



Simeon and Anna Rejoice

Goal: To honor and celebrate wise elders who teach us the way of Jesus.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 2:22-40

Mary and Joseph were devout followers of Moses's law, which said that the firstborn son belonged to God. They followed the Jewish customs of their time. Jesus was taken to be circumcised (Luke 2:21), Mary went to be purified, and Jesus was taken to be presented to God in the temple (vv. 22-38).

Anna and Simeon were waiting for a baby who would grow up and restore the nation of Israel as God's chosen nation. Because Luke was writing for a largely Gentile audience, he extended this promise to include Jesus bringing peace and justice for all the nations of the earth.

Set in the context of obeying the law of God in Israel, recognition came. Jesus initiates the coming "redemption of Jerusalem" (v. 38). God's Messiah is now before the people, the one who will save them and redeem from all that binds them and hinders their true relationship with God. Salvation and liberation will come through this "redemption."

Now a new age has dawned. By God's grace, Anna and Simeon beheld the one who would redeem Israel—the Messiah. Their hope for one to redeem Israel was also expressed later by the two travelers on the road to Emmaus after Jesus' resurrection (24:21). Praise and proclamation marked Simeon and Anna's deep gratitude for what their eyes had seen!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Are children and young people welcomed in your congregation? Are their contributions valued? Does it seem the children have a keen sense of belonging—or not? Pay attention to their responses and see what you can learn about their sense of belonging in your church. You may gain insights that will help you be more welcoming in the future.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Having "eyes of faith" to see God's work in the world, even in small things, is an important practice to nurture. Elders in the faith community are a great resource for this kind of faithful and lifelong witness. When an adult recognizes a child's potential, it gives him or her hope. Encourage all your children to think about how they light up the world with God's love and care for others. Celebrate how amazing it must have been to recognize baby Jesus as the Son of God.

*Dear God, give me a sense of your eternal presence
and peace in knowing your son as Savior. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 5, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blanket or mats

Christmas music

Advent wreath with five
battery-operated votive
candles

white candle

snack (optional)

invited adults

Guided Play

choice 1: child-friendly
nativity set(s)

choice 2: picture books
about Jesus' birth, old
Christmas cards

choice 3: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1,
newspapers, baby
blankets or 2' square
pieces of cloth

Exploring

choice 1: paper bag
dolls from "Guided Play"
choice 3

choice 3: hair dryer
(optional)

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

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.

Use **SCM i-ii**, "Your Visual 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 your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Provide an Advent wreath with five battery-operated votive candles. Invite a few adults in leadership roles to join you for this session. Tell the adults that they will enjoy the company of the children and may interact as they wish.

"Exploring God's Grace" choice 3 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Welcome the children by name as they arrive and say, "Merry Christmas!" Prompt them to respond with the same words. Be sensitive to any children who might be visiting for the first time.

Explain to the parents/caregivers that the children will hear a story about two people, Simeon and Anna, who rejoiced when they saw Jesus. Play Christmas music throughout the session, as children work and play. Introduce the adult guests and invite them to interact with the children throughout the session.

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

- 1. Playing**—Set up unbreakable nativity set(s) with movable figures. Invite the children to play with the figures. Encourage them to play out the story of Jesus' birth.
- 2. Story Corner**—Provide an area with old Christmas cards to look at. Provide picture books about Jesus' birth, such as *The Nativity* by Julie Vivas and *The Nativity* by Géraldine Elschner. *I Loved You Before You Were Born*, by Anne Bowen, is a story about a grandmother waiting for the birth of a grandchild.
- 3. Making Dolls**—Provide copies of **GN 1**, one for each child. Cut out some of the doll faces while the children work. Invite the children to wad up newspapers to fill lunch-sized paper bags. Tape the ends of the bag closed. Write the child's name on the bag. Let the children choose whether to cut out the doll face or use one that you have already cut. Help the children position the face on the paper bag, then glue or tape it in place. Children may name their dolls, wrap them in blankets or cloth, and play with them during the session. They will use the dolls in "Exploring God's Grace" choice 1.



- T** Children can get frustrated by too many “stops and starts.” Try to keep the flow of the session predictable to lessen those feelings.

Transitioning to Story Time

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 center candle. Tell the children that this is the first Sunday of the Christmas season. Say that the white candle is called the Christ candle. We light it to remember Jesus is always with us.

Explain that we celebrate the Christmas season for twelve days. January 2 is the eighth day of Christmas. This is the time that we celebrate that Jesus was born as a baby, just like them. Invite the children to each hold up eight fingers. Ask the children to count with you.

Clap, Step, Praise God



Sing this to the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”

If you know of baby Jesus, clap your hands. (*clap, clap*)
 If you know of baby Jesus, clap your hands. (*clap, clap*)
 If you know that baby Jesus came to teach and love and feed us,
 if you know of baby Jesus, clap your hands. (*clap, clap*)

His parents took him to the house of God. (*step, step*)
 His parents took him to the house of God. (*step, step*)
 They knew that baby Jesus came to teach and love and feed us.
 His parents took him to the house of God. (*step, step*)

Simeon and Anna said, “Praise God!” (*wave hands in air*)
 Simeon and Anna said, “Praise God!” (*wave hands in air*)
 They knew that baby Jesus came to teach and love and feed us.
 Simeon and Anna said, “Praise God!” (*wave hands in air*)

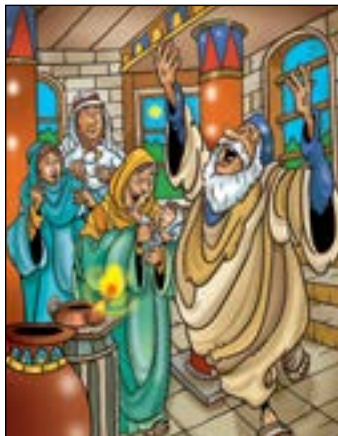
We’re so happy when we get to do all three. (*clap, clap; step, step; wave hands in air*)

We’re so happy when we get to do all three. (*clap, clap; step, step; wave hands in air*)

We know that baby Jesus came to teach and love and feed us.
 We’re so happy when we get to do all three. (*clap, clap; step, step; wave hands in air.*)



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.



Waiting 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, is Jesus here?" Encourage the child to respond, "No, I'll wait with you."

That child sits. Ask the next child, "Knock, knock, is Jesus here?" Continue until all the children are sitting in the circle.

Hearing the Story

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Pray a listening prayer together by encouraging the children to sit comfortably and take a few slow, deep breaths to quiet themselves. They can close their eyes or focus on the lit candle on the Advent wreath. After a time of quiet, invite everyone to say, "God's child has come." After a moment, say, "God is always with us. Amen."

Open the Bible to Luke 2. Tell the children that Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem after he was born so they could thank God for Jesus' birth.

Read or have an adult guest read **SCM 5**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Tell the children, "Now we have seen God's promise come true." Prompt the children to stand and respond, "Thank you, God."

Ask the children to be Mary and Joseph going to the temple, using their dolls from "Guided Play" choice 3 wrapped in blankets or cloth. Then ask them to be Simeon and Anna, expressing their feelings about seeing Jesus. Repeat as desired.

Turn off the candle.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Playing Simeon

M MS B

Have the children sit on the floor in a circle with their paper bag dolls.

- ▼ Choose one child to be Simeon. Hold Simeon's doll for him or her.
- ▼ Simeon stands outside the circle and says, "Is this the special baby?"
- ▼ Then Simeon walks around the outside of the circle, looking at all the dolls, patting each doll on the head and saying, "No" about each of them.
- ▼ When at last Simeon says "Yes," he quickly runs around the circle.
- ▼ The person holding the doll chases Simeon around the circle, trying to catch him.
- ▼ Simeon tries to get around the circle first and sits down in the vacant space.



- ▼ Return Simeon's doll to him or her.
- ▼ Take the doll from the person who was chasing Simeon so this person can be the new Simeon.

Continue until everyone has had a turn.

2. Playing Anna



Line the children up, shoulder to shoulder, on opposite sides of the room. Have a clear pathway between the two lines. Comment on how Anna, when she saw Jesus, was so excited that she went and told everybody she saw about his birth.

In this game, the children can be like Anna and tell one another about Jesus' birth.

Choose a player on Side A to begin the game. This player runs to the other side, stands in front of a Side B player and says, "Jesus is born!" The Side B player then runs to the other side and tells a Side A player, "Jesus is born!" Meanwhile, the first Side A player has taken the first Side B player's spot. In other words, the players trade sides. Play until everyone has had a chance to run to the other side and say, "Jesus is born!"



3. Celebrating Wisdom



Before the session, use a white crayon or candle to write "Thank You!" across a sheet of cardstock for each child.

Tell the children that they will make a gift for adults who have been like Anna and Simeon, people who are happy to see children in the church and tell them about Jesus. Hand out the cardstock sheets you have prepared. Explain that there is a message written on each sheet but that they can't see it yet. It will appear once they have painted their papers. Provide paint and encourage the children to use different colors across the paper to make the message appear. Once the message is clear, ask the children to tell you what it says (Thank You!). Have the children sign their names to their art. Set aside the papers to dry or use a hair dryer. Encourage the children to give their art to an adult and thank them.

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.

Say a personal word to each child. It might be no more than “I’m glad you were here” or “I’m sorry you have such a bad cold,” but let each child know you paid attention to him or her today.



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).

4. Coloring Page C

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

- ▼ I wonder, “Why does Joseph have two pigeons in his hands?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How did Simeon and Anna feel when they met baby Jesus?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What did Simeon and Anna do after they met baby Jesus?”

LG *Look for opportunities for children to practice leadership and generosity, such as helping set up the space, passing out papers, holding visual aids, or offering help to other children.*

LOVING AND SERVING GOD FA LG

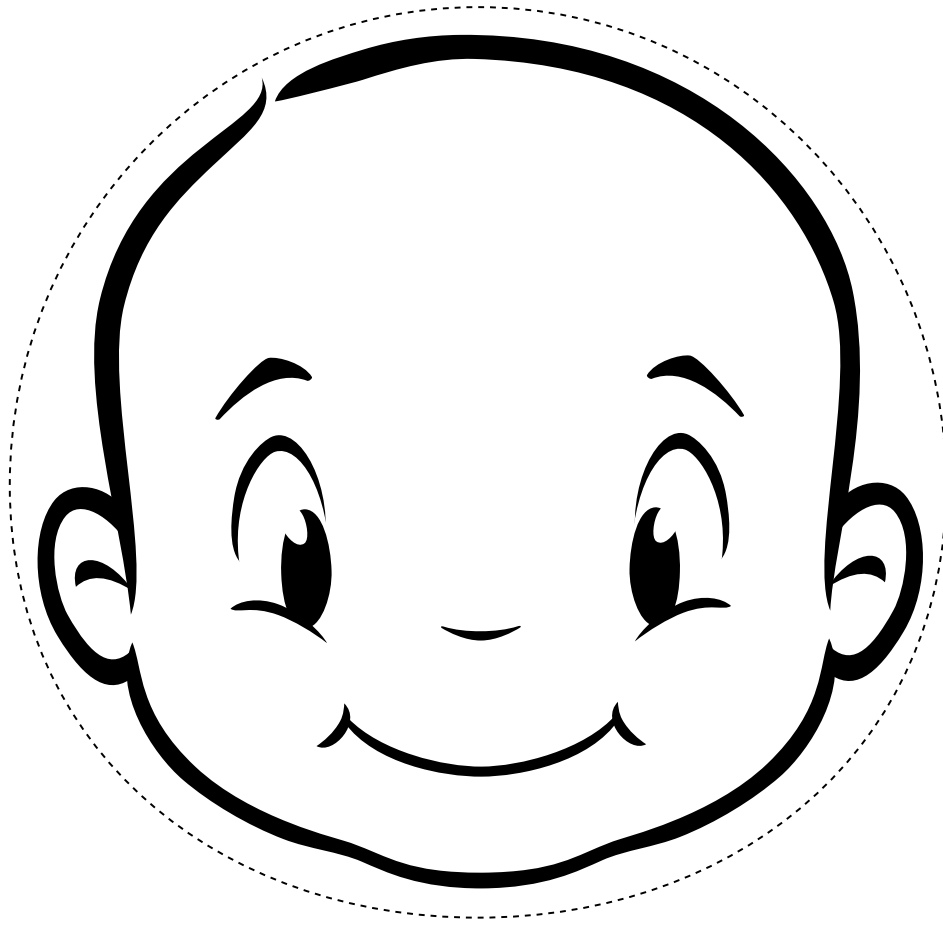
Have each child and adult put away one toy or object. Invite everyone to sit around a table or on the floor.

Invite the children and adults to sing “O Child Jesus, You Are So Lovely (Jesucito de mi vida)”—**SCM 21**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate. Explain that this song is a lullaby that expresses our love for Jesus. Invite them to sing as they rock their paper bag dolls in their arms.

If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Say an echo prayer, such as:

Thank you, God, for your love. /
Thank you, God, for Simeon and Anna. /
Thank you, God, for your gift of Jesus. /
Help us to share your love with others. /
Amen. /

As the children and adults leave, say, “May the grace of God be with you.” Ask the children and adults to respond, “And also with you.”



Simeon and Anna Rejoice



Simeon and Anna give praise to God when they meet baby Jesus.

