

## Grade 1—Unit 5

# A Special Surprise

---

This unit retells the Christmas story. God used ordinary people as carriers of the message of love. Even these ordinary people were surprised by the message they were given. Nevertheless, they were obedient to God’s call.

### LESSONS

1. An Angel Visits Mary
2. Jesus Is Born
3. Shepherds Spread Good News

# Unit 5: A Special Surprise

---

## Unit Information

### SUMMARY

This unit uses the concept of family to develop the birth of Jesus. Cousins Mary and Elizabeth rejoice that the promised Messiah will soon be born, and Mary and Joseph become an earthly family for the Son of God. The shepherds help to spread the news to others. Students will begin making a baby book for Jesus, to be used in this unit, as well as in unit six.

### KEY BIBLE TEXTS

Matthew 1:18-24

Luke 1:26-56\*

**Luke 1:46-48 (memory verse)**

Luke 2:1-20\*

**Luke 2:10-11 (main memory verse)**

*\*texts used in lessons*

### BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

#### Jesus' Birth Is Foretold

In the Luke account, the story of Jesus' birth is told from Mary's point of view. In the Hebrew culture, women were historically treated as mere possessions. Their value was found in the number of sons they could give to their husbands. Luke countered this tradition and gave a special place to women. He shared the stories of Mary and Elizabeth, women who obeyed God and believed in the magnificent impossible.

Mary went to Elizabeth after the angel announced that she would have a child. Elizabeth felt her baby leap when Mary arrived. Elizabeth knew that Mary was going to have a special baby, just as her own baby was special. Elizabeth encouraged Mary by telling her she was blessed by God—hardly a message to give an unwed pregnant woman!

At first glance, Mary and Elizabeth seem dissimilar, for one was quite young and the other fairly old. But there are many similarities in their stories. Both were having babies when they thought it was impossible. Both babies had been announced by an angel. The births of both children were foretold in Scripture. Mary and Elizabeth both believed in God. They believed the unusual messages God gave them. They had much to talk about, as good friends do.

#### On a Busy Night in Bethlehem

A census was taken in Palestine approximately every 14 years, so Caesar could levy appropriate taxes and find those who were eligible for military service. (Jews were exempt from military service, but were required to pay taxes.) To register, all people had to return to their homelands. Joseph, being of the house of David, traveled to Bethlehem, David's city of birth.

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a small town six miles south of

Jerusalem, was about 80 miles. It is unlikely that Joseph and Mary traveled alone, since many people would have been heading “home” for the census count. They would have met customary middle-eastern hospitality along the way, which would have made the trip manageable, though still not pleasant, for a pregnant woman.

Joseph was solicitous of his pregnant wife. He cared about her comfort and wanted to provide for her. Even though Joseph knew he wasn’t the birth father of Jesus, he agreed to “adopt” Jesus as his own son. Joseph also chose to obey the message from the angel in his dream (Matt. 1:18-25).

### **Shepherds Spread the Good News**

Angels are key players in the story of Jesus’ birth. They announced the birth of Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-17), the birth of Jesus to Mary (Luke 1:26-37), and provided Jesus’ name (Matthew 1:21). Angels also told the shepherds about the Messiah’s birth and sang hallelujahs (Luke 2:13,14).

When we imagine what the shepherds were like, it’s hard to think of them being demonstrative and exuberant. They spent large blocks of time watching their sheep in the hill country, away from large groups of people. Shepherds were not highly-regarded, since they could not keep the ceremonial laws as dictated by Jewish law.

The shepherds heard the angels’ message and song. They trusted that the message the angels gave them was true. They left their sheep and hurried to Bethlehem in search of the Messiah; a little baby laying in a manger. The news of the Messiah’s birth gave them freedom to act out of character. They went and spread the good news to everyone they met. The good news of Jesus can transform us in much the same way!

### **ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS**

- Angels had special announcements for Mary and the shepherds.
- Jesus was born into an earthly family.
- Mary and Joseph trusted God.

### **WORSHIP**

1. Use an Advent calendar daily, and briefly reflect on what each symbol has to do with Christmas. Give students the opportunity to share what the symbols mean to them.
2. Have a birthday party for Jesus. What might students give to Baby Jesus? This can be tied in with lesson one, where students fill a manger with good deeds they see people do.

### **BULLETIN BOARD IDEAS**

1. Put up a traditional nativity picture. Add students’ photos around the manger.
2. Create a bulletin board with the angel choir (Lesson 3). Add a list of ways we can tell others about Jesus (i.e., being kind to each other) or the memory verse found in Luke 2:10-11.

## MEMORY PASSAGES

This unit offers the following verses for students to memorize. You may copy and clip the following verses for students to take home.

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11

And Mary said, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.”

Luke 1:46-48

## MEMORY VERSE CONNECTIONS

*Make this memory verse connection during Lesson 3:*

Read Luke 2:10-11, “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” Have students take turns making this grand announcement to the class.

## ASSESSING TEACHING / LEARNING

Observing students and their interactions is one of the best ways to discover if students are practicing the lessons. Look to see if they cooperate with each other, if they use caring words, and if they practice peacemaking skills.

A quiz is also included, at the end of the unit.

# A Special Surprise

## LESSON 1: AN ANGEL VISITS MARY

### Objective

Students will understand that Gabriel had special news for Mary.

### Key Concepts

- The angel Gabriel had a special message for Mary.
- Mary’s baby is the one who John the Baptist talked about.
- Mary shared her news with Elizabeth.
- The stories of John the Baptist and Jesus are in the New Testament.

**Text:** Luke 1:26-56

**Estimated Lesson Time:** 30 minutes

### Materials

- Bible
- For Extend the Lesson: cardboard box (a bit larger than a shoe box), shredded newspaper or straw, paper strips

### Teacher Preparation

- Practice telling the story of Gabriel’s visit to Mary in your own words, or from Lesson Step 2.
- If using Extend the Lesson, prepare a cardboard box to represent a manger by placing shredded newspaper or straw inside. Cut paper strips large enough for children to write their names on them.

## INTRODUCING THE LESSON

**Talk about friends.** Hold up a Bible that is open between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Explain to the students that the story of John the Baptist, and the stories they will hear in the next few weeks, come from the New Testament.

Ask the students to think about someone who is a really good friend to them. Divide the group into pairs to share about their friends with these (or similar) questions: How did you meet your friend? What do you and your friend like to do together? Do you and your friend ever talk about things that don’t make sense to you?

## LESSON STEPS

**1. Elizabeth’s cousin.** Remind the students of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and their “impossible” son. Does anyone remember his name? (*John the Baptist*)

Tell the students that Elizabeth had a cousin, Mary, and they were really good friends. One day Mary had something happen to her that puzzled her. It didn’t make sense.

**2. Tell the story of Gabriel’s visit to Mary.** Opening your Bible to Luke 1:26-38, tell the story in your own words, or use the following:

God sent an angel named Gabriel to the town of Galilee, to visit a young woman named Mary. Mary was engaged to marry a man named Joseph.

Gabriel gave Mary his message from God. He said, “Greetings, favored one.” Mary was confused and wondered what was going on! The angel continued, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for God will bless you. You are going to have a son, and you will name him Jesus. Jesus will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. God will give him the throne, so that he will reign over all of Israel forever.”

Mary was confused. She said that she couldn’t have a baby. But Gabriel told her that nothing is impossible with God.

Mary responded, “I am God’s servant. I will do as God wishes.”

**3. Pause to reflect.** Stop the story for a moment to reflect on these questions: An angel announced another baby’s birth. Who was it? (*John the Baptist*) Mary thought the angel was asking her to do something impossible, and this confused her. Have any of you ever had to do something you thought was impossible? What do you do when you’re told something confusing? (*Answers will vary. Have students share their answers with a partner.*)

**4. Continue the story,** from Luke 1:39-45:

A few days after the angel’s visit, Mary traveled to the house of her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth was pregnant at the time with John. And when Elizabeth saw Mary, she felt the baby move inside her! Elizabeth recognized that something special was happening. She told Mary that Mary was blessed by God. Elizabeth recognized that Mary was to be the mother of Jesus.

**5. How do we prepare?** Discuss how Mary needed to wait for, and prepare for, the birth of her child. We celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas time. How do we wait and prepare for Christmas? How are they like or not like the ways in which Mary prepared? Responses will vary; write them on the board, so that students can see a difference in the amount of items named from one time period to another.

## **EXTEND THE LESSON**

*(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 30 minutes.)*

• **Wait for Jesus with good deeds.** Tell the students that, in your classroom, they will wait and prepare for the birth of Jesus by filling a manger with good deeds. Make a manger in the classroom by using a box and lining it with shredded newspaper (or straw, if you have access to it). Have a pile of strips of paper available, next to the manger. As students do good deeds throughout the day, tell them to write their names on strips of paper and put them in the manger. How long will it take to fill the manger with paper strips?

# A Special Surprise

## LESSON 2: JESUS IS BORN

### Objective

Students will understand that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

### Key Concepts

- Mary and Joseph were traveling when Jesus was born.
- Mary and Joseph named their baby Jesus.

**Text:** Luke 2:1-7

**Estimated Lesson Time:** 30 minutes

### Materials

- One or two baby memory books (your own, your child's, or a friend's)
- Bible
- Five paper strips (cut 8½ x 11-inch sheets in half, lengthwise)
- Baby Book for Jesus activity pages (pp. 169-170)
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- For Extend the Lesson: Christmas picture book

### Teacher Preparation

- Prepare five story event strips, writing each of the following events on one strip (A census was to be taken; People needed to return to their hometowns for the census; Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem; Mary had a baby; Mary laid the baby in a manger).
- Pre-assemble a Baby Book for Jesus for each student, using the baby book pages from this lesson through Unit 6. The sheets for the baby book are found on pages 169, 170, 174, 185, and 193. Ask a parent to help make copies of all the baby book pages and assemble them, so they are already stapled together when the students receive them. Children will be working on one page for each lesson.

### INTRODUCING THE LESSON

**Baby's special events.** Share one or two baby books with the class. Draw attention to how special events are recorded, as well as the pictures that are included. Read some of the entries.

### LESSON STEPS

**1. Read the story of Jesus' birth.** Remind the students that in the story so far, Gabriel told Mary that she is going to have a baby. Then read Luke 2:1-7 from the Bible.

**2. Review the story.** Hand out the five story event strips you prepared, and have the students stand in the order of events in front of the classroom. Repeat the exercise several times, using different students. Add that Mary and Joseph named the baby Jesus.

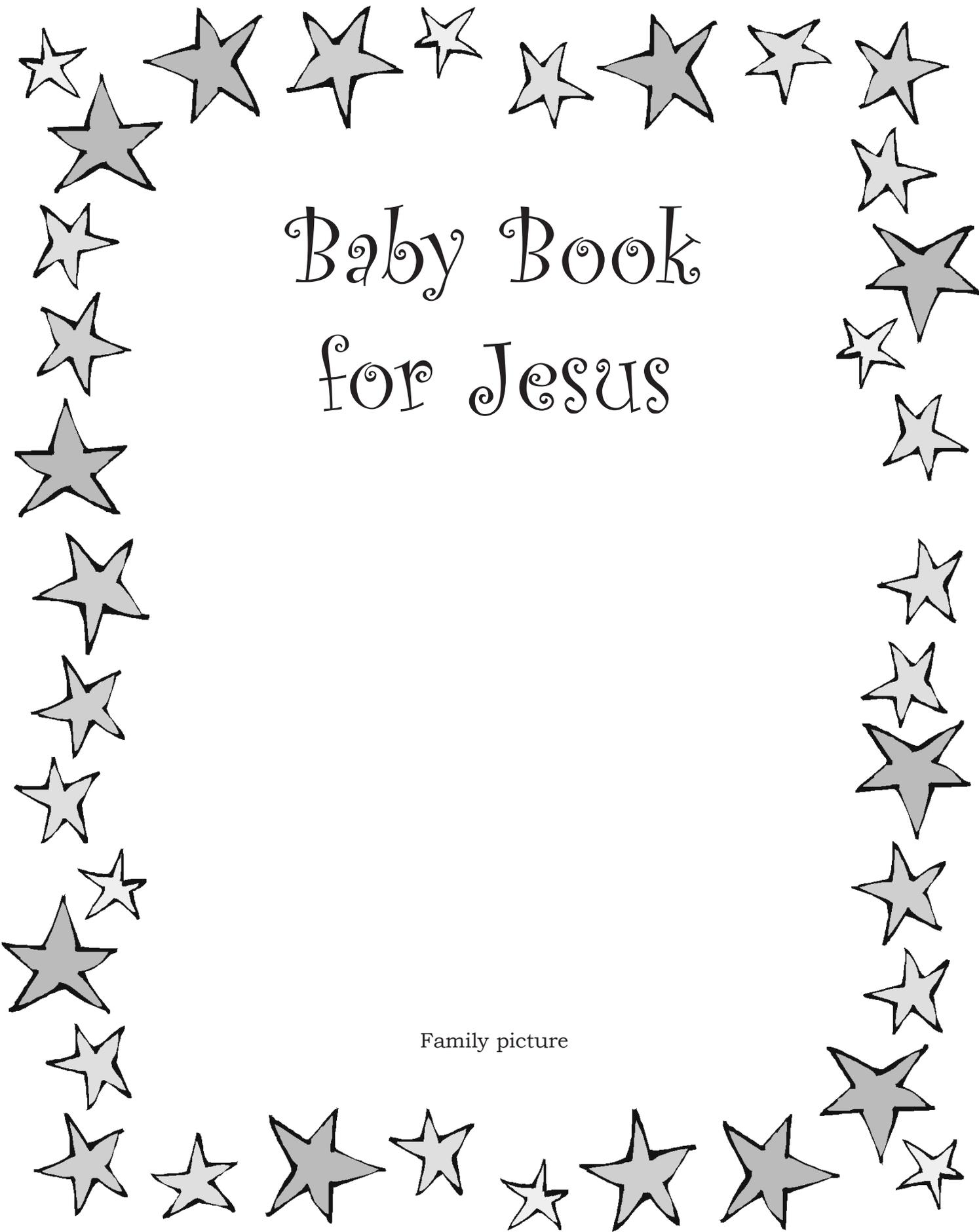
**3. Begin work on Jesus' baby book.** Give each student a pre-assembled Baby Book for Jesus, to work on the cover and the page for today. The children may draw a family picture of Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus on the cover.

Think together about what could be written on the "Where Jesus Was Born" page, and write suggestions on the board. Let students choose what they want to write, however. Ask them to draw a picture of Jesus' birthplace. Students may choose different aspects to illustrate. For example, some might want to draw the town of Bethlehem, while others will want to draw the traditional stable and manger.

### **EXTEND THE LESSON**

*(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 30 minutes.)*

- **Read a Christmas book.** Read a picture book that illustrates the birth of Jesus. How is the book like the Bible? How is the book different from the Bible? What stories do the illustrations tell?



Baby Book  
for Jesus

Family picture

# Where Jesus Was Born

---

---

---

# A Special Surprise

## LESSON 3: SHEPHERDS SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

### Objective

Students will recognize that God used shepherds to spread the good news of Jesus' birth.

### Key Concepts

- An angel told shepherds about Jesus' birth.
- The shepherds visited Jesus.
- The shepherds told others about Jesus.

**Text:** Luke 2:8-20

**Estimated Lesson Time:** 30 minutes

### Materials

- Bible
- Baby Book for Jesus
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- For Extend the Lesson, option one: angel pattern (p. 173), construction paper, glitter, glue, string
- For Extend the Lesson, option two: rhythm instruments (*optional*)

### Teacher Preparation

- If using Extend the Lesson, option one, make several copies of the angel pattern.

### INTRODUCING THE LESSON

**When a baby is born.** Ask the students how they heard about the birth of a younger brother or sister or cousin. Did someone stop by their house to tell them? Did someone call them on the phone? Were they at the hospital when the baby was born? Allow time for students to think about these memories.

Ask what they did after they found out about the birth of the new baby. Did they call friends to tell them the happy news? Did they tell their classmates or their teacher?

### LESSON STEPS

**1. Read the story of the angel and shepherds.** Remind the students that Jesus, the Son of God, had just been born. How do they think God might announce the arrival of such a special baby? (*Many will probably already know that angels announced Jesus' birth.*) Read the story from Luke 2:8-20.

**2. Talk about the story.** Wonder with the students that God chose to announce Jesus' birth to shepherds. Some people might have thought God would announce Jesus' birth to kings and other important leaders, but instead God chose shepherds. This shows that Jesus is for everyone, not just those who are rich and famous.

**3. Imagine the shepherds' feelings.** Imagine together how the shepherds must have felt, being visited by the angels with such important news. They would have been sitting in a field, watching their sheep. Suddenly, the sky was lit up and there were angels all around. How would the shepherds feel? Scared? Happy? Excited? Allow time for sharing.

**4. Work on the Baby Book for Jesus.** Even though the shepherds might have been scared, they were excited and happy, too. It was important for them to tell others about the good news of Jesus' birth.

Hand out the students' baby books for Jesus and work on the announcement page together. When you have filled in the words, the children may illustrate some part of the angels and shepherds story.

### **EXTEND THE LESSON**

*(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 30 minutes.)*

- **Make an angel choir.** Have the students trace the angel pattern onto construction paper, then cut the angels. They may decorate their angels with crayons, markers, and glitter. Encourage the children to make the angels' skin and hair colors as varied as the skin and hair colors of all God's family around the world. Hang the angels from the ceiling, grouped together to make an angel choir.
- **Do a Christmas march.** Read the following poem, then repeat, marching around the room and miming, or actually playing, rhythm instruments.

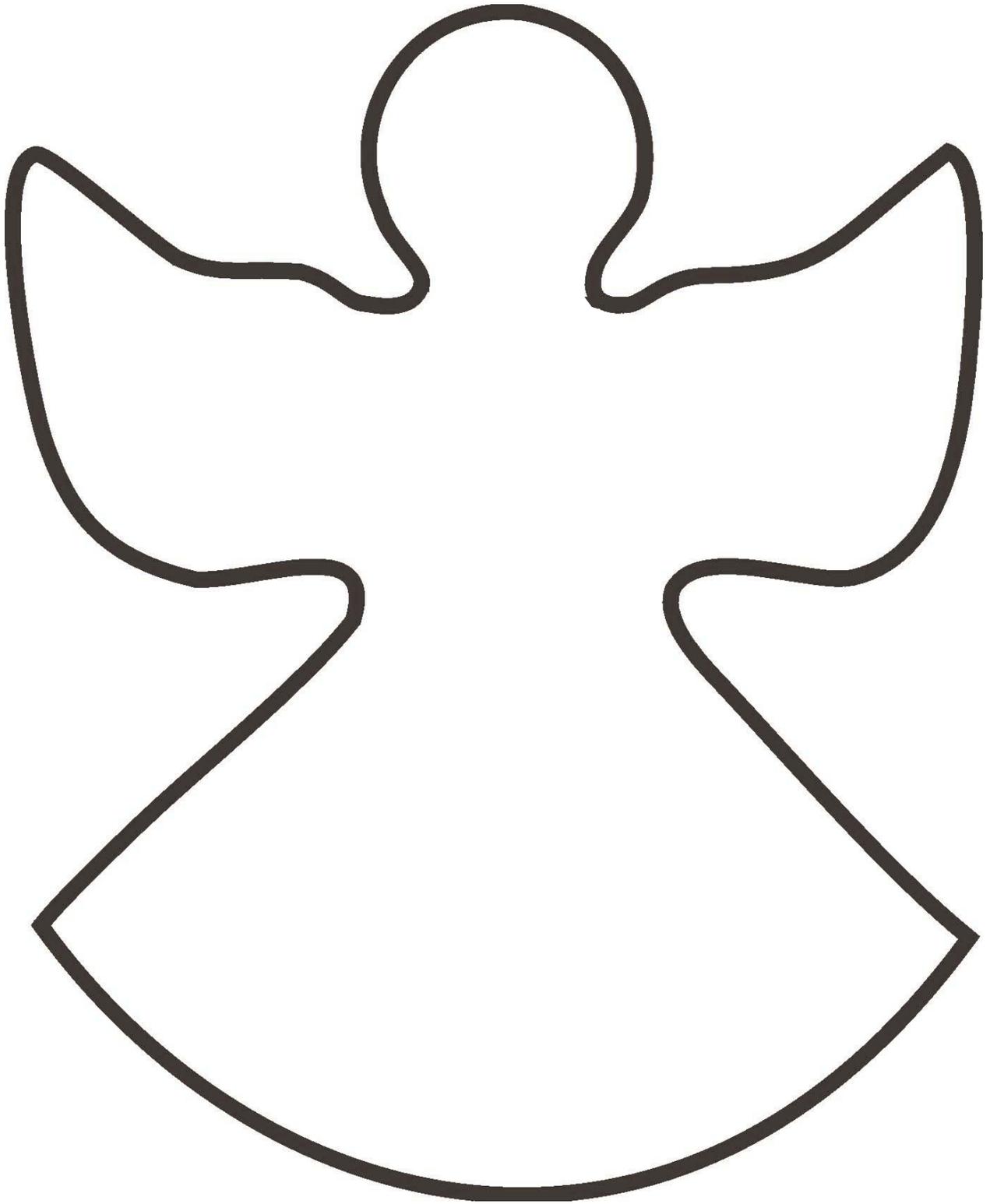
#### **Christmas March**

Blow the trumpet,  
Beat the drum.  
Spread the word,  
The King has come!

Bang the cymbals,  
Ringing clear.  
Tell the news,  
The King is here!

—Sharon Lee

# Angel pattern



# Jesus' Birth Announcement

Jesus' birth was announced to

---

by

---

# Unit 5 Quiz

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Circle the correct answer:

1. The stories of John the Baptist and Jesus are found in what part of the Bible?
  - a. Old Testament
  - b. New Testament
2. Mary and Joseph needed to travel to which of these towns?
  - a. Bethlehem
  - b. Jerusalem
  - c. Rome
3. Who announced the birth of Jesus?
  - a. The innkeeper
  - b. Jesus' aunt
  - c. Angels
4. Who heard the announcement?
  - a. Shepherds
  - b. Kings
  - c. Innkeepers

**Draw a picture** of one thing that happened when Jesus was born:

**Draw a picture** showing something we do to celebrate the birth of Jesus:

**Answers to Unit 5 Quiz:**

1. b. New Testament
2. a. Bethlehem
3. c. Angels
4. a. Shepherds

(Drawings will vary.)