

Today's Suggested Schedule—December 2023, Week 3

Today's Bible Story: Repeat the Sounding Joy (Jesus Is Born) • *Luke 2:1-7*

Today's Bottom Line: You can have joy because God sent Jesus.

Monthly Memory Verse: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon[d] his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

Monthly Virtue: Christmas—Celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Before kids arrive, take a few moments to pray for them. Thank God for the promise fulfilled through sending Jesus. Pray that you'll be able to help your few see that they can choose joy in any situation because God is at work.

Check out our Pinterest page here <https://bit.ly/447HSZi> for a visual on some of the activities.

LARGE GROUP (35 minutes)

STORY: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways

WORSHIP: Inviting People to Respond to God

Hang Time
Welcome/Opener
Worship
Bible Story
Bottom Line
Prayer
Closer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration
Bible Story Review: Christmas Bells
Application Activity: Choosing Joy
Memory Verse Activity: Dance for Joy
Prayer Activity: Pray and Dismiss

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

Parent Cue Card (Print or Email)
Devotionals for Kids
Parent Cue App

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Use this if kids have questions about following Jesus.

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word gospel. Clarify that the word gospel means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

If a child has expressed interest in following Jesus, please let the parents know so they can be a part of the conversation that their child is having about faith.

What Now?

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as the One who forgives your sins and makes it possible for you to know God, we are so proud of you! There is no greater single decision that you could make.

We believe that baptism is an important next step for you. Baptism is your way of telling your friends and family, “Hey, I'm a follower of Jesus!” If you're interested in learning more or participating in baptism, talk to a staff member about the next steps you should take.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Story Exploration

Can you imagine what it was like to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem? The journey for Mary and Joseph was long—about 90 miles, and cars hadn't been invented yet! When they got there, Mary needed a safe place to have her baby. Imagine knocking on doors to find a place to stay, only to discover that every place was already full. So Mary and Joseph went to a place where animals were kept and that is where Jesus was born.

Do you know why Mary's baby was called Jesus? Look at Matthew 1:21. [Allow kids to read the verse and respond.] The name Jesus means "Savior." Imagine being a shepherd in the dark hills when an angel appeared, the glory of the Lord shining all around. The shepherds were terrified. Do you remember what the angel said to them? Look at Luke 2:10-12. [Allow kids to read and respond.] The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found the baby. What did the shepherds do after they saw Baby Jesus? Look at Luke 2:20. [Allow kids to read the verse and respond.] We too can tell others the good news: Jesus was born to be God's promised Savior!

The birth of Jesus was good news! Jesus was not an ordinary baby. He is God's Son, sent to earth from heaven. So, is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human. Jesus, the promised Savior, came into the world to deliver us from sin and death.

Jesus' birth was good news! Jesus wasn't born into the world to just show people the right way to live or be kind to people; Jesus was born to be God's promised Savior. A savior is someone who saves from danger or destruction. Jesus was born to rescue sinners from sin and death.

Remind kids that Jesus came because we needed Him. The purpose of Jesus' birth was twofold: to bring glory to God and to make peace between God and those who trust in Jesus' death and resurrection. Celebrating the birth of Jesus is about rejoicing over the greatest gift we could ever receive. God's own Son came to earth to be our Savior and our King.

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

- Why do you think Jesus was born in such a humble way rather than in a palace to a wealthy family?
 - Guide kids to consider how Jesus can relate to ordinary people because of His upbringing. He gave up His glory and power in heaven to live humbly among people. Jesus' birth reflects how His kingdom's values differ from the world's values. We can boldly and humbly approach His throne in prayer.
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Heb. 4:15-16.)
- Why was Jesus' birth good news?
 - Help kids understand that Jesus came because we needed Him. God showed His love for us by sending His Son into the world. We were separated from God because of our sins, but God was working out His promise to rescue sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read John 3:16.)

- Why should we tell others about Jesus?
 - Lead kids to recognize that salvation through Jesus bring the privilege and responsibility of sharing the gospel with the world. God calls us to live as witnesses to the saving power of Jesus—in what we say and how we live.
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Ps. 66:16.)
- Share your favorite part about the story of the first Christmas.
- Even if your Christmas falls short of what you'd hoped for, what's something you can still be joyful about?
- Why is it important to celebrate Jesus' birth?
- Why does Jesus top every other gift we've been given or have yet to receive?
- Do you think there is a difference between joy and happiness? Explain why or why not.
- Can someone have joy even when things are not going the way they want? If so, why?
- What do you know about Jesus that gives you joy?
- Why is it important that Jesus came as a human baby?
 - Help kids understand that God's plan to destroy sin required a perfect sacrifice. Jesus' birth as a human meant that He could grow up and lay down His life for us. He could live the perfect human life we are unable to live and die the kind of death we deserve. Jesus' full humanity is why He could die to save humans.
- Why is it important that Jesus remained God?
 - Explain that Jesus' nature as fully God is what allowed Him to bear the weight of God's punishment for sin in a human body. The complete power of God in Jesus also gave Him the power to reject temptation and live a perfectly sinless life.

1. Christmas Bells

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need: “Number to Word Key” Activity Page

What You Do:

- Ask the kids to gather in a circle.
- Read a word from the “Number to Word Key” Activity Page
 - Encourage the kid to share how that word or phrase relates to today’s story.
 - Continue on till all words are read.

What You Say:

“What are some of the crazy and unplanned things that happened to Mary and Joseph? (*Invite responses—angel visit, news of having a baby, a long trip to Bethlehem, no place to stay, having a baby in a place where animals stayed, etc.*). They found a way to be happy, even though things did not go their way. That’s what joy is! They chose joy in a very difficult situation because they saw how God was fulfilling a much-awaited promise, and they trusted that God was at work. They also saw how God took care of their family, even though it seemed impossible. By choosing joy, they were able to see past all of that to what really mattered: God had sent Jesus! Because of Jesus, God’s Son, our broken relationship with God can be restored, and one day God will make everything right again.

“Just like Mary and Joseph did, we can choose to be happy when things don’t go our way because Jesus came to rescue us from the pain and messiness of our lives and promises to make everything right again. **[Bottom Line]** You can have joy because God sent Jesus and that is something to celebrate this Christmas!”

[Make It Personal] (*Share an example of a time something unexpected happened and you prayed and asked God to help you get through it. How did it turn out? How did remembering that you can trust God help you have joy in the middle of the situation?*)

*2. Choosing Joy

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need: “Situation Cards” Activity Page, butcher paper, markers, and painter’s tape

What You Do:

- Instruct the kids to get into pairs.
- Give each pair a “Situation Cards” Activity Page card and markers.
- Set out the butcher paper.
- Instruct each pair to illustrate their assigned scenario on a section of the butcher paper.
- After the pairs have completed their drawings, invite them, one pair at a time, to briefly present their situations to the entire group.
- After each team has explained their drawings, together, brainstorm ways God can help them have joy in those situations.
- Invite the teams to draw how they would choose to turn their difficult situation into joy.
- Tape up the butcher paper in the environment so it’s visible during “Pray and Dismiss.”

What You Say:

“Wow, you did an amazing job! You showed how important it is to choose joy, even when things don’t go your way. Now, let’s think about some exciting things coming up in the next two weeks. (*Pause for response.*) Those sound really fun! Remember, choosing joy even if things don’t happen as we expect is so important.

“Maybe you’re excited about a delicious Christmas dinner with your family or a special toy you hope to get. But sometimes, unexpected things can happen. For example, the car might break down on the way to Grandma’s house, and you end up having fast food instead of the Christmas dinner you wanted. Instead of feeling sad, you can choose to be joyful by enjoying the time with your family in a different way. Or maybe your parents couldn’t buy the toy you wished for. Instead of feeling upset, you can choose to be happy because the toy you have allows you to have fun with your sibling.

“These unexpected things can make us feel sad and spoil our Christmas, but we can choose to remember what joy is all about. Joy is finding a way to be happy even when things don’t go our way. Sometimes, we focus too much on ourselves—how we feel, what we want, and getting our own way. Let’s remember that God is always at work! When you remember that **[Bottom Line] you can have joy because God sent Jesus**, your circumstances become less important and you can focus on finding joy in every situation.”

3. Dance for Joy

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need: “Ornament Verse” Activity Page, Bibles, music player, Christmas music, *Optional: office tape and timer*

What You Do:

- Make sure each kid has a Bible.
- Together, look up Isaiah 9:6 using the Bible navigation tips below and read it out loud.

Finding verses with 2nd and 3rd graders: Guide kids to open their Bibles to the front and find the table of contents. Hold up a Bible opened to the table of contents to show the kids what the page looks like. When the kids find the table of contents, lead them to find “Isaiah” in the list under “Old Testament.” When the kids find Isaiah, lead them to look at the page number beside the word. Explain that the number tells them on what page they can find Isaiah. Help the kids find the page. When they find Isaiah, explain that the big numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. Help them find chapter 9. Explain that the small numbers are verse numbers. Help them find verse 6 in chapter 9.

- Set the Bibles aside, but keep them open to Isaiah 9:6.
- Designate a safe play area and scatter the cards from the “Ornament Verse” Activity Page all over the floor, making sure you have the same number of verse cards as kids.
 - If you have fewer kids than verse cards, tape two consecutive words together to create the correct number of ornaments.
 - If you have more kids than cards, play the game in two different rounds. Time each team to see who completes it first.
- Play Christmas music.
- Instruct the kids to walk or dance while you play the music.
- When the music stops, direct the kids to stand next to an ornament.
- At your signal, instruct the kids to pick up their ornament and try to arrange the entire verse while holding their card by standing in the correct order.
- Allow the kids to refer to the Bibles, as needed.
- Once done, direct the kids to recite the verse together.
- Collect the ornaments and scatter them all over the environment again.
- Play additional rounds, as time allows.
- Recite the verse together.

What You Say:

“What are some Christmas traditions you enjoy doing every year? (*Invite responses—decorate the tree, put up lights, hang ornaments, go to the Christmas service, give and receive gifts, etc.*) Those are all so much fun! Do you know that the absolute BEST gift you can ever receive is Jesus? Isaiah, who wrote this verse a long time ago, told everyone that Jesus was coming to rescue us from our sins and make everything that was wrong right again. That is why we celebrate Christmas.

“Real joy comes from knowing that God loves us. God showed that love to us by giving us the most amazing gift ever. God sent Jesus to rescue us and be our forever friend. That can bring you joy, no matter what’s going on in your life. So always remember **[Bottom Line] you can have joy because God sent Jesus!**”

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Say:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- How does this story help me love others?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?

What You Need: "Advent Ornament" Activity Page that kids started in the previous weeks (extras for kids not present); and markers or colored pencils

What You Do:

- Direct the kids to form a circle.
- Set out the markers.
- Give kids their "Advent Ornament" Activity Page that they worked on the previous week.
- Give any kids who did not start an ornament in Week 1 or 2 a blank "Advent Ornament" Activity Page and encourage them to write their names on the back of the triangle.
- Point out the gingerbread man.
- Invite the kids to recite the Bottom Line with you a few times, putting extra emphasis on "Joy."
[Bottom Line] You can have joy because God sent Jesus.
- Inform the group that they will be coloring a different word on the ornament every week. They will have the opportunity to assemble the ornament and take it home next week.
- Discuss what "Joy" means, and instruct the kids to color the word joy and the section with the gingerbread man.
 - For example: Joy means finding a way to be happy even when things don't go your way. Joy is when you can't have your favorite dessert, but you still find a way to be happy because you get to spend time with your best friend. We can choose joy in a difficult situation because we can trust that God is still at work.
- Briefly recite the Bottom Lines from the previous two weeks. **[Bottom Line] You can have hope because God is faithful. [Bottom Line] You can have peace because God has a plan.**
 - If time allows, encourage the kids who may have missed previous weeks to color the words "Hope" and "Peace" on their ornaments.
- Collect the ornaments and store them for next week.
- Close your group time in prayer.

What You Say:

"We can be confident that God is a promise keeper. One of the BEST promises God has made and kept is sending Jesus. **[Bottom Line] You can have joy because God sent Jesus.** Even when things are hard, even when we're discouraged or unsure of how things will turn out, and even when it seems like there is NO reason to be happy, we can still have joy. God is with us and sent the Holy Spirit to live with us – helping us find ways to be joyful in every circumstance. That is something to be thankful for! Let's pray.

“Dear God, thank You for reminding us today that Mary and Joseph found a way to be happy, even when things did not go their way. That’s what joy is! Thank You for keeping Your promise to send Your Son. Because of Jesus, our broken relationship with You can be restored, and one day You will make everything right again. Please help us always remember to have joy because You sent Jesus. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

As adults arrive to pick up, encourage the kids to show them the butcher paper with their drawings and explain how they can still have joy in the middle of that messy situation.

GETTING READY

Here's everything you need to know to get ready for this week.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Create a safe place to connect and learn how the Bible story applies to real life experiences, through interactive activities and discussion questions.

(Choose as many of these activities as you like.)

**If you don't have time to do all these activities, be sure to do activity #2*

1. Christmas Bells

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need:

- Print "Number to Word Key" Activity Page on paper, one for each Small Group
- Hershey's Kisses (bells if possible) or 2 oz. mini plastic red disposable cups for a non-food version, twenty-four for each Small Group
- Color-coding sticky dots, twenty-four for each Small Group
- Marker
 - Before group time, prepare the "bells" by numbering the dot stickers #1–12, twice. (Use the same color for matching numbers, i.e. both #1s red, etc.) Stick the prepared dots on the bottom of the Kisses or inside the bottom of the cups.

***2. Choosing Joy**

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need:

- Print "Situation Cards" Activity Page on paper and cut apart, one card for every two kids
- Large piece of butcher paper, one for each Small Group
- Markers
- Painter's tape, one for each Small Group

3. Dance for Joy

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need:

- Print "Ornament Verse" Activity Page on cardstock and cut out, one set for each Small Group
- Bibles
- Music player, one for each Small Group
- Christmas music
- *Optional: office tape and timer*

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Need:

- Print "Advent Ornament" Activity Page on cardstock and cut out, one for each kid plus extras

- Make sure you leave the tabs attached when cutting out the triangles.
- “Advent Ornaments” Activity Page that the kids started in Weeks 1 and 2
- Markers or colored pencils

Note: Kids will be working on this project for the next few weeks. Have a plan to collect and save their ornaments for future weeks. Assembly directions will be provided in Week 4. Make extra copies for others who attend the group in the following weeks.

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

- Print on cardstock or email this week’s devotionals and Parent Cue cards.
- Tell parents about our additional family resources: **Parent Cue app**