

LESSON 1

ADVENT I

LESSON NOTES

FOCUS: THE PROPHETS

- LITURGICAL ACTION
- CORE PRESENTATION

THE MATERIAL

- LOCATION: FOCAL SHELVES AND CHRISTMAS SHELVES
- PIECES: ADVENT CARDS ON A RACK OR TRAY; 4 ADVENT CANDLES IN A BOX, MATCHES IN A METAL CONTAINER AND A CANDLE SNUFFER, ALL ON A TRAY; PURPLE OR BLUE CLOTH OR FELT; MODEL OF BETHLEHEM; OPTIONAL: CANDLE HOLDERS
- UNDERLAY: PURPLE (OR BLUE) AND WHITE

BACKGROUND

This lesson, together with the next three lessons, helps the children to anticipate the mystery of Christmas. We move toward Bethlehem and arrive at the birth of Jesus and the lighting of the Christ Candle in the church.

Churches often have customs that preclude doing a single lesson about Advent on each of the Sundays of the season. For example, the whole congregation might use the first Sunday to make Advent wreaths together, or use the fourth Sunday to hold a Christmas party for the children. In such situations, group the lessons as seems best to you, presenting two or even three Advent cards on one Sunday. Remember, too, to start the first Advent session together by telling the story of the Holy Family (pp. 20-26), in order to change the liturgical color from green to purple (or blue).

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

Find the materials for this presentation on the Christmas shelves and the focal shelves. The Christmas shelves are to the left of the focal shelves. The model of Bethlehem stands to the far left on the top shelf of the Christmas shelves. In the middle of the top shelf you'll find the tray or rack of Advent cards. The box of candles, container of matches and candle snuffer are on a tray at the left end of the second shelf (below the model of Bethlehem).

A special stand or carrier rack for the Advent cards makes them visible to a child scanning the room. This stand for the cards should also hold the rolled-up underlay. If you do not use this stand, put the rolled-up underlay and cards in a tray. You may want to line the tray with purple or blue cloth or felt.

There are five cards or wooden plaques, representing, in this order:

- the prophets
- the Holy Family
- the shepherds
- the Magi
- the birth of Jesus

These cards or plaques are laid on a strip of cloth divided into five equal sections, one section for each of the four weeks of Advent, plus an additional section for the feast of Christmas. The first four sections of this cloth are purple or blue (for Advent); the fifth and final section is white (for Christmas). This cloth is the Advent underlay; roll up the underlay so that the white segment is hidden inside. (An illustration of the underlay, with all five cards or plaques and candles laid out in order, appears in Lesson 5, p. 68.)

Many churches use blue for their Advent color. In this presentation, we refer to the liturgical color purple, but use whatever color your church uses. Instead of referring to the royal color (purple), point out that blue is a good color for getting ready, because it is the color associated with Mary, Jesus' mother. Without the mother Mary, there would be no baby.

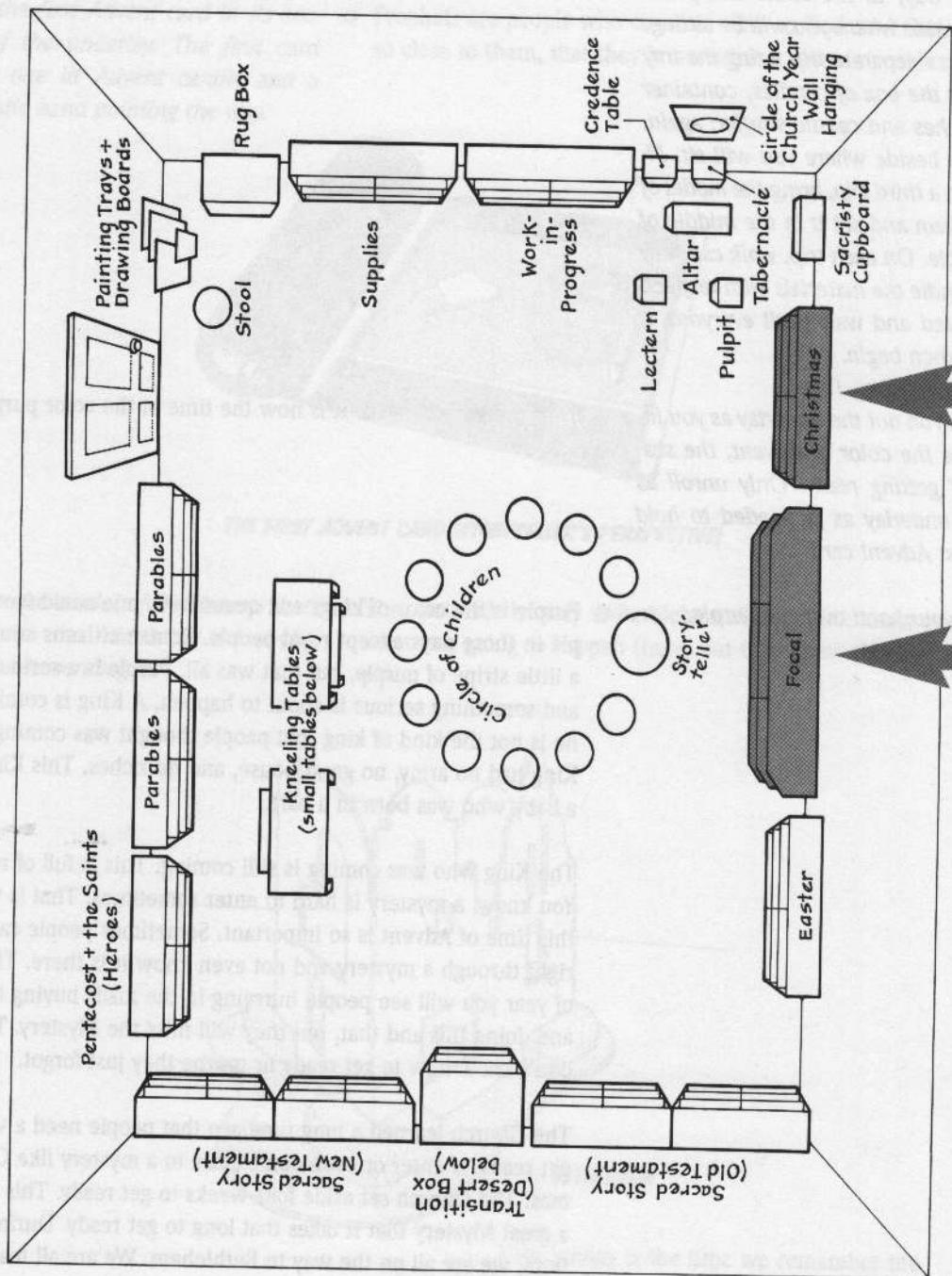
You also need a box to hold the four candles used in the lesson. In this presentation, we refer to one rose and three purple candles, but, again, follow the custom of your church. Use candles with wide bases for stability (e.g., votives or pillar candles), or, if you use tapers, also use candle holders. You also need a metal container for matches; look in an import store for beautiful and inexpensive metal containers. Though this container may tarnish quickly, some children may enjoy keeping it polished in the classroom! You will also need a candle snuffer. Keep these items (candles, matches and snuffer) on a tray lined with purple or blue cloth or felt.

Finally, you need a model of the city of Bethlehem, similar to that pictured on page 31. It is to be set in the middle of the circle of children to show that we are all on the way to Bethlehem, including the storyteller.

SPECIAL NOTES

Classroom Management: Working with fire during the work period is problematic. It means something different for different ages or for different children. Some children need more supervision than others. Sometimes children are more attracted to the fire

than to the meaning of this lesson, so they need a lot of support and supervision to get past that. This attraction, however, is still a point of entry into the lesson, so don't worry too much about why they are interested. Only be aware that these are the very children that need the most supervision. One pragmatic way to address these issues is by making a rule for *everyone* that the storyteller always lights the candles.



WHERE TO FIND MATERIALS

MOVEMENTS

When the children are ready, go to the Christmas shelves.

Bring the cards and underlay (on the rack or tray) to the circle and place them beside where you will be sitting. Then, in a separate trip, bring the tray holding the box of candles, container of matches and candle snuffer; again, set this beside where you will sit. Finally, in a third trip, bring the model of Bethlehem and set it in the middle of the circle. On each trip, walk carefully and handle the materials with respect. Be seated and wait until everyone is ready, then begin.

Start to roll out the underlay as you introduce the color of Advent, the season of getting ready. Only unroll as much underlay as is needed to hold the first Advent card.

Move your hand over the purple.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go so you will always know where to find this lesson.

Everything is changed. It is now the time of the color purple.

Purple is the color of kings and queens. No one could wear purple in those days except royal people. Roman citizens could wear a little stripe of purple, but that was all. Purple is a serious color, and something serious is about to happen. A King is coming, but he is 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 was born in a barn.

The King who was coming is still coming. This is full of mystery. You know, a mystery is hard to enter sometimes. That is why this time of Advent is so important. Sometimes people can walk right through a mystery and not even know it is there. This time of year you will see people hurrying in the malls buying things and doing this and that, but they will miss the Mystery. They don't know how to get ready or maybe they just forgot.

The Church learned a long time ago that people need a way to get ready to enter or even come close to a mystery like Christmas. The Church set aside four weeks to get ready. This is such a great Mystery that it takes that long to get ready. During this time, we are all on the way to Bethlehem. We are all making the

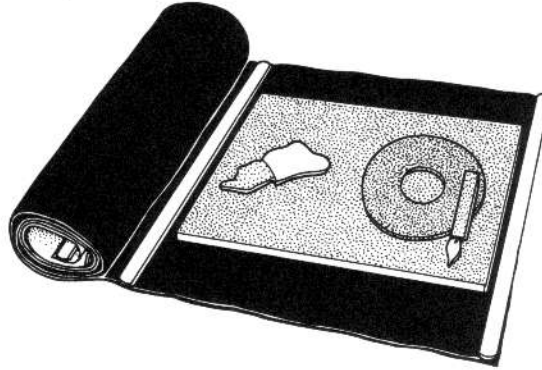
MOVEMENTS

Place the first Advent card in its section of the underlay. The first card shows one lit Advent candle and a prophetic hand pointing the way.

WORDS

journey. We are all getting ready to enter the Mystery of Christmas, so let's go with the prophets, the Holy Family, the shepherds, the angels, the Magi and all the rest to make the journey that was not just back then. It is also now.

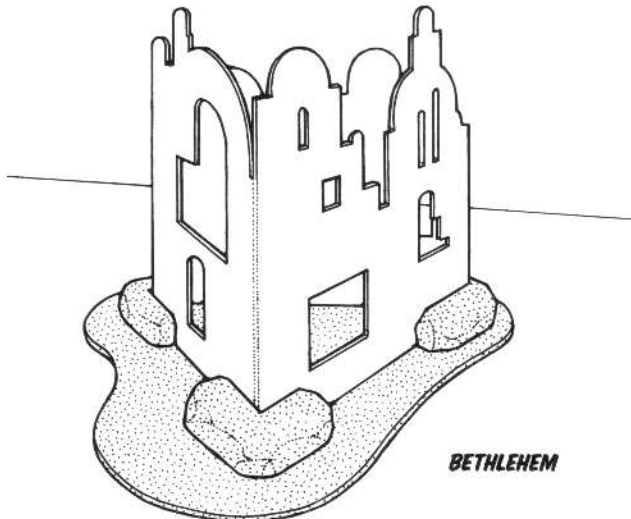
Prophets are people who come so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know what is most important.



THE FIRST ADVENT CARD (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

Point to the model of Bethlehem that you put in the middle of the circle when the lesson began.

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



This Sunday is the time we remember the prophets. Here is the hand of a prophet pointing the way to Bethlehem, showing us the way, too.

MOVEMENTS

Point again. Be emphatic, bold, definite.

Place the first of the purple candles between you and the section of the underlay with the card on it. Pick up the container with the matches in it. Open the container, strike a match and light the candle.

Sit for a moment and genuinely enjoy the light of the prophets. You might even have the door person, with a nod from you, turn out the light, so the candlelight is more visible. Sometimes the candles burn down inside so that all the children see is the light glowing within the candle or the glow over the top of the candle. The storyteller looks down into the candle and sees the flame, but the children may not.

If you turned off the light, have the door person turn it back on now. Pick up the candle snuffer.

Snuff the candle. Hold the snuffer over the flame for it to fill with smoke. When you lift it, the smoke will rise and begin to spread out.

WORDS

Stop. Watch. Pay attention. Something incredible is going to happen in Bethlehem.

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

Prophets are the people who know the most important things. They knew which way to go. They are the ones who showed us the way. Now we can go to Bethlehem, too.

I want to show you something very strange and very important. Look.

I want to show you what happens when the light is changed. Sometimes people don't pay attention to this. They miss this part.

Look. Do you see how the flame is in just one place now? It is right here. When I change the light, it will no longer be in just one place. You can't see it after it spreads out all over the room, but it is there.

Watch. Do you see it? It is no longer here in this one place. Now it is spreading out, getting thinner and thinner as it fills up the room with the light of the prophets. Anywhere you go in this room you will be close to the prophets.

There may even be one sitting in this circle. Prophets can be boys, and prophets can be girls. They pay attention. They know things.

MOVEMENTS

Enjoy the moment and then begin to put the material back. There is no wondering at the end of this lesson. It is better to let the presence of the prophets rest in the room.

Carry Bethlehem back to its shelf first. Then put the card and the underlay back in their rack (or tray) and return the rack to its shelf. Put away the candle tray last, making certain the wax in the candle has had time to cool, so that it will not spill out into the cloth-lined tray. Be certain that the matches are secure in their container.

When everything is put away, come back to the circle and begin to help the children make their decisions about what work to get out next.

WORDS

Now watch carefully where I go with this material, so you will always know where to get it when you want to work with it.