



CHRISTMAS BONUS SESSION

OLDER KIDS LEADER GUIDE



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT®

CHRISTMAS BONUS SESSION

JESUS IS OUR GREATEST GIFT

MATTHEW 1; LUKE 2



KEY PASSAGE: Psalm 34:17

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why does sin separate us from God? Because God is holy, sin has broken our relationship with God.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The birth of Jesus was good news! Jesus was not an ordinary baby. He is God's Son, sent to earth from heaven. Jesus, the promised Savior, came into the world to show us what God is like and to deliver us from sin and death.

STORY POINT: God's Son, Jesus, was born in Bethlehem.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

In the Gospel accounts of Christ's birth, the miraculous plans of God coincide with the seemingly mundane events of humanity to reveal the promised Messiah. God used modest means to bring about the divine incarnation of His only Son who would deliver us from the death we deserve.

Where was Jesus' birth prophesied in the Old Testament? How does His birth make a way for people to receive the gift of eternal life?

Jesus' genealogy, found in Matthew 1, demonstrates how the long-awaited Savior can be traced back to Abraham. Later, in verse 23, we read the prophecy first relayed in Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel." In today's passages—written about 700 years after the words of Isaiah—an angel of the Lord appeared first to Mary, then to Joseph, and later to the shepherds in the field, announcing this newborn baby as the Savior of the world. These ordinary people experienced God's great power at work through the miraculous birth of Jesus.

Consider the grandness of the nativity story. Reflect on the wonder of Jesus coming to earth in such lowly form. The humble birth of Christ would lead to His humbling death: crucified and left to die among wretched sinners. Yet this would not be the end of His story—nor for those who trust in His name! In three days, Jesus would rise from the grave, and by faith in His finished work on the cross, we can be reconciled to God as recipients of His grace.

Pray for the boys and girls who will gather to be taught this spectacular passage of Scripture. May they find their place within God's redemption story, placing true faith in the Savior born to bring us eternal life. May they turn from their sins and call upon Immanuel, our "God with us" forever. And like the shepherds in today's passage, may you faithfully share this good news, giving praise to the God of our salvation for the great gift we have in Jesus!



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10-15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25-30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Find the Way" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ graham crackers, 4 per group
- ☐ gumdrops
- ☐ mini candy canes
- ☐ decorating icing, 1 per group
- ☐ animal crackers, 3 or 4 per group
- ☐ rolled-up fruit snacks, 1 per group
- ☐ toothpicks
- ☐ paper plates
- ☐ tablecloths

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ unusual gift-wrapped items such as a can opener, tape measure and flashlight, and a lint roller



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set
- ☐ world map



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ individually wrapped candy canes
- ☐ bowls, 1 per group
- ☐ permanent marker

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- ☐ cups, 10 per group

Journal and Prayer

- ☐ Journal Page
- ☐ "Our Greatest Gift" activity page



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "Jesus Is Our Greatest Gift" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "He Rescues Them (Psalm 34:17)" song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

| **SAY** “What makes something a good gift? Why?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Find the Way” activity page.

| **SAY** “Today, we will see how the shepherds heard the greatest news: a Savior had been born in the town of Bethlehem.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: GRAHAM CRACKER NATIVITY



Before the session, gather the items listed in the supplies. Cover tables with tablecloths. Form kids into groups of three or four. Lead groups to create an edible nativity scene. On a paper plate, guide kids to place icing on three edges of a graham cracker. Stick another graham cracker to the long iced edge of the graham cracker to form the back “wall.” Take a half graham cracker and stick it one end of the iced graham cracker to form a “wall.” Repeat at the other end of the iced graham cracker. Then add icing to three edges of a fourth graham cracker and place it on top of the “walls” to form the “roof.” Make “baby Jesus” by stacking two gumdrops on a toothpick and wrapping them in the rolled-up fruit snack. Create “Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds” by stacking three gumdrops onto a toothpick. Using icing, stick a candy cane to the shepherds to make their staffs. Add animal crackers as desired.

| **SAY** “Today, we will see that God’s promise to send the Savior into the world came true.

We’ll learn that **GOD’S SON, JESUS, WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM**, and He is our greatest gift.”

☐ OPTION 2: WHAT’S WRAPPED?



Before the session, gift wrap some unusually shaped items such as a can opener, a tape measure and flashlight, and a lint roller. Guide kids to sit in a circle and choose one of the gift-wrapped items to pass around the circle. Allow kids to feel the item and think about what it might be. Once everyone has had a turn to hold the item, invite kids to share what they think it is. Choose one kid to open the “gift” to see if she guessed correctly. Repeat with the other two items.

| **SAY** “Was each gift what you were expecting? [Allow responses.] Sometimes, we receive a gift and it’s not what we expected. Today, we will see that God’s Son, Jesus, was born in an unexpected way. Jesus is the King, but He didn’t come to earth like we might expect a king to come. Yet, in our story we’ll see that Jesus’ birth is good news, and He is our greatest gift.”





LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Hi, kids! My name is [your name], and I am so happy you are here to learn from God’s Word! Today, we will be celebrating the birth of Jesus. If you have your Bible with you, please take it out. [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] The birth of Jesus is recorded in two books of the Bible: Matthew and Luke. What division of the Bible are Matthew and Luke found in? [Allow responses.] That’s right, they are both in the Gospels.

As we learn from God’s Word together, we will hear about how God sent His Son, Jesus, to be born in the world. We’ll learn that **GOD’S SON, JESUS, WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM.** [Display the Story Point Poster.] Before we open God’s Word, let’s prepare our hearts and minds for what He wants to teach us today. Pray with me: ‘Dear God, thank You that we can gather together to hear from Your Word. Help our hearts trust You and believe that Jesus is our greatest gift. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “Our big picture question is, **Why does sin separate us from God?** The answer is, **Because God is holy, our sin has broken our relationship with God.** Let’s repeat the answer together: **Because God is holy, our sin has broken our relationship with God.**

Before we can have a right relationship with God, we need to have our sin forgiven. Sin separates us from God, but He had a plan from the very beginning to bring people back to Him. Soon after sin entered the world, God made a promise to send a Rescuer to defeat sin and death. In our story, we will see how God’s plan to send the Savior into the world finally came true! God showed His love to us and provided us with Jesus so that anyone who trusts in Him can be with God forever. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “In the book of Genesis, we learned how God made people: Adam and Eve. Sadly, Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God and rejecting His command. But God promised to send a Rescuer into the world. As time passed and more people were born, God worked out His plan to send the Rescuer into the world. He made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and said that the Rescuer would come through their family. Even though God’s people continued to sin, God always kept His promise. Finally, the time had come for God’s Son, Jesus, to be born. ”



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Luke 2. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Jesus Is Our Greatest Gift.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

JESUS IS OUR GREATEST GIFT

“ Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph. **One day, an angel told Mary she was going to have a very special baby. The angel explained, “This baby will be God’s Son.”** Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. **The angel said, “Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Her baby was put there by the Holy Spirit. Name Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins!”** This was amazing news! Jesus—God in the flesh—would come as a light into the dark world.

Mary and Joseph lived in the town of Nazareth. **During the time Mary was pregnant, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, announced that everyone needed to return to their own towns and be registered for a census. Since Joseph was a descendant of King David, he and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, the city of David. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. Mary and Joseph looked for a safe place to stay, but every place was full. So Mary and Joseph found a place where animals were kept, and that is where Mary had her baby. Joseph named Him Jesus.** Mary wrapped the baby tightly in cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough.

That night, some shepherds were watching over their sheep in the fields near Bethlehem. Suddenly, an angel stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified! The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! I have very good news for you and for all the people: Today a Savior, who is the Messiah and the Lord, was born for you in the city of David.” Then the angel said, “You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, a whole army of angels appeared, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!”

When the angels left and returned to heaven, **the shepherds decided to go straight to Bethlehem to see what had happened. They hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the feeding trough. Then the shepherds went and told others about the baby Jesus.** Everyone who heard about Jesus was amazed. Mary thought about everything that was happening and tried to understand it. The shepherds returned to their fields, praising God because everything had happened just as the angel said.

Christ Connection: The birth of Jesus was good news! Jesus was not an ordinary baby. He is God’s Son, sent to earth from heaven. Jesus, the promised Savior, came into the world to show us what God is like and to deliver us from sin and death. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Act it out: Invite kids to act out the actions of the people in the story while you say it aloud.

Define it: Tell kids that the name Jesus means “the Lord is salvation.”



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ All throughout the Old Testament, God shared His promise to send a Savior into the world. He gave His people prophecies about the Savior’s birth, life, death, and resurrection. God spoke to prophets like Isaiah, Daniel, Micah, and Zechariah and gave them hope about the future Messiah. All of God’s promises are true and can be trusted. Eventually, God’s promise came true, and Jesus was born into the world. What town was Jesus born in? Look at Luke 2:4-7. **[Choose a volunteer to read Luke 2:4-7 aloud.]** **GOD’S SON, JESUS, WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM.** Because of a census, Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This happened just as God said it would! In the Old Testament, the prophet Micah shared God’s words and wrote that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus is fully God and fully man. As the Son of God, Jesus is also eternal. This means He has always existed. Jesus became a man by leaving heaven and being born a baby. Since Jesus is fully God, He never sinned. Jesus is worthy of all praise, and He is King over all creation.

Yet when Jesus was born, He was placed in an animal’s feeding trough. How might His birth tell us something about the life He would live? **[Allow responses.]** Jesus’ birth shows us what kind of life He would go on to live: He would be humble and serve others. Philippians 2:6-11 teaches us that Jesus took the form of a servant and made Himself lowly. He came to follow God’s plan to save people from sin. He humbled Himself and obeyed God, dying on the cross for the sins of the world.

When Jesus was born, God announced this good news to a group of shepherds. What did the angel say to the shepherds? Look at Luke 2:11. **[Choose a volunteer to read Luke 2:11 aloud.]** The angel told the shepherds a Savior had been born for them! Jesus is the Savior all people need because all people sin. After the shepherds heard the good news and visited Jesus, they praised God and shared the good news with others.

The birth of Jesus was good news! And Jesus’ birth is good news for us today. Jesus was not an ordinary baby. He is God’s Son, sent to earth from heaven. Jesus, the promised Savior, came into the world to show us what God is like and to deliver us from sin and death. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ Every person is a sinner, and every person needs to be saved from his or her sin. We can’t take away our sin on our own. God sent Jesus to be born so we could be saved from sin. Jesus is our greatest gift because only He can save us from our sin. His birth is good news because Jesus would live a perfect life, die on the cross for our sin, and be raised to life again. Anyone who trusts in Jesus will be saved from sin. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

4 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Before the session, create a Christmas tree from green poster paper. Hang the tree on a wall. Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Psalm 34:17 together.

| **SAY** “ Jesus’ birth is good news because Jesus came to rescue us from sin and eternal death! ”

Form kids into four groups and provide groups with construction paper, scissors, markers, and tape. Direct groups to cut out ornament shapes and write a word from the key passage on each ornament. Assign each group a section of the Christmas tree. Then lead groups to tape their ornaments, in the correct order of the key passage, to the Christmas tree.

Lead kids to sing “He Rescues Them (Psalm 34:17).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

5 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

| **SAY** “ Dear God, thank You for the gift of Jesus. Thank You for sending Jesus to be born in Bethlehem so that anyone who trusts in Him will be saved from sin. Help us share this good news with others. In Jesus’ name, amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





LOVE

THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the New Testament Israel Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Luke 2. Remind kids that the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are known as the Gospels because they teach about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Tell kids that the word gospel means “good news.”

Consider comparing the New Testament Israel Map to a modern-day map to help kids understand where this story took place. (Tip: Locate the areas in and around modern-day Bethlehem [14].) Choose a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:15 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY “As soon as the shepherds heard the good news of Jesus’ birth, they went straight to Bethlehem. The news of a Savior was worth leaving their sheep for and worth the travel. They couldn’t wait to see Jesus!

The shepherds also recognized that this news was made known to them by God. The Lord had revealed Jesus’ birth, and they now had Someone who could save them from their sins. This same good news is made known to us by God. God has given us His Word so we can know and trust in Jesus in order to be saved from our sin.”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “The shepherds praised God and glorified Him. Why was Jesus’ birth worthy of praise?”

Remind kids that no one can save themselves from his or her sins. Every person needs a Savior: Jesus Christ. Tell kids that Jesus’ birth was the greatest gift because God’s plan to provide the way for people to be saved from their sin, completely and forever, came true. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Acts 4:12.)

SAY “Why was Jesus not an ordinary baby?”

Discuss how Jesus is fully man—He took on human flesh, ate, slept, and felt emotions—but He never sinned. Tell kids that Jesus is also fully God, and He alone was able to live a perfect life. Discuss how Jesus’ righteousness is given to us when we place faith in Him. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 2 Cor. 5:21.)

SAY “The shepherds shared the good news of Jesus’ birth. Who can you share the gospel with?”

Answers will vary. Tell kids that if we are Christians, God has commanded us to share the gospel with other people He places in our lives. Discuss how every person needs to hear the gospel because it shares the only way for people to be saved from their sins. Tell kids that God helps His people share about Jesus. If time allows, spend some time reviewing The Gospel: God’s Plan for Me Poster. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Mark 16:15.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: CANDY CANE ROUND UP



Before the session, use a permanent marker to write a word from the story point on individually wrapped candy canes. Create three sets of story point candy canes. Place each set of story point candy canes in individual bowls.

Form kids into three groups. Distribute a set of story point candy canes in a bowl to each group. Tell kids not to touch them. Then provide each kid with their own candy cane. Explain that kids in each group will place their arms behind their back, hold their own candy cane in their mouth, and try to “hook” one of the candy canes in the bowl to their own candy cane. Kids in each group will go one at a time, until one group is the first to retrieve all the candy canes and place them in the correct order of the story point.

SAY “**GOD’S SON, JESUS, WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM.** Jesus came to save people from their sins. When we turn away from our sin and trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven.”

☐ OPTION 2: CHRISTMAS TREE STACK



Guide kids in an activity to help them see how God’s promise to send a Savior was fulfilled in Jesus. Write the following Bible references: Genesis 3:15; Genesis 15:4-6; Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 2:7-9; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:1-6; Isaiah 53:7; Micah 5:2. Form kids into three groups and provide each group with a Bible. Invite groups to work together to find each Bible verse and read it. Once a group finds a verse, give them a plastic cup. Groups will continue finding verses and receiving a cup until they are the first to build a “Christmas tree” out of their 10 cups.

SAY “These verses pointed to Jesus and how God’s plan all along was to send a Savior into the world to save people from their sin. Jesus’ birth was the greatest gift because it meant God’s people now had a way to be permanently and completely saved from their sin. Jesus was born, died, and rose again so we can be saved.”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

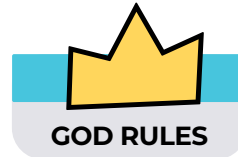
Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, praising God for His greatness and goodness, knowing He is Creator and King. As time allows, lead kids to complete “Our Greatest Gift” on the activity page.



THE GOSPEL

GOD'S PLAN FOR US

The gospel is the good news, the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use these prompts to share the gospel with your kids.



Ask: "Who is in charge at home?" Explain that because God created everything, He is in charge of everything. Read Revelation 4:11.



Ask: "Have you ever done something wrong?" Tell kids that everyone sins, or disobeys God. Our sin separates us from God. Read Romans 3:23.



Explain that God is holy and must punish sin. God sent His Son, Jesus, to take the punishment we deserve. Read John 3:16.



Ask: "What is the best gift you've ever received?" Say that Jesus took our punishment for sin by giving His life, and He gives us His righteousness. God sees us as if we lived the perfect life Jesus lived. This is the best gift ever! Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.



Explain that everyone has a choice to make. Ask: "Will you trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord? You can turn from self and sin and turn to Jesus." Read Romans 10:9-10.