

## 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 Key Question:** What makes your Christmas joyful?

**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 (Communicator Script)

Key Question

Prayer

### **SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)**

**GROUPS:** Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration

Application Activity: Take a Snapshot

Bible Story Review: Bible Story Extension and Discussion Questions

Memory Verse Activity: Verses to Take with You

Prayer Activity: Make It Personal with Prayer

**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.

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.)

## 1. Bible Story Extension

### [Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

*Made to Create: an activity that explores ideas through the process of drawing, building, designing, and problem-solving*

**What You Need:** “Light Show” Activity Page, string(s) of Christmas lights; *Optional: electrical outlet*

#### What You Do:

- If possible and safe, plug in a string of Christmas lights.
  - NOTE: This activity works without plugging in lights, but adds festivity if you’re able to plug them in!
- Add additional strings to make a large length for kids to use.
- Set out the cards from the “Light Show” Activity Page facedown near your group.
- Instruct a pair of kids to take one “Light Show” card without letting anyone else see what’s on it.
- Direct the kids to work together to arrange the string of lights into the shape shown on the card.
- Invite the rest of the group to guess what the shape is.
- After the kids properly identify a shape, ask, “What does this shape remind you of from today’s story?”
- If needed, possible ideas are listed below for how shapes relate to the story.
  - Donkey (*Mary and Joseph probably rode a donkey to Bethlehem.*)
  - Manger (*After Jesus was born, Mary placed Baby Jesus in a manger or feeding trough to sleep. They were staying in a place where animals stayed because there were no guest rooms available.*)
  - Heart (*God loved us and sent us Jesus, the Savior.*)
  - Baby (*When Mary’s Baby was born, she named Him Jesus.*)
  - JOY (*We can have JOY because God has given us the gift of a Savior.*)
- Unplug the lights and set them aside.
- Choose some of the sentence starters below to discuss the story of Jesus’ birth.
  - One question I’d love to ask Mary is . . .
  - Something I don’t understand about this story is . . .
  - One thing in this story that stood out to me was . . .
  - Jesus’ birth matters because . . .
  - I wonder if . . .
  - The story of Jesus’ birth reminds me that . . .

## 2. Discussion Questions

### [Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

*Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share and collaborate with others while growing their understanding*

**What You Need:** No supplies needed

#### **What You Do:**

##### **Say:**

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:**

- 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.

### 3. Verses to Take with You

#### [Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

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

#### What You Need: Bibles

#### What You Do:

- Make sure each kid has a Bible.
- Together, look up John 3:16 using the Bible Navigation Tips below, if needed.

**Finding verses with 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders:** Ask kids to tell you if the book of the Bible they're looking for is in the Old Testament or New Testament. If it's in the Old, instruct kids to flip slowly, starting at the front of the Bible and heading toward the back, until they find the book they're looking for. If it's in the New, instruct kids to start flipping from the back, going forward to find the book they're looking for. Once they find the book, explain that the big numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. First, have them find the chapter they're looking for. Then explain that the small numbers are verse numbers. Tell kids to find the verse within the chapter they've already found.

- Invite a volunteer to read John 3:16 two words at a time.
- Ask the other kids to echo the words back as the volunteer says them two words at a time.
- Ask the following questions:
  - Choose one word from John 3:16 that you feel describes our greatest need. Explain why you chose that word.
  - What word from this verse do you think best describes what God did to help us with our greatest need? Share why you chose that word.
  - If you could choose a word from this verse that makes you feel joyful, what word would it be? Explain your choice.
- Challenge the kids to say John 3:16 backwards.
- Allow them to refer to their Bibles if needed.

## 4. Make It Personal with Prayer

### [Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

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

**What You Need:** No supplies needed

#### 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 Do:

- Share that you're going to use a familiar Christmas carol, "Joy to the World," as a prayer focus.
- Explain that you'll pause after each phrase of the first verse of the song and give them time to respond together in prayer.

#### What You Say:

"Joy to the world! The Lord has come . . . ' We can have joy because Jesus came into the world to be our Savior and Lord. Let's ask God to give us joy that goes beyond Christmas gifts or fun celebrations—a joy that finds a way to be happy, even when things don't go our way. *(Pause for kids to pray silently or out loud.)*

"The next part of the song says, 'Let earth receive her King . . . ' Jesus wants to be our Savior and help us find the joy that comes in following Him. Because of Jesus, our broken relationship with God can be restored. Take time to thank Jesus for being our Savior. *(Pause.)*

"The song continues, 'Let every heart prepare Him room . . . ' God wants us to give Jesus the place He deserves in our hearts and in our lives—FIRST PLACE. Let's ask God to show us how to give Jesus more room in our life and to forgive us when we haven't been following in the way we should." *(Pause.)*

"The first verse ends with the words, 'And heaven and nature sing . . . ' Imagine every part of creation singing praises to God all at one time. That would be an AMAZING sound. Let's close our prayer time by giving thanks to our great God."

"Dear Jesus, You are the reason we celebrate Christmas. Help us to not get so caught up in the lights and gifts that we lose sight of what is most important—YOU. You bring 'joy to the world,' and we are so glad You came to save us. We love You, and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

Note: If kids would enjoy it, close your group time by singing "Joy to the World" together.

## 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.)**

#### **Story Exploration – No supplies**

##### **1. Bible Story Extension**

**[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]**

*Made to Create: an activity that explores ideas through the process of drawing, building, designing, and problem-solving*

**What You Need:**

- Christmas lights, one or more strings for each Small Group
- Print “Light Show” Activity Page on paper and cut apart, one set for each Small Group
- *Optional: electrical outlet*

##### **2. Discussion Questions**

**[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]**

*Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share and collaborate with others while growing their understanding*

**What You Need:**

- No supplies needed

##### **3. Verses to Take with You**

**[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]**

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

**What You Need:**

- Bibles

##### **4. Make It Personal with Prayer**

**[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]**

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

**What You Need:**

- No supplies needed

### **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**