



Joseph's Dream

(based on Matthew 1:18–24)

Mary and Joseph lived in a small town in Nazareth. They were planning to get married.

Before they got married, something unexpected happened. An angel came to Mary with a message. God had chosen Mary to be the mother of a very special baby. This baby would come from the Holy Spirit.

Mary went to Joseph and told him about the angel and the special baby. Joseph was worried.

“How can Mary be having a baby when we aren't married?” Joseph wondered. “What am I going to do?”

After a lot of thinking, Joseph decided that he would not marry Mary. He sadly made plans to call off the wedding.

Then an angel came to him in a dream.

“Joseph, the baby growing in Mary comes from God,” the angel explained. “Go ahead and marry her. When the baby is born, call him Jesus. That name means ‘God saves.’ When this baby grows up, he will be Emmanuel, which means ‘God is always with us.’”

So, Mary and Joseph got married just as they had planned. Soon it was time to get everything ready for the new baby. Mary and Joseph were excited and scared all at the same time. Still they knew that God would be with them, and they were glad.



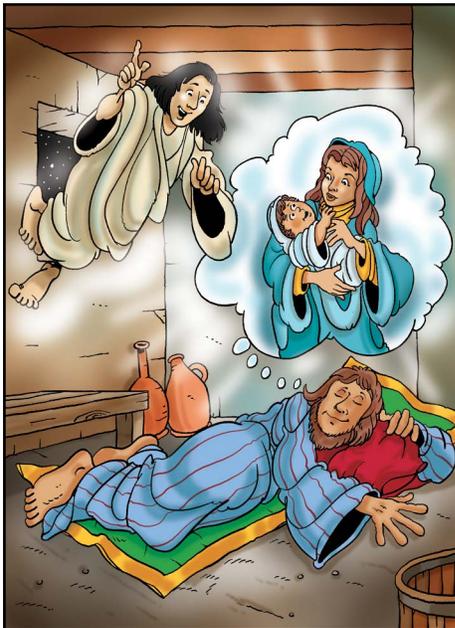
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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- Advent wreath—Purple candles are a symbol of royalty and the coming birth of Jesus the king. When your family is together for a meal this week, read the Bible story and light all four purple candles of the wreath.
- Nativity scene—In your child-friendly nativity set, add the baby Jesus, the shepherds, and their sheep to the scene.
- Christmas symbols guessing game: Can you guess which common Christmas treat is in the shape of a shepherd's crook? Answer: Candy canes! Enjoy one this week.



Responding to God's Grace

- An angel appears to Joseph in a dream, and Joseph finds the strength to act with compassion. Reflect on the angels in your own life. Who has provided you with comfort and guidance? Pray that you will be given the strength to be an “angel” to someone in need.
- Explore the many ways that God still appears to us today. Talk about the ways that you experience God. Try not to impose stereotypes; children will have many different images of God.
- The angel told Joseph to name the baby *Jesus*, which means “God will save.” Play a name game. Think of words describing yourself that begin with the same letter as your first name (for instance, “joyful Jamal” or “super Sarah”). The first person states his or her name and adjective, then each subsequent person repeats the names that have gone before. Help each other remember names.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Watch the YouTube video “Emmanuel by Amy Grant” (bit.ly/Emmanuelson). When have you heard these words before? Remember the words from Isaiah on the first Sunday of Advent.
- Share the joy of Jesus’ birth by taking your family Christmas caroling. Carol in your own neighborhood, or find a group in your church that is caroling and join them.
- As you light the fourth purple candle, pray:

O God, you are with us in the bright candle flame. You made us and grace us, and know all our names. You're with us in laughter; you're with us in tears. You're with us in stories from long-ago years. Be with us today. Help us, with grace, to walk in your way. Amen.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.