

Zechariah Prophecies About Jesus

Luke 1:68-79



Worship Theme:



God meets our needs.

Weaving Faith Into Life:



Children will praise God for the loving way he meets their needs.

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
<p>1 Let's Praise God! (up to 25 minutes)</p>	<p>Sing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My God Is" • "He Is the Light" • "Jesus Is Alive" • "Joy to the World!" • "God With Us" • "He's the King" • "All That I Am" (Psalm 103:1) 	<p>KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i></p> <p>Classroom Supplies: Video equipment</p>

Preschool

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
<p>2 Let's Learn the Point! (up to 25 minutes)</p>	<p>The Shape of Love Hold felt shapes representing God's love, and hear the Bible story.</p>	<p>Classroom Supplies: Enough red and green felt to cut at least one shape per child, scissors</p>
	<p>Blanket of Love Make a blanket as a reminder that God loves us and meets our needs.</p>	<p>Classroom Supplies: Large piece of fabric, "The Shape of Love" felt pieces, safety pins, glitter glue, glue gun</p>
	<p>* Full Hearts Decorate and eat heart-shaped cookies to remind them that God meets our needs.</p>	<p>Classroom Supplies: Heart-shaped cookies, frosting, plastic knives, decorations, napkins</p>

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
2 Let's Learn the Point! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i>	* Surprise Visitor Hear a surprise visitor tell Zechariah's story.	Classroom Supplies: Copy of "Zechariah's Story" (at the end of this session), costume, 5 cue cards
	* "The Amazing Needomatizer" Watch a video segment and discuss how God provides for our needs.	KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i> Classroom Supplies: Video equipment
	Worship Banners Make banners to praise God for meeting our needs.	KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i> Classroom Supplies: Bibles; video equipment; 1 piece each of red, green, and yellow poster board; scissors; markers; craft supplies; masking tape

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
3 Let's Pray! <i>(up to 10 minutes)</i>	The Offering Write ways God has met their needs, and thank him.	Classroom Supplies: Offering bowls, envelopes, pencils
	Lord, Help Us See Ask God to show them needs to pray for.	Classroom Supplies: Candle, matches
	Christmas Tree Prayer Pray for needs by writing them on ornaments and hanging them on a Christmas tree.	KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i> Classroom Supplies: Video equipment, pencils, wrapping paper, scissors, ornament hooks, Christmas tree

* Starred activities can be used successfully with preschool and elementary children together.

Customize your session to fit your needs. You can separate preschoolers and elementary children for Section 2.

Or, if you keep the children all together for the entire worship session, we suggest you choose from the starred activities.

Zechariah Prophecies About Jesus

Luke 1:68-79

The priest Zechariah doubted an angel's message to him that his aging wife, Elizabeth, would have a son who would prepare the way for the Lord. Because of his unbelief, Zechariah was struck with an inability to speak until the baby was born. Shortly after appearing to Zechariah, the angel appeared to Mary, telling her that she would give birth to the Messiah and that Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was also pregnant. Mary visited Elizabeth, who by then was expecting the child who would become John the Baptist. Mary proclaimed her good news to Elizabeth and glorified the Lord for his goodness to her and to all the earth (see Luke 1:46-56).

When John was born, Zechariah was suddenly able to speak again. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah delivered the prophecy contained in Luke 1:68-79. This proclamation is known as *Benedictus*, which is the Latin for "praise be," the first words of the prophecy.

Luke 1:76 indicates that John would be a prophet who would prepare the way for Jesus. He would be the Elijah figure mentioned in Malachi 4:5-6, who was to appear before the coming of the Lord. John was to give people the knowledge of salvation. They had drifted so far away from God that they had lost even that knowledge. John was to prepare them for Jesus by reminding them of what that salvation was all about—the remission of sins.

How would the remission of sins be made possible? Through the mercy of God. The words of Luke 1:78-79 are reminiscent of Isaiah 60:1: "Arise, shine, for your light has

come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you." The coming of Jesus would bring light to a dark world, through the mercy of our loving God.

The final promise of peace mentioned at the end of verse 79 might have brought a sigh of relief to the average Jew. Having suffered and struggled so much, the Jews longed for peace. Our world is no different. Caught up in the hectic schedules of living, most people yearn for the peace Jesus can offer. And thanks to our merciful God, that peace is available to all who believe in Jesus.

Devotion for Leaders

As prophesied by Zechariah, John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming Messiah. Because of our relationship with Jesus, we also have the responsibility to prepare others to have a relationship with him.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: Imagine you're Zechariah, the father of John, and reflect on how you'd feel if your son were to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Messiah. As a parent, what responsibility would you feel if you knew your child were to be a prophet of God? Think about your responsibilities in response to God's gift. Pray a prayer of praise for our Messiah, Jesus.

Why We Worship for Leaders

When Zechariah's son, John, was born, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to praise God and to prophesy. In his prophecy, Zechariah pointed out specific ways the Savior, Jesus, would meet the needs of people. He would bring salvation and forgiveness, hope, and help in following God.

Whether we admit it or not, we all need God. We need the help and the salvation that only Jesus offers. It's tempting to think people or things can meet our needs, but time proves to be both temporary and empty. Only God can truly meet our deepest needs, and he's waiting to do just that. That's reason to worship!

Easy Prep for Leaders

Let's Praise God!—Make sure your video equipment is ready.

Surprise Visitor

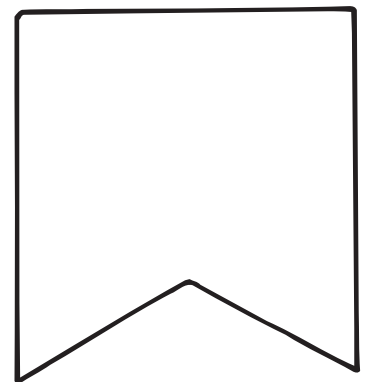
- Recruit an adult male volunteer to play the part of Zechariah in the "Surprise Visitor" activity. Provide a costume—a Bible-times robe and beard, for example—and give your volunteer a copy of the "Zechariah's Story" script at the end of this session. Ask him to practice it beforehand, memorizing it if possible. Have the volunteer wait outside the room until you cue him to enter.
- Use pieces of poster board or paper and markers to make a cue card for each of the following words: WOW! YEA! OOH! AHH! and UH-OH!
- Set up a table for "Zechariah" to use.

"The Amazing Needomatizer"—Watch "The Amazing Needomatizer" at least once before the session so you're familiar with it.

Worship Banners—You'll need red, green, and yellow poster board. Cut the bottom of each piece to give it a banner look. (See illustration.) Provide at least three Bibles, and gather enough craft supplies for children to work in three groups. Include scissors, glue or glitter glue, and scraps of Christmas wrapping paper or construction paper.

Let's Pray!—You'll want to darken the area used for Let's Pray! as much as possible, so check for ways to do that. Set up a Christmas tree in this area. If you can't use a real tree, cut a tree shape from green butcher paper, and tape it to a wall. Cut enough 6-inch squares of Christmas wrapping paper to have at least one for each child. Set a box of ornament hooks (or tape) near the tree.

Preschool Activities—Refer to the preschool pages for preparations.



1 Let's Praise God!

Play music videos from the *KidsOwn Worship DVD* as children arrive. Designate greeters to welcome children at the entrance, and ask your greeters to shake hands with them and welcome them by name.

When you are ready to begin,

Say Welcome, everyone! Let's take a few moments to greet each other. Turn to the people around you, and tell them you're glad they're here.

Ask • What are some reasons you came to children's church today? (I came to worship God; children's church is fun; my parents made me come.)

Say No matter what your reason for coming, we're all here because God brought us together.

Ask • What are some ways we need God? (We need God to give us food; we need God to forgive our sins; we need God to keep us safe.)

Say We need God's salvation so we can live with him in heaven forever. We need God's forgiveness when we do wrong things. Sometimes, when we feel lonely or sad, we need God's love and acceptance. It's good to know that God meets our needs! God is our Father, Savior, creator, and master. Let's worship God by singing "My God Is."

 Sing "My God Is."

Say God meets our needs. He sent Jesus to give us salvation and forgiveness, to give us hope, and to help us follow him. Let's pray, thanking God for who he is and how he meets our needs.

Invite kids to pray their own prayers of thanks aloud.

Say God sent Jesus to meet our needs. That's exciting! Let's sing about how God sent Jesus to be the light of the world.

 Sing "He Is the Light."

Say We'll be celebrating Jesus' birth soon. That means Christmas is coming, and Christmas usually means presents, which usually bring joy! Raise your hand if you feel joy at Christmastime. (Pause.) Presents are fun, but God gives us something better than toys, video games, or sports equipment! God's best gift is his Son, Jesus. Jesus offers us salvation, which means he saves us from something.

Ask • What do we need to be saved from? (We need to be forgiven for the bad things we do; we need to be saved from the things that take God's place.)

Say We need to be saved from the guilt of the wrong things we do. John 3:17 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." That's joyful news! Let's sing our next song joyfully.

▶ Sing "Jesus Is Alive."

Say ▶ In today's Bible story, God told Zechariah that God would send a Savior to meet our needs. And you know what? God kept that promise! Soon after Zechariah prophesied about him, Jesus was born. Let's sing about the joy our Lord brought to the world.

▶ Sing "Joy to the World!"

Say ▶ Christmastime is a joyful time. Presents, special foods, and being with family and friends all make us happy. God wants us to feel that joy at other times, too. Tell us about a time you felt joy because God met a need you had or because of something he did for you. Give children time to respond.

Ask ▶ • What are some ways we can express our joy? (Clapping our hands; cheering; laughing)

After children respond, ask a few volunteers to lead the group in expressing joy by shouting, dancing, jumping up and down, or doing something else children suggested.

Say ▶ Jesus also brings us peace. Sit down now, and show me how you look when you're peaceful. That's great! I feel more peaceful already just looking at you!

Ask ▶ • Does God's joy help meet our needs? Why? (Yes, because we can be happy with what we have; yes, because we need to be happy; yes, God's joy makes us peaceful.)

Say ▶ When we have God's joy, it helps us keep going, even when things are tough or when they don't turn out the way we expected. During our next song, let's smile to show our joy that God is with us.

▶ Sing "God With Us."

Say ▶ God sent Jesus to us, but are we ready for him? God wants us to get ready for Jesus by asking him to be Lord in our lives.

Ask ▶ • What does "Jesus is Lord" mean? (It means that Jesus rules over us; it means that Jesus is in charge.)

• How can we show Jesus that he's our Lord? (We can pray to him; we can worship him; we can obey him.)

Say ▶ Let's make Jesus our king by making him the most important person in our lives. Make room for him in your heart, and let him be in charge of everything.

▶ Sing "He's the King."



Leader Skillbuilder

It's easy for children to identify material needs—the need for food, clothing, homes, and families, for example. This lesson focuses on our intangible need for salvation and forgiveness. Be prepared to guide children toward thinking on a deeper level about human needs. If discussions gravitate toward physical needs, accept those responses, but prompt children to think further about those needs that we can't see, touch, smell, hear, or taste.

Say Jesus is king of everything, and he loves us. We can love Jesus, too. He has done so much for us! Think of some reasons to love Jesus. On the count of three, call out your reason. Ready? One, two, three! (Pause.) Those are great reasons! Jesus heard every one of them! Now let's tell Jesus we love him by singing the next song and praising his holy name with our whole hearts.

▶ Sing "All That I Am" (Psalm 103:1).

Pray God, thank you for helping us see that we need you. Thank you for meeting our needs. Thank you for sending Jesus to give us salvation, hope, forgiveness, and help in following you. In Jesus' name, amen.

2 Let's Learn the Point!

Preschool Activities, pages 27-28

At this time, have the preschool leader invite the preschoolers to go to their own room for this section of activities. Tear out the Preschool Activities page, and give it to the preschool leader. Have the preschool leader bring the preschoolers back to participate in Let's Pray! with the older children. If you prefer to keep all the children together, do the starred (*) activities. They will work well with both elementary and preschool children.

Elementary Activities

* Surprise Visitor

Cue your volunteer "Zechariah" that it's time to enter the meeting area.

Say We have a surprise visitor with us today. It isn't often we get to visit with someone from the Bible! Zechariah has agreed to visit our worship session and tell us about something that happened to him. Zechariah, I understand you've had quite an experience. Please tell us about it.

Lead children in responding to the volunteer when he holds up the cue cards. When "Zechariah" is finished, thank him, and lead the children in clapping for him.

- Ask**
- **According to Zechariah, what do people need?** (People need a Savior; they need forgiveness for their sins.)
 - **Why was Zechariah praising God?** (Because God had given him a son; because he could speak again.)
 - **How did he say God would meet people's needs?** (He would send them a Savior; he would take away their sin.)



Say ➤ **God meets our needs by giving us hope, salvation, forgiveness from sin, and help in following him. That's why we praise God!**

* *"The Amazing Needomatizer"*

Show kids "The Amazing Needomatizer" video. It shows a girl who has built a machine that creates whatever she needs. When it's over, discuss the following questions:

- Ask** ➤ • **Would you like to have a machine like this?** (Yes, it would be fun; no, the machine always messed up.)
- **How is God like the amazing needomatizer? How is he different?** (God gives us everything we need; God doesn't mess up our needs; God doesn't always give us the silly things we ask for.)

Say ➤ **God doesn't do whatever we ask—he's not a wish machine. But the Bible does promise that God will take care of our needs.**

Have the children look up Philippians 4:19. Have a volunteer read the verse aloud.

- Ask** ➤ • **What does this verse tell us about God?** (God will meet our needs; God is rich.)
- **God sent Jesus to fulfill our needs. How does Jesus meet our needs?** (Jesus loves us; Jesus became our Savior; Jesus died for us.)

Say ➤ **God knew people need to be saved from their sins. God sent Jesus to take care of our needs. He saves us from our sins, he comforts us, he loves us, and he guides us. Let's learn more about God's gift to us.**

Worship Banners

Have kids form three groups. Designate one the Salvation and Forgiveness Group, one the Hope Group, and one the Help Group. Give each group craft supplies, including markers and glue, and one of the pieces of poster board you prepared earlier. Make sure each group has a Bible.

Have the groups look up the following Scriptures to help them understand their needs and how God fills them through Jesus.

- Luke 1:69-71 and Acts 4:12 (the Salvation and Forgiveness Group)
- Psalm 42:5-6a and Micah 7:7 (the Hope Group)
- Isaiah 41:10 and Luke 1:74-75 (the Help Group)

Say ➤ **Choose someone to read the verses for your group. Then discuss with your group how God meets our needs for salvation and forgiveness, hope, and help in following him.**

Give groups several minutes to read and discuss the Scriptures.


Worship Leader Tip

Talk to the volunteer for "Surprise Visitor" beforehand about allowing time for children to ask him questions at the end. Encourage questions that will help children better understand his message.



- Ask**
- **How does God meet our need for salvation and forgiveness?** (God is the only one who can forgive us; he saves us from our enemies.)
 - **How does God’s hope help us?** (It makes us happy when we are sad; we can talk to God, and he will hear us.)
 - **How does God help us?** (He gives us strength; God helps us to not be afraid; God rescues us from our enemies.)

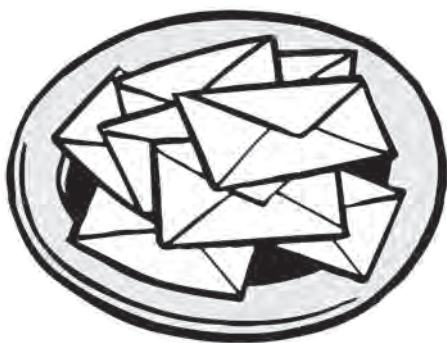
Say We’re going to make worship banners to thank God for meeting our needs in Jesus. Use your poster-board banner and craft supplies to illustrate what your group talked about. For example, you might write, “God gives us salvation and forgiveness,” and then decorate your banner with words, drawings, and designs that tell or show how God meets our needs for salvation and forgiveness through Jesus.

-  Play “Joy to the World!” while the kids work. When the groups are finished with their banners, hang the banners in the meeting area, and have group members explain them.

Have everyone stand under the Salvation and Forgiveness banner. Encourage kids to call out praises to God for providing salvation. Then move everyone to the Hope and Help banners, and repeat the praise activity.

Pray Dear God, thanks for seeing our needs and meeting them. Without you, we would be lost, hopeless, and helpless. But with you, we have salvation, forgiveness, hope, and help in following you. Thanks, Lord! In Jesus’ name, amen.

Keep the banners on the wall throughout the Christmas season.



3 Let’s Pray!

The Offering

Say One way to thank God for meeting our needs is to let him use us to meet the needs of others. We should look for ways to care for others as God cares for us. Give each person a small envelope and a pencil.

- Ask**
- **Why does God want to use us to meet needs?** (Because we are Christians; because we are supposed to be a light to others.)
 - **How can we help meet the needs of others?** (Give some of our things to charity; listen to a friend who is sad; share with others.)
 - **How does giving our offerings show God we’re thankful that he meets our needs?** (We are giving back to God; we are giving our extra money to help others.)

(continued on page 29)

Zechariah Prophecies About Jesus

Luke 1:68-79

Worship Theme:



God meets our needs.

Easy Prep for Leaders

The Shape of Love—Cut large hearts from red felt and cross shapes from green felt. Each shape should be 6 inches tall, although you may want to adjust the size according to the number of children in your group and the size of the fabric you'll use for the "Blanket of Love" activity. Cut enough shapes to make a decorative pattern on the blanket. If your group is small, give children more than one shape each.

Blanket of Love—You'll need a piece of fabric, such as an old flannel bedsheet. Spread the fabric on a table.

Using Theo

Consider using Theophilus the FaithRetriever puppet today in these ways:

- Have Theo lead the preschoolers from the main worship area to the preschool room.
- Have Theo give children the affirmations in the "Blanket of Love" activity.
- See the KidsOwn Worship Kit for a puppet skit written for today's worship session.



The Shape of Love

Say A long time ago, a priest named Zechariah told everyone that the Savior was coming soon. The Savior is someone who helps us get to heaven. Zechariah didn't know the Savior's name because he wasn't born yet. But we know the Savior's name. Who is the Savior? (Pause.) That's right. Jesus is the Savior!

Zechariah told people the Savior would forgive them for the wrong things they do. Make a sad face if you've ever done a wrong thing. (Pause.) All of us have done wrong things. Jesus will forgive you. These crosses remind us of Jesus' forgiveness.

Pass out green crosses to half the children.

I have more shapes to give the rest of you. Zechariah also told the people that the Savior would show them God's great love. Zechariah said the Savior would help them and give them what they need. These hearts remind us of God's love.

Pass out the felt hearts to the rest of the children. Make sure each child has at least one shape.

Ask • What things do you need Jesus to help you with?

Say God loves to meet our needs! Zechariah said that the Savior would help us follow God. We need God's help. Hold your shape up in the air if you're glad God sent Jesus to be our Savior. (Pause.) Wave your shape back and forth through the air if you're glad God meets our needs. (Pause.) Place your shape over your heart if you love Jesus. Your shape just might stick to your shirt like Jesus sticks with us! (Pause.)

Let's play a game now and take our shapes over to the table. We're going to make something to remind us that God meets our needs. Ready? Follow me.

Lead the children around the room, Follow-the-Leader style, to the craft table.

Blanket of Love

Gather the children around the blanket you spread on the table.

- Ask** ▶ • Do you have a favorite blanket to sleep with?
• How do you feel when you have your special blanket? When you don't have it?

Say ▶ God's love feels warm and soft like a blanket. It makes us feel safe and happy. The shapes you have are to remind you of something about God.

- Ask** ▶ • How do your shapes make you think of God's love?

Say ▶ The cross reminds us that Jesus forgives us when we do wrong things. The hearts remind us that God loves us and helps us. Let's use our shapes to make a special blanket to remind us of God's love. It will remind us that God meets our needs.

Help children place their shapes on the fabric to form a pattern. Then attach each shape with safety pins.

Preschool Leader Tip

Use the blanket from "Blanket of Love" in future lessons to express God's love. For example, each child could have a turn holding it or wrapping up in it during the Bible story or playtime. Say something like, "God's love hugs us like a warm blanket."

Explain that the pins will hold the shapes in place until you glue them on later. Hold the blanket up to show the children.

Say ▶ What a special blanket to remind us of God's love! The hearts and crosses make a pretty pattern and remind us that God meets our needs. Let's take turns wrapping ourselves in the blanket—it'll feel like getting a hug from God.

Wrap each child in the blanket and say something loving to the child, such as "Jesus loves you," or "You're special to God." Make sure everyone gets "hugged" in the blanket and affirmed. Then spread the blanket on the table again.

Say ▶ Let's add some finishing touches to our blanket. We'll put little dots of glitter glue on our shapes to make it look extra special, like God's love. As you add dots, let's tell ways that God shows his love for us.

Help children make small dots on the felt shapes. Encourage every child to name at least one way God shows his love by meeting our needs.

Say ▶ This blanket looks beautiful! Let's hang our blanket in our room to remind us that God meets our needs.

After the session, remove the safety pins, and use the glue gun to glue the shapes to the blanket.

* Full Hearts

You'll need heart-shaped cookies, at least one per child, as well as frosting; plastic knives; napkins; and decorations, such as sprinkles and mini-candies.

- Ask** ▶ • How does God show his love to us?
• How can you show your love to God?

Say ▶ God shows us his love in lots of ways. God meets our needs. God forgives us, God helps us get to heaven, and God helps us follow Jesus. God's love makes our hearts feel full and happy! Let's make our heart-shaped cookies look full and happy, too. Each time we put a new decoration on, let's thank God for meeting our needs. I'll start. Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to us.

Help children spread frosting and add decorations, one at a time. Encourage each child to say at least one thank-you prayer as he or she decorates. Continue until the cookies are full of decorations.

Say ▶ Our cookies are full of yummy things! Now it's time to make our tummies full and happy! While we eat our cookies, let's remember that God meets our needs.

ALLERGY ALERT



Be aware that some children have food allergies that can be dangerous. Know your children, and consult with parents about allergies their children may have. Also be sure to read food labels carefully as hidden ingredients can cause allergy-related problems.

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Say On your envelope, list specific ways God has met your needs, or draw a picture of how God takes care of you. Then, if you brought an offering, place it in the envelope and seal it. As you put your envelopes in the bowl, thank God for meeting your needs.

Pass the offering bowl, and have children put their envelopes in it.

Lord, Help Us See

Darken the room as much as possible, and light a candle.

Say This candle is to remind us of God's presence. God is with us all the time, and he meets our needs.

Have children find a place in the room to sit or stand quietly with eyes closed.

Say Let's ask God to show us some needs to pray for. They might be our needs or the needs of others—needs for salvation and forgiveness, hope, or help in following him. I'm going to pray first, and then you repeat after me. Remember, God listens when we talk to him!

Pray God, we come to you right now. Pause while children repeat.
We are listening for you. (Pause.)
Speak to each of us in our hearts. (Pause.)
Show us needs that we can pray for. (Pause.)
Thank you, God. (Pause.)
In Jesus' name, amen.

Say Keep your eyes closed now and be totally quiet for several more seconds. Think about the needs that come to your mind. Pause for about 30 seconds before continuing.
The things that came to your mind are needs that you can ask God to meet. Let's get ready to pray for those needs in a fun way.

Christmas Tree Prayer

Have children form small groups. Give each group squares of Christmas wrapping paper, scissors, and pencils or markers.

Say To make a Christmas ornament, cut the piece of wrapping paper in any shape you want. On the back of your ornament, write the needs that came to your mind when we prayed a few minutes ago. When you're finished writing, come get an ornament hook and hang your ornament on the tree. Our Christmas tree is a way of offering our prayers to God.



Play "Crown Him With Many Crowns" as children work. Allow children to make more than one ornament if time permits. When everyone has hung an ornament, gather around the tree.

Worship Leader Tip

It may be helpful to walk around the room during "Lord, Help Us See" to help kids stay quiet and focused on God. If a child is having difficulty being quiet, gently touch him or her on the shoulder and whisper a reminder to focus on God during this time.

Say ➤ God has seen the things you've written on your ornaments. He hears our prayers and meets our needs. That gives us hope! Let's pray.

Pray ➤ Lord, we put these needs on our Christmas tree for you to see. Thank you for knowing and understanding each of them. You understand even the things that aren't written down. Thank you, God, for loving us and meeting every need we have. In Jesus' name, amen.

Zechariah's Story

Set the cue cards on a table near you. Recite the text below. Pause at the designated cue spots, hold up the cue card, and wait for the kids to respond.

Say

Hello, everyone! My name is Zechariah, and I'm a priest in the temple of God. I have a story to tell you about how God sent Jesus to meet our needs. You can help me. When I hold up a cue card, just say what it says.

As you can see, I'm quite old. My wife, Elizabeth, is almost as old as I am—much too old to have a baby. But we desperately wanted a child. So we prayed.

One day, as I was in the temple presenting an offering to God, an angel of the Lord appeared to me! (Hold up the "WOW!" cue card.)

The angel told me that God had heard our prayers for a child. My wife, Elizabeth, was going to have a baby! (Hold up the "YEA!" cue card.) But that wasn't all. The angel said the baby would be a boy and would be very special. God would use our son to convince people to turn back to God. He would be a special messenger from God to prepare people for the arrival of Jesus! (Hold up the "OOH!" cue card.) The angel said we were supposed to name him John. (Hold up the "AHH!" cue card.)

Frankly, I found this whole thing hard to believe. (Hold up the "UH-OH!" cue card.) So I asked the angel, "How can I be sure this really will happen? I mean, Elizabeth and I are pretty old."

The angel wasn't impressed by my question. (Hold up the "UH-OH!" cue card.) He told me that, because I didn't believe his words, I wouldn't be able to speak until our son was born. (Hold up the "OOH!" cue card.) One surprise after another! Well, I returned home to my wife, and she was pregnant! (Hold up the "WOW!" cue card.) And I couldn't speak. (Hold up the "OOH!" cue card.)

Finally our son was born. (Hold up the "AHH!" cue card.) There he was, as wonderful a baby as we could have imagined. (Hold up the "OOH!" cue card.) In those days, we held a ceremony when the baby was eight days old. That's when we named the baby in front of everyone. Everyone expected us to name him Zechariah, since that's my name. That's

what people did back then. I still couldn't talk, but Elizabeth spoke up and said, "No! His name is going to be John." (Hold up the "YEA!" cue card.)

All the people were really surprised. I guess they figured Elizabeth was a little confused, because they asked me what I wanted to name the child. Since I couldn't talk, they gave me something to write on. I wrote, "His name is John."

They couldn't believe I wanted to name him John! But they were in for an even bigger surprise! Because at that moment, suddenly I could speak again! (Hold up the "WOW!" cue card.) So I began praising God. I was so grateful to God for giving us a child and for sending this messenger who would prepare the way for Jesus.

The Holy Spirit filled my heart and gave me a song to sing. (Hold up the "OOH!" cue card.) The song was full of prophecy—that means special knowledge from God—about what was going to happen when John and Jesus grew up. My prophecy went something like this: Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to earth and set his people free. He has made a way for us to be saved from death and guilt for the wrong things we do. God has sent Jesus to save us from our enemies, to let us serve God without being afraid, and to be holy and righteous because he takes away our sin.

And you, my child, John, will be called a prophet of God because you'll go before the Lord to prepare the way for him. You'll tell his people that they can be forgiven for the wrong things they do. God's light will shine on all the people who are in darkness and the shadow of death. His light will show them the way to peace with God. (Hold up the "WOW!" cue card.)

And that's my story, boys and girls! You see, my message is about God's love—and the message is for you, too! Jesus is here today to be your Savior and to meet every need you have, just as he did for Elizabeth, John, and me. God loves you! (Hold up the "YEA!" cue card.)