

It's hard to wait for Christmas, isn't it? What do you love about Christmas? I love all those things, too! Christmas is special for so many reasons, but the greatest reason is Jesus. We celebrate Jesus at Christmas because He is the best gift, ever!

As you read the Scripture above, light the first **purple** candle which represents hope in anticipation of the Messiah. Have you ever noticed that the longer you wait for something, the more you want it? If you wait twenty minutes for dinner, you might be happy when it's time to eat, but you probably won't throw a dance party. After all, you only waited twenty minutes, and dinner isn't a big deal.

But Christmas is a big deal, and it takes a loooong time to get here. We still have to wait 19 days! Each day we wait, our excitement grows as we long for Christmas more and more. This is how people felt while they waited for Jesus to come to earth. Do you know how long they waited for Him? (I'll give you a hint — it was more than 19 days!) They waited 400 years. Imagine that!

Many Christmas carols reflect how much people longed for Jesus as they waited. Listen to these words (or sing them together): Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free. From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee. Why were people waiting for Jesus? Because He alone could set them free.

We can always trust Jesus because He is good and He loves us so much! Let's make a happy face. Can we trust Jesus when we're happy? Yes! Let's make a sad face. Can we trust Jesus when we're sad? Yes! How about a mad face? Can we trust Jesus when we're mad? Yes! We can always trust Jesus because He is good and He loves us so much.

Do you remember how long the people of God waited for Jesus to come to earth? That's right, 400 years! Jesus was worth waiting for because He was going to rescue them from sin and death. He was their only Hope. Some of them waited well, and others...not so much.

Read the Scripture above. There are times when everyone gets tired of waiting. But verse 31 says, "Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength." Did you know that other versions of the Bible translate the word "wait" as "hope"? Try reading that verse again using the word hope: "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength."

Waiting and hoping go together. Whether we're waiting to make friends, get better at math, or celebrate Christmas, putting our hope in God strengthens us to wait well. Is there something (besides Christmas!) you're waiting for? Ask God to fill your heart with hope as you trust Him day by day. Now flex your muscles — you may not be able to see it, but you just got stronger!

Jesus loves you so much that He died on the cross to save you. He wants to know you and take care of you forever. You can talk to Jesus any time — morning or night, in the car or in the pool, when you're excited or when you're scared. He will always listen. He will always love you.

Would you rather be poor, brokenhearted, or in prison? Probably none of the above. Sadly, because of sin, our world is filled with poor, brokenhearted, and imprisoned people. To be "poor" means to be "without" something. It doesn't necessarily have to be money. You could have lots of money and be without hope because you don't have Jesus. In the same way, you don't have to be in prison to be stuck in captivity. Some people are free to walk around, but their hearts are stuck in sin or fear.

Our Scripture today describes why Jesus came to earth. Let's read it together. Why did Jesus come to earth? That's right — Jesus was chosen by God to preach good news to the poor, to comfort the brokenhearted, and to free prisoners. Amazing!

Is there an area in your life where you feel poor? Or sad? Or stuck in sin? Let's pray and entrust these things to Jesus. He is our Hope! He alone can save, comfort, and free us.

Do you know what "joy" means? It means your heart is SO happy. What are some things that make you happy? The Bible says that everything good comes from God (James 1:17). God loves to give you good gifts. At Christmas we celebrate the best gift of all: Jesus!

Light the **pink** candle, called the Shepherd's candle, which represents joy. Over the next few days, we will learn about an old man, his wife, and the craziest (most joyful) experience of his life. Read the Scripture above.

Okay, let's review. What was Zechariah's job? What happened while he was burning incense in the sanctuary? What are Zechariah and Elizabeth supposed to name the baby? Why does Zechariah find it unlikely that they will have a child? How does the angel discipline Zechariah's lack of faith? How long will Zechariah be silent?

Perhaps you're thinking that this doesn't sound very joyful for Zechariah. Don't worry, it will be! Remember, the angel promised it. He said, "There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth" (v14). The baby in our story today is going to grow into a famous biblical character: John the Baptist. And he has an important role in the life of Jesus. Stay tuned!

Who made you? Can you say, "God made me"? That's right — God made you! You are very precious to God because He made you in His own image. You were made to bring glory to God. Let's try it one more time: Who made you? "God made me!"

When we left off yesterday, Zechariah was mute, Elizabeth was pregnant, and none of the neighbors were prepared for what would happen next. Don't you love a good story? Let's keep going! Read the Scripture above.

Why was everyone overjoyed when Elizabeth had her baby? What did they assume Zechariah and Elizabeth would name him? Why were they shocked when Zechariah and Elizabeth insisted that his name would be John?

Zechariah named his baby, and suddenly he could speak again! The people were terrified because they recognized the hand of God. They whispered among themselves, "Who is this baby? What is his destiny?"

God had a special plan for John the Baptist, and He has a special plan for you, too. Just like John, you were created for a purpose — to glorify God and to share the joy of the gospel with others. You are not an accident! You are God's own idea, made in His image, and very dear to His heart.

PRESCHOOL
PROMPT

Put your hands over your eyes. It's dark, isn't it? Keep your hands there! When we don't know Jesus, we live in darkness. Now, move your hands and open your eyes! The Bible says that Jesus is the Light of the World (John 8:12). Jesus fills our lives with light! He is our joy and hope.

Zechariah had a long time to be quiet and think...nine months, to be exact. Now, picture the scene: baby John making baby noises in Elizabeth's arms, neighbors and relatives gathered round with their jaws hanging open. Then, Zechariah starts to speak. If I were there, I'd have listened closely because these are the first words he's saying in nine months!

As we read our Scripture for today, listen carefully for what Zechariah prophesies about his son, John the Baptist. Read the Scripture above. What did Zechariah say his son would be called? What would be his job?

John the Baptist prepared people for the arrival of Jesus by telling them that they would be saved, forgiven, and freed from darkness because of the loving mercy of God. This week we lit two candles to represent hope and joy. Our greatest hope and joy in life comes from this wonderful news!

As you look at the light from our candles, imagine Zechariah – filled with the Holy Spirit – declaring these words to the people long ago: Jesus is coming “to give light to those who sit in darkness”!

Do you remember who made you? Let's say it together: "God made me!" Why did God make you? Say this with me: "For His own glory." Let's try again. Who made you? "God made me." Why did God make you? "For His own glory." Very good! God made you for His own glory!

Now that we know about John the Baptist's birth, let's fast-forward and see the fulfillment of his dad's prophecy about him. Read the Scripture above.

What was John's message? What kind of clothes did he wear? What did he eat? It's fair to say, John was a little bit different. Would you like to wear camel's hair to school tomorrow? Or pack some locusts for snack time? I didn't think so.

But listen to all the amazing things John did: He told people about Jesus. He baptized countless people, including JESUS. (Say what?! That's right, John baptized Jesus. See for yourself in Matthew 3:13-17). And speaking of amazing things, Jesus said that John the Baptist was greater than any other man who ever lived (Matthew 11:11).

It's easy to believe happiness comes from fitting in. But true joy comes from being who God wants us to be and doing what God wants us to do. As we wait 13 more days for Christmas, thank God that long ago, a strangely-dressed, bug-eating man prepared the way for Christ. And ask God how you can prepare others to know Jesus, too.

**Now follow the instructions for the first activity
in the Activity Book.**

Do you know how to clap your hands? Good job! Do you know how to dance? Wow! Do you know how to make the whole world? Try it! Make a tree appear in our living room. Then you can make some flowers appear, and maybe some cows. Isn't that silly? Of course you can't make the whole world! Neither can I. God is the Creator of the world. God made everything!

Light the third candle, which is also **purple**. This is called the Bethlehem candle, and it represents love. From now until Christmas, we are going to learn about the greatest love story ever. (Don't worry, there's no kissing involved!) Our story begins at the very beginning of time. Read the Scripture above.

God is love (I John 4:8), and He made the whole world to fill it with His love and glory. What are some good or beautiful things in the world? When you see a rainbow after a storm, or a sunset on the beach, or a puppy so cute you just want to squeeze him, pause and tell God, "Thank you!" in your heart. Because everything good and beautiful is a reflection of His loving character.

This love story has a great beginning, doesn't it? But like all good stories, there's about to be a big twist in the plot...

Have you ever done something wrong? What did you do? I have done wrong things, too. The reason we lie, disobey, and do mean things is because there is sin in our hearts. We were born with sinful hearts. That's why Jesus came! Jesus loves us and He came to rescue us from sin.

Read the Scripture above. People sin all the time, so why was Adam and Eve's sin such a big deal? What made it unique? Adam and Eve didn't just sin; they welcomed sin into the world for the very first time. The moment they sinned, everything in creation – including their own hearts – became broken.

Imagine if I cut a branch off a tree. At first, it would still look alive. It might be bright green and even have a flower or two. But that branch would be as good as dead. Just like that branch, Adam and Eve were destined for death the moment they sinned against God.

We, too, are destined for death because of sin. Romans 5:12 says that we inherited a sin nature from Adam. That's why it's so easy to fight with your brother or sister! It's easy to be selfish because we are sinful by nature. In Romans 7:24, the apostle Paul cries, "Who will save me from sin and death?"

Do you know the answer to that question? Yes! Jesus is the answer. Advent is all about longing for Jesus because He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Do you remember who made you? Let's say it together: "God made me." Why did God make you? "For His own glory." Today we're going to learn one more truth about God. How do you bring glory to God? Say this with me: "By loving Him and obeying His commands." Great job! We bring glory to God by loving Him and obeying His commands.

We've reached an exciting point in our love story. First, we learned that God created everything to reflect His love and glory. Then, we watched as all of creation broke when Adam and Eve welcomed sin into the world. Now, it's time for Jesus to save the day! But first, in order to prepare the way for Jesus, a young woman will have to do something really hard.

Read the Scripture above. Talk about a change of plans! Mary's whole life changed in a moment. When have you experienced a big change? How did you feel? When things change, it's normal to feel excited, sad, angry, or scared. I bet Mary experienced all those feelings at some point, too.

But Mary chose to obey God because she loved and trusted Him. As a result, she had an amazing opportunity – she got to be the mother of Jesus! And notice, the angel Gabriel mentions another soon-to-be mom. Who is it? Do you remember Elizabeth? At this point in the story, she is six months pregnant with John the Baptist. Stay tuned, because their stories are about to collide in a beautiful way!

You are SO loved! Who are some people who love you? Yes! All of those people love you so much. Do you know who loves you most of all? Jesus! He loves you so much He died on the cross to save you. No matter what, Jesus will always love you.

When we left off yesterday, Mary had just found out she would be the mother of Jesus. She also learned that her relative, Elizabeth, was pregnant. Let's review: who was the baby in Elizabeth's tummy? That's right, John the Baptist! And who was Elizabeth's husband? You got it – Zechariah, the mute priest.

Some biblical scholars believe Mary and Elizabeth were cousins; others think Elizabeth was Mary's aunt. Either way, we know that Elizabeth was an older relative to Mary. Ready to keep going? Let's read the Scripture for today!

Why do you think Mary rushed to Elizabeth's home? Elizabeth lived around 50-79 miles away. Imagine traveling 50+ miles without a car...and with a baby in your tummy! Mary was willing to go the distance for the comfort and encouragement of being with someone she loved.

One of the ways we can experience God's love is by being loved by other Christians. Name some people who make you feel loved. Whether you're going through a happy time or a hard time, reach out to other Christians for love and friendship. We were not meant to follow Jesus all alone!

God is so good to us! He has given us a beautiful home filled with love. He gives us food to eat and clothes to wear. What are some other things God has given us? Let's thank God, together, for being so good to us!

Let's read our Scripture for today. While visiting Elizabeth, Mary's heart was so filled with worship that it overflowed in song. Mary's song is called the Magnificat, and through the years, legendary composers like Bach and Mozart have set her beautiful words to music.

In her song, Mary praises God because she recognizes that He has done great things for her (vs 49). Mary could have focused on the difficulties ahead: on the fact that she wasn't even married yet, people may not believe her story, and let's not forget, she still has to walk over 50 miles home! But instead of complaining, Mary worships God by recounting all the wonderful things He has done for her.

What wonderful things has God done for you? Let's close our time together by creating our own Magnificat as a family. Think of one way God has shown love to you. One at a time, let's pray out loud and praise God for the wonderful things He has done for us!

Do you know what “prayer” is? Prayer is talking with God. You are very good at talking. And guess what? God is very good at listening! You can talk to God about anything. He loves you so much, and He loves it when you pray to Him. Let’s pray together, now.

Seven more days to go! It’s almost Christmas, and it’s almost time to read about the birth of Jesus! But before we celebrate His birth, let’s learn more about why it was so significant. Remember, God created the world to fill it with His love and glory, but mankind sinned, filling the world with darkness and sorrow instead. Read the Scripture above.

Isaiah prophesied that the people living in darkness would see a great light. Who is the Light? It’s Jesus! According to Isaiah’s prophecy, the Light of the World would change everything. He would turn sorrow to joy, slavery to freedom, death to life.

Jesus changes EVERYTHING! He is the Wonderful Counselor who will change your whole life if you surrender to Him. A “counselor” is someone who guides you with wisdom. Next time you don’t know what to do, whisper a prayer to Jesus. Ask the Wonderful Counselor to guide you with His wisdom. Ask Him to lead you to true happiness. Ask Him to be the Light of your life.

Flex your muscles – wow! You are so strong. Who’s stronger, you or Daddy? I think Daddy is a little bit stronger than you. But do you know who is even stronger than Daddy? God! God is so mighty, He can do anything! Now, cross your arms over your chest. This is the sign for love. God isn’t just strong; He is also full of love. We can make these two signs to remember that God is strong (flex arms) and loving (cross arms over chest).

Imagine that once upon a time there were two kingdoms. One was ruled by a strong king. He was so mighty, he could do anything. But there was just one problem – he was cruel. Why would it be scary to live in that kingdom? The second kingdom was ruled by a loving king. In fact, he was the kindest king on earth. Unfortunately, he had no power at all. Why would it be scary to live in that kingdom?

Yesterday, we read Isaiah 9:6, which says that Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. Let’s pause and read the Scripture for today.

Jesus is the perfect King because He is both strong AND loving. He is mighty enough to do anything, and loving enough to always do the right thing.

Sometimes we doubt that God is strong. We believe the lie that our problems are bigger than God. Sometimes we doubt that God is loving. We believe the lie that He doesn’t care about us. Are you believing either of those lies? If so, let’s confess our unbelief to God and claim the Truth: God is STRONG and LOVING!

**Now, follow the instructions for Activity 2
in the Activity Book.**

Sometimes we feel worried or scared. When you feel scared, you can talk to God. The Bible says that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He loves to take away our fear and give us peace. What makes you feel worried or afraid? Let's pray about it together.

Read the Scripture above as you light the final **purple** candle, the Angel's candle, which represents peace. What are some things you worry about? Often, we worry about things we can't control. We can't control whether or not our teacher is strict. We can't control what other people say about us. We can't control sickness, who will win the big game, or whether the cafeteria is serving pizza or jalapeño vegetable rolls.

But here's what we CAN control: ourselves. When we're anxious, we can choose to pray. We can read the Bible. We can thank God for food, even if it is jalapeño vegetable rolls.

The Bible promises that when we trust God with our worries, we will experience His peace. Isaiah 9:6 actually says that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. True peace is only found in Him. Let's close in prayer. Surrender your concerns to God, one by one, with thankfulness and trust.

Do you have any broken toys? How about broken crayons? Lots of things break, but do you know what will never break? God's love! God's love for you will last forever and ever. God loved you when you were a teeny, tiny baby. He loves you right now, and when you are all grown up, He will still love you! God is the Everlasting Father.

What was your favorite toy when you were a toddler? Why don't you play with it anymore? It's normal to outgrow things: shoes, clothes, even the decorations in your bedroom. We live in a world where stuff doesn't last. It gets old, broken, and forgotten.

Sometimes, even relationships don't last. You might be best friends with someone in first grade, then move to a new city, or grow apart over the years. That's normal, but it still feels sad. Part of what makes life painful is that things don't last forever. But there is one relationship we can count on forever. And when I say forever, I mean FOREVER – not just in this lifetime, but for all eternity.

Read the Scripture above. In this passage, Isaiah prophesies that a child will be born, who will be called our Everlasting Father, and there will be no end to His peace. God is the Father who will never give up on you. His love lasts forever – you can't break it, escape it, or outgrow it. He is the Everlasting Father.

Read Luke 2:1-7

December 22nd

PRESCHOOL
PROMPT

Long ago, an angel visited Mary and told her she would have a baby named Jesus. At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus' birthday. His birthday is very special because Jesus was born to rescue the world. He was born to bring us hope, joy, love, and peace.

Isaiah prophesied that a baby was coming who would be called what four names? That's right – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. It's time to learn about the birth of this special baby! Read the Scripture above.

Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem? Mary and Joseph traveled 90 miles to get to Bethlehem from Nazareth! [Parents, put this into perspective by comparing it to a known location. For instance, if school is 3 miles away, it would be like walking to school and back 15 times!] How do you think they felt as they traveled? What do you think they talked about?

Usually, before a baby is born, lots of things are ready: a room with a crib, diapers and a changing table, bottles and books and toys. But the time came for Jesus to be born, and there wasn't...anything. No room, no bed, no toys. So Mary snuggled Him up tightly in cloths, and laid Him in a manger – a wooden box where animals eat.

What a humble beginning for the King of Kings! For centuries people would sing songs and tell stories about the birth of Jesus. "What Child Is This?" they sang. This remarkable child was the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Read Luke 2:8-20

December 23rd

PRESCHOOL
PROMPT

One night, after Jesus was born, some shepherds were watching their sheep. Suddenly, the sky filled up with angels! The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!" They told the shepherds about Jesus' birth, and the shepherds ran to see the new baby. They were amazed, and they worshipped Jesus.

Yesterday we talked about the birth of Jesus. Where was Jesus born? Some people think Jesus was born in a stable or barn; others imagine that it looked more like a cave where animals sleep. We're not exactly sure what it looked like, but we know there was no guest room available for Mary and Joseph, so Jesus was laid in a manger. Let's read our Bible passage for today.

In Bible times, being a shepherd was a lowly job. People viewed shepherds as unimportant and unpopular. Yet, God chose to reveal Himself to them. Isn't that amazing? Ordinary shepherds were among the very first people to see the Messiah and share the good news of His birth with everyone.

God loves to use ordinary people, just like you and me. You don't have to be the coolest kid, with the latest iPhone, and the most friends to be loved by God. He doesn't care about all that stuff. He wants YOU – your heart, your personality, your strengths and weaknesses. He wants a real relationship with the real you.

Now follow the instructions for the third activity in the Activity Book.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

December 24th

PRESCHOOL
PROMPT

When Jesus was still young (probably around two years old) wise men came to visit Him. When they saw Jesus, they were filled with happiness! They worshipped Him and gave Him special gifts. We worship Jesus by loving Him.

It's time to light the white candle, the Christmas candle! As we do, let's read our Scripture for today. Why was King Herod disturbed when he heard about the birth of Jesus? Herod didn't want anyone to threaten his power, so he planned to kill Jesus. He sent wise men as spies, but his plan backfired! When the wise men saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with joy. They fell to their knees and worshipped.

What gifts did they give Jesus? These gifts are symbolic. Gold was a gift for royalty. By giving it to Jesus, the magi recognized His Kingship. Frankincense was made from a special tree bark, and used by priests as incense. It was the perfect gift for the Great High Priest. Myrrh was a perfume used in burial, and it pointed to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The wise men worshipped Jesus as the ultimate King, Priest, and Savior of the world.

Tomorrow, we'll open a lot of gifts! But let's not forget that it's Jesus' birthday. What gifts can we give Jesus? Is there something special you want to offer Him this upcoming year – like your trust in a difficult situation, your thankfulness, love, or obedience in a specific area?

Read John 3:16

December 25th

PRESCHOOL
PROMPT

Today is CHRISTMAS!! Show me your happy dance! I'm so happy too! Today we say, "Happy Birthday Jesus!" Because Jesus was born, we have hope, joy, love, and peace.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!! It's finally here! Today we celebrate Jesus, and His story wouldn't be complete without one last stop. Read the Scripture above.

Two thousand years ago, God gave the world the greatest gift imaginable: Jesus. He came to rescue us from sin and death by dying on the cross. Anyone who believes in Jesus and gives their life to Him, will be at peace with God forever!

Today, as you open presents, eat yummy food, laugh, and have fun, remember: Jesus is the gift that never grows old. He will always be with you, He will lead you to true peace and joy, and He will love you forever. Happy Birthday Jesus!! We love You!

Merry Christmas!