Our Savior Is Born

Today's Readings

Isaiah 9:2–4, 6–7
Psalm 96:1–2a, 2b–3, 11–12a
Titus 3:4–6
Luke 2:1–14

Prepare the Meeting Space

In the worship area, on a table draped with a white cloth, place:

- ☐ a Lectionary
- ☐ a battery-operated candle
- ☐ a baby doll in a "manger" (cardboard box lined with real hay, Easter-basket grass, or torn newspaper strips)

Have ready the following for the Gathering activity:

- ☐ a square of cloth and two long strips of cloth (perhaps torn from old bed sheets) to be used for swaddling clothes

Have ready the following for the Homily:

- ☐ a music player
- ☐ recording of "Angels We Have Heard on High" (traditional hymn)

Suggested Music

GATHERING:
"Away in a Manger" *(**Seeds** CD-1, Track #8) or* **"Jesus' Lullaby"** *(**Seeds** CD-2, Track #5 or **Promise & Good News** CD-1, Track #8)*

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:
"Gospel Acclamation; Alleluia" *(**Promise & Good News** CD-2, Track #24)*

PREPARATION

Children's Leaflet

Have on hand copies of the Children's Leaflet for this Sunday. Distribute copies either at the start of the session or before the children return to the assembly.

PREPARE WITH PRAYER

The LORD is great and deserves our greatest praise! He is the only God worthy of our worship. Everyone on earth, now tremble and worship the LORD, majestic and holy. **(PSALM 96:4, 9)**

Scripture Background

Isaiah's original audience probably thought that the passage we hear in today's First Reading was about a wise new king coming to restore the Jewish kingdom some 70 years after its fall to Babylon. Today we understand that he was speaking of a more distant time, when the Messiah would come and rule a new and everlasting kingdom. Isaiah 9:5 gives the Messiah four specific titles that add up to a description that can apply only to Jesus Christ:

- ■ He will be called "Wonderful Advisor" because he will have Godlike wisdom, rendering unnecessary any flawed human advice.
- ■ He will be called "Mighty God" because his strength will be invincible.
- ■ He will be called "Eternal Father" because he will love his people as a father loves his children.
- ■ And because of his infinite wisdom, strength, and love, his people will live in endless peace. That makes the culminating title for the Messiah "Prince of Peace."

Because Paul's letter to Titus was written late in the first century, it reveals the insights around Christ that had solidified among the Christians of that time. Christ had come to earth purely out of the goodness of his own

heart to give humanity "new birth and a fresh beginning" (Titus 3:5).

Whenever times are hard, the poor suffer the most. This was no less true in Jesus' time. One reason Saint Luke wrote his Gospel was to encourage the more prosperous Christians of his day to imitate Christ by helping the less prosperous. For this reason, Luke tells of the angels' visit to the shepherds. It is a way of introducing an important theme in his Gospel, that Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, who made up the majority of the population.

CHILDREN'S CONNECTIONS

For today's Homily, help the children imagine that they are shepherds in Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. Use the following script for a guided meditation:

You are spending the night with some other shepherds in the hills just outside Bethlehem. All your sheep have been herded inside a low fence made of stones piled on top of each other. You look up and see that the skies are clear and starry. It is a beautiful night.

Although the air is chilly, you feel snug in your shepherd's clothes. You are wearing a long undershirt of smooth linen, and a woolen tunic that covers you from your shoulders to below your knees. For added warmth you have a big woolen cloak that doubles as a blanket. Lying near a dying campfire, you've kicked off your sandals for the evening and keep your feet warm under your cloak.

The sheep are softly bleating as you and your companions start drifting off to sleep. You don't worry at all about the wolves and foxes in the area. You have a slingshot and a pouch full of stones ready for hurling at predators! You are poor and cannot afford to lose even one sheep.

So it's just another ordinary night in the hills—until all at once an angel appears and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashes all around you!

Now you are afraid, but the angel says, "Don't be afraid! I bring good news. This very day, in King David's hometown, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is because you will find him wrapped in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay."

Suddenly many other angels come down from Heaven and join in praising God. They sing, "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*," which means, "Glory to God in Heaven."

After they leave, another shepherd says, "I know where this bed of hay must be. Let us all go and visit the newborn baby."

More About ...

How to Dress a Newborn

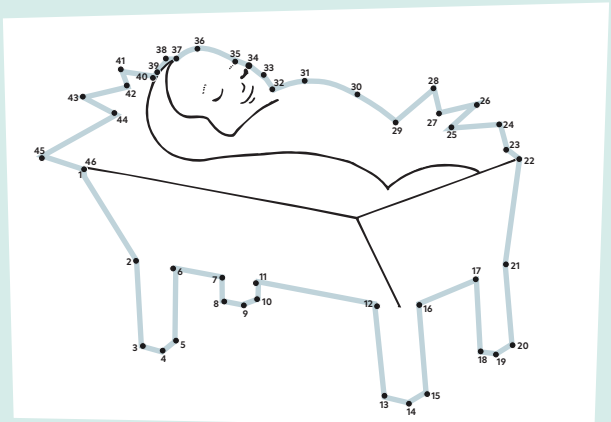
In the *New American Bible, Revised Edition* translation of today's Gospel, Luke relates that the newborn infant was wrapped in swaddling clothes. What exactly does this mean? According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, the child was placed diagonally upon a square of cloth; then three corners were folded over his feet and sides to cover him, while the top corner was folded beneath his head. One or two long strips of cloth, resembling today's rolled gauze bandages, then were wrapped around the cloth to hold it securely in place. Infants were dressed this way throughout their first year of life.

Not only did this attire keep the baby warm in chilly weather and protect him from the scorching sun in hot weather, but it also assured safer, sounder sleep. (To learn the results of a 2002 university study of the benefits of swaddling, go online and Google the article "Swaddling May Help Sleeping Babies Remain on Their Backs.")

CHILDREN'S LEAFLET

The Children's Leaflet for this week helps children learn about being ready to welcome Jesus through a summary of the Gospel, prayer, and a creative activity.

You may distribute the leaflet now, for use during the session, or before the children return to the assembly. If you distribute the leaflet now and time permits, you may wish to read with the children the summary of the Gospel in "The Word of God This Week" after you have read the Gospel. Point out the artwork and ask the children what is happening in the picture.



Leaflet Activity

After completing a dot-to-dot, children will have a reminder of the reason for this joyous day. Encourage them to hang it up at home.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gathering

Gather the children around a table or empty space on the floor to watch you wrap the baby doll in swaddling, as explained in "How to Dress a Newborn" on page 2. Explain that this was what Mary did with Jesus after he was born. Then place the doll in the "manger" you have prepared in the worship space, and invite the group to join in singing the Gathering hymn, "Away in a Manger" or "Jesus' Lullaby."

Opening Prayer

LEADER: *Invite the children to bow their heads and pray. The response to each brief prayer will be "Lord, have mercy."*

By coming among us as a little baby, God our Savior has shown us how good and kind he is. Lord, have mercy.
CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

LEADER: He saved us because of his mercy, and not because of any good things that we have done. Lord, have mercy.
CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

LEADER: God sent Jesus Christ our Savior to give us his Spirit. Lord, have mercy.
CHILDREN: Lord, have mercy.

Invite the children to be seated. Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading

LEADER: In ancient times, God's people sometimes were ruled by bad kings, but the prophet Isaiah promised that one day, a wise and good leader would come to rule them. Today we know that Jesus was the one he was talking about. Listen to what Isaiah said.

Read Isaiah 9:2–4, 6–7. Then say,
"The Word of the Lord."
CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm may be sung or spoken. Before beginning the psalm, sing or announce this response.

LEADER: Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.
CHILDREN: Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.

LEADER: *Read Psalm 96:1–2a, 2b–3, 11–12a.*

Second Reading

LEADER: Just think, today is Jesus' birthday and yet he is the one who is bringing all the gifts to his party—gifts of love and light, guidance and peace. In today's Second Reading, Saint Paul reminds us that we did nothing to deserve this generosity.

Read Titus 3:4–6. Then say,
"The Word of the Lord."
CHILDREN: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel

LEADER: When people don't have good leaders, people who are poor suffer the most. Maybe that's why God wanted the poor shepherds of Bethlehem to be

the first people in the world, after Mary and Joseph, to know that Jesus was born. Let's listen to their story. The Lord be with you.
CHILDREN: And with your Spirit.

LEADER: A reading from the Gospel of Luke.
CHILDREN: † Glory to you, O Lord.

LEADER: *Read Luke 2:1–14. Then say,*
"The Gospel of the Lord."
CHILDREN: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Turn off the lights and invite the children to imagine that they are the poor shepherds of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. Let them close their eyes as you read them the meditation given in "Children's Connections" on page 2. After the meditation, turn the lights on again and invite the children to sing along with a recording of "Angels We Have Heard on High."

Profession of Faith

LEADER: Please stand for our Profession of Faith and respond, "Yes, I do" to each of these questions.

Do you believe in God, the Father, who long ago sent us Jesus to be our Lord and Savior?
CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in Jesus, God's Son, who will come again to be our Lord and King?
CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who stays with us until Jesus comes again?
CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

LEADER: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who stays with us until Jesus comes again?
CHILDREN: Yes, I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

LEADER: Knowing that Jesus came to save us from every evil, let us ask God for all that we need. Please respond to each prayer, "Prince of Peace, hear our prayer."

For good shepherds to lead and guide our Church, let us pray to the Lord.
CHILDREN: Prince of Peace, hear our prayer.

LEADER: For wise and just leaders in every nation on earth, let us pray to the Lord.
CHILDREN: Prince of Peace, hear our prayer.

LEADER: For loving parents and kind children in all the families of our parish, let us pray to the Lord.
CHILDREN: Prince of Peace, hear our prayer.

LEADER: For God's special blessings on the poor and needy of our community, let us pray to the Lord.
CHILDREN: Prince of Peace, hear our prayer.

LEADER: *Invite the children to pray their own petitions. Then pray:*

Loving God, thank you for sending us Jesus to be our King of Kindness and Prince of Peace! May his wisdom, strength, and love guide us all the days of our lives, and may your holy name be praised forever and ever.
CHILDREN: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. If you haven't already done so, distribute the leaflets. Remind the children to take the leaflets home and share them with their families. Encourage them to watch this week's Gospel Reflection video and complete the Family Corner activities as a family.