



# God's Gift of Love

Goal: To celebrate Jesus' birth by saying "thank you."

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Luke 2:1-7

Mary and Joseph must have been nervous as they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was a long journey and Mary was ready to have a baby. Even worse, there was "no place for them in the guestroom" (v. 7, CEB). Yet God provided a place: a manger, where Mary "gave birth to her firstborn child, a son" (v. 7, CEB). God provided a place for Jesus to be born.

How like the gracious God to take care of the details and provide for the needs of God's people! God's grace extends throughout the necessities of our lives, down to the smallest needs we have. In safety, among God's creatures, the Son of God was born.

When it must have seemed that all was in danger for lack of a place for the birth, God's grace furnished a means by which the baby Jesus could come into the world in shelter and protection.

### . . . In Your Children's Experiences

The culture wants us to celebrate Christmas with all of the appropriate consumerism, inviting us to be anxious about spending time and money to get everything ready—to get it all done. Children are not oblivious to these cultural expectations.

In the church, we observe Advent, a countercultural season of preparation, waiting, and hope for God's greatest gift: Jesus. As children take part in the simple gestures of the season—lighting candles, singing songs, and praying prayers—they enter into a world governed by God's grace.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Encourage the children to share stories of how they are getting ready to make room for the birth of Jesus. Do they light candles, pray, or sing songs about Jesus? Be open to hearing the stories of their plans for Christmas.

We can help children discover ways to celebrate Jesus' birth by simply making room in their lives to say thank you. As you put Jesus in the manger, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's gracious gift. In your prayers this week, name each child, giving thanks for his or her birth.

*Holy God, give me a heart of gratitude  
for the marvelous gift of your son. Amen.*



## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 3, 15, 19

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

blanket or mats

Advent wreath with five  
battery-operated votive  
candles

snack (optional)

## Guided Play

choice 1: puzzles from  
previous session

choice 2: baby dolls,  
baby blankets

choice 3: Christmas  
storybooks

## Exploring

choice 2: tan or yellow  
tissue paper, **Grace**

### Notes (GN) 1

choice 3: balloons

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

## Book suggestions:

- *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim, [pcusastore.com](http://pcusastore.com)
- *The Animals' Christmas Eve* by Gale Wiersum

## 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 with five battery-operated votive candles. This is the third Sunday of Advent, and we say thanks for God's love.

"Exploring God's Grace" choices 2 and 3 require more prep.

### Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet the children by name and with the words "Grace and love to 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 the parents/caregivers who you do not know personally. Explain to them that the children will hear a story about God's grace through the birth of Jesus.

Introduce children to your helper or helpers. Invite children to look at the guided play activities and pick one to start:

1. **Playing with Puzzles**—Provide the puzzles made in the previous session. Invite the children to work together to solve the puzzles. While the children work, discuss what loving actions they see in the puzzles.
2. **Playing with Dolls**—Provide several baby dolls and baby blankets. Allow the children to wrap the baby dolls with the blankets. Encourage the children to show ways they would put the baby to sleep. Have a conversation about ways their parents help them go to sleep
3. **Reading**—Provide Christmas storybooks for young children. If you have enough adults, have someone in the center to read to the children.

**T** *If transition times have been difficult, consider introducing an object such as a baby Jesus doll or a stuffed lamb. Show the children where the object will be next and allow them to follow. Assure them that the object will follow them throughout the session and that they will see it when they return again.*



## Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “God Is with Me”—**SCM 15**. Encourage the children to sing along, repeating words and phrases as seems appropriate.

Remind the children that it is Advent and that we are getting ready for Christmas. Chant the phrase “Let’s get ready, let’s get ready, Jesus is coming.” Clap or use a rhythm instrument to keep the beat. Invite the children to chant with you. Repeat the chant several times, starting softly and becoming louder.

Place an Advent wreath on a table with four votive candles in the circle of the wreath and one in the center. Turn on the first, second, and third candles. Tell the children this is the third Sunday of Advent. Remind the children that Advent is a time of preparing and waiting for the birthday of Jesus. The candle for today reminds us that Jesus gives us love.

### The Baby Is Asleep



Remind the children that the name of the baby in today’s story is Jesus. Invite the children to sing with you about baby Jesus. To the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell,” you could sing “The Baby Is Asleep.” Follow the suggestions to add movements to the song.

The baby is asleep. (*pretend to be sleeping*)

The baby is asleep.

Everyone be quiet now. (*put your index finger on your lips*)

The baby is asleep. (*pretend to be sleeping*)

The baby’s waking up. (*raise both arms and stretch*)

The baby’s waking up.

See him look at me and smile. (*share your smile with others*)

The baby’s waking up. (*raise both arms and stretch*)

The baby’s name is Jesus. (*rock the baby in your arms*)

The baby’s name is Jesus.

He was born in Bethlehem. (*raise both arms and wiggle your fingers*)

The baby’s name is Jesus. (*rock the baby in your arms*)

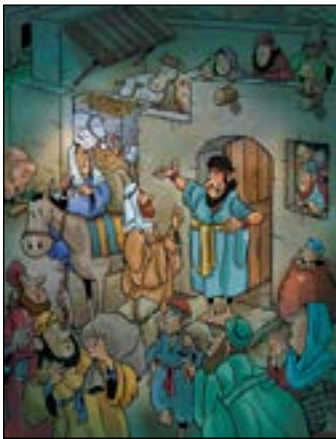


### Where Is Jesus?

Say or sing the following song to the tune of “Frère Jacques.” Invite the children to respond with the bolded lines.

Where is Jesus? **Where is Jesus?**  
In the Bible! **In the Bible!**  
Let us hear his story. **Let us hear his story.**  
Tell us more! **Tell us more!**

A listening prayer is an exercise in which you can help the children to notice that God is present with them, even when they don't realize it. Being silent can help them to quiet themselves and to open their hearts to receive the word of God.



### Hearing the Story

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 candles on the Advent wreath. After a time of quiet, invite everyone to say, “Jesus is coming.” After a moment, say, “God is always with us. Amen.”

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

Read **SCM 3**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Show them the picture in **SCM 3** and encourage them to find and identify Mary, Joseph, and the innkeeper. Ask the children to tell you the story in their own words. Help them if needed.

Celebrate the story by giving thanks for people who take care of us. Remind them that Mary and Joseph took care of Jesus and that God took care of all three. Ask the children to think of ways people take care of them. Tell them that you will pray by thanking God for these people and the things they do. Give an example: “Thank you, God, for my mom because she gives me food.” Close the prayer.

Turn off the candles.

## EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

### 1. Motion Song



Sing the words or find an audio recording to “Away in a Manger” and invite the children to follow your motions.

Away in a manger, (*sweep arm up and away from you*)  
no crib for his bed, (*wave finger back and forth in front of you*)  
the little Lord Jesus (*make the sign for Jesus by putting the  
middle finger of left hand to the palm of right hand and then  
the middle finger of right hand to palm of left hand*)  
laid down his sweet head. (*place palms together and put hands  
to one side with cheek resting on back of hand*)

You can find two versions of “Away in a Manger” in the Presbyterian hymnal, *Glory to God*: 114 and 115.



The stars in the bright sky (*raise hands above head and wiggle fingers*)  
 looked down where he lay, (*put hand above eyebrows as if searching and look down*)  
 the little Lord Jesus (*make the sign for Jesus*)  
 asleep on the hay. (*place palms together and put hands to one side with cheek resting on back of hand*)



## 2. Paper Plate Manger

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*Before the children arrive, cut paper plates in half so each child will have a whole paper plate and a half paper plate.*



Invite the children to color the star and baby Jesus on **GN 1**. Help the children cut out the figures. Invite the children to color the back of the half plate to make the manger. The children can color the inside of the other plate to represent the sky. Encourage the children to glue the star in the sky. When they have finished coloring, staple the paper plates together, creating a pocket. Cover the staples with tape. Provide tan or yellow tissue paper squares for children to crumple and put in the manger. Invite the children to gently tuck baby Jesus into the manger.



## 3. Pondering the Story

B MS C FA

*Before the children arrive, blow up balloons in four different colors. Have enough for at least one per child.*

Gather the children in a circle and hand each one a balloon. Tell them that they will play a thankful game. Explain that when you say, "Thank you, God!" they toss their balloons into the air and try to catch a balloon or pick one up from the floor. Ask them to repeat the phrase, "Thank you, God, for . . ." by filling in the appropriate response:

Red balloon, "Thank you, God, for (*person they are thankful for*)."

Yellow balloon, "Thank you, God, for (*place they are thankful for*)."

Green balloon, "Thank you, God, for (*food they are thankful for*)."

Blue balloon, "Thank you, God, for (*anything they are thankful for*)."

- B** *Providing opportunities for boys and girls to play games can be fun. However, it can also provide opportunities for unwanted behavior such as bullying or excluding children. Help children focus on respecting others and being polite.*

If you have children with latex allergies, substitute the balloons with colored balls.



Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wonder 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

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions.

- ▼ I wonder, “How did Mary and Joseph feel when they finally found a place to rest?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What kinds of noises would be heard in the street, houses, and stables of Bethlehem?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How did Joseph and Mary give thanks to God for the baby Jesus?”

**T** *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities such as wiggling hands in the air, touching toes, and so forth.*

### LOVING AND SERVING GOD FA

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

Sing “He Came Down”—**SCM 19**—while you serve the snack. Come up with a movement for the word *love* and add it to the movements for the words *peace* and *hope* from the past two sessions.

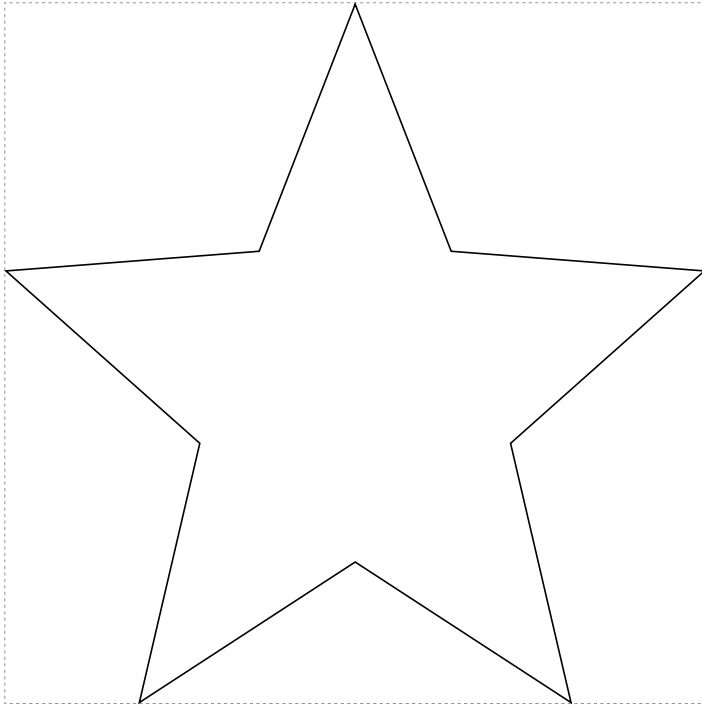
Say the following litany and ask the children to respond with “Thank you, God”:

Thank you, God, for your love. (*Thank you, God.*)  
 Thank you, God, for Mary and Joseph. (*Thank you, God.*)  
 Thank you, God, for your gift of Jesus. (*Thank you, God.*)  
 Help us to share your peace, hope, and love with others.  
 (*Thank you, God.*)  
 Amen.

As the children leave, bless each one: “(Name), the grace and love of God are with you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads), where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).







# Thank You, God



Mary and Joseph find a place to stay.

