



Shepherds Glorify God

Goal: To imagine the shepherds telling the good news of Jesus' birth.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 2:1–20

Our Advent anticipations are fulfilled with the birth of Jesus.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem accomplished God's promises in sending the One who is the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, CEB) and who reigns with "justice and righteousness now and forever" (Isaiah 9:7). Angels proclaim to shepherds: "I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord" and "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors" (2:11). The shepherds found the baby Jesus and "returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen" (2:20).

In the birth of Jesus, God's grace reaches out for all people. Jesus is God's Son, who lived and died, and was raised again to bring salvation, justice, peace, and new life to the world. He is the One God promised to the prophets and the One who is "God with us" (Matthew 1:23) now and forever.

We glorify God who loves us and in grace sends Jesus our Savior who brings us peace with God and with others. God's great grace brings our great gratitude!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

This great story is so full of drama and imagination. Children will enjoy hearing it again. Invite them to engage with it by talking about their favorite part of the story and why they like it. Invite them to think about how the birth of Jesus changed the lives of the shepherds, Mary, and Joseph. They will also be able to respond to the questions, "What do we need Jesus to bring to us today? What does our world need the most?" This will help the children remember that Jesus' birth was not a onetime thing. Every year they have the chance to hear the story again and join God's work in helping to live as peacemakers.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

It is Christmas Eve and children may be very excited and eager to talk about Christmas Day and the gifts they hope to receive from Santa. Help them stay focused on this story and the best gift ever, the gift God gave us—Jesus. You could bring a wrapped box and have a nativity scene inside. Children could help take out the pieces and set it up in the room, preparing it for hearing the story about the angels, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus.

*O Jesus, we welcome you with hearts wide open.
Be with us today and every day, our Lord and Savior. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 4, 16, 17

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

Advent wreath, four
battery-operated
candles

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: items for
shepherd costumes:
robes, sheets, dish
towels, rope, neckties;
stuffed animals

choice 2: children's
Bibles and picture books
about the story of
Jesus' birth

choice 3: child-friendly
nativity set

Exploring

choice 1: copies of **Grace Notes** (GN) 1, six toilet-
paper tubes or card-
stock cylinders for each
child

choice 3: copies of **GN 2**,
clear contact paper

choice 4: copies of **GN 3**

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Provide an Advent wreath and four candles to use in “Loving and Serving God.”

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 3 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet children as they arrive and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Tell the parents/caregivers that today’s story is about the birth of Jesus and the shepherds’ role in that important story.

Invite the children to choose a guided-play activity to start:

1. **Dress Up Like a Shepherd**—Invite the children to dress up like a shepherd and pretend being a shepherd. You can use robes, sheets, dish towels, and rope or old neckties for belts and ties for the robes and head dresses. Invite the children to pretend that the stuffed animals are sheep.
2. **Story Corner**—Place pillows on the floor. Have children’s books about the birth of Jesus available. Play quiet Christmas music. Invite the children to find pictures of shepherds and angels and tell you about the scene.
3. **Playing with a Nativity Set**—Invite children to play with the characters and animals of a nativity set.

B *Providing opportunities for children to explore a nativity set gives them a hands-on experience with the story of Jesus’ birth. Children love to play with them and act out the story of Jesus’ birth themselves. Help children focus on being respectful while enjoying creative play.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Mary Had a Baby”—**MM 9; SCM 16**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Come to Story Time

L

Invite the children to repeat each line after you. Challenge them to make up motions to go with each action.

Come as Mary, riding a donkey.
Come as Mary to story time.

Come as Joseph, walking beside her.
Come as Joseph to story time.

Come as shepherds, herding your sheep.
Come as shepherds to story time.

Come as angels, wings all fluttering.
Come as angels to story time.

Hands Go Up

MS L T VI

Invite the children to repeat each line and follow your motions.

Hands go up. (*raise your hands in the air*)
Hands go down. (*move your hands down to each side*)
I can turn myself around. (*turn around in a circle*)
I can stand up on one foot. (*stand on one foot*)
I can listen. (*cup your right hand by your right ear*)
So can you. (*point to another person*)
I can sit. I'll show you how. (*sit on the floor*)
Bible time is starting now. (*point a finger to your other wrist*)

Hearing the Story

L T

Open the Bible to Luke 2 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that the story is about the shepherds hearing about the birth of the baby Jesus.

Read **SCM 4**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Read the story again, inviting the children to act out the story using the directions in parentheses.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Tell the Story FM

If you do not have enough toilet-paper tubes for each child, you can make card-stock tubes and tape the figures to the cylinder shape for the same effect.

Give the children copies of **GN 1**. Have the children look at the pictures and tell you who each of the characters in the story are: Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, a shepherd, a sheep, and an angel.

Invite the children to color the pictures. When they have finished coloring, help them cut out their pictures and instruct the children to glue each picture to a toilet-paper tube. The baby Jesus and a sheep will each be glued to a toilet-paper tube cut in half.

Invite the children to retell the story of Jesus' birth using their figures. Put the figures in paper bags to take home.

2. Bethlehem Song MS

Say or sing the following song to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Invite the children to join in with you and follow your actions.

(Pretend to bounce on a donkey.)

Mary rode a donkey, a donkey, a donkey.

Mary rode a donkey going to Bethlehem.

(Walk in place.)

Joseph walked beside her, beside her, beside her.

Joseph walked beside her going to Bethlehem.

(Pretend to rock a baby.)

Mary had a baby, a baby, a baby.

Mary had a baby there in Bethlehem.

(Cup a hand beside your mouth as if you are calling someone.)

The baby's name was Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

The baby's name was Jesus there in Bethlehem.

(Wave your arms like an angel's wings.)

The angels told the shepherds, the shepherds, the shepherds;
the angels told the shepherds in fields near Bethlehem,

(Hold an arm out and point with your index finger.)

"Go and see the baby, the baby, the baby;

"go and see the baby there in Bethlehem.

(Move your arms in a wide circle.)

"He will bring peace to the world, to the world, to the world;

"he will bring peace to the world there in Bethlehem."



(Move your hands open on either side of your face.)

The shepherds saw the baby, the baby, the baby.

The shepherds saw the baby there in Bethlehem.

(Cup a hand beside your mouth.)

The shepherds told the story, the story, the story.

The shepherds told the story, God's grace in Bethlehem.



3. Angels in the Sky

TD FM

Before the session, use the template from GN 2 to cut out a circle frame and an angel from black construction paper for each child. Cut out a 6-inch circle from clear contact paper. Cut squares of yellow, gold, and white tissue paper.

Tell the children that they are going to make a picture of an angel in the night sky with all the light shining around the angel.

Place a circle of contact paper sticky side up, in front of each child. Show the children how to place squares of tissue paper on the sticky circle. Invite them to cover their circles with the tissue paper.

Make a thin line of glue around the edge of the circle and place the black paper frame on top of the circle. Give the children the angel figures, have them put glue on one side, and place the angel where they would like in the circle. Invite the children to hold their pictures up in front of a window or a light to see the light shine around the angel.

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

4. Coloring Page

C L

Hand out copies of GN 3 and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture of the shepherds listening to the angels. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, "What did the shepherds think when the angels spoke to them?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What did the shepherds feel when they saw Jesus?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What did the shepherds say to Mary and Joseph?"

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as moving arms like angel wings, touching toes, turning in a circle, and so forth.*

*This prayer is part of a Christmas prayer by Robert Louis Stevenson.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

FA

Call the children together, singing “What Child Is This?”—**MM 10; SCM 17**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Consider having children design flowing movements to mirror the feel of the song. The movements can be free-form.

Display the Advent wreath with four candles. Count the candles. Ask the children how many Sundays are in Advent (*four*). Turn on all four candles. Tell the children that this is the last Sunday of Advent. Jesus’ birthday is coming soon.

Remind the children that the shepherds were the first ones to tell the story of Jesus’ birth to others. Invite them to tell the good news that the shepherds heard long ago!

If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray:

Dear God, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men. Amen.*

Turn the candles off. As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), go and tell the good news of Jesus’ birth. The grace of God goes with you.”





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Shepherds hear the good news from messengers and run to Bethlehem.

