

**God's Gift of Love**

(based on Luke 2:1-7)

Mary and Joseph lived in a place called Nazareth. It was almost time for Mary to have her baby. She and Joseph worked hard to get everything ready. They couldn't wait to welcome baby Jesus.

"Not long now," they said to each other.

At that time, a man named Caesar Augustus was the Roman emperor. Caesar wanted everyone's name to be put on a list. So he made a law ordering everyone to go to their hometowns to be listed.

Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, so they had to go all the way to Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph had no choice. They went to be counted, along with everyone else.

It was a long journey. Every day, they walked along dusty roads. Every day, they walked under the hot sun. Every night, they stopped to rest. Every night, they prayed for God's guidance and protection.

Finally, Mary and Joseph saw Bethlehem in the distance. They had arrived. What a relief!

The small town was crowded with people. All the houses were full. So many people had come to town to be counted.

"Will we find somewhere to stay?" worried Joseph. "Mary can't have her baby in the street."

They prayed, trusting God to help them find a safe place for the baby to be born.

Finally, Mary and Joseph found a place to stay when a kind person welcomed them. All the spare rooms in the house were full, so Mary and Joseph had to sleep with the animals.

It wasn't fancy. But it was warm and safe. There was lots of hay, so they made a bed.

That night, Jesus was born. Mary wrapped baby Jesus in strips of cloth and laid him in a feeding bin for animals called a manger. The animals looked down in astonishment at the new baby sleeping in their hay.

Mary and Joseph were so glad their baby had arrived. They said "thank you" to God for their special child. Then they said "thank you" to God for helping them find a warm, safe place for Jesus to be born.

Welcome, baby Jesus!



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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Advent wreath—When your family is together for a meal this week, read the Bible story, and light the first, second, and third candles of the wreath. Wonder together where God's grace is in this story.
- Invite everyone to imagine what it was like for Mary and Joseph to get ready for Jesus to be born and to take a long trip. Play a "make-a-list" game by naming something to pack for the baby or something needed for the trip. Try to use every letter in the alphabet.
- Retell the story as a *Las Posadas* play around your home or with neighbors. Identify people to be Mary, Joseph, and two or more innkeepers. Pick a place for Mary and Joseph to begin the journey, several places to stop and ask for a room, and a last stop. As someone narrates, Mary and Joseph go from place to place—knocking, asking, and being told "no." At the last place, the innkeeper will say, "Welcome! There is room here."



Responding to God's Grace

- Sing the following lyrics to the tune of "London Bridge Is Falling Down."

Everywhere they went that night, went that night,
went that night,
everywhere they went that night said, "There's
no room for you."

Finally, one welcomed them, welcomed them,
welcomed them.

Finally, one welcomed them with a place
to stay.

Mary had a baby boy, baby boy, baby boy.
Mary had a baby boy; and his name was Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God, Son of God, Son of God.
Jesus is the Son of God; thank you, God, for
Jesus.

- Bundle up and take a nature walk. Look for animals that are getting ready for winter. Wonder how the animal's preparation is like that of Joseph and Mary when they went to Bethlehem.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- In gratitude for shelter and the hospitality of others, find a pattern for making a simple no-sew, fleece baby blanket. Pick out fabric, and make one or more blankets to use at the church or donate to a clinic or hospital nursery.
- Bake a birthday cake for Jesus and share it with your neighbors. Invite everyone to put on party hats and to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus.
- Pray the following prayer each day this week:

Dear God, help us share your presence in the world. Amen.