

Message Received: Hearing God's Call

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADER GUIDE



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To order or request information, please call 1-844-727-8672 or visit GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com.

INTRODUCTION

God has a message for you! Can you hear it?

Samuel heard it during the middle of the night. Mary heard it through an angel. The disciples were hard at work when they heard it. They all heard God's special message just for them! *Message Received: Hearing God's Call* lets children know that God continues to call all kinds of people—including them! People are called to love God and follow Jesus every day. Those who hear God's message and respond are forever changed.

Young children:

- Enjoy repetition and routine,
- Are energetic and need change in activities,
- Have short attention spans,
- Thrive on positive reinforcement, and
- Like to attempt things they know they can do successfully.

The five sessions in the curriculum match the interests and developmental levels of children ages 4–5. You will worship together, learn about God, play games, and sing songs. You will eat snacks, move around, and hear stories about God's remarkable messages.

Allow for flexibility as you set up the area and organize the time. While some children can engage in stories and activities for longer periods of time, others have shorter attention spans and will need to move their active bodies. Wherever possible, provide opportunities for the children to move around between activities. Organize the space to accommodate the different needs and interests of children.

SCHEDULE

This curriculum has plenty of ideas for a 2-hour-and-15-minute program, but you may do fewer ideas if your program is shorter than two hours. Choose activities best suited for your schedule, space, and the children in your Bible school.

PLAN AHEAD

Read through this guide and the sessions, including the Bible backgrounds, stories, and activities. Plan what you will do and gather the materials. Open yourself to God's Spirit as you prepare to teach the children. The children will learn and develop through your interactions with them.

ROOM ARRANGEMENT

Prepare different spaces for activities to allow for movement. If the meeting area is small, however, the same space may be used for all of the activities.

- Include a table so that there is an area for activities, crafts, and snacks.
- Create a story area large enough to accommodate children. Be sure to include a chair for the storyteller and others participating in the stories.
- Have a space devoted to quiet items such as books, puzzles, and coloring sheets. Children may pursue these activities as they finish group activities.
- Have a large space designated to play games and do movements together. Some active ideas are appropriate for the outdoors if there is a suitable area.

STORYTELLING

Practice the Bible stories before presenting them to the children. Some of the stories require additional adults to help, so be sure to practice with everyone prior to the storytelling time. Gather the storytelling objects and props, which will help you tell the stories as well as keep the children's attention.

Each story has a different format for presentation. Adjust according to your students' attention spans, interests, and abilities to sit still.

Questions are offered to help children think about the story. Choose questions and comments according to your group's interests; you are not expected to ask all of them.

WORSHIP OPTIONS

While *Message Received* group worship music and dramas are intended for older children, they are also appropriate for this age group. If you choose to attend, you may want to shorten other parts of the session. Talk about the worship experiences and dramas to be sure the children understand them.

ACTIVITIES

Children are invited to respond to the Bible story through *Message Received* activities that include snacks, crafts, games, and *My Book of Stories* student book activities. Choose activities according to the time and space available. Adapt activities to meet the needs of the leaders, children, and space. Do activities as one large group or in smaller groups. Be sure to have several adults on hand to help. If you choose crafts, create a sample ahead of time so that children can see what they will make.

A storybook list is included with each session so that you may read to the children if there is time. Books have been chosen because they go along with the theme of the day. Choose from the list or find other books that go along with the theme.

MUSIC

The *Message Received* CD includes music that goes along with each theme. Some songs are especially appropriate for young children and they are mentioned in the session. Play music as children gather in the room, and also for children to sing along with while working on projects or playing.

Along with the songs on the CD, you will want to choose songs that are familiar and easy for the group to learn and sing together. The following are suggestions for leading preschoolers in music:

- **Sing songs from the CD.**
- **Sing other familiar songs.**
- **Listen quietly** to the CD.
- **Incorporate movement** along with music.
- **Have children use rhythm** or other instruments.
- **Chant song lyrics** rather than singing them.

Each session uses original words to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men.” If you are not familiar with the tune, find a video on the Internet that features the song and play it several times. The lyrics for VBS early childhood are as follows:

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, calling you and me!

Motions

God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers point upward with thumb nearest to your body; raise hand above head and bring down in a line from face to chest. Find an Internet video if you are not familiar with this sign.*)

calling (*cup both hands around your mouth*)

listen (*move both hands around your ears*)

you (*point to others*)

self (*point to self*)

Each day has new lyrics:

- **Day 1:** Hear the word of God and obey! Hear and obey! Hear and obey!
Hear the word of God and obey! And may God bless you!
- **Day 2:** Work together, do what is right! Do what is right! Do what is right!
Work together, do what is right! Pray for courage, too!
- **Day 3:** God loves you so trust in God’s plan! Trust in God’s plan! Trust in God’s plan!
God loves you so trust in God’s plan! It’s the best for you!
- **Day 4:** I will make you fishers of friends, fishers of friends, fishers of friends!
I will make you fishers of friends! If you follow me!
- **Day 5:** Open your heart, let Jesus come in! Jesus come in! Jesus come in!
Open your heart, let Jesus come in! And his love flows out!

BIBLE MEMORY

The same memory verse will be used each day so that by the end of the week, the children will know the verse.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it! —Luke 11:28b

Motions

Blessed are those (*cross arms over chest, giving yourself a hug*)

who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)

the word of God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers point upward with thumb nearest to your body, raise hand above head and bring down in a line from face to chest. Find an Internet video if you are not familiar with this sign.*)

and obey it (*step forward and nod head*)!

SNACK AND REST TIME

Snack suggestions are included with each session plan and you may use the suggestions or plan your own snack. Be sure to have small plates, napkins, and drinking cups on hand. Provide juice or water for each day. Have several adults help with snack preparation, serving, and clean up.

- **Day 1:** Make snacking sounds! Serve finger foods that are noisy (such as pretzels, crackers, apple slices, baby carrots) and quiet (such as banana slices, finger gelatin, cheese, grapes).
- **Day 2:** Serve opposite foods: salty pretzels and sweet raisins.
- **Day 3:** Serve foods starting with the letter *m*, just as Mary's name does (e.g. muffins, melon, mozzarella cheese, mandarin oranges).
- **Day 4:** Go fishing! Prepare a small snack plate of goldfish crackers for each child (a blue plate will remind children of a lake). Include a small amount of dip (such as peanut butter, cream cheese, cheddar cheese spread, or hazelnut spread) and a few pretzel sticks.
- **Day 5:** Feast on purple foods (such as grapes, crackers with grape jelly, grape Fruit Roll-Ups™, blueberries).

Include a quiet time after the snack for children to rest. Be sure to provide blankets, pillows, or towels for resting on the floor.

OFFERING PROJECT

We have teamed up with Catholic Relief Services, the international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States, to include an offering project suggestion. You may alternately or in addition choose to promote a project serving your local community, through your parish or local Catholic Charities.

To collect a monetary offering, place a large metal bowl on a table at the door of the worship space. Encourage children to put their offering in the bowl as they enter the space, listening carefully to the sound the money makes as it is dropped in the bowl. Have an adult monitor this area.

A Message from Catholic Relief Services

As conflict worsens in the Middle East, millions of displaced families need our support. Together with our Caritas partners, Catholic Relief Services is supporting hundreds of thousands of families who have been displaced or forced to flee their homes because of conflicts, civil strife, and economic conditions in the Middle East and other regions.

The war in Syria has entered its sixth year. In Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, more than 4 million Syrian refugees—mostly women and children—are struggling to get by. At the same time, the economies, social services, and basic infrastructure in these countries are strained to the breaking point. In addition to providing basic services, CRS focuses on education, care, and trauma counseling for Syrian children, many of whom have been out of school for most of their childhoods.

Please pray for the families and children affected by the violence in Syria and Iraq. And please give generously to strengthen our response to the refugee crisis and conflicts in the Middle East.

Be aware of children with gluten intolerance and nut or other allergies. Have alternative foods on hand if necessary.



Good Resources on the Syrian Refugee Crisis:
Read and Act

What We Are Doing: CRS' Support of Syrian Refugees
• [CRS.org/media-center/current-issues/syrian-refugee-crisis](https://www.crs.org/media-center/current-issues/syrian-refugee-crisis)

Syrian Refugees: Meet the People Everyone's Talking About • [CRS.org/media-center/syrian-refugees-meet-the-people-everyones-talking-about](https://www.crs.org/media-center/syrian-refugees-meet-the-people-everyones-talking-about)

What Would You Do?
Syrian Refugees: Starting Up and Starting Over • [CRS.org/stories/syrian-refugees-starting-up-starting-over](https://www.crs.org/stories/syrian-refugees-starting-up-starting-over)

Helping Syrian Refugees:
By the Numbers • [CRS.org/stories/helping-syrian-refugees-numbers](https://www.crs.org/stories/helping-syrian-refugees-numbers)

What Can Our Vacation Bible School Do?

Send donations for the Catholic Relief Services project to:
Catholic Relief Services
P.O. Box 17090,
Baltimore, MD 21297-0303.

Once collected, mail your check or money order with this code in the Memo section: YFYIYFLOWR.

Advocacy References for Syrian Refugee Crisis

How Can U.S. Leaders Help
• ConfrontGlobalPoverty.org/issues/syrian-migrant-refugees/

Write a Letter • [Click here](#) or find link on VBS download page

1. Pray. Pray for protection for refugees—particularly those fleeing Northern Africa for Europe—as well as for personal transformation as we face the needs of refugees everywhere. You may choose to use the Prayer for Refugees found here: CRS.org/resource-center/moment-grace-prayer-refugees.

2. Provide the Teachers AND Parents with information about the Syrian refugee crisis. The more you learn about this crisis, the more you'll understand its underlying causes and can spread the word. Continued warfare in Syria, and violence in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, has contributed to the surge of refugees from those countries. Meanwhile, deteriorating economic conditions in places like Sub-Saharan Africa has led people to Europe in search of a better life. (Find links to more information in the sidebar.)

3. Donate. One of the best ways to help is through donating to accredited nonprofit organizations that are responding to the crisis. More than 90 percent of money donated to CRS goes directly to people in need. Consider having a “Change for Children” change drive. The change collection will support CRS’ work worldwide to end hunger and poverty. (See donation information in the sidebar.)

4. Advocate. For years, countries in the Middle East have been sheltering the largest number of Syrians and Iraqis. CRS is calling on the United States to continue and expand humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in these countries, as well as those burdened by this new migration. Most importantly, the United States should lead concerted diplomatic efforts to end the fighting in Syria. But you have a part, too. Read more about how our nation’s leaders can respond to the crisis, and write a letter urging them to take up the cause (see sidebar for details).

5. Use Social Media. Follow and retweet @CatholicRelief and @CRSNews on Twitter for the latest updates on the #RefugeeCrisis that’s reached Europe.

Offering visuals

Plan a visual way to recognize the amount of money contributed for the project. Review the amount each day so children are aware of how much they’re giving.

- **Attach letters of the word CALL to the wall**, each letter representing a specific amount of money. See how many times CALL can be spelled around the room.
- **Invite children to trace their hands** onto various colors of paper, and then cut out their handprint. Attach each hand to a poster board to represent a specific amount of money.
- **Invite children to write the name of a friend or relative** they love that they are grateful is safe on a large piece of paper as they donate.
- **Create a paper chain** with each link representing a certain amount of money.
- **Fill a glass jar** with the offering money.
- **Complete a chart or graph** as money is contributed.

Day 1

SAMUEL

Biblical background

Samuel is a familiar and popular figure in the Old Testament. As a child he serves God in the temple with his mentor, Eli, the priest. As an adult, he serves as a prophet of God to the people of Israel.

Samuel begins his ministry at a young age after experiencing something highly unusual—he actually hears God’s voice calling him. Not surprisingly, Samuel thinks it is Eli who is calling, and goes to see what he wants. Eli, however, realizes that it is God who is calling Samuel’s name.

According to 1 Samuel 3:1, the beginning of this story, “the word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” Yet God calls and Samuel responds, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” He is willing to take on whatever God has for him, even though it means that he has to tell Eli some difficult news.

God has warned Samuel about the coming downfall of the house of Eli. Samuel is afraid to share the message, but Eli invites him to do so anyway. Eli hears the news with resignation, saying that the Lord should “do what seems good to him.”

Listening and responding to God’s call transforms Samuel’s life. He grows from a young boy who does not fully know God, to a man who becomes known as a trustworthy prophet of the Lord at Shiloh.

Children will be fascinated that someone their own age was given such an important task from God. This can encourage them to think about God’s call in their own lives and to listen for the voice of God as they make decisions.

Advance preparation

- Supplies
 - Bible
 - Name tags (copy from p. 45)
 - *Message Received* CD and songbook
 - *My Book of Stories* student book (one per child)
 - Objects to go with the Bible story: pillow and blanket
 - Snack (p. 12)
 - Materials for chosen *Message Received* activities (pp. 12–13)
 - Sheets of plain paper, one per child, and crayons
1. Prepare items for snack.
 2. Choose activities from pages 12–13 and gather necessary materials and supplies. Some of the activities require advance preparation.
 3. Practice telling the Bible story on page 9. Find an adult to be Eli (nonspeaking role) and make sure the adult is familiar with the story and knows what to do as it is read. Place the pillow and blanket on the floor to create a bed for Eli on the side of the room opposite the story area.
 4. Practice songs for the session.
 5. Create name tags that can be pinned or taped to children’s shirts, or punch a hole through the name tag and string with yarn to create a necklace.

MESSAGE
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD’S CALL

Today’s Bible experience

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Summary

Samuel, a young person, is called by God and gives a message to Eli. Samuel listens to God and Eli accepts the message.

Bible memory

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it! —Luke 11:28b

Faith focus

God calls us to listen and respond.

Group experience

Gathering

1. **Play the *Message Received* CD** as background music as children arrive. “We Are Children of God,” “Open My Eyes,” and “Send Me” are appropriate songs for this session.
2. **Greet children and welcome them to Bible school.** Give them name tags to wear. Pin or tape name tags to their shirts, or place them around their necks if name tags are strung with yarn.
3. **Invite children to sit at the activity table,** providing a paper and crayons. Children will decorate their paper to look like a pillow, either a favorite pillow at home or one they would like to have. Those who finish may go to a quiet area and look at books or work on puzzles and other activities.
4. **Transition to the Bible story area.** Whisper: *If you can hear me, clap your hands one time.* Pause, then whisper a bit louder: *If you can hear me, clap your hands two times.* You may need to increase the claps until all of the children join in. Point out that children needed to listen so that they can hear you giving them directions to clap.
5. **Pray an opening prayer.** Begin with the sign of the cross, encouraging them to follow your hand motions: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The children respond: “Amen.” Pray: *Dear God, thank you for bringing us all together today to learn about you and how we can love you better. We pray this in Jesus’ name.* Prompt the children to respond: “Amen.”

Then say: *At Bible school, we will talk about how God calls us to listen, follow, and obey what God says. Now, you need to listen to me and follow what I say. Take your paper pillows and go to the Bible story area. Sit on the floor and hold the pillows on your lap.*

6. **Sing together** these words to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men.” See page 4 for motions.

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children’s names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

Bible story

1. Introduce the Bible story.

Say: *Today's story is about a little boy, Samuel, who heard God calling him. He listened to God for a special message.*

2. Explain that the children will help act out the part of Samuel. When Samuel is lying in bed, children will hold their paper pillows on their hands and rest their heads on it. In other parts of the story, Samuel gets up and moves. The children will follow quietly wherever you lead. Remind children that they are to be listening, not talking, when acting out the story.

3. Bible story: 1 Samuel 3:1-21

Samuel was a little boy who lived in God's temple (*all the children, as Samuel, wave hello*). He was a special helper to the priest named Eli (*point to Eli*). A priest helped people hear from God. But people had not heard God speak for a long time (*Eli shakes head and shrugs sadly*), and Eli was now a very old man (*Eli walks slowly to his bed to lie down*).

One night, while Samuel was in bed (*children hold pillows in their hands and rest their heads on them*), God called his name: "Samuel! Samuel!" (*everyone look up*). Samuel went to Eli's room (*stand up and walk across room to Eli, children quietly following*). Samuel said, "Here I am, you called me." Eli was confused (*shakes head*). "I did not call you, go back to bed."

Samuel went back to bed (*lead children back to story area, sit, and rest heads on pillows*). As soon as he lay back down, God called again, "Samuel!" Again Samuel got up and went to Eli's room a second time (*lead children back to Eli*). "Here I am Eli, you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call you, Samuel, go back to sleep."

Samuel went back to bed (*lead children back to story area, sit down, rest heads on pillows*).

Then God called Samuel a third time, "Samuel!" Samuel went back to Eli (*lead children back to Eli*).

This time Eli realized that it must be God who was calling Samuel. He told Samuel, "Go back to bed. When God calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

Samuel listened to Eli and went back to bed (*lead children back to story area, sit down, rest heads on pillows*). Then God called Samuel again, "Samuel! Samuel!" (*everyone look up*). Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." God gave Samuel an important message to tell Eli. Samuel told Eli God's message, and Eli listened.

As Samuel grew up (*everyone stand up and stretch tall*), he kept listening to God. People trusted what Samuel said because they knew he was a person who heard (*everyone cup hands behind ears*) the word of God and obeyed it (*everyone take a step forward and nod their heads*).

Pope Francis called Samuel's simple words in this bible passage ("Speak Lord, I am listening") as a beautiful way to pray. He said they are especially good words to use when we have doubts, are confused, or have some resistance to the Holy Spirit. He said we shouldn't be afraid when the Holy Spirit surprises us or changes our plans: joy is part of the package! (4/14/2016)

Children may be curious what it sounds like when God calls us. Share that God may speak to people through an audible voice, such as with Samuel, but that is rare. However, God also speaks to us through the Bible, through words of other people, by giving a sense of peace, by prompting our hearts, through prayer, and in other ways. You may want to share a personal example of how God has spoken to you.

Respond to the Bible story

- 1. Talk about the Bible story.** Allow space for all children to share ideas and wonder out loud together.
 - How did God call Samuel?
 - God called Samuel by his name. Do you think God knows your name?
 - What do you think you would do if you heard God calling your name out loud?
- 2. Pray.** Explain to the children that it is time to talk with God by praying. Demonstrate that sometimes people pray with their hands folded in front of them, but today you will pray in a special way. Today, everyone will cup their hands around their ears to show that they are listening to God.

Pray: *Dear God, thank you that you know our names. Help us remember to listen carefully, so that we can hear your call and obey it! Amen.*
- 3. Stand in a circle to say the memory verse** (Luke 11:28b). Open the Bible to Luke to show children where the verse comes from. Explain that the Bible is one way that God speaks to us.

Say the verse and demonstrate the motions, then invite children to do them with you.

Blessed are those (*cross arms over chest, giving yourself a hug*)
who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)
the word of God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers point upward with thumb nearest to your body, raise hand above head and bring down in a line from face to chest*)
and obey it (*step forward and nod head*)!

Message Received activities

- 1. Choose several activities**, including snack, that best suit your group, space, and schedule (pp. 12–13). Be sure to prepare for the activities in advance and gather the necessary supplies. If doing a craft, make a sample before the session so that children can see what it is they are creating.
- 2. When it is time to clean up, chant:**

Clean up, clean up, one, two, three.
Clean up, clean up, you and me!

Demonstrate to children your expectations of putting away supplies and cleaning the work space. Put names on projects. Place all projects to be taken home in a safe place.

Sending

1. **Gather in the story area and sit in circle.** Sing together the song from the beginning of the session:

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children's names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

2. **Collect name tags** and put them in a safe place so they can be used again for the next session.
3. **Thank children for their good listening** today, and tell them you are excited to see them back at Bible school the next day to learn more about God's call.
4. **Children may play** as they wait to be picked up.

MESSAGE RECEIVED ACTIVITIES

Snack

Make snacking sounds! Serve finger foods that are noisy (such as pretzels, crackers, apple slices, baby carrots) and quiet (such as banana slices, finger gelatin, cheese, grapes). Provide juice or water. Listen to the sounds the food makes as it is eaten. Which food is the loudest? Which is the most quiet? Explain that just as we can choose to eat a noisy or quiet snack, we can also choose to fill our lives with noise and distractions that make it hard to hear God, or we can take time to be quiet and listen to God.

My Book of Stories student book

Open *My Book of Stories* to page 3. Listening for God's call takes practice! Children will circle the pictures that show ways to become better at listening to God, and put an X over pictures that show things that might make it harder to hear God. Children will color and decorate Samuel's pillow on page 2.

Songs

- "All That God Wants You to Be" (theme song)
- "Calling Us by Name" (theme song)
- "We Are Children of God"
- "Open My Eyes"
- "Send Me"
- Stand and sing another verse to the tune of "I Will Make You Fishers of Men":

Hear the word of God and obey! Hear and obey!
obey! Hear and obey!
Hear the word of God and obey! And may
God bless you!

Motions

hear (*cup hands around ears*)
God (*make sign for God: Right hand
fingers point upward with thumb
nearest to your body; raise hand above
head and bring down in a line from
face to chest*)
obey (*small step forward and nod*)
bless you (*wrap arms around yourself like
a hug*)

Books

You may want to read to the children if there is time.

- Blackaby, Tom, and Rick Osborne. *Sammy Experiences God*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.*
- Lester, Helen. *Listen, Buddy: A Story about Learning to Listen*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.
- Lindahl, Kay. *How Does God Listen?* Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2005.
- Lucado, Max. *God Listens When I Pray*. Max Lucado's Hermie & Friends. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012.
- Stone, Lynn. *How Do Animals Use Their Ears?* Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Publishing, 2008.
- Zolotow, Charlotte. *If You Listen*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2002.

* *Sammy Experiences God* is about a boy who realizes that he is always a part of God's adventure, even if God doesn't talk to him in the same ways as to characters in the Bible. It is a longer book and parts can be read each day of Bible school.

Crafts

1. All Ears for God

In preparation, cut out a headband and two large ears for each child (see template on page 47). Show children pictures of animals with large ears. What do they notice about the ears? Why are the ears so large? Animals with large ears might seem like they are too big for their body. They look like they are all ears! But sometimes people use the expression “I’m all ears” to mean that they are ready to listen carefully.

Show the sample craft item of rabbit ears attached to a headband. Explain that the rabbit ears will remind us that we should always listen carefully for God’s call.

Give each child two ears and one headband.

Demonstrate how to use a glue stick to glue the ears to the headband. After ears are attached to the band, use the glue stick directly on the ears. Press cotton balls onto the glue on the ears. An adult will staple the ends together to make a headband.

Materials: pre-cut headband and ears, pictures of animals with large ears (rabbit, fox, donkey, and others), glue sticks, small cotton balls, stapler

2. Samuel Sketches

In preparation, find a suitable sidewalk or parking lot with space for each child to draw. Invite them to use sidewalk chalk and draw pictures of today’s story. You may want to talk about ideas such as: Samuel sitting up in bed, Samuel running to Eli, Eli looking surprised. Children may use the pictures to help retell the story.

Materials: sidewalk chalk

Activities

1. Samuel Says (Simon Says)

Invite children to stand in a circle, or randomly throughout the room. As leader, tell the children to do different motions or activities, beginning the command with “Samuel says . . .” Or, simply tell the children a motion without preceding it with “Samuel says . . .” Alternate the two commands so that children have to listen carefully. The actions can be things such as: put your hand on your head, stand on one foot, take one baby step, sit on your hands, etc. Tell the children to follow the movement when they hear “Samuel says . . .” at the beginning, but to not follow when “Samuel says . . .” is not at the beginning. Children can continue playing the entire time, whether they follow the directions correctly or not.

2. Hear and Obey Game

All children begin on one side of the playing area, with an adult leader on the opposite side. The leader will call out one or several children’s names. The children will respond, “I’m listening!” The leader will then give a direction such as “Take one step” or “Hop two times like a bunny.” The children whose names were called will follow the directions. The leader needs to give equal opportunities for children to hear and obey. The goal is for each child to reach the leader.

3. Name Game

Demonstrate to the children how to squat. As children squat, an adult leader will call out a name or characteristic. When the name or characteristic of a child is called, the child(ren) will jump up. The children then return to a squatting position to wait and hear the next item called out. Options include: names (make sure that everyone’s name is called one time), those who like macaroni and cheese, those with curly hair, those wearing red, those who are four years old, those who are five years old, those who have a pet dog, those who have a pet fish, etc.

Day 2

ESTHER

Biblical background

The book of Esther is a fascinating narrative. It includes royalty, grand banquets, a plot to kill, and a plan to save a group of people. Esther has been raised by her relative, Mordecai, who urges her to enter a contest to choose a new queen. Esther is chosen.

Haman, a leading official close to King Ahasuerus (ay-HAS-eeoo-EHR-uhs), wants people to respect him and bow before him. Mordecai, however, will not bow to Haman. This enrages the official, and he plots to have Mordecai killed, as well as all of his people, the Jews.

Queen Esther has not told anyone about her Jewish heritage, but Mordecai pleads with her to go before King Ahasuerus and ask him to save her people, the Jews. Queen Esther, however, knows that she can only appear before the king if summoned, or she may lose her life.

In today's text, Mordecai is urging Queen Esther to do something on behalf of her people—to dare to request an audience with the king. "Who knows?" he says. "Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Queen Esther responds that she will go to the king, but requests that every Jewish person fast for three days on her behalf.

The story has a happy ending for Queen Esther. She is welcomed by King Ahasuerus, who is appalled that someone wants to kill the queen and her people. The king orders Haman to be killed instead.

This is an unusual story of call. Esther has to make difficult choices in which she sacrifices her own needs for the needs of the greater community. The story provides a picture of God working through circumstances and people to save others.

Children will be excited by this story about a queen, but they will come to understand that Queen Esther's life was not an easy one. She was called to do a difficult task and responded in a powerful way to save her people.

Advance preparation

- Supplies
- Bible
- Name tags (copy from p. 45)
- *Message Received* CD and songbook
- *My Book of Stories* student book (one per child)
- Objects to go with Bible story: props for children (pp. 48–53), crayons
- Snack (p. 20)
- Materials for chosen *Message Received* activities (pp. 20–21)

MESSAGE
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today's Bible experience

Esther 4:13-17

Summary

Esther is called to go before the king to deliver a message that might save her people. In turn, Esther asks the community to fast and pray as she prepares for this responsibility.

Bible memory

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it! —Luke 11:28b

Faith focus

God calls us to work together for what is right.

1. Prepare items for snack.
2. Choose activities from pages 20–21 and gather necessary materials and supplies. Some of the activities require advance preparation.
3. Practice telling the Bible story from page 17. Emphasize the character's names and pause to hold the correct prop. Use the templates on pages 48–53 to make Bible story props on card stock. Each child should be given one prop, plus the storyteller should have all four props.
4. Practice songs for the session.
5. Create name tags that can be pinned or taped to children's shirts, or punch a hole through the name tag and string with yarn to create a necklace.

Group experience

Gathering

1. **Play the *Message Received* CD** as background music as children arrive. “We Will Follow” and “Wherever Love Is” are appropriate songs for this session.
2. **Greet children and welcome them to Bible school.** Give them name tags to wear. Pin or tape name tags to their shirts, or place them around their necks if name tags are strung with yarn.
3. **Invite children to the activity table** and hand each child one prop to color. Those who finish may go to a quiet area and look at books or work on puzzles and other activities.
4. **Transition to the Bible story area.** Whisper: *If you can hear me, clap your hands one time.* Pause, then whisper a bit louder: *If you can hear me, clap your hands two times.* You may need to increase the claps until all of the children join in. Point out that children needed to listen so that they can hear you giving them directions to clap.
5. **Pray an opening prayer.** Begin with the sign of the cross, encouraging them to follow your hand motions: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The children respond: “Amen.” Pray: *Dear God, thank you for bringing us all back together today to learn about you and how we can love you better. We pray this in Jesus' name.* Prompt the children to respond: “Amen.”

Say: At Bible school, we will talk about how God calls us to listen, follow, and obey what God says. Now, you need to listen to me and follow what I say. Take your prop and go to the Bible story area. Sit on the floor and hold your prop on your lap.
6. **Sing together** these words to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men.” See page 4 for motions.

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
 God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children's names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

Bible story

1. Introduce the Bible story.

Say: *Today's story is about a young woman named Esther. God used other people to call Esther to do what was right and help others. God also called other people to work together and help Esther.*

2. Explain that the children will help with the story by pretending to be certain characters. The children will need to listen carefully for that person's name and hold up their prop. Say:

- *Who has Queen Esther's crown? You are Esther in our story. Whenever you hear the name **ESTHER**, hold the crown up to your head.*
- *Who has the beard? Your part is Mordecai, Esther's older relative. When you hear the name **MORDECAI**, put on your beard.*
- *Who has the fancy stick? That is a scepter and it belongs to the king. When I say **KING**, hold up your scepter.*
- *Who has the angry eyes! You get to be Haman, the bad guy in our story. When you hear me say **HAMAN**, hold up your angry eyes.*
- *As I tell the story, remember to keep your props down in your lap and listen quietly until you hear your name in the story. Are you ready?*

3. Bible story: Esther 4:13-17 (along with other portions of Esther)

There once was a young woman named **ESTHER** who had an older relative, **MORDECAI**. She followed God, just like her relative taught her. When the **KING** was looking for a queen, he chose **ESTHER**. She left her home and went to live in the palace.

The **KING** had a helper named **HAMAN**. But he was not a good man. In fact, he hated people who followed God! **HAMAN** was making a plan to get rid of everyone who followed God.

When the followers of God heard about the plan, they were afraid! **MORDECAI** sent a message to Queen **ESTHER**. He wanted her to ask the **KING** to stop **HAMAN**. But **ESTHER** was afraid. It was against the rules to go to the **KING** if he didn't call you. If she broke the rule, she could be in very big trouble!

Then **MORDECAI** said to her, "Remember that you follow God. Maybe God called you to be queen so that you could do what is right and help others!" **ESTHER** decided to listen and obey. "I will go and ask for help, even if I get in trouble," she said.

She asked **MORDECAI** and others who followed God to pray for her. Then she walked bravely to the throne. When the **KING** saw her, he held out his golden scepter to show that he was not angry.

"Please help us!" cried **ESTHER**. "**HAMAN** is trying to get rid of the followers of God, like me and my relative, **MORDECAI**!" When the **KING** heard what **HAMAN** was trying to do to his queen and her family, he was very angry! He told his guards to get rid of **HAMAN**!

Pope Francis argues that being Christian and following Jesus "entails giving up evil and selfishness and choosing good, truth and justice, even when this demands sacrifice and the renunciation of our own interests." Faith should not be something ornamental in our lives, he says, like decoration on a cake, but the driving force behind everything we do. (8/18/2013)

The **KING** promised to protect those who followed God. He chose **MORDECAI** to be his new helper instead of **HAMAN**. The followers of God were very glad to be safe, thanks to faithful **MORDECAI** and brave Queen **ESTHER**. They obeyed God's call to work together for what is right!

Respond to the Bible story

1. **Talk about the Bible story.** Allow space for children to share ideas and wonder out loud together.
 - People often talk about Queen Esther being brave and courageous. Let's think of times in the story when Esther needed to have courage.
 - a. What would it be like to leave your home and family and go live in a big palace?
 - b. Why was Esther afraid when Mordecai asked her to go talk to the king?
 - Esther was courageous and brave for doing what is right. When have you been brave and courageous?
2. **Pray:** Invite children to stand in a circle and link arms to show that you want to work together and help each other do what is right. Ask children to close their eyes and listen while you pray.

Pray: Dear God, we want to do what is right even when it takes courage. Help us to be brave. Help us to work together to do what is right. Amen.
3. **Stand in a circle to say the memory verse** (Luke 11:28b). Open the Bible to Luke to show children where the verse comes from. Explain that the Bible is one way that God speaks to us.

Say the verse and demonstrate the motions, then invite children to do them with you. Suggest that the children use a deep Mordecai voice, like Mordecai might have sounded when he taught Esther about God. Say the verse together a second time, using Queen Esther's voice.

Blessed are those (*cross arms over chest, giving yourself a hug*)
who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)
the word of God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers point
upward with thumb nearest to your body, raise hand above head
and bring down in a line from your face to your chest*)
and obey it (*step forward and nod head*)!

Message Received activities

1. **Choose several activities**, including snack, that best suit your group, space, and schedule (pp. 20–21). Be sure to prepare for the activities in advance and gather the necessary supplies. If doing a craft, make a sample before the session so that children can see what it is they are creating.
2. **When it is time to clean up**, chant:

Clean up, clean up, one, two, three.
Clean up, clean up, you and me!

Demonstrate to children your expectations of putting away supplies and cleaning the work space. Put names on projects. Place all projects to be taken home in a safe place.

Sending

1. **Gather in the story area and sit in a circle**. Sing together the song from the beginning of the session:

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children's names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

2. **Collect name tags** and put them in a safe place so they can be used again for the next session.
3. **Thank children for their good listening** today, and tell them you are excited to see them back at Bible school the next day to learn more about God's call.
4. **Children may play** as they wait to be picked up.

MESSAGE RECEIVED ACTIVITIES

Snack

Esther and Haman were opposite in how they treated people in the story. Salty and sweet are opposites, too! Serve salty pretzels and sweet raisins. Provide juice or water.

My Book of Stories student book

Open *My Book of Stories* to page 5. Children will find and circle the five hidden crowns in the picture of Queen Esther and Mordecai. They may use the picture to help retell the story.

Children will color and decorate Esther's crown and the king's scepter on page 4.

Songs

- "All That God Wants You to Be" (theme song)
- "Calling Us by Name" (theme song)
- "Wherever Love Is"
- "Send Me"
- Stand in a circle and sing another verse to the tune of "I Will Make You Fishers of Men":

Work together, do what is right! Do what
is right! Do what is right!
Work together, do what is right! Pray for
courage, too!

Motions

work together (*put arms around each
other's shoulders*)
do (*make fists, tap them on top of the
other*)
right (*two thumbs up*)
courage (*put hands on hips and stand tall*)

Books

You may want to read to the children if there is time.

- Favre, Sherry and Bryan Sirchio. *Wherever Love Is*. Sirchio.com. This is the story behind the song by the same name that is part of this VBS!
- Berenstain, Jan and Mike. *The Berenstain Bears and the Gift of Courage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2010.
- Davis, Aubrey. *The Enormous Potato*. Buffalo, NY: Kids Can Press Ltd, 1999.
- Disalvo, DyAnne. *A Castle on Viola Street*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Kropf, Latifa Berry. *It's Purim Time!* Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2005.
- Terwilliger, Kelly. *Barnyard Purim*. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2012.
- Waber, Bernard. *Courage*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Crafts

1. Music Shakers

Make music shakers to praise God! Provide either a small paper bag or a plastic bottle for each child, along with dried beans or small pebbles. Invite children to decorate their bags or bottles with crayons or markers. An adult leader will put a small amount of beans or pebbles inside the bags or bottles after they are decorated. Replace the bottle cap, or fold over the top of the paper bag and staple it shut. Children can use the music shakers as they sing or move around the room, praising God.

Materials: small paper bags (lunch bags) or plastic bottles, one per child; dried beans or pebbles; crayons or markers; stapler (if using bags)

2. Necklaces

In preparation, cut the yarn into necklace lengths. Put small piles of cereal at different locations on the table, and be sure to include a variety of colors on each pile. Tell the children that Queen Esther is a hero in the Bible because her actions saved many people. Invite children to make a colorful necklace worthy of a hero. Demonstrate how to string the cereal onto the yarn, leaving space at either end to be tied. When the child is finished stringing cereal, an adult will tie it around the child's neck.

Materials: yarn, cereal such as Cheerios and Fruit Loops

Activities

1. Golden Scepter Freeze Tag

In preparation, make a simple scepter out of soft materials such as a thick milkshake straw with a decorated foam craft ball glued to one end. Define play area boundaries. Remind children that the king held out his scepter when Queen Esther approached, and that this game involves a scepter. Explain that the game is a form of tag. Someone will be IT. When IT tags someone, the tagged child needs to sit down and not move. A king will have the scepter and use it to gently tag seated children so that they may play again. After a few moments, give different children the roles of IT and the king.

Materials: scepter

2. Golden Scepter Red Light Green Light

In preparation, make a simple scepter such as is described in the Golden Scepter Freeze Tag game. Children will line up on one side of the playing area. An adult leader will be on the opposite side as a king, holding the scepter. When the king holds out the scepter, the children move toward the king. As soon as the king puts down the scepter, the children need to freeze. Play continues until children reach the king.

Materials: scepter

3. Balloon Toss

In preparation, mark or draw a line across the playing area. Blow up one balloon per child. Children will need to work together to play this game. Invite all of the children to stand on one side of the line. Throw one balloon to the children. They need to hit the balloon over the line without it touching the ground or being carried. As the children work with one balloon, throw another one to them. Continue throwing all of the balloons, one by one, to the children to hit over the line. Play ends when all of the balloons are successfully over the line.

Materials: balloons

Day 3

MARY

Biblical background

“Here I am.” This is Mary’s simple response to a call that will change not only her life, but the entire world. The angel’s message tells her that she will be the mother of God’s son, Jesus. Mary’s courageous response puts her at great risk because she is not yet married. Her fiancé, Joseph, could respond to the pregnancy by writing Mary off as unmarriageable. Instead, he also takes a risk after receiving a visit from an angel in a dream. “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,” the angel tells him, “for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).

Mary is an ordinary young woman who is favored by God and asked to do something extraordinary. She not only accepts the task, but thanks and praises God for it! “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant” (Luke 1:46-48). Mary acknowledges the situation with wonder and joy. She is ready to trust God’s plan.

We know that Mary is very young in this story. Though we don’t know her exact age, young women living at that time could be married when in their early teens. Children will be interested to know that a person not much older than themselves said yes to God’s call and had a huge impact on the world. God does not just use grown-ups who are smart and confident. God can use people of any age if they trust in God’s plan.

Advance preparation

- Supplies
 - Bible
 - Name tags (copy from p. 45)
 - *Message Received* CD and songbook
 - *My Book of Stories* student book (one per child)
 - Object to go with the Bible story: adult angel costume
 - Snack (p. 28)
 - Materials for chosen *Message Received* activities (pp. 28–29)
 - One set of angel wings per child (p. 55), crayons
1. Prepare items for snack.
 2. Choose activities from pages 28–29 and gather necessary materials and supplies. Some of the activities require advance preparation.
 3. The Bible story is told by the angel Gabriel. Invite an adult to be Gabriel and to wear an angel costume. Practice telling the Bible story from page 25.
 4. Practice songs for the session.
 5. Create name tags that can be pinned or taped to children’s shirts, or punch a hole through the name tag and string with yarn to create a necklace.

MESSAGE
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today’s Bible experience

Luke 1:26-56

Summary

The angel Gabriel visits Mary to tell her that she is favored of God and will have a baby, Jesus. Mary responds to this call with joy and trust in God’s plan.

Bible memory

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it! —Luke 11:28b

Faith focus

We are called to trust God’s plan.

Group experience

Gathering

1. **Play the *Message Received* CD** as background music as children arrive. “Woman of of God” and “Calling Us by Name” are appropriate songs for this session.
2. **Greet children and welcome them to Bible school.** Give them name tags to wear. Pin or tape name tags to their shirts, or place them around their necks if name tags are strung with yarn.
3. **Invite children to the activity table.** Give each a set of angel wings and invite them to add color and designs to the wings. Put children’s names on the wings and set them aside for a craft activity. Those who finish may go to a quiet area and look at books or work on puzzles and other activities.
4. **Transition to the Bible story area.** Whisper: *If you can hear me, clap your hands one time.* Pause, then whisper a bit louder: *If you can hear me, clap your hands two times.* You may need to increase the claps until all of the children join in. Point out that children needed to listen so that they can hear you giving them directions to clap.
5. **Pray an opening prayer.** Begin with the sign of the cross, encouraging them to follow your hand motions: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The children respond: “Amen.” Pray: *Dear Jesus, thank you for bringing us together for our third day to especially learn about your mother, Mary. Let the Church say...* The children respond: “Amen.”
Say: *At Bible school, we will talk about how God calls us to listen, follow, and obey what God says. Now, you need to listen to me and follow what I say. Go to the Bible story area and sit on the floor.*
6. **Sing together** these words to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men.” See page 4 for motions.

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children’s names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

Bible story

1. Introduce today's Bible story.

Say: *Today's story is about a young woman, Mary, who received a message from God in a very special way. An angel visited her!*

2. Explain that today's story about Mary will be told by the angel, Gabriel!

And Mary has a lot of different feelings in today's story. Whenever Mary is feeling something in the story, invite children to show that feeling through facial expressions. Practice before you begin by asking children to show you a sad face, then a happy face.

3. Bible story: Luke 1:26-56

Mary was a girl who was kind and faithful to God. Can you all show me your kindest smiles (*pause and look at the smiles*)? Mary was young, but she had promised that she would marry a good, faithful man named Joseph. God noticed what good, kind, and faithful people Mary and Joseph were. So God chose them for a *very* special job! That's when God sent *me* to Mary with an important message. I think Mary was shocked when she saw me! Show me some shocked, I-can't-believe-this-is-happening faces (*pause and look at faces*)! That's exactly what she looked like!

I said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." Now Mary was still frightened—give me a frightened face (*pause and look at faces*)—but also a little curious to know what I was going to say. Can you look at me like you are curious (*pause and look at faces*)? Then I told her, "Don't be afraid, Mary! You have made God very happy! That's why God is calling *you* to be the mother of God's own Son! You will have a baby, and you will name him Jesus. He will be a great king forever!"

Mary was still not sure. Show me some really confused faces (*pause and look at faces*). "How can this be?" she asked. "I am young, and Joseph and I are not even married yet. How can I be the mother of God's Son?"

I told her, "God has called you. Nothing is impossible for God!" Mary was amazed! Can I see your wow-that's-amazing faces (*pause and look at faces*)? Mary finally understood how exciting this news really was! She was going to be the mother of God's own Son! Everybody show me what an excited face looks like (*pause and look at faces*).

Mary had a very important call from God. At first it was confusing. Show me your confused face again (*pause and look at faces*). But when Mary chose to obey and trust in God's plan, it became really exciting! Show me your excited face again (*pause and look at faces*). Mary knelt to show that she trusted God. God wants you to know that there are exciting plans for you, too. When God calls you, just remember to trust in God's plan, like Mary did!

Pope Francis sees Mary as the model of faith for all of us, beginning with the "yes" she makes in this passage. She lived out her faith in simple, normal, everyday ways: as a mother. He urges us to remember that Mary is not a distant person who is distant from us, but someone who did normal things, always staying connected to Jesus. We can learn from her and live like her. (10/23/2013)

Respond to the Bible story

1. Talk about the Bible story. Allow space for all children to share ideas and wonder out loud together.

- What were some of Mary's feeling when the angel gave her the special message from God?
- When we trust God's plan, we believe that it is always best even if we do not understand it. Mary did not understand right away but she still trusted God. How did Mary show she trusted God?
- Is it hard to trust someone you love? Why or why not?

Tell the children that God has a special plan for them, too. God always knows what is best and that's why God calls us to trust.

Say: *Everybody shout "Trust God's plan!"*

2. Pray. Explain that when Mary trusted God's plan she knelt. Invite children to kneel to pray, demonstrating how to do so.

Pray: *Dear God, you always know what is best for us, even when we don't understand. No matter how we feel, we can always trust you. Amen.*

3. Stand in a circle and say the memory verse (Luke 11:28b). Open the Bible to Luke to show children where the verse comes from. Explain that the Bible is one way God speaks to us.

Say the verse and demonstrate the motions, then invite children to do them with you. Mary felt confused because she didn't understand how God's plan would work. Use confused faces and voices as you say the verse a second time. In the end, Mary was excited and praised God! So the third time, jump for joy as you joyfully shout out the verse!

Blessed are those (*cross arms over chest, giving yourself a hug*)

who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)

the word of God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers pointing upward with thumb nearest to your body, raise hand above head and bring down in a line from face to chest*)

and obey it (*step forward and nod*)!

Message Received activities

1. **Choose several activities**, including snack, that best suit your group, space, and schedule (pp. 28–29). Be sure to prepare for the activities in advance and gather the necessary supplies. If doing a craft, make a sample before the session so that children can see what it is they are creating.
2. **When it is time to clean up**, chant:

Clean up, clean up, one, two, three.
Clean up, clean up, you and me!

Demonstrate to children your expectations of putting away supplies and cleaning the work space. Put names on projects. Place all projects to be taken home in a safe place.

Sending

1. **Gather in the story area and sit in a circle**. Sing together the song from the beginning of the session:

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children's names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

2. **Collect name tags** and put them in a safe place so they can be used again for the next session.
3. **Thank children for their good listening** today, and tell them you are excited to see them back at Bible school the next day to learn more about God's call.
4. **Children may play** as they wait to be picked up.

MESSAGE RECEIVED ACTIVITIES

Snack

Serve foods that start with the letter *m*, just as Mary's name starts with the letter *m* (such as muffins, melon, mozzarella cheese, marshmallows, mandarin oranges). Provide juice or water.

My Book of Stories student book

Open *My Book of Stories* to page 7. Read the poem to the children and talk about which face goes with which emotion. Children will color the faces.

I can trust God when I am happy.
I can trust God when I am angry.
I can trust God when I am confused.
I can trust God when I am sad.
I can trust God's plan no matter how I feel,
Because God *always* knows what's best!

Children will color and decorate the angel's wings on page 6.

Songs

- "All That God Wants You to Be" (theme song)
- "Calling Us by Name" (theme song)
- "Woman of God"
- "Wherever Love Is"
- Stand and sing another verse to the tune of "I Will Make You Fishers of Men":

God loves you so trust in God's plan! Trust
in God's plan! Trust in God's plan!
God loves you so trust in God's plan! It's
the best for you!

Motions

God loves you (*wrap arms around yourself
like a big hug*)
trust in God's plan (*join hands and walk
in one direction around the circle, then
walk in the other direction the next
time it is sung*)
it's the best for you (*two thumbs up*)

Books

You may want to read to the children if there is time.

- Dalton, Pamela. *The Story of Christmas*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011.
- Dungy, Tony. *You Can Do It!* New York: Little Simon Inspirations, 2008.
- Henley, Karyn. "The Angel's Secret," in *The Beginner's Bible: Timeless Children's Stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 1997.
- Norris, Jeannine Q. *Tonight You Are My Baby: Mary's Christmas Gift*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Smith, Todd Aaron. *Cow on the Tracks*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001.

Crafts

1. Angel Wings

In preparation, spread the surface with newspaper for easy cleanup. Give children their wings from the gathering activity. Children have already decorated their wings with color, and now children will add glitter. Have several adults on hand who can help with this step. Demonstrate how to use a glue stick on the wings, then sprinkle glitter onto the glue. Show children how to turn the wings to one side and so that excess glitter falls off the paper. An option is to use glitter glue and glitter glue pens

Materials: angel wings from gathering, glue sticks and glitter or glitter glue and glitter glue pens

2. Angel's Message Megaphone

Give each child a paper towel tube. Tell the children that Gabriel gave a special message to Mary. Sometimes when people have special messages to give each other, they use a megaphone. Explain that the tubes will be used to make megaphones and give messages to each other. Invite children to decorate their tubes with crayons and stickers. Give children messages to say to each other through the megaphones: God loves you, God has something to say, Baby Jesus will be born. Tell children to give special messages to other friends, too, using the megaphone.

Materials: one toilet paper or paper towel tube per child, crayons, stickers (An alternative to cardboard tubes is to provide a sheet of construction paper to each child. Demonstrate how to roll the paper into a tube, then tape it together.)

Activities

1. Mary's Statues Game

Children will move around the space as music is played from the *Message Received* CD. An adult leader will stop the music suddenly and when it stops, the children must freeze. Young children may need to practice freezing before doing this activity. When the music stops, the leader will say: *One day, an angel appeared to a girl named Mary, and Mary was very afraid—make a very scared statue!* Pause for a few seconds in scared positions. Start the music again; children will move until it stops, then freeze. Say: *The angel told her she was going to have a baby, God's Son! Mary was very confused—make a confused statue!* Pause; music begins again; children move until it stops, then freeze. Say: *The angel told Mary that God had chosen her, and nothing is impossible for God! Mary was amazed—make a 'wow-that's-amazing statue'!* Pause; music begins again, children move until it stops, then freeze. Say: *After Mary decided to trust God's plan, she was really excited—make a really excited statue!* To finish, say: *Then Mary began to sing a song of praise to God—let's do one last happy praise dance to the music!* Put the music on for a minute more and move and sing along together. If children want to continue making statues, use other scenarios from the story.

Materials: *Message Received* CD

2. Angel Messages

In preparation, write movements on slips of paper and put them in a basket. Be sure to demonstrate each of these movements as you begin this activity. Mark two lines about 10 ft / 3 m apart, both long enough for all of the children to stand along. Begin the activity with all of the children standing along the same line. Choose one child to be the first angel. The angel will reach into the basket for a slip of paper. An adult leader will read the paper and whisper the movement into the angel's ear, and the angel will use his or her best angel voice to tell the other children what the movement is. The children will need to do the movement to the other line. Invite a second child to be an angel. Continue until all children have had a turn being the angel.

Materials: paper slips with movements written on them (such as jump, walk heel-to-toe, crawl, walk sideways, walk backwards, use big steps, fly like a bird, tiptoe, etc.), basket, halo for the angel (optional)

3. Trust Walk

In preparation, put carpet squares or newspapers on the floor in a curved stepping-stone pattern at some places, and straight in others. Be sure children can easily step from one square to another. Arrange children in a single-file line at the first square. Have an adult lead them through the path. Children should step only onto the squares and not the floor surface. Only one child may be on a square at any time. After everyone is through the path one time, the adult will remove two random squares. Children will follow the leader through a second time, this time stretching over the places where the squares used to be in order to not touch the floor surface. Adults and children will need to trust that they can do this. Go through a third time, jumping from square to square.

Day 4

DISCIPLES

Biblical background

The men in today's story are doing their daily work of fishing, important work in first-century Palestine. In the middle of this hard and important work, they have a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

The account in Luke begins with a miraculous event. Simon Peter tries to catch fish, but the nets come up empty. Then, Jesus comes along and tells Simon to cast the nets at a different place. To Simon's amazement, the nets fill with fish! There are so many fish, in fact, that the boat begins to sink.

Matthew's account includes Jesus' words: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Jesus calls Simon and his brother Andrew, and another pair of brothers, James and John. The men leave their boats and nets and follow Jesus.

Following Jesus requires a shift of priorities. The men go from fishing with nets in the sea to fishing for people. Surely this is a new concept, and yet the men willingly leave the life they know to pursue the unfamiliar. Little did they know how much their life would change!

We may wonder how the men could just leave everything and follow Jesus. Yet we are also called to follow Jesus. What do we need to leave behind in order to do so? What things keep us in the familiar flow of life rather than following Jesus into a life of the unknown?

The imagery of fishing will appeal to children, but it will also be puzzling to try to understand "fishing for people." Help children to think of it as sharing Jesus' love with those they meet—family, friends, classmates, and others.

Advance preparation

- Supplies
 - Bible
 - Name tags (copy from p. 45)
 - *Message Received* CD and songbook
 - *My Book of Stories* student book (one per child)
 - Objects to go with the Bible story: fishing net
 - Snack (p. 36)
 - Materials for chosen *Message Received* activities (pp. 36–37)
 - Foam fish (p. 57), markers
1. Prepare items for snack.
 2. Choose activities from pages 36–37 and gather necessary materials and supplies. Some of the activities require advance preparation.
 3. The Bible story needs a narrator, Simon Peter, and Andrew. Copy and practice the story from pages 33–34 together.
 4. Practice songs for the session.
 5. Create name tags that can be pinned or taped to children's shirts, or punch a hole through the name tag and string with yarn to create a necklace.
 6. Create one fish per child using brightly colored foam craft sheets and the templates on page 57. Glue a googly eye to each fish head (optional).
 7. Place fishing net in the story area.

MESSAGE
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today's Bible experience

Matthew 4:18-22; Luke
5:1-11

Summary

Jesus calls some fishermen to follow him. Jesus says that he will teach them how to fish for people.

Bible memory

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it! —Luke 11:28b

Faith focus

Jesus calls us to follow him.

Group experience

Gathering

1. **Play the *Message Received* CD** as background music as children arrive. “Fish with Me” and “We Will Follow” are appropriate songs for this session.
2. **Greet children by name and welcome them to Bible school.** Give them name tags to wear. Pin or tape name tags to their shirts, or place them around their necks if name tags are strung with yarn.
3. **Invite children to the activity table** and allow each child to choose a foam fish shape. They may use markers to add color and details to their fish, such as fins and scales. Make sure their names are on the fish. Keep all the fish together so they can be taken to the activity area later. Those who finish may go to a quiet area and look at books or work on puzzles and other activities.
4. **Transition to the Bible story area.** Whisper: *If you can hear me, clap your hands one time.* Pause, then whisper a bit louder: *If you can hear me, clap your hands two times.* You may need to increase the claps until all of the children join in. Point out that children needed to listen so that they can hear you giving them directions to clap.
5. **Pray an opening prayer.** Begin with the sign of the cross, encouraging them to follow your hand motions: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The children respond: “Amen.” Pray: *Dear God, thank you for bringing us all back together to learn about how we can be good disciples. We pray this in Jesus’ name.* Prompt the children to respond: “Amen.”
Say: At Bible school, we will talk about how God calls us to listen, follow, and obey what God says. Now, you need to listen to me and follow what I say. Go to the Bible story area and sit on the floor.
6. **Sing together** these words to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men.” See page 4 for motions.

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children’s names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

Bible story

1. **Introduce the Bible story.**
Say: Today’s story takes place by a big lake. Fishermen are trying to catch fish when Jesus, God’s son, talks to them. Jesus calls them to follow him.
2. **Bible story:** Matthew 4:18-22 and Luke 5:1-11

| NARRATOR | SIMON PETER AND ANDREW |
|--|---|
| One day when Jesus was walking by the lake, teaching people about God, he saw two brothers on a boat. | <i>Simon and Andrew wave.</i> |
| Their names were Simon Peter and Andrew. | Simon: Hi! Andrew: Hello! |
| They had just been out fishing. Fishing was their job and it was hard work. They used big fishing nets so they could catch lots of fish. | <i>Pick up the fishing net together and pretend to toss it over the edge of an imaginary boat.</i> |
| On this day, the brothers had been out on their boat fishing all night long. | <i>Big yawns.</i> |
| But every time they pulled up their nets to check for fish, there were no fish! | <i>Pull up the empty net and check it, shake heads, sigh, shrug, and throw back into the water.</i> |
| They had checked their nets at midnight. They checked their nets at 2:00 a.m. And when they pulled up their nets for the last time, there were still no fish! | <i>Shake heads, sigh.</i> |
| By this time the brothers were ready to give up for the day. They tied up their boat and cleaned their nets so they could go home. | <i>Pull up the empty net and check it, shake heads, sigh, shrug, then help each other fold up the net neatly and set it aside.</i> |
| But when Jesus saw them by the shore, he walked right over to their boat and climbed on board! | Andrew: Is that really him? Simon: Yeah, that's Jesus, and he just climbed into <i>our</i> boat! |
| Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Take the boat into the deep water and put down your nets to catch some fish." Simon Peter and Andrew looked at the nets they had already cleaned and put away, then back at Jesus. | Simon: Jesus, we've been out fishing all night. Andrew: We kept trying over and over until morning, but every time we checked our nets, there were no fish! Simon: But if you say so, we will try again. |
| So the brothers took the boat back to the middle of the lake, let down their nets, and waited. | <i>Unfold the net and throw it back over the edge of the imaginary boat.</i> |

Children may be curious what it means to "fish for people." Explain that if we follow Jesus, we will share his love with others. That is one way to fish for people.

Pope Francis reminds us that when he started his ministry, he did not call the most important people of the time (priests and scribes), but he went to humble and simple fishermen. They immediately follow him on an exciting adventure. "The Lord is calling today, too!" says Pope Francis. "May each one of you think: the Lord is passing by today, the Lord is watching me, he is looking at me! What is the Lord saying to me? And if one of you feels that the Lord says to you 'follow me' be brave, go with the Lord. The Lord never disappoints. Feel in your heart if the Lord is calling you to follow him." (1/26/2014)

(continued next page)

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>But they did not need to wait long! They were so surprised to see fish. And more . . . and more . . . and more. Soon, the nets were so full of fish and they were so heavy. What if the nets broke?</p> | <p><i>Act more and more amazed as fish keep jumping into the net. Begin to strain as if it is getting too heavy to hold on to.</i></p> |
| <p>Simon Peter and Andrew called for James and John, their friends in another boat, to come and help them pull in the nets full of fish.</p> | <p><i>Wave and motion to call others over.</i></p> |
| <p>They all realized that Jesus had just done something amazing!</p> | <p><i>Shake heads in amazement.</i></p> |
| <p>Finally, they got the boats back to shore. Then Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Simon Peter and Andrew looked at the huge catch of fish in their nets, and then at each other. Do you think they left their boats and their nets and followed Jesus? (<i>Direct the question to the children and wait for an answer: yes.</i>)</p> | <p>Simon: You bet we did! Andrew: Anybody want a fishing job? We won’t be using those nets and boats for a while; we’re off to help Jesus catch people for God!</p> <p><i>The men wave and head out the door.</i></p> |

Respond to the Bible story

1. **Talk about the Bible story.** Allow space for all children to share ideas and wonder out loud together.
 - What were Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John doing when Jesus called to them?
 - What did Jesus tell Simon and Andrew to do?
 - What happened when they obeyed?

We can’t follow Jesus by walking around with him like the fishermen did, but Jesus still calls us to follow him. How do you think we can follow Jesus?
2. **Pray.** When Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John pulled in their nets with so many fish, they knew they needed to follow Jesus and listen to what he said! Let’s gather around the fishing net and hold on to it while we pray.

Pray: *Dear God, thank you that Jesus calls us, just like he did the fishermen. Help us to follow you. Amen.*
3. **Stand in a circle and say the memory verse** (Luke 11:28b). Open the Bible to Luke to show children where the verse comes from. Explain that the Bible is one way God speaks to us.

Say the verse and demonstrate the motions, then invite children to do them with you. Because the Bible story is about fishing, say the verse the first time while making fishy faces and pretending that arms are fish fins. Say it a second time, pretending to pull in a net filled with fish.

Blessed are those (*cross arms over chest, giving yourself a hug*)
who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)
the word of God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers pointing
upward with thumb nearest to your body, raise hand above head and
bring down in a line from face to chest*)
and obey it (*step forward and nod*)!

Message Received activities

1. **Choose several activities**, including snack, that best suit your group, space, and schedule (pp. 36–37). Be sure to prepare for the activities in advance and gather the necessary supplies. If doing a craft, make a sample before the session so that children can see what it is they are creating (p. 36).
1. **When it is time to clean up**, chant:

Clean up, clean up, one, two, three.
Clean up, clean up, you and me!

Demonstrate to children your expectations of putting away supplies and cleaning the work space. Put names on projects. Place all projects to be taken home in a safe place.

Sending

1. **Gather in the story area and sit in a circle**. Sing together the song from the beginning of the session:

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children's names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

2. **Collect name tags** and put them in a safe place so they can be used again for the next session.
3. **Thank children for their good listening** today, and tell them you are excited to see them back at Bible school the next day to learn more about God's call.
4. **Children may play** as they wait to be picked up.

MESSAGE RECEIVED ACTIVITIES

Snack

Go fishing! Prepare a small snack plate of goldfish crackers for each child (a blue plate will remind children of a lake). Include a small amount of dip (such as peanut butter, cream cheese, cheddar cheese spread, or hazelnut spread) and a few pretzel sticks. Demonstrate how to go fishing by dipping the pretzel into the dip, then pressing it to a cracker so that it sticks to the pretzel. Provide juice or water.

My Book of Stories student book

Open *My Book of Stories* to page 9. Follow Jesus and help bring new friends to love him too! Follow the path and look at the pictures to see ways to follow Jesus and share his love with others.

Children will color the boat on page 8.

Songs

- “All That God Wants You to Be” (theme song)
- “Calling Us by Name” (theme song)
- “Fish with Me”
- “We Will Follow”
- Stand and sing another verse to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men”:

I will make you fishers of friends, fishers of friends, fishers of friends!

I will make you fishers of friends, if you follow me!

Motions

I will make you fishers (*pretend to cast out and reel in fishing line*)
friends (*everyone reaches out to gently pat the people beside them on the back*)
follow me (*march in place*)

Books

You may want to read to the children if there is time.

- Dodd, Sarah J. “Wild Weather,” in *Bible Stories for Little Angels*. Oxford: Lion UK, 2011.
- Hoffman, Mary. “A Netful of Fish,” in *Miracles: Wonders Jesus Worked*. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books, 2001.
- Silverman, Erica. *Follow the Leader*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Skipworth, Kelly. *The Twelve Ordinary Men*. St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009.
- Tieck, Sarah. *Commercial Fishermen*. Edina, MN: ABDO, 2012.

Crafts

1. Faces in the Fishing Net

In preparation, make copies of the fishing net, one per child, on page 59. Hand them out to the children and then ask: *What is this a picture of? Who does Jesus love?* Add that Jesus loves everyone and wants everyone to follow him. Tell the children that they will fill their nets with faces of people Jesus loves. Invite them to draw and color faces into the nets such as their own face, their family members, and friends.

Materials: copy of fishing net for each child (p. 59), crayons

2. Fish Sun Catchers

Give each child a clear plastic lid. Invite them to draw a colorful fish on their lids. Have an adult make a hole at the top, and thread string through it and tie with a knot to be able to hang it. Hang lids next to the window when the sun is shining and look at the beautiful fish. Use the fish to help children retell the Bible story.

Materials: clear plastic lids such as those from deli

containers, markers, hole punch, string

Activities

1. Human Fishing Net Tag

In preparation, mark boundary lines across a playing area. Create two lines about 40 ft / 12 m apart. To begin, choose one child to stand halfway between the lines to be the fisherfolk. The other children all stand on one line and on “Go!” they will run across the playing field to the other line. The fisherfolk will tag as many children as possible. They will join hands to make a chain (human fishing net). Children will run from one line to the other again, with the chain trying to tag them. Play continues, back and forth between the lines, until all children are caught. When finished, say: *When we all join together and follow Jesus, we make one big net that wraps people up in God’s love! We are fishers of people, making new friends for Jesus!*

2. Follow the Leader

The fishermen followed Jesus. Invite children to form a single line behind an adult leader. The adult will lead children around the playing area, doing different activities while walking. Children need to go what the leader does. This might mean jumping at times, crawling under a table and out the other side, going up and

down steps, sliding down a slide, etc.

3. Fish in the Lake

Spread the parachute or blanket on the floor and position the children around it. Have each one grab hold of the parachute with both hands and gently lift it off the floor. Explain that the parachute is a lake (a blue parachute will be best). Give descriptions of the lake and move accordingly, children following your lead. Say:

Most of the time on the lake, the water is pretty calm, with just some gentle ripples (*shake parachute gently to make very small, slow ripples*).

There are some fishing boats that go by, and they make medium-sized waves as they go past (*make medium-sized waves with the parachute*).

Sometimes there are storms on the lake, with thunder and rain and wind, and then the water gets really choppy and wild (*shake parachute hard*).

But when the storm is over, the water is smooth and calm again (*hold parachute straight and still*).

There are many fish that live on the lake (*toss the foam fish onto the parachute*).

They swim around in the calm, quiet water (*shake parachute gently to make gentle, slow ripples*).

Whenever the fishing boats go by, the fish do their best to stay out of the way and not get caught (*shake parachute to make medium-sized waves*).

Some days it got really wild during storms and the fish got tossed all around in the waves (*shake parachute hard*).

The fish are glad when the storms end and the water is calm again (*hold parachute straight and still*).

Now one day, the fish were really staying away from the fishing boats that came by (*shake parachute to create small waves*).

The fishermen didn’t catch any fish. But then someone very special got into one of the fishing boats and his name was Jesus. The fish started jumping right into the fishing nets (*shake the parachute wildly until all of the fish bounce off of it*).

And then the fish were all in the nets. The lake was calm and quiet (*lower parachute to the ground and release*).

Materials: parachute or blanket, foam fish from gathering activity

Day 5

LYDIA

Biblical background

Lydia's story is just a small one in the Bible, but it deserves to be told. As the story begins, a group of women gather along a river just outside of the city gate. Paul and his traveling companions join them.

Lydia is described as a “worshiper of God,” meaning that she is a Gentile who is religious but not a convert to faith. She hears a call from God to listen to what Paul is saying, and her life changes forever. Lydia confesses her faith and is baptized. Remarkably, Lydia's entire household is baptized along with her. Afterward, she opens up her house as a place for believers to gather.

These few verses in Acts do not tell us much about Lydia; however, we can learn more about her by knowing the culture of that time. Though living in Philippi, Lydia is from the city of Thyatira (thai-uh-TAI-ruh), a place known far and wide for its textile industry. Lydia herself is a dealer in purple cloth, reserved for the wealthy and those of high status. She moves in circles of power and influence. Her house is likely a large and comfortable space for believers to gather.

Lydia is socially and financially accomplished. Yet she responds to God's call by opening her heart. This story is a good reminder that we can tell others about God, such as Paul did with Lydia, but that it is God who causes the results.

Children feel a spiritual connection to God whether or not they can put it into words. We can nurture them in their faith journey by providing love, acceptance, and examples of following Jesus.

Advance preparation

- Supplies
 - Bible
 - Name tags
 - *Message Received* CD and songbook
 - *My Book of Stories* (one per child)
 - Objects to go with the Bible story: paper plate streamers (made by the children)
 - Snack (p. 43)
 - Materials for chosen *Message Received* activities (pp. 43–44)
 - Paper plates, blue and purple crepe paper streamers, double-sided tape, crayons
1. Prepare items for snack.
 2. Choose activities from pages 43–44 and gather necessary materials and supplies. Some of the activities require advance preparation.
 3. Practice telling the Bible story from page 41.
 4. Practice songs for the session.
 5. Cut paper plates in half, one half per child. Cut streamers about 12 in / 30 cm long so that each child will have eight strips, though it would be good to have extra on hand. Put a piece of double-sided tape across the straight side of each half plate.

MESSAGE
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today's Bible experience

Acts 16:11-15, 40

Summary

Lydia already knows God but hears from Paul a call to open her heart and be baptized. She extends hospitality to others who follow Jesus.

Bible memory

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it! —Luke 11:28b

Faith focus

God calls us to open our hearts to Jesus.

Group experience

Gathering

1. **Play the *Message Received* CD** as background music as children arrive. “Open My Eyes” and “We Are Children of God” are appropriate songs for this session.
2. **Greet children and welcome them to the last day of Bible school.** Give them name tags to wear. Pin or tape name tags to their shirts, or place them around their necks if name tags are strung with yarn. At the end of the session, children will take their name tags with them.
3. **Invite children to the activity table.** Give each child half of a paper plate and eight streamers (four blue and four purple). Show children how to stick the short edge of the streamers onto the tape, leaving most of the streamer hanging off of the plate. Have a sample prepared to show children what it is they are creating, and have extra adults on hand to help. Children may add more color using crayons, if there is time. Be sure to write children’s names on the plate. Those who finish may go to a quiet area and look at books or work on puzzles and other activities.
4. **Transition to the Bible story area.** Whisper: *If you can hear me, clap your hands one time.* Pause, then whisper a bit louder: *If you can hear me, clap your hands two times.* You may need to increase the claps until all of the children join in. Point out that children needed to listen so that they can hear you giving them directions to clap.
5. **Pray an opening prayer.** Begin with the sign of the cross, encouraging them to follow your hand motions: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The children respond: “Amen.” Pray: *Dear God, thank you for bringing us together for our last day. Help us be good listeners so we can bring everything we learn this week home with us. We pray this in Jesus’ name.* Prompt the children to respond: “Amen.”
Say: At Bible school, we will talk about how God calls us to listen, follow, and obey what God says. Now, you need to listen to me and follow what I say. Take your plate and go to the Bible story area. Sit on the floor and hold your plate on your lap.
6. **Sing together** these words to the tune of “I Will Make You Fishers of Men.” See page 4 for motions.

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children’s names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

Bible story

1. Introduce the Bible story.

Say: *Today we will hear about a woman who opened her heart to Jesus. The story is in the Bible, which tells lots of stories about those who followed Jesus and then told others about Jesus so that even more people followed him. They were fishers of people!*

2. Explain that today's story is about a woman named Lydia.

Her job was selling purple cloth for people to wear. Whenever Lydia's name is said in the story, children should wave their streamers in the air and chant: *Lydia, Lydia, purple, purple, Lydia!* Explain that other parts of the story talk about the sea and the river. At those places, children should wave their streamers and chant: *the sea, the sea, the blue, blue sea* or *the river, the river, the blue, blue river.*

Practice chants before the story begins.

3. Bible story: Acts 16:11-15, 40

Paul and Silas sailed across *the sea, the sea, the blue, blue sea.* They wanted to share the good news about Jesus with new friends! Paul and Silas traveled wherever God called them to go.

One day they went to a city that had *a river, a river, a blue, blue river.* Some of the women in the city went there to worship God and pray together. They loved God, but they had never heard about Jesus. So Paul and Silas talked with them.

One of the women who loved God was *Lydia, Lydia, purple, purple Lydia.* Her job was selling very expensive purple cloth. Only very important and very rich people could wear purple clothes.

God was calling *Lydia, Lydia, purple, purple Lydia* to open her heart to Jesus. God brought Paul and Silas clear across *the sea, the sea, the blue, blue sea* so they could share Jesus with her! Paul told her that Jesus is God's Son. He told her that if she believes in Jesus, God will give her new life!

She listened eagerly to what Paul and Silas said about Jesus. Then *Lydia, Lydia, purple, purple Lydia* opened her heart to Jesus! She was baptized in *the river, the river, the blue, blue river* so that everyone would know that she believed in Jesus!

Pope Francis explains that it is the Holy Spirit that opened Lydia's heart in this reading. "Each time we feel something in our heart that draws us to Jesus, it is the Spirit working within," he said. That same Spirit pushes us to make Jesus known to other people, he continued, not only with words but with the way we live our lives. (5/2/2016)

Respond to the Bible story

- 1. Talk about the Bible story.** Allow space for all children to share ideas and wonder out loud together.
 - Look at the purple streamers. Why do they remind us of Lydia?
 - Look at the blue streamers. What do they remind us of?
 - Why do you think Lydia invited Paul and Silas to her house?
 - If you could invite anyone to your house, who would you invite?
- 2. Pray.** When Lydia and the other women wanted to worship God and pray together, they went to the river. Invite children to lay out all of the plates and streamers alongside each other to look like a river. Have them sit along the river to pray.

Pray. *Dear God, thank you for the story of Lydia. Help us to open our hearts to you, too! We want to grow up and follow you. Amen.*

- 3. Stand in a circle and say the memory verse** (Luke 11:28b). Open the Bible to Luke to show children where the verse comes from. Explain that the Bible is one way God speaks to us.

Say the verse and demonstrate the motions, then invite children to do it with you. Use the streamers to do the motions to the verse.

Blessed are those (*cross arms over chest, giving yourself a hug*)
who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)
the word of God (*sign language for God: Right hand fingers pointing upward with thumb nearest to your body, raise hand above head and bring down in a line from face to chest*)
and obey it (*step forward and nod*)!

Message Received activities

- 1. Choose several activities**, including snack, that best suit your group, space, and schedule (pp. 43–44). Be sure to prepare for the activities in advance and gather the necessary supplies. If doing a craft, make a sample before the session so that children can see what they are creating.
- 2. When it is time to clean up**, chant:

Clean up, clean up, one, two, three.
Clean up, clean up, you and me!

Demonstrate to children your expectations of putting away supplies and cleaning the work space. Put names on projects. Be sure to send all projects home today.

Sending

- 1. Gather in the story area and sit in a circle.** Sing together the song from the beginning of the session:

God is calling, listen to God! Listen to God! Listen to God!
God is calling! Listen to God, Calling you and me!

Sing again, this time using children's names. Point to children as you sing their names.

God is calling ____ and ____! ____ and ____! ____ and ____!
God is calling ____ and ____!
Calling ____ and ____!

- 2. Send name tags** home with the children.
- 3. Thank children for their good listening** today, and tell them you were excited to see them at Bible school.
- 4. Children may play** as they wait to be picked up.

MESSAGE RECEIVED ACTIVITIES

Snack

Feast on purple foods (such as grapes, crackers with grape jelly, grape Fruit Roll-Ups™, blueberries). Provide juice and water.

My Book of Stories student book

Open *My Book of Stories* to page 11. Follow the dot-to-dot and color the picture of Lydia's house.

Children will color and decorate the robe and head scarves worn by the people on page 10.

Songs

- "All That God Wants You to Be" (theme song)
- "Calling Us by Name" (theme song)
- "Open My Eyes"
- "We Are Children of God"
- Stand and sing another verse to the tune of "I Will Make You Fishers of Men":

Open your heart, let Jesus come in! Jesus
come in! Jesus come in!

Open your heart, let Jesus come in! And
his love flows out!

Motions

open your heart (*form heart shape with
hands in front of chest*)
Jesus (*point upwards*)
come in (*point toward chest*)
his love flows out (*make ocean wave mo-
tions with arms*)

If you have time, you may want to sing
other verses to the song.

Books

You may want to read to the children if there is time.

- Brett, Jan. *The Mitten*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1989.
- Leodhas, Sorche Nic. *Always Room for One More*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1965.
- Pearson, Emily. *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed*. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2002.
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Crafts

1. Tie-Dye Lydia's Heart

In preparation, fold coffee filters in half and cut out hearts along the folded edge. Make one per child. Cover the table with newspapers or an old tablecloth because marker colors may bleed through the filter. Explain that the children will be making colorful hearts because Lydia's heart was filled with joy after Paul and Silas told her about Jesus. Give each child a heart and invite them to use the markers to add lots of joyful colors and designs to them. As they do this, give each one a cotton swab and small cup of water. Demonstrate how to dip the cotton swab into the water, then "paint" over the designs. The colors will spread and create new designs. When children are finished, carefully transfer each heart to a dry paper towel and write their name on the paper towel. Set aside to dry.

Materials: coffee filters, markers, cotton swabs, small cups of water, paper towels

2. Puppets

Give each child a paper lunch bag and crayons. Demonstrate how to turn the bag into a puppet by drawing a mouth, clothes, and hair onto the bag. Allow children time to create their own puppets of characters from today's Bible story, such as Paul and Lydia. Invite children to retell the story using their puppets.

Materials: one paper lunch bag per child, crayons

Activities

1. Hula Hoop Hospitality

Tell children that Lydia invited Paul and Silas to stay at her house. Others who believed in Jesus gathered there, too. She welcomed people to her house. A big word for making people feel welcome is *hospitality*. This game is a way to show hospitality. Begin with five or six large hula hoops on the floor. As music plays, children will move around the play area, outside of the hula hoops. They may wave the streamers they made during the gathering time. When the music stops, everyone needs to find a home inside of a hula hoop. Children will need to show hospitality to others so that there is room for everyone. Continue playing using all of the hoops, or by removing one each round.

Materials: five or six hula hoops, *Message Received* CD

2. Lydia, Lydia, Purple (Duck, Duck, Goose)

This game is played like Duck, Duck, Goose, using the words *Lydia, Lydia, Purple*, instead. Have children stand in a circle. Demonstrate being IT by walking around the circle and gently tapping heads and saying "Lydia" with each tap. After several taps as Lydia, say "Purple" as you tap one child. The child who is tapped will chase IT around the circle until they return to the vacant spot in the circle. Play until each child has a turn to be the leader.

3. Water Run

Lydia and her friends worshiped near the river. After believing in Jesus, she was baptized with water. Remind children about water in the story as they play this game. In preparation, mark two lines in the play area: a starting line and a finish line. Set a bucket full of water at the finish line, and an empty bucket at the starting line. Form a line (or two lines, depending on the size of the group) behind the starting line. Give the first child an empty paper cup. The child will run from the starting line to the bucket of water, and fill the cup with water. The child then runs back to the starting line and pours the water into the empty bucket, and hands the cup to the second child before going to the back of the line. Continue until all have had two or three turns.

Materials: two buckets, water, paper cup

NAME TAGS



NAME



NAME



NAME



NAME



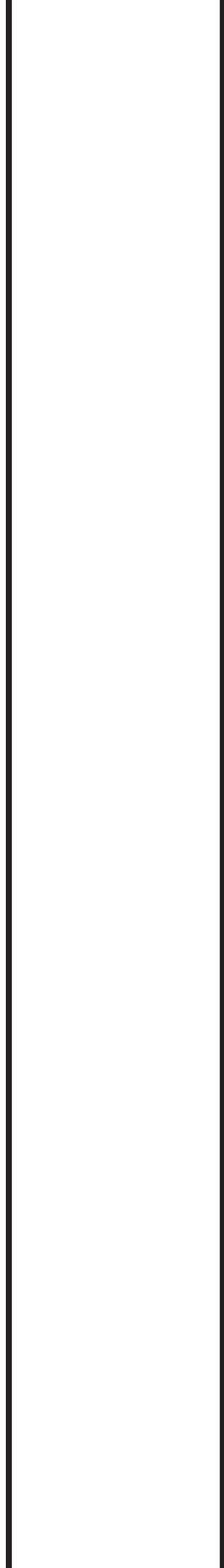
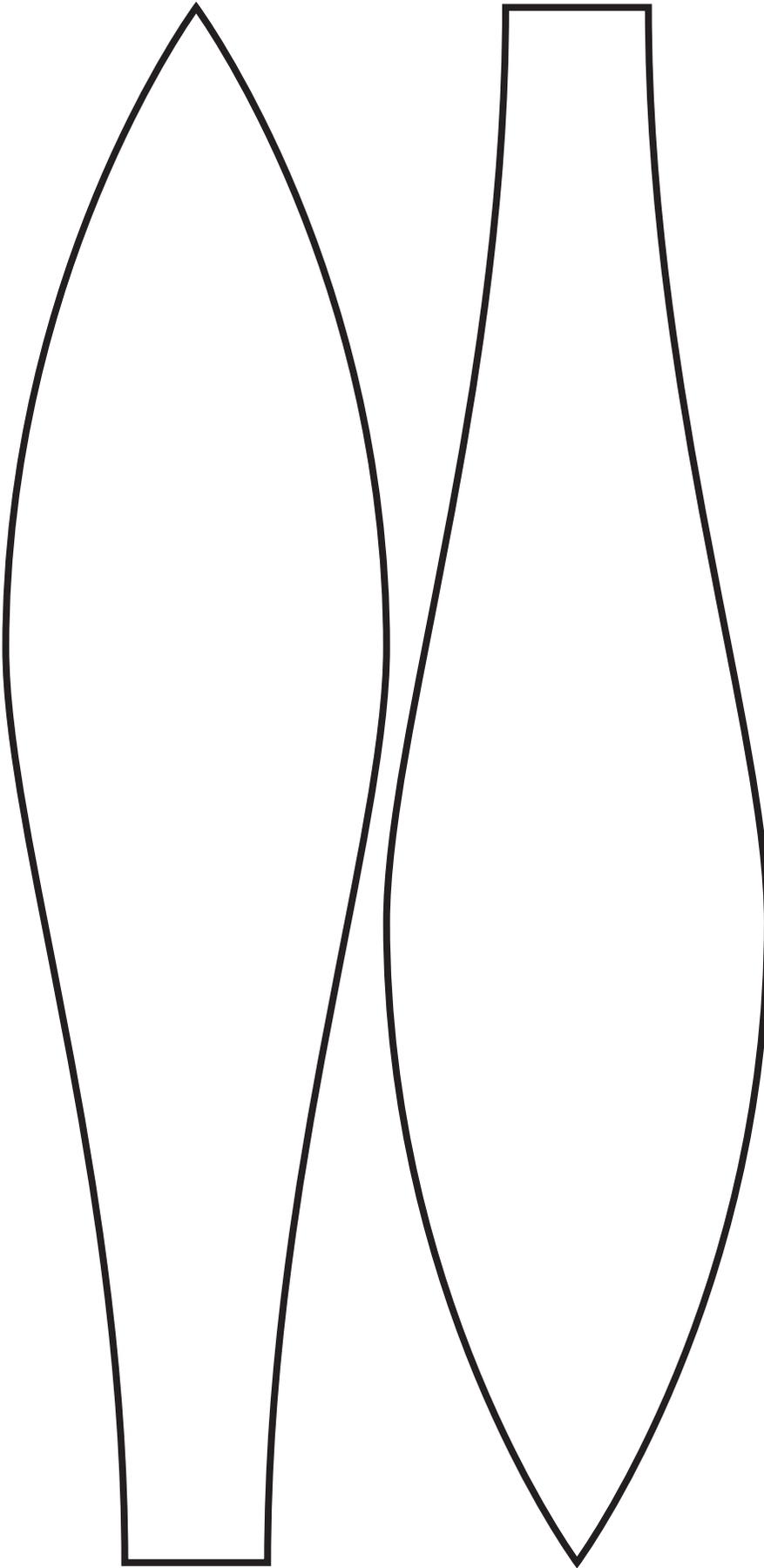
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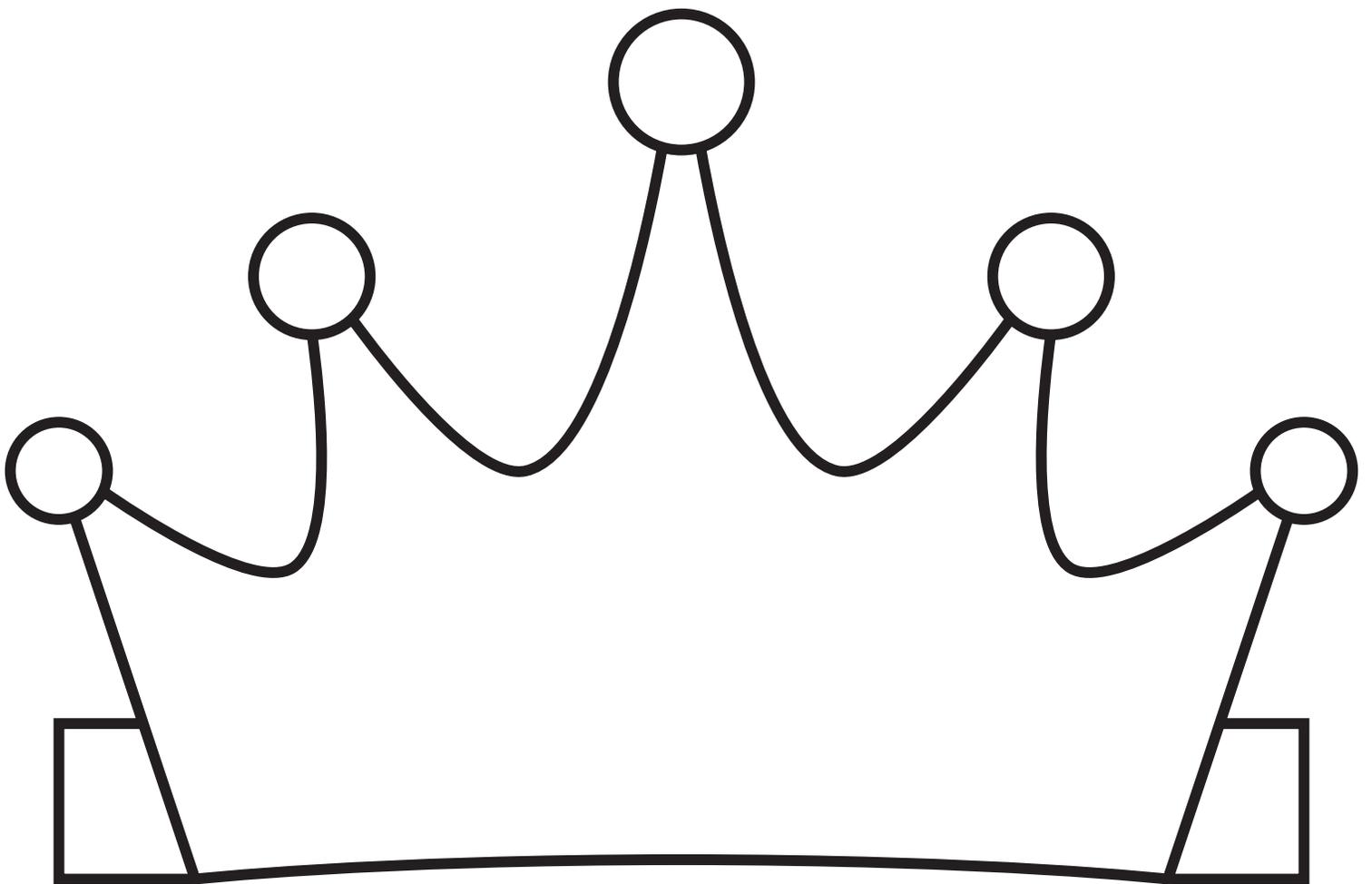
ALL EARS FOR GOD

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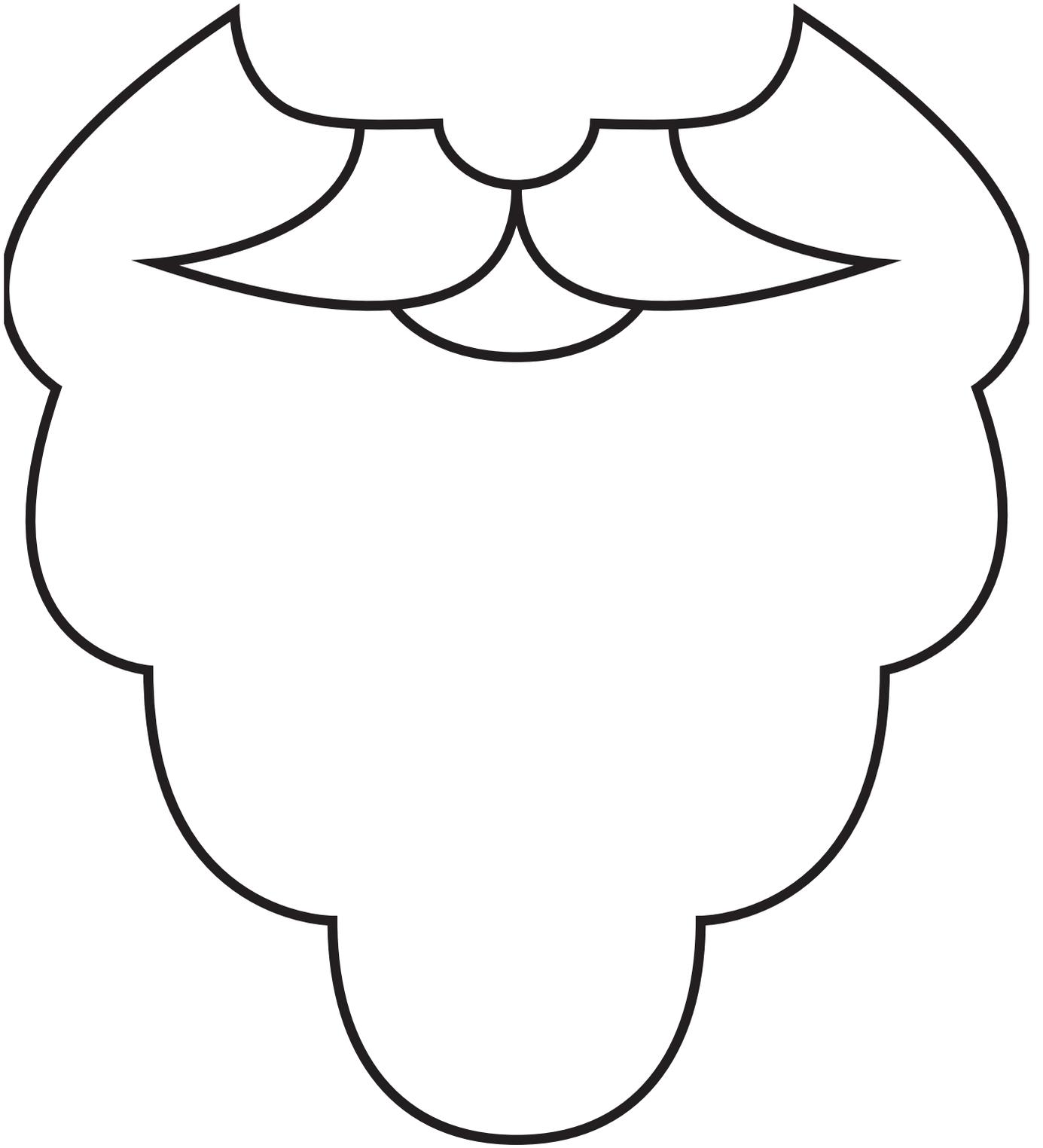
ESTHER STORY PROPS

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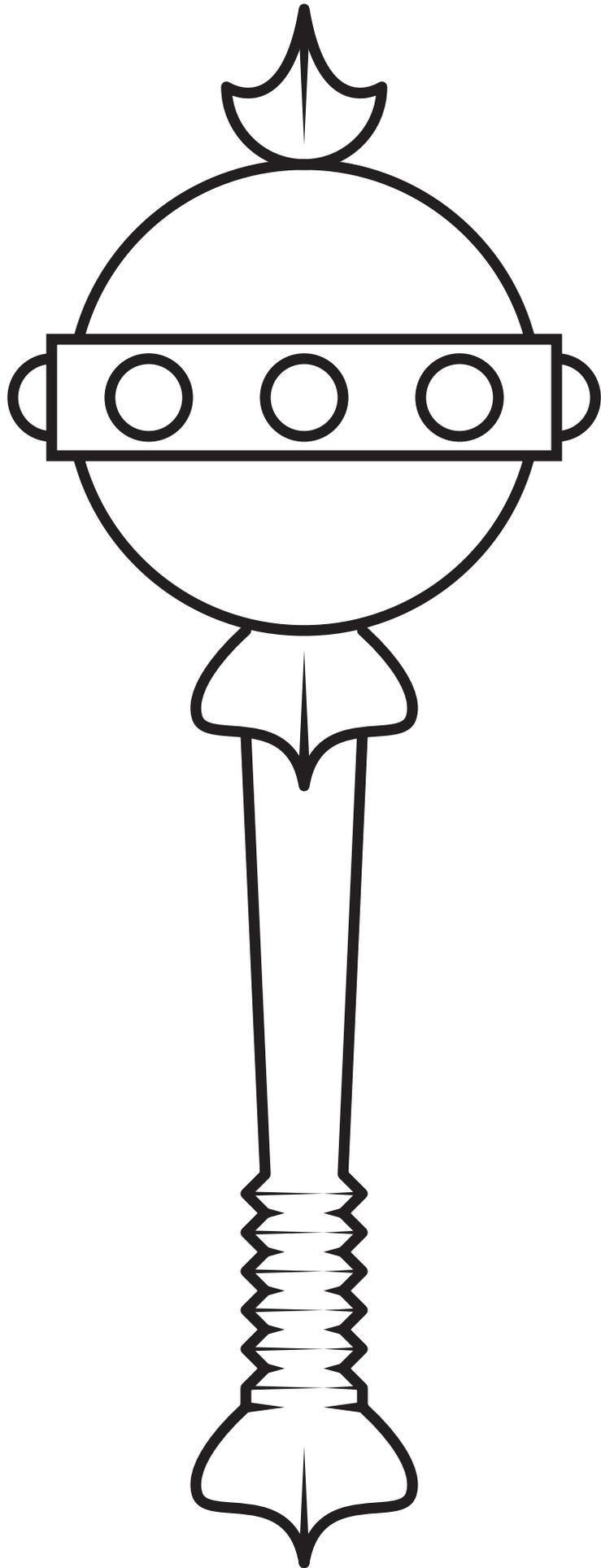
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ESTHER STORY PROPS

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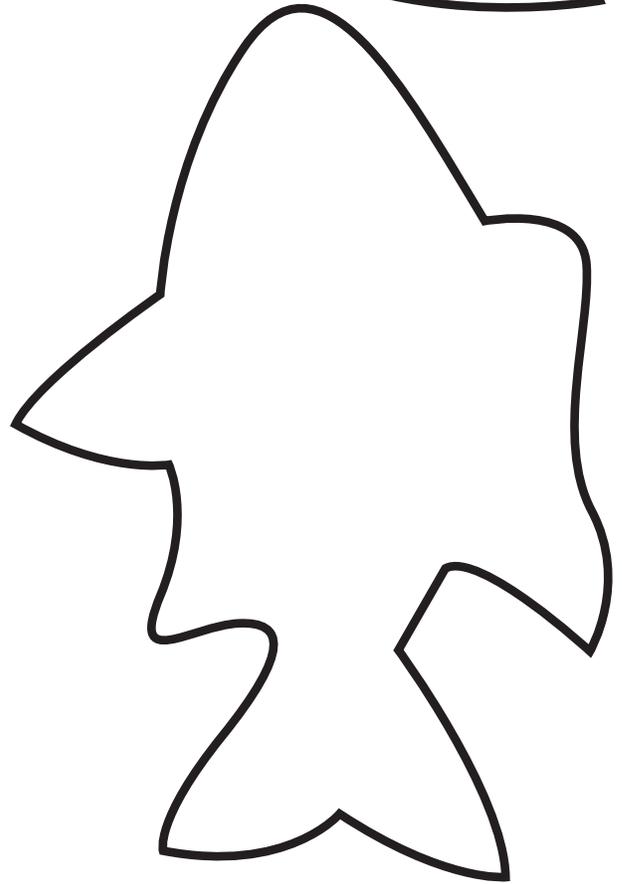
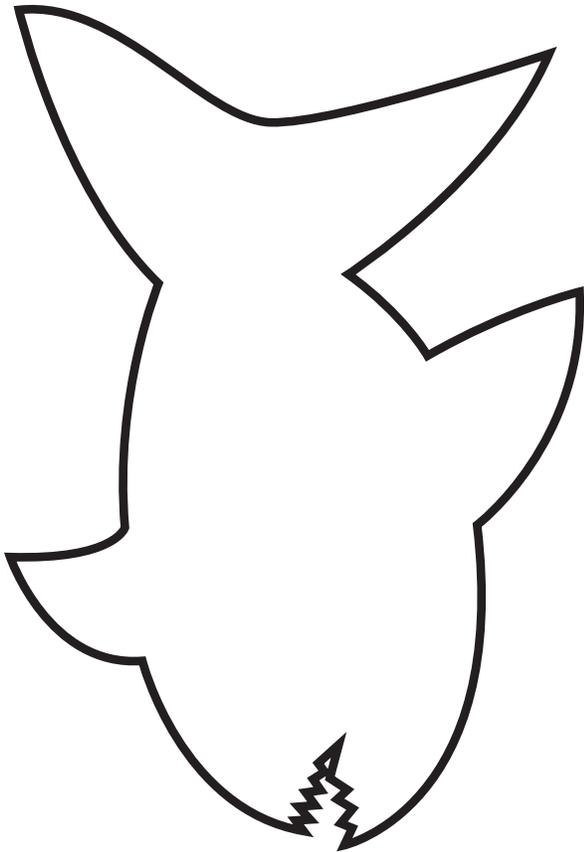
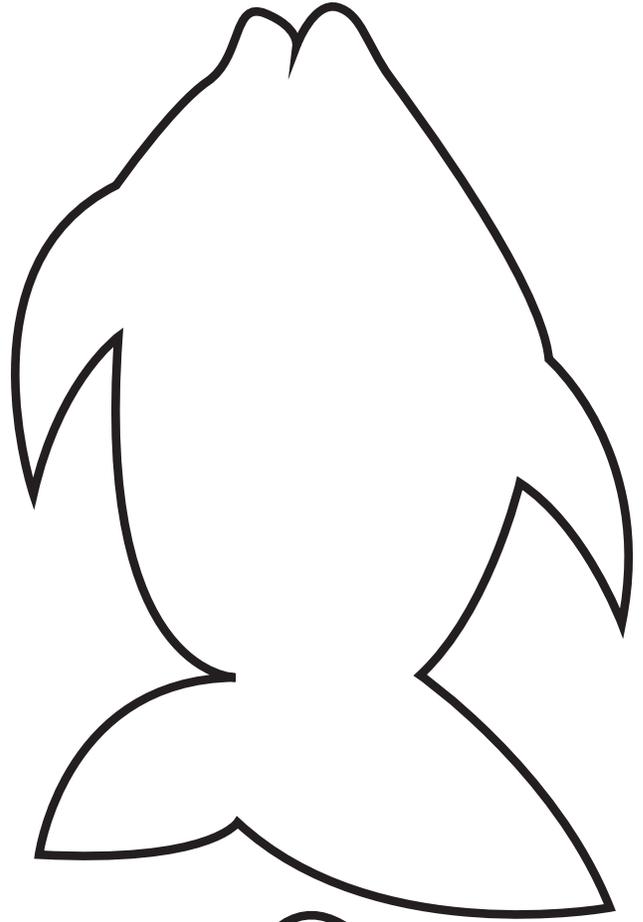
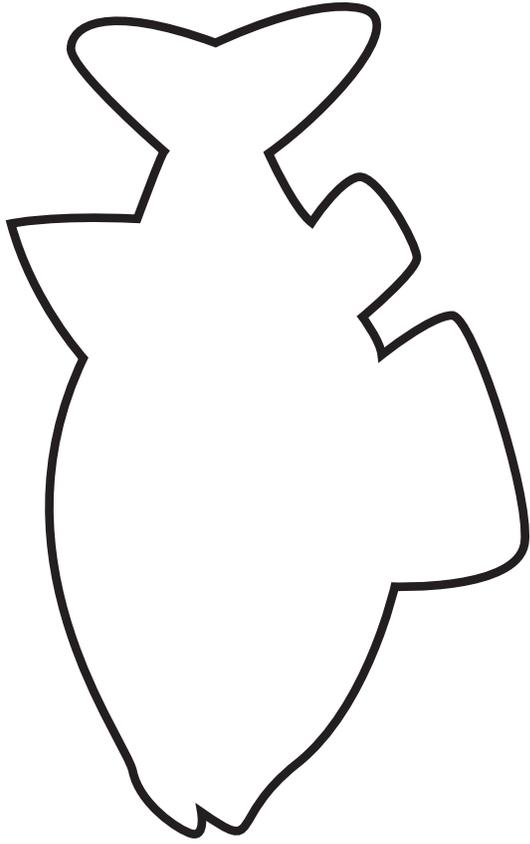
ANGEL WINGS

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FISH

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FACES IN THE FISHING NET

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