



Surprised by Grace

Goal: To know that everyone is a beloved child of God.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

An old man and his wife receive the startling announcement that they will become parents! The angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zechariah in the temple, announcing that John, whose name means “God is gracious” and who “will be great in the Lord’s eyes” (v. 15, CEB), will be born to Elizabeth and him. Through the child John, the loving God gives grace. The child turned out to be John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus the Messiah. Of John it was said, “Indeed, the Lord’s power was with him” (v. 66, CEB).

John’s birth was an act of God’s pure grace. Although Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed for a child for a long time, they must have been very surprised about the child God was giving them. They were chosen by God to be John’s parents as a wonderful gift of God’s goodness and love.

When Zechariah was able to speak, “he began praising God” (v. 64, CEB). His response was praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude. Our response to God’s gracious love in Jesus Christ is the same. We praise and thank God, expressing our gratitude by being disciples of Jesus Christ. In faith, we give our lives to serving Christ in response to the grace we receive and the gratefulness we want to express.

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Elizabeth and Zechariah waited a long time to receive the blessing of John’s birth. Remembering the prophecy of the angel, their friends wondered who he would be and what he would become. The story proclaims promise and hope in the face of disbelief, and joy and expectation in the face of barrenness. John’s name proclaims to all the grace of God.

Children connect with the story in many ways—in their wanting and waiting, in their hoping and praying, and in their wondering and imagining. Moreover, it can reassure them that God’s gracious love is theirs and that they are beloved children of God.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Children love to hear stories of their birth or adoption. They enjoy hearing how they fit into their loving family. This story is confirmed at baptism, when the minister says, “You are a child of God, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever.”

As you end your time with the children each week, give each one a blessing, speaking their names and reminding them of the promise of God’s love. This week, pray for each child by name, that each one may grow in God’s grace and be a blessing in this world.

*Holy God, take me by the hand and lead me
into your promised future by your grace. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 2, 15, 19

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blankets or mats

Advent wreath with five
battery-operated votive
candles

baby dolls, stuffed
animals

snack (optional)

Guided Play

choice 1: **SCM 2a, 2b, 2c**,
cardstock, envelopes

choice 2: Christmas
items

choice 3: baby dolls, doll
clothes, blankets, doll
bottles

Exploring

choice 1: white drawing
paper, white crayon,
purple or blue tempera
paint, paintbrushes

choice 3: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

Save the puzzles for use
in the next session.

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Post **SCM i-ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker onto a clothespin. Use the schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii-iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, glue **SCM 2a, 2b, and 2c** onto cardstock. Cut the pictures into simple puzzle pieces. Put the puzzles in envelopes. (If you make more than one copy of the puzzles, color the backs of the cardstock differently for each puzzle so you can tell them apart.)

Provide an Advent wreath with five battery-operated votive candles. This is the second Sunday of Advent, and we will focus on hope.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace and hope be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time.

Introduce yourself to the parents/caregivers. Explain to them that the children will hear a story about God’s grace through the birth of John to elderly parents.

Invite the children to choose a guided play activity to start:

1. **Playing with Puzzles**—Invite the children to put together the prepared puzzles. After the children are done working the puzzles, save them to use in next week’s session.
2. **Wondering**—Provide Christmas items that the children can enjoy with their different senses. For example, you might have unlit scented candles, unbreakable angel ornaments, Christmas bows, Christmas wrapping paper, and so on. Wonder together how they are used at Christmas time.
3. **Caring**—Provide baby dolls, doll clothes, blankets, and doll bottles. Encourage the children to take care of the babies. Ask what the babies’ names are.

T Use transition cues to give plenty of warning that a change is coming. Clear, tangible signals that are obvious help alleviate tensions. Consider using count down numbers on a whiteboard before moving to the next activity.



Transitioning to Story Time M

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “God Is with Me”—**SCM 15**. Encourage the children to sing along, repeating words and phrases as seems appropriate.

Remind the children that we are celebrating Advent and that we are getting ready for Christmas. Chant the phrase “Let’s get ready, let’s get ready, Jesus is coming.” Clap or use a rhythm instrument to keep the beat. Invite the children to chant with you.

Place an Advent wreath on a table with four votive candles in the circle of the wreath and one in the center. Turn on the first and second candles. Tell the children this is the second Sunday of Advent. Remind the children that Advent is a time of preparing and waiting for the birthday of Jesus. The candle for today reminds us that Jesus is our hope.

Play a Name Game MS C

Invite the children to stand in a circle, a couple of steps apart. Go to a child. Pretend to knock on a door, saying, “Knock, knock, whose house is this?” Encourage the child to respond, “I am (*Name*). This is my house.”

That child comes with you to another child and both of you say, “Knock, knock, whose house is this?” Continue until all the children have joined you.

Play Rocking the Baby

Invite the children to choose a baby doll or stuffed animal. Ask them to sit, hold the baby in their arms, and pretend to rock the baby while you say this poem:

Rock-a-baby, rock-a-baby, little bit. (*make rocking chair motions*)

Smile a tiny smile and baby copies it. (*smile*)

Baby’s crying, baby’s crying—there, there, there. (*pick up and pat the baby*)

Hold a baby, hold a baby—show I care. (*make rocking arm motions*)

Play peekaboo with baby: “Peekaboo!” (*play peekaboo*)

Give a whisper, give a whisper: “I love you!” (*whisper “I love you!”*)



D M

A listening prayer, used in “Hearing the Story,” is an exercise in which you can help the children to notice that God is present with them, even when they don’t realize it. Being silent can help them to quiet themselves and to open their hearts to receive the word of God.



Hearing the Story

Pray a listening prayer together by encouraging the children to sit comfortably and take a few slow, deep breaths as a way to quiet themselves. They can close their eyes or focus on the lighted candles on the Advent wreath.

After a time of quiet, invite everyone to say, “Come, Jesus.” After a moment, say, “God is always with us. Amen.”

Open the Bible to Luke 1 and point out that the story comes from the Bible.

Tell the children that there is a story in the Bible about a baby. The children probably will think that it’s Jesus. Explain that this was another special baby, and that when this baby grew up, he helped people get ready for Jesus. Ask them to listen to find out what the baby’s name was.

Read **SCM 2**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Look puzzled when Elizabeth announces the baby is to be named John. Act surprised when Zechariah writes “John.”

Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Ask the children what the baby’s name was. See if they remember what *John* means (God is gracious).

Prompt the children to say the word *grace*. Tell them that it is a happy word. Grace is another way of saying God loves us and all people. Invite the children to say how much God loves them and their families and friends.

Turn off the candles.

EXPLORING GOD’S GRACE

1. Make Name Pictures

VI

Just as John’s name was special, so is the name of each child in the group.

On separate sheets of white paper, write each child’s name heavily in white crayon. Let the child paint over the paper with a thin solution of purple or blue tempera paint. The child’s name will appear as if by magic. As the children work, you might make a sheet with John’s name on it. Remind them that the baby in today’s story was named John.

Here is a way to make the words fit the meter of the tune:

G-od has a fam-i-ly,
from Abraham to you
and me.

Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wonder questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

2. Making God’s Family Motions C

Invite the children to follow the motions as you sing to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

God has a family, (*move arms in a wide circle*)
from Abraham to you and me. (*point out, then at self*)
All belong to God above. (*point up*)
All are joined by gracious love. (*hug self*)
Just like you and just like me, (*point out, then at self*)
God has a family. (*move arms in a wide circle*)

Wonder with the children how to thank God for welcoming us as God’s children. Encourage their responses.

3. Making Welcome Cards

Discuss how, as children of God, we are all part of a church family. Invite the children to make Advent cards for a newborn nursery at a hospital or a day care center that welcomes infants. You can also use the cards to send to the infants and toddlers of your congregation or other infants and toddlers the children know.

Help the children fold their copies of **GN 1** in half. Invite them to decorate the front of the card. Make arrangements for the cards to be delivered, and include the children if possible.

4. Coloring Page

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation by using the following questions:

- I wonder, “How did Elizabeth feel when holding her baby for the first time?”
- I wonder, “What did people think when Zechariah named the baby John?”
- I wonder, “What else might Zechariah have said when he recovered his voice?”

C *Some children don’t verbalize quickly. Nod and show them you are listening, giving them time to formulate an answer.*



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

FA

Encourage each child to put away one toy or object. Invite the children to sit around a table or on the floor.

Sing “He Came Down”—**SCM 19**—while you serve the snack. Come up with a movement for the word *hope* and add it to the movement for the word *peace* from the last session.

Say the following litany and ask the children to respond by saying, “Thank you, God”:

For John and the man he grew up to be (*thank you, God*).

For Elizabeth and Zechariah and all their love and care
(*thank you, God*).

For babies, families, and friends, loving and caring (*thank you, God*).

For [*name each group member including the leaders and special visitors*] (*thank you, God*).

For being your children and calling us (*thank you, God*).

For your love and guidance (*thank you, God*).

In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

As the children leave, remind them that God made them and loves them very much. Ask them to find ways to care for others this week.

Bless each one: “(*Name*), the grace, love, and hope of God are with you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

I learned about a special baby named
John who grew up to be John the
Baptist. God had a special job for him.
I know you're special too!

Welcome to
God's family!

Surprised by Grace



His name is John.

