



SESSION 1 of 4

## Annunciation

### MEETING AIM

To hear the story of Gabriel's announcement to Mary. To reflect on how God is with us on ordinary days, and on days with surprises.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-21

### BACKGROUND

These Christmas outlines are standalone, but they all contain common features: lighting another candle every Sunday in an Advent ring, using a wooden object to tell the Bible story, making a Christmas tree decoration, singing a song and adding extras verses. There is a recurring theme that the Christmas story is full of surprises.

### 5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome each child by name. Talk about the ordinary things children and adults do on a weekday morning, such as getting dressed, eating breakfast or packing a school bag. What about the ordinary things they do in the evening such as brushing teeth, having a shower or a bath or putting on pyjamas?

### 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

Ask the children to act out a morning activity for the others to guess what it is. Then act out the ordinary things we do in the evening. Are there any activities they do in the morning and the evening?

### 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a long-handled wooden brush; a model wooden bed, wooden bricks to build a bed or a photo of a wooden bed; a dustpan

Gather the children together and tell them this story:

Mary was a young girl who lived with her family 2,000 years ago. She was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph, but they weren't married yet. Mary did a lot to help in the house. It was a hot and dusty country and they didn't have vacuum cleaners. She swept the floor at least once a day with a wooden brush. *Invite a few children to have a go at brushing the floor.*

*Stand and lean on the brush.* One morning she was brushing the floor when she heard a rustle behind her. *Turn around and encourage*

*everyone to gasp.* To her surprise, she saw a shimmering light surrounding a tall sort of person. *Gasp again and drop the brush with a clatter.* It was an angel!

*Pick up the brush and stand to attention as though you are the angel.* "Don't be afraid," the angel said. (They usually say that to people the first time they meet them.) "God is very pleased with you. You are going to have a baby. He's going to be called Jesus. God is his father. He will change the world for ever."

"It's impossible," Mary said, trembling. "I'm not married." *Invite the children to tremble in fear.*

"God can do the impossible!" the angel said.

Mary stopped trembling and stayed very still, as though deep in thought. *Invite children to be still.* At last she took a deep breath. "OK," she said, "if that's what God wants. I'll do what pleases him."

*Take a deep breath.* And the angel disappeared.

*Sit down to tell the next part of the story.*

It was evening. Joseph, Mary's fiancé was tired. He was a carpenter and worked with wood. His hands had splinters in them and he'd banged his finger with a hammer. *Ouch! Ask the children if they have ever had splinter.*

He climbed into his wooden bed. He had made it himself. *Show the bed, the photo or build a bed out of bricks.* That night he fell asleep very quickly and slept very deeply. He was snoring. *Invite the children to snore. They could even lie down and imagine they are Joseph.* Joseph dreamt that an angel had come to him. The angel had a message for Joseph.

The angel said: "You know that Mary is going to have a baby. God is the baby's father and he has chosen you to be the boy's foster father. You are to marry Mary and bring him up as your own son. You are to give him the name Jesus."

Joseph woke up. He knew what he needed to do, so he married Mary. He was going to look after her and the baby when he was born.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- When you get up in the morning you can never be sure what surprising things might happen before you get to school or nursery, or when you get there. Can anyone think of a surprise that has happened to them?
- Sometimes surprising things happen in the evening. Does anyone have any ideas?

- God often gives people surprises. In the Bible Jesus healed people and calmed a storm. Do you have any other suggestions?

Chat about how God might surprise us today. We know for certain that he is with us all the time. Just as the angel said not to be afraid, God says that we don't need to be worried or anxious.

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** card measuring 15cm x 10cm; tissue paper cut into 15cm x 10cm pieces; glue; glitter or tinsel; felt tips; thread or wool

In advance, cut a hole in the shape of a long isosceles triangle at the centre of the card, with a circle above the top for an 'angelic head'. Punch a hole above the head in the frame of the card.

Cover the triangular hole in the card with tissue paper on one side. Decorate the frame on the other side with felt, glitter and small pieces of tinsel. Insert wool or thread so the children can hang the angel on a tree.

As you work, chat about the story and what the children think God is doing here.

### 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** angels from 'Creative response'; song words and advent ring instructions from [youthandchildrenswork/links](http://youthandchildrenswork/links)

Before the session, download the song words and prepare an advent wreath using the instructions on [youthandchildrenswork/links](http://youthandchildrenswork/links). Sing the first two verses of the song, with each child holding their angel.

Surprise the children by lighting the first candle of the Advent ring. Explain why there is a 'halo' around the base. Remind them that Christians often light a candle when they pray as a sign that God is with us and hears our prayers. Jesus is the light of the world. Pray together:

"Thank you, God, that sometimes you surprise us, just as the angel surprised Mary and Joseph. Thank you that you are with us in the ordinary times and the surprising times. Amen."

### RO WILLOUGHBY

worships at St Chad's Woodseats, Sheffield.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to [youthandchildrenswork/together](http://youthandchildrenswork/together).



SESSION 2 of 4

## Jesus' birth

### MEETING AIM

To hear the story of the birth of Jesus. To think about how Joseph and Mary might have been worried but knew they could trust God.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 2:1-7

### BACKGROUND

This story will be familiar to many of the children, but they hear it as though for the first time every school year! Explain that we can hear Bible stories again and again, and there is something new to discover every time. Note, there is no mention of the donkey or the stable, which don't appear in the Bible account.

### 5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share any refreshments you have brought. Begin by talking about all the things the children can think of that are made of wood. Remind them what a carpenter is and talk about Joseph and the sort of furniture, buildings and farming tools he might have made.

### 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** at least three lollipop sticks per child

Before the session, hide the lollipop sticks around your meeting space. Make some obvious and others less so to give the children a challenge.

Invite the children to find as many hidden wooden lollipop sticks as they can. Explain that you will use them later. Enjoy searching for the sticks, but don't turn it into too much of a competition.

### 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a nativity set, crib scene or manger, or a photo of one; straw or yellow wool; a wooden hammer, a mallet and any other wooden tools you can find; a doll; a piece of cloth

Let the children handle the animals and figures in the nativity set. Draw attention to the manger, and talk about how animals are fed and watered.

Remember from last week that Joseph had been told by God to marry Mary and look after her son, Jesus, as a foster father. But before the baby was born the Roman authorities ordered everyone, including Joseph, to go back to the town where their families came from. This meant that Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, which was 100km away. That was a long way! He couldn't leave Mary on her own. She would have to come with him.

Joseph packed up his tools. *Show the children the tools and talk about them.* He never went anywhere without them because he never knew when he might be asked to make a chair or a doorframe or a spade. Mary packed up her clothes and cloths for the baby, and some food for the journey. *Act out packing a bag.* Off they went.

Mary got tired very quickly because her baby was due very soon. She and Joseph had to walk for several days. By the time they were close to Bethlehem she knew her baby would be born very, very soon. Joseph knocked on the door of one place where they might have been able to stay. *Knock! Knock! Knock!* "There's no room here! Go away!"

Joseph knocked on the door of another place. *Knock! Knock! Knock!* "There's no room here! Go away!"

Mary knew the baby was coming very, very soon! Joseph knocked on the door of yet another place. *Knock! Knock! Knock!* "We've got some room where the animals are sleeping inside. It's warm and safe!"

Mary lay down on the straw with the animals close by. And that was where she had her baby. She wrapped Jesus in the cloths she had brought with her. *Wrap up the doll.* Joseph looked around to see where it was safe to put the baby. He didn't want the baby to lie on the ground in case an animal trod on him. He didn't want the baby to be cold. He looked at the wooden manger or feeding trough where the food for the animals was kept. This was off the ground and the straw would keep the baby warm. They put baby Jesus in the manger. This was the safest place for him.

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- It was a really big thing for Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem just before their baby was born. If you were Joseph I wonder what would have made you most worried. Forgetting some of your tools? Not finding somewhere to stay? Not finding a safe place to put the baby? Something else?

- The angel had told Mary she was going to have this special baby boy. Mary thought for a bit and then accepted what God wanted her to do. Do you think she still worried a lot? I wonder how she was able to trust God...

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** lollipop sticks from 'Intro activity' (three per child); glue; yellow wool; pieces of card 6cm x 3cm (enough for two per child); hole punch; thread

Show the children how to cross two sticks at one end and stick them together. Lay the third stick across the ends of the first two sticks to make a manger shape and stick them together. Stick a piece of card on either side of the wide end of the manger and stuff small lengths of yellow wool (hay) in through the gap between the card. Punch a hole in the card and push some thread through to hang the manger on a tree. You could decorate the 'manger' to make it a glitzy tree decoration.

As you work, chat about the story and what God might be doing in it. Have the children learnt anything new today?

### 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** song words and advent ring instructions from [youthandchildrens.work/links](http://youthandchildrens.work/links)

Light the second candle on the advent ring and remind the children about the story behind the first one. Is there anything the children are sad or worried about? It could be something big or scary. Pray for them, reminding them that God is with us, just as he was with Mary and Joseph. Sing the first three verses of the song.

### RO WILLOUGHBY

worships at St Chad's Woodseats, Sheffield.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to [youthandchildrens.work/together](http://youthandchildrens.work/together).



SESSION 3 of 4

# Shepherds

## MEETING AIM

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

**BIBLE PASSAGE**  
Luke 2:8-20

## BACKGROUND

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

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Talk about the times when the children are in a hurry: when they are late for school, to catch a bus or train, to go to a special party or to meet a favourite person. Sometimes we're in a hurry because we're late, or because we're keen to get somewhere, or maybe because we just like running!

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**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 a couple or more 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. They could run for the first race, jump for the second and jump sideways for a third, for example.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a wooden shepherd's crook (or a photo of one), a wooden stave or a walking stick; toy sheep or sheep puppets  
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, for example paramedics, people who repair motorways and train tracks, and farmers at lambing time. At the

time Jesus was born, shepherds had to stay outside at night-time to make sure the sheep were kept safe from wild animals and were not stolen by thieves. It was not a very nice job because they got cold and didn't get paid very much. Show them the shepherd's crook and talk about how it was 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 probably 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 this.*

The shepherds saw an angel in the sky. *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. Then 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 for ever. He has come from God. He's a newborn baby right now, wrapped up tightly in cloths and lying on a bed of hay 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 half-covered their ears. It was so loud it almost hurt, but they wanted to hear it anyway! *Everyone half-covers their ears.* They sang, "Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth!" again and again and again.

And then it went quiet and dark again. The shepherds jumped up, each grabbing their shepherd's crook and grabbing 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 beside 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 had 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?

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- The shepherds told everyone they met what had happened on their way home. I wonder how special they felt. (The children could walk around in small circles, imagining what they would have seen if they were the 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 had been one of the shepherds?
- We can also tell others about what the shepherds saw and heard. Who are you going to tell?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

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

If you're using pipe cleaners, bend them into the shape of a crook. Cover the wrapped candy cane or pipe cleaner with paper, glitter and so on, so 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?

## 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** canes from 'Creative response'; song words and advent ring instructions from [youthandchildrenswork/links](#)

Light the third candle on the advent ring and remind the children of the stories behind the first two. Sing the first four verses of the song.

Everyone stands up, holding their 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."

## RO WILLOUGHBY

worships at St Chad's Woodseats, Sheffield.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to [youthandchildrens.work/together](#).



SESSION 4 of 4

# Wise men

**MEETING AIM**

To hear the story of the arrival of the wise men coming from afar, and to reflect on yet more surprises in the Christmas story.

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

Matthew 2:1-12

**BACKGROUND**

There are some nasty aspects to the story of the wise men, which we will not be focusing on today, but there are several more surprises to conclude this series on the Christmas story.

**5 CIRCLE TIME**

Greet the children by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Ask the children if anyone has had a birthday present recently, or an early Christmas present. How was it wrapped up? In paper, a cloth, a box, an envelope or a bottle? Comment that toddlers are often more interested in a present's wrapping paper rather than the present itself! Is anyone any good at guessing what is inside a parcel? Sometimes we can, sometimes we can't.

**5 INTRO ACTIVITY**

**You will need:** newspaper pass the parcel; music and the means to play it; two twigs or sticks

Before the session, create a pass the parcel using plenty of newspaper for each layer to bulk it out. Wrap the twigs or sticks in the middle (which can be bound together later in the session to make a cross).

Play the game, then wonder together about what the two sticks might mean.

**15 BIBLE STORY**

**You will need:** a large star; three boxes (preferably wooden); the twigs or sticks from 'Intro activity'; string; perfume spray; a gold chocolate coin

Gather the children together and tell this story:

In a faraway land there were some wise men who studied the stars. They noticed a star that rose in the east and was moving away from them toward the city of Jerusalem. They knew about the king of the Jews, whom everyone was expecting.

*Hold up the star.* They decided they would have to follow the star to find out where it was going. Would the star lead them to this king?

At night-time they travelled, and in the daytime they rested. The star kept going. *Move around holding the star, encouraging the children to follow you.* On and on toward Jerusalem. At last they saw the city walls. The star stopped over the city.

"Hooray!" they thought. "We're going to find this king."

But King Herod, who was a bad king and lived in Jerusalem, didn't like the idea of another king. He told these wise men to keep on following the star, which was still moving.

On and on they went. *Move the star.* Then the star stopped! It stopped in a small town called Bethlehem. It stopped over an ordinary house. They went inside. Here they saw a mother and a father, and a boy who was a toddler. This was Jesus. This was the king they had come to look for. This was no ordinary king. They were amazed to see him.

They gave him three gifts. *Take the boxes and ask the children to open them, commenting on the 'wrapping'.* Inside one box was...a gold coin. Who wears a gold crown? Jesus was going to be a king, but not the sort of king who wears a gold crown. Inside another box was...frankincense, a sweet-smelling perfume. *Spray some, being careful not to direct it specifically at any child.* Sweet-smelling spice was burned to remind people that God hears prayer. People were going to pray to Jesus. Inside the third box was...a perfume called myrrh, which was used to rub on someone's body after they had died. *Inside this box are the two twigs.* Jesus was going to die. He died on a cross. *Bind the twigs together with the help of a child if possible.*

The wise men set off home, but they did not go back through Jerusalem. They went another way because they didn't want to see bad King Herod again.

**5 CHATTING TOGETHER**

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

- There are many surprises in the Christmas story. What surprises did you see? The wise men expected the star to stop in Jerusalem, but the king they were looking for was not there. They were surprised that the star had stopped over an ordinary home. Mary and Joseph were not expecting the wise men to visit them. They would have been surprised at the gifts they brought.
- Part one of the story of Jesus is about his birth, which we celebrate at Christmas. Part two comes at Easter time.

What do the children think about that? Some of Jesus' followers were surprised that Jesus died on the cross. They thought he was a fierce king. They were even more surprised that Jesus came back to life.

**10 CREATIVE RESPONSE**

**You will need:** six-pointed stars cut from card, 10cm high with a slit from one of the points to the centre of the star; glitter thread or wool; sticky shapes; glitter glue; shiny paper; glue

Decorate two stars on both sides, slide one star's slit into another star's slit so they meet at the centre. Attach thread to the 3D star so it can hang on a Christmas tree.

As you work, chat about what God is doing in the story. Have they discovered something new today?

**5 PRAYER**

**You will need:** stars from 'Creative response'; song words and advent ring instructions from [youthandchildrenswork/links](http://youthandchildrenswork/links)

Light the fourth candle on the advent ring and remind the children about the stories behind the first three. You may want to light the fifth (Christmas Day) candle if you have not already done so. Sing all the verses of the song.

Everyone stands up and holds their tree decoration, swinging their moving star. Pray this prayer, encouraging the children to say: "Thank you, God" with you.

Thank you, God, that the wise men followed the star. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that the star led the wise men to where Jesus was. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that Jesus was born.

**Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that Jesus died and came back to life. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that we can celebrate Christmas! **Thank you, God.**

**RO WILLOUGHBY**

worships at St Chad's Woodseats, Sheffield.

For the rest of this month's sessions go to [youthandchildrens.work/together](http://youthandchildrens.work/together).