



WEEK FOUR: To Choose LOVE

SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 2:15-20

REFLECTION

Have you ever looked forward to an event for a long time and imagined how it would go, only for it not to happen the way you expected? Maybe it was a family vacation, summer camp, or the first day of school. It is easy to feel disappointed when things don't happen the way you have planned them. You can get lost in your expectations, feel frustrated, and even close your heart to what is happening unexpectedly, instead of noticing the wonderful experiences around you.

In this story, Mary's baby was born and placed in a manger. Animals, hay, and strangers surrounded him. Then, as they were trying to rest, a whole group of sweaty shepherds came traipsing in to meet Jesus and Mary. This is probably not in any way how Mary imagined Jesus being born. She could have looked at the shepherds and said, "No. No. No. Nope!" and sent them on their way. Instead, she chose to open her heart and invite them in. She chose to listen to their amazing story about meeting angels and tell them her own amazing story. And because she chose to be open, the shepherds left to share this good news with everyone, and Mary was able to hold the experiences she could never have imagined inside her heart.

What do you do when things don't go the way you planned, when you feel nervous or afraid, and the ground feels like it is shaking beneath your feet? Do you lock your heart up tight? Sometimes people lock their hearts because they think it will protect them. They lock out strangers who might become friends; they lock out different places that might become places where they belong. The problem with locking your heart is that it doesn't actually protect you; it keeps out all the love you didn't think to imagine. When Mary opened her heart to the unexpected, she chose love. Choosing love transformed her heart, and it also transformed the world. She shared her love with strangers who became friends, and those friends chose to share the message of love with everyone they met. That is what happens when you open your heart and choose love. You can't help but share a message of love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think it was like for Mary after Jesus was born? Can you imagine some of the fears or worries she might have felt? What do you think helped her choose love in the story?
- Can you think of a time when things didn't go the way you expected, and you felt afraid? Share your story with your family. Did you choose love? If not, can you imagine what might have been different if you had chosen love?
- What is one way you can choose love this week? Make time to check in with each other later this week and encourage one another to keep choosing love.

ACTIVITY

Materials:

- This week's Activity Page
- Construction paper (recommended) or printer paper
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Art supplies (markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc.)

When we have big feelings, it is easy to forget to choose love. Let's make some reminders to post in our homes to help us remember to choose love even when it is not easy.

Because we treasure love, we are going to create a 2D treasure chest. Using a piece of construction paper or printer paper in portrait orientation, fold both top corners down toward the middle to create a triangle, like you're starting a paper airplane. Fold the triangle down, the point meeting the bottom edge.

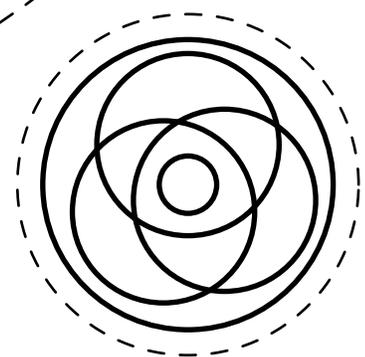
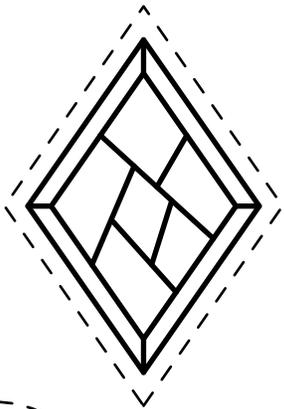
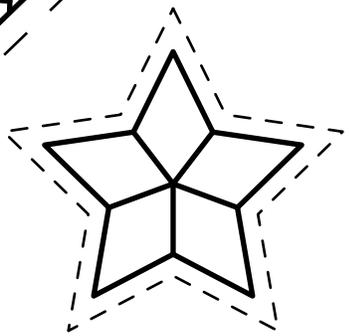
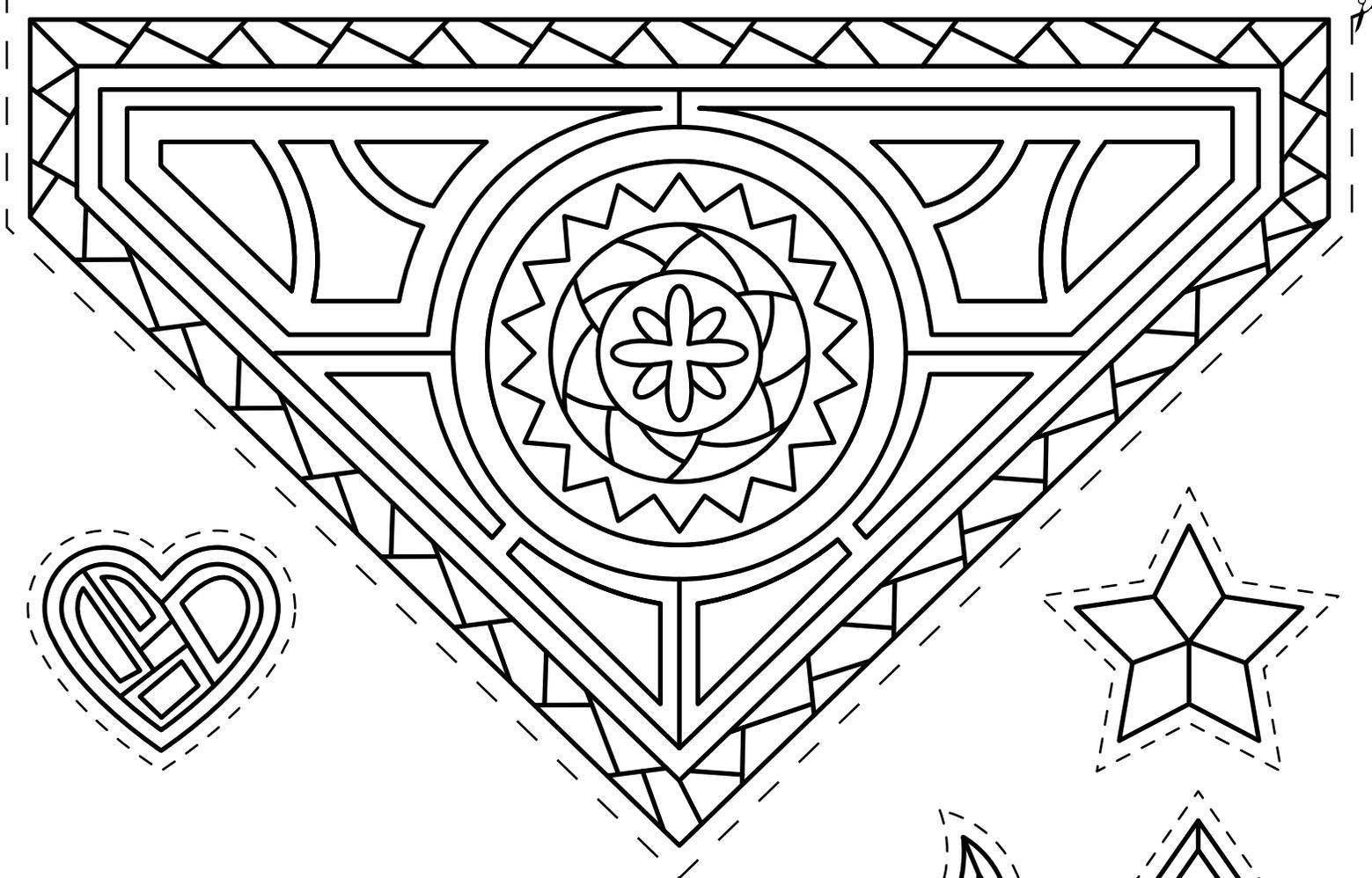
Now color and cut out the elements of your treasure box on the Activity Page. Using glue or tape, adhere the decorated triangle from your Activity Page to the triangle flap on your treasure box. Then adhere your "Choose Love" message inside the treasure box and add any other designs you want. When you flip it open, you will remember to choose love!

Place your reminder in a place that you often see: the fridge, the mirror, the front door, or on a bulletin board. When you feel frustrated, angry, sad, or selfish, take a moment to breathe and decide how you will respond with love.

PRAUER

Loving God,
Thank you for loving each one of us, no matter what.
Choosing love is hard,
especially when we are anxious or frustrated.
Give us the courage to open our hearts
and choose love even when it is not easy.
Amen.

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