



It's Epiphany! Let's Worship Jesus!

Goal: To follow the journey of the wise men and worship Jesus with them.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 2:1-12

The writer of Matthew's Gospel was likely a Jew who wrote his account of Jesus' life many years after Jesus' death. By then, Jewish followers of Jesus would have left their communities to join the newly formed churches. They would be struggling with whether to believe Jesus' promises were for them alone or if they were meant for all people. In the first two chapters of this Gospel, Matthew addresses these concerns by affirming both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus' Jewish heritage is outlined in the first chapter's genealogy. And his mission to the world is affirmed in the second chapter's story about the visit of the foreign wise men.

Matthew probably used the story of the wise men to show that Jesus' birth was significant not just to the Jews, but to the whole world. Coming from another religious tradition in the East, they were convinced that the "star" foretold the coming of a great king. That's why they traveled so far to pay him homage. The use of the star also builds on the Hebrew Bible prophecies about a Messiah or "a star shall come out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17) and "nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Isaiah 60:3).

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children have a capacity for wonder and awe that most adults have lost along the way. This openness allows them to consider that the mysteries of the universe might be related to God's connection to us. They may easily accept that this star of Bethlehem was a sign from God that something special was about to happen.

The children will probably relate to this story along the lines of good guys and bad guys and will be delighted that the good guys come out ahead. The idea that God would assist Jesus and the magi by sending an angel will appeal to their sense of fairness. It might be hard for some of the children to understand that Herod wished to do Jesus harm. They may not understand why the magi were warned not to return to him.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Think about who has guided you in your journey. Recall the people you consider to be truly wise. Make note of what sets them apart from others who are merely well educated. List the ways you have grown in wisdom. How can your wisdom light the way for the children you teach?

If your group has not talked about symbols recently, you might want to remind them that symbols are things that point to or remind us of something else. The star of Bethlehem reminds us of God's presence in the universe and God's love for us, made very real through the life of Jesus.

Gracious God, I am grateful for the opportunities of a new year. Be with me as I plan and as I teach. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 6, 17, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blanket or mats

snack (optional)

Guided Play

choice 1: dark
construction paper,
variety of star stickers,
glitter glue (optional)

choice 2: a child-friendly
nativity set(s) with wise
men and camels

choice 3: children's
Bibles, storybooks about
the magi or three kings'
visit to Jesus

Exploring

choice 1: One piece of
yarn 10 feet long for
each child.

choice 2: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

Book Suggestions:

- *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim, www.pcusastore.com
- *The Three Wise Men: A Christmas Story* by Loek Koopmans
- *We Three Kings* by Gennady Spirin
- *Humphrey's First Christmas* by Carol Heyer
- *A Star for Me* by Jean Fischer

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!

"Exploring God's Grace" choices 1 and 2 require more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play

TD **SD**

Greet the children as they arrive and say, "Grace and peace be with 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 parents/caregivers who you do not know personally. Explain to them that the children will hear a story about wise people who follow a star to find a new king, Jesus.

Invite the children to choose a guided play activity to start:

1. Stars at Night—Tell the children that a special star has a big role in today's story. Give each child a sheet of dark construction paper and star stickers. Invite them to put stars on their paper. Engage them in conversation about seeing stars at night. Ask them if they have ever seen a star brighter than others. Ask them which star on their papers is the brightest star. If you would like, let them put a little glitter glue on and around that star and set it aside to dry.

2. Playing with a Nativity Set—Invite children to play with a nativity set. Make sure to include the wise men and camels this session. Engage in conversation about what the wise men might be bringing the baby Jesus.

3. Story Corner—Place large pillows and a blanket on the floor to make a story corner. Set out several children's Bibles with bookmarks placed at the story of the wise ones (kings or magi) following a star to visit Jesus. Invite the children to look at the pictures you have marked, as well as other storybooks you have gathered.

T *For children who have tactile sensitivities, stimulations that most people do not particularly notice, or at least are not bothered by, could cause extreme reactions that may be interpreted as bad behaviors. Avoid activities involving tactile materials such as sand, glitter, and finger paint. Body contact may also be a trigger.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Praise God, All You Nations (Da n’ase)”—**SCM 17**. This song has words in English and Twi, a language spoken in Ghana. Listen to the song, to familiarize yourself with the words and help the children learn them.

Follow the Teacher MS

Invite the children to follow you as you go and tap each child on the shoulder. Instruct them to get in line behind you and follow where you go. Wander throughout the room and end at the story corner.

All of Me MS

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

My hands are for clapping. (*clap hands*)
 My arms can hug tight. (*hug yourself*)
 My fingers can wiggle, (*wiggle fingers*)
 or turn out the light. (*pretend to turn off a light switch*)

My legs are for hopping. (*hop*)
 My eyes help me see. (*cup your eyes with your hands*)
 I love my body (*cross arms over chest*)
 because God made me. (*raise arms in the air*)

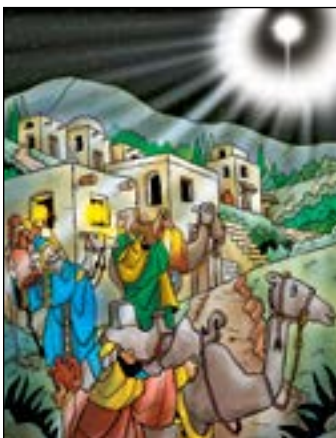
Hearing the Story M L

Open the Bible to Matthew 2 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about wise people who follow a star to find a new king, Jesus.

Read **SCM 6**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Read the story again inviting the children to make the following motions when they hear these words:

- Wise people/ones (*make a “thumbs up” motion*)
- Star (*wiggle their fingers in the air above them like twinkling stars*)
- King (*make a pretend crown on their heads*)
- King Herod (*make a “thumbs down” motion*)
- Baby (*pretend to rock a baby in their arms*)





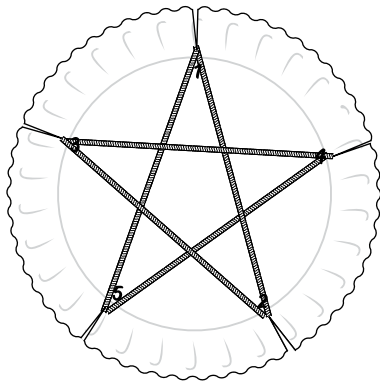
EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE



1. Stars



Before the session, cut five evenly spaced notches in a paper plate for each child. With a permanent marker, number the notches clockwise: 1, 4, 2, 5, 3. For a dinner size plate, each child will need approximately 10 feet of yarn.



Ask the children to recall what the wise ones followed to find Jesus. Tell them that a star can be a reminder for us to remember Jesus and his love for us. Give each child a notched paper plate and let them choose a color of yarn.

Show them how to start at notch 1 placing the yarn through the notch with the tail in the back. Demonstrate stringing the yarn across the front of the plate to notch 2, then across the back of the plate to notch 3, across the front of the plate to notch 4, across the back of the plate to notch 5, and across the front of the plate back to notch 2.

Then complete the star by continuing across the back from notch 1 to notch 2, across the front from notch 2 to notch 3, across the back from notch 3 to notch 4, across the front from notch 4 to notch 5, and again finishing the star on the front and back by crossing the back from notch 5 to notch 1.

Depending on the size of the plates, the children may have extra yarn. They may leave a 4"-5" tail to hold their plate or keep stringing the yarn randomly from notch to notch.

Encourage the children to take their stars home and hang them where they can see them to be reminded of the star that took the wise ones to see Jesus.



2. Star Book



Before the session, cut the two story strips from copies of **GN 1** for each child. Make one long strip by taping together the end of the first strip tab (picture of a camel) to the beginning of the next strip ("They went over mountains . . .").

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. Give each child a long story strip (ten panels) prepared from **GN 1**. Read the story panel and encourage them to point to each corresponding picture. Invite them to color the pictures.

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. 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.



3. Gifts for Jesus Relay

F LG A B MS

Invite each child to find something in the room that they would pretend to give to the baby Jesus as a gift. Call the children together and invite them to share why they chose the item as a gift for Jesus.

Form two teams and tell the children they are going to play a relay game with the items for Jesus. Place two grocery bags or baskets on one side of the room and the children holding their items on the other side. Give the children the following instructions:

- ▼ Run, one at a time, to the bag and place your item in the bag.
- ▼ When you return, tag the next person in line and say, "I gave Jesus a [item]. Now it's your turn."
- ▼ When everyone has had a turn, the first person runs to the bag, finds their item, brings it back, and sits down.
- ▼ The next person in line does the same, and so on until everyone has returned with their items.
- ▼ When the whole team is sitting down, shout out, "We praise Jesus!"

LG *It's important to help children understand the need to share, act generously, and give freely. By sharing at home, they learn caring behaviors that can translate to the same kinds of acts in their community. Kindness and generosity are contagious.*

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

FM

Hand out copies of **GN 2** 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, "How did the wise ones know which star to follow?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How long did the wise ones travel?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How did they feel when they found Jesus?"

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as taking giant steps, pretending to bounce like you are riding a camel, bowing down, and so forth.*



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

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

FA

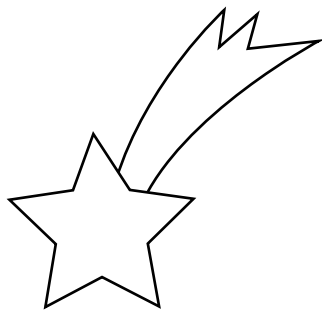
Call the children together, singing “O Child Jesus, You Are So Lovely (Jesucito de mi vida)”—SCM 21. Remind them this is a lullaby that expresses our love and praise for Jesus. We worship him as the wise ones did. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate.

Encourage the children to tell the story of the wise ones following a star to visit Jesus to someone else. Remind the children that the wise people went home a different way.

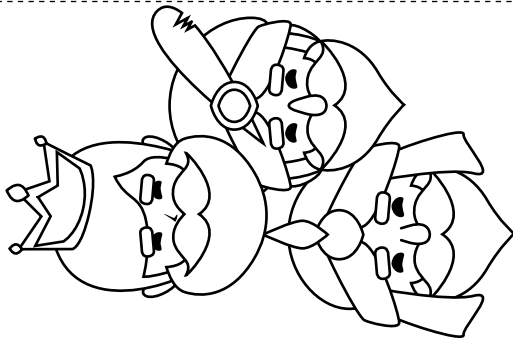
If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray:

For food to eat, (*raise hands to mouth*)
and friends to share, (*hold hands out*)
for those we love everywhere, (*place hands over heart*)
we thank you, God. (*put hands together in prayer*)

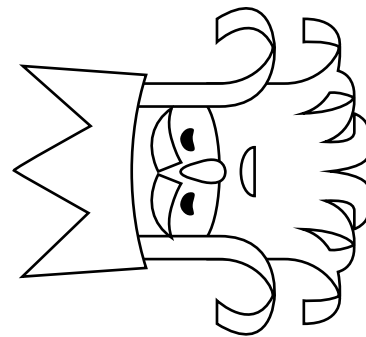
As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), the grace of God is with you.”



Wise people
from far away
found a new
bright star in
the night sky.

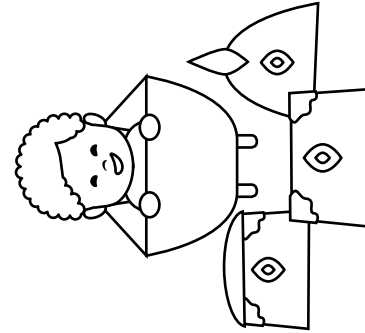


King Herod did
not want a new
king to take
his place so he
tried to
trick the wise
ones to tell him
where this new
king was.



They went over
mountains . . .
and crossed
rivers . . . and
traveled
through
deserts . . .
following
the star.

"It's the birth
of a new king!"
said one of the
wise ones.
"We must go
meet this king!"
said another.



The wise
ones knelt
before Jesus,
saying words
of praise and
thanksgiving.
They gave
Jesus their
gifts of gold,
frankincense,
and myrrh.



It's Epiphany! Let's Worship Jesus!



The wise ones find Jesus and worship him.

