

Ages 3-5



Growing

in
Grace & Gratitude

Year 2, Winter



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Introduction

Advent is a time to hear about and prepare for the coming of Jesus. This Advent begins with the voice of Isaiah sharing God’s message of hope, a light to those who walk in darkness. To a people in exile far from home, Isaiah’s message of comfort is a welcome one. As we move week by week toward the celebration of Jesus’ birth, we, too, hear a message of hope and comfort for a world seeking peace. As we wait for the Messiah, we learn of his ancestors, faithful throughout generations, and the announcement of his birth to a worried father, assuring him that “God is with us.” The story of Jesus’ birth is made known, and wise ones seek him, bringing gifts and worshiping him. Then, in order to protect Jesus, God leads Joseph and his young family to safety.

We celebrate baptism and its claim on our lives as we hear of Jesus’ baptism and God’s blessing upon Jesus as beloved son. Jesus knows that what he needs to do is a big task, so he finds help. He calls people to follow him. And they do. They drop everything and follow Jesus.

Through the first few chapters of Matthew, we follow Jesus from his birth to his early ministry as crowds are drawn to him, to hear his word, to feel his touch. Their hearts and souls yearn for his good news. To those who have very little, he finds their blessings and encourages them to be a blessing to others—to be salt, flavor, and spice in a world in need, and to be light, illuminating God from the hilltops. Jesus sifts through the worries people carry to the kernel of truth—seek first God’s kingdom and everything else will be all right. Through metaphor and imagery—salt, light, birds of the air, dressed-up flowers in the fields, specks and logs, and wise and foolish builders—Jesus knows where people are in need and how to capture their imaginations and their hearts. Jesus calls for his disciples and us to not only hear but also do what he has taught. His message is to bless others, be salt and light, seek God first, do not judge others, and follow his teachings. Will we be like the wise builder or the foolish one?

Overview of the Year 2, Winter Quarter

The complete scope and sequence for Year 2 can be found at www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.

The winter quarter begins with Advent 1 and goes through Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Lent begins.

Since the date of Easter changes every year, the number of Sundays after Epiphany and before Lent and after Easter will fluctuate from year to year. Additional sessions are provided, but check your calendar and plan accordingly. You may not use one or more sessions in one year, and you may use extra sessions in another year.

Year 2, Winter 1

A Child Will Be Born

Isaiah 9:2–7

Goal: To wait and prepare for the Prince of Peace.

Year 2, Winter 2

Prepare a Road

Isaiah 40:3–11

Goal: To hear the message of Isaiah that God will bring God's people home.

Year 2, Winter 3

Jesus' Family Tree

Matthew 1:1–17

Goal: To learn about Jesus' family as well as our own.

Year 2, Winter 4

Joseph's Dream

Matthew 1:18–24

Goal: To claim the promise of God's loving presence in Jesus.

Year 2, Christmas

Grace in a Manger

Luke 2:1–7

Goal: To celebrate the Christmas story with joy and gratitude.

Year 2, Winter 5

Gifts for the Baby King

Matthew 2:1–12

Goal: To practice gift giving as a grateful response to God's grace.

Year 2, Winter 6

God Protects Jesus' Family

Matthew 2:7–15, 19–23

Goal: To trust and be grateful for God's protecting grace when we are afraid.

Year 2, Winter 7

John Baptizes Jesus

Matthew 3:13–17

Goal: To celebrate the grace of God through baptism.

Year 2, Winter 8

Fishers of People

Matthew 4:18–22

Goal: To follow Jesus' call to discipleship.

Year 2, Winter 9

You Are Blessed

Matthew 4:23–5:11

Goal: To be a blessing to others.

Year 2, Winter 10

You Are Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13–20

Goal: To follow Jesus' call to be salt and light in the world.

Year 2, Winter 11

God Cares for All

Matthew 6:25–33

Goal: To trust in God's abounding care for us.

Year 2, Winter 12

Specks and Logs

Matthew 7:1–5, 12

Goal: To offer grace to others rather than judgment.

Year 2, Winter 13

The Two Houses

Matthew 7:24–29

Goal: To practice ways to listen to Jesus and act on his words.

Resources and Session Components

Growing in Grace & Gratitude curriculum is available for fall, winter, spring, and summer as downloadable PDFs. Each season's material for the leaders includes:

1. **Session plans for embracing children in the grace of God through engagement with the Bible**
2. **Session title, session goal, and background information**
 - ▼ *Recognizing God's Grace* helps leaders explore the Bible story with a focus on God's grace in Scripture.
 - ▼ "In Your Children's Experiences" and "In Your Relationships with the Children" provide leaders with an understanding of the children's needs, abilities, and interests.
3. **Three movements that echo Presbyterian and Reformed worship**
 - ▼ *Gathering in God's Grace*
A hospitable welcome calls children to sing and pray to God, to hear and reflect on the Bible story.
 - ▼ *Responding in Gratitude*
A choice of age-appropriate activities based on the group size and time available. Some activities (noted as "more prep") require advanced planning and/or additional supplies.
 - ▼ *Loving and Serving God*
An invitation to discipleship that inspires children and their families to practice hospitality, generosity, and love.
4. **Grace Notes (GN)**
 - ▼ Black-and-white reproducible pages that provide activities and crafts.
5. **Stories, Colors & More (SCM)**
 - ▼ Colorful resources are provided to aid in the flow of the sessions.
 - ▼ The Support Map offers practical suggestions for working with children who have difficulty communicating, transitioning, reading, or writing and children who are visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or in need of mobility support. The Support Map also provides tips for celebrating the strengths of children through leadership, generosity, and fairness.
 - ▼ Colorful illustrations of the Bible stories spark imagination. The stories appear on the back of the illustrations to make it easy for the leader to show the art while reading the story.
 - ▼ Other colorful resources, such as teaching pictures and maps, are now organized in session order.
 - ▼ **Music and Melodies:** Song lyrics sheets are gathered in the back of the resource.

Free Supplemental Resources

Download the following supplemental resources at www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads:

- **Music & Melodies** are song tracks with familiar lyrics as well as new child-friendly tunes.
- **Grace Sightings**, an online resource to print or email home, includes a summary of the week's session and age-appropriate activities for home use.
- **Audio stories** of the weekly Bible stories are available to listen to online or download.

Basic Supplies

All materials beyond this list will be specified in the supply list for each session:

- Bibles
- CD player
- cleanup supplies
- coffee filters
- cover-ups or smocks
- craft supplies (e.g., cotton balls, craft sticks, glitter, stickers)
- crayons, large and small
- cups, napkins, plates, utensils, drinking straws
- glue and glue sticks
- hole punch
- office supplies (paper clips, rubber bands, self-adhesive notes)
- paint, paintbrushes
- paper (card stock, construction, drawing, index cards, mural paper, newsprint)
- paper bags (lunch-sized, grocery-sized)
- pencils, colored pencils, markers, pens
- pipe cleaners
- plastic bags (zip-closure, garbage)
- play dough
- rhythm instruments
- ribbon, string, yarn, scarves
- round-tip scissors (some left-handed)
- stapler, staples
- tablecloths
- tape (duct, masking, painter's, transparent)

Reusing Materials

Encourage church members to collect a variety of materials for art projects, such as:

- buttons, ribbon, yarn
- clothespins
- egg cartons
- plastic containers
- shoeboxes
- old magazines, catalogs, newspapers
- paper tubes (from gift wrap, paper towels, or toilet paper)
- used gift wrap and cards

Including Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Create an environment that helps children of all abilities experience God's grace by becoming familiar with the developmental terms, descriptions, and icons on the Children with Disabilities and Special Needs Support Map (in *Stories, Colors & More*, **SCM iii–iv**). Colorful icons (🧠 🗣️) from the map and notes about specific needs are incorporated into each session to offer ways to adapt activities. (Note: While many of the activities could fit in multiple categories on the support map, for simplicity only those that require particular attention have been identified.)

Use the Visual Schedule (in *Stories, Colors & More*, **SCM i–ii**) to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group. By consistently using these tools, you will help your faith community discover and practice grace-filled ways to be the body of Christ with and for all children.

Support Highlight: Deaf/Hard of Hearing

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Hearing impairment can vary from slight hearing loss to deafness. In most cases, hearing impairment does not translate to any other loss of ability. Children with hearing impairments use a variety of ways to understand, such as wearing hearing aids, reading lips, and using sign language. Assumptions should not be made about the ability of a child with a hearing impairment to participate in activities. Some simple adjustments can be made to make their experience more positive.

- Make sure the child can see you speaking.
- When you speak, make sure you have the child's attention.
- Speak clearly, avoiding exaggerated volume or gestures.
- Use additional visual supports whenever possible.
- Include the child in all discussions and activities, aiding in their self-sense and feeling of community.

Ideas for Working with Pre-readers

- Keep small pieces of scratch paper handy so you can quickly write a word for a child to copy.
- If a child is struggling with an activity that calls for writing a word, write the word using dotted lines so he or she can trace it.
- Form pairs to solve puzzles. Encourage children to help one another—there's no need to cover their papers so others can't copy!
- If you observe a child struggling to work independently on an activity, offer to be his or her partner. If many are struggling, work as a group to complete the activity.
- If a child seems frustrated by writing an answer, suggest that he or she draw a picture of the response or act it out. You also might offer to write what the child dictates to you.
- Offer old family-friendly magazines with pictures that can be cut out and used to illustrate a response or complete a project.
- When a child is trying to sound out a word, don't be too quick to jump in and help. Whether he or she finally decodes the word or you provide it, affirm the new skill of reading and how hard the child is trying.

Flyaway Books

Flyaway Books (www.flyawaybooks.com) is a children's picture book imprint from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. These books reflect themes of diversity, inclusivity, kindness, compassion, self-esteem, and care for our world, as well as retelling familiar religious stories in new ways. Flyaway Books titles are available at www.pcusastore.com.

Scheduling Tips for Ages 3–5

Here are some suggestions for scheduling, depending on how long your group meets:

- If children are attending a session for one hour or less, allow ten to fifteen minutes for each session component, including cleanup and other needs.
- If children are attending a session for two hours or more—with some children arriving and leaving between the hours—allow fifteen to twenty minutes for each session component, repeating guided play, story time, and activities without repeating snack. Allow time for cleanup and other needs between components.

Using Guided Play with Ages 3–5

Guided-play activities are part of the initial moments of the session, when children focus on a particular activity that encourages them to pretend and play. If your group meets in a room that is already set up for toddlers or three- to five-year-olds, it may have areas prepared for specific activities such as reading, building, pretending, or drawing. If so, use these areas for guided play. If your room is not organized in that way, use the suggestions provided in the session for setup and content. You may have other ideas. Feel free to design your own guided-play areas.

What Do Children Ages 3–5 Need?

Young children need extended playtime for their physical and emotional development. You do not have to fill the whole session with structured activities. Your most important task is to show God's grace and love to each child.

There are big differences in children who are three years old and children who are five years old. You will need to adjust some activities depending on the ages of the children in your group. For example, five-year-olds may have experience with structured activities; three-year-olds are just learning those skills. Allow the children to be involved in activities at their level of ability and interest. Some children may just observe, and others may want to tell the Bible stories themselves.

Each session will include structured opportunities for experiencing God's grace and a response of gratitude. Those activities begin to teach the children about God's love and about ways they can respond thankfully in their lives, and they also provide children with opportunities to follow instructions and do what the group is doing. Exercise grace in inviting and encouraging them to participate, but also be graceful in allowing for flexibility and being aware of their needs.

Be alert to what activities your children enjoy, and don't be afraid to repeat their favorites. Repetition helps children learn.

A Note about Candles

Growing in Grace & Gratitude suggests the use of a candle in the worship space for most sessions. Jesus said: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). The lighting of the candle reminds us of this and signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit with us. Most churches have a policy around candles and either lighting real candles or using battery-operated candles. While we simply state “candles,” *Growing in Grace & Gratitude* recommends using battery-operated candles for safety around children.

Team of Contributors

The development team of *Growing in Grace & Gratitude* is grateful to have an amazing team of educators and writers to collaborate in the production of this curriculum.

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Deborah Huggins is our consultant for children with disabilities and special needs. She is the writer of the Children with Disabilities and Special Needs Support Map. She is a Presbyterian teaching elder and church educator with an MDiv from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. Deborah was a special-education teacher. She is working on a PhD in special education, researching access and inclusion for people with disabilities in communities of faith. Deborah is married to Jeff Huggins; they have three children.

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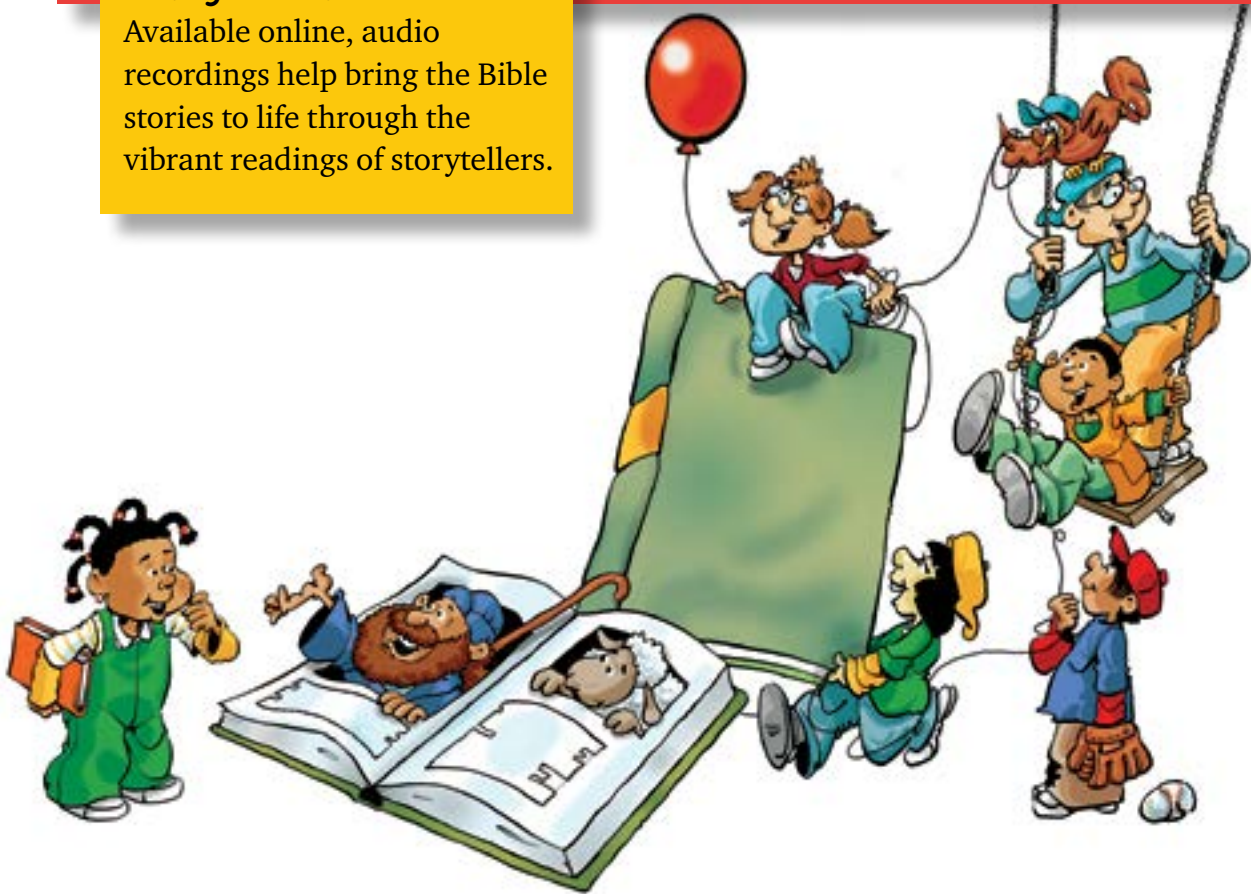
Free!

Grace Sightings

This online resource includes the story from the week's session and age-appropriate activities for children to do at home with their parents or caregivers. Each week's pdf shares the same colorful illustrations and Bible stories used in weekly sessions. With *Grace Sightings*, sessions reach beyond Sunday morning, encouraging children to live their lives as an expression of God's grace at home and at school.

Story Audio

Available online, audio recordings help bring the Bible stories to life through the vibrant readings of storytellers.



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