

Hope

Week 1 - Scene 1



The Promise of the Messiah *(Isaiah 7:10-17, 9:1-7; Micah 5:2)*

Summary

It is important that in all these Old Testament promises about the coming of the Messiah, God's people are facing enemies and an uncertain future. Every time, they need hope. In each passage we read, God promises His people that he will bring them salvation by the birth of their Messiah. The New Testament takes these important passages and reminds us of them at the birth of Jesus Christ. The Gospels introduce His birth with genealogies, which for us is a little odd. We may not be proud of all the people in our family's past, but perfection is not the point. The individuals included in the lists tell the stories of people who were redeemed and used powerfully by God, and who now point the way to our Savior and His work. The birth of Jesus is God's long-foretold plan. The birth of Jesus means we can be saved by God, and that there is genuine hope even when we are surrounded by enemies and face an uncertain future.

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- Share some of your favorite Christmas memories as a family (without talking about presents!).
- The promise of Jesus' birth gives hope to His people. How do you think Jesus brings hope that other things in this world cannot?
- Read the names given to the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6. Talk about each one and how you think it applies to Jesus.
- Talk to each other about the hope that Jesus can bring into your family.

4-8-year-olds

- Think about a time you were like King Ahaz, and you were afraid about something. Do you remember what made you feel better and what gave you hope?
- Jesus came to give all of us hope. When you think about your family, what kinds of good things do you hope for?

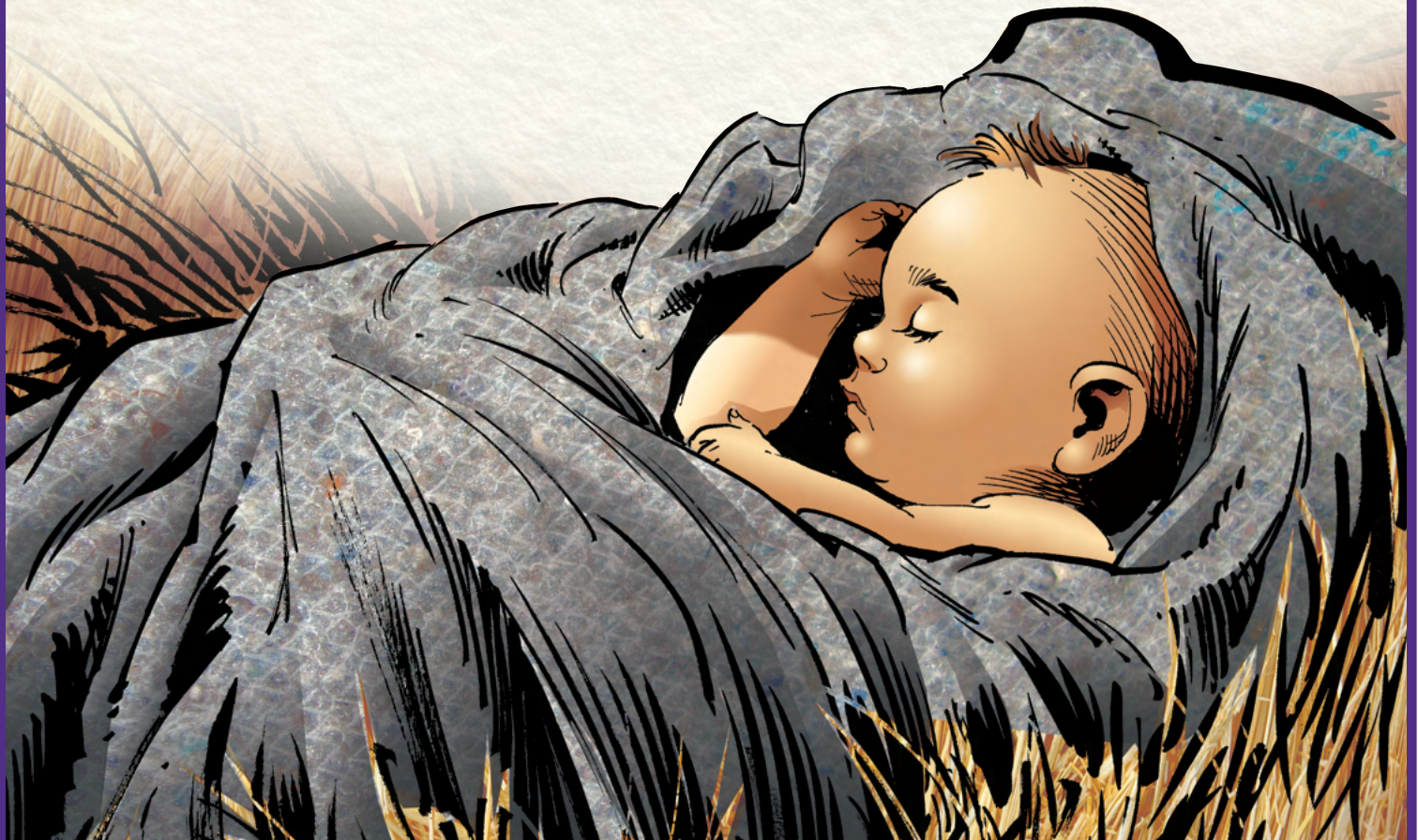


9-12-year-olds

- Do you remember a time when someone broke their promise?
- Isaiah 9:2 says that the birth of Jesus will be like light shining in a dark place. Where do you want the light of Christ to shine?
- Scripture says that when we hope in Jesus, we hope in what we do not see with our eyes (Hebrews 11:1). How can you reassure yourself that God will fulfill all of His promises?
- The promise of the birth of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled. Our hope for His coming again is still in the future. How does your hope in the future change the way you live today?

13-18-year-olds

- Ray Vander Laan talked about how Westerners and Easterners think about the Bible differently. How does this change your perspective, especially regarding your ideas about God and interpreting Scripture?
- We think a lot about how the Bible relates to our lives. Have you ever thought about God's faithfulness to the prophetic promises He makes in His Word? How does this make you feel about the future?
- When you think about how long the people of Israel waited for the Messiah, does God seem more trustworthy or more unpredictable to you? Why?
- What promises have we made that you want us to keep? (Examples: paying allowance in exchange for chores, providing unconditional love, forgiving one another, etc.)



Hope

Week 1 - Scene 2



Gabriel Announces the Birth to Mary *(Luke 1:26-38; Psalm 89:1-4)*

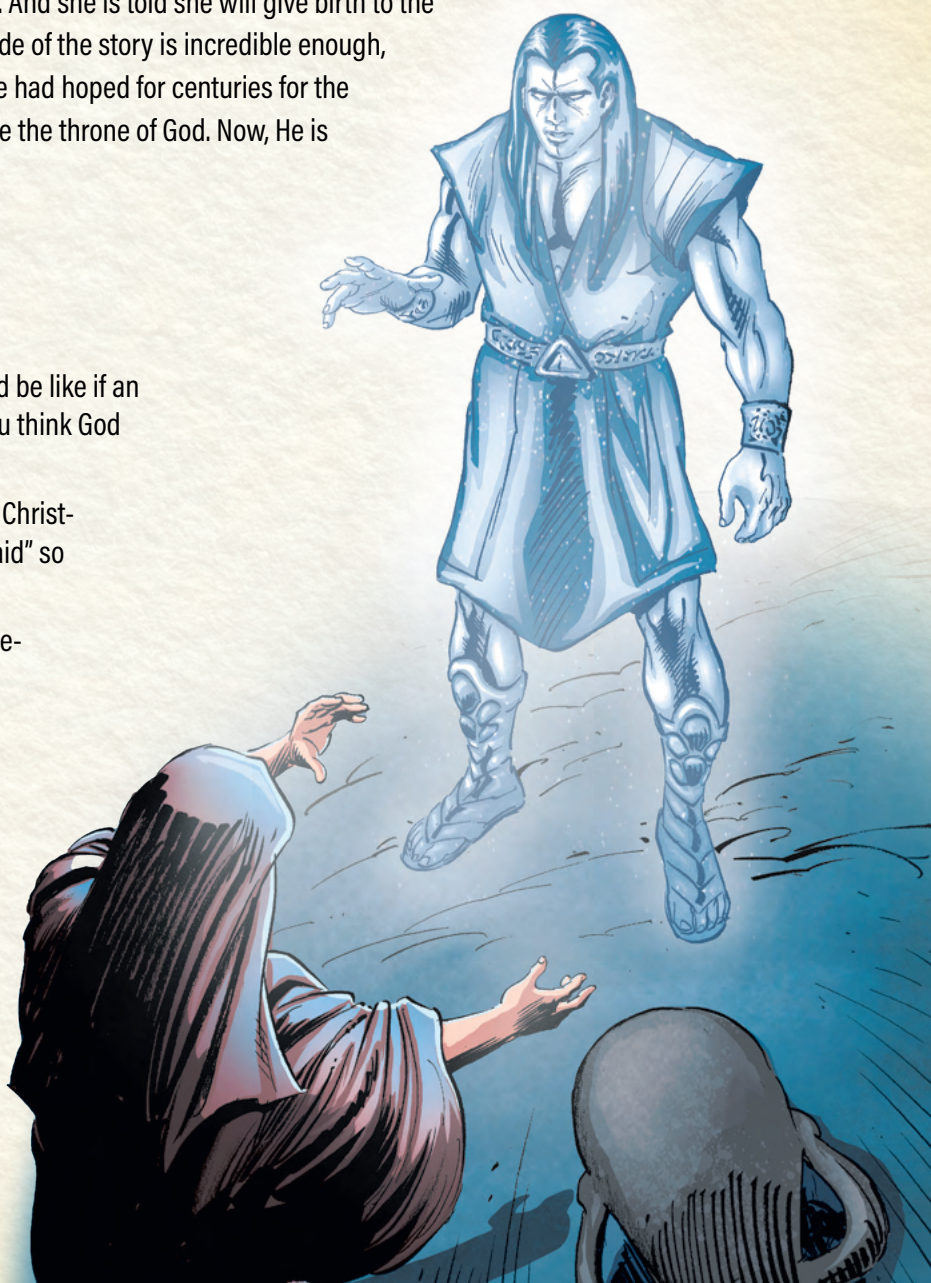
Summary

It is amazing to imagine the scene: Mary is a young teenager, and an angel of God appears and begins to talk with her! Gabriel comes with a message from God that is at first frightening and unbelievable. Mary is told to not be afraid; we would probably all be afraid if we were her. And she is told she will give birth to the Messiah even though she is a virgin. Her side of the story is incredible enough, but it is part of God's larger plan. His people had hoped for centuries for the Messiah, the Son of David, to come and take the throne of God. Now, He is coming. Their hope will be fulfilled.

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- Imagine and describe what it would be like if an angel appeared to you. What do you think God would say?
- Why do you think the angels in the Christmas story tell people to "not be afraid" so often?
- What does it mean to hope for something to happen? How does that impact your decisions in life?
- The people of God had been hoping for their Messiah for a very long time. What do think it would be like to hope for something that long?
- What is your favorite part of Mary's story?



4-8-year-olds

- What good things do you want to happen soon? This is a little like hope. What good things do you think Mary wanted for her son, Jesus?
- What good things did God want for people when He sent Jesus to be with us?

9-12-year-olds

- In Psalm 89:1, we read about God's faithfulness to generations past. How does that help you have hope for the future?
- What images associated with Christmas and Advent give you the most hope?
- What were Mary and the rest of God's people hoping for?

13-18-year-olds

- Why is the genealogy of Jesus important to Matthew? Why does it give you hope?
- Are there parts of your family's past that can give you the same kind of hope? How can you live your life to pass along God's hope to your family someday?



Peace

Week 2 - Scene 3



Abide in Christ *(Matthew 1:18-25; John 14-16; Isaiah 26:3-4)*

Summary

During Advent, we are reminded that we can find peace in the middle of scary times. Trusting in Jesus with patience is an essential mental tool in the life of a Christian. In these passages, we learn that the Holy Spirit was just as actively involved when Jesus was conceived as He was when Jesus left earth after His resurrection. Jesus tells His disciples that He is leaving and will provide a "Helper" or counselor, the Holy Spirit, for their provision and guidance along the way. In both these big moments involving the Holy Spirit, people are told not to be afraid because of the trust they can have in God's love, provision, and timing of things.

Jesus was going to heaven to prepare a place for His followers. How exciting! He encourages His disciples and tells them to abide in Him so that they can be effective in all they do while He is physically not with them. Abiding in Him means to depend on Him, obey Him, trust Him, and pursue a close relationship with Him while He is gone. The more we learn to trust in Him and fill our thoughts with His truth, the more peace we'll experience in our souls. Isaiah 26 reiterates that promise by telling us that when we keep our minds on the Lord instead of the troubles of this world, we will find peace. Jesus says it will be hard to be His faithful follower, but He has conquered the world and can give us peace and joy along the journey as we patiently wait for His glorious return.

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- What do you imagine the place Jesus is preparing for us looks like?
- What are some things that make you feel afraid?
- What does it look like to trust in God?
- What does the name "Immanuel" mean? What do you feel in your soul when you think about the meaning? Do you believe it's true?
- Read Isaiah 26:3-4 together and discuss how your family can keep God "on your minds" in your home.
- Why do you think God chose a dirty stable for Jesus' birth?



4-8-year-olds

- What do you picture in your mind when we/you pray?
- How do you think Joseph felt as he woke up from such an intense dream?
- Do you believe the Holy Spirit is with us all the time?
- Right now, what do you think the Holy Spirit is doing as we pray and read God's Word together?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph had peace when Jesus was born in a stable?

9-12-year-olds

- Do you think the Holy Spirit can help you face your fears peacefully?
- Jesus said it several times in different ways: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word." Why is it so hard to follow Jesus sometimes?
- What would you do if your friends tease you about praying and believing in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

13-18-year-olds

- How did Joseph demonstrate his trustworthiness and love for God?
- What does "abide" mean to you? Jesus says to abide in Him and His love. What do you think He means by this?
- What does it mean to have a "mind stayed on Him"? Why would this be important? If you were to be honest, what two or three things do you think about the most?
- The biggest battle on earth is a spiritual one for our souls. It is fought in our minds. What do you think you need to do in response? What prevents you from managing and guarding your mind? How can you learn to think about God more often?
- When have you struggled to trust in God? Why do you think trust is so complicated sometimes?



Peace

Week 2 - Scene 4



Nothing Can Separate Us from Christ *(Luke 2:8-21; Romans 8; Philippians 4:1-9; Isaiah 65:17-25)*

Summary

Advent reminds us of the peace that is found through obedience and life lived with freedom in Jesus. These verses remind us of the reassurance we find when we follow God's guidance and pursue Jesus with all our hearts. His peace is stronger than the troubles of this world. Even when sin, suffering, and other things are against us, God is with us — the inseparable Immanuel — providing us with complete freedom. Notice how the shepherds, Joseph, Mary, and Paul show an "all in" mentality as they fully commit to God.

It's amazing to think that such a powerful and beautiful Spirit lives in us and that we can find peace in our minds at any time by fully trusting in Jesus. And if our minds are set on Jesus, we will naturally and lovingly follow His commandments and feel a deep connection with Him.

This deep connection and the hope of His return give us incredible endurance and strength. It's interesting to think that all creation around us cannot wait for Jesus to return — and we can join creation in that anticipation! Isaiah 65 is a glimpse of God's final and eternal kingdom. God's people will be at peace from threats and at peace with each other, and will live in a world where even the animals are at peace with each other. The fulfillment of this incredible promise began on the night Jesus was born, and the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14).

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- What would it be like to be a shepherd and have an angel appear to you?
- What do you think the angels meant when they said *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*?
- What do you think it means that the Spirit of God lives inside of you?
- What are temptations you wrestle with?
- What does it look like for your family to live according to the Spirit of God instead of according to the ways of the world?



4-8-year-olds

- What would you say to an angel if one appeared in your room tonight?
- What are some ways you can show that you love God?
- What is something you would like to ask God?
- What do you enjoy thinking about? Why?

9-12-year-olds

- Read Romans 8:38-39 out loud and talk about what these verses mean. Why was the birth of Jesus necessary for this to be true?
- When is it hard for you to be patient?
- What is sin?
- What do you think you're good at, and what are some things you're not so good at?
- Do you think God can give you peace when you're scared? How?
- What does it mean to "ponder" things in our hearts?

13-18-year-olds

- What impressed you about the shepherds, Mary, Joseph, and Paul?
- Can God trust you? How?
- Even though God says nothing can separate us from His love, what are some things you notice trying to move you away from a life with Christ?
- What is something true? What is something honorable? What is something lovely? What is something commendable? What is something pure? What is something that is just? What is something excellent? How do these things bring peace to your mind?
- Do you believe that prayer and gratitude can bring you peace? What does peace feel like?
- Read Romans 8:18-19 out loud and talk about how God's ultimate glory — His peace — is greater than any suffering in this world. Do you believe that is true?
- What does the birth of Jesus in a stable teach us about God's idea of power? Who is more powerful: a king or president, or Jesus?



Joy

Week 3 - Scene 5



The Ultimate Joy We Find in Jesus! *(Luke 1:57-2:11; Ephesians 1-2)*

Summary

Ray reminds us that the shepherds were the first to hear the announcement of the arrival of the Messiah and were filled with joy. This week, you get to experience the joy that can be found in Jesus and the unfolding of God's grand story! Two ordinary people, Elizabeth and Zechariah, give birth to a son named John, who becomes known as John the Baptist. The prophetic voice of the Lord had not been heard for about 400 years but now was being heard through Gabriel, Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah with a common theme of a Savior for God's people. His name is Jesus, and He is Christ the Lord. Later in the story, the joy Paul discovers in his soul comes from the realization that through Jesus comes the forgiveness of our sins, the riches of His salvation (eternal life), unity with God, peace, and purpose. Ultimate joy is found in truly knowing how much God loves us.

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- Who do you know is praying for you? What do you feel when you think about the fact that people are praying for you?
- Who are you thankful for in your life? Why?
- What would you have done if the angel had appeared to you and said, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"?
- Why do you think God chose shepherds as the first to hear about the arrival of the Messiah?
- What does it look like for our family to become "peace bringers"?



4-8-year-olds

- How do you know God loves you?
- What would you tell Jesus if He was sitting with us right now?
- What do you love about growing up, and what does it mean to be strong in spirit?
- What is the good news of Jesus' birth?

9-12-year-olds

- What does it look like for you to become strong in your spirit, as described in John?
- What is one of the best gifts you've received? What do you think of the gift we receive through Jesus?
- David was called servant David and not King David in Luke 1:69. Why do you think this is important?
- In what unique ways has God created you to be a follower and servant of Christ?
- Would you rather be one of the shepherds or one of the wise men in the nativity story? Why?

13-18-year-olds

- What do you believe about Jesus?
- Would you rather know the truth about the past or the future? How do you search for truth?
- How do you find peace as a follower of Christ?
- What do you tend to do when you're afraid?
- Why do you think it's important to pray for others?
- What does a thankful servant heart look like?



Joy

Week 3 - Scene 6



Following Christ's Example *(Romans 15:1-13; Psalm 16; Matthew 13:44-45)*

Summary

This week of Advent is about the steadfast joy we can discover through an ongoing pursuit of a close relationship with Jesus. This close relationship leads us to imitate Jesus' love of people, which is a love that is welcoming, encouraging, and steadfast. We learn to serve and love others for their good the closer we get to Jesus. And through this transformational journey, we can find guidance, security, and gladness. Jesus is our rock, salvation, and refuge along the way. By steadfast hope and belief in Jesus, we discover the fullness of joy! Along the adventure, with joy, we discover the incredible value and importance of the Kingdom of Heaven. Joy is about so much more than just feeling happy — it is found in Jesus!

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- How do you show love to others?
- Does the birth of Jesus and anticipating His return bring you hope? If yes, how does that hope impact how you see each day?
- What does it mean to be "filled with joy"?
- What are you invited to through Jesus?
- Do you believe that Jesus is God in a human body (in the flesh)?

4-8-year-olds

- What makes you feel safe?
- How do you feel when you pray by yourself?
- How do you show your love for Jesus?
- How do you serve others?
- How do you encourage others?



9-12-year-olds

- Would you rather be the servant or the one being served?
- How do you try to make the day better for others?
- What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus?
- What is most valuable to you?
- What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

13-18-year-olds

- Would you rather be known for your endurance or your encouragement?
- How does Jesus change the way we disagree with one another?
- What difference does it make in your life to have Jesus as your Savior?
- What is joy? What would it look like to be joy-filled?
- What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?
- What do you think about the Kingdom of Heaven being the most valuable pursuit?



Love

Week 4 - Scene 7



God's Faithful and Steadfast Love *(Luke 3:15-22; 2 Peter 3; Psalms 61-62:2; Psalm 100)*

Summary

This week of Advent is about God's steadfast love. Ray discusses that true power is sacrificial love. It is important to consider what drives our love. Is it selfish or is it self-sacrificial? Is it from Jesus' model or Herod's model? The story of love from God continues as we get a glimpse into Jesus' baptism. The heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, and God spoke. What a moment in history! Beautiful words of affirmation and blessing were spoken, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased!" Later in the story, 2 Peter reminds us that Christ will return and that we need godliness, holiness, discernment, wisdom, knowledge, and grace as we wait for Him and as we love those around us. There's an important warning about Scriptures being twisted by the ignorant and unstable, and the possibility of getting pulled away and losing our own stability and closeness to God. However, we can be reassured that God provides us with a refuge and salvation for our souls through Jesus. God hears our prayers and is with us day-to-day as we faithfully follow Him.

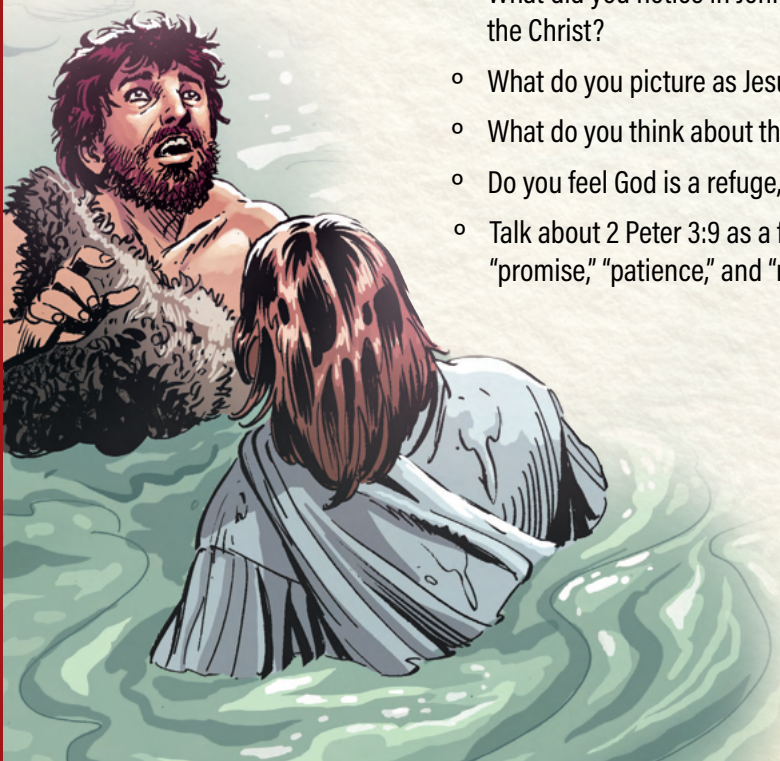
Conversation Starters:

As a family

- What did you notice in John the Baptist as people began saying that maybe he was the Christ?
- What do you picture as Jesus was baptized? What do you think that looked like?
- What do you think about the two kingdoms Ray talked about?
- Do you feel God is a refuge, rock, and fortress for you? What does that mean to you?
- Talk about 2 Peter 3:9 as a family. Talk about some key words in this passage — "promise," "patience," and "repentance."

4-8-year-olds

- What do you think godliness and holiness mean? What do they look like in people?
- Do you believe Jesus is coming back?
- Do you think God hears your cries?
- Who is patient with you, and when do you show patience toward others?



9-12-year-olds

- Would you rather have watched Jesus' baptism or His ascension into heaven?
- What is a scoffer?
- What do you think Jesus' second coming will look like?
- What does a lawless person look like?
- How do you know Jesus is listening to your prayers?

13-18-year-olds

- What does it mean to grow in grace and knowledge?
- How do you know if someone is ignorant and/or twisted?
- How can you tell that God has a steadfast love for you?
- Why is baptism important, and what's the difference between the baptisms discussed in these verses?
- What do you notice between what John the Baptist said and what Psalm 61:2 says? Did you notice the humble heart John responds with? Why do you think humility is important as you patiently wait for Jesus' return?
- Why do you think we're so drawn to a Herod-type kingdom?



Love

Week 4 - Scene 8



Jesus Is Coming! *(Luke 1:39-56; Psalm 96; Revelation 22:6-21)*

Summary

Mary had just had a conversation with Gabriel about her pregnancy and her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy. Both pregnancies were incredible miracles! Mary decided to visit Zechariah and Elizabeth and stayed with them for three months. Initially, she may have gone to visit to see if what Gabriel had said was true regarding Elizabeth's pregnancy. Regardless, Mary showed courage, obedience, trust, and faithfulness to God as she leaned into what God had invited her to do. She thanked God and reflected on His faithfulness and power. Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, responded to Jesus' presence by leaping inside her womb. This response gave Mary confirmation that she was indeed pregnant with Jesus. Psalm 96 reminds us of God's power, faithfulness, beauty, authority, and trustworthiness. God's creation is full of joy in anticipation of the freedom that will come when Jesus returns to judge the world through His faithfulness and righteousness. Revelation 22 reminds us of God's amazing power and that He is coming soon. Come, Lord Jesus!

Conversation Starters:

As a family

- What do you love most about the Christmas season?
- What do you think it will be like when Jesus comes back?
- What do you love about Christmas in our home?
- Would you rather have been at Jesus' birth or witnessed one of His miracles?
- Where did you see trust in this story, and what was its impact?



4-8-year-olds

- What makes you feel safe and relaxed?
- What are some of your favorite gifts?
- What do you believe about God's power?
- Do you believe God loves you and will be coming back?
- Who do you love to spend time with and why?

9-12-year-olds

- What do you think God wants from you?
- What would you have done if you had been in Mary's shoes? What did you notice about her attitude? Did it help her?
- What do you think about God's judgment?
- Why do you think God's creation is joyful in anticipation of His return?
- Who is difficult for you to trust and why?

13-18-year-olds

- How do you know Jesus will return? Do you think He cares about you personally? How do you know?
- How is your soul today? What is going on inside of you?
- What do you think about Jesus' return and His judgment?
- What are some ways you're building trust with others around you?
- Is it hard for you to trust God sometimes? Why?
- What is your earliest Christmas memory?
- What do you wish we did more of as a family?

