

TEXT

Luke 2:1-7

OBJECTIVE

The students will realize that God loved us so much He sent His Son to earth. They will also be able to recount the events surrounding His birth.

MEMORY VERSE

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. — John 3:16

The Birth of Jesus

MEMORY VERSE IN ACTION

FOR GOD — Point up.

SO LOVED — Cross fists over heart.

THE WORLD — Hold arms in circle over head.

THAT HE GAVE — Palms toward self, touching chest, move hands away from body, opening hands out in front.

HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON — With right middle finger, touch left palm. With left middle finger, touch right palm.

THAT WHOSOEVER — Point to others.

BELIEVETH IN HIM — Make fists, one on top of the other.

SHOULD NOT — Shake head No.

PERISH — Left palm up, right palm down. Change over to left palm down, right palm up.

BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE — Hands in front, palms up. Throw hands up and out like you're excited and rejoicing.

MEMORY VERSE VISUALIZED

A silhouette of Bethlehem in a heart and a boy praying is the visual representation of this week's memory verse. (See pattern at the end of this lesson.) Cut apart the six pieces on the heavy black lines. Put the arrangement back together, one section at a time, as your students learn the verse.

BIBLE LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction: Give each child the first piece of the miniature felt scene described under In-Class Activities (the dark blue rectangular background). Tell them that today they are going to build on that piece of felt a little scene that tells the greatest story in the world.

Progression of events:

1. Review how the angel announced Jesus' birth to Mary and Joseph.
2. Briefly describe Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. Place their figures on the dark blue piece of felt.
3. Detail the surroundings. Add the manger and lamb to the scene.

Climax: Jesus was born at a time and place appointed by God and detailed by prophecy.

Conclusion: Jesus' birth was humble in origin, but it was the greatest event the world had ever known.

Response: Your students will be able to tell you the story of Jesus' birth.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem when Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth? Historians would say that Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, ordered a census to be taken and all people under his rule, to pay a tax. Joseph and Mary were obedient to that command. It was necessary for the people to return to their ancestral home, and Bethlehem was where Mary and Joseph's ancestor, King David, had lived as a boy. But there was more to their being in Bethlehem at that time than just to pay a tax. The prophet Micah, centuries before, spoke of Bethlehem, "...out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." God spoke it and it came to pass.

Why is Christmas celebrated on December 25? Early tradition fixed December 25 as being the time of Jesus' birth, the calendar suggesting the year 0. However, through the years, research into the census that was taken shows the time to be closer to 4 or 5 B.C. No one is really sure. Sometime during the 4th century A.D., the Western Church settled on December 25 and the Eastern Church on January 6. The important factor is that throughout the world people celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and we call it Christmas.

"On a cold winter's night...." How cold? That night when Jesus was born was no doubt a cold night, both outside and in the stable as well. Winter in Palestine, the coldest temperature being about 19° F, is the cold, rainy season, often accompanied by hail, thunder, and lightning. On the Bethlehem hillside where the shepherds watched their flocks that night it probably wasn't down to freezing temperatures, but a lonely, dark hillside could be miser-

able. The cold was probably uppermost in the thoughts of the shepherds until that glorious moment when the glory of the Lord brightened the night and they heard the glad news, "A Savior is born."

SPECIAL NOTE FOR THIS LESSON

Refer to Lessons 4b and 28b for additional ideas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

For each child, make a miniature nativity scene cut from felt (see Patterns). The pieces will include a dark blue felt rectangle for a background, a tan stable, Mary (cut from pale blue), Joseph (cut from brown), the manger (cut from gold or yellow), Baby Jesus and one lamb (cut from white). If you wish, make a larger set with which to present the story in class, allowing the children to assemble their smaller scenes as you go through the story.

Make a simple manger and stable from construction paper (see Patterns). Use as props for teaching the lesson.

Choose a favorite book about the Christmas story. Record the story onto a cassette tape and use this as a background while you act out the story, using dolls. A very appropriate story book is, "The Baby God Promised," by Arch books.

Help your students make Christmas cards in class to take home and give to a person of their choice (see Patterns). Copy the pattern onto heavy white paper and trim around the heavy lines. Let the children color the holly leaves and berries. Then fold on dotted lines so the beginning of the verse is on the front of the folded card.

Make donkey masks out of brown grocery bags (see Patterns). You can either make just one to use as you tell the story or let each child make a mask to keep for himself. As the pattern shows, cut eye holes about one inch apart, and then trim the sack around the bottom to form the shape of a donkey's head. Attach the ears to each side of the sack and the nostrils near the center bottom. Use black or dark brown yarn to form the mane.

Prepare a concentration game to use in reviewing the Christmas story (see Patterns). On tagboard or other heavy paper, make two copies of each picture. Mix them and lay them face down on your table or floor. Let each child take a turn trying to find matching pictures by remembering where they were in each of the previous turns. If the pictures match correctly he should tell what part of the story that picture represents and then he may choose again. If the pictures do not match, it is the next child's turn to try. NOTE: This would make a fun gift for each of the children in your class.

QUESTIONS

Was it part of God's plan that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem? How do we know?

How do you suppose the innkeeper felt when he found out a baby had been born in his stable? Do you think he knew who the Baby was?

How was Jesus different from other babies? How was He the same?

How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when Jesus was born?

What type of clothes did Mary have to put on Jesus?

How would you feel about having been born in a stable?

How can we make room for Jesus?

What does *humble* mean?

Why do you suppose God sent Jesus to earth as a baby? Why not as an angel or a grown-up man?

Do you think Jesus knows how little children feel? Why?

PRESCHOOL SUGGESTIONS

Give each child a Baby Jesus and a manger made from felt (see Patterns). Let them put the Baby in and out of the manger as you tell the story. This would also make a nice Christmas remembrance to put in your Christmas card for each child.

Give each child a copy of the picture of Mary holding the Baby Jesus (see Patterns). Let the children paste straw on the manger. As an alternative, they may glue on strips of gold-colored felt, or use crayons to color some straw.

Make a "gift" card for each child (see Patterns). Copy the pattern onto the bottom half of a piece of construction paper (dotted lines in the center of paper). Then fold the paper on the dotted lines. Cut around the double thickness to make a card that opens. Provide stickers with the Christmas nativity theme. Let the children put these inside their cards as you talk about God's greatest Gift — Jesus.

REVIEW IDEAS

Give a review on "Gifts From God." Have several different-sized gift-wrapped boxes. (You might like to wrap them in such a way that you will need only to lift off the lids.) Inside each box have an article representing a gift God has given us; such as, an animal puppet (animals), a poinsettia (plants), a mobile of stars (night sky), sun glasses (day sky), jar of sand or dirt (earth). The list is endless. Finally, spotlight the remaining gift — God's greatest Gift — Jesus.

Have a large manger scene behind you as you review the story. Make masks (see Patterns) to represent the six animals in the following poem. Cut out the holes for the eyes and attach a Popsicle stick to the back of each mask. Begin your review with these remarks and questions: "I wonder what it was like on that first Christmas! Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been at the manger when

Jesus was born? I wonder what it was like for the animals in the stable? Let's pretend to visit the manger." Hold up the appropriate mask as you read, slowly, each section of the poem. After reading each stanza, attach that mask to the manger. End by reemphasizing God's great love to us through Jesus.

POEM:

The donkey walked softly, uphill and down,
Took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem town.
The cow gave her manger, with hay soft and deep,
To make a nice bed for the Baby to sleep.
The mouse, who liked mostly to hide in the hay,
Came quietly out to see where Jesus lay.
The cat with its fur so soft, cuddly, and warm,
Was impressed by the sweetness of Jesus, God's Son.
The lamb with the shepherds heard angels above.
He came to see Jesus — God's great Gift of love.
The dove cooed from rafters that first Christmas morn.
He wanted to tell the world, "Jesus is born!"

COORDINATING SONGS

"What Child Is This?"
"Away in a Manger"
"Silent Night"

SUPPORT MATERIAL

The Very Best Book of All — Happy Day Book by Fran Flourney, Standard Publishing
The Very Special Night — Happy Day Book, Standard Publishing
The Gift of Christmas — Jane Belk Moncure book, Standard Publishing
Jesus Loves Us — Coloring book, 8 each of 6 pictures, Warner Press
Frances Hook's "Bible Pictures" — Includes "Birth of Jesus," Standard Publishing

MEMORY VERSE SONG



MEMORY VERSE VISUALIZED

