



SESSION 1 of 4

# Jesus starts it all

## MEETING AIM

To explore the way Jesus began his ministry.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 1:1-15

## BACKGROUND

Mark's Gospel begins with the voice of John the Baptist, as God's chosen messenger, preparing the way for Jesus. This session explores what it means for the long wait to be over; for God's people then and for us today to see Jesus as he reveals himself in these opening verses.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and invite them to share their news from the past week. You may choose to share some refreshments together. Ask the group: "Are you good at waiting for things? When do you find this easy or difficult?"

## 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** a start and finish line; appropriate props as follows

Set up a series of races for the children to participate in. These could be on a large scale, such as team obstacle relay races, or a small scale, such as wind-up toy races. These could even be challenges, such as first one to drink a glass of water, depending on the size of your group and the facilities available. Ensure that you begin each race with the words: "Ready, steady, go!"

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a candle

Gather the children to sit in a circle with you. This story should be told in a quiet, reflective way. It may help to light a candle in the centre of the circle to help the group focus. Begin the story as follows:

God's people had been waiting. Waiting so long. God's people had been waiting. Waiting for God to fulfil his promise.

Then, after so many years of waiting, God kept his promise. It was just as the prophet Isaiah had said it would be: "A messenger, in the desert, calling to the people: 'Get ready! Get ready for the Lord to come.'"

John was the messenger in the desert. John had wild hair, scratchy camel-hair clothes and enjoyed a diet of grasshoppers and honey!

He called to the people: "Get ready for the Lord to come. Turn back to God and be baptised. God will forgive you."

One day a man came to the river and asked John to baptise him. John recognised the man. He pointed to the man and told the people: "This is who I've been telling you about!" The man was Jesus. John wanted the people to see Jesus as he saw him.

John baptised Jesus, just as Jesus had asked. When Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down on him like a dove, and Father God called out over him: "You are my Son and I am very pleased with you!"

Jesus had to prepare himself for the work Father God had sent him to do. So Jesus took himself off into the desert. While he was there he was tested in every way by Satan, but Jesus stayed true to Father God and the angels looked after him.

The long, long wait was over. God had sent his Son to save his people, just as he had promised so very long ago. The wait was over and Jesus' work was about to begin.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- What is your favourite part of the story?
- Do you have any questions you want to ask?
- What things are important for Jesus to do before he begins his work?
- How do you think it would feel for the people to discover that their long wait was over?
- Why did Father God use John in this way?
- If it was up to us to save God's people, how might we go about it?
- Why do you think Jesus does it in this way?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** a large piece of paper; paint or marker pens; Bibles or printout of the text  
In this story, many things are said about Jesus and over him. Use this response time to think together about some of these things and what they mean to us.

Place a large sheet or roll of paper on the floor and ask a volunteer to lie on the paper to be drawn around. Explain to the group that this outline represents Jesus and you are going to write words or

phrases, or paint images or symbols onto, over or around him to represent some of the things we have discovered about Jesus from the words in this passage. Provide Bibles or copies of the text so the children can check for themselves, supporting those who may have difficulty accessing written text.

Encourage the children to work together as a group, or in multiple small groups depending on the number of children you have. They may choose to paint images such as the dove appearing over Jesus' head, or the angels around him, protecting him. Or they may want to write words that are used in the text to describe Jesus, such as 'Dear Son', 'Powerful' or 'Tested'.

Point out to the children that it is verse 15 before Jesus utters a word, and yet we are already able to discover so much about him from the things he does and the words other characters speak. As they work together, encourage the children to talk about the things they notice and what this teaches us about who Jesus is.

When complete, find a suitable place to display your artwork so that it can be reflected upon further, both by the children and other members of your church.

## 5 PRAYER

This passage provides a perfect opportunity for children to respond to the gospel. Remind them that John tells the people: "Turn back to God and be baptised, then your sins will be forgiven." Jesus also says: "Turn back to God and believe the good news."

Provide a simple, appropriate invitation for children to turn back to God, and lead those children in a prayer of commitment. Ensure that you follow this up appropriately with the children and their parents after the session.

## BECKY MAY

is a freelance writer and an experienced children's and youth leader. She can be found at [theresourcescupboard.co.uk](http://theresourcescupboard.co.uk).

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SESSION 2 of 4

# Jesus meets Levi

## MEETING AIM

To explore Jesus' invitation to follow him.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 2:13-17

## BACKGROUND

In this passage, Jesus boldly confronts the religious leaders and reveals to them the reason why he has come: as a doctor to the sick, to invite the sinners to follow him. This session explores what it means for us to be invited to follow Jesus and how we can extend that invitation to those we love.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and invite them to share their news from the past week. Save any refreshments you have brought until the intro activity this week. Ask the group: "What is the most exciting invitation you have ever received?"

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** a table and chairs; simple party decorations; party food

Work together with the children to set up the party table rather than setting it up in advance. As you lay the table, prepare the decorations and set out the food, talk about the children's own experiences of hosting or attending parties. What makes them so special? How can we enjoy this mini party as a group? Sit together at the table and share the party food. Encourage an atmosphere of party or celebration as you do so (you can talk about this later in the session).

## 15 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** simple costumes (optional); the party setup from 'Intro activity'

Divide the children into two groups and explain that one will play the part of the sinners and tax collectors, while the other will play the part of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. If you have a supply of simple costumes, such as those used for a

nativity play, make these available for the children to dress up appropriately. Sit the children in their groups and begin the story as follows, discretely directing the children in acting out their roles as you get to each part of the story.

Jesus was in Galilee, surrounded by crowds of people. *Sit down among the sinners and tax collectors.* He noticed a man called Levi. Jesus said to him: "Come with me!"

Later, Jesus shared a meal at Levi's house. *Sit down at the table and gather the same group around you.* Many tax collectors and sinners had become followers of Jesus and were guests at Levi's house.

Some of the religious leaders of the day noticed what Jesus was doing. They were shocked! They asked Jesus' disciples what on earth he was doing. *Encourage this group to look shocked and ask: "What is he doing?"*

Jesus heard their criticisms and answered: "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I came here for the sinners!" *Encourage both groups to think about how they might react.*

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- What do you like best about the story?
- Which bits are more difficult to understand?
- What do you think happened when Jesus spoke to Levi?
- Who did Jesus come to help?
- Why was this so hard for the leaders to understand?
- Why do you think Jesus invited this particular group of people to follow him?
- What does this mean for us? Where would we be in this scene?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** cards; a selection of craft materials or a laptop and printer

Jesus explained in this story who he had come to invite to follow him. We are given the job of extending the invitation to those around us, so that they also have the opportunity to respond to Jesus. This activity would work particularly well if you have a specific event coming up that the children can invite their friends to, such as a community event, a special group session or a church service.

Ask the children to work together to create some invitations they can then give out to their friends. You could either do this by using a selection of art and craft materials or electronically on the

laptop. It would be particularly poignant for the children if they could be involved in planning the event itself, thinking about the message they would like to share and the opportunities they would like to give their friends to respond.

Remind the group that it is not our task to decide who Jesus has come for, or to decide who is 'good' or who is 'bad'. Elsewhere in the Bible it teaches us that all of us have sinned and fallen short, and that Jesus died for us all to have the opportunity to be forgiven. Our task is to share Jesus' invitation as widely as we can.

At the end of the session, remind the children to take their invitations away to distribute to their friends.

## 10 PRAYER

**You will need:** a table and chairs

Gather the children around the table again, but this time leave one empty chair. Invite the children to think about who might be missing from the table. Who would they like to invite to discover Jesus for themselves? Lead the children in prayer, firstly thanking God that he invites us to spend time with him and to follow him ourselves. Then turn your attention to the empty chair and invite them to pray aloud for those who are not yet followers of Jesus. Pray that they would have opportunities to invite their named friends and family members to discover Jesus in ways that are meaningful and achievable.

As you draw the session to a close, challenge the children to continue to pray for the person or people they will be giving their invitations to, that they will be received well. Follow this up at a later stage as your group prepares for the event your invitations relate to, and also after the event. Help the children explore what it means to be involved in this process of invitation, sharing their joys and frustrations along the way.

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SESSION 3 of 4

## Jesus calms the water

### MEETING AIM

To discover that Jesus has authority over all things.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 4:35-41

### BACKGROUND

In this session, we explore the well-known story of what happened the day Jesus and his friends found themselves in a storm at sea. It is worth noting that when we pick up this story by looking at only these few verses we miss the teaching Jesus delivered to the same disciples just before getting into the boat. It is well worth taking a look back to discover the message Jesus spoke to his disciples about what it meant to have faith in him.

In this section of the passage, Jesus shows them just how much they still have to learn about this faith he is urging them to grow. This session explores what it means for us to live with true faith in the authority of Jesus, who can address all circumstances on our behalf.

### 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle. Encourage them to share your refreshments and talk about their recent experiences. Ask if any of them have ever been on a boat ride. What was their experience? Was it a calm crossing or has anyone ever been on the sea in a storm?

### 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** plastic bottles; a jug of water; blue food colouring; baby oil; funnels  
This activity can be done as a whole group or in pairs, but it will have the greatest impact if each child has the opportunity to make their own sea storm bottle so they can all have hands-on experience.

To create a sea storm bottle, half fill a plastic bottle with cold water. Add a few drops of blue food colouring. Then fill the bottle with baby oil to the very top and seal the lid securely. Give the children time to 'play' with their bottles by shaking, tipping

or swirling them to see what effects they can create. A calm sea? Surfer waves? A tremendous storm?

### 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** wide blue floristry ribbon cut into similar lengths

Arrange the children so they are sitting in a circle on the floor. Spread the floristry ribbon strips around the circle so they cross over and fill the space in different directions. Ensure that the children are holding on to each end of the pieces of ribbon, perhaps holding more than one end each. Begin the story, as follows:

One evening, after Jesus had spent many hours teaching people about God's kingdom, he went out in a boat across the lake with the disciples. Jesus was very tired, so he took himself to the back of the boat and settled down to sleep. While he was sleeping, a sudden windstorm struck the lake. Waves started splashing into the boat, and the disciples were worried that it was going to sink. *Prompt the children to create 'waves' with the ribbons, getting steadily larger and larger.*

They woke Jesus, saying: "Teacher, aren't you worried that we're going to die?"

Jesus calmly stood up and said to the wind: "Quiet!" *Prompt the children to still their ribbons.* Then he turned to the disciples: "Why were you afraid? Don't you have any faith?"

The disciples were stunned: "Who is this man? Even the wind and waves obey him!"

### 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- How does this story make you feel?
- What questions does this story raise for you?
- How do you think you might respond if you were with the disciples?
- What does this story tell us about Jesus?
- How does this story challenge us as disciples?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** access to YouTube and the means to play clips, or printed examples of artwork on the theme of 'a storm at sea'; Post-it notes and pens

How you choose to respond to this story will depend upon the facilities available to you and the way you feel is best to share this with the group.

You could select a clip or two of real-life RNLI lifeboat rescues from YouTube to show the group. As you watch, talk about the different emotions they see in the reactions of those who are being saved.

Alternatively, display a selection of artwork on a 'storm at sea' theme and talk about how the art communicates this theme.

Distribute the Post-it notes and pens for either activity. Invite the children to write on separate notes how they would respond to the images. What emotions do they feel during the storm and during the rescue? Gather the Post-it notes together where everyone can see them and talk about common themes that have been noted. Ask the group what experiences we have that can relate to these emotions. We may not be in a physical sea storm, but when do we feel anxious and long to be saved? Use this time to talk about any issues raised.

### 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** floristry ribbon strips from 'Bible story'; marker pens

Gather the children together and give each one a length of floristry ribbon and a marker pen. Invite them to write on the ribbon a situation that is making them feel anxious or scared. If they prefer they can write the name of someone they know who is struggling in this way.

Explain that you are going to pray for Jesus to calm these real-life 'storms' and bring his peace into their lives. As you do so, they should hold the ribbon between their hands and smooth it out, reflecting on what it would mean for Jesus to breathe peace into their circumstances right now. Remind the children that Jesus has authority over all things, and that nothing is beyond his control.

As you draw the session to a close, make yourself available to talk through any specific situations that may need further practical support.

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SESSION 4 of 4

# Jesus feeds a crowd

## MEETING AIM

To explore the way Jesus multiplies the little we have to share.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 6:30-44

## BACKGROUND

In this session, Jesus multiplies the limited resources of the disciples to serve the crowd, both physically and spiritually. This session explores how he invites us to give the little we have so that he can multiply it.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit in a circle to share your refreshments together. Ask the group if they can think of an event they have been to recently that was so good they didn't want to go home.

## 10 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** several numbered large jars or clear containers filled with sweets or other small objects; paper and pens; a small prize

Before the session, prepare a number of large jars or clear plastic containers with small sweets or other small objects. Count how many objects are in each jar and record this somewhere so you can refer to it at the end of the activity.

As you begin the session, give each child a piece of paper and a pen, then invite them to guess how many objects are in each of the numbered jars. When everyone has had a go, tell the children the correct answers and award a small prize to the person who most accurately guessed the number of items. Explain that in this story we will be working with really large numbers that can be hard to visualise.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a roll of paper; marker pens  
Spread out the large roll of paper so everyone can access it, perhaps along the floor or attached to a wall. Tell the

group you are going to need their help as you retell this story, and give each child a marker pen. As they hear you tell the story, they should listen carefully to the detail and work together to draw a large picture of the scene you describe. You may find it helpful to start in the centre of the picture by drawing Jesus yourself.

Tell this story:

Jesus had been teaching those who would listen for hours, so he and his disciples tried to slip away to get some rest.

*Encourage the children to draw the twelve men who were closest to Jesus.* However, the crowds followed. Jesus could see that they were hungry to hear what he had to say, so he continued to teach them.

Many, many crowds gathered. There were at least 5,000 people, and that was just the men! *Challenge the children to begin drawing as many stick men as they can as you continue the story.*

Jesus could see that the crowds were hungry for physical food and for the things he was teaching them. The people needed to be fed, but they were miles away from anywhere. The disciples had brought no food with them and they certainly couldn't feed everyone!

They asked Jesus to send the crowd away, but he said: "You give them something to eat."

The disciples were surprised. They didn't know what to do! All they had was five loaves of bread and two small fish. *As you continue, the children should add the relevant details to the picture.* I wonder how the disciples must have felt to show this meagre supply to Jesus. Nervous? Anxious? Embarrassed?

Jesus barely batted an eyelid! "Gather the people together in small groups and make them sit on the grass," he said. All the people sat down in groups of 50 or 100.

Then Jesus raised the food to heaven and thanked God before he started to distribute their lunch. The disciples couldn't believe it; the food just kept on coming! More and more! There was more than enough for everyone! In fact, when everyone had eaten enough there were still twelve baskets of food left over to be collected up.

So that day, Jesus took twelve tired disciples and multiplied the little energy they had to satisfy more than 5,000 hungry hearts. He took one tiny lunchbox and multiplied it to satisfy more than 5,000 hungry tummies.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

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

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- What questions would you like to ask about it?
- What do you discover about Jesus here?
- Where do you picture yourself in this story?
- What can you give to Jesus that he could multiply?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** either a loaf of bread, tuna and spread, or ingredients to make soda bread

How you choose to respond to this story will depend on the facilities available to you. You will need to check for food allergies before you begin.

You could work together to make tuna sandwiches, perhaps to share with the wider church if appropriate. Or you could follow a recipe to make soda bread, which shortcuts the kneading and rising process to save time. One example recipe is available here: [youthandchildrens.work/links](http://youthandchildrens.work/links). As the bread bakes, talk about the way the bread rises or 'multiplies', and how Jesus multiplied the small meal that was shared.

## 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** a basket or lunchbox; small slips of paper and pens

Give each child a small slip of paper and a pen, and place the basket in the centre of the group. Remind the children that the disciples gave the little energy they had to Jesus and he multiplied it to serve the crowd. They also gave the little food they found and Jesus multiplied that to feed the crowd.

Ask them what they have that they could give to Jesus. Perhaps it's a particular gift or skill they have (you may find it helpful to give some examples here). If they want to respond in this way, invite the children to write this down on the slip of paper and put it in the basket.

Pray together over the gathered slips, asking Jesus to multiply these things so that each of us can serve him more fully.

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