



## SHEPHERD'S SURPRISE PARTY

Luke 2:6-20

**Big Ideas:** *Christmas, surprise, shepherds*

I. Gathering (Attendance, First-Timers, Announcements)

II. Engaging the Brain

A. Set Up: Shepherd's Staff

1. If you can come up with a shepherd's staff, place it in a little noticed corner of the room.
2. Leave the staff there until the end of the session.

B. Pictionary Game

1. Bring a flip chart and markers to the group (or a chalkboard and chalk).
2. Form two teams.
3. Put the following words on separate slips of paper and place them in a hat (or a bowl or small trash can or...)
  - Angel
  - Shepherd
  - Afraid
  - Humble
  - Staff
  - Night
  - Flock
  - Glory
4. Designate someone to be the timekeeper.
5. Explain how the game will work.
  - Each team will select four people who will do the drawing for them.
  - The first drawer will come to the front, pull a word from the hat, and on the signal, begin to draw the word he or she has received.
  - Each drawer will have up to one minute to get his or her team to correctly guess the word being drawn.

### 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).

- Once a word is correctly guessed, the scorekeeper will record the amount of time it took to do so.
  - The drawers for each team will alternate.
6. Invite the teams to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
  7. Play the game, writing each correctly guessed word on the board.
  8. Process Question:
    - **What do all of these words have in common?**
    - **If you had to guess what the big idea of our session today will be, what would you come up with?**

C. Bad (Totally Unrelated) Christmas Pun

1. If you have a group that appreciates (or sufficiently groans at) bad punning, you might want to try this one.
2. Read the following story to the group:

*A group of chess enthusiasts checked into a hotel and were standing in the lobby discussing their recent tournament victories. After about an hour, the manager came out of the office and asked them to disperse. "But why?" they asked, as they moved off. "Because," he said, "I can't stand 'chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.'"*

D. Check-in Question

1. Move the group into a circle.
2. Starting with the person wearing the most wool, invite each person in the group to check in by answering one of the following check-in questions:
  - If someone in your family had a baby this month, who, outside your family, would be the first person you would expect to pay a visit?
  - If you could change one thing about Christmas, what would that be?

E. Video Clip: Introducing the Text With *A Charlie Brown Christmas*

1. Show the clip of the "shepherd part" of the Christmas story being narrated in the final pageant ("Shepherds were in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night...").
2. Process Questions
  - **If you could hear anyone read the Christmas story this year, whom would you want to hear it from?**
  - **Some people think the Christmas story about the shepherds makes the most sense to children. Why do you think that is?**

**Written by Mark DeVries**

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III. Igniting the Heart

A. A Matter of Perspective: The Text

1. Divide the group into the following teams (with small groups, teams may be made up of one person each):
  - The Shepherd Left Behind to Keep the Sheep: telling the story of his impressions of the story he heard his fellow shepherds related to him.
  - The Angel: telling the story of how the shepherds responded to the angel's announcement.
  - A Shepherd: 10 Minutes before the Angel Comes, telling the story of what the shepherds were doing just before the angel appears.
  - The People Who Heard the Shepherds' Report about What Had Happened to Them: giving their impressions of what they heard.
  - Joseph: reporting on what happened when the unexpected shepherds arrived.
2. Give each team one of the above descriptions.
3. Distribute paper and pencils to each team.
4. Explain that each team will have the chance to tell the story found in Luke 2:6-20, from the unique perspective each team has been assigned, including writing any creative dialogue the teams might put in the mouths of the characters in the story.
5. Invite the teams to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
6. Give the teams two to three minutes to write their stories.
7. Invite each of the teams to tell their stories to the entire group.
8. Process Questions
  - **What might the shepherds have said to Mary and Joseph?**
  - **What might Mary and Joseph have said to each other when the shepherds left?**
  - **If the shepherds could have chosen between seeing the angel and having some food, which do you think they might have chosen?**
  - **I wonder...**
    - **...if the shepherds were Jewish.**
    - **...how the shepherds found the manger.**
    - **...why there would be more than one shepherd with the flock.**
    - **...how Luke learned about this story.**

B. Brainstorming and Ranking: The Gospel to the Margins

1. Ask the group to brainstorm all the possible vocations that people might have had during the time of Jesus (make sure the group includes shepherds).
2. Once the group has at least five (no more than ten), have the group rank the list from the occupations considered the most important to the occupations considered the least important.
3. Process Questions
  - **What job today would be comparable to the job of shepherd in Jesus' time?**
  - **Why would it fit in God's plan that announcing the message of Jesus' birth would come to shepherds? What was the point?**
  - **Some people believe that God only reveals himself to people who are least respected by those around them. What do you think of that idea?**

C. The Big Idea Debate

1. Divide the group into four teams.
2. Explain that each team will be given a single sentence that could summarize the "Big Idea" of today's story.
3. Explain that each team will be responsible to make the case for why the "Big Idea" they have been given should be considered THE big idea of the story.
4. Invite the teams to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
5. Give each team one of the following Big Ideas:
  - When God shows up, it always impacts those at the bottom of the social ladder.
  - God doesn't abandon us, even when we are "out in left field" and not even thinking about God.
  - If we just keep doing our job, God will eventually show up.
  - The message of what happened in Bethlehem was such good news that, even in mouths of the least respected, people would believe it.
6. Bring the groups back together and have each team make their case for their assigned big idea (Remind the groups that they don't have to agree with the "Big Idea" they have been given in order to argue in favor of it).
7. Process Questions
  - **Stepping out of your debater's thinking, which of these ideas make the most sense to you?**
  - **Are there other "big ideas" that you see in this story that we haven't looked at yet?**
  - **What difference might this story make in our lives?**

D. The Return of the Staff

1. Walk over to the corner where the shepherd's staff has been placed, and pick up the staff.
2. Process Questions

- **How many of you noticed this shepherd's staff in the corner today?**
- **What does the placement of this staff during our time together today communicate about the message of today's story?**

#### IV. Taking It Home

##### A. Check-Out Question

1. Move the group into a circle.
2. Starting with the person in the group who has been the most vocal in this session, invite everyone to wrap up the session by answering the following check-out question:
  - Of all the characters in the story (besides Jesus), which one would you say is most like you and why?

##### B. Candy Cane Take Home

1. Bring enough candy canes to the group today to provide one for each person in the group.
2. Remind the group that candy canes were originally created as a reminder, among other things, of the shepherd's staff.
3. As the group is leaving, hand everyone a candy cane as a reminder that God uses some very unlikely characters (like shepherds and teenagers) to be big roles in God's story.

##### C. Food for Thought Take Home

1. Make enough copies of the following quote by Thomas Merton to provide one for each person in the group:

*Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others who do not belong, who are rejected by power, because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world.*

*(Thomas Merton, [www.merton.org](http://www.merton.org))*

2. Invite the group to close their eyes and listen to this reflection from Thomas Merton. When you have finished reading the quote, move immediately into the closing prayer.
3. Distribute this quote to the group for them to take home.