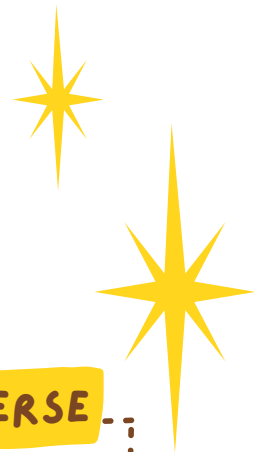




THE BIRTH OF JOHN



MAIN POINT

God sent His messenger to prepare the way for Jesus

God always keeps His promises

MEMORY VERSE

Isaiah 9v2a "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

BIBLE STORY

Our Bible story is found in Luke chapter 1

An angel appears to Zechariah, from the family of Levi the priests, and proclaims that he and his wife Elizabeth will bear a son. Zechariah does not believe Gabriel, but God brings about the miracle. The messenger is born.

ACTIVITIES

Game - Make way

Craft - paper trumpet

Activity - Dominoes

Prayer - Light of the world

LEARNING

- God fulfilled the words of Isaiah and Malachi in sending John to prepare the way for the Lord
- God remembers all His promises
- John was the messenger... according to the prophets, next the Lord Himself would come! How would He appear...?



STORY

BIBLE STORY

Our Bible story is found in **Luke 1v5-25** and **Luke 1v57-80**

An angel appears to Zechariah, from the family of Levi the priests, and proclaims that he and his wife Elizabeth will bear a son. Zechariah does not believe Gabriel, but God brings about the miracle.

EQUIPMENT

Suggested props:

An angel costume (e.g. tinsel on the head and white robe), Zechariah costume (e.g. tunic + tea towel), Elizabeth costume (e.g. tunic + tea towel), doll to be John, a curtain/sheet, a gold bowl to be the incense bowl. You could ask two tall, sensible children to hold the curtain up at the right time or an adult could do this.

INSTRUCTIONS

This story is told by a narrator, which should be an adult who can direct the children as they read. The children then mime the story (act without making sounds/speaking). There are 3 specific parts for the children, the angel, Zechariah and Elizabeth. The rest of the children will be the crowd praying outside the temple and then the neighbours and relatives in Judea.

Suggested layout:

Have the narrator stand in the middle and the children sitting in front of them facing the narrator. Have Zechariah and Elizabeth begin to the narrators left and the angel and curtain begin to the narrators right. The crowd of children do not have to move in the story. You might find it easier to keep them sitting in their place and have them act where they are seated.



THE BIRTH OF JOHN PART 1

Narrator:

Long ago in the times of the Romans, there was a king named Herod ruling in Jerusalem. While Herod was a king of sorts, he was not the true King from the line of David who would set the people free, he did not honour God and he could only rule if the Romans let him. God's people, the Israelites were looking forward to the day when God would fulfil the promises given through the prophets.

Isaiah the prophet had said that God would send His light into the land of darkness. Jeremiah said that God's true King would gather the people back from the lands they had been taken as slaves to and bring them back to God. Malachi had said that the priests would be washed clean from their sin when God visited His temple in Jerusalem and offered a perfect sacrifice for sin. Before this happened, Malachi said, a messenger would come.

Hmm... but when would that be? The people had been waiting hundreds of years...

Then one day, a man called Zechariah who was married to Elizabeth and both of whom were in the priestly family, the Levites, went to Jerusalem. [E+Z walk from side of the stage to the other] They loved God and served Him faithfully, but they were old and still had not had any children.

It was Zechariah's turn to go into the Holy Place to offer incense on the golden altar. Many people were outside praying as he went in behind the curtain to the Holy Place. [Z goes through the curtain carrying the bowl while the rest of the children kneel and put their hands together in prayer]

Suddenly an angel appeared beside the golden altar! [Angel appear!] Zechariah was terrified! [Z look terrified!]

But the angel said "Zechariah, don't be afraid. Your prayer has been heard by God. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son. You will name him John and you will be very happy.

Lots of people will be happy because he is born. He will be a great man and will be holy to the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit and will go before the Lord, making the people ready before the Lord comes."

Zechariah said to the angel "But how can I know that this is true? I'm old and my wife is old!"



JOHN'S BIRTH PART 2

The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand before the presence of God and God sent me to tell you this good news. Now because you did not believe me, you will be silent, unable to speak until the child is born."

Outside the temple, the people were wondering what was taking Zechariah so long. Then Zechariah came outside but he could not speak. He could only make signs to them. [Z come back through the curtain and make signs to the rest of the group] and they realised that he had seen a vision of some kind in the Temple.

Zechariah and Elizabeth went home [Z+E walk back across the stage]

Later Zechariah's wife Elizabeth did become pregnant! It was a wonderful miracle! But she hid herself for 5 months in her home, giving thanks to God. [E raises her arms in thanks to God] When it was time for Elizabeth to give birth, she had a boy, just as the angel Gabriel had said. [E holds the doll in her arms]

All her neighbours and relatives came to praise God with her. They were all very happy! [The rest of the children smile and wave to E and the baby]

When the baby was eight days old, the boy was circumcised. The people wanted to name the boy Zechariah after this father, but Elizabeth said "No! He will be called John." The people were confused and looked at Zechariah, who still could not speak. Zechariah asked for a table to write on and wrote down "His name is John". Immediately Zechariah could speak again. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and sang a wonderful song of praise!

"Let us thank the Lord, the God of Israel.

God has come to help his people and has given them freedom.

God has given us a powerful Saviour from the family of God's servant David.

God said He will do this through His holy prophets who lived long ago.

Now you my child will be called a prophet of the Most High God.

You will go first before the Lord to prepare the people for His coming.

A new day from Heaven will shine upon us.

God will help those who live in darkness.

He will lead us into the path of peace."

The people were amazed at what had happened and wondered what would happen next...





ACTIVITIES



ACTIVITIES

- Game - Make way
- Craft - paper trumpet
- Discussion - Dominoes
- Prayer - Thanksgiving

PAPER TRUMPET

You will need: paper worksheets, tape or glue, scissors and colouring pens or pencils

1. Each child colours in a worksheet
2. Cut out and stick the trumpet together
3. March around trumpeting "prepare the way for the Lord!"



MAKE WAY

see next page

PRAYER

Thank you for keeping your promise to send a messenger to prepare the way for the Lord.
Thank you that you always keep your promises.
Thank you for sharing your beautiful story with us. Give us faith and help us to understand your story in the name of Jesus. Amen.

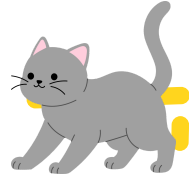
DOMINOES

See next page



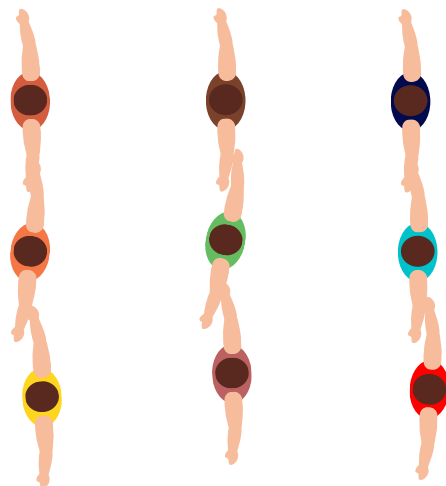
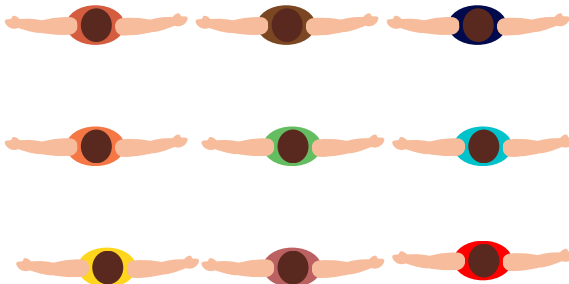


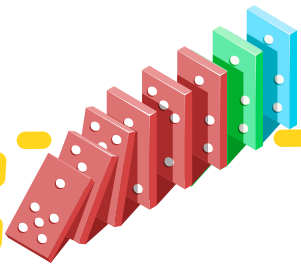
MAKE WAY - CAT AND MOUSE



1. Have the children stand in a grid pattern except for two children who are the cat and the mouse
2. The children forming the grid must face one wall and have their arms out to the sides to form channels
3. When you shout "make way!", they all turn 90 degrees to face a different wall, making channels in the perpendicular direction.
4. Practice that a couple of times so that they get the idea
5. Then send the mouse to start running along the channels
6. After giving the mouse a head start, send the cat to chase the mouse
7. The cat and mouse cannot break through the lines
8. Whenever you shout turn, the grid turns and the cat and mouse choose which way they want to run up or down the line
9. When the cat catches the mouse, switch to a new cat and mouse

Alternative way to play: the cat and mouse have to weave under the arms of the children making the lines and can still only travel in the direction of the line





DOMINOES



Suggested prop: a set of dominoes or jenga blocks and a Bible timeline. If you can, then add labels to some ("Creation" "Israel" "Isaiah" "Jeremiah" "Malachi" "John" "God")

Ask the kids to work together to stand the jenga blocks or dominoes on their ends in a line, close enough together so that if you knock the first one over, the whole line will fall down. If you are able to, label some of the blocks beforehand and encourage the kids to think about where they come in the flow of God's story from Creation to the end of the Old Testament and hold onto a block labelled John and a block labelled God to be added later. The labels you might want to add beforehand are "Creation" "Israel" "Isaiah" "Jeremiah" "Malachi" and have a number of blank ones to put in between.

The stories of the Bible are all connected. God writes one beautiful story from beginning to end and each part has its place, so that the story can move forward, a bit like these blocks each standing in their place in the line.

When Zechariah and Elizabeth were alive, they had all of what we call the Old Testament, that's the first and biggest part of the Bible. They knew that God loved and created the world. They knew that God had chosen a people for Himself, the Israelites, to be lights in the world but that they had turned from God. They knew from Isaiah that the people walking in darkness would see what? (A great light)



And from Jeremiah that God's family who were scattered across the earth would one day do what? (Come home to God)



And from Malachi that God would clean up the priesthood (the Levites, which is Zechariah and Elizabeth's family) by sending who? (First a messenger and then God Himself would come to His temple.)



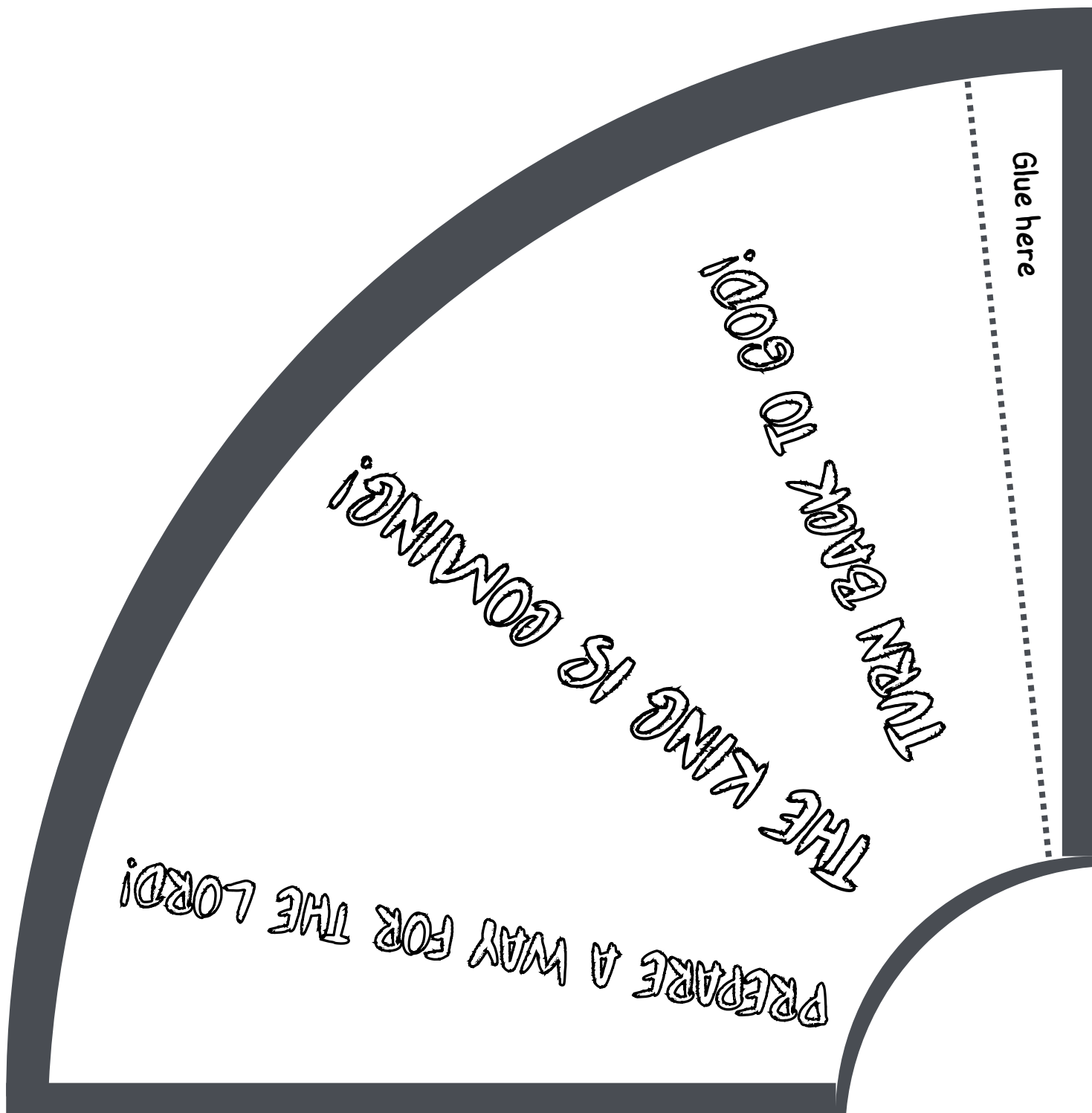
In the line of events... where does John come? Who is he? (The messenger, place him at the end of the line after the prophets)



If the messenger had come, then who would Zechariah and Elizabeth expect to come next? (God! Put the block labelled God after John)

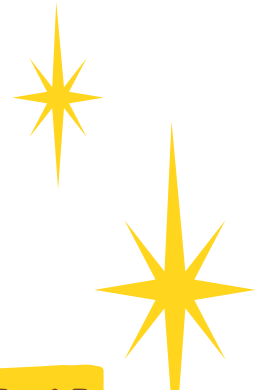


Isaiah 9v2a "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."





THE BIRTH OF JESUS



MAIN POINT

Jesus is God come to Earth

Jesus is the King on David's throne

MEMORY VERSE

Isaiah 9v2a "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

BIBLE STORY

Our Bible story is found in **Luke 1v26-38** and **Luke 2v1-40**

Gabriel speaks to Mary and tells her that she will conceive and give birth to the promised King! Angels sing for joy, Shepherds run and see and Simeon and Anna rejoice as the Lord visits His temple in the form of a baby.

ACTIVITIES

Game - Musical statues

Craft - Biscuit decorations

Discussion - Dominoes

Prayer - Mary's faith

LEARNING

- God fulfilled His promises
- Jesus is the new born King!
- Jesus is God!
- Mary believed that God would fulfil His promises



STORY

BIBLE STORY

Our Bible story is found in **Luke 1v26-38** and **Luke 2v1-40**

Gabriel speaks to Mary and tells her that she will conceive and give birth to the promised King! Angels sing for joy, Shepherds run and see and Simeon and Anna rejoice as the Lord visits His temple in the form of a baby.

EQUIPMENT

If you have nativity costumes, they will add to the fun and drama of the story.

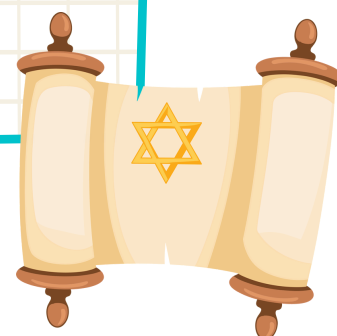
Characters in the story are:
Mary, Joseph, the Angel Gabriel, (Elizabeth),
Shepherds, angels, Simeon, Anna, baby Jesus

INSTRUCTIONS

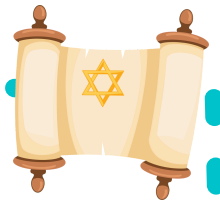
This story is told using the nativity stories from Matthew and Luke. We start with an imaginative backstory of what it might have been like for Mary before the angel Gabriel appears to her. Most of the clues for this are found in the gospels.

Have an adult read the narration and the children act out the story in mime. Extra children can be shepherds or angels or the crowds at the temple.

It is a fairly substantial retelling of the nativity, so you will probably want to give half of your session over to it.



JESUS' BIRTH PART 1



Narrator:

Today's story is very special. We tell it every year at Christmas time! But this time, we are going to start with a bit of imagination. We are going to think about what Mary's life might have been like before the wonderful events of the Bible and then we are going to tell the story using what the Bible tells us about what happened next...

Elizabeth, who we met last week, had a cousin who live in Nazareth. She was a young lady called Mary [Mary stand up] and was due to be married to a man called Joseph, whose great-great-great-great... grandfather was King David [Joseph stand up]. Mary lived a simple life. Joseph was a carpenter [pretend to cut wood] and they were never going to be rich or powerful, but Mary was happy. Joseph was a good man. He worked hard with his hands and he followed Yahweh (their God) and worshipped every Sabbath day (that's a Saturday) at the local synagogue (that's a bit like a church, but for Jews). They both loved God with all their hearts and hoped that one day they would have children who would love God too.

Last Sabbath, at the synagogue, someone read from the scroll of Malachi. They talked about how God would come to His temple once more. Oh, how Mary longed to see that day! She believed the prophets, though she could not imagine how it would all happen.

Then one day while she was by herself...An angel appeared to her! [Angel Gabriel stand and pretend to speak]

He said "God has blessed you! He is with you!"

Mary must have looked scared and confused, because the angel said, "Do not be afraid Mary! God is very pleased with you! You will become pregnant and give birth to a Son. You will call Him Jesus and He will be the Son of the Most High God. God will make Him King like His father David and He will rule over the house of Jacob (that's a way of saying, all the tribes of Israel, God's chosen people) forever. His kingdom will never end!"

"How can this happen?" asked Mary. "I'm not married yet."

"The Holy Spirit will overshadow you" said Gabriel. That's what the Holy Spirit did at the beginning of creation too. He hovered over the chaotic waters and created life. Now God was going to hover over Mary and create life. A miracle baby! How wonderful!

Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it happen to me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary did become pregnant, just as the angel had said she would. She went to see her cousin Elizabeth, who was very old and had not had any children. [Mary walk across the stage] Mary found that Elizabeth too was pregnant with a miracle baby! The angel had told her that too. After the miracle child John was born, Mary went back home. [Mary walk back again] How she was going to explain to Joseph what was happening, she had no idea!





JESUS' BIRTH PART 2

[Joseph stand up ready to greet Mary] Joseph was excited to see Mary again! But when he realised that she was pregnant and that the child was not his, he was heart broken. [Joseph pretend to cry] He thought that Mary had betrayed him. It would be very dangerous for Mary in that time and place to have a child before she was married. Other people might hurt her for betraying Joseph and Joseph still cared for Mary. He did not want her to be hurt, so he was going to break off the marriage quietly. He fell asleep full of worry [Joseph go to sleep].

An angel appeared to him in his dream [Angel appear]. "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife." The angel said. "The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. You must name Him Jesus and He will save His people from their sins."

When Joseph woke up, he was so relieved that Mary had not betrayed him! He believed that Mary had been visited by an angel just as he had been and that the baby was from God. He married Mary and looked after her and adopted the baby as his own son. [Joseph wake up and take Mary home]

Then a law was announced saying that everyone had to travel to their family town to be counted. Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, where their ancestor David was born. So they had to trek to Bethlehem. Mary was almost ready to give birth and it was a difficult journey. [Mary and Joseph travel] When they got to Bethlehem, the guest rooms were all full of other relatives coming home to be counted. No one knew that Mary was carrying the son of God inside her. If they had, they might have given her the best room in Bethlehem, but as it was, Mary gave birth among the poor. The poor had one room houses and the animals were brought into the house at night to keep warm. That is where Mary gave birth to God's precious Son. Among the noise of animals and the smell of straw. Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling cloth and laid Him in one of the animal's feeding troughs called a manger. The Son of God was born!

Outside on a hillside, there were shepherds watching over their flock. [Shepherds sit in a semi circle] Suddenly an angel appeared to them and a bright light from Heaven shone around them! [Angel appear]

"Do not be afraid!" The angel said. "I bring you good news of great joy! Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born! You will find him wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

[Other angels appear] Then thousands of angels filled the sky and began praising God singing "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth, peace be given to those He is pleased with!"

The angels left and went back to Heaven. [Shepherds run to Bethlehem] The shepherds were so excited that they sprang to their feet and ran as fast as they could to Bethlehem. When they got to the town, they asked where the baby was born. A woman pointed to a poor peasant home at the end of the street. [Shepherds tip toe towards Mary and Joseph] With hearts filled with wonder they crept forward and waited a moment outside the door. They knocked gently.



JESUS' BIRTH PART 3

As they stepped inside, their hearts hammered in their chests. They stepped quietly forward and knelt on the mud floor among the straw. Their eyes were fixed on a little bundle wrapped in cloth, lying in a manger, whose tiny chest rose and fell with sleepy breaths.

Mary and Joseph looked very tired, but happy. They were surprised to have visitors. Joseph asked, "Hello, have you come to meet the baby?"

"Yes," whispered the shepherds. "Angels appeared in the sky and told us that He is the Saviour of the world. They told us He would bring peace to all people with whom God is pleased."

Mary and Joseph were stunned. For a long while, no one spoke. They just waited and watched the baby, letting the angel's words sink in. Then the shepherds described the singing and the light from Heaven and Joseph and Mary told them that His name was Jesus.

"Jesus," the shepherds repeated thoughtfully, "what a wonderful name!"

The shepherds left praising God and telling everyone who would listen to them what had happened.



A few days later, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple to offer sacrifices as Moses had instructed them in the Bible. When they were at the temple, an elderly man called Simeon appeared and took Jesus into his arms. Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the promised Saviour. When Simeon held Jesus, he burst into praise, saying, "Lord you are King over all! Now I, your servant can go in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation. It is a light for all nations!"

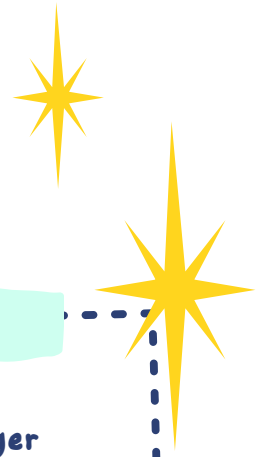
Mary and Joseph were amazed at what Simeon had said and they treasured his words. Then an elderly woman called Anna appeared. She worshipped God day and night in the temple. When she saw Jesus, she rejoiced, thanking God for Him. She told everyone who would listen to her about the child and that God was going to free Jerusalem and rescue God's people.

Mary wondered at all these things and treasured them in her heart. The angels words, Elizabeth's son, Joseph's dream, the shepherds visit, Simeon and Anna's prophecies... Truly, God had come to His temple and He would rescue His people!





ACTIVITIES



ACTIVITIES

Game - Musical statues

Craft - Biscuit Decorating

Discussion - Dominoes

Prayer - Mary's faith

BISCUIT DECORATING

You will need: biscuits or ginger bread, Christmassy sprinkles, icing pens

Each child decorates a biscuit



DISCUSSION

Dominoes discussion - see next page

MARY'S FAITH

Mary believed what the angel Gabriel said and she treasured up all the messages about her Son, Jesus. Pray for one another that we would treasure God's words like Mary did and that we would believe, like Mary, that God will fulfil all of His promises.



MUSICAL STATUES

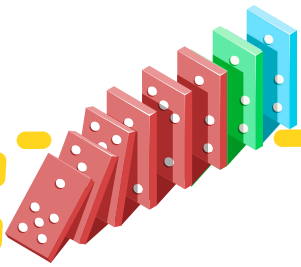
You will need: Music

The angels burst into song when Jesus was born! We can dance and sing for joy too!

Play musical statues to worshipful Christmas music.

When the music stops, stand as still as a statue. When the music plays, dance and sing!





DOMINOES



Suggested prop: a set of dominoes or jenga blocks and a Bible timeline. If you can, then add labels to some ("Creation" "Israel" "Isaiah" "Jeremiah" "Malachi" "John" "God")

This is a recap of the activity they did last week to help them understand how the Bible makes it plain when you follow the prophets that Jesus is not just a man, but is God become a man.

Ask the kids to work together to stand the jenga blocks or dominoes on their ends in a line, close enough together so that if you knock the first one over, the whole line will fall down. Keep the block labelled "God" back, but get the children to put the rest of the labelled blocks in order (as pictured below).

Last week we talked about how the different parts of the Bible are all connected in one big story of how God is saving the world. Do you remember where the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Malachi come in the story? (Between the kings like David and Solomon and the New Testament. Isaiah was during the last kings of Judah before the temple was destroyed and the people of Judah were taken into exile. Jeremiah was during exile, when the temple was destroyed. Malachi was after the people had been brought back to Jerusalem from exile, the temple had been rebuilt, but things were still not right.) What was the special message we learnt from Isaiah? Jeremiah? Malachi? (I: The people walking in darkness would see a great light. J: The people taken captive into exile would come home to God when a king sits again on David's throne. M: The priesthood will be washed clean of sin when the Lord visits His temple. Before the Lord visits His temple, a messenger will appear)



If John is the messenger, preparing the way for God to come and visit His temple, who was due to come next? God



Read the angel Gabriel's words again. Who does he say that Mary's baby will be? (Luke 1v30-35)



God had finally come! He came in the form of a baby! It is no wonder that the angels sang for joy at His birth... "Glory to God in the Highest! And on earth, let there be peace to the people who please God!" (Luke 1v14) How much God must love people, that He would become one of us to save us!

