

Stories, Colors & More

for Ages 5-7



Year 2, Winter





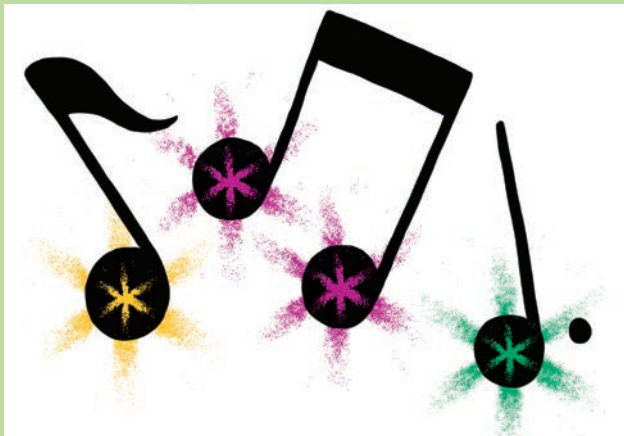
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Your Visual Schedule



Welcoming
and
Preparing



Singing
and
Praying



Hearing
the
Story



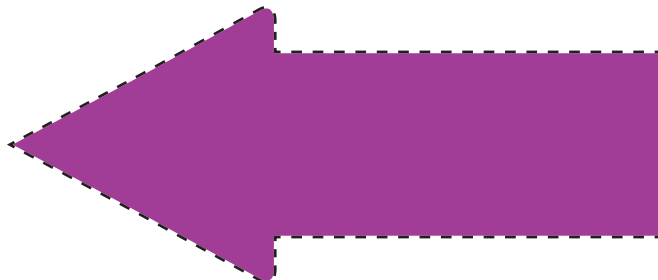
Reflecting
on God's
Grace



Activity
Choices



Loving and
Serving
God



Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Support Map

M Movement

Some children need to move more than others. Setting boundaries for appropriate movement can allow the leader to meet the needs of the group while also meeting the needs of the child. Mark a place on the floor with tape, a mat, or a pillow. Be clear that the child can move within this space. Sometimes having two spots (chairs and pillows or mats) can be helpful.

T Transitions

Transition times provide a challenge to children. Clear expectations, follow-through, and routine help with those times, but they may not be enough for some children. For children who struggle with transitions, consider quick physical activities—such as doing chair push-ups, squeezing your hands together, and stretching—before or after the transition.

TD Tactile Defensiveness

Sometimes children struggle with textured objects such as glue, clay, finger paint, and chalk. For some children, textures create real anxiety. Allow and encourage children to explore textures without pressure, and provide opportunities to wash or wipe their hands right away. For children who struggle with texture, find a way to participate in the activity without getting their hands dirty, such as being a timekeeper.

A Adapting Activities

You can adapt an activity by process, product, or environment—the way that something is done, what is done, or the setting in which it is done. Giving extra support in the completion of a task is an example of changing the process; having children make something different is an example of changing the product. Instead of thinking, “This child can’t do this,” think, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”

B Behavior

Children’s behavior can challenge us, disrupt the group, and lead to unsafe situations. Be clear about what you expect before you do the activity. If you don’t want children to touch one another while they are in a circle, tell them that before they touch one another. Clear expectations let children know what the rules are. Using the included visual schedule is a great way to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for children to remember.

C Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty Communicating

Reach out to parents and caregivers about alternative forms of communication used by children. Learning a few words in American Sign Language, becoming familiar with the Picture Exchange Communication System, or exploring how to support with other assistive technologies are examples of showing hospitality to the children. In addition, give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.

FA Food and Other Allergies

Remove all food and other products containing allergens. Post signs to help people remember the allergy. Have all children wash their hands and faces to avoid triggering a reaction.

L Listening

Attending to a story or comprehending instructions can be a challenge for children who struggle with attention. Supporting these children requires consistency, clear expectations, and organization. Some hints that may help include clearly communicating expectations before the activity, checking for understanding, providing visual support as well as verbal instructions, building movement into activities, and supporting transitions.

Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Support Map

LG Leadership and Generosity

Focus on the strengths of the children, and learn to see them as gifted members of your community. Look for opportunities for them to express generosity. Offer them ways to practice leadership, such as passing out items, holding visual aids, helping other children, or serving as the example in games and activities.

LD Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty with Reading and Writing

Whenever children read aloud, ask for volunteers. Calling on a child who does not read at grade level may make him or her feel embarrassed and unwelcome. Always encourage children to write or draw pictures as part of their responses. Children then can share their drawings.

MS Supporting Children with Mobility Supports

As you set up, think about ample space between furniture to maneuver a wheelchair or walker. Think about materials and how they are positioned. Doing a roll-through in a wheelchair or walker can be a helpful way to make sure that your room setup is accessible. Think about including your children who use assistive devices. For example, seating all children on chairs or placing materials for a game on a table instead of on the floor are simple ways to create a more welcoming community.

VI Visual Impairment/Blindness

Talk with parents, caregivers, and children about the strengths and abilities of the child, as well as the best ways to offer support. Large print or special lighting may allow full access to the materials. Talk with parents or caregivers about the use of the copy machine or scanned images and a computer or tablet to enlarge print. Encourage children to describe their pictures and other creations in words as they share them.

D Deaf/Hard of Hearing

To create a welcoming environment for children who are deaf or have difficulty hearing, provide visual supports, such as written instructions and copies of the stories told. Employ an interpreter, and encourage children and adults in the community to learn to communicate through American Sign Language. Limit background noise. Face a person before speaking. Become familiar with children who use assistive technology. Be sure to check with parents or caregivers of children who use cochlear implants or hearing aids about any special considerations.

F Fairness

To make every child feel welcome and successful, think about fairness in a different light. Fairness is not every child getting the same thing; it is every child getting what she or he needs.

SD Sensory Defensive

Some children have strong reactions to different stimuli. Help them feel more comfortable by putting them in charge of the challenging sensations, allowing them to take actions such as turning the lights on or off.

Ask for Help

A team approach to including people with disabilities in your congregation helps build understanding and knowledge in the congregation, provides support for the child and family, and makes including all of God's children in church school an attainable goal.

A Child Will Be Born

(based on Isaiah 9:2–7)

The Israelites were afraid. They lived in a time when there was war and fighting all around them.

I wonder, “What is war?”

“What will happen to us?” they worried. “Will the fighting ever end?”

Then someone came along who gave the people hope. It was the prophet Isaiah. A prophet is a messenger with important news from God. Isaiah knew that God had a special message for the people.

It was an amazing message.

It was a message filled with hope.

“I know you are afraid,” Isaiah proclaimed. “It seems very dark and difficult when war is all around. But God’s light is coming. Do not be afraid.”

The people stopped to listen. “Tell us more,” they begged.

“God will send a sign,” Isaiah continued.

“A child will be born for us. A baby boy will come to live with us. He will rule over the whole world.”

I wonder, “Who is the baby boy?”

“Tell us more about this baby boy,” the people exclaimed.

“He will be called the Prince of Peace,” Isaiah explained.

The people liked the sound of that. “Tell us more about the Prince of Peace,” they demanded.

“His kingdom will be filled with kindness,” said Isaiah. “He will rule with goodness and fairness. The God of heaven loves us and will do this for us.”

The people liked the sound of that. “We will wait for this child,” they cried. So they began to wait and watch for the child who would bring God’s peace to the land.

God’s message brought hope at a difficult time. While they were waiting, the people gave thanks for God’s promise of a child who would bring peace to the land.

The people remembered God’s message. They reminded each other about God’s promise when they heard reports of war in the news. They looked forward to the day when God’s peace would come to everyone.

I wonder, “What does peace look like?”





Dear God, with our eyes wide open we look around us and see our friends, people who care for us, and our church. We know that outside these walls is your world, full of beauty and love.

But for many, and even at times for us, we know darkness.



Our eyes are closed tight and we are in the dark.

We pray for those who are lonely or sad.
We pray for those who are bullied by others.
We pray for those who have no home or go hungry.



And, when we put our hands over our eyes and block out the darkness others feel, we, too, are in darkness.

We wait for your light, Jesus.
Bring your light into the world.



Take our hands from our eyes so that we may hold a candle to light the darkness for others.



Open our eyes so that we may see the light of the world spreading throughout the world. May we be the light of Christ for others.

And, with our eyes wide open let us look around us and see our friends, people who care for us, and our church. Let us know that outside these walls is your world, full of beauty and love.
Amen.

Prepare a Road

(based on Isaiah 40:3-11)

A long time ago, the country of Babylon went to war with Israel. During the war, soldiers captured many Jewish people and took them back to Babylon. The people were broken-hearted and wept tears of sorrow. They were held as captives in a land that they didn't know.

I wonder, "What is it like to live in an unfamiliar place?"

All they wanted was to be able to go home. But they were not allowed to go back.

Many years passed, and still the people were not allowed to leave Babylon.

"Will we ever be able to go home?" cried the people in despair. "Will we ever see Jerusalem again?"

As the years passed, the captives gave up hope. They believed they would have to live in Babylon forever. Then God sent a messenger to help the people remember that they had not been forgotten. This messenger was the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah had a special message from God. It was an amazing message of love.

"Listen to what God says," cried Isaiah. "Get ready! Make a road through the wilderness. Make it straight and smooth. Fill in the valleys and clear away the rocks. God is coming to take us home."

I wonder, "How would they make a road?"

The people couldn't believe their ears. Could it be true? How could it happen?

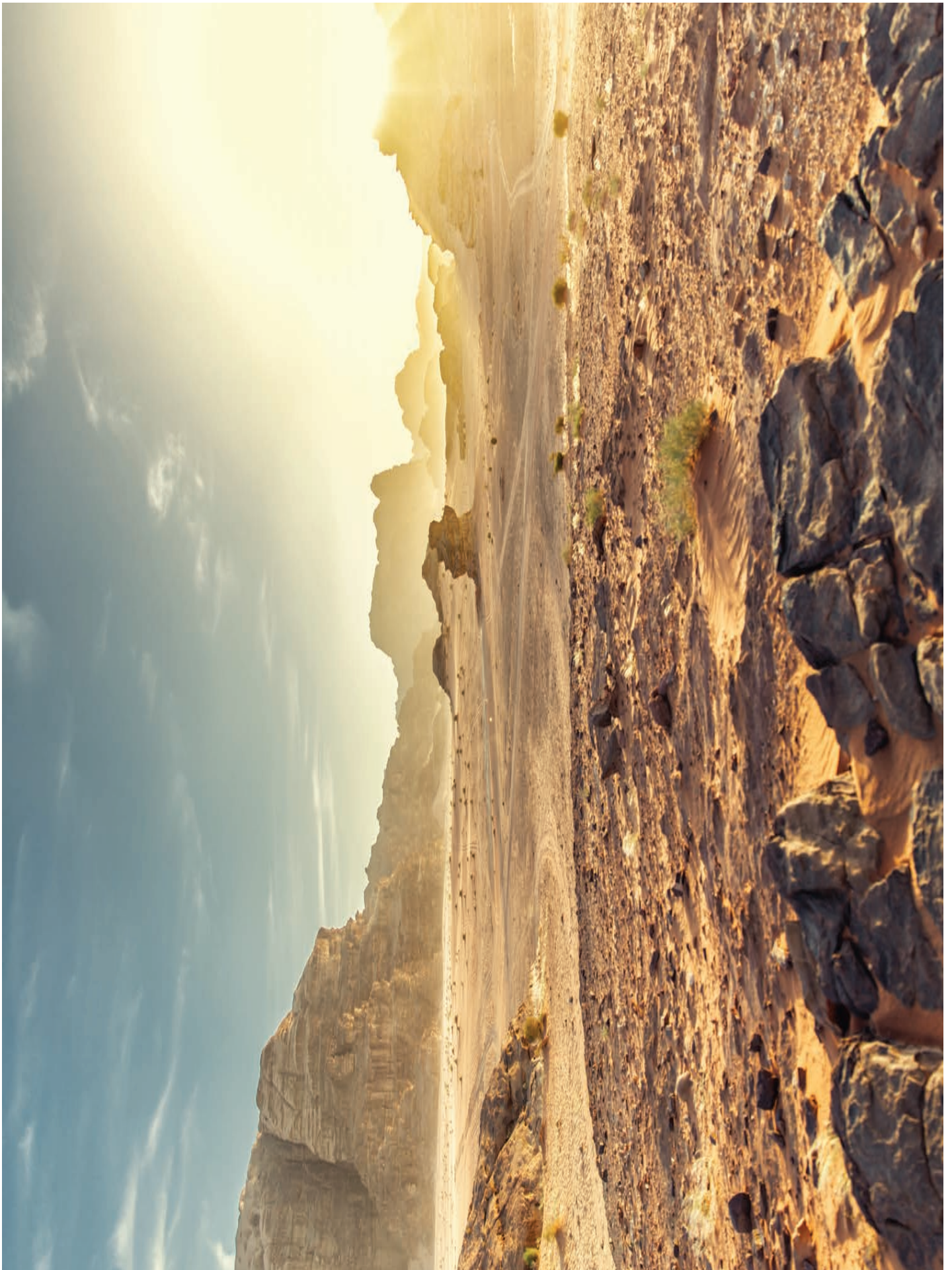
"God will make it happen," proclaimed Isaiah. "Just like a shepherd who gathers the lambs in his arms, God will take care of us and lead us home."

"God will take us home!" exclaimed the people. "This is good news! God is coming to save us!"

The people gave thanks for God's message of hope. They looked forward to returning home. Some day the waiting would be over and God's promise would come true. God would make it happen.

I wonder, "What did the people do to remain hopeful while waiting?"





Jesus' Family Tree

(based on Matthew 1:1–17)

One day when Jesus was a boy, he might have asked his mother, “Ima [EE-ma], who are my people? At synagogue today, Rabbi said he was from the tribe of Asher. Who am I from?”

I wonder, “Who am I from?”

Mary probably said, “Let’s go talk with your father. He loves to tell this story.”

Joseph said, “My son, who you come from and who your people are is a great question. You will recognize some names, and they all have a story to tell—some exciting and some ordinary—but all tried to walk faithfully with our God.” Joseph continued, “Jesus, you are the son of Abraham and the son of David.”

Jesus nodded. He knew that all the Jewish people were from Abba Abraham. “Wait! I am from King David?” he gasped.

Joseph began again, “Yes, Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah . . .”

Jesus couldn’t help himself. “Judah? I am from the tribe of Judah the Lion? Wow!”

Joseph continued, “And Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron. . . .” The names kept rolling on, “. . . and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed . . .”

“Wait a minute,” Jesus interrupted. “Ruth. That’s the third woman you’ve mentioned. Why do you say their names?”

Mary said, “Jesus, there are women and men of faith in our story, but often it is the men who get recognized. These women were brave and took great risks. Ruth wasn’t Jewish, but she pledged her loyalty to her mother-in-law Naomi and to our God. She became the great-grandmother of King David. You must always respect women and tell their stories too, my son.”

Jesus nodded. “Tell me more about David,” he begged.

I wonder, “Do you remember stories about David?”

Joseph said, “You know he was a great king, yet . . .” he paused and then continued, “even David, as well as others, made mistakes or bad choices, but that doesn’t mean that they aren’t important members of our family story. We are like everyone else. We try to be faithful and follow God, but sometimes we fail. Now, we’re only halfway through!”

Joseph continued, “Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David . . .” He continued for fourteen more generations until he said, “and Jacob, your grandfather, was my father, and I, Joseph, am the husband of your mother, Mary.”

Jesus probably thanked his parents and ran off to play, thinking of all he had heard. Then a funny thought popped into his head. “Hmm,” he thought, “Abba didn’t say he was my father. I wonder what that means? I think there’s more to this story!”





Abraham



Isaac



Jacob



Judah



Tamar



Ruth



David



Joseph



Jesus

Joseph's Dream

(based on Matthew 1:18–24)

Mary and Joseph lived in a small town in Nazareth. They were planning to get married.

I wonder, "What plans did Mary and Joseph have for their wedding?"

Before they got married, something unexpected happened. An angel came to Mary with a message. God had chosen Mary to be the mother of a very special baby. This baby would come from the Holy Spirit.

Mary went to Joseph and told him about the angel and the special baby. Joseph was worried.

I wonder, "How did Mary feel after she told Joseph about the baby?"

"How can Mary be having a baby when we aren't married?" Joseph wondered. "What am I going to do?"

After a lot of thinking, Joseph decided that he would not marry Mary. He sadly made plans to call off the wedding.

Then an angel came to him in a dream.

"Joseph, the baby growing in Mary comes from God," the angel explained. "Go ahead and marry her. When the baby is born, call him Jesus. That name means 'God saves.' When this baby grows up, he will be Emmanuel, which means 'God is always with us.'"

I wonder, "How was Joseph able to sleep after that dream?"

So, Mary and Joseph got married just as they had planned. Soon it was time to get everything ready for the new baby. Mary and Joseph were excited and scared all at the same time. Still they knew that God would be with them, and they were glad.



Grace in a Manger

(based on Luke 2:1-7)

It was almost time for Mary to have her baby. “The baby will be coming soon,” she said to Joseph. Mary and Joseph had worked hard to get everything ready. They were very excited to welcome baby Jesus.

I wonder, “What did Mary and Joseph do to get ready for baby Jesus?”

Then one day they got some bad news. The Roman Emperor wanted to count all the people. Mary and Joseph had to travel all the way to Bethlehem. The Emperor said they had to go there to be counted.

Mary and Joseph didn’t want to go, but it was the law. They gathered some blankets and some food. Mary took along some things for her baby.

I wonder, “What items did Mary pack for the baby?”

It was a very long journey. Mary and Joseph were exhausted when they reached Bethlehem. The little town was busy and crowded because many people had come to be counted.

Mary and Joseph needed to rest. It was time for Mary to have her baby, but all the rooms in the inn were taken. The only place left was the stable where the animals lived. It wasn’t the best place to stay, but at least it was dry. In that place, with animals all around them, Mary’s baby was born.

Mary wrapped baby Jesus in some long strips of cloth she had brought. They made a little bed in the manger so that Jesus could sleep.

Mary and Joseph looked at their new baby. They remembered how the angel had come with the news that they would have a special child. The angel had promised that one day Jesus would grow up to tell everyone about God’s love.

Mary and Joseph had been looking forward to welcoming their baby. Now Jesus had arrived safely.

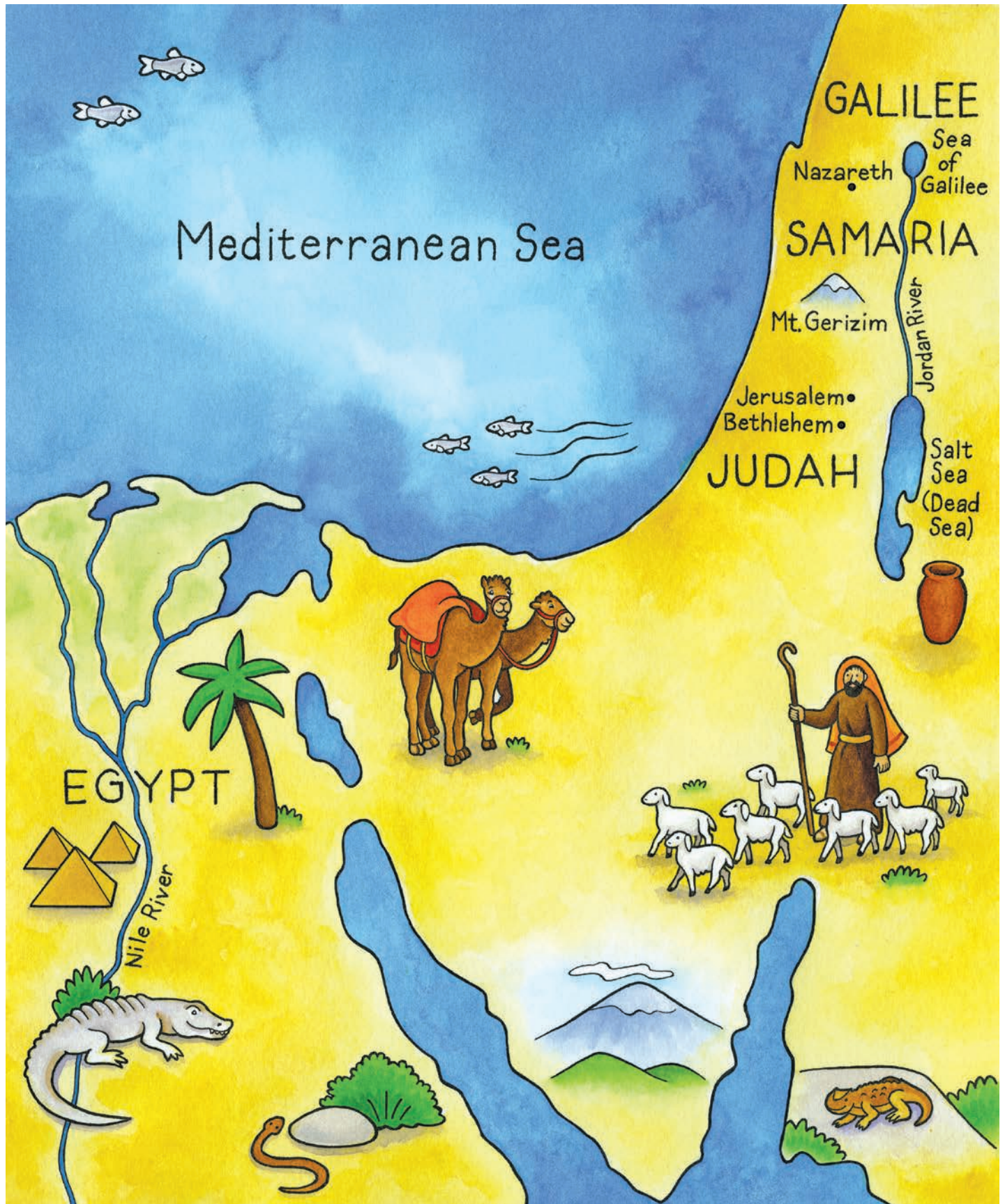
Mary looked at Joseph. “It seems a strange place for such a special baby to be born,” she whispered.

“It is,” Joseph agreed. “But God is with us in this place.”

I wonder, “Where would Mary and Joseph have imagined having their baby?”

Then Mary and Joseph said “thank you” to God for their beautiful baby.





Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing, . . .

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, . . .

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found, . . .

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love, . . .



Words: Isaac Watts, The Psalms of David, 1719.

Gifts for the Baby King

(based on Matthew 2:1-12)

A long time ago, a group of wise men watched the stars in the sky. They were called magi. One evening, they saw something much unexpected. It was a brand-new star.

I wonder, "What did the magi look like?"

The magi started to talk about the new star. Where had it come from? What did it mean? After a lot of talking and studying, they realized that this was a very important star. It was a star with a very special message for them.

"A new king has been born."

"We must leave immediately," they said. "We must follow that star, find the child, and bow down to the new king."

So, they decided to go and find the new king. Each one packed up for the long journey. And each one chose a special gift to give to the child.

I wonder, "What were the special gifts?"

It was a very long journey. Most of the time, the magi traveled at night so that they could follow the star.

Eventually after many nights of traveling, they arrived at the city of Jerusalem and went to the royal palace of King Herod.

"We saw a special star in the sky that told us a new king has been born in your country," they explained. Where can we find the child?"

I wonder, "What did the special star look like?"

Herod was not happy to hear what the travelers had to say. Herod was afraid that this baby might become king instead of him, so he pretended to be friendly. "My helpers tell me that this special child is in Bethlehem," Herod said. "Why don't you find the child, then come back and tell me where to go. I want to bring gifts to the child too."

So, the magi went to Bethlehem. The bright star went ahead of them leading the way. Finally, it stopped over the house where Jesus lived. The travelers went into the house and saw Jesus with Mary, his mother. One by one, they knelt down and gave Jesus special gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

That night God spoke to the travelers in their dreams. God warned them not to go back to Herod, so they went home a different way.





God Protects Jesus' Family

(based on Matthew 2:7-15, 19-23)

Joseph was dreaming. Something was wrong. Jesus was in danger. God sent an angel to warn Joseph. The angel came to him in a dream.

“Get up, Joseph! Get up now!” the angel shouted. “King Herod is angry. He is going to look for Jesus. It is not safe for you to stay here. Take Mary and Jesus and go to Egypt. Go now and wait until I tell you to come back.”

I wonder, “Why was King Herod angry?”

Joseph woke up with a start. His heart was pounding. He woke Mary.

“We have to leave right now!” Joseph explained. “God has sent a message. It is not safe for us to stay here. We must leave immediately.”

Mary and Joseph quickly gathered up the things they would need. It was time to make another long journey with their son, Jesus.

I wonder, “What would they pack if they were in such a rush?”

It took weeks and weeks for them to travel to Egypt. They knew that God was with them, so they felt safe as they walked.

Finally, they arrived in Egypt and found a place to live. It was hard learning to live in a new land. Everything was different and strange at first. Still, at least they were safe.

I wonder, “What did they do while they were in Egypt?”

Mary and Joseph remembered the stories from long ago when the Hebrew people had been slaves in Egypt. They told Jesus the story of how God had sent Moses to lead the people to the Promised Land. The family waited for God to tell them that it was safe for them to leave Egypt and return home.

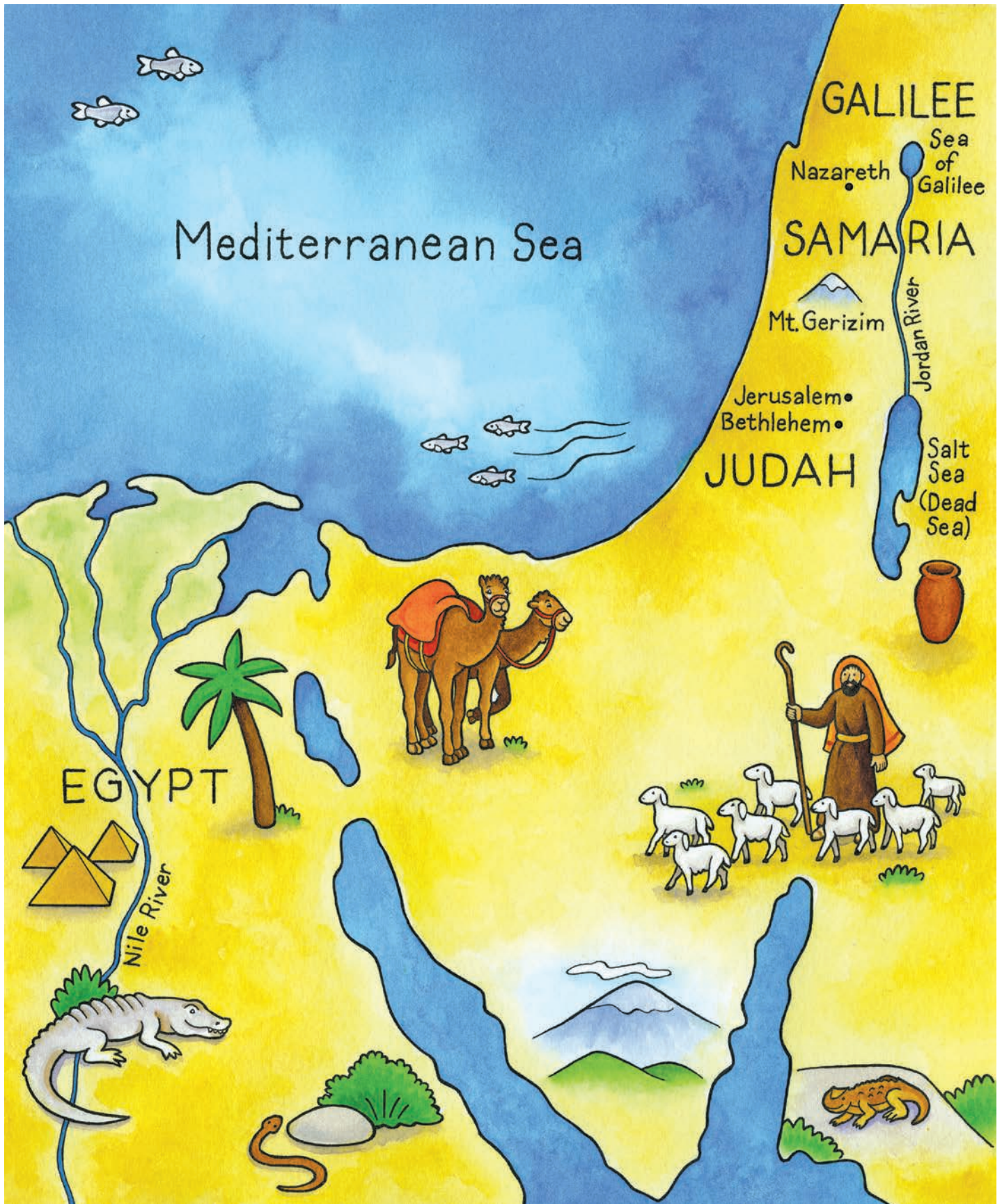
One night the angel returned to speak to Joseph in a dream.

“King Herod has died,” the angel explained. “Now it is safe for you to go home.”

Mary and Joseph packed up their things and made the long journey back. They were so excited to see their family and friends again.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus returned home to Nazareth, where they could live in peace and where Jesus could grow up safe and happy.





John Baptizes Jesus

(based on Matthew 3:13-17)

John was a messenger sent from God. He worked hard to teach everyone he met about how God wanted them to live. When people were willing to follow God's way, they came to find John by the river to say they were sorry to God and to be baptized. As the people came near, John shouted, "Repent! Change! Turn back to God! Live new lives! The kingdom of heaven is near!"

I wonder, "How many people came to the river to see John?"

One by one, people followed John into the river where he gently held them while the water washed over their heads. Then he said a prayer: "Now you are baptized, go and live in God's loving ways." When the people came out of the water, they were ready for a fresh new start. It was a wonderful feeling.

One day Jesus walked down to the river to see John. Jesus wanted to be baptized too.

John looked at Jesus. John knew that Jesus was very important to God.

I wonder, "How did John know that Jesus was important to God?"

"You should be baptizing me," said John. "Why have you come here?"

"This is what God wants," replied Jesus. "God wants you to baptize me."

John and Jesus waded into the water. John gently held Jesus while the water washed over his head, and then John said a prayer. As Jesus came out of the water, something amazing happened. The sky opened, and God's Spirit came to rest on him like a dove.

Then God spoke to the crowd from heaven,

"This is my beloved son, and I am pleased with him."

I wonder, "What did God's voice sound like?"

Jesus saw the dove and heard God's words. It was the start of something new for him. Now Jesus was ready to begin his work. He was prepared to teach people about God's grace.



Fishers of People

(based on Matthew 4:18–22)

Jesus had some extraordinary experiences before he began his ministry. He met John at the Jordan River and was baptized. A voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved son, and I am pleased with him.” Well, those were words to get Jesus moving! He went into the wilderness for forty days and was tested. He came through with flying colors. No question he knew who he was. Jesus had work to do, and the time had come.

So, he began proclaiming, “Repent! Change your hearts and lives! God’s kingdom is here.” It was lonely work, and it was a big task. Jesus knew he would need help if he were to reach people near and far.

I wonder, “Who would help Jesus?”

One day, Jesus was walking alongside the Sea of Galilee. He saw two brothers who were fishermen: Simon, who everybody called Peter, and Andrew. He had often seen them early in the mornings, preparing their nets to go out to sea and catch fish. Day in and day out, they worked. It was hard work, and they were devoted to it. These were the kind of helpers he would need. It was OK that they were fishermen and not preachers. They had dedication.

Jesus called them by name, “Peter! Andrew!”

Peter and Andrew looked up from their nets to see who was calling them, although later they would both say that they knew Jesus’ voice the minute he said their names. They nodded at Jesus in the way a hard-working person does in the middle of a task.

“Come, follow me!” Jesus invited. And then he said something that the brothers still smile at the memory, “I will show you how to fish for people.”

I wonder, “How can you fish for people?”

Well, Jesus caught their attention, and their hearts. They put down the nets, stood up, and walked over to him. Jesus clasped their hands warmly in his, and they knew they were right where they were supposed to be.

They walked along the shore a bit farther and saw the Zebedee brothers, James and John. They were moored about twenty feet out in the shallow water, repairing nets with their father in the boat.

Jesus called to them as well, “James! John! Come, follow me!”

The brothers, to this day, don’t know who jumped in the water first. But there they were, splashing their way to the shore and leaving their father quite surprised in the boat.

That was just the beginning, but Jesus knew he would call men and women, youth and children, to follow him, to help him spread his message about God’s love. And they would catch people with their good news!

I wonder, “What good news would they share?”



Obey

verb, \oh-bey\

obeyed; obeying

1 : to follow the commands or guidance of

He always obeys his parents.

late 13c., from Old French *obeir* “obey, be obedient, do one’s duty” (12c.), from Latin *obedire*, *oboedire* “obey, be subject, serve; pay attention to, give ear,” literally “listen to,” from *ob* “to” (see ob-) + *audire* “listen, hear.”

Disciple

noun \dis-ci·ple, dí-'sī-pəl/

1 : a follower or student of a teacher/leader

Jesus called disciples to follow him.

Old English *discipul* (fem. *discipula*), “one who follows another for the purpose of learning,” especially “the personal followers of Jesus Christ during his life, the twelve Apostles chosen or called by him to be his immediate associates,” a biblical borrowing from Latin *discipulus* “pupil, student, follower,” which is of uncertain origin.



Who was
James's brother?

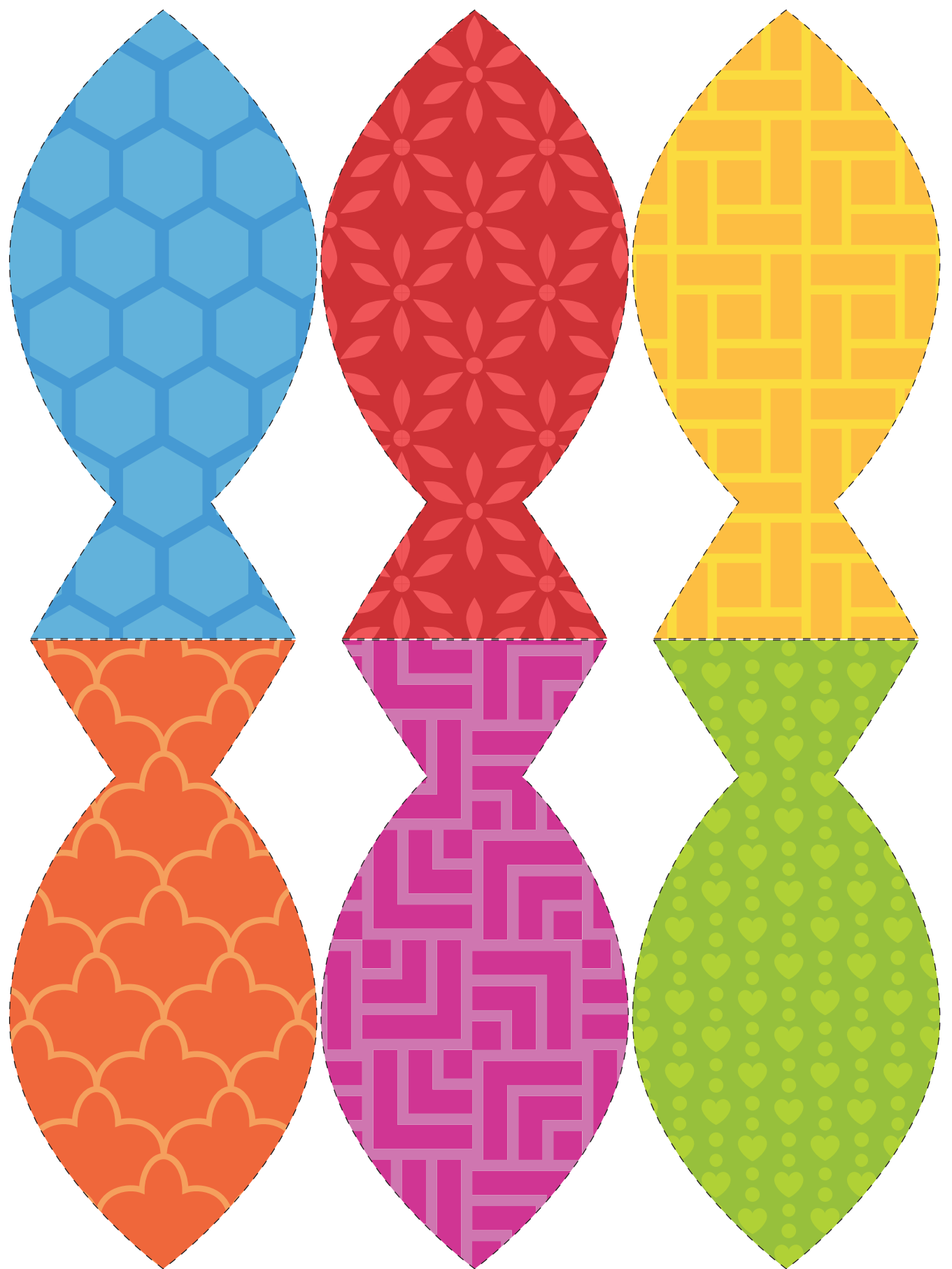
What job did Jesus'
first disciples have?

Jesus told the first
disciples that they would
now fish for what?

What did the first
disciples do when
Jesus called them
to follow him?

What does it
mean to obey?

Who was
Andrew's brother?



What is a way you
can share Jesus
with others?

What does it mean
to be a disciple?

What does it mean
to “fish for people”?

What is a way that
you can obey Jesus?

Where can you
“fish for people”?

What is a way you are
a disciple of Jesus?

You Are Blessed

(based on Matthew 4:23–5:11)

Large crowds followed Jesus wherever he went. There were mothers and fathers, children and babies, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. There were sick people and lonely people. Some people came with questions, and some wanted to know more. They had all come to see Jesus.

I wonder, “Why did the crowds follow Jesus?”

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down. His disciples gathered around to listen. Jesus began to teach about people who are blessed.

“Do you see the people who rely on God? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

“Do you see the people who are sad? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

“Do you see the people who stay calm even when others try to upset them? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

“Do you see the people who listen for God’s voice in their lives? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

“Do you see the people who show kindness? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

“Do you see the people who get into trouble for doing the right thing? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

“Do you see the people who bring peace to troubled places? The grace of God is with them.”

Response: Thanks be to God.

Jesus’ words were passed from one person to another.

“I try to obey God every day,” said one person. “The grace of God is with me.”

Response: You are blessed.

“I have to rely on God for everything,” exclaimed another. “The grace of God is with me.”

Response: You are blessed.

“You are kind,” said one friend to another. “The grace of God is with you.”

Response: You are blessed.

“We use kind words to encourage others,” cried two women. “The grace of God is with us.”

“The grace of God is with us all,” the crowd exclaimed. “We are blessed!”

I wonder, “How does it feel to be blessed?”

The people gave thanks for God’s love and blessings.



You Are Salt and Light

(based on Matthew 5:13–20)

Jesus was walking from town to town, from region to region. Many people—men and women, boys and girls—followed Jesus, hoping to hear his teachings and maybe witness a miracle.

When Jesus saw the crowds of people, he went up a mountain. He sat down with his friends and began to speak about God's blessings. The disciples knew that when a teacher like Jesus sat down, he was going to say important things. So the disciples became quiet, eager to hear what else he had to say. His words were like nothing they'd ever heard before. He said:

"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."

Jesus paused and looked at them and studied the faces of the disciples. He wondered if they understood what he meant.

The disciples looked at each other with questions—"What does that mean?" "How can we be salt and light?"

Peter said to no one in particular, "Salt makes food taste good. And it stops food from going bad."

I wonder, "How does salt stop food from going bad?"

"That's right," said Jesus. "Salt makes our lives better. Without salt, our life would be a lot harder. When you live in God's way of kindness and love, you make life better for other people and yourselves."

"And light," said Peter, "light makes our lives better by shining in the dark, lighting a path so that we don't stumble in the night."

"You are right again, Peter. Light helps us see." Wonderful, Jesus thought. He gets it.

"Good job, Peter" said Jesus. "When you light a lamp, you don't cover it with a basket. No, you put the lamp where it will give light to every corner of the room."

"Just like that lamp, let your light, God's light, shine brightly so that everyone can see it. Then they will know what good things God has done and they can tell others."

I wonder, "How big would the basket have to be to cover God's light?"

This brought smiles to the faces of the disciples. And Jesus continued, "God's law is still important. Pay attention to it, and you will be called great in God's world."

The disciples realized that if they lived in God's ways of love they made the world a better place just like salt. And light.

Soon it was time to go home.

"Don't forget to be salt and light," they said to each other, smiling.

They were ready to make the world a better place.

I wonder, "How can we make the world a better place?"



God Cares for All

(based on Matthew 6:25–33)

Jesus and his disciples were spreading the good news about God's love everywhere they went. Large crowds began to follow him, wanting to hear his words. On a large grassy hill, covered in wildflowers and trees, Jesus gathered people. He wanted them to know how much God loved them. He wanted to help them learn to live in God's way.

Jesus knew that the people had worries. He wanted to comfort them and give them hope.

I wonder, "What did the people worry about?"

Jesus looked at the people and said, "Don't worry so much about what you will eat or drink or what you will wear. Life is so much more than food, and the body is about more than clothes."

The people looked confused.

There were birds of all colors and sizes flying in the air and perched on branches in the trees. "Look!" Jesus exclaimed. "Look at the birds. They don't plant seeds, harvest the grain, and store it in barns. Yet God provides for them. Aren't you worth more than the birds?"

A few people started to respond, "But . . ." "What do I . . . ?" "How will we . . . ?"

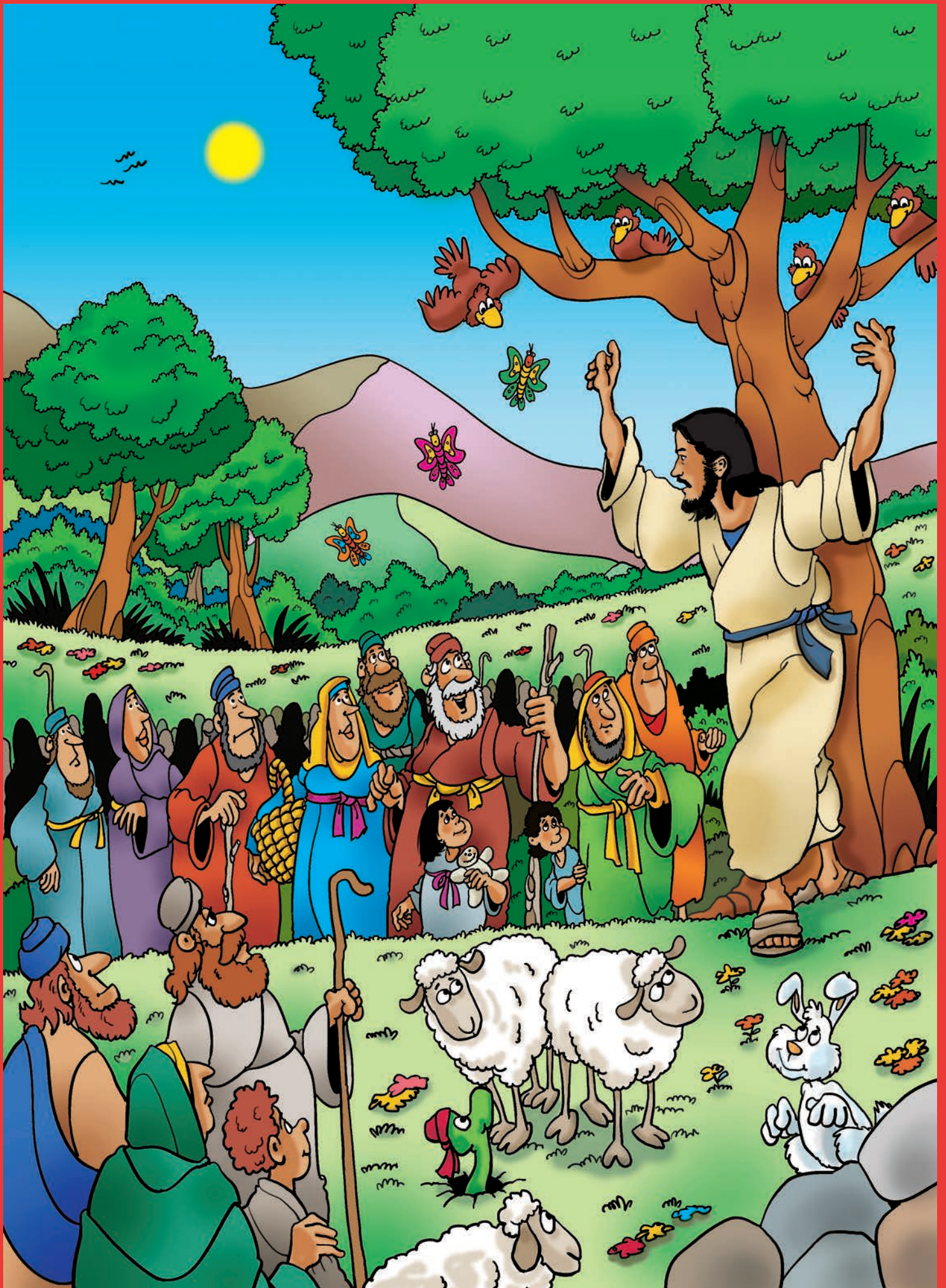
He said, "Do you think you can add a single moment to your life by worrying about these things?" He continued, "And clothes. You do not need to worry about clothes. Look around at all the wildflowers in the fields. The flowers don't work, make cloth, and dress themselves, but look at all their colors and designs. Even King Solomon in all his splendor didn't look as fine and fancy as these flowers. Think about it. If God dresses up the grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow is wilted, withered, and walked on, won't God do so much more for you? Sometimes you do not have faith in our God to take care of you!"

Jesus wasn't unfeeling. He knew that people were hungry and thirsty and poor, but he wanted to remind them how they could depend on God for their needs and how living in God's ways meant taking care of one another too.

I wonder, "How can we take care of one another?"

Jesus said, "So don't 'But . . .' or 'What do I . . . ?' or 'How will we . . . ?' You don't need to worry. People who do not know our God worry about these things. Our God knows that you need to eat and drink and have clothes. Here's what you should spend your time and energy on: seek God's kingdom, God's way of living and caring for one another. When we all do this, we will all have what we need to live."

I wonder, "What is God's kingdom like?"



Specks and Logs

(based on Matthew 7:1–5, 12)

Jesus was traveling around the Sea of Galilee, telling people about the good news of God's love and how to live in God's ways. People gathered to hear his message. And though his message was sometimes hard to hear because it asked for people to turn from sinful ways and follow God's ways, Jesus offered hope and new life.

I wonder, "How did people travel in Jesus' time?"

One time, the crowd of people was so large that Jesus had to walk up a hill so that the people could see and hear him. He looked out over the gathering of women and men, youth and children. He spoke words of blessing and comfort. He challenged them to think and live differently than they had been. He taught them about God and how to live together as God's people.

At one point, Jesus said, "Don't judge others so that you are not judged by them. What I'm saying is, if you pick on people, if you criticize their faults and failures, you open yourself up to being treated the same way."

People looked nervously at each other. Everyone knew that at one time or another they had been quick to criticize a neighbor or cousin. It was easy to pick on a brother or sister for mistakes they've made.

I wonder, "How did people point out the faults of their neighbor or cousin?"

Jesus picked up on their discomfort, so he thought of something that might help them understand. He said, "Telling someone they have done something wrong is like seeing a speck in their eye. You point it out, saying, 'Hey! Look at that speck in your eye! You must not be able to see what you are doing. Let me help you be a better person by pointing out that speck.' But what you don't realize is that you have a log in your own eye!"

"A log?" the people gasped. Children giggled. It was funny to imagine a log sticking out of someone's eye! Jesus sure was funny.

"Yes," Jesus continued, "a log. Some blunders are so big and ridiculous that it would be like having a giant log in your eye. How can you even begin to see the faults of others when you have some yourself? Why do you criticize others? Don't you see you've made your own mistakes? Take care of yourself before you start picking on other people's problems."

The people nodded understandingly.

Jesus said, "Treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you. That's everything that our law and prophets have taught us—to love our neighbors as ourselves."

I wonder, "How can I treat people better?"





A family moved into a new apartment. One morning while they were eating breakfast, the daughter, Karen, looked out the window and to the apartment across the street, where a man was hanging laundry out to dry.

“That laundry is not clean!” Karen exclaimed. “Our neighbor doesn’t know how to get clothes clean!”

Karen’s dad looked but didn’t say anything.

Three more days that week, her neighbor hung his laundry to dry. All three times, Karen looked out the window and said that the neighbor didn’t know how to get his laundry clean.

The next week, Karen was surprised to look across to the other apartment and see clean laundry hanging on her neighbor’s balcony. She said to her dad, “Look, our neighbor learned how to clean his clothes!”

Karen’s dad said, “Sweetheart, he knew all along. I got up early this morning and washed our windows!”

The Two Houses

(based on Matthew 7:24–29)

One day, Jesus told a story to help the disciples think about something important:

“Two people wanted to build new houses. They both went looking for a good place to build their homes.

I wonder, “What would make a good place to build a home?”

“The first person thought carefully about the house before the building started. She wanted a house that was strong and well built. And so, she wisely decided to build her house on a sturdy rock that would never move.

“She dug the foundations, carefully built the walls from sturdy materials, and made the house look beautiful.

“When she was finished, the wise builder looked at her strong, beautiful house and was pleased.

“The second person also wanted a house that was well built. However, he foolishly decided to build his house on sand.

“He dug the foundations, carefully built the walls from sturdy materials, and made the house look beautiful.

“When he was finished, the foolish builder looked at his beautiful house and was pleased.

“One day there was a terrible storm. Lightning flashed, and thunder roared. Rain poured down, the river flooded, and the wind blew hard on the two houses.

I wonder, “What will happen to the two houses?”

“The first house stood strong and firm because it was built on a sturdy rock. Nothing could move that house. When the storm passed, the house was still standing.

“The second house did not fare so well. The river washed away the sand, so there was nothing left to hold up the house. The wind blew the walls over with a big crash. When the storm passed, the house was gone.”

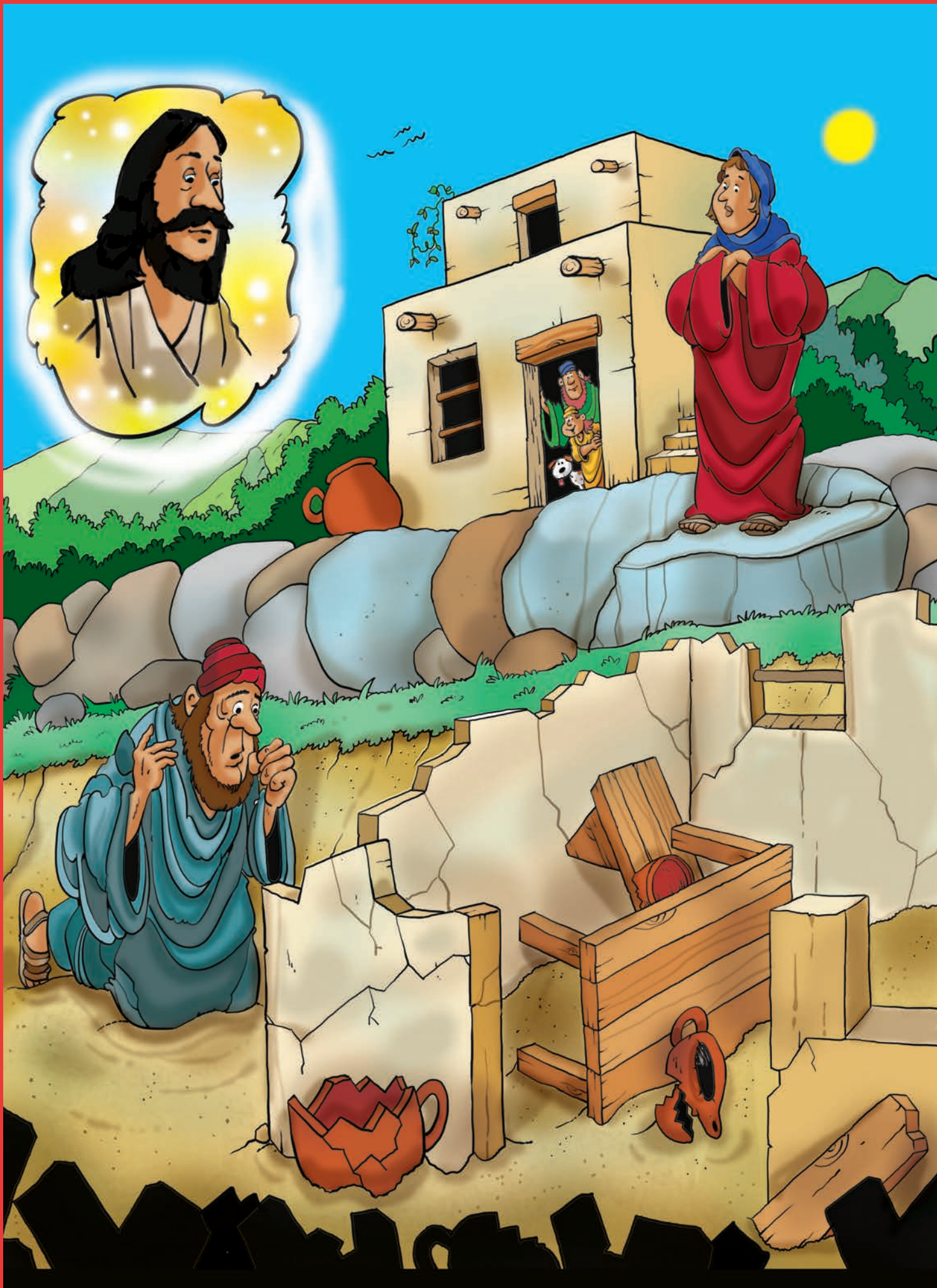
I wonder, “How are the houses like you and me?”

When Jesus finished telling the story, he sat down. Jesus knew that the disciples listened carefully to all his words. He said:

“Anyone who hears my teaching and tries hard to do what I say will be like the wise person. They will build a strong foundation for life. When trouble comes, they will be OK, just like the house built on the rock.

“Whoever hears my teaching and does not do what I say will be like the foolish person. They will not have a strong foundation for life. When trouble comes, they won’t know what to do and they will fall apart, just like the house built on the sand.”

Jesus told the story, so his friends would know it was important to follow the way that Jesus had shown them.





O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

God, we sing with praise to you,
Light the flame of *hope* anew;
Light this candle, light the way,
Bring hope into our hearts today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts today.

God, we sing with praise to you,
Light the flame of *peace* anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise to you,
Light the flame of *love* anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise to you,
Light the flame of *joy* anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise to you,
Light the flame of Christ anew;
Light this candle, light the way,
We celebrate new life today.
Christ, be near us as we pray
And celebrate new life today.



Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing; the poor baby wakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.



These wise men,
these wise men,
see how they come,
see how they come,
with frankincense and myrrh and gold,
they come across the desert bold
to bring their gifts of wealth untold.
These wise men.



Take me to the water. Take me to the water.
Take me to the water to be baptized.

I love Jesus. I love Jesus.
I love Jesus; yes, I do.

He's my Savior. He's my Savior.
He's my Savior; yes, he is.

Glory hallelujah. Glory hallelujah.
Glory hallelujah to be baptized.

We are blessed to be a blessing;
we are blessed to be a blessing.
We are blessed to be a blessing,
growing in the grace of God.

Refrain:

*Growing in the grace of God,
growing in the grace of God,
we are blessed to be a blessing,
growing in the grace of God.*

Just like Jesus helping others, . . .

Just like Jesus healing others, . . .

Just like Jesus feeding others, . . .

Just like Jesus teaching others, . . .

Just like Jesus loving others, . . .





Why should I feel discouraged?
Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely
and long for heaven and home,
when Jesus is my portion?
My constant friend is he:
his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me;
his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me.

Refrain:

*I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
for his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me.*



Jesus, Jesus,
Jesus in the morning,
Jesus in the noontime;
Jesus, Jesus,
Jesus when the sun goes down!

Praise him, praise him,
praise him in the morning,
praise him in the noontime;
praise him, praise him,
praise him when the sun goes down!

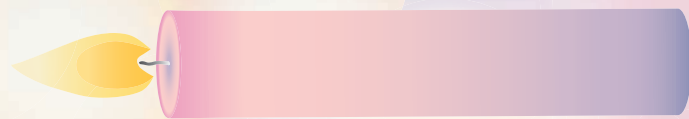
Love him, love him,
love him in the morning,
love him in the noontime;
love him, love him,
love him when the sun goes down!

Serve him, serve him,
serve him in the morning,
serve him in the noontime;
serve him, serve him,
serve him when the sun goes down!



Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light,
like a little candle burning in the night;
in this world is darkness, so let us shine,
you in your small corner, and I in mine.

Jesus bids us shine, first of all for him;
because he knows and loves us if our lights grow dim;
Jesus walks beside us to help us shine,
you in your small corner, and I in mine.



Jesus bids us shine, then, for all around,
many forms of darkness in the world are found;
sin and want and sorrows, so we must shine,
you in your small corner, and I in mine.

Thank you, God, for loving me,
thank you for my family,
thank you for all friends who show
love to me wherever I go.



Refrain:

I am the salt of the earth.

I am the light of the earth.

*I am the salt of earth,
and I'm gonna share the flavor of Christ. Oh yes!*

Salt so that I can share,
share the flavor of Christ,
light of the world is He
and I want to shine with love and with light. Oh yes!

(Refrain)

I am spreading the salt
so that new things can grow,
flowers of love and justice
that show the world the presence of God. Oh yes!

(Refrain)



This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

(Repeat two times)

let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

(Repeat two times)

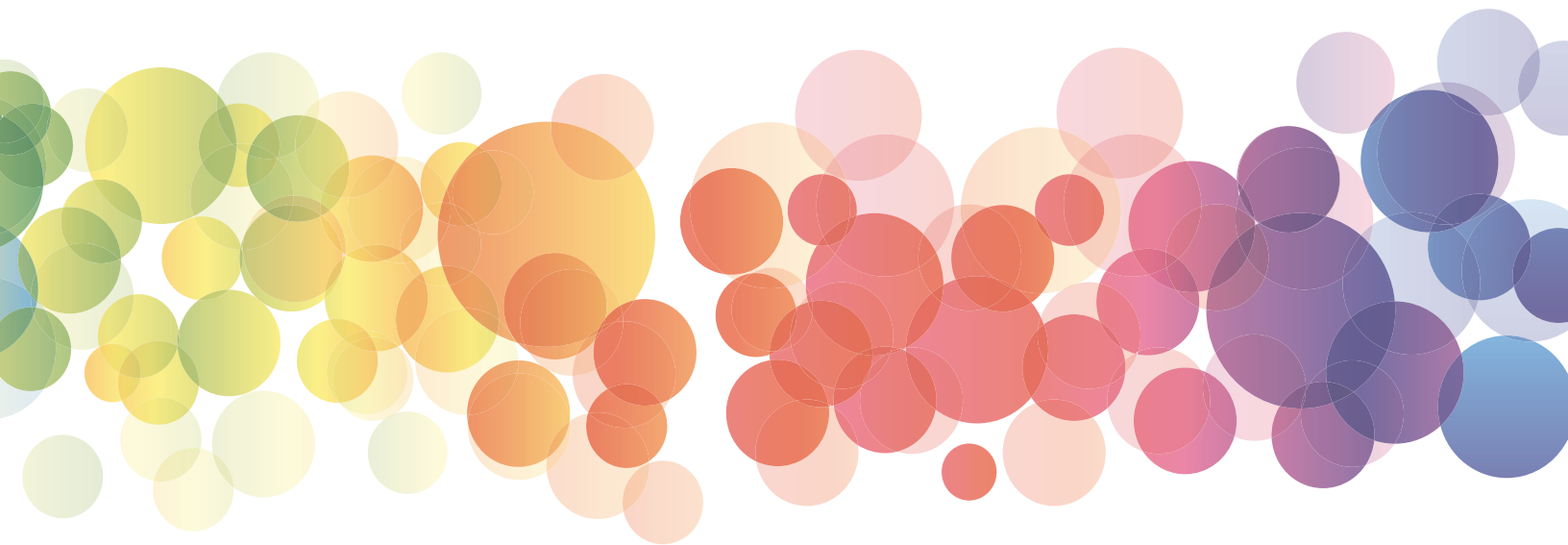
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

All through the night, I'm gonna let it shine.

(Repeat two times)

let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.





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