

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: Finger Puppet Nativity
Application Activity: I've Got Joy!
Memory Verse Activity: Caroling the Memory Verse
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. Finger Puppet Nativity

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

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

What You Need: “Finger Puppets” Activity Page, safety scissors, crayons or markers, clear tape, Bible, permanent marker, and resealable bags

What You Do:

- Set out the scissors and coloring materials.
- Give each kid a “Finger Puppets” Activity Page.
- Encourage the kids to color the finger puppets and cut them out. (Be prepared to help with cutting.)
- Show the kids how to tape the tabs together at the bottom of each finger puppet so they can put them on their fingers.
- As kids finish, open the Bible to Luke 2:1-7 and read (or select a strong reader who volunteers to read) the Christmas story.
- As you or the volunteer read, encourage the kids to act-out the story with their finger puppets.
- After you finish, give each kid a resealable bag with their name on it to place their finger puppets inside to take home.

What You Say:

“Mary and Joseph chose joy in a difficult situation. They saw how God had fulfilled a promise, and they trusted that God was at work.

“I love the story of Christmas! At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus, the greatest gift ever given! I love that God sent Jesus, God’s ONE and ONLY Son, as a baby. Can you believe He was born in a place where animals stayed and placed in a feeding trough? God sent Jesus to the world to bring us joy. **[Bottom Line]** You can have joy because God sent Jesus. We can have joy, no matter what, because of this amazing gift, given to us so long ago!”

2. I've Got Joy!

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands on experimentation and discovery

What You Need: "I've Got Joy" Activity Page

What You Do:

- Read one of the scenarios from the "I've Got Joy" Activity Page.
- Ask kids to share a way they can turn the "I've Got Joy!" scenario around and find joy, even when things aren't going their way.
 - If the kid is stuck, invite other kids to answer or give prompts from the Activity Page.
- Continue until every scenario is discussed.

What You Say:

"This Christmas, things may not always go your way. You might be disappointed if there's no snow to build a snowman or marshmallows to add to your hot chocolate. You might not receive a gift you really wanted. Or there may be bigger challenges. Maybe your grandmother is sick, so you won't get to see her this year. Maybe your parent is looking for a job so there are less gifts this year. We all face hard things.

"But remember, joy is finding a way to be happy, even when things don't go your way. God promised to send a rescuer, and God kept that promise! Christmas is proof that we can trust God, always. Remember, **[Bottom Line]** you can have joy because God sent Jesus."

[Make It Personal] (Share about a time something unexpected happened during a Christmas holiday. How did you find joy in the middle of that situation? Remind kids that no matter what happens, we can still have joy, because Christmas is about God loving us so much and keeping the promise to send Jesus to help us have a relationship with God. Remember to share an age-appropriate example.)

3. Caroling the Memory Verse

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

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

What You Need: Bible marked at Isaiah 9:6

What You Do:

- Select a volunteer to open the Bible to Isaiah 9:6.
- Read the verse aloud for review.
- Lead the kids to sing the words of the memory verse to the melody of Christmas songs.
 - Lead the singing and invite kids to repeat each line after you.
 - Song suggestions: “O Christmas Tree,” “Jingle Bells,” “Joy to the World”
- If time allows, let the kids suggest their favorite Christmas songs and see if you can sing the words of the verse to those tunes.

What You Say:

“There are so many beautiful songs to sing at Christmas! The best songs are the songs about Jesus. He’s the real reason we celebrate! Isaiah spoke these words for God as a promise that Jesus, God’s Son, would be sent for everyone. That’s why we celebrate! This year, as you celebrate and take part in all your favorite Christmas traditions, stop and remember what it’s really all about! God gave us Jesus! God sent Jesus for you. God sent Jesus for me! **[Bottom Line] You can have joy because God sent Jesus.**”

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

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: "Bottom Line Label" Activity Page, "Ornament Template Week 3" Activity Page, washable markers

What You Do:

- NOTE: If you did not decorate ornaments during "Early Arriver," give each kid an ornament, set out markers, and give kids a few moments to decorate them.
- Use the permanent marker to write "JOY" in block letters on the center of each kid's ornament.
- Give each kid a label from the "Bottom Line Label" Activity Page.
- Instruct the kids to stick their label on the back of their ornament.
- If using the paper ornaments, punch a hole in the top of each one with the single hole punch.
- Cut a length of string for each kid and help them run a piece of string through the top of the ornament and knot it for hanging.
- Close your group time in prayer, thanking God for the joy we have because of Jesus!

What You Say:

"You've made another beautiful ornament to take home to add to your Christmas tree! Each time you look at it, it will remind you that **[Bottom Line] you can have joy because God sent Jesus**. Let's pray and thank God for the joy we have because of Jesus!"

"God, thank You for Christmas and for sending Jesus! Help us remember that we can have joy, no matter what happens, because of this amazing gift! We love You, and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

As adults arrive to pick up, encourage the kids to show off their finger puppets and their joy ornaments, including the Bottom Line on the back of their ornaments as they talk about how **[Bottom Line] you can have joy because God sent Jesus**.

GETTING READY

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

SOCIAL: Providing Time for Fun Interaction (15 Minutes)

Welcome kids and spend time engaging in conversation and catching up. Get ready to experience today's story.

(Choose one or both of these activities.)

1. Early Arriver

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

What You Need:

- Offering container

Option 1:

- Plastic tablecloth, one for each Small Group
- Wooden bookmark ornaments like these: <https://bit.ly/45b13SH>, one for each kid
- Copy paper, one for each kid
- Paint pens or permanent markers in different colors, at least one for each kid
- Hand wipes, one for each Small Group

Option 2:

- Print "Ornament Template Week 3" Activity Page on cardstock and cut out, one for each kid
- Washable markers

2. Opening Activity

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

What You Need:

- Green crepe paper, three rolls for each Small Group
- Stick-on bows, thirty for each Small Group
- *Optional: smartphone or camera*

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 #1.*

***1. Finger Puppet Nativity**

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

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

What You Need:

- Print "Finger Puppets" Activity Page on cardstock, one for each kid
- Safety scissors, one for each kid
- Crayons or markers
- Clear tape
- Bible
- Permanent marker, one for each Small Group

- Resealable sandwich bags, one for each kid

2. I've Got Joy!

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands on experimentation and discovery

What You Need:

- Print "I've Got Joy" Activity Page on paper, one for each Small Group
- Playground ball, one for each Small Group
- Masking tape or painter's tape
- Music player or smartphone, one for each Small Group
- Upbeat music

3. Caroling the Memory Verse

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

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

What You Need:

- Bible marked at Isaiah 9:6

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Need:

- Print "Bottom Line Label" Activity Page on Avery® #5160 labels or equivalent, one label for each kid
- "Ornament Template Week 3" Activity Page
- Washable Markers

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**