



THE STAR

THE STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

IN THEATERS NOVEMBER 17

CATHOLIC CURRICULUM

NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

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The National Conference of Catechetical Leadership presents lessons inspired by **THE STAR**.

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THE CHRISTMAS STORY

And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. ~ MATTHEW 2:9

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

BE CREATIVE

NOTE TO LEADERS AND PARENTS

This lesson may be adapted for use with various groups. There are four sections: **PRAYER, LEARN, REFLECT, ACT**. You may rearrange components of the sections to fit your family's/group's needs. Be creative and have fun with the prayers, reflections, and activities as you strengthen the relationships in your family/community!

St. Francis of Assisi celebrated the birth of Jesus by creating a Christmas manger scene in a stable on Christmas Eve in 1223. Since then, Christmas Creches or Nativity Scenes have been displayed in churches and homes.



BLESSING OF A NATIVITY SCENE

All make the Sign of the Cross...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADER: Lord Jesus, Son of God, come into our hearts this Christmas.

READER: Proclaims Luke 2:1-8. **The Gospel of the Lord.**

ALL: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

All extend their hands over the Nativity Scene in a sign of blessing. As an option, a family/group member may sprinkle holy water on the Nativity Scene.

LEADER: Lord our God, send your blessing upon this depiction of the night of your birth. May it be a reminder to us of your great love and presence in our lives. As we look upon this scene and reflect upon your Incarnation in Jesus your Son, bless us so that in the coming days of Christmas, we may be filled with your Spirit of kindness and mercy to be a sign of your love to all we meet. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY OVERVIEW

Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born in a stable. Explore their journey and learn about the land of Israel.

THE LAND OF ISRAEL & THE CHRISTMAS STORY



THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Knowing the geography of Israel helps us to better understand biblical history.

Israel is in the Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The countries bordering Israel are Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

With an area of 20,330 square kilometers, Israel is slightly larger than the state of New Jersey. The lowest point is the Dead Sea at 431 meters below sea level, and the highest point is Mount Meron at 1,208 meters above sea level.

Israel's natural resources include timber, potash, copper ore, natural gas, phosphate rock, magnesium bromide, clay, and sand.

The three major locations in the Christmas story are:

- **Nazareth** – where the Holy Family lived. Search online for information on Nazareth.
- **Jerusalem** – the capital of Israel and location of the Temple. Search online for information on Jerusalem.
- **Bethlehem** – King David's hometown and where Jesus was born. Search online for information on Bethlehem.

ACTIVITY: Search online for a map of Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem. Imagine walking and riding a donkey, like Bo, from Nazareth to Bethlehem. How much time would it have taken to travel? Compare your answers to the estimates below.

FACTS ABOUT THE JOURNEY FROM NAZARETH TO BETHLEHEM

Since we do not know the exact route Joseph and Mary traveled, we can estimate the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem would have been between 80 and 100 miles. It is possible for a fit individual to travel about 20 miles per day, so the journey would take about four days. We know that Mary was pregnant and tradition holds that Joseph was older, and the terrain was rough, including hills, mountains and desert. It is likely, therefore, that they would have traveled about 10-12 miles per day, making the journey in six to eight days.

Along with the length of the journey and the terrain, they would have contended with weather and the possibility of wild animals. Traveling through the desert, they would have been hot during the day and cold at night.

LEARN FROM SCRIPTURE

What does the Bible say about Nazareth?

Read the following Scripture verses for a description of Nazareth.

- Matthew 2:23
- Luke 23-5
- John 1:44-46
- Mark 1:8-10
- Luke 2:38-40

What does the Bible tell us about Bethlehem?

Read the following Scripture verses for a description of Bethlehem.

- Genesis 35:18-20
- The Book of Ruth
- Micah 5:1-3
- Judges 17:8-10
- 1 Samuel 16:1-5
- Matthew 2:1-7



What does the Bible say about Jerusalem?

Read the following Scripture verses for a description of Jerusalem.

- Genesis 35:18-20
- Ezra 1:1-11
- Mark 10:32-34
- Luke 21:37-38
- 2 Samuel 5:1-15
- Psalm 122:1-9
- Luke 2:21-23
- Acts 1:13-14
- 1 Kings 8:1-3
- Matthew 2:1-12
- Luke 13:34-35

THE CHRISTMAS STORY SCRIPTURES AND THE STAR

There are several scenes in **THE STAR** that reflect Scripture passages about the Christmas story from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Read the following Scripture passages and discuss the movie scenes portraying these passages: What does Scripture say? What happened in the movie? What does it mean for us today?

- **The Annunciation** – Luke 1:26-38 (*read on the 4th Sunday of Advent, Year B*)
- **Joseph's Dream** – Matthew 1:16,18-21,24a (*read on the 4th Sunday of Advent, Year A, and Solemnity of Saint Joseph on March 19*)
- **Journey to Bethlehem** – Luke 2:1-14 (*read at the Christmas Mass at Midnight, Year ABC*)
- **The Wise Men & King Herod**** – Matthew 2:1-12 (*read on the Feast of the Epiphany*)
- **The Nativity of Jesus** – Matthew 1:1-25 (*read at the Christmas Vigil Mass, Year ABC*)
- **The Nativity of Jesus** – Luke 2:1-14 (*read at the Christmas Mass at Midnight, Year ABC*)
- **The Nativity of Jesus** – Luke 2:15-20 (*read at the Christmas Mass at Dawn, Year ABC*)
- **The Word** – John 1:1-18 (*read at the Christmas Mass during the Day, Year ABC*)

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

We Bring Gifts



****Note to parents:** King Herod's search for the infant Jesus is presented in **THE STAR**, but the movie doesn't include the entire story of Herod's vengeance against the Newborn King. You may want to personally reflect on the story of Herod's slaughter of the Innocents (Matthew 2:13-23) and decide for yourself whether or not to share it with your children, especially if they are very young. It may be enough for young children to know who King Herod is in conjunction with the story of the Wise Men without discussing the story of Herod's slaughter of the Innocents.

If your children are older and you decide to share this part of the story, discuss with them Herod's motivation of jealousy and hatred for the Newborn King, Jesus.

Ask: Why did King Herod want to find the Baby King? Why do you think King Herod was angry and jealous? How did God keep the Holy Family safe?



SHARING FAITH

Reflect on the Christmas story as you discuss the experiences of Joseph, Mary, and Bo in **THE STAR**.

Parents & Adult Leaders: You may want to reflect on the questions before talking with your children. You may encourage journaling before or after your conversation for further reflection.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

Families/Communities Reflect, Journal & Discuss

PARENT REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

REFLECT ON YOUR OWN STORY:

Faith is a journey. Think back on your life and your relationship with God. Create a timeline of your faith journey. *(Encourage older children to create their own timeline.)*

- When did you first come to know God?
- Who told you about God? How did they tell or show you about God?
- How have you experienced God's presence throughout your life?
- What struggles, sufferings, and joys have brought you closer to God?
- How is your faith connected to all aspects of your life?

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT THE CHRISTMAS STORY

GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED:

- What is your favorite part of the Christmas story? Why?
- What is the significance of Jesus being born in a stable?

THE JOURNEY

REFLECT ON THE JOURNEY:

- What do you think Joseph and Mary encountered on their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem?
- What do you imagine Joseph and Mary took with them on their journey?
- What would you take on a journey like this?
- What have you encountered on your life's faith journey?



PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

The Christmas story is probably the best known Christian story in Scripture. We live our faith best when we know the stories of Scripture. Make a commitment to regularly reading and reflecting on Scripture.

MAKE THE SCRIPTURES A PART OF YOUR FAMILY

- Reading the Bible as a family. Reading the Bible together may seem uncomfortable at first. Advent and Christmas is a perfect time to begin! As you begin, read and reflect on the passages of the Christmas story in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Choose a time each day that you will gather together. (What is the time of day that you all are naturally together and your children are at their best?) Light a candle as a symbol of God's Presence. Keep it short. Some passages and stories are long. Read parts of the stories and discuss them.
- As a family, choose an Advent or Christmas Scripture to include in your Christmas cards. Read the passage aloud. Parents and older children can write the Scripture in the cards. Younger children may draw an image of the passage. Perhaps you could create a family prayer based on your reflection on the Scripture passage.
- Read the story of the Birth of Jesus, then create a "Nativity in a Bag." Find an inexpensive, unbreakable Nativity set. Place all of the characters (Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, shepherds, sheep, donkey, angel, etc.) in a bag or basket. After reading the Nativity story in the Bible, pass the bag/basket and invite each family member to select a character from the bag/basket. Once everyone has a character, invite them to re-tell the story of the Birth of Jesus from the viewpoint of their character. Encourage them to use their senses as they tell the story: What did they see? smell? hear? taste? touch or feel? What did they do? Who did they meet? Where did they go? How did they feel through their experiences?
- Reflect on light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness." (John 8:12) Walk through your house and count the number of light bulbs. After you have found all the light bulbs, discuss how Jesus is the Light of the World.
- The Holy Family traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Assemble a "Travel Care Package" for those who may need assistance when they are away from home. The travel care packages could be donated to a local food pantry or shelter. In a gallon resealable bag, a small plastic container, or a grocery bag, include the following items: \$5 or \$10 Gas card; small bottle laundry detergent; bottle of water; crackers; clean socks; shampoo and comb; wet wipes or hand sanitizer; change (for a phone call).
- Create a "Birthday Box" to be donated to a local food pantry or shelter, so that every child (or child at heart) may have a birthday cake. Discuss with your child the importance of recognizing Jesus Christ in others, and doing something special for Jesus on a regular basis, through acts of kindness to others. For this act of kindness: Buy a 13"x9" cake tin. Inside the cake tin, place a boxed cake mix, a can of frosting, package of birthday candles, birthday plates, napkins, plastic forks, sprinkles, and maybe party hats. (Optional: You could include a gift card to a local grocery store for eggs and any other perishable items needed to bake the cake.)



DIVINE PROVIDENCE

*We know that all things work for good for those who love God,
who are called according to his purpose. ~ ROMANS 8:28*

**DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS GOD'S GUIDANCE,
GOD'S WISDOM IN OUR LIVES**

BE CREATIVE

NOTE TO LEADERS AND PARENTS

This lesson may be adapted for use with various groups. There are four sections: **PRAYER, LEARN, REFLECT, ACT**. You may rearrange components of the sections to fit your family's/group's needs. Be creative and have fun with the prayers, reflections, and activities as you strengthen the relationships in your family/community!



PRAYER TO MARY

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 288

Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who, moved by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith: as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One, help us to say our own “yes” to the urgent call, as pressing as ever, to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Filled with Christ’s presence, you brought joy to John the Baptist, making him exult in the womb of his mother.

Brimming over with joy, you sang of the great things done by God. Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith, you received

the joyful comfort of the resurrection, and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit so that the evangelizing Church might be born. Obtain for us now a new ardor born of the resurrection, that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.

Give us a holy courage to seek new paths, that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman. Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are that she may never be closed in on herself or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom. Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world. Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us.

Amen. Alleluia!

DIVINE PROVIDENCE OVERVIEW

Divine Providence is a central theme throughout Salvation History. This is especially true in the Incarnation, the Christmas story. Throughout **THE STAR**, the theme of Divine Providence is highlighted. In this lesson, we will explore the mystery of God’s Divine Providence.



WHAT IS DIVINE PROVIDENCE?

DEFINITION

“Divine Providence consists of the disposition by which God guides all of his creatures with wisdom and love to their ultimate end.” (CCC 321) God watches over all his creatures. God lovingly guides us in our decisions and actions. Because God loves us and wants what’s best for us, we have confidence in God’s presence and action in our lives.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN SACRED SCRIPTURE

Read and discuss the following Scripture passages:

- **Matthew 6:25-34** - Do not worry about your life...Seek first the kingdom of God.
- **Luke 12:22-34** - Where your treasure is, there also will be your heart.
- **Matthew 1:18-24** - God speaks to Joseph in a dream.
- **Luke 1:46-55** - Mary's Magnificat

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN *THE STAR*

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

Let It Be Done



Abby, the little jerboa, witnesses Mary's encounter with God's angel. Mary accepts God's invitation, trusting in God to take care of her. Abby immediately begins to spread the good news that she's heard.

As the animals see the star, they know that it means something. The star is a symbol of God's Presence and action in the world.

In **THE STAR**, after Mary tells Joseph what God has asked of them, Joseph is overwhelmed and needs time to think and pray about everything that's happening. Sometimes God leads us in unexpected ways. We may need time to take it all in. It's important for us to talk with other trusted people to help us discern God's will for us.

Sometimes life gets hard and it is difficult to know and live according to God's will. In the movie, there is a scene when Mary and Joseph argue after experiencing difficulty on their journey. Mary walks away. Joseph prays, then goes to Mary and apologizes. Mary responds that it's not always easy to follow God's plan. We may get frustrated and scared, but if we continue to trust in God, he will see us through our difficulties.

Bo, Dave, Ruth, Mary, Joseph, and all the characters experienced God's presence in and through one another. God often moves in our lives through the words and interactions with other people.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN THE LITURGICAL YEAR

The theme of Divine Providence is apparent in the celebrations, prayers, and readings throughout the Liturgical Year. God's Presence and Goodness is a primary theme in the Advent readings and in the two Advent Marian feasts: The Immaculate Conception on December 8 and Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. Encourage learners to participate in Mass on those days.



SHARING FAITH

God is with us always, in good times and bad. Recall the times when you just knew that God was with you. Reflect on how God has guided you throughout your life.

Parents & Adult Leaders: You may want to reflect on the questions before talking with your children. You may encourage journaling before or after your conversation for further reflection.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

Families/Communities Reflect, Journal & Discuss

PARENT REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

REFLECT ON YOUR OWN STORY:

Looking back over your life, how has God been with you through good times and bad? God often moves in our lives through our connection with other people. How have you experienced the presence of God in your family members, your children?

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT DIVINE PROVIDENCE

GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED:

- What were some of the ways God was with the characters in **THE STAR**?
- How have you experienced Divine Providence working in your own life?

GOD IS ALWAYS WITH YOU

DISCUSS HOW GOD PROTECTED JOSEPH, MARY, JESUS, AND BO:

- How did Bo keep The Hunter, Thaddeus and Rufus away from Mary?
- Why do you think Bo risked his own life to save Mary?
- Recall a time when God was watching over you or protecting you. What happened? How did you know God was with you?

PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

Through the weeks of Advent, be aware of Divine Providence. Make an intentional effort to recognize God's presence with you and God working in your life.



BE AWARE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

- Pray the “O Antiphons.” The “O Antiphons” are the seven short phrases that are chanted or sung during the Octave (eight days) before Christmas. Each one highlights a title of the Messiah and each one refers to a prophesy about the Messiah found in the Book of Isaiah. The Advent hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is based on one of the O Antiphons. This hymn is in **THE STAR**.
- Mary’s Magnificat is the quintessential ode to Divine Providence. It is prayed each day in Evening Prayer. Through the seasons of Advent and Christmas, pray the Magnificat together at bedtime.
- Difficulty Family Box. Create a box with items that can help a family member get through a difficult experience, such as tissue to dry tears, candy to sweeten the moment, a prayer card with an inspirational prayer, a list of encouraging Scripture passages, etc. For the list of encouraging Scripture passages, every time a family member comes across a passage that encourages them, they could add it to the list in the Difficulty Family Box.
- Reflect on Divine Providence throughout the Liturgical Year. On their feast days, read about Saints and discuss how God moved in their lives and through them to touch other people.



FRIENDSHIP

Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. ~ SIRACH 6:14

**DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS GOD'S GUIDANCE,
GOD'S WISDOM IN OUR LIVES**

BE CREATIVE

NOTE TO LEADERS AND PARENTS

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GIFT OF RELATIONSHIPS

Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are relationship. You created us in your image to live in relationship with you and with others. We praise you for we are wonderfully made!

We thank you, Lord, for relationships, for friendships with which you bless us. We thank you for the people in our lives that accompany us through good times and bad. Thank you for friends who make us laugh and who bring us joy. Thank you for friends who bear our pain and help us heal. Thank you for friends who help us to know ourselves and to know you.

We are grateful, Lord, for your invitation to friendship with you. Help us to grow ever closer to you, Lord, that we may always know your presence and your love.

Amen.

THE VALUE OF FRIENDSHIP OVERVIEW

Scripture calls faithful friends a treasure. Friendships are very important in our lives. Even very young children know the value of friendships. We want someone with whom we can laugh and play. We want someone who understands us, who dreams with us, who shares with us the memories we've made together.



SCRIPTURE, THE SAINTS, AND FRIENDSHIP IN *THE STAR*

Friends care about one another. They respect each other. They listen to one another. They want what's best for one another. They stand by and support each other.

Consider the friendship between Bo, the donkey, and Dave, the dove, in **THE STAR**. They are very different, but friends often are very different. Still, each individual brings something to the friendship.

Dave visits Bo in the mill and brings him the town news. They enjoy being together, and they dream of joining the Royal Caravan and of doing something important with their lives. Dave helps Bo develop a plan to escape and then promises he'll wait for him when it doesn't work out.

Faithful friends journey with us through good times and bad. We can depend on them no matter what. In **THE STAR**, we see this is true for Bo, Dave, and Ruth as they set out on a wondrous adventure. Their friendship provides an example of the virtues and qualities of good friendships particularly when trying to solve problems.

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

Follow My Lead



We find examples of faithful friendship in Scripture and the Saints. Some of the great friendships in Scripture are David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus and Lazarus. Many Saints shared great friendships with other Saints: St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, St. Catherine of Siena and Blessed Raymond of Capua, and St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal.

FRIENDSHIP IN SCRIPTURE

In the First Book of Samuel, David and Jonathan share a friendship of souls: “As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” (I Samuel 18:1) David and Jonathan committed themselves to one another: “Jonathan and David made a covenant, because Jonathan loved him as his very self.” (I Samuel 18:3) Their friendship shows us how friends should be completely devoted to one another and make sacrifices for one another.

In the Book of Ruth, Ruth and Naomi show us the value of loyalty, devotion, and unconditional love. Ruth refused to leave Naomi, her mother-in-law, after her husband and sons died. Ruth stayed with Naomi even as Naomi led her to a new land and new people. Ruth’s loyalty, following Naomi wherever she goes and doing whatever she does, is an example of strong friendship.

In the Gospel of John (John 11:32-36), we read about the intimacy Jesus shares with his friend, Lazarus:

“When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’”

Jesus’ deep love for Lazarus moved him to act. His actions showed the people how much he loved Lazarus. They saw Jesus weep for his friend. They saw how his love for Lazarus empowered him to raise Lazarus from the dead.

FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN SAINTS

St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal were friends who helped each other discover God's path for their lives. The letters Francis and Jane wrote to each other for many years give us a picture of the spiritual, personal and even professional growth their friendship offered them. Francis was Jane's spiritual director, but as their letters show, their friendship developed into a mutual spiritual companionship. Grounded in their love for God, they inspired one another to reach their dreams for the greater good of their communities.

Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi were good friends. They were both members of well-to-do families in Assisi. Francis renounced the riches of his family and left home to devote his life to following Jesus Christ. Clare was attracted to Francis' love for God and like Francis left home to pursue a community life of prayer and dedication to Christ. Francis and Clare shared a bond of love for Christ Jesus and they each started separate religious orders for men and women to share and spread that love. They watched over and encouraged one another to live their lives for God.

FRIENDSHIP IN *THE STAR*

The relationships in **THE STAR** mirror the relationships in Scripture and the Saints. Dave does not hesitate to follow Bo, to go anywhere for him, like Ruth goes with Naomi. Like Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane de Chantal, Bo and Dave help each other discover God's path for their lives.

Bo is also loyal to Mary. He sacrifices his own dream to be a part of the Royal Caravan so that he can help to save Mary, Joseph, and Jesus from Herod's hunter and the mean dogs. He tells Dave that he's sorry he can't join the Royal Caravan, but encourages Dave to still pursue his dreams of joining the Royal Caravan. Dave remains loyal to Bo.

Good friends are supportive and encouraging. Ruth, the sheep, helps Bo through some difficult situations. She encourages him to continue to follow his dreams, just as she follows the star.

The poet John O'Donohue wrote: *"Friendship is always an act of recognition."* Have you ever experienced a time when you met someone and you immediately felt like you had something in common? Bo and Ruth had that experience when they realized that they both wanted to follow the star.

Like Bo and his friends, we can have more than one friend at a time. Bo had Dave and Ruth. Though Dave seemed a little possessive at the start, he warmed up to Ruth. Ruth called the three of them a little flock. They developed a sense of community through their shared experiences, dreams, and memories. They became part of something greater than themselves.

In our Christian community, we are one flock with Jesus as our Shepherd. In the Mass, we are one family, united in Christ through his Word and the Eucharist. Jesus tells us, "I call you friends." He gave us the Church and calls us to carry out his mission through the community of the Church.

At the end of the movie, all the animals, the Wise Men, and the shepherds are gathered around the nativity to adore the newborn King.

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

We Bring Gifts



We still gather around the King today. We gather together at Mass to give thanks and praise to our King. We turn to our brothers and sisters in the Penitential Act and ask God and each other for forgiveness: “I confess to almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters...” We offer one another the sign of peace, and when we leave at the end of Mass, we are sent forth to go in peace and share Christ’s love with the rest of the world. We are part of something greater than ourselves, the Kingdom of God.

St Ambrose said that human friendship is a necessary part of the outpouring of God’s friendship. Aristotle, the ancient philosopher, stated, “What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.” St. Augustine wrote much about friendship, including this from Confessions 4, 8:

The comfort of friends refreshes me and puts me in good spirits...We teach and learn from each other... By our facial expressions, by a word, a glance and many a gesture we give evidence of loving hearts which know themselves to be loved; we fan the flames of our souls from these myriad sparks and thus we mold all of us together into one.





SHARING FAITH

Friendship is a gift from God, a gift of his love, a gift of his mercy. Let's explore what this means in our lives today.

Parents & Adult Leaders: You may want to reflect on the questions before talking with your children. You may encourage journaling before or after your conversation for further reflection.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

Families/Communities Reflect, Journal & Discuss

PARENT REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS AND YOUR OWN RELATIONSHIPS:

Support your children's friendships. Teach your children that people are important. Give your children plenty of opportunities to make friends by scheduling play dates when they are young or encouraging them to be part of teams and clubs as they get older.

Role model good friendship. Model the importance of staying connected. Talk with them about your friendships, especially long-lasting friendships. If you are married talk about how important it is to be friends with your spouse. Point out that in friendships there might be ups and downs, but that you love each other still, and how communication is key to keeping the friendship through the years.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT HIS OR HER FRIENDSHIPS

GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED:

- Why are friendships so important to us?
- What qualities or virtues make good friendships?

RECONCILIATION IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF FRIENDSHIPS

When Bo was angry at being rejected by Joseph, he lashed out at Ruth. Sometimes we let our emotions get the best of us and act in ways that can hurt others, which can leave us feeling guilty. We must apologize to build a bridge back into relationship with the other person, to help heal the hurt. Bo apologizes to Ruth when he returns to Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem, and Ruth accepts Bo's apology and thanks him for coming back.

- Talk to your children about a time you had to ask a friend for forgiveness or when you had to forgive a friend to heal the relationship.

BEING REJECTED OR DISCOURAGED

At one point during **THE STAR**, Bo, feeling dejected and discouraged, leaves Mary and Joseph. Talk to your children about feeling rejected or left out. Share a time when you felt the same way.

- Have you ever felt left out? What happened? What did you do?
- Discuss with your children the need to show appreciation when a friend does something thoughtful or helpful.

EXPLORING FRIENDSHIPS

Sometimes our friends don't really like each other. It's not healthy to have just one friend who doesn't ever want us to have other friends. We need many friends. Dave and Ruth communicate and come together for Bo. Talk about having friendships with more than one person.

- Do best friends always have to do everything together?
- Do best friends always have to have the same friends?
- What would you do if one of your friends didn't like one another?

To keep our friendships growing and strong, we need to spend time with our friends, talk to them, and get to know them better. God wants to be our friend, too. He made us to know him and love him.

- What can you do to spend time with God, and get to know him better?
- How can you improve your friendship with him?



PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

Spend time with your children and their friends' families or your friends and their families doing some of the following things in preparation to welcome Jesus at Christmas. Build up your friendships while anticipating the coming of Christ at Christmas!

WELCOME JESUS THIS CHRISTMAS

- Schedule a play date at your home for your children and their friends. Read the Nativity story and other Christmas stories, make Christmas cookies, and discuss the gifts we give each other in friendship.
- Visit a live Nativity scene with friends. Talk about that first Christmas. Look up Saint Francis of Assisi and his depiction of the Nativity.
- Invite another family to join you in watching a favorite Christmas movie and share a favorite Christmas treat. (Maybe invite everyone to wear jammies.)
- Go to a tree-lighting ceremony with friends.



- Gather with friends and make paper crowns for the kids. Talk about the Magi and the gifts they brought to baby Jesus.
- Go caroling with friends and their families in your neighborhood. Bring good cheer to others, then return home for hot cocoa and fellowship.
- Spend time with younger children playing with your family Nativity scene and/or acting out the Christmas story.
- Invite friends to join you in making Advent Wreaths.
- Invite friends to attend Midnight Mass or Christmas Morning Mass with you.





PRAYER

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”
~ LUKE 1:46-47

PRAYER IS...

BE CREATIVE

NOTE TO LEADERS AND PARENTS

This lesson may be adapted for use with various groups. There are four sections: **PRAYER, LEARN, REFLECT, ACT**. You may rearrange components of the sections to fit your family's/group's needs. Be creative and have fun with the prayers, reflections, and activities as you strengthen the relationships in your family/community!

The use of the Advent Wreath is a traditional practice which has found its place in the Church as well as in the home. Families/Groups gather around the wreath each Sunday of Advent to share prayer.



ADVENT WREATH PRAYER

All make the Sign of the Cross...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADER: Lord, open our hearts to your Presence. Open our ears to your Word.

READER: (proclaims the Scripture)

WEEK 1: Isaiah 9:1-2, 5-6

WEEK 3: Matthew 5:13-15

WEEK 2: Isaiah 2:4-5

WEEK 4: John 8:11-13

READER: The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSE: Thanks be to God.

Leader prays:

Lord God, send your grace and mercy upon us as we light the candle(s) of this wreath. Shine your light into our hearts that we may reflect your love and mercy throughout this Advent season and always. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen

The blessing may conclude with a verse from “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

ABOUT PRAYER

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul writes, “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Discuss how the characters in **THE STAR** prayed and explore your own way of praying and connecting with God.



PRAYER IN *THE STAR*, HOW WE PRAY, LEARNING TO PRAY

PRAYER IN *THE STAR*

Throughout **THE STAR**, the characters turn to God in prayer.

Mary is visited by an angel of God, Gabriel, who tells her she will be the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God. She responds to God’s invitation with a prayer of acceptance: “Yes. Let it be done just as you say.”

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

Let It Be Done



When he discovers that Mary is pregnant and she tells him of God's plan, Joseph kneels down, turns his gaze to heaven, and sees the star. He prays to God for guidance. As they journey to Bethlehem and look for a room in an inn, Joseph continually turns to God in prayer.

Bo had dreams and did all he could to realize those dreams. He gives up his dreams in order to save Mary and her baby. When she is threatened, he prays to God that she be kept safe.

Mary, Joseph, and Bo all pray to God, but in their own ways. There is no wrong way to pray. After his birth, the shepherds, Wise Men, the animals, and Bo worship Jesus the Baby King. They kneel and bow their heads in respectful awe of the Baby King's presence.

HOW WE PRAY

In the Catholic faith, we pray both communally and personally. We pray in communion with others primarily in the Mass, but also when we share in prayers such as the Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, and intercessory prayer. We pray personally whenever we turn our hearts to God, whether it be in formal prayer like the Our Father or in simple conversation with God.

In our daily lives we have many conversations with family, friends and others in the community. Our conversations can vary from being very informal, such as hanging out with friends, to a formal conversation with a professional such as a doctor, teacher or judge. Different situations call for different actions, speech, and body language. Many times through our life's journey we turn to prayer: when we are broken and hurting, facing uncertain or challenging times, being repentant for something we have done, or feeling grateful for something we have received.

There are different postures for prayer. Sometimes we stand. Sometimes we kneel. Sometimes we sit. Sometimes we hold our hands up to heaven or fold them near our hearts. We can even walk and pray. We bow our heads. We hold hands with others when we pray with them.

In the Liturgical cycle, days are identified by different liturgical colors, allowing us to pray with certain purpose, i.e. a Church season or for a particular saint or martyr.

LEARNING TO PRAY

Bo watched Mary kneel in prayer and followed her example when he prayed to God. Praying in public, then, helps us to witness the faithful turning to God in various situations. It could be as simple as saying grace together when eating in a restaurant. Each week as we gather in community at Sunday liturgy, bringing our sorrows and joys, we pray with one voice to God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, with our minds, hearts and bodies.



SHARING FAITH

Using the examples of Mary, Joseph, and Bo, reflect on your own experience of prayer.

Parents & Adult Leaders: You may want to reflect on the questions before talking with your children. You may encourage journaling before or after your conversation for further reflection.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

Families/Communities Reflect, Journal & Discuss

PARENT REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

REFLECT ON YOUR PRAYER LIFE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:

- Your children learn how to pray from your example. In what ways do you demonstrate prayer in your life?
- How would you describe your relationship with God? Do you feel close to God, far away, or sometimes close and sometimes far away?

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT HIS OR HER PRAYER

GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED:

- Who taught you to pray? How does that person's example still influence your own prayer?
- What is your favorite way to pray?
- Why do you like that prayer or way to pray?
- Think of a time when you were praying for a certain situation. Did you pray a memorized prayer, like the Our Father, or did you simply speak to God from your heart?

WHY DO WE PRAY?

- When you want help with something, how do you ask for it? To whom do you go for help?
- Recall a time when you put all your trust in God. What happened?

HOW DO WE PRAY?

REFLECT ON HOW YOU PRAY IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS:

- What is your posture in these situations? What words do you use?
 - How do you praise God?
 - How do you pray when you are happy or thankful?
 - How do you pray when you are sad or worried?
 - How do you pray when you want something for someone else?
 - How do you ask God for help?
- What new insights do you have regarding how you pray? How can you pray more as a family?
- How can you improve your prayer life?
- Who can you pray for this week?





PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

Our children learn how to pray from our example and practice. Make a commitment to saturate your home and lives with prayer. While it may feel uncomfortable at first, as your family practices praying together, it will become more comfortable and will actually be something you all look forward to doing together.

EXPLORE PRAYER THIS CHRISTMAS

- Create a prayer habit. Give thanks to God before and after meals. Pray a bedtime prayer as you tuck in for the night.
- Practice praying spontaneously. Invite family members to just speak from their hearts.
- As the members of your family experience struggles and pain, pray out loud to God together for peace and healing. Notice the different postures and types of prayer that are used in the Sunday liturgy. Throughout the week, use those same postures in your personal prayer.
- Spend time after Mass exploring the church. What do you see that might help people to pray?
- Spend time this week praying for someone who may be struggling with a difficult situation or someone who is facing uncertainty.
- Each day of the season of Advent, pray Mary's Magnificat and reflect on how God has acted in your life:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever."



LAS POSADAS

And she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ~ LUKE 2:7

CELEBRATE THE JOURNEY

BE CREATIVE

NOTE TO LEADERS AND PARENTS

This lesson may be adapted for use with various groups. There are four sections: **PRAYER, LEARN, REFLECT, ACT**. You may rearrange components of the sections to fit your family's/group's needs. Be creative and have fun with the prayers, reflections, and activities as you strengthen the relationships in your family/community!



PRAYER FOR THE JOURNEY

Pray give us lodging, dear sir,
in the name of heaven.
All day since morning
to travel we've given.
Mary, my wife, is expecting a child.
She must have shelter tonight.
Let us in, let us in!

Please show us pity,
your heart cannot be so hard.

Look at poor Mary,
so worn and so tired.
We are most poor,
but I'll pay what I can.
God will reward you, good man.
Let us in, let us in!

Enter, enter, holy pilgrims, holy pilgrims. Welcome to my humble home.
Though 'tis little I can offer,
all I have please call your own.

- Verses from *Las Posadas*

LAS POSADAS OVERVIEW

Las Posadas, "The Inns/Lodgings," is a tradition in many Spanish-speaking countries. Usually celebrated as a novena during the nine days leading up to Christmas, people gather to re-enact Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem and seeking a room.



THE JOURNEY OF *LAS POSADAS*

JOURNEY IN *THE STAR*

THE STAR is about a journey. Mary and Joseph journey from Bethlehem to Nazareth. Bo, Dave, and Ruth follow Mary and Joseph, protecting them from The Hunter and the dogs. The camels and the Wise Men follow the star to Jerusalem, then Bethlehem.

On their journeys, the characters experience difficulties and encounter moments of God's grace. They grow in their trust of God, especially in their struggles.

The tradition of *Las Posadas* reminds us that we can trust God in our journey through life. God is always with us, guiding us and watching over us, just as God watched over Mary and Joseph on their journey.

Just as God watched over Mary and Joseph, so too God watches over us. We are gifted with moments to recognize God's presence through unexpected gestures of goodness, in ways that seem unimaginable prior to our experience of them. This is God's grace.

THE TRADITION OF LAS POSADAS

Luke 2:7 is the only Scripture reference to there being no room in the inn. Based on this brief reference, communities who celebrate *Las Posadas* re-enact Joseph's and Mary's search for a room in Bethlehem. As the community travels with the Holy Couple, they sing songs. There are several stops along the way, and at each stop the "innkeepers" turn away the Holy Couple. At the end of *Las Posadas*, Mary and Joseph are welcomed to stay at the final "inn." Everyone enters with them to celebrate with singing, eating tamales, and drinking a warm drink thickened with corn masa called champurrado.

IDEAS FOR DOING LAS POSADAS

If you already live in a community where *Las Posadas* is celebrated, just go! It is a prayerful, joy-filled, fun celebration. Invite friends to go with you. Hospitality is a key ingredient of *Las Posadas*, so this is a wonderful opportunity to share faith with others.

If you are not near a parish community that does *Las Posadas*, create your own. Remember to be respectful of cultural expectations. If you don't have time to plan a parish or larger neighborhood event, consider these suggestions for your family or close neighbors:

- Create a "Creche Course." Gather a group of parishioners, friends, and/or family. Go to churches in your area and visit their Creche/Nativity Scene. At the churches, light a candle, say a prayer together, perhaps sing Advent hymns. Then go home to share food and celebrate being welcomed to the inn.
- *Las Posadas* is a prayerful version of a progressive party. Plan a *Las Posadas* with other families. At each house, share some refreshments, pray one decade of the Joyful Mysteries, sing a hymn together, and/or incorporate some other prayer activity before going to the next house. Invite your pastor or parish deacon to bless each home's Nativity Scene or Advent wreath. Have a party at the last house with people bringing food for a potluck celebration.



SHARING FAITH

As you experience *Las Posadas*, take time to reflect on how you connect with Mary's and Joseph's story.

Parents & Adult Leaders: You may want to reflect on the questions before talking with your children. You may encourage journaling before or after your conversation for further reflection.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

Families/Communities Reflect, Journal & Discuss

PARENT REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

REFLECT ON YOUR OWN STORY:

- What do you know about your own birth? What can you share with your children about their own births?
- Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem. What are the journeys that have defined your life and your family's history? Were there (im)migrations, pilgrimages, or other journeys important to you?

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK WITH YOU

SHARE IN CONVERSATION:

- How did God show faithfulness to the various characters in **THE STAR** through their journeys? How has God been present to you, faithful to you?
- Consider what it might feel like to not have a home or shelter. How does this help you understand what the Holy Family experienced as they left their home in Nazareth, stayed in a stable in Bethlehem, and fled to Egypt?
- Recall a time when you searched for something? How did you feel when you couldn't find it? How did you feel when you finally found what you were looking for?
- How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when they were finally able to sit down in the stable after their long journey?
- Have you been with family or friends in the delivery room or visited them with their newborn? Imagine being in the stable with Mary and Joseph on or just after Jesus was born.



PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

"They will celebrate and remember the grace of this moment."

- Deborah the Camel

In the midst of all the holiday preparations, it is good to remember the reason for all the fuss. At the end of **THE STAR**, Deborah the Camel reminds us of what lies at the root of it all. The whole purpose of Christmas is to remember and celebrate God's grace experienced in that stable in Bethlehem and how God's grace flows into this moment of time in which we live.

EXPLORE THE GRACE OF THE SEASON

- Pray in ways that nurture your adult faith, and pray with your kids in ways that will help them develop a strong relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Read the Christmas Story from a Bible (Luke 2) or story book. As you read the story, invite family members to imagine themselves in the scene, to become one of the characters. Perhaps they become Mary or Joseph, the shepherds, the Wise men, the innkeeper, or maybe one of the animals. After reading the story, ask family members to share their perspective of what happened. Encourage them to consider the scene with their senses: What did they see? hear? smell? feel? What did this experience mean to them?
- Like Lent, Advent is a time when we can do something special to grow in relationship with God. Perhaps you could start a prayer journal as a way of focusing on the grace-filled moments you encounter. What songs, people, Scriptures or other things put you in touch with the joy, hope, and expectation of Advent?
- So many feasts...so little time! The celebration of *Las Posadas* leads up to Christmas Day. There are many feast days to celebrate during the Advent and Christmas seasons. These feast days offer opportunities to experience cultural traditions, as well as to create your own. Journey through the seasons by celebrating some of these feast days:

End of the Season of Ordinary Time (prior to Advent)

- **Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe:** The final Sunday of the Liturgical Year. Make your New Year's resolutions now, rather than waiting for the civic calendar. How will you welcome Jesus more fully into your life through the next Liturgical Year?
- **Thanksgiving:** This national holiday is a wonderful time to experience hospitality. If you have people come to your house, how do you welcome them in and make them feel at home? If you travel to someone else's house, how are you welcomed in and made to feel at home?

Advent

- **On the four Sundays of Advent**, lighting the Advent wreath is a wonderful experience of shared prayer. Invite family members to take turns saying the prayers and lighting the candles of the wreath. What other traditions of prayer do you share in your household through Advent?
- **St. Nicholas, Dec. 6:** Because of his giving and care for the poor and children, St. Nicholas of Myra (also known as St. Nicholas of Bari and St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker) is the real-life basis for Santa Claus. Put out your shoes on the night of Dec. 5 for St. Nicholas to give you some goodies on his feast day.
- **The Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8:** This Solemnity celebrates Joachim's and Anna's conception of their daughter, Mary, who, by the grace of God, was conceived without Original Sin.
- **St. Juan Diego, Dec. 9:** Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to St. Juan Diego on Mount Tepeyac in Mexico.
- **Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12:** The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531.
- **St. Lucy, Dec. 13:** Many cultures remember this martyr with various celebrations, including lighting candles.
- **The O Antiphons:** Recite the O Antiphon for each day leading up to Christmas with your recitation of the Magnificat. The O Antiphons begin on December 17 with the first O Antiphon, O Wisdom and ends on December 23 with O Emmanuel.

The Season of Christmas

- **Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Dec. 24 and 25:** Celebrate the Birth of Jesus, our God and King, with family traditions.
- **The Octave of Christmas, Dec. 25-Jan. 1:** An "octave" is the 8-day period of continued celebration after a major Christian feast.
- **St. Stephen, Dec. 26:** Mentioned in the song "Good King Wenceslas," St. Stephen's Day can be a great time to do something special to remember that the joy of Christmas is just beginning.
- **The Holy Innocents, Dec. 28:** On this feast commemorating the children killed at the order of Herod, pray for little ones around the world who suffer and die due to violence and hatred.
- **The Holy Family**, celebrated on the Sunday between Christmas (Dec. 25) and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (Jan. 1). Do something special as a family.
- **Mary, Mother of God, Jan 1:** We begin the civic calendar year by dedicating our lives to Mary, the Mother of God. (This day also commemorates Jesus' circumcision on the eighth day after his birth, according to the Law of Moses.)
- **Epiphany, Jan. 6** (celebrated on the Sunday between Jan. 2 and Jan. 8 in dioceses in the U.S.): We celebrate the Wise Men's visit with the Baby King. Time to let those Wise Men join the Nativity Scene.
- **Baptism of the Lord**, celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany, unless Epiphany is on Jan. 7 or 8, then it is the day after: This feast ends the Liturgical Season of Christmas. Remember your own Baptism and re-commit your household to living your Christian faith.



VOCATIONS

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;
there are different forms of service but the same Lord... ~ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-5*

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

BE CREATIVE

NOTE TO LEADERS AND PARENTS

This lesson may be adapted for use with various groups. There are four sections: **PRAYER, LEARN, REFLECT, ACT**. You may rearrange components of the sections to fit your family's/group's needs. Be creative and have fun with the prayers, reflections, and activities as you strengthen the relationships in your family/community!



PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Hail Mary, full of grace,
we call you blessed among us.
Hail Mary, Mother of God,
when asked by the angel
to bring forth the Christ Child,
you responded with faith.
You allowed the Spirit of God
to give you courage, strength
and perseverance to say,
“Let it be done unto me.”

Be with us as we discern our vocation. Guide us in hearing your Son’s voice. Help us answer the call to be Children of God. Help us discern how God wants us to use the gifts we have been given. Help us say yes to all that God Calls us to.

May our vocation help to make You real in our world today. Amen

VOCATION OVERVIEW

The word “vocation” comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning “to call.” In the document *Lumen Gentium*, we are reminded of the universal call to holiness in the Church. This call to holiness is for the fullness of Christian life. “Be holy, as your heavenly Father is holy.” (Matthew 5:48) This holiness is accomplished when we wholeheartedly live out the will of God.



EXPLORE VOCATION

VOCATION IN SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures reveal to us how much God loves us and desires us to be in communion with Him so that we may live out our vocation.

- **Genesis 1:27-31** tells us that God has created each human person in God’s image and likeness and that this creation is very good.
- **Psalms 139** prayerfully reminds us that God has created us out of God’s great love. God will, therefore, guide us and keep us close to God.
- **Isaiah 49** reminds us that even before we were born God called us and chose us for a specific plan.
- **Matthew 5** reminds us that we are called to be light for the world.

Throughout his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul writes that all the faithful make up the Body of Christ, so we all need to do our part to establish the fullness of God's plan.

These Scriptures point to the reality that God made us in God's image for a very specific purpose. We have been made for greatness, to be an example of God's love for the world. God calls each of us to live according to God's will for us, to live out the vocation for which God created us.

LIVING OUT VOCATIONS

There are various ways to live one's vocation. God calls some people to married life, some to the ordained priesthood and others to the consecrated religious life. God gives each person specific gifts and talents through the Holy Spirit at Baptism. Throughout life, we discern how to use our gifts and talents to live according to God's will, to follow our vocation.

VOCATION AND *THE STAR*

In **THE STAR**, we see many examples of discernment and living out one's vocation. Each of the main characters wrestles with what God calls them to do. As Mary, Joseph, Bo, Dave, and Ruth face situations, they freely choose how to respond to God's will.

God loves us so much that God allows us to freely choose how to live, to follow or not follow God. No matter our choices, God continues to love us unconditionally. When we discern and freely choose to live according to God's will, to live our vocation, we experience great joy and freedom.

Mary is a young Jewish woman in Nazareth. She is betrothed (engaged) to Joseph, a direct descendent of David. An angel appears to Mary and invites her to be the mother of God's Son. She freely accepted God's invitation.

Mary didn't know what would happen to her as a result of her "Yes," but she trusted that God would give her the strength, wisdom, and courage to live this vocation.

Bo has great dreams for his life. He desperately wants to join the Royal Caravan, to be part of something big and important. He does everything he can to escape his life as a mill donkey in order to live his dream to carry a king. As he meets Mary and follows her on her journey, he discovers that his dreams may need to change.

Bo sacrifices his dreams of joining the Royal Caravan to save Mary. His choices ultimately lead him to Bethlehem, carrying Mary to the stable. He then realizes that he has fulfilled his vocation of carrying The King.

Ruth is convinced that she must follow the star. She knows deep down there is something important about this sign in the sky. It is not insignificant that she leaves her flock to do this thing (follow the star) that she feels called to do. After all, sheep have a strong instinct to follow the group and do not often make "decisions" on their own. But Ruth leaves her flock to follow her vocation. She meets Bo on her journey and pauses in her mission to get him safely down the mountain. Once Bo is safe, Ruth states, "Well, I guess I'll go back to following the Star!"

Ruth was focused on her mission to follow the star, but she was open to opportunities to help others, like Bo and Mary, along her journey. Because she was focused on her mission, she was able to keep Bo focused on his vocation to help Mary. And in the end, she is rewarded for her fidelity and charity and given a great sign from God to share the Good News.

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

Ruth to the Rescue



SHARING FAITH

Take some time to think about your own vocation. Consider how God is calling you to live God's will for your life.

Parents & Adult Leaders: You may want to reflect on the questions before talking with your children. You may encourage journaling before or after your conversation for further reflection.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

Families/Communities Reflect, Journal & Discuss

PARENT REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

REFLECT ON YOUR OWN STORY:

Think about God's will for your life. How have you responded to God's love for you and God's desire for you to be happy? How have you discerned how to follow God's will? In what ways do you consider who you are and what you do as a vocation, living in response to God's will?

In the Rite of Baptism, parents are given a ministry and a responsibility. As they sign their child with the Sign of the Cross, proclaim the Profession of Faith, and invite the priest to immerse their child in the waters of Baptism and anoint their child with the Sacred Chrism Oil, they commit themselves to living their vocation as Christian parents. After Baptism, they live their vocation by raising their child to know, love, and serve God. Reflect on your child's baptism and your vocation as a Christian parent. How are you helping your child to grow in relationship with God and to realize his or her own vocation?

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT VOCATION

GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED:

- What things do you enjoy doing? What things are difficult for you?

DISCUSS VOCATION IN *THE STAR*

- When the angel appeared to Mary, do you think she was scared? How did she respond to the angel's invitation? Share a time when you were scared to do something. Did you ask God to help you overcome your fear? What happened?
- Bo really wanted to be part of the Royal Caravan. Have you ever wanted something so much that you were willing to do almost anything to get it? If you got it, was it as good as you expected? If not, were you disappointed? How is getting something or not getting something part of following God's will?

ENCOURAGING VOCATION DISCERNMENT

REFLECT ON VOCATION DISCERNMENT:

- How will you know what to choose to do as an adult?
- Do you imagine yourself getting married? What about being a priest or a religious sister or brother?
- What do you think God wants of you?





PUT FAITH INTO ACTION

Use some of the following suggestions to explore and celebrate vocations. Continue discussing following God's will throughout the year.

EXPLORE VOCATIONS

- Tell your child about his or her Baptism. Why did you choose his or her name? Why did you choose his or her godparents? Look at pictures and the symbols of his/her Baptism: the candle, baptismal gown, Baptism certificate. Accept Pope Francis' invitation for every Catholic to celebrate the anniversary of Baptism. Mark your calendar and make plans to have a celebration on each family member's Baptism day.
- Create a "Gifts Box" for each family member. Decorate a small box for each person. Encourage family members to give one another symbols or written notes of the gifts they see in one another. As you begin, brainstorm a list of possible gifts, such as teaching, serving, encouraging, giving, healing, leadership, making peace, mercy, joy, wisdom, courage, faithfulness, love, etc.
- On New Year's Day, invite each family member to identify a Saint to look to as an example of lived faith throughout the year. At the evening meal or bedtime each night through the year, pray for each person's Saints' intercession to help them follow God's will for their lives. Celebrate each Saint's feast day and give thanks to God for their witness.
- Obtain a list of seminarians and men and women in formation for religious life. Write to them and let them know you are praying for them to be filled with God's Spirit of strength, courage, and faith as they explore how they will live their vocation.
- Invite your parish priest to dinner and ask him to share his story of becoming a priest.
- Talk to your children about your marriage. Tell them about your courtship and decision to get married. Look through your wedding pictures and share stories of that day. Talk about how you view your marriage as a vocation and how you live that vocation.
- Cut out a paper star for each person. Invite each person to write their name on the star and place it under the tree, by a manger, or on a prayer table (depending on your setting). Then pray: *God we give you the gift of ourselves this Christmas season. Help us this year to discover our gifts so that we may shine like the star and point others to you. Amen.*

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