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experience

The Christ Child: Christmas with Children



shepherd story, magi journey and born in a stable



xperience Christmas!

When was the last time you actually read the Christmas stories with new eyes? When did you last sit down and think through what it actually meant to be born in a stable at that time? Or when did you last connect the pain and joy that is childbirth with God's child being born into our world? For many of us the answer to these questions is either, "I can't recall" or "never". Christmas for many of us is a busy time of family celebrations, dinners to prepare and the obligatory church service in the morning or evening.

This booklet is designed to assist your congregation, kids club, Sunday School group, to really experience Christmas anew. To listen, to feel and to see the stories that make up this magical story with new eyes. Each of the experiences are linked with a Bible passage and are adaptable as you see fit. Each of the experiences are as powerful for children as they are for adults, so don't be scared to involve your whole congregation. Many of the experiences will take some setting up, and some organisation before hand - so working on these as a team can be valuable. This booklet is divided into three well known stories that symbolise Christmas for many of us. You are invited to use one, or all depending on your group.

The Shepherds Story
The Magi Journey
Born in a Stable

Storytelling is a great tradition in our society, many of us don't even realise we are sharing stories in our everyday: when you tell someone what you did last night, when you share events, like birthdays, with people, you are creating your story. We are formed by the stories told to us and by those we build and share ourselves, lets take some time to hear and feel the story of Jesus anew ...



born in a stable

Mary looked around at the small, dark space and sighed - this was not what she had planned for the birth of this child, this special child of God.

Determinedly she dragged a wooden manger to the space the Joseph had cleared in the straw.

(place the cardboard box in the middle of the space)

And in the manger she placed some straw and some cloth, to soften the makeshift cradle.

(place some straw in the manger, give the children each a length of cloth to place in the manger)

When her time came to give birth Mary pushed, and panted, she cried out in pain, she gasped for breath... just like any mother giving birth to her baby.

And the baby was born into our world surrounded by the love of his parents, and in the very humble and lowly stable in Bethlehem.

(pause)

Mary and Joseph took some water and washed their baby, then Mary wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in the manger.

(take the bowl of water and wash your hands, invite the children to do likewise, then cup your hands in your lap like a small cradle)

Cushioned and safe, the baby slept. At this time, the shepherds, the wise men and probably others were sharing the good news of Jesus' birth. People came to that stable to offer gifts and to share in the love, joy and peace of this special child.

Spend some time wondering with the children...

How to use this resource

This resource can be used in a variety of ways, please feel free to explore the use of these stories in the way that suits your congregation best.

For some this may be:

- use just one story and create the experience during your Sunday School time;
- use all three stories one after the other on consecutive weeks during Sunday School;
- use all three stories in a 'round robin' type storytelling/learning time at Kids Club;
- use one or more of the stories as part of your Advent Workshop Storytelling program;
- use the stories in your congregation setting, is there some way that you can create this experience in the foyer of your church, so people are welcomed as they hear the story;
- use the stories as part of worship; or
- adapt or reconstruct any or all of these stories for your congregation/small group/bible study group—remember adults can experience Christmas just as children can.

shepherd story

Preparation:

A large tent
Tape of sheep sounds, or someone willing to make authentic baaing sounds!
Picnic rugs
Spot lights (large torches would do)
Glitter stars for the roof of the tent.
(Cut out some largish stars from cardboard, glue them front and back and stick gold and silver glitter to them, hole punch the top spike and thread through some string to hang them up.)
A storyteller—someone who will sit in the tent with the children.

Setting up

Set up your tent in an open area - the middle of a hall, or in the grounds of the church. Fill the bottom of the tent with the picnic rugs and hang/stick the glitter stars to the roof. Organise the spot lights so that they are outside the tent but when turned on will illuminate the tent from two sides.

It is best to do this activity in small groups of 6.

Lets get started:

Gather the children, sitting in a circle is best, outside the tent. The children will have many questions about the tent and what is going to happen. So first of all explain that you are going to have a bible story and then you are going to go into the tent and hear the bible story told differently.

Ask one or two of the older primary children to read the bible reading: **Luke 2: 8 - 20.**

Invite the children to enter the tent quietly and to lie down (if there is space) or sit down without touching each other.

Storytelling

Leader: What does the straw feel like to lie on?
Close your eyes. What can you hear and smell?

(encourage the children to respond whilst they settle into this unusual environment.)

Leader: Mary and Joseph had traveled to Bethlehem from Jerusalem, a journey of about 3 days. Mary was very pregnant, she would have felt heavy, her ankles might have been swollen and she would have been very tired.

When they finally reached their destination, there was no where to stay...imagine the disappointment and the fear. Mary would have know she was very very close to having her baby—where would she have it?

(pause)

Luckily a local innkeeper took pity on them and offered them his stable. A place where animals were kept, a place that was most likely dirty and dark. A stable in those times being either a small cave or a shelter made for keeping animals out of the worst of the weather.

(pause to sit still in the darkness)

Mary and Joseph gratefully accepted the innkeepers offer of shelter. Entering the dark cave they lit a light to make the space seem more welcoming

*(light a candle *make sure it is safe a tea light in the bottom on a glass jar and wedged safely somewhere out of the reach of the children)*

How do you think the light made them feel?
How does light in the darkness make you feel?

born in a stable

Preparation:

A large tent
Dark material or black plastic to make the tent dark inside
Bale or two of straw
Cardboard box
Tea light candle, glass jar and matches
Strips of cloth (enough for everyone)
Bowl of water

Setting up

Set up your tent in an open area - the middle of a hall, or in the grounds of the church. Cover the outside of it in material or plastic to ensure that it is dark inside. Fill the bottom of the tent with the straw. In the centre of the tent put your cardboard box and half fill with straw..

It is best to do this activity in small groups of 6.

Let's get started:

Gather the children, sitting in a circle is best, outside the tent. The children will have many questions about the tent and what is going to happen. So first of all explain that you are going to have a bible story and then you are going to go into the tent and hear the bible story told differently.

Ask one or two of the older primary children to read the bible reading: **Luke 2: 1—7.**

Invite the children to enter the tent quietly and to lie down on the straw or if there isn't enough space to sit in a circle facing each other.

Storytelling

Leader: Let's start our story.

(pause)

It was nighttime - the sky was dark, but for the light from the stars. In the distance the animals could be heard stirring.

(quiet animal noises)

The shepherds were relaxed, some of them dozed whilst others talked quietly whilst they watched the sheep.

(have some people muttering quietly outside the tent)

For shepherds, the night time was a time to be wary and alert for foxes and wolves that might prey on the sheep, but on this night everything was quiet and calm.

(pause. Let the children hear the quiet)

All of a sudden the darkness became LIGHT.

(spot lights)

The shepherds were confused and scared. Out of the light an angel appeared. Terrified they huddled together. The angel spoke to them: "Do not be afraid, I bring great news. To YOU this day is born a child, the Messiah."

(turn one spot light off)

"Follow the star light and you will find a baby wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger"

Could this be true, the shepherds all looked at one another to be sure that they were not having some strange dream. Then the angel was joined by hundreds of other angels who sang together and the sky was filled with light and music. It was amazing, terrifying and wonderful. Then they were gone.

(pause)

shepherd story

Leader: The shepherds turned to each other. Could this be true? Did you just see what I saw? They pinched each other just to make sure that they were awake and not dreaming. Slowly the news sunk in: there was a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, the Messiah, the Lord, the Prince of Peace!

Gathering their belongings together, they herded their sheep towards Bethlehem to see if this news was indeed true.

(noise of animals moving and shepherds herding)

When they came to the stable they found a happy but exhausted couple, Mary and Joseph and in the manger a small wrinkly baby wrapped in cloth. Excitedly they shared their news with the small family and the others who gathered there.

Returning back to the paddocks with their sheep the shepherds praised God for all that they had seen and witnessed.

(turn spotlights off)

Spend some time wondering and discussing with the children about the story.

I wonder what the angels looked like?

I wonder what the stable looked like?

I wonder how many shepherds there were?

I wonder if it was a cold night?

I wonder...

(Don't try to explain away the mystery of the story, let the mystery be. Allow the children to ask any questions they want, you don't need to have the answers. Allow them to explore the story themselves...)

These were rich gifts indeed for a child so young. The wise men, had a dream and they knew not to go back to Herod with their news, instead they traveled home by a different route, sharing their news with all who would hear.

A King is born!

The Prince of Peace!

Spend some time in wondering and discussing the story with the children.

I wonder how many wise men there actually were?

I wonder how far they traveled?

I wonder what it is like to travel on a camel that far?

I wonder what it was like in the stable when they arrived?

I wonder if they got to hold the baby Jesus?

I wonder...

Invite the children to take their star home to remember the story of the wise men. They might like to stick it on the fridge at home, put it in the middle of the dinner table or put it in their bible.

Information for this segment came largely from:

www.whychristmas.com

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09527a.htm>

magi journey

Storytelling Continued:

Leader: Herod asked the wise men to search for this child King and to return and let him know so that he might go and honour him. So the wise men continued on their journey.

(unravel the coils of ribbon so they reach from Jerusalem to Bethlehem)

When they reached Bethlehem they found Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in a stable. The lowliest place to rest, a place certainly not fit for Kings, men of learning, and yet they knelt down in the straw and gave gifts to Jesus.

Do you know what they were?

(invite the children to answer...many will know. But may not know the symbolism)

Gold was given. Gold is often associated with Kings. Christians believe that the baby Jesus is the King of all Kings.

(pass around a bowl with gold glitter in it, invite the children to glue the front of their star and then dip in the glitter)

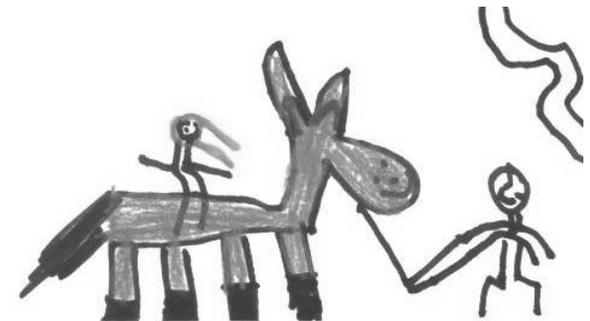
Frankincense was given. Frankincense was sometimes used in worship at the time. This symbolized the fact that the people would worship Jesus in his lifetime.

(pass around a bowl of blue glitter and invite the children to again dip their star into the glitter)

And Myrrh was given. Myrrh was a perfume that was put on dead bodies at this time, to make them smell nice. This symbolized that Jesus would suffer and die.

(pass around a bowl of red glitter and invite the children to again dip their star into the glitter)

Space for Leaders to write notes and ideas:



magi journey

Preparation:

A large tent

Lots of rich textured cloth, pillows, rugs - these are used to make the inside of the tent feel sumptuous, to set the scene.

A large map of the world / or the area we are talking about at the time of this story.

3 ribbons of different colour

A bowl of gold stars (enough for one each—they will need to be about the size of the palm of a hand.)

Glue sticks for each child

Bowl of gold, blue and red glitter (or you can put these in a film canister with holes poked in the top so it is like a shaker for easier use)

A storyteller - someone who will sit in the tent with the children and tell the story.

Setting up

Set up your tent in an open area - the middle of a hall, or in the grounds of the church. Fill the bottom of the tent with the material, pillows, cushions and rugs. Create a cave or riches and luxury...

It is best to do this activity in small groups of 6.

Let's get started:

Gather the children, sitting in a circle is best, outside the tent. The children will have many questions about the tent and what is going to happen. So first of all explain that you are going to have a bible story and then you are going to go into the tent and hear the bible story told differently.

Ask one or two of the older primary children to read the bible reading: **Matthew 2: 1—12.**

Invite the children to enter the tent quietly and to sit in a circle facing each other.

Storytelling

Leader: The wise men from the east, were what we might call scientists today or possibly magicians in their time, men of learning who explored the mysteries of the universe. Men that would take up their servants and gifts and travel a long long distance to find a King. They came looking for a King, imagine their surprise when they found a baby!

The Bible tells us of these wise men in one of the gospels, the Matthew reading that we just heard. We don't know how many of them there were, though many count three as there were three gifts, we don't even know if they are imaginary (a story) or real or even where they came from. Possibly they came from Iran, Saudi Arabia or the Yemen.

(take out your world map and place a coiled ribbon at each of these places)

The wise men traveled far, it was a long journey. Most likely it took them 3 - 12 months travel by camel back. Imagine how tired they would have been traveling all this way...

(slowly unravel your coils of ribbon so that they reach Jerusalem)

In Jerusalem they met King Herod, who had heard of their quest.

(whisper into the ear of the child next to you "They are looking for the Christ child". Have the children whisper this around the circle and back to you)

News had traveled from person to person, and many had heard of the travelers following the star bright in the sky in their search for the King.

(pass around the circle a bowl of stars and invite the children to take one each, also pass out glue sticks or have these already out and scattered around the circle)