

GOD the SAVIOR



*Our Freedom in Christ and Our Role
in the Restoration of All Things*

STUDY GUIDE | EIGHT SESSIONS

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Resources

God the Savior Study Guide
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The story of the Bible reveals that heaven and earth are woven more closely together than we might think. All through the Bible, we find two parallel and beautiful dramas unfolding.

There is the **lower story**. Humans live on earth and see things from a horizontal perspective. We can't see what is around the bend but must make decisions on which way to go, where we will live, and how we will respond to what happens to us. We focus on getting through the day as best we can. We interpret why we think other people do what they do. We struggle to know why certain things happen and why other things don't happen.

Then there is the **upper story**. This is how the story is unfolding from God's perspective. Heaven is breaking into our world, and the story of God's seeking love, perpetual grace, and longing for a relationship with ordinary people is breathtaking. Of course, as humans living on this earth, we won't always be able see what is taking place in this upper story. But we can be sure that God is always present, at work, and active in every detail of our lives.

The objective of *God the Savior*—the third in a series of three small-group studies in *The Story* series—is to introduce

you to these lower and upper stories. In this study, you will witness how all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah came to fulfillment in Jesus, the Son of God. You will examine how the early church was born after Jesus' ascension and how the disciples first spread the gospel. You will see how Paul continued to spread that gospel message through his missionary journeys in spite of persecution, hardships, and imprisonment. Finally, you will look at the vision that John received concerning Jesus' second coming and the end of time.

God wants to be with you. He wants to fill your life with greater purpose, meaning, and understanding. He wants to weave your lower story into his greater upper story that he has been writing. He wants to walk with you in every situation of life. As you recognize how closely his story and your story fit together, you *will* experience his love, grace, and wisdom.

SESSION OUTLINE

Each session is divided into two parts. In the group section, you will watch a video teaching from Randy Frazee and follow along with the outline that has been provided. (Note that you can watch these videos via streaming access at any time by following the instructions found on the inside front cover of this guide.) You will then recite the key verse(s), the key idea, and engage in some guided group discussion through the questions provided. You will close your group with a brief time of prayer.

PERSONAL STUDY

At the end of the group section, you will find a series of readings and study questions for you to go through on your own

during the week. The first section will help you *know the story* by asking you to read several key passages from the Bible that were covered during your group time. The next section will help you *understand the story* through a short reading from Randy Frazee that will help you grasp the main takeaways. The third section will help you *live the story* by challenging you to put what you have learned into practice. The final section will help you *tell the story* through a short prompt for a conversation starter around a meal or dinner table. **The personal study is a critical component in helping you grasp the overall story of the Bible, so be sure to complete this study during the week before your next group meeting.**

GROUP SIZE

God the Savior can be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small-group gathering) and also as an individual study. If you are doing the study as a group with a large number of participants, it is recommended that everyone watches the video together and then breaks up into smaller groups of four to six for the discussion time. In either case, you can access the teaching videos via the streaming code found on the inside front cover.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Each participant in the group should have his or her own study guide. Although the course can be fully experienced with just the video and study guide, participants are also encouraged to have a copy of *The Story*, which includes selections from the *New International Version* that relate to each week's session.

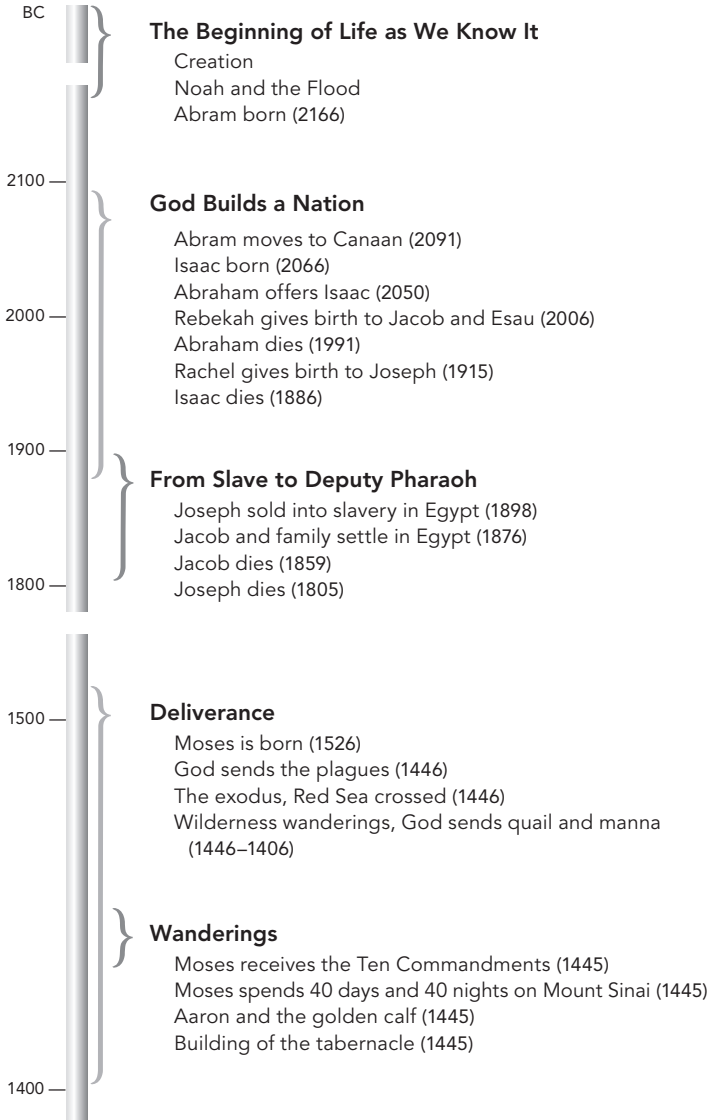
Reading *The Story* as you go through the study will provide even deeper insights and make the journey even richer and more meaningful.

FACILITATION

Each group should appoint a facilitator who is responsible for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring everyone that has the opportunity to participate. (For more thorough instructions, refer to the the leader's guide that is included at the back of this guide.)

TIMELINE OF THE STORY

TIMELINE OF GOD THE CREATOR

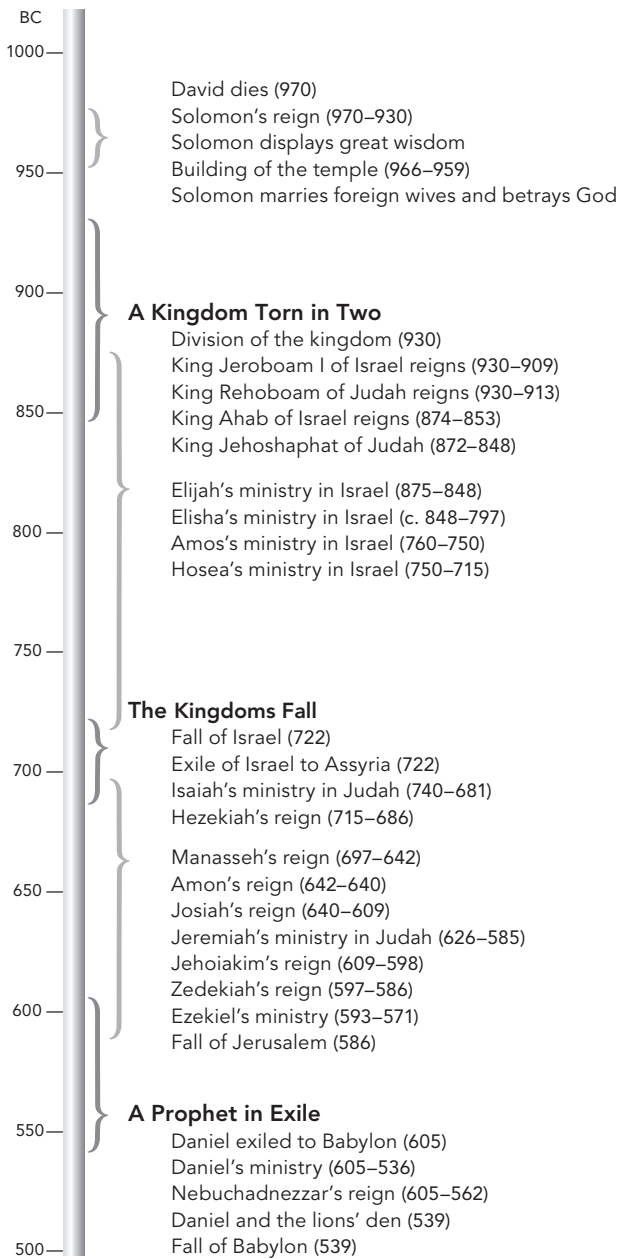


Note: Dates are approximate and dependent on the interpretative theories of various scholars.

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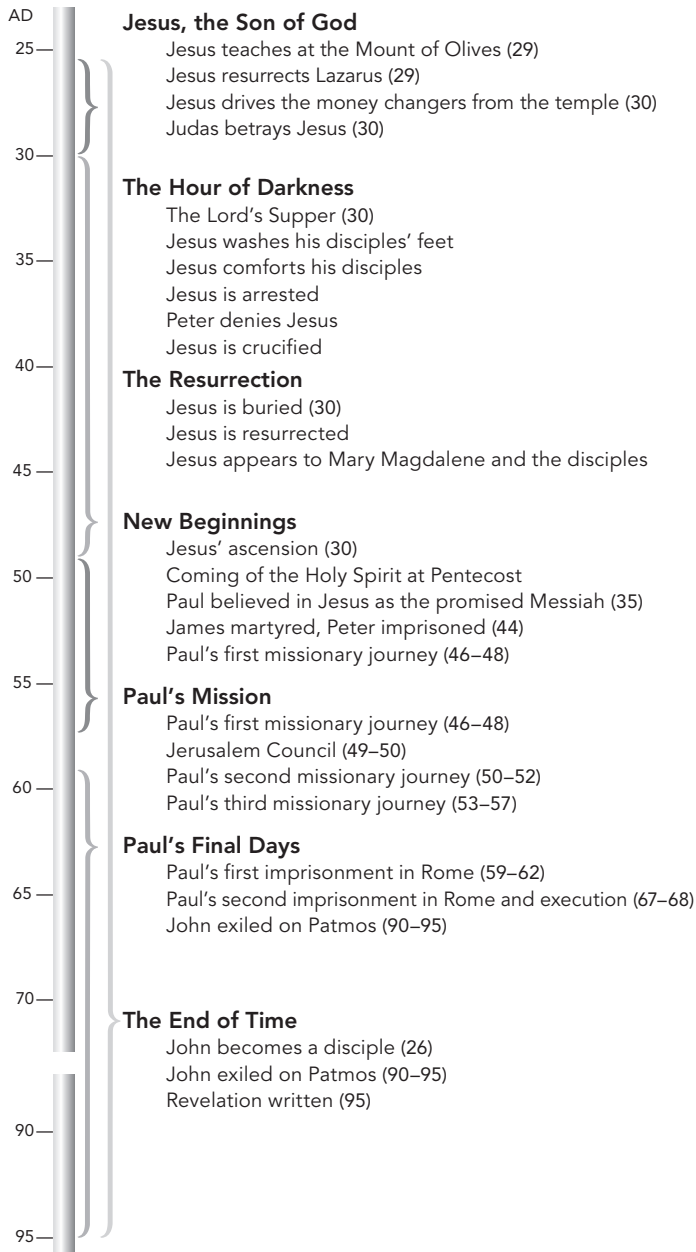
Timeline of The Story



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Timeline of The Story





Session 1



JESUS' BIRTH AND MINISTRY

MATTHEW—JOHN

WELCOME

None of us likes to wait. We get impatient at traffic lights. We get edgy when the line at the grocery store doesn't seem to move. We get irritated when people talk too slowly and won't get to the point. We don't like the inconvenience of having to wait for just a few minutes. But no amount of waiting on our part compares to what the people of Israel had endured. By the time the events of the New Testament unfold, they had been waiting *400 years* for the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that a king would reign on David's throne and over his kingdom (Isaiah 9:7). Four hundred years is a long time to wait . . . and when their promised king did finally arrive, he was nothing like the figure from their Scriptures that they were expecting.

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

Welcome to session one of *God the Savior*. If this is your first time together as a group, take a moment to introduce yourselves. Watch the video (see the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover) and use the following outline to record some of the main points. The answer key is found at the end of the session.

- Jesus' life is filled with _____ from the beginning—illegitimate child, scandalous teaching, and a scandalous death on a Roman cross. Even his _____ would end up leading scandalous lives.
- The one in the womb of Mary has never been _____ by the seed of a man but by the Holy Spirit. This means the _____ has not been transmitted to the child in her womb. He had been conceived without sin.
- *Immanuel* means “_____.” The baby growing in Mary's womb is none other than God himself. He is leaving the upper story to not only be with us in the _____ but to actually become one of us.
- The only place Mary and Joseph could find to deliver God was a cave-like _____ behind one of the local Bethlehem inns. How unfortunate that the best we could do for the arrival of _____ into our world was a birth in a barn!

- But in the upper story, God wanted Jesus to be born in a manger. To fulfill _____, Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem in humble circumstances.
- We want all the people in our lives to see Jesus because his birth is not the _____ of a scandal but a _____ to our scandal—to our sin.

GETTING STARTED

Begin your discussion by reciting the following key verse and key idea together as a group. Now try to state the key verse from memory. On your first attempt, use your notes if you need help. On your second attempt, try to state it completely from memory.

Key Verse: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Key Idea: Every story of Israel, including 353 Old Testament prophecies, have pointed to this day of Jesus' birth. It begins when the Lord orchestrates an empire-wide census that moves Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in time for the delivery. Jesus is not born of man, but of God, and is the second man to walk on earth without sin in his nature. But unlike Adam, the first man, Jesus will *remain* sinless. His ministry is announced by John the Baptist, who proclaims

that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John thus makes the connection that the Passover lamb who saved the firstborn sons of Israel from the angel of death was really a symbol foreshadowing the coming of Jesus.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What part of this week's teaching encouraged or challenged you the most? Why?

2. How was Jesus' life filled with scandal in the lower story?

3. What do you believe is the significance of Jesus being born of the Holy Spirit?

4. What do you learn about Joseph through his encounter with the angel?

5. Why did God, in the upper story, want Jesus to be born in a stable in Bethlehem?

6. What is your biggest takeaway as you reflect on what you learned this week?

CLOSING PRAYER

One of the most important things we can do together in community is to pray for each other. This is not simply a closing prayer to end your group time but a portion of time to share prayer requests and life, to review how God has answered past

prayers, and to actually pray for one another. Use the space below to record prayer requests and praises. Also, make sure to pray by name for people God might add to your group—especially your neighbors.

Name	Request/Praise
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

FOR NEXT WEEK

Next week, we will look at the story of the beginning of Jesus’ surprisingly quiet entry into the public part of his earthly ministry. Before your next group meeting, be sure to read through the following personal study, complete the exercises, and memorize the key verse for the session.

VIDEO NOTES ANSWER KEY

scandal, disciples / conceived, sin nature / “God with us,”
lower story / stable, God / prophecy / result, solution



PERSONAL STUDY

Every session in this guide contains a personal study to help you make meaningful connections between your life and what you are learning each week. Take some time after your group meeting each week to read through this section and complete the personal study. In total, it should take about one hour to complete. Some people like to spread it out, devoting about ten to fifteen minutes a day. Others choose one larger block of time during the week to work through it in one sitting. There is no right or wrong way to do this! Just choose a plan that best fits your needs and schedule and then allow the Scripture to take root in your heart.

KNOW THE STORY

He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. He spoke to Moses in the fire of a burning bush. He guided Israel in a cloud by day and fire by night. He sat enthroned over the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. But all of these were just the warm-up for the main act. Now, to fulfill the upper-story plan of providing a solution to humankind's sin, God would intervene directly into the lower story by becoming a human. Fully God . . . and yet fully man.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1–14).

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. 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.

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. 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."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25).

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first-born, a son.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about” (Luke 2:1-15).

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”—
“a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”*

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming

up out of the water; he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:1–11).

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

*"He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"*

Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"(Luke 4:1–12).

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1. How does John, in his Gospel, describe the coming of Jesus into the world?

2. What was Joseph's initial plan when he learned of Mary's pregnancy?

3. What events led to Jesus being born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of prophecy?

4. What did John the Baptist proclaim about the coming Messiah?

5. What strategies did Satan employ to tempt Jesus in the wilderness?

UNDERSTAND THE STORY

The doctrine of the incarnation, the eternal God entering the limitations of time and space and being born as a human being, lies at the heart of the Christian faith. In what can only be described as a mind-bending mystery, the child born in a manger and known to us as Jesus Christ is one person with two natures: fully human but also fully divine. While the many things that Jesus said revealed God in a way that no other words could, it was the Word himself who was the fullest revelation. As Paul wrote, “The Son is the image of the invisible God. . . . He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15, 17).

Each of the four Gospels present a distinct understanding of Jesus. Matthew presents Jesus as a king, which underscores the fulfillment of God’s promise to David to establish his descendant on an eternal throne. Mark presents Jesus as a servant, which emphasizes his humility as he goes about the business of his heavenly Father. Luke presents Jesus as a man, which highlights the Savior’s common bond to all

people. As Paul would later write, “He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself” (Philippians 2:7–8).

John presents Jesus as a member of the Trinity—pre-existent in eternity with all the power and authority of the Godhead. He takes great care to explain exactly who Jesus is: “the Word was God” (John 1:1). Our words come from us and express our identity. Identifying Jesus as “the Word” of God, who was God and was eternally with God, is equivalent to calling Jesus “God.” God himself entered the story as a human being—and something new has happened, something we haven’t seen since the beginning of time!

1. What do the stories you have read this week reveal about Jesus’ identity?

2. How will these stories help you to better understand Jesus’ nature?

LIVE THE STORY

Early in Jesus' ministry, while he was in Jerusalem, he received an unexpected visit from a Pharisee named Nicodemus. During their conversation, Jesus revealed God's plan for restoring us into a relationship with him. He told Nicodemus that in order to be a part of the divine community, he had to be "born again." Jesus then offered Nicodemus one of the clearest declarations of who he was and why he came down to this earth: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We live "down here," in all the ordinary messiness of life, including what appears to be the final stop—*death*. But Jesus, who was "up there," came down to defeat death for us so that we can live eternally with him. All we have to do is believe.

1. How have you responded to Jesus' instruction to repent and be born again?

2. What is one action you will take this week to put what you've learned into practice?

TELL THE STORY

The goal of this study is not only for you to understand the story of the Bible but also for you to share it with others. So, one day this week around a meal or your dinner table, have an intentional conversation about the topic of this session with family or friends. During your time together, read Matthew 3:13–17, and then use the following question for discussion:

Why do you think it would be important for Jesus to hear his Father's blessing?

Ask God this week to help you fully embrace the story of Jesus' birth and early ministry. Also, spend a few minutes each day committing the key verse to memory: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).