



## Surprised by Grace

**Goal: To recognize moments of God's surprising grace and share it with others.**

### RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

#### . . . In Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

An old man and his wife receive the startling announcement that they will become parents! The angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zechariah in the temple, announcing that John, whose name means "God is gracious" and who "will be great in the Lord's eyes" (v. 15, CEB), will be born to Elizabeth and him. Through the child John, the loving God gives grace. The child turned out to be John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus the Messiah. Of John it was said, "Indeed, the Lord's power was with him" (v. 66, CEB).

John's birth was an act of God's pure grace. Although Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed for a child for a long time, they must have been very surprised about the child God was giving them. They were chosen by God to be John's parents as a wonderful gift of God's goodness and love.

When Zechariah was able to speak, "he began praising God" (v. 64, CEB). His response was praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude. Our response to God's gracious love in Jesus Christ is the same. We praise and thank God, expressing our gratitude by being disciples of Jesus Christ. In faith, we give our lives to serving Christ in response to the grace we receive and the gratefulness we want to express.

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

Elizabeth and Zechariah waited a long time to receive the blessing of John's birth. Remembering the prophecy of the angel, their friends wondered who he would be and what he would become. The story proclaims promise and hope in the face of disbelief, and joy and expectation in the face of barrenness. John's name proclaims to all the grace of God.

Children connect with the story in many ways—in their wanting and waiting, in their hoping and praying, and in their wondering and imagining. Moreover, it can reassure them that God's gracious love is theirs and that they are beloved children of God.

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

Children love to hear stories of their birth or adoption. They enjoy hearing how they fit into their loving family. This story is confirmed at baptism, when the minister says, "You are a child of God, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever."

As you end your time with the children each week, give each one a blessing, speaking their names and reminding them of the promise of God's love. This week, pray for each child by name, that each one may grow in God's grace and be a blessing in this world.

*Holy God, take me by the hand and lead me  
into your promised future by your grace. Amen.*

## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

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

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 2, 16, 18

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

Christmas music

purple cloth

four Advent candles

gift-wrapped box with  
medium-size bowl  
inside

baby doll and biblical  
costumes (optional)

## Responding

### Celebrating

copies of **Grace Notes**  
(GN) 1 and GN 2

### Offering

copies of **GN 3**,  
cardboard box

### Extra

SCM 2a, 2b

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker on a clothespin. Use the 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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

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 second week of Advent. Play Christmas music as the children arrive. Invite them to help you set up your space. Provide a Bible, purple cloth, and four Advent candles to set on the table. Invite the children to name what they know about the season of Advent. Explain that Advent means “coming.” During Advent, we remember that Jesus came long ago and promised to come again.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Today’s Scripture passage is lengthy. Decide if you will have children read the Scripture passage from **SCM 2**. Invite several volunteers to practice the reading.

### Singing

Sing “This Is the Day”—**SCM 16**—to celebrate the gifts of God. If the song is unfamiliar, sing one line of the song to the children and have them sing it back to you. Or you can lead the song while the children sing the echo. Encourage the children to come up with motions to the song.

### Praying

Invite the children to gather around the Advent candles. Turn on two 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 a volunteer to say a prayer or have the children join an echo prayer. Ask a for a volunteer to lead the prayer today.

Holy God, /  
you are good and great. /  
You came to the world, /  
full of grace and truth. /  
We look forward to when you will come again. /  
Amen. /

### Preparing to Hear the Story

Tell the children that grace means that God accepts us and loves us just as we are. Suggest one way to imagine grace: God smiling.

Present the gift-wrapped box. Suggest that seeing a present with brightly colored wrapping paper can help us recognize grace. Wonder what our faces look like when we receive a gift. Wonder what is in the box.

Invite the children to unwrap the gift box and locate the bowl inside. Ask: What is surprising about the contents of the box?

Wonder what kind of gift a bowl is and what a bowl can reveal to us about God’s grace. Place the bowl on the worship table, and comment that today’s story is full of surprises.



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](http://www.pcusastore.com).

Surprises include: an angel visiting Zechariah, Zechariah not being able to speak, Elizabeth having a child in her old age, and the child being named “John.”

### Hearing the Story M L

Invite a child to find Luke 1 in the Bible. Read, or have volunteers read, Luke 1:5–25, 57–66, or the story from **SCM 2**. 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.

Invite the children to choose a character from the story (Zechariah, Elizabeth, Gabriel, people in the temple, people in the house) and act out the story as you read it again using **SCM 2**. Invite the children to use the baby doll for John and dress in biblical costumes if you have them.

Challenge the children to use the bowl. Give them suggestions, as needed: the bowl could be an artifact in the temple, or even the writing tablet that John uses to write the message.

Repeat the story by having the children change characters and act out the story using their own words.

### Reflecting on God’s Grace L C

Invite the children to name parts of the story that were surprising. Wonder together how God’s grace was present in the surprising events.

Wonder what the bowl might represent about grace. Accept all responses. Suggest that the bowl’s emptiness reminds us of Elizabeth and Zechariah’s emptiness in being childless. Wonder how God’s grace filled their emptiness. Ask: What are some feelings that help us express our emptiness? What feelings help us express being full?

Share a personal account of a time when something good filled your emptiness without you expecting it. How did you thank God?

### Singing

Sing “He Came Down”—**SCM 18**—to celebrate God’s love and grace. Add a verse including the word *grace*. Use repetition.

Turn off the candles.



**T** Use transition cues to give alert children of upcoming changes. Clear, tangible signals that are obvious help alleviate tensions. Consider using count down numbers on a whiteboard to signal the next activity.

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



### Celebrating God’s Grace

MS LD

*Before the session, cut out the cards on GN 1 and GN 2. Hide the cards around the meeting space. If you want to add the names of your children and their meanings, follow the instructions in the sidebar.*

Invite the children to look around the meeting space for the fourteen cards you have hidden, asking that each child find at least one card and hold it. After all the cards are found, ask the children holding cards with the name meanings to come forward. Invite the children to read them one at a time, and to help one another identify the person whose name corresponds to the meaning. After each name is identified, comment that the person named is a beloved child of God.

Leave the card with “God is gracious” until last. Ask: Whose name means “God is gracious”? Remind the children that the angel Gabriel told Zechariah to call the child John. The name reminded the family that God is gracious.

Comment that all Christians, regardless of our names, try to live in such a way that shows the grace and goodness of God. Discuss ways the children can show God’s grace in the coming week.

If you looked up the children’s names and meanings, give them their cards. Talk about ideas to show God’s grace that relate to the meanings of their names. For example, Henry means “rules his house.” Perhaps Henry could show God’s grace at home by helping with a chore unexpectedly. A more difficult name might be one like Brittany, which comes from a region in France (Bretagne). Perhaps Brittany could show God’s grace by being kind to someone not from this country. Help the children think creatively to incorporate the meaning of their names and a way to show grace.

### Praying God’s Grace

M

Tell the children that during Advent we can prepare a space to be attentive to God’s surprising grace all around us. By having a time of quiet prayerfulness each day, we can make it possible for God to truly be with us. This spiritual practice is a kind of prayer known as listening for God or attentiveness.

Encourage the children to find a comfortable position for sitting and to take several slow, deep breaths. As they inhale, tell the children

Use an Internet search engine and type in the name you are searching for and “name meaning.” Write down each child’s name and its meaning on an index card.

John—God is gracious

Mary—wished-for child, rebellion

Joseph—God will add or increase

Elizabeth—my God is abundance

Gabriel—God is my strength

Zechariah—God remembers

Jesus—God saves



to let it be a breathing in of God’s blessings. As they exhale, tell them to let it be a breathing out of distractions. Children can close their eyes. Give them a chance to practice.

If the children would like a short prayer phrase, suggest “Surprise me with your grace” or “God, you are with us.”

After a time of silent prayer, invite the children to name the blessings and distractions they thought of, if they would like to do so. Tell them that by practicing this each day, they may find less distractions and be surprised by God’s grace.

### Offering God’s Grace



Wonder how to surprise people with grace. One way is to help one another and show God’s love. Explain to the children that they can collect food donations for people who are hungry. Talk about what kinds of foods are needed at food pantries—proteins, such as canned meats, fish, and nuts; grains, such as low-sugar cereals, oatmeal, and rice; and healthy snacks, such as granola bars, popcorn, and packaged fruits (no sugar added). See the list on **GN 3** for more suggestions.

Suggest that they make a donation station out of a cardboard box. Invite them to decorate it and make a poster with pictures and a list of the foods people need. Encourage the children to name ways they can surprise people who are hungry with God’s grace.

Ask for a couple of volunteers to write a notice for your church newsletter or bulletin about the food collection project. Use copies of **GN 3** to encourage children, their families, and the congregation to contribute.

Place the collection box in a prominent place in the church. After the next session, deliver the food to a local agency. Ask for parent volunteers to drive and chaperone. Send a copy of **GN 3** home with each child.

### Extra Activity



Tell each child to write their name on a slip of paper, fold the paper in half, and place them in a pile. While they are writing their names, cut and tape together **SCM 2a** and **SCM 2b**.

Remind the children that Zechariah could not speak, but he needed to communicate to the people what the baby’s name would be. He wrote the name on a tablet. Tell the children that instead of a tablet, they will play a silent game to spell out names.

Post the Alphabet Movements chart. Invite each child to pick up a slip of paper from the pile. Have the children take turns spelling out the name they drew by doing the activities listed on the chart. Help as needed. Allow the child doing the movements to finish spelling the name before the other children guess who it is. Celebrate that God knows each of their names and smiles upon them, a gift of grace.



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).

## LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Sing the second stanza of “He Came Down”—**SCM 18**.

Remind children that this is the second week of Advent and that for each week until Christmas you will light one candle. Last week you looked for ways that Jesus brings peace, and today you learned about God’s surprising grace.

Offer the following prayer or one of your own choosing.

God of grace, thank you for your grace, which is like you smiling upon us. May we be attentive to your grace and share it with others. Amen.

Send each child with a blessing. Say to each one: “(Name), the grace of God is with you. Tell your friends and family how surprising God’s grace is!”

**John**



**Mary**



**Joseph**



**Elizabeth**



**Gabriel**



**Zechariah**



**Jesus**







“God is  
gracious”

“Wished-  
for child,  
rebellion”

“God will add  
or increase”

“My God is  
abundance”

“God is my  
strength”

“God  
remembers”

“God saves”



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Our children are growing in grace and gratitude by collecting food for people who are hungry in our community. The children have placed a collection box in \_\_\_\_\_ of our church building.

Please consider making a food donation. The last day to contribute is next Sunday. The food will be delivered to \_\_\_\_\_ after that date. Thank you.

### Basic Food Needs

- meals in a can (stew, chili, soup)
- canned tuna, salmon, and chicken
- peanut butter
- canned foods with pop-top lids
- low-sugar cereals
- oatmeal
- 100% fruit juices in single-serving boxes
- shelf-stable or powdered milk
- packaged fruit packed in juice (no sugar added)
- canned vegetables (low salt)
- snack items—100% fruit rolls, raisins, graham crackers, unsweetened applesauce, cheese and crackers, microwave popcorn, pretzels, granola bars (without nuts)
- holiday items—canned yams, cranberry sauce, stuffing mix



