

Shepherding Little Hearts:
Practical Activities that Teach
Great Truths

Speaker:
Melissa McKee

Watermark Resources:

<http://www.watermark.org/blog/preschool>

<http://www.watermark.org/blog/elementary>

The Nest Facebook Page

BUILDING FAMILY TRADITIONS

In establishing traditions consider:

Expectations: Discuss expectations with your husband and if they are reasonable. Pick and choose the best for your family.

Family Heritage – Consider what you each loved growing up. What you would like to carry forward for your children.

Outreach Opportunities – What will provide opportunity to reach out to extended family, neighbors or friends?

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. **Deuteronomy 6: 5-9***

*Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children. **Deuteronomy 4:9***

Every day is a teaching opportunity, but holidays are special teaching times. Our society goes crazy at holidays. Help your children see past the glitz and the fables, and point them to the Lord.

- We can't do this apart from our own pursuit of Christ.
- We can't pass on what we don't have.
- Our children will imitate our example and "get" what we do.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Think of traditions as practices that create positive feelings and are repeated at regular intervals. Traditions don't have to be extravagant, intense or require a lot of planning. What do you want to cultivate in your children? Strive to be a family that honors Christ and promotes a spirit of love, grace, trust and joy.

Valentines Day

- Cards, chocolates, special breakfast
- Make cards for family members
- Love Tree- Buy simple wood hearts and write the attributes of love or the fruits of the spirit. Talk about them over dinner and add the heart to the tree.

Easter

- Resurrection rolls (roll wrapped around marshmallow which disappears when baked. e tomb is empty...He is risen!)
- Resurrection eggs – go through symbols
- Play special music associated with Easter and resurrection
- Easter bunny is ok. . .but how much are you emphasizing this?
- It's an outreach opportunity: host a cookie decorating or egg-dyeing party and share the Easter story.

Birthdays

- Annual birthday letters to your child can be special, or a birthday video
- Talk about the day that child was born
- Cut out numbers of the year and write down things you love about them

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. **Psalm 139:13-14***

Halloween

- Real Truth Real Quick on celebrating Halloween as a believer
- Pumpkin gospel (childrensministry.com/articles/the-pumpkin-gospel-presentation)
- Neighborhood – time to meet and spend time with neighbors

Thanksgiving

You might be in charge SOONER than you think! Trust God with the journey and that holidays may not be what you expected

- Thank the Lord for what He has done for your family through the past year
- Developing a spirit of gratitude can carry over into Christmas
- Thanksgiving Tree – cut out a tree trunk with construction paper or use an actual tree, each day add leaves of what everyone is thankful for.
- Buy a tablecloth and trace each person's hand that is at the table that year and write what they are thankful for inside their hand. You can go over it with stitching or just use permanent marker.

Christmas

- Focus is Jesus; keep things in perspective!
- Nativity set that your children can play with
- Jesse tree (<https://www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=1625>)
- A Meaningful Christmas (www.facebook.com/pages/A-Meaningful-Christmas-a-24-day-Family-Devotional/168020766617323)
- Invite people to church and meals with you (great way to love and serve others and a great example to your watching children)
- Santa – secret about Santa! (great reading to decide your plan: watermarkblogs.org/wmparents/?s=santa)
- Christmas frame for each year – display all of them each Christmas
- Family calendar from the past year
- Angel tree or Operation Christmas Child buying and giving to others
- Jesus Birthday Party – birthday cake for Jesus



GIVE
THANKS

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THANKSGIVING PACKET | 2012

HOW TO USE THIS PACKET

These ideas are intended for you to use and adapt to help your children learn the virtue of gratitude. Please note that there are several books/activities/crafts included to help foster the interests of many children and to give you, as parents, many things to select from. With that in mind, please don't let the quantity overwhelm you. Rather, choose a few that work best for you and yours and HAVE FUN!! Use the icons provided to help you decide at a glance.

The microwave icon indicates a busy day. We all have moments that we want to be intentional, but it is going to have to be done quickly and without much planning.



The Slow Cooker icon will take you through an activity that may be a little more time or preparation, but the reward will be something well worth the effort.



GRATITUDE DEFINED FOR OUR KIDS:

Appreciating God's goodness in all of life; Being thankful and saying so.

POEMS

For flowers that bloom
about our feet;
For tender grass, so fresh,
so sweet;
For song of bird, and hum of bee;
For all things fair we hear or see,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee.
For blue of stream and
blue of sky;
For pleasant shade of
branches high;
For fragrant air and
cooling breeze;
For beauty of the blooming trees,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee.

~~Ralph Waldo Emerson
1803-1882

May all who share
these gifts today
Be blessed by Thee,
we humbly pray.
What God gives and
what we take
'Tis a gift for Christ his sake;
Be the meal of beans or peas,
God be thanked for those
and these;
Have we flesh or have we fish,
All are fragments from His dish.

~~Robert Herrick 1591-1674

SCRIPTURE

These three suggested verses to memorize as a family and meditate during this month. There are many more, but this can get you started.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
Psalm 107:1 (NIV)

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
I Thess. 5:18 (NIV)

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his people,
the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.
Psalm 100 (NIV)

ACTIVITIES

SCRIPTURE MEMORY:

Needed: paper, crayons/colored pencils



We memorize best when we can link the words to something that can be seen or imagined. Read Psalm 100 and then have your kid(s) draw a picture of what they think of when they hear it. Write the verse on their drawing or have them write it.

AND

Needed: memory card in appendix



Use the scripture Memory card with pictures found in appendix. If you decide to memorize Psalm 100, learn two lines a week and take your time learning, memorizing, and understanding the verse with your children.

SHEEP CRAFT:

Needed: white, green and black paper, google eyes, marker, glue



Remind kid(s) that Psalm 100 tells us that we are the sheep of His pasture. Use this time to read/say the Psalm again. Cut 10-12 skinny strips of white paper and then have your child curl the paper around the marker. Glue the white curls onto a sheet of green paper (this is the pasture). Cut the a sheep head out of paper, glue/draw on eyes and add little black feet. Write or have your child write Psalm 100 on the paper. If they enjoy this activity, they can make as many sheep as they'd like.



GRATITUDE ROLLS:

(beautyandbedlam.com)

Needed: crescent rolls, paper, and pen



Have each person write or draw a picture of something they are thankful for on a piece of paper. Place each paper on a wedge of crescent dough and LOOSELY roll them up. Bake according to package directions and serve with dinner. Enjoy sharing what each one says. For an added twist keep them a secret and try to guess who is thankful for what. This could even be a wonderful activity to do with extended family and friends on Thanksgiving Day.

THANKFUL TURKEY

(adapted from Tania Cowling, Yahoo! Contributor Network)

Needed: paper (preferably construction), marker, turkey head (page appendix)



Talk with your kid(s) about how a grateful heart is ready to praise God for his goodness. Ask them what they want to praise God for. Trace each of their hands or have them trace their own on paper and use the turkey head in the appendix to trace onto paper as well. Write (or have them write) each of the things that they are thankful for on each finger. Glue the turkey head in place. Now you have a turkey with gratitude feathers. This thankful turkey can be used to assist in prayer time throughout the month by reminding them to give God praise for the things they have listed.



THANKFUL TABLECLOTH

(Tania Cowling, Yahoo! Contributor Network)

Needed: paper tablecloth, markers, and crayons



Purchase a paper tablecloth and let your kid(s) go wild. They can write the scripture that applies to having a grateful heart and draw pictures / write things and people they are grateful for. This would be fun to eat on for Thanksgiving Day or just have out for a few meals as a reminder.

OR



Needed: fabric large enough for your table, fabric marker.

Spend an evening asking your family to list things/people they are thankful for. Write those things around the border of the fabric tablecloth. The following year you can write another row of thankfulness. Each year you can add to the tablecloth and read the things from the previous year.

COUNTDOWN WITH THANKFULNESS

(247moms.com)

Needed: countdown printout, stapler/tape, scissors



Cut the countdown printout from the appendix into strips and make a paper chain out of the strips. Kids will be able to countdown the days until Thanksgiving Day while being given a challenge each day that shows their thankfulness. Try not to be overwhelmed by this. You could just choose seven and do it for one week... you could do the whole month, but pray about each thing/person listed rather than partake in a daily challenge. Make it as involved as you'd like or as simple as you'd like. But every child LOVES a countdown so don't miss out on the anticipation that this activity can build. Once you've decided how you'd like to do this one, put the chain together and hang as a garland in your home.

ABC GRATITUDE

(Tania Cowling, Yahoo! Contributor Network)



As the family sits around the dinner table, play a game of gratitude using the alphabet. The first player starts with the letter A, and makes a statement like, "I am thankful for apples that are in our apple pie dessert." The next person uses B and may say, "I am thankful for my baby brother." Continue around the table with each person using the next letter. Can you get through the entire alphabet?

OR



Needed: alphabet cards (see appendix), scissors

Cut and shuffle the alphabet cards from the appendix. Take turns drawing a card and naming something you are thankful for that begins with that letter.

THUMBPRINT TURKEY

(sillyeaglebooks.com)

Needed: orange, brown, yellow paint or inkpad, black marker, cardstock/blank index cards



Cut cardstock into note card size or use index cards. On one side of the card let your kid(s) make a thumbprint turkey (see image below). After the cards have dried, let them write a note of thankfulness to someone they appreciate. For younger kids, you can write, "I am thankful for you, _____" and allow them to write in the name. For even younger kids you can do all the writing, but allow them to tell you what to write. An alternative to this would be to write one of the poems or scriptures from the beginning of the packet. These can be used as place cards for Thanksgiving dinner or sent as post cards at anytime.



SHARING MY GRATITUDE

(adapted from 247moms.com)

Needed: pen/pencil/crayon, sticky notes

Simply leave a sticky note pad and pen out where every family member can write or draw things they are thankful for. The first few days you may have to model how to recognize things and jot them down. Have everyone stick them to the fridge, a door, or a window and watch it fill up fast. Discuss the new additions from time to time.



OR

Needed: pen/crayon, jar/box, crafty materials

Have your kiddo(s) help you decorate a box or jar. Use one of the scriptures on the outside as well. They can also decorate the index cards. Leave the index cards near your box/jar and each time anyone thinks of something they appreciate have them write or draw it and add it to the jar. From time to time have family members pull them out and read them.



OR

Needed: leaf tracing (see appendix), construction paper, ribbon or string, pen/crayon

Have kid(s) trace and cut leaves onto construction paper using the template from the appendix. Leave the leaves out where family members can record things they are thankful for all month. As you collect them, punch a hole in the top and string them onto ribbon/string to make a beautiful garland for your home. You could also attach them to branches from your yard to make your own "thankful tree" for a different spin.



GRATEFUL FOR CREATION

Needed: pen/crayon, paper/journal, gift bag (or any sack)

Read John 1:3 (NIV) together, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Let this verse be on your minds as you take a walk around your neighborhood. Notice the gifts God has given us in nature and record them in your journal. If applicable, put some of your findings in a gift sack. Upon returning home let the kid(s) take great pleasure in all that He made as they "unwrap the gift He has given." Take time to pray and show your gratitude for all you've seen.



OWL CRAFT

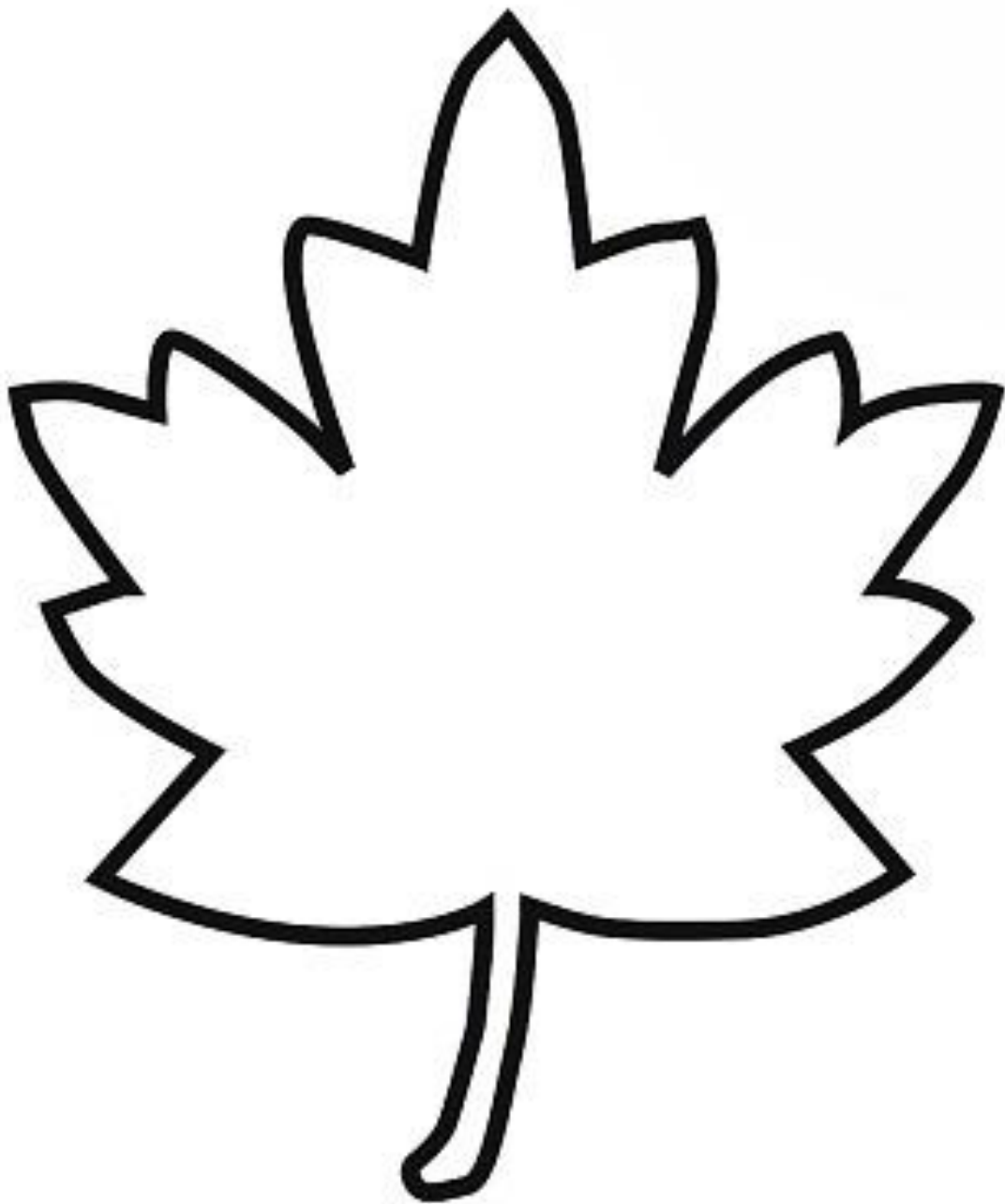
(innerchildfun.com)

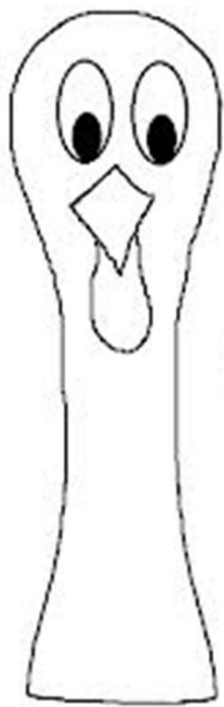
Needed: old toilet paper rolls, glue, construction paper, google eyes, paint/markers

Make sure and do the Grateful for Creation activity and use this as a follow up craft. It will be another opportunity to discuss John 1:3. Take one side of a toilet paper roll and glue the sides together to make two points that resemble an owl's head (see photo). Paint or color the owls (paper roll). Cut out wings and glue them on. Add a triangle nose and google eyes. If you don't have eyes, just draw them in. Your little owls will be the perfect addition to your fall décor and a reminder of God's gifts in nature.



APPENDIX





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Psalm 100 (NIV)

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the 


Worship the LORD with  ;

come before him with joyful 

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his  ,

the  of his pasture.

Enter his  with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the LORD is good and his  endures forever;

his faithfulness  through all generations.

COUNTDOWN WITH THANKFUL ACTIVITIES

We are Thankful for our Grandparents

Call, make a card, or send them an email

We are Thankful for our Missionaries

Pray for someone serving in missions

We are Thankful for our Teachers

Make a thank you card (possibly the thumbprint turkey card, page 6)

We are Thankful for our Fire fighters, policemen, doctors etc.

Stop by the fire station/police station to simply say thank you!

We are Thankful for our toys.

Clean out your toys and donate them to a local shelter.

We are thankful for Daddy.

Do something nice/ a chore for Daddy (example: Wash his car, take out the trash).

We are Thankful for Mommy

Do one extra chore today for her (example: unload the dishwasher or sweep the floor).

We are Thankful for our Clothes.

Clean out our clothes and donate clothing to a local shelter.

We are Thankful for our Sister (s).

Write a Thankful note or do a chore or something nice for her.

We are Thankful for our Brothers (s).

Write a Thankful note or do a chore or something nice for him.

We are Thankful for our friends.

Write a note, send an email, bake a special treat for them.

We are Thankful for our family.

Have a family game night.

We are Thankful for our food.

Collect food for or serve your local shelter.

We are Thankful for our Eyes.

Watch a Movie together as a family.

We are Thankful For a Church to go to.

Pray for your pastor today.

We are Thankful for books.

Start a new book to read together as a family.

We are Thankful for our Neighbors.

Deliver a treat and note of thanks to their porch - play doorbell ditch.

We are Thankful we are able to pray.

During dinnertime prayer have each person pray one thing they are Thankful to God for.

We are Thankful for the earth.

Decide as a family another way you will become ECO friendly. National Geographic has great suggestions at <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/stories/spacescience/green-tips/>

We are Thankful we can write.

Write three things you are thankful for or write out one of the gratitude verses.

We are Thankful helpers.

Think of a way to secretly help someone by tomorrow.

We are Thankful for our classmates.

Discuss one way that you can bless a classmate the next time you're at school and then do it!

We are Thankful for shoes.

Fill empty shoeboxes with items and donate to Operation Christmas Child or donate a pair of shoes (<http://donateyouoldshoes.org/>)

We are Thankful for our pet.

Take them on a walk, clean their cage, play with them. If you don't have a pet, offer to care/play with a friends.

We are Thankful for our Military.

Take time to pray for our men and women in the armed forces. If you know someone personally, pray for them by name. Another great site to visit is <http://www.militaryfamiliespray.com/>

We are Thankful to share our gratitude.

Do one of the activities on page 7 in which you share what you're thankful for.

We are Thankful for our Car,

Go for a fall drive, visit a relative or friend. See what you can see that will remind you of our LORD.

We are Thankful for family memories.

Start a journal or scrapbook to remember what the LORD has done.

THE PUMPKIN GOSPEL

Now it's your turn! Invite your friends or family and use this guide to tell them about the Good News of Jesus while decorating a pumpkin!

- * God made us! He also chose us just like you chose your pumpkin
Ephesians 1:4
- * Write your name on the pumpkin to remind you God calls us by name
Isaiah 43:1
- * The pumpkin represents us, dead, full of sin, and not connected to the vine
John 15:5, Colossians 2:13
- * The yucky insides represent all of our sins
Romans 3:23
- * God scoops the yucky sin out of our hearts when He saves us
Romans 5:8
- * We can bring our sins (yucky insides) to Jesus and ask for forgiveness
1 John 1:9
- * Your carving tools represent the Holy Spirit & the Word
Hebrews 4:12
- * Heart shaped eyes - Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts to know hope
Ephesians 1:17-19
- * Cross shaped nose - We are the aroma of Christ
2 Corinthians 2:15
- * Smile - We can have the joy of the Lord even during pain/suffering
James 1:2
- * Candle - The light of Jesus shining through us to the world
Matthew 5:16

The pumpkin will eventually rot just like our bodies will die but while we're here He's going to let us shine for Him! Some day, those of us who put our trust in Christ will get to live with Him forever in heaven! John 3:16



Resurrection Eggs

Watermark Starting Blocks

#1/Pink: Donkey - Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

#2/Orange: Coin - Judas' blood money

#3/White: Cup - Last Supper

#4/Green: Praying Hands - Garden of Gethsemane

#5/Yellow: Leather Strip - Jesus' trial and lashes

#6/ Purple: Cross - Jesus carrying His cross

#7/Blue: Nails - Jesus' crucifixion

#8/Pastel Pink: Die - Casting of lots for Jesus' clothes

#9/Pastel Yellow: Spear - Roman soldiers piercing His side

#10/Pastel Green: Gauze - Jesus' body wrapped in cloth

#11/Pastel Blue: Stone - Stone was rolled away

#12/Pastel Purple: Empty Tomb - Jesus' resurrection



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CHRISTMAS PACKET | 2012

HOW TO USE THIS PACKET

Christ can easily be overlooked in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas Holiday. The purpose of this packet is to take holiday symbols that surround this season and focus them on Jesus. Hopefully, you will be armed with helpful ways to help draw your little ones closer to our Savior this year.

Several stories and activities were taken from The ADVENTure of Christmas by Lisa Whelchel.

Finding the Birth of Jesus in the Scripture

Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-11 (portions of the story)

Luke 1:26-45, 2:1-20 (the entire account)

Additional Books

What is Christmas? By Michelle Medlock Adams

The Crippled Lamb by Max Lucado & Thomas Nelson

The Pine Parable, The Parable Series #4 by Liz Curtis Higgs & Thomas Nelson

The First Christmas by Carol Heyer

Online Resources

Jesse Tree:

A Jesse Tree is an advent project. Each day an ornament represents part of the lineage of Christ. The tree begins with creation and stretches through the Old and New Testaments until we reach the wonderful story of the birth of Jesus.

<http://christmas.yourway.net/jesse-tree-ornaments/>

Advent Calendar with Scripture Reading:

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/holidays/making-meaningful-christmas-memories/celebrate-advent.aspx>

ADVENT WREATH

The word advent means, "to come." The advent wreath is used to prepare our hearts as believers for the coming of Jesus.

Advent is completed over a four week period and consists of three purple candles, one pink candle and a fifth white candle lit on a circle-shaped wreath of evergreen. The three purple candles in the wreath symbolize hope, peace, and love. These candles are lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent. The pink candle symbolizes joy and is typically lit on the third Sunday. The fifth, white candle is lit on Christmas Eve/Day and symbolizes the birth of Jesus.

The accumulation of light is an expression of the growing anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. The circular wreath represents God's eternity and unity. Evergreens are a symbol of enduring life.

Advent Wreath

Materials Needed

- Garland or greenery attached to a Styrofoam wreath
- Pine cones (optional)
- 3 purple candles, 1 pink candle, 1 white candle
- 5 candle holders

Directions

1. If using a Styrofoam circle wreath, insert your greens and pinecones into the Styrofoam to make a wreath. If using garland, create a circle with your garland and tie it together. Adorn the garland with pinecones and other items of your choice.
2. Place the wreath around your candleholder. Place four purple candles, one pink candle and one white candle in the center.
3. On the next page you will find an example of an Advent family devotional. Feel free to add verses, carols, and discussions of your own.

First Sunday/ Dec 2nd: “The Prophet’s Candle” (HOPE)

This candle is meant to signify the hope of Jesus’ coming

- Light one purple candle
- Have a time of prayer
- Read Isaiah 60: 2-3
- Extinguish the flame

Second Sunday/ Dec 9th: “The Bethlehem Candle” (PEACE)

This candle is in honor of the city of Christ’s birth

- Light two purple candles – hope and peace
- Pray
- Read Mark 1:4
- Extinguish the flames

Third Sunday/ Dec 16th: “The Shepherd’s Candle” (JOY)

- Light two purple candles and one pink to symbolize joy
- Pray
- Read Isaiah 35:10
- Extinguish the flames



Fourth Sunday/ Dec 23rd: “The angle’s Candle” (LOVE)

- Light all four candles- hope, peace, joy, and love
- Pray
- Read Isaiah 9:6-7
- Extinguish the flames

Christmas Eve/Day: “The Christ Candle”

- Light all four candles and add the fifth white candle to the light of Christ.
- Prayer/Thanksgiving/Celebration
- Read the Christmas Story... Luke 1:68-79 and Luke 2:1-20
- Keep the candles lit a bit longer, or safely throughout the day/evening.
- Celebrate the highlight of Advent... the birth of Jesus! Discuss ways to celebrate Him all year long!

CHRISTMAS TREE

While decorating your Christmas tree discuss...

The Christmas tree is a perfect reminder of why Christ came as a baby. One day, Christ would be nailed to a tree and die for the sins of all mankind. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness."

Other connections:

1. The tree boughs extend outward like the arms of Christ stretched upon the cross.
2. The tree points toward heaven drawing our attention to our Father that loves us.

Scrap Tree Activity

Materials needed:

- Green, brown, yellow, red, white paper/fabric
- Scissors
- Circle punch/hole punch (optional)
- Glue

Directions

1. Cut green paper into various length strips.
2. Glue the strips down to form a tree.
3. Add a brown stump and yellow star.
4. Use a circle/hole punch or trace circles on the red paper. Use the red circles to decorate the paper tree.



THE STAR

Anytime this symbol is around discuss...

Matthew 2:2 says, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

The star plays such an integral part of the birth of Jesus and we use this symbol all through the Christmas season. Even Jesus refers to himself as the bright morning star in Revelation 22:16.

Star Gazing

Materials Needed:

- A clear night
- Blanket

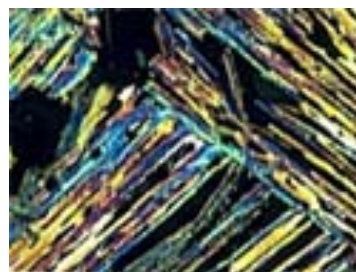
Directions

1. Take your kiddos outside to try to do some stargazing. It may be hard to find a good spot, but it will be well worth the hunt.
2. Lie on your backs and absorb the brilliance of God's handiwork. Use the opportunity to talk about what a miracle it was for that star to plant itself directly over the baby Jesus.

Starry Art (crayon etching)

Materials Needed

- White Poster board (although paper could work)
- Crayons
- Popsicle stick / paper clip



See note below

Directions

1. Fill the paper with crayon patterns making sure to press hard. It is best to use shades of yellow and white for this activity
2. Once you have filled the paper with crayon patterns, color heavily over the whole paper using black crayon.
3. Begin to scratch star designs using your stick or paper clip into the black crayon. The light colors will show through where you scrape away the black.
4. If you want your picture to have a polished look, rub wax paper on it over the top to give it a shine.

NOTE: for younger kiddos they can just etch into the black and you can talk about being lights in a dark world.

LIGHTS

While driving around admiring the lights discuss...

Christmas lights scream to us what we are to be – shining through the world's darkness. Matthew 5:14, 16 read, "You are the light of the world- like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

Other connections:

1. Jesus wants us to shine like these Christmas lights. Can you think of ways we can be a light to our neighborhood?"
2. The Christmas lights that line peoples' driveways remind me of Psalm 119:105 which says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path." It is a lot easier to see where we are going with all these lights. Lets help one another remember to be reading God's word so that we are better in step with Him.

Luminaries

Materials Needed:

- Lunch Sacks
- Hole punch or decorative punch
- Sand or kitty litter
- Votive candles

Directions

1. Punch the sides of the lunch sacks with hole/decorative punch
2. Fill the bottom of each bag with an inch of sand/kitty litter
3. Anchor a votive candle firmly in the sand and light the candle.
4. Line your walkway or porch and shine for your neighbors!

CARDS

When sending or receiving cards discuss...

The purpose of the original Christmas card has gotten lost through the centuries. Cute sayings and pictures of ourselves have taken the place of the original purpose of sending greetings during this season. Christmas cards were first produced in 1843. They were illustrated with nativity scenes and would echo the words of the angel who delivered the very first Christmas message, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." (Luke 2:10)

Other Connections:

1. Discuss how your family can spread the good news of Jesus by sending cards. Explain the importance of making sure that if we send cards that they depict the true meaning of Christmas.
2. Why do you think people who don't believe in Jesus still love Christmas so much?
(Explain that even people who reject Jesus still long for the peace, joy, and love that he can bring. That's why it is important that we help others know who can give them all of that and more.)

Card Pile Up

Materials Needed:

- Collected Christmas cards
- Metal ring/ ribbon
- Hole punch

Directions:

1. Gather the cards and photographs that your family has received throughout the month.
2. Punch a hole in the corner of each card or photograph and string them on a metal ring or ribbon.
3. Keep this stack near your kitchen table. Each evening pray for one or two (depending on how many you have) of the families represented in each card.
4. When you get to the end, start over. By the end of the month your kiddos will know your family friends better and have a deeper understanding of praying for others.

GIFTS

While buying, wrapping, or opening gifts discuss...

Around the 1800s people began purchasing small trinkets rather than making homemade Christmas gifts, which was the custom. In order to make these store bought presents seem more meaningful, people would wrap them in brown paper and decorate the paper themselves... and so began the tradition of wrapping gifts. The greatest gift giver wrapped His gift up in swaddling clothes. Philippians 2:6-7 says, "Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form." The best gift ever given was wrapped and sent to save us all.

Other Connections

1. Why was God's gift to the human race so important?
(discuss hope, grace, and salvation)
2. What difference does it make to us today that God wrapped himself in human flesh and came to earth?
(talk about being able to better understand him as the Son of God when we can relate to Him as the Son of Man).
3. Ask your kids to think of one gift that they are really hoping to get this year. Discuss why it does not come close to comparing to the gift of baby Jesus.

Homemade wrapping paper

Materials Needed:

- Plain or brown wrapping paper / newspaper
- Art supplies to decorate with (flowers, stickers, glitter, buttons, etc).

Directions:

1. After hearing about the wrapping of gifts in the 1800s, your kiddos may want to wrap their own gifts to add their own personal touch to the gifts they give.
2. Allow them to wrap and decorate their wrapping in anyway they would like.

The gift game

Materials needed:

- A gift sack for each of your children
- Random objects from around your house

Directions

1. Ask your child to hunt through the house for something you or another family member (that is present) would want. Tell them to secretly place it in the gift sack once they find it. Double check the gift before it is given. You may have to do a little coaching here. I have had to say, "that is a nice gift and YOU would really like it, but is that something SHE would really like?"
2. Upon returning with the gift sack ask them to give it to the person they got it for.
3. The recipient of the gift has two rules. The first is that they must say thank you and the second is that they have to say one positive thing about the gift that they received.
4. Play the game this way two or three times until they become good at coming up with the positive response. If you have multiple kids they can take turns.
5. Once they have gotten the hang of it ask them to find something that the other person will probably NOT enjoy and bring it back in the gift sack.
6. The recipient still has the same two rules only this time it becomes a little more difficult to find something positive to say. Give your kids help in this area. Good phrases to arm them with are: "Thank you, I don't have one of these." "Thank you, that is a really nice color." "Thank you. I will enjoy sharing this with my brother/sister." You will, however, be surprised at what great things they can come up with when given the chance to think about it.

***Play this game periodically throughout the month. When the time comes to open gifts this holiday season, give them a little reminder of what they have been practicing!

Gifts of the Magi

If you're looking for a different way to look at Christmas gifts with your family this year, here is a different spin. There were three wise men that brought gifts to baby Jesus. They brought gold (something of value), frankincense (something used in worship that brought others closer together), and myrrh (something useful or needed). You could pattern your gift giving in the same fashion. Your children could receive something of value (something they have really been wanting), something the whole family can do together (passes, tickets, new books to read, etc), and something practical that they need (shoes, clothes, etc).

For more info on these gifts:

<http://voices.yahoo.com/the-meaning-behind-gifts-wise-men-2366505.html?cat=34> - <http://voices.yahoo.com/the-meaning-behind-gifts-wise-men-2366505.html?cat=34>

Scripture memory

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord...”



Birthday In a Bag

Project:

Gather supplies and put together a “birthday-in-a-bag” to be donated to Brother Bill’s Helping Hand or Minnie’s Food Pantry (or contact other food pantries to see if they take birthday supplies). Make birthday cards to include in each bag.

Supplies/Preparations:

- * Each bag will need a box of cake mix, a can of frosting, a gift bag to hold all the supplies, and miscellaneous party supplies (balloons, candles, sprinkles, plates & napkins, streamers, birthday banner, hats, party blowers, etc.)
- * Supplies can be gender-specific, themed, or they can be for a general birthday party.
- * Use markers / crayons, construction paper, stickers, etc., to make a birthday card to include in the bag. Make sure the cards the kids decorate say something like, “God made you, and you are special!”

Devotional:

Read Psalm 139:13-14 together. God created every person and made him or her just the way He wanted him or her to be. The Bible says we are wonderfully made in God’s image! We are His children! When we celebrate our birthdays, it is a great time to remember that God made us and everything He makes is good. Two other great verses are Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 2:10. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we were created in God’s image. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God’s masterpiece! We are God’s greatest creation!

Discuss:

- * What is your favorite birthday treat?
- * What is your favorite thing to do on your birthday? Do you feel special on your birthday?
- * How would you feel if you didn’t have a birthday party, gifts, or a cake on your birthday? Some families don’t have enough money to give their children these things, but we have the ability to serve others by picking out treats for them.
- * Read Galatians 5:13. Serving and loving others shows them God’s love. God gives us joy when we love others as He loved us!
- * Pray for the child that will be receiving your birthday bag.
- * If appropriate for your kids’ ages, discuss families that might look different than your own (like single parent families, families with less financial means, etc.).

Additional Info:

*If you are delivering several bags, you may want to call Brother Bill's, or Minnie's Food Pantry (or the food pantry where you are donating them) to make sure they are open the day/time you plan on delivering. You may also be able to get a tour of the facility, which is a great chance for your kids to see how that organization serves those in the community.

* Brother Bill's Helping Hand: www.bbhh.org/index.php?action=programs or volunteer@bbhh.org

* Minnie's Food Pantry: www.minniesfoodpantry.org

BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

DAY 1

TRUTH: God Made Everything

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Psalm 19:1

MEMORY VERSE:

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. Colossians 1:16 (NLT)

ACTIVITY:

Go on a nature walk around the neighborhood and collect things that God created. Practice the memory verse as you walk and talk about how creative God is through His creation.

Materials needed: plastic bag for each child with the memory verse & their name.

CRAFT:

On a piece of card stock glue & paint the items found from the nature walk. *Elementary-age kids – write the memory verse on the top of the page.

Materials needed: One piece of card stock for each child, glue, paint, & scissors.

SNACK:

Dirt pudding cups – Fill a cup with chocolate pudding, top with crumbled chocolate sandwich cookies and add a couple of gummy worms over it all.



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

DAY 2

TRUTH: God Loves Me

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Proverbs 139:14; Matthew 10:29-31

MEMORY VERSE:

So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. Matthew 10:31 (NLT)

ACTIVITY:

Put a mirror in a box, but don't tell the children what is in the box. One at a time have them take a close look in the box to see what God loves the most. Make sure they don't tell anyone what they see! Pass it around and let each child look inside one at a time. When everyone has seen themselves, discuss how much God loves each one of us.

Next send the kids on a "love hunt" looking for cutout hearts you have hidden. Each time a child finds a heart they are to yell, "God loves me!"

Materials needed: box with a mirror inside; lots of cutout hearts

OR

Read Matthew 10:29-31. What does this verse tell us? How does it make you feel when it tells you that God knows the hairs on your head?

Divide the kids into small groups. Give each team a can of whipped topping and a designated amount of chocolate chips or marshmallows. When you say, "Go!" each team will squirt the whipped topping onto one team member's head. Then as quickly as they can, they put the chocolate chips or marshmallows onto the person's head **ONE AT A TIME**. The winning team is the first one to get all of the items stuck in the whipped topping. Have a hose nearby to wash off.

Materials Needed: can of whipped topping for each team, chocolate chips or marshmallows

CRAFT:

"God Loves Me" necklace - String a fun foam heart, "God Loves Me" written on cardstock, and fun foam heart on a piece of yarn. Let the kids wear their necklace the rest of the day.

Materials needed: (for each child) 2 fun foam/cardstock hearts, 1 "God Loves Me" phrase written on cardstock, yarn



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

OR

“God Loves Me” Figure – Have each child decorate one side of a paper cut out of boy or girl to look like him/herself. Allow them to be as creative as they want to be – crayons, cut paper, yarn. On the other side have child write his/her name at top of figure. Write different words on the figure that represent how God sees that child.

Materials needed: Paper cut outs for each child, Items to decorate cut outs (crayons, paper, glue, scissors, you decide), pencils

SNACK:

Ice cream “hairs on your head” – Give each child a scoop of ice cream and allow them to decorate with whipped topping and chocolate chips or marshmallows.

Materials needed: ice cream, whipped topping, marshmallows and chocolate chips



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

DAY 3

TRUTH: God has a rescue plan

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: John 3:16, Luke 24:1-12, Matthew 27:27-31

MEMORY VERSE:

Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead!
Luke 24:5-6 (NLT)

ACTIVITY:

Wiped Clean – Let the kids play with a bunch of newspaper, encouraging them to crumple the pieces into balls and throw them into a hoop or basket. After playing with the newspaper a while have the kids all look at their hands. Talk about how the dirt on their hands is like sin in our hearts. Give each child a wipe and have them clean their hands with it. Explain how Jesus takes away our sin and makes our hearts clean when we trust in Him.

CRAFT:

The Gospel with stickers

- Black represents our sin. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Red represents the blood of Jesus Christ
- White represents how we are washed clean and seen as sinless when we accept Jesus Christ as our own Lord.
- Blue represents being baptized.
- Green represents growing in the Lord.
- Gold/Yellow represents eternity in heaven with Jesus.

Materials needed: Cardstock & circle colored stickers

OR

Gospel bracelets

- Black represents our sin. They are reminded that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Red represents the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice.
- White represents how we are made clean through Jesus' blood. By accepting His sacrifice on our behalf, God sees us through the righteousness of Christ, and our sins are forgiven.
- Blue represents being baptized. God's Word tells us this is an outward act of an inward decision; and, once we decide to make Jesus Christ our Lord, we are to follow by obediently being baptized.
- Green represents growing in the Lord. Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, we need to learn more about Him. We develop a closer relationship to Him through His Word and through prayer.
- Gold/Yellow represents eternity in heaven with God.

Materials needed: Yarn & colored beads



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

SNACK:

Roll sugar cookies out and bake. Let the kids spread the peanut butter on the cookie. Break the pretzels and put them on the edges of the cookie. Read Matthew 27 and talk about what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Materials needed: sugar cookies, peanut butter, pretzels

OR

Read Luke 24:1-12. Roll up the crescent rolls with the marshmallow in the middle. Make sure the “tomb” is completely closed. Bake at 375 for 10 minutes. Cut open the crescent rolls – the marshmallow is gone just like Jesus body was gone from the tomb!

Materials needed: Marshmallows & Crescent rolls



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

DAY 4

TRUTH: God wants to spend time with you

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15 – 17

MEMORY VERSE:

Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. Mark 10:14 (NLT)

ACTIVITY:

Demonstration. Put water and sparkling water in the clear glass. Add food coloring to make it even more fun! Drop one alka seltzer into the water. Ask the kids how this makes them feel. Excited? Then drop a second alka seltzer in the water. It should really be fizzing by now. Explain that God feels excited when we spend time with him. Review ways we can spend time with him.

Materials Needed: clear glass, water, sparkling water, alka seltzer, food coloring

AND/OR

Draw pictures of things that you are thankful for. Pray and thank God as you draw for all of these great things.

Materials Needed: sidewalk chalk

AND/OR

Worship God together. Sing songs, dance, shout, make a parade to praise him.

Materials Needed: Music, Songs, optional – musical instruments or things that make noise

Thankful Game-Have kids pick partners or put them in small groups. Give each pair or group a balloon. Have the kids try to keep the balloon up in the air as long as they can by batting it. Each time they hit the balloon, they shout out something they are thankful to God for.

Materials Needed: Balloons (one for every two kids)



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

CRAFT:

Make a Joyful Noise Instrument - Give each child two paper plates. Children can decorate the paper plates. Fill them with beans and staple or tape the edges shut. Then make a joyful noise to the Lord!

Materials Needed: paper plates, beans, stapler or tape, crayons

AND/OR

Praying Hands - Trace each child's hands and cut them out. Children can color on their paper hands. Punch a hole in a finger and tie them together with yarn. Make a loop so it can hang on a doorknob or bed post. Write today's truth on the hands. Children can take them home as a reminder to pray.

Materials Needed: construction paper, scissors, yarn, hole punch, crayons

AND/OR

Prayer Pail - Have the children decorate the container as they wish. Help the kids write one name on each craft stick of someone they would like to pray for. Put all of the sticks in the Prayer Pail and let them take it home to remind them to pray for those people.

Materials Needed: Craft sticks, pail/baggie/other container, markers, stickers, etc.

SNACK:

Show the children unpopped popcorn and tell them that the kernels are like children who haven't found Jesus or don't know to ever spend time with Him. Without the warmth of God's love they haven't burst to life. Pop the popcorn. When God's love warms our hearts we burst with happiness, and praises to Jesus burst out of us. We can't help but tell others how much we love Him and how great we think He is. This makes us want to spend more time with Him! Eat the popcorn!

Materials needed: unpopped popcorn kernels; hot air popcorn popper



BACKYARD BIBLE CLUB

DAY 5

TRUTH: God finds joy in us

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Psalm 118:24; Neh 8:10

MEMORY VERSE:

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24 (NLT)

Plan a fun activity for the whole group as your last day celebration. Use one of the ideas below or come up with your own way to celebrate.

- Go to the Arboretum & have a picnic.
- Wear bathing suits, run through the sprinklers, play in baby pools, throw water balloons. Get soaked and have a blast!
- Movie Play Date - Watch "What's in the Bible" or "Veggie Tales" with popcorn and M&Ms.
- Decorate cookies and eat them with your new friends.
- Go to the zoo or aquarium and talk about what you learned Day 1 about our Creator.

