



Shepherds Glorify God

(based on Luke 2:1-20)

Night came to the small town of Bethlehem. It had been a busy day. The Roman emperor gave orders that everyone must return to their hometown to be counted. Bethlehem was crowded with people who came to be registered.

Mary and Joseph joined others on the trip to Bethlehem. When they arrived, there was no place for them to stay, so they settled in with the farm animals. In that place, with animals around them, Mary's baby was born.

Mary and Joseph wrapped the baby Jesus in some soft cloths, made a bed in the straw for him, and tried to rest. Soon they drifted off to sleep.

That same night, not far away from the town of Bethlehem, a group of shepherds watched over a flock of sheep. Everything was calm and quiet as the shepherds talked to each other.

Suddenly the night sky lit up with a brilliant light. An angel from God appeared before the astonished men. The shepherds were terrified and began to shake.

"Don't be afraid," the angel said. "I come to bring you good news. Today in Bethlehem, a special baby has been born for you. He is God's chosen one. You will find him wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger."

The shepherds gasped in surprise. As they watched, a huge choir of angels appeared singing to God. It was beautiful!

"Glory to God in heaven," they sang. "And peace to all boys and girls who live on the earth."

Then the angels left them just like that. The shepherds sat and looked at each other in shock. For a moment, they couldn't speak. The sound of the angels' voices echoed in their minds.

"We have to go," stammered one of the shepherds. "We must go to Bethlehem and see the special child the angel told us about." So they all jumped up and hurried down to Bethlehem. It didn't take long to find Jesus.

The shepherds crowded into the stable where Jesus lay sleeping. They told Mary and Joseph about the angels and the angels' message.

"We had to come and see for ourselves," they explained.

Mary and Joseph welcomed the shepherds into the stable. Everyone gathered around the manger to look at the special baby sent from God.

Finally, the shepherds tiptoed quietly out of the door and went back to their sheep. As they went back to work, the shepherds sang and thanked God. They told their story over and over. Everyone who heard it was amazed.



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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 the Bible story, and light four purple candles on your Advent wreath. The Christ candle will be lighted for Christmas Day. Jesus is the light of the world, shining for all people.
- In your child-friendly nativity set, add the shepherds and sheep for the fourth week of Advent. Put baby Jesus in the manger after sundown, and move the angels to a position to talk to the shepherds. They join Mary and Joseph, the stable, and animals to remind us of who knew about the birth. Magi and camels are coming next week.



Responding to God's Grace

- Christmas symbols guessing game: What decorations remind us that Jesus is the light of the world? Answer: Christmas lights, candles, glitter.
- Mary and Joseph camped out in a stable so they could be warm and sheltered. Have everyone think of things that offer warmth and shelter in their own lives.
- The shepherds heard the news of the birth of Jesus. Have everyone make a list of sounds of the season. Some examples are Christmas carols and bells. What sounds are unique to your family's traditions?

Celebrating in Gratitude

- The shepherds went to see the baby. If weather permits, take a walk or drive to enjoy looking at Christmas lights. Discuss which are your favorite.
- Sing a song of shepherds and/or angels, such as: "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night," "The First Noel," "Go, Tell It on the Mountain," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," and so forth.
- Pray this prayer:

God, we thank you for the sounds and sights of this special time. Thank you for helping us receive the message of the birth of your son. Amen.