



Bring Him Gifts

Goal: To learn and practice ways of sharing the grace of God in the world.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 2:1-12

The strangers from the East who came to King Herod in search of “the newborn king of the Jews” (v. 2, CEB) had followed a star that was leading them onward. After consulting with Herod, they set out for Bethlehem, where they were told the Messiah was to be born, and “the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was” (v. 9, CEB).

The star was a means of God's grace in leading the magi onward, toward being able to worship the baby Jesus. It was God's way of providing direction so those outside the people of Israel could pay homage to the savior of the world. How grateful the magi were for that star!

Symbolically, God continues to provide stars to steer our lives. They are means of grace to help us worship and serve Jesus Christ. They give direction and light our ways. In the church, Scripture and sacraments are means of God's grace. We have the church community and our faith traditions.

We can also be means of grace to others. God's grace can work through us to give light and provide direction to others. We are grateful!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

The magi followed a star. The light of the star led them to the child Jesus, and they offered their gifts. Children are eager to both learn and practice ways of offering their gifts and sharing the light of Christ in the world. They respond to spiritual practices and disciplines that illuminate the presence of God in their lives. Their families are committed to raising their children according to the Christian faith and have made decisions about the stars to follow and guide their lives: hearing and responding to God's Word with others in community.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

For children who are back in school and who no longer see the decorations in the stores or hear carols on the radio, Christmas was over days ago. However, in the church the celebration of Christmas doesn't end until Epiphany (January 6). Today, as the children hear the story of magi bringing gifts to Jesus, they will have the opportunity to think about the gifts they can present to Jesus.

As you prepare to meet the children, pray for them. Remember that you are a light in their lives. You are a presence of grace, representing the light of God's love for them. Leaders like you give them support and direction. It is such a simple, yet astounding fact: As children know and experience grace, they then can share grace with others. Light a candle each day this week as you pray for each child.

*God, guide me into the wonders of grace and light
that I may lead your children into your truth. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 5, 18

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

Advent wreath, white
battery-operated candle
snack

Guided Play

choice 1: cutout figures
from **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, flashlights

choice 2: child-friendly
nativity set

choice 3: **SCM 5a, 5b**

Exploring

choice 1: copies of
GN 2–3 on different
colors of paper, poster
board, poster-board
star

choice 2: copies of
GN 4, star stickers, six
envelopes for each child

choice 3: 6-inch
squares of cotton cloth,
potpourri, paper plate,
GN 5

choice 4: copies of **GN 6**

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. Remove the four candles and place a white (Christ) candle in the center of the wreath.

Cut out and attach the figures from **GN 1** onto the end of craft sticks for “Guided Play” choice 1.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1 and choice 3 require more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play

B **MS** **D** **VI**

Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace and peace to you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know. Be sure they know who will be caring for their children. Explain to the parents/caregivers that their children will hear about the magi, or wise ones, who visited the baby Jesus.

Introduce children to your helper or helpers. Invite them to look at the guided-play activities and encourage them to participate:

1. **Making Shadow Figures**—Invite the children to turn on the flashlights and play by making the shapes cut out from **GN 1** appear on the wall or a piece of newsprint. Have the children experiment with moving the figures closer or farther away from the flashlight and seeing what happens to the shadow figure.
2. **Playing with a Nativity Set**—Invite children to play with the characters and animals of a nativity set. Include magi figures.
3. **Reading Signs**—Provide **SCM 5a** and **SCM 5b**. Point to each sign and ask the children to wonder what each means. Explain that signs help us know where something is or what something is. A sign can also tell us what to do. Ask the children if they can think of any other signs they see.

T *The session plans for Growing in Grace & Gratitude follow a common flow. This helps in planning an effective schedule with transitions to help decrease the number of behavior issues.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner. Play “We Three Kings”—**MM 11**; **SCM 18**. Invite the children to sing along if they know the words of the verses or the refrain.

Sing “Great Big Star”

L

Sing this song to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Lead the children in lifting hands up in the air when singing “great big star”:

Twinkle, twinkle, great big star!
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky,
Twinkle, twinkle, great big star!
How I wonder what you are.

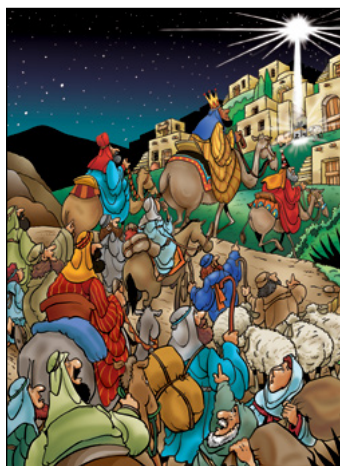
Twinkle, twinkle, great big star!
Wise ones saw it from afar.
Then they traveled many miles,
Looking for the special child.
Twinkle, twinkle, great big star!
Wise ones saw it from afar.

Follow Me

MS

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

I am looking for a king. (*cup hands around eyes and search*)
I am following a star. (*march in place and point to the sky*)
I am traveling with my friends. (*give high fives*)
I will find the baby Jesus. (*kneel down*)
I will worship him with my whole heart. (*cross hands over heart*)



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.



Take care when doing this activity because some floors or carpets may be slick and the paper stars and gifts might slide. If that could be the case, tape or otherwise secure the different shapes to the floor.

Hearing the Story

L M

Light the white (Christ) candle. Comment that the white candle is called the Christ candle. We light it to remember Jesus Christ is always with us.

Pray a listening prayer together by encouraging the children to sit comfortably and take a few slow, deep breaths as a way to quiet themselves. They can close their eyes or focus on the lighted candle.

After a time of quiet, invite everyone to say, "Jesus Christ is the light of the world." After a moment, say, "God is always with us. Amen."

Open the Bible to Matthew 2 and point out that the story comes from the Bible.

Read **SCM 5**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Ask the children to tell you about the picture on **SCM 5**. Encourage them to find and identify magi/wise ones. Invite the children to retell the story in their own words. Help them along if needed.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Play Stars and Gifts

MS A

Before the session, copy GN 2-3 onto various colors of paper. You will need at least one color of each pattern per child. Cut one large star out of poster board.

Scatter the stars and gifts prepared from **GN 2-3** on the floor around the room. Place the large poster-board star on the floor in the center of the room.

Explain that you will give the children a direction that includes a shape and/or a color. They should find that shape and/or color and follow your instructions. For example, give a direction such as "Put your hand on a blue star." "Put your toe on a red gift." "Go to a star and shout 'Yippee.'" "Find a green gift and stand on one foot." or "Find a blue star and pretend to rock a baby."

Tell them that when you call out "Follow the star," they should go to the big star in the center of the room and kneel down.

Play as long as the children are engaged in the activity.

2. Making Gift Coupons

LD FM

Help the children share gifts with others. Hand out copies of **GN 4**, envelopes, and star stickers. Explain what coupons are. Discuss with the children the ideas that are on the coupons. Ask for their ideas about why this coupon would be a good gift for someone and to whom they might give their coupons.



Invite the children to decorate their coupons and envelopes with crayons or markers and the star stickers. As they work, spend a moment with each child. Ask the child to name who they would like to receive particular coupons and then write that name on an envelope. If there are children who can write their names, let them put their name on the coupon. Cut out the coupons and place them in the envelopes for the children to take with them.



3. Making Potpourri Gifts

TD SD C

Before the session, cut 6-inch squares of cotton cloth, one per child.

Explain that they will be using potpourri, a mix of dried spices, flowers, fruits, and other ingredients that have a pleasant smell. Tell the children that the gift of potpourri can remind people of two of the fragrant gifts the wise ones brought to Jesus: frankincense and myrrh.

Give each child a 6-inch square of cotton cloth. Put the potpourri on a paper plate. Invite the children to pick up a small amount of potpourri and place it in the center of the piece of cloth. Help them gather up the corners to make a bag.

Help them wrap a length of ribbon around the bag to close it. Tie the ribbon tightly.

Guide the children to make gift tags using **GN 5** to attach to the potpourri and share it with others.

Perhaps the children could tell the story of the wise ones/magi to another group. Give them some time to rehearse so they know what to expect and what is expected of them.

4. Coloring Page

Hand out copies of **GN 6**. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, “What did the wise ones think when they saw the small village of Bethlehem when they were looking for a king?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What did the shepherds and townspeople think when they saw wise ones coming to their town?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How long did it take for the wise ones to get to Bethlehem?”

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as squeezing your hands together, stretching, and so forth.*

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.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Encourage each child to put away one toy or object. Invite the children to sit around a table or on the floor.

Listen to “We Three Kings”—**MM 11; SCM 18**—while you serve the snack.

Say this litany and ask the children to respond with “Thank you, God”:

Thank you, God, for the bright star.

Thank you, God.

Thank you, God, for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.

Thank you, God.

Thank you, God, for the gifts of the wise ones.

Thank you, God.

Help us to share our gifts with others.

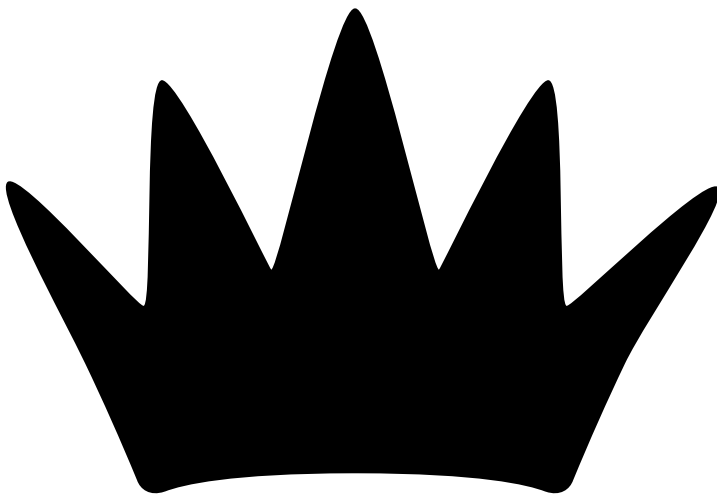
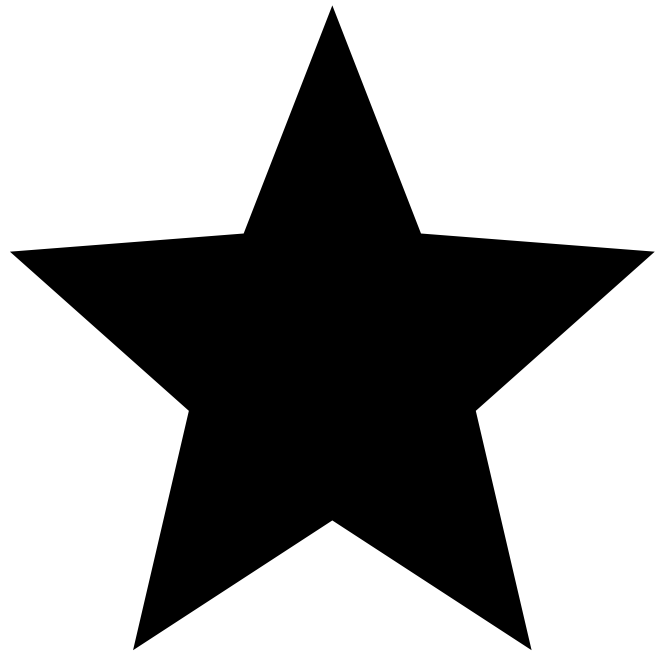
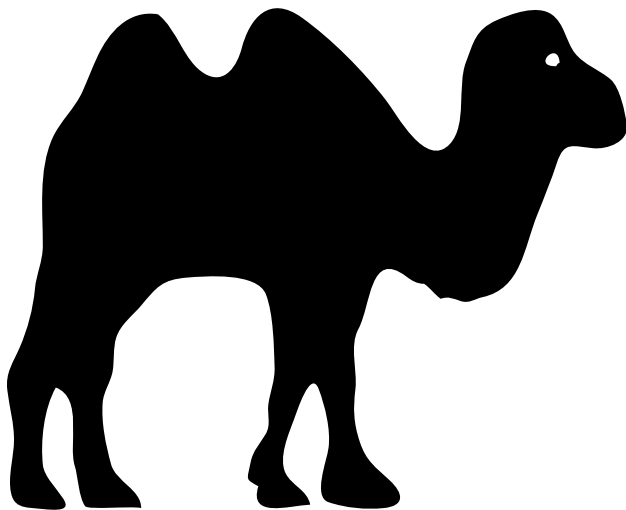
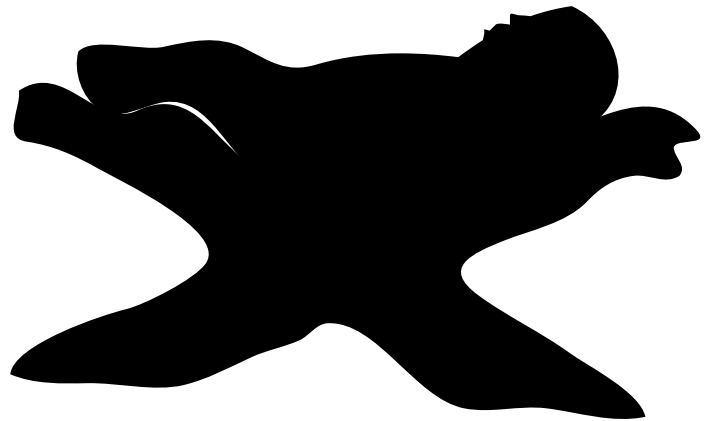
Thank you, God.

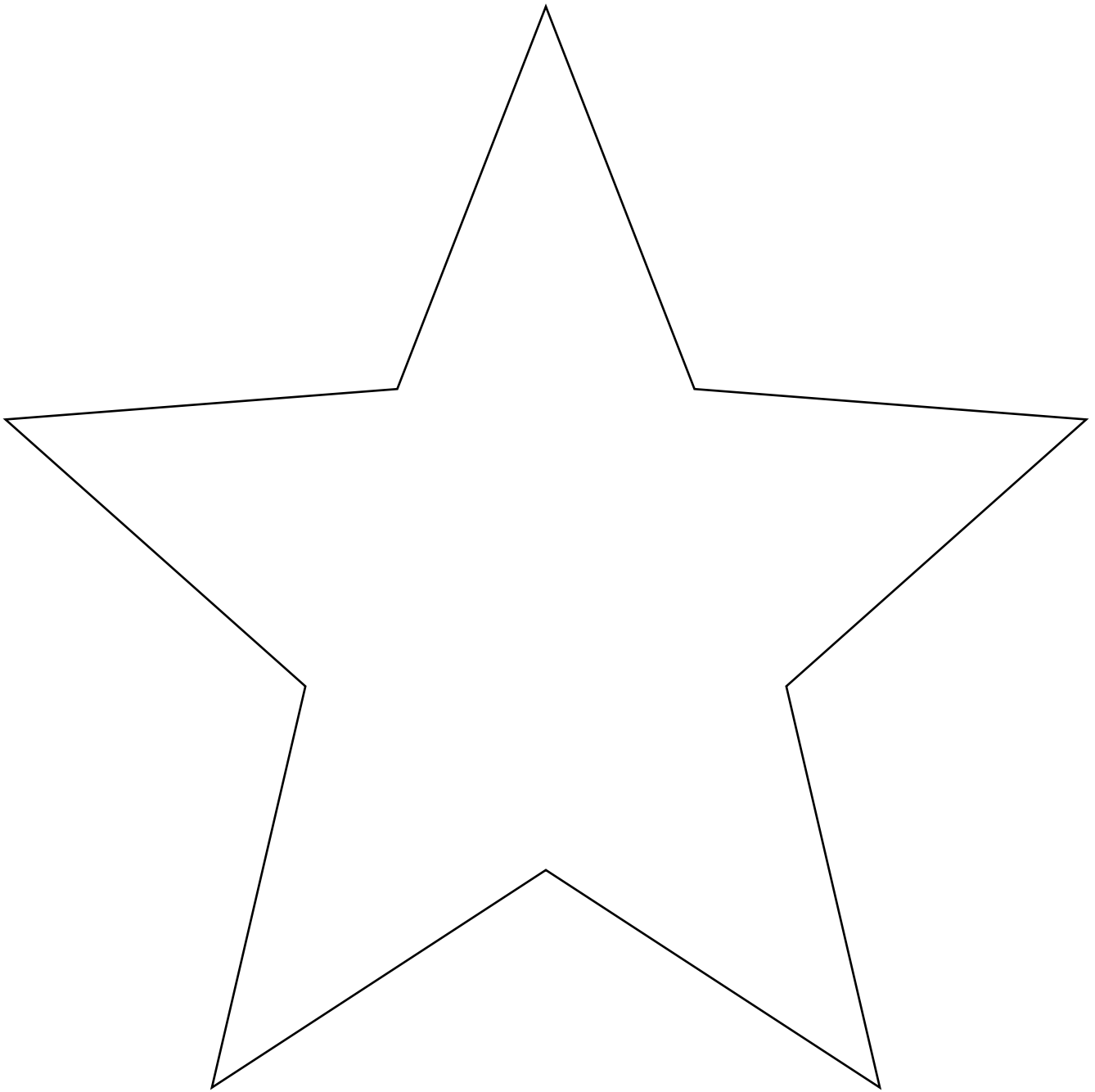
Amen.

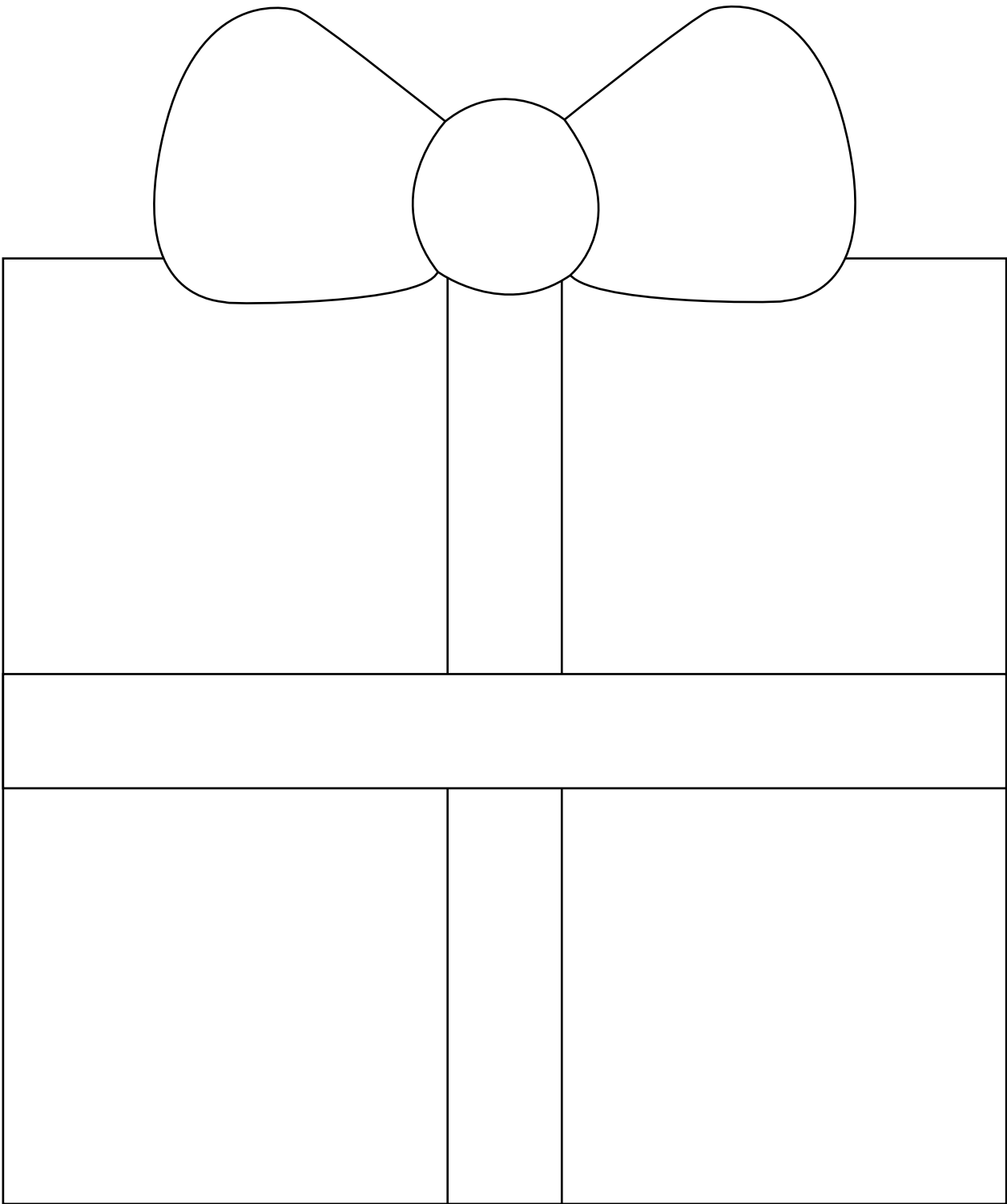
As the children leave, bless each one: “(Name), share the love and light of Jesus with others. The grace of God is with you.”



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).



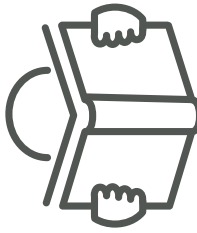




I will pick up
my toys.



I will have
quiet time.



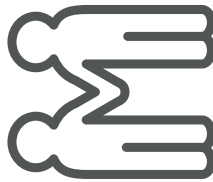
I will help
with chores.



I will give
you a kiss
and hug.

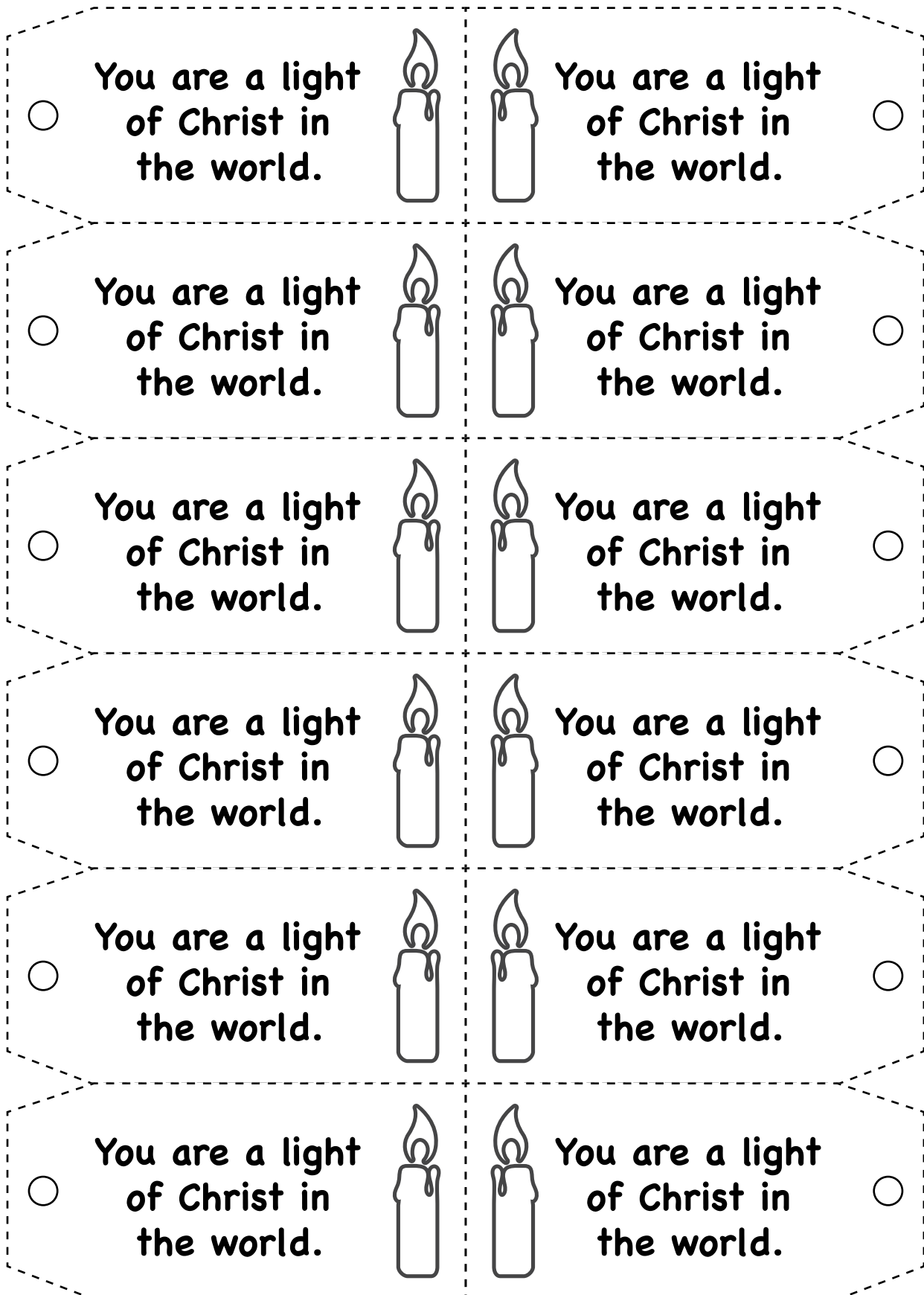


I will
play
with
you.



I will say
thank you.





Bring Him Gifts



The wise ones seek the baby Jesus to worship him.

