

Advent I

Today's lesson, together with the next three, helps children anticipate the Mystery of Christmas. Together we journey toward Bethlehem, guided by the prophets (in today's lesson), and then joined by the Holy Family, the shepherds and the Magi (in the next three lessons). Finally, we arrive at the birth of Jesus, when the light of Christ is lit. For this lesson, and the three that follow, you can use the pictures on this page, but you might want to use a Nativity set if your family owns one.

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 the 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:

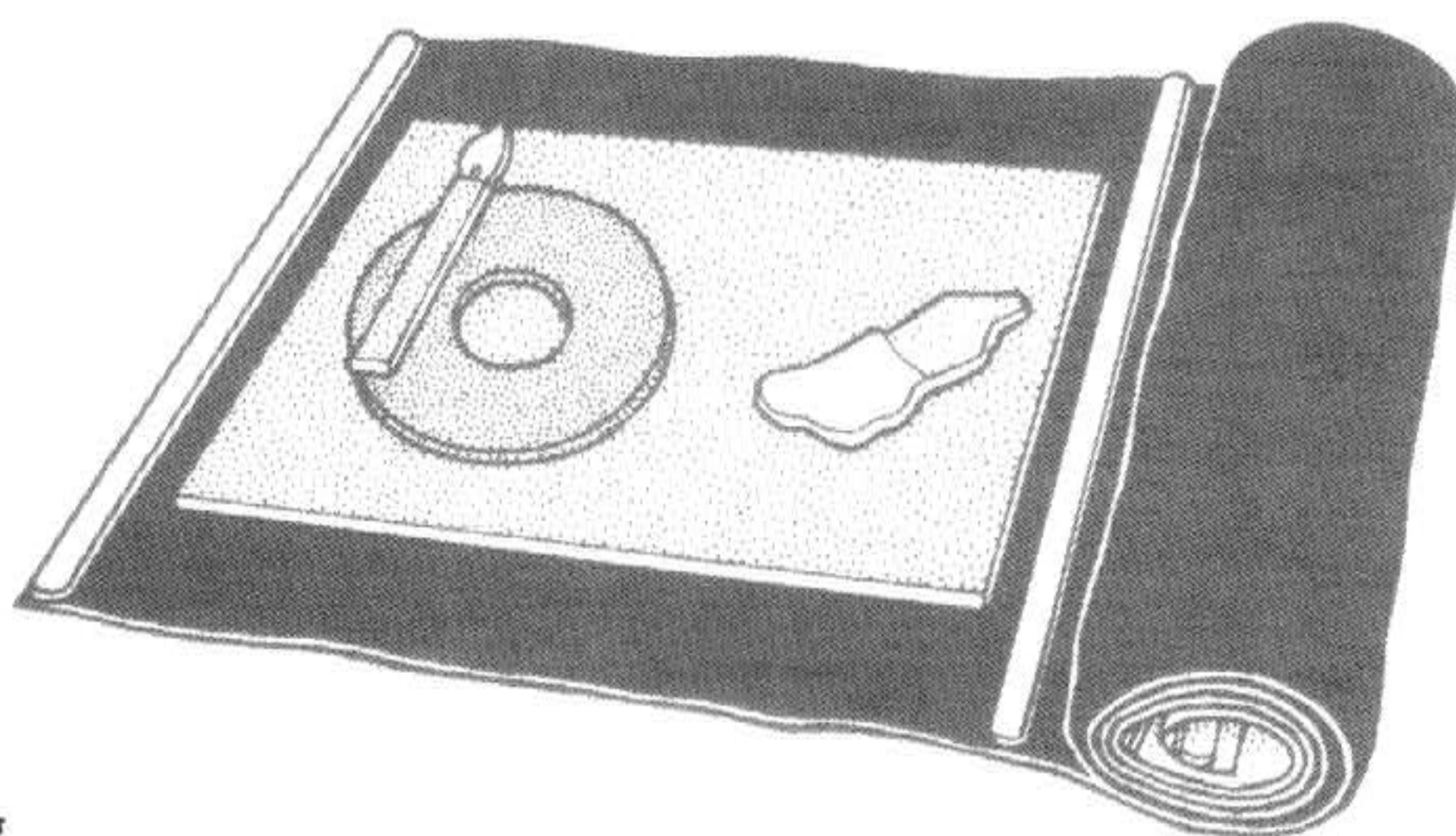
- five candles (three purple, one pink and one white, or four blue and one white, depending on your church's custom)
- *optional*: candle snuffer
- *optional*: You might like to use the home version of the Godly Play Advent materials, called "Mini Advent," available from Godly Play Resources. (To order,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

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

The Presentation

A king is coming, but not the kind of king that people thought was coming. This king had no army, no great house, and no riches. This king was a baby who is born in a barn.

The coming of this King is a mystery. A mystery is sometimes hard to enter. That is why this time is important—the time of Advent. Sometimes people walk right through this mystery and don't even know it is there.



Christmas is such a great mystery that it takes four weeks to get ready to enter it. During this time, we are on the way to Bethlehem with the prophets, the Holy Family, the shepherds, the angels, the Magi, and more. This journey was not just back then or there; it is also here and now.

Today we remember the prophets. They came so close to God and God came so close to them that they knew something important was going to happen in Bethlehem.

They pointed the way to Bethlehem. They didn't know exactly what was going to happen there, but they knew this was the place.

Today we remember the prophets. (*Light one of the purple candles.*)

This is the light of the prophets. Let's enjoy the light.

Look. Do you see how the flame is in just one place? It is right here. When I "change" the light, it will no longer be in just one place. (*Gently snuff or blow out the candle.*)

Watch. Do you see it? It is spreading out, getting thinner and thinner as it fills up the room with the light of the prophets. Anywhere you go here you will be close to the prophets.

Prophets can be boys, and prophets can be girls. Any of us here might be a prophet too.

Godly Play Understanding Play (Part 1)

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.

So many activities that we choose for leisure aren't really play but *working* at play. For your own personal exploration, choose an activity that feels like wasting time.

That's right. Set aside about thirty minutes and "waste" it. That idea runs counter to everything our busy, pragmatic culture believes in, so don't multitask and don't

do anything you feel you "should" do. No product, just deep concentration.

You may discover that "wasting time" this way draws you into your own creative process. You may connect with language in a new way, and you may not even want to use language at all.

When you make "room" in your day for something like this, it is an invitation for God, the Creator, to come and play too. It also opens you up again to what you did by nature as a child. Play, then, is an experience you, God, and children have in common.