

2 Sam. 7:1–11, 16
 Luke 1:46b–55 or
 Ps. 89:1–4, 19–26
 Rom. 16:25–27
 Luke 1:26–38

Calling All Angels

Goal for the Session

Tweens will prepare for Christ's coming by engaging the story of the Annunciation and acting as messengers of good news.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 1:26–38

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Lewis R. Donelson

In many ways, the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary of the coming miraculous birth of Jesus reads almost exactly like the announcements of the wondrous births of Ishmael (Genesis 16:7–13), Isaac (Genesis 17:1–21; 18:1–15), Samson (Judges 13:3–20), and most obviously John the Baptist (Luke 1:8–20). This announcement is, of course, the second announcement of miraculous birth in the Gospel of Luke. Gabriel appears not only to Mary but, in 1:8–20, to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Thus, this passage is part of Luke’s careful interweaving of John the Baptist and Jesus, in which John serves largely in the role of Elijah preparing for the day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). Luke emphasizes John’s special calling and high status, while carefully elevating Jesus above John.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Cynthia L. Rigby

Mary has the reputation of being in perfect sync with God, responding to God’s command in absolute obedience. She is the “blessed one” who is called by God to bear the Christ child, the “servant of the Lord” who desires that God’s will come to fruition, even in and through her. Mary recognizes what all Christian believers must recognize—that we, creatures before the Creator God, are incapable, in and of ourselves, of accomplishing God’s will, but we can be instruments of God’s will.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Ashley Cook Cleere

Mary’s puzzlement grants permission to take time to adjust to astonishing news, to question whether or not trials and tragedies, or God’s magnificent promises, are for real, and to contemplate potential repercussions. The query “How can this be?” is a reverberating refrain that shapes our faith by reminding us how much is hidden from us. The exclamation of these four words may well signify the nearness of God. Perhaps Mary’s words deliver God’s Christmas wish, that followers of Christ will believe that nothing is impossible with God, and invite the Holy Spirit to work through them to attain miracles.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Kimberly Bracken Long

God’s coming reign of justice and favor for all people is embodied in God’s choosing to pour out the divine Spirit upon Mary, even within her, to bring about salvation for the whole world. That’s the sort of good news that we can hardly conjure up on our own. Dare we proclaim that God breaks in, to restore, reveal, and redeem the mess we have made of the world? Dare we proclaim that God’s gospel of justice and peace may turn our world upside down—and that this news is very, very good?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26–38

Focus on Your Teaching

In 2006, a poll by the Barna Group found that 89 percent of teens in the United States believe in the existence of angels. Adolescents were far less confident, however, in what they believe *about* such supernatural beings. Angels have made a comeback in recent pop culture and, of course, are prevalent during the holiday season. Today, you'll use Luke's story of Gabriel and Mary to challenge many popular ideas about angels, and to help learners believe in the most important kind of angels of all: real people, including them, who can and do act as messengers of God.

God, help these tweens and me live as your angels, communicating the good news of Jesus to each other and the world. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ blue or purple cloth
- ☐ 4 votive candles
- ☐ matches, if allowed
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ angel food cake, napkins
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 8, 9, 29, 33
- ☐ *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*; CD player
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ your church's hymnal or songbook

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: newspapers, magazines, copies of Resource Sheet 2, drawing paper, markers
- ☐ option 2: *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*; CD player
- ☐ option 3: computer or Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before learners arrive, use slips of paper to mark Isaiah 61:10a–b (through “. . . exult in my God”), Mark 1:3b (begin with “Prepare the way . . .”), Luke 1:37, and 1 Corinthians 1:9 in a Bible.

As you greet tweens, invite them to arrange the blue or purple cloth on the table, using the same color your church uses during Advent. Place Color Pack 1 on top of the cloth, and arrange four votive candles on top of the candles in the picture. (If open flames are not allowed, use battery-operated votives.)

Gather the group by singing “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 33; track 8 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*). Ask one volunteer to light all four votives while another volunteer reads aloud 1 Corinthians 1:9, Mark 1:3b, Isaiah 61:10a–b, and Luke 1:37.

Offer this prayer or one of your own:

God, may your Spirit strengthen us to remember Jesus' coming as a baby, to welcome him when he comes again to rule, and to receive him in our lives today. Amen.

Invite responses to the following question:

✠ What's the most important message you've ever delivered to someone?

EXPLORING

Being aware of food allergies, serve angel food cake for tweens to enjoy as you distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Angelic Attributions). Invite learners to look through the quotations, choosing one or two that grab their attention. Ask them to read aloud the quotations they choose, commenting on why they chose them.

The angel Gabriel also appears in Daniel (8:15–26; 9:20–27; possibly 10:5–12:13), where he interprets the prophet's visions of the future. The only other angel mentioned by name in the Protestant Bible is the archangel (chief angel) Michael (Jude 9).

Tell learners that the English word *angel* comes from the Greek word for “messenger.” Tell them that today’s Bible story is about an angel with an important announcement.

Have learners find Luke 1:26–38 in their Bibles, helping one another as needed. Recruit three volunteers to read the text aloud: two “in character” as Gabriel (direct speech in vv. 28, 30–33, 35–37) and Mary (direct speech in vv. 34, 38), and one as the narrator (the remaining verses). After the reading, use Bibles as needed to discuss these questions:

- ✠ What does Gabriel call Mary? (v. 28)
- ✠ How would you describe Mary’s initial reactions to Gabriel’s message? (vv. 29, 34)
- ✠ How does she finally respond? (v. 38)
- ✠ How does Gabriel reassure Mary? (vv. 35–37)
- ✠ What does Gabriel tell Mary about the child she will have? (vv. 32–33)
- ✠ Do you think Mary was free to reject Gabriel’s message? Why or why not?
- ✠ How do you react to Gabriel’s claim that nothing is impossible with God? (v. 37)

Some symbols commonly found in scenes of the Annunciation include the lily (symbolizing Mary’s purity), Gabriel’s staff (a sign of rank for imperial messengers), Mary’s book (the Scriptures, thus representing her piety) and the dove (symbolizing the Holy Spirit).

Display Color Pack 8 and 9. Explain that this story is often called the Annunciation, a word that means “announcement.” Invite tweens to compare and contrast these two artists’ interpretations of the Annunciation:

- ✠ How are these two images of the Annunciation alike? How are they different?
- ✠ How does each artist use lighting, color, and shape to create a mood in the picture?
- ✠ Which picture appeals to you more? Why?
- ✠ What does this art add to your understanding of the story?

Sing or read a hymn or song about the Annunciation from your church’s hymnal or songbook, such as “The Angel Gabriel.” Ask:

- ✠ What words does this hymn use for Gabriel’s message? How are these words like the words in Luke 1:26–38? How are they different?
- ✠ What does this music add to your understanding of the story?

Ask learners to look ahead to Luke 1:47–55 (a lectionary option for the third and fourth Sundays of Advent). This is Mary’s song of praise to God when she visited Elizabeth after Gabriel’s visit. Invite learners to follow along as you read these verses, looking for ways in which Mary is now God’s messenger. Ask:

- ✠ What message(s) does Mary proclaim about Jesus?
- ✠ What message(s) do you have to proclaim about Jesus?
- ✠ How can you be a messenger and tell others about the importance of Jesus’ birth?

EASY
PREP

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

Refrain: Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.

While shepherds kept their watching
Over silent flocks by night
Behold throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.

Refrain

The shepherds feared and trembled,
When lo! above the earth,
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed the Savior's birth.

Refrain

Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn.

Refrain

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Mixed Messages** To contrast the messages we often receive in our culture with the messages we receive from God, ask tweens to look through newspapers and magazines for examples of advertising that seem to send messages that are contrary to God's messages. For example, learners might find ads that promote unhealthy food and drink choices, encourage excessive attention to material goods, or rely on unrealistic body images to sell products. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Mixed Messages) and read the information together. Challenge youth to write and draw "advertising" that presents a message from God for young people today. Display these messages in the hallways of your church.
- 2. Angelic Encounters** To think about how God uses people as messengers, play "Music for Meditation" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*) and invite tweens to recall times when they thought or felt God might be using someone else to send them a message. After some quiet time for reflection, ask volunteers to tell about their experiences. Ask each one: What message from God do you think this person brought you? How did you respond? Thank learners who tell their stories, affirming them as "angels" or messengers for talking about their experiences.
- 3. Message and Media** Challenge tweens to think about how to use technology to be God's messengers of good news. Discuss: In what ways might a person use technology to be an "angel" of God? What unique opportunities and challenges does modern technology present for Christians as God's messengers? Form pairs to write a Facebook status update or a Twitter "tweet" in which they share a message about celebrating Jesus' birth. Post these or ask learners to do so from their home computers.

CLOSING

Gather as a group around the Advent wreath and light all four votives. Invite tweens to tell what they will remember about the story of the Annunciation. Offer this prayer or one of your own:

God, you do not remain hidden and silent, but make yourself known in countless ways. Breathe your Spirit into us again, that we may sing of your steadfast love forever, and proclaim your faithfulness to all people as we celebrate the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Teacher: Go and reach out into the world with words and deeds of God's love and blessing.

All: Amen! (*All clap.*)

Invite tweens to clap along with the music as they sing "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" (Color Pack 29; track 7 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*).

Wish each learner a merry Christmas as the group departs.

December 24, 2023
Calling All Angels

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING on the WORD
CURRICULUM

Tweens
Resource Sheet 1

Angelic Attributions



Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings!
—said by Zuzu Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*



The poet Francis Thompson says . . . that the wings of angels beat upon our hearts, but we fail to pay attention.
—John and Katherine Paterson, *Images of God*



God will command his angels to protect you wherever you go.
—Psalm 91:11 (CEV)

Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.
—G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

I can spot a commandment-breaker a mile away.
—said by Loki, a fallen angel, in *Dogma*



The harvest is the end of time, and angels are the ones who bring in the harvest.
—Matthew 13:39 (CEV)



One time I put the face of the Lord on a bowl of oatmeal. But mostly I just take people up to see God.
—said by the angel Asphodel in *A Prairie Home Companion*

If the fact that all the heavenly host are keeping watch for his safety will not satisfy a man, I do not see what benefit he could derive from knowing that one angel has been given to him as his especial guardian.
—John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.XIV.7



Even Satan tries to make himself look like an angel of light.
—2 Corinthians 11:14 (CEV)

Mixed Messages

Did you know that, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, in 2006, the average child saw about 40,000 commercials every year? That's just on TV! In addition, ads are seen in magazines, in newspapers, on billboards, and on clothing. While many people now stream content with fewer ads, children have more access to online content with an even greater number of ads—even in games children play. You can quickly realize what a staggering amount of money companies spend to send you messages.

The bottom-line message is usually “Buy!” But advertising can contain other messages, too—messages that aren't always easy to spot and aren't always telling the truth about the world or about who you are.

Scripture tells us to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). That's good advice when it comes to advertising, too. Not all the messages you see and hear are messages that agree with God's Word or encourage us to live in God's ways.

Here are some questions to ask to help you “test the spirits” of advertising:

- ✧ How important do people in your community consider the advertised product to be? To what extent is the advertised product a source of controversy or tension in your community?
- ✧ What claims does the ad make about the product, either directly or indirectly? How reasonable are these claims? How might you prove or disprove these claims?
- ✧ In what ways does the ad show people? What do you notice about their gender, race, age, and relationships with each other?
- ✧ What comparisons does the ad make?
- ✧ What attitudes does the ad communicate?

And, as Christians, we also ask:

- ✧ How does this ad reinforce or challenge Jesus' values, as the church and I understand them?