

Teaching Aids

SESSIONS 1–4

Advent Wreath

Keep the tradition of lighting the Advent wreath candles with the youth during Connect to God during the four weeks of Advent, sessions 1–4. Use this information to help youth understand the tradition and its symbolic meaning.

The Advent wreath began as a German Lutheran tradition but is now kept by Christians across the globe. It is a way of marking the four weeks of Advent, the season leading up to the birth of Christ.

- **Wreath:** An unending circle, like the love of God for us.
- **The color green:** Representing eternal life.
- **Candles:** One for each week in Advent, representing the light of God that will break into the world through the birth of Jesus. Usually the candles are purple or blue, the main colors of the season, and sometimes with one pink candle to honor Mary. A white candle is placed in the center of the wreath and lit on Christmas Eve to represent Jesus, the light of the world, being born.



SESSION 2

"Zechariah and Elizabeth" Readers Theater

Make one copy for each youth. *Italic parts are summary.*

Narrator 1: *Many years after the time of the prophet Isaiah, there lived a priest named Zechariah. Zechariah had a wife named Elizabeth, and they were both followers of God. They had lived many years, but they had no children.*

Narrator 2: Once when Zechariah was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. At the time of the incense offering, a crowd was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him,

Angel: Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

Narrator 1: *The angel explained to Zechariah that his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. He would be important to the people of Israel, helping them return to serving and obeying God.*

Narrator 2: Zechariah said to the angel,

Zechariah: How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.

Narrator 2: The angel replied,

Angel: I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.

Narrator 1: *Many people were waiting outside the sanctuary and wondered why Zechariah was taking so long. When he finally came out, he gestured to them but could not speak. When he had completed his duties at the temple, he went home to Elizabeth. Some time later, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Everyone rejoiced. On the eighth day, their relatives came together to celebrate.*

Narrator 2: They were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said,

Elizabeth: No; he is to be called John.

Speaking

Crowd: None of your relatives has this name.

Narrator 2: Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said,

Speaking

Crowd: What then will this child become?

Narrator 1: *But Zechariah knew and praised God saying:*

Zechariah: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David.

Narrator 1: *Zechariah knew that God had not forgotten Israel but was making a way to save them as God had promised through the prophets. Zechariah's son, John, would play a part in that.*

Zechariah: And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

SESSION 4

"Jesus Is Born" Readers Theater

Ask for volunteers for the five parts. Additional youth can be added to those reading the Shepherds and Heavenly Hosts parts. Italic parts are summary or creative additions. You will need a copy of this page for each youth.

Narrator 1: *In the days when Quirinius was governor of Syria, Emperor Augustus sent out a decree that all people must be counted. Each must return to the town of their birth and be registered.*

Narrator 2: Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Narrator 1: While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Narrator 2: In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Shepherds: *Whoa. We're super scared.*

Angel: Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Narrator 1: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Heavenly

Hosts: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!

Narrator 2: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Shepherds: Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

Narrator 1: *So, the shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. When they departed, they spread the good news and all who heard it were amazed. The shepherds returned to their flocks praising God for all they had seen and heard.*

Narrator 2: But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

SESSION 4

"True or False?" Strips

Copy and cut into strips to use during Explore (Wrestle).



Question 1: True or False? Jesus was born in an animal stable because there wasn't room at the local inn. (*Answer: False*)

Explanation: The "inn" could refer to a guest room, like a spare room in a house. Or, it could be referring to the public houses for the poor (think homeless shelters). It definitely wouldn't have been a hotel.

Question 2: True or False? The word that is translated as "inn" in this story is actually the same word that is used later in Luke to talk about the upper room where Jesus and the disciples shared their last supper. (*Answer: True*)

Explanation: Often a word in the Bible is translated differently in different parts of the text depending on the setting or situation. The same Greek word is used for both.

Question 3: True or False? Most families would have had a stable to keep their animals. (*Answer: False*)

Explanation: Most families would not have had a stable. They would have just brought their animals into their homes with them. The manger where Jesus was laid was the feeding trough for those animals.

Question 4: True or False? A traditional nativity scene, like the ones we see in pictures or in decorative sets, was first created by Mary in her old age as a way to remember the birth of her son, Jesus. (*Answer: False*)

Explanation: It was Saint Francis of Assisi who first created a nativity scene in 1223 CE. It was a manger (or barn scene) with Jesus in an animal trough, Mary and Joseph, three wise men, shepherds, and live animals. It was so popular that it became a standard part of Christmas celebrations.

SESSIONS 1–5

Words to Live By—Luke 1

And you, child, will be called
the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare his ways,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

—Luke 1:76–79 (NRSVue)

SESSIONS 4, 6, 7

Lectio Divina Instructions

Use these instructions to guide youth in lectio divina praying.

Lectio divina is a spiritual practice of listening for God in scripture. Lectio divina is translated as “divine reading.” People hear the scripture several times and focus on a different question with each reading.

- Prepare by inviting youth to quiet their thoughts, find a comfortable position for their body, take a few deep breaths, and focus their mind on prayer.
- Invite youth to listen and pay attention for a word, phrase, or image that captures their attention. (*Key question:* What stands out to you?) Read the scripture passage for the first time.
- Keep silence for 30 seconds.
- Ask youth to listen for what God might be saying to them through the word, phrase, or image that grabbed their attention. (*Key question:* What is God telling you?) Read the scripture a second time.
- Keep silence for 30 seconds.
- Ask youth to listen for how God is calling them to respond to the word, phrase, or image God has spoken to them. (*Key question:* What is God asking of you?) Read the scripture a third time.
- Keep silence for a slightly longer period, and close the time by saying “Thanks be to God. Amen.”
- If time allows, you may want to ask youth to share the word, phrase, or image that stood out to them from the Scripture.

SESSION 5

"Magi Come to Worship" Story Strips

Copy and cut into strips to use during Encounter (The Story).



In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him,

"In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, **"Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."**

When they heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; they knelt down and paid him homage.

Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

SESSION 5

Writing a Collect

Use this page to teach youth about what a collect is and how to write one in the box below during Explore (Words to Live By).

A collect is a simple, short prayer that follows a standard pattern. Collects have been used by the church for many years and can be adapted to many different circumstances. There are four parts to a collect:

1. An address that names God (like God of Peace, Father God, Compassionate God)
2. A request or petition of God
3. A desired result
4. A closing in God's name or giving God glory or honor

Here are two examples of a collect:

Almighty God,
who sends us messages through
angels, shepherds, stars,
and through Jesus—
the baby born long ago.
Speak to us with your good news for us today,
as you have done in days of old.
So that we may follow your signs
all the way to Jesus,
honoring him with our
praise and adoration.
In his name we pray this prayer.
Amen.

Creator God,
who made all that is,
who made us in your image,
help us to care for the earth
by restoring destroyed forests.
So that plants and trees may flourish,
animals find shelter,
and we may delight
in cool shade on warm days.
To you, Creator, be the glory
of your good creation living
in harmony and peace.
Amen.

SESSION 6

Baptism Interview Questions

Use these questions during Explore (Collaborate). Ahead of time, copy and give a set of the questions to each person being interviewed.



Tell us about your baptism. What was it like? How old were you? What do you most remember?

What made you want to be baptized?

How did baptism change you? How has being a follower of Jesus changed you?

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What made you want to be baptized?

How did baptism change you? How has being a follower of Jesus changed you?

SESSIONS 7, 11, 13

Words to Live By—Philippians 4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything,

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:4–7 (NRSVue)

SESSION 7

"Follow Me" Script

Make a copy for each youth to use during Encounter (The Story). Have youth read the script once individually, making director's notes in the assigned area. (Director's notes are any ideas about sets, props, action, and so on). Have youth share their notes and ideas to plan and act out the story.

Scene 1

Setting: Along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the fishermen (Simon and Andrew) are throwing their nets out trying to catch fish.

Jesus: *(walking by the shore)* Come, follow me, and I'll show you how to fish for people.

(Simon and Andrew immediately leave their nets and follow him. Jesus keeps walking farther down the shore, and, seeing James and John in their boat repairing their nets, calls to them. James and John leave the boat behind and immediately follow him. Jesus continues walking by the lake, a crowd surrounds him, and he teaches them.)

Jesus: *(seeing Levi sitting at a booth collecting taxes)* Follow me.

(Levi gets up and follows him.)

Scene 2

Setting: Levi's house, where many tax collectors and sinners were eating a meal with Jesus and his disciples.

Legal Experts: *(to disciples)* Why is he eating with sinners and tax collectors?

Jesus: *(overhearing)* Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners.

(Jesus leaves and goes up into the mountains, calling people to follow. Many did. Twelve became apostles to whom he gives authority to go out and preach and heal. Their names were Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot.)

Director's Notes:

SESSION 8

"Compare/Contrast Chart" Information

Copy and cut apart the information boxes. Ask for two volunteers to read the information to the group. This will be used to fill in the Compare/Contrast Chart during Explore (Wrestle).

<p>CAUSES</p> <p>Without advanced scientific knowledge, illnesses were explained supernaturally. They believed the causes of illness were divine or demonic. They also thought illness was a symptom, or result, of sin. If you were sick, it must be because you had done something bad or wrong that you needed to repent of and be forgiven for.</p>	<p>CURES</p> <p><i>Repentance and Forgiveness</i></p> <p>If you could address the sin, God would take your illness away.</p> <p><i>Healers</i></p> <p>People skilled with herbal remedies, healing touch, or supernatural power might be able to help you.</p>
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SESSIONS 9–11

Prayer Loom

Create a prayer loom by using a windowsill, large empty picture frame, table edges, or any large open rectangle to create a frame. Check out the “Winter 2023–2024” board on the *Shine: Living in God’s Light* Pinterest page for ideas as well.

Attach ribbon or yarn ¼ in / 0.5 cm apart along the top of the frame and attach the opposite end of the ribbon or yarn to the bottom of the frame. This creates a loom, similar to an egg slicer or harpsichord, where youth will weave their strips of paper going over, then under, the threads of the loom horizontally. It may be helpful to do an internet search for images of “prayer loom” to see examples of what these can look like and how they are used.



Photo by Suzanne Vinson.
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SESSION 12

"God’s Love" Passage

Provide one copy for each youth to use in Explore (Peace Pursuit).

My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God *is* love—so you can’t know him if you don’t love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. . . . My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. . . . God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. . . . The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.

—1 John 4:7–12, 17, 21 (*The Message*)

SESSION 9

"Five Friends" Readers Theater

Ask for four volunteers and assign each a part to read. For larger groups, the Reader 4 part can have multiple readers. For smaller groups, Reader 1 and Reader 2 can be combined.

Reader 1: Jesus had been outside the city for a few days when he decided to return to Capernaum. When he arrived, people heard that he was home and came to see him.

Reader 2: So many gathered that there was no space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them.

Reader 1: Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,

Reader 3: Child, your sins are forgiven!

Reader 1: Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them,

Reader 3: Why do you fill your minds with these questions? Which is easier to say to a paralyzed person: "Your sins are forgiven" or "Get up, take your bed, and walk"?

Reader 2: Then, in order to help them understand that he had authority from God to forgive sins, he said to the man who was paralyzed:

Reader 3: Get up, take your mat, and go home.

Reader 2: Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying,

Reader 4: We've never seen anything like this!

Reader 1: Jesus' ministry had only just begun and already he had eaten with sinners, healed the sick, and forgiven sins. No wonder the people were amazed!

SESSION 11
Coloring Page

Make copies to use during Explore (Peace Pursuit).



SESSIONS 12, 13

Guided Prayer of Intercession

Use the following during Connect to God to guide the prayer of intercession.

Holy God, the One who hears our prayers and sends help to those in need, hear our prayers for others . . .

We pray for those who suffer—
those who are sick, sad, and hungry, and those who experience violence and oppression.
Hear our prayers for those on our hearts and minds who suffer . . .

(Allow a moment of silence for youth to add their prayers, spoken or silent.)

Lord, we pray also for those who are helpers and leaders—
for the leaders of our country; those in positions of power around the world;
those whose job is to help others; and those who offer help, in any way, big or small.
Hear our prayers for those who are helpers and leaders . . .

(Allow a moment of silence for youth to add their prayers, spoken or silent.)

Lord, hear our prayers for those we see as enemies—
for those who bully or treat others badly, and those we don't like or have a hard time loving.
Hear our prayers for those we call enemies . . .

(Allow a moment of silence for youth to add their prayers, spoken or silent.)

Lord, we pray also for our loved ones—
for our friends, family, and church.
Hear our prayers for our loved ones . . .

(Allow a moment of silence for youth to add their prayers, spoken or silent.)

God who hears our prayers and sends help to those in need,
we thank you for hearing our prayers.
We trust that you are at work
bringing love, comfort, and peace for all the world. Amen.