



## TODAY'S SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

### TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

Following Yonder Star Wise Men  
Matthew 2:1-12

#### 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.

**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.

#### TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

Celebrate Jesus all year long.

#### MONTHLY VIRTUE

Christmas—Celebrating Jesus,  
God's greatest gift

#### TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

What are you looking  
forward to in the new year?

#### MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

"A child will be born to us. A son will be given to us. He will rule over us. And he will be called Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God. He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever and Prince Who Brings Peace." Isaiah 9:6a, NIV

# DECK THE HALLS

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS



WEEK  
**FIVE**  
DECEMBER 2023

LARGE GROUP  
**PRETEEN**

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

STORY

WORSHIP

GROUPS

HOME

25 MINUTES

10 MINUTES

## TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

Following Yonder Star  
Wise Men  
Matthew 2:1-12

## TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

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Isaiah 9:6a, NIV

## MONTHLY VIRTUE

Christmas—Celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift

## BASIC TRUTH

I can trust God no matter what.

## LARGE GROUP

ENGAGE KIDS' HEARTS THROUGH A DYNAMIC AND INTERACTIVE BIBLE STORY, WORSHIP, AND PRAYER EXPERIENCE IN A LARGE GROUP SETTING.

**AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS STUDENTS ENTER.**

**SLIDE: THEME**

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP**

Host enters . . .

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): COUNTDOWN**

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME**

## WELCOME

Host has lots of energy as he or she welcomes everyone to [Name of Environment]. Host is relatable and inviting. Host can talk about something that happened culturally throughout the week like a big sports game, movie opening, a viral video on YouTube, etc. Host tells them how excited he or she is that they're there and briefly runs through what they can expect. This is especially helpful for first-time guests to make them feel like they know what's happening.

## OPENER

**HOST:** Hey, friends! Did you have an awesome Christmas last week?! I sure did. Even though our Countdown to Christmas is over, we have plenty to be excited about here. We can celebrate that Jesus is God's greatest gift all year long! So let's keep the celebration going and get started with a game that helps us remember some of the things that we talked about this month while we decked the halls! I call it 'Four Corners: Christmas Edition!'

**SLIDE: "FOUR CORNERS: CHRISTMAS EDITION"**

"Who's played four corners before? (Pause for responses.) Awesome! You'll be great at this game! As you look around the room, you'll notice we have . . . four corners. We have the Hope corner, the Peace corner, the Joy corner, and the Love corner. And just like a normal game of four corners, I'll close my eyes, and you move quickly—without running—to one of the corners. I'll call out one of those advent words. If that's the corner you're in, come sit in the middle. If you're still in, move again, and I'll call out another word. Everyone understand? Any questions? Great! Let's go!

**AUDIO: FUN BACKGROUND MUSIC**

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*Play until there is a winner or multiple rounds if time.*

*(After the game) "That was fun! Without looking, who can remember the four big Christmas words we talked about this month? (Pause for responses.) Great! Now let's stand together and worship our awesome God!"*

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## WORSHIP

*Worship Leaders enter as Host exits.*

**WORSHIP LEADER:** "It's been so fun to celebrate Christmas and sing Christmas songs with you this month. And the joy of Christmas doesn't have to end! Let's sing 'I will go and tell it,' because Jesus' birth is good news for the whole world.

**AUDIO:** "GO TELL IT" / TRACK 1 FROM GO TELL IT SINGLE

**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** "GO TELL IT" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"Jesus brought true joy to the world. He didn't just give us happiness, but JOY that will last through the ups and downs of life. Come on and sing about the joy Jesus gives us!

**AUDIO:** "JOY TO THE WORLD (GLORY TO THE KING)" / TRACK 1 FROM JOY TO THE WORLD (GLORY TO THE KING) SINGLE

**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** "JOY TO THE WORLD (GLORY TO THE KING)" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"It's truly amazing when you stop and think about how much God loves us! As we read in 1 John 3:1: 'See what amazing love the Father has given us! Because of it, we are called children of God. And that's what we really are!' (NirV) God loved us enough to send Jesus FOR us. Let's join our voices together and sing 'How amazing is Your love! Here we go!'"

**AUDIO:** "HOW AMAZING" / TRACK 6 FROM EVERYTHING TO ME

**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** "HOW AMAZING" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

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## COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

*SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND*

*Communicator enters as Worship Leaders exit.*

### INTRODUCTION

**COMMUNICATOR:** "Hey everyone! Happy New Year's Eve! Did everyone have a great Christmas?"

*SLIDE: VIRTUE*

"Hopefully, you found some peace, experienced joy, and shared God's love as you celebrated Jesus, God's greatest gift!"

"But now that Christmas is over, you might be thinking about tomorrow: New Year's Day! When people think about the New Year, many think about how they can improve, what they can work on, do differently, and change in their life. These sorts of decisions are called New Year's Resolutions . . . anyone make a resolution or two? (*Pause for responses.*)"

"Awesome! How about this? Turn to the person or people next to you and talk about this: What New Year's resolution(s) do you plan on making? Why? And if you haven't thought about it yet, will you? What are they? Okay. Go!"

*As time allows, go through the audience and have kids share a few of their responses.*

"Okay, I have to ask because no one shared about this yet. I'm curious . . . Did anyone make a resolution to celebrate Christmas . . . all year long? (*Looking around.*) No? No one? Huh . . . interesting!"

### TENSION

**COMMUNICATOR:** "Okay, let's be honest, not many people make New Year's resolutions about celebrating Christmas all year long. People love Christmas; they love celebrating that God sent Jesus to rescue the world. But at the end of December or maybe the beginning of January, they take down the decorations, pack them up, and put them away until the following Christmas season."

"But just because the decorations have been packed up and put away, does that also mean we just stop celebrating Christmas the rest of the year? I get it, that might sound like a trick question. You might be thinking: Of course you don't celebrate Christmas the rest of the year—it's not Christmas time!"

"But think about it with me for a second: If Christmas is about celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift, isn't that something we should always be celebrating? And if we should always be celebrating Christmas, what does that look like in January . . . or June? Can we really make a habit of celebrating Christmas all year long?"

"Well, that's a great question that we get to explore today. And thankfully, the Christmas stories we have recorded for us in the Bible about when God sent Jesus to earth as a baby don't end at the manger or with the shepherds and angels. We can find some pretty amazing ideas about what it means to keep celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift, way beyond Christmas. Let's jump in."

### TRUTH

**COMMUNICATOR:** "Today we head to another familiar story from the book of Matthew, and it will certainly help answer our questions. This story takes place after the events of Christmas, but it's still connected to Jesus' birth. Well, look at

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that, even in the Bible we're reading about something that happened after Christmas, but it's still focused on the birth of Jesus. Check it out!

*Open the Bible to Matthew 2:1 (NirV) and read.*

*"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea. After Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem."*

"Okay, we already have quite a bit going on. So we already know the first part—that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

**SLIDE: SLIDE 1- FLASHBACK BIRTH OF JESUS IN MANGER**

"But you may not have been familiar with the second part—that at the time of Jesus' birth, the southern part of Israel (where Bethlehem was) was ruled by a king named Herod . . .

**SLIDE: SLIDE 2- KING HEROD ON A THRONE**

"What kind of king was Herod? Kind. Generous. Good to all the people. Not so much. These are qualities I WISH I could use to describe Herod. In reality, Herod was extremely mean and super scared that people would try to take over his throne. He liked his high position and was always looking over his shoulder for anyone who was the least bit of a threat. And he wasn't afraid to do things . . . drastic things . . . to keep his power.

**SLIDE: SLIDE 3- ZOOM IN ON KING HEROD'S EVIL GRIN**

"There's one last piece to keep in mind from that opening verse. Matthew told us that WISE MEN had traveled from the east to Judea and were in the capital city of Jerusalem.

**SLIDE: SLIDE 4- SILHOUETTE OF WISE MEN TRAVELING**

"So who were the wise men? Were they like super smart guys that you want helping you study for tests or on your trivia team? Not exactly. The wise men are the guys in nativity scenes who are always dressed really snazzy outfits! Think of them more like wise scholars who were experts at charting the stars. They might even have had connections all the way back to Daniel in the Old Testament, who had served as an advisor in Babylon hundreds of years before!

"And while the wise men are often part of Christmas decorations, the truth is that they didn't show up to see Jesus until He was older, maybe even when He was a toddler! But even though we're not quite sure about where they came from, we do know they must have been important, and we know that they had traveled from a loong way away.

"So the wise men went to Herod, the king, to ask an important question . . .

**SLIDE: SLIDE 5- WISE MEN BEFORE HEROD**

*Open the Bible to Matthew 2:2 (NirV) and read.*

*"They asked, 'Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose. Now we have come to worship him.'"*

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“Why did they ask Herod? Well, he was in charge! Of course he would know about something as important as a king being born in his kingdom, right? But . . . that wasn’t the case. Matthew tells us that when Herod heard this, he was really troubled and very upset. He started to investigate.

“You might wonder why this was such a big deal. Well, think about what the wise men said. They wanted to know where the child was who was born to be what? *(Pause for responses.)* A KING! Yes! The wise men knew something Herod didn’t. AND . . . if this child was truly a king, what did that mean for Herod?

*Wait for response.*

“Exactly! He wasn’t the true king! And remember Herod’s reputation. He would do anything to protect his power.

**SLIDE: SLIDE 3- ZOOM IN ON KING HEROD’S EVIL GRIN**

“Herod called for the chief priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah—the new king—was supposed to be born. These priests and teachers told King Herod what they knew from the words of the prophet Micah: the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

“Now before we move on . . . let’s check on an important detail. What led the wise men to Jerusalem in the first place? *(Pause for responses.)* A star, yes!

**SLIDE: SLIDE 6- BRIGHT STAR IN THE SKY**

“These were men who tracked changes in the stars, and what they saw in the sky was unlike anything they had ever seen. Well . . . like storm chasers gotta chase storms, star trackers gotta chase stars. So naturally the wise men followed it with hopes that they would find this Child King and worship Him. Back to the story.

“King Herod called for the wise men in secret, and he started asking them about the star. Then he told them to go to Bethlehem, saying . . .

*Open the Bible to Matthew 2:8 (NirV) and read.*

“*Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report it to me. Then I can go and worship him too.*”

**SLIDE: SLIDE 7- HEROD POINTING FOR THE WISE MEN TO GO**

“Okay. Do you REALLY think Herod wanted to worship Jesus too? What do you think was really happening here?

*Invite responses.*

“Herod was totally USING the wise men for his own advantage. Like we said before, Herod was known for using his power for his own advantage. Well, let’s call this ‘exhibit A.’

“Then the wise men left and continued in their journey. Remember, the whole reason they came in the first place was to find the Child born King so that they might worship Him. But how would they find Him? Check out what continued to show the way . . .

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Open the Bible to Matthew 2:9 (NirV) and read.

*“After the Wise Men had listened to the king, they went on their way. The star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them. It finally stopped over the place where the child was.”*

**SLIDE: SLIDE 8- BRIGHT STAR IN THE SKY NOW OVER BETHLEHEM**

“The star was there leading the way to Bethlehem! And it was like a billboard in the sky pointing the way for the wise men to find Jesus. They were filled with joy as they followed the star. Then check this out.

Open the Bible to Matthew 2:11 (NirV) and read.

*“The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh.”*

**SLIDE: SLIDE 9- WISE MEN BOWING AND LAYING GIFTS DOWN**

“These wise men were convinced that they were in the presence of the long-awaited king of the world. This small Child would have power unlike Herod and would have more wisdom than the greatest of wise men. But what about Herod? What would they do about him? Check this out!

Open the Bible to Matthew 2:12 (NirV) and read.

*“But God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their country on a different road.”*

**SLIDE: SLIDE 10- SPLIT SCREEN OF SILHOUETTE OF WISE MEN TRAVELLING / HEROD ON THRONE WAITING**

“How do you think Herod responded when he realized the wise men weren't coming back? (Pause for responses.) Yeah, he was pretty fired up. And let's just say he became quite irrational and extreme. But God knew that Herod's power was limited and would only last for a short time. But Jesus—the true King of Kings—was here to stay.”

## APPLICATION

**COMMUNICATOR:** “We spent this whole month counting down to Christmas and looked at several familiar stories from the Bible that are often called ‘Christmas stories.’ I've had such a great time with you as we've considered what a gift we have in Jesus.

“But here is my question: Are these stories ONLY Christmas stories? What I mean is . . . can't we celebrate these stories all year long? Think about it . . . into a dark world, God has sent the light of the world . . . like a bright star, lighting up a dark night over Bethlehem. Isn't that worth celebrating all year long?! And this Child, born a King, was God's greatest gift to us. Isn't that gift worth celebrating all year long?!

“Because of Jesus, we can have HOPE . . .

**SLIDE: HOPE**

“. . . even when things are not going the way we think they should or it looks like there's no way out.



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"Because of Jesus, we can have PEACE . . .

**SLIDE: PEACE**

". . . because we know that God's plan is better than anything we can imagine for ourselves.

"Because of Jesus we can have JOY. . .

**SLIDE: JOY**

". . . no matter the circumstances or situation we find ourselves in.

"And because of Jesus, we know that God loves us, without a shadow of a doubt . . .

**SLIDE: LOVE**

"And that LOVE is for everyone! Now those are things to celebrate all year long!"

## LANDING

**COMMUNICATOR:** "Today as you head to Small Group, take some time to think about this:

**SLIDE: KEY QUESTION**

**"What are you looking forward to in the new year?** And how can you celebrate God's greatest gift—Jesus—throughout the new year? You'll get the chance to chat all about this and more with your Small Group. Maybe you'll all figure out how you can do this together as you meet each week at church. Before you head to groups, let's pray and thank God for Jesus and for giving us another year! Let's ask God to guide us and help us live with wisdom in the year ahead. Let's pray!"

**SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND**

*Communicator leads group in a prayer related to what they just heard. After prayer, Communicator dismisses kids to Small Group.*

**AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS THE KIDS EXIT.**

**SLIDE: THEME**

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP**