



# An angel brings good news

Session 1  
Winter 2015–16  
Early Childhood

LUKE 1:5–25

## prepare

### PRAYER

*Amazing God, I want to be able to see your work in the world. I want to be able to recognize the messengers you send. Open my eyes to you. Amen.*

### PURPOSE STATEMENT

To rejoice with Elizabeth and Zechariah

### STORY SUMMARY

Elizabeth and Zechariah had grown old without having any children. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was offering incense in the sanctuary of the temple. The angel said they would have a son named John who would turn many to God. Zechariah doubted, so the angel said Zechariah would be unable to speak until his son's birth. When Zechariah came out of the sanctuary, people realized he had seen a vision.



### teaching tips for early childhood

Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent. Lighting one candle at the beginning of each session builds a sense of expectation. LED candles are suggested, but could be replaced with real candles if that works in your setting.

Use the Story figure patterns on pages 91–92 to prepare a set of figures for use throughout the quarter. Instructions are on page 90. You may want to invest the time and effort to have someone from the congregation cut them out of wood. These patterns are available online at [www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras](http://www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras). Also on this webpage are tips for working with younger children.

Go to [www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras](http://www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras) to find tips for working with younger children. Decide which Explore activities you will do. If you plan to offer today's Discover option, check with families ahead of time to see if children are sensitive to particular smells. Check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

## Zechariah and Elizabeth, models of righteousness

In the Gospel of Luke, the good news of Jesus is linked to other stories of God's faithful intervention. God is at work in the lives of God's people. After a brief and highly literary introduction (verses 1–4), Luke shifts to a plainer narrative style and tone that reminds us of Old Testament accounts. Luke introduces Zechariah and Elizabeth as a righteous couple, advanced in years, yet childless. He draws a deliberate connection to the story of Abraham and Sarah, the father and mother of the faith. In so doing, Luke signals to readers that there is no conflict between observant Jewish devotion and this new chapter in the story of salvation.

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth begins in the temple, a very significant choice of location. Temples were understood as meeting places between heaven and earth. Zechariah has been granted the extremely rare privilege of burning incense in the holy place, the closest any ordinary priest could approach to God's presence. While in the holy place, the angel Gabriel appears at the right side of the altar of incense, signifying the goodwill of God. Gabriel proclaims that Elizabeth and Zechariah will bear a son, John, who will be filled with the Holy Spirit and will minister in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah.

The timing of this scene at the moment of daily prayer is also significant. Luke emphasizes the role of prayer more than the other Gospel writers. Many key events in the books of Luke and Acts happen as a result of prayer. Outside the temple, crowds are gathered in prayer; inside, prayer is symbolized by Zechariah's offering of incense. Gabriel tells Zechariah that his prayer has been heard, weaving the prayers of Zechariah and Elizabeth together with the prayers of the nation.

### A surprising response

Given the careful staging of this scene, Zechariah's dull response to Gabriel's good news is surprising. As a priest, Zechariah would have been responsible for teaching



scripture in village life and for serving two weeks each year in temple service. He should have been the first to recognize that the good news brought by Gabriel was entirely in character with God's compassionate intervention in the world. Zechariah, however, fails to perceive this and fails to respond to God's gracious initiative.

Zechariah is disciplined in a way that symbolizes his lack of spiritual insight. In biblical times, those who were hearing impaired would have been unable to speak. Zechariah's mute condition signifies his own imperception. Spiritual perception and imperception are prominent symbols throughout Luke and Acts. In a later example, we see Paul's temporary blindness in the same way: Paul was unable to perceive God's plan and his own persecution of Christians (Acts 9:1–9).

Zechariah's response to Gabriel's words is meant to be compared and contrasted with other accounts. When Gabriel comes to Mary, her reaction to his announcement is quite different than Zechariah's (Luke 1:26–56). She is shown as one who is quick to perceive what God is doing; she believes and submits to God's will. Likewise, in Luke 2, Simeon and Anna, another elderly man and woman, readily perceive and believe God's gracious plan. At the end of Acts, Paul issues a final, cautionary word from prison, reiterating the prophet Isaiah's warning about spiritual imperception and dullness among God's people (Acts 28:26–27; Isaiah 6:9–10). Like Paul, Zechariah will not remain imperceptive and unbelieving, but will yield to loud praise when his tongue is loosed.

Zechariah and Elizabeth have a representative role in the Gospel of Luke. Their individual story is woven into and symbolic of the larger story of salvation that Luke narrates. Zechariah plays a key role in this larger story through his role as a priest and representative of the people before God. As we read on in Luke's narrative, we shall see that Zechariah symbolizes a divided Israel. Poised somewhere between doubt and faith, Zechariah is a focal point for transformation.

# gather

## supplies

- *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*
- CD player
- Four LED candles on a plate

## resource pack

- Bible memory poster (Luke 1)
- "Places of worship" poster

## to do

- Post the "Places of worship" poster and the Bible memory poster from the resource pack.
- Place four LED candles on a plate to make an Advent display. *Option:* Lay greenery or pinecones around the candles or use a traditional Advent wreath.

## media connections

- Internet search for images of "Herod's temple"
- Internet search for video clips of the "Temple Mount in the time of Jesus"
- Pinterest search for "Advent wreath" for ideas for worship area
- Books celebrating the wonder of babies, such as *Everywhere Babies* by Susan Meyers or *Global Babies* by the Global Fund for Children

## BUILD COMMUNITY

Say the following chant for each person in the room, including adults. Rub your palms together as you chant, then point at the named person on the word *you*.

Special, special, special,  
\_\_\_\_\_ (*name*), you're very special.

God made you!

## WORSHIP TOGETHER

Draw attention to the four Advent candles in the worship area. Explain that today you will light a candle for hope. Hope is a belief that good things will happen.

Turn on one candle and sing verse 1 of "Light One Candle" from the *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*, track 19. Song lyrics are at the back of this guide.

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Some spiritual practices are done individually, while others happen when people gather. Look at the "Places of worship" poster from the resource pack together. How are these places similar to or different from your church? Invite children to talk about things you do together at church, such as sing, pray, and read the Bible. These are all ways to show love for God. You will do all those things today.

God, we love you. Be with us today. Amen.

## Bible memory

Draw attention to the Bible memory poster. Talk together about the pictures on the poster. Ask questions like: What do you see? What are some things children do with their feet? Point to the words on the poster as you read the verse. Invite the children to repeat them after you.

Guide our feet into the way of peace.  
—Luke 1:79b

# experience

## SHARE THE STORY

Open a Bible to Luke 1 and show the words of the story. Set the open Bible to the side.

Set out a small box to represent the holy place of the temple. Read the short description of the temple on the "Places of worship" poster from the resource pack.

Set the Crowd story figure from page 92 in this guide next to the box. Say:

**Many people came to the temple, but only a few of the special priests could go into the holy place (*point to the box*) of the temple.**

Have three other figures (Zechariah, Elizabeth, angel) out of sight.

The Bible story is found on the back of the story picture in the resource pack. Follow the instructions there for movement of the props.

## WONDER AND REFLECT

Ponder the following together, aloud or silently. Use the time to explore the story in greater depth, not as a time to test the children's comprehension.

- (*Point to the box.*) I wonder why only some people could go into the holy place.
- (*Take a deep breath in through your nose.*) Imagine your favorite smell filling the room.
- I wonder how Zechariah felt when he could not talk.
- Zechariah and Elizabeth were so happy about having a baby. I wonder what makes you feel happy inside.

Give each child a crayon and an Early Childhood leaflet open to page 3. Children can draw lines to indicate what made Zechariah and Elizabeth most happy, as well as what brings them joy.

## PEACE NOTES

Zechariah and Elizabeth chose to walk in God's ways. They prayed to God. Zechariah also helped out in the temple.

If possible, walk around your building. As you walk in different spaces, talk about ways people help the church, such as by playing music, arranging worship spaces, helping in the kitchen, handing out bulletins, setting up chairs, cleaning, taking care of the outdoors, and so on. If you see someone, stop and introduce these workers to the children. If you cannot take the group around your building, talk about some of the different rooms (sanctuary, kitchen, office) and how people help in those spaces.



**An angel brings good news**

**Luke 1:5-25**

## supplies

- Bible
- Early Childhood leaflets
- Crayons

## resource pack

- Story picture
- "Places of worship" poster

## storytelling props

- Story figures: Zechariah, Elizabeth, angel, Crowd (from Additional resources)
- Box
- Play dough and craft sticks (optional)

## to do

- Copy and prepare story figures from pages 91-92 in this guide, or use your own figures. Use the Crowd figure and choose three other figures to represent Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the angel. *Option:* Spread a thick layer of play dough on a tray. Stand craft sticks in the dough to create a large crowd of people.
- Find a box large enough for two story figures to stand inside it. Cut off one side of the box so children will be able to see the figures.
- Practice telling the story with the props.

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# explore

## CREATE

Create an Advent wreath for the children to take home. Demonstrate how to roll a ball of dough into a “snake” shape about the diameter of your thumb. Then connect the ends to create a ring. Place the ring on a paper plate. Stick four birthday candles into the dough. Children can take the wreaths home for use in an Advent worship time. The Early Childhood leaflet gives ideas for families on page 4.

### supplies

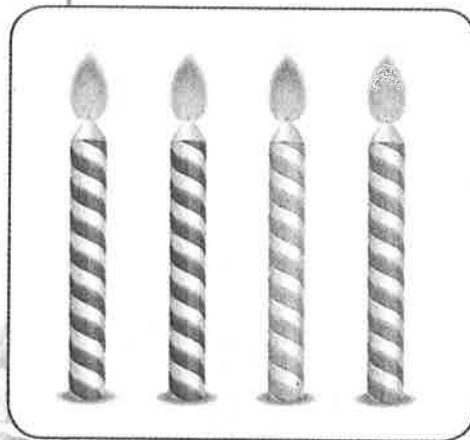
- Early Childhood leaflets
- Play dough or salt dough (recipes at [www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras](http://www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras))
- Paper plates
- Birthday candles (four per child)

## MOVE

Zechariah was not able to speak for many months. Play a game of “Charades” to get a feel for communicating without words. Each child can act out an activity without using words. The other children guess the activity being acted out. You may need to give children ideas for what activity to do or how to move. See “Ideas for charades game” on page 90 in this guide.

### supplies

- “Ideas for charades game” (from Additional resources)



### other ideas

- Build a temple or altar with blocks.
- Sing or listen to Christmas songs about angels, such as “Angels We Have Heard on High” and “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.” Many are available on YouTube.

## RETELL

Set out costumes and props related to the story. Children often think of ideas for play based on the props they see. Encourage children to play out the story in their own way.

### supplies

- Bible-times costumes or towels and belts
- White or yellow cloth (angel)
- Large box (altar)
- Battery-operated candles to place on altar

## DISCOVER

Begin by having children complete page 2 in the Early Childhood leaflet. Explain that Zechariah worshiped God by burning incense in the temple. The smoke smelled sweet and filled the room. Set out various objects with scents for the children to smell. Drops of liquids can be placed on a cotton ball inside a small container. Dry spices can be sprinkled inside a small container.

### supplies

- Early Childhood leaflets
- Crayons
- Small containers
- Cotton balls
- Extracts, such as vanilla, lemon, almond
- Spices, such as cinnamon, basil, garlic powder
- Scented lotion

# bless

## PRAY

Gather the group for a blessing. Pray:

**God, keep us safe wherever we go this week. Remind us that you can do amazing things. Amen.**

## SEND

Give children their Advent candle wreaths from Explore (Create) to hold. Sing verse 1 of “This Little Light of Mine” from the *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*, track 27. The lyrics are at the back of this guide.

Make sure to send leaflets and Advent wreaths home with the children.

Let families know that there is a free download of the song “Light One Candle” on the Shine website ([www.ShineCurriculum.com/Music](http://www.ShineCurriculum.com/Music)). Instructions for downloading the free song are on the back of the Early Childhood leaflet, along with family Advent worship ideas.

## supplies

- Early Childhood leaflets
- *Shine Early Childhood Music CD*
- CD player
- Advent wreaths (from Explore)

### leader's closing prayer

We are flooded with messages—email, text messages, voicemail. We get snail mail and memos and notices. We read newspapers, books, and magazines. With all these flashy “voices,” our sensitivity to God’s messages of hope can often be dulled.

*God, I want to recognize your voice. I want to be guided and shaped by your loving hand. Give me hope this season. Help me to imagine what you might do in my life and in this world. Amen.*

*Some young children seem to have very strong likes and dislikes. It is important to have a variety of activities. Whenever possible, I solicit input from parents in advance about their children's likes and dislikes to help me in planning.*

—Christopher Walker  
Conover, Ohio

