

### Who did what?

Lead a guessing game that connects famous people to their work. Prepare five flash cards, each bearing the name of a famous person.

Examples:

Thomas Edison  
Hillary Clinton  
Tiger Woods

As you hold up each name, ask learners to identify what work each person does or did.

Example:

Tiger Woods—Golf Pro

Discuss briefly what we learn about a person by knowing his or her occupation.

### Biblical who's who

Expand on the concept of linking persons to their jobs. This time, shift the focus to Bible characters. Direct learners to work in pairs.

Give each pair a large index card on which to write the names of five Old and New Testament characters (exceptions: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit).

Examples:

Isaiah  
Eve  
Matthew

Ask your learners to pass completed cards to another group. Then ask each pair to read the names of the characters on the card they have received. Ask them to identify the role each character played in God's plan for salvation. As they do, they should write that "occupation" after the character's name.

Example: Isaiah—prophet

Discuss the results of this activity. Stress the person and work connection.

### The work of angels

Against this backdrop, ask learners this pivotal question: What job do you think angels do?

Give learners time to discuss this question in pairs. Record their responses on a white board.

Read Luke 1:19: "I am Gabriel, who stands before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news." Compare the

angel's description of his own work to learners' answers.

Together, work toward understanding the explanation found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "With their whole beings, the angels are servants and messengers of God" (329).

### Messages for us

Scripture teaches us that the job of angels is often to serve God by bringing his messages to people like Zechariah (Lk 1:8-14), Mary (Lk 1:26-35), and the shepherds near Bethlehem (Lk 2:8-14). In this concluding exercise, learners consider how the work of angels also has meaning for us.

In advance, copy these five messages announced by the angels to the shepherds in Luke 2:8-14. Copy one message per paper strip and create enough strips to provide one message per pair. (Some pairs will have the same message.)

- "Do not be afraid."
- "I proclaim good news of great joy that will be for all the people."
- "Today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord."
- "This will be a sign for you: You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling

clothes and lying in a manger."

- "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Distribute the message strips.

Instruct pairs to read their message. Then they are to work together to determine what the message means—both to the shepherds and to us. Ask for volunteers to share their findings with the entire group.

Use your shared discussion to establish that the work of the angels was to bring an amazing message from God to the shepherds near Bethlehem, a message that led them to Jesus. Discover together that today, as clearly as on that first Christmas, it remains the work of angels, through Scripture, to announce the coming of the Savior, encourage our faith, call us to worship, and lead us to Jesus.

And that's not fluff. RTU



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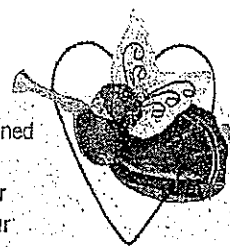
## Angel search

Angels are not simply marvels of the Nativity scene, to be examined once a year. Rather, they are constant and active participants in salvation history appearing throughout Scripture. Encourage your learners to expand their understanding of the role of angels in our Catholic faith. Use this angel search or similar searches you create yourself throughout the year.

Direct learners to discover the presence and identify the work of angels in each of these passages from the New Testament in the left-hand column below (teacher and catechist hints are in right-hand column).

Search for	Discover angels at work
Matthew 2:19-20	With Joseph
Luke 22:43	During the agony in the garden
Mark 1:12-13	When Jesus is tempted
Matthew 28:2-6	At the tomb

Share your findings.





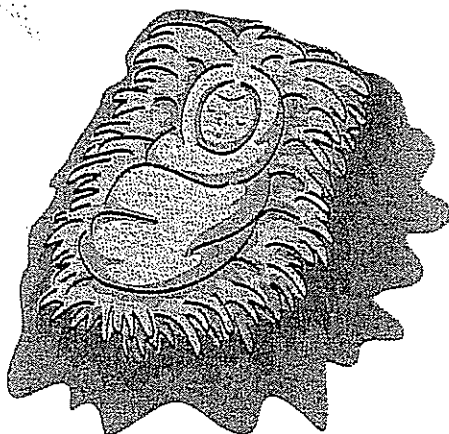
# REDISCOVER THE Word Made Flesh IN THE CHRISTMAS GOSPELS

Use the readings of the season to explore the mystery of Jesus' birth

» *Janet Schaeffler, OP*

One of my fondest childhood memories is unpacking the crèche every year and arranging the figures under our family Christmas tree. In this insightful article, Janet Schaeffler, OP, gives us some practical, hands-on ideas that will help those you teach learn the deep meaning of the Nativity.

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Often what we do with Scripture stories is focus on the details rather than the core message. For instance, with the creation story, we might invite the learners to draw pictures of what God created on each of the six days. Not a wrong activity, but a better one might be one large, magnificent mural of creation with the words, "God created and saw that it was good."

While exploring the gospel story of Jesus calming the seas, do we have a craft project of making little toy boats, or do we explore what the message of the story is for us today?

## What is the true message of Christmas?

So, what do we do when we come to the Christmas gospels? Do we concentrate on the details and make replicas of the stable with the baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph? Certainly

needed so that we know the story, but is there more?

Some thoughts and guidelines to remember:

- Realize and rejoice that the Holy Spirit gave us two accounts of the Christmas events (Matthew and Luke); to interpret them faithfully is to treat them separately. They don't have to be harmonized; they are not exact historical records.
- Matthew and Luke put together their gospels, including the infancy gospels, from their faith in the Resurrection. They knew how the story turned out, so they read Jesus' death and resurrection into his life and ministry as well as into his

birth. As they wrote about his birth, it wasn't just about a baby, but about who Jesus was to become.

- In catechesis, use all of the Christmas gospels, not just the ones of Christmas day. Christmas is a season that lasts until the Baptism of the Lord; all of the feasts and their gospels stand together; all are facets that help us appreciate the Incarnation—God taking on humanity and embracing the human condition.

Christmas magnanimously reminds us that Jesus is present with us in our lives, in our world. This overwhelming reality sustains us from childhood through every stage of our lives.

- Give your learners one-use cameras or ask them to use their cell phone cameras. Invite them to go in search of situations, places, gatherings, and people where they see Jesus present in the world today. Who are the people who continue the Incarnation today? What are the various ways Jesus continues to be present to those in need (to the sick, the grieving, or the poor, for example)?
- As a group, write prayers that Jesus will be recognized in the various places we live, learn, and play.

The Christmas gospels point to the

faith attitudes needed for all disciples.

- Invite each one of your learners to choose one of the people from the Christmas gospels (e.g., Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist). Ask them to “become” that person. How did they feel? What qualities or characteristics did they need to respond in their Christmas story? Come back to today. How do they use those qualities today?

In Luke’s infancy narrative, there are several prayers: 1:46-55; 1:68-79; 2:14; 2:29-32.

- Why did the people pray them?
- Invite your learners to illustrate the prayers through photographs, drawings, or a PowerPoint presentation.
- Invite them to write a modern-day version.

### The key to understanding “incarnation”

The Christmas gospels proclaim that Jesus became one of us—a living, breathing, human being. He became human to share in our lives, to show us how to live. John summarized the entire story of the birth of Christ with the sentence: “The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (1:14; gospel for Christmas morning).

- Invite your learners to have a conversation: How does it make you feel to know that Jesus was a human being just like you?
- In small groups, invite your learners to do a Scripture search, looking for places where Jesus talked about or showed us by example how to live.
- Working in different teams, design a newspaper centered on “Jesus shows us how to live.” Consider publishing it for your parish (as a Christmas gift).

The Christmas gospels foretell that Jesus is food for a hungry world. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means “House of Bread.” Jesus was laid in a manger—a food and watering trough for livestock.

- Explore with your learners how these symbols connect with Jesus as the Bread of Life, his gift to us in Eucharist.
- Just as Jesus gives himself to us in bread, explore how we are called to give our lives for a hungry world.
  - Use the Web site Feeding Minds—Fighting Hunger ([religionteachersjournal.com/links1109](http://religionteachersjournal.com/links1109)) to provide your learners with an international interactive experience of creating a world free from hunger.
  - Kids Can Make a Difference ([religionteachersjournal.com/links1109](http://religionteachersjournal.com/links1109)) is a program that focuses on the root causes of hunger and poverty and how youth can help.

### Who would be at Jesus’ birth today?

Christmas declares that with Jesus there is no exclusion. The Cantic of Zechariah sounds the theme of gentle inclusion. The manger scenes, bequeathed to us by early Franciscans, contain an interesting array of witnesses to Jesus’ birth: the elegant magi, the shepherds from the fields, the noisy animals.

- If Jesus were born today, who might be in the Nativity scene? Draw or construct a Nativity scene of today.

Are there laws that might keep some people out? Who do you think Jesus would want there?

Luke’s infancy narrative tells us of the poverty of Christ and the simplicity to which we are all called.

- Invite your learners to read Luke’s full infancy narrative, looking for what it says about the simplicity of Jesus’ early days.
- Explore ways to live simply and how that would affect others, the earth. These Web sites might help. All links are available at [religionteachersjournal.com/links1109](http://religionteachersjournal.com/links1109):
  - [Affluensa.org](http://Affluensa.org)
  - [Alternatives for Simple Living](http://Alternatives for Simple Living)
  - [Fifty Possible Ways to Challenge Over-Commercialism](http://Fifty Possible Ways to Challenge Over-Commercialism)
  - [New American Dream](http://New American Dream)
  - [The Simple Living Network](http://The Simple Living Network)



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## Quiz about Scripture facts

- 1 According to the Scriptural accounts, which animals were in the stable at Jesus’ birth? (Neither of the gospels mentions any animals being present.)
- 2 How many wise men came to see Jesus? (The gospels do not tell us that there were three. It tells us that there were three gifts, but that doesn’t necessarily mean there were three magi; it has been an ancient tradition that there were three and their names were Casper, Melchior, and Balthasar. However, we don’t know the exact number.)
- 3 On what date was Jesus born? (Scripture does not tell us the date; neither do we know the exact year or month.)
- 4 Do all four gospels tell us about the birth of Jesus? Do they tell us the same things? (Only Matthew and Luke give us what are called the “infancy narratives,” and many of the details are different in each account. They were written for different audiences, many years after the actual events, written to share a message.)