

Reflect, Resist, Re-imagine

A child comes to us, “What can I do?” We say, “Use your imagination.” Yet we often resist our instincts to re-imagine the church. We reflect and romanticize the good ole’ days and choose to remain rather than re-imagine. How might we awaken our imaginations and live into God’s love?

Focus scripture: Luke 1:26–38

The church from early times has celebrated the births of John the baptizer and Jesus six months apart (June 24 and December 25). These dates are closely tied to the pagan celebrations of the summer and winter solstices. However, the math doesn’t work, so let’s focus on purpose rather than precision. The nature or purpose of the message relayed by the angel is not changed. Gabriel appears to be the bringer of good tidings in the annunciations of these births. This gospel writer reinforces the Davidic dynasty by mentioning the lineage of Joseph and emphasizing a reign that will last forever. We are reminded of what is possible by the power of God and further persuaded by the news of Elizabeth. This text is the pinnacle of re-imagining: re-imagining who God will use; re-imagining how God will come into the world; re-imagining what it means to be a bearer of God.

Luke 1:46b–55 The song of Mary echoes the cries and songs of the Hebrew scriptures. The foretelling of what is to come, of how God is at work in the world. The song is not in the future tense of what is to come but in past and present tenses, reflecting God’s activity in creation right now. This child that is to be born will manifest God’s will for the world that is fleshed out in Mary’s song.

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16 changes the theological understanding of the people of Israel from a God who is reactive to the ebbs and flows of the morality of the people, to a God who is unconditionally present and who participates in the dynastic path of the people. The prophecy of Nathan creates a shift in the trajectory of a tribal people to a

nation-state whose line of succession will be blessed forever. Theologically, this presents an enduring and unconditional love for the people of Israel, and it politically secures the Davidic succession.

Romans 16:25–27 expresses the power of God, who can strengthen through the words of Paul’s witness and testimony of Jesus the Christ. The writer wants us to ensure that everything that has been expressed so far in this letter reflects the very nature of God; one who is powerful, one who is open and accepting of those previously thought to be outsiders, one who projects wisdom and understanding. The writer wants to project the power that God gives to those who have been eternally changed by God in Jesus the Christ, as is made evident in verse 25a. The transformative power of Christ is the focus of verse 25.

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This week’s scripture passages reflect God’s love for the world by highlighting the creative power of God. In 2 Samuel, the people theologically pivot from a God who shows conditional support to a God of unconditional love and abiding; re-imagining the dynamic between the people and God. In the gospel reading, we are challenged by the song of Mary – a song of God’s activity in the world, and a song of resistance. The letter to the Romans invites us to reflect on the transformative nature of the message of Christ which delves us into the re-imagining of who God is, of who God uses, and of who God calls us to be.



Focus scripture Luke 1:26–38

Additional scriptures
2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16
Luke 1:46b–55 or
Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26
Romans 16:25–27

**Love incarnate,
we ask that you
move us beyond
the daydream
of a world that
shows your love
to the reality that
is your love in the
world. Move and
breath within us
until your reality
becomes our
reality. Amen.**

Lection Connection

links current events with this week’s scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Most of the children in this age group are able to look forward to, and vividly imagine, an upcoming special event. Sometimes the anticipation is a very large part of the pleasure and excitement that they experience in a special outing, or visit with a friend, or receiving a long-awaited gift. In this last week before Christmas, the children in your group may be experiencing a kind of emotional roller-coaster ride due to excitement, anticipation, and tiredness from many activities.

This week's session offers children an opportunity to hear a story about Mary and to explore the emotions of anticipation and surprise in the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth. Children will be encouraged to consider how they also can be messengers of the good news of God's gift of love in Jesus. Pray that the children will be filled with the wonder of God's special gift.

Note: Since this is the last Sunday before Christmas, this week's biblical story includes the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2:1–7.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Luke 1:26–38, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 27).
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and *CD player*; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with purple or blue cloth, Bible (with bookmark placed in focus passage), [Advent wreath](#) with Christ candle (see p. 100), and offering basket.
- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Advent Candle Ritual](#)" (p. 100).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[A Baby for Mary](#)."
- ❑ **Bible research group:** print the following scripture verses on slips of paper: Luke 2:15–16, Matthew 2:11.
- ❑ **Story group:** bring a variety of used Christmas cards (with and without a religious theme); cut off the backs.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** used Christmas cards with biblical scenes, small boxes (one for each child), shredded paper, play dough or modelling clay, pipe cleaners, fabric scraps, tissue paper scraps, wooden clothes pegs/clothespins
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** coloured paper, copy of instructions for "Haiku poetry" from resource sheet "[Patterns and Poetry](#)" (p. 102)
- ❑ **Music zone:** small jingle bells, lyrics and recording for "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ **Advent banner:** half a sheet of poster board, Christmas gift wrapping paper, [heart-shaped templates](#) (see p. 102) cut from cardboard
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Folded Stars](#)," strips of paper in two different colours (2.5 x 15 cm/1 x 6 in), yarn or narrow ribbon

Bless

- ❑ Bring lyrics for the song "Invocation" (p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring copies of this week's resource sheet "[The Twelve Days of Christmas](#)."



Reflect, Resist, Re-imagine

Scripture

Luke 1:26–38

FOCUS To hear the angel's message about God's special gift for the world

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Explain that this is the last Sunday in the Season of Advent, the last Sunday before the birth of Jesus.

Opening ritual

Advent ritual Invite children to gather in the worship space. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Advent Candle Ritual](#)" (p. 100) and invite

four volunteers to lead the group in the ritual for the fourth Sunday of Advent.

Song If possible, sing "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering and extinguish the Advent candles to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to talk about times when they have had something surprising happen to them.

■ **In what ways can surprises make you feel happy and excited?**

■ **When can surprises feel a bit scary?**

Explain that in today's Bible story something very surprising happened to Mary, who would become Jesus' mother.

Engage

Prepare for the Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Luke. Explain that the gospel of Luke is in the last section of the Bible called the New Testament. This part of the Bible tells us about the life of Jesus and the followers of Jesus.

The Bible story

Explain that in today's story from Luke's gospel many people were waiting and hoping and praying for God to bring peace and healing to the world. Mary was one of those people and God answered her prayers in a very surprising way. Tell the story from the resource sheet "[A Baby for Mary](#)," based on **Luke 1:26–38** and **2:1–7**. After the story, use the following questions to wonder about the story:

■ **I wonder what Mary thought when the angel appeared in her house?**

■ **I wonder what Mary thought would happen next?**

■ **I wonder what Mary said to God after Gabriel left?**

Explore the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Bible research group The children in this group will have an opportunity to discover some more information about Jesus from the gospels of Luke and Matthew. Distribute the slips of paper with the scripture verses and have the children look up these verses in their Bibles to find out who the first visitors to baby Jesus were and what his first

gifts were. Have them look again at **Luke 1:26–38** and see how many other names or titles for Jesus are listed in these verses.

Story group This group will explore the stories of Christmas told in Christmas cards. Gather around the images from used Christmas cards and invite the children to select a card each that they think tells something about Jesus’ birth or about something else that is part of the whole Christmas story.

Reporting Invite each group to report on their discoveries.

The Bible story and us

Jesus was God’s special gift to the world and would share God’s love with everyone. Invite children to think about what they can do to share love in the world.

- **With whom would you like to share God’s love? What would you do?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- ❑ **Art zone: Nativity scene** A crèche offers a tangible way or useful prop for retelling the nativity story. Distribute the materials and invite children to use these to create their own nativity scenes. Encourage them to use these to share the story of Jesus’ birth with friends and family.

- ❑ **Quiet zone: Poetry** The angel told Mary that she would have a special baby. Invite children to condense this week’s Bible reading into short poems that tell the story of the angel’s visit to Mary. Provide instructions for writing [Haiku poetry](#) (from p. 102). Consider sharing these poems in a display for the rest of the congregation or posting them in the “Prayer and Poem” gallery in the Action Zone of the website.



- ❑ **Music zone: Christmas songs** Celebrating the birth of Jesus always includes music. Distribute copies of lyrics to those who can read and invite children to learn the song “Celebrate Emmanuel” by listening to the recording. Provide bells for the children to accompany their singing. Explain that “Emmanuel” means



“God with us.” Talk together about the meaning of the phrases “lift our voices” and “God has come, with us dwells.” Invite children to sing other Christmas songs that they know, such as “Away in a Manger.”

- ❑ **Advent zone: Advent banner** Invite children to add a fourth and final “panel” to the banner created over the last three weeks. This week, distribute heart templates and have them cut heart shapes from the gift paper and write on these shapes some ways in which they can share God’s love in the world. Print the following phrase in the middle of the poster: “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Have children glue their heart shapes around the verse. Display all four panels in the church hall for the Christmas season.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Christmas cards** Invite children to share the joy of Jesus’ birth by making cards using the materials provided. Help them to write messages such as, Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, or Jesus is Born! on their cards, which can be given to family members or distributed through a pastoral care team.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the four Advent candles (hope, peace, joy, and love). Since this week's story included the birth of Jesus, light the Christ candle in the middle of the Advent wreath. Invite children to name ways they can share love during the Christmas season.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Celebrate Emmanuel" as a reminder that God is always with us.

Pray As a closing prayer, invite two volunteers to alternate in reading the lyrics for verses 2–5, and then read in unison verse 6 of the song "Invocation."

Blessing Send each child out saying, "(Name), go out to share God's love in the world."

Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[The Twelve Days of Christmas](#)" to help in family celebrations during this season.

Reflect

In what ways did the children express their understanding about the visit of the angel? Pray for the children in your group during the next two weeks, as they celebrate Christmas with their families and move into a new calendar year.



A Baby for Mary

(based on Luke 1:26–38 and 2:1–7)

When the story quickly moves some months ahead, pause and stress the sentence or phrase that connects the two stories.

Many years after the people of Israel had returned to Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, but still many, many years ago, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town called Nazareth. A girl named Mary lived there. She was engaged to marry Joseph, who was a carpenter in Nazareth.

The angel Gabriel suddenly appeared before Mary. Before she knew what was happening, Gabriel said, “Hello, Mary. God is with you.”

What is going on, thought Mary. Who is this stranger?

Gabriel saw that Mary was startled. He said, “Do not be afraid. God has seen that you are good and faithful. So, you will have a baby son. You will name your baby “Jesus.” Your child will be great and will be called the Child of the Most High. God will set your child Jesus on the throne of King David to reign forever.”

“But how can I have a baby?” Mary asked. “I am not yet married to Joseph.”

“Yours will be a special baby, Mary,” said Gabriel. “Your child will be holy and will be called the Child of God. Don’t worry. Nothing is impossible for God.”

Mary smiled and murmured, “A child, the child of God.” Then she looked at Gabriel. “Here I am, faithful to God. Let all this happen as you say.”

In a flash, the angel Gabriel was gone.

Days and months went by. Mary and Joseph were married. When it was almost time for the baby to be born, they had to go to Bethlehem, a long, hard journey, to be registered by the Roman government. Many other people had to go to Bethlehem too. When Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem, they could not find a place to sleep. Finally, someone offered the stable where the animals stayed.

That night the baby was born and they named the baby Jesus, just as the angel Gabriel had said.



Folded Stars

For each star:

1. Use four strips of paper (two of each colour).
2. Fold a strip of one colour in half lengthwise; fold a strip of the second colour in half lengthwise around the middle of the first strip (*see illustration #1*).
3. Fold another strip of the first colour in half lengthwise over the ends of the strip of the second colour (*see illustration #2*).
4. Fold another strip of the second colour in half lengthwise and weave it around and through the other strips. (*see illustration #3*).
5. Trim the ends of each strip in a V-shape (*see illustration #4*).
6. Lightly glue the ends together with a glue stick or a drop of white glue.
7. Thread a length of yarn or narrow ribbon through one of the folds as a hanger.

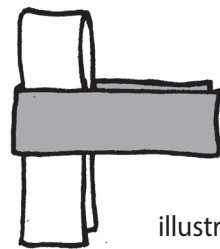


illustration #1

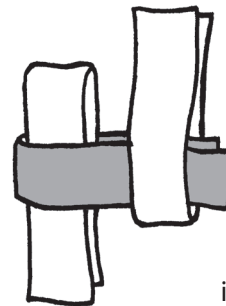


illustration #2

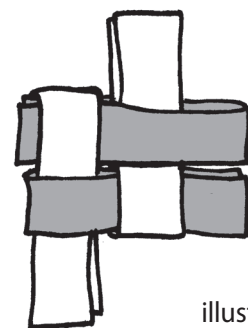


illustration #3

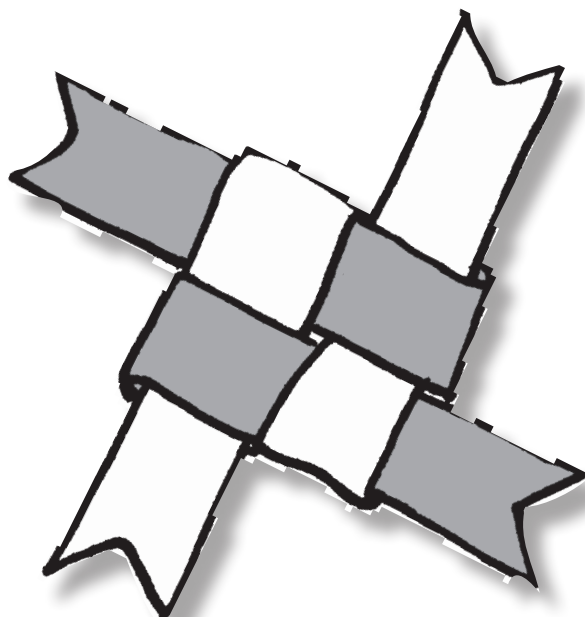


illustration #4



The Twelve Days of Christmas

Read these ideas with your family and choose some to do during the Twelve Days of Christmas.

December 25 <i>Gifts</i> Don't unwrap all the Christmas gifts at one time. Spread the gift opening throughout the Twelve Days of Christmas, then set aside some unused toys for children who need them.	December 31 <i>Have a spur-of-the-moment party</i> Ask everyone to bring a food or beverage to share. Play games. Sing Christmas carols. Exchange inexpensive funny gifts.
December 26 <i>The Light of Christ</i> Etch a symbol for Christ on a big white candle. Light this Christ candle each day as a reminder that we continue to celebrate "Emmanuel – God with us."	January 1 <i>Nature walk</i> Whatever your weather, spend some time outside together. Look for signs of God.
December 27 <i>Christmas carolling</i> Gather family and friends for an evening of carolling on your street and in your community.	January 2 <i>Give of your time</i> Invite another family's young children to spend the afternoon with you. Entertain them with craft projects and games.
December 28 <i>Christmas productions</i> View videotapes or watch the television schedule for special Christmas shows to view together.	January 3 <i>Other traditions</i> Use the library in your community or the internet to find out about Christmas traditions in other places. Try a new tradition this year.
December 29 <i>Give the gift of yourselves</i> Visit relatives, friends, and church members who may be house-bound, lonely, or grieving during this holiday time.	January 4 <i>Continue the music!</i> Begin or end a meal together by singing a Christmas carol. Listen to Christmas CDs and tapes during all twelve days.
December 30 <i>Christmas stories</i> Get books of Christmas stories from the library and read them aloud together.	January 5 <i>Twelfth Night party.</i> Invite friends and relatives to help you plan an "end of Christmas celebration." Research medieval Twelfth Night festivities. Celebrate the last day of Christmas as you did the first, with joy and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Christ child.

Advent Candle Ritual

Making an Advent wreath

Materials: real or artificial evergreen branches, or green garland; five candle holders; four blue candles, or three purple candles and one pink candle; one white candle

1. Form the branches or garland into a circle (symbolizing God's love which never ends).
2. Place the four coloured candles in a circle evenly spaced around the wreath.
3. Place the white candle (Christ candle) in the middle.



First Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: Today is the first Sunday of Advent.

Reader 2: We light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Light the first blue or purple candle.

Reader 3: We wait in hope and longing for Jesus' birth.

Second Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: We light the first candle again, the candle of hope.

Light the first blue or purple candle.

Reader 2: Today is the second Sunday of Advent and we light the second candle, the candle of peace.

Light the second blue or purple candle.

Reader 3: We wait in hope and longing for Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Third Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: We light the first two candles again, for hope and peace.

Light two blue or purple candles.

Reader 2: Today is the third Sunday of Advent and we light a candle for joy.

Light the third blue or the pink candle.

Reader 3: We wait in hope and longing to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: We light the first two candles, for hope and peace.

Light two blue or purple candles.

Reader 2: We light the third candle again, for joy.

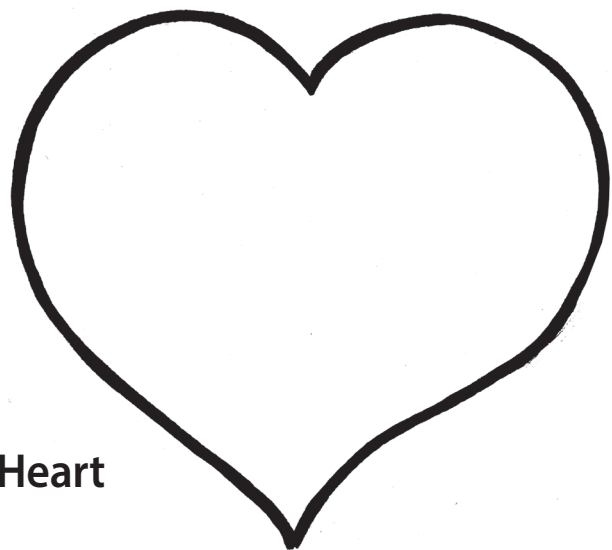
Light the third blue or the pink candle.

Reader 3: Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and we light the last Advent candle, for love.

Light the fourth blue or purple candle.

Reader 4: We wait in hope and joy as we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ child.

Patterns and Poetry

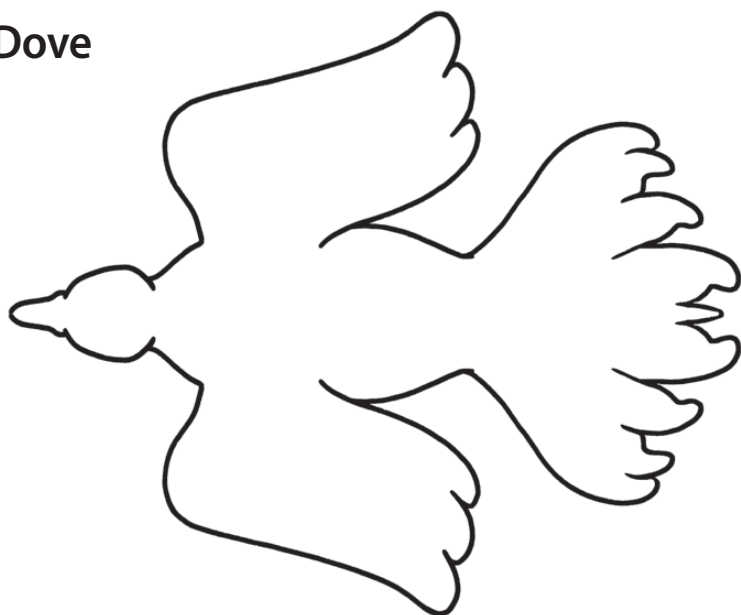


Heart



Star

Dove



Fish



Haiku poems

Haiku poetry is a type of Japanese poetry that has three lines, written in this pattern:

Line 1 – five syllables

Line 2 – seven syllables

Line 3 – five syllables

Example:

Love, Peace, Hope, and Joy

Advent candles bring new light

Helping us to wait

