

TEACHING CHILDREN THE GOSPEL AT CHRISTMAS

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I think most everyone is a bit weary of the commercialization of Christmas. Most of us love the season, the traditions, time with family, carols, food, and opportunity to rest. We are not tired of Christmas; we just fear losing what made it “Christmas” to begin with.

That is particularly true when it comes to our children. We do not want them to think this sacred holiday is merely about having their every electronic, plastic, and sugar-infused desire met. We love the expression on their faces as they open presents. We delight even more in putting those smiles there. But we want them to see that those presents represent “the gift;” a gift that was given not to pacify a desire or annual fad, but to meet the deepest need of their soul.

What follows is a liturgy (order of service) of sorts. Feel free to adapt it. The liturgy is intended to be highly interactive and is built around four presents and is infused with Christmas carols, Scripture and conversation. The four gifts can be given at one time prior to the family gift exchange or be given one per evening on the four nights leading up to the family gift exchange.

If you choose to use this with your family, it is advised you read through the flow of interaction several times, so that you can lead the conversation without reading it from the article. It will be more effective as a natural conversation than something read from paper (with the exception of the Scripture readings). It is also advised that you sing the hymns with your children in the weeks before Christmas. If they are already familiar with the words, then the context in which they are sung will have greater meaning.

GIFT ONE: FROM GOD TO US

Wrap a shoe box in Christmas paper. Wrap the top and bottom of the box separately so that package can be opened without ripping the paper (and so this set of gifts can be used each Christmas, if desired). The simple opening of lids will allow this time to remain focused on the message of Christmas. Pretty boxes, wrapped top and bottom, create a strong parallel with the presents exchanged between family members and friends later.

In this first box place a baby doll wrapped in swaddling clothes. Around the baby place spring-loaded decorations (like you would find in a prank can of nuts) and confetti. You might have to seal the present with rubber bands to keep in closed.

Read Luke 2:1-7

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was

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with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

After reading the passage allow one of the children to open the first gift. As they open it, the springs will burst forth and confetti will fill the room. In the box they will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Have a conversation that explains the following:

“You know you can tell the size of most presents by looking at the size of the package. Have you ever gotten a present that was bigger than its package? [Allow them to answer and hope they don’t remember the trampoline was bigger assembled than the box it came in.] The manger was a present that was bigger on the inside than it was on the outside [for follow up during the next month’s bedtimes you might read C.S. Lewis *The Last Battle* where this concept is used]. The manger was a small place and Jesus was a small baby, but the manger held the one who created the whole world and fits the universe with all its stars in the palm of his hands. That is the first and greatest gift of Christmas.”

Sing “Away In a Manger” and/or “What Child Is This?” as a family.

Away in the Manger

Author Unknown; Stanza 3 by John Thomas McFarland

Verse 1

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Verse 2

The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes;
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Verse 3

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray;
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
And fit us for Heaven to live with Thee there.

What Child Is This?

William C. Dix

Verse 1

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Verse 2

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Verse 3

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

GIFT TWO: FROM US TO GOD

Wrap another shoe box in different color paper as the first. The gifts from God to us (gifts one and three) will be in one color paper. The gifts from us to God (gifts two and four) will be in another color paper.

In this box place objects that your children have broken in the last year, dirty-torn clothes, or other objects that represent hard times the family has faced in the last year.

Read Matthew 1:18-23

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.**" All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).*

After reading this passage, allow another child to open gift number two. As they open this present they will find things that are not desirable or reminds them things they have done wrong. If you are doing the all four gifts in one evening, have children put on the dirty clothes and hold their objects from the box.

Have a conversation that explains the following:

“Do you remember these things from the last year? Don’t worry you are not in trouble. But this is all we have to give God. This is why Jesus came. Do you remember that passage we just read where it said ‘[Jesus] will save his people from their sins’? That means Jesus came, beginning as a baby, to take away our sin. Part of Christmas is admitting that we needed a Savior to come; that we have sinned and we can’t make it better by ourselves. It is hard and embarrassing to admit these things, but luckily this is not the last present.”

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Sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” as a family.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Old Latin Hymn



Verse 1

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Verse 2

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory over the grave.

Refrain

Verse 3

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

Refrain

Verse 4

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

Refrain

GIFT THREE: FROM GOD TO US

Wrap a third package in the same color paper as the first. In this package place a simple white robe (could be an old sheet freshly bleached with hole cut for the head and a sash for the waste) for each of the children present. Also place a piece of paper with the message in the box below. Take time to decorate this message on the computer in a way that fits each child. Use colors that coincide with the colors of his/her room. If possible, laminate the paper to ensure it is durable.



Name of Child
I Forgive You!
I Love You As My Son/Daughter

Read Luke 2:21-32

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

Have another child come and open the third present. As they open the present, they will find robes to wear and plaques with their names as the message of Christmas written to them. (You might design this on the computer in colors that match the colors of each child's room.)

Have a conversation that explains the following:

"You want to know something incredible? God doesn't see you in those dirty clothes of the last present. God doesn't think about those broken toys or things you did wrong. When God looks at His children He sees Jesus and the perfect character of Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, 'For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' God sees us as if we were wearing the white robes of heaven. We are going to take this plaque and place over the door in your room you will know Jesus came to say, '[Name] I forgive you and I love you as my son/daughter!'"

Sing "Joy to the World" as a family.



Joy to the World
Isaac Watts

Verse 1

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Verse 2

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

Verse 3

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

Verse 4

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

GIFT FOUR: FROM US TO GOD

Wrap a forth package in the same color paper as the second. In this package place an individual picture of each member of the family or each person who is present for the gift exchange. While only the children participated in the enactment of gifts one, two, and three, everyone in the room will participate in this enactment. You will also need to have a nativity scene in the room.

Read Matthew 2:1-11

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all

the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

" 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and **they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.***

Have another child come and open the final present. As they find the pictures of each person in the room, ask them to take each person's picture to that person.

Have a conversation that explains the following:

“What did the wise men bring Jesus? Presents, that’s right. They brought him special presents that represented Jesus role as king (gold), priest (frankincense), and savior who would die for us (myrrh). Do you know what present God asks from us? [*Allow for a moment of cute answers if they come.*] Jesus wants our life and our love. Jesus wants us to live for Him and share His love with others. That is what Christmas is all about. At some point in your life you will realize you are a sinner who needs Jesus as a Savior. [*This conversation assumes not all of the children present have been born again and that some may have not yet reached the age of accountability.*] Now we are all going to take our picture and place at the foot of the manger—like the wise men did their presents—to show Jesus we love him and want to live for him.”

Note: If all children have expressed their need for Christ as Savior, then the conversation would emphasize more of what it means to follow Christ. This conversation would emphasize sacrifice, humility, and service. In this case, you might want to read Philippians 2:1-11 and help them write one way they want to express sacrifice, humility, and service on the back of the picture before they place it at the foot of the manger.

Take your pictures to the nearest nativity and then sing “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”

O Come, All Ye Faithful
Old Latin Hymn

Verse 1

O Come All Ye Faithful
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Verse 3

All Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
O Jesus! for evermore be Thy name adored.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Verse 2

O Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing all that hear in heaven God's holy word.
Give to our Father glory in the Highest;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

ENDING

Say a short prayer thanking God for the true meaning of Christmas and have a brief (the kids have been waiting long enough) conversation which explains:

“Now that we know the true meaning of Christmas and what the greatest gift of all is, you can better understand why we give presents at Christmas. We give presents because we want to bless others, especially those in our family, in the same way that God blessed us – with presents!”