

Gather Around

THE MANGER



Stories and Activities for Advent



This carol is almost 900 years old! The writer imagines what the first Christmas must have been like. In a humble place where animals were kept, baby Jesus lay in a manger—an animal’s feeding dish. The stable may have been made of stone instead of wood. The animals around him may have been goats and chickens instead of cows and sheep. We don’t know!

The Gift of the Animals

Jesus, our brother, kind and good,
Was humbly born in a stable rude.
And the friendly beasts around him stood:
Jesus, our brother, kind and good.

“I,” said the donkey, shaggy and brown.
“I carried His mother up hill and down;
I carried her safely to Bethlehem town.”
“I,” said the donkey, shaggy and brown.

“I,” said the cow, all white and red.
“I gave Him my manger for his bed;
I gave Him my hay to pillow his head.”
“I,” said the cow, all white and red.

“I,” said the sheep, with curly horn.
“I gave my wool for his blanket warm;
He wore my coat on Christmas morn.”
“I,” said the sheep, with curly horn.

“I,” said the dove, from the rafters high.
“I cooed him to sleep that He should not cry;
We cooed Him to sleep, my mate and I.”
“I,” said the dove, from the rafters high.

Thus all the beasts by some good spell,
In the stable dark were glad to tell,
Of the gifts they gave Emmanuel,
The gifts they gave Emmanuel.

But we *do* know that the baby Jesus was our brother, “kind and good,” just as the song says. We do know that the baby Jesus was God himself, come to the world he had made. We do know that God loves all that he has made, including all the animals that were there at his birth.

Long ago, to honor that birth, St. Francis of Assisi asked the owner of a farm to let him use his stable with animals to show the Christmas story. This was the first Christmas “crèche” or crib. In this booklet, we’ll tell you how to make your own crèche, day by day, to show your family the Christmas story in a whole new way.



How to Make a Crèche

People make Christmas crèches from many kinds of materials: beautifully carved wood, pipe cleaners wrapped with yarn or simply drawn pictures. Use whatever you like to make your own crèche! In this booklet, we’ll tell you two easy ways to make a crèche: by using cornstarch clay or by decorating construction paper cones.

Cornstarch Clay

Ask an adult to help mix up this great clay. When you shape a figure from it, just leave it out in the air for a few days to dry. When your clay figure is dry, you can decorate it with markers or paint it.

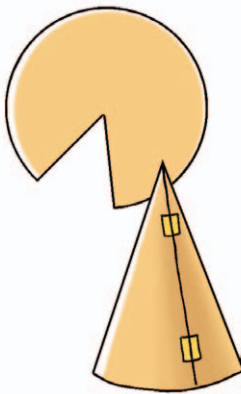
Making Clay

- Mix 1 cup corn starch, 2 cups baking soda and 1-1/4 cups water in a saucepan.
- Stir and cook the clay over medium heat until it resembles mashed potatoes. Keep your hands and wrists covered in thick kitchen gloves, so the bubbling clay doesn't burn your skin!
- Let the clay cool down. When it's cool, knead it until it's smooth. (Do you know how to knead dough? Just fold it and push it and turn it, over and over, until it's smooth.)
- You can store any clay you haven't used in an airtight plastic container.



Construction Paper Cones

- Find something round to use as a pattern: a plate that's about 7" or 8" wide is a great size and shape!
- Put the plate on a piece of colored construction paper. Trace around it to make a circle. Cut out the circle. Cut a wedge out, just as if you were cutting out a piece of pizza!



- Now roll the rest of the "pizza" up into a cone shape. Use tape to keep it closed.

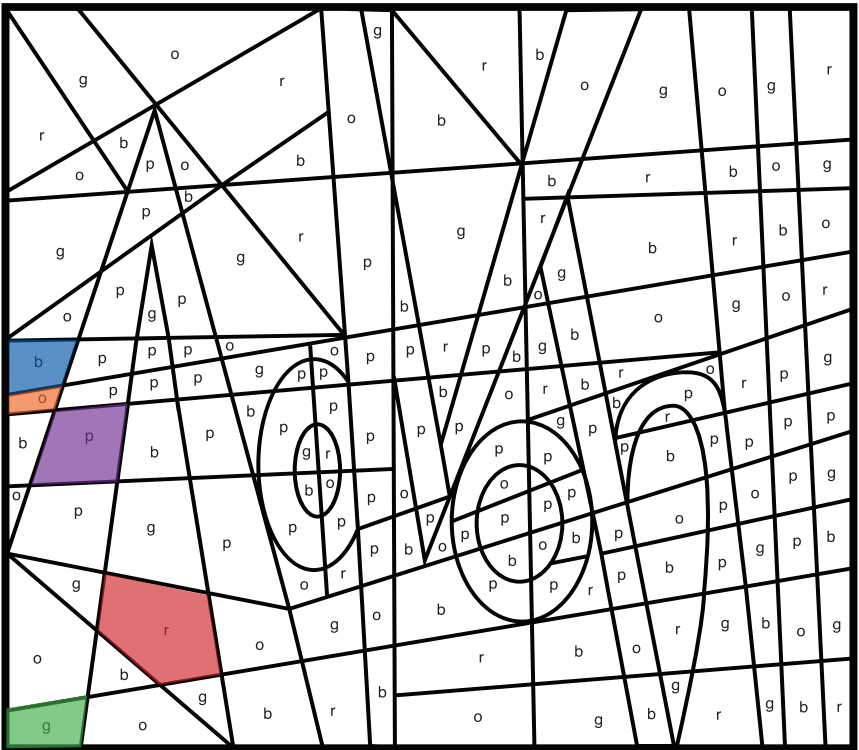
For example, you could use a blue piece of construction paper to make a cone for Mary. Use a tan or brown piece of construction paper to cut out an oval for her face. You can add details to Mary with a fine point marker.

December 1

You are clothed with majesty and glory.

–Psalm 104:1

The Color of Advent. What's the color of Advent? It's the color of kings. In the time of Jesus, ordinary people weren't even allowed to wear this color! It's the color of rich gifts. Jesus is the richest gift of God to God's People.



What's the color of Advent? In the picture above, color each space according to this code and see! When you see the word *Advent*, you'll see its color, too!

r-red
b-blue
o-orange
g-green
p-purple

December 2

They clothed Daniel in purple, with a gold collar.

—Daniel 5:29

Purple Place. Now that you know that the purple of kings is the color of Advent, find **purple** things to put around the manger. With your friends or family, play “I Spy Advent!” Start by looking around the room for something colored **purple**: a toy, a book, a piece of cloth—anything! Pick one and say aloud, “I spy Advent!” Your friends and family start naming anything **purple** that they see. When they’ve guessed your **purple** thing, ask one of them to choose the next Advent thing.

Collect all the purple items found in a basket.

Talk it over: would one or more of these look good with the manger? How about a purple toy offered to Jesus? How about a purple cloth under the manger?



December 3

Truly the Lord is in this spot! –Genesis 28:16

House of God. We read the Bible, the word of God, to hear stories about God with us. The first stories were written in a language called Hebrew. Knowing a few words of Hebrew can give you clues about God!

The story about Jesus' birth in a stable reminds us of the words "house of God." Where is the house of God in the Christmas story? Jesus! Jesus is the house of God on earth.

We make a stable to show where he was born, but Jesus was the house of God when Mary gave birth to him, when Joseph rocked him, and when his friends asked him to come out and play!

The Hebrew words *beth* and *lehem* mean "house" and "bread." Jesus, *the house of God*, was born in Bethlehem, *the house of bread*. **Use these clues to fill in the crossword puzzle.**

- | | | | |
|---------------|---|-------------|--|
| Across | 1. Where Jesus was born. | Down | 2. In Hebrew, Bethlehem means the "___ of bread." |
| | 5. The baby born to Mary. | | 3. The language that has the words beth and lehem is called ___. |
| | 6. In Hebrew, this word means "house." | | 4. Mary is the ___ of Jesus. |
| | 7. In Hebrew, this word means "bread." | | |
| | 8. The Bible is also called "the ___ of God." | | |



Answer: Across: 1 Bethlehem, 5 Jesus, 6 beth, 7 lehem, 8 Word.
Down: 2 house, 3 Hebrew, 4 Mother.

December 4

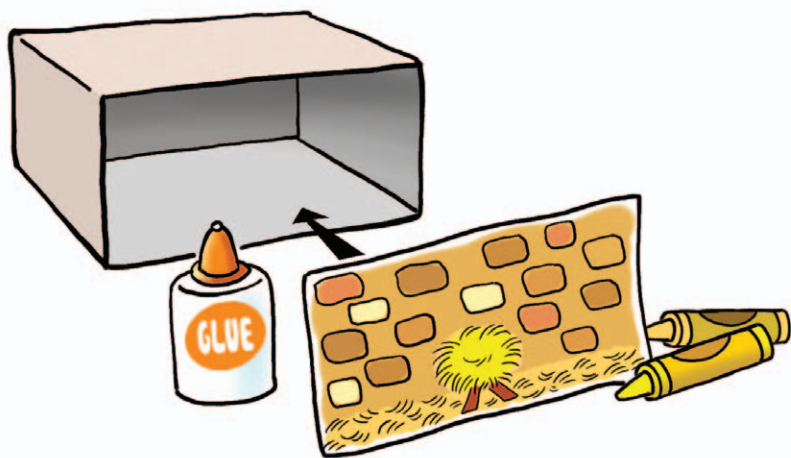
What kind of house can you build for me?

—Isaiah 66:1

Make the Stable. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, God teases us a little. “Heaven is my throne,” he says. “The whole earth is like a stool I can put my feet on. What kind of house can you build for me?”

Then God surprises us by making a house among us! He sends Jesus to be the house of God forever.

Today, make a stable for your crèche scene. This is where Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and all the animals will gather. Just remember: the real house of God in your scene is Jesus himself, even though we cannot see him!



To make a crèche:

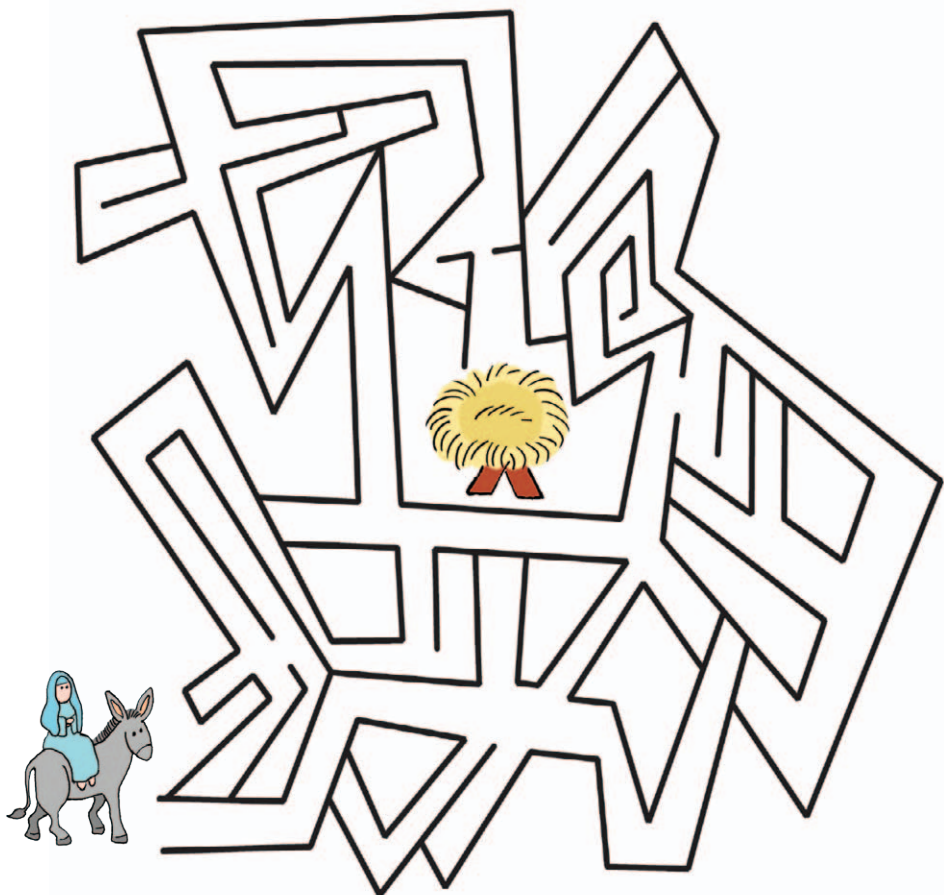
- Start with a shoebox.
- Cut a piece of tan paper to fit on the inside of the shoebox.
- On the piece of paper, draw the inside of Jesus' stable. Remember: it was where the animals lived.
- No one knows what that stable really looked like, so you can make it look any way you like!

December 5

“I,” said the donkey, all shaggy and brown, “I carried his mother up hill and down.” –Old English Carol

The Donkey's Way. We don't know if Mary really rode on a donkey to Bethlehem, but we hope she did! When a woman is ready to have a baby, a gentle donkey to sit on can make her journey a little easier.

Help this donkey find the way to the place where Jesus will be born.



December 6

See, your king shall come to you!

–Zechariah 9:9

The Donkey's Message. In the Bible, writers use donkeys to teach God's People about God and God's ways. These writers promise: God's own king will come in peace one day. He will ride on a donkey to come to God's People. When Jesus grows up, he rides a donkey into the great city Jerusalem. "Hosanna!" God's People cry out. "Save us now!" They see Jesus as their king. They see him come in peace, riding on a donkey.

Use the clues below to find out what the people sang to him. (*Hint:* we sing these words to Jesus at the Mass!)



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the  of David.



+ ed is he



HOO

comes



the

hello, my
is Maria.

of the Lord.

December 7

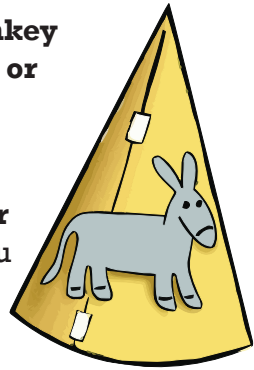
Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
 –Galatians 6:2



Make the Donkey. Donkeys help us. They carry heavy things. They travel on hard journeys. Who helps you do hard things? Who can you count on to go with you, wherever you go?

Today you can make a donkey for your crèche using clay or paper.

If you choose to use paper cones for your crèche, you can do the donkey in two different ways:



- Glue parts for the donkey right onto the cone: a donkey face, donkey legs, a donkey tail.
- You can also color a donkey onto a piece of paper. Cut out the donkey, and glue it onto a paper cone.



Clay is easy to use to make people or animals.

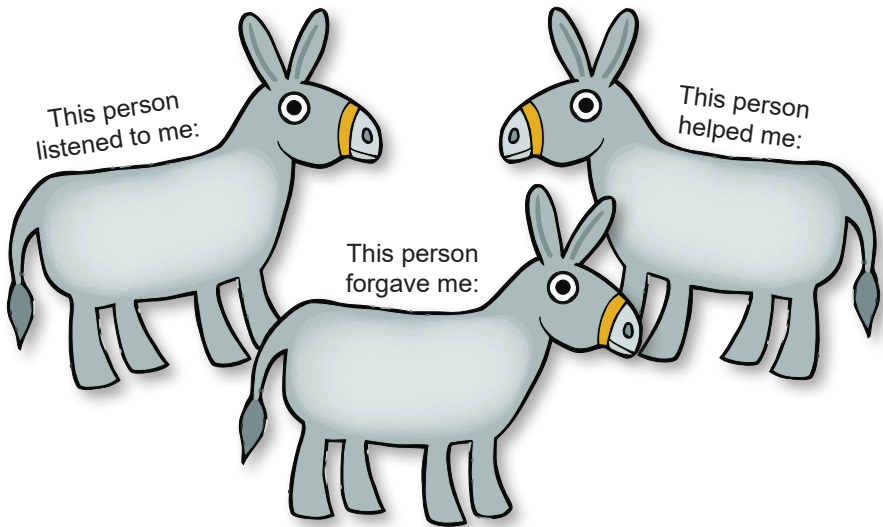


December 8

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.
—Romans 10:15

Carrying Jesus. Like the donkey, we can “carry” Jesus to others. When we listen to someone who needs us to listen—we carry Jesus to them. When we help someone who needs us to help—we carry Jesus to them. When we forgive someone who needs us to forgive—we carry Jesus to them.

Who carries Jesus to you? Look for these people in your own life this week! Write their names on each donkey.

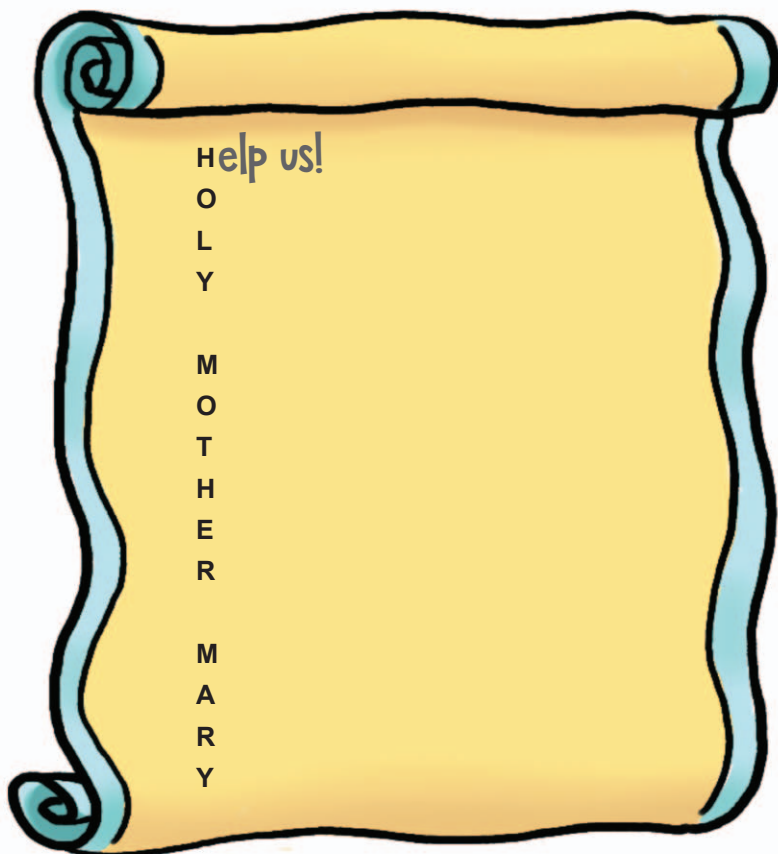


December 9

Most blessed are you among women! –Luke 1:42

Make Mary, our Mother. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the first person to love him and stay close to him. Years later, when he died, she stayed close to him. That's why we try to stay close to Mary, too! She teaches us how to stay close to Jesus. Today, use clay or paper to make a figure of Mary for the crèche. Some people like to show Mary dressed in blue or rose. How will you make Mary look?

Can you write a poem to Mary? Next to each letter below, write something you want to say to our mother Mary. (We filled in one word to get you started.)



December 10

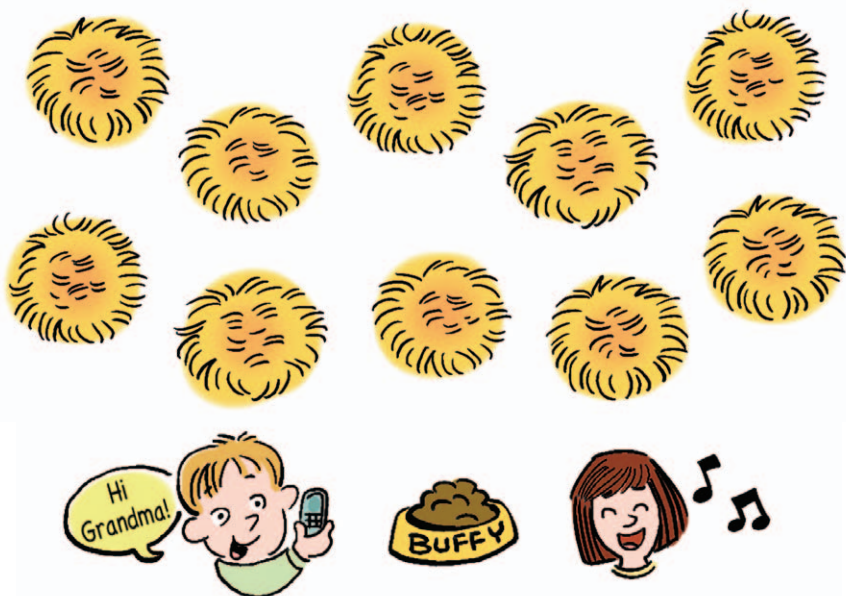
“I,” said the cow, “all white and red.”

“I gave him my manger for his bed.” –Old English Carol

A Baby’s Bed. Today use paper or clay to make a cow and a manger. The Bible says that Joseph and Mary put Jesus into a manger for a bed. A manger is an animal’s feeding dish. If a cow was there, then the manger would have held a lot of hay.

In Austria, families put out a manger during Advent to play a family game. Each time a family member does something kind in secret for another, they put a handful of hay into the manger. By Christmas, the manger should be filled with good hay!

You can play your own version of this Austrian game. **For each secret kindness you do this Advent, circle one of the handfuls of hay below.** Can you “fill the manger” by Christmas? We’ve given you some ideas of kind things to do, but use your own ideas, too.



December 11

Long for pure spiritual milk so that through it you may grow into salvation. –1 Peter 2:2

Drink Your Milk! The Letter of Peter tells Christians that they need to “drink their milk.” Peter means that Christians should avoid doing these kinds of bad things:



- malice (being mean)
- deceit (lying)
- insincerity (being fake to people)
- slander (gossiping)

Instead, says, Peter, we should long for “pure spiritual milk.” Peter says that it will help us grow. No, our bodies won’t get bigger from *spiritual milk*! We’ll grow in a whole

new way. We’ll be nicer, more truthful, and the kind of person other people can trust.

How do we drink *this* kind of milk? Jesus tells us the secret. Unscramble it below. (Hint: Look at Luke 10:27 for help!)

oYu hlsal vole hte roLd oury dGo
nad yrou hnbergoī sa eofysurl.

You

December 12

Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid. –Matthew 1:20

Make the Man Chosen by God. God asked Mary to be the mother of Jesus. Then God asked a man to take care of Jesus, God's own son. God wanted a man who would be kind to Jesus. God wanted a man who would care for Mary and Jesus his whole life.

Do you know the name of the man God asked? You can find the six letters of his name in the clues below. (The letters of his name are **extra large**.) Then unscramble the six letters to find the name of the man. Once you know his name, you can make his figure for the crèche from clay or paper.

Read the clues to learn what this great man was like. In fact, this is what all great parents are like!

This man was **S**TRONG. God could count on him to do even the hard things parents do.

This man was **L**OVING. That means his family knew he would do his best for them.

This man was **h**ARD-WORKING. God didn't ask a rich man, but a hard-working carpenter.

This man was **J**UST. That means he tried to be fair and do what was right.

This man was **pati**ENT. He could travel long, hard roads to care for God's family.

This man was **h**OPeFul. He trusted God to care for God's People.

December 13

*"I," said the sheep, with the curly horn
"I gave him my wool to keep him warm."*

—Old English Carol

Make the Sheep. Sometimes we think of love as something that warms us. In the carol, the gift of the sheep is the gift of warmth: love.

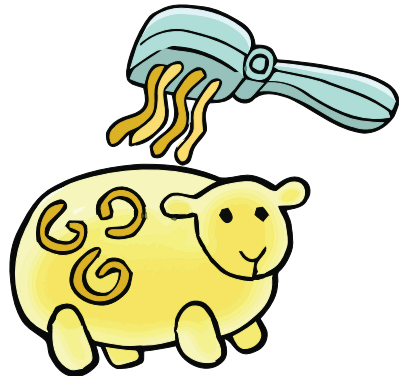


Today you can use cotton balls or clay to make one or more sheep for your crèche.

If you are using cotton balls, you can use paper to draw the face then glue on the sheep.

If you are using clay, you can make sheep wool in two different ways.

1. Use the tines of a fork to draw curvy lines on your sheep, suggesting wool.
2. Use a garlic press to squeeze bits of clay into curly lines of wool. Press these onto your sheep.



December 14

We are God's people, the flock he shepherds. –Psalm 100:3

Make a Song. Sheep were important animals in the days of the Bible. A sheep gave families wool to keep them warm, and even milk for them to drink. Families took good care of their sheep.



That's why some writers of the Bible said that God's people were like sheep. They didn't mean that God's people have wool! They didn't mean that God's people would give milk!

They meant that God loves God's People. God takes good care of God's People. One psalm (that means song) says, "We are God's well-tended flock!" A flock is many sheep together, just as God's People are many people together. "Well-tended" means "well-cared for." God takes good care of us.

If you wrote a song to God, what could you write about the way God cares for us? Don't try to make these four lines rhyme or come out the same length. Just finish them with your own words!

God cares for us when _____

God cares for us by _____

God cares for us who _____

God cares for us in _____



December 15

He calls his own sheep by name. –John 10:3

Hear His Voice. One amazing thing about sheep is how they listen. If there's a large crowd of mother sheep and baby lambs, the mother sheep listen to the baby's bleats. Then they go right to their own lambs. They know the baby's voice.

Jesus knew that sheep know the voice of their shepherd, too. He said, "My sheep know my voice. They come to me. They follow me." When we pray, we sometimes imagine how Jesus speaks to each one of us.

Try this:

- Imagine seeing Jesus right after school.
- You take Jesus to your favorite after-school place.
- As you walk together, Jesus says, "What do you want to say to me?"
- What do you say to Jesus?
- What could Jesus say to you?



Write your answers below.

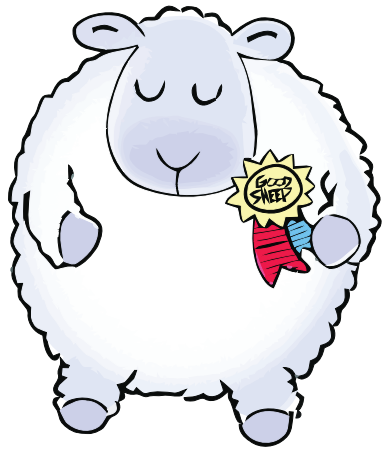
December 16

He will place the sheep on his right. —*Matthew 25:33*

Good Sheep. Once Jesus talked out loud about what he meant by “being good.” He didn’t say: “Always do what you’re told.” “Get the best grades in class.” “Dress nicer than everyone else.”

Instead Jesus said, “Feed the hungry.” “Take care of sick people.” “Give clothes to those who don’t have them.” “Open your homes to those who need them.”

Do you know people who do this work that Jesus calls good? Write their names on the good sheep below and tell what good work they do. If you need help, ask your family what they think!

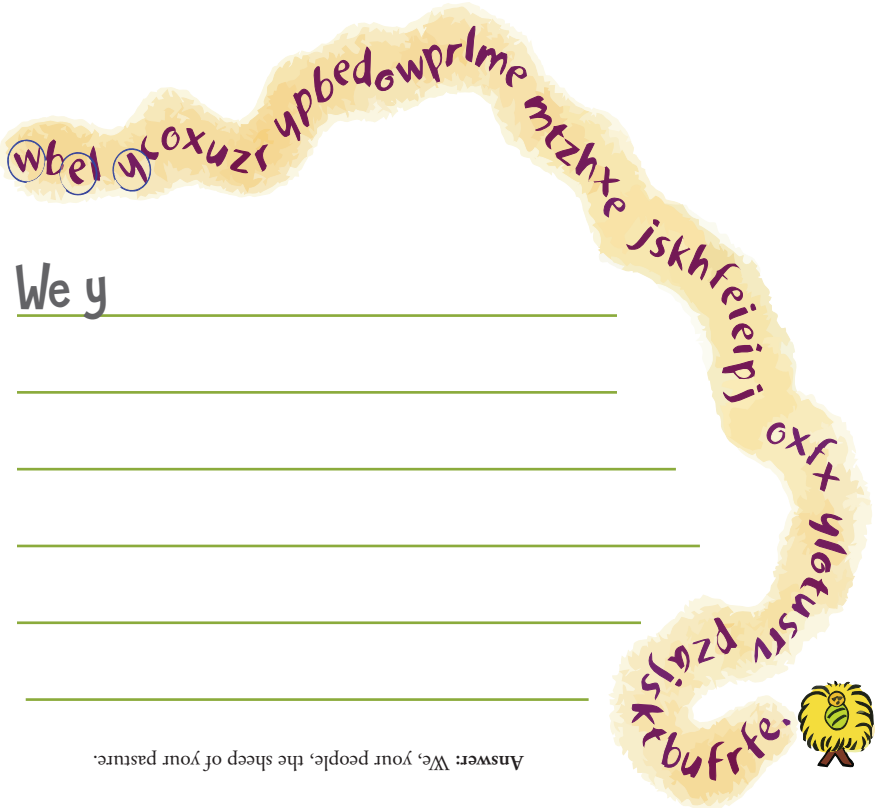


December 17

I am the good shepherd. –John 10:11

Make the Shepherds. The very first visitors Jesus ever had were shepherds with their woolly sheep. Jesus must have loved shepherds his whole life long. For hundreds of years, his people had sung to God, calling God their good shepherd. When Jesus was all grown up, he said that he was like a shepherd, too. He would take care of us just as if we were his favorite sheep!

Help the shepherds find their way to Jesus in the manger. Circle every other letter on the path below and read the words that God's people sang to God long before Jesus was ever born. (We circled the first 3 for you!)



We y

December 18

*“I,” said the dove, from the rafters high,
“I cooed him to sleep that he should not cry.”*

—Old English Carol

Noah’s Dove. We can easily imagine a quiet dove cooing the baby Jesus to sleep! Doves show up in many stories of the Bible. When you read about a dove in the Bible, you know they are there to remind us of things God loves: quiet. Peace. Safety. Doves even remind us of who God is: the Holy Spirit comes like a dove to Jesus.

In the story of Noah’s ark, Noah and his family float in the great boat waiting for dry land to appear. Noah sends out a dove to look for land. The dove flies back to Noah with an olive branch in its mouth. Noah and his family are happy! Soon they will leave the boat and go back to God’s good earth. God gives them land on which to live in peace.

This is why people still use the olive branch as a symbol of peace. This is why the song imagines a peaceful dove singing the Prince of Peace to sleep.

We make peace when we:

- listen to even the quietest voice
- look every day for the gifts of God to ourselves and to others

What are your ideas for making peace? Write four of your ideas on the leaves of the olive branch.



December 19

Be shrewd as serpents and as simple as doves.

—Matthew 10:16

Harmless as Doves. Jesus sent his friends and followers out into the world with just a few instructions. He told them to not take along a lot of stuff. He told them to bless every-



one they met. He told them to be as “simple” (or harmless) as doves.

We can’t imagine a dove harming anything. We can’t imagine Jesus harming anything, either.

Look at the cartoon below. How could you finish the story so no one gets hurt?





December 20

After Jesus was baptized...he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove.

—*Matthew 3:16*

Make a Dove. A dove reminds us of peace. The Holy Spirit is God's peace. A dove reminds us of quietness. The Holy Spirit is the quiet voice of God.

Today find a few minutes to be quiet with God. Find a place to sit. You can start with a simple prayer: "Come, Holy Spirit." Then be quiet and alone with God.

How is being with God like being with a friend?



How is being with God different from being with a friend?

Today, for your crèche, use paper or clay to make a dove.



December 21

Glory to God in the highest and peace to those on whom his favor rests.” –Luke 2:14

Make an Angel. Today we remember the angels who filled the sky with song and praise. “Glory to God!” they sang to sleepy shepherds. “Peace to God’s People!” They brought the first good news to poor shepherds: God’s own Son, Jesus, was born.

Imagine you get to write words for one of the angels shown to the right. What would your good news sing or say? Write your idea below.





Today you can also use paper or clay to make an angel for your crèche scene.

December 22

*“Jesus, our brother, kind and good,
was humbly born in a stable rude.”* –Old English Carol

How Rude! Why does the Old English Carol say that Jesus was born in a “stable rude?” When we use the word rude, we usually mean someone has baaaaaaad manners! But it would be silly to say that a stable has bad manners.

The word rude also meant “simple, humble, poor.” No one knows what that first home of Jesus looked like, but we do know that Jesus chose to be simple, humble and poor his whole life long.

Break the code below to see what Jesus said about himself. (*Hint: Jesus calls himself the “Son of Man” in the message below.*)

Use our key to figure out which numbers stand for which letters. (We’ve left some words for clues.)

A=1	E=5	I=9	M=13	Q=17	U=21	Y=25
B=2	F=6	J=10	N=14	R=18	V=22	Z=26
C=3	G=7	K=11	O=15	S=19	W=23	
D=4	H=8	L=12	P=16	T=20	X=24	

You’ll find the answer in Luke 9:58!

S
M
20 8 5 S 15 14 **of** M 1 14 **has** 14 15 23 8 5 18 5
to 18 5 19 20 **his** 8 5 1 4.

Answer: The Son of Man has now here to rest his head.



December 23

*“And the friendly beasts around him stood:
Jesus our brother, kind and good.”* –Old English Carol

Jesus our Brother. Sometimes we call Jesus our King, our Savior, our Lord. But Jesus called himself our friend. “I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.” Jesus called himself our brother. “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister.”



A good friend is someone who wants to be with you. A good brother is someone who loves you your whole life long. **Draw yourself with your friend and brother, Jesus.** How would you like to spend time with your friend? What would you want to say to your brother?



December 24

*They shall name him Emmanuel, which means
“God is with us.” –Matthew 1:23*

Gifts for Emmanuel. Here’s how the old carol ends:

Thus all the beasts by some good spell,
In the stable dark were glad to tell,
Of the gifts they gave Emmanuel,
The gifts they gave Emmanuel.



The Hebrew name *Emmanuel* means:
God is with us. In Jesus, God is with us.
The carols say that even the animals
gave gifts to baby Jesus.

**Imagine you could visit Jesus today.
What gifts would you want to give
him? Draw or write each gift on the
gift box below.**



December 25

“Behold, I am coming soon.”

–Revelation 22:7

God’s Best Gift. Yesterday we thought about the gifts we want to give to God. Today, think about all the gifts God gives to you: the best things you see each day, the happiest things you do each day and the people you love most. Write the names of five of these gifts from God around the crèche scene below.

Then make one more clay or paper figure for your crèche, the very best gift God has given, to each and every one of us. Can you guess who that gift is? **Jesus.**

God gives us Jesus, who came as a baby long ago, but comes to us in our hearts each day.

Make a baby Jesus for your crèche.

Ask your family to sing a Christmas carol with you as you place the baby in the crèche.

Merry Christmas!





Gather Around the Manger

Jesus, our brother, kind and good,
Was humbly born in a stable rude.
And the friendly beasts around him stood:
Jesus, our brother, kind and good.

