

**God Sends His Son
to Save Us**

NEW TESTAMENT 1

DIRECTOR HANDBOOK



Contents

Exploring Cross Explorations	1
Leading Cross Explorations	4
Law and Gospel in God's Word	7
Extra Grace Kids	9
Lesson Scope and Sequence	12
Preparing the Lesson	13



Copyright © 2015 Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

All rights reserved. Unless specifically noted, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

The purchaser of this publication is allowed to reproduce the marked portions contained herein for use with this curriculum. The resources may not be transferred or copied to another user.

Edited by Mark S. Sengele

Portions originally published in *Teachers Interaction*, copyright © 2013, 2014 Concordia Publishing House.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The quotations from Luther's Works in this publication (marked AE) are from the American Edition: vol. 45 ©1962 Muhlenberg Press. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Cross Explorations® is published by Concordia Publishing House. Your comments and suggestions concerning this material are appreciated. Email us at sundayschool@cph.org.

Welcome to Cross Explorations

Cross Explorations is the Sunday School with the biblical integrity you've come to expect from Concordia Publishing House. The Bible accounts in Cross Explorations follow the same sequence as Concordia's traditional Sunday School curriculum, Growing in Christ.

Cross Explorations combines the best of large-group/small-group instruction and site rotation. Leaders will love the easy-to-use leader guides as well as the options available for each lesson. Above all, Cross Explorations puts Christ at the center of each and every lesson.

Exploring Cross Explorations

Cross Explorations at a Glance

Engage

Cross Explorations starts with Engage. During Engage, all students take part in an opening activity together, singing and preparing for the rest of their exploration.

Explore

The Explore site divides kids by two age levels. Level 1 includes kids in grades 1–3, while Level 2 covers kids in grades 4–6. During Explore, students dig into the day's Bible story, guided by their Explore Leaders Leaflets and the Explore Student Leaflets. We recommend having eight to ten kids in a group with one leader. So, depending on the number of kids you have, you may have multiple Level 1 and Level 2 groups.

Express

During Express, kids apply the Bible learning from the Explore session to their lives as they create, experiment, sing, serve, and more. Options depend on the time you have available and the talents of your volunteers. The Express leader materials provide numerous options for each week:

- **Express Crafts Booklet**—thirteen pull-apart cards provide creative projects for each lesson, complete with supply lists, directions, talking points, and pictures of the completed craft.
- **Express Music CD**—includes recorded music, music activities for each lesson, and PowerPoint slides with linked music. Reinforce the lesson with new songs, old favorites, and familiar hymns.
- **Express Skit CD**—brief skits allow students to review each Bible lesson. Ideas for costumes and visual props are included.
- **Express Activities & More CD**—includes creative snack ideas and group activities for each week. Additional activity ideas, including service projects, are suggested for some weeks. Activities included:
 - Group activities
 - Science demonstrations
 - Service projects

Leaders have the option to access materials by week, by topic, or by type of activity.

The amount of time available determines if students will rotate through one, two, or more Express options each week. If time is limited, vary Express activities from week to week so students get a chance to experience different types of learning.

The Cross Explorations Schedule

Cross Explorations offers flexibility for a variety of settings. Here is a suggested schedule for a traditional 60-minute Sunday morning setting:

- All students at Engage for 15 minutes.
- Students break into Explore Levels 1 & 2 for 20 minutes.
- Students move through two or more Express rotations for 25 minutes.

If you are using Cross Explorations in a Midweek setting, your schedule probably offers more time. In this setting, the Engage and Explore times remain the same, but extra time may be used to include additional small-group Express options.

Flexibility

The flexible Cross Explorations materials allow you to customize the program to fit your specific needs. Here's how one congregation customized Cross Explorations to meet the specific needs in their Sunday School. They have a lot of students in grades 1–3, with smaller numbers in each of the older grades. Their solution:

- Everyone in grades 1–6 starts together in Engage.
- With a smaller number of students in grades 4–6, they move as one group into Explore. Following Explore, the older students split into two groups and rotate through two Express stations.
- Meanwhile, the younger students in grades 1–3 stay in single-grade groups and rotate through three stations. Explore becomes one of the three rotations, and leaders choose the other two stations from the Express materials.

Cross Explorations in a Self-Contained Classroom

Some congregations, by preference or due to limited space or number of students, use Cross Explorations in self-contained classrooms. The flexible Cross Explorations resources easily allow for use in this setting. If needed, divide students into two groups, Lower Grades (1–3) and Upper Grades (4–6), and plan on a leader for each group. If most of your students are younger, you could use just the Level 1 materials; likewise, use the Level 2 materials if most of your students are older.

Introduce the lesson to all students, using the Engage leader leaflets and optional PowerPoint slide shows. (Or provide an *Engage CD* to each teacher to use in the classroom.)

Then, divide students into two or more groups for the Explore Bible study. Have them meet with their leader in their classroom or an assigned area of a larger space to dig into the Bible account and work through the student leaflets.

Following Explore, have students continue with Express activities in their classroom or rotate through Express activities with other classes. They can stay in the Explore groups, combine with other groups, or form new groups. Select the Express options that work best for your setting. These options can vary from week to week to keep students excited and engaged in what might happen next week.

Assembling Small Groups

Small groups form the core of Cross Explorations. Groups may be assigned by traditional grade levels or by combining students from the three grades comprising each of the two levels for Explore. For instance, you could have two or more groups of students from grades 1–3. Likewise, you could have groups with a mix of students from grades 4–6. Ideally, groups will have eight to ten students in them. If you have more than ten students at either level, plan on two Explore sites for that level. Depending on the age range of your students and their level of maturity, you might also include students in third grade in your Level 2 groups.

What about Other Sunday School Levels?

Preschool

We recommend letting preschoolers learn in their own settings and groups. The Growing in Christ *Early Childhood Teacher Guide* has age-appropriate material for preschoolers that follows the same lesson sequence as Cross Explorations.

Keeping preschoolers separate from your elementary program is beneficial for several reasons. Sunday School is often a preschooler's first group experience. A young child needs a safe environment with predictable routines and the same caring teacher each week to feel secure. Parents and children may feel anxious, timid, or afraid in the midst of the larger Sunday School setting. If you can, give preschoolers separate learning spaces so that they can do age-appropriate activities in an environment suitable to their needs. Preschoolers can get lost among older kids, but in their own space, they can relax, play, and feel more secure. This kind of atmosphere maximizes their ability to learn and remember.

Junior High and High School

Since Cross Explorations is a complementary program to Growing in Christ, you can use Growing in Christ for junior high and high school levels. The two programs share a common Bible story, so the whole family is studying the same story each week.

Adults

The Cross Explorations *Explore Adult Bible Study Guide* provides weekly lessons for adult learners. Parents and other adults join children for the large-group Engage session, then continue learning in their own Explore group for thirty minutes. Families continue learning at home through the *Explore More Cards*. These talking points help families take the lesson home each week and engage kids and parents in talking about the faith.

Leading Cross Explorations

Staffing for Cross Explorations lets volunteers work from their strengths. Each Cross Explorations leader works in a role designed to let him or her be most effective. It is beneficial when groups of children have two adults present with them at all times.

Large-Group Leader

The large-group leader begins each week's Cross Explorations adventure during the Engage session. This leader needs the energy and confidence to work with a large group of children. The Engage leader should also have the ability to get kids excited about learning. Since this large-group leader sets the tone for the day, choose this leader—or leadership team—carefully. Because of the variety of ages involved, it is important to select a large-group leader who communicates well with students.

Site Leaders

Your Cross Explorations site leaders do what they do best—crafts, music, science, teaching the lesson, and more. Volunteers who feel comfortable teaching students would be ideal leaders for the Explore Level 1 and Explore Level 2 sites. For the most effective learning environment, Explore leaders should be consistent from week to week. If teaching volunteers like to work in teams, enlist three teachers for each Explore team and encourage at least two of them to be present each week. Those volunteers with a love for crafts, music, drama, or other ways to apply the lesson truths to kids' lives would be excellent leaders for the Express sites you choose. Since Express sites may vary each week, volunteers may take turns serving.

Rotation Small-Group Leaders

Cross Explorations small-group leaders serve a very important role. You will need one small-group leader for every eight to ten kids. The small-group leaders may not have to teach; rather, they lead their small group of students from one site to another. Groups may be assigned by age or grade level, or they may be multi-graded. Strive for groups no larger than ten students. Encourage students to select a name for their group in order to develop a sense of group identity. Small-group leaders

- are leaders and encouragers, not bosses;
- develop friendships with every child in their group;

- help and encourage kids to participate, cooperate, and try new things;
- ask questions and lead kids to discover Bible answers;
- keep kids focused on tasks and challenges;
- participate in activities;
- get to know their group members well; and
- are patient and do not yell or express anger.

Older adults and older youth often make ideal small-group leaders. In some situations, you may want to have your small-group leaders actually be the teachers for the Explore or Express sites. For the balance of the time at Cross Explorations, these teachers simply lead their small group. The choice is yours!

Cross Explorations Resources

The Cross Explorations leader materials provide all of the resources your volunteers need to effectively share God's Word with children.

■ Engage

- **Leader Leaflet** includes opening activities and music suggestions.
- **Engage Music CD** provides selected music for use in Cross Explorations.

■ Explore

- **Level 1 Teacher Leaflets** include resources for teaching the Bible story to children in grades 1–3.
- **Level 1 Student Leaflets** include full-color Bible art and activities for children in grades 1–3.
- **Level 2 Teacher Leaflets** include resources for teaching the Bible story to children in grades 4–6.
- **Level 2 Student Leaflets** include full-color Bible art, activities, and discussion questions for children in grades 4–6.
- **Explore More Cards** provide family-centered questions and activities to extend the lesson to the home each week.
- **Explore Adult Bible Study Guide** allows parents and other adults to explore the same lesson that kids do each week.

■ Express

- **Express Craft Booklet** uses visuals to guide students as they express the lesson creatively. (Craft activity patterns, when required, are found on the *Express Activities & More CD*.)
- **Express Music CD** allows kids to express the lesson through song.
- **Express Skit CD** lets students express the lesson through drama and role play.
- **Express Activities & More CD** has ideas and activities that vary from week to week. These include science demonstrations, games, snacks, service projects, and more. Each one provides students with unique ways to express their learning. (This CD may also contain craft patterns.)

■ Director CD

- **Director Handbook** with planning materials for the Sunday School Leader.
- **Preparing the Lesson** leaflets for each week. Provide all your volunteer leaders with copies of these devotions as they prepare for each week's lesson.
- **Planning Pages** are designed to help teachers and leaders plan the lessons each week. The planning pages outline the activities available for each section of the lesson.
- **Bulletin Notes** are designed to help connect your congregation and Sunday School by providing a brief lesson highlight and suggested questions for parents and others to discuss with students.
- **Pronunciation Guide** helps teachers and students correctly pronounce more difficult names of people and places in the Bible.
- **Arch Book List** helps teachers reinforce the Bible account by providing another method of sharing the story with students.

The Perfect Setting: Environment Matters

Stress, mess, and chaos hinder learning. Open a door to effective learning by providing a relaxed, comfortable environment.

- Make sure your facility is clean and safe. Eliminate unneeded furniture and supplies.
- Use child-size furniture so kids feel comfortable.
- Decorate to capture curiosity. Nearly 75 percent of people are visual learners who learn best with visual prompts. Thematic decorating helps them understand and remember well.
- Use words and pictures on signs for sites, restrooms, and offices.

Where to Meet

Deciding where to meet for Cross Explorations will depend on the space available in your building.

Engage requires a space large enough for all students to be seated and equipped so the leader can be heard clearly. If you plan to use the recording on the *Engage CD*, you will need a CD player. If you plan to use the PowerPoint presentation on the *Engage CD*, you will need a computer and a projector. The church sanctuary, a fellowship hall, or even a gymnasium can work for this session.

Explore requires separate spaces for the two levels. Classrooms equipped with chairs or desks or a section of a larger room that can be screened off will both work for this session. Preschool students, youth, and adults should have their own meeting locations apart from the Explore session.

Express sessions offer the greatest flexibility as far as meeting locations. You could offer multiple Express sites in one large space, provided you can screen off areas to prevent distractions. Rolling dividers, movable walls, or even

fabric panels help block the view from one area to another. In other situations, separate classrooms might offer the best setting for the Express sessions.

Decorating Ideas

Help students experience Cross Explorations by setting the scene for learning. Your decorations may be as simple as Concordia's realistic Bible Story Poster Sets. These sets contain pictures of each Bible story for the quarter. Use posters to decorate Explore learning areas so teachers can refer to the appropriate picture for that week's lesson. You can view the posters in each set at www.cph.org/sundayschool.

If you have a dedicated area for Sunday School, consider more extensive decorating to help set the stage for learning. Furnish Explore and Express areas with Bible-times decorations. Piles of brightly striped pillows can double as seating for storytelling time. Use baskets and ceramic vessels to hold craft supplies and student materials for each Express location. You might even set up a Bible-times marketplace to keep students engaged in the learning process.

Law and Gospel in God's Word

by David Rueter

Is it truly necessary to ensure every lesson you teach contains both Law and Gospel? Is it not more appropriate to make sure we allow the text covered in the lesson to present either Law or Gospel directly and naturally from the text? Are we really, as teachers, encouraged to seek to incorporate both Law and Gospel in every lesson?

Yes! Not every passage of God's Word directly contains both Law and Gospel. God's Word, taken as a whole, is the perfect application and balancing of these critical and interrelated elements. It is, in fact, the interrelated nature of Law and Gospel that compels us as teachers to insist upon the presence of both each time we prepare our lessons. For we do truly understand the value of presenting both the Law, which reveals our sins and need for a Savior, and the Gospel, which, just as we are wont to despair, calls us back to God through Christ as that very Savior.

A Simple Tool

So, how are we to determine whether we have, in fact, correctly identified the Law and the Gospel presented in the passage for our lesson? There is a rather simple diagnostic tool you can use to do this properly. Begin by asking these two questions as you approach the text:

- What is commanded of us in the passage? That is the Law.
- What does God promise to us in the passage? That is the Gospel.

For example, if the text for our lesson is Romans 3:23–24, we should note that verse 23 presents the Law when Paul says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The implication—there is a standard God set, which none of us is able to meet. This verse presents the Law not only by telling us what we should have done but also by convicting us for not having done so.

Meanwhile, verse 24 presents the Gospel when Paul writes that we “are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Here, we see the resolution of the tension created in verse 23. Where our sin separates us from God, it is God Himself who acts to restore us to a right relationship with Him, justifying us through Christ.

For another example, let’s look at a narrative passage often used in a children’s lesson. Consider the Book of Jonah. Here, we find layers of both Law and Gospel. We see Law in both the prophecy Jonah is sent to present as well as the storm God sends to prevent Jonah from fleeing. The great fish might appear to serve as an additional instance of Law, yet it is instead a method by which God saves the drowning Jonah and places him back on his path to Nineveh. God also offers His gracious Gospel to the people of Nineveh, accepting their repentance and relenting from His judgment upon them.

The Bigger Picture

The complication arises when there is no evident instance of either Law or, conversely, Gospel in a particular passage. At times, a text may seem to be exclusively Law or Gospel. For example, a classic presentation of the Gospel is John 3:16. In this text, we could hear nothing but Gospel. We have to look a bit harder to dig out the Law. In this case, begin by reading a larger section of Scripture around the given text. Look for the larger context of the particular passage for the lesson, seeking to find in the larger section of Scripture Law or Gospel elements not found in the passage prescribed in the lesson. There are, in fact, two ways to draw out the Law here. First, the small phrase “should not perish” points to the need for a Savior; that is the Law. If we look further in John 3, we note that “whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (v. 18)—more Law.

If a natural word of Law or Gospel is not evident in the surrounding passages, we might need to continue to expand, perhaps even to the point of reading the entire chapter or book to gather the full context. Take Deuteronomy 4:2 as an example: “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.” Looking into the surrounding context of the verse reveals more and more Law. How can we teach the Gospel in this case without doing exegetical violence to the original text? We should not claim that the text itself says more than it actually does. Instead, bring in the Gospel from another passage, such as Psalm 119:105, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,” which demonstrates how God’s command to avoid compromising the integrity of His Word helps to ensure a clear presentation of the light, which is Christ. For passages found in the Gospels, you may look for parallel passages that add additional details not accounted for in the particular Gospel you are working in. This can also be done for other areas of Scripture; just keep in mind what genre of writing you are dealing with, and avoid bringing in texts out of their own context.

Context

While it may be ideal to make use of the immediate context of a passage to teach both Law and Gospel, bringing in either Law or Gospel from other portions of Scripture does not necessarily do damage to the text. We are not necessarily violating principles of Biblical interpretation when we do so. The whole of Scripture is God's Word; each passage speaks to the whole of God's message, revealed in both Law and Gospel.

What is of critical importance is that, as we bring an additional voice into the mix in our lesson planning, we do so in such a way that neither text is presented out of its original context. Rather, we select texts that allow the original meaning of each text to remain while providing a clear exposition of Law or Gospel. The key to guiding this process in our lesson preparations is an understanding of the elements of Law and Gospel that must be present to provide the proper structure in your lessons. Each time we teach, students need to clearly hear they are sinners in need of a Savior—and that Savior has come to claim them as His own in the person of Jesus Christ.

Extra Grace Kids

by Steve Christopher

You know who the “extra-grace-required kids” are!

They distract from your carefully planned lesson, disrupt the class, draw attention away from the Gospel, and seek to be the focal point in your Sunday School classroom. They also seem to be there every week, and in spite of their antics, there is a lovable quality about them. What do you do with them? How do you, as a volunteer Sunday School teacher, address this issue? Here are four steps to use.

Step 1: Rename It!

Let's address these children not with negative “disruptive, undisciplined, out-of-control” types of titles, but rather “Extra Grace Kids.” So often, how we perceive someone, especially if it is negative, causes us to think and behave in ways that furthers the negative rather than draws out the positive. Whether we call these students Extra Grace Kids or something similar, we need to drop the stereotypes. We need to start fresh in how we perceive these special children of God.

Step 2: Celebrate!

Give thanks to God that He has delivered this special child to your classroom! It is not by accident that this child arrived in your class—it is by divine design. Our Lord, who is also present in your classroom, wants to encounter this child and all the children in attendance. What an opportunity to share the message of salvation in the Gospel of Jesus through Bible stories, learning activities, and your loving presence as a teacher. You only have these students for a short period of time; let them know Jesus wants them as His own for all time and eternity! What a blessing!

Step 3: In-Class Strategies

You *can* address the various challenges these Extra Grace Kids bring with them into your classroom.

- **Classroom Rules** Normally, Sunday School classrooms do not adhere to all the rules a regular school classroom would have. However, it is still a classroom and needs to have some simple, clear, and understandable rules that everyone follows. Set these rules at the beginning of the year, along with the appropriate consequences for violations. Review them often.
- **Classroom Arrangement** How are chairs and desks positioned? Are students seated around a table? How close will the children sit to one another? Can you reduce the temptation for physical contact by creating “safe space” for each student? A carefully arranged room created by the teacher helps set a positive tone for student learning and behavior.
- **Assigned Seating** Children enjoy regular patterns and habits. The routine of knowing where students sit helps avoid uncertainty every Sunday. It can create positive norms in the class environment. As the teacher, you may also use seating strategy to position your Extra Grace Kids near you and away from other distractions without it becoming a big deal for your students.
- **Engaging Activities** The movement and variety of teaching techniques that capture the attention of students can help avoid disruptions. Many children who act out are simply bored and decide to create their own excitement. Stay one step ahead of them! When needed, employ a hands-on activity pertaining to the lesson; have another one waiting in the wings.
- **Special Responsibilities** There may be routine responsibilities in your classroom that an Extra Grace Kid could do, such as taking attendance, collecting offering, or handing out Bibles. Many times, these children just need to stay busy and receive positive attention from an adult. Use your everyday routines to engage them in positive ways.
- **Control Yourself** Nothing gets a class offtrack more than a teacher “losing it” over a child’s behavior. This is a real challenge—asking you to remain calm and to rise above the antics of a child. Take a deep breath, address the issue calmly, listen intently, pause and pray, then move forward. Don’t let a moment of frustration take over the lesson.

Step 4: Beyond-Class Strategies

You are not just a Sunday morning teacher; you are an all-week teacher as well. You may see your students in worship services and at other church activities, and even out in the community. Your influence extends beyond that one hour and into their lives at other moments. Consider the following opportunities to connect and support these Extra Grace Kids.

- **Get to know their parents.** Chances are, the behaviors you see for an hour on a Sunday morning are nothing new to them. Parents may welcome support and understanding from another adult who experiences the same challenges with their child they do. Be a listener, be a supporter, thank them for the spiritual support they show by bringing their child to Sunday School and worship. See parents as allies in the spiritual growth process of this special child of God.
- **Follow up during the week.** Send notes of support and thanks to Extra Grace Kids (and the rest of your students as well) at special times of their year—their birthday, their Baptism birthday, Christmas, and Easter. Take time to ask what they are doing this coming week, and follow up on these experiences the next Sunday before or after class (or even as part of the lesson, if it is fitting).
- **Pray for them.** While Extra Grace Kids may get up our angst or cause frustration, we can turn it all over to God. We can pray for those who frustrate us. We can ask God to change their behavior and our attitude toward them as well. Prayer changes things—sometimes, it changes us!
- **Develop a bad memory.** Learn to forget the harm and frustration caused by others by forgiving—in heart and head. Then move forward in an outward, supportive relationship with that person. Holding grudges, withholding love and care, being indifferent toward others (especially a child) doesn't resolve much at all. Displaying a forgiving spirit and a loving heart can do wonders for an Extra Grace Kid, as well as present a wonderful witness to his or her parents and other students in the class.

Lesson Scope and Sequence: God Sends His Son to Save Us

The lessons for this quarter focus on New Testament accounts beginning with announcement of the birth of John the Baptist and concluding with Jesus calling His first disciples.

Lesson	Title	Text
1	The Birth of John Foretold	Luke 1:5–25
2	The Birth of Jesus Foretold	Luke 1:26–38
3	Mary Visits Elizabeth	Luke 1:39–56
4	The Birth of John	Luke 1:57–80
5	An Angel Visits Joseph	Matthew 1:18–25
6	The Birth of Jesus	Luke 2:1–20
7	The Presentation of Jesus	Luke 2:22–40
8	The Visit of the Wise Men	Matthew 2
9	The Boy Jesus in the Temple	Luke 2:41–52
10	John Prepares the Way	Matthew 3:1–12
11	The Baptism of Jesus	Luke 3:15–22
12	The Temptation of Jesus	Luke 4:1–13
13	Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael	John 1:43–51

Weekly Podcasts

For teachers using the Cross Explorations Sunday School material, there is a wonderful weekly podcast resource available at **www.cph.org/sundayschool**. Click on “Sunday School Tools” tab at the top of the page. This weekly interview unpacks the richness of the Bible text. Teachers will gain practical, relevant, biblical information to inform their teaching of the lesson.

Preparing the Lesson

The Birth of John Foretold

Luke 1:5–25

Date of Use

Key Point

God promised to send John to prepare sinners to receive the Savior. Through His Word, God calls us to repent and declares us righteous because of Jesus.

Law/Gospel

I sin when I doubt God's Word and promises. **God sent His Son to forgive my sin and works through His Word and Sacraments to give me faith to believe and to strengthen my trust in Him.**

Context

God set up the regulations for the tabernacle, and later the temple, in order to establish and maintain His people. God is merciful in providing sacrifices to cleanse that which is unclean and make holy that which is common.

Commentary

God promises to make His people a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. Zechariah and his fellow priests followed all the temple regulations with the result that God's people were taught right from wrong and that God loves and forgives them.

The name *Zechariah* means "God will remember." God remembered His people by sending His holy messenger Gabriel to Zechariah to announce the birth of John, the forerunner and relative of Jesus. Zechariah was not only rightfully gripped with fear, but he also doubted God's message.

Would we not also doubt? After all, God had not sent a prophet or an angel for centuries. Yet God forgave Zechariah's doubting and gave him the cross of muteness to bear as a sign of the coming blessing of John, whose name means "the Lord is gracious and moved to pity."

Even when we bear our crosses, they testify to Christ. In this world or in the next, He gives us so much joy that all suffering for His sake will be forgotten, swallowed up in His love and abundant gifts.

God knows us, loves us, and desires to save us, even before we are born. God does not forgive us because of our worldly righteousness, but because Jesus exchanged His perfect righteousness for our deep and abiding sin when He was killed on the cross in our place. All those who speak the truth of God's love speak about the person and work of Jesus for us. Our human thoughts and frailties do not limit God's love. Nothing is impossible with God.

To hear an in-depth discussion of this Bible account, visit cph.org/podcast and listen to our Seeds of Faith podcast each week.

Preparing the Lesson

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1:26–38

Date of Use

Key Point

Because of Christ, God favored Mary and chose her to be the mother of the Savior. Because of Christ, God favors us and chooses us to be His children.

Law/Gospel

Like Mary, I deserve nothing from God because of my sinfulness. **God gives me unmerited grace and favor because of His Son.**

Context

The angel Gabriel visited both Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, and Mary, Elizabeth's relative. Elizabeth was too old to have a baby, while Mary was too young—still a virgin—only engaged to be married.

Commentary

This story about Mary begins “in the sixth month” (v. 26), that is, six months after John the Baptist was conceived. Gabriel appears to Mary with a message from God: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v. 35). This came about exactly as Gabriel described it would: the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus Christ within Mary.

While Elizabeth had the support of her husband, Mary faced the possible loss of her reputation, her family, her fiancé, and even her life. Not only could she be stoned to death for supposed adultery, but she could also die

because of complications of pregnancy and childbirth. In spite of the looming mix of joy and fear at Gabriel's message, Mary did not question God. She submitted to His will because she first received the Gospel, the Christ to be born from her womb. Her faith accepted the unacceptable, and for Christ's sake, all generations do call her blessed.

As Paul says in Philippians 1:6, any good work or blessing comes through Jesus Christ alone, who will complete that good work in the day of His second coming, even as He will execute judgment on the wicked.

The Good News of Christ embraces both His suffering and death for us on Calvary and also His return as Lord and Judge. It is His Word that counts, not the words of the world. That means we can trust His Word in spite of all worldly cares and fears. We can accept the unacceptable in Christ's name.

Like Mary, we can bear the most fearful of crosses that God gives us as blessings in Christ. We believe that the worst evil that might strike us in this world cannot overcome the Judge of all worlds and ages. Our victory in Christ is an eternal victory. Like Mary, we are eternally blessed.

To hear an in-depth discussion of this Bible account, visit cph.org/podcast and listen to our Seeds of Faith podcast each week.

Preparing the Lesson

Date of Use

The Birth of John Foretold

Luke 1:5–25

Key Point

God promised to send John to prepare sinners to receive the Savior. Through His Word, God calls us to repent and declares us righteous because of Jesus.

Law/Gospel

I sin when I doubt God's Word and promises. **God sent His Son to forgive my sin and works through His Word and Sacraments to give me faith to believe and to strengthen my trust in Him.**

Context

God set up the regulations for the tabernacle, and later the temple, in order to establish and maintain His people. God is merciful in providing sacrifices to cleanse that which is unclean and make holy that which is common.

Commentary

God promises to make His people a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. Zechariah and his fellow priests followed all the temple regulations with the result that God's people were taught right from wrong and that God loves and forgives them.

The name *Zechariah* means "God will remember." God remembered His people by sending His holy messenger Gabriel to Zechariah to announce the birth of John, the forerunner and relative of Jesus. Zechariah was not only rightfully gripped with fear, but he also doubted God's message.

Would we not also doubt? After all, God had not sent a prophet or an angel for centuries. Yet God forgave Zechariah's doubting and gave him the cross of muteness to bear as a sign of the coming blessing of John, whose name means "the Lord is gracious and moved to pity."

Even when we bear our crosses, they testify to Christ. In this world or in the next, He gives us so much joy that all suffering for His sake will be forgotten, swallowed up in His love and abundant gifts.

God knows us, loves us, and desires to save us, even before we are born. God does not forgive us because of our worldly righteousness, but because Jesus exchanged His perfect righteousness for our deep and abiding sin when He was killed on the cross in our place. All those who speak the truth of God's love speak about the person and work of Jesus for us. Our human thoughts and frailties do not limit God's love. Nothing is impossible with God.



To hear an in-depth discussion of this Bible account, visit cph.org/podcast and listen to our Seeds of Faith podcast each week.



Phil Howe. © CPH.

Preparing the Lesson

Date of Use

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1:26–38



Key Point

Because of Christ, God favored Mary and chose her to be the mother of the Savior. Because of Christ, God favors us and chooses us to be His children.

Law/Gospel

Like Mary, I deserve nothing from God because of my sinfulness. **God gives me unmerited grace and favor because of His Son.**

Context

The angel Gabriel visited both Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, and Mary, Elizabeth's relative. Elizabeth was too old to have a baby, while Mary was too young—still a virgin—only engaged to be married.

Commentary

This story about Mary begins “in the sixth month” (v. 26), that is, six months after John the Baptist was conceived. Gabriel appears to Mary with a message from God: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v. 35). This came about exactly as Gabriel described it would: the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus Christ within Mary.

While Elizabeth had the support of her husband, Mary faced the possible loss of her reputation, her family, her fiancé, and even her life. Not only could she be stoned to

death for supposed adultery, but she could also die because of complications of pregnancy and childbirth. In spite of the looming mix of joy and fear at Gabriel's message, Mary did not question God. She submitted to His will because she first received the Gospel, the Christ to be born from her womb. Her faith accepted the unacceptable, and for Christ's sake, all generations do call her blessed.

As Paul says in Philippians 1:6, any good work or blessing comes through Jesus Christ alone, who will complete that good work in the day of His second coming, even as He will execute judgment on the wicked.

The Good News of Christ embraces both His suffering and death for us on Calvary and also His return as Lord and Judge. It is His Word that counts, not the words of the world. That means we can trust His Word in spite of all worldly cares and fears. We can accept the unacceptable in Christ's name.

Like Mary, we can bear the most fearful of crosses that God gives us as blessings in Christ. We believe that the worst evil that might strike us in this world cannot overcome the Judge of all worlds and ages. Our victory in Christ is an eternal victory. Like Mary, we are eternally blessed.

To hear an in-depth discussion of this Bible account, visit cph.org/podcast and listen to our Seeds of Faith podcast each week.



Cheri Bladholm. © CPH.

God Sends His Son to Save Us

New Testament 1

Arch® Book Connections

Children love the rhyming patterns found in Concordia Publishing House's beloved Arch Book series. Arch Books also offer lots of options for expanding and enriching your Cross Explorations lessons:

Read the Arch Book as a sort of "readers theater." Have students take turns reading stanzas, pages, or even the whole book. This would make a great Opening activity or lesson review.

Make a "book trailer"—sort of like a movie trailer—of the Arch Book with a narration that "plugs" the book. For example: He was small—his adversary, a giant! He had only five smooth stones, while his enemy had a spear as long as a weaver's beam. Thrill to the challenge! "Ha, ha, ha! Come out and fight, pip-squeak!" Tremble with fear! "King Saul, what shall we do?!" Read it for yourself and find out who comes out victorious! Available now at your Sunday School library! The story of David and . . . (bum, bum, baaa!) Goliath!

Do a dramatic presentation of an Arch Book, and share it with another class. If the upper grade students do one story as a drama or trailer, make sure the lower grades see the final results. Let the younger children perform for the upper grades as well.

Have students create their own rhyming book with illustrations. Take digital pictures of the illustrations, and make them into a PowerPoint slide "book." These could be performed in a chapel service or the Opening in Sunday School.

If your church provides "Worship Bags" to help keep young children focused during the worship service, consider inserting the Arch Books for the quarter in those bags. With each new quarter, change out the Arch Books to include the applicable stories.

The Arch Books that correspond to the lessons for this quarter:

Lesson 1: *His Name Is John!* 59-2207

Lesson 2: *Mary's Christmas Story* 59-1499

Lesson 3: *Mary's Christmas Story* 59-1499

Lesson 4: *His Name Is John!* 59-2207

Lesson 5: *When Jesus Was Born* 59-2209

Lesson 6: *Baby Jesus Is Born* 59-1579

Lesson 7: *Baby Jesus Visits the Temple* 59-1544

Lesson 8: *Star of Wonder* 59-1594

Lesson 9: *Jesus and the Family Trip* 59-1520

Lesson 11: *The Story of Jesus' Baptism and Temptation* 59-1503

Lesson 12: *The Story of Jesus' Baptism and Temptation* 59-1503

Lesson 13: *The Twelve Ordinary Men* 59-2222

Copyright © 2015 Concordia Publishing House. Scripture: ESV® Reproduced by permission.

God Sends His Son to Save Us

New Testament 1

Bulletin Notes

The following summaries of this quarter's *Growing in Christ*® and *Cross Explorations*® Sunday School lessons are intended to provide a Sunday School link to parents and the congregation. These paragraphs can be copied from the Director CD using a word-processing program.

Consider using these summaries:

- Print them in your congregation's weekly bulletin or newsletter.
- Email them as a weekly email encouragement for student and parent Sunday School participation.
- Email them as a review email follow-up to Sunday School each week.
- Email them as a "staying in touch" note or email for students or families who are absent.

Lesson 1

Today's Sunday School lesson is "The Birth of John Foretold." The children learned that God, in His mercy, promised to send John to prepare sinful people for the coming of the Lord. God, in His Word, calls us to repentance, declaring us righteous because of His Son, Jesus. *In your family discussions, ask, "When have you doubted God's Word? How does God forgive and relieve our doubts?"*

Lesson 2

In Sunday School today, the children will hear the message "The Birth of Jesus Foretold." God favored Mary, choosing her to be the mother of Jesus. God favors us because of Jesus Christ, choosing us to be His children! *Ask your children, "How did God show Mary, and us, His unmerited grace and favor?"*

Lesson 3

Today in Sunday School, the children learned the account "Mary Visits Elizabeth." In the presence of the Son of God growing within Mary's womb, John the Baptist leapt inside Elizabeth's womb. God fills us with Himself in Word and Sacrament, and we, like Mary, offer our praise and worship. *Consider asking, "How or when does God fill us with His presence today?"*

Lesson 4

Today in Sunday School, children studied "The Birth of John." Zechariah spoke God's Word, announcing that this baby, John, would give people knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins. God speaks through His Holy Word to give us knowledge of salvation and forgiveness through Jesus, His Son. *In your family discuss, "How does Jesus remind us of the work He has done for us?"*

Lesson 5

Today in Sunday School, we studied "An Angel Visits Joseph." Just as the angel proclaimed to Joseph that Mary would bear an infant who is the Son of God, the Savior, so God proclaimed to us in His Word that this same Jesus is our Savior from sin and death. *Parents could ask, "What important message did the angel give Joseph? What important message do we hear in God's Word?"*

Lesson 6

“The Birth of Jesus” as recorded in Luke 2 is today’s Sunday School lesson. A Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord! *As a family, discuss the details of Christ’s birth. Ask, “How does our sin cause us to fear God like the shepherds did? Focus on the fact that God’s Son, Jesus, takes away our fears and offers us true peace, rescuing us from sin and death.*

Lesson 7

Today in Sunday School, the lesson is “The “Presentation of Jesus” in the temple. Already in His infancy, Jesus was fulfilling the Law for us and for our salvation. *Ask your children, “What happened, and who was in the temple waiting to see the promised Savior? What does this text tell us about who we find in God’s house?*

Lesson 8

“The Visit of the Wise Men,” as told in Matthew 2, is the Bible story in Sunday School today. This Bible story teaches us that the Savior came into the world for the salvation of all people. Just as the Wise Men came to Bethlehem to see the Savior and to honor Him, so we come to church to see the Savior in His Word and Sacraments. With these gifts, He both honors and blesses us. *Consider discussing, “How are we sometimes like Herod? How are we like the Wise Men?”*

Lesson 9

In Sunday School today, the lesson was “The Boy Jesus in the Temple.” As a boy, Jesus was found in His Father’s house. In God’s house, I hear His Word, see that Jesus is my Savior, and receive His gifts of forgiveness and salvation. Because of sin, we are like Jesus’ parents and do not understand what God says to us. We don’t recognize who Jesus truly is—our Savior. *Ask your children, “How does the Holy Spirit help identify who Jesus is?”*

Lesson 10

Today in Sunday School, we learn more about “John Prepares the Way.” As John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, so our pastors point us to this same Jesus, who grants us forgiveness, life, and salvation. *Ask your children, “What did you learn about John, what he ate, and how he dressed?”*

Lesson 11

“The Baptism of Jesus” is the Bible story taught in Sunday School today. God sent the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ Baptism, announcing that Jesus was God’s Son. At our Baptism, God makes us His children through the work of the Holy Spirit. *Let your children tell you the dramatic events of this story.*

Lesson 12

Today in Sunday School, the children will study “The Temptation of Jesus.” Like us, Jesus was tempted by Satan to sin. Yet, for us, He overcame all temptation because we cannot. *In your family discussions, consider asking, “How are we tempted to rely on ourselves and trust in our powers?”*

Lesson 13

Today in Sunday School, we study the calling of Jesus’ first disciples with “Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael.” In Jesus, access to heaven is given to all who believe. *You might discuss, “How did Philip and Nathanael know that Jesus was the Christ? How do we learn that Jesus is the Christ?”*

Lesson 1: The Birth of John Foretold

Text: Luke 1:5–25

Date Used: _____

Key Point: God promised to send John to prepare sinners to receive the Savior. Through His Word, God calls us to repent and declares us righteous because of Jesus.

Law/Gospel: I sin when I doubt God's Word and promises. **God sent His Son to forgive my sin and works through His Word and Sacraments to give me faith to believe and to strengthen my trust in Him.**

To bring:

Engage

Approximate time: _____

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Bible Challenge Question: Who were the parents of John the Baptist? **Zechariah and Elizabeth**

Notes: _____

To bring:

Explore

Approximate time: _____

Level 1 (Grades 1–3)

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes: _____

Level 2 (Grades 4–6)

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes: _____

Adult Bible Study

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes: _____

To bring:

Express Options (Choose 2 or more!)

Approximate
times:

Slot 1:

Slot 2:

Slot 3*:

Slot 4*:

Slot 5*:

Slot 6*:

Music: Jesus, Our Good Friend (Track 13)

Prepare the Way of the Lord (Track 23)

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry (Track 21)

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Skit:** The Birth of John Foretold

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Craft:** Point the Way Finger Puppet

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Food Activity:** A Message for You

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Group Activity:** Zechariah Charades

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

*If applicable

Lesson 2: The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Text: Luke 1:26–38

Date Used: _____

Key Point: Because of Christ, God favored Mary and chose her to be the mother of the Savior. Because of Christ, God favors us and chooses us to be His children.

Law/**Gospel:** Like Mary, I deserve nothing from God because of my sinfulness. **God gives me unmerited grace and favor because of His Son.**

To bring:

Engage

Approximate time:

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Bible Challenge Question: Who told Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus? **The angel Gabriel**

Notes:

To bring:

Explore

Approximate time:

Level 1 (Grades 1–3)

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

Level 2 (Grades 4–6)

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

Adult Bible Study

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

To bring:

Express Options (Choose 2 or more!)

Approximate
times:

Slot 1:

Slot 2:

Slot 3*:

Slot 4*:

Slot 5*:

Slot 6*:

Music: Savior of the Nations, Come (Track 26)

Joy to the World (Track 16)

Isaiah 9:6 (Track 10)

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Skit:** The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Craft:** Baby Peg Doll

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Food Activity:** Angels All around Us

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Group Activity:** Secret Messages

Whispering the Magnificat

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

☐ **Service Project:** Helping Young Mothers

Location: _____

Leader(s): _____

Notes:

*If applicable

Pronunciation Guide—NT1

NOTES

- List includes only proper names.
- Meanings are given for the first lesson used; I didn't repeat it for other lessons. If the word is used in another lesson, consult first use here for the pronunciation. Repeat meaning at first use in each lesson since they'll be standalone eventually.
- List does not include common names like Elizabeth and Gabriel that are still used today.

Lesson 1: The Birth of John Foretold; Luke 1:5–25

Herod	HEHR ud
Judea	joo DEE uh
Zechariah	zack ah RIE ah
Abijah	ah BUY jah
Israel	IS ray ell
Elijah	ee LIE juh

Lesson 2: The Birth of Jesus Foretold; Luke 1:26–38

Galilee	GAL ih lee
Nazareth	NAZ ah reth

Lesson 3: Mary Visits Elizabeth; Luke 1:39–56

Judah	JOO duh
Abraham	AY bruh ham

Lesson 4: The Birth of John Luke; 1:57–80

No new names from previous lessons

Lesson 5: An Angel Visits Joseph; Matthew 1:18–25

Immanuel	im MAN you ell
----------	----------------

Lesson 6: The Birth of Jesus; Luke 2:1–20

Caesar	SEE zur
Augustus	aw GUS tus
Quirinius	kwy REN ih us
Syria	SIHR ih uh
Bethlehem	BETH luh hem

Lesson 7: The Presentation of Jesus; Luke 2:22–40

Jerusalem	jeh ROO sah lem
Simeon	SIM ih un
Phanuel	fuh NOO uhl
Asher	ASH err

Lesson 8: The Visit of the Wise Men; Matthew 2

Jeremiah	jer uh MIGH uh
Ramah	RAY muh
Archelaus	ar key LAY us
Nazarene	nazz uh REEN

Lesson 9: The Boy Jesus in the Temple; Luke 2:41–52

No new names from previous lessons

Lesson 10: John Prepares the Way; Matthew 3:1–12

Isaiah	eye ZAY uh
Jordan	JOR dun
Pharisees	FARE uh sees

Bible Words Level 1

New Testament 1—God Sends His Son to Save Us

Lesson 1 The Birth of John Foretold

Repent and believe in the Gospel. Mark 1:15

Lesson 2 The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! Luke 1:28

Lesson 3 Mary Visits Elizabeth

[Mary said,] “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Luke 1:47

Lesson 4 The Birth of John

All the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]. 2 Corinthians 1:20

Lesson 5 An Angel Visits Joseph

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

Lesson 6 The Birth of Jesus

For unto you is born . . . a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11

Lesson 7 The Presentation of Jesus

My eyes have seen Your salvation. Luke 2:30

Lesson 8 The Visit of the Wise Men

We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him. Matthew 2:2

Lesson 9 The Boy Jesus in the Temple

[Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. Luke 2:40

Lesson 10 John Prepares the Way

By His grace we . . . become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:7

Lesson 11 The Baptism of Jesus

Baptism . . . now saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3:21

Lesson 12 The Temptation of Jesus

[Jesus] has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15

Lesson 13 Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. John 6:68

New Testament 1

God Sends His Son to Save Us

Lesson	Title	Date of Use
1	The Birth of John Foretold	_____
2	The Birth of Jesus Foretold	_____
3	Mary Visits Elizabeth	_____
4	The Birth of John	_____
5	An Angel Visits Joseph	_____
6	The Birth of Jesus	_____
7	The Presentation of Jesus	_____
8	The Visit of the Wise Men	_____
9	The Boy Jesus in the Temple	_____
10	John Prepares the Way	_____
11	The Baptism of Jesus	_____
12	The Temptation of Jesus	_____
13	Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael	_____