



## Joseph's Dream

**Goal:** To claim the promise of God's loving presence in Jesus.

### RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

#### . . . In Matthew 1:18-24

Mary and Joseph were engaged. But before they were married, Mary "was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18). What to do?

Joseph's plan to "call off their engagement quietly" (v. 19, CEB) was overruled by an angel from God who appeared in Joseph's dream. The angel assured Joseph that Mary's baby was from the Holy Spirit and that a son would be born to them. The angel even indicated the name for the baby: Jesus. This name is appropriate because it indicates what Jesus will do: "He will save his people from their sins" (v. 21).

We can hardly imagine greater grace given! God was sending a deliverer, a savior to save people from their sins. Now the brokenness of the relationship with God can be healed; our sin, forgiven. Jesus is Savior.

God's pure grace is being born as a baby, in the person of Mary and Joseph's son. Amazing! Jesus is "'Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us'" (v. 23). God reaches out and becomes a human person to save us—greatest grace! No wonder Joseph did what the angel commanded. He must have marveled greatly in gratitude—as we do—at God's wondrous love!

#### . . . In Your Children's Experiences

This vivid story is one that children can easily engage in many ways. Consider the action of naming. The angel told Joseph that Mary would give birth to a son whom Joseph should name Jesus, because he would save his people. The prophet Isaiah told about the birth of Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Your children may know about their names and why they got their names. They can know that, just as Jesus' birth would mean God was with all God's people, so, too, God is with each of us today when we show God's love to each other.

#### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

The story for this week focuses on Joseph and the visit of the angel to him. As you tell this familiar story of the birth of Jesus, be aware of children who might know couples who have a child and aren't married. You can help them remember that the times and customs in which Mary and Joseph lived were very different from today. One of the ways to engage them with their own curiosities about this story is to invite them to imagine what it would have been like to have been Joseph when he heard the news from the angel.

*God of hope, peace, and love, thank you for the days  
of Advent to ponder your promises to us. Amen.*

## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 4, 14, 15

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

purple cloth

Advent wreath with  
four battery-operated  
candles

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

sleeping bags or rugs

prepared newsprint  
with lyrics to "O Come,  
O Come, Emmanuel"

## Responding

### Claiming

card-stock copies of  
**GN 2**, tissue or fabric  
pieces, yarn or hay, foil  
or metallic wrapping  
paper

### Celebrating

refrigerated sugar  
cookie dough, bite-  
sized chocolate bars or  
mint wafers, rolling pin,  
plastic knives, nonstick  
cooking spray, baking  
sheets

### 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.

Before the session, print the lyrics from **SCM 14** on a large sheet of newsprint.

"Claiming God's Grace" and "Celebrating God's Grace" require more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

Greet the children by name and with the words, "The grace of Christ be with you." Prompt the children to respond with the same words. Invite children to help set the scene. This is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Provide a Bible, a purple cloth, and an Advent wreath with four battery-operated candles. Add rugs or sleeping bags around the room to use for "Hearing the Story."

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

Provide copies of **GN 1** and crayons. Read the word aloud to the children and explain that they will hear this word in today's story. Ask if anyone knows the meaning of *Emmanuel*. Tell them that it means "God is with us." Encourage them to listen to the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" while they decorate the word. Have the children place their pictures in the worship space.

### Singing and Praying



Invite the children to gather around the Advent wreath. Sing the first four verses of "God, We Sing"—**SCM 15**. Consider darkening the room for the prayer and turn on the lights afterward. Turn on all four candles. Remind the children that the candlelight is a reminder of God's presence and Jesus as the light of the world.

Have everyone stand in a circle. Lead a movement prayer:

In Advent, we look back to the birth of the baby Jesus. (*turn to look away from the circle*)

In Advent, we look ahead to a time when Jesus will come to bring God's glory and peace. (*turn to face into the circle*)

In Advent, we look all around for Jesus, because he is with us here and now. (*turn slowly in place*)

Remembering Jesus' birth and looking forward to Jesus' return, we ask the Holy Spirit to lead us. Amen.



**MS** As you select and plan activities, think about the space children need to maneuver a wheelchair, walker, leg casts, or crutches.

### Preparing to Hear the Story **C**

Invite the group to review what they know about Advent, the time the church prepares to celebrate the coming of Jesus. Encourage them to tell how they celebrate Advent in their homes.

Ask children what they remember about Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. Explain that the story of Jesus' birth is told in different ways in different books of the Bible. Today they are going to hear the story from the Gospel of Matthew.



### Hearing the Story **M L**

Invite a child to find Matthew 1 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Read **SCM 4** or use the story audio. If reading, use your voice, expressions, feelings, and body to make the story more lively. Vary the tone, speed, and pitch of your voice to indicate changes in mood. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Invite the children to find a spot on the sleeping bags or rugs that you have placed around the room. Ask them to lie down, as Joseph was, and to close their eyes, trying to imagine the story as if it were a movie. Read the story again. Have the children open their eyes and share what they pictured in their minds as you read the story.

### Reflecting on God's Grace **LD**

Distribute Bibles and have the children work in pairs. Help them use the table of contents to find Matthew. Then help them find the passage beginning with Matthew 1:18.

Point out the two names given for the baby in the story: Jesus (v. 21) and Emmanuel (v. 23).

Explain that *Jesus* means "God saves." Wonder why the angel told Joseph to name God's Son, Jesus. (*Jesus brings God's grace to us; God saves us because God loves us.*)

Remind the children that *Emmanuel* means "God is with us." Wonder why the angel said the baby would be called Emmanuel. (*Through Jesus, God is always with us.*)

Wonder together about what we can learn from Joseph about trusting God.

Being quiet may not be easy for some children. Encourage them to be as quiet as they can so everyone can dream together.



## Singing



Listen to “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”—**SCM 14**. Display the prepared newsprint with the lyrics. Read through each line, having the children repeat after you. Ask:

- ▼ What words from the song did you hear in today's story?
- ▼ What words do you need help with?
- ▼ Why do you think we sing this song during Advent?

Point out the line “ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here.” Remind the children that the prophet Isaiah had shared God's message of hope when the people were far from home in a foreign land. This line reminds us of that part of the Jewish people's story and their desire to be saved.

Turn off the candles.

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

### Claiming God's Grace



Remind the children that Mary and Joseph learned about the coming of the special baby, Jesus. Tell them that they will make an ornament as a reminder of the baby.

- ▼ Hand out card-stock copies of **GN 2**. Provide available craft supplies, such as tissue or fabric pieces, for the blanket; yarn or straw for hay to line the manger; and foil or metallic wrapping paper for the star.
- ▼ Help the children cut out the center triangle, then cut the manger along the solid lines.
- ▼ Fold the flaps in along the dotted lines and secure with tape.
- ▼ Have the children decorate the baby Jesus, star, and sign.
- ▼ Tape or glue the Emmanuel sign to the front of the ornament.
- ▼ Place the baby in the manger.
- ▼ Punch a hole in the star where indicated and thread a piece of yarn or string through the hole. Tie the ends together.

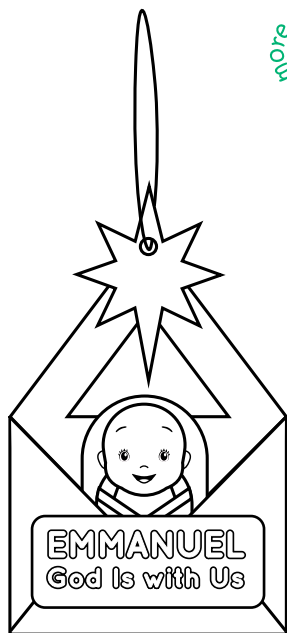
Suggest that the children take the ornament home to share the message about Jesus that Joseph heard in his dream.

### Celebrating God's Grace



Celebrate the way God's grace worked in Joseph's dream by baking pillow treats.

Roll the cookie dough until it is about 1/8" thick. Invite the children to cut rectangles from the dough a bit larger than the chocolate bar. Have the children place one rectangle on a lightly greased baking sheet. Add a chocolate bar to each rectangle and then another





rectangle of cookie dough. Show how to gently press the cookie dough edges together to cover the candy bar. Bake according to the package directions. It may take a few minutes longer to brown, so watch carefully. Remove from oven and allow treats to cool.

As you enjoy the sweet treats, wonder what the sweetest part of today's story was and how the sweetness of the treats can remind you to trust in God's promises like Joseph did.

**M** *Sitting quietly for a prayer may be difficult for some children. Consider having them hold something, such as the Bible, that may be needed soon. This will give them something to focus on as well as provide an important role for them.*

### Praying God's Grace



Lead the children in a prayer of *examen*, a way to look for Jesus' presence in their lives as "God is with us." Explain that this is a very old way of praying. Many families pray the examen together. Lead the group in the prayer process.

Think about Jesus being with you.  
Thank Jesus for loving you.

Think about and rejoice in the good moments of the day.  
Think back over what happened during your day.  
Where did you go?  
What did you do?  
What did you hear, see, or smell?  
How might Jesus have been with you in those moments?  
Thank Jesus for all those good moments.

Think about the moments when you felt bad.  
Think back over the moments when you felt bad because of something you did or said.  
Say you are sorry for whatever you said or did. Jesus forgives you.  
Plan to apologize to anyone you hurt by what you said or did.

Think about how Jesus will be in your life tomorrow.  
Imagine that Jesus is sitting with you.  
Tell Jesus what you need so you can feel he is with you.  
Pray that you will be able to do this.

At the conclusion of the prayer, pause for the children to think of one way they will look for Jesus at work in their lives this week.



### Extra Activity



Write the phrase “GOD IS WITH US” on a sheet of newsprint. Provide copies of **GN 3** and markers. Allow time for the children to color and cut out the triangle dice. Show them how to fold in the tabs and tape them on the inside. The object of the game is to spell out the phrase, “God is with us,” using the code on **GN 3**. Children may play on their own with the two dice, with a partner each tossing a die, or as a class taking turns rolling the dice.

## LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Ask the children to help clean the space.

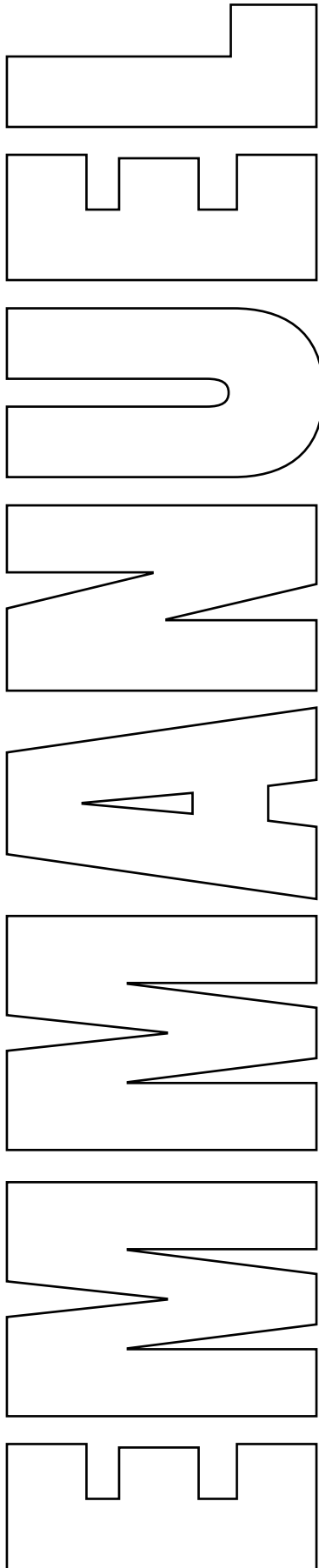
Invite the children to think of where in their lives and in the world love is needed, and tell them they will get a chance to share that in the prayer. Lead the group in prayer, giving each child a chance to pray for love where he or she feels it is needed:

O God, bring love to the world and to the places we name.  
Bring love to (*prompt children to name their ideas*). And may love come to us. Amen.

End the session with each child becoming a messenger of good news. Have the children point their hands and fingers in different directions and say, “Love be with you and you and you!” As they say this, encourage them to point in many different directions to include the whole group in their departing message of love.

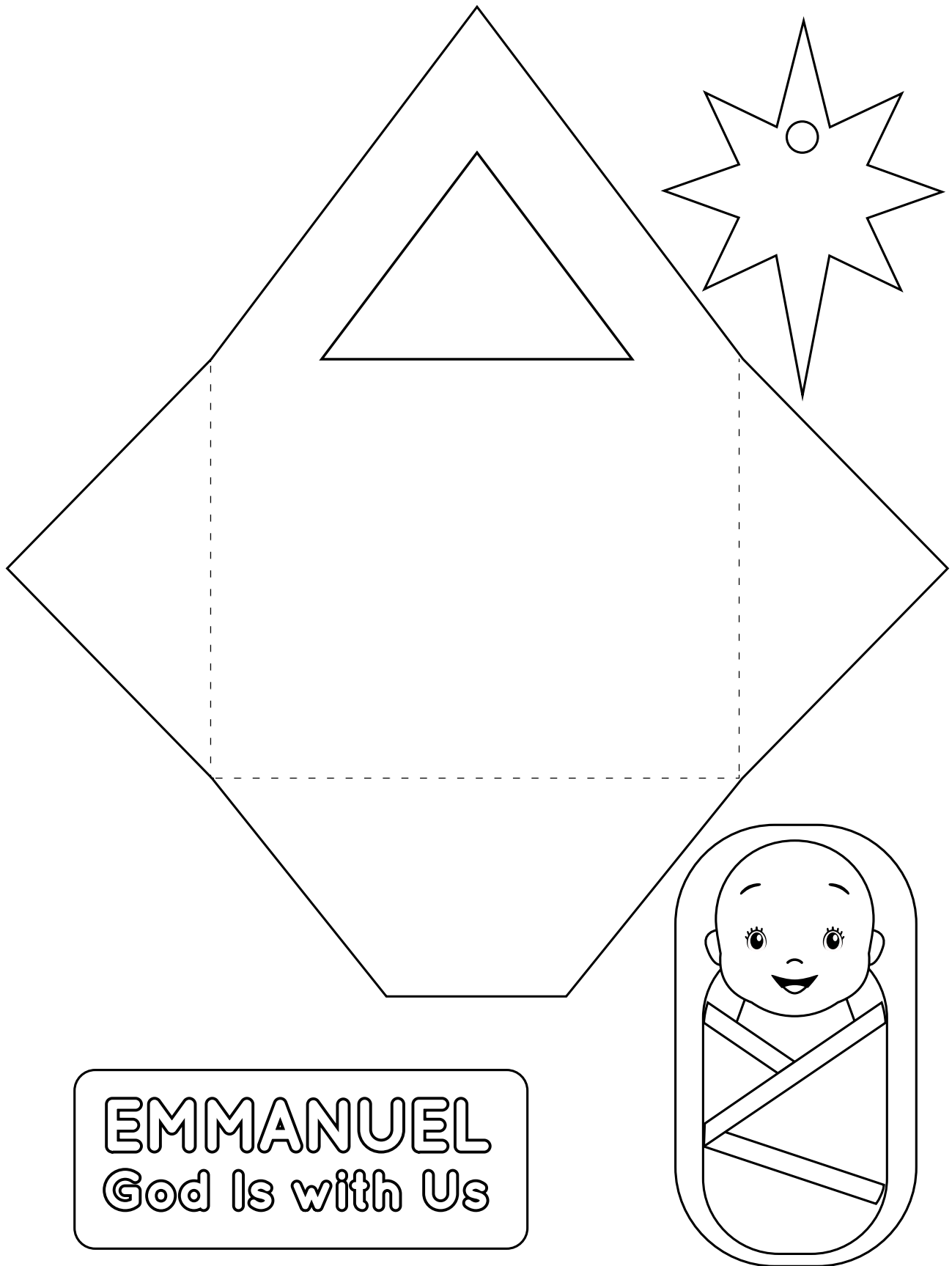


Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads), where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).











**Code:**

Roll a pair	= GOD
Jesus + Gabriel	= W
Jesus + Mary	= I
Jesus + Joseph	= T
Gabriel + Mary	= H
Gabriel + Joseph	= U
Mary + Joseph	= S

