

## WE CELEBRATE GOD'S PLAN

All Activity Sheets

### KEY WORDS

INCARNATION FORERUNNER

### BIBLICAL REFERENCE

Luke 1:5-25, 57-70, 76-77 and John 1:6-9

### LESSON OBJECTIVE

To help preadolescents understand the ministry of John the Baptist, who prepared the people to receive the Savior; and also prepare to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of Jesus

### MEMORY VERSE

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NIV\*).

### PREPARE YOURSELF TO TEACH

Christmas is a time of various activities for most elementary school children. Many are involved in numerous programs and parties, church activities, and traditional Christmas celebrations with their families.

For them, simply being with the whole family represents a lot of time and effort. It is also true that the secular aspects of the Christmas celebration would seem to be the most fun for most. What child does not like to have fun, receive gifts and have lots of free time?

What we can do throughout this unit is to help them focus their attention on the wonderful story of Christ's birth and the person of Jesus. Our goal is not necessarily for preadolescents to forget Santa Claus (Father Christmas) and everything that story represents, but we can try to change the strong secular focus of celebrating Christmas.

Each of the next lessons is intended to help the preadolescents better understand and thank God for all that he gave us on that first Christmas.

Pray a lot this month for each session. Ask God to help you so that children can celebrate the birth of Jesus with its real meaning,

and receive him as their Savior and Lord.

A final thought: if the preadolescents seem more distracted or behave worse than usual, understand that it has to do with the date and be patient.

## **BIBLICAL COMMENTARY**

For most of us, Christmas is a time of intense preparation: gifts, elaborate meals, special programs, and festive social events. We Christians call the time before Christmas as the “time of Advent,” which means that it is “arriving” or “coming.” During the time of Advent we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of the Savior. For many this implies fasting, prayer, and thinking about our lives.

However, preparation for Christmas does not begin with us. Christ’s coming was the result of God’s plan, devised before the creation of the world, and carefully carried out step by step through hundreds of years. Through Abraham, God formed a family that became the nation in which the Savior would be born. Through the prophets, God spoke about the coming of a Messiah and the task he would carry out. Finally, as the time of Jesus’ birth was approaching, God sent a messenger that would help people prepare for the salvation God offered them. This “preparer” was John the Baptist.

John’s parents had a pious marriage, both from priestly families. While they were imperfect human beings, the use of the descriptive phrase “righteous in the sight of God” indicates that their hearts were right and focused on God.

At that time in Judaism, there were a number of priests who took turns serving in the temple. The priests were organized into 24 groups of about 1,000 each. At the time of this story, Zechariah’s group was in service, and he had been chosen to light the incense in the holy place. For most priests, that was an opportunity that occurred once in a lifetime. We can be sure that the apparent coincidence in the selection of Zechariah at that particular time did not happen by chance, but was a part of God’s plan.

After his initial fear at seeing the angel, Zechariah calmed down as the angel told him that God had answered his prayers. It is very likely that Zechariah had prayed both for the arrival of the Messiah and for the arrival of a son. In that culture, not being able to have children was a disgrace, and was often regarded as a sign of God’s disapproval. The birth of a child would remove that stigma.

The name John means: “The Lord is full of grace.” And truly his birth was a gift of grace to Zechariah and Elizabeth. In addition, part of John’s task as a forerunner would be to let the people know that God had not forgotten them, and that by grace he would send the Savior that was promised long ago.

John’s role was very similar to that of the Old Testament prophets, particularly that of the prophet Elijah. We tend to think of the prophets only as those who predicted future events. However, an important aspect of their ministries was preparing the people for something new that God would do for them. The prophets tried to help people get away from their sin and return to God. That’s what John would do in preparing the Jews for the arrival of Jesus.

While they did not worship idols as in the time of Elijah, for many people at this time the worship of God was more of a ritual than a reality. John would denounce their sins, and help them become aware of their need for a Savior. Then he would guide them to respond with regret and repentance.

Zechariah’s first response to the angel’s message was one of disbelief. But by the time when John was born, he was able to grasp the meaning of that event, and referred to Isaiah’s prophecy about a forerunner (40:3-5) by applying it to his son.

God’s preparation for the first time of advent was almost complete. Soon, the Savior and his forerunner would be born.

## **INTRODUCE THE LESSON**

### **Prepare for Christmas**

Have one student search for and read the definition of “forerunner” in the regular dictionary, while another searches for and reads it in a Bible dictionary. Hand out Student Activity Sheet #414-A. Read the instructions to the students and have them answer the questions. We’ll learn more about this today.

## **TEACH THE LESSON**

### **Preparing**

Pass out Student Activity Sheet #414-B (Preparing for the first Christmas). It contains the list of the Scripture references. Depending on the size of your group, assign each of the following passages of Scripture to a student, pair of students, or smaller groups: Luke 1:5-17; Luke 1:18-25; Luke 1:57-66; Luke 1:67-70 and 76-77; John 1:6-9.

Allow time for them to read their passage, and then rewrite their passage in their own words, giving it a title. Then come back into the large group and ask them to comment on what they wrote.

## CONNECT THE LESSON

### The first Christmas

When finished with the Bible lesson, distribute Student Activity Sheet #414-C. Instruct the students to look up the verses and write the answers to the questions on the blanks to find a hidden name.

Ask the students to seriously consider what they personally will do to prepare for Christmas this year. If possible, divide them into small groups and discuss what they think about this and take note of their ideas, and then apply them to their families. Then have them form one group again, and ask a volunteer from each smaller group to report to the whole group.

## PRACTICE THE MEMORY VERSE

[Download Additional Memory Verse Activities PDF](#)

[Download Suggestions for Bible Memorization PDF](#)

### Billboard / Mural: "Christmas Stars"

You'll need: poster or lining paper, poster board, silver or aluminum paper, glue, markers, adhesive tape. Before or during this session, prepare 34 paper stars with the students, and write on each of them one of the words of the unit verse (including the reference in the last star). If you want you can make a star larger than the rest, and place it in one of the corners of the mural.

Have the preadolescents help you assemble the billboard of this unit so that you can memorize the verse together. Provide them with poster paper of dark blue color, with which they can cover the billboard, as a sky. (They could also paste it on one of the walls of the room). Bring two or three samples of the stars you made. Provide silver sheets on which they can mark the outline of the stars and cut them out (or make stars on poster board or cardboard and cover them with aluminum foil). Ask the students to make 34 stars, one for each word of the verse. (If you do not want to make so many stars, divide the verse and write short phrases on each star.) Then, they can paste the stars on the billboard, with the text correctly arranged. Put a title on the billboard.

Say: "A special star guided the wise men toward the newborn Jesus. These stars will help us learn and remember a special truth about the Lord. This truth is the key idea for this unit."

Help students pay attention to the words of the memory verse. Say the biblical passage together, and repeat it several times.

Give the students Student Activity Sheet #414-D (What will you do now?) and ask them to take it home to discuss with their families and friends.

## WRAP-UP

### Pray

Thank God for preparing that first Christmas so carefully. Ask the Lord to help each child think about Jesus while making preparations for this Christmas.

### Encourage

Encourage students to think about Jesus while making their Christmas preparations.

### Invite

Invite students to attend the next session and tell them something interesting about it. Remind them to welcome visitors.