

English Paper Piecing *Isn't Just for Hexagons*

by *Teresa Justice*



STAR OF BETHLEHEM, 12" x 12", made by Teresa Justice

Easy

SKILL

12" x 12" finished

SIZE

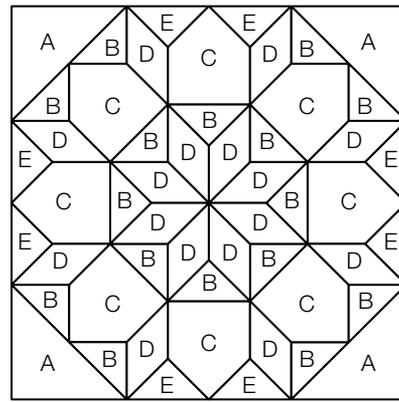
Star of Bethlehem

BLOCK

Are you familiar with the English paper-piecing (EPP) technique that is used to piece many incredible hexagon quilts? The hexagon shape is an easy one to use when learning to English paper piece, but you can use the same EPP techniques to piece blocks of many different shapes. The Star of Bethlehem block is made up of diamond, square, triangle, and house shapes, making it ideal for learning how to English paper piece many unique shapes. This block finishes as a 12" square; add borders to a single block for a nice wallhanging or piece more blocks to make a quilt.



Fig. 1. Star of Bethlehem



Star of Bethlehem block

I hope you enjoy English paper piecing the Star of Bethlehem block. The instructions below give an overview of the English paper-piecing method as well as specifics for the Star of Bethlehem block.

Supplies

- Assorted fabrics for the block
- Thread: hand quilting (40-wt) and general purpose (50-wt)
- Sharps needle size 7 or 8
- Heavy paper or cardstock
- Hole punch

Preparing the pieces

Using heavy paper or cardstock, make enough copies of the templates for all the pieces in your block.

Tip: For any EPP blocks that will be bordered or machine stitched to another block in a quilt, leave an extra $\frac{3}{8}$ " paper along the outer edge of the outside pieces as I show for A

and E; this will allow you to secure that edge, making piecing easier.

For the Star of Bethlehem block, use 4 A, 16 B, 8 C, 8 D, and 8 E. Cut out the paper pieces and make a hole in the center of each paper template with a hole punch. The center hole makes it easy to remove the papers later with an awl or the round end of a seam ripper.

Select the fabric to use for each piece. For the Star of Bethlehem block, refer to the block photo and block diagram to help you choose fabrics (fig. 1). Using the paper pieces as a templates cut out the fabric pieces leaving at least a $\frac{3}{8}$ " allowance for folding over the pattern all around.

First prepare the interior pieces of the block. Interior pieces are those with no edges occurring along the outer edge of the block. For the Bethlehem Star block, the interior pieces include all except the A and E triangles. For basting, use any color of thread that won't fade onto the front of

the piece. I like to use 40-wt hand quilting thread in a matching or neutral shade. Thread a needle with a length of thread and knot at the end.

Center the paper pattern on the wrong side of the fabric so that there is at least a $\frac{3}{8}$ " allowance all around. Pin through the punched hole to secure, if desired. At sharp angles, you may trim off the long points of the fabric to within $\frac{3}{8}$ " of the paper.

Basting

To learn the basting process, it is easiest to start with pieces without sharp points such as C in the Bethlehem Star block (fig. 2). Starting at a corner that is 90° or larger, fold the fabric over the paper on both sides of the corner. Take 2 tacking stitches to hold the fold in place, being careful to sew through the fabric only.

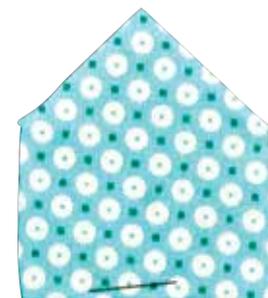


Fig. 2. Basting a piece without sharp points

Fold the fabric for the next edge over the paper. *Tip: If any paper edge is longer than 1/4", make a basting stitch through both the fabric and paper at the midpoint.* Continue around the piece tacking each corner (and edge where needed), ending at the corner where you started .

For shapes with narrow points such as diamonds and triangles, again start basting at an angle that is 90° or larger. To reduce fabric bulk at the narrow points, first fold the fabric directly over the point (fig. 3). Fold the sides neatly over the point and tack to secure. The fabric “wings” that naturally occur at sharp points need no further attention; they will fall into place as you stitch the pieces together.



Fig. 3. Prepare a point

Exterior Pieces

If you plan to English paper piece the entire block to another block all the way around, baste all edges of the outer edge pieces as you did the interior pieces. However, if you are planning on machine sewing the block to other blocks or adding borders

to make a small quilt as in my Star of Bethlehem block, you do not need to fold the outer seam allowance over the paper. Beginning at one corner of the outer edge, fold the fabric over the paper edge that is adjacent to the outer edge. Tack through the paper and fabric with a couple of small stitches. Continue as for the interior pieces until you reach the corner at the other end of the outer edge. Fold the fabric at the corner then tack through the fabric and paper with a couple of stitches. Baste the outer edge of the fabric to the pattern within the seam allowance, then finish the basting where you started (figs. 4a and b).

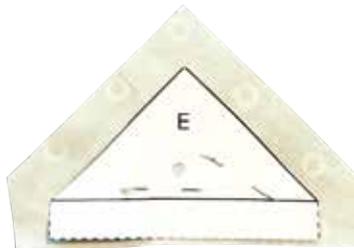


Fig. 4a

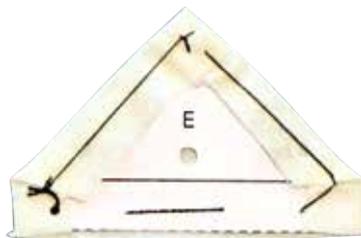


Fig. 4b

(Ed. Note: Some people like to use glue sticks like a Sewline glue pen instead thread for basting. Use a fine line of tacky, not liquid, glue that is not right on the edge of the paper.)

Piecing the block

For any English paper-piecing project, after the pieces are basted lay them out as they will be in the finished block. Starting at the center of the block, select 2 pieces to sew together. Hold them right sides together with edges aligned. To ensure the pieces will line up correctly, you may wish to tack the matching corners of the pieces together. Secure the stitching with a small knot at the first (and last) whip stitch. By doing this, if the thread breaks or if you need to remove a piece, you only have to rip out the stitches to the last knot. Using 50-wt thread and a sharp needle (size 7 or 8), whip stitch the pieces together taking 10 to 12 stitches per inch (fig. 5). In the same way, sew the rest of the pieces together.



Fig. 5. Whip stitch the pieces together

Do not remove the papers until all the edges of any piece have been sewn to another. The block’s outer edge papers will be removed when the block is completed and pressed.

For the Star of Bethlehem, make two halves of the center star

by sewing together 4 Ds for each half. Sew the two halves together, initially making a tack stitch at each end of the seam and in the middle to be sure the pieces align correctly (fig. 6).



Fig. 6

Sew a B inside each inverted point of the center star. You may now remove the papers from the center star only, as all sides have been sewn to another piece (fig. 7).



Fig. 7

Sew a C to each B. You may now remove the papers from the B pieces (fig. 8).



Fig. 8

Sew a D between each C (fig. 9). As you work, the block may not lie flat. No papers are removed at this time. Later, when papers are removed, it will smooth out.



Fig. 9

Sew a B into the two inverted points at each corner of the star. Sew an A to each two Bs, forming the corners of the block. Two sides of A will remain open on the outside edges.

Sew E pieces into the remaining inverted points along the sides of the blocks. Seam allowances will remain open on the outside edges (fig. 10).

When all the pieces have been added, press the block well and remove all remaining papers. Square up block to the desired size, 12½" x 12½" for this Star of Bethlehem block.

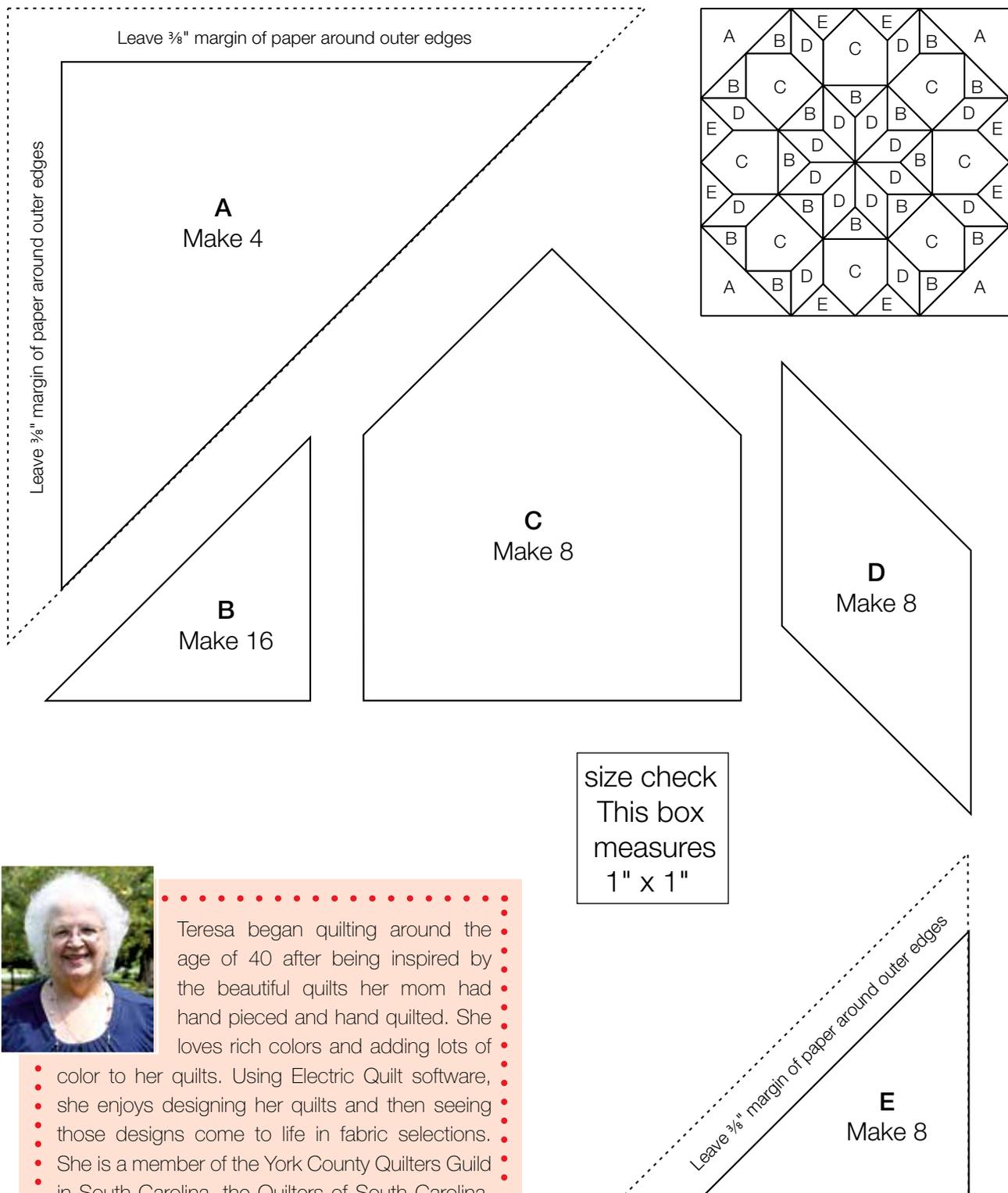
To make a cute mini quilt using your finished Star of Bethlehem block, simply add a border from 1½" strips, layer, quilt, and bind. 



Fig. 10

While researching the Star of Bethlehem block, Teresa Justice discovered that many variations of the block are found under the same name. Equally true, this particular block can also be found under names such as the Star of the Magi and the Star of Jerusalem. While dissimilarities may exist in the placement of fabrics and in construction techniques, Teresa believes that the block is an excellent one to try with her English paper-piecing method.

Patterns for Star of Bethlehem block (seam allowances not included)



Teresa began quilting around the age of 40 after being inspired by the beautiful quilts her mom had hand pieced and hand quilted. She loves rich colors and adding lots of

- color to her quilts. Using Electric Quilt software,
- she enjoys designing her quilts and then seeing those designs come to life in fabric selections.
- She is a member of the York County Quilters Guild in South Carolina, the Quilters of South Carolina, and Stitchin' Friends, a small club of close quilting friends. You can follow Teresa and her quilting interests at Stitchinfriends.blogspot.com.

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