

Bar. 5:1–9
or Mal. 3:1–4
Luke 1:68–79
Phil. 1:3–11
Luke 3:1–6

The Path of Peace

Goal for the Session *Children will examine Zechariah’s prophecy and add this message of peace to their Advent practices.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Luke 1:68–79

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Robin Gallaher Branch

Although Zechariah’s is quite possibly the most endearing, heartwarming prophecy over a child in the biblical text, what makes the prophecy so compelling is that Zechariah is not primarily concerned about himself or about his miraculous son. Instead, Zechariah’s prophecy exalts God, points to the dominant work of the Dayspring, and foretells God’s tender mercies on upcoming generations of God’s covenant people. Zechariah conveys a sense of wonder that he is part of it. He—with all his arrogance and unbelief—basks now in the love, forgiveness, mercy of God.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Rosetta E. Ross

Zechariah identifies John as one who makes way for the work of the incarnation by delivering knowledge about salvation and forgiveness. Offered because of God’s “tender mercy,” the forgiveness coming through the incarnation will make it possible to see differently. New sight, resulting from the dawn breaking in and giving light, insinuates possible paradigm shifts and the reversals identified with Luke’s Gospel. Perhaps those identified as enemies earlier in the song may become friends. In fact, Luke’s Gospel and Acts feature many such reconciliations—the conversions of Zacchaeus and Paul and the openness to Gentiles being typical.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Randle R. Mixon

This ancient hymn is set in two parts. The first deals with social redemption, salvation of the people; the second addresses more personal redemption, salvation of the soul. Repentance that leads to forgiveness is to be John’s message, repentance and redemption that are both personal and corporate. We now look deeply into our hearts to see what changes may be needed, to understand where we must turn around and head in a different direction in our lives. We also ask where repentance and redemption are needed in the social and political realities of the world in which we live.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Randle R. Mixon

Zechariah’s hymn makes clear that true peace—in our hearts and in our world—will come only when we are right with God, when we have laid aside our own ambitions and passions, or at least turned them over to God. The condition of souls and the condition of creation is troubled by self-centeredness, self-absorption, and failure to understand what is available in true communion with God, what God has offered us in the ancient covenant and offers us still in the coming of Jesus, the Christ. Though we may live in between times, when we do not yet fully walk in the way of peace, Zechariah promises that his little boy, John, will prepare us to bridge those times as we live toward God’s reign in hope.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:68–79

Focus on Your Teaching

Children usually know something about waiting for a baby to be born from their own experience or their friends. Although the focus scripture is Zechariah's prophecy, the larger story of John's birth is included to help children place the story in context with other stories surrounding Jesus' birth. Younger children will hear this as a single story, but older children can place the story in the nativity sequence from Luke. When the focus turns to Zechariah's prophecy, children will spend time with verses 76–79, which tell about John's work. This emphasis prepares them for other stories about John's coming soon.

Loving God, may I see in each child the promise that Zechariah saw in the baby John. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- purple or blue cloth
- Advent wreath (directions on Resource Sheet 2)
- Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- Bible
- offering basket
- Color Pack 1, 28
- Resource Sheet 1, 2

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 3, crayons, scissors, glue, hole punch, yarn
- option 2: Color Pack 2; two balls; *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- option 3: index cards, pencils
- option 4: Color Pack 17, 28; *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a bookmark at Luke in the worship table Bible. Many churches prohibit lighted candles in the classrooms. If that is your situation, make the Advent wreath described on Resource Sheet 2 (Preparing for Advent).

Note: If you used Color Pack 26 from November 28, 2021, for the Advent wreath, continue to add paper flames to it.

Invite the first children to arrive to arrange the worship table with the purple or blue cloth (use the color used by your congregation), Advent wreath, Bible, and offering basket.

When everything is ready, gather around the worship table. Invite a child to receive the offering. Point to the Advent wreath. Ask:

- ✠ What do you know about the Advent wreath?
- ✠ What do you know about the season of Advent?

After the children have told what they know, explain that the first candle to be lit is the candle of hope and that the second candle is the candle of peace. (They will be lit at the end of the session.) Ask:

- ✠ What does *peace* mean?

Their answers will prepare them to move to Exploring following this prayer:

Loving God, as we celebrate the season of Advent, we give thanks for our church. We are here to learn more about your son Jesus and the Bible. Amen.

EXPLORING

Request a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Invite children to decide whether today's reading is from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) or New Testament. Have the child read the name of the book to determine which answer is correct. Recall that the Bible story from the previous week was from a prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures, Jeremiah. Ask the children to listen for words that sound like words from God as you tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (A Message of Peace).

Show Color Pack 1. Ask:

- ✪ What part of the story is shown here?
- ✪ What happened before this scene? (*Allow time to tell the whole story.*)
- ✪ How do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth felt about their baby boy?
- ✪ What do you think other family and neighbors thought about this new baby?
- ✪ What happened after this scene?

Peace: As described by Zechariah, peace is a time when all creation will live in God's ways.

Read Zechariah's words of prophecy from Resource Sheet 1 to the children. Ask:

- ✪ What good things would God do?
- ✪ How would John help these things happen?
- ✪ What words of peace did you hear?
- ✪ What message of peace do you want to remember?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children.

**EASY
PREP**

- 1. Peace Ornament** These ornaments will remind children and their families of God's path of peace. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 3 (Peace Ornament). Ask a volunteer to read the words on the ornament aloud. Talk together about how the world would be different if everyone was on God's path of peace. Review the directions for making the peace ornament on the resource sheet. Ask them to consider what colors on the ornament would remind them of peace. Provide crayons, scissors, and glue for the children to decorate and make their ornaments. Help them punch a hole and thread yarn through it to make a hanger.
- 2. Prepare-the-Way Game** This game will help children consider ways to prepare for the birth of Jesus as John would help prepare people for Jesus, the Messiah. Show Color Pack 2. Explain that the man in front of the cave is John. People called him John the Baptist because he baptized people in the Jordan River. Invite children to sit in a circle close together on the floor or in chairs. Give small balls to two children. Explain that when the music plays they will pass the balls around the circle. When the music stops, they stop passing the balls and the children holding the balls each tell one way to prepare for the birth of Jesus. Play "Dona Nobis Pacem" or "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (tracks 5 and 16 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). When the game is over, ask the children to name which way they want to try during Advent.

3. **Prayer** An important part of Zechariah’s message was that his son John would encourage people to say they were sorry (repent) and prepare for God’s Messiah. Distribute index cards and pencils. Ask children to write or draw something they did or forgot to do to follow God’s path of peace this week. Explain that no one else will see their cards. Have them write or draw something on the other side of the index card that they can do to change that kind of behavior in the coming week. Conclude this activity by gathering around the worship table. Have everyone stand facing outward and ask them to look at their cards and tell God silently what they wrote on the first side. After a moment, ask them to turn around so everyone is facing the worship table and tell God silently what they wrote on the second side of their cards. Suggest that they do this prayer with their families.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

4. **Songs** Two songs will help children recall the second Sunday of Advent and God’s message through Zechariah. If “Dona Nobis Pacem” (Color Pack 27; track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*) was played during another activity during this session, children will recognize it. The simple lyrics, which mean “Give us peace,” are easy to learn. After children know the words, sing it without pausing several times.

God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope*
anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
Bring *hope* into our hearts
today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.

(Stanza 2: replace *hope*
with *peace*)

Review “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 28; track 8 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). The first stanza with *hope* was sung on the previous Sunday. After singing it together, substitute *peace* for *hope* and sing the song again. This song is part of Closing.

CLOSING

Gather at the worship enter. Light two candles of the Advent wreath with a paper flame or light the votive candles.

Sing the first stanza of “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 28; track 21 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). Sing it again substituting *peace* for *hope*.

Invite the children to think about how God’s words to Zechariah about his son John give them peace today. Pray:

God of Peace, as we go into the second week of Advent, we will remember Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John. When we struggle, we will remember your path of peace. Amen.

To each child, say, “Thank you for coming. See you next week.”

December 5, 2021
The Path of Peace

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING *on the* **WORD**
CURRICULUM

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1

A Message of Peace
based on Luke 1:68-79

Many, many years after Jeremiah spoke God's words to the people of Israel, a man named Zechariah was taking his turn as a priest in the temple in Jerusalem. Only priests could go into the holiest places in the temple where they prayed to God. Each day was much like the one before it, until this day.

On this day, Zechariah was doing what he always did when the angel Gabriel appeared before him. It was pretty scary to have a messenger from God standing next to you.

"Don't be afraid," said Gabriel. "You and your wife Elizabeth have prayed for many years for a child. Now you are going to have a son!"

"But we're too old to have babies now," stammered Zechariah.

"God sent me to speak to you about this baby. Believe me, it will happen. However, you don't believe me, so you will be unable to speak until this happens."

Gabriel left, and Zechariah went into the part of the temple where others were waiting. They knew immediately that something had happened.

And Elizabeth did have a baby boy. Everyone came to hear the baby boy's name, expecting it to be Zechariah. But Elizabeth said, "His name is John."

Right away, Zechariah spoke,

*"Bless the Lord God of Israel, who comes to help the people.
You, child, will be called a prophet of God.
You will prepare the way for God's messiah.
You will tell people how to be saved through forgiveness of their sins.
The light of God will come over us.
We will be shown the path to peace."*

Zechariah and Elizabeth raised their son to be this prophet of God. The next story about John in the Bible is when he is a grown man, doing just what Zechariah said.



Preparing for Advent

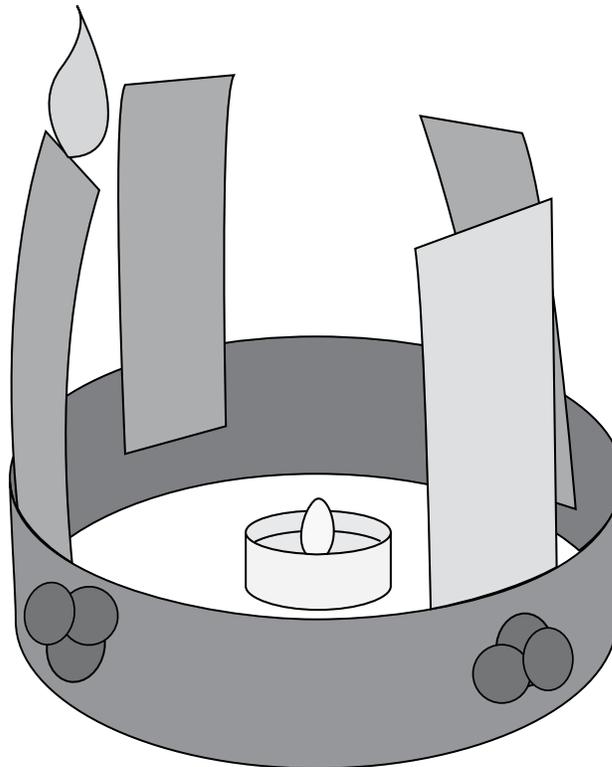
YOU WILL NEED

- purple or blue place mat, napkin, or cloth
- green construction paper
- blue or purple construction paper
- pink construction paper (optional)
- yellow construction paper
- scissors
- stapler
- markers
- tape
- battery-powered candle

Note: During Advent, some churches use the color blue as a symbol of hope. Some churches use purple, a color of royalty, to honor the coming of our king, Jesus. In your class, use the same color your church uses in worship during Advent.

Directions:

1. Cut two 3" x 12" strips from green construction paper. Staple them to form a circle (to be the wreath).
2. Cut four 2" x 9" rectangles (to be the candles) from purple or blue construction paper, using the color your church uses during Advent. Option: If your congregation uses one pink candle in its Advent wreath, replace one of the purple or blue rectangles with a pink one.
3. Space these four paper candles around the wreath and staple them in place. (See diagram below.)
4. Use markers to decorate the outside of the wreath as desired.
5. Cut four large teardrop shapes from yellow construction paper to be the "flames." You will tape a flame to one candle each week.
6. Choose a place to set the Advent wreath, perhaps in the center of the table where you meet. Put a blue or purple place mat, napkin, or cloth under it.
7. Put a battery-powered candle in the center of the wreath.



Peace Ornament

Directions: Cut out the double-circle shape, being careful not to cut the circles apart. Fold on the dotted line so that the two circles line up with each other. Glue the circles together. Use a hole punch to punch a hole on the black circle. Put a 12" piece of yarn through the hole and tie it to make a loop for hanging.

