

Angels Visit

Lesson At-a-Glance

Scripture Reference
Matthew 1:18-25

Lesson Focus
**God is at work in unexpected places
in surprising ways.**

Bible Memory Verse
**"She will bear a son, and you are to
name him Jesus, for he will save his
people from their sins." Matthew
1:21**

Gather (10 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Arrival Activity Kids will look for a secret message.	Spark Activity Pages, Spark Coloring Pages	Sticky notes, marker, colored pencils
Circle Time Kids will be introduced to the lesson.	Spark Song CD, Spark Songbook	Music source, picture in standing frame
Opening Prayer Kids will learn Pope Francis's "Five-Finger Prayer."	None	None

Open the Bible (15 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Angels Visit Story Kids will think about what happened before Jesus was born from a different perspective.	Spark Story Bibles Spark NRSV Bible	None
Scrambled Dreams! Kids will unscramble the angel's message to Joseph.	Leaflets	Pencils

Activate Faith (15 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Imagining Joseph Kids will finish a picture of Joseph, imagining what he might have looked like.	Leaflets, Spark Bible Stickers	Pencils, colored pencils
Bad Dream or Message from God? Kids will determine what might be a message from God.	None	None

Send (5 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Closing Conversation Kids will review the lesson and check out Faith on the Go! options.	Leaflets	None
Closing Prayer Kids will pray for something for Christmas that isn't a thing.	Spark Family Pages	None

Bible Background

The words spoken through the prophet Isaiah returned generations later when, once again, God sent a sign. It was an unexpected turn of events. The Hebrews were again living under oppression, occupied by the Romans. They prayed for a leader like King David to overthrow their oppressors and lead their country to greatness again. Instead, an angel announced the birth of a child. Though the significance of this child was signaled by his unusual conception and the presence of an angel as God's messenger in Joseph's dream, he would enter the world in a remarkably humble way.

Why This Story Matters

The events around Jesus' birth are well known, even to many kids. But if the familiarity is peeled back, kids will be surprised at what a shocking story it really is. An ordinary young woman is chosen for an incredible role. An ordinary man accepts and believes a most suspicious story. Kids might feel they can only be part of God's work in the world when they are older, but this story reminds us that God has surprised us before and, no doubt, will do so again.

Gather (10 minutes)

Arrival Activity

If some kids arrive earlier than others and you need a lesson-based activity, make copies of the Activity Page and Coloring Page and set them out for kids to try.

Prior to kids' arrival, write out a message on sticky notes, one word per sticky note. Use the Bible Memory Verse or any message you want. Stick the notes around your space so kids can find them with moderate effort. Be sure to jot down what your message is in case you forget and count how many sticky notes are waiting to be located.

As kids begin to arrive, instruct them that there is a message hidden in the room. As they find the sticky notes, invite them to stick them to a table where everyone can see. After all the sticky notes are found, challenge kids to order them and decipher the message.

Spark Resources

Spark Activity Pages
Spark Coloring Pages

Supplies

Sticky notes
Marker
Colored pencils

Circle Time

Bring a self-standing frame of any size containing a picture, a painting, or a scene from a magazine. Set it down in front of kids and point to it. **What do you see here?** Invite kids to explain what they see. **Easy question, right? Okay, here's a more challenging question: What don't you see?** They can't see what's going on behind the image, beside it, above it, and so on.

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook

Supplies

Music source

Today we're going to hear the first part of a story that may be very familiar to you. But let's see if we can look at the events leading up to the birth of baby Jesus from the perspective of what might have been going on around it to understand how surprising it must have been to all those involved.

MUSIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Song 1: "This Little Light of Mine" (tracks 16 and 33 on Spark Song CD, page 90 in Spark Songbook)

Song 2: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"—enjoy this traditional Advent and Christmas song. When listening to this song, consider dimming the lights and inviting kids to imagine hoping for a light to shine in the darkness.

Opening Prayer

For our opening prayer, we're going to learn a simple prayer taught by Pope Francis. It's called The Five-Finger Prayer. Hold up one hand and put your opposite pointer finger on each of the fingers that I name. As I state what to pray for, you can pray for those things silently.

Spark Resources
None

Supplies
None

Point to thumb: **We pray for those closest to us: our families, neighbors, and friends.** (pause)

Point to pointer finger: **We pray for those who teach us: our teachers, pastors, and elders.** (pause)

Point to middle finger: **We pray for leaders and all who govern and make decisions that affect others.** (pause)

Point to ring finger: **We pray for those who are weak, ill, or struggling in any way.** (pause)

Point to pinky finger: **We pray for ourselves.** (pause)
Amen.

Open the Bible (15 minutes)

Angels Visit Story

Invite kids with Spark NRSV Bibles to each find and sit with a buddy with a Spark Story Bible.

Spark Resources
Spark NRSV Bibles
Spark Story Bibles

Today we're going to hear a story that you've probably heard before, but we're going to hear it from a little different perspective. In the Bible, there are four books that tell about Jesus' life: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Those are the four Gospels. The story of Jesus' birth only appears in two of the Gospels: Matthew and Luke. Look on page 1058 of the Spark NRSV Bible. Can someone

Supplies
None

tell me what the orange title at verse 18 says? (*"The Birth of Jesus the Messiah"*)
But here's a funny thing: there's not actually anything in here about Jesus' birth!

Have you ever heard a woman talk about having a baby? Listen to kids' reflections. **When women talk about giving birth to babies, there might be accounts of labor pains and pushing for hours and interesting things that happened while getting to the hospital.** If you know an interesting story about your birth or the birth of someone in your family, consider sharing it now. **When we read this account of Jesus' birth and the events leading up to it, it makes me wonder if anyone asked Mary, Jesus' mother, what it was like!**

Let's read this version and see whose perspective it gives. Invite one or two kids who like to read to do so for the group.

What do you think of when you think of Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' birth? Answers might include the angel Gabriel visiting Mary, Joseph and Mary's trek to Bethlehem, no room in the inn, the manger, shepherds and their flocks, angels, and so on. **Who is the focus of this version?** (*Joseph*) **What do you think he thought when an angel told him in a dream that Mary was expecting a baby that God was sending?** Challenge kids to understand how very surprising this news would have been. **Do you think you would have believed it, or would you have wondered if it was just a dream? It would be natural to ignore it! Do you like surprises?** Good surprises can be fun! **This was a really unusual thing that God was doing, and it was being done through some unusually average people. Joseph and Mary would probably feel afraid and confused, and would be wondering, "Why me?"**

Now, please get with your buddy. Younger buddies, if you could open your Bible to page 196, then show your older buddy where to start reading.

Bible Memory Verse

"She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

Let's look at the Bible Memory Verse for today! Check it out in your leaflet and see if you can learn it this way:

Older buddy: "She will bear a son..."

Younger buddy: "And you are to name him Jesus..."

Older buddy: "For he will save his people from their sins."

Younger buddy: "Matthew 1:21"

Allow buddies to practice their portions of the verse several times and take turns, too. **Find the Bible Memory Verse in the Spark NRSV Bible and place an "I Memorized It" sticker next to the verse.**

Spark Resources
Spark NRSV Bible
Spark Bible Stickers
Leaflets

Supplies
None

Scrambled Dreams!

Have you ever woken up from a dream, but then you suddenly couldn't remember what it was about? What if that happened to Joseph when the angel spoke God's message to him? Let's help Joseph unscramble the message in his brain.

The answer to the leaflet activity is:

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid. Mary will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus.

Invite kids to read and discuss the Bible Bits together.

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Pencils

Activate Faith (15 minutes)

Imagining Joseph

In the Bible, there are just a few mentions of Joseph, Jesus' earthly dad. We know a few things about him: he was a Jewish carpenter, and he was a descendent of the great King David. We don't know what he looked like or much about his personality. How do you imagine him? On the back of your leaflets, there's a start to a drawing of his face. Working with your buddy, sketch what you imagine Joseph to look like.

Ask for volunteers to read the Did You Know? items aloud. Invite kids to place a sticker or special marking next to the item they find most interesting.

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Pencils
Colored pencils
Stickers

Bad Dream or Message from God?

In the story today, who was God's messenger? (*The angel.*) In the Bible, God often speaks to people through their dreams. Do you think God still speaks to us that way today? Sure! So, here's a question for you: How do you know when God is speaking to you, especially if the message is something really surprising like what Mary and Joseph heard? If you have a dream that has clearly conveyed a message, how do you know if it is from God, or if it is just a side effect of eating too much jalapeño pizza before bed?

God gave us minds to think things through. Your frontal lobes are still growing, but you're off to a good start at being able to reason. So let's stand up. I'm going to give you a sample message. There's an imaginary line in our room. If you think the message I say could be from God, go to this side. Point to your left. **If you think there's no way that God would send you that message, go to this side.** Point to your right. **If you think "maybe" or "it depends," go somewhere in the middle. A "probably" would go in the middle left. A "probably not" would go in the middle right. There's not necessarily a correct answer, but we will**

Spark Resources
None

Supplies
None

try to determine if a message could be from God by what we know about God, especially from what is in the Bible. Say each sentence and give kids time to move. You might also discuss why they stand where they do.

Give money to everyone who asks you for money.

It's best to wear name-brand clothing.

Everyone needs to have a pet animal.

Love your neighbor.

You should only help someone with their homework if a teacher tells you it's okay.

Spend as much time on electronics as possible.

Care for outsiders or strangers.

It's okay to be mean to someone if they've been mean to you.

Buying stuff will make you truly happy.

If you have extra time, invite kids to offer some messages to decide if they could be from God.

Send (5 minutes)

Closing Conversation

Today's story was pretty good, wasn't it? We got to think about how the news of Mary's pregnancy affected not just Mary, but Joseph too. God must have thought Joseph was a pretty decent guy to give him Jesus to raise! Joseph was wise to listen to the message he received in his dream and to be there for Mary.

Let's check out the Faith on the Go! section in your leaflets. Which ones do you want to try this week?

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
None

Closing Prayer

Distribute Spark Family Pages to kids and point out the Eye Spark section. Did a parent keep a baby item or do they have a baby blanket? Recruit it into use!

For our closing prayer, I'd like to go around the circle and have you pray for one thing you'd like to ask for this Christmas. The only rule is that it can't be an object—not a toy, not an electronic device, not a new car. Please ask God for something that Santa can't bring: patience, wisdom, friendship, or something else that can't be wrapped up.

Let's pray:

Dear God, for the first Christmas, you gave Joseph the gift of a heavenly message, patience, and wisdom. This Christmas, we ask for the following gifts... (go around the circle). **Amen.**

Spark Resources
Spark Family Pages

Supplies
None

As you say goodbye to kids, make sure they take home their leaflets and Family Pages.