



Living in Faith Together



December 2022

God is with Us!



Available online at www.hosannatogether.org/lift

This Month's Theme and Scripture

God experienced the fullness of humanity through Jesus--all the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows. God is with us (and understands us)!

Matthew 1:18–25, 2:1–12; and Luke 1:26–58; 2:1–20

LiFT with Children...

Read this story together in a Bible:

Spark Story Bible:

You might read the first two sets of stories now and the final one on Christmas after opening presents. Or read them all both times!

A Ruler from Bethlehem - pages 194-195

Angels Visit, Mary Visits Elizabeth - pages 196-207

Jesus Is Born - pages 212-217

The Action Bible:

You might read the first set now, and the second set on Christmas Day. Or read them all both times!

The Life of Jesus, When in Rome, Angel Promises - pages 546-555

Mary and Joseph, Birth of a Savior - pages 558-565

This Bible has been revised, so your page numbers may be slightly different.

Ask each other some or all of these questions:

- Who are Mary and Joseph? Why do you think God chose *them* (of all people) to be Jesus' parents?
- What do you think God felt when God was a baby in Jesus? What did Jesus need as a baby? How do you think this helps God understand you and your needs?
- What do we receive from babies?

Watch Christmas Movies!

- **Movies that focus on Jesus and the nativity:**

- The Star
- Veggie Tales: The Star of Christmas

- **Movies that focus on grace and love:**

- The Grinch / How the Grinch Stole Christmas
- Polar Express
- A Charlie Brown Christmas
- The Muppet Christmas Carol
- Veggie Tales: Saint Nicholas: A Story of Joyful Giving
- Veggie Tales: The Toy That Saved Christmas

Choose a few activities that fit you:

- Sing or listen to favorite hymns or carols as a family. Search YouTube for different versions of your favorite carols. Research online the origin of your favorite carols.
- Folk art nativity scenes are made by people who aren't professional artists and uses available materials. Search online for nativity sets from around the globe. What differences do you see? Why? What parts are always the same? Why? Create your own nativity scene with whatever you have.
- Make a special ritual to put a nativity ornament on the tree before or after all of the other ones (you might need a special nativity ornament for *each* kid!).
- If you have an angel on the top of your tree, talk about why it's there, and how it's like the angels that appeared to Mary and to the shepherds. What message might it have for us?
- Imagine a favorite toy is the baby Jesus and sing him to sleep.
- Make up quiz show clues based on the Christmas story from the Bible and see what family members know about this story.

Make a Plan to Celebrate Jesus this Christmas

We all know how it goes... Presents are the first and last things on kids minds at Christmas. That's okay. They aren't greedy; they are kids who get excited. Consider how you can connect this excitement to God and find joy about Jesus, too. This takes planning and being intentional about making opportunities to talk about and experience birth of Jesus and God's nearness. What if we spent as much time preparing to talk about the birth of Jesus as we spend buying presents! Consider these ideas:

- Attend worship on Christmas Eve, wherever you are. Hosanna! has worship at 5:00 and 7:00. Come again Christmas morning at 9:30!
- Instead of getting presents for your kids to give spouses or siblings, let them be part of picking it out. Talk about why we give gifts, the joy it brings people, and what a gift God is.
- Play with a nativity set. Dig out the DIY nativity kit you got at Hosanna! during the pandemic or pick up one at church on Dec. 18. Talk about the characters and what they might have been like. Allow each character to tell the Christmas story from their perspective (don't forget the animals!). Act out the Christmas story with the pieces, but let the kids humanize it with conversations and unexpected twists, too.
 - Go a step further by recording your kids acting out the story of Christmas with the nativity, then share it on social media.
- Find ways to focus on people instead of stuff, just like God did when God was born in Jesus. Don't worry about making Christmas perfect or magical. The first Christmas wasn't. It was messy, and about love and relationship.

Pray together--this or a prayer you make up:

Dear God, thank you for giving yourself to us at Christmas. Help us remember that you understand what we love and what we fear, and to see you in our lives. Amen.

Keep Thinking:

Throughout the season, keep looking for opportunities to talk about the birth of Jesus and pointing out ways God is with us.

LiFT with Teens or Adults...

Read the story...

Luke 1:26–58 - Mary's Experience

Discuss these questions:

- How would you have felt if you were in Mary's shoes?
- Why do you think Mary was so willing to go along with things? Are there clues from her song (the Magnificat) in vss. 46-55?

Read another passage...

Matthew 1:18–25 - Joseph's Dream

Discuss these questions:

- What did Joseph have to be afraid of?
- What do you think gave him the trust to move forward with Mary? What do you think he had to sacrifice to do that?

Read another passage...

Luke 2:1–20 - The Birth of Jesus

Discuss these questions:

- Why is it significant that Jesus is born in this way?
- Why would the news be shared first with shepherds? What would it have meant to them?

Read another passage...

Matthew 2:1–18 - Coming of the Magi

Discuss these questions:

- Why is it significant that they didn't find Jesus in the palace?
- Research the meaning of the gifts the magi bring.

Watch Christmas Movies!

There are some "kid" movies included in this list, but Christmas is a good time to experience God's action through the eyes and with the faith of a child.

- **Movies that focus on Jesus and the nativity:**
 - The Chosen: Season 1 - "The Shepherd" Christmas Special
 - The Chosen: Season 2 - "The Messengers" Christmas Special
 - The Star
 - The Nativity Story
- **Movies that focus on grace and love:**
 - The Grinch / How the Grinch Stole Christmas
 - Polar Express
 - A Charlie Brown Christmas
 - The Muppet Christmas Carol

Choose a few activities that fit you:

- Spend time looking at any nativities in your home. Think about the characters and what they might have been like. What would they have thought and experienced?
 - Consider how your nativity was made. What was the creator trying to convey in the way they made it and the characters?
 - When visiting friends or family, ask about their nativities. What stories are behind them? What do they love most about them? Use this as an opportunity to talk about Jesus birth with them!

- Sing or listen to favorite hymns or carols. Search YouTube for different versions of your favorite carols. Research online the origin of your favorite carols.

Make a Plan to Focus on Jesus

We focus a lot on kids, events, and shopping at Christmastime, and it can be easy to rush around and forget what's important. Be intentional and make plans to focus on God and how God is with you at Christmas. Consider these ideas:

- Attend worship on Christmas Eve, wherever you are. Hosanna! has worship at 5:00 and 7:00. Come again Christmas morning at 9:30!
- Don't just give gifts. Remind the recipients of the love behind the gift.
- Take time to share the Christmas story with grandkids, nieces, or nephews. Read it to them from a children's Bible, just tell them the story, or use a nativity set to share the story.
- Find ways to focus on people instead of stuff, just like God did when God was born in Jesus. Don't worry about making Christmas perfect or magical. The first Christmas wasn't. It was messy, and about love and relationship.

Pray together--this or a prayer you make up:

Dear God, thank you for giving yourself to us at Christmas. Help us remember that you understand what we love and what we fear, and to see you in our lives. Amen.

Keep Thinking:

Throughout the Christmas season, keep looking for opportunities to talk about the birth of Jesus and pointing out ways that God is with us.

What is LiFT?

Living in Faith Together is a monthly series of conversations and activities to grow your connection with God and others.

When do I LiFT?

We're encouraging you to gather the second Sunday of each month, but you can choose *any* day. Just be intentional

Who do I LiFT with?

Anyone and everyone! LiFT at home with kids, grandkids, or a spouse (or all of them!). Invite grown kids over or talk on the phone/online. Gather friends or neighbors over a snack. Join a group after worship the second Sunday of the month. Activities are listed by age, but you can do any of them.

COLORING PAGE

While coloring, think about when you've felt most helpless.
How might Jesus have experienced something similar?
How is God with you in your time of vulnerability?



*Some questions and activities from Advent and Christmas. Spark Sunday School
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