

# Experiencing The Christmas Story

---

By Benjamin Kerns

Here is an Advent/Christmas experience that's perfect for a mid-week gathering or Sunday School. It's a little different than a traditional Bible study. It's great if you're looking to have your students learn about the Christmas narrative in a more experiential way.

Here's how it works:

1. You'll need to set-up five rooms, or five areas of your church where students can go to interact experientially with various aspects of the Christmas narrative.
  2. Ideally, you'll need an adult in each room to facilitate the interaction. Though, if you don't have that many volunteers you can simply lead the interaction in each room yourself.
  3. You can debrief after each room, or once you're done with all of them. The two questions we used to debrief are: How do you identify with this character? How can you move more towards Jesus this Christmas?
- 

## Room 1: The Giver

**Set-up:** Have students sit or stand around tables. Provide material for students to write Christmas cards.

FIRST, read Matthew 2:9-11.

THEN, say something like:

- **The natural reaction of the human heart is to have gratitude and generosity toward those who bless us. When we're given an amazing gift, our heart grows towards that person and it is actually really easy to bless them back. In Jesus Christ, God initiates the most amazing gift to all of humanity, and to you personally. As you receive that gift, the natural response is gratitude and generosity. The wise men gave their gifts, what gifts do you give or want to give back to Jesus?**

NEXT, read Matthew 25:40. Then say something like:

- **We are going to take a few minutes for you to write a Christmas card to someone at your school who is often left out or lonely.**

FINALLY, encourage students to write a message on a card and attach a candy cane. Encourage them to take the card with them and to deliver it to the person they have in mind tomorrow

## Room 2: The Rebel

**Set-up:** Read outside before going in room. Provide note-cards and something to write with. Provide a box in the center of the room for students to put their note-cards in when they're finished.

FIRST, before you let students go in, read Matthew 2:1-2, 16.

THEN, say something like:

- **King Herod knew exactly who Jesus was and what his birth meant. His reign would be challenged. A king who loved his position and power was not willing to surrender to a new ruler, so rather than concede, he chose to fight. Herod actively and violently pushed back against the lordship of Jesus.**

**Some of us know exactly who Jesus is and know exactly the call that he has on our lives, the call to die to our selves and surrender. This call to concede our kingship is too much to bear and we find ourselves actively fighting against the things of God. Maybe it is time to pick up your cross, confess your sins, and submit to the King.**

NEXT, before entering, instruct students to remove their shoes. As they enter the room, explain to them that through prayer, they have the opportunity to go before the throne of God and surrender. Say something like:

- **When you enter find your own space to pray about the things in your life that you need to confess or need to give over in surrender to God. These could include mistakes, control, and worry. When you're ready, you can take an index card and write down the thing you need to surrender and place it in the box in the center of the room.**

### **Room 3: The Outcasts**

**Set-up:** Have students wait outside the room. Inside the room, have cookies and hot chocolate set up, almost like a little party.

FIRST, before letting students go in the room, read Luke 2:8-12.

THEN, say something like:

- **Christmas is a season of gift giving and parties. For some it is an awful reminder that they are on the outs. The gifts everyone buys aren't for them, the parties everyone is getting dressed up for will not include them. The exact season where we should feel included only reminds some of us of our brokenness and isolation.**

NEXT, encourage students to sit in silence for the next few minutes and think about what it means to be alone and isolated.

THEN, say something like:

- **Even if this is you, the Christmas story calls to the lowly, the broken, the outcasts. Of all the people that could have gotten a special invitation and announcement of Jesus' birth, it was the shepherds, the lowest of the low of their culture. They were seen and esteemed by God and invited to be the first on the scene when Jesus, Emmanuelle, was born.**

NEXT, welcome students into the room to the party you have set-up. Encourage students to enjoy the celebration together of cookies and hot chocolate and remember to intentionally to look to include people especially during this Christmas season.

### **Room 4: The Watcher**

**Set-up:** Provide a stack of newspapers or other news-magazines. Provide tape to stick the articles to the wall.

FIRST, read Luke 2:25-28.

THEN, say something like:

- **Simeon is someone who gets little attention during the Christmas season. But unlike the other characters around the nativity, Simeon was the only one who was actively watching and waiting for god to show up. And god richly blessed him, by allowing him to live until he could see the Messiah, the baby Jesus.**

**God actually is alive and at work in our world. Some of us are too distracted to notice. Some of us might be inclined react to something that god does. But it is a special gift to expect and long for God to move. It tunes our hearts toward his movements, and our faith is increased as we get to see the more subtle and continuous movement of God.**

NEXT, encourage students to look through these newspapers and find stories where they think God be working in the world. Instruct them to tear them out and tape them to the wall. Encourage them to remember to keep their eyes open for the things that God is doing in their life and in the world.

## **Room 5: The Distracted**

**Set-up:** Find something that represents Christ's birth. A nativity scene, or a manger figurine or ornament, or something similar is ideal. But if you're in a bind, it can be as simple as a Bible. Set up the object in a prominent location. Then, create as much Christmas clutter all around it as you possibly can. Wrapping paper, gift boxes, Christmas lights, ornaments, Santa Clause figurines . . . the more the better. The goal is to barely be able to see whatever it is you've identified to represent Christ's birth.

FIRST, read Luke 2:1-3.

THEN, say something like:

- **In the time of Jesus' birth, God was in the process of doing the most amazing thing in all of human history. At the same time, Bethlehem was jam packed with families for the census. While there were many people in the proximity of this historic work of God, everyone seemed to miss it.**

**Imagine a gigantic family reunion. Everyone was busy preparing their homes for guests, buying presents for loved ones, etc. And while everyone was doing their own thing, God shows up. This may have felt like the mall at Christmas time.**

NEXT, ask:

- **This Christmas season, what are the things that are consuming your mind, or are distracting you from seeing that God is actually alive and moving in our midst?**

THEN, explain that it's super easy to get distracted from the real reason for Christmas. Point out your display. Ask students if they can pick out what represents Jesus' birth in your set-up. Explain to them that the clutter all around this is representative of the clutter that often exists in our day-to-day lives during the holidays. Push back all the things you have distracting from the symbol of Jesus' birth so that it's more or less isolated from the clutter. Then, explain to students that this represents our efforts to make Jesus' birth the center of our hearts and minds during Christmas.

FINALLY, encourage students to take a picture of the scene using their phones. Encourage them to set this picture as their screen saver to remind them to focus on Christ during Christmas.