



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 16 Jesus Is Born

Summary of Today's Story

At the beginning of the book, Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus that shows him as a descendant of Abraham and then of King David.

In a dream, an angel tells Joseph that the child Mary will bear has been conceived from the Holy Spirit. When the son is born, Joseph names him *Jesus*, as the angel commanded him.

King Herod hears of the birth of the “king of the Jews” from wise men who have come from the East to worship him. He sends them to Bethlehem where they find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, and they present him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

After the wise men leave, Joseph learns in a dream that King Herod plans to kill Jesus, so he takes his new family and flees to Egypt until the danger has passed. Meanwhile, Herod has all young children around Bethlehem killed on the chance that one of these babies may be the baby Jesus, King of the Jews.

After Herod dies, Joseph and his family return to Israel and settle in Nazareth in the district of Galilee.

Where You'll Find Today's Story

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Matthew 1 and 2

In Children's Bibles

If you plan to use a children's Bible for storytelling, write the page numbers of today's story in the space below.

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sunday:

Year A: First Sunday of Advent

Year A: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year A: Second Sunday after Christmas

Year A: Day of Epiphany

Year B: Second Sunday after Christmas

Year B: Day of Epiphany

Year C: Second Sunday after Christmas

Year C: Day of Epiphany



Weaving Our Story with the Biblical Story

Now, with the birth of Jesus the Son of God, God's Story becomes *our* story.

Whereas Luke, with his concern for the poor, talks about the lowly shepherds visiting the stable, Matthew focuses on the kingly aspect of Jesus, and so the “wise men from the East” are his visitors. Even at Jesus' birth, kings bow down to him.

As Matthew will say many times in his gospel, the prophets had spoken of salvation for God's people and Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies. In Jesus, God's will for humanity is revealed and lived out. In Jesus—fully human and fully God—humanity is finally reconciled with God.

Although Matthew makes clear that all of the signs of Jesus' divinity are present at his birth, it will be in Jesus' life and ministry that we will truly see our salvation worked out in him. Jesus—Immanuel, God with us—lives a life that is utterly faithful to God's will, utterly obedient to God's mission on earth, and utterly devoted to bringing God's reign to God's people on earth.

In his ministry, Matthew's Jesus proclaims the kingdom (reign) of God on earth. “The kingdom of God is among you!” And in his very life and actions he inaugurates that reign. The beginning of the reign of God is seen by Matthew as foreshadowed in the wondrous events that surround the birth of Jesus. Even at his birth—appropriately a mingling of the divine and the earthly, the lowly and the noble—there are kings present. Later we will learn, as will the disciples and the people, that the true King is this baby in the manger.



The Episcopal Thread

Christians everywhere celebrate Christmas, the birth of our Lord. Anglicans, whose theology is derived in part from the sixth-century Celtic

Christianity of the British Isles, add a special regard for the birth of Jesus that reflects the Celtic spirituality.

Celtic Christianity, with its sense of physicality and materiality, was based on an incarnational theology. The Celtic Christians found God residing in everything around them, and their wonder and awe at this abundance and extravagance of God's gifts is evident in their exuberant artwork and in the concrete images in their poetry. God is seen as revealed in God's works of creation and redemption.

The incarnational theology of the Celtic Christians pervades the *Prayer Book*, for example: “We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation...” (Eucharistic Prayer B, p. 368).

The birth of Jesus, then, is seen as the perfect and special revelation of God to us. We Episcopalians have a very special reverence for the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ—God made human, divine made flesh, heaven come down to earth. It is the birth of Jesus that tells us about the love that God showed us when he became incarnate as a man and walked among us.

In the Anglican tradition, our celebration of Christmas is full of beauty and awe. We worship as we believe. So when you come to church on Christmas Eve, be sure to look at the ways in which our worship services, with their many symbols of our faith, encapsulate the meaning of the Incarnation. Look at the liturgical color, the rich fabrics that symbolize the kingship of Christ, the Eucharist that foreshadows his sacrifice for our salvation, the words of scripture that connect God's

story to us, and the music of joy and love and praise to God. As we sing in “O Little Town of Bethlehem”:

*...praises sing to God the King,
and peace to men on earth.*



Weaving God's Beloved Community

Jesus is born of loving parents Mary and Joseph, who cradle him and do everything they can to protect him from harm. In the early days of Jesus' infancy, the biggest danger comes from King Herod, who is jealous of the baby he comes to see as a threat to his throne.

In God's Beloved Community, God rules over all, through the teaching of God's fundamental values of love, mercy, and justice. But in any earthly society, there are also earthly rulers. In today's world that is far from that Beloved Community, some leaders are good or do what they believe is best for their society, but some are ineffective or even harmful, when they either do not care for their people or even actively work to oppress their people.

Topics that can be discussed with children:

King Herod was a bad leader who wanted to hurt Jesus. Can you imagine what makes a good leader?

Mary and Joseph ran away from Bethlehem to escape from Herod and protect Jesus from being hurt. Think of a time when you have helped somebody who needed help, or a situation when you might be able to help somebody.



Gathering

The time of gathering together might well be spent in simple fellowship and sharing about this Advent and Christmas time. If you have a class Advent calendar, use it to count down the days until Christmas.

If you need busy hands, engage the children in a Christmas activity such as creating a Christmas card for the elderly or homebound in your congregation. You might provide stickers or cut-out Christmas scenes to glue onto the cards. (You'll find directions for making stickers on page 5 in the Appendix.) Have the entire class sign each card.

After all the children have arrived and you are ready to begin the lesson, lead the children in a short prayer, such as:

- Dear Lord, today we remember and celebrate your birth among us, you as God who has become a baby, for us. We love you and we worship you, our King and our Savior. Thank you for gathering us together today, and stay with us during this hour as we share with each other the joy of your birth.
Amen.



Telling the Story

There are many children's books about the birth of Jesus. You may read today's story from one of these or from a children's Bible, or read from the version of the story we provide, found on pages 8-10. Best yet, tell the story in your own words. Use a manger scene if possible.

For other ways to enhance your storytelling, see pages 2-3 in the Appendix.

This story is full of innocence and mystery, the sacred and the ordinary, all combined into one story. There will be no need to unravel the meaning of this story for the children. The mystery stays with us even as we grow old. God's infinite power is never harnessed in our minds.

And so, as you tell this story of the birth of God's Son, you may tell it in all its awesomeness and without the need to explain or discuss it. This is the time to let the children hear and absorb the story. Later, while having snacks or doing an activity, you can bring up the story again and invite the children to talk about it.



Prayer

Set up a small worship center in your classroom.

Materials

small table with a cloth to cover it
 Advent wreath with Advent candles or 1 large Christ candle
 matches
 Bible
 cross
optional: flowers (real, fake or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles. If you are using an Advent wreath, light the appropriate number of Advent candles.

Read one or two verses from today's scripture to help the children connect the story that they just heard with the Bible. If working with older children, you might expand the reading to several verses.

Suggestions for the reading:

For younger children: Matthew 1:21

For older children: Matthew 1:20-23. (Any passage would be appropriate for older children.)

Help familiarize the children with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew:
(*Read the selected passage.*)

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Invite prayers of thanksgiving for the gifts that God has given us. The children may also give thanks to God for the ways in which God has been present in their lives during the past week.
- Welcome prayers of concern or petition for those in need during this season.
- Ask if anyone has had a birthday or celebrated a special day during the past week and give thanks for these special times.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.



Sharing

Pass out snacks and say a simple grace, such as:

- Give us grateful hearts, O Lord, for all thy gifts, and make us mindful of the needs of others; in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

Or this one:

- We thank you, Lord, for these your gifts. We pray that when we eat or drink, and in whatever we do, all may be done for your glory and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

— paraphrased from prayer found in
One Hundred Table Graces, p. 34
(New York: Bell Tower, 1992)

This is an excellent time, while sharing a snack, to begin talking about the story that the children have just heard. The theme is *joy* in the birth of God-as-man. Encourage the children to share their joy with the class as you share yours.

Younger children may be so excited about the secular signs of Christmas that you may need to redirect their thoughts to the birth of Jesus. All children can imagine the experiences of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem and see the birth of Jesus through their eyes, as well as the eyes of the shepherds, the wise men and even the innkeeper.



Memorization

If intermediate children have not yet learned the books of the New Testament, encourage them to begin memorizing these.

Suggestions for ways to help the children with their memorization can be found on page 15 in the Appendix at the back of this document.



Weaving Our Faith

Before the closing prayer, take a few minutes to help the children think about today's story and what it teaches us about God by asking questions such as:

- What was our story about today?
- What special things happened around Jesus' birth?
- What does this story say about God?

Encourage the children to recall key words or phrases from today's story such as: *birth of Jesus, wise men, king, worship.*



Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Loving God, you sent your Son Jesus Christ to be born and live among us and to teach us how to love you and to love one another. Send us now back to our families so that we can do as Christ did, loving you and loving others this day and always. This we ask in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

End the class with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The children respond:

- Thanks be to God.



Weaving God's Promises

MATTHEW 1 and 2

This is Matthew's story of how Jesus is born. Of the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—Mark and John do not say anything about Jesus being born. They introduce him when he is already grown up. Luke tells us about Jesus being born in a stable and laid in a manger, and then shepherds come to see him.

Matthew has a different story. Here is what he says.

Mary is married to Joseph, and she has a son. They call him *Jesus*, just as the angels have told them to do.

King Herod is the king over the land, and he lives in the city of Jerusalem. As king, he rules over all the towns in the area, and that means also Bethlehem, where Jesus is born.

One day, King Herod has some visitors. They are important visitors. They come from the East, and they are what people call “wise men.” These wise men look at the stars, and in the stars they can see the future, and they can find out important news about the world that they live in.

The wise men have seen something *very* important in the stars. In fact, they have suddenly seen one single star come up into the night sky where before there was not any star. The coming of this new star tells them that there is a new king just born—the king of the Jews. The star also tells them that this king is not just any ordinary king. He is a king to be worshiped. He is king not just of earth but also of the heavens.

The wise men talk to King Herod

(For younger children, this section may be skipped.)

The wise men don't know where to find this new king. The star tells them that the baby is in King Herod's land, but they don't know exactly where. Maybe

King Herod knows! He has wise men with him—surely they know about this new king and where to find him!

So the wise men take a trip to Jerusalem. They stop at King Herod’s palace. Because they are important people from far away, the king lets them in.

The men have important business. They don’t make small talk. One of them says to Herod, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?”

King Herod says, “What? What do you mean?” He is confused. Where is *whom*? I am the only king around here!

The man says, “The king of the Jews! We have seen his star when it came up. We know he is near here, in your land. We have come to worship him.”

Now King Herod is afraid. A king that people worship? in *my* land? a baby who will one day take *my* place as king? someone who will overthrow me and set up his own kingdom?

Herod sends the wise men to a hotel to get some sleep while he thinks about what to tell them. Then he calls his best, his smartest and his wisest people. Then he asks them, “I hear that a Messiah is supposed to be born sometime and somewhere. That’s what your prophecies say. Where is the place where he will be born?”

“In Bethlehem, so they say,” says one. “That’s what they tell us.”

King Herod then calls for the wise men. “I have news for you,” he says. “I know where this king of yours is. But exactly when did that star show up?”

When the men come back to see King Herod in his palace, Herod is sneaky. He says to them, “The child is in Bethlehem, but I don’t know which house. Go and look for him. You will find him—Bethlehem is not that big a place. When you do find him, please, please let me know! I too want to go see him and worship him!”

The wise men were very happy to hear this. Now they know where to go. “Thank you!” they say to the king. And then they set off on their journey to Bethlehem.

The star leads the wise men to Jesus

Now a strange thing happens. As they start their journey, they see that star. The star is just ahead of them. And as they keep on their way, the star stays ahead of them, leading them on. When they get to the house where Jesus is, the star stops moving. *Here is the place*, it seems to say to them.

The men jump for joy. *Yes, here is the place!* Quietly, the three men go into the house. There, they see Mary. And then, they see the baby, *Jesus*. One by one, the men fall down on their knees in front of the baby. And they worship him.

Then, one by one, the men give the gifts that they brought to the newborn king. There is gold, and there is frankincense, and there is myrrh—strange, but wonderful gifts for the new and holy king.

The men go someplace to sleep. Then, each one has a dream, the same dream. Each one hears, in his dream, “Do not go back to Jerusalem! Do not go back to Herod!” So they find another road to their own country, and, going around Jerusalem by a long way, they head home.

Joseph also has a dream

After the wise men leave, that night Joseph dreams of an angel. He is getting used to dreaming of angels. This time, the angel does not bring good news. Instead, there is troubling news, and then a command.

“Get up right now! Wake up Mary, and take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. You must go quickly! And then stay there until I tell you that you can come back to this land.”

“Why?” says Joseph. “What’s happening?”

“King Herod is about to look for your baby Jesus. He wants to kill the baby.”

Joseph hears and understands. It is still nighttime, but he must move now. So he gets up, wakes up Mary, and together they take the baby Jesus and a few things that they need, and they make their way to Egypt. They stay there until King Herod dies. Then it is safe for them to go back home.



Weaving God's Promises

WHAT'S MISSING? for Preschool, Primary

Children guess which figure went missing from the crèche scene while their eyes were closed.

Materials:

crèche with figures

Directions:

Invite the children to play the What's Missing game.

1. Have children close their eyes.
2. Remove one figure from the crèche.
3. Ask the children to open their eyes and guess which figure is missing. Let one of the children be the next person to remove a figure.



Weaving God's Promises

CLAY CRÈCHE SCENES for Primary, Elementary, Intermediate

Children make stables out of shoe boxes and figures out of clay to create a crèche scene.

Materials:

shoeboxes, 1 per child

baker's clay: 4 cups flour, 1½ cups salt, 1¾ cups water *or* Crayola's Model Magic® (good but expensive) *or* colored non-drying clay

optional: spray paint, brown

optional: hay

Directions:

Invite each child to make crèche scene. Offer these directions:

1. Use a shoebox for your stable. If desired, spray paint the box brown. Add hay for realism.
2. Mold Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the manger out of clay. You can also make an angel, shepherds and animals, if you wish.
3. After the clay dries (several days for baker's clay, one day for Model Magic®, never for non-drying clay), children may color the figures with markers.



Weaving God's Promises

STABLE SCENES for Preschool

Children make simple stable scenes with craft sticks, cotton balls and starburst sequins.

Materials:

9" x 12" purple, red or green construction paper
flesh-colored paper
craft sticks
large gold starburst sequins or star beads
cotton balls
pen
scissors
glue

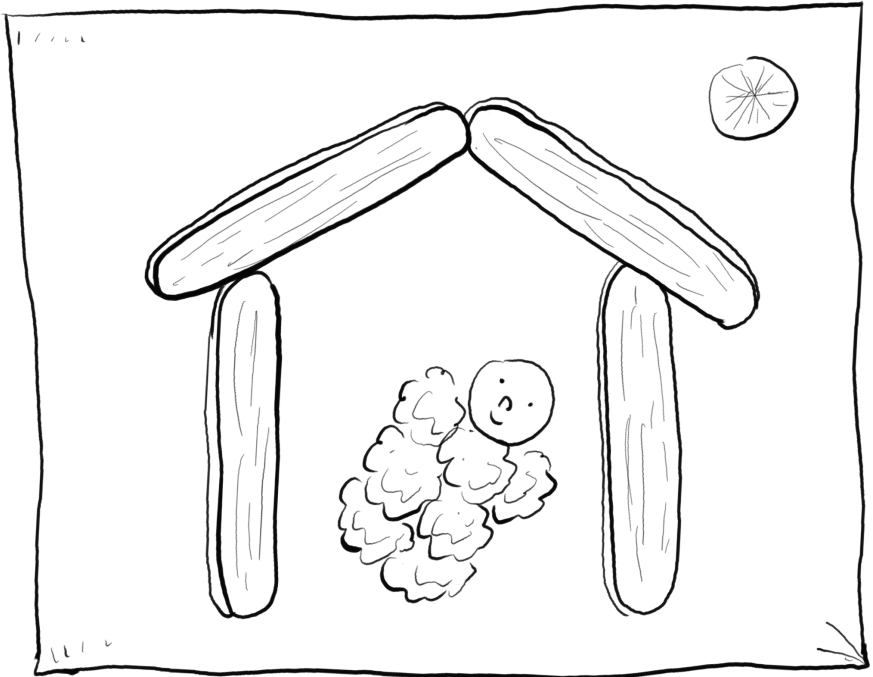
Preparation:

For each child, cut a circle from pink paper the size of a half dollar. Draw on it two eyes, a nose and a smile.

Directions:

Hand out the circles with smiley faces and invite each child to make a stable scene.

1. On construction paper, have each child glue 4 craft sticks to make the shape of a stable, then glue the face and a few fluffed cotton balls for swaddling clothes inside the stable. (See picture.)
2. Give each child a sequin to glue above the stable for the star.





Weaving God's Promises

GOOD-DEED MANGERS for Preschool, Primary, Elementary

Children make matchbox mangers in which they place pieces of yarn each day for every good deed they do. By Christmas Eve their mangers should be full and ready for the baby Jesus.

Materials:

- small boxes (large kitchen matchboxes work well)
- brown construction paper
- pieces of yellow yarn
- plastic babies from a craft store
- small pieces of flannel
- small plastic bags
- tape or glue
- Note to Parents* (p. 16)
- scissors

Preparation:

Make a copy of the *Note to Parents* for each child. Cut the brown paper into strips long enough to wrap around the small boxes or into strips that fit the individual sides of the boxes.

Directions:

Set out the materials and invite each child to make a good-deed manger. Help the younger children as needed.

1. Explain to the children what they are making and what the note says.
2. Have the children cover the sides of their boxes with brown paper to make mangers.
3. Help each child pack a plastic bag to take home. Each bag should contain:
 - a piece of flannel
 - a handful of yarn pieces
 - a *Note to Parents*
 - a plastic baby
 - a manger

Note to Parents

Dear Parent:

This is a good-deed manger.

For each good deed your child does, please allow him or her to place one piece of yarn in the manger. By Christmas Eve, the manger should be full and the baby may be wrapped in the small piece of flannel and placed in the manger.

Thank you.

Note to Parents

Dear Parent:

This is a good-deed manger.

For each good deed your child does, please allow him or her to place one piece of yarn in the manger. By Christmas Eve, the manger should be full and the baby may be wrapped in the small piece of flannel and placed in the manger.

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Thank you.

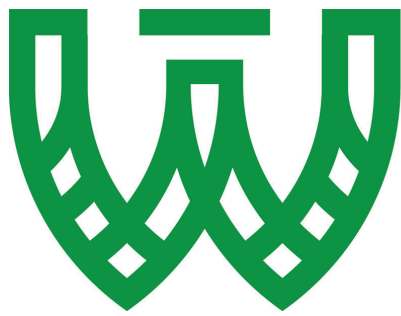
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Thank you.



Weaving God's Promises

CHRISTMAS STORY PIECES for Primary, Elementary

Children make magnets out of old Christmas cards.

Materials:

- lots of old Christmas cards
- scissors
- stick-on magnetic tape

Directions:

Invite each child to make Christmas magnets. Give the children these directions:

1. Look through the Christmas cards to find nice large pictures of all the people and animals that were part of the Christmas story. You will need pictures of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, plus the shepherds, angels, wise men, sheep, camels and whatever other animals you would like to include.
2. Carefully cut out each picture and stick a small piece of magnetic tape on the back.



Weaving God's Promises

THREE WISE MEN for Preschool, Primary

Children color the costumes of the Wise Men then glue them onto tubes so they will stand.

Materials:

Wisemen Patterns (pp. 19-20)
crayons
glitter
toilet paper tubes
scissors
glue

Preparation:

Copy the patterns of the *Wisemen Patterns* for each child.

Directions:

Hand out the *Wisemen Patterns* and invite each child to make three Wise Men. Help the younger children as needed. Offer these directions:

1. Cut out the Wise Men figures and do your best coloring to decorate their costumes. Add glitter if you want.
2. Spread the figures with glue and press them around the cardboard tubes.

WISEMEN PATTERN 1



WISEMEN PATTERN 2



WISEMEN PATTERN 3





Weaving God's Promises

STARS OF BETHLEHEM for Preschool, Primary

Children decorate stars with glitter and other shiny materials.

Materials:

Star Pattern (p. 23)

markers, glitter and other shiny, decorative materials

balloon sticks

streamers

poster board or other stiff paper

scissors

optional: glow-in-the-dark paint

Preparation:

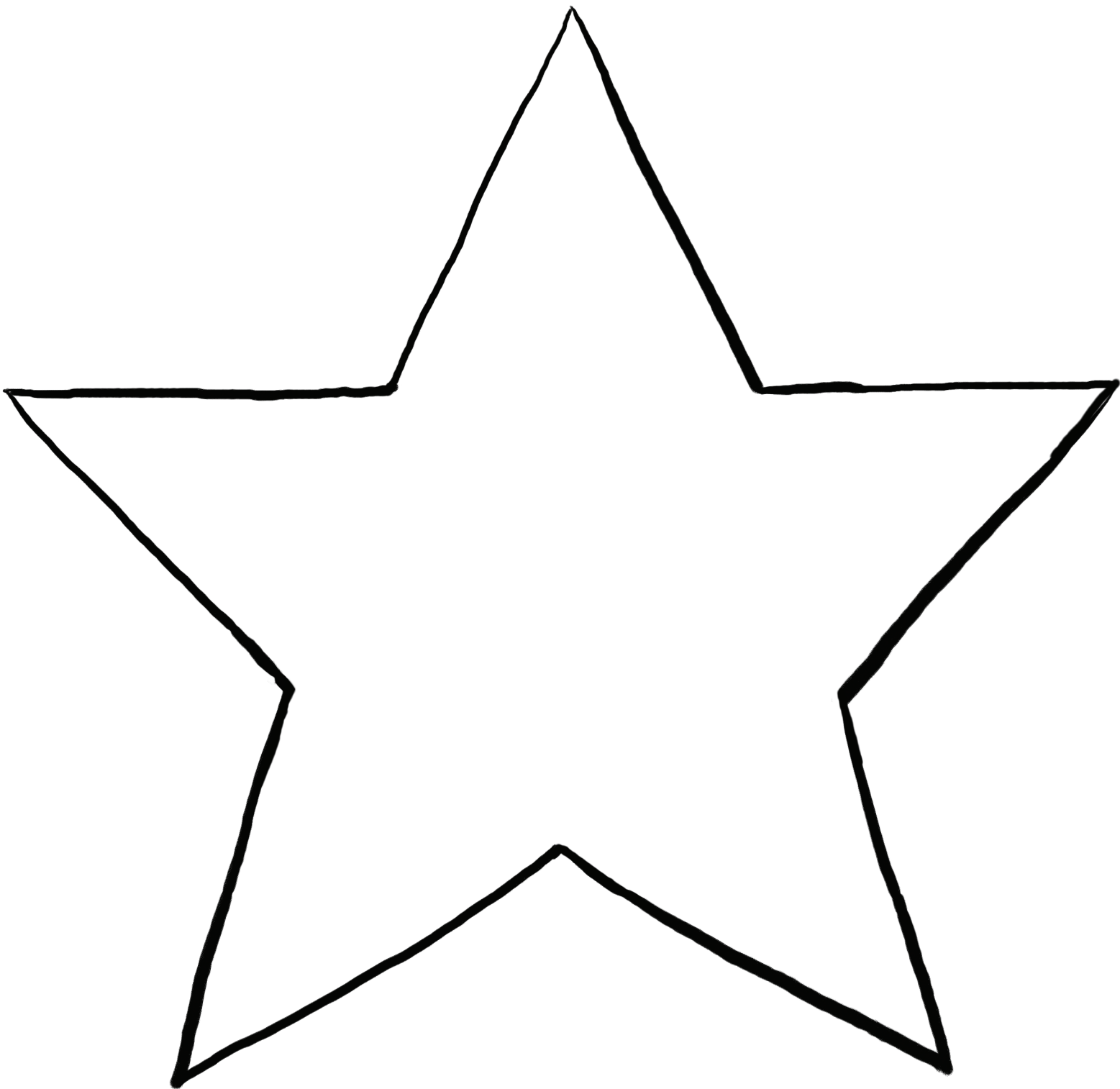
Make copies of the *Star Pattern* and cut them out.

Directions:

Distribute the *Star Patterns* and invite each child to make a star of Bethlehem. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Trace around your *Star Pattern* onto poster board or stiff paper and cut it out.
2. Decorate the star with markers, glitter, etc. Paint it with glow-in-the-dark paint (if available) to make the star glow at night.
3. Staple streamers to your star.
4. Tape the star to a stick.

STAR PATTERN





Weaving God's Promises

PIPE CLEANER ORNAMENTS for Elementary

Children bend sparkly pipe cleaners into Christmas shapes to make ornaments.

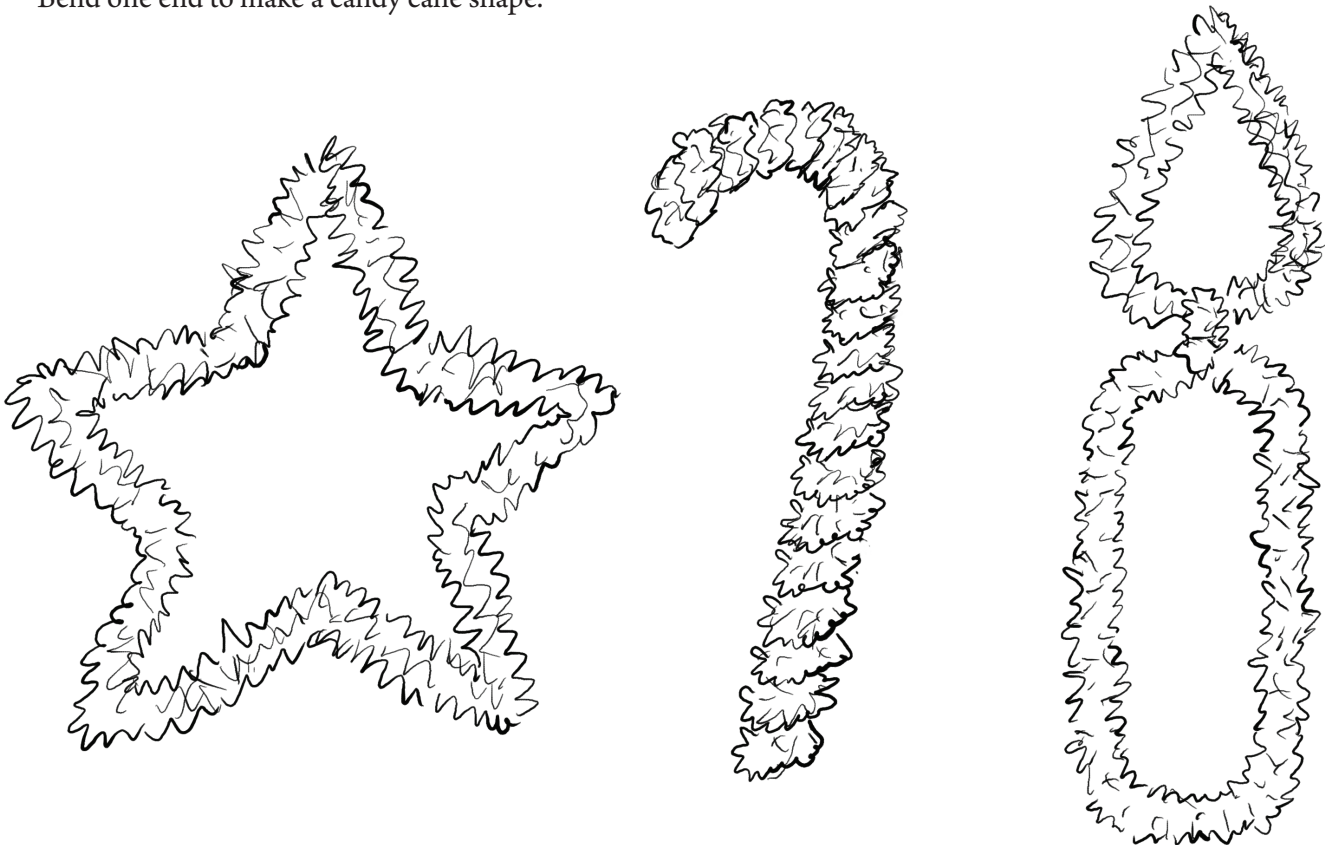
Materials:

sparkly pipe cleaners (gold, silver and other assorted colors)

Directions:

Invite each child to make a Christmas ornament. Give the children these directions:

1. *To make a star:* Bend a pipe cleaner into 5 zigzags and join the ends together.
2. *To make a candle:* Shape a flame with a gold pipe cleaner. Shape a candle in purple, twisting the pipe cleaner ends into a wick. Bend the wick around the flame to hold it in place.
3. *To make a candy cane:* Twist a white and red pipe cleaner around each other to make one thick spiral stick. Bend one end to make a candy cane shape.





Weaving God's Promises

GINGERBREAD NATIVITY SCENES

for Preschool, Primary, Elementary, Intermediate

Children make nativity scenes out of graham crackers, candies, Bugles® snack crackers and fruit rolls. Everybody likes this craft, even older children.

Materials:

- graham crackers
- small empty milk cartons (½ pint)
- glue gun (for advance preparation by adults)
- scissors
- paper plates
- various colorful candies: ribbon candy, jelly beans, rope licorice, M&Ms, etc.
- Bugles® snack chips or other food that can be used for people
- fruit rolls
- white frosting
- plastic knives
- small bowls for frosting

Preparation:

Cut the milk cartons so that there are three sides plus a floor; a roof is optional. Use a glue gun to glue graham crackers to the sides and top, if they have roofs. (You may use white frosting instead, but the stable will not be as sturdy.) These are the stables. Make one for each child. Put each stable on a paper plate.

Directions:

Set out small bowls with white frosting to use as glue and plastic knives to spread it with. Hand out the stables, then invite each child to make a nativity scene with the foods. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Make figures with Bugles® snack chips, using fruit rolls for their clothing. “Glue” on candies to individualize their characters.
2. Create animals and decorate the stable with the candies and other food, using frosting to glue pieces together. Use your imagination!



Weaving God's Promises

NATIVITY MOBILES

for Elementary, Intermediate

Children create colorful nativity mobiles using black paper with tissue paper inserts.

Materials

black construction paper or poster board
colorful tissue paper or cellophane
scissors
yarn
hole punch
light colored pencils
pencils
glue
Nativity Patterns (p. 27)

Preparation:

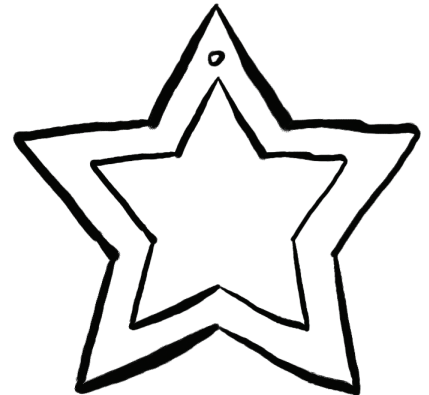
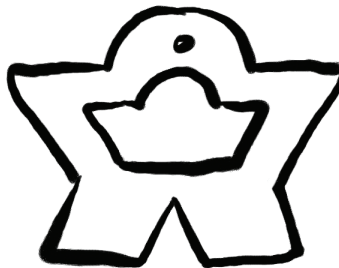
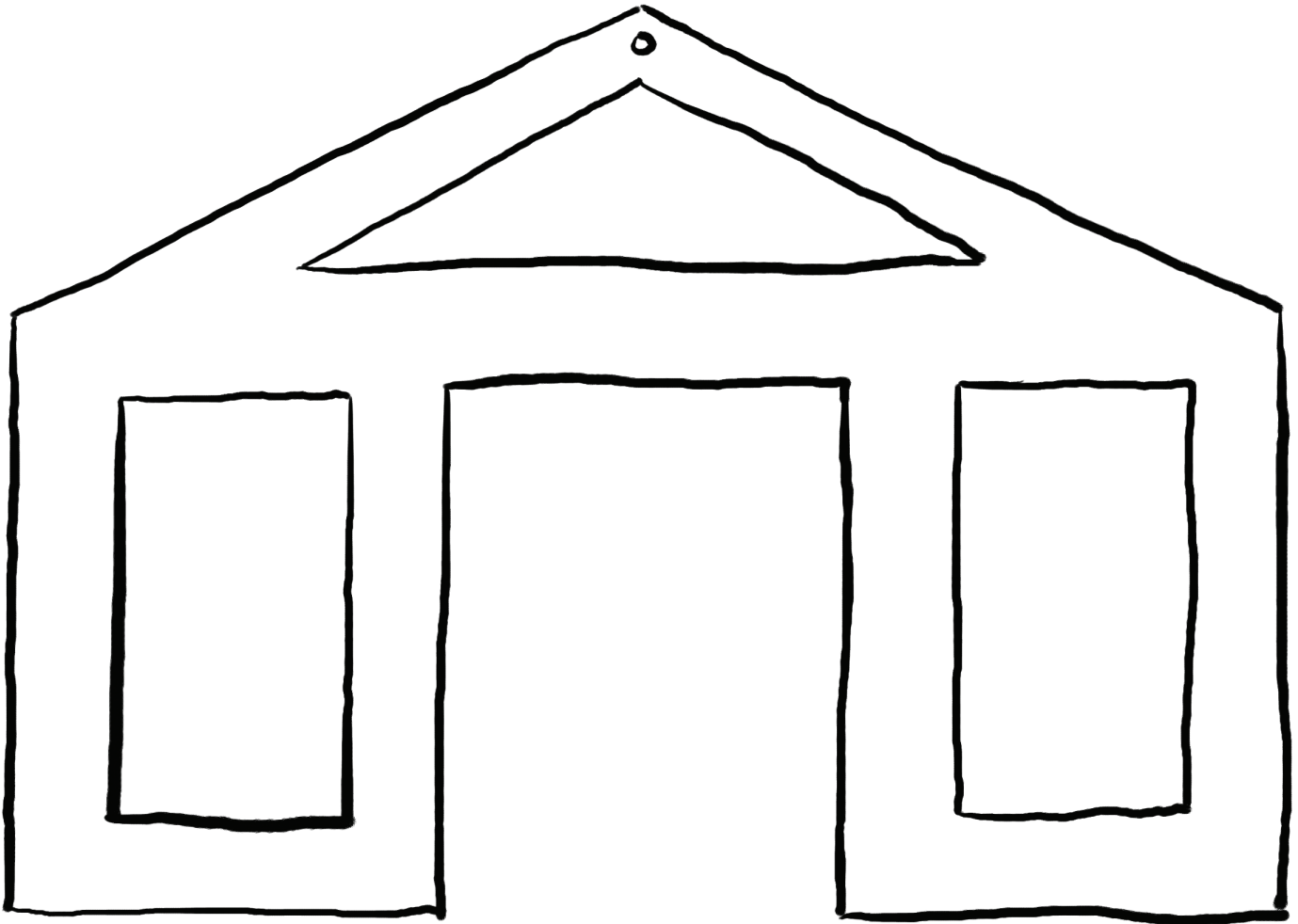
Make a copy of the *Nativity Patterns* for each child.

Directions:

Distribute the *Nativity Patterns* and invite each child to make a nativity mobile. Give the children these directions:

1. Cut out the shapes. Also, carefully cut out the shapes inside the shapes (the two rectangles and the triangle).
2. With the light colored pencils trace the patterns (including the inside shapes) onto black paper and cut them out.
3. Trace the inside shapes onto colored tissue paper or cellophane. Add an extra ½" around the edges, then cut out.
4. Glue the colored tissue over the black paper shapes to cover the cut-out areas.
5. Punch a hole at the top of each black paper piece. Thread yarn through the holes and connect the pieces together to make a mobile.

NATIVITY PATTERNS





Weaving God's Promises

GLISTENING CHRISTMAS STARS for Intermediate

Children shape pipe cleaners into stars and drop them into jars of hot water and borax to create glistening Christmas stars.

Materials:

- pipe cleaners
- large mouth clear jar
- food coloring
- string
- pencils
- borax
- hot water
- tablespoon
- craft sticks or straws for stirring
- scissors

Directions:

Invite each child to make a Christmas star that glistens. Give the children these directions:

1. Bend a pipe cleaner into the shape of a star. Make sure it will go into the jar without touching the sides.
2. Cut a length of string and tie one end to a pencil. Tie the other end to the star. Check to make sure that the star will hang in the jar without touching the bottom or the sides when you rest the pencil across the top of the jar. Then take out the star.
3. Pour hot tap water into the jar. Add about 3 tablespoons borax per cup of water.
4. Stir in a little food coloring.
5. Holding the pencil, drop the star into the water and rest the pencil on the lip of the jar.
6. Let the star sit. It will grow as the water cools and evaporates.
7. Take out the star and let it air dry.

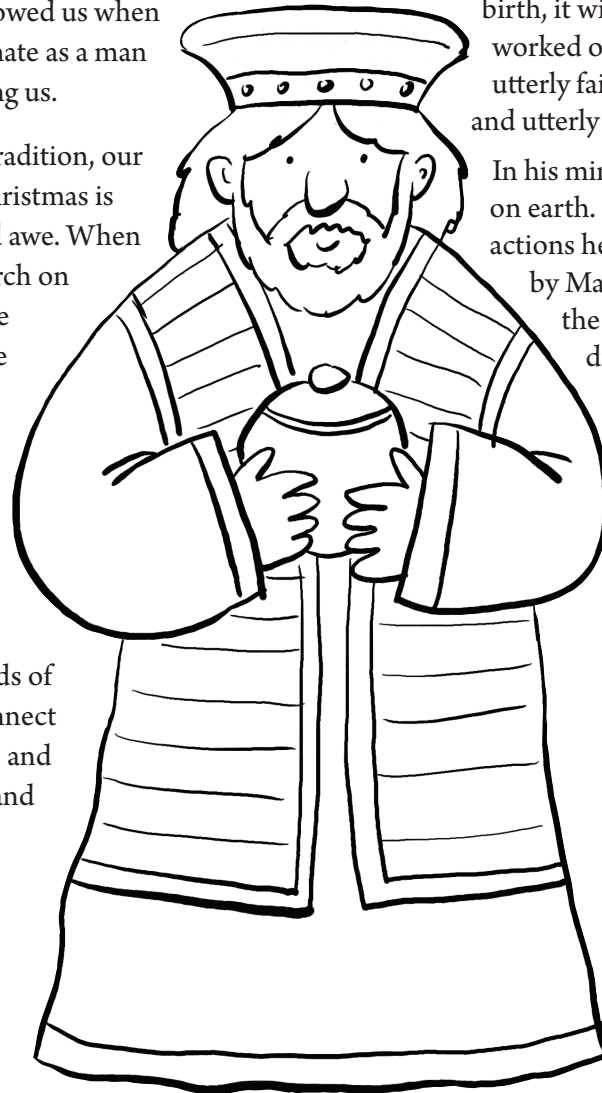
LESSON 16: JESUS IS BORN



We Believe . . .

We Episcopalians have a very special reverence for the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ—God made human, divine made flesh, heaven come down to earth. It is the birth of Jesus that tells us about the love that God showed us when he became incarnate as a man and walked among us.

In the Anglican tradition, our celebration of Christmas is full of beauty and awe. When you come to church on Christmas Eve, be sure to look at the liturgical color, the rich fabrics that symbolize the kingship of Christ, the Eucharist that foreshadows his sacrifice, the words of scripture that connect God's story to us, and the music of joy and praise to God.



Today's Story:



Matthew 1-2

As Matthew will say many times in his gospel, the prophets had spoken of salvation for God's people, and Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies. In Jesus, God's will for humanity is revealed and lived out. In Jesus—fully human and fully God—humanity is finally reconciled with God.

Although Matthew makes clear that all of the signs of Jesus' divinity are present at his birth, it will be in Jesus' life and ministry that we will truly see our salvation worked out in him. Jesus—Immanuel, God with us—lives a life that is utterly faithful to God's will, utterly obedient to God's mission on earth, and utterly devoted to bringing God's reign to God's people on earth.

In his ministry, Matthew's Jesus proclaims the kingdom (reign) of God on earth. "The kingdom of God is among you!" And in his very life and actions he inaugurates that reign. The beginning of the reign of God is seen by Matthew as foreshadowed in the wondrous events that surround the birth of Jesus. Even at his birth—appropriately a mingling of the divine and the earthly, the lowly and the noble—there are kings present. Later we will learn, as will the disciples and the people, that the true King is this baby in the manger.



Words of Faith

Wise men—the kings or astrologers from the East who follow the star to see Jesus

King—though born a helpless baby, Jesus is really our King

Worship—to honor and praise; what the wise men did when they visited Jesus

With the birth of Jesus the Son of God, God's Story becomes our story.

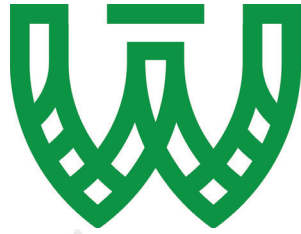


Sharing

There are many children's books about the birth of Jesus. You may read today's story from one of these or from a children's Bible. Best yet, tell the story in your own words. If you have a family manger scene, use it to illustrate the story.

This story is full of innocence and mystery, the sacred and the ordinary, all combined into one story. There will be no need to unravel the meaning of this story for the children. The mystery stays with us even as we grow old. God's infinite power is never harnessed in our minds.

Reinforce the idea that Jesus has come to be with us and be one of us, a cause for deep joy and real celebration.



Weaving God's Promises



This Week at Home

- **Celebrate Christmas in song.** Bring together hymnals or songbooks with Christmas songs. Share your favorites. Sing them together. Improvise rhythm instruments using found objects around the house. Turn your carol sing into a joyful noise!
- **Make a family crèche set.** You can do so using self-hardening modeling clay. Let each family member pick one or more people and one or more animals to create. Once the figures have dried, use them to tell the Christmas story.
- **Bake cut-out Christmas cookies together,** using cookie cutters that relate to the Christmas story, like stars and animals that might be found in the stable. As you decorate the cookies, share your favorite stories about Christmas. Share your cookies with family, friends, neighbors and people who might be feeling sad or lonely during the holidays.
- **Experience this creative way to retell the Christmas story:** Hand each family member one or more figures from your home crèche set, including the animals. Invite each person to speak as that figure, telling their part of the Christmas story, for example, "I'm Nango, the donkey, and I carried Mary to Bethlehem. It was long, tiring trip, 'cause she was heavy." Here the story from new perspectives!
- **Watch A Charlie Brown Christmas together.** This timeless classic television special reflects on the true meaning of Christmas, and includes Linus's telling of the Christmas story from the gospels. You'll find this clip on YouTube by following this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQeKdvXliIU>. "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown!"
- **Share favorite Christmas memories** while seated around the Christmas tree or in front of the fireplace. Pop corn, make hot chocolate and gather to recall favorite Christmases past and your hopes for future Christmases. Take turns completing this simple prayer: "Dear God, thank you for the Christmas gift of..."



Household Prayer

God, we wait and wait for Christmas to come, with colorful lights and trees and goodies and gifts to mark the time. But we thank you for the greatest gift of all, Jesus your Son, whose birth we celebrate at Christmastime. Thank you, thank you, thank you, God and Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

