



Christmas in a Box

Family Devotional

Instructions:

On behalf of First Congregational we wish you a Merry Christmas and offer Season's Greetings while we are apart. Know that we miss you and hold you in prayer during this extended time of separation. Also know that while we are apart, we are still the body of Christ cradled in God's love and growing in purpose and strength. In lieu of being together, we welcome you to Christmas in a Box! This is a family-based devotional engaging all five senses meant to guide you through the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to set aside about 30 minutes to complete this journey. We have also included a CD of past Christmas music to fill your home with the sounds of FCUCC. Feel free to play it while you do this devotion or enjoy it whenever you like.

This devotional is divided into three sections: Read, Respond, Discuss (not always in the order). When reading out loud, feel free to take turns so everyone's voices are heard.

When responding, you will be given a short activity based around one object in this box. Don't have the box? No problem! All our items can be readily substituted with common items around the house. Just do your best to gather what you can or enjoy reading without the worship aids.

Lastly, you will have one question to discuss as a family to help remember something important about what Jesus' life means to you.

The Light Comes into the World

(Adapted John 1:1-18)

*As you open the box, notice that everything is swaddled in burlap and laid upon straw - just like Jesus in the manger. Imagine you are gathered around the manger wondering at the gift of the Child before you. First, as you read, take out the candle and when you reach the words **“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it,”** light your candle and repeat those words together. Think about how beautiful the light is and how Christ’s light shows us hope, today.*



READ:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. But to all who received

him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

DISCUSS: What is the most important part of Christmas to you and why? How does this show you God's love - the light of Jesus Christ?

MARY AND THE ANGEL

(Adapted Luke 1:26-38)

RESPONSE: HEAR. *There is a long tradition of trumpets and angels appearing together in the bible. The Gospel of Matthew even says, "And God will send out God's Angels with a loud trumpet call." Unfortunately, a trumpet would not fit in this box. Instead we included a bell. Every time the Angel speaks, ring your bell so you can hear the presence of God's messengers!*



Got instruments? Get them and play them!

READ:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

JESUS AND THE SHEPHERDS

(Adapted Luke 2:1-18)

READ:

In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to

Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

RESPONSE: FEEL. *Take out the Donkey from your box. Feel how soft its fur is and imagine what it would have been like to be the Donkey, looking on as Jesus was born and laid in his manger. Now it is time to celebrate the birth of this new little baby who is in your manger, your new manger buddy! As a family, parade your Donkey through EVERY room in your house saying out loud “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”*



DISCUSS: If you were the Donkey, what would you have felt having to share your space with this new little baby?

JESUS AND THE “PEOPLE OF WISDOM”

(Adapted Matthew 2:1-11)

READ:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise people from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard

this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

RESPONSE: SEE. *Take out the glass star from your box. If you can, turn off the lights and shine a flashlight through the star. Imagine seeing this star far up in the sky and following it to see baby Jesus - like you were going home to see your own family. Feel free to bundle up and go outside if it's a stary night. Hold your star up to the sky and imagine following it to see the Child of God laying in a manger. Afterwards, hang your First Congregational star on your Christmas Tree or somewhere in your home.*



DISCUSS: How does God help to make our house feel like our home?

FINISH READING:

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

RESPONSE: SMELL & TASTE.

Remove the frankincense & myrrh incense stick from your box and light it. Frankincense is from the Boswellia tree and in Jesus time was very expensive and only afforded by wealthy people. Myrrh has been prized traded in the Middle East for over 5,000 years. Take a moment to smell what everyone would have smelled in the manger that night. It's like your home is becoming the manger itself!



Other Spices were also highly prized in the Middle East, especially cinnamon. So, let's take out the tea and cinnamon sticks. Boil some hot water and add the tea and stick to your cup. Taste what those in the manger might have drunk in their time to stay warm on the cold winter night.

DISCUSS: What are the smells and tastes that make Christmas special to you? Why are they special and how do they help to celebrate our greatest gift, the baby Jesus?

A CHILD IS BORN!

(Isaiah 9:1-7)

READ:

Sometimes it's best to start back at the beginning, or maybe long before the beginning. About seven hundred years before the beginning of our story Isaiah proclaimed the coming of a child, God's Son, that we celebrate tonight. Hear these words of hope and love from the prophet:

**The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness -
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,**

**Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

We hope that this Christmas in a box has helped to remind you of the true meaning of Christmas: the love of God known through the birth of baby Jesus. We wish we could celebrate this Christmas with you in person but that time will come soon enough. Meantime, we encourage everyone present to finish this devotion by reading aloud this Christmas blessing:

UNISON CHRISTMAS BLESSING:

God of the manger and God of the star, God of hope and God of Joy, God who gave your only son and God who is the Son our Savior, we praise your holy name this night! With angels singing and shepherds watching, wise men bearing fine gifts of spice, help us to celebrate the precious gift of Jesus. This year, may we unwrap a new and everlasting faith that gives us joy and confidence in your presence until we can worship together again. Bless us and bless our home; Amen.



— *The Church of the Open Door* —

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