**GROWING TOGETHER:** FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Session 3 of 4

# Shepherds

### MEETING AIM

To tell the story of the shepherds hearing about Jesus’ birth.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 2:8-20

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

Jesus has been born in Bethlehem. Now God wants to announce his arrival, starting with the most unexpected of people. Sometimes we think that faith and revelation is only for the people at the front, the most important people. However, shepherds were low down on the social scale. The fact that God chose them to reveal the news of the saviour’s birth says much to us about the inclusivity and radical nature of God’s saving plan. Children too can often feel at the bottom of the pecking order. Help them to explore the idea that Jesus came for them, as well as the people leading the church!

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and pass round a simple object. When a child has the object, they can share their response to the question. Sometimes it’s helpful to have a sand timer so that you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn’t want to say anything, they can just pass on the object. Ask the children to talk about who they want to share important news with.

### INTRO ACTIVITY – 10 mins

**You will need:** flipchart paper; marker pens

Divide the sheet of paper in half by drawing a line down the middle. Ask the children to think of who the most important people in society are – those with the most influence. Write those people on one side of the paper.

Turn the paper over and ask the group to list the most unimportant people in society – those with no influence at all. Chat about the differences between the two lists. Is it possible for people to move from one side of the paper to the other – to become important (or go the other way and become insignificant)? Are there times when the group feels insignificant?

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** Bibles

Ask who can recap the story so far. Who knows what happens next?

Say that everything about Jesus’ story is slightly upside down. Jesus was born to be the king of the universe and put things right forever between God and his people, but he’s born to pretty ordinary people in pretty basic circumstances. Not only that, but when he’s born, the first people God wants to tell are poor, ordinary people with no influence or power at all. That really sets the stage for Jesus’ whole life – it’s the poor and the powerless and the people that no one else wanted, that he went to spend time with.

In today’s story, God gives a big announcement to some shepherds who come to visit Jesus and then go off to tell as many people as they could. Read the story from the Bible (Luke 2:8-20) – the International Children’s Bible is great.

Ask the group to divide into groups of five or six and prepare a quick drama sketch of the story. Once everyone has finished, allow some time for any groups to perform the drama to the rest of the children. They don’t need to if they don’t want to – they could just enjoy the process! Get some initial feedback on how the shepherds might have felt and what made them rush off to tell the rest of Bethlehem.

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

* If you were God, would you have planned Jesus’ story like this?
* If not, how would you have done it?
* If Jesus came today, who would be the people who heard this first announcement if they were the same sort of people as the shepherds?
* Why do you think God is so interested in the people with no power or influence?
* How do you think the shepherds felt?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** small boxes and flat stones from session two; permanent markers; hay

You’re going to continue to make your stone nativity scene. Put a little hay into the box and then as you decorate the stones, you can place them in. In this session, use the permanent markers to decorate stones to look like shepherds and angels, with the odd sheep if you like. As you work, chat together about the story and what the children think God is saying to them.

If you didn’t do session two, you’ll need to create stones for Mary, Joseph and Jesus to add to your nativity scene.

If you can’t get stones, you could form some flat pebbles out of air-drying clay a few weeks in advance so that they are dry enough to be drawn on. Or you could make salt-dough pebbles and bake them in the oven ahead of time.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** paper and pens

Ask the children to find a quite space and think about what it must have been like to be a shepherd hearing the news from the angels. Let them write a prayer as if they are the shepherd, thanking God for the story they’ve been part of. Give help to any reluctant writers, helping them to articulate and record what they want to say.

If the children would like to read out their prayer, allow them time to do so now. However, if they don’t want to, have a time of quiet as the children reflect on the prayer they have written and talk to God about what they have discovered through this story.

**JENNY CHEUNG**

is a mum, church planter and choir-nut! She pioneers The Voice Project Scotland – a missional expression inviting children and their families to find their voices and enter into community to sing.