



Sermon Guide

TODAY'S BIBLE STORY **Goodness and Light** Jesus Is Promised Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6-7; 7:14-15

WEEK 1

Key Question: **What are you hoping for?** Hope is a word that gets tossed around a lot at Christmas, but kids might not get the chance to really talk about it. That's why we start with a question about hope. We all have expectations about what we need or want out of life. We pray that, through answering this question, kids will find a safe place to discuss the ways they're trusting God to meet their needs.

In our first week, we start in **Micah 5:2, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Isaiah 7:14-15**, where we discover how prophets predicted that God would send a Savior. No one could have expected that it would take hundreds of years before Mary, Joseph, or any of the shepherds or wise men came on the scene. The prophets wrote these promises to offer hope to God's people as they faced exile. Even though it took time, God kept these promises, and because of that, we can still have hope today.

Bottom Line: **You can have hope because God is faithful.** Much of what we celebrate at Christmas is an incredible reminder that God can be trusted no matter what. We can

TEACHING GUIDE:

have hope because, when all seemed hopeless, God made promises to save the world and then followed through with Jesus. No matter what we face in life, we can have hope and trust that God is at work and can help us get through our circumstances.

KEYSCRIPTURE: Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6-7; 7:14-15

This message should be 15-18 min. More time for small group is key. Remember the lead small model.

SLIDE: KEY QUESTION

"What are you hoping for? How does knowing God has a plan give us hope even when things are difficult? You may not quite know how to answer those questions. That's totally fine. You'll get a chance to chat all about hope while you're with your Small Group. Before you head out, let's pray and ask God to remind us of the true hope we have in Jesus! Let's pray!"

"Today as you go to groups, think about this: What are you hoping for?"

CHRISTMAS is about celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift.

HEADS UP: IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU TALK ABOUT CHRISTMAS WITH KIDS

The Christmas season can be an interesting time for families as they navigate how they'll celebrate with their kids and extended family and friends. It's important to keep in mind that not everyone will experience this season the same way. Some go all out with presents, while others keep it low-key. Christmas can be a time when people feel grief from losses over the past year or the pain of current health situations. Christmas can also expose some of the socioeconomic differences among the people who attend your church. It's important to keep all of these things in mind as you talk about Christmas plans, what kids want for Christmas, or what kids are hoping for this year. Have a plan in place to make sure ALL kids feel at home in your church. Also, remind your Small Group Leaders and Storytellers that it's not our job to tell kids what to think and believe about Santa Claus, Elf on the Shelf, or any of the traditions that people have. Just meet kids where they are and direct them back to their parents for these sorts of questions.

TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

You can have hope because God is faithful.

MONTHLY VIRTUE

Christmas—Celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

What are you hoping for?

MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

"A child will be born to us. A son will be given to us. He will rule over us. And he will be called Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God. He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever and Prince Who Brings Peace." Isaiah 9:6a, NIRV

DECK THE HALLS

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS



WEEK
ONE
DECEMBER 2023

LARGE GROUP
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25 MINUTES

10 MINUTES

TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

Goodness and Light
Jesus Is Promised
Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6-7; 7:14-15

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

What are you hoping for?

TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

You can have hope
because God is faithful.

MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

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will be given to us. He will rule over
us. And he will be called Wonderful
Adviser and Mighty God. He will also
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MONTHLY VIRTUE

Christmas—Celebrating Jesus,
God's greatest gift

BASIC TRUTH

I can trust God no matter what.

LARGE GROUP

ENGAGE KIDS' HEARTS THROUGH A DYNAMIC AND INTERACTIVE BIBLE STORY, WORSHIP, AND PRAYER EXPERIENCE IN A LARGE GROUP SETTING.

AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS STUDENTS ENTER.

SLIDE: THEME

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP

Host enters . . .

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): COUNTDOWN

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME

WELCOME

Host has lots of energy as he or she welcomes everyone to [Name of Environment]. Host is relatable and inviting. Host can talk about something that happened culturally throughout the week like a big sports game, movie opening, a viral video on YouTube, etc. Host tells them how excited he or she is that they're there and briefly runs through what they can expect. This is especially helpful for first-time guests to make them feel like they know what's happening.

OPENER

HOST: "Hey, everyone! I am so pumped for another month here at [Name of Environment]. We're Decking the Halls and counting down to the big day! And what 'big day' is that, you might ask? Christmas, of course! Who is ready for Christmas break? (Pause for responses.) I know I am! All month long, we're planning on making a big deal about this big day that celebrates Jesus, God's greatest gift! And to start the countdown, I need four volunteers to play a game that is sure to get ALL of us into the Christmas spirit . . . I call it, 'Deck the Trees!'

SLIDE: "DECK THE TREES"

Host picks 4 volunteers.

"(To volunteers) How many of you like decorating the Christmas tree? Me too. Well, today's game is inspired by this age-old tradition . . . but of course, this is [Name of Environment], and we can't just decorate a Christmas tree. Nope, we've got a bit of a twist to keep it interesting. You'll be divided into teams of two. One team member will be blindfolded. The other team member will hand that person a Christmas decoration. Then, without help, they place that

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decoration on the tree. At the end, after all the decorations are on, we will ask your friends out in the audience to judge the trees to see which turned out best. Understand? Any questions? *(Pause for responses.)* Great! Get ready. Get set . . . and go!"

VIDEO: 60-SECOND COUNTDOWN TIMER

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): COUNTDOWN

AUDIO: FUN CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Set out two identical sets of decorations as well as an empty Christmas tree. Blindfold one volunteer from each team and start the game. When finished, have all the kids vote on their favorite by applause.

"(After the game) Well done! Although I can't make any promises that someone won't come behind and tidy up those trees a bit. Now, let's stand together and worship!"

DECK THE HALLS

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WORSHIP

Worship Leaders enter as Host exits.

WORSHIP LEADER: "I'm excited to worship with all of you! It truly is beginning to look and sound like Christmas. Let's spread some Christmas cheer with this song right now. When we get to the chorus, you sing, 'For Christmas this year.' Ready? Here we go!

AUDIO: "CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR" / TRACK 5 FROM JINGLE JAM WRAPPED UP

OPTIONAL VIDEO: "CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR" LIVE LYRICS VIDEO

"That was so fun! Nice singing, everyone. Before we continue in worship, let's watch this.

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): LIVE LOUD VIDEO FROM GET REEL

"We have a new version of a Christmas song for you today. It's called 'Silent Night.' Let's sing and celebrate God's greatest gift. Sing this with us because Jesus, our King, is born!

AUDIO: "SILENT NIGHT (THE KING IS BORN)" / TRACK 1 FROM SILENT NIGHT (THE KING IS BORN) SINGLE

OPTIONAL VIDEO: "SILENT NIGHT (THE KING IS BORN)" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"That's right! Jesus, the King, was born for us. I'm so thankful for that! Listen to these words to God in Psalm 90:14: 'Satisfy us with your faithful love every morning. Then we can sing for joy and be glad all our days.' (NIRV) We can have joy because God loved us enough to send Jesus for us. Let's sing 'Joy to the World!'"

AUDIO: "JOY TO THE WORLD (GLORY TO THE KING)" / TRACK 1 FROM JOY TO THE WORLD (GLORY TO THE KING) SINGLE

OPTIONAL VIDEO: "JOY TO THE WORLD (GLORY TO THE KING)" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

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COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND

Communicator enters as Worship Leaders exit.

INTRODUCTION

COMMUNICATOR: "Hey, everyone! Merry, MERRY Christmas! I know, I know . . . It's not quite Christmas yet, but it's just so great to be with you as we Countdown to Christmas!"

SLIDE: VIRTUE

"Christmas, of course, is all about celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift! And as we celebrate Jesus this month, each week we'll take a closer look at a word that helps us countdown to the big day. The word for this week is . . .

SLIDE: HOPE

"HOPE! So, to kick us off, I was wondering . . . what are some of the things we hope for? Take a moment and tell a few people next to you something you're REALLY hoping for right now.

Give kids a chance to chat with each other for a few moments.

"Okay, let's hear from some of you. What are you really hoping for right now? We'd love to hear!

Communicator walks around the room and has kids respond with what they are hoping for.

"Okay those were great. I love how we heard about everything from grades in school to Christmas presents to people and pets who you'd like to feel better. As I think about hope, I'm hoping for . . .

Communicator shares an appropriate hope they have.

"It seems like we always have things we hope for, but especially at this time of year. For some reason Christmas is a time of year when the idea of hope really shows up."

TENSION

COMMUNICATOR: "Now . . . let me ask you a different question about hope. Raise your hand if you've ever had a time when you were hoping for something, but it was taking forever to happen. *(Pause for responses.)* Yeah, me too! And maybe all that waiting started to get to you and you started to get frustrated—can anyone relate to that? Raise your hand if that's you! *(Pause for responses.)* Yep, same here!

"In all that frustration and waiting, what should we do? How do we cope? Where do we turn? Do we give up hope or find some sort of strength to keep waiting? After all, chances are pretty high that hope is even more important in times like those.

"Those are really important questions for us to think about. Thankfully, we can find all sorts of hope in this book right here *(hold up the Bible)*, the Bible! And in the Bible, we can find all sorts of truth to help us as we ask hard questions, and not just questions about hope, questions about . . . anything! Remember, the people who wrote the Bible had

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personal experiences with God. And God inspired them to write about those experiences so people like us could learn from them, thousands of years after they were first written! Let's dive in and see what we can discover about hope!"

TRUTH

COMMUNICATOR: "Now, I know when we think about Christmas, we think about the stories of Jesus, but today, we're actually headed back to the Old Testament of our Bible to the time BEFORE Jesus was born. See, in the beginning, God made an amazing world. But sadly, people turned away from God and the world became broken. But God didn't give up on the world or the people. God knew that the world needed a Rescuer.

"So, God made a plan to bless the whole world through a man named Abraham and his family. You might remember them. God's people were called (*wait for responses*) . . . the Israelites, right! But over and over again, it seemed like the people kept resisting God's plan for them. Eventually, God gave the Israelites kings. The third king led the people away from God, so God allowed the kingdom of Israel to be split into two nations. The northern kingdom of Israel never had a good, wise king who followed God and led the nation like God wanted. The southern kingdom of Judah had some good kings, but most of them were unwise and foolish and led the people further AWAY from God.

"During this time, God spoke through people called prophets to encourage and challenge the people to turn their hearts back to God—and to tell them that God was going to send a Rescuer! Two of these prophets were Isaiah and Micah. Let's spend a little time checking out pieces of their messages.

"Let's start with Isaiah. Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus was born! God allowed Isaiah to understand some important moments that would happen to God's people living in the kingdom of Judah. Isaiah could see ahead that the people would be overtaken by their enemies. Their rebellion had led to this, but still it was awfully sad. The kind of sad that makes you ask . . . is there any HOPE?

"That's where we pick up our first passage for today. I need some help. Even though this passage is short, it's PACKED with promises and details about what to expect. And it looks like we have received a Christmas card to help us . . .

Communicator takes out oversized Christmas envelope #1 and chooses a volunteer to open it, revealing the contents. They unfold a large writing of the verse with words emphasized.

Open the Bible to Isaiah 9:6a (NIRV) and read with emphasis added.

"A CHILD will be born to us. A son will be GIVEN to us."

"Alright, so right away, what is being promised?

Allow for responses.

"The promise of a Child . . . a Child who is given. But what do we know about this Child? Let's keep reading.

Continue reading Isaiah 9:6 (NIRV) and read with emphasis added.

"He will RULE over us."

"What is this saying about this Child . . . this Son?"

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Allow for responses.

"Royalty! A King! Let's keep reading.

Continue reading Isaiah 9:6 (NIRV) and read with emphasis added.

"And he will be called WONDERFUL Adviser and MIGHTY God. He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever and Prince Who Brings PEACE."

"Well, we haven't really gotten a name yet for this King . . . but certainly some amazing titles and characteristics of what this Ruler will be like. Wonderful Adviser or Counselor. Mighty God. Eternal Father or Father Who Lives Forever. Prince Who Brings Peace.

"Those are some pretty amazing promises! But that's not the end. Actually, it's just the start.

"Now, this next part is pretty cool because it goes beyond the titles to tell us what it will be like when this Son, this King, rules. Check this out.

Open the Bible to Isaiah 9:7 (NIRV) and read with emphasis added.

"There will be no limit to how great his authority is. The peace he brings will NEVER END."

"How is His authority and peace described? (Pause for responses.) Right! It will NEVER end! If the ruler is a tyrant, this is a nightmare scenario. But if the ruler is wonderful, wise, and truly good? Well, let's keep reading.

Continue reading Isaiah 9:7 (NIRV).

"He will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom. He will make the kingdom strong and secure. His rule will be based on what is fair and right. It will last forever."

"So that first part is really important—David's throne. That's an important connection to the ruler God promised to send one day. This Rescuer, the Messiah, would come from the line of David. And just like David, He would build God's kingdom into a secure one. But did you catch what the promise said about the WAY in which He would rule? Like a tyrant? Like someone who only cares about Himself? NO! His rule will be based on what is fair and right . . . and this will go on like this forever.

"Why did God make this promise? And what will ensure that it actually would happen? Well, look at the very end of the verse."

Continue reading Isaiah 9:7 (NIRV).

"The Lord's great love will make sure that happens. He rules over all."

"It's God's great love that drives this WHOLE thing. It's God's great love that ensures it will happen. It is because of God's great love that we get an amazing gift—Jesus, God's own Son! That sure sounds hopeful, doesn't it?

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"How about we open the second envelope . . .

Communicator chooses a volunteer to open Christmas envelope #2, revealing the second passage.

"Even though we learned so much from that first passage, Isaiah wrote something else that helps answer some more questions. And it's a big one: how would God's people know when the king arrived?

Open the Bible to Isaiah 7:14 (NIRV) and read with emphasis added.

"The Lord himself will give you a SIGN. The virgin is going to have a baby. SHE will give BIRTH to a SON. And he will be called IMMANUEL."

"What do you think Isaiah meant here by the word 'sign'?

Allow for responses.

"Right! When you see a sign, it points you to something, like a sign on the highway that helps you know how far you are to your destination. God was signaling HOW they would know when the Rescuer had arrived. And what was the sign? A woman would give birth to a Son. That doesn't seem all that out of the ordinary. Happens all the time, actually. But it was the WAY it would happen, which we'll talk more about next week. Can anyone guess the 'SHE' Isaiah was talking about here?

Allow for responses.

"Yes, Mary! And Isaiah went on to say that the Child's name would be called IMMANUEL. (*Communicator pauses.*) Anyone confused? Did anyone think Isaiah was about to say a different name?

"Well, Isaiah WAS talking about Jesus . . . you're not confused there. But Immanuel is like a title, kind of like the titles we saw before . . . Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God . . . and so on. Immanuel means 'God with us.' This SON will be GOD WITH US!

"And just like the previous passage, look what Isaiah said about the way He will rule.

Open the Bible to Isaiah 7:15 (NIRV).

"He will still be very young when he can decide between right and wrong."

"Right and wrong. Fair and just. A truly good king. Again . . . super hopeful!

"Now, like we said earlier, God didn't just share these plans with Isaiah. God spoke to several prophets who then spoke to the people. Micah was another prophet who spoke to God's people during this time when they seemed to have very little hope. Let's check out one more passage together.

Communicator chooses a volunteer to open Christmas envelope #3, revealing the third passage.

Open the Bible to Micah 5:2 (NIRV) and read with emphasis added.

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"The Lord says, 'BETHLEHEM Ephrathah, you might not be an important town in the nation of JUDAH. But out of you will come for me a RULER over Israel. His family line goes back to the early years of your nation. It goes all the way back to days of long ago.'"

"Okay, first of all, did you notice the places and names that jump out of the verse? (Pause for responses.) Yes! Bethlehem and Judah. God was using the prophet Micah to narrow in on where the Ruler would come from. He would be born in Bethlehem! He would be from the people of Judah. And check it out . . . His family line went back to the early days of the nation.

"When God was planning how to bless the world . . . and send a Rescuer . . . who was God's answer? Jesus! And God sent prophets like Isaiah and Micah to announce this during a time when all hope felt lost. God wanted to make sure that even while they were waiting, God's people could cling to hope!"

APPLICATION

COMMUNICATOR: "Isn't it amazing to think that long before Jesus was ever born, God had this all planned out? God knew how Jesus would come into the world, and God knew exactly what we needed in a Rescuer. Now, I'm sure when Isaiah and Micah shared these words with God's people—who were definitely in a time of uncertainty—it was hard for them to see how God's plan would all happen. They might have even struggled to believe in a king Who would reign with fairness and justice forever and ever. After all, they had seen many kings do the exact opposite. But these words from God were meant to give hope. God had a plan . . . and He had not forgotten the people of Israel or Judah!"

"You know, if we go back to some of our questions, these prophecies can help us during times when we start to feel like all hope is lost. As we know, these prophecies came true. That's what so much of Christmas is all about. God promised to send a Rescuer, and God made good on that promise through Jesus, God's Son! At Christmas, and all through the year, we celebrate Jesus' birth, the true King, who will bring peace and justice forever and ever. That's a big promise, but God was and always will be faithful to carry out a plan like that! And that's a promise big enough to give us true hope!"

LANDING

COMMUNICATOR: "Today as you go to groups, think about this:

SLIDE: KEY QUESTION

"What are you hoping for?" How does knowing God has a plan give us hope even when things are difficult? You may not quite know how to answer those questions. That's totally fine. You'll get a chance to chat all about hope while you're with your Small Group. Before you head out, let's pray and ask God to remind us of the true hope we have in Jesus! Let's pray!"

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND

Communicator leads group in a prayer related to what they just heard. After prayer, Communicator dismisses kids to Small Group.

AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS THE KIDS EXIT.

SLIDE: THEME

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP