Like the shepherds, we seek Jesus and rejoice to find him.

- In today's gospel, the shepherds find the baby in humble surroundings.
- Our salvation is announced to humble outcasts who are the first to spread the good news!
- In today's session, children celebrate the birth of Jesus as the culmination of the Advent sessions theme of anticipation.

**Question of the Week**

Just as Mary was blessed, so are we. What is one blessing you are most grateful for?

### Core Session

- Getting Started (*We're Going to See Baby Jesus Game*)
- Gospel Story: Jesus is Born
- Special Guest: New Baby Visit
- Praying Together (*Advent wreath or candles*)

### Enrichment

- Discover the Good News
- Singing Together
- Story Review: Christmas Characters
- Action Rhyme: Going to Bethlehem
- Christmas Crèche Review
- 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
- Exploring Your Worship Space
- The World of the Bible: “Abba, Father”

---

**Scripture**

*Luke 2:8-21*
Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Children create and play a game about visiting the baby Jesus.

Lead children in the “We’re Going to See Baby Jesus Game,” attached to this document. Complete instructions for the game will be found on the same sheet as the game cube. You’ll also need green, blue and yellow construction paper, along with masking tape and the crèche figures you’ll be using to tell today’s Story.

Note that the game is appropriate for up to six children at a time. If you have more than six children in your group, invite children to double- or triple-up and play as teams.

This would also be a good time to let a group of nonplayers “debrief” about their Christmas presents, activities and visits.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

Jesus is Born

Use a crèche set as a focus for today’s story. If necessary, adapt the story to suit the figures you have available.

(Bring out the figure of Joseph.)
Joseph says, “It’s time for Jesus to be born.”

(Bring out the figure of Mary.)
Mary says, “It’s time for Jesus to be born.”

Mary and Joseph walk to Bethlehem.
(Walk the figures to the crèche.)

Mary and Joseph stay in a stable. (Touch the crèche.)

The stable has many animals.

A cow says... (Encourage the children to supply the “Moooo.”)

A horse says... (“Neiiigh.”)

A sheep says... (“Baaaa.”)

But Mary and Joseph say, “It’s time for Jesus to be born.” (Place the figure of the baby Jesus in the crèche.)

Near the stable, shepherds watch their sheep. (Bring out the shepherd figure.) “I wonder what time it is,” says one shepherd.

An angel appears. (Bring out the angel figure.) The angel says, “You are very lucky, shepherds, because it’s time for Jesus to be born.”

“Let’s go see baby Jesus,” say the shepherds. (Walk the shepherd figure to the crèche.)

The shepherds find the stable. (Touch each figure as you name it.) The shepherds find Mary. The shepherds find Joseph.

And best of all, the shepherds find the baby Jesus.

“Thank you, God,” say the shepherds. “Thank you that baby Jesus is born.”

Special Guest

New Baby Visit

Before the session invite a parent or couple with an infant child to join your session to share their experience and introduce their baby.

In the session, help the children sit quietly with the baby. Invite parents to show the baby’s hair (or lack of it), tiny hands and feet, diaper, etc. Ask the parents to teach the children a lullaby they use to sing to the baby.

If the parents agree, the children can gently touch the baby. If the parents feel especially adventurous, they might bathe the baby where the children can watch. The children will love to help by handing towels or feeling the water temperature.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Children greet each other with the good news of Jesus’ birth.

Gather around the Advent wreath. Light all the candles. Ask each child in the circle to tell the next:

◆ Jesus is born!

Close by praying:

◆ Thank you, God, for baby Jesus, Mother Mary and Father Joseph. Amen.

Note: Distribute this week’s At Home with the Good News to children as they depart (or e-mail it to families after the session).
Discover the Good News
(5-10 minutes)
In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a story-review rhyme. You’ll also find a Christmas Memory Book activity for children to share with their families.

Note: If you use At Home with the Good News, distribute this week’s papers to the children before they leave.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News you and the children can sing together:
◆ “We’ve Got to Get Away” (p. 22 of the songbook)
◆ “God’s Family” (p. 23 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)
◆ “Good News” (p. 25 of the songbook; also available as an MP3)

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.

Sing these words to the tune of “Rock-a-Bye Baby”:

Rock-a-bye, Jesus, in Mary’s arms,
Cloths wrapped around you will keep you warm.
Rock-a-bye, Jesus, Joseph is near.
So go on to sleep now, Jesus so dear.

Story Review
Christmas Characters
Children review today’s story with two games and an action rhyme.

Children use the crèche figures used to tell today’s story in an active game. Gather children in a circle. Distribute one of the figures to each child. Call out the name of one Christmas Character, such as shepherd.

Each child holding a shepherd figure comes into the center of the circle and gives the children a command, such as, “Take a big hop!” Possible commands:
◆ Wiggle your nose.
◆ March around the circle.
◆ Show us how to hold a baby.
◆ Touch your toes.

Action Rhyme
Going to Bethlehem
Children learn an action rhyme based on today’s story.

Stand with the children in a circle. Encourage them to imitate your movements and join in the repeated words of this rhymed story:

We’re going to walk to Bethlehem:
(Join hands and circle right.)

It’s time for Jesus to be born.
(Upturn right palm.)

We’ll take some water, take some food:
(Upturn left palm.)

It’s time for Jesus to be born.
We’ll find a stable in Bethlehem:
(Shade eyes and look to right, then left.)

It’s time for Jesus to be born.
The cow says moo, the sheep says baa:
(Pause after each “says,” allowing the children to say “moo” and “baa.”)

It’s time for Jesus to be born.
We’ll close our eyes and go to sleep:
(Close eyes and pillow head on hands.)

It’s time for Jesus to be born.
Jesus is here! Let’s shout hooray!
(Open eyes. Raise hands and shout “hooray!”)

It’s time for Jesus to be born.
Christmas-Crèche Review
(5-10 minutes)

Children use the crèche figures to review today’s story. (Limit this game to 4 children at a time.)

Set the crèche figures in view of the children. Invite children to answer the questions by touching the appropriate figures.

Story-review questions:
◆ Who was the mother of Jesus? (Mary)
◆ Who walked with Mary to Bethlehem? (Joseph)
◆ Where did Mary and Joseph stay in Bethlehem? (the stable)
◆ Who said “moo” and “neigh” and “baa” when Jesus was born? (the animals)
◆ Who told the shepherds that Jesus was born? (the angel)
◆ Who walked to the stable to see Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus? (the shepherds)

Young Children and the Gospel

We encourage you to give special attention to the children’s needs today, especially by providing a listening ear to stories and problems. The days after Christmas are often times when children feel strong emotions brought on by the excitement, disappointments and stress of Christmas.

Today’s session for preschoolers and kindergartners explores the Christmas story from Luke, giving children an opportunity to explore this incarnation story together. There are many appealing picture-book versions of the Nativity story for preschoolers and kindergartners. A good choice would be The Donkey’s Dream by Barbara Berger (New York: Philomel, 1985). This book, with its glowing illustrations, draws on medieval liturgical symbolism to tell the story of the blessed donkey who carried Mary to Bethlehem for Jesus’ birth.

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.
  — An enlarged-text version of an Advent Action Rhyme: Going to Bethlehem.
  — A child-friendly version of the story told in today’s Core Session—Jesus Is Born.
  — A handout for catechists entitled Using Creative Drama.
  — A handout for catechists on Learning Centers.
  — The We’re Going to See Baby Jesus Game, to be used in today’s Getting Started.
  — 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 titled The Sung Praise of Israel, which explores the importance of praise and song, not only in scripture, but also in the lives of today’s Christians.
  — A printable article on New Year’s Resolutions.
  — An article for catechists titled Using Poetry in Faith Formation.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

This week’s readings celebrate the beauty and power of the name given the baby by his Mary and Joseph: Jesus. In Numbers, God promises the Israelites that they will be known by God’s name, and so be blessed. Paul assures the Galatians that redemption is found in the one sent by God to be born of Mary. Today’s gospel tells the story of the naming of Mary’s baby, Jesus—“the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21).

Numbers 6:22-27

The book of Numbers relates Israel’s wandering in the wilderness with honesty both about the people’s failures and about God’s faithfulness.

In today’s reading, God blesses the people through Aaron. This benediction becomes an integral part of the temple liturgy and reveals God’s intentions toward those who are willing and obedient.

The Lord’s shining face turned toward the people represents God’s favor and loving attention. The peace (Hebrew, shalom) that the Lord offers transcends the absence of conflict and includes both physical and spiritual well-being.

Galatians 4:4-7

The recipients of Paul’s letter, whether Jews or Gentile converts, apparently believed that faith in Christ was not sufficient, but that they were also required to keep the Mosaic law. In response, Paul describes the need for subjection to the law as only temporary and now superseded by Christ’s work.

What humanity is given in Christ is not a better instructor, but a redeemer, one to set it free. The Son is “sent” (v. 4) by God (implying his preexistence) and “born of a woman” (v. 4), indicating his participation in ordinary humanity.

Those who believe in the Son are adopted as children, making possible not merely a new status but also a new relationship with God. Switching from “we” (v. 5), to “you” (v. 6), Paul makes a direct appeal to the Galatians’ own experience of “the Spirit of his Son” (v. 6). Through the Spirit, the believer addresses God as Jesus himself did—as a son and thus an heir to the promises made to Abraham.

Luke 2:16-21

The birth narratives in Matthew and Luke present the meaning of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection as heralded in his birth. Jesus is the Messiah from the time of his conception (1:32) and birth (2:11).

The good news of salvation is announced not to the mighty but to shepherds, suspected of being thieves and regarded as outcasts because their nomadic way of life made it difficult to keep the law. The “sign” (v. 12) to them is the child lying in a manger. This “thing that has taken place” (v. 15) is literally a word (Greek, rāma), a communication of significance. They respond, as Luke intends his readers to respond, by spreading the news and by praising God.

The baby boy is circumcised in obedience to the Torah and is given the name announced by the angel, Jesus—the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua—meaning “Yahweh is salvation.”

Reflection

How fitting to begin the new year with a blessing. The words of the Lord to Moses, echoed in Psalm 67, set a positive tone for a year in which the Lord’s face will shine on us and bless us. How will it happen? How will we detect these hints of divine mercy, catch the kindness in God’s eyes, sense peace in the midst of our chaos?

Perhaps the answers are contained in the feast we celebrate. Most of us first experienced the kindness of God through a mother’s touch and continue to do so through other people. To honor and understand Mary, Mother of God, we remember human mothers and nurturers. That gathered memory gives us a wonderful insight on Mary and the face of God she reveals to us.

Perhaps this feast also provides an opportunity to examine our own images of God. To what extent does the feminine color our thinking about the divine? Scholars who have studied the religious imagination have discovered that people whose image of God is mother/lover/friend/spouse find life to be more gracious and grace-filled.
While Catholics have sometimes erred in the wrong direction, sentimentalizing Mary, we get into far more trouble by trying to erect a Church without Mary and the feminine influence. Then we build rigid structures, focus on law and become impressed by our own pomposity. We become so slavish that we forget we are daughters and sons.

As we begin the new year, we could do worse than burrow into our blessings: our identity as heirs, the constant, kind reassurance of God and Mary.

The Scriptures and the Catechism
Though known in the gospels only as the mother of Jesus, the Church, especially since the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, has venerated Mary as the Mother of God (CCC, #466). Everything that we understand and believe about Mary is in one way or another connected to this affirmation of her special status as mother of God (CCC, #487-511). We also recognize her as the model of the kind of faith and Christian life that we aspire to (CCC, #144, 148–49, 494, 967–70).

Exploring Your Worship Space
by Roger W. Hutchison
Take an excursion with your group to your church's worship space. Ask them to show you their favorite spot. It may be near a special window where the light shines over them or in a pew where they can have a wonderful view of the ever-changing altar.

Take young children, your teenagers or a group of adults and have them touch the actual floor—encourage them to imagine the many soles and souls who have walked over these floors. Maybe they crawled across these floors as a baby. Maybe they said “I do” here to the love of their lives. Maybe they said a final goodbye to a parent or a friend.

Does your worship space have clear glass in the windows instead of stained glass? Have you ever really watched a tree change from season to season? A child in your midst watches the leaves change and the squirrels play. Creation (and destruction) is always taking place.

Experience the Stations of the Cross with your teenagers. Provide them a blank canvas or shapeless lump of clay and encourage each of them to create one of the stations. Watch their eyes as they enter into each graphic and vivid image, seeking to hold Christ up.

This dance between visual arts and Christian formation is not just for young children; it is for all of us on this journey.

Imagine the spiritual impact for your entire community of faith if you exhibited the Stations of the Cross as designed by your teenagers. Display their work during Holy Week, around a Labyrinth, in your worship space or in an empty room. Provide a journal at the end of the Stations for people to leave their responses.

The World of the Bible
“Abba, Father”
Abba is the Aramaic (the spoken language of Jews in the Holy Land in Jesus’ time) word for “father.” It is commonly understood to be a more familiar way to address God (a bit like “dad” or “daddy”) than the common but slightly more formal (“father”). Thus it might indicate a more intimate and close relationship that Jesus has with God in prayer (Mark 14:36). Paul does not expect the Greek-speaking Galatians to know its meaning, so he connects the Aramaic term with its Greek translation, “Abba, father.”