



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, 5a, 20, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

white cloth

white candle

three boxes

shiny or glittery
wrapping paper

Home by Another Way
by Barbara Brown Taylor
(Flyaway Books, 2018)
(optional)

Responding

Celebrating

apples, cutting board,
knife

Praying

card-stock copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1,
two 5" squares of clear
contact paper for each
child, gold glitter

Extra

copies of **GN 2**

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” and “Praying God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

A **T** **B** **MS**

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

Invite the children to set up the room. Suggest they create a house scene with a small table and chairs. Have them decorate or wrap three boxes as special gifts and make a star and hang it above the house. Encourage the children to set up a worship space in the house. Include a Bible, a white cloth, and a white candle.

Play “We Three Kings”—**MM 11**—as the group works. Comment that the kings mentioned in the song are called *magi* in today’s Bible story. The Bible does not say how many magi, or wise ones, visited Jesus; however, the song writer imagined three.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite a couple of volunteers to practice reading the Scripture passage for today’s reading.

A Adapt any activity to suit your children’s needs. Ask yourself, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”

Singing

Invite the group to sit around the house scene. Admire the efforts of the children to create today’s worship space.

Sing “We Three Kings”—**MM 11**; **SCM 21**. As you sing, point out the words on **SCM 21** so the children can sing along. Invite them to create movements for the refrain of the song.

Praying

C **LD**

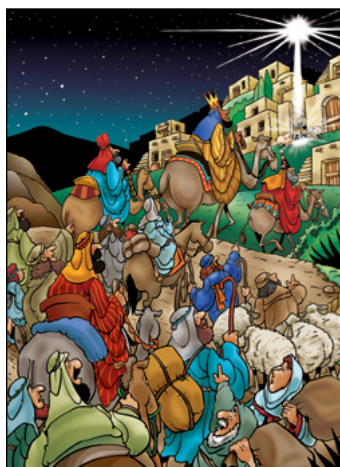
Light the white candle. Wonder why we light a white candle during the Christmas season.

Invite the children to join an echo prayer. Perhaps a confident reader could lead the prayer today.

Dear God, /
fill us with your Spirit. /
Fill us with your light. /
In Jesus Christ, our Lord. /
Amen. /



Seeing where the story is found in the Bible reinforces the importance of this book for the church.



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.

Preparing to Hear the Story

C VI

Play a name game. Indicate the person on your right, saying, "This is my friend (*Name*). Welcome to my home."

That child turns to the next person and does the same thing. Continue until everyone has a turn. Play a second time, but have each person introduce the person on the left and say their name.

After the game, invite the children to look at **SCM 5a**. Suggest that the picture includes symbols of the visit of the magi, or wise ones, that will be in the story. See if they can identify some of the items: gifts for Jesus (gold, frankincense, or myrrh), camels, star, and kings.

Hearing the Story

M L

Invite a child to find Matthew 2 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Have volunteers read Matthew 2:1–12. 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 5** or listen to the story audio. Invite the children to do the corresponding actions when they hear the following words:

- ✦ magi—place hands in an L-shape, lower onto head like a crown
- ✦ star(s)—hold pointer finger up on both hands, rub sides of fingers together up and down overhead
- ✦ baby, child, Jesus, or born—pretend to rock a baby in arms
- ✦ gifts—hold hands out as if offering a gift

Reflecting on God's Grace

M C

Explain that the visit of the magi is a day in the life of the church called *Epiphany*, which means "manifestation," a big word to mean that God made Jesus known as God's gift to the whole world. Comment that, in some countries, people give gifts or do something kind on Epiphany, the twelfth day after Christmas (January 6). They remember the magi who traveled a long way to bring gifts to Jesus.

Encourage the children to think of gifts they can give that would honor Jesus: gifts of service to the church (picking up bulletins after church), to the family (helping clear the dishes), to the community (picking up trash along the sidewalk or road), or to other children (sharing games or toys; offering kind words). Hand out index cards and invite the children to draw a picture of their gift to honor Jesus. Have them put their cards on the worship table as a gift to Jesus.

Singing

Sing "We Three Kings"—**MM 11**; **SCM 21**—to celebrate the joy of God's gift of Jesus. Use the motions created earlier for the refrain.



T *For children who struggle with transitions, this may be a good time for an adult helper to come close to one or more children to model and encourage appropriate responses.*

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God's Grace

FM

Give each child a paper bag. Invite the children to decorate the bags with designs that remind them of today's Bible story.

Punch holes in the tops of the bags. Tie ribbon through the holes to make a handle for each bag.

Invite the children to review the index cards on the worship table and then to put their card in their gift bag.

Encourage the children to take home their gift bags as reminders to give gifts of service that honor Jesus.



Celebrating God's Grace

FA

God's creation offers everyday reminders of God's grace. Invite the children to watch as you cut apples in half crosswise through the center, revealing a star shape in the seed area of the core. Wonder what the star in the apple reminds us of (*the star that the magi followed to find Jesus*).

Ask a volunteer to pray a prayer of thanks for food before eating the apples. Talk about ways to shine like a star by helping others learn about Jesus. Encourage children to show their families the star inside an apple and tell the story of the magi visiting Jesus.

TD *Some children struggle with touch and feeling messy. Give advance warning and provide options, such as crayons or markers for drawing. Allow the child to wash their hands often if needed.*



Praying God's Grace

TD FM

Create prayer reminders of God's guiding grace. Remind the children that the magi had God's star to guide them. The star was a means of grace, a gift, for the magi.

Talk about the three gifts that the magi brought to Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Look at the verses to the song "We Three Kings"—**SCM 21**. Suggest that these three gifts were representative of who Jesus was. Gold was offered to Jesus as a king. Frankincense was burned to create a sweet-smelling aroma used in worship. Myrrh, the somewhat odd gift, was used as an anointing oil—often when someone died—but also as a healing balm. It is thought to represent Jesus' death and burial that would happen one day.



Distribute card-stock copies of **GN 1** and invite children to read the prayer aloud with you. Follow these directions to make prayer stars:

- ▼ Color the star with colored pencils.
- ▼ Cut out the circle, following the dotted line.
- ▼ Take the backing paper off one square of self-adhesive plastic. Place it on a table, sticky side up.
- ▼ Sprinkle a small amount of gold glitter onto the sticky side of the self-adhesive plastic.
- ▼ Place the cutout circle facedown on the glitter and sticky self-adhesive plastic.
- ▼ Take the backing paper off the other square of self-adhesive plastic. Place it on the back of the star, trying to line up the edges with the first square. Use your fingers to smooth out any big bubbles.
- ▼ Trim the plastic to the edge of the circle.

Encourage the children to take the star home and hang it in a place they can see each day and remember their prayer.

Extra Activity

LD

Tell the children that they will make a book that looks like a star and tells the story of the wise ones who followed the star to visit baby Jesus.

Hand out copies of **GN 2**. Ask a volunteer to read each panel, pausing for children to draw the responses to the prompts. Have the children cut the two story strips and make one long strip by taping together the end of the first strip tab (the wise ones following the star) to the beginning of the next strip (“They went over mountains . . .”).

When they have finished, show them how to fold their strip accordion-style on the dashed lines beginning with the star on top. Assist as needed. Have the children tape the end of the story tab (“. . . gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”) to the picture of the star. The story now forms a star book!

Encourage the children to take home their books and tell the story of the wise ones following the star to their parents, or caregivers, and families.



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).

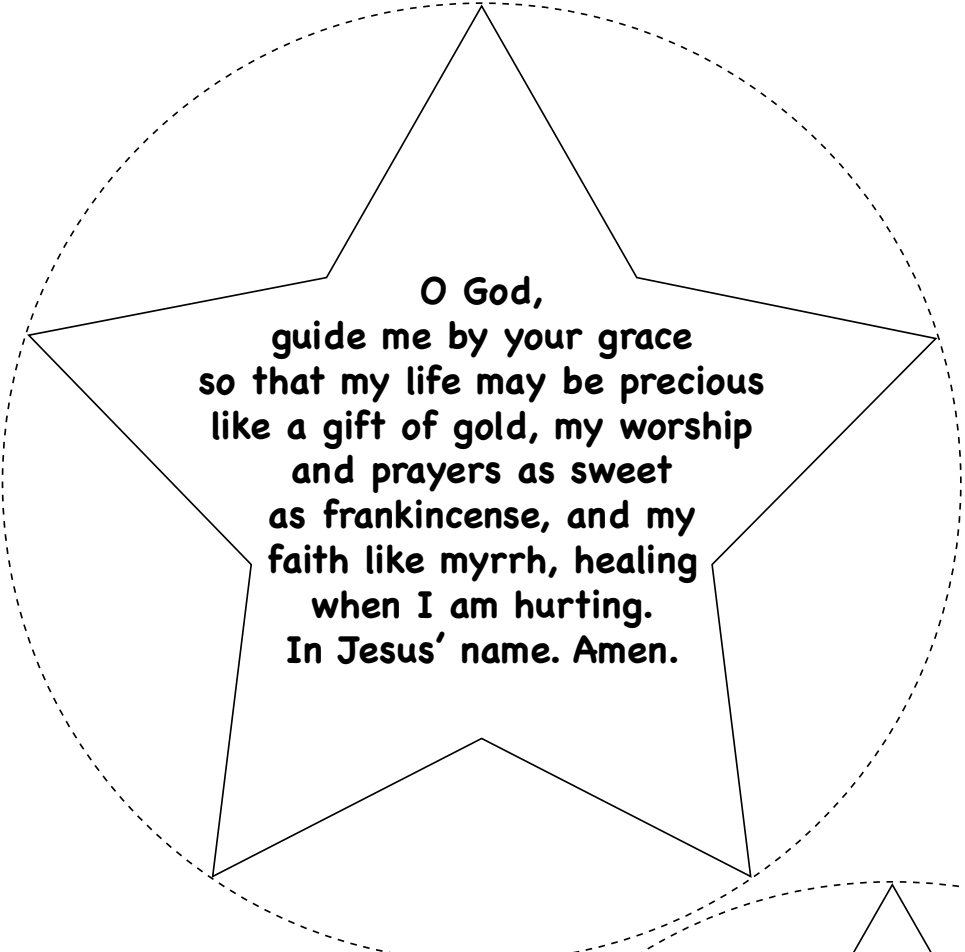
LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Gather the children and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

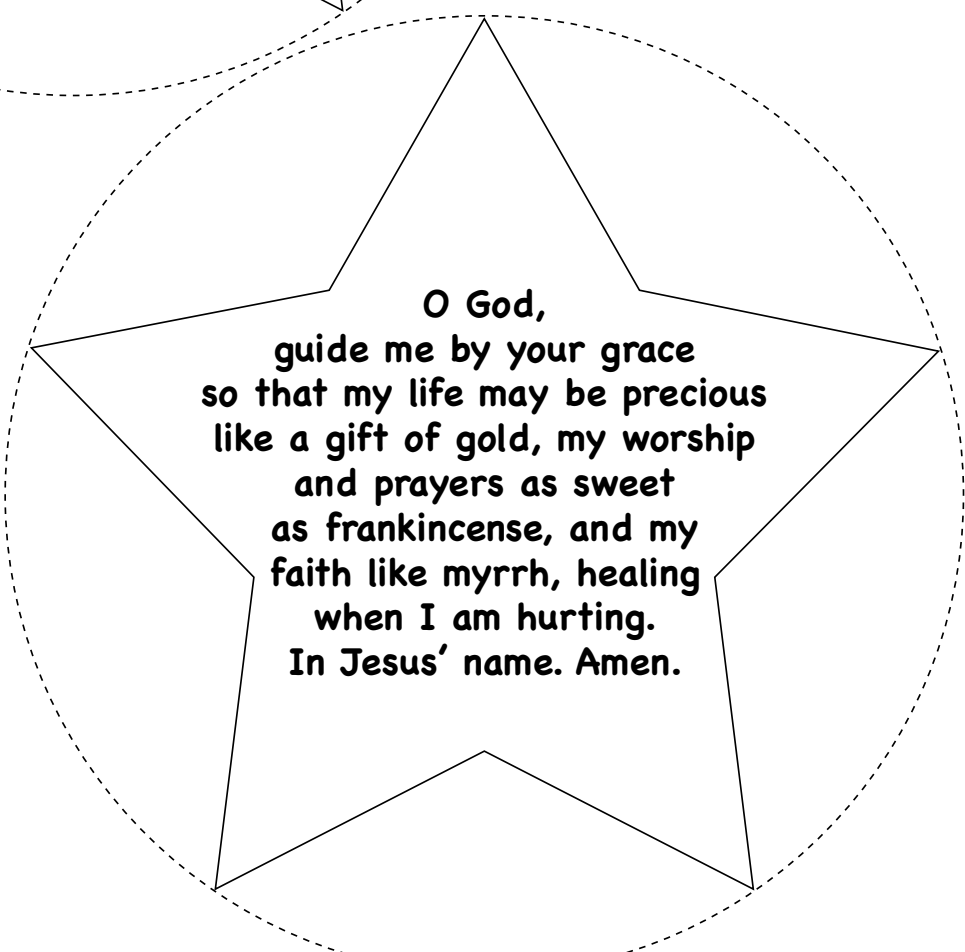
Invite the children to tell their favorite part of the story about the magi visiting Jesus or read aloud *Home by Another Way* by Barbara Brown Taylor for another telling of the magi story.

Sing “What Child Is This?”—**MM 10; SCM 20.**

Give each child a blessing. Say to each one: “(Name), shine like a star and guide people to Jesus this week. The grace of God is with you.”



**O God,
guide me by your grace
so that my life may be precious
like a gift of gold, my worship
and prayers as sweet
as frankincense, and my
faith like myrrh, healing
when I am hurting.
In Jesus' name. Amen.**



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<p>Draw a bright star.</p>	<p>Wise people from far away found a new bright star in the night sky.</p>	<p>Draw the wise ones.</p>	<p>“It’s the birth of a new king!” said one of the wise ones. “We must go meet this king!” said another.</p>	<p>Draw the wise ones following the star.</p>
<p>They went over mountains . . . and crossed rivers . . . and traveled through deserts . . . following the star.</p>	<p>Draw an angry King Herod.</p>	<p>King Herod did not want a new king to take his place, so he tried to trick the wise ones to tell him where this new king was.</p>	<p>Draw the baby Jesus with the gifts from the wise ones.</p>	<p>The wise ones knelt before Jesus, saying words of praise and thanksgiving. They gave Jesus their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.</p>

