



CHRISTMAS JOY

SPECIAL OFFERINGS

CHURCH LEADERS—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Older Children's (5th -8th Grade) Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives

Children will:

- Reflect on the characteristics of what makes a good gift
- Discover Jesus as God's perfect gift
- Consider their response to God's perfect gift of Jesus
- Respond to God's gift of Jesus by considering how to build God's neighborhood

Resources and Equipment

- Bibles for each participant
- The Message Bible paraphrase (or a printout of John 1:14 from The Message Bible)
- A few copies of the Presbyterian Giving Catalog (or view the digital version at www.presbyteriangifts.org)
- A copy of the Older Children's Activity Sheet (one per participant on white paper)
- Markers
- Poster board (1 or 2 depending on the size of your group)
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

GATHER (15 MINUTES)

Greet participants as they enter. Open with prayer using the prayer provided or one of your own.

Holy God, in this season of Advent, we reflect especially on the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, for the world.

Pair up with a partner and share with your partner about the best gift you've ever been given.

- Who gave it to you?
- How did receiving the gift make you feel?
- What makes it the best gift ever?

Now pair up with someone else and talk about the best gift you've ever given.

- What was the gift?
- Who did you give it to?
- How did giving the gift make you feel?
- How did the person who received it feel?

When all have shared with their partners, ask:

- What makes the perfect gift?
- Why do we give gifts?



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- What is our response when we're given a gift?
 - What do we do?
- What about the response of people we've given a gift to?
 - Do they thank you? How do they thank you?

EXPLORE (40 minutes)

Responding to the Perfect Gift

Sometimes we love people so much that we want to show them how much we love them. One way we do that is by giving them a gift.

God is the same way.

God wanted to show the world exactly how much God loved the world. So God gave the world a gift. Let's see if we can read about what exactly that gift was.

Our story from the Bible today is from the very first chapter of the book of Matthew: Matthew 1:18–24.
Invite a participant to read the passage.

Discuss the passage together:

- Did anyone catch what gift God was giving to the world?
- Emmanuel is a Hebrew word that means "God with us."
 - How is the very idea of God coming down to earth to be with us through Jesus a gift to the world?
 - When we think about perfect gifts, this is the ultimate perfect gift — God coming to the world in Jesus to show us what love looks like.

Let's read together more about what it means that God came to be with us in the form of Jesus Christ by reading about what another gospel writer has to say about it. In a moment, we'll divide into two groups and look at the same verse, but from a different translation or a paraphrase.

Divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to use a Bible to read John 1:14 to their small group (preferably from the NRSV or CEB translations).

Ask the other group to read from The Message Bible, informing them that it is a paraphrase of scripture using modern language.

In your small group, discuss:

- What words jump out to you?
- How does this verse help you understand what it means to know God is with us?



Older Children's (5th -8th Grade) Lesson Plan *(continued)*

Gather back together as a large group and have each group read their verse and share a reflection or two about their conversation about the scripture passage.

Let's reflect together about the phrase *The Message Bible* uses in the first line: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood."

- Why would God want to "move into the neighborhood"?

Earlier we talked about how we respond when we receive a gift given with love. What were some of the things we did as we responded to a wonderful gift?

So God has given us this wonderful, amazing, perfect gift of Jesus.

- How do we respond?
- How should we respond?

Building God's Neighborhood

The gift of God coming down and "moving into the neighborhood" is big. How should we respond to this great, amazing gift from God — the gift of Jesus Christ?

Receiving the gift of Emmanuel, God-with-us, changes us and moves us to say thank you through both our words and our actions.

God "moved into the neighborhood" to show us what love looks like. And God desires for our response to this great gift not to be just empty words and practices, but to join God in building God's neighborhood in this world — by showing the world God's great love.

Our denomination has a gift catalog — a way that Presbyterians around the country and world can contribute to the building up of God's neighborhood. Let's look through it together and find some examples of ways we can build up God's neighborhood. Let's start with some projects that are supported by our church's next Special Offering — the Christmas Joy Offering. You can give to this offering with your money too! When you give, you are supporting past, present, and future leaders. Read the following projects to find out what the Christmas Joy Offering supports:

- Education Scholarship Fund for Communities of Color
- Arts Education for Young People of Color
- Emergency Assistance Grants

Each of us will design our own block of a city or town with examples of what God's neighborhood would look like if we all responded to God's gift of Jesus Christ with acts of peace, justice, and love in our communities.



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Using the Older Children's Activity Sheet, instruct the participants to design their own block to represent God's neighborhood using the questions on the activity sheet to guide them in their neighborhood design.

When the neighborhood blocks are finished, combine them by gluing them on a piece of poster board. When all are added, look at the entire neighborhood together and comment on what you notice about God's neighborhood.

CLOSE (5 minutes)

We talked earlier about how we respond to God's gift. I want to challenge you to choose something you see in God's neighborhood that we made here and put it into practice in your life. We can work to make God's neighborhood and vision for our world a reality when we commit to acts of love and justice and peace in our own lives.

Closing Prayer

Close in prayer together, using the prayer below or one of your own.

Dear God, we thank you for moving into the neighborhood to be near us in your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to work toward building your neighborhood here as we respond with grateful and loving hearts to the perfect gift of Jesus for us and for the world. Amen.

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