



Mary and Joseph

MEETING AIM

Mary and Joseph.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2

BACKGROUND

The Christmas story is incredible from start to finish; miracles occur at each stage, not least the fact that Mary and Joseph end up together at all. Palestine 2,000 years ago was not the place to be if you got pregnant and weren't married, even if you claimed it was by divine intervention. Joseph was well within his rights to walk away after Mary's news. However, he's not the kind of guy who makes a fuss and still wants to protect her, even though he absolutely intends to leave her. But then there's a dream and an angel and everything looks different. Joseph steps up and together, he and Mary ensure the safe arrival of God's promised one and are kept safe in the aftermath.

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 the children to share any dreams they've had this week.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

You will need: map of your area (paper or online)

Look at the map together. Ask the children if any of them can find where you are right now on the map. Mark it, then trace out some of the regular routes you might make to go to school, church or the shops.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: map of Mary and Joseph's journey

Print the map as large as you can or copy it out onto a large sheet of paper. Gather everyone around the edge.

Challenge the family to look up the following Bible passages, find the place on the map where they occurred and draw the events. Make sure everyone gets a turn at drawing if they want to. With children at

the younger end of the range, you might want to paraphrase each passage and have it printed or written out so that it can be simply read.

- **Luke 1:26-31** (The angel visits Mary in Nazareth)
- **Matthew 1:18-21** (Joseph is visited by an angel in a dream in Nazareth)
- **Luke 2:1,3-7** (Mary and Joseph journey to Bethlehem where Jesus is born)
- **Luke 2:22** (Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem to present him at the temple)
- **Matthew 2:13** (Joseph is warned in a dream to take the family to Egypt to escape Herod)
- **Matthew 2:19-20,23** (Joseph has a dream giving him the all-clear to return to Nazareth).

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- In today's story, there are lots of times when angels visit, either in real life or in dreams. Why do you think God spoke to Mary and Joseph in this way?
- What might have happened if Mary or Joseph hadn't listened to the angels and dreams?
- Have you ever had a dream where God spoke to you? Would you like to, if you haven't?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: a square of paper (any colour) 17cm x 17cm; two circles (2.5cm diameter) cut out of the same colour card; thin strip of ribbon 20cm long; scissors; glue

Start by cutting your paper in half. Working from the short edge, fold each piece back and forth like a fan. You should end up with two fans of the same width.

Hold each fan closed and fold the top end over about a third of the way down. Glue the now touching parts together. The rest will spring back up again and that's fine.

Place the two fans back to back so that the long edges are touching and the folded over parts are to the outside.

Take your ribbon, fold in half and glue

the ends together. Sandwich this end between your two fans at the top (where the folded over part is) and glue them together. You can see you now have the robe and wings of an angel.

Spread glue on one card circle and stick it onto the ribbon just above the wings. Turn the angel over and put the other card circle back to back with the first so that the ribbon is sandwiched between with a loop at the top for hanging.

As you work, continue chatting about the story, what the children have discovered and what God has said to them. Hang the angels on your tree and remind your family of the story every time you look at them.

An instructional video for DIY Paper Angels can be found on YouTube by Osaka Crafts.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: smaller copies of the map from 'Bible story'

Give everyone a map and ask them to take it to a quiet place. Encourage them to run their fingers over the journey taken by Mary, Joseph and Jesus. As they 'take' the journey, they should ask God to be with them on the journeys they will take in the coming week.

Pray aloud: "God, thank you that you are with us on the journeys we take. Help us to be expectant that you will speak to us, just like you spoke to Mary and Joseph. Amen."

JENNY CHEUNG

is a mum, church planter and choir-nut! She pioneers The Voice Project Scotland – a missional expression inviting children and their families to find their voices and sing together with others.



The shepherds

MEETING AIM

To show, through the story of the shepherds, that God entrusts big news to ordinary people like us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 2:8-20

BACKGROUND

God's people knew the Messiah was coming – he'd been promised more than 400 years before – and it might be that they thought it would be obvious when he arrived. Four hundred years might seem like it's just a snap of the fingers, but it's like us waiting to see something that was promised before the year 1620! Would a bunch of shepherds on an unremarkable hillside outside of Bethlehem really think the Messiah would come? They certainly wouldn't have expected to be the first ones informed of his arrival...

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 the children to share if there's anything they are waiting for at the moment – Christmas, a birthday, a special event, a new baby, the end of the pandemic.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

In each of the following scenarios, ask your children who it would be appropriate to tell the news to, or what methods (eg press, social media, word of mouth) you might use to share it.

- There is no bread left in the kitchen.
- You won a certificate at school.
- A new baby has been born in the family.
- A new royal baby has been born.
- You are launching a new fundraising campaign.
- You've learnt to tie your shoelaces.
- Two film stars are getting married.
- Brexit has been cancelled.
- Your school is shutting for two weeks because of COVID-19.
- There is a new president in the USA.

Make the point that different news is important to different people. There is some news that everyone needs to know.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

Read the story of the shepherds and the angels from any translation or children's Bible. The Bible for Kids app is also an option. Ask everyone to have a think about how they would feel if they were one of the shepherds.

Designate a chair as the 'hot seat' and invite a volunteer to be a shepherd. Once they are in the hot seat, they can be asked questions by the rest of the group about what happened and what they felt about it. The person in the hot seat has to answer as if they were a shepherd. Let as many as want to take turns at being in the hot seat. If anyone is struggling to answer any questions, let the others help them come up with a reply.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- Why is it strange that God chose to tell the shepherds about Jesus first?
- What do you think the angels thought about being sent to tell some extraordinary news to some very ordinary shepherds?
- If you were God and Jesus was being born today, how would you manage the news?
- What do you think Mary and Joseph felt about being visited by shepherds?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: wooden curtain rings – the kind with a small metal loop screwed into the top (one for each child); sheep-coloured wool or yarn – the thicker the better; black craft foam; googly eyes; PVA glue; scissors; thin ribbon in Christmassy colours

Tie the end of the wool or yarn onto the wooden curtain ring and wrap it around and around (through the hole in the middle) until the ring is completely covered – as if you were making a pompom. Tie or glue the end down.

Cut out a sheep head shape with ears from the black craft foam – think Shaun

the Sheep! Stick googly eyes on and then glue the head to the wool-covered ring so that it is central at the top with the metal loop behind it.

If you want to, you can also add two legs cut out of craft foam at the bottom. These will need to be glued onto the back of the wool-covered ring so that they appear to come out of the wool when seen from the front. Thread a ribbon through the metal loop.

As you work, continue chatting about the story, what the children have discovered and what God has said to them. Hang the sheep on your tree (next to the angels from session one, if you did that) and remind your family of the story every time you look at them.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: paper; pencils or pens

Ask your family to think about what they'd like to talk to God about and then write a headline to sum it up. They can write a prayer underneath or, if they're not that keen on writing, draw a picture to express it.

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The wise men

MEETING AIM

To think about how the wise men read the signs of their times in order to find Jesus.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 2:1-12

BACKGROUND

For such familiar biblical figures, we actually know remarkably little about the wise men. Various called wise men, kings and Magi, we can't be 100 percent sure who they were. They may have been priests from another religion who had a keen interest in the stars and saw something they didn't expect, leading them to investigate its origin and find Jesus. We also don't know exactly where they came from – perhaps Persia or India – but again we don't really know. What we do know is that they were awake enough to read the signs of the times and open enough to let their observations lead them to Jesus.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

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INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

Look online for an accurate star chart for the day you're doing this session on. You could use this site. Have a good look together, talking about the things that people recognise from the chart. Some children may be quite interested in stars already and may be able to give lots of information.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: atlas or map app

Ask the children if they have ever heard someone say: "The signs of the times". Ask them if they know what that means? Talk about how it means being aware of what's going on in the world around you and thinking that through so you have an understanding of what might or might not happen.

Say that the characters in today's story were aware of things going on in the world around them, which pointed them towards bigger stories and truths. They weren't reading the newspapers, though, they were reading the night sky – just like you did with the star chart. In the ancient world, people put a lot of meaning into the ways the stars looked and the wise men saw something that led them to believe that something world-changing was happening not so far away. They believed that the stars were telling them that someone had been born who would be the king of the Jews, so they set out to find him to pay their respects.

Read Matthew 2:1-2. These wise star-readers saw an unusual star in the sky and were so intrigued that they decided to set out to see where it was shining above. They ended up in Jerusalem, but where did they start? We don't know, but it was somewhere east of Jerusalem. On your atlas or map app, find Jerusalem and where might be east of that. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they went to see the king to ask about the new baby.

Eventually the wise travellers tracked the star down to Bethlehem – find that on the map too. And who did they find in Bethlehem? Jesus! He might have been a toddler by then. Read Matthew 2:9-11. They had brought some presents with them. Ask the children if they were going to visit a baby or toddler, what kind of presents would they bring? Ask what these strange presents might mean. Gold – for a king. Frankincense for a priest – that's someone who connects people to God. And myrrh, which was something you used when someone had died – this was to show that Jesus' death would be significant. How did the visitors know what to bring and what it would show about who Jesus would be?

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What questions do you have about the story?
- Should we be looking at the stars today to get an idea of what important things are happening?
- What gives us some clues about what God's doing in the world today?
- If you were going to give Jesus a gift, what would it be and why?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: cardboard tubes (eg kitchen roll); scissors; glue; large sequins; thin ribbon

Squash the tube flat and cut across it at 1cm intervals so that you end up with lots of flat cardboard hoops. Each person will need four of these.

Lay one hoop vertically in front of you. Take a second flat hoop, lay it horizontally and push it through the middle of the first. Glue (or staple) in place where the links touch each other. Push a third flat hoop diagonally through the middle and glue or staple in place. Finally, push the fourth hoop diagonally the other way through the middle. Glue or staple in place. You should end up with a star shape.

Glue sequins on your star. Thread a piece of thin ribbon through one link to hang it on the tree.

As you work, continue chatting about the story, what the children have discovered and what God has said to them. Hang the stars on your tree (with the angels and sheep, if you made them) and remind your family of the story every time you look at them.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: newspapers; scissors'

Before your session, separate out some sheets of newspaper that have the most important current stories on. Ask the children to find a story about something they think is important. Encourage them to cut a star shape out of the piece of paper with the story on it. As they cut, they can talk to God about that situation. Pray: "God, please help us to see what you are doing in all the events unfolding around us. Amen."

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Herod

MEETING AIM

To tell the story of King Herod's reaction to the birth of Jesus.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 2:1-18

BACKGROUND

King Herod was king of Judea at the time of Jesus' birth. The whole area was actually under Roman occupation, so Herod could only be king with Roman support – and some financial persuasion in the right direction. Herod was responsible for a lot of important building in Jerusalem during his reign – including the second temple, of which the Wailing Wall is a surviving part. Power was hugely important to Herod and he did anything to keep hold of it, including executing anyone who got in his way. So when wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem asking to see the new king of the Jews, there was no way Herod was going to take any perceived competition lying down.

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 the children to share what is most important to them.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

You will need: two large sheets of paper; marker pens

Create a mind map together on a large sheet of paper. Think of all the good things you would do if you were king or queen for a day. Write or draw them on your mind map.

Now think about all the ways you could use your power as ruler badly. Create another mind map on another sheet of paper. Compare the two mind maps.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: paper; pencils; felt-tip pens

Explain that you are going to create a cartoon strip of the story of Herod, the Magi and baby Jesus. Divide a piece of paper into six equal parts and take it in

turns to contribute to each drawing. Talk about the story as you decide what to draw. Use the following Bible references to create each picture or scene.

- Matthew 2:1-2
- Matthew 2:3-6
- Matthew 2:7-8
- Matthew 2:9-11
- Matthew 2:12-15
- Matthew 2:16-18

Once you have finished, admire your handiwork and chat about the story in general, then go into the questions from 'Chatting together'.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- Why was Herod so bothered about Jesus?
- Can you imagine you are King Herod? What might you be feeling?
- Did Jesus come to be the sort of king that Herod was worried about?
- Can you come up with five words to describe Herod in this story?
- Why is this story so shocking?
- What is God doing in this story?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: gold and / or silver pipe cleaners; beads that will thread onto the pipe cleaners; thin ribbon; scissors

You are going to make a crown tree decoration; you can either do a 2D or 3D version. For a simple 2D crown, bend your pipe cleaner into the outline of a crown – probably three points on top is plenty. Thread on your beads to add jewelled effects. Twist the ends together so that the beads don't escape. Tie a piece of thin ribbon to the middle point to hang it up.

For a 3D version, first twist a pipe cleaner into a circle and twist it closed. Ideally you want the pipe cleaner to go around twice to make it strong. Now cut short lengths of pipe cleaner to create the crown points or triangles coming up from the circle (the head band). Be as fancy as you like and add some beads onto the points along the way. When you're done, tie a thin ribbon onto one of the points to hang it.

As you work, continue chatting about the story, what the children have discovered and what God has said to them. Hang the crowns on your tree (next to the angels, sheep and stars, if you made them) and remind your family of the whole story every time you look at them.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: paper; felt-tip pens; shoebox or similar

Think back to your discussion at the start and ask the children to write down or draw the thing that they said was most important to them. It might be an actual object or perhaps an idea – like being clever.

Place the shoebox in the middle and explain that it represents a manger. Invite each person to fold up their paper and put it in the manger to show that they don't want anything to stop them making Jesus king over their lives.

Pray: "Jesus, thank you that you are the best king. Thank you that you don't use your power badly. Help us to make you king in our lives every day. Amen."

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