



Shepherds Glorify God

Goal: To understand the love of God that reaches out to all people.

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, 19, 20

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

purple cloth

Advent wreath, candles

shepherd figures from
nativity sets

sheep from nativity or
farm sets, stuffed sheep,
or cotton balls

black construction
paper

yellow, gold, and white
crayons; colored pencils;
and/or chalk

Responding

Celebrating

shepherd figure from
nativity set, Christmas
music

Extra

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

L **LG**

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

This is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Invite children to help set the scene. Provide a Bible, a purple cloth, an Advent wreath and candles, shepherd figures, and a variety of sheep. Follow the tradition of your congregation in selecting the number and color of the candles. You will turn on the candles at the end of the session.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities, and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Engage in conversation as you prepare the space.

Provide each child a sheet of black construction paper and a variety of yellow, gold, and white crayons; colored pencils; and chalk. Ask them to imagine that their paper is the dark night sky and to fill it with as many angels as they can. Attach all completed sheets of paper to the wall so that, together, they form a mural of a dark sky filled with angels.

Singing

Invite the group to sit. Admire the efforts of the children to create a worship space.

Sing “Mary Had a Baby”—**MM 9**; **SCM 19**.

Praying

T

Wonder aloud what a good “guesstimate” would be as to how many angels they have drawn on their “night sky” mural. Wonder how many angels it would take to fill up the night sky. Encourage their creative guesses.

Pray:

God of grace, thank you for sending angels to tell people about the birth of Jesus. Give us hearts to understand that your love extends to all people, and to tell others the good news. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

T *The best way to cope with transitions is to be prepared and know what is coming. Use the visual schedule to help the children know the plan for the session and identify times of transition in advance.*



Preparing to Hear the Story

Draw attention to the shepherd figure(s) and sheep on the table. Offer that shepherds were not wealthy, they were not important, and they were not popular.

Explain that you will read today's story twice. The first time you read it, ask children to close their eyes or to look at the angel mural they created and to see the story playing like a movie in their mind; encourage them to use their imagination as they listen. The second time you read it, explain that they will get to add some noise.



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.

Hearing the Story

L B

Invite a child to find Luke 2 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Read **SCM 4** as children sit silently, imagining. Use your voice, expressions, and feelings to make it engaging. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again using **SCM 4** or listen to the story audio. Invite the children to make noise at these points:

- ▼ ... with animals around them (*make the sound of an animal you imagine could have been in the barn*)
- ▼ ... they drifted off to sleep (*make gentle snores*)
- ▼ ... the shepherds were terrified (*make sounds you imagine they made*)
- ▼ ... the shepherds gasped (*make a loud gasp*)
- ▼ ... singing to God (*sing the words "Glory to God" to the tune of "Joy to the World"*)
- ▼ ... hurried down to Bethlehem (*pat your legs to sound like the shepherds running quickly*)
- ▼ ... the shepherds tiptoed quietly (*pat your legs gently and quietly*)

Reflecting on God's Grace

C

Invite children to describe for one another what they saw with their imaginations when you read the story.

Ask them what questions they have about the story. It is OK not to answer their questions, but simply to let them ask them.

- ▼ I wonder, "Why would God choose to tell the shepherds first about Jesus' birth?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What do we learn about God's love from this story?"

Singing

T

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing together "What Child Is This?"—**MM 10; SCM 20**.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God's Grace



Comment that shepherds were not important people at the time that Jesus was born, yet God told them first about Jesus' birth. Wonder together if the shepherds knew that they were the first to know and what they must have thought about that.

Offer that God has done great things for all people.

Teach children the motions to these words: "Glory to God!"

- Glory: hold palms facing down, and wiggle (*twinkle*) fingers as you raise them above head
- God: point both hands heavenward

Practice saying the phrase and using the motions several times. Say the following sentences, allowing children to finish each response. Then say and move to "Glory to God!"

God came for all people. God came for . . .

(*Glory to God!*)

The birth of Jesus was good news because . . .

(*Glory to God!*)

Name some good things God has done. Add "Glory to God!" with motions after each response.

C *For some children, listening and speaking may take longer. Allow time for these children to feel truly a part of the session. Be patient and encourage children to do the same.*



Celebrating God's Grace



Choose a Christmas song. Have the children gather in a circle and pass around one of the shepherd figures from the worship table as the music plays. Pause the music at various intervals and, when the music stops, the child holding the shepherd is invited to finish the following sentence: "If I had been there with the shepherds, I would have . . ."

Encourage them to finish the sentence with words, a movement, or a facial expression—whatever will best express how they would have reacted had they seen the angels and been left to tell of the good news of Jesus' birth. Play and pause music until everyone has had a turn.



Praying God's Grace

LG

Imagine together who the shepherds may have rushed toward to tell about the good news of Jesus' birth. Wonder together how they told the story and whether or not people believed them. Discuss:

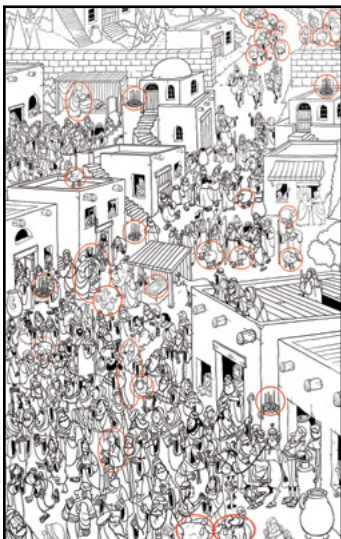
- ▼ If you were one of the shepherds, what details would you have included when you told others?
- ▼ If you were telling someone today about God's love through Jesus, what details would you include?

Gather around a sheet of newsprint and write the names of people you'd like to tell about Jesus. Write names "crossword style" so that if one child writes "John," another child may write "Jenny" using the "J" from "John." If names don't "cross," add them alongside the other names.

Once completed, spend a moment looking at the names of people children wish to tell about Jesus. Remind them that God's love is for all people.

Pray over the poster for those named, and ask God to offer ways for each of you to share your love for Jesus and for God's loving goodness.

GN 1 Solution:



Extra Activity

LD VI M

Provide copies of GN 1 and markers. Use the art to encourage the children to recall the stories of Advent that they may have heard in the past. Accept all answers.

Have the children see if they can find the following items:

- ▼ 28 sheep
- ▼ 5 Advent wreaths
- ▼ 4 angels
- ▼ 2 chickens
- ▼ baby Jesus in the manger
- ▼ 3 magi

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

LG C

Invite the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

Remind the children that today is the fourth and last Sunday of Advent before Christmas morning.

- ▼ Turn on the first Advent candle and say, "The first candle of Advent reminds us of Isaiah, who imagined a peaceful world."
- ▼ Turn on the second candle and say, "The second candle of Advent reminds us of Mary, who said yes to God."
- ▼ Turn on the third candle and say, "The third candle reminds us of the joy that God brings into the world, especially when the impossible becomes possible!"

Joy to the world, the Lord
is come!
Let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare
him room,
and heaven and nature
sing,
and heaven and nature
sing,
and heaven, and heaven
and nature sing.

Music and lyrics can be
found online at:
bit.ly/JoyToTheWorldAudio

Note: bit.ly web addresses
are case sensitive.



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).

- Turn on the fourth candle and say, “The fourth candle reminds us that God’s good news is for the whole world!”

Sing and lead “Joy to the World” (first verse; see sidebar).

Imagine together how the world could be different and filled with joy if all people knew of God’s perfect love for them. Invite the children to consider what role each of them can play in helping others to know that God’s love is for them. Ask them to share some of those ideas out loud, and encourage them to find ways to make their ideas a reality this week.

End with this prayer, inviting children to echo each line:

God of grace, /
thank you for Jesus /
and for your love, /
which is for all people. /
Let our love /
be for all people too. /
Amen. /

Turn off the candles.

Send each child with a blessing: “(Name), be joyful, knowing that Jesus came for you and the whole world. The grace of Jesus Christ be with you.”



