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NOW IN FLESH APPEARING...

Welcome to An Illustrated Advent for Families: Now in Flesh Appearing, a resource for engaging families in faith formation at home during Advent. Thousands of families around the world have used our Illustrated Lent for Families and Illustrated Advent for Families, and we are excited to share this Advent resource with you.

The story of Advent is about God taking on a physical body like ours. As you wait with anticipation and prepare for baby Jesus to be born this Advent season, we invite you to discover the awesomeness of incarnation and what it means for God to move, act, and live with us.

This Advent resource invites your family to explore the ways in which we can claim:

- Body, have HOPE!
- Brain, practice **PEACE!**
- Self, feel JOY!
- Heart, feel LOVE!
- Everyone, **celebrate!** We are alive!

We hope our Advent devotional will help you share in conversation about how God came to be human and live among us. The devotions are written for children and adults of all ages. At the same time, feel free to tweak the content and questions to work for your family and community. Don't feel like you need to complete all the activities to have a meaningful experience! Each devotion includes the elements below. We invite you to look at the material, see what you think will work best for your family, and find time each week to gather together for the devotion.

- Oscripture: Look up each scripture, and read it out loud together.
- **Reflection:** We offer a brief reflection for each of the scripture texts. It might make sense for you to read this section to your family, or you may want to read it for yourself and see what questions or themes best resonate.
- Discussion and Coloring Page: This is a chance for some family discussion. We love coloring here at Illustrated Ministry, and we find some of the best conversations happen while coloring and doing something creative together as a family. We suggest discussing the questions offered while coloring the week's coloring page.
- Activity: Take time with your family to do each week's suggested activity. Each activity offers a way to prepare for Advent and Christmas while connecting with the weekly scripture reading.

- **Prayer:** Finally, each week's devotion ends with a short prayer. You can read the prayer, or invite your children to repeat after you. This prayer is a simple ritual for ending your family's weekly devotion time. You might also choose to use the prayer throughout the week.
- Advent Calendar: We also provide you and your family with an Advent Calendar. Our calendar starts on December 1, and each day brings an opportunity to complete a simple activity as a family. We consider families' busy lives, so the activities are short and meaningful without distracting from the real purpose—family time.

Media Kit: We have also provided a media kit that includes variations of the "Now in Flesh Appearing" logo, as well as some promotional images you can use in newsletters, social media, and your website. You can download the media kit here: **illstrtdm.in/MediaKit-NowInFleshAppearing**

As you use this resource, we would love to hear what was helpful and meaningful, as well as any suggestions and comments you have for improvement. Your feedback helps us continue to create quality faith formation materials. You can always reach us at **info@illustratedministry.com** or find us on the following social networks:

Facebook: facebook.com/illustratedmin
Instagram: instagram.com/illustratedmin
TikTok: tiktok.com/@illustratedmin
Twitter: twitter.com/illustratedmin
Pinterest: pinterest.com/illustratedmin

Our Facebook Group is a wonderful community. If you're looking for ideas and suggestions for using this resource, you can request to join here:

fb.com/groups/illustratedmin

We also love to see photos and hear stories about how you are using our products. When you post photos or comments online, please use the hashtag #illustratedministry, or tag us in the photos so we can see them. This allows us to be part of the conversation and you to be part of our online community. Additionally, checking the hashtag on social media is a great way to see how other families and churches creatively use our resources.

Peace be upon you,

Illustrated Ministry

Best Practices for Sharing Illustrated Ministry's Resources

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If you purchased this product by selecting Ministry Use (Church Size: ### members), we've found that there are three good ways to share our files with your community.

Email: Depending on the size of your congregation, we encourage you to email files to those who want to use the resource. Another option is to put an announcement in your bulletin, asking those interested in receiving the files to email the person with access to the resource.

Note: Please do not include attachments or links to download our files in any emails/newsletters that are posted publicly online with services like Mailchimp, Constant Contact, etc. Links of this nature are searchable by Google, and the files become accessible to the general public.

Posting Online: We generally discourage posting our files online because they become accessible through Google searches. We do not want the general public to have access to our products free of charge. One option is to put the files on a password-protected page of your website, or use a private Facebook Group. Please remember to take the files down after you've finished using them.

Note: Please do not post the password in a bulletin or newsletter that is posted publicly online.

Print: Most congregations who purchase our digital files choose to print out the materials. Printing the materials is probably the easiest way to share the resources with your community.

Thanks for understanding, and we appreciate your support!

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Devotions



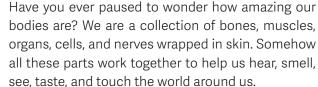
• • • WEEK ONE: BODY, HAVE HOPE! • • •

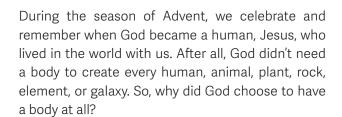
God knows what it's like to be a human.

Scripture: John 1:1-5, 14a

Reflection







People who know a lot about the Bible have a long list of possible answers to this question, though no one knows for sure why Jesus was born at that time and in that place in human history. So, let's focus on what we do know. God, who is expansive and endless, "put on" a human body, and we call him Jesus.

Jesus grew bones, muscles, organs, cells, and nerves that were all wrapped up in skin. Now, Jesus could hear, smell, see, taste, and touch the world he helped create. But Jesus wasn't born a grown-up, was he? Jesus had to learn and grow, just like all of us!

Jesus learned how to walk and go to the bathroom.

Jesus sang songs and took naps.

Jesus went to school and played with his friends.

Jesus helped his parents make food and clean the house.

Jesus even went through puberty and had a job.

When he lived on Earth, Jesus felt hungry, tired, itchy, wiggly, thirsty, overstimulated, and sunburnt. He scraped his knees, got stomach aches, and brushed the tangles out of his hair. Whenever it feels hard to live in a body, we can have hope because God knows what it's like to have a body just like ours.

For Discussion

- What are two things you love about your body?
- How does it feel to know Jesus had a body just like yours?
- What is one thing you want to learn about how your body works?

Activity: Silly Self-Portrait

Throughout history, artists have been captivated by the beauty and diversity of the human body—we're made of so many different shapes and colors! One way artists express their appreciation is by creating portraits of themselves (self-portraits) and of others. Sometimes it's hard to start a portrait of anyone, let alone a portrait of ourselves. This activity will help you build and color a self-portrait to spark your hope and creativity!

Each person needs a blank piece of paper and coloring utensils; then, place the activity page and dice somewhere everyone can see. Begin with the "head" column, and take turns rolling the dice. Find the head shape that matches the number you rolled, and draw it on your paper. Then move to the "body" column and continue this pattern until you've finished building your self-portrait.

Note: Arms, legs, and eyes each have one column, yet many of us have two of each. You can roll once for each column, using the same shape for both parts, or you can roll twice, using different shapes for each part.

The last column you need to roll the dice for is hair color. Use that color to draw your hair in whatever style you love; then, use any colors you want to color in your self-portrait. When everyone is finished, take turns showing off your silly self-portraits. Then, hang them up where everyone can see them.

Materials

- □ Activity page
- □ Paper
- □ Coloring utensils
- □ Dice

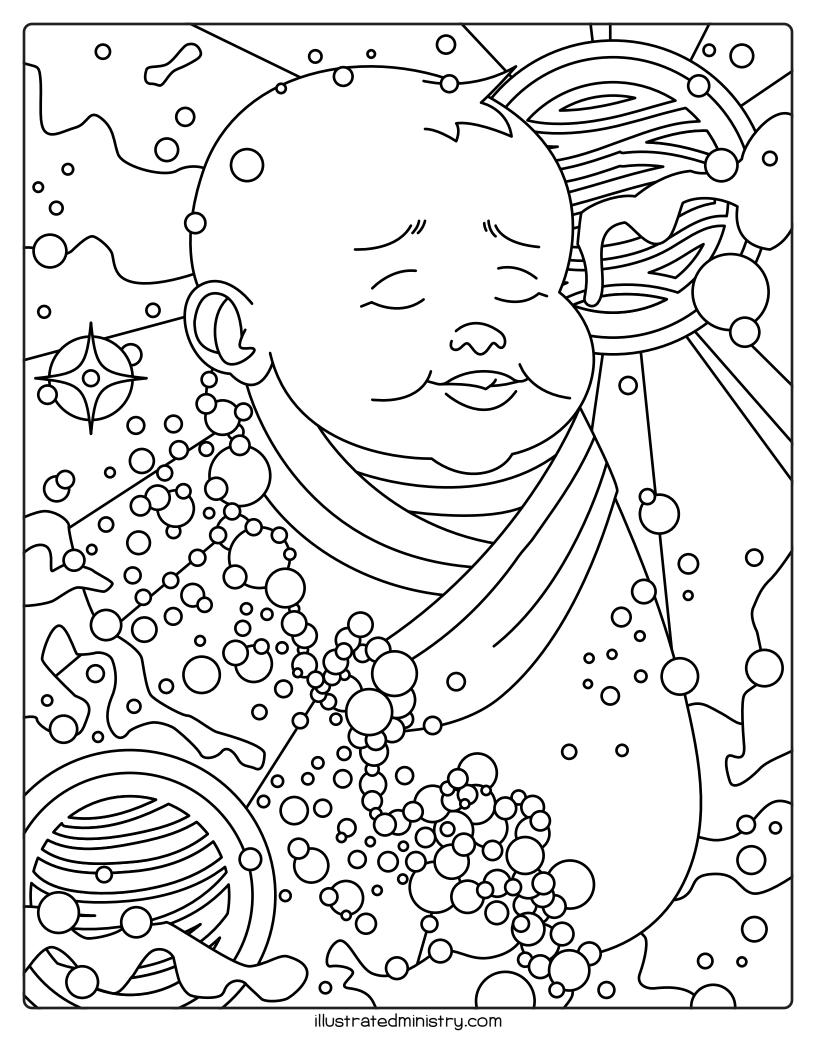
Fun Fact

Did you know your skin is the largest organ in your body?

Prayer

- Dear God, sometimes it's hard to have a body that grows, gets hurt, and feels tired. When we feel overwhelmed, help us have hope by
- remembering you had a body that grew, got hurt, and felt tired, too.
 Amen.

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WEEK TWO: BRAIN, PRACTICE PEACE!

Thanks for always taking care of us.

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38

Reflection







Have you ever been so surprised by something or someone that your heart races, your skin feels hot, and your brain wakes up brighter than before? Maybe your friends threw you a surprise party, and they all jumped out and yelled, "Surprise!" Maybe your sibling hid a toy spider in your cereal. Or maybe a bright, shiny angel suddenly appeared and said, "Hi! You're pregnant!"

That heart-racing, skin-burning, brain-waking feeling is your body's natural response to something surprising or unexpected, and it's all thanks to your nervous system. Your body has an entire network of nerves connecting your brain to the different parts of your body; this is how your brain sends and receives messages.

For example, if you touch a hot stove, your brain and body might send messages like this.

Hand: "Huh, this stove is at a different temperature than normal."

Brain: "Get out of there, Hand! It's burning hot!"

Hand: "Okay!"

Brain: "Phew, that was a close one." Hand: "Ouch! I feel all gooey."

Our brains are designed to take care of us, and sometimes that looks like our bodies reacting before we fully understand what is happening. When the angel startled Mary and Joseph with unexpected news, their nervous systems flooded with heartracing, skin-burning, brain-waking messages! Their brains were trying to keep them safe.

When Mary and Joseph realized they weren't in danger, their brains and bodies eventually calmed down. Now, they could respond to the angel and practice peace. Practicing peace looked like letting their brains and bodies calm down when they realized they were not in danger. They were able to respond, instead of react, to the angels' words. Mary grew curious and asked the angel questions to understand the situation better, while Joseph took to heart what the angel said and chose to believe and support Mary.

Sometimes your brain reacts in heart-racing, skinburning, and brain-waking ways, and that's okay! That's how it's designed. Try to notice the next time you feel this way. If you are safe and not in danger, try responding with, "Thanks for looking after me, brain. I am safe. How can I practice peace?"

For Discussion

- What do you think Mary and Joseph's initial reaction to the angel's startling greeting looked like? Act it out!
- Share a time when you felt scared, surprised, or stressed. How did your body respond?
- What is one thing you do to help your body feel calm and practice peace?

Activity: What Would You Do?

When you are in a surprising, stressful, or scary situation, your nervous system automatically responds to protect your body and keep you safe. People who study the brain call this the "Fight, Flight, Freeze, or Fawn" response. Depending on the person and situation, your autonomic nervous system could respond in any of these ways.

If a bear was chasing you, your autonomic nervous system might:

Fight: challenge the bear to a wrestling match.

Flight: help you run away faster than you've ever run before.

Freeze: pause all your muscles and decision-making. You wouldn't run or fight, but maybe the bear would mistake you for a statue?

Fawn: find any way to please the bear. You might give the bear all your snacks or promise to babysit her cubs every day for a year in hopes the bear will stop chasing you.

These responses can be helpful in dangerous situations, but they might not always be beneficial in everyday situations. One way to help your brain practice peace when your autonomic nervous system activates is to practice deep breathing. When you feel surprised or stressed, taking slow, deep breaths sends a signal to your brain that you are not in danger. When your brain realizes this, it sends messages to your heart and muscles to slow down and relax.

This family activity is designed to practice peace in stressful, everyday scenarios. Cut out the scenario cards on the activity page and place them in a pile face down. Take turns drawing a card, reading the scenario, and answering these questions:

- What is your initial response to this scenario?
- o Take a deep breath. Practice peace. Now, how can you respond?

Materials

- □ Activity page
- □ Scissors

Fun Fact

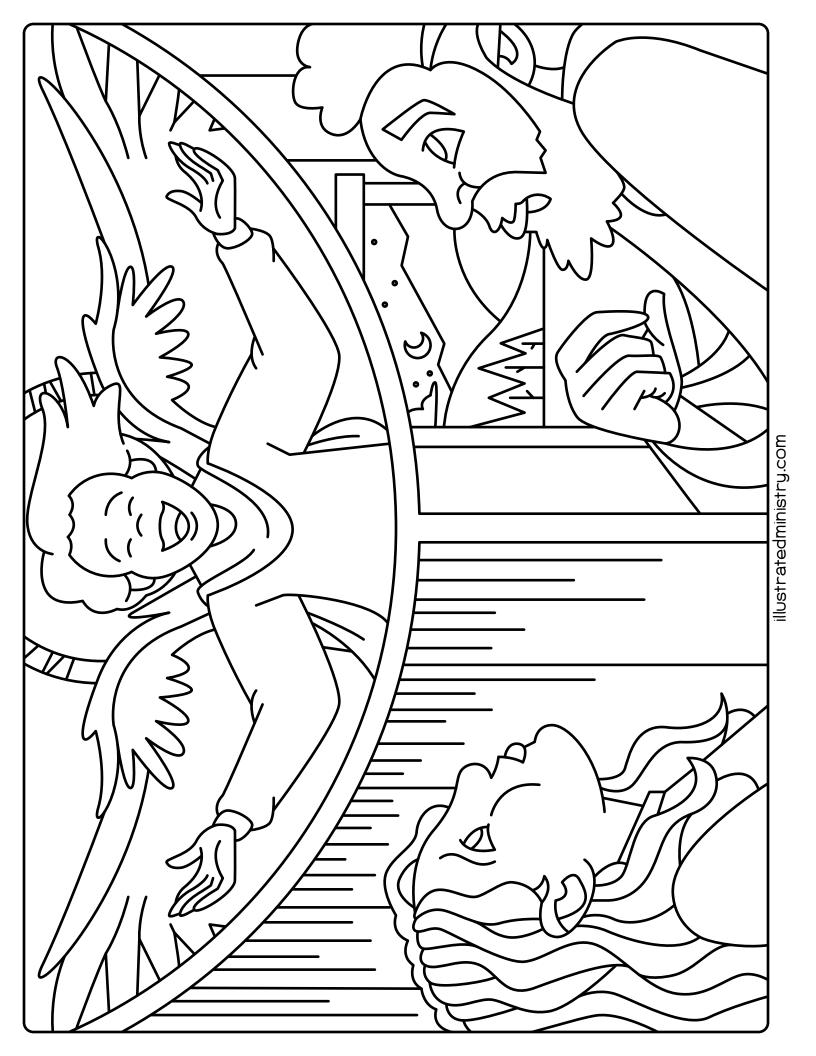
Did you know your brain uses about 23 watts of energy? That's enough to power a light bulb!

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for brains able to alert us to possible danger and practice peace by calming down when we are safe! Help us to slow down

and appreciate the ways you have created us to practice peace. Amen.

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• • • WEEK THREE: SELF, FEEL JOY! • • •

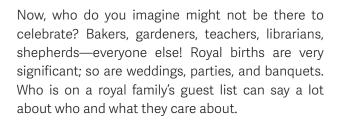
We all belong in God's story, just as we are.

Scripture: Luke 2:8–20

Reflection



When you think about the birth of a king, who do you imagine might be there to celebrate? According to traditions across the world and throughout history, there could be a room full of royal doctors, government officials, and midwives.



The shepherds were thrilled, and probably a bit confused, when the angel invited them to celebrate the birth of Jesus along with Mary, Joseph, and a whole symphony of animals. Since shepherds were not usually included in royal birth stories, what does this say about the kind of ruler God is?

Shepherds look after animals. They are gentle, strong, brave, loving, patient, wise, and kind. They care for the vulnerable and make sure their flock is safe, nourished, and thriving. So, maybe God is like that too!

God is the kind of ruler who cares about the vulnerable, overlooked, and left-out. God creates a realm where everyone is nourished, welcome, and thriving. God doesn't care about your social status or report card; God cares about you—the beautiful, unique, and wonderful you! So, what does this have to do with our bodies?

Our bodies are uniquely ours—the size, shape, color, and texture, from our fingerprints to our genetic code. No two people are exactly the same, not even identical twins! We are all different, and still, we all belong in God's story. Regardless of how you identify or choose to express yourself, no one is left out of God's realm. Everyone is welcome in God's love, and that is certainly a reason to feel joy!

For Discussion

- What do you think the shepherds talked about as they journeyed to Bethlehem?
- If you were throwing a royal party, who would you invite? Why?
- What is (at least) one thing you love about yourself?

Activity: Express Yourself! Paper Doll

Have you ever wondered why some people have curly hair and others have straight hair or why some people are short and others tall? It's all thanks to something scientists call deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA for short. DNA is like a blueprint for all living things; it guides the process of creating how your body looks, moves, and changes over time in the world. Without DNA, your body would have no idea what it's supposed to look like or what it should do!

DNA is inherited—passed down—through all living things. That's why some people look alike or act in similar ways. The order, or sequence, of your DNA determines traits like dimples, freckles, attached/detached earlobes, or right or left-hand (or both) dominance.

DNA plays an important role in who you are, but it doesn't determine everything about you. Your environment can also influence who you are and how you express yourself. People who study the human body have different ideas of which one has more influence (nature or nurture), but it's clear there are some traits you're born with and some traits you can choose for yourself.

This family activity celebrates the uniqueness of everyone by encouraging self-love and self-expression. Give each person an activity page; then, use various crafting supplies and coloring utensils to express who you are and what you love about yourself.

Here are some ideas of materials to use to get you started!

- Clothes: photos of people you love, fabric scraps of your favorite color, or pages from an old book
- o Hair: pasta, tissue paper, string, or pipe cleaners
- Face: buttons (for eyes), staples (for braces), or paperclips (you could twist them into glasses)
- Accessories: print and cut out pictures from the internet or use stickers to represent hobbies or interests

When everyone is done, celebrate your beautiful creations. If you want to take it one step further, cut out each person, and put them together to create a family portrait.

Materials

- □ Activity page
- □ Coloring utensils
- □ Craft supplies
- ☐ Glue
- □ Scissors

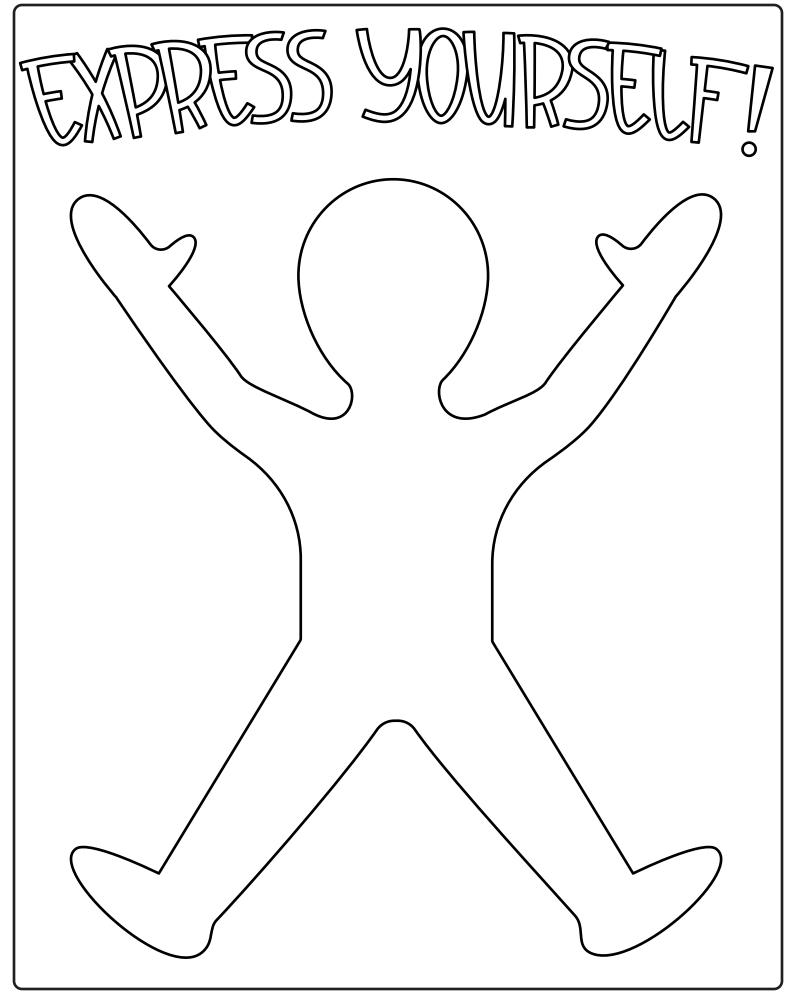
Fun Fact

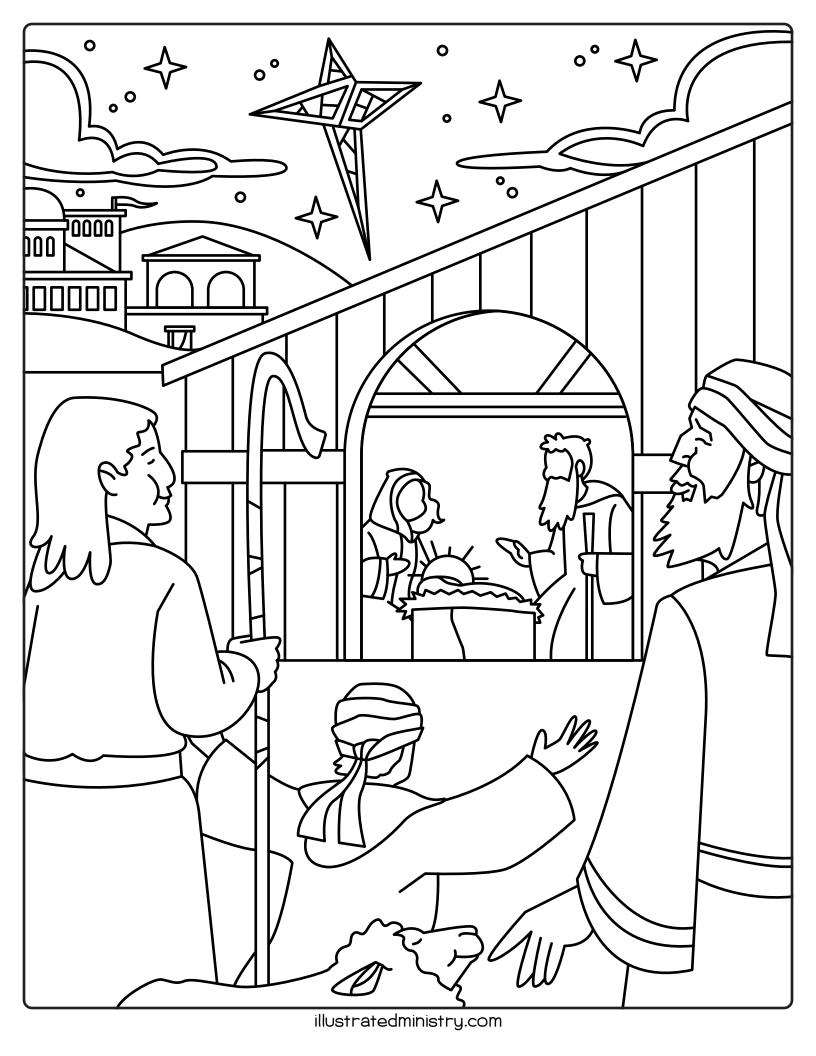
If you laid all your DNA endto-end, did you know it would span the diameter of our solar system twice?

Prayer

God, you are full of joy, inviting us to celebrate with you! It is a gift to know we are never neglected or left out of your love as we grow and

uniquely express ourselves. You take care of and welcome everyone, just as we are. Amen.







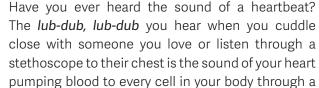
• • WEEK FOUR: HEART, FEEL LOVE! • • •

It's okay to feel your feelings.

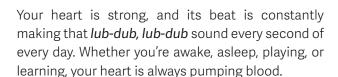
Scripture: Luke 1:39-46

Reflection





series of veins and arteries.



People who study the human body have shown that emotions are processed in your brain, but because your body is beautifully intricate and interconnected, your whole body responds to these emotions in different ways. If you feel mad, your skin might get hot and sweaty. If you feel anxious, your stomach might be swirly and queasy. If you feel rejected and alone, your heart beat might slow down.

Mary and Elizabeth felt a lot of feelings in this story: tired, surprised, excited, confused, amazed, welcomed, loved. Many of these are great emotions to feel, but sometimes feeling your feelings isn't so easy.

Have you ever struggled to understand what you were feeling? Have you ever thought your emotions were too much for yourself, or anyone else, to handle? Learning how your feelings grow and flow, and how your body responds to them, isn't always simple.

In those moments, when your feelings feel too small, too big, or too colorful, listen to your heart beat. Each *lub-dub*, *lub-dub* you hear is the sound of your heart pumping blood all over your body for every cell to get what it needs. May this constant, non-stop rhythm remind you of God's constant, non-stop love for you. A love that's big enough for every feeling—no matter how big, small, or colorful.

For Discussion

- How are you feeling right now?
- o Do you find it easy or difficult to name your feelings? Why do you think that is?
 - Look up a feelings wheel on your favorite web browser as a tool to help name feelings.
- Mary and Elizabeth celebrated God's great, big love together. Have you ever experienced God's great, big love? What does it feel like?

Activity: Feelings Labyrinth

Your heart has a very important job: it pumps blood all around your body to deliver oxygen and nutrients to your cells and take away toxins and waste. The *lub-dub*, *lub-dub* you hear in your heartbeat is the sound of your heart at work, and the rate at which it pumps is one way to see how, and what, your body is feeling.

Is your heartbeat fast? You might be feeling excited or nervous.
Is your heartbeat slow? You might be feeling calm or sleepy.
Is your heartbeat steady? You might be feeling confident or at peace.

This family activity creates space for naming, embodying, and sharing your feelings through a contemplative prayer labyrinth. Give each family member a copy of the activity page. Find where the maze begins, and use your finger to move through each twist and turn. Pause at each feeling face; decide if you will share stories out loud after each prompt or if you will move through the entire maze before sharing.

This face looks **surprised**. When was the last time you were surprised? Do you like feeling surprised?

This face looks **excited**. What is something you're excited about or looking forward to? What does it feel like to wait?

This face looks sad. What makes you feel sad? Who can you talk to about it?

This face looks **mad**. What makes you feel mad? What do you do with your mad feelings?

This face looks **happy**. What makes you feel happy? How have you helped make someone else happy?

This face looks **bored**. When was the last time you felt bored? What did you do about it?

This face looks **silly**. When was the last time you felt silly? What does it feel like to be silly?

This face looks **lonely**. Have you ever felt alone? Where were you, and what did it feel like?

Materials

□ Activity page

Fun Fact

Did you know that your heart pumps about 1.3 gallons, or 10 pints, of blood every minute?

Prayer

God, because you are full of love, you made us with love. Your love is like a heartbeat, pumping joy and life through all of creation. When we feel

our hearts beat fast, slow, and steady, help us remember we are loved.
 Amen.





• • CHRISTMAS DAY: EVERYONE, CELEBRATE!

We are alive!

Scripture: Luke 2:1–7, 15–20

Reflection

Silent night, holy night All is calm, all is bright.



These words we sing during this season paint a picture of a beautiful and sacred moment—Mary holding her newborn child while he drifts off to sleep. But were the events leading up to this moment just as silent and calm? Probably not. Bringing a new human into this world comes with a chorus of groans, wails, and rhythmic breathing, not only from the person in labor but also from all who labor with them.

Take a deep breath in. Do you feel your chest expand? This is your lungs filling up with oxygen-rich air.

Breath out slowly. Do you feel your chest deflate? This is your lungs pushing out carbon dioxide, a harmful waste your body doesn't need. The cells in your body need oxygen to keep you alive and healthy. When you inhale, air moves from your nose or mouth, down your trachea, and into your lungs where it flows through a series of air pipes that eventually end with clusters of tiny air bags called alveoli.

Here, oxygen is taken from the air and moves into your cells to be transported all over your body. In exchange, your cells pass back carbon dioxide into your alveoli to travel backward through your lungs, up your trachea, and out of your nose or mouth as you exhale.

So much happens in just one breath! Whether that breath is quiet and slow, loud and fast, or connected to tubes and machines, the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe reminds you that today, you are alive. And that is something to celebrate!

For Discussion

- Which animals do you think were present when Jesus was born? What do you think they sound like when they breathe?
- The Hebrew word for breath, *ruach*, is the same word used for spirit and wind. How might breath, spirit, and wind be connected? Can you think of any other stories in the Bible about breath?
- Have a contest to see which family member can hold their breath the longest. What does it feel like to hold your breath? How does your body tell you it needs oxygen again?

Activity: Breathe Deeply

On average, your lungs breathe in and out over 20,000 times daily. That's a lot! Thankfully, a part of your brain called the medulla oblongata keeps track of all that inhaling and exhaling for you, so you don't have to think about it.

Can you imagine if you had to tell your lungs to breathe over 20,000 times every day? You would have no time to sleep, eat, play, or learn.

Even though your body takes care of breathing for you, it is still important to pay attention to your breath now and then. Practicing deep breathing is a great way to do this!

As you celebrate with loved ones today, find a moment to pause, and take a few deep breaths. With each breath, thank God for the gift of life today. Feel free to use this breathing exercise below:

Slowly breathe in, feeling your chest and abdomen expand, as you count to five.

Hold your breath for five seconds.

Then, slowly release your breath as you count backward from five to zero. Practice this rhythm five times.

Materials

☐ Just yourself!

Fun Fact

Did you know the current world record for holding breath is 24 minutes and 37 seconds?

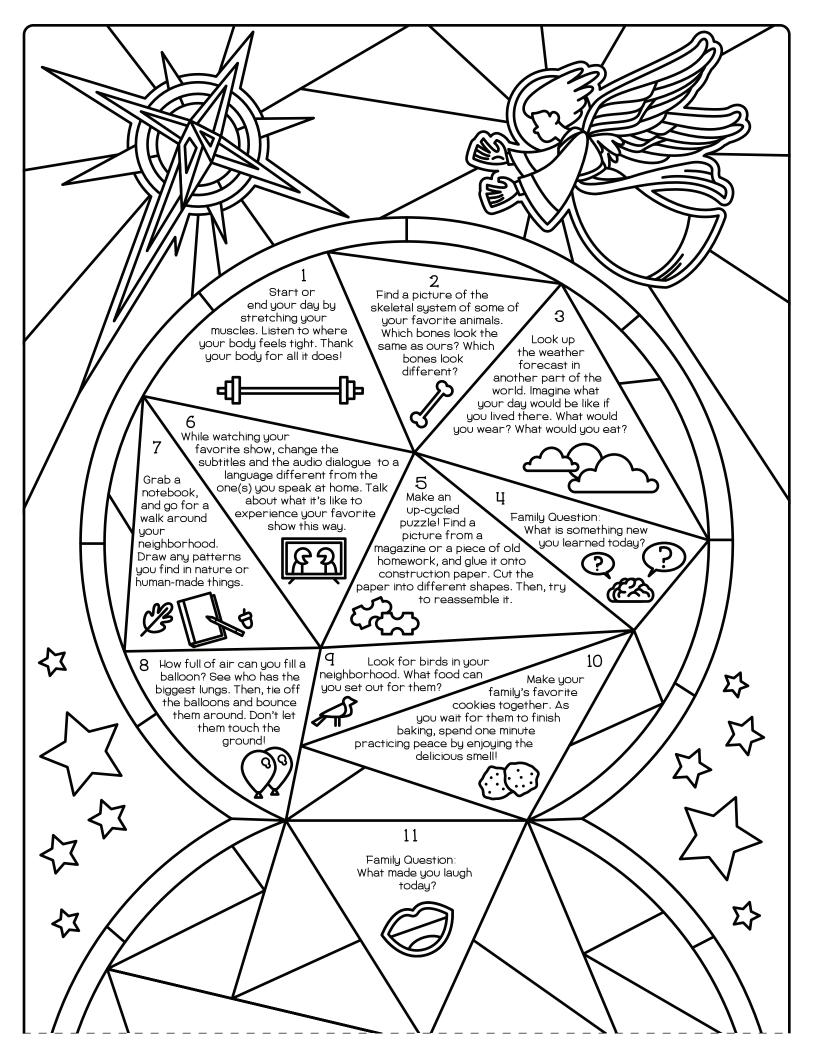
Prayer

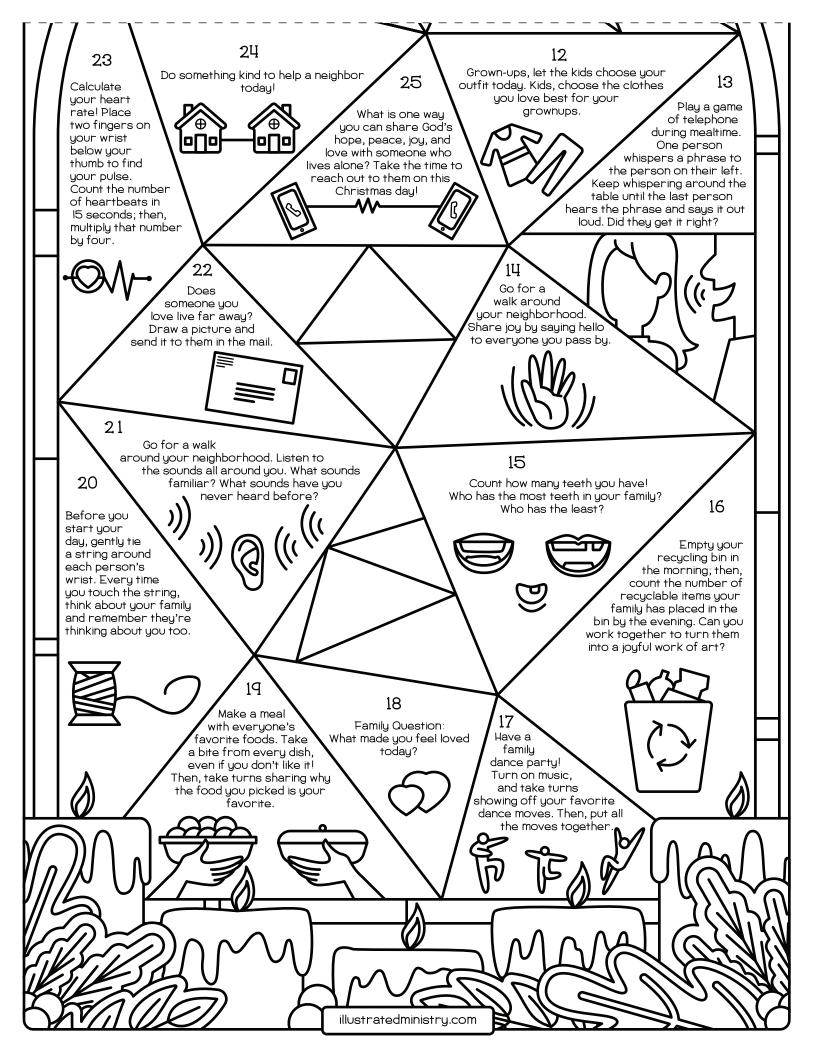
Dear God, your breath is woven throughout all creation, bringing life to the expansive universe, the microscopic cells in our lungs, and

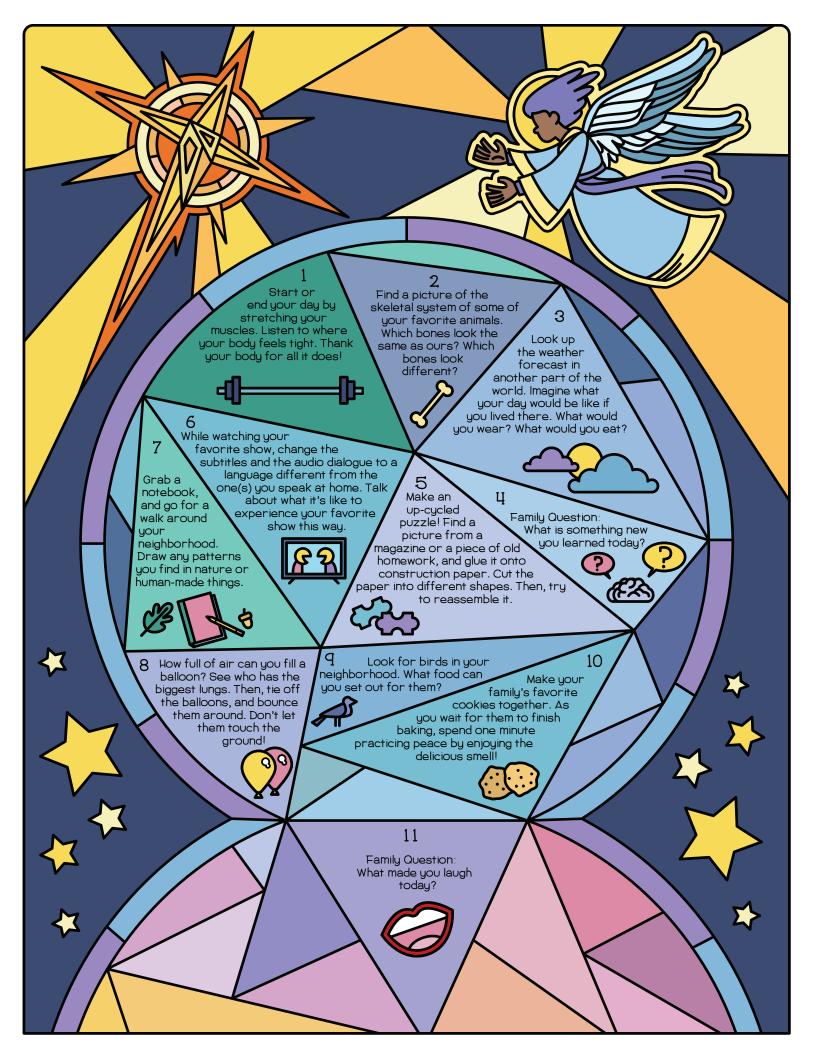
everything in between. With each breath we take, help us remember the gift of today. Amen.

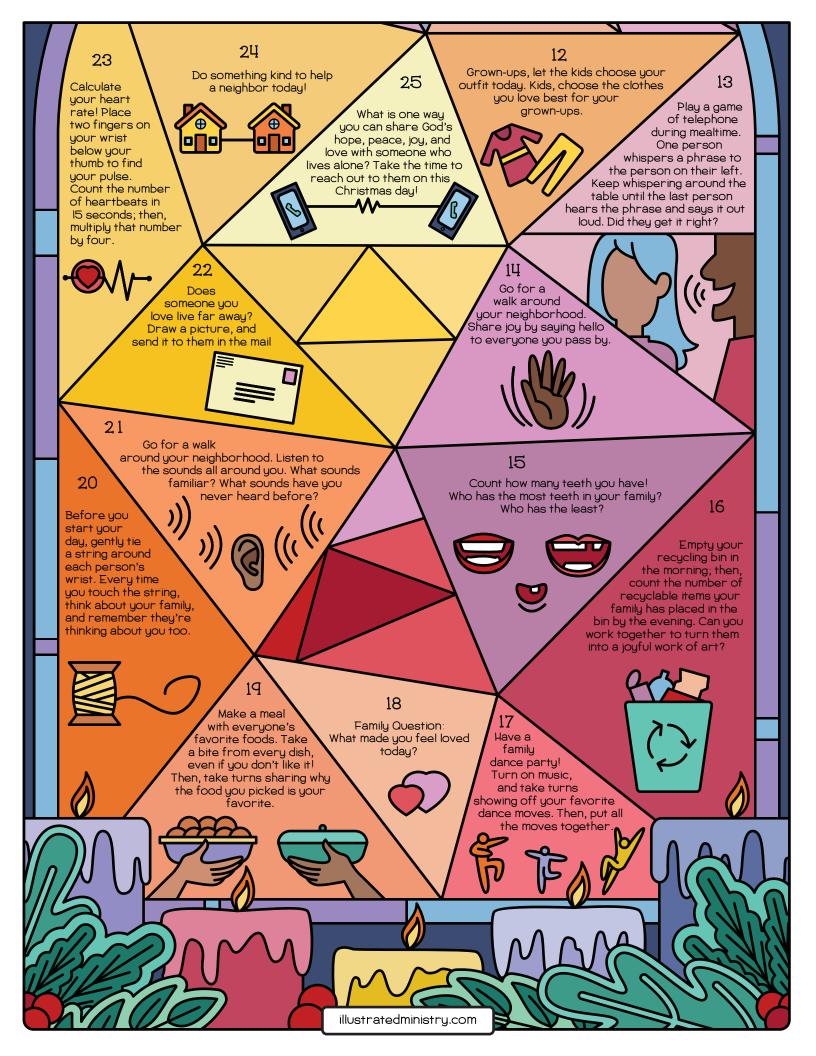


Advent Calendar











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