UNIT 2 ■ Many People are Excited About Jesus

LUKE 2:8-40; MATTHEW 2:1-12

"My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song." *Psalm 28:7b*

STORY

Read through the story ahead of time. Practice not just reading it but making it come alive for the students.

Many People are Excited About Jesus

One starry night, shepherds were watching over their sheep in the darkness. An angel came to them and the shepherds were very afraid! The angel was from God and came to give them a special message.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! My message is good news for all people everywhere! Today, a wonderful baby has been born. He has come to save the world! If you go look, you will see the baby wrapped warm and safe. He is in a barn and sleeping in a manger. A manger is where the hay for the animals is kept! His name is Jesus."

Suddenly, there were many, many angels filling the sky and they were singing beautifully, "Glory to God and peace to all people!"

As soon as the angels left, the shepherds said, "Let us hurry! We want to go see Jesus!" When they got to the barn, they saw Jesus, his mother Mary, and his father Joseph, just like the angels said. They were so happy! They praised and thanked God!

When baby Jesus was eight days old, his parents brought him to the temple courts. There was someone waiting there who was excited to see Jesus. His name was Simeon. Simeon was very close to God and he knew Jesus would bring joy and peace to all people. When Simeon met Jesus, he held the baby in his arms and praised and thanked God!

There was also an old lady who lived in the temple courts. Her name was Anna. She told everyone what God told her. She loved God with all her heart and knew Jesus was a special baby. She was excited Jesus had arrived, too. She was so excited that she told everyone about how Jesus had come to save them! As soon as she saw Jesus, she praised and thanked God!

After Simeon and Anna had seen Jesus, his parents took him home. Jesus continued to grow.

There were also wise men that saw a special star and followed it to Jerusalem. It took them a long time. It was maybe even two years! When they got there, they asked, "Where is the special baby who was born to be the king? We saw his star and we want to bring him gifts." They heard about Jesus and they came to worship him.

Some people were not glad Jesus had come. King Herod was not glad. King Herod was jealous. King Herod tried to trick the wise men. The king said, "When you find Jesus, tell me where he is. I want to worship him too!" But King Herod planned to hurt Jesus.

The wise men followed the star until it finally stopped above the place where Jesus was. They were so excited! They went in and found Jesus with his mother, Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their treasures and gave him gifts. They saw the star. They knew this star meant that Jesus had come as a new king, so they worshiped him.

Do you remember what King Herod asked the wise men to do? The wise men knew from a dream that King Herod was trouble, and they didn't want to put Jesus in danger. So when they found Jesus, they did not tell the mean king where they found him. They left and took the long trip home to their country a different way so that King Herod could not find them.

REFLECTING

Use these questions to help your students think about the story. You can use any combination of the questions or statements below.

I Wonder About the Story—

I wonder what the angels looked like. I wonder what the angels' singing sounded like. I wonder what happened to the sheep when the shepherds went to look for Jesus. I wonder what kind of animals were in the barn where Jesus was born. I wonder if Jesus' mom and dad made their bed out of hay. I wonder what Jesus' clothes looked like. I wonder how old Simeon was. I wonder if Anna had grey hair. I wonder what color the wise men's robes were. I wonder if the wise men were scared of King Herod. I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt when people bowed down and worshiped their baby. I wonder how big the star was the wise men followed. I wonder if the star twinkled.

I Remember the Story—

Who remembers how the shepherds found out about Jesus? Who can tell me where Jesus' parents took him when he was eight days old? Where did Simeon and Anna live? How did they feel about Jesus being born? Why did the wise men come to visit Jesus? What helped the wise men to find Jesus? Who remembers the name of Jesus' mom?

I am a Part of the Story—

Why do you think the angels came to sing about Jesus birth? Why do you think people who were close to God were so excited about Jesus being born? Why do you think people worshiped Jesus when they saw him? Why do you think people praised and thanked God when they saw Jesus? Do you think God was with Jesus always?

Use these activities during your lesson to help kids feel welcomed into the story, remember about the stories from weeks past, and respond to the story in a way that will help solidify the Bible story in their minds. Each category has activities for week 1 and week 2 of the unit.

WELCOMING

WEEK 1

CENTER 1—Gather a collection of basic dress up items, such as: a staff, crowns and tiaras, hats, robes, jewelry, even wigs if available. Be aware of lice when using headwear. Have kids use their imaginations to pretend they are shepherds, kings and queens, or old men and women. Show them they can walk or talk differently as they become pretend characters. As the children dress up, encourage them to think of something exciting they want to share with their friends! As you play, have children take turns telling about something that is exciting to them.

CENTER 2—Bring a variety of kid-friendly musical instruments for every child. Microphones (toy microphones, wooden spoons, or paper towel tubes) are also a good choice. Have children sing and dance as you help them with a simple impromptu song to share the good news of Jesus. It can be silly or serious, depending upon your group. Use short, repeating phrases which can quickly become familiar to the kids. For example: "We are glad that Jesus is here!" is a good refrain. If desired, allow children to dress up first and sing their song while wearing the costumes.

WEEK 2

CENTER 1—Bring a large plastic table cloth, or a flat bed sheet to spread on the floor. Bring a container filled with dry beans. Have the children keep the beans on the floor covering for easy cleanup. Make a list of simple-to-form items pertaining to the story, such as: a star, angel wings, a gift/treasure box, a smiley face, etc... Have children use the beans to create these simple shapes. As each item is being shaped, talk with the children about the item's general role, or how it might fit into the story.

CENTER 2—Bring back the box of dress up items. Allow children to pretend freely as they put on the accessories and interact with each other. Do you recognize bits and pieces of the story in their play? Point out what you notice relating to the story during this exercise. Ask, "How do you feel knowing that Jesus is here? Are you excited?"

REMEMBERING

WEEK 1

Bring out a Bible or Bible story picture book and open and close the book rhythmically as though it were a bird flapping its wings. Have the children clap, or "flap" their hands along with you as you focus their attention on the Bible book. Show the children the book and ask if anyone recognizes it. Ask the children, "What's your favorite story from the Bible? Who do you learn about when you hear Bible stories?" Allow children to openly share what they know. Show your pride about anything they know or remember. Say, "The Bible is God's story of love for us! Let's clap our hands for God's love and His story, the Bible!"

WEEK 2

Ask children to tell what they remember about the Bible story from last week. Listen for parts of the story that stand out as unique. As you talk to the children about what they remember, ask, "Why do you think that was important?" Ask, "Do you have a favorite part of the story?" To encourage participation, you may also ask specific questions about the story. Ask, "How did those messengers tell about Jesus birth? Did the shepherds go look for Jesus right away, or did they wait until later? How did Simeon and Anna feel about Jesus? How do you know? What kinds of things do you think they said or did to show how happy they were about Jesus?"

RESPONDING

WEEK 1

Provide Play-Doh or modeling clay for each child. Allow children to make animals, some shepherds, some angels, some wise men, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna and of course baby Jesus. As the children create a character (or characters) from the story, ask them to tell you about who they've chosen and why? Notice details about their sculpture. Does Anna have wrinkles? Admire their creations.

After children form their clay, Ask, "What happened first in our story? Do we have any angels? Who made a shepherd?" Continue leading the children through the story prompting the children to share what came next. Encourage the children with angels to sing praises to God. Simeon, Anna and the wise men can express their excitement about Jesus' birth by shouting, bowing, or saying, 'Amen!' The children who have made animals can show their excitement about baby Jesus by meowing, mooing, clucking, etc. Feel free to let "baby Jesus" cry and coo, too! Everyone can work together to tell the story and show their joy about Jesus' coming.

WEEK 2

Hand out pieces of blank paper and crayons or washable markers. Have children draw their version of the story. Let them tell you about each element they draw and talk to them about how it pertains to the story. Say, "It is wonderful to hear exciting news! What kinds of things do you do and say when you're excited?" Allow children to experience excitement about God's presence on earth, beginning with the coming of Jesus, but also today!

After they finish drawing and talking about the story, instruct children to turn over their paper. On the back, have them draw a picture of at least one person with whom they can share the exciting news of Jesus!

Have children practice telling the story in class. Help them use the picture they drew to talk about the Bible story. Encourage them to take the paper they created and tell someone else about the exciting news when they leave the classroom. For another fun option, provide pieces of black construction paper and colored chalk with which to draw the pictures. This is especially good for making nighttime scenes with stars.