

With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. (Luke 1:46-47)

Jesus Brings Joy – Luke 2:1-7

Prepare to Wonder

Today we finally get to celebrate the greatest joy of all—the birth of Jesus! But this joy did not come easily. There were a lot of surprises, confusion, and changes that led to this miraculous birth.

As seen in today's story, Mary and Joseph had to take a long journey to Bethlehem. The emperor forced families to return to their hometowns to be registered. This was not part of these expectant parents' plans, and neither was the news they had received earlier about the upcoming birth of Jesus. After their journey to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph arrived to find no place to deliver this special baby and were forced to bear the child in a room shared with animals. Nothing was going according to plan. Yet, after the long journey, the waiting, and the difficulties, they received with great joy their newborn son, Jesus.

Jesus brought joy not only to Joseph and Mary, but also to the whole world. There is so much in this story for children to latch onto. Most importantly, we want them to know there is JOY. During this Advent season, children have been anxiously awaiting Christmas. Many of them likely are imagining what gifts they will receive and the fun they will have. This is a joyous time; however, this story also can help children focus on the joy we find in Jesus. Jesus' story has just begun, and children can embrace this joy throughout their lifelong faith journeys.

Spiritual Practice for Adults

Many of us plan our days, our weeks, and more. We have schedules and routines we always follow. But what if those plans are disrupted? This week shake up your schedule. Look at your daily tasks, errands, meetings, and responsibilities, and try to do one thing differently. Maybe you can respond to that email later and instead make a gratitude list. Try going for a walk while you listen to a conference call. Whatever may be your disruption, it is important for you to remember that things do not always go according to plan. If you can practice self-care in the midst of change, you might just find a little joy!

Welcome to Wonder

Supplies: CEB Bible, Annual Music CD or song download, optional: Digital Class Pack

- Gather together near your Wonder Table.

SAY: Today's faith word is *joy*.

- Show the children the "Joy" poster (Digital Class Pack).

SAY: Joy is a feeling of gratitude and happiness. Joy makes us want to celebrate.

WONDER: What makes you want to celebrate?

SING together

- Use your Annual Music CD or download the song, "Joy" (<https://www.cokesbury.com/Celebrate-Wonder-Annual-Music>).
- Play the song, "Joy."
- Sing and celebrate.

Wonder with Me

Supplies: CEB Bible, Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook, optional: Wonder Cube (Digital Class Pack)

READ the Bible Story

- Read the Bible story, Luke 2:1-7. Roll the Wonder Cube. Take time to answer a few of the questions.

WATCH the Bible Story

- Visit <https://www.cokesbury.com/Celebrate-Wonder-Video> to download and watch today's Bible story, or watch on www.amplifymedia.com.

WONDER together

- How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when they couldn't find a place to stay?
- What do you think it would be like to stay in a place where animals are kept? What do you think Mary and Joseph felt when Jesus was born?

CONTINUE to Wonder

- What do you think it was like to travel in Mary and Joseph's time? Have you ever spent the night in an unusual place? If so, where?
- How does Jesus bring you joy?

PRAY together

- Dear God, help me be full of joy. Amen.

Experience Wonder—Create a Space for Jesus (Art)

Supplies: pictures of diverse manger scenes; recycled materials, such as plastic containers, bottles, aluminum cans, paper, and so forth. You might also include other craft supplies, such as craft sticks, chenille stems, and so forth.

- Gather your supplies.
- Show the children the manger scenes.

SAY: In our Bible story today, Jesus was born in an unexpected place.

WONDER: What do you think it might have looked like? smelled like?

SAY: Using these materials, re-create the manger scene.

- Let the children be creative.

Spiritual Practice—Exploring Joy through Celebration

Supplies: Advent Wreath (Digital Class Pack or real family Advent wreath), candles (real or LED), Baby Supplies Kits made earlier, optional: Celebration Chart (Digital Class Pack) and Celebrate Wonder Family Activity Book

SAY: Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. We will light the next candle on our Advent wreath.

- Invite a child to color or help you light one of the purple candles on the wreath.

SAY: One of the ways we celebrate at Christmas is by giving gifts to one another. We do this as a reminder that God gave us the greatest gift of all, baby Jesus. Today we have made gifts for the babies in our community. Let's say a blessing over them. I'm going to say some words of blessing, and you will repeat them after me.

- Say the following prayer of blessing, stopping after each sentence to let the children repeat your words.

PRAY: God, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. We pray the gifts we've prepared for babies in our community will be a blessing to them and their families Amen.

- Encourage the children and their families to use the Celebration Chart (Digital Class Pack) and to read together the *Winter 2020–21 Celebrate Wonder Family Activity Book* (if purchased) at home this week.