



Northern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative

ADVENT



O Come Let Us Adore Him

Working together for stronger Catholic schools



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Northern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative

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EXPECTATIONS OF THE ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL GRADUATE CATHOLICISM'S CORE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

Distinctive expectations for graduates of Catholic schools are determined and shaped by the vision and destiny of the human person emerging from our faith tradition. This Christian anthropology or world view, reveals the dignity and value of the person....

This Christian vision of the human journey is best understood within the context of relationship. It is accomplished in community, in solidarity with brothers and sisters in the Church and beyond.

Catholic education views human life as an integration of body, mind, and spirit. Rooted in this vision, Catholic education fosters the search for knowledge as a lifelong spiritual and academic quest. The expectations of Catholic graduates, therefore are described not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but in terms of values, attitudes and actions.”

VISION OF THE LEARNER

- (1) *A discerning believer*
- (2) *An effective communicator*
- (3) *A reflective, creative and holistic thinker*
- (4) *A self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner*
- (5) *A collaborative contributor*
- (6) *A caring family member*
- (7) *A responsible citizen*

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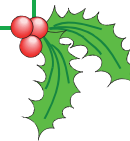
“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ Luke 3:4-6

There are few times that a separate school can proclaim itself more clearly Roman Catholic than during the Advent/Christmas season. This, and the Easter season, are parts of the year when our religion can rightfully dominate the whole school program. Our focus on the true meaning of this time, as a preparation for the birth of the Christ child, should declare us as counter cultural. The way we celebrate this season should stamp our schools truly Roman Catholic.

This Advent resource unit is aimed at assisting our Catholic teachers in celebrating with their students the season of Advent. The resource includes a section for the celebration of Christmas and Epiphany as well. The resource can be used in conjunction with the existing resource, *Advent/Christmas Resources - Planning Guide*. We have divided this unit into the celebration of the four weeks of Advent and have included a teacher reflection on the Gospel readings, student activities, and extensive appendices for use with the children throughout the Advent season.

The expectation of Advent is anchored in the event of God’s incarnation. The more we come in touch with what happened in the past, the more we will be in touch with what is to come. And yet we know that everyone who has allowed God’s love to enter into his heart has not only become a better human being, but has contributed significantly to making a better world. Jean Vanier considers this divine covenant the basis of every form of human faithfulness. We can only stay together when the “staying power” comes from the One who comes to stay. This Advent, as Catholic teachers, let your prayer be from the book of Revelation, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Rev. 22:20

“May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.” Psalm 72:11-12



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The Meaning of Christmas



Lighted houses and trees brighten the December nights, carols and Christmas songs echo down store aisles packed with sparkling gifts, and millions of Christians all over the world prepare to remember one of the two greatest events in their faith. It is Christmas and we know that God is with us, Emmanuel; Jesus is born.

Yet, for many, the crass commercialism which surrounds this holy holiday mocks its spiritual core. But even in this spoiled world, the light of Christmas shines and the songs of Christmas ring out, because it was to just such a spoiled and commercial world that Jesus came. He was born in a stable because the local inn was crowded with travelers who had come to pay their taxes. Too crowded for Mary and Joseph to find room. Those who came to pay homage were not kings and priests, but scruffy shepherds and pagan astrologers. We human beings are all too often confused, foolish and commercial. When God chose to be with us in our humanity it involved being born into confusion and commercialism. This is just as true when God comes to us this

Christmas as it was two thousand years ago. Millions of people in hundreds of denominations and hundreds of countries celebrate the birth of Jesus in the midst of confusion, human folly and, yes even commercialism.

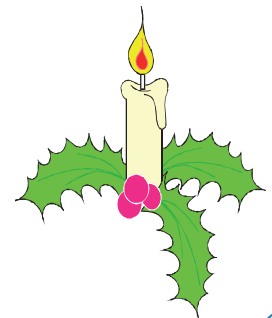
It is no wonder that, in spite of everything, Christmas makes us feel good. We hear a choir singing, "Joy to the World" and, for a moment, we know that is not just our song, but God's. We see a manger scene and remember God's self-giving. We see the blaze of Christmas lights and know that somewhere the eternal Light still shines.

Our hearts are warmed; our spirits are lifted; we become a little better people for the gift of Christmas.

Let Us Pray:

Holy One, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Amen



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The Advent Wreath

- The Circle:** Reminds us that we are all one in God's creative plan - connected to God, to one another, to the earth.
- The Evergreen:** A sign of hope and life, symbolizes the right to life and the need to respect all life and allow it to develop and grow.
- The Four Candles:** A sign of the four kinds of relationship that justice promotes and protects - the integration of self, close relationship to God, respectful and responsible relationships with others, and care of the Earth.
- The Ribbons:** Represent the ties of love and justice that bind us together.

The blessing of the wreath should take place on Saturday evening before the first Sunday of Advent. For educational purposes, the wreath can be blessed on Monday morning when announcements are made and can form part of the school's morning prayer.

- Principal: Our help is in the name of the Lord.
All: Who made Heaven and Earth.
Principal: Let us pray. O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Your blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from you abundant graces through Christ our Lord.

AMEN

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First Sunday of Advent

Suggested Reading:

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.” **Matthew 24:36-44**

TEACHERS’ REFLECTION

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is talking about a time of trouble to come. He warns that many are going to die, and that there will be many false prophets and messiahs. He tells us to be prepared because not even the Son knows, but only our Heavenly Father.

The challenge presented here comes shrouded in mystery: no one knows when he will come. Everyone will be busy living their lives in some way or another, being very complacent about his coming. We tend to deal recklessly and carelessly with the things that matter most to God. We need to be “awake” and be “prepared” for when he comes he will be bringing with Him the Kingdom of God. For those who live in his light and are busy doing God’s work on earth; they’re already living out the Kingdom. They live each day with hope in their hearts; and they find joy in the journey.

What if you’re unprepared? What if you’re caught? What if you have been foolish with the gifts God has given you, wasting his gifts out of laziness or hoarding, just because you’re afraid your “things” might get used up?

Don’t wait for the Kingdom to come before you start living it out. Part of it is already here, wherever faith in Christ is lived out. The Kingdom life was meant to start here on earth, in this life, in this world, among those people around you. Live it because of your love of God, and you will be ready when he returns. He will find you ready and waiting, for your life will already be in His hands.

Let Us Pray: O God of Tenderness we know that Advent is a time of vigil. Help us to keep watch in prayer for the signs of your coming to bring us peace, to lift us up in holiness, and make us ready to receive your Son at this special season of Christmas. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen

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ACTIVITIES TO CELEBRATE THE ADVENT SEASON

The Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree is named from Isaiah 11:1: “A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” The Jesse tree can be either a tree or a large banner with a symbolic tree that is decorated each week. The children can decorate it with ornaments or objects that represent the Old Testament events from creation to the Birth of Jesus. The ornaments are traditionally hand made, and are added one each day of Advent. Some schools might decorate with warm items that could be collected for the needy of their community and the gifts beneath it could be non-perishable food items collected for their local food bank.

The tree itself is meant to tell the story of God in the Old Testament, and to connect the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across 4,000 years of history. The branch is a biblical sign of newness out of discouragement, which became a way to talk about the expected Messiah. It is therefore an appropriate symbol of Jesus the Christ, who is the revelation of the grace and faithfulness of God.

Biblical History

The Israelites through the descendants of Abraham were chosen by God to be a light to the nations. When they were imprisoned by the Egyptians, they called upon God for deliverance. God responded and he entered history in a marvelous way to deliver them and bring them into a place where they could worship God and serve Him in peace and joy. God promised to be with them and to be their God, and they would be His people.

As they settled into the land that God gave to them, they soon forgot their Deliverer. Even though God had raised up godly leaders like David, kings and religious leaders served their own interests, and the people began to worship false gods of the land once again.

Because they had forgotten God, they also forgot the call of God to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God” (Mic. 6:8). God sent prophets to warn them and through the prophet Jeremiah, God promised them that if they would turn from their wicked ways He would bless them and be with them in the land. Most of the people would not listen. They continued to cheat the poor, steal from each other, neglect the needy, and do all things evil.

God let them go their way and suffer the consequences for their actions. God did not give up on them, even though they had failed to be His people. God had made a promise to these people and he would not break his promise even though they had rejected Him.

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Isaiah had spoken of a time when God would cause a new shoot, a new king, to spring from the stock of Jesse, David's father. During the time of Exile, they had little reason to believe in old promises. Still, the old promises echoed across the years, even if they could not believe them or understand them.

In the midst of their failures, and in spite of their inability to envision a future beyond exile, there came a time when God entered history as their Deliverer. They would have another chance to be His people, not because they had earned it, but simply because God in His grace had chosen to forgive.

God was faithful to His promise, and a new King was born in Bethlehem. So we can exclaim with Simeon: "My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before all people, a light of revelation to the nations, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Even though we can have peace and joy through the presence of Jesus Christ, we still long for deliverance from the oppression of sin in the world. We long for the branch, the new shoot from the stock of Jesse, we still anticipate with hope the second Advent, and await the completion of the promise.

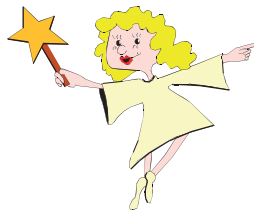
The Jesse tree helps us retell this story and express it with hope.

Making a Jesse Tree

The Jesse tree can be a banner or a poster of a wall, with the symbols attached to it; or a tree, with the symbols hung from the branches.

If a tree (real or artificial) is used, it should be relatively small and only one ornament a week should be attached. A large tree can be used if all the children are adding ornaments on a weekly basis.

Once the tree is erected, place it near the prayer centre and be certain that the centre is colour coordinated with the liturgical season. Historically, the primary color of Advent is purple. This is the colour of penitence and fasting as well as the colour of royalty to welcome the Advent of the King.



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Prayer of Waiting (based on Isaiah 64:2-7)

Preparation: Stand in a circle with a small clock. Pass the clock to students after the leader's prayer.

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

All: Amen

Note to the Leader: Talk to the children about kindness and the power of God. Discuss Isaiah's impatience for God to come and our own impatience. We are like leaves in the wind rushing around getting ready for Christmas. Discuss the ways we can better prepare for Christmas.

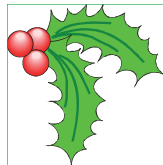
Leader: God has given us many gifts. Thank you God for the special gift of time. When we are young, we want to hurry and grow up. When we are old we want time to slow down. Time is either too slow or too fast. The prophet Isaiah wanted God to hurry up and help us. There are so many of us that need God's help, and so many people that God can help through us.

As I hand you this clock, take it and hold it gently and quietly. Pray for a person you want to help or to forgive, or a person that you may want to spend a little extra time with during the Advent season. No one will know who you will help, just you and God. While you say your private prayer, we will practice waiting for Jesus. (The leader prays silently for a few minutes, and then passes the clock to the student beside him/her.)

Closing:

Leader: Dear God, you are the beauty of all the seasons together and you are always new. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts so that we can see and hear those who wait for us. You sent us Jesus to show us how to make all things new.

All: Amen



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Bethlehem Bound

In each heart lies a Bethlehem,
an inn where we must ultimately answer
whether there is room or not.
When we are Bethlehem bound,
we can no longer look the other way
conveniently not seeing stars,
not hearing angels' voices.
We can no longer excuse ourselves by busily
tending our sheep or our kingdoms.

This Advent, let's go to Bethlehem
and see these things that the Lord has made known to us.
In the midst of the shopping sprees,
let's ponder in our hearts the Gift of Gifts.
Through the tinsel,
let's look for the gold of the Christmas Star.
In the excitement and confusion, in the merry chaos,
let's listen for the brush of angels' wings.
This Advent, let's go to Bethlehem
and find our kneeling places.

Ann Weems





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Second Sunday of Advent

Suggested Reading: “In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” **Matthew 3:1-7**

TEACHERS’ REFLECTION

Imagine the sight of John the Baptist! A very grubby, dusty, hairy, hungry, sharp-tongued mountain man. Quite a sight! But they were coming from all around to hear this man John. Many were shaken by his message and they came to be baptized.

John the Baptist was full of the Holy Spirit. That is why his words were acknowledged. But he knew there was a greater power and greater effectiveness than he could ever have. For however much he was inspired by God, he could not send that Spirit into anyone. Could he cause them to put their sins behind them? Yes! Could he cause them to strive to be holy? Yes! But he could not give them the presence of God; he could only tell them to prepare for the One who could, and would give it.

It was John’s job to tell of the One to come, the Messiah, the One who would send the Holy Spirit into those he baptized. One whose words and deeds would have even greater impact than John’s. One that John knew would separate out the good from the bad, the fruit from the waste materials. One that John knew as friend and family, whom John had already come to respect and highly value. The One was Jesus. Throughout his ministry, and in the early years of the apostles after Jesus’ death, Jesus and his followers would keep coming across people who had come to love God through John’s work. Some who heeded John’s call took up their crosses and followed Jesus. John’s call for repentance helps us prepare, too, for John was trying to get people to do what God wanted, and that’s how we can prepare for the presence of God-with-us.

Let Us Pray: **Loving God, within and about us a voice cries out to us to prepare the way in the wilderness. You came to restore us to new life with you and with one another. Help us to be open to every opportunity, so we can prepare a way for you, within our hearts, this season. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen**

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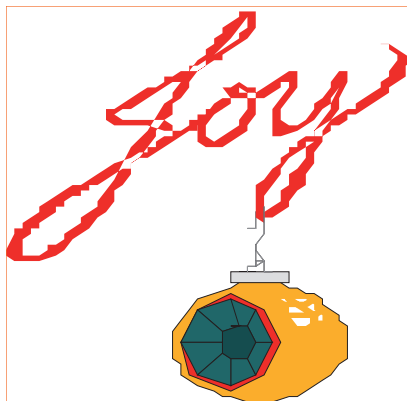
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Remember that Advent and Christmas are two different seasons....

The seasons are a part of our Roman Catholic identity. We don't just keep the seasons. They keep us as well. They help us be who we are...A December spent in preparation and a January spent in celebration make the winter pass more pleasantly..In the quiet of Advent, we make ready to hear the angels' songs, and we prepare to be awe-struck by the star of Bethlehem.

Suggestions for Prayer Centres during the Advent Season

- Prayer centre cloth should be the colour violet
- Include pictures or statues of Isaiah, John the Baptist and Mary. Rotate these pictures for each week of Advent
- Include an Advent wreath and a Bible open at the reading of the day
- Bare branches, dried grass, pine cones, brown leaves, seed pods, and vines all suggest barrenness
- Use icicles, snowflakes or stars cut from Advent colours and hung on branches
- A Jesse tree
- An Advent calendar with ideas for age appropriate interaction
- An area beside the table to collect canned goods for a *giving project* the class has undertaken
- A road or path on a bulletin board with signs, scripture quotations and suggestions that apply to the children's lives
- A crooked road made from strips with student's Advent resolutions (a way he/she will prepare for Christ's birth) written on the back
- A stable with an empty manger, and Mary and Joseph and the donkey placed closer and closer to the stable each week of Advent
- Remember to keep Advent and Christmas separate

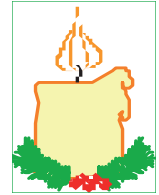


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Let Your Light Shine...A Service of Reconciliation



Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All: Amen

Leader: The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus be with you all

All: And also with you.

Greeting by the Celebrant:

Our Jesse tree reminds us of how the world lay in sin and darkness, of a people waiting for a Saviour who would bring hope, forgiveness, life, and light. The winter scene around us today is one of coldness and dead branches. But we have hope that the warmth of the sun in springtime will bring new life, flowers and joy. As Jesus, our light brought hope, life and forgiveness, we Christians reject everything that is not a loving act, so that we can share hope and light with others. We brighten our trees with lights as we prepare to welcome Jesus our light into the world. This celebration reminds us that we are called to share his light with others.

First Reading: John 1:1-15

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Response:** Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Homily and Response:

Girls and boys, remember that Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” **Mathew 5:14**
(*LIGHT A CANDLE AT THIS POINT*)

I light this candle as a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world. When we follow his light, we will never walk in darkness. Let us think for a few moments about the times we chose not to follow his light.

Rite of Reconciliation (General Confession)

Leader: God our Father, we have come together today to praise you for your goodness to us. We want to become more like you. We have thought about the times we have not been the best person we could be, and we are truly sorry.

Reader 1: God our Father, we ask forgiveness for the times we have called people names, or said mean things about them.

All: **Father, forgive us.**

Reader 2: For the times we have taken things that did not belong to us.

All: **Father, forgive us.**

Reader 3: For the times we have avoided responsibility for our actions by lying.

All: **Father, forgive us.**

Reader 4: For the times we have lost our temper, held a grudge, or refused to forgive others.

All: **Father, forgive us.**

Reader 5: For the times we have not done our best work.

All: **Father, forgive us.**

Leader: Let us pray together in the words our Saviour taught us.

All: Recite the Our Father...

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Exhortation of Penance by Celebrant:

Boys and girls, to prepare for Jesus' coming into each of our hearts anew this Advent, let us prepare our hearts as suitable mangers.

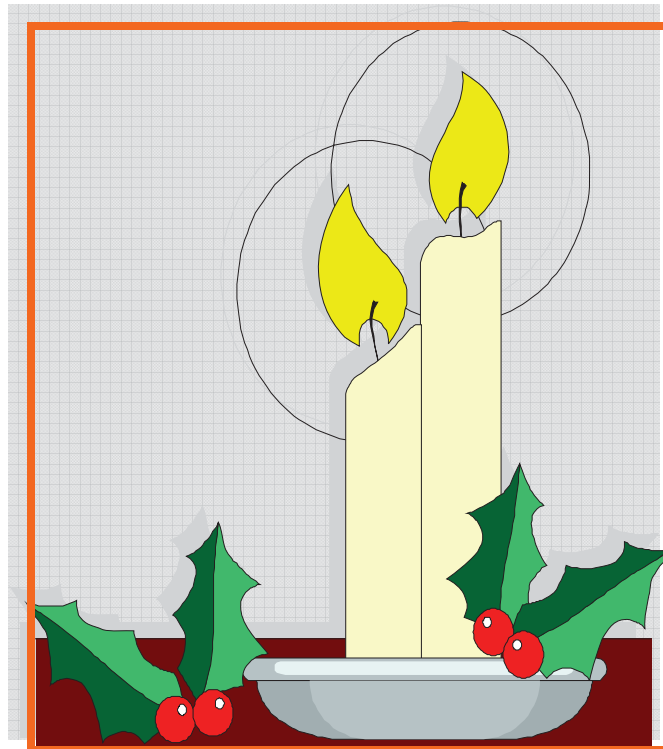
Blessing: We believe that the Son of God once came to us; and we look for Him to come again. May His coming bring you the light of His Holiness and free you with his blessings

All: Amen

Celebrant: May Almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Closing Hymn: O Come Divine Messiah



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ADVENT PRAYER

**Lord Jesus,
master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon
our preparations for Christmas.**

**We who have so much to do,
seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.**

**We who are blessed in so many things,
look forward to your coming among us.**

**We whose hearts are heavy,
seek the joy of your presence.**

**We are your people,
walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.**

To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus."



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Third Sunday of Advent

Suggested Reading: “Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’ Jesus answered them, ‘go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.’

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A man shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly I tell you, among those born of woman no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. Let anyone with ears listen! **Matthew 11:1-15**

TEACHERS’ REFLECTION

John the Baptist was in prison. He was a victim of Herod’s cruel rules, the same rules that would later be the cause of his death. But he was not in isolation; he had contact with his core followers, and there were others in the same situation as he was. Word was getting back to him about a teacher and healer doing amazing things in Galilee. This preacher was the same man he had baptized not long ago, and they were familiar with each other. But something new was afoot. He was hearing that Jesus was acting and preaching with a conviction that had not been seen before. So he sent two of his followers to report back to him, to find out whether Jesus was the One he had been preaching about all these years.

So they went. And what did they see? A man teaching the highest truths to all who sought the truth. Good news spread to the poor. The crippled walked, the blind see, the lepers were cleansed. Even death responded to him. Acts of strength. Power. Authority. Just like the Messiah John had been preaching about. So they went to Jesus and asked him John’s question: “Are you the one who is to come?” Jesus told them, “see for yourselves!” The evidence was all around them.

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Advent is the season of coming. What John's followers saw was just the beginning, a sampling of what the coming of the Kingdom of God and the end of this-world-as-we-know-it would bring. Jesus' main course was yet to come, in all its ugly horror and overpowering glory. Christ is with us now, thanks to the Holy Spirit, and we can live in the wonders of that until all is complete. So, even though Jesus has come, and is here, we still are waiting. He will return, and the message for us today is still the same, "A voice cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his path." **Matthew 3:3**

Let Us Pray: Loving Creator, you are faithful forever. Help us during this season of Advent to leave a trail of bright light by our generous and kind actions. Keep us faithful so that we will welcome you, the Light of all Lights, with love this Christmas season. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen

A Progressive Prayer Service: All Grades

Preparation:

Each classroom door might be decorated according to the theme of Advent/Christmas. For example, at the door of the starting point - a Bethlehem scene - a class could pause, share a Biblical reading, say a prayer, sing an appropriate carol, and progress to the next door. The second classroom could have a shepherd scene, followed by an angel scene, a Magi scene, etc.

An alternative to this might involve the painting of murals to be affixed in the hall, or gymnasium. Each class could present a segment, with all participating in carols depicting individual segments. An overhead projection, or individual song sheets, and/or accompanying tape recording would encourage student participation.

The following includes a reading, explanation, prayer, and carol for each of the above scenes. Students can be encouraged to write their own prayers, and teachers can adapt the scenes as desired.

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Bethlehem Scene

- Read: *Luke 1:2-5*
- Sing together *O Little Town of Bethlehem*
- Explain:



The song that we just sang is one of the most popular of all Christmas carols. It was written by a young minister after he spent a night in the starlit hills of Palestine overlooking Bethlehem. He wrote this poem for his Sunday school children. The organist of his church had a dream about angels singing the poem. He wrote down the melody he had heard in his dream. It fit so perfectly with the words the minister had written that he was convinced the carol was a gift from heaven.

- **Pray: Hail and blessed be the hour and the moment when the Child Jesus was born of Mary in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus be born anew in my heart this Christmas. May we find you the Lord of Light this holy season. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen**
- Sing together *Away in a Manger*

Away in a Manger is often called the cradle hymn. It was sung to little children not only at Christmas time, but as a lullaby throughout the whole year. It must have been hard for Jesus to sleep in the scratchy straw-filled manger and Mary probably sang him a lullaby.

- Explain:

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks is a very old Christmas hymn. It was written before 1700 by Nathum Tate, who was the poet for King William III of England. The words of this carol remind us of the long ago night when shepherds heard the first Christmas carol. God does not often send angels to carry his messages as he did to the shepherds, but he sends messages to us all. We can learn about God and what he wants us to do by listening and seeing with our hearts.



Shepherd Scene

- Read: *Luke 2:8*
- Sing together *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks*
- **Pray: O God of Tenderness, the shepherds loved to take care of their sheep. The shepherds always prayed under the stars. That holy night they heard angels singing of your special birth. I ask now in prayer that the angels sing a love song to me and my family as we sing our Christmas hymns this season. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen**



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Angels Scene

- Read: *Luke 2:9-16*
- Sing together *Angels We Have Heard On High*
- Explain:

This song tells us what the angels sang on the night of Christ's birth. In Latin, the words *Gloria in excelsis Deo* mean, Glory to God in the highest. It was first used as a hymn in 129 AD, when Telespharus was the Bishop of Rome. He told people that they should solemnly sing the *Angels' Hymn* at their church services. The angels were sent by God to spread the Good News of Christ's birth.



Pray: O God of Wonder, we thank you for the lovely angels songs which Give joyful raise to the new born King of Bethlehem. Let me join with the Angels in singing to you this season as we celebrate your birthday. We ask This in Jesus name. Amen

We Three Kings is a North American carol that was written to be acted out as a play. Many churches gave Epiphany plays, but John Hopkins thought his church program would be special if the kings could tell the story in song. Each king's journey was long and it was sometimes hard for them to follow the star. Sometimes it is hard for us to keep the light of Jesus in front of us as well.



Magi Scene

- Read: *Matthew 2:1-11*
- Sing together *We Three Kings*

Pray: Lord Jesus, your light drew the magi from afar. These wise kings worshipped the Child and offered Him their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Give me a loving heart, one that is open to receive the gifts of family and friends, and help me to remember to give the gift of my heart this Christmas to the Child Jesus. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen

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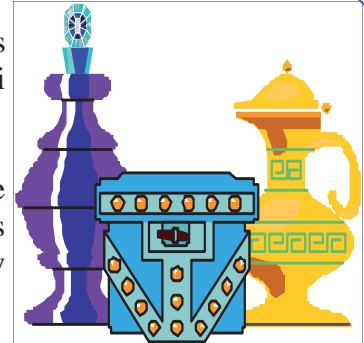


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Where Did The Magi Live?

The magi probably originated in Persia (now known as Iran). Accounts of the early Church fathers and in the earliest representation of the magi in Christian art, shows them in Parthian garb.

The star formation was centered in the part of the sky known as the sign of Aires, which at that time represented Judea and adjoining lands in Herod's kingdom. With that information, the magi knew what they were looking for and, generally where.



The biblical phrase describing where the magi originally saw the star, whether translated "in the east" or "at its rising," refers to heliacal rising in the morning, in the east, a fairly precise distance ahead of the sun at dawn.

During the magi's journey, Jupiter, the central star of the formation, made a noteworthy zigzag across the sky. This could help explain the Bible's account of the star's unusual movements. The biblical account describes the star's movement in words that contain astronomical meanings. It is not that the star "preceded them," but that it "went before." Such a distinction may appear small, but the Greek term used in some translations was used by the magi to describe a planet's retrograde motion. Retrograde motion occurs when a planet, as seen from Earth, appears to go backwards in its orbit for many days or weeks at a time. Then it stops and resumes its normal course. Jupiter "went before," on a retrograde course, in the latter half of 6 B.C. At the end of the retrograde, it stood still in the sky - or one might say it stopped to mark a place - on December 19th. By that time, Jupiter was back in the sign of Aries, where it originally had been when the magi saw it in April at its rising in the east.

The Bible itself suggests that the magi used star studies to find Christ. The gospel account of the magi's visit, is sprinkled with phrases of astronomical meaning. If the magi visited the Christ Child, they almost certainly described the star that prompted their visit in the context of their specialized knowledge. The gospel writers, not sharing their expertise, recorded their findings as well as he could.

The Church which does not encourage associating astrology with the Bible, has suggested that the star was a miraculous phenomenon, distinct from stars, constellations, and planets. In the days of the early Church, Jews and Christians living in the areas of Greco-Roman influence condemned astrology as idolatry because star studies were strongly associated with the Greek and Roman gods.

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The star's behavior is consistent with a miracle viewpoint. The star, the Bible implies, is hiding when the magi reach Jerusalem. When the magi leave Herod, the star seems to reappear and moves strangely: "And behold the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was." **Matthew 2:9-10**

"That this star was...not a star at all,...but some invisible power transformed into this appearance is...evident from its very course," says St. John Chrysostom in his fourth-century homilies on Matthew's Gospel. "For there is not any star that moves by this way."

Pope John Paul II's description of the star, presented in a homily at the time of the Epiphany in 2002, reveals how the Church's mystical view of the star and the magi's astrological view might meet. The pope casts the star as the light of Christ, appearing to the magi "in the form of a heavenly body, so bright as to attract their attention and guide them to Jerusalem." then the Pope suggests, Christ "sets them on the trail of the ancient messianic prophecies 'a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel.'"

At the prophetic crossroad, the Church's symbolism and the magi's meet. In the church's terms, "a star coming forth from Jacob" foretold Jesus' birth from the chosen people. In the magi's terms, "a scepter arising from Israel" may well have meant a regal planetary configuration arising in the astrological sign of the Jews.

In any event, Owen Gingerich, professor of astronomy and the history of science at Harvard University, makes the most important contribution of the 20th Century in terms of interpreting the star the magi's way. "It makes good sense in the cultural context of its time," he says "and it lends credibility to the historical authenticity of the magi coming to Jerusalem in search of a newborn king."

Catholic Digest, 2003



Wise Men Still Adore Him

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Fourth Sunday of Advent

Suggested Reading: “‘She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophets.’

‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’ which means, ‘God is with us.’”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife. **Matthew 1:21-25**

TEACHERS’ REFLECTION

The test of one’s character is when one faces life-and-death decisions. Joseph had to face this. But his character quickly started coming through. No legal or violent punishment for a woman he cared so much about. He did not just quietly call the relationship the failure it seemed to be, and send her away to some place strange. A place strange enough that just being there would remind her of what she had done.

Joseph’s response changed when the facts came in, thanks to an angel. But even his reaction to the angel took some character. He could’ve explained away the dream as the result of having too much wine that night. No! Instead Joseph gave a “yes”. Not as momentous a “yes” as Mary gave, to be sure. But a difficult and important yes to make. For his ‘yes’ meant that the son of the heavenly Father would have an earthly father like other humans do. And a just man for a father, a man who would raise the Son of God with the depth of character and caring that he himself was demonstrating at this moment. As with Mary’s ‘yes,’ Joseph’s ‘yes’ pleased God and serves as an example to all of us.

Let Us Pray: O God, source of all peace, we have heard your promises and your vision for all people revealed to us through an angel’s visitation to Mary and Joseph. Give us a reverence for our spirit-filled traditions, and a loving respect for our faithful ancestors. Let them remind us of the quiet, peaceful way by which you come and are present to us. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen

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A Birthday Gift

By
Christina Rossetti

What can I give him,
poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd,
I would give him a lamb;

If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;

What can I give him?
I'll give him my heart.

Suggested Activities:

After reading the poem, students could discuss love as the greatest gift. God's commandment to love one another as he has loved us, and God's greatest Gift is Jesus. They might go on to discuss further how we are also called to love and care for the Earth, (ecology) and to love the poor and marginalized (social justice).

Make a heart display, on a bulletin board, or to hang from the branches of the Jesse tree in your classroom.

Heart Suggestions

Play dough hearts for primary, Danish hearts for junior, and woven hearts for intermediate children.

Play Dough Directions:

Combine 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt. Add 2 cups of boiling water, red food colouring, and 2 tbsp. salad oil. Mix well and allow to cool.

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Roll out to thickness of 1/2 inch. Use a heart-shaped cookie cutter. Before the dough dries, poke a hole in the top of each heart. Allow to dry flat overnight.

Danish Paper Hearts

In Denmark, many ornaments are made of paper. The little heart basket is a favourite with children because it is frequently filled with treats. An alternative could be to fill each heart with love gifts (slips of paper telling of a kind act the child will perform)

Instructions:

Cut 2 pieces of paper approximately 2 cm by 6 cm. Fold each in half, rounding off the open ends. Cut an equal number of strips up to, but not past, an imaginary line where the rounded part of the paper begins. Weave the two parts together. Add a paper handle for hanging.

Woven Straw Hearts

In Scandinavian countries, people make many of their tree decorations from straw. The straw represents the stable and Christ's lowly birth.

Instructions:

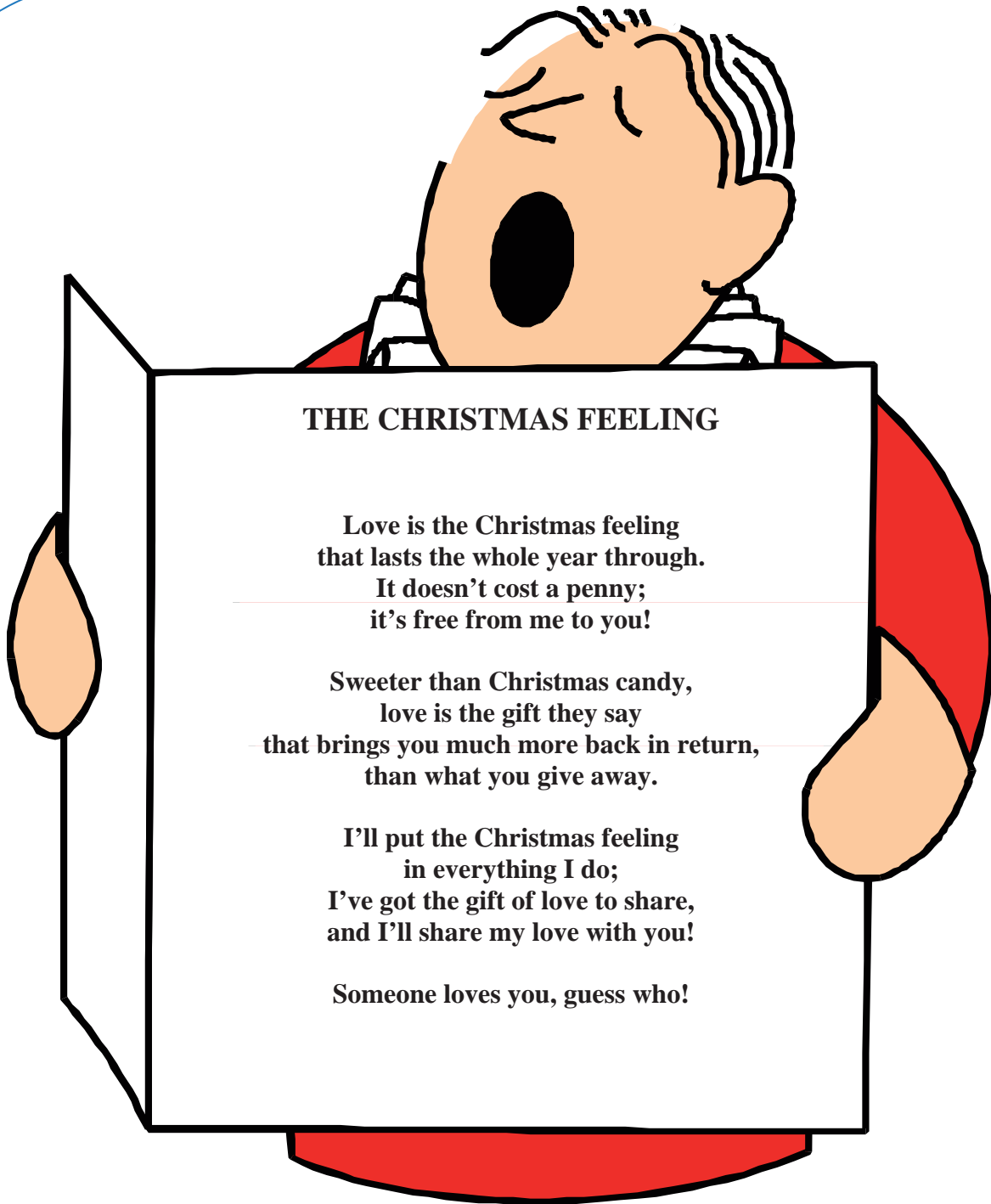
Straw or wheat, which has been soaked overnight, thin red cord, a staple and glue gun, optional thin wire for shaping. Keep the straw in a damp towel until using. (Note: check your local craft supply store for alternate grasses)

Directions:

Begin by tying three long pieces of straw together. Braid as you would hair. Tie the end with red cord. Make a second braid the same length. Trim the ends and tie the two braids together. (fastening with staples or hot glue in advance makes tying easier.) Allow the heart shapes to dry flat. You may need to weave a piece of thin wire in the straw to help it hold its shape.



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PERSONS ARE GIFTS

Persons are gifts.....wrapped!

Some are wrapped beautifully:

They are very attractive when I first open them.

Some come in ordinary wrapping paper.

Others have been mishandled in the mail.

Once in a while there is a special delivery!

Some persons are gifts which are very loosely wrapped, not sealed.

Others are tightly wrapped, practically locked, enigmas really, almost forbidding.

But the wrapping is not the gift!

It is easy to make this mistake...

It's very amusing when babies do it.

Sometimes the gift is very easy to open.

Sometimes I need others to help.

Is it because some are afraid?

Does it hurt to be known truly, honestly?

Maybe they have been opened before and thrown away, discarded?

Maybe such a gift isn't for me, too good for me?

Maybe I'm not ready; I'm not open? I'm indifferent?

Maybe I don't recognize, that it is for me?

I am a person...

Therefore I am a gift too.

A gift to myself first of all...God gave me to me!

Have I ever really looked inside the wrapping?

Perhaps I've never accepted the gift that I am?

Could it be that there is something else inside than what I think?

Could God's gift be anything but good?

Maybe it needs polishing - to bring out its value, it's natural luster!

Maybe it's unique - hasn't found its essential worth?

And I am a gift to other persons!

Am I willing to be given to others? A person for others?

Do others have to be content with the wrappings?

Never permitted to enjoy the true me?



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Every meeting of persons is an exchange of gifts.
But a gift without a giver is not a gift...
It is a thing devoid of relationship to giver or receiver.

Friendship is a relationship between persons who see themselves
As they truly are: both gifts of God... to each other..for others
Truly related to each other.

A friend is a gift not just to me, but to others through me.
When I keep my friend...possess him..I destroy his "giftedness."
If I save his life for me, I lose it;
If I lose it for others, I save it!

Persons are gifts,
Gifts received and gifts given...God's best gifts on Earth!

Receive and give the gift with eyes wide open and rejoice!

Author Unknown



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CHRISTMAS

“The Word became Flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory. The glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love.” **John 1:14**

The actual date of Christ’s birth is unknown. The Gospels do not record it and there is not any early tradition to identify it. Scholars identify the approximate year as sometime between 8 - 5 BC and the season as probably early spring. The feast day was placed where it was, in all likelihood to supplant the practice of the winter solstice festival among pagan converts by pointing to Christ as the true light who comes into the world. The Western Church emphasizes the celebration of the Nativity or Birth of Jesus on December 25th, while the Eastern Church celebrates His manifestation to the Magi on the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6th.



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The word Christmas was derived from the Old English, Cristes Maesse or “Mass of Christmas.” Over the centuries it has become a comprehensive word including both the religious traditions and the secular traditions.

In North America, the early immigrants brought their Christmas traditions with them. The Germans brought the Christmas tree. The Irish contributed the lights in windows of homes. Catholic immigrants brought Midnight Mass and everyone had their own Christmas carols.

Lights of Christmas

The most obvious symbol of Christmas are lights - Christmas candles, window lights, luminaries, lights of the Advent wreath and the Christmas Tree. All signifying that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.

Christmas Candle

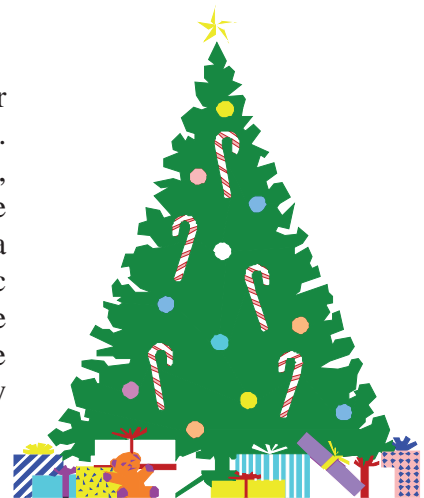
The Christmas candle is an ancient tradition. It is usually placed in the center of the Advent wreath to complete the removal of darkness and sin by the Coming of Christ the Light of the World.

Window Lights

Lights placed inside window sills depict a beacon to light the way for Mary, Joseph, and the coming of Christ.

Christmas Tree

Christmas trees can be found almost anywhere, any size. For many people, the Christmas tree is only a seasonal decoration. To Christians, it symbolizes the green of hope at a time of dying, the burning light of Christ at a time of spiritual darkness and the fruits of paradise. Its origin as a Christian symbol may trace to a historical event. When St. Boniface evangelized the Germanic tribes he chopped down their sacred oak to prove the impotence of their god. Just as Patrick used the shamrock as a symbol of the Trinity. Boniface used the evergreen as a symbol of the eternity of the true God.



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Holly

The appearance of holly is representative of the burning bush of Moses and Mary's burning love for God. The red berries and prickly points are symbolic of the crown of thorns and the bloody death that Jesus would eventually suffer.

Poinsettia

Poinsettias are associated with Christmas as the lily is with Easter. In Mexico it blooms at Christmas time and is called the "Flower of the Holy Night." Its name is from the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Dr. Joel Pointsett.



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SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER CENTRES DURING CHRISTMAS/NEW YEARS

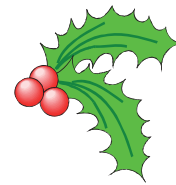
- Try to hold off on the Christmas theme decorations until the final week of Advent and leave these up until January 6th
- Keep the Nativity crèche, up until the Epiphany. Christmas is not just Christ's birthday, but is the festival of the birth of Christ according to the liturgy
- Seasonal colours are white, gold or silver
- Complimentary colours are red and green
- Focus on continuing your service project (food collection) throughout January, with a decorated box for items being collected near the prayer centre, which could be sent just before the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2, known as Candlemas
- Pictures at the Prayer Centres could include:

- The Holy Family
- A focus on the Magi with groupings of stars including one very large star
- A picture of the Christ Child surrounded by the class photo or pictures of people with a caption "find Jesus in everyone you meet"
- Focus on the three wonders of the Epiphany (Magi visit, Baptism in the Jordan, Wedding Feast at Cana)



- You could also include:

- Branches from evergreen trees
- A poinsettia plant
- Gifts of gold (chocolate wrapped coins)
- A sea shell/holy water to symbolize the Baptism of the Lord
- A dove hanging over the prayer centre
- Prayer to the Holy Family
- Display a blessing over your class door
- Teachers could use a peace/justice theme at the prayer centre since Christmas is a time to pray for peace and commit ourselves to Jesus who is the Prince of Peace



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A Divine Gift

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy... **Isaiah 9:2-3**

The joy that Jesus offers his disciples is his own joy, which flows from his intimate communion with the One who sent him. It is a joy that does not separate happy days from sad days, successful moments from moments of failure, experience of honor from experiences of dishonor, passion from resurrection. This joy is a divine gift that does not leave us during times of illness, poverty, oppression, or persecution. It is present even when the world laughs or cries. It is truly ecstatic, always moving us away from the house of fear into the house of love, and always proclaiming that death no longer has the final say, though its noise remains loud and its devastation visible. The joy of Jesus lifts up life to be celebrated.

Celebration is indeed the word we need here. The divine ecstatic joy of the house of love becomes manifest in celebration. Celebration marks the life of the disciples of Jesus as well as the life of his new community. The disciple leaves behind the old life in search of a new life. For every disciple as well as for the entire fellowship, following the Lord involves celebration, the ongoing, unceasing lifting up of God's love that has proved itself victorious. Celebration is the concrete way in which God's ecstatic joy becomes visible among us.

Merry
Christmas

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The Season of Epiphany

Epiphany is the climax of the Advent/Christmas Season and the Twelve Days of Christmas, which are usually counted from the evening of December 25th until the morning of January 6th, which is the twelfth day. The term epiphany means “to show” or “to make known” or even “to reveal”. In Western Churches, it marks the coming of the wise men bringing gifts to visit the Christ child, who by so doing “reveal” Jesus to the world as Lord and King. In some Central and South American countries influenced by Catholic tradition, The Three Kings’ Day, or the night before, is the time for opening Christmas presents. In some churches the day is celebrated as Christmas, with Epiphany/Theophany occurring on January 19th.

The colours of Epiphany are usually the colours of Christmas, white and gold, the colours of celebration, newness, and hope that mark the most sacred days of the Church year.

As with most aspects of the Christian liturgical calendar, Epiphany has theological significance as a teaching tool in the Church. The Wise Men or Magi who brought gifts to the infant Jesus were the first Gentiles to acknowledge Jesus as “King” and so were the first to “show” or “reveal” Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. This act of worship by the Magi, which corresponded to Simeon’s blessing that this child Jesus would be a “light for revelation to the Gentiles” **Luke 2:32**, was one of the first indications that Jesus came for all people, of all nations, of all races, and that the work of God in the world would not be limited to only a few.

The day is now observed as a time of focusing on the mission of the Church in reaching others by “showing” Jesus as the Saviour of all people. It is also a time of focusing on Christian brotherhood and fellowship, especially in healing the divisions of prejudice and bigotry that we all too often create between God’s children.

An Epiphany Prayer

Eternal God, from the East you guided the Magi with the light of a star, as they travelled from afar to worship the Saviour. These brave wise kings brought precious gifts to offer the new-born King. The light that guided the three travelers continues to this day to bring us new life. This light continues to bring healing to our hurting hearts, and teaches us to give thanks for your Guiding Light in our lives. We pray to be open to the Light of your Holy Star. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen

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THE THREE GIFTS

The Three Kings or Wise Men came from the east to find the child Jesus because he was very important to them. Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world. It was a custom to welcome important people with gifts. Each gift had a special meaning.

The Wise Men probably knew a little about the Messiah from reading the Old Testament. We can be wise like them when we look for Jesus in our everyday lives and in the people we meet.

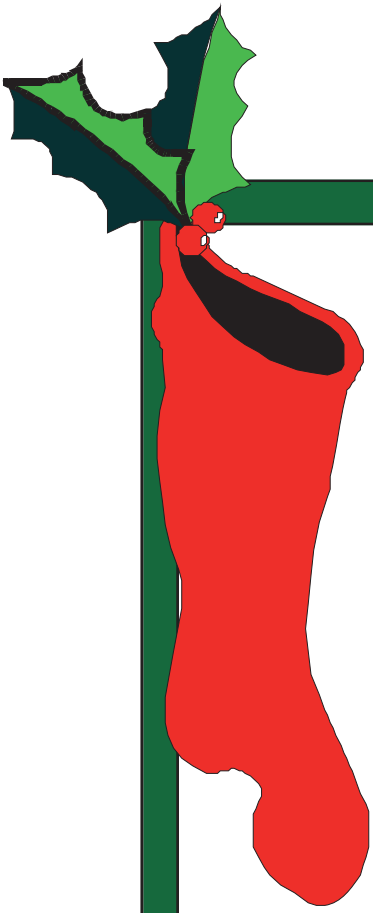
The **gold** was a very valuable metal and it symbolized riches, wealth and money. The first king brought gold as his gift to say that he recognized Jesus as the Son of God. The king knew Jesus was valuable because he would save the world. Jesus would be rich not in money, but in kindness and mercy. The gift was a gift of love.

The **frankincense** was a gift that had a very pleasing odour. It is a fragrant gum from Africa, used in medicines and incense. When we burn incense at Church, we see smoke rising in the air. This is a sign of the lifting up of our prayers to God. The second king's gift was a gift of prayer and recognition of Jesus as God.

The third king brought a gift of **myrrh**. Myrrh is also a gum resin and has a very bitter taste almost like raw vinegar. It comes from Arabia and Ethiopia. The third king brought myrrh as his gift because he knew the troubles and difficulties that all of us, especially Jesus would run into in his life. In Jesus' time, myrrh was used to prepare the dead for burial. The greatest trouble would be Jesus' death on the cross. The king's gift recognized that Jesus was human like us.



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The Night Before Christmas

A more spiritual version of the famous Christmas story

By Sister St. Thomas, B.N.D. de N

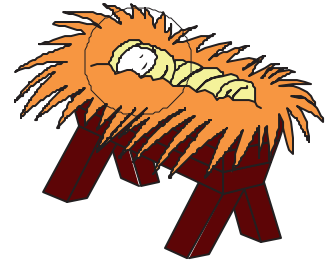
Tw'as the night before Christmas, and all through the town,
St. Joseph was searching, walking up roads and down;
Our Lady was waiting, so meek and so mild,
While Joseph was seeking a place for the Child.



The children were nestled, each snug in their beds,
The grown-ups wouldn't bother, there's no room they said;
When even the innkeeper sent them away,
Joseph was wondering, where would they stay;

He thought of the caves in the side of the hills,
Let's go there said Mary, it's silent and still;
The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow,
Made pathways of light for their tired feet to go;

And there in a cave, in a cradle of hay,
Our Saviour was born on that first Christmas Day!
The Father was watching in heaven above,
He sent his angels, his couriers of love;



More rapid than eagles God's bright angels came;
Rejoicing and eager as each heard his name;
Come Power, Come Cherubs, Come Virtues, Come
Raphael,
Come Thrones and Dominions, come Michael and Gabriel;

Now fly to the Earth, where my poor people live,
Announce the glad tiding my Son comes to give;
The Shepherds were watching their flocks on this night,
And saw in the heavens and unearthly light;

The Angels assured them, they'd nothing to fear,
It's Christmas they said, the Saviour is here!
They hastened to find him, and stood at the door,
Till Mary invited them in to adore.



He was swaddled in bands from his head to his feet,
Never did the Shepherds see a baby so sweet!
He spoke not a word, but the shepherds all knew,
He was telling them secrets and blessing them too.



Then softly they left him, the babe in the hay,
And rejoiced with great joy on that first Christmas Day;
Mary heard them exclaim as they walked up the hill.
Glory to God in the Highest, Peace to all of good will!

THE LEGEND OF THE CANDY CANE



A candy maker in Indiana wanted to make a candy that would be a witness, so he made the Christmas candy cane. He incorporated several symbols for the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ.

He began with a stick of pure white hard candy. White to symbolize the virgin birth and the sinless nature of Jesus, and hard to symbolize the solid rock, the foundation of the Church, and firmness of the promises of God.

The candy maker made the candy in the form of a “J” to represent the precious name of Jesus, who came to earth as our Saviour. It could also represent the staff of the “Good Shepherd” with which he reaches down into the ditches of the world to lift out the fallen lambs who, like all sheep, have gone astray.



Thinking that the candy was somewhat plain, the candy maker stained it with red stripes to show the stripes of scourging Jesus received by which we are healed. The large red stripe was for the blood shed by Christ on the Cross so that we could have the promise of eternal life.

Unfortunately, the candy became known as a candy cane - a meaningless decoration seen at Christmas time. But the meaning is still there for those who “have eyes to see and ears to hear.”

I pray that this symbol will again be used to witness to the wonder of Jesus and his great love that came down at Christmas and remains the ultimate and dominate force in the universe today.

Anonymous



MY CHRISTMAS STORY



MY GIFT TO THE CHRIST CHILD WOULD BE

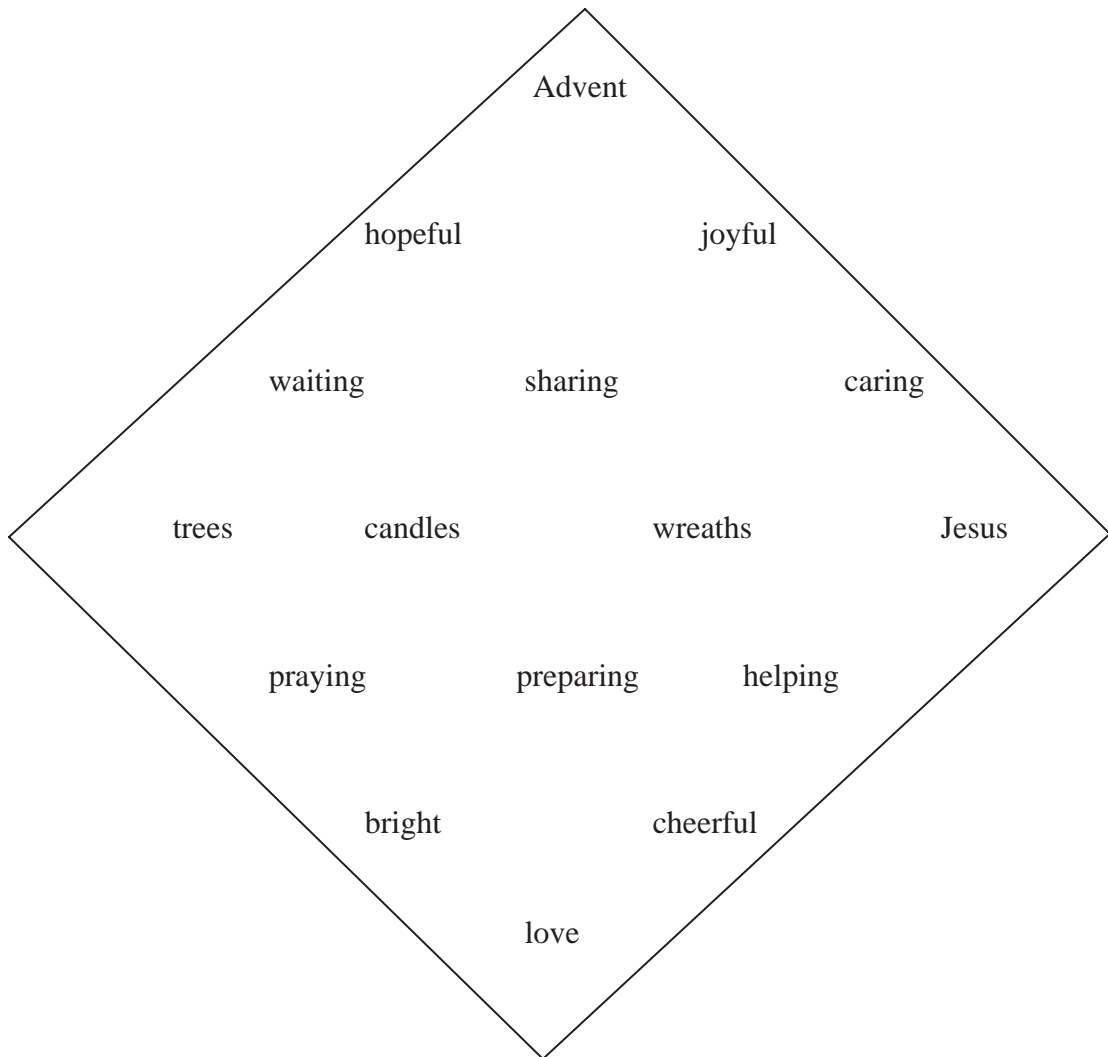
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Advent Poem

DIAMANTE

Help the children understand the season of Advent by writing a class poem. A good poetry form to use with a group is the diamante, a seven line poem with a specific form: one noun, two adjectives, three verbs, four nouns, three verbs, two adjectives, one noun. The words in a diamante form a diamond shape.

After talking with the children about the meaning of Advent, work with them on a poem. As the children suggest words, print them on the chalkboard or a piece of paper. The first noun in the poem should be Advent. An Advent diamante will look something like this:

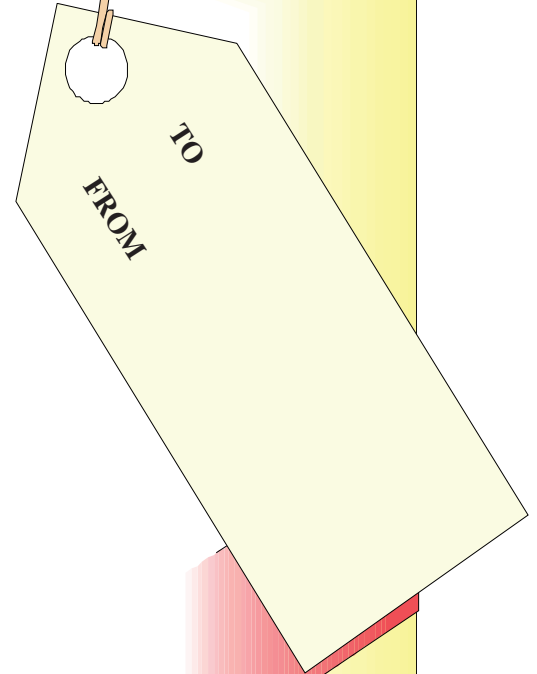


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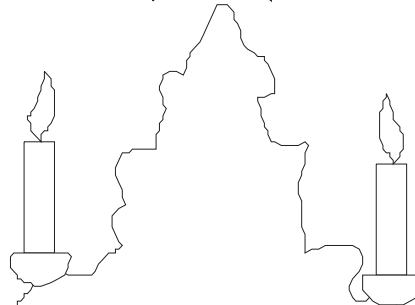
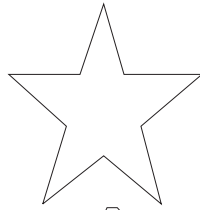
CHISTMAS GIFTS

**Of all the gifts
that Christmas brings,
the best are made
of little things.
Melody of carols all the year,
cheer to friends that you hold dear.
Courage to someone else to start
some task for which he hasn't heart.
Thoughts for those having less than you,
faith though the future's not in view.
Fun and laughter to go everywhere,
kindness to show how much you care.
Strength to begin all over again,
and love to seek the best in each man.
While other seasons come and go
and another year hurries past,
let's give again the little things...
The gifts of love that last.**

Anonymous



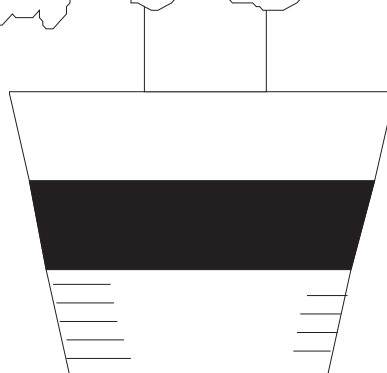
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A Secret

**Do you know why the pine trees
stand straight and tall,
spread their branches thick and fine,
and never stoop at all?**

**It really is a secret
which the North Wind told to me;
every pine tree hopes some day
to be a Christmas tree.**



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BLESSING PRAYER FOR THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Lord of the forest, maker of trees,
we honour you as we dedicate this tree,
that is a sign of Christmas in our homes and schools.
Green as life are its needled leaves;
open and inviting are its outstretched branches;
strong as love is its trunk.

May the blessing of this tree
call forth from within us
the memory of our ancient parents
who worshipped trees as godly.
May we show reverence and care
toward all the brother and sister trees
of this our Christmas tree.
May we speak to them and sing them songs,
enjoy their shade and eat their fruit.
May we learn wisdom from their stories
and faithfulness from their ever-greenness.

May all trees be for us Christmas trees
and trees of life
as they become incarnations of God
in our own Garden of Eden.
As Christ died upon the tree of the Cross
that we might be gifted with Life,
may we then remember
that the gifts soon to be placed about this tree
are but reflections of the gifts that came
at the foot of the tree of the Cross.

As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve,
may the spirits of kindness and love
rest upon it.

May the spirit of Christmas
ride in its branches,
this season and for all seasons,

Amen



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BLESSING FOR THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

Holy One,
we pray before this our Christmas crib
and await the feast of the Birth of the Holy Child,
call forth the dormant child from within each of us;
cause us to wonder and to rejoice again
in this most ancient feast.

As the magi came bearing gifts,
may we, this Christmas, gift one another
with the gold of charity,
the myrrh of kindness
and the incense of prayer.

With the shepherds,
we come to the birth of Christ
seeking a simple celebration,
where the greatest gift will be ourselves
given to you, our God,
and to each other.

May the star of Bethlehem
which shone brightly over the first crib
stand guard over our home,
filling it and all the earth
with light and peace.

We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You
because by your holy birth
you give hope to all the world.

Amen



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PRAYER FOR THE ADVENT WREATH

Lord, Source of all Energy and Light,
the ancients saw the sun
as a great fire wheel rolling across the sky,
May our Advent wreath, this small wheel of green,
be for us a symbol of the sun
and of the Son of God.

May its ever-greenness
be a sign of life and of light
in the midst of the darkness of winter,
May the candles that burn brightly upon it
remind us of your Son, Jesus,
Who was the light of the world.

Grant, Lord, that this our Advent wreath
may be for us and for all who visit our school
a sign of faith in a world grown cold with disbelief,
a symbol of hope in a time of gloom and despair
and a flaming image of love.

May all who look upon this symbol of Advent
be encouraged to prepare their hearts
for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

May this green wreath with its bright candles
help us to prepare for the real Christmas
which happens within our hearts.

May, then, your blessing - Father of Light,
Son of Glory and Spirit of Love -
be upon this Advent wreath and upon our school.

Amen



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BLESSING PRAYER FOR LIGHTING A CANDLE ON THE ADVENT WREATH

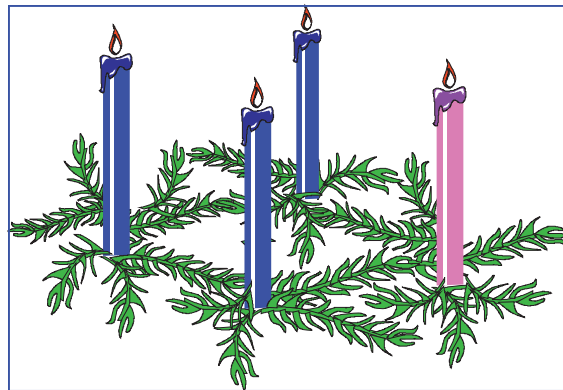
Lord God,
you who sent into the world your Beloved Son
as light that shines in the darkness,
invest this wreath, our Advent symbol,
with the power of your energy and light.

With each of these candles that is lighted,
may we rekindle within ourselves the desire
to prepare a way for the birth of Christ.

With each new candle that is lighted,
may the flame of Christ's coming
grow brighter and brighter
so that this Christmas may see
a fresh and ever-green coming of the Lord of Light
into each of our hearts
and into our whole world.

candle is lighted

We pray, then, that the richness of God's blessing
rest upon this Advent wreath,
upon our school and upon each other
as we light this candle
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen



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Wise Men Echo Pantomime

One way to help children learn about the coming of the wise men is an echo pantomime. The teacher says each line and does the accompanying motion. The children repeat the words and actions. This particular pantomime follows the Biblical account of the wisemen's visit.

When Jesus was born	<i>(cradle arms)</i>
Wise men saw a bright star	<i>(point up)</i>
They knew in their hearts	<i>(hand over heart)</i>
That this was good news	<i>(shake head yes)</i>
They set out on a long journey	<i>(walk in place)</i>
To find the special child	<i>(cross arms over chest)</i>
They went to Jerusalem	<i>(walk in place)</i>
To ask about Jesus	<i>(cradle arms)</i>
Then they went on to Bethlehem	<i>(walk in place)</i>
Following the shining star	<i>(point up)</i>
The wise men looked for Jesus	<i>(shield eyes and look around)</i>
Until at last they found him	<i>(shake head yes)</i>
They offered him gifts	<i>(palms up)</i>
Of gold, frankincense and myrrh	<i>(count on three fingers)</i>
The wise men thanked God	<i>(bow head, fold hands)</i>
That Jesus came for everyone	<i>(hold arms outstretched)</i>

This echo pantomime helps children understand the story of the Epiphany. It helps them remember that Jesus came for all of us.

(Burlap and Butterflies, Patricia Matheson, p. 73)

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MARY: FULL OF GRACE

When it comes to talents, some people seem to be loaded. They are intelligent, good-looking, sought after. The rest of us try hard; we sweat, struggle and smile nicely in order to win our way, but, for all our efforts, we end up overlooked.

We are like the prince in the fairy tale who tries every charm in the book to win the heart of the princess. And then she goes off regardless to marry a penniless woodcutter who didn't do anything spectacular to win her favour. The woodcutter is only chosen because of the mysterious preference of the princess' love. And the prince is left wondering why he couldn't earn the love of the princess.

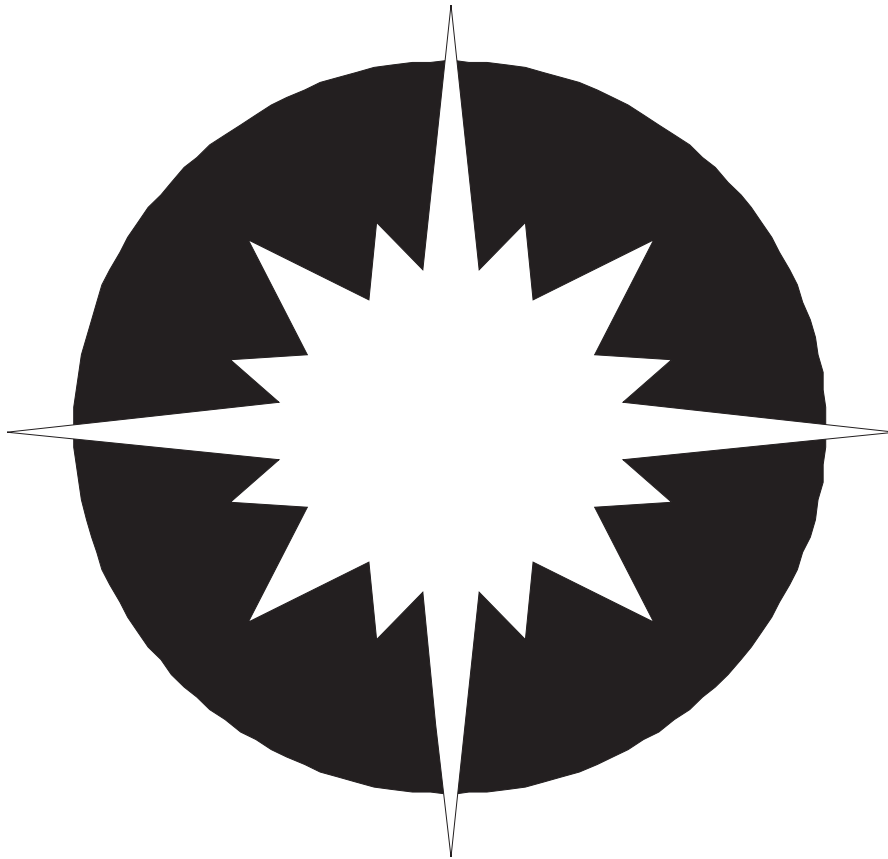
We can't earn someone's love. There's nothing we can do to guarantee another's grace and favour. And this is true of Mary in relation to God. When the angel Gabriel sent by God addressed Mary as "full of grace," he didn't mean that Mary had done something to deserve God's favour. For God's favour was a free gift. And gifts reflect the generosity of the giver - not the worthiness of the receiver.

Mary's title *full of grace* provides the foundation for our belief in her *Immaculate Conception* which we celebrate on December 8th. Mary was conceived immaculate in the heart of God from the beginning, not because of her goodness, but because of God's own goodness...

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Children will be returning to school around the time that we are celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany. Distribute stars as a symbol of following Jesus just as the wise men did. Read the following passages:

“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for the family of faith.” **Galatians 6:9-10**

St. Paul challenges the Galatians to keep on doing good and trust God for the results.

“So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told to them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told to them.” **Luke 2:16-20**

1. Have the students reflect on the past year and especially on the things for which they are thankful. On the star provided, write down some of these gifts and signs of God’s love.
2. Have the students reflect on the things they don’t do so well and would like to improve on. Record this on the reverse of the star. This is a new year’s resolution (promise).
3. Decorate the stars and hang them from the ceiling of the classroom with yarn.

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CHRISTMAS BOXES

Have the students decorate tiny boxes with Christmas wrap for their families. They can create cards to attach to the empty box with the following verse as part of the cards.



**This is a very special gift
That you can never see
The reason it's so special is
It's just for you from me.**

**Whenever you are lonely
Or even feeling blue
You only have to hold this gift
And know I think of you.**

**You can never unwrap it
Please keep the ribbon tied
Just hold the box close to your heart
It's filled with love inside.**

**This is a very special gift
That you can never see
The reason it's so special is
It's just for you from me.**

**Whenever you are lonely
Or even feeling blue
You only have to hold this gift
And know I think of you.**

**You can never unwrap it
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Just hold the box close to your heart
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Just hold the box close to your heart
It's filled with love inside.**

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A Little Carol

*Mary had a baby
One night in Bethlehem
Three wise men went to see her.
Taking gifts with them.
They made a special journey,
Star led from distant lands.
But first to visit Mary
Were the men with careful hands.
God sent three quiet shepherds
Before he sent the kings,
For they were used to handling
Little newborn things.*

By Helen Morgan



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EMMANUEL: GOD-IS-WITH-US

Who is this child for us?

Yes, he is God-with-us, but in the New Story context we do not think about the birth of this Child as an intervention into this world by an elsewhere God. We endeavor to see God as present everywhere, at all times, and Jesus as giving human expression to the God *always with us*.

Jesus is revealer of God in our midst. He challenges us to stop looking in the wrong places for the sacred. The Christmas story will always be the story of God-here-with-us in the ordinary, the everyday, the chaos, the shabbiness of a stable, the flight into exile, the love between a man and a woman, the birth of a child, and in people despised because of their lowly social status.

Our prayer invites us to recognize God's presence with us, especially in places we are reluctant to look.

God Is New, Michael Morwood



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LET THE DAY COME LORD

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Let the day come, Lord,
when our misery
will find your mercy.

Let the day come, Lord
when our poverty
will find your riches

Let the day come, Lord,
when our path
will find the way to your house.

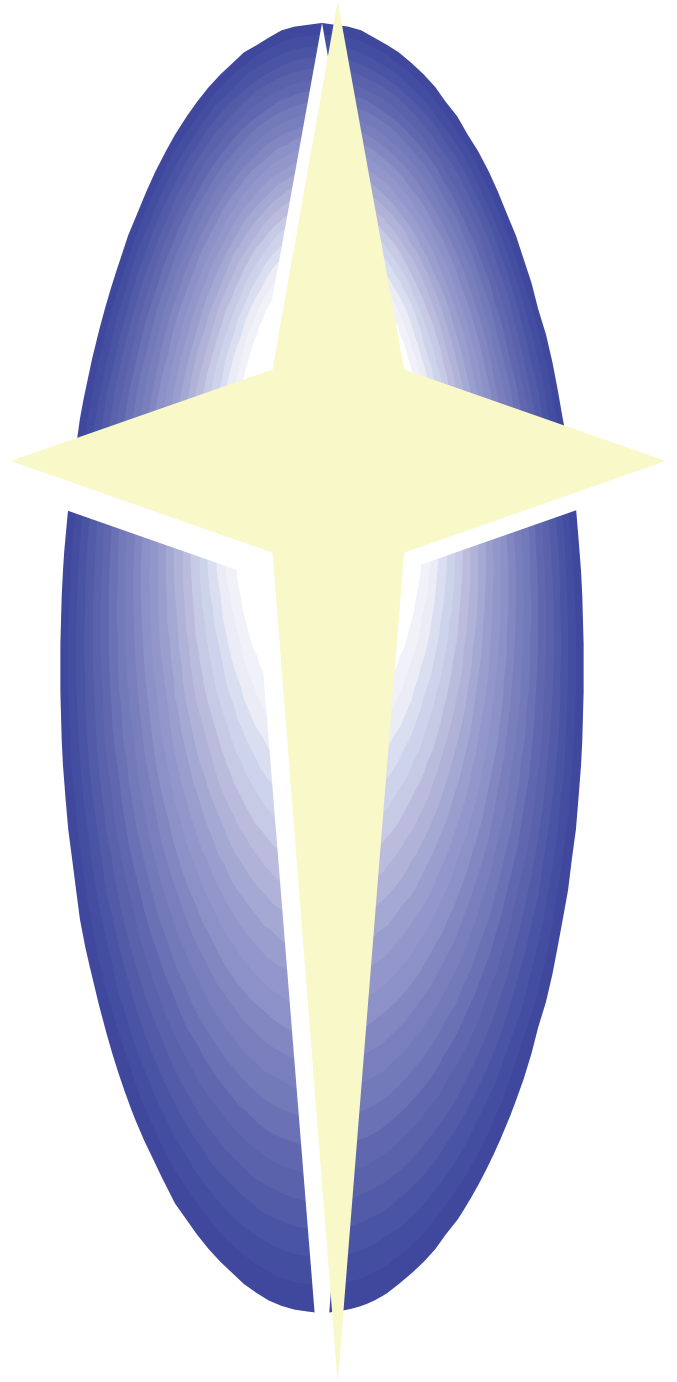
Let the day come Lord,
when our tears
will find your smile.

Let the day come, Lord,
when our joy
will find your heaven.

Let the day come, Lord,
when your Church
will find the Kingdom.

May you be blest, God,
for that day
when our eyes will find your face!
Throughout all the time of our life
you have not ceased to come before us
in your Son Jesus Christ
Our Saviour and our Brother.

Anonymous



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“Christmas really happened. It is continuing to happen through God’s sons and daughters who embrace the Christ of Christmas and demonstrate God’s love and power in their relationships. God grant that it may happen through each of us, that we may be able to make Christmas vital and significant in our world and thereby convince others that Christmas really happened.”

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**She treasured all
these things and
pondered them in
her heart.**

Luke 2:19

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“Stables stink! Moldy hay, cow dung, smelly sheep and all. What kind of place is that for any baby to be born, much less the son of God? Who would look for God in a place like that, anyway?”

The Christmas crib, no less than the cross, should shake us from our complacency. The Nativity invites us to search for God in the least likely places: among the poor, the misfits, foreigners and nonbelievers, above all, in our humanity.

What’s a Nice God Like You Doing In a Place Like This? Maryknoll Magazine, December 1992, p. 15

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**A thousand lakes and islands
may be more beautiful, but
Galilee alone can boast of being
the “roots” of Jesus!**

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“Advent is a time of thinking and thanking. It is a time to ponder gifts that we have received and that we give. The greatest gift we have every received is God’s love and presence within us. God is at home with us! Thoughtfulness invites us to become more and more aware of the Divine within us and around us.

This Advent our gracious God invites us to become more aware of our giftedness. Gratitude is a movement from one who receives to the one who gives. It echoes the goodness of the giver and returns it to him/her. The giver shines forth from the one who receives in gratitude.

Releasement, Barbara Fiand, the Crossroad Publication Co., New York, 1991, p. 6

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**“You make springs gush forth
in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild animals quench their thirst.**

**By the streams the birds of the
air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water
the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the
fruit of your work.”**

Psalm 104:10-13

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Peace on Earth

PEACE ON EARTH

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WHAT'S A NICE GOD LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

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THE STORY OF ST. NICHOLAS

St. Nicholas, the 4th century saint who inspired our modern figure of Santa Claus, was born near Myra, a port on the Mediterranean Sea serving the busy sea-lanes that link the seaports of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Ships sailing these waters, frilled with grains and all kinds of goods, found safety in the port from raging storms and menacing pirates. Nicholas came from one of the city's wealthy merchant families, but he was not spoiled by his family's wealth. His mother and father taught him to be generous to others, especially those in need. So Nicholas came to see that helping others makes one richer in life more than anything else.

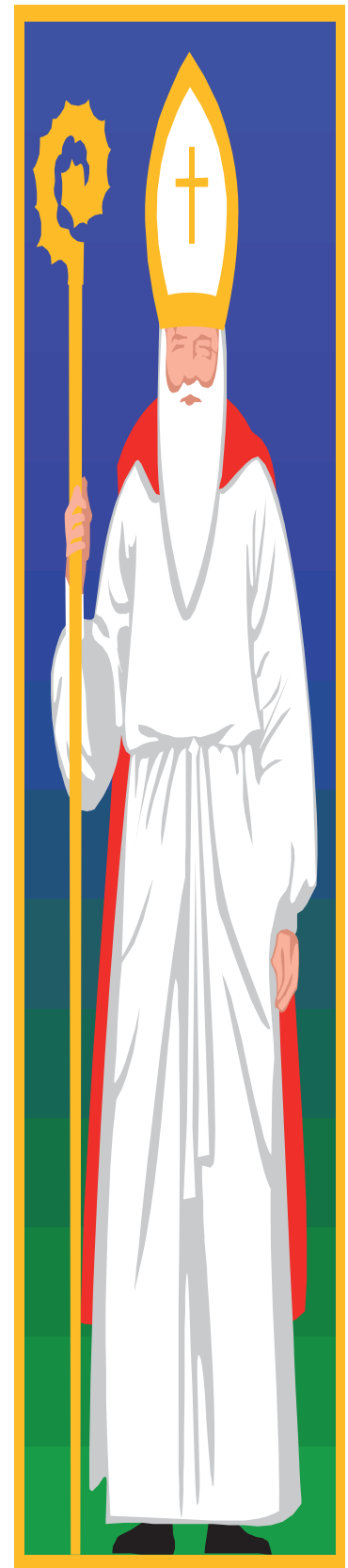
One day, by chance, Nicholas heard about a rich man in Myra who lost all his money when his business failed. The man had three lovely daughters, all wishing to get married, but he had no money for their marriage. Besides, who would marry them, he thought since their father is such a failure? With nothing to eat, the man in desperation decided to sell one of his daughters into slavery. At least then the rest of them might survive.

The night before the first daughter was to be sold, Nicholas, with a small bag of gold in his hand, softly approached their house, and, tossing the gold through an open window, quickly vanished into the darkness. The next morning, the father found the bag of gold lying on the floor next to his bed. He had no idea where it came from. "Maybe it's counterfeit," he thought. But as he tested it, he knew it was real. He went over the list of his friends and business associates. None of them could possibly have given him this.

The poor man fell to his knees and great tears came to his eyes. He thanked God for this beautiful gift. His spirits rose higher than they had been for a long time because someone had been so unexpectedly good to him. He arranged for his first daughter's wedding and there was enough money left for the rest of them to live for almost a year. Often he wondered: who gave them the gold?

But by the end of the year, the family again had nothing, and the father, again desperate and seeing no other way open, decided his second daughter must be sold. But Nicholas, hearing about it, came by that night to their window and tossed in another bag of gold, as before. The next morning the father rejoiced, and, thanking God, and begged His pardon for losing hope. Who, though, was the mysterious stranger giving them such a gift?

Each night afterwards the father watched by the window. As the year passed their money ran out. In the dead of one night he heard quiet steps



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approaching his house and suddenly a bag of gold fell onto the floor. The father quickly ran out to catch the one who threw it there. He caught up with Nicholas some distance away and recognized him, for the young man was from a well-known family in the city.

“Why did you give us gold?” the father asked. “Because you needed it,” Nicholas answered. “But why didn’t you let us know who you were?” the man asked again. “Because it’s good to give and have only God know about it.”

When the bishop of Myra died, the priests and leading people of the city along with the neighbouring bishops came together in their cathedral to select a new bishop. They prayed and asked God to point out who the new bishop should be. In a dream God said to one of them that they should all pray together the next morning. Someone would come through the cathedral door as they prayed. He should be their choice.

It was Nicholas who entered the cathedral the next morning. Immediately, the people of the city named him their bishop, for they knew that God meant this unassuming person, whose good deeds they had learned about, should lead them.

As bishop of Myra, Nicholas seemed more aware than ever of people’s needs. He would appear all over the city offering help to anyone in difficulty, and then quietly disappear without waiting for thanks. He shunned publicity. Still, his reputation as a holy man grew and grew, even spreading to distant cities that had never seen him.

He was especially interested that families had enough to eat and a good place to live, that children got ahead in life, and that old people lived out their lives with dignity and respect. And he always loved the sailors living so dangerously on the sea. Without their ships, people everywhere would be without food and other goods they carried for trade.

Yet it is as a lover of children that Nicholas is best remembered today. While he lived, he gave the little ones he met small gifts - some candy, and a toy. His kindness, which always managed to surprise them, touched their hearts, and they learned from this holy man what a beautiful thing giving can be.

In the figure of Santa Claus, whose name and activity Nicholas inspired, we have this saint with us today.

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PRE-CHRISTMAS ST. NICHOLAS BLESSING PRAYER FOR DECEMBER 6th

St. Nicholas, holy patron of children, Bishop of the East, we invite you to come among us and to grant us your holy blessing.

Help us in this busy season not to miss the miracle of the coming of Emmanuel, in the days of preparation as well as on the feast itself.

Help us not to be blind to the gifts of getting ready. Protect us from insincerity. May every greeting we send be signed with love, friendship and prayer. May our greetings, so written, be fun to open and treasures to keep.

Kind St. Nicholas, protect us from shopper's fatigue. Show us how to take delight in the marketplace, now transformed in beauty, lights and music.

Save us from all anxiety over what to give so that we may concentrate on how to give. Stand by us as we decorate our homes and trees and lives.

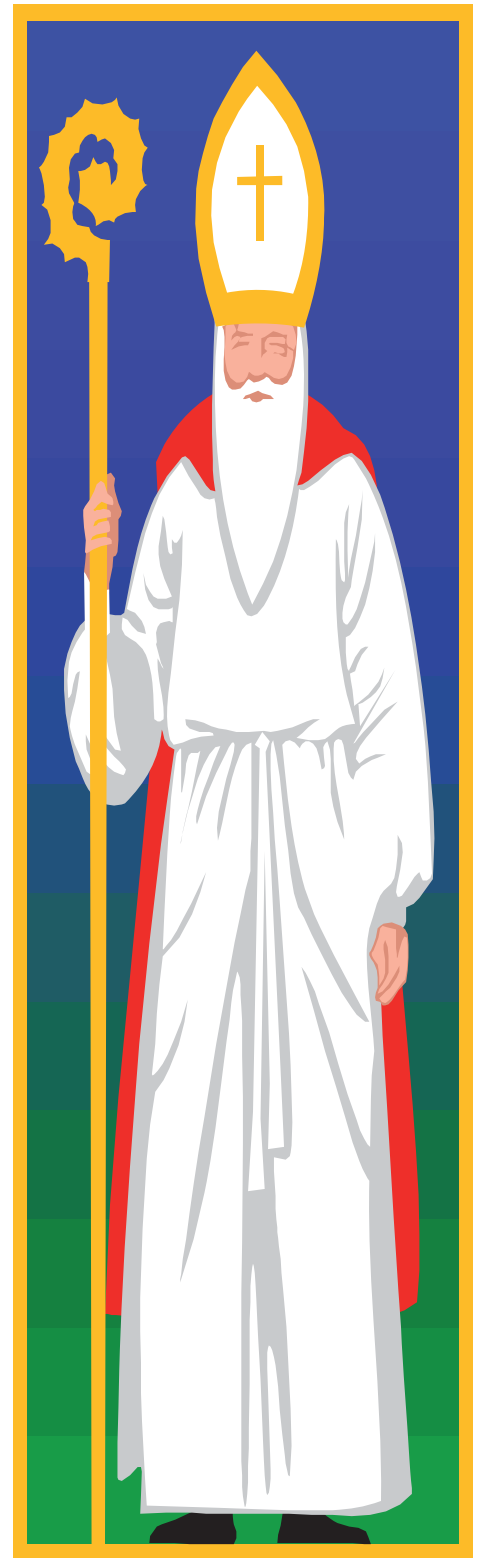
May our decorations not be mute but rather singing symbols, sacred signs of the evergreen coming of the Lord of life.

Help us to remember that mistletoe, holly and all other ornaments of the season were sacred signs to ancient believers.

But, most of all, jolly saint of toys and sweets, help us stay youthful, humorous, playful and dream-filled as we prepare together for the coming of Christ with Advent longing.

St. Nicholas, pray for us. AMEN

Edward Hays



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Resources

The following resources are available at the NOCCC office at 1516 McKeown Avenue, North Bay, Ontario, Canada, P1B 7N1 or free to download at:

Advent/ Christmas Resources - Primary, Junior, Intermediate Planning Guide, 2008

Designing Prayer Centres - 2006

Easter to Pentecost - Celebrating Eastertide, 2008

Living Water - 1999

Staff Room Prayers - Praying Together, 2008

Reflections on the Beatitudes - 2007

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The Way of the Cross - Primary/Elementary - 2005

Catholic Graduate Expectations - Poster - 2005

