Angels Visit December 6, 2020

**Bible Verses:** Luke 1:26-38

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 196 to 201

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **The angel helped Mary prepare for Jesus’ birth.**

The candle for the second Sunday of Advent is typically known as either the candle of “peace” or “preparation” – but for most of our lesson we’ll focus on the preparation side of things. All of us do things to get ready for Christmas: decorating houses, buying gifts, and baking cookies. But the angel Gabriel’s visit reminds us that this season isn’t just about getting our *outside* ready (house prep) – it’s about getting our *inside* (our hearts/minds) ready for Jesus’ birth as well. Being open to things like hope, joy, and love are easier for kids, I think, but it is still important to be reminded of what the baby Jesus means through reading the Bible, praying, and being able to share with others in need. Jesus came into the world to help us know that we are loved, and that we should show love to others – that is the heart of this season!

* **Preparation is the difference between “active” and “passive” waiting.**

This second point is one that will work much better for older grades, but it is still an important message to share in a season that feels built on waiting… and waiting. 25+ days feels like an eternity for kids, and there’s a temptation to just wait out the count down until Christmas. Advent, though, can be a chance to practice “active waiting” – of trying to put the messages of hope, joy, and love found at Christmas into practice throughout the month! Encourage kids to think of small ways they can show love to others – either once a week, or maybe even once a day if they’re inspired: write letters, give surprise gifts, share a toy with someone in need, or call someone and tell them you love them. Practice makes perfect – and so we can be practicing the true meaning of Christmas all month, rather than just waiting for presents on Christmas.

* **There’s a lot of importance to Jesus’ name and titles!**

We spent time talking about Immanuel (“God with us”) last week, but the angel Gabriel shares that the child that Mary will give birth to will be called: Son of God, Son of the Most High, he will reign over the House of Jacob, and he will be called Jesus. The first two are somewhat self-explanatory but are obviously important. The “House of Jacob” refers to the combined kingdoms of Israel and Judah (see past Bible Backgrounds for more) – and was a promise that God’s kingdom would indeed reign. Finally, Jesus was a Greek variant of the name Joshua, which was a Hebrew word meaning “Yahweh saves” – both drawing from the name of God given to Moses in Exodus, as well as a Hebrew word meaning “to rescue” or “to deliver”.

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
	+ Younger kids: What is one of your favorite Christmas ornaments?
	+ Older kids: Highs and Lows from their past week
* **What are things that you do every year to prepare for Christmas? What are some of your favorite decorations or traditions?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Today, we’re reading about a visit that Mary had from the angel Gabriel, who had some shocking news that would change her entire life!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ You’ll need to screen share the passage for the day in Zoom.
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Gabriel starts by telling Mary, “Do not be afraid!” How do you think that you would react if you were visited by an angel?
* Gabriel was helping prepare Mary for being Jesus’ mother – do you think it would have been hard being Jesus’ mom and dad?
* “Angel” comes from the Greek word *angelos*, meaning messenger**.** If God sent an angel to bring you a message today, what might it be about?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* We spend a lot of time with different traditions around Advent and Christmas, especially around getting outside decorations together. What are ways that we help get our hearts/minds (inside) ready for Christmas?
* The baby Jesus showed us how much God loves us – what are small ways that we can show love to other people during this Advent season?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* The candle for the second Sunday of Advent is called both the candle of “peace” and also “preparation” – but one of those things is calm, while the other sounds busy! Does this time of year feel more calm or busy to you? Do you wish it was different, or do you like it the way it is?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions**

* What has your family been doing to get ready for Christmas?
* What are some of your favorite decorations?
* What are some of your favorite Christmas songs?

**Fun Activity**

* Today is the second Sunday of Advent, the season when we are waiting for Jesus to arrive on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. And in our Bible passage, we heard about the angel Gabriel giving Mary a really important message – and that meant she had to listen closely!
* We’re going to play a game that will require you to be excellent listeners! I’m going to make a noise with something off-camera, and I need your help in trying to guess what it is.
* Examples:
	+ Crumple up a piece of paper
	+ Tap a spoon on a glass
	+ Clap your hands
	+ Snap your fingers
* This can go on as long as kids are having fun, but eventually you can move on to questions about the Bible passage.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Mary obviously wasn’t listening for silly sounds – she was hearing a message that she was going to give birth to the baby Jesus, who like we talked about last week, would be “God with us”. Pretend that you are both surprised and excited – what would your face look like??
* What do you think Mary had to do to get ready for baby Jesus? What are things that babies need?
* Even though he’s little, the baby Jesus reminds us that God’s love for us is really big! How do you show people that you love them?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Florence Nightingale**

As we learn about an angel visiting a young woman named Mary today, it’s also a great opportunity to learn about another young woman who listened early on to God’s call in her life: Florence Nightingale.

Nightingale was born in 1820 in the city of Florence (which she was named after), but her wealthy English family moved back to England by the time she was 1. The Nightingales spent a great deal of time educating their daughters, and Florence proved to be an amazing student in a wide variety of subjects. However, when she was 16, Nightingale felt a call from God to serve the needs of others – and she soon began devoting herself to learning medicine and science, things that were seen as off-limits to “proper” English women.

Her medical training began to pay off as she began to work as a nurse, often in really difficult conditions like wars or field hospitals. One of the main turning points for her was her work as a nurse during the Crimean War of 1854 – she trained a small volunteer staff of 34 nurses who helped to treat those wounded in battle, but she also began to appeal to the British government for help in creating better sanitary conditions in the field hospitals. Nightingale had noticed that those poor conditions were causing unnecessary deaths, and so she used a combination of medical training and statistical analysis to make an appeal for better funding.

After the war, Nightingale published a book called *Notes on Nursing*, which is believed to be one of the first nursing books ever published – in fact, Florence Nightingale is sometimes referred to as the founder of modern nursing! She continued to serve others in a variety of ways throughout her life, particularly by training hundreds of nurses who would later serve in hospitals and in the front lines of many wars. In reflecting on her work, Nightingale once wrote: “There will be no heaven for me, nor for anyone else, unless we make it” – words that display her compassion and commitment to serving those in need.

Crafts / Activities

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**Angel Drawing**

**(Ages 5+, 3-5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* Although we often think of angels dressed in white, no one *really* knows what angels look like! Ask the kids to use their imagination and draw what they think the angel Gabriel looked like, and share it when finished!

**Angel Word Puzzle/Scramble**

**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This is essentially two puzzles in one – first, identifying 11 six-pointed stars, followed by unscrambling those 11 letters into a short message.



**Angel Word Puzzle (Hard)**

**(Ages 7+, 10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This word puzzle will take a bit of time to complete, but older kids should be adept at cracking the code. Kids need to carefully keep track of the number of letters they should skip, filling in the phase at the bottom.

Biblical Background – Angels Visit[[1]](#footnote-1)

On this second Sunday in Advent, we finally make our way into the New Testament – turning to the first chapter of Luke, and the angel’s visit to Mary!

There is obviously a lot that happened in between the time of the prophets Isaiah and Micah in 722 BCE and the birth of Jesus – so I’ll sum up below:

* 722 BCE – The ascendant kingdom of Assyria conquers the Northern Kingdom of Israel; Judah survives due to making a treaty with Assyria behind Israel's back.
* 722-586 – Judah continues to get harsh critiques from the prophets, briefly flourishes when the Assyrian empire collapses, but then is threatened by the Babylonians.
* 586 – The Babylonians conquer Judah, taking thousands into exile and destroying the Temple.
* 586-539 – The religious and political leaders of Judah are in exile, leaving the land decimated and the future of the Hebrew people uncertain (at best).
* 539-333 – The sudden rise of the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great leads to the defeat of the Babylonians. Unlike the Babylonians, Cyrus has a radically different approach to ruling – allowing conquered countries to rebuild and keep their own religious traditions… as long as those countries pay up! The Temple is rebuilt and it is a period of peace and prosperity.
* 333-323 – Alexander the Great has one of the great military campaigns in history, conquering a massive area. Unfortunately, conquering and ruling are different skill sets… Alexander's death with no succession plan leads to widespread civil war between his generals.
* 322-164 - One of those generals, Ptolemy, and his successors take over the area of Judah, followed by the Seleucids, also one of Alexander's former generals.
* 166-164 – A rebellion breaks out against the widely hated Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV
* 164-63 – The Maccabean revolt leads to the establishment of the first self-ruling Hebrew government since 586 – known as the Hasmonean Dynasty.
* 63-40 – Rome begins to flex their muscles across the Mediterranean, conquering Judah (renaming it Judea) and bringing an end to the Hasmonean Dynasty… and leading to growing hopes about a future leader/Messiah who can usher in a new era .
* 40-4 BCE – Herod the Great is appointed King of the Judea by the Roman Senate
* 4 BCE – Jesus is believed to have been born in this year.

It is also important to note that it is angels, rather than prophets, who begin to take on the role of being God’s messengers in the New Testament – in effect, a blurring of the lines between divinity and humanity! Angels do appear in the Old Testament (most famously in Isaiah’s vision of God in Isaiah 6) but their appearance was not commonplace. By contrast, angels appear both around Jesus’ birth and death as a reminder that God is beginning to speak to the people in a new, direct way. In Emmanuel (“God with Us”) we will be able to hear God in an entirely new way – and that will be cause for rejoicing at Christmas!

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)