

DECK THE HALLS

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS



PRETEEN
DECEMBER 2023

FOR LEADERS ONLY

GOD VIEW: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND GOD'S CHARACTER, SHOWN THROUGH GOD'S BIG STORY

With the busyness of the Christmas season, it's easy to lose sight of why we celebrate in the first place. We forget that at the time of the first Christmas, God's people were anticipating a Rescuer who would come and save the world. That's what makes a countdown like an advent calendar so powerful. It allows us daily moments to stop and reflect on God, who loved us so much and sent Jesus to be our Savior. That's why this December, we're "decking the halls" and taking the whole the month to focus on nothing but Christmas. We're celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift! We can't wait to shine a spotlight on crucial moments in the story of Jesus' birth as we count down to Christmas. The best gift God ever gave was Jesus. Because of Jesus, it's possible for us to have a relationship with God that will last forever. As we take this month to count down to the fun of Christmas Day, let's take time to remember the reason we celebrate in the first place: Jesus, the greatest gift the world has ever known.

CHRISTMAS is about celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift.

HEADS UP: IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU TALK ABOUT CHRISTMAS WITH KIDS

The Christmas season can be an interesting time for families as they navigate how they'll celebrate with their kids and extended family and friends. It's important to keep in mind that not everyone will experience this season the same way. Some go all out with presents, while others keep it low-key. Christmas can be a time when people feel grief from losses over the past year or the pain of current health situations. Christmas can also expose some of the socioeconomic differences among the people who attend your church. It's important to keep all of these things in mind as you talk about Christmas plans, what kids want for Christmas, or what kids are hoping for this year. Have a plan in place to make sure ALL kids feel at home in your church. Also, remind your Small Group Leaders and Storytellers that it's not our job to tell kids what to think and believe about Santa Claus, Elf on the Shelf, or any of the traditions that people have. Just meet kids where they are and direct them back to their parents for these sorts of questions.

WEEK 1

Key Question: **What are you hoping for?** Hope is a word that gets tossed around a lot at Christmas, but kids might not get the chance to really talk about it. That's why we start with a question about hope. We all have expectations about what we need or want out of life. We pray that, through answering this question, kids will find a safe place to discuss the ways they're trusting God to meet their needs.

In our first week, we start in **Micah 5:2, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Isaiah 7:14-15**, where we discover how prophets predicted that God would send a Savior. No one could have expected that it would take hundreds of years before Mary, Joseph, or any of the shepherds or wise men came on the scene. The prophets wrote these promises to offer hope to God's people as they faced exile. Even though it took time, God kept these promises, and because of that, we can still have hope today.

Bottom Line: **You can have hope because God is faithful.** Much of what we celebrate at Christmas is an incredible reminder that God can be trusted no matter what. We can

have hope because, when all seemed hopeless, God made promises to save the world and then followed through with Jesus. No matter what we face in life, we can have hope and trust that God is at work and can help us get through our circumstances.

WEEK 2

Key Question: **What are your plans this Christmas?** We start with this question to help kids start generally thinking about the plans they make. By now, preteens understand that plans don't always work out. However, what we can learn through the Christmas story is that God can use what we're experiencing to do amazing things in and through our lives. We pray that kids will start trusting that no matter what they face, God still has a plan for their lives. .

In week 2, we turn to **Luke 1:26-56**. The Messiah had been promised for generations, but no one would have guessed that God would use a young woman to bring that promise to fulfillment—including that young woman herself. Mary was awestruck when the angel came to announce that she was about to have a child who would be the Savior of

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the world. Mary found peace in trusting that through God, all things are possible.

Bottom Line: **You can have peace because God has a plan.** When God sent Jesus, it was the answer to many, many years of a plan to rescue the world. The people must have wondered what God was doing or if God was still working. We can feel the same way about our own circumstances. Yet, time and again, we realize that we can trust God no matter what. We might not understand God's plan, but we can have peace when we remember how God has been faithful throughout history.

WEEK 3

Key Question: **What makes your Christmas joyful?**

We sing songs like "Joy to the World" that can remind us why joy is such a huge part of Christmas. Beyond that, we want kids to start thinking about how they can personalize that joy through their own relationship with Jesus. That's why we kick off Small Group with a question that gets them thinking about why they can have joy this Christmas. We pray this becomes a great conversation that leads them to a stronger relationship with Jesus, the most important reason we can find joy!

In week three, we head to the familiar Christmas passage in **Luke 2:1-7**. On the surface, it might have seemed like nothing was going right for Mary and Joseph: a census, no room for them to stay, not to mention giving birth in place where a whole lot of animals were sleeping. In spite of all that, Jesus was born! God's rescue plan to save the world was in motion, and as we remember how Jesus was born, we can always find joy!

Bottom Line: **You can have joy because God sent Jesus.** We all know that Christmas is about Jesus, but sometimes it's just too easy to think Christmas is only about lights, decorations, and presents. Those things aren't bad, but it's important that we use those things to stay focused on the truth of what we celebrate at Christmas. God loved us enough to send Jesus to rescue us. Knowing that can help us find joy no matter what is happening around us this Christmas season.

WEEK 4

Key Question: **How can you share God's love this Christmas?** On Christmas weekend, it can be too easy

to forget that Christmas isn't all about us. We hope to remind preteens that Christmas is ultimately about God's love for us that allowed Jesus, God's only Son, to come to earth and rescue us from the consequences of sin. When we think about Christmas like that, we can discover that we should be sharing that same love with others.

For Christmas weekend, we continue the story in **Luke 2:8-20**. Jesus was born, and it was now time to announce it to the world. Instead of heading to the palaces and mansions, God's angels visited the shepherds and announced Jesus' birth! Christmas reminds us that God's love isn't just for the people who think they have it all together. Jesus came to show God's love to everyone!

Bottom Line: **God's love is for everyone.** This story reminds us that Jesus didn't just come for the powerful or most important people. Jesus came to show everyone that they can be part of what God is doing in the world. We pray that this Christmas will be a time for kids to experience God's love and put their faith in Jesus.

WEEK 5

Key Question: **What are you looking forward to in the new year?** Once Christmas is over, it can seem like everyone is talking about New Year's resolutions and plans for the year ahead. We hope this sort of question will help Small Group Leaders and parents guide their kids to understand how they can make following Jesus a big part of their new year. Because of Jesus, we have something to look forward to, no matter what.

We finish up our Christmas season celebration in **Matthew 2:1-12**. We see how the announcement of Jesus' birth was far-reaching. Wise men from the east saw a star that set them on an adventure to find a promised king of Israel. We're not sure how long it took, but when the wise men finally found Jesus, they worshipped Him!

Bottom Line: **Celebrate Jesus all year long.** After the Christmas decorations come down, it can be easy for kids to assume that the spirit of Christmas gets packed away too. We want kids to realize that they don't need a fancy holiday to celebrate Jesus. They can celebrate when they sing to Jesus, read the Bible, and show Jesus' love to others.