

December
in the
Outdoor Classroom

As our 'little saints' entered Outdoor Classroom, they discovered many props inviting them to celebrate Baby Jesus' Birthday. The manger had three stalls and it was warm and dry. Next to the manger, a straw basket was filled with dress up clothes for acting out the Christmas story and it was beautiful to observe as the children chose costumes and played together. It was precious to see how they nurtured Baby Jesus and brought Him gifts like the Three Wise Men.

In our Dramatic Play Center, our friends enjoyed decorating a small Christmas tree with shatterproof ornaments. Their selection and placement of the ornaments on the tree was very intentional and they also decorated the ramp that leads to the Parish Hall and our little play structure. At the Music Center, we provided the children with repurposed biscuit tin cans and rhythm sticks and we observed many little Drummer Boys and Girls. The children in Kindergarten described it as a 'jammin' session.' At the Block Center, our friends found 'Star builders' and 'C – links' designed to boost eye/hand coordination and creativity. Their creativity lead to math and science exploration when they inserted the manipulatives onto the rhythm sticks. Once their new creation was complete, they would take it to the ramp and observe its trajectory. The rhythm sticks with the most manipulatives would roll faster.

For Sensory Play, we created a cardboard topper with circular cut-outs for the sensory table and provided our friends with mixing bowls, mixing spoons and cardboard ovens. The sensory table was filled with a mixture of Bisquick, oats, cinnamon and the children delighted in baking. We invited the first PreK Class to visit our classroom to help with the design of the ovens. They were very helpful and very detailed in adding all the settings with a *Sharpie*. They wrote 'On', 'Off', and numbers for the timer/temperature settings. I should point out that all the details were the children's idea without any teacher direction. It is a great example of children's observational skills.

It is the season of joy and giving. The best gifts we can give a child are the space, the 'loose parts', the time, and the freedom to play. It is the best recipe for 'joyful' and effective learning.









