

Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Jesus' Birth – Luke 2:1-20

Prepare to Wonder

Faith Word: ADVENT

The time of waiting and preparing for the birth of Jesus is almost over. The Advent season will soon come to a close with the birth of the baby Jesus, in a manger in Bethlehem.

The second chapter of Luke is a familiar one to most of us. Caesar Augustus dominated the Roman Empire and ordered everyone to travel to their hometowns to be registered. The registration of each person was to ensure that taxes were paid by everyone in the empire. Since Joseph was from the house of David, Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem, even though Mary was about to give birth.

Jesus was born in humble circumstances in Bethlehem. Travelers during this time often stayed in a guestroom in the home of a family they may not know. Since so many people were in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph could not find a guestroom to stay in. A manger filled with straw was Jesus' first bed. A manger is simply the place where the family's stock was fed.

Shepherds were quietly tending their sheep, when the angelic pronouncement that a savior had been born in Bethlehem. The surprise they felt at one angel's pronouncement must have turned to awe when the entire sky was filled with a heavenly host. The shepherds quickly went to find the baby and confirm what the angels had announced. When they found the baby in the manger, they hurried off to tell others of the holy birth. Mary was left to remember the events and to consider them carefully. I wonder what she must have been thinking.

Spiritual Practice for Adults

As you light the candles in the Advent wreath this week, take time to remember the hope, love, and joy you have felt this season. The fourth candle in the Advent wreath is the candle of Peace. Jesus was born to bring peace to the world, to give us hope of a better future, to celebrate the big and small things joyfully, and to share God's love with all people. Reflect on these things as you light a candle and pray.

Come Together

Come Together

Supplies: *Class Pack, Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook, Wonder Box, purple cloth, battery-operated candle, baby Jesus figure*

Prepare Ahead: *Set up a Wonder Table (see p. 3) with a purple cloth, battery-operated candle, and a Wonder Box (see p. 3). Display the Unit 1 Bible Verse Poster (Class Pack—pp. 10 & 15) and Faith Word Poster (Class Pack—p. 22). Place the baby Jesus figure inside the Wonder Box.*

- Point to the Unit 1 Faith Word Poster (Class Pack—p. 22), and invite the children to wonder about what the word *Advent* means.
- Invite the kids to join you in a circle.

SAY: This month we are talking about stories at the beginning of Jesus' life. Our story today is about the angels announcing the birth of Jesus to the shepherds.

- In this curriculum, we recommend reading stories from the *Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook*. Allow an elementary-age child to read the stories, "Jesus Brings Joy" (pp. 198–9) and "Joyous News" (pp. 200–1), from the storybook.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for the birth of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus' Birth – Preschool

Supplies: *Reproducible Kids' Book, crayons*

Prepare Ahead: *Photocopy "Jesus' Birth" (Reproducible 3A) for each child.*

- Invite the preschoolers to use crayons to color the picture.

SAY: It was time for Jesus to be born! What holiday do we celebrate Jesus' birth?

Shepherds' Maze – Younger Elementary

Supplies: *Reproducible Kids' Book, crayons*

Prepare: *Photocopy "Shepherds' Maze" (Reproducible 3B) for each child.*

SAY: Help the shepherds find their way to meet baby Jesus! Then color the picture.

- Invite the kids to work out the solution to the maze.
- Encourage the kids to color the picture.

ASK: Why do you think the shepherds went to find baby Jesus and his family?

Nativity Crossword – Older Elementary

Supplies: CEB Bible, Reproducible Kids' Book, pencils or markers

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Nativity Crossword" (Reproducible 3C) for each child.

- Hand out a copy of "Nativity Crossword" to each child.

SAY: Today's Bible story tells us about Jesus being born. Solve the crossword puzzle using the clues on the page.

- Invite the kids to use the clues to fill in the crossword puzzle. You may want the kids to use Luke 2 in a *Common English Bible* to help solve the puzzle.
- Have the kids work together, if you wish.

ASK: What answers did you find to solve the puzzle?

Pets Survey – All Ages

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book, clipboards, pencils

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Pets Survey" (Reproducible 3D) for each kid.

- Hand out a copy of "Pets Survey" to each child, along with clipboards if available. Hand out pencils to the kids too.

SAY: Use this sheet to find out about the pets your classmates might have.

- Preschoolers may need some help writing their answers. Pair elementary kids with preschoolers. Invite the pairs to interview each other about pets they may have. Instruct the older kids to help write down answers for the preschoolers.
- Bring the class back together. Lead a discussion about the activity.

ASK: What did you learn about the pets your classmates may have?

- Invite the kids to share what they learned.

SAY: In today's Bible story, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. There was a census being taken. A census is like this activity. During a census, people are asked about the people in a family, their names, and other information. During the census, Jesus was born.

Wonder Time

Interactive Bible Story

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Jesus' Birth" (Reproducible 3F) for each child.

- Invite several readers to take turns reading the story one section at a time.

ASK: How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when the shepherds arrived?

Share a Story

Supplies: Celebrate Wonder DVD, Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook, TV, DVD player

- Invite the children to join you, sitting in a circle on the floor.
- Watch the Session 3 video (Celebrate Wonder DVD).

Wonder with Me

Supplies: Class Pack, Wonder Box, scissors

Prepare Ahead: Lay out the Wonder Story Mat for Unit 1 (Class Pack—pp. 7 & 18).

Cut out the remaining two Bible story figures (Class Pack—p. 6), if not done already.

- Place the Wonder Box on the Unit 1 Wonder Story Mat.
- Show the children the Unit 1 Faith Word Poster (Class Pack—p. 22).

SAY: Today's faith word is *Advent*. Advent is a time we wait and prepare for the birth of Jesus.

- Hold up the communication device figures.

ASK: When we are waiting and preparing for the birth of Jesus, we can share the story of Christmas with others. Remember the angel shared with Mary, Mary shared with Elizabeth, the angel shared with the shepherds, and the shepherds shared with everyone they met. There are lots of ways to share good news.

WONDER together:

- How else can we share good news today?
 - Who shares the stories of baby Jesus with you?
 - What is your favorite way to share good news?
- Place the smartwatch figure on its matching shadow on the Wonder Story Mat.

- Show and read the text messages to the kids.
- Open the Wonder Box to reveal the baby Jesus figure.

WONDER: I wonder what we will do this week as we wait during the final days of Advent until Christmas.

Experience Wonder

Shepherds' Game

Supplies: wool dryer balls or small balls (at least one for each kid in your class), two laundry baskets, masking tape

Prepare Ahead: Turn your classroom into a small "soccer field" in the following way. Use masking tape to mark a line dividing the classroom in half. Place one laundry basket at one end of the classroom. Place the other laundry basket at the other end of the classroom.

- Put the wool dryer balls (or other small balls) on the floor.
- **SAY:** Some shepherds were invited to meet baby Jesus and his family. Shepherds were people who took care of sheep. They had to take them out to graze in the fields, then bring them back home. In this game, our dryer balls are the sheep! Your team must work to herd as many sheep into your pen (*laundry basket*) as you can.
- Divide the class into teams. You can play this game a variety of ways, but the easiest is to put an equal number of dryer balls on each side of the line. Then teams must lightly kick their dryer balls into the laundry basket on the opposite side of the room. The first team to put all of the dryer balls in their goal wins.
- Another more competitive version would be to have fewer dryer balls on the "field" and have the teams compete to put all the dryer balls into their goal.
- Play multiple rounds as time allows.

Examine the Bible Verse

SAY: Our Unit 1 Bible verse is Luke 2:11. Find it in your Bibles.

ASK: Is the Book of Luke in the Old or New Testament? (*New*) Where is Luke located in the New Testament? (*third book*) In what chapter of Luke is our verse located? (*2*) What is the verse number? (*11*)

SAY: Our Bible verse tells us about the good news of Jesus' birth.

- Gather the kids around the Bible Verse Poster (Class Pack—pp. 10 & 15). Read it together.

Peaceful Place

Supplies: Leader Guide—p. 113, Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook, book: “Room for a Little One: A Christmas Tale” by Martin Waddell, child-friendly Advent wreath, Nativity set, music player with headphones and Christmas music playlist, card-making supplies, crayons or markers

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy the Unit 1 Faith Word coloring sheet (Leader Guide—p. 113) for each child.

- Assist the children, as needed, as they interact with the items provided.
- Invite the children to draw a picture of today’s story.
- Have each child color the Faith Word coloring sheet.

Tip: All of the supplies/activities suggested for the Peaceful Place are optional.

Go in Peace

Spiritual Practice – Exploring Advent Through Presence

SAY: A spiritual practice is something we do to help us be present with God. Advent is a time we can be present with God as we wait and prepare for the birth of Jesus.

- Guide the children through a spiritual practice:
 - Gather around the Advent wreath and light four candles on the wreath. As you light the candles, have the children sing, “Getting Ready for Christmas” to the tune of “This Is the Way.”

SING: This is the way we light our candles, light our candles, light our candles. This is the way we light our candles, getting ready for Christmas!

SAY: The fourth candle on the Advent wreath is to remind us of the peace that Jesus brings. As we pray today, follow me as I touch my fingers and say the prayer. This will help you connect to God.

PRAY: Touch your pinkie finger: “God gives us hope”; touch your next finger: “God gives us love”; touch your middle finger: “God gives us joy”; touch your index finger: “God gives us peace”; touch your thumb: “God gave us Jesus. Amen.”

- Bless the children before they leave. Touch each child as you say this blessing: “May you be filled with the hope, love, joy, and peace of Jesus all year.”

Family Spiritual Practice

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book; Leader Guide—pp. 111, 112

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Celebration Chart" (p. 111) and "Family Letter" (p. 112) for any child who does not already have copies.

SAY: Let's take a look at your Take-Home Pages (*Reproducibles 3F–3G*). Ask your family to read the Bible story and participate in this week's spiritual practice with you. There's an extra activity for you to do sometime this week.

- Send home a copy of the Take-Home Pages, a copy of the Family Letter, and a copy of the Celebration Chart with each child.

Supplemental Activities

Preschoolers – Build-a-Stable Dress-up

Supplies: large cardboard boxes; stuffed animals that would be found in a stable; manger; baby doll; blanket; shepherd, angel, Mary, and Joseph costumes

- Have the children work together to build the stable and set up the props. Let the children dress up in costumes and act out the story.

SAY: Mary and Joseph traveled a long way to get to Bethlehem. They may have walked or ridden on a donkey. Either way, I am sure they were tired. Then they couldn't find a place to rest, except a place where animals slept and ate. But how wonderful that the shepherds came to visit them!

WONDER: How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when they finally got settled? How do you think the shepherds felt when they saw baby Jesus? What part of this story do you like the best?

Early Elementary – Nativity Painting

Supplies: card stock, paintbrushes, cups of water, watercolor paints, device connected to the internet

Prepare Ahead: Set out the art supplies. Pull up this web page: <http://the-creative-business.com/24-famous-paintings-nativity/>

SAY: The story of Jesus' birth is very important for Christians. For two thousand years, Christians have been telling the story of Jesus' birth. Artists have drawn the picture, called the Nativity, in many ways too.

- Show your class some of the Nativity paintings.

ASK: Which of these paintings is your favorite guess of what Jesus' birth looked like?

- Invite the children to paint their own versions of the Nativity.

Older Elementary – Improv Retelling

SAY: We've heard this week's story every year because it's important. I bet you all know it so well that you could act out the story without any practice. Let's try.

- Give parts to the children who want to act out the story.
- Invite the children to improvise a retelling of this week's Bible story.
- If there is time, invite the other groups of kids to watch the improv retelling.

ASK: What makes this story so special? What could you leave out without changing the meaning of the story?

Intergenerational Activity – Make a Christmas List

Supplies: *Reproducible Kids' Book, colored pencils*

Prepare Ahead: *Photocopy "Christmas List" (Reproducible 3E) for each participant before class.*

- Hand out a copy of "Christmas List" to each participant.

ASK: When Christmastime comes, do you ever make a list? What kinds of things go on your list?

- Invite the participants to talk about their lists. Children may talk about a gift list for items they'd like to receive. Adults might make a list for gifts to buy, parties to plan, items to bake or cook, and so forth.

SAY: We are going to make a different kind of Christmas list today.

- Invite the kids to make a list of activities they'd like to do with friends or family this Christmas season.
- Have adults, youth, and older-elementary kids help the younger kids as they write down ideas. Very young children can draw their ideas on the back of the page.
- Ask the participants to share their ideas with the group.

SAY: Christmas began with a celebration of Jesus' birth. Mary and Joseph were happy to see their baby. The shepherds were happy to meet baby Jesus and his family. We can celebrate Christmas by spending time with people we love.