Scripture
Matthew 2:1-12

Christ’s Light for All

God guides those who journey in faith.
- In today’s gospel, we remember a journey of faith: the magi travel to the baby Jesus.
- Young children are on their own journey of growth, a journey we support by trusting them enough to make their own mistakes and accept their own responsibilities.
- In today’s session we focus on the Epiphany narrative, remembering the wise ones’ journey to a Light greater than the star that guided them.

Question of the Week
What treasures does God give me each day?

Core Session
- Getting Started (flashlight)
- Gospel Story: The Wise Men and the Star (simple crèche set)
- Story-Review Game (rod or broomstick, star on a string or ribbon)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Crèche Play (simple crèche set, baskets of natural materials)
- Art: Swanson’s Festival of Lights
- Epiphany Stars (gift wrap, ribbon or yarn, hole punch; optional: glitter)
- Story-Review Games (used Christmas bows, baby doll in a box or cradle, tape)
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More about Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Faith Formation and the Arts, Part 6
Getting Started (10-15 minutes)

Introduce today’s session with flashlight play for the children.

Let the children take turns handling a flashlight. They can point it up, down and all around, being careful to shine it toward the wall and not in one another’s eyes.

Let each child pick an object for the light to “find.” Ask the other children to guess what object has been chosen. Repeat until every child has had at least one turn.

Explain that in today’s Bible story, we hear about a light that led some visitors to a surprising place.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Focus: Use crèche figures found as a visual focus for today’s story. Encourage children to join in the story refrain:

Follow, follow, follow the star.
It’s many miles to Bethlehem.

Story: The Wise Men and the Star

The wise men say, “It’s time to visit the baby Jesus.”

Follow, follow, follow the star.
It’s many miles to Bethlehem.

“Look!” says one wise man. “There is a bright star in the sky.”

“The star will show us the baby Jesus,” says another wise man.

Follow, follow, follow the star.
It’s many miles to Bethlehem.

“Here is the stable,” says one wise man.

“Here is the mother and here is the baby,” says another wise man.

Follow, follow, follow the star.
It’s many miles to Bethlehem.

The wise men bring gifts into the stable.

“Here, baby Jesus,” the wise men say. “These gifts are for you.”

Follow, follow, follow the star.
It’s many miles to Bethlehem.

After the Story

Explain:

◆ After the wise men left, God still helped take care of baby Jesus.
◆ God told Mary and Joseph when they should take baby Jesus away from the stable.
◆ God helped Mary and Joseph find a new home in the faraway land of Egypt.

Story-Review Game (5-10 minutes)

Children use a star to play a variation of Follow the Leader.

Tie the star so that it dangles from the rod; hold it up so that the star swings freely.

Let each child take a turn leading the other children around the room, following the star. Let the child decide where to lead the line. If a child leads the group to the crèche figure of baby Jesus, remind them that’s just what happened in the Bible story for the day.

As children walk they can sing these words, sung to the tune of “Twinkle, twinkle, little star”:

Follow, follow, great big star,
You will lead us very far,
When we see you every night,
Trav’ling far and burning bright.
Follow, follow, great big star,
You will lead us very far.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Gather children around the crèche.

If children have decorated stars today, invite them to hold their stars high as you pray:

◆ Dear God, thank you for the wonderful light that you give us in the stars. Help each one of us (name each child) find Jesus, just as the wise men did so long ago. Amen.

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
Discover the Good News
(5-10 minutes)
On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find an illustrated version of the Epiphany story-review rhyme found on page 2.

On page 2 of Discover we give instructions for a simple Epiphany story-review game.

Singing Together (10-15 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
- “Christmas Dreams” (songbook p. 18, also available as an MP3)
- “The Hay Was Scratchy” (songbook p. 20)

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

You can also use simple movements to turn “Christmas Dreams” into a prayerful dance. See the handout Christmas Dreams Dance, attached to this document.

Crèche Play (10-15 minutes)
Children explore the stories of the Nativity cycle through free play. As in the sessions for the 1st through 4th Sundays of Advent and the session for the 1st Sunday after Christmas, we recommend that you provide this free-play area throughout the weeks of Advent and Christmas.

Cover a box, stool or small table with a cloth. Arrange the crèche figures on the table. Place baskets of natural materials nearby, such as evergreen branches, pine cones, twigs and stones. Invite two or three children at a time to explore this free-play area.

Because some children may worry about whether or not they may touch the crèche figures, emphasize the children’s freedom to touch, move and rearrange the figures and materials.

Art (5-10 minutes)
Swanson’s Festival of Lights
Gather children around John August Swanson’s painting Festival of Lights, attached to this document. This colorful poster shows people holding lights, moving together in a joyful procession toward the viewer. The image evokes the brightness given to us through the life and Spirit of Jesus, spread throughout the world in the people of his Church.

Ask children to talk about what they see in the picture. Ask them to imagine that all the people in the picture are traveling to see baby Jesus. Ask:
- If you could travel to see baby Jesus, what kind of light would you carry?
- What would you say to Jesus?
- What would you want to bring to Jesus?

Explain:
- Christmas is a time when we think about light shining in darkness.
- Sometimes we call Jesus our Light. We say, “Jesus, you are the Light of the world.”
- Listen as I read you words from scripture about Jesus our Light.

Read aloud John 1:5: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

Epiphany Stars (10-25 minutes)
Children decorate stars to use in a game below.

Activity Soundtrack: Play Prokofiev’s “Troika” to set a festive holiday mood, complete with sleigh bells! (Open your Winter-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Before the session cut at least one star per child from poster board or oaktag. In the session set glue sticks and other materials on a work surface.

Read aloud John 1:5: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out. Explain:
- The wise men followed a special light to find the baby Jesus: a bright and strange star.
- We can make stars, too, to remember the wise men and their visit to the baby Jesus.
Children can decorate their stars by gluing on scraps of gift paper or by drawing designs with felt pens or crayons. Children can also use glitter, but supervise this option carefully and keep the work surface covered with newspapers.

Punch a hole in the top of each star. Help children string yarn or ribbon through the holes as hangers. Save the finished stars to use in the game below.

☐ **Story-Review Games** (10-20 minutes)
Children play story-review games.

*We’re Going to See Baby Jesus:*
The rules and game cube for this game are attached to this document.

*Story-Review Stars:*
Children use the stars made in today’s Epiphany Stars activity to play another story-review game.

Ask the children to form a circle, holding their stars high in the air. One child stands in the center of the circle, holding the flashlight. (If you have a helper in the room—an adult or older child—this person could be the first person in the center.)

Sing or play music as children move around the circle, holding their stars high. (Appropriate songs to sing would be, “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Follow, Follow” (from the Story-Review Game on p. 2) or one of the songs from today’s Music activity.

When the music stops, the person in the center shines the flashlight on one of the stars. The child holding that star then changes places with the person in the center. Continue playing until everyone has had a turn to be in the center, shining the light.

*Bring Gifts to the Baby:*
Children play an active game based on today’s story.

Explain:

- During Christmas, we remember that baby Jesus was born. We often give each other presents.
- Today we remember the wise kings who came to baby Jesus. They brought presents, too—special presents, just for Jesus.
- We will play a game of bringing gifts to baby Jesus.

Gather children at the opposite end of the room from the doll. Give each child a Christmas bow to take to baby Jesus.

Teach the children to chant in unison this game verse:

I’m bringing a gift,  
I’m bringing a gift,  
I’m bringing a gift to Jesus.

Then say “Who’s bringing a gift? (Child’s name) is bringing a gift. Go!”

The child then runs to the cradle or box and attaches the ribbon. (Position yourself by the baby Jesus so that you can help tape on bows.) When the game is over, leave the bows in place as a reminder of the children’s Christmas joy.

---

**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 copy of today’s Gospel Story: *The Wise Men and the Star,* which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
  - Printable directions for the *Christmas Dreams Dance,* suggested in today’s Music activity.

- Open your Winter-B *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Winter-B’s *Models of the Faith.*
  - For catechists and/or families, a helpful *Christmas Overview,* an *Epiphany Overview* and an article offering *Reflections on the Incarnation.*
  - A printable article for catechists titled *First Impressions,* which offers practical helps for the use of fine art.
  - An article for catechists suggesting ways for *Dramatizing Scripture* in the classroom.
  - An article for catechists exploring the importance of understanding and acknowledging various *Learning Styles* among group members.
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
The prophet looks beyond the limited restoration of Israel after the exile and sees the future glory of the people embodied in Zion. Thus, Israel’s return from Babylon is a type, a preceding but lesser instance, of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. These promises of glory were partially realized as God’s people were restored to the land, but they will be fully consummated in the age to come.

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Today’s reading begins as a prayer (3:1, 14-21) that is interrupted with a statement about the author’s ministry and God’s plan for the world (3:2-13). The emphasis is on the inclusive nature of the “mystery hidden for ages in God” (3:9).

Matthew 2:1-12
In the birth narratives, Matthew is more interested in showing the theological implications of Jesus’ birth than simply giving a historical account. He concentrates on the meaning of the birth as a fulfillment of Old Testament expectations and upon the response of others 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) symbolized the Messiah in Jewish thought. The “wise men” (v. 1) become, as in later Christian art, “three” from the number of their gifts, and “kings” on camels from the description of foreign gift-givers in Isaiah 60:6. Matthew adapts Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2b to identify the child explicitly as the awaited Shepherd of Israel. The responses of Herod and the magi are curiously contrasted: Israel rejects its king while the Gentiles accept him.

Reflection

The clash between Herod and the child continues today: evil forces are always unsettled by anything new, creative or liberating. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the “house of bread” among wheat fields. He is small, vulnerable and, ultimately, nurturing.

King Herod, from the seat of power, reacts with violence to any threat. He doesn’t want to nurture his people, but to murder them. Between these two forces move other realities: the star set in heaven, beyond human machinations. And the magi: seekers willing to risk. They are truly wise, because their first responses, on seeing the child, are to rejoice, do reverence and give gifts. Note: they don’t pontificate or draw attention to themselves as pseudo-celebrities or insecure people would. The whole tableau unfolds...
without a word. One last sterling quality: they follow the warning which comes through a dream.

This is a good day to reflect on how we model the magi. Are we comfy settled in our unchallenged routines, our unexamined attitudes? Or are we willing to leave the comfort zone and follow what seems implausible? Do we take our cues from God or set our directions by human opinion? Stars and joys await…

The Scriptures and the Catechism

The Epiphany reminds us how eager God is to be with us and to be known by us (CCC, #50–55). God reveals many clues about the divine presence in our world. Like the magi, we search for our star that will lead us on our journey to find God in our world. Other religions, too, search for God in their own ways (CCC, #27–29, 817–22, 839–56). Like the magi, when they come close to God, scripture can help them discover clues about how to interpret what they find.

Faith Formation and the Arts, Part 6

by Roger W. Hutchison

Visualizing Our Faith

When we tell stories of Jesus’ calming the sea, we must include images of oceans, boats and storm clouds. We must allow children to stick their fingers into paints and bring their blank pages to life with angry grays and lightning blues. We must invite our children to mold lumps of clay into elephants waiting to climb upon the ark.

Provide your seniors, those who are 18 and those who are 82, with a blank canvas and some finger paints. Encourage them to paint their self-portrait. Their eyes will twinkle, their memories will soar, and they will experience a delight that often fades away when we move from childhood into adulthood. Exhibit their work, naming it “The Face of Christ.”

“The Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.”
—Gerard Manley Hopkins

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

It doesn’t take a huge budget to provide opportunities for your faith community. You do not have to be an art educator. You already have the tools to do this. You are faithful. You want your community to experience a sense of inclusion and awe. You want them all to know that they are part of the greater story.

It is my eternal prayer that when our children open their wings and leave the safety of their nest for the last time, they will carry with them the visual images of a faith that inspires and encourages. I pray that this sense of awe, love, joy and hope will carry all of us through adulthood and into the richness of eternal life.

The World of the Bible

Epiphany and the Magi

Epiphany (meaning “to show forth”), celebrated on the 12th day after Christmas, commemorates the magi’s visit, the wise ones who traveled from afar to worship the Christ child in Bethlehem and who represent all nations of the world. Jesus is savior for all people.

The story of the magi, which is found only in Matthew’s gospel, reflects his concern not so much to highlight the mystery of who Jesus is, but to display the possibilities for response when Jesus comes into our lives. There are always two possibilities and thus two types of persons. Some will accept Jesus and his message and follow him, while others will reject him even to the point of crucifying him. The tension of Matthew’s gospel revolves around the question of who will follow Jesus and who will reject him.

These two possibilities of response also reflect the church of Matthew’s day. The gentiles showed great interest and had converted to such an extent that the whole church was now dominated by their presence and attitudes. But the Jews showed little interest even though the Jewish scriptures attested to the identity of Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah.

Thus Matthew’s Christmas story (Chapters 1 and 2) reads like the gospel in miniature. Its themes echo the rest of the gospel: Jesus comes into the world—and into each person’s life—demanding a decision about how to respond. Some people accept and follow him (like Joseph, Mary and the magi), while others reject and persecute him (like Herod and the Jewish leaders) to the point that he becomes a target for murder and is forced to flee into hiding in Egypt in order to survive.

“Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.”
—Gerard Manley Hopkins

As Kingfishers Catch Fire