

Zechariah's Praise

Intro

- Briefly look at three characters who were caused to praise God through the Christmas story
 - and reflect on our praise...

Preparation

- What would you need to do to prepare for a party?
 - dress up, get games ready, music, food, venue, invitations...
 - did we forget anything important?
 - easy to!
- When God came to preparing people for the coming of Jesus he made very careful plans indeed!
 - sent an angel to Zechariah;
 - Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were to have a baby, who when he grew up would announce Jesus' ministry (**John the Baptist**), getting them ready for Jesus
 - the circumstances of his birth were to be special... Zechariah doubted, so God made it so he couldn't speak!
 - and then when he was born, Zechariah could speak again!
- **He praised God!**
 - because he could see God's special plan to help and save his people starting to work out
 - (like the excitement we have before a party...)

Mary's Praise

- There are some questions we'd happily answer **yes** to and others to which we would definitely answer **no!**
 - show of hands for these ones....
 - would you cook a meal for friends?
 - would you paint a picture for someone?
 - would you do someone's dirty washing?
 - would you consider rowing across the Atlantic?
 - would you dig up a worm and eat it?
 - would you move to a smaller house for a better job?
 - would you write a letter to tell someone they had done something good?
- Mary was asked by God (through angel Gabriel) to agree to something unusual and difficult:
 - having a baby, when she wasn't married yet...
 - Mary had learned to say **yes** to God
 - Bible records her praising God for privilege of being involved in God's amazing plan, even though her part in it would be difficult
- How good are we at saying **yes** to God when he asks us to do stuff?

Responsive prayer

- (*Teach response: "Help me say yes to you..."; prayer with responses on screen...*)
- Lord God, when you ask me to do something that seems unusual or unnecessary...
 - **Help me say yes to you**
- Lord God, when you ask me to do something that is outside my comfort zone...
 - **Help me say yes to you**
- Lord God, when you ask me to do something that is going to be quite difficult for me to do...
 - **Help me say yes to you**
- Lord God, when you ask me to do something for someone I don't like very much...
 - **Help me say yes to you**
- Lord God, when you ask me to forgive when forgiveness is hard...
 - **Help me say yes to you**

Angel's Praise

- Why did the angel's praise God above Bethlehem?
 - just because God had told them to?
- What words can you make from these letters?
 - Immanuel...
- Praise because God is now **with** us
 - what difference does that make?
 - understanding, sympathy with our situation, insight to change it, presence and support

Christmas Praise

- *Need scissors & pens available, plus digital nativity video clip*
- Share good news stories from this week
 - is there something that has been good for you this week - in your family life, news from someone you know, something on the world news?
 - (for me, digital nativity clip this week!!)
- Fill out stars - something of the Christmas story you want to praise God for:
 - might be a word, a name, might be a sentence of what it means to you...
 - string the stars up together...
 - (and leave digital nativity clip running while we fill these in!!)
- We can not just praise by **doing things** at church
 - whether singing and praying, or writing stuff on stars!
 - but by living out the good news with gratitude...
 - welcoming, sharing the comfort we know from his presence with others, obediently seeking to say **yes** to God, etc