

Older Youth

Day 2 What if God is Bigger?

Scripture

- Luke 1:35-55

Scripture Focus: Luke 1:46–47

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,”

Daily Prophet: Elizabeth

Theological Summary: God chooses each of us to make God’s love bigger, and today is a day to invite campers to celebrate the ways God’s love can be made bigger by each of them.

Today, campers will...

- learn that God is bigger than what has been and what we imagine will be
- explore the vastness of God’s creation
- discover amazing visions of God’s people that have already come to pass
- wonder about what else they may still discover about God
- claim the discovery about God as a journey with no end

Daily Activities

— Just a Little Closer #Play #Learn	Zoom in activity
— Headlines #play	Seeing more than one side
— Beyond Expectations #learn	Mary and Elizabeth’s possible reality
— Once Upon a Time #learn #pray	Praying over God’s timeline
— Dig Deep #Create	Creation below and above
— Field of Vision #serve #pray	Encouraging and blessing others
— A Whale of a Tale #create #play	Story keeps getting bigger
— Connect the Dots #create	Nigh time start pattern experiment

Leader notes: God sent an angel to inform a pregnant teen that her world might fall apart, but that God would be blessing her and everything would be OK in the end. That is not the typical message a young woman gets in that situation. It is important to allow youth to identify with Mary as a youth but we need to be careful not to romanticize her experience. Life got hard. Why else would she be sent to stay with relatives for a while? Elizabeth has her own child related challenges with finally conceiving after being thought barren. Elizabeth’s hope in God is affirmed while Mary seeks hope in the midst of uncertainty.

***End First Page.

Activity Pages:

Just a Little Closer #Play #Learn

Why: Continue getting to know each other while exploring how God gets bigger as we grow closer to each other.

Supplies: Piece of paper. Camera with zoom optional (see BTW)

How: roll up the piece of paper into a small tube. Invite one camper to close their eyes. Have another camper stand in the middle of the group and hold the tube up to their shoulder or hair. Move the first camper to the tube and challenge them to open one eye to look down the tube and try to identify the camper on the other end. Take turns letting campers try to identify each other. Adjust the size of the viewing tube to make the activity easier or more difficult. Be careful to be appropriate with where the viewing tube is aimed. Do not get near personal spaces. After the activity, spend some time discussing how zooming in on details might make a person more recognizable. Ask the campers to reflect on how this might relate to God as we look more closely at God's creation and think about the vastness of God's creation.

BTW: This could be done with a digital camera, taking pictures in advance of each camper at various levels of zoom. Zooming out with each progressive picture would allow the group to start out with the most difficult level and have it get easier till they can identify the camper. Zoomed in pictures of campers could be combined to form a collage to post in the group space or as a worship image.

Headlines #play

Why: Have some fun while preparing campers to dive deeper into today's scripture. This is a game you can add on to or come back to as the week goes on.

Supplies: none

How: Share each of the "headlines" below and then have the campers vote on whether it is "good news" or "bad news." After each, allow some time to reflect on how campers might come to either conclusion. If all are in agreement, help them imagine how someone might see it different based on life experience or expectations. At the end, spend a few minutes reflecting on how looking at things from more than one perspective makes the world a bigger place.

"Large amount of rain expected soon"

"TV show to tell full story of popular teacher's life"

"Researchers discover truth about mysterious bones found in cave"

"Pregnant girl in small town goes to live with relatives"

"Jesus agrees to interview that will clear up differences between churches"

BTW: Encourage campers to come up with more "headlines" through the week. You can keep a running list in your group area. Each time they think of one, they are naming a way that reality might be bigger than our first assumptions.

Beyond Expectations #learn

Why: Dive deeper into the story and explore similar issues people face today. Help campers understand that God's love is bigger than reputations, expectations, or assumptions.

Supplies: Large sheet of paper and marker

How: Read Luke 1:35-55 together. Remind the campers that Elizabeth was unable to have a child for a long time and people looked down on her for being childless. Remind campers that Mary was a young girl who got pregnant but was not married. Read the scripture again and ask the campers to reflect on how each might have been treated by those around them. Brainstorm events, social settings, holidays, etc. that might be difficult for either to face and write them on a large sheet of paper. Once you have a list, ask the campers how God elevated the women above the expectations or judgment of others and what challenges they both still might have to face in the future.

BTW: If your group is ready to dig deeper, expand the brainstorming to include how people might have treated the children of Mary and Elizabeth. Encourage them to think about the gossip they hear and judgement they see in their own community. Remember, this is all hypothetical because we don't have scripture about Jesus' youth, but we can imagine the challenges of growing up in that community.

Once Upon a Time #learn #pray

Why: Help campers connect today's story with the larger story of God's people found in scripture and begin thinking about their role in that ever growing story.

Supplies: Note cards or pieces of paper, marker

How: Write Bible characters' names on separate note cards (Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Mary, Jesus, Paul) and challenge the campers to put them in chronological order. They may use their Bibles to find the order. Give each camper or pair of campers one of the characters to focus on and ask them to try and find a way to tell their story in three sentences or less. This will require a lot of details to be left out. Give the campers a few more names (Constantine, Martin Luther, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr.) and ask the campers to add them to the timeline. Tip: Theresa was born before MLK Jr. After the timeline is updated, ask the campers to share why these people might be on a timeline of God's story. Give the campers blank cards and markers and ask them to add other names they think should be on the timeline from Jesus' time to now. This might include people who have impacted them, or leaders in their Church tradition. Close by giving each person a card and asking them to lift up a prayer for the role that person played in the story of God and God's people.

BTW: You could add cards for leaders from your denomination or camp leadership to make the activity more specific to your community. If your group is ready to dig deeper, consider adding faith leaders from other religious traditions such as Mohamed or Buddha. If you take this step, be ready for a deep conversation and make sure everyone feels safe with disagreement.

Dig Deep #Create

Why: Help campers connect with things beyond their vision that are around us or beneath us every day as we continue exploring God's big universe.

Supplies: paper and pencils or colored pencils.

How: Invite campers to look down, and share what they are standing on. Some may talk about things beneath the surface but many will simply describe the grass, rocks, or dirt they see. After everyone has shared, invite them think about what could be deeper. Give each person a piece of paper and provide colored pencils. Ask everyone to imagine the layers of earth under them and what could be laying below them. Give them time to draw the layers of earth, creatures, and any other artifacts they imagine lay below. Some will draw all the way to the other side of the earth. Others may only go down a little way. Affirm both and remind the campers that we are always learning that our perspective is limited. Repeat the activity by looking up and describing what is above us. As the conversation moves beyond our atmosphere and into space, ask the campers how big God's universe is and how much of it they think we can truly know or understand.

BTW: This would be a great activity to move to night time, or divide between two sessions with the earth portion being during the day and the looking up at night. You could also provide images from the Hubble Space Telescope as campers discuss what is beyond our vision.

Field of Vision #prayer #serve

Why: Campers have a profound influence on each other that they sometimes fail to appreciate. By looking at Elizabeth and Mary, we can see how another person expands our vision, especially in difficult times.

Supplies: large sheet of paper and markers

How: Ask campers to brainstorm a list of challenges people their age face. Remind them to think about their own community, others in our nation, and youth who live in different circumstances around the world. Once you have a list, pair up campers and assign each pair a different challenge from the list. Each pair should imagine one of them is facing the challenge and the other is trying to speak a word of hope or encouragement. Remind them of Elizabeth's words of blessing to Mary in her time of fear or worry. Ask each pair to have a "what not to say" and a "word of blessing" to share with the larger group. After each pair has shared, invite the campers to reflect on how our words can limit God or expand people's understanding of God at

work in their life. Having practiced the sharing of a blessing, ask each camper to take turns blessing each other. This can be personal or very simple, "God bless you, and be with you as you make decisions that impact your week of camp and life beyond."

BTW: This activity could be repeated at the end of the week as a closing blessing, or used in worship as a gathering as people come in. In some traditions, placing a hand over a person's head is a visible sign of blessing and could be used.

A Whale of a Tale #create #play

Why: Have some fun and let the creative juices of the group flow while continuing to discover how big God's presence in our lives can be.

How: Start a story by giving one simple starter. You might try, "Sarah and Javier saw a man on their way to school," or "In the beginning God created a mouse." Going around in a circle, ask each camper to make the statement bigger or more amazing, and then add on a sentence to the story. The next camper can expand one or more of the sentences to make the scene bigger. Allow some collaboration if someone is stuck on their turn. Remember, the goal is to get a story that keeps getting bigger and more amazing. Once one story finds its end, feel free to start another.

BTW: This could be done between groups of campers as each group receives a piece of the story, then adds a "biggered" version to the next group. The final product could be shared in worship.

Connect the Dots #create (NIGHT TIME ACTIVITY – maybe a lightning bug or flash light logo?)

Why: Explore the stars as part of God's creation and reflect on how big God's universe really is.

Supplies: Paper, pencils, yellow markers.

How: Invite campers to lay on their backs and look at the stars. Ask them to pick a star to be the middle of their image, and place a yellow dot on their paper to represent that star. Now, invite campers to place more stars on their page, trying to recreate the scene before them. They can choose how detail to get and how far afield to include. After everyone is done, go inside and invite them to look at their images and try to create "constellations" by connecting the star dots to form shapes and pictures. Remind them that real constellations are not exact so there is no pressure to be perfect. Afterwards, if there is time, reflect on the real distance between the stars and how close it and far away it all feels to us on Earth.

BTW: Consider having campers trade images and find constellations in each other's images.

***End Activity Pages.

STORY RESOURCES:

Men In Black (Columbia Pictures, 1997) : The closing scene where Will Smith's character discovers that our universe is actually held inside a locker of someone else's larger universe is a great example of how God is perpetually bigger than we imagine.

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (20th Century Fox, 1980): Yoda's explanation of the Force to Luke is a great way to imagine God surrounding and penetrating all things in creation. Luke's failure to believe in how big the Force is and how powerful he can be is the only thing that limits him from doing amazing things. This lesson fits well with today's theme.