

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Nativity stories from Matthew, Luke, John

This series is accompanied by a Bible reading plan that you can encourage your families to be following along with together at home to prepare the children for the Nativity story sessions.

Author: Eleanor Delport

NATIVITY FAMILY BIBLE READING PLAN

Over the advent period we are going to be looking at the story of Jesus' birth.

Jesus' birth is told at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, Luke's gospel and in a poetic form, in John's gospel. In all three accounts, the theme of light and Jesus being the **Light of the World**, shines through the pages.

We will be enjoying these stories together on Sunday mornings and would like to invite you to read along with your children at home, from children's Bibles or an accessible adult Bible like the Good News Bible. Here is a plan of how you can journey with us at home.

Week 1 The birth of John (Witness to the Light)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 1 | Luke 1v5-25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 2 | Luke 1v26-38 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 3 | Luke 1v39-56 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 4 | Luke 1v57-80 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 5 | John 1v6-9 |

Sunday
— Dec

Week 2 The birth of Jesus (Light from Heaven)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 1 | Isaiah 9v2-7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 2 | Luke 2v1-7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 3 | Luke 2v8-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 4 | John 1v1-5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 5 | John 1v14 |

Sunday
— Dec

Week 3 Light to the nations (Light of the world)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 1 | Luke 2v21-32 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 2 | Matthew 1v18-25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 3 | Matthew 2v1-8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 4 | Matthew 2v9-12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day 5 | John 1v10-13 |

Sunday
— Dec



The light

shines in

the darkness

and the darkness

has never

put it out.

John 1v5

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SESSION 1: WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

Big idea: John came to witness to the light

John the baptiser was born to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, the light of the world.

10 years +

SESSION 1: WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

(TOGETHER)

SHARE NEWS, REGISTER

Reiterate expectations of session: We hope to have a lot of fun together, particularly in the game. We also expect everyone to listen respectfully to one another and sit on their bottoms in the Bible study and prayer times.

(TOGETHER) INTRO PART 1 – SETTING THE SCENE

We are starting a new series on the birth of Jesus. Use the Bible timeline to orientate yourselves in the overall Bible story. See [introduction](#)

STORY – Act out/retell Luke chapter 1, the birth of John the Baptist

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 1:

We will be using a Bible study method called “PLURP!” (Pray, Look, Understand, Respond, Pray again) Read Luke 1v67-79

Use PLURP worksheet 1 to help you Pray and Look at the passage.

(TOGETHER) GAME –: Surprise!

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 2

Use PLURP worksheet 2 to help you understand, respond to the passage and pray

MEMORY VERSE

We are going to learn this memory verse

The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. John 1v5



INTRODUCTION

Use the Bible timeline to help the children see where they are in the overall story of the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of books that together tell the story of how God created the world and made human beings to be His children and know His love. Very early in the story, however, people turned away from God's good plan and chose to run from God. God is like a loving father, who keeps searching for His children and rescuing them so they can come home to Him. The whole Bible points to God sending His Son Jesus to come and rescue us.

Find Abraham on the timeline. *What did God promise to Abraham's family?*

Find David on the timeline. *What had God promised to David?*

Find the time just before Jesus came. *What situation were the Israelites, Abraham's family in and what were they waiting for?*

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the story
Read Luke 1v67-79

WHEN?

- When in the Bible story did this happen? (covered in Bible Timeline introduction)

WHERE?

- The hills of Judea

WHAT?

- What happens?

LOOK

WHO?

- Who are Zechariah and Elizabeth? How old were they? Do you think they still were hoping for a child?
- John means “gift from God”.

10+ years

GAME: SURPRISE!

Zechariah and Elizabeth had all but given up having a baby, but God surprised them with a baby boy in their old age. This game involves a surprise person and 1 person guessing who it is.

You will need: 1 blanket/sheet and 1 blindfold

1. Sit the group in a circle
2. Choose 1 child to be blindfolded and turn with their face to the corner of the room
3. Choose another person to be covered by a blanket/sheet and lie/sit in the middle of the circle
4. The blindfolded person can turn to face the group and come nearer so they can hear everyone, or give them a chair to sit on, but they must not remove the blindfold
5. The blindfolded person asks questions about the person in the middle to try to work out who it is. After a maximum of 5 questions, they have a maximum of three guesses to try and identify the person in the middle.
6. They then remove the blindfold and the middle person can then shout surprise and throw off the blanket.

UNDERSTAND

What was promised to Abraham and David that had not yet been fulfilled?

Were Zechariah and Elizabeth still holding out hope for a baby do you think? Were the Israelites still holding out hope for a Messiah/Saviour/King from David's line do you think? There would have been a mix of expectations. Some would still believe God's promises, some might have given up, some might think they need to make it happen themselves, etc.

In what way were the people of Zechariah and Elizabeth's day sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death?

Who was the light coming into the world and what was John's job in relation to the light that was coming?

RESPOND

In what ways are the people around us also living in darkness and in the shadow of death?

Do people need God's peace and light today? In what ways?

John the Baptist was witness to the light. In a way, we have a similar role to play in the world today. We can witness to the light and peace of Jesus.

PRAY

Where do you need God's light or peace in your life or where do you see people around you needing God's light and peace?

Spend some time praying for each other and the world around you, for situations you see and people you know need the light and peace of God.

SESSION 2

HEAVENLY LIGHT

Big idea: God's light arrived in Jesus

God came in the form of a human baby. He announced his arrival with angels that shone with the brightness of Heaven. At Jesus' birth, Heaven's light shone on the earth so that our eyes might see who God truly is.

10 years +

SESSION 2: HEAVENLY LIGHT

(TOGETHER)

SHARE NEWS, REGISTER

Reiterate expectations of session: We hope to have a lot of fun together, particularly in the game. We also expect everyone to listen respectfully to one another and sit on their bottoms in the Bible study and prayer times.

(TOGETHER) INTRO PART 1 – Recap the story of John the Baptist's birth. Who was he and what special job had God given him?

STORY – Act out/retell Luke 2v1-21, the birth of Jesus

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 1:

We will be using a Bible study method called "PLURP!" (Pray, Look, Understand, Respond, Pray again) Read Luke 2v1-21

Use PLURP worksheet 1 to help you Pray and Look at the passage.

(TOGETHER) GAME – Herding Sheep

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 2

Use PLURP worksheet 2 to help you understand, respond to the passage and pray

MEMORY VERSE

We are going to learn this memory verse

The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. John 1v5



PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the story
Read Luke 2v1-21

WHEN?

- When in the Bible story did this happen?

WHERE?

- Nazareth and Bethlehem

WHAT?

- What happens?

LOOK

WHO?

- Who were Mary and Joseph?
- What do you know of the lifestyle or social status of shepherds in ancient times?

10+ years

GAME: HERDING SHEEP

Equipment: Balloons in 2 colours, 2 pieces of card that match the colours of the balloons, 2 chairs, tape, paper plates

1. Tape the 2 pieces of card to the 2 chairs and put them at either end of the room.
2. Give each child a paper plate.
3. Release balloons into the middle of the room. These are the sheep.
4. Divide the group in half so that half are herding one colour balloon and half are herding the other colour.
5. When you say go, the two teams try to herd their balloon sheep to the appropriate end of the room. The team that finishes first, wins.

How easy was it to herd the sheep sheep?

Shepherds worked very hard, were often sweaty and dirty and were not usually invited to palaces. How wonderful that the King of Kings, the God of Heaven was born in a poor person's home and shepherds were able to come and see the newborn baby!

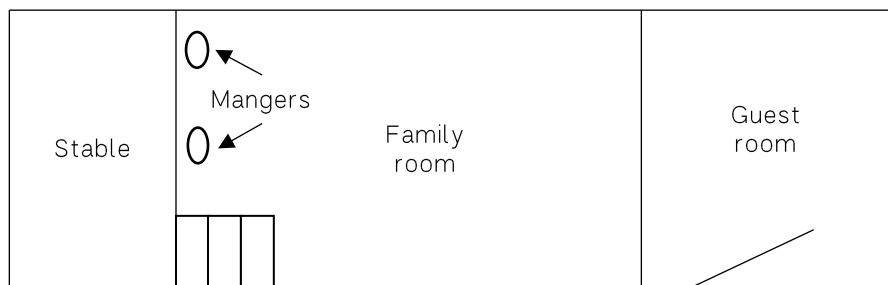
SIDE NOTE: STABLE OR PEASANT HOME?

This is just a side note. You don't need to make a big thing of it or even mention it at all if it is not going to be helpful, but it might help to picture the scene more accurately.

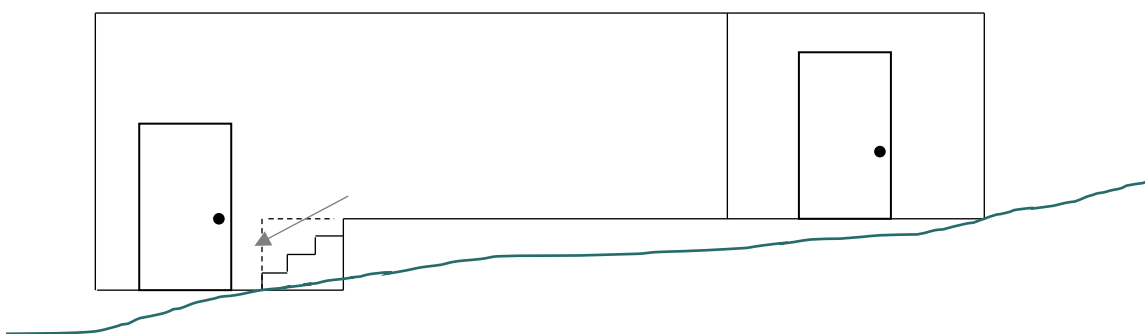
The traditional storytelling of the nativity is that Jesus was born in a stable, because in modern homes we don't have mangers in the house. They are found in stables. However, in ancient middle east and even right up to the middle of the twentieth century, most homes would be made of just one room, two rooms if you were wealthier. The main room was a large family room with steps to a lower section at one end where the animals were brought into at night. The second was a guest room either on top of or at the end of the house. The family room would have mangers cut into the floor of the family area so that cows could lean over from the lower stable area to feed during the night.

The word usually translated "inn" in the story, is *katalyma* which most likely refers to the guest room. The word used elsewhere in the gospels (the story of the good Samaritan) for a commercial inn was different. It was *pandocheion*.

So, to understand the nativity with more historical accuracy: when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, where Joseph would have sought out his family, there was no room in the guest room. People had already arrived in Bethlehem before them and had taken the best part of the house. Instead, Jesus was born in the family room, surrounded by animals and most likely the female members of the family, who would have acted as midwives. He was born among the common people, given hospitality among the poor and his birth was announced to the poor shepherds. They would not have dared to go to a palace, where they would have been shunned as unclean and unfit for a King, but were willing to go to seek the Messiah, hearing that he was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger, i.e. in an ordinary peasant home.



A typical village home in Palestine viewed from above (Diagram reproduced from Kenneth E Bailey's *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*)



A typical village home in Palestine viewed from the side (Diagram reproduced from Kenneth E Bailey's *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*)

UNDERSTAND

When Jesus was born, what kind of dwelling was He born into (see side note, if you would like a more historically accurate reading than the traditional stable)? What does it tell you about God that He allowed Himself to come into the world this way?

Where does light first appear in the Bible? Day 1 of the seven day creation narrative. How do you think God's light suddenly shining around points to another kind of creation happening? (New creation, new kind of person – God and humanity coexisting in Jesus. Dawn of a new era for humanity. God is making everything new, etc.)

Thinking about the connection between light and creation, what then do you think it means that Jesus is the light of the world?

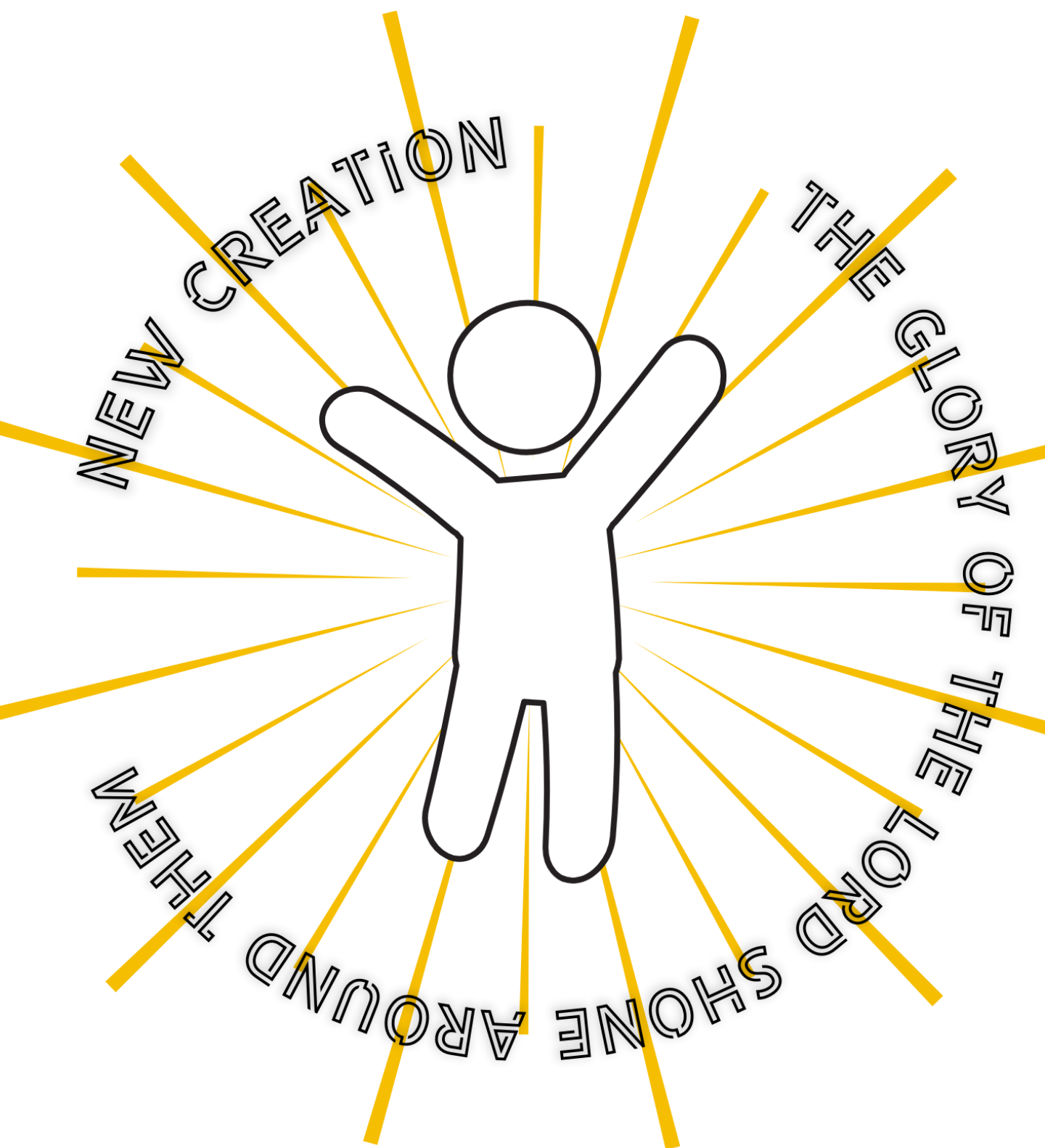
Who did the glory of the Lord shine around in Luke 2?

What does that tell you about who God is inviting into this New Creation?

RESPOND AND PRAY

Jesus shone Heaven's light on the earth. If we have chosen to follow Jesus, then we are New Creations. Jesus has done this once and for all when we put our trust in Him. He also changes us to be more and more like Him, transforming us from one degree of glory to another. He can change situations that are bad to use them for good and He can take people who are struggling with sin and transform them into bright lights for Him. How would you like Jesus to transform you or a situation you are in? Think about what Jesus is like. How would you like to be more like Him? Pray for these things, so that we might live in the light of God.

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6



JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

I want to be more like Jesus by _____



SESSION 3 LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Big idea: Other nations came seeking the
light of God.

The wisemen came from distant nations and in
the temple, Simeon prophesied that Jesus
would bring God's light to all the nations of the
world.

5-9 years

SESSION 3: LIGHT OF THE WORLD

INTRO

Recap the stories of John and Jesus' birth and Heaven's light shining through to the shepherds.

BIBLE STORY – Matthew 1v18-2v12 and Luke 2v22-40 Act out the story.

DISCUSSION – Light of the world

GAME – Blind man's buff

PRAYER – Pray for the world, for places that need light and peace. See suggested activity.

MEMORY VERSE

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. John 1v5

CRAFT – Star

EXPLORE THE STORY



10 years +

SESSION 3: LIGHT OF THE WORLD

(TOGETHER)

SHARE NEWS, REGISTER

Reiterate expectations of session: We hope to have a lot of fun together, particularly in the game. We also expect everyone to listen respectfully to one another and sit on their bottoms in the Bible study and prayer times.

(TOGETHER) INTRO PART 1 – Recap the story of John the Baptist's birth and the light shining on the shepherds at Jesus' birth

STORY – Act out/retell Matthew 1v18-2v12, the visit of the wisemen

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 1:

We will be using a Bible study method called "PLURP!" (Pray, Look, Understand, Respond, Pray again) Read Matthew 1v18-2v12

Use PLURP worksheet 1 to help you Pray and Look at the passage.

(TOGETHER) GAME – Blind man's buff

(IN GROUPS) PLURP PART 2

Use PLURP worksheet 2 to help you understand, respond to the passage and pray

MEMORY VERSE

We are going to learn this memory verse

The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. John 1v5



PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the story
Read paraphrase of Matthew 1v18-2v12

WHEN?

- When in the Bible story did this happen? What time period?

WHO?

- Who were the wisemen and what sort of things might they be particularly interested in finding out?
- Who is Herod and what was his reaction to the news?

LOOK

WHERE?

- Where were the wisemen from and which places did they visit on their quest to find the newborn king?

WHAT?

- What happens?
- What might have been the expectations and hopes as the wisemen were travelling?
- What kind of a welcome did they receive in Jerusalem and Bethlehem?

GAME: BLIND MAN'S BUFF

Equipment:

1 blindfold

Isaiah prophesied about the coming of Jesus that “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” Isaiah 9v2

In this game, one of you is going to “walk in darkness”, i.e. wear a blindfold!

1. Choose a child to wear the blindfold
2. Everyone else has to try not to be caught by the child with the blindfold
3. When someone is caught or after a suitable length of time, they switch over

UNDERSTAND

Why were the wisemen following a star?

What might their expectations have been?

Are people looking for a light from Heaven today? What sorts of things are people searching for today?

The heavenly light led the wisemen to find Jesus. How does God guide people towards Jesus today? What sorts of things might God use to draw them towards Jesus?

RESPOND AND PRAY

Read Isaiah 9v2

Many people around the world are searching for light and peace. Have a look at a world map. Take a candle or picture of a candle and place it on the map where you would like to pray for God's light to shine. What would it look like if God's light shone and transformed that place? Pray for that part of the world to seek God and pray for God's light to shine upon those walking in darkness.

PRAYER

You will need: a map of the world, candles cut out of paper or teal light LED candles

Ask the children where in the world do people think especially need Jesus' light this Christmas. Pray for those places and place a candle on the world map as you pray.

