

Christmas

After Christmas this year, my eldest announced, “Mom, Christmas really is about the presents...” I waited with bated breath for the rest of the sentence: “...because God gave us Jesus!” Phew!

I realize that Christmas is a confusing time for a lot of Christian parents. We want to join in all the fun with elves on shelves and the expectation of Santa and his mountain of gifts. Sometimes we feel that maybe the story about the baby in the stable isn't extraordinary enough, not magical enough to give our kids the same kind of Christmas memories we have from childhood.

So what is a parent to do? How can we make the Christ part of Christmas exciting and relevant for our little ones?

The following devotions contain a few of many ways to help your children remember that it's not just about the presents and Santa and elves on shelves. The Christ part of Christmas doesn't have to be boring! We can make new Christmas traditions, ones full of joy and laughter, ones with extraordinary magic because of their eternal basis.

Traditions like lighting advent candles, having toy Wise Men chase a star around one's house, choosing gifts for others out of charity catalogues, and making biblically themed crafts can make the season of advent and Christmas incredibly fun, and maybe even more marvelous than the ones you fondly remember from your own childhood.

This Christmas, my three-year-old encountered the Christmas story for the first time in his memory. When we visited my in-laws at the beginning of December, he paid no heed to the beautiful crèche they had displayed. During his next visit three weeks later, he very excitedly told me, “Grandma and Grandpa have a stable!” Somewhere in those intervening three weeks, something had clicked and the birth of Jesus had become extraordinary and magical to him.

An Angel Visits Mary

Luke 1:26–33, 38

One day, a girl named Mary was hanging out, probably doing some laundry. Suddenly, something super bright was standing right in front of her! She freaked out a bit, but the shiny thing turned out to be an angel from God. He told her that God had chosen her to do something very special. He said that God wanted Mary to have a baby, even though she wasn't married yet. She was pretty confused, but God said that he really wanted *her* to have this baby. See, this baby wasn't just any old baby. It was God's own Son. This baby was going to be the Saviour! God had chosen Mary for a very special job—she would get to be the mom of God's Son, and she was supposed to call him Jesus.

Day 1. Mary would have been very excited about the birth of her Son, just as we get excited to celebrate his birthday. With your child, put together a paper chain with one link for each day before Christmas. Remember to take off one link each day! *ASK:*
Are you excited about Christmas? Why?



Day 2. Act out the story together, with one person being Mary and one being the angel. Mary could be doing chores when the angel surprises her with some amazing news. Put your emotions into it and really imagine how you might feel if an angel visited you.

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Day 3. Read this part of the story in a children's Bible. *ASK:*

What's your favourite part of the story? Why?



Day 4. Have your child draw a picture of an angel while you read Luke 1:26–33, 38. *ASK: How do you think Mary felt when the angel appeared?*

Day 5. Mary reacted to this good news by writing a worship song. Together with your child, write a song or poem of worship to God.



PRAYER:

God, thank you for choosing Mary, an ordinary person, to be the mommy of your Son. Thank you for loving the world so much that you sent your Son to live with us. Help us to remember that you are the reason we have Christmas!

Amen.

Jesus Is Born

Luke 2:1-7

Just before Mary had her baby, the king decided that he wanted everyone in the country to be counted and pay taxes, but they had to be in their hometown. So Mary and Joseph left their town and went to Bethlehem, which is where Joseph's family was from. While they were there, Mary had her baby. Sadly, since there were so many people in Bethlehem, there was no room in anyone's house for them to sleep in. But someone did let them stay with the animals. Only the newborn Saviour ended up with a bed that night, and it was a manger—that is where people kept the food for their animals! And they called him Jesus, just as the angel had said.



Day 1. Pretend that you are Mary and Joseph and take a long walk through your home. When you reach your child's bedroom, shut the door and say, "There's no room here! I guess we'll have to rest in the hallway." *ASK: What do you think it was like for Mary to go on a long trip with a baby in her tummy? How does it feel to be told that there's no room for you?*

Day 2. Find a nativity scene and use it to re-enact the story.
ASK: What do you like the best about the story?



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Day 3. Have your child draw a picture of a baby while you read Luke 2:1–7. *ASK: Why do you think Mary wrapped him up? How do we take care of babies in our country?*

Day 4. Pretend to be barn/stable animals together. *ASK: Where do women normally have babies? Do you think Mary was surprised to have her baby in the barn? How do you think it smelled? Was it warm or cold? Do you think Mary was scared? Why or why not? Sing “Away in a Manger” together.*



Day 5. Find a baby doll or a stuffed animal and a box or laundry basket. Put the doll in the basket, pretending that it is baby Jesus in the manger. Gather around the box, then pray: *Thank you so much, Jesus, for coming, and for being born in a barn instead of in a castle. Thank you for loving so much that you would come down from heaven to live with us. We love you so much, Jesus.*

PRAYER:

Thank you, God, for protecting Mary and Joseph on their long trip. And we most especially thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus.

Amen.

Shepherds Hear Some Great News

Luke 2:8–20

One dark and quiet night, some shepherds were watching their sheep in a field. Suddenly, there was a bright light and an angel spoke to them! The angel said that there was an extra special baby who had just been born, and that they should go visit him. The baby's name was Jesus. Then even more angels joined the first one and they sang praises to God. After they left, the sky grew dark and the field became quiet again. The shepherds were so excited that they jumped up and ran to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus. After they saw him, they told everyone they knew that Jesus had been born!

Day 1. Pretend that you are shepherds taking care of sheep. *ASK:* What do shepherds do for their sheep? What do they do when the sheep are hungry? Thirsty? Tired? Jesus says that he is like our shepherd and he takes care of us like the shepherds took care of their sheep.



Day 2. Turn off the lights in your room and have your child pretend to be sleeping. Suddenly, turn on the lights or a bright flashlight and tell your child what the angel said. *ASK:* Did I surprise you? How do you think the shepherds felt when the angel showed up? Sing “Angels We Have Heard on High,” or another angel Christmas carol, with your child.

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Day 3. After the shepherds heard about Jesus' birth, they had to go find him. Hide a small doll or stuffed animal and have your child go find "baby Jesus." *ASK: How do you think the shepherds felt when they found the baby? How would you feel if you got to see the real baby Jesus?*



Day 4. Draw the shape of a shepherd's staff (with a crook). Show your child the similarity between the candy cane shape and the shepherd's staff. *SAY: The man who invented the candy cane made it in the shape of a shepherd's staff to remind us that shepherds visited the baby Jesus at his birth! If we look at the candy cane upside-down, what letter does it look like? A "J"! And whose name starts with J? Jesus!*

Day 5. Read this part of the Christmas story in a children's Bible. *ASK: I wonder why God showed these shepherds how to find Jesus. What made them so special that they got to meet God's Son?*



Christie Thomas

PRAYER:

Thank you, God, for telling your great news to ordinary people. Thank you for loving the world so much that you sent your Son. Help us to remember you and the best present of all this Christmas.

Amen.

Wise Men Meet Jesus

Matthew 2:1-11

When Jesus was born, people noticed that there was a beautiful star shining brightly in the sky. Some wise men from far away saw the star and knew that it meant a new king had been born. They packed up some camping supplies and went on the long journey to find the baby king. They followed the star right to the place where baby Jesus was living. When they saw him, they bowed down and worshipped him, and gave him wonderful gifts.



Day 1. Pretend to be the wise men and go on a little journey through your house, looking for baby Jesus. *ASK: How do you think the wise men felt on their long trip? What did they think when they finally found the baby they were looking for? Do you think they were surprised that the baby king wasn't living in a castle?*

Day 2. *SAY: Do you remember what the wise men followed to find the baby Jesus? Let's sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" together to remind us about the amazing thing God put in the sky when Jesus was born!*



Day 3. Have your child draw a picture of a star while you read Matthew 2:1-11. *ASK: Have you ever been on a long journey? What would you bring with you if you were going to find a newborn baby?*

Day 4. Read today's story in a children's Bible. *ASK: I wonder why God showed these men how to find Jesus. What made them so special that they got to meet God's Son?*



Day 5. *SAY: The wise men brought baby Jesus some interesting gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Frankincense and myrrh are types of perfume. What kind of gift would you bring the baby Jesus?*

Option for families with multiple children: Have your child choose one of their special toys, which they can gift to another child in the family. *ASK: Why do we give gifts at Christmas? What makes a good gift?*

PRAYER:

God, you are so amazing to be able to put a star in the sky for people from another country to follow. Thank you for showing these strangers the baby Jesus. Thank you that you care about and love everyone.

Amen.

If you loved these simple activity-based devotionals, check out the rest of them in my book, "Wise for Salvation".