



Christmas party plan

PARTY AIM

To give parents, carers and children the chance to hear the Christmas story and respond in some way.

BACKGROUND

This party plan is Santa-Rudolf-Christmas-tree-free so that children and parents hear the Bible's version of the Christmas story. Do your best to exclude features that are entirely secular and consider using a crib scene if one is available. Children like to handle figures of animals and people, deciding where to place them.

BIBLE STORY

You will need: hats and scarves for everyone

Gather the children in a circle, each wearing a hat and scarf. Tell this story:

Long before we had washing machines people washed clothes by hand, squeezing out the water, then drying damp clothes on a washing line or resting them on a bush in the garden. *Pretend to do this.*

Mary was a young woman who lived a long time ago. If she wanted to wash her scarf she would have had to do it like this. *Encourage the children to copy you as you rub the ends of scarf together, pretend to squeeze out the water and hang it over an imaginary bush or washing line.*

One day, while she was washing her scarf, Mary heard a rustle behind her. She turned around and...it was an angel, bright and shimmering! What a surprise! "It's OK, Mary. Don't be afraid. You're going to have a very special baby, a boy. You're to call him Jesus. He's from God."

Very soon Mary's baby began to grow inside her. Does anyone know someone whose tummy is getting bigger because they're having a baby?

Just before the baby was due, Mary's husband Joseph said the emperor had ordered them to travel to Bethlehem. It would take several days to walk there. Mary packed her bag. *Roll your hat and scarf into a bundle and put into an imaginary bag.*

It was a long, long way. *Lay out your scarf in a straight line. Slowly start walking your fingers along the scarf.*

"Keep going, Mary!" Joseph said. "I know you're tired, but keep going!"

By the time they got to Bethlehem Mary was very tired. The baby was coming soon. There wasn't much room, so they had to settle down where the animals lived. That's

where Mary's baby was born. She called him Jesus. She wrapped him up and laid him on a bed of straw. *Wrap your scarf around your hat.*

It was cold outside that night. Shepherds were looking after their sheep on the hills above Bethlehem. *Wrap your scarf around your neck. Put on the hat.*

Suddenly, a bright light flashed all round. *Pull your hat down over your eyes.* A bright angel said: "It's OK. Don't be afraid. A very special baby has been born today. He's from God. Go and find him in Bethlehem, lying on a bed of straw."

Then there was loud, excited singing and more bright flashes. *Wave your scarf around and shout: "Hurrah!"*

It went dark. The shepherds jumped up and ran all the way to Bethlehem. *Put your hat and scarf on and run on the spot.* They found the baby lying on a bed of straw, just as the angel had said. *Wrap the hat in the scarf again.* This made them so happy.

Around the same time some very wise men were studying the stars, high in the sky. As they did this they became sure that a baby king was about to be born and they wanted to see him. It would mean taking a very long journey. *Stretch out a scarf and begin to slowly walk your fingers along it.* One bright star in the sky kept moving, showing them the way to where the baby king was. They followed it.

At last the star stopped over a house in Bethlehem. It was where Jesus was living with his mum and dad. These wise men were so happy to have found the baby king. They went inside and offered their special presents to Jesus. *Place your folded hat in cupped hands, then lift your hands up to offer the 'gift'.* They were amazed. He really was so special. He was from God.

BIBLE STORY

Sing 'Twinkle, twinkle little star', 'Large, bright star' or 'Happy birthday Jesus.' Or try these songs:

'Baby born in Bethlehem' (to the tune of 'Mary had a little lamb')

Baby born in Bethlehem, Bethlehem, Bethlehem.

Baby born in Bethlehem.

Born on Christmas Day.

Mother Mary cares for him...

Shepherds run to visit him...

Wise men bring their gifts to him...Born for you and me.

'We follow the star to Bethlehem' (to the tune of 'The wheels on the bus')

We follow the star to Bethlehem, Bethlehem, Bethlehem.

We follow the star to Bethlehem, to find the special baby.

The star shines over Bethlehem, Bethlehem, Bethlehem.

We've found the special baby.

We'll go inside to give him gifts, give him gifts, give him gifts.

He's the special baby.

From Tiddlywinks My Big Red Book (Scripture Union); used with permission.

GAMES

OPTION 1: To Bethlehem

Sing 'Here we go off to Bethlehem' to the tune of 'Here we go round the mulberry bush'. Skip, hop, walk, walk sideways, jump and crawl in a circle. You could use a parachute and encourage the children to cross underneath it in different ways as you lift it high in the air.

OPTION 2: Star hunt

You will need: card stars; A4 card; art materials

Hide stars for the children to find, then turn them into Christmas cards by sticking them onto folded card and decorating them.

CRAFT

Choose some of the ideas from Craft (page 60) or one of the following activities.

OPTION 1: Christmas tree decoration

You will need: five-pointed card stars; a hole punch; shredded paper; glitter; glue; sticky stars; felt; ribbon or twine

Give everyone a star with a hole punched through the point at the top. Stick shredded paper into the bottom two points to make straw. Scatter glitter and gold stars onto the other three points. Stick a strip of felt on top of the 'straw' and a circle of felt for Jesus' head. Thread glittery twine or ribbon through the hole.

OPTION 2: Potato angel

You will need: potatoes; a knife; paint in different colours; A3 paper

Give out A3 paper with the outline of a large isosceles triangle drawn on it for the angel's body. Cut out different shapes from potatoes and show the children how to dip them into the paint and make prints on the paper. Encourage everyone to create a head and decorate their angel.

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Nativity play

This Nativity play has been designed for church-based children's groups to perform within their own communities. In situations where we are often unsure who may be there on the day, this play is led by one adult narrator who keeps the story moving along, while also involving other children in the action. There are several key speaking roles, all of which have only a few simple lines to remember, and there is flexibility about the number of other children who can be involved in non-speaking roles. A simple costume might help to explain the role of Narrator Angel.

SETTING

The action takes place in several locations, so define these at separate places in your venue where possible to allow for movement between them. It may even work if the children simply move up and down an aisle to return to the front, ensuring that the congregation or audience can still see all the action.

CAST

- Narrator Angel
- Gabriel and two other angels
- Mary and Joseph
- Bethlehem inhabitants
- Shepherds
- Wise men

THE STORY

Two to four angels are dozing on stage.

Narrator Angel: Wake up, wake up! It's time! The boss has spoken! Gabriel, you're up! Off to Nazareth you go. You need to find Mary and tell her what's coming. Give her some time to get used to the idea!

Gabriel gets up and travels (or zooms!) around the venue until he reaches Mary, who is sitting at home.

Gabriel: Do not be afraid! God is pleased with you. He has chosen you to have his son, who will be King of the whole world!

Gabriel zooms back to base. Mary looks worried, then sits with Joseph.

Narrator Angel: Uh oh, looks like we have a problem. Joseph doesn't seem too sure! Angel 2, you're up! Wait until Joseph's asleep, then see if you can ease his worries.

Mary exits the scene, Joseph lies down as though asleep and Angel 2 zooms to earth to stand beside him for a moment before zooming back.

Narrator Angel: Mission accomplished. Well done, Angel 2! I think we're going to have a busy few months ahead of us.

Angel 3 hands a scroll or piece of paper to Narrator Angel.

Narrator Angel: News just in...this is going to make it tricky! Joseph and Mary have to go to Bethlehem to be counted. We could really do without this complication. Could the Boss not have avoided this? Right, OK. Eyes open, everyone. Keep a close eye on what's going on.

Mary and Joseph trek slowly around the venue until they reach 'Bethlehem', where the crowds are milling around. Joseph knocks on a few doors.

Joseph: Can we stay here tonight?

Bethlehem inhabitant 1: Sorry, no room.

Joseph: Can we stay here tonight?

Bethlehem inhabitant 2: Sorry, no room.

Joseph: Can we stay here tonight?

Bethlehem inhabitant 3: Sorry, no room.

But you can stay with my animals if you like?

Narrator Angel: I'd have thought the Boss would at least have made a reservation. It's going to be pretty smelly for them with the animals tonight! Oh my, and busy too! It looks like tonight's the night!

Mary and Joseph sit together, centre stage, Mary holds the 'baby'. Angel 3 hands a scroll or piece of paper to Narrator Angel.

Narrator Angel: Right, team, this is it! It's the moment we've all been waiting for! Are we all shining our shiniest and praising our praisiest? Everyone ready? Right, over there to the left are the shepherds. Gabriel, you take the lead. Everyone else move on Gabriel's cue!

The shepherds are seated together on the ground. Gabriel appears before them.

Gabriel: Don't be afraid! I bring good news for all the people. Tonight, in Bethlehem, a baby has been born. He is the saviour of the world, Christ the Lord. You will find the baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.

Other angels appear around him.

Angels: Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to all people!

The angels exit and the shepherds journey towards the manger scene, sitting at the feet of Mary and Joseph.

Narrator Angel: Great job, everyone. Awesome singing. This night will definitely go down in history!

The shepherds exit. The wise men start travelling around the venue towards 'Bethlehem'.

Narrator Angel: Oh, hang on. It looks as though we have more visitors on their way. And it looks as though they've been travelling for a while.

The wise men arrive and put their gifts down in front of the baby as they say their lines.

Wise man 1: I bring gold.

Wise man 2: I bring frankincense.

Wise man 3: I bring myrrh.

Narrator Angel: Angel 2, you're up again! It seems these visitors received some bad advice on the way here and may be heading back to speak to Herod. Wait until they're asleep and then let them know that it wouldn't be a good idea.

Mary and Joseph exit. The wise men lie down as though asleep. Angel 2 zooms to earth to stand beside them for a moment before zooming back. The wise men then wake up and journey back around the venue in the opposite direction.

Narrator Angel: Gabriel, it's your turn now. You need to warn Mary and Joseph to get out of there! There's trouble brewing, and we need to keep that baby safe. Tell Joseph to get his new family to Egypt. They'll be safe there.

Mary and Joseph lie on the floor as though asleep. Gabriel zooms around the venue to stand beside them for a moment before zooming back, Mary and Joseph exit, taking the baby with them. The angels sit on the floor, centre stage, as they were in the opening scene.

Narrator Angel: All right, you can sleep for now. It's been a busy time. You'll remember this for ever, and so will they.

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Christmas party plan

PARTY AIM

To explore the Christmas story and what it means, and to have lots of fun in doing so.

BACKGROUND

This party is designed for use in a variety of contexts, for example Sunday schools, after-school clubs and evening social clubs, so you'll need to select the elements that are most appropriate for you. Make sure you include the Bible story. It's important to tell it as you might have children at the party who have never heard the real biblical story before.

WELCOME

Organise an activity that everyone can join in with as they arrive at the party. This could be a simple game or a communal art activity. Set out a long piece of lining paper and some art materials, encouraging the children to create something Christmassy together.

BIBLE STORY

You will need: a mixing bowl; a cushion; a scroll of paper; a map or satnav; a toy sheep; a halo; a star decoration; a gold dish or box; boxes; Christmas wrapping paper; scissors; sticky tape; printouts of Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-12

Before the party, place each of the eight items listed above in a box and wrap each box with wrapping paper. Hide the wrapped boxes around your venue, making some easier to find than others.

Challenge the children to find the eight boxes and bring them back to you. Once they've all been found, unwrap the boxes and consider what they all mean. Some children might guess that they represent the Christmas story (if not, drop some hints!). Try to guess together what the correct order should be.

Give out copies of the Bible text and ask the group to match the items to the story. Then break the children into smaller groups (or stay together if your group is small). Give each group one or two of the items and encourage them to come up with a dramatic retelling for that part of the story. They can be funny or serious! Ask the leaders to circulate and help any groups that need assistance. Once everyone is ready, put the dramas together to create your own Nativity play.

Chat about the children's favourite parts of the story for a minute or so. Did they learn anything new? Share what the Christmas story means to you.

ACTIVITIES

OPTION 1: Baking

You will need: ingredients for a basic gingerbread recipe; baking equipment; access to an oven; cover-up and clean-up equipment; paper bags; icing and other biscuit decorations (optional)

Before the session, gather all the ingredients and equipment you'll need for your chosen recipe (remembering to include ingredients for those with special dietary requirements).

Guide the children through how to make the dough, then roll it out and cut it into shapes. They could do this by hand or with cookie cutters (these are available cheaply online or in kitchen supply shops).

As you work, chat about Christmas. Discuss what the children are going to do over the festive period and, if you're doing this after the story, about what they think the Christmas story means. Then bake the biscuits and put them on cooling racks.

If you have time after the biscuits have cooled, decorate them with icing and other decorations. Then put them in paper bags ready for the children to take home.

OPTION 2: Storytelling

You will need: the props and Bible passages from 'Bible story'; art materials; sound recording equipment; smartphones

Challenge the children to retell the Christmas story in a way that suits their creative skills. They could come up with a modern-day drama but should use the props from 'Bible story'. Alternatively, they could draw a comic strip of the story or retell it as if it were a radio programme or TV news report. Let the children use their creativity and see what they come up with! (Ensure that you follow your church's safeguarding policy when taking pictures or filming the children in your group.)

OPTION 3: Singing

You will need: recordings of various Christmas songs (with or without printouts of the lyrics) or access to a music streaming service; musical instruments

Let the children choose their favourite Christmas songs from the ones you have provided or search your music streaming service to find the songs they like. As you search, discuss how accurately they tell the Christmas story, if at all. Do they even mention Jesus?

Choose one to learn together. Download the lyrics, learn the words and tune, and then have a go at singing as a choir. If you have musical instruments, get the children to play them alongside the singing. You could even work out simple harmonies.

GAMES

Choose some games to play from the suggestions on page 59. Alternatively, play this adapted party classic.

SPLITTING PASS THE PARCEL

You will need: eight small prizes (such as Christmas chocolate or a wooden novelty); wrapping paper; scissors; sticky tape; music and the means to play it

Wrap each small prize individually before the party. Group them together into four pairs and wrap each pair up, so that you have four parcels. Add another layer of paper to each parcel, then group them together into two pairs and wrap each pair up, so that you have two parcels. Add another layer to each parcel, then wrap them up together. Then add a couple more layers of wrapping.

Sit the children in a circle and play pass the parcel in the usual way. When two presents are revealed, pass them around the circle in opposite directions. Keep doing this until you have eight parcels going around the circle!

You could also add forfeits or challenges between the layers, but put the same ones in all the parcels. That way the children can compete against each other when they have the same challenge!

CRAFT

Choose some craft ideas from the suggestions on page 60.

FOOD

Food is an important element at every party, so provide some refreshments for the children (and for the adults as they drop off and pick up their children). Make sure that you follow food hygiene and allergy guidelines. There may be people in your congregation who are happy to make food in advance for you to serve at your party.

FAREWELL

Make sure you finish well. Say goodbye to each child by name if possible and ensure that everyone knows about the other events your church is staging over Christmas, as well as ongoing events that will be happening when the term restarts in January.

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YOUTUBE NATIVITIES

You will need: a laptop and projector; Wi-Fi access; Bibles

It's likely that your group will know the Christmas story like the back of their hand, but how about using technology as a way of getting a fresh perspective? Show the group a couple of YouTube videos to help them explore the story.

Show *Funny Nativity* by Hannah Sergeant. Years after the incident, the angel's older sister (also in the video) uploaded a video of a not-so-angelic angel in a children's Nativity play at a church. The little angel's mum had told her to sing up so she could hear her, and the video reveals the angel bellowing out the song with all her might while the other children look on in awe and surprise! You can hear the vicar's wife (who is doing the filming) giggling as her hand shakes!

Start a reminiscent conversation about the group's childhood experiences of Nativity plays. It's funny how nostalgic young people already are for their childhood in many cases! If you work for a church, you might have some shared memories of things not going to plan at Christmas. (I once set myself alight with a Christingle!)

Go on to check out *The Christmas story* by Stpaulsartandmedia. Here you'll see sweet children with Kiwi accents narrating and acting out the Christmas story. Ask the group to create their own Nativity. They could pretend to be younger children or put their own spin on the story, using music, media and words that reflect who they are and what they like. Make sure you have Bibles on hand to help create an accurate retelling.

CHRISTMAS TASKMASTER

You will need: equipment for your chosen tasks (see below)

Your group (especially if its members are older) might have enjoyed a bit of *Taskmaster*: a TV show in which comedians compete in bizarre tasks to see who will win. Have a Christmas *Taskmaster* party. You can be the Taskmaster and ask another leader to be your assistant! Depending on the size of the group, either ask them all to compete or ask them to do so in batches of three to five in a series of tasks on behalf of their group so that everyone gets a turn.

How about these Christmas tasks? If you want to really get the creative juices flowing and have some particularly comedic or wacky young people who will take this chance to shine, you could ask a young person to be the Taskmaster and plan this activity with you beforehand and come up with some of your own tasks! Or go one step bigger and invite some adults from the church to join you all for some *Taskmaster* bonding over silly tasks!

You will need a points system. If there are five teams, award five points for first place, four for second and so on.

Task idea 1: Direct a John Lewis Christmas advert. Choose a song and three people in each group to act it out. Groups have ten minutes to plan, and then they have to act the advert out to everybody. The one that most makes you want to shop at John Lewis wins.

Task idea 2: Give a contestant the full selection from a Christmas chocolate box (such as Celebrations or Quality Street). Ask the contestants to rank the chocolates from least favourite to favourite for the Taskmaster. Whoever is closest to the Taskmaster's choice gets the most points.

Task idea 3: Invent a new Boxing Day tradition. Each contestant has two minutes to write it down before the Taskmaster ranks it in order of which is most 'cosy'.

Task idea 4: Make a present for the Taskmaster out of tin foil. Give each contestant a roll of foil and see who makes the best present.

Task idea 5: Who can eat the most Brussels sprouts? Precook a large pot of Brussels sprouts and give the contestants one minute to see who can eat the most. (Teams can forfeit if no team member is willing to participate!)

Task idea 6: Build a Christmas tree. Take the group to an outside area, such as a park or a garden. They can compete as groups

or individuals, depending on the size of the group. Ask them to build the best Christmas tree out of any raw materials they can find in ten minutes. (For example they could use something abstract to represent a tree, they could build a tree out of 'branches' or they could decorate an actual tree.)

Task idea 7: Write the best Christmas carol. It has to have three verses, a chorus and a simple tune. Give the groups 20 minutes to write their carol and then sing it to everyone.

Task idea 8: Have a small stocking filled with five very random Christmas tree decorations. Contestants have to feel inside and describe what the decorations are. The most accurate description wins.

CHRISTMAS FEASTING

You will need: the relevant resources for whatever your group decides to organise

One of the special Christmas rituals we have is sitting and eating with the people we love. During a break from Christmas games, you could plan to share a meal with your older young people to demonstrate a coming-of-age and mutuality, giving them space to shape how you might celebrate together. Plan a Christmas meal with your group. Give people different roles to help make it a lovely evening, for example setting the ambience (decorations / music), choosing a venue, planning and cooking the meal, organising some games or entertainment and planning a Secret Santa.

You might even want to think about inviting people from your wider community, such as church members, youth leaders or parents, to just spend time together or to say thank you for all that they do.

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Single use

Jesus

Use this drama as part of a youth session or Christmas service.

SETTING

Four friends (any mix of male and female) meet on Christmas Eve.

CAST

A: a typical teen, going through life

B: up for a good time and loves parties

C: a real eco vegan

D: thinks some deep thoughts at times but can venture a little off topic

A enters, drinking cola with a plastic straw. **B, C** and **D** enter from the other direction.

C: What do you think you're doing?

A: Me? Being me!

C: I mean, why are you drinking that?

A: It's only cola.

C: No, that! How could you?

A: Nope, still not getting it. It's even reduced sugar. I don't want to ruin this gorgeous smile.

B: I think I know where this conversation is heading.

D: I'm glad someone does.

C: What's the point of having a gorgeous smile if the world doesn't exist any more?

D: That's a bit extreme. Cola isn't normally that destructive. Although I did see something on the Discovery Channel where they used cola to strip the paint off a toy car.

C: No, the straw. It's plastic. Single-use plastic! Don't you care about the planet?

A: It's just one straw. One straw for one cola for one me.

C: Exactly, and that's the problem: everyone saying "It isn't my problem" and doing nothing.

B: Changing the subject. Are you going to Harry's party later? It's going to be a wild one. His parents are away, the house is all his and he has plenty of time to clean up afterwards.

A: Er, well, I...

B, C and **D:** Party, party, party!

A: Well...

B, C and **D:** Party, party, party!

A: Perhaps...

B: You're not going are you?

D: More like you're not allowed to go!

C: Ah. What are your parents making you do tonight?

A: Nothing! I can do whatever I want to do.

B: What could be better than Harry's party, single-use straw person?

A: Well, it's Christmas Eve...

B: Yes, Christmas Eve. Party at Harry's!

C and **D** cheer.

A: Well, my family goes to the midnight service at church. We celebrate what Christmas is all about.

C and **D** fall silent. They look at **A** in shock.

C: What?!

B: But why?

A: We go every year. It's Christmas, so we go to church to remember what Christmas is all about.

D: Presents!

C: Food!

B: Harry's party!

A: No, it's about Jesus.

B: Jesus?

A: Where do you think the 'Christ' in 'Christmas' comes from? Jesus was also called Christ. He is the whole point of Christmas. It's a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus. So once a year we go to church to do that. We say thank you to God and welcome Jesus: the light of the world who brings peace and joy to all men.

D: What about women?

A: Yes, and women too, of course. It's just that sometimes religious talk is a bit old-fashioned. In fact, our church is a bit old-fashioned. It should be peace and joy to everyone; to the whole world.

C: What about orangutans?

A: What?

C: Orangutans. Does Jesus bring peace and joy to them?

A: I...don't know.

C: You see, being the single-use plastic king of this town, you're actually part of the problem with the world and the destruction of the rainforests. And that, my eco-challenged friend, is where the orangutans come in. They're endangered through rainforest destruction. Does Jesus bring peace and joy to the orangutans, too?

A: I think...actually, I don't know. I suppose the way to find out would be to ask the vicar at church, or to find out a bit more about Jesus and God to see if the orangutan is on their help list.

C: And polar bears?

A: What? Er, yes. The same thing.

D: And the bees? The bees are important, you know. No bees, no pollination. No plants to eat, or to feed the animals, or to produce oxygen and trap carbon. It's a vicious circle.

B: Bees are vicious. They're always buzzing around when you're just trying to enjoy a sunny day.

D: You're thinking about wasps. Bees are friendly and furry and cuddly.

B: You're one messed-up animal lover.

C: And even though some wasps sting and annoy you on a hot summer's day they are still important in the ecosystem. So what does—

D: Hold on. I think I heard that God is the creator of everything there is. And that before anything existed, like the earth, the stars, the animals, the insects and even plastic straws, there was God. And God just imagined and spoke everything into being.

They all look at **D** in surprise.

D: But I could be wrong, I might be thinking of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*.

C: If Jesus is so great, why do you only go to church once a year?

B: Yeah. You know your problem? You have a bad case of non-environmentally friendly religion!

A: What are you talking about?

D: You know. You just go to church once a year.

C: So you have a single-use Jesus! Just like your single-use plastic straw.

D: If everyone has a single-use Jesus the world will become polluted. If you only use Jesus at Christmas the light is only for one day, or one moment. And the peace will only be for one day or one moment, and the joy, too.

C: Yes. The world would become a polluted, dark and hateful place if Jesus is only used once.

A: I think you've got things mixed up a little, but I suppose you could be onto something. A single-use Jesus is pointless and potentially damaging, like a single-use straw.

B: So are you going to forget about church and come along to Harry's party after all?

A: No. Perhaps this Christmas I'll continue with Jesus into Boxing Day, and then into the new year as well. Bringing peace and light and joy to the world needs to be ongoing, not just a one-off, single-use thing.

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