



Rejoice and Ponder

Goal: To ponder and rejoice in the good news of Jesus' birth.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 2:8-20

The quiet night sky broke forth into a spectacular display in the heavens. An angel announced to poor shepherds: "I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord" (vv. 10-11, CEB). When the shepherds found the child lying in the manger, they returned, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen" (v. 20, CEB), while Mary pondered all that was happening (v. 19).

Those two reactions show our response to God's grace today. As we experience God's love in Jesus Christ and what it means to be Christ's disciples, we need to take time to ponder as well as to act.

We think and reflect on all God has done in Jesus Christ—for the world and for us. We study the Scriptures and other resources to understand better what God's grace means. Ponder!

We also act in gratitude for God's grace. The shepherds glorified and praised God, as we do too. When we love and serve others as Christ did, and when we seek to be like Jesus in bringing people together in reconciliation, peace, and justice, we are glorifying God. Rejoice!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

In this familiar story, we recognize the qualities of doing and being in ourselves and in the children we lead. Like the shepherds who were actively engaged in praising God, children offer their worship and service in active, energetic, trusting ways. Like Mary, who took the time she needed to remember and reflect on what she had just experienced, children enter periods of silence to reflect and make sacred in their memories the events that hold transformative power for them. Both responses are important!

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you prepare to meet the children, recall that children grow in their faith by experiencing different ways of responding to God's love and grace in their lives. Model a variety of ways of being and doing. How can you respond to the news of Jesus' birth as the shepherds did, actively sharing the good news of Jesus' birth with your children? Or as Mary did, taking some needed quiet time to remember and reflect with the children? Encourage the active doers in your group to take quiet time, and invite the quieter, more reflective children to rejoice!

Gracious God, give me a voice of praise and a heart of wonder at the mention of your beloved son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 4, 19, 20

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

pieces of cloth and rope

purple cloth, white cloth

four Advent candles and
one white candle

medium-size bowl

baby doll and biblical
costumes (optional)

Responding

Praying

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Offering

copies of **GN 2**,
shoeboxes

Extra

copies of **GN 3** and
GN 4, small markers
or objects

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **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.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

B **MS**

Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace and hope be with you.” Prompt them to respond with the same words.

This is the fourth week of Advent. Invite the children to set up the room as a campsite they imagine the shepherds might have had when God’s angels arrived. Provide simple pieces of cloth and rope for children to create shepherd’s head coverings.

Encourage the children to set up a worship table in the meeting space. Provide a Bible, a purple cloth, four Advent candles, and the bowl from the previous session. You will use the white cloth and candle at the end of the session.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Lead informal singing of the first stanzas of familiar Christmas carols, asking whether the carol makes you want to rejoice and dance or to think quietly and wonder about God. Suggested carols include “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” “Jesus, Jesus, O What a Wonderful Child,” “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” and “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.”

Singing

Invite the group to sit around the camp scene. Admire the efforts of the children to create it.

Sing “Joy to the World”—**SCM 19**—to celebrate the joy of God’s gift of Jesus.

Praying

L **LD**

Invite the children to gather around the Advent candles. Turn on four candles. Remind the children that the candlelight is a reminder of God’s presence and gift of grace to the world. God shines light in the darkness through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Invite the children to join an echo prayer. Ask a for a volunteer to lead the prayer today.

The people walking in darkness /
have seen a great light. /
Jesus Christ is our life and light. /

Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth. /
Amen. /

- A** Adapt any activity to suit your children's needs. Ask yourself, "How can I change this activity so this child can do it?"

Preparing to Hear the Story

Invite the children to describe *grace*. Gesture to the bowl and ask the children to wonder how many bowls would be needed to hold God's grace.

After a time, suggest another way to describe God's grace—a love bigger than we can imagine. Wonder how we can describe a love bigger than we can imagine. Suggest that we can't do it. That's why we read and listen to Bible stories, to help us hear stories and imagine God's grace.

Comment that God has filled us with good things through the stories in the previous three sessions. Review: Micah told the people long ago of God's promise of peace; Zechariah and Elizabeth received surprising news of a baby, John, whose name means "God is gracious;" and Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. Wonder who will be filled with good things in today's story.

Seeing where the story is found in the Bible reinforces the importance of this book for the church.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Hearing the Story

Invite a child to find Luke 2 in the Bible and place it on the worship table. Read **SCM 4**. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Invite the children to choose a character from the story (shepherds, angels, Mary, Joseph) and to play out the story as you read it. Use biblical costumes if you have them.

Challenge the children to use the bowl. Give them ideas: one of the shepherds could be feeding the sheep, or the bowl could be filled with strips of paper to represent a manger.

Read the story again. Use your voice, expressions, and feelings to make it engaging.

Repeat the story, or invite the children to tell it in their own words, if children want to change characters.

Reflecting on God's Grace

Suggest that when we learn about God's grace and how much God loves us, we want to do something to say "thank you." Worship is saying "thank you" to God.

Explain that sometimes, when we think about or experience God's grace, we want to dance and sing because of how much God loves us; other times, we want to quietly wonder about God's amazing grace. Both responses are important ways to worship God. Encourage the

children to use their bodies to show rejoicing and pondering. Invite them to share a time or experience when something wonderful happened and they wanted to rejoice and tell others, and a time when they wanted to take it all in and think about it by themselves first.

Singing

Invite the children to listen to the bilingual song “O Child Jesus, You Are So Lovely (Jesucito de mi vida).” Look at the words on **SCM 20** and encourage the children to practice and sing in Spanish and English. Turn off the candles.

T *For children who struggle with transitions, this may be a good time for an adult helper to come close to one or more children to model and encourage appropriate responses.*

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Celebrating God’s Grace A B

Help children make megaphones to rejoice and shout out messages of God’s love and grace. Distribute construction paper and crayons or markers. Invite children to decorate one side of the paper with happy designs and the words “love” and “grace.”

Show children how to lay the paper on a flat surface, decorated side down. Start rolling the paper from one corner to make a cone shape with a small opening at one end and a large opening at the other.

For each child, staple the edge of the paper cone at the large opening. Have children tape the seam.

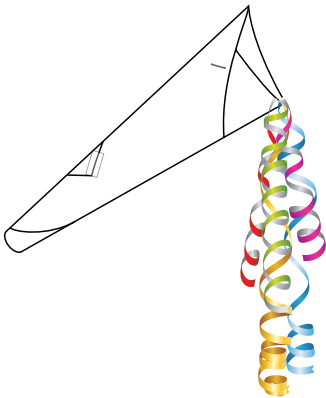
Give each child five 12" pieces of narrow gift wrap ribbon to tape around the large opening as streamers.

Talk about the messages the shepherds might have shouted through the megaphones. Invite each child to shout joyfully several messages to the group.

Praying God’s Grace LD

Help children ponder and wonder about Jesus. Say that we can know more about God’s grace through Jesus. Remind them that one way to think about grace is as a love bigger than we can imagine. Wonder how it feels to know that God’s grace is that big.

Distribute copies of **GN 1**. Lead the children in a pondering prayer with times of silence, according to the following directions:



Some messages children might shout: God loves you! Our hope is in God! Trust the Lord! God is gracious!

Slowly trace the lines of the heart with a fingertip while you hear the words read. (*silence*)

Trace the heart again and think about how Mary, a mother, might look at Jesus, her newborn baby. (*silence*)

Trace the heart again and think about how God looks at you, because you are a child of God. (*silence*)

Trace the heart again and think about how you can share God's love with others. (*silence*)

Provide markers or crayons for the children to draw or write things they can do to show God's love. Encourage the children to post the hearts where they will be reminded of their pondering prayers.



Offering God's Grace



Provide a shoe box or other cardboard container for each child. Talk to the children about Boxing Day, the day-after-Christmas tradition of giving a Christmas gift to people who serve others all year long. Explain that this holiday has become a day to box up extra shoes, clothes, and toys to donate to those who do not have enough.

Ask the children to name what they could put in the box and how they would decorate the box. Invite them to decorate it, to take it home, and to fill it with extra items their family can give to others this Christmas season.

As time allows, invite the children to write or draw a prayer of joy and thanksgiving for Jesus' birth to include in the box. Provide copies of GN 2 for the children to give to their parents or caregivers as an explanation of this offering activity.

Extra Activity



Before the session, cut out the squares from GN 4 and place them in a paper bag.

Play a game of Star Bingo to celebrate the birth of Jesus! Give each child a copy of GN 3 and GN 4. Have them color and cut out the squares from GN 4 and glue them in the spaces on their Star Bingo card. There will be four extra pictures, so children may decide which sixteen pictures they want on their Star Bingo card. There will be no "Free" space.

Give the children small markers or objects to mark their spaces. Tell the children you will draw pictures from the bag and call out the picture. Children may form a Star Bingo by marking four pictures in a row, column, diagonal, or four corners. Suggest that the children call out, "Jesus is born!" when they get a Star Bingo.

Today is the final day of the food collection project, if you chose to do it. Finalize plans for delivering the food to the chosen agency, and secure drivers and chaperones for the group's visit.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Sing “Joy to the World”—**SCM 19**—to celebrate the joy of Christmas and God’s gift of Jesus. Help the children learn the song. Invite them to dance and rejoice!

Remind children that this is the fourth and final week of Advent. In the past weeks, you looked for ways that Jesus brings peace, learned about God’s surprising grace and God’s surprising love. Today you heard how the shepherds and Mary reacted to the love and grace of God in Jesus. The shepherds rejoiced and shared the news, and Mary pondered this miracle in her heart.

Set the white cloth on a table and place the white candle on top of it. Tell the children that as purple was the color of Advent, white is the color of Christmas. Turn on the Christ candle and say, “Candlelight is a reminder of God’s presence and gift of grace to the world. God shines light in the darkness through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.”

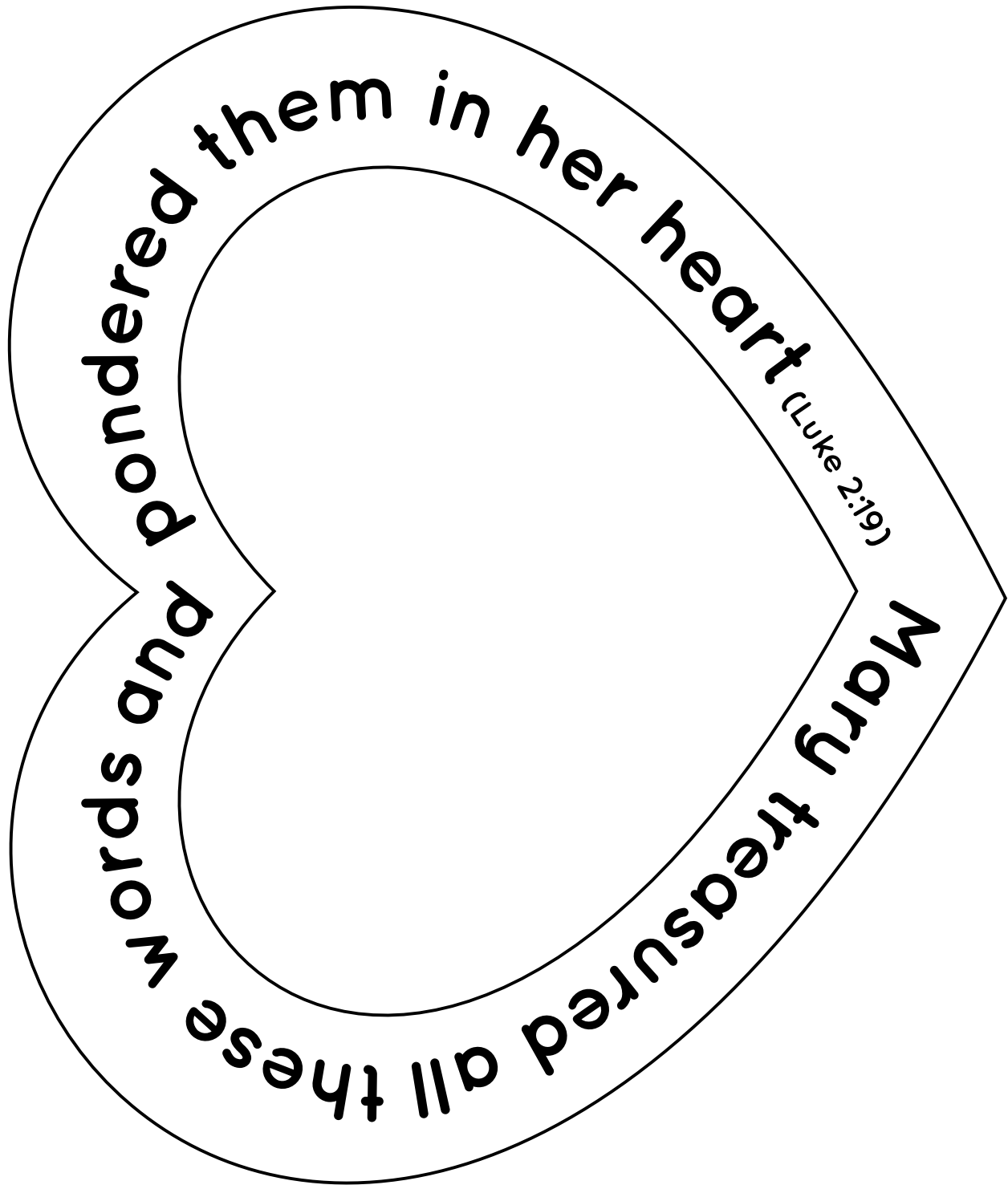
Turn off the candle.

Give each child a blessing. Say to each one: “(Name), God’s surprising love and grace is with you. Ponder it in your heart and then go tell it to everyone!”

Turn off the candle.



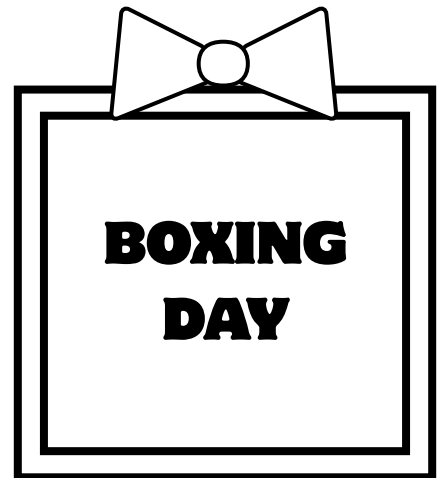
Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).



Dear Parents,

Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, is celebrated in some parts of the world (for example, Canada, United Kingdom, and Barbados). On this day, Christmas boxes are given to those who serve others as a token of appreciation. The tradition expanded in recent years to become a day for collecting and boxing gently used clothes, shoes, and other items to give to those who do not have enough.

To respond in gratitude to God's gift of Jesus at Christmas, help your child collect and prepare an offering of clean, usable clothes, shoes, or toys. Pack the items in the box your child decorated, and donate the contents to a shelter or organization that collects donations for others. Pack extra boxes to donate if your family has more goods to share.



★ STAR BINGO ★

