



---

# WEEK **THREE**

# REFLECTION

---



## Scripture: Luke 2:2-14

This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!”

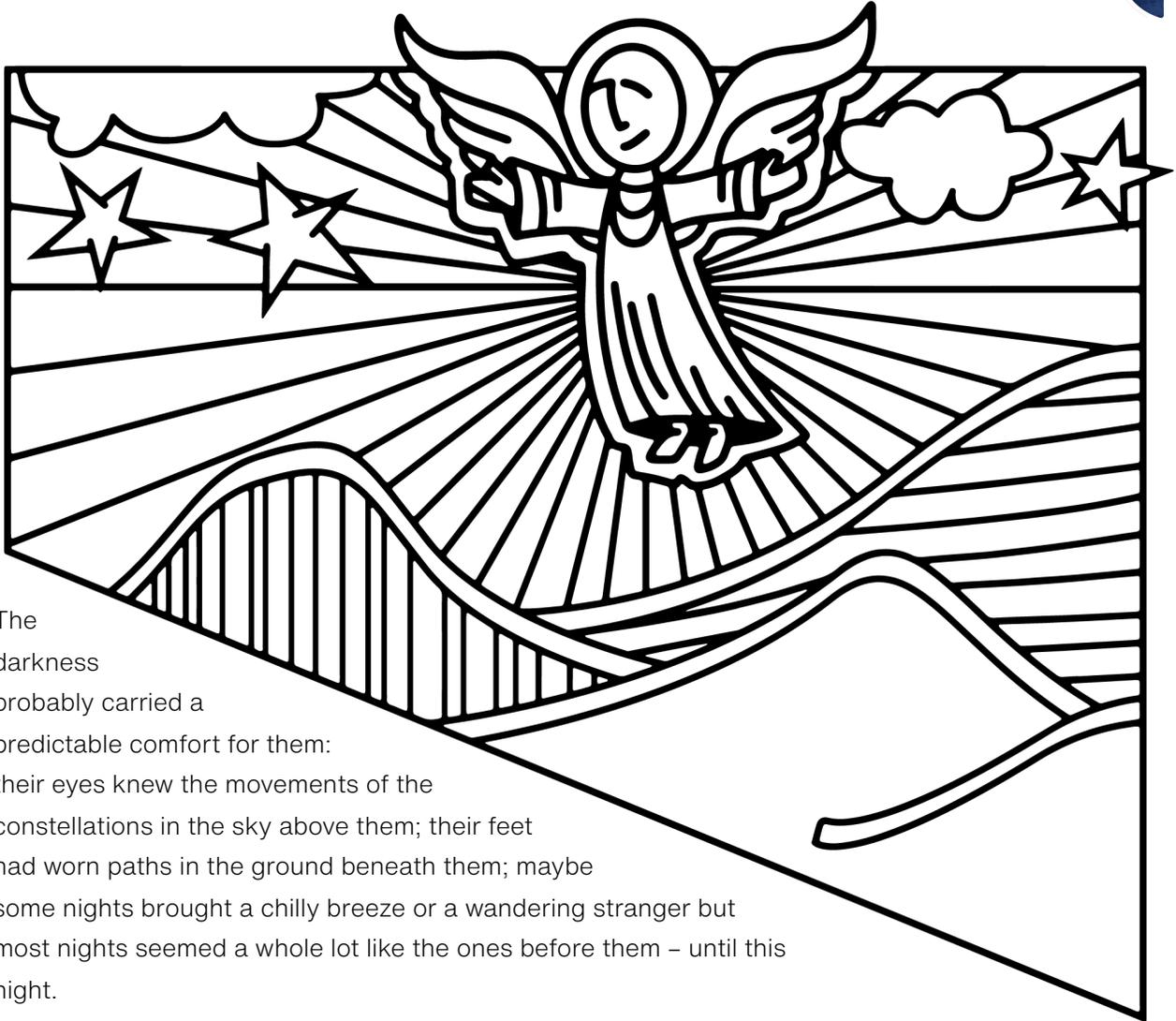
## WEEK THREE Reflection

---

Sometimes the skies surprise us. Maybe a fluffy white cloud, looking convincingly like a dinosaur, drifts across a blue sky. Maybe a shooting star flashes across a still dark night, leaving a trail of light lasting only long enough for us to remember we can make a wish, then disappearing before we've been able to think of what we should wish for.

I remember sitting outside on a lakeshore two summers ago with some friends waiting for the solar eclipse to begin. We listened for animal sounds, because we'd heard animals follow the cues from natural light, or darkness. Sure enough, when the moon passed in front of the sun for that brief time and the world grew dark, things got quiet – as though the animal kingdom was bedding down – and when the sun began to reappear barely minutes later, the birdsong and the squirrel rustling around started back up again, too! There are things we expect from the natural world; patterns our minds and bodies grow accustomed to, and when those expectations are unmet – or challenged – it can delight us, confound us, or sometimes even terrify us.

That's what happened to the shepherds. They were out in their fields, under a vast night sky, one they'd looked up into thousands of nights before this one.



The darkness probably carried a predictable comfort for them: their eyes knew the movements of the constellations in the sky above them; their feet had worn paths in the ground beneath them; maybe some nights brought a chilly breeze or a wandering stranger but most nights seemed a whole lot like the ones before them – until this night.

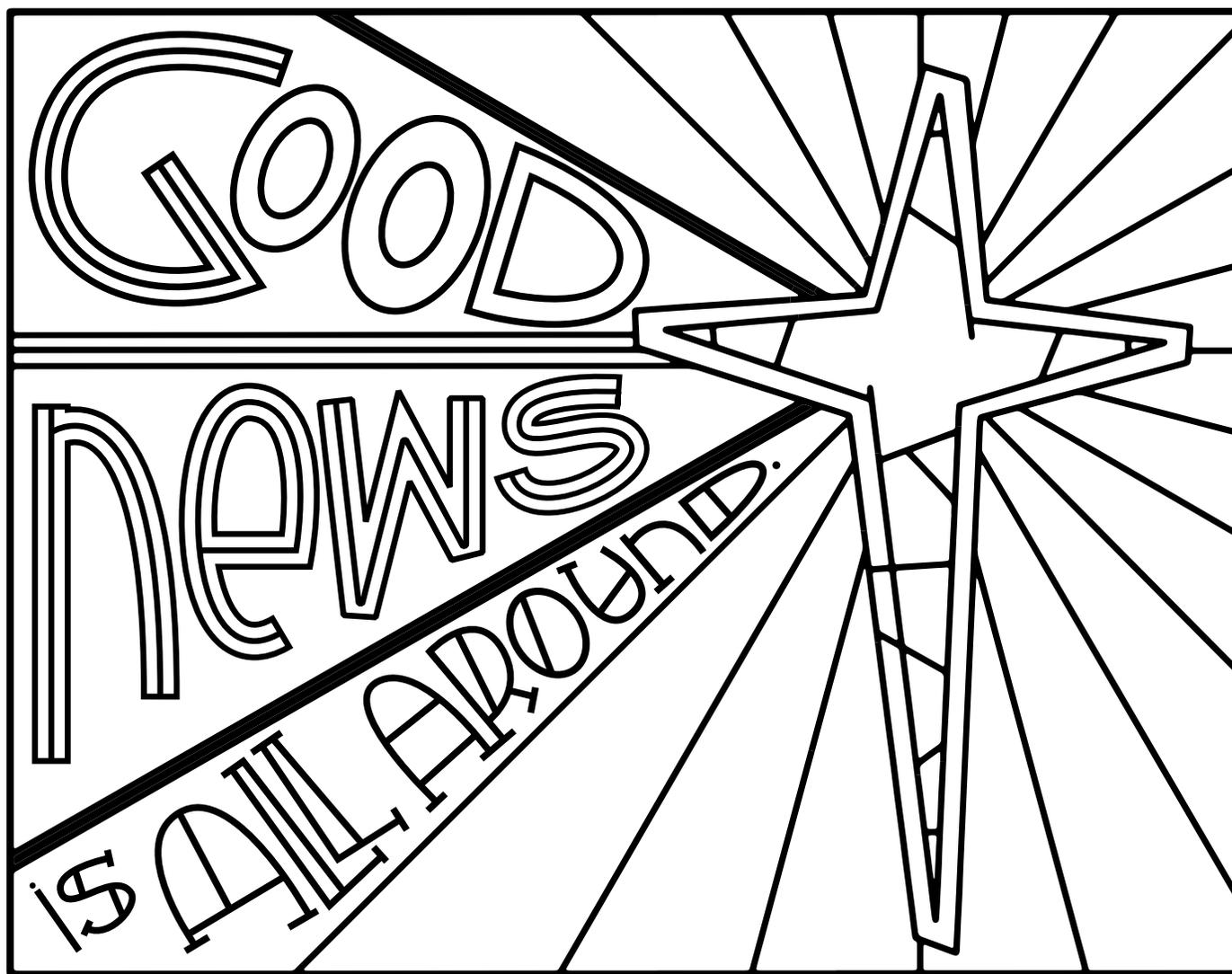
On this night, light pierced the darkness – “the glory of the Lord shone around them” – and it terrified them. It was unexpected; it was unnerving; it was intense. And they became the next ones to receive the message now forming our Advent refrain - “Do not be afraid.” All the characters with major roles in this story are visited at some point and told not to be afraid. Joseph heard it in his dream; Mary heard it in her vision. Now the shepherds hear it out in their fields. For those of us familiar with this story, the frequency with which this refrain, “do not be afraid,” is repeated is an invitation to wonder: is this a scary story? Like, if I didn’t know that this was going to end well, would I be trembling throughout, like all the characters seem to be?

And every time the angels tell their listeners not to be afraid, the accompanying message is the same: things are not what they seem. Joseph worries Mary’s pregnancy is a sign of her unfaithfulness to him; the angel tells him it’s a sign of her blessing from God. Mary fears the angel’s presence, uncertain why she’d be visited by God’s messenger and imagining it to be nothing good; the angel reassures her it’s a sign of favor, of God’s delight in her.



The shepherds cover when the light floods their field that night; they're quickly reassured this intrusion is a friendly one, that the angel brings "good news of great joy!" And the angel announces not so far away, under that same dark sky, a baby was born who would be the Savior – a baby who would one day, we know from other stories, come to be called the Light of the World; a Savior whose love, like Rilke's "dark" in the poem from Week One, embraces everything.

"Things are not what they seem" is news that can be comforting or unsettling, wonderful or terrible, depending, of course, on how things seem. But in a world where we've come to so easily associate light and dark with good and bad, it can be important to remind ourselves God shows up in everything: the dark night cradles the baby Jesus; the light piercing it displays God's glory; the shepherds are invited to witness all of it. Good news is all around.





## Questions to Discuss

---

Is the story of Jesus' birth a scary story? Explain your answer.

Has darkness ever been a predictable comfort for you? How so?



## Going Deeper

---

Imagine you were among the shepherds in the field this night. What would you have been thinking or feeling – first at the burst of light, then at the angel’s announcement, then at the invitation to go and find this baby? Would you have been trying to convince your friends to follow this good news, or would you have needed to be convinced yourself?

When has something not met your expectations and delighted you? Confounded you? Terrified you? How have you known God’s presence in that?

• RESPOND • DRAW • COLOR • DOODLE •

