



ONE NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM

Church Event Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Think of this Advent event as a trip back in time to Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. The collection of ideas and materials in this guide will help your children and their families enjoy learning about and experiencing what it must have been like on that first Christmas.

This one-time event can be held on an evening during a week in Advent or on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon in Advent or any time that works for your parish.

The event can be arranged as a series of sessions presented one after the other for the whole group to watch and participate in together for the entire gathering time of approximately 2-3 hours. Or the event could be set up as an array of stations that small groups engage in for a period of 20-30 minutes while other small groups engage in activities at other stations simultaneously. All small groups will rotate through each of the stations by the end of the event.

The sessions or stations for this event are as follows: Colors, Characters, Places, Prophecies, Songs and Sights. Each session or station will include various items and activities that will teach participants about Bethlehem and Baby Jesus.

Since this event is essentially a one-night VBS program, it is a perfect way to invite children and families from the community to something fun and interactive that teaches about the Christian faith.

Any instructions, scripts, recipes, sheet music or lists of props, items, tools or costumes needed for each of the various sessions or sections are included.

Feel free to adapt, change, add to or eliminate anything herein to match what works best for your parish.

Consider offering childcare on-site for children 4 and younger who may not be old enough to engage in these activities, which are designed for children approx. 5 to 12.

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COLORS

The Volunteer of this session or station says:

If you were traveling to Bethlehem from a long distance, like from Capernaum or Nazareth, what would you see on the horizon as you approached Bethlehem?

Bethlehem's colors are often associated with blue and yellow. The city's skyline features a blue sky with green palm trees and olive groves, while the buildings, constructed with sand-dried bricks, contribute a yellow, light brown and sandy look. In some depictions, blue represents the peaceful and sacred nature of the city, while yellow can symbolize the sun and the city's historic connection to the region.

At night, Bethlehem would be dotted with the light of candles and lanterns in windows and doorways. As we approach Bethlehem this night, we think of the colors purple and rose. They are the colors of the candles found on an Advent wreath that marks our journey to Bethlehem in the four weeks leading up to Christmas.

The first candle on the wreath is purple and is traditionally called the Prophecy Candle. Purple reminds us to be humble before God and confess our sins to him. The Prophets let the world know that a special guest was on the way to Bethlehem to bring forgiveness and love. Week 2's candle is also purple and is called the Bethlehem Candle after this very city. It reminds us of our own homes, where we find peace. The candle for Week 3 is rose to symbolize joy. It is called the Angels' Candle because of the glad song they sang to welcome a very special guest to Bethlehem. Week 4 is the Shepherds' Candle, which is purple and points to the people the angels sang to just outside of Bethlehem. The

shepherds ran into Bethlehem to see the special guest the angels spoke of. This is the candle of love because the shepherds loved to tell the story of what they heard and saw in Bethlehem.

On the day when we celebrate the arrival of the special guest into Bethlehem, we light a white candle to symbolize that the Special Guest we welcome is pure and holy.

Advent Wreath Activity

(Needed: Advent wreath, candles, lighter)

Light the candles of the Advent Wreath for the week you are in and talk about the meaning of each candle when you light it.

Coloring Activity

(Needed: crayons, colored pencils, copier paper, included coloring pages)

Distribute crayons and colored pencils, and have children color in the coloring pages of the Bethlehem skyline and the Advent wreath and talk about the meaning of the colors as they do.

Next, somewhere around the edges of the town, I want you to draw hills and stick figures for the shepherds and the sheep. This is where the shepherds were on the night Jesus was born. Jesus would one day say, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). He will always guard and keep us.

Then at the top of the page, I want you to draw stick figures of angels with musical notes around them. This is the sky where the angels sang. Add small stars in the sky as well. God promised Abraham offspring "as numerous as the stars of heaven" (Genesis 22:17). We rejoice with the angels because we are blessed to be the children of Abraham and children of the promise through the birth of Jesus.

Since Bethlehem is the house of bread, draw a loaf of bread and a bread store at another intersection in the town. Jesus would one day say, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). He was born to nourish our souls.

Next, near the center of the town, draw a census office with stick figures of people waiting in line to be counted. Jesus came to earth to make sure our names are "written in the ... book of life" (Revelation 21:27).

When everyone is done with their Bethlehem maps, we are going to have people get up in front of the group one by one to talk about their map, and we will hang up all the maps in a prominent place for all people in attendance to see and admire.

(Use tape to attach the Bethlehem maps to a wall or other flat surface.)

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PROPHECIES

The Volunteer of this session or station says:

There were special people in the Bible called prophets. Prophets were people who were blessed by God to predict the future. One of the things they predicted was what would happen on this one particular night in Bethlehem. They said that a Savior would be born in Bethlehem to rescue the world from sin, death and the devil.

One of those prophets was Micah. Here is what he wrote about this city:

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

What do we learn about Bethlehem in this verse? (*Allow time for discussion.*)