



God Protects Jesus' Family

Goal: To trust and be grateful for God's protecting grace when we are afraid.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 2:7-15, 19-23

Herod is described in much the same terms as the Egyptian pharaoh of Exodus times: a ruler who will stop at nothing to destroy anyone who stands in the way of his self-interest. Like Moses, Jesus escapes from a king's clutches and goes on to lead the people in a new way. The parallels between Jesus and Moses, Herod and Pharaoh, are further emphasized in Matthew 2:15: "out of Egypt I called my son" (from Hosea 11:1). Matthew uses Hosea's words to portray Jesus as the leader of a new exodus to a promised land that will be governed by a new king.

Joseph was ordered in a dream to take his family into Egypt to wait until Herod's persecution was over, so Jesus and his family were protected during the period of Herod's wrath. When Herod died, they were able to return to Israel. Joseph was instructed to reside in Nazareth, in Galilee.

Through it all, we see God's protecting hand, keeping the family safe during dangerous times. This was God's grace in action. When the danger was past, God directed Joseph where to settle with the family. All of this enabled Jesus to grow and begin his ministry according to God's purposes and promise. In gratitude, we—like Jesus' family—can be grateful for God's protecting grace. By this grace, Jesus' work was able to begin, leading to salvation.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

It will be helpful to remind children about King Herod, who appeared in the story about the magi in the previous session. He was afraid of an infant he thought would challenge his leadership, so Mary and Joseph acted quickly to protect their child. If you have children in your group who are refugees or immigrants, they will have their own stories of leaving the familiar to be safe in a new and different place. An essential connection to help children make is that, just as God was protecting Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; so, too, God protects us.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Invite children to share any dreams that they remember. Sometimes they are vivid and memorable. Be aware of your children's life experiences and anything that is important to know as you tell the story of an angry king who did not want Jesus and his family to be safe. Children understand that Jesus grew up loved and cared for by his family and community. He could go on to do great things because of this love. Help children name the ways they are loved and cared for, and remind them that they can do beautiful things in this world.

*O God, give me a heart for those who are outcast and who suffer.
Give me the will to help. In Christ's name. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2019–2020

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 5, 6, 6a, 17,
23

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

e-book or story audio
(see p. vii)

white fabric

white candle

Responding

Offering

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, internet-
connected device

Extra

copies of **GN 2**, timer

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG C A L

Play “These Wise Men”—**MM 9**—as children arrive. Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the response, “And also with you.”

Invite the children to help set the scene. On a table, place a white fabric and a Bible. (Even though green is the color for the season after Epiphany, we use white today because the story is a part of the Christmas story.) Add a white candle to signify the light of Christ.

Show **SCM 5** (last session’s story art). Encourage the children who know the story of the magi, or wise men, to tell it to the others.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Ask for two volunteers to practice reading today’s Scripture passage.

Wonder together who has moved from one town to another; from one country to another. Invite the children to describe the move—the preparation, the physical move, and getting acquainted in a new school, a new church, and a new community. Comment that the Bible story for this session is about a family that moves to a new country.

Singing

Sing “These Wise Men”—**MM 9**; **SCM 17**—to remember the story of the magi.

Praying

L

Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus, the light of the world. Take time to show gratitude for God’s gifts. After each line, prompt the children to respond, “We thank you, God.”

For shining light into the world,

we thank you, God.

For the gifts you give us,

we thank you, God.

For grace and peace,

we thank you, God.

For showing us how to live in your way,

we thank you, God.

Amen.



Preparing to Hear the Story C

Ask the children to tell you what they remember about the wise men's visit to Herod and Herod's response to the news of Jesus' birth. Read aloud Matthew 2:3–8.

Explain that today's Bible story begins in the town of Bethlehem, located in Judah. Help the children recall what other stories happened in Bethlehem. Show **SCM 6a** to remember locations for the stories of Jesus' birth (Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem). Talk about the dangers of travel in that time and the need for strangers to offer hospitality to travelers.

- C Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.



Hearing the Story SD L

Invite a child to find Matthew 2 in the Bible. Ask the two volunteers to read Matthew 2:7–15 and 19–23. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Ask the children to close their eyes as they hear a retelling of the story from **SCM 6** or the story audio. Have the children imagine the scenes and how they might portray either a person or situation in the story.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Show **SCM 5** again and ask if anyone can recall how God protected the wise men. (*A message was given to the wise men in a dream.*) Remind the children that an angel gave Joseph a message in a dream. Invite the children to talk about the ways God was present with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Ask them how they think each person might have felt at the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

Wonder together how people today can know of God's presence when they are afraid or anxious (*while taking a test at school, at night, during a storm, when someone is mean to them*).

Share with the children what helps you to remember that God is always with you. Encourage the children to share their own experiences of knowing God's gracious presence.

Singing

Play and sing “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**MM 25**; **SCM 23**—to thank God for God's love and protection.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God's Grace

B C LD

Invite children to act out the story of Joseph's dream, Jesus' family flight to Egypt, and their return to Nazareth. Suggest that they can add characters, depending on how many children there are. They may choose to have a narrator reading **SCM 6** or tell the story in their own words.

After the skit, engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- How did it feel to have an angel give you a message?
- How did it feel to have to rush to leave?
- How did it feel to have to settle in a new land?
- How did it feel to know that God was with you, protecting you?
- When are times when you know that God is with you?

Consider taking digital pictures or video of the skit and sharing them with your congregation.

Praying God's Grace

M

Wonder when children might worry or feel afraid. Explain that one of the ways we can remind ourselves that God is with us is with a breath prayer. Demonstrate:

(Breathe in.) God is here.

(Breathe out.) I will not fear.

Invite the children to sit with straight backs and join you in the breath prayer. Wonder about times to pray this prayer.

Suggest they pray the prayer when they are worried or anxious. They can also teach it to friends or family members to use.

Option: Suggest that the children find a partner and sit across from each other. As both children breathe in, the first child says, "God is here." Both children breathe out as the second child responds with, "I will not fear." They can take turns.

M *Sitting quietly for a prayer may be difficult for some children.*

Consider having them hold something, such as the Bible, that may be needed soon. This will give them something to focus on as well as provide an important role for them.

When sharing pictures of the children, follow your church's safe practices policy.



Offering God's Grace

MS LG

Ask the children to tell you what they know about *refugees*. Explain, if necessary, that refugees are people who have been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. Wonder together how Jesus and his family were refugees. Wonder together who might be refugees today.

Tell the children that a part of the United Nations, an organization of many countries of the world that try to work together for peace and help people in need around the world, focuses on refugees. This year it is trying to make people aware of how many people walk to find safety. It is called "One Billion Miles to Safety." As a way of thinking of all the people who must flee their homes and walk to safe places, the United Nations is challenging people to count their steps and miles.

Invite the children to research and implement this project using the instructions on **GN 1**.

Make a poster encouraging people in the congregation to join the project as well. Display the poster in a prominent place in your church. Consider writing an announcement for your church's newsletter or announcement time during worship.

Extra Activity

C

Begin by telling the children that they will be taking a long trip, and that they have very little time to pack. Form pairs. Hand out a copy of **GN 2** facedown and a pencil to each pair. Set a timer for two minutes. Have the children turn their papers over and write as many things as they can that they want to take with them until the timer stops. Encourage both members of the pair to contribute ideas to the list. Allow time for the children to share their responses.

Continue the discussion by telling them that there may not be electricity where they are going and there will be no internet connection. Have them cross out all items that use electricity or the internet.

Now tell them that they have to pack all of it in one backpack, since they will be walking. Ask them to determine what would fit into the backpack, then cross out all of the things that do not fit. Have them look at what remains in their backpacks. Wonder together how it may feel to leave things behind and travel with only a few things. Wonder together how we might be able not to worry or feel afraid.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Ask the children to help clean the space.

Gather the children in the worship space and form a circle. Before singing, have the children take turns counting aloud, “one, two, one, two,” until all children have a number. Suggest that each child extend their right hand to the shoulder of the person to their right, as a sign of protection. At the pause between verses, all the “ones” will step to the inside of the circle. The inner circle will take a step to the right; the outer circle to take a step to the left. Then all the children will move back into one circle. Reestablish the shoulder connection, protecting another child. Sing “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**MM 25; SCM 23.**

Pray aloud, prompting the children to echo each phrase:

Thank you, God, /
for protecting Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. /
Thank you for being with us /
whenever we are afraid, /
wherever we go, /
whatever we do. /
Amen.

Send each child with these words: “(Name), go in grace. God is always with you.”

Remind the children about the free e-book and challenge them to read the story during the week.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit gracesightings.org. Remind the parents and caregivers about the e-book and story audio (see p. vii).

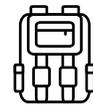
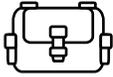
RESEARCH

- On an internet-connected device, go to www.stepwithrefugees.org. Click on the “About” tab at the top of the page. Research what the project is about. Have several volunteers take turns reading while another volunteer writes down key points on a sheet of newsprint.
- Click on the “Stories” tab and choose a refugee’s story to read. Have volunteers take turns reading. Click on the “down arrow” in the bottom center of the page to move the story along.
- Start small. Invite the children to walk from one side of the room to the other and back again, counting their steps along the way. Write each child’s step count on a sheet of newsprint. Now have the children walk back and forth four more times. Multiply each child’s step count by five for a total of five circuits. Add together all the children’s steps. Tell the children that it takes about 2,000 steps to walk a mile.



IMPLEMENT

- Invite the children to make a poster or mural encouraging people in their church to join the “One Billion Miles to Safety” challenge. Have them choose key points to include about refugees and why walking will raise awareness. Make some sort of path as a way to keep count of steps/miles. Perhaps set a goal of 50 or 100 miles. Make a key that tells that 2,000 steps equal a mile. Suggest that people keep track of their steps/miles and add them to the poster. Set a time period for collecting the steps/miles. Even though this project lasts through the year, set a reasonable time for people to participate, perhaps the month of January.
- Begin by coloring in the number of steps the children took.



My Packing List

