

Introduction to Christmas Time



Seasonal Background

By the third century, Christians wanted a feast to celebrate the birth of the Savior. The choice of a time in midwinter, the darkest time of the year in North America, points to the belief that Christ brings light into the darkness of our world. The birth of Jesus is good news. His coming proclaims that light triumphs over darkness.

The mystery of the Incarnation, God becoming fully human, encompasses a whole season, revealing that Christmas is more than a celebration of Jesus' birth. Christmas Time, like the whole of the liturgical year, gives us a chance to meditate more deeply on important events in the life of Jesus. We are able to think about Jesus' early life and the miraculous signs that accompanied his birth. We celebrate that he, like us, was born into and was part of a family and that our families too are holy. We think about his mother Mary and her special role in salvation history. We reflect on Christ's baptism in the Jordan River and what it might mean for us to be adopted into the same special relationship with the Father. Each of these moments inspires deeper reflection on the Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. What these Scripture passages have in common is their emphasis on how God came into our midst. The full mys-

tery of the Incarnation, Jesus as true God and true man, fully human and fully divine, is the essential message of Christmas.

Celebrating the Season

During Christmas Time, the liturgy reflects joy and the glory of God. The singing of the Gloria, the aroma of incense, the sounds of the choir, and the images of the Nativity draw us deeper in awe of the mystery this season celebrates: that God has taken on human flesh and become one of us.

In keeping with the season, the Christmas Time environment should be rich and vibrant. The liturgical color for this season is white. You may wish to decorate your space in white, gold, and silver and with poinsettias, Christmas cactus, and evergreens. Crafts on Nativity scenes, stars, shepherds and sheep, and images of the Holy Family are all beautiful ways to celebrate Christmas Time. Keep the celebration going with music too! Christmas carols are fun and joyful, and remind us that our celebration is too joyful to be limited to just one day.

Encourage parents not to end their Christmas celebration on December 26. Remind them to continue displaying their decorations, especially the Nativity scene. Send children home with chalk and a traditional house blessing prayer to celebrate Epiphany.



Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

December 25

Rejoice and Be Glad

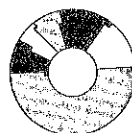
Focus: To celebrate the Messiah's birth.

Catechist's Context

The glory of the Lord shone in a bright flash of light at the appearance of the angel. The shepherds were afraid, but the angel brought the Good News of Jesus' birth. The dazzling light that dispelled the dark night and the song of the angels stand in contrast to the glory of God concealed in the tiny baby.

Focus on Church Teaching

God created the world out of love. When the world fell into darkness, God entered into his creation out of love to free us from the power of sin. This great mystery, the Incarnation, is at the heart of our faith: Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became flesh and dwelt among us as one of us to save us because he loves us. Our response to such great love can only be to believe in him, to obey his call to love, and to carry that love to the whole world (EG, 264; RMI, 11).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. For Catholics, our celebration of Christmas lasts more than just one day. Together, count the number of days in Christmas Time this year (the gold or white days on the calendar during this season). Why does Christmas last more than one day? What do we celebrate during this time? Use the "Introduction to Christmas Time" on page 19 to help you lead this discussion.

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Luke 2:10-11

Alleluia, alleluia.

Good news and great joy to all the world:
today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:1-14

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. These first records were made when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.

Mary was engaged to Joseph and traveled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon going to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying in a manger."

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: "Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

The Light in the Sky

☉ What do you know about your birth? or the first days with your family? or how they brought you home for the first time? Did friends or relatives come to see you?

Today's Gospel passage is the story of how Jesus was born. There are a number of people involved in the story of Jesus' birth.

☉ Who was in the story?

☉ One of the special characters is the angel. Do you remember the special role angels have? (You might remind the children about how the angel told Mary and Joseph about Jesus.)

Again, we hear about the angel bringing a message from God. This time, the angel announces the Good News of Jesus' birth to shepherds. When the angel came to the shepherds, they saw a bright flashing light. But this wasn't any ordinary light. This light was the brightness of God's glory.

☉ How did the shepherds react when they saw this bright flash?

☉ Have you ever seen a bright flashing light?

Maybe you have seen lightning or fireworks in the sky. They are beautiful, but they can also be a little scary! Imagine that the shepherds saw this and an angel talking to them. Of course, they were afraid.

Then, more angels came and filled the sky, singing and praising God. Just imagine what this must have been like, with the glory of the Lord shining and the angels filling the sky and their beautiful voices singing praise to God. It must have been very beautiful!

We talked about the stories your parents told you about when you were born. All of them are wonderful. But the story of Jesus' birth is the most wonderful of all! The announcement of his birth had such beauty—filled with a chorus of rejoicing angels and the night sky filled with a bright light of God's glory. Can you imagine? This was a very special baby! This baby was Jesus.

Gloria!

Explain to the children that the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will," is sung at most Sunday Masses, using different melodies throughout the year. Most children have heard the Latin refrain as part of the Christmas carol "Angels We Have Heard on High." Teach the children to sing the refrain from "Angels We Have Heard on High" or your parish's adaptation of the Gloria, and sing it several times.

God's Greatest Gift

You will need a copy of *The Legend of the Poinsettia* by Tomie dePaola to lead this activity.

Before reading *The Legend of the Poinsettia* by Tomie dePaola aloud to the children, discuss briefly:

- What is the best gift you've ever received?
- Who gave you this gift?
- Why is it so special?

The answers will vary, and it is fine if they include toys and games. Then tell the children that the story you are going to read is about a little girl who is trying to find the best gift for baby Jesus. Read the story aloud and show them the pictures.

When the story is finished, ask the following questions to help the children understand that gifts don't need to be expensive; even simple gifts can be very meaningful.

- What gift did Lucida want to give?
- Which was more important, that Lucida have a special gift to give or that she be with her siblings at church on Christmas Eve?
- What happened when Lucida gave a very simple gift out of love?

Finally, help the children to understand that God's greatest gift was not fancy or expensive but came in the form of a little baby, Jesus. Jesus would grow up to save us from our sins and help us to live with God forever in heaven. Ask the children to recall details of the Nativity story, ones from today's Gospel as well as from other Gospel accounts, which show how humble Jesus' beginning on earth was. (For example, he was born in a manger, his first visitors were poor shepherds, etc.)

It is okay for us to enjoy the gifts we are given, but we should always remember that God doesn't need expensive gifts. We give God the best gift of all when we believe in him, pray, go to church, act as good disciples, and show others his love.

Glory and Peace

You will need cardstock with "Glory to God in the Highest" or "Peace" printed on them and coloring materials to lead this activity.

Explain to the children that the angels said special words to praise and thank God: "Glory to God" and "Peace." In the celebration of Mass, we join with the angels in our prayers of praise and thanksgiving, and we use these special words. Let children choose a "Glory to God" or "Peace" prayer card. They may decorate the prayer cards any way they like. Instruct the children to bring the cards home and put them in a special place to remind them of the special words they can use to pray with the angels.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

December 25



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 9:1–6

Psalms 96:1–2a, 2b–3, 11–12, 13

Titus 2:11–14

Luke 2:1–14

Prayer

Lord our God,
here in a humble stable we see
Joseph and Mary
keeping watch over their newborn son.
We see poor shepherds and animals
whose manger serves as a bed for
this baby, the Christ child:
Mary's son and God's Son,
helpless infant and mighty God.
We are reminded of the happy truth
of Christmas:
"The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling with us"
(John 1:14).
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that the Christmas story is a combined narrative of the Gospel accounts? These different sets of readings are for the Vigil Mass (which takes place on the evening of Christmas Eve), Mass at Midnight, Mass at Dawn, and Mass during the Day. In Matthew's account (read at the Vigil Mass), we hear about Jesus' family tree and about Joseph's role in Jesus' life. The Mass at Midnight uses Luke's account, in which we hear about Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem to be counted in the census and how there is no room for them at

the inn. This reading also includes the angels proclaiming the news of Christ's birth to the shepherds. The Mass at Dawn continues the story from Luke, with the shepherds greeting the newborn Jesus and his family. The Mass during the Day uses the beginning of John's Gospel, which is not a narrative account, but a reflection on Jesus as the Incarnate Word of God.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ There was no room at the inn for baby Jesus, but we can make room for him in our hearts. How can we make room for Jesus in our hearts?
- ☉ Christmas is a busy time. How do we concentrate on Jesus' birth and its importance?
- ☉ If you were at the manger with the shepherds, what would you say to Mary and Joseph? or to baby Jesus?

Faith in Action

For many families, Christmas week is one of the busiest of the year. Make time to share with one another some of the thoughts and prayers you have offered during Christmas liturgies and rituals at home. How does celebrating Christmas bring us closer to our incarnate Lord?



Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

My Family, Holy Family

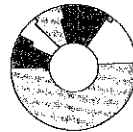
Focus: To allow Christ to dwell in us richly.

Catechist's Context

In the Gospel reading today, we see that the life of the Holy Family, like that of our own families, was at times stressful but always characterized by love, care, and concern for the well-being of one another. When we put our trust in God, just as Joseph trusted in God's guidance and followed the angel's direction, he will lead us to where we are supposed to be.

Focus on Church Teaching

Jesus lived a truly human life. He was subject to the authority of his parents. From them he learned to live in loving human relationships, to work, to be obedient, to learn the customs and rules of his community, to know the stories of his ancestors, and to pray. The family is the model God gives us to teach us how to live with our fellow Christians (CCC, 1655) and with all people. Jesus teaches us that we are to be brothers and sisters, members of one family with God at the head (GS, 24).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi-viii for more information about the saints). We are part of God's family because we have been baptized. How did the saint you read about help God's family? How do you help other members of God's family?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Colossians 3:15a, 16

Alleluia, alleluia.

May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, and the fullness of his message live within you.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

An angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel said, "Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him."

That night Joseph got up and took his wife and the child to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod died. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "I called my son out of Egypt."

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph while he was still in Egypt. The angel said, "Get up and take the child and his mother back to Israel. The people who wanted to kill him are now dead."

Joseph got up and left with them for Israel. But when he heard that Herod's son Archelaus was now ruler of Judea, he was afraid to go there. Then in a dream he was told to go to Galilee, and they went to live there in the town of Nazareth.

So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "He will be called a Nazarene."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection Led by the Lord

This Gospel can be very frightening. The idea that there was a king who wanted to kill Jesus when he was only a baby is not what we like to think about at Christmas. It's important to remember that God was watching over the baby Jesus, as he watches over each of us.

☉ How did God protect the baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph?

We know that angels are God's trusted messengers. An angel told Mary that she would have Jesus and told Joseph that it was okay for him to get married to Mary. An angel also told Zechariah and Elizabeth that they would have a baby (St. John the Baptist). Today's Gospel reading happens shortly after Jesus' birth. God trusted the angel to deliver his message, and he trusted Joseph to do as the angel instructed so that the Holy Family would be safe. King Herod had no power in Egypt, so Jesus would be safe there. Joseph loved God and knew that God would protect them.

☉ Have you ever moved or gone on a long trip? What did you have to do to get ready? Did you miss your friends while you were away?

It's hard to leave home and move to another country far away. It isn't like going on a weeklong or two-week vacation. Joseph and Mary didn't have time to say goodbye to family and friends or to plan how they were going to get to their new home. Making a new home, earning a living in a new land, and making new friends is not easy. Joseph and Mary may have had to learn a new language too. Despite all the challenges, they always trusted that God would take care of them.

☉ How do your parents or other family members help take care of you?

Some people today have to leave their homes because it is not safe. They might have to move to another state or even to another country. God helps to take care of them by inspiring people like us to help them. Just as God sent an angel to tell Joseph how to protect Jesus, God sends the teachings of Jesus to tell us how to care for others today. We are part of God's family and should treat everyone as children of God.

☉ How can you help take care of others?

Family Portraits

You will need paper and coloring materials to lead this activity.

Ask the children to draw pictures of their families on Christmas. When they are finished, invite each child to show his or her picture to the group and to name the different people and animals present and describe what they are doing. After each child presents his or her picture, invite the group to say a quick prayer for that child's family. You can use these or similar words, "God our Father, bless [child's name]'s family."

The Holy Family's Travels

You will need a biblical map of the Middle East to lead this activity.

Show the children where Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. Trace their journey to Bethlehem and explain that it was a small town and that King David was from the town too. In the Old Testament, King David was described as an important king and one of Jesus' ancestors. Trace the route to Egypt, noting that Herod's men were not in Egypt. Finally trace the route back to Nazareth, where Jesus grew to adulthood.

We Are God's Children

You will need small poster board, a hole punch, yarn, four-inch-diameter circles cut from heavy paper or poster board, lengths of yarn or string, and crayons to lead this activity.

This craft will be a banner or poster for your meeting space wall. On the center of a small poster board, write the words, "We Are Family in the Sight of God." Punch a series of holes along the bottom and sides of the poster. Distribute small circles to the children; on one side have them draw their own faces, and on the other side, his or her name. With assistance, punch a hole in their finished circle and tie a length of yarn onto it. Tie the circles to the poster board. Finish the activity by praying these or similar words, "God, watch over us and help us to trust in you and always follow you."

Living the Liturgy at Home

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph



Scripture Readings

Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Psalms 128:1–2, 3, 4–5

Colossians 3:12–21 or 3:12–17

Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

Prayer

Loving Father,
as we look at this Nativity scene,
may we remember Mary,
the Holy Mother of God,
who said yes to your plan of salvation.
May we imitate St. Joseph, who
protected and loved your Son and
his Blessed Mother.
And may we adore Jesus for ever
and ever.
We ask this through the same Jesus
Christ, our Light and our Life. Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that the story of the Holy Family returning to Israel after living in Egypt parallels the story of Moses leading the Hebrews out of Egypt? In fact, Jesus is referred to as “the new Moses” because he brings freedom and liberation to God’s people.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ What are the hard parts and easy parts about being in a family? What are the fun parts and sad parts of being in a family?
- ☉ What are the hard parts and easy parts of being a member of God’s family?

Faith in Action

The Feast of the Holy Family reminds us that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were persecuted and had to seek refuge in a foreign land. Checking with your parish, your child’s school, or going online, find out what services are offered for refugees in your area. Ask if there are any needs that you and your family might be able to help meet. Refugee families frequently need household and school items as they establish new households. Help your child to see how we are all part of God’s family and how we can help others.



Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1

Mary, Blessed of God

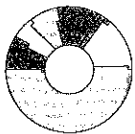
Focus: To realize we are all God's blessed people.

Catechist's Context

After the shepherds heard what the angel had said, they went to Bethlehem and told everyone about what had happened. Mary pondered these events in her heart. We too are called to recognize God's blessings that surround us, to meditate on them, and to return thanks and praise to God.

Focus on Church Teaching

After centuries of preparing the world by revealing himself and entering into covenants with humankind, God entered creation. He humbled himself, choosing to be born into a poor family, in obscure conditions (CCC, 525). He came to offer his people peace, to teach us to be humble as he was humble, that we might enter into his kingdom (CCC, 526). Although humble, he was fully God as well as fully human. Mary, his mother, is called Mother of God because his divinity and humanity are one (CCC, 496).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Today we celebrate Mary's role as the mother of God. When the shepherds learned about Jesus, they were excited to see him. Mary shared in this excitement over the gift that God had given her and the whole world in the infant Jesus. What do these reactions teach us about rejoicing in our

relationship with Jesus? Are we excited to spend time with Jesus?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

Hebrews 1:1-2

Alleluia, alleluia.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets;
now God speaks to us through the Son.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:16-21

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

The shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying in the manger.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things

about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands. And they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary when he promised she would have a baby.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Heart-Thinking

This Gospel passage continues what we heard on Christmas. The angel of the Lord announced Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds, and a choir of angels in the night sky sang their praises to God. The shepherds saw the glory of the Lord. Today's Gospel tells us what happened next. After the shepherds heard the angel's message from God that a Savior was born in Bethlehem, they didn't waste any time. They wanted to see the Savior.

☉ What did the shepherds see when they arrived?

The shepherds saw Jesus! They saw a little baby whose name means "God saves." They could see that everything that the angel had told them was true.

☉ What did the shepherds do when they saw that what the angel had said was true?

They spread the Good News! First, they told Mary and Joseph. Then they shared the news with everyone they met. Do you think they could have stopped talking about God if they tried?

☉ How do you think Mary and Joseph felt after the shepherds' visit?

Both Joseph and Mary knew what it was like to receive a message from God from an angel. But now others have come to tell them they also received news from an angel. The news doesn't get old—it always surprises. The Gospel tells us that Mary kept thinking about this. This means that she must have realized how much she was blessed, and she was grateful for God's love in her heart.

Sometimes we experience surprises. When we unwrap gifts, what we find is a surprise. When we hear some news, like when we find out that we will have a new brother or sister, we are surprised. We may also be surprised to know that we have to move to a new home or school and leave our old one behind. Some surprises are good, and some are hard to accept. We just have to keep in mind that when God surprises us, we can be like Mary and think about them, about how we can see them as blessings. We can use our brains to think. We can also think in the deepest part of ourselves, which we call our hearts. We can ask God to guide our brains and our hearts to help us understand what God is saying and doing for us through these surprises.

Crown of Roses

You will need rosary beads to lead this activity.

The word *rosary* means "crown of roses." Explain to the children that when we pray the Rosary, we ask Mary to pray for us. We also think about all the great things Jesus did and how God is with us. Show the children the Rosary and point out the Hail Mary beads and the large Our Father beads, the centerpiece, and the crucifix. Invite the children to help count the beads in one decade. Explain that we say prayers on each bead. Tell them that the Hail Mary begins with the words that the angel said to Mary when she was asked to be the Mother of Christ. Each decade (set of ten beads) begins with a story about Jesus or Mary, and we keep these stories in our hearts as we pray, just as Mary kept the stories of Jesus in her heart.

Heart Full of Memories

You will need white construction paper, safety scissors, and drawing materials to lead this activity.

Help children cut out a large heart. Discuss the memories that we treasure, as Mary treasured the memories surrounding the birth of Jesus. Invite the children to share favorite memories of times when God's blessings brought joy and happiness to their lives. Have each child draw on his or her heart something that brings to mind a favorite memory of God's blessings. Help them understand that Mary was very much like us in that she had special memories that she treasured, just as we do.

Go Tell It Everywhere!

You may want to have a recording of "Go Tell It on the Mountain" to lead this activity.

On the way back to their sheep, the shepherds couldn't stop talking about what happened to them. They were proclaiming the Good News that Jesus Christ was born! We remember and honor this when we sing the Christmas spiritual "Go Tell It on the Mountain." Teach the children the chorus to this song:

*Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born!*

Sing the verses (or play a recording, preferably sung by a children's choir) for the children and invite them to sing the chorus after each verse.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1



Scripture Readings

Numbers 6:22–27

Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8

Galatians 4:4–7

Luke 2:16–21

Prayer

Loving Father,
as we look at this Nativity scene,
may we remember Mary,
the Holy Mother of God,
who said yes to your plan of salvation.
May we imitate St. Joseph, who
protected and loved your Son and
his Blessed Mother.
And may we adore Jesus for ever
and ever.
We ask this through the same Jesus
Christ, our Light and our Life. Amen.

?? Did You Know?

... that *evangelization* means “to preach the Gospel”? It comes from the same root word as *angel*, which means “messenger.” Like the angels who announce a message from God to people throughout Scripture, we too are to bring the message of God to others. When we do so, we are being evangelists.

Conversation Questions

☉ When have we been surprised by God’s work in our lives?

☉ We honor the Blessed Mother today on the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Who has taught us about motherhood? What can we learn from Mary?

Faith in Action

Your Christmas decorations, particularly your crèche, may stay up throughout the liturgical season of Christmas Time. As a family, reflect on this scene. (If you do not have a crèche, you can use an image of one found online.) The Gospel tells us that Mary treasured the memories of all the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. She meditated on these things in her heart. Discuss what the image represents to you. What catches your attention? How does this image help you to draw closer to the Holy Family?



Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Light in Darkness

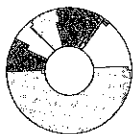
Focus: To follow the light.

Catechist's Context

From Isaiah's prophecy to Christ's fulfillment of it, the readings for Epiphany speak in unison of a peaceful, just kingdom, led not by the commander of a mighty army, like Herod, but by one who serves and shepherds. Strangers will enter not with swords but with gifts, awed by what they behold. We can help to bring about this Kingdom of God through our actions that follow Jesus' teachings.

Focus on Church Teaching

Through the Jewish people, the one true God revealed himself. He made a covenant with their ancestors, promising to make them a great nation. He gave them his commandments, sent them prophets to comfort and reprimand them, and sent his only begotten Son. From them, the light of Christ is to be spread to the whole world (LG, 1); the Magi are symbols of that (CCC, 528). The white garment and candle of our Baptism symbolize our call to bring the light of Christ to the world (CCC, 1243, 2105).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help the children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi-viii for more information

about the saints). The Wise Men had a star to follow to find and worship the infant king. What helped this saint find Christ? What points us to Christ in our daily lives?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 2:2

Alleluia, alleluia.

We have seen his star in the east
and have come to adore the Lord.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 2:1-12

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

**A reading from the holy Gospel according
to Matthew.**

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. Herod brought together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote, *'Bethlehem in the land of Judea, / you are very important among the towns of Judea. / From your town will come a leader, / who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.'*"

Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too."

The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Gifts for Jesus

☉ Who were the men who searched for Jesus?

These special visitors from a faraway land are sometimes called the Three Kings, the Magi, or the Three Wise Men. Whatever they are called, these men studied the stars and their movements

in the heavens. Because they spent much time looking at the sky, they noticed the patterns of the stars and how they moved. One time when they were studying the stars, they saw something new. A star appeared that hadn't been there before. The Wise Men recognized that, with this new star, God was sending a special message.

God had made a promise a long time before. God had said that Bethlehem would be the place where a great leader, one who would lead the people, would be born. Bethlehem was a small town. The star appeared in Bethlehem. The wise men decided to find out whether God was keeping his promise.

☉ When the Magi found the place where Jesus was, what did they do?

☉ What do you do at church, when you go near the altar or during parts of the Mass?

When the Wise Men saw the child, they knelt down and worshiped him. They gave the baby very special gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were very beautiful gifts fit for a king. Even though they did not find Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in a palace like an ordinary king, they realized that this was the person that they were looking for.

☉ What gift would you have given the newborn Jesus?

We can give our own gifts to Christ too! Jesus told us: In the Bible, we are told, "Whenever you do something for any of my people, you do it for me" (Matthew 25:45). When we show love to others, we give gifts to Jesus. We can befriend new children at school and church. We can tell others the Good News of Jesus' love for us in our words and actions. We can give Jesus gifts like the Wise Men did.

The Gifts of the Magi

You will need examples of gold, frankincense, and myrrh or similar items to lead this activity. An example of gold might include a necklace chain or other piece of jewelry. Frankincense and myrrh are more difficult to obtain, but similar items are available at your parish. Ask your parish pastor or sacristan for a few grains of incense and access to sacred chrism. Let the children see the chrism, which is blessed by the bishop, and if possible, let the children smell the oil.

The three gifts of the Magi included gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Experiencing these gifts can help us to enter into the significance of the Epiphany. Gold was a precious resource used as currency. Frankincense is a very special kind of incense. When incense is burned, the smoke rises up like our prayers rise to God. Myrrh is an oil used in anointing. Both frankincense and myrrh have been used as perfume and medicine. Invite the children to look at and smell the gifts. Explain their uses and invite them to think about why the Magi may have chosen to give these very special gifts to baby Jesus.

The Gift of Hospitality

You will need paper and coloring materials to lead this activity.

One way we welcome Jesus, the Light of the World, is by welcoming one another. Invite the children to name some ways they can show hospitality to others. Have the children draw pictures of themselves showing hospitality. Invite volunteers to present and describe their drawings.

Bless the Doorway

For this activity, you will need chalk or a strip of poster board or white construction paper at least 12" x 6", a marker, and tape or poster putty.

The Magi came a long way to welcome baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph, in turn, welcomed the Magi. The Church welcomes all people to be baptized into Christ. Blessing the doorway to your classroom is a symbol of your willingness to welcome all who come to your door. Invite the children to gather near the door and repeat the words of this blessing after you:

*Peace to this place,
and a smile on each face
that comes to this door
seeking embrace.*

Use chalk to write above the doorway on the outside of your room, or a marker to write on poster board or construction paper that you will hang over the doorway:

[first two digits of the year] + C + M + B + [last two digits of the year]

The letters stand for the traditional names of the magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. They also abbreviate the Latin words *Christus maisonem benedicat*: "May Christ bless the house." The numbers represent the current calendar year and remind us that God is always present in our time.

Leave the sign of welcome in place for the whole year, and refer to it when your class offers hospitality to visitors. You may even teach the children the blessing rhyme to welcome guests throughout the year.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 60:1–6

Psalms 72:1–2, 7–8, 10–11,
12–13

Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6

Matthew 2:1–12

Prayer

Loving Father,
as we look at this Nativity scene,
may we remember Mary,
the Holy Mother of God,
who said yes to your plan of salvation.
May we imitate St. Joseph, who
protected and loved your Son and
his Blessed Mother.
And may we adore Jesus for ever
and ever.
We ask this through the same Jesus
Christ, our Light and our Life. Amen.

? Did You Know?

... that the story of the Magi coming from the East to visit the newborn King of the Jews is found only in the Gospel according to Matthew? Likewise, we find the account of the shepherds receiving the news from the angel only in the Gospel according to Luke.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ The Wise Men looked for God's work in the movement of the stars. When have you seen the beauty and grandeur of God's work revealed in the natural world?
- ☉ The Wise Men and King Herod responded differently to the news of Jesus' birth. How can you respond to God with worship and praise?

Faith in Action

The Wise Men were outsiders and travelers in Israel, and yet they were the ones to whom God was revealed in the child Jesus. As a Church, we welcome and offer hospitality to all people, including new members or guests in our communities. How can your family offer hospitality this week? Some suggestions include having lunch with someone you don't normally eat with, inviting new neighbors over for a meal, or getting to know a new family at church.



Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

God's Anointed

Focus: To listen to the voice of God's beloved.

Catechist's Context

On this feast of the Lord's baptism, we are called to remember the promises of our own Baptism. As followers of God's Anointed, we too are called to be a light for the world, to work for justice and peace, to care for those in need, and to serve our heavenly Father in all righteousness.

Focus on Church Teaching

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets, announcing the coming of the Messiah and preaching a baptism of repentance to prepare for him. John recognized Jesus as the Messiah; the voice of God confirmed it. Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry (CCC, 444, 535-36). Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are plunged into Christ's death and Resurrection and are made his disciples, called to continue his ministry of sharing the Good News of salvation to the world (CCC, 537, 1223).



Liturgical Calendar Connection

Help children find today's date on the liturgical calendar. Point out what feast days are coming up this week. As a group, choose one saint to read more about (see pages vi-viii for more information about the saints). When we are baptized, we become the children of God. How did this saint live as a child of God? How did he or she listen to Jesus?

Sign of the Cross

All stand and make the Sign of the Cross.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Acclamation

See Mark 9:7

Alleluia, alleluia.

The heavens were opened and the Father's voice was heard:

This is my beloved Son, hear him.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Refer to page ix for citations to the standard Lectionary.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Everyone became excited and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?"

John said, "I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

After everyone else had been baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. Then as he prayed, the sky opened up, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reflection

Jesus' Mission Begins

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. Did you know that Jesus was baptized? Jesus was a grownup at his baptism. In this Gospel passage, we hear about John and Jesus, who were cousins.

John's mission was to prepare the way for Jesus and to help people get their hearts ready so they could follow Jesus. He told them to change their actions into ones that reflected God's love. For example, people should help the poor instead of ignoring them. He also said that they should ask for forgiveness from God and from others when they do wrong.

Some people wondered if John was the Messiah. People had been waiting a long time for a Messiah, and they hoped that the Messiah would come soon. John assured people he was not the Messiah, but someone wonderful was coming, someone who was incredibly and immeasurably special.

☺ Whom was John talking about?

John was talking about Jesus. John said that he was baptizing with only water but that the one they were waiting for would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus would bring a new baptism to the people.

☺ When John baptized Jesus, what happened? What came out of the sky?

The Holy Spirit, represented by a dove, came down from the sky, and a voice said, "You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you." God was letting the people know that Jesus is his son and that his time to minister to the people had begun.

Since ancient times, the Jewish people had special ritual baths they would take to prepare for something important. The washing that takes place during a ritual cleansing meant refreshing or cleaning. During his baptism, Jesus' body was rinsed with water, and the baptism was meant to signal a new beginning. Jesus' baptism wasn't like the Baptisms we have today. When we are baptized, we become members of God's family. We baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. When John baptized Jesus, he would not have used those words. Baptizing people in the River Jordan, John was helping people be ready to turn their lives toward God, though Jesus' life was already wholly focused on God.

Because we love and seek God, we live our lives in response to God's grace and mercy. We can focus our lives on God when we listen to Scripture, when we pray, and when we make choices that we know God wants us to make.

☺ Are we being kind to others and taking care of them?

☺ Are we helping others, treating them like we would treat Jesus?

This week, choose a way you will try to show Jesus' love.

Jesus Was Baptized

Teach the children the following song, to the tune of "Old MacDonald." Once they learn it, let them march around the room as they sing or come up with movements to match the lyrics.

*Jesus was baptized by John
in the river wide.
The Father said, "This is my Son
in whom I'm satisfied."
The Holy Spirit like a dove
came down from heaven up above
with the glory of God's love
as Jesus was baptized.*

A Visit to the Parish Font

To lead this activity, you will need to arrange to visit the baptismal font in your parish.

Before visiting the font, talk to the children about Baptism. Explain that the Church has three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion. In the Roman Rite, Baptism is typically the only sacrament offered to babies and young children. During Baptism the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister pours water over the person's head, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. At the font, let the children touch the water and make the Sign of the Cross on themselves.

Explain to the children that every time we enter church, we should bless ourselves with holy water to remind us of our Baptism. If your church has small holy water fonts at the entrances, show the children where these are.

Living the Liturgy at Home

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord



Scripture Readings

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

Acts 10:34-38

Matthew 3:13-17

Prayer

Loving Father,
as we look at this Nativity scene,
may we remember Mary,
the Holy Mother of God,
who said yes to your plan of salvation.
May we imitate St. Joseph, who
protected and loved your Son and
his Blessed Mother.
And may we adore Jesus for ever
and ever.
We ask this through the same Jesus
Christ, our Light and our Life. Amen.

? Did You Know?

. . . that the baptism of Jesus was not like our Christian Baptism, although it appears similar? Jesus was sinless and did not need baptism. His baptism signals the beginning of his public ministry, while our Baptism washes away original sin and incorporates us into the life of Christ.

Conversation Questions

- ☉ John the Baptist was known to be a very holy person. Do you admire anyone for being holy? Why do you admire that person?
- ☉ Have you ever seen a Baptism? Did you have any questions about what was happening? How did it make you feel?

Faith in Action

With your child, share family pictures of liturgical events and sacraments. Talk about your child's Baptism and, if possible, the Baptisms of other family members. Explain that everyone who is baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is a member of God's family. Come up with a way to welcome those in your parish who are newly baptized and their families. Perhaps your child can help make a card welcoming the newly baptized into God's family.

