

An Advent Journey with Zoe Empowers Mission

Meeting Jesus through the transformed lives of orphaned and vulnerable children



A seven-session interactive resource for small groups, youth groups, classes, families or individuals.

Includes Scriptures, discussion questions, prayers, and links to inspiring on-site video encounters with Zoe young people in India, Kenya, Rwanda and Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Welcome to this inspiring resource for traveling through this season as we prepare to truly welcome the Savior at Christmas and beyond! This guide is meant for use by individuals and families as a devotional, or by small groups, youth groups, or Sunday school classes of any age. Reflection questions are included and may be used for your own contemplation, prayer, and journaling, or for group discussion. Intergenerational groups, such as extended families will enjoy and benefit from hearing the thoughts and ideas of the children and teens!

Each session includes scripture, meditations, prayer and some live links to video reports from Zoe Empowers groups in one of the 7 countries where Zoe is at work- Rwanda, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Liberia, Zimbabwe, and India. In this way you will meet some of the Zoe young people and hear their stories of transformation firsthand!

Zoe Empowers is a "mission done right", that empowers orphaned and vulnerable children to lift themselves out of extreme poverty in 3 years, and never need charity again. It is a unique, holistic, community- based, indigenous-led, child-empowering, and cost effective program!

We invite you to come and see!

(If your group will be using printed copies for each participant, print them ahead of time, and designate one person to have a computer on hand to show the videos to the group. You may download them in advance to be ready to go.)

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First Sunday in Advent

Welcoming the Promise



For generations God's chosen people had looked and longed for the promised Messiah. Through suffering, exile, oppression, hardships, and times of drought and famine, they still turned to God, waiting.

Was the promise real? Did God still love them? Was the dream of justice and hope ever coming to them?

Jeremiah, speaking to a hopeless, defeated people says this:

The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is what he will be called: The LORD Is Our Righteousness. — Jeremiah 33:14-16, Common English Bible

Likewise, the prophet Malachi declares God's promise of justice:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. — Malachi 3:1, 5

We read that the coming messenger from God will bring justice for the orphan, the widow, and the alien (foreigner)- the three vulnerable groups lifted up again and again in the Hebrew Bible as the ones that God champions! These are the ones God's people are supposed to treat with compassion, justice, and generosity. As Jesus himself would later say,

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' — Matthew 25:40

Welcoming the Promise



Many of the orphaned children coming into the Zoe program report having experienced abuse and injustices such as theft of their land, homes, and possessions because they have no adult to protect them. Before Zoe, they often work long hours on neighbors' farms, only to be cheated out of wages, or paid only a few potatoes for a full day's hard labor.

The Zoe Empowers staff places each child-headed family into a community empowerment group of 25-30 child-headed families for support. They are given training on child rights, and have a mentor and other community leaders to turn to for help. As a group, they are now empowered to stand up for their rights and support one another until they receive justice. Knowing how to restore their rights brings dignity and hope! They now know themselves to be beloved children of God, worthy of care and respect.

Let's meet Solange, in Rwanda, and hear the story of how her life was transformed through the support of Zoe, from hopeless to happy and secure.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What strikes you about Solange's story? How does it connect to our scripture texts?
- 2) Have you ever had a time when you felt abandoned by God? Longed for a better life?
- 3) What promises of God are you longing for now?
- 4) How can we participate in God's promise of justice and hope for orphans?

Prayer

Gracious God, champion of the weak, father of the fatherless, open our hearts today to hear the cries of your beloved children. Move us to join in your kingdom mission of justice in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen

Action

As a family or individual, prepare an offering jar/box for your Zoe Empowers Christmas Blessing Box. It can be an empty box, oatmeal container, peanut butter jar, or empty can. Whatever you have! Have your children or grandchildren help in decorating the box! Keep it beside your Advent wreath.

This week add Zoe orphans to your Christmas list, and place an offering in the box every time you go shopping! (Suggest \$5 or more) If you don't have cash, put in IOUs and write a check to Zoe for the total later. Your gift to Jesus will grow through the Advent season! You will become more mindful of those who most need your gifts, and how very blessed we all are!

Second Sunday in Advent

Welcoming Support for the Journey



God amazingly chose to become flesh and blood by entering into the humblest and most vulnerable of places- the womb of an unwed teen from a hated minority in a poor village under cruel, oppressive foreign rule. Imagine the loneliness and fear of Mary, facing an uncertain future full of stigma, shame, and isolation.

But true to the angel Gabriel's promise, nothing is impossible with God. She is led to visit her relative, Elizabeth for support. Elizabeth, a wise woman who has herself endured years of ridicule and shame as a "barren" woman, is also miraculously pregnant in her old age. Let's read the account of their meeting:

Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,

*You're so blessed among women,
and the babe in your womb, also blessed!
And why am I so blessed that
the mother of my Lord visits me?
The moment the sound of your
greeting entered my ears,
The babe in my womb
skipped like a lamb for sheer joy.
Blessed woman, who believed what God said,
believed every word would come true!*

*And Mary said,
I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what
happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be
forgotten,*

*the God whose very name is holy, set apart
from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies,
piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.*

*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months
and then went back to her own home.
— Luke 1:39-56, The Message Bible*

Second Sunday in Advent

Welcoming Support for the Journey



Mary found support and encouragement from Elizabeth and gained the courage needed to fulfill God's mission. What began in fear ended in joyful song!

Like Mary, prior to meeting Zoe Empowers, orphaned teens are often isolated and shunned by their community. At their first Zoe organizational meeting, the children share their struggles with the group.

Meet Clarisse, as she is welcomed to tell her story by social worker Epiphanie Mujawimana, Zoe Empowers Rwanda Country Manager, and the Empowerment model founder.

[Launch Video](#)

At their first group meeting, these struggling youth are told that they are not alone any more, and are beloved children of God. Their empowerment group becomes like family, providing a source of joy, strength, and support for these isolated children. They gain acceptance and love from each other and Zoe staff. Each group also selects a mentor from their own community, chosen because they care about children. Zoe graduates often become mentors to new groups to pass along what they have learned! Like Elizabeth in our text, Zoe mentors teach, encourage, and act as role models.

Let's meet Marie Claire and see how her mentor has helped her.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What strikes you in Clarisse and Marie Claire's stories?
- 2) When in your life have you felt alone? Who was present with you on your journey?
- 3) Share a story of how a mentor or role model helped you?
- 4) Who in your family, church, neighborhood, or community may be feeling alone, stigmatized, or rejected/How can you be like Elizabeth to them?

Second Sunday in Advent

Welcoming Support for the Journey



Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for being present with us on all our life journeys, and for giving us friends and family to support us in difficult times. Open our eyes to those around us that need our presence, love, and encouragement. In this busy season, may we not miss seeing you in those around us who are alone or suffering. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Action

Zoe churches and individual donors provide the resources to establish empowerment groups that give crucial support to children barely surviving in extreme poverty. Prayerfully consider how you might share your resources for a life-changing purpose through partnering with Zoe. Talk today with your class, small group, and/or extended family about:

Full Empowerment Group Partnership (25-30 child-headed families, 60-100 participants), \$8,500/year for 3 years
(For example, 20 people giving \$35/month)

Half Empowerment Group Partnership (12-15 child-headed families, 30-50 participants), \$4,250/year for 3 years

Collective Partnership, through monthly giving, pooled with other donors

See <https://zoeempowers.org/empowerment-group-partners> for more details about partnership.



Third Sunday in Advent

Welcomed by the Least with Joy



Luke 2:8-32 The Message Bible An Event for Everyone

There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

The shepherds working the cold night shift in the fields that night never dreamed of seeing angels, or hearing news of the Messiah's arrival. As a lower class, marginalized group, shepherds never expected the Messiah to show up anywhere near their grubby job site. What a surprise when angels fill their skies! Can they really believe what they hear? They do respond to the good news, and get to be the first to see the miracle of Jesus' birth with their own eyes. No wonder they return home filled with joy! And Mary is surprised by joy also, pondering all that this night has held; fear and struggle turned to joy, and she treasures everything in her heart.

Many of the Zoe young people are equally surprised and skeptical when they hear of a program coming to help them. They have been tricked, disappointed, and misled before. Some are hesitant to attend the first meeting, as it means they will miss a day's labor for wages (money or food) to take a chance on help. Often expecting a small handout, they instead learn of a program that offers a path to long-term success, self-sufficiency and dignity.

Third Sunday in Advent

Welcomed by the Least with Joy



As they form into their group and share life stories of struggle and isolation, these young people begin to dream again for a new future. As they come to know God's love for them and hope grows, they cannot wait to share the good news, and often invite other orphans to join them.

Let's meet Yernika in Vizag, India, and hear how the good news changed her life!

Launch Video

The shepherds were among the "least" in society in Jesus' day, yet Mary and Joseph welcomed them to draw close to Jesus. As he grew, Jesus himself lived a simple village life, laboring with his hands in his father's carpenter shop until adulthood. God chose to move into this neighborhood, showing us that no work is beneath any other, and we can honor God with our honest, hard work and diligence.

Zoe young people dream of a chance to work and support themselves, and Zoe support lets them pursue their own dreams and their chosen vocation, whether carpentry, tailoring, baking, businesses, raising livestock, or farming. They receive training, micro-grants, and group support. They work hard to achieve their dreams! Their joy and pride is evident as they succeed, and freely share their knowledge with others.

Let's visit with Antony in Kenya and hear his story.

Launch Video

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What do you notice about the Zoe young people in the videos of Yernika or Antony?
- 2) Share about a time when you received good news or kindness unexpectedly?
- 2) How have you experienced God showing up in your life, at home, at work, or perhaps in nature, or outside on a starry night?

Action

As an individual, group or family, look through the Zoe Gifts that Matter alternative Christmas catalog, in hard copies, or online at <https://zoeempowers.org/gift-catalog>

Choose a gift that provides the tools needed for a trade or business that will change the lives of a child-headed family! This is a gift that will keep on giving for years to come. Place the money or an IOU in your Zoe Blessing Box. Pray for the family that will be transformed by this gift.

Prayer

God of good news to the lowly, we thank you for leaving your glory to live with us, share in our labors, and give your life to save us. Empower us to share the good news freely with our lips, our lives, and our generous actions, so others may live the abundant life you desire for all. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Welcomed by Animals



In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 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.
— Luke 2:1-7 NRSV

This familiar text doesn't give us many details, but it is believed that Jesus was most likely born in a cave or stable, filled with animals and placed in a feeding trough. He was totally helpless, in the care of young, first-time parents, with no granny or midwife to help! He heard the sounds of goats, sheep, or cattle, smelled the earthy smell of straw and dung, tasted the sweetness of his mother's milk, felt arms of gentle love cradle him. He entered into human life at its most vulnerable state, at a time in human history when 1 in 3 babies died before their first birthday. God took the risk and emptied himself of all but love.

Doesn't a newborn baby draw us to feel such deep love, protection, and compassion for their helpless dependency? So much care is needed! Imagine God becoming so helpless, humble, and dependent! So vulnerable! All for love!

God made a choice to become poor and helpless, but babies today cannot choose where they are born. Some 385 million orphaned and vulnerable children are currently living in extreme poverty, not by choice. What does that look like?

Meet Joseph in Rwanda, as Epiphanie Mujawimana helps share his story at his first Zoe meeting.

[Launch Video](#)

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Welcomed by Animals



In Africa, to own animals means wealth and hope. The animals around Jesus at his birth represented a hopeful future for their owner, and provision of warmth and shelter for Jesus. Zoe provides animals and training on their care to orphaned children so they too can have a future with hope. Let's visit Olive in Kenya and see how animals transformed her life:

Let's visit Olive in Kenya and see how animals transformed her life.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Talk together about Joseph and Olive's stories. Share how you are feeling after meeting them.
- 2) Think about God's choice of when, where, and how to enter into human history and live among us. What are your thoughts? What does it show us about who God is and who we are?
- 3) As a follower of Jesus, how can you make a difference in the lives of children born into extreme poverty?

Action

Do you have a family pet? Tally up your average monthly spending on your animals and match that as a gift to your Zoe Blessing Box.

Then look through the Zoe Gifts that Matter catalog at <https://zoeempowers.org/gift-catalog> and choose an animal you wish to give as a Christmas gift through Zoe to change the lives of an orphan child-headed family. Add that amount or an IOU to your Blessing Box, and pray for the family who will receive that gift.

Prayer

Risk-taking God of love, we cannot ever understand the depth of your love in your incarnation as a helpless baby! But we thank and praise you for this love, and ask today that you fill our hearts with your love by the power of your spirit. May our gratitude overflow in sacrificial loving and generous living in our broken world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Christmas Eve/Day

Moving into the Neighborhood



The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
God present to the Word.

The Word was God,
in readiness for God from day one.
Everything was created through him;
nothing—not one thing!—
came into being without him.

What came into existence was Life,
and the Life was Light to live by.
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out.

There once was a man, his name John, sent
by God to point out the way to the Life-Light.
He came to show everyone where to look,
who to believe in. John was not himself the
Light; he was there to show the way to the
Light.

The Life-Light was the real thing:
Every person entering Life
he brings into Light.
He was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.
He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves.
These are the God-begotten,

not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

John pointed him out and called, "This is the
One! The One I told you was coming after me
but in fact was ahead of me. He has always
been ahead of me, has always had the first
word."

We all live off his generous abundance,
gift after gift after gift.
We got the basics from Moses,
and then this exuberant giving and
receiving,
This endless knowing and understanding—
all this came through Jesus, the Messiah.
No one has ever seen God,
not so much as a glimpse.
This one-of-a-kind God-Expression,
who exists at the very heart of the Father,
has made him plain as day.

— John 1:1-18 (MSG)

Christmas Eve/Day

Moving into the Neighborhood



In the Message translation, Eugene Peterson captures the essence of verse 14: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood!" How truly astonishing?

God didn't just stop by for a quick visit, never getting hands dirty! God became one of us, lived among us, experienced all of human life, from life in the womb to death on the cross. This is the message of Christmas—now and always God is with us—Emmanuel!

God is with you when you feel alone or helpless or hopeless. God is with you in your struggles, whether emotional, physical, financial, or relational.

God is with you in your home, in your family, in your neighborhood, your work place, inviting you to open the door and allow Jesus to enter your heart and life. He comes today, inviting you to know all your sisters and brothers and share the journey of kingdom love with them, as Jesus did with us.

Sharing in the lives of orphaned children, entering their homes, hearing their stories, deepens our own experience of what "God with us" means. As we become close "neighbors" to vulnerable children, knowing their journeys as our own, our hearts are enlarged by God's Spirit. We become more like Jesus—the "light" and "Generous inside and out, true from start to finish." Truly the Zoe young people give us far more than we can ever give them.

Let's visit Dorcas in Kenya and be inspired and blessed.

[Launch Video](#)

In 2008, Zoe brought a young man, recently graduated from the empowerment program, to the US to share his story of life transformation with youth and churches. Jean Damascene was from a remote village in the mountains of Rwanda and had never ridden in a car, let alone a plane across the ocean! At the end of his two week stay, he was asked what he would remember most from his visit. His answer was surprising!

"I will remember the family who invited me to their home. They invited many friends and everyone was given meat. (Outdoor BBQ) I have never seen this before. For us, we can only eat meat once a year at Christmas." He paused thoughtfully, "Now I understand why you come so far to my home to help us. It is because God has blessed you so much."

Christmas Eve/Day

Moving into the Neighborhood



Questions for Reflection

This Christmas, take time to ponder how God has blessed you.

How is God calling you to bless others?

How many young people can you bless with hope?

Prayer

Emmanuel, God with us, on this special day we thank you for leaving heaven's glory to move into our neighborhood. We are truly blessed! We welcome you into our hearts today. Empower us to live as vessels of your love, and to pour out your blessings on others, near and far. In honor of your lowly birth in a barn, may we share our blessings to bring hope to children living in extreme poverty. In Jesus' name. Amen

Action

As you bring your Zoe Christmas Offering Box to the altar, pray for the children who will be blessed by your generous love!

Pray together with your church, family, or small group about ongoing support of a Zoe Empowerment group, making your Zoe Blessing Box Christmas offering a beginning!

You may donate online at zoeempowers.org, make a check out to your church with memo Zoe Empowers, or mail a check made out to Zoe Empowers directly to:

Zoe Empowers
P.O. Box 28839
Raleigh, N.C., 27611

Sunday After Christmas

Welcomed as a Refugee



Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

*"A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."*

— Matthew 2:13-18

Early in his young life, Jesus and his family faced danger and death as they fled Bethlehem as political refugees. We don't get to hear how Jesus' family was able to survive in Egypt but we know somehow they were welcomed and helped as refugees. Jesus' life as saved.

The children entering the Zoe Empowers program share stories of danger, disease, and suffering. They are grieving the deaths of parents, the rejection and exploitation of neighbors, having property stolen and experiencing abuses of all kinds as they struggle to survive without adult protection and care.

Just as Joseph listened to God's dream and provided protection for young Jesus, Zoe staff, mentors, and community groups form a circle of protection around these vulnerable children, acting as God's hands and feet. In India, where human trafficking is rampant, Zoe offers protection for vulnerable children.

Let's visit Zoe Empowers in India to see empowerment at work.

Launch Video

Sunday After Christmas

Welcomed as a Refugee



Shelter is a key element of keeping orphaned children safe from abuses. Homeless children are especially vulnerable to trafficking and victimization. The Zoe groups often come together to build a home for the neediest among them.

Let's meet Emmanuel in Rwanda.

[Launch Video](#)

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What struck you in the scripture or videos today?
- 2) Share about a time you were a stranger and someone welcomed you.
- 2) Have you ever experienced life-shattering grief or loss? How did you survive it? Who helped you?

Action

If you have a roof overhead, give thanks today! If you are giving ongoing support to a Zoe group, you can send your donation monthly when you pay your rent or mortgage. As you share, be grateful for your own home and safety. Your donation can help a family in need have a safe home. Look for organizations supporting refugee families in your area and volunteer to help!

Prayer

O God, Protector of the orphan, widow, and stranger, we pray your presence and help for refugees and especially for children displaced by war and violence. Open our hearts to hear their cries and to act in Jesus' name. Amen



Epiphany/New Year

Welcoming the Light



In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[c] was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd[d] my people Israel.'*"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

— Matthew 2:1-12, NRSV

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*

— Isaiah 60:1, NRSV

On this Epiphany Sunday we remember how God's light was revealed to the Gentiles in the visit of the Magi from the East. A spiritual thirst drew them and the star's light led them to meet the God-child, Jesus, and worship him. Epiphany means revelation or spiritual manifestation of God's presence.

Epiphany/New Year

Welcoming the Light



The gifts they gave have often been interpreted as symbolic, but they were also of great benefit. Did the rich gifts given by these men, moved by God's Spirit, provide the food, shelter, and tools needed by this soon-to-be refugee family? Did their generous gifts help Jesus' family to survive?

The Magi recognized the holy in this poor child, Jesus, and worshiped him in humility. As a man, Jesus would elevate the place of children, as we see in Mark 9:37: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

It must have been a revelation to his disciples when he said indignantly in Mark 10:14, "Let the little children come to me." And then he added that the least, the children in need, are what God's kingdom looks like!

We have experienced this over and over in Zoe Empowers—seeing revelations of God's presence in these young people. Once they experience God's love through Zoe, they become a light in their community, acting out God's kingdom love to others.

Imagine the hardships of orphaned heads of households trying to provide for younger siblings. Yet, astonishingly, in their dark times, Zoe children bring the light of Jesus to their villages—adopting other orphans, sharing their food, creating businesses and hiring orphans, and helping the elderly and disabled persons in their communities. Their Zoe health and hygiene training is freely shared as they teach others how to stay healthy. Zoe graduates may also become mentors for new Zoe groups to pass on their skills and knowledge.

When you support a Zoe group you not only help them experience God's love, but also provide the training that allows them to face life's circumstances and challenges with flexibility and resilience, and to share it with others. The whole community is blessed!

Let's close our journey visiting a soon to graduate youth caring for four younger siblings and see what he has accomplished with the support of Zoe Empowers. Meet Charles, a member of the "Light of the World" empowerment group in Zimbabwe.

On this Epiphany Sunday, be blessed by the light of love and pride on his face!

[Launch Video](#)

Welcoming the Light



Questions for Reflection

- 1) Where do you glimpse the light of Christ in the story of Charles?
- 2) Who in your life has been a light for you, manifesting the presence and love of God?
- 3) How can you reflect the light in your home, church and community?

Prayer

Light of the World, we see the darkness and despair all around us in our world today. And yet we know that the Light has come, and the darkness can never overcome it! Thank you for the many ways you continue to reveal yourself to us in the midst of our own darkness. Help us more and more in this New Year to reflect your light and love! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Action

Put prayer for Zoe and the needs of orphaned children on your New Year's resolutions! If you have not already done it, this is a great time to make a commitment to support a Zoe empowerment group. You will receive a group picture and list of all the families' names and ages so you can pray for them. You will be inspired as you receive reports and videos like the ones you have seen here, about the progress your group is making in lifting themselves out of poverty!

Keep your Zoe Blessing Box and Gifts that Help booklet in view throughout the year. Use it as an act of gratitude for the blessings that come to you. Make gifts to Zoe in honor of special events or for giving to people who "have everything".

*May God bless you so much as you bless
and pray for the Zoe young people!*

Happy New Year!