

Advent IV

This lesson—the fourth in Advent—continues to prepare children for the Mystery of Christmas. We continue moving toward Bethlehem, guided by the pointing prophets, with the Holy Family, the shepherds and the Magi. Finally, we arrive at the birth of Jesus, when the light of Christ is lit. This week's lesson focuses on the wise men and the celebration of Christmas.

How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's lesson. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today's story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive way. You

are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today's presentation offered below. If you retell the presentation, you will need:

- five candles (three purple, one pink and one white, or four blue and one white, depending on your church's custom)
- Nativity figures of Jesus and the manger
- *optional*: candle snuffer
- *optional*: You might like to use the home version of the Godly Play Advent materials, called "Miniature Advent," available from Godly Play Resources. (To order, call 1-800-445-4390 or visit www.godlyplay.com.)

Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

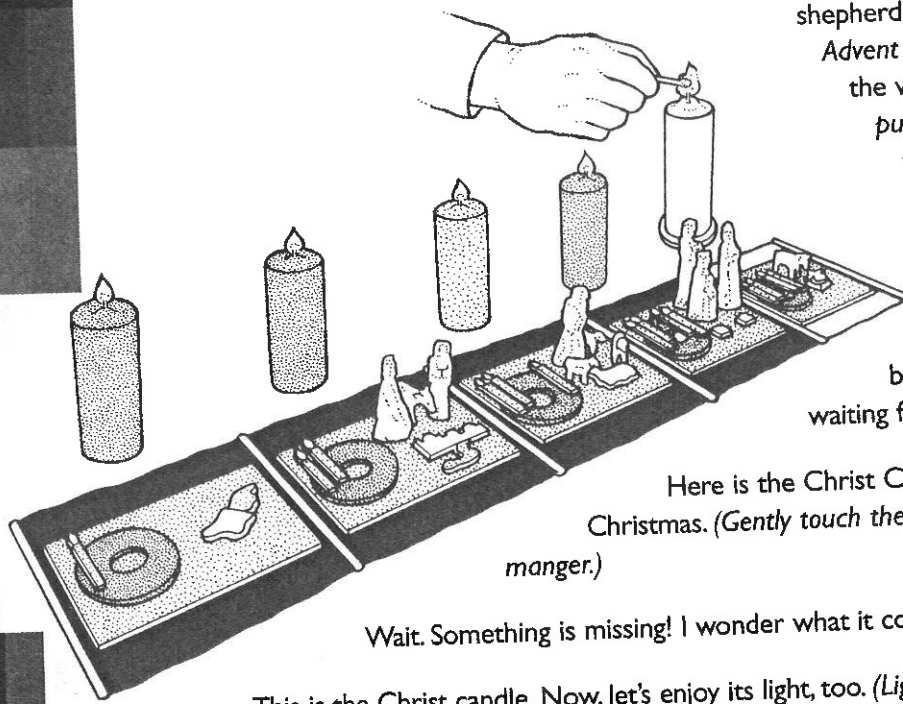
The Presentation

On the fourth Sunday in Advent we remember the three kings, the wise men, the Magi. They came from far in the East, and of all the things they knew, they knew the most about the stars. They knew where each star was supposed to be at each time of the year, so they could tell people when it was time to plant their crops or take a trip on the ocean in a boat, or cross the high mountains.

Suddenly they saw the wild star. It was not on any of their star maps. It went where it wanted to go. It did not stay put. They decided to follow the wild star to see where it was going and what it wanted to show them.

They followed the star all the way to Bethlehem, but they came from so far away that they got there after the baby was born. Every year they arrive on January 6th, but we remember them now anyway, because, like us, they too are on the way to Bethlehem.

Here is the candle of the prophets. (*Light the candle for Advent I.*) This is the candle of the Holy Family. (*Light the candle for Advent II.*) Here is the candle of the



shepherds. (Light the candle for Advent III). Here is the candle of the wise men. (Light the third purple candle.) Let's enjoy the light.

Now we come to the Mystery of Christmas. This is when the baby is born, the one we have been waiting for.

Here is the Christ Child, the Mystery of Christmas. (Gently touch the figure of Jesus in the manger.)

Wait. Something is missing! I wonder what it could be?

This is the Christ candle. Now, let's enjoy its light, too. (Light the white candle.)

Now watch. I am going to change the light. (Gently snuff or blow out the prophet candle.) The light that was in just one place is now spreading out. Soon it will fill up the whole room.

(Repeat for the Holy Family candle, the shepherd candle and the three kings candle.)

Now I am going to change the light of the Christ candle. (Gently snuff or blow out the Christ candle.) Look. It too is spreading out to fill up the room. As it spreads out, it gets thinner and thinner until you can't see it at all. That doesn't mean that it's gone. It only means that you can't see it. You can still feel the Christmas light. It is filling up the room with the prophets, the Holy Family, the shepherds and the three kings. Anywhere you go, you can come close to them.

Godly Play Understanding Play (Part 4)

In every Parent Page, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. To fully enter into Godly Play, we need to be deeply aware of what makes *real* play and what distracts or detracts from it.

In the previous Parent Page, we discovered that play is the opposite of emptiness, that real play involves fullness, connection, engagement, vitality. To build on what we've already discussed:

- Play is pleasurable.
- Play has no extrinsic goal but engages us for its own sake.
- Play happens spontaneously, energizing us instead of depleting us. It is voluntary.
- Play involves deep concentration.
- Play nourishes creativity, problem-solving, language-learning and learning social roles.

In theological language, we might say that true players are aware of God's image as the Creator within them. Play is graceful.