



A 4-WEEK STUDY
FROM THE
GOSPELS ON

CHRISTMAS

FROM OUR ANNUAL *TEACHING STRATEGY*



WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED WITH . . .
JEREMY CLARK & JADA PRICE

OVERVIEW



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WEEK 2

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WEEK 3

- ▶ [Game](#)
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- ▶ [Game](#)
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- ▶ [Discussion Guide](#)
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- ▶ [Stuff to Print](#)

SERIES OVERVIEW

There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today – like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

WEEK 1

This week, we'll explore the story of Zechariah and a reminder from Proverbs to trust God's plans.

- **BIG IDEA:** God's timing is always right.
- **BIBLE:** Luke 1:8-24; Romans 13:11-12; Psalm 27:14

WEEK 2

This week, we'll explore the announcement of Mary's pregnancy and the prophecies that came before it.

- **BIG IDEA:** Jesus is always good news.
- **BIBLE:** Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-24; John 10:10

WEEK 3

This week, we'll explore the story of the shepherds who shared the good news of Jesus on the day of the very first Christmas.

- **BIG IDEA:** We can always share God's story.
- **BIBLE:** Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 11:2-5; 1 Peter 3:15

WEEK 4

This week, we'll explore the danger Jesus and his parents experienced following Jesus' birth.

- **BIG IDEA:** God is always ready to rescue.
- **BIBLE:** Matthew 2:11-18; Psalm 80:1-7, 91:14-15

MEMORY VERSE: "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth." – Luke 1:14 (NIV)

HOW TO DISCIPLE DURING THIS SERIES

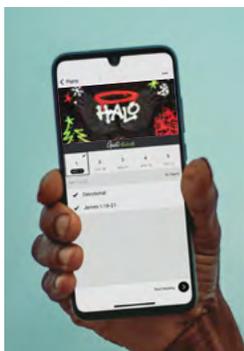
We all know teenagers don't get disciplined just by sitting through a message every week. So here's what else we've provided to **help your students develop more consistent spiritual habits.**

THE 4 SPIRITUAL HABITS

We feature one of Grow's 4 Spiritual Habits every month with a unique activity or experience. But the 4 Spiritual Habits show up year-round! **Here are a few of the places you can spot them in this series:**

- **SPEND TIME WITH GOD:** In Weeks 2 and 4, the application encourages students to make prayer and Scripture part of their daily rhythm make prayer and Scripture part of their daily.
- **SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS:** The discussions every week are designed to help students grow in relationships through strategic conversation make prayer and Scripture part of their daily.
- **USE YOUR GIFTS:** In Week 3, the application helps students think about how God has gifted them and how they can use that to seve make prayer and Scripture part of their daily rhythm.
- **SHARE YOUR STORY:** In Week 1, students will be encouraged to identify someone they want to share the hope of Jesus with make prayer and Scripture part of their daily rhythm.

DEVOTIONALS



To help students regularly **spend time with God**, every series comes with daily readings and devotionals through The Bible App. You can access them on your browser or app [right here](#). And don't forget about your [Volunteer Devotional!](#)

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITY

If you're following along with our scope and sequence, our discipleship activity this quarter is Community Art Crawl, an activity to help students **use their gifts**. We also made you some [posters and graphics](#) for this quarter's habit you can print, display, or share online.



MEMORY VERSE

Try challenging students to memorize a verse that corresponds with the Big Ideas or themes of this series. Here's the verse we chose — and [we made graphics](#) you can post, print, or show on screen too!



HOW TO PROGRAM FOR THIS SERIES

Outside of your teaching time, we have a few programming ideas to help this series really come to life — everything from how to **design your room**, to which **games to play**, to what **music to play and sing**.



ROOM DESIGN

For this series, you'll be creating an urban Christmas mural! Throughout this series, your students will be creating a variety of art pieces inspired by urban art installations, so if you'd like to display their art each week, make sure you plan some space on your backdrop for their art to be hung.

First, you'll need a backdrop. There are tons of ways to create a backdrop that you can re-use multiple times each year. Check out [this post](#) for a list of ideas. For this series, **we recommend using foam insulation boards or plywood panels**. While you only need enough boards or panels to create the series graphic, you may want to extend your backdrop for this series in order to display the art your students will create throughout this series.

To complete your backdrop, create a brick texture or pattern, either by painting it or adding adhesive [faux brick panels](#) onto the backdrop. Using the series graphic for reference, paint the series title onto the center of the wall.

When your backdrop is finished, try adding some city-inspired Christmas decor, like benches, street signs, or faux trees wrapped in Christmas lights.



GAMES

If you have a designated time for games before your worship and teaching time, we have a few suggestions for games you can play! Since this series is all about Christmas, the games for this series are all Christmas-themed. To get the instructions and graphics for each game, click the images to the right or visit the Games

section of your Grow Students dashboard.

- [North Pole Landmines](#)
- [Jello Halo](#)
- [Christmas Object Shootout](#)
- [Christmas Ribbon Unroll](#)

MUSIC

Here are a few on-theme worship songs you may want to feature throughout this series . . .

- **"O Come All Ye Faithful"** (Red Rocks Worship)
- **"Away in a Manger (Forever Amen)"** (Phil Wickham)
- **"Angels We Have Heard on High"** (Life.Church Worship)
- **"Joy to the World / Joy of the Lord"** (Maverick City Music)
- **"Simple Gospel"** (United Pursuit)
- **"When The Fight Calls (Acoustic)"** (Hillsong Young & Free)
- **"We'll All Be Free"** (William Matthews)
- **"Skyline"** (ARISE Worship)
- **"Living Sacrifice"** (Brandon Lake)

- **"You Deserve It All"** (John Legend)
- **"The Dream of Christmas"** (Gary Barlow)
- **"I Dream Of Christmas"** (Norah Jones)
- **"Let It Snow"** (Babyface and Tori Kelly)
- **"The Christmas Song"** (Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello)

We've added these songs to our [Grow Students \(Volume 6\) Spotify playlist](#) for your personal use only, according to Spotify's [terms and conditions](#). For more information on how to use copyrighted music in your services legally, [read this!](#)

And if you want to sing or sample a non-worship song or two (maybe as an opener, a closer, a bonus song during your program), try some of these . . .

GRAPHIC DESIGN

We give you editable graphics so you can make everything your own! If you're going to **edit our graphics** or **create something brand new** . . .

Use this font! Download it [here](#).

PRIZMA FINE

Use this font! Download it [here](#).

Lato Heavy

And use these colors!

 HEX: #F54D47
CMYK: 4-95-84-00

 HEX: #91E44D
CMYK: 43-00-87-00

 HEX: #4E4D4D
CMYK: 59-53-54-35

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS SERIES

SHOPPING LIST

If you want to try all of our suggestions for this series, here's what you'll need to buy, borrow, Google, or dig for in your storage closet . . .

WEEK 1:

- At least five popular Christmas toys (either the actual toys or images of the toys)
- Index cards
- A short clip from a video [like this one](#) (2:22-4:05) from "Angels and Cherubim" by BibleProject
- Sidewalk chalk or other art supplies
- The handout provided in your Week 1 folder

WEEK 2:

- Bowl
- White board and dry erase markers
- Play-Doh
- Index cards
- Paper gift tags or blank Christmas stationary
- A set of angel wings and a halo
- [An easel with a built-in paper roll](#)
- Brown craft paper
- A large permanent marker
- Sheets of brown craft paper
- String or ribbon
- Markers or pens
- The sticker design provided in your Week 2 folder
- Custom ordered stickers

WEEK 3:

- A large [angel tree topper](#)
- Index cards, paper gift tags, or blank Christmas stationary

- Your childhood Christmas photos
- Props for telling the Christmas story (like a [star light](#), an image or video of [a field at night](#), [nature sound effects](#), a rotating fan, a bright light, and costumes for shepherds, Mary, and Joseph)

WEEK 4:

- A short clip from a Christmas movie of your choice
- A white board and dry erase markers
- A few seconds from the chorus of popular Christmas songs
- An iPhone with the Emergency Call feature enabled
- [Cardboard or foam letters](#) that spell "rescued"
- A wooden base
- Art supplies and materials like:
 - Paint and brushes
 - Markers
 - Crayons
 - Wire
 - Rubber bands
 - Colorful washi tape
 - Colorful duct tape
 - Scrap paper and glue
 - Play-Doh or modeling clay
 - Loose pages from damaged Bibles
 - Bible verses you've printed about God's ability to rescue and save
- Worship music

PREP LIST

WEEK 1:

- For **Guess the Gift**, prepare your toys or images of toys.
- If you'll be using handouts for **A Sidewalk Chalk Prayer**, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder.

WEEK 2:

- For **Halo Hullabaloo**, on each piece of paper, write a Christmasy word or phrase (like "ornaments," "Christmas tree," "nativity set," or "cookies") and place them into a bowl.
- For the **Good News Prayer List**, cut sheets of brown craft paper in half vertically.
- For the **Good News Sticker Exchange**, print or order custom stickers using the image provided in your Week 2 folder.

WEEK 3:

- Set up your props to help you **Set the Scene** of the Christmas story.
- Ask a few trusted students or volunteers to join you in briefly sharing **your personal faith stories**.
- For **Graffiti Faith Stories**, set up a large space where students can paint or spray paint on a large roll of paper, sheets of plywood, or a section of wall. See your Week 3 Teaching Guide for details!

WEEK 4:

- Prepare **A Clip from a Christmas Movie of Your Choice** and a variety of short **Clips from Christmas Songs**.
- For **A Rescued Mixed Media Sculpture**, build a simple sculpture of [cardboard or foam letters](#) that spell "rescued" by mounting the letters on a wooden base and painting the entire sculpture a neutral color, like black or white. Set up a table of additional supplies.

WHAT TO CUSTOMIZE

You know your students better than we do, so there are probably some things you'd like to change about this series before you start teaching. Here's what you'll need to update if you make changes . . .

- **TEACHING:** Add your own stories, jokes, and any pop culture references that make sense for your group. You can edit each message using the Word documents provided or the [Grow Message Builder](#).
- **DISCUSSIONS:** If you make any changes to your teaching, make sure your discussion questions reflect those changes. You can edit these using the Word documents provided.
- **GRAPHICS:** We've provided graphics in your [Graphics & Video](#) folder already, but we've also provided blank slides in case you need to make your own.
- **PRESENTATION:** Customize your weekly presentations in [SLIDR](#) and use it to show images and videos during your weekly program. Each week of Grow Curriculum comes pre-loaded with content to get you started.
- **EMAILS & HUBS:** Customize and send the [volunteer and parent emails](#) as well as the [Volunteer and Parent Hubs](#) content we've provided for this series to keep everyone's grown-ups in the loop.

WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

To make sure your students, volunteers, and parents are in the loop, follow along with the Marketing Checklist we've provided for this series to make sure you've got everything covered, like . . .

- **STUDENTS:** Throughout the month, post the [Graphics & Video](#) we've provided on social media, like the Big Idea images and Bumper Video. Post the [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) we've provided or use the **One-Minute Sermon Scripts [JUMP]** to film a recap video each week and post it on social media.
- **FAMILIES:** Before you begin teaching this series, send parents the [Parent Email](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). After each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to parents online. And don't forget to update your [Parent Hub](#) with the information they need for this series!
- **VOLUNTEERS:** Before you teach each week of this series, send volunteers the weekly [Volunteer Emails](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). Before each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to volunteers online and make sure they have their Discussion Guides in advance! And don't forget to update your [Volunteer Hub](#) with the information they need for this series!

And hey! When you post on social media, **don't forget to use the #growcurriculum hashtag and tag us @stuffyoucanuse** to share your ideas and stories with our team and with other churches who are using Grow!

HOW TO HACK THIS SERIES

Every ministry is different. Whether you're teaching middle schoolers, high schoolers, teenagers with special needs, or all three, here's how to hack this series to fit your unique and diverse audience.

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for middle school students, here's what to adjust . . .

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In Week 1, keep your answers for Guess the Gift within the last five years. Your middle schoolers probably won't remember or know about many of the popular Christmas presents before that.

In Week 2, be sure to tell middle schoolers graffiti is illegal. Your graffiti art project might get them excited to create some additional graffiti of their own, so be sure to let them know they should not go out and do this independently.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

In every week of this series, scale down your art projects if you're worried about the messiness of creating art with middle schoolers. Like we've demonstrated in the instructions for A Sidewalk Chalk Prayer (Week 1), you may want to do versions of these art projects that can be done on paper, with less messy supplies, or even at home.

REMEMBER

You can't really tell the Christmas story without talking about pregnancy — Mary's and Elizabeth's too! As you prepare to cover these stories in this series, remember:

- Not all middle schoolers will know as much about sex and pregnancy as you think they do.
- Some middle schoolers will know a lot more about sex and pregnancy than you think they do.
- Most middle school parents will want a heads up that you'll be covering this topic so they can be prepared for questions and conversations after church.

HACKS FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for high school students, here's what to adjust . . .

In every week of this series, be prepared for attempted rabbit trails into angelology. If you're eager to journey down that trail with your interested high schoolers, go for it! But if you'd prefer to let them do their own learning about angels outside of your weekly program, we recommend providing the link to BibleProject so they can watch the complete video on angels and cherubim.

In Week 1, give extra examples about God's timing for their futures. Your high schoolers are eager to know how God's plan aligns with their high school and post-school dreams. As you talk about God's timing, talk about the experience of waiting for God's timing for their future careers, relationships, families, and decisions.

In Week 2, have your high schoolers create the prompts for Halo Hullabaloo. This will save you some time in your preparation for this week, and it will make the game extra challenging for your students.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

In Week 3, replace the story prompts with stories from students. Instead of telling your own personal stories (or asking volunteers to tell theirs), invite high schoolers to share their stories of faith, as well as their stories about hearing the Christmas story for the first time. Just be sure to work with your students in advance to make sure their stories are clear and concise!

REMEMBER

Don't assume your high schoolers are all looking forward to or enjoying the holidays. While this could be the case for middle schoolers too, remember that high schoolers with troubled families will have had more years of accumulated trauma and more time to notice and reflect on the dysfunction that impacts them at home. With that in mind, some high schoolers may have significant trauma around the Christmas season and could be triggered by the assumption that Christmas is fun for everyone. To help serve those students well, acknowledge this in your teaching and create space for each student and small group to process this after your teaching is over.

HACKS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for students with special needs, here's what to adjust . . .

In Week 1, revise the Guess the Gift game to be image-based.

If any of your students with cognitive impairments are unable to participate in this game, try an alternative where you gradually reveal an image of the gift as well as (or instead of) providing verbal clues.

In Week 2, provide buddies for Halo Hullabaloo. If any of your students with cognitive or fine motor impairments would like to participate in this game, pair them with a buddy who can assist them. Because this game already allows players to choose how they would like to give their clues, your students with special needs already have some options of how they would like to engage with the game.

Every week, revise the art projects if needed. Depending on your students' individual needs, you may need to adapt the art projects to better fit their ability levels, depending on their fine motor skills. Consider including Play-Doh or sand to meet their sensory needs and providing a buddy who can assist them, if needed.

In Weeks 1, 2, and 4, provide fill-in-the-blank prayers when you prompt students to pray. Consider writing out simple prayers for students who may struggle with thinking of what to pray. If a child is cognitively impaired, this will teach them to pray in a way that's manageable for them.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

Every week, provide alternative activities for the large group activities. Rather than expecting every student to participate in the large group games, create a quiet or calming space with different sensory bins for students who might feel overstimulated by the large group activities.

REMEMBER

Since there are plenty of video clips involved with this series, remember to turn on closed captioning for any video you play.



WRITTEN & DEVELOPED WITH . . .

Jeremy Clark has spent the past 16 years serving the local church in various places and roles, mainly in student ministry. I currently serve as an Executive Pastor in Bloomington, Indiana. When Jeremy isn't doing ministry, he is a jack of all trades but master of none. I'm into woodworking, playing music, graphic design, bobblehead collecting, playing and coaching basketball, and have an affinity for the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers. Whatever you're into, I probably would like to be into it.

Jada Price provides administration and event support for the student ministry at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, IN. Originally from Colorado, she moved to Indiana after a pastoral residency revealed her passion for both shenanigans and telling people about Jesus in creative ways. Outside of church, Jada loves reading in coffee shops or playing guitar for Canadian geese at parks.

. . . AND THE REST OF THE TEAM!



SERIES DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW: Elle Campbell, Brooklyn Lindsey, David Magallanes, Crystal Quintero, Stephen Switzer, Linda Moon, Jada Price, Stephanie Whitacre, Isaiah Board, Tegan Brindley, Carly Bartlett

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL, AND SPECIAL NEEDS: Ida Mundell, Stephen Bay, Lilliana Reza, David Magallanes, Alyssa Roberts, Addison Roberts

MENTAL HEALTH REVIEW: Anastasia Brokas

STUDENT DEVOTIONALS: Cassandra Dorsaint, Crystal Quintero

GAMES: Jeremiah Herring, Tyler Grant

ONE-MINUTE SERMON VIDEOS: David Magallanes, Elle Campbell, Jose Rodriguez, Erica Rodriguez, Vanessa Serrano Cruz, Damean Easter, and the Rescue a Generation team

GRAPHIC & LAYOUT DESIGN: Jules Gray, Amber Gaddis, Elle Campbell

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT: Kenny Campbell, Tash McGill, Ali Gattison, Kellee Gentry, Madison Terry, Caitlyn Smelser, Jada Smith, Avery Cochran, Emily Acton, Jay Logan, Eddie Irvin

VOLUNTEER DEVOTIONAL



STUDY

This Christmas, what if you looked at the story of Jesus from a different point of view? Halo is a series from the Gospels that focuses on the angels who came with some far-reaching news. Their words have the potential to change how they view Jesus' birth, God's timing, and their ability to share the good news.

So, when's the last time you thought about how these truths impact you? God's timing may not make much sense to you right now. You may not feel adequate to share about Jesus and God's story. It could feel like God is far from you and the least interested in your rescue. Actually, God wants to speak to you and encourage you, too.

To get ready for this series, **spend a few minutes reading the stories we'll be teaching students this month.** As you do, think about what God has taught you (and is still teaching you) about Jesus being "God with us" through these passages, and how these Big Ideas have been true in your life.

WEEK 1: God's timing is always right. Luke 1:8-24; Romans 13:11-12; Psalm 27:14

WEEK 2: Jesus is always good news. Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-24; John 10:10

WEEK 3: We can always share God's story. Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 11:2-5; 1 Peter 3:15

WEEK 4: God is always ready to rescue. Matthew 2:11-18; Psalm 80:1-7, 91:14-15

PRAY

Have you ever heard of "semantic satiation?" It's a phrase that describes something that can happen when you hear a word or a phrase repeatedly. Sometimes those words or phrases temporarily lose their meaning and the result is hearing a message that is meaningless, too. If you've heard the Christmas story a few times, you might be experiencing this and not realize it. Instead of hearing Charlie Brown's teacher's version replayed in your mind, pause to reflect on how you might tune in to what God could be saying to you this year. Look at the words the angels spoke to people in the Christmas story and ask God for a fresh perspective and dose of hope as you read them.

Which passage of Scripture or Big Idea from this month is most relevant to you right now? Spend a few minutes asking God to show you how you've already grown in this area, plus the next step you need to take in order to keep growing.

GROW

So what's your next step? If you're waiting on God during this season, maybe it's time to begin trusting that God's timing is always right. Do you need to receive the good news of Jesus in a fresh way? Do you need to take the next step in sharing God's story with someone around you? Or, is it time to reach back to God for your rescue?

Whatever your next step is right now, take it. Then help students do the same.

WEEK 1 TEACHING GUIDE



BIG IDEA

God's timing is always right.

BIBLE

Luke 1:8-24; Romans 13:11-12;
Psalm 27:14

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Guess the Gift!

- Welcome to our brand new series, *Halo*, where we're going to be talking about all things Christmas: Christmas lights, Christmas trees, Christmas cards, stockings, candy canes, ornaments, and yes, angels.
 - All these things scream "Christmas," but there are few things more iconic than the Christmas gift.
 - Every year, it seems like there is a new set of must-have toys that everyone is fighting to get their hands on. Let's see if you can name any of the most popular ones.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, students will need to name some popular current or past Christmas toys (like from the years your students were born). You'll need at least five popular Christmas toys (either the actual toys or images of the toys) and index cards with clues written on them. For each toy, come up with three clues: Clue #1 should be difficult to guess, Clue #2 should make the answer a little clearer, and Clue #3 should make the answer obvious. To play, split your students into two teams or bring pairs of students to the front to compete against each other. For each round, set a timer for 60 seconds. Read Clue #1 when you start the timer, read Clue #2 after 20 seconds, and read Clue #3 after 40 seconds. Award players or teams 3 points for guessing correctly after Clue #1, 2 points for guessing after Clue #2, and 1 point for guessing after Clue #3. Reveal the toy at the end of each round and give away some of the toys as prizes for the winners. Here are some ideas to get you started:*
 - *Nintendo Wii (2006)*
 1. *To use it, thumbs are helpful.*
 2. *A little kid might yell this from a playground swing.*
 3. *It's not original, Super, 64, a Cube, or a Switch — but it is a video game console.*
 - *Baby Shark Puppets (2019)*
 1. *It has an annoying theme song.*
 2. *It's a sea creature, but less scary than Jaws.*
 3. *It's a baby, a shark, and also a puppet.*

- *Animatronic Grogu Doll (2020)*
 1. *It's green and it moves.*
 2. *It's a character from a popular streaming series.*
 3. *This doll has a name, but it's not Baby Yoda.*

STORY | Talk about your favorite parts of the Christmas season.

- Of course, Christmas isn't only about gifts. In fact, they're kind of the least important parts of the holiday season. There's so much to love about Christmas beyond just the stuff we get (or don't get).
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about one or two of your favorite things about the Christmas season, like your grandma's cookies, one of your family's traditions, or a specific sound, sight, smell, or feeling.*

QUESTION | What's your favorite thing about Christmas?

- Besides the gifts, **what's your favorite thing about the Christmas season?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*

POLL | Are you struggling to feel festive this Christmas?

- There's so much to love and celebrate about the Christmas season, but can we be honest? Christmas is supposed to be a time of joy and cheer, but it's not always easy to feel festive this time of year.
 - Maybe so much family time reminds you your family isn't perfect.
 - Maybe it's the first Christmas you'll experience without a loved one who used to always be there.
 - Maybe something has shifted in your friend group, and you don't know who you'll spend Christmas break with this year.
- When life is challenging, the timing for Christmas feels a little off. **Is anyone here kind of struggling to feel festive this Christmas?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite students to respond by raising their hands or saying "yes."*
- When Christmastime doesn't exactly feel like "the most wonderful time of the year," we might wonder:
 - If God's timing is a little wrong.
 - If God knows (or cares) what's going on with us.
 - If God can be trusted to come through for us.
- This Christmas, if you're struggling to muster up some hope and joy, you might want to take a look at the story of the very first Christmas. It begins with someone struggling to feel hope and joy too.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

VIDEO | A Clip of "Angels and Cherubim" from The Bible Project

- For the next few weeks, we'll be exploring four different stories from Scripture that all have to do with the very first Christmas — and they all involve angels.
 - Angels are a pretty common sight around Christmastime, aren't they? We find them in songs, in nativity sets, in lights on people's front lawns, and even sitting on the tops of our Christmas trees.
 - But before we go any further, what exactly are angels? What do they do? And what do we need to know about them?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (2:22-4:05) from "Angels and Cherubim" by the Bible Project. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*

- Angels are sometimes treated as background characters in the Christmas story, but they're actually vital to the birth of Jesus.
- Over and over again, we see angels appear in the days and months surrounding Jesus' birth. And each time they appear, they come with an important message to deliver.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 1:8-24

- In Luke 1, we meet a priest named Zechariah, who gets an incredible message from an angel: after many years of trying to have a baby, he and his wife Elizabeth are finally going to have a child.
 - The angel tells them their child will play an important role in announcing the coming of Jesus, Savior of the world. But after so many years of disappointment, Zechariah has a hard time believing it could be true.
 - As you listen to this story, imagine what it might be like to be Zechariah — a guy who committed his whole life to obeying God, but was still waiting for God to give him the child he so desperately wanted.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Luke 1:8-24.*
- Zechariah was chosen to go into the temple by "casting lots." This is kind of like the ancient version of drawing straws or using a random name generator.
 - In other words, Zechariah probably looked at the scheduling of this priestly work shift as random — nothing special or out of the ordinary.
 - But God decided this was the day to introduce Zechariah to a bigger story. On this day, Zechariah's "random" appointment was no accident at all — it was time for a greater purpose to be made known.
- When the angel Gabriel, told Zechariah he was going to have a son, it probably seemed too good to be true. For Zechariah and Elizabeth, not having a child of their own was difficult.
 - In those days, if women couldn't get pregnant, they often wondered if they had done something to deserve God's punishment. This might seem strange to us today, but in that time and culture, men and women both sometimes had their characters questioned when they couldn't get pregnant.
 - Of course, Zechariah and Elizabeth's inability to have a baby didn't have anything to do with their character or supposed sins. But by the time the angel told Zechariah they would finally have a baby, it seemed like God's timing was too late.
 - At this point, both Zechariah and Elizabeth were pretty old — too old to have a child . . . right?
- The angel promised their child would play an important role in announcing the coming of Jesus, Savior of the world. But after so many years of disappointment, Zechariah had a hard time believing it could be true.
 - Zechariah's struggle to believe God probably wasn't because he was rebellious or intentionally distrustful of God. When you've spent so much time being disappointed, it makes sense if you temporarily forget how to feel hopeful.
 - When we look at how Zechariah responded to the angel Gabriel, it's clear Zechariah thought it was too late. He needed Gabriel's reminder that his circumstances weren't random — God was indeed working!
- Of course, God did exactly what the angel promised God would do. Elizabeth became pregnant a baby who would one day grow up to become John the Baptist — the guy who would help prepare the world to hear Jesus' message. God wasn't too late. For Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the whole world, God was right on time.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **In the years Zechariah and Sarah spent praying for a child, what questions or doubts do you think they might have had about God? Have you ever had any of those questions or doubts?**
 - ✪ **Why do you think it was so difficult for Zechariah to believe the angel's message? How do you think you would have reacted?**

SCRIPTURE | Proverbs 3:5-6

- I don't know what kind of questions, disappointments, or doubts you're holding this Christmas, but I hope you know there's room for you (just like there was room for Zechariah) in the Christmas story.
- If it feels like God's timing is off, or your prayers aren't being heard, or it's too late for God to come through, I hope you'll hang onto these words this Christmas . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Proverbs 3:5-6.*
- In life, we won't always understand (or like) God's timing.
 - We'll sometimes want our prayers answered faster, more often, or differently than God decides to answer them.
 - We'll sometimes be more confident in our own understanding than God's understanding.
 - We'll sometimes want to follow our own paths or timelines instead of waiting for God's timing.
- If you, like Zechariah, are struggling to trust what God is up to, I hope you'll remember how God came through for Zechariah and Elizabeth at the perfect time. Because what was true for them is true for you: **God's timing is always right.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - What are some reasons people today might have a hard time trusting God's timing?
 - ✪ **Have you ever struggled to trust God was hearing or answering your prayers? Tell us about it.**

STORY | **Talk about a time you learned to trust God's timing.**

- At some point, we're all going to struggle to trust God's timing. Maybe you've already experienced that struggle to trust. Maybe you . . .
 - Apply to every college on your list, but don't make it into any of them.
 - Practice every day after school, but still don't make the team.
 - Have been praying and praying for that thing that's been stressing you out, but God still hasn't come through.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you learned to trust God's timing. Share what you were hoping would happen, what happened instead, and how you learned God could be trusted even when God's timing wasn't like yours.*

REFLECTION | A Sidewalk Chalk Prayer

- Unlike the people of Zechariah's time, we aren't waiting for baby Jesus to arrive anymore. But we could be waiting for other things. What kind of promises are you hoping God will keep sooner rather than later?
- When we're waiting on God's timing, there are a lot of ways we might respond.
 - We might confidently say, "God I trust you!"
 - We might say, "God, it's not easy, but I'm trying to trust you."
 - We might wonder, "God, why should I trust you?"
 - Or we might even shout, "God, I don't think I trust you."
- You might think only one or two of those options are the right ones. But if you look through the pages of Scripture, you'll see God actually welcomes all of those responses from us, as long as they're honest.
 - So what's one way you're waiting on God's timing right now?
 - And what do you want to say to God as you wait?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this time of reflection, you have two options: chalk art on an actual sidewalk or on a handout students can take home. If you'll be using an actual sidewalk at your church or in your community, you'll need plenty of sidewalk chalk in different colors. If you'll be using handouts, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder. Place one under each seat and set up a table of pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils, or other art supplies. Either way, challenge your students to create sidewalk chalk prayers using images, words, symbols, or poetry. Photograph and display their art in your church or on social media.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ⊛ **Which of these prayers sounds like something you might pray right now and why?**
 - "God, I trust you."
 - "God, it's not easy, but I'm trying to trust you."
 - "God, why should I trust you?"
 - "God, I don't think I trust you."
 - **Read Psalm 27:14. Has God ever answered a prayer after you'd been waiting for a while? If so, how did that impact your faith?**

RESPONSE | A Gift for the City: Serve While You Wait

- It's always difficult when things don't work out like we wanted or planned. But while we wait for God's timing, there is always something we can do to grow our trust in God while we wait.
 - **PRAY WHILE YOU WAIT:** Like you just practiced, keep talking to God about the thing you're waiting for. You might not always feel capable of confidently saying you trust God, but that's okay. God wants your honest prayers — even if that means saying, "God, I don't know what you're doing and it's not easy to trust you today." Just keep talking.
 - **REMEMBER WHILE YOU WAIT:** How has God come through for you in the past? Can you think of any prayers that were answered or moments when God felt present? Make a list on paper, on your phone, or even on social media, because remembering how God has been trustworthy in the past makes it so much easier to believe God is still trustworthy today.
 - **SERVE WHILE YOU WAIT:** After so many years of waiting, Zechariah finally got his answer from God while he was busy serving in the temple. Sometimes when we're frustrated by waiting for God to meet our needs, the best thing we can do is shift our focus to someone else and their needs. Sometimes that's exactly when God will speak most clearly.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *In small groups, challenge students to identify a need that exists in your city this Christmas and come up with a creative way to help meet that need. Give them examples like:*
 - *Writing encouraging notes to teachers, first responders, or essential workers.*
 - *Organizing a clothing drive.*
 - *Serving at a food pantry.*
 - *Raising funds for people in need by shoveling neighbors' driveways for donations.*
- I know the holidays can be a challenge sometimes. So if you, like Zechariah, are having trouble experiencing hope and joy this Christmas season, I hope . . .
 - You'll talk to God about what you're experiencing.
 - You'll remember how God has already been proven to be trustworthy.
 - You'll spend your time waiting by choosing to love others well in the meantime.
 - You'll remember what God revealed through the angel Gabriel: that **God's timing is always right.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **While we wait for God to answer our prayers, why is serving others, like Zechariah did, a good use of our time?**
 - **This week, what's something you can do to show you're choosing to trust God's timing?**

WEEK 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today — like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

God's timing is always right.

BIBLE

Luke 1:8-24; Romans 13:11-12;
Psalm 27:14

QUESTIONS

- What's your favorite thing about Christmas?
- What are some reasons people might find the holidays to be difficult?
- In the years Zechariah and Sarah spent praying for a child, what questions or doubts do you think they might have had about God? Have you ever had any of those questions or doubts?
- Why do you think it was so difficult for Zechariah to believe the angel's message? How do you think you would have reacted?
- What are some reasons people today might have a hard time trusting God's timing?
- Have you ever struggled to trust God was hearing or answering your prayers? Tell us about it.
- Which of these prayers sounds like something you might pray right now and why?
 - "God, I trust you."
 - "God, it's not easy, but I'm trying to trust you."
 - "God, why should I trust you?"
 - "God, I don't think I trust you."
- Read Psalm 27:14. Has God ever answered a prayer after you'd been waiting for a while? If so, how did that impact your faith?
- While we wait for God to answer our prayers, why is serving others, like Zechariah did, a good use of our time?
- This week, what's something you can do to show you're choosing to trust God's timing?

ACTIVITY

Brainstorm some simple but practical ways you can serve others this Christmas season, like writing encouraging notes, organizing a clothing drive, serving at a food pantry, or raise funds for people in need by shoveling neighbors' driveways for donations.

WEEK 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today — like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

God's timing is always right.

BIBLE

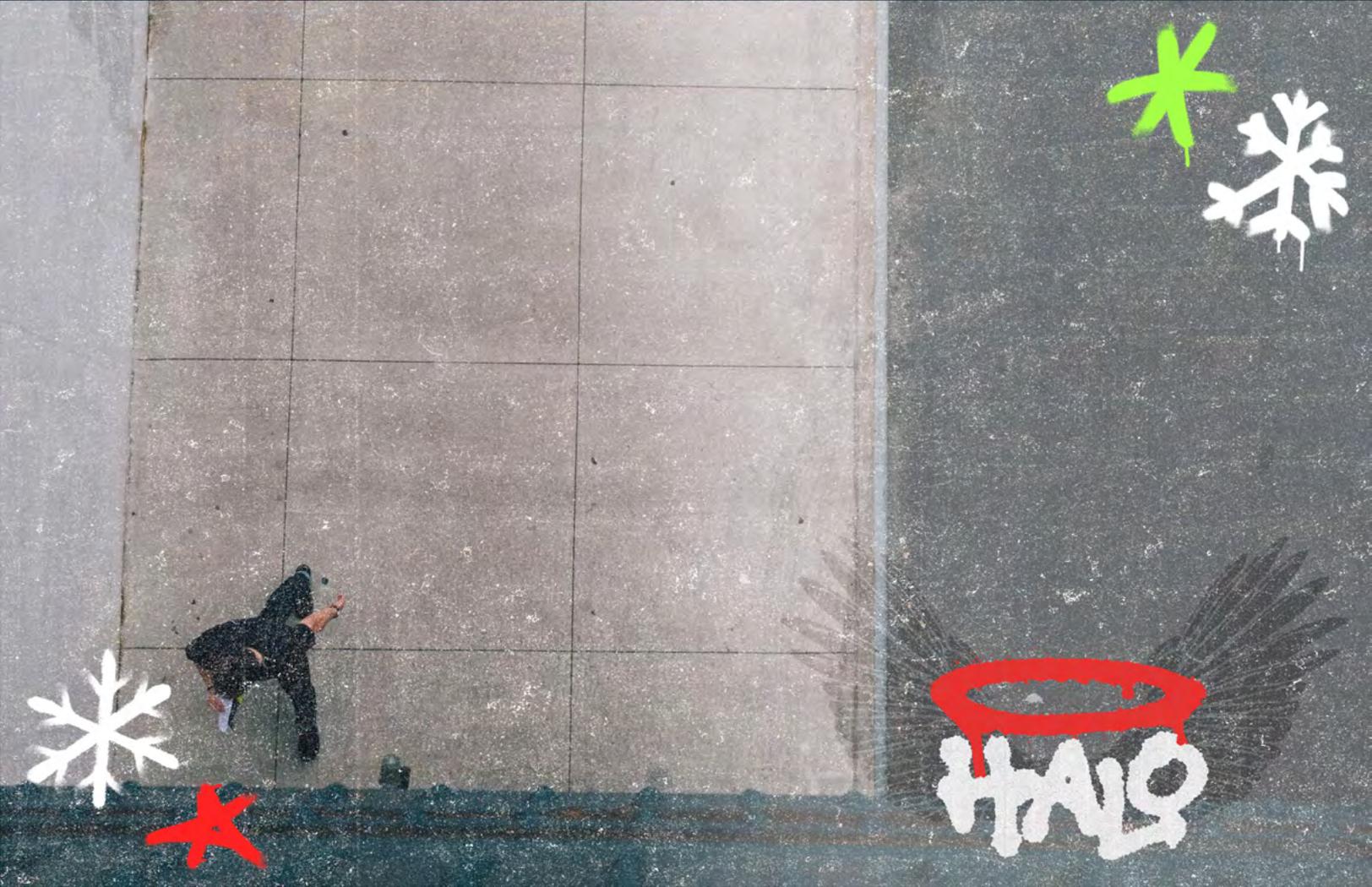
Luke 1:8-24; Romans 13:11-12;
Psalm 27:14

QUESTIONS

- **What's your favorite thing about Christmas?**
- **What are some reasons people might find the holidays to be difficult?**
- **What are some reasons people today might have a hard time trusting God's timing?**
- **Read Psalm 27:14. Has God ever answered a prayer after you'd been waiting for a while? If so, how did that impact your faith?**
- **While we wait for God to answer our prayers, why is serving others, like Zechariah did, a good use of our time?**
- **This week, what's something you can do to show you're choosing to trust God's timing?**

ACTIVITY

Brainstorm some simple but practical ways you can serve others this Christmas season, like writing encouraging notes, organizing a clothing drive, serving at a food pantry, or raise funds for people in need by shoveling neighbors' driveways for donations.



WEEK 2 TEACHING GUIDE



BIG IDEA

Jesus is always good news.

BIBLE

Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:26-38;
Matthew 1:18-24; John 10:10

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Halo Hullabaloo

- Welcome back to *Halo*, a series where we're discovering what role the angels played in the very first Christmas.
 - If you were here last week, you know God occasionally sent angels to deliver some pieces of big, exciting news — especially in the days surrounding the very first Christmas.
 - But before we start talking about those messengers, let's see how good you are at delivering some Christmas messages of your own.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll need a bowl, a white board and dry erase markers, Play-Doh, plenty of index cards, paper gift tags, or blank Christmas stationery, and maybe a set of angel wings and a halo. On each piece of paper, write a Christmasy word or phrase (like "ornaments," "Christmas tree," "nativity set," or "cookies") and place them into the bowl. To play, have at least one student come to the front and put on the angel wings and halo — they'll be your Messenger for that round and will pass the wings and halo to someone else for the next round. Put 60 seconds on the clock and play as many rounds as you'd like. For each round, the Messenger must draw a word from the bowl and communicate that word to the audience, using one of three methods:*

 - **CHARADES:** *Act out the word without making any sounds or mouthing any clues.*
 - **SCULPTING:** *Sculpt the word out of Play-Doh.*
 - **DRAWING:** *Draw the word on the white board.*

QUESTION | What good news would you want to hear from an angel this Christmas?

- Obviously, the angels who delivered messages on the very first Christmas had a lot more complicated (and important) messages to deliver than the ones we just attempted. But now I'm wondering, if an angel appeared to you this Christmas with an announcement, **what good news would you want to hear?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- Maybe your idea of some good Christmas news has to do with something small, like . . .

- Getting that one big present you've been wanting.
- Your least favorite family Christmas gathering getting canceled.
- Christmas break going on forever — and school resuming never.
- Or maybe your idea of some good Christmas news is about something a lot bigger, like . . .
 - Your family spending time together without a huge blow-up fight.
 - Your loved one's health improving.
 - Your needs getting met.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - What's something you're hoping for this Christmas that isn't a present?
 - ★ **What are some reasons the Christmas season might not feel like "good news" to some of us this year? Can you relate to any of those reasons?**

OBJECT LESSON | A Grown-Up Christmas List

- When you were a kid, your Christmas Wish List was probably pretty simple: toys, games, candy, or maybe a pet pony if you were dreaming really big. But as we get older, or life gets a little less carefree, our Christmas lists have likely started to change.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, you'll need [an easel with a built-in paper roll](#), brown craft paper, and a large permanent marker. You'll be creating a Christmas list with your students in reverse order, writing at the bottom of the paper roll first and then adding more items at the top of the list, pulling the paper roll downward as you go to create a long scroll of Christmas wishes. Begin by asking students what was on their Christmas list when they were toddlers, then preschoolers, then in elementary school, and so on. When you get to the present day, prompt them to share Christmas wishes that go beyond just tangible gifts.*
- If things are good this Christmas, your idea of "good news" might be as simple as getting some new toys or games. But if you're dealing with some difficult things this Christmas, your idea of "good news" might be getting something more important than cool stuff.
- For those of us struggling with bad news this holiday season, our Christmas lists this year might ask for . . .
 - Peace in our homes in place of chaos or disagreement.
 - Our families to stay together instead of breaking apart.
 - Help figuring out a difficult situation or relationship.
 - Hope for the scary thing we're experiencing.
- This year, if your Christmas list looks anything like that, I hope you know you're not alone — and there's good news.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Isaiah 11:1-10

- Almost 3,000 years ago, long before the very first Christmas, God's people (the nation of Israel) were looking for some good news too.

- Generations earlier, God had promised Israel it would be a thriving nation under God's protection and God would do big things through them.
- But suddenly Israel was conquered by enemy nations, divided, and struggling. People were turning their backs on God. The wealthy and powerful were taking advantage of people who were weaker or in need. Brokenness, fear, injustice, and sin were everywhere.
- In that moment, when the situation seemed beyond repair, God stepped in with some good news. A prophet named Isaiah was sent to speak to the people of Israel on God's behalf.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Isaiah 11:1-10.*
- The word "Messiah" refers to a person who would rescue God's people, make God's will happen on earth, and right all the wrongs sin had caused.
 - This Messiah wouldn't be like other rulers of the past though. He wouldn't be a king who sinned, turned away from God, or ruled unjustly. God's promised Messiah would be good, just, and faithful.
 - And the coming of this Messiah wasn't just wishful thinking. Through Isaiah, God promised a Messiah was on the way!
 - But since God didn't give Isaiah or Israel an exact date, God's people waited, trusted, and waited some more.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 1:26-38 & Matthew 1:18-24

- Prophets like Isaiah were one kind of messenger from God, but God sometimes used other kinds of messengers to speak to humanity too. Scripture tells us God often sent angels to communicate important messages to the world.
 - Last week, we met the angel Gabriel, who told the priest Zechariah he and his wife Elizabeth would be having a baby after a long and difficult period of waiting.
 - Today, we're going to see Gabriel make yet another pregnancy announcement to yet another couple – but this one was even more unexpected than the first.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Luke 1:26-38 & Matthew 1:18-24.*
- Okay, be honest. Have you ever gotten a Christmas present that was, um, not exactly what you were hoping for? Maybe the gift was wrapped beautifully and from someone you really love – but when you opened it, you were like, "Um, what is this? And why?"
 - Well, I wonder if that's how Mary and Joseph felt about this announcement – at least at first. Of course, it's really cool they were going to be having a baby who would grow up to save the whole world . . . but it probably didn't immediately sound like good news to them.
 - Remember, Mary and Joseph weren't married, Mary was still a virgin, and this development in their social lives was definitely going to cause a scandal.
- Even though what Gabriel shared with Mary and Joseph was great news for the whole world, it took a minute for these soon-to-be-parents to process what was happening.
 - That's why Mary asked, "How is this even possible?" And it's why Joseph considered calling off the marriage. They both knew being pregnant under mysterious circumstances could permanently ruin their reputations.
 - Despite all that was on the line, Mary and Joseph both eventually realized that the angel's news wasn't an inconvenience or burden. It was good news. It was the best news!
- In the big picture of God's story, this is exactly what God's people had been waiting for! Jesus, the baby Mary and Joseph would parent, was the Messiah Isaiah had written about so many centuries earlier.
 - In Isaiah's time, the people of Israel couldn't have predicted how God's promise to send a Savior would one day come true, but the good news he was on the way was enough.

- In the same way, Mary and Joseph couldn't fast forward to the future to see how a newborn baby could possibly change the world, but they trusted God's promise anyway.
- In time, the baby God promised would grow up to change all of history and reconnect every human with the love of God.
- Isaiah, Mary, and Joseph couldn't see the future, but they could sit in the present with the promise that the Messiah would be good news — in the past, in the present, and definitely in the future.
- Mary and Joseph realized the good news of Jesus wasn't just good news for them personally. He would be good news for the whole world, including for you and me. What Mary and Joseph learned on that first Christmas is what you and I might need to be reminded of today: that Jesus is good news even when . . .
 - We don't see how God is working.
 - We can't understand why things are going the way they're going.
 - We're afraid of what we don't know or can't predict.
- No matter how scary or confusing things seem, no matter what's going on in our lives or in the world, Christmas is a reminder that **Jesus is always good news.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - Why do you think the announcement of Mary's pregnancy might not have felt like "good news" to Mary and Joseph at first?
 - ★ **How do you think Mary and Joseph were able to move beyond their fears to see baby Jesus as "good news"?**
 - Why was Jesus' birth good news for the whole world?
 - ★ **Why do you think some people don't see the message of Jesus as "good news?" What could Jesus' followers do to help change that?**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

STORY | Talk about a time Jesus was good news in your life.

- When we say Jesus is good news, we mean that in two ways:
 - Jesus is good news for the whole world! His gift of salvation is available to anyone and everyone, and Christmas is the day we celebrate him coming into the world for the very first time.
 - Jesus is good news every day, in every area of our lives. He didn't just come to bring eternal salvation. He also came to bring hope, peace, and restoration to our lives right now.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time Jesus was good news in your life. This could be the story of how you came to know Jesus for the first time, or it could be a story about a time Jesus brought hope, peace, or restoration into a difficult situation. If you can manage to tell a story about a time Jesus was good news to you specifically during the Christmas season, that's even better!*
- When Jesus came into the world, the world was instantly changed. But people's lives continue to change every single day because Jesus is still good news, today and every day.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What are some ways Jesus can be good news, not just for our eternal lives, but in our everyday lives too?**
 - **Read John 10:10. If you know Jesus, what's one way he has given you the kind of life this verse describes?**

REFLECTION | Good News Prayer List

- We can disagree about how soon you're allowed to play Christmas music, but one thing that is good in every season is Jesus.
- So let's make a list and "check it twice." This Christmas, how do you need the good news of Jesus to change your life (or the life of someone you love) for the better? What (or who) do you want to see Jesus . . .
 - Change?
 - Transform?
 - Rescue?
 - Fix?
 - Heal?
 - Save?
- Make a list. Then, after each one, write a one-sentence prayer asking Jesus to transform that situation with his good news.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this time of reflection, you'll need sheets of brown craft paper (cut in half vertically to make a long, thin rectangle to mimic the roll of paper you used earlier), string or ribbon, and markers or pens. Before your teaching time, place the supplies under each seat. Invite students to make their lists while you play some reflective music.*

RESPONSE | Good News Sticker Exchange

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, use the design provided in your Week 2 folder to order or print enough "Jesus is Always Good News" stickers for everyone. Invite students to put their stickers somewhere they'll see it, or somewhere everyone can see it, and take a picture. Collect and display their images in your church or on social media.*
- As you leave this week, I wonder how you'll respond to the good news of Jesus. Do you need to . . .
 - **RESPOND TO JESUS FOR THE FIRST TIME?** If you're unsure what you think about Jesus right now, I hope you know his love for you is unchanging and unwavering. He is inviting you to experience the good news that comes through a relationship with him. It's a relationship that will change you forever and that relationship can begin today.
 - **ASK FOR JESUS' HELP?** Maybe right now you don't feel like there's a lot of good news in your life, either because of mistakes you've made or because of circumstances beyond your control. Jesus' birth is proof God has not abandoned us — or you. No matter what you are going through, Jesus is with you and able to help. So reach out.
 - **SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS?** If you follow Jesus, you have some good news to share with others. You can share that good news with your actions (by loving, caring, helping, or serving) or with your words. Try finishing the statement, "My life is different because Jesus . . ." If you're unsure how to answer that, try asking someone close to you how they see your life as different with Jesus in it.

- This week, choose one step to take. Then choose somewhere to put your "Jesus Is Always Good News" sticker as a reminder of the hope, peace, and salvation that is available to you.
 - If you need the reminder that Jesus is always good news, put your sticker somewhere you'll see it, like . . .
 - The back of your phone.
 - Your locker.
 - Your mirror.
 - A notebook or Bible.
 - If you know someone who needs some good news right now, give them your sticker with a note of encouragement.
 - Or if you want people in your school or neighborhood to know about the good news of Jesus, put your sticker somewhere public, where everyone can see it.
- The good news of Christmas is that Jesus is finally here. It was good news then and it's good news now, because **Jesus is always good news.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **Has there ever been an area of your life you struggled to let Jesus change or heal? If so, what do you think was stopping you?**
 - **What's one way you need the good news of Jesus to change your life (or the life of someone you love) right now? Now let's pray for each other!**

WEEK 2

DISCUSSION GUIDE



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today — like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Jesus is always good news.

BIBLE

Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:26-38;
Matthew 1:18-24; John 10:10

QUESTIONS

- What's something you're hoping for this Christmas that isn't a present?
- What are some reasons the Christmas season might not feel like "good news" to some of us this year? Can you relate to any of those reasons?
- Why do you think the announcement of Mary's pregnancy might not have felt like "good news" to Mary and Joseph at first?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph were able to move beyond their fears to see baby Jesus as "good news"?
- Why was Jesus' birth good news for the whole world?
- Why do you think some people don't see the message of Jesus as "good news?" What could Jesus' followers do to help change that?
- What are some ways Jesus can be good news, not just for our eternal lives, but in our everyday lives too?
- Read John 10:10. If you know Jesus, what's one way he has given you the kind of life this verse describes?
- Has there ever been an area of your life you struggled to let Jesus change or heal? If so, what do you think was stopping you?
- What's one way you need the good news of Jesus to change your life (or the life of someone you love) right now? Now let's pray for each other!



Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

WEEK 2

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today — like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Jesus is always good news.

BIBLE

Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 1:26-38;
Matthew 1:18-24; John 10:10

QUESTIONS

- **What's something you're hoping for this Christmas that isn't a present?**
- **Why do you think the announcement of Mary's pregnancy might not have felt like "good news" to Mary and Joseph at first?**
- **Why was Jesus' birth good news for the whole world?**
- **What are some ways Jesus can be good news, not just for our eternal lives, but in our everyday lives too?**
- **Read John 10:10. If you know Jesus, what's one way he has given you the kind of life this verse describes?**
- **What's one way you need the good news of Jesus to change your life (or the life of someone you love) right now? Now let's pray for each other!**



Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

JESUS
IS ALWAYS
**GOOD
NEWS**



JESUS
IS ALWAYS
**GOOD
NEWS**



JESUS
IS ALWAYS
**GOOD
NEWS**



JESUS
IS ALWAYS
**GOOD
NEWS**



WEEK 3 TEACHING GUIDE



BIG IDEA

We can always share
God's story.

BIBLE

Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 11:2-5;
1 Peter 3:15

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Bad Movie Summaries: Christmas Edition!

- Welcome back to *Halo*, where we've been exploring stories from the very first Christmas. We'll get back into the real Christmas story in a minute, but first, let's see how good you are at identifying some non-Bible-related Christmas stories.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll need a large [angel tree topper](#) and index cards, paper gift tags, or blank Christmas stationary. On each piece of paper, write (or ask students to write) a bad summary of a popular Christmas movie. To play, split students into teams. For each round, have each team send a representative to the front. Randomly draw one of the summaries from the stack of summaries, put 30 seconds on the clock, and read it out loud. The first student to grab the angel tree topper and answer correctly is the winner for that round. Here are a few examples of movie summaries to get you started (with some extra hints in parenthesis):*
 - **ELF:** *A man with few friends and only one outfit searches for his birth father (and spaghetti with maple syrup).*
 - **HOME ALONE:** *Two coworkers are seriously injured by a child on Christmas Eve (while breaking and entering).*
 - **JINGLE ALL THE WAY:** *The Terminator forgets to go Christmas shopping (for a Turbo Man action figure).*
- Some Christmas stories are so good, we can recognize them even when they're explained, um, pretty badly.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **If you could make a movie retelling the Christmas story, what genre would you choose and who would you cast?**
 - **On a scale of 1-10, how well do you think you know the story of Jesus' birth? Where have you heard it before?**

QUESTION | How many times have you heard the Christmas story?

- From stories of elves and reindeer to family dramas, a lot of stories have been told about the Christmas season. But behind all of these stories, of course, there is one ultimate Christmas story — the story of Jesus' birth. If you had to guess, **how many times do you think you've heard the Christmas story?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond. Then try to determine who in the room has heard the story the most times, maybe because they are the oldest, have gone to the most church Christmas productions, or once got really obsessed with rereading a children's book that told the story of Jesus' birth.
- For those of us who've heard the story of Jesus' birth more times than we can count, the Christmas story probably seems like old news.
 - Maybe we've heard it so many times we feel as though there's nothing else for us to learn.
 - Maybe we've heard it so many times we can't imagine anyone not being familiar with it.
 - Or maybe you've stayed a little quiet during this conversation so far because, actually, you're not sure you even know the whole story of Jesus' birth.
- Whether you know the story of the very first Christmas or not, I wonder if you know why that ancient story still matters today, more than 2,000 years after it took place.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

IMAGE | Your Childhood Christmas Photos

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As you tell the story below, show Christmas photos of yourself from around the time your story took place.

STORY | Talk about a memorable time you heard or experienced the Christmas story.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you remember hearing the story of Jesus' birth in a memorable way. You might share about a family tradition reading the story every Christmas Eve, or your involvement in a church Christmas production, or the first time you remember hearing the story in full. Share why that experience stands out to you and how the story of Jesus' birth has impacted you.
- Whether you've heard the story of Jesus' birth once, twice, or a million times, try listening today as if it were the very first time.
 - Imagine the scene. What might things have looked, sounded, smelled, or felt like?
 - What do you notice that you've never noticed before?
 - Put yourself in the shoes of someone in the story. What do you think their experience might have been like?

OBJECT LESSON | Setting the Scene

- Imagine you're a shepherd in first century Jerusalem. I'm guessing that's not easy to imagine, so let me help.
 - Shepherding was considered menial work. It was definitely not a job for the prominent, wealthy, or popular.
 - As a shepherd, it was your job to ensure the sheep in your flock were always safe, protected, and well-fed — even throughout night.
 - In that time and location, there was of course no social media or texting, so news traveled a lot more slowly. That's especially true when you're a shepherd, living in a wide-open field rather than in the heart of a town or city.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As you read or summarize the story of Jesus' birth from the shepherds' perspective, set the scene with visual, auditory, and other sensory details to help the story come to life. You might . . .
 - Dim the lights and [project stars](#) on the ceiling.
 - Show an image or video of [a field at night](#).
 - Play [nature sound effects](#), like [the sound of sheep](#), crickets, or grass and leaves being rustled in the wind.
 - Turn on a rotating fan to imitate the breeze.
 - Shine a bright light to represent the angel.
 - Ask a few volunteers to dress as shepherds, Mary, and Joseph, and silently act out the story as you read or tell it.
- The shepherds who were involved in the very first Christmas story had no idea about the story that was already in progress. They didn't know:
 - Angels had been appearing to people for months, delivering messages of hope for the baby who was on his way.
 - A young couple named Mary and Joseph (unmarried, but miraculously pregnant) had just traveled a long way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
 - When that couple arrived, there was nowhere for them to stay, so they were forced to spend the night in a pretty surprising space — where animals ate and slept.
 - In that noisy, dirty, uncomfortable space, a baby had just been born. His name was Jesus and, even though hardly anyone knew he existed yet, the whole world had already changed.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 2:8-18

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read or summarize Luke 2:8-18.
- The shepherds are a vital part of the Christmas story, both because of who they were and what they did.
 - **WHO WERE THE SHEPHERDS?**
 - Remember, being a shepherd wasn't a glamorous or high-income job. A shepherd's work was vital to their community, but their value was often overlooked by society. So isn't it interesting that God chose to announce the good news of Jesus' birth to these "unimportant" shepherds?
 - It says a lot about how God works. The angel didn't appear to political figures, celebrities, wealthy people, or even to the most powerful religious leaders. Instead, God chose to speak to people who were usually overlooked.
 - **WHAT DID THE SHEPHERDS DO?** Did you catch how the shepherds responded to the angels' news? They didn't keep it to themselves. They immediately understood the importance of what had just happened and the importance of sharing that news with everyone they could.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - ☆ **When we told the story of Jesus' birth today, what's one thing you noticed or wondered about and why?**
 - **Why do you think God chose to tell the shepherds about Jesus' birth, of all people? What does this tell you about what God is like?**
 - ☆ **In your own words, what do you think the shepherds told people when they shared the news about Jesus?**

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 11:2-5

- Years later, when Jesus was first beginning to teach, heal, and perform miracles, people were once again told to share the good news of God's salvation. But this time the good news didn't come from an angel. This time it came from Jesus himself.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 11:2-5.*
- The good news Jesus came to share wasn't only good news for the people of Jesus' day. Because God is still healing, saving, and restoring, it's good news for us today as well.
 - Before Jesus, humanity had been waiting for generations for God to rescue us from sin and its consequences. When Jesus showed up, God's promises to save us were finally fulfilled.
 - So this Christmas, I hope you'll remember the Christmas story isn't just a cliché story you've heard a million times. It's the story that has changed the world forever and can change lives right now.
- That's why, like the angels, the shepherds, and even Jesus himself, **we can always share God's story.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

STORY | Share your personal faith stories.

- But when we talk about sharing God's story, what exactly are we talking about?
 - That a baby was born?
 - That a guy named Jesus taught a bunch of sermons and healed a bunch of sick people 2,000 years ago?
 - That Jesus died and rose from the dead?
- What exactly is God's story? And why is it worth sharing?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, ask a few trusted students or volunteers to join you in briefly sharing two things: how they would summarize "God's story," and their personal story of faith, in as few words as possible. Encourage everyone participating to share something that is personal and unique to them so everyone's contributions are different. Be sure to rehearse with everyone in advance so you know how much time this will take!*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **Who's story have you heard that made you want to know Jesus more? What about it made you want to know more?**
 - **Read 1 Peter 3:15. Why do you think Peter mentioned sharing your story with "gentleness and respect?"**

RESPONSE | Graffiti Faith Stories

- So what about you? How can you share God's story, not just this Christmas, but any time? How could you . . .
 - **SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS?** Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking we're not allowed to talk about Jesus unless we've got everything figured out. If we have questions, experience doubt, or are struggling in different areas of our lives, we might think we have to stay quiet so we don't give Jesus a bad rap. But that's not true! When the shepherds shared God's story, they didn't have everything figured out either. They didn't even have time to make any changes in their lives. All they knew was some very good news had come into the world and they needed to share it — immediately! When you share your questions, doubts, and struggles with others, you're not

making anything awkward for God. You're showing others God loves and welcomes each of us, with all of our questions or imperfections. Your questions are worth sharing.

- **SHARE WHAT YOU'RE LEARNING?** You'll never know or understand everything there is to know or understand about God. None of us will. But you've already learned some things about who God is and what God is like — and you're still in the process of learning even more. What is God teaching you through your mistakes? What are you learning from other Godly people? What is Scripture teaching you? What you're learning is worth sharing.
- **SHARE YOUR STORIES?** You sometimes hear people share stories of faith that have clear beginnings, middles, and ends. But maybe your story of faith doesn't seem so simple. The truth is, everyone's story of faith is always in progress. Whether you try to share your faith story with someone today or fifty years from now, it's always going to be unfinished. So you might as well get started now! Because your stories are worth sharing.
- What if you only had a moment to share what you know, believe, or love about Jesus? How would you capture the bigness of God's story in just a word, or a phrase, or an image? Let's try it.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, set up a large space where students can create simple graffiti that shares the good news of Jesus, using spray paint (or paint with brushes for less mess). For this activity, you'll need spray paint or paint, plus a large roll of paper, sheets of plywood, or a section of wall (either temporary, like the wall in the Room Design section of this series, or permanent). Before asking students to add their graffiti, we recommend adding brick texture or pattern to the wall, either by painting it or adding adhesive [faux brick panels](#). We also recommend adding some graffiti of your own to get them started. Whatever medium you choose, ask students to paint a simple word, phrase, or image that shares the good news of Jesus in some way. Photograph and display their art in your church or on social media.*
- Being a graffiti artist probably isn't going to be the best way for you to share the story of God, but hopefully it got you thinking about some other creative ways you can.
- If you're wondering how you can share the story of God in a way that is true to who you are, there are so many ways! The limit does not exist! Maybe you could . . .
 - Put it in a song! If songwriting's your thing, share your story through music.
 - Write something! Whether it's a poem, story, essay, or caption on a post, don't miss an opportunity to put the story of God into words.
 - Make a video! Thanks to social media, it's easier than ever to share with others the things that matter most to you.
 - Serve someone! Words aren't the only way to make the story of God real for other people. When you love, care for, encourage, advocate for, or help someone in Jesus' name, you demonstrate what God's love looks like in action.
- I know it's tempting to let the story of Christmas become little more than a cliché we've heard one too many times. But what God did on that very first Christmas is worth sharing — it was then, and it is today.
 - When the shepherds were visited by that angel and heard the Savior of the world had just been born, they not only ran to meet Jesus, but they ran and told everyone they could as well.
 - Whether you've known about Jesus for a lifetime, or you just heard God's story for the first time a few moments ago, you have everything you need to share that good news with others. You don't need to know it all. You just need to know Jesus changes everything.
- This Christmas, I hope you'll remember the Christmas story isn't just a story you've heard a million times. It's the story that has changed the world forever, and can change lives right now. That's why **we can always share God's story.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Do you think being honest about our doubts and questions is more likely to help or hurt people who are curious about Jesus? Why?**
 - ✪ **Which do you think is more intimidating: sharing what you're learning about God right now, or sharing the whole story of your faith journey? Why do you think so?**
 - **This week, what's one way you could share God's story with someone?**

WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today – like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

We can always share
God's story.

BIBLE

Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 11:2-5;
1 Peter 3:15

QUESTIONS

- **If you could make a movie retelling the Christmas story, what genre would you choose and who would you cast?**
- **On a scale of 1-10, how well do you think you know the story of Jesus' birth? Where have you heard it before?**
- **When we told the story of Jesus' birth today, what's one thing you noticed or wondered about and why?**
- **Why do you think God chose to tell the shepherds about Jesus' birth, of all people? What does this tell you about what God is like?**
- **In your own words, what do you think the shepherds told people when they shared the news about Jesus?**
- **Who's story have you heard that made you want to know Jesus more? What about it made you want to know more?**
- **Read 1 Peter 3:15. Why do you think Peter mentioned sharing your story with "gentleness and respect?"**
- **Do you think being honest about our doubts and questions is more likely to help or hurt people who are curious about Jesus? Why?**
- **Which do you think is more intimidating: sharing what you're learning about God right now, or sharing the whole story of your faith journey? Why do you think so?**
- **This week, what's one way you could share God's story with someone?**

ACTIVITY

Share some faith stories as a group by asking students to respond to one of these prompts: What's your story? What are you learning? What are your questions?

WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE *for middle schoolers*



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today – like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

We can always share
God's story.

BIBLE

Luke 2:8-18; Matthew 11:2-5;
1 Peter 3:15

QUESTIONS

- **If you could make a movie retelling the Christmas story, what genre would you choose and who would you cast?**
- **On a scale of 1-10, how well do you think you know the story of Jesus' birth? Where have you heard it before?**
- **Why do you think God chose to tell the shepherds about Jesus' birth, of all people? What does this tell you about what God is like?**
- **Who's story have you heard that made you want to know Jesus more? What about it made you want to know more?**
- **Read 1 Peter 3:15. Why do you think Peter mentioned sharing your story with "gentleness and respect?"**
- **This week, what's one way you could share God's story with someone?**

ACTIVITY

Share some faith stories as a group by asking students to respond to one of these prompts: What's your story? What are you learning? What are your questions?

WEEK 4 TEACHING GUIDE



BIG IDEA

God is always ready to rescue.

BIBLE

Matthew 2:11-18; Psalm 80:1-7, 91:14-15

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

POLL | When do you celebrate Christmas?

- Welcome to our final week of *Halo*, where we've been telling the story of the very first Christmas. If you were here last week, you know we already covered the story of Jesus' birth — but the story isn't actually over yet!
- Everyone has different rhythms for celebrating Christmas with their friends and family, so what about you? Are your Christmas celebrations over, in progress, or just beginning? **When do you celebrate Christmas?**
 - The party's over!
 - We haven't even started yet!
 - A little bit of both!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask students to respond to each option by raising their hands. Then ask a few students to share more about their Christmas plans.

VIDEO | A Clip from a Christmas Movie of Your Choice

- Whether you've already eaten all of your Christmas meals this year or you still have one or two to go, I'm guessing we've all experienced a family dinner that needed to be rescued.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a Christmas movie of your choice that shows a bad Christmas meal. You might try the turkey scene from [Christmas Vacation](#) (1:23–2:05), Buddy the Elf pouring [maple syrup on spaghetti](#) (0:04–0:20), or a clip from your personal favorite Christmas movie. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)

ACTIVITY | Jesus Take the Meal: Christmas Dinner Bracket

- Hopefully your Christmas dinners this year haven't looked like that. But when Christmas dinner is looking like Struggle City, which dish is sure to save the meal?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you'll need a white board and dry erase markers. On the board, draw a large [tournament bracket](#) with 16 slots. Ask your students to name their favorite Christmas dishes (like ham, turkey, mashed potatoes, banana pudding, sweet potato casserole, or macaroni and cheese) and write those dishes in the first 16 slots. For each meal match-up, split the room in half, have students run to the side of the room that represents their favorite dish in the match-up, and tally the votes — the winning dish should move

up in the tournament. Keep voting until there is only one winning dish. To celebrate, give all of your students a Christmas treat (or disaster), like [a can of Christmas Tinner](#).

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **From burnt cookies to Christmas present fails, have you experienced any Christmas disasters this year? What happened?**
 - **Have you (or someone you love) ever had a difficult Christmas for more serious reasons? What happened?**

STORY | Talk about a time you had a difficult Christmas.

- Some Christmas disasters can be rescued with a little extra mashed potatoes or gingerbread cookies, but let's be honest — some problems aren't quite so easy to solve.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you had a difficult Christmas or were feeling down during the Christmas season. Share what was going wrong and what it was like to feel that way during the holidays.*

MUSIC | Clips from Christmas Songs

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you mention the following Christmas songs, play a few seconds from the chorus of each song. If you'd like, you might also want to play a clip from a song that relates to the personal story you just told.*
- Have you ever noticed how sad some Christmas songs are?
 - We've got plenty of cheerful songs like "Jingle Bells" or "Deck the Halls," but there are a lot of sad ones too, like "I'll Be Home for Christmas," or "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."
 - There are Christmas songs about missing loved ones, missing the old days, and missing family members who passed away too soon.
- Christmas can be a time to be "merry and bright," but this season leaves room for some not-so-joyful feelings too. Maybe that's because the first Christmas (when Jesus was born) was filled with both joyful and difficult moments too.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 2:1-18

- We talked last week about how many of us have heard the story of Christmas more times than we can count. But sometimes when we think we know everything there is to know about a story, we actually miss some important details.
 - You know that happy manger scene with smiling shepherds, wise men, and fuzzy animals? That's not actually how the story ends.
 - You know how we love to portray Jesus' birth as a time of celebration and joy? Well, that's not entirely true either.
- Jesus' birth story was full of pain and discomfort. Remember, he was born among a bunch of smelly animals, after his family couldn't find anywhere to stay. But then, after Jesus' birth, things actually turned tragic.
 - At the time Jesus was born, that area of the world was ruled by a king named Herod.

- Throughout his reign, Herod did terrible things in order to stay in power. He was known for banishing, imprisoning, and killing people he thought could threaten him.
- Because of Herod's hunger for power, the Christmas story doesn't end with joy and peace. It ends with a great injustice.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Matthew 2:1-18.*
- Once again, an angel played a key part in this part of the Christmas story. But this time, the angel didn't appear with a message about a baby, a promise fulfilled, or good news for the whole world. Instead, the angel came with a message to run.
 - In an attempt to kill baby Jesus, Scripture says King Herod had every infant boy in the area killed, leading Mary and Joseph to flee with baby Jesus into Egypt as refugees.
 - People who haven't read the Bible might think it's a collection of lots of inspirational, feel-good stories. In reality, the Bible is filled with stories of tragedy, trouble, fear, and confusion — but God is always at work in the midst of every story.
 - Herod may have been working on his plan to maintain power and control, but God was at work carrying out the real plan. God's plan was to ensure the safety and rescue of the people Herod intended to harm.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Why do you think people are more likely to focus on the happy parts of the first Christmas story than the painful parts?**
 - ✪ **Why do you think God let Jesus' birth story include things like discomfort, fear, pain, and injustice?**

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 80:1-7

- The Bible isn't about perfect people with perfect lives. It's about people who trusted God to rescue them from even the most terrible situations.
- Long before Mary and Joseph found themselves in deep trouble, God's people found themselves in deep trouble too. The book of Psalms (which is a book of songs and poetry) recounts many of the times God's people needed to be rescued.
 - Sometimes they needed to be rescued from their own sin and its consequences.
 - Sometimes they needed to be rescued from a challenging situation.
 - Sometimes they needed to be rescued from their enemies.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 80:1-7.*
- This is just one psalm, but there are many more like it. Over and over again in Scripture, you see God's people crying out for help.
 - When you read a passage like this, maybe you think, "Wow, if these people needed so much help, maybe God wasn't that good to them. Maybe if God actually cared about them, their lives wouldn't have been so difficult."
 - But I don't see God causing harm or neglecting people in need. Instead, I see someone who trusted God so much they weren't afraid to ask for help. In fact, they wrote a whole song about it.
- Christmas isn't just for people who feel "merry and bright." This Christmas, God has something to say to you if you . . .

- Feel like you're holding both joy and pain.
- Are feeling a little lost, or hurting, or afraid, or hopeless.
- Need someone to rescue you.
- The first Christmas wasn't perfectly peaceful either. Whatever you're going through, Christmas is a reminder **God is always ready to rescue.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **What did Jesus' family need God to rescue them from? How did God do it?**
 - **Read Psalm 91:14-15. Have you ever needed God to rescue you from something? How did God do it?**

OBJECT LESSON | Emergency S.O.S.

- Did you know most phones now come equipped with an Emergency Call feature? With this feature, it's possible to call for help in less than three seconds.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Hold up an iPhone and activate the Emergency Call feature – just be sure to cancel the call before the countdown completes and the call connects!*
- That's a pretty fast response time – but our ability to reach out to God (and actually be heard) is even faster.
- When Mary and Joseph were visited by the angel, they were given some pretty scary emergency-level news. But they were also given an opportunity to act. God was ready to rescue Mary and Joseph, but they had to reach out and participate in their own rescue as well.
- Rescue always requires movement and action. So . . .
 - How do you need God to rescue you or someone you love right now?
 - How will you participate in your own rescue?
 - How will you participate in the rescue of others?
- What do you need today?
 - **DO YOU NEED TO CALL FOR HELP?** God is ready to rescue us, but we have to reach out and accept the help that's being offered.
 - **DO YOU NEED TO BE RESCUED FROM SOMETHING?** Maybe you need to be rescued from physical violence, like Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus did. Maybe you need help getting out of a harmful relationship, scary situation, or painful experience. Whatever you need to be rescued from, I wonder if there's something God is inviting you to do in order to participate in your own rescue. God is ready to rescue, but maybe God is also inviting you to . . .
 - Reach out to a trusted adult.
 - Be honest about how you're struggling.
 - Go to God regularly with the things you're dealing with.
 - **DO YOU NEED TO BE RESCUED FROM YOUR OWN CHOICES?** Unlike Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, sometimes we find ourselves in trouble because of our own choices. We are all sinful – there's no getting around that. We're prone to doing things that hurt us and others. But God can rescue us from that too. Whatever you need to be rescued from, I wonder if there's something

God is inviting you to do in order to participate in your own rescue. God is ready to rescue, but maybe God is also inviting you to . . .

- Choose to make a change in your behavior.
- Ask someone for help.
- Remove yourself from situations or relationships that aren't helping you.
- Ask God to forgive you and change you from the inside out.
- **COULD YOU HELP SOMEONE WHO NEEDS TO BE RESCUED?** You and I may not be angels, but that doesn't mean we can't do for each other what the angel did for Mary and Joseph on the very first Christmas. There will be times when we see someone is in trouble and have the opportunity to step in and help. Maybe God is inviting you to . . .
 - Comfort or encourage someone who needs hope.
 - Help provide food, shelter, or clothing for someone in need.
 - Reach out to someone you know is struggling.
 - Say the uncomfortable but necessary thing your friend needs to hear.
 - Commit to praying for someone who's struggling or grieving.
- Some of us may need God's help to help us step away from our own destructive choices. Others of us may be in need of rescue because of hurtful circumstances that are completely out of our control. Either way, God loves you, God sees you, and God is always ready to rescue you — and sometimes, God is calling us to help each other find the rescue we need.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Have you ever felt like God didn't rescue you from a situation you needed to be rescued from? What happened?**
 - ✪ **How do you think we can make sense of situations where it seems like God isn't coming to our rescue in the way we hoped or expected?**
 - **Has God ever used a person to give you the help you needed? Has God ever used you to do that for someone else? Tell us about it.**
 - **What's one way you need God to rescue you (or someone you love) right now? How can we pray for you?**

RESPONSE | A Rescued Mixed Media Sculpture

- For the next few minutes, let's think about this as we create something together. We're going to build a visual reminder to ourselves, to each other, and to our community, that God is always ready to rescue.
- As you think about how you want to contribute, here are a few questions to get you started . . .
 - **What has God rescued you from?**
 - **What do you need God to rescue you from?**
 - **What does Scripture tell us about God's ability to rescue?**
 - **What do you want people to know about God's ability to rescue us?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, build a simple sculpture of [cardboard or foam letters](#) that spell "rescued" by mounting the letters on a wooden base and painting the entire sculpture a neutral color, like black or white. During this reflection time, play some worship music and invite students to help create an art piece about God's ability to rescue, using a variety of "rescued" materials you've collected. Photograph and display their completed art in your church or on social media. You might include materials like . . .*

- Paint and brushes.
- Markers.
- Crayons.
- Wire.
- Rubber bands.
- Colorful washi tape.
- Colorful duct tape.
- Scrap paper and glue.
- Play-Doh or modeling clay.
- Loose pages from damaged Bibles.
- Bible verses you've printed about God's ability to rescue and save.

MUSIC | Christmas Worship

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Close this series with a brief time of worship. As you sing, encourage students to participate in the creation of the sculpture above. Here are a few songs you might want to sing:
 - "O Come All Ye Faithful" (Red Rocks Worship)
 - "Away in a Manger (Forever Amen)" (Phil Wickham)
 - "Angels We Have Heard on High" (Life.Church Worship)
 - "Joy to the World / Joy of the Lord" (Maverick City Music)
 - "Simple Gospel" (United Pursuit)
 - "When The Fight Calls (Acoustic)" (Hillsong Young & Free)
 - "We'll All Be Free" (William Matthews)
 - "Skyline" (ARISE Worship)
 - "Living Sacrifice" (Brandon Lake)
- This Christmas, no matter what you're experiencing, I hope it's clear God has a message for you. Whether this holiday season has been "merry and bright" or anything but, may the Christmas story remind you that . . .
 - **God's timing is always right.**
 - **Jesus is always good news.**
 - **We can always share God's story.**
 - And **God is always ready to rescue.**

WEEK 4

DISCUSSION GUIDE



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today — like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

God is always ready to rescue.

BIBLE

Matthew 2:11-18; Psalm 80:1-7, 91:14-15

QUESTIONS

- From burnt cookies to Christmas present fails, have you experienced any Christmas disasters this year? What happened?
- Have you (or someone you love) ever had a difficult Christmas for more serious reasons? What happened?
- Why do you think people are more likely to focus on the happy parts of the first Christmas story than the painful parts?
- Why do you think God let Jesus' birth story include things like discomfort, fear, pain, and injustice?
- What did Jesus' family need God to rescue them from? How did God do it?
- Read Psalm 91:14-15. Have you ever needed God to rescue you from something? How did God do it?
- Have you ever felt like God didn't rescue you from a situation you needed to be rescued from? What happened?
- How do you think we can make sense of situations where it seems like God isn't coming to our rescue in the way we hoped or expected?
- Has God ever used a person to give you the help you needed? Has God ever used you to do that for someone else? Tell us about it.
- What's one way you need God to rescue you (or someone you love) right now? How can we pray for you?

WEEK 4

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers



There are certain things that make Christmas really feel like Christmas, right? Christmas trees, holly, candy canes, nativity sets, that one Christmas album your family can't get enough of . . . oh! And angels. If you pay attention, you'll find them everywhere this Christmas season. They're on Christmas trees, ornaments, and greeting cards. They're in Christmas carols, movies, and nativity sets. And they're all over the pages of Scripture, too. That's because angels played an important role in the very first Christmas. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll pay close attention to the announcements the angels made surrounding Jesus' birth. Together, we'll see why the messages the angels shared back then still matter today – like the message that **God's timing is always right**, that **Jesus is always good news**, that **we can always share God's story**, and that **God is always ready to rescue**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

God is always ready to rescue.

BIBLE

Matthew 2:11-18; Psalm 80:1-7, 91:14-15

QUESTIONS

- **From burnt cookies to Christmas present fails, have you experienced any Christmas disasters this year? What happened?**
- **Have you (or someone you love) ever had a difficult Christmas for more serious reasons? What happened?**
- **What did Jesus' family need God to rescue them from? How did God do it?**
- **Read Psalm 91:14-15. Have you ever needed God to rescue you from something? How did God do it?**
- **Has God ever used a person to give you the help you needed? Has God ever used you to do that for someone else? Tell us about it.**
- **What's one way you need God to rescue you (or someone you love) right now? How can we pray for you?**

ONE-MINUTE SERMON SCRIPTS



ONE-MINUTE SERMONS

After you teach each week, we recommend **filming a video of yourself re-teaching your message in one minute or less**. Then post it on social media! We've written the beginnings of a script for you each week, and we've also filmed complete [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) for you too, in partnership with [Rescue a Generation](#). Make your own or post ours – whatever you want!

WEEK 1

The holidays are here again! I know we're *supposed* to be full of hope and joy, and maybe you are! But for some of us, the timing of Christmas might feel a little off. This Christmas, if you're struggling to muster up some hope and joy, you might want to take a look at the story of the very first Christmas. It begins with someone struggling to feel hope and joy too. In Luke 1, we meet Zechariah, who gets an incredible message from an angel: after many years of trying to have a baby, he and his wife Elizabeth were finally going to have a child. And their child would play an important role in announcing the coming of Jesus, Savior of the world. But after so many years of disappointment, Zechariah had a hard time believing it could be true. If you, like Zechariah, are struggling to trust what God is up to, I hope you'll read Zechariah's story. Because what was true for him is true for you: **God's timing is always right.**

WEEK 2

Okay, be honest. Have you ever gotten a Christmas present that was, um, not exactly what you were hoping for? Maybe the gift was wrapped beautifully and from someone you really love – but when you opened it, you were like, "Um, what is this? And why?" Well, I wonder if that's how things happened in the days leading up to the very first Christmas. When Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, were told by an angel they were going to be having a baby who would grow up to save the whole world, it may not have immediately sounded like good news to them. They weren't married, Mary was still a virgin, and this development was definitely going to cause a scandal. But what Mary and Joseph learned on that first Christmas is what you and I might need to be reminded of today. No matter how scary or confusing things seem, no matter what's going on in our lives or in the world, Christmas is a reminder that **Jesus is always good news.**

WEEK 3

If you had to guess, how many times do you think you've heard the Christmas story? You know — the one about Jesus' birth? For many of us, the Christmas story probably seems like old news. Maybe we've heard it so many times we can't imagine anyone not being familiar with it. But whether you know the story or not, I wonder if you know why that story still matters today. If you look back at that first-ever Christmas story, you'll notice a few people who definitely did understand its significance. They were shepherds. And when they were visited by an angel and heard the Savior of the world had just been born, they not only ran to meet him, but they ran and told everyone they could as well. So this Christmas, I hope you'll remember the Christmas story isn't just a story you've heard a million times. It's the story that has changed the world forever, and can change lives right now. That's why **we can always share God's story.**

WEEK 4

Have you ever noticed how *sad* some Christmas songs are? We've got plenty of cheerful ones, but there are a lot of sad ones too! There are songs about missing loved ones, missing the old days, and missing family members who passed away too soon. Christmas can be a time to be "merry and bright," but this season leaves room for some not-so-joyful feelings too. Maybe that's because the first Christmas (when Jesus was born) was filled with both joyful and difficult moments too. Jesus' birth story was full of pain and discomfort. Then, after his birth, things even turned tragic. In an attempt to kill baby Jesus, Scripture says King Herod had tons of infants killed, leading Mary and Joseph to flee with Jesus into Egypt as refugees. So this Christmas, if you feel like you're holding both joy and pain, or you're feeling a little lost, or hurting, or afraid, or hopeless — Christmas is for you too. Whatever you're going through, Christmas is a reminder **God is always ready to rescue.**

MARKETING CHECKLIST



BEFORE THE SERIES

✓ TO DO

	Print your Series Promo Poster and Series Promo Cards and display them where families and volunteers can see them.
	Customize your Volunteer Hub and Parent Hub web pages for this series.
	Customize and send the Parent Email for this series.
	Send the Volunteer Email for Week 1 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.
	Review the suggested Social Media Posts and Captions for this series.
	Post the Bumper Video on social media with this caption: We're starting a new series on Christmas this week called Halo!

AFTER WEEK 1

✓ TO DO

	Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 1 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, in Week 1 of <i>Halo</i> , we talked about how we can trust in God's timing when we are uncertain about our plans. Here's a recap!
	Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 1 on social media and/or send with this caption: Remember, even when we don't understand God's timing, we can trust that God is with us.
	Send the Volunteer Email for Week 2 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.

AFTER WEEK 2

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 2 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, in Week 2 of <i>Halo</i>, we talked about how Jesus' birth is good news for all of us. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 2 on social media with this caption: Remember, Jesus came so we can have hope – and that hope is for everyone.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 3 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 3

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 3 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, in Week 3 of <i>Halo</i>, we talked about the ways we can share God's story. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 3 on social media with this caption: Remember, God's story is for everyone.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 4 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 4

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 4 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, in Week 4 of <i>Halo</i>, we talked about how we are in need of rescuing. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 4 on social media with this caption: Remember, whatever is going on in your life, the Christmas story reminds us that God sees us, hears us, and wants to help us.</p>
	<p>Get ready for the next series!</p>

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS & CAPTIONS



Need some help deciding what to post on social media before and during this series? Here's our suggestion: each week, share the media we've provided in your Graphics and Videos folder using the captions below.

BEFORE THE SERIES



BUMPER VIDEO

We're starting a new series on Christmas this week called Halo!

AFTER WEEK 1



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 1)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about how we can trust God, even when it's difficult. Here's a recap!

AFTER WEEK 2



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 2)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about how Jesus' birth was good news and continues to be good news today. Here's a recap!



BIG IDEA (WEEK 1)

Remember, sometimes when we're frustrated by waiting for God to meet our needs, the best thing we can do is shift our focus to someone else and their needs.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 2)

Remember, when Jesus came into the world, the world was instantly changed. But people's lives continue to change every single day because Jesus is still good news, today and every day.

AFTER WEEK 3



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 3)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about how God's story is so incredible, we can't help but share it. Here's a recap!

AFTER WEEK 4



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 4)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about all the ways Christmas reminds us God can rescue us from anything. Here's a recap!



BIG IDEA (WEEK 3)

Remember, the Christmas story isn't just a story you've heard a million times. It's the story that has changed the world forever, and can change lives right now.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 4)

Remember, God loves you, God sees you, and God is always ready to rescue you — and sometimes, God is calling us to help each other find the rescue we need.

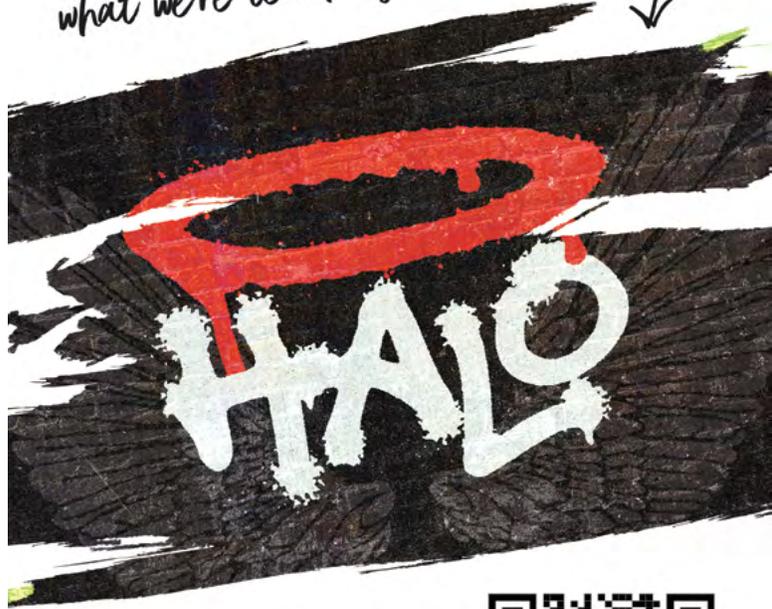
what we're teaching



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