

The Well | Kids' Advent Devotional

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Advent | Day 1, November 29 | Luke 1:1-4

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, **2** just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, **3** it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **4** that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

My dad has written in his journal every day for many years. He always writes the most important thing that happened that day. Hopefully, in a long time when he goes to live with Jesus, I will have his journal to look back on what he loved about the days I was with him and to learn about the days of his life before I was born. I'm so grateful to have his life in writing!

In the Bible, Luke tells us that he took the time to write down everything he had been carefully watching and learning. This was a hard job since there was no internet back then. **Luke had to talk to lots of people and pastors, and he couldn't use a car or plane to visit them! He spent years and put lots of love into visiting locations and listening to people's memories in order to write down everything in a letter to someone named Theophilus for him - and for us! - to know that we are reading what is true about Jesus our savior.**

God our Father in heaven gave us more than a journal of His memories. He gave us Himself through his Son Jesus so that we can be sure of who God is and that He loves us. **During the time of Advent, we remember that Jesus came to earth at Christmas and will come again one day! I pray that Luke's writings of Jesus in the Bible will make you believe and be sure that Jesus is our true King and that you would love the Bible more and more in your heart.**

Advent is a time to slow down and be thankful for the gift that God has given us - Jesus himself who became a human and lives with us.

Advent | Day 2, November 30 | Luke 1:5-7

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,^[a] of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. **7** But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Luke's Bible book about Jesus' life begins with a man and woman who are very old and cannot have any children. When he says "but they had no children," he is showing that **they must have spent many years being sad and confused, but continuing to pray together.** These Bible verses end with them still living like that.

The man and woman are Zechariah and Elizabeth who live during a time when people had not heard from God for hundreds of years since He had not sent any prophets to deliver a message. Much like the well-known people of the Old Testament - Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Samuel's mother Hannah - Zechariah and Elizabeth have been hoping to see God do something during their whole marriage, but He still didn't say anything.

So, today we are going to focus on trusting how God loves us and is still doing good things for our life, even when we don't hear Him.

During Advent this year, we are going to practice celebrating Jesus coming. We will also practice waiting and hoping for something to happen as we slowly read through how Luke writes about the first coming of Jesus. We should take time to quietly think about how and why Jesus came on Christmas.

Right now, we all have to practice waiting and hoping - waiting and hoping to hang out with our friends, to visit our favorite places, to go back to church with everyone. Let's remember to make time to think about how God is always making things happen. When it seems like God is quiet, we can trust that he is still making good things happen for us.

A pastor named John Piper said that if we don't take time to be quiet with God, we will probably not understand how God's work in the past thousands of years makes a difference in our lives today. It is hard to focus and understand big things when we are busy or around lots of noise.

In the next few verses of the Bible, God is going to finally speak to announce a miracle for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but we are not going to hurry to read it. We are not going to hurry past how they felt while trusting God but not having what they hoped for. We are not going to hurry past their situation, just like we may want to hurry past our own situation to get to Christmas or next year or the end of the pandemic. **We are going to practice waiting and hoping by sitting still right now. We are going to tell God our thoughts and worries since He sees us and loves us. We are learning to trust Him and calm down knowing that He is always in control.**

We are learning to trust that **God doesn't hurry. He makes good things happen.**

Advent | Day 3, December 1 | Luke 1:8-17

8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, **9** according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. **10** And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. **11** And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. **12** And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. **13** But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. **14** And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, **15** for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. **16** And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, **17** and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Pretend that you are Zechariah, a priest who works in the temple to serve God. Today is a special day! You walk down the usual road that you take to the temple and see the same people on their way to work as you always see. You arrive at the temple and smell the usual smells of sweet incense and tired travelers. But today, you are about to receive an amazing message that you are the one who was chosen to offer the sacrifice of incense in the temple. This is an honor! **You walk in the temple, and you are praying to God for all the people, but then you have your own personal prayer answered! The angel Gabriel appears and promises a son to you and your wife, Elizabeth, even though she was unable to have children before!**

Zechariah became more excited for his son, John, to arrive. In another book of the Bible, the prophet Isaiah predicted that God would send someone to prepare the world for Jesus by saying "A voice says: in the wilderness, get ready for God to come; make a road in the desert for Him... All people will see the greatness of God together, for He has said so" (Isaiah 40:3-5).

The "voice" that Isaiah predicted is the words of the baby John who God promised to Zechariah and Elizabeth. I am sure that Zechariah felt nervous, happy, and hopeful as the angel told him about his future son, John. God filled John with the Holy Spirit before and after his birth because John was

specially chosen for God to serve Him. John would use his voice to prepare everyone for Jesus to arrive.

Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayer was answered in a way that they did not expect. They had even given up on praying for a child. What prayer do you want to pray hoping that God will answer?

Since God can do anything, He helped Zechariah and Elizabeth by giving them a son. Since God can do anything, He also helped you and me by sending His Son Jesus to save the world.

Prepare for Jesus to come again one day!

Advent | Day 4, December 2 | Luke 1:18-20

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." **19** And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. **20** And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

It's interesting to think that **Zechariah was a good priest who loved serving God, but he is surprised and afraid when the angel Gabriel appears to him in the temple. Priests like Zechariah were sent into the most special part of the temple, called the Holy of Holies, to meet with God and then come back to tell others what they heard from God.** If Zechariah was in the temple to meet with God, why was he scared when Gabriel appears and why does he doubt the angel's words?

Maybe we are a little like Zechariah. We follow the rules and say we love Jesus, but when we hear God's words as we read the Bible or pray, we doubt what He tells us. Humans often want complete proof before we believe something, but when we have faith, that means we trust and obey God without needing proof all the time.

Zechariah now has to wait for months without being able to speak while he thinks about the news that he will have a son who will prepare the world for Jesus to arrive. I wonder what he was thinking over those long, quiet months.

What about you? Are you thinking about Christmas and waiting excitedly for Jesus to come? Waiting is hard since most people want things immediately. We want answers now and we want things to go our way now. **In the middle of this Bible story, Luke reminds us to be quiet and wait for God's plan to happen how He wants it to, not how we want it to happen. Christmas is coming - are you thinking quietly about Jesus' arrival?**

Advent | Day 5, December 3 | Luke 1:21-23

21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. **22** And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. **23** And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

Zechariah was a priest, which means part of his job was to burn something called incense in order to make sweet smells in the temple as a gift to God. The place where incense was burned was right outside the Holy of Holies - the most special part of the temple where the priests could visit God. Different priests went in there often and would usually do the same routine each time: walk in, burn the incense, pray, and then go out to the front of the temple to pray for the people. He would pray that God would protect them, forgive them, provide for them, and give them peace (Numbers 6:24-26).

Zechariah walked in the temple, but he stayed in there a lot longer than usual. People outside were probably starting to talk to each other, worrying and wondering what was happening.

As we learned over the last few days, Zechariah was visited by an angel inside the temple. The angel was answering his lifelong prayer, to have a child. He was finally getting what he and his wife Elizabeth had wanted for years, and what did he do?

He did what all of us do a lot - he doubted what the angel said and asked for proof.

He did what all of us do so often. He doubted and asked for proof.

“How do I know this is really you, God? How do I know that you will really do this?”

Since he doubted God, God made Zechariah unable to talk. He left the temple, and as people saw him, they were filled with hope getting ready for the prayer that Zechariah would pray for them.

They looked at him waiting, and:

Nothing. He couldn't speak.

Zechariah's prayer for a child was answered. He also had something from God happen that most of us never will - he spoke with an angel. But instead of trusting God's angel, Zechariah asked for proof.

Outside the temple, he couldn't do anything since the crowd couldn't understand his hand motions and he couldn't speak, so he went home.

I am a lot like Zechariah. I see how we are similar because I also often doubt God's promises in the Bible. I forget to see how God is keeping His promises in my life.

During Advent, we celebrate one of the most important promises of God, that He would send us his Son, Jesus. I hope that we will not listen to our doubts and will happily accept the promises God has for us.

Advent | Day 6, December 4 | Luke 1:24-25

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, **25** "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Hope is what we focus on during Advent. A lot of us hope for a specific gift, or to see family and friends again, or to start a new year.

We read in the beginning of Luke that Elizabeth hoped for a child. She held onto that hope for so long even though her prayer was not answered for years. But finally, in these verses we hear what Elizabeth says when she sees that her prayer has been answered. **God did what other people thought was impossible to do! During the time that Elizabeth lived, people thought that women without children were less important than women who had children. That is why we see her thanking God for taking away the bad view that people had of her that separated her from them.**

For us, Jesus is our hope. The Savior who people waited for so long has come and taken away what separated us from God and other people - our sin (when we do things that are different than how God wants us to live life). We get to look at Jesus with joy, thankfulness, and hope since He will return and we can live forever with Him.

What are you hoping for right now? Do you hope most for Jesus? Let's thank him for being all we need to hope for!

Advent | Day 7, December 5 | Luke 1:26-30

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

The angel Gabriel starts speaking to Mary by calling her "favored one" which means that God was happy with her. Even though this was a good thing to be called, she still is worried when he says that to her and Gabriel has to tell her again that God has found favor with her and is happy with her.

Is God happy with Mary because she always did the right things? Is there something we can do to be called "favored" too? Nope. The Bible says that no one always does the right things and that no one can earn God being happy with them (Romans 3:10). The favor that Mary has from God means He chose to give something to Mary that she did not deserve because He is loving and generous. Mary gets to be the mom of Jesus because God generously chooses her to be His mom, not because of anything she had done.

Not only did God generously give Mary a gift, but He chose to send an angel from heaven to talk to her. Angels are a big deal. I would probably be like Mary and wonder why an angel would be talking to me too! Still, **Gabriel calls her "favored" and tells her that God is with her.**

What do you think it would be like to be with God? Would you feel happy, loved, relieved, or would you feel nervous like Mary? We forget that to be in front of God was scary for people in the Bible before they felt safe and loved. Thanks to Jesus, we don't need to feel not good enough to be with God. Because of Jesus, we are forgiven by God for everything wrong we have done and we can feel God's love. God has let us know in the Bible that His goal for the world was to bring together everything on earth and in heaven, which will happen when Jesus comes back to earth one day (Ephesians 1:7-10).

God chooses to be with us. He chooses to give us good things and forgiveness in order to bring heaven and earth together. **One of the names that Jesus is called is Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” Because of Jesus, God will be with anyone who asks Him and believes in Him. Now we are favored like Mary. God is happy with us and will always be with us. One day Jesus will come back to earth again and God will live on earth forever with us** (Revelation 21:3).

Craft | Week 1, Hope | Luke 1:26-33 The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Classic Salt Dough Ornaments

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

What you need:

- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- Up to 1 cup of water (add gradually)
- Cookie cutters
- Decorations (acrylic paint, glue, sequins, glitter, etc.)
- Ribbon

What to do:

1. Combine the salt and flour then pour in the water gradually, stopping when it has become dough-like and not too sticky. There should be no residue left on your fingers when you touch it.
2. Knead the dough on a floured surface for a few minutes to make it soft, workable and stretchy. Roll out the dough as if you were making cookies.
3. Choose a range of cookie cutter shapes and simply cut straight from the dough. Poke a straw through the top of each shape so that ribbon can be threaded through later.
4. Lay them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Cook at 200 degrees for up to 3 hours.
5. Let cool on the counter while the kids decide how to decorate them.
6. Paint, add glitter, sequins, dried foliage, whatever you can scoop up

Advent | Day 8, December 6 | Luke 1:31-33

31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

“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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

In today’s verses, Luke tells us more about the special talk that the angel Gabriel had with Mary. We already learned about this angel’s talk with Zechariah telling him that God would do a miracle and his wife Elizabeth would have a baby. Now we are going to learn about how Gabriel told Mary, the mom of Jesus, that God would do a miracle for her too!

The angel tells Mary true things about Jesus - things that God’s prophets - or messengers - wrote about a long time ago that were finally about to happen! **And Gabriel also says a powerful name for the first time ever in the Bible: Jesus.**

It’s amazing to think that this one name, Jesus, is the name that everyone in the whole Bible has been waiting for! We see the Bible mention a Messiah, or Savior, many times and by many names, but this name, His human name, is the most important of them all. His human name is the name that everyone will call Him when they bow down to Him as our king (Philippians 2:10-11). His human name is the name we ask to save us (Acts 4:12). **His human name reminds us of His plan: to save His people from their sins, the things they do that separate them from God (Matthew 1:21).**

How wonderful is His human name: Jesus!

Luke says that his reason for writing this book of the Bible is to help Theophilus know for sure that Jesus is the Messiah, or Savior of the world. By carefully describing Gabriel’s talk with Mary, Luke reminds people of the predictions that the prophets made earlier in the Bible about Jesus and his

life. Here are some of the verses in the Bible that predicted Jesus would come to earth. Isn't it cool that God used people to write these predictions hundreds of years ahead of time and then made them come true?

Isaiah 7:14 | God will show you that He is telling the truth. Look! A young woman who isn't married yet will have a baby boy and name him Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6-7 | This will happen when the special child is born. God will give us a son who will be in charge of leading the people. His name will be "Wonderful Helper, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace." His power will continue to grow, and there will be peace that will never end. He will be a king and show goodness and fairness forever and ever. The strong love that God has for his people will make this happen!

2 Samuel 7:12-13 | After your life, I (God) will make one of your children become the king. He will build a house for me and I will make his kingdom strong forever.

And ever and ever and ever.

Advent | Day 9, December 7 | Luke 1:34-38

34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. **36** And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God.”

38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

How surprising that the King of the whole universe would come to earth as a baby to a young, unmarried woman! But that’s how the Bible predicted that Jesus would arrive. “This will be how you know: look, a young woman will have a son and call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14), which means “God who is with us.”

Since the very beginning of the Bible, God has loved His people and wanted them to love Him too. This is the moment when we learn that God is finally going to come to earth so that His people can know and love Him! The angel tells the young woman that God is going to use her to have a baby who would help people finally be able to know and love God. God loves to use unexpected people, like Mary, to make His big plan happen in the world.

Mary would have been so surprised to hear that her baby would be the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Bible said that the Savior would come from a young, unmarried woman, but what are the chances that it would have been her?! A woman who was not well-known at all is chosen to be the mom of the Savior of the universe!

People probably did not believe her when she told them what happened since she was not yet married, but when she heard the angel’s message, she agreed to God’s plan with lots of faith.

Mary, a young, unmarried woman, and Elizabeth, an older woman who could not have children, had strong faith that God was with them. Imagine how much their friendship grew as both women believed and depended on God to do what He promised in their lives.

Like Mary and Elizabeth waited excitedly for their sons to be born who would change the world, how can you help others wait excitedly for Jesus to return? How do you think the women's faith would have encouraged people around them?

Faith is being confident that God is good and loves us - more confident than anything else in your life! I don't know where God will lead me, but I do know who is guiding me. (Martin Luther)

Advent | Day 10, December 8 | Luke 1:39-45

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, **40** and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. **41** And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, **42** and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! **43** And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. **45** And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Now Luke describes Elizabeth and her baby that is going to be born. As Mary visits her house with the baby Jesus inside her, we see John the Baptist inside his mom already showing the world that Jesus is special.

The angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his son John would prepare people for Jesus. **John let his mother know that she was around someone very special when she saw Jesus.** Elizabeth reacted by saying great things about God.

Mary was so happy to hear these words from Elizabeth. She has one of the biggest jobs ever and Elizabeth encourages her. We all need someone in our lives who sees us and encourages us to do God's plan for our lives.

How do you react when you are close to Jesus? Do you want to jump because you are so happy? Do you think you are special to be near Him like Elizabeth did? Are you encouraging people to live God's plan for their lives? Christmas is coming - are you excited for the coming King, Jesus?

Advent | Day 11, December 9 | Luke 1:46-56

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, **47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, **48** for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; **49** for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. **50** And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. **51** He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; **52** he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; **53** he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. **54** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, **55** as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." **56** And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Mary's song is one of my favorite parts of the Bible. Her thankfulness and amazement at God's greatness is obvious and we see parts of her song that are like verses in the Old Testament (the first half of the Bible).

Mary's song is like the song of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Both women were told they were pregnant and the first thing they did was tell God how great He is.

We can learn a few things from Mary's song:

Mary knew her Bible

Mary mentions the Old Testament multiple times, showing that she knew her Bible very well. She talks about Psalm 114, which talks about the Jewish holiday Passover. In the same way that the Jewish people celebrate Passover to remember how God saved them from Egypt, **the baby growing inside Mary would one day save the world from their sins (their actions that separated them from God).**

She understands her part in God's plan

Look at verses 48-49: **Mary says that from now on all people will say she was given a special gift from God, and she says that He is great.**

Mary has chosen to let God use her in his plan to save the world with Jesus. If God chose you for this extra special task in his plan to save the world, would you feel like it was because you did something great to deserve it or because you were better than other people?

That's not how God works. In the Bible, we see God often uses normal people to make the most important things happen, and Mary understands that. She says that people will say she is special because of what God has done for her, not anything she has done. **She gives all the credit to God.**

Mary celebrates even though God's plan hasn't been completed yet

Mary thanks God right away. She believes God's plan and is happy to be part of it. How often do we respond like her? How often do we completely trust God's promises? One pastor, Charles Spurgeon, said that most people don't even celebrate God when he has already given us something He promised, but Mary trusts God so much that she celebrates before she gets what God promises her. Mary is quick to give God all the credit He deserves.

I hope that this month we can celebrate and thank God for our lives. This year has been hard, but may we grow closer to each other and to God.

Advent | Day 12, December 10 | Luke 1:57-66

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. **58** And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. **59** And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, **60** but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." **61** And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." **62** And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. **63** And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. **64** And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. **65** And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, **66** and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

God's kindness is something we can't completely understand because it is so great. The Bible tells us that God's love and kindness never ends (Lamentations 3:22-23). He has more kindness for us every day. But how often do we thank God for the kindness he shows us every day? I don't do it enough. We have so many reasons to thank God!

At the beginning of these verses, we see people come visit Elizabeth because they have heard of the great kindness that God has shown her by giving her a child. They are celebrating!

But God does even more. **God lets Zechariah talk again after not being able to speak for 9 months. What does Zechariah first say? Instead of being mad at God for making him quiet for so long, he starts thanking God right away.**

Let's take time today to thank God for His kindness. No matter how big or small His kindness might seem today, let's take time to celebrate Him with our words!

Advent | Day 13, December 11 | Luke 1:67-80

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, **68** “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people **69** and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, **70** as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, **71** that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; **72** to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, **73** the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us **74** that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, **75** in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. **76** And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, **77** to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, **78** because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high **79** to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” **80** And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

I don't know about you, but my first words after having been silent and unable to speak for months would probably not be, “how amazing is the Lord God of Israel.” It makes you wish that we would react like that, doesn't it? **God kept his promise and it filled Zechariah with joy and thanks. God visited and saved His people just like He promised He would. Now we are forgiven of everything we do that separates us from God.**

The last book of the Bible tells us that one day we will not need a sun because we will be with God and He will be our light. We can thank and love God without being afraid because Jesus lets us take the credit for the perfect life that He lives. Because of Jesus, God now sees us as special and doing things that make him happy with us. Wow! That is good news!

These verses thank God, but also are a prediction from God. As Zechariah predicts his son's future, only 2 of the 12 verses are actually about his John. The other verses are about how John is part of Jesus' life and mission. How do you describe yourself? By the things you like to do? By your family? By what type of person you are? Do you think about yourself as part of Jesus' life and mission?

Our life makes the most sense when we think of who we are because of Jesus. **We are God's children who he loves so much!** We are saved from punishment because we believe in Jesus. It's not because we do something right; it's only because God saves us as a gift to us (Ephesians 2:8-9). Take time today to pray and write about who you are because of Jesus. Then thank Him.

Advent | Day 14, December 12 | Luke 2:1-7

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

He is here.

Imagine how all of heaven would have been focusing on this one baby in this one manger (a box for feeding animals) in this one little town. He is the great great great great great...great grandchild of Eve who God promised in the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 3:15). He is the one from God who would sacrifice himself to take away all the sins in the world (John 1:29), the only One who is great enough to finish God's plan (Revelation 5).

But this night, **Jesus is a baby wrapped up, laying on hay. His mother is tired. His father is amazed. Heaven is ready to celebrate. This is what all of heaven and earth has been waiting for: the God of everything was born as a tiny child in order to save the world.**

Here are the words from one version of the song Silent Night. **Rest today and think about the gift that we could never earn: Jesus, God with us.**

Silent Night (lyrics adapted slightly)

How do you fix a broken world?
Give it a gift it could never earn.
Give it love that it doesn't deserve.
Send it a Son who is a Savior.

It was a silent night.
A special night.
All was calm,
And all was bright.
The young woman was a Mother and the Child was

God as an infant so little and calm.

Hush, hush

I hear the clouds singing of His glory, singing

Hush, hush.

I see the sky showing God the Father's heart, singing

Hush, hush.

I see the stars bowing, Heaven is smiling down, singing

Hush, hush.

God is making my wrongs right, bringing me eternal life on a silent night.

How do you repay the gift of life?

How do you say thanks for a sacrifice?

Because silver and gold aren't enough,

So I'm giving God my heart as my reply.

It was a silent night.

A special night.

All was calm.

And all was bright.

The young woman was a Mother and the Child was

God as an infant so little and calm.

Hush, hush

I hear the clouds singing of His glory, singing

Hush, hush.

I see the sky showing God the Father's heart, singing

Hush, hush.

I see the stars bowing, Heaven is smiling down, singing

Hush, hush.

God is making my wrongs right, bringing me eternal life on a silent night.

Oh, a child is born for the world.

A Son is given to the world on a silent night.

All the greatness, all the respect

On a silent night.

<https://youtu.be/RIjVCY0mquk>

Craft | Week 2, Peace | Luke 1:68-79 Zechariah's Prophecy

Vanilla Peppermint Play Dough

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,
70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord
to prepare his ways,
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet
into the way of peace."

What you need:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup salt
- 4 tsp cream of tartar
- 2 cups water
- 2 tbs vegetable oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tbs peppermint extract or
8-10 drops peppermint
essential oil
- 1 tbs vanilla extract
- Food coloring (optional)*
- Glitter (optional)

What to do:

1. Combine all ingredients into a medium saucepan and stir together over low heat. Stir constantly until a dough begins to form and pulls away from the edges of the pot, about 15 minutes.
2. Just before taking the dough off the heat, add the peppermint extract/oil. Remove from the pot and place on the counter to cool.
3. Store in a Ziploc bag or sealable jar for up to 3 months!

**If you're making one color of playdough, add the food coloring at the same stage as the extract. If you are making more than one color, let the playdough cool enough to handle first. Separate the dough into desired amounts in plastic bags and knead in the food coloring drops.*

Advent | Day 15, December 13 | Luke 2:8-14

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

The first people who were told that Jesus was born were shepherds who were taking care of the sheep in a field nearby. That is interesting because Jesus is called the Good Shepherd since he takes care of us. Jesus was born in "the town of David." This is the town where David, the great king of Israel, was born. Jesus is even greater than David; he's an even greater King!

In the time of Jesus, shepherds would give their best lambs to God as a sacrifice to ask forgiveness for disobeying God. This is a picture of what God Himself would end up doing for us through Jesus. **Jesus is called the "Lamb of God" because He sacrifices himself to save the whole world and forgive us for disobeying God.** In all of the Bible, other sacrifices were given to God by good men like Abel (Genesis 4:4), Noah (Genesis 8:20), Abraham (Genesis 22:13), and Job (Job 1:5), but none of those could forgive the whole world. In the time of Moses, God told the people specific ways to give Him sacrifices, and over the years the people sacrificed millions of animals to God.

It is possible that the shepherds in the field close to where Jesus was born were taking care of sheep that would be used as sacrifices to God. These shepherds understood how much care it took to raise a lamb good enough for sacrifice, so they are amazed to hear the angels tell them that the perfect "Lamb of God has come!"

Jesus is the last and perfect sacrifice, born of a young woman and completely without sin since He always lived life how God wants us to live. He was perfect in every way.

Advent | Day 16, December 14 | Luke 2:15-20

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

In these verses, we see the first visitors the Bible describes who came to meet the Son of God - the shepherds from the fields. These ordinary people are told by an angel of God that the promised Savior was born and they go right away to meet the baby. I'm sure they were amazed to see a manger (animal food box), a baby, and a mom and dad who would soon hear the shepherds' amazing story of seeing angels who told them about the promised Savior. **If Mary was unsure of anything, the shepherds were there to remind her of who her baby truly was: the Savior who God promised to the people of Israel hundreds of years ago. I'm sure it was a lot to think about!**

The shepherds' story encouraged the new mother. As Mary thought in her heart about their words, it was another reminder of God's plan for her: to raise the Son of God so he can complete His mission. His mission is just starting and will be finished over 30 years later when he becomes the Savior who came back to life. **Everything during Jesus' life will matter to Mary, to the shepherds, and to us today.**

Have you thought about what the day Jesus was born means? What do these verses and Jesus' life later as an adult mean to you? Have you been telling the story of His arrival to people like the shepherds did? Christmas is coming; are you telling people about the coming King?

Advent | Day 17, December 15 | Luke 2:21-24

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. **22** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") **24** and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had a job to do. The Jewish law from God had requirements for different times in someone's life (Leviticus 12), and one of the requirements was for when someone was born.

Mary followed the law for what was supposed to be done with Jesus when he was eight days old, which showed that Mary and Joseph loved to do what God says. It also made sure that Jesus would be able to obey all parts of the Jewish law in His life.

The requirements here for babies were in the law so that people would remember that we are all born with sin - we all naturally disobey God and need to be purified, or cleaned to be with Him. **Jesus was the only person who was born and lived his whole life without sin, but we see in the Bible that even as a baby, Jesus came to live His life like us.**

Even as a baby, Jesus was already beginning to take away the sins of the world by following the law perfectly.

We also see in verse 24 that Mary gives what was known as "the offering of the poor." The law said that people had to give a lamb to God, but if they could not afford a lamb, they could offer two turtle doves or two pigeons instead. That's how we know that Jesus was born in an ordinary home. He was born to a home that couldn't afford expensive things, not even a lamb.

But God gave a different lamb for a bigger purpose. Jesus was the most important lamb. **He lived his whole life like the law says and then sacrificed Himself to pay for our sins and save us from the punishment we deserve for not obeying God's law.**

He gave us a gift that we could never give ourselves - forgiveness and love from God.

Jesus was the lamb for all of us, when all we could afford is two turtledoves.

Advent | Day 18, December 16 | Luke 2:25-32

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. **27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, **29** "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; **30** for my eyes have seen your salvation **31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

One of the great things about Advent is that it's the time of waiting. We wait four Sundays in a row before we finally get to celebrate that our Savior was born. Each day we slowly get closer and closer to this celebration, time to remember, and hope about the future. This time of Advent reminds us about what we are always doing - waiting for Jesus to come again as He promised.

In today's reading, we see Simeon who was also trusting and waiting for Jesus. God had promised that Simeon would not die until he saw the Christ, the Savior. This was what Simeon had hoped for and waited for. We see him in the temple waiting as he probably did every day. God had not told him when this Christ would come, just that he would not die before he saw Him. **How wonderful it is that we get to see this promise answered in the Bible! Simeon knows as soon as he sees Jesus that He was the person that God had promised he would see.**

Let's take a minute to think about how good and true Simeon's words are as he thanks God for finally being able to see the Savior of the world. "Lord, now I have peace in my life, just as you said; because I have seen the person you will use to save the world, to bring truth to everyone, and to make your people in Israel admired." We have also seen the person that God promised to do these things.

Spend some time today thanking God for his special gift of Jesus, the Savior who people hoped and waited so long to arrive.

Advent | Day 19, December 17 | Luke 2:33-35

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. **34** And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed **35** (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Lots of people would later be amazed at Jesus like his parents were - people who heard Him teach, people who He healed, people who saw Him do miracles, and even people who just heard stories about Him. **But there were also a lot of people who heard and saw the same things but did not like Him**, including the people who were from His city and Bible leaders.

In verse 34, Simeon's words are like another Bible verse (Isaiah 8:14) that says God's Savior would make some people in Jerusalem angry. Yesterday, we read that Jesus would be a light showing truth to people (verses 30-32), but Jesus is also a light that shows what people are thinking in their hearts.

He was chosen to help some people grow but some people would fall, or turn away from God. **Not everyone would be amazed by Jesus and grow toward God by following Him. Many people will disagree with Him and end up turning away from God.** God has always wanted our hearts - for us to love Him more than anything else - and these verses remind us that God can see what we really think about Him.

The Bible says that because we are sinful (that we don't always want to obey God), there are times when we disagree with Jesus. Today, let's ask Jesus to show us how our thoughts might disagree with Him. Then, let's take time to ask Him to forgive us and pray that He would help us live how He wants us to.

What things do you love about Jesus?

Write down or tell someone these things and take a minute to thank God for sending Jesus to save us.

Is there anything you don't like that Jesus says? What parts of the Bible do you not like to obey?

Write down or tell someone these things and ask God to forgive you and help you want to obey Him.

Here is one more verse to encourage you, since it is true of everyone who believes in Jesus:

“Since we can confidently come to God because of Jesus, let's come to Him with lots of trust in Him and with confidence that Jesus has made our hearts good.” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Advent | Day 20, December 18 | Luke 2:36-38

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, **37** and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.^[a] She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. **38** And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna understands. She **sees the baby Jesus and begins telling people about Him right away. The Savior they have been waiting for is here!**

In the Bible, we see lots of people in Israel who don't understand. They met Jesus, saw His miracles, heard Him teach, saw Him die, and they didn't believe He was the Savior they had been waiting for. **Even leaders who had memorized the Bible verses about Jesus** and knew every word in the whole Law **did not realize that the Savior had been right in front of them.**

Anna, though, lived her life knowing God, and she knows exactly who this baby is. The temple (which is like church) she goes to is where Jesus will visit a lot as He gets older - He will chase out thieves from the temple, predict how He will come back to life, teach and heal people, and resist the devil here - but in these verses He is still a baby. The Savior that everyone waited for is a baby in His mother's arms.

This is the only time we read about Anna in the Bible, but I bet that after years of praying at the temple, she would understand the important meaning of Jesus' words when he is an adult and says "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here," (Matthew 12:6). Jesus is much more important, much greater, than the temple because He is God.

Let's not miss celebrating our Savior Jesus this month. Advent is almost over. Christmas for us may look different this year than last year, but there are lots of opportunities to be distracted by things that aren't Jesus. Don't let this month end and let the Savior pass by without seeing Him like other people did in the Bible. **Talk about Him to people at home so that we can remind each other about our Savior Jesus.**

Song:

"Shout it.

Go on and scream it from the mountains.

Go on and tell it to the masses (groups of people).

That He is God"

- *All the Poor and Powerless* by All Sons and Daughters

Advent | Day 21, December 19 | Luke 2:39-40

39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Mary and Joseph obey the Law by bringing their baby Jesus to the temple to promise Him to God.

When Jesus is older, He teaches the people and says “Don’t think I came to throw away the Law in the Bible; I did not come to throw it away, but to finish it. Whoever ignores even the smallest rule and teaches other people to ignore one too will be less respected in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever follows God’s rules and teaches them to other people will be called great in the kingdom heaven. I’m telling you that unless you live better than the teachers of the Bible, you will never go to the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:17-20).

Since Jesus finishes the law and sacrifices himself for us, our sin doesn’t keep us away from God anymore! We don’t have to sacrifice animals (like lambs and pigeons) to pay for our sins and get forgiven and we don’t have to do everything right. **Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, God is generous and kind to us all the time, even when we disobey Him.** We often say that Jesus died for us, but we still think we have to be good enough for God to love us.

Even though Jesus did everything God wanted us to do, do you ever think that there are rules you need to follow for God to love you? Take time to thank God that Jesus followed all the rules for us and all God wants us to do is love and trust Him.

Craft | Week 3, Joy | Luke 1:8-17

DIY Enamel Hot Cocoa Mug

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

What you need:

- Enamel mugs to decorate!
- Rubbing alcohol + cotton ball
- White extra fine tip oil-based Sharpie paint pen (Other paint pens designed for use on ceramics should work, but water based makers will not work!)
- Stencils (optional)
- Paper to practice on (optional)

What to do:

1. Pre-clean your mugs with rubbing alcohol to remove any residues or oils and help the marker stick.
2. Once the alcohol is dried, get drawing!

Advent | Day 22, December 20 | Luke 2:41-52

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. **42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. **43** And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, **44** but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, **45** and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. **46** After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. **48** And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." **49** And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" **50** And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. **51** And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. **52** And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Here we see 12-year old Jesus traveling with His parents to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate a holiday called Passover. We learn in these verses that He is very focused on doing what His Father, God, wants Him to do - talk with the teachers and the people in the temple area. Do you wonder where Jesus slept at night and what He ate for the three days He was there without His parents? These verses don't tell us, but they do tell us how amazed all the people were when He asked questions and gave answers.

Jesus was where He wanted to be. We also see the other side of this story - worried parents trying to find their son for three days. I'm sure they were feeling so many things while they nervously searched the fields, the city, and the temple where they finally found Him. Mary was focused on saving Jesus, but Jesus was focused on saving the world. **He knew what His Father in heaven (God) wanted Him to do and He was going to do it**, even if it meant disappointing His parents on earth (Mary and Joseph).

What about you? What do you feel like God wants you to do? How can you stay very focused on doing that without being distracted? How can

you stay focused even if no one else helps you? **Christmas is coming - are you focused on what God is doing?**

Advent | Day 23, December 21 | Luke 3:1-6

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, **2** during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **4** As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. **5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, **6** and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

John the Baptist served God all the time. His entire life was about telling others about Jesus. We see in verses 4-6 that **John is who the Bible predicted would come before Jesus to prepare the world for Him.**

John didn't tell other people about Jesus because it helped himself. He told them because that's what God wanted him to do. Actually, when he did start to get more famous, a king punished him.

How often are we happy to do what God wants, even if it's hard? How often are we okay living our whole life to make God happy without getting anything compliments or rewards? If I'm honest, I don't usually live like that. I get distracted by what I want to do and what I can get for myself.

During this time of Advent, it's easy to get excited about Christmas celebrations or about gifts we might get from people. I hope we can **take some time to think about what we can do this year to also tell people what John the Baptist said:**

**"Prepare for Jesus to come!
Every person will see God save the world."**

Jesus tells us we are the light of the world because we are supposed to tell people this good news, like John did. **Tell people about Jesus who haven't heard about Him. Be as kind and generous with other people as God is to**

us. God, who created the whole universe, loves us so, so much. Let's use our time to love Him too and help tell the world about Him.

Advent | Day 24, December 22 | Luke 3:7-14

7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. **9** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." **10** And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" **11** And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." **12** Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" **13** And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." **14** Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

Do you ever learn things about God from other people that you remember for a long time? I do. I remember someone told me that if we do the right things for the wrong reason, it still can be sin.

I bet that's how the people who are coming to John must feel. They came to be baptized, but not for the right reason. John says they are there only because they do not want to be punished. When they ask him what they should do instead, John gives each of them different answers. He tells the crowd to share their clothes and food with people who need them. He tells the people who collect money for the government to only collect the amount they are supposed to (instead of making people give them extra money so they could keep some for themselves). To the soldiers, he tells them to not scare people into giving them money.

John told each type of person to love others in specific ways that were hard for them. They were all ways that Jesus loves us. We can't say that we love God if we don't want to love His people too. That's one of the great things about Christmas. We get to show our love of people through giving (our time, our help, or presents). Let's not stop after Christmas. Let's keep loving others, just like Jesus loves us every day.

Advent | Day 25, December 23 | Luke 3:15-20

15 As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, **16** John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **17** His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." **18** So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. **19** But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, **20** added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

We are people who care what others think of us. When we do a good job, we want people to tell us. Many of us are worried about not being important. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be told that we did something well, but what really matters is who tells us that. We shouldn't hope that people compliment us, when we can focus on God telling us that we have done a good job and He is proud of us. Isn't that what we really want to hear?

As Christians, we want to work hard and do good work for God.

Sometimes people notice when we do a good job, but we know that we can't do anything good without God's help. **John shows us in these verses how to do good work and give the credit to God.**

The people are wondering if he is the Savior that the Bible promised. John was doing great work. He was doing such a good job at getting the people's hearts ready for the Savior that they think he is the Savior! But, he chooses to correct them to make sure that Jesus is the one they would compliment and follow. Not only that, but **he made sure they knew who Jesus really was.** John tells them that the person who is greater than him (Jesus) will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. John only baptizes with "normal" water.

John tells people how Jesus is the Savior and the Judge who "gathers the wheat" (wheat represents the people who believe in Jesus who he brings to live with Him forever). John hopes that when Jesus arrives, people will know who He is. **He is completely focused on preparing the world for Jesus to**

arrive, so He teaches the truth even when it's hard and even though people locked him in prison for it. To John, Jesus is worth it.

All of us have a chance to prepare the world for Jesus, just like John did. Jesus has saved us and made us sons and daughters of God, so we are invited to help Him with His mission.

Remember these two things about Advent:

First, we remember the people of Israel hoped and waited for a long time for the Savior that the Bible promised. We celebrate that He arrived on earth and beat sin and death.

Second, we hope and wait for Him to come back again, as He promised. Are you using your life, like John, to make sure that people are prepared for Jesus to arrive again? He is worth it!

Advent | Day 26, December 24 | Luke 3:21-38

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, **22** and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son;[t] with you I am well pleased." **23** Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, **24** the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, **25** the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, **26** the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, **27** the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,[v] the son of Neri, **28** the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, **29** the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, **30** the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, **31** the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, **32** the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, **33** the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, **34** the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, **35** the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, **36** the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, **37** the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, **38** the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

"The son of God" (verse 38).

Maybe we hear too often how we are sons and daughters of God to be amazed when we hear this verse. Go back and read again about Jesus' baptism. Look what God says: You are my Son who I love very much.

Many times in the book of Luke, we see how Jesus is both a human and God.

Even though He was born as a little baby around dirty animals, a star appeared in the sky when He was born.

As a baby, His parents took Him to the temple like the Law says to do, but while they were there, multiple people recognized that He was the Savior that the Bible promised.

When He was 12 years old, His parents lost Him in Jerusalem. When they find Him in the temple, He is not afraid and is making grown men amazed with His questions and everything He understands.

Since this book of the Bible was written to make Theophilus (and us) sure about who Jesus is, then these are important verses to do that. Here we see again how Jesus is both a human and God. He comes to get baptized by John even though He has never sinned and doesn't need to wash away His sin, but He does it to live like we do as humans. And **when He comes out of the water after being baptized, God speaks to Jesus and calls Him His very loved Son.**

Luke also makes sure we understand that Jesus is God's son by showing us Jesus' family tree. Beginning with the phrase "being the son of Joseph (as was supposed)," Luke tells us Jesus' family all the way back to Adam and then to God.

Earlier, Luke showed us how one of the Bible's predictions came true by a young, unmarried woman being the mother of the Savior. Here he shows us another prediction that came true when he describes Jesus' family all the way back to Adam.

In the beginning of the Bible, God gives us His first promise that predicts He will send someone to save the world. After Adam and Eve eat the fruit that they were told not to eat, God tells the serpent that He will one day give a baby to a woman who will beat the serpent for good.

By showing how God says that Jesus is His Son, and by including Jesus' family tree that leads back to Adam and then God, Luke shows us how Jesus is completely God and also completely human. As both God and a human, He is the only person who can bring us back to God the Father. He is the One promised in the first half of the Bible, the King who is better than all kings, the Son of God. **There is nothing He can't do. There is no sin that is too big for Him to forgive. There is no sadness too small for Him to care about. No miracle is too hard for him to do.**

Tomorrow is Christmas - the day we celebrate that Jesus first came to earth. Jesus came as completely God and completely human, arriving as a little baby. He came to bring us back to Himself so that we can live with Him forever and ever and ever.

O Holy Night (adapted)

By Adolphe Adam and John Sullivan Dwight

Oh special night, the stars are brightly shining.
It is the night that our Savior was born.
For a long time the world was full of sin and errors
Until He appeared and gave our soul meaning.

Filled with hope, the whole world celebrates
Because here comes a new and amazing day.

Kneel down and
Hear the angels' voices.
This special night
The night when Jesus was born.
This special night
This night
This special night.

Craft | Week 4, Love | Matthew 2:1-11 The Wise Men Visit Jesus

Gifts for Jesus Placemat

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” **3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

6 “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” **9** After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. **11** And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

What you need:

- Contact paper
- Frankincense | Sugar in the Raw + mixed with coarse salt
- Gold | Gold glitter or flakes
- Myrrh | Green leaves
- Straw | Dead grass, broken spaghetti or torn construction paper
- Ribbon
- Scissors

Other placemat theme ideas

Winter wonderland | White hole punch chads, silver glitter, rosemary (fresh or dried), twigs

Jesus's birthday | Confetti, balloons, ribbon, squares of construction paper (as gift boxes)

Nativity scene | Straw, brown sugar, cotton balls, twigs, Star of Bethlehem, angel shaped paper

What to do:

1. Cut two pieces of contact paper to placemat size. Lay one out on a flat surface, sticky side up.
2. Use a ribbon to make a “frame,” if desired.
3. Let your kids sprinkle the frankincense, gold, myrrh and straw, reading the corresponding scripture as they go.
4. When they are finished decorating, lay the second piece of contact paper on top, sticky side down. Press both sheets together, making sure to push out any air bubbles.
5. Trim the edges and voila