

Session 41

Of royal descent

In this session, children hear the Christmas story from Matthew's Gospel. It is probably a story that most of your group will be very familiar with by now. Try to help them see how amazing this story really is: the God of heaven chose to be our 'Immanuel' – 'God with us' here on earth.

To plan your session... Choose a selection of *Starting, Into the Bible* and *Living the life* activities to make your session fun and memorable.

Options to start your session...

Meet a baby

Activity time: 5–10 minutes

Aim: to appreciate that God came to earth as a tiny, vulnerable baby

You will need: a baby and parent, or a photo of a baby

- 1 Encourage the children to imagine that someone really important or famous, such as royalty or the president of the United States, is going to visit the area where they live. Invite them to tell you how they will be able to tell that the person is important. (There are TV news bulletins, press photographers, security guards, red carpets, flags, etc.)
- 2 Ask the children what they think should happen if God himself, the King of kings, were coming. Should he appear very important?
- 3 Invite a parent to bring in their baby and show him or her to the children (or show the photo). Allow a few minutes for the children to appreciate how tiny and vulnerable a new baby is. Say that the King of kings should have been very obviously a king – yet this is what happened.

What kind of baby?

Activity time: 5–10 minutes

Aim: to think about the meaning of names

You will need: copies of the *Xstream* sheet from page 291, a book of baby names

- 1 Give out copies of the *Xstream* sheet from page 291 and invite the children to complete the questionnaire. (They may need to fill in some of the information at home, if they don't know the answers.)
- 2 Ask the children if they know what their name means. If they don't, try to find the meaning in a book.
- 3 Challenge the children to look up the Bible verses to find out what the names given to God's Son mean and complete the *Xstream* sheet.

Aim

To be amazed that God came to live with us

Bible passage

Matthew 1:18–25; Isaiah 7:14

READY TO USE activity

Creative praise

Activity time: 5 minutes

Aim: to praise God

- 1 Invite the children to sit in a circle, and ask them to think of words that describe God.
- 2 Write the words on separate slips of paper and give one to each child.
- 3 Complete a 'Mexican wave' clockwise around the circle. Invite a volunteer to stand up, raise their arms in the air, shout 'God you are...' (adding whatever their word is), lower their arms and sit down. Immediately, the person on their left should do the same, and so the action is passed around the circle.
- 4 Challenge the children to listen for names and their meanings in today's story.

Tip for Leaders: Sitting in a circle so that everyone can see each other is ideal because it helps everyone to feel included. If possible, the leader should be on the same level as everyone else.

Into the Bible – options to explore the Bible passage...

READY TO USE activity

Rap with drama

Activity time: 20–25 minutes

Aim: to be amazed that God came to live with us

You will need: copies of the *Xstream* sheet from page 292

1 Read the rap

Read out the rap below, emphasising the syllables in bold type. Pause at the end of alternate lines for the children to complete them with the correct words. The rap is also on the *Xstream* sheet from page 292, so alternatively the children could fill in the blanks on the page.

Mary and Joseph were **about** to be **wed**

'But **now** I'm **pregnant**,' **Mary**... (*said*).

'An **angel** **gave** God's special **message** to **me**:

I'm to be **mother** to a **special**... (*baby*).'

This was an **amazing** **event**,

When **God's** only **Son** from **heaven** was... (*sent*),

To **be** a **baby** to **live** on the **earth**.

There **could** have been **trouble** **before** his... (*birth*),

For **Joseph** **wondered** **if** he **should**

Leave **Mary** and **go** **away**, while he... (*could*).

But **as** he was **thinking** **what** to **do**,

He **fell** **asleep**, and **just** guess... (*who*)

Stepped **into** his **dream** and **to** him **spoke**?

Believe me, **this** was no **ordinary**... (*bloke*),

But an **angel** who **said** in a **very** clear **voice**,

'**Stay** with **Mary**, that **is** God's... (*choice*).'

So **Joseph** **knew** he **had** to **stay**,

Marry **Mary**, and **not** go... (*away*).

So **stay** he **did** as the **baby** **grew**

And **when** it was **born** Joseph **also**... (*knew*)

To **call** him **Jesus**, **because** that **name**

Means '**Saviour**', **which** is **why** he... (*came*)

As a **baby**, **to** the **world**, to **tell**

That **God** is **with** us... (*Immanuel*).

Once the children are confident of the words that go in the blanks, run the rap through again, getting them to shout out their words more loudly. Explain that the name 'Immanuel', which was one of the names given to Jesus, means 'God is with us'.

2 Retell the story

Divide the children into small groups of no more than four. Explain that the rap is based on what we are told in the Bible about Jesus' birth. Invite them to look at Matthew 1:18–25 in their Bibles. You may need to explain the following words (from the CEV):

'King David' – He had lived hundreds of years before Jesus and was one of his ancestors;

'the baby ... is from the Holy Spirit' – Mary was having this special baby through God's power (if specifically asked, explain that humanly speaking it was impossible for her to be pregnant);

'angel' – messengers from God.

Explain to the children that, in their groups, they are going to retell the story of Jesus' birth. Encourage one child in each group to be a narrator and read the relevant Bible verses while the others mime. While the children are working on their mime, circulate and offer help and encouragement to the groups. After about 10 minutes, invite each group in turn to present what they have done to everyone else.

3 Reflect and pray

Discuss how powerful God is. What amazing things can the children think of that God created? Invite them to think about how fragile a new baby is. Say that Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, was prepared to come to earth as a tiny baby – awesome!

Read Isaiah 7:14 to the children, followed by Matthew 1:22,23. Allow time for silent reflection and prayer in response to this.

Story with questionnaire and craft

Activity time: 15–20 minutes

Aim: to be amazed that God came to live with us

You will need: a photo of a baby, copies of the questionnaire from page 293, clipboards, collage materials

1 Bible Timeline

Fold the *SU Bible Timeline* so that the picture 'God becomes human' is the only picture on view. Invite the children to tell you anything they know about people and events that took place before Jesus was born. As they refer to different Old Testament characters, unfold the *Timeline* and spread it out on the floor. Invite the children to identify the people that have been mentioned. Point out how Jesus' birth was part of God's plan to save his people and, hundreds of years before, Isaiah had said it would happen. Help the children to find Isaiah 7:14 in their Bibles and read it aloud together.

2 Read the story

Explain to the children that they are now going to discover how what Isaiah said came true. Read, or ask a confident reader to read, Matthew 1:18–25 while the other children follow.

3 Prayer

Ask the children to sit in a circle. Place the photo of a baby in the centre of the circle. Invite them to thank God that he came to earth as a tiny baby.

4 Questionnaire

Invite the children to get into small groups of three to five. Encourage each group to choose a good reader to be their market researcher, and give each researcher a copy of the questionnaire from page 293 along with a clipboard. Give the researchers a few minutes to ask their group the questions and record the answers. (Alternatively, invite the children to get into pairs and take it in turns to ask and answer the questions on the questionnaire.) Allow time for brief feedback from the children on some of the answers they gave or received.

5 Something to make

Give each child a sheet of paper and collage materials and invite them to create a picture to show that God sent his Son to earth as a tiny baby. When the pictures are completed, display them – perhaps in church, ready for the Christmas services, if possible. The children could visit the *Bubbles* group if you have one with their collage pictures (by prior arrangement!) and show and tell the younger children the story of when Jesus was born.



More on this theme

If you want to do a short series with your group, other sessions that work well with this one are:

Session 42 Royal visit, Matthew 2:1–12; Isaiah 60:1–3

Session 43 Trusting Mary, Luke 1:26–38

Session 44 The praising shepherds, Luke 2:1–20

Session 45 Happy Christmas! Luke 2:1–20; Matthew 2:1–12

Living the life – options to help live God’s way...

Decoration

Activity time: 10 minutes

Aim: to remember that God came to earth as a baby

You will need: glitter, ribbon, template from page 293

- 1 Give each child a copy of the bauble template from page 293, or invite them to draw their own.
- 2 Invite the children to choose one of the following words or phrases: ‘Jesus’, ‘Saviour’, ‘Immanuel’, ‘God with us’ and write it on their bauble with pens or glitter. Encourage them to decorate the rest of the shape (making sure the words are visible) and attach a ribbon loop.
- 3 Encourage the children to hang the bauble on their Christmas tree to remind them that God came to earth as a baby.

Chat

Activity time: 5–10 minutes

Aim: to think about why God came to earth as a baby

- 1 Divide the children into small groups and invite them to think about how they would answer the following questions:
Why did God become a human being?
Hundreds of years earlier, God had promised to send his people a saviour. What is a saviour?
How could a baby be the Saviour that God had promised?
What did Jesus rescue us from?
- 2 After a few minutes, invite each group to share the answers they have. Guide their responses if they don’t understand, or are incorrect. Encourage further questions, if appropriate.
- 3 If the children have questions that you cannot answer, see if you can find the answer together in the Bible. If necessary, don’t be afraid to say that you will find out the answer and tell them next session.

READY TO USE
activity

Active game

Activity time: 5–10 minutes

Aim: to remember that God is with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing

- 1 Ask the children if they can remember the meaning of the name ‘Immanuel’ that was given to baby Jesus (*God is with us*).
- 2 Challenge the children to think up places and times when God is with us, and make up an appropriate action for each. (For example: ‘Home’ – run to one end of the room; ‘Lonely’ – shake head and look sad.)
- 3 Play a game where each time you say a word you preface it with, ‘God is with us when we are...’ For example, if you say, ‘God is with us when we are at home’, the children should run to the appropriate end of the room.
- 4 This could be played as an elimination game, or with different children calling.

Extra ideas for the session and beyond...

Invite two leaders or children to take on the role of Mary and Joseph. Challenge them to sit in the ‘hot seat’ while everyone asks them questions about Jesus’ birth.

What kind of baby were you?



Draw a self-portrait of you as a baby here.



Your name: _____

The meaning of your name: _____

Your birthday: _____

Did you

- cry a lot?
- sleep a lot?
- burp a lot?

When you were born, were you

- on time?
- early?
- late?

When you were born was it

- night-time?
- daytime?

Did people say you were

- chubby?
- skinny?
- neither?

Was your hair

- fair?
- dark?
- not there at all?

Look up the Bible references to find out their meanings.

So what kind of baby was Jesus?
We don't know, but we do know that his names were very important.

Immanuel (Matthew 1:23)

Jesus (Matthew 1:21)

Mary rap

MARY AND JOSEPH WERE ABOUT TO BE WED

'BUT NOW I'M PREGNANT,' MARY _____

'AN ANGEL GAVE GOD'S SPECIAL MESSAGE TO ME:

I'M TO BE MOTHER TO A SPECIAL _____!

THIS WAS AN AMAZING EVENT,

WHEN GOD'S ONLY SON FROM HEAVEN WAS _____

TO BE A BABY TO LIVE ON THE EARTH.

THERE COULD HAVE BEEN TROUBLE BEFORE HIS _____

★ FOR JOSEPH WONDERED IF HE SHOULD

LEAVE MARY AND GO AWAY, WHILE HE _____

BUT AS HE WAS THINKING WHAT TO DO,

HE FELL ASLEEP, AND JUST GUESS _____

STEPPED INTO HIS DREAM AND TO HIM SPOKE?

BELIEVE ME, THIS WAS NO ORDINARY _____,

BUT AN ANGEL WHO SAID IN A VERY CLEAR VOICE,

'STAY WITH MARY, THAT IS GOD'S _____!'

SO JOSEPH KNEW HE HAD TO STAY,

MARRY MARY, AND NOT GO _____

SO STAY HE DID AS THE BABY GREW


AND WHEN IT WAS BORN JOSEPH ALSO _____

TO CALL HIM JESUS, BECAUSE THAT NAME

MEANS 'SAVIOUR', WHICH IS WHY HE _____

AS A BABY, TO THE WORLD TO TELL

THAT GOD IS WITH US _____



Read out the rap below, emphasising the syllables in RED type. But before you start you'll need to fill in the gaps! (clue! The missing words should rhyme with the word at the end of the line above - well, sort of!)

A Christmas questionnaire

1 What do you like best about Christmas?

2 Whose birthday are we celebrating?

3 Why do people go to church on Christmas Day, even if it isn't a Sunday?

4 Which part of the story of Jesus' birth do you like best?

5 Who was given the name Immanuel?

6 What does it mean?

7 When do you think it would help you to remember that God is with you?

