



Gifts for the Baby King

Goal: To practice gift giving as a grateful response to God's grace.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 2:1-12

It's hard to imagine the determined devotion of the magi, those "wise men from the East" (Matthew 2:1). They followed the star and traveled innumerable miles to come to honor "the child who has been born king of the Jews" (v. 2). Their interview with Herod sent them to Bethlehem, after the king had ascertained from the Jewish religious leaders where the Messiah was to be born.

Led again by the star, which "stopped over the place where the child was" (v. 9), the magi were "overwhelmed with joy" (v. 9). When they saw Jesus with Mary in the house, they fell to their knees and honored Jesus. They gave important gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were costly gifts, fitting for a king. They were sure to be important when Jesus' family had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath.

The magi, non-Jews, recognized who Jesus was and worshiped him. They brought expensive gifts, expressing gratitude for God's grace in sending the Messiah for the people. The magi's response to Jesus in offering gifts of costly devotion is a model for us. Whatever is costly to us should be offered in gratitude to God for the grace we have experienced in Jesus Christ.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

The magi brought expensive gifts to baby Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Your children may need help in understanding what frankincense (a resin from tree bark used in incense and perfumes) and myrrh (also a tree resin that is an essential oil) are. Children will be able to understand that they brought these gifts because they wanted to give Jesus the best things they had. It is also important to help children understand that when we give a gift, we give the best thing we can give and sometimes that is something simple, such as love, care, a hug, or a kind word.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Because this is the week after Christmas, children may want to talk about the gifts they gave and received, and how they spent Christmas Day. It will be easy to connect their stories with the one for today, the visit of the magi to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, who was no longer a newborn baby. As you talk about the beautiful and expensive gifts that the magi brought, it might be fun to engage their imagination with this question: "If you had been one of the magi, what gift would you have brought to Jesus?"

O God, make my heart grateful for all good gifts from your hand so my hands may be generous in Jesus' name. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 5, 5a, 15, 16, 17

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white cloth

white candle

chalk

Home by Another Way
by Barbara Brown Taylor
(optional)

Responding

Praying

card-stock copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1, five
craft sticks per child

Offering

jars with lids, battery-
operated candles, star
stickers and/or stars
cut from contact paper,
dark colors of acrylic
paint

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.

Consider obtaining *Home by Another Way* by Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), pcusastore.com.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

A B M L

Play “Away in a Manger” as children arrive. Welcome each child with, “Happy First Sunday after Christmas Day, (Name).”

Invite the children to help set the scene. On a table, place a white cloth, a Bible, and a white candle to signify the Christmas season.

Invite the children’s creativity in setting the worship space for “Hearing the Story.” They could print “Bethlehem” and “Jerusalem” on separate sheets of paper. Designate spots as Herod’s palace and the house in Bethlehem. Make a star and place it over Bethlehem.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Singing

L

Play “Away in a Manger”—**SCM 16**. As the children listen, say that this song helps us remember the story of Jesus’ birth. Then join in singing.

LG *Communication is key to leadership and relationships. When you nurture their communication skills, children learn to build relationships and inspire others.*

Praying

LG

Turn on the candle. Take time to show gratitude for God’s gifts. After each line, prompt the children to respond, “We thank you, God.”

For shining light to the world,

we thank you, God.

For the gifts you give us,

we thank you, God.

For grace and peace,

we thank you, God.

For showing us how to live in your way,

we thank you, God.

Amen.



The word *epiphany* is derived from a Greek verb that means “to reveal” or “to make known.” On Epiphany, Christians celebrate that God is made manifest—made known—to all people in the person of Jesus Christ.



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.

Consider reading *Home by Another Way* by Barbara Brown Taylor for an imaginative telling of the wise men’s visit to Jesus.

Preparing to Hear the Story



Comment that, in some countries, people give gifts or do something kind on January 6 (the Epiphany). They remember the magi, or wise men, who traveled a long way to bring gifts to Jesus. Share any traditions that you have and ask the children to do the same.

Explain that today’s Bible story begins in the town of Bethlehem, located in Judah. Help the children recall what other stories happened in Bethlehem. Show **SCM 5a** to remember locations for the stories of Jesus’ birth (Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem).

Hearing the Story

Invite a child to find Matthew 2 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 5** or use the story audio. If reading, use your voice, expressions, feelings, and body to make the story more lively. Vary the tone, speed, and pitch of your voice to indicate changes in mood. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Give black construction paper and chalk to your group. Invite them to draw a nighttime scene on the paper while you read the story again. Invite the children to share their chalk drawings.

Reflecting on God’s Grace

Play a game of Follow the Leader to recreate the wise men’s journey to Bethlehem. Use the star made during “Welcoming and Preparing.”

Invite one child to carry the star and lead the other children around the room or building. Encourage the leader to go up and over and underneath objects to make the trail interesting. Periodically change leaders to allow all the children to have a turn. You may want to play music as the children travel. After, wonder aloud why the wise men’s visit was so important.

Encourage the children to think of gifts they can give that would honor Jesus. These gifts could be service: to the church (picking up bulletins after church), to the family (helping to clear the dishes after a meal), to the community (picking up trash along the sidewalk or road), or to other children (sharing games or toys, offering kind words).

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play, listen to, clap, and sing “These Wise Men”—**SCM 17**. Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Celebrating God's Grace

MS F

Play a game like Duck, Duck, Goose. Have children sit in a circle. Invite a volunteer to be the wise one. The wise one walks around the outside of the circle and taps another child on the shoulder. The two children then walk in opposite directions around the circle until they meet. When they meet, they exchange greetings:

Child: Who are you?

Wise One: I'm a star watcher.

Child: Glad to meet you. (*the two shake hands*)

Wise One: I've come very far. I followed God's star.

When the word *star* is said, both children run in opposite directions for the open space in the circle. The first one to reach the open space sits down, and the other child becomes the wise one. After each child has had a turn, wonder about what made the wise men know to follow the star.

Praying God's Grace

LD A

Before the session, make card-stock copies of GN 1 and cut apart the tags.

Invite the children to make a prayer star using craft sticks. Hand out tags cut from GN 1. Read the tag aloud to the children. Tell them to color the stars in the following way:

- ▼ red: people we love
- ▼ orange: things I'm thankful for
- ▼ yellow: Jesus, light of the world
- ▼ green: things in God's creation
- ▼ blue: people who are sad or hurting



Give each child five craft sticks and have them color each stick one of the five colors. As the children are decorating their sticks, encourage them to offer prayers related to the color they are using.

Show the children how to glue the craft sticks together to form a star. Have them punch a hole in the corner of the tag and thread a piece of string or yarn through the hole and the top of the star. Help the children tie the tag onto their star to remember the pattern for praying. Encourage the children to hang their star in a visible place in their home and invite family members to use the star for prayers as well.



Offering God's Grace



Before the session, cut star shapes of various sizes from contact paper.

Just as the wise men gave gifts, the children can create gifts to give to people who work in your congregation. Ask the children to name some of the people who work in your congregation (*the pastor, church secretary, custodian, committee chair, or others*).

Depending on the number of jars you have, the children can work alone or in groups to create star nightlights for the people the children have named.

- ▼ Adhere stars to the jar.
- ▼ Provide a variety of dark-colored acrylic paints. Paint the jar, painting over the stars.
- ▼ Allow time to dry.
- ▼ Carefully remove the star stickers.
- ▼ Place a lit battery-operated candle in the bottom of the jar.
- ▼ Cover the jar.

Dim the lights and let the children see how the jars glow. Say, “These gifts say thank you to people who help our church.” Include the children in presenting the gifts.

Pray:

Dear God, thank you for your gift of Jesus. May we remember to give gifts to others. Amen.

LG *Providing opportunities for children to express generosity, welcome others, and offer kindness helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*

Extra Activity



Hand out copies of **GN 2**. Allow time for the children to solve the puzzle. While the children find their way through the maze, use the following questions or ones of your own to engage them in a discussion about stars.

- ▼ Have you ever looked up at the night sky to see the stars?
- ▼ Did you notice one star that shines brighter than all the others?
- ▼ What did that star make you think about?



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Ask the children to help clean the space.

Turn on the white candle. Explain that the white candle is a reminder of Jesus, the light of the world. Remind the children that God gave us such a wonderful gift in Jesus. It is out of gratitude for this gift that we then share gifts with others.

Sing stanza 5 of “God, We Sing”—**SCM 15**.

Encourage the children to use the prayer star from “Praying God’s Grace” with their family. Encourage them to think of ways to share the gift of prayer with others.

Pray aloud, prompting the children to echo each phrase:

Thank you, God, /
for being with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. /
Thank you for leading the magi by the star. /
Thank you for being with us /
wherever we go, /
whatever we do. /
Amen.

Send the children with these words: “May the grace of God be with you.”

Remind the children about the free e-book and challenge them to read the story during the week.



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).

Pray for ...

- ☆ people we love
- ☆ things I'm thankful for
- ☆ Jesus, light of the world
- ☆ things in God's creation
- ☆ people who are sad or hurting

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