# § Explore it

## Love is a gift



#### Bible verses:

Luke 1:57-66; 2:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25 The birth of Jesus



#### Aim:

To celebrate the birth of Jesus as the gift of God's love and the sign that God is with us



#### Today's fruit:

Peace



In today's session we celebrate the moment when God's love became a gift to the whole world, when Jesus was born to be with us and bring his love and peace to everyone.

As we continue our Advent journey, we remember that God always keeps his promises. Joseph didn't know what the future would hold, but God had a plan. Through an angel's message, Joseph learned that Mary's baby would be very special, God's own son. This baby was to be named Jesus, which means 'The Lord saves', and Immanuel, which means 'God with us'.

We can know and show God's peace when we trust God and receive his love.

#### Each child will need:

- A sticky note and pens/pencils
- Resources to make and decorate a photo frame see Action It
- Explore It ideas handout

#### You will need:

- To know the meaning and origin of your first name and tools to research the meaning of each child's name (optional) – see Start It
- Fruit of the Spirit poster: Peace download from Salvationist



Start with a discussion about first names. Some children may not know much about their early years or family background, so please be sensitive as you lead the activity.



#### Ask:

- Do you know how you got your name?
- Who chose it for you?
- Are you named after anyone?

#### Say

Names are often chosen because they have a special meaning or connection to someone important.

Explain to the children where your own name came from and anything special about it. Discuss how names often have special meanings and tell them what your name means.

Give the group an opportunity to find out what their own name means.

If you have a group that meets regularly, you may wish to prepare these in advance. If not, this can be done in the session. You may have a baby name book or use one of these websites:

- bounty.com/pregnancy-and-birth/baby-names
- behindthename.com/names/usage/english/2
- meaningofthename.com

Once the children know the meaning of their names, give them a sticky label and ask them to write their name and decorate it in a way that reflects its meaning.

#### Say:

Today we'll continue our journey through the Christmas story and discover the special meaning of the name Immanuel, given to Jesus at his birth.



#### Sau:

Our song for today is linked to our memory verse. Before we sing, let's share it together.

### Memory verse

'For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)



### Song

'Isaiah 9:6-7' (lyric video) by The Corner Room (3:10)

Display the Peace sign.

Explain that Jesus' birth brought peace to the world – not just quietness and calm, but a deep kind of peace that comes from knowing God loves us and is always with us.

#### Ask:

- In the song Jesus has many names, including 'Prince of Peace'. Why do you think Jesus is described in this way?
- How can we share the peace of Jesus with others this Christmas?



#### Say:

In the last two sessions, we met Elizabeth and Zechariah, an elderly couple who loved and served God faithfully. Even though they had waited many years for a child, God had not forgotten them.

#### Read:

'When it was time for Elizabeth to give birth, she had a boy. Her neighbours and relatives heard how good the Lord was to her, and they rejoiced.

'When the baby was eight days old, they came to circumcise him. They wanted to name him Zechariah because this was his father's name. But his mother said, "No! He will be named John."

'The people said to Elizabeth, "But no one in your family has this name!" Then they made signs to his father, "What would you like to name him?"

'Zechariah asked for something to write on. Then he wrote, "His name is John." Everyone was surprised. Then Zechariah could talk again. He began to praise God.'

(Luke 1:57-64 ICB)

#### Ask:

- What was the name of their baby boy?
- Why was he so special?

#### Say:

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus. Elizabeth and Zechariah were very excited about the news.

#### Ask:

Who else did the angel Gabriel visit with another very special message?



#### Say:

The angel Gabriel also came to Mary, a young woman engaged to Joseph. Gabriel told her that she would have a baby, God's own son! Mary didn't understand how this could happen, but she trusted God's plan.

#### Ask:

- How do you think Mary felt when she heard this news?
- Why do you think it was such a surprise?

#### Say:

Joseph wasn't sure what to do when he heard Mary's news, but God showed him that this was all part of his plan. Let's read what happened next in Matthew 1:19-25.

#### Read:

'Mary's husband [to be], Joseph, was a good man. He did not want to disgrace her in public, so he planned to [break the engagement to] her secretly.

'While Joseph thought about this, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name the son Jesus. Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins."

'All this happened to make clear the full meaning of what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel." This name means "God is with us".'

(Matthew 1:19-23 ICB)

#### Ask:

- What two names did the angel give for the baby?
- What do those names tell us about who Jesus is?

#### Say:

The name Jesus means 'The Lord saves'. It reminds us of the gift of forgiveness and grace given to us by God. The name Immanuel reminds us that God is always with us. Both names, Jesus and Immanuel, remind us that this baby was God's greatest gift to the world.

#### Sau:

Let's see what happened next in our story.

#### Read:

'At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order to all people in the countries that were under Roman rule. The order said that they must list their names in a register. This was the first registration taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own towns to be registered.

'So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee. He went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea.



This town was known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. Joseph registered with Mary because she was engaged to marry him. (Mary was now pregnant.)'

(Luke 2:1-5 ICB)

#### Say:

The Roman rulers wanted to count everyone in their empire, so Mary and Joseph had to make a long journey to Bethlehem. Travelling wasn't easy, especially for Mary, who was expecting a baby! Let's find out more about what it meant to take part in a Roman census.

#### Video

The Roman Census by Drive Thru History with Dave Stotts (1:38)

Watch 0:00 to 0:48 'There was no way some average Joe – or Joseph – could avoid it.'

#### Ask:

- What was the main reason Rome gathered people for a census?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph felt as they travelled to Bethlehem?

#### Say:

Rome wasn't bothered if you were sick, old, very young or heavily pregnant like Mary. If they called a census, then everyone had to turn up. Even though the journey was long and uncomfortable, God was with Mary and Joseph every step of the way.

#### Read:

'While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. She gave birth to her first son. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed.'

(Luke 2:6-7 ICB)

#### Ask:

- Why was it so difficult for Mary and Joseph to find somewhere to stay?
- Do you think Mary and Joseph knew that God was with them as they cradled the baby Jesus?
   Explain your answer.

#### Say:

Try to imagine Mary looking down at her tiny baby, knowing that this was the child God had promised. When Jesus was born, God's love wasn't just promised any more, it was given as the most amazing gift ever!





#### Say:

The Christmas story reminds us that when Jesus was born, God gave the world his greatest gift, the gift of himself. Jesus' name Immanuel means 'God with us'. That's what makes Christmas so special – love came down to be right here with us.

#### Ask:

- Can you think of a time when you've felt particularly close to God or noticed his love in your life? If you feel comfortable, then share it with the rest of the group.
- Has there ever been a time when you found it hard to feel that God was with you?

#### Say:

Sometimes we don't always feel God's love, especially when things are difficult. But Matthew 1:23 reminds us that even when we can't see or feel it, God is still with us.

#### Photo frame

Explain to the children that they are going to make a photo frame to remind them that God's love is a gift that is always with us. Inside the frame they can place a picture of something or someone that reminds them of God's love. It could be their family, a friend, a pet, or even a picture of themselves. Encourage them to decorate with phrases like 'God is with us' or 'God's greatest gift'.

#### Suggested photo frames

- Purchase a cardboard or wooden photo frame from bakerross.co.uk
- Make a frame with lolly sticks
   Easy DIY Photo Frame Making with Popsicle or Ice cream sticks by Aloha crafts (3:28)
- Fold an origami frame
   DIY Mini Paper photo frame by World of Art and Craft (3:20)
- Cut, glue and roll a photo frame
   Super easy paper photo frame by Mana creative corner (3:38)

They might want to give the photo frame as a gift to someone this Christmas, to share the good news that God's love is a gift for everyone. Remind the children that each time they look at their frame, to remember that Jesus is God's greatest gift!





#### Say:

We face lots of challenges in our world today, and sometimes it can all feel a little overwhelming. The Christmas story reminds us that God sent his only son to earth to be with us.

#### Say:

We're going to listen to some music and watch a clip that tells us of the hope we find in Jesus.

#### Video

'For God is with us' by For King + Country (3:19)

#### Say:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for showing your love for us by sending your son.

Today you have reminded us that even though the world may seem a scary place at times, you are always with us.

We can always find our hope in you.

Help us to remember you are with us, not just at Christmas, but always.

#### Amen.

Spend time praying with your group and then bring the session to a close.

## **66** Explore it

Remember to send home the *Explore It ideas* for children and families.



Explore It is produced by the Children and Youth Department in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview)



### Advent: Session 3

# **8** Explore it

## Love is a gift

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.

Peace



#### Bible verses:

Luke 1:57-66; 2:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25



#### Aim:

To celebrate the birth of Jesus as the gift of God's love and the sign that God is with us



Today's fruit:

Children & Youth



## Create

Find or take a picture, to put in your 'God with us' photo frame. Display it at home or decide who you are going to give it to as a Christmas qift.



## Watch

Snuggle up on the sofa with someone at home and enjoy the Christmas story retold by children.

**Christmas according to kids** by Southland Christian Church



# Song for the week

**'Isaiah 9:6-7' (lyric video)** by The Corner Room





## Memory verse

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
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