**Light it Up**

**Zechariah and Elizabeth**

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**BIG IDEA: God is gracious, so we can find joy in the gift of His Son.**

**BIBLE BASIS: Luke 1:5-25**

**KEY VERSE: “The LORD is gracious, kind and tender. He is slow to get angry and full of love.” Psalm 145:8 (NIrV)**



**7–15 minutes**

**30–40 minutes**

**7–15 minutes**

**15–25 minutes**

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**LEADER DEVOTIONAL**

When God is about to do extraordinary things, He sometimes sends extraordinary messengers to give the heads up. Yes, I’m talking about angels. Sometimes, the plans that God has are so extraordinary that He chooses to communicate them through extraordinary means. Such is the case in the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. God chose to bless this older couple with the child they had always wanted. But not just any child. This son of theirs, John the Baptist, prepared the way for Jesus—the long-awaited Messiah.

When I read stories like this I sometimes think, “Geez… Why can’t God give me directions as plainly as this? Where was the fiery angel when I was deciding where to go to college?” But then I quickly realize that my choice of colleges was probably a little less than “angel worthy.” Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit, through a variety of means, never fails to give me the direction that I need at the very time that I truly need it. So what exactly are those means?

**Scripture:** Scripture should be home base when it comes to our decision making and everything should be measured against it. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said it best. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)

**Other People:** Sometimes God nudges another person to tell us something true that we need to hear. “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.” (Proverbs 12:15 NIV)

**Circumstances:** God sometimes speaks through our circumstances. God can take away or present options and opportunities to help steer us in the right direction. “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV)

**Prayer:** Prayer is a two-way conversation. When we pray, God orients us. He can guide our hearts and minds so that we understand the things he wants us to understand.

If you ever feel alone in your decision making, remember that God is more than interested in your life and the direction that it takes. But He may not use an angel to loudly proclaim His almighty purpose for your life. Rather, His direction for you is more likely to come through the quiet study of His Word, the wise counsel of a friend, the opening or closing of doors, and the daily conversations with the Wonderful Counselor Himself.

*John Garrison*

GO! Contributor

**LARGE GROUP SKILL BUILDING**

***The Basics of Blocking: Using Levels***

In our last “Skill Building,” we talked about “The Basics of Blocking: Movement, Planting and Stillness.” “Blocking” is a drama term that refers to how you move and position your body while acting or teaching. Good blocking is like visual candy for kids — it pulls them deeper into your message. Poor blocking, on the other hand, can put your kids to sleep. One of the most effective ways to employ blocking to your advantage is to use a variety of levels (the highs and lows of your space). In fact, at the moment you change levels, you’ll probably notice an increase in the kids’ attention. From high to low, here are some different levels you can use along with the message they convey:

**Elevated level:** If you stand on a chair, a ladder, or some other tall, stable object, you’ll be towering over the kids. This is the most dominant level, and it’s great when you want to have an overbearing presence. Are you speaking as if you were Goliath or an angry king? Place yourself high above the kids to help them feel the overwhelming power of the situation.

**Standing level:** This is your baseline level — the one you’ll use most often. People often address kids from a standing position, so it’s one they’re very familiar with and it doesn’t necessarily convey either dominance or intimacy.

**Seated level:** This level is beginning to put you closer to the kids and therefore is a more relaxed and comfortable level. It’s a good level to be at when you want to share something from the heart. This might be a great level to use while sharing a personal story, depending on the nature and energy of the story.

**Kneeling level:** Kneeling puts you almost at eye-level with the kids and is therefore the most personal and intimate of the levels. You might employ this level near the end of a lesson when you’re sharing the truth about Jesus’ immense love for them. If you get on your knees, and speak softly and slowly, the kids will eat up every word you say!

**UNIT DESCRIPTION**

There are so many things to love about Christmas — the music, the presents, the decorations, the bad sweaters, and crazy uncle Sal dressed as Santa! And to top it all off, there are the twinkling lights. Christmas is sometimes referred to as the season of light. Not just because of the colorful lights you see hanging on houses and trees, but because we celebrate the birth of Jesus — the Light of the World. During “Light it Up,” kids will get clues about the contents of a present. At the flip of a switch, the present will light up, magically revealing its contents and shedding light on the amazing story of Jesus’ birth.

**SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS**

* Find 4 boxes that have at least one side that is larger than an 8½ x 11 piece of paper.
* In each box, cut a rectangle out of one side that is just slightly smaller than an 8½ x 11 piece of paper. (Approximately 8” x 10.½”)
* Wrap the boxes in Christmas wrapping paper, but leave the 8” x 10 ½” hole uncovered. Consider putting a bow on top of each box.
* Print out the 4 black and white “Story Pictures” on 8½ x 11 paper. Each picture will be on a separate piece of paper. (See Resource Folder.) Tape one of the 4 pieces of paper over each open hole with the picture facing inward so that it’s not visible from the outside of the present.
* Place a small light inside each of the boxes. There are different ways to do this. The easiest way is to place a balled-up strand of white Christmas lights inside of the box. Make sure the plug comes out from the back of the box (opposite the hole.)
* Place all 4 boxes in order on a table in the teaching area. Put a power strip on the floor near the back of the table. Be sure the plug for each of the 4 lights can reach the power strip.
* When the box is lit up, the light will shine through the white portions of the paper, but not the black. This will reveal the picture to the kids.
* Tip: Save the boxes from week to week. Simply remove the old pictures and apply the new ones.
* Print the 4 “Clue Cards” on 8½ x 11 paper and cut apart. See Resource Folder. Fold each of the cards in half so that the clues are hidden from sight. Place each card on top of the appropriate present (ex. Card #1 on Present #1.)
* Optional: Create a cool Christmas light display in the teaching area or throughout the room.
* Print out the seven “Big Bible Story Review Signs” (see Resource Folder) and tape them randomly in different spots around the room so that they’re visible from the audience.
* Place a flashlight in the teaching area. Check to make sure the batteries are working.
* Put several bad Christmas gifts inside of a present or stocking. Some suggestions include: a dirty sock or a pair of underwear, an old banana peel, a video game case with no game inside. Feel free to include your own funny bad gifts instead. Place the present or stocking in the teaching area.
* Choose which of the Reflect and Respond stations you would like to make available. Set out the appropriate materials for each of those stations.



**CG: “Light it Up” title graphic**

**Sound: Play upbeat music as kids move to large group area**

**Video: Play “Light It Up” Intro Video**

**LIGHT IT UP INTRO**

**Large Group Leader:** Hello everybody! *(Kids respond.)* Can you believe it? It’s almost here! Christmas is coming! Does anyone know how many days are left until Christmas? *(Call on kid for answer.)* Whoa — that is really soon! What do you still need to do to be totally ready for Christmas? *(Take answers. Kids will most likely say things like wrap presents or decorate tree.)* Wow — I love those things about Christmas! I love the food, I love the music, I love the presents, but I *really* love the lights. *(Tell the kids about an extraordinary Christmas light display you saw or helped create.)*

Optional: Create a cool Christmas light display in the teaching area or throughout the room. Lead the kids in a countdown, then have them yell, “Light it Up!” Turn the lights on.

Did you know that sometimes Christmas is called the “Season of Light”? It’s true! And it’s not just because of the colorful lights you see hanging on houses and trees. It’s because Jesus is known as the “Light of the World” and during Christmas time, we celebrate His birth. Light is what destroys the darkness and when Jesus was born, it’s like He destroyed the darkness of sin. For the next four weeks, during the “Light it Up” series, we’re going to shed some light on the amazing story of Jesus’ birth.

**BIG BIBLE STORY REVIEW**

Before we get to that, though, let’s think back to the very beginning of the Big Bible Story. I’m going to call out a picture. If you can find it somewhere in the room, raise your hand. *(Hold up flashlight.)* I’ll give you this flashlight and you can light it up! Let’s get started. Can you find the picture of…?

**Lights:** **DIM the room lights (if possible)**

Ahead of time, tape the Big Bible Story review pictures in various locations around the room. Call out the pictures in order. Choose a kid to shine the flashlight on the picture. After each picture is found, give the brief summary of that portion of the story from below.

* **The Earth.** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth.
* **Adam and Eve.** Everything was perfect until Adam and Eve disobeyed God and brought sin into the world.
* **Abraham.** God promised to give Abraham and his family a special land. He also promised that his family, known as the Israelites, would one day give birth to the Savior who would defeat sin.
* **Moses:** After escaping slavery in Egypt, Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness and into a land that God had promised them—a land called the Promised Land.
* **King Solomon:** King Solomon began as the wise leader of Israel, but he eventually led Israel into worshipping fake gods. Because of his sin, the nation of Israel was torn into two.
* **The Prophets:** God sent prophets to help turn the people of Israel back to Him, but the Israelites wouldn’t listen. So God allowed for Jerusalem to be destroyed and the Israelites were kicked out of the Promised Land.
* **Nehemiah:** After many years, God used Nehemiah to help the Israelites return to the Promised Land and fix the walls of Jerusalem.

**CG: “Big Bible Story” graphic**

**THE BIG BIBLE STORY— ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH**

After the Israelites returned to the land of Israel, God did not speak to His people for a *long* time. For four hundred years, God was silent. But then, finally, after all that time, God sent a message to Zechariah, one of his faithful followers. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, loved God with their whole heart and obeyed His commands, but there was a problem. Maybe these clues will shed some light on the problem.

Remove and open the clue card from present #1. Read each of the 3 clues one at a time and allow the kids to guess what’s inside. Following the final clue, have the kids count down from 3 and yell, “Light it Up!” Turn on the light inside the present. When the light hits the paper on the face of the present, it will reveal the picture for the kids to see.

The answer is tears! The Bible says that Zechariah and Elizabeth were sad because Elizabeth was never able to have children. Back then, women were sometimes looked down on if they couldn’t have a baby, so that made Elizabeth feel extra ashamed. On top of that, they were both very old, so having a baby was almost impossible now. Nevertheless, Zechariah wasn’t ready to give up just yet. Let’s shine a light on what he did. *(Read the clues from present #2. Repeat the instructions from above.)* It’s prayer. Zechariah prayed and prayed that Elizabeth would have a baby.

One day, Zechariah was on duty at the temple of God where he worked as a priest. As soon as Zechariah walked inside, he saw something crazy! Let’s see if you can guess what it was — I’ll give you some clues. *(Read the clues from present #3. Repeat the instructions from above.)* It’s an angel! An angel of God named Gabriel appeared to Zechariah. When Zechariah saw him, he was both amazed and terrified. Can you imagine what he must have looked like? Show me what you look like when you’re amazed. *(Look amazed with kids.)* Show me what you look like when you’re terrified. *(Look terrified with kids.)* Now show me what you look like when you’re amazed AND terrified at the same time. *(Try to look both amazed and terrified with the kids.)* Wow — you kids look…um…amaz-ified!

The angel, Gabriel, could see the amaz-ified look on Zechariah’s face, so listen to what he said. *(Open Bible and read Luke 1:13 aloud.)* “But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will have a child. It will be a boy, and you must call him John.’” *(Close Bible.)*

When Gabriel finished talking, Zechariah’s amaz-ified look turned to confusion. *(Look confused.)* Even though he had prayed for this, he couldn’t believe what the angel was saying, so he said, *(speak in old voice with exaggerated disbelief)* “Huh? How could this be? I’m super old and so is my wife!” Zechariah could never have guessed what would come out of his mouth next! Let’s see what it was. *(Read the clues from present #4. Repeat the instructions from above.)*

It’s silence! Zechariah had doubted God’s power to give them a baby. And because of his disbelief, Gabriel made it so that Zechariah couldn’t speak until after John was born. When he opened his mouth, the only thing to come out was… *(mimic like you’re trying to talk, but nothing is coming out)* …silence. When Zechariah’s duty at the temple was over, he returned home and a short time later, just as Gabriel had said, Elizabeth became pregnant with a baby. She was so happy that she shouted for joy! She said, *(exclaim with excitement)* “The Lord has taken away my shame.” Zechariah shouted for joy too. He said, *(silently mouth the words, “This is amazing!”)*

**CG: “Big Bible Story Questions” graphic**

**BIG BIBLE STORY QUESTIONS**

At the end of the Bible story have the kids turn briefly to their small groups or neighbors and discuss the following questions: **For Younger Kids: What was your favorite part of this story? Why? Why do you think Zechariah had a hard time believing what the angel told him? For Older Kids: What does this story teach you about God? Why do you think it was such a big deal that Zechariah didn’t believe what the angel told him?** After a few minutes, draw their attention back to the teaching area.

**CG: “Light it Up” title graphic**

**Video: (Optional) Play “Journey Today Show” video *(requires Premium subscription)***

**GOD IS GRACIOUS**

Pretty cool story, isn’t it! But do you think you can remember it all? *(Kids respond.)* Let’s find out! I’m going to point to the pictures one at a time and you tell me what happened in that part of the story. *(Stand behind each present one at a time and have the kids briefly recount what happened.)* Nice work — you really do remember! Let’s see if you can remember one other thing, though. What did the angel tell Zechariah to name his baby? *(Take answer.)* You got it! The angel said to name the baby “John.” The name “John” has a really cool meaning. It means “God is gracious.” Whoa — fancy-pants word alert! Does anyone know what the word “gracious” means? *(Take answers.)* Great thoughts! The word gracious means “to show kindness.”

**CG: Gracious: *(noun)* to show kindness.**

Do you think “John” was a good name for Zechariah and Elizabeth’s baby? *(Kids respond.)* Yes — it was a *great* name! It was a name that reminded them of how gracious or kind God had been to give them a baby. God could have just ignored Zechariah’s prayers. He could have gotten mad that Zechariah doubted Him and said, “No way buddy — you aren’t getting a baby!” But He didn’t. Instead, God was gracious with Zechariah and slow to get angry with him. That’s what our Bible verse for today talks about. Let’s take a look at it. *(Encourage kids to open their Bibles to Psalm 145:8.* *Be prepared to give younger kids more time and assistance in finding the verse. When ready, choose a kid to read it aloud or read it aloud yourself while the kids follow along.)*

**CG: “The LORD is gracious, kind and tender. He is slow to get angry and full of love.” Psalm 145:8 (NIrV)**

**AN UNDESERVED GIFT**

Because God is gracious and slow to get angry, He gave Zechariah an incredible gift that he didn’t even deserve. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been given a gift you didn’t deserve? *(Kids respond.)* I’ll bet you have. And I’ll bet it’s going to happen again really soon! Let me explain what I’m talking about. *(Hold up a present or a Christmas stocking.)*

Do any of you love getting presents for Christmas? *(Kids respond.)* Of course you do! But what if the gifts you got were the ones that you *really* deserved? Think about all of the times you disobeyed your parents over this past year. Think about how many times you talked back to them or got angry at them. Think about how many times you broke or lost something of theirs. Now imagine if your behavior determined what Christmas gifts you got. They might look something like this:

Pull out bad Christmas gifts from the present or stocking one at a time and react to them. The following are some bad gift ideas: dirty sock or underwear, old banana peel, video game case with no game inside. You can use these suggestions or make up your own fun bad gifts. When finished, consider asking the kids for other bad gift ideas.

Fortunately, your parents don’t give you the gifts you deserve. They give you the gifts you ask for because they’re gracious and they love you. It’s the same way with God. *(Set down present or stocking.)*

*(Take a seat or kneel near kids.)* Think about how many times you’ve messed up and sin against God. Think about how many times you’ve lied, or gossiped, or treated someone unkindly. Because we’re sinners, we don’t deserve any good gifts from God. But over 2,000 years ago, on the very first Christmas, God gave us the best gift ever — the gift of His Son, Jesus. He didn’t give us Jesus because we deserve Him, He gave us Jesus because He is gracious and He loves us. He gave us Jesus so that our sins could be forgiven and we could spend forever with Him in Heaven. That’s the good news of Christmas that brings great joy to everyone who hears it!

Close the Large group time by praying for the kids in whatever way the Holy Spirit prompts you. Following the prayer, explain to the kids which of the Reflect and Respond Stations will be available. Remind them to move about the stations very quietly. Tell them they are free to respond to God in whatever way the Holy Spirit leads them, but if they need suggestions, some of the stations will give them ideas for how to pray, write, or draw. Give each child one “GO! Home” sheet and instruct them to take it with them to the stations. Place small group leaders at the different stations to quietly help the kids. The stations listed below are just the ones that have prompts that are specific to today’s lesson. For more instructions on how the Reflect and Respond Stations work as well as a full list of possible stations, see the “GO! Guide.”

**CG: “Light it Up” title graphic**

**Music: (Optional) Play quiet instrumental music**



**Prayer Station prompt:** Write a prayer to God and thank Him for giving you the gift of Jesus, even though you don’t deserve it.

**Journal Station prompt:** Tell God why you think Jesus is the best gift ever.

**Bible Station prompt:** Read it for yourself: Luke 1:5-25. Draw a picture of the story or write to God about your favorite part of the story. Tell Him why you liked it.

**Art Station prompt:** Draw a picture of yourself holding Jesus — the best gift ever.