

Ages 5-7



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 hear a message of hope, that Jesus is light in the darkness.

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 bless others with encouragement and support.

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 make a strong foundation for our lives by doing what Jesus taught.

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 (LG T) 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



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 a child's ability to participate in activities because of a hearing impairment. 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.

A Few Notes about Children and Reading

All versions of the Bible are above second-grade reading level. *Growing in Grace & Gratitude* tries to provide a way to share the Bible stories while engaging both pre-readers and readers. Since the Holy Scriptures were written for adults, curriculum writers try to choose sections of Scripture that children can understand. Still, at times, the children in your group may seem to struggle to understand a verse or passage. When that happens, assure them that God will help them understand the Bible in new ways as they grow. Encourage a sense of wonder at God's amazing ways. Reassure the children of God's grace, a grace that does not depend on how much they know or understand.

Some of the following strategies may enhance your time with the children:

- When you write something for children to read, print the words. Many of them cannot read cursive writing.
- If an activity sheet has something to read, ask for a volunteer to read it aloud rather than calling on an individual child. Even better, have the group read it aloud in unison. If most children in your group are pre-readers, ask them to point to the words on the page as you read them aloud.
- Make a poster with church vocabulary words. Each week, add a word to learn, such as *God, Jesus, love, Bible, pray, bless, thanks, disciple, praise, and worship*.
- Give each child a few sheets of paper folded in half and stapled to make a word book to keep in the room. When an activity calls for children to write a word, name, or simple sentence, let them know you are happy to write it in their word books so they can copy it.

- Expect children of this age to occasionally reverse letters (for example, using “b” for “d”) and to make errors in spelling. It is not important to correct such errors during the session.
- If children need to know a repeating response for a litany or drama, write it on newsprint. Invite them to read it with you in unison several times before beginning the litany or drama. Adding actions to the words will help children remember them.
- Many children love learning through rhymes and songs. Try to include music in each session.
- Many children enjoy acting out stories. Invite them to act out certain parts of the story as you read it aloud. Challenge them to act out what they think happened next in a story. Some children will be able to act out responses to questions more easily than writing them.
- Be careful not to hold up children for whom reading comes easily as being somehow “better.” Resist putting them in the role of leader.
- Affirm each child by name—whatever his or her reading and writing skill level—two or three times each session.

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.

Ideas for Working with Pre-readers

- Keep small pieces of scratch paper handy to 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, 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.

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 about 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 with 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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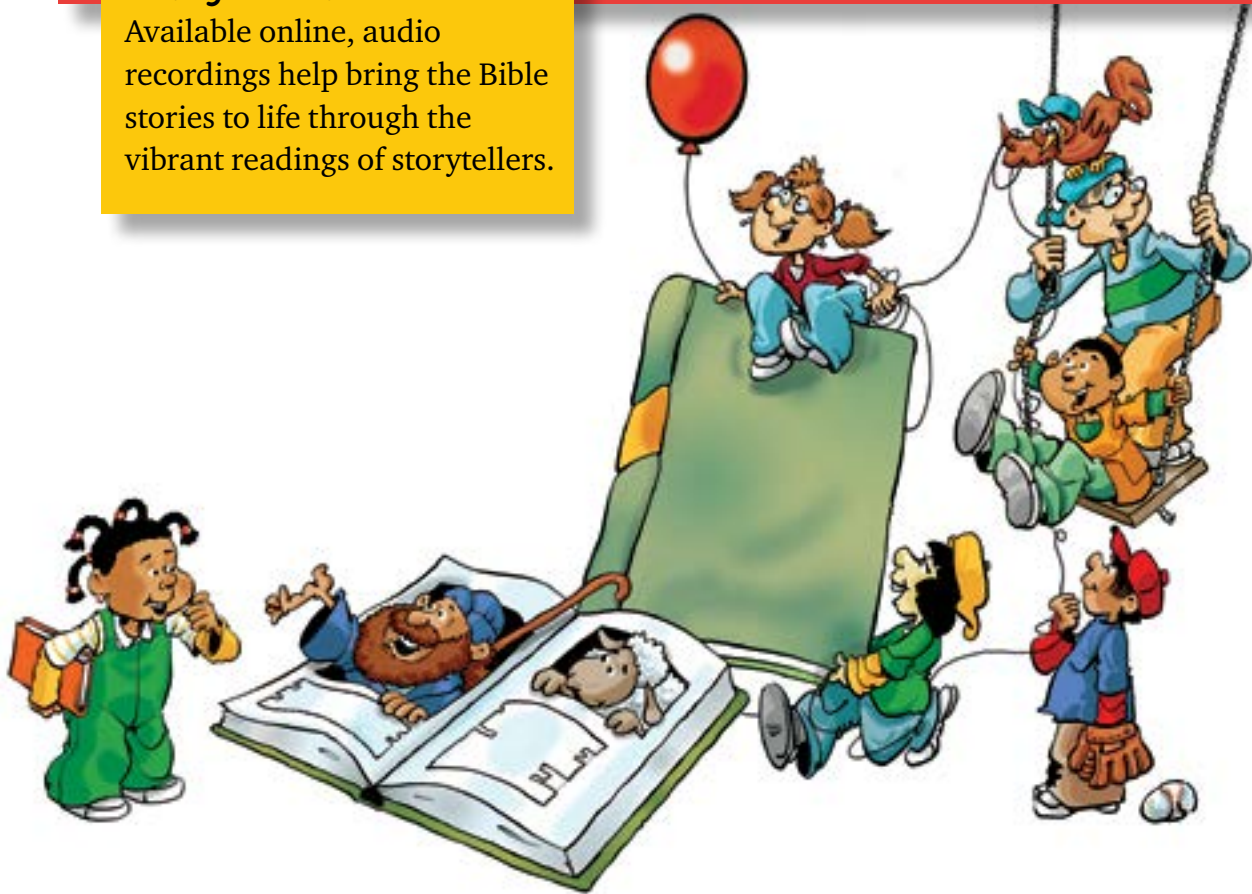
Free!

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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