

ENRICHMENT LESSON

THE HOLY FAMILY

LESSON NOTES

FOCUS: AXIS OF THE CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE SYSTEM: THE BIRTH, LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

- **LITURGICAL ACTION**
- **ENRICHMENT PRESENTATION**

THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: FOCAL SHELVES**
- **PIECES: HOLY FAMILY AND FIGURE OF THE RISEN CHRIST**
- **UNDERLAY: NONE**

BACKGROUND

We first present this lesson at the beginning of the church-school year. We repeat the lesson whenever we change the liturgical colors in the room to reflect the changes in the liturgical season—purple or blue for Advent, white for Christmas, green for Epiphany and so on. On those occasions, one purpose of the lesson is simple: we take the Holy Family off the shelf, change the colored cloth on the shelf to a new one, then replace the figures on the new cloth.

However, the Holy Family holds deep significance for our work throughout the year. That is why it sits right in the center of the focal shelves in the room—right behind the storyteller—every week of the year. That is why we draw attention to it in this presentation to the children every time we change liturgical colors. The Holy Family is the *matrix*—the Latin word for womb—out of which new life comes. This story is the story of the re-creation of the universe. Christ's incarnation changes everything. Most especially, it changes the way we understand ourselves, each other, the Creator and the created world around us.

We find existential meaning in our lives, in the places into which we are born, through the network of these relationships. The “answer” to life is not a propositional statement or verbal key. Instead of an answer, we find a “home,” every day, in the midst of these relationships of love and creating.

The axis of life in the Christian tradition is birth-death-rebirth. The children begin to perceive this axis through the naming of the Holy Family, and through the careful,

respectful moving of the figures. We do not talk about this meaning, but wait for the children themselves to discover it. We, like the Holy Family, are invited to be cocreators in the biological, psychological, social and spiritual spheres of life.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

The material is a Nativity set with these figures: Mary, Joseph, the Christ Child (removable, with outstretched arms), a shepherd, one or more sheep, a donkey, a cow and the three kings, together with a figure of the Risen Christ with outstretched arms. Any size will do, but 4"-6" figures work well for young children. Children can easily handle these small figures, and they won't take up as much room on the shelf. Behind the Holy Family, place the Risen Christ with outstretched arms.

If possible, find figures that are not too detailed or realistic, so that children can supply details through their imaginations. More figures or more complex figures will not work as well as the simple set described above. Don't include a stable; it distracts from the Holy Family.

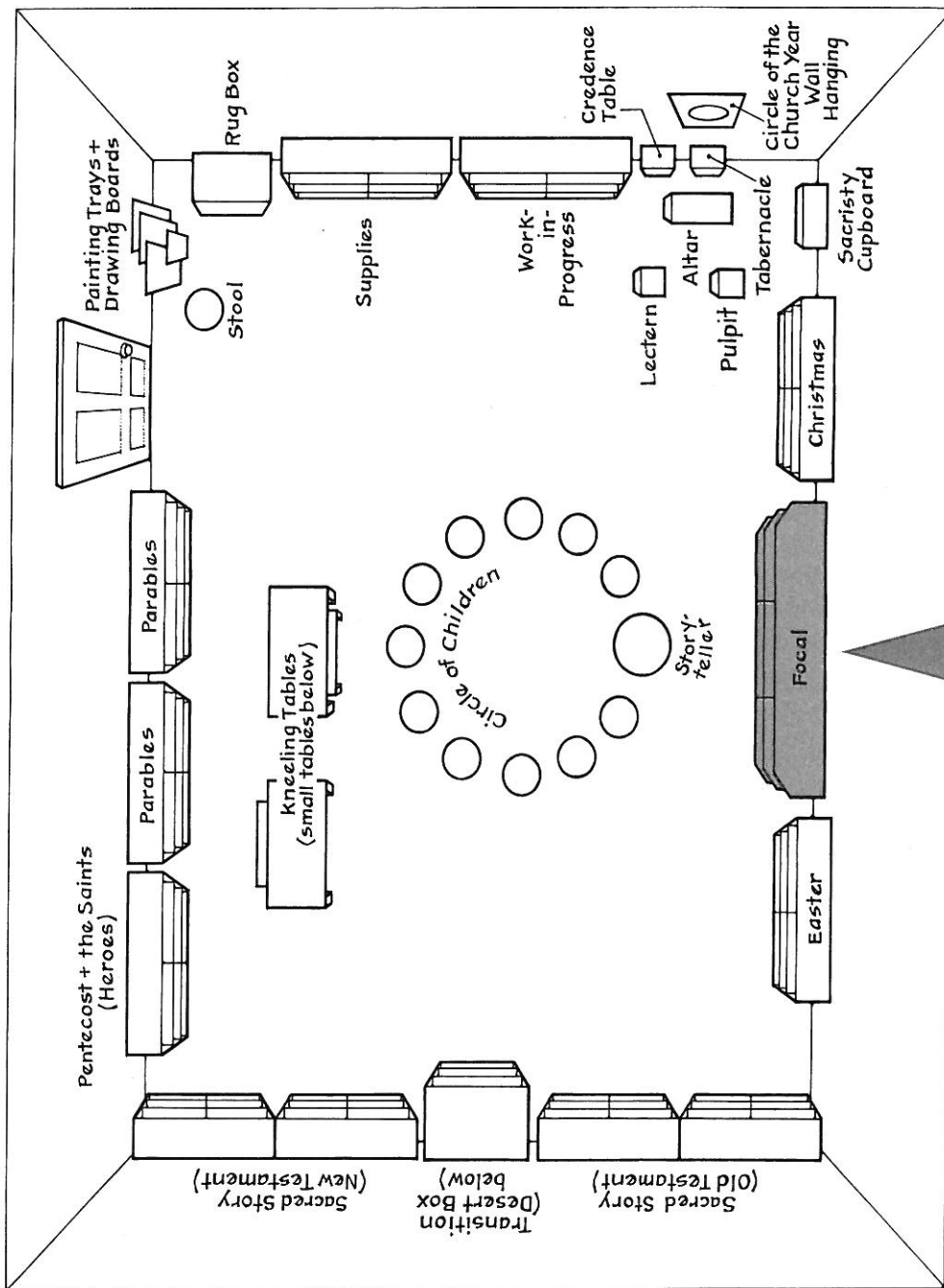
In an ideal setup, the focal shelves are the shelving unit directly opposite the door through which the children enter. The Holy Family sits in the center of the top shelf of the focal shelves. To the right of the Holy Family, also on the top shelf, is the green circle with the figure of the Good Shepherd and his sheep, from the material for World Communion (see *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 4*). To the left of the Holy Family stands a tall white candle called the Light (or the Christ Candle).

On the shelves below the Good Shepherd are the remaining materials for the World Communion lesson. Below the Light on the second shelf are the remaining materials for the lesson about Holy Baptism (see *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 3*). Below the Holy Family on the second shelf is a tray that contains the colored cloths of the liturgical year and a circular tray lined with white felt. You will use these two trays whenever you change liturgical colors during the year. On the bottom shelf is the material for the Circle of the Church Year.

SPECIAL NOTES

Classroom Management: Children can use the felt-lined tray when they work with the Holy Family, but most children will prefer to keep the figures on the top focus shelf as they move them around.

We suggest you tell this story three times in the Winter season. On the first Sunday of Advent, use the story to change the cloth underneath the Holy Family from green to purple or blue. On Christmas, Epiphany or the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, use the story to change the cloth underneath the Holy Family from purple or blue to white. On the first Sunday after these feasts (Ordinary Time or Epiphany season), use the story to change the cloth from white to green.



WHERE TO FIND MATERIALS

MOVEMENTS

The storyteller sits in front of the focal shelves. In the center of the top shelf is the Holy Family, which rests on a cloth colored to match the liturgical time of year—red for Pentecost, white for Easter, and so on. Behind the Holy Family, there is a picture or carving of the Risen Christ.

Tell this story whenever you want to change the color of the cloth underneath the Holy Family, the focal point of the room throughout the year. For this lesson, the Holy Family is already resting on a green cloth. In this telling, you will change the cloth to purple or blue, to match the liturgical color used in your church for Advent.

When the children are settled in the circle, you begin. Go to the rug box and get a rug. Return to the circle and roll it out. Turn and take out the round tray for the Holy Family from the lower shelves behind you. It is large enough to hold all the figures of the Holy Family. The bottom of the tray is covered with white felt.

Move to the side so the children can see the Holy Family on the shelf behind you. Turn toward the shelf and open your hands to show what you are going to talk about. Wait until you are present to the story yourself before beginning.

Pick up the Christ Child from the manger and hold it in the palm of your hand for all the children to see.

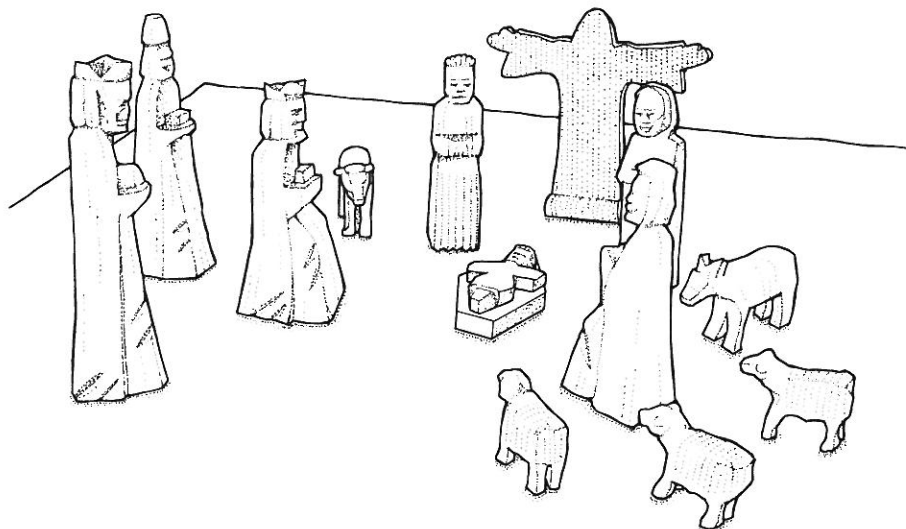
WORDS

■ This is the Holy Family. Sometimes when you see something like this, it is not for children to touch. It might break easily, so you need to ask if you can touch it or work with it. This Holy Family is for you. It is for you to touch and work with. You don't need to ask to work with it.

■ This is the Christ Child. He is holding out his arms to give you a hug.

MOVEMENTS

WORDS



THE HOLY FAMILY

Put the manger on the white circle tray in front of you. Replace the Christ Child in the manger.

Hold Mary in the palm of your hand as well, showing her to the children. Then place her behind the manger, looking across it to the children.

Hold Joseph in the palm of your hand and then place him next to Mary.

Hold out the donkey and then place it beside Mary.

Hold out the cow and then place it beside Joseph.

Hold out the shepherd and sheep and then place them facing toward the Christ Child on the other side of the manger from Mary and Joseph.

◆ Here is the mother Mary.

◆ Here is the father, Joseph.

◆ Here is the donkey that Mary rode when she and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be counted by the Roman soldiers. Mary was about to have a baby, so it was hard for her to walk. Sometimes she rode on the donkey. It is also hard to ride on a donkey when you are about to have a baby, so she got down again and walked.

◆ Here is the cow that was in the stable when the baby was born. He was surprised to find a baby in the feed box, the manger, where he usually found his breakfast.

◆ Here is the shepherd who saw the great light in the sky at night. There were more shepherds than this, but we will put down one to remind us. Here are some of the sheep. There were more, but these will do to help us remember.

MOVEMENTS

Hold out the three Magi and place them as you speak.

Pick up the Christ Child from the manger. Hold out the Christ Child to the children and continue holding him as you speak.

Move the Christ Child slowly and with dignity to the figure of the Risen Christ. Superimpose the baby with outstretched arms on the Risen Christ's outstretched arms.

WORDS

When they saw the light in the darkness, they were afraid. I would be, too. Then they heard singing. That scared them, too, until they heard the words. The angels sang that they came to bring peace on earth and good will to all people. "Run. Hurry. Go to Bethlehem. Something has happened there that changes everything!"

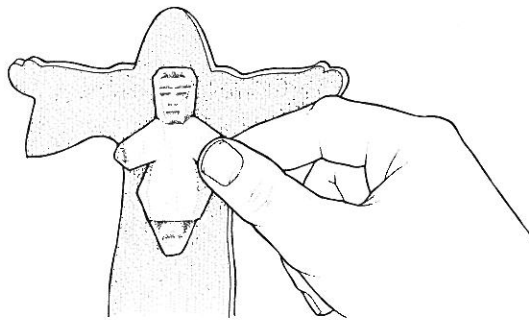
Here are the three kings, the wise men. They were so wise that people thought they were magic. In their language they were called the Magi, and that word is the word from which we get our word *magic*. They knew so much that people thought they were magic. And of all the things they knew, they knew the most about the stars.

One day they saw the wild star. The Magi knew where all the stars were supposed to be in the sky, but this star moved. This star was not on their maps of the sky. So when it moved, they were curious, and followed it. It led them to the stable where the Christ Child was born.

The wise men brought with them gifts for the Christ Child: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Here is the little baby reaching out to give you a hug. He grew up to be a man and died on the cross. That is very sad, but it is also wonderful, in an Easter kind of way.

Now he can reach out and give the whole world a hug. He is not just back then, in this place or that place. He is everywhere, and in every time.



THE CHRIST CHILD AND THE RISEN CHRIST

MOVEMENTS

Return the Christ Child to the manger. Sit back and quietly take in the whole scene. Be present to its meaning.

Roll up the green underlay from the top shelf of the focal shelves. Place it on the tray of liturgical cloths on the middle shelf of the focal shelves. From this same tray, take out the purple or blue cloth and roll it out on the top shelf.

You now begin to replace the Holy Family, one by one, without hurrying, naming each one as you slowly and with care put them back on the purple cloth. (Whether placing the figures on the white tray, or returning them to the focal shelf, use the layout illustrated on p. 24.)

Pause and then begin the wondering with the children.

Sit back as the wondering draws to a close. Enjoy what has been said and done. Then begin to go around the circle to help the children choose their work, one at a time.

WORDS

- Here is the Baby Jesus.
- Here is the Mother Mary.
- Here is the Father Joseph.
- Here is the donkey that Mary rode on.
- Here is the cow that was so surprised in the morning.
- Here is one of the shepherds and a few of the sheep.
- Here are the wise men, the three kings, the Magi.

This is the Holy Family, and you can work with these figures any time you wish. In our classroom, they are for you.

- Now I wonder what part of the Holy Family you like best?

I wonder what part of the Holy Family is the most important part?

I wonder if you have ever seen any of the Holy Family in our church?

I wonder if there is any of the Holy Family we can leave out and still have all we need?

- Now it is time to get out our work. What work would you like to get out today? You may work with the Holy Family, or you may make something about them. Maybe you have something that you are already working on. There may be another material you would like to work with. There is so much. While I am going around the circle, think about what you are going to work with.