

THEME 2

God's Most Precious Gift

This theme provides an overview of Jesus' life. *God's Most Precious Gift* begins with an Advent unit that tells the story of Jesus' birth. Children will then learn about his life as a child and follow him through adulthood, death, and resurrection.

At the kindergarten level, we are telling the story of Jesus' birth and life without making assumptions about previous Bible learning. Consequently, the focus for this theme is on hearing the story and finding ways we can identify with the person of Jesus.

Theme 2 includes the following units:

Unit 6: The Christmas Story

Unit 7: Jesus Was a Child Like You and Me

Unit 8: Jesus Grew to Be a Man of God

Kindergarten—Unit 6

The Christmas Story

This Advent/Christmas unit portrays Jesus' birth in four segments: Mary's visit from the angel; the journey to Bethlehem; the angels' visit to the shepherds; and the wise men's visit to the boy, Jesus. The children will become part of the story as they watch story figures tell the story in a new way. They will create tools to help them retell the story at home. The message of giving and love is spoken as the students bring gifts for needy children.

LESSONS

1. The Angel Visits Mary
2. From Nazareth to Bethlehem
3. The Angels Visit the Shepherds
4. The Wise Men Visit Jesus

Unit 6: The Christmas Story

Unit Information

SUMMARY

In this unit, children will participate in the story of Jesus' birth in a variety of ways. They will act out the proclamation of the angels. They will see the stories of the journey to Bethlehem and the shepherds and wise men's visits acted out in a large story box. Students will respond by making their own story figures to retell the Christmas story, caroling to others, and bringing gifts for needy children.

KEY BIBLE TEXTS

- Matthew 1:18–2:12
- Luke 1:26-38
- Luke 2:1-20

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

The Angel Visits Mary

The account in Luke 1:26-38 describes the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary. Even though she was initially afraid, Mary responded in obedience. We read the account of the angel's visit to Joseph in Matthew 1:18-24. Mary and Joseph both accepted the word of the angel and obeyed the angel's commands.

Obedience is an important aspect of our Christian walk. Mary and Joseph provide excellent role models of people who were obedient in circumstances that were less than ideal. Their acts of obedience probably caused them both to be ostracized and ridiculed in the home community.

Several of Mary's attributes lend significance to her selection as the woman who gave birth to Jesus. She showed that she had a good understanding of scripture in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) by her allusions to Old Testament prophecies. Being rooted in scripture is a goal of Christians. Again, Mary was an excellent role model.

From Nazareth to Bethlehem

Luke 2:4 describes the journey Mary and Joseph took to Bethlehem from Nazareth: "So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David."

Bethlehem, a town about five miles south of Jerusalem, in Judea, was at least 80 miles south of Nazareth, a town in the province of Galilee. Traveling would have been slow, with many stops along the way. It is no wonder that by the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, it was time for her to deliver her child.

As we imagine the journey and try to make it become real to the students we teach, it is helpful to understand the Middle Eastern attitude toward hospitality. Rather than picturing the journey as arduous (*although it most likely was*) and lonely, we need to realize that Joseph and Mary would have been in the midst of people as they traveled from town to town. They would have been welcomed as guests and treated courteously as they came upon settlements of people.

When a host in ancient Middle Eastern culture saw visitors coming, he would go out to meet them and welcome them into his home. The guests received food, drink, and lodging. The host offered this hospitality with no questions asked. It

was up to the guests to be thankful and not overstay their welcome. In light of the importance of hospitality in Middle Eastern culture, we must consider the innkeeper's anguish at turning away guests, particularly an obviously pregnant woman such as Mary. It is unlikely that the innkeeper was cold-hearted and lacking in understanding, as is so often portrayed in Christmas pageants. This host probably did as much quick thinking as possible to find a solution that would offer the couple some privacy and provide a place for Mary to give birth.

The Angels Visit the Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20 tells of the shepherds' obedience to the direction of the angels and their search for the "baby wrapped in cloths" (Luke 2:12). The shepherds were out in the fields, watching over their sheep, that night. This suggests that it was probably lambing season (*spring*) rather than mid-December or winter.

Shepherds were not regarded highly at the time of Jesus' birth. In many parts of the world today, it would most likely be young boys who would be out with the sheep—not grown men with families. The act of angels giving God's message to shepherds shows that God valued people who society did not. We need to remember that the powerless and the young can be obedient to God's teachings. They can also be messengers of truth. We who teach kindergartners can give examples of times students spoke the truth in a way that caused us to stand back, marvel and simply say, "Yes."

The Wise Men Visit Jesus

Matthew 2:1-12 describes the journey of the wise men to Bethlehem. The wise men, like the shepherds, received a message to go visit the new king. Their "message," a bright star and Old Testament prophecies, was much more subtle than the message given to the shepherds. Though many legends have evolved around this part of the Christmas story, it seems certain that the wise men did not visit Jesus at the same time as the shepherds. Mary and Joseph were probably living in a house by the time of the wise men's visit; they were no longer in temporary lodging provided by the innkeeper. Herod's edict to kill all male children under two years of age is an indication of Jesus' age at the time of the wise men's visit.

The wise men were just that—"wise men." The magi were astrologers who studied ancient manuscripts, including Old Testament scriptures. It was likely that they were responding to the teaching of Daniel and the promise of a star in Numbers 24:17 when they began their trek to Bethlehem in search of a new king. The visit by the wise men provides us with two additional insights into the significance of the birth of Jesus. First, these well-educated and respected men represented one end of the spectrum of society, the shepherds the other. Leading rulers of the times sought the wisdom of these men. Second, they were Gentiles—the first Gentiles we know about who believed the prophecy of the Messiah.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- God sent messages to Mary and Joseph by sending angels.
- Mary and Joseph obeyed God.
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem to carry out a promise God made to his people.
- Shepherds heard the good news of Jesus' birth and told other people what they had heard and seen.
- We can give gifts to others as the wise men brought gifts to Jesus.
- Obedience is a gift we can give Jesus.

WORSHIP / BIBLE MEMORY

Each day before you begin the lesson, light a candle (*or use a battery-powered light*) and call the children to worship with these activities. Listen (*in the candlelight*) to the words of Luke 2. Don't be afraid to repeat the words before every lesson. This is an important chapter of scripture. We want the children to be familiar with its beautiful text.

1. Introduce the Bible memory verse by saying, "When the angels came to the shepherds in the field, they said words we want to remember. The angels told the shepherds where Jesus was born and why he was so special. He was their Savior! You may know this verse already, but let's practice it, anyway."

You can have the children take turns playing the role of an angel announcing the good news to the shepherds. Have the child stand on a chair and "proclaim" Luke 2:11 to the rest of the class:

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

2. Sing one or more of the following songs from the *Jubilee Songbook*:

- Jesus, Baby Jesus, page 38
- Away in a Manger, page 39
- There Was a Little Baby, page 40

Add any other favorite Christmas songs.

3. Play for the children a *very* short segment from a recording of Handel's Messiah. These parts echo the Bible memory verses: No. 8, Recitative for Alto—"Behold! A virgin shall conceive," and No. 15, Recitative for Soprano—"And the angel said unto them." You might want to play other familiar parts and ask the children why they think grownups like this music so much.

4. Prayer. Thank God for:

- The obedience of God's people, as shown by Mary and Joseph—Lesson 1
- The fulfillment of an old promise, that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem—Lesson 2
- Angels and people over the years who have spread the good news, all the way to our ears—Lesson 3
- The example of the wise men, who brought gifts to show their love for Jesus—Lesson 4

ASSESSING TEACHING / LEARNING

Observing the children and reflecting on their talk will provide you with information to assess whether they are internalizing what they are experiencing in this unit. Do the children realize what is so special about Jesus' birth?

MEMORY PASSAGES

This unit offers the following verses for students to memorize: Luke 2:11 and Matthew 1:23 (*bonus*). You will find them in large format on pages 180-181, to copy as take-home sheets for students. A child with a good memory may want to memorize all of Luke 2.



Today in the town
of David a Savior
has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11





The virgin
will be with child and
will give birth to a son,
and they will call him
Immanuel—which means,
“God with us.”

Matthew 1:23

The Christmas Story

LESSON 1: THE ANGEL VISITS MARY AND JOSEPH

Objective

Children will know how obedient Mary and Joseph were when receiving news of their roles in Jesus' birth.

Key Concepts

- An angel came to Mary with a message from God that she would have a baby and he would be Jesus.
- An angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid. Mary's baby would be Jesus.
- Mary and Joseph obeyed and did what the angel told them to do.

Text: Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25

Estimated Lesson Time: 30-40 minutes

Materials

- *Jubilee Songbook*
- Bathrobes and/or sheets for acting out Bible story
- Angel, Mary, and Joseph figures (p. 185)
- Glue, tape, scissors, markers, tinsel, foil, glitter
- Self-adhesive Velcro (looped side only)
- Folder or large plastic bag for each child
- 9" x 12" white or light-colored construction paper, markers, stapler
- For Extend the Lesson, option one: fine art prints of the Annunciation to Mary (*find in fine art books or at www.art.com*), various art materials for children
- For Extend the Lesson, option two: pictures and information about first-century Israel

Teacher Preparation

- Practice telling the story.
- Make copies of the Angel, Mary, and Joseph figures on card stock or stiff paper (1 set for each child).
- Cut Velcro into 1- to 2-inch pieces (3 per child) and cut small pieces of cloth to use for figures' clothing.
- If using Extend the Lesson, option two, study the culture of first-century Israel.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

1. Worship and Bible memory. See Unit Information, page 179.

2. Play "Simon Says." To introduce the game, begin with you playing the role of Simon. Give simple commands, such as "Simon says touch your toes." Continue with "Simon says" statements, occasionally omitting the words, "Simon says." When these words are omitted, children should NOT do what you command. Let children take turns being the leader. You will not have time to give everyone a turn, so draw name sticks to be fair, or continue the game later in the day.

After a few minutes of play, stop the game and say, “We knew when to obey, didn’t we? We knew that when Simon said to do something we should obey. Today, I’m going to tell you a story about two people who obeyed. They obeyed because someone very important told them what to do.”

LESSON STEPS

1. Tell the story of the angel visiting Mary and Joseph. Act out this story with the children. In a way that seems fair to the children, assign the parts of Mary, Joseph, and the angel(s). Provide bathrobes, sheets, or other costumes. You will serve as narrator and the voice of God.

Long ago, God sometimes sent angels to give special messages to people. One day, God called the angel Gabriel to give him a special job. *(Call Gabriel to you.)* “Gabriel,” said God, “The right time is here for my son Jesus to go to earth and live among the people. And you are the one I have chosen to take the news to the young woman who will be his mother. Her name is Mary, and she lives in Nazareth. You are to go there and find her. Mary is planning to marry a man named Joseph. This is what you are to say to her, ‘Mary, you have been chosen by God to be the mother of his son.’”

Gabriel did exactly as God commanded. He went to Nazareth and found the young woman named Mary. He greeted her with these words, “Greetings, favored woman. The Lord is with you.” *(Tell child playing Gabriel to go to Mary and repeat these words.)*

Now Mary never thought this would happen to her. She knew that sometimes an angel would bring a message of good news, and sometimes a message of something bad about to happen. She also knew that angels appeared to special people, but Mary was just an ordinary person—just a young girl, really, about 13 years old. She didn’t know what to say.

Gabriel must have seen how confused and frightened she was. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” he said. “I have a special secret to share with you. God has chosen you to be the mother of his son, who will be born as a tiny baby. You are to call the baby Jesus. He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David, and his kingdom will never end.” *(Invite angel to tell Mary she will be Jesus’ mother.)*

Now Mary wasn’t afraid anymore! She was beginning to understand what the angel’s visit was all about. She answered, “I will do whatever God wishes. I am willing to be his servant. I promise to take good care of God’s son.” *(Let Mary paraphrase these words. Then have her tell Joseph she will be Jesus’ mother.)*

When Mary told Joseph about the angel’s visit and the message he brought, Joseph was confused. But later an angel came to Joseph in a dream, too, and gave him the same message. *(Have same or another angel come to Joseph.)* He told him that Mary would have a baby boy and that they should name him Jesus. Joseph listened to the angel. He named the baby “Jesus” when he was born, just as the angel had said to do.

2. Wonder about the story, using the following statements:

- I wonder why God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus.
- I wonder if Mary and Joseph told others about their secret.
- I wonder if they were afraid.
- I wonder if I could obey as well as Mary and Joseph did.

Then pray, “Thank you, God, for sending Jesus. We are glad Mary and Joseph obeyed what you sent the angel to tell them. Help us to obey you, too. Amen.”

3. Christmas story figures. Introduce the art activity that will continue through all the lessons in this unit. The children will make figures to tell the Christmas story on their own story cloth at home.

You will need a set of Mary, Joseph, and the angel for each child (*with extras available for those whose scissors don’t cut straight!*). Provide glue, safety scissors, foil, tinsel, glitter, and other appropriate art materials. Give children an angel figure first. Instruct them to cut out their angels and decorate them (*fronts only!*) with the materials available. Make sure they put their names on the back. They should also place a small piece of Velcro on the back of the figure. As children finish their angels, they may get a Mary figure to cut out and decorate. Follow with Joseph. When the figures are dry, give children manila folders or large plastic bags labeled with their names in which to keep them. They will add to their collection with each lesson. If some children finish early, let them browse your collection of Christmas books.

4. Make a “God Says” book. Gather together and come back to the idea of Mary and Joseph’s obedience to God. Remind the children about your “Simon Says” game, and how you obeyed “Simon.” Mary and Joseph knew that when God spoke to them through an angel, they needed to obey. “We listen to God, too. Sometimes God speaks to us in our minds. But sometimes God tells us what to do by sending messengers, like the angel who came to Joseph and Mary. We need to listen to people who might be speaking God’s words to us. Now let’s think about what God says to us.”

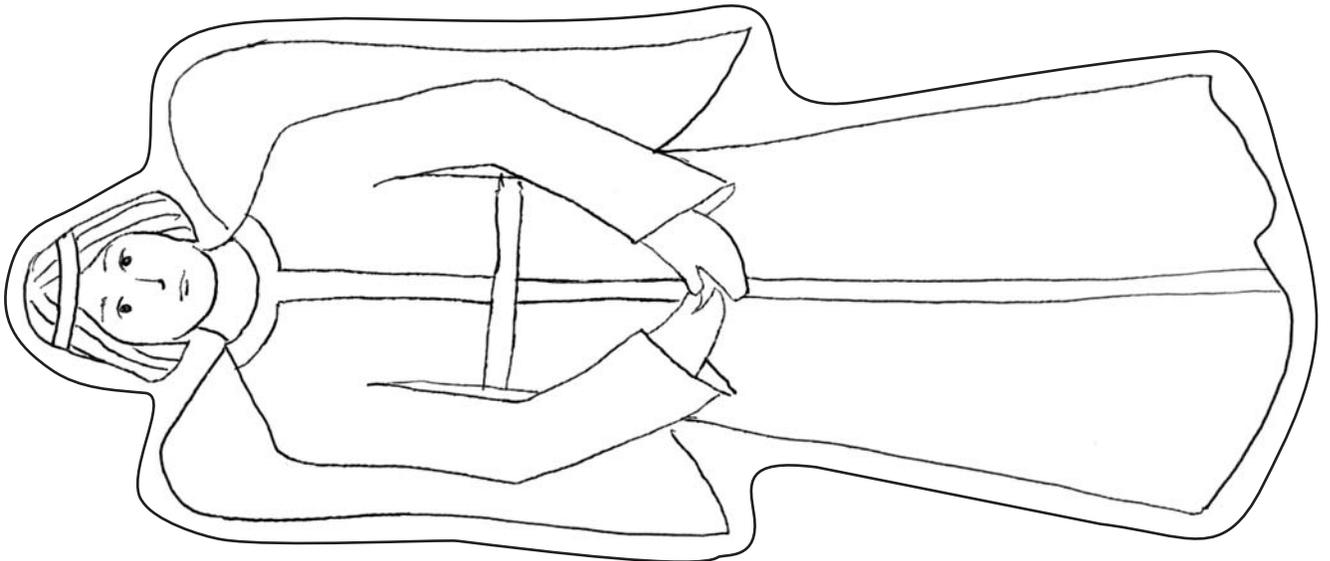
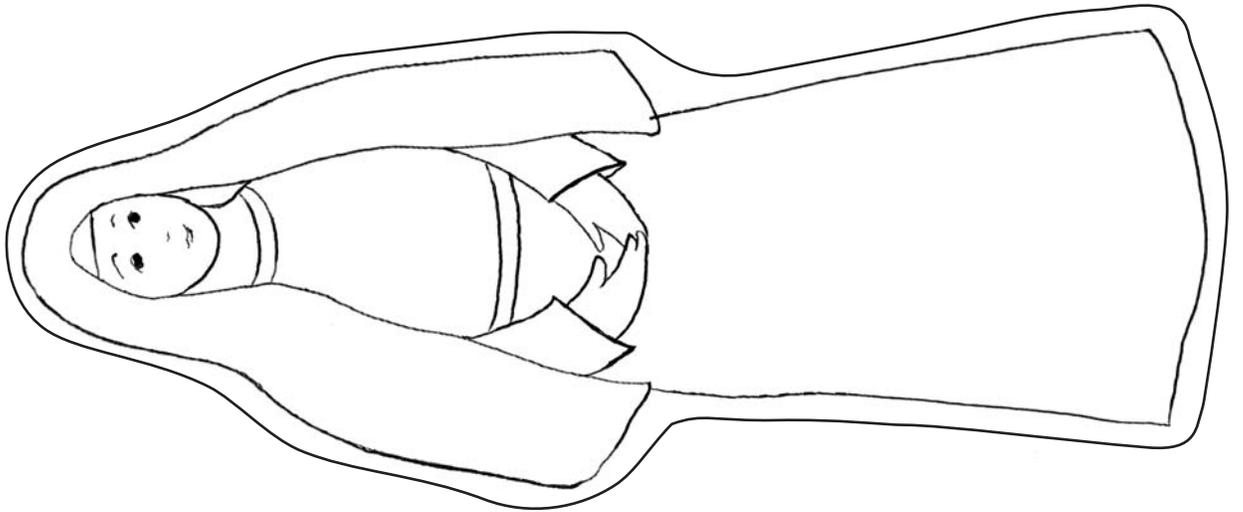
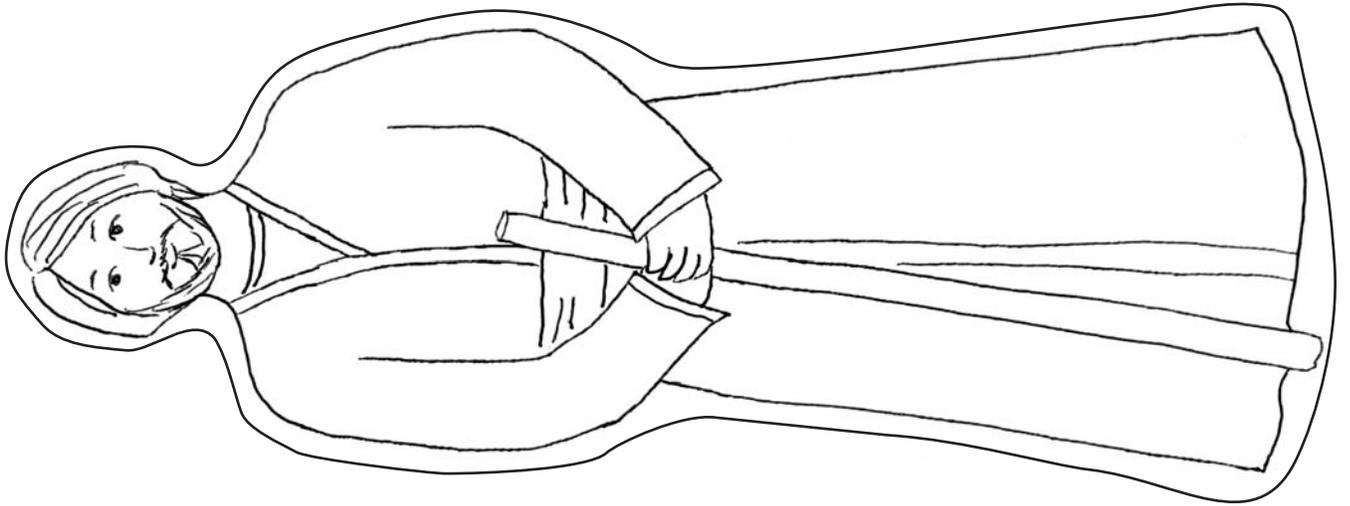
Make a “God Says” book with the children. Depending on children’s abilities and time available, you might do this as shared writing (*children dictate ideas, but you write*), interactive writing (*children dictate and help write some words or letters*) or independent writing, where each child creates one page for a class book. On sheets of light construction paper, write several things God says that we should obey. (*Children may come up with answers such as “Pray” and “Read the Bible,” or they may suggest more general things, such as “Be nice.”*) Accept any reasonable ideas. Begin each sentence with the words, “God says . . .” Children could illustrate the book to help them know what the words say. End by reading the book together.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 30-40 minutes.)

- **Look at art prints.** Bring in several fine art prints of the Annunciation (*the angel’s visit to Mary*). Before showing children the prints, have them close their eyes and come up with a mental image of what they think the scene looked like. Prompt them with questions such as, “What was Mary wearing? Was she sitting or standing? What did the angel’s clothes look like? What were the expressions on their faces?” After a few moments of imagining, show children each print and explain that this is how *one* person thought the event might have looked. Let the children be the artists and draw/paint their own version of the Annunciation.

- **Learn about first-century Israel.** Give children background on the culture surrounding this story. Show them pictures of houses, landscapes, etc.



The Christmas Story

LESSON 2: FROM NAZARETH TO BETHLEHEM

Objective

Children will be able to re-tell the story of Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth there.

Key Concepts

- Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem while Mary was pregnant with Jesus.
- When Mary and Joseph got to Bethlehem, the only available lodging was a stable.
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Text: Luke 2:1-7

Estimated Lesson Time: 30-40 minutes

Materials

- *Jubilee Songbook*
- Story box: bottom of large cardboard box *OR* large, clear-plastic storage box containing shallow layer of sand (or tan story cloth)
- Story figures, stones for road, cardboard box stable with smaller manger, sticks for signposts, small blocks of wood to represent houses (*optional*)
- Jesus, manger, and donkey figures (p. 189)
- Glue, tape, scissors, markers, crayons, brown yarn, flannel cloth, straw or hay
- Self-adhesive Velcro (looped side only)
- *Nine Days to Christmas* by Marie Hall Ets (Viking Penguin, 1972)
- For Extend the Lesson, option two: piñata (homemade or bought)
- For Extend the Lesson, option four: refrigerator box, cardboard box, straw, stuffed animals, doll, bathrobes and/or sheets
- For Extend the Lesson, option five: *The Friendly Beasts* by Tomie dePaola (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981)

Teacher Preparation

- Practice telling the Bible story with props.
- Make copies of the Jesus, manger, and donkey figures on card stock or stiff paper (1 set for each child).
- Cut Velcro into 1- to 2-inch pieces (3 per child) and cut small pieces of felt and cloth to use for figures.
- If using Extend the Lesson, option one, invite a local farmer to bring a donkey or pony to the school.
- If using Extend the Lesson, option three, practice the echo pantomime (p. 190).

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

1. Worship and Bible memory. See Unit Information, page 179.

2. Storytelling game. Gather in a circle and tell children to pretend they are going on a trip. Moving around the circle, take turns finishing the sentence, “I’m going on a trip and I’m going to see . . .” If you want to stretch children’s memories (*this may be difficult for kindergarteners*), have them repeat what those before them said and then add their own ending to the sentence. (*Or just have them repeat what the last person said.*) Say, “Today, I’m going to tell you a story of two people who went on a long, tiring trip.”

LESSON STEPS

1. Tell the story of the journey to Bethlehem. With stones or other material (*such as a tan cloth*), create a road through the middle of the story box. Place two signs on sticks in the sand, putting one sign on each end of the road. Label one sign “Nazareth” and the other “Bethlehem.” In Bethlehem, place a small, upside-down cardboard box, large enough to hold the figures of Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus and some animals. (*You may also wish to place some small blocks in sand at Nazareth and Bethlehem, to represent houses.*) Now you are ready to tell the story with wooden story figures.

Do you remember what the angel told Mary and Joseph? He said that Mary was going to have a baby! Mary and Joseph (*put two story figures in town of Nazareth*) were excited. They knew that God promised them a very special baby.

While they were waiting for Jesus to be born, the king of their country made a rule. He wanted to know how many people lived in his country. So he said that everyone had to go to the towns where their families came from. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, but long ago, Joseph’s family lived in the town of Bethlehem. So Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to be counted.

They packed food and some extra clothes into bags for their journey. At that time, no one had cars. Most people walked where they needed to go. Some people traveled on donkeys. Mary may have ridden a donkey to Bethlehem. It would have been a very long walk for a woman who was going to have a baby! Nazareth was about 80 miles from Bethlehem. It would have taken many days to walk there. Even if Mary did ride on a donkey, Joseph probably walked beside her. They walked (*move story figures along road from Nazareth to Bethlehem*) and walked and walked some more. They had to camp along the road at night, or stay in strangers’ homes.

Mary and Joseph were very tired when they arrived in Bethlehem. Mary knew it was almost time for Jesus to be born. They looked for a place to stay, but all of the guest rooms in Bethlehem were full. (*Move Mary and Joseph around Bethlehem area. If you have blocks in sand to represent houses, move them from house to house.*) Many people had come to Bethlehem to be counted.

Finally, Mary and Joseph found a kind man who said they could stay in the stable with his animals. They may have slept on the hay. (*Lay Mary and Joseph down inside prepared stable.*) During one of the nights they stayed in the stable, Mary’s baby was born. (*Add small story figure to represent baby Jesus.*) Mary wrapped him in soft cloth she had brought with her and laid him on the hay. Mary and Joseph were very happy. They knew God had kept his special promise to them. They named the baby Jesus. (*Leave the story figures in the stable, ready for the next lesson.*)

2. Wonder about the story, using the following statements:

- I wonder how Mary felt, traveling all that way when she was expecting a baby.
- I wonder if the innkeeper knew that Mary and Joseph were special people.
- I wonder if Mary and Joseph knew that God wanted Jesus to be born in Bethlehem.
- I wonder what baby Jesus looked like.

Then pray, “Thank you, God, that Mary and Joseph made their journey to Bethlehem safely. Thank you that Jesus was born on that special night. Amen.”

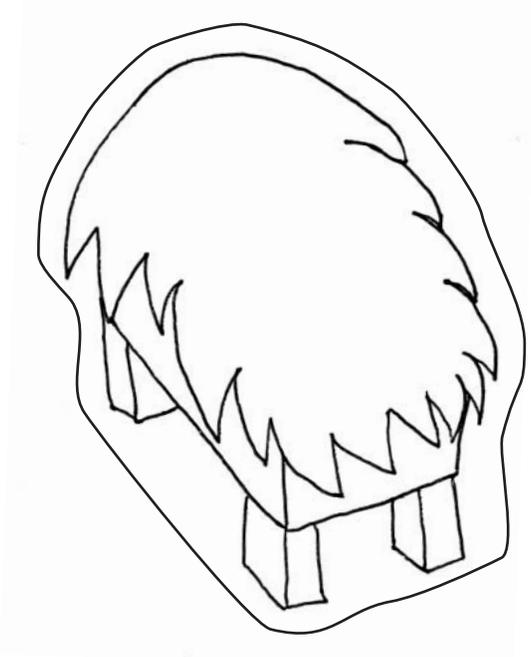
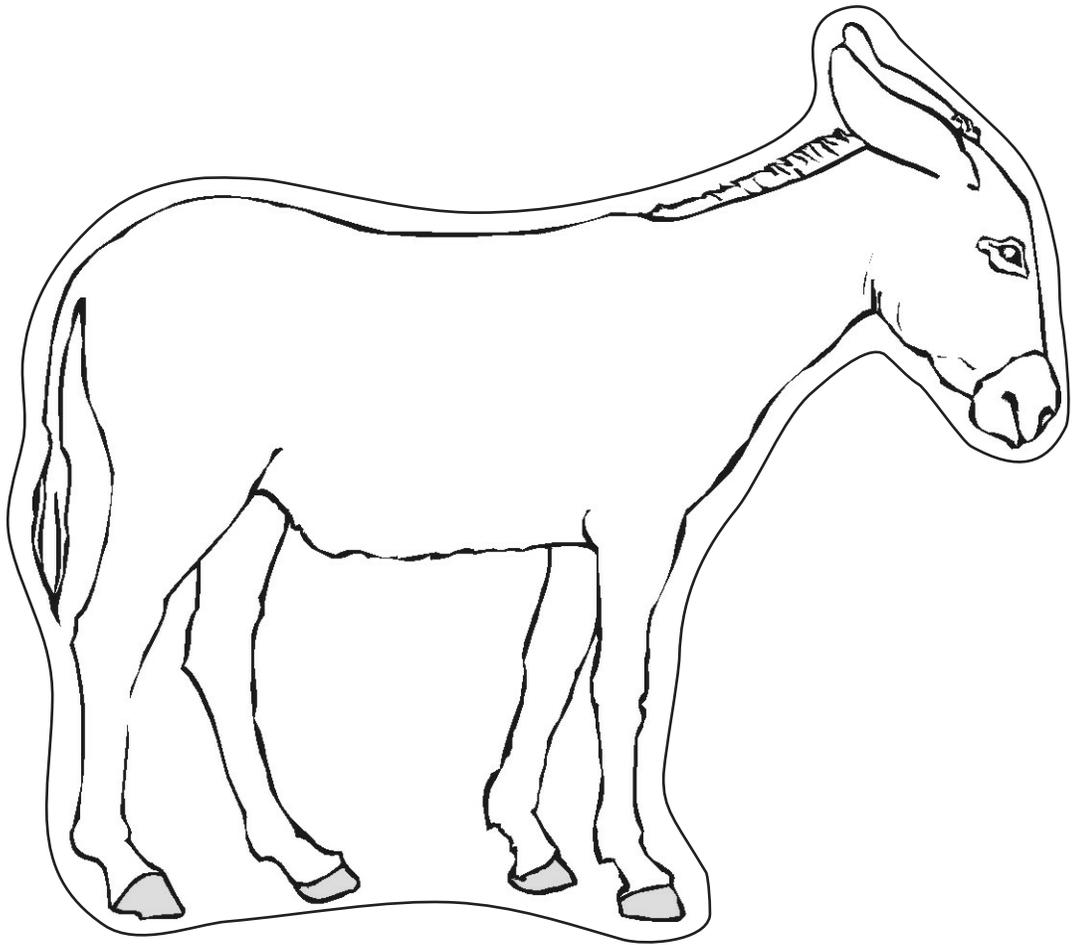
3. Christmas story figures. Continue the art activity begun in the previous lesson. Children will make additional nativity figures to tell the Christmas story on their own story cloth at home. You will need a set of the donkey, baby Jesus, and the manger for each child, plus several extras. Give each child one of the figures and let them decorate it. Have the other figures available, but encourage them to work on just one at a time. Provide glue, scissors, markers, crayons, brown yarn (*for the donkey*), straw (*for the manger*), and soft cloth such as flannel (*for baby Jesus’ swaddling clothes*). Instruct children to cut out the figure and decorate (*fronts only!*). Make sure they put their names on the back. Place a small piece of self-adhesive Velcro on the back of each figure. When the figures are dry, store them in the children’s folders or plastic bags with the previous lesson’s figures. If some children finish early, let them retell the Bible story using the story figures.

4. Read about *Las Posadas*. Gather together again and read *Nine Days to Christmas*. This is a long book that you may want to paraphrase at times. It highlights the Latin American celebration of *Los Posadas*. If possible, invite a person from that culture to your classroom to share about the tradition of “finding room” on Christmas Eve. Discuss hospitality with the children and if you wish, role-play the search for a room. Emphasize that Jesus was born into a poor family that had to rely on the kindness of strangers. The innkeeper probably wanted to help Mary and Joseph, and gave what he could.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 30-40 minutes.)

- **Invite a local farmer** who has a donkey or pony to bring the animal to the school for the children to sit on. They can see how Mary felt on her journey.
- **Celebrate *Los Posadas*** with a piñata, as in the book, *Nine Days to Christmas*.
- **Do an echo pantomime** of the Christmas story, found on page 190.
- **Act out the Bible story**, using a refrigerator-box stable, a straw-stuffed box, stuffed animals, a doll, and bathrobes and sheets for costumes. This could be an activity for free play times.
- **Read *The Friendly Beasts*** by Tomie de Paola.



“Jesus Is Born” Echo Pantomime

(Reprinted from *The Foundation Series*, Herald Press)

Leader says and acts out the words indicated. Children repeat words and actions.

Words

The king in Rome
Wrote a decree
That all the world should be taxed.
Mary and Joseph
Had to go to Bethlehem.
It was a long journey,
And they got very tired.
When they came to an inn
The innkeeper said, “No room.”
Mary was so tired!
She had to rest.
The innkeeper said,
“There’s a stable in the back.”
They went to the stable
And lay down for the night.
During the night
The baby Jesus was born.
Mary laid him in a manger.
And said, “His name shall be Jesus.”
They were so happy!

(Continue, or save rest of pantomime until next lesson.)

Out in the fields
Shepherds were watching their sheep.
Suddenly a bright light came.
The angel said, “Don’t be afraid.
A Savior is born.
Go find the baby
In a stable in Bethlehem.”
Many, many angels
Said, “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace
Among those with whom he is pleased.”
The shepherds hurried
To the stable
Where they found the baby
And Mary and Joseph.
They worshipped the child Jesus.
When they left
They told everyone the good news—
Jesus the Savior is born.

Actions

Put “crown” on head.
Make writing motion.
Make wide motions with arms.
No actions.
Walk on spot.
Continue walking on spot.
Continue walking and wipe brow.
Knock on imaginary door.
Shake head.
Wipe brow.
Bend head and lie on hands.
No actions.
Point to appropriate place.
Walk on spot.
Bend head and lie on hands.
(Speak softly.) No actions.
Fold arms as if holding baby.
Put baby down.
No actions.
Smile and clap hands.

Point to right side.
Hold imaginary staff.
Shield eyes from light.
Hold up right hand.
(Speak triumphantly.) No actions.
Hold imaginary baby.
Point to left.
Raise both arms to sky.
No actions.
No actions.
No actions.
Run on spot.
Point to left.
Hold imaginary baby.
No actions.
Fold hands in prayer.
Run on spot.
Cup hands at mouth.
Speak loudly through cupped hands.

The Christmas Story

LESSON 3: THE ANGELS VISIT THE SHEPHERDS

Objective

Children will remember the angels' visit to the shepherds. They will share the angels' good news with others in their school.

Key Concepts

- Angels told the shepherds that Jesus was born.
- The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Jesus, then shared the story of Jesus' birth with others.
- The news that Jesus was born was truly wonderful!

Text: Luke 2:8-20

Estimated Lesson Time: 30-40 minutes

Materials

- *Jubilee Songbook*
- Story figures, story box (or story cloth) prepared for previous lesson, flashlight
- Shepherds, sheep, and star patterns (p. 195)
- Glue, scissors, crayons, markers, foil or glitter, quilt batting or cotton balls, small sticks
- Self-adhesive Velcro (looped side only)
- Instruments to accompany Christmas caroling
- For Extend the Lesson, option one: dark blue bulletin board paper, yellow and/or white paint in bowls, newspapers, sponges cut in star and angel shapes, paint shirts
- For Extend the Lesson, option two: *The Little Drummer Boy* storybook (any version)
- For Extend the Lesson, option three: construction paper, markers, other materials for "good news" posters

Teacher Preparation

- Practice telling the Bible story with story figures.
- Copy the shepherds, sheep, and star onto card stock or stiff paper. Make one set for each child.
- Cut Velcro into 1- to 2-inch pieces (3 per child) and prepare cotton (for sheep) and sticks (for shepherds' staffs).
- Arrange with the school office staff, another class, or neighbor(s) for your class to carol to them.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

1. Worship and Bible memory. See Unit Information, page 179.

2. Play "telephone." Sit in a circle on the floor. Whisper the words, "Jesus is born!" to the child sitting next to you. Have that child whisper the "news" to the next child, etc. When the news gets all the way around the circle, have the last child SHOUT the words. If the news got changed along the way, discuss what happened. Try other phrases related to Christmas.

LESSON STEPS

1. Tell the story, “The Angels Visit the Shepherds.” Again, use the figures in the large story box (*or on the story cloth*) you created to tell this story. Somewhere in the empty space between Nazareth and Bethlehem, place several story figures and sheep. Turn off the lights in your classroom (*unless you have no windows*) and use a flashlight when the angels appear to the shepherds. Set Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in the stable (*if they aren’t already there*). Have the angel figure ready to appear at the appropriate time. Provide several more angels for students to hold when the “heavenly host” appears.

It was a dark and quiet night on the hills outside Bethlehem. Some of the shepherds were dozing off (*lay some shepherd figures down*). Others took their turn watching the sheep. Most nights were peaceful and quiet, but sometimes a wild animal would attack one of the sheep. Then all of the shepherds were awake and excited, helping to save the precious sheep or lamb.

Tonight there were no wild animal attacks, but it wasn’t an ordinary night. Suddenly a bright light shone all around the shepherds, and an angel stood in front of them. (*Turn flashlight onto shepherds and hold angel above them.*) Now the shepherds were wide-awake and scared! What was happening in their quiet field?

Right away the angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m bringing you the best news you’ve ever heard. A baby has just been born in the town nearby. He will be the Savior of the world and will show the way of God to all people. And you will go to visit him!” Then the angel described where they would find the baby—in a manger, wrapped in cloths.

All at once, there were many, many angels filling the sky (*have several students help to hold angels above shepherds*), praising God and singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people.”

Then the angels left. (*Turn off flashlight and put angels away.*) The sky was dark again, and all was quiet in the fields. The shepherds looked at each other in amazement. (*Turn shepherd figures to face each other.*) Had an angel really come and spoken to them just a few minutes? Was the sky really lit up with bright angels?

“Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see this child that God has sent,” one of the shepherds said. The rest agreed. (*Turn flashlight on over stable and move shepherds there.*) They hurried to Bethlehem, and sure enough—there was the newborn baby, just as the angel had said. He was lying in a manger, and was wrapped in newborn baby cloths. His mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph, were standing close by. Even the animals in the stable seemed surprised and were watching in wonder.

The shepherds couldn’t keep all this excitement to themselves. They told everyone they met what the angel had said, and the people who heard it were amazed. But Mary listened quietly and thought about all this.

The shepherds went back to their fields (*move shepherds back to fields*) and their sheep, praising God for the gift of Jesus. They were so happy that they had seen the baby, just as the angel had said.

2. Wonder about the story, using the following statements:

- I wonder what the angels looked like.
- I wonder if the angels told anyone else the good news.
- I wonder what the shepherds said to Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus.

Then pray, “Thank you, God, for the good news of Jesus’ birth. Thank you that Jesus came for everyone. We worship him, just as the shepherds did. Amen.”

3. Christmas story figures. Continue the art activity from previous lessons, making additional nativity figures to tell the Christmas story on their own story cloth at home. You will need a set of the shepherds, sheep, and star for each child, plus several extras. Give each of the children a shepherd and let them decorate it. Have the other figures available, but encourage them to work on just one at a time. Provide glue, scissors, markers, crayons, cotton (*for sheep*), foil or glitter (*for star*) and small sticks (*for shepherds’ staffs*). Instruct children to cut out the figure and decorate (*fronts only!*). Make sure they put their names on the back. Place a small piece of self-adhesive Velcro on the back of each figure. When figures are dry, store them in the children’s folders or plastic bags with the previous lesson’s figures. If some children finish early, let them retell the Bible story using the story figures.

4. Share the good news! End the lesson by caroling to another class, the school secretary and principal, or a neighboring home. Use bells, shakers, drums, or other joyful instruments to accompany the singing. Practice your message of song for a few minutes before caroling. Suggestions from *Jubilee Songbook* include:

Jesus, Baby Jesus, page 38
Away in a Manger, page 39
There Was a Little Baby, page 40
Instrument Carol, page 41

Add any of the children’s favorite Christmas songs.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 30-40 minutes.)

- **Sponge-paint a mural** of stars, angels, and shepherds using white and/or yellow paint on dark blue paper.
- **Read *The Little Drummer Boy*** (*any version*) and teach the children the song. Talk about how poor shepherds were in Jesus’ time. They would have had no gifts to bring when they came to see him.
- **Learn a Christmas poem:** “What Can I Give Him?” by Christina Rossetti.

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb:
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
Yet, what can I give him?
Give him my heart.

- **Make posters** to hang around the school, proclaiming the good news of Jesus’ birth. Encourage children to write the words “Jesus is born!” by themselves.

- **Tell “The Flower of Christmas Eve,”** a Mexican folk tale:

Long ago in a small, Mexican village, there lived a girl named Maria and her little brother José. Maria and José were very poor, but they always looked forward to the Christmas festival. Each year, a large manger scene was set up in their church. They had many parties in the days before Christmas.

Maria and José loved the Christmas festivities, but one thing made them sad. They were so poor that they had no money to buy presents. It was a tradition in their village for people to bring gifts to the church, as if they were giving gifts to the baby Jesus. Maria and José were especially sad that they had nothing for the baby Jesus.

On Christmas Eve, Maria and José walked to church to attend the Christmas service. Along the way, they saw some bright green plants growing along the road.

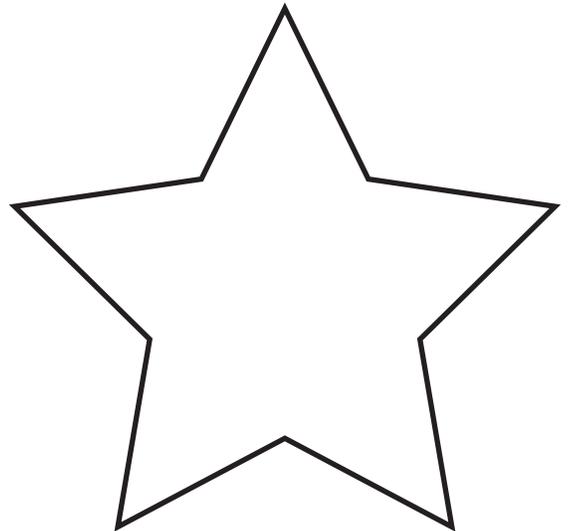
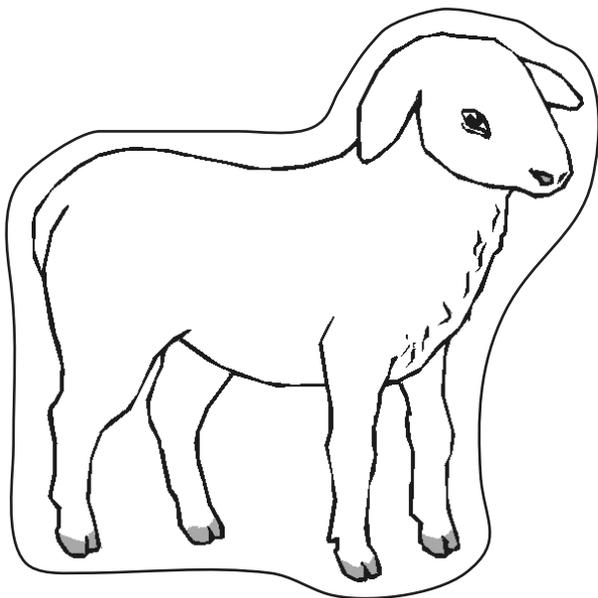
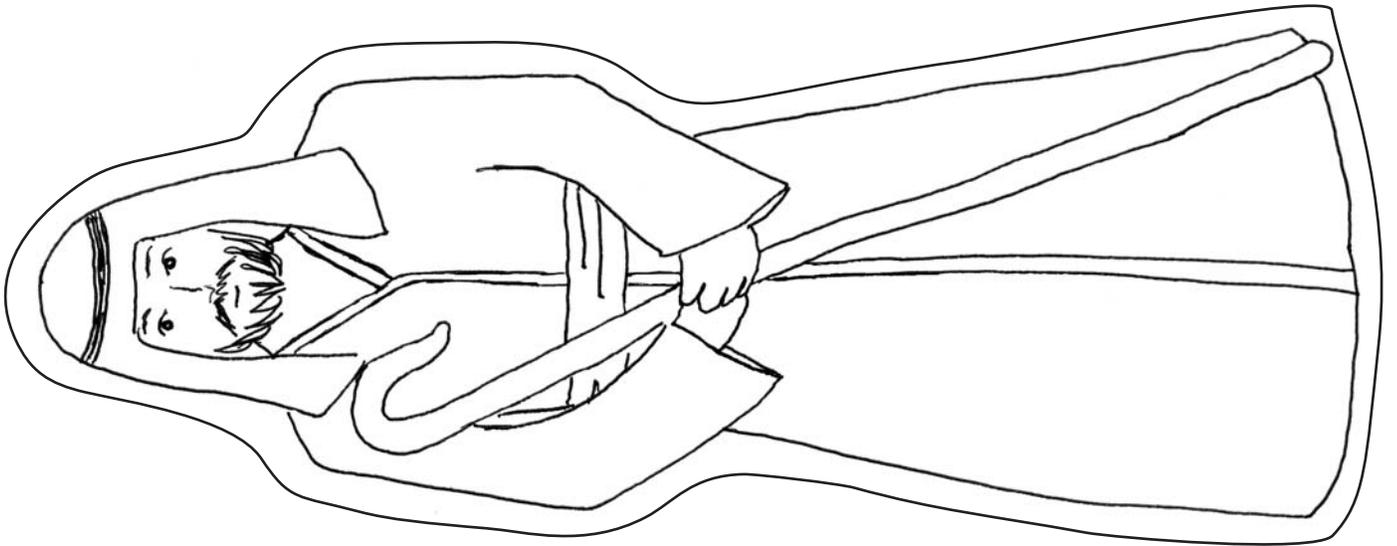
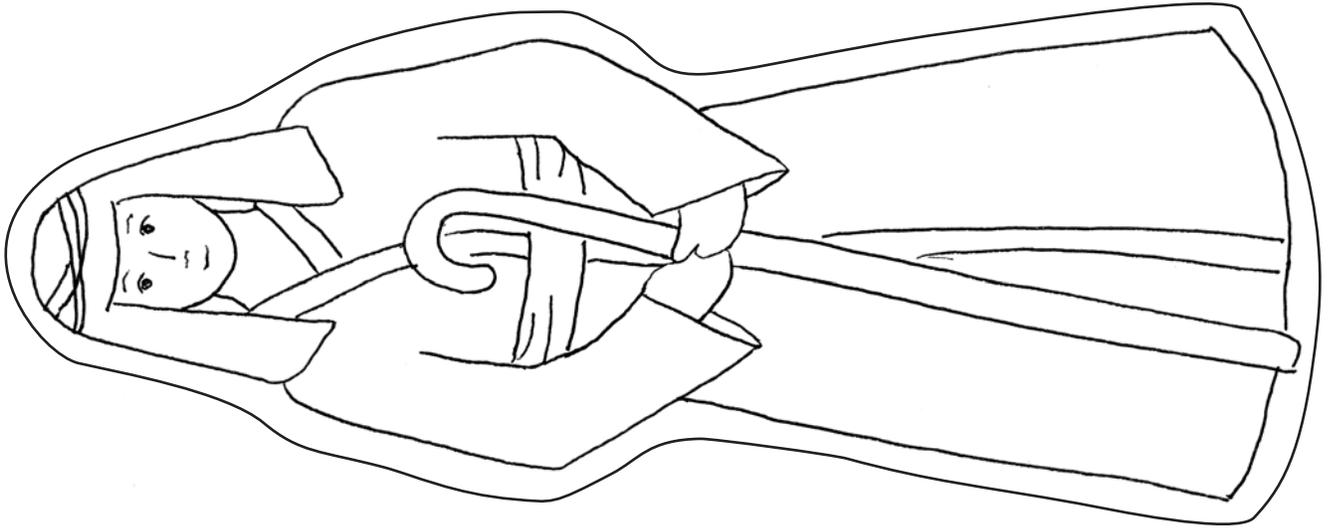
“I know,” said Maria. “Let’s take these plants with us to give to the baby Jesus.”

“All right,” said José.

So the children gathered up the plants and took them to the church, where they placed them around the manger. Some of the other children teased them, because they had no better presents to bring. But Maria and José had given what they could.

During the church service, a wonderful thing happened. All around the manger, the plants that Maria and José had brought began to change color. One by one, the green leaves on top of the plants turned bright red. Soon the manger was surrounded by beautiful red flowers.

From that time on, people in Mexico began calling the green plant with the bright red petals “The Flower of Christmas Eve.” Others came to call it the poinsettia, and now it is a favorite flower at Christmas time, everywhere.



The Christmas Story

LESSON 4: THE WISE MEN VISIT JESUS

Objective

Children will understand why we give gifts at Christmas time when they hear the story of the wise men. They will respond by giving gifts to others.

Key Concepts

- Wise men traveled a long distance to worship Jesus.
- The wise men brought gifts to Jesus.
- We can give gifts to Jesus, too, by offering gifts of love, time, money, and food to others.

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Estimated Lesson Time: 30-40 minutes

Materials

- *Jubilee Songbook*
- Large star stickers
- Story figures, gold coins, incense or perfume, fragrant spice
- Wise men figures (p. 200)
- Scissors, glue, tape, foil, gift wrap, ribbon
- Self-adhesive Velcro (looped side only)
- Large (2' x 3') piece of felt for each child, note to parents (p. 199)
- Suitcase, gifts children have brought to share
- For Extend the Lesson, option one: yellow paper, scissors, crown pattern, tape or stapler
- For Extend the Lesson, option two: real samples of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (*available in specialty stores or online*)
- For Extend the Lesson, option three: small jars with corks or lids, mineral oil, perfume, dried flowers or herbs (*optional*), food color (*optional*), chocolate coins (*optional*)

Teacher Preparation

- At least one week ahead of time, invite parents to help each child choose a new toy *OR* a favorite toy to give to a needy child.
- Practice telling the Bible story with props.
- Copy note to send home with the children's story figures (1 per child).
- Hide star stickers around the room, at least one per child.
- Copy the wise men figures onto card stock or stiff paper, one set for each child.
- Cut Velcro into 1- to 2-inch pieces (3 per child)
- Contact an agency that could use the gifts your students brought to share. If you wish, arrange for a representative to visit your class.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

1. **Worship and Bible memory.** See Unit Information, page 179.

2. Search for stars. Tell the children that there is something for each of them hidden around the room—star stickers. When they find a sticker, they can wear it or save it for later. When everyone has found a star, gather the children and explain that today you will tell them a story about some people who searched for something special. This story has a star in it, too!

LESSON STEPS

1. Tell the Bible story, “The Wise Men Visit Jesus.” Again, use story figures in the large story box (or on the story cloth). Place Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in a “house” (use box for stable, but do not include manger, animals, or hay). At the other end of the road, set three story figures to represent three wise men. Place one more story figure halfway down the road to represent Herod. Have ready some gold coins (real or toy), incense or perfume to represent frankincense, and a spice that smells good to represent myrrh.

A long while after the shepherds had come to see baby Jesus, a different group of people came to see him. They were wise men, who studied the stars and the planets. They also studied the scriptures.

When the wise men noticed a new and unusual star in the sky, they were sure it meant something special. (*Point to star.*) It was the kind of star that meant a new king had been born somewhere. “But where?” they wondered. So they decided to follow this star and see where it would lead them.

The wise men might be traveling for a long time. They had to get their camels ready. They needed food and supplies for many days. And, because they were visiting a new king, they wanted to take presents for the child and his parents. They would take gold. (*Show gold coins.*) Maybe the parents would use it to buy something special for the baby. They would take frankincense, too. It smelled sweet, like perfume. (*Let children smell perfume.*) And they would take myrrh. It smelled like spices and kept things fresh for a long time. (*Let children smell spice.*)

When everything was ready, the wise men set off on their camels, traveling by night and resting by day, so they could keep track of the special star. (*Move wise men down road, close to Herod.*)

After a long trip, they arrived in the big city of Jerusalem. The wise men asked people they met where the new king was living. But no one could tell them. Herod, who was king at that time, heard about these visitors and got a little nervous. He thought, *If a new king has been born, he might take my place someday.* Herod began to feel jealous. So he called the people who knew the scriptures and asked them where God’s special baby was to be born. They said, “Don’t you remember the verses about that? The little town of Bethlehem is where he’ll be born.”

Herod decided he had to do something fast. He sent a message to the wise men to come and see him, but what he told them was a lie. (*Move wise men figures next to Herod.*) “When you find the baby,” he said, “let me know where he lives, so I can come to worship him, too.” But what Herod *thought* was, *If I know where he lives, maybe I can make a plan to get rid of him before he grows up.*

After their meeting with Herod, the wise men followed the star that led them to Bethlehem, right to the house where Jesus was. (*Move wise men next to house.*) They were so excited when they went in and saw the little Jesus for the first time. They knelt down and worshipped the tiny king they had found at last! Then they joyfully opened their gifts and presented them to Jesus. (*Lay gold, perfume, and spice next to Jesus figure.*)

2. Wonder about the story, using the following statements:

- I wonder why the wise men wanted to see the new king.
- I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt to be visited by kings.
- I wonder how I can honor Jesus, as the wise men did with their gifts.

Then pray, “We love you and worship you Jesus, just like the wise men did so long ago. Thank you for coming to live in our world. Amen.”

3. Christmas story figures. Continue the art activity from previous lessons, making additional figures to tell the Christmas story. You will need a set of wise men for each child, plus several extras. Give each of the children one wise man and let them decorate it. Have the other wise men available, but encourage them to work on just one at a time. Provide glue, scissors, markers, crayons, foil, gift wrap and ribbon, and other materials children might enjoy using. Make sure they put their names on the back. Place a small piece of self-adhesive Velcro on the back of each figure. When figures are dry, store them in the children’s folders or plastic bags. If some children finish early, let them retell the Bible story using the story figures.

Send the figures and a large piece of felt home with each child. The felt will serve as a story cloth. Include the note from page 199 to encourage parents to listen to their children retell the Christmas story with their figures.

4. Give gifts. Close the lesson with a time of gift giving. Have children help fit the toys they brought to share inside a suitcase (*as if the wise men were carrying them to Jesus*). If possible, invite a representative from a local agency to accept your gift, or deliver the gifts at another time. When all the gifts are in the suitcase, explain that we can’t give gifts to Jesus like the wise men did, but Jesus said that if we give to those in need, it’s as if we are giving to him. Pray together, thanking God for fun toys and asking God to bless these toys as they arrive in others’ hands.

Note: Your school may already be doing a school-wide Christmas project. You might use the toys the children brought for that, if it fits with this lesson, rather than having them bring gifts for two separate projects.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 30-40 minutes.)

- **Make crowns.** Provide yellow paper, scissors, patterns, and tape or staplers for the children to make their own crowns.
- **See and smell real gold, frankincense and myrrh.** You might find these items at specialty stores or online.
- **Make sweet rubbing oil** to give to parents as gifts. Mix a small amount of perfume with mineral oil. Place in a small jar with a lid or cork. Add color or dried flowers or herbs if you wish. You might add a few gold-covered chocolate coins to the gift, to replicate the wise men’s gifts!



Dear Parents,

Today your child is bringing home a set of figures he or she worked hard to create. These figures represent the main characters in the four Christmas Bible stories from our Bible sessions. The set includes Mary, Joseph, an angel, baby Jesus, the manger, a donkey, two shepherds, a sheep, a star, and three wise men.

Your child is also bringing a large piece of cloth to hang or lay over the back of a couch or chair. This cloth will provide the background for the figures.

Please take time to listen to your child retell the stories of the angel's visits to Mary and Joseph, Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth, the angels' visit to the shepherds, and the shepherds and wise men's journey to see the little Jesus. Your child may remember parts of the stories and be able to retell more with your prompting.

I wish your family joy as you share the beauty and wonder of the Christmas story with each other.

Sincerely,



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