

# Celebrating Our Lord

## Christmas



### Prayer Starter

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...  
Dear Lord, thank you for sending your Son to us. We learn from him how you love us and how to find our way to your grace. Help us to understand his teachings and live them every day. We celebrate his birthday and the joy you brought to the world that day. Amen.

### Daily Bread

At the time right before Jesus' birth, the emperor asked everyone to pay their taxes in the city where they were born. This was bad news for Joseph and Mary, because Joseph had been born in Bethlehem and they would have to travel over 50 miles from where they lived to get there. In those days, you had to walk or ride a donkey or camel to get places. Traveling that far by foot would take days. Mary was expecting a baby, so this journey was very hard for her.

When they arrived in Joseph's hometown, there was nowhere for them to stay. All the rooms in the hotels were full because so many people were visiting to pay their taxes.

They had to sleep inside a stable with the animals.

Soon after they got to the stable, Jesus was born. Joseph and Mary wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, which is a small box that is usually used as a feeding dish for horses and cows.

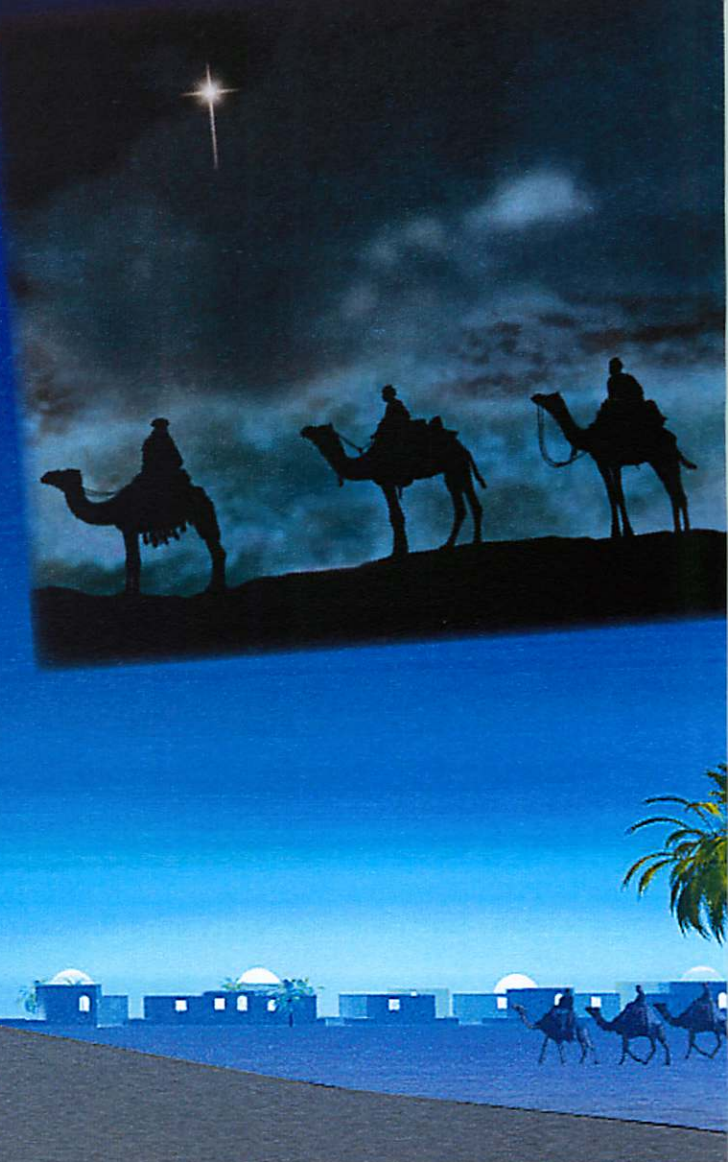
A few hours later, Mary and Joseph were interrupted from their rest when shepherds arrived at the stable. At first, Mary and Joseph did not understand why they were there. But the shepherds explained how angels told them about this special child that was sent by God and told them where to find him.

The same night that Jesus was born, a star appeared in the sky over Bethlehem. In the East, three wise men were watching. They knew this was special and that a great king was born that night.



Each decided to leave his own country and follow the star so they could give gifts to the new king. They had three gifts: frankincense, myrrh, and gold.

Both frankincense and myrrh are types of incense that smell good and were used for many different reasons in those days, including for religious ceremonies. This was a symbolic gift to wish good health and a happy life to the child. The other gift of gold was to help Jesus' family take care of him as he grew up. Today, it would be like giving money.



## SCRIPTURE SOURCE

"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they

were terrified! But the angel said: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!"

*Luke 2: 6-11*

This quote from the Bible is one of the most beautiful and mystical in the New Testament. Even though this baby Jesus was being born in a stable to a poor family, he was the one who would change the world. The angel told the shepherds this to begin spreading the good news of the love that can fill each of us inside, even today.

## In the Armenian Tradition

Every year, Christmas celebrated on December 25th is a lot of fun. Sometimes, we spend too much of our thoughts and energy on shopping, getting gifts, and having parties and the real point of Christmas gets lost in the shuffle. We spent time on this very topic in our lesson on Advent.

We are lucky that we, as Armenians, have a quieter time after the rush of the American holiday season to really pay attention and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and how his presence on earth changed everything. We celebrate the birth of Christ on January 6th along with his baptism by John the Baptist. A baptism is like a spiritual birth, a birth into a life with God. By being baptized, Jesus gave us all an example of how to begin a life as a child of God.

We call the day the Feast of Theophany. There are three special services that are traditionally done around this Feast.

### **Jrakalouyts Divine Liturgy (the lighting of the lamps service)**

First, we have a Christmas Eve service on January 5th. People hold candles during the service to symbolize how Jesus' birth on earth brought the light of God's love to us.

### **Feast of Theophany Services**

Then on January 6th we have a special Christmas day Badarak service. At the end of the Badarak, we have another ceremony called "The Blessing of the Water."

During this ceremony, the cross is dipped in water, just as Christ entered the Jordan River and was baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist. Blessed oil, called *muron*, is poured into the water from a dove-shaped container, just as is done at baptisms.

At the end of the ceremony, members of the congregation take home some of the blessed water. Drinking the blessed water helps us to remember that Jesus was baptized for a reason - to show that he planned to share his love with the world and teach us God's will.

### **Home Blessings**

Home Blessings are usually requested at this time of the year. Every family can invite the priest to come to their home and perform the blessing. The family provides bread (a symbol of the Word of God), salt (a symbol of the things that give our life 'taste' or meaning), and water (the most important element of life).

The priest brings a *nushkhar* wafer and incense. He blesses the bread, the water and the salt. These three fundamental elements are essential life-giving gifts for human life. The priest asks God to bless the home and the people who live there. He prays for God to provide for them, physically and spiritually, so they have enough to eat, live well, and have grace and love in their lives.



# CELEBRATE WITH GOD

Create a Birthday  
Card for Jesus!



## BIBLE BYTES

**Swaddling cloths** *For centuries, in almost every culture all over the world, mothers have wrapped new-born babies in narrow strips of cloth or some kind of blanket in a very tight way. They all end up looking like a burrito with a cute head coming out the top. The idea is to make them feel just like they did when they were crowded inside their mother's belly – warm and having something close up against their skin. The act of wrapping babies this way is called “swaddling.” Our Armenian great grand-mothers would have done this as well.*

### Well Versed

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among all people. . .”

Luke 2:14

Muron is made by the Catholicos at Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia. It is made of olive oil, balsam and forty different flowers and herbs. The Catholicos along with many Armenian bishops make it and bless it. Then some of it is sent to every Armenian church in the whole world.

Did you know...!?

When your church gets some, it is put into a special, small, dove-shaped pitcher. Then, your priest will use the *Muron* during the blessing of the water ceremony on the Feast of Theophany. He also uses it at all baptisms and chrismations. Your priest probably touched you with the blessed *muron* at your baptism and chrismation when you were a baby.



## Family Focus

Today, the children discussed the meaning of Christmas and the Feast of Theophany. They learned details about when, where, and how Jesus was born and compared it with the details of their own births. It was a fun discussion. We celebrated the fact that we, as Armenians, get to have two Christmases, and we looked at the distinct Armenian services connected with Christmas.

## Living Your Faith

- Look at the “Me and Jesus” handout your child filled in and discuss it together. You will certainly be able to add to the information!
- Armenian Home Blessings are traditionally performed around Christmastime. Request a home blessing from your priest and create a special time for your family to make the connection between your church and your home.