



It's Epiphany! Let's Worship Jesus!

Goal: To explore Epiphany as a way to worship Jesus with the wise men.

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, 6a, 17, 20

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white cloth

white candle

star (ornament or
paper)

Home by Another Way
by Barbara Brown Taylor

Internet-connected
device

YouTube video of
“We Three Kings –
Claymation Christmas”

Responding

Claiming

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, colored pencils

Praying

black construction
paper, chalk

Offering

dog and cat treat
ingredients (see GN 2)

Extra

copies of GN 3

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 known to all people in the person of Jesus Christ.

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.

Obtain *Home by Another Way* by Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Flayaway Books, 2018), pcusastore.com.

“Praying God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing LG

As the children arrive, greet them warmly. 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 you set up your space. Provide a Bible, white cloth, a white candle, and a star to set on the table. Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Ask for two volunteers to practice reading the Matthew 2:1–12 Scripture passage and another volunteer to bookmark and practice reading John 1:5.

Begin a conversation about travel by asking the children to tell about the most extended trips they have ever taken.

Singing

Gather the group around the candle. Tell the children that today is Epiphany, the final day of the Christmas season. On Epiphany, the church remembers the wise men who worshiped baby Jesus. Play “Come into God’s Presence”—SCM 17—inviting the group to sing along.

Praying

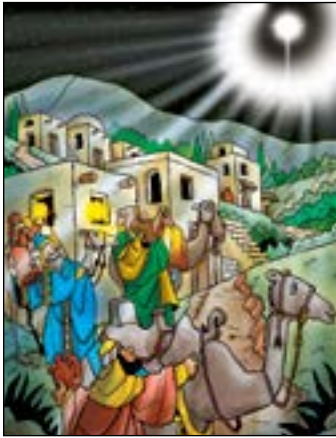
Turn on the candle. Ask the volunteer to read aloud John 1:5. Invite another volunteer to say a prayer or pray the following aloud:

Gracious God, help us begin this new year with your light at the center of our lives. Teach us how to worship you, love you, and serve you. Amen.

T *Abrupt transitions can cause problems with some children. Give the time a focus by engaging the children in a simple activity. Marching from one place to another, lining up by height, or clapping hands can give focus to the task.*



The region of ancient Parthia is in modern-day Iran.



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.

Homage means to give someone special honor, respect, or reverence.

bit.ly/2BqC7fk or search YouTube for "We Three Kings—Claymation Christmas."

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.

Preparing to Hear the Story VI

Introduce today's Bible story by showing **SCM 6a**, a map of the Middle East that shows the terrain or landscape. Ask volunteers to locate Parthia and Jerusalem. Explain that some scholars say the wise men came from Parthia. Have the children imagine some of the difficulties the wise men may have faced traveling that long distance over such hilly areas. You might explain that some people believed it took at least twenty days, others estimate fifty days or more. It could have even been much more if they were following established trade routes and taking rest breaks.

Hearing the Story LG C

Invite one of the children to find Matthew 2 and the volunteers to read Matthew 2:1–12. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship center.

Ask the children how many wise men, or magi, are in the story. Most likely, they will tell you three. Invite them to listen to the story again as you read **SCM 6** or play the story audio that is a story based on the Bible. Use your voice, your expressions, your feelings, and your body to make the story lively.

Ask the question about the number of magi again. There is no mention of the number in the story. Explain to the children that traditions grew up over the years around this story that there were three magi because of the three gifts. Different traditions even give the magi different names. Oftentimes we know the magi as Caspar, Melchior (MEL-kee-or), and Balthazar (BAHL-thuh-zahr).

Engage the children in a conversation about the star in the story. Discuss what its purpose was (guidance, light) and how a star can be a symbol for us today.

Reflecting on the Story C

Read *Home by Another Way* by Barbara Brown Taylor for an imaginative perspective on this story of Jesus' visitors.

Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ▼ What did the wise men do when they first saw Jesus?
- ▼ Why do you think they knelt down and worshiped Jesus, a baby?
- ▼ How do you think the wise men knew they found what they were looking for?
- ▼ What did you like about this story?

Singing

Together, watch a video of "We Three Kings—Claymation Christmas" on YouTube or sing the song "We Three Kings of Orient Are" from your church's hymnal. Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Many children, as well as many adults, may think worship happens only in church on Sunday morning. Encourage expansive thinking.

Claiming God's Grace C

Invite the children to think more deeply about what it means to worship Jesus Christ. Distribute copies of **GN 1** and colored pencils. Point out that stars remind us of the light of God's love that shines through Jesus Christ. Invite the children to use colored pencils to write or draw a way to worship in each of the points of the star.

Invite the children to draw a way they worship God in church below the star. Encourage the children to think of times and ways they worship outside of the sanctuary on Sundays. Have them draw ways that they worship God through the week in the area around the star. Invite the children to talk about the ways they worship God.



Praying God's Grace TD L

Suggest that the magi may have said a blessing, or a special prayer, upon entering or leaving the house. Tell the children that there is an Epiphany tradition called "chalking the doorway" to remember Epiphany and ask for Christ's blessing on one's home.

Write the following on a chalkboard or newsprint:

$$20 + C + M + B + _ _$$

Write the last two numbers of the coming year in the two blank spaces at the end of the blessing.

Give the children a strip of black paper and chalk. Invite them to copy that marking on their paper. Make one for the door of your room as well. Explain the marking to the children. Tell the children that the first and last numbers indicate the new year and that the marking is asking for a blessing for the coming year.

Write "*Christus mansionem benedicat*" on the chalkboard or newsprint. Tell the children that these are Latin words. See if they can decipher some meaning from them. Do they see the word "Christ" in the first word? Do they see the word "mansion" (for house) in the second word? Do they recognize part of the word "benediction" (a blessing, or good words) in the last word? The phrase means, "Christ bless this house." The C, M, and B also remind us of the traditional names given the three magi—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.

Tape the black strip over the doorway to your room. Encourage the children to take their strips home and place them over the doorway to their house or room, asking for Christ's blessing for the coming year.



Offering God's Grace

A B MS

Ask the children if they know any Epiphany traditions. Some children may have family or cultural traditions for celebrating this day. Explain that over the years, the magi also became known as kings. Epiphany is often called Three Kings Day and some places celebrate with a "King's Cake," a sweet pastry with a hidden treasure, coin, or even a little baby Jesus inside. The person who finds the hidden object has good fortune for the coming year.

Tell the children that one way to worship Jesus is to show kindness to all, including animals. An Epiphany tradition in many Latin American countries is leaving grass for the camels that have helped the wise ones on their journey. Parents and children go out on the day before Epiphany and choose the best and most tender blades of grass for the camels. Some families leave water out as well. This tradition shows children how to care for all God's creatures.

Ask the children to wash their hands. Hand out copies of **GN 2** and use the recipes to make dog and cat treats. Wash hands again.

While the treats are baking, invite the children to decorate labels. Have the children write what meat, vegetable, or fruit was used in the dog treats.

When the treats are finished baking and have cooled, provide plastic bags and have the children put a few treats in each bag along with a label indicating if it is a dog or cat treat. Suggest that the children take the treats home or provide the treats to other members of the congregation for their pets.

Extra Activity

LG LD

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.

Hand out copies of **GN 3**. Invite a volunteer to read each panel. Have the children draw accompanying illustrations. Instruct the children to cut the two story strips and make one long strip by taping together the end of the first strip (wise men following star) to the beginning of the next strip ("They went over mountains . . .").

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. Have the children tape the end of the story (" . . . gold, frankincense, and myrrh.") to the picture of the star. The story now forms a star book!

Encourage the children to take their books home and tell the story of the wise ones following the star to their parents, or caregivers, and families.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Gather the children and lead them in cleaning the worship space. Sing “O Child Jesus, You Are So Lovely (Jesucito de mi vida)” — **SCM 20**. The song is in Spanish and English. Listen to the words and become familiar with the pronunciations. The song is a lullaby for Jesus, so invite the children to sing, imagining that they are visiting the child Jesus just as the wise ones did.

Pass a star around the circle. When it is their turn to hold the star, invite the children to share one way they paid homage (worshiped) to Jesus during the session and one way they think they can worship Jesus this coming week.

Pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing.

Gracious God, thank you for sending your light, Jesus Christ, into the world. Each day, may we worship and honor Jesus with our lives. Amen.

Send each child with a blessing. Say to each one: “(Name), the light of Jesus is with you. Go and spread the light!”



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).





Dog Treats

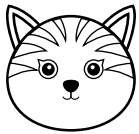
2 cups whole wheat flour or oats ground into flour
2 (4 oz.) jars baby food (beef, chicken, turkey, sweet potato, carrots, or fruit—avoid grapes or raisins)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix flour and baby food. If dough is not firm, add more flour. Roll dough on a floured surface to about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Cut with cookie cutters or plastic knives. Place $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart on a greased cookie sheet and bake for 20–25 minutes. Store in a paper bag to keep the treats crunchy.

contains
flour and



Dog
Treats

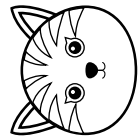


Cat Treats

5 oz. can of tuna
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white cornmeal
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix all ingredients and form a ball. Pinch off little pieces and roll into small balls. Place the balls on a baking sheet about 1 inch apart. Use 2 fingers to flatten each ball. Bake for 5 minutes. Flip and bake an additional 5 minutes.

contains
tuna,
cornmeal,
flour



Cat
Treats

<p>Draw a bright star.</p>	<p>Wise people from far away found a new bright star in the night sky.</p>	<p>Draw the wise men.</p>	<p>“It’s the birth of a new king!” said one of the wise ones. “We must go meet this king!” said another.</p>	<p>Draw the wise ones following the star.</p>
<p>They went over mountains . . . and crossed rivers . . . and traveled through deserts . . . following the star.</p>	<p>Draw an angry King Herod.</p>	<p>King Herod did not want a new king to take his place, so he tried to trick the wise ones into telling him where this new king was.</p>	<p>Draw baby Jesus with the gifts.</p>	<p>The wise ones knelt before Jesus, saying words of praise and thanksgiving. They gave Jesus their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.</p>

