

This I Promise You

Bible Story: This I Promise You (God promises a Savior) • *Isaiah 9:6-7*

Bottom Line: I can have joy because God keeps His promises.

Memory Verse: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" *Philippians 4:4, NIV*

Life App: Joy—finding a way to be happy, even when things don't go your way.

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Early Arriver Activity (8:45) (10:30) (5:45)

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask kids what they like best about the Christmas season.

What You Say:

"What is your favorite Christmas tradition? What are you looking forward to doing during Christmastime this year? There are a lot of fun things about Christmas! Today in Large Group, we are going to hear that there's so much more to Christmas than any of the fun things we mentioned!"

Plug In (9:00) (10:45) (6:00)

What is Christmas?

What You Need: Old magazines, Christmas cards, catalogs, or store ads; scissors; paper; glue sticks

What You Do:

Instruct kids to cut out pictures and glue them onto a piece of paper to make a collage of what Christmas is all about.

What You Say:

"You guys did a great job on those collages! Christmas definitely includes many things like presents, decorations, food, candy, and baby Jesus. But Christmas is also part of a much bigger story. **[Transition] Let's head to Large Group where we will hear all about some of the other stories in the Bible that also have to do with Christmas.**" Lead your group to the Large Group area.

Prayer Time

After large group, gather children in their small groups. Lead them in prayer focusing on "The Bottom Line."

Catch On #1

Quilt Activity –Sew It Together (application activity / review the Bible story)

What You Need: "Quilt Squares" (Activity Page), markers, tape, scissors

What You Do:

Give each child a square with a quarter of a circle on it. Instruct kids to illustrate one of the stories they heard in Large Group inside the circle part. They can decorate the area around the circle however they want to. When all the kids are done drawing, tape all the pieces together on the wall to form circles, and put the circles together to make a "quilt" that illustrates how all the stories in the Bible work together to illustrate how God keeps His promises.

What You Say:

"We heard a lot of stories today that, at first, might seem like they have nothing to do with one another. Just like the circles we made today, these stories can seem like they are unrelated, but as you can see, they all work together to make a bigger picture. To the people in these stories, it might have seemed like everything was falling apart because they couldn't see the big story. So, even when it seems like nothing is going right, we can remember that **[Impress] I can have joy because God keeps His promises. [Personalize] (Tell kids about a time God kept a promise to you.) [Apply] This week, think back on the things that have happened in your life and how it turned out okay even when you couldn't see it at the time.**"

Catch On #2

Let it Snow! (memory verse activity / great for active learners)

What You Need: 10 disposable cups, bag of large cotton balls, permanent marker, Bibles

What You Do:

Help kids find Philippians 4:4 in their Bibles.

Finding verses with 2nd and 3rd graders: Guide kids to open their Bibles to the front and find the table of contents. (Hold up a Bible opened to the table of contents to show the kids what the page looks like.) When the kids find the table of contents, lead them to find Philippians in the list under “New Testament.” When the kids find Philippians, lead them to look at the page number beside the word. Explain that the number tells them on what page they can find Philippians. Help the kids find the page. When they find Philippians, explain that the big numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. Help them find chapter 4. Explain that the small numbers are verse numbers. Help them find verse 4 in chapter 4.

Then give each kid a cotton ball. Instruct them to gently toss the cotton balls into the cups and then flip over the cups when they get a cotton ball in it. When all the cups have been turned over, tell kids to arrange the verse in order and read it together.

What You Say:

[Apply] “This verse is telling us to rejoice always, not just when we are feeling happy. Sometimes we might feel like things aren’t going the way we want them to, but we need to remember that ***[Impress]*** I can have joy because God keeps His promises. This week, try to remember to rejoice no matter what is going on.”

Baby, What a Big Surprise

Bible Story: Baby, What a Big Surprise (Zechariah and Elizabeth) • *Luke 1:5-25; 57-79*

Bottom Line: I can have joy because anything is possible with God.

Memory Verse: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” *Philippians 4:4, NIV*

Life App: Joy—finding a way to be happy, even when things don’t go your way.

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Early Arriver Activity (8:45) (10:30) (5:45)

What You Need: An offering container

What You Do:

Collect kids’ offerings as they arrive. Ask kids about the most amazing thing they have ever seen. Ask: What is something you saw someone do that was incredible? What’s something you thought would be impossible, but then it happened?

Plug In (9:00) (10:45) (6:00)

Kisses Impossible

What You Need: Individually wrapped candy

What You Do:

Place a pile of candy in the middle of the table. Tell kids they can eat as many as they want, but they can’t use their hands to unwrap them. (*Reminder: Check for allergies before beginning this activity.*)

What You Say:

“You guys were pretty creative with trying to find ways to unwrap your candy. Did it seem like a pretty impossible task, though? **[Transition] Today in Large Group we are going to hear about something that seemed completely impossible, but God made it happen anyway.**” Lead your group to the Large Group area.

Prayer Time

After large group, gather children in their small groups. Lead them in prayer focusing on “The Bottom Line.”

Catch On #1

What Was That? (application activity)

What You Need: white boards, markers, table or tray, 10-15 random objects (e.g., toys, craft supplies, books, etc.), blanket or sheet

What You Do:

Place the objects on a table or tray. Give the kids 30 seconds to look at the objects. Then cover them with a blanket or a sheet. Hand out white boards and markers and have kids draw or write as many of the objects that were under the sheet as they can remember. Tell them that just like Zechariah couldn’t talk in today’s Bible story, they can’t talk while they do this activity. After a minute or two, instruct kids to put down their markers. Reveal the objects again so kids can see how well they did.

Catch On #2

Rejoice! (memory verse activity)

What You Need: “Rejoice” strips (Activity Page), bowl or bag, scissors

What You Do:

Place all of the strips into the bowl or bag. Have kids pull out strips without looking to try to collect all four and make a complete verse. When they get two of one phrase, they put one back. If they pull out a “Lament” strip, they have to put back all their strips and start over. Explain that “lament” is the opposite of “rejoice.” Play until someone completes the verse.

What You Say:

“It can be frustrating when we are trying to do something that seems impossible. I bet some of you thought no one would ever get all the pieces to the verse! **[Apply] It’s important to remember that when God says something will happen, it will happen, but it might take awhile. When we get frustrated how long something is taking, we can remember that [Impress] I can have joy because anything is possible with God.**”

Born in the H.A.Y.

Bible Story: Born in the H.A.Y. (Jesus is born) • *Luke 2:1-7*

Bottom Line: I can have joy because God sent His Son.

Memory Verse: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" *Philippians 4:4, NIV*

Life App: Joy—finding a way to be happy, even when things don't go your way.

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Early Arriver Activity (8:45) (10:30) (5:45)

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask kids about babies they know: What are babies like? What do they do? What do you have to do for them? Do you remember when your younger siblings or cousins or neighbors were babies? What was it like taking care of a new baby?

Plug In (9:00) (10:45) (6:00)

Not As It Seems

What You Need: Whiteboard and markers (*optional*); paper; pencils or pens

What You Do:

Write "Merry Christmas" on a white board or piece of paper where all the kids can see it. Then, hand out paper and pencils or pens to each kid. Give them five minutes to think of as many words as they can, using only the letters in the words "Merry" and "Christmas." If kids are having trouble, let them partner up for the last two minutes.

What You Say:

"I bet you guys have seen those words a hundred times this month alone. But, today we looked at them a little differently and saw words in them that we never would have seen if we just saw those words on a card or on a sign in the store. **[Transition] In Large Group today, we are going to hear a story we have probably heard before, but if we think about it and look closely, we might just realize something about it we have never heard before!**" Lead your group to the Large Group area.

Prayer Time

After large group, gather children in their small groups. Lead them in prayer focusing on "The Bottom Line."

Catch On #1

The Night Jesus Was Born (application activity / review the Bible story)

What You Need: "The Night Jesus Was Born" (Activity Page), scissors, paper bag

What You Do:

Cut the characters apart and place them in a paper bag. Have the kids sit in a circle. Go around the circle and have each kid take turns choosing a character from the bag and then telling the Christmas story from that character's perspective. (Explain that we don't know whether Mary rode on a donkey, but she may have. Or perhaps there was a donkey in the place where Jesus was born.) The first four kids will tell what the characters were thinking in the first half of the story. The next four will tell what they were thinking in the second half of the story. Any remaining kids can tell the whole story briefly as their character. Encourage kids to really think about what that character would have seen/heard/smelled. Have them use a special voice and actions to tell their story. Have kids replace the character in the bag after they have told the story.

What You Say:

"Good job getting in the heads of the characters. Even though we weren't there when Jesus was born, we can imagine what it must have been like for the people who were there. Mary and Joseph were young, they had never had a baby before, they had been traveling, and they were in a strange place. This was not necessarily an easy situation, but it was an amazing one. Even though the circumstances weren't perfect, Joseph and Mary learned quickly that **[Impress] I can have joy because God sent His Son. [Personalize] (Tell kids about why Jesus' birth brings you joy.) [Apply] This week, remember the real reason for Christmas and celebrate that Jesus came to earth for you.**"

Catch On #2

Joy to the World! (*memory verse activity*)

What You Need: Bibles, blindfold, whiteboard and marker (or paper and pencil)

What You Do:

Blindfold kids one at a time and have each kid write one word of the verse on a white board or piece of paper. The only person blindfolded is the one writing, so the other kids can watch and give helpful instruction if they want to. When the whole verse has been written, look it up and read it together.

What You Say:

“This verse tells us to rejoice! What do you think it means to rejoice? (*Pause.*) This Christmas season, we have a lot to rejoice over and we can remember that **[Impress] I can have joy because God sent His Son. [Apply] This week as you open gifts, remember that God gave us the best gift of all—His Son.**”

A Star Is Born

Bible Story: A Star Is Born (Shepherds and angels) • *Luke 2:8-20*

Bottom Line: I can have joy because God's story is for everyone.

Memory Verse: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" *Philippians 4:4, NIV*

Life App: Joy—finding a way to be happy, even when things don't go your way.

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Early Arriver Activity (8:45) (10:30) (5:45)

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask kids what songs they like to sing at Christmastime and what gets them really excited about Christmas.

What You Say:

"What is your favorite Christmas song? What is your favorite thing to do at Christmastime? What do you like to do when you are on Christmas break from school? Today in Large Group, we are going to hear the story some of those songs come from!"

Prayer Time

After large group, gather children in their small groups. Lead them in prayer focusing on "The Bottom Line."

Catch On #1

Joy on Top (application activity / great for active learners)

What You Need: "Joy on Top" stars (Activity Page), whiteboard, marker, masking tape, blindfolds or scarves, Bibles

What You Do:

Draw an outline of a Christmas tree on a white board. Give each kid a star. Have them look up the verse on their star. Give kids a loop of tape to put on the back of their stars. One at a time, ask kids to read their verses aloud. After a kid has read the verse, blindfold him, spin him around, and have him try to stick his star on the top of the tree.

What You Say:

[Apply] "The Bible is full of verses that talk about joy. These verses were only a few of the ones we could have looked up. Joy is an important part of knowing about God because He wants us to know that

[Impress] I can have joy because God's story is for everyone. Take home one of these verses with you to remind you of the joy that is in God's story."

Waiting on the World to Change

Bible Story: Waiting on the World to Change (Simeon at the Temple) • *Luke 2:21-35*

Bottom Line: I can have joy because God has a plan to make things right.

Memory Verse: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” *Philippians 4:4, NIV*

Life App: Joy—finding a way to be happy, even when things don’t go your way.

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Early Arriver Activity (8:45) (10:30) (5:45)

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask kids about the gifts they got for Christmas.

What You Say:

“What was the best gift you gave someone else? Is there a certain kind of gift you usually get in your family (e.g., PJs on Christmas eve, an ornament, etc.)? Today in Large Group, we are going to hear about a gift one man waited a very long time for.”

Plug In (9:00) (10:45) (6:00)

Craziest. Present. Ever.

What You Need: Index cards, pens

What You Do:

Ask kids to tell you the craziest present they’ve ever received. It can be silly, strange, unwelcome, giant, etc. Write down each answer on an index card. If there is time, talk about how those gifts made you feel (frustrated, awkward, silly, etc.).

What You Say:

“Wow, those are definitely some crazy presents! **[Transition]** Let’s go to Large Group, where we’ll find out about everyone else’s crazy presents!” Lead your group to the Large Group area. Take the index cards with you, and put what you consider the craziest ideas on the top of the stack.

Prayer Time

After large group, gather children in their small groups. Lead them in prayer focusing on “The Bottom Line.”

Catch On #1

Joy Time (application activity / great for active learners)

What You Need: 2 cookies, 2 stockings, timer or stopwatch

What You Do:

Pair kids up. Both kids in each pair will do one of the challenges listed below.

Challenges:

- Move a cookie from your forehead to your mouth without dropping it. No hands are allowed to move the cookie—just to catch it if it starts to fall.
- Toss a stocking into the tub using only your foot.
- Do as many jumping jacks as possible in 30 seconds.
- Say the phrase, “Joy to the world,” as many times as possible in a minute.

What You Say:

“Those were some pretty funny challenges! Since I told you what each challenge was right before you did it, you didn’t have any time to plan how you were going to do it. **[Apply]** Even though we don’t always get to plan how every part of our lives is going to go, God has a plan for everything in all time. We can trust His plan, and you and **[Impress]** I can have joy because God has a plan to make things right.”

Catch On #2

Reasons for Rejoicing (memory verse activity)

What You Need: “Reasons for Rejoicing” (Activity Pages), pens, Bibles

What You Do:

Look up and review the verse with the kids. Then have them think of reasons to rejoice that start with the letters in the word to make an acrostic. When they are done, have them compare words.

What You Say:

“Great job thinking of words! Which words did more than one of you write? Who came up with especially big or unique words? **[Apply]** You guys have a lot of reasons to rejoice, even though Christmas has come and gone! Rejoicing doesn’t depend on things going right—it depends on trusting God! Hang these pictures up in your room this week as a reminder that **[Impress]** I can have joy because God has a plan to make things right.”