



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

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

biblical costumes

doll

Advent wreath, candles

Responding

Claiming

recording of “Joy to the World”

SCM Christmas 1b

ribbons or scarves

Celebrating

Christmas cookies

juice

recorded Christmas music

Praying

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

yellow or gold paint

index cards or skin-colored construction paper

tissue paper

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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep. Plan accordingly.

Welcoming and Preparing

A B M L

Play “Away in a Manger” as children arrive. Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the response, “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—two signs (one says “Nazareth” and the other says “Bethlehem”) and a winding road that connects the two places.

Invite 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 while the children clap out the rhythms they as they sing. 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

M

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

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

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

(*Turn slowly in place.*) In Advent, we look all around for Jesus as 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 teach us today. Amen.”



Preparing to Hear the Story

Ask 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

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, your feelings, and your 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

Invite children to act out today's story of Jesus' birth in Luke 2:1–7.

Distribute Bibles. Ask volunteers to read the story from the Bible in these sections: vv. 1–2, v. 3, v. 4, v. 5, vv. 6–7. Use the children's suggestions about how to dramatize it and invite volunteers to take on the roles, using simple costumes and a doll. Then, with one or more narrators reading the story in sections, put all the acts together.

Afterward, ask the children to imagine being Mary. Wonder aloud:

- ▼ How you (Mary) feel about going to Bethlehem.
- ▼ How you feel when you cannot find a room.
- ▼ What it's like in the stable.
- ▼ Your thoughts on the birth of Jesus.

Next, invite the children to imagine being Joseph. Wonder aloud:

- ▼ What concerns you (Joseph) have about going to Bethlehem.
- ▼ How you feel when you find a place in the stable.
- ▼ What you see/smell/hear in the stable.
- ▼ Your thoughts on the birth of Jesus.

Singing

Celebrate the birth of Jesus. Play 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

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 invite the children to clap in rhythm to it. Then give each child a ribbon or scarf and ask them to 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. Play “Joy to the World.”



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 and ways you and the children and their families prepare for Christmas.

Enjoy some recorded Christmas music.

Praying God's Grace

Make prayer reminders for the children to be thankful that God is always near and available, ready to listen.

Demonstrate how to glue five craft sticks together to form a star (see **GN 1**) and encourage the children to do the same. When the glue is dry, invite the children to paint their star yellow or gold. Have the children use the baby Jesus shape pattern on **GN 1** to make the baby on an index card or out of skin-colored construction paper and add a face to the baby shape. Wrap the baby shapes with tissue paper and secure with tape or glue. Have the children cut small pieces of yarn to represent straw and glue it to the back of the baby shape. Show the children where to glue the baby shape on the star. To make a hanger, string a 12" length of yarn through the top point of the star and tie a knot. Have the children write “Thank you, God” on one of the star points.

Talk together about how they can remember to pray and for what they can give God thanks.

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


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


Ask the children to help clean the space.

Tell the group that they have made it through Advent, the season when we get ready for Christmas, and that we are ready to 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:

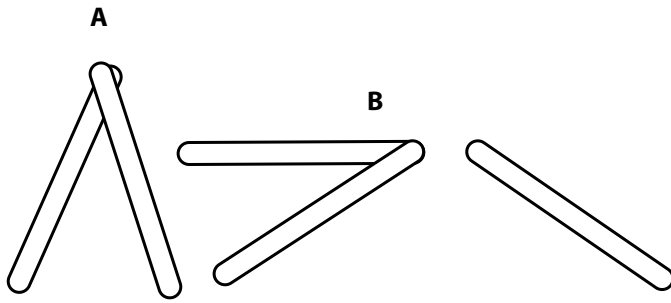
O God, Christmas is here and Jesus is with us! We see hope, peace, love, and joy in the places we name (*prompt children to name their ideas*). We thank you, God. Amen.

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.

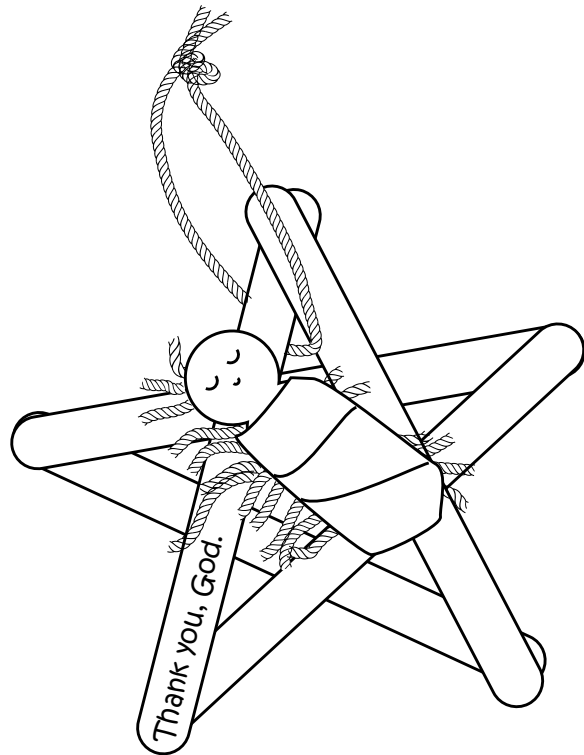
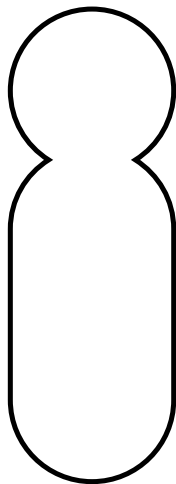
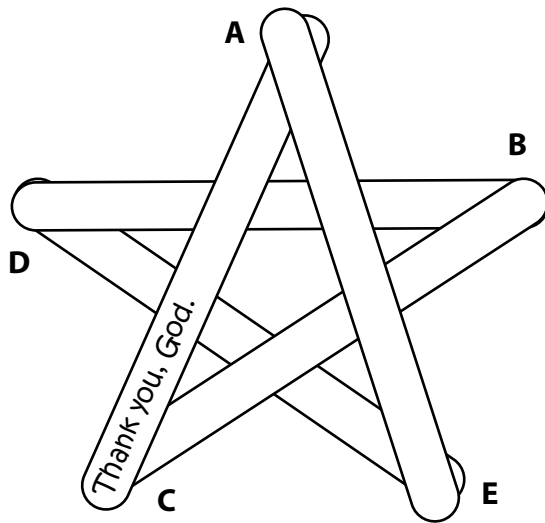


Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).



Glue sticks together to form two “V” shapes (Diagram A and B). The fifth stick will be added later. Cross the two “V” shapes and glue the lower left point (C). Use the fifth stick to finish the star shape by gluing the first end at the top (D) and other end at the bottom (E).

Cut out the baby Jesus pattern, trace it on skin-toned construction paper, and cut it out.



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



