

39. Christmas



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 1:26-45, Matthew
1:18-25, Luke 2:1-20,
Matthew 2:1-12
(summary)

Jesus is born



AIMS

To celebrate the end of term and to help the children continue to reflect on Jesus' birth and its significance.

This session is slightly different from the others as it is an outline for an end of term party. There will be more time for games than usual, but there is an outline for a short talk helping the children to reflect on the significance of Christmas.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passages for this session and reflect:

- Where have you seen God at work in your SU Group this term?
- What are your hopes for next term?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

► Tear a Christmas Tree

You will need: green paper

Give each child a piece of green paper. Their challenge is to tear it into the shape of a Christmas tree while holding it behind their backs. Give them a couple of minutes to complete the challenge and then see who has managed to create the best Christmas tree shape.

► Pin the Nose on Rudolph

You will need: printout of reindeer picture (from additional document:

Rudolph), cutout of a red nose for each child (from additional document: Rudolph noses), Blu tack, blindfold or scarf, pens or pencils (optional)

Stick the reindeer picture to the wall. Give each child a red nose with a piece of Blu tack on the back. Let them take it in turns to be blindfolded and spun around, then led to the reindeer picture so that they can stick their red nose on. The winner is the child who gets it closest to the right place. If you have a large group, you may want to get the children to write their initials on the red noses before they start so that you can keep track of whose is whose!

► Snow Blower Game

You will need: cotton wool balls, straws

Give each child a straw and a

(continued overleaf)

cotton wool ball, and have them standing at one side of the hall. Their challenge is to place the cotton wool ball on the floor and blow it to the other side of the room using their straw. The child who completes the challenge the fastest is the winner.

If you have a large group or limited space, you could divide the children into teams and let them complete the challenge as a relay race.

There are further suggestions for Christmas-themed games in Session 11 of One Big Story. You could also use traditional party games such as Pass The Parcel and Musical Statues.



► Christmas Cracker

You will need: at least one Christmas cracker (ideally one for each child)

Over the last few weeks, we have been thinking about Jesus and some of the things he did when he was grown-up. Just now we're coming up to Christmas, the time when Christians celebrate Jesus' birth, so today we're going to think back to that story and think about why Christians celebrate.

What are some of the reasons why Christians celebrate Jesus' birth?

Allow the children to give some answers.

Something that can help to remind us is a Christmas cracker.

Give out crackers to the children, or ask for two volunteers to pull the cracker if you are only using one. Give them a couple of moments to enjoy looking at the contents of

the crackers and telling the jokes etc.

Let's take a closer look at the things we found inside the cracker and see what they can teach us about the Christmas Story. *(Depending on your group, you could see if the children are able to come up with a connection to the story for each item before you explain it to them.)*

First of all there's usually a bit of paper with a joke or sometimes a message on it. That can help us think of the first part of the story.

A very special message was brought to a lady called Mary. She was just going about her normal everyday business, when suddenly an angel appeared. Mary was confused and disturbed, but the angel told her not to be afraid. Then he went on to give her the special message: "You have found favour with God. You will give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus. He will be very great and he will be called the Son of the Most High."

Mary was very, very confused now. I imagine that at first the angel's message must have seemed like a bit of a joke. "How can that be?" she said. "How can I possibly have a baby?" The angel said, "The baby will be a special holy baby and he will be called the Son of God. Nothing is impossible with God." And so Mary agreed to go along with God's plan.

The angel brought a message to Joseph too, telling him not to be afraid but to take Mary as his wife. He reassured him that the baby was from God and that he was to call him Jesus as he would save people from their sins.

Next we have a crown - what does a crown make you think of? A king. That can remind us that the Bible tells us Jesus

was coming as a king. We heard earlier this term about how the people were waiting for a king to come. There were lots of prophecies and lots of promises about the one God was going to send. *(You could see if the children remember any of the prophecies from session 33.)* **The people had to wait for a long time for the prophecies to be fulfilled.**

Where would you expect to find a king?

Probably in a palace. But when it got close to the time for Mary to have her baby, she and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem. The emperor had called a census which meant they wanted to count the people and they were going to collect taxes from them, and so everyone had to return to their home town. When they finally arrived in Bethlehem they found that it was very busy. They struggled to find a place to stay and ended up not in a palace, not even in a nice house, but in a place where the animals were kept. That was where Jesus was born. Mary wrapped him up in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger which was an animals' feeding box. So he was a King, but not the kind of king the people expected.

The next thing we have in a cracker is a bit of a surprise. Sometimes it's a toy or a gift but we don't know until we open it what it is going to be. In the Christmas story we have lots of surprises. It was a surprise for Mary and for Joseph when the angel spoke to them. It was a surprise that the king was born in a place full of animals rather than in a palace. There were more surprises to come.

That night, out in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were watching over their sheep. Suddenly they got

a big surprise. An angel appeared in the sky and told them to go to Bethlehem because the Saviour had been born. They left everything and rushed to see for themselves.

As well as it being a big surprise for the shepherds, it was a surprise that they were the people the angel told. When a special baby, a royal baby, is born, you'd expect the family to be told first, then maybe important people or powerful people to hear about it. In those days shepherds were thought of as people with a low position. It wasn't a well paid job, they wouldn't be rich or well-educated, they wouldn't be people that were thought of as important at all - and yet they were the people that God sent the angel to tell.

The next set of visitors to come and see Jesus were a big surprise too—some wise men from a far away country who had found their way to Jesus by following a star. They had seen the star in the sky and travelled many miles, following it until they finally found the place where Jesus was. That must have been a big surprise for Mary and Joseph.

As well as thinking of the toy inside the cracker as a surprise, we can think of it as a gift. That can remind us that the wise men brought gifts to Jesus. They brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh and that's why we give gifts at Christmas - to remember the gifts the wise men brought.

(You could see if the children remember the significance of the different gifts from Session 34.)

The last thing we have inside the cracker is the snap. It makes a bang when we pull the cracker. If someone pulled a cracker without you knowing they were going to do it, the bang would make you turn

around and take notice. That can remind us that Jesus made a big impact on the world. As he grew up, he began teaching people about God, he began doing miracles and other amazing things. We've started to think about some of those and we'll continue next term.

Some people really liked Jesus and listened to his teaching and chose to follow him, some people hated him and tried to get rid of him but he made a big impact on everyone, so much so that even now, over 2000 years later, we still celebrate his birth.



REFLECT & RESPOND

► Prayer

Lead the children in a short prayer thanking God for sending Jesus at Christmas.

If you used the prayer activity in Session 34, unwrap the box with the children's prayers. Look through them together and pray, using some of the prayers the children wrote.

If you used the Christmas Card reflection activity in Session 34, make sure you return the cards to the children if you haven't already so that they can give them to a family member or friend.