



## WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE CHRISTMAS STORIES?

John 1:1-14

**Big Ideas:** *Christmas, different versions of the Gospels*

- I. Gathering (Attendance, First-Timers, Announcements)
- II. Engaging the Brain
  - A. Set Up: Christmas Video
    1. Before the group arrives, have a Christmas video playing (*It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Grinch*, and so forth) just to give the group an easy third object to focus on as they arrive.
    2. Once most of the group has arrived, move into today's session.
  - B. Wrapping Contest
    1. Set Up
      - a. Have on hand wrapping paper, three tape dispensers, three pairs of scissors, and three empty boxes.
      - b. Have a table set up in the front of the room with three chairs and wrapping material for each of the three stations.
      - c. Call three contestants to the front and have them sit behind the table.
      - d. Select one adult and one youth to serve as the impartial panel of judges.
    2. Give the Following Instructions:
      - a. To the contestants: Your job is to wrap a present as nicely as you can in one minute.
      - b. To the rest of the group: Your job is to cheer loudly for all of the contestants.
      - c. Invite the group to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
    3. Give the contestants one minute to wrap their presents.
    4. Have each contestant present his or her gift, explaining the finer points of his or her wrapping style.
    5. Invite the panel of judges to rate the wrapping jobs and select a winner.
    6. Brainstorming
      - a. Invite the group to come up with as many answers as possible to the debriefing question. (This could be a competition between the girls and the guys.)

### Note to the Leader

- Choose the activities that will work for your specific group and time frame.
- We recommend changing your teaching method at least three times each lesson.
- If you have any questions about *Spice Rack*, contact us at [youthministrypartners.com](http://youthministrypartners.com).

- b. The debriefing question:
  - How was the Wrapping Paper Game like Christmas for many people? (Ideas: Rushed, Can't ever get it quite right, Crowded, Focus so much on the wrapping you forget what's on the inside)

C. Go-Around Check-in Questions

1. Move the group into a circle.
2. Starting with the person in the group whose family has had their Christmas decorations up the longest, invite each person in the group to check-in by answering one of today's go-around questions.
3. The Question Options
  - Tell about one of your best or worst memories about Christmas.
  - When you were little, whom did you like better—Jesus or Santa?
  - Who in your family is the most “over the top” when it comes to Christmas?
  - Who in your family is the most Grinch-like when it comes to Christmas?

D. Christmas Carol Marathon

1. Set Up: Form two teams
2. Instructions
  - a. The first group will sing the first line of a Christmas carol.
  - b. While the first group is singing, the second group is deciding on another Christmas carol to sing.
  - c. When the first group finishes singing, the second group sings the first line of their Christmas carol.
  - d. While the second group is singing, the first group is choosing another carol, singing it immediately after the second group is done.
  - e. Repeat the back-and-forth process until one of the groups can no longer come up with a song without repeating one already sung.
  - f. Remind the group that this is an exercise in which the quantity (and volume) of music counts more than the quality.
3. Play the game.
4. Process Questions
  - **How important is music to the Christmas season?**
  - **Do you think Mary and Joseph ever sang with Jesus at home?**
  - **What is the likelihood that you will hear Christmas music in your house this week? Whom will you hear it from?**

E. Word Association

1. Explain how this exercise will work.
  - a. You (the leader) will call out a word.
  - b. Immediately after the word is given, the group will shout out the first word that comes to their minds after hearing the given word.
  - c. Invite the group to ask questions

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to clarify the instructions.

2. Call out the following words, allowing time after each word for the group to respond with their word associations:

*Christmas*  
*Presents*  
*No Room*  
*Santa*  
*Advent*  
*Ornaments*  
*Christmas*

3. Transitional Mini-Lecture: Now that the group is focused on Christmas, we're going to look today at the Christmas story that is in the Gospel of John.

### III. Igniting the Heart

#### A. Competition: Unsolved Mysteries

1. Set Up
  - a. Have the group form three teams.
  - b. Have each team pick a leader, a recorder and a reporter.
2. Instructions
  - a. Explain to the group that you want them to do a little detective work.
  - b. The teams will be given a situation that contains an unsolved mystery.
  - c. Each team will try to come up with the most creative, plausible theory that explains the mystery.
  - d. Invite the group to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
3. The situation: Matthew and Luke tell about the birth of Jesus in lots of detail--detail that has become very familiar to most Christians (you know, manger, shepherds, wise men, and so forth). But the Gospel of John includes nothing about Jesus' birth. Why?
4. Give the teams three minutes to come up with their theories.
5. Reporting
  - a. Have the reporter from each team give the team's theory about why John includes no traditional Christmas stories.
  - b. Ask the previously appointed panel of judges to determine which solution they believe is closest to the truth.
6. Process Questions
  - **Do you agree with the judges' decision?**
  - **Did your teams come up with any other reasons why John might have chosen not to include the traditional stories about Jesus' birth?**

#### B. Bible Scavenger Hunt

1. Distribute Bibles to everyone.
2. Explain that there is a quite different version of the Christmas story (much shorter) in the first chapter of the Book of John.
3. Explain to the group that their mission is to find that story in thirty seconds or less.

4. Before the group begins, ask those who find the story to call out, “Where are the dang shepherds?!” as soon as they find it.
5. Invite the group to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
6. After a few have acknowledged that they have found the story, ask them to tell about what they have found.
7. Process Questions
  - **What would you guess about the personality of the person who wrote this Christmas story, compared to the personality of the person who wrote the version you are more familiar with?**
  - **Which one do you think makes more sense to people you know? Which makes more sense to intellectuals?**
  - **Do you think we really need both kinds of stories (the shepherds and wise men stories and the shorthand version of the story here in John)? Why?**
  - **Which version do you like best?**

#### C. John 1--The Christmas Short Story

1. Introductory Mini-Lecture: You’ve already learned that John was able to summarize the Christmas story in just a few words found in the first chapter of his Gospel. Read John 1:1-5, 14.
2. Distribute the journals and pencils.
3. Explain to the group that their task is essentially to do what John did. We can assume that John was familiar with the Christmas stories, but chose not to include them. Instead, John abbreviated the Christmas story and wrote it in the language of his audience.
4. Have the group answer the first question in the journal (to summarize the Christmas story in one sentence, in three words, and finally in one word).
5. Give the group three to five minutes for writing.
6. The Sharing of Christmas Short Stories
  - a. Set up
    1. Form teams of four (as close to two guys and two girls as possible).
    2. Have the teams find out which person on their team has the shortest Christmas tree. That person will be the leader of the small team.
  - b. Sharing
    1. Beginning with the leader, each person will tell his or her Christmas Short Stories (answers to all three parts of the question).
    2. Once everyone has had the chance to tell their answers, invite anyone who wants to share what they have written or to share what someone on their team has written.

#### D. Delicious Object Lesson: The Menu or the Meal

1. If they have not already done so, have the participants complete the remaining journal questions.
2. Bring a copy of a restaurant menu to the group today (or you could simply make one of your own).
3. Also bring something that might be on the menu—Christmas cookies for example.

4. Hold the two objects up before the group and ask,
  - a. How are these two items alike?
  - b. How are these two items different?
  - c. What would you think about a person who really loved looking at the menu but never actually tasted the food?
5. Explain that one of the most dangerous misconceptions about the Christian life is that it is just about something you think, not about something you *are* and *do*.
6. Interrupting Question:
  - If a person's faith doesn't make a difference in the way they live, what does it tell you about what they really believe?
7. Mini-Lecture: The emphasis in John's Christmas story is that "the Word," the idea of God, became flesh, became real.

## V. Taking It Home

### A. Pyromaniac Alert: Passing the Candle

1. Optional Go Around: Invite the members of the group to share one thing they would like to do next week to allow their faith to "become flesh" in a way that affects their lives, beyond just agreeing to a set of ideas about God.
  2. Another (perhaps less threatening) option would be to ask the group members to mention one idea that they have learned in this group.
  3. Candles anyone?
    - a. Give each student a candle.
    - b. You begin the "go around," by lighting your candle and answering one of the above questions.
    - c. After you finish, explain that you want the group to wrap up today by passing the light of the candle around the circle, so that as each person finishes speaking, he or she will light the candle of the person next to him or her.
    - d. Invite the group to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
    - e. Light the candle of the person next to you, and after he or she shares, remind him or her to light the candle of the person next to him or her.
    - f. Repeat the process until everyone has had the opportunity to speak.
- B. Close the group in prayer, asking God to allow the faith of each person in the group to infect and affect their lives and their worlds for Christ.



## JOURNAL SHEET

### WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE CHRISTMAS STORIES?

#### JOHN 1:1-14

1. Rewrite the Christmas Story in

One sentence...

Three words...

One word...

2. What is the one thing you could do this week to make the words of your faith into "flesh?"

3. What change in your life would you like to give God as a gift this Christmas?