

WEEK 4 LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

Jesus is God's greatest gift.

BIBLE

Jesus Is Born:

Luke 2:1–20; Micah 5:2–4

ABOUT THIS WEEK

Some of the best gifts can appear in unexpected packages, which was undoubtedly the case for Jesus. This week, we'll hear the joyful news that Jesus was born and see how the shepherds came to celebrate. While details around his birth aren't exactly what you would expect, the way people from all over came to worship makes it clear that **Jesus is God's greatest gift.**

LARGE GROUP TIME

Welcome back to *Joy Story*! Christmas is almost here. Aren't you excited? Everywhere you look, you see gifts under Christmas trees, gift wrap for sale, gift ideas at the store ... gifts, gifts everywhere! In today's *Joy Story*, we'll see how God sent us the best gift of all—Jesus, right when the world needed some joy!

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Lifesize Toy

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, play [this song](#) during this activity. Divide kids into teams of about eight, depending on your class size and space. Supply each team with leftover craft materials like yarn, tissue paper, construction paper, butcher paper, markers, safety scissors, tape, empty boxes, and anything else you might have. Give kids three minutes to turn one of their teammates into a toy using these materials.
 - ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** Create a [Nativity sensory bin](#) that kids can play with, including artificial hay, sand, people and animal figures, and fake snow (or cotton balls). Allow kids to play at various times throughout your programming, especially if they need quiet time.
- Let's pretend it's Christmas Eve. You need to give a friend a present, but there's no time to shop for their favorite toy. What are you going to do?
- Let's build our own toys! However, this isn't any ordinary toy-building project. You are going to turn one of your teammates into a toy!

ACTIVITY | Gift Randomizer

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you will need to pass out an index card and a marker to each kid. Have everyone write or draw any word they want (remind them to use words that are appropriate and not made up). Collect all the cards and shuffle them around. Pair up kids and assign them two cards at random. Have them come up with an idea for a brand-new toy that combines the two words they're given. You could provide some paper for them to draw out their idea. Allow kids to share their new inventions with the group!

- ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** *Modify this activity by having preteens use [Apples to Apples Junior](#) (red cards only) instead.*
- ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** *Print full-page pictures of toys onto cardstock paper. Cut them into four to six rectangles to form simple puzzles. Have them put together the puzzles to see what toy it makes. You can also give kids random pieces of different puzzles and have them get silly by putting different parts of different toys together to come up with a new toy!*

- **Who might want to receive this new toy you invented?**

- Gift-giving is serious business. It's easy to just pick something at random and hope the other person will love it, but usually a lot of thought goes into trying to pick the perfect present for the people we love.
- We may not always succeed in giving a great gift to others, but did you know we were already given the greatest gift? Let's find out more in our Bible story!

QUESTION | What was a gift that brought you joy?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask the following questions. You can have every kid shout their answer but then ask a few kids to share their answers with everyone. Comment briefly on their answers—and have fun with this!*
- Think of a time someone gave you a gift that brought you joy. Or maybe you did something to bring someone else joy. Maybe it was a brand-new toy or just a comforting hug when you were feeling sad.
- We all want things that we think will bring us joy, but only one gift gives us real joy—a joy that won't just be a passing fad but lasts forever.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Luke 2:1–20 (Jesus Is Born)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Set up a simple workbench with some tools and toys like you did in previous weeks. Wear an apron and tinker with a toy (maybe a sheep stuffie) as you tell the Bible story, pretending to fix or adjust it.*
- Hey everyone! You dropped in during the busiest time at my workshop. Christmas is almost here which means I'm working super hard to make as many toys to spread as much joy as I can to kids everywhere. I want everyone to remember that they are special and loved. That's what God wanted us to remember when Jesus was sent to this earth as a baby!
- It sure is hectic in here, but I've always got time to share a Joy Story. How about the most important one of all? The one about Jesus being born!
- **Let's check out Luke 2:1–3.**
 - The ruler of the Roman empire in those days, over two thousand years ago, wanted to know how many people were part of his kingdom. So, he decided to take a census.
 - **Does anyone know what a census is?** A census is when a country counts how many people live in it. This meant that everyone in the Roman Empire had to go back to their hometown to be counted.
 - So everyone went to their hometown, including Mary and Joseph. Mary was engaged to Joseph. One day, she was visited by an angel who told her that she was going to have a baby. Now, not just any baby, Mary was going to have the Son of God who would be named Jesus. Jesus was the savior God promised to send.
- **Let's read Luke 2:4–7.**
 - So Joseph and Mary had to travel from the town of Nazareth all the way to the town of Bethlehem because that was Joseph's hometown. When they arrived, the town was packed! There were people everywhere! Every home was filled with relatives, every inn was full of guests, and every available space was taken. There wasn't a room, sofa, or even a spot on the floor to sleep. Mary

and Joseph ended up in a place where the animals were kept.

- **What kind of animals do you think were there?** There might have been chickens, sheep, and maybe a cow or a donkey. It was probably stinky, but this was the only place they could find to stay.
- While they were there, it was time for the baby to be born! Mary gave birth to the baby the angel promised—Jesus, the son of God! Mary wrapped the little baby in cloths and placed him in a manger.
 - **Who knows what a manger is?** A manger is like a trough, a thing that farm animals would eat out of. It was a little gross, but again, that is all they had.
 - It didn't matter where the baby was born, though. All that mattered was that he was finally here!
- **Let's read Luke 2:8–14.**
 - My, there are a lot of angels in this *Joy Story!* I guess all of heaven knew something special had happened that night, and now it was time to let the people on earth know.
 - Nearby in the fields lived some shepherds, whose job was to take care of sheep, all day and all night. This meant that shepherds had to stay out in the field with the sheep. Imagine you are dozing off near your sheep. Suddenly, an angel appears in a bright light in the dark sky!
 - The angel told them the news of Jesus and invited them to go see for themselves. And then an entire angel choir appeared and praised God!
- **What do you think the shepherds did next? Let's find out in Luke 2:15–20.**
 - The shepherds decided they should go to Bethlehem and see this baby that they had heard about from the angels. They hurried off to see this baby as quickly as they could. They found Mary, Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.
 - The shepherds then told everyone about this baby and what the angels had said. Everyone who heard this was amazed.
 - This was incredible news! God was sending Jesus as the promised savior. The people expected the savior to free them from human kings or emperors (like the kind who makes people travel for a census), but Jesus came to do something even bigger—to connect people back to God! Everything in the universe was about to change!
- This is why we celebrate Christmas. We all love the gifts, the food, and the music, but these are all just extras. We celebrate Christmas because God sent us Jesus, a gift we can have forever!

BIG IDEA | Jesus is God's greatest gift.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Create as many gift tags as there are Big Idea words (five for this week). A simple way to do this is to cut wrapping paper into little rectangles, fold them over, and write the word on the inside. Attach each tag to a different toy and place them inside a large gift box. Invite kids to come up and pull out a toy and read the word aloud (or show it to a leader to read for them). After all the toys have been brought out, arrange the toys in order and have everyone say the Big Idea together. You could also do this without the toys and have kids draw out one gift tag at a time from the box.
- Let's say the Big Idea together joyfully: **Jesus is God's greatest gift!**

STORY | A Story About Gifts

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Share a personal story about a time when you or someone gave a gift that meant so much beyond its monetary value. You may also choose to show [this clip](#) from "Toy Story 3" to discuss further how we can share the gifts we get with others, like the gift of Jesus. We always suggest viewing the clip beforehand to make sure you think it's a video that will be a good fit for your context! For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- During Christmastime, we focus a lot on giving and receiving gifts, but the truth is, the gifts we give or receive are with us just for a season.

- **Can you think of any Christmas presents you've gotten, like toys, that you don't use or play with anymore?**
- We might outgrow stuff, but Jesus is the gift that we never outgrow. If anything, we grow *with* Jesus and because of Jesus! And Jesus isn't a mere playmate or a plaything. **Jesus is God's greatest gift**, sent to us because God so loves the world!
- With great gifts, the joy multiplies when we share it with others. In the same way, we can share the gift of Jesus with others. We can tell other people all about who Jesus is, how he came to earth, and what he has done for us!

ACTIVITY | Gift Wrap Design

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, give each kid a square of butcher paper or lay out long sheets for kids to work together. Provide markers, crayons, stamps, glitter, stickers, and other art materials, and have kids design their own wrapping paper. You can roll up the paper and secure it with a rubber band for kids to take home. If kids are working together, prepare some boxes that they can wrap with their newly designed gift wrap.*
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** *Get silly by hosting a gift wrapping contest between teams. Have a few differently-shaped boxes or items and have one person from each team race to the middle to choose a gift for their team to wrap. Choose a few ways you will award preteens, such as "most fancy," "most creative," and "most silly."*
 - ✂ **ACCESSIBILITY HACK:** *Have kids put their hand prints all over their piece of paper to make their gift wrap design. Provide ink pads or paint to use. You can also provide Christmas stamps, sponge stamps, or cookie cutter shapes for design options.*
- One of the most fun parts of opening a gift is wondering what's underneath the gift wrap. There are so many different kinds of gift wrap out there! But most of the time, the wrapping paper has nothing to do with the gift itself. Usually, we tear the paper away to get to the good stuff inside!
- In today's Bible story, we discovered that God's greatest gift did not arrive wrapped in fancy gift wrap and a bow—but what lay inside a wrapping of cloths would be the greatest gift of all!
- During Christmastime, we often get so distracted by holiday events and sales and candy canes and twinkle lights and all those gift exchanges that we forget what God gave the world on that first Christmas day. God sent Jesus! **Jesus is God's greatest gift.**

SCRIPTURE | Micah 5:2–4

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read the passage aloud.*
- **Does anyone have an idea of what these verses are talking about?**
- It's about Jesus! And it was written a long, long time before Jesus was born. It's from the prophet Micah, who was telling the people about the savior God promised to send.
- It says that the savior would come from Bethlehem.
 - **Anyone remember from today's Joy Story where Jesus was born?** Bethlehem!
 - And even though Jesus was a baby born in Bethlehem, Micah says that his "origins are from of old, from ancient times." That's because Jesus was more than just a baby. Jesus is the Son of God!
- And you know the best part about these verses? It says that Jesus will be a shepherd for his flock. You and I are part of that flock, and Jesus takes care of us! Because of Jesus, we "will live securely." We can feel safe because of Jesus, who is the greatest gift of all—a gift that "will reach to the ends of the earth."
- These verses from the Old Testament show us how Jesus is the promised savior who came at the perfect time to bring joy to the whole world. **Jesus is God's greatest gift!**

VIDEO | Joy Story, Episode 4

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play this week's episode of [Grow TV](#).*

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?***REFLECTION | Time For Toys**

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Like previous weeks, provide a box of [assorted fidget toys](#) that kids can manipulate as they think and share. Encourage kids to choose a different one each week to give everyone a chance at all of the different types. Play a Christmas song of your choice and give kids time to play and chat freely with their neighbors (because they will want to talk about the toy they got!) before you invite them to focus on today's reflection questions. Collect the toys to use one more time next week.
- Today, we talked about the greatest part of the *Joy Story*—Jesus was born! He was born in a room shared with animals, and a manger was his first crib, but he was the greatest gift to be given to the world! Shepherds heard the news from angels and came to see baby Jesus for themselves!
 - **What are some of your favorite gifts you've ever gotten? Why are they your favorite?**
 - **Have you ever given a gift to someone else? How did you feel when you gave them the gift?**
 - **Have you ever gotten a gift that you shared with someone else? How did that feel?**
 - **What are some ways we can give the gift of Jesus to others?**
- We can begin sharing Jesus by telling others about him, like the shepherds. They saw Jesus for themselves and went out to spread the news. But we can also share in other ways, such as being kind to someone going through a hard time, helping a classmate who might need help, or befriending a new kid in your class.
- Even being nice to your siblings or family members can be a way to share the love and joy of Jesus. Jesus may not have arrived in the prettiest packaging, but there's no doubt that **Jesus is God's greatest gift.**

RESPONSE | Joy Tree

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Use your version of the Christmas tree you set up in Week 1. Hand out this week's ornament [printable](#) that they can write or draw their response on. Punch a hole at the top and loop some string through it to create an ornament to put on the tree.
- **What can you do to remind yourself that Jesus is God's greatest gift?**
- Maybe you can ...
 - Read the Christmas story from the Bible together with your family.
 - Share what you learned today with friends.
 - Make a card for someone and share why Jesus is the greatest gift!
 - Sing a song together about Jesus.
 - Give away some of your gently used toys and books.
 - Pray for someone who doesn't know Jesus.
 - Spend less time on things that serve as distractions and focus on Jesus this Christmas.

MEMORY VERSE | Luke 1:46–47 (NIV)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Learn the memory verse together using any combination of the resources provided: [memory verse coloring page](#), [sign language motions](#), or choose from [this list](#) of our favorite memorization techniques!
- **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."**

PRAYER

- God, you sent us the greatest gift ever—Jesus! Thank you so much for loving us. You promised to send us a savior, and you did! You sent us Jesus, the greatest gift! Help us each to remember that Christmas is about Jesus and what you did for us. Amen.
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** *Speaking of gifts, a novel perspective we can give preteens is that prayer is a gift we can give people. We are talking to God from our hearts and presenting requests to*

God on behalf of another person. Scaffold prayer for preteens to pray their own prayers with this in mind.

SMALL GROUP TIME

DISCUSSION

● SCRIPTURE QUESTIONS

- **Where was Jesus born? Why was he born in that town?** He was born in Bethlehem, Joseph's hometown. The prophets foretold that the savior would be born there.
- **What did the angel say to the shepherds?** They said not to be afraid because they bring good news for all people — a savior has been born who's wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.
- **What did the shepherds do as soon as the angels left?** They went to Bethlehem to find Jesus and then told everyone about him.
- **Read Micah 5:2. What clues do you see that this verse is about Jesus?** "Bethlehem" is where Jesus was born, Jesus is the true "ruler over Israel," and Jesus has been with God "from ancient times."

● APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- **Of all the gifts that are given at Christmas, why is Jesus the greatest of God's gifts to us?**
- **Who is someone you can share the story of Jesus with?**
- **How can sharing Jesus with someone be a gift to them?**

ACTIVITY | Jesus Gift Box

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, provide drawing supplies and stickers for kids to decorate a small blank gift box. You could ask some local eateries if they have any small to-go containers they'd like to donate for this. Give each kid half of a jumbo popsicle stick, and have them draw a face on the rounded edge. Then have them wrap the rest of the stick in yarn to make a baby. Add some yellow tissue paper or [crinkle-cut paper filler](#) into the box, and place "baby Jesus" inside. See a worked example [here](#).
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Make a baby Jesus ornament like [this](#) with the Big Idea on it to give as a gift to a relative, friend, or teacher to spread the joy that Jesus is God's greatest gift. Preteens can also keep it for themselves as a reminder of the Big Idea.
- Let's take our little gift boxes with us and open them up each time we get swept up in the Christmas frenzy so that we can always remember **Jesus is God's greatest gift**. Wishing you all a very merry and blessed Christmas day!