



The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem Creative Christian Education



INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT SERIES

This series is focused on the Nativity Story, who the people were and where they lived.

This Christian Education template is designed to help leaders and teachers, lay and ordained, bring the Bible alive by sharing local knowledge of the times of Jesus and information about Christians in the Land today. This is a special offering of the Diocese of Jerusalem, which includes Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine. The Christians of this region are Arabic speaking descendants of the early Christians listed in the New Testament story of the Pentecost. Through the centuries, these Christians have maintained insights into cultural traditions, images and geographical contexts of Biblical references from the times of Jesus. Often called the 'Living Stones,' the Arab Christians of the region are our living connection with the people whom Jesus taught and healed.

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability... Amazed and astonished, they asked ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in our own native language?’ ... Cretans and Arabs, in our own languages, we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” Acts 2: 4-11

FORMAT: Multi-age Christian education discussion with lesson plans for children.

Lessons in this series are aimed at 45 minutes but will depend on the teacher, the number, ages and abilities of the children involved. It is set in one form for a multi-age group found in the majority of churches. The lesson is set for elementary school children which can be easily simplified for younger children or expanded for older children. Given the expected mixed ages and abilities, it is suggested that the older children be asked to prepare materials for the younger children, assisting them where needed so every child can finish the craft without time left with nothing to do.

The lessons can be shortened by eliminating portions or lengthened by adding a relevant children’s story or video. When desired, older children can be set off in a separate part of the room to prepare a skit demonstrating the story while the younger children start or make the craft.

The individual teachers select the opening song appropriate for the children in their care. It is best to choose a regionally and age appropriate song that has relevance to the theme or has a unifying quality.

The readings, lessons, craft ideas and closing prayer are provided. The leader will need a Bible and materials listed for each lesson.

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1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT – THE COMING OF THE LORD

FOCUS AREA/THEME for SERIES: *"For nothing will be impossible with God."* (Luke 1:37 NRSV)

Greetings and best wishes to you from your Christian brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem. The Arab Christians in the Land of Jesus today keep the traditional Christian presence, which began at the first Pentecost. These Christians, living as a tiny minority among the Jewish and Muslim majorities in the region, are the vital roots of Christianity and are often called the "Living Stones" of our faith. Today, the Christians of the Diocese of Jerusalem offer this story and understanding for you.

SONG/GAME: Theme song of the leader's choice, appropriate to your region and children's ages.

SHORT BIBLE READING INTRODUCING FOCUS AREA FOR DAY: Luke 1:30-33, 39-45

LEARNING/STORY: Nazareth and the Virgin Mary. Mary was a young woman whose mother was from a busy town called Sephoris on a hill five miles north of Nazareth. It was a very fancy town with theatre and art, shopping, town water and reservoirs, baths and many entertainments. Most of the people living there were Jewish. Mary's mother left that town to move to Nazareth, a small hillside village with about 200 people, perhaps when she married. In Mary's time, people lived near the relatives of the husband's family and parents arranged who their children would marry.

We don't know much about Mary from the Bible so we depend on the stories about her that are still treasured in the Holy Land today. The stories that have developed over two thousand years about Mary portray her as pure, kind, thoughtful, modest and devoted to God. As all young women of her time, she would have helped with work for her family. One of her jobs was probably to get water for cooking and cleaning. There was no water in the houses. People had to walk far every day to get water from the spring where clean water came out of the ground. Women carried water home for drinking and cooking, bathing and growing food. Though Mary would have been doing what she knew was right and natural for her and other young women to do, others noticed that she was special. God noticed. After Mary's parents arranged for her to marry Joseph, who was also faithful and kind, God sent an angel to tell Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. God trusted Mary to be a good mother to his son. Mary trusted God and said "Let it be with me according to your word." Luke 1:38b

While waiting for Jesus to be born, Mary cared for her cousin Elizabeth. It would have been common for a young girl to go help an older relative, especially one having a child late in life. Mary would have stayed to help fetch water and help with the hard work of keeping house and making meals. Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, and John the Baptist would tell the world to prepare the way for the Lord, the coming ministry of Jesus.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Clothes pins, pipe cleaners, scrap fabric, glue, scissors.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Give the supplies to the children and challenge them to make Mary and baby Jesus, using the clothespins for the body of Mary, pipe cleaners for arms and baby Jesus, fabric for the clothes. Keep them to complete the Nativity set in following weeks.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God's way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus, too.*

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SHORT BIBLE READING INTRODUCING FOCUS AREA FOR DAY: Luke 2: 1-5

LEARNING/STORY: The Journey to Bethlehem. We are familiar with the story of Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem before Jesus was born so they could register in a census. As with many stories that are told, details are lost as the main points of the story are emphasized. We don't know exactly when Mary and Joseph traveled, but it was probably months before Jesus was due to be delivered to make walking and riding on a donkey manageable.

We do know it was a long dusty journey during which they probably traveled with a group for safety, possibly coming down through the hills of Samaria where there were more springs for water, though they would have to deal with Samaritans, whom the Jews of the day did not like or trust. Another way would be to walk around Samaria down to the desert by the Jordan River, and back over the mountains to Bethlehem. They would have had to be extra careful during the long walk up the barren mountains to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Judea. That centuries old dirt road had a dangerous section where robbers were known to hide. Today it is a paved highway, marked with the site of the Good Samaritan story. Along both routes, the path was rough with many sharp limestone rocks. Perhaps they walked east to the Mediterranean Sea and down the coast, trading as they went, before heading west up into the hills to Jerusalem.

Through Samaria, the path would have been full of prickly plants and scrubby bushes between olives trees and terraced gardens. Wild animals would have prowled anywhere sheep and goats were grazing. In the desert, other fears were hunger and thirst, scorpions, dust storms and injury, without villages or help nearby. The hard rocky soil made walking difficult, especially with the sandals that offered little protection. Mary probably walked the first part of the journey while the donkey carried their supplies. As they neared Bethlehem, there was less for the donkey to carry and Mary would have been tired. Perhaps more importantly, it would have shown more respect for Mary to be riding the donkey instead of walking when they entered the town of Joseph's ancestors.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Map of Israel/Palestine in Jesus' time. Pipe cleaners, cotton balls or fiberfill stuffing, glue, newsprint, flattened cardboard box, and old newspaper. (Optional: paint or markers for added color)

CRAFT ACTIVITY: Look at the map. Imagine walking 3-4 days through rough hills or desert with only hard ground to sleep on. Mark the map with Mary's and Joseph's journey (if possible). Scrunch up the old newspaper and place it on the flat cardboard. Lay the newsprint over the scrunched newspaper and glue it down to make hills. Invite the children to make sheep, goats, and other animals if desired, from the pipe cleaners and cotton balls (or fiberfill). Use pipe cleaners for trees and prickly plants. Add color as desired. Glue the handmade objects on the hills.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God's way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus, too.*

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3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT – THE COMING OF THE LORD



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SHORT BIBLE READING INTRODUCING FOCUS AREA FOR DAY: Luke 2: 4-8

LEARNING/STORY: Bethlehem, Joseph, and House of David. One of the most important parts of the stories we share at this time is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, meaning the "House of Bread," which was David's city. Joseph was descended from David, the shepherd boy who defeated Goliath and later became king of the Jews. The prophets who had predicted the arrival of the Savior, the son of God, announced that he would be born in Bethlehem of Judah because he was of the house and lineage of David. The story of Jesus' birth fits with that prophecy, and that is why the story is told as it is. Judah, the region of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, was very important in the beginning and end of Jesus' life, while most of his ministry was spent in the fertile Galilee region to the north.

If people lived near their relatives, how would Joseph have been raised so far from the city of David, his ancestor? The Jews understood that it was important to mix people for political relationships and physical health. Marriages would be arranged between distant cousins, and women went to live with the husband's family. As people married and moved to nearby villages, it was possible over generations to end up far from the original ancestral home through marriage. The other complicating factors were the numerous conquering armies that came through the area. Many of Joseph's ancestors had been deported to Babylon for a long time, as we see in the genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew (1: 7-17).

When we think of Bethlehem, we imagine a quiet hillside town with stone and plaster homes, shops and inns for travelers. We know there were lots of sheep and goats, which were daily scattered through a rocky countryside that was not good for farming. Bethlehem sits on a hill and is surrounded by hills at the edge of the desert; it is about six miles, or 10 kilometers, from Jerusalem. The inn would likely have been a modest limestone and mud-plaster building. The stable was probably an attached back shelter or a cave for the owner's animals. In any case, it was very humble. It probably smelled of hay and animals, but the presence of both would have made it warm and safe.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Pipe cleaners, glue, scrap fabric, scissors, craft Popsicle sticks.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: With the pipe cleaners and scrap fabric, ask the children to make 'Joseph.' Joseph would have had loose clothing and a cloth on his head to protect him from sun and dust. Anyone with extra time can make shepherds to go with last week's animals. Add the shepherd(s) to the hills. With the Popsicle sticks, encourage the children to make a cradle for baby Jesus. Glue and let dry.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God's way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus, too.*

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SHORT BIBLE READING INTRODUCING FOCUS AREA FOR DAY: Luke 1:11-14; 18-19 to Zachariah; Luke 1:26-30; 35-39 to Mary; Luke 2:8-12.

LEARNING/STORY: Angel Gabriel, messenger from God. An angel is a messenger from God. Gabriel is sometimes called an angel and sometimes an Archangel. The term Archangel is used to show he is more important, more special than other angels. As people, we cannot understand angels who are spirit beings. According to the stories from the Bible, they seem to be able to take human form, perhaps so we can see them and understand the message better. But they are not human. Because we cannot see them, many people aren't sure if they believe in angels. The Bible stories tell us they exist and that Gabriel was an important messenger from God. Gabriel seems to be God's messenger about the Messiah.

Angel Gabriel is mentioned five times in the Bible. He is named once in the Old Testament in the Book of Daniel, 8:15-17, and appears again in chapter 9:20-27. Gabriel appears to Daniel to give him wisdom and understanding about his visions, which Gabriel interprets as being about the coming Messiah. Gabriel reappears in the New Testament to announce the coming birth of John the Baptist to "prepare the way of the Lord," the coming of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and the joyful announcement to lowly shepherds of the birth of Jesus, the Savior.

In Daniel, we read that Gabriel's appearance 'was of a man' (Daniel 8:15). Elsewhere, his appearance is not described. Acknowledging that we all tend to accept things better if they are presented in a familiar way, it is possible that the appearance of Gabriel is related to the cultural norm in the region, which affects many of the Bible stories. Men were considered more factual beings than women. One man's word was considered accurate information. Women, known for focusing on relationships and emotions, were not considered valid messengers unless two other women confirmed the same news or message. Most importantly, angels, male or female, are God's messengers and we must listen to the messages they share.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Clothes pins or pegs, pipe cleaners, glue, white scrap fabric, scissors. Shoe box or small boxes, light cardboard, yellow/gold paper and glitter.

CRAFT ACTIVITY: With the clothes pins/pegs or pipe cleaners and white fabric, ask the children to make the angel Gabriel. While clothes pins/pegs are good for bodies, pipe cleaners may be used for wings. Set the shoe boxes on their sides to set up the nativity scene. Glue in Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus in his cradle, and the Angel Gabriel. Cut the paper and cardboard to make a star for each child, add glitter with glue. Attach to a pipe cleaner and glue on the top of the shoe box nativity scene. Invite older children to help younger children with cutting the fabric and stars.

END WITH PRAYER: *Thank you God for giving us your son, Jesus, who teaches us how to live God's way. Bless Christians all over the world as they live their faith in God and follow Jesus. Help me to follow Jesus, too.*

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