

WEEK 1

LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

Jesus is God's plan.

BIBLE

An Angel Appears to Zechariah:

Luke 1:5–25; Isaiah 11:1–5

LARGE GROUP TIME

What's up, everybody? Welcome to *City of Angels*! Just imagine it: An angel is visiting your city. What would that be like? So much happens in a city, even people experiencing Jesus in their everyday lives.

This month, we'll see how angels in the Bible told stories of good news about Jesus. We'll see how they brought messages to everyone they met, messages about being a part of God's big plan to bring help and hope to everyone. We'll be traveling throughout the City of Angels, checking out all the ways angels brought the good news of Jesus to ordinary people like us!

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Angels We Have Hidden on High

- This month, we're going to play a little game called, "Angels We Have Hidden On High!" Each week, we'll be looking for an angel who seems hidden to us, but is somewhere in this room!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Get an angel tree topper (something [like this](#)) that you'll use every week this month like "Elf on the Shelf." Hide the angel in plain sight next to a printout of a [map of Los Angeles](#). Have kids silently search the room and once they find the angel, have them return to their seats and make a "halo" by making a circle with their hands above their heads. Remind kids not to shout out the answer or point conspicuously so everyone can have the joy of finding it themselves!
 - **PRETEEN HACK:** Invite the first preteen to arrive each week to hide a plush angel somewhere in the room (preferably doing something silly!) and the other kids have to locate it. You can also hide a bunch of small printouts of angels of all shapes and sizes around the room and see if they can find them all (like the [Hidden Mickeys](#) at Disneyland).
- Okay, now that all of you have located the angel, **did anyone notice what the item closest to it is?** It's a map! This is a city map of Los Angeles, California, whose nickname is "The City of Angels."
- Maps tell us how to get around and where to find things all over the world. To create a city or town, a tremendous plan has to be made. A map shows us what that plan was and how it looks now.
- In fact, to do any big project, you need a solid plan!

ACTIVITY | Uncover the Art

- On these angel wings, there's a secret message we can find once we color it in.

- When you've discovered the message, don't tell anyone! We want to give everyone a chance to find it on their own. Once everyone is finished, let's all shout out the angel's message together!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give each kid a copy of the printable printed on white cardstock paper on which you've already written the hidden message with white crayon. This week's message is "Special Plans." If you have a large group, invite older kids to write the message themselves, or have them help you prep the printables beforehand. Set up watercolor stations so kids can paint over the wings to reveal the hidden message. Use colored pencils if watercolor isn't available. (See a worked example [here](#).)
 - **PRETEEN HACK:** Give preteens the option to write the secret message themselves using fine-tip, metallic, or brush markers and create their own lettering.
- **What was the angel's message?**
- Hmmmm . . . I wonder what the message "Special Plans" has to do with angels!

QUESTION | My Great Plan

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask kids questions about their imaginative city plans and communication plans.
 - **PRETEEN HACK:** If your preteens are into world-building games, ask them about their favorite game build (or even a movie world). Be prepared to give some examples of your own and discuss with kids what they like about it and how they might include it in their own imaginary cities.
- Every city has planners who have great ideas for how cities should be built. These planners make decisions about where the parks are, which streets are busiest, and where's a good place to walk your dog.
- **I'm curious, if you could be on a city planning team and you got to change one thing in a real or made-up city, what would it be?**
 - Would you add a special playground?
 - Would you create an animal park?
 - Would you design a new city hall or another important city building?
 - Would you rename the streets?
 - Would you change the color of the traffic lights?
 - Would you add more recycling centers?
- **Then, how would you tell people about the plan you made?**
 - Would you send an email?
 - Would you have a parade?
 - Would you send carrier puppies to everyone's houses with a note about the plan?
- We'll find out more about God's special plans and how they were communicated to the people in today's Bible story!

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | Luke 1:5–25 (An Angel Appears to Zechariah)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read the Bible passage aloud first and then tell this week's Bible story from Luke 1:5–25 as a storyteller sharing history with young people in their town — assume a name or occupation that's familiar to your town (like an ice cream vendor, street performer, or a friendly elderly person like an "abuela."). Ask another volunteer to play the angel, Gabriel. You can also record this segment beforehand and show them as videos.
- Well, hello, neighborhood friends! (Introduce yourself as the storyteller character of your choosing.) Gather around, and let me tell you about a story I heard about back when I was a kid growing up in these very streets. And because we're in *City of Angels*, this story has angels in it.
- Before all of our technology like YouTube, phones, and the internet existed, news and stories had to be communicated in a different way. People would tell stories to each other in markets and in city centers to pass on information that would spread out from there.
 - The story's details were filled in with new words, art, poetry, and songs! These tactics make stories super memorable.
 - It wasn't weird to hear announcements from all kinds of people. What was strange was hearing announcements from people who weren't, well, people! I'm, of course, talking about angels.

- Angels have always been important players in Bible stories, but we never really get to hear their side of the story. But this is *City of Angels*, where wondrous things happen all the time. Look! I see an angel now! Hey, Gabriel!
 - **Gabriel:** Hi, friend! What's going on?
- Oh, I thought I'd talk about a Bible story that has angels in it, and you walked by. Wanna tell our friends here about the time you had to deliver a message to Zechariah?
 - **Gabriel:** For sure! So, Zechariah was this priest guy who worked in the temple. Well, one of those nights he was working in the temple, I paid him a visit and he freaked out!
- Well, Gabriel, you probably know this by now, but humans aren't used to seeing angels pop up out of nowhere. Next time, you might consider knocking on the door or something. Anyway, if I remember correctly, the news you gave Zechariah was unbelievable.
 - **Gabriel:** Literally. He couldn't believe it at all. In fact, Zechariah wasn't able to speak for months until he finally believed what he'd heard.
- For months? I could never not talk for that long. These kids know what I'm talking about! What was it about the message he couldn't believe?
 - **Gabriel:** Well, it was because I told him that God heard his prayers and that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby.
- Oh, that's right! And Zechariah and his wife were considered way too old to have a baby. Of course, they wanted one for a long time, but by that point, they were sure it was too late.
 - **Gabriel:** But it wasn't too late. By God's calculations, they would have a baby at exactly the right time. The baby's name was to be John. John would belong to God and would be led by God's helper, the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, John would prepare the way for the greatest person we've all been waiting for.
- That person being Jesus, right?
 - **Gabriel:** You got it. Little did Zechariah know, his wife, Elizabeth, would soon give birth to John, who would later be known as John the Baptist. As a grownup, John would point everyone toward Jesus, who will change the world forever!
- That's awesome . . . you have such a cool job! Thanks for stopping by and sharing your story with us. Everyone, let's say bye to Gabriel!

BIG IDEA | Jesus is God's plan.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *On a large piece of bulletin board paper, write this week's Big Idea somewhere on it, and then roll up the paper. You'll be adding to this wall art every week, so conserve space when writing the Big Idea. You might want to recruit a volunteer to write it using [mural lettering](#) or graffiti art (or look up tutorials like [this one](#) to do it yourself). After week four, invite kids to add their names and other art to this "wall" and put it up somewhere in your space.*
- If you look around any urban city, you'll easily find all sorts of street art, from words to colorful murals. Our *City of Angels* is no different — can you make out what it says on this wall?
- *[Unroll bulletin board paper to reveal what it says.]*
- **Jesus is God's plan!**
- God's plan to save us all started with the birth of John, who would be the one to point the way to Jesus and ultimately, God!
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MEMORY VERSE | Luke 2:10 (NIV)

- "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people!'"
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Show a bucket drumming video (like [this one](#)). About halfway through, invite kids to repeat chunks of the memory verse after you, chanting it in rhythm with the drumming. If you're uncomfortable leading to this beat, after you show the video, have everyone slap their knees with both hands to create a steady beat at the tempo and pacing of your choice. Here's how we suggest breaking up the verse for the call-and-response drum session:*
 - *But the angel said to them (echo)*
 - *Do not be afraid (echo)*
 - *I bring you good news (echo)*

- *That will cause great joy (echo)*
- *For all the people (echo)*
- *Luke two ten (echo)*

Wednesday Night Material...

Recap lesson for those that weren't there on Sunday.

VIDEO | City of Angels, Episode 1

- INSTRUCTIONS: *Play this week's episode of [Grow TV](#).*

STORY | Interrupted Plans

- INSTRUCTIONS: *Share a story about a time when you planned for something, but it didn't pan out the way you planned at all. Were you disappointed? Was this better than what you had planned?*
- We have no way of knowing the future, so it's likely that the things we want to do may not work out exactly as we planned. But even when things don't go our way, we can trust God will make it work and things may even turn out better than we planned.
- Because guess what? God's plans always work out perfectly. We know this because **Jesus is** — and always has been — **God's plan!**

ACTIVITY | Trust the Plan

- INSTRUCTIONS: *Using [tangrams kits](#), [printable versions](#), or a 3D kit like [Buildzi](#), divide kids into groups and have them try building as many of the images they can build that come with each kit. For large groups, consider having volunteers take turns to come to the front to try this out.*
- Each of you was given a plan to build something. You may not have known how it was going to turn out, but you followed the plan and created something beautiful together!
- God's plan was to send us Jesus, and that's exactly what happened. I'm so glad God always has the perfect plan for us.

SCRIPTURE | Isaiah 11:1–5

- INSTRUCTIONS: *Read Isaiah 11:1–5.*
 - **PRETEEN HACK:** *Show preteens that Jesus was God's plan in the entire Bible! Use a [Jesus Centered Bible](#) (or screenshots of pages) that would help them visualize the parts of the Old Testament that allude to Jesus directly. Alternatively, give a parallel pair of Old Testament and New Testament verses for them to examine, like Micah 5:2/Matthew 2:6; Isaiah 9:1-2/Matthew 4:12-16; Isaiah 53:4-5/Matthew 8:16-17; 27:26; Psalm 118:26; 148:1/ Luke 19:36-40.*
- In the Bible, we find God sent messages to people through a number of ways, and sometimes, God sent messages through angels, and at one time, it was through a talking donkey (no joke)! One famous human messenger was a prophet named Isaiah.
- Isaiah received messages from God and delivered them to the people. The message we just read showed that someone from Jesse's family tree, filled with the Holy Spirit, would one day come along and rule the Earth and love the people.
- This prophesy Isaiah gave came true when Jesus came to Earth because Jesse was an ancestor of Jesus, meaning he was Jesus' great, great, great (so many greats) grandpa.
- Human news, angel news, and all of the news work together to help people know that **Jesus is God's plan!**
- And guess what? You can be a part of that news, too. You can be a good news messenger just like Isaiah and Gabriel.

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

REFLECTION | One Word Project

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Pass out blank Christmas cards or postcards and have kids write one word that will help them remember today's Bible story. Encourage them to decorate the card and make it colorful.
- Gabriel's message to Zechariah about what his son, John, would do once he grew up showed that **Jesus is God's plan**. Zechariah may not have understood it completely at first — he didn't even believe it right away — but as time went on, he would come to realize what a big part his son would play in preparing people to receive Jesus and reconnecting them to God.
- **What one word will help you remember this week's Bible story?**
- Keep this word with you throughout the week to remember the angel's message and what it meant for the whole world.

ACTIVITY | Park Plan

- One of the cool things about urban cities that you may not expect is there are lots of parks. Whether it's in the middle of the financial district surrounded by high-rise buildings or a small playground in the neighborhood, there are places that were built into the city plan where people can go to rest, play, and take in the view.
- **Let's say you got to design your own dream park.**
 - What would it look like?
 - What kinds of activities would you include?
 - What would be the main attraction at your park?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Show pictures of big city parks, such as [Echo Park](#) (Los Angeles), [Central Park](#) (New York City), [Piedmont Park](#) (Atlanta), or playgrounds in the city ([like this apartment](#) or [this neighborhood park](#)). You can either print these and pass them around or include them in your digital slideshow (For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)). Then, using [this park plan](#) (or make your own), have kids add elements to make their own dream park.
 - **SPECIAL NEEDS HACK:** Have kids do this activity in 3D. Provide kinetic sand, LEGOs, or [playground-themed toys](#) and have them build out their ideal park.
- A park adds beauty to a city, and that's why city planners make space for it in their plans. **Jesus is God's plan**, which is the greatest plan of all, and we can accept that plan by making space in our lives for Jesus!

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PRAYER

- God, we thank you for your plan to send your only son, Jesus, to us. You even planned for someone like John the Baptist to come into this world to help people turn to Jesus — and you put people in our lives today who help us do that, too. Help us to trust your plans because they are always good. Amen.

SMALL GROUP TIME

DISCUSSION

- What message did the angel have for Zechariah?
- How did Zechariah respond?
- What did the angel say would happen because Zechariah didn't trust right away?
- Read Isaiah 11:1–2. Who is this "branch" from Jesse that the passage is talking about?
- Do you like to plan or do you like to be spontaneous? Do you think one is better than the other?
- How do you know God planned to send Jesus long before Jesus was born?
- What does it mean for us that Jesus is God's plan?

ACTIVITY | Urban-gelic Ornaments

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give each kid an [angel ornament cutout](#) and have them sketch and then color their own urban angels. Invite kids to think creatively and make them as hip and unconventional as they'd like. Here are some examples of modern angel art for inspiration: [Example 1](#), [Example 2](#). For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- You're probably used to seeing angels the way they're pictured in a book or on TV. The kinds of angels that exist are probably so much different than any of us could imagine. They may even take the shape of people like you and me!
- Let's make our own urban angels to remind us God watches over our city just as much as when Gabriel was sent to Zechariah to let him know that **Jesus is God's plan!**