Explore it

Love is a Promise (1)



Bible verses:

Luke 1:5-20 Zechariah and Elizabeth



Aim:

To know that Zechariah's prayers were answered



Today's fruit:

Patience



In today's session we see how God answered Zechariah and Elizabeth's long-awaited prayer for a child.

Even though they had waited for many years, God had not forgotten Zechariah and Elizabeth. Through the angel's message, God promised the birth of John, a baby who would prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah. As we begin Advent, we remember that love is a promise: God hears our prayers, keeps his word, and calls us to wait with patience and hope.

Just like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we need to show patience as we wait for answers to our prayers.

Each child will need:

- Memory verse wristband
- A clear plastic cup or a jam jar, tracing paper or plain paper, scissors, sticky tape, pens/ pencils and a battery tea light
- Explore It ideas handout

You will need:

- Christmas charades clues folded up and placed in a container see Start It
- Memory verse poster
- Fruit of the Spirit poster: Patience download from Salvationist
- To watch *Kids' Christmas Craft: Christmas Lanterns* by DK Books (3:29) for inspiration





In our Bible story today, the main character is silenced by God. So we are going to play a game where you are not allowed to speak. We are going to play *Christmas charades*.

Divide the group into two teams and let the children take turns acting out the Christmas clue for the rest of the team to guess. Keep a tally of the scores and see which team can guess the most Christmas words. You could either swap between teams each time or give them a certain amount of time to complete as many clues as possible.

Write a selection of Christmas-themed clues (examples below) prior to the session, fold them up and put them in a container.

- Baby Jesus
- Angel Gabriel
- Three Wise Men
- Shepherd
- Father Christmas
- Elves
- Frosty the Snowman
- Silent Night
- Deck the Halls

- Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
- The Nightmare Before Christmas
- Hark! the Herald Angels Sing
- All I want for Christmas is you
- Ebenezer Scrooge
- How the Grinch Stole Christmas
- Arthur Christmas
- Polar Express
- Home Alone



Say:

Our memory verse for this month comes from the Old Testament. It lets us know that the people had been waiting a long time for Jesus to be born.

Display the memory verse in the room where you meet, so that the children can regularly refer to it as they learn the words. Give each member of the group a memory verse wristband.

Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)



Over the coming month we will aim to learn Isaiah 9:6 from memory. Today's song will help you get started.

Song

'Isaiah 9:6' (memory verse song Nairobi Chapel) by Quest NC (1:15)



Display the Patience sign.

Say:

Trusting God's timing when we are waiting for him to answer our prayers can be challenging and requires a lot of patience. Our fruit of the Spirit for today reminds us that patience is something that we can grow in our hearts with God's help.

Say:

In the Bible God's people had waited a very long time for the promised Messiah. The Christmas story tells how God answered those prayers. Usually we begin with the angel Gabriel visiting Mary, but today we're going to go a little further back in the story to meet Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Ask:

What do you already know about Zechariah and Elizabeth?

Say:

Let's watch the clip to find out more about them and their story.

Video

Zechariah and Elizabeth by Faith Kids Videos (1:42)

Say:

Now, let's look more closely at their story in the book of Luke in the New Testament.

Read:

'During the time Herod ruled Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah. He belonged to Abijah's group. Zechariah's wife came from the family of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Zechariah and Elizabeth truly did what God said was good. They did everything the Lord commanded and told people to do. They were without fault in keeping his law. But Zechariah and Elizabeth had no children. Elizabeth could not have a baby; and both of them were very old.'

(Luke 1:5-7 ICB)



Ask:

- What do we find out about Zechariah and Elizabeth in these first few verses?
- Zechariah and Elizabeth were very old. What do you think the chances were of them having a baby?

Say:

Zechariah and Elizabeth loved and obeyed God but still they had no child. Sometimes we can be doing the right things and still have prayers that feel unanswered. Their story reminds us that waiting doesn't mean God has forgotten us.

Read:

'Zechariah was serving as a priest before God for his group. It was his group's time to serve. According to the custom of the priests, he was chosen to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn incense. There were a great many people outside praying at the time the incense was offered. Then, on the right side of the incense table, an angel of the Lord came and stood before Zechariah. When he saw the angel, Zechariah was confused and frightened.'

(Luke 1:8-12 ICB)

Say:

There were around 18,000 priests in Jerusalem at the time and only 14 were chosen each year to burn incense in the Temple.

Ask:

- How do you think Zechariah felt about being chosen for this?
- How would you feel if you suddenly saw an angel?

Say:

Being chosen to burn incense in the Temple was a once-in-a-lifetime honour. Zechariah's big moment turned out to be even bigger than he expected - God broke the silence with a personal message of hope.

Read:

'But the angel said to him, "Zechariah, don't be afraid. Your prayer has been heard by God. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son. You will name him John. You will be very happy. Many people will be happy because of his birth. John will be a great man for the Lord. He will never drink wine or beer. Even at the time John is born, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will help many people of Israel return to the Lord their God. He himself will go first before the Lord. John will be powerful in spirit like Elijah. He will make peace between fathers and their children. He will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking. He will make people ready for the coming of the Lord."

(Luke 1:13-17 ICB)



Ask:

What do we learn about John from the angel's message?

Say

John would be a special child with an important job – preparing people for the coming of Jesus, the promised Messiah. God's answer to Zechariah's personal prayer was also part of his huge rescue plan for the whole world.

Read:

'Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that what you say is true? I am an old man, and my wife is old, too."

'The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand before God. God sent me to talk to you and to tell you this good news. Now, listen! You will not be able to talk until the day these things happen. You will lose your speech because you did not believe what I told you. But these things will really happen."'

(Luke 1:18-20 ICB)

Ask:

- Why did God make Zechariah silent until the baby was born?
- Why do we sometimes find it hard to believe that God will answer our prayers?

Say:

After so many years of waiting, Zechariah found it hard to believe that God had finally answered his prayers. Sometimes God uses waiting to help us trust and grow closer to him.

Say:

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth shows that God keeps his promises and hears prayer, even when the answer takes time. This Advent, as we wait for Jesus, we can remember that love is a promise, God's promise to send his son and to hear us when we pray.



Say:

Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed and waited for many years for a child. At times, it must have seemed as though God had forgotten them. At just the right time, God sent his angel with good news.

Advent is a season of waiting too. We wait for Jesus, the Light of the World, to come and shine into the darkness. Sometimes waiting is hard, but God asks us to trust him and be patient, knowing his promises will come true.



Christmas lanterns

Explain to the children that they are going to make a lantern to use during their prayer times throughout the Advent season.

Video

Kids' Christmas Craft: Christmas Lanterns by DK Books (3:29)

Ask the children to cut and stick shapes (stars, angels, words of hope or promise) or use some of the ideas in the clip. Adapt the activity to the resources you have available and the needs of your children.

Ask the children to write or draw something on their lantern that they are waiting or praying for, or a promise of God they want to remember while they wait. Give each child a battery tealight to place in their lantern. The lanterns will be used later during the prayer time.



Say:

Zechariah had a lot of time to be quiet and listen to God's voice. Sometimes it's important for us to take time to be quiet too, especially when the world around us is noisy and busy.

Ask:

- Do you ever have times when you are very quiet, maybe thinking to yourself or not wanting to talk?
- Does God ever speak to you, not just through a voice or an angel, but through another person or something you see?
- How might God be answering your prayers today?

Say:

Advent is about long-awaited promises. Zechariah and Elizabeth had to wait a long time before they were blessed with a child, but God kept his promise to them. The angel's visit to Mary reminds us that hope begins in quiet, faithful waiting. Sometimes we need to wait for things, and when we wait calmly, we show patience.

Say:

We're going to have our own time of peace and quiet now. Hold your lantern in front of you and switch on the light. As the gentle music plays, close your eyes or look quietly at the light and remember that God is with you as you wait and listen. Think about what you wrote or drew on your lantern. It could be your prayer, your hope, or God's promise.



Listen

'What Child is This' (piano and electric cello) by The Piano Guys (3:00)

Say:

Dear God, thank you that you hear our prayers even when we are waiting. Thank you for keeping your promises and bringing hope to us. Please help us to be patient and to trust your timing. Amen.

66 Explore it

Remember to send home the *Explore It ideas* for children and families.



Explore It is produced by the Children and Youth Department in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview)



Explore it

Advent: Session 1

Love is a Promise (1)

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.



Bible verses: Luke 1:5-20



Aim: To know that Zechariah's prayers were answered



Today's fruit: **Patience**



Take home the lantern you made in our session. Each evening during Advent, switch on the light and spend a quiet moment with God.

You could:

- Think about the prayer or promise you wrote or drew.
- Thank God for hearing you, even while you wait.
- Ask God to help you be patient and trust his timing.



Share

There may be children at your school who don't know the real story of Christmas. Share this clip with them and let them know what Christmas is all about. It's not about presents, Father Christmas, or gifts under the tree. Christmas is about the birth of

The Mystery of Christmas by Hillsong Kids



Song for the week

'Isaiah 9:6' (memory verse song Nairobi Chapel) by Quest NC



Memory verse

Children & Youth

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

Kids Alive! Online - salvationarmy.org.uk/kidsalive

Kids Alive! The UK's only weekly Christian comic - is filled with jokes, competitions, Bible-based cartoons and much more... and is now available to read online!

Explore it

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

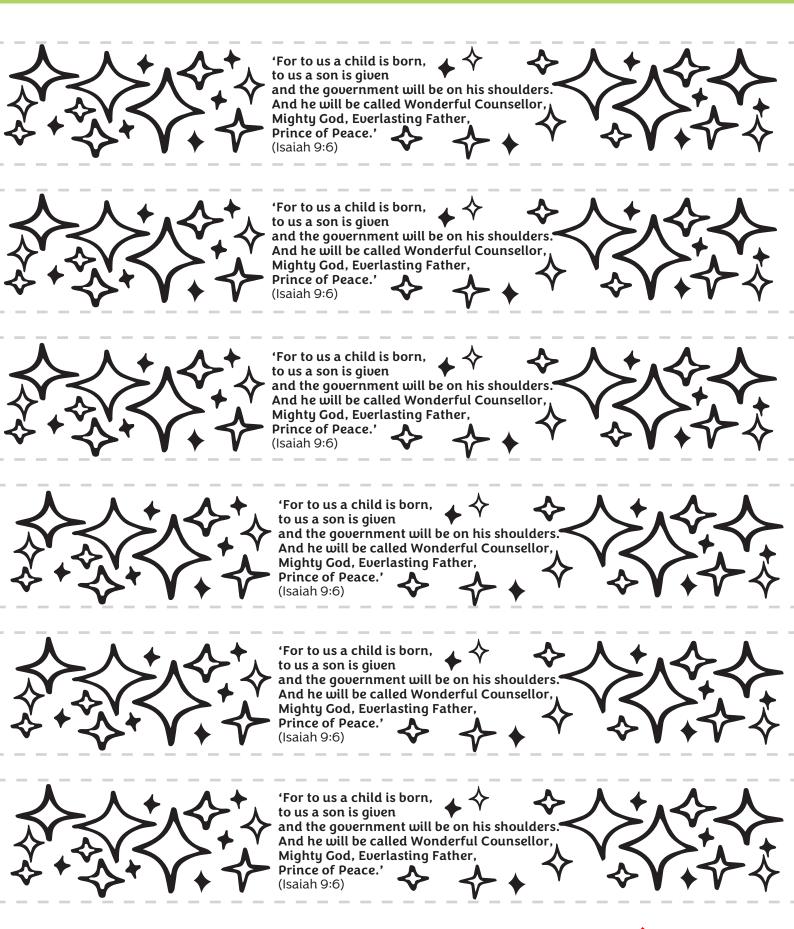
And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 N/V)



Advent Session 1: Memory Verse Wristband

Explore it





Explore it

Advent Session 1: Memory Verse Wristband

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' (Isaiah 9:6)

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§ Explore it

Love is a Promise (2)



Bible verses:

Luke 1:26-38,57-66 The virgin Mary



Aim:

To see how Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary made choices of faith



Today's fruit:

Joy



In today's session we see how Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth each made a choice of faith when God spoke to them.

Gabriel's message gave Mary the chance to say yes to God's plan, even though it was surprising and scary. Zechariah and Elizabeth showed faith by naming their baby John, just as God had said. Their son John would grow up to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. This reminds us that God invites us too to make choices of faith. When we say yes to God, like Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth, we can share in the joy of being part of his plan.

Mary experienced joy in being part of God's plan, and we can too.

Each child will need:

- A paper plate, a smallish circular object to draw round, craft items to decorate, scissors,
 Christmas wrapping ribbon, sticky tape, glue and pens/pencils see Action It
- Pens/pencils and paper
- Explore It ideas handout

You will need:

- A pair of over-ear headphones (not ear buds) that can connect to a playlist, video or CD of familiar Christmas songs – see Start It
- To draw the angel outlines on the paper plates for the children (optional) see Action It
- Fruit of the Spirit poster: Joy download from Salvationist





Play a game of *Guess the Christmas Song*. One child wears headphones and listens to a Christmas song. They then hum the tune out loud for the rest of the group to guess. Once the song is guessed, a different child wears the headphones for another song.

This video might help you with the playlist. There are 21 song snippets - though they are very short!

Listen

Christmas song quiz by Love to Sing (4:33)



Say:

Our song is quieter than usual and tells us a little about the Bible story we are looking at today.

Song

'Mary Did You Know?' by Allstars Kids Club (3:26)

Say:

The song asks Mary if she knew all the amazing things Jesus would do when he grew up. The truth is, God had promised a Saviour long before Mary was even born. Our memory verse reminds us of that promise, written hundreds of years before Jesus came. See if you can remember the memory verse and let's say it together.

Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'
(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)







Last week we met two important characters who struggled to believe that God could answer their prayer.

Ask:

What were their names, and what do you remember about them?

Say:

Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed for a baby for a very long time. When Zechariah was burning incense in the Temple, an angel appeared and told him that Elizabeth would give birth to a son. Zechariah struggled to believe it could ever happen.

Ask:

What happened to Zechariah?

Say:

Zechariah spent the whole of Elizabeth's pregnancy in silence, as he could not say a word. He had to wait, watch, and learn to trust. Today we will find out what happened when the same angel came to visit a young girl named Mary. Gabriel's message would give her the chance to make a big choice of faith too.

Video

Gabriel Visits Mary by Superbook (1:08)

Ask:

- What was the angel's news for Mary?
- What did we discover about Jesus from the angel Gabriel?

Say:

Mary was amazed and even asked, 'How can this happen?' When the angel explained, Mary made the choice to put her faith in God.

Read:

'Mary said, "I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!" Then the angel went away.'

(Luke 1:38 ICB)

Ask:

Do you think Mary's choice to follow God's plan was brave? If so, why?



Mary trusted God and said yes. She made a choice to have faith in God and in his plan for her life. As we continue in the story, we see that Elizabeth and Zechariah also had to make their own choice of faith when their baby was born.

Read:

'When it was time for Elizabeth to give birth, she had a boy. Her neighbours and relatives heard how good the Lord was to her, and they rejoiced.

'When the baby was eight days old, they came to circumcise him. They wanted to name him Zechariah because this was his father's name. But his mother said, "No! He will be named John."

'The people said to Elizabeth, "But no one in your family has this name!" Then they made signs to his father, "What would you like to name him?"

'Zechariah asked for something to write on. Then he wrote, "His name is John." Everyone was surprised. Then Zechariah could talk again. He began to praise God. And all their neighbours became alarmed. In all the mountains of Judea people continued talking about all these things. The people who heard about these things wondered about them. They thought, "What will this child be?" They said this because the Lord was with him.' (Luke 1:57-66 ICB)

Ask:

At what point was Zechariah able to start talking again?

Say:

Elizabeth and Zechariah followed what God had asked them to do and named their baby boy John. Let's find out more about John and the special role he had in the life of Jesus.

Video

God's Story: John the Baptist by Crossroads Kids' Club (4:03)

Ask:

In what ways did John choose to place his faith in God and follow his plan?

Say:

John the Baptist helped people get ready for Jesus. He made a choice of faith to trust and follow God's plan.



Say:

The angel Gabriel came to visit Zechariah and Mary and gave them messages from God. Each of them had to make a choice of faith, to trust God and say yes to his plan.



Paper plate angels

Explain to the children that they are going to make a Christmas angel decoration to take home. The angel will remind them that, just like Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth, we can make choices of faith and trust God's plan for our lives.

Video

Paper Plate Angels (quick and easy Christmas tree toppers) by Red Ted Art (Maggy Woodley) (1:14)

The children can choose one of these faith-filled phrases to write on their angel or create their own.

- I say YES to God.
- I choose to follow God's plan.

Say:

Every time you see your angel, let it remind you of Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth and John, who made choices based on their faith in God. Let it also remind you to say yes to God and trust his plan for your life.

Display the *Joy* sign.

Explain that when we make choices of faith, like Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth, God fills our hearts with joy because we know we are part of his plan. Encourage the children to let their angel decorations remind them not only to choose faith, but also to remember the joy that comes from trusting God.



Say:

In our story today Mary had to make a choice. She could have said no, because the angel's message was big and scary. Instead, she trusted God's plan for her life, and her strong faith in him meant she could say yes to whatever lay ahead.

Ask:

- How do you think Mary felt when she chose to say yes to God?
- Have you ever had to make a brave choice for God? What did it feel like?
- What faith-filled choices can we make for God?

Say:

For our prayer time we're going to listen to a song that tells Mary's story in her own words. As the music plays, you might want to close your eyes and pray these words, 'Yes, God, I choose to follow you.'



Listen

'Who, Me?' (Mary's song of trust) by Trueway Kids (3:26)

Say:

Dear God, thank you for Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who made choices of faith and trusted you.

Please help us to say yes to you and make choices of faith in our own lives.

Thank you that your plan includes us too. Amen.

∂∂ Explore it

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Explore It is produced by the Children and Youth Department in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview)



Advent: Session 2

Explore it

Love is a Promise (2)

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.



Bible verses: Luke 1:26-38,57-66



Aim:

To see how Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary made choices of faith



Today's fruit: Jou



Take home your angel decoration and hang it somewhere you'll see it each day. Each time you look at it, remember the words you wrote and ask God to help you make a choice of faith. You could pray using these words: 'Yes, God, I choose to follow you.'



Share

In today's session we listened to a beautiful song that tells Mary's story.

Watch the clip with the people at home and discuss this question:

 What does it mean for us to say yes to God today?

'Who, Me?' (Mary's song of trust) by Trueway Kids



'Mary Did You Know?' by Allstars Kids Club





Memory verse

Children & Youth

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

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§ Explore it

Love is a gift



Bible verses:

Luke 1:57-66; 2:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25 The birth of Jesus



Aim:

To celebrate the birth of Jesus as the gift of God's love and the sign that God is with us



Today's fruit:

Peace



In today's session we celebrate the moment when God's love became a gift to the whole world, when Jesus was born to be with us and bring his love and peace to everyone.

As we continue our Advent journey, we remember that God always keeps his promises. Joseph didn't know what the future would hold, but God had a plan. Through an angel's message, Joseph learned that Mary's baby would be very special, God's own son. This baby was to be named Jesus, which means 'The Lord saves', and Immanuel, which means 'God with us'.

We can know and show God's peace when we trust God and receive his love.

Each child will need:

- A sticky note and pens/pencils
- Resources to make and decorate a photo frame see Action It
- Explore It ideas handout

You will need:

- To know the meaning and origin of your first name and tools to research the meaning of each child's name (optional) – see Start It
- Fruit of the Spirit poster: Peace download from Salvationist



Start with a discussion about first names. Some children may not know much about their early years or family background, so please be sensitive as you lead the activity.



Ask:

- Do you know how you got your name?
- Who chose it for you?
- Are you named after anyone?

Say

Names are often chosen because they have a special meaning or connection to someone important.

Explain to the children where your own name came from and anything special about it. Discuss how names often have special meanings and tell them what your name means.

Give the group an opportunity to find out what their own name means.

If you have a group that meets regularly, you may wish to prepare these in advance. If not, this can be done in the session. You may have a baby name book or use one of these websites:

- bounty.com/pregnancy-and-birth/baby-names
- behindthename.com/names/usage/english/2
- meaningofthename.com

Once the children know the meaning of their names, give them a sticky label and ask them to write their name and decorate it in a way that reflects its meaning.

Say:

Today we'll continue our journey through the Christmas story and discover the special meaning of the name Immanuel, given to Jesus at his birth.



Sau:

Our song for today is linked to our memory verse. Before we sing, let's share it together.

Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)



Song

'Isaiah 9:6-7' (lyric video) by The Corner Room (3:10)

Display the Peace sign.

Explain that Jesus' birth brought peace to the world – not just quietness and calm, but a deep kind of peace that comes from knowing God loves us and is always with us.

Ask:

- In the song Jesus has many names, including 'Prince of Peace'. Why do you think Jesus is described in this way?
- How can we share the peace of Jesus with others this Christmas?



Say:

In the last two sessions, we met Elizabeth and Zechariah, an elderly couple who loved and served God faithfully. Even though they had waited many years for a child, God had not forgotten them.

Read:

'When it was time for Elizabeth to give birth, she had a boy. Her neighbours and relatives heard how good the Lord was to her, and they rejoiced.

'When the baby was eight days old, they came to circumcise him. They wanted to name him Zechariah because this was his father's name. But his mother said, "No! He will be named John."

'The people said to Elizabeth, "But no one in your family has this name!" Then they made signs to his father, "What would you like to name him?"

'Zechariah asked for something to write on. Then he wrote, "His name is John." Everyone was surprised. Then Zechariah could talk again. He began to praise God.'

(Luke 1:57-64 ICB)

Ask:

- What was the name of their baby boy?
- Why was he so special?

Say:

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus. Elizabeth and Zechariah were very excited about the news.

Ask:

Who else did the angel Gabriel visit with another very special message?



The angel Gabriel also came to Mary, a young woman engaged to Joseph. Gabriel told her that she would have a baby, God's own son! Mary didn't understand how this could happen, but she trusted God's plan.

Ask:

- How do you think Mary felt when she heard this news?
- Why do you think it was such a surprise?

Say:

Joseph wasn't sure what to do when he heard Mary's news, but God showed him that this was all part of his plan. Let's read what happened next in Matthew 1:19-25.

Read:

'Mary's husband [to be], Joseph, was a good man. He did not want to disgrace her in public, so he planned to [break the engagement to] her secretly.

'While Joseph thought about this, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name the son Jesus. Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins."

'All this happened to make clear the full meaning of what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel." This name means "God is with us".'

(Matthew 1:19-23 ICB)

Ask:

- What two names did the angel give for the baby?
- What do those names tell us about who Jesus is?

Say:

The name Jesus means 'The Lord saves'. It reminds us of the gift of forgiveness and grace given to us by God. The name Immanuel reminds us that God is always with us. Both names, Jesus and Immanuel, remind us that this baby was God's greatest gift to the world.

Sau:

Let's see what happened next in our story.

Read:

'At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order to all people in the countries that were under Roman rule. The order said that they must list their names in a register. This was the first registration taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own towns to be registered.

'So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee. He went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea.



This town was known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. Joseph registered with Mary because she was engaged to marry him. (Mary was now pregnant.)'

(Luke 2:1-5 ICB)

Say:

The Roman rulers wanted to count everyone in their empire, so Mary and Joseph had to make a long journey to Bethlehem. Travelling wasn't easy, especially for Mary, who was expecting a baby! Let's find out more about what it meant to take part in a Roman census.

Video

The Roman Census by Drive Thru History with Dave Stotts (1:38)

Watch 0:00 to 0:48 'There was no way some average Joe – or Joseph – could avoid it.'

Ask:

- What was the main reason Rome gathered people for a census?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph felt as they travelled to Bethlehem?

Say:

Rome wasn't bothered if you were sick, old, very young or heavily pregnant like Mary. If they called a census, then everyone had to turn up. Even though the journey was long and uncomfortable, God was with Mary and Joseph every step of the way.

Read:

'While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. She gave birth to her first son. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed.'

(Luke 2:6-7 ICB)

Ask:

- Why was it so difficult for Mary and Joseph to find somewhere to stay?
- Do you think Mary and Joseph knew that God was with them as they cradled the baby Jesus?
 Explain your answer.

Say:

Try to imagine Mary looking down at her tiny baby, knowing that this was the child God had promised. When Jesus was born, God's love wasn't just promised any more, it was given as the most amazing gift ever!





The Christmas story reminds us that when Jesus was born, God gave the world his greatest gift, the gift of himself. Jesus' name Immanuel means 'God with us'. That's what makes Christmas so special – love came down to be right here with us.

Ask:

- Can you think of a time when you've felt particularly close to God or noticed his love in your life? If you feel comfortable, then share it with the rest of the group.
- Has there ever been a time when you found it hard to feel that God was with you?

Say:

Sometimes we don't always feel God's love, especially when things are difficult. But Matthew 1:23 reminds us that even when we can't see or feel it, God is still with us.

Photo frame

Explain to the children that they are going to make a photo frame to remind them that God's love is a gift that is always with us. Inside the frame they can place a picture of something or someone that reminds them of God's love. It could be their family, a friend, a pet, or even a picture of themselves. Encourage them to decorate with phrases like 'God is with us' or 'God's greatest gift'.

Suggested photo frames

- Purchase a cardboard or wooden photo frame from bakerross.co.uk
- Make a frame with lolly sticks
 Easy DIY Photo Frame Making with Popsicle or Ice cream sticks by Aloha crafts (3:28)
- Fold an origami frame
 DIY Mini Paper photo frame by World of Art and Craft (3:20)
- Cut, glue and roll a photo frame
 Super easy paper photo frame by Mana creative corner (3:38)

They might want to give the photo frame as a gift to someone this Christmas, to share the good news that God's love is a gift for everyone. Remind the children that each time they look at their frame, to remember that Jesus is God's greatest gift!





We face lots of challenges in our world today, and sometimes it can all feel a little overwhelming. The Christmas story reminds us that God sent his only son to earth to be with us.

Say:

We're going to listen to some music and watch a clip that tells us of the hope we find in Jesus.

Video

'For God is with us' by For King + Country (3:19)

Say:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for showing your love for us by sending your son.

Today you have reminded us that even though the world may seem a scary place at times, you are always with us.

We can always find our hope in you.

Help us to remember you are with us, not just at Christmas, but always.

Amen.

Spend time praying with your group and then bring the session to a close.

6ô Explore it

Remember to send home the *Explore It ideas* for children and families.



Explore It is produced by the Children and Youth Department in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview)



Advent: Session 3

8 Explore it

Love is a gift

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.



Bible verses:

Luke 1:57-66; 2:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25



Aim:

To celebrate the birth of Jesus as the gift of God's love and the sign that God is with us



Today's fruit:

Children & Youth

Peace



Create

Find or take a picture, to put in your 'God with us' photo frame. Display it at home or decide who you are going to give it to as a Christmas qift.



Watch

Snuggle up on the sofa with someone at home and enjoy the Christmas story retold by children.

Christmas according to kids by Southland Christian Church



'Isaiah 9:6-7' (lyric video) by The Corner Room





Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his
shoulders.
And he will be called

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

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§ Explore it

Love is powerful



Bible verses:

Luke 2:8-20

Some shepherds hear about Jesus



Aim:

To consider why the angels appear to shepherds, and why the 'outsiders' receive the good news first



Today's fruit:

Love



Today's session is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ and his powerful, all-inclusive love.

As we explore the story of the shepherds, who were the first to hear the good news, we'll discover how God's love reaches even those who are often left out. There will also be time for the children to celebrate together, remembering that everyone is invited to share in the joy of Jesus' birth.

We know that God loves everyone – we too can show love to those people who may be on the outside, like the shepherds.

Each child will need:

- Explore It ideas handout

You will need:

- Fruit of the Spirit poster: Love download from Salvationist
- Resources for a Christmas celebration see Action it



Say:

Imagine you were asked to organise a special Christmas celebration.

Discuss with the children how they would plan the Christmas celebration, encouraging them to think about who they would invite and what makes someone feel included or important.



Discuss:

- Who would you invite?
- What would the party invitations look like?
- Where would it be?
- What would you eat?
- What kind of event would it be?
- Some parties have a VIP section for 'very important people'. If your celebration had one of these, who would you include? Would anyone be left out?

Say:

Christmas is a time of celebration, but God's celebration looked a little different! On the very first Christmas the most important invitation didn't go to kings or celebrities. Instead, God's powerful love reached the ordinary shepherds out in the fields. Later we'll find out why God chose them to hear the good news first.



Say:

You'll probably know our song for this week: it's all about celebrating the birth of Jesus!

Song

'Come and join the celebration' by Scampton church (1:53)



Ask:

In our last session we looked at the meaning of the name Immanuel. What did it mean?

Say:

Immanuel means 'God with us', and that message continues in today's story. Jesus wasn't sent just for kings or important people, but for everyone, rich or poor, near or far. God showed his powerful love by sending the angels to some very unexpected visitors.

Video

The story of Christmas (Jesus and the shepherds) by Saddleback Kids (2:25)

Ask:

Who were the first special visitors who came to see Jesus?



You might think the birth of such a special baby would bring VIP guests from palaces or temples. But instead, the angels appeared to shepherds, ordinary people who were often ignored or left out. God's love is so powerful that it reaches everyone, especially those others might forget.

Ask:

- Why do you think God chose the shepherds first?
- How does that show God's love?

Display the Love sign.

Say:

This week's fruit of the Spirit is love. God's love reached out to the shepherds, people who lived away from the hustle and bustle of the city. When we know how much God loves us, we can reach out to others with that same love.

Say:

As well as experiencing God's love, the shepherds got to hear the most amazing choir that night.

Read:

'Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel. All the angels were praising God, saying:

"Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God."

(Luke 2:13-14 ICB)

Ask:

- The Bible says the angels sang to the shepherds. If you were in charge of the angel choir, what song would you ask them to sing?
- Can you think of a Christmas carol all about the angels singing to the shepherds?

Say:

The angels' song filled the sky with joy and peace, reminding us that God's love brings hope to the whole world. Let's join in and celebrate with our own song of praise.

You can use this music to transition to the celebration part of the session.

Listen

'Hark the Herald (Sing out loud)' (official music video) by The Spirituals Choir (5:55)



=□ Action it

Spend some time celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Here are some ideas:

- Do a Christmas praise dance party!
 TGIF Dance party Christmas themed (kids worship with motions and lyrics) by Kids Zone 473 (9:40)
- Play some Christmas games.
 Eg Nighty night sheep from Biblegamescentral.com/the-story-of-christmas-minute-to-win-it-games
- Make some sheep cupcakes.
 Bake from scratch or use plain shop-bought ones to decorate and to eat at the party.
 You may wish to add a bit of Christmas cheer to the decorations eg Sheep cupcakes by preppykitchen.com

To bring the time of celebration to a close, and to prepare the children for the prayer time, watch the clip that reminds us that God chose the humble shepherds to meet Jesus. This song should also settle the children down, ready for the Pray It section.

Song

'He chose the shepherds' (nativity video) by friendsandheroestv (3:25)

Say:

This song reminds us that God chose the shepherds, who were ordinary, hardworking people, to be the first to hear about Jesus. His love reached people who were often left out, and it still does today.

Ask:

- The shepherds were the first to be invited to see Jesus. If you were planning your own celebration, who might you invite that other people sometimes forget?
- How can we make sure everyone feels welcome in the celebration of Jesus' birth?



Say:

At the end of the clip we saw Jesus as a grown man meeting the disciples after his resurrection. Jesus may have come to us as a baby boy, but he grew to be a man who showed his love to all people. God chose the shepherds as the first people to meet Jesus to show us that God's love is for everyone. This is a powerful message that we can share with the world – not just at Christmas, but every day.



To bring our time of celebration to a close, we are going to share our memory verse together. With big loud voices we are going to celebrate the special gift of Jesus.

Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'
(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)



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Advent: Session 4

Explore it

Love is powerful

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.



Bible verses: Luke 2:8-20



Aim:

To consider why the angels appear to shepherds, and why the 'outsiders' receive the good news first



Today's fruit: Love

> Children & Youth

* Sing

Listen to this song all about the Christmas Story and see if you can either learn the words or make up some actions to go along with the song.

'The very first Christmas' (official music video) by LifeKids



Care

As a family, think of someone who might feel alone or find Christmas difficult, like a neighbour, a friend, or someone at church. Make a simple card or Christmas decoration with a message that reminds them they are loved



'Come and join the celebration' by Scampton church (1:53)





Memory verse

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

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Explore it

Love is an action



Bible verses:

Matthew 2:1-12
Wise men come to visit Jesus



Aim:

To see how the wise men faithfully responded to God's gift of Jesus, and to learn that we can also respond by giving ourselves fully to God



B

Today's fruit:

Faithfulness

In this session we meet the wise men, travellers who faithfully followed God's sign in the night sky.

Their story reminds us that love is not just a feeling, but something we do. The wise men gave their time, energy and gifts to worship Jesus. Their love was an action, and through them we learn what it means to live faithfully for God. We also introduce Covenant Sunday, a special time when Salvation Army members and friends renew their promise to give 'all of me for all of you forever'.

We can respond with faithfulness to the love God gave through the gift of Jesus.

Each child will need:

- A star that can be drawn/written on from a template or pre-cut star, a ribbon / piece of string, scissors, glue/tape and pens/pencils
- Explore It ideas handout

You will need:

- A large cut-out star for each team leader see Start It
- Fruit of the Spirit poster: Faithfulness download from Salvationist
- To set up a display area for a 'Sky full of faithfulness' see Action It



Play a game of *Follow the star*. Divide the group into smaller teams. Choose a sensible leader for each team and give each one a large cut-out star.



The aim of the game is to follow your star. Your star is going to move around the room, without crashing into any other stars, and your job is to follow it faithfully.

Explain to the 'stars' that they can weave in and out of the chairs or objects in the room, but everyone needs to walk sensibly and stay together as a group. The following track can be used as background music.

Listen

'A sky full of stars' (official audio) by Coldplay (4:34)

After about a minute, call everyone back and sit down together.

Ask:

- Was it easy or hard to keep your eyes on the star?
- How did your team help one another to stay together?

Say:

Today we're going to discover what happened when the wise men decided to faithfully follow God and keep their eyes on the star that would lead them to Jesus.



Say:

Before we sing, let's remember our memory verse, the promise we have been learning this month. God kept this promise when love came down at Christmas.

Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

Say:

Our song for today reminds us that Christmas is not just about presents or lights; it's about a celebration of God's love for each one of us.



Song

'What Christmas is about' song by Orange Kids Music (lyrics and actions) video by Zoom Kids (2:33)



Say:

Over the Advent season we've been discovering how love came down at Christmas as the gift of Jesus from a loving God.

- We met Zechariah and Elizabeth, who patiently waited for God's promise to come true.
- We heard how Mary and Joseph said yes to God and followed his plan for their lives.
- We celebrated with the shepherds, who were the first to hear the good news that Jesus had been born.

Ask:

- Why do you think God chose the shepherds to hear the good news first?
- What did that show us about God's love?

Say:

God's love reached the shepherds out in the fields, and today we'll see that it also reached people from far, far away. Some travellers from another country saw a bright star in the sky, a sign that God had sent his promised King. They followed it all the way to Jesus. Let's watch the clip to find out what happened.

Video

The story of Christmas (Jesus and the wise men) by Saddleback Kids (3:30)

Say:

Now that we've seen an overview of the story, let's see what the Bible has to say about the wise men.

Read:

'Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. After Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east. We came to worship him."

(Matthew 2:1-2 ICB)

Ask:

What did the wise men see that made them start their journey?



Why do you think they wanted to find Jesus?

Say:

As soon as the wise men saw the star, they were drawn to it. Without even seeing the baby boy, they trusted that the star was a sign from God and set off to find the newborn King.

Read:

'When King Herod heard about this new king of the Jews, he was troubled. And all the people in Jerusalem were worried too. Herod called a meeting of all the leading priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ would be born. They answered, "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this in the Scriptures:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are important among the rulers of Judah.

A ruler will come from you.

He will be like a shepherd for my people, the Israelites."

'Then Herod had a secret meeting with the wise men from the east. He learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. Then Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem. He said to them, "Go and look carefully to find the child. When you find him, come and tell me. Then I can go and worship him too."'

(Matthew 2:3-8 ICB)

Ask:

- Why do you think King Herod was 'troubled', instead of happy, when he heard about Jesus?
- How were Herod's actions different from the wise men's?
- What do you think the wise men might have felt when Herod asked them to come back and tell him where Jesus was?

Say:

King Herod only pretended he wanted to worship Jesus, but the wise men truly wanted to find and honour him. Even when faced with a powerful and untrustworthy ruler, they stayed faithful to God's sign and kept following the star.

Read:

'The wise men heard the king and then left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east. It went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. They went to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary. They bowed down and worshipped the child. They opened the gifts they brought for him. They gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went home to their own country by a different way.'

(Matthew 2:9-12 ICB)



Ask:

- How did the wise men feel when they saw the star stop above the place where Jesus was?
- What did they do when they finally found him?
- What do their gifts tell us about how special they believed Jesus was?
- What did the wise men do after God warned them in a dream?

Display the Faithfulness sign.

Say

The wise men didn't just talk about loving God; they showed it by what they did. They followed God's star, gave their best gifts, and worshipped Jesus.

Being faithful means keeping close to God, trusting him, and doing what's right even when it's hard.

Say:

God kept his promise and showed his faithful love by sending Jesus. When we follow Jesus, we can show our love for God every day.

Ask:

In Matthew 2:10 it says that the wise men 'were filled with joy' when they saw the star. Why do you think that was?

Say:

When we follow God faithfully, like the wise men, we also discover joy. It's the joy of knowing that God's love lights our way.



Sau:

God has given us the most wonderful gift of all – Jesus. Just like the wise men, we can respond to that gift by giving something back to God. It doesn't need to be gold, frankincense or myrrh; it can be our hearts, our time, and our love.

Explain that the children are going to create a 'Sky full of faithfulness'. Give each child a star and ask them to write or draw on it one way that they want to give their best to God. It might be using their talents, showing kindness, choosing to pray, helping others or thanking God each day.

They could also write the following prayer on the back of their star:

Dear God,

I give you my best and want to follow you faithfully. Amen.



Attach the ribbon or string to each star. When everyone has finished, collect the stars and hang them together to make a 'Sky full of faithfulness'. You could even display them in your church so that others can see how the children are responding to God's love.

Say:

These stars remind us that God showed his faithful love by sending Jesus. We can respond in faithfulness, too, when we show God's love in action every day.

Ask:

What do you notice when you look at all our stars shining together?

Say:

These stars remind us that God showed his faithful love by sending Jesus.

As you look at our 'Sky full of faithfulness', notice how the stars fill the space together. Each one is special on its own, but together they make the sky shine brightly. That's how it is when we follow Jesus; we are not on this journey alone.



Our Pray It activity gives the children the opportunity to look at the stars on the 'Sky full of faithfulness' and reflect on what they have learned today. This is a joyful and celebratory moment, rather than a quiet reflection. The following music clip can be used as part of this activity.

Listen

'A sky full of stars' by Coldplay performed by Epic Orchestra (5:45)

Say:

Today we've made our 'Sky full of faithfulness'. Each of these stars shows how we want to give our best to God and the ways we can show love in action every day.

Say:

Just as the wise men brought their gifts to Jesus, we can bring our own gifts to God. Our gifts aren't gold, frankincense or myrrh, but they are just as special. We can bring our kindness, our prayers, our time and our faithfulness.

Invite the children to stand or gather where they can see the display. Explain that while the music plays, they can look at the stars, think about their gift to God, and thank him for loving them. They may even want to have a joyful dance!

Say:

In a couple of weeks we will take part in a very special day known as Covenant Sunday. This is a time when we remember that God has been faithful to us, and we promise to be faithful to



him. We'll celebrate Covenant Sunday properly soon, but today we have already begun thinking about what it means to give all of ourselves to God, for ever.

Bring the session to a close in prayer.



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Explore it

Love is an action

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.



Bible verses: Matthew 2:1-12



Aim:

To see how the wise men faithfully responded to God's gift of Jesus, and to learn that we can also respond by giving ourselves fully to God



Today's fruit: Faithfulness

> Children & Youth



Create

Cut out a small star or use a sticker and keep it somewhere you will see it every day. Each morning when you see your star, say this short prayer:

Dear God, help me to shine for you today and to follow your light faithfully.



Walk

Wait for a clear night and go for an evening walk together. Take time to look up at the stars. Tell the people at home all about the journey of the wise men and everything you have discovered during this week's session.



Song for the week

'What Christmas is about' song by Orange Kids Music (lyrics and actions) video by Zoom Kids



Memory verse

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

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