

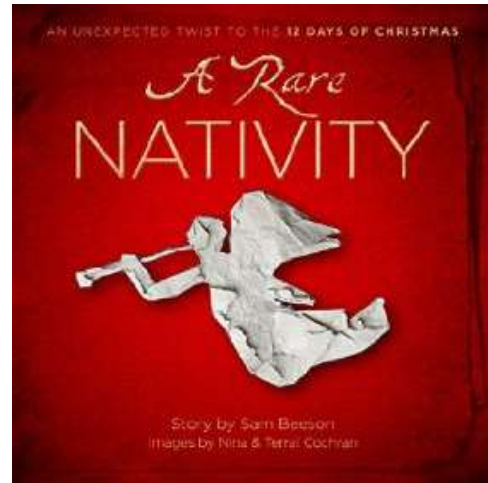
Sunday Storytellers

A Rare Nativity

By Sam Beeson

Images by Nina & Terral Cochran

Summary: “It’s clear that the narrator holds a bitter grudge as s/he sends an enemy crude and discarded gifts over the course of the “twelve nights of Christmas.” What the narrator’s enemy decides to do with each of these gifts is nothing less than a Christmas miracle, touching on themes of forgiveness and redemption and the hope of a new beginning that the Christmas story promises.”



Sunday Morning...

Welcome everyone warmly! Children can color, do beading or other simple activities as others arrive. About 10 minutes into the session, gather the children around you. You can sit on the floor or a slightly higher spot; the kids can sit on the floor or benches.

Icebreaker: Have each child share their name and share their favorite holiday food (if Thanksgiving was the prior Thursday, have them say one thing they ate for Thanksgiving dinner; if Christmas is close, they can share a favorite food they’re looking forward to at Christmas dinner). The catch: the item they mention must be different than the ones mentioned before!

Introduce the Book: Show the cover. “What do you think nativity means here?” [The root word “native” has to do with someone’s birth or origin; the scene of Jesus’ birth is often called “the nativity.”]

Read the Book: Start at the dedication:

“For those I have hurt or offended. Forgive me. – Sam.”

Also read the Bible verse included at the beginning:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

- Matthew 5:43-44

Read the book “librarian style” with pictures pointing out. Make sure everyone has seen the pictures before you turn the page.

Wondering Questions:

[No right or wrong answers. Just affirm/reflect each response. Ask for clarification if needed.]

- I wonder why the narrator sent all of that stuff to his or her enemy?
- Did you notice that halfway through the book the pictures went from black and white to color? Why do you think the art changed like that?
- The enemy writes back: “Forgive me,” and then sends the manger scene assembled from all the trash. What is the connection between forgiveness and the birth of Jesus?

Hands-On Bible:

- Hand out the Bibles and say “Let’s find the Bible verse that the author quoted right at the beginning of this book about how to treat your enemy.” [Pair up the youngest children with a teen or older child.]
- We will be going to the Book of Matthew
- First look in the Table of Contents. Notice that there are two big sections of the Bible: The Old Testament (the old stories before Jesus was born) and The New Testament (the stories of Jesus’ life and after his death).
- We’re looking for the Book of Matthew – is it in the Old Testament or New Testament? [New.]
- What page does Matthew start on? (p. 939) [Wait for everyone to get there.]
- We’re looking for Chapter 5. See the blue numbers at the top of the page? [Wait for everyone to get there.]
- Now look at the teeny-tiny numbers in the text – those are the verse numbers. We’re looking for verse 43... [Wait again read verses 43 and 44 aloud]:



You have heard the law that says, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say, **love your enemies!** Pray for those who persecute you!
-- Matthew 5:43-44

[Note: this is a different translation than the one quoted in the book.]

*Write **the highlighted part** on the board or on a flip-chart page.

Bible Follow-up:

Are you able to love your enemy like the Bible says? How can we do this? Does anyone have any suggestions for how to love an enemy?

Optional Extras...

➤ **Nature Walk & Art Project:**

Take a walk and collect “found items” OR bring in an assortment of “found items,” like the ones in the book: rocks, wire, leaves, crumpled paper, seed pods, egg shells, twigs, hay, plastic pieces, etc.!

As a group, assemble a nativity with the items. Have glue, hot glue gun, tape, scissors and a “platform” for the nativity (piece of cardboard?) on hand.

To divvy up the work, ask the children which part of the nativity they want to work on (sheep? baby Jesus? angels? Etc.). Set up in the classroom and continue to work on it/add to it through Advent.



The finished nativity from the book.

➤ **Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS):**

Bring in a classic and/or contemporary image of the nativity. Have the kids look at it carefully. Facilitate as they observe by repeatedly asking the three VTS questions:

- What’s going on in this picture?
- What makes you say that?
- What else can we find?

Some examples:



➤ **Video:**

A Rare Nativity, wordless video 1:19

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmNaZCA4aAk>



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