

1 Celebrate God's Preparations

December 4, 2016

Unit 1: Move Over, Santa!

BIBLE STUDY

Luke 1:5-25, 57-70, 76-77;

John 1:6-9

"Preparing for the First Christmas"

BIBLE TRUTH

God prepares people to receive the Savior.

LESSON GOALS

To help preteens . . .

- Understand the role of John the Baptist in preparing people to receive the Savior
- Want to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas
- Take steps to prepare themselves for the celebration of Christ's birth

VERSE-A-MONTH CLUB

"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

Access these lessons online at www.sundayteacher.com
Password: incarnation

Reflect on the Word

For most of us, Christmas is a time of intense **preparation**: of gifts, of special foods, of special programs, and of holiday social events. Christians call the period before Christmas "Advent," which means "coming" or "arriving." During Advent we **prepare** our hearts to celebrate the birth of the Savior. This often involves fasting, praying, and reflecting on our lives.

Preparing for Christmas didn't originate with us, however. The birth of Christ was the result of God's plan, formed before the creation of the world, and of careful preparations carried out step-by-step over hundreds of years. Through Abraham, God developed a family, then a nation into which the Savior would be born. Through the prophets, God told of the coming of a Messiah and of His task. Finally, as the time for Jesus' birth drew near, God sent a "forerunner," to help people prepare for the salvation God offered. This "preparer" was John the Baptist.

John's parents were a godly couple, both from priestly families. Though they were imperfect human beings, the use of the term "blamelessly" indicates that their hearts were rightly oriented to God.

At that time in Judaism, there were so many priests that they had to take turns serving at the Temple. The priests were organized into 24 groups of about 1,000 each. At the time of this story, Zechariah's group was on duty, and he was chosen—by casting lots—to burn the incense in the holy place. For most priests, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We can be sure that the seemingly coincidental choice of Zechariah at this particular time was not chance, but part of God's plan and direction.

After calming Zechariah's fears, the angel first told him that God had answered his prayers. It is likely that Zechariah had been praying both for the coming of the Messiah and for a son. In that culture, barrenness was a disgrace, and often considered a sign of God's disfavor. The birth of a son would remove that stigma.

The name John means "The LORD is gracious." John's birth was a gift of grace to Zechariah and Elizabeth. In addition, part of John's task as forerunner would be to let people know that God had not forgotten them, and that He would graciously send the Savior promised so long before.

John's role was to be much like that of the Old Testament prophets—particularly the fiery prophet Elijah. We tend to think of the prophets as only "predictors" of future events. However, a greater aspect of their ministry was to prepare people for something new God would do on their behalf. The prophets tried to help people turn away from sin and turn to God.

This is what John would do to prepare the Jews for Jesus. Though they were not worshiping idols, as in Elijah's time, for many the worship of God was more ritual than reality. John would denounce their sins, thus helping them see their need of a Savior. Then he would lead them to respond with repentance.

Zechariah's first response to the angelic message was disbelief. But by the time John was born he obviously grasped the significance of this event. He referred to Isaiah's prophecy of a forerunner (40:3-5) and applied it to his baby son.

God's preparations for the first Advent were nearly complete. Soon the Savior, and His forerunner, would be born.

We can be sure that the seemingly coincidental choice of Zechariah at this particular time was not chance, but part of God's plan and direction.

Connect with Your Kids

Christmas is a busy—even hectic—time for most preteens. Most are involved in a whirl of school programs and parties, church programs and parties, and family Christmas traditions. For preteens in blended families, just being with family may take much time and effort.

It's also true that the secular aspects of Christmas celebrations are likely the most enjoyable for most preteens. What boy or girl doesn't want to have fun, receive gifts, and have time off from school?

What you can do through this unit is to help preteens expand their focus at Christmas to the wonderful story of the birth of Christ. The goal is not necessarily to get rid of Santa and all he represents, but we can move him to one side in the preteens' thoughts. Each of the next five lessons is designed to help preteens better understand and feel grateful for all that God gave us at the first Christmas.

In the coming month, pray much about each lesson. Ask God to help each preteen to truly celebrate the birth of Jesus, and to welcome Him as his or her Savior and Lord.

A final word: if your preteens seem more distracted or less well behaved than usual, realize that it "goes with the season" and be patient. Many may be overexcited or overtired.



HELPING HAND
Activity-specific teaching tips



30-SECOND SKILLBUILDER
General teacher training tips



Foundational words of the faith



Spiritual formation tips



Important biblical and theological insights

LESSON PLANNER

SEE

HEAR & SAY

SING

DO

SOLVE

READ & WRITE

	Check to Use	Lesson Xpress*	ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITY FOCUS	CURRICULUM RESOURCES	OTHER MATERIALS**
A ATTENTION GETTERS	<input type="checkbox"/>		"Scripture Stars" Bulletin Board —Put up the unit bulletin board.		Resources, Item 1	silver foil, picture of Baby Jesus in a manger, letter patterns, opt.
	<input type="checkbox"/>		Pick a Picture —Play a game to categorize and discuss Christmas symbols.			picture of Santa Claus or Father Christmas, picture of a manger scene
	<input type="checkbox"/>		Forerunner Facts —Discuss the meaning of a forerunner.			
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	Christmas Preparations —Discuss our Christmas preparations and God's.		Connections, p. 1	
B BIBLE EXPLORATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	"Preparing for the First Christmas" —Do a directed Bible study.		Connections, p. 2	
	<input type="checkbox"/>		Speak Up! —Students participate in this fun and interactive Bible story presentation.			
	<input type="checkbox"/>		All About John —Work a puzzle describing John's ministry.		Connections, p. 3	
C CONNECTIONS TO LIFE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	Preparing for This Christmas —Discuss ways preteens can focus on Jesus at Christmas.		Connections, p. 4	CD of quiet Christmas music
	<input type="checkbox"/>		Advent Lighting —Light the first and second Advent candles and have a brief worship time.			Advent wreath from November 27, matches or lighter, hymnbooks, copies of the Advent scripture reading from p. 11.
	<input type="checkbox"/>		Closing —Pray and hand out <i>Passport</i> .		Passport for every preteen	



*Lesson Xpress—If your class time is short, consider choosing these activities.

**In addition to materials listed in this chart, you need Basic Classroom Supplies. See the inside back cover and the activities in this lesson.

ATTENTION GETTERS



HELPING HAND

Here are other options for using the Scripture Stars. If you use one of these, make an extra set of stars to use for the memory activities suggested in this unit.

- Create a mobile by hanging the stars from a dowel. Punch a hole in each star. Tie yarn of varying lengths to the stars and attach to the dowel. Use extra yarn to make a hanger.

- Punch and tie the stars to lengths of yarn as described above. Hang them from the ceiling tiles in your room.



HELPING HAND

Here is an alternate bulletin board idea if you use the Scripture Stars in one of the ways described above. Provide a picture of Santa Claus and several pictures depicting the Bible stories of this unit. Put the caption "Move Over, Santa!" down the middle of the board, somewhat left of center. On the narrower side of the board put the picture of Santa. On the wider side, put the biblical pictures. If desired, put up only one picture this week. In succeeding weeks, put up additional pictures illustrating the Bible stories covered.



Fast Words

FORERUNNER: One who goes ahead of another person, letting people know that the person is coming and giving them time to prepare for him or her. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus.

Choose from these activities to help focus your preteens' attention and prepare them to learn today's Bible Truth.

"Scripture Stars" Bulletin Board

Let preteens help prepare the unit bulletin board as follows:

- Punch out the Scripture Stars from Item 1.
- Cover the bulletin board with dark blue paper.
- Use one Scripture Star to make a pattern. Copy this on silver foil. Make one foil star for each Scripture Star.
- Staple or glue the silver stars to the bulletin board in a pleasing arrangement. Then pin the Scripture Stars, in verse order, to the silver stars. Position the Scripture Stars slightly to the left or right of the silver stars so the silver shows.
- Create a title for the bulletin board. Possible choices could be "A Star Is Born," "Stars for Jesus," "Stars for the Savior," or "Light the Sky for Jesus" (or "the Savior").

- Print the title on a strip of paper or cut out letters for it. Mount these on the bulletin board.

- Attach a picture of Jesus in the manger to the board.

TRANSITION: As students work say, *A special star led the wise men to Baby Jesus. These stars will help you learn and remember a special truth about Jesus. This truth is the key idea for this unit.*

Help students note the words of the *Verse-a-Month Club* verse. When you finish the bulletin board, read the verse together.

Pick a Picture

Before class, tape a picture of a manger scene to one wall and a picture of Santa or Father Christmas to the opposite wall. Place the pictures as far apart as possible, to give students room to walk from one to the other.

In class say, *Hanging on the walls are two pictures that symbolize Christmas in our society. As I read the items on this list, walk to the picture that you associate with each item.*

Read the list below, one item at a time. Pause between each item to give preteens time to walk to the picture of their choice. If you want to make this a fast-paced game, give students five seconds to get to the picture and sit down on the floor before time is up.

Rudolph	Manger	Advent candles	Guiding star
Wise men	Shepherds	Eggnog	Christmas tree
Mistletoe	Tree decorating	Joseph and Mary	Angels

TRANSITION: Say, *The title of the group of lessons we are going to study the next five weeks is "Move Over, Santa!" What comes to your mind when you hear this title? (At Christmas, we have a better symbol than Santa. Jesus reminds us of the true meaning of Christmas—God's plan to save us from sin. We can enjoy the fun that comes with Santa/Father Christmas—but the real symbol of Christmas for Christians is the Baby in the manger.)*

Forerunner Facts

Ask, *Who here has run the longest distance?* Give students a chance to respond. Then say, *Legend has it that in 490 B.C., the army of Athens was under attack and sent for help from the people of Sparta, another Greek city. A professional runner named Pheidippides ran*

You'll need

- Resources, Item 1
- Dark blue construction paper
- Silver foil paper
- Stapler and staples, or glue
- Scissors
- Bulletin board pins
- Picture of Baby Jesus in the manger
- Letter patterns or paper for title, opt.
- Markers, opt.

You'll need

- Picture of Santa or Father Christmas
- Picture of manger scene

145 miles from Athens to Sparta to deliver the message. Then he ran back from Sparta to Athens to tell the Athenians that help was on its way. Pheidippides was what we call a “forerunner.” Let’s take a look at what it means to be a forerunner.

Explain that in ancient times, when a king went to a new place, he would send a special messenger—a forerunner—ahead of him. This messenger would tell the people the king was coming so they could prepare for his arrival. The preparations needed were often extensive: improving the roads, finding places for the king to stay, and providing food for the king and his court.

TRANSITION: Say, *Our Bible study today is about John the Baptist, who is called the “forerunner” of Jesus. Based on what you have just learned, what do you think was the task God gave to John the Baptist? (To prepare people for Jesus.) We will learn more about this today.*

Christmas Preparations

Direct students attention to *Connections*, page 1. Discuss the two questions, one by one. If students don’t have many ideas at this point, don’t worry. This is what they will discover in the Bible study. Here are possible responses.

■ **Ways we get ready for Christmas:** (*Put up a Christmas tree and other decorations, buy and wrap gifts, fix special foods, plan parties, prepare special programs.*)

■ **Ways God prepared for the first Christmas:** (*Created a special nation from Abraham’s family. Jesus was born into this nation. Told the prophets about the coming Savior. Sent angel messengers to tell Joseph and Mary that Jesus was coming. Sent John the Baptist to be Jesus’ forerunner.*)

TRANSITION: See if students can figure out the riddle at the bottom of the page. Then say, *John the Baptist was an important part of the preparation God made for the first Christmas. We’ll learn more about this today.*

- *Connections*, p. 1
- Pens or pencils, opt.



HELPING HAND

Here’s an optional idea for the forerunner activity. Print FORERUNNER on a sheet of colored paper and cut it into several puzzle pieces. On a second sheet of paper in another color print the **Faith Words** definition of forerunner. Cut this sheet into pieces also. Hide all the pieces around the room. Have students hunt for the pieces and assemble the puzzles to discover what a forerunner is.



BIBLE EXPLORATIONS

Choose from these activities to help preteens study the Bible passage.

“Preparing for the First Christmas”

Introduce the Bible study by saying, *God carefully prepared for the first Christmas. Our Bible study today describes an important part of the preparations God made.*

Direct students’ attention to *Connections*, page 2. Assign each passage to a student, pair of students, or small group. Give students time to read their assigned passages, write the key words from the passage and give it a title. Then regroup and have each student or group share their work. To further explain the key words, add the comments below to what the students say.

Group 1: Luke 1:5-17—Angel Announcement. While Zechariah, a godly priest, was offering incense at the Temple, an angel appeared to him with exciting news. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a special son whom they were to name John. From birth, John would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he would help people get right with God. In many ways, he would be like the prophet Elijah.

Group 2: Luke 1:18-25—“I Don’t Believe It!” Since Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, Zechariah found it hard to believe the angel’s message. Gabriel replied, “Because you didn’t believe my message from God, you will not be able to talk until everything takes place as promised.” Sure enough, when Zechariah left the Temple, he could not speak—he could only make signs. Not long after this, though, he and Elizabeth knew for sure that she would have a child.

Group 3: Luke 1:57-66—“It’s a Boy, and His Name Is John.” After Elizabeth gave birth to her baby, neighbors came to rejoice with her and Zechariah. They assumed that the baby would be named Zechariah, after his father. “No,” said Elizabeth. “We’re calling him John.”

- Bibles for all students
- *Connections*, p. 2
- Pens or pencils



HELPING HAND

Christmas Preparations

For more activity, provide a small wrapped gift box filled with small pieces of wrapped candy. Have students stand or sit in a circle. Play a lively Christmas song from *Great Big Praise 2* as students pass the box from person to person. When you stop the music, the one holding the box responds to the question you are discussing. Do this several times for each question, giving every student a chance to respond to at least one question. At the end of the activity, eat the candy!



HELPING HAND

The passage for Group 4 is more difficult to understand and interpret than the others are. If you wish, assign only the passages for Groups 1-3 and 5. When you come to the Group 4 passage, do this as a whole group.



HELPING HAND

Here's another way to present the Bible study. Ask a man and woman to represent Zechariah and Elizabeth and present the Bible story as a dialogue. To prepare, the couple should read the scripture passages, from several translations if possible. Then they should tell the story as they think Zechariah and Elizabeth would have told it to their friends at the time. Encourage them to alternate back and forth in the telling. For example:

Zechariah could describe his experience at the Temple.

Elizabeth could tell what it was like when Zechariah came home speechless but with such exciting news, and how she felt when she realized she really was going to have a baby.

Zechariah could tell how his understanding of what God was doing grew when he knew Elizabeth was going to have a baby.

Elizabeth could recount the discussion with the neighbors about naming the baby.

Zechariah could break in at this point and talk about how he affirmed the name John, and how his speech returned. He could summarize his praises to God.

Following the presentation, have a fun snack for your visitors and preteens. Discuss the final question from the activity "Preparing for the First Christmas."

Everyone was surprised, because this wasn't a family name. So they checked with Zechariah to see what he thought. On a tablet Zechariah wrote, "His name is John." Immediately Zechariah could speak again. His first words were praises to God.

Group 4: Luke 1:67-70, 76-77—Praises and Predictions. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Zechariah praised God for keeping His promises to bring salvation to His people. He spoke of the promises that God had made to King David and the people through the prophets. Zechariah also spoke about the part his son John would play in God's great plan of salvation. John would prepare people for Jesus. He would help them know that Jesus was coming, and he would encourage them to repent of their sins.

Group 5: John 1:6-9—"Witness to the Light." God sent John to do a special task. That task was to witness (tell) people about Jesus, the "light of the world" so they would believe in Him. John was not God's promised Savior, but He was God's witness about the Savior.

Close the Bible study by asking, *Why do you think God prepared so carefully for the coming of His Son into the world? Why have a forerunner? Why not just send Jesus to speak for himself?* (Possible answers: Any important event requires careful preparation. The coming of Jesus was one of the biggest events in history, and an important part of God's plan of salvation.)

Have students look up and read Mark 1:4-5 in unison. Point out that John's ministry was successful in helping at least some of the people repent of their sins. This was the best possible preparation for the coming of Jesus.

Speak Up!

Before class, write the following list on the board.

Key Word	Student Response
Elizabeth	Wow!
Zechariah	I can't talk!
Angel	Hallelujah!
John	Here He comes!

- Chalkboard or dry erase board
- Chalk or dry erase marker

You'll need

In class, tell your students that they are going to actively participate in today's Bible story. Pointing to the board say, *As I read the scripture, listen for these key words. Each time, call out the response words.*

Assign each word to a small group. Or, if your class is small, let the whole group respond to all the words. If it works better for your class, have students stand up and sit down quickly at the mention of each key word, rather than shout.

Read **Luke 1:5-25, 57-70, 76-77**. Allow time for students to respond after each key word.

Following the Bible story ask, *What is the main message of today's story?* (God chose John to prepare the world for the coming Savior.) *Why did God prepare so carefully for the coming of His Son into the world?* (The coming of Jesus was extremely important and required careful preparation.)

All About John

Give students time to complete the acrostic puzzle. It reviews some details from the Bible study, and gives additional information about John's ministry. If time is limited, divide up the questions among students and let them share answers.

Answers: (1) Angel; (2) John; (3) Zechariah; (4) Elizabeth; (5) wilderness; (6) Isaiah; (7) locusts; (8) wild honey; (9) prepare; (10) repent; (11) baptize; (12) heaven; (13) Holy Spirit; (14) water. The acrostic name is JOHN THE BAPTIST.

- Connections, p. 3
- Pens or pencils

You'll need

CONNECTIONS TO LIFE

Choose from these activities to help preteens connect the Bible Truth to life.

Preparing for This Christmas

Direct students' attention to *Connections*, page 4. Guide preteens to brainstorm ways they can prepare themselves to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. List the ideas on a chalkboard, marker board, or newsprint. (Read Christmas stories from the Bible. Listen to religious Christmas songs. Buy a Christmas decoration with spiritual meaning. Read the Christmas story

before opening gifts. Adopt a needy family to help this Christmas. Use an Advent wreath. Find and use a book of Advent devotionals. Reduce spending on gifts for your family and use the money to help others.)

After students have listed several ideas, ask them to seriously consider what *they* will do personally to prepare for Christmas this year. If possible, let students spread out in the classroom to think about this and jot down their ideas on the candles on the *Connections* page. Play quiet Christmas music as they work.

Regroup and provide an opportunity for volunteers to share what they have written down. If they seem reluctant, begin by telling what you are going to do.



- *Connections*, p. 4
- Pens or pencils
- Chalkboard, marker board, or newsprint
- Chalk, dry erase markers, or regular markers
- CD of quiet Christmas music
- CD player

Advent Lighting

Choose a preteen to light the first and second purple candles. Lead the group in this worship experience.

Sing “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” or “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” (first verse only).

Read the Advent Scripture. One group may read the words in lighter print and a second group the words in darker print. Or, you may read the light print sections and all students the dark print sections.



- Advent wreath made on November 27 (see HELPING HAND)
- Purple candles
- Matches or lighter
- Hymnbooks
- Copies of the Advent scripture reading

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God, and the word was God.
 He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life,

And that life was the light of all mankind.

To all who did receive him,

To those who believed in his name,

He gave the right to become children of God.

[All]

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 1:1-4, 12, 14

Share This Advent Thought. *The second week of Advent reminds us of God’s love. He loved us so much that He sent His only Son to earth as a human being to “show and tell” us about that love. Christmas is a special time for us to delight in God’s love and share it with others.*

Lead Preteens in This Response.

This week, we will pause to think about God’s love, and about the sacrifice Jesus made when He joined us on earth as a human being. As God leads us, we will share this great love with those around us.

Closing

Close with prayer, thanking God for preparing so carefully for the first Christmas. Ask God to help each preteen focus on Jesus in his or her Christmas preparations.

Give students their copies of *Passport*. Draw attention to the article, “Give Yourself a Christmas Gift,” which reinforces the theme of this lesson.



- *Passport* for each preteen



HELPING HAND

If students want to work in pairs or small groups for this activity, allow them to do so.

FaithWords

ADVENT: A word that means “coming.”

The four weeks before Christmas in which Christians prepare their hearts for Jesus in various ways, such as praying, fasting, and thinking about their spiritual lives.



HELPING HAND

Advent Lighting

Before class, purchase the materials needed to make an Advent wreath. In the Styrofoam circle cut four holes, evenly spaced, for the purple and pink candles. Duplicate the Advent reading for every student.

In class, show students the materials you brought to make an Advent wreath. Let preteens work together to:

- Put the purple and pink candles into the holes in the Styrofoam circle in this order: purple, purple, pink, purple.
- Insert greenery into the circle, covering it completely.
- Place the white candle in the center of the Advent wreath.



How did your students respond to the activity Preparing for This Christmas? In the brainstorming activity, could they think of ways to focus on Christ and the true meaning of Christmas? Did they make specific commitments to what they would do individually? Were they willing to share those commitments?

This week, pray for each student by name. Ask God to help.