

# The Songs of *Christmas*



Advent Worship Guide

2021





You don't need another thing to do,  
You need space to be with God.

We understand that the desire to spend time with  
our children in the presence of Jesus can be fraught with  
expectations, shame, and just plain tiredness.

But what if being together in the presence of Jesus  
was actually life-giving and faith-forming for all of us?  
What if we lowered our expectations and found that  
Jesus met us there again and again?

Our Advent Guide is simple because we get it.  
In less than 15 minutes each day, your family will have  
the chance to wonder, to connect, to read the word of God,  
and to sing songs Christians have been singing for generations.  
We've mixed in a few spiritual practices that we hope will help  
bring more space to your lives this season, not more busyness.

Let's make space together this Advent Season.



# Introduction

For a long time, the Church has set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas to reflect, to wait, and to listen again to the story of the God who makes all things new. Advent is the beginning of the church year, and it is a season of anticipation as we join God's people throughout time and space, looking back to the first coming of Jesus as a baby while also looking ahead to the second coming of Jesus in glory at the end of all things.

This Advent guide is designed to give your family space to be with God together. It's simple, it's easy to use, and it's designed to engage your family's sense of awe and wonder as you wait and watch together.

## Each week includes

- A candle lighting rhyme so you can use the guide with an Advent wreath.
- A suggested hymn to sing throughout the week.
- 5 days of suggested Scripture readings with weekly questions and a weekly blessing.
- 4 stories written from the perspective of different characters in the Christmas Story
- A faith practice for your family to experience together.

## How to Use this Guide

I suggest picking a special time each day to light your Advent candle and read, talk, and pray together. The story is designed to be read at the beginning of the week, perhaps on Sunday night, to spark wonder and imagination. Throughout the week, you'll re-read the account in the Bible a few verses at a time. Use the suggested questions, and add your own. If you begin with the story on Sunday, Saturdays will be free for your family to explore the faith practice together.

# Advent Wreath

An Advent wreath can be a fun and meaningful way to make the celebration of Advent a bit more tangible. A traditional Advent wreath is shown on the next page.

Three candles are typically purple or blue to signify the serious and longing nature of the season, while one candle is typically pink, to signify joy. The center candle, a white candle, is called the Christ Candle and is lit on Christmas Day as a celebration of the light coming into the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

Each day's readings in this guide begin with a short rhyme that you can use as you light your Advent candle. Although it is not necessary, you may wish to create or purchase an Advent wreath to use along with this guide. You can purchase different types of Advent wreaths online or at craft stores, or you can make your own. Alternatively, you could choose a single candle to use with the Advent guide each evening.

## Making an Advent Wreath

### Materials:

- 4 candles for the four Sundays of Advent, (Advent wreaths traditionally use taper candles in a ring-shaped holder, but you can use pillar candles on a plate or tray.)
- 3 purple or blue and 1 pink OR
- 4 candles of any color
- 1 white pillar candle for the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas.
- Greenery or wreath
- Candle holder, plate, or tray: this can be a ring-shaped candle holder decorated with greenery, or any other candle holder you find that holds 4 candles. You can also arrange the candles on a plate or tray.

### Instructions:

Arrange your candles and greenery in a holder, on a tray, or in your Advent wreath and set it in a prominent place in your home to keep the season of Advent near your thoughts.

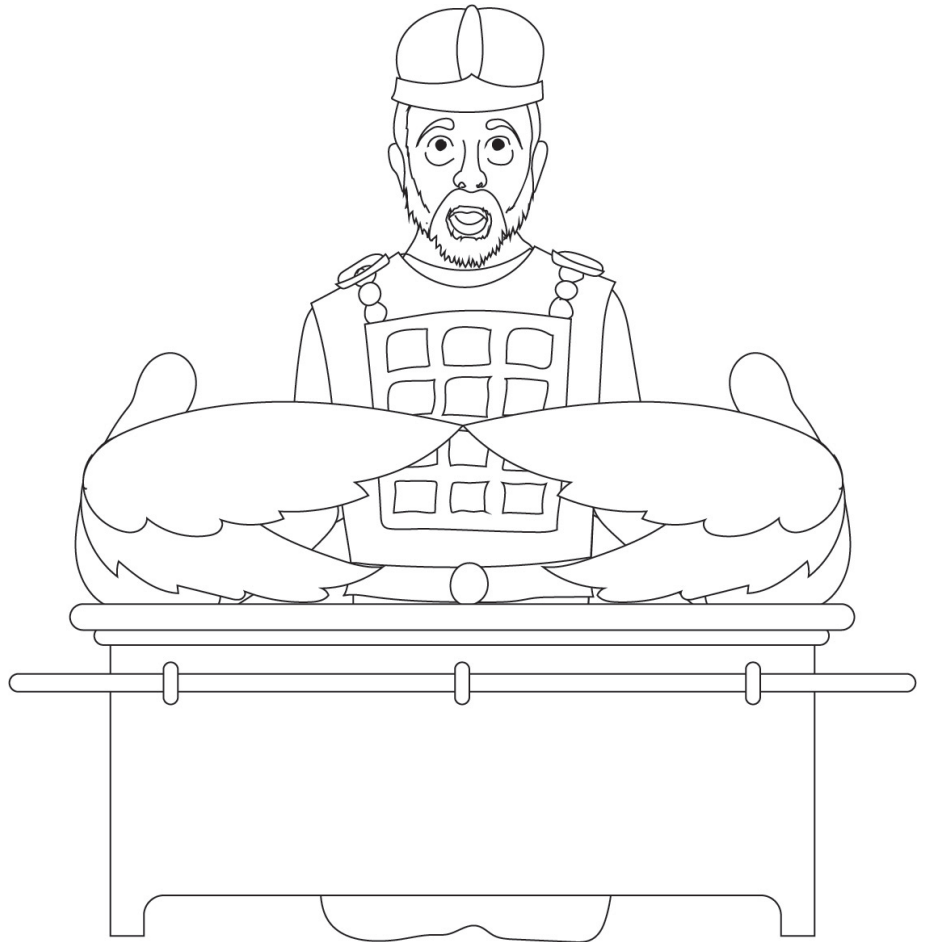


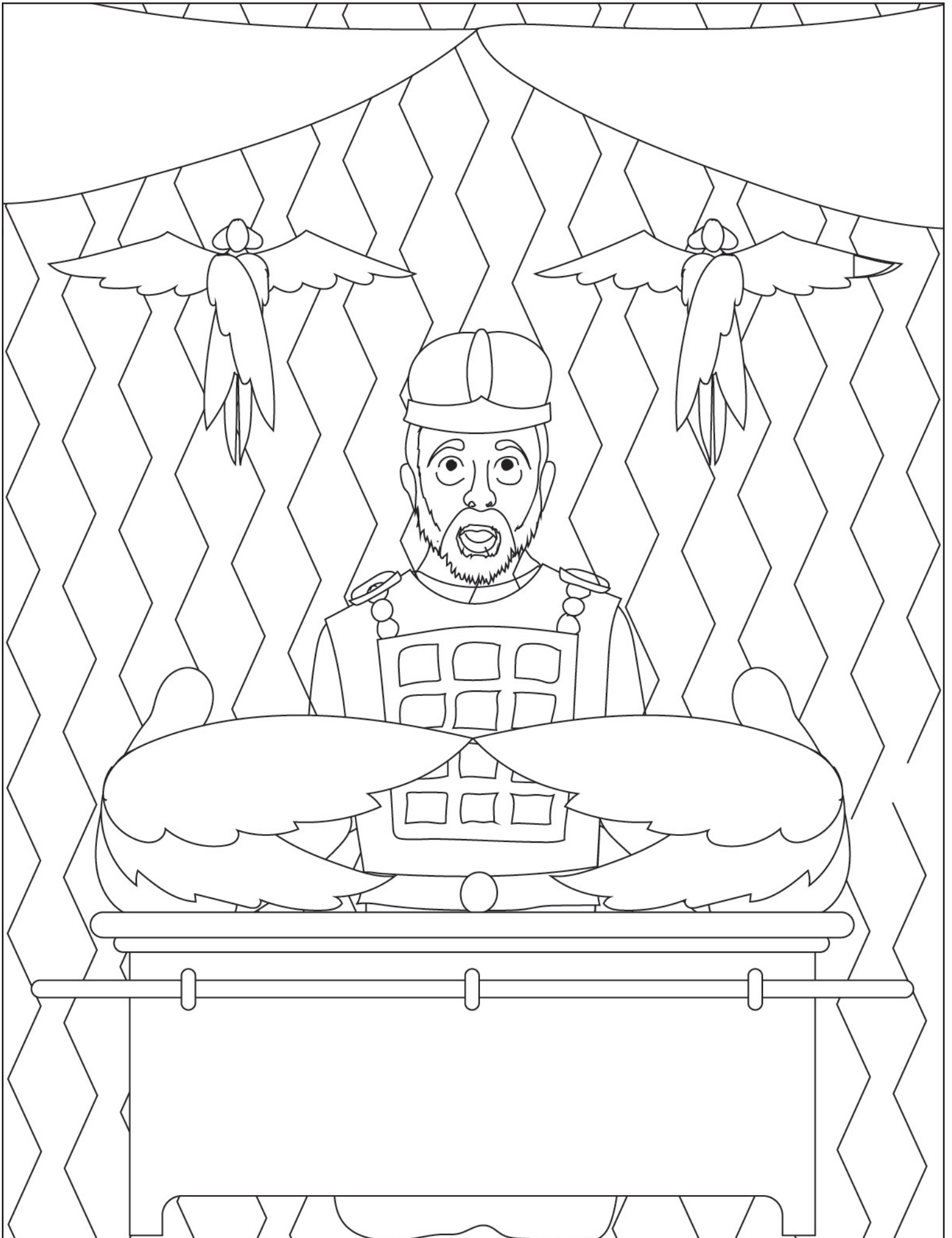




Week 1

# The Song of the Speechless





# Imaginative Retelling

# Zechariah's Song

I serve as a priest in the house of God. My wife is from Aaron's family, and her name is Elizabeth. We both follow God faithfully, living to honor him and keep his commandments.

We also carry a deep sorrow because we cannot have a baby. For many years we prayed and prayed that God would give us the joy of having a child, but slowly we got used to our sorrow. It became like a song that played in the background of all of our memories. We waited many long years, but Elizabeth was too old. I was too old. It seemed that this gift we so longed for would never be ours.

In my work as a priest, it became time for me to do a once-in-a-lifetime priestly job. We drew straws and it was my turn to enter into the Holy of Holies, the place where God's Spirit dwells in the temple, and burn incense on behalf of the people. All the congregation gathered outside the temple and prayed. I entered the temple to do my duties. Suddenly, an Angel appeared next to the altar of incense. I was terrified. I desperately tried to remember if I had heard about this from anyone before, but my mind was frozen. All I could hear was my own heartbeat in my head.

"Zechariah," The angel said, "Do not be afraid."

My heart beat fast. I struggled to slow down my breathing as the angel continued.

"God has heard your prayer. Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a baby. A boy. He will grow up to be a man who leads people back to God. He won't fill his life with useless things, but he'll be focused on one thing only--making a way for the Rescuer who will save God's people."

I could still hear my heart pounding in my ears. The hairs on my arms stood up. The angel's words sounded like the best news I had ever heard. Too good. I blinked my eyes, I had imagined hearing this news so many times. Could I be imagining it now? I almost laughed, a low sad laugh. "How can this be true?" I heard myself say. "My wife and I are very old, and though we have prayed and prayed she has never been able to have a baby."

I shook my head sadly and continued, "Now it's too late."

I thought of the congregation standing outside, praying, waiting, watching, wondering what could be taking so long.

The angel's voice shook me out of my wonderings, "I am Gabriel," he thundered, "I stand in God's presence, and I came from him to tell you that he has heard your prayer and your wife will have a baby. But since you didn't believe, you will not be able to speak until the baby is born."

I opened my mouth to ask a question and found that no words came out. I tried again, to ask the angel if I had understood, but silence provided my answer.

Then, just as quickly as he had appeared, the angel Gabriel left.

I turned to leave the Holy place, wondering what I would do when I stepped back outside and stood before the people.

"What took you so long?" The people asked. But I could not answer them. I tried making signs with my hands to show them what had happened. I was the only one who really understood the wonder and the mystery of that day in the temple. And mine was a very poor understanding indeed.

I can scarcely believe I am writing this, but Elizabeth became pregnant, and even though I knew it would happen, I still could hardly believe my eyes when I looked at her. Every time I saw her, the way her belly grew, felt the tiny kicks from the inside, or heard her whisper with wonder in her eyes, "So this is how God chose to answer our prayer and to restore my dignity." I remembered those long years of praying, of waiting, of watching. And even though my mouth was silent, a voice called out from within me.

Elizabeth grew weary with the weight of our soon-to-be-born child. It was very hard to carry a child in her old age. I worried sometimes that she would not be able to bear it, but she did. Eventually, her time came. The labor was long, hard work.

And then, I saw him for the first time. Our son.

Tears filled my eyes and I remembered the day I stood in the temple and the angel told me this would come to pass.

We brought the boy to the temple to set him apart to God, as is the custom among our people. I told Elizabeth as best as I could that we would name him John, but she would have to speak up. Everyone would have expected that he would be named after me, since he was our firstborn son. I wondered what would happen. I wondered if I would ever speak again.

Of course, the relatives questioned our decision of a name.

“John.” Elizabeth insisted, and of course they didn’t believe her. I wrote, “His name is John.” and suddenly, my tongue felt loose and I tried to speak. The song that had grown in my heart for the last 9 months poured forth in the company of all those people:

*The God we serve is a very good God!  
He has done just what he said he would!  
He has rescued his people from their enemies.  
More than that, he has made a way for us to follow him faithfully.  
This baby boy, my son John, will help us get ready for this rescue,  
He will walk ahead of the Rescuer;  
Reminding us of our need for God’s forgiveness and mercy,  
Helping us to watch for the light of God, shining on us,  
Leading us away from death and into life with God,  
Helping our feet to walk in the path of peace.*

# Daily Liturgy

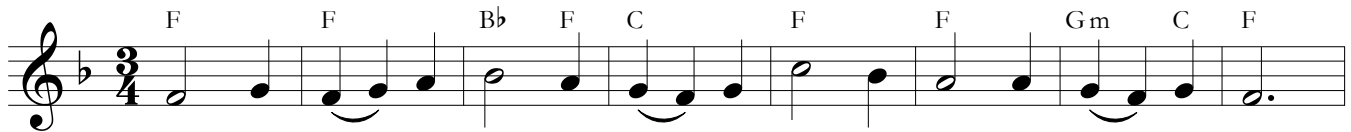
## Candle Lighting

Light the first candle of your Advent wreath and read these words together:

*One candle we light on this Advent night,  
A light in the darkness, hope shining bright.  
A candle for silence, awaiting a babe,  
His voice would echo loudly, "prepare the way!"*

### Sing

#### Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus



1. Come, Thou long ex - spect - ed Je - sus, born to set Thy peo - ple free.  
2. Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a Child, and yet — a King.



From our fears and sins re - lease us; Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Born to reign in us for - ev - er, now Thy gra - cious king - dom bring.



Is - rael's strength and con - so - la - tion, Hope of all — the earth Thou art;  
By Thine own — e - ter - nal Spir - it rule in all — our hearts a - lone.



Dear De - sire of ev - 'ry na - tion, Joy of ev - 'ry long - ing heart.  
By — Thine all — suf - fi - cient mer - it, raise us to — Thy glo - rious throne.

Text: Charles Wesley (1745)  
Music: HYFRYDOL, Rowland H. Prichard (1830)

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# Read

<b>Day 1</b> Retelling, p.7	<b>Day 2</b> Luke 1:5-10	<b>Day 3</b> Luke 1:11-25	<b>Day 4</b> Luke 1:57-66	<b>Day 5</b> Luke 1:67-75	<b>Day 6</b> Luke 1:76-79
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# Wonder

Wonder together about what it would be like to be silent for 9 months.

What does this story tell us about who God is and what he is like?

Have you ever wanted something very badly, but expected that you wouldn't get it?

God met Zacheriah in this place. How has he met you here?

# Bless

Hold hands, or make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads as you pray these words all together, then blow out the candle.

*God, may the light of your kindness shine on us,  
and may your son Jesus guide our feet in the path of peace.*

# Practice: Silence

This exercise gives you the chance to practice silence in a small, manageable way. You will begin by ringing a bell and then trying to keep a bell quiet and noticing the difference between noise and silence. Then you will make a few comments to prepare for your time of silence. You can try this practice during the Advent reading each night this week, just once, or at a separate time.

## Materials

- A bell

## Instructions

Pass a bell around the circle, giving each person a chance to ring it. Then pass the bell around the circle a second time, trying to keep the bell from making any sound.

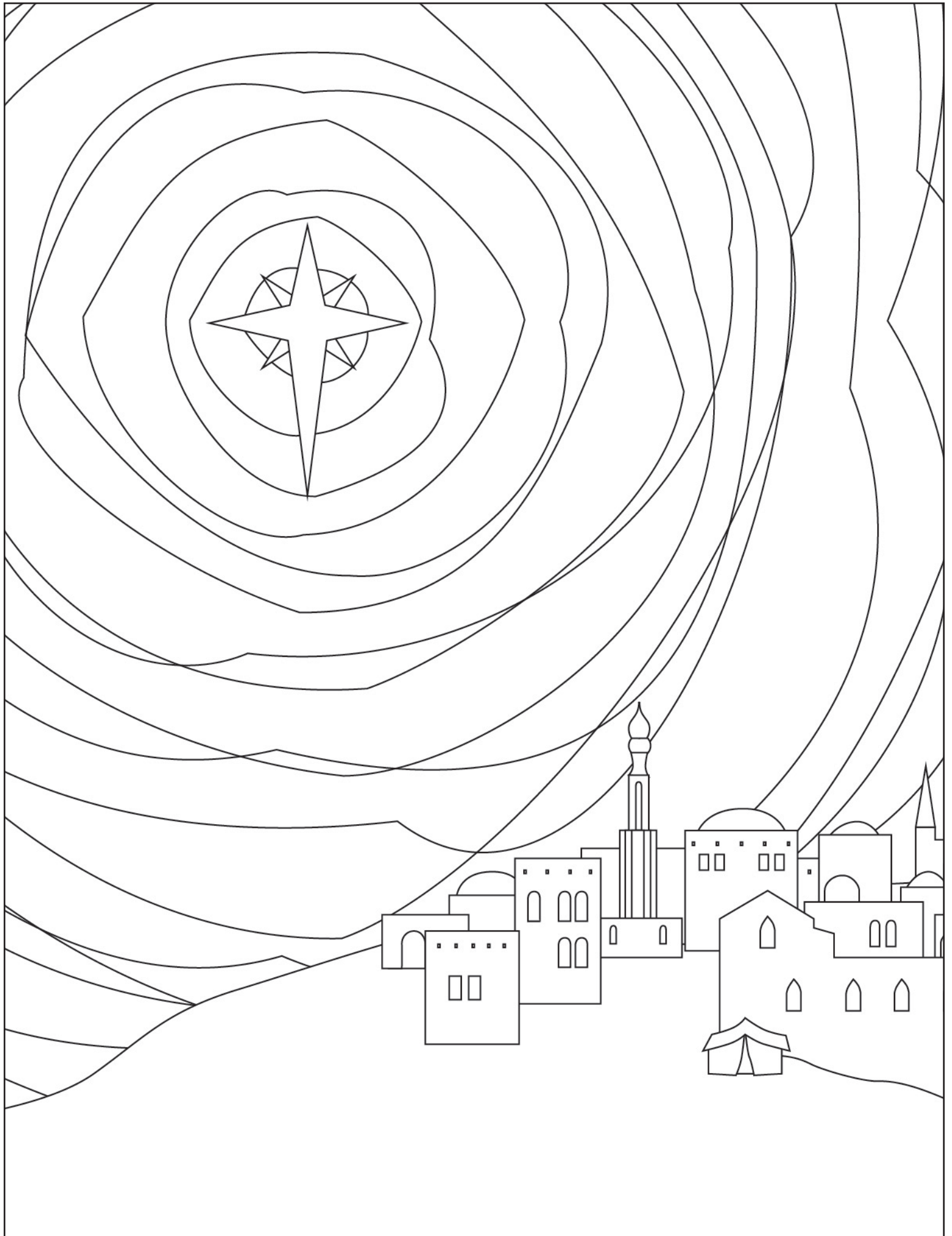
Say something like: *It can be nice to sit quietly for a moment or two, can't it? When we're quiet, we have the chance to remember how much God loves us. We have the chance to hear what our own thoughts and feelings are telling us about how our day is going, and we have the chance to notice where God has been at work in our lives.*

Prepare to sit quietly for one minute (feel free to select any length of time that will work for your family) after you light your candle. Invite people to choose whether they will lay down or sit up, whether they will close their eyes or keep them open. Young children might like to have a stuffed animal to hold while you practice silence together. If a family member forgets, remind them by placing a finger to your lips.

One family member can begin the silence by ringing the bell, and then end the silence by ringing the bell a second time.

After the silence, share what it was like to sit quietly together. If you are practicing the silence during your Advent reading, continue by singing the song *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*.

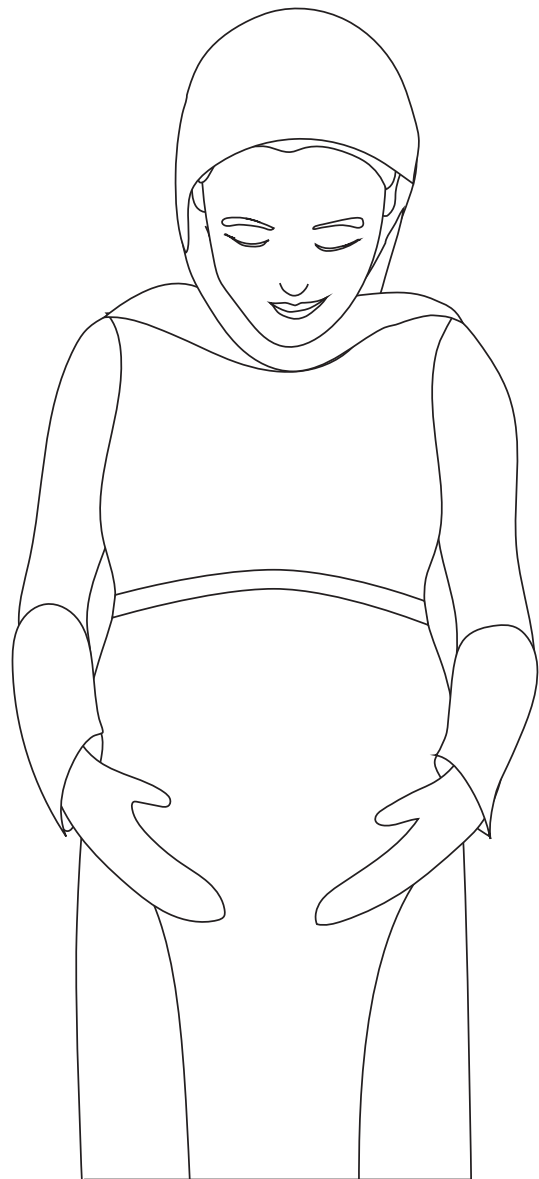


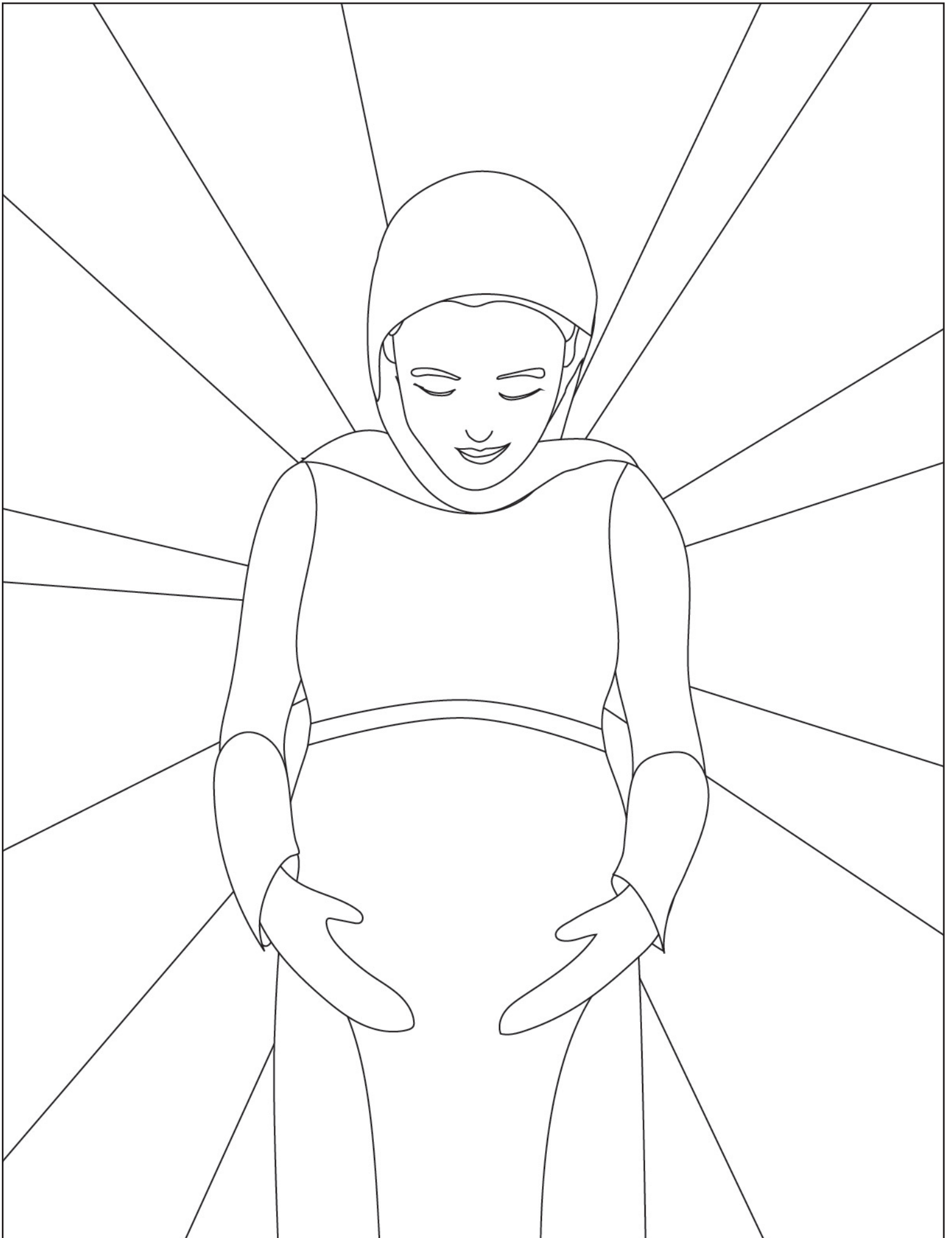




Week 2

# The Song of the Thankful





# Imaginative Retelling

## Mary's Song

That morning, I was at work in my father's house, preparing things for the day. Everyone else was gone, and I was alone. I was daydreaming about doing these chores in my betrothed's house one day soon, once I was his wife.

Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I saw a light. It was bright and shining. I looked up slowly and saw an angel standing in front of me. Before I could cry out, he spoke,

“Hello Mary.  
You are a treasure to God.  
And he is with you.”

I am not really sure what happened next. Maybe I just stared with my mouth open because I didn't know what to say or do. The angel began again,

“Mary, do not be afraid,  
God treasures you.  
You are going to have a baby.  
Name him Jesus.  
He will be great.  
He is the one you have been waiting for all these many years,  
the one from King David's family who will rescue God's people.”

“I don't understand,” I said, “How can I have a baby without being married?”

The angel told me that the Holy Spirit would do it, that this baby would be Holy, the Son of God.

“Mary, nothing is too hard for God to do. Right now your cousin Elizabeth is pregnant, even though she is very old.”

What choice did I have, but to trust God? What could I do but say yes to this rescue plan?

“I am God’s servant.” I said, “Let him do what he wants.”

The angel left, and I heard my own words ringing in my ears.

“Let him do what he wants.”

I swallowed deeply, realizing for the first time that I had no clue what that would mean, for me or for Joseph. As tears pricked my eyes, I remembered the stories I had heard from the time I was young. The story of Sarah, who had a baby even when she was very old, of Miriam, playing her tambourine after marching through the Red Sea. I remembered hearing how Abigail stood up to her foolish husband and God provided for her; how God gave Ruth a husband and a baby when her life had seemed so sad.

And I thought of my cousin Elizabeth, of the way people laughed at her and mocked her for having no children. I thought of the pain I saw cross her face every time a new baby was passed around the family. I imagined her round and full and joyful, waddling under the weight of a baby as I had seen so many women do throughout my life.

“Elizabeth...pregnant.” I whispered aloud to myself, and I knew that I needed to see her, that she was probably the only one who would understand. I gathered my things and headed to Elizabeth’s house.

\* \* \*

“Elizabeth! You are a treasure to God, and he is with you!” I called out as I approached her house.

Then I saw her, coming from inside the house with a big round belly, eyes shining, song on her lips. Tears sprang into my eyes as she called out,

“YOU are a treasure to God!

What a gift that the mother of the Rescuer would visit me!

When I heard your voice, the baby in my belly leapt for joy!

What a gift, to have the faith to believe that God would rescue his people, just like he promised he would!”

Elizabeth reached me and I wrapped my arms around her and that big round belly. Tears filled both of our eyes as we gazed at one another with wonder, silently marveling at the goodness of our God.

And then, almost without noticing, I began to sing,

*Deep within me, I praise God!  
I am happy in God!  
He sees those that no one else does.*

*Generations after me will see what God has done for me, and they will praise him!  
His great mercy is for me, for them, and for all the generations to come.*

*Everyone will see that God has made the proud run away in all directions,  
He has filled up those who are hungry,  
He has sent the rich away empty,  
He has rescued his people, just like he said he would.  
He is the God who does everything well.*

Elizabeth put her arm around me and we walked back into her home together as she began to share with me her own story of wonder. I stayed with Elizabeth for about three months, and we waited and watched together.

# Daily Liturgy

## Candle Lighting

Light the first two candles of your Advent wreath and read these words together:

*Two candles we light on this Advent night,  
Two lights in the darkness, hope shining bright.  
A candle for silence, waiting for a babe,  
Whose voice would echo loudly, "prepare the way!"  
A candle for the thankful song of a woman,  
Awed by the mercy of God's wonderful plan.*

## Sing

Song of Mary (Magnificat) (next page)

## Read

<b>Day 1</b> Retelling, p.17		<b>Day 2</b> Luke 1:26-33		<b>Day 3</b> Luke 1:34-38		<b>Day 4</b> Luke 1:39-45		<b>Day 5</b> Luke 1:46-51		<b>Day 6</b> Luke 1:52-56
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## Wonder

How is Mary's response to the Angel similar to Zechariah's? How is it different?  
What part of Mary's song surprises you the most? What part do you like the best?  
Are there other stories in the Bible that Mary's song reminds you of?



# Bless

Hold hands, or make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads as you pray these words all together, then blow out the candle.

*God, show us your mercy, scatter the pride from our hearts,  
and fill us with yourself, as we wait for our Lord Jesus Christ.*

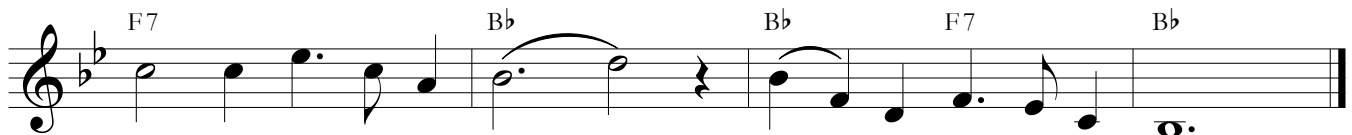
## Silent Night



1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, all is calm, all is bright  
 2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, shep - herds quake at the sight.  
 3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God, love's pure light



'round yon vir - gin moth - er and Child. Ho - ly In - fant so ten - der and mild,  
 Glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far, heav'n - ly hosts — sing al - le - lu - ia;  
 ra - diant beams from Thy ho - ly face, with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace,



sleep in heav - en - ly peace, — sleep in heav - en - ly peace.  
 Christ the Sav - ior is born! — Christ the Sav - ior is born!  
 Je - sus, Lord, at Thy birth, — Je - sus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Text: Joseph Mohr (1816), translated by J. Freeman Young (1859)  
 Music: STILLE NACHT, Franz Gruber (1818)

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\*The original version of this worship guide contained the “Song of Mary (Magnificat)” by Liturgical Folk.  
 It has been replaced to comply with our copyright license, but we encourage you to look it up online,  
 as it is a beautiful rendition of Mary’s song, straight from scripture!

# Practice: Gratitude

Mary sings a song of thanksgiving to God, praising him for all he has done. As she sings, she notices God's work in her own life, and she looks back at everything God has done from the beginning of time.

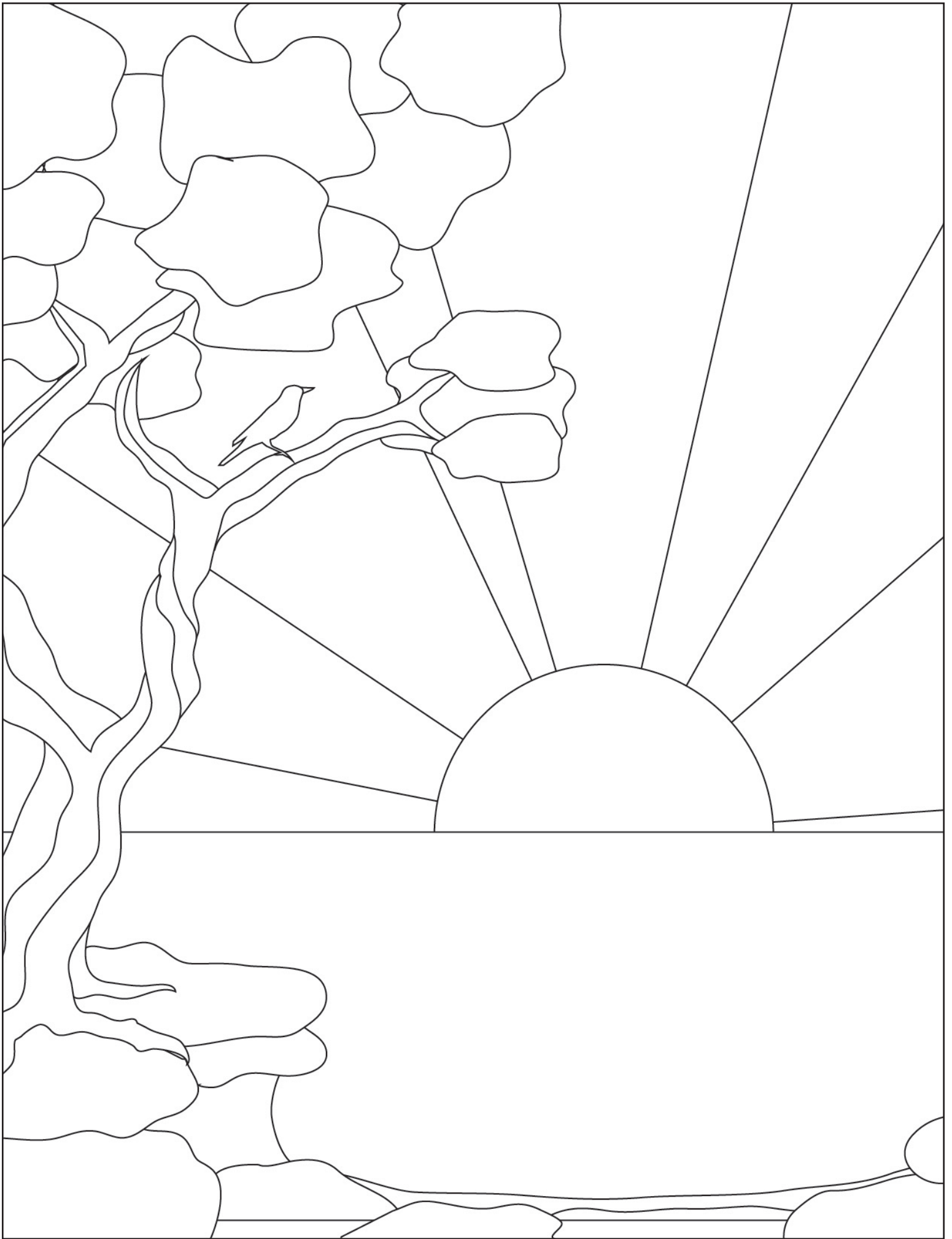
When we pause to be grateful, it is not only very good for our brains, but it is also good for our hearts. Because we know and worship God, being grateful is a chance for us to praise him. This week, with Mary, we are going to practice gratitude with a winter walk.

## **Gratitude Exercise**

Pick a day for a winter walk. Brew a cup of hot chocolate and read Psalm 100 together. Then set out on your walk.

As you walk, notice things you are grateful for and name them, thanking God for them together. The things you notice might also remind you of who God is and what he is like, thank him for these things as well. When you finish your walk, read Mary's Song together from Luke 1:46-55.

If you enjoyed the silence exercise last week, practice silence for a portion of your walk as well. Walk in quiet, paying attention to what sounds you hear. After a few moments, share what the experience was like.

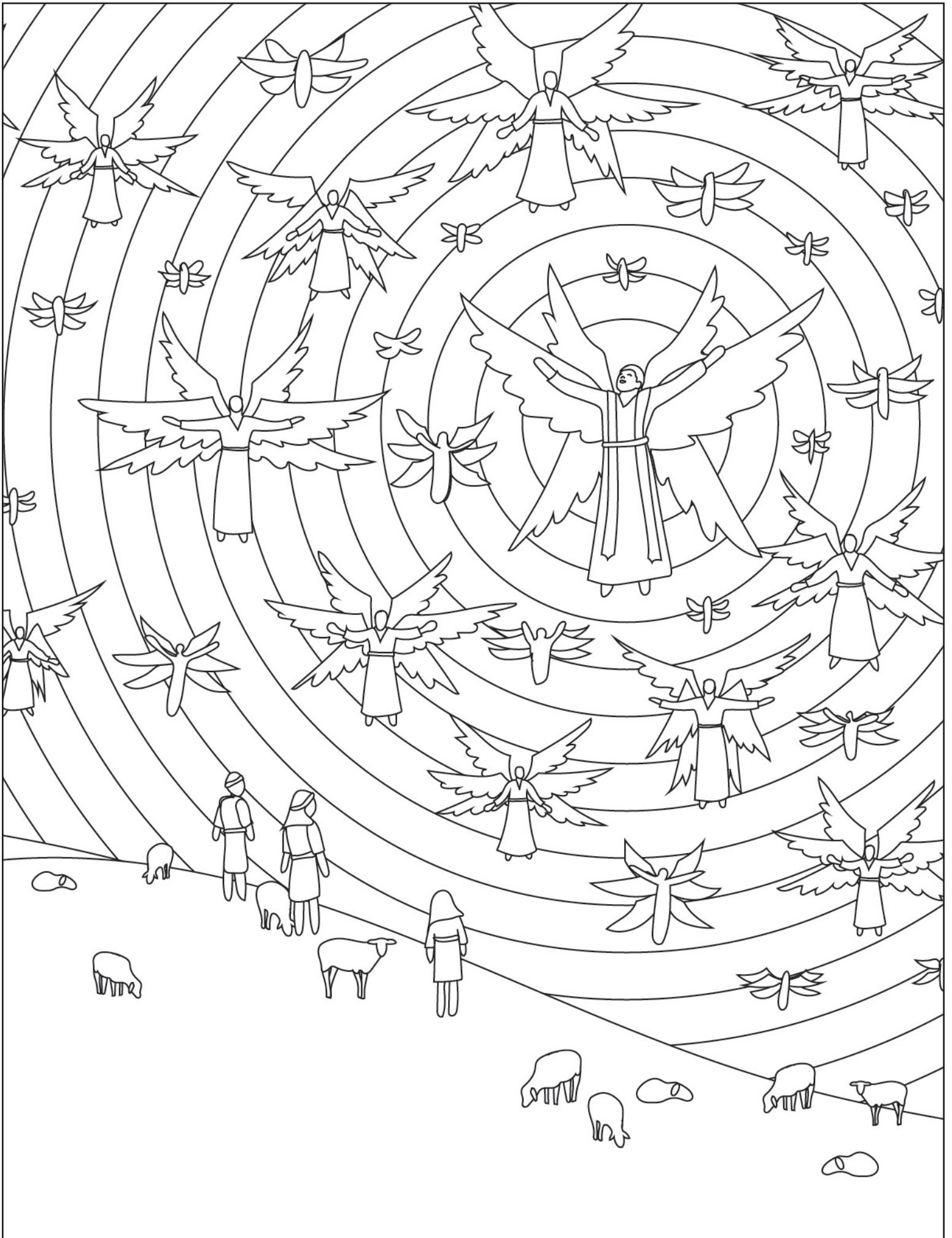




Week 3

# The Song of the Joyful





# Imaginative Retelling

# The Shepherds’ Song

I will never forget that night. We were outside of Bethlehem, watching over our sheep. It was my turn to keep awake, and as the others slept, I daydreamed, staring into the fire. It had been a long day. So much walking, like we do every day, but that night I was weary all the way to my bones. The fire crackled and the night air felt thick with anticipation.

I pulled my cloak closer around myself and looked deep into the night.

All of the sudden, in the dark sky, a thin light began to shine and to grow brighter all the time. I shielded my eyes with my hand and looked up, and my heart began to pound in my chest.

All around me, the other shepherds began to awaken, shocked by the sudden brightness. I rose to my feet, looked left and right and noticed for the first time that a person shone forth in the middle of all that brightness, so beautiful and shining like a thousand suns. I felt the goosebumps along the back of my neck and turned to run, when I heard his voice:

“Do not fear!” He thundered. Somewhere in the night another shepherd laughed in spite of himself.

“I bring you good news that will fill your hearts with joy.  
And not only your hearts, but the hearts of all people everywhere.  
Today, In David’s town, the Rescuer was born.  
Here’s how you will recognize him.  
He will not be in the place of honor, where kings dwell.  
He will be in a lowly manger,  
Wrapped in strips of cloth.”

Then suddenly, he was joined by thousands upon thousands of other angels like him, and their brightness made the sky brighter than the sunniest afternoon.

Their voices echoed loud through the night as they sang,

*Glory to God in the highest of heavens,  
And peace to everyone everywhere on earth.*

I had never heard this song before, but I found I couldn't help but join in. The joy that poured forth from the heavens filled my heart too. As I sang, I realized what I was saying.

How could this be true? After all these years? Had the Rescuer finally come? And how could it be that a group of lowly shepherds would be the ones to hear of it in such a wonderful way?

As the song faded so did the brightness, and the angels returned to wherever they had come from. As our eyes adjusted to the firelight, we looked around from one to another. The joy that overflowed my heart was reflected in each face.

"Come on," I heard myself say, "Did you hear what they said? Let's go and see this baby in a manger."

No one hesitated. Though we were weary from the day, our joy moved us onward to the place where the angels had told us we would find the baby.

As we got closer, my steps slowed. What if we had dreamed it? What if we found nothing but ordinary guest rooms and animals feeding at mangers full of hay?

But then I heard it. The unmistakable sound of a new baby's cries drifted out into the street. I looked around and saw wonder like I have never seen on each of my friends' faces. Our eyes grew wide as we turned the corner and saw the babe, wrapped tightly and lying in the manger; his mother, her eyes full of wonder and her hands unsure; his father, nearby, watchful and cautious.

The Prophet Isaiah's words, which I had heard as a boy came back to my mind,

"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Could he really be the one, I wondered? The Rescuer?



“What’s his name?” I felt myself ask.

“Jesus,” the father replied slowly, as if his thoughts were far away.

“Jesus.” I repeated.

Then, almost as soon as we had caught our breath, we were off again! Running through town, telling everyone we saw on the street, shouting the news into the homes filled with travellers. The song we had heard that night filled out hearts, bursting forth to all we met that night:

*Glory to God in the highest of heavens,  
And peace to everyone everywhere on earth.*

# Daily Liturgy

## Candle Lighting

Light the first three candles of your Advent wreath and read these words together:

*One candle we light on this Advent night,  
A light in the darkness, hope shining bright.  
A candle for silence, awaiting a babe,  
His voice would echo loudly, "prepare the way!"  
A candle for the thankful song of a woman,  
Awe'd by the mercy of God's wonderful plan.  
A candle for joy, the angels sang,  
And the shepherds quickly rushed to proclaim.*

## Sing

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (next page)

## Read

<b>Day 1</b> Retelling, p.27		<b>Day 2</b> Isaiah 9:1-2		<b>Day 3</b> Isaiah 9:3-7		<b>Day 4</b> Luke 2:8-9		<b>Day 5</b> Luke 2:10-14		<b>Day 6</b> Luke 2:15-20
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## Wonder

Share a story about a time you have been filled with joy in Jesus.

What are the words to the song the angels sing?

What do you think these words mean?

Wonder about what it was like to see the angels and hear them singing.

Wonder about why God would announce his rescue plan to lowly shepherds.

# Bless

Hold hands, or make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads as you pray these words all together, then blow out the candle.

*God, give us your peace, and make us people who spread peace so that Jesus will be glorified on earth and in heaven.*

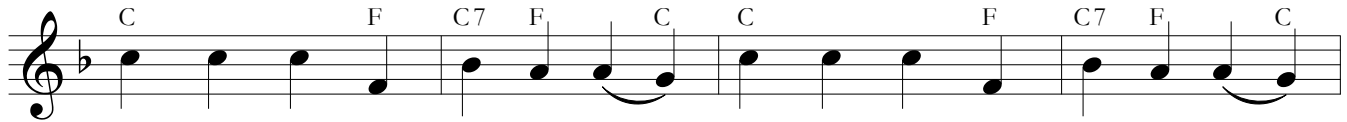
## Hark the Herald Angels Sing



1. Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King;  
 2. Christ by high - est heav'n a - dored; Christ the ev - er - last - ing Lord!  
 3. Hail the heav'n - born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Right - eous - ness!  
 4. Come, De - sire of Na - tions, come, fix in us thy hum - ble home.



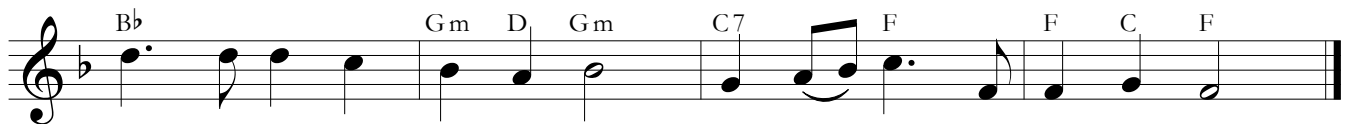
Peace on earth, and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"  
 Late in time be - hold him come, — off - spring of the Vir - gin's womb.  
 Light and life to all he brings, — ris'n with heal - ing in his wings.  
 Rise, the wo - man's con - quer - ing Seed, bruise in us the ser - pent's head.



Joy - ful, all ye na - tions rise, join the tri - umph of the skies;  
 Veiled in flesh the God - head see; Hail th'in - car - nate De - i - ty,  
 Mild he lays his glo - ry by, born that man no more may die,  
 A - dam's like - ness now e - fface, stamp thine im - age in its place.



With th'an - gel - ic host pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"  
 Pleased as man with men to dwell, Je - sus, our Em - man - u - el.  
 born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them sec - ond birth.  
 Sec - ond Ad - am from a - bove, re - in - state us in thy love.



*Refrain* Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King."

Text: Charles Wesley (1739), altered by George Whitefield and others  
 Music: MENDELSSOHN, Felix Mendelssohn (1840)

Luke 2:13-14  
 Public Domain  
 7.7.7.7 D with refrain

# Practice: Generosity

The Shepherds received the news of Jesus' birth with great joy. Then they quickly ran to share their joy with others. When we give, like the shepherds, we are sharing out of what we have been given.

This Advent and Christmas season, as you prepare gifts to give to teachers, friends, family members, or to others you don't know, invite your children into the process with you and be intentional with your conversations.

## **Some questions you can consider this week:**

How has God provided for you?

What does it look like for your family to be generous with what you have been given?

Who in your life is God inviting you to be generous to?

Is there something you are being invited to give up for the sake of another?

What would it look like to share the joy that you have in the story of Christmas?

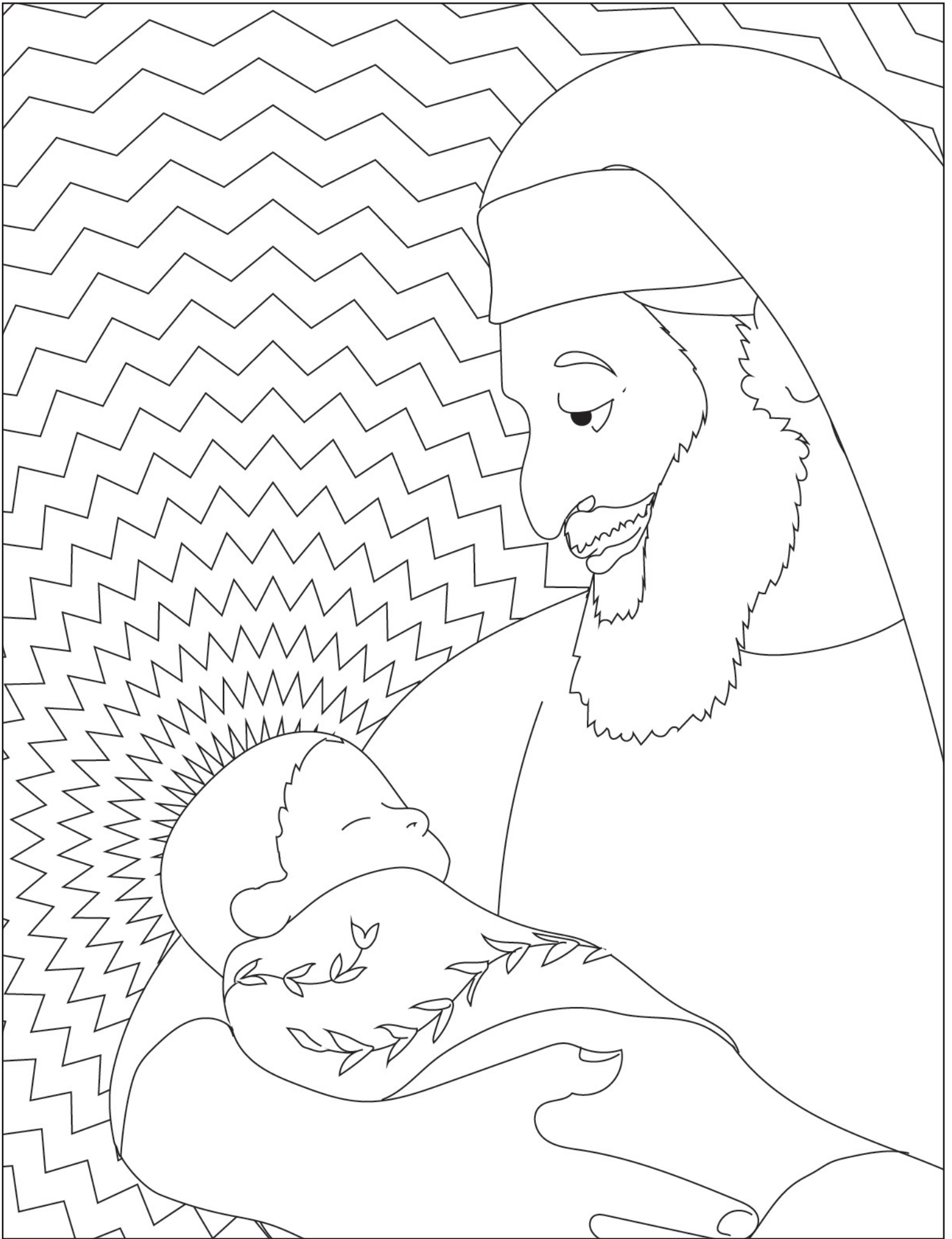




Week 4

# The Song of the Faithful







# Imaginative Retelling

## Simeon's Song

I still remember waking up that morning, even though it was the same as waking up every morning.

*Will it be today?* I wondered as I began my day. Ever since the Spirit of God showed me that I would not die without seeing the Rescuer, this question had been the first thing on my mind as I opened my eyes: *Will this be the day I meet the Rescuer?* And every night, before I fell asleep, my last thought was *Perhaps tomorrow.*

The main point of my life has been watching and waiting for the Rescuer. In fact, I remember that I wasn't sure what I would even do with myself once I finally met him. I might as well just die in peace, I used to say, as long as I was able to see the Rescuer just once.

When I was a boy, I remember hearing the stories of how God spoke to his people. I would imagine Moses, bush aflame in the desert, voice of God strong in his ears and in his heart. I would think of Deborah, speaking truth to Barak even when he didn't listen. I would think of Samuel, watching the sons of Jesse parade before him, listening for the voice of God to say "That one! He's the king!" I would think of Micah, calling God's people back to justice and mercy, to faithfulness. And I would imagine what it was like to hear Isaiah, speaking of the Rescuer to come.

How I longed to hear God's words through the Prophets, spoken to us with a voice we could hear! But God has been silent now for hundreds of years. My own grandfather didn't even remember ever hearing a message from the Lord. The thought that I might one day hear, might even see, the one sent from God himself was enough to consume my whole life. Everything I have done has been in service of this waiting, this watching. As I have worked, I have thought only to keep my body strong enough and preserve my life long enough to be here when he finally arrives.

Though I went often, I didn't spend every day in the temple, as my friend Anna did. But on this particular day, I was drawn to the temple. On this day, I went to the temple, as I had many times before. It was busy and full-people from all over had come for the census. As I scanned

the crowded temple court, I noticed a man and a woman who carried a baby boy with them, not more than a few days old. This wasn't uncommon. According to our custom, babies would be brought to the temple when they were five days old to be dedicated to the Lord. But this couple caught my eyes and my attention. I watched them, and suddenly realized they were moving towards me.

The Spirit stirred my heart and I knew, I just knew that this was what had happened all those years ago with Moses, Deborah, Samuel, Micah, and Isaiah. The Spirit spoke to me.

Almost before I knew what was happening, the couple was near enough to me to speak. I stepped towards them and began to pray,

*Lord, you are King of Everything.*

I reached for the baby, and his mother looked in my eyes and placed him in my arms. As I stared into his eyes, I continued my prayer:

*Just like You promised, You can send me away in peace,  
Because I've finally gotten to see your Rescuer,  
Who you have sent as a Savior to all people--  
To save those who weren't even looking for you,  
And to surprise those who thought they knew you were coming.*

I looked up at his mother, and saw the wonder in my own eyes reflected in hers. A pain filled my heart as new words came to mind, words I did not want to say. I remembered all the prophets of old who spoke hard words to God's people and opened my mouth anyway.

*May the Lord be kind to you and keep you in his ways,  
May the Lord show his love to you,  
May he give you his peace.*

*For your child will cause some people to be brought low, and some to be brought high.  
He will be a Word from God that shows the true loves and desires of people's hearts, and he will suffer for it.  
And your own heart will know the deep pain of suffering and sorrow.*

A tear slipped down her cheek, and I knew that she heard me. But I also knew that she would not walk this hard road alone. I handed the baby back to her, and I turned to go.

Then I saw Anna, the old woman who is always at the temple, waiting and watching. She approached the mother and spoke to her in a quiet voice. The mother looked so young, standing next to Anna.

The baby began to cry, and Anna reached out a wrinkled hand and smoothed his forehead while she prayed. Then she turned to the crowded temple and began to speak God's words to his people, as the Rescuer slept in his mother's arms.

I turned to go, with a lighter step. The many years of silence were over.

God's Word had come to live among his people.

# Daily Liturgy

## Candle Lighting

Light all four candles (minus the Christ candle) of your Advent wreath and read these words together:

*One candle we light on this Advent night,  
A light in the darkness, hope shining bright.  
A candle for silence, awaiting a babe,  
His voice would echo loudly, "prepare the way!"  
A candle for the thankful song of a woman,  
Awe'd by the mercy of God's wonderful plan.  
A candle for joy, the angels sang,  
And the shepherds quickly rushed to proclaim.  
A candle for faithful eyes that watched,  
Ready to see the mystery of God.*

## Sing

O Come, All Ye Faithful (next page)

## Read

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Day 4</b>	<b>Day 5</b>	<b>Day 6</b>
Retelling, p.37	Isaiah 57:14-16	Isaiah 57:17-19	Luke 2:22-24	Luke 2:25-32	Luke 2:33-35

## Wonder

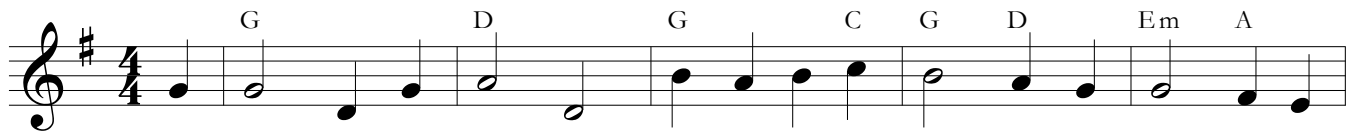
What parts of the story tell us about Simeon & Anna's faithfulness?  
Do they remind you of anyone you know?  
What would faithfulness to Jesus look like in your family's life together?

# Bless

Hold hands, or make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads as you pray these words all together, then blow out the candle.

*God, open our eyes to see your salvation, even when it is hard to see.*

## O Come, All Ye Faithful



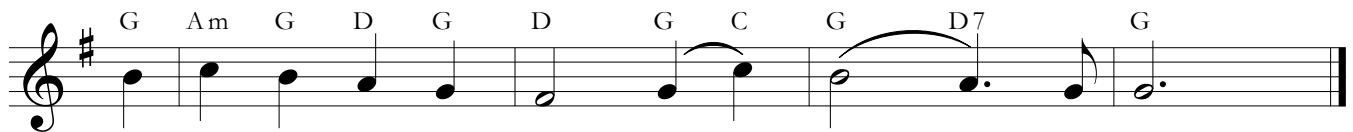
1. O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant, O come ye, O  
 2. Sing choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion, Sing, all ye  
 3. Yea, Lord we greet Thee, born this hap - py morn - ing, Je - sus, to



come ye to Beth - le - hem! Come and be - hold Him, born the King of an - gels!  
 cit - i - zens of heav'n a - bove! Glo - ry to God, all glo - ry in the high - est!  
 Thee be all glo - ry giv'n; Word of the Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing!



*Refrain* O come, let us a - dore Him, O come, let us a - dore Him,



O come, let us a - dore Him, — Christ — the Lord!

Text: John Francis Wade (c. 1743), translated by Frederick Oakeley (1841)  
 Music: ADESTE FIDELES, John Francis Wade (c. 1743)

Luke 2  
 Public Domain

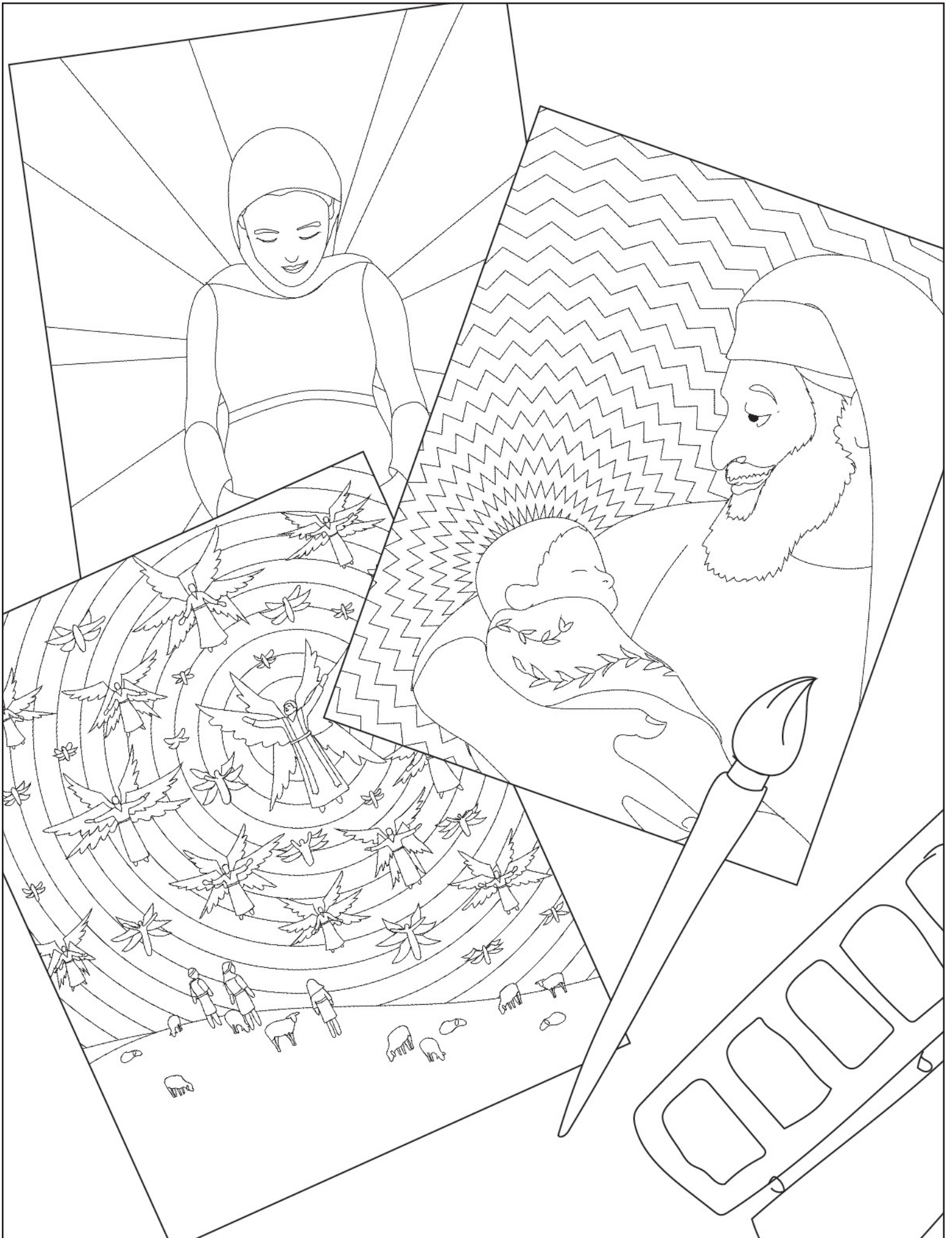
# Practice: Creativity

Simeon and Anna both exemplify people whose lives were caught up in God's story. Is your life caught up in God's story?

## **Materials:**

- Canvas boards or heavy duty art paper of any size
- Art materials of your choice.

During the week following Christmas, take some time to talk about the stories of these people again: Zechariah, Mary, the Angels & Shepherds, and Simeon and Anna. Use your favorite art materials to illustrate each story and display your artwork in your home until Epiphany on January 6. Then put them away and save them for next Advent.







Christmas Day

# The Song of the Rescuer



# Christmas Day Liturgy

## Candle Lighting

Light all five candles of your Advent wreath, lighting the Christ candle last, and read these words together:

*One candle we light on this Advent night,  
A light in the darkness, hope shining bright.  
A candle for silence, awaiting a babe,  
His voice would echo loudly, "prepare the way!"  
A candle for the thankful song of a woman,  
Awe'd by the mercy of God's wonderful plan.  
A candle for joy, the angels sang,  
And the shepherds quickly rushed to proclaim.  
A candle for faithful eyes that watched,  
Ready to see the mystery of God.  
A candle for the baby born this night,  
God right here among us, the world's true light.*

## Sing

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (next page)

## Read

Luke 2:1-7; Hebrews 1:1-4

## Wonder

What do you think that journey was like for Mary & Joseph?

What it was like to have her baby far from her home?

Which of the stories we've read is your favorite?

In all the stories, people sang about the Rescuer. Who is this Rescuer?

Has Jesus rescued you? How?  
 What do you think it means that God has spoken by his son?

## Bless

Hold hands, or make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads as you pray these words all together, then blow out the candle.

*God, thank you for the gift of your presence, your light and your word among us.  
 Help us to see Jesus in our daily lives.*

### Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

1. In - fant ho - ly, in - fant low - ly, for his bed a cat - tle stall;  
 2. Flocks were sleep - ing, shep - herds keep - ing vig - il 'til the morn - ing new

ox - en low - ing, lit - tle know - ing, Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
 saw the glo - ry, heard the sto - ry, tid - ings of a gos - pel true.

Swift are wing - ing an - gels sing - ing, no - els ring - ing, tid - ings bring - ing;  
 Thus re - joic - ing, free from sor - row, prais - es voic - ing, greet the mor - row:

Christ the babe is Lord of all. Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
 Christ the babe was born for you. Christ the babe was born for you.

Text: Traditional Polish Carol, translated by Edith M. G. Reed (1920)  
 Music: W ZLOBIE LEZY, Polish melody

Luke 2  
 Public Domain  
 8.7.8.7.8.8.7.7



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