

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

Zechariah's Blessing

Goal for the Session

Children will hear how Zechariah sang about God's promises for John's life and for theirs, and respond with peaceful actions.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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 this age think in concrete and literal ways, and their ideas about God's peace are likely to be defined by actions. They have been part of arguments and have witnessed others behaving in contentious ways. They can appreciate that all people can learn more peaceful ways of responding. They also can envision doing peaceful actions. Expect the children to be a bit more restless this month. It may help to offer a wider variety of activity levels and learning spaces during the session.

*God of peace, thank you for the gift of the vision of peace in the Scriptures.
Fill me with your wisdom and love as I teach. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ Bible
- ❑ Resource Sheet 1, materials listed there
- ❑ Color Pack 1, 2, 27, 28
- ❑ *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*; CD player

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*; CD player; Internet-connected device (optional)
- ❑ option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, scissors, glue sticks, hole punch, markers, crayons, yarn
- ❑ option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 3

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you did not prepare an Advent wreath for the November 29 session, make one according to the directions on Resource Sheet 1 (Preparing for Advent) and attach a paper flame to one of the paper candles. If you are using option 1 in Responding, become familiar with the song “Dona Nobis Pacem” (track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*).

Welcome each child by name. Invite them to tell about any guests their families are expecting at Christmastime. Ask how their families prepare for guests.

Gather with learners around the Advent wreath and explain that today is the second Sunday in the season of Advent, the time when Christians prepare to celebrate Christmas. Remind them about the meaning of the color of the candles. Recall that the candle with the flame is the first Advent candle of hope. Attach the flame to the second candle, saying that this is the candle of peace. Invite learners to offer definitions of the word *peace*. Affirm that we have peace because God is always with us. Pray aloud, asking learners to repeat each phrase:

*Loving God, / thank you for being with us today. / Help us to learn more
/ about the peace you give. / Amen.*

Show Color Pack 27. Introduce the words to the second stanza of “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 27; track 21 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). Sing stanzas 1 and 2.

EXPLORING

Open your Bible to Luke 1:68–79 and say that this is where the story is found. Show Color Pack 1 and introduce the characters of Zechariah (seated at table) and Elizabeth, holding baby John. Tell the story, using the following script:

Zechariah (zeh-kuh-RAI-uh) will be an unusual name for most children, but they will enjoy learning to say it. Have them repeat it several times.

God, We Sing

1. 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.

2. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *peace*
anew; . . .

Zechariah was a priest, a worship leader in the temple. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had wanted a baby for a long time. After many years, God's angel told Zechariah that they would have a son, whose name was to be John. Zechariah didn't believe it, so the angel took away Zechariah's ability to speak! When their son was born, their neighbors and families celebrated with them.

When the baby was eight days old, Zechariah and Elizabeth took him to the temple. The people there were going to name the baby Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John." There was an argument. The people in the temple looked at Zechariah to find out what he wanted to name his son.

Zechariah took a tablet and wrote, "His name is John." Right away, Zechariah started speaking again! He praised God. In fact, Zechariah was so excited that he sang about the good things God promised to do. He sang about two people—his son, John, and the one who would be God's promised Savior.

Zechariah sang that God's savior was coming to bring God's love and mercy. This promised one would turn enemies into friends. He would give people the courage to do good things. He would bring peace.

Then Zechariah sang about his son, John. He said that God had blessed John to help people prepare to meet God's savior. John would tell the good news of God's savior. Zechariah said God would bless John and help him to do this important job.

When John was an adult, he met Jesus. God's Spirit told him that Jesus was God's promised savior. And John told everyone he met to follow Jesus.

Ask:

- ✪ What things in the story surprised you?
- ✪ Why do you think Zechariah sang about the good things God was promising to do?
- ✪ What job did Zechariah say his son, John, would do?

Form pairs, and designate one child in each pair as Zechariah and the other as John. Have the children portraying Zechariah speak God's blessing to the children portraying John. Have them tell the work God is blessing them to do. Have partners switch roles and repeat.

Show Color Pack 2, inviting learners to tell what story it shows. As needed, say that this picture illustrates the story of Jesus' birth. The words are ones that Zechariah spoke. Explain that the word *light* refers to God's promised Savior, Jesus. Wonder together what Zechariah meant when he said God's savior would "guide us into a life of peace" (Luke 1:79, CEV).

- ✪ What might you do to live in peaceful ways as you prepare to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, God's promised Savior?

**EASY
PREP**

Option: To view a children's choir singing "Dona Nobis Pacem," go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKz_aBRhClk.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

Dance and Sing

Dance and sing, for God
will be with you,
Glory, hallelujah!
Dance and sing, for God
will be with you,
Glory, hallelujah!

Refrain:

Dance and sing for joy,
Glory, hallelujah!
Dance and sing for joy,
Glory, hallelujah!

Repeat stanza and refrain
one time
Repeat refrain three times

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **"Dona Nobis Pacem"** Singing a song will reinforce Zechariah's message for the children. Ask learners to listen to "Dona Nobis Pacem" (track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022). Have them repeat the words after you. Explain that this song is a prayer. The words mean "Give us peace." Sing the song together. Ask: When might you sing this song, either aloud or to yourself? When might you sing it alone? When might you sing it with others? Why is God's peace important?
2. **Peace Ornament** Children will create a concrete symbol for peace to hang on a Christmas tree. Give each child a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Peace Ornament). Lead learners in following the directions on the resource sheet. Read the words on the ornament in unison. Invite learners to tell what colors, shapes, and images remind them of peace. Have them use markers or crayons to decorate both sides of the ornament to tell about God's peace that comes to us through Jesus, the Savior. Encourage learners to hang their ornaments on a Christmas tree or other place at home. Ask: What will you tell your family about God's peace? What might you pray together?
3. **Finding Peace** As they discuss contemporary stories, learners will name peaceful actions they might take. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 3. Read aloud the story of Lily. Form groups of three to talk about the story and to think of peaceful actions that could be taken in that situation. Have each small group tell their ideas to the entire class. Follow up by asking what learners would do if they were Lily. Repeat this process for the story of Andre.

Invite learners to tell how knowing about God's peace might help them when faced with a situation that is not peaceful.

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent wreath and invite learners to tell what they will remember about Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John. As the group sings "Dance and Sing" (Color Pack 28; track 3 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022), change the words in the refrain to "Dance and sing for peace."

Invite the children to pray with you, saying "give us peace" when you point to them:

God, when we are worried,

give us peace.

When we are not sure of what we should do,

give us peace.

When someone is not kind to us,

give us peace.

We pray for peace in our homes and in our world. Amen.

Bless each child by saying, "(Name), God bless you and fill your heart with peace."

Preparing for Advent

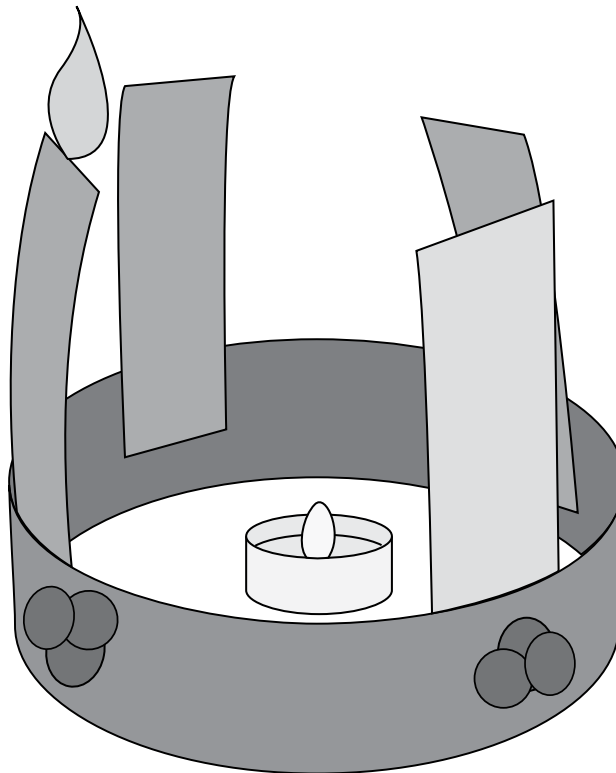
YOU WILL NEED

- 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.

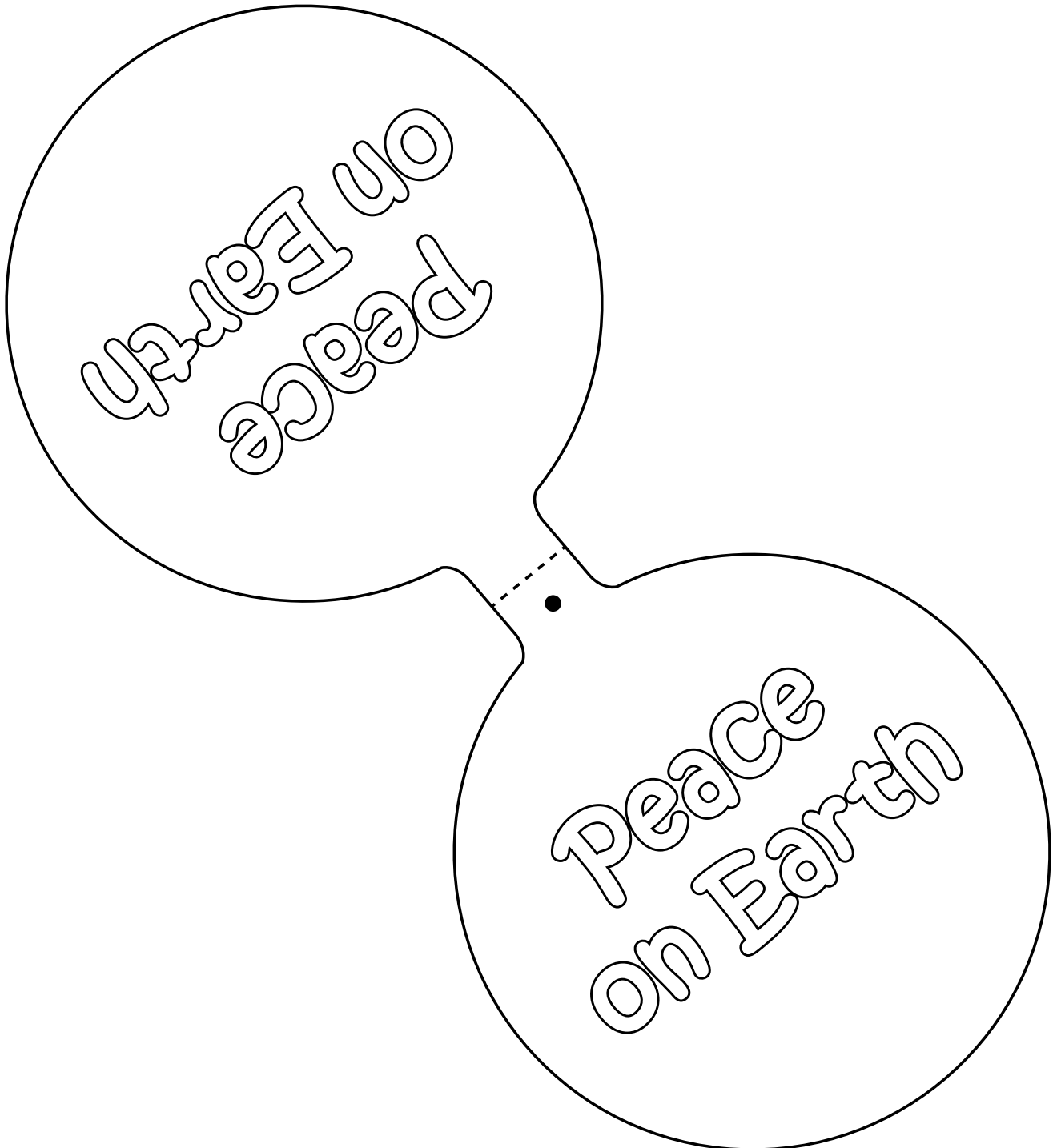


December 5, 2021
Zechariah's Blessing

Grades K-2
Resource Sheet 2

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.



December 5, 2021
Zechariah's Blessing

Grades K–2
Resource Sheet 3

Finding Peace



Lily shares a bedroom with her sister, Emma. Lately, they can't seem to stop fighting! They tease each other. They take each other's things. They tattle on each other. Lily feels like there is no peace at home. What peaceful actions might make things better? Who might take these actions?



Andre plays on a soccer team. Lately, the team members can't seem to stop fighting! They say mean things to each other. They do not take turns with the ball. They do not listen to the coach. They push and shove each other. Andre gets a stomachache just thinking about soccer practice. What peaceful actions might make things better? Who might take these actions?