

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

Turn Around

Goal for the Session

Tweens will engage with Zechariah’s prophecy and discuss ways to practice repentance this Advent.

■ 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

From a young age most tweens have been urged to say, “I’m sorry” when they’ve hurt someone. They likely have had others apologize to them on occasion. Tweens are beginning to grow in understanding that any declarations of remorse must be accompanied by a change in behavior in order to be sincere and meaningful. Use this understanding to tackle the concept of repentance. Although the focus of this session is on the practice of repentance, it also provides the opportunity to emphasize God’s unfailing love and eagerness to forgive.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth
- shallow bowl
- glass floral beads
- 4 votive candles, matches or battery-powered votives
- Color Pack 1, 2, 28, 30
- Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Bibles
- paper, pens
- colored paper
- scissors

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens, envelopes
- option 2: index cards; pens; *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, card stock, scissors, fine-tipped markers, glitter glue, hole punch, yarn

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

God of love, as I examine my own life this Advent, give me wisdom to see where I fail to follow you and the grace to practice meaningful repentance. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make an Advent bowl by placing a layer of glass floral beads (available at craft stores or florists) in a shallow bowl and nestling four votive candles into the stones. Place a blue or purple cloth (see sidebar) in the center of your learning space and place the Advent bowl on it. Print each of the following Scripture references on a separate slip of paper: Luke 1:1–17; Luke 1:18–25; Luke 1:57–66. If you are using option 3 in Responding, bring several 6-inch circles that learners can trace.

Welcome tweens as they arrive. Gather around the Advent bowl. Welcome them to the Second Sunday of Advent. Remind them that during Advent, Christians hope for the completion of God’s kingdom and prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birthday.

Sing “Dona Nobis Pacem” (Color Pack 28; track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022) as you light two candles as a reminder that Jesus, the light of the world, is coming. Pray aloud:

God, be with us as we wait and hope for the love that will be poured into the world through a baby in a manger. Help us to prepare our hearts for Christmas. Amen.

Extinguish the candles.

Place Color Pack 1 in the middle of the group and challenge learners to use only their eyes to find their way through the maze. Ask:

- ✎ How difficult was it to do this without touching the maze?
- ✎ What did you do when you found yourself going the wrong way?
- ✎ In life, when can it be helpful to turn around and change the way you are going?

Say that the Bible reading today says something about changing directions.

Some churches use the color blue in worship during Advent 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.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 2 and ask learners to recall what they know about John the Baptist (also called John the Baptizer). Affirm their responses. Say that today's Bible reading is about John's birth. But first, they need to know the backstory.

Distribute Bibles. Form three groups and give each group one of the prepared slips of paper. Instruct groups to read their passage and plan a creative way to present that part of John's story. After a few minutes, have each group present its part of the story, beginning with Luke 1:1–17 and proceeding in order. Invite learners to follow along in their Bibles as you read aloud Luke 1:69–79.

Form two groups. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Zechariah's Song.) Assign one of the parts to each group. Have tweens work together to complete their assigned section and then present their findings to the whole group. Discuss:

- ✿ What do we learn about God from Zechariah's prophecy?
- ✿ What words would you use to describe the mood of Zechariah's words?
- ✿ What does Zechariah say John will do?
- ✿ What will John's message be?
- ✿ Which part of Zechariah's prophecy gives you hope? Why?

Show Color Pack 2 and comment that this scene would have taken place about thirty years after Zechariah sang his song. Read the words in the speech bubble in unison. Discuss:

- ✿ What does the word *repent* mean? (Explain, if necessary, that *repent* means to turn around or change one's behavior. John called people to turn to living in God's ways.)
- ✿ Why do you think John told the people to repent as they prepared to meet Jesus?

Distribute construction paper, pencils, and scissors and invite tweens to trace and cut out one footprint. Have tweens sit in a circle. Arrange the footprints in a circle in the center, all pointing in the same direction. Play "My Heart Cries Out to You" (track 15 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*) and invite tweens to think silently of things they have done that are selfish or mean, and what they might do to change their behavior.

Invite tweens to tell their ideas for things they might do to change direction and follow God's ways more closely during Advent. As ideas are given, turn the footprints to face in the opposite direction.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Note to Self** Tweens will write letters to reflect on their practice of repentance during Advent. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Turn Around) and ask volunteers to read it aloud. Brainstorm ways of completing the final sentence. Have tweens turn their papers over and write a short letter to themselves as a reminder to take two or three specific actions during Advent. Have learners place their letters in envelopes, seal them,

EASY
PREP

and print their name and address on the front. Plan to mail the letters this week or hold them to give to learners next week.

Option: If you have access to a long corridor, have tweens do the prayer exercise as they walk in a straight line, one after the other, then turn around and come back.

- 2. Prayer** Tweens will practice repentance as they participate in a prayer activity. Distribute index cards and pencils. Allow a quiet moment for each learner to write one way he or she has neglected or forgotten to follow God's ways on the front of the card and one action they could take to change this behavior on the other side. Gather around the Advent bowl and light two candles. Ask learners to turn so they are facing outward. Play "My Heart Cries Out to You" (track 15 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022) and invite tweens to silently tell God what they wrote on the front of their cards. When the song ends, invite everyone to turn around and silently tell God what they will do to change direction. Read aloud Luke 1:78–79 and invite learners to tuck their cards into a pocket. Extinguish the candles.
- 3. Decorations** As they make decorations, tweens will discuss how to practice repentance during Advent. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Turn Around) and read it together. Brainstorm ways of completing the final sentence. Have each tween trace a 6-inch circle on a piece of card stock and cut it out. Direct them to write one way they have forgotten to follow God's way of love on one side of the circle and one action they could take to change their behavior on the other side. Invite them to decorate the second side with glitter glue and a cheerful design. Have them punch a hole in the finished circle and thread a piece of yarn through it for hanging. If possible, hang circles in your learning area, where they can spin gently as reminders to practice repentance during Advent.

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent bowl and light two candles. Invite tweens to tell one thing they can do to help bring God's love into the world this week.

Play "Dance and Sing" (Color Pack 30; track 3 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022), inviting learners to move in a circle as they sing along. Pray aloud:

O God, thank you for your never-ending love. May the time of your justice be now. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Invite learners to clap twice as they say "amen" at the end of the blessing:

*May the God of peace go with you this Advent season.
Amen.* (Clap twice.)

Say good-bye to each learner by name.

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!

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

Repeat verse and chorus (1x)
Repeat chorus (3x)

Save the Advent bowl
for use on December 12
and 19.



Zechariah's Prophecy

“John’s father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and he spoke God’s message.”

—Luke 1:67, TEV

Zechariah spoke God’s message in the form of a hymn. A hymn is a song or poem of praise or thanksgiving to God. The hymn has two parts. Part one is Luke 1:68–75 and part two is Luke 1:76–79.

Group 1

Read aloud Luke 1:68–75, and then fill in the chart below:

	Key idea:
Luke 1:68–69	
Luke 1:70–71	
Luke 1:72–75	

Summarize the main message of Luke 1:68–75 in one sentence:

Group 2

Read aloud Luke 1:76–79, and then fill in the chart below:

	Key idea:
Luke 1:76	
Luke 1:77	
Luke 1:78–79	

Summarize the main message of Luke 1:76–79 in one sentence:

Turn Around

In Advent we are called to turn from selfish, greedy, or mean-spirited ways. We are called to change our behavior so that we are living more in God's ways. How might we do this? Here are a few ideas:



This Advent, instead of buying new wrapping paper, I will wrap my Christmas gifts in the comic pages from a newspaper.



This Advent, instead of buying candy for myself, I will use some of my allowance to buy food for the community food pantry.



This Advent, instead of trying to get out of doing my chores, I will do them without being asked or reminded.



This Advent, instead of playing video games by myself, I will take time to play with or read a book to a younger child.



This Advent, instead of asking for lots of gifts for myself, I will ask that one of my Christmas gifts be a donation to a charity.



This Advent, instead of _____, I will _____.