



# Rejoice and Ponder

**Goal: To rejoice in the birth of Jesus.**

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Luke 2:8-20

The quiet night sky broke forth into a spectacular display in the heavens. An angel announced to poor 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" (vv. 10-11, CEB). When the shepherds found the child lying in the manger, they returned, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen" (v. 20, CEB), while Mary pondered all that was happening (v. 19).

Those two reactions show our response to God's grace today. As we experience God's love in Jesus Christ and what it means to be Christ's disciples, we need to take time to ponder as well as to act.

We think and reflect on all God has done in Jesus Christ—for the world and for us. We study the Scriptures and other resources to understand better what God's grace means. Ponder!

We also act in gratitude for God's grace. The shepherds glorified and praised God, as we do too. When we love and serve others as Christ did, and when we seek to be like Jesus in bringing people together in reconciliation, peace, and justice, we are glorifying God. Rejoice!

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

In this familiar story, we recognize the qualities of doing and being in ourselves and in the children we lead. Like the shepherds who were actively engaged in praising God, children offer their worship and service in active, energetic, trusting ways. Like Mary, who took the time she needed to remember and reflect on what she had just experienced, children enter periods of silence to reflect and make sacred in their memories the events that hold transformative power for them. Both responses are important!

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

As you prepare to meet the children, recall that children grow in their faith by experiencing different ways of responding to God's love and grace in their lives. Model a variety of ways of being and doing. How can you respond to the news of Jesus' birth as the shepherds did, actively sharing the good news of Jesus' birth with your children? Or as Mary did, taking some needed quiet time to remember and reflect with the children? Encourage the active doers in your group to take quiet time, and invite the quieter, more reflective children to rejoice!

*Gracious God, give me a voice of praise and a heart of wonder at the mention of your beloved son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

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

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 4, 18, 19

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

blanket or mats

Advent wreath with five  
battery-operated votive  
candles

snack (see “Exploring  
God’s Grace” choice 3)

## Guided Play

choice 1: child-friendly  
nativity set(s)

choice 2: Christmas  
items

choice 3: bowl, colored  
jingle bells with strings  
attached

## Exploring

choice 3: cupcakes,  
sprinkles, plastic knives,  
icing, birthday candles,  
paper plates, small  
bowls

choice 4: copies of  
**Grace Notes (GN) 1**

## 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 your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Provide an Advent wreath with five battery-operated votive candles. This is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and we will joyfully thank God for the birth of Jesus.

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

### Welcoming and Guided Play A B

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 the parents and caregivers you do not know. Be sure they know who will be caring for their children. Explain to the parents and caregivers that their children will hear a story about the shepherds and angels at Jesus’ birth.

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

1. **Sharing**—Set up unbreakable nativity sets with movable figures. Invite children to arrange the scenes. Talk with them about the birth of Jesus. Invite them to share with you some of the ways their family is going to celebrate Christmas.
2. **Wondering**—Provide Christmas items that the children can enjoy with their different senses. For example, you might have unbreakable angels, shepherds, and star ornaments, ornaments made out of cotton, and so on. Wonder together what each item has to do with the Christmas story.
3. **Sorting**—Provide a bowl with multicolored jingle bells. Set out paper plates with the colors of the bells indicated on each. Encourage the children to sort the bells by color. If time remains, have the children collect groups with one bell of each color.

**T** *Transition times can cause children to act out. Giving children something that they enjoy doing provides a way to deal with these times.*



## Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Come into God’s Presence”—**SCM 18**. Encourage the children to sing along and shake the bells each time they hear “alleluia.”

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, third, and fourth candles. Tell the children that this is the fourth 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 joy.

### The Baby Is Asleep

M

Invite the children to sing with you about the excitement of seeing baby Jesus. Sing the verses below to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell.” Follow the suggestions to add movements to the song.

We are going to see a child. (*pretend to be looking for something*)

We are going to see a child.

Let’s run and hurry up! (*run in place*)

We are going to see a child. (*pretend to be looking for something*)

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*)

And Jesus is his name. (*rock the baby in your arms*)

And Jesus is his name.

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

and Jesus is his name. (*rock the baby in your arms*)

### Searching Game

MS C L

Invite the children to stand in a circle, a couple of steps apart. Go to a child. Pretend to knock on a door, saying, “Knock, knock, is Jesus here?” Encourage the child to respond, “I’ll go check. This is my house.”

That child comes with you to another child and both of you say, “Knock, knock, is Jesus here?” Continue until all the children have joined you.



A listening prayer, used in "Hearing the Story," 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

L C

Pray a listening prayer together by encouraging the children to sit comfortably and take a few slow, deep breaths 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 4**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Invite the children to retell the story of the picture on **SCM 4**. Help them along if needed. Encourage them to find and identify the shepherds.

Celebrate the story by giving thanks for people who tell us about Jesus. Remind them that the angels told the shepherds, the shepherds told everyone about Jesus, and then they thanked God. Ask the children to think of ways people tell us about Jesus. Tell them that you will pray by thanking God for these people and the things they do. Give an example: "Thank you, God, for our minister because she tells us about Jesus." Close the prayer.

Turn off the candles.

## EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

### 1. Motion Song

MS C

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*)  
 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. Play Follow the Leader



Remind the children that Mary and Joseph followed God: wonder how they followed God. The shepherds followed God: wonder how.

Play the game Follow the Leader. Give each child a chance to lead the group in some kind of physical activity for at least one minute. Invite other children to follow the leader's example.

Suggest that the children follow as the shepherds did (rejoicing and praising God) and as Mary did (quietly pondering or wondering). Let the children decide how to move their bodies. Remind the children that Mary and Joseph showed they were thankful by following God.

Play lively music such as "Joy to the World" or "This Is the Day" as the children move. Invite the children to use their bodies to show how they would thank and follow God.




## 3. Celebrating Jesus



Give each child a cupcake to decorate. Have several small bowls with different colors of icing. Invite the children to choose their icing and spread it on top of the cupcake. Give each child a paper plate and write her or his name on it. Pour a few sprinkles on each paper plate.

Provide birthday candles for the children to put on the cupcakes. Talk about how they are preparing to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Ask them to leave their cupcakes on their plates; they will eat the cupcakes during snack time.

-  *Washing hands can take time! Waiting in line for the sink may make some children anxious. Devise a routine for your group so they know what to expect. Use a song, movement poem, or physical activity to match the time required.*

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

Hand out copies of GN 1 and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture.

Engage the children in conversation as they color by using the following wondering questions.

- ▼ I wonder, "What is Mary thinking about?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What are the shepherds saying about Jesus?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What would you say to others about Jesus?"



## 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.

Call the children together and sing “He Came Down”—**SCM 19**. Encourage the children to come up with a movement for the word *joy* and add this motion to the movements for the words *peace*, *hope*, and *love* from the previous sessions. The movements can be free-form.

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

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 love with others. (*Thank you, God.*)

Amen.

As the children leave, bless each one: “(Name), the grace and joy 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).

# Rejoice and Ponder



The shepherds share the good news of Jesus' birth.

