

The Best Christmas Present in the World!



A Toddler Christmas Celebration

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Here are some ideas you can use to celebrate Christmas and help toddlers understand how God gave us the gift of his son Jesus. You might like to invite parents to bring their children dressed as nativity characters.

Ready:

- Put a baby doll into an old shoebox and wrap it in several layers of paper and a bow to make it look like a big, exciting Christmas present. Display it prominently out of reach!
- Serve festive themed refreshments such as jelly babies dipped in chocolate, crispy 'mangers' or a traybake cut into squares and iced as wrapped presents.
- For the story, you will need a Christmas stocking or shoe bag containing the nativity characters, a toy donkey, a baby blanket and a star.

Teddy:

Dress Teddy as a shepherd with a tea towel and a headband and give him a toy sheep to look after. You might like to ask the children to make him a flock of sheep by sticking cotton wool on pre-cut shapes as they arrive and to think up a name for their sheep. Explain what shepherds do, how much they love their sheep and how they know all their names.

Go:

It's exciting to think that you may be the first person to tell the Christmas story to some children in your group – what a privilege! They won't take in all the details this year, but if they

go away knowing that Christmas is all about the birth of a special baby, this will be a great foundation for building layers of knowledge in years to come.

Storytelling tips:

As a 'way in' to the story, you could sing (to the tune of *The Muffin Man*):

Christmas is a happy time, a happy time, a happy time,

Christmas is a happy time, a happy time of year.

Explain that Christmas is happy and exciting because we are thinking about the first Christmas, when God gave us all a wonderful present.



The story: The Best Christmas Present in the World!

Leader:

Long ago, God smiled down on the Earth and all the people that he loved so much. He wanted to send them the best Christmas present in the world . . . (*Point to the wrapped present.*)

Hmm – what could that be?

He asked one of his angels to take a message for him. I wonder which angel he chose. Let's see . . .

(*Bring out the angel.*) Oh, it was the Angel Gabriel!

The Angel Gabriel listened carefully to God and flew down to earth with some exciting news. (*Can you flap your arms like angel wings?*)

I wonder who the angel was going to visit? Let's see . . .

(*Bring out Mary.*) Oh, it was Mary!

I expect Mary was very surprised to see an angel in her house. Can you make a surprised face too?

The angel said . . .

Angel Gabriel:

Don't worry Mary! God loves you very much. He is going to send everyone the best Christmas present in the world. Please can he send the present to you to look after?

Leader:

What do you think Mary said? Yes or no? She said . . .

Mary:

YES! I'm so happy. Please tell God that he can send the present to me.

Leader:

Can you nod your head like Mary and call out 'YES'?

Well, Mary couldn't wait to tell someone the news. I wonder who that was? Let's see . . .

(*Bring out Joseph.*) Oh, it was Joseph! Mary told Joseph that she was expecting a present from God. And she asked Joseph to help her look after it for everyone.

What do you think he said? Yes or no? He said . . .

Joseph:

YES! I will help you look after the present Mary. And I will look after you too.

Leader:

Mary and Joseph waited a long time for the present to arrive. And just when it was nearly time, oh no, they had to go on a long, long walk to Bethlehem. The emperor wanted to count all his people there!

I expect Mary rode on a little donkey . . . *clip-clop, clip-clop* . . . all the way to Bethlehem.

When they got there, it was crowded with all the people who had come to be counted too. We're a big crowd, aren't we?

Joseph knocked on lots of doors . . . *rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat* . . . asking if they had a spare room for the night. But all the inns and hotels were full. Can you shake your head and say . . .

All:

No room, no room! No room at the inn.

Leader:

Oh, dear! Where could they sleep? What if the special present arrived that night?

But don't worry! God was looking after them. A very kind man said . . .

Innkeeper:

You do look tired. My house is full, but you can stay the night in my stable with all my animals, if you like.

Leader:

I'm sure that Mary and Joseph were happy to have a rest – even if it was in a stable. And I expect the little donkey was pleased too! What noise does a donkey make?

All:

Hee-haw, hee-haw!

Leader:

(A *wed whisper*.) That night, when most people were asleep, and the stars were twinkling in the sky, and the sheep were baaing on the hillside, God sent the best Christmas present down to the earth. (*Fetch the present*.)

Shall we help Mary and Joseph to unwrap it?

What do you think it is?

Ah, it's a baby! The present was God's very own son, called Jesus.

(*When you are ready, wrap the doll in the blanket and place it in the shoebox 'manger'. Regain everyone's attention by singing a simple carol verse together.*)

Leader:

Then bright angels sparkled in the night sky. They sang for joy, about the newborn baby. I wonder who they sang to.

(*Bring out the shepherds.*) Oh, it was the shepherds . . .

Shepherd:

Come on! Let's hurry to Bethlehem to see the baby. The angel said he is all wrapped up and lying in a manger.

Leader:

So, the shepherds hurried into the town and found baby Jesus in the manger, just as the angel had said. They knelt down and gazed at God's own son.

And on the way back to their sheep, they told everyone about baby Jesus and how he would grow up to look after his people like a kind shepherd.

Then God hung a big shining star in the sky.

(*Hang up or point to the star.*)

I wonder who saw it? Let's see . . .

(*Pull out the kings.*) Oh, the three kings!

King:

Look at that amazing star! It means a baby king has been born. Let's go and find him and give him some special presents.

Leader:

So, the three kings rode on their camels and followed the star to Bethlehem. When they found Jesus, they bowed down and gave him their precious gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh!

Even the kings bowed down to baby Jesus because he is the King of Kings!

Then God smiled down on the earth and all his people. He was so happy that he had given them baby Jesus to be their friend and king – the best Christmas present in the world!

Prayer Rhyme

(Show the appropriate nativity character/s as you say the prayer.)

This is the angel who flew down to say (*flap arms*).
A Christmas baby is on his way.

This is Mary who nodded her head (*nod heads*).
"I'll look after the baby," she said.

This is Joseph who knocked at the door
(*mime knocking*).
And found them a bed in the animals' straw.

These are the shepherds who hurried away
(*rock arms*).
To find the babe in a manger of hay.

These are the kings who followed the star
(*hands out, offering*).
To bring baby Jesus rich gifts from afar.

So, thank you to God who sent us his son
(*hands together*).
With lots of love to everyone.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

Party Bag

You might like to hand out the Christmas activity sheet for parents and carers to use at home during the Christmas period. You could add a small present, such as a packet of star stickers, for making the Christmas card.



The Best Christmas Present in the World activity sheet

Just for parents:

It's all too easy to worry about providing our families with 'the perfect Christmas', forgetting that the first one took place in a dirty, smelly stable! Probably what our children want most is the gift of our time – chatting, playing games and creating some memorable Christmas family traditions together.

Take time to read the nativity story in the Bible and see how simply it is told. God came to be with us in the form of a baby who would be our loving and forgiving friend and give his life for us. What a present!

Story time:

Retell or 'play' the story, perhaps using a simple nativity set. Wonder about it together:

- I wonder how Mary felt when the angel asked her to be baby Jesus' mummy
- I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt after their long walk to Bethlehem
- Do you think that baby kings are usually born in a stable?
- Can you remember who came to see baby Jesus?
- What present do you think you would like to give baby Jesus?
- I wonder what is your favourite part of the story

The joy of giving

You might like to help your toddler put some treats in a bright sock or colour a Christmas card for a lonely relative or neighbour. Ask how it makes them feel to make someone else happy.

A Christmas family tradition

What could you do each year that your children will always remember? For example, reading a nativity story together on Christmas Eve.

Eye-spy (or sense) the Christmas story

Look out for reminders of the nativity story everywhere. For example, in star and angel decorations, wrapped presents, Christmas cards, rich colours (the kings' robes), perfumed soap (frankincense), a fleece/cotton wool (the sheep)!

Jesus in the manger cakes:

You will need cereal (such as All-Bran), milk chocolate, jelly babies, cake cases.

Have fun together stirring the cereal into the melted chocolate and dividing between the cases. Add a jelly baby and pop in the fridge for 30 mins to set.

Chat about how Mary laid Jesus in the animals' feed box because they were a long way from home and he didn't have a cot in the stable.

Bedtime prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for sending us the best Christmas present in the world. Thank you for baby Jesus, who loves us and looks after us and shows us the way to go. Please help us to think about him and to talk to him this Christmas. Amen



A Christmas card to decorate and fold

1. Cut along the dashed line to leave a square piece of paper.
2. Have fun decorating the picture with crayons and any other material you may have, such as a star sticker or yellow raffia for the straw.
3. Fold the four corners into the centre (along the dotted lines) and decorate as a wrapped present, perhaps with ribbon or a bow.
4. Give the card to someone special to open!



Playtime

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