



Faith Adventures for Children Together



*Committed to URC Children Together:
enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus
together in the home, church and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link:
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

Luke 2:12, 15-17 – The Shepherds' Story

Theme: an event for everyone – the shepherds' story

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

The book of Luke was written by the disciple of the same name. He was a physician and a Gentile, a non-Jew. He writes in a way that seems to want everyone to know that Jesus came for everyone, Jew and Gentile. So, it's no surprise that his telling of the birth of Jesus includes the story of the shepherds in quite a lot of detail.

It's a fascinating task to research these shepherds and see who they really were and what farming life was like for them. These were not just normal shepherds; they were specialists in their field (no pun intended). They would have been local people who did seasonal shepherding on the grazing fields around Bethlehem town.

Bethlehem means House of Bread, and this is because the fields were used to grow grain. Once the harvest was complete, the shepherds would be invited to bring their flocks to live in the fields, eating the left-over stubs of grain and preparing the field for resowing. The sheep that the shepherds looked after would have been used for sacrifices in the temple. One of the practices would have included finding the perfect lambs who were spotless, wrapping them in cloths and keeping them in mangers as sacrificial lambs. An image that would have connected with them when the Angel told them to go find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. The Bethlehem shepherds ran to meet the lamb of God in a manger. The Bethlehem shepherds ran to meet the good shepherd.



It didn't end there, they then went out and told the good news to others, and all those who heard were amazed. This session is an opportunity to explore the shepherd's story, wonder about farming life then and now and consider how we go and tell this Christmas.

We have used a paraphrase version (The Message) because it tells the story so beautifully, but would always suggest you also read it in your usual version to check translation when a paraphrase is used.

Together

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,

(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN

(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,

Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.

Amen

In-person game - Sheepfold

This game will help the group begin to explore the role of a shepherd.

You will need:

- space to play in
- balloons (one colour for each team, at least 20 balloons in each colour)
- rolled up paper (like a bat) one for each child



What you do:

Put the children into smaller groups (depending on how many colours of balloons you have). It also works in small groups with one person per colour. Explain that they are now shepherds.

Each shepherd (or group of shepherds) has their own corner of the room, or space that is their sheep pen (maybe a hoop or a circle marked on the floor in chalk). The balloons are all mixed up in a pile in the centre of the room.

On the word 'GO', all shepherds at once must try to herd their coloured sheep into the pen (without killing or damaging a sheep). They use their paper bats to move the sheep to the sheep pen.

Once all sheep are safe in the pen, the shepherds sit by the pen and its game over..

Alternative game – Charades

A familiar game that offers a fun way of exploring the idea of passing on messages.

You will need:

A set of phrases/messages, such as put the kettle on, time to get up, hand in your homework, go to bed now and so on.

What you do:

Put the group into two teams. The teams race each other to guess as many phrases as possible.

Each team sends someone to the leader who shows them a message; they then have to act that message out to their team mates.

Whoever guesses correctly, then has a turn.

Continue until all the messages have been guessed.

Experience

For this story we recommend using the The Message

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A12%2C+15-17&version=MSG>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: Shepherds visit – Care bear's Bible stories

<https://youtu.be/vs4SQP9QSXE?si=x-P2OiblzVfcj5Bh>

Over fives: Storytellers: Shepherds and Baby Jesus <https://youtu.be/gSBMkKxkE-s?si=Aqx1luyGLzHWAIHY>

Songs to support the story

Under fives: Hush, there's a baby – Maynard's Groovy Bible Tunes

<https://youtu.be/1YurJsAVorg?si=Jeleg3Eh9nKTGjc->

Five to elevens: It's Christmas – North Point Kids

<https://youtu.be/TnbQNOM7gHg?si=lcI8R5JtiHdyLDZb>



Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the passage

Ensure everyone has access to **The Message** retelling of the Bible passage.

Luke 2: 8-12& 15-18

The shepherds' story in Luke gives us a good idea of the timeline of the angels visit, Jesus birth, the visit to Jesus and the fact that they went to tell others what they saw. However we don't really know what that might have looked like in reality. This is an opportunity for small groups to use their creative inspiration and act out the story. Once finished, showcase the different stories. If time allows, chat about each one, the differences and similarities and what stood out.

Some things to consider when planning the drama.

What were the shepherds doing when the angels appeared?

What did *'the shepherds talked it over'* look like?

How did they get to the stable?

What about the sheep?

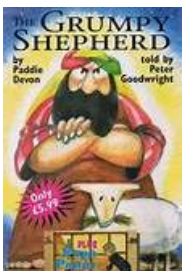
How did they share the news of Jesus birth?

I wonder what they said?

How could your group share these stories with the wider church and community?

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too.



'The Grumpy Shepherd' by Paddie Devon

<https://youtu.be/D9yCP4IAGTU?si=eRNCaLjeRWmirfkl>

Talking together: How might we talk about the story together?

- I wonder why the first thing the angels said was not to be afraid?
- I wonder what angels really look like?
- I wonder how many shepherds there actually were – did they all go at once?
- I wonder how long the shepherds talked about it before they went to the stable?
- Would God have looked after their sheep while they were gone? Or an angel, maybe?
- I wonder whether everyone believed what the shepherds told them? I wonder what they said.
- I wonder if they took their sheep with them? Did the sheep follow? Some Bibles say they left their sheep – do sheep let them do that?



- How might you have felt if angels came in the night to give you a message like that? Would you go?

Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- I wonder who you would tell if you saw something amazing?
- I wonder what is your favourite bit of that story?

What's in the box (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing "what's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- A letter – The angels share the message with the shepherd who passes the message on to other people. Why not pass the letter around the group?
- An angel – I wonder what they thought when they saw the angels?
- A torch – the night sky was lit up with the star which guided them to the manger.
- A special present wrapped up – the baby Jesus was wrapped up, just like a special present to the world.
- A sheep or lamb – I wonder if the sheep followed the shepherd to the stable?
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (eg stones, felt, twigs etc)

Express

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Creative Prayers

You will need:

- A sheep
- Baby Jesus from your nativity or one you have made
- Angel, feather or a halo (gold or silver pipe cleaner or tinsel)
- Shepherd

What you do:

Place the objects around your room as prayer stations or have individual objects for each child. Think about going bigger and using larger objects and make prayer stations the whole community can join with.

Sheep

The shepherds went off to Bethlehem to see the baby but the sheep were left behind in the field and missed out on seeing Jesus. I wonder who are the people who are missing this Christmas? Take hold of the sheep. Think about the people who you feel are missing out. Who are the people who are feeling forgotten? Refugees, the homeless, those without money for food...?





Dear God

May this Christmas be celebrated with hearts filled with peace and love. We pray for the people who are going through a hard time or feeling left out this Christmas, for those who are lonely, afraid, or sad. Please may they know your comfort, peace and love. Amen

Baby Jesus

What would you like to say thank you for this Christmas?

Thank God for sending Jesus to be a light in the world. Hold the baby Jesus in your hand. Think about what you would like to say thank you to God for: families and friends? fun and food? Christmas cards and presents?



Dear God

Thank you for parties and presents, cards and carols, Thank you for fun and food, family and friendship. But most of all thank you for the most extraordinary gift: Jesus, your son. Amen

Angel

The shepherds heard the message from the angels. Hold the angel, halo or feather in your hand.

Close your eyes and sit and listen. What can you hear? Is there just silence? Is there birdsong or traffic or voices? What do you need to quieten inside yourself? Share your thoughts with God.



Dear God

Just as the shepherds heard the good news from the angels Help us to listen to your good news. You speak to us through the words of songs and hymns, You speak to us through our prayers, You speak to us through others. Lord Jesus, you speak to us in so many different ways, Help us to listen to your good news. Amen.

Shepherd

After visiting the Baby Jesus, the shepherds shared the good news. How can you share the good news this Christmas? Hold the shepherd in your hand. Think about the good news of Jesus being born and ask God to help you share that news with others, just like the shepherds.





Dear God

May we like the shepherds be praising, bubbling, sparkling, and overflowing with the joy of knowing that Jesus was born for each of us.

Help us to share the good news and all the gifts we have.

Amen.

Spoken prayer

You will need an advent wreath with four candles: this can be as simple as you like. Each week of Advent we will add a prayer for each of the candles.

Candle 2 – The Shepherds

Dear God,

This candle we light
is for the shepherds
who heard the message of joy
that the angels sang.

Help us to celebrate in the good news of Jesus' birth
and share that joy with others this Advent time.

As we journey with the shepherds
in this time of waiting and getting ready,
may our hearts be filled with Joy.

Amen



Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond. <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Action stations

We are told the shepherds shared the news of Jesus birth with all they met. Have a discussion and think about what sorts of ways our own message of faith or Christmas could be shared and how it could be shared. Have some resources to hand for those wishing to respond creatively. If necessary, give some suggestions:

- Poster/ card
- Video the drama created in today's session.
- Write a rap or poem or song

but allow plenty of time and space for the group's own response.

The children may need some support in enabling their idea to be a reality.



Sheep Cupcakes

You will need:

- Vanilla cupcake mix or ready made cupcakes
- Small marshmallows
- Icing sugar
- Chocolate eggs (cut in half) or chocolate buttons
- Writing icing

What you do:

Make the cupcakes as directed on the mix packaging.

Once the cakes are cool, if the cake has a point, slice the top off to make it flatter so that it is easier to position the marshmallows.

Mix up some icing sugar and water (quite thickly), to make icing to spread on your cupcake.

Place marshmallows around the top of the cakes, with half an egg or a chocolate button placed roughly in the centre. Use two dots of icing for eyes, and then use the writing icing to create the ears and eye detail.



Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- That first Christmas was an event for everyone. Who do you know who might find it difficult to celebrate Christmas this year? Perhaps you could send them a card or make them a small gift or visit them to remind them that you are thinking of them. Some churches host a Christmas Day event for people who are alone at Christmas. Maybe you could help prepare something for that.
 - The shepherds shared the story of their experience on that first Christmas, the good news that Jesus had been born. Do you have a story you could share about your friend Jesus with someone you know?
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We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of the Bethlehem Shepherds with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk

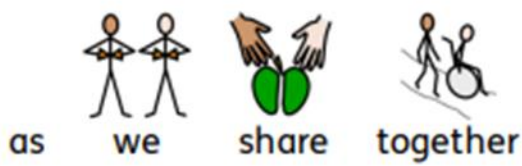
Why not have a look at next week's resource on **Psalm 72**?



Jesus our friend,



be with us today



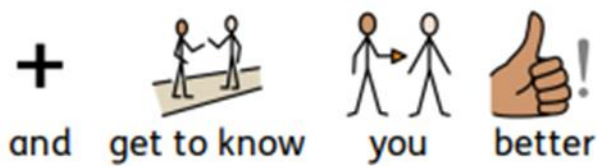
as we share together



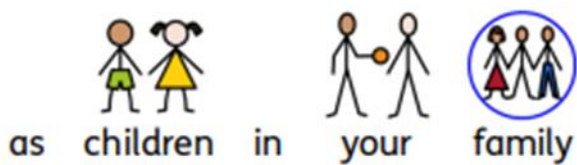
pray together



play together



and get to know you better



as children in your family



Amen

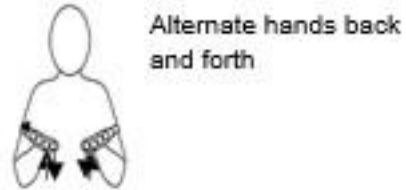




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