



Plan for the children to form groups as they arrive. Ask the shepherds for each group to sit in the same area of the gathering place each week. Each group should have a different color flag, sign, or carpet square for identification.

Ask the shepherds to visit with the children as they arrive, to make them welcome, and to remind them to stay with the group.

SETTING THE STAGE

Begin each week with one of the songs from the **"Who Is Jesus?" CD**.

Take the offering.

Have shepherds take the roll.

If participating in a mission project (see Reflection Week), use this time to explain or remind children what to bring.

If birthdays or baptismal anniversaries are part of your gathering time, celebrate those individuals with a simple gift such as a bookmark or small candy.

EACH WEEK

Each week as the students arrive they will do a very simple activity to create banners of the "I Am" sayings. Shepherds will need to facilitate this process, with a leader giving the entire group instructions.

Note: If you will not be spending eight weeks on the unit, divide the group in half and have each group work on a different banner so that you can create two banners a week.

Resources

- * Who Is Jesus? CD
- * Who Is Jesus? lyric transparencies

Supplies

- overhead projector and screen (if using lyric transparencies)
- 6 four- to five-foot long sheets of butcher paper
- scissors
- markers
- crayons
- glue sticks
- construction paper
- large bulletin board letters
- paper cutouts of sheep, paper leaves, yarn, or twine
- tape
- plain paper plates
- plain paper cups
- dark blue construction paper cut in quarters or smaller
- gel pens or Crayola® construction paper crayons
- city map
- strips of butcher paper
- construction paper (red, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple)



Gathering Activities

Week 1

* For Older Children

Give each group or class four- to five-foot lengths of butcher paper. Write "Messiah" in large letters at the top of each banner. Have the children work in small groups to write the following names on the banners: Good Shepherd, the Vine, the Bread of Life, the Way, the Resurrection, the Light of the World.

For example: One group will cover one banner with the words "Good Shepherd." Encourage them to write in large letters. They can write vertically, horizontally, around the edges, and so forth but they should cover the page with that one name of Jesus. (You will need six banners in all.)

Option: Choose a color scheme, such as various shades of green lettering for the good shepherd banner, and yellows and oranges for light of the world.

* For Younger Children

Give each group of younger children large letters to decorate. You can purchase large letter sets from a teacher supply store, or simply write large bubble letters, or print them on a computer. Use the letters to create these names of Jesus: Good Shepherd, the Vine, Bread of Life, Light of the World, the Way, and the Resurrection. You can use other names; you will need six images. Keep the sets of letters together to make it easier to create the banners. Have the children decorate the letters with patterns such as dots, stripes, and doodles. Cut out the letters, if necessary, and save them for use in succeeding weeks.

When the children finish, hang the banners made by the older children.

Week 2

Creating The Good Shepherd Banner

* Prepare

Glue the Good Shepherd letters in Week 1 onto the good shepherd banner made by the older children.

Have each group sit with their shepherd. Read (or say together) the Twenty-third Psalm. Give each group several sheep cutouts.

Say: Write one word on each sheep that describes a good shepherd.

As a prayer, invite the children to come up one at a time and add their sheep to the banner. Have them say the words out loud as they add them.

Week 3

Creating the Vine Banner

* Prepare

As before, glue the letters for Vine onto the appropriate banner.

Have the children sit with their shepherd. Give each group of children leaf cutouts and a piece of twine, or yarn. Remind the children that Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5).

Say: When we stay connected to Jesus, like the branches on a vine, we will bear fruit, just as a vine does.

Give each child a leaf. Ask the children to write on their leaf one thing they can do to show others God's love. Have the shepherd tie or tape each leaf onto a piece of twine or yarn.

Have the children make an offering of these acts of kindness: They will tape each leaf to the banner so that they will hang down in front of the words “the Vine.”

Week 4

Creating the Bread of Life Banner

Read John 6:35 to the children.

Pass out paper plates and cups. Have the children draw on the plates and cups images of any of the following: hungry faces, happy faces, favorite foods, people eating together. Attach the plates and cups to the “bread of life” banner.

Close With Prayer

Thank you, God, for Jesus’ words. They are food for our souls. Thank you for bread and water, which feed our bodies. Amen.

Week 5

The Light of the World Banner

Read John 8:12 to the children.

Create a large sun in the center of the “light of the world” banner. Give the children dark blue paper and gel pens or Crayola® construction paper crayons (either will show up on dark paper).

Ask the children to name things that people are sometimes afraid of. (To get beyond monsters, you may want to ask these questions: What would someone who does not have a home be afraid of? What would someone who lives in a war zone be afraid of?) Have them write these fears on the black pieces of paper. Attach the papers around the sun on the banner.

Pray Together

God, sometimes this is a frightening world. Thank you for always being by our side.

Please especially be with those who are afraid today. Amen.

Week 6

The Way

* Prepare

Purchase a map of your city. Cut out the area in which your church is located and glue it to the appropriate banner.

Have the groups meet with their shepherds. Give each group a long piece of paper and ask them to draw a road on it. Will the road be curved or straight? Hilly or flat? Smooth or bumpy?

Say: When you are on a trip, you need to know where you’re going and how you are going to get there. On our trip called life, Jesus told us he will be “the Way.” He will help us know where to go, and how to get there. Have the children add their names to their roads, then add the roads to the banners.

Close With Prayer

Caring God, show us the good paths, and help us to choose to take them. Thank you for helping us find our way back when we take a wrong turn. Amen.

Week 7

The Resurrection and the Life Banner

* Have the groups meet with their shepherds. Give each group a different color of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet.

Say: Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Have each group fill their papers with living things that are of that color. For example, the group with yellow should fill their paper with things that are yellow, such as cats or

buttercups. When finished, add them to the “resurrection and the life” banner.

- * Celebrate the gifts of life. Remind the children that in Christ we have an abundant rich life.

Close With Prayer

Thank you, God, for these many gifts. Thank you most of all the gift of life you gave us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Week 8

The Messiah

- * If you were making two banners each week, have the individual groups introduce their

banners to the other children. If you made one banner each week, review each of the banners and talk about their meaning. If you have extra time, sing additional songs from the **Who Is Jesus CD**.

Note: Plan the gathering times to last about ten minutes.