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TOOLS FOR RAISING KIDS WHO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, we celebrated Thanksgiving in Pennsylvania with our family. For a fun adventure, we took our kids to the Hersheypark Christmas Candylane. They love the magnificent Christmas lights and especially the rides. Walking into the park we approached a nativity. Our son—who was four at the time—stared at the characters.

"Dad," he said, "Look. It's the magi."

"You're right, buddy," I chuckled.

As we walked away to find the more exciting rides, my mom leaned toward me, "Josh," she said, "he's four. He knows the magi?"

"Well," I said, "I literally just read him the Christmas story last night before bed. So yeah, I guess he knows the magi now."

Of all the characters to point out—baby Jesus, the angels, Mary, Joseph—he chose the magi.

Kids love a good story. And there's no greater story we tell on earth than the hope of Christmas. That got me thinking: "How can I teach my kids about Christmas in a way they will understand and enjoy it?"

ENTER THE CHARACTERS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Not only do I want our kids to learn about Christmas, I want to learn too. Even more, I want all of us to apply what we learn so we can live out the Christmas message in our family.

Therefore, beginning Dec. 1, we're going to begin journeying together through the 25 characters of the *Christmas Story: An Advent Experience for* Families.

Each day between Dec. 1 and Christmas Day introduces a new character relevant to the Christmas story. In addition, each character boasts a character trait and life lesson taught from their role in the Christmas story.

Released in chronological order as they enter the story, each day's experience includes:

- The Character Morning Prayer for Our Kids
- Character Trait
 A Brief Character Synopsis
- Life Lesson
- An Activity for Parents and Kids
- Bible Verse
- A Bedtime Question

Especially relevant is that the series can be tailored to any age. Even more, you can apply as little or as much as you have time for.

We will do them before bedtime, but you can do them at dinner or first thing in the morning.

Each day we'll post the character in the TwentyTwoSix Facebook community with an opportunity for you to share questions and stories from that day's character.

We cannot wait to journey with you this Christmas season!

DR. JOSH + CHRISTI





CHARACTER TRAIT Hope

LIFE LESSONGod is with me.



WHY IS ISAIAH IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Prophets are God's mouthpieces. Isaiah was a prophet of hope. He delivered encouragement and divine guidance to God's people. Isaiah also foretold the birth of a new king, the coming Messiah, nearly 800 years before Jesus was even born. Not only did Isaiah say the Messiah would be born of a virgin, he also spoke of Him as a "Wonderful Counselor" and "Prince of Peace." The irony about the meaning of Isaiah is that his name means "Yahweh saves." Do you know what other name means "Yahweh saves?" That's right—Jesus.

The hope Isaiah pointed to was Immanuel, meaning "God with us." You see, Jesus was both man and God. That means God knows everything we're going through because He went through it too. When we're sad, we can be assured that God knows what it feels like. And best of all? He's with you when you're sad. He's with you when you're angry. He's with you when you're jealous. He's even with you when you're happy. So no matter how you feel or what's going on in your life, the hope you can always cling to is that God is with you.



Immanuel, instill in my children the hope that You are "God with them" no matter what they're going through.

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, NIV

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Have your kids draw a picture of a moment they recently felt scared or alone. When they're finished drawing the picture, have them talk about that moment with you. After they talk about it, have them draw a picture of Jesus in the picture beside them. Now have them talk about what they see and how it would change the way they feel if they pictured Jesus with them when they felt scared or alone in the future. Write "hope" across the top of the picture and hang it on the refrigerator as a reminder this Christmas season that "God is with us."

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Did you ever feel like God was with you in a particular situation? Describe that moment(s).



CHARACTER TRAITFaith

LIFE LESSONGod is my deliverer.



WHY IS DAVID IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

There was another prophecy in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:12-16) that spoke of the coming Messiah as the seed of David. Jesus fulfilled that prophecy, which is why He was often referred to as the "son of David." His earthly father, Joseph, adopted Him into the family lineage of David. But his mother, Mary, was also of the bloodline of David.

The "son of David" described the earthly family Jesus was a part of, but even more, it pointed to Him as the Messiah, the long-awaited Deliverer. Whenever Jesus was called the son of David, it was by people who had faith that He could deliver them from torment (Matt. 15:22) or illness (Matt. 20:30). Calling Jesus "son of David" meant they had faith that He was the Messiah.



Father, increase my children's faith in You, the Son of David, the Messiah, their Deliverer.

Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. —Luke 2:4-5, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

You will want to bake or buy some cookies or ice cream ahead of time. But don't tell your kids! Have your children stand facing away from you with their eyes closed. Blindfold them. Ask them if they trust you. Now lead them outside. Get a candle or something else with a pleasant smell and ask them to sniff it. See if they can tell what it smells like. Ask them if they trust you. Next, lead them into the bathroom. Turn on the water. Ask if they still trust you. Now, put soap on and wash their hands. Remember to keep them blindfolded. Now, lead them into the kitchen. Ask them to open their mouth. Ask if they trust you. Stick a bite of their favorite cookie or ice cream into their mouth. Take the blindfold off.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What does it mean to put your faith in someone? Can you give me an example of when you put your faith in God and you saw Him come through for you?



CHARACTER TRAIT Prayer LIFE LESSON Pray big.



WHY IS ZECHARIAH IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Zechariah was kind of an old man when he became a dad. For a long time, Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, could not have children. But that didn't stop Zechariah from praying. The Bible says he was a righteous man and followed God's commands. By the time Zechariah was "well along in years," an angel named Gabriel appeared to Zechariah. The angel said to him, "Your prayer has been heard." Zechariah was going to have a son.

If you have time, read Luke 1:13-17. Notice what the angel tells Zechariah about his son. He is to name him John. John is a miracle from God. His son will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will prepare people for the coming Messiah. The angel not only tells Zechariah his prayer was heard and that he'll have a son, but the angel then describes who John will become. This passage suggests Zechariah's answered prayer was way bigger than just having a son.



Father, help my children learn to cry out to You in a way that brings incredible blessing to those around them.

But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John." —Luke 1:13, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Sit down at the table as a family, each with a piece of paper. Have your children write down one way they would like to change the world around them. What burdens them? Talk about that. Now have them write down one really big prayer they want to begin praying to meet that need. Make it a BIG prayer! It could be a prayer they don't see answered until the end of their life. Use this as a chance to show your kids that the God they pray to is bigger than the burdens they carry.

Remember, God answers prayers that bless others and point them to Jesus. Attach the prayer to their bedroom door so they can remember to pray it often. For extra fun, be creative with how you design it. You could even frame it on their wall.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Tell me a prayer God answered for you. How long did it take for him to answer it?



CHARACTER TRAITMentor / Teachable

LIFE LESSONSeek godly mentors.



WHY IS ELIZABETH IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Elizabeth was Zechariah's wife and an older relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Remember, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and told him God had heard his prayers and that Elizabeth would conceive and give birth to a miracle baby (John the Baptist). This miracle was also very important because God used it as a way to provide comfort to Mary. As a woman not yet married, and still a virgin, Mary was scared when Gabriel told her she would give birth to baby Jesus. She was scared because in her culture, she would be publicly ridiculed for not being married. That's why the angel Gabriel comforted her with the words "even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age..."

The Bible then says that Mary "hurried" to Elizabeth's house. We can only imagine the comfort and guidance Mary was looking for. She needed someone to talk to. Mary needed someone to help her through her pregnancy. What did Elizabeth do when Mary arrived? She welcomed her with open arms. Even with all that was going on in their lives, their relationship with one another came first. As Mary's older relative and a woman Mary looked up to, Elizabeth invited Mary to stay with her in her home for three months. Elizabeth helped Mary answer questions she had, but they also celebrated their coming babies.



Father, place godly mentors in my kids' lives—men and women who will support and encourage them to walk in Your ways.

"And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. For nothing will be impossible with God." —Luke 1:36-37, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Find or buy a picture frame with 3-5 spaces for pictures. Sit down with your children and talk about what a mentor is. Ask your kids whom they go to when they need help. To whom are they most likely to talk? Don't be offended if it's not you, especially if your kids are a little older. We need other like-minded voices speaking into our kids' lives. The goal in this activity is to help them find 3-5 godly people they respect and trust when they need help. They can be older family members, pastors, coaches, teachers, or even a neighbor. Find or take a picture of your kids with that person, and fill it in one of the slots. Hang the picture in their bedroom as a reminder of the people who love and support them.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Name three people you know personally you would love to grow up and be like one day. What is it about them you admire?



CHARACTER TRAITHumility

LIFE LESSONGod looks at the <u>heart</u>.



WHY IS MARY IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Mary is the mother of Jesus. Think about how amazing that is. Why do you think God chose her for something so important? Do you think Mary was a princess to become the mother of Jesus? Or maybe she had lots of money? Do you think she was famous?

Actually, Mary wasn't any of these things. An angel named Gabriel appeared to her and told her she was highly favored by God. In other words, God was proud of her. He sent the angel to tell her she would become the mother of Jesus, the Savior of the world. But Mary was young and poor. Many believe she was about 14 years old at the time, because that was the common age to marry. She also lived in a super small village of little importance. Even more, she was a virgin, which meant she couldn't have a baby. Young. Poor. Not famous. Unable to have a baby. Does that sound like someone you would choose? What did God see in her?

He looked at her heart. She told the angel, "I love God. I'll do whatever he asks of me." The Bible says that God honors those who are humble. He chose a young woman, insignificant in the eyes of the world, to miraculously be the mother to the Savior of the world. Why? Because God saw that her heart was pure. She wanted what was best to bring glory to God.



Father, create in my children a lowly and pure heart. May they, like Mary, find favor with You.

"I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel left her. —Luke 1:38, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Gather as many flashlights, lanterns, or "small lamps" instead of "lights that have bulbs" as you can find in your house. Put them on the table. Turn the lights on. Discuss with your kids the differences with each one (colors, sizes, designs, etc.). Have them walk around and look at floor and table lamps too. Talk about or write down the differences. Which flashlight is their favorite? Is there a lamp they find ugly or wouldn't use? Have your kids pick the light they find the ugliest and have them sit with it in the living room. Read 1 Samuel 16:7 together. Ask what all of the lights have in common—a light bulb. Explain that no matter how popular, good-looking, talented, or rich a person is on the outside, God looks at the light he/she shines through their hearts. Though Mary wasn't popular, her heart was a bright light in God's eyes.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Is there someone at your school who isn't very popular? What can you do tomorrow to brighten his/her light?



CHARACTER TRAITIntegrity

LIFE LESSON Do what's right, not what's normal.



WHY IS JOSEPH IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Like Mary, Joseph was likely a teenager when Jesus was born. He was a young carpenter engaged to Mary. But when Mary shows up and tells him that she's pregnant, Joseph has a big decision to make. Since they weren't yet married, and Mary was pregnant, he knew she would be shamed and disciplined by the Jewish customs of the day—maybe even stoned. So what did he do? He made a plan to break up with her quietly. Joseph cared for Mary. He wanted to protect her.

But then, an angel of the Lord shows up to Joseph in a dream. "Don't be scared to marry Mary," the angel tells him, "the baby is from the Holy Spirit." God picked Joseph to become Jesus' earthly Dad. In Jewish culture, it was rare for a man to raise a child who wasn't his. In spite of what others thought, Joseph raised Jesus. He loved him dearly. He even taught him how to be a carpenter. Could Joseph have left Mary to raise Jesus on her own? That's the pressure he probably felt from many around him, even his friends. But instead of doing what was normal for the culture, he did what God wanted him to do. As a result, Joseph had the unbelievable privilege of being Jesus' Dad.



God, help my kids to grow up discerning righteousness from tradition, doing what's right, not what's normal.

But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."—Matthew 1:20, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Have your kids play an "integrity" game. Take two pieces of construction paper. Write the word "yes" on one piece of paper and "no" on the other. Place a rope or piece of masking tape on the floor to split it into two sides. Put the "yes" paper on one side, and the "no" paper on the other side.

Give your kids situations, based on their ages, that test someone's integrity. For instance, if your child is preschool age, create a scenario where Bella is playing at school with the blocks. You see Connor come and knock them over, pick them up, and bring them to you to play with. You start playing with the blocks too. Have your child step in the "yes" side if they think it's acting with integrity, or the "no" side if they don't think it's acting with integrity. Adjust your examples based on your child's age.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Who is someone at school who always seems to do the right thing? Tell me about him/her.



CHARACTER TRAITCourage

LIFE LESSONBe not afraid.



WHY IS GABRIEL IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

The angel Gabriel is a messenger of God. He first visits Daniel (in the Old Testament) to send him a prophetic message about "Messiah the Prince." He then tells Zechariah (in the New Testament) that his son, John the Baptist, will precede Jesus and get people ready for His arrival. Perhaps Gabriel's most famous encounter is when he visits Mary, telling her that her son will be "the Son of the Most High." Every time he shows up in the Bible, Gabriel delivers good news about the anticipated coming of Jesus the Messiah.

How do you think you would react if Gabriel talked to you? When Zechariah questioned him, Gabriel showed his trust and authority. "I am Gabriel," he said, "who stands in the presence of God." When we think of angels today, we often think of cute-looking beings with wings. The way the Bible describes Gabriel, though, suggests something different. Even Daniel was so scared that when he saw the angel, he fell on his face. Yet, in every case, Gabriel reassures the person he is speaking to, "Be not afraid." Sent by God to prepare Mary for Jesus' birth, Gabriel's message to us, too, is clear: "In Jesus, we have nothing to fear." Be courageous.



Father, help my children to learn to trust You with their fears. May we anticipate, not fear, Your glorious return.

The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news." —Luke 1:19, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Depending on the age of your child, find a news clip or article from the recent wildfires in Gatlinburg, Tenn. Update your children on how quickly a fire can grow out of control. Now get a candle and light it. If you have a fireplace, you may also want to use it for this illustration. Explain that fear is a lot like a fire. It starts small, but if you feed it, it can quickly grow out of control.

Whenever Gabriel talked about the coming Messiah, he always began with "Be not afraid." Ask your children to draw a picture of something they fear. Talk about it. Now, have your children blow out the candle and repeat Gabriel's words, "Be not afraid." Use this is a visual illustration and constant reminder that whenever they get scared, Jesus is bigger than their fear. Side note: You may also want to cover fire safety rules in this lesson too. ;-)

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

When you get scared, what are ways you calm yourself down?



CHARACTER TRAITPrudent

LIFE LESSONPrepare your heart.



WHY IS JOHN THE BAPTIST IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Just like Jesus, John the Baptist was also a miracle baby. He was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. John, like Isaiah, was a prophet. However, he came long after Isaiah and was the first prophet in Israel for hundreds of years. When the Israelites learned about John, they crowded around him to listen to what he had to say. What made John even more intriguing was that he continued the ministry of Elijah from the Old Testament. John the Baptist became the New Testament prophet who came right before Jesus. John told people to prepare their hearts. "A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!" (Mark 1:3).

The word "advent" means "coming." The first Christmas was all about the "coming" birth of Jesus. Today, as we celebrate Christmas, we can use it as an opportunity to prepare our hearts for the "Second Coming," when Jesus returns again to the earth. Nobody knows when that will be or even if it will happen in our lifetime. But what we do know is that we can be ready. John told us to prepare our hearts, turn away from our sins, and ask Jesus to forgive us. That is how we prepare our hearts for Jesus on Christmas morning.



God, prepare my child's heart for the coming of the Messiah. Teach them to seek Your forgiveness and repent.

And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. —Luke 1:17, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

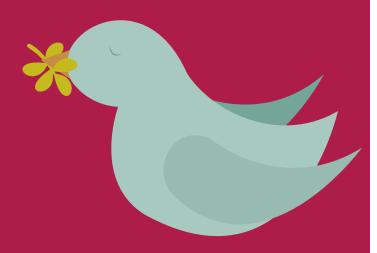
Take a box, put some straw in it, and wrap it as a Christmas present. You could also use the manger from a nativity set. Put a nice bow on it. Make the box look enticing to your kids. As they look at it, tell them they have to wait to open it. Build the anticipation. Talk to your kids about how hard it is to wait on something. What do they think is in it? Use this as a way to help them understand how long the Israelites waited for another prophet and the coming Messiah.

Now have them open it. Was it what they expected? Use the straw to talk to your kids about how many of the Israelites were anticipating a powerful king. Yet, Jesus was born in a manger, arriving virtually unnoticed to the world. He humbled himself as God Incarnate and came as a servant who would later suffer death on a cross. Keep the straw as an illustration. Put it on your Christmas tree as a reminder that each day we need to prepare our hearts, humble ourselves, and seek God's forgiveness.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is your favorite Christmas gift you ever received?





CHARACTER TRAITJoy

LIFE LESSON Be joyful.

WHY IS THE HOLY SPIRIT IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no Christmas story. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not only was the Holy Spirit "hovering over the surface of the waters" during the creation of the world (Gen. 1:2), the Holy Spirit also "came upon" and "overshadowed" Mary. In other words, it was by the Holy Spirit that Jesus became flesh. This is known as the incarnation.

The Holy Spirit also filled John the Baptist while he was in Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:15b). And when Mary shows up at Elizabeth's house, "the baby leaped inside her." As many suggest, the baby (John) leaped for joy when Mary walked into the room because she carried in her womb the coming Messiah. Elizabeth, who was also filled with the Holy Spirit, joyfully praised God with Mary at that very moment. Not only were they carrying two boys who were about to change history, they too would be saved by the Messiah in Mary's womb.



God, fill my children with joy. I pray they grow to experience the joy of their salvation at Christmastime!

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. —Luke 1:41, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

We have two Christmas songs in our home that our kids love to joyfully dance to. We crank them up: "Joy to the World" by the Hunter Brothers and "Light of Christmas" by Owl City. Find the Christmas songs your kids love. Throw a joyful dance party together to celebrate the coming Messiah. To begin with an illustration, hold a deflated balloon. Ask questions you know will get your kids excited. After each question, blow a deep breath of air into the balloon.

Here are a few examples: Who's excited for Christmas? Ready to throw baby Jesus a birthday party? What do you hope is under the tree on Christmas morning? Are you ready to see Grandma and Grandpa (or family they will see during the holidays)? Once the balloon is full, explain to them how sometimes we're so full of joy that we just have to let it out, like the baby did in Elizabeth's womb. Let the balloon release. Watch it swirl around the room. For effect, time the release of the balloon with the beginning of the music for the dance party.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Tell me about a time you leaped for joy. What was so joyful about that moment?



CHARACTER TRAIT Augustus LIFE LESSON Stability



WHY IS CAESAR AUGUSTUS IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Caesar Augustus was the first emperor of the Roman Empire. He brought stability and organization to the Roman world. Right before the birth of Jesus, Caesar Augustus wanted to get a list of the names of people living throughout the land. He did this so he could be sure they paid their taxes. Since Palestine was part of the Roman world, Joseph had to return, with Mary, to Bethlehem to be registered because that's where his family came from.

Caesar Augustus likely had no idea who Jesus ever was. He was 1,500 miles from where Jesus was born. Not only that, he died when Jesus was about 19, before Jesus became well known. Yet, because he ordered a census, the prophecy that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem was fulfilled (Mic. 5:2). Even 600 years before Caesar Augustus, God had a plan to use him. In fact, his leadership provided the stability and organization of roads throughout the Roman Empire that helped Christianity spread across the land. His actions helped create a ripple effect we get to experience even more than 2,000 years later.



God, help my kids to see how their actions can have ripple effects on others, often in ways they'll never know.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. —Luke 2:1, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Ask your kids, "Do our actions over time cause ripple effects on others?" Of course they do. Fill the sink with water. Find different weighted objects to drop into the water. To add more fun, you could bake Christmas cookies and use utensils and ingredients. For instance, find something heavy, like a spoon or even a weighted piece of dough. How many ripples did it make? Go down in weight with different objects, pointing out the decreasing number of ripples. Try a Hershey's Kiss, then a peanut. Go as small as a chocolate chip or a sprinkle. Use this illustration to show that no matter what we drop in, it makes a ripple.

Use examples of how happy they are when someone gives them a smile (a chocolate chip), a compliment (a peanut), a Christmas present (a Hershey Kiss), or cleans their bedroom (a spoon). Even though a chocolate chip makes fewer ripples, more smiles over time add up to the number of ripples of a spoon. Even the smallest of actions, done often over time, have ripple effects on the lives of so many. And like Caesar Augustus, we may never know it.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Tell me about the action of another that put you in a good mood this week. How can you pay it forward?



CHARACTER TRAITSteadfast

LIFE LESSON
Jesus is all we need.



WHY IS BETHLEHEM IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Bethlehem is the small village where Jesus was born. Though not a person, the city itself is an important character in the Christmas story. Joseph and Mary were to return there for the census because it was where their ancestors, from the family of David, were from. The four- to five-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 80 miles full of hills and rough terrain. And Mary was nine months pregnant. Yet, she remained steadfast in the journey.

Bethlehem means "house of bread." This is a fitting place for Jesus to be born. For those of us who follow Him, He is the Bread of Life. Whenever we face a difficult journey, like Mary did, we can always rely on Jesus to get us through it. The bread means that Jesus is all we need.



God, no matter what my children face, help them to remain steadfast on the journey, turning to You to be fed.

Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. —Luke 2:4-6, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Play a board game your kids enjoy. However, choose one that may take a little longer than they can sit still for. Monopoly may be good for teenagers. For us, Chutes and Ladders is enough to test even our steadfastness. Have your children stick the game out until the end, especially if they're losing or bored. Talk to them about what it means to be steadfast, no matter how they feel. Compare it to Mary's journey to Bethlehem.

Afterwards, have some bread together as a snack. Use butter, jam, or even Nutella. Make it taste really good. Use this as an experiential lesson that Jesus, who is our Bread of Life, will help us through whatever we face.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Tell me about an obstacle you had to overcome this week. How did you get through it?



CHARACTER TRAIT Hospitality

LIFE LESSONServe others.



WHY IS THE MANGER IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Remember, Joseph and Mary returned to Bethlehem for the census. The custom for ancestors returning to the "city of David" was to show hospitality, especially for a woman who was pregnant. Though we're normally taught that Joseph and Mary were turned away, the word "inn" in the Bible actually means "guest room." There was no space in the guest room because so many people had come back for the census.

So, in hospitality, Mary and Joseph were put outside, under the "guest room," or main living area. This is where the animals were kept warm. While she stayed here, Mary gave birth to baby Jesus. Mary wrapped Him in cloths and laid Jesus in a manger. The manger, or feeding trough, was what the animals ate their hay from. The manger is like our heart—a place we prepare for Jesus. When Jesus takes over our hearts, we humbly serve others in hospitality.



God, humble my children. May they, in humility, count others more significant than themselves.

Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no quest room available for them. —Luke 2:7, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Go serve someone this week. Sing carols at a nursing home. Invite a widow over for dinner. Serve at a homeless shelter. Take gifts to a single mom for her kids. Have your children use their money. No matter what you do, make sure your kids invest in the activity and that it costs them something. Perhaps they give away some of their own toys to kids in need.

Use this activity to help them understand the humility of the manger. Jesus was laid in the place where animals' food goes. He became the food we all need. As a family, go out this week and feed those who are physically, emotionally, and spiritually hungry.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Is there someone you're concerned about this Christmas? A friend at school? Someone you know at church? What is something you can do for them?



CHARACTER TRAITLove

LIFE LESSON Love Jesus with all your heart, mind, and soul.



WHY IS JESUS IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Jesus is the Christmas story. Without Jesus, all of us would be in big trouble. Every person is a sinner. We all need a Savior to rescue us from our sin. And that's what Christmas is all about. As the angel said, Jesus is the Good News of great joy for all people. God the Father loved us so much that He chose to send His only Son from heaven to earth to be born as a baby. Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life with God (John 3:16).

Not only did Jesus become fully human as a baby, He also .loved us so much that He later died to save us from our sin. When we confess and turn from our sin, Jesus cleanses us. The only way to heaven is by accepting Jesus as our personal Savior (John 14:6). He is our mediator with God the Father (1 Tim. 2:5). Even more, we can know Jesus' love even right now as we live our lives. Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love." (John 15:9).



Father, help my children to accept Jesus into their hearts and grow to love and serve Him all of their days.

But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord."—Luke 2:10-11, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Plan a birthday party for Jesus. You can choose to have the party on Christmas Day or whenever it bests suits your family plans. Either way, plan the party today. Get the ingredients to bake a cake. Have balloons. Celebrate His birth together as a family. Sing carols. Even sing "Happy Birthday." Make it a family tradition your kids look forward to.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

How does Jesus' love for you change the way you treat your mom and dad? Your sibling(s)? Your friends? Others? Give examples.

You could also ask: Do you know what it means to accept Jesus into your heart? Use this as an opportunity to lead your children to Jesus if they are ready. Help them understand what Jesus did to redeem them.

DAY 14 SHEPHERDS



CHARACTER TRAITAdoration

LIFE LESSON

When we adore Jesus, we can't wait to tell others about him.

WHY IS SHEPHERDS IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Like so many other parts of the Christmas story, the shepherds were humble. Being a shepherd was usually left to the youngest child in the family. And in those days, shepherds were seen as unimportant. Even shepherd boy David, before he became king, was disregarded. Yet, God shows up to the people most looked down on in society to show, once again, that He looks at the heart.

You can almost hear the excitement in the voices of the shepherds as they hurry to Bethlehem. Even Mary treasured in her heart the shepherds' story about what the angels told them. On their way back to the fields, there was no way the shepherds could keep silent. These shepherds adored Jesus so much they told everyone they saw about Him. What's really cool about this moment is that the Bible refers to Jesus as the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world. Perhaps that's the very reason God uses these shepherds as his first mouthpieces to excitedly share the Good News about the birth of Jesus.



God, give my children the heart to respond to Your birth the way the shepherds did, with praise and adoration.

When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told. —Luke 2:15-20, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Listen to what Isaiah writes: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa. 52:7, NIV, emphasis mine). Imagine the feet of those shepherds running throughout the countryside proclaiming the Good News!

Tonight, as a family, use your feet to bring Good News. Begin at home. Gather together and ask God to increase your adoration for Him, both individually and as a family. Get bundled up and go for a family prayer walk around your neighborhood. Pray for each house you pass by. Focus your prayer on the salvation of those who live there. Use this activity as a catalyst for talking to your kids about how you can begin sharing about Jesus throughout the year with those in your neighborhood.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is something you adore so much you love telling others about it (a toy, a friend, a memory together, etc.)?



CHARACTER TRAITStrength

LIFE LESSONJesus is the light of the world.



WHY ARE THE ANGELS IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Angels are messengers of God. Remember Gabriel? His messages to Zechariah and Mary are very important parts of the Christmas story. Besides Gabriel, Michael is the only other angel whose name we know. But there are more. Many more. The Bible tells us there are more than 100 million angels who serve God and carry out His instructions (Rev. 5:11; Ps. 91:9-12).

However, contrary to popular belief, angels don't look like sweet, gentle-winged beings we see on nativity scenes. Instead, they're described as having "great strength, who do [God's] word, obedient to his command" (Ps. 103:20, CSB; consider also 2 Kings 19:35). It's no wonder that when the shepherds saw the angel, they, like so many others, were "terrified." Yet, the angel tells the shepherds, "Do not be afraid!" Then, suddenly, many more angels appear, lighting up the night skies above the shepherds. God sent these angels as the very first messengers to proclaim the birth of the Savior to the world.



Father, summon Your angels to strengthen my children. May they choose to follow You and live in the light.

Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!" —Luke 2:13-14. CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Not only were the angels praising God for "the people [God] favors," but the angels light up the night sky above the shepherds to proclaim victory over the dark forces of evil (Satan) with the birth of the promised Messiah (Isa. 14:13-14; 2 Pet. 2:4).

Tonight, as a family, put on your pajamas. Make some popcorn. Pile into your car. Drive around eating popcorn and looking at all of the houses lighting up the night sky in your neighborhood. Talk to your children about how the bright lights at Christmas remind us that Jesus is "the light of the world." Whoever follows Jesus "will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12, CSB).

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Is there anything that confuses you about the Christmas story?





LIFE LESSONPractice being content.



WHY IS KING HEROD IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

King Herod is the villain of the Christmas story. He was the cruel and hateful ruler over the Jews leading up to the birth of Jesus. When he found out the "King of the Jews" had been born, he was jealous. He wanted to be the only king. So Herod asked wise men—who were on their way to see Jesus—to report back to him where the baby was located. When he found out that the wise men tricked him and did not return, Herod was in a fit of rage.

King Herod did not like that someone else had something he did—the title of king. He grew so jealous and angry that he schemed an evil plot. To try to have Jesus killed, Herod ordered that every boy under the age of two in and around Bethlehem be put to death.



God, instill contentment in the hearts of my kids. Help them to be grateful for who they are and all they have.

When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born.—Matthew 2:3-4, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Role play with your kids tonight to show them what jealousy looks like. If you have multiple children, have them sit at the table. Give one child an iPad to play with, one child a boring book, one child a toy, etc. Make sure to distribute the toys in a way you know will cause your kids to argue. Let them play a little bit. Study their behavior. After a few minutes, process with your kids what they're feeling. Who is whining? Is anybody in a fit of rage? Did anyone try to sabotage and take another's toy? Talk about jealousy with your children in this role-playing. Use it as an opportunity to connect with what King Herod was feeling. Brainstorm with your kids ways they can act differently when they're beginning to feel jealous.

If you have an only child or your kids won't react too much to the above scenario, set up the role-playing with your spouse. Pretend one of you got a new iPad and act out inappropriate ways (whining, trying to take it, etc.) people act when they're jealous.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Tell me about a time you felt jealous. What can you do next time to be more content with what you have?





Discernment

LIFE LESSON

When God leads, follow.



WHY IS THE STAR IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

The Star of Bethlehem was a sign to the wise men, or magi, that Jesus was born. The star is even described as "His (Jesus') star" in Matthew 2:2. The magi, who lived in the east, were likely really smart astronomers. They not only studied the stars and planets, but the magi knew of a prophecy that pointed to a unique star for the birth of the Messiah (Num. 24:17). However, it was so unique that nobody else seemed to notice the star except the magi.

The star was their sign to set out on a journey to find the Messiah. When they arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem, the magi asked King Herod where "the King of the Jews" was to be born. This likely means the star didn't lead them all the way to Bethlehem like most believe. However, when they neared Bethlehem, the star reappeared. What did they feel when they saw the star again? They were "overjoyed beyond measure!" Stars do not stop because the earth rotates. Since the star "stopped" above the place Jesus was, the star was most likely a supernatural occurrence, just like the virgin birth. And the magi, discerning its significance, followed.



God, overjoy my kids beyond measure when You lead them. Give them a discerning eye for when to go.

After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. —Matthew 2:9-10, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Google the lyrics to the song "We Three Kings." Depending on the age of your child, sit down and sing the song together as a family, paying attention to the lyrics. Talk about the lyrics afterwards. If you have preschoolers, you can even look on YouTube for an animated video of the song.

Here is one to get you started: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s]pecRI_OwY

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

In what ways do you think God speaks to us today? Have you ever done something you felt God led you to do?



CHARACTER TRAIT
Generosity

LIFE LESSONGive generously.



WHY ARE THE MAGI IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

The magi, otherwise known as the wise men, traveled from the Middle East to find Jesus. These men likely studied science, or what we call astrology today. They were very smart. Some also believe the magi were wealthy and had great reputations. Though the Bible doesn't tell us how many magi journeyed to see Jesus, the common teaching is there were three. That's because they brought three generous gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus.

The Bible also tells us that the magi entered a house. Even though we see them at the nativity, the magi likely didn't arrive to Jesus until He was between 16-24 months old. When they saw Jesus, they fell to their knees and worshipped Him. Since Jesus came to save "all peoples," the magi are the first Gentiles mentioned in the Bible to worship Jesus as the Messiah. Even though King Herod tells them to report back to him where Jesus is, the magi, warned by God in a dream, choose not to. Obeying God, they returned home a different way. The magi knew the significance of Jesus' birth for their lives. They respond by giving generously back to Him.



God, help my children to grow into generous givers. May their giving flow from their worship.

Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. —Matthew 2:11a, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Help your kids understand that everything we have is a gift from God. For this activity, you can do one of the following activities: If you know a family in your local church who is in need this Christmas, have your child either give away a toy of their own or have them use their own money to buy a present for the family. Deliver it personally with your child. You can also have children give their own money in the church offering. Use these activities as an opportunity to discuss how blessed we are by God and how He wants us to give back to Him in return.

We give not to earn God's love, but because He already loves us so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us. We give generously because of His love for us.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is your favorite gift you gave to someone? How did it make you feel?





LIFE LESSON

Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.



WHY IS GOLD IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Gold is a very treasured metal and one of the gifts the magi give Jesus. Though we don't know how much gold they gave Jesus, it was thought to be worth more than it is today—so even a small quantity was worth a lot. The gold was likely used to help Mary and Joseph care for Jesus.

In addition, the gift of gold was used in the Bible to honor a king or deity. The gift of gold honored Jesus as both God and King. The magi knew the baby they traveled to visit wasn't just an ordinary baby. Jesus is indeed the "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16). Though kings and world leaders are human and flawed with sin, Jesus is the perfect King and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Ps. 89:14).



Father, help my children grow to honor You as their King. Lead them in the way of righteousness and justice.

Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. —Matthew 2:11b, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

The magi brought Jesus gold to honor him as King. Sit down together tonight as a family around the table. Have your kids make a list of five things they admire about each of their siblings. Talk about them as a family. Go around the table and honor each child aloud. Use construction paper, markers, crayons, or other creative ways to make these lists. Have your kids post their honor lists where your family can see them. Help your children, one time each day, practice using the list to find a creative way to honor their brother(s)/sister(s). Parents, you too! Write an honor list for your spouse while the kids work on theirs.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

If you were a king and had the power to make one rule everyone had to follow, what rule would you make?



CHARACTER TRAITMindful

LIFE LESSON Jesus is our great high priest.



WHY IS FRANKINCENSE IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Frankincense is the second gift the magi give Jesus. Also quite expensive at the time, frankincense is a perfume or incense that was commonly burned by priests in worship to God.

Just as gold showed that Jesus was King, frankincense meant that He was also priest (Heb. 6:20). Jesus' priesthood means that we don't have to confess our sins to a religious leader, pastor, or priest. Neither do we have to offer animal sacrifices like believers in the Old Testament when we sin. Instead, Jesus is our intercessor (Rom. 8:34). The Bible even uses incense to describe the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8). When we confess our sins to God in prayer, it's an aroma pleasing to Him. Jesus is our great high priest (Heb. 5:5).



May my kids' prayers be an aroma pleasing to You. May they be mindful of their sin and other's needs before You.

Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. —Matthew 2:11b, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Use tonight's lesson as an opportunity to teach your kids that their prayers are an aroma pleasing to God. He is listening. Sometimes we just have to be mindful of what to pray for. A number of years ago, I learned of a family with young children who taught them to pray a five-finger prayer. Since our hands are so close to us, our fingers can be a helpful reminder to us as we pray.

Everyone sit together. Hold up your hand. Since your thumb is the closest finger to your body, have your child use it to be mindful to pray for those closest to them (mom, dad, siblings, grandparents, friends). Next, use the pointer finger to pray for their teachers, pastor, or coaches. The middle finger, since it's the biggest, is used to give thanks to our big God for all He's blessed us with. The ring finger is used to pray for those around us who are sick or in need. Finally, the pinky finger is used to say a prayer for ourselves. We can use it to pray for our own needs, but we can also be mindful of confessing our sins to God. Feel free to simplify or adjust based on your child's age and understanding.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

Who do you want to pray for tonight? Is there someone you know especially hurting right now?





CHARACTER TRAITSacrifice

LIFE LESSONJesus paid the price for our sin.

WHY IS MYRRH IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Myrrh is the third gift the magi give Jesus. Similar to frankincense, it too lets off a pleasing aroma. However, in Bible times, myrrh was most connected with suffering and used as an embalming oil after someone's death.

Even though it may seem odd to give to baby Jesus, this gift shows the faith of the magi. Many prophecies throughout the Old Testament foretold Jesus' suffering. When it came time for Jesus to suffer death on the cross, the soldiers offered him wine mixed with myrrh to ease the pain (Mark 15:23). But Jesus refused it. After Jesus' death, Nicodemus brings myrrh for the burial (John 19:39). The myrrh the magi give Jesus was a symbol of the sacrifice Jesus would make for our sins.



God, give my kids a growing appreciation for the sacrifice You made. Help them to live out that sacrifice.

Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. —Matthew 2:11b, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Have your children grab some money. If they already have a dollar bill or some change in their pocket, even better. Put a five or ten dollar bill up your sleeve, but don't let your kids see it. Ask them to give you the dollar or change they have in their pocket. Tell them they'll never see it again but to give it to you. Ask if they're willing to give it up. Do they trust you? Praise their willingness to sacrifice it once they give it away. Have them now sit at the table. Walk over and give them the five or ten dollars you had up your sleeve.

Use this as a lesson to show them that God would never ask us to sacrifice something if He already didn't have something better up His sleeve. Tell a story of how you sacrificed something in your life and got more in return than you ever imagined possible. Be sure to also talk about benefits like more joy, patience, faith in God, closer relationship to Jesus, trust, etc. You can also talk about earthly sacrifices we make for greater purposes (athletics, graduate degrees, missionaries, doctors, having children, etc.).

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is one way you can show thanks to Jesus for coming to save you?





LIFE LESSONGod is our refuge.



WHY IS EGYPT IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Egypt is where Joseph and Mary went to live to protect Jesus from King Herod. Remember, the government was about to take away all boys under the age of two. Imagine what Joseph and Mary were likely feeling. Not only was King Herod out to get them, they also had to leave their home and everything that was comfortable to them. Egypt was foreign land. But Egypt was also safe. That's why Joseph and Mary raised Jesus there until King Herod died. Though we don't know exactly, it was likely that Jesus was between six and eight years old when He went back to his own homeland.

Jesus, a young boy, was a refugee living in foreign land. Do you know who else is a refugee? You and me. That's right; the Bible says that we are "aliens and strangers" in this world (Heb. 11:13). We are spiritual refugees longing for home. The world we live in now is a foreign land. That's why we have pain and are tempted to make bad decisions. We're not where we belong. But in Christ Jesus, we are home (Eph. 2:19; read Eph. 2:11-22, if you have time). He has a place prepared just for us (John 14:2-3). He is our refuge (Ps. 46:1).



God, help my kids to be safe to others in need, just as You're safe to my kids—a refuge in time of trouble.

After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you." —Matthew 2:13a, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Parents, you will have a little homework prior to this activity, but trust me, it's well worth it. You will also have to explain this to your child age-appropriately, in a way they understand. Tonight, we're helping our kids learn to pray for those "to the end of the earth"—brothers and sisters who seem so far away, yet are no different than you and me (Acts 1:8). When we see ourselves as spiritual refugees, we can relate to those, just like Jesus, who need to flee their homes for safety.

Read this incredible story from my friends at Open Doors. This story is about a 28-year-old woman and her husband who had their baby in Aleppo, Syria, then fled to Lebanon. See what God is doing there. Click here for the story. Depending on the age of your child, you can either tell it to them at a level they'll understand, or you can read it together with your children. Afterwards, talk about what it means to be safe for those around us in need as well. End tonight's activity by praying for Aleppo and studying more about Syria. Click here for prayer points, photos, and demographics of Syria.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is one thing you'll most look forward to when you get to heaven?



CHARACTER TRAITRighteous

LIFE LESSONSeek God and you will find Him.



WHY IS SIMEON IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Simeon was a righteous man, meaning he paid close attention to living according to what the Scriptures taught. Well along in years when he enters the Christmas story, Simeon is used by God to be a witness of Jesus as the Messiah. Amazingly, the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he saw Jesus in real life.

Simeon's name means "hearing." As a righteous man, Simeon prayed a lot. His desire was not only to hear from God but also to see Him. One day, the Holy Spirit just so happened to guide him into the temple. And on that day, it just so happened that Mary and Joseph were there with Jesus. Coincidence? No way. Since Jesus looked like every other baby at the temple that day, Simeon had to have known, by the Holy Spirit, that Jesus was the Messiah. When he saw Mary and Joseph, he joyously ran to the baby, picked Him up in his arms, swung Him around, and praised God. Simeon, because of his desire to see God, prayed to and obeyed God his whole life. Then, God blessed him. For not only did Simeon get to see salvation, he held salvation in his arms (Luke 2:30).



Like Simeon, help my kids to ask, seek, and knock. May their hearts be completely Yours. Show them salvation.

Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, "Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. For my eyes have seen your salvation."

—Luke 2:28-30. CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Simeon was super lucky because he actually got to hold baby Jesus in his arms. When the Bible says that he got to "see" salvation, it also meant that he understood in his heart that Jesus was his Savior. With only two days left until Christmas, we won't get to hold Jesus in our arms, but we can, and should, hold Him in our hearts.

For tonight's activity, sit together and talk as a family. But as you do, find a baby doll or even a baby Jesus from a nativity scene in your house. Each person gets a turn with the baby. Pretend that baby is Jesus, and that you are an excited Simeon holding Him and swinging Him around in your arms.

As you go around the room, take turns passing the baby around to the right. Whoever holds the baby takes a turn excitedly sharing what Jesus means to them. You can help your kids by asking them questions like "What is one thing you really love about Jesus?" Our four-year-old said just last night that he loves that Jesus builds and creates everything. If you could shout from the roof what you love about Jesus, what would it be? What are you thankful for? How has Jesus changed you? Finally, end the night with each person's answering the bedtime question.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is one way you want to begin seeking Jesus with more of your heart? How can I help you do that?



CHARACTER TRAITPatience

LIFE LESSONWaiting is an action.



WHY IS ANNA IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Anna was also well along in years. She was widowed after only seven years of marriage. Can you imagine the heartache and grief as a young woman? Though she could have grown bitter or resentful, Anna chose to seek God. The Bible says she was literally in the temple both day and night. She wasn't out gossiping with her girlfriends or moping around about being alone. Anna knew the importance of godly friends and community. She sought God at the temple and hung out there day and night. Anna, like Simeon, grew to wait patiently on God, even in her distress.

Anna actively pursued God while she waited for Him. Her waiting wasn't like we think of waiting today. We grow bored. Look at our phones. Watch TV. Anna instead fasted and prayed to God, expectedly awaiting His arrival into the world. And because she did, Anna was in the temple the same day as Simeon. She too recognized Mary and Joseph when they entered with Jesus. The Bible tells us that when Anna saw the baby, she walked over to Jesus, blessed Him and began telling everyone about Him. Her wait was worth it.



God, in a world of instant gratification, help my kids to wait on You. Plant in them a desire to fast and pray.

There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and was a widow for eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. —Luke 2:36-37, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Interestingly, the word "wait" in the Bible is a verb. Even in the case of Simeon (Luke 2:25), the word "wait" means "to expect." In this instance, the word means that Simeon and Anna, without a doubt, expected the coming of the first advent, or the birth of baby Jesus. They knew, without a doubt, that Jesus was coming. Used in other places in the New Testament, this word "wait" is used to focus on our daily walk with God, as we expectantly wait for the second advent, the Second Coming of Jesus.

For today's activity, think about what it means to wait. Begin by asking your kids how they feel in the final days before Christmas. Why do they feel this way? They know it's coming, right? We do advent calendars to count down for this very reason. But could you imagine being Simeon and Anna? They knew Christmas, or the birth of Jesus, was coming, but they didn't know when. How would it change how we feel if we knew Jesus was coming, but we didn't know when? How would it change how your kids feel leading up to Christmas if they didn't know when it was coming? When we have to wait for things, people, or events, how do we handle it? What does it say about our hearts?

Jesus is coming again. We, too, are waiting on his return. But we also don't know when. Today, have your kids make two columns on a piece of paper. Join in if you so dare. On the left column, write "Ways I Wait Poorly." On the right column, write "Ways I Can Wait Expectantly." This exercise helps us to see on paper how we can better honor God in our "waiting." When we "act" as though Jesus is coming back, our daily wait, like Anna's, will be worth it. If your family tradition is always to open one gift on Christmas Eve, consider "waiting" until tomorrow. Talk about ways you can "wait" without being bummed out but thanking God with expectation.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

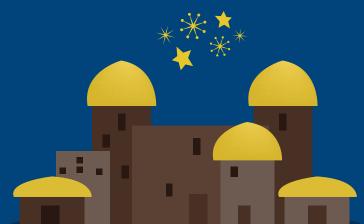
When you have a sibling or friend who is impatient toward you, how does it make you feel?





LIFE LESSON

Jesus relates to and understands our circumstances.



WHY IS NAZARETH IMPORTANT TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY?

Remember, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lived in Egypt in Jesus' early childhood. Then, after King Herod died, an angel told Joseph to take his family back to Israel where Mary and Joseph were from (Luke 2:39). Nazareth is the town Jesus grew up in and lived until His public ministry (Luke 4:16). Nazareth is also where Jesus learned to be a carpenter with His earthly dad, Joseph. He made farm tools, kitchen utensils, and furniture.

When Jesus began His public ministry in Nazareth, the people there were so angry they wanted to disown him (Luke 4:29; Matt. 13:54-58). Because of this, Jesus moved to Capernaum and didn't perform miracles in Nazareth because the people did not believe in Him. Perhaps this is why Nathanael asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). People from Nazareth were seen as unimportant and not well-liked. Jesus' virgin birth, in so many ways, displayed His humility. In a manger. To an unimportant teenager who also grew up in Nazareth.

As we finish on this Christmas Day, our characters come full circle. Our first character, Isaiah, wrote that Jesus "didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2, CSB). Even though He came down from heaven, Jesus entered this world in an unimpressive fashion (John 6:38, 51). That's because Jesus chose to take on the most human of circumstances so He could relate to you and me in anything we go through (Heb. 2:17; 4:14).



Help my kids learn how well You relate to all their circumstances. Reveal to them Your human understanding.

Then [Joseph] went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that [Jesus] would be called a Nazarene. —Matthew 2:23, CSB

ACTIVITY FOR OUR KIDS

Merry Christmas! Happy Birthday, Jesus! Today, keep it simple with your activity. Choose one of the following:

- 1. Have your kids tell you their favorite character from the Advent experience. Find it and have your kids draw a picture of that character from the series. Have them explain why they loved that character so much. Write the character trait at the top and hang it where they can practice it throughout the coming months.
- 2. Everyone go around the room and choose one character trait they want to make their word of the year for 2018. Hang that character trait in your room, and ask your family to help you develop that character trait throughout the year.

BEDTIME QUESTION FOR OUR KIDS

What is the most important lesson you learned this Christmas?