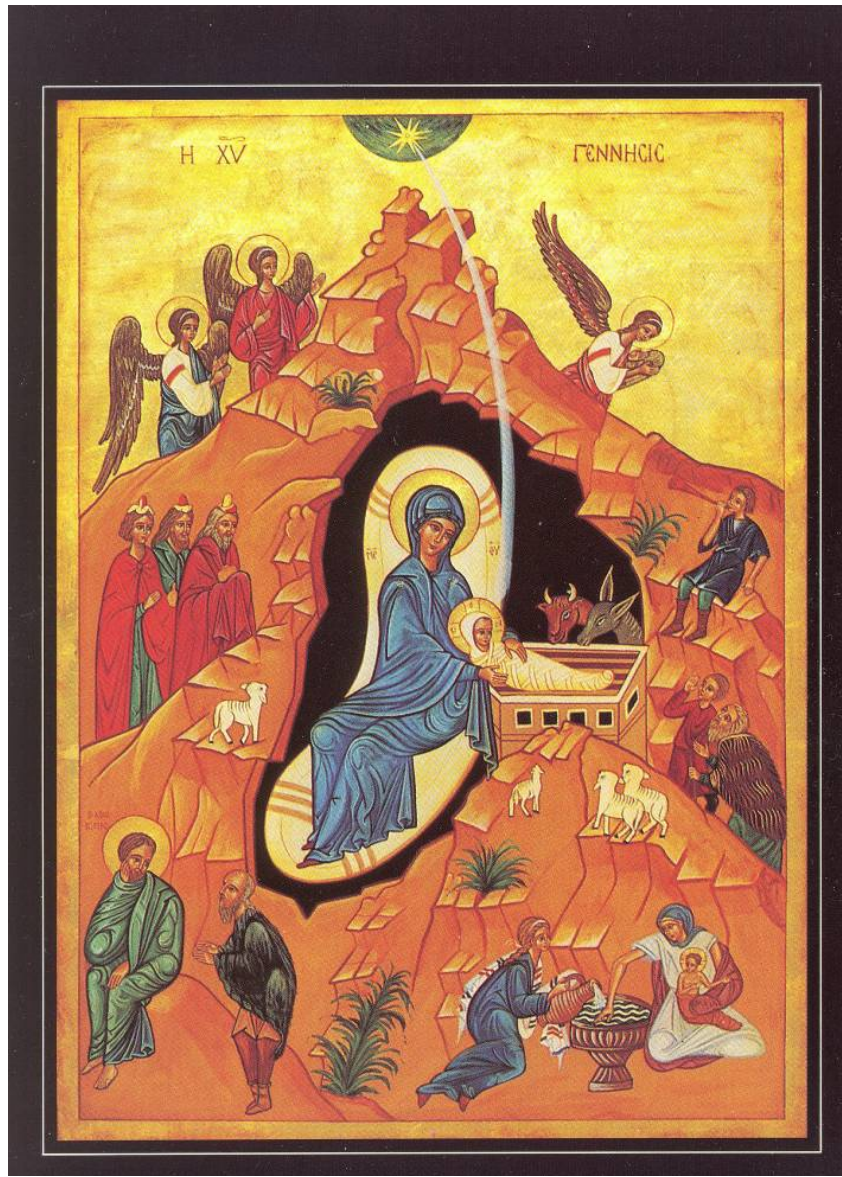


Nativity Icon



(Addressed to the children):

How many of you know how to read?

What are your favorite things to read?

Do you know how to read a picture?

This picture is a sacred icon.

It a sacred story.

So the artists say that they “write an icon.”

The icon tells the story about the birth of Christ.

Let's read the icon.

The title is right up here at the top.

It's hard to read so I will read it for us.

Yes, it is in another language, Greek. {Possibly: Slavic in Cyrillic alphabet?}

"The birth of the Holy Savior"

Can you help me read the icon to your families? Use your "playground" voices.

Well, first of all, can you show me where baby Jesus is?

How do we know that it is Jesus?

Yes, he is a baby.

AND, he has a halo! {Add-on: with the letters saying he is "I am who am" Ex.3:14}

What does a halo mean?

What's he sleeping in?

- Manger – a place that holds food for animals
- Wearing swaddling clothes

Can you find Jesus in another place in the icon?

Yes, that's Jesus down in the lower right corner.

Can you see what is happening to baby Jesus?

Two of Mary's helpers, midwives, are preparing to give baby Jesus his first bath!

I wonder why the artist put that in the icon?

There must be a reason but I have no idea! {Add-on: to prove Jesus was human}

And where is Jesus' mother?

What's her name? Mary.

What does the icon tell us about her?

She is by Jesus

She is dressed in blue – seems to be a favorite color for artists to use for Mary.

She has the biggest halo

The artist put some letters in her halo – an abbreviation for Mary – God Bearer

Those letters are a little code in case we are not sure of who it is

I wonder why she is smiling? Happy to be a new mom!?

Well, who do you think this is down here in the left corner?

He must be somebody special also since he has a halo.

Yes, it is St. Joseph, the carpenter, Mary's husband.
 Then who do think the guy is who is wearing red pants?
 That's the devil and he is talking to Joseph.
 He's trying to confuse him.
 The devil is telling him "Certainly you don't believe that baby is really the Son of God, do you? Naw, he's just another baby!"
 Of course, we know better! God told Mary and all of us that this is his Son and he is to be named "Jesus."

Did you notice the place where Jesus, Mary and the animals are?
 It's a cave, right?

I wonder why the artist shows us Jesus in a cave?

The Bible story told us that there was no room for Joseph and Mary in the inn (the place where travelers stayed) so they went to where the animals were kept.

Maybe it was a cave or maybe it was a stable.

This icon artist decided to make a cave because there are many caves in the hills around Bethlehem. {add-on: also, looking ahead to Jesus burial in a cave}

What are these two animals in the cave with Mary and Jesus?

Yes, a donkey and an ox.

Most Christmas pictures show the donkey and the ox.

Why do you think the artists do that?

It's an old story from 500 years before Jesus lived.

Back then a prophet named Isaiah told the Jewish people:

"An ox knows its owner; and a donkey knows its master's manger." {Is 1:3}

In other words, even a dumb ox knows that this baby is the Son of God!

How about these men over here on the right?

Who are they?

Yes, the shepherds. They have some of their sheep with them.

Why did they come to see Jesus?

Yes, the angels told them about Jesus.

Where are the angels in the icon?

How do we know that they are angels?

Yes, wings and halos – and they are close to the sky.

I think you all are getting pretty good at reading an icon!

Who are the three men over here on the left?

Magi – Three wise men – Three kings – we use all those names for them.

They were wise people who studied the stars.

They are part of another story about the birth of Jesus – Matthew’s Gospel.

Do you remember where they came from?

Yes, the “East” – probably from Persia, about 900 miles away.

Do you remember why they came to see Jesus?

They saw his star.

In our icon the star light is coming all the way down to baby Jesus.

There are millions of stars out there.

I wonder how the wise men knew this was a special star.

There must have been something special about the star, something different,
something new -- maybe it was bigger.

That’s the end of the icon’s story.

Here’s the really hard question about the icon story.

I wonder why Jesus came to us here on earth?

- To show us that God loves us
- To show that God is close to us, not far, far away
- To show us that we are connected to God – we are family
- To save us from our sins
- To show us how to love God and one another.

In this basket I have some little wooden stars.

They are made of olive wood from Bethlehem.

There is one for each family.

Please put your star some place special, like on your Christmas tree, to remind you
that Jesus is our special star... and you are special ...you know how to read sacred
icons!

Please take one of the stars and find your way back to your families.

I have one brief point for the rest of us. {A word for the adults}

In our Gospel story the Innkeeper had no room for Jesus in his establishment.

We are the innkeepers of today. Will you have room for Jesus when he comes or will
you turn him away?

As we said all during Advent, “Find us ready, Lord.”