

WEEK 1 LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

Jesus is the savior
God promised.

BIBLE

An Angel Appears to Mary:
Luke 1:26–38; Jeremiah 33:14–16

ABOUT THIS WEEK

Some of our favorite gifts are things that were promised to us—a new baseball glove, a computer, or a special trip with our family. This week, we'll hear about how the angel Gabriel told Mary the joyful news that she will carry God's own son. When he was born, people realized just how special this gift would be

Jesus is the savior God promised.

LARGE GROUP TIME

Welcome to our new series, *Joy Story!* I'm so excited because it's Christmastime, and Christmas brings us so much joy. Christmas carols, colorful cookies, time with friends and family, all the gifts ... I just can't wait! But Christmas is still a few weeks away, so we'll have to wait, and while we wait, let's have some fun. It's never too early for some Christmas joy, because the true joy of Christmas comes from Jesus!

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Christmas Cookie Pictionary

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, cut out a bunch of circles using brown or tan construction paper to resemble cookies. If you'd like to make less, make one or two, laminate them, and use dry-erase markers. Prepare a list of toys on small pieces of paper or have a master list from which you can whisper the words to draw. Have one kid draw a picture of the assigned toy in 30 seconds. After time's up, have them pass it to someone in the group to guess what it is. Keep passing the cookie until someone gets the correct answer. Invite a new person to draw and repeat. Some words you can include in your list: stuffed animal, LEGOs, book, basketball, race car, slinky, playdough, slime, telescope, board game, scooter, skateboard, tablet, video game.*
- ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** *Play a modified version of this activity by providing a picture of the toy along with the word so kids have a visual for what they can draw. Allow them to have a longer time to draw their assigned toy.*
- There's so much excitement around Christmas—toys, presents, even cookies! **All of it is so much fun, but is that what Christmas is all about?**
- Sure, those things bring us a lot of happiness, but Christmas is about much more. It's about Jesus and a forever-lasting joy!
- We have joy and celebrate because Jesus came to save us. But Jesus didn't just appear on a whim one day. Jesus came to earth to fulfill a promise from God!

ACTIVITY | Guess What's Wrapped

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, find three to five oddly shaped objects and wrap them in advance using gift wrap, newspaper, garbage bags, or whatever else you have on hand. Place them in different parts of the room, and let kids travel to each object. Allow them to touch it, but they cannot lift it or remove any part of the wrapping. After about a minute at each object, have everyone regroup and tell you their guesses. For smaller spaces, you can show the group one object at a time and have them ask you ten “yes or no” questions from their seats.
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Challenge preteens to a speed wrap contest! Gather a few oddly shaped toys that are harder to wrap. Prepare crepe paper to wrap them with, safety scissors, stick-on bows, ribbon, and tape. Create teams of 2–4 kids and give them each a toy to wrap. On “go,” they must wrap the toy quickly. Set a time limit and give them a 30-seconds-left warning. Pick a winner based on speed, neatness, and creativity.
- In order to guess what was wrapped, you had to examine each item carefully.
- **What were some clues that led to your guesses of what was underneath all of the wrapping?**
- God gave a bunch of “clues” throughout Scripture about a savior that would come to rescue everyone. But while you only had to wait a few minutes for the secret to be revealed, God’s people waited hundreds of years for the savior to arrive!

QUESTION | What are you looking forward to the most this Christmas?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask the following questions. You can have every kid shout their answer but then ask a few kids to share their answers with everyone. Comment briefly on their answers—and have fun with this!
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Add a few more questions to make this activity more interesting. What are your favorite Christmas traditions that you look forward to? What makes it your favorite? Who do you do them with?
 - ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** Make this a poll to see what Christmastime-related things kids are looking forward to more, like Christmas lights, cookies, toys, wrapped gifts, stockings, burning fireplace, candy canes, ornaments, hot chocolate, winter break, caroling, ugly sweaters, Christmas books, and baby Jesus or nativity scene. Show them two pictures or actual items and have them raise their left or right arm depending on which item they are looking forward to more.
- There are so many wonderful things about Christmastime. But Christmas isn’t for another few weeks, and waiting for the day to arrive can be challenging! It helps to find joy in the waiting—the building up of the anticipation.
- **What are you looking forward to the most this Christmas?**
- We know what we are waiting for—to celebrate Jesus’ birth! Long ago, God’s people didn’t know what to expect or how long the wait would be.
- In today’s Bible story, we’ll find that God’s people were waiting for a really long time for the very first Christmas day to come because that would mean God’s promised savior would be here!

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

SCRIPTURE | Luke 1:26–38 (An Angel Appears to Mary)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Set up a simple workbench with some tools and whatever toys you have available. Wear an apron and tinker with a toy as you tell the Bible story, pretending to fix or adjust it.
 - ✂ **HACK:** With winter break coming up for most of your kids, chances are that their families have plans to travel or are otherwise occupied with lots of other commitments. Plan ahead for weeks

when you anticipate low attendance and consider combining lessons to ensure that most of your group doesn't miss out on fun activities and important Bible stories.

- Hey everyone! Welcome to my workshop! I am the “Toy Maker.” I love making toys because I know they bring so much joy to kids everywhere ... especially around Christmastime!
- As much as I love what I do, I have to say sometimes I get a little sad because I think the real joy of Christmas gets lost beneath all the presents, decorations, and mugs of hot cocoa. Not that these things are bad! But maybe not as important as what God—the “Joy Maker,” if you will—gave all of us. I’ll tell you all about it as I work on this toy.
- Our Joy Story begins with a promise. God promised to send a savior.
 - **Do you all know what a savior is?** Simply said, a savior is someone who saves or rescues.
 - God’s people were in need of a savior. They had experienced all sorts of hardship under evil kings who took them from their homes and spread them out in different lands. God sent special messengers, called prophets, to encourage the people to stay faithful to God. God had not forgotten them and would indeed send a savior.
- **Let’s read Luke 1:26–28.**
 - **What kind of savior do you think the people were hoping for?**
 - But it would be over 400 years since the people last heard from God that the promise would finally come true. And the message came from an angel to Mary.
 - I don’t know about you, but if an angel appeared to me, I’d be very frightened. But angels in the Bible always appeared when there was an important message to be shared.
- **Let’s read Luke 1:28–33.**
 - The angel told Mary that she would have a baby—a baby boy named Jesus. And this baby would not be like any other baby born before. This baby would be the Son of God, the savior that God had promised hundreds of years ago!
 - After Mary heard all of this from the angel, she had one question. Mary asked simply, “How can this happen?”
- **The angel answered in Luke 1:35–37. Let’s read it!**
 - The angel assured Mary that God would make it all happen. The angel reminded Mary that every promise from God is true.
 - After all, her relative Elizabeth was about to have a baby, and nobody thought that would even be possible because of her old age! (We’ll learn more about her story next time.)
- **Let’s read Luke 1:38 to see what Mary said.**
 - Mary decided to trust and obey God. Very soon, she would be carrying the savior of the world in her belly! What an honor to be a part of God’s story in this way!
 - This *Joy Story* is just beginning, though. The people had waited a very long time for a savior, but God had been planning on sending the savior for a long time, too. That meant there was more to this plan that we’ll talk about the next time you visit my workshop!

BIG IDEA | Jesus is the savior God promised.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Create as many gift tags as there are Big Idea words (six for this week). A simple way to do this is to cut wrapping paper into little rectangles, fold them over, and write the word on the inside. Attach each tag to a different toy and place them inside a large gift box. Invite kids to come up, pull out a toy, and read the word aloud (or show it to a leader to read for them). After all the toys have been brought out, arrange the toys in order and have everyone say the Big Idea together. You could also do this without the toys and have kids draw out one gift tag at a time from the box.
- Let’s say the Big Idea together joyfully! **Jesus is the savior God promised!**

STORY | A Story About Promises

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Share a personal story about a time you or someone you know made a promise that wasn't kept. You may also choose to show [this clip](#) from "Toy Story 2" to discuss further how it feels when a promise or relationship is broken. We always suggest viewing the clip beforehand to make sure you think it's a video that will be a good fit for your context! For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- It's easy to make a promise but it's often easier to break one. We say things we might mean in the moment but forget to follow through to the end. When a promise to us is broken, we can feel hurt, betrayed, and alone.
- When God's people didn't hear from God for roughly 400 years, they probably thought God had forgotten about them. They might have given up hope that the savior would come as promised.
- But the truth was that God had not forgotten. Just as the people were waiting, God was waiting for the right moment. And when that moment came, God delivered on the promise.
- **Jesus is the savior God promised!**

OBJECT LESSON | Savior For What?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Prepare a paper towel, permanent marker, washable markers, and a tub or bowl of water. Use a permanent marker to draw a large heart on the paper towel. When you get to the part about sin, have each kid come up and draw a sad face inside the heart using washable markers. At the end of the lesson, dip the paper towel into the water and show the kids how the "sins" (sad faces) disappear while the heart remains. You could also provide materials for the kids to follow along with you step by step.
- **Today, we discussed Jesus being the savior promised by God, but why do we need a savior?**
- The heart on this paper represents God and God's love for us. God loves us so much, but we all sin—we all make mistakes that go against the love of God.
 - **Have you ever sinned or made a mistake that doesn't match up with God's love?**
 - **For example, have you ever said something unkind? Acted selfishly? Said something that wasn't true? Did something that hurt someone else?**
- The Bible says that we all have sinned, and it's true—sometimes without even knowing it! It's hard to live a life that pleases God all on our own. That's why God made a way and sent Jesus to earth to be our savior and save each one of us.
- When we believe in Jesus and ask for forgiveness, look what happens to all our sins! All our sin is forgiven. And because we are forgiven, we can be with God forever and ever. That's why God sent Jesus. **Jesus is the savior God promised!**

SCRIPTURE | Jeremiah 33:14–16

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read the passage aloud and invite kids to jump when they hear words from the Big Idea in this passage (promise, savior).
- God was talking to the prophet Jeremiah about the future—but remember, this is from the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born.
 - God made a promise to the people of Israel and Judah. A promise is when you say you will do something and you really mean it, so people will trust you to keep your word.
 - **What do you think this promise is?**
 - God promised to send a savior to do what is right and save the people. This savior would come from King David's family.
 - **Who do you think this savior is?**
 - Jesus! Jesus comes from the family of King David.
- This passage says Jesus will be called "The Lord Our Righteous Savior," because Jesus will take away the sins of the world, sin being the thing that separates us from God. Jesus would save the world by connecting us back to God. And he has! **Jesus is the savior God promised.**

VIDEO | Joy Story, Episode 1

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

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

REFLECTION | Time For Toys

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For each week's Reflection time, provide a box of [assorted fidget toys](#) that kids can manipulate as they think and share. Encourage kids to choose a different one each week to give everyone a chance at all of the different types. Play a Christmas song of your choice, and give kids time to play and chat freely with their neighbors (because they will want to talk about the toy they got) before you invite them to focus on today's reflection questions. Collect the toys to use again next week.
- In today's Joy Story, we heard about how God's people had waited for a savior for hundreds of years, and God finally fulfilled that promise when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to baby Jesus.
- Did anyone ever make you a promise you weren't sure they would keep?
- Have you ever made a promise that you kept? Have you ever made a promise that you didn't keep?
- Why is it important for promises to be kept?
- How can you show that you trust God's promises?
- The Bible is filled with promises God made to us. God promises to be with us, watch over us, forgive us, and love us. We know we can trust these promises because God kept the ultimate promise by sending us a savior—and Jesus is the savior God promised!

RESPONSE | Joy Tree

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Set up a small Christmas tree in your environment. If a tree isn't possible, create one on a wall by outlining a simple tree shape with green masking tape or on bulletin board paper you could hang up and take down each week. Hand out this week's ornament [printable](#) that they can write or draw their response on. Punch a hole at the top and loop string through it to create an ornament on the tree.
- **What are some things that brought you joy this past week?**
- It's good to remember everything we can be grateful and joyful about. It helps us to remember that God loves us and gives us good things. Like Jesus! **Jesus is the savior God promised.**

MEMORY VERSE | Luke 1:46-47 (NIV)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Learn the memory verse together using any combination of the resources provided: [memory verse coloring page](#), [sign language motions](#), or choose from [this list](#) of our favorite memorization techniques!
- **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."**

PRAYER

- God, it's amazing how you love us. Jesus is the savior you promised. Now we can have so much joy. Thanks for showing us how much you love us. Help us share the joy we have with others. Amen.

SMALL GROUP TIME**DISCUSSION**

- **SCRIPTURE QUESTIONS**
 - **What message did the angel Gabriel deliver from God to Mary?** She has found favor with God and will give birth to a son called Jesus.

- **What example did the angel give Mary to show that God keeps promises?** *Her relative Elizabeth would be having a baby in her old age because God said it would happen.*
- **How did Mary respond to this message?** *She said, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."*
- **Read Jeremiah 33:15–16. Who is the promised savior—the "righteous branch"—these verses are talking about?** *Jesus.*
- **APPLICATION QUESTIONS**
 - **How do you know God keeps promises?**
 - **What are some other examples from the Bible of promises God has made and kept?** *(Feel free to read some Bible passages together that you've bookmarked in advance or search for [a list online](#).)*
 - **What does it mean to you that Jesus is the savior God promised?**

ACTIVITY | Christmas Wreath

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, have each kid fold a six-inch paper plate in half and carefully cut out the middle. Then, stack two pieces of green paper horizontally and cut the paper into strips roughly one inch wide. (They don't have to be perfect—you could even have them fold the paper and tear it for a more rustic look.) Kids can fold each strip and hook them around the ring from the plate using adhesive dots or double-sided tape. Provide pom poms, stickers, and gems for kids to decorate the wreath and write the words of the Big Idea somewhere there, too! Check out [this tutorial](#) for more detailed instructions.*
 - ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** *Simplify this activity by pre-cutting and pre-folding the materials. You can also provide dot markers or paint to decorate the paper plate instead of using the folded paper.*
- We usually see a lot of wreaths around Christmas. The evergreens and the circular shape remind us of our forever life with God, thanks to Jesus!
- The season of waiting for Christmas is called Advent, and during this time, we can remember how God's people waited all those years for a savior. **Jesus is the savior God promised!**