

A Birthday Party for Jesus

Either just before or just after Christmas plan a children's party. Send out birthday party invitations to the children of your church and encourage them to bring a friend or two. Adapt party games E.g. Pin the tail on Mary's donkey, Musical chairs with Christmas music, and I'm sure you can think of others. Have a face painting area if possible, and an area where children can choose from a variety of paper, markers, crayons, stickers, glitter and decorative scissors to create cards for family members or, if you prefer, for shut ins or those in a local seniors' home. Near the end of the time allotted, have Christmassy food and give each child an iced cupcake with a birthday candle to blow out while you all sing 'Happy Birthday' to Jesus. Then read the Christmas story and have a prayer before the children go home. Have a named bag available for each child to take home the cards they have made, a few treats, and maybe a Christmas pencil and eraser.

Ways to reinforce a story

Cartoons Suitable for Grade 2 and up.

Use strips of adding machine tape, cut to a suitable length. Help the children decide how many "frames" are needed, and what will go in each one. Suggest that the words the characters are saying should go into a speech bubble. Ask them for suggestions, using the Bible story to help. Don't insist on any one correct way, providing the words are appropriate, and not too lengthy to fit into a "speech bubble". Discuss the style of the pictures - not too detailed but bold with obvious gestures or actions. There is time for great comment and discussion of the story as the children work. The children's first attempts at cartoons will be a learning experience, but they will improve rapidly if you share each child's efforts, praising the good things about each one, and repeat the activity with another story soon.

Drama Suitable for all ages.

By dramatising a story children are able to enter into the feelings of the characters, and relate them to their own experiences. Build up a "tickle trunk" of costumes and accessories to help with this. Several cloaks, a head scarf or two (wash these each time they are used), a couple of crowns (I got some from Burger King), maybe a halo or some simple wings, and a shepherd's crook

would be a start. Then add to it as you go along.

It is best not to use a script with the very young. Go over the story more than once and encourage the children to decide what characters are needed and to create the dialogue themselves and think about the action. Then let them improvise. Alternatively, read the story from a children's Bible while the children mime it. Sometimes the teacher might play one of the key parts to keep things moving. Repeat the drama several times allowing different children to have different roles.

With older children (Gr 4,5,6), children may like to write a script one week and perform it the next. You might do this on chart paper with everyone's input, or they may prefer to work in pairs.

If children are too shy to perform in front of others, or don't want to wear costumes, don't force the issue. One day they will no longer want to be left out.

The children may wish to invite their parents to see their play when they come to pick them up from class.

Design an ad in connection with the story

E.g. A lost and found ad for the pearl of great price, the lost coin or the lost sheep.

A wanted ad for the men who attacked the Samaritan, for good workers for labour in the vineyard, for guests to attend the wedding banquet.

A for sale ad for fishing nets no longer needed by the disciples, for a sleeping mat whose owner has been healed, or for extra strong yeast.

Make your own crossword puzzle with words from the story, then make up clues and see if a friend can solve your crossword.

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P      O I L
R      E  W
COINS  V  O
E      I  U
S A M A R I T A N
T      O  E  D
      B  S
      B
D O N K E Y
      R
J E S U S
    
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It is easiest for children to do this on graph paper with about 4 squares to the inch.

Children were asked to think of a word which had to do with starting the New Year the right way. One child exclaimed, "Reservations!"