

FAMILIES LEARNING TOGETHER

BOOK 1: JESUS' EARLY LIFE



Karyn Henley

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Introduction

Home groups. Cell groups. Care groups. Family groups. Community groups. These are some of the names for small gatherings of church members meeting together weekly in homes. Many church leaders have found these meetings to be an effective way to provide caring relationships for church members as well as being an effective format for evangelism. Membership in these groups can be quite diverse. One group may include couples, singles, older adults, and families with a variety of ages of children. And often, the question that is foremost in their minds is, "What do we do with the children?"



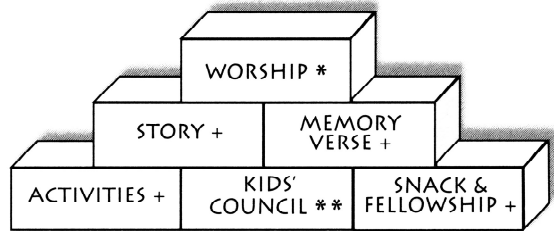
HOW DO I USE THIS GUIDE?

THE DECISION IS YOURS!

If you want step-by-step structure, you can follow each lesson as written.

But remember:

- The structure was created to serve you.
- You were not created to serve the structure.
- That's where your decisions come in.



WHAT DECISIONS?

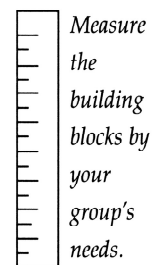
Decide which Building Blocks to use.

WHY?

- Some of them may not fit your group's needs.
- You may want to do things in a different order.
- You may want to leave out a block or two.
- You may want to add a block of your own.

So, choose the blocks you need, in the order you need.

- * This block requires kids and adults together.
- ** This block requires kids to separate from the adults. However, do provide two adults to facilitate.
- + Options:
 1. Do with kids and adults OR
 2. Do with kids only.



Add or delete as needed.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT THIS GUIDEBOOK?

GOAL: to help children and adults develop and exercise faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

ADAPTABILITY: This guide is yours, so be flexible.

- Feel free *not* to follow the order of the lessons. Skip around, if you like.
- You may want to stay close to a subject your pastor has emphasized in a large assembly. For example, if your pastor has given a lesson on prayer, you may want to use one of the lessons on prayer, even though you are going out of sequence.

CHOICES: Don't try to do every activity. You'll only have time for one, maybe two. See page 8 for other decisions you may want to consider.

AGE SPAN: It is for multiage groups of kids in an intergenerational setting. There are activities for all ages of children. Older children are encouraged to help the younger children when necessary, in family-style cooperation.

MATERIALS: All items listed are commonly found in most households or are readily available at the nearest grocery or discount store.

IMPORTANT: Again, this is a collection of suggestions. As with any teaching guide, you may change it to suit your particular needs. This guide is quite structured to help those who rely on specific steps spelled out. Feel free to change it in any way you need to.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THE CHILDREN?

One of the first questions to be asked about cells and home groups is, "What do you do with the children?" That is a very good question. Place the emphasis on the word *with*. "What do you do *with* the children?"

If you want to reap the richest rewards from your group, include the children. Be a family. Once you worship *with* children, do an object lesson or activity *with* children, snack and fellowship *with* children, you'll find out that God has planned all along for them to do for you much more than you had ever imagined!

So, *what* do we do with our children? We show them they belong. We value them. We treat them as part of the group, which is an extended family.

WHY INCLUDE THE CHILDREN?

1. To promote family togetherness. The family in our society is broken. Time for developing family relationships is preempted by school, sports, lessons, work, TV. Malachi wrote, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:5, 6). This guide is to help facilitate parent-child interaction.
2. Parents will know what their children are learning and will be able to build on the teaching during the week. This places the responsibility where it should be: parents teaching their children about life in the Lord.

3. Adults will be reached by participating in the children's lessons. We touch their hearts by going in the back door so to speak. Adults often think they are observing or helping out when they watch and listen to someone teaching children. Then they realize that the spiritual truth, presented so simply, has impacted their lives in a memorable way.
4. Children can minister to adults too. They can pray powerful prayers for adults. They can come up with profound insights. God uses them. They are not the future church. They are part of the church today.
5. Single adults often long for "connectedness." They often struggle with loneliness, and for that reason, they enjoy being with families. "God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:6). It is also good for singles and young couples to watch the loving interaction between parents and children. Single adults can sometimes give children special attention that children long for.

HOW DO WE SHOW THEM THEY BELONG?

We develop a meaningful relationship with them. It's the best way to make a difference in their lives.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM?

We listen to them. We *do* things with them. We play with them. Hemfelt and Warren, in their book *Kids Who Carry our Pain*, tell us "play is the single most effective way to communicate with children less than nine years old."

WHEN DO THE ADULTS GET TO TALK AND SHARE TOGETHER WITH OUT THE CHILDREN?

Adults do need time to share concerns with other adults. Children need time away from adults in the group too. So after spending some time gathered as a large group, you will want to separate and allow time for kids and adults to continue separately. Decide when this time will be according to your group's needs. See options on page 5.

WHO TAKES CHARGE OF THE CHILDREN'S TIME?

Take turns. Rotate each week, so each adults can get to know the children, and the children can get to know each adult. Anyone who feels uncomfortable working with the children can be an assistant for awhile to another adult who is perhaps more familiar with children.

It is best to have at least two people working with the children. Older children can help the younger, just as in a real family. This helps both the older and younger child feel valued.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN?

1. The younger the child, the shorter his attention span will be. Most kids have a hard time sitting still for more than ten minutes at a time, less than that for young ones.
2. The more of their five senses you involve, the greater the possibility that they will remember. Some learn best by simply hearing, but most learn best by seeing and doing.
3. Children younger than 8 or 9 do not understand symbolism and do not have a good perspective of time and history.

4. Decide on rules of conduct. Let the children know what those rules are. Link responsibility (to behave properly) with privileges (joining the activity, snack, and so on). Be consistent in enforcing the rules and encourage those who misbehave that you are confident they'll do better next time.

WHAT ABOUT TEENS?

Your group will have to decide. Some groups like to continue to preserve the family togetherness by involving the teens with the family's cell group. Teens can be in charge of the story time. If there are few teens, they can help with the younger children when the kids and adults separate. If there are several teens, they can form a third group to share their concerns and pray for each other.

Other groups encourage teens to have special teen cells entirely separate from the family cells.

HOW DO WE DO THIS? GIVE ME SPECIFICS.

Feel free to

- take lessons out of order.
- do the segments of the lesson in any order.
- leave out any portion of the lesson.
- choose only one or two of the activities.

NOW, LET'S INSPECT EACH BUILDING BLOCK.

I. WORSHIP (songs and praise)

Encourage children to suggest songs and to lead songs sometimes. Children will also enjoy singing energetic songs and songs with hand motions.

II. STORY (optional)

If you have all heard your pastor speak on a certain passage, you may want simply to refer to what everyone has heard and then move on to a memory verse or activity that would be appropriate.

If you need a story, you will find suggestions in each lesson for ways to tell the story. Some are object lessons. You can choose one adult to be in charge of the story time each week, or let adults take turns. You do not have to use the suggestions given. Feel free to tell the story your own way. Children can even tell the story or read the passage. But try not to do the same thing every week. Vary the approach to keep it interesting and fun.

III. MEMORY VERSE (optional)

Most verses are short. Explain any words children may not understand. Each memory verse includes a song or active method to help children remember the Scripture. Give parents an index card and ask them to write the verse on the card so they can take it home with them and continue to review the verse during the week as a family.

There may be children who come without their parents. In that case, another child can get together with this child during the following week, either by phone or in person, and help him review his memory verse.

IV. ACTIVITIES

A variety of activities are suggested. You will only be able to do one or two of them. Vary the type of activity from week to week. Choose activities according to the abilities, interests, and needs of the specific children in your group. Let older children and adults help the younger ones.

You will find suggestions for discussion included with most activities. There is also a list of questions after the activity section. During the activity, while hands are busy, use these questions to guide discussion toward the concepts you want everyone to discover and think about.

V. KIDS' COUNCIL

Try to make this time special by your attitude and the atmosphere you set, so the children feel like the focus is on them and their needs. You can sit together on the floor or ground if that helps make it a special time. Or you may choose a special room or corner that the children can feel is their own. You may even want to have Kids' Council in a clubhouse or tent.

1. **Bring it Home.** Apply the Scripture and activity to their daily lives in the coming week. Questions are suggested for you.
2. **Share and Pray.** Sometimes the previous discussion with the children will expose prayer needs. At other times, children may have very different needs. Share answers to prayers that you've prayed in the past weeks. Let children pray for each other.
3. **Extra.** As needed, do another activity (section IV), or allow free play. Play with the children to strengthen your relationship.

VI. ADULT STUDY QUESTIONS

While the children are having a special time together, adults will want to share their needs with each other. The study questions allow adults to go deeper into the theme of the lesson. The questions are meant to be a challenge and lead into thoughtful discussion. But if your group has other needs, you will want to skip the study questions so you can share those needs and pray for each other.

VII. SNACK AND FELLOWSHIP TIME

You may wish to have this time at another point in the meeting. The advantage of having it at the end is that it gives you the option of letting the children prepare and serve the snack.

HOUSE RULES

A home group is like an extended family. Just as a family has practical guidelines for behavior, your group can also have guidelines. It is helpful if everyone in the group is aware of the guidelines. If these are group guidelines, then there is an understanding that everyone will remind one another that "this is the way we behave in our group."

Generally, there should be only a few rules and they should be stated in the positive. See the examples shown.

Remember that children younger than four need to be reminded often, and wigginess and a short attention span are not misbehaviors.



You may find it helpful to write your rules on a poster. Or you may want to use a group meeting time to list the ways everyone agrees to behave. Let all the children sign this list as a contract or agreement to abide by the guidelines.

Rules usually fall into three basic categories:

1. Honoring God
2. Respecting and encouraging others
3. Respecting property

These may be the only guidelines you want to write down. It will be helpful for children if you discuss each one briefly and let them tell you how they can achieve each rule and what behaviors might be considered violations of the rules.

Children can also give suggestions for what the consequences for violating the rules might be. Generally, effective consequences are

- removing the privilege that the behavior is abusing.
- removing the child from the group for a period of time.
- removing material that is being abused or that is being used to hurt others or property.

Sometimes children misbehave when they are in situations in which it is unclear who the authority is. It may be helpful to let everyone know that

1. when you meet as a large group (adults and children together), the parents are in charge of their own child's behavior.
2. when children and adults meet separately, the people who are supervising the children are the ones to be obeyed. They will enforce the rules.
3. the person at whose house you are meeting has the last word on what is or is not out of bounds for their house. It will help if doors are closed to any room that is off limits and if fragile or treasured objects are put in safe places.

For suggestions on dealing with misbehavior, see the book *Child-Sensitive Teaching* or the chapter on Behavior Management in the *Child-Sensitive Teaching Workbook*.

If you have problems with certain specific behaviors, it is very appropriate to discuss it in a group meeting and help each other decide on the best way to handle it. Remember that you may not immediately arrive at a solution that will work. If what you try doesn't seem to be working, try something else.

INVOLVING CHILDREN WITH ADULTS

THE SITUATION

In the beginning, God created family. Older family members taught the younger family members through example and counsel. Younger family members challenged the thinking of older family members and were often a source of joy as the older members watched them grow stronger and wiser. Older people were comfortable being around the younger ones. Little ones were comfortable interacting with the older generations.

But in our society today, children spend most of their time with peer groups. Adults spend much of their time with adults. So it is not unusual for adults to feel bothered and impatient with children whose needs they do not understand. And it is not unusual for children, especially older children, to feel impatient and bothered with adults.

THE NEEDS

In order to form an intergenerational group, you will need adults who are willing to move out of the traditional peer-oriented comfort zone. They will need to be

- **Patient**

If this is the first time adults and children have been in an intergenerational group, do not expect everything to flow smoothly at first. The children will have to get used to what is happening and what is expected of them. The adults will have to get used to a group whose members may wiggle more and make more noise.

- **Willing to Learn**

In the intergenerational group, everyone comes to learn together. Adults don't come in order to pour their knowledge into children. Instead, they establish an atmosphere where everyone learns together. Adults ask and listen and guide. An intergenerational group challenges everyone's thinking.

- **Good Examples**

Children don't know what it's like to be an adult, so they will watch and listen to adults. Adults in the intergenerational group need to be aware that younger eyes are watching them, and younger ears are listening to them. The adults in the group are teaching more by their example. They are modeling life as a follower of Jesus.

- **Willing to Love and Encourage**

one of the primary benefits of family is the love and encouragement that can be given to each other. Being family is...

- ... being valued and respected for who you are.
- ... being able to contribute to the welfare of the family unit.
- ... being accountable to people who care about you.
- ... being able to make mistakes and still be loved anyway.
- ... being able to talk and be listened to.
- ... being encouraged and not discouraged.
- ... being prayed for day in and day out.

- **Willing to Sacrifice Self-Interest for the Interests of Others**

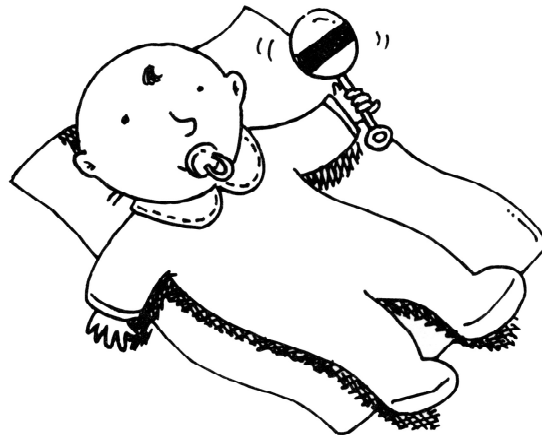
In God's kingdom, those who give up their lives find true life. Those who cling to their lives lose life. It takes work to mature in a family. It takes thinking and praying and giving up self. It means doing the difficult. It means giving up current pleasure in order to receive future rewards.

So "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

HOW GOD MADE US

INFANTS

- are self-centered.
- depend on others to care for them.
- learn through their senses.
- focus on the present.
- do not make conscious choices between right and wrong.
- are sensitive to tone of voice.



If you have infants in your group,

- they will enjoy listening to your group sing.
- they will enjoy holding or chewing on their toys.
- may want to be with mom and/or dad.
- or they may be happy being held by someone else.
- they can stay with the adults during Kids' Council, or they can go with the children if an older child will help care for them.
- they may want someone to hold them and walk them around the room during parts of your group time.
- let them feel the atmosphere of love, joy, and peace, so they will know they are in a safe, loving place.
- you can introduce infants to God by saying: "God made (whatever they are eating, touching)." "God takes care of you" (when you are taking care of them)." "God loves you (when you are rocking or snuggling with them)."

EARLY CHILDHOOD: Ages two and three

- are wanting to be more independent.
- may have strong wills.
- have short attention spans.
- sit still for only a few minutes.
- want to know that mom and/or dad are nearby.
- are still self-centered and self-focused.
- learn by touching and doing.
- play *beside* but not cooperatively with other children.
- need to know what the rules are.
- need patient, consistent training from adults.
- need to be able to do some things for themselves.
- get fantasy and reality mixed up.
- do not understand the flow of time.
- do not understand symbolism or figures of speech.
- imitate the faith of significant adults around them.



If you have toddlers in your group,

- be prepared to let them wiggle.
- try to find ways that they can help.
- allow them to play a rhythm instrument when you sing.
- let them hold a small, sturdy book for a songbook and a Bible so they can imitate you.
- let them move in and out of activities as their attention ebbs and flows.
- give them things to touch and do.
- ask older children to help them as big sisters and brothers help their younger siblings.
- be patient.
- have extra toddler toys for them to play with.
- let them go with the other children to Kids' Council, but be ready to let them go back in with the adults to get the assurance that mom and dad are still nearby.

EARLY CHILDHOOD: Ages Four and Five

- enjoy exploring and discovering.
- are usually very active.
- ask many, many questions.
- learn by touching and doing.
- still have short attention spans, although it's getting longer.
- need to know what the rules are.
- are beginning to be more self-controlled because their conscience is now developing.
- can begin to be aware that they sin.
- get fantasy and reality mixed up.
- do not understand the flow of time.
- do not understand symbolism and figures of speech.
- imitate the faith of the significant adults around them.
- realize that they are growing and getting older.
- now play *with* and not just beside other children.
- want to help and like to surprise people with their good deeds.

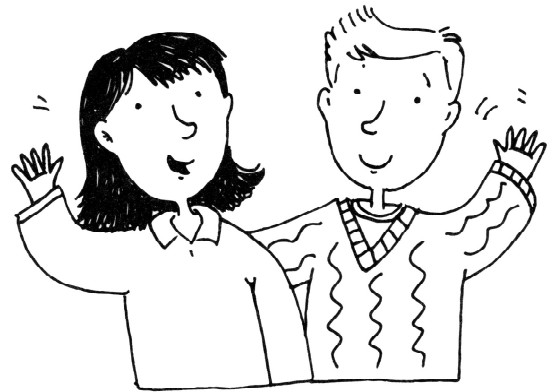


If you have four and five year olds in your group,

- actively involve them as much as possible.
- explain symbolic concepts and language in simple ways, relating it to something they know.
- let them choose and lead some songs or games.
- choose touching and doing activities, as well as activities that fit their abilities.
- enjoy their curiosity.
- tell them how proud you are that they are getting so big and growing up.
- acknowledge and compliment their efforts.
- listened to them.
- let them use songbooks and Bibles designed for preschoolers.
- be patient.
- point out that the Bible stories really happened.
- provide opportunities for them to help.
- find ways of helping them without making them feel incapable.

ELEMENTARY: Ages six through ten

- want to be busy doing productive things.
- enjoy projects.
- like to show their skills and abilities.
- want to feel like a valued member of a group.
- want to hear adults' testimonies about how God is working in their lives.
- want to tell about what God is doing in their own lives.
- sit still longer but may still wiggle.
- learn best by touching and doing and seeing visual aids.
- easily feel inferior if they are put down or if they feel incapable.
- are seeing their need for a Savior.
- can be very sensitive to spiritual issues.
- want to see how God is real and how he relates to everyday life.
- have a growing understanding of symbolism.
- understand the flow of time.
- are concerned about what's fair and just.
- are more consistent about discerning right from wrong.
- memorize more easily.



If you have elementary age children in your group,

- treat them as full-fledged members.
- ask them about their schools, sports, and other interests and listen with interest.
- let them take an active part in group discussions, activities, preparations, and cleanup.
- involve them in service projects with your group.
- try to utilize their skills and abilities.
- let the older children help with the younger.
- encourage them to pursue their own relationship with the Lord through Bible reading and prayer.
- ask adults to tell how God is working in their lives.
- let children tell about God working in their lives.
- help them apply the spiritual lessons you discuss in your group to their daily lives.
- compliment their efforts.

LEADING A CHILD TO JESUS

Each child is a unique individual. So the best way to know a particular child's spiritual level is to listen to him and observe him. This requires developing a relationship with him. Developing relationships is one of the blessings of intergenerational groups. The preceding pages have given a foundation of important facts that help us lead children to Jesus. Here is a review.

- **Self and Sin.** Children are born self-focused. Since self is the basis of sin, we can say that children are born sinful. But in their first few years, they're not aware that they sin.
- **Right and Wrong.** As children get close to two years old, they begin exhibiting a strong will. They want some independence in decision making but are not mature enough to make consistent decisions between right and wrong. In fact, they decide what's right and wrong by knowing whether they'll be rewarded or punished for certain behaviors.
- **Awareness of Others.** Around three years old, children reach a major milestone: becoming aware that other people have possessions, opinions, and needs. They begin to see how their choices affect others.
- **The Conscience.** The four-year-old child reaches another major milestone. His conscience begins to develop. This guides more of his choices. Now he can understand that he sometimes makes the wrong choice. This awareness allows him to say, "I am a sinner," and he can begin to see the need for a Savior.
- **Fantasy and Reality.** Everything a young child experiences gets stirred into one big world in his brain, interpreted largely by imagination. Spiritual concepts and Bible stories get mixed in with cartoon stories and super heroes. But around age five, children begin distinguishing fantasy from reality. They can know that the salvation message is real.
- **Death and Life.** Young children have a hard time telling what is alive and what is not. Until they are about five or six, they will not understand what it means when we say that Jesus died.
- **Symbolism.** When children are six or seven, they begin to understand symbolism. In fact, some people call the child's seventh year "the age of reason." This is significant, because many of the methods we use to tell the salvation message are symbolic.
- **Seeing a Need.** Elementary age children begin feeling a need for God's help as they face their everyday lives.

SO AT WHAT AGE CAN A CHILD RECEIVE JESUS AS HIS LORD AND SAVIOR?

He can learn to love Jesus and believe in him very early. Then he must see that he sins and needs a Savior. He must be willing to let Jesus be his Lord, his Boss, his King. How much do children have to understand? That's a good question. But God never asks us to understand. He just asks us to obey. And that's something even a child can do.

THE SALVATION MESSAGE IS REALLY VERY SIMPLE.

- God is perfect. He never does wrong.
- God does not allow anything bad, wrong, or imperfect to be around him.
- We are not perfect. Even if we try to be perfect, we sometimes make the wrong choice. We lie, or say bad words, or throw a fit, or take things that really aren't ours.
- Since we are not perfect, we cannot be around God. We will never be able to live with him where there's no hurting or crying or dying, where there's joy and peace and love forever.
- But God loves us and wants us to be able to live with him. So he sent Jesus, his Son. Jesus was a man, a human like we are, except for one thing: he was perfect.
- So Jesus traded with us. He took our sins, our wrongs. And he was punished for all the bad things we've done or will do. He was killed on a cross.

- So Jesus took our sin and gave us his perfectness. If we say YES to Jesus, if we tell him we will let him be our Savior (to save us from the punishment our sin would bring us), then we get his perfectness. We become perfect in God's kingdom, and we will get to live with joy and peace and love forevermore.
- In fact, there's more good news: God brought Jesus back to life again, and now Jesus is preparing a place for us with him in heaven.
- And there's even more good news: When we let Jesus be our Savior and our Lord (our Boss, our King), he sends his Holy Spirit to live inside us. In that way, Jesus can always be with us. The Holy Spirit puts joy and peace in our hearts. He teaches us and leads us and tells us God's thoughts. He helps us become all that Jesus wants us to be.

Looking for Jesus to Come

OBJECTIVE: *To realize that God always fulfills his promises, sometimes in ways we might consider impossible.*



WORSHIP

Sing songs that are meaningful and familiar to your group, especially those that relate to the promise that God made to his prophets long ago. Here are some suggestions.

- “Arise and Sing”
- “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”
- “For Unto Us a Child is Born” (Isaiah 9:6; 7:14)
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”
- “I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord”
- “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Isaiah 7:14)
- “Wonderful, Wonderful Jesus Is to Me” (Isaiah 9:6)

STORY

The Angel Tells Mary About the Coming Birth of Jesus, Luke 1:26-38

- The angel Gabriel appears to Mary.
- Gabriel tells Mary that she will be the mother of God’s Son.
- Mary says she will do God’s will.

Draw in the dark. Give each person paper and a pencil or crayon. Turn off the lights. While you tell the story, everyone else tries to draw an angel in the dark. Then turn on the lights and let everyone show each other what they’ve drawn. Talk about Jesus being the “true light” for the world (John 1:9). Ask: “What does that mean?”

MEMORY VERSE

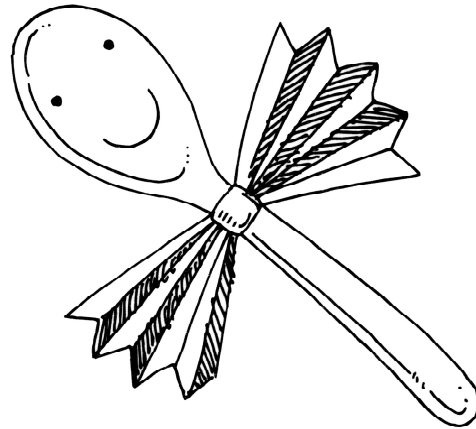
“Nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

To help everyone remember the verse, sing it to the tune of “The Ants God Marching One by One” (page 19). Repeat as many times as you wish. To end the song, add “amen” at the end.

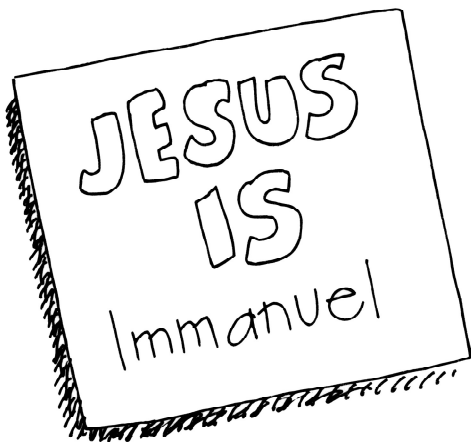
ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to support the story or theme and to provide a springboard for discussion.

ANGEL PUPPETS. Give each person a plastic spoon. On the bowl of the spoon, each person draws a face with a permanent marker. Supervise young children. Fold a piece of plain white paper according-style. Tape the center of the folded paper to the handle of the spoon beneath the face to make wings. Hold the handle of the spoon to fly the puppet.



BOW JEWELRY. Give each person a stick-on gift wrap bow and a length of string or yarn, about 34-inches for a necklace, 12-inches for a bracelet. Take the protective paper off the bow sticker. Lay the center of the string across it. Cut a piece of plain paper to be the size of the protective paper. Place this piece of paper on top of the string, sandwiching the string between the paper and the bow. Tie the ends of the string to fit loosely around the person's neck or wrist. Talk about the gift that the angel told Mary about.



JESUS IS. On paper, each person can glue letter-shaped dry cereal to spell JESUS IS. Then he chooses a name for the promised Son of God and glues on cereal to spell that name, or writes the name with a marker. Some suggestions can be Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Or they may choose other words, such as Lord, Master, Savior, Son of God. Talk about God's plan announced to Mary.

SENDING A MESSAGE. Choose a Sender. Give him an envelope. The Sender says, "I'm sending a message by (he names another person) Express. I'm sending it over the sand." The person he named must come to the Sender and get the envelope, pretending to walk on sand. Then he walks back to his own seat the same way, and he becomes

the Sender. The Sender always calls a person's name and how that person will have to travel (over snow, ice, mud, rain puddles, a hot sidewalk, and so on). Talk about the different ways we send messages today and how God sent his message to Mary.

QUESTIONS

1. When do you say, "I can hardly wait"? What kinds of things are you waiting for when you say that?
2. Can you think of some Scriptures from long before Jesus was born that told about Jesus' coming? (Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7; 11:1-3; Micah 5:2)
3. Who were some of the people waiting for Jesus to come?
4. What are some things you can do while you are waiting for something?
5. What do you like best about the story of Jesus' birth?

KID'S COUNCIL

BRING IT HOME

- Some people who celebrate Christmas do not believe in Jesus. Do you know someone like this?
- How can you share your faith with them this year?
- How can you help them know about Jesus?

SHARE AND PRAY

- Ask the children to pray for each other.
- Pray for the people the children mentioned above.
- Ask God for the courage to share their faith with these people. Ask God to draw these people to Jesus.

ADULT STUDY QUESTIONS

- What are some of the obstacles that Mary might have faced if this story had taken place in today's world? What obstacles did she face in her day?
- What arguments could Mary have made mentally as to why this message could not be true?
- Have you ever felt that God was wanting you to do something that you thought was impossible? What were the obstacles?
- Do you really believe that "nothing is impossible with God," or are there some qualifications to this statement?
- Tell about something that God has done that would seem impossible in the eyes of the world.

SNACK AND FELLOWSHIP

Hot Cider. Let children mix together:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 quart apple juice | 1 quart cranberry juice |
| 2 tablespoons lemon juice | 1 stick cinnamon |
| 3 cloves | 1/4 teaspoon allspice |
| 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg | |

Heat to boiling, strain, and serve. Discuss waiting. Say: "We have to wait for foods to cook. We have to wait for Christmas. Who was waiting for Jesus to be born?" (More people than just Mary and Joseph.)

Oh, noth - ing is im - pos - si - ble with God, our Lord. Oh,

noth - ing is im - pos - si - ble with God, our Lord. Oh, noth - ing is im - pos - si - ble, oh,

noth - ing is im - pos - si - ble with our great and migh - ty

God, Al - migh - ty God, won - der - ful God, hal - le - lu - jah!

God's Gift

OBJECTIVE: *To contemplate the significance of why Jesus came.*



WORSHIP

Sing songs about Jesus' birth that are meaningful and familiar to your group. Here are some suggestions.

- "Angels We Have Heard on High"
- "Away in a Manger"
- "Hard! the Herald Angels Sing"
- "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
- "Silent Night"
- "The First Noel"

STORY

The Birth of Jesus, Luke 2:1-20

- Jesus is born in a stable in Bethlehem.
- Angels announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds.
- Shepherds visit the baby in Bethlehem.

Bring a baby doll. Assign parts for the characters in the story. Children act out the nativity story as you read or narrate it. Or ask a child to read or narrate. Then everyone can sing carols together.

Option: While adults meet, the children can plan and practice the presentation of the story. Then before snack time, children join the adult group again to present their nativity play.

MEMORY VERSE

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

To help the children remember the verse, use hand motions.

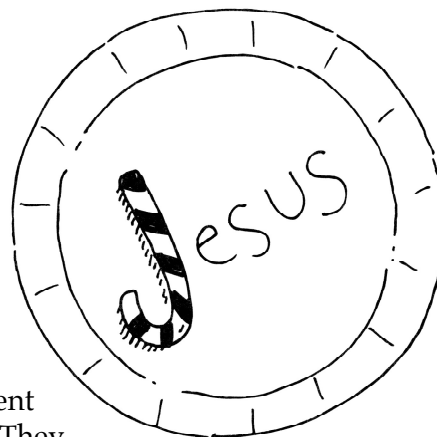
- For God so loved the world (hands over heart)
- that he gave his one and only Son (one finger up)
- that whoever believes in **him** (tap temple with forefinger on the syllables in bold)
- shall not perish but have eternal life (spread arms out wide, side to side)

Discuss the meaning of the words *perish* and *eternal*.

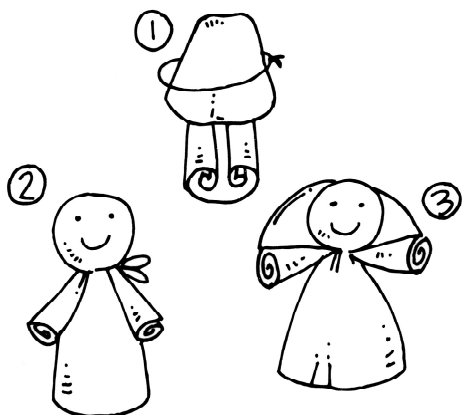
ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to support the story or theme and to provide a springboard for discussion.

CANDY CANE NAME. Give each person a paper plate and a candy cane. Show everyone how to turn the candy cane upside down to make a J. Spell the name JESUS by gluing the J to the left of the center of the plate and write JESUS to the right of the J. Read what the angel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21. Talk about why Jesus came.



BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT. Talk about what a birth announcement is. Let each person make one on a piece of gift-wrapping paper. They write on the white side, "Jesus Is Born!" Then fold the paper like a greeting card with the message inside. Talk about how Jesus' birth was announced to Mary, Elizabeth, and Joseph.



CLOTH ANGELS. Give each person a square of soft cloth the size of a handkerchief or bandanna. Lay it flat in front of them. Show them how to roll the right and left sides toward each other to meet in the middle like a scroll. Fold the top of this scroll down halfway. You are working on the back of the angel. Tie it a few inches from the fold with gift wrap ribbon to make a head. The short rolls are arms, the long rolls are legs. Pull the fabric between the short rolls up and over the "head" to make wings. Turn the angel over to see the front. Draw eyes and mouth if you want. Talk about messages the angel brought in Luke 1, 2.

NATIVITY. Children act out the nativity story for parents. Everyone sings carols together.

BOW PICTURE. Give each person a piece of paper and a self-stick gift wrap bow. Let everyone stick the bow on the paper. Write on it, "I am a gift from God to my family." Talk about John 3:16 and the gift God gave.

QUESTIONS

1. What makes Christmas special for you and your family?
2. Why do we celebrate Christmas? Why do we give gifts?
3. Why did Jesus come? (Read John 3:16.)
4. What do you think Jesus had to give up to come to the earth? (Read Philippians 2:6, 7.)
5. Is there anything you have to give up for him?

KIDS' COUNCIL

BRING IT HOME

- What can you give besides something you buy?
- Think of something you can do for someone this week. Doing things for people is a way of giving.

SHARE AND PRAY

- Encourage children to pray for each other.
- Pray a prayer thanking God for the gift of his only Son.
- Children may want to pray to ask Jesus to be their Lord and Savior.

ADULT STUDY QUESTIONS

- Why do you think John 3:16 has become such a well-known verse?
- Read John 3:17, 18. If God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, why do so many people feel that God is a condemning God? Compare what these verses really say to the way the world has twisted the concepts of salvation and condemnation.
- Discuss Philippians 2:5-11. Verse 5 says we should have the attitude of Jesus that verses 6-8 describe. How can that attitude be lived out in our lives today?

SNACK AND FELLOWSHIP

Candy Cane Cupcakes. Mix and bake cupcakes from a boxed cake mix, any flavor. Frost the cupcakes and place a small candy cane on top so that it forms the letter J. Discuss the meaning of the J as suggested in the activity "Candy Cane Name."