

How to Lead a Family Worship Service on Christmas Day

Instruction to the leader: We will not be having our regular worship service on Sunday, December 25th. However, in lieu of our Hope worship service, we want to encourage you to lead your own worship service with your family. Don't be intimidated by this. If you can read, you can lead! You'll need your Bible. If you have children who are older, please have them bring their Bibles also. Please note there are optional elements you can include. Please skim over this BEFORE Christmas morning. You'll need to print some song sheets and if you want to sing with music, you'll need an internet connection.

Leader: "Did you know that most churches in the first century were house churches? They did not meet in church buildings. So this morning, we are going to 'do' church the traditional way and have it here in our home. When you read the New Testament, when the first believers gathered together, they were all participants, not spectators (for younger children, you may need to explain the meaning of "spectator" and "participant"). So this morning, we are all going to participate as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. First let's pray."

Pray (Option- You can just read this prayer or use your own words): "Jesus, thank you for coming for us. We want this morning to celebrate your birthday. So would you please give us a sense of your presence as we sing to you and as we open up your Word? Thank you. In Your name, amen."

Sing: Joy to the World See the song sheet at the end of this devotional. (Option- You can sing as a family a cappella (no music) or go online to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbrCxyDvqOE&feature=related> and sing with the music. Tip: For those who have a laptop, but not wireless internet- If you download the youtube video ahead of time & if you do not close the tab, you can still play the video without an internet connection)

Devotional: There are 4 options, depending on your family. Choose the one which best fits your family.

Optional #1: Families with very young children

- Have the family act out the Christmas story. Ollie & I used to do this when the kids were younger & they loved it! It made for some humorous memories. Let them pick out the character they want to be. Dads, you need to get down on your hands and knees and be the donkey! Let them dress up for the parts. That's half of the fun for them. Even though it will take most of the time, just enjoy it with them! (Tip- use bathrobes, pillowcases for head dresses, white sheet for the angel). Then, you or your spouse read through the story in Luke 2:1-21 and have them act out the parts. You may need to take turns reading. Give them each a simple line to say (e.g.- Mary- "Joseph, the angel said that I'm going to have a baby!"; Joseph- "Mary, we need to go to Bethlehem to register"). Mom & Dads may need to act out several parts. To be honest, it may get a little chaotic, but don't sweat it! Just have fun with it! As long as you do it with them and enjoy it, they'll love it! Trust me, when they are older, they may not be able to recall what present you gave them this Christmas, but they will remember this!
- Finally, sing "Happy birthday" to Jesus. If you have donuts or a coffee cake, you may want to use birthday candles and allow your children to blow out the candles.

Optional #2: Families with older elementary children

- Read Luke 2:1-21. You may want to ask your family to take turns reading a paragraph at a time.
- Then ask the following questions:

- What are all the challenges you think that Mary & Joseph faced? After making the list, ask- Do you think Jesus' family had an easy beginning or a difficult beginning? Why?
- How do you think the shepherds felt when the angel appeared before them? If you were a shepherd & you saw and heard an angel, how do you think you would feel?
- God could have chosen many people to announce the coming of Jesus. He could have chosen rich and famous people. He could have chosen powerful people like Caesar or the Roman government officials. Instead, God chose lowly, humble shepherds. Why do you think God chose them? (Possible answers: To show God cares about all people, because God is humble and is not a show off, because God enjoys humble people more than proud people & He likes to honor humble people)
- After the angels spoke to the shepherds, they hurried off to see Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Do you think they were surprised at what they saw? Why or why not?
- The angel said to the shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord." What do you think the angel meant when He called Jesus a Savior? (Note to the leader: Savior simply means rescuer or deliverer. Jesus first and foremost came to rescue us from our sin so that we could have a relationship with God forever.)

Optional #3: Families with either teenage children or no children

- Read Luke 2:1-21. You may want to ask your family to take turns reading a paragraph at a time.
- Then ask the following questions: (Note- Most of these questions do not have a right or wrong answer. They are simply to make your family members think and to help make the story come alive. These were real people living real lives!)
 - Put yourself in Joseph or Mary's sandals. How do you think they felt through this whole ordeal? Why?
 - The story of Christmas is the story of the infinite God of all creation becoming a finite creature in Christ. It was like one of us choosing to become a mosquito, only even more dramatic.
 - How do you think Jesus felt as He faced the decision to become a man? Why?
 - Do you think Jesus felt claustrophobic when he took on human flesh? Why or why not?
 - Do you think that as Jesus was lying in the feeding trough, that He consciously knew He was the Son of God? If not, when do you think He became cognizant of that fact?
 - In V.11, the angel gives Jesus 3 titles. What are the 3 titles? Of the 3 titles, which of them mean the most to you this morning?
 - V. 19 says, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." How much do you think Mary understood about who Jesus really was?
- In v.17, it says the shepherds spread the word about what had been told to them. These shepherds were the first evangelists to talk about Jesus to others.
 - Do you find it easy or difficult to talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him? Why?
 - Who would you like to come to know Jesus as their Savior & Lord?

Optional #4: Families with either teenage children or a spouse who does not know Christ

- Say, "I realize that _____ may question whether or not the New Testament story of Christ is real. But because this is Christmas, I'd like for us just to read the story from the New Testament" (NOTE: Don't try to convince anyone that the Christmas story is true. In fact, seek to understand them, not to give rebuttals to their questions. Listen with the intent of

understanding them, even if they walk away thinking they are justified in their answers. Trust that God's Spirit will take His Word, and use it to plant seeds that will one day germinate!)

- Read Luke 2:1-21. You may want to ask your family to take turns reading a paragraph at a time.
- (Optional) Only if appropriate, ask the following question (Feel free to skip the questions if you think this will turn into a debate!)
 - (Optional) According to Christians, Christmas is all about God being born as a man in Christ. Thinking from a purely philosophical viewpoint, do you think the concept of God being born a man is even intellectually feasible or possible? Why or why not?
 - (Optional) On a scale of 0% to 100%, if you were to guess, how likely (or unlikely) is it that this story is true, with 0% being absolutely certain that the story is false and 100% being absolutely certain that the story is true, how would you rate the possibility of the story being true??
 - If there is an openness, feel free to ask more questions. However, be careful not to put anyone on the spot, nor to get into any debate, nor to try to defend the Christian faith.

ALL- Sing: Hark! the Herald Angels See the song sheet at the end of this devotional. (Option- You can sing as a family a cappella (no music) or go online to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPJA7W3ZH2w&feature=related> and sing with the music. Tip: For those who have a laptop, but not wireless internet- If you download the youtube video ahead of time & if you do not close the tab, you can still play the video without an internet connection)

Pray (Option- You can just read this prayer or use your own words): "Lord Jesus, thanks again for coming for us. Because of you, we can experience the forgiveness of our sins and have a relationship with God which will last forever. Thank you for the sacrifice you made in coming down to dwell with us as a man and for the ultimate sacrifice of giving your life for us on the cross that we might be with you forever. Happy birthday, Jesus!"

Joy To The World

Joy to the world the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and heaven and nature
sing

Joy to the earth the Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat repeat the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and
grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders wonders of His love

JOY TO THE WORLD
Isaac Watts/George Frederick Handel/Paul Marino
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HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled
Joyful all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies
With angelic hosts proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem
Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the new born King

Christ by highest heaven adored
Christ the everlasting Lord
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of the virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate deity
Pleased as men with men to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King

Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace
Hail the Son of Righteousness
Light and life to all He brings
Ris'n with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING
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