

Family Sign & Play Nativity Guide



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This curriculum guide is intended to help you gather your family together at Christmas time to share the reason why we celebrate Christmas. The hope is that as you use this guide, your family will be able to engage together in a way that is meaningful and enjoyable to every member of your family, regardless of their hearing level or language ability!

As you think about when and how you will go through this, this guide is designed to help you prepare. Read through the “Set your space” section to gather materials and get things set up well. There is also a video available through the Deaf Kids Connect website and DKC Ministries app showing how to sign each word from the vocabulary section.

Within families, American Sign Language (ASL) ability can vary widely from person to person. The intention for this guide is that it would meet your needs wherever you are on your ASL journey! Check out the “Family Nativity Sign and Play” Video to get some ideas on a simple way to share the Christmas story as well as a video highlighting some helpful tips to remember as you walk through this activity. If there are parts of this lesson you don’t yet feel comfortable signing, feel free to skip through them. Maybe you can find an ASL teacher or Deaf friend who can tell the story or help you learn how to share some of that at a later time.

You can do it! God wants you to share the Truth of His Son’s birth with your family! Pray as you prepare, pray as you go, and Praise God when you are finished! He will use every ounce of your effort to obediently disciple your kids! Let's go!!!!

VOCABULARY

Truth
Bible
Christmas
Who?

Mom
Mary
Dad
Baby
Angel

Shepherd
Wisemen
Story
Ready

YOU WILL NEED:

- Your Bible
- Access to the DKC Ministries App or Deaf Kids Connect Website
- Access to the Deaf Bible App or Deaf Missions website
- Your nativity set wrapped in a box or gift bag
- Props for acting out the story
- A well-lit room with enough space for your family to move around
- Seating arranged in a circle or semi-circle

TELLING THE STORY

START with Prayer

NEXT Begin the story by opening your Bible. If your children have Bibles, encourage them to go get them and open their Bibles to the story of Jesus's birth.

Say/Sign: This is a Bible. It is true! This is a story of why we have Christmas! Some people don't know why we have Christmas, but we do because we can read the Bible and it tells us!

READ the story from Luke chapter 2

Open the Deaf Bible App/ Deaf Missions website to the ASLV. Play Luke 2 for everyone to watch.

WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS?

Open the nativity set wrapped as a gift from under the tree.

Say/Sign: This gift will help us understand the story. Let's see who this story is about (Pull out Mary). Sign WHO?, Sign MOM (language expansion, MARY)

Sign WHO? Sign DAD (language expansion, Finger spell "JOSEPH")

Sign WHO? Sign BABY (language expansion, JESUS)

***Repeat the same process for all the characters in your nativity set.

***The goal is to present all the characters voice off!

TELL THE STORY:

Say/Sign: Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. The Bible says that while they were there, Mary had her baby, but she wasn't in a hospital, she was in a barn! This baby was named Jesus because He was born to save people from their sins!

There were shepherds out in the field at night with their sheep. When Jesus was born, God sent angels out to the field to shine bright in the sky and tell the shepherds the great news! The angels said, "Don't be afraid, Jesus is born! You can go see Him in a manger!" Then, many angels filled the sky and praised God for this awesome thing!

The shepherds went right away to go see the baby, and they were amazed!

Later, wisemen traveled from far away to see Jesus. They knew where Jesus was because there was a giant star in the sky! They brought great gifts for Jesus.

ACT IT OUT! GET UP AND GET INVOLVED!

Acting out a story is a highly effective way to keep your child's attention, ensure comprehension and allow them to internalize the message. By holding them "responsible" to perform as a character in the story, they either need to recall the information just shared with them or ask for help in doing their part. This ensures that they are paying attention, but better, this allows them to understand the concepts in a new way, as a type of "firsthand" experience rather than an abstract or distant story.

START: Explain we are now going to act out the story. Assign each person a character. How many participants do you have? Think about who the most important characters are in the story. Include your surroundings to make it more exciting! (For example, a family pet can be a donkey, a Christmas tree topper can be the guiding star, or a child's most cherished stuffed animal can be baby Jesus). Depending on the number of people in your family, you may need some to be multiple characters. If this is the case, then a hat, piece of fabric, or even a play fireman coat can be very helpful so everyone can understand when the characters change.

NEXT: Narrate. One person can narrate the story to cue the characters of where to walk, what to say, and what happens next. It is a good idea to keep your nativity set in view and you can pull the characters out so they "act the story along" to help for comprehension or if someone gets stuck.

DEBRIEF: Celebrate your family's participation and success! Make sure to emphasize the parts they did well and encourage them! Comment on the funny things that happened.

Tips

A simple way to visually explain the process with very little language is to hold up the character from the nativity set and give it to the person who is to portray that character and point to them. Sign, YOU, MOM. YOU BABY. Etc. You can have adults model this first by having them take the same pose and use props as the person in the nativity once they receive the figure to help solidify the idea that once the character figurine is placed with a person, they “become” that character.

Have fun! This is not a serious dramatic production. While we never want to mock God’s Word in any way, allowing the chaos of letting young children explore the character, get distracted with something else or laugh at someone’s costume are all important parts of this exercise!

Do it again! Your kids may have so much fun getting to play out the story, they may ask to do it again. Do it! You can allow everyone to stay in the same character to emphasize and really support comprehension for their part, or if your kids are older and feel familiar with the story, offer your family members to switch roles, or change costumes.

Make it a tradition! As you engage in this yearly, remind your family of last year’s performance. Discuss how next year you’ll do it again. This is your chance to write a new tradition unique to your family that your kids will remember and cherish.

DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION

WHY IT MATTERS

While Christmas feels like just the start of the story, it is not! Now that we have supported great comprehension of the story, let’s move into why this story is great news by looking at the reason we need Jesus!

KEY TAKE AWAY: BECAUSE OF JESUS, WE CAN BE FRIENDS WITH GOD!

START:

Say/Sign: Christmas is so important! Let me tell you why! When God made the World, He made it perfect! We can read in the Bible that He made everything, and it was good! (Genesis 1) But the people He made, Adam and Eve, wanted to see if there was something better than God. They wanted to be like God themselves. They disobeyed God, and the Bible tells us because of that, the world became covered in sin (Genesis 3). Because of that sin, people could not be friends with God like they were before. Our sin made a huge divide.

READ: Romans 5:12, Colossians 1:21 (Use ASLV if you’d like!)

DEMONSTRATE:

Say/Sign: Let's see what this looked like.

Have two people stand next to each other. One is to represent God and the other represents people. Ask the two people to sign "friend" using one hand from each person to complete the sign. Emphasize the fact that they are together and close.

Now, have them separate further than arm's distance away from each other. You can use something black to represent sin and put it in between them. Now, ask them to sign "friend" using one hand from each person. They cannot do it because of the distance. Sin has separated them.

Say/Sign: They are not able to be friends now, because sin has separated them. But! That's why Christmas is so special!

Pick up the baby Jesus from the manger set. Give it to the one representing God and have them hold it out towards the other one.

Say/Sign: Because of Jesus, now we can hold on to Him and become connected back to God. Because of Jesus, we can be friends with God again!

Have the person representing people walk towards the one holding Jesus out. Have them both hold onto baby Jesus.

Now, ask if they can sign "friends" with each other. They can!

WRAP UP:

Say/Sign: This is why Christmas is so great! God loves you so much, He made a way for us to be friends with Him again through Jesus! Because of Jesus, we can be friends with God.

By working through the above conversation, you are laying the building blocks of the Gospel. While this is a very simplistic and incomplete explanation, this concrete concept of "holding onto Jesus to become friends with God again" is where we want to focus. As your children grow, you will add more detail of what sin is, how Jesus was able to get rid of it, and what it means to follow Jesus. If you feel your kids are ready for it, below is a small expansion to help guide you and your children into a deeper discussion

GOING DEEPER:

Say/Sign: Jesus is the only way we can become friends with God again. Every person has sin and is separated from God. The Bible tells us that it is only through Jesus that we can have that sin removed. (Romans 3:23, John 14:6) The great news is that Jesus will remove sin from every person who trusts Him and wants to follow Him for the rest of their lives.

Titus 3:4-5 says that it is because of God's great loving kindness that He saved us through Jesus and we can be friends again with God! Being friends with God is the absolute best

thing we could ever have! That is why Christmas is so special! Because it was all a part of God's plan to save us so through Jesus, we could be cleansed from our sin and friends with God!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WAYS TO APPLY THE MESSAGE

CHILDREN AGES 0-3:

What book has the Christmas story in it?

Answer: The Bible

Who is your favorite character from the Christmas story, why?

Do you think sleeping on hay was comfortable or not comfortable?

Is this story real, or pretend?

Answer: Real!

Does God love you?

Answer: Yes! John 3:16

CHILDREN AGES 4-6:

Why weren't Mary and Joseph at their houses or a hospital when Jesus was born? Answer help: Luke 2:1-5

Did the shepherds go right away to see Jesus, or wait? Why do you think they did that? What do you think the other people who heard the shepherds' message thought? What would you think? Answer help: Luke 2:16-18

How Does a person "hold on to Jesus" to become friends with him again?

Answer: John 3:16, Romans 10:9, Romans 10:13,

A NOTE TO PARENTS

A note about grief: Christmas is such a wonderful time- some would say THE MOST, wonderful time of the year. But as a parent to a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child, Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for us too. As we experience this season through the lens of our child with hearing loss, surprisingly we can feel a deep sense of loss. For many of us, as we look forward to recreating memories and traditions at Christmas from our childhood, we realize many of them heavily depend on auditory input and language. As we reflect on those memories and are unable to partake in them with our Deaf or Hard of Hearing child, it can feel weighty.

In addition to this season's heaviness, I (as a mom of a Deaf son) have felt at many different times that my family...my son...is forgotten by the majority. I can go down a rabbit hole that perhaps my son is destined to a life of being an outcast in society, on the outskirts, always desiring connection and relationship but unable to have access to it due to language barriers. Sadly, sometimes this idea is even reinforced by some in the medical community, pushing speech therapy and auditory support devices so that our children can be "normal" and engage in the things that we as parents want most. But what happens if those therapies and technologies are not successful? Is the fight I have fought to try to get my son's cochlear implants on for just minutes at a time, coaxing with promises of "almost done" and a candy reward really the fight for my son's *only hope* of access to connection? To being seen as human? As valuable?

That is another reason why Christmas is so wonderful. As I am sitting at a coffee shop studying the story of Jesus being born, I am reminded once again, WHO it is that Jesus came for. The creator of the universe came as a baby born next to farm animals, and some of the first people other than his parents to find out about it were shepherds. In the time of Jesus' birth, shepherds were seen as a very low class of society. Not worth the time ... But these were not just low-class shepherds...the ones who first laid eyes on the Messiah were the night-shift shepherds; a class potentially even lower than the standard shepherds. I recently had my 3rd son, and I am reminded again how God is the one who determines the exact time when that baby will come. Why did God have Mary labor through the night and welcome that child in darkness? Perhaps one of the reasons is so that that specific crew of the outcast night shepherds would get access to God, in a way almost no one else has had. And what if that fact was all designed into God's plan so that a few thousand years later, we parents of Deaf children could see the heart of our Maker. What is His priority when it comes to people? It was those who were socially outcast, deemed as less value, so far from human connection they were tasked to work while everyone else was far away sleeping in their beds... it was those individuals to whom God directed the angels to say, "For unto YOU, is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord."

As you undoubtedly hear and read that phrase multiple times this Christmas season, I encourage you, as I encourage myself... take the weight of the responsibility of having a Deaf child, the grief, the pressure, the sadness, the fear and worry... take all the burden that you carry that is unique to your child with hearing loss, and remind yourself that the

“YOU” in the angels’ message is for YOUR son or daughter. They are not missed by God. They are not even the second-round pick. God knew YOUR child from the beginning of the creation of the world and included him or her in the greeting, as He instructed the Angels’ message to say “to you.” Take a minute to say out loud, God has not missed _____ (your child’s name). And perhaps thank Him in a new way as you hear the phrase “for unto you...” throughout the season.