

Advent and Christmas

Welcome to the stories of Advent and Christmas. As the caring leader of your small group of kids, you are an important part of their Spark experience. You also support the other Rotation leaders by being a consistent and friendly presence with your group. Use these Small Group Builders, Conversation Sparks, and Transition Tips to generate conversation and build relationships with your kids. Have fun as you grow in faith together!

Small Group Builders

Try these tips to build relationships, trust, and friendship with your small group of kids when you have a few minutes at the beginning of Sunday school or between activities.

- **Birth Stories**

Baby Jesus had a surprising entrance into the world. Share and compare birth stories. Where was baby Jesus born? Who was there? Who came to visit Jesus? Where were you born? Who was there? Who came to visit you?

- **Celebrate**

When Jesus is born, the whole earth celebrates God's love! The stars twinkle in praise, the animals make their animal noises, the shepherds and wise men gather to praise God and meet Jesus. How do we celebrate when a baby is born? Sing the Happy Birthday song to Jesus.

- **Gifts Fit for a King**

Three kings brought baby Jesus special gifts. What did they bring? Think of a gift you would bring for Jesus. Give three clues about your gift and let the others guess what it is.

Conversation Sparks

Spark some faith-filled conversation during time you wait for activities to start or between activities. Use these questions with the kids in your group whenever you have a minute or two.

- What did the angels do in the story of baby Jesus?
- What do you think an angel looks like?
- Why did Mary and Joseph have to go to Bethlehem?
- I wonder what Mary was thinking as she lay her newborn baby on hay.
- Jesus is one of us! How are you and Jesus alike? How are you different?
- The wise men followed a star to find Jesus. Who or what do you follow to be closer to Jesus?

Transition Tips

As your group moves from one place to another, keep things fun and story focused! Try these tips as you transition. Be sure to let Shepherds know their roles at the stations.

- **With Child Waddle**

Ball up a sweatshirt, scarf, or hat and fill your shirt to make believe there is a baby in your belly. Waddle like a very pregnant Mary as you make your way to Bethlehem. That would be one long walk!

- **Angel Wings**

Put your arms out to your sides and flap them like the angels' wings when they came to tell the shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth. As you fly, say what the angels said, "Glory to God in the highest. And peace to all people on earth."

- **Signs of Jesus**

Scout out symbols of Christmas from the Bible stories: stars, angels, kings, shepherds, and the baby Jesus. Detour through the sanctuary and past Christmas decorations. Point out the images and connect them to the stories of Advent and Christmas.

- **Animal Praises**

Even the animals praised God when Jesus was born! What animals were in the stable to welcome Jesus to the world? Take turns calling out different animal names. Make their unique noises as you copy their movements. Strut and cluck like a chicken, gallop and neigh like a horse, wander and baa like a sheep, scurry and squeak like a mouse.

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- **Star Power**

The wise men followed a star to find Jesus. Point out a star on a Christmas decoration or liturgical art. For each point on the star, name someone or something that points you toward Jesus. Who are the stars that shine as leaders in your faith journey?

- **Manger Memories**

Share your favorite Christmas traditions and memories. What is the one thing that you can hardly wait for each Advent and Christmas? What does Christmas really mean to you?

- **Faces of Christmas**

Advent and Christmas are flowing with emotion. Emoticons are the faces we make with our computer keyboards in tweets, text, and e-mail messages to show feeling. Which emoticons would you use at the different points in the Christmas story? When an angel surprises Mary with the news of her son? When Joseph doesn't believe her? When Mary tells Joseph it is time for the baby to be born? When the angels sing to the shepherds? When the wise men arrive on the scene?

Conversation Sparks

Spark some faith-filled conversation during time you wait for activities to start or between activities. Use these questions with the kids in your group whenever you have a minute or two.

- In many Bible stories, the first thing angels say is, "Do not be afraid." What do you think could be scary about an angel?
- What would you do if an angel came to you in a dream? In person?
- Share the news of Jesus' birth in a short message, like a tweet.
- Why was King Herod afraid when he heard that the baby king had been born?
- Why did Jesus, God's son, come to earth?
- I wonder what the shepherds talked about as they walked back to their fields after meeting baby Jesus.

Transition Tips

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- **God with Us**

Brainstorm as many names of Jesus as you can: Christ, Immanuel, Messiah, Savior. Think through the lyrics of your favorite Christmas carols for help.

- **Star Sparkle**

That must have been some star that led the wise men on their trek to see the Christ child! Be a bright and shining star! Do a sparkle and shine dance, beckoning the wise men to follow you to the prize of the baby Jesus.

- **Quick Draw**

No talking allowed in this tricky art game. Walk in a close line. With your finger, draw a simple image of Christmas on the back of the last kid in the line. Pass the drawing forward, each person in line reproducing the image on the back in front of them. Ask the first person in the line, the last one to receive the drawn message on their back, to tell what it is.

- **Royal Highway**

The wise men may have been part of a caravan, complete with slaves to carry them and their gifts. Put your shoulders back, straighten your turban, and strut like a leader of a nation. Pause to dump the sand from your shoes, and find the star in the sky. What would the kings discuss as they were walking all that long way?

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- **Christmas Characters**

Put yourself in the stories of Advent and Christmas. What character in the stories would you like to be: donkey on the way to Bethlehem, innkeeper, animal in the stable, angel, shepherd, king? Take turns seeing the birth of Jesus through a variety of eyes.

- **Baby Bundle**

Pretend to pass baby Jesus from kid to kid. Have you ever held a newborn baby? What is it like? What kind of care does a new baby need?

- **A Gift for You**

Jesus is a gift to all people. What an amazing statement! No matter who we are, where we come from, what we do, say, or wear, Jesus is for each of us! What gifts does Jesus bring to the world from God? Which of these gifts does the world need most? Which do you need most?

Conversation Sparks

Spark some faith-filled conversation during time you wait for activities to start or between activities. Use these questions with the kids in your group whenever you have a minute or two.

- How did Mary and Joseph know to name their son Jesus?
- Why were the shepherds the first to get the news of the birth of baby Jesus? Who would you have told first?
- What gifts would you bring to baby Jesus?
- Why do you think God sent Jesus as a baby?
- Why did the baby Jesus surprise the wise men and scare King Herod?
- I wonder what it was like for the wise men to follow a star.

Transition Tips

As your group moves from one place to another, keep things fun and story focused! Try these tips as you transition.

- **Sing the Story**

Stop to sing Christmas carols for other groups. Try Silent Night, Away in a Manger, and Joy to the World. Do you remember all of the words? What is your favorite Christmas hymn?

- **Bearing Gifts**

Pretend you are carrying a gift to baby Jesus like the wise men. Imagine that you are holding the gift in different and challenging ways: balance it on your head, put it in your pocket, share the weight of it with a partner, push it in a cart. Call out different creative ideas.

- **No Room in the Inn**

Put yourself in Mary and Joseph's sandals on the night they arrived in busy Bethlehem. Knock on every door you pass. Is there a room available here for us? Nope. Keep plodding along until you finally find the stable with some fresh hay, just in time for the baby to be born.

- **Heavenly Hearsay**

Angels quickly spread the news of Jesus. Good news travels fast. Whisper a secret message from the front to the back of a line: Glory to God in the highest and peace to all people on earth! Send a message forward again: Jesus is born! Immanuel—God with us! Continue passing heavenly messages of God's son until you arrive at your destination.