



The Light of the World is Jesus

- Large and Small Group Sessions for Kindergarten-Grade 3 and Grades 4-8
- 2 Dramas
- Songs
- Complete Christmas Program
- Crafts, Games, and Other Photocopiable Pages

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Walk With Me

Grades K-8

Year 1, Christmas: The Light of the World Is Jesus

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How to Use This Book

“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

John 1:9, NRSV

Christmas is an exciting time of year. It’s a time when we worship and focus our thoughts on Jesus, the true Light. It’s a time when we give glory to God for giving us Jesus. Our old life in the darkness has been pushed away, and we now live in God’s light—all praise to our LORD!

This Christmas, all of the lights and stars that we see will help us turn our eyes toward Jesus as we celebrate his birth. The goal of this book is to teach children about Jesus, the Light of the world. We pray that the leaders, children, and all who participate in the sessions and in the Christmas program will come to know Jesus. To help meet this goal, one main image and theme will shine brightly throughout the session plans—the image of light and the corresponding theme: Jesus brings light into this dark world.

This book offers a variety of ideas and options for large group sessions, small group sessions, and a Christmas program. Use the ideas and options that work best with your church school. Ideally, the large group session would take about 15-20 minutes; then the children would break up into their small groups for about 30-40 minutes. You may also need to schedule an extra practice time or two if your church is planning on doing the Christmas program.

Finding time to do everything in this book may be difficult, so choose what you think your group will be able to handle. You will need one copy of this book for each of your leaders. As the purchaser of this book you are granted permission to photocopy the drama and the patterns and activities on reproducible pages 47-52 and 73-94.

Getting Started

Because these materials suggest a different format and approach than the regular *Walk With Me* units, you’ll want to spend some extra time planning and preparing to teach these sessions. Although we realize that each church situation is unique, you may find some of the following suggestions helpful:

- In the early fall, appoint a small committee to read through this book and decide which of the many suggestions would work best for your church.
- After the committee makes its recommendations, recruit actors, song leaders, accompanists, and teachers as necessary.
- Recruit volunteers who are willing to gather materials for these special sessions. Give them plenty of time for this task (a month or two) since they will likely want to ask the congregation to save and/or gather some of the items.
- Schedule rehearsals for the drama team.
- If you’re planning a Christmas program, schedule a large final rehearsal that includes drama, singing, recitation, and so on.

Large Group Sessions and Christmas Program

The large group session materials in this book contain a drama for each week and a list of songs to learn as a whole group. (All the songs are included on the CD that comes with this book.) Each drama takes about eight minutes and requires five to seven actors. The costumes and sets may be as simple or as elaborate as you like. (See suggestions on pages 10-11 and 30-31).

You'll probably want to choose either middle schoolers or a team of adults or older teens to play these roles. Either way, be sure to schedule ample rehearsal time.

The dramas and songs can be used not only for the large group session but also for a Christmas program. You'll find a sample program along with ideas for organizing and producing it on pages 69-71.

Small Group Sessions

Small group sessions will give you the opportunity to help apply the story to the children's lives. If you are unable to present the story in a large group setting, you can still use the drama or another form of the story in the small group setting. It's a story you want children to hear!

Each small group session opens with a Hello step designed to catch the children's interest and get them thinking about the lesson's theme.

Next comes the Know step (telling the story). If the children have already heard the story in the large group session, you'll want to use this time to review the story with them. If you did not participate in a large group session, either use the drama or another interesting way to present the story to the children (see sessions for suggestions).

The Grow step will help children understand what the story means for their lives, and the Show step will guide them to respond to what they learned in this session.

The small group session includes many options for activities and crafts that leaders (or the committee you appointed earlier) should carefully consider well ahead of teaching these materials. **Once you've decided which crafts and activities to use, you may want to appoint two or more volunteers (possibly parents of children in the group) who will spend the time needed to gather materials, cut out patterns, and assemble all the items you'll need.**

Above all, we hope you'll enjoy planning these Christmas sessions. We trust that you and your congregation will see Christ this Christmas! The Light of the World has come—let us rejoice!

Scheduling Rehearsals

1. Let cast members know rehearsal times when you ask them to participate. Stress that agreeing to participate means making a commitment to come to all practices.
2. Schedule two to four well-planned all-cast rehearsals.
3. Request that all lines be memorized by the first rehearsal.
4. Build community at rehearsals. Pray, practice, and enjoy a snack together.
5. If you are presenting the dramas as part of a Christmas program, use your final rehearsal to go through the entire program, including music, recitations, and so on.

Tailoring Your Sessions to the Ways Children Learn

How do children learn? The answer to that question can be almost as varied as the children in your group. Some learn best through words. Others through music. Still others through nature or through movement.

Sessions in the *Walk With Me* curriculum try to respect the many ways children learn. *Walk With Me* sessions include a wide range of activities that speak to children with the following types of intelligence (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Within each session, the icons below highlight the learning styles represented by each activity. As you teach, you'll begin to get a sense for how the children in your group learn best. Children who are



Word Smart

learn best through verbal activities (listening, reading, or speaking), including discussions, worksheets, writing, reading, storytelling, and word games.



Number Smart

learn best by exploring patterns and relationships through activities such as problem solving, logical puzzles or games, making charts and graphs, or putting things in sequence.



Picture Smart

learn best by visualizing concepts. These kids enjoy viewing maps, slides, pictures, videos, and diagrams; making jigsaw puzzles; and expressing their ideas with shape, color, and design.



Body Smart

learn best by using their bodies, acting things out, using puppets, moving—anything hands-on.



Music Smart

learn best through sound, music, and rhythm—playing musical instruments, writing their own songs and raps, listening to recordings, singing, and so on.



People Smart

learn best through doing things with others, cooperating and working in small or large groups, role playing, conversations, brainstorming, and other interactive exercises.



Self Smart

learn best by working independently through such things as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, and reflecting.



Earth Smart

learn best through activities connected to living things and natural phenomena, through nature walks, examining plants and animals, nature experiments, and activities that focus on ecology.

—The ideas on these pages are based on material from the following resources: *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, © 2000, and a chart prepared by Donald L. Griggs, Livermore, California.



1

Large Group Session

The Light of the World Is Born

Scripture

Luke 2:1-20

Memory Challenge

John 1:9

Focus

God gave us Jesus to be our Savior. Jesus is our Light.

WORDSearch

Think About It

In Luke’s version of the Christmas story we’re immediately struck by the humble, almost forlorn, setting that surrounds Jesus’ birth. The context suggests that he’s born in an area that also housed animals—the place has a manger, a feeding trough for cattle. Perhaps Jesus was born in a stable or, more likely, a cave. Even today Bedouin people in the Judean wilderness pen their sheep and other animals in caves dotting the rocky terrain. Luke draws our attention to the fact that there’s no royal fanfare, no joyful singing, and, most notably, not even a decent place to lay our Savior’s head.

Pray About It

Have you thought about the way Christ’s light exposes your heart, making it visible and vulnerable? Pray about it. Have you praised God for shining forgiveness into your heart? Give thanks! The apostle Paul reminds us: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Jesus was born to turn your darkness into light. Give glory to God.

But then the scene shifts, almost imperceptibly at first: “Oh, by the way,” Luke continues, “there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby.” Adding more of that same mundane quality to the tale, since shepherds were held in such low regard. Poor and homeless, sleeping out under the stars, they had a reputation for stretching the truth. What does it all add up to? To a tiny little Child born in a manger and some vagabond shepherds grazing nearby. A forgettable scene—there’s nothing spectacular about it.

The scene shifts once more, this time radically so, into another gear altogether—high gear, heavenly gear, moving at the speed of light. An angel of the Lord appears, an angel shining with God’s glory. Glory suddenly breaks into this drab, mundane world. Light bursts into the darkness. We start to ask,

“Why on earth here, to these lowly shepherds? Why in this darkest place, at this darkest hour, does light blaze?”

The shepherds can’t understand it. They’re blown away by it, blown to their knees in fear and amazement. “What does heavenly light have to do with us shepherds? Look who’s picking on us now! It’s not enough that our own people look down on us; now God’s going to start picking on us too!” But instantly, there’s assurance from above. “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news!” (Luke 2:10). How is that possible? There can’t be

Tell About It

Psalm 27 begins: “The LORD is my light and my salvation.” Children and young people need to know and experience what it means that the light of Jesus shines in their lives. Help them to imagine how great it feels when they stumble around in the darkness and suddenly the light comes on. They need to learn the contrast of the darkness of their sin so suddenly dispelled by the light of God’s forgiveness. Then they’ll know why Jesus’ birth is such delightful good news.

any good news for people with such sorry reputations. How can there be good news for people living in the dark? But there's no mistaking what the angel said: "Good news! Great joy for all the people!"

The light of glory bursts into the darkness to announce the good news that Jesus, our Savior and Lord, has arrived on our dark and sullen planet. He's the one the shepherds had been waiting for. He's the one for whom the whole creation, especially Mary, had been groaning. Now the labor has ended. Jesus is born. Living, breathing, saving grace has broken in like a searchlight in the darkness. At last: good news for the shepherds, for all the downtrodden, and for all us sinners. The Savior has begun his search in earnest. The Christ is lighting the way for lost men and women. The Lord Jesus lies in a feeding trough, ready to be thrown to the wolves so he can save his sheep.

The scene shifts one more time. As the angel points the way to the manger, the whole sky lights up with heavenly worshipers. Now the shepherds must make their way to the humble manger. It's now no longer common. It's holy. Even in the dark, it's a place of heavenly light. They leave it glorifying and praising God. What other kind of response could we expect from those who have come face to face with the salvation of our God?

One final note: much later on in Luke, Jesus tells us in his own words why he came. He came to seek and to save the lost (19:10). Think about it. When those angels lit up the sky in the area near the manger, what were Mary and Joseph pondering? Perhaps they wondered whether the new day was breaking too early. But God knew it wasn't. It came just in time to seek and to save the lost—to seek and to save you and me.

Planning the Session

You are in charge of presenting the story of Jesus' birth to all the children in your church school—from kindergarten through eighth grade. What a challenge! How can you best bring the joy of the Light of the world into the lives of these children and young teens who may have already seen too much of the world's darkness? The outline and suggestions that follow may help you plan and schedule the 15-20 minutes you have together. You'll need to decide which suggestions would work most effectively for your group. Then set the plan in motion!

A possible schedule for your session might look like this:

- Singing (5-10 minutes)
- Readers' theater (2 minutes)
- Drama (8 minutes)

If you are planning to present a Christmas program, you may want to use the large group session each week (in addition to other rehearsals as needed) to help the children prepare. You'll find suggestions for program planning on pages 69-71.

The suggestions in this large group session assume that you'll be telling the story of Jesus' birth to children and young teens and preparing them to respond to it in their small groups.

Singing

You may want to ask someone with musical gifts to lead the singing and teach new songs to the children during these two weeks. Be sure to share the tips in the box "Introducing a New Song" with that person.

However, most of the songs you choose for these two sessions will likely be favorite Christmas carols that children know and love. The following songs (included on pages 53-67 and on the CD) are among those you may want to sing. They were selected for their ties to the themes of the drama and the Christmas story.



Note: If you are planning to use these songs as part of a Christmas program, you will probably want to start teaching them to the group already in early fall so that they know them well by the time you present the program in December.

- “I Am the Light of the World” (p. 53; CD, track 1)
- “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light” (p. 54; CD, track 2)
- “Mary’s Boy Child” (p. 56; CD, track 3)
- “That Boy-Child of Mary” (p. 60; CD, track 4)
- “Glory to God” (p. 61; CD, track 5)
- “Rock the Baby” (p. 63; CD, track 6)
- “We Three Kings” (p. 66; CD, track 7)
- “What Can I Give Him” (p. 67; CD, track 8)
- You may also wish to include these favorites: “Away in a Manger,” “Silent Night,” “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

Introducing a New Song

The way you introduce a new song is crucial. Of course you’ll want to know it well yourself. But you’ll also want to take time to think through how you’ll introduce it to your group. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind:

- Many kids learn mostly by rote and repetition. Listen to the CD or play the tune and encourage the kids to join in on a line or phrase at a time. You may want to start by teaching them a phrase that repeats often.
- Make up motions that may go along with simple words (i.e., step, Jesus) to help them remember the words.
- Be enthusiastic! Model your love of singing instead of being concerned about your performance.

—Adapted from *Songs for LIFE*, © 1995 by CRC Publications.

Readers’ Theater

If you have plenty of time for your large group session, you may want to ask the older groups (grades 4-8) to present the Scripture passage as readers’ theater for the younger children. Use the readers’ theater script of Luke 2:1-20 (reproducible page 84).

If possible, have them rehearse once or twice before your group session so that the reading goes smoothly.

Drama

Rehearsing and presenting a drama can be a fun and rewarding experience—both for the actors and for the people who view the drama. For this week’s drama, “Lights Breaks into a Dark World,” you will need five or more actors (depending on how many angels you include). You’ll want to find a team of actors, either teens or adults, and begin working with them early. This could be a wonderful gift for your middle school group to offer to the younger children. (See tips for scheduling rehearsals on p. 5.) You’ll also want to begin thinking about costumes and props—consider asking someone to help you gather the things you will need.

Costumes

Plan early for costumes, but remember that they don’t have to be fancy. (Think bathrobes for shepherds!) The following suggestions are only that—suggestions. Use what you have available and what you can find to create your own nativity scene. Here are some general principles to remember:

- Using a variety of fabrics with different textures and patterns can create interest. Adding interesting trims can help too.

- Generally it makes sense to use the brightest tones for your main characters—in this case, Mary and Joseph.
- Cut-off legs of nylons work well for securing headpieces.

Here are some specific suggestions to help you begin gathering costumes for this drama:

- *Shepherds*. Find neutral-colored bathrobes or create something out of an earthy fabric like burlap. Include a “staff” and headdress.
- *Angels*. All white or off-white robes or fabric. Sheets work well. (Halos? Wings?)
- *Joseph and Mary*. Brightly colored robes or fabric and headdress.

Props

As with costumes, you can do as much or as little with props as you’d like. If you have a talented artist or designer, you may want to create a backdrop of Bethlehem and the stable. You might also want to use lighting. In most cases, though, the following simple props are all you need for an effective presentation:

- log or rocks for the shepherd Kar to sit on
- manger/feeding trough deep enough for a doll
- stools for Mary and Joseph near the manger
- doll (for baby Jesus)

You’ll want to divide your stage area into two sections—the hills where the shepherds tend their sheep and the stable or cave where Jesus is born. (You could accomplish this quite simply with printed signs.)

Small Groups

After the drama, children will meet in small groups. If your regular leaders are present for these two weeks, it would probably work best to have children meet with their groups as usual or to combine several groups together. Note that we have only included two session plans—one for children in K-grade 3 and another for children in grades 4-8. Each leader will need to adapt the plan to the needs of his or her children.

The Light of the World Is Born

Scripture

Luke 2:1-20

Memory Challenge

John 1:9

Focus

God gave us Jesus to be our Savior. Jesus is our Light.

WORDSearch

See page 8.



HELLO

Picture Smart

Number Smart

Word Smart

Remembering the Story

Goal

Feel welcomed and get ready to listen to the Christmas story.

Time

5 minutes

Materials

Nativity scene patterns (reproducible pages 74-76) copied on cardstock, cut out, and colored

As the children enter the room, hand them one of the nativity scene characters or animals. Make enough sets so that each child gets to hold a figure. Encourage them to trade characters or pieces with someone near them. What do they see? What do these figures remind them of?

If the children just came from a group session where they saw the drama of Christ's birth, they may make the connection between the figures and the story. If not, help them see the connection by asking some open-ended questions:

- I wonder who this baby might be?
- I wonder why this baby is sleeping on a bed of straw?
- I wonder who this baby's mom and dad might be?
- I wonder who these men are?
- I wonder where these sheep came from?
- I wonder who this woman on the donkey might be?

Children in your class who are familiar with the Christmas story will be eager to fill in the details and to talk about the events of the story. If none of the children know the story, explain that today you will find out together who these people and animals are.

2

KNOW

Jesus Is Born

Picture Smart

Word Smart

Goal

Tell the story of Jesus' birth.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Gift box nativity set (see instructions on pp. 15-17)

Bible

Retell the story from Luke 2:1-20, using the visuals in the gift box to tell the story. If the children saw the drama in the large group session (or if they know the story well), you might want to ask occasional questions like the following that will permit them to help you retell the story.

- What's the name of the baby in this story? Do you remember where the baby was born?
- Who came and talked to the shepherds?
- How do you think the shepherds felt when they heard the angels sing?

The story follows:

(Begin by laying the large piece of tan felt from the gift box on the floor and inviting the children to gather around it.) The Bible tells us a story about a king who made a rule. This king said all the people had go to the town where they were born to be counted.

That meant that a man named Joseph and his wife, Mary, had to take a long, long trip—all the way to Bethlehem. (Move the figure of Mary and Joseph with donkey across the tan felt.) Finally they reached the town of Bethlehem. They looked for a place to stay. (Move Mary and Joseph up and down imaginary streets.) They knew they needed a place to rest because it was almost time for Mary to have a baby. But Mary and Joseph couldn't find a place to stay! All the rooms in Bethlehem were full. Mary and Joseph were *so* tired. (Put brown rectangle on the felt base. Move Mary and Joseph up to the rectangle.)

Finally they stopped at another inn. The man said, "Sorry, no room." But he felt sorry for Mary and Joseph. He told them they could stay in his stable with the animals. (Lay stable down behind the inn. Walk Mary and Joseph around the inn to the stable.) At least they would have a place to rest.

While they were there, Mary's baby was born. (Remove Mary and Joseph with donkey and replace with Mary and Joseph by manger.) He was Jesus, God's own Son! Mary wrapped Jesus up so he would be warm, and she laid him in a manger, the place where animals eat.

Out in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were taking care of flocks of fuzzy sheep. (Add pasture, sheep, and shepherds.) All of a sudden, the dark sky turned bright. An angel stood in the field with the scared shepherds. (Add angel.)

"Don't be afraid," the angel said. "I am bringing you good news! A Savior has been born, and his name is Christ the Lord. If you go to Bethlehem, you can visit him!"

Suddenly the sky was filled with angels, singing and praising God. (Add angel choir.) The shepherds could hardly believe their eyes!

After the angels left, the fields were dark again. (Remove angels.) But the shepherds knew what to do. They hurried to Bethlehem. (Move shepherd to manger.) When they got there, they found Mary and Joseph, and they saw baby Jesus lying in the manger.

After they left the stable, they were happy and excited. (Move shepherds up and down imaginary streets.) They told everyone they met the good news: “Jesus is born! Our Savior is here. We’ve seen Jesus, the Light of the world!”

Option to
step 2

option option option option

Take-Home Storybook:

Jesus Is Born Word Smart Picture Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Take-home storybook *Jesus Is Born*, copied and assembled (reproducible pages 77-78)
Picture books of Jesus’ birth (optional)

If you’d prefer to read the story to the children, use the storybook the children will be taking home to share with their families this week. Assemble a sample book before class and show the children the pictures as you read through the pages together.



If your children really enjoy listening to stories, look for a colorful picture book that tells the story of Jesus’ birth and use it to tell the story today. Or bring several books and let the children compare the pictures and tell the story by looking at the pictures.

After reading the story, you may want to discuss the Think About It questions on page 8 of the take-home storybook.



GROW

Thank You, Jesus

 Word Smart

 Self Smart

 Picture Smart

 Music Smart

Goal

Sense how much Jesus loves us.

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Gift box nativity set from Know step
Litany: “Jesus Is Born” (reproducible page 73), copied as an overhead or made into a poster
Overhead projector
Songs (pp. 56-65)



If you’re teaching second or third graders, you can carry this discussion a bit further. Mention that Jesus was born so that someday he could die for us. Jesus was born to be our Savior.

Have the children help you put all the pieces back in the box. Talk about what the box looks like—a present! Tell the children that Jesus is the best present in the world. God gave us baby Jesus because God loves us. And God wants us to be able to live in heaven with him someday. Explain

that the Christmas story figures are wrapped up like a present to remind us how much God loves us!

Invite the children to tell you what they do when they get a present (open it, say thank you, and so on). Then ask them to suggest ways that we can say thank you to God. Help

them see that by singing songs to God and praying to God we can tell God how thankful we are for the wonderful present of baby Jesus.

This would be a wonderful time to sing a song or two together. Choose a well-known carol such as “Away in a Manger” or use one or more of the songs at the back of this book (perhaps one you’ve been singing together during the large group session). “Mary’s Boy Child,” “That Boy Child of Mary,” and “Rock the Baby” would all be very appropriate today.

Then lead the children in the response from the litany “Jesus Is Born” on page 73. (Ahead of time you’ll want to either make an overhead of this page or write the litany on a poster.) Spend a few minutes teaching the children the refrains. Each time they see Mary, Joseph, and the donkey, they should say, **Jesus is coming**. Each time they see Jesus in a manger, they should say, **Jesus is born**. Each time they see the smiling children, they should say, **Thank you, God, for baby Jesus**.

After you have practiced the refrains several times, do the reading together. Point to the appropriate picture each time the children are to respond.



If you are teaching small children, you may want to divide them into three groups and teach each group just one of the responses.

4 **SHOW** Celebrate and Tell

Goal

Celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Time

25 minutes

Materials

Note: See individual projects for lists.

Once we know the joy of Jesus’ birth, we want to celebrate—and tell others as the shepherds did. Make this celebration part of your session today. Music, food, and decorations will add to the festivities.

During this part of your session, you’ll want to choose one or more of the activities below—activities that will help the children tell others the good news of Christmas.

Two-Week Project Idea

Gift Box Nativity Set



Picture Smart



People Smart



Word Smart

Time

15 minutes each week

Materials

Box gift-wrapped in Christmas wrapping paper or Christmas gift bag, one per child
Christmas storycard (reproducible page 79), one per child
30" x 36" piece of tan felt, one per child
9" x 12" piece of brown felt, one per child
9" x 12" piece of green felt, one per child
4" x 4" square of yellow felt, one per child
9" x 12" piece of gray felt, one per child
Scissors and crayons
Nativity characters copied on cardstock (reproducible pages 74-75), one set per child



If you choose this project, the children will make their own nativity sets (the same set you used in the Hello and Know steps above) and learn how to retell the Christmas story. This craft may involve a lot of work for you and others before the session, but we think you'll find it's worth it!

You'll need to carefully guide the children through each of the following steps, showing them your sample to help them understand what you are asking. Try to do about half of the project this week and allow time for the remaining work next week.



If you are teaching small children who are not very efficient with scissors, you may want to cut out all or most of the pieces for them ahead of time and let them spend their time coloring their characters this week and practicing the story next week.

In addition to finding volunteers to help you gather and prepare materials, you may want a volunteer to two to attend this session and offer assistance to children as needed.

1. Cut out a 7" x 10" rectangle in the center of the brown felt square to make the inn and a brown house for the nativity scene.



2. Cut irregularly around the edges of the green felt to make the green pasture.



3. Cut an irregular rainbow shape out of the gray felt to make the stable.



4. Cut a star out of the yellow felt.



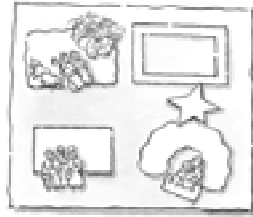
5. Have the children cut out and color the nativity characters.



6. Pass out copies of the storycard to the children (reproducible page 79). It includes an abbreviated version of the Christmas story. Read the card to the children.



7. Encourage the children to retell the story using their gift box nativity sets.



One-Week Project Ideas

Christmas Program Invitations

AA Word Smart People Smart Picture Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Christmas program invitations (reproducible page 80), one copy per child
Crayons and markers
Construction paper (optional)
Old Christmas cards, glitter, glue, tinsel (optional)

If your church school is planning to present a Christmas program this year, consider inviting people in the community to join you. Children can either color copies of the invitation from reproducible page 80 on which you've filled in the appropriate information, or they can use markers, construction paper, and whatever decorations you provide to design their own invitations. Have them glue a copy of the printed information from the invitation or print the information themselves.

If you have time, go for a walk with the children and have them hand-deliver the invitations to your neighbors. Otherwise plan to deliver them yourself or ask several volunteers to do so.

Take-home Storybook: Jesus Is Born

AA Word Smart Picture Smart People Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Take-home storybook *Jesus Is Born* (reproducible pages 77-78), one set per child
Markers or crayons



Distribute a set of the storybook pages to each child. Show them how to fold the pages into a book. Then provide crayons and markers and give the children the opportunity to color their books. Encourage the children to tell the story of baby Jesus to their families and friends this week at home.

Christmas Quilt Banner

People Smart

Picture Smart

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

8" x 8" felt squares, various colors—yellow, green, and white—one per child

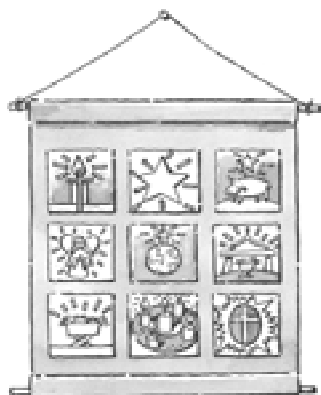
One large piece of red felt for the background (must be large enough to fit all of the quilt pieces)

Sequins, scraps of felt, glitter glue, fabric paints, ribbon, trims
Felt figures cut out from patterns (reproducible pages 81-83)
Notice that some of the patterns are especially appropriate for younger children.

2 wooden dowels cut 2 inches longer than the width of the banner

Ribbon or cording to hang banner

Tacky glue (available in craft and fabric stores)



This would be an excellent activity to do together with the older children.

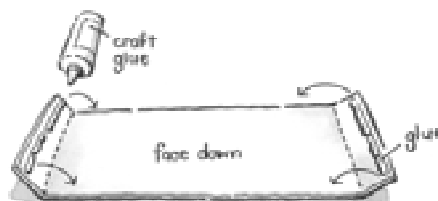
Pair older and younger children together to create the banner.

One way of sharing the Christmas message with your congregation would be to create a Christmas Quilt Banner and display it somewhere in your church. Because you're working with young children, you'll need to do much of the preparation work ahead of time. During the session, have children choose one of the figures you cut

from felt, glue it to a square, and decorate it.

For Background

1. Cut a piece of red background felt large enough to hold all of the squares (for nine squares, you would need a piece about 38" x 28").
2. Use tacky glue to glue a 2" hem on the top and bottom to form a casing for the wooden dowels. Be generous with the glue. Let it dry completely.



For Quilt Pieces

1. Cut 8" x 8" squares of yellow, green, and white felt. Give one square to each child.
2. Have the children decorate their square with one of the symbols or pictures you have cut from felt before the session. See examples below. Provide sequins, felt scraps, glitter glue, fabric paint, ribbon, and other trims. Select symbols that are appropriate for the age of the children you work with.



Assembly

1. Lay out children's quilt squares on top of the background felt (see example above). Glue quilt squares onto the background felt. (Leaders may make additional squares so that the design will be even.)
2. Insert the wooden dowels into the top and the bottom of the banner.
3. Attach ribbon or cording. Knot it tightly to the ends of the dowels.



If you are working with very young children, you may want to limit the children's work to gluing on the pictures or symbols.

Snack: Candlelight Cupcake Cones

Materials

Ice cream cones
Yellow cake mix
Yellow frosting
Sprinkles and colored sugars

- Prepare a yellow cake mix according to the directions on the box.
- Fill ice cream cones two-thirds full of the cake mix. Place them in a muffin tin to keep them steady.
- Bake according to the directions on the box for cupcakes.
- When cool, frost each cone with yellow frosting.
- Serve these to the children as a snack; if you have extra time, they may decorate them with sprinkles, frosting, and/or colored sugars.

Small Group Session: Grades 4-8

The Light of the World Is Born

Scripture

Luke 2:1-20

Memory Challenge

John 1:9

Focus

God gave us Jesus to be our Savior. Jesus is our Light.

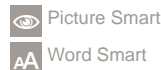
WORDSearch

See page 8.



HELLO

Christmas Light



Goal

Prepare to think more deeply about the story of Jesus' birth.

Time

5 minutes

Materials

Newsprint (one or more sheets)
Markers
Candles (optional)

As children enter the room, have one or more sheets of newsprint hanging on the wall or lying on the table. Write the words Christmas Light at the top of the newsprint and invite the children to write or draw as many different kinds of symbols and things they can think of that remind them of light at Christmas. Possibilities include candles, many kinds of tree lights, the star, the angels, Jesus, and so on.

Light your candles (if you brought them), and remind the group that Christmas is about light—the true Light that came into our world. If you have come from the large group drama presentation, ask the group what role light played in the drama. Who is the Light of the world?

If you didn't have a large group session, invite the group to listen for "light" as you read through today's Scripture story.

We Were There Word Smart People Smart Body Smart

Option to step 1

Time
5 minutes
Materials
Actors in costume

If some of your middle school kids were the actors in the large group meeting today, you may want to have them remain in costume and “visit” the other kids in the 4-8 group. Encourage the non-actors in the group to take the role of newspaper or TV reporters and ask the actors some questions about the events of Christmas. If they have trouble getting started, you could begin with some of the following questions:

- How did you feel when the angel appeared?
- Did you believe the angel right away?
- What did the angel look like?
- Did you know the baby was special right away?
- Did the baby look like other babies?
- How did it feel to be the mother of God’s own Son?

KNOW Word Smart Body Smart

Readers’ Theater: Luke 2:1-20

Goal
Tell the story of Jesus’ birth and how it shows God’s love for us.
Time
10 minutes
Materials
Readers’ theater script (reproducible page 84) Drama script: “Light Breaks into a Dark World” (photocopied from pp. 47-49), optional

If your group saw the drama “Light Breaks into a Dark World,” you may want to review that story by involving the group in the reader’s theater of Luke 2:1-20 (make copies for readers from reproducible page 84). There are three parts in the reading: Leader, Group A, and Group B. Choose one student or adult to read the leader role, then divide the rest into Group A and Group B. Give everyone a few minutes to read through the page silently before you read it aloud together. (If you plan to give a Christmas program for the congregation and/or community, this reading could be part of the program.)

If you do not have a large group session before you meet together as a small group, consider reading through the drama together today. (Make copies from pages 47-49 in this manual.) Ask for volunteers to read the various roles; then either walk and read your way through the skit or have the kids read it as readers’ theater. Be sure to give cast members a few minutes to read through their parts before beginning the drama.



3

GROW

Darkness and Light

Picture Smart

Self Smart

Word Smart

People Smart

Goal

Understand what the birth of Jesus means for us.

Time

5 minutes

Materials

Candles and matches
Newsprint and markers or chalkboard and chalk
Advent wreath (optional)

If the candles you lit in step 1 are still burning, extinguish them.

Remind the group of the light images you talked about together when they first arrived. Then invite them to think about the roles that light and darkness play in the Christmas story they just heard. Who was in the dark? (Mary and Joseph were in a dark town, in a dark stable. The shepherds were keeping watch in a dark field.) What brought the light? (An angel appeared, then a whole choir of angels. A baby was born. A star lit the sky.)

Comment that our world is dark too—and not just when the sun goes down. We sometimes talk about the darkness of sin. Invite them to think of examples of darkness in our world; list their examples on chalkboard or newsprint. You may have to give them a few nudges from the following list to get them thinking. The examples can be as specific or as general as the group chooses.

- hate
- murder
- hunger
- war
- divorce
- sickness
- accidents
- loneliness
- cruelty
- dishonesty

Comment that Jesus comes as the Light into a dark world filled with all the misery and pain on your list. Jesus comes because he loves us. In place of misery and hatred and hopelessness and darkness, Jesus brings the light of love, hope, joy, and peace—for each one of us!

As you light the candles again with the group, talk about how Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection give us new hope and light in a dark world. Ask one of the members of your group to rip up or erase your list of darkness as a reminder that the Light of the world is more powerful than darkness.

If you've asked the group to memorize the Memory Challenge, now would be a good time to review it together. If you're working with older kids, you may want to read John 1:1-4 to set the verse in context. Talk about John's use of the words *light* and *darkness*.

Close this part of your session with prayer, thanking Jesus for bringing light into our darkness.



Many of the young people in your group may be familiar with the Advent wreath. You may want to place your candles in an Advent wreath for this session. (You can make one easily by forming a circle with coat-hanger wire and weaving greens around it. Place candleholders with taper candles at four places in the greens. Place a large candle in the center of the wreath.) Explain that the four outer candles are often used to remind us of hope, joy, love, and peace. The center candle is the Christ candle, which is lit on Christmas Day.



4

SHOW

Celebrate and Tell

Goal
Celebrate the birth of Jesus.
Time
25 minutes
Materials
<i>Note:</i> See individual projects for lists.

Once we know the joy of Jesus' birth, we want to celebrate—and tell others as the shepherds did. Make this celebration part of your session today. Music, food, and decorations will all add to the festivities.

During this part of your session, you'll want to choose one or more of the activities below—activities that will help your young people tell others the good news of Christmas. Although some of the finished projects may be too juvenile for your group, they'll make great tools for kids in your group to use in telling the story to younger siblings and younger children in your church or community.

Another option would be to have your group (especially middle schoolers) help out in one of the classrooms of younger children, working one-on-one with a child who is creating a quilt square or a nativity scene.

Two-Week Project Idea

Gift Box Nativity Set



Picture Smart



People Smart



Word Smart

Time

15 minutes each week

Materials

Box gift-wrapped in Christmas wrapping paper or Christmas gift bag, one per student
Christmas storycard (reproducible page 79), one per student
30" x 36" piece of tan felt, one per student
9" x 12" piece of brown felt, one per student
9" x 12" piece of green felt, one per student
4" x 4" square of yellow felt, one per student
9" x 12" piece of gray felt, one per student
Scissors and markers
Nativity characters copied on cardstock (reproducible pages 74-76), one set per student



If you are working with middle schoolers, consider having them make the nativity sets for a local hospital to pass out to young patients, for a local food pantry as gifts for young children, or for a classroom of students in a school.

If you choose this project, students will make their own nativity sets and learn how to retell the Christmas story. Explain that they will have time to start the project today and complete it next week.

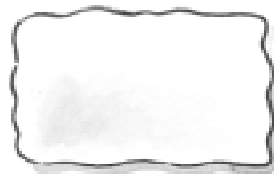
Once each of your group members has created a set, you may want to ask one or more of them to practice using the story cards and figures to retell

the story. Then challenge them to use the nativity set to tell the Christmas story to young children they know!

1. Cut out a 7" x 10" rectangle in the center of the brown felt square to make the inn and a brown house for the nativity scene.



2. Cut irregularly around the edges of the green felt to make the green pasture.



3. Cut an irregular rainbow shape out of the gray felt to make the stable.



4. Cut a star out of the yellow felt.



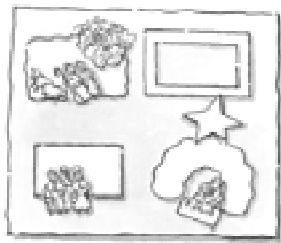
5. Cut out and color the nativity characters.



6. Pass out copies of the storycard (reproducible page 79). It includes an abbreviated version of the Christmas story. Read the card to the students.



7. Encourage students to retell the story using their gift box nativity set and the storycard (reproducible page 79).



One-Week Project Ideas

Christmas Program Invitations



Word Smart



People Smart




Picture Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Christmas program invitations (reproducible page 80),
one copy per student
Crayons and markers
Construction paper (optional)
Old Christmas cards, glitter, glue, tinsel (optional)
Chalkboard or newsprint



If your church school is planning to present a Christmas program this year, consider inviting people in the community to join you. Kids can either color copies of the invitation from reproducible page 80 and fill in the appropriate information (write it for them on chalkboard or newsprint), or they can use markers, construction paper, and whatever decorations you provide to design their own invitations. Have them glue a copy of the printed information from the invitation or print the information in themselves.

If you have time, go for a walk together so kids can hand deliver the invitations to your neighbors. Otherwise plan to deliver them yourself or ask several volunteers to do so.

Time with God Devotional

 Music Smart  Word Smart  Picture Smart  Self Smart

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

“Silent Night” (CD, track 9)

CD player

Copy of words and/or music of “Silent Night” (available in most hymnals)

Time with God devotional, week 1 (reproducible pages 85-86), one two-sided copy per student

Bring a recording of “Silent Night” or invite the group to sing this well-known Christmas carol with you (it’s found in most hymnals). Then distribute the devotional *Time with God* for this session.

If you have time, read the story of “Silent Night” together and talk about the questions on page 4. If your time is short or you’ve chosen to use other activities for this session, send a copy of the devotional home with the students and encourage them to read it at home.

Christmas Quilt Banner People Smart Picture Smart

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

8" x 8" felt squares, various colors—yellow, green, and white—one per student

One large piece of red felt for the background (must be large enough to fit all of the quilt pieces)

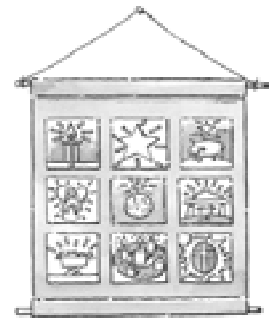
Sequins, scraps of felt, glitter glue, fabric paints, ribbon, trims

Felt figures cut out from patterns (reproducible pages 81-83), or let group members design their own figures

2 wooden dowels cut 2 inches longer than the width of the banner

Ribbon or cording to hang banner

Tacky glue (available in craft and fabric stores)



One way of sharing the Christmas message with your congregation would be to create a Christmas Quilt Banner and display it somewhere in your the church, especially during the Christmas program, if you have one. Introduce the banner by reminding the group about the list of Christmas lights they made at the beginning of your session. Explain that you’re going to make a banner that tells others about the Light of the world.

You may want to show them the patterns from reproducible pages 81-83, but explain that they can also use their own ideas to cut out symbols from felt that remind us of the light Jesus brings. (This is especially appropriate for middle school kids.) Challenge your group

to be creative. During the first week, they might come up with their own design for their felt square by researching a few Bible stories that have “light” in them and then sketching out a design on paper. The next week they could make their felt square.

If your whole church school is working on this project, you may want your group to work with a class of younger children. Pair an older child with each younger child and have them work as a pair to create a square.



Creating the squares is only the beginning of the job. You may want to ask for a few volunteers from the group to help you assemble the squares into a finished banner after the session.

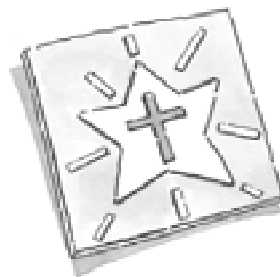
For Background

1. Cut a piece of red background felt large enough to hold all of the squares (for nine squares, you would need a piece about 38" x 28").
2. Use tacky glue to glue a 2" hem on the top and bottom to form a casing for the wooden dowels. Be generous with the glue. Let it dry completely.



For Quilt Pieces

1. Cut 8" x 8" squares of yellow, green, and white felt. Give one square to each person.
2. Have students decorate their square with a symbol or picture. See examples below. Provide sequins, felt scraps, glitter glue, fabric paint, ribbon, and other trims.



Assembly

1. Lay out quilt squares on top of the background felt (see example above). Glue quilt squares onto the background felt. (Leaders may make additional squares so that the design will be even.)
2. Insert the wooden dowels into the top and the bottom of the banner.
3. Attach ribbon or cording. Knot it tightly to the ends of the dowels.

Snack: Candlelight Cupcake Cones

Materials

Ice cream cones
Yellow cake mix
Yellow frosting
Sprinkles and colored sugars

- Prepare a yellow cake mix according to the directions on the box.
- Fill ice cream cones two-thirds full of the cake mix. Place them in a muffin tin to keep them steady.
- Bake according to the directions on the box for cupcakes.
- When cool, frost each cone with yellow frosting.
- Serve these to the children as a snack; if you have extra time, they may decorate them with sprinkles, frosting, and/or colored sugars.