

St. Philip's Fast – The Nativity Fast
Awaiting the Saviour



Your nativity, O Christ Our God, made the light of knowledge dawn on the world. Through it those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship You the Sun of Righteousness, and to know You the Dawn from on high. Glory to You, O Lord.

Troparion of the Feast

On November 15, forty days before Christmas, the Church begins to prepare for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. During these forty days, we prepare to celebrate the coming (therefore *Advent* which means *coming* or *arrival*) of God's Son, Jesus Christ, into this world.

Many faithful people had waited a long time for the coming of Jesus. During this long period of time, God spoke to prophets and instructed them how He wanted His people to prepare for the coming of His Son. He told them that they need to repent, change their way of living, make peace with one another, care for each other, and be obedient and faithful to God. Similarly, every year during this forty-day period we are invited to prepare in like manner as we await Christ's arrival.

Forty days can seem like a very long time for children and even adults. We know how anxious we are when a birthday or anniversary is approaching – how we want to start planning a party and inviting our friends. When we think about that special celebration we realize that part of the enjoyment of it is the time we spent getting ready for it.

The Church helps us get ready for this very special celebration of Christ's birth. First, the Church issues an announcement, much like an invitation, letting us know that the Feast of the Nativity is approaching. Then, during the this forty-day period there are additional announcements made which instruct us on how to get ready and focus our attention as the feast approaches. Here are some of the days on which these announcements are made:

November 15

This is the first day of the Nativity Fast which begins forty days before Christmas. It is a good day to spend reflecting on and deciding how we should spend the rest of this preparatory period – what we should do to try to improve our way of living, and how we should spend our time in order to allow more time for prayer and charitable work. On this day we should mark the special days on the calendar that will help us arrive spiritually renewed to Christmas, or, we can begin to make an Advent Calendar with our children to help us keep track of the days before Christmas. We can also start a St. Philip's Chain of good deeds that we can later use to adorn our Christmas Tree (see below for more details on these activities).

November 21

This is the day of a major feast which commemorates the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple. It marks the first announcement that is given in the Church of the coming of Christ. During Matins on that day, the words "Christ is born! Glorify Him!" are sung for the first time. These words will be sung at every Sunday Matins service from this point on until Christmas.

November 30

The last day of November is the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle. Noteworthy is that during the services commemorating the life of St. Andrew, the Church weaves in additional hymns which tell us what will happen on the day of Christ's birth – note how psychologically prudent this step was: the congregation is being prepared for the Nativity

in the hymnography of the feast-days weeks in advance! Here are three texts from Matins of that day that explicitly speak of the Nativity:

1. *Katavasia* of ode 1: “Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is from heaven, receive Him! Christ is on earth, be lifted up. Sing to the Lord all the earth and praise Him with joy all people, for He has been glorified!”
2. *Katavasia* of ode 9: “I behold a strange, most glorious mystery! Heaven – the cave! The cherubic throne – the Virgin! The manger – the place where Christ lay, the uncontainable God whom we magnify in song!
3. *Now and forever* at the Psalms of Praise: “Bethlehem receive the Mother City of God; for she has come to give birth in you to the unwaning Light. You Angels, marvel in heaven; mankind give glory upon earth, Magi from Persia bring your triple glorious gift, Shepherds abiding in the fields sing the thrice-holy hymn. Let everything that has breath praise the Maker of all.

December 6

This day is dedicated to the memory of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. The life of St. Nicholas is an excellent example for us to follow if we want to learn how to care for and help one another. During the services on this day, we are reminded again of how the whole earth prepares to glorify the birth of Jesus. Below are two texts from Great Vespers of that day:

1. *Now and forever* at the “Lamp Lighting” Psalms (140/141): “O Cave, prepare yourself to receive the Mother who bears Christ within her womb. O Manger, receive the Word who destroyed the sins of all. O Shepherds, keep watch and then bear witness to the awesome wonder. O Magi, come from Persia, and bring your gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the King. For the Lord has appeared from a virgin Mother; yet she bowed to Him as a servant and spoke to Him within her bosom, saying: How were You conceived in me? How did You grow in me, my God and Saviour?”
2. *Now and forever* at the Aposticha: “O Virgin without husband, from where do you come? Who gave you birth; who is your mother? How can you cradle the Creator in your arms? How did you accomplish virgin-birth? Most pure Lady, we see in you great wonders, awesome mysteries fulfilled on earth. We shall prepare a worthy cave for you. We shall ask the heavens for a star. We shall ask the Magi to come from the east to the west to behold your new-born Child in a manger, to behold the Saviour of all.”

The Two Sundays Before Christmas

The first of these two Sundays is called the *Sunday of the Forefathers*. The verses from the services on this day tell us how the people of the Old Testament prepared for the coming of the Saviour. The second Sunday is the *Sunday of the Fathers* which repeats a lot of the hymnography that was sung on the Sunday of the Forefathers. The Gospel reading on this day lists all the generations of the ancestors of Jesus. In order to illustrate this Gospel lesson, you may want to make a Jesse Tree with your children to show who some of these ancestors and faithful leaders of God’s people were.

Suggested Activities

I. ADVENT CALENDARS

A. A Surprise Advent Calendar for Children

Using special sheets (A-1 and A-2) you can make a calendar that will give you a surprise each day of Advent. After you finish making the calendar, carefully open the numbered doors, one door each day until Christmas. This way you can keep track of the number of days until Christmas.

Materials Needed:

Crayons, glue or paste, single-edged razor or craft knife.

1. Colour and decorate with glitter, stars, etc. the pattern labelled A-1 which contains a picture of a church. Do not color too darkly over the dotted lines.
2. With the razor or knife, cut the doors on the dotted lines. **DO NOT FOLD BACK.**
3. Apply glue or paste to the margin of the page labelled A-2.
4. Lay the church page over it, making sure that the edges are carefully lined up – the two pages must be matched for the calendar to work correctly.
5. Now carefully open the first door to see your first surprise.

B. An Advent Calendar for Older Children and Adults

Use the special sheets labelled A-3 and A-4 entitled “The Season of Advent.” With the aid of a current desk or wall calendar, fill in the corner of each box with the dates of Advent, beginning with November 15 and continuing through to December 27. Make sure you place the numbers on the correct days of the week. Now go back to the text given above which introduces the “announcements” and incorporate them into your calendar. Also, you may want to find a list of special feast days and saints’ days that announce the Nativity of Christ. In the box for each of these days, write in the name of the feast or saint or draw a small picture or symbol to remind you of the person or event that is remembered on that day. Be sure to mark also the two Sundays of preparation before Christmas.

Here is an example of the names of prophets and saints that you may want to include on your calendar besides the ones noted above, who are commemorated by the Church on the following days:

November 16 – St. Matthew the Evangelist who wrote one of the four Holy Gospels.

November 19 – The prophet Obadiah, who rebuked God’s unfaithful people for their pride and wicked deeds, saying that one the Lord’s Day, the Day of Judgment, they will be rewarded according to their deeds.

December 1 – The prophet Nahum who told of the destruction of Nineveh and warned the people of Judah to keep the feasts and remain faithful to the Lord.

- December 2 – The prophet Habakkuk who had a vision of God coming from Teman to save His people (see Hab. 3:3-4).
- December 3 – The prophet Zephaniah who spoke of the coming of the Lord, the King of Israel (see Zeph. 3:14-20).
- December 4 – St. John of Damascus, a poet and musician who composed many of the hymns sung at Christmas.
- December 7 – St. Ambrose of Milan, a saint and bishop, who composed a wonderful hymn of praise to God – it is sung in Church at the beginning of the New Year.
- December 9 – The conception of St. Anna, when she conceived the Most Holy Mother of God who gave birth to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
- December 12 – St. Spyridon the wonderworker, a bishop who cared about his people and tried to help those in need.
- December 13 – St. Herman the wonderworker, a humble monk who was one of the first missionaries to Alaska. He brought the good news of Christ to the Aleut people and showed them how to live a Christian life. He is the first saint of America.
- December 16 – The prophet Haggai who spoke God’s word to the people and told them to rebuild the Temple of Solomon which had been destroyed.
- December 17 – The prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths. Among other things, he recorded the story of the three youths who were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to be unfaithful to God by worshipping an idol.

II. AN ADVENT CHAIN

A. One of the aspects of preparation during the Nativity Fast is increased prayer. To encourage children’s (and adult’s) prayers, by providing a physical activity associated with prayer, we suggest the making of an “advent chain.” This chain is a variation of a simple paper chain made out of strips of paper that are looped together. The links of this chain, however, are really “prayer links,” for as each link is made, a prayer is said to God for a specific person or reason. Begin the project by gathering the following materials together in a box.

Materials Needed:

Construction paper (assorted colours) cut into strips approximately 8” long and ¾” wide, glue and crayons, markers or pencils.

Each day, each person in the family can make one or more links on the chain at his/her normal time of personal prayer. On the link, write the name of the person for whom the prayer is intended, or, the whole prayer that is said (if it is a short one such as the “Jesus Prayer” – “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”). The links could also include a biblical verse that will be read each day. Loop the new strip through the last link on the chain and join at the ends with glue. At Christmas, the chains can be used to help decorate the tree or the house.

B. An alternative suggestion is to make a link for each thing that is done during Advent to try to establish good habits. Begin by discussing together the types of things that each person could do to try to improve his/her life. A list of ideas could be drawn up for reference, with things such as saying morning and/or evening prayers, praying before meals, making someone’s day brighter by a good word, helping brother or sister or parents cheerfully, doing assigned chores without being asked or reminded, reading a selection from the Bible, getting school work done ahead of time, helping an older person or a shut-in in the neighbourhood, etc. your family can probably add many more items to this idea list. Put the list with the chain materials in a box. Each day, each person in the family can write out on strips the things they have done that day to try to improve their life.

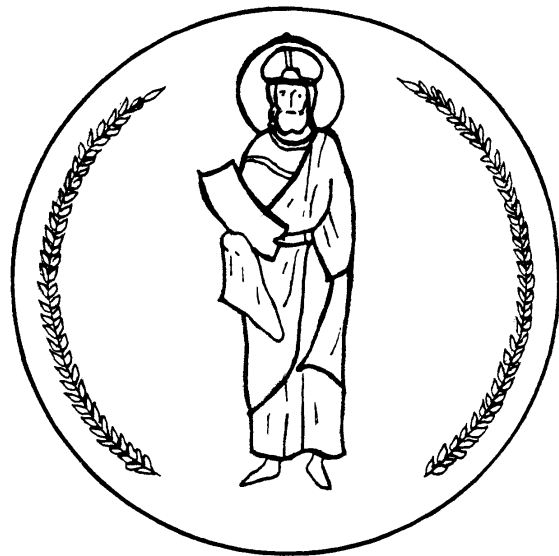
III. JESSE TREE ORNAMENTS

These ornaments can be used to decorate your Christmas tree.

Materials Needed:

Salt dough (1 cup flour, 1 cup salt, 1 rounded teaspoon powdered alum; add water to these ingredients slowly and knead until a clay-like consistency is achieved), pencils, crayons, water-based paints, rolling pin, string (may replace salt dough with cardboard)

Roll out the salt dough to a thickness of ¼ inch. Using the circles on the pattern sheets cut dough circles. Lay the patterns on the tops of the dough circles and gently trace the figures to leave an impression of the design in the clay below. Lift the pattern and go over the outline to make sure it is clear. Make a hole in the top at the point indicated by the dot on the pattern. Make sure it is large enough to get a piece of string through. If you want to, make the name of the saint depicted in the clay while it is still wet. Bake in a slow oven until dry and hard. Colour with crayons or water colours and hang string through the hole in the top.



IV. BIBLE READINGS FOR TEENS AND ADULTS

The following readings (one for each day of St. Philip's Fast) provide a summary of the major events in the history of salvation which led to the Nativity of Christ.

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| 1. Luke 1:26-35 | 21. I Chron. 16:7-36 |
| 2. Matthew 1:18-24 | 22. I Kings 2:1-5 |
| 3. Genesis 12:1-2 | 23. I Chron. 22:1, 6-11 |
| 4. Genesis 17:5-6 | 24. I Chron. 29:23-30 |
| 5. Genesis 17:15-16 | 25. Psalm 132:11-18 |
| 6. Genesis 21:1-3 | 26. Isaiah 2:1-5 |
| 7. Genesis 26:1-5 | 27. Isaiah 7:3, 10-15 |
| 8. Genesis 28:1-4 | 28. Isaiah 9:2-3, 6-7 |
| 9. Genesis 28:10-17 | 29. Isaiah 11:1-5, 10 |
| 10. Genesis 35:9-12 | 30. Isaiah 40:1-2, 9-11 |
| 11. Genesis 46:2-4 | 31. Isaiah 42:1, 6-9 |
| 12. Genesis 48:1-5 | 32. Isaiah 49:5-7 |
| 13. Genesis 48:15-16 | 33. Isaiah 56:1-2, 7 |
| 14. Genesis 49:1-2, 8, 10 | 34. Isaiah 60:1-6 |
| 15. Genesis 49:28-33 | 35. Isaiah 60:19-22 |
| 16. Genesis 50:22-26 | 36. Micah 5:2-4 |
| 17. I Samuel 16:1-13 | 37. Isaiah 66:22-23 |
| 18. II Samuel 2:1-4a | 38. Zephaniah 3:14-20 |
| 19. II Samuel 5:1-5 | 39. Luke 1:39-56 |
| 20. I Chron. 13:1-4 | 40. Matthew 1:1-17, 2:1-12 |

V. A COUPLE OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS FOR ADULTS

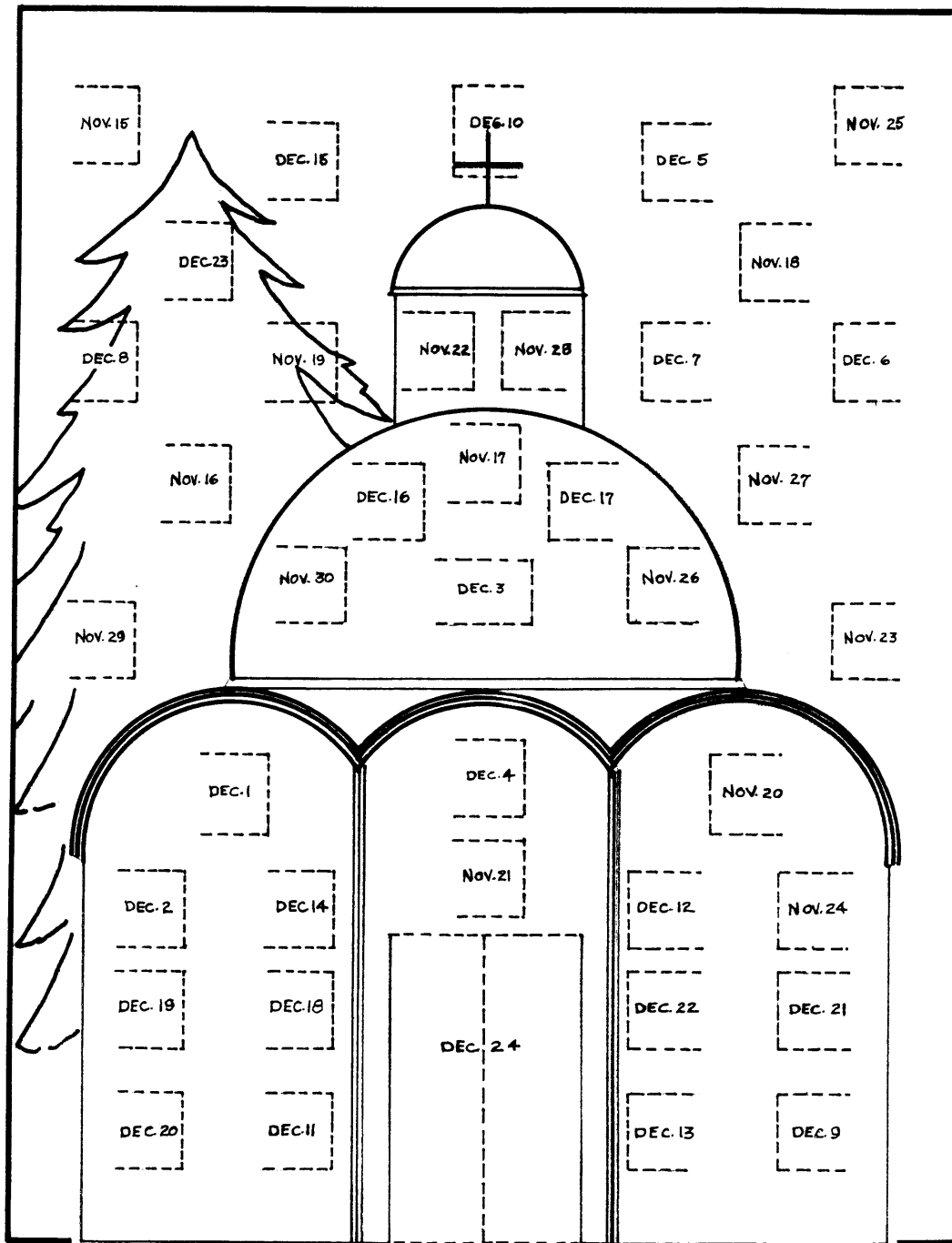
A. St. Gregory the Theologian encourages us to reflect on the feast of the Nativity as the festival of re-creation. In preparation for this process of re-creation of our old selves, ponder the following:

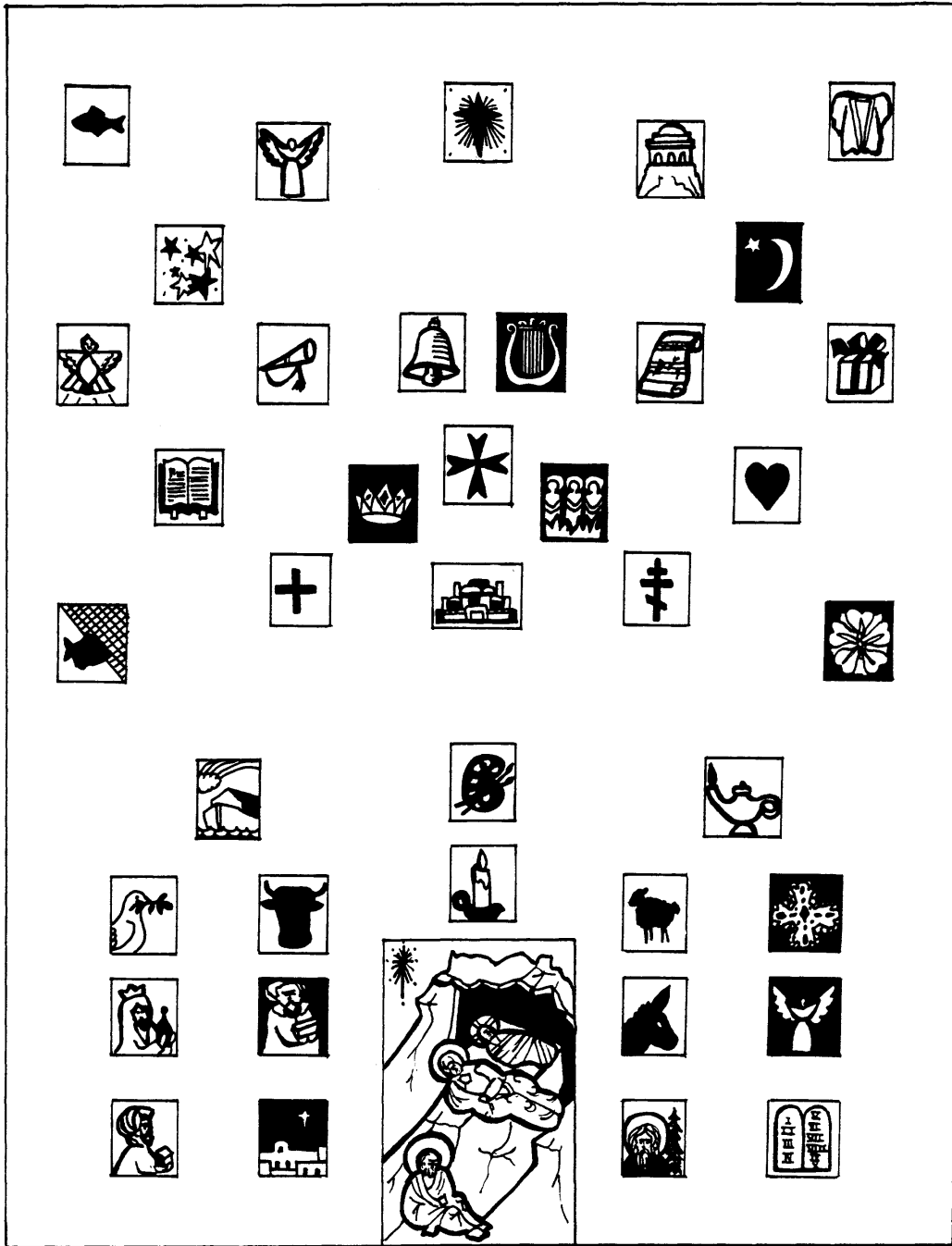
The Word of God has become flesh in order to restore God's image and likeness in us. He enables us to be what we were created to be in the beginning. Christ restores the image of God in human beings, being Himself God's uncreated and eternal image, by becoming a real human being, the "last" and "final" Adam (read 1 Cor. 15:45-49). As the second Adam, Jesus does everything that the first Adam was called, but failed to do. He obeys God; He honours His Name; He accomplishes His will; He loves Him unto His own death. In this manner, Christ fulfills Himself in a human manner as one made in God's image and likeness. However, being the uncreated Image of God, His accomplishment extends to all human beings and is made fully and freely available to all. This is, then, the message of Christmas. The new Adam is born, the one who will restore the image of God so that we can be made whole again. It is in Him that we find fulfillment, perfection, and, ultimately, immortality.

B. Another theological exercise to consider during this forty-day period is this excerpt from St. Athanasius's writing:

“... He has not assumed a body as proper to His own nature, far from it, for as the Word He is without body. He has been manifested in a human body for this reason only, out of the love and goodness of His Father, for the salvation of us men. ... The first fact that you must grasp is this: the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning. There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it at the first.”

On the Incarnation, 26



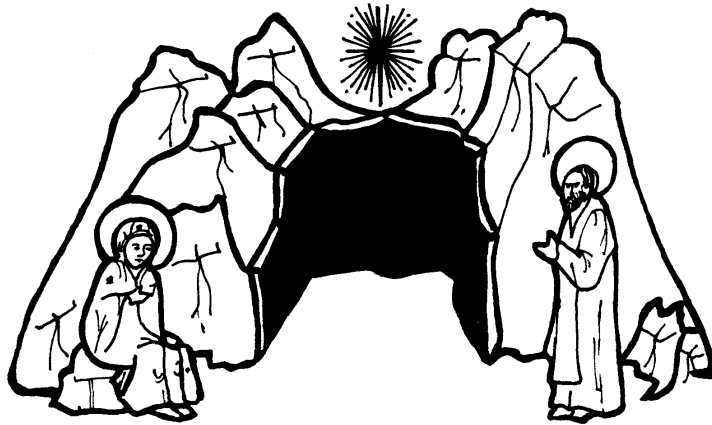


-The Season of Advent-

A-3

A-4

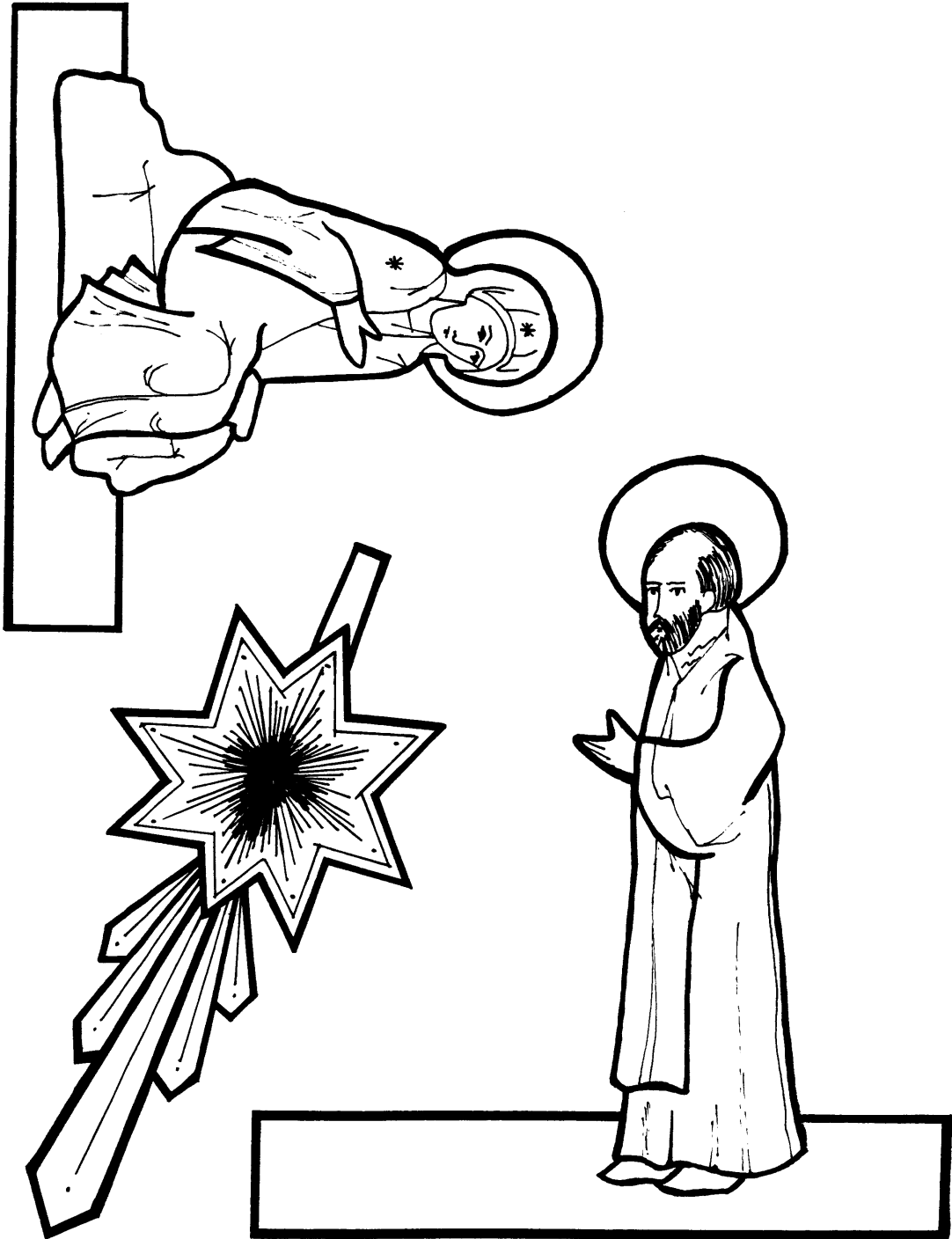
Additional Activities Younger Children Will Love

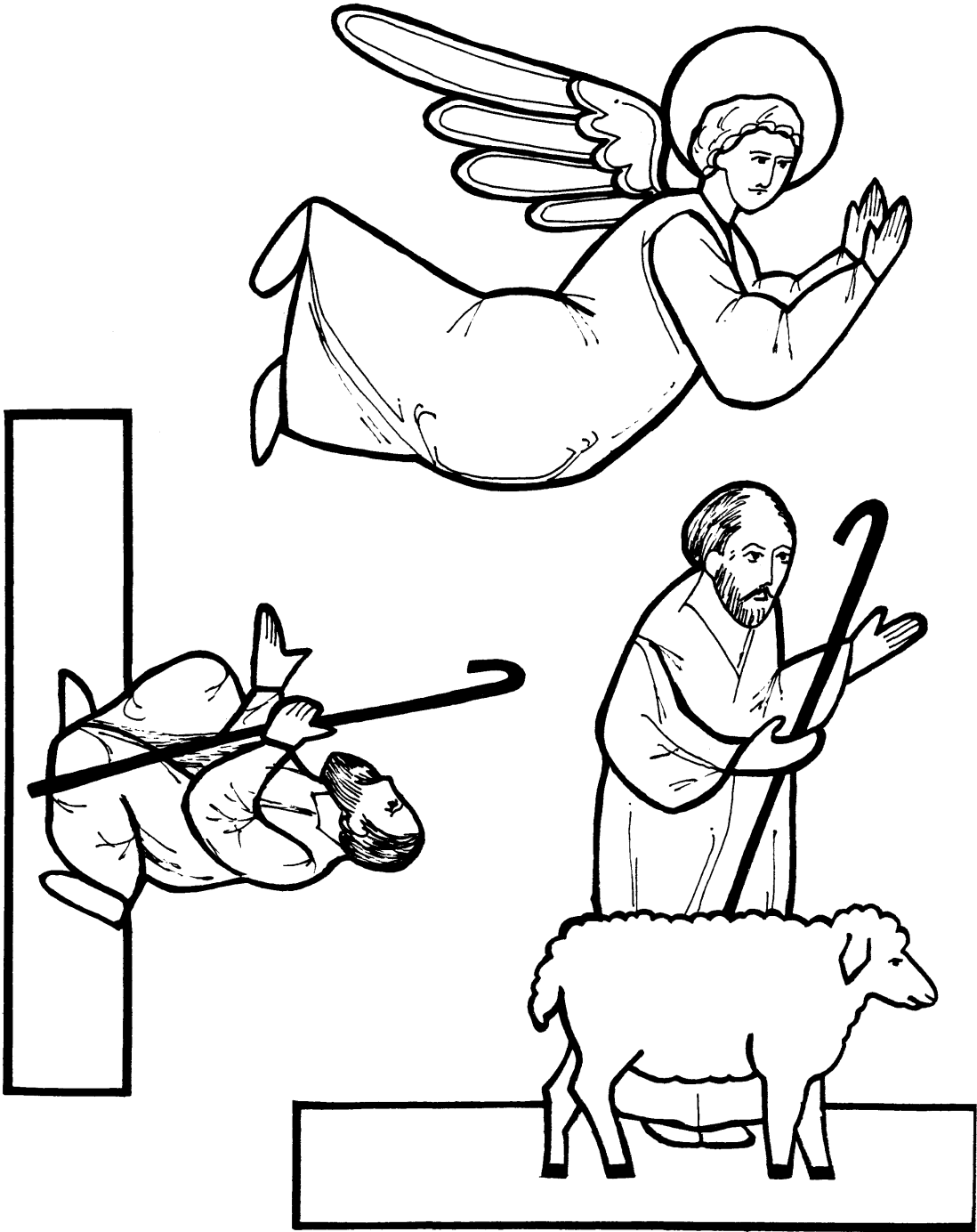


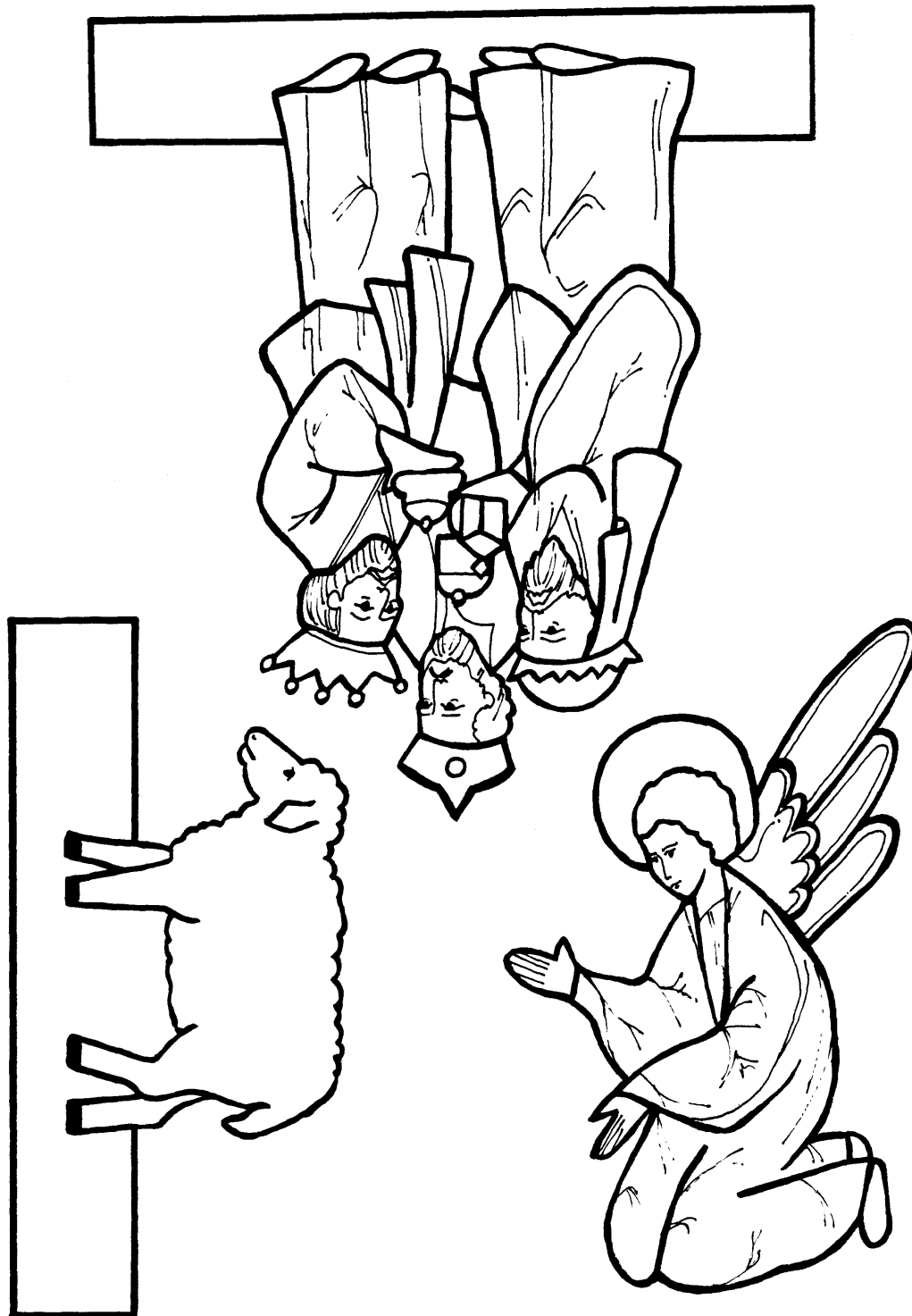
NATIVITY CRECHE

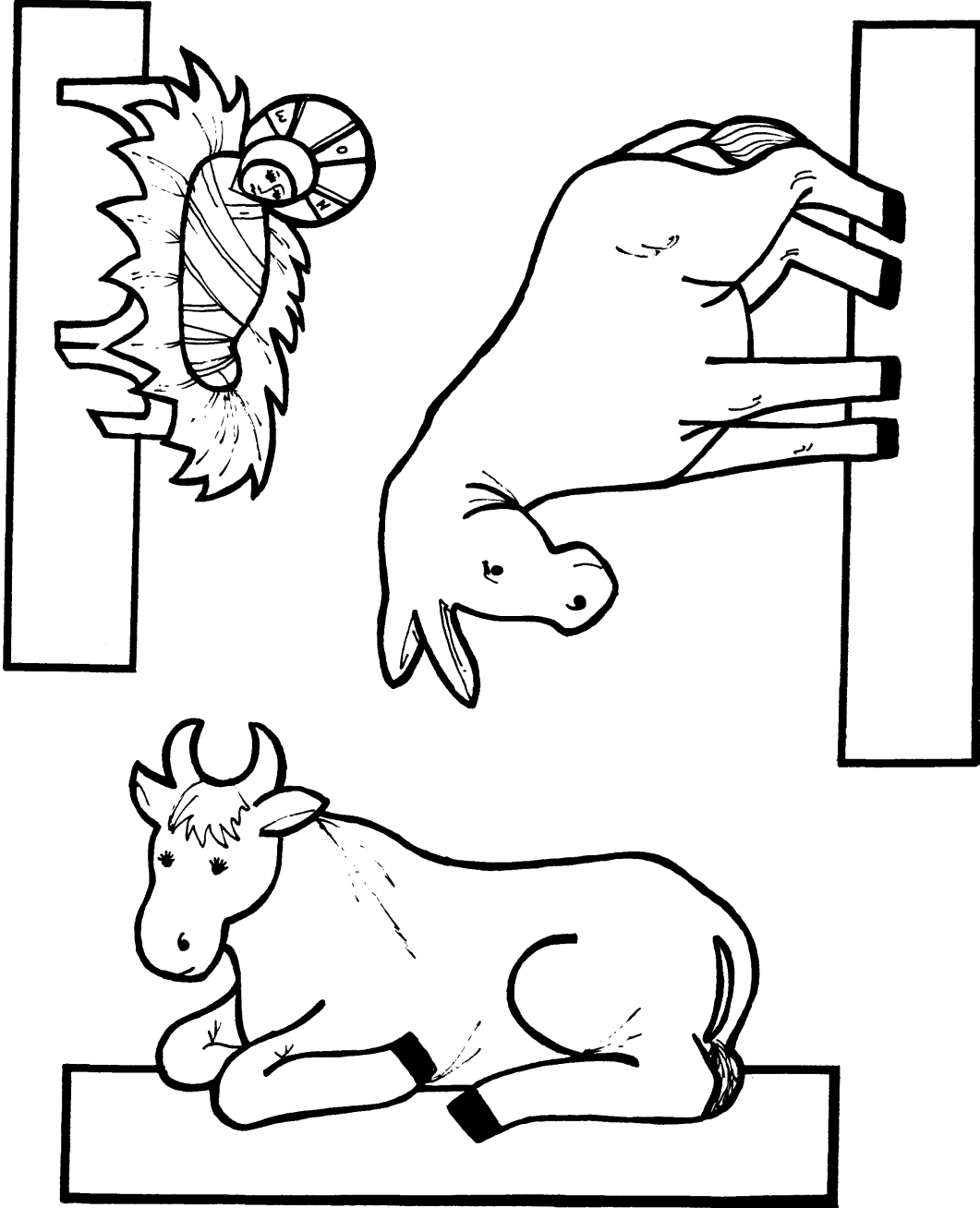
Materials Needed:

- Sheet or cardboard or heavy poster board
- Large grocery bag or brown wrapping paper
- Stapler
- Packages of construction paper — assorted colors
- Scissors
- Glue, cellophane tape







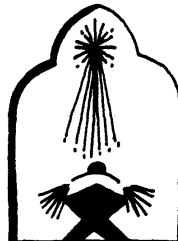
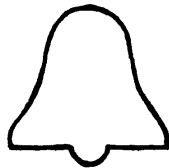
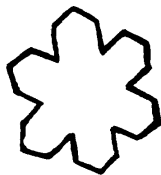
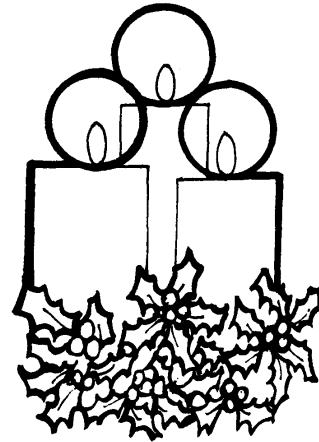
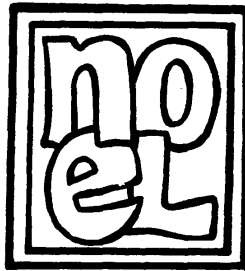
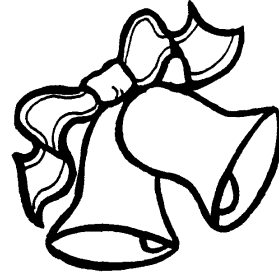
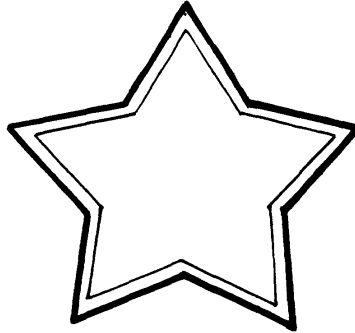
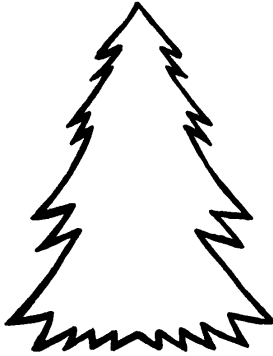


CHRISTMAS CARD PATTERNS (Potato Prints)

Material needed:

Kitchen pairing knife, or single edge razor blade, potato, poster paint, or ink pad, ½ inch paint brush.

1. Cut the potato in half. The size and shape of your selected design, as well as the shape of the potato will determine if you cut it vertically or horizontally.
2. Carve a design onto the flat side of the potato.
3. Dip the carved potato into the poster paint or onto the stamp pad. If the paint does not adhere well, take the paint brush and paint the raised part of the design.
4. Press firmly on paper to create your design.



TRUMPETS TO ANNOUNCE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST
(Kazoos)

Material needed:

Paper tubes from rolls of paper towels
Regular weight aluminum foil or wax paper
Rubber band for each trumpet
Glue, construction paper, misc. crepe paper or gift-wrap, etc.
Glue-on stars, seals, yarns, tassels
Scissors

1. Cut a 4-5 inch square of foil or wax paper.
 2. With a rubber band, attach the foil/wax paper over one end of the tube so that it fits snugly, but without denting the end of the tube.
 3. Select a piece of decorative paper to cover the tube. Cut to size.
 4. Apply glue in long vertical lines all around the tube. Roll paper onto tube and hold until glue has begun to set.
 5. Select the items you want to decorate your trumpet. Try cutting "grass" or fringe; take a 4 inch square of construction paper and cut $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ inch strips into one side of the paper (about two thirds of the way in). Curl it by rolling it around a pencil, then glue to trumpet.
Glue stars or seals in a pattern around the trumpet.
Apply glue to the end section of the trumpet and wind yarn around it, leaving an end hanging down. Attach a tassel to the hanging end.
 6. Use your imagination to create other ideas.
- When you hum into the trumpet, the foil will vibrate creating your very own musical instrument.

