

**Sunday school lesson: Advent; Ruth chapter 1**

Today's HOPE (main point): I can trust God when things seem hopeless because He is Sovereign!

We are going to take these few Sundays before Christmas to look at story that may at first seem like an unusual one for the Christmas season. It's a story about a family in Bethlehem, but it's NOT Mary and Joseph. We are going to look at the book of Ruth.

Ruth is a short book of the Old Testament with many similarities to the Christmas story. It's also a story with much sadness, loneliness, and uncertainty. This time of year can hard for us sometimes, can't it? There's so much brokenness and pain in our world that sometimes we don't feel like smiling and singing Christmas songs and participating in Christmas activities. So let's just be honest that sometimes we feel more like Blue Christmas than a Holly Jolly Christmas. And let's see what we can learn from the story of Ruth to help us this holiday season.

Let's start by reading Ruth 1:1-5:

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. **3** Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.



There were a lot of names in there, weren't there? Let's break it down to just the parts you need to remember:

A family moves to the land of Moab because there's a famine where they live. The famine was in Bethlehem!

This Israelite family must leave Bethlehem to move to Moab. And that must have been hard. But then the man dies, and his two sons die. So who is left? *Naomi, the man's wife, and the wives of the two sons.*

And in just five verses, the story has turned so very sad. The book of Ruth starts with famine and death.

Let's go on with the story. Ruth 1: 6-13

When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. **8** Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9** May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." **11** But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— **13** would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

So let's stop and break this part down. Naomi is from Bethlehem, remember? She and her family only went to Moab because of the famine in Bethlehem years ago. But now there is food again in her home town and so she decides to go back. And her two daughters in law are going to go with her, but she stops them. Why? Because they were Moabite women, Bethlehem was not their home. She thinks they can find new husbands.

It's important for us to remember what life was like back then for women. How was it different than today? *take answers*

Women needed the protection of a husband. Also, to not have children was looked down upon. Naomi knows she's too old to find a husband, but her daughters in law are not. She wants them to stay in their homeland of Moab, find new husbands, and have a new family of their own.

Which also meant Naomi was truly going to be even more alone!

Let's read the verses 14-18.

**14** At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

**15** "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

**16** But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. **17** Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

So Ruth is determined to stay with Naomi. That means she's going to have to leave her homeland and go to Bethlehem with Naomi. And aren't Ruth's words to Naomi just beautiful? How precious that moment must have been to Naomi.

Let's finish chapter 1.

**19** So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

**20** "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

**22** So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

So Naomi and Ruth travel to Bethlehem. There were still people living there who knew Naomi. The Bible says the town was "stirred" when they arrived.

Why do you think the townspeople asked, "Can this be Naomi?" *take answers....she has probably aged, and the bitterness and sorrow probably shows on her face*

We don't place as much importance on names today as they did back Bible times. So we might think this next part is strange. We also have to know what the name Naomi means. It means pleasant, good, or lovely.



What does Naomi want them to call her instead of Naomi? *Mara*

Why do you think that must be? *Mara means bitter*

Can you relate to Naomi's pain? Have you ever felt like God has afflicted you? *let them discuss*

Naomi's life probably seemed hopeless and totally out of her control. We can all relate to that, right? We have all found ourselves in situations where there was absolutely nothing we could do to change anything.

That's why these tragic stories in the Bible are so important. They show real life....real pain, heartache, sin, and conflict. And in the midst, we always see God's sovereignty. The word sovereign just means supreme power or authority. As we go on to read the rest of Naomi and Ruth's story, we're going to see God's sovereignty. God is at work in their lives even though they can't see it. And He's always at work in our lives too, even when we, like Naomi, feel afflicted and bitter. And that gives us HOPE!

Was there anything about this story so far that reminded you of the story of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus? *discuss...same town, a journey, a very uncertain situation*

Some churches light candles during Advent. Did any of you grow up doing that?



The first candle is the candle of hope.

Let's read this Advent prayer together:

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the center, the focus of our lives always, and particularly this Advent time.

Amen.

*Prayer courtesy of spiritualeldercare.com*



## Faithful Friends

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## **Prayer for Advent/Hope:**

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the center, the focus of our lives always, and particularly this Advent time.

*Amen.*



## O Little Town of Bethlehem

1. O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.



2. For Christ is born of Mary  
And gathered all above  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars together  
Proclaim the holy birth  
And praises sing to God the King  
And peace to all the Earth.

## **O Come All Ye Faithful**

1. O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem  
Come and behold him, born the King of angels  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

2. Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation  
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above  
Glory to God, glory in the highest  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

3. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, Born this happy morning  
Jesus, to thee be all glory given  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

## Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

1. Hark! The herald angels sing:  
Glory to the newborn King!  
Peace on Earth, and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled  
Joyful all ye nations, rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With angelic host proclaim:  
Christ is born in Bethlehem  
Hark! The herald angels sing:  
Glory to the newborn King!



2. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in his wings  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that we no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of Earth,  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark! The herald angels sing:  
Glory to the newborn King!

## Away in a Manger

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed  
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.  
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

2. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

3. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care  
And take us to heaven to live with thee there.



## **Go Tell it on the Mountain**

Go tell on the mountain,  
Over the hills and everywhere  
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.

1. While shepherds kept their watching  
O'er silent flocks by night  
Behold, throughout the heavens  
There shone a holy light.

Go tell on the mountain,  
Over the hills and everywhere  
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.

2. Down in a lowly manger  
The humble Christ was born  
And God sent us salvation  
That blessed Christmas morn.

Go tell on the mountain,  
Over the hills and everywhere  
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.



# **Christmas Hymns**





## The First Noel

1. The first Noel, the angel did say,  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay  
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Noel, noel, noel, noel  
Born is the King of Israel.

2. They look'ed up and saw a star  
Shining in the east beyond them far  
And to the Earth it gave great light  
And so it continued both day and night.

Noel, noel, noel, noel  
Born is the King of Israel.



## Joy to the World

1. Joy to the world! The Lord is come.  
Let Earth receive her King.  
Let every heart prepare him room  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and heaven and nature sing.

2. He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness  
And wonders of his love  
And wonders of his love  
And wonders, wonders of his love.

JOY

## Ruth Chapter One

Find these words from the first chapter of Ruth.

Q R K D O Z S F Y S V K U Y N V M T R V  
 H F C E G G D Y H Z H E P S Z A S O Y X  
 Q Y I L I K G L Q G L T H G R H L M A L  
 T K I O I W E J R Q Z A U A O N X I R B  
 F R N B C B X R L W S Y E R L K V S L E  
 R H U K S I I O M N J N D V B N U F L E  
 P A D J K T W B P E I H T A E D E O L D  
 G W F Y S T G S R M H B A M F M O R E P  
 A Y T F H E B P A O Z J A H H G N T G Q  
 N S U V U R H F V W Z H F O G G C U B N  
 M Z O N A U A X Z O U Y P M C I J N W R  
 P O Y N S S J E U N Q N N F L E N E H U  
 U D C W Z S D K I A C K I F M U Z S Q T  
 F O Q Q F Z Q N L J X R F K N W D T S E  
 F Y W V C H K A A W N A O M I S G U A R  
 V M E H E L H T E B Z Y I Y B C A M X F  
 V B B O B E E T R T S E P M L W Y Q J B  
 O D A A A H I D M C M U Q Q M T D T T K  
 U S J J H Z V W I W J C H F O R P A H C  
 S L W Q W A C J C C R N P K K Q I Z D Y

NAOMI

MOAB

WOMEN

MARA

DEATH

RUTH

RETURN

HUSBANDS

ORPAH

MISFORTUNE

BETHLEHEM

FAMINE

BITTER

AFFLICTED