Epiphany Joy

Jesus shines as light for our world.
- Wise men travel to visit the baby Jesus, a symbol of Jesus’ mission to the whole world.
- The world of young children is centered on the people they see often: family, friends—and their faith formation groups.
- Today’s session invites young children to travel once more to the stories of Jesus’ birth as we conclude the nativity cycle.

Question of the Week
What gifts do you want to bring baby Jesus?

Core Session
- Getting Started (crèche set)
- Gospel Story: Wise Men Visit
- Go to Bethlehem (recorded music and player)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Christmas Story Review (crèche set)
- Craft: Star Wands (tissue paper, dowels, sticks or straws, ribbons, yarn, gummed foil stars)
- Music and Movement: Star March
- Art: McGrath’s Prince of Peace (modeling clay)
- Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More about Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- The World of the Bible: God’s Glory and the Mystery of Salvation
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)

If time allows, begin with the Christmas Story Review activity on page 3.

Otherwise bring out a set of crèche figures and place them in the center of the story circle. Invite children to name the figures and tell you about them. Then set apart the figures of the wise men. Say:

◆ These people came to see Jesus, too, and that’s the story I’m going to tell you today.

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

**Wise Men Visit**

*Story Focus: Use crèche figures to act out today’s story.*

After Jesus was born, after the angels sang, after the shepherds came to see, men came walking. Wise men came walking. Wise men from the East came walking.

“Where is Jesus?” they asked. “Where is the baby king?” But no one knew. So the wise men from the East kept walking.

Then one of them said, “Look!” All the wise men looked up in the sky.

“It’s a star,” said another.

“The star of the baby king,” said a third.

How happy they were to see that star! They followed it until they came right to the manger where Jesus was, with Mary and Joseph.

And there the wise men gave gifts to Jesus, gifts of gold and good-smelling spices and perfume.

How happy the wise men were that they came walking. How happy they were to follow that star. How happy they were to see the baby and lay gifts at his feet. Jesus, the baby king.

**Go to Bethlehem** (10-15 minutes)

Children play Go to Bethlehem, a variation of Musical Chairs in which everyone wins.

Ask the children:
◆ Who did the wise men see? *(Jesus or baby Jesus)*
◆ Where did the wise men see Jesus? *(at Bethlehem or in a manger; use whichever phrase the children understand in the game below)*

Set the chairs in a row, facing in alternate directions. Play music; we recommend “Farandole.” (Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Ask children to walk around the chairs while the music plays. As children walk, remove one chair. When the music stops, call out, “Go to Bethlehem (or to the manger).”

Children sit in the chairs that remain, crowding into the “stable” or “manger” at Bethlehem. Ask children to share the chairs and their laps, making room for everyone. Continue playing, removing one or two more chairs before you stop the music each time. When you call out “go to Bethlehem,” children sit on whatever chairs are left or each other’s laps.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Gather around the crèche. Explain that the wise men brought gifts to the baby Jesus: gold and sweet-smelling spices. Ask the children what gifts they wish they could give to baby Jesus. Allow children time to imagine and to talk to the baby Jesus.

Close by praying:
◆ Thank you, God, for sending a star to help the wise men find baby Jesus. Thank you for letting us give gifts to Jesus, too. *Amen.*
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a simple version of today’s gospel story. You’ll also find a fingerplay you can teach to the children.

Help children practice the fingerplay so that they may share it with their families at home.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “Let’s Go See” (p. 21 of the songbook)
- “Prepare the Way” (p. 18 of the songbook)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

Christmas Story Review (5-15 minutes)
Use crèche figures to help the children tell you the Christmas story.

Sit with the children in a circle. Encourage them to tell you the Christmas story by asking these questions:
- Who are these? (Hold up Joseph and Mary.)
- Where are they going? (Walk the figures to the crèche stable. The children might remember “the manger” or “the stable,” or they might just say “for a walk.”)
- Mary says it’s time. Do you know what it’s time for? (Place the baby Jesus in the manger to help the children remember that it’s time for Jesus to be born.)
- Who are these? (Put the shepherds some distance away from the manger.)
- An angel comes to the shepherds. What does the angel tell them? (Put the angel over or near the shepherds. The children may need help remembering that the angel tells the shepherds that Jesus is born.)
- Where are the shepherds going? (Move the shepherds to the manger.)
- Who do the shepherds see? (Place the shepherds around the Baby Jesus.)
- Then the shepherds go home again. (Move the shepherds back to the field.)

After the story review, set up a learning-center where the children can make up their own games and stories with the crèche figures. Let two or three children at a time play for 5-10 minutes at the free-play center, while the other children participate in the activities below.

Craft (10-15 minutes)

Star Wands
Children make star wands to remember the star the wise men followed. Use the wands in the Music and Movement activity on page 4.

Cut stars and circles from yellow construction paper for each child.

Ask the children what the wise men followed to find Jesus. Invite the children to make their own stars to use in today’s musical game.

Help each child use a glue stick to spread glue on two stars or two circles. Show the children how to stick the stars or circles together around a dowel, stick or straw to make a wand.

Children can choose one or more of these methods of decorating their wands:
- Children can glue star shapes or gummed foil stars to the circles.
- Children tear colored tissue paper into irregular pieces, each 1”-2” wide. Children use thinned glue to stick the tissue paper pieces onto the paper stars or circles.
- Children wind yarn or ribbon around the dowels or straws. Children can also tie ribbon streamers to the dowels.
- Children use felt pens, crayons and gummed foil stars to decorate the circles, stars and wands.
**Music and Movement (5-15 minutes)**

**Star March**
If time and space allow, invite the children to hold their “stars” (made in the activity above) high as they march around the room or to a crèche. We recommend playing “Farandole” as the children march. (Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

As an alternative, you can sing with the children the chorus of the familiar carol “We Three Kings of Orient Are” as you walk:

> Oh, star of wonder, star of light,  
> Star of royal beauty bright;  
> Westward leading, still proceeding  
> Guide us with your perfect light.

**Note:** The piece suggested above, called “Farandole,” is by French composer Georges Bizet, who lived from 1838–1875. There are two melodies in this piece, the grand march that starts it off, and the lighter dance-like melody that follows. Eventually both melodies combine and intensify. Bizet borrowed the march theme from a French Christmas carol called the “March of the Kings.”

**Art (5-15 minutes)**

**McGrath’s Prince of Peace**
Gather children around the painting Prince of Peace by Michael O’Neill McGrath, attached to this document.

Invite children to talk about the picture. Which part of the picture do they like best? Why? What questions do they wish they could ask the painter?

Tell children that the title of the painting is Prince of Peace. Christians believe that Jesus is the Prince of Peace, the leader who can bring peace to the whole world. The wise men in today’s story traveled from far away to see the prince who could bring peace to the whole world.

Distribute play dough or other modeling material. Invite children to make people figures or more animal figures you can place before this painting of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Encourage children to make many figures, to show that Jesus comes to bring peace to everyone.

**Young Children and the Gospel**

In today’s scripture, wise men from the East follow a guiding star to the manger. They visit the infant Jesus and bring symbolic gifts.

This story of the wise men occurs before last week’s gospel of the escape of the Holy Family to Egypt. Although young children do not typically care about story sequence, you may want to explain that today we hear another story about the birth of Jesus. This happened just after Jesus was born and before the story of Joseph’s dream which we heard last week.

In this closing celebration of feasts related to the story of Jesus’ birth, children may still want to spend time recalling their Christmas feelings; make time for their stories and for plenty of free play.

**Where You’ll Find Everything Else**

- Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
  - A child-friendly version of the story told in today’s Core Session—Wise Men Visit.
  - An alternative Story-Review Action Rhyme to review today’s Gospel Story.
  - The Gifts of the Magi Mini-Poster to use as a visual aid in telling today’s gospel story about the wise men’s visit.
  - The Star Patterns for use in today’s Craft.
  - McGrath’s Prince of Peace, to be used in today’s Art activity.
  - A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.

- Open your Winter-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Winter-A’s Models of the Faith.
  - A printable article examining Discipleship in John’s Gospel.
  - A printable article taking a look at the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated today.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s scriptures celebrate Epiphany—God’s light for all people! Isaiah describes the rising glory of the Lord, breaking the heavy darkness and bringing the bright dawn. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes the gospel as God’s mystery revealed; through Christ we all can come before God. Matthew tells of wise foreigners studying the stars, seeing in them the signs of a great King, worthy to be worshiped by all people.

Isaiah 60:1-6
Today’s reading applies the promise of Isaiah 49:7-23 to the situation after the exile. The returned Israelites found their land devastated, depopulated and impoverished. The task of rebuilding was slow and difficult. In this setting of discouragement, the epiphany (manifestation) of God is shown forth by the Lord’s active presence in historical events, symbolized by the dawning of light. Jerusalem’s children and wealth will return, and all nations will gather at the Lord’s altar. The imagery of this passage influenced Matthew’s account of the magi.

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Today’s reading starts as a prayer interrupted by a statement on Paul’s ministry and God’s plan for the world. The “mystery” (v. 3), God’s hidden purpose for salvation, is made known through the revelation of Christ to Paul and to the leaders of the community. It is summarized succinctly as the unity of all, particularly of Jew and Gentile together as one in the Christian community.

Other mediators are not needed between God and human beings, nor can they hinder access to God. Indeed, the Christian community will reveal to all the wisdom of God, manifested in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-12
Matthew is more concerned to present the theological implications of Jesus’ birth than simply to give a historical account. In today’s gospel, he concentrates not upon the event of the birth, but upon its meaning as a fulfillment of Old Testament expectations and upon the response of the many different characters to that birth.

A number of Old Testament passages supply the imagery for the star and the wise men. The star and scepter to “rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17) were identified with the Messiah in Jewish thought, and thus Herod is implicitly presented as Balak, who sought to control Balaam’s blessing (Numbers 22-24).

Matthew adapts Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2 to identify explicitly the child born as the long-awaited Shepherd of Israel. The responses of the magi and of Herod are contrasted. As Matthew stresses throughout his gospel, Israel rejects its King while the Gentiles accept him. Matthew also foreshadows the crucifixion and resurrection, as the child is named King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37), anointed with myrrh, greeted with “great joy” (Matthew 28:8) and worshiped as universal savior (Matthew 28:9).

Reflection
The story of the magi is filled with incongruities. Surely wise people would not bring an infant such impractical gifts. Artists of northern Europe and the US have transferred their native setting of pine trees and snow to the middle east. And many of the familiar details have come not from scripture but from carols and cards. (Matthew never mentions the number three—or camels.)

While there may be discrepancies if we take the story literally, we can read it symbolically and find the treasure there. We may understand Epiphany better if we remember the wisest person we know. This person has probably taken great risks and gone on long journeys—if not physically, then within the soul.

His or her vision goes beyond a mundane view of the world, to discover the hidden stars which sparkle there. This wise one has made sacrifices to continue the quest which ultimately brings great joy. If we meditate admiringly on this person, we may eventually take on similar characteristics, becoming like our model.

Sometimes we place too much emphasis on the magi’s search and not enough on God’s desire for us, God’s delight in finding us. Epiphany also celebrates the joy of that discovery.
The Scriptures and the Catechism
The Epiphany celebrates the disclosure of God’s plan for the salvation of all humanity (CCC, #74, 543). Paul reminds us about the important part played by the Jewish people in this divine plan (CCC, #59–64, 761–62). Matthew reminds us that the innocent who suffer also play a significant part (CCC, #164, 1521, 2268–69). God always enters our world to take the side of the innocent victims and expects us Christians to share in this saving work.

The World of the Bible
God’s Glory and the Mystery of Salvation
Isaiah’s Hope for God’s Reappearance
In today’s readings, Isaiah hopes for the reappearance (epiphany) of the “Glory of the Lord” that will dispel the darkness of the exile. In Hebrew, the word glory is related to weight or heaviness, hence it describes someone’s inner worth or importance. When applied to humans, it can be associated with anything that gives a person dignity and commands respect such as honor, wealth or wisdom.

When glory is associated with God, the meaning becomes more complex. On the one hand, glory describes the essence of God’s divinity that requires us to respect and honor God. But glory also points to the visible manifestation of God’s invisible presence, for example in the cloud and pillar of fire leading the Hebrews during the exodus.

The Mystery of God’s Salvation
Paul has experienced God’s presence appearing in the overwhelming mystery of salvation that is now available for the Gentiles.

In the Greek world of early Christianity, mystery pointed to that which is hidden or secret and cannot be talked about openly. It was most often used to describe sacred rituals which were not to be revealed to anyone who did not belong to the religious group.

For Christians like Paul, mystery points to what is hidden and cannot be known unless God reveals it. Paul identifies this revealed mystery as God’s surprising desire to unite all humanity—both Jew and Gentile—into one community in Christ. Of course, this mystery cannot be kept hidden but becomes the core of Paul’s Christian message.