All About the Atrium
CGSUSA Parent Newsletter
The Holy Family

As the youngest of four children, I was used to receiving hand me downs. Being the only girl with three older brothers, some of the items being handed down were in rough condition by the time they reached me. I discovered our family’s nativity set as a young child, or what was left of it: the only pieces I found were the stable and two chickens. All the other pieces had been lost or chewed by the dog and eventually discarded. Could that be one of the reasons why I love and treasure Nativities? I think that love is in actuality universal among children. There is an excitement that builds as the holiday decorations emerge from storage. There is something very special though about the Nativity and setting it up in your home each Advent. The children in the Atrium love to work with the figures of the Infancy Narratives and ponder the mystery of the Incarnation, not just during the Season of Advent, but all year long.

WHO IS THIS CHILD?
The Infancy Narratives help the child wonder, “Who is this Child?” Sofia Cavalletti, the co-founder of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, wrote that when we speak about the identity of this particular Child, we invite the children to “listen” and know that the Scripture text contains more for us to discover. Sofia said, “In this way we will educate the children in humility in facing the Word of God.”

The Infancy Narratives also help the older children understand and reflect upon their own identity: Will I be among those who know and accept Jesus (like Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi, Anna and Simeon) or will I be with those who reject him (like Herod, or the busy city)?

NOT VISIBLE BUT HIDDEN
In her book The Religious Potential of the Child, Cavalletti tells us that Infancy Narratives, especially the Gospel of Luke, are a type of theological embroidery filled with rich content, but the theology is not clearly visible, it is hidden in the text. The theology contained is not academic, but is discovered after a long “listening” to the text. It is so important for our children to have time to ponder the mystery of the Incarnation, so that they may come to discover what is concealed within the Scriptures.

Birth of Jesus and Adoration of the Shepherds from the Rome Atrium
I still have those two chickens from my childhood Creche, and even though the other pieces may not have endured the test of time, working with the Nativity materials have brought my family much joy in coming to know and understand the rich tapestry of the Infancy Narratives. May all of our children receive that gift in abundance this year.

Do you have a Nativity at home? If not, this would be a good time to start this beautiful tradition. Provide figures that are beautiful and noble, not cartoon like. The figures should be unbreakable and fit easily into the child’s hand.

Read the story of the Birth of Jesus found in the Gospel of Luke 2:1-20 together as a family.

Ask: What did you hear in the story? View the map of Israel. Locate Nazareth and the town of Bethlehem. What kind of journey would that have been for Mary and Joseph? What would you have packed if you were walking from Nazareth to Bethlehem?

Locate an Atlas of the Bible and measure the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem. How long would it take your family to make that journey?

The shepherds were the first to hear the news about Jesus’ birth. Do you recall what the shepherds were doing when they heard the news?

How can we give glory to God this week? What would that look like for our family?

From
CGSUSA Board Member Lynn Robinson

December is a time to reconnect with those we may have fallen out of touch with during the year or over several years. Recently, I had the privilege to chat through emails with a fellow catechist, Gillian Waldron, that I had not seen in a while. I was not even sure she would remember me, but it seems that many of the bonds created in CGS formation last a lifetime. Included in her reflections, she shared these thoughts about the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. "It is a formation program I believe in and have witnessed the fruits in the lives of my sweet students. They are wonderful young disciples and each have fond memories of the time we shared in the Atrium. I thank God for it and for faithful catechists....." Her words inspire me to keep on with this great work to which we have been called. Please consider what you can offer to the work of the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Be generous with whatever financial contribution you can make to help form more catechists, wonderful young disciples and fond memories in the Atrium.

To donate copy and paste the link into your browser: http://www.cgsusa.org/annual_appeal.aspx

© The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, 2017