



Mary and Joseph

MEETING AIM

To explore how Mary and Joseph played their part in God's plan.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 1; Luke 1 (selections)

BACKGROUND

Mary and Joseph were ordinary people, picked out to play a major part in God's plan to bring his people back to him. Where kings and priests had failed God, Mary and Joseph stayed true to what God asked them to do, even if it was difficult. And it was difficult; this couple put themselves in real danger by following God, but they were instrumental in preparing the way for him to save his people. I wonder what God is asking of you and your family this Christmas.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning). Ask everyone about the last time they were given some good news.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: communication free-play toys, such as phones, letters and letter boxes, play computers

Set out all your free-play equipment and encourage the children to play around getting in touch with each other. You don't need anything special, just set out some items you have in the house and invite your family to use their imaginations and pretend. If the children invite you to join in, do so, but let them lead the play.

As you play, chat about how you talk with each other and how you tell each about good news.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: two large sheets of paper; marker pen; shiny collage materials (such as kitchen foil, metallic card, wrapping paper, tinsel, white and yellow tissue paper); glue sticks

Before you start, draw a large outline of an angel on each of the sheets of paper. Work together to decorate the angels with your shiny collage materials. As you work, chat about Christmas and what your family is looking forward to. Say that in the Bible, angels sometimes act as messengers from God. They tell people what God wants them to know.

When you have finished, tell this story:

A very long time ago, there lived two people. Mary and Joseph. They were engaged! But our story starts before they were married. One day, Mary was at home. She was doing some cleaning and thinking about what she might like for lunch.

Encourage the family to mime various housework activities.

Suddenly, an angel appeared in the room! Show your first angel collage. *Ask your children to think about how they might feel if they saw an angel. They can mime what they suggest.*

Mary was scared, but the angel said: "Do not be afraid!" The angel told her that God loved her. The angel told her that she was going to play a big part in God's plan. She was going to have a baby. And that baby would be God's Son.

Mary was a bit confused. But she agreed. She would be part of God's plan.

Joseph was unhappy. He had found out that Mary was going to have a baby. He knew that he wasn't the father, so he thought Mary loved someone else, not him. He decided that they shouldn't get married. But then, one night when he was asleep, he saw an angel too, in a dream! Show your second angel collage. *Ask your children if they have ever had any special dreams. What were they about?*

The angel said to Joseph: "You can marry Mary. The baby is God's Son. You should call him Jesus, because he will save lots of people." Jesus means 'God saves'.

And when Joseph woke up, that's exactly what he did. He would be part of God's plan.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- What's your favourite part of this story?
- Why do you think were Mary and Joseph happy to be part of God's plan?
- What else do you know about Jesus? Do you know any stories about him?
- Do you think you have a part to play in God's plan? Why? Why not?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: art and collage materials; glue sticks; large sheets of paper

Provide whatever art and collage materials you can find and let the children use what they want to create a picture in response to the story. What the children produce is not the most important thing here. What is important is the process. When hands are busy, it gives the mind space to think about the story and to listen to God.

As you work, continue to chat about the story and what they think. The children might have questions that to us seem strange or unimportant, but you should treat these questions with respect as they represent your children sorting out elements of the story and what it tells them about God, faith and life. This is true even of younger children. Try to answer some of these questions together as you create your artwork.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: angel collages from 'Bible story'; artwork from 'Creative time'

Gather all the artwork and collages you created during this session and admire them. Recap briefly about everything you've chatted about – Mary and Joseph being part of God's plan, and what you discussed after exploring the story.

Invite your family to say one-line prayers to God in response to all you have discovered today. These might be thanking God for Mary and Joseph or for sending Jesus. It might be about helping us be part of God's plan too.

ALEX TAYLOR

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Shepherds

MEETING AIM

To discover how the shepherds heard about Jesus and told others the good news.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 2:8-20

BACKGROUND

Shepherds were not the natural choice to be the first to hear about Jesus' birth. They were low down in society's hierarchy of professions. You would expect rulers and religious leaders to be the ones to be told, yet the shepherds are a foreshadowing of much of Jesus' ministry. He calls people regardless of who they are and how others see them. In the same way, young children can be at the bottom of the heap, and yet they can still be used greatly by God; the shepherds went home telling everyone they met about Jesus – how can our young children do the same?

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning). Chat about what has happened in the last week that surprised you.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: computer, tablet or phone; toy sheep

Search the internet to discover together what a shepherd is. Imagine what it might be like to be a shepherd and look after sheep. Show the children your toy sheep and encourage them to play at being shepherds. Some can be shepherds, some can be sheep – join in with the children, but let them direct the play.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: child-friendly Bible translation (such as the Contemporary English Version); a Christmas carol and the means to play it

Gather your family and read Luke 2:8. Invite everyone to lie down on the floor and to imagine they are on the hillside with the shepherds. Ask what they might be able to see in the sky as they look up. You might think of stars, clouds or the moon. Comment that, when this story takes place, shepherds weren't the most popular of people.

Read Luke 2:9 and ask how the shepherds might have felt. The Bible says they were "terrified". Why might the shepherds have been frightened? Go on to read Luke 2:10-12. What do the children think about what the angel said? What might they want to do?

Read Luke 2:13-14 and play your Christmas carol. All join with singing and dancing, pretending you're praising God with the angels.

Read Luke 2:15-16 and all rush off to another part of your house. Wait outside the door to a room and whisper that you have found where Jesus has been born. Creep into the room and pretend to see Jesus. Read Luke 2:17-19.

Finally, read Luke 2:20 and go back to the place where you started your story. Play your carol again and use it to praise God together. If you can, using a mobile phone, message friends and other family members with the good news that Jesus has been born, just as the shepherds told everyone they met about Jesus.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- What's your favourite part of this story?
- Why do you think God chose the shepherds to tell about Jesus' birth?
- What does Christmas and Jesus being born mean to you?
- Who might you want to tell about Jesus being born at Christmas?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: art and collage materials; glue sticks; large sheets of paper

Provide whatever art and collage materials you can find and let the children use what they want to create a picture in response to the story. What the children produce is not the most important thing here. What is important is the process. When hands are busy, it gives the mind space to think about the story and to listen to God.

As you work, continue to chat about the story and what they think. The children might have questions that to us seem strange or unimportant, but you should treat these questions with respect as they represent your children sorting out elements of the story and what it tells them about God, faith and life. This is true even of younger children. Try to answer some of these questions together as you create your artwork.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: artwork from 'Creative time'

Gather all the artwork and collages you created during this session and admire them. Recap briefly about everything you've chatted about – Jesus being born, God choosing the shepherds first and how excited they were to meet Jesus – and what you discussed after exploring the story.

Invite your family to say one-line prayers to God in response to all you have discovered today. These might be thanking God for the shepherds or for sending Jesus. It might be about how we can tell others about Jesus too.

ALEX TAYLOR

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Wise men

MEETING AIM

To discover how the wise men came to worship Jesus and think about how we can worship Jesus too.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 2:1-12

BACKGROUND

Wise men come from the east to worship “the one who has been born king of the Jews” (v2). But, like the shepherds, they are not the most obvious choice to be the first recorded worshipers in Matthew’s Gospel. They weren’t Jewish; they were studiers of the stars. Moreover, they brought strange gifts. These gifts were valuable, but unlikely for a poor family in Bethlehem. The worship of these strange visitors can speak our children – no one is excluded, and everyone can bring something valuable to Jesus in worship.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you’re doing this in the morning). Chat about what is exciting about giving and receiving presents.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: dressing-up clothes

Before your time together, gather any clothes, hats, pieces of material or other items that children might use to dress up. Show the children what you have and encourage them to play however they would like.

Ask the family what they would choose to wear if they were wise. What would they wear if they were rich? What about if they were from another country?

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: dressing-up clothes from ‘Play’; three elaborately wrapped boxes; card star; Christmas carol (that your children know) and the means to play it

Ask the children to imagine that they are wise and rich people who come from far away. How might they dress? Use the dressing-up clothes, and any other poten-

tial props or clothing to hand, to create appropriate costumes. Give everyone one of the wrapped boxes – if you have more than three family members taking part, have extra presents so that everyone has one. When you are ready, hold the star up and tell this story:

Well, here we are! All wise people, about to go on a journey. We’re so wise that we can tell what the stars mean! This star tells us that there is a new king born a long way away. We’re going to have to travel to go and see him. *Journey all around your house holding the star above your head. Make comments about what a long way it is, how you hope to be there soon and how tiring it is. Eventually come back to the room where you started.*

Phew, we’ve arrived at a huge palace in a city called Jerusalem. This must be where the new king is. Then we can give him our presents. Can you find the king? *All look around.* There’s no newborn king here!

But there is another king. And his advisors have told us that the new king will be in a little town called Bethlehem. We need to travel a bit more! See? The star is showing us where to go. *Set off on a much shorter journey around your house, holding the star about your head, before returning to your room.*

And here it is! The star has stopped over this house! And there’s the little king, called Jesus. He has been born to be the king of all creation. Let’s give him our gifts. *Encourage the children to put their gifts down where they imagine Jesus is in your room. Play your Christmas carol and praise Jesus.*

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- What’s your favourite part of this story?
- Why do you think God chose the wise men to tell all about Jesus?
- How do we worship Jesus today? What gifts can we give him?
- What do you want to say to Jesus after hearing this story?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: art and collage materials; glue sticks; large sheets of paper

Provide whatever art and collage materials you can find and let the children use what they want to create a picture in response to the story. What the children produce is not the most important thing here. What is important is the process. When hands are busy, it gives the mind space to think about the story and to listen to God.

As you work, continue to chat about the story and what they think. The children might have questions that to us seem strange or unimportant, but you should treat these questions with respect as they represent your children sorting out elements of the story and what it tells them about God, faith and life. This is true even of younger children. Try to answer some of these questions together as you create your artwork.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: artwork from ‘Creative time’

Gather all the artwork and collages you created during this session and admire them. Recap briefly about everything you’ve chatted about – the wise men visiting Jesus, and what you discussed after exploring the story.

Invite your family to say one-line prayers to God in response to all you have discovered today. These might be worshipping Jesus or thanking God for sending Jesus. It might be about helping us be part of God’s plan too.

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Herod

MEETING AIM

To explore the reaction of Herod to the birth of Jesus.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 2:1-8,16-18

BACKGROUND

Not everyone reacted with the joy of the shepherds or the adoration of the wise men when they discovered that Jesus had been born. Herod didn't take kindly to the birth of a new king of the Jews. While we're going to avoid the more gruesome episode where Herod ordered the killing of all boys under the age of two, we can still help younger children examine their own reaction to the birth of Jesus.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning). Ask about a time when the children felt unhappy about something.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: shop play equipment

Set out whatever toys you have around shop play and encourage the children to play as they would like. Explore the idea that some people are happy with what they buy and the service that they get in shops, and some people are not. As you play, ask the children if they have ever been unhappy in a shop. You might want to share a story of when you reacted badly to what people said to you.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: a crown

If you did session three, then you will have already explored Matthew 2:1-8. However, this time you're going to look at it from Herod's point of view, not the wise men. Give the crown to one of an adult or older child in your family and say that they are King Herod. Then tell this story:

At the time of the first Christmas, there was a king living in Jerusalem. He was called King Herod. *Ask Herod to parade up*

and down as regally as they can. He was king of the people living in the country. They were called the Jews. But he wasn't really in charge. The people who were really in charge were called the Romans. They were in charge of all the known world!

Herod was king, but he was a bully. *Ask your Herod to look threatening.* But like lots of bullies, he was actually really scared. *Ask everyone, including Herod, to do their best scared face.* He thought other people might want to get rid of him and become king themselves. *Encourage your family members to try to take Herod's crown. If you're online, then ask all the children to pretend to be kings or queens.*

One day some people came to visit Herod from far away. They had travelled many miles from the east. *All apart from Herod walk around your space, pretending to travel a long way.* They asked Herod: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" They had seen this new king's star in the sky and had travelled to meet him. *Ask the children who this king might be.*

Herod was shocked! *Ask everyone, including Herod, to do their best shocked or surprised face.* He was king of the Jews. No one else! Herod pretended that he wanted to meet this new king. He sent the wise travellers off towards Bethlehem, and told them to come back and tell him where this new king was. He said he wanted to worship the new king. But really, he was going to get rid of this new king! *Ask everyone, including Herod, to do their best shocked or surprised face again.*

Well, Herod waited for the wise travellers to come back. *Ask your family, or the children online, to pretend to wait.* What might they do? What might they look like? He waited and he waited. He waited and waited some more. But they didn't come back. God had warned the travellers in a dream not to go back to Herod. They went home on a different road.

Herod was angry! He was so scared that this new king would take his place. So he did horrible things to try to get rid of this new king – Jesus. *Ask your Herod to look threatening again.* But God kept Jesus safe. He told Joseph, Jesus' father on earth, to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, far away from Herod. Jesus – the king of the world – was safe!

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Continue chatting about the story using these questions:

- What did you like about this story?
- Is there anything you didn't like about the story?
- Why do you think Herod was scared?
- When you hear the story of Jesus, how do you feel?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: art and collage materials; glue sticks; large sheets of paper

Provide whatever art and collage materials you can find and let the children use what they want to create a picture in response to the story. What the children produce is not the most important thing here. What is important is the process. When hands are busy, it gives the mind space to think about the story and to listen to God.

As you work, continue to chat about the story and what they think. The children might have questions that to us seem strange or unimportant, but you should treat these questions with respect as they represent your children sorting out elements of the story and what it tells them about God, faith and life. This is true even of younger children. Try to answer some of these questions together as you create your artwork.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: artwork from 'Creative time'

Gather all the artwork and collages you created during this session and admire them. Recap briefly about everything you've chatted about – how Herod reacted to hearing about Jesus, and what we think about Jesus and Christmas.

Invite your family to say one-line prayers to God in response to all you have discovered today. These might be saying thanks to God for sending Jesus or asking him to help us follow Jesus.

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