



Christmas

HOW DOES THIS SESSION HELP PEOPLE GROW IN CHRIST?

Christmas is part of our seasonal celebration of the major stories of the Christian faith. We remind everyone that Christ is at the heart of Christmas and keep his story alive among the tinsel and turkey. Yes, Christmas features in both the earlier Messy Church books as well as *Messy Christmas*, but it comes round every year and is a huge opportunity for family celebration.

Main Bible story: Luke 1–2

You will find a great range of special Messy Church Christmas crafts from Infinite Crafts to add even more variety to what you are offering: www.inf.co.uk/infinite/Messy_Church_Craft_Kits.html.

ACTIVITIES

1 Angelic host picture

You will need: sturdy card backing; clear plastic bottles; tinsel, lametta or shredded foil; card; dark-blue paint; paint brushes; yellow or white paint (optional); glittery pipe cleaners; felt-tip pens; paper ovals in different skin colours; scissors; sticky tape; thread

This craft is 3D, so may need to be hung up rather than pinned on to a display board. Beforehand, cut an X-shape into the backing card. This will form the hole you poke the bottle through, so make it to fit. Paint the background card in dark blue or black and splatter on stars with white or yellow paint if desired. Make angels using the bottles as the bodies. Fill the bottle with lengths of tinsel, lametta or shredded foil. Draw a face on a paper oval and tape the face flat on top of the neck of the bottle. Add pipe-cleaner wings and a halo. Push the angel's backside through the X in the backing card far enough for it to be safely wedged. Attach thread to the card for hanging.

Talk about

What's it like when heaven breaks through on to earth?

2 Shepherds' hot chocolate

You will need: hot-chocolate powder; mini marshmallows; sprinkles; squirty cream; warm milk (not too hot)

Make hot chocolate drinks with all the extras.

Talk about

The shepherds didn't have drinking chocolate, but if it had been available in those days they might well have been knocking it back around their campfire before the angels came.

3 Sheep sock puppets

You will need: old (clean!) black socks; white felt (cut into two triangles per sheep); googly eyes; PVA glue; spreaders; cotton wool

Make a sheep puppet out of the sock with felt triangles glued on for ears. Attach the googly eyes, then stick the cotton wool on top of the head and on the body.

Talk about

Using the puppets, tell the shepherds' story from the point of view of the sheep.

4 Nativity storyteller

You will need: squares of paper; Christmas story stickers or cut-outs of clip art

Make a 'fortune teller' from the origami pattern to be found online (search for 'origami fortune teller'), or in most school playgrounds. Stick pictures of Mary, Jesus, Gabriel and a shepherd on the innermost fold-out points and put images of the star, a stable, a sheep and Bethlehem on the outside, with numbers in the middle as usual. See how people use them in different ways to tell parts of the Christmas story.

Talk about

How much can you tell me about each person or thing or place in the Christmas story in the model you've made?

5 Cheese candles

You will need: rye biscuits or similar large, rectangular savoury biscuits; packs of square cheese slices; carrots or radishes; cucumber; soft cheese in a tube

Cut a cheese slice in half to make two rectangles and put one on your biscuit, orientated 'portrait', as the candle. Add a carrot chip or half

a radish as the flame and decorate the base with circles of cucumber. Squeeze a frame of soft cheese around it.

Talk about

Jesus is the light of the world.

6 Giant paper chains

You will need: rolls of wallpaper; staplers; sturdy cord; spray bottles; runny paint

Many of us have made pretty little paper chains in the past, and this is the same principle, scaled up as large as it will go without breaking under its own weight. You could use the cord to hold it up if you want to cheat. Make a paper chain out of the wallpaper (you could experiment with loops interlocked or with the concertina type). Make it a more cheerful colour if needed by squirting it with runny paint from spray bottles.

Talk about

What you're looking forward to over the Christmas season.

7 Build-and-draw live stable

You will need: props to make a stable scene: straw, guinea pig hay, a manger, sacks, buckets, characters; artists' charcoal; big sheets of good-quality paper

Set up a stable scene and have two people dressed as Mary and Joseph—and a baby if you have a handy one. Invite people to come quietly into the stable and draw what they see. You could have quiet music playing to help the mood. Note: watch out for people with hay fever.

Talk about

Tell me about what you've chosen to draw.

8 Cork table decoration

You will need: corks or play dough; old CDs; either craft wire and confetti stars or the tinsely decoration that has stars sticking out from curly wire; big paper clips; PVA glue; spreaders; scissors

Use the paper clip to poke holes in the cork. Stick short lengths of wire into the cork and wind the loose ends round some confetti stars. Have them sticking out wildly in all directions. Glue the cork base on to the CD to hold it upright. An easier version for little ones is for them to cut up the ready-starred wire into short lengths and poke those into the cork or a play-dough base.

Talk about

The wise men followed the star.

9 Frankincense hand rub

You will need: unscented baby oil; a small bottle of essential oil of frankincense, suitable for use on skin; bowl

Mix the baby oil with a few drops of the essential oil in the bowl. After checking for allergies, treat people to a relaxing hand rub with the perfumed baby oil. Enjoy the smell of it.

Talk about

How busy are you in the run-up to Christmas? Would it help if I prayed for you?

10 Gift tags

You will need: good-quality card or old Christmas cards; tag shapes cut on a die-cutting machine or by hand; gift ribbon; decorative stickers, bows, trims and other Christmassy tat; PVA glue; spreaders; scissors

Create a set of gift tags to make your gifts look beautiful.

Talk about

God gave us the gift of Jesus at Christmas time.

CELEBRATION

Are you looking forward to Christmas? It's a busy time and an exciting time, with lots of things to do to get ready.

What things will you be busy doing in your home to get ready? (*Putting up the tree; buying and wrapping presents; putting up cards and decorations; buying special food...*)

We'll be as busy as Martha was when she was getting ready to welcome Jesus—do you remember her and her duster? Let's all have a dust... and a Hoover. *Mime dusting and hoovering.*

We're getting ready for special visitors in our house. Has anyone else got family members coming to stay? We need to make the bed for them. Let's all put a clean sheet on the bed together. *Mime putting on a sheet.*

Imagine if we didn't bother—if the guests arrived and there was nowhere ready for them to stay. We could say, 'Sorry, we've no room, but you can put this tent up in the garden if you like, or you can have these blankets and lie down next to the lawnmower and the broken bicycle in the garage.' How do you think they'd feel? (*Left out in the cold? Not welcome, wanted or loved?*)

That's what happened on the very first Christmas night.

Mary and Joseph had had a very long journey all the way to Bethlehem. They must have been hungry and exhausted, and Mary was about to have her baby. But there was nowhere for them to stay. Nobody had dusted for them. Nobody had hoovered. Nobody had made a bed. There was no warm cot for Mary's baby. So Jesus had to sleep in a trough made of wood or perhaps even cold stone, used for feeding animals.

And yet this baby was the most important visitor ever to come to this earth: God's son.

The name Mary and Joseph gave him was Jesus. But in the Bible he has another name too: Immanuel, which means 'God is with us'. Jesus came to be with us, to be part of our human family and to bring us all together in love as God's family.

In all your busy preparations, don't forget to make room for Jesus to be with you in your celebrations. Perhaps you could sing a carol for him when you get up on Christmas morning. Or say a prayer just thanking him for being with you.

Prayer

Let's all stand or sit or kneel round the manger and say the repeated line with me: 'Lord Jesus, come and stay with us.'

*Jesus, whose mother was Mary,
we pray for our families, that we may not take each other for granted.*

Lord Jesus, come and stay with us.

*Jesus, lying in a manger,
we pray for those who don't have anywhere to live. Help them find shelter
and helpful friends.*

Lord Jesus, come and stay with us.

*Jesus, sharing the stable with the animals,
we pray for all of your creation so full of life. Help us to look after the earth
you have given us.*

Lord Jesus, come and stay with us.

*Jesus, worshipped by shepherds and kings,
we pray for all the different countries of the world, for an end to fighting and
wars and unfair situations.*

Lord Jesus, come and stay with us.

*Jesus, our Immanuel,
we pray for those who are unwell, and ask that you would be with them,
comfort them and help them get better.*

Lord Jesus, come and stay with us.

Sunday treat

... the love of God...

God, our Father, your love is so big we can't measure it.

It's too wide, too long, too high, too... (say your own ideas).

Nothing can separate us from your love, not even accidents or... (say your own ideas).

You are always with us.

Take-home idea

Each choose your favourite Christmas carol:

- ❖ Why is this your favourite carol? Is it the tune, the words or something else?
- ❖ Which part of the Christmas story does it relate to?
- ❖ Which is your favourite part of the Christmas story?

Messy team theme

- ❖ Is the picture of God in your head one of God as a tiny baby or a grown-up?
- ❖ What memory of Christmas in church would you most like your families to go away with?
- ❖ What present has God given you through your Messy Church?