



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 16 **JESUS IS BORN**

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

At the beginning of his gospel, 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 1–2

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Year A: First Sunday of Advent, Fourth Sunday of Advent, Second Sunday after Christmas, and Day of Epiphany

Year B: Second Sunday after Christmas and Day of Epiphany

Year C: Second Sunday after Christmas and Day of Epiphany

KEY CONCEPTS

- Birth of Jesus
- God-as-Man
- Joy and Praise



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.



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to "check in" with group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- Advent wreath with Advent candles or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather together for a simple opening prayer. If you are using an Advent wreath, light the appropriate number of Advent candles. Invite one member to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room.)

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- 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

Set the scene:

If the group made crèches in a prior lesson, have them on display in the meeting space when they come in *or* bring in and display a nativity scene of your own.

Tell the story in your own words. 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 group. 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 youth hear and absorb the story. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*
- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a group member to act as *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- What about the birth of Jesus fills you with joy?
- What do you have to offer Jesus as a gift (a gift of yourself)?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in the participants' own words.



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say this traditional Irish Christmas blessing:

- The light of the Christmas star to you,
The warmth of home and hearth to you,
The cheer and good will of friends to you,
The hope of a childlike heart to you,
The joy of a thousand angels to you,
The love of the Son and God's peace to you.

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

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

The youth respond:

- Thanks be to God.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

Joseph was told that Jesus would be called "Emmanuel" or "God with us". Jesus was God on Earth, come

to show God's people what it means to be God's Beloved Community. King Herod said that Jesus was the new "King of the Jews".

Jesus was a leader amongst the Jews, but he didn't act like what many thought of as a King. Jesus led by example, through loving and caring for others, through calling out injustice, and trying to bring about God's Beloved Community.

- What makes someone a "king"?
- What traits do you think a "king" should have?
- What is more important, the crown someone wears or how they treat those around them?



Weaving God's Promises

AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF . . .

Group members imagine and express several people's reactions to the birth of Jesus...including theirs!

Materials:

"As Seen Through the Eyes Of" worksheet (p. 7), 1 per participant
pens and pencils
Bibles

Preparation:

Make copies of the worksheet (p. 7).

Have Bibles available in case the members need to refer back to today's readings from Matthew.

Directions:

1. Distribute copies of the worksheet.
2. Explain to participants they may work individually or in pairs.
3. Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.
4. Regather and invite volunteers to share their thoughts.



Weaving God's Promises

AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF ...

As you can imagine, there were many different reactions to the birth of Jesus: *surprise, joy, fear*, etc. Think about the people below felt about Jesus' birth and how it might affect their lives. Use your imagination! Write their responses as you think they might have spoken them *or* try using more modern terminology.

JESUS IS BORN!!!!!!

	So, how do I feel?	How will this affect my life?
Mary		
Joseph		
Shepherds		
King Herod		
Wise Men		
<i>Me!</i>		



Weaving God's Promises

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Group members interview church members of all ages about their attitudes toward Christmas. In addition, they will take photos of the interviewees. The answers and pictures will then be on display for all to enjoy.

Note: This activity will take at least two sessions.

Materials:

cell phone camera(s) and photo printer(s)

notepads

pens and pencils

index cards

optional: stickers, markers, glue, glitter and other accessories for decorating comment cards

Preparation:

You may choose to prepare for this activity a week or two in advance by asking volunteers to come to your class for their interviews at a specific date and time; *or*

Arrange for your group to visit other classes to conduct their interviews. Limit the questions to two at the most. Send one photographer and one reporter to each room. If the class is large, have them work in teams; *or*

Be sure to interview adults for this project. Coffee time is a good opportunity to talk with people for a few minutes. Or you may get permission to interview adults in place of their usual adult-education gathering that day.

Directions:

1. Once the “teams” have been made, send the group members on their assignments (unless the interviewees are coming to them, in which case you will need more than one meeting place).
2. Tell the reporters to ask 2 questions:
 - What is your name?
 - What does Christmas mean to you?
3. Even if you know the interviewee, it’s a good idea for the reporter to write down the person’s name (spelled correctly) in addition to their comments.
4. Once the interviews are finished, return to the group’s meeting place. There, they should copy the comments onto index cards and decorate them for display (if desired).
5. In the meantime, have some participants load and print the photos.
6. Post the photos and matching comment cards on a bulletin board that all will see.



Weaving God's Promises

WE ARE FAMILY: GENEALOGY

In Matthew 1:1-17, we read of Jesus' family tree. Of course, it is quite long and complicated—going back 42 generations! For this activity, group members fill in the roots and shoots of their own family trees (to the best of their knowledge).

Note: Keep in mind that some students may be from joined or even divorced families. Some students may also be adopted. If they are uncomfortable with this activity, let them choose from the other activities.

Materials:

- copies of the three “Family Tree Forms” (pp. 10-12)
- pens and pencils
- markers, colored pencils

Preparation:

Make multiple copies of the “Family Tree Forms” (pp. 11-12); participants are likely to use more than one.

Fill in your own Family Tree Form and post it as an example.

Consider inviting other family members to join in this exercise.

Directions to participants:

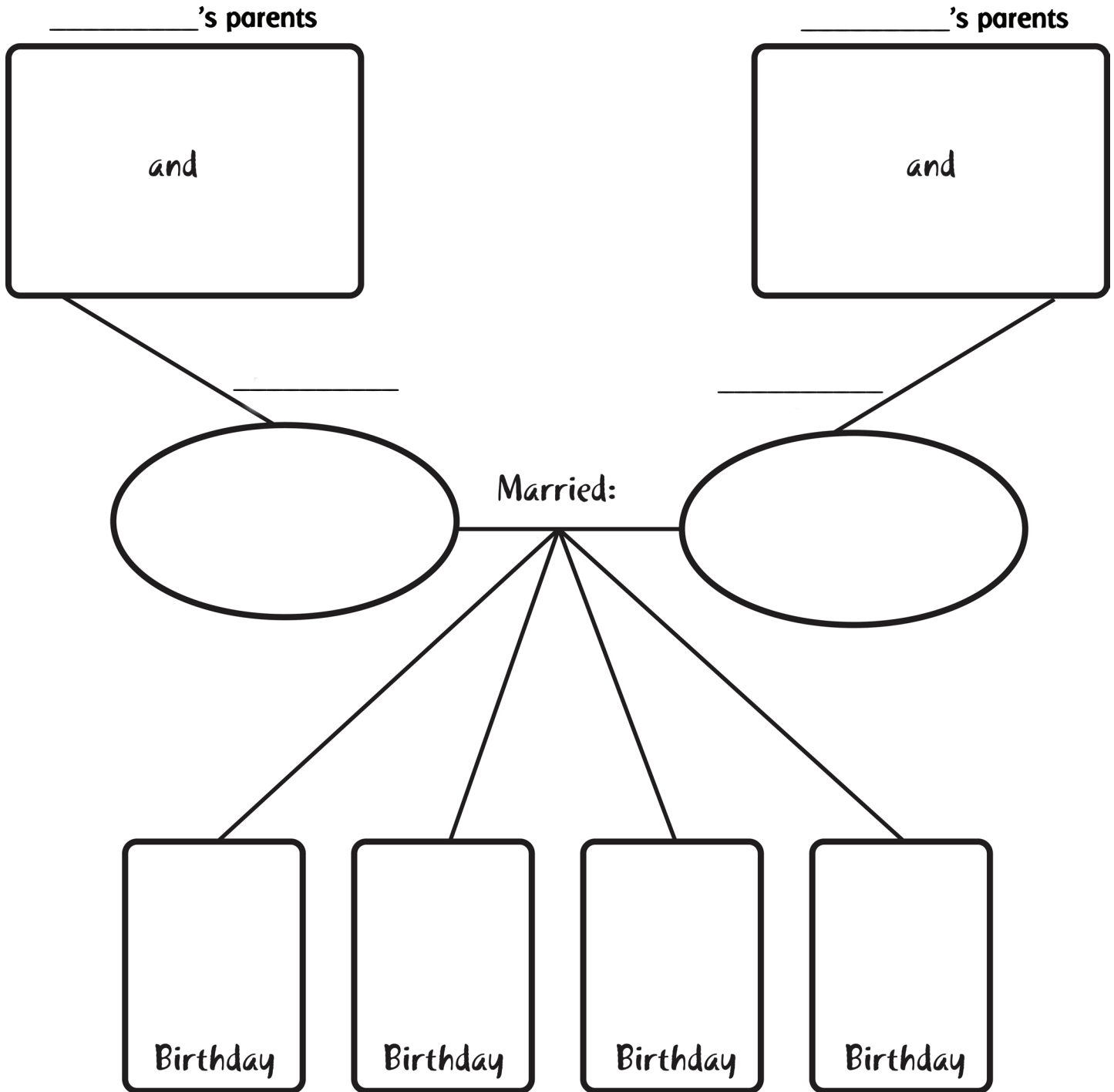
1. Fill in your 3-generation family tree.
2. Then, if you can, fill in a more detailed tree for each parent's side of the family.
3. When you have finished your trees, fill in the title space and lightly draw a tree in the background.

Close:

- Display the family trees on your group's bulletin board.

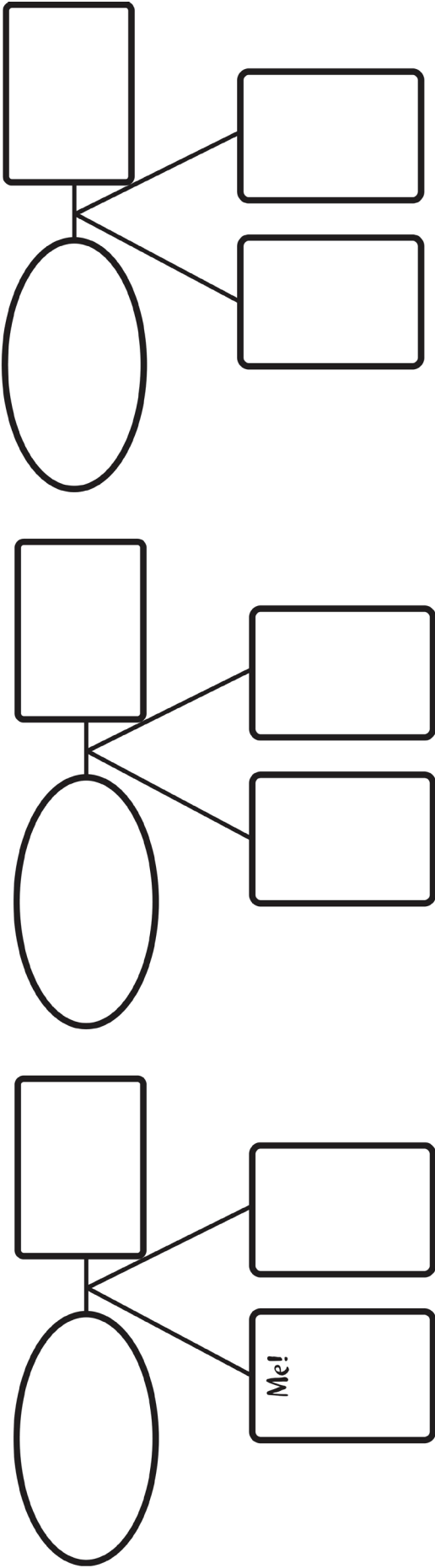
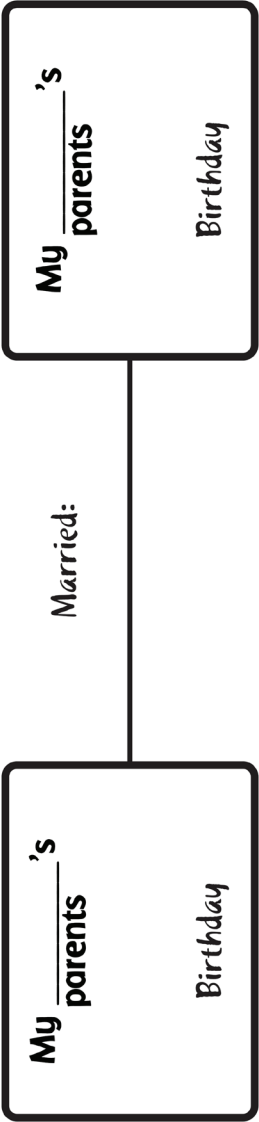
The _____ Family Tree

3 GENERATIONS



Add more squares for more siblings!

_____ 's parents
Grandparents, siblings and their children



ADD MORE SHAPES FOR ADDITIONAL AUNTS, UNCLES, SIBLINGS AND COUSINS!



Weaving God's Promises

ADVENT WREATHS

Group members make Advent wreaths use in their homes.

Note: This activity should be scheduled at the beginning of Advent.

Materials:

- 1½" pink candle
- 3½" purple/blue candles
- 4 or 5 candle holders (optional if using Styrofoam® rings)
- circular Styrofoam® rings (at least 10" in diameter)
- florist or other sturdy wire
- wire cutters
- fresh pine, fir, cedar or spruce boughs
- optional:* holly, pine cones, red berries for embellishments
- clippers (for tree boughs)
- optional:* hot glue gun and glue sticks
- copies of the "Advent Wreath Directions" (p. 14)

Preparation:

It would be best to engage some volunteers the day before the group meets to gather the tree boughs. If time permits, cut them into manageable sizes.

Styrofoam rings can be purchased at any craft store or in larger department stores.

Directions to participants:

1. Space the candles evenly so that one is standing in each quarter of the circle. Make a hole in which to stand each candle securely. Put the candles aside.
2. Cut pieces of boughs so that they can easily be manipulated and are not too big for the form.
3. Cut pieces of wire (about 6" in length) and wrap around the end of the bough; keep about 2" of the wire unwound.
4. Secure the bough to the form by pressing the wire into the Styrofoam.
5. Continue until the entire form is covered with branches. Locate the holes for the candles, and place the candles carefully.
6. Add sprigs of holly and/or pinecones and berries for decoration. Secure with hot glue.
7. The white candle will go in the center of the ring on Christmas Eve.
8. Before group members leave, give each of them a copy of the Advent Wreath Directions.

ADVENT WREATH DIRECTIONS

To use the Advent wreath at home, gather with your family on each of the four Sunday's of the season. Light a candle on each Sunday and say the prayer suggested below:

DAY	COLOR	THEME	READING
1ST Sunday	purple/blue (first candle)	hope	Isaiah 60:2-3
2nd Sunday	purple/blue (second candle)	love	Mark 1:1-3
3rd Sunday	pink	Mary/joy	Luke 1:46-48
4th Sunday	purple/blue (third candle)	peace	Isaiah 9:6
Christmas Day	white	Christmas	Isaiah 9:1-7

Important notes:

- Keep the wreath moist so it stays fresh (a spray bottle filled with water will help).
- Never leave burning candles unattended.



Weaving God's Promises

BE AN ANGEL: REACHING OUT TO THE ELDERLY

Group members design and make cards to send to the residents of local nursing homes or assisted living facilities. This activity could take two sessions to complete.

Materials:

- sheets of card stock in assorted colors
- pens, pencils, markers
- stickers, glitter, yarn and other accessories for embellishment
- glue
- scissors
- list of recipients' names
- digital camera and photo printer, with 4" x 6" photo paper (if possible)
- candy canes, cookies or other treats to accompany cards

Preparation:

Contact local nursing homes and assisted living facilities to get the names of residents who might enjoy receiving cards. It is possible that their names will not be given; in that event, find out how many residents there are so that you have enough cards to distribute.

As soon as the group gathers, take a group photo for the cards. Print out as many copies as are necessary.

Directions:

1. Fold a piece of card stock in half.
2. Glue a photo onto the front of the card. Decorate around the photo in the spirit of the Christmas season *or* design a cover of your own and place the photo inside the card.
3. On the inside of the card, write your message. Use the blessing that you opened with (see below) or write a message of your own.
4. On the inside top section of the card, have every member of the group sign.

The light of the Christmas star to you,
The warmth of home and hearth to you,
The cheer and good will of friends to you,
The hope of a childlike heart to you,
The joy of a thousand angels to you,

The love of the Son and God's peace to you.

Close:

- Deliver the cards to the residence and spend a few minutes visiting with each resident.
- Give a candy cane or other treat along with the card.