

Junior Soldiers

Unit 6 : Lesson 10



All welcome at the stable!

PURPOSE: For the children to explore and understand that with the birth of Jesus, God demonstrated that He values everyone and welcomes all into His Family as His children.

‘Think how much the Father loves us. He loves us so much that he lets us be called his children, as we truly are.’

1 John 3:1a

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Matthew 1:1–25

Luke 2:1–20

John 1:12–14

1 John 3:1a

In Matthew 1 we read the genealogy of Jesus; it establishes that Joseph is a direct descendant of the house of David. God promised King David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne for eternity. Other Old Testament prophecies spoke of a Messiah or Saviour who would save people from their sins and reunite them with God. God always intended to be in relationship with His creation but, because of sin, humanity chose to distance itself from God.

In today’s lesson we will look at Joseph’s relationship to people in Bethlehem and how God invites unlikely people to become a new family, through their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Note that shepherds were low on the rung of Jewish society. They were seen as outcasts from religious circles because they couldn’t participate in cleansing ceremonies needed for temple worship. According to Jewish custom, Jews were required to wash at least three times a day. Shepherds had to stay with sheep 24/7, so they couldn’t participate in things like Sabbath and annual festivals (Yom Kippur, Passover, Hanukah, etc.). They lived on the outskirts of town with their sheep and didn’t participate in the daily lives of those in the city.

The other important thing to realize was that Bethlehem was only 8 km from Jerusalem. Bible commentators believe that these particular shepherds may have tended the flocks that were used for all sacrificial lambs used in the great temple.

We know that Jesus became the ‘sacrificial lamb’ for humanity and these shepherds were witnessing the fulfillment of old related prophecies (Leviticus includes the practice of sacrificing lamb to absolve sins and Isaiah 53:10 refers to the Lord making his life a guilt offering). John the Baptist reinterprets

the Old Testament scriptures and uses this as a prophecy and foreshadowing that Jesus is 'the lamb that takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

During this lesson, be aware of children from dysfunctional, chaotic or non-participatory families and be especially sensitive to them.

What you will need:

For 'Connecting In'

- Chairs to play 'Musical Chairs'
- Computer or media device to play DVD or clip
- Snacks or treats, if this is the option that you choose

For 'The Main Thing'

- Bibles
- Max7 DVD clip – downloaded from
- <http://www.max7.org/resource.aspx?id=343f9350-7da7-42c8-8d40-a00e8d65cf07>
- Computer or media device to play clips
- CD or musical instrument to accompany the Christmas carol 'O, come let us adore Him'

For 'Tying In'

- You will need to download a Max7 DVD, 'R U smarter than a fly_ Christmas pudding' from
- <http://www.max7.org/resource.aspx?id=0ae2bbb9-a4ba-473d-bef5-476928b6cf3a>
- Christmas tree for decorating
- Card cut in a variety of shapes, e.g. baubles, people, stars etc. Add a piece of ribbon or string for hanging purposes.
- Textas, pencils etc.

For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off the Home & Beyond cards for each child
- Card, patterned paper with Christmas designs, stickers and other craft materials
- Church 'Family Christmas Celebration' information



Connecting In

Musical chairs...

Play a game of traditional 'Musical Chairs'.

Once the game is over play again, but this time, instruct the children that they have to try and see how many people they can get onto one seat each round. The group with the smallest number on the seat is out. (*It would be good to put some boundaries around this game for the safety of those playing.*)

Ask these questions:

- How did it feel to play the game with only one person to a seat?
- How did it feel trying to squeeze as many as possible on to one seat?
- How did it feel when you were out and no longer included in the game?

Link: It is fun to play a game, but not so much fun when you are the one that is sitting out. It is not a great feeling when you are left out or not included in something. I wonder if there has been other times when you felt included or excluded. (*Give the children some time to share their thoughts.*)

There are times when we are left out from activities and times when we might leave others out. As we lead up to Christmas, we want to focus on Jesus being born for everyone—this means that nobody is left out and that God loves us all. God loves us and welcomes us into His family: we are always welcome.

Left out...

For this activity we want to engage the children in discussion about feeling left out. Below are a couple of suggestions to help initiate this discussion.

Leader to bring in a DVD or clip to watch on a laptop, ask some of the children to come and watch with you but ask the other children to do something else that's not fun, e.g. sorting out a stack of coloured squares into individual piles. Have the laptop positioned so that the group not included cannot see what is on the screen. After a short amount of time invite the other children to come and join you.

Same as the above. Leader brings in special party treats and starts to eat them alone, and then invites some of the children to join in while you ask the rest of the children to do something else not fun, e.g. sharpen the pencils. After a small amount of time, ask the other children to come and join you.

Link: I wonder how you felt today either if you were in the group that was excluded or if you were in the group that was included. *(Give the children some time to share their thoughts.)*

It is not a great feeling when you are left out or not included in something. I wonder if you have had some other times when you felt included and excluded. *(Give the children some time to share their thoughts.)*

There are times when we are left out from activities and times when we might leave others out. As we lead up to Christmas, we want to focus on Jesus being born for everyone—this means that nobody is left out and that God loves us all. God loves us and welcomes us into His family: we are always welcome.



The Main Thing

A part of God's family...

Jesus' birth makes it possible to become part of God's family (John 1:12–14, 1 John 3:1a)

Together, read the account of Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:1–7) having to go to Bethlehem and finding no room for them at the inn and giving birth to Jesus in a stable. Perhaps you could assign different parts to different children to be read as a dialogue.

- Why were Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem?
- Do you think Joseph would have had family there? Why? *(Joseph would have had lots of aunties, uncles, cousins, relatives who also would have come to Bethlehem for the census. Yet none of them would give Mary and Joseph a place to stay.)*

Ask the children the following questions to get them to think about how Mary and Joseph would have felt coming to Joseph's home town of Bethlehem for the census and being left out by people in the town.

- Who travels to be with family at Christmas, or does the family/friends come to you?
- Where do you stay, e.g. grandparents, caravan park nearby, tent in the backyard, etc?
- Have you ever travelled to see your family and they were not home or they had run out of room for you?
- If yes, what did you do? If no, what would you do or how would you feel?

So Mary and Joseph end up in the stable out the back of the town, alone. God provided for them a new family. God's plan was to use this young couple to introduce the Messiah to the world and to show that God wanted all of His creation to be in relationship with Him, not just the Jews.

Who is this new family?

Introduce the shepherds: max7 clip – ‘the Christmas story_the shepherds’ or read Luke 2:8–20.

Explore the shepherds together and their place in Jewish society. (See earlier notes.)

- What do shepherds do?
- How do you think they lived back in biblical days?
- Why would God have chosen the shepherds to tell this good news to? (Assuming Joseph’s family was in town).
- Who else lived nearby? (Joseph’s family, Jerusalem was 8 km down the road, full of religious leaders etc.)

God doesn’t always choose the most prominent person to be the bearer of great news.

Even though Joseph’s family was absent at the birth of Jesus, God sent others to celebrate the birth of Jesus and invited them to be part of His family (read aloud 1 John 3:1a). God was extending His love not just to the Jews but to ALL people, both those who lived on the edge of Jewish society, and even to foreigners who didn’t even worship him (the wise men).

Jesus came with a message that everyone can belong to the family of God. We are going to explore some scripture together that tells us about this message:

Read Luke 2:17

- ‘The shepherds were so excited they spread the news and invited others to also come and see and be part of this new family dynamic.’

Read John 1:12–14

- Verse 14: The Word became a human being and lived here with us (this was Jesus).
- Verse 12: And some people accepted Him and put their faith in Him. So He gave them the right to be the children of God.

Anyone and everyone can belong to God’s family. We are all ‘children of God’ and we are allowed to call him our ‘heavenly Father’.

Sing:

Sing ‘O, come let us adore him’ (guitar, piano, percussion instruments, CD or unaccompanied)



Tying In

R U smarter than a fly...

You will need to download a Max7 DVD, ‘R U smarter than a fly_Christmas pudding’ from <http://www.max7.org/resource.aspx?id=0ae2bbb9-a4ba-473d-bef5-476928b6cf3a>

Play the clip on the screen or a computer for the children.

Find and read together John 3:16–17

Jesus came into the world as a baby for you. You are important to Him. You can become a friend of His whenever you want to. Jesus wants to be your friend.



Christmas FAMILY Tree...

For this activity you will need a Christmas tree to decorate (any size) and some card cut into a variety of shapes e.g. baubles, people, stars etc. There will also need to be some string or ribbon on the card so that the shapes can be hung on the tree.

Invite the children to decorate the card shapes with a picture of Jesus and the shepherds. Then get them to add either their name and the names of family and friends, or pictures of them to some more of the card shapes. Get the children to then decorate the tree with all the different card shapes to create God's family tree. Everyone is welcome on God's family tree.

No matter what our family is like, we can belong to God's family. We can thank God today for inviting us to be a part of His family. Now is the time to make the decision, or to renew my decision to belong to God's family by placing my name or picture on the tree.

Pray in small groups, thanking God for His warm welcome and invitation to join His family, for including each of us.

You might like to finish by using the song again, 'O, come let us adore Him'.

Give children time to finish their prayers and talk with each other or a leader.



Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

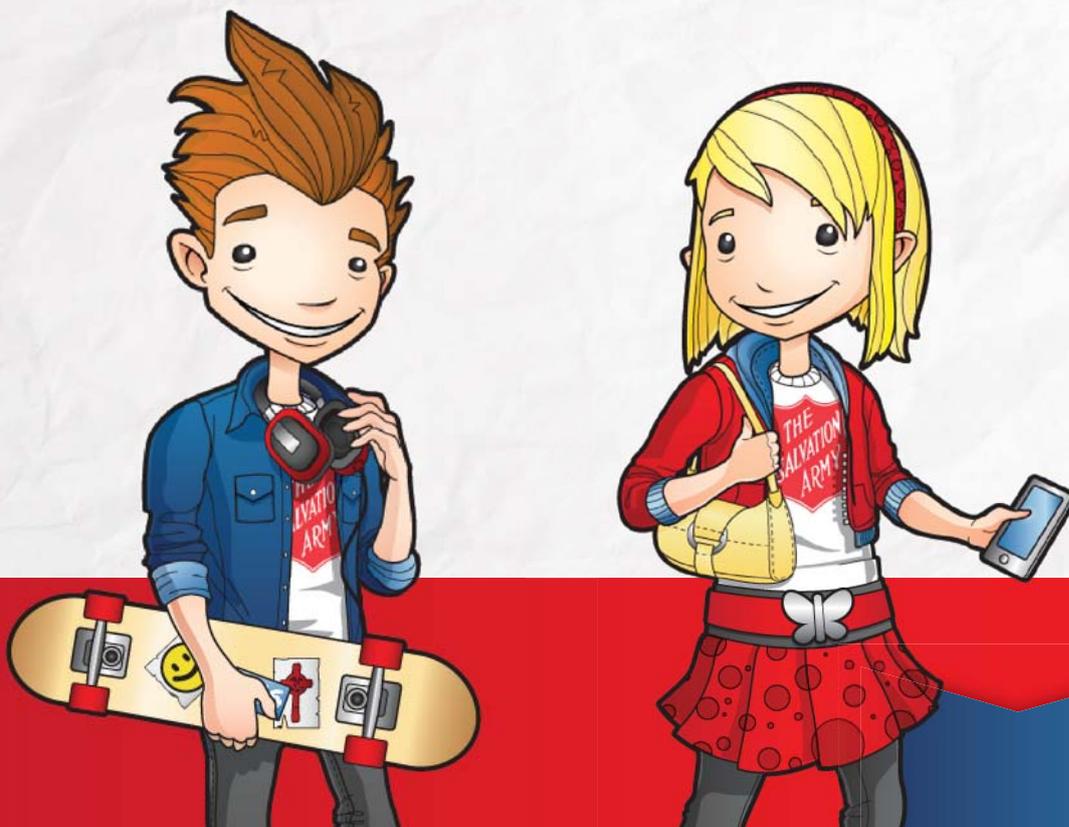
Including Others...

Just like God welcomes all of us into His family, we want to include others in our family.

Make some invitation cards to invite people to your church 'family Christmas celebrations' or to your personal family Christmas event (party, lunch, etc.).

You will need to have information from your leader regarding the church activities over the Christmas period.

You might like to provide some craft materials for the children to take home so that they can make the special invitations above for people they know.



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