Week 1: “Keep Quiet! Just Listen.”

Objects needed: earplugs, or other forms of ear protection

Theme/Main Idea: Just as Zacharias would have been wise to keep quiet and just listen to the message of the angel, we need to think of ways we can be quiet and listen to God as Christmas draws near.

Presentation:

“Today we start the season of Advent. It is a time we look forward to a celebration of the birth of Jesus. There is a lot of excitement during this season, and with that excitement comes a lot of noise and activity. It can be hard not to get distracted and a little frazzled with all the noise, lights, parties, concerts, family gatherings and school and church activities, right?!

I’ve brought something to share with you today… [take earplugs or ear protection out of your bag or box] What are these? [children respond] What do they do for the person that uses them? [make things quiet, block out noise, help you sleep, etc.]

That’s right! These are ear plugs and they do help to keep noise out. Now let me ask you a trickier question: Do earplugs help us hear better or worse? [children respond]

Most of the time, we’d answer that earplugs make our hearing worse. But, in a season that is so busy and noisy, earplugs… or just taking some time to be quiet and get away from all the noise and activity… just might help us hear someone a little better. Who do you think that someone might be? [children respond] That’s right… God!

In the Bible story for today, Zacharias starts talking when he should have just been listening. The angel delivers a wonderful message, and Zacharias can’t keep his doubts to himself. As a priest, he should know more about God’s wonderful abilities than most folks. But, despite this knowledge in his head, the doubts in his heart creep in and he speaks, questioning the promise of a son that will be a forerunner of God’s own son, Jesus.
Zacharias’ son, John, was going to have the special job of spreading the message of the coming of Jesus to love people and forgive them of all the wrong things they had ever done. The Bible says John was “a voice crying out in the wilderness” preparing the “way of the Lord.”

Now we don’t live in the wilderness. We live here... in the middle of what we call civilization. And with civilization comes a lot more people, more activities, more noise. And, above all that noise, I wonder if we’ll be able to hear that voice calling to us? Will we hear and respond appropriately, preparing our hearts to receive the coming of Jesus that we celebrate this Christmas?

Will you pray with me?

God, help us to find enough quiet in the days ahead that we can prepare our hearts and minds to receive your Son, Jesus. We don’t want to miss your call to us in the midst of all the noise and celebration. Thank you for you love this day and always. In Jesus name. Amen.”

**Key Text:** Luke 1:5–25, An angel appears to the priest Zacharias and tells him that his wife, Elizabeth, will have a baby boy, even though she is long past childbearing age, and that they are to name the baby John. The angel also explains that the baby has been sent by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. The baby grows up to become John the Baptist.
Week 2: “What a Wonder!”

Objects needed: A cell phone/smart phone, computer tablet, iPod, or some other complicated technological ‘gizmo’ that the kids will be familiar with how it operates, but not how it works

Theme/Main Idea: We place our faith in a lot of things each day that we don’t really understand. We might know how to make them work, but not how or why they work the way they do. We buy them and trust them to work as promised. How much more should we trust God, and respond as Mary did… trusting even when she didn’t fully understand how God was going to fulfill his word of promise?

Presentation: Our world is filled with so much wonder, I think we sometimes miss it. What am I talking about? Well, I have a wonder here today that I want to share with you. Are you ready to be amazed?

[take out cell phone, iPod, or whatever gadget you have brought with you]

Isn’t it amazing? Wow! [ Likely the kids will give you looks like this ‘wonder’ of yours is no big deal. ]

What’s the matter? You don’t think this is amazing? You don’t think it is wonderful? How many of you know how to work one of these? Okay, well… a lot of you it seems. But, how many of you know HOW it works? [Let children respond] Hmm… some interesting responses. I know how to use this, charge it, and make it turn on and off, but as to HOW it works… that is a wonder to me.

Today’s Bible story has a lot of wonder in it too. A young lady named Mary hears that she is going to have a baby… but not just any baby, she is going to have GOD’s baby. She correctly wonders at how this could happen, and the angel tells her that God’s Spirit will come upon her and make it happen. Well… does that clear it up for you? Would that have been a very satisfying answer? Yes?
For some of you, I trust that would have been enough. But, for many of us, I think we would want to know more. But Mary’s response is beautiful. She basically says, “God, you are the boss. I trust you and love you. If you say it’s going to happen, I trust that it will all work out.” Amazing!

You see, just like I trust this gadget I brought today to work, Mary trusted God to work. And, I think Mary’s trust rested on a lot better source than my trust that my gadget will always do what it is supposed to. Things break and I can’t fix them... computers, TVs, phones, iPods. God never “breaks” in this way... what he promises, he will do. It doesn’t always look like we think it would. We might wonder a bit at how things will work out. But, ultimately, just like Mary... we can trust in God.

Now that’s something we don’t have to wonder about! Let’s pray:

“God, we are so thankful that you are more dependable than our gadgets—those we understand, and those we look at and marvel. We can do great things and make amazing things with the gifts, skills, and intelligence you gave us, God. But nothing compares to the wonder of your Son coming to live with us, being born to us as a baby in Bethlehem. Prepare our hearts and prepare our church home to welcome all the wonder that you bring. You are truly amazing, God. Amen.”

**Key Text:** Luke 1:26-28. A young woman, pledged to be married to a carpenter named Joseph, is visited by the angel Gabriel who foretells that she will bear a son—Jesus. She wonders how this could happen, considering she is a virgin, but Gabriel tells her that her child will be the Son of God.
Week 3: “Change of Plans”

Objects needed: Ideally, a copy of the children’s book by Margery Cuyler called “That’s Good! That’s Bad!” as well as a magnifying glass and a pair of binoculars.

Theme/Main Idea: Perspective is a funny thing. Sometimes we are so close to something that is happening that we can only see one truth about it... it’s either all good or all bad. But, from God’s perspective, sometimes what seems good or the right thing to do could be bad, and the thing that seems bad might be the best thing God has in mind for us. The key? Ask God! Check out our perceptions with godly people we trust, what the Bible teaches, and lots of prayer and listening. Joseph might have done the wrong thing if an angel hadn’t intervened with God’s message!

Presentation:

“One day, a little boy went to the zoo with his mother and father. They bought him a shiny red balloon. It lifted him high into the sky. WOW! Oh that’s good! No, that’s bad. The balloon drifted for miles and miles until it came to a hot steamy jungle. It broke on the branch of a tall prickly tree. POP! Oh that’s bad! No, that’s good. The little boy fell down into a muddy river. SPLAT! Oh that’s bad. No that’s good... and on and on the story goes, always changing your thoughts about what seems bad being a good thing and what might seem a good thing at first being kind of bad!

Now I have something else here today, two things in fact, that I think might help us understand a really big word... a big idea. That word is “Perspective.” Do you know what that means?

[as you take the magnifying glass and binoculars out, solicit responses from the children as to what the meaning of “perspective” is]
Those were all great guesses and ideas about that word, “perspective.” As we think about it today, in light of our Bible story, I would like to think about it as how we see something… how we think about something from our point of view. In the children’s book “That’s Good! That’s Bad!” your point of view as the reader changes. You don’t know the whole story, so you aren’t sure if something that’s happening on a given page is good or bad.

In the Bible story, Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, and he knows it is not his baby. So, rather than shame her and make her feel really bad in front of everyone, he decides that they will just split up quietly. From his point of view—or perspective—this seems like a good thing to do in a bad situation. He is looking closely at the situation, like you might look closely at something with this magnifying glass, studying it and then drawing some conclusions about what you know from what you see. Joseph has looked things over closely [use magnifying glass to look at the kids, then set it down]. But then, something happens.

An angel comes to Joseph and gives him a whole different way of looking at what has happened to Mary. She doesn’t have a baby because she has done anything wrong… quite the opposite! She has been chosen by God to have God’s Son, and God is trusting Joseph enough to be Jesus’ earthly dad! Amazing! [pick up the binoculars]

God sees things way far away into the past and can see things way far away into the future. He knows the plan because it is God’s plan, and has been all along. When we get a glimpse of God’s perspective, God’s way of seeing things, it can change everything.

How has your perspective been this Advent season? Are you seeing things just from your close-up point of view, maybe missing the bigger picture, or have you been taking that time to pause and listen to God, stepping back a little from each day to see things from God’s point of view. If you give yourself that gift, it just might change your plans like it changed Joseph’s!

Let’s pray: “Jesus, we don’t want to lose God’s point of view in all this activity of the season. We love everything that is bright and beautiful about Christmas, but we can also get caught up in a lot of selfishness and weariness that saps our joy. Help us step back and see things from your perspective. We love you so much. If we need to have a change of plans, like Joseph did, please let us know. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.”

**Key Text:** Matthew 1:20-24 An angel appears to Joseph in a dream, encouraging him to marry Mary as planned, foretelling that her child would be Jesus, the Savior.

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Week 4: “Getting the Word Out”

Objects needed: a phone you can text on, a pen and paper, a megaphone (you could make your own with paper!), a small radio

Theme/Main Idea: There are lots of ways we could get the message out about Jesus, but the best way is to let that message shape our hearts and minds. Then, our words and actions will ALL point to Jesus!

Presentation:

“Hi boys and girls. I have some things here I would like to show you... I am wondering if you can figure out something they all have in common.

[take various objects out and display for the kids... phone, pen and paper, megaphone, the radio, etc.]

What is something that all these different objects can do? Can you guess it? No? Well, all these objects can help get a message out. I can text, call, write a letter, play a radio, shout through my megaphone... Now you see, right? All these can be helpful at getting the word out, as they say, about something.

In today’s Bible story, God’s way of getting the message out to the shepherds was to appear as an angelic messenger, and then as a whole bunch of angels in the sky singing God’s praises. It sure got the shepherd’s attention! They left their flocks in the fields and ran into Bethlehem to find the baby Jesus. Then, after having found everything just as the angels told them they would, they became some of the first human messengers of the good news of Jesus’ birth. They got the word out by telling others.

Now, fast forward to today... what do you think is the best way to get the message out about Jesus’ birthday? Would you use one of these? [hold up objects again] Yes? No? Why do you say that? What ways have you see people trying to get the word out about Jesus this December?

[children respond]
Can I give you something to think about before we close in prayer? I think one of the best ways to “get the word out” about Jesus is to fit let the story of Jesus really get IN TO you… make it something that is really important... maybe even more important than presents, lights, and celebrations. Then, once that story of Jesus has really made it down deep into your heart, then the sharing of the message will come naturally from you, changing the words you use, the actions you take, and the way you choose to live.

Then, no matter what you do and how you do it, you can reflect the greatest story ever—Jesus’ birth, God’s Son coming to live with us to show how much God loves us.

Let’s pray: “God, you have a story worth sharing this Christmas. It’s not about presents, but it is about a gift. A gift of love that shows us always and forever that we matter to you. You love us. Help us get that word out to others through our words, our actions, and our lives. In Jesus name, Amen.”

**Key Text:** Luke 2:8-20. Shepherds watching their flocks in the fields near Bethlehem are visited by angels on the night of Jesus’ birth. First an angel tells them that the Savior has been born; then the sky is filled with more angels proclaiming God’s glory.
Christmas Eve: “Be a Christmas Angel!”

Objects needed: a picture or a figurine of an angel

Theme/Main Idea: Sometimes we think more about what an angel is rather than what an angel does. We think about angels as being pure, heavenly beings, fluttering around with angel wings and being holy. But, even the name “angel” suggests that the most important thing about an angel is that they carry God's message. The word “angelos,” from which we get the word “angel,” means messenger. You and I can be “Christmas angels” if we carry the message of Jesus’ birth to others.

Presentation:

“Hello, boys and girls, how are you this evening/today? There is a lot going on today, so I am going to keep my talk pretty short. Would you like to see what I brought with me this morning/evening?

[take angel pictures or figurines out] What have I got here?

That’s right! Angels! I am not sure you noticed, but every story we have talked about for the four weeks of Advent and leading up to tonight have all had angels in them! Did you catch that? Raise your hand if you noticed that. Good for you!

Well, since we have been talking about angel stories for a few weeks, what can you tell me about angels? [give children a chance to respond, maybe asking a few follow up questions or prompt them if they are feeling a little tired or shy!]

Does anyone here know how angels got the name angels? It’s because of a job they do. Their name is their job; they are messengers! That’s right. The word “angel” means messenger. That’s pretty exciting, don’t you think? No? You don’t think so? Well, let me tell you why I think it is exciting...
You and I can be angels, because we can all be messengers for God! That’s right! We don’t need wings or a halo to do this work. We can use our words, our actions, and our love to others to share the best message of all: God loves us all so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to be our Lord and Savior! That’s a great message, and one worth sharing. Let’s all leave today/tonight eager to be God’s angels for a world that needs to hear this message.

Let’s pray:

*God, thank you for this Christmas Eve. Help all of us gathered here to be your messengers of peace, of love, of hope. You have brought these things to us in the gift of your Son, Jesus, and in his name we pray. Amen.*“

**Key Text:** Luke 2:1-7. Mary and Joseph welcome the baby Jesus, the Savior of the world, into the world in the midst of barnyard animals. In humility Jesus entered the world he had come to save.