

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 3–5

As Christmas draws closer, children have experienced the build up of excitement during the past few weeks. For many children, this is a joyful and busy time with their families – attending school concerts for older siblings, going shopping with parents, helping to make and wrap gifts. Yet for some this may also be a difficult time of the year; they may be over-stimulated some days, or they may find it hard to be happy because of the absence of someone important to them. Very young children may find it hard to understand the story of a birth that happened so long ago.

Our task as leaders will be to help children celebrate the nativity story while offering a calming space that will include all children, no matter how they are feeling. A strong theme this week is one of God's love and presence, "God with us." The session offers an opportunity for leaders to affirm God's presence in the lives of the children in the group. This is an awesome mystery for both young and old. Pray that the children may experience wonder and love as they celebrate the joy of Jesus' birth.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Luke 1:26–38, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 21).
- ☐ Bring items for worship area: purple or blue cloth, the Advent wreath from last week, offering basket, Bible with a bookmark placed in the gospel of Luke.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)" (p. 76) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Bring poster board of stars and construction paper stars (see resource sheet "[Patterns](#)," p. 80), one for each child and extras for visitors.
- ☐ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ☐ Bring resource sheet "[Welcome, Baby Jesus](#)" and a variety of bells (one for each child).

- ☐ Make copies of resource sheet "[Story Strips](#)"; cut strips apart and glue each set to form a long strip.

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ☐ **Story booklets:** construction paper (cut into strips and tape together to form a long strip)
- ☐ **Ornaments:** Nativity scenes cut from used Christmas cards, used CDs, strong adhesive tape, ribbon, glitter
- ☐ **Sock doll:** small plain coloured socks, elastic bands, quilt stuffing, circles of light brown coloured felt (use fine-tipped marker to draw facial features of sleeping child); review instructions on resource sheet "[Advent Resources](#)," p. 77).

Bless

- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ☐ Bring "Mary, Joseph, and baby" figure from [Storytelling Poster 2](#).



Reflect, Resist, Re-imagine

Scripture

Luke 1:26–38

FOCUS To celebrate the joy of Jesus' birth

Gather

Welcome children by name and invite them to talk about some of the things that make them feel happy.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship table. Invite a child to help spread the blue or purple cloth and place the Bible on the table. Explain that we can read stories about God's love in the Bible. Receive the offering.

Advent wreath Point out the Advent candles for hope, peace, and joy. Invite a child to "light" the last candle by gently pulling up the yellow tissue inside the fourth candle. This candle is a reminder that God never stops loving us.

Pray Dear God,
we are happy to be here with you.
Thank you for your love.
Amen.

Poster ritual Distribute more construction paper stars and use a glue stick to help children add these around the edges of the poster board full of stars. Look at all the stars! Explain that the time of waiting for Christmas is almost over.

Sing "We Are Waiting" (on resource sheet [Additional Songs](#), p. 76)

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi everyone! I'm so excited! Christmas is almost here and I'm getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

Leader: What are you doing to get ready, Priscilla?

Priscilla: So many things! I've been decorating our tree and I've been helping my mother bake some treats, and... I can't even remember all the things I have done.

Leader: Children, what are you and your families doing to get ready for Christmas? (*Provide time for answers.*)

Priscilla: It seems like everyone has been getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

Leader: Today we're going to hear a story about when Jesus was born. You can hear the story with us, Priscilla.

☐ **Getting ready** Explain that Christmas Day is next Thursday. Count together the days until then: "1...2..." Invite children to talk about some of the things that they and their families are doing to get ready for Christmas. Explain that at Christmas we celebrate Jesus' birthday and today we're going to hear a story about that day.

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Luke. Mention that Luke was a storyteller who wanted people to know the good news of Jesus. Distribute the prepared story strips (see "Prepare") and review the instructions on the resource sheet "[Welcome, Baby Jesus](#)" for participating in the story. Read the story, ringing a bell in between each section.

After the story

Activity Distribute jingle bells and invite children to ring them as they learn the following song. Encourage them to move around as they sing and ring their bells.

Sing "Ring the Bells" (on resource sheet [Additional Songs](#), p. 76)

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

☐ **Story booklets** Invite children to prepare their own storybooks of Jesus' birth by glueing their story strips onto prepared lengths of construction paper and colouring the figures. Help children to fold along the line between each image, with the title page on top. Encourage them to share the story at home.



☐ **Ornaments** Invite children to create Nativity ornaments as reminders of God's gift of love in baby Jesus. Provide Nativity scenes cut from used Christmas cards to glue onto the shiny sides of used CDs. Use rolls of tape to stick

together the labelled sides of pairs of CDs, with a taped loop of ribbon at the top as a hanger. Help children to add a layer of glitter along the edges of the CD if desired.

☐ **Sock doll** A baby doll can help children celebrate the wonder and joy of the Christmas story. Give a sock to each child to stuff with filling. Help them glue on face circles and use elastic bands to fold their socks to make a baby doll (see p. 71 for instructions). Invite children to decorate the dolls with markers and encourage them to use the dolls to share the news of Jesus' birth with their families.

Bless

Gather around the worship table. Place the figure of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus (from the [Storytelling Poster 2](#)) in the middle of the group and invite the children to remember the story of Jesus' birth that they heard today. Invite them to celebrate the story by ringing their bells again as they say, "It's time to celebrate!"

Sing or listen to, if possible, "Celebrate Emmanuel" (p. 6 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #10 *Seasons Music* CD, Vol. 7) and encourage children to ring their bells again.

Pray Thank you, God,
for Christmas and your special gift of love.
Help us to look for it every day. Amen.

Send each child out with the words "(child's name), you are a gift of love to the world."

Reflect

How might you continue to affirm that the children are special gifts of love? (**Planning ahead:** keep the Advent wreath for next week, when the Christ Candle will be lit.)





Story Tip

This story might be told with the children sitting around a table so they have a hard surface when decorating the stars.

Welcome, Baby Jesus

(based on Luke 1:26–38 and Luke 2:1–20)

(Hand out a story strip to each child. Children decorate the star on the first picture and then listen to that part of the story. Each time you ring a bell, the children decorate the star on the next picture and listen to the next part of the story. Invite children to repeat the italicized words or sound after each section of the story.)



This story is called “Welcome, Baby Jesus!” It was written by a man named Luke. *Welcome, baby Jesus!*



One day God sent an angel with a message to Mary. “Mary, you are going to be a mother. You will name the baby, Jesus.” Joseph was surprised. And then Joseph said, “I will look after you, Mary. We will take care of this baby together.” *Thank you, God.*



But before the baby was born, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. They had to go to be counted with all the other people. Mary sat on a donkey’s back and Joseph led the way. It was a long way to Bethlehem. They must travel on dusty roads. They must travel under the hot sun. *Clippity clop, clippity clop, clippity clop*



Finally they arrived in Bethlehem. There were people everywhere. Where would they find a place to stay? What would they do if their baby came? They had so many questions and they were very worried. They must find a place to sleep. *Knock, knock, knock*



And then they found something. It wasn’t fancy. It wasn’t even a room in a house. But it was warm and safe. And there was a lot of hay nearby so they could make a bed for themselves and their little baby who soon would be born. Mary and Joseph huddled together. They looked out at the bright moon. They were reminded of God’s love. They closed their eyes. They hoped for some sleep. *zzzz-zzzzz-zzzzz*



But sleep wasn’t to come. It was time for Mary and Joseph’s baby to be born. It was time for God’s promise to come true. *Welcome, baby Jesus!*



Not far away, up in the hills, some shepherds were watching their sheep. Then an angel came with a message. The angel said, “I have good news for you. This news will make everyone happy. Today a special leader has been born. You will find the baby sleeping on a bed of hay.” And then more and more angels appeared. The sky was filled with happy songs! *mmm, mmm* – (Hum a familiar Christmas song.)



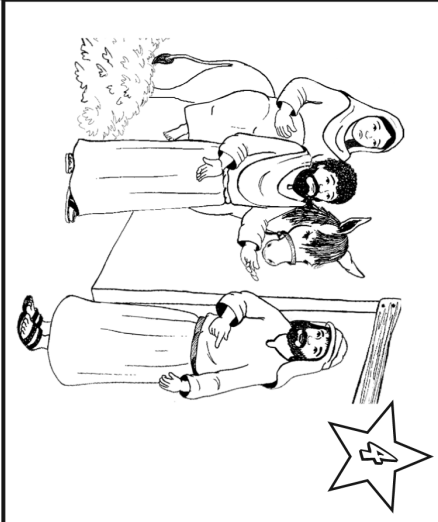
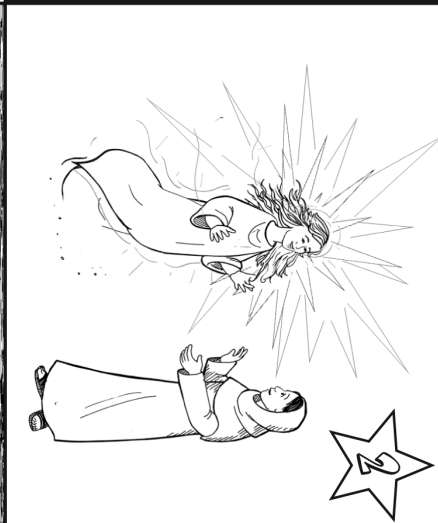
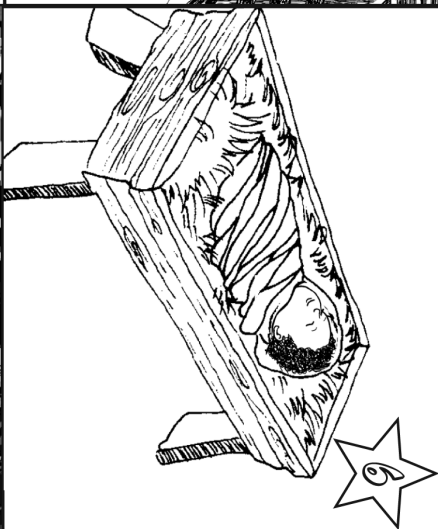
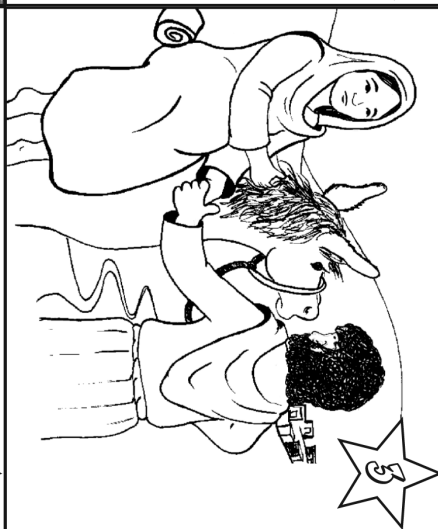
The shepherds hurried down the hillside. They found Mary and Joseph. Little baby Jesus was lying in a manger, just as the angels had said. The shepherds knelt down and welcomed the baby. And then they thanked God for this wonderful night and all God’s love. *Thank you, God.*



And Mary and Joseph? They, too, thanked God for this special baby. They thanked God for each other. And as they prayed, they felt God’s love inside them and all around them. They knew it was a special time! *Whisper: Thank you, God.*



Story Strips

 1	 2	Welcome, Baby Jesus 1
 3	 4	 5
 6	 7	 8
Tape or glue to back of panel 7		Tape or glue to back of panel 4

Additional Songs

We Are Waiting

(tune: "Frère Jacques" or "Are You Sleeping?")

We are waiting, we are waiting,
every day, every day,
to celebrate a birthday,
to celebrate a birthday,
Jesus' birth! Jesus' birth!

Ring the Bells

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Ring, ring, ring the bells.
Ring the bells today.
Jesus comes to share God's love.
Ring the bells today.

God Is With Us

(tune: "Frère Jacques" or "Are You Sleeping?")

God is with us, God is with us,
all the time, all the time,
comforting and loving,
comforting and loving,
Thank you, God. Thank you, God.

If You're Happy and You Know It

The musical notation is written on a single staff in 4/4 time. It includes four lines of music with lyrics and actions. Chords F, C7, Bb, and F are indicated above the staff. The lyrics are: "If you're hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers. If you're hap - py and you know it, then your face will sure - ly show it. If you're hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers." The actions are: "clap your hands", "stamp your feet", "snap your fingers", and "clap your hands", "stamp your feet", "snap your fingers".

Other verses:

If you're sad and you know it, cry boo hoo.
If you're tired and you know it, give a yawn.
If you're angry and you know it, stamp your foot.
If you're excited and you know it, give a jump.
If you're loving and you know it, throw a kiss.

God Loves Us

(tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")

We are all God's family. (Open arms wide.)
Look around and you will see.
(Shade eyes with one hand and look around.)
God loves you and God loves me.
(Place hands over heart.)
We are all God's family. (Open arms wide.)
Look around and you will know.
(Shade eyes with one hand and look around.)
God's love helps us all to grow.
(Bring arms up and hold hands above head.)

We Will Follow Jesus

(tune: "The Bear Went Over the Mountain")

We will follow Jesus
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Je-sus
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Je-sus
and do what Jesus did.



Advent Resources

Advent Wreaths

Traditionally, the Advent wreath is a circle of evergreens, the round shape symbolizing the unending love of God and the evergreens symbolizing the hope for eternal life shared by all God's people. There are four coloured candles (either four blue or three purple and one pink), which represent the four weeks of Advent, and one white candle in the middle. The lighting of an Advent candle each week marks the growing excitement and anticipation of Jesus' birth and the white Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Wreath #1

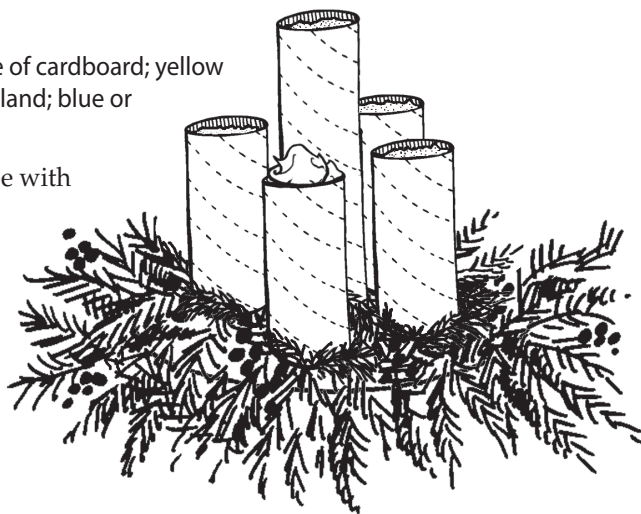
Materials: 15 cm/6 in Styrofoam circle; 4 small paper rolls or tubes; 1 paper towel roll cut down so it is slightly taller than the other tubes; yellow tissue paper; blue or purple paint; pink and white paint, greens (fresh, artificial or paper); gold glitter; low temperature glue; diluted white glue

Paint four tubes blue, or three purple and one tube pink, and the paper towel tube white. Press the paper towel tube into the middle of the Styrofoam circle. Position the four other tubes around the larger tube. (Push enough to put markings in the circle.) Remove the tubes and then use a low temperature glue to secure them in the Styrofoam. Cut yellow tissue paper into squares, brush them lightly with glue and sprinkle them with gold glitter. When dry, place the tissue paper inside the "candles" to be pulled up by the children. Decorate the base with artificial or fresh greens.

Wreath #2

Materials: 5 small paper rolls or tubes; 30 cm/12 in circle of cardboard; yellow and orange tissue paper; 60 cm/2 ft piece of artificial garland; blue or purple, pink, white and green paper; hot glue

Cover three tubes with blue or purple paper, one tube with pink and one with white. Cover the cardboard circle green. Cut slits around the bottom of each tube, about 1/2 in. up, and hot-glue onto the green base so that the "candles" stand up. Glue artificial garland around the base. Gently insert several squares of orange and yellow tissue paper into each "candle." (Twist the squares together first so they will stay together.) Each week a child can reach into the tube and pull up a flame.



Sock Doll (baby Jesus)

(Dec 20)

- Fill a small sock with stuffing almost to the top.
- Secure a rubber band around the top of the sock (illus. #1).
- Cut out a 5 cm/2 in circle from felt and draw a simple baby face on it with a fine-line permanent marker.
- Glue felt face below the rubber band (illus. #2).
- Fold top of sock down to make a cap (illus. #3).



Illus. #1



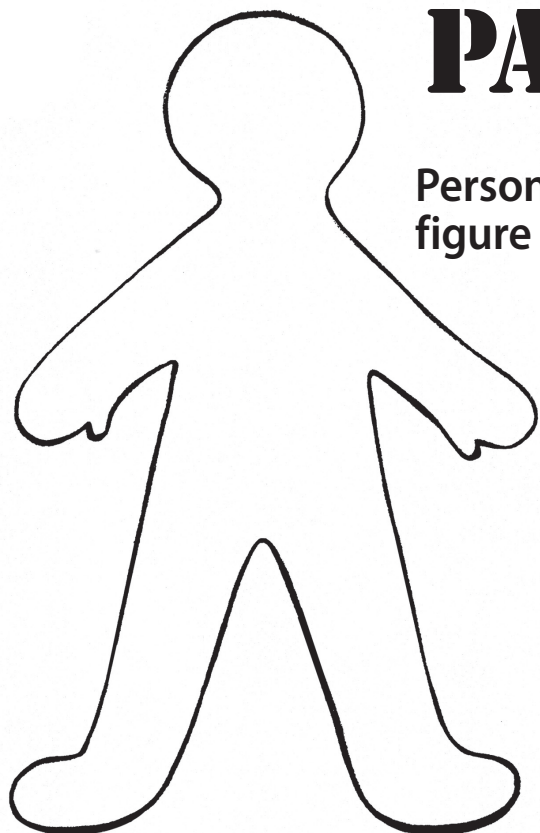
Illus. #2



Illus. #3



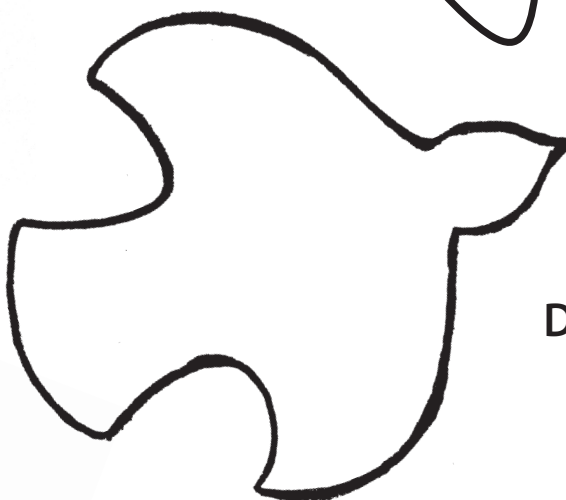
PATTERNS



Person
figure



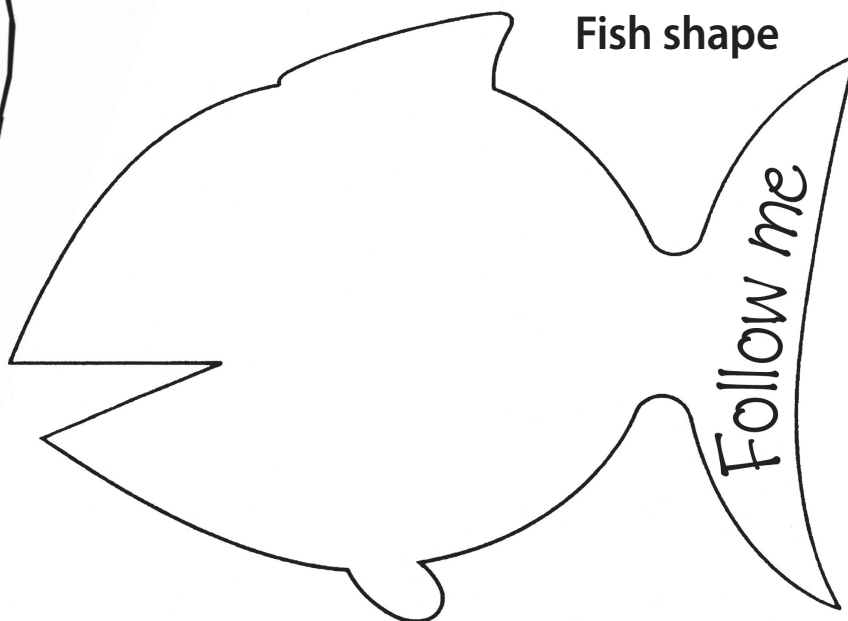
Star shape



Dove shape



Footprint shape



Fish shape

