

The background of the poster is a detailed illustration of a town at dusk, with warm orange and yellow light from the setting sun and glowing windows. In the foreground, Joseph, a man with dark curly hair wearing a green robe, stands on the left. Mary, a woman with dark hair wearing a blue headscarf and a brown and white dress, stands in the center, holding her belly. To the left of Mary is a brown donkey with large ears and a white patch on its face. In front of the donkey is a small white lamb with a green face. A white dove is flying between the donkey and the lamb. The title 'THE STAR' is written in large, bold, gold letters at the top, with a bright starburst effect behind the word 'STAR'. Below the title is the subtitle 'THE STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS' in smaller gold letters.

THE STAR

THE STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

FAMILY
DISCUSSION
GUIDE

COURAGE



THE STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

Reading the Christmas story each year to my own children, I was delighted to watch *The Star*.

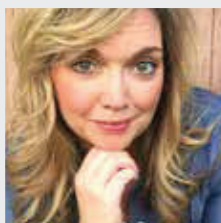
Charming and funny, this animated film views the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of the animals. With quick wit while holding strong to the Biblical storyline, I came away with new insights to the courage behind the characters.

I was struck by the many dilemmas that Mary's miraculous pregnancy caused. Watching the story unfold allowed me to ponder from a different perspective.

In this Family Discussion Guide, we dig into the lives of the supporting characters and discover the courage displayed in their own story through this five-day devotional.

Each day we include Scripture reading, a devotion, family fun activities and discussion questions. My hope is that parents take the opportunity to keep the

discussion alive after watching the film as the Christmas season approaches.



Enjoy the Movie
Rebecca Farris
Well Planned Gal

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Courage to Hope

As the first characters we read about in the Christmas story, Zechariah and Elizabeth displayed courage as they placed their hopes in God.



Courage to Trust

Given overwhelming news that was both joyful and concerning, Mary's courage was seen in her commitment to trust that God had a plan all worked out.



Courage to Believe

Overwhelmed with the news of becoming the father of the Son of God, Joseph chooses to courageously believe regardless of his fears of the future.



Courage Lost

King Herod had many soldiers to protect him, but his fear of a new king caused him to make bad decisions when he trusted in himself instead of God.



Courage to Follow

Traveling a great distance, the wise men had the courage to follow a star and search for the baby Jesus, even after a challenging encounter with King Herod.





Zechariah & Elizabeth

Courage to Hope

Close your eyes for a minute and think about something you want really badly.

Maybe you want to go somewhere special with your family. Perhaps there is a very special Christmas present you have in mind. Maybe you have a test coming up that you want to do well on. As you grow older, you will want different things like a car or a college scholarship or a certain job.

It is not a bad thing to want something very badly. But, sometimes we get so focused on what we want that we start to become afraid or mad about not getting it. What can we do to keep ourselves from becoming afraid or mad?

In the book of Luke in the Bible, the first characters we read about in the Christmas story are two people named Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah and Elizabeth were married, but they did not have any children. They wanted children to help take care of them in their old age and give them grandchildren. But, they had never been able to have any, and now they were too old.

They could have become afraid of what would happen to them as they grew older. Or, they could have become angry at God for not giving them what they desired most. But Luke 1:6 tells us that, instead of becoming angry or fearful, Zechariah and Elizabeth chose to obey and follow God and trust Him to take care of them.

It takes courage to trust God that way! First of all, we have to trust that God will give us what is very best for us, even if it is not what we want. Then, we also have to trust Him to take care of us, even if what we think is best does not happen. Zechariah and Elizabeth chose to be courageous and trust that God had a plan.

It turned out that God had an amazing plan. He gave Zechariah and Elizabeth a baby when they were old! And, this was a very special baby. His name was John, and when he grew up his preaching would prepare the way for people's hearts to be ready for Jesus.

Things do not always turn out like we want them to. But, when we have the courage to trust God, He will always make things turn out the best way!

Fun Facts

Not having a child can be extremely painful for any couple. But in Bible times, people thought that God kept couples from having children because they had disobeyed Him or made Him angry. This was especially troublesome for Zechariah because he was a priest! But God doesn't see things the way humans do. He knew Zechariah and Elizabeth loved and obeyed Him, and He knew He had a special plan for them.

Zechariah was struck mute because he didn't believe what the angel told him about his coming son.

Zechariah & Elizabeth

DISCUSSIONS

Zechariah didn't believe what the angel said was truly going to happen. Has anyone told you something was going to happen that you found hard to believe? How did you feel when it really did happen?



Luke 1:5-7 (NIV)

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.

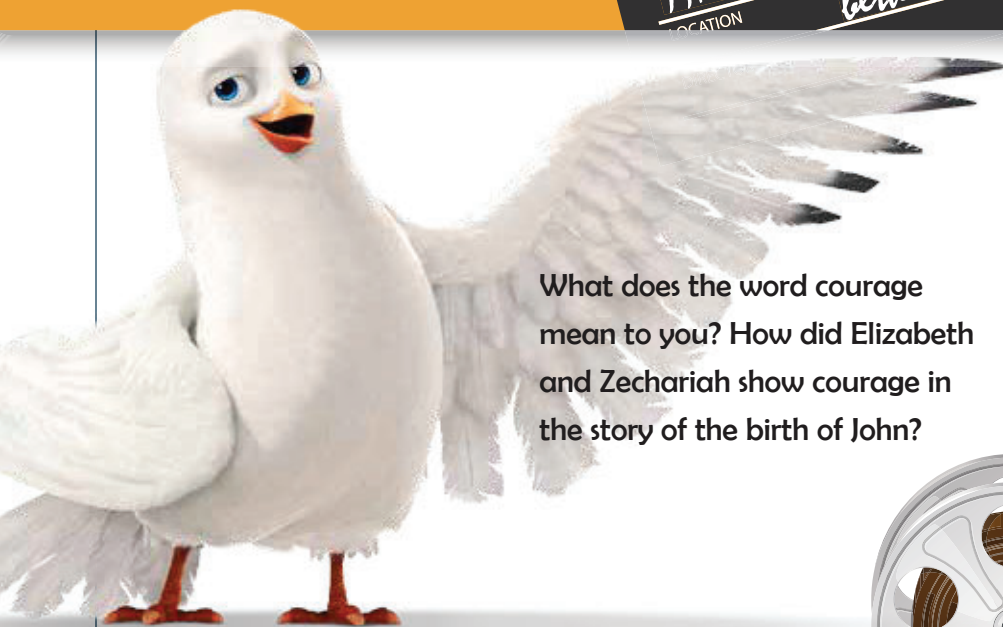
7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Luke 1:23-25 (NIV)

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."



What does the word courage mean to you? How did Elizabeth and Zechariah show courage in the story of the birth of John?



Courage to Hope

Elizabeth not only trusted God with having a baby in her old age, but she also welcomed Mary into her house. How did Elizabeth show hope for the future when she greeted Mary and her baby leaped for joy in her womb? (See Luke 1:41-45.)

John the Baptist

Name two things that were unusual about the birth of John the Baptist.

It takes courage to
put your hope in God.

FAMILY FUN

1

Set a timer and try spending a period of time communicating completely without talking.

After the timer goes off, discuss the experience. What was difficult? How did you make yourself understood?

3

Make a writing tablet or poster that says "His Name is John".



Zechariah
& Elizabeth

4

Have you ever wanted something really badly, but had to wait for it? Draw a picture of something that you had to wait for a long time before it finally happened.

Did You
Know?

Zechariah was serving in the temple when an angel of the Lord told him that he and Elizabeth would have a baby. His job was to go into a holy place in the temple, pray special Jewish prayers, and burn incense. It was a great honor to be chosen for this job, and a priest might only get to do it once in his entire life, if at all!

2

Tell the stories of how your children's names were chosen, as well as yours or other family members if you know them.





Mary

Courage to Trust

Do you know a teenage girl? Maybe a sister or cousin or friend.

What does she like to do? What is her favorite subject at school?

In the Christmas story we meet Mary, a girl engaged to a man named Joseph. These days, couples do not usually become engaged until they are in their twenties or older. But, in Mary's day, girls much younger were considered old enough to get married. Before that time, instead of going to school, a Jewish girl spent her time learning how to be a good wife and mother by helping around the house, caring for younger siblings, and learning the songs, Jewish law, history and heritage of her people.

Although the Bible does not tell us exactly how old Mary was when she was visited by the angel Gabriel, what we just talked about suggests that she was probably a young teenager. We do know that Mary's parents had already arranged for her to marry Joseph, and she was probably expected to become a mother not long after getting married. That sounds really strange to us, doesn't it? Would you like your parents to pick out the person you were going to marry? Probably not! But, Mary thought that was perfectly normal.

What was not normal was a visit from an angel giving her some strange news. The angel said she would become a mother soon, but it would not be like a normal Jewish girl becoming a wife and a mother. Instead, she would be having God's child! That was very different from what she had expected!

Many frightening thoughts probably went through Mary's mind as she listened to Gabriel. Would her parents and Joseph believe that an angel had visited her? Would she get in trouble for becoming pregnant before she was married? Would her friends abandon her? If you read Luke 1:26-38, you will see that Mary was a bit frightened and uncertain about Gabriel's visit and message. But, she did not let that keep her from listening and obeying. She showed courage and chose to be obedient to the Lord, even when it meant doing something strange and unexpected.

Sometimes God calls us to do things that seem strange to us. But, we can learn from Mary what it means to be full of courage, even when God's instructions are unexpected!

Fun Facts

Mary got to see Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water into wine.

Mary was present at both Jesus' birth and at his death. Since Joseph is not mentioned at the time of the crucifixion, she is almost surely the only person who witnessed both events.

DISCUSSIONS **Mary**



Why do you think God chose a young girl to be the mother of His Son, rather than an older woman?

Mary was afraid when the angel appeared to her and gave her the news that she would give birth to the Son of God. But very quickly, she showed courage in following God's plan. What did she say before the angel left her? (See Luke 1:38.)

Can you think of some times that you obeyed God, even when it was difficult or seemed strange?

An Angel Visit

How do you think you would have felt if an angel had visited you?

Strange or Foolish

Name some other times in the Bible that God asked someone to do something that seemed strange or even foolish.

It takes
courage
to trust
in God.

Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee

27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

37 For no word from God will ever fail."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

FAMILY FUN

1

Interview married family members and friends to find out how old they were when they got married. Create a graph. What were the most common ages for marriage?

Study some marriage traditions in different areas of the world. Compare them to marriage traditions in your country.

2



3

Use an encyclopedia, a Bible dictionary, or an Internet search to learn about how children were taught in the first century. Compare it to school in modern times.

4

Make an angel by cutting out shapes. Use a pink, tan, or brown circle for the head, a white triangle for the body, and white rectangles for the arms. Then trace your hands onto yellow or gold paper and cut them out to use as wings.

Mary



Joseph

Courage to Believe

Do you remember Joseph, the man who was engaged to Mary?

He heard a pretty crazy story one day, and he didn't know what to think. He heard that Mary was going to have a baby, but he and Mary were not married yet. That was not the way things were supposed to happen. She said an angel had visited her and told her she would have God's Son. But that story sounded too hard to believe, and Joseph decided that he probably should not marry her after all.

Then something amazing happened. An angel came to Joseph, too! He had a dream, and in his dream, the angel told him that Mary was telling the truth and that God wanted Joseph to go ahead and marry her and take care of her and the baby. He even told Joseph that the baby should be named Jesus.

Now Joseph had a choice, and it was a pretty scary one. He could choose to tell Mary that he had changed his mind and he would not marry her. That would be the easy choice. Or, he could obey the instructions God had told the angel to give him. But, that would mean taking care of God's Son!

The Bible does not record how Joseph felt about all of this, but take a minute to think about how you would have felt about these instructions. Would you have been afraid of taking care of Jesus? According to Jewish custom, a young man learned a trade and established himself in a job before getting married. That way, he could support a wife and children. Joseph was a carpenter, which meant he built things out of wood or possibly stone (a more common building material in Israel). He could support a family, but that did not mean he was rich. How could a poor man like him care for the King of kings?

God gave Joseph instructions that were not easy to follow. They were even a bit scary. But, Joseph decided to make the courageous choice instead of the easy choice. He chose to obey God and follow through with his commitment to Mary. He became her husband and Jesus' earthly father.

Obedience is not always the easiest choice. It takes courage to obey! Joseph chose to be courageous.

Fun Facts

Although Mary is mentioned several times after Jesus begins His ministry, Joseph is not.

Joseph has no recorded words in the Bible.

Although the word "carpenter" brings to mind someone who builds houses, Joseph likely made tools and furniture, as well as perhaps building houses.

DISCUSSIONS Joseph

Has anyone ever told you something that really happened, but was hard to believe?



Joseph was faithful to the law, faithful to God, and faithful to Mary. He believed the angel and named the baby Jesus. Why was it important for Joseph to give the baby that name? (See Matthew 1:21.)

An Angel Visit

Joseph obeyed God, even though he didn't know exactly what was going to happen. Faith requires obedience, even when we don't know what the outcome will be. Can you think of some times that you obeyed, even when you didn't know what was going to happen?

Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

How do you think Joseph felt when he was told about Jesus?

Parenting

Do you think it takes courage to be a good parent? Why or why not?

It takes courage
to believe in God.

FAMILY FUN

1

Make an angel puppet using a circle of construction paper for the head, a coffee filter folded in half for the body, and doilies for the wings. Attach to a popsicle stick.

On a map, trace the route Joseph and Mary would have taken from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

2

3

Write a story about Mary's announcement and Joseph's dream in first person from Joseph's perspective.

Joseph

4

Draw a picture of a dream that you have had.



King Herod

Courage Lost

We like to talk about what it looks like when people have courage.

But what happens when people decide to not be courageous?

The Christmas story shows us an example of someone who was not courageous. His name was Herod, and he was king over the Jews when Jesus was born. We often think of a king as a courageous person, don't we? Think about King David in the Old Testament. He knew that his courage came from God, and that courage even helped him fight a giant named Goliath. But, sometimes kings are not courageous. Instead, they are afraid. King Herod was like that. What do you think he was afraid of? Stop for a minute and share some ideas with your family.

Did you guess that King Herod might have been afraid of someone taking away his power? If so, then you guessed right! Instead of being a courageous king who ruled well and protected his people, he was an evil king who did hateful things to anyone who he thought might take away his power.

One day, King Herod found out that a little baby had been born, and that people from a far away land were calling this baby the King of the Jews. Can you imagine being afraid of a little baby? Well, that is what happened to King Herod. He was afraid a baby would take away his power as king. And Herod's fear made him very, very mean and evil. He was so evil that he wanted to kill that baby. That is what happens when we choose fear instead of trusting that God can give us courage. We become afraid of little things, and we become hateful and mean to the people around us.

Fortunately, that baby was Jesus, God's Son. And God had a special purpose for Jesus. Since God is the King over all, He is more powerful than evil kings like Herod. God had a plan to protect Jesus from the evil King Herod. We have already talked about the courage Mary and Joseph showed as they obeyed God's instruction before Jesus was born. That courage stayed with them and God helped them protect Jesus from King Herod.

We learn stories about people like King Herod so we can know what can happen when we choose not to have courage and trust God.

Fun Facts

The King Herod of the Christmas story and the Herod who ordered John the Baptist to be killed were two different men.

Herod was the first in a line of rulers that were all called Herod, but are distinguished by a second name, including Herod Antipas and two Herod Agrippas.

DISCUSSIONS

King Herod

King Herod was afraid that someone else was going to take away his power. Wanting power does not make a good ruler. What are some qualities of a good ruler?



What are some other words to describe someone who does not have courage?



King Herod pretended he wanted to worship the newborn king, but he really wanted to hurt him. How did the wise men know not to go back and tell King Herod where they'd found Jesus? (See Matthew 2:12.)

Lack of Courage

Name some other people in the Bible who lacked the courage to do what was right.

Government

What is the difference between a king, like Herod, and a president?

It takes
courage to
have faith
in God.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

FAMILY FUN

- 1 Make a list of some other rulers in the Bible and/or in history. Categorize them as courageous rulers or rulers without courage. Discuss why.

Cut yellow paper into the shape of a crown, then decorate with stickers, crayons, or sequins.

Create papers with situations that a king might face. As a family, draw one situation at a time and discuss how to handle the situation with courage, and how to handle it without courage.

King Herod

- 4 Use beads to make jewelry that a king might wear.

2

3

Wise Men



Courage to Follow

Sometimes things do not go according to plan.

Do you remember the people from a far away land that told Herod about baby Jesus? Well, a long time ago, they experienced a trip that did not go according to plan.

For many years, these wise men had studied old writings that said a special King would be born to rule over the Jews. Their studies told them that a special star would let them know when this special King was supposed to be born. Can you imagine how excited they were when they finally saw the star that they had been waiting for? They wanted to go see this new king and worship him. But, that meant a long journey and they were not exactly sure where they were supposed to go. They just knew they were supposed to follow that special star! After traveling for a long, long time, they stopped at what they thought was a very logical place to find a special Jewish King, the palace in Jerusalem.

But they did not find the King at the palace! Instead, after meeting with the wicked and selfish King Herod, these wise men learned that the King was actually in a little town called Bethlehem. The star they had been following led them to a small house, not a palace, where they met a poor baby boy named Jesus. No, this trip had definitely not gone as planned or expected.

And the strangeness did not stop there. When the wise men were ready to go home, they had a dream that told them not to let King Herod know where Jesus was. So, they had to change their plans once again and go home a completely different way.

What do you do when things do not go according to plan? Do you get mad? That is what the wise men could have done. They could have decided it wasn't worth it to keep looking for the special King when things stopped going according to plan. Instead, they chose to have courage and keep following the special star, even when they had no idea where they were going.

You can have courage, too, even when things do not go as expected. Just remember the wise men and remember that God will guide you just as He guided them!

Fun Facts

While tradition tells us that there were three wise men since there were three types of gifts given to Baby Jesus, the Bible does not actually say how many wise men traveled to Bethlehem.

Unlike most Nativity scenes you see, the wise men and the shepherds did not visit the Holy Family at the same time.

The Holy Family was most likely in a house or guest room by the time the wise men arrived to visit Baby Jesus, who may have been as much as two years old.

DISCUSSIONS **Wise Men**



Imagine that you are going on a long trip and can't take a car, train, or plane. How would you get there? What would you need to take with you?

Why do you think the wise men chose to travel many miles to visit Jesus?

God Supplies!

God supplied what Jesus needed by sending Him visitors with special gifts. How has God supplied you with what you need?

Long Journey

Can you think of anyone you know who has been sent by God on a long journey? What was the purpose and where did they go?

The wise men followed the star and ended up at the palace in Jerusalem. But when they left King Herod, the star led them to baby Jesus in Bethlehem. How did the wise men feel when they saw the star? (See Matthew 2:10.)

It takes
courage to
follow God.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

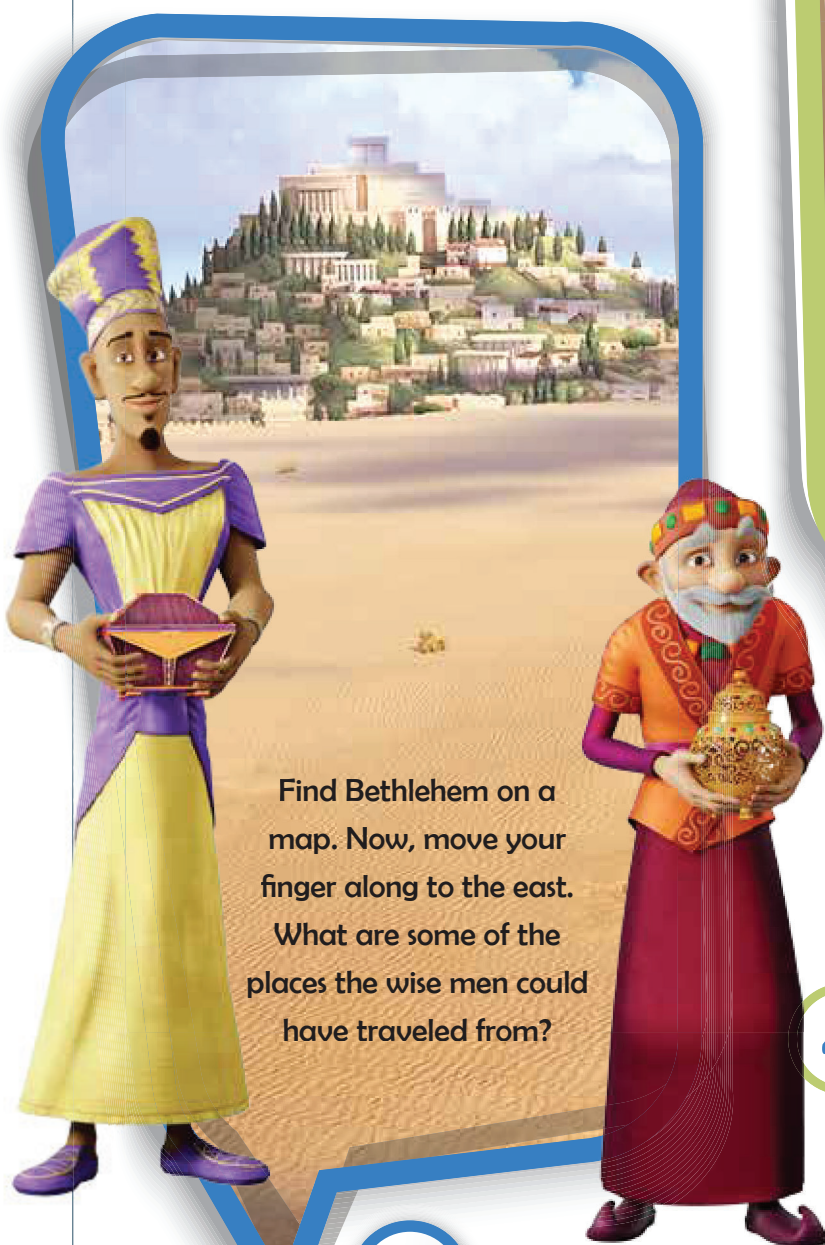
11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

FAMILY FUN

1

The wise men brought gifts that the Holy Family would need on their journey to Egypt. As a family, come up with someone who you could bless with a special gift. Maybe someone who has had a hard time or needs encouragement.



Find Bethlehem on a map. Now, move your finger along to the east. What are some of the places the wise men could have traveled from?

2

Use glue to create a star shape on waxed paper, then cover it with gold glitter. After it dries, gently peel it from the paper and attach a string to it to hang it in the window or on your tree.



Wise Men

4

Read a book about stars. Compare the information in the book with what the Bible says about the Christmas star.

3

THE STAR

THE STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS



FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE