



WEEK ONE: To Hold HOPE

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 1:26-45

REFLECTION

Who do you know that has had a baby? Did you get to hold that new baby? We hold new babies with care because they are delicate. Imagine for a minute that you are holding a new baby. How would you feel?

Two women were about to have babies.

Mary and Elizabeth had never had babies before.

They had never been mothers before!

They did not know what it would be like to give birth to a baby. Would they be safe?

Would they know how to be mothers?

Their lives were about to change.

Have you ever faced a change that made you afraid or nervous?

We are thinking about Mary and Elizabeth's story because they were brave and hopeful, even though they did not know what would happen. An angel visited Mary to give her a message about her baby. Mary's baby would change the world. God also chose Elizabeth's baby for important things. But God's plans for baby Jesus and baby John felt so mysterious. How do you think Mary and Elizabeth felt about this big announcement? Nervous? Afraid? Excited?

While they may have been afraid, they held hope that God would be faithful, right by their side, throughout this journey. We know Mary and Elizabeth held hope because the story tells us some amazing things happened when they saw each other. When Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, baby John leaped inside of Elizabeth's womb. Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to give a blessing to Mary.

Of course, it's possible to feel afraid and hold hope at the same time.

Mary and Elizabeth held hope when they were apart, and now that they were together, hope grew even more between them. The Holy Spirit inspired Mary and Elizabeth to hold great hope for the future, even in all the uncertainty. Sometimes when we face challenges alone, we feel overwhelmed and even afraid to hold hope. The Holy Spirit inspires us, too. When we join together, we can hold hope with each other and feel brave and strong together.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Grown-ups, have you ever felt scared about being a parent? What did you hope for? How did hope help you be brave? Tell the story to your children.
- Everyone, describe a time when you have felt anxious or afraid about something. How did you feel hopeful that good things would happen?
- How can we all hold hope for someone when they feel discouraged or nervous?

ACTIVITY

Materials:

- This week's Activity Page (we recommend printing this on cardstock)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint, glitter, etc.)

The angel shared a message of hope with Mary telling her the Holy Spirit would be with her. Did you know Christians often imagine the Holy Spirit as a bird? The Holy Spirit is like a bird that rests on our shoulders, in our hearts, or on our heads, and reminds us of God's presence. Think about how the Holy Spirit brings us messages of hope, even when we are afraid. Can you imagine the Holy Spirit flying to you with a message of hope? What would that message say?

Let's create some birds to remind us of the Holy Spirit's messages of hope. Take time to decorate your bird and write the message of hope you imagined earlier in the blank space on the bird. You could say something like, "Middle school will get better," "My sibling and I will grow closer this year," or "I will learn to ride a bike."

Then cut out your bird and wings along the dashed cut lines. Fold the bird and wings along the gray fold lines. Lastly, glue the flat part of the wings to the flat part of the bird. When you have finished, look at the bird you have made. As you hold it in your hand, close your eyes and imagine it flying to you with a special message of hope. When you have finished, place your birds of hope around your family's Advent wreath or Christmas tree to remind you to hold hope this week.

NOTE: You can also make this into an ornament using a needle and thread/string/yarn. Open up your finished bird with the decorative side down. Thread your needle, making sure that both ends of the thread/string/yarn are even in length. In the middle of the bird, poke a hole with the needle and pull a bit of string through to the desired length. Tie a knot in the thread/string/yarn on the underbelly side of the bird. You can even tape or glue the knot at the end of the string to make it more secure. Hang your bird ornament with the loop you just made.

PRAVER

God of Hope,
Sometimes we feel afraid.
Just like the angel told Mary, you whisper to us, "fear not."
When fear grows inside us, help us hold hope.
Help us be brave and share your messages of hope
with our friends and neighbors.
Amen.



