

Lesson 2: The Nativity - Unpacking the Symbols and Meanings

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers
- Student projects from the previous lesson (diorama, play script, or comic strip)
- "Symbol Detective" worksheet (can be a simple three-column chart labeled: Symbol, Literal Meaning, Deeper Meaning)
- Pencils and colored pencils
- Index cards or small pieces of paper
- Optional: Access to a child-friendly online encyclopedia or Bible dictionary for extension activity

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Recall the key characters and sequence of the Nativity story (building on the previous lesson).
- Explain the symbolic meaning of at least three key elements from the story (e.g., the stable, the shepherds, the gifts of the Magi).
- Analyze how a character's actions contribute to the story's overall message.
- Connect individual symbols to a central theme of the Nativity, such as humility or hope.

Lesson Procedure

Part 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

Review & Hook: From Storytellers to Symbol Detectives

"Last time, you all became fantastic storytellers by creating your dioramas, plays, and comics. Let's quickly review our detective work. Who can name the main characters you included in your projects?" (Allow for answers: Mary, Joseph, Jesus, Shepherds, Wise Men, etc.) "And what was the correct order of events?" (Briefly review the sequence from the last lesson).

"Excellent! You know the 'who, what, and where' of the story perfectly. Today, we're taking our investigation to the next level. We're moving from being *story detectives* to *symbol detectives*. A symbol is something simple that represents a much bigger idea. In the Nativity story, almost everything—from the place Jesus was born to the gifts he received—is a clue to a deeper meaning. Let's get our magnifying glasses ready to uncover the secret messages within the story we already know."

Setting Our Goals

"Our goal today is to understand *why* the details in the story are so important. By the end of our lesson, you'll be able to explain the hidden meaning behind the star, the shepherds, and the special gifts the Wise Men brought."

Part 2: Body of the Lesson (25-30 minutes)

I Do: Modeling the Analysis (5 minutes)

The teacher will model how to find a deeper meaning, using the whiteboard and the three-column chart format.

"Let's start with a symbol we all remember: the stable. In our 'Symbol' column, I'll write 'The Stable.' In the 'Literal Meaning' column, I'll write what it actually is: 'a simple shelter for animals.' Now for the tricky part, the 'Deeper Meaning.' A king is usually born in a grand palace, right? But Jesus was born in a humble stable. This choice is a powerful symbol. It suggests that greatness and importance don't come from being wealthy or powerful. A deeper meaning is **humility** and that the most important events can happen in the simplest of places. See how we connected a simple place to a big idea?"

We Do: Guided Investigation (10 minutes)

"Now, let's investigate a group of characters together: the shepherds. Looking back at our story, who were the shepherds?" (Guide students to recall they were common, working-class people). "And what happened to them?" (An army of angels appeared to them first with the good news). "Why is that interesting? Why not appear to a king or a rich merchant first? What could the deeper meaning be?"

Work together to fill out the chart for 'The Shepherds.' Guide the discussion toward the idea that their inclusion means the message of hope and joy is for **everyone**, not just the rich and powerful. It reinforces the theme of humility we saw with the stable.

You Do: Symbol Detective Agency (10-15 minutes)

Hand out the "Symbol Detective" worksheets. On the whiteboard, list several key symbols from the story:

- The Star of Bethlehem
- The Wise Men (Magi)
- Gift 1: Gold
- Gift 2: Frankincense
- Gift 3: Myrrh

"Now it's your turn to be the lead detectives. Choose at least two symbols from this list to investigate. Use your worksheet to write down what the symbol literally is, and then think hard about what deeper meaning it might represent. Think about our discussion of humility and the message being for everyone to help you find clues."

Teacher's Notes for Guidance:

- **Star:** A guide, hope, a divine sign pointing the way.
- **Wise Men:** Wisdom, perseverance, the long journey to find truth; also shows people from all over the world (not just the local shepherds) came to see Jesus.
- **Gold:** A gift for a King. Symbolizes Jesus's kingship.
- **Frankincense:** A type of incense used by priests in worship. Symbolizes Jesus's divine or holy nature.
- **Myrrh:** An expensive oil often used in ancient times for burial. Symbolizes Jesus's humanity and the suffering he would later endure.

Success Criteria:

- Your worksheet is filled out for at least two symbols.
- The "Literal Meaning" is accurate.
- The "Deeper Meaning" is a thoughtful explanation that connects the object to a bigger idea.

Part 3: Conclusion (10-15 minutes)

Show and Share: Reporting from the Field (Formative Assessment)

"Okay, detectives, let's hear your reports! Each of you, please share the deeper meaning you discovered for one of the symbols you investigated. As you listen to each other, think about how all these symbols connect."

As students share, write the key "deeper meaning" words on the board (e.g., Hope, Guidance, Kingship, Divinity, Humanity, Humility).

Recap and Connection (Summative Assessment)

"Look at all these incredible ideas we've uncovered! We started with a story about a baby being born, and now we see it's also a story packed with messages about humility, hope, and kingship. Last time, you built the Nativity scene; today, you built its meaning. You've learned that the details aren't random—each one helps tell a bigger, more powerful story."

"For our final step, I'm giving each of you an index card. On it, please answer this question: **How did the gifts from the Wise Men help explain who Jesus was?** This will show me you truly understand the connection between a symbol and its meaning. Fantastic work today, detectives!"

Differentiation

- **For Learners Needing Support:**

- Provide a "Meaning Bank" on their worksheet with simple definitions (e.g., "A gift for a king," "A sign to follow," "Something used in worship") that they can match to the correct symbols.
- Work with them in a small group, focusing on just two symbols like the Star and Gold.

- **For Advanced Learners:**

- Challenge them to research and connect a Nativity event to an Old Testament prophecy (e.g., Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem... out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.").
- Have them write a short journal entry from the perspective of a shepherd or a Wise Man, explaining the events and what they believe they symbolized.