



All About the Atrium

CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

Biblical Geography

In the atrium of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, we present to the children the Land of Israel as the particular place which God favored and chose. He chose this place out of all the countries in the whole world, to be the homeland of Jesus. For the younger children we introduce a globe (and often a planisphere, a map of the two hemispheres). This allows the children to locate the Land of Israel and also orient them to Israel in relation to their own home in the United States. The purpose of offering geography for the three to six year old child is (1) to see Jesus as historical, i.e., real person, (2) to see salvation as realized in time and space, and (3) to nourish the child's sense of order, that there is a place for everything.

When we speak about this place, we refer to it as the Land of Israel because this land holds salvific meaning for us and therefore must be referred to by its salvific name: Israel.



We give the child a view of the global, and then move to a more local view. The material is sensorial and

concrete. These materials sow the seeds of understanding that God chooses the small for great work, as the prophet reveals to us: *I choose you, Israel, not because you are great, but because you are small.*

We offer the child some geographical information, which lays the groundwork for speaking about the birth of Jesus. The Incarnation is an historical event; so that we need to locate it in time and space. The child recognizes that since we can locate a time and space for Jesus, there is also a time and space for the child. We lift up for the children the three most important cities in the life of Jesus: Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. How wonderful for the child to recognize that the facts found in the story of the birth of

It is important to let the children know how to situate the historical events in a point in space.

- Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, p. 113

Jesus, which occurred so many years ago, has relevance for each one of us. The Infancy Narratives reveal the time, place and nature of our Lord's birth.

The geography work assists the child in answering the question, "Who are you Lord?", and as we approach the season of Advent, "Who is this Child?" that comes to us in Bethlehem? The child comes to understand that Jesus is connected to this land. It reveals

to us something about how God works: God does not choose the largest city within the nations, but one of the smallest. God has a preferential option for the “small” of the earth.

THE CHILD OF THE SECOND PLANE

The child of the second plane (ages 6-12) has new capacities that were not present in the first plane (ages 0-6) of development. The 6-9-year-old child’s mind is like a fertile field. The child of the second plane has an expansive or a “cosmic” hunger. For the younger child, the physiological center is the family, whereas the older child’s world is opening up and they are moving beyond the home and family to the world around them. They have a great hunger for knowledge. The psychological center now becomes the universe.

For the older child, we expand our look at geography by including additional cities, deserts, mountains and waterways of the Land of Israel. We also begin to discover additional information about the layout of the Land of Israel and about particular cities within Israel. The child is then led to the Bible, where he or she may read more about what happened in that particular place.

The raised surface map and puzzle map from the younger atrium may be a part of the atrium for the older child, but the child of the second plane will also begin to explore other resources to feed their hunger for knowledge. For the younger child, the raised surface map helped the child in naming these most important locations in the life of Jesus. For the older child, we are now offering cultural and historical details. For the older child, the materials move deeper into the mystery of the Incarnation that



Jesus was a real person by expanding their knowledge of the details of his earthly homeland. Through accompanying booklets, the child will read about a particular city or location, and what happened in that place. A scripture citation will lead the child to find more information in the Holy Bible. The child may also look to an atlas to know more about the geography of the Land of Israel. Further information about Israel’s geography aids the child’s Bible Study, giving them a context for the stories they read about Jesus’ life.



A beautiful book full of color pictures highlighting the different regions of Israel.

26 pages.

Perfect gift for your home, as you prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Created by CGS Catechist and Formation Leader, Julie Baltuska

Available at www.CGSUSA.org or call (480) 874-3759

Visit our website to see all the resources for your family.