



Simeon and Anna Rejoice

Goal: To rejoice, like Simeon and Anna did, as we recognize God's promise in 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, 3, 5, 5a, 19, 20

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white cloth

white candle

candlesticks, candles

scented votive candle
(optional)

baby doll and biblical
costumes (optional)

Responding

Celebrating

invited actors, copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

Offering

copies of **GN 2** on card
stock

Extra

copies of **GN 3**

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,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Invite two older adults to portray Anna and Simeon. Give them costumes and copies of **GN 1** to prepare to tell their story in “Reflecting on God’s Grace.” In addition, if you choose to do “Celebrating God’s Grace,” ask the adults to talk about ways, in ways appropriate to the children’s ages, in which they have seen the grace of God in Christ at work in the world. Invite them to bring photos or other “show-and-tell” items to go with their stories.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing



Play “Joy to the World” as children arrive. Welcome each child with “Merry Christmas, (Name)!”

Invite the children to create a worship space with a white cloth, a Bible, and a white candle. Explain that white is the color of Christmas.

Encourage their creativity in setting a Bethlehem scene and a temple scene on different sides of the room. For Bethlehem, they could place a table turned on its side for the stable and add stuffed animals, if available. For the temple, they could use two or three candlesticks with candles. It is not necessary to light them, but you might light a scented votive candle during “Hearing the Story” to create more atmosphere if your church allows a lit candle.

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

Singing

Play “Joy to the World”—**SCM 19**—as the children listen. Play the song again and, together with the children, clap out the rhythm. Then join in singing.

Praying

Gather the children in the “Bethlehem” area of the room. Turn on the candle. Take time to show gratitude for God’s gifts. After each line, prompt the children to respond, “We thank you, God.”

For bringing light to the world, (*response*)
for the gifts you share with us, (*response*)
for hope, peace, joy, and love, (*response*)
for teaching us how to live in your way, (*response*)
Amen.



- C** Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.

Preparing to Hear the Story **C**

Allow time for children to tell about the special things they have done this week.

Ask children what they remember about Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. If attendance was low or the group did not meet for the last session, read the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1–7 or **SCM 3** before beginning today's story.

Explain that today's Bible story begins in the town of Bethlehem. This is where Jesus was born. The story setting will move to the temple in Jerusalem. Explain that Jerusalem was about a two-hour walk from Bethlehem, or about six miles. Give a local reference of something about six miles away. Show **SCM 5a** and have the children find Bethlehem and Jerusalem on the map.



Hearing the Story **L**

Invite a child to find Luke 2 in the Bible. Tell the children that in the story, two people are going to be very happy. They are Simeon and Anna. Invite children to come up with some "happy" movements and tell them to listen for the phrase "was so happy" in the story so they can do their happy movements at that time.

Read **SCM 5** or use the story audio. If reading, use your voice, your expressions, your feelings, and your body to make the story more lively. Vary the tone, speed, and pitch of your voice to indicate changes in mood. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Reflecting on God's Grace **C L**

Have the actors playing Simeon and Anna wait for the group in the area designated as the temple. Move the children from the Bethlehem area to the temple and introduce Simeon and Anna. Have them use **GN 1** to tell the story of Jesus' presentation in the temple.

After, invite the children to talk with Simeon and Anna. Use the following questions as prompts, if necessary.

- ▼ How did you know who Jesus was?
- ▼ Why were you so happy to see baby Jesus?

Then invite the adults playing Simeon and Anna to ask the children the following questions.

- ▼ Which adults in our church make you feel welcomed and loved? How do they do this?
- ▼ What do you think this story tells us about God?

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.



Thank your actors. If they are going to participate in “Celebrating God’s Grace,” invite them to join you in “Singing.”

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play and listen to “O Child Jesus, You Are So Lovely (Jesucito de mi vida)”—**SCM 20**. Note that this song is in English and in Spanish. Practice both languages, then sing and sway to the song. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God’s Grace



Have the children make three signs—“Bethlehem,” “Jerusalem” and “Nazareth,”—and post them in separate locations around the room. Remind the children that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, dedicated in the temple at Jerusalem, and grew up in Nazareth.

Say that Anna and Simeon were able to recognize Jesus as God’s Messiah because they had practiced looking for Jesus by worshiping, studying the Bible, and praying. Play a game to practice looking for Jesus.

One person plays Anna/Simeon. She/he leaves the room while the rest of the group chooses three children, one of whom will be “Jesus.” Each of the three children chooses a separate location—Bethlehem, the temple in Jerusalem, or Nazareth—and stands by that sign.

Anna/Simeon comes back into the room and tries to figure out which child is Jesus by asking questions such as:

- ▼ “Is Jesus a baby?”
- ▼ “Is Jesus with the shepherds?”
- ▼ “Is Jesus being dedicated?”
- ▼ “Is Jesus growing up?”

The group replies to each question with only “yes” or “no.” When Anna/Simeon thinks she or he has guessed where Jesus is, she or he goes to that child and asks, “Are you Jesus?”

When Anna/Simeon guesses correctly, a new Anna/Simeon is selected and the game is repeated. Play the game until each child who wishes to has a chance to be Anna/Simeon and/or Jesus.



If posting photos to your church's website, make sure you have signed permission to use photos of the children. See the photo release form under Leader Helps on www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.

Celebrating God's Grace

Invite the older adults who portrayed Anna and Simeon to talk about ways in which they have seen the grace of God in Christ at work in the world.

To prepare the actors for the visit, have them read Luke 2:22-40. Ask them to tell the children, in ways appropriate to the children's ages, how they have seen the grace of God in Christ. Ask them to bring photos or other "show-and-tell" items to go with their stories.

During the visit, encourage children to ask questions. Take a photo of the children with the visitors and display it in your meeting space. Consider sending the photo to the church office so it can be used in the church's bulletin or on its website.

Ask the actors to bless the children at the end of their conversation.

Offering God's Grace



Simeon offered a blessing for the baby Jesus and his parents. A blessing is a short prayer that asks for God's care and presence in a person's life. Make blessing gifts for your church to give to parents when there is a birth or baptism.

Give each child a copy of **GN 2** printed on card stock. Provide art supplies to decorate the door hangers: paint, markers, stickers, and so on. Invite the children to decorate them however they want. Give the decorated door hangers to the pastor or other church leader to be given when there is a birth or baptism.

Extra Activity

Ask the children to think about adults who have been like Anna and Simeon and told them about Jesus. Invite their ideas and write names on a sheet of newsprint. Tell the children that they are going to make a card thanking these people. Have each child choose one or more of the people named.

Hand out copies of **GN 3**. Encourage them to color the front of the card and then cut out the card. Suggest that they may write a note on the inside of the card or just simply sign their name. Have the children give their cards to the adults they chose, or you may prefer to collect their cards and deliver or mail them.



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).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

LG

Ask the children to help clean the space.

Tell the group that the time between Christmas, December 25, and Epiphany, January 6, when the visit of the wise men is celebrated, is twelve days called Christmastide. It is a time when we celebrate that Jesus is always with us.

Turn on the white Christ candle. Explain that the white candle represents that Jesus, the Light of the World, has been born.

Sing “Joy to the World”—**SCM 19**.

Explain that just as adults in the church and at home have taught them about Jesus, they may pass on the same stories to others. Send them with a blessing and a charge: “(Name), you are God’s child. Go and share the good news about Jesus!”

Turn off the candle.

A SCRIPT FOR SIMEON AND ANNA

Script for Simeon

All of Jerusalem know that I am a good and faithful man of God. God's Holy Spirit has come upon me. God has promised me that I will not die until I have seen the one God has promised us. Today, God's Spirit nudged me until I came to the temple. I did not know why.

But while I was here, thinking about God and all that God has given us, a family came. They had a baby named Jesus and brought a pair of turtledoves for the required sacrifice. All parents of the firstborn son do this, so this was not surprising.

However, I was moved to take the baby in my arms, and suddenly I knew that this baby was the promised one from God. I praised God and thanked God. To God, I said, "Dismiss your servant in peace. My eyes have seen your promise of salvation. You have given us this one, who is a light to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel."

The parents were amazed at what I was doing. I blessed them all, as is normal. Then I looked at the mother, whose name was Mary. I had a special message for her: "This child will bring about the rise and fall of many in Israel. He will reveal the inner thoughts of many. Because of him, a sword will pierce your soul too."

While this was happening, Anna, who has spent almost her whole life fasting and praying in the temple, came to us. She, too, recognized the importance of this child. She, too, praised God and then told others about the baby. What a day!



Script for Anna

I must look ancient to you. Well, I am. I am eighty-four years old, and I have lived here in the temple since my husband died. That was many years ago.

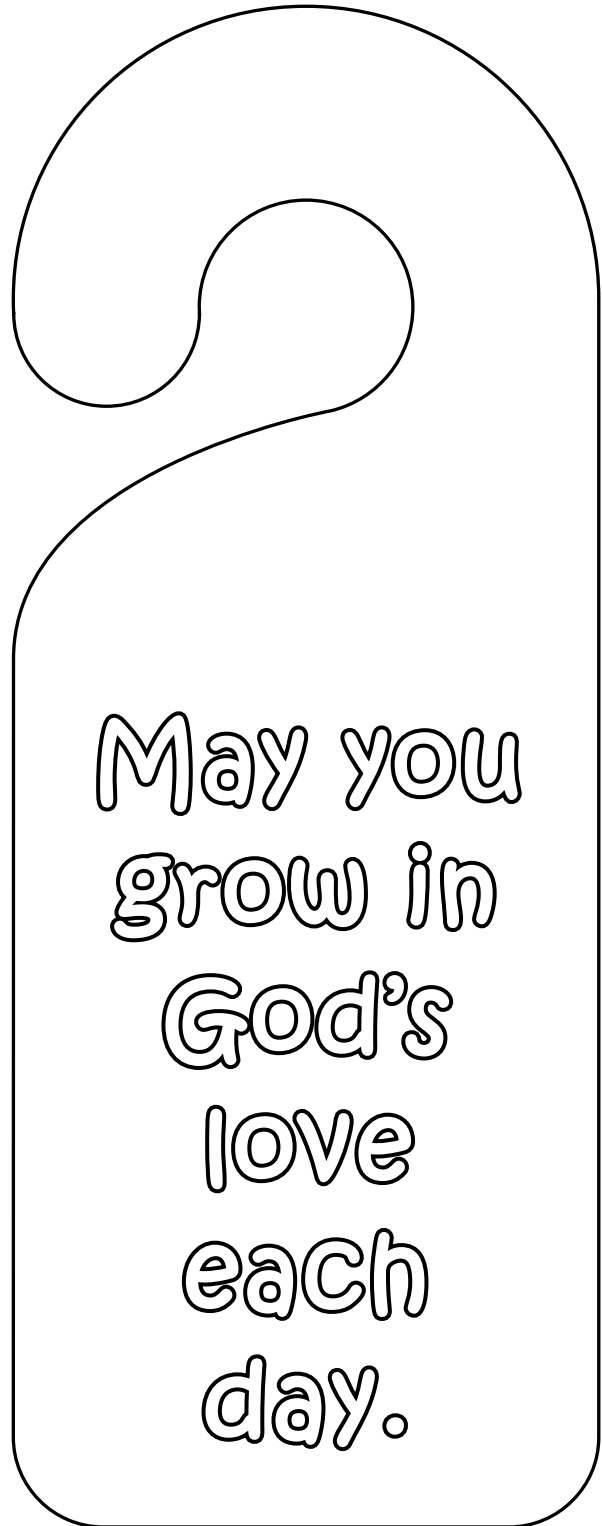
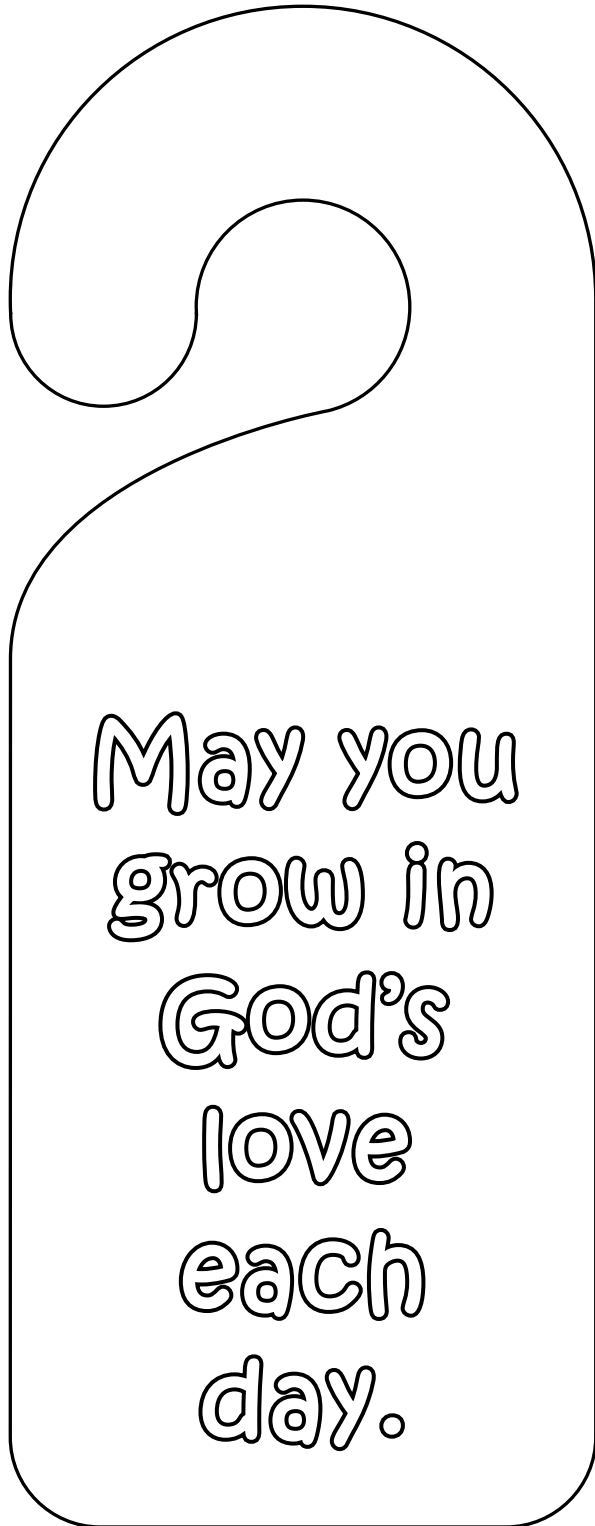
What happened in the temple today has made all my fasting and prayers here worthwhile. Let me tell you about it.

When I entered the temple, I saw Simeon, a most faithful man, with a young couple and a baby. It isn't unusual for all Jewish parents to bring their first child here with a sacrifice for God, but I could tell by the light in Simeon's eyes and the excitement in his voice that this was a special baby.

Simeon has often said that God promised that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, the one God has pledged to send us, God's people. As I came near them, I heard Simeon bless the baby. Then he said to the mother, "This child will bring about the rise and fall of many in Israel. He will reveal the inner thoughts of many. Because of him, a sword will pierce your soul too."

I knew then that this baby was the Messiah. I praised God and told everyone around me about the child, the child who would save Jerusalem. What an exciting day, but now I must go to offer more prayers to God.





You have taught
me about Jesus.

THANK
SIMEON
AND
ANNA
LIKE



