



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

Celebrating

2 boxes, 2 baby dolls,
2 dish towels, 2 floor
pillows, 2 stepladders
(optional), 2 copies of

Grace Notes (GN 1)

Praying

copies of **GN 2**

Offering

copies of **GN 3**, shoe
box or other cardboard
container for each child

Extra

copies of **GN 4** and
GN 5, 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,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require 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 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. Ask for volunteers to practice reading the Scripture passage from the Bible.

Lead informal singing of the first stanzas of familiar Christmas carols, asking whether the song makes you want to rejoice and dance or to quietly think 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

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 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** *Some children don't verbalize quickly. Nod and show them you are listening, giving them time to formulate an answer.*

Preparing to Hear the Story **C**

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 imagine 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.

Hearing the Story **LD C**

Invite a child to find Luke 2 in the Bible and volunteers to read Luke 2:8–20. 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 (shepherds, angels, Mary, Joseph) and to act out the story as you read it. Use the baby doll for Jesus and dress in 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 from **SCM 4**. Use your voice, expressions, and feelings to make it engaging.

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

Reflecting on God's Grace **MS**

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.

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.

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 wonder quietly 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: (1) a time or experience when something wonderful happened and they wanted to rejoice and tell others; and (2) a time when they wanted to take it all in and think about it by themselves.

Singing

Invite the children to listen to the bilingual song "O Child Jesus, You Are So Lovely (Jesucito de mi vida)." Review the words on **SCM 20** and encourage the children to sing in both Spanish and English.

Turn off the candles.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Celebrating God's Grace

Before the session, cut apart the cards on copies of GN 1.

Invite the children to celebrate the good news of Jesus' birth by playing a game to rejoice like the shepherds and ponder like Mary. Using the cards from **GN 1**, have the children help you set up two sets of the following stations in your room:

- ▼ box with baby doll, Card 1
- ▼ stepladder or chair, Card 2
- ▼ floor pillow, Card 3.

Form two teams of two or more. Give the second person in each line a dish towel. Tell the children that the first person on each team will run to the box with the baby doll and follow the instructions on Card 1, then go to the stepladder or chair and follow the instructions on Card 2, then proceed to the floor pillow and follow the instructions on Card 3, and finally return to their team tagging the next person on their team to go. You may want to read the cards at each station aloud to the group before the game begins so they are familiar with the instructions at each station.

Explain that when everyone on the team has had a turn, the team decides together if they would like to rejoice in or ponder the good news of Jesus' birth. If they choose rejoicing, they should shout together, "Jesus is born!" If they choose pondering, they should sit down together and bow their heads.

After the game, ask the children which thing they prefer to do when they receive good news: rejoice, ponder, or both.



Praying God's Grace

L VI

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 2**. Lead the pondering prayer with times of silence, according to the following directions:

- ▼ Place your index finger at the beginning line of the labyrinth and trace the line while thinking about ways in which you can rejoice in the message of the angels, like the shepherds did.
- ▼ When you reach the center, rest your finger there for a moment and read the passage in the middle of the heart. Read it slowly several times and think about how you can treasure God's words, like Mary did.
- ▼ Trace the line with your finger to go out of the labyrinth. While you do this, think about how you can share God's message with others, as the shepherds did when they found Jesus.

After they are done, give the children time to share their thoughts about the prayer. Encourage them to post **GN 2** where they can use the prayer once again or invite their families to use the labyrinth as one way to pray.

L *Children who struggle with listening may need help with focus and comprehension. Provide a specific word to listen for, suggest listening prompts, or engage them with movement.*



Offering God's Grace

LG

Provide a shoebox 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 their 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 3** for the children to give to their parents or caregivers as an explanation of this offering activity.

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.



Extra Activity



Before the session, cut out the squares from GN 5 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 4 and GN 5. Have them color and cut out the squares from GN 5 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 the four corners. Suggest that the children call out, “Jesus is born!” when they get a Star Bingo.

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 the children that this is the fourth and final week of Advent. During the past weeks, you looked for ways that Jesus brings peace and 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 the 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 are with you. Ponder them in your heart and then go tell everyone!”



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).

1. Greet the baby Jesus with the words “Welcome to the world, Jesus!”

You are asked to wrap baby Jesus in a towel, but you have to run back to your team to get it. Run back. Wrap baby Jesus in the towel and place him back in his manger (the box).

2. Go tell the good news on the mountaintop like the shepherds! Climb the mountain (stepladder or chair) and shout out the good news: “Jesus Christ is born!” Climb down the mountain and do a happy dance.

3. You want to ponder the good news like Mary. Oops! You need baby Jesus. Run back to the manger and get baby Jesus. Make sure you keep him wrapped up. Sit down on the pillow and sing “Rock-a-bye Baby” or another lullaby to Jesus.

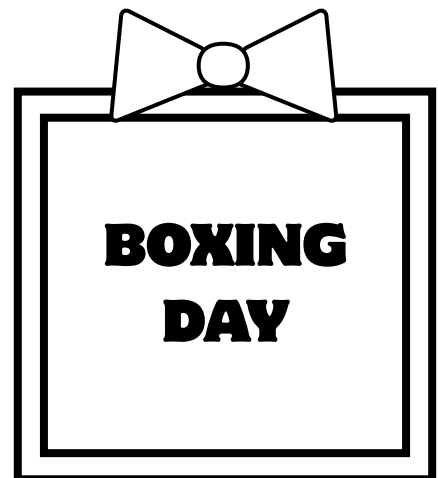
Take baby Jesus back to the manger (the box) and take the towel to the next person in line on your team.



Dear Parents,

Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, is celebrated in some parts of the world (for example, Canada, the 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 ★

