



That Baby in the Manger

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Use at
Home, Church
and School!

Discussion and Activity Guide for Grades PreK–4

It is the last week of Advent, and in the church the crèche has been set up. The statues and the first-graders all seem to be awaiting the most important statue of all—the one of the Christ Child.

The children have questions about what the real Baby Jesus looked like. Parishioner Antonio Gonzales and Father Prak recognize the children are voicing a much deeper concern: did Jesus come into the world for them?

Discussion suggestions

Before reading the story:

- The time in which the story is set is called Advent. Do you know what Advent is? When do we observe Advent?
- What are some things we do at our church during Advent?
- What is a crèche?
- Name at least 5 figures in a crèche.
- Do you have a favorite figure in the crèche?
- Do you know where the tradition of setting up a crèche comes from? Stories tell us that Saint Francis of Assisi made the first Nativity scene in 1223 in Italy. Instead of statues, he had people and real animals for the scene. Some say he did this because many of the townspeople could not read. This way they could see the story even if they could not read it.

After reading the story:

- What kinds of feelings did you have during the story?
- Each day, Mr. Gonzales spends time praying by himself. Do you ever pray by yourself? If so, where and when are some places you pray? If not, are there special places you could use for quiet time?
- Most of the statues were set up in church. Why wasn't the Baby Jesus statue there yet?
- What were some of the questions the children were asking as they looked at the crèche? Do you think some of them were worried about something? If so, what were they worried about?
- What do you think the real Baby Jesus looked like?
- What did Mr. Gonzales leave in the manger? Why?
- What did Fr. Prak want the children to understand about Jesus?
- What do you think Fr. Prak prayed for just before Christmas?
- If you were in this story, would you bring a doll to church on Christmas morning? If so, describe the doll.

You might conclude the reading and discussion by singing “Away in a Manger.”

Activities

Unity Poster — For all ages

We learned that “that baby in the manger” sees all people as God’s children. Create a class or family poster (or individual posters) to show the beauty of God’s family. The poster will also serve as a symbol of the unity of God’s family.

Materials needed:

- poster board
(group poster: 36”x48”; individual: 22”x28”)
- scissors
- glue sticks
- black or dark blue markers
- paper for printing
- Scriptures about God’s family and inclusiveness printed off the computer or hand-lettered.
Suggestions (you may want to paraphrase for children):
Romans 12:15–16
1 John 4:11
1 John 4:7
Proverbs 22:2

- numerous photos of people of various ages and ethnicities
Many wonderful photos can be found online that are in the public domain. After choosing a search engine, try these phrases:
Children and babies of many ethnicities
People around the world
at prayer in various religions
eating/feasting/food
crying, talking, laughing, playing
using water: playing in, celebrating with,
carrying, working
Celebrations of the world
Weddings, Birthdays/births
Christian celebrations such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Immaculate Conception and other Marian feasts
Celebrations of various religions and cultures such as Eid al-Fitr, Diwali, Purim, Sukkot, Loy Krathong, Raksha Bandhan

Directions:

Children choose photos and Scriptures, decide on placement of each, and attach them with glue sticks to the poster board. Display the poster where guests and others will see it. Encourage children to explain that Jesus came for everyone, and the poster is a celebration of how wonderful God’s people are, and a reminder to accept others.

IMPORTANT: Children should be supervised if they are searching for photos on any online site.

WORD MATCHING — For Grades 3–4

In the story, we read about the “crèche.” This is a French word that refers to the Nativity scene we make with statues of Jesus as a baby, Mary, Joseph, etc. and a barn. (It can be used to mean “day care center” in French too.) You may also hear it called a stable, manger, Nativity set, or crib.

Crèches are created all over the world. See these websites for examples:

<http://www.worldNativity.com/our-story.html>

<http://www.worldNativity.com/our-collection.html>

<http://www.serrv.org/category/nativities>

Do you want to know how children in many places in the world might say “Nativity scene?” Match the phrase to country where it is used.

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| 1. scena della natività | Germany |
| 2. szopka | Ireland |
| 3. chulsaeng jangmyeon | Italy |
| 4. golygfa's geni | Korea |
| 5. Canh Chua Giang sinh | Mexico |
| 6. Janama de drisa | Pakistan |
| 7. Radharc | Philippines |
| 8. nacimiento | Poland |
| 9. krippe | Vietnam |
| 10. eksena ng kapanganakan | Wales |

Answers:

- 1= Italy 2= Poland 3= Korea 4= Wales 5= Vietnam
6= Pakistan (the language is Punjabi) 7= Ireland 8= Mexico
9= Germany 10= Philippines



HANDS ON THE NATIVITY STORY — For Grades PreK–2

Here are three ways to help make the story of the Nativity real to children. Choose those that best fit your setting and ages of the children.

Provide a child-friendly crèche for your home or classroom. Plastic or fabric figures can be purchased online or in religious supply stores. A good retelling of the Nativity story in a picture book or children's Bible will be helpful.

- 1) As you read or tell the Nativity story, present the figures of the crèche at the appropriate times in the story, lining them up for the children to see. When the story is finished, allow children to play with the figures. Keep the crèche accessible during the Advent and Christmas seasons.
- 2) If you meet with students on a weekly basis, introduce the stories and the figures over the four weeks of Advent. This will help create a sense of waiting, which is what Advent is all about! Just before Advent begins, set out a stable. (If you need to make one, use a shoe box, plastic building bricks, wooden blocks, etc.)

In the first week of Advent, show children the angel figure, explaining the role of the Angel Gabriel, and the Mary and Joseph figures, making certain children know of their importance. A child can place the human figures somewhere in the room, a distance from the stable. Tell of Mary and Joseph's travels to Bethlehem and explain that the class will move these figures closer to the stable each week in recognition of this journey. The angel, however, should disappear into a drawer until closer to Christmas!

For week two, introduce the shepherds and sheep, and place them in a "field" close to the stable. A green or brown cloth napkin can designate the field. Children may benefit from a little discussion about the work of shepherds.

For week three, introduce the magi, or kings. After explaining that they traveled from an eastern country, determine where east is in your classroom, and place the statues there.

During week four, have Mary and Joseph arrive at the stable, and the angel can reappear there. Read the Nativity story. Add the Baby in the manger and sing "Away in a Manger" or another appropriate song the children know. Children can then bring the shepherds and sheep to see the Christ Child. The magi can also arrive.

- 3) If you work with preschool and Kindergarten children, you may also choose to offer imaginary play throughout December and January. Provide simple props so children can act out the story. Suggested props:
 - adult-sized tee shirts for clothing
 - bath towels for shawls or cloaks
 - a box for a manger (add strands of yellow yarn for hay)
 - a baby doll
 - paper wings and safety pins (cut out wing shapes from 8"x11" [or A4] paper; these will not be too heavy for children and can be attached to their clothing with safety pins; they will not be so big that the wings bump into other children)
 - stuffed animals for representing sheep, donkey, and camel