

Advent I

Today's lesson, together with the next three, helps children anticipate the Mystery of Christmas. Together we journey toward Bethlehem, guided by the prophets (in today's lesson), and then joined by the Holy Family, the shepherds and the Magi (in the next three lessons). Finally, we arrive at the birth of Jesus, when the light of Christ is lit. For this lesson, and the three that follow, you can use the pictures on this page, but you might want to use a Nativity set if your family owns one.

How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's lesson. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about the picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today's story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive way.

You are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today's presentation offered below. If you retell the presentation, you will need:

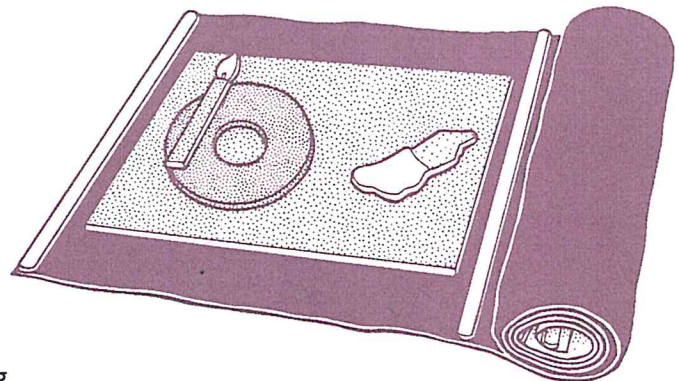
- five candles (three purple, one pink and one white, or four blue and one white, depending on your church's custom)
- *optional*: candle snuffer
- *optional*: You might like to use the home version of the Godly Play Advent materials, called "Mini Advent," available from Godly Play Resources. (To order, call 1-800-445-4390 or visit www.godlyplayresources.com.)

Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

The Presentation

A king is coming, but not the kind of king that people thought was coming. This king had no army, no great house, and no riches. This king was a baby who is born in a barn.

The coming of this King is a mystery. A mystery is sometimes hard to enter. That is why this time is important—the time of Advent. Sometimes people walk right through this mystery and don't even know it is there.



Christmas is such a great mystery that it takes four weeks to get ready to enter it. During this time, we are on the way to Bethlehem with the prophets, the Holy Family, the shepherds, the angels, the Magi, and more. This journey was not just back then or there; it is also here and now.

Today we remember the prophets. They came so close to God and God came so close to them that they knew something important was going to happen in Bethlehem.

They pointed the way to Bethlehem. They didn't know exactly what was going to happen there, but they knew this was the place.

Today we remember the prophets. (*Light one of the purple candles.*)

This is the light of the prophets. Let's enjoy the light.

Look. Do you see how the flame is in just one place? It is right here. When I "change" the light, it will no longer be in just one place. (*Gently snuff or blow out the candle.*)

Watch. Do you see it? It is spreading out, getting thinner and thinner as it fills up the room with the light of the prophets. Anywhere you go here you will be close to the prophets.

Prophets can be boys, and prophets can be girls. Any of us here might be a prophet too.

Godly Play Understanding Play (Part I)

In every Parent Page, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. To fully enter into Godly Play, we need to be deeply aware of what makes *real* play and what distracts or detracts from it.

So many activities that we choose for leisure aren't really play but *working* at play. For your own personal exploration, choose an activity that feels like wasting time.

That's right. Set aside about thirty minutes and "waste" it. That idea runs counter to everything our busy, pragmatic culture believes in, so don't multitask and don't

do anything you feel you "should" do. No product, just deep concentration.

You may discover that "wasting time" this way draws you into your own creative process. You may connect with language in a new way, and you may not even want to use language at all.

When you make "room" in your day for something like this, it is an invitation for God, the Creator, to come and play too. It also opens you up again to what you did by nature as a child. Play, then, is an experience you, God, and children have in common.

Advent II

This lesson—the second in Advent—continues to prepare children for the Mystery of Christmas. We move toward Bethlehem, guided by the pointing prophets, with the Holy Family, the shepherds, and the Magi. We arrive at the birth of Jesus, when the light of Christ is lit. This week’s presentation focuses on the Holy Family. For this lesson you can use the pictures as you retell it, and you might want to use a Nativity set if your family owns one.

How to Use this Parent Page

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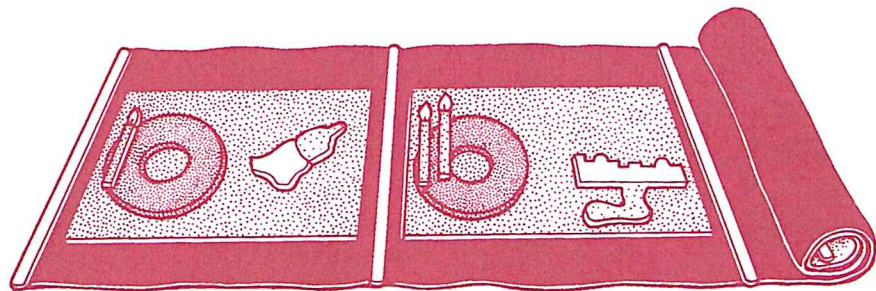
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- five candles (three purple, one pink and one white, or four blue and one white, depending on your church’s custom)
- Nativity figures of Mary, Joseph and the donkey
- *optional*: candle snuffer
- *optional*: You might like to use the home version of the Godly Play Advent materials, called “Mini Advent,” available from Godly Play Resources. (To order, call 1-800-445-4390 or visit www.godlyplayresources.com.)

Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying “Amen.”

The Presentation



On the first Sunday in Advent we remembered the prophets. Today we remember the Holy Family and we light two candles. The Holy Family is on the way to Bethlehem and we are going with them.

Here is the Mother Mary. (*Gently touch each figure as you name it or bring them to the story.*) Here is the Father Joseph. Here is the donkey.

Mary was about to have a baby. It is very hard to walk when you are about to have a baby. Sometimes she could not take another step. Then she rode on the donkey.

It is also hard to ride on a donkey when you are about to have a baby. When she couldn't ride another step, she got down, and walked. She rode and she walked.

They must have been the last people coming up the road to Bethlehem that night.

Here is the light of the prophets. (*Light the purple candle lit for Advent I.*)

Here is the light of the Mother Mary and the Father Joseph as they make their way to Bethlehem. (*Light a second purple candle.*)

Let's enjoy the light.

Now watch. I am going to change the light. Do you see how the light of the prophets is just in one place? I am going to change the light so that it can be in every place. (*Gently snuff or blow out the prophet candle.*)

Watch. Do you see how the light of the mother Mary and the father Joseph is just in this one place? I am going to change the light so that it can be in every place. (*Gently snuff or blow out the Holy Family candle.*)

Do you see how the light is not gone? It is changed. It is not in one place. Now it is spreading out, getting thinner and thinner, to fill up the whole room. The room is filling up with the light of the prophets and with the light of the mother Mary and the father Joseph. Anywhere you go in this room you can come close to them today.

Godly Play Understanding Play (Part 2)

In every Parent Page, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. To fully enter into Godly Play, we need to be deeply aware of what makes *real* play and what distracts or detracts from it.

Research suggests that about 20% of the energy of young mammals in the wild is spent purely in "play," activity that serves no observable purpose. Why would nature favor the use of so much biological energy in the service of seemingly useless activity? Perhaps it is not as "useless" as it seems.

As a culture, we struggle with the purpose and meaning of play. Ancient views of play

related it to power (status, victory), to fate (magic, luck), to community identity (festivals, cooperation), or to frivolity (nonsense as opposed to work). The modern view sees play as involving progress (adaptation, growth), the imaginary (creativity, fantasy), or the concerns of the self (peak experiences, leisure). *Our* view is that play involves all of this. That is why it is so hard to define.

The first thing to acknowledge, then, as we struggle to understand play, is its ambiguity. It is tough to define! Could it be that play, by its very nature, cannot be captured using precise language, but rather through the language of poetry, overflowing with energy and life?

Advent III

This lesson—the third in Advent—continues to prepare children for the Mystery of Christmas. We continue moving toward Bethlehem, guided by the pointing prophets, with the Holy Family, the shepherds, and the Magi. Finally, we arrive at the birth of Jesus, when the light of Christ is lit. This week's presentation focuses on the shepherds. For this lesson you can use the pictures on this page and/or use a Nativity set if your family owns one.

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- five candles (three purple, one pink and one white, or four blue and one white, depending on your church's custom)
- Nativity figures of Mary, Joseph, the donkey, shepherd(s), and sheep.
- *optional*: candle snuffer
- *optional*: You might like to use the home version of the Godly Play Advent materials, called "Mini Advent," available from Godly Play Resources. (To order, call 1-800-445-4390 or visit www.godlyplay.com.)

Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

The Presentation



On the first Sunday in Advent we remembered the prophets. On the second Sunday we remembered the Holy Family. (Touch the Holy Family or bring them to the story.) On the third Sunday in Advent we remember the shepherds who were standing in the fields around Bethlehem keeping their sheep and we light three candles. They were trying to stay awake so the wolf could not come and get the sheep. Suddenly there was so much light in the sky that it hurt their eyes.

They were afraid. Then they heard singing in the sky! Angels were singing, “Don’t be afraid. We bring you tidings of great joy. Peace on earth and good will to everyone. A child is born. Go. Hurry. Run to Bethlehem to see the child who will change everything.”

Here is the candle of the prophets. (*Light the candle for Advent I.*) Here is the candle of the Holy Family. (*Light the candle for Advent II.*) Here is the candle of the shepherds. (*Light the pink candle.*)

Look—there is something different about this candle. It is the color of roses. This is to remind us of the great joy the angels sang of. It also helps us remember that even if it is very serious to get ready to come close to a great mystery like Christmas, you can’t be serious all of the time. This is the Sunday when it is time for a little celebration.

There is one more thing about the color of roses. It is also one of the colors for the Mother Mary. We remember her again, for without the Mother Mary, there would be no baby.

Let’s enjoy the light.

Now I am going to change the light. Do you see how the light of the prophets is just in one place? Watch. (*Gently snuff or blow out the prophet candle.*)

Now it is changed, and the light that was in just one place is spreading out. It gets more invisible as it spreads out. Soon it will fill up the whole room.

Here is the light of the Holy Family. Now watch; I am going to change the light. (*Gently snuff or blow out the Holy Family candle.*) Look. It is spreading out and filling up the whole room. Just because it is hard to see doesn’t mean that it isn’t there.

And here is the light of the shepherds. I am going to change the light. Do you see how it is in one place? (*Gently snuff or blow out the shepherd candle.*) Look. It is filling up the room with the shepherds and mixing with the Holy Family and the prophets. Anywhere you go in the room today they will all be there.

Godly Play Understanding Play (Part 3)

In every Parent Page, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. To fully enter into Godly Play, we need to be deeply aware of what makes *real* play and what distracts or detracts from it.

Perhaps we can clarify what play is by defining its opposite. Our search for the opposite of play will involve language, but also include nonverbal, body-based “knowing.”

Some suggest that “seriousness” is the opposite of play. While seriousness may try

to exclude play, play includes seriousness. Is “work” the opposite of play? For many people, their work *is* play; think of the artist, athlete, or business person who experiences work and play as two parts of a unified rhythm of life rather than opposites.

Godly Play suggests that the opposite of play is *emptiness*. When we are at play, we are full of life, connected to the game and to the players in the game. Energy seems to expand rather than be used up.

Advent IV

This lesson—the fourth in Advent—continues to prepare children for the Mystery of Christmas. We continue moving toward Bethlehem, guided by the pointing prophets, with the Holy Family, the shepherds and the Magi. Finally, we arrive at the birth of Jesus, when the light of Christ is lit. This week's lesson focuses on the wise ones and the celebration of Christmas.

How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's lesson. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
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- five candles (three purple, one pink and one white, or four blue and one white, depending on your church's custom)
- Nativity figures of Mary, Joseph, the donkey, shepherd(s), sheep, the three magi, Jesus and the manger
- *optional*: candle snuffer
- *optional*: You might like to use the home version of the Godly Play Advent materials, called "Mini Advent," available from Godly Play Resources. (To order, call 1-800-445-4390 or visit www.godlyplayresources.com.)

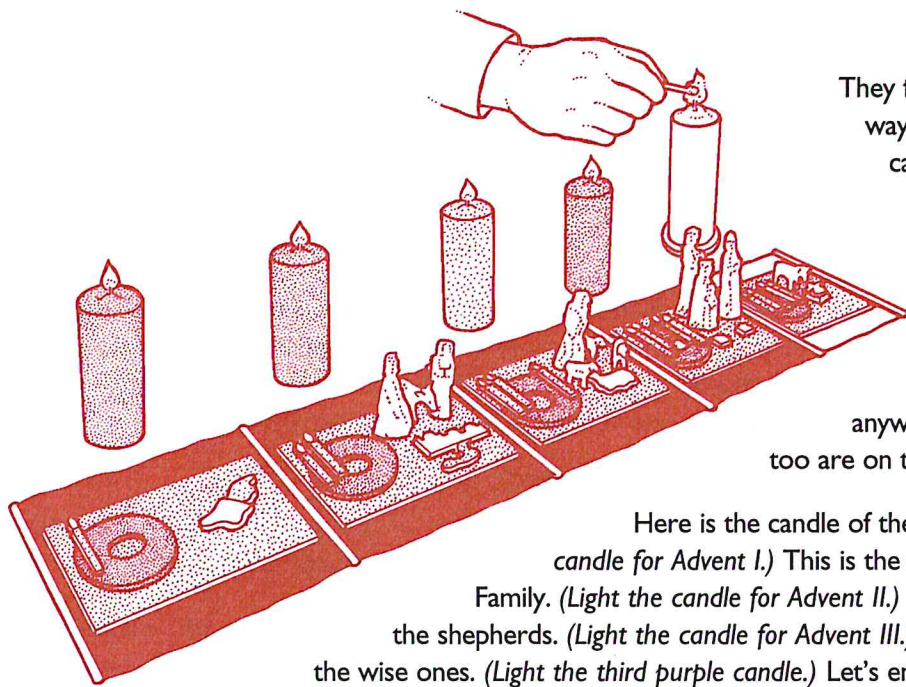
Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

The Presentation

On the first Sunday in Advent we remembered the Prophets. On the second Sunday, the Holy Family. (Touch Mary, Joseph and the Donkey or bring them to the story.) And on the third Sunday we remembered the shepherds. (Touch the shepherd(s) and sheep or bring them to the story.)

On the fourth Sunday in Advent we remember the three kings, the wise ones, the Magi, and we light four candles. They came from far in the East, and of all the things they knew, they knew the most about the stars. They knew where each star was supposed to be at each time of the year, so they could tell people when it was time to plant their crops or take a trip on the ocean in a boat, or cross the high mountains.

Suddenly they saw the wild star. It was not on any of their star maps. It went where it wanted to go. It did not stay put. They decided to follow the wild star to see where it was going and what it wanted to show them.



They followed the star all the way to Bethlehem, but they came from so far away that they got there after the baby was born. Every year they arrive on January 6th, but we remember them now anyway, because, like us, they too are on the way to Bethlehem.

Here is the candle of the prophets. (*Light the candle for Advent I.*) This is the candle of the Holy Family. (*Light the candle for Advent II.*) Here is the candle of the shepherds. (*Light the candle for Advent III.*) Here is the candle of the wise ones. (*Light the third purple candle.*) Let's enjoy the light.

Now we come to the Mystery of Christmas. This is when the baby is born, the one we have been waiting for.

Here is the Christ Child, the Mystery of Christmas. (*Gently touch the figure of Jesus in the manger or bring him to the story.*) And here is the cow who was so surprised to find a baby in the feed box on Christmas morning. (*Gently touch the cow or bring to the story.*)

Wait. Something is missing! I wonder what it could be?

This is the Christ candle. (*Show them the white candle.*) On Christmas Eve we will light it.

Now watch. I am going to change the light. (*Gently snuff or blow out the prophet candle.*) The light that was in just one place is now spreading out. Soon it will fill up the whole room.

(*Repeat for the Holy Family candle, the shepherd candle, and the three kings candle.*) On Christmas Eve you can light all the candles.

Godly Play Understanding Play (Part 4)

In every Parent Page, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. To fully enter into Godly Play, we need to be deeply aware of what makes *real* play and what distracts or detracts from it.

In the previous Parent Page, we discovered that play is the opposite of emptiness, that real play involves fullness, connection, engagement, vitality. To build on what we've already discussed:

- Play is pleasurable.
- Play has no extrinsic goal but engages us for its own sake.
- Play happens spontaneously, energizing us instead of depleting us. It is voluntary.
- Play involves deep concentration.
- Play nourishes creativity, problem-solving, language-learning and learning social roles.

In theological language, we might say that true players are aware of God's image as the Creator within them. Play is graceful.