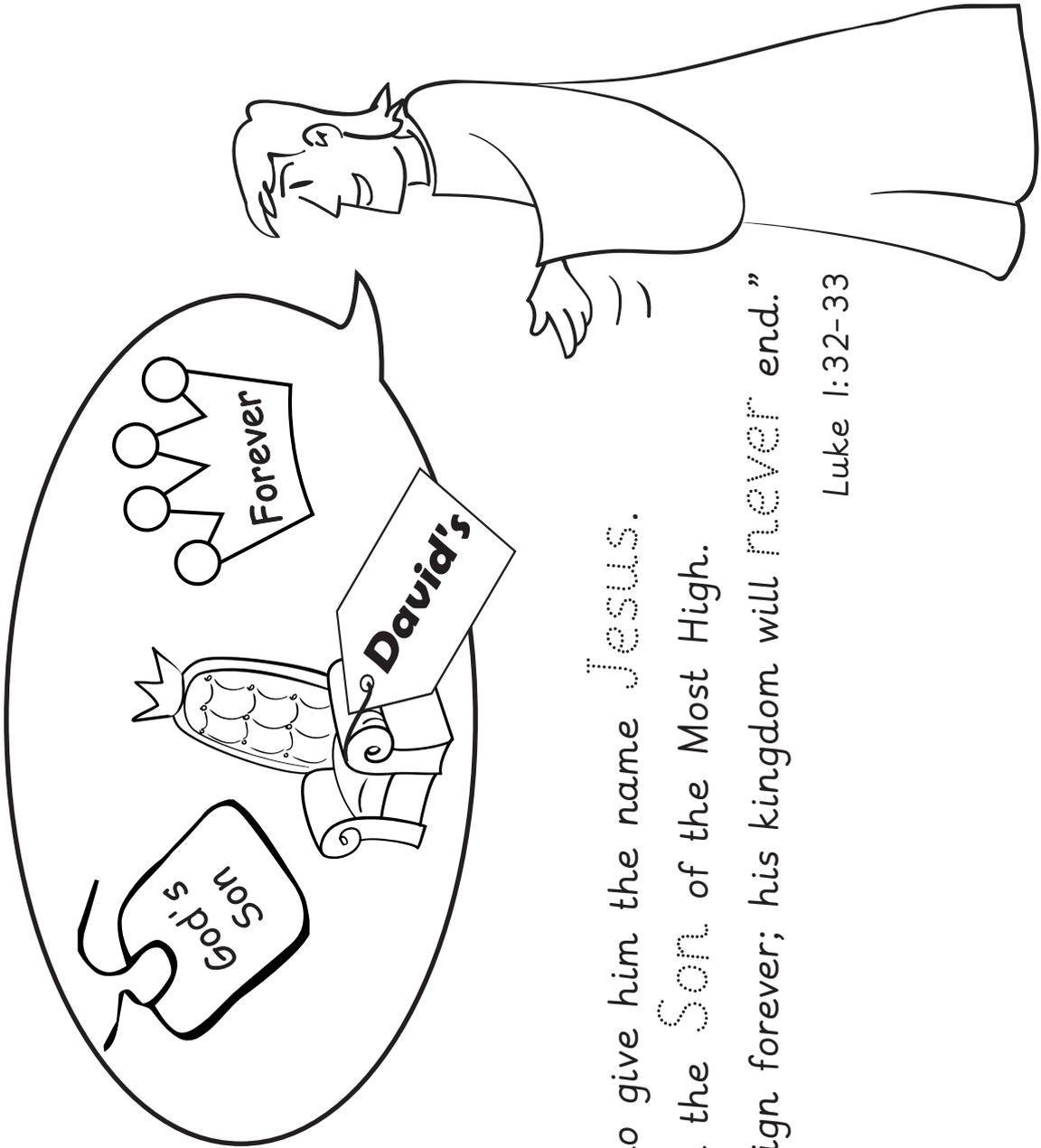
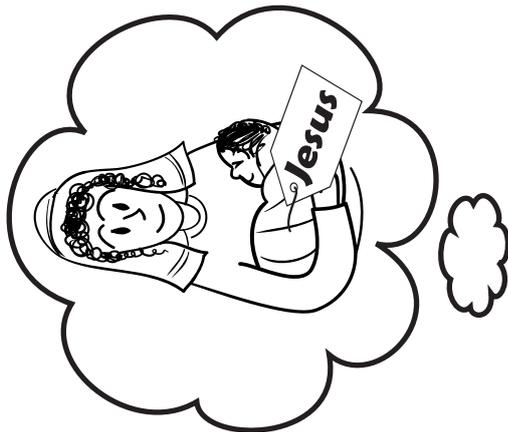
Memory Verse

Luke 2:11 – *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* [NIV84]



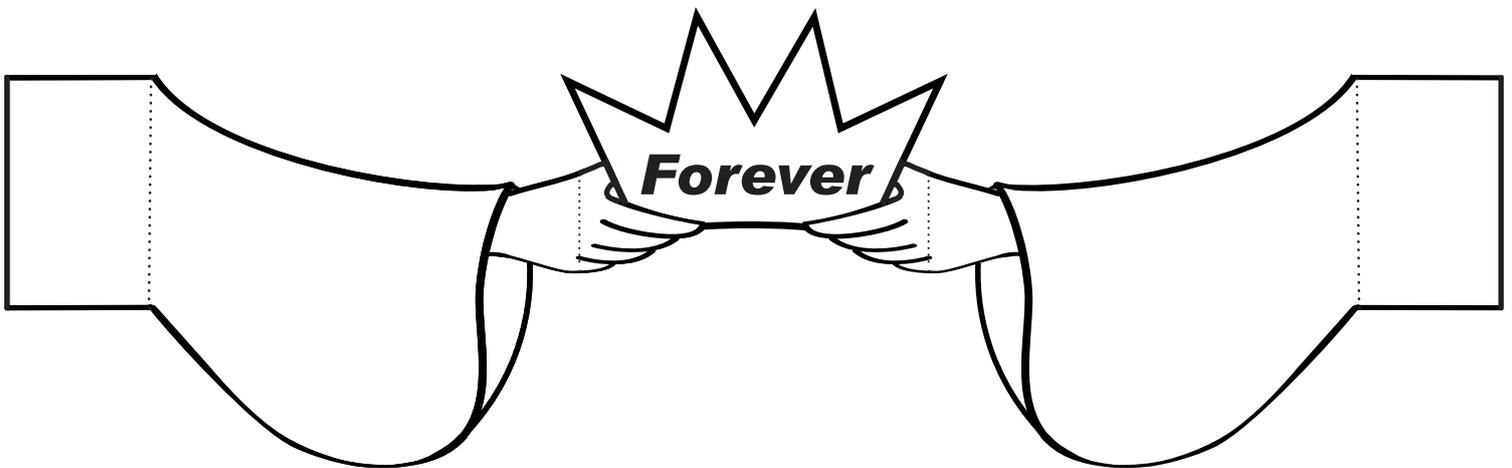
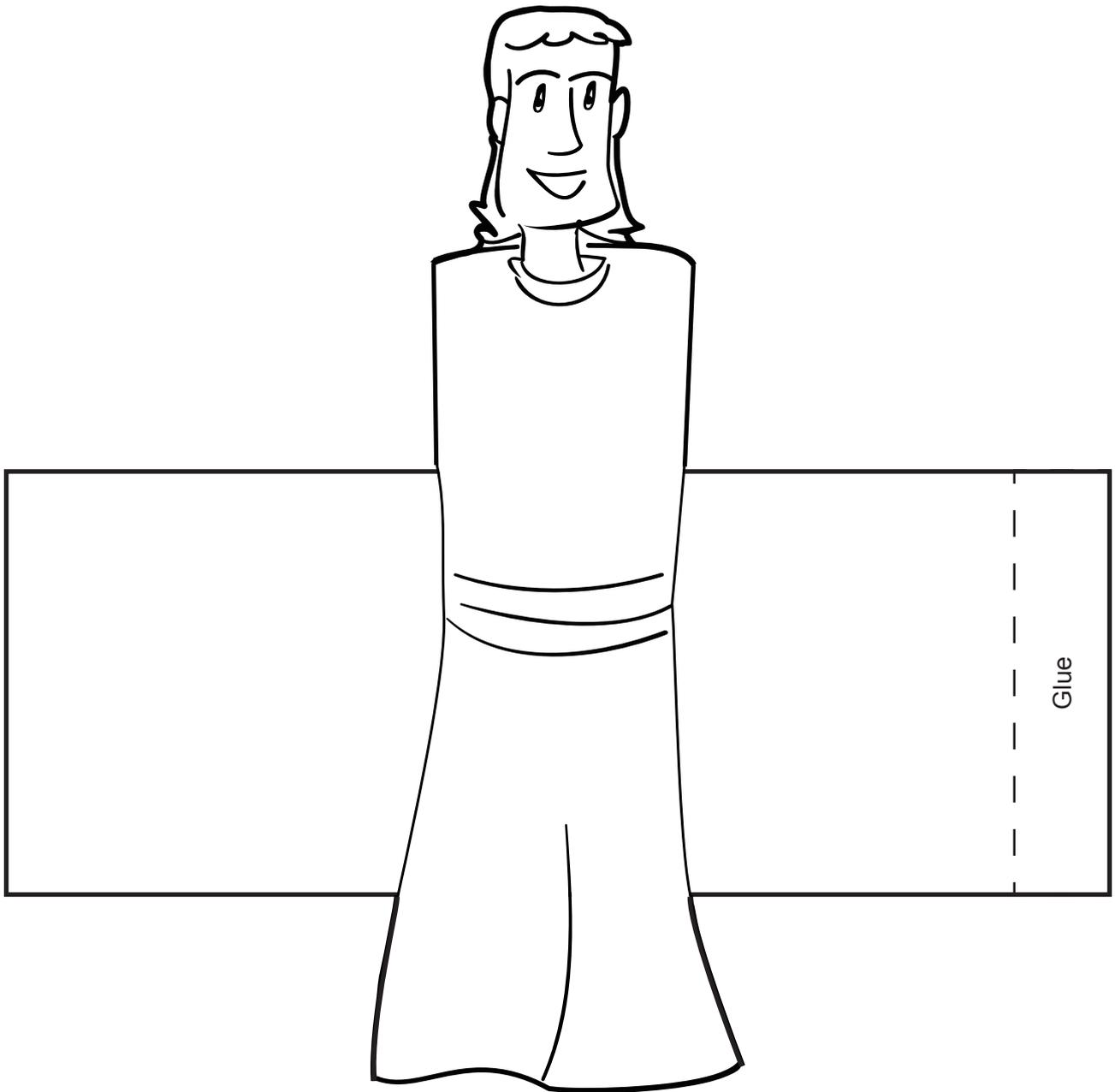


"You are to give him the name Jesus.
He will be the Son of the Most High.
He will reign forever; his kingdom will never end."
Luke 1:32-33



"You are to give him the name **Jesus**.
He will be the **SON** of the Most High.
He will reign forever; his kingdom will **never** end."

Luke 1:32-33



God's Gift to the Shepherds

Luke 2:1-20

Big Idea : Jesus' birth is announced by angels to lowly shepherds. They are told to go and meet the one who has come to rescue the world.

Aim : To understand the staggering truth that Jesus Christ came into the world as a normal baby to rescue normal people.



The Story So Far

Week 1

- The Angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his old and childless wife was going to have a son called John.
- John would be the one who would prepare the people for the longed-for arrival of God's final King.

Week 2

- The Angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God.
- His name will be Jesus and he will reign forever as the King of God's never-ending kingdom.



Leader's Study Notes

Read Luke 2:1-20 using the following notes to help you.

In the last passage we noted a contrast between the birth stories of John and Jesus. It seemed odd that the announcement of an eternal, divine king's arrival into the world should be done in the privacy of a humble home.

This passage deals with the birth itself and again we will discover that things are not as we would expect of a royal, divine birth. Some things are out of place, some are totally unexpected.

2:1-3 The decree of the Roman Caesar (the most important man in the world at that time) was used to bring Mary to Bethlehem. The town was famous for only one thing – King David. God is at work and he even uses a census decreed by Caesar to ensure that Jesus is born as the new David (Micah 5:2).

2:7 Normally inns would have been on the first floor above the stable. So with the inn busy, the stable would have been the obvious place to find shelter. What surroundings!

2:8 Shepherds were very ordinary and somewhat despised members of society. It's hard to think of less likely people to announce the actual birth of Jesus to than a group of rough shepherds watching their sheep!

2:10 Good news for all people, including lowly shepherds! Finally, God's promise to bless all people on earth through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:2-3) is being fulfilled.

2:11 This verse is packed full of titles given to this baby. "In the town of David": (mentioned for the third time here) shows that this baby sits in the line of David and has come to take the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:16 and Luke 1:32).

"Saviour": because he will deliver God's people from danger.

"Christ": because finally the chosen, promised King has arrived.

"Lord": is explained in Luke's Gospel and Acts to mean that Jesus is the ruling king. God has made this Lord equal with himself – The Lord who is God himself.

2:12 The shepherds were given explicit instructions and proof that this baby was the promised Saviour.

2:14 Peace with God is possible because Jesus has come into the world. This peace comes to us as a result of God's undeserved favour – his kindness.

2:18-20 Notice two responses modelled for us. "Mary...pondered". There is a depth to the Christmas story that requires serious thought.

“They [shepherds] spread the word... the shepherds returned...praising God”. Sharing the staggering news of Christmas and thanking God.

This story is one of contrasts. Nothing seems to quite fit.

Caesar is in charge,

But Mary is in exactly the right place for the birth.

The Rescuer and Son of God is born,

But his first hours are spent in a feeding trough!

Armies of angels announce his birth,

But to a group of shepherds in a field.

It's good news for all people,

But no-one seems to notice.

These unusual contrasts will culminate, at the end of Jesus' earthly life, in him being recognised as the Son of God only once he has died as a criminal on a cross (Mark 15:39).

But the contrast continues because Jesus came to be a Saviour, a Rescuer. The righteous Son of God, who was perfect in every way, came to rescue those who, because of their sin, are lowly and despised. It is news of great joy and needs to be heard by all people.

Reflect

- Christmas cards have sentimentalised the nativity scene, but Jesus' birth was so much less than ordinary it is actually bizarre. Does the contrast and injustice of it move you?
- What do you feel when you 'ponder in your heart' that the righteous Son of God went through all of this to rescue you?
- Give thanks to God for his incredible mercy in sending Jesus into this world to save sinners.



Plan

Review last week's lesson. Can the children remember the true story about a young woman who was going to have a special baby?

- What was the baby's name?
[*Jesus (Luke 1:31)*]
- What made the baby special?
[*Both God and Man (Luke 1:32)*]
- What would the baby do when he grew up?
[*Reign forever over a never-ending kingdom (Luke 1:33)*]

✓ **Introduce** this week's lesson with the introductory idea.

✓ For 3-7's – this story is a combination of exciting drama and a speech from the angel that is full of revelation.

To tell the story you could consider making use of the three locations mentioned, perhaps identifying three parts of the room.

- Mary and Joseph start in Nazareth
- They move to Bethlehem
- Shepherds are in a field near Bethlehem when an angel appears to them.
- They decide to go to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem.
- They visit and then return to the field, telling people what they had seen as they go.

As with the previous two lessons, the central teaching of this lesson comes through the words that the angel says.

To make these words more dramatic, the key concepts can be drawn as simple visuals, perhaps as the angel says them. The script on page 30 gives one idea how this can be done, using the visuals on page 31.

Tip: The visuals can be drawn lightly in pencil on a flip chart and then simple traced with a large marking pen during the lesson.

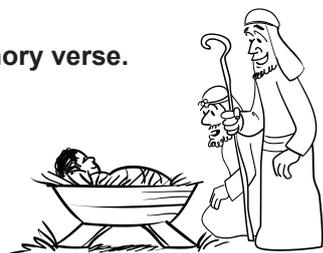
The central truth of this lesson is that a saviour had been born for normal people. So everything you can do, using props, visuals or explanations, to stress the normality of this story would help to teach this; the shepherds were despised in society, the baby's cradle was a grubby trough, the baby's clothes were just torn up bits of cotton, Mary and Joseph were a long way from home, their family, a hospital or any luxury.

✓ For 7-11's – There are a number of approaches you could take. The difficulty is that this age group have done so many nativity plays that they may have become deadened to the meaning of the words being said in this amazing episode.

Choose a combination of the following options

- Use the script on page 30, particularly if you can involve everyone.
- Go through the action of the story using Lego men on a map, or something similar, just to show the various comings and goings. This would be helpful just to set the scene, particularly if there are some who are less familiar with the detail.
- Put the text of 2:10-14 on some big sheets of paper, and ask appropriate questions to draw out the critical information that is contained here. Again, as this may be over familiar, you need to find a way to introduce intrigue and investigation. Perhaps see it from the shepherds point of view – uneducated, socially at the bottom of the ladder, in the middle of the night, half asleep – what in this passage would confuse or surprise them? Or see the innkeeper’s perspective – “a baby has been born in my stable tonight, what would I expect to be told about that baby? Poor? Probably loved in his own family, but unlikely to make any impact beyond that?”
- Draw up a table with the title, “If this baby is God’s King...”. Have the two headings, “Then I would expect...” and “But instead...”. Go through the various surprises in this text, and prepare what you would expect in each case, and how God actually has arranged it. Ask the children what they would expect for each aspect, then take them to the Bible verse to discover the surprising truth. So for instance, if this baby is God’s King, then what kind of place would I expect him to be born? Take answers, then go to verse 12 to discover that (it doesn’t say a stable, but) it does say a “manger” was his first bed. You can do the same exercise with...
 1. What influence would the emperor have on the birth?
 2. Who would be the first visitors?
 3. What difference would it make in the surrounding region?
 4. How would the mother feel?

- ✓ **Play the game** to reinforce the lesson aim.
- ✓ **Revise** the questions from the Introductory Idea.
- ✓ **Discuss and apply.**
- ✓ **Uncover the third gift on the overview picture** (page 10 and 11) – the gift addressed to the Shepherds. The 'Saviour' sash is a summary of what the angel told the Shepherds was true of Jesus – can the children remember what this represents?
- ✓ **Revise the memory verse.**



Introductory Idea

Odd one out. Get a series of objects or pictures where there is an odd one out. Get the children to identify the odd one. Ideas include

- A bunch of vegetables with one fruit.
- Use an overhead projector to project shadows, and identify the odd one out. If you don't have a projector, you could also place them behind a white sheet and shine a bright light onto them to create a shadow for the children to see.
- A selection of smart clothes and then one holey, old sock.
- Pictures of places in this country (or postcards) and then one of abroad.
- Members of a family (perhaps they all look alike) and then find the one outsider.
- Three birds that can fly and one that can't.
- Three sports with a ball and one without.

In today's true story from the Bible we are going to learn about the "odd one out". So much of what happens and how it happens seems not to belong. It's just not what we would expect, but there's a reason for that! The children must listen carefully to discover:

- Who was the odd one out?
[Jesus]
- Why didn't he belong there?
[Because he is Christ, the Lord. (Luke 2:11)]
- Why did he have to be there?
[To be the Saviour of the world. (Luke 2:11)]



Game Idea

Option 1: One child leaves the room, he/she is the 'detective'. Stand or sit the rest of the group in a circle. Pick one child to be the 'King'. The rest of the group have to do whatever the 'King' does, while staying in a circle, and trying not to look directly at the 'King'.

The detective comes and stands in the middle of the circle and is allowed two guesses at who the King is. That game is about one person being different, then everyone else obeys. Jesus was different. He had to be different to every other King who had ever lived.

Option 2: Prepare six cards with different statements about the group, one statement per card. Suggested statements are: anyone with brown shoes, anyone with blond hair, anyone with white socks, anyone with blue eyes, anyone with black shoes, anyone who is over 5ft. 6ins. tall.

Make sure that the six statements collectively include the entire group so that no-one will be left out.

The children and leaders form a large circle holding hands. The circle moves round in a clockwise direction until the command is given to freeze. This

could be done to music, stopping the music to stop the circle.

One of the children chooses an envelope containing one of the six cards and reads out the statement. All those who qualify form a smaller circle within the larger circle.

Repeat, with the two circles moving in opposite directions, until all six statements have been read out. By the end, everyone should have transferred from the outside circle to the inside circle.

When the inside circle becomes bigger than the outside circle the people in the outside circle stop holding hands.

Jesus came as the King of all, which was good news of great joy for all people. It doesn't matter what you wear, how tall you are, where you were born – Jesus' birth is good news.



Discuss and Apply

For younger children – remind them of the visuals on page 31 that illustrate the angel's words. Can the children remember what the shepherds were told?

See if the children can understand why it is "Good news" and "Great joy", and why it is "for all people"?

Can they explain why Christmas is all of these things because of Jesus?

Finally, you could try to explain why the Saviour King was laid in a grubby manger and visited by stinking shepherds – it's because Jesus came for normal people like us. Christmas is for us. He is our Saviour, Rescuer and King.

For older children – perhaps split a large piece of flip chart paper in half. On one side see if the children can remember and write down what we learnt about Jesus in today's story (from the angel) and on the other side write down some of the surprises from this episode.

Point out the contrast between the two sides. Discuss the reasons.

Perhaps pose the question from an unbelievers point of view, "*Most of the evidence from this story points to this baby being utterly unimportant – convince me why you think differently*".

What shocks are there in this story for someone who doesn't think Jesus is anything more than an ordinary man with some special teaching?

If there is time, or instead, you could ponder the shepherds as a case study in responding to the news of Christmas. How do we respond to this same news? Did they respond differently? Why?



Activity

For 3-5s – print page 32 onto paper for each child.

The children – colour the picture and glue cotton wool onto the sheep. The word 'Saviour' means 'rescuer'.

For 5-7s – print page 33 onto paper for each child.

The children – colour the picture, glue cotton wool onto the sheep and write over the dotted words. The word 'Saviour' means 'rescuer'.

For 7-11's – make 'Saviour of the world' Christmas tree decoration.

Print page 34 onto white card for each child. To save time you may choose to do all the cutting out for the children.

The four parts of this craft are; two halves of a world globe, a crown of thorns and a king's crown. You could use two intertwined brown pipe cleaners to be the crown of thorns. You could also cover the king's crown in gold foil.

To assemble – glue the two halves of the globe together, being careful to not glue the tabs and making sure they are both facing the right direction.

Fold all eight tabs outward so they are perpendicular to the faces of the globe. Glue the crown of thorns around the globe using the top and bottom tabs (north and south) so that the crown crosses over the front and back of the globe.

Glue the king's crown in place using the two side tabs (west and east) so the king's crown crosses over the crown of thorns.

Attach a loop of thread on the top so the globe can be hung from a Christmas tree.



Quick Craft

A quick craft suitable for all ages is provided on page 12. This is meant to be a simple alternative to the activities above.

Print page 12 onto card for each child. The page contains one gift tag for each of the four weeks in this series. You may choose to print onto a variety of brightly coloured card.

The children simply decorate the tag with glitter, sequins and any other suitable materials.

Attach the gift tag with a piece of ribbon to a foil covered chocolate Christmas tree decoration. The children can hang these on their Christmas trees at home.



Memory Verse

Luke 2:11 – *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* [NIV84]

Narrator: At that time the Emperor ordered a count to be taken of every single person in the Roman Empire. Everyone had to go back to where their family were from to register themselves.

Joseph went from where he lived in the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea. Joseph went there because he was from King's David family. King David had been born in Bethlehem. He went to register with Mary, who was engaged to marry him. She was pregnant, with Jesus, as Gabriel had explained to her. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. Because of the big count, everyone was in town, so there was no room to stay in a hotel, or an inn or even in someone's spare room. So when she gave birth to her first son, she wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger- an animal's eating trough.

There were some shepherds near Bethlehem, who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks of sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and a bright light shone around them. The light was the awesome glory of the Lord. They were petrified,

Shepherd: Umm. Who are you? Please don't hurt us. What's going on? Let us go.

Angel: Let me explain. Oh, and write some of this down so you remember. Its the most important thing you'll ever hear. Ever!

Shepherd: *[Finds a pen and prepares to draw the visuals on page 31 in time with the angel speaking – slowly]*. Right. Um ready. I think.

Angel: Don't be afraid! I'm here with good news for you *[Shepherd writes 'Good News']*
This good news will bring great joy *[Shepherd draws happy face]*
to all the people. *[Shepherd draws groups of people]*

Shepherd: I'm with you so far.

Angel: This very day in Bethlehem, which is King David's town, your Saviour *[draw Saviour without crown]* has been born

He is Christ the Lord! "Christ" means "God's promised King"— He is the Boss!

Shepherd: What? Say all that again. That was heavy.

Angel: *[A bit frustrated!]* This very day in Bethlehem, which is King David's town

your Saviour has been born

He is Christ the Lord! *[Add crown to the saviour]* "Christ" means "God's promised King"— He is the Boss!

Shepherd: Umm. Really? For real? Today? For us? For everyone?

Angel: And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.

Shepherd: You want us to go? That's why you're telling us? To visit God's King? We don't have the clothes, or the presents, or the... anything. We're shepherds. I think there's been some sort of terrible mistake.

Narrator: Suddenly a great army of Heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

Angel: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!

Narrator: When the angels went away from them, back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another:

Shepherd: We should go to Bethlehem and see this thing, meet the boss! God says its happened, so who are we to argue?

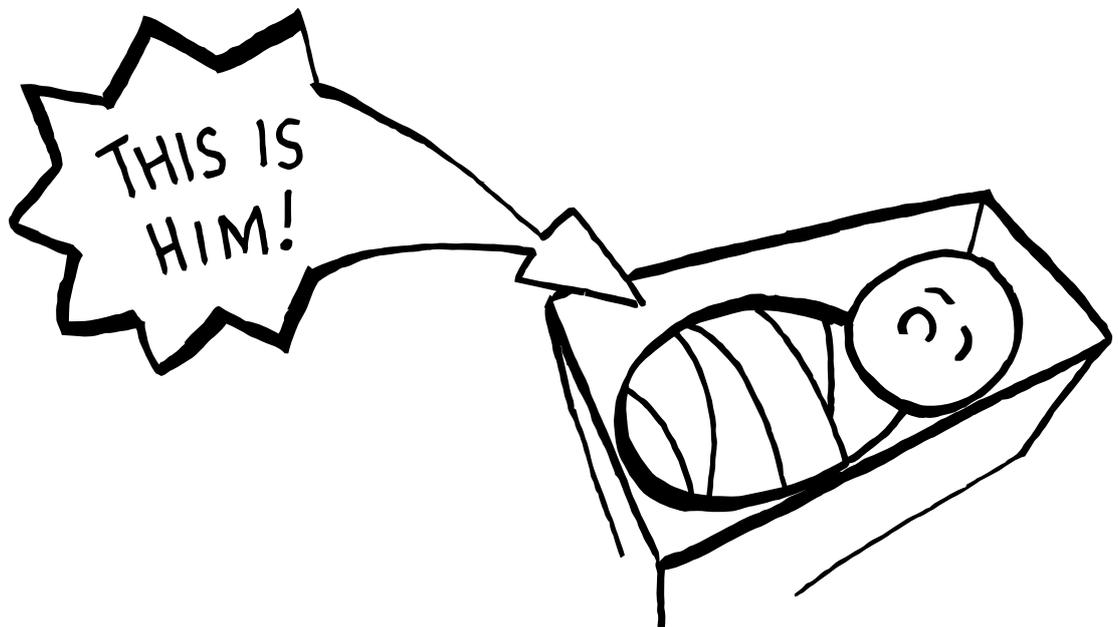
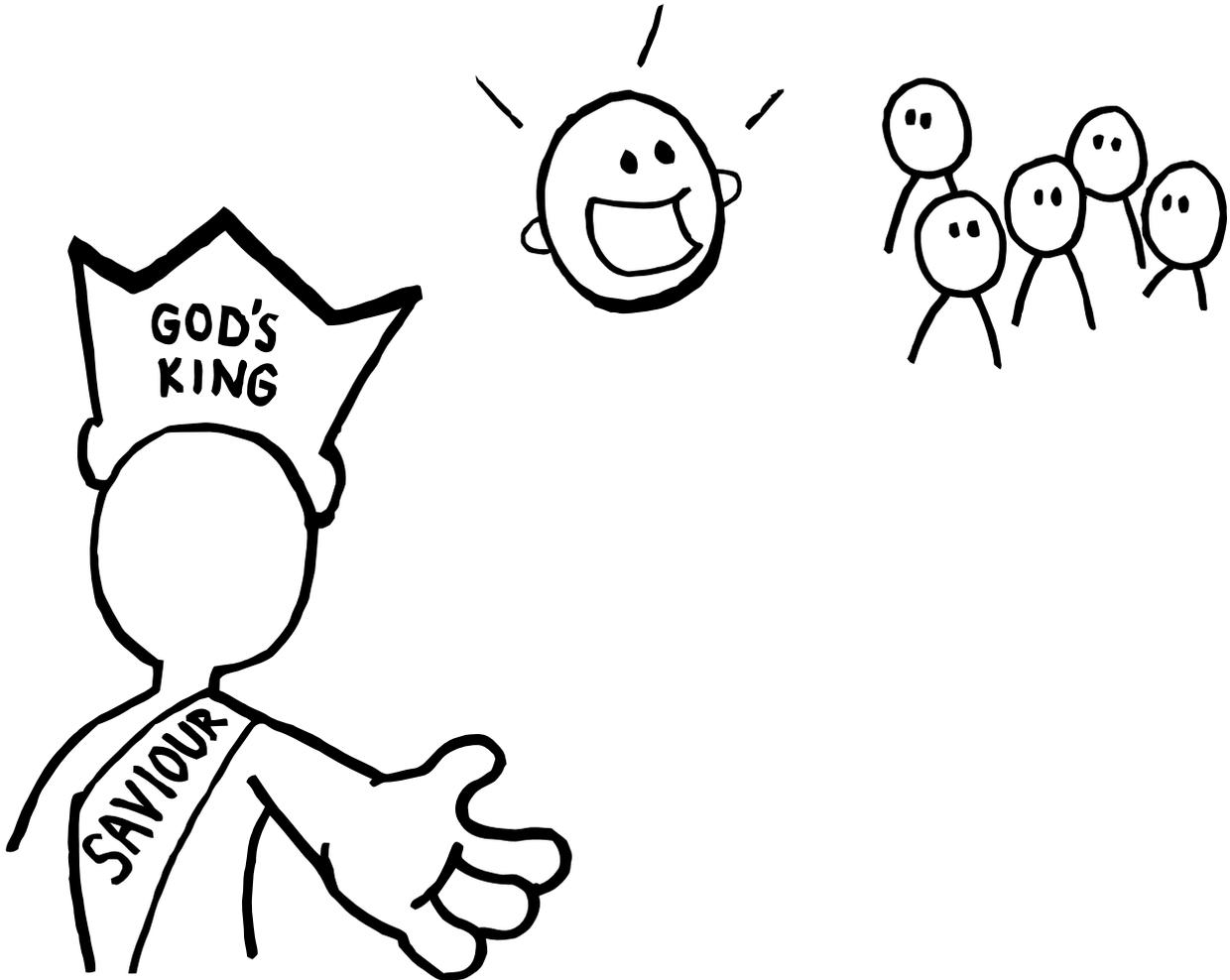
Narrator: So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child.

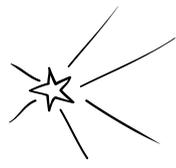
Shepherd: This is going to sound odd, but the angels – yeah, they just visited us in our field – say he's the Christ, God's promised King, the Saviour! He's good news for every single person in the world, ever! Quite a baby you've got there. Er, congratulations.

Narrator: Everyone who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

Shepherd: We've seen the K-ing. We've seen the K-ing. We've seen the King. Hallelujah. God rocks!

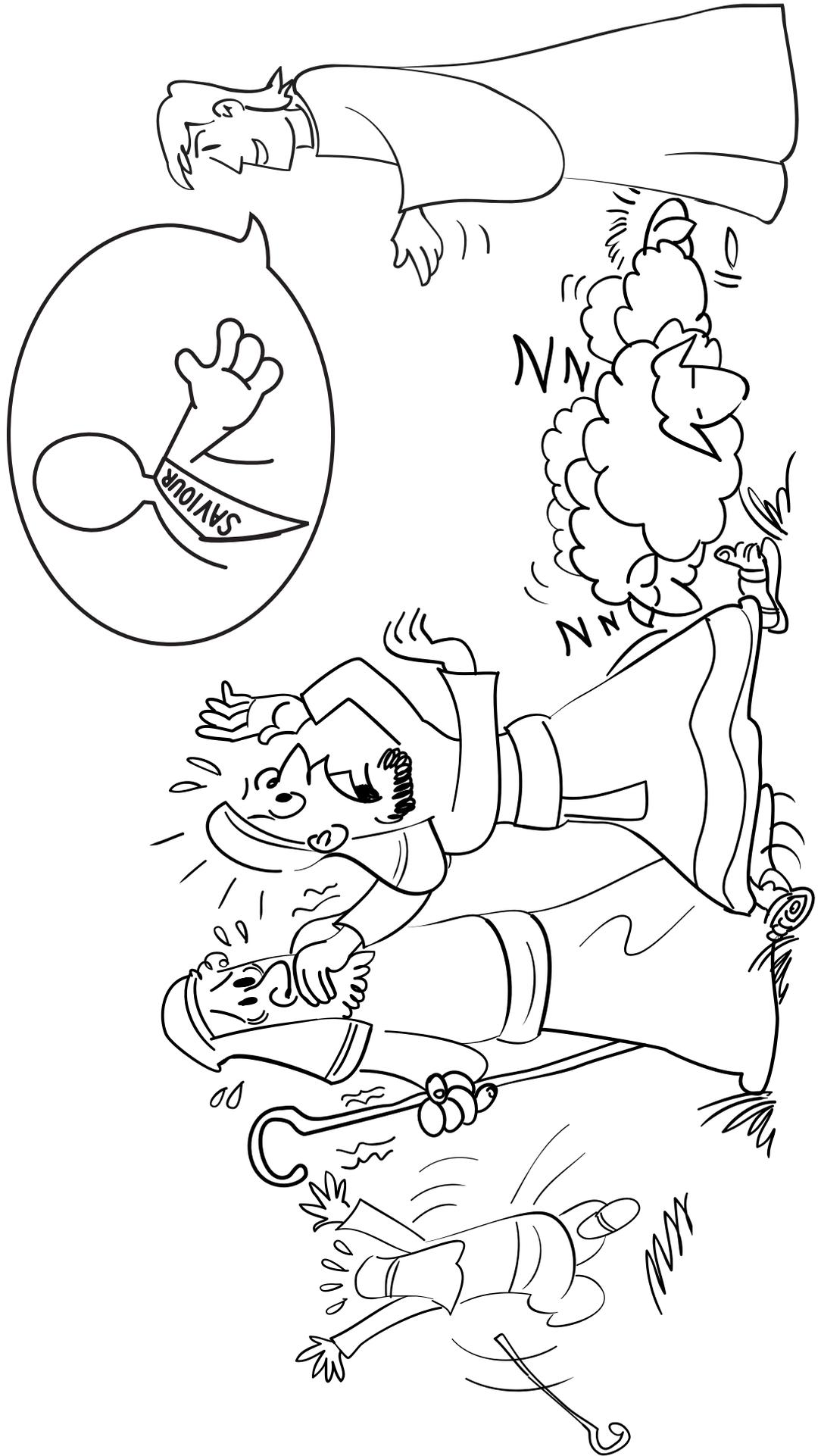
GOOD NEWS

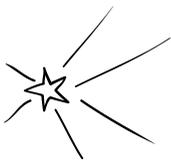




"Today, in the town of David a Saviour has
been born to you; he is Christ the Lord".

Luke 2:11

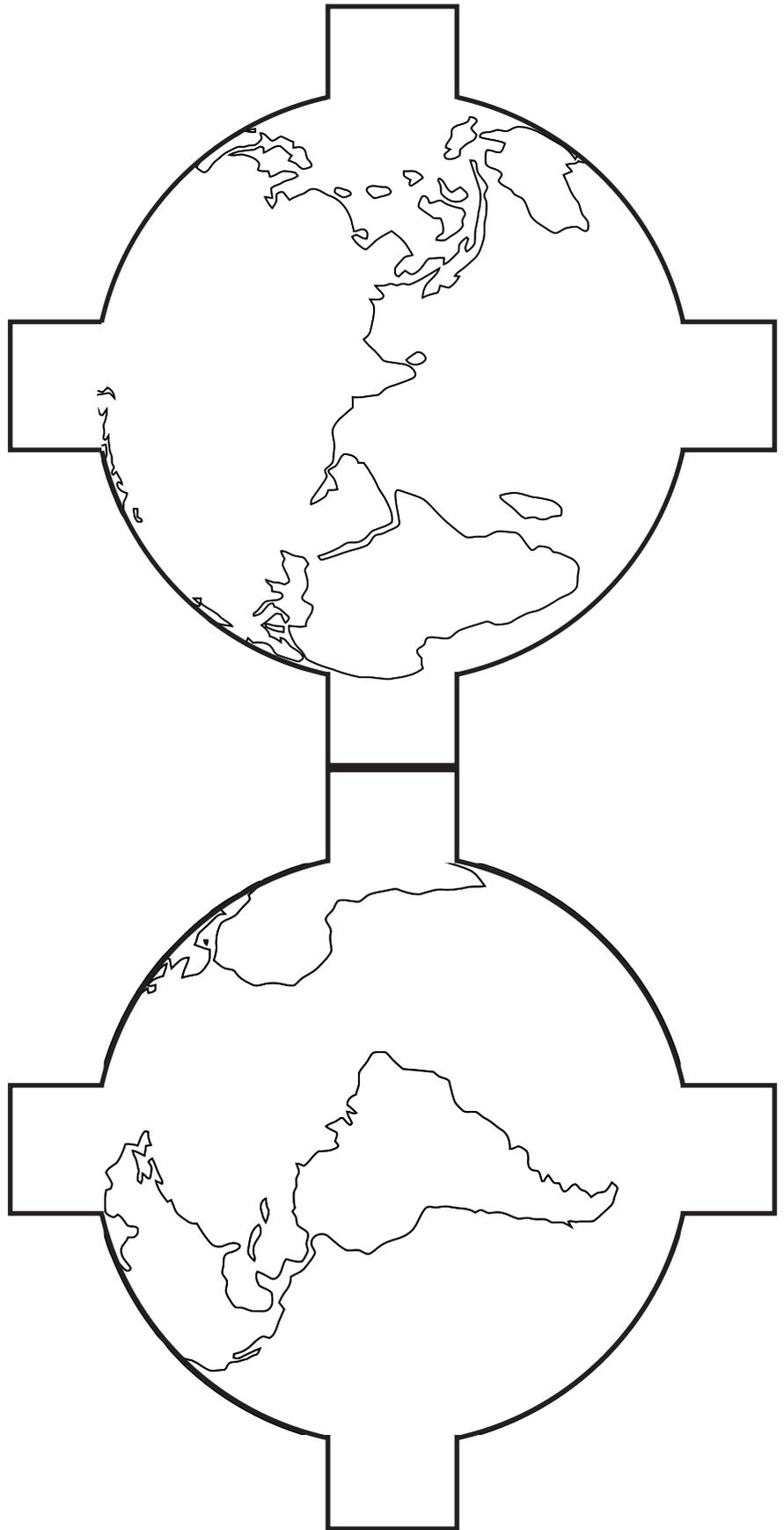




"Today, in the town of David a Saviour
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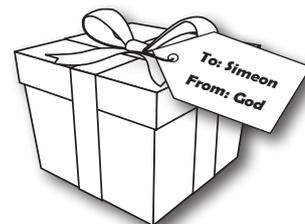


God's Gift to Simeon

Luke 2:21-35

Big Idea : The Holy Spirit shows Simeon that Jesus is God's promised King who brings freedom to His people and rescue to everyone. But not all will accept Him.

Aim : To teach that Jesus is the one who allows us to see how we can be in God's family. Some choose to push him away.



The Story So Far

Week 1

- The Angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his old and childless wife was going to have a son called John.
- John would be the one who would prepare the people for the longed-for arrival of God's final King.

Week 2

- The Angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God.
- His name will be Jesus and he will reign forever as the King of God's never-ending kingdom.

Week 3

- Angels announce the actual birth of Jesus to a group of lowly shepherds.
- The shepherds are told to go and meet the Saviour of the world who has come to bring peace.

birth. So she had to wait 40 days after the birth, then she had to go to the temple and offer a sacrifice to be made clean (Leviticus 12:1-8). For this reason, the timing of her visit to the temple was 'fixed' and the meeting with Simeon is therefore no coincidence. God is in control!

2:25 "Consolation of Israel" is the promised restoration of God's people back into relationship with God: an end to punishment, experienced at the hands of various regional powers who kept conquering them. Israel felt distant from God, but Simeon knew God had made promises to bring final relief.

2:25-27 The Holy Spirit at work in Simeon shows that he had been set apart for this special work by God. Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was only given to do certain tasks. This incident in the temple is his life's work (also 2:36).

2:31,32 Simeon realised that Jesus had come to save both Jew and Gentile; as God had promised he would (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). This is staggering news – finally someone will open the eyes of non-Jews to the truth!

2:26-32 Notice the emphasis on "seeing", "revealing" and "light". We're meant to pick up that when we see Jesus, we understand everything. This is Luke's version of "Jesus is the light of the world" (John 9:5).

2:33 Can you imagine what this experience would have done to Mary and Joseph?

2:34 Jesus will divide his hearers, as he still



Leader's Study Notes

Read Luke 2:21-35 using the following notes to help you.

Thus far in the series we have seen who Jesus is – the divine man who is the king of God's eternal kingdom. We have also seen what he came to do – be the saviour of all people.

This passage deals with Jesus' future and people's response to his rule. This is revealed in the prophetic words of Simeon who had been waiting all his life to see the promised king.

2:23 All firstborn sons belonged to God as a memorial of the Passover in Egypt when every firstborn son was rescued from death by God (Exodus 13:2, 12, 15).

2:24 Mary, according to the law, was regarded as being ceremonially unclean after giving

does. It is the reaction to Jesus that reveals our hearts. Another shocking truth about God coming into our world in the person of Jesus – not everyone will accept him.

2:35 This “sword” that will pierce Mary points to the many occasions in Jesus' life when he would be rejected but ultimately she would be “pierced” by the cross.

This is the final great mystery of Christmas – if this baby would be the one to open blind eyes to the long-for rescue, why would the promised King be rejected by those he came to save?

Simeon reminds us that people's rejection of Jesus as King reveals the true nature of their hearts. John came to prepare the people to receive Jesus. John's message was one of repentance (a turning of hearts back to God). Like Jesus, John too was rejected and executed.

God's grace and mercy in sending a Saviour into the world is what lies at the heart of the Christmas story. We must rejoice that we can 'see' this great news. We must also recognise that what is received as good news by those who are being saved, is rejected by others.

Reflect

- What would Christmas feel like and look like for you without "a light for revelation"?
- What is your initial response to this passage? If you don't have one, read it again, slowly!
- Give thanks to God for his incredible grace in sending Jesus into the world and for his mercy in revealing Jesus to you.



Plan

Review last week's lesson. The story was about how someone who was the odd one out. Can the children remember:

- Who was the odd one out?
[Jesus]
 - Why didn't he belong there?
[Because he is Christ, the Lord. (Luke 2:11)]
 - Why did he have to be there?
[To be the Saviour of the world. (Luke 2:11)]
- ✓ **Introduce** this week's lesson with the introductory idea.

You could quickly explain the reason for the family's visit to the temple, as being similar to the baptism/blessing of a new child today. It was the

welcoming of a new baby into God's family.

This is a less well known story, so you have far more options about how to tell it. You could tell the story in a dark area, with a torch illuminating the character (Jesus is the light that shows us how to be saved).

- ✓ **For 3-7's** – this story is the collision of two worlds, by God. Mary and Joseph are trying to do the normal Jewish thing with the 'normal' baby. Simeon is on the look out for the Christ. He is waiting to die! He just has one task left to complete – to meet the eternal (forever) King. And just then...

To tell this story, consider introducing Mary and Joseph. For dramatic effect, it is helpful to stress that at the start of this story we are introduced to them as a normal Jewish couple. Introduce them, explain what they're doing and ask the children how they might be feeling.

Introduce Simeon. Tell the children about him. How do the children think he would be feeling?

The the big meeting. What would it have looked like? How would each person have reacted? Huge drama!

Simplify Simeon's words for the children so they understand the enormity of what he is saying. Then, as Simeon leaves, how do Mary and Joseph feel?

This story could be told using five or six emotion cards with faces depicting different expressions to choose from.

- ✓ **For 7-11's** – read the above for ideas to create the drama of this story. Involve the children in imagining this story.

Ask them questions, quick fire, to help them 'see' the scene, the characters, the sense of anticipation and the shock.

A simple Bible study afterwards will allow the children to discover the truths about Jesus for themselves.

Perhaps think about 2:29-32 and 2:34-35 in three areas:

1. Simeon: How did Simeon feel? (2:29-30)
2. Jesus: What did Simeon understand about Jesus? (2:31-32)
3. People: What would Jesus do to the world? 2:34-35

You might want to prepare some questions to help the children understand these three areas.

Perhaps scribble down the various answers, ideas and thoughts the children have on three sheets of paper.

The third area is the hardest to understand from the passage. Be prepared to talk the children through a simple explanation of what this means.

- ✓ **Play the game** to reinforce the lesson aim.
- ✓ **Revise** the introductory questions.
- ✓ **Discuss and apply.**
- ✓ **Uncover the fourth gift on the overview picture** (page 10 and 11) the gift addressed to Simeon.
- ✓ **Revise the memory verse.**



Introductory Idea

Option 1: Any activity where the children need to anticipate something and respond in some way.

You could drop a tennis ball down a length of black gutter pipe held vertically off the ground. A volunteer needs to try and catch the ball as it exits the pipe. They may not hold their hands under the pipe, waiting. They have to respond to the ball leaving the pipe.

For younger children – hold the pipe at an angle so the ball rolls down the pipe at a slower rate. It is meant to be a challenge though.

If you don't have a suitable pipe, then simply blindfold the volunteer and get them to hold their hands out, palms facing upwards. Drop a light weight ball from a height above their palms. They must try to catch the ball as it hits their hands.

Take briefly about what it feels to know something is going to happen, but not being sure when it will happen. How do you respond when it finally does happen.

In today's true story from the Bible we are going to hear about a man who was expecting to see Jesus before he died.

- Who was expecting to see Jesus?
[*Simeon (Luke 2:25)*]
- Who did he say Jesus was?
[*The Christ – the promised king (Luke 2:26)*]
- How did he expect people to respond to Jesus?
[*Some will accept him, others will reject him (Luke 2:34)*]

Option 2: You could choose to connect with the idea that light reveals. What games can you think of using light?

- Shadow puppets – using your hands to make shapes of animals.
- Overhead projector fun – put various objects on an overhead projector (with a screen around it so that the children can't see the object sitting on the glass). Can the children identify the items?
- Dark rooms and torches – to make a room really dark is difficult (and frightening for young children), but you can seal up a box, so that it is dark inside. Paste a picture of a baby on one wall of the box and make two holes, one opposite the picture

and one above the picture. Two cardboard tubes (similar in size to toilet roll tubes) inserted just inside the holes will prevent the ambient light from entering the box. The children look through the hole opposite the picture and see nothing. But shining a torch through the top makes seeing the baby easy!

You will need to think of a different link to the lesson and some of your own introductory questions to get the children thinking about the lesson.



Game Idea

Option 1: The aim of this game is to show that the same news can be good for some, but bad for others.

Before the session cut a few A4 sheets of coloured paper into small squares. 4cm x 4cm squares will enable you to get 28 squares out of a single sheet of paper. You need a good number more squares than you have children and you also need to have a number of different colours (three or more).

Divide the group into two or more teams and scatter the squares of paper all over the floor.

At the signal, each team must collect as many squares as possible of a **single colour** that they, as a team, have decided to collect. The teams may choose to collect the same colour.

After a suitable, but short length of time, the leader calls a halt. The teams count their squares and make a note of the total.

The leader then randomly draws one of the colours from a hat or bag that contains one of each of the colours.

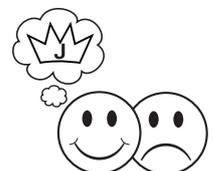
The colour drawn is announced. Only teams who have collected the same colour may add their tally to their total. This is incredibly good news for that team, but terribly bad news for the other teams.

Repeat for a number of rounds as time and enthusiasm allow. The teams may choose a different colour each time.

Remind the children that in today's story from the Bible, Simeon said that the news that Jesus is the Saviour of the world will be good news for some who will accept it, but bad news for others who will reject it.

Option 2 (for older children): Let the children play, 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' with each other. Discuss the fact that in each round they had to make a choice and their choice had consequences.

Everyone makes a choice about Jesus – Simeon said that it would have consequences (it matters).





Discuss and Apply

There are two closely linked ideas that we pray the children will understand and be struck by.

1. Jesus allows us to see how we can be saved, to become part of God's people (his family).
2. Once people can see and understand who Jesus is; everyone then chooses whether to trust him or push him away. Jesus' revealing of the trust becomes rescue for some but judgement for others.

For younger children – focus on the first area, and touch on the second. **Older children** will be better able to understand and consider the second area. Older children are also more aware of others who reject Jesus.

For 3-7's – once you have explained to the children what you are going to do, you could switch out the lights, and then after a brief time of darkness, switch on some Christmas fairy lights.

Discuss how darkness means we cannot see what is there. How did it feel? What can they see now with the lights on? Which do they prefer?

Explain or discuss how Simeon knew that Jesus was the one who would be like a light to show us how to be in God's family. He would be a light to show us himself, as the Saviour! There will be great ways that you could explain, discuss and illustrate some of this.

Perhaps to close, you could explain that not everyone thinks Jesus is the most exciting part of Christmas. Simeon told Mary and Joseph that this would happen. Even after Jesus has brought light, some don't want to trust and love Him.

For 7-11's – perhaps discuss this story in terms of "good news" and "bad news". These can then be related to prayers of praise and prayers where we might ask God for something specific.

We do not want our children to be people who believe they have been smart enough to discover God's salvation through their own merits.

It is likely that your class is a group of "Gentiles" who, without Jesus, would not have a way into the Kingdom and would not have been able to understand the rescue offered.

Prepare questions to help them understand the reason for Simeon's enormous joy at seeing the Christ. His joy can be our joy. A "light" illustration may help you with this.

Finish by discussing different people's understanding of Christmas. Why do they think people differ in this? Is it personal preference? Is it because we're all different? What answers does Simeon offer? Some people know nothing of Jesus, while others know more. How can Simeon's words help us to pray?



Activity

For 3-7s – print page 39 onto paper for each child.

Before the lesson – cut the strip off the bottom of the page and cut away all the gray shaded area.

Also use a craft blade to cut the bold lines on Mary's and Simeon's arms.

The children colour the picture and the strip with Baby Jesus.

Help the children to slide the strip through slots.

The baby can now be transferred from Mary's arms to Simeon's by pulling the strip of paper.

Can the children remember what the symbols in Simeon's speech bubble mean?

For 7-11's – make 'Happy/Sad' spinning Christmas tree decoration.

Print page 40 onto white card. You will need one copy for every three children. Each child will need one happy/sad pair each.

All the circles need to be neatly cut and the gray ring must be discarded. You can use the gray area as an access point for a pair of scissors to cut the outside of the inner circle and the inside of the outer ring. The children can manage this if you provide a slit, cut with a craft blade, in the gray area of each circle.

Provide glitter and anything else that will help the children brightly decorate the circles and the rings.

Each child will also require a length of thread or embroidery cotton.

To assemble, lay the one inner circle inside an outer ring (both face down and centred). Take note of which way is up and make sure they are both aligned in the same direction.

Apply glue to both the ring and the circle and stretch a length of thread across both from top to bottom, down the centre.

Place the other circle and outer ring (face up and aligned) on top and press down firmly to secure the thread. The inner circle can be wound-up to spin.



Quick Craft

If you have been using the quick alternative craft on page 12, then you should already have the tags printed on card. The children simply decorate the tag with glitter, sequins and any other suitable materials.

Attach the gift tag with a piece of ribbon to a foil covered chocolate Christmas tree decoration. The children can hang these on their Christmas trees at home.

This child is destined to
cause the falling and
rising of many.

Luke 2:34



