

CHRISTMAS BONUS SESSION

OLDER PRESCHOOL

LEADER GUIDE

theGOSPELPROJECT®

CHRISTMAS BONUS SESSION

JESUS IS OUR SUBSTITUTE

LUKE 2



STORY POINT: Jesus was born to save us from sin.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jesus is God, but He also became a human to save people from sin. As Jesus grew up, He lived a perfect life and took the punishment for our sins so that if we believe in Him, we will be forgiven and have a right relationship with God.

KEY PASSAGE: Romans 8:31

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: *What did Jesus do to save us? Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead.*



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

Though the world often views the nativity story as a mere Christmas decoration along the same lines as snowmen and gingerbread houses, followers of Jesus recognize Christ's birth is the true and wondrous account of the long-awaited Savior, born to die so that we may find life in Him. From before the creation of the world, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was always God's plan for our redemption (1 Peter 1:18-20).

The story of the birth of Jesus isn't as glamorous as people might have expected for the arrival of a royal king; instead, it's a humble story of an ordinary young woman giving birth among animals and common shepherds being invited to worship the newborn King. In calling shepherds to marvel at the arrival of Jesus, God didn't summon those with power, wealth, and positions of great influence in society. Instead, He invited the lowly and humble, and they responded to God's invitation to experience the glory of His Son.

Whereas Caesar Augustus called the people of his kingdom to travel far and wide for his goal of conducting a census—a measure of an earthly ruler's power—Jesus was humbly making His way to His people in the greatest act of power the world has ever seen: God becoming man. Christmas is the story of Immanuel, which means, God with us.

Though the Christmas season comes each year, we must continually bring ourselves to recount the wonder, majesty, and grandness of the nativity story—the awe that our Creator would make the way to forgive us and to bridge the gap between God and sinners by becoming a human, living a perfect life, dying for our sins, and rising again.

Pray that the boys and girls you lead will experience the story of Jesus's birth and find their place in His redemption story. May they receive His love and—like the shepherds in this story—share the story of Christ with others.



THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session.



10–15 MINUTES

Greet preschoolers and open the session.



25–30 MINUTES

Teach preschoolers the story of the gospel.



15–20 MINUTES

Lead preschoolers to love the God of the gospel.



15–20 MINUTES

Lead preschoolers to live the mission of the gospel.



Scan the QR code to listen to The Gospel Project for Kids Weekly Leader Training Podcast.

PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, Allergy Alert, construction paper, copy paper, washable markers, crayons, blunt-tipped scissors, glue sticks, glue, tape, blocks, baby dolls, play dough, world map, snacks, paper cups, napkins.

WELCOME

Welcome
- ☐ "God is For Us (Romans 8:31)" song

Activity Page
- ☐ "Fill in the Map" Activity Page, 1 per child

Play with farm animals
- ☐ toy barn
- ☐ variety of toy farm animals (cows, sheep, horses, and others)

Transition
- ☐ countdown video (optional)

LOVE

Snack and talk
- ☐ hand sanitizer (optional)
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster
- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Make a manger ornament
- ☐ yellow construction paper, 1 per child
- ☐ 2-inch blue construction paper ovals, 1 per child
- ☐ 1-inch tan construction paper circles, 1 per child
- ☐ yarn
- ☐ single hole punch

LEARN

Introduce the Bible story
- ☐ map of the United States

Learn about the Bible
- ☐ bookmark
- ☐ Giant Timeline or Small Group Timeline

Tell the Bible story
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster
- ☐ "Jesus Is Our Substitute" video (optional)
- ☐ storytelling tips props (optional)

Review the Bible story
- ☐ toy manger scene

Practice the key passage
- ☐ Key Passage Marker
- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "God is For Us (Romans 8:31)" song
- ☐ 2-inch wide construction paper strips, 1 per child
- ☐ stickers
- ☐ tape

Learn the Big Picture Question
- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

LIVE

Sing worship songs with instruments
- ☐ variety of kids rhythm instruments
- ☐ device that plays music (optional)

Play an angel announcement relay
- ☐ a bell

Explore a sheep sensory bin
- ☐ plastic bin filled with cotton balls
- ☐ small tongs
- ☐ paper bowls

Transition
- ☐ coloring page, 1 per child
- ☐ "God is For Us (Romans 8:31)" song
- ☐ Big Picture Cards for Families



WELCOME Preschoolers

Post an Allergy Alert, if needed. Set out supplies to engage preschoolers as they arrive. Play music as you welcome preschoolers. Greet children by name at eye level. Follow your church's security procedures.

1 ACTIVITY PAGE

Lead preschoolers to complete "Fill in the Map" on the Activity Page.

> **SAY** *"This map shows the path Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Something amazing and special happened while they were in Bethlehem. I'm so excited to open the Bible and tell you all about it!"*

2 SESSION STARTER

Use one or both of the following options to engage curiosity about today's Bible story.

COUNT ITEMS



Choose different items from the room, and guide kids to count them. Items could include baby dolls, blocks, markers, crayons, chairs, tables, or glue sticks. You could also count the number of boys, girls, leaders, and total people in the room.

> **SAY** *"You counted so many different things! What did we count the most of? **[Allow responses.]** What did we count the least of? **[Allow responses.]** In today's Bible story, we will learn that Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem to be counted. Something very special happened while they were in Bethlehem. Do you know what it was? **[Allow responses.]** I can't wait to tell you the whole story!"*

PLAY WITH FARM ANIMALS

Set out a variety of farm animals and a toy barn. Guide the kids to play with the farm animals. Set blocks nearby for kids to build fences around the barns.

> **SAY** *"Where do farm animals usually live? **[Allow responses.]** You're right, usually in a barn. In Bible times, sometimes animals lived in caves attached to houses or the lowest level of the houses. In today's story, a human baby was born in the place animals were kept. Do you think you know this baby's name? Let's listen to our story to find out!"*

3 TRANSITION TO LEARN

Gain preschoolers' attention by showing the countdown video, turning the lights off and on, or clapping a simple rhythm for children to copy. Invite preschoolers to pretend to be farm animals as they transition to *Learn*.

Transition from **WELCOME** *to* **LEARN**



LEARN the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE BIBLE STORY

Show a map of the United States to the kids. Point to some different locations where you have traveled. Use your finger to outline the path of travel from where you live to where you have traveled.

> **SAY** *"Look at this map. It shows the United States. There are so many amazing places to travel to. In our Bible story today, Mary and Joseph made a trip to where Joseph was born. Something really special happened while they were there!"*

2 LEARN ABOUT THE BIBLE

Place a bookmark at Luke 2 in your Bible. Invite a preschooler to open it. Reverently display the open Bible.

> **SAY** *"All the words in the Bible are true and from God. Today's story is in the New Testament in the book of Luke, one of the four Gospels. The Gospels tell of the good news about Jesus."*

Point to the Bible story picture on the Giant Timeline or Small Group timeline. Remind children that all the stories in the Bible fit together to tell an even bigger story. The Bible tells us the big story of how God rescues sinners through His Son, Jesus.

3 TELL THE BIBLE STORY

Tell the following Bible story using the provided storytelling tips or show the video. Use the bold version of the Bible story for younger preschoolers.

JESUS IS OUR SUBSTITUTE

> *Long ago, a leader named Caesar Augustus decided that everyone in the land should be counted. He ordered every person to travel to the place where they had been born.*
>
> **Mary was** *a young woman who lived in Nazareth. She was* **going to have a special baby. God told Mary that her baby would be God's Son and the Savior of the world!**
>
> **Mary was going to marry a man named Joseph. They traveled** *from Nazareth* **to Bethlehem,** *which was Joseph's hometown.* **When they got to Bethlehem, Mary was ready to have her baby. There was no guest room for them to stay in, so Mary had her baby in a place where animals were kept.**
>
> **Mary wrapped Baby Jesus in cloths and placed Him in a manger**, *a feeding box for animals.* **Jesus, God's Son, was born to save the world.**
>
> **Nearby, some shepherds were taking care of their sheep. Suddenly, an angel appeared and told them the good news: "***Today, in Bethlehem,* **a Savior has been born. He is the Messiah, the Lord!" The angel told them they would find the baby in a manger.**

> **The shepherds quickly went to Bethlehem and found Jesus,** *just as the angel said. They were so happy to see the Savior, and* **they praised God for sending Jesus to save them.** ”

4 CHRIST CONNECTION

> **SAY** “ *Jesus is God, but He also became a human to save people from sin. As Jesus grew up, He lived a perfect life and took the punishment for our sins so that if we believe in Him, we will be forgiven and have a right relationship with God.* ”

5 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

Use a toy manger scene to retell the Bible story. Hold up pieces of the manger scene to prompt questions such as:

- Who traveled to Bethlehem? *(Mary and Joseph)*
- What did the shepherds see in the sky? *(an angel)*
- Where did Mary lay Baby Jesus? *(in a manger)*

> **SAY** “ *Jesus is God; Jesus came to earth as a baby.* **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN.** *After Jesus was born, He grew up and lived a perfect life. Then He took the punishment for our sins so that if we believe in Him, we will be forgiven.* ”

6 PRACTICE THE KEY PASSAGE

Cut strips of construction paper that are two inches wide and long enough to fit around a child’s wrist, one strip for each child. Write *God is for us* on each strip. Place the Key Passage Marker at Romans 8:31. Invite a child to open your Bible to the key passage. Read the key passage aloud. Provide kids with the paper strips, markers, stickers, and some tape. Encourage kids to decorate their strips with drawings and stickers. When kids are finished, fit the bracelet to their wrists and tape the two ends together. Lead kids to take turns saying the verse aloud.

> **SAY** “ *This bracelet will help us remember to practice and say our verse. We can share ‘If God is for us, who is against us?’ Romans 8:31. We were reminded of this truth in our Bible story when* **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN.** *Jesus loves us so much that He came to earth to save us!* ”

Sing the key passage song, “God is For Us (Romans 8:31).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

STORYTELLING TIPS

Use a manger scene: Use a manger scene to play out the story as you tell it.

Use a baby doll: Show a baby doll, gently wrap it in a blanket, and place it in a box as you tell the story.

7 LEARN THE BIG PICTURE QUESTION AND ANSWER

> **SAY** "Jesus came to the earth as a baby to save us. **What did Jesus do to save us? Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead.** Jesus lived a perfect life and took the punishment for our sins by dying on the cross and coming back to life. If we believe in Him, we will be forgiven of our sin and have a right relationship with God."

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

LOVE God because of what we learned

1 PRAY

Invite preschoolers to close their eyes and think about God as they talk with Him.

> **SAY** *"God, thank You for sending Jesus. We praise You that He was born to save us from our sins. You sent Jesus because You love us. Help each child follow You and share the good news about Jesus with others this Christmas. Amen."*

2 SNACK AND TALK

Post an Allergy Alert. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer. Serve a snack. Show the Bible Story Picture Poster as you ask the following questions. Retell parts of the Bible story as needed.

> **SAY** *"What was your favorite part of today's Bible story?"*
>
> **SAY** *"What did you learn about God in today's Bible story?"*
>
> **SAY** *"Why did God send Jesus to earth?"*
>
> **SAY** ***"What did Jesus do to save us? Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead."***

3 MAKE A MANGER ORNAMENT

Cut two-inch ovals from blue construction paper and one-inch circles from tan construction paper before the session, preparing one set for each child. Trace each child's hand on yellow construction paper. Assist the kids as needed in cutting out their hand shapes. Direct the kids to hold the hand cutout with the fingers pointing downward. Instruct the kids to glue the blue oval in the center of the hand to make Jesus's blanket. Guide the kids to glue the tan circle on top of the oval to make Baby Jesus's face. Encourage the kids to use markers or crayons to draw a face on the circle. Punch a hole at the top of the palm and thread a piece of string through the hole to complete the ornament.

> **SAY** *"Where was Jesus born? **[Allow responses.]** Since there was no guest room for them, Mary and Joseph stayed in the place where animals were kept. What did Mary do after Jesus was born? **[Allow responses.]** She wrapped Baby Jesus in cloths and placed Him in a manger, a feeding box for animals—like the ornament you made. **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN.** We can share this truth with others!"*

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

LIVE for God out of love

1. Choose the activities that best fit your group, space, available resources, and time constraints. Set up activities in one of these ways: as a group, all at the same time; in small groups that rotate through each activity; or set up as centers, allowing preschoolers to browse and choose.

PLAY A TRAVEL GAME



Guide kids to travel from one location of the room to another using different movements. Some movements could include travel to the table by hopping, travel to the blocks by crawling, or travel to the home living area by tiptoeing. Remind kids that Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born.

> **SAY** *You traveled all over our room! Who traveled in our story today?* ***[Allow responses.]*** *Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted. While they were there Jesus was born.* **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN**. *Who else traveled in our story today?* ***[Allow responses.]*** *After an angel came to a group of shepherds and told them about Baby Jesus, they traveled to Bethlehem to find Him. The shepherds praised God for sending Jesus. We can praise God for sending Jesus too!*

SING WORSHIP SONGS WITH INSTRUMENTS

Provide a variety of kids rhythm instruments such as drums, cymbals, rhythm sticks, shakers, or jingle bells. Demonstrate how to play each instrument using gentle hands. Lead kids in singing worship songs or familiar Christian Christmas songs while they play their instruments. Allow the kids to switch instruments with a friend if they would like. Play music on a device, if helpful, to support singing and playing together.

> **SAY** *When* **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN**, *an angel appeared to the shepherds to tell them this good news! The shepherds went to find Jesus and praised God for sending Him. We can praise God too! One way to do that is through singing, thanking Him for sending Jesus to save people from their sin.*

PLAY AN ANGEL ANNOUNCEMENT RELAY

Line up kids on one side of the room and place a bell on the other side of the room. Instruct kids to move across the room one at a time, ring the bell, say "A Savior has been born," and then sit down. Once that child sits down, the next child can go. Continue the activity until every child has participated. Talk about the angel appearing to the shepherds and sharing the good news of Jesus's birth.

> **SAY** "*In our story today, some shepherds were taking care of their sheep. Then what happened? [Allow responses.] An angel appeared and told them the good news—'Today, in Bethlehem, a Savior has been born. He is the Messiah, the Lord!' The angel told the shepherds they would find the baby in a manger. The shepherds went and found Jesus, just like the angel said! They were so happy to see the Savior and praised God for sending Jesus to save them.* **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN.** *Like the shepherds praised Jesus, we can praise Him too!*"

EXPLORE A SHEEP SENSORY BIN

Fill a plastic bin with cotton balls. Place paper bowls next to the bin. Explain that kids will pretend the cotton balls are sheep. Encourage the kids to use small tongs to gently move the "sheep" from the bin into the bowls. Review the Bible story as the kids play. (Note: Consider preparing additional bins if you have a large group of kids.)

> **SAY** "*Shepherds take care of sheep. What happened to the shepherds in our story today when they were taking care their sheep?* (*An angel appeared and told them the good news about Baby Jesus.*) *What did the shepherds do after they heard this news?* (*They went to Bethlehem and found Jesus.*) *The shepherds were so happy to see the Savior, and they praised God for sending Jesus to save them.* **JESUS WAS BORN TO SAVE US FROM SIN.** *If we believe in Jesus, we will be forgiven of our sin. Like the shepherds, We can praise God for sending Jesus.*"

2 TRANSITION

Invite preschoolers to complete their coloring pages. Consider leading preschoolers to sing the key passage song or involving them in a simple game to practice the key passage or big picture question. If parents are picking up children at this time, tell them something that their child enjoyed doing or did well during the session. Give parents the completed Activity Page. Distribute the Big Picture Cards for Families. Encourage parents to review the Bible story and engage with the family discussion starters during the week.



THE GOSPEL

God's Plan for Preschoolers

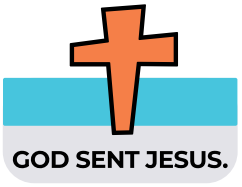
While preschoolers might not be ready to respond to the gospel, use this guide to help young minds begin to grasp big truths about Jesus and the kingdom of God.



Ask: "Who is in charge at home? Who is in charge over the whole world?" Explain that God made everything! He is King over everything, and He is in charge.



Ask: "Have you ever done something wrong?" Tell preschoolers that everyone sins, or disobeys God. Our sin makes God sad.



Explain that God must punish sin. He loves us, and He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth. Jesus came to take away the punishment for sin.



Ask: "Do you like gifts?" Explain that Jesus gives us the best present. He never did anything wrong, but He was punished in our place. Jesus wants to take away our sin because He loves us.

Pray for the salvation of the preschoolers in your class. As you faithfully teach the Bible, you are planting gospel seeds in children's hearts. Ask God to grow the preschoolers into children who love and trust in Jesus.