



*Preparing for Christmas*

*2008*

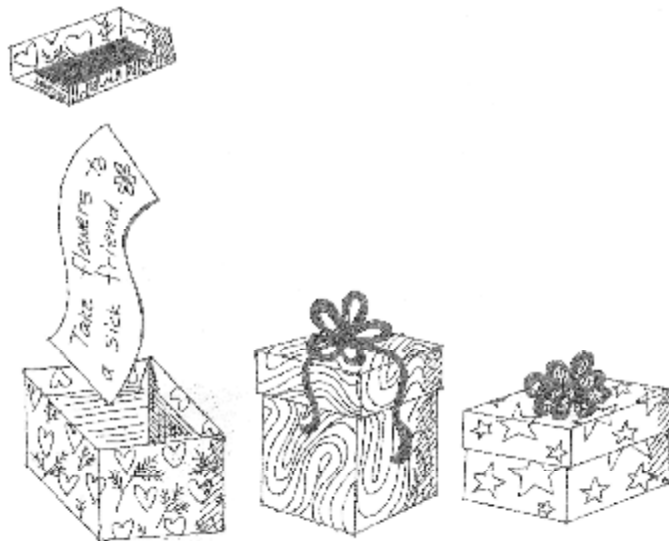
## *A Gift of Commitment* *(Older Elementary Children)*

### Materials Needed:

- ~ Small gift boxes (like jewelry boxes)
- ~ Wrapping paper
- ~ Ribbons
- ~ Tape
- ~ Fine-lined markers or pens
- ~ Scissors
- ~ Small pieces of paper

### What You Do:

1. Remind the children that the Wise Men brought gifts to the child Jesus. These were valuable gifts, meant to honor a king. Begin a discussion by asking the children, "What kind of gifts can we give to honor Jesus?" Talk about how acts of service to the church, parents, or to those who need assistance in some way (like young parents who need babysitters or older people who might need help with yard work) are gifts worthy of the Christ-child.
2. Ask each child to think about a gift of service that he or she can offer someone. Tell the children to be sure to offer something that they will really do. Let children write down the gift of service and the name of the recipient on a sheet of paper.
3. Give children small boxes, wrapping paper, scissors, ribbon, and tape. Tell them to wrap the top and the bottom of the box separately so that the box can be opened.
4. Once the boxes are wrapped, tell the children to fold up the sheet of paper on which they have written the gifts of service and put them inside the boxes.
5. Stack the completed boxes where they can serve as a reminder to the children of their commitments. Or let children take them home and ask that they keep the boxes in their bedrooms to remind them of what they wrote.



## *Advent Alphabet Activity*

To use this alphabet activity, copy template on green and/or red paper, cut the strips, staple, tape or glue them together to make a paper chain. Hang on your tree or around the house. Enjoy the activities as you prepare for Christmas.

**A is for Angel:** Read the Christmas story in Luke 1:26-33, 2:1-20. Count how many times angels appear. What does this tell you about Jesus' birth?

**B is for Bethlehem:** Read 1 Samuel 17:12-15. What Old Testament hero was born in Bethlehem? He is an ancestor Jesus!

**C is for Carol:** Caroling is a custom from medieval times of singing and dancing around the Christmas tree.

**D is for Donkey:** Donkeys, lambs and cows were animals close to Jesus at the time of his birth.

**E is for Evergreen:** Evergreen trees are always green and represent Christ's gift of eternal life. We use them for wreaths, garlands, and Christmas trees.

**F is for Family and Friends:** Christmas is a time to enjoy family and friends. Think of ways you can tell your friends and family that you are thankful for them.

**G is for Gift:** The Wise Men brought special gifts for a King: Baby Jesus. Can you think of the best gift of all that was given to us at Christmas?

**H is for Holy:** Holy is a shrub with spiny leaves and red berries. Early French and English families hung holly over their doors to symbolize a home in which Christ's birth is celebrated.

**I is for Inn:** In Jesus' time, an Inn was like a motel. In Bethlehem there was no room at the Inn for Mary and Joseph so they wrapped Jesus in clothes and placed him in a manger. (Luke 2:6-7)

**J is for Joseph:** Joseph was a quiet person during the Christmas story. Try to imagine how Joseph felt when the Inn was full; when Jesus was born; when the shepherds appeared.

**K is for King:** Jesus came as a baby, but the Wise Men knew that Jesus was the King. Read why they called him the King in Matthew 2:2.

**L is for Light:** Candles and lights remind us that Jesus is the light of the world.

**M is for Messiah:** Jesus is called the Messiah, which means the "One chosen by God."

**N is for Night:** Jesus was born at night. On a clear night, go outside and look at the beautiful stars in the sky.

**O is for the One and Only:** Jesus was God's One and Only Son. John 3:16 says "God loved the world so much that he gave his One and Only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life."

**P is for Purple:** Purple is the color for “getting ready” used during Advent. Purple reminds us of the coming of the royal King, Jesus Christ, and it also refers to repentance.

**Q is for Quiet:** Jesus was born quietly in the middle of the night. We can be quiet too as we think about that special night.

**R is for Ready:** Advent is a special time to get ready for Jesus’ birth. How are you getting ready for Christmas Day when you will celebrate Jesus’ birthday?

**S is for Shepherds:** Shepherds are people who tend sheep. They heard about Jesus from the angels and then came to the manger bed to honor the baby Jesus.

**T is for Three Gifts:** Three kings brought three gifts of gold (a precious metal for a king), frankincense (a resin from a tree used as incense), and myrrh (a resin from a shrub used to make perfume).

**U is for Unusual:** Lots of unusual things happened when Jesus was born. Angels, Shepherds, a bright and shiny Star, Kings, gifts...read about it in Luke 2.

**V is for Vision:** Visions are special dreams. Joseph had several visions that helped protect Baby Jesus. Read about them in Matthew 2:13-15.

**W is for Wreath:** A wreath is a ring decorated with greenery. The circle symbolizes God’s everlasting love for God’s creation.

**X is for Christ:** In Greek, the language in which the New Testament was first written, the first letter for Christ looks like an X. When you see Xmas, people are really saying Christ's Day.

**Y is for You:** You are special. Enjoy celebrating Jesus' birthday and continue to learn more about Jesus' love for you and your love for Jesus.

**Z is for Z:** Jesus is described as both the beginning and the end of everything. Jesus is everything from A to Z. Merry Christmas!

## *Advent Banners: Lasting Symbols of God's Love*

Simple Advent banners became the basis for four lessons during Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy. Each Sunday we added a symbol to our banners and built a lesson around its meaning. The banners were made by all classes preschool through sixth grade. In the preschool classes more complicated pieces were first glued together by the teacher and the whole figure was then placed on the banner by the child and decorated. The Advent banners and lessons could easily be adapted to learning centers or workshops. All the banners were used to decorate the sanctuary for the Christmas Eve service. On the back of each banner we attached a sheet explaining the meaning of the various colors and symbols to that the banner would become a treasured part of each family's Christmas decorations and each year would serve as a reminder of the meaning of Advent. The banners measured 9 x 23 inches. One inch at the top was folded over and the edge glued to the back so that a dowel could be inserted for hanging.

Attached to the back of the banners:

### MEANING OF THE ADVENT BANNER

*HOPE* (star) – The wisemen followed the star in the hope they would find the Christ (Matthew 2:1-8).

*PEACE* (Mary, Joseph, Jesus) – Finding the babe in the manger, the wisemen and shepherds found the peace that Christ's love brings to each of us (Luke 2:1-20).

*LOVE* (wisemen) – They gave their most treasured gifts to Jesus, so also we bring him our most treasured gift, ourselves (Matthew 2:1-11).

*JOY* (angels) – The real joy of Christmas is in sharing its message and meaning with others as did the angels and shepherds (Luke 2:10).

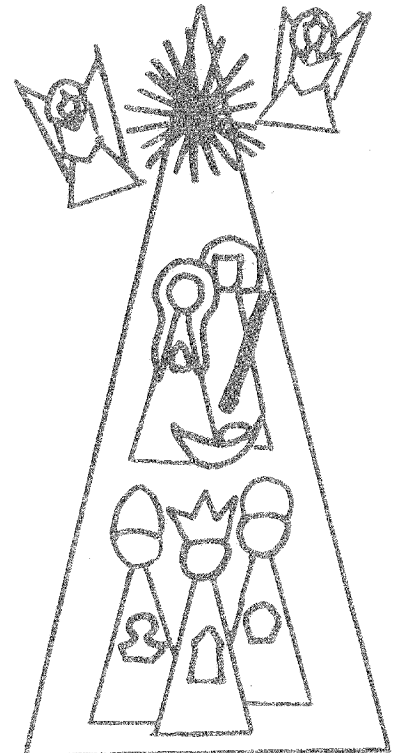
### MEANING OF COLORS AND SHAPES IN THE BANNER

*GOLD* (background) – The richness and abundance of God's love

*LIGHT GREEN* (triangle, tree-shaped) – Peace, new life in Christ

*PURPLE* (wisemen) – Royalty, also the color of preparation

*TRIANGLE* (tree) – Christmas tree, God's eternal love



## *Advent Calendars*

Advent calendars can be made or purchased at a nominal price. Prior to the first Advent Sunday, the youth groups could make an adequate number of Advent calendars and sell them after church during November as a fund raising project. Materials needed to make Advent calendars include: construction paper, old magazines or Christmas cards, markers, scissors and glue. Glitter is optional. Cut out small squares to equal the number of days in Advent. Cut out the same number of small pictures of Christmas objects or items. Glue the pictures to a sheet of construction paper in rows. Lightly glue the construction paper squares on top of the pictures and number them. Glitter may be used to decorate the outer edges of the calendar of to enhance the words "Advent Calendar" at the top.

If calendars are not made, the church can purchase an adequate supply to sell to the families in the church. Although the second method is not a fund raiser, it provides every family with the opportunity of celebrating the Advent season at home.

The Advent planning committee selects families to participate in the lighting of the Advent candles during the four Sundays preceding Christmas. Guide sheets are mailed to the families which include the theme for each Sunday, appropriate scripture verse, a short devotional thought and a closing prayer. Families are encouraged to include as many members as possible in this presentation. The selection process includes families who are representative of the entire congregation. Therefore, single parent families, older families and single adults should be considered.

The secret to a successful Advent is in the planning. When planning for Advent is accomplished with the entire church family of faith in mind, then the celebration of the season spills over from Sunday mornings to the homes.

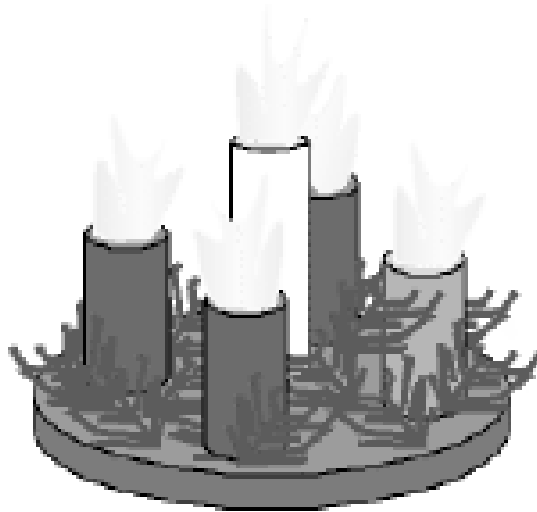
## *Advent Wreath with Tissue Paper Flames*

### Materials Needed:

- ~ 4 toilet paper tubes
- ~ 1 paper towel tube
- ~ 12" circle of green cardboard
- ~ 4 6" squares of yellow and/or orange tissue paper
- ~ 2 foot pieces of green garland
- ~ Purple, pink, white tempera paint or construction paper

### What You Do:

1. Paint or cover the 3 toilet paper tubes with construction paper – 3 purple and 1 pink (or make all of the tubes purple).
2. Paint or cover the paper towel tube with white construction paper.
3. Cut slits around the bottom of each tube, about ½ inch up, and hot-glue onto the green base so that the "candles" stand up in a circle. Put the larger white tube in the middle.
4. Hot-glue the garland around the candles on the cardboard.
5. Fold the yellow and orange tissue paper to look like flames. Put the "flame" down inside the candle tubes.
6. Each week you can reach into the tube and pull up a flame. On Christmas Day, pull up the flame in the white candle and celebrate Jesus' birthday!



## *Bread Dough Ornaments*

### Materials Needed:

- ~ 2 cups flour
- ~ 1 cup salt
- ~ 1 cup or less of water (add gradually)
- ~ Food coloring
- ~ Cookie sheet
- ~ Oven

Shape dough into a ball and kneed 5-10 minutes until smooth. Add food coloring if desired. Make ornaments, insert paperclip into top for hanging. Place on cookie sheet and bake at 325 degrees until hard. Ornaments can be painted with a gloss finish if desired.

### Suggestions for Use:

- ~ Make ornaments into shapes of Christian symbols: cross, dove, butterfly; characters from the Christmas story; spell words like Joy, Hope, Love, Peace, children's names.
- ~ Use ornaments to decorate a Chrismon tree (a tree decorated with symbols of Christ).
- ~ Larger ornaments can be hung in children's rooms.

## *Felt Stained Glass*

### Materials Needed:

- ~ Scraps of colored felt
- ~ Black felt for background
- ~ Scissors
- ~ White glue

Scraps of colored felt can become a beautiful stained glass banner. Use a background of black felt. Choose a simple subject such as the cross, a candle, bells, etc. Glue on scraps of colored felt to depict the central subject, and then fill in the background. Remember to leave space between the pieces so that the black shows through.

### Suggestions for Use:

- ~ Decorations for classroom, sanctuary, family home, patients' doors, etc.
- ~ Black can be applied to a larger colored background to make a larger banner. Several can be grouped together.
- ~ It can be glued to a toilet paper roll, hung with a pipe cleaner to make a hanging ornament.



## *Happy Birthday, Jesus!*

Isn't Christmas the most gigantic birthday celebration on earth? When you think about it, millions of people celebrate the birth of Jesus by giving presents to family and friends. To make Christmas more personal for children, have a children's party for Jesus.

### Party Plan:

Story: Read a child's version of Jesus' birth

Discussion Questions

Gifts: Make gifts for Jesus

Games: Pin the Star on Bethlehem, Race the Wisemen to Bethlehem

Birthday Cake

Closing Prayer

### Suggestions:

To prepare the children for the discussion, let them experience some of what it may have been like in the stable where Jesus was born. If you can, bring in some hay; a few large armfuls will be sufficient. Lay the hay on a hard surface in an area that will not be used for the general party. After reading the story, bring the children over to the hay and let them take turns feeling it, smelling it, and laying in it. Warm some milk in a pan and let the children smell it. Let the children stand in an open outside door feeling the cold air for a few minutes.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What did the hay feel like? Was it soft, scratchy, warm? Did it make you sneeze? Is your mattress filled with hay?
2. What did the hay smell like? Did it smell like your bed?
3. Since there were cows in the stable, there was the smell of milk. Can you smell warm milk at your house? Do you get your milk from a cow or from the store? Do you suppose milk tasted different in Jesus' day?
4. When you stood in the doorway, were you cold? There was no heat in the stable. Do you suppose it was cold? How would you feel if your house was that temperature all the time? Did people have heated houses in Jesus' time? Do you suppose Jesus was cold? Why or why not?
5. The Bible says Jesus was dressed in swaddling clothes. Was Jesus dressed different than you were when you were a baby?

### Gifts:

Since we can't give actual things to Jesus today, we're going to give gifts that we think Jesus would like us to do for others. Have the children cut the paper into different shapes – bells, trees, angels, birds, etc. On each piece, write something they can do to help someone else; for instance, Help Mom Set Table, Help Dad Clean Garage, Tie My Sneakers, Make My Bed, Get Up On Time. Give the suggestions, but let each child come up with his or her own idea of how he or she can help at home or at church. String each shape with yarn. The children now have decorations for their tree.

### Games:

*Pin the Star on Bethlehem:* Draw a map of Canaan. Cut out one star for each child. Write each child's name on them. Then play the same as Pin the Tail on the Donkey.

*Race the Wisemen to Bethlehem:* Draw a large curvy path with 10 spaces on it. Ask each child a true/false question and have them move a marker the number of spaces indicated on the card if they answer correctly.

1. Herod sent four magi to find Jesus. (F) 3 spaces
2. Jesus was born in America. (F) 2 spaces
3. Mary was Jesus' mother. (T) 3 spaces
4. St. Paul was Jesus' father. (F) 2 spaces
5. An angel told Joseph to take his family to Egypt. (T) 4 spaces
6. Jesus was born in a palace. (F) 2 spaces
7. Jesus grew up in a family. (T) 2 spaces
8. The wisemen followed a star that shone over New York. (F) 3 spaces
9. Jesus was born in June. (F) 2 spaces
10. The shepherd ran away from the angel. (F) 4 spaces
11. Jesus slept in a feather bed. (F) 3 spaces
12. There were animals in the stable when Jesus was born. (T) 2 spaces
13. The wisemen brought gifts to Jesus. (T) 2 spaces
14. Jesus wore pants and a shirt. (F) 3 spaces
15. Joseph was a sailor. (F) 4 spaces

### Birthday Cake:

Put 5 candles on the cake representing each of the 4 Sunday's in Advent and Jesus' birth. Let the children blow out the candles together.

### Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for Your birth, God's gift to us, His Son. Bless our gifts to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

## *Road Signs for Advent* *(Older Elementary Children)*

### Materials Needed:

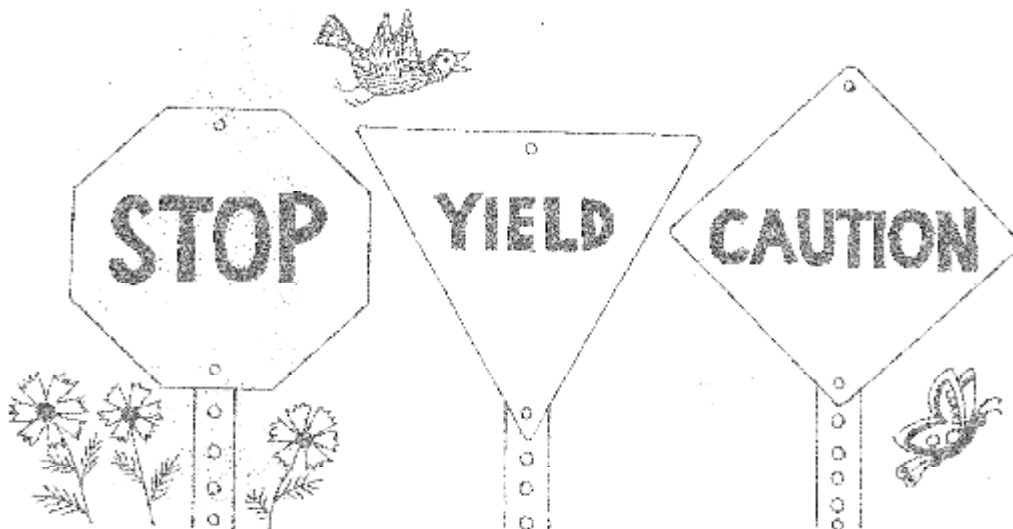
- ~ Bibles
- ~ Highway road test booklet (illustration of road signs)
- ~ Purple or blue poster board or construction paper
- ~ Felt-tipped markers
- ~ Thin dowels or other sticks for signs
- ~ Tape
- ~ Newsprint

### What You Do:

1. Have the children look up and read aloud Isaiah 40:3-5 and Mark 1:2-4. Tell them that it was customary in the ancient world to prepare a processional path along which the image of a deity would be carried in the annual religious festival. It might be a wide, level pathway from which obstacles have been cleared.
2. To begin a discussion about Advent, ask the children, "What can we do to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus at Christmas?"
3. Have the children identify the road signs in the road test booklet. What kinds of messages are on the signs?
4. Relate the road signs to the season of Advent by asking the following questions: What should we stop during Advent in order to get ready? Of what should we be cautious? To what should we yield? Print the children's responses on newsprint.
5. Give the children purple or blue paper and tell them to make a road sign for Advent. Tape thin dowels to the back of the signs.

### And More:

When the children have completed the signs, work together to make a poster for each sign that tells one or two things people can do to "obey" the sign. For example, if a sign says "STOP BUYING SO MUCH," children might give one or two suggestions for gifts of the service. Set the road signs up along the hallway with the accompanying posters next to them.



## *Terra-Cotta Trio*

### Materials Needed:

- ~ 2 small terra-cotta pots
- ~ 1 small terra cotta saucer
- ~ Acrylic paint
- ~ Fine-point marker
- ~ 3 wooden knobs, one smaller than the others
- ~ Tacky glue
- ~ Fabric
- ~ Embroidery floss
- ~ Raffia



Time Needed: About 1-2 hours

### What You Do:

1. Paint the terra-cotta pots and saucer. Use a fine-point marker to draw faces on the wooden knobs.
2. Once the paint is dry, turn the pots upside down and use the tacky glue to attach a larger head to the bottom of each pot. When the glue is dry, drape a piece of fabric around the top of each head and tie it in place with embroidery floss.
3. Form a swaddling blanket from another piece of cloth, as shown, gluing it to secure the shape. Glue the small head to the blanket and set it in the saucer on a bed of raffia.

# *Tin Can Lanterns*

*(Older Elementary Children)*

## Materials Needed:

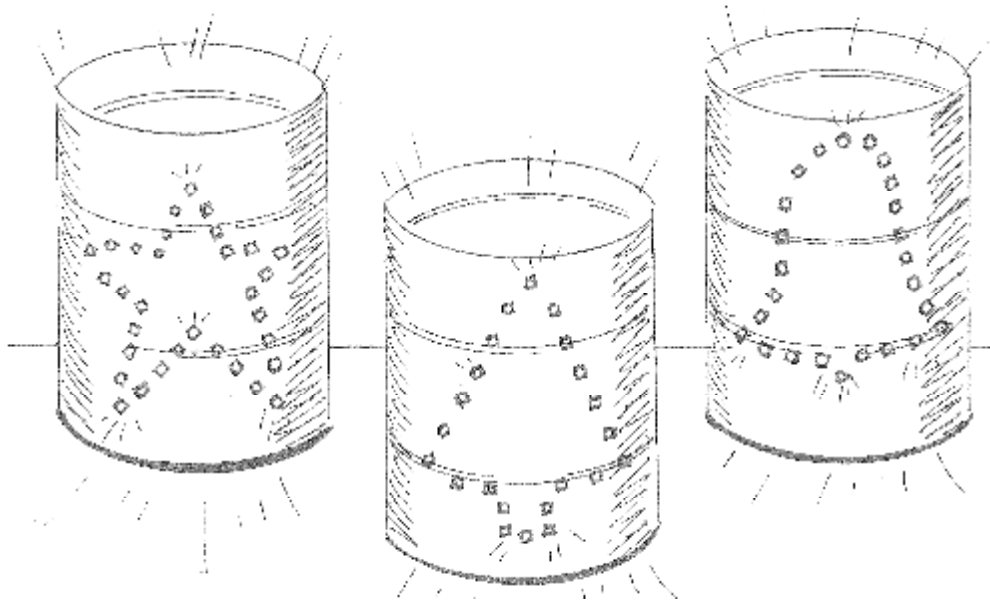
- ~ Soup cans with labels removed
- ~ Water
- ~ Freezer compartment of a refrigerator
- ~ Hammers
- ~ Large nails
- ~ Paper cut to fit around the cans
- ~ Tape
- ~ Pencils
- ~ Glossy black spray paint (or red, green, or purple)
- ~ Votive candles

## What You Do:

1. In advance, fill the cans with water and freeze until solid.
2. Have children draw a simple design on the paper (something they can render by punching holes, such as stars, crosses, a dove, etc.)
3. Have them tape the design to the outside of the cans.
4. Following the lines of the design, have them use the hammer to drive the nail into the can. The more holes they make, the more light will shine from their lanterns.
5. Have them remove the paper from the outside of the can. Run the cans under hot water to melt the ice, and dispose of it.
6. Dry the cans and spray paint the outside. Allow to dry.
7. Put a votive candle inside each can.

## And More:

Use coffee cans and soup cans of various sizes sprayed with matte black paint.



# *Whose Story?*

*(Older Elementary Children)*

This activity helps older elementary children understand the two accounts of the Christmas story found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

## Materials Needed:

- ~ Bibles
- ~ 2 posters or sheets of newsprint, labeled "Matthew's Good News Paper" and "Luke's Good News Paper"
- ~ Tape
- ~ Story cards with the facts printed on the right side of the page

## What You Do:

1. Tell the children that Matthew and Luke each are writing a Good News Paper, and each one has a different story to tell about the birth of Jesus.
2. Let the children use the Bibles to help them sort out the story cards to tape on either Luke or Matthew's story sheet.
3. Compare the two stories. Why do the children think the accounts are different?

Joseph has a dream and an angel speaks to him.

An angel visits Zechariah with news.

Wise Men come from the east seeking Jesus.

An angel brings news to Mary.

Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth.

The Wise Men ask Herod where to find the  
king of the Jews.

John the Baptist is born.

The Wise Men follow the star and find the child in the  
house with his mother.

Mary and Joseph journey to Bethlehem to be registered for  
the census.

The Wise Men give gifts of gold, frankincense,  
and myrrh.

There is no room for them in the inn, and Jesus is born in a  
stable.

The shepherds get joyous news from heavenly visitors.  
They visit the baby.



## *Miscellaneous Advent Activities*

### Christmas Question and Answer

1. Everyone gets a piece of paper and a pencil. On the top half of the paper, they write a question about Christmas. On the bottom half they write the answer to that question.
2. They tear the sheet in half, with the question on one piece and the answer on the other.
3. The questions are collected in one bowl, and all the answers are collected and put in a different bowl.
4. Each person draws one question out of the question bowl and one answer out of the answer bowl. Then go around the room and each person reads their question and answer out loud. Some random combinations of questions and answers will make sense, some will not, but fun most likely will be had by all!

### Decorate Someone as a Christmas Tree

1. Each table is given a variety of supplies (crepe paper, construction paper, cotton balls, ornaments, tape, scissors, crayons, etc).
2. Each table picks a person to be their tree – and the rest of the table decorates that person. Picking the tree could be done randomly by leaders choice (birthday closest/farthest from Christmas, most letters in their name, etc. Something that doesn't overvalue or undervalue someone!)
3. The trees then come to the front for all to enjoy – possibly sing songs (O Christmas Tree).

### Christmas Sing-off

1. Each table goes to a separate area of the room, as far away from others as they can.
2. Give each group paper and a pencil to write down as many Christmas songs as they can in an allotted time.
3. Then each group takes turns singing part of a Christmas song as soon as the leader points to them (they can't stop and think, must be ready!). They must sing a song no other group as sung yet.
4. If they sing one already sung or can't think of a different song, the group is out. The last group with a different song wins.