

# THE ADVENT STORY

## BIBLE STUDIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, FOCUSING ON DIFFERENT CHARACTERS FROM THE ADVENT STORY

This collection of nine Bible studies takes us on a journey, meeting those people who feature in the events around the birth of Jesus. Each one has been written for children and young people to use independently or as part of a group, offering an opportunity to explore these encounters with God in ways that are meaningful and accessible for them.

Leaders may want to support children and young people to engage with the Bible passages by helping them to navigate their way around the Gospels. Those who are unfamiliar with the Bible may value learning how to find chapters and verses from the abbreviated references given.

There is a variety of ways to engage with the short studies: as part of a virtual gathering online with others or individually beforehand. These studies could be peer-led by different members of the group, with plenty of space to share thoughts, wonder together, ask questions and pray. They could also be shared with households and families to reflect on together at a time that suits them.

Each study contains a Bible verse, reflection, question and prayer. There is a single overarching Advent prayer to be said alongside each Bible study as follows:

Holy God, you spoke and called different people, with different gifts, to be a part of the Christmas story. In the darkness of winter, we pray, speak, and listen to you God, waiting for when the light of Jesus will shine out on Christmas Day. May we be gifts to you and to others, as you call us to be.

Amen.

## 1. Isaiah

### Read Isaiah 9:1-6

“For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”  
Isaiah 9:6

### Reflection

In the Bible, prophets were people who drew close to God, and who heard from God about aspects of daily life. They often spoke about the future, sometimes as a warning, sometimes blessing. In this case, Isaiah is speaking about the coming of a Messiah, and Christians believe that he was referring to Jesus. It is important that we start our Advent journey with this voice – long before Jesus was born people were proclaiming the news of his arrival!

### Question

Are there prophets today? How do we hear from God? Where do we need a proclamation of God’s love now?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called Isaiah, who used his gifts to tell others about Jesus. Thank you for those who teach us about Jesus and guide us in our faith journey. God, we listen to you as you call us to tell others about Jesus. Amen.

## 2. Mary - Mother of Jesus

### Read Luke 1:26-36

“Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”

Luke 1:38

### Reflection

Mary wasn't rich, she didn't live in a palace or have any servants. When she was a child she lived in Nazareth, which was not considered a great place to live. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” someone once asked. The sudden appearance of the angel must have frightened her. Why her? Had she done something wrong?

Some people think angels have wings, yet in the Bible they can look just like humans. Abraham entertained angels and gave them a meal without realising who they were. Mary seems to immediately recognise Gabriel as being an angel. She believes what he says. She will have a child who is holy and will be called the Son of God. Amazing and scary, but Mary was prepared to do it.

### Question

Why do you think Mary believed the angel? Would you?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called Mary, the mother of Jesus, who cared for and nurtured Jesus. Thank you for those who look after us. We thank you especially for key workers and volunteers. God, we listen to you as you call us to care for others. Amen.

### **3. Elizabeth**

**Read Luke 1:13-15, 1:24-25, 1:41-45**

“After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion.”

Luke 1:24

#### **Reflection**

Elizabeth was probably Mary’s aunt. She was much older than Mary and was perhaps considered to be too old to have children and had given up hope of having any children of her own. In those days, not being able to have a child was seen as a sign that God was angry or displeased.

When Elizabeth found out she was pregnant, she kept herself isolated for five months. Mary visited her when she discovered she was also pregnant; Elizabeth was excited and felt blessed that Mary had come to visit her, for she knew she was carrying God’s Son.

Elizabeth later gave birth to a baby boy – John the Baptist.

#### **Questions**

How might Elizabeth have felt that she was chosen for this special task by God? What might it have been like for Elizabeth to be on her own for five months before having her baby?

#### **Prayer**

Loving God, you called Elizabeth, and her story reminds us that you have a plan for us, even if we don’t always understand it. Thank you that you know us and have known us for the whole of our lives, and are with us on our life journeys. God, we listen to you as you call us to live by your plans, not our own. Amen.

## 4. Zechariah

### Read Luke 1:5-25

“But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

Luke 1:20

### Reflection

When you think of Advent and Christmas, Zechariah is maybe not the first person you'd necessarily think of. Zechariah was a priest, and the husband of Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist. Like Mary and Joseph, they were both visited by the Angel Gabriel, who told them that, despite Elizabeth being unable to have children, they were going to have a baby.

Zechariah was so shocked by this news that he didn't believe it, so as a consequence he wasn't able to talk until the baby was born! Zechariah had heard from God, via the angel, but struggled to believe what he had heard, because of his age.

### Question

Sometimes what we hear from God is uncomfortable or can feel challenging or unbelievable. I wonder if you have heard from God and how that made you feel?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called Zechariah, who was forgiven after he doubted you. Thank you God, that you forgive us when we do things wrong, and that other people forgive us when we hurt them. God, we listen to you as you call us to say sorry if we do something wrong and to forgive others who hurt us.  
Amen.

## 5. Angel Gabriel

**Read Luke 1: 6-11 and Luke 1:26-38**

“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.’”

Luke 1: 30

### Reflection

Throughout the Christmas story, the Angel Gabriel was the main messenger who brought messages to various people from God. He was often greeted with trepidation and fear, and often his first words to people were “Do not be afraid”. He was a proclaimer of peace and joy, and news that changed people’s lives. He appeared to Joseph to tell him not to leave Mary but support her, and he could therefore be an agent of reconciliation as well as change. He helped explain the will of God to God’s people. Gabriel reminds us that God listens to and cares for God’s people.

### Question

Where can we be messengers of hope, peace and reconciliation in the world today? What would help us to do this?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called Angel Gabriel, who guided others to do God’s work. Thank you for sending people who are like messengers and guide us. We listen to you as you call us to be a guide for others and to be guided by others too. Amen.

## 6. Joseph

### Read Matthew 1:18-25

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.’”

Matthew 1: 20

### Reflection

When we read the Christmas story in the Bible, we often focus on Mary, Jesus’ mother. But it would be fair to say that Mary would not have been able to fulfil God’s wish if it weren’t for the loyalty and kindness of hardworking Joseph the carpenter.

As Mary and Joseph were not married, there may been some issues with their families as they were having a baby. More importantly, Joseph could have been angry that he was not the baby’s dad – he might not have believed Mary when she said God was the father, but he did.

Joseph remained very loyal and nurtured Mary through her pregnancy, remembering what he'd been told in his dream. He taught Jesus his trade as a carpenter, loving and guiding him as best he could throughout Jesus' earthly life.

### Question

I wonder why God chose Joseph to be Jesus’ earthly father? How do you think God chooses us to do things for him?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called Joseph, who listened to you and supported his family, even when it wasn’t easy. Thank you for those who support us, like teachers, our youth leaders, and our ministers. God, help us to listen to you as you call us to follow you, even when it is difficult, and find ways to support others.  
Amen.

## 7. Wise Men

### Read Matthew 2:9-12

“They saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.”

Matthew 2:11

### Reflection

The wise men are familiar to us all: colourful, confident characters, playing a key role in our Christmas Nativity plays. However, putting aside robes and crowns for a moment, let’s dig a bit deeper. Perhaps we can discover more about these characters that may help us to see them in a different light.

Firstly, they weren’t actually kings; we don’t know how many of them there were, and they didn’t visit the stable, arriving at a much later date. However, whilst they weren’t kings, they were *wise*, studying philosophy and the stars. They were committed to searching for the Messiah, overcoming many obstacles on their long journey.

They were *obedient* to God, following His call. Not knowing their final destination, or having detailed directions, they walked by faith.

They were *adoring*, being the first worshippers of the Messiah and the first people to give gifts.

### Question

What can we learn today from the wise men?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called the Wise Men, who gave their gifts to Jesus. Thank you for the generous gifts you give us. God, we listen to you as you call us to use our gifts for Jesus.

Amen.

## 8. Shepherds

### Read Luke 2:8-20

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Luke 2:20

### Reflection

The shepherds heard from God when an angel suddenly appeared in the night sky, bringing the good news that Jesus had been born. Loads of other angels joined in the party. Imagine what that must have been like!

The shepherds could have heard the message, enjoyed the light show and then gone back to their sheep, but they didn't. They just knew they had to go and see what had happened – so they did! They saw Jesus! And listening to their hearts they just knew he was the Son of God.

Once the shepherds had heard and seen the good news they were so excited they had to tell everyone. They talked about Jesus with all those they met, praising God for all that had happened.

### Question

What good news about Jesus have you heard and how will you share it this Christmas?

### Prayer

Loving God, you called the Shepherds, who were ordinary people but who were sent to find Jesus. Thank you that we can all find Jesus, just as we are, without being special. God, we listen to you as you call us to find Jesus. Amen.

## 9. King Herod

### Read Matthew 2:1-12

“Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’”

Matthew 2:8

### Reflection

King Herod did not behave well. He was quite willing to trick the wise men into telling him where the Messiah was born once they found him, so he could kill Jesus. Joseph, Mary and Jesus had to flee to Egypt to a place of safety until King Herod died.

King Herod was old and ill when he met the wise men. He knew people plotted to take his throne. He was possibly frightened for his life.

### Question

King Herod made some bad choices. How easy do you find it to make good choices? How might God help us to do what is right?

### Prayer

Loving God, you showed us Herod, who did bad things. Help us to make good choices and to say sorry when we do not. God, we listen to you as you call us to make choices in how we live our lives.

Amen.

*This resource has been written by Debbie Andrew, Lydia Harrison, Claire Knight, Hayley Liversidge, Charlotte Mckernan and Gail Adcock. Prayers were contributed by Phoebe Parkin, Youth President 2020/21.*