

4 Devotions to Accompany the *One Night in Bethlehem* Advent Banner Craft

This set of four family devotions is designed to encourage and uplift you and your family during the Advent season (the four weeks before Christmas). Each devotion is based on one of several pennants that are included in CTA's *One Night in Bethlehem* banner kit (#ONB21KT).

It's our prayer that as you read and discuss these simple devotions and Bible texts, the Holy Spirit will fill your hearts with genuine joy and peace. For ease of use, directions are included in italics and parentheses within the devotions; all other text can be said out loud.



To begin, you'll need to decide where to place your banner. CTA has provided a string along with several separate pennants to hang from the string. If your children are small, plan to position the banner so that they can safely and independently view it (for example, across a blank wall or over a picture window).

Next, decide the best way for your family to use the devotions along with the pictures on the banner. You might want to post all the pictures and hang the completed banner. Then you can refer to a particular picture as you use the corresponding devotion. Or, you may want to simply add a picture to the banner as you use the devotion that correlates with it. **Since there are six pennants and four devotions, you might choose to use the first one (star) and the last one (baby Jesus) at the beginning of Advent and on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.**

Finally, choose a time and place for your family devotions. There is one devotion for each of the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Some families choose a particular day and time for their devotions. Others find that flexibility is needed because of their busy schedules. Talk with your family members and come up with a plan that best fits *your* family.

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Devotion 1

Awaiting the Savior

(Pennant 2)

Introduction

(Use a timer on your phone or the second hand on a nearby clock to time one minute. Work together to list as many “waiting situations” as you can during that time frame [for example, waiting for the red light to turn green or waiting for your birthday to come]. Then talk together about the last time you had to wait.) Was it easy or hard to wait? Why?

Sometimes when we wait, we get discouraged. The longer we wait, the more frustrated we can feel. Sometimes waiting can even make us feel hopeless. We might give up believing that our wait will ever end!

Getting to the Heart

Have you ever wondered how God’s people felt as they waited for the Promised One to come? Think about it: God first promised a Savior to Adam and Eve. These first people disobeyed God and brought sin into God’s perfect world. You can read about it in Genesis 3.

Only God could fix the terrible sin problem. So, he promised Adam and Eve a Savior. This Savior would take the punishment for sin in their place. In exchange, they would receive God’s complete forgiveness.

Our heavenly Father repeated his promise to send a Savior over and over again—throughout the Old Testament of the Bible. Generation after generation may have wondered, “Will the Savior come to us now? Is this the time when God will fulfill his promise?”

Waiting for God to keep his promise of salvation might have caused people to feel discouraged. Waiting year after year, generation after generation, would have been so hard. That’s why our loving Father kept encouraging his people. Time after time, God, our heavenly Father, reassured people that he would indeed send a Savior—One who would save them from their sins.

Adam and Eve weren’t the only ones who needed the Savior. All people sin or do wrong things (Romans 3:23). Even you and me. Can you think of a time when you did something wrong? *(Talk about it together.)* Do adults ever sin? Yes. *(Talk about it.)* Everyone needs a Savior because everyone sins—does wrong things or fails to do what is right. God did not want our sins to separate us from his love. So, on that first Christmas, God fulfilled his promise. The wait was finally over. The Savior came. God’s son, Jesus, was born to Mary and Joseph. That’s why we celebrate Christmas. It’s Jesus’ birthday! And we are forever his forgiven children of God.

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Taking It Home

Is it hard for you to wait for Christmas to come? You can begin to celebrate Christmas today, you know. You can read about Jesus' earthly mom and dad from the Bible (Matthew 1:18–21; Luke 2:1–5). You can read and think about the first Christmas when Jesus was born (Luke 2:1–7). You can thank God, your heavenly Father, for his wonderful gift of a Savior.

(Pray together:) Dear Lord God, sometimes it's hard to wait. Help us when waiting gets difficult. Help us focus on how much you love us and how you sent Jesus to be our Savior on the first Christmas. Help us live with thankfulness toward you and love for one another today and always. Amen.

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Devotion 2

Shepherds Hear Amazing News

(Pennant 3)

Introduction

(Challenge family members to find items in your home that make a noise [for example, a dog's squeak toy or a baby's rattle]. Each person should conceal his or her chosen item so that others cannot see it. When everyone has gathered again, take turns listening to the various sounds, one at a time, and try to identify its source. Family members might close their eyes, or the item might be sounded from behind a piece of furniture—out of sight. When all the items have been identified, set them aside.)

Getting to the Heart

Sounds can be loud, happy, or even surprising. Did you know that on the first Christmas, shepherds heard amazing sounds! It's true. You can read about it in the Bible. Find Luke 2:8–18. *(Read it together as a family.)*

I wonder what angel voices sound like. At first, the shepherds were afraid. It was so unexpected to have the dark night suddenly explode into a brighter-than-daytime brightness! Then, just as shepherds were trying to figure out what was happening, an angel's voice sounded from the sky. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news." That must have been a reassuring sound for the shepherds. The angel's message continued, "Today's the day—the day God promised long, long ago. Today the Savior has been born! Go and see!" As the shepherds tried to comprehend the wonder of the moment, the sky filled with more and more angels, all saying, "Glory to God!" Their voices must have thundered through the heavens. No wonder the shepherds jumped up and ran into Bethlehem to find the Savior!

Did you hear what happened *after* the shepherds saw baby Jesus? They told everyone what they had seen and heard. They just could not keep the good news to themselves! Shepherds told the Christmas news over and over again. They just couldn't keep quiet about the birth of our Savior.

The shepherds' actions remind me of a special sound we hear, especially during the season of Christmas—the ringing of bells. It's been said, "You can't un-ring a bell." That means once the bell has sounded there's no way to stop people from hearing the sound. The shepherds were like bells, ringing over and over, telling the world that the Savior was born. God our heavenly Father wanted the shepherds to spread the joyous news. God wanted the entire world to know that Jesus, the Savior, had come!

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Taking It Home

How might our family be like the shepherds, and share the good news that Jesus is born? *(Talk about the following ideas. Tweak the activities of interest to fit your family. Choose one or two suggestions to try this week.)*

- Deliver a handmade Christmas card to a neighbor.
- Gather and count loose coins you find around the house and car. Donate the money to a missionary or a missionary's specific need.
- Use sidewalk chalk to draw a Christmas message on your driveway or sidewalk for passersby to see.
- Make a Christmas drawing or ornament and give it to someone who is homebound.
- Use your phone to make a video of children as they set up and explain the figures of your nativity set. Send the video to friends or family for spiritual encouragement.
- Invite school or work friends to upcoming Christmas services at your church.

(Pray together:) Dear Lord, help us share the good news of Jesus' birth with others. Direct our actions and our words so that others will rejoice in the Savior's birth this Christmas and always. Amen.

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Devotion 3

Angels Filled the Sky with a Song of Joy

(Pennant 4)

Introduction

One way we celebrate the joy of Christ's birth is through Christmas songs and hymns. Do you have a favorite Christmas song or hymn? *(Sing each family member's favorite song now.)*

Christmas songs can fill our hearts with joy. Some songs or hymns remind us how much God loves us—so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. Still other Christmas songs bring us peace as they remind us that we are forgiven and are forever a part of God's family.

Do you know who sang the very first Christmas song? You might be surprised! *(Find the answer in Luke 2:13–14.)* What words did the angels sing? The birth of Jesus was so important that all of heaven rejoiced as angels welcomed the newborn Savior with a Christmas song of praise.

Getting to the Heart

Let's take a closer look at the words in the angels' song. What do you think "Glory to God in the highest" means? Does it mean God is the highest in the sky? Or do the words mean God is the tallest? Or the biggest in the universe? *(Talk about it.)*

"Glory to God in the highest" means that God is over all things. Our God is the most powerful of all powers. God is the greatest of all. Best of all, God is the most loving. He even loves you more than Mom or Dad or your grandparents can love you. And God will *never* stop loving you. Ever! God is the highest, the greatest of all!

The angels' song can help remind us what Christmas is all about. Christmas celebrates God's great big love, his unequalled forgiveness, and the complete peace we enjoy because Jesus is our Savior. The song of the angels reminds us to focus on Jesus throughout the season of Christmas.

(Read 1 Corinthians 10:31 from your Bible.) As we decorate our home, bake cookies, give gifts, gather with others . . . whatever we choose to do, we will do it all to the glory of God! He deserves all our praise!

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Taking It Home

(Here are some ways you can give glory and praise to the Lord this Christmas. Choose some to try as a family and try some of the activities individually.)

- Play Christian Christmas music. Sing along to praise God as a family!
- Memorize your favorite Christmas song, to the glory of God.
- Go Christmas caroling as a family. Invite neighbors and friends to join you so they can glorify God, too.
- Write a Christmas song or poem that praises and gives thanks to God.
- Attend a Christmas choir concert and hear others give God glory through song.
- As a family, play "Guess My Song." Listen as a family member hums the first part of a familiar Christmas song. See who can guess the song title first. Then give God thanks as you sing the song together.
- Support your local Christian radio station. Send a handwritten note of thanks along with your family's donation.
- Create a family playlist that includes each person's favorite Christian hymn or song of praise.

(Pray together:) Dear Lord, help us always keep Jesus in mind as we enjoy this Christmas season. Help us honor and praise you in everything we say and do. Amen.

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Devotion 4

Jesus, Our Savior, Was Born to Mary and Joseph

(Pennant 5)

Introduction

(If possible, bring each family member's baby picture to devotions. Take time to look at and compare the pictures.) Who did you look like as a baby? Did you resemble anyone in your family? Maybe your eyes were the same color as your mom's. You might have had the same curly hair as your brother.

What about now? You've changed since you were a baby. You've grown. Do family members share similar looks today? Has anyone ever told you, "I can see your dad in you. You have the same smile"? Or "You look just like your mom!" It can be fun looking like someone else, sharing the same color hair or a similarly shaped nose. *(Set the baby pictures aside.)*

Have you ever wondered what baby Jesus looked like? You've probably seen pictures in books, but those pictures show only what the book illustrator thinks. We don't have any actual photos of Jesus because cameras hadn't been invented when Jesus was born. What do you think baby Jesus looked like? *(Talk about it together.)*

Getting to the Heart

What Jesus looked like isn't nearly as important as *who Jesus is* and *what Jesus did*. Jesus is the Son of God. God chose Jesus to be the Savior. The only way that could work was if Jesus became a person—someone born with skin, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and every other body part that makes a person real.

But Jesus wasn't only a human baby. He was also God. Jesus grew up and he helped many people. He healed them. He encouraged them. Jesus told people how much God loves them, too. Jesus did everything God wanted. He perfectly obeyed every one of God's laws. And then Jesus took your sins and mine to his cross. There Jesus paid the price for sin. He died in our place. Three days later, Jesus came alive again! Jesus returned to heaven and is alive today—helping, healing, and encouraging you and me and all the dear children in God's family.

When people look at you, they may notice that you look like others in your earthly family. This Christmas, when others see you, let them see that you are part of God's family, too. How can they tell you belong to God's family? By the way you talk and act.

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Taking It Home

What can you *say* to show others that you belong to God's family? What can you *do* to show it? Wouldn't it be wonderful if during this Christmas season other people see you and think or say, "I can see Jesus in you"?

(Pray together:) Thank you, Jesus, for coming to earth on the very first Christmas. Help us be like you as we say kind words and act in ways that clearly show your love to others. Thank you for making us a part of the family of God. Amen.

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