**FIRST STEPS TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Session 3 of 4

# Shepherds

### MEETING AIM

To hear the story of the shepherds (who were just ordinary people), racing to find the newborn Jesus. We too can share the Christmas story with others.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 2:8-20

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

Children may not know much about what it was like for shepherds in ancient times. Their status was low in society (King David, the very youngest son, was given the least significant and potentially dangerous job of looking after sheep). They didn’t own the sheep they cared for and they lived out in the open.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Welcome the children by name and share out any refreshments you have made. Talk about the times when the children are in a hurry – late for school, catching a bus or train, keen to go to a special party or meeting a favourite person. Sometimes we’re in a hurry because we’re late, sometimes because we’re keen to get somewhere, or maybe we’re someone who just likes running!

### PLAY – 10 mins

**You will need:** two (or more) toy sheep

Divide the children into two (or more) equal ability teams with half of each team at different ends of the room. Run two or three relay races with each child running to the other end to hand the sheep to the next person, who then carries their sheep back again. Children could run for the first race, jump for the second, jump sideways for a third if appropriate.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** a wooden shepherd’s crook (or a photo of one) or a wooden stave or walking stick; toy sheep or sheep puppet

Ask the children if they have been out at night in the last week. What was it like? Has anyone been outside all night? If you had been, what do you think that would be like?

Explain that some people work outside at night-time – paramedics, people repairing motorways and train tracks, farmers, especially at lambing time. At the time Jesus was born, shepherds had to stay outside at night-time to make sure sheep were kept safe and were not stolen by thieves. It was not a very nice job, because they got cold and they didn’t get paid very much. Show them the shepherd’s crook and talk about how it is used. They were very ordinary, poor people. Tell the children this story:

The night Jesus was born, there were some shepherds protecting their sheep in the fields near Bethlehem. They were cold and tired and maybe bored. *Encourage everyone to shiver, yawn and pull a long face.* But they were in for a surprise. (There are lots of surprises in the Christmas story!) Suddenly there was a very bright light in the sky, so bright that they all screwed up their eyes and then covered them with their hands. *Everyone does so.*

In the sky the shepherds saw an angel. *Everyone opens their mouths wide.*

Can anyone remember what angels usually said when they met someone? “Don’t be afraid!” That’s what this angel said. The angel said a lot more...

“Here’s some good news. Today, in the town of Bethlehem, close by, a saviour has been born, someone who is going to change the world forever. He has come from God. He’s a newborn baby right now, wrapped up tightly in cloths and lying on a bed of straw in a manger to keep him safe and warm!

And then there was a giant choir of angels in the sky singing joyously and beautifully, all praising God together. It was so loud that the shepherds covered up their ears…well, ‘half-covered’ because it was so loud it almost hurt but they wanted to hear it anyway. *Everyone half-covers their ears!* “Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth!” again and again and again.

And then it went quiet and dark.

The shepherds jumped up, took their shepherd’s crooks, grabbed a small lamb and began to run. *Everyone gets up and runs on the spot – faster and faster!* They were desperate to see this newborn baby. They found Mary and Joseph, with the baby lying in the manger just as the angel had told them. *Everyone pants for breath.* They all spoke at the same time to tell Mary and Joseph about the angels and the singing and the brightness, and what they’d been told about the baby. It had all come true. They were ordinary people and they were among the first to be told the great news about Jesus. Mary and Joseph listened carefully and were surprised at what the shepherds said. Mary was very thoughtful. What did all this mean?

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, ensuring everyone has the chance to contribute:

* On their way home, the shepherds told everyone they met what had happened. I wonder how special they felt. (The children could walk in small circles, imagining what they had seen if they’d been shepherds, talking all the time to no one in particular – see how much noise they can make!)
* What would you have told people, if you’d been shepherds?
* We can also tell others the story about what the shepherds saw and heard. Who are you going to tell?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** candy cane crook lollipops or pipe cleaners; shiny paper; tinsel; glitter; ribbon; glue; tissue paper; scissors (be aware of any food allergies)

If you’re using pipe cleaner, bend them into the shape of a crook. Cover the lollipop or pipe cleaner with paper, glitter and so on, so that it can hang on a Christmas tree.

As you work, chat with the children about what God is doing in the story. Have they discovered anything interesting today?

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** canes from ‘Creative time’; song words and Advent ring instructions from NexGenPro

Light the third candle on the Advent ring and remind children about the story behind the first two. Sing the first four verses of the song.

Everyone stands up and holds their cane tree decoration. Then pray:

“Thank you, Lord Jesus, that we’ve heard the story about what the angels told the shepherds. Thank you that we too can tell others about what happened to the shepherds. Help us to share the Christmas story with our friends and family. Amen.”

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