

Immanuel: God with Us

Christmas Lesson Celebration!

1. *Connecting:* Play a game that introduces the Christmas story.
2. *Teaching:* Hear the exciting story of the birth of Jesus' (Matthew 1:18—2:23, Isaiah 7:14).
3. *Responding:* Have the opportunity to follow Jesus, Immanuel, as the Magi did.

SUPPLIES

- Bible

Optional Supplies:

- Paper
- Crayons or coloured pencils
- *The Action Bible*, pages 526–529, 532–537, 538–541
- Memory Verse poster
- Decorations such as streamers, balloons, Christmas music, etc.
- Sweet treat
- Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

*Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign:
The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.
Isaiah 7:14*

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
John 1:14*

The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah with these words. "Immanuel" means God with us. In John 1:14, the original words literally mean, "God pitched His tent among us." The promise of Isaiah seemed almost impossible—the God of the universe would come to earth and move into their village, their neighbourhood. Then on an ordinary night in an ordinary stable, an extraordinary baby was born.

Jesus was God clothed in flesh. As you prepare to teach children the incredible story of Jesus' birth, take time to ponder how miraculous it is. If possible, read Luke 2:1–40 and Matthew 1:18—2:23. Pause in awe and wonder after every example of God's faithfulness and quietly praise Him. He is with us.

Family Connection: You may have children in class whose families are unaware of the true story of Jesus' birth. Some may have heard of Christmas but do not know its biblical significance. This week encourage the children to tell their families the true story of Jesus' birth.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Play a game that introduces the Christmas story.

Optional Supplies:

Today you will have a special celebration lesson teaching your children about the wonderful birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. This is a reason to celebrate! If possible, set a festive atmosphere by decorating your space and having some Christmas songs playing when the children arrive. If possible, have a sweet to share at the end of today's lesson.

End of Option

Welcome your children with a cheery Christmas greeting as they come to class today. Some of your children may have never celebrated Christmas before, and this might be the first time they hear the story of Jesus' birth. Be sure that you share this lesson as though you are unwrapping the best gift ever given—because it is!

Today we will hear the true story of Jesus' birth. In the story, some wise men called Magi followed a star, which led them to a very important person. On their way, they had to be wise to avoid an angry, evil king. We will play a game in which everyone follows the star's lead, but will have to be wise enough not to be caught by the king!

Here is how we will play: All of us will stand in a circle, and I will select someone to be the king. He will go to the centre of the circle and cover his eyes. While his eyes are covered (no peeking!), I will select someone to be the star and silently show the rest of the group who it is. The star will do little movements when the king is not looking. The rest of you in the circle are the Magi who will follow the star by doing the same movements she does. She may nod her head, or wiggle her arm, or whatever she chooses to do. She can change the movement she is leading at any time. When I tell the king to open his eyes, he will try to figure out who the star is. The trick is that you should not all stare at the person who is the star because the king only has three guesses to pick who the secret star is.

Gather the children in a circle and select the king, then the star. The star will begin the game and the Magi will follow her movements. If the king does not discover who the star is in three guesses, start the game over. Choose two new children who will play the parts of the king and the star. Remember to have the king cover his eyes before you choose the star! Play the game a couple of times.

2. Teaching: Hear the exciting story of the birth of Jesus' (Matthew 1:18—2:23, Isaiah 7:14).

Gather children together and have them sit down. Share this storytelling version of Jesus' birth.

Optional Supplies:

If you are using *The Action Bible*, divide your children into 3 groups. Assign each group 1 of the stories on the following pages: 526–529, 532–537, and 538–541

Each group should read the story and prepare a quick skit to tell the story to the large group. After about 10 minutes, call the groups back together and let each one perform their part of today's story. If you use this option, do not read the story below and only use the questions at the end of this section.

End of Option

This story is true and really happened to these 2 people who were engaged to be married when something incredible happened to them. Mary and Joseph were a good match for each other. Mary was kind and loved God with all her heart. She would make a fine wife for any man. She was promised to Joseph.

Joseph loved God too, and because he did, he was concerned about what to do with his future bride. He had wanted to marry this girl. He thought he knew her, but now he found out that she was pregnant. He was not the father. She told him about an angel telling her that the baby was coming from the Holy Spirit. It seemed impossible.

The Bible does not tell us, but we can imagine that Joseph's sandals shuffled dust along the workshop floor, his stomach felt as tangled as his plans had become. Imagine that he sorted through his tools as he tried to sort out his thoughts. He wondered what to do. Finally, he made his decision: He would divorce Mary quietly. It was the best way to protect her reputation and his.

- What would you do if you were Joseph?

With his decision made, Joseph went to sleep. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream that very night. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because the baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Joseph may have stirred in his sleep. He might have remembered the words of the prophet Isaiah he had learned as a boy:

Read Isaiah 7:14 directly from your Bible. You can also show the Memory Verse poster.

*Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign:
The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*
Isaiah 7:14

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel commanded: He took Mary as his wife. And when the baby was born, he named him Jesus.

In Hebrew, the language of Isaiah, Immanuel means "God with us." Until this time in history, God had led His people. But since the first man and woman sinned, God had not literally walked among His people. That changed the day Jesus was born. Jesus is God, and He left His throne in heaven to come live on earth. Jesus is Immanuel, God living among us.

- If Jesus moved into your village or neighbourhood and you met Him face to face, how would you respond?
- What would you say to Him?
- What would you say to others who did not know who He was?

At the time Jesus was born, some Magi (who were important wise men in their country) travelled from far away looking for the king of the Jews. They were eager to meet Him and give Him gifts and honour. Therefore, when they arrived in Jerusalem, they asked about Him. Listen to what they asked:

If possible, read Matthew 2:2 directly from the Bible. Otherwise, the verse is printed here:

*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?
We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.*
Matthew 2:2

When King Herod, who ruled the Jewish people, heard about their questions, he was very upset. He worried that this new ruler would overthrow him. So he asked the religious leaders where God's promised Saviour was supposed to be born. They told him that one of the prophets had said that He would be born in Bethlehem. Herod told the Magi to look for the new king in Bethlehem and then return and tell him where the child was so he could also worship the child.

After they heard the king the Magi went on their way. Above their heads shone the star they had seen in their own country, urging them in the direction they should go. Surely this new king was someone special if the stars themselves were drawn to him.

They were overjoyed when the star finally paused, hovering over the house where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were. Upon seeing Jesus, the Magi were filled with awe. Bowing down in worship, they offered Him gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh. This was the true King.

The night before they left for home, God warned the Magi in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they returned by another route. God knew that Herod wanted to kill Jesus. God also showed this to Joseph in a dream. He warned Joseph to escape with Jesus and Mary to Egypt.

Herod soon discovered that the Magi had tricked him, and he was furious! He ordered every boy in Bethlehem 2 years old and under to be killed. It was a cruel act from a desperate man who wanted to protect his power.

- Have you ever known anyone who acted with cruelty so that he could be the one with power? What do you think about that kind of power?

Joseph kept Jesus safe in Egypt until an angel of the Lord told him in another dream that it was safe to go back home. Joseph obeyed and moved his family again.

Have children pair up with someone sitting near them. Ask the following questions one at a time and give children about 1 minute to discuss each question with their partner. Then call on 2–3 pairs to share their thoughts with the class.

- What do you think the most important part of this story is? Why?
- How did the Magi respond to Jesus' birth?
- How did King Herod respond to Jesus' birth?

3. Responding: Have the opportunity to follow Jesus, Immanuel, as the Magi did.

Think about the 2 responses to Jesus that you heard in our story. One path was the path that Herod chose. He did not want to lose his power, and he wanted to protect himself at any cost, even if it meant hurting others. He was rich and surrounded with servants, but he trusted no one. He wanted control, but he had no peace.

The other path is the one the Magi took. They followed the star that led them to worship Immanuel—God with us. They took risks, but God watched over them. This path leads to Jesus, the One who makes friendship with God possible.

Jesus was born so that one day His death on the cross would pay for our sins. His innocence cancels out our guilt if we put our faith in Him. So now you have a choice.

You can respond like Herod did. You can depend on yourself alone and hold tightly to control of your own life. Or you can choose to trust and worship like the Magi did. You can recognize that you have sinned and lived your own way instead of God's way. And you can accept God's forgiveness and His gift of salvation through the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. This choice means that you depend on God to light your path.

Have the children stand.

You have a chance right now to decide which path you want to take. If you want to follow Jesus like the Magi, stand up and walk in place as a symbol of following the path that leads to Jesus. As you walk, hold up your hand with your fingers wide apart to create a star shape.

If you are not sure you want to follow Jesus, stand still and hold your hand straight out in front of you in the shape of a star as a prayer that God will guide you to faith.

Optional Supplies:

Pass out paper and crayons for the children. Have them draw and colour a star on their papers. When the children are finished with their stars, invite them to put their faith in Jesus.

If you want to follow Jesus like the Magi, hold your star up high above your head. If you are not sure you want to follow Jesus, hold out your star as a prayer that God will guide you to faith.

If you are using the Student Pages, allow the children to respond by writing their name on the star and colouring it in.

End of Option

Teacher Tip: Follow up with any children who may have made a first-time commitment today to follow Jesus. Refer to the Salvation Path at the front of this guide as you share more about the amazing gift of salvation with them. If they would like, lead them in prayer, asking God to forgive them and accepting His gift of salvation. Invite them to come to you with questions anytime they have them. Share in their excitement as you celebrate this eternal, life-changing decision! Be sure to share this news with the child's family too!

Have your children stand quietly while you pray this blessing over them:

Blessing: Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Through Him, you can have a friendship with the God of the universe! Like the Magi, may you follow the path that leads to our Saviour.

Remind the children that they can pour praises back on God as they worship. Lead the children in singing "Blessed Be Your Name."

<https://youtu.be/tTpTQ4kBLxA>

