

Today's Suggested Schedule—July 2024, Week 1

Today's Bible Story: Tidings of Comfort and Joy (Shepherds and Angels) • *Luke 2:8-20*

Today's Bottom Line: Jesus brings joy to the world.

Monthly Memory Verse: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* Philippians 4:4 (ESV)

Monthly Virtue: Joy—Choosing to celebrate what God is doing

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Before kids arrive, take a few moments to pray for them. Pray for those who might visit your group for the first time. Reflect on your own personal, ordinary, and everyday moments. Take time to thank God for the joy you can find in those moments and others because of the Good News that God sent Jesus. Ask God to help the kids learn to find joy in their own ordinary moments too.

Check out our Pinterest page here <https://bit.ly/447HSZi> for a visual on some of the activities.

LARGE GROUP (35 minutes)

STORY: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways

WORSHIP: Inviting People to Respond to God

Welcome/Opener

Worship

Bible Story (Communicator Script)

Key Question

Prayer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration

Application Activity: Take a Snapshot

Bible Story Review: Bible Story Extension and Discussion Questions

Memory Verse Activity: Verses to Take with You

Prayer Activity: Make It Personal with Prayer

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

Parent Cue Card (Print or Email)

Devotionals for Kids

Parent Cue App

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Use this if kids have questions about following Jesus.

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word gospel. Clarify that the word gospel means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

- **A – ADMIT** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin. (*Romans 3:23, Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:9*)
- **B – BELIEVE** that Jesus is God's son and receive God's gift of forgiveness from sin. (*Acts 16:31; Acts 4:12; John 14:6, Ephesians 2:8-9*)
- **C – CONFESS** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (*Romans 10:9-10,13*)

If a child has expressed interest in following Jesus, please let the parents know so they can be a part of the conversation that their child is having about faith.

What Now?

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as the One who forgives your sins and makes it possible for you to know God, we are so proud of you! There is no greater single decision that you could make.

We believe that baptism is an important next step for you. Baptism is your way of telling your friends and family, “Hey, I'm a follower of Jesus!” If you're interested in learning more or participating in baptism, talk to a staff member about the next steps you should take.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Story Exploration

The Setting:

Discuss the humble circumstances of the shepherds. They were ordinary people, often overlooked, working the night shift in the fields.

Relate it to how God often brings His greatest messages and joy to the most unexpected places and people.

The Angel's Message:

Read verses 9-12. Discuss the initial reaction of the shepherds (fear) and how it turned into joy with the angel's message.

Question: Why do you think the angel's message brought such great joy to the shepherds?

The Angelic Choir:

Read verses 13-14. Imagine the scene of a multitude of angels praising God.

Question: How does the praise of the angels help us understand the significance of Jesus' birth and the joy it brings?

The Shepherds' Response:

Read verses 15-16. Discuss how the shepherds hurried to see Jesus and then spread the word about Him.

Question: What can we learn from the shepherds about responding to the good news of Jesus?

Sharing the Joy:

Read verses 17-20. Focus on how the shepherds shared the joy they found in Jesus with others and returned, glorifying God.

Question: How can we share the joy of Jesus with others in our daily lives?

Other Verses

- **Psalm 100:1-2** - This Psalm calls for joyful worship, akin to the shepherds' reaction to the angelic announcement and their worship of Jesus in the manger.
- **Nehemiah 8:10** - This verse emphasizes the joy that comes from the Lord, which is similar to the joy proclaimed by the angels and experienced by the shepherds at the birth of Jesus.
- **Luke 1:46-49** - Mary's song of praise (the Magnificat) parallels the joy and gratitude expressed by the shepherds and the angels at the birth of Jesus.
- **Isaiah 9:6-7** - This prophecy foretells the birth of Jesus, who will bring peace and establish an everlasting kingdom. The shepherds' encounter with the angels and the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 fulfill these prophetic words.
- **Micah 5:2** - Micah's prophecy points to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah. Luke 2 records Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, aligning with this Old Testament prophecy.
- **Philippians 2:6-8** - This passage highlights Jesus' humility, from His birth in a manger to His death on the cross, reflecting the humble circumstances of His birth as described in Luke 2.

1. Good News of Great Joy

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need: “Good News of Great Joy” Activity Page, Bible marked at Luke 2, and a variety of party items

What You Do:

- Open the Bible to Luke 2, or invite a volunteer to open it for you.
- Ask open-ended questions to help the kids recall as much of the Bible Story as possible. For example:
 - What do you remember most about today’s Bible Story?
 - What happened first? (*Pause.*) What happened next? etc.
 - How did the shepherds feel when they saw the angel?
 - How do you think the shepherds felt after they saw Baby Jesus? (*Pause.*) What makes you think that?
- Say: “We’re going to act out the Bible Story we heard today!”
- Assign kids to play the different parts: Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the angels, and sheep.
- Distribute the props and help kids put on the “costumes.” Possible uses for the items include:
 - Napkins as the shepherds’ headdresses
 - Plates as additional “sheep”
 - Party hats for angels to wear
 - Party glasses for Mary and Joseph
 - Be creative with the supplies. The random (even humorous) costumes and props will engage the kids’ brains and enhance their memory of the story!
- Position the shepherds, sheep, and angels on one side of your group area and “Mary” and “Joseph” on the other side of your group area.
- Read the “Good News of Great Joy” Activity Page and use it as a guide to help kids reenact the key events.
- If time allows, let the kids switch roles and dramatize the story again.

What You Say:

“God chose ordinary, everyday shepherds to share the most important message. EVER! What was that message? (*Invite responses like: that Baby Jesus was born, that God sent Jesus to be our Savior.*) Yes! The angels told the shepherds that God had sent the Savior! Wow! And after the shepherds saw Baby Jesus, they were SO filled with JOY that they shared the good news about Jesus with EVERYONE they met! Who can YOU share the good news about Jesus with? (*Invite responses.*)

[Make It Personal] (Tell kids who YOU’LL share the good news about Jesus with.) “Just like the shepherds, you can share the good news of God’s love. Even in your ordinary, everyday lives, you can be joyful because **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world!**”

* 2. Joy to the World!

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands-on experimentation and discovery

What You Need: No supplies

What You Do:

- Share that you're going to read a scenario below.
- Instruct the kids to listen to the entire scenario and make noise by clapping if they think the person in the scenario found or shared joy.
- Read the following scenarios and pause after each one:
 - When she finishes her work, Maria draws a picture for a friend.
 - Elijah hums his favorite song while he waits for the bus.
 - Theo thinks about a Bible verse when he's doing his chores.
 - Wrenly smiles and says, "Good morning," to her teacher.
 - Carter holds the door open for someone and smiles.
 - Katarina dances with her little brother.
- Remind kids to make noise if the kid found or shared joy in the scenario. (All of them did!)
- Continue with additional scenarios.
 - Add scenarios that are meaningful for your unique group.

What You Say:

"After the shepherds saw Baby Jesus, they were filled with so much joy that they went out into the streets of Bethlehem and told EVERYONE they ran into that the Savior had been born! Wow!

"And you know what? You can ALWAYS choose to focus on the joyful news the shepherds shared—that God sent JESUS! God loves us SO MUCH that . . . Who did God send? (*Invite responses.*) Jesus is God's Son, and God sent Jesus to be our Savior!

"Jesus showed us how to love God and love others in any situation. When you remember that, you can share this good news of God's love and spread a little joy, just like the shepherds because **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world!**"

3. Be Joyful

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need: “Be Joyful” Activity Page, Bibles, tape

NOTE: If your group space allows, prepare supplies for two or three teams. Prepare a string and set of cards for each team. If space is limited, prepare one set of supplies and time each team during the activity.

What You Do:

- Give each kid a Bible.
- Together, look up Philippians 4:4 using the Bible Navigation Tips below.

Finding verses with kindergartners: Guide kids to open the Bibles to the marked page. Point to the word *Philippians* at the top of the page as you say “Philippians” aloud. Then guide kids to find the big number 4 on the page. Explain that this is the chapter number. Finally, guide them to look under the big 4 for the little 4; this is the verse number. Tell them to leave their finger on the verse as you read the verse aloud. Then lead everyone to say the verse together.

Finding verses with 1st graders: Guide them to open their Bibles to the front and find the table of contents. (Hold up a Bible opened to the table of contents to show the kids what the page looks like.) When the kids find the table of contents, lead them to find Philippians in the list under “New Testament.” You can help by telling them that Philippians starts with the letters P-H. When the kids find Philippians, lead them to look at the page number beside the word. Explain that the number tells them on what page they can find Philippians. Help the kids find the page. When they find Philippians, explain that the big numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. Help them find chapter 4. Explain that the small numbers are verse numbers. Help them find verse 4 in chapter 4.

- Read the verse to the kids, inviting them to read or repeat after you.
- Say: “One way to think about joy is CHOOSING to celebrate what God is doing. When we choose to focus on God and what God is doing, we can have joy when we’re happy, when we’re sad, or even when we’re confused.”
- Divide your group into two (or three) teams.
- Instruct the groups to line up at one end of the group area.
- At the other end of your group space, opposite each team, show kids where to tape pennants to.
- Scatter a set of the pennants from the “Be Joyful” Activity Page on the floor next to the wall.
- Instruct the first kid on each team to run to their team’s pennants, find the first one, tape it to the wall, run back to their team, and tag the next kid.
 - Point out the numbers on each pennant if kids need help putting the verse in order.
 - Add fun by guiding kids to move in joyful ways: hopping, dancing, running while clapping, etc.
- Continue to play until each group attaches all its pennants.
- Lead the kids in saying the verse like a team cheer!
- Repeat the “cheer” a few times.

What You Say:

“Jesus brought joy to the world, and Jesus STILL brings joy to the world. When we choose to celebrate that God loves us SO MUCH and sent Jesus to be our Savior, it can fill us with JOY! So remember, you can be joyful because God sent Jesus to be our Savior and **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world!**”

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Say:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember?
- How do they help me trust and love God?

What You Need: No supplies

What You Do:

- *Encourage kids to clap as their "noise maker"*
- Lead kids to use their noisemakers as you sing "Joy to the World" to the group.
 - It might work best to repeat just the opening lines a couple of times: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!"
- After the mayhem and joy, encourage the kids to share God's love and spread joy!
- Close the group time in prayer.

What You Say:

"Dear God, thank You SO MUCH for sending Jesus to be our Savior. Help us always choose to focus on the joyful news that You sent Jesus. Whether it's an exciting or ordinary day, help us always celebrate the truth that **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world!** We love You and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

As adults arrive to pick up, encourage kids to tell one way they'll share joy with others. Provide prompts if a kid is stuck for an idea.

GETTING READY

Here's everything you need to know to get ready for this week.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Create a safe place to connect and learn how the Bible Story applies to real-life experiences, through interactive activities and discussion questions.

(Choose as many of these activities as you like.)

** If you don't have time to do all these activities, be sure to do activity #2.*

1. Good News of Great Joy

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need:

- Print the "Good News of Great Joy" Activity Page on paper, one for each Small Group
- Bible marked at Luke 2
- Party items, such as: party hats, party glasses, plates, napkins, or anything else!, at least one item for each kid
 - *NOTE: Kids will use party items as "costumes" or props. Be creative with the supplies. The random (even humorous) costumes and props will engage the kids' brains and enhance their memory of the story!*

*** 2. Joy to the World!**

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands-on experimentation and discovery

What You Need:

- No supplies

3. Be Joyful

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need:

NOTE: If your group space allows, prepare supplies for two or three teams. Prepare a string and set of cards for each team. If space is limited, prepare one set of supplies and time each team during the activity.

- Print the "Be Joyful" Activity Pages on cardstock and cut apart, one to three sets for each Small Group
- Bibles (for Kindergarteners, mark Bibles at Philippians 4), one for each kid
- Tape

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Need:

- No supplies