

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Jesus: Beginnings



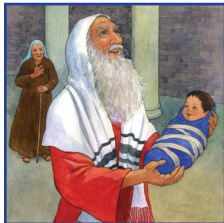
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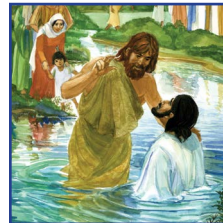
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Jesus: Beginnings

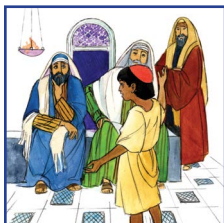
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Anna and Simeon
Luke 2:25–38 9



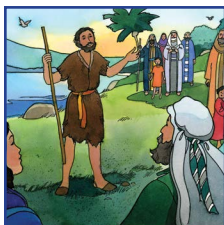
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Luke 3:21–22 27



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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

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Connecting

🌱 **Goal:** To explore the meaning of hope.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Luke 1 and 2 take us through the births of John and Jesus. Immediately preceding the text for this session is the circumcision of Jesus at eight days old, and now he is being presented in the temple, a Jewish ritual through which the parents dedicate their firstborn son to God. They also brought an offering to God for the ritual cleansing of Mary after giving birth. Two prophets, Simeon and Anna, are in the temple. God's Spirit has promised Simeon that he will not die before seeing the Messiah. That moment is finally here. But Simeon's words to Mary must have set her heart on edge. While Anna's words are not recorded, it is clear that she recognizes the significance of this little baby.

For a brief commentary on this text, visit bit.ly/GLSimeonAnna.

Connecting with the World

The appearance of the baby Jesus was a sign of hope for Simeon and Anna. Check out these organizations that bring hope to particular groups of people in the world today.

- 🌱 The refugee resettlement arm of the United Nations is a sign of hope for many families around the world. Learn about their work at bit.ly/GLUnitedNations.
- 🌱 Anna and Simeon were elderly but found community at the temple. Many senior citizens today are isolated in their homes. Meals on Wheels provides meals and a friendly visit to people unable to leave their home. Visit bit.ly/GLMealsWheels to learn more.

Which local organizations give hope to people and families experiencing stress in your community? How can you and your congregation support them?

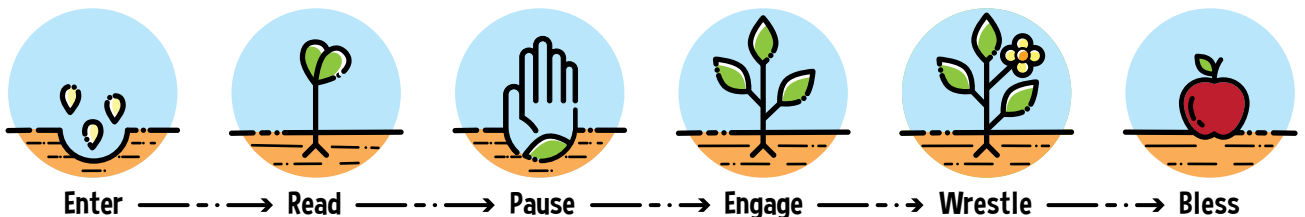
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

The setting for this story may provide an occasion to talk about the special nature of the baby Jesus with children. Jesus' birth story is usually heard only at Christmas, and children, excited about gifts, special events, and family gatherings, can easily miss why this birth is like no other. As children develop a spiritual relationship with Jesus, this will become more important as they learn about the nature of Jesus and discover for themselves just who Jesus is. The stories in this unit can help children recognize the transition of Jesus, the infant, to Jesus, the adult.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

- 🌱 When we are feeling hopeless, we can go to the book of Psalms for words of reassurance. Consider Psalms 23, 118, or 146. Read one of these psalms reflectively, focusing on words and phrases that give you peace.
- 🌱 Our hopelessness may overwhelm us because we don't pay attention to the hope around us. Try this for a month: On your own or with your family, each day write a sign of hope that you read or observed, however small, on a slip of paper and put it in a container. At the end of the month, read each one and give thanks to God.
- 🌱 Often our feeling of hopelessness is deepened when we burrow into it. An older woman who was recovering from a broken hip was feeling sorry for herself until she saw a young man working out in the rehab center and said, "He has a much harder and longer road to go than I do." Look around you and take hope from others who are also struggling.

Holy God, as I look for signs of hope in my life, remind me of the hope for which Simeon and Anna waited so long. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Bibles
- ✓ Small tablecloth
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Battery-operated tea lights, one per child
- ✓ Basket or bowl
- ✓ Drawing supplies
- ✓ Copies of Resource Pages 1 and 2
- ✓ Hymnals with a topical index
- ✓ *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018)

Preparing to Lead

Read Luke 2:25–38. As you read, what word or phrases stand out to you? What questions does it raise for you? Then read the story “Anna and Simeon” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 194).

Think about the following as you engage with this text:

- ✓ What images come to mind while reading this text?
- ✓ Consider why Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the temple. What happened when they arrived?
- ✓ Simeon refers to Jesus as the “light” (Luke 2:32). As you think about the light, what other Scripture passages come to mind?
 - What is the significance of the light?
 - What does this story say about God's promises?
 - How is this story a message of hope?
 - When have you experienced hope—by yourself, in community, by praying or meditating, or in other ways?
- ✓ As you think about this story and other stories of hope in the Bible, consider how hard or easy it is to connect them to ways we experience hope in the world today. Does this come naturally to you? How have you shared a message of hope with others?

Bring to mind the names and faces of the children you will teach. Think about how children may experience hope. Pray for them.

Research symbols of hope such as the cross, a dove, an anchor, and so on. Look to see if these symbols are present in your sanctuary.

Identify your gathering space. Invite volunteers to set up a comfortable seating area in a circle for the children. This might include items like floor pillows, cushions, or small scatter rugs. In front of your seat, place the tablecloth on the floor with the candle, a Bible, and *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*. Place the tea lights in a basket or bowl beside you.

Tell parents/caregivers that you will be spending time in the sanctuary during the session, if it is available.

If the sanctuary is not available during your session, take pictures or a video to share with the children for a virtual walk-through for “Sanctuary Visit” (p. 11). Include the baptismal font, pulpit, candles, and other symbols of hope.



Enter into sacred space together.

Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Turn on the candle and explain to the children that the light is symbolic of Jesus' presence and share from the story: “A man from Jerusalem, named Simeon, studied God's word. God's Spirit promised him that he would see the Messiah before he died. God kept God's promise. Simeon held the baby Jesus in the temple shortly after he was born, and said, ‘I have seen the One from God who will be the light for all people’” (p. 194).

Place a tea light in front of each child. Explain that they will turn on their candle during the prayer. After the candles have been placed in front of the children, invite them to repeat after you in words and action as you pray:

God of love, /
light a candle within my heart
(turn on tea light) /
so that we may learn /
about your word /
and be filled with hope. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for illustrating or writing down anything they are hearing while they engage with the story of Anna and Simeon.

Leading

If older children arrive early, invite them to quietly read 1 John 1:5–10 or “Light and Darkness,” in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* (p. 316) on their own or to a younger child. Ask them to come up with a phrase or sentence that reveals their understanding of God’s light, such as “God’s light is love” or “God’s light is forgiveness.”



Read a story of God’s people.

As you transition to reading the story of Anna and Simeon, ask the children to sit quietly and focus on the candle in front of you while you are reading the story. Then invite the children to listen to the story “Anna and Simeon” (p. 194) of when Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the temple to be dedicated.



Pause to let God’s Word enter into hearts and minds.

Point out the drawing supplies. Invite everyone to respond to the story by illustrating or writing their thoughts or by sitting quietly and watching their tea light.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God’s story.

Invite the children to wonder aloud together about the story.

- ✎ What do you think the temple looked like?
- ✎ Who was at the temple that day?
- ✎ Why do you think God wanted Simeon and Anna to see baby Jesus?
- ✎ What do you think Anna told everyone about this special baby?

Turn off your candle and invite the children to turn off their tea lights. Pass the basket or bowl around to collect the tea lights.

Choose one or both options:

- What Is Hope?
 - ✎ Have a conversation about the word *hope*. Ask the children for examples of something they hope for. Explain how hope can be similar to saying that we wish for something to happen; then ask the children what it means to have hope in God. Explain that when we say we have hope in God, we are saying that we trust God and that God keeps promises.

- ✎ Discuss why stories of hope are important to our faith:
 - What do they teach us about God?
 - What do they teach us about the people of God?
- ✎ Look for examples of hope in the Psalms. Read, or have a volunteer read, Psalm 147:1–14. Invite the children to use the art supplies to illustrate the psalm. Allow time for the children to share their artwork if they would like to do so.

○ Sanctuary Visit

- ✎ Lead the children on a tour of the sanctuary. Visit:
 - *the baptismal font*. Invite the children to share out loud what the font is for. Then think about the story of Anna and Simeon. Why did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple?
 - *the candles*. Explain that the candles remind us that God is with us in worship. If your congregation uses acolytes, invite an acolyte to talk about what it means to carry the light into and out of the sanctuary. Ask the children what Simeon said when he held the baby Jesus.
 - *the pulpit*. Invite the children to share what happens from the pulpit. Give each child the opportunity to stand behind the pulpit. Remind the children that Simeon studied God’s Word and that Anna prayed in the temple day and night. Ask the children what Anna and Simeon did after seeing Jesus.

If the pulpit is too tall for younger children to see over, have a step stool available so that they can experience what it feels like to step behind the pulpit.

- ✎ Point out the cross and other symbols of hope that may appear in your sanctuary. Explain why these are symbols of hope.
- ✎ When the children have had a chance to explore this sacred space, return to your gathering place.

If the sanctuary is not available during your session, show pictures or a video recording of the sanctuary for a virtual walk-through, with images of the baptismal font, pulpit, candles, and other symbols of hope.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Re-form your circle in your gathering area. Ask the children if there is any part of today's story that could be taken away and still leave a message about hope. Have them consider what it would feel like if they were at the temple that day.

- ✦ What would they see or hear?
- ✦ How does this story offer us hope?

○ Hope Journals

- ✦ Pass out copies of Resource Page 1 and invite the children to complete the prompts with words or pictures. Allow time for the children to share their answers and any other art they have created during the session.
- ✦ Explain that the children have a chance to keep looking for hope all week! Pass out copies of Resource Page 2 and explain how the children can use it to keep track of "hope sightings" every day.
- ✦ Encourage the children to share this journal and their search for hope with their families or caregivers.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Thank the children for their participation. Share how being with them has given you hope. Invite the children to stand up, hold hands, and close with the following prayer, repeating after you:

God of hope, /
 continue to fill us with your love /
 so that we can share /
 your hope and light with others. /
 Amen. /

Turn off the candle. As the children leave, remind them to work on their hope journals throughout the week.



Grow with more.

○ Songs of Hope Sing-Off

- ✦ As a group, recall songs you've heard or sung that speak of a message of hope. Name a few examples familiar to your group.
- ✦ Form two (or more) small groups, taking care that each group includes some strong readers. Demonstrate how to use the topical index in the back of the hymnal.
- ✦ Explain that you are going to have a hope sing-off between the two groups. The first group will start singing a song about or including hope, and the second group must respond with a different hopeful song. Alternate singing groups until one side can't think of any more songs about hope. Assure the children that they don't have to use songs from the hymnal; they can also use songs they don't think of as traditional church songs.
- ✦ See how many songs your group can come up with and then consider picking one that is familiar to most members of your group and singing it together.

○ *The Invisible String*

- ✦ Read the book *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst, or show the YouTube video "The Invisible String" (bit.ly/GLInvisibleString, 5:26).
- ✦ Wonder together about the story:
 - How do you feel when listening to this story?
 - What is sad about this story?
 - Where is the message of hope in this story?

Be aware of and sensitive to children who may have suffered a loss or separation recently. Be prepared to comfort the children and share a prayer for the special person or animal they miss.

“Hope is ...”

“I have hope when ...”

Create a journal entry for each day of the week.

Decorative header with a wavy line and icons: a heart, three small hearts, a sun, an umbrella, and a rain cloud.

Wednesday, when

Thursday, when

Friday, when

Saturday, when

I experienced hope on...

Sunday, when

Monday, when

Tuesday, when

Decorative footer with a wavy line and icons: a cloud, a bird, and an arrow.