



## Rejoice and Ponder

(based on Luke 2:8–20)

It was nighttime in Bethlehem. In the nearby hills, some shepherds were watching over their sheep.

Suddenly, there was a bright light. An angel was standing right in front of the shepherds. They had never seen an angel before and were very scared.

“Don’t be afraid!” the angel announced. “I am here with good news for all people. Today a baby has been born in Bethlehem. He is God’s chosen one. You will know it’s him when you find the baby wrapped snugly and lying on a bed of hay.”

Suddenly, more and more angels appeared. The whole sky was filled with light and music. They sang the same words over and over: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all people on the earth!”

When the angels finished singing, they went back to heaven. The shepherds looked at one another. “Let’s go to Bethlehem right now!” they cried. “Let’s see for ourselves what has happened.”

The shepherds hurried down the hillside. They soon found the stable with Mary and Joseph. Baby Jesus was lying in a manger on a bed of hay. It was just as the angel had said.

The shepherds told Mary and Joseph what had happened to them—about the singing angels. Then they ran out into the town and told everyone what they had seen and heard. Everyone who heard the shepherds’ story was amazed.

Mary thought carefully about the things the shepherds had told her. She knew that she would never forget what had happened.

Meanwhile, the shepherds went back home, singing and praising God. Everything had turned out just as the angel had told them.



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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

- Advent wreath—When your family is together for a meal this week, read the Bible story, and light the first, second, third, and fourth candles of the wreath. Wonder together where God's grace is in this story.
- Turn off most of the lights in the room. Invite everyone to close their eyes and pretend to be shepherds on the Bethlehem hillside at night. Using a flashlight, make a sudden bright light in the room. Talk about the experience of being startled and surprised.
- Invite someone to be the angel, telling the shepherds not to be afraid and sharing the good news about the baby born in Bethlehem.
- Find the hymn "Angels We Have Heard on High" in a hymnal, on a CD, or online. Learn the song and sing joyously, as if you are angels on Jesus' birthday.



### Responding to God's Grace

- Designate a quiet place in your home to be a pondering station. Place a pillow on the floor or a chair in a corner for a comfortable place to pause and to think. Add a Bible, picture books, artwork, or a basket of paper and pencils nearby. Invite everyone to stop and enjoy the quiet place one or more times during the week. Encourage them to take time to listen, to look, and to ponder.
- Invite your child to make door hangers by cutting shapes of angels or other Christmas symbols out of construction paper. Help your child write or draw the message of the angels—"Glory to God in the highest"—and decorate the door hangers with markers, glitter, and glue. When the door hangers are finished, punch a hole in the top of each one, thread with yarn or ribbon, and make a loop. Take a walk around your apartment complex or neighborhood. Share your "good news" creations with people you meet or hang them on front doorknobs.

### Celebrating in Gratitude

- Think about one or more ways to surprise someone this week. For example, bake cookies, write a note, take in empty garbage cans, sweep or shovel a sidewalk, and so forth. Share a Christmas blessing with a neighbor or someone in need of a visit.
- Pray the following prayer each day this week:

*Dear God, help us spread the peace of Christ in the world. Amen.*