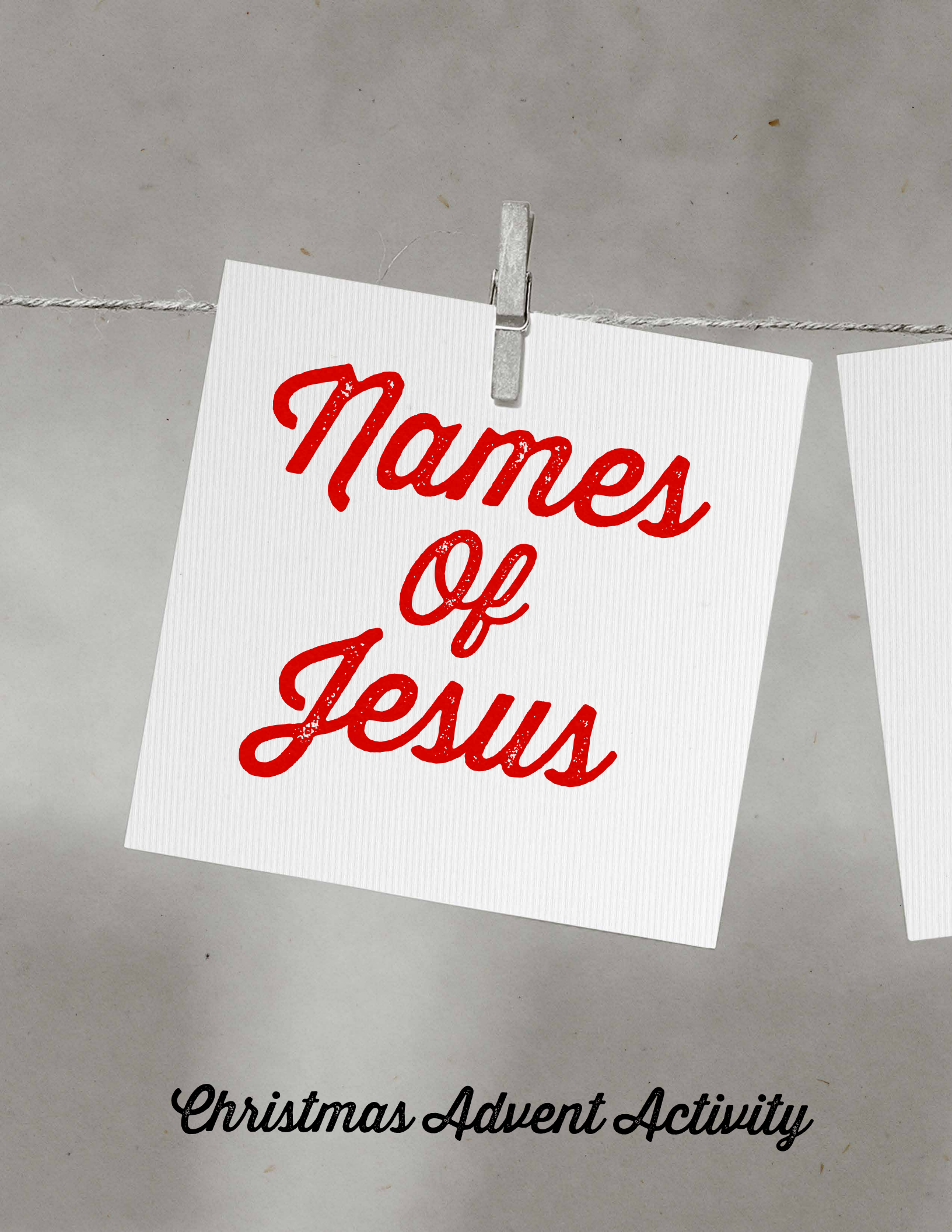

Names
of
Jesus
Christmas Advent Activity

Christmas...

It's that time of the year again. Anyone else ever felt like a "Christmas Failure" as a parent? I have. It happens almost every year as a matter of fact. I attempted to keep Jesus as the center with a variety of ideas from books, others and the web. My best intentions to have 25 full days of Christ-centric activities usually end on about December 4th. In an effort to "bless" my neighbors I have stayed up until 3 AM baking cookies (with my families help) only to be barking at everyone about the need to make them correctly. I want to believe my children have truly taken to heart what Christmas is about, but I usually seem to be the worst example. Instead, as I run around making sure others are taken care of my attitude sinks into a black hole.

John Grisham wrote a funny little book a few years back called, "Skipping Christmas." Two empty nesters send their twenty something only daughter off to join the peace corps the day after Thanksgiving . Since they are alone this year they eventually choose to go on a cruise rather than get caught up in the usual Christmas celebrations. In the process they anger everyone in town as they refuse to put up lights, host a party or buy gifts. Neighbors can't understand why they won't be a part of all of those traditions everyone loves. Suddenly, they discover their daughter IS coming home and with her Peruvian fiancé who is not from America. The young woman wants him to experience all of those things the parents have shunned this year: lights, bad food, and ugly sweaters. As you can guess they have to apologize to everyone for being a Scrooge and pull together to make the traditions magically appear. In the end they give the cruise to a friend who has found out his wife is terminally ill. You see the point. The traditions that cause business are the ones they try to shun. These are the very things that their friends believe bring them closer and their daughter celebrates. Being together with all the quirky things we can only do one time a year was what was enjoyed.

I love the book, (the movie is alright) because it totally captures the variety of pressures we feel to make this holiday perfect. There are decorations, food, gifts, and the desperate attempt to keep Jesus at the center of it all. Since "Happy Holidays" is more acceptable these days than, "Merry Christmas," there is even more of a push to ensure we are consistently and boldly announcing the reason for the season. Some throw Jesus a full blown birthday party. Others keep an empty manger and ceremoniously place Him in the hay on Christmas morning. There's the conundrum of Santa or no Santa. How many gifts should we give? What about giving money to dig a well in a third world country instead? On top of it all we are supposed to use this time to teach our children to be selfless and find a host of places to volunteer.

As my kids have gotten older and entered the teen years it has been interesting to hear what they love most about Christmas. The quirky traditions that they love most. We always have a red velvet cake for Jesus' birthday. It's symbolic for us with a red center and white frosting. We read the Christmas story from the Bible and sing carols off key. Last year we visited family and they missed our usual Christmas buffet. We have always

opened up our home at about 3 PM Christmas day and told people to just stop by for appetizers and fun. It's been a place for those who are feeling lonely or without family to land. I used to try to make a big meal and that just seemed to overwhelm me as I had to head to the kitchen right after gifts were opened. This is way easier and we get to be together a little more. When our tradition of a house full of people couldn't happen, my kids missed it terribly. Looking back I have been glad to host a place for my friend the year her husband died or a space for a single Mom with two babies. This year we are really contemplating an ugly sweater contest.

Here's my point. Let the feelings of failure end today! The perfect Christmas will not make or break your family. Take Christmas back. Remove the pressure and take a deep breath. This season is just an extension of who you already are and the love He has for you the other 364 days of the year. It's a time to remember why we love Jesus so much and all of the ways He loves us. For those of us with tweens and teens this is a time to come back together as a family and remember all the fun of years past. This can be an amazing catalyst to look to the next year and launch it right.

If you're household is anything like mine you are just emerging from Fall sports, activities and the never ending chauffeuring duties. To take on more stuff, just feels like more stuff. That is one thing I know that Jesus wouldn't want from us this year. So here is what I am doing for you. I am giving you some ideas of ways you can take this time to move forward as a family and embrace Christmas all at the same time.

I've noticed a lot of family devotionals for this season are focused on younger children. Yet, for those of us who have kids in JH or HS, or mixed ages living in the home we don't always know what to do to really take this time of year back from falling away from us. Each idea is meant to be creative and adjustable for your situation. The goal is for each encounter to take no more than about 10-15 minutes a day with an "extra" longer idea for weekends. Turn off electronics for a short while, eat breakfast together, use time in the car, whatever, it takes to make space in your day. You probably have some of your own family traditions down pat. This is written for the parents like my husband and I. We are the ones who love the Lord and want keep the main thing the main thing: at Christmas as well as all year long. Yet, the reality is that we are also dealing with those practices, music lessons and the obligatory fundraising committee for whatever trip our child will take this year. We haven't even gotten to day jobs, meals, chores and time for hygiene. We need some help refocusing on the Lord. I hope this helps you rest and remember.

Who's This For:

Families. It's up to you who leads the time everyday or what time of day works best for you. Instead of running television or play right up to sleep time sit down together for 15 minutes right before you all head to your own bedrooms. Most of the families I know have children of a various ages in their home. It's not uncommon for a second grader and a seventh grader to be living in the same house. So I have tried to make a daily connection that everyone can participate in. Feel free to use each idea as a catalyst in something

that will better fit your family. The devotions are not focused on younger children so you may need to adjust. There are three elements to every day. Feel free to do all three or pick one. Our best family devos have been the "failed" ones. Don't give up if it seems to not be going well, just simplify and move on.

What We Are Doing:

There are lots of amazing ideas out there to have a "Christmas Countdown." In some traditions a candle is lit on the four sundays leading up to Christmas each one focusing on a different portion of the Christmas story. There is a really cool tradition called a "Jesse Tree," that we did one year. It follows all of the major Biblical events that lead up to Jesus arriving on earth. You literally set up a tree, tell stories and put ornaments on the tree. (You can check it out more about that here: http://tinyurl.com/jessetreechristmas)

When I was growing up I loved having one of those cardboard calendars with little pieces of chocolate you opened each day. Please don't throw out your own traditions or celebrations. These are meant to enhance those elements you already hold.

Instead this is 25 day family devotional guide with three elements to it (Feel free to do one or all each day.):

Theme: Names Of Jesus:

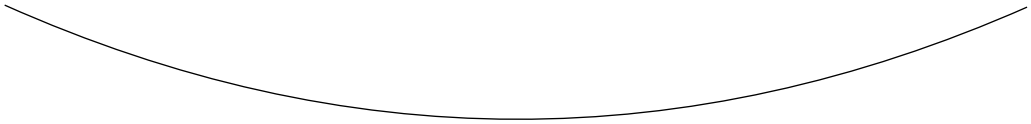
I mentioned that one of those things I struggle with at Christmas is truly keeping Jesus at the center of the season. This isn't to say we don't do things for Him, or not acknowledge this is a "holy" day based around HIm. Yet, as we are running around really taking time to truly reflect on Him has been a challenge for us (especially as the kids have gotten older.) This year we are going back to looking at the Names of Jesus. There are so many amazing descriptions of who He is. We call Him by many titles and descriptions, but do we take the time to reflect on these as we revel in the truth of His birth? This is the main bulk of your daily devotional.

The goal is not to be overwhelmed by one more thing to do, but to have several simple interactions that reinforces the month of celebration. It is set up so that you can have a meaningful interaction daily without a lot of prep. HOWEVER: There is an optional more time consuming activity for weekends. These will take a little extra work and you will want to look ahead to anything written in red for activities that might take some extra time.

As you read through the daily interactions there will be different things each day to get you connected. Sometimes it might be a video you watch, other times a simple activity or even a game. There will be suggestions of questions to ask, and a guideline that you can talk through.

Rope Challenge:

Take a piece of yarn or twine and set it up along a wall in your home. It should look like this:



We will be hanging things on it as the days progress towards Christmas and the New Year. You will need print and cut out the pictures from the "Rope" page and just keep them in a pile somewhere you can find them daily. These are the different names of Jesus we will be thinking about as we progress. You will need small clothes pins or paperclips to hang your pictures. The hope is that you will create a picture string that can stay up even beyond Christmas if desired.

Every day in your family time you will see the title: "Rope Challenge." If you have no other time to talk as a family take a few moments to look at the picture, the verse and ask a question. You can always do JUST this on any given day.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Where is the one place everyone in your family is sure to visit every day? Yep, in our house it's the rest room. Each day we are going to end our interaction with a simple reminder to put around the mirror or on the wall of our bathroom. It's your choice if you want to replace each note daily or keep them all up at once. Look for the title "Sticky Note Bathroom" as an indication of what to write on your note for that day.

**Note: Rope Challenge and Sticky Note Bathroom will work together. The goal is to have two places in your home where you can SEE what you are reflecting on daily.

Names of Jesus Coloring:

This website: http://tinyurl.com/coloringnames has printable ornaments of the names of Jesus that can be cut out and colored. There are instructions on how to make them into working ornaments. While some of the names they suggest we will not be covering in our time together having these on hand for younger children reminds them of all the amazing ways we describe the Lord.

Shopping List: *(What you will need this month)*

We are going to use some simple items that are either easy to come by or you may even have around the house for each of the family connection times. This is a list of things you will need:

Sticky notes
Pens
Card stock or heavy paper for printing.
Yarn or twine
Clothes pins or mini clothes pins (Sometimes found in the scrap booking department of Walmart or a similar store)
Markers or crayons
An internet ready device (phone or computer) to be able to watch videos on.

Prayer:

Each day have someone in your family pray to end your time together. Take turns. Take time to thank the Lord for who HE is!

Traditions: (I AM)

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Take 5 minutes and have each family member write down their favorites from your family.

Then Ask:

What are the ones they wish would go away?
What will they add in when they have a family?

This does not mean that you have to change anything (although doing this is new.) Take a minute and talk about how this year you as a family are going to take back a few minutes every day to not just remember baby Jesus, but the Son Of God who came to earth, born for the purpose of restoring our broken relationship with God. This year you are going to reflect on some of the names and titles Ask how remembering our traditions help us remember Jesus during this time of year? It doesn't have to be a tradition that directly connects to the nativity. Maybe there is something in the tradition that reflects the character of who God is? (For example: If you open a gift on Christmas Eve, it helps us think about how excited we are about the gift of a Savior.) Yes, some of them might be a stretch, that is alright. The point is to get your family thinking about how everything we do can reflect who Christ is, even the small things. It's about being reminded Jesus is in the midst of all you do.

Rope Challenge:

Take the December 1 picture: "I AM" and put it up.

You might recall the story of Moses. When he was in the desert God showed up in a burning bush telling him to go back to Egypt to free the people of Israel from slavery and oppression. Moses asks the Lord, "When the people ask me who sent me what do I say?" God answered, "Tell them I AM sent you."

Jesus tried to clearly tell people over and again in His time on earth He was God. On one occasion He actually described Himself as the I AM.

John 8:58: "Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I am."

The people of Israel should have immediately known who He was and why He was here. Instead, they missed it. God is the IAM and He is still here with us today. Talk about how you plan to use your traditions to see the IAM in the midst of all that you do this season.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write HE IS on your note today. Look at this as a reminder that the I AM is still with us.

What About Christmas?
(Emmanuel)

What About Christmas? (Emmanuel)

I mentioned that one of those things I struggle with at Christmas is truly keeping Jesus at the center of the season. This isn't to say we don't do things for Him, or not acknowledge

So what IS the Christmas story? Jesus is our reason for celebrating, however, do we really think about who we are focusing on. When is the last time we leaned into the details of that first Christmas to reflect on the difference between what are nice thoughts and what is actually part of the story? Just like we have family traditions there are wonderful ideas behind the way we tell the story of the first Christmas. However, these are traditions, not the true story.

Watch this fun video together as a family then talk about what you did and didn't know were ACTUALLY in the Christmas story:

http://tinyurl.com/retooningnativity

Talk for a few moments about those things you didn't know weren't actually in the Biblical account of the story.

The narrator talks at the end of the video about how reflecting on Jesus matters.

Discuss as a family if the details do matter, why or why not?

Read the ACTUAL account from Luke 2:1-20 together and ask each family member to discuss which part of the story means the most to them personally and why:

Luke 2: 1-20 (NLT)

2 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.
4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.
5 He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.
6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.
The Shepherds and Angels
8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. 9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the

Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! 12 And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."
13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,
14 "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."
15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."
16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. 17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. 18 All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, 19 but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. 20 The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Rope Challenge:

Find December 2nd or "Emmanuel" (Also spelled Immanuel) God is with us!

How often in our retelling of the Christmas story do we forget one of the most important parts? God left heaven to come and be with us here on earth. Our relationship with God had been broken when sin entered the world. Before that did you realize we were able to physically walk around talking to God in person? It was time for God to be with us once again, that's what He had promised would happen.

Matthew 1:23 (NLT) "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

No matter how many details we might get "wrong" in the story, nothing can hide the fact that God came to earth to be with us again. He came to take our sin so we can be with Him forever. Talk as a family about your thoughts on this idea.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "HE IS WITH US!" today and put it up. Every time you look at this for the next day remember that it wasn't just at Christmas that Jesus is with us. It is because of Christmas that we can be sure He is ALWAYS with us.

What's In A Name?

(The Way, The Truth, The Life)

What's In A Name? (The Way, The Truth, The Life)

Have everyone in the family take a sticky note and write all of the names and titles you hold in 20 seconds or less. You will want to write your first, middle and last name, nicknames, and then all of roles others might call you in their lives. So for example: are you a Mom, sister, aunt, cousin, boss, student, friend? What are ALL of the names someone you know might call you?

Have one person set the timer, call GO and you have to stop at 20 seconds. Now put on your "name tag." Have everyone in the family talk about what they wrote down.

***Note if someone in your family can't write well, then they can draw pictures or just put a letter that represents their many names.*

Just like us, Jesus has many names and titles.

Take 3 minutes as a family and write as many of His names as you can think of.

Some of those things we "call" Jesus are His name, others represent a role He holds in our life like Lord, while still others are descriptions of who He is. There are so many.

One of the ways Jesus described Himself was as the Way, the Truth and the Life. These are actually three separate names.

Take a moment to discuss what each of these could mean separately:

The Way:

The Truth:

The Life:

Why did Jesus use these three to talk about Himself?

In John 14 Jesus is having a conversation with His 12 best friends. He is telling them that even when He leaves them it's going to be alright because they can someday with Him. Thomas honestly says, "We have no idea where you are going."

This is when Jesus responds:

John14: 6-10

6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. 7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is.From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"
8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.

It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "Don't you remember all of the fuss around my birth? Now I have been living with you and you still don't get it? I am God."

It can feel very confusing sometimes, but Jesus showed us that through Him we can have a relationship with God once again.

Talk as a family about ways you see Jesus as the, "Way, The Truth and the Life."

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 3rd. "The Way, The Truth, The Life" go back and read

John 14:6 "Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

Discuss for a moment how we see this is who He is even in His birth story? What parts of the Christmas story show us that Jesus is the way back into a relationship with God?

Discuss why knowing this is important to you personally.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write the word "LIFE" on your note today. Every time you see it be reminded that the whole purpose of Jesus coming to earth was to be the Life, that gave His Life, so we can have Life with HIM FOREVER!!!

Wonderful Counselor

Wonderful Counselor

For today everyone needs a blank piece of paper. Using only stick figures, draw a scene showing a time when you have been given some really BAD advice. Maybe it was as simple as someone telling you that a certain food would taste good, and it was horrible. It could be a time when you were challenged by a friend to do something that turned out terrible.

After you have drawn your pictures, turn them around and have each member of the family share why this turned out to be horrible advice.

Discuss:

What made it such bad advice?
Why did you follow the advice?"
What would have been better advice?

Isaiah 9:6 uses several titles to describe Jesus and we are going to talk about a couple of them for the next few days.

Isaiah 9:6: For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

A counselor is someone we go to for advice, they help us know how to live.

Ask your family:

Why do you think God is described as a wonderful counselor?
How would the advice He gives be different from the picture you drew?
If you could re-draw that picture with the advice God would give, what do you think it would look like?

In 1 Corinthians 1 we see the difference between the advice people give versus the advice God gives. God calls this, "wisdom." As a matter of fact it isn't just that God give wisdom, He is described as wisdom in verses 30 & 31:

"30 God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. 31 Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."

*** Note you may decide to read verses 18- 31. This passage walks through the difference between God and our thoughts totally.*

Final question:

Why do you think God couldn't just give us wisdom by He has to be wisdom?
What does that mean to you personally?

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 4th, "Wonderful Counselor." Re-read Isaiah 9:6: For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Ask:
What do you think God being wisdom looks like in the Christmas story?
How did He show us He is wisdom even as a baby?
Why isn't He just a counselor but a "wonderful" counselor?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Today write, "Wisdom" on your note. Remember it isn't just that the Lord gives us good advice, He is the very wisdom we can rely on. Think about what that means.

Prince of Peace

Prince of Peace

Disney Prince search: Take a few minutes and think of all the Disney movies you can who have a princess and a prince (or someone who becomes a prince.) If you want even do a quick internet search of "Disney Princes" to remember who was in what.

Then write down all of the things you can remember about those princes. What were there character traits? What did we like or hate about them?

A prince is someone in charge, would you agree?

One of the names that Jesus carries is the, "Prince of Peace." Take a look at our verse from yesterday again:

Isaiah 9:6: For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Ask:
What does it mean to be the, "Prince Of Peace?"
What could this mean?

In John 14 Jesus is talking again to the 12 disciples about what is going to happen when He physically leaves the earth. He tells them this in 14:27:

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

Ask:
Knowing he doesn't just give a little peace but He is called the "Prince of Peace," how does it change the way we look at peace?
What does it even mean to have peace?
How does know that God will give us a peace that is unlike all other change the way we think about our everyday life? Does it?

The phrase, "Peace On Earth," is often seen at Christmas time. What does that have to do with Jesus being the, "Prince of Peace?" Does it mean that things are always quiet? Finish today by discussing what this peace means for us today and always.

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 5th, "Prince of Peace" up today.

Discuss:
Why do you think Isaiah 9:6 talks about Jesus at His birth not just as giving peace but being the one who rules over peace?
How does knowing that Jesus is the Prince of ALL Peace make you feel?
How did Jesus show us He was in charge of all peace even at His birth?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "Peace On Earth," on your note today. Reflect that because of who Jesus is and our relationship with Him we don't have to be anxious. He desires to not just give us peace, but be our peace today.

Mighty God

Mighty God

Who is the strongest person in your family? Today take the time to have a "strong man" contest today. Have some elimination rounds of thumb wrestling. Pair off Mom, Dad, and siblings until only one winner stands! You may not be able to lift the most, but you could have the strongest thumbs!

When you are done you can award the winner an extra piece of candy for the day!

After you are done laughing or discussing if the win was fair or not come back together and ask:

Would you say being the family thumb wrestling champ makes you "mighty?" When you think of that word what comes to mind?

For the last couple of days we have been looking at Isaiah 9:6. Let's take another glance:

Isaiah 9:6: For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Ask the family:

Why do you think Mighty God is listed as a name along with wonderful counselor and prince of peace? `

It gives us a completely different picture of Jesus doesn't it?
When you think of Mighty God what comes to mind?
How would you describe God as being mighty?

We probably don't think of God being mighty in the way that is described in Psalm 147: 3-5

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."

Ask :

When we read this what does the word "mighty" make you picture?
How does God caring about the hurting, naming the stars and understanding everything show His might?

How would the way Jesus came to earth show just how mighty of a God He is?

Rope Challenge:

Take December 6: Mighty God and hang it. Go back one more time and look over Isaiah 9:6, discussing how a God we call, "Prince of Peace" can be called, "Mighty God" in the same sentence.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Today simply write, "My God is so strong and so mighty" on your note. Be reminded of the many ways we serve a mighty God.

Extra: Buy a box of simple Christmas cards or even just red or green blank note cards. Take some time today to write "thank you" notes to at least 5 people for being a great influence in your life. This week we have been starting to look at all the names of Jesus and who He is. This causes us to be thankful for Him and the people He has put in our lives. Give your notes (or mail them) this week to the people you have written them too.

Christ

Christ

We have taken the last couple of days and looked at just the names of Jesus that are in Isaiah 9:6. In just one small verse, it describes this baby who will come to earth and be God and man all at the same time.

Did you know that God spoke these words to the prophet Isaiah almost 700 years BEFORE Jesus was born?

(A prophet in the Old Testament was someone who God spoke through to give a message to His people.)

Think about that. 700 years!! That is a really long time.

Ask:

If God told you He was coming to earth 700 years from now what would your reaction be?

Take a moment and watch this video together as a family:

http://tinyurl.com/namesGod

In this video a pastor starts with quoting Isaiah 9:6 but goes on to talk about some other names and titles we call Jesus. (We will be talking about others in the coming days.)

Ask the family what stands out to them most from this video.

At the end he quotes Acts 4. Too often we think that "Christ" is Jesus' last name. Instead did we know that it is actually a title that means, "The Anointed One" or "Messiah." Jesus was God coming to earth to save us from being forever separated from relationship with the Lord.

Look at Acts 4:10-12

"Then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is "'the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

No matter what name we call the Lord, we can be sure that He is the ONLY one who would come to take our sin and restore us back to a relationship with God.

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 7 "Christ" up today. Talk for another moment as a family about how Jesus is the anointed one sent as the only one who can save us. Talk about what you feel Jesus has saved you from (beyond the over encompassing word sin).

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write: "Jesus Anointed One." on your note as a reminder of who Jesus is still to this day.

Son Of God

Son Of God

Perhaps one of the hardest parts of understanding Jesus is that he could be described as and "Everlasting Father" (did you catch that in our Isaiah verse last week?) While at the same time we are told He is the "Son of God." How could He really be called Father and Son at the same time?

Remember those name tags from last week? A Dad is also someone's son. A Mom is also someone's daughter. They are two different titles that God holds, among the many names He is called.

In Luke 1:29- 38 we see exactly how Jesus is seen as a son:

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."
34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"
35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called(b) the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail."
38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Can you even begin to imagine how that could feel? Mary is a teenager, engaged to be married. She is probably excited about all of those things that you get excited about when you are planning a wedding. Then an angel shows up and tell her she is going to give birth to the Son of God. WHAT?

Ask: How would you feel if an angel showed up and said these things to you?

Mary's first response? Umm how can this happen? Then the angel says God is going to miraculously make Mary pregnant. So she will stay a virgin and give birth to a child. Her son will be called the, "Son of God." God can make anything happen.

Ask: What is Mary's response in verse 38? Is that how you would respond?

Today take a moment and watch this video by a group called, "Pentatonix." They are singing a Christmas song called, "Mary Did You Know?" This Christmas song focuses on the questions we would have for Mary as she gave birth to Jesus. As you listen have each family member take notes about lines that stand out to them:

http://tinyurl.com/maryknow

Once you have watched it take a few moments to talk about what stood out to each of you in your family from the words of the song.

Finish up by asking: Can you imagine being the mother to the son of God?

In other portions of the story the statement, "Mary pondered these things in her heart," is made over and over. I think that she spent a lot of time taking it in and wondering what God was doing.

Rope Challenge:

Find, December 8th and put it on your rope. Take a moment to step back and look at the names and pictures that are gathering. Talk for a moment about Luke 1:35. "The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." This wasn't nay Mary's son, but God's son as well. What would it be like to co-parent a child with God?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "SON OF GOD" on your note today. Ponder today how Jesus came to earth to be fully a person and fully God all at the same time. What does that mean for us here on earth?

Savior

Savior

There are all sorts of Christmas carols about one event that happened in the Christmas story. A bunch of Shepherds were hanging out in a field in the middle of the night watching sheep. Now something we need to understand about shepherds is they were considered pretty lowly working class folks. It would be like some garbage men out on an early morning round. They were not respected at all. When all of a sudden some angels appear in the sky with an announcement, "You know that Savior you have been waiting for? He has been born and you should go see Him."

Now set a timer. You have 2 minutes. Write down all of the lyrics you can remember to the following songs:

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Joy To The World

Angels We Have Heard On High

Look up the lyrics here after the timer goes off to see how many you got correct:

http://www.bookofcarols.com (Maybe give a small prize to the winner.)

There are so many Christmas carols and here we have three alone dedicated to this one night. Let's take a look at what actually happened to those Shepherds in Luke 2: 8-14

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their
flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone
around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I
bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of
David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to
you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising
God and saying,
14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

After you have read it together focus in on verse 11: **Ask:**
What do you think the Shepherds thought they were being "Saved" from?

Do you think they knew they needed a Savior?

How would you feel if you were told this Savior was a baby?

I don't know about you but I think those Shepherds knew exactly why they needed a Savior. Talk for a few moments as a family about what it means to each of you that Jesus is called Savior. What has he "saved" you from?

Rope Challenge:

Find December 9th, the "Savior" picture today and hang it up. Notice the picture is of a lock. Jesus has saved us from the chains of sin and hopelessness. Reflect for a few moments as a family again about the way that the Shepherds and the Angels reacted to this "Savior" coming to earth. Thank the Lord for what He has saved you from.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, **"SAVED"** today and put it up. Reflect on all of the ways the Lord is your Savior.

The Word

The Word

Words. They are important. They help us understand, and they speak to us in deep ways. Today we are going to do a quick and easy "words" activity. Everyone will need a small stack of sticky notes. You will also need a small blank space like a wall or even your refrigerator to stick the notes.

Time the family for 1 minute. You have to write one word per note that pertains to Christmas. It can be ANYTHING about Christmas. The point is it can only be one word per note. (For younger children they can draw a simple picture.) When you write it down, you have to go put it up. Run back and write another one. See how many words your family can get on the wall in one minute!!

Once the minute is up take the words down and read them. Take a moment and have everyone discuss why that word makes them think about Christmas.

All of those words are about a Holiday. However, have we ever thought about the fact that Jesus IS the Word? He doesn't just encompass a lot of different words. Today let's look at one small yet complex verse:

John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The other three Gospels start totally differently:

Mark starts with a declaration about Jesus from John the Baptist.

Matthew starts with the family tree of Jesus.

Luke starts with the birth of John the Baptist.

You see those three start with us being reminded about why Jesus coming to earth was important. We learn His story through others. However, John tells us He is the Word.

Ask: What does that mean?

Well the original word that was used here was actually, "Logos." To over simplify this would have meant something to both the Jewish and non-Jewish people of the day. To the Jews this was a direction to look back to the Old Testament. It was asking them to look at a long history that promised the Son of God was coming to be the Messiah to save

them. To those who were not from that people group it was an introduction that God was both human and divine. In other words just like the other Gospels it was a set up for the reader to understand Jesus has always been, He is God. He is the WORD.

John started by telling us Jesus is the WORD because he would end in John 20: 30 & 31 by saying this:

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe hat Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Do you see the connection? Somewhere in almost every word we write about Christmas is THE WORD. There is no way we can ever write down everything that He is or that He has done. However, when we look into the Bible, we see THE WORD. You see when we feel doubtful about who He is, we can read about Him, knowing He is the one who owns all of the words in the universe.

Talk for a few moments today about what these two verses mean. What does it mean that God is the Word and that He is Christmas?

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 10th today. Talk for a moment about how Jesus is the word, and how His words help us understand Him more clearly.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "Jesus is the Word." on your note. Hang this and reflect on that today.

God

God

For the last couple of days we have been talking a lot about Jesus being the Son of God, the Savior and The Word. In yesterday's verse we saw that the Word was with God, but it all says He is God.

Jesus came to earth as a man, the Son of God and as God himself. In the song, "Mary Did You Know?" we watched the other day there is a line that says, "When you kissed your little baby you kissed the face of God."

How often as we contemplate the manger, the shepherds, the animals, do we truly contemplate that GOD came to earth because He loved us SO much He wanted us to be in a right relationship with Him.

Sit quietly for a few moments with your eyes closed. Find your favorite version of the song, "O Holy Night," to play while you sit. For the few moments the song plays think about the fact that Jesus was and IS God. The Christmas story is about God.

When the song or time is over come back together as a family and talk about the idea that GOD came to earth in human form.

We may know the story of `Doubting Thomas." He was the disciple who missed out on seeing Jesus in person after His resurrection. The other disciples were telling Thomas they had seen them and Thomas said, "I really need to be able to touch Him to believe." Jesus then shows up. Here is Thomas' reaction in John 20: 26-29

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."
28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We give Thomas a bad wrap because he was struggling. Yet, notice that when Jesus appeared his reaction was not to lecture Thomas for not believing. Instead Jesus first answers the question and says, "Thomas come here and touch me."

Ask the family: What is Thomas' reaction? What does he say in verse 28?

Notice Thomas (who we refer to as the great doubter) immediately recognizes that

Jesus is God. It all becomes clear to him. Jesus response is for those of us who don't get to touch the wounds far more than it was for Thomas. He is saying, "Thomas you got to touch me and that is what helped you, but there are going to be a lot of people who won't get to see me in human for and believe I am God. These people are blessed."

You see that's us.

Talk as a family:

Do you feel blessed that you believe Jesus is God even though you haven't seen him in human form?
Why or why not?

Do you ever doubt Jesus is who He says He is? Why or why not?

It's not easy to have faith that Jesus is all He says He is. Thomas was not a bad guy because He had doubts. We all need to see the Lord more clearly than we do. This is why it's good that we take the time to explore and learn who He is.

**Note if your children struggle with doubts this might be a perfect opportunity to talk about those for a few moments. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers. Just share the ways you struggle at times to have faith and why. Then talk about how you turn to God and ask Him to help you with your doubts. Thomas needed to see to believe. We don't want to put God on trial just so we can see if He can grant our wishes. However, if we really want to see God and know He is real, then He will always show up.

Rope Challenge:

Take December 11th and put up GOD on your rope. Ask Jesus today to show you some of the ways you can see Him as GOD in this Christmas season.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Today write GOD in big letters on your note. Reflect on all of the way we can see God in this Christmas season.

Holy One

Holy One

Everyone today let's think for a moment about babies. Write the word: BABY vertically. We are going to make an acrostic poem from this word. So like this:

B
A
B
Y

Then next to each letter write something about babies that starts with the letter. For example:

B- Bottles
A- Always cooing
B- Brilliant smiles
Y- Yours

Now you all give it a try. If you have younger children who struggle with this, pair them up with an older sibling or just do it together as a family.

Share your "poems." Now answer this question. Do any of your poems make you think of the word, "Holy?"

Do another poem like the above with the word Holy. Compare them with your baby poem.

We rarely think of babies as being "holy." Crying, diapers, spit up, and drool don't seem very awe inspiring. Yet, even as a baby on that first Christmas morning Jesus was our Holy God. Talk as a family about that for a moment.

The prophet Isaiah shared these words from God.

Isaiah 43:15-19

I am the Lord, your Holy One,Israel's Creator, your King. This is what the Lord says— he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: "Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

When God spoke these words to the people of Israel they were in need of some hope. He wanted to remind His people who He is. He is Holy, Creator and King. The new ways He was making in the desert? He wanted them to hold on because Jesus was coming. God promised to send a Messiah, one who was Holy. Jesus was the most Holy baby around.

Talk today about ways we can see a Holy God in this Christmas season.
How does God being Holy help us to focus less on the past and more about what He is doing in our lives?

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 12th up today. As you do talk about how God is not just the "Holy One," but according to Isaiah 43:15 he is OUR Holy One and Lord. How does that make the members of your family feel?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "OUR HOLY ONE" on the note. Reflect today about it isn't even just that God is Holy, he is our Holy One.

Unspeakable Gift

Unspeakable Gift

You will need some scrap paper and pens or pencils today. Have everyone in your family draw a picture today of the ONE gift they hope they get for Christmas, without anyone looking. Have each person show their picture and have the others guess what the picture is of. (If family members have been paying attention you may or may not know without even looking.)

Have each member of the family talk about the best Christmas present they have ever gotten under the tree.

There is a passage in 2 Corinthians 9:12-15 that is really interesting in talking about presents:

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people
but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service
by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that
accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing
with them and with everyone else. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out
to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his
indescribable gift!

At first verse 15 seems sort of random. The people of the city of Corinth are being commended for the way they serve. They are being told that their service helps with some physical needs but also shows God they are thankful for who He is. People will praise God for the way they show Christ to them in their generosity. Then we can see that verse 15 actually fits perfectly.

This verse is talking about Jesus, who He is and what He gave us. To be in a relationship with God is an. "indescribable gift." Some translations use the word, "unspeakable" to describe who Jesus is.

Take a moment and discuss how the gift of Jesus is different than the gift you want for Christmas.

Ask the family: Would you consider your best present so awesome you were totally speechless? Why or why not?

Jesus is the best gift this world has ever gotten and it is the best one we can give to others. To help people understand who He is, is honestly the best Christmas present we have.

As you finish up watch this cute video by the "Kid President." This is his challenge to give a great gift this Christmas. No he doesn't discuss sharing the Gospel, but he does talk about serving:

http://tinyurl.com/perfectgift14

After this video discuss some ways you as a family could show others the love of Christ this season. Is there a way you could help someone in need either hear or in another country?

Extra: This weekend find a simple and unique way you could serve others. Go to a local grocery or Walmart store and bring carts inside. Stand at the carts and hand them out to people as they walk in. Make a batch of brownies or cookies and drop them off at a Nursing home. Better yet, see if you could visit with someone lonely this season at the home. Brainstorm as a family a simple service project you can do this weekend or even over school vacation.

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 13th up today and just talk for a moment at what a gift Jesus is!

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write BEST GIFT EvER! as a reminder of how Jesus really is the gift we can't describe.

Servant

Servant

Discuss this as a family:

- When someone serves us it makes us feel special. Talk as a family about a time when you have gone into a store and felt like the people who work there have gone above and beyond for you. Does anyone in your family have a story?

- Did you see the Coca-Cola bottles this year that they put first names on? Where you able to find one with your name on it? How did that make you feel?

- What about in your family? Has anyone ever done something to help take care of you when they didn't have to? How did that make you feel?

- Is serving the same thing as being a servant?

- When we talk about Jesus being a servant what does that mean?

Jesus when He was with us on earth was always giving to the people. He would heal, cast out demons and take care of physical need. He even raised people from the dead. His every thought were ways He could serve us. Instead of seeing this the people were afraid and wanted to kill Him. In Matthew 12: 14-21 He is described like this:

But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.
Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. 16 He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he has brought justice through to victory.
In his name the nations will put their hope."

As a family talk about that for a moment. What does that say about Jesus?

He loved us so much He went all the way to His death without complaining. As a result it is in His name, the Servant, Jesus we can put our hope.

This is way above and beyond great customer service, or our name on a Coke bottle. This is the ultimate act of serving.

Be honest, when is the last time each member of your family didn't complain when they had to do the dishes, clean our rooms or do something that made us go out of our way (when we didn't want to.)

We know that Jesus struggled with the choice before Him. He asked if there might be another way when He was talking to the Father in the garden right before His arrest. This wasn't a complaint, or a whine, it was a knowing of just how hard this was going to be.

Talk as a family for a few more moments about what Jesus the servant did just for you.

**** Note: If you have decided on a service activity as a family talk about how we can be servants out of our gratitude for the ways Christ has served us.*

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 14th up today. Reflect for a moment on what this passage truly means:
"Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whol delight."

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write: "Jesus serves me, I will serve Him." today. Out of a thankfulness for the way Jesus served us by dying for us, what are some ways we can serve Him?

Lord of Lords

Lord of Lords

Ask the family: What exactly is a "Lord?" Have we ever thought of that before?

Sure a Lord is someone who is in charge. They were in charge of people and lands, kind of like a King. Jesus was described as the Lord of Lords.

Ask: What do you think that means?

At Christmas we focus on the baby Jesus who seems serene and bubbly like all babies do. Yet, in the book of Revelation we hear about when Jesus will come back to earth. At this time He will not be a baby but in all of His glory. He will fight for us, and to get rid of pain, hurt and evil once and for all. Revelation 17:14 talks about it this way:

"They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

You see evil will try to win, just like it tried to win when Jesus was nailed to the cross. He overcame death and came back to life for our sake. He will be the one who will always conquer in the end, because He is the one in charge of everything.

We are going to listen to a song called, "Lord of Lords," by a group called Hillsong. We are going to watch the video and really focus on
the words. (Note: For children who might struggle with really listening and paying attention, have them draw a picture of what a Lord of Lords might look like. They can also write down things that stick out to them from the song.)

http://tinyurl.com/lordoflords

Once you have watched it, talk as a family about how Jesus being the Lord of Lords makes you feel? How did it make the writer of this song feel? What stands out to you from all you heard and saw? Why would we want to worship and praise the Lord of Lords?

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 15th up today. Reflect on Rev. 17:14 from above. Think about what it will be like to be one His faithful followers who is with Him all the way to the end.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Today write, "I worship the Lord of Lords," as a reminder He is the one in charge of everything even our hearts.

The Amen

The Amen

Today you are going to play a couple of rounds of, "Two Truths and A Lie," with a twist. (You will need to be sitting at a table of some kind for this version.) If you have never played the game it goes like this. The person who is "it" makes three statements about themselves. It can be anything. So something like this:

My favorite flavor of ice cream is mint chocolate chip. When I was little I had a pet rock named rocky. I have always secretly wanted to own a panda bear as a pet.

The statements can be silly or serious. One of the statements needs to be a "lie." The goal is for family members to identify the lie. Everyone can call out.

Here's the twist. When someone guesses the "lie" correctly the player has to slap the table and scream, "SO BE IT!!"

This may seem a little strange at first, but once you have done it once, it should turn into some fun. Do this for a couple of rounds then bring everyone down a few notches and ask:

In the Bible there is a word that literally means, "So be it." Any idea what that is? Hint we usually say it at the end of prayers.

Yes the word is "Amen." We often think of it like an exclamation point on the end of a prayer. It literally means so be it. However, in Hebrew it has the same root as the words that mean truth and faith. It is a way of acknowledging that we are putting words in front of God. Yet, did you know that Jesus is also called, "The Amen."

We see it clearly in Revelation 3:14:

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."

Ask: Why do you think God is described as, "The Amen?"

God says this before a very difficult passage in talking to us. As the passage goes on in Revelation 3 He tells the people that it is better to be all in or all out for the Lord than in between. He uses some very strong language to explain why He really doesn't like people who are lukewarm. (You can look it up if you want in Rev. 3:15& 16)

Before God could tell us He wanted us to be totally "in" for Him we needed to be

reminded at His position. He is allowed to say, "I AM THE TRUTH!" He is the one that is most important and can say things to us.

Ask: Why would God want us to be totally into Him?

God wants us to know He is the one that puts the finishing truth into our lives. He isn't a dictator who hits the table. His love is SO BIG He knows what is best for us. Do we believe that?

Ask: How does it make you feel that God is the Amen? What does it make you think about? (Have everyone in the family share.)

Rope Challenge:

When you hang December 18th today have the whole family yell, "SO BE IT!" If God were not the one who declared truth, would He have come to earth as a tiny baby to show us just how much He loves us?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "SO BE IT!" on your note today. Make this your exclamation today, "God said, I believe it, That settles it."

Eternal Life

Eternal Life

Take the picture you will hang today and put it in the middle of your family. Have each member write down separately on a piece of paper why that picture symbolizes "eternal life."

Come back together and discuss what everyone wrote down.

Do you remember the two trees that were in the Garden of Eden? One was the knowledge of good and evil (it's the one that got us in trouble) but there was a second tree. It was called the "tree of life."

The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground--trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.- Genesis 2:9

The tree of life was the reason why we had to leave Eden when sin entered the world. As long as we ate that fruit we could live forever. We wouldn't die. When we lost our innocence knowing the difference between good and evil (we only knew good prior to this,) we were no longer worthy of eternal life.

Then Jesus came to earth to bring us back into a relationship with God. This time around a piece of fruit wasn't going to be enough. This time God needed to be the sacrifice. You see once our innocence was lost we could never get it back. (Sort of like seeing a movie you know you shouldn't have seen, you can't unsee it.)

We often say that Jesus died to GIVE us eternal life. Yet, do we realize He IS that eternal life??

1 John 1: 1-3 puts it this way:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Take a few moments and think about that. Look at what you wrote about that piece of fruit. You knew it said, "Eternal Life" but what does that mean?

Ask:

Does eternal life excite you or bore you?
If life isn't like it is here on earth with hurt, pain and tears how does that make you feel?

Having eternal life may or may not sound exciting. However, a relationship with one who IS eternal life may bring more comfort. Why or why not?
What changes knowing not only that we can have eternal life with Jesus but it is the nature of who He is?

Talk about this as a family.

(**Note: Use this as an opportunity as a family to talk about your doubts about understanding eternal life. What are the ways each of you struggle. Take some time to discuss the comfort that comes with being certain of eternal life.)

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 17th today knowing who IS the eternal life. Talk for a few moments not just what having eternal life is like, but being in relationship with the one WHO is life.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

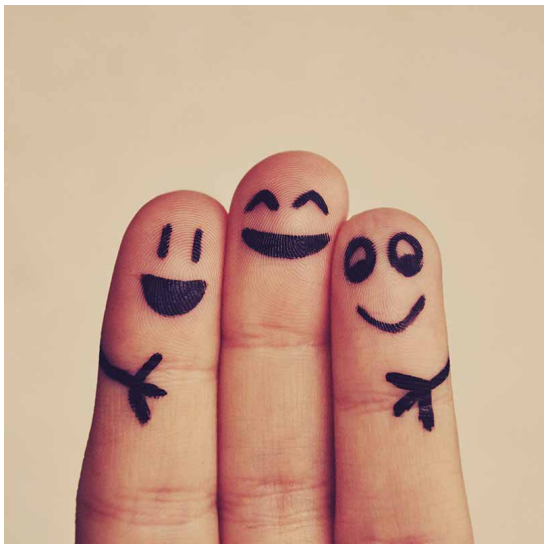
Write, "JESUS IS ETERNAL LIFE." Today be reminded not only does Christ offer eternal life it is the nature of who He is.

Friend

December 18

Friend

Today let's be a little silly. You need a couple of thin tipped sharpies or pens. We are going to start out by making, "Finger friends." Let everyone in the family use at least 3 or even 4 fingers to make some "friends" like in this picture:



After everyone is done have each family member tell you about their "friends." What are their names? What are their best attributes as friends?

*(**Note don't wash up. At the end of today's time take pictures of the friends and post them on your social media site for fun.)*

Once you are done going around ask:

If Jesus was in your little finger huddle what attributes would He hold as a friend?
Have you ever thought of Jesus as your friend? Why or why not?
How have you thought of Him as your friend?

Let's take a look at John 15 14-17 to see about this:

15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

Talk about this passage for a few moments as a family.

What does this say about Jesus being our friend?
How does it make you feel that Jesus chose you to be His friend?
As our friends why do you think He tells us to love each other?

Jesus is the BEST friend. He always has our back, always wants what is best for us and wants us to come to Him for help.

Ask: On those lonely days when it feels like we are friendless how does it make you feel that God is your friend?

Finish up today by taking pictures of your finger friends. Look at them as a reminder that Jesus is our friend that goes far beyond anything and everything.

Rope Challenge:

Hang up December 18th today. Talk for a moment just about John 15:15 and what it means for each of you personally. John 15:15 "I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me."

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "He calls us friend." on your note today. Be reminded that Jesus could once call us slaves, demanding we follow Him and do His will. As God He had that right. Instead He calls us friend, giving us the choice to accept His friendship.

Deliverer And Redeemer

December 19

Deliverer And Redeemer

Start today by watching this video story:

http://tinyurl.com/ChristmasScale14

After you have watched it together ask your family whether or not the story was powerful. Why?

Why is that simple line, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!" the best news?

Let's take a look at a couple of verses from another song, a Psalm. 18: 1&2

"I love you, Lord, my strength.The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

This was written far before Jesus came to earth by King David when his life was saved. David knew he was delivered from physical death.

Talk about this:

When Jesus came to earth what did He deliver us from? How did He redeem us?
What does it mean that God is our deliverer and our redeemer?
How did Jesus become our Deliverer and Redeemer on that first Christmas morning?

David knew that God took care of Him, He rescued Him. In this passage He uses other names to describe the Lord as well. Talk about these and what they mean.

Talk as a family about what you feel God has delivered each of you from. How does it feel to be redeemed back into a relationship with Him?

Finish up by singing, "Joy To The World" as a family.

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 19th up today. Look at the verse on the picture Romans 11:26. It says this:
" and in this way(e) all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob." It is a great reminder that Jesus came to redeem us back to Him, delivering us from a life without Him!

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "JOY TO THE WORLD" on your note today. Be reminded of who Jesus came both as a Deliverer and a Redeemer.

Messiah

Messiah

Can you imagine what it was like in the years and years before Jesus came to earth? Think about it for a moment in a time line.

Get a large piece of paper and make a timeline from Creation to Jesus. Have everyone talk about what stories were important before Jesus came.

This website gives the full timeline, dates and Biblical references from Creation to Jesus: http://biblehub.com/timeline/ Highlight only the details you want.

Make sure to point out:

Creation
Sin
The Flood
Moses and the introduction of the commandments and the law
The Judges and Prophets who were sent to help the people know how to live for God
The fact that not everyone could directly talk to or have relationship with God. (Only the priests.)
Israels continued rebellion
David

(You may even want to just look at the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1 stopping and talking about the likes of Tamar, Rahab and even David himself, none perfect.)

Here's the point: When we look at the timeline from our first sin to Jesus we see A LOT of mistakes. We also see a lot of redemption. Have you ever thought about the number of rules that people had to live by to be "right with God?"

Here are some highlights:

Death for rebelling against your parents.

There were some serious repercussions for disobeying parents. In Exodus 21:17, a kid who cursed their parents was to be put to death, and in Deuteronomy 21:20-21, rebellious teens could be stoned by the town.

A Special Haircut:

In Leviticus 19:27 the haircut of choice involved not cutting the hair on the sides of the head, or trimming the edge of the beard. This look would help the Israelites stand out from the people of the other nations.

Using Dust to Detect Lies

In Numbers 5:11-31, we are told that if a man thought his wife was having an affair, but had no physical proof, he could take her to the priest. The priest would sweep some dust off the Tabernacle floor, and mix it into a pitcher of water, and make the wife drink it.
If the dusty water didn't make the woman sick, then she was innocent, but if her belly swelled up with pain, then she was guilty.

These are just 3 of literally HUNDREDS of rules they had to live by.

Along the way though God tells them He is going to send a "Messiah," or savior.

Ask:

In light of what you just read and looked at, do you think they were looking forward to His coming?

Here's the strange part though. When Jesus came he wasn't exactly the "type" of Messiah many wanted and so they missed it.

Some were looking for a ruler who would make their life better. Others were looking for a king that would replace the rule of a foreign government.
Still others were looking for someone who would free them from all the rules of the church.

Very few were looking for someone who would give right our relationship with God. Even His disciples while He was here on earth didn't always understand.

One day Jesus has this conversation with Peter (one of the core 12):

Mark 8:27-30

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"
28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."
29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."
30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Talk as a family:

Who did most of the people think Jesus was?
What did Peter say?

The people didn't think Jesus was the one they had been waiting for. How could He be? He was born in a stable, from a little tiny town and didn't look like much of anything.

He must have words from God or even be a special person who spoke of God, but the Savior?

Peter on the other hand saw through to who He was. He saw the miracles, the healing, the raising from the dead, the free from sins and Peter knew this was who they had been waiting for.

Talk as a family. Do you think you would have know Jesus is the Messiah? How?

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 20th today. Discuss how you know Jesus is your Messiah. How do you know He is your Savior?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write: "Messiah" on your note today to be reminded of all Jesus has saved you from.

Extra: Make something handmade for each of your neighbors that live directly around you. So the most you are talking about is 3 or 4 (Each side and perhaps across the street.) Bring them to them personally with a, "Merry Christmas." This is a great time of year to get to know those around you.

It can be as simple as a bouquet of Candy Canes with a Christmas note or make a favorite batch of cookies.

You can easily search, "Easy Christmas crafts." There are some super simple ones like a mint sugar scrub for the body or lips (http://tinyurl.com/mintscrub) or you can hand paint a cheap white mug and put a couple of packets of cocoa in it, (http://tinyurl.com/paintingmug).

The point is to thoughtfully show the love of Christ in a small way of caring to your neighbors. If you are REALLy ambitious make a coupon book with things like, "Take your trash to the curb" or "Shovel you out in the next snowstorm." Then make sure they follow up on using them!!

Light Of The World

December 21

Light Of The World

In the last couple of years videos of homes lit for Christmas with synchronized music has become really popular. Watch this one which is put to the music, "Carol of The Bells. " ***http://tinyurl.com/lightsbells*** (If you prefer go to Youtube and find another one you would like to watch.)

Christmas lights are festive and fun. They are a great representation of a name that Jesus called himself, "Light of the World."

In John 8:12 this is what He says:

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Ask your family:

Why would Jesus call himself the Light of the World?
What do you think it means that when we follow Jesus we will never walk in darkness?
What does it mean to have the light of life?

Talk about how Christmas lights can make us think about Jesus being the light of the world.

*(***Note: If there is an area close to you or a neighborhood known for amazing lights, take a drive and have a family best of the best contest.)*

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 21 up today. Think about what light does in darkness. The more lights on a home the more we are drawn to look at it. There is something about Christmas lights that make us feel happy, warm and festive. Jesus helps us see that He is the light of the world.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "He Is the Light" today on your note as a reminder that Jesus doesn't just show us a light, He IS the Light!!

Alpha And Omega

Alpha And Omega

Snow. You might love it, you might hate it. Depending on where you live you may already have seen too much of it this year, or your children may have never seen it at all. No matter how we look at it, the picture of snow flakes are associated with Christmas time. There are even a favorite holiday song, "It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas," "Let it Snow," and "I'm Dreaming of A White Christmas" that embraces the fluffy white stuff as an integral part of our season.

We hear a lot of talk about how every snowflake is unique. A Russian photographer named Alexey Kljatov actually figured out a way to prove this statement through macrophotography and a lot of work. He took the time to take pictures of individual snow flakes. As a family look at what he discovered here: http://tinyurl.com/realsnowflakes.

Take a few moments and look and think about those flakes then think about this:

Not only is each flake special, each is intricate. For those of you who have had to shovel, can you imagine that in those drifts and piles are millions upon millions of intricate crystals, each different?

Why would God do something like that? I think he sums it up pretty well when He calls himself by this name in Revelation 1:8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

This name means, "beginning and end." He was the one who existed before Creation and He will exist all the way to the end of time and beyond. He is the one who in His mightiness would take the time to craft snowflakes. There is no end to the way Jesus will show himself to us.

Ask:

What are some other ways we can see that God is the beginning and the end?
How do these intricate snowflakes show us how God has always been?
How does it make us feel that God has always been and always will be?
You know what else is amazing? He knew the plan to come to earth and become a baby for our sake. He knew always He was born to die to conquer death.
Talk as a family about the power in that reality.

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 22nd today. Think about the ways He is the Alpha and Omega. Looking at the picture talk about how just like our path of life He was there before we came to be, He is with us now and He will be waiting for us at the end. How does that make you feel?

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "Beginning and End" on your note today as a reminder Jesus is the one who was, is and always will be.

Faithful and True

Faithful and True

Today put some Christmas music on in the background, and give everyone a piece of paper.

If you were going to write a new, "Christmas slogan" what would it be. We see them on cute little signs around Christmas every year. Things like:

"The best way to spread Christmas cheer is by singing loud for all to hear."

"Jesus loves you snow much."

"Be jolly and of good cheer because Christmas comes but once a year."

Take a few moments write it out and if you want even design a picture to go with it.

We know Christmas will come every year. We know we will take this time to celebrate the birth of our Savior. That is the definition of something being faithful. However, none of your greetings probably conjured up this imagery from Revelation 19:11-14:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter."(He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.

This is not the picture of a baby in a manger. This does not make us sing, "Silent Night." This is the stuff of a really great action film. Jesus shows up with the name, "Faithful and True," ready to wage war on evil. He has fire coming out of his eyes and a sword coming out of his mouth, wearing a robe that bears the blood He shed on the cross and a tattoo reading KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS. He is amazing, powerful and triumphant. This is not a picture of serenity.

He is Faithful and True.

Ask:

In light of Christmas and this passage how does it make you feel that Jesus is "Faithful and True?"

What does it mean that He is faithful and True?

How would people react if we used portions of the above passage as a Christmas greeting?

A picture of Jesus portrayed in this passage probably wouldn't sell too many Christmas cards.

Talk about this though:

Jesus was faithful and true to come to earth to save us, becoming fully God and fully man. He is also faithful and true to come again to get rid of evil once and for all. How does this change the way we think about Christmas?

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 23rd up today. Reflect on this verse Rev. 19:15, "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True."

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write the winning greeting from your family time on a note today.

Jesus

Jesus

Tomorrow is the BIG DAY! This is Christmas Eve. There are so many ways we come together as a family to celebrate that tomorrow is Jesus birthday.

Take a moment and watch this video together:

http://tinyurl.com/Jesusnames

Have each family go to your piece of rope and select the name of God that has stood out to them the most. Have each member discuss why this name really was important to them.

All of these names are titles we call the Lord. Yet. when the angel came to visit Mary he said this to her in Luke 1: 31-33

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

The name his parents screamed when they thought he was lost was, "JESUS." His friends called Him, "Jesus." More accurately they called Him by the Hebrew name, "Yeshua," which means, "God saves." This is the name that sums up all the other names. He is the salvation. God saves.

Reflect for a few moments again on how God has saved you and what this means for each of your family members. (Remember there is no right or wrong answer.)

Talk about why each member of your family is excited about Christmas Day.

Rope Challenge:

Hang December 24th up today. Not only did the angel tell Mary what she should name her baby Jesus we see in Luke 2:21 that is exactly what she did: "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived." Reflect on who Jesus is and why we truly celebrate the Christmas holiday.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, **"GOD SAVES"** on your note today as a reminder that Jesus came to be our salvation.

Baby
(Christmas)

Baby (Christmas)

Today is the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus. He came as a tiny baby to be our salvation. Today you have many family traditions. Take the time to sing, "Happy Birthday" to our Savior. You may even decide to set aside a desert and call it his birthday cake.

Once again read the story of his birth in Luke 2:1-18 and reflect on the power of this day:

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the
entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while(a) Quirinius was
governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.
4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem
the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there
to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.
6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth
to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because
there was no guest room available for them.
8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their
flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone
around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I
bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of
David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to
you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising
God and saying,
14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one
another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has
told us about."
16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the
manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been
told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds
said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard
and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Rope Challenge:

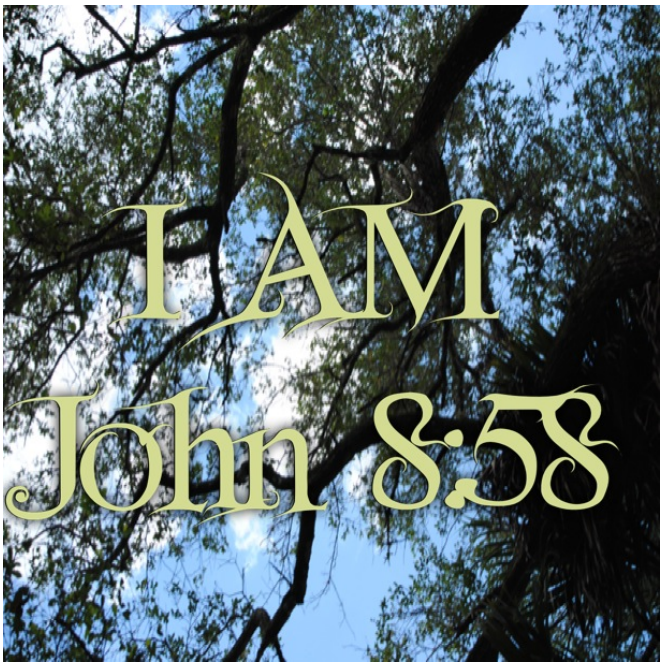
Hang December 25th. He had to come as a baby, or else there is no way He could be fully God and fully man. How crazy is it to think that the same Lord who has fire coming out of his eyes in Revelation 19, would be helpless like that? Think about the baby Jesus today.

Sticky Note Bathroom:

Write, "I Love You" on the note today as a reminder that you love Jesus and that He loves you.

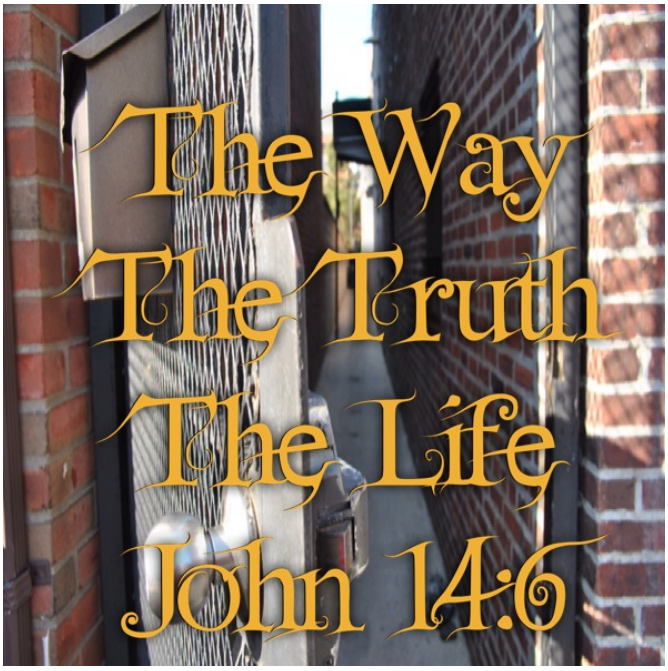
Rope Images:

Dec. 1



Dec. 2

Dec. 3



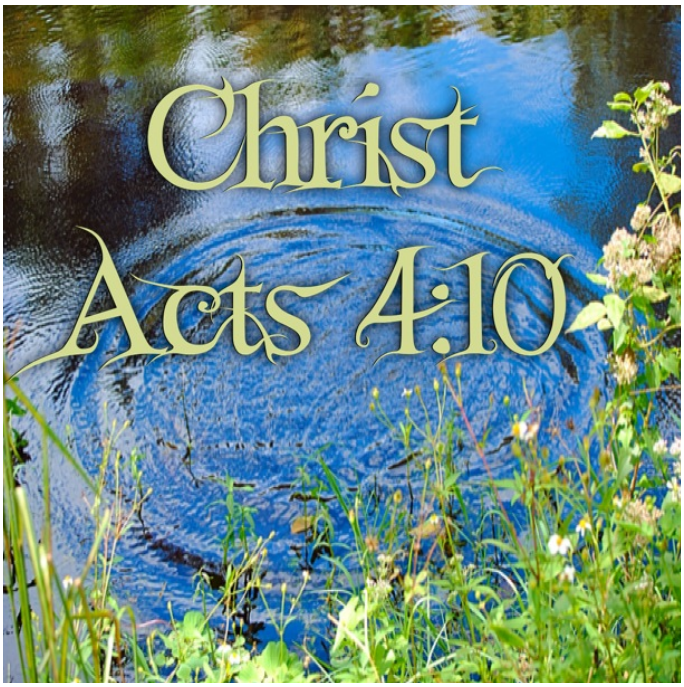
Dec. 4

Rope Images:

Dec. 5

Dec. 6

Dec. 7



Dec. 8

Rope Images:

Dec. 9

Dec. 10

Dec. 11

Dec. 12

Rope Images:

Dec. 13

Dec. 14

Dec. 15

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Dec. 17

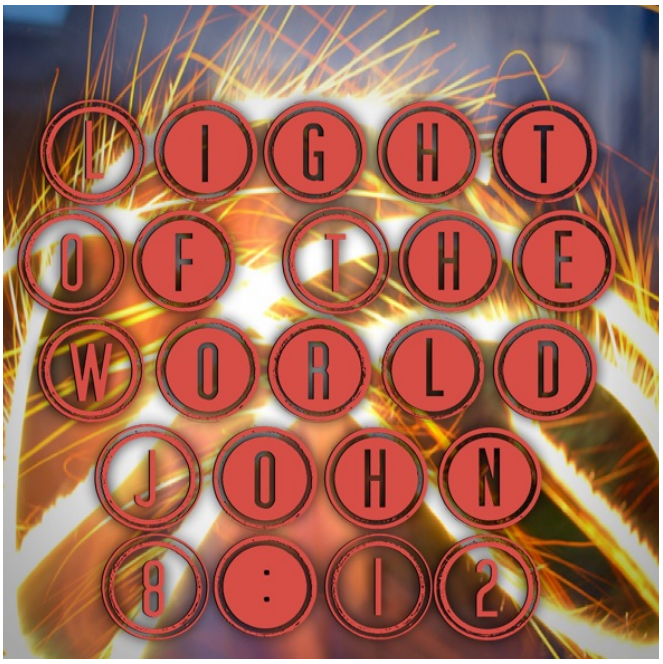
Dec. 18

Dec. 19

Dec. 20

Rope Images:

Dec. 21



Dec. 22

Dec. 23

Dec. 24

Rope Images:

Dec. 25