

Explore It

FOR LEADERS



HOW CAN I BE JOY-FILLED THIS CHRISTMAS?

Luke 1:26-38 An angel appears to Mary

Each child will need:

- Colouring pens/pencils and paper
- A blindfold (optional)
- A printout of the nativity template (see notes below), specifically the Mary figure
- You could also ask everyone to wear a Christmas jumper

Before you begin this series of Christmas sessions, email (or drop off) a nativity template to each child. The children can cut out, colour in and assemble the template in advance, except for Mary, Joseph, one shepherd, and one wise man. These four figures are to be coloured in and assembled in the sessions. Or, if you don't want to use those figures during the sessions, you could ask the children to come prepared with the appropriate figure cut out and coloured, ready to place into the scene together. Here are two websites where you can download templates from:

<https://truesdaykids.com/waiting-for-christmas>

<http://madebyjoel.com/2013/12/paper-city-nativity-scene-joyfully-expanded.html>

Start It


Ask everyone to take piece of paper and pencil and then to close their eyes / put on a blindfold. Ask them to draw exactly what you say while keeping their eyes closed.

 **Say:**

- Draw three circles above each other, the top circle is smaller than the others
- Draw three buttons going down the centre of the two larger circles
- Draw two eyes, a carrot nose, and a mouth in the top circle
- Draw a hat on top of the smallest circle
- Draw stick arms on both sides of the middle circle
- Draw a broom in one stick hand

Ask them to open their eyes and see what they have drawn. You can award them points for things like the circles touching one another, the buttons and face being in the circles and so on.

Share a picture of a nativity scene. Ask the children to name all the characters that you see in it. You could make up the names of the shepherds and wise men (although traditionally the wise men are called Gaspar/Caspar, Balthasar and Melchior). Ask the children if they have a favourite character and why.

 **Say:** The birth of Jesus is part of a fantastic story, a big story – God's story. It is a story full of joy! When we think about all the people who played a part in the Christmas story – Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, the shepherds, the angels, the wise men – one thing we can notice is that they were filled with joy and excitement and wonder. They all somehow realised the significance of this event – God was coming to live among us, starting out as a tiny baby – and that the world would never be the same again! And the great news is that we are all part of this story too.

- **Say:** In these next four sessions we are going to remember the real meaning of Christmas and look at how we can experience the joy of Christmas and help bring that joy to our families, each other and our communities.

(NB Check that your group understand what 'joy' means.)

Tell It

Brainstorm on a whiteboard (or use the chat function) all the words that people think of when they think about their own experience of Christmas. You could also make a list of the events that everyone would normally be looking forward to at this time of year, even though we know that many of them won't be able to go ahead. Have any families put up any Christmas decorations yet?

- **Say:** We don't know what Christmas will look like this year - it will probably look a bit different from what we are used to. This may be difficult for some of us and we may have to work a bit harder to find some of the joy and excitement that we would normally feel. We will need to look beyond all the parties, presents, shopping and fun activities that we usually get involved in for the real joy in Christmas.
- **Say:** But although Christmas may be different, the meaning behind our celebration is the same and more relevant than ever. Instead of moaning and feeling disappointed, let's think about how we can give to others and make their Christmas this year the best ever!
- **Say:** So, let's go back to how it all began...

Read Luke 1:26-38

The following video clip illustrates this Scripture passage - but only watch until 2 mins 20. (You can watch the rest in the Session Two.)

'Gospel Project: Angels Spoke to Mary and Joseph'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kcap1eWuatE>

Explain that Mary was a simple Jewish girl who honoured God. She may have been as young as 12 or 13 and living an ordinary life, but God chose her to give birth to his son. Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph; they weren't married yet. The angel Gabriel appeared to her, and he must have been really big and bright because Mary felt frightened and surprised by his message to her from God.

Ask:

- What did the angel say to Mary?
- How did Mary respond?
- What did she say?
- What did she do?

Allow time for response and discussion.

Sing It

- **Say:** We can only imagine Mary was confused and probably a bit worried about what was happening. But she put all her trust and hope in her God... and she became a main player in the greatest story of all time! So let's stand up and sing this song together. Just like Mary, we can be sure that God is always by our side.

'Hope' by Allstars Kids Club
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_t5xitQjlc

Action It

Part One

🗨️ **Say:** Despite her confusion and shock at the angel's visit and message, Mary knew that God was working in her life. She said, 'I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said' (Luke 1:38 CEV).

Ask each person to take their Mary figure from their nativity scene, cut it out (if not already done so) and colour it in. As they colour you could ask the following 'I wonder...' questions:

I wonder...

- ➔ how frightened Mary felt when the angel came.
- ➔ how much courage it took to say yes to being part of God's plan.
- ➔ how excited Mary felt to be part of God's plan.
- ➔ how much joy and happiness Mary felt when she held her new baby in her arms.

When they have finished colouring, ask the children to hold on to their Mary and reflect quietly on her life as you say the following words:

- 🗨️ **Say:** God could have chosen anyone to give birth to Jesus, but he chose Mary, a young girl living in the little village of Nazareth. She wasn't very important, but she was important to God, and he chose her to do the most important thing one could imagine - he chose her to give birth to his son.
- 🗨️ **Say:** Mary knew God was asking her to serve, and she willingly obeyed. She didn't know how it would happen, what the world would think of her, or about the tremendous opportunity she would have, but she trusted in God. She said, 'Lead and I will follow.'
- 🗨️ **Say:** How will you respond to God when he calls you? Will you say, 'You've got the wrong person' or will you respond, 'I am your servant, let it happen as you've said it will'?
- 🗨️ **Say:** God still chooses ordinary people to perform important tasks. He has given you and me the task of sharing the good news of Jesus and his love to the whole world. Can you imagine a more important task? Let's make a start this Christmas!

Ask everyone to stand their Mary figure in their nativity scene.

Part Two

Ask the group to go to their nearest window and look outside for one thing that makes them happy. When everyone returns to their screen have each person share what they saw and why it makes them feel happy.

Take it in turns for each child to tell the group about something that brings them joy. This could be something they do or see, or a person they spend time with, that makes them feel happy and joyful. If anybody chooses something that can easily be shown to the group - for example, a dance, a piece of music, a joke - then you could allow some time for the children to share this and for the other group members to experience it too. (You could split into smaller groups using the breakout rooms function to do this.)

🗨️ **Say:** Wow, those are some great examples of the ways that you can find joy! We know that it has been a difficult time over these last few months; so it's important, before the hustle and bustle of Christmas really hits us, that we take some time to look after ourselves. One way we can do this is by doing the activities that make us happy.

Encourage the group to take some time this week to do something that fills them up with joy. This could be a piece of artwork, baking some delicious cakes, listening to some music, dancing, getting out in nature, or doing something for another person.

🗨️ **Say:** Let's remember that Jesus came so that we can have God's joy in all things. God wants us to find joy this Christmas because of him, so remember also to spend some time with Jesus, and ask him to fill you with his deep joy.

Pray It

- **Say:** Right after God broke into Mary's life in the most amazing way, and right after she said yes to him in faith and obedience, Mary sang this song of praise and thanks:

My soul praises the Lord; my heart is happy because God is my saviour.

I am not important, but God has shown his care for me, his servant girl.

From now on, all people will say that I am blessed, because the Powerful One has done great things for me.

(Luke 1: 46-49 ICB)

Share screen with the following lines:

My soul praises the Lord; my heart is happy because God is my saviour.

I am not important, but God has shown his care for me, his servant.

From now on all people will say that I am blessed, because...

Ask each person to write or think of one sentence to finish off the end line.

Go around the group and ask each person to read the first two lines and then their own line, and ask everyone to say AMEN!

Finish with this prayer together:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you came into the world to fill us up with joy. Thank you that you came to give new life, peace, hope, and joy. Please fill me with your peace and happiness this Christmas, as I celebrate your birth with family and friends, and help me to share this joy with others. Amen.

Explore It

Remember to send home the Explore It (For Me) and Explore It (Together) ideas for children and families.