

WEEK 2 LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

God sent Jesus
at the perfect time.

BIBLE

Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John:
Luke 1:5–25, 57–66; Malachi 3:1–4

ABOUT THIS WEEK

Waiting over 400 years for a gift to arrive seems impossible, but that's how long God's people waited for a savior. This week, we'll hear the joyful news that Zechariah and Elizabeth will have a son who will prepare the way for Jesus. Even though God's people had been waiting a long time for a savior, **God sent Jesus at the perfect time**, and John would help get everything ready for him.

LARGE GROUP TIME

Welcome back to *Joy Story!* Christmas is coming, and it's a time for joy. It's not just because of all the decorations and songs and presents, though. We have joy because of Jesus, who came to save the world. Isn't that incredible news? What's more amazing is that God's plan to send Jesus when the world needed a savior even included sending a messenger ahead of time, too! God had it all figured out so that Jesus could come to earth at the perfect time.

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Action Toys

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, play reverse charades with a few playthings that you might have in your ministry space or could bring from home, such as a slinky, stuffed animal, fidget toy, hacky sack, playdough, puppet, or yo-yo. Place them inside a box and have one kid come up to the front. Show the rest of the group what item is in the box, and have them act it out without making any noise. The person in the front has to guess what the object is correctly. Play as long as time and interest allow with different guessers.*
- How we share comes naturally to us. It was hard to share when we couldn't do what we usually do. It was probably pretty frustrating trying to get the message across.
- In today's Bible story, we'll hear about someone who could not speak for months until the perfect time God had planned.

ACTIVITY | What's My Name?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, pass out a [name badge label](#) to everyone (without peeling off the backing) and have them write their names. Collect it back and assign each person a name that isn't theirs, hiding it well. Have them peel off the label and place it on their foreheads. Kids have to walk around and ask other people Yes or No questions only about whose name might be on their forehead, no names mentioned. The person answering can only shake their head for "No" or nod for "Yes"—no speaking! Have them approach their best guess. If correct, the other person can remove the name tag and put it on their shirt! Play until all name tags are returned to their owners.*

- ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Use famous people and Bible characters for this activity instead of preteens' names.
- ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** Play a simple guess who game with the kids. Have all the kids sit or stand in rows, like a they are each in their own space in a grid. Write their names on pieces of paper and place them in a bowl. Invite one kid up front to be the guesser. Have a leader be the host, or ask if another kid would like to be the host. The host will draw a name then state facts about that person until the guesser correctly guesses who is being described. The guesser can walk up to the person or point if they are nonverbal.

- Great job figuring out whose name belongs to who! Names are important to us. Sometimes, names are given for some pretty special reasons.
- God had a very special name planned for the special baby on the way, and it was super important that Mom and Dad gave the baby the right name.

QUESTION | What needs to have perfect timing?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Discuss the idea of perfect timing with the group. Ask the following questions.
- Let's name some things that require perfect timing. For example:
 - When you bake something in the oven, you have to leave it there for the perfect time or your dessert will be burnt.
 - When you play music, all the notes need to be struck exactly how they're written or it won't be the same song.
 - When you're jumping rope, you have to jump at just the right time, or your feet will get stuck.
- **What else needs to have perfect timing?**
- In today's Bible story, we'll find out how for God's promised savior to be born, God would make way for another special baby to be born at just the perfect time!

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

SCRIPTURE | Luke 1:5–25, 57–66 (Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Set up a simple workbench with some tools and toys like you did in Week 1. Wear an apron and tinker with a toy (maybe a clock toy) as you tell the Bible story, pretending to fix or adjust it.
- Welcome back to my workshop! I am the "Toy Maker," making toys to bring joy to kids everywhere! The greatest joy of this season, of course, has nothing to do with the toys I make. Because no one can bring lasting joy like Jesus does!
- But waiting for Jesus to arrive was the hard part. After all, God's people had been waiting for a savior for hundreds of years. Then, one day, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her she would be the one to give birth to that savior that God promised!
- To show God keeps promises, Gabriel even told Mary that her relative Elizabeth was about to have a baby, and nobody thought that was even possible. Let me tell you a little more about that in today's Joy Story.
 - **Let's read Luke 1:5–7.** Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth had always wanted to have kids. They believed in God and had been praying for years, but they never had any and thought they had gotten too old to be parents.
 - **Let's read Luke 1:8–10.** Zechariah went inside the temple to light incense while all the other priests stayed outside and prayed. Out of all the priests, Zechariah was chosen to go into the temple of God! This was a rare opportunity! But he sure did not expect what happened next.
 - **Let's read Luke 1:11–17.** The angel Gabriel (the same one who would talk to Mary sometime later) appeared to give Zechariah some exciting news. God heard Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayers for a child and would give them one!

- **What will the baby's name be?** John!
 - The angel told Zechariah that his son John would have a big and special purpose. John would grow up to tell people about Jesus, God's Son. John would teach and tell people what would happen, and people's hearts would turn to God.
 - John was going to play a big part in the Joy Story of Jesus. God was sending John first, and then the time would be right for Jesus to come!
- **What do you think Zechariah said to the angel?**
 - **Let's read Luke 1:18.** Instead of being joyful at the good news, Zechariah was doubtful. He couldn't believe it was possible to have kids at their age, even though it was an angel from God telling him!
 - **Let's read Luke 1:19–22 to see what happened next.** To help Zechariah remember that this was a promise from God and not a joke, the angel told him that he would not be able to speak until baby John was born. When he could speak again, he would know that God's promise came true at just the right time.
 - **Let's read Luke 1:23–25.** Sure enough, Elizabeth would have a baby—the son God had promised Zechariah. Back in those days, women who didn't have children were not that common, which made them stand out in their community. They became the topic of gossip and made many women feel ashamed. Elizabeth was so grateful that God allowed her to experience the joy of being a mother even this late in life.
- Remember how the angel said Zechariah wouldn't speak until the baby was born?
 - **Let's find out what happened in Luke 1:57–66.** Gabriel had told Zechariah that his son would be named John, and as soon as Zechariah wrote, "His name is John," he could speak again.
 - Zechariah knew that this baby had come from God. Even though the rest of the world might have thought they had a baby much too late, it was actually the perfect time in God's plans.
- God worked it out so that John was born first and Jesus would be born soon afterward. God even had the birth of the savior's messenger planned out! And with the birth of John, it meant that Jesus was on his way!

BIG IDEA | God sent Jesus at the perfect time.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Create as many gift tags as there are Big Idea words (seven 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 and 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! **God sent Jesus at the perfect time.**

STORY | A Story About Timing

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a personal story about a time something happened at just the right time that you didn't plan for—it was all God! You may also choose to show [this clip](#) from "Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium" to discuss further how God works in more miraculous ways than a make-believe magical toy store!*
- As we go through life, we learn more and more that timing is super important. You have to be on time so you don't miss important moments ... or a bus. You have to use your time wisely. You have to try to spend time with the people you love.
- But sometimes, the timing works out so perfectly, even though you didn't plan it that way at all. That's when you remember that God is always paying attention and guiding us along according to God's perfect timing.
- Zechariah and Elizabeth might not have thought that having a baby at their age was the ideal time. Why not when they were younger and had more energy and when all their friends and family members were having

babies, too? But it turns out it was the perfect time because their baby John was born to prepare the way for the savior, Jesus.

- God planned a perfect time for John and Jesus to be born! That's how we know **God sent Jesus at the perfect time!**

OBJECT LESSON | Laying Down Tracks

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Raid your preschool room's toy box for wooden train tracks, or get some [Hot Wheels tracks](#) to create a simple track with a beginning and an end. Another option would be to print out train track graphics like [this](#) on cardstock and cut them out. Once you lay down the tracks, have a car or toy train run along the track.
 - ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** Make this activity more hands on for the kids. Invite them to help put the tracks together. Give them a specific starting point and a destination end point so they know what they are working towards. This can as simple as "from this chair to that table." Or you can tie in the theme by having a pile of small toys in a pile that need a track to get to the toy bin. They can be in charge of running the car or train to take the toys to the bin after the track is finished.
- When God makes a promise, God often sends messengers to prepare people for when it comes true. God sent the angel Gabriel to Zechariah to tell him that John was coming. John would prepare people for Jesus. This baby would later be known as John the Baptist.
- John would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would follow God. John would convince people to turn away from their sins and turn toward God instead.
- God sent John ahead of Jesus to prepare the way, almost like how we lay down these tracks ahead of the toy car or train.
- People may have been waiting for a savior for hundreds of years, but **God sent Jesus**—and John—**at the perfect time!**

SCRIPTURE | Malachi 3:1–4

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read the passage aloud.
- God spoke through the prophet Malachi, one of God's messengers in the Old Testament. God promised that another messenger would come to prepare the way before God. Then, the promised savior they were waiting for would come.
 - **Who do you think the messenger is?** It's John!
 - **And who is the Lord and savior that the people were seeking and waiting for?** It's Jesus!
- John would fulfill another of God's promises made in the Old Testament. This passage says that the messenger will prepare the way for the savior who would act as "a refiner's fire" or "launderer's soap."
 - **What do you think these things are?** A refiner's fire was used to purify metals, like gold and silver. Launderer's soap was used for, well, laundry. Both of these were used to take things that were unclean and make them clean again.
 - That would be what Jesus would do for the world. Jesus would have the power to cleanse us of sin. And John would prepare the people by getting them ready for Jesus!
- God made this promise through the prophet Malachi about 400 years before John and Jesus were born.
 - **Can you imagine hearing a promise and not seeing it happen for 400 years?**
 - **How many of you might give up, thinking the promise will never come true?**
- So many people gave up waiting for the savior, but God always keeps promises. **God sent Jesus at the perfect time.**

VIDEO | Joy Story, Episode 2

- **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:** Like last week, 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.
 - ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** Toys are a big part of the series theme! Use a visual timer paired with transition songs to help kids move to the next activity from a preferred activity, such as one that involves preferred or novel toys. Preparing them for the change in rhythm helps them cope, minimizes frustration, and prevents meltdowns.
- In today's Joy Story, we heard that God gave Zechariah and Elizabeth a baby at the perfect time. Even if it didn't seem like it at first, the promised messenger's birth would align perfectly with the promised savior's birth.
 - **Have you ever been promised something you had to wait for? How long did you have to wait?**
 - **Why is waiting so hard?**
 - **What is one way you can be more patient and wait for God's perfect timing?**
- Sometimes, we have to wait for the things God has promised. That doesn't mean that God forgets about us. God invites us to be patient and wait on God's timing. After all, **God sent Jesus at the perfect time**, and he was worth the wait!

RESPONSE | Joy Tree

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Use your version of the Christmas tree you set up in Week 1. Hand out this week's ornament [printable](#) that they can write or draw their response on. Punch a hole at the top and loop some string through it to create an ornament on the tree.
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** As you discuss waiting for God's perfect timing this week, talk to kids about what they've waited for in the past. Was what they waited for worth the wait? Did it bring them joy or other emotions?
- Zechariah and Elizabeth had clearly prayed about a baby for a very long time. Their prayers may not have been answered when they wanted them to be, but God had other plans—much better and more wonderful plans!
- Waiting can be challenging, but we can trust God while we wait!
- **What is something you want to pray about and wait on God for?**
- God may not answer our prayers the way we want or expect, but we can trust God no matter what because God's plans are perfect.
- **God sent Jesus at the perfect time**, and John—born just at the right time—would prepare the way!

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, your timing might seem late to us sometimes, but it is always perfect. Thank you for sending John at the perfect time to prepare the world for Jesus at the perfect time. Help us learn to be patient, to never give up on your promises, and to focus on the joy that we have knowing Jesus. Amen.

SMALL GROUP TIME

DISCUSSION

● SCRIPTURE QUESTIONS

- **The angel Gabriel says that God heard Zechariah's prayer. What were Zechariah and Elizabeth praying for?** *They wanted a baby but were both very old.*
- **How did Zechariah react to the angel's news that he and his wife would have a baby?** *He had difficulty believing it and would not be able to speak until the baby was born.*
- **When was Zechariah able to speak again?** *When everyone wanted to give the baby a different name, he wrote, "His name is John."*
- **Read Malachi 3:1. Why did God plan to send a messenger before the savior?** *To prepare the way for him.*

● APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- **How do you feel when you don't get what you want when you want it?**
- **Why is waiting for what you want so difficult?**
- **What can you do to remind yourself to wait more patiently because God's timing is perfect?**

ACTIVITY | Time Tablets

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, give each kid four craft sticks and a quarter sheet of black construction paper. Have them glue on the sticks to form a frame around the paper. Then, decorate the frame with Christmas-themed stickers ([like these](#)), and provide white oil pastels for them to write the Big Idea inside. You could also paint small pieces of thin cardboard or wood with chalkboard paint in advance for kids to decorate and use pieces of chalk instead. See a worked example [here](#).*
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** *Level up this activity with a different set of materials for preteens to make their own reusable writing tablet. Here is a [tutorial](#) you can follow, using [zip bags](#) with black paint and clear liquid glue and frames like [these](#). They can use their finger or a blunt object to write the Big Idea on their tablet.*
- When Zechariah wrote, "His name is John" on a tablet, he was finally able to speak after months of silence. This showed that he truly believed his baby was a gift from God, and everything the angel said about what John would grow up to do was true!
- Let's make our own tablets to help us remember to be patient because God's timing is always perfect. **God sent Jesus at the perfect time.**