



Grace in a Manger

Goal: To celebrate the Christmas story with joy and gratitude.

RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 2:1–7

As if Mary didn’t have enough to do in preparation for the birth of her firstborn son, now comes word that she and Joseph have to make a seventy-mile journey from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered for the tax rolls. Bethlehem was the destination because Joseph’s ancestry was associated with King David and Bethlehem was David’s city.

We don’t have details of their trip or housing arrangements when they arrived. We do know that because they didn’t have a room inside an inn or house, Mary gave birth to her son and laid him in a manger, a trough used for feeding animals.

God’s grace was with Mary and Joseph in providing a place for Jesus to be born, the manger. But in the manger is even greater grace—Jesus himself! Though born like all other humans, this baby was also God in human flesh—Emmanuel, “God is with us.”

We cannot be more grateful for God’s grace given in Jesus. He came to live and die and be raised again to forgive our sin and bring us into God’s family forever. Our whole lives overflow with gratitude for the grace given in that Bethlehem manger!

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

This story is probably one that most children know. Children hear it at church and perhaps at home as they grow up playing with a beloved nativity set. When we consider what we most want children to know, what we think is most important in their growth as a spiritual being, knowing they are loved by their family and they are a beloved child of God is at the top of the list. This story of the birth of Jesus helps children remember that God sent God’s Son, Jesus, to help us see how we could love and to remember that God is always with us.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you prepare to tell this familiar and beloved story of the birth of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, be alert to how the children have heard it over the years. Older children will be able to understand how two authors, Matthew and Luke, both told the story but did so in different ways. Here in Luke, we hear how Mary and Joseph had to travel and so they were looking for a guest room to stay in so Mary could have her baby. Since the birth story will be familiar to most of them, you could invite them to think about questions they would like to ask the people in the story. This would help them think about Jesus’ birth in new ways.

*O gracious God, be with me in every new morning,
that Christ will be born again in my life. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, Christmas 1, Christmas 1a, 15, 16

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white cloth

biblical costumes

doll bed

doll

towel or baby blanket

strips of cloth

Advent wreath with
four battery-operated
candles and a white
Christ candle

Responding

Claiming

recording of “Joy to the
World”

SCM Christmas 1b

Celebrating

Christmas cookies

juice

paper cups

recorded Christmas
music

Offering

seven craft sticks per
person

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Extra Activity

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” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing



Play “Away in a Manger” as children arrive. Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite the children to help set the scene. On a table, place a white cloth, a Bible, and an Advent wreath with candles. Follow the tradition of your congregation in selecting the color of the candles. Add a white Christ candle for Jesus’ birth today.

Invite the children’s creativity in setting the scenes for the drama in “Reflecting on God’s Grace”— signs saying “Nazareth” and “Bethlehem” and a winding road that connects the two places.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Mix with the group and encourage conversation.

Singing

Play the first four verses of “God, We Sing”—**SCM 15**—as the children listen for the words of Advent; *hope, peace, love, and joy*. Play the song again, and together with the children, clap out the rhythm. Then join in singing. Turn on the candles. Remind the children that the candlelight is a reminder of God’s presence and Jesus as the light of the world.

Praying



Have everyone stand in a circle. Lead a movement prayer:

“In Advent, we look back to the birth of the baby Jesus. (*Turn to look away from the circle.*)

In Advent, we look ahead to a time when Jesus will bring God’s glory and peace. (*Turn to face into the circle.*)

In Advent, we look all around for Jesus because he is with us here and now. (*Turn slowly in place.*)

Remembering Jesus’ birth and looking forward to Jesus’ return, we look for the Holy Spirit to guide us today. Amen.”

C Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.



Preparing to Hear the Story C

Ask the children what they remember about Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. Explain that the story of Jesus' birth is told in different ways in different books of the Bible. Today they are going to hear the story based on the Gospel of Luke.

Explain that today's Bible story begins in the town of Nazareth, located in Galilee. This is where Joseph and Mary lived. The story will end in Bethlehem. Show **SCM Christmas 1a** and wonder how long it might have taken Mary and Joseph to walk the distance of seventy miles. (Hint: the average person can walk three miles per hour.)



Luke's telling of Jesus birth 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.

Hearing the Story L

Invite a child to find Luke 2 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center.

Read **SCM Christmas 1**. 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. Encourage the children to stand and walk in place while you read, as if they are on a journey.

Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Ask the children to place the blanket on the floor in the center of your meeting area. Set the doll bed in the middle of the blanket and place the doll in the bed. Invite the children to sit in a circle around the doll bed.

Encourage them to peek at the "baby" and to talk about what they would think of this as a bed for a newborn baby. Invite those who wish to hold the doll to take turns picking it up, pretending that it is real.

Talk about what a baby's bed is usually like. Ask: "What are some reasons why a baby might not have a proper bed?"

Invite the children to share any wondering questions they might have about today's story. Ask them to compare the birth of baby Jesus with the birth of babies in their community today.

Show the children how babies were wrapped in "swaddling clothes" in Bible times. Wrap the baby doll in a towel or baby blanket, then show the children how to wrap strips of cloth snugly around the doll. Be sure children understand that this was done to keep the baby snug and warm. Take turns "swaddling" the baby doll.

Singing

Celebrate the birth of Jesus. Play, listen to, and sing "Away in a Manger"—**SCM 16**.

Turn off the candles.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God's Grace

MS M

Talk with the children about the joy we have because Jesus was born. Explain that a Christmas carol that expresses this joy is “Joy to the World.” The words are on **SCM Christmas 1b**. Invite the children to read the words aloud with you.

Play a recording of “Joy to the World” (or ask your church’s music director to lead the singing). Play it again and have the children clap in rhythm to it. Then give each child a ribbon or scarf. Suggest that the children find a place to stand that will not be in someone else’s way. Encourage them to show the joy in the music by waving their ribbons or scarves as you play “Joy to the World” again.



Celebrating God's Grace

FA

Plan a surprise party. Serve Christmas cookies and juice. Give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus before eating.

As you and the children eat the snack, encourage them to recall the meaning of Christmas by wondering aloud:

- ▼ why we celebrate Christmas
- ▼ ways you and the children and their families prepare for Christmas

Enjoy some recorded Christmas music as you eat.

Offering God's Grace

LG

In this last week before Christmas, it is important to remember to offer blessings to others.

Have the children select seven craft sticks and paint one side with bright colors. Allow time to dry. Paint the other sides and allow them to dry.

Have the children select seven of the pass-the-blessings ideas from **GN 1** and cut them out. If they have their own ideas, they can write them on the blank strips. Show them how to glue each idea to a craft stick. When the sticks are dry, the children can put them in a paper cup or bag to bring home.

Encourage them to select one stick each day and do the activity on it as a way to pass the blessings they have this week.


GN 2 solution:

God is with us.

Extra Activity

Recall why Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem. (They had to be counted in the census). Hand out copies of **GN 2** and pencils. Have the children count the items and fill in the code, then use the code to solve the puzzle. If time allows, provide markers for the children to color the picture.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD
LG

Ask the children to help clean the space.

Tell the group that waiting and wondering during Advent has made us ready for Christmas. Today, we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Sing “God, We Sing”—**SCM 15**. Invite the children to think of where in their lives and in the world they have seen hope, peace, love, and joy, and tell them they will get a chance to share them in the prayer. Say the echo prayer together, giving each child a chance to thank God for hope, peace, love, and joy:

O God, Christmas is here and Jesus is with us! We see hope, peace, love, and joy in the places we name (*prompt children to name their ideas*). We thank you, God. Amen.

Send the children with these words: “Go and find ways to share the gratitude of Christmas with your family and friends, and in your school and neighborhood. 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).

Pass-the-Blessings Ideas

Make a construction paper chain using paper to give to a friend.	Donate pet supplies to an animal rescue organization.
Wrap Christmas presents for friends and family.	Send cards to men and women serving in the armed forces.
Give up your spot in line to be nice to someone.	Read Matthew 1:18–25, the birth of Jesus, to a friend or family member.
Tell Christmas jokes to make someone smile.	Make a paper Nativity to bring to a neighbor.
Feed the birds.	Write a letter to baby Jesus and give it to your pastor.
Make get-well cards for someone who needs them.	Shop for a gift to put under the Tree of Joy (or another charity at your church).
Collect money for The Christmas Joy Offering and take to church.	Make a birthday card for baby Jesus and give it to your parent or caregiver.
Learn all three stanzas for “Away in a Manger” and sing the song to your family.	

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A =	D =	G =	H =	I =
Number of stripes on the blanket.	Number of windows.	Number of fingers the people in the picture would have.	Number of sheep.	Number of pans on the wall.
O =	S =	T =	U =	W =
Number of small clay jugs.	Number of hands we can see.	Number of chickens.	Number of spots on the cow.	Number of stars in the sky in the window.

30	4	1	3	5
20	3	8	2	9
				5



