



2024 | CHILDREN'S TIME DECEMBER 1-22

Prepare the Way

Preparation:

Before worship, gather supplies and prepare:

- Pieces from a Nativity set that can be handled by children (Mary, Joseph, shepherd, wise men — any others are a bonus).
- Identify in advance where north and east are in your worship space. Have a general idea where children will place the nativity figures, as directed below. Depending on your space and logistics, these can be near where you sit or farther away.
- Copies of the Christmas Joy Coloring Sheet (*optional*).

Gathering:

Use your own words to say and do something like this:

Welcome, friends! I want to show you something, and then I need your help.

(Show the children the pieces from a Nativity set and tell them a little about it — where it came from, where it is usually set up, etc.)

This Nativity set reminds me how far some people had to travel to meet Jesus in Bethlehem. First, of course, Mary and Joseph came before Jesus was born. They traveled all the way from a town called Nazareth. It was about 90 miles, and they either walked or maybe rode on a donkey. The roads were dusty and rocky in places, and they went through valleys and hills. If we say the manger is here, let's put Mary and Joseph in the north, where their road started in Nazareth. *(Have a child place the figures on the north side of your sanctuary or narthex.)*

Later, the shepherds came. They were out in the fields near Bethlehem, when the angels appeared to them, and told them about Jesus. The Bible tells us they went with haste to get there. We don't know exactly where they started, maybe a mile or so away, so let's choose a spot for them sort of close by. *(Have a child place a shepherd and sheep somewhere close by in your sanctuary or narthex.)*

Later still, the Magi, or the Wise Ones, came. They lived far away in the East somewhere, maybe as much as 900 miles away, and they traveled over many long roads, winding around deserts, and over hills and through valleys to bring their gifts to Jesus. It was such a long way to walk; we imagine that they might have ridden on camels. Let's put them far off in the east. (*Have a child place the Magi farther away to the east of your sanctuary or narthex.*)

Imagine all the roads people had to travel to see Jesus. Do you think they were difficult journeys? (*Let the children wonder about it — up hills, down valleys, around rocks, through streams. Agree that it couldn't have been easy.*)

There is a part of the book of Isaiah that says, "Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness!" Then Isaiah describes a highway in the desert that is straight and level, and easy to travel so all people can see the glory of God. It reminds me of these people who traveled actual difficult roads to see Jesus when he was born.

It also reminds me of people today who might feel far away from God or like the road they find themselves on is too difficult. They might be sick or sad or have problems they can't solve alone. As the church, as God's people, we try to do what Isaiah says and prepare the way of the Lord. We help make the road easier for people.

Today we take up a special offering called the Christmas Joy Offering. The money we give will get combined with money from congregations down the road and hundreds of miles away. All of it helps prepare the way of the Lord for past, present and future church leaders. Half of it goes to make the road easier for students just a bit older than you to attend Presbyterian-related schools and colleges in communities of color. The other half goes to help church workers, pastors and educators who have unexpected financial needs. In a way, it's like we get to help prepare a good level highway in the wilderness so they can see Jesus more easily. I hope we can give generously.

(Ask the children to bring the Nativity figures back, then close with a prayer using your own words, or like the one below.)

Prayer

God of Christmas Joy, you are always with us.
Even when our roads are difficult, we are never alone.
Help us make the road easier for others today and every day,
so that all people can see your glory and know your love.
In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

(You might give out copies of the Christmas Joy Coloring Sheet if children are not using it in a class setting today.)

Prepared by the Rev. Julie Coffman Hester. Julie is a pastor and writer in North Carolina who has served all ages in faith formation for over 30 years. Her current ministry focuses on writing curriculum and resources and teaching workshops on writing as a spiritual practice and writing through grief.



QUESTIONS?

Feel free to contact us at

800-728-7228, ext. 5047

or email special.offerings@pcusa.org

pcusa.org/christmasjoy