

# Advent Lesson - Week 1

## Hope: The Lord is With You

**Scripture Context:** Luke 1:26-38

**Memory Verse:** Luke 1:28 (NirV)

*The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has given you special favor. He is with you."*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will experience what it means to HOPE for something (and be reminded of what that feels like).
- b. Students will learn about Mary's conversation with the angel and what she was HOPING for.
- c. Students will further experience HOPE (and trust) in other people, thus catching a glimpse/feeling of what it is like to HOPE (and trust) in God.

## **LARGE GROUP PORTION**

### **Lesson Preparation:**

- Have a large, gift wrapped box at the front of the room with an affordable gift for every person in the room (i.e. a candy cane, bouncy ball, advent candles, anything a student would appreciate that is within reason).
- Optional: video or book of Max Lucado's *You Are Special*
- Blank sheets of paper, cardstock and envelopes, markers, crayons, paints, pens, etc., for making pictures and cards.
- If possible, obtain and set out an Advent candle ring to be used each week.

### **Opening:**

**Say:** I've got a present in this room for each one of you. It's the Christmas season, the time to give gifts. So what better way to kick off our experience through Advent, than to give all of you a present.

What do you think it might be? Turn to a friend in the room and come up with some ideas of what might be in this box for all of you.

(Allow a few minutes for the students to share with one another).

Okay. What did you come up with? What do you think you might get from this box? Or better yet, what are you **hoping** is in that box? (Let the students really get into sharing their ideas. The more you let them embellish and HOPE, the better this learning experience will “teach” them because they are “feeling” it.)

All right, enough anticipation, come on up and receive your present (At this point you can tell them what it is and let them enjoy and relish it for a few minutes).

Although you all may not have received what you **hoped** for earlier, doesn't it feel good to hope? To wonder? To anticipate? I wonder where that comes from?

The first week of Advent is about hope. Hope that God is looking out for us. Hope that God cares about us. Hope that God wants to save us. (At this point you can have a student or adult leader light the advent candle for hope.)

### **Bible Point:**

Let's read together Luke 1:26-38 (NIRV)

<sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month after Elizabeth had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. <sup>27</sup> He was sent to a virgin. The girl was engaged to a man named Joseph. He came from the family line of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has given you special favor. He is with you."*

<sup>29</sup> *Mary was very upset because of his words. She wondered what kind of greeting this could be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. <sup>31</sup> You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must name Him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make Him a king like His father David of long ago. <sup>33</sup> He will rule forever over His people, who came from Jacob's family. His kingdom will never end."*

<sup>34</sup> *"How can this happen?" Mary asked the angel. "I am a virgin."*

<sup>35</sup> *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the holy one that is born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Your relative Elizabeth is old. And even she is going to have a child. People thought she could not have children. But she has been pregnant for six months now. <sup>37</sup> Nothing is impossible with God."*

<sup>38</sup> *"I serve the Lord," Mary answered. "May it happen to me just as you said it would." Then the angel left her.*

### **Reflection questions:**

1. What do you think Mary hoped for when she heard the angel's news? (Allow students to answer – A healthy baby, that she would be a good mother, that she would please God, etc.)
2. Did Mary believe God? (Allow students to answer – Yes.) How do you know? (Her response and actions)

3. What did God hope for in Mary? (Allow students to answer – a willing servant.)

Christmas is a really special time. It reminds us that the LORD God is with us. I don't know about you, but even as an adult, I don't like being alone. Sometimes I like being away from people and things for a little while. That's called a break. But the LORD God made us for relationships and wants us to be around other people.

Don't you think that it is pretty wild that the LORD God, the creator and sustainer of the entire universe, wants to hang out with Mary? That's one of the first things the angel said to her: "The Lord is with you." Do you think that Mary was like: "Okay, cool. What's up God?" Or do you think that she was like: "NO WAY! REALLY! THAT'S AWESOMELY INCREDIBLE!!! WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS!!!!"

And not only did the angel say that the Lord was with her, but that she was "highly favored." In other words, "you are REALLY special!" Whoa! The LORD God thinks Mary is special! I don't know about you, but I would love to hear those words from God!

So, I wonder... what are you hoping for this Christmas/Advent season? Just presents? Maybe. Or perhaps hope from the LORD God that He is "with us" and that we are "highly favored" or really special?

- Do you think you are special? (Pause for effect)
- Do you think the LORD God wants to hang out with you? (Pause for effect again)

Although Christmas is a time for giving and receiving gifts and we often hope that we get what we want, do you think God wants us to remember a different kind of hope?

If I remember correctly, Mary ends up giving birth to a very special baby who is named Jesus, right? Perhaps hope is found not only in the presents we get on Christmas morning, but also in the ultimate present from God. What is the ultimate present from God? (Jesus.) That's right! Because eventually Jesus died on the cross for our sins so that we could be forgiven.

Wow. I'm so glad that the LORD God gives us hope. Hope that He is "with us". Hope that we are "highly favored" and special. And the ultimate hope that He saves us from our sins.

Let's pray.

### **Activity:**

#### Trust Fall

1. Pick a willing child volunteer and a strong adult volunteer.
2. The child stands in front of the adult with their back to the adult and facing forward.
3. Count to 3 and have the child fall backward with the adult catching them.

This activity is a very tangible way to experience hope and trust in other people saving us. Make sure that you choose only "willing" volunteers as some children may not feel comfortable. Please don't make an unwilling child do this.

Have as many child volunteers fall as are willing and as time allows.

**Video Suggestion:**

*You Are Special* by Max Lucado is a great resource/story for children that could go along with this theme of hope that someone is looking out for you and with you, no matter what you feel or think is real. This is available as a video and in a storybook. Video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scj3A1cLVzY>

# Advent Lesson - Week 1

## Hope / The Lord is With You (Small Group Portion)

**Scripture Context:** Luke 1:26-38

**Memory Verse:** Luke 1:28 (NirV)

*The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has given you special favor. He is with you."*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will experience what it means to HOPE for something (and be reminded of what that feels like).
- b. Students will learn about Mary's conversation with the angel and what she was HOPING for.
- c. Students will further experience HOPE (and trust) in other people, thus catching a glimpse/feeling of what it is like to HOPE (and trust) in God.

## **SMALL GROUP PORTION**

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What does it mean to hope for something?
2. What do you hope for?
3. What happens when what we hope for doesn't happen? Or the present we want (hope for) is not what we get?
4. What is our best hope? (God is with us, God thinks we're special, and Jesus came to save us from our sins.)

### **Personal Response:**

#### **Non-Readers:**

1. On one side of this blank piece of paper draw a picture of one thing that you hope for Christmas this year.
2. Once you are done, on the other side of the piece of paper, draw a picture of what the ultimate hope of Christmas is all about—the baby Jesus!
3. Have the students share with the group what they hope for Christmas and show the picture of the ultimate hope.

**Readers:**

Have the students make a card to someone they know that needs to know or be reminded of what HOPE during Christmastime is all about. This can be to a family member, friend at school, another adult... possibly to themselves. Make and design a card especially for that person. It can be simple. It can be pretty. It can be manly. You can make more than one and have it sent to more than one person. Maybe you know a couple of people who need to be reminded of the HOPE of Christmas. (The church could mail the card for them or encourage the student to mail the card.)

# Advent Lesson - Week 2

## Peace / Have No Fear

**Scripture Context:** Luke 2:8-20

**Memory Verse:** Luke 2:20 (NIRV)

*The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will experience the opposite of peace (or what they think is peace).
- b. Students will interact with the story of the angelic visit with the shepherds and ponder what peace really means.
- c. Students will wonder what peace might be like found in the person of Jesus.

## **LARGE GROUP PORTION**

### **Lesson Preparation:**

- Sound system or CD player with a rockin' song available to play
- National newspaper (USA Today, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, etc)
- Blindfolds and a creative obstacle course (made from chairs, turned over tables, things on the floor, etc.)

### **Opening:**

Sometimes we understand an idea by experiencing the opposite of it.

Come up with some ways to create chaos and a lot of noise. For example, have someone turn on a music CD really loud and have a handful of selected volunteers' talk really loud; not shouting, just in loud voices. Do this for 1 minute, and then silence everything by saying (or yelling): "I want some peace and quiet!" It should be dead quiet for a second or two after all that noise.

*(If you have students with autism or other special needs make sure they can handle the extreme noise.)*

**Say:** Peace? Is that what peace is? Is it being quiet? Why do your parents say: "Can we just have a little bit of peace and quiet for just a few minutes!"

What about this? (Show a national newspaper and go through a hand-full of headlines, mainly ones that highlight the lack of peace in our country and our world.) Does this show peace?

What is peace? Is peace being quiet? Is peace being good? Is peace making everything right? Is peace perfect?

Last week was about hope. Hope that God is “with us”. Hope that we are “highly favored” and special. And hope that this baby named Jesus will save us from our sins. Let’s light the candle for hope again. (Have a student or adult leader light the hope candle.)

This week is about peace. Let’s light the candle for peace. (Have a student or adult leader light the peace candle.)

### **Bible Point:**

Let’s read together Luke 2:8-20 (NIrV)

<sup>8</sup> *There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were looking after their sheep.* <sup>9</sup> *An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified.*

<sup>10</sup> *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. It is for all the people.* <sup>11</sup> *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.* <sup>12</sup> *Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."*

<sup>13</sup> *Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said,*

<sup>14</sup> *"May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!  
And may peace be given to those He is pleased with on earth!"*

<sup>15</sup> *The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

<sup>16</sup> *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger.* <sup>17</sup> *After the shepherds had seen Him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child.* <sup>18</sup> *All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*

<sup>19</sup> *But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over.*

<sup>20</sup> *The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.*

If this is supposed to be a story about peace, I don’t know if we got the right story or not. It doesn’t seem like there are a lot of “peaceful” things going on. I mean, put yourself in the shoes of a shepherd out in the field at night. They are minding their own business of

watching sheep, which is pretty boring especially at night. Anytime I am ever outside at night (other than during fireworks!) it is pretty peaceful.

They were probably settling down for a long winter's nap. The shepherds might be sharing stories of the day's sheep adventure with one another over the campfire, laughing and getting sleepy. Peaceful setting, isn't it?

Then all of a sudden, *an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them...* (Luke 2:9)! If that didn't wreck a perfectly peaceful evening for those shepherds I don't know what would. The glory of God! Whoa! That's not like a puny flashlight shining in the dark, night sky; it's more like a nuclear explosion!! No wonder the shepherds were "terrified"! Things went from peaceful sheep watching to an invasion of the glory of God!

But the angel just says: "don't be afraid ... this is a peaceful invasion ... this is good news ... not bad news ... for everyone in the whole world ... all the people ... a Savior, a rescuer, a deliverer has been born to you in the town of David ... He's wrapped in cloths and lying in feeding trough in a stinking manger".

Probably during this whole, angelic speech, the shepherds are trying to pick their jaws off the ground. No sooner had they settled down some after being shocked out of their peaceful setting, when another not-so-peaceful thing happened: D-DAY! The original shock brought one angel, but then a "great company of the heavenly host appeared" which is like an entire angelic army invading planet earth! Not only had the nuclear explosion occurred (the glory of God), but now there were thousands of angels invading the earth right in front of the shepherds! I'm thinking that those shepherds were thinking this could be bad for all of us humans!!!

But instead of an attacking invasion, the angels started to sing. Imagine the shepherds surprise after they picked themselves off the ground and the "heavenly host" started to sing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests" (Luke 2:14).

I further imagine the shepherds were thinking: "Peace? Peace?! Whoa! I've got to rethink what I think peace is!"

And then they were gone. The angel of the Lord. The glory of God. And all the heavenly host. Gone.

The shepherds take off toward Bethlehem, the town of David, to see this "peaceful" baby. "When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them" (Luke 2:17-18).

### **Reflection questions:**

1. Is Jesus peace? (pause for effect)
2. Is peace about no more wars or your parents telling you to be quiet? Or is it about a person? (pause for effect)
3. What is God's idea of peace? (pause for effect)

Maybe Jesus, this little baby lying in a manger, is somehow peace. Maybe peace is going to be who Jesus is and what He is going to do with His life. Maybe peace is what Jesus eventually has to go through at the end of His life – crucifixion. Maybe peace is Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit all wrapped up into one nice little package—a baby in a manger.

I don't know about you, but I kind of like, and marvel, at that kind of peace. I think Mary must have done the same: *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart* (Luke 2:19).

Peace must be God's idea of bringing His son, Jesus into the world to speak to His people in a way that calls them to love one another and bring His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Understanding peace might just be believing and following the person of Jesus Christ.

### **Activity:**

#### Blindfold Obstacle Course

1. Get one volunteer and have them pick a friend (student or adult) that they trust.
2. Blindfold the volunteer.
3. Create a sort of obstacle course that the blindfolded volunteer's trusted friend is going to help guide him/her through without touching at all.

The rest of the students get to be the bad guys! They get to scream and yell and try to distract the blindfolded student and get them to go the wrong way. The trusted friend is able to stand close to the volunteer and guide with words, but that is it, only words.

Do this a couple times or as much as time allows.

Do you think it was difficult to hear the right voice amidst all the wrong voices? Do you think it is difficult to hear God's voice in our world amidst all the wrong voices?

### **Video Suggestion:**

Some kind of visual retelling of the story of the angels visiting the shepherds and what it must have been like (perhaps from the movie, "The Nativity" or "A Christmas Wish" from [www.sermonspice.com](http://www.sermonspice.com) )

## Advent Lesson - Week 2

### Peace / Have No Fear (Small Group Portion)

**Scripture Context:** Luke 2:8-20

**Memory Verse:** Luke 2:20 (NIRV)

*The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.*

#### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will experience the opposite of peace (or what they think is peace).
- b. Students will interact with the story of the angelic visit with the shepherds and ponder what peace really means.
- c. Students will wonder what peace might be like found in the person of Jesus.

### **SMALL GROUP PORTION**

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. When you think of “peace” what comes to mind? What does that look like?
2. Why did the angels (and God) terrify the shepherds in the story?
3. How do you think the shepherds felt during this “out-of-this-world” experience? How would you have felt?
4. What do you think the shepherds learned about peace in this story?
5. What can we learn about peace from their story?

Peace must be God’s idea of bringing His son, Jesus, into the world to speak to His people in a way that calls them to love one another and bring His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Understanding peace might just be believing and following the person of Jesus Christ.

#### **Personal Response:**

##### **Non-Readers & Readers:**

Clear an area on the floor and have the students lie down on their backs, looking up at the ceiling. Perhaps you can set the mood by dimming the lights somehow and

playing some soft “earthy” music, like waves slowly rolling in or wind whistling. Have the students relax and close their eyes. And ask them these questions, having them answer one at a time by raising a hand.

1. When are you most peaceful?
2. What is “noisy” to you?
3. Who is most peaceful to you?
4. Is peace important to you?
5. How will you allow Jesus to be your peace?

Review the answers they gave with the group after they get up from lying down. Have the readers copy them to a piece of paper or have the group craft a poster board about PEACE for the classroom wall. Have the non-readers draw a picture of what they felt like when they were lying down and answering questions.

# Advent Lesson - Week 3

## Joy / Finding God's Way

**Scripture Context:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Memory Verse:** Romans 15:13 (NirV)

*May the God who gives hope fill you with great joy. May you have perfect peace as you trust in Him.*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- Students will experience Joy in following God's way and not always their own way.
- Students will learn that Joy is in following God's way and not always their own way.
- Student will step inside the shoes (perhaps mind) of Joseph as he is confronted with God's way and not his way.

## **LARGE GROUP PORTION**

### **Lesson Preparation:**

- OREO cookies or other "delicious snack" of your choice
- Red, green and white construction paper strips

### **Opening:**

**Say:** How many days left till Christmas? Does anyone know? It's coming soon. Presents. Presents. Presents. Right? Can't wait? Oh man, there's something about the energy in a living room on Christmas morning! It's electric! It's contagious! Everyone is happy. Joyful.

Let's do an experimental poll called: "What makes you happy?"

As I read this list, raise your hand when what I say makes you happy:

1. Candy
2. Presents

Okay these were easy ones, now it gets tougher...

3. Parents
4. Snow days, or school canceled due to bad weather
5. Babies
6. Church
7. Teacher at school
8. McDonalds
9. Christmas carols
10. Writing thank you notes
11. Homework
12. Playing outside
13. Summer vacation
14. TV
15. Jesus

Turn to a friend and ask them: what are 3 things that make you really happy. (Give the students 1-2 minutes to talk amongst themselves). Alright, let's share some of the things that make you happy.

- Does God care about your happiness?
- Is happiness the same thing as joy?
- What does joy have to do with Christmas?

The first week we talked about Hope. We learned that hope is God with us, highly favoring us and saving us. Let's light the hope candle again. (Have a student or an adult leader light the Hope candle.) Last week we talked about Peace. We learned that peace is closely connected to (or is) a person—Jesus. (Have a student or an adult leader light the Peace candle.)

This week is about Joy... Let's light the candle for Joy. (Have a student or an adult leader light the Joy candle.)

### **Bible Point:**

**Let's read together Matthew 1:18-25 (NIrV)**

<sup>18</sup> *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary and Joseph had promised to get married. But before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph was a godly man. He did not want to put her to shame in public. So he planned to divorce her quietly.*

<sup>20</sup> *But as Joseph was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary home as your*

wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She is going to have a son. You must give Him the name Jesus. That is because He will save His people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> All of this took place to bring about what the Lord had said would happen. He had said through the prophet, <sup>23</sup> "The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And He will be called Immanuel." The name Immanuel means "God with us."

<sup>24</sup> Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not make love to her until after she gave birth to a son. And Joseph gave Him the name Jesus.

God's way is not always our way.

I wonder if Joseph had his life mostly figured out. Something that went like this: grow up well, don't get in too much trouble, learn a trade, get a good job, find a girl to pledge to marry, then get married, have babies, raise them right, enjoy grandchildren someday, and die a happy man. And kind of in that order. So when Mary, his wife to be, is found to be pregnant, Joseph's decides it's time to get out. It's out of order for him. This sort of messes with his life plan. But because Joseph is an honorable man, he wants to break up with her quietly and not in public.

Joseph was choosing to live his life his way which could be God's way... unless God tells us otherwise.

One night, as Joseph was considering breaking up with Mary, God told Joseph otherwise. God told Joseph that breaking up with Mary was not His way. More accurately an angel of the Lord told Joseph in a dream: "...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

**Reflection questions:** (Pause for reflection after each – not necessarily answers.)

1. Do you think that is true: God's way is not always our way? (pause for an answer, or make it rhetorical)
2. How do you think Joseph felt when he found out Mary was going to have a baby and he was not the father?
3. Did the conversation with the angel change Joseph's joy? In other words, did it make Joseph happy to hear God instruct him to marry Mary anyway?

Maybe joy is not a feeling of happiness, but rather a sense of security in obeying God's way. What?! Maybe the joy we celebrate at Christmas and during the season of Advent, is following God's way instead of our own way. Joy then, is not a feeling, but confidence in following God and not ourselves.

I like that. Do you know why I like that? Because my happiness is not dependent on whether I get the exact present I want for Christmas. What if you got underwear for Christmas? What if that is all you got for Christmas? How would you feel? Probably bummed, right? Well maybe what you "wanted" and what you "needed" were two different things. We don't always "need" the exact present we "want" for Christmas. And we may not "want" underwear, but we do "need" underwear.

Maybe we don't "want" to obey God, or our parents, or our teachers, or whatever... but we "need" to. Why? Because that is Joy:

- Joy is in following God, obeying God and not ourselves.
- Joy is in knowing that God has our life figured out even when you don't.
- Joy is in knowing that even though you are a kid, following God brings Him great joy. (And a smile!)

God's way is not always our way.

### **Activity:**

Have a plate of Oreo cookies or some other delicious snack the students will like, and make sure you have enough for every student up front. For the students to obtain a delicious snack or the Oreo cookie they have to follow these simple steps in order:

1. clap hands 3 times
2. do 7 jumping jacks
3. spin around 2 times
4. cluck like a chicken for 5 seconds
5. fall down on the ground
6. then shake the leader's hand upside down

Don't write these down or put them on the board! The students have to remember them. You can repeat the instructions to the students as often as they need to remember. And don't give them hints while they are trying to accomplish it.

Have various leaders (adults) around the room and have students go up one at a time to the various adults and "perform" these tasks in the correct order. If they do, then they get the delicious snack. If they do not, then they have to try again. Other students can help them "re-learn" the tasks in order, but the student cannot be helped during the "performance."

### **Reflection on Activity:**

1. Was it difficult to remember the right steps in order?
2. How did it feel when you got it wrong?
3. How did it feel when you got it right?

Doing things a certain way (6-step performance) produces certain results (a delicious snack). If you obey your parents/teacher/other adults you will produce trust and respect. If you disobey, then you produce poor character in your life.

Is it a good idea, for your sake, to follow God's way? (Yes) Why? (Because following God brings Joy!)

**Video Suggestion:**

“Christmas – Not for the Selfish” from [www.sermonspice.com](http://www.sermonspice.com) or “Christmas with a capital ‘C’” by Go Fish on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (free download)

# Advent Lesson - Week 3

## Joy / Finding God's Way (Small Group Portion)

**Scripture Context:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Memory Verse:** Romans 15:13 (NirV)

*May the God who gives hope fill you with great joy. May you have perfect peace as you trust in Him. ...*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will experience Joy in following God's way and not always their own way.
- b. Students will learn that Joy is in following God's way and not always their own way.
- c. Student will step inside the shoes (perhaps mind) of Joseph as he is confronted with God's way and not his way.

## **SMALL GROUP PORTION**

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the feeling you get when you open your presents on Christmas morning?
2. Why is getting gifts so important to our happiness on Christmas morning?
3. Did Joseph like the situation with Mary? Why did Joseph obey God and marry Mary?
4. Do you like obeying your parents? Why or why not?
5. How does obeying God bring joy into our lives?

### **Personal Response:**

#### **Non-Readers:**

Make a joy chain, using red, green and white strips of construction paper. Have the students make a "J" on the red, an "O" on the green and a "Y" on the white. [Talk about how the Joy is found in following God.]

**Readers:**

Make a joy chain, using red, green and white strips of construction paper. Have students write the memory verse (one word per strip) and connect to form their chain. [Talk about how the Joy is found in following God.]

## Advent Lesson - Week 4

### Love / That Changes the World

**Scripture Context:** Matthew 2:1-12

**Memory Verse:** John 3:16 (NIrV)

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will understand that God's love rocks our world.
- b. Students will learn that God's love is demonstrated by sacrificing his son, Jesus.
- c. Students will experience that God's love is not just a feeling, but a continual choice.

## **LARGE GROUP PORTION**

### **Lesson Preparation:**

- Kingly crown for King Herod
- Comfortable bathrobe for the Magi.
- Paper and crayons/markers/pencils/pens for drawing a picture.

### **Opening:**

**Say:** I need two volunteers to answer some deep questions.

You must answer honestly remember, you're in church! (Ask each question and allow each of the two volunteers to share their answers.)

1. When your brother or sister calls you a name, what do you do?
2. When your brother or sister hugs you, what do you do?
3. When your brother or sister knowingly gets you in trouble, what do you do?
4. When your brother or sister looks at you funny, what do you do?
5. When your brother or sister smiles at you, what do you do?

Thank you for sharing your honest answers!

I imagine that most of you in this room do the exact same things as those mentioned during this quiz. I find it interesting that those we love the most, we want to do the most

harm! Meaning: we love to hate our family members, especially our brothers and sisters. Remember, we sometimes understand an idea when we look at the opposite. Today we are talking about LOVE.

What is LOVE really? Is it just a really good feeling or affection toward someone? Or is it something more?

Three weeks ago, we started this journey through Christmas/Advent with HOPE. Hope that God is with us, hope that God “highly favors” us and hope that He saves us. Let’s light the Hope candle. (Have a student or adult leader light the hope candle.)

Two weeks ago we continued the journey of Advent with PEACE. Peace, we learned, is found in a person, Jesus. Let’s light the Peace candle. (Have a student or an adult leader light the Peace candle.)

Last week we wrestled with the idea of happiness and JOY. Joy is discovered when we follow God’s way and not our way. Let’s light the Joy candle. (Have a student or adult leader light the Joy candle.)

This week we conclude our journey to Advent, the coming of Jesus as a baby into our world, with the idea of LOVE. Let’s light the Love candle. (Have a student or adult leader light the Love candle.)

### **Bible Point:**

#### **Let’s read together Matthew 2:1-12: (NirV)**

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea.*

*After Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> They asked, "Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? When we were in the east, we saw his star. Now we have come to worship him."*

<sup>3</sup> *When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset. Everyone in Jerusalem was troubled too. <sup>4</sup> So Herod called together all the chief priests of the people. He also called the teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ was going to be born.*

<sup>5</sup> *"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied. "This is what the prophet has written. He said,*

<sup>6</sup> *" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are certainly not the least important among the towns of Judah.*

*A ruler will come out of you.*

*He will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "* —(Micah 5:2)

<sup>7</sup> *Then Herod called for the Wise Men secretly. He found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem. He said, "Go! Make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, bring me a report. Then I can go and worship him too."*

<sup>9</sup> *After the Wise Men had listened to the king, they went on their way. The star they had seen when they were in the east went ahead of them. It finally stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy.*

<sup>11</sup> *The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, incense and myrrh.*

<sup>12</sup> *But God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their country on a different road.*

Magi from the East coming to visit and worship Jesus because they followed a star; King Herod wanting to kill this baby because he thought He might later be a threat to his privileged position; the Magi giving extravagant gifts to baby Jesus and being told in a dream not to go back the way past King Herod. All these fascinating events surrounded the otherwise meager birth of the Savior of the world.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Did God know that He was sending His one and only son, Jesus, into this really bad environment?
2. Did God know that Herod had it in for this special baby?
3. Did God know what Herod would later do to the other baby boys in Bethlehem? That he would kill boys under 2 years old in an attempt to get this would-be Savior named Jesus?

Let's say John 3:16 together:

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

God's love rocks our world. God's love makes us stop and think. The closest thing on earth to the love God has for us is our parents. You all may not understand it, nor feel it sometimes, but your parents absolutely LOVE you. This kind of love is only a fraction, a mere drop in the bucket, compared to the LOVE that God had for us.

You see, God's love rocked King Herod's world! (Put on a "kingly" hat or crown, if you have one available).

1. Was King Herod excited that another "king" was born that might take over his throne eventually? (No.)
2. Was King Herod thrilled that there were people, Magi, that were going to worship this baby instead of him? (No.)
3. Could King Herod have chosen to obey and follow God and love this special baby named Jesus that God was going to use to save the world? (Yes.)
4. King Herod could have chosen that route. But he did not? Why? (Pause for answers if any child has a thought.) Maybe he did not choose that route because he didn't understand how much God loved the world and wanted to save it. Maybe King Herod thought that he was loving the world and trying to save it... for himself. And it wasn't just King Herod that was rocked by this baby. The Bible says that "all Jerusalem with him" was disturbed (Matthew 2:3). This baby rocked the whole world!

Maybe we would rather have our way instead of God's way. (Remember last week and JOY?) Maybe we are much more like King Herod than we all want to admit. Maybe, though, we still have a choice...

Let's say John 3:16 together again:

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

God's love not only rocked King Herod's world, but it also rocked the Magi's world. (Put on a bathrobe if you have one available.) The Magi travelled all the way from the East. That's a long way! They had seen a star in the sky and started following it.

1. Why did they do that? Do you follow stars across the desert?
2. If you saw a certain star moving in the sky, would you follow it?
3. Would your parents let you travel across the United States following a weird star in the sky? For some reason that we do not fully know, these special wise men or Magi sought out baby Jesus and discovered Him in Bethlehem. When they saw Jesus, "they bowed down and worshiped him...opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). People who were not sure what they would find in the "king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2), found the love of God in a baby. And instead of trying to kill him like King Herod, they worshiped Him and gave Him gifts. Two very different responses to God's gift of love to the world.

Let's say John 3:16 together again:

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

And so we are left with a question:

1. How will you respond to God's gift of LOVE this Christmas?
2. What will you do with the baby Jesus?
3. Will you love Him? Believe Him? Follow Him? Or will you ignore Him? Try to kill Him?

I think God wants us to love this free gift of love... that's why He gave Jesus to us. But God cannot make you. He can only LOVE you into loving Him. What will you choose?

Let's say John 3:16 together:

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

Let's pray.

### **Activity:**

To Love or Not to Love.

On this side of the room is King Herod. He chose not to embrace God's love.

On the other side of the room are the Magi, the wise men. They chose to embrace God's love.

This is the middle where all of you are. Go to the side of the room that best represents your honest response as I ask you these various questions. Come back to the middle after

each scenario. Sometimes embracing God's love in real life is difficult. (Pause and have students return to the middle after each scenario.)

1. Your brother or sister takes a toy or something you really like away from you. And your parents are not in the same room. What do you do? (Lead students through this first one – if they would hit their sibling or yell or do something unkind, go to the Herod side of the room. If they would share, or resolve the situation peaceably, go to the Magi side of the room.)
2. Your best friend at school runs away from you during recess to play with someone else. And they do not want you to come with them. What do you do?
3. Your parents ask you to clean your room or take out the trash. And you are in the middle of your favorite TV show. What do you do?
4. Your teacher leaves the classroom for a second and two people (friends of yours) start running around the room, chasing each other. What do you do?

Living out God's love is tough. Talking about God's love is easy. Which one do you think God cares more about? Talking about God's love or doing God's love?

**Video Suggestion:**

“Charlie Brown Christmas” [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) “Birth of Jesus Animated” by [www.sermonspice.com](http://www.sermonspice.com)

# Advent Lesson - Week 4

## Love / That Changes the World (Small Group Portion)

**Scripture Context:** Matthew 2:1-12

**Memory Verse:** John 3:16

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

### **Lesson Goals:**

- a. Students will understand that God's love rocks our world.
- b. Students will learn that God's love is demonstrated by sacrificing his son, Jesus.
- c. Students will experience that God's love is not just a feeling, but a continual choice.

## **SMALL GROUP PORTION**

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why do you think King Herod did not like baby Jesus?
2. What was King Herod afraid of?
3. What were the wise men, the Magi, looking for?
4. What did the Magi find when they followed the star? How do you think they felt when they saw the star that led them to a baby?
5. What is God's gift of LOVE?
6. What are you going to do with this LOVE gift from God?

### **Personal Response:**

#### **Non-Readers:**

Draw a picture of God's love. It could be a picture of the baby Jesus in a manger scene. It could be you obeying your parents. It could be you loving your brother or sister. It could be you hugging Jesus' cross.

Tape the pictures to the wall in a sort of collage with a sign over it that says: "God's Love in Action". This will remind the students that God's love is unique in its application in our real, everyday lives.

## **Readers: Norwegian Christmas Ornament**

These little heart shaped baskets are filled with small candies and hung on the tree in Norway.

Materials:

- two different colors of paper (gift wrap or construction paper both work)
- scissors

### **Instructions:**

1. Stack the two pieces of paper on top of one another and fold them in half.
2. Cut a large U shape (so the straight part of the U is at the fold)
3. Unfold and make sure they look right.
4. Refold and hold in a heart shape to ensure you're happy with the shape. Trim a bit if needed.
5. While still folded and stacked together, cut two slits starting at the straight edge running about 2/3 of the way up the U shape.
6. To sort out how far up to cut, imagine your U shape is a square with a half circle on top. Cut up to where the half circle starts

Now it gets a bit complicated:

7. Take the red and "open" the top loop. Take the blue and stick the first end down inside the top red loop.
8. Now (on the same end) open the blue loop and stick the second red loop partially through.
9. Stick the blue end through the last red loop.
10. Keep weaving the loops together to form the heart shape
11. Fill with candy and tape a ribbon or paper handle on to hang it on the tree

(Download full details at:

[http://www.dltk-holidays.com/xmas/norwegian\\_christmas\\_ornament.htm](http://www.dltk-holidays.com/xmas/norwegian_christmas_ornament.htm) )

