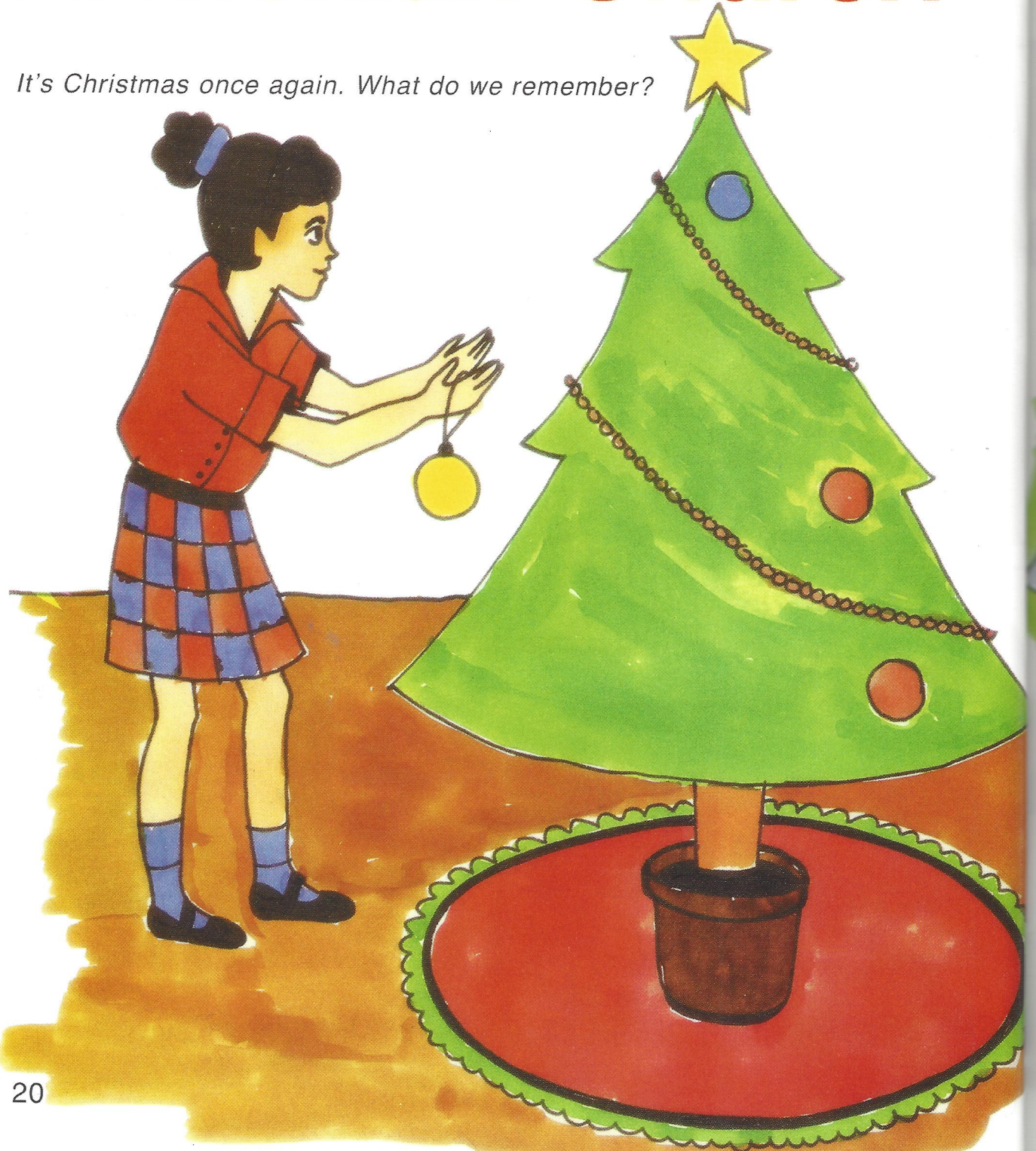


Christmas in the Armenian Church

It's Christmas once again. What do we remember?



It was a quiet thing when God came to Mary.
He told her a secret.
Then Joseph, too, was told.
In a quiet way, at night.



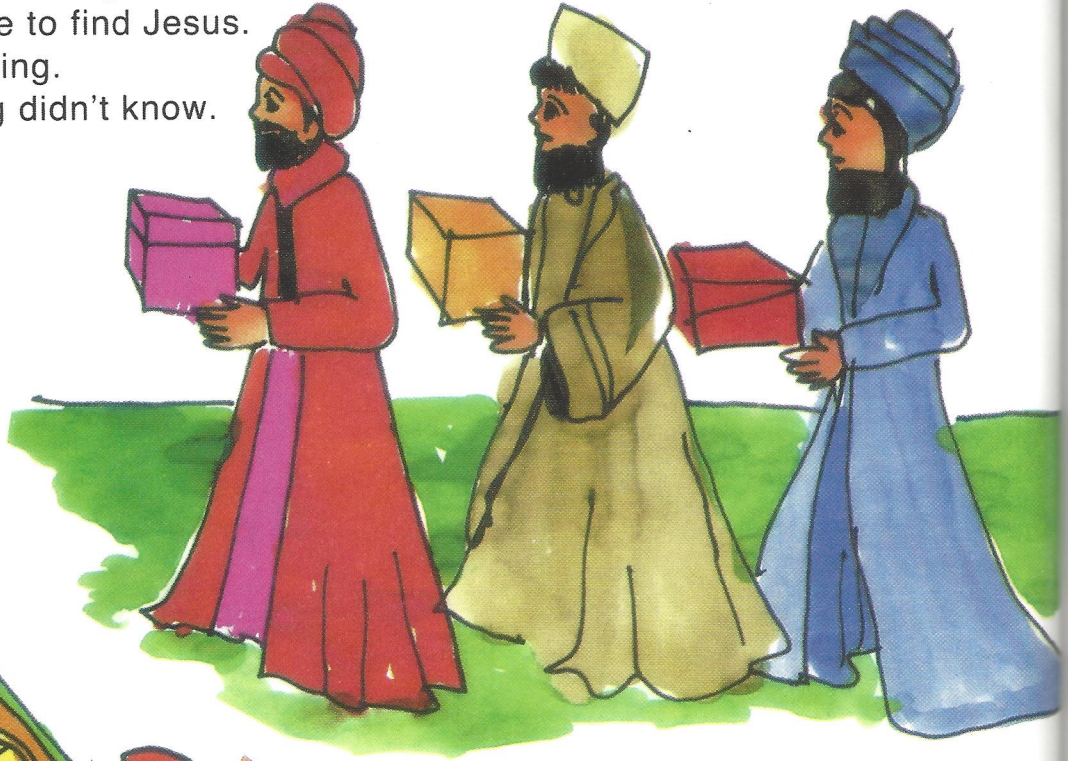
Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem.
They went quietly.
And the innkeeper said he had no room.
Joseph looked around for a quiet place.
He found a stable.



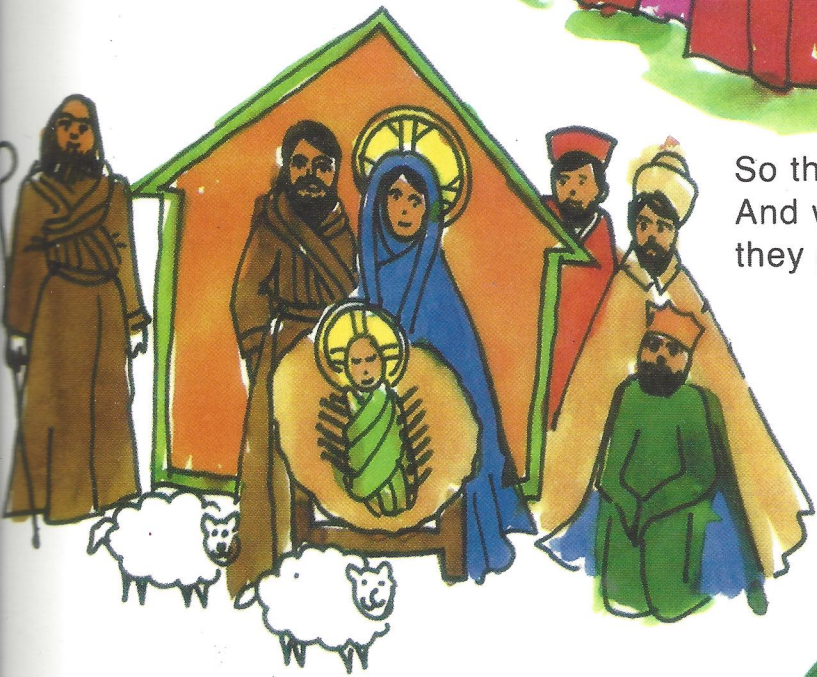
Jesus was born there in the quiet stable.
Mary and Joseph told no one.
But someone told some shepherds
to come to see Jesus.

Christmas
Սուրբ Ծնունդ
Soorp Dzunoont

It was such a quiet thing that three wise men
didn't know where to find Jesus.
They asked the king.
But even the king didn't know.



So the wise men went on hunting.
And when they found Jesus,
they gave him gifts.



At Christmas
we like to talk with friends
and sing and play our
drums.
For Christmas is a
birthday —
Jesus' birthday.



CHRISTMAS EVE

Lori was hurrying home from school today. She knew mother had told her it was a special day, but she couldn't remember exactly what it was. As she turned the corner she saw her brother David coming from school. "Hurry up, Lori," David yelled. "You know today is Christmas Eve. I have to get to church early!"

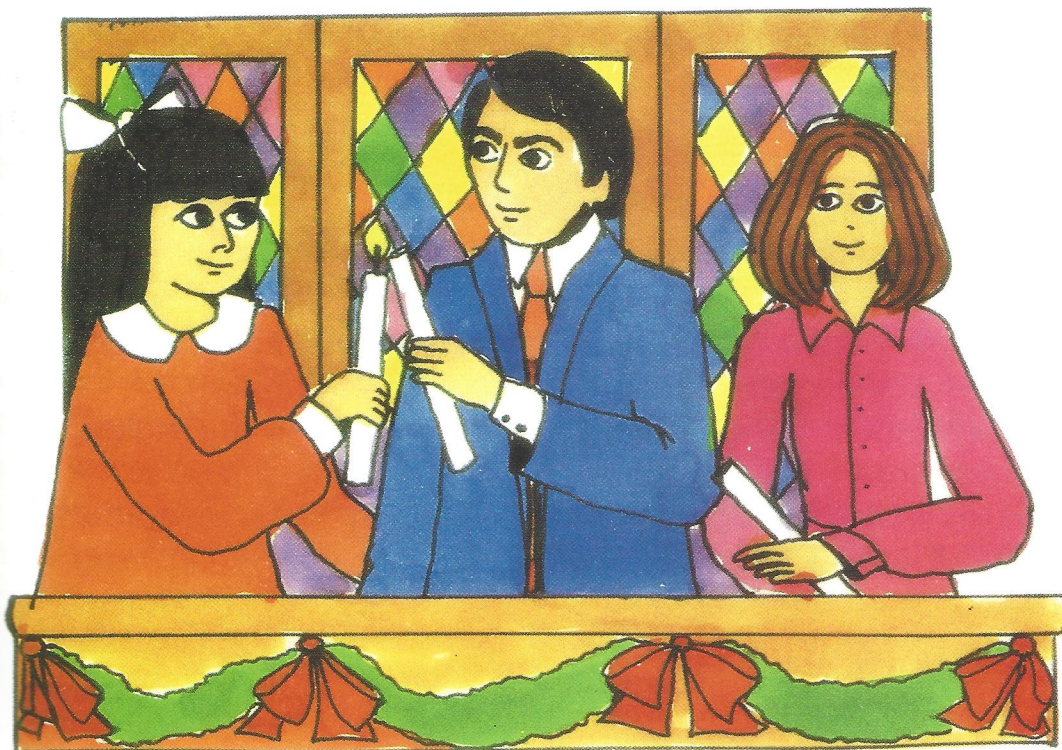
Then Lori remembered. Mother had told them to come straight home after school so that they could get cleaned up and ready for church. David was reading something from the Bible tonight at the services. Lori knew David had been practicing for weeks.

David opened the door and Lori followed in. "Take off your boots and hang up your coats," mom called. "What's to eat?" Lori asked her mother. "Nothing today. We're all going to receive Holy Communion tonight. We'll skip snacks today. Der Hayr said if we didn't eat after 3:00 p.m. it would be fine."

David was practicing his reading again when the doorbell rang. Lori ran to get it. It was Sandra, the girl in her class who lived down the street. "Are you ready to come and play in the snow," asked Sandra? "I can't," Lori answered. "It's Christmas Eve, and we have to get ready to go to church."

"How can you be going to church? This is Wednesday, not Sunday, you know. And what's this Christmas Eve stuff?" asked Sandra.

"Tomorrow is Christmas in the Armenian Church," said Lori. "We are lucky, we have *two* Christmases, one for presents and one



for church. After church tonight we will have a big party, especially for the children. I can hardly wait!"

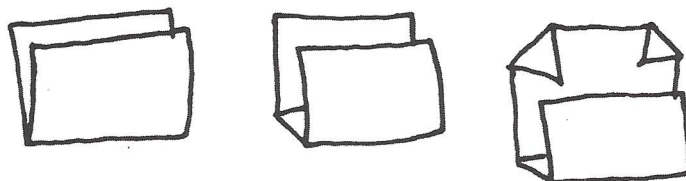
"Are you really going to have a party?" asked Sandra. "What kind of a party? We had a birthday party for Jesus in my Sunday School class a few weeks ago."

"All the children from the Sunday School will be there, my mother said. And there will be dinner, and chocolate cake, and ice cream, and candy for all the children. And there will be games too, and prizes for everyone. First, we'll go to church, and David will read, and then after, we'll have the party. And tonight we're going to take our grandparents too."

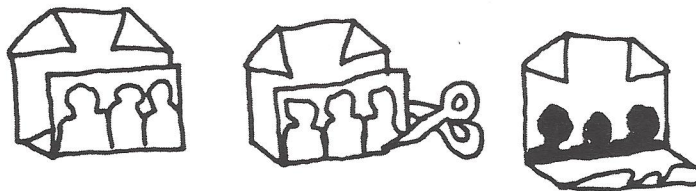
"I wish you could play now," said Sandra. "But I wish even more that I could come with you tonight. Do you think I could?"

"Sure you can," said Lori. "We can take you with us. Go ask your mother."

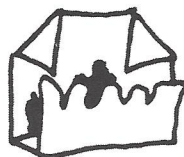
MAKE A CRECHE (Take Home Activity)



1. Take a heavy piece of paper and fold it in half almost to the top.
2. Open it up and fold it again about two inches lower.
3. Fold the corners down to make the stable. Color this yellow to look like the straw.



4. On the top sheet draw the figures of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Cut out these figures leaving them attached to the fold.
5. On the bottom sheet draw the animals which were in the stable, and the shepherds.
6. If the paper is heavy enough, your crib will stand. Otherwise, it is nice to hang it up.



describe them. Otherwise give a brief explanation for each feast; i.e., on "Christmas we celebrate Jesus' birth and baptism, on Easter we celebrate his resurrection, on Exaltation, etc." Ask the children to repeat the English name for each tabernacle feast. Tell them the words for feast day (*don*) and tabernacle feast (*daghavar*), and ask them to repeat them.

Play a game by pointing to the pictures and asking the children to name the feast. Be sure each child has a turn to participate. Then play "Which Feast Am I?", by giving a one-sentence summary of the feast day, concluding with "Which Feast Am I?"—such as, "I am the day we celebrate Jesus' birth and baptism. Which feast am I?" Again, give everyone an opportunity to play. (20 min.)

6. Make a feast day chain. Give each child strips of construction paper and a marker, and have him/her write the names of one tabernacle feast on each strip; i.e., Christmas, Easter, Transfiguration, Assumption, Exaltation.

Write the names on the blackboard so that the children can copy them, or underline the words on the poster. After the children have written at least two strips with each tabernacle feast, show them how to glue the strips together to make a chain. If children work quickly, they may make 3-4 strips for each tabernacle feast, and lengthen the chain. As the children work, ask them to name the tabernacle feasts. (15 min.)

7. Ask children if they can name a way to celebrate each of the feast days in their homes. If they have no answers, remind them how their mother marks their birthdays, or Christmas, or Thanksgiving, by serving a meal. Then say, "In the Church we celebrate every one of our feast days with a special meal, Holy Communion. And when we are given Holy Communion, we receive God's blessing and share the special day we're celebrating. Holy Communion is a special meal Jesus gave us to share together. It is a sign that we are one family and that we want to be his friends. We share this meal just as we celebrate big occasions at home with a meal. Jesus wants us to receive Holy Communion every time we celebrate one of his feast days."

Do activity, "Jesus shared many meals with his friends," in student text, page 19. (All should be circled.) (10 min.)

8. Clean-up, snack, closing prayer.

"We thank you, Lord, for the time we had together today. Help us grow in your love this week, remember what we have learned, and love you more. Amen."



Session 2—Christmas in the Armenian Church

Key Concepts

1. Jesus is God's Son and comes to all of us.
2. We participate in the events of Jesus' birth and baptism in the Church.
3. Christmas is the first of the five major feast days.

Objectives

Students will

1. Be able to recall the Christmas story.
2. Recognize the importance of giving of themselves, especially at the Christmas season.
3. Recognize that we celebrate the Feast of Christmas in special ways.

Background for Teacher

Read Christmas story in St. Matthew 2:1-12. Read *Saints and Sacraments*, pages 61-64.

Christmas (*Soorp Dznoont*)

Christmas is the anniversary of our Lord's birth. There is no historical evidence that our Lord's birthday was celebrated during the apostolic age. However, authorities give various dates for the observance of Christmas. Thus, Hippolytus (an early Church authority) mentions January 2; Clement of Alexandria, May 20, etc.

January 6 was originally fixed as the date of the baptism or the manifestation of Jesus Christ as God and the Feast of Epiphany.

St. John Chrysostom states that the celebration of the birth of Christ "according to the flesh" was not inaugurated at Antioch until 375 A.D. This means that, during the early centuries, the baptism of Jesus had been considered by the church to be as important as his birth. The idea of the adoption of Jesus as Son of God and his exaltation to divine rank and power tended to magnify the anniversary of his baptism and to cause comparative indifference in regard to the precise date of his birth according to the flesh.

The celebration of Christmas as Epiphany by the early Christians (January 6) laid stress upon the pre-existence of Christ as the eternal divine Logos* and of the absolute deity of Jesus Christ.

The physical birth assumed more and more importance in the Christian consciousness. The celebration of Christmas as a special Christian festival spread rapidly from the middle of the fourth century onward in conjunction with the triumph of orthodox Christology.

For practical purposes, first in Rome and later in Jerusalem (550 A.D.), the Feast of Epiphany and Christmas were separated. Christmas was celebrated

on December 25. Epiphany was observed seven days later. The Romans made reference to the pagan festivals of Saturnalia. The Bishop of Rome was opposed to the pagan practices. The same thing occurred with the Armenians when St. Krikor Loosavorich combined the festivities of Vartavar or Navasart with the Transfiguration.

The practical purpose for the Jerusalem Church was the following: the Christians used to celebrate Christmas and the baptism of our Lord on the same day as we do to this day. The Christians in Jerusalem used to celebrate the feast in Bethlehem (in the grotto) and on the banks of the River Jordan. Because of inadequacies in transportation, they separated the dates of celebration.

In our church, following the celebration of Christmas on January 6, the service of the Blessing of Water (Churorhnek) takes place with reverent solemnity. Briefly, the ceremony proceeds with the Holy Muron, which is poured from a dove-shaped container into the water; the water is blessed in the presence of a godfather; prayers are recited, and then the Holy Water, as a healing, life-giving, grace-giving element, is ready for distribution to the congregation.

The religious significance of Christmas must not be minimized by us as it is, unfortunately, by others. For some people, it is merely an occasion for exchanging gifts, or a day of feasting.

The celebration of our Lord's birth and baptism should remind us of the greatest gift of God, his Son and our Lord Jesus Christ.

* *The Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, both in his pre-existent and in his incarnate condition (St. John, Chapter I).*

Materials Needed

- Crayons, markers
 - Construction paper of various colors
 - Old Christmas cards
 - Glue, glitter, scissors
 - Cassette recorder, cassette tape with Christmas music (optional)
 - Five Major Feast Days poster
- (A parent's help may be required for Christmas card activity.)

Procedure

1. Welcome children warmly. Be enthusiastic in your attitude—it's catching! Have cassette playing Christmas music softly (if possible). Opening prayer, page 19 in *Prayers for Armenian Children*. (5 min.)
2. Have children open textbooks to page 20. Ask children to look at the photo and tell what they see there. "What is this girl doing? Did you ever help your parents get the house ready for Christmas?" Read

the caption. Encourage each child to tell about some Christmas experience he/she has had at home.

3. Look at pages of the Christmas story in textbooks. Guide the children to describe the scene in the stable. Ask about the shepherds. "Why does he carry the long stick with the curved end?" (These sticks helped shepherds pull sheep away from dangerous places as they took care of their flocks.) (10 min.)

4. Then ask: "Do you see one of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus? Have you ever thought about giving a gift to Jesus yourself? What did Jesus ask for?" (He asked us to be kind to one another. This can be a gift.) (5 min.)

5. Tell the children that today we'll make Christmas cards for people who cannot get out much, and who would appreciate receiving them this coming Christmas (people in an old age/nursing home or the elderly of the parish). Pass out construction paper. Distribute old Christmas cards. Let children cut out the pictures from the cards and glue onto construction paper (folded in half). Let them decorate their cards with glitter, or illustrate with crayons or markers. Print a simple Christmas message such as, "Merry Christmas" or "A Joyous Christmas," on the board and let those who can copy it for the inside of their cards, and then sign their names. (You may have to help some with their Christmas messages or even with their names.) Explain to children that we will mail the cards to the old age home closer to the Christmas season. (20 min.)

6. Read story, "Christmas Eve," on pages 23-24. Have children follow in their books. Then ask questions such as, "Why did Lori want to go to church?" (She knew she was going to see her friends.) "How did Lori's family celebrate Christmas Eve?" (By going to church, receiving Holy Communion, and spending it with their *second family*.) (15 min.)

7. Clean up, go over take-home activity. Prayer: "Glory to you, O God, glory to you. For all things, O Lord, glory to you." (5 min.)

At-Home Activity: Make a creche.

To extend the lesson

Read *The Clown of God* by Tomie di Paola; also Arch Books: *Donkey Daniel in Bethlehem*, *Little Benjamin and the First Christmas*, *The Baby Born in a Stable*, *The Happiest Search*, *Mary's Story*, *Simeon's Secret*.

Session 3—Easter in the Armenian Church

Key Concepts

1. Easter is the celebration (feast) of the resurrection of Jesus.