

A Good Shepherd Story of Jesus

Advent IV The Magi

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2nd Edition
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INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

The Good Shepherd Program is an ideal vehicle for the celebration of the season of Advent. It is an easy way to show the children in a touchable, concrete way the four weeks of "waiting and getting ready".

The stage is set for Advent by using an underlay that changes from purple to white. The underlay is 45 x 12 inches. The purple fabric on one end is 36 x 12 inches and the white fabric on the other end is 9 x 12 inches. The underlay is rolled up with the white end to the inside and unrolled a little each week of Advent. There is great anticipation as the children eventually see the white piece appear. They actually see us approach the holy season of Christmas.

The Advent cards are used each week as the stories are shared. The first week only the card with one candle on it is used. The second week that card and the one with two candles on it are used. And so on. Each week we begin with card one, repeating in a shorter version each part of the Advent story, while adding the current week's story at the end.

Each week the card is placed on the underlay, the appropriate wooden figures from the Advent/Nativity set are placed above each card and a candle is placed next to the figures. The set becomes a horizontal Advent wreath. Just like we light the candles of the Advent wreath, so here we light the candles of the Advent story. The children are encouraged to take the Advent basket from the shelf and see if they can tell the story each week. Since matches are the only thing in the Good Shepherd room that must not be used by children, they are reminded to ask for adult help in the lighting of the candles as they tell the stories.

Each lesson of Advent contains an explanation of the candle used on the given week as well as telling you which wooden figures and Advent cards are to be used. During the "circle of light" be sure to place the appropriate bookmark representing each week's story in the Good Shepherd classroom Bible. This allows the children, non-readers as well as readers, to become familiar with where the Advent stories are found in the Bible.

Each week we emphasize the waiting and getting ready for the birth of Jesus. Those exact words may not be used, but the message is sent to the listeners that the incarnation of Christ into this world is a time of great joy and wonder. That is the message of Advent.

MATERIALS USED ADVENT IV, The Magi

Items from the large Advent basket:

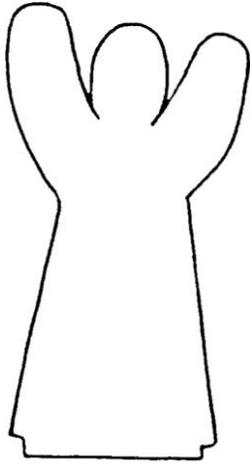
- the underlay
- first four Advent cards
- 4 candleholders
- 3 purple candles
- 1 pink candle
- 3 small metal covered containers holding:
 - a small piece of "gold"
 - frankincense that has been lit and blown out
 - myrrh on a piece of cotton or cloth
- smaller basket to carry wooden figures from Advent/Nativity set

Items from the Advent/Nativity set (see next page for silhouettes of figures):

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| - prophet | - star |
| - annunciation angel | - wiseman I |
| - Mary | - wiseman II |
| - Joseph | - wiseman III |
| - shepherd's angel | - gift, round |
| - shepherd with staff | - gift, rectangle |
| - 2 sheep | - gift, pentagon |

Items from the worship shelf:

- candle snuffer
- matches



Prophet

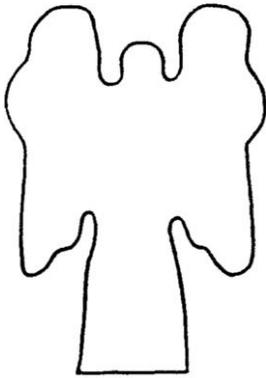


Annunciation Angel



Mary

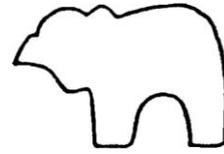
Joseph



Shepherd's Angel



Shepherd with Staff



Sheep



Wiseman I



Wiseman II



Wiseman III

ADVENT IV, The Magi MATTHEW 2:1-11

ACTIONS

After speaking, get the Advent basket from its shelf. After bringing it to the circle, return to get the basket of wooden figures, snuffer and matches.

Allow 10-15 seconds of silence as you gently touch one or more of the wooden figures, centering yourself and the children.

Unroll the purple underlay to the edge of the white, keeping the white hidden.

Slowly smooth the purple cloth.

Shake your head slowly.

Place the prophet figure to left front of the first part of the underlay.

Place the first Advent card on the purple underlay.

Place one purple candle, in holder, to the right of the card, in front of the underlay. Light the candle and pause to enjoy the light.

Place Mary, Joseph and the annunciation angel to left front of the underlay.

Softly emphasize the name "Jesus".

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside me. Will you make silence with me please, so I can find all the words to this story?

Here is our purple cloth again.

It tells us we are still in Advent, still waiting and getting ready.

Long ago the people of God waited, too. They waited for a savior, but they didn't know who he was.

God sent the people of God prophets who lifted their arms to God and spoke God's words.

One prophet said, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. "

This is the prophet's candle of hope that we lit to celebrate the first week of Advent.

Much later Mary and Joseph heard special and wonderful words from an angel.

The angel said that Mary would have a baby boy and that they must name him Jesus.

Place the second Advent card next to the first.

Place a second purple candle, in holder, to the right front of the underlay. Light it and pause to enjoy the light.

Place the shepherd with staff, 2 sheep and shepherd's angel figures to left front of the next space on the underlay.

Gently touch the shepherd with staff figure and the 2 sheep.

Smile as you quickly shake your head.

Lay the third Advent card next to the second.

Place the pink candle, in holder, to right of the Advent card, in front of the underlay. Light the candle and pause to enjoy the light.

Extend one arm, palm out, away from you and move it slowly to the side.

Set the wooden star to left front of the next area of underlay.

Then Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to be counted in the census.

This is the angel's candle of expectation. We lit it to celebrate the second week of Advent.

This is a shepherd. And these are some of his sheep.

Last week we heard about the message of joy the angel brought to the poor shepherds who stayed out with their sheep.

The angel told the shepherds not to be afraid because there was wonderful news.

The angel said, "For unto you is born, today, in Bethlehem, a savior."

Then all the angels sang, "Peace on earth and good will to all. "

This is the shepherd's candle of joy that we lit last week to celebrate the third week of Advent.

In a land far away from the shepherds there were wisemen, called Magi.

The same night the angel came to the shepherds the Magi saw a bright new star in the sky.

They believed the star told that there was a new king.

They left then to go on a long journey to find the new king.

Place the 3 wisemen next to the star.

They journeyed for a year or more, always following the star.

Draw out the word "finally".

They finally came to Bethlehem.

Bow your head at the end of the sentence.

There they found Joseph, Mary and the child, Jesus.

Place the three "gifts" next to the wisemen.

They bowed down to worship the child.

Place the fourth Advent card on the underlay, next to the third.

Then they gave him gifts fit for a king; gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Touch the card gently.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent.

Place a purple candle, in holder, to the right of the Advent card, in front of the underlay.

It is our last week of waiting.

Light the candle and pause to enjoy the light.

This is the Magi's candle of love.

Lightly touch each of the Advent cards.

We light it to celebrate the men who journeyed so long to find the special baby.

Place your hand over your heart.

We have waited now for four weeks. We have made ourselves ready.

Next week, in our hearts, we will come to the manger to worship and rejoice.

OPTIONAL

During the time for wondering questions you may want to pass around the small metal containers that hold the gold, frankincense and myrrh and allow the children to smell, touch and see the three gifts. Allow the children time to wonder how Mary, Joseph and the baby felt when they received the gifts.

Set the three containers in front of you and indicate them by gently touching each one.

In these containers is a small piece of gold, frankincense, and a piece of cotton with myrrh on it.

Allow each child time to handle each container. You may tell the children that it's appropriate to visit quietly about the three gifts while they are being passed around.

Take the three containers and place them in the Advent basket.

Continue with either wondering questions or ritual to begin work.

Snuff all candles and place them and holders in the basket. Place all Advent cards in the basket. Roll up the purple underlay and place it in the basket. Place wooden figures in the small basket.

Return the Advent basket to its shelf, then get small basket of figures and return them. Last, return matches and snuffer.

Dismiss all children only after everyone has had a chance to choose their work.

I'm going to pass these around. If you smell the frankincense and the piece of cotton with myrrh on it you'll have an idea of what Mary and Joseph smelled when the wisemen came to visit them.

I'm going to leave these gifts in the Advent basket for you to touch and smell later if you would like.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder if the Magi ever got tired of looking for the baby?

I wonder if Mary and Joseph were afraid when the Magi found them?

I wonder how the Magi knew the star was about a king?

Watch carefully as I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where I return these materials so you will always know where to find them if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

What will you make your work today? I wonder if you will do something from the story? Let's go around the circle and choose our work.

Remember, if you choose to work with the Advent story from today, you may use all the materials except the matches. Please ask an adult to help you light the prophet's, angel's, shepherd's and magi's candles. Let's begin.

ADVENT IV, The Magi TEACHER HELPS

The story of the wisemen is traditional as much as it is scriptural. The wisemen were not kings, but rather "Magi", or court advisors who may have been astrologers. The term "east" in this account simply means east of Bethlehem, not the Orient, or far east. Also, the Bible does not tell us that there were three wisemen. Rather, it says that there were three gifts brought to the child. From that we have deduced that there were three Magi, though it is not Biblical. And finally, no matter how many nativity sets you see, remember that the magi came to the child Jesus when he was about a year old. By that time he no longer lived in the stable, but in a house in Bethlehem. QYHAT YOU KNOW MIGHT NOT BE SO, compiled by David C. Downing, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987, pp. 180-181.)

So why do we make this problematic threesome part of the Advent stories? The story of the Magi brings to us a great deal of richness and some valuable lessons. For starters these men were willing to travel a year or more searching for the new king. They went first to the most logical place, Jerusalem, but only succeeded in upsetting King Herod while they were there. So, first we celebrate the faithfulness of the Magi. The persistence of their hunt is a model for us as we work out our faith. May we always be so faithful as we search God's will for us.

Even more important than their faithfulness is the Magi's willingness to worship the child they find. They were not true Jews, and yet they spent more than a year of their lives looking for the "king of the Jews." From the beginning not only was this savior for the poor and oppressed, he was for all people of all nations. There was no difference between races and creeds. Those who heard of Jesus would call him Lord.

Notice that I have excluded the story of King Herod sending his soldiers to kill all the male children in Bethlehem two years old or younger. I've hesitated, because I believe we need to give the children the scriptures as they are, as much as possible. And if this story were being told simply as a story and not as part of the preparation for Advent I would include it. However, I believe the purpose of the Advent series is to point to all those who faithfully heard, obeyed and rejoiced in the coming of Christ. So I will save that story for another time.

The wondering questions begin with a very human question. Did the Magi ever tire of looking for the baby king? I imagine they did, but it will be interesting to hear the responses of the children.

We don't know if Mary and Joseph were afraid when the wisemen came to them. I doubt that the children will believe they were afraid because the Magi came bearing gifts. Allow them this trust. I know we need to talk with children about being careful who they accept gifts from, but let's keep the Advent stories a safe and secure time.

Tradition has it that because there were three gifts there were also three visitors to the Christ child. While not scriptural, the tradition has become so entrenched that most of us believe the Bible tells us of the three Magi or wisemen. The gifts that were brought to Jesus are gifts that would be given to a new king. They were expensive. Gold, spices, and scented oil were difficult to obtain and therefore very costly. If you choose to use the three metal containers to pass around the three "gifts" be certain to tell the children that the gifts to Jesus did not look exactly like these, but may have smelled very similar. The items used here, the small piece of gold, the incense, the myrrh, can all be purchased at a local craft store. The use of these items is encouraged because it employs more of the child's senses and therefore may further the learning and retention of the story. Allow the wonderment and likes or dislike of the students to be shared quietly during the time of wondering.

The wisemen thought they were coming to see the new ruler of the land of Israel. Their gifts were directed to Jesus' office, rather than being personal gifts. The children may express thoughts that Jesus didn't get very neat presents. Only the older children may be able to understand that these were not gifts for a child, but gifts for a king. If time allows, go around the circle and ask the children what they would bring to baby Jesus if they could give him a gift.

The third question is answered by saying simply that the Magi were people who studied stars. The study of astrology was a science in the early east. We do not know the science that told these men that the star indicated a new king, we only know that, in this case, their science became fact.

It's important to be sure the children understand that we are coming to the end of the Advent season. When you next have class with them we will be in the Christmas season. By making this exciting and wonderful with your words, you will help them understand the joyful anticipation of waiting for Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

The story of the wisemen is in only one of the four gospels. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that the wisemen were Jews. Why would they have worshipped a new baby king, who was Jewish, if they were not Jews? (Teachers: The wisemen may have believed from their studies that this king would have an effect on the whole world.)

Some traditions say that the wisemen were of three different races. Why would this be important to some people? (Teacher: It would help us to understand that the Savior, Jesus, came for all people, not just for the Jews.)

Read Matthew 2: 1-23. What terrible thing did King Herod do when he found out there was a new king born to the Jews? Why would he have all the babies killed? What was he afraid of?

WARNING

The use of candles and matches should be closely supervised by a responsible adult. Serious injuries may result from contact with flame or hot wax.