

SESSION

2

Christmas

**MEETING AIM**

To revisit the Christmas story in a fresh and fun way.

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2

**BACKGROUND**

The Christmas story is one that your group is likely to be very familiar with! Sometimes it's so easy to go through the motions of Christmas and get caught up in the hype that surrounds it that we forget what we are celebrating. This session is an opportunity to pause and remember the first Christmas and to help each other look afresh at the story of the birth of Jesus by comparing the two Gospel accounts and identifying with the characters. At the same time, it's an opportunity to enjoy the sense of fun and celebration that Christmas brings.

+ GATHERING TIME

As the group arrives, share refreshments. You could enter into the celebration of Christmas by sharing mince pies or other Christmassy refreshments. Ask the group to remember the nativity plays of their childhood, including any funny stories of things they or their friends did!

+ PASS THE PARCEL

You will need: a prepared 'pass the parcel'; Christmas music and the means to play it

Prepare a 'pass the parcel' with many layers. Between each layer, put sweets and forfeits or 'getting to know you' questions on strips of paper. Some suggestions are:

- Whistle 'Jingle bells' through your nose.
- Pretend to be an angel for the rest of the game.
- Tell an awful cracker joke.
- Do your best impression of a donkey.
- Do your best Father Christmas laugh.
- Whistle a Christmas hymn and see if we can guess it.
- What's the best Christmas present you've ever received?
- What's the worst Christmas present you've ever received?

- What's your favourite part of a Christmas dinner?
- If you could invite any celebrity to your Christmas dinner, who would you choose?
- What's your favourite Christmas film?
- What's your favourite Christmas song?
- What are your family's Christmas traditions?

At the centre of the parcel, put a Father Christmas hat with the instructions to wear it until the end of the session.

Play pass the parcel, making sure everybody gets a turn!

+ BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles; dressing-up clothes and props (optional)

Split the group into two (consider who might work more cooperatively with each other and consider assigning a leader to each group). Explain that there are two accounts of the Christmas story in the Bible: one in the Gospel of Matthew and one in the Gospel of Luke. Often, we piece together the story using the two accounts.

Ask the groups to take a Gospel account each: Matthew 1-2 for one and Luke 1-2 for the other. Ask them to take some time out to read the passages together and then devise a small nativity play. Stress that these don't have to be Oscar-winning performances and improvisation is fine (if not positively encouraged!). Give the groups 15 minutes each to read the passage and plan their performance, and then ask them to perform their Christmas stories to each other.

Wonder together about why the two accounts are different. Why do you think different Gospel writers would have written different things about the birth of Jesus?

+ CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the group these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- When you read the story in full, what were the things that sounded strange and what sounded familiar?
- What might be gained from rereading a story that we know so well?
- Why is Christmas such a big festival to us?
- What difference does it make to us that Jesus was born?
- How can we celebrate Christmas in a way that truly remembers the birth of Jesus?

+ CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: Fimo, Plasticine or some kind of modelling clay

Ask the group to think about the different characters in the Christmas story and what they have to teach us. Who in the story struck them as inspirational and why? Ask the group to select a character that they feel has something particular to teach them this Christmas and invite them to model a small figurine of this person.

Give the group ten minutes or so to do this and ask them to think about this character's role in the story and what the birth of Jesus meant to them. Once they've finished, invite them to show their figure and explain why they chose this character. Encourage the group to take their figurine and keep it somewhere safe until Christmas. Then they will be able to remember what they explored during this session. (You may need to think about baking and redistributing the models, depending on what kind of modelling clay you've used. The benefit of Plasticine is that this won't be an issue, but the drawback is that the figures won't last as long.)

+ PRAYER: STAR OF WONDER!

You will need: string; paper stars; pens; paper clips or clothes pegs

Hang some string (or for a more festive look, gift ribbon) across the room. Have a good number of paper stars (or star-shaped gift tags if you can pick some up) that are large enough to write on, so that there are enough for several mini prayers per person. Explain that, inspired by the song 'Star of wonder', you'll write prayers of thank you and wonder for the gift of Jesus and hang them on the string (using paper clips or clothes pegs). You could even play 'Star of wonder' as you write and hang your prayers as a group. Have fun hanging them and muddling them up. When you've all finished, either read out the prayers on behalf of the group, or invite the group to read out their prayers (you may want to warn them that you'll read them out together) and work your way down the line, inviting the group to agree by saying 'AMEN!' at the end of each prayer.