



Grace in a Manger

(based on Luke 2:1-7)

It was almost time for Mary to have her baby. “The baby will be coming soon,” she said to Joseph. Mary and Joseph had worked hard to get everything ready. They were very excited to welcome baby Jesus.

Then one day they got some bad news. The Roman Emperor wanted to count all the people. Mary and Joseph had to travel all the way to Bethlehem. The Emperor said they had to go there to be counted.

Mary and Joseph didn’t want to go, but it was the law. They gathered some blankets and some food. Mary took along some things for her baby.

It was a very long journey. Mary and Joseph were exhausted when they reached Bethlehem. The little town was busy and crowded because many people had come to be counted.

Mary and Joseph needed to rest. It was time for Mary to have her baby, but all the rooms in the inn were taken. The only place left was the stable where the animals lived. It wasn’t the best place to stay, but at least it was dry. In that place, with animals all around them, Mary’s baby was born.

Mary wrapped baby Jesus in some long strips of cloth she had brought. They made a little bed in the manger so that Jesus could sleep.

Mary and Joseph looked at their new baby. They remembered how the angel had come with the news that they would have a special child. The angel had promised that one day Jesus would grow up to tell everyone about God’s love.

Mary and Joseph had been looking forward to welcoming their baby. Now Jesus had arrived safely.

Mary looked at Joseph. “It seems a strange place for such a special baby to be born,” she whispered.

“It is,” Joseph agreed. “But God is with us in this place.”

Then Mary and Joseph said “thank you” to God for their beautiful baby.



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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- Why is Christmas important to you? Share memories you have of childhood Christmas celebrations. Make time to read the Christmas story to your child from the Bible (Luke 2:1-20).
- Talk about ways that your family is sharing the message of Jesus with each other, with your family and friends, and with the world. Talk about choices your family has made this season in activities, home decorations, Christmas spending, and giving to others. Help your child identify how the good news of Jesus has been shared in each choice.



Responding to God's Grace

- Make piñatas, just as children in Mexico often do at Christmas. Start with a grocery bag. Decorate the bag with images of Christmas. Cut out images and designs from Christmas wrap and glue these to the bag or draw pictures on the bags using markers or crayons. Put a few handfuls of candies (or a nonfood alternative) in the bag. Tie the bag shut and attach a loop for hanging. On Christmas Day, tie the piñata to a tree outside. Family members take turns being blindfolded and trying to break the piñata with a broom handle or stick. When the piñata breaks, collect the treats.
- Play a singing game: One person thinks of a Christmas carol and sings the first line. The family member sitting to the left of the first person sings the first line of a different Christmas carol. The next person sings the first line of another carol. The game continues, with each person taking a turn singing a first line to a different Christmas carol. See how long you can keep the game going without repeating a carol.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Continue the tower of boxes you began last week. This week, cover one box with blue paper. Help your child to tell what they know about Mary. Use a marker to write "Mary" on the covered box. Add other words or images about Mary to decorate the box. Set the Mary box on top of the green Joseph box from last week.
- Light a purple candle. Pray:

O God, you are with us in the bright candle flame. You made us and grace us, and know all our names. You're with us in laughter; you're with us in tears. You're with us in stories from long-ago years. Be with us today. Help us, with grace, to walk in your way. Amen.