

# *Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany Activity Pack*

for  
Children & Families



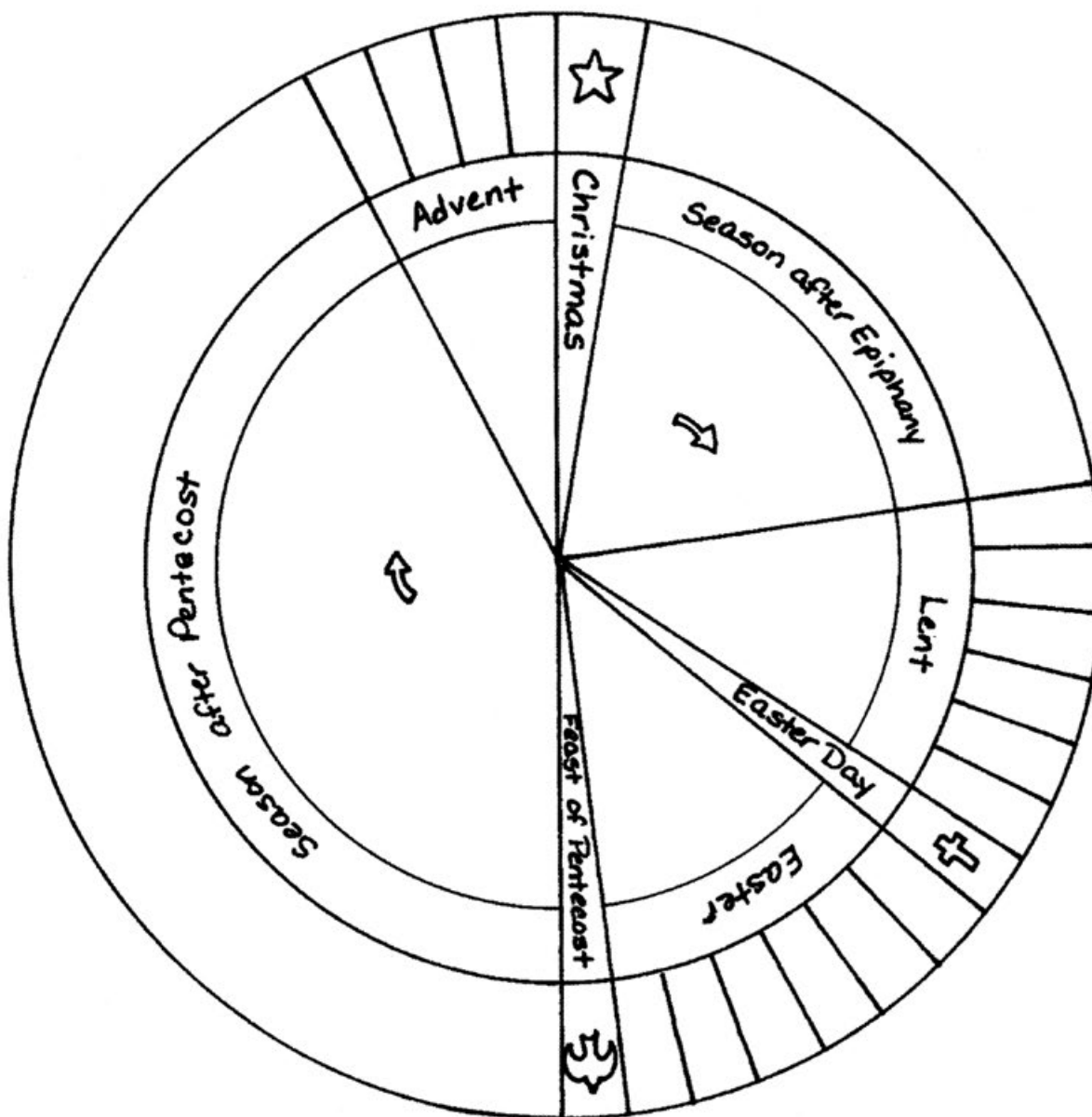
The circle of the church year turns, and always, in hope and faith, we begin again. For the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, Church Publishing invites families into meaningful observances and joyous celebrations through selections from three of our favorite faith formation resources: *What We Do in Advent: An Anglican Kids' Activity Book* by Anne Kitch, *Faith at Home: A Handbook for Cautiously Christian Parents* by Wendy Claire Barrie, and *Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God from Advent through Epiphany* by Sharon Ely Pearson.

In these pages you'll find a wide variety of activities and ideas. Some are especially appropriate for young children, some are intended for intergenerational groups, some will work well over Zoom, and some are just right at the kitchen table or in front of the fireplace with family members of all ages.

We wish you all health, peace, moments of joy, and a deep sense of God's living presence among us.

# Seasonal Overview

# Church Year Calendar



Advent is the beginning of the Church Year. Each Church season has a different color. Color the seasons according to the key:

**Green** – Season after Pentecost  
and Epiphany

**Blue (or Purple)** – Advent

**Gold** – Christmas and Easter

**Red** – Pentecost

**Purple** – Lent

## CHAPTER 5

# Seasons and Celebrations



*For everything there is a season. . . . Ecclesiastes 3:1*

New Year's Day is on January 1. In New York City the school year begins in September, around the same time our Jewish friends celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Chinese New Year is in February. Our upstairs neighbors observe the Persian New Year as spring begins. I relish all these opportunities for fresh starts and take advantage of them as often as possible.

The Church's new year comes late in the secular calendar. Christians mark time in a different way. Following the liturgical cycle of seasons and holy days can create a faith-filled home and set a rhythm and a pattern that helps us

make meaning in our lives through the stories and traditions handed down from generation to generation.

## **Advent**

The Christian liturgical calendar begins in late fall with the first Sunday of **Advent**, which means “coming.” In the secular world this period of preparing for the birth of Christ has been swept up into “the holiday season,” that frantic period of time from just after Halloween (if we’re lucky) until Christmas Eve. In the church, however, we are serious about getting ready over a four-week period. The color of Advent is blue (for Mary, the mother of Jesus) or purple (for the newborn king). The evergreen wreaths we make at church are horizontal, to place on a table with four candles set into them, one to be lighted each week. No carols are sung; the mood is quiet, simple, more focused. We are waiting for Jesus, and this is holy time. This slower, more deliberate approach to the season may be worth bringing home. What can you simplify? Where can you be more intentional, less rushed?

## **Christmas and Epiphany**

Christmas Eve is when churches are at their very best. The colors on the altar and vestments worn by the clergy are white for joy and gold for celebration. Go, see the baby lying in a manger (if there isn’t a pageant, there surely will be a crèche), sing the angels’ song of peace, and expect that your children will want to tell the story over and over again when you get home. You may have a beautiful crèche or nativity

## Seasons and Celebrations

set that you will not want your kids to play with, so—if you can—get another that's sturdy or unbreakable. It's worth it. The story of Christmas is one with great power over our hearts and imaginations, and it's natural that we want to get our hands on it.

Perhaps keeping Advent at home is not helpful to you. It is not currently helpful in our house. As someone who works full time in the church, December is an incredibly busy month for me, so reality dictates that the tree goes up when there's time—and some years that's Thanksgiving weekend. However, we take full advantage of knowing that there are twelve days of Christmas and the first day is Christmas Day. That's right—just when everyone else thinks Christmas is over, my family is just beginning to celebrate. Our holiday party is the Saturday after Christmas, and sometimes the cookie baking waits until then, too.

Save one gift for each person to open on January 6, the **Feast of the Epiphany**, when we remember the visit of the Magi to the child Jesus. This part of the story is one that bears closer attention. Though in most Christmas pageants, three kings arrive just after the shepherds bearing gifts for the baby, that's not what the Bible actually says. Read the story in Matthew's gospel (1:18–2:7) and wonder: What's up with those gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Collect some gently used baby clothes, new diapers, and formula to take to a women's shelter; babysit for a friend, offering a much-needed break to the parent and some insight into what it means that God came to us not just in human form, but as a baby, born helpless and dependent as all babies are, to a poor family in a troubled place.



## Keeping the Holidays Holy

More and more our commercial culture imposes its timing and taste onto our holidays. This is perhaps most evident in the month before Christmas when we are surrounded by symbols that have nothing to do with the birth of Christ. It is important for those of us in Christian households to reclaim the holidays. In fact, the word “holiday” comes from the practice of keeping “Holy Days.” We need to remind ourselves and our children that Christmas comes from Christ’s Mass, a feast dedicated to the coming of the Christ, and that Santa Claus is really St. Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop. One way to prepare for a holy Christmas is to honor the season of Advent.

Advent marks the start of the Church year and begins four Sundays before Christmas. It is a time of waiting, and, like any beginning, it holds expectation and promise. During the Advent season we wait for the coming of the Messiah, who we know as Jesus Christ. On the one hand this means waiting for the birth of a child in the manger at Bethlehem; yet Advent is also the time that we wait expectantly for the second coming, the appearance of Christ our King and the completion of God’s creation, the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

We cannot prevent ourselves or our children from being bombarded by cultural messages telling us how to celebrate the holidays and what to buy to make them special. But we can speak our values just as clearly. In this book, you’ll find enjoyable activities that will enrich your children’s experience of Advent as well as teach them more about the traditional events in which they will participate. Prepare for Christmas with an Advent Wreath in your home; celebrate the Feast of St. Nicholas on December 6; say a blessing over your Christmas Tree; say a family prayer around the crèche; celebrate all twelve days of Christmas, up to the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6.

We can choose where our children learn about celebration and keeping holy days: at the mall, on television, from their friends—or in the bosom of their families.



# Advent

## MARKING TIME

### Weekly Advent Calendars

Make Advent calendars individually or in groups of three or four members each. This calendar will feature envelopes for each day of the week, Sunday through Saturday, in which a daily idea or activity will be hidden. When a new week begins, new ideas are added to each envelope to begin the process again, each week leading up to Christmas.

Make enough calendars so that each person will receive one. Put all the calendars from all the groups together, and ask one or two children to distribute one to each person.

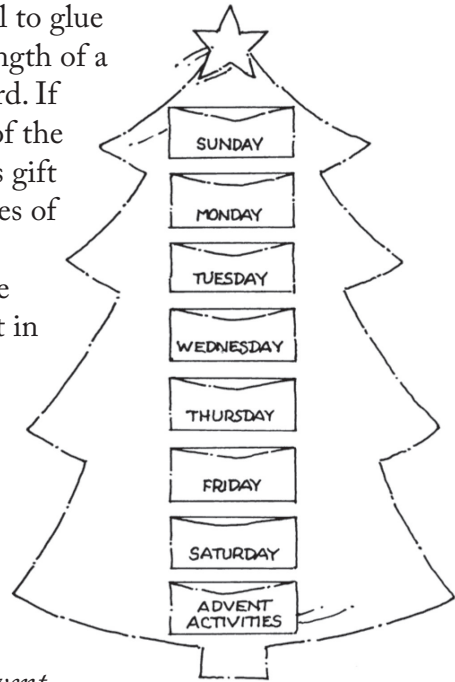
#### *Materials*

- newsprint
- glue
- envelopes (8 per calendar)
- burlap or poster board (any color) or green poster board (1 per calendar)
- scissors
- pens or pencils
- 3" x 5" memo pads or blank index cards
- *optional*: Christmas gift wrap; clear tape

#### *Directions*

1. Together, brainstorm activities appropriate for Advent, noting them on newsprint, such as:
  - Add a figure to your crèche.
  - Make a Christmas card for a friend.
  - Read Mary's song in Luke 1:46–55.
  - Give coins to a Salvation Army kettle.
  - Sing an Advent song.
  - Make a present for Jesus.

2. Ask each group or individual to glue eight envelopes down the length of a strip of burlap or poster board. If desired, first cover one side of the poster board with Christmas gift wrap, folding it over the edges of the poster board, and taping the gift wrap in place. Or use green poster board and cut it in the shape of a large Christmas tree, making sure that all eight envelopes will fit on it.



3. Write the name of each weekday (*Sunday*, *Monday*, etc.) on an envelope. Mark the eighth envelope with the words *Advent Activities*.
4. Have the participants write the activities on slips of memo paper, one slip for each activity, providing one activity for each day of Advent. Put all the slips in the envelope marked *Advent Activities*.

Invite everyone to post Advent calendars on a wall at home. Each Sunday during Advent, take seven slips of paper from the *Advent Activities* envelope on your calendar and put one slip in each of the other envelopes. Each day pull a slip out of the appropriate envelope and follow its instructions.

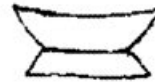
# The Advent Wreath

To make your own Advent wreath you will need:

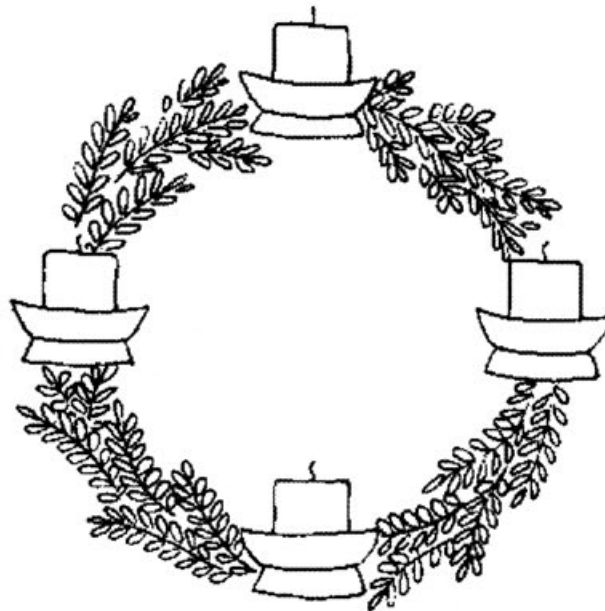
4 candles



4 candle holders



some greens

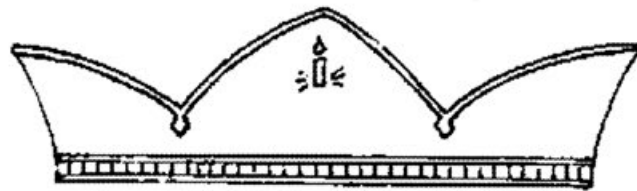


- Place candles and greens in a circle.
- Light 1 candle during the first week of Advent, 2 candles during the second week of advent, and so on.
- Candles can be any color, but 3 purple and 1 rose are traditional. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent.

Candles – Light of Christ; Greens – life; Circle – eternity

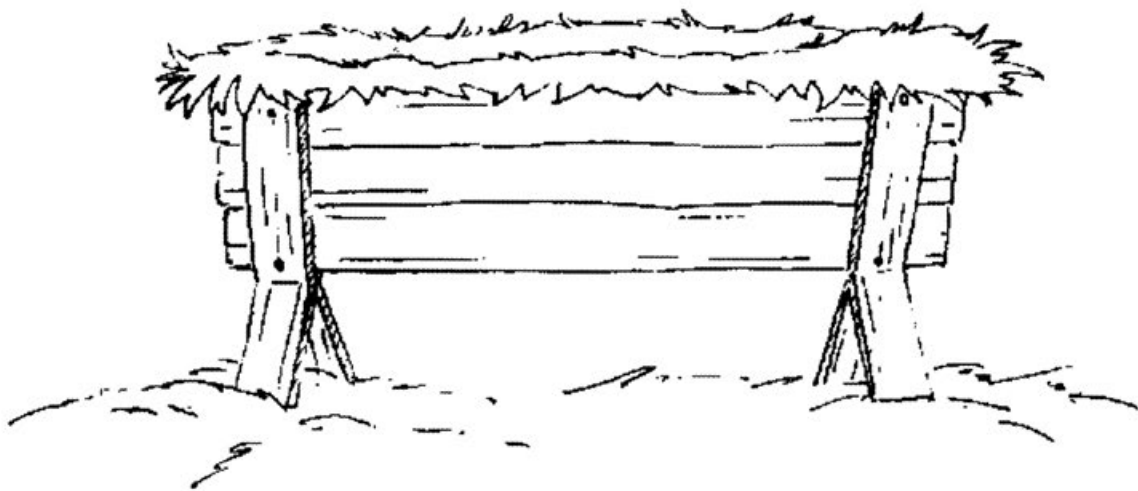


# The Season of Advent



The word Advent means \_\_\_\_\_. During the Season of Advent we \_\_\_\_\_ for the coming of Christ. We look forward to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the baby Jesus. We also expect the return of Christ our \_\_\_\_\_.

the coming      birth      King      prepare



## PRAYER ACTIVITIES

### Quiet Time, Festive Time

This is not so much a single activity as a plan for an evening for adults and older children, combining the penitence and joy of Advent. The first part of the evening is silent, except for music. Ideally a large, open room with a rug works best, so that people are comfortable sitting on the floor.

Communicate in advance to participants that the first part of the evening will be a time for reflection and the second part will be a party. Ask everyone to bring food and drink to share at the party. (You might want to plan some separate activities for young children during the quiet time and invite them in to join the party later.)

#### *Materials*

- evergreen boughs
- 5–6 candles in holders
- recorded Christmas music or musicians from your worship community
- prepared slips of paper with names of figures in the Nativity story (*Mary, Joseph, shepherd, donkey, sheep*, etc.)
- basket or container to hold slips of paper
- 5–6 pictures of situations or places in our world where there is poverty, violence, or other tragedy
- craft supplies (paper and fabric scraps, cardboard tubes, pipe cleaners, aluminum foil, modeling clay, cotton balls, glue, scissors, etc.)
- small natural objects (pinecones, twigs, rocks, etc.)
- refreshments brought by participants

#### *Advance preparation*

Since the latter part of this activity is a festive time of drinking and eating together, you will need—in advance—to ask participants to bring a variety of snacks and beverages to share.

### *Directions*

1. Before participants arrive, set up five or six places around the room where people will pray. At each of these, have a lighted candle on the floor. Encircle the candle with evergreen boughs and a picture that shows people or situations that need God's healing love.
2. Set the craft supplies, including the small natural objects, on a table.
3. Post signs asking everyone to enter silently. Maintain this silence until everyone has gathered.
4. When everyone has arrived, explain that you will pass a basket with slips of paper. On each slip is written the name of one of the figures in the Nativity story. Ask each person to select a slip, choose craft supplies, and find a corner in which to create a figure representing the name on the slip.
5. Maintain silence while everyone works. Encourage each participant to think about why this particular figure happened to be the one he or she received. Or to put it another way, "Why did this figure choose you?"
6. After participants have made their figures, invite them to visit the prayer stations around the room, placing their figures at each candle as they meditate briefly on the image at each station. Encourage them to reflect and ask God what needs to be born inside themselves this Christmas.
7. After they have stopped at every station, have them place their figure in the center of the room or wherever your crèche is located.
8. Choose an appropriate Christmas hymn to sing together, gathered around the crèche.
9. Then greet each other with the phrase, "Blessed birth!"

*Tip:* An excellent resource to use in exploring simpler Christmas celebrations is *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back into the Season* by Jo Robinson and Jean Stacheli (New York, Quill, 1991).

## **Winter Saints**

Let me say a word about the saints. The Book of Common Prayer calls saints “the lights of the world in every generation”—people whose lives and deeds have shone brightly and helped others more closely follow Jesus. There are saints who lived long ago and there are saints living and working in the world today, saints who are known by the church and saints who are known only to God. We say that we are part of the Communion of Saints, the company of all faithful people, connected through our baptism to those Christians who have died, those who are alive now, and those yet to be born. The word “saint” means holy. In the Episcopal Church we have a Calendar of Saints, holy men and women we remember in prayer and with readings from scripture on their feast day. The saints tend to be quite colorful, and being perfect is in no way a requirement.

### ***The Feast of St. Nicholas***

Nicholas of Myra was born in what is now western Turkey in the latter part of the second century. His feast day is in early Advent, December 6. The most famous story told about Nicholas is one that may have inspired the story of Santa Claus. There was a poor family with three daughters. In those days young women could not be married unless they had dowries, sums of money that were to be given to their husbands. On each of three nights, a sack of gold was tossed into their home through an open window, landing in their shoes—or in their stockings hanging by the fire to dry. These gifts, given in secret, saved the young women from being



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sold into slavery. If you place an orange or a clementine in the toe of your child's Christmas stocking, this is the reason: it represents Nicholas's gift of gold.

Stories are also told of Nicholas protecting children and sailors, feeding the hungry in Myra during two years of famine, and going before the Emperor Constantine to ask for lower taxes for his people. He also attended the Council of Nicea, the first great meeting of bishops from all over the Christian world in 325, from which we get the Nicene Creed that we say together in church on Sundays.

Nicholas is remembered especially in Europe, Greece, and Russia. On the evening of December 5, children leave hay and carrots in their shoes for St. Nicholas's horse and wake to find that they've been exchanged for small toys or chocolates. People all over the world honor St. Nicholas during Advent and Christmas by being generous to those in need, and by giving gifts in secret.

How might your family continue the tradition of gift giving in secret? Our church in California has an "angel tree" hung with tags filled out by children and teens in the foster care system with what they most want for Christmas. The year Peter was three and a half, we choose the tag of a boy the same age who wanted the very same gift as Peter: Thomas the Tank Engine. Then we went shopping. Peter asked, "Doesn't Santa come to every house?" I answered, "No, we have to help." Peter asked with great excitement, "You mean *we* get to be Santa for Julio?"

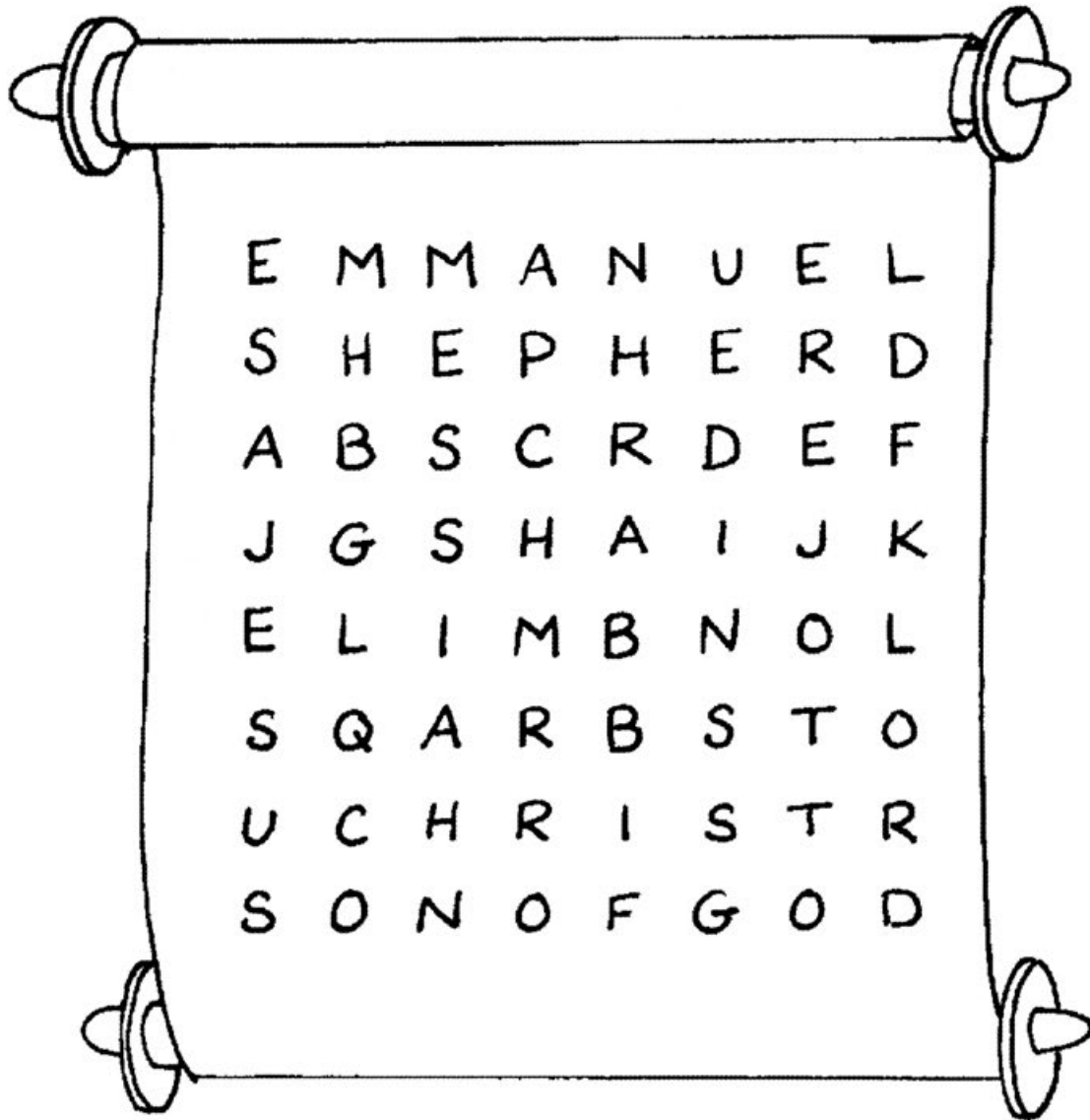
You can have an Angel Tree at home, too. A lovely picture book with ideas for giving to others in this season is LuAnn Schnable Kaldor's *The Angels On My Tree*. You could start a

## FAITH AT HOME

collection of angel ornaments and put one on the tree each time your family participates in an act of kindness to others, or you could make angel ornaments and start a collection that way. There are several simple patterns on my Pinterest board, which are linked on my blog, [wendyclairebarrie.com](http://wendyclairebarrie.com).

# Names of Jesus

We call Jesus by many names. Find and circle these names of Jesus.



Christ  
Lord  
Shepherd

Emmanuel  
Messiah  
Son of God

Jesus  
Rabbi

And you will name him Jesus. (Luke 1:31)

# The Feast of St. Nicholas

December 6th

St. Nicholas was the Bishop of Myra. He is the patron saint of children and sailors and is often shown holding three golden balls to represent his generosity. He loved God and lived a life serving others until his death in 343 CE.

Connect the dots on St. Nicholas' head to draw his Mitre. Draw a gift in his open hand.



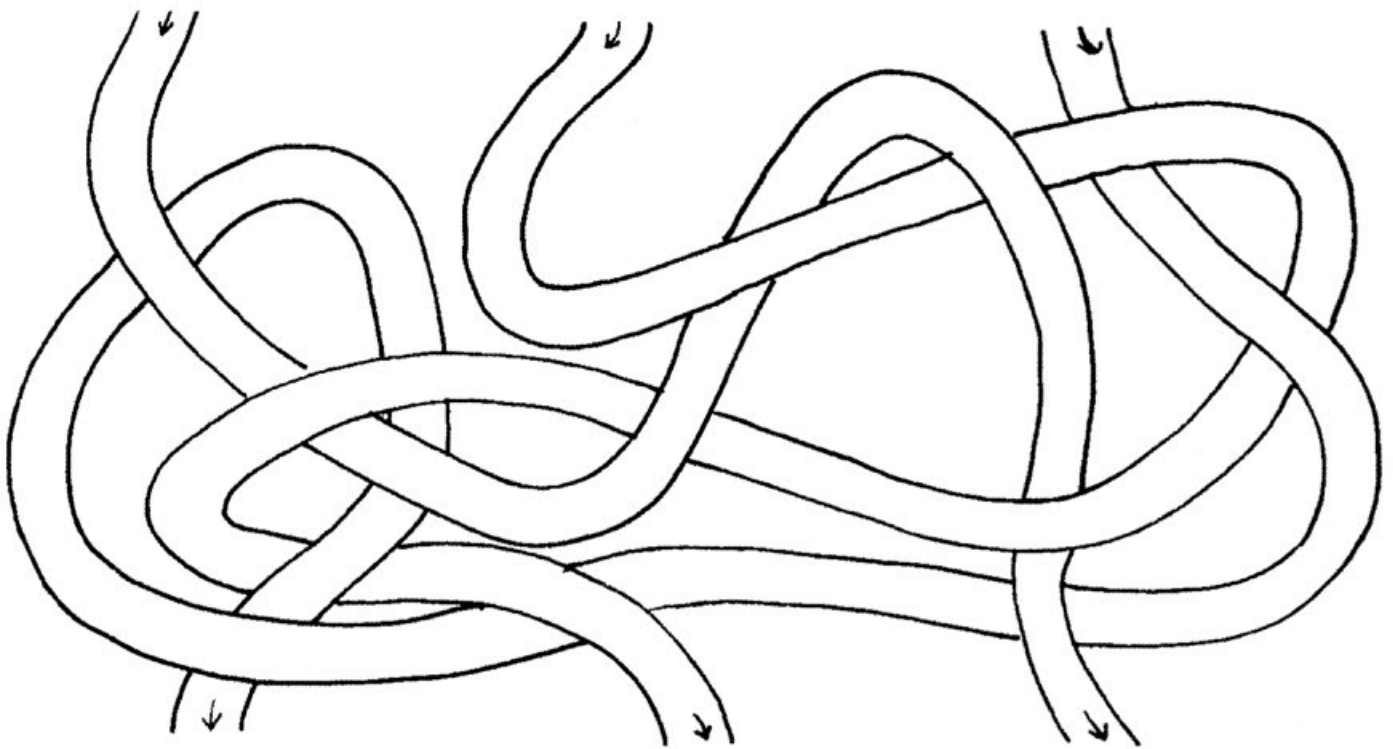
# Prophets

A prophet carries God's promises to the people and shows God's love by living and telling God's story. Follow the paths to see what each prophet said about Jesus.

Isaiah 4:6

Jeremiah 33:15

Micah 5:5



"From Bethlehem will come one to rule Israel."

"A righteous branch will spring up from the house of David."

"He will be called the Prince of Peace."

# Advent Carol



Emmanuel means "God with us."  
Prepare for Advent by singing this  
carol.

Music notation for the Advent Carol, consisting of six staves. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Staff 1: O come O come Em - m a n - u - el And

Staff 2: ran - som cap - tive Is - ra - el. That

Staff 3: mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here Un -

Staff 4: Til the son of God ap - pear Re -

Staff 5: joice, re - joice Em - man - u - el Shall

Staff 6: come to thee, O Is - ra - el

# The Annunciation

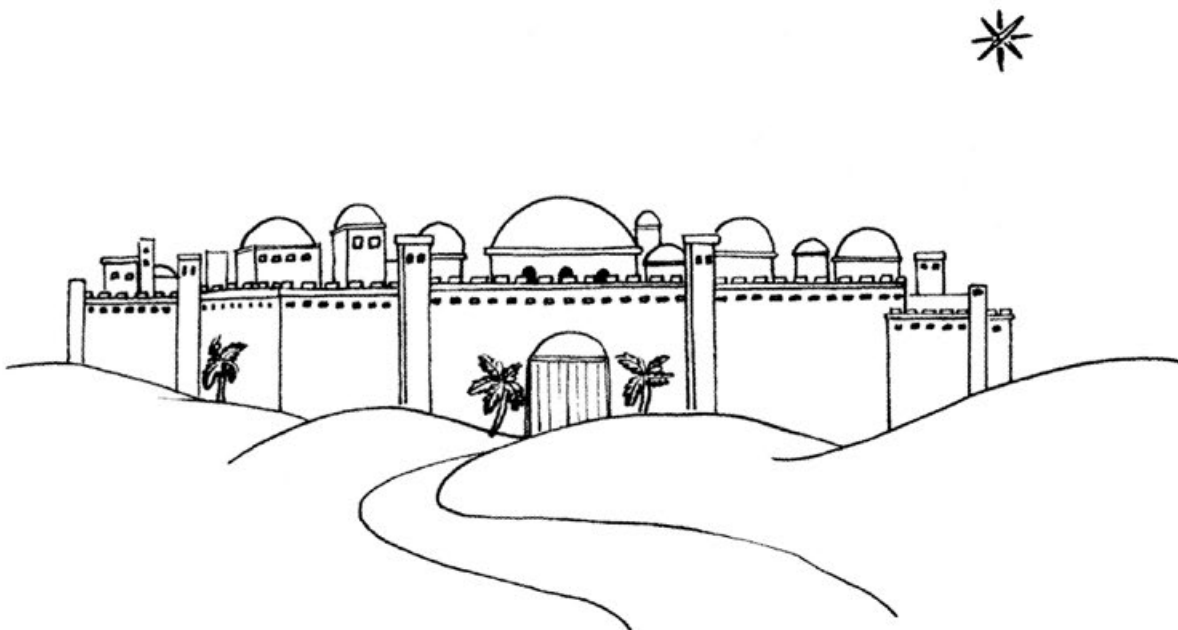
In the sixth month the Angel \_\_\_\_\_ was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was \_\_\_\_\_, of the house of David. The virgin's name was \_\_\_\_\_. And he came to her and said, "Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The Angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him \_\_\_\_\_." Luke 1:26-31

Mary

Jesus

Gabriel

Joseph



Color Mary's home town of Nazareth.

# Gabriel Visits Mary

Draw the Angel Gabriel telling Mary about her special baby.





# The Visitation

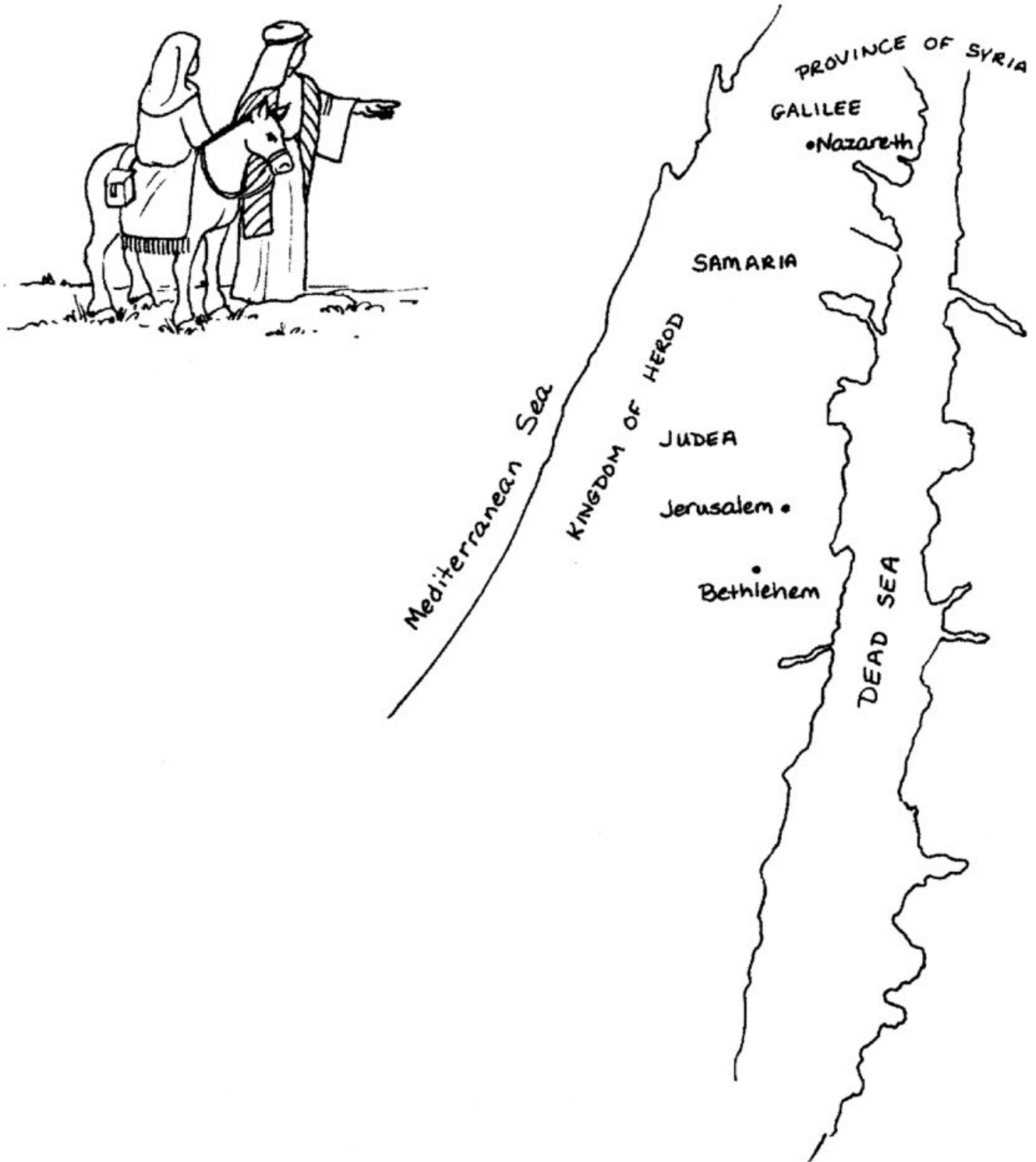
In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When \_\_\_\_\_ heard Mary's greeting, the \_\_\_\_\_ leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the \_\_\_\_\_ and exclaimed in a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in \_\_\_\_\_ my Savior." Luke 1:39-42, 46-47



Help Mary find her way to Elizabeth's house.

# Journey to Bethlehem

Trace a path for Mary and Joseph to follow from Nazareth to Bethlehem.



## Shoe Box Crèches

### *Materials*

- modeling clay or play dough
- shoe boxes
- cardboard
- scissors
- glue
- pencils, pens, or other styluses for adding detail to clay
- dried pine needles, excelsior (wood shavings used for packing material), or shredded paper

### *Directions*

1. Show the participants how to make figures—of Mary, Joseph, the baby, or the animals—by pulling appendages out of a single piece of clay. (Some people may want to make shepherds and an angel, too.)
2. Invite each child to make a figure from the nativity story, using a pencil, pen, or stylus to add details such as facial features and clothing textures.
3. Use a shoe box as a stable for each crèche. Mangers and troughs may be cut from cardboard. Pine needles can be used for straw on the floor.
4. Display completed crèches somewhere in your gathering area or the church for others to enjoy through the Christmas season.

## Holy Family Mural

Groups can work together to create scenes from the life of the Holy Family to make one large mural.

### *Materials*

- Bibles
- butcher paper or newsprint

## FAITHFUL CELEBRATIONS: ADVENT THROUGH EPIPHANY

- tape
- markers/crayons/colored pencils

### *Directions*

1. Divide the participants into five groups.
2. Tape a long sheet (at least 15 feet) of butcher paper to a wall or place on the floor.
3. Assign one of the following short Bible passages about the Holy Family to each group:
  - Matthew 1:18–24
  - Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23
  - Luke 2:15–21
  - Luke 2:22–40
  - Luke 2:41–51
4. Ask each group to read the passage and create a design for its assigned scene. Have each group draw its scene on a section of the butcher paper so the scenes are presented chronologically.
5. Display the mural someplace throughout the Christmas season.

## STORYTELLING AND BIBLE STUDY

### **A Child is Born**

Gather the youngest children around and read them this vibrant version of the Christmas story. Afterwards, lead them in a discussion of what they like most about the story and what they think it tells us about God. Remember that there are no right or wrong responses.

### **Emmanuel, God with Us**

God called the angels together and they crowded about, leaning forward with excitement to hear the news.

God spoke: “This day my Son, Jesus, has been born in Bethlehem. He will show all people how deeply I love them. They will learn from him what it is like to be with me. They will even call him Emmanuel—God with us.

“Go now, angels! Not one, not two, not three of you, but all of you! Go and tell the good news. Tell the news to the shepherds taking care of their sheep in fields near Bethlehem. Tell the news to kings who live far away.”

Off the angels flew to sing a new song of good news: “A child is born. His name is Jesus and he is God’s Son. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth.”

As the angels sang, a new star appeared in the sky. It came to rest right over the stable in Bethlehem where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were staying.

The shepherds who were taking care of their sheep in the fields nearby were amazed and frightened at the brightness of the star. But then they saw an angel. Can you imagine how they trembled?

The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for I bring you good news of great joy. To you this very day in Bethlehem,

a Child—a Savior—has been born. He is Christ the Lord. You will know this Child when you find a newborn Baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly the shepherds saw not just one angel, but thousands of angels, all the host of heaven. The angels were singing, “Glory to God in the highest and peace to God’s people on earth.”

When the angels left, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go into Bethlehem right now and look for this Baby. Just imagine, angels came to tell us! Why, we may be the first to know! Us! Just simple shepherds. Let’s run! Hurry! See the bright star? It hangs there low in the sky. Follow it. Hurry! Hurry!”

Away the shepherds ran, as fast as they could go. They found the stable where Mary and Joseph were. They found Jesus lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, just as the angel had told them. This was the Baby. This was the Savior!

“We came to see the Baby,” the shepherds said.

“His name is Jesus,” Joseph whispered to the shepherds.

“How did you know about him?” Mary asked.

“How did you know to look here?” Joseph asked.

The shepherds told Mary and Joseph all they had heard and seen, about the sky full of angels and the new, bright star. One of the shepherds said to Joseph, “The angels said ‘to you a child has been born.’ What can that mean? Could it mean that this Baby, this Savior, came to show you and me God’s love?”

The shepherd smiled and looked shyly at Joseph. “You know,” he said, “if Jesus were born into my family, this is just the kind of place he would be born. My children came into the world on our farm, and there were more animals around than people! Why, Jesus even looks a lot like my

youngest did. But there's something special about this child, isn't there?"

Joseph smiled and placed his hand on the shepherd's shoulder. "Yes," Joseph said, "there is. This Baby is God's Son. There is more to his birth than even his mother and I understand. But rejoice and celebrate with us, because this child will save his people."

Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds smiled at the Baby sleeping in the manger. Their hearts and voices sang grateful songs of praise to God. The angels in heaven rejoiced because God's plan was being carried out in this simple place with these simple people.

"Hallelujah! To all of us a Child is born! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

## Crèche Sharing

Invite participants to bring and display their crèches. During the Celebration, invite individuals to share stories about their crèches with the gathered group, such as the history of the crèche and traditions that they observe. If your church has a traditional crèche with an interesting story, invite a long-standing member or leader also to share that story with the group.

You might do this at the beginning of your Celebration as participants arrive. This could be a great icebreaker or a conversation-starter during snack time.

### *Materials*

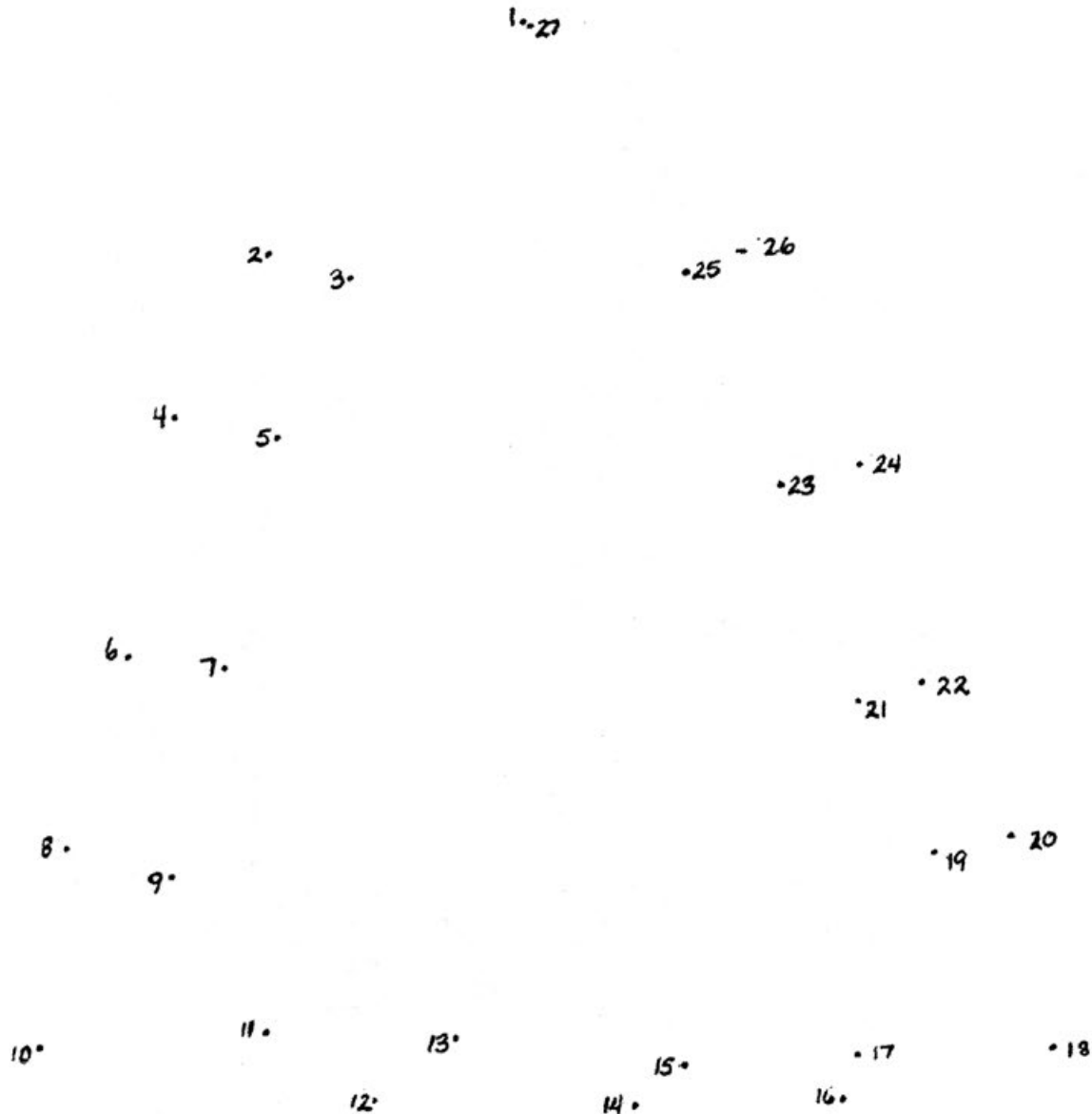
- family and personal crèches (*Note:* In advance, invite willing individuals, couples, and families to bring their crèches to the Celebration.)
- tables
- *optional:* congregation's crèche

Christmas



# Getting Ready for Christmas

Connect the dots to find a Christmas symbol that represents everlasting life.



People used to bring evergreens inside during the winter to remind them that there is always new life and that spring would come again. As Christians we use this symbol to remind us that Jesus is the new life that God has sent us. Decorate your picture to celebrate the birth of Christ.

## RECIPES

### Angel Cookies

Celebrate the Annunciation of Our Lord with angel cookies. Prepare this simple sugar cookie dough in advance, or purchase refrigerated cookie dough and pre-made icing. Any age can roll out dough, cut out cookies, and decorate after baking. Or bake cookies in advance and have them available for decorating during your celebration.

#### *Ingredients*

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup butter, softened
- 1 egg
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon vanilla
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups flour
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon baking powder
- icing (2 cups confectioners' sugar, 2–3 tablespoons milk, 1 teaspoon vanilla)
- decorations: chocolate sprinkles, colored sugars, etc.

#### *Other supplies*

- angel cookie cutters
- measuring cups and spoons
- bowl
- wooden spoon
- mixer
- flour sifter
- rolling pin
- cookie sheet
- rack
- plastic knives and spoons

### *Directions*

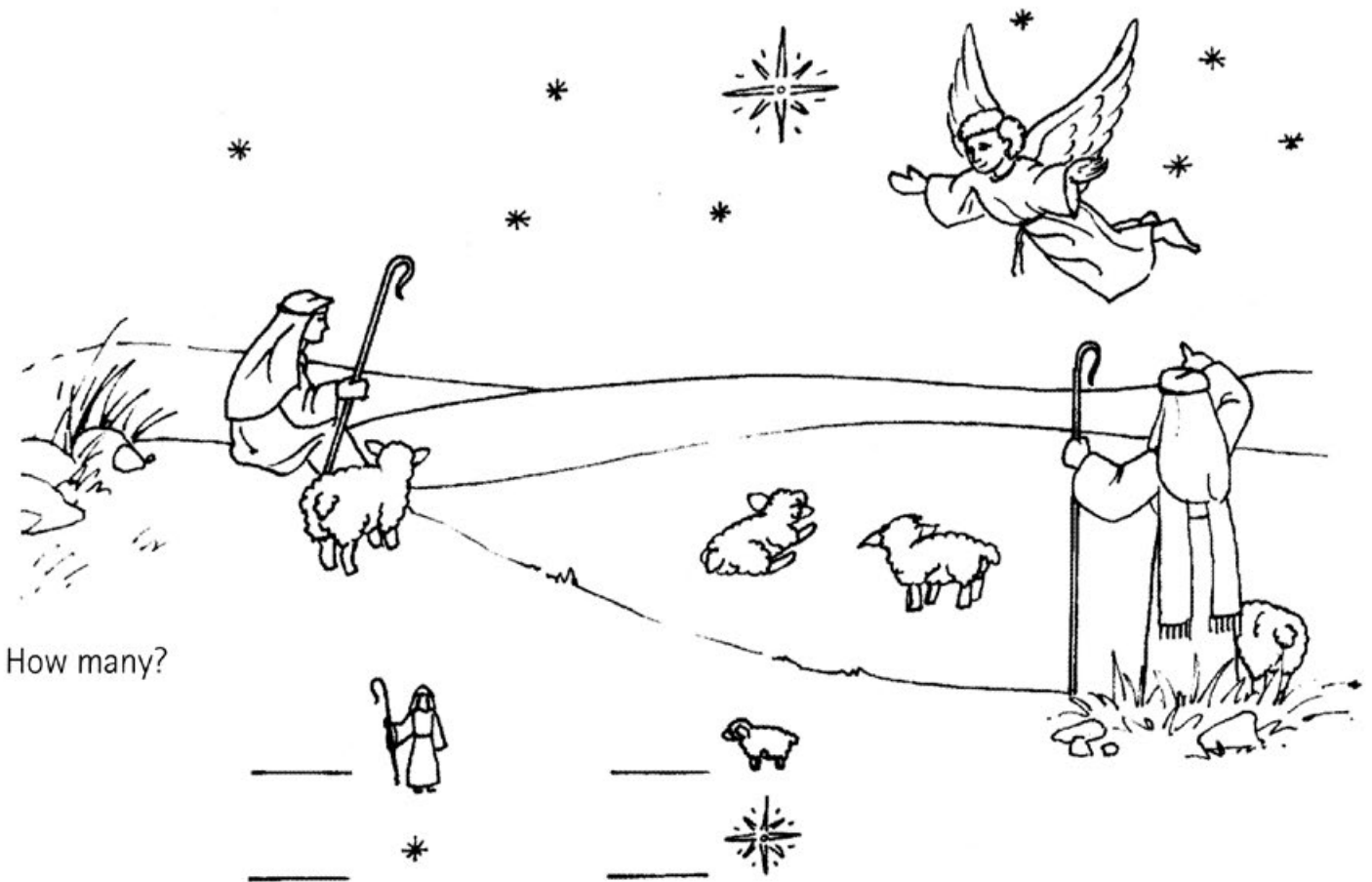
1. Put the butter and sugar into a bowl.
2. Use wooden spoon or mixer to cream the butter and sugar together.
3. Beat in the egg and vanilla.
4. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt.
5. Stir the flour ingredients into the butter mixture. (*Note:* The dough will roll out more easily if you allow it to rest in the refrigerator until chilled.)
6. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface.
7. Cut out 2" angels with a cookie cutter or with a plastic knife.
8. Put the cookies on a cookie sheet and bake at 325° for about 10 minutes.
9. Put the cookies on a rack to cool.
10. Mix together the confectioners' sugar, the vanilla and the milk to make icing.
11. When the cookies are cool, decorate using icing, sprinkles, colored sugars, etc.

Makes 3–4 dozen cookies.

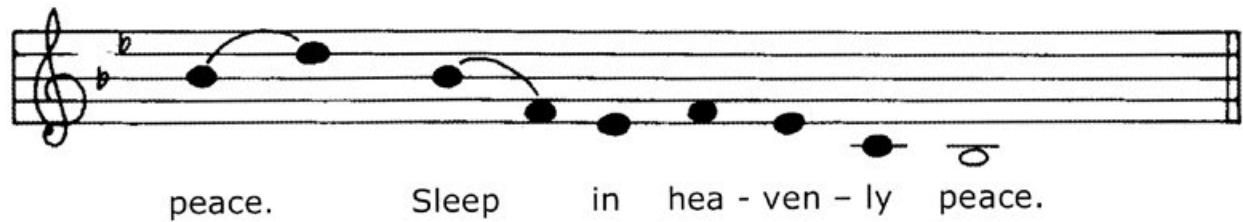


# The Shepherds

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Luke 2:8-11



# Silent Night



## WORSHIP

### Opening Prayer

Offer this prayer, the “Collect for the First Sunday after Christmas Day” (Book of Common Prayer, page 213) followed by some singing of Christmas carols, many noted below.

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

### *A selection of Christmas carols*

- O Little Town of Bethlehem
- O Come, All Ye Faithful
- Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
- It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
- Angels We Have Heard on High
- Go Tell It on the Mountain
- Joy to the World!
- Away in a Manger
- The First Noel
- Silent Night
- What Child Is This
- People Look East
- Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow

## **The Christmas Story in Four Parts**

*Read:* Luke 2:1–4

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown. Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David.

*Sing:* “O, Little Town of Bethlehem”

*Read:* Luke 2:5–7

He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

*Sing:* “Silent Night, Holy Night”

*Read:* Luke 2:8–14

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

*Sing:* “Go, Tell It On the Mountain”

*Read:* Luke 2:15–20

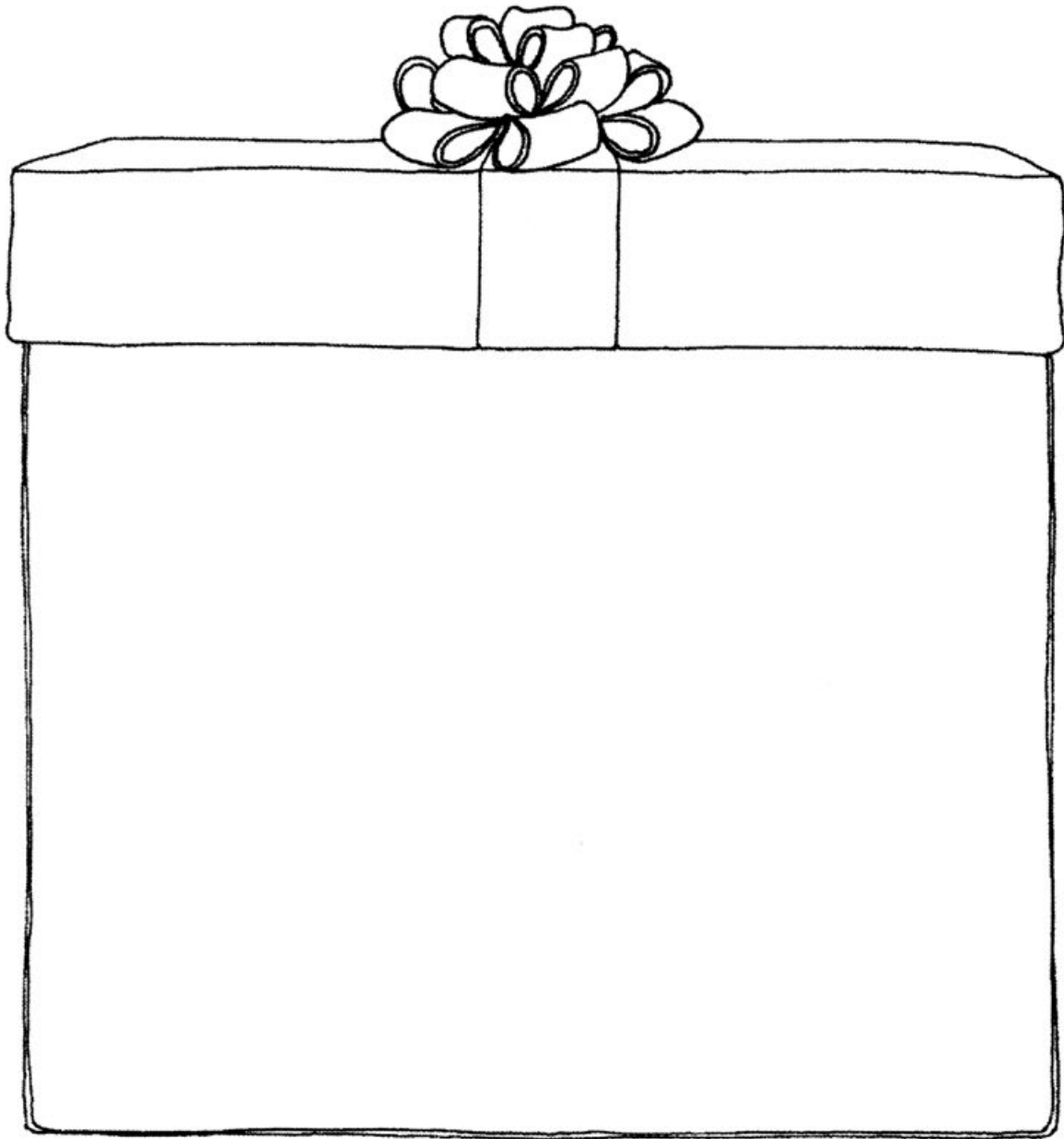
When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

*Sing:* “O Come, All Ye Faithful”



# Christmas Gift

Jesus is the special gift that God gives us at Christmas. Draw a picture of a special gift you would like to give.



Who would you like to give this gift to?

## GAMES

### What's Missing?

This game can be simplified for the youngest participants by limiting the number of figures to three or four. Ways to increase the game's difficulty include:

- using more items
- rearranging the items before removing one
- removing more than one item
- rearranging the items without removing any

#### *Materials*

- crèche with figures

#### *Directions*

1. Ask participants to close their eyes.
2. Remove one figure from the crèche.
3. Ask participants to open their eyes and guess which figure is missing. Return the missing figure to the crèche; whoever guesses correctly gets to remove the next figure.

### Put the Star on the Tree

Here is a Christmas version of "Pin the Tail on the Donkey."

#### *Materials*

- butcher paper or newsprint
- markers
- masking tape
- scissors
- 3" stars cut from yellow construction paper
- blindfold

*Directions*

1. Use the markers to draw a Christmas tree, approximately three feet high, on the butcher paper.
2. Tape the tree to a wall of the room.
3. Put a loop of masking tape on the back of each star. Invite everyone to play "Put the Star on the Tree."
4. Blindfold one player at a time and give the player a star. Turn the player around in a slow circle twice then give them a gentle push in the right direction.
5. Ask the player to walk to the wall and touch it. When the player touches the wall, he or she must stick the star on the exact spot touched. Let the player remove the blindfold, and write his or her name on the star.
6. Repeat until everyone has had a turn. The winner is the one to stick a star closest to the top of the tree.



# Epiphany

## Chapter 6

# EPIPHANY

### INTRODUCTION

The word *Epiphany* means manifestation. The readings for Epiphany manifest, or reveal, the person and nature of Jesus.

The feast of Epiphany is celebrated on January 6, a date chosen in ancient times to counteract a pagan festival in Egypt that marked the winter solstice. The pagan festival used themes of light, water, and wine. Making use of these same elements, the Eastern Church celebrates the revelation of Jesus Christ at his birth, marked by the light of the Nativity star; at his baptism in water; and at Cana, where he changed water to wine.

The Western Church, which had begun to celebrate Christmas on December 25 in opposition to a pagan winter solstice in Rome, appropriated some, but not all, of the Eastern significance of Epiphany. In the West, celebration of Epiphany emphasized the visit of the magi, guided by the Nativity star. This event came to be interpreted as the revelation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

### Remembering the Magi

Scripture does not describe the number or race or mode of travel of the magi. The biblical emphasis is on the magi's three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts reveal the royal, divine, and sacrificial nature of the infant Jesus.

Many customs exist in European countries that give the day far more significance than in our own culture. Some countries use this day, rather than Christmas Day, as the time to exchange gifts. Other countries observe the day with “Star Carols” sung by a procession of singers, dressed as magi and carrying stars.

## **The Baptism of Jesus**

The Baptism of Jesus, observed on the first Sunday after Epiphany, is an important feast of the season. At his baptism, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God and sealed by God’s Holy Spirit. After this feast, the Sundays of Ordinary Time, between Epiphany and Lent, reveal Jesus enacting his baptismal ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing.

Our own baptisms share in this manifestation or revelation. At baptism, each of us stood revealed as God’s own child, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and called to ministry and mission.

As we come to the end of the Christmas season, let us look with joy to our Savior, revealed by the star that shone at his birth, by the waters of his baptism, and by the power of his ministry. See, the Lord goes forth to teach, to preach, and to heal. Let us look—and then follow.

## WORSHIP

### Opening Prayer

The gospel for Epiphany is from Matthew 2:1–12. Proclaim this gospel at the beginning of your Celebration:

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

“In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they answered. “For this is what the prophet wrote:

Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah;  
for from you will come a leader  
who will guide my people Israel.”

So Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: “Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him.”

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought

out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

## **The Blessing of the Home**

From the time of the Middle Ages it has been a tradition that on the feast of the Epiphany we pray for God's blessing on our dwelling places, marking the entrance to our homes with chalk. Chalk is used as a tangible reminder of the dust of the earth from which we are all made.

We mark the main door of our home with the initials of the magi and the numerals of the new year. The initials remind us of the names of the magi—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar—and also stand for the Latin motto: *Christus mansionem benedicat*, “May Christ bless this house.” We connect the initials and the numerals with crosses as a sign that we have invited God's presence and blessing into our homes.

If your Celebration is taking place in a home, use this liturgy as part of your event. If being held at your church, gather everyone to bless the chalk. Then invite everyone to take the chalk home to bless their homes after your gathering.

## ***The Blessing of the Chalk***

Participants gather around a basket containing pieces of ordinary white or colored chalk.

### ***Materials***

- chalk (1 per family)
- basket
- copies of “The Blessing of the Home” (1 per family, couple or individual, see p. 130) (download at [www.churchpublishing.org/faitfulcelebrations3](http://www.churchpublishing.org/faitfulcelebrations3))



## ***The Blessing***

*Leader:* God dwells in you.

*Participants:* And also with you.

*Leader:* Let us pray. Bless, O Lord, this chalk that it may be a sign of your blessing upon the homes of your people. We pray that, like wise men and women of old, we may serve him as our only King, worship him as the one true God, and honor him with lives of sacrifice and praise, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## ***The Blessing of the Home***

The blessing of the house begins with all members of the household at the entrance of the home. A member of the family leads the blessing.

*Leader:* Peace be to this house.

*Participants:* And to all who enter here.

*The Leader speaks the following while marking the doorway with the chalk as indicated:*

*Leader:* Wise ones came to honor the Savior and offer him gifts.

C Caspar,

M Melchior,

B and Balthasar followed the star of God's Son who  
became human

two thousand and [*insert current year*] years ago.

++ May Christ bless our home and all who join us here,

++ and remain with us throughout the new year. *Amen.*

20 + C + M + B + 19 (or current year)

*All:* May this Epiphany blessing be a reminder of Christ's presence among us and a symbol of God's love and care as we share the blessings and burdens of our daily lives.

## CRAFTS

### Epiphany Crowns

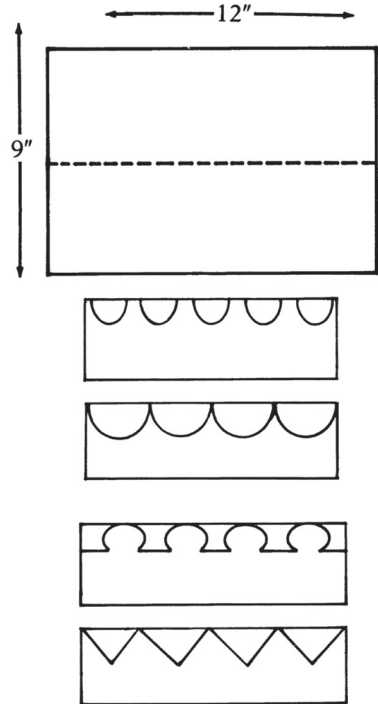
Invite participants to wear crowns as they eat Three Kings Cake (page 146) or sing Star Carols (page 139).

#### Materials

- 9" x 12" construction paper in assorted colors
- scissors
- crayons and markers
- glitter
- gummed stars
- glue
- clear tape or stapler

#### Directions

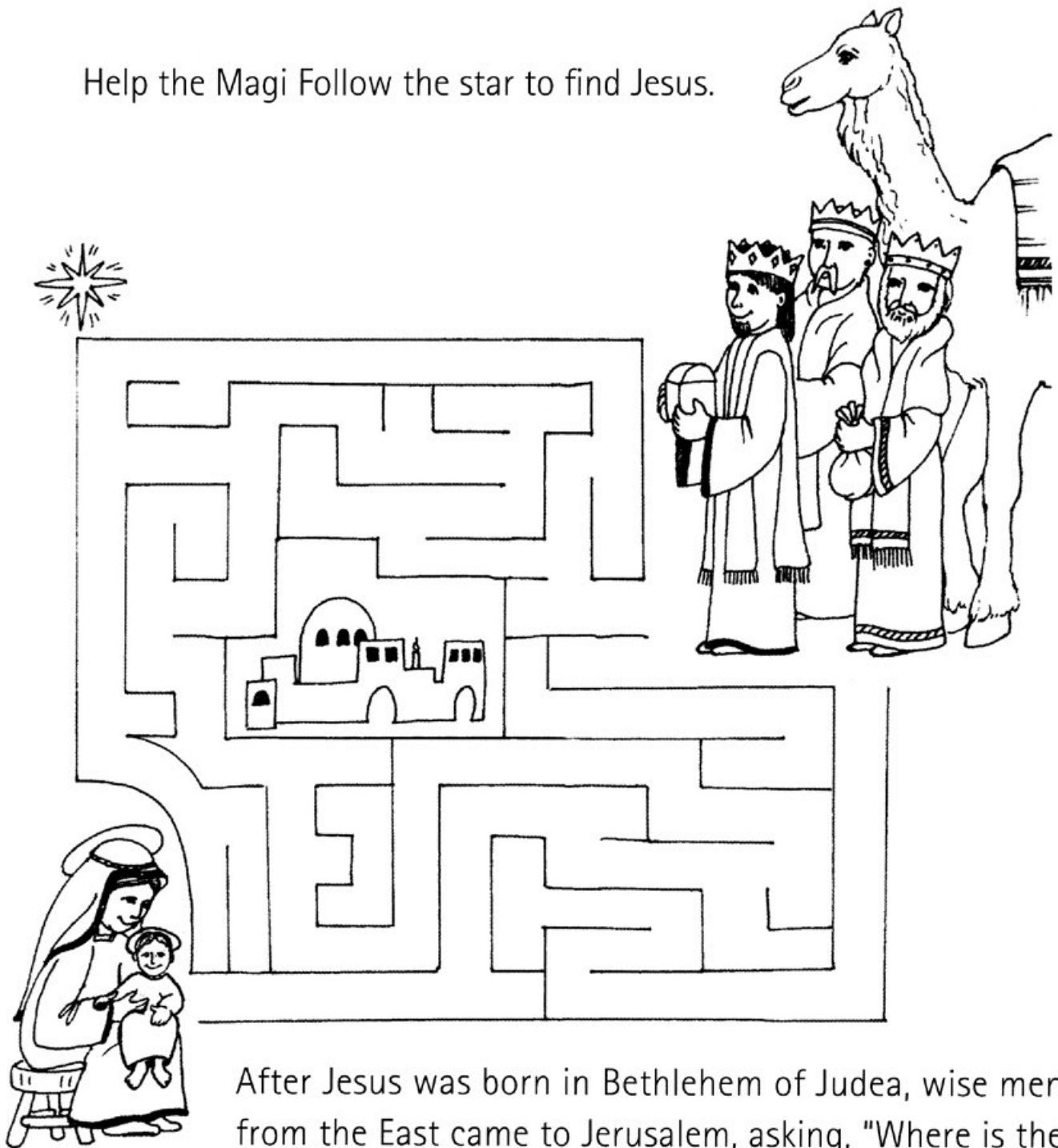
1. Demonstrate how to make simple construction-paper crowns by cutting a 9" x 12" rectangle of construction paper in half length-wise. Cut the top edges into various shapes.
2. Decorate the crowns while flat, using materials such as glitter, crayons, markers, construction paper shapes, gummed stars, etc.
3. Glue, tape, or staple the two ends of each crown together, being careful to check the fit first. (You will need two identical strips taped together to make a large enough crown.)



# The Feast of the Epiphany

## January 6th

Help the Magi Follow the star to find Jesus.



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage." Matthew 2:1-2

## STORYTELLING AND BIBLE STUDY

### Storytelling Round

Tell the story of the birth of Jesus and the visit of the magi by holding a Story Round.

#### Materials

- star-shaped Christmas tree ornament *or* star cut from cardboard and covered with gold or silver foil

#### Directions

1. Ask participants to sit in a circle. Begin the story with a sentence or two, such as:

*At that time, the emperor demanded that everyone go to his hometown to be counted so that the emperor could collect tax money from all of his people. Joseph and Mary traveled to Joseph's home city of Bethlehem, to be counted. . . .*

2. Hand the star to the next person in the circle, who continues the story by adding a sentence.
3. Then that person passes the star to the next person in the circle, who continues the story and hands on the star.
4. Continue around the circle until the whole story has been told.



### Gifts for Jesus

#### Materials

- Bible or copy of *The Visit of the Kings* (p. 135)
- paper
- crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- tape

### *Directions*

1. Read *The Visit of the Kings* (below) or read the story from Matthew 2:1–12. Ask the following questions:
  - How did the magi try to find Jesus?
  - How do we try to find Jesus?
  - What gifts did the magi bring?
  - What gifts can we bring?
2. Encourage participants to express respect for every answer. For example, if a child says “a skateboard” in answer to the last question, look the child directly in the eyes as you say, “You’d like to give Jesus a skateboard. I think Jesus would have fun playing with that!”
3. When participants have had a chance to express their ideas, ask everyone to write or draw presents to give to Jesus. If participants choose, invite everyone to share their “gifts for Jesus.”

### **The Visit of the Kings**

When Jesus is born in Bethlehem, a star shines in the sky right over the stable. Three kings in faraway lands see that new star. They know it means that something very special has happened. So they set out on their camels to follow the star. They follow the star for many days and many miles.

When the three kings arrive in Jerusalem, they stop to talk to the king of that land. His name is Herod. He is not a very good king at all. In fact, he is mean and wicked. Herod asks, “What are you doing in my country?”

The kings tell him, “We are here to worship a newborn king. We have seen his star in the sky.”

Herod is not happy when he hears that a new king is born. He asks the three wise men to come back to him after they find the new king. He says he wants to worship the newborn king, too. (But he is not telling the truth!)

The star moves across the sky and the three kings follow it. The star leads them on to Bethlehem and stops at the place where Jesus and Mary and Joseph live. The three kings go to the door and knock. (How do you think Mary and Joseph feel when they see three kings standing at their door?)

The kings have special gifts for Jesus. They carry the gifts in and lay them down by Baby Jesus. The gifts are gold, sweet smelling incense, and myrrh, used as perfume or medicine.

The kings “ooh” and “ahh” at the beautiful baby. They smile and hold out their fingers for Jesus to squeeze. They laugh and tickle the baby, and make him smile and laugh. (Have you ever seen people do this to babies?)

The kings say goodbye to the little family and start their long journey home. They set up camp that night not far from Bethlehem. They eat supper and fall fast asleep.

That night in a dream God talks to the three kings. He says, “Do not go back and tell wicked King Herod about Jesus. Go home another way. Herod is evil and he wants to hurt Jesus!”

The next morning the kings start home by a road that leads far, far away from King Herod’s palace. They sing and laugh and give thanks to God for his gift of Jesus to the world.

## **The Baptism of Jesus**

The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus is celebrated on the Sunday after January 6. The season of Epiphany, which lasts until Lent begins, is about Jesus’ ministry and call to bring the Good News to others. It is a time to remember our own baptisms and recall our mission as Christians.

### *Materials*

- Bibles
- paper
- pens or pencils

### *Directions*

1. Invite participants to look up the four Bible passages given below, spending 5 minutes noting the differences and similarities between them.
2. Discuss:
  - How are these passages similar?
  - How do these passages differ?
  - What would you choose as the most important emphasis of each passage? How could we outline the events of Jesus' baptism?
  - Do these events have counterparts in our rites of baptism today?
  - Do these events have counterparts in our daily lives as Christians?
3. If your group is large, divide everyone into small groups to discuss these questions:
  - How would you define the mission of Jesus after his baptism?
  - How would you define the mission of baptized Christians?
  - How does this understanding of mission affect your daily life?

## **The Baptism of Jesus in the Four Gospels**

### ***Matthew 3:13–17***

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am pleased."

***Mark 1:9–11***

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

***Luke 3:21–22***

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am pleased.”

***John 1:29–34***

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man, ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”



## FAITH AT HOME

### ***Martin Luther King, Jr.***

The church for centuries has observed the feasts of saints on the day of their death, but in this case, please celebrate the ministry of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when our nation does, on the Monday closest to January 15, his birthday. What your kids learn about him in school isn't enough: his Christian faith and his calling compelled Dr. King to make civil rights his life's work.

The lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures appointed for his feast day is taken from the story of Joseph with the coat of many colors, whose brothers were jealous of him and decided to get rid of him. Eventually, they sold him into slavery, but Joseph became a powerful leader in Egypt. Pharaoh, Egypt's king, believed Joseph's dreams and because of that, Joseph was able to save the Egyptians and even his own brothers from a terrible famine. It is taken from Genesis 37:17–20:

They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Read or listen to the "I Have a Dream" speech, beginning at the line, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'we hold these

## Seasons and Celebrations

truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”<sup>1</sup> Continue to the end of the speech. Talk as a family about Dr. King’s dream, and how it has continued after his death.

Many people across the country take this day as a day of service. How can your family participate in making his dream come true? This is one of my favorite quotes of Dr. King: “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

Families with young children could try beginning this conversation with a brown egg and a white egg. Crack the eggs into the bowl one at a time. No matter what we look like on the outside, inside we are the same. Dr. King’s most famous speech is about his dream that everyone will one day live the way God wants us to live, treating each other fairly and with love, no matter the color of our skin or how different we might be. Read this quote: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” What we have inside us is the most important part of us. Talk together about what we dream of doing to make the world a better (peaceful, fairer) place. Read the excellent picture book *God’s Dream* by Desmond Tutu.

### **Valentine’s Day**

There is no historical basis for a saint called Valentine and the story we have about him is rather gruesome, but that shouldn’t keep you from making February 14 all about love. Include strangers: fill up snack-sized Ziploc bags with chocolate hearts or kisses and hide them for others to find. Make

## FAITH AT HOME

valentines from colored construction paper or from paper that you might have recycled which you can brush with red, pink, and purple watercolor. Take extra and signed valentines to the public library and tuck them into books.

Peter was due on February 12. On February 14 I woke up feeling huge and miserable, like this baby was going to stay inside me forever. The weather had been below freezing for several days. I looked out the window of my New York City apartment and discovered that someone had hung a large red tag-board heart decorated with glitter and shiny stickers that caught the light in the branches of every tree on our block. Even though they were not meant for me personally, those valentines made me feel loved. Read *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* by Eileen Spinelli and dream up acts of kindness for your neighbors. God's love spills over into everything and everyone if we let it.

# If you enjoyed this activity pack here are some more ideas for Lent and beyond:

What We Do in Lent: A Child's Activity Book

Anne E. Kitch, Illustrations by Dorothy Thompson Perez

Faith At Home: A Handbook for Cautiously Christian Parents

Wendy Claire Barrie

## ***Faithful Celebrations series***

Edited by Sharon Ely Pearson

Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God from Mardi Gras through Pentecost

Faithful Celebrations: Making Time with Family and Friends

Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God in Autumn

Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God in Winter

Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God with the Saints