

Stepping stones Christmas story trail

Resources to help very young children journey through the Christmas story

Introduction

- These seasonal resources allow you to journey alongside very young children, building the Christmas story step by step, using four Bible passages.
- The children follow a story trail, collecting symbols and engaging in activities linked to the story.
- You can use the trail with toddler groups, or as part of a special service for very young children.
- There are four stories from the Bible. You can use all, some or just one of them – whatever suits your situation – at any time during Advent.
- The flexible story trail can be used in one session, and this would take about an hour in total. For each of the four individual sessions allow 15 minutes within your usual session.

Step one

What you will need to start

- ✓ **Stepping stones Christmas story trail** – this handout with the four Bible stories and related activities
- ✓ **Stepping stones trail sheets** ✓ **Stepping stones symbol sheet**



This is what the finished scene will look like once the symbols are added.

Go to www.rootsontheweb.com/Christmastrail for the trail and symbol sheets. (You'll need one set of story trail sheets and a symbol sheet for each child).



Step two

Planning and preparation

- There are four stories from the Bible. Within each story there are three stickers related to a particular activity. The children will collect twelve stickers in total.
- Decide on four areas (if you're doing the story trail in one session) in the space that you are using to correspond to each Bible story.
- Cut out stepping stones from recycled cardboard and stick to the floor. (Alternatively you can use sensory stepping stones – available from www.educationaltoys.co.uk/products/sensory-stepping-stones).
- Mark out the path of the journey you will make using stepping stones, leading from one area to another and – if you have space – within each area to the places you will use for the three different activities.
- Provide glue sticks in each activity area of the trail for the children to glue the relevant symbol onto their story trail sheet.
- Cut out the symbols from the symbol sheet and give each child a set of twelve images and the story trail sheet.

Step three

What will the session look like?

- Begin by welcoming everyone and introducing the idea that you will be exploring Bible stories which take you on a journey towards the Christmas message.
- Explain that you will journey through one story at a time.
- Give out the story trail sheets to each child and a set of the twelve cut-out symbols for each child. (You'll find both of these at www.rootsontheweb.com/Christmastrail).

Sing this song and then move to the first story:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Step by step we're travelling,
travelling, travelling.
Step by step we're travelling
On our journey.**

Each story on the trail should run like this:

Welcome – gather everyone together and introduce the idea that this is the first/next step on the journey to Christmas.

Free play – time for the children to explore the story.

Story time – time for children to listen to the story.

Creative prayer – allows children to respond to the story.

At the end of Free play, Story time, and Creative prayer, the children will collect a symbol and sing a song.

Christmas story



A story of promises about Jesus before he was born based on Isaiah 9.2-7

Free play

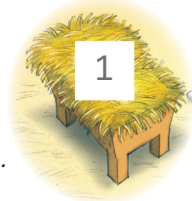
You will need: translucent coloured objects e.g. glass nuggets, cellophane shapes, pieces of organza ribbon, light box (or make your own by placing battery-operated fairy lights in a large, shallow clear plastic box, covering with a layer of greaseproof paper and putting the lid on), black underlay.

Place a light box on black underlay. Invite the children to make peaceful patterns in the light, using the translucent coloured objects.

The children collect the first symbol of a dove and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Isaiah promised peace for all,
peace for all, peace for all.
Isaiah promised peace for all,
peace through Jesus.**



Story time

You will need: dark cloth, battery-operated candle, light-coloured ribbon/paper, flag, chains, wooden sword and paper flames, baby Jesus crib figure, dove (you could have pictures of some of these objects instead).

Pass round a story bag and invite the children to dip their hands in and take a picture/object (see italics) to place when appropriate as you tell the story:

The prophet Isaiah wrote about the one who was coming, 'The people who walk in darkness (*dark cloth*) will see a great light. (*battery-operated candle*)

For those who live in the land of deep darkness, a light will shine – (*light-coloured ribbon/paper to make rays from the candle*) and the people will rejoice. (*flag*)

The chains of slavery will be broken, and the people will be set free. (*chains*)

The weapons of war will be burned in the fire, and the people will live in peace. (*wooden sword and flame cut-outs*)

For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us. (*baby Jesus figure*)

And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (*dove*)

The children collect the second symbol of broken chains and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Isaiah promised they'd be free,
they'd be free, they'd be free.
Isaiah promised they'd be free,
free through Jesus.**



Creative prayer

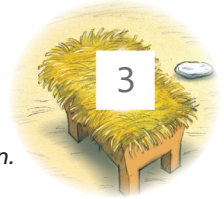
You will need: sparkly wool, sticks, dark cloth.

Invite the children to wind some sparkly wool around a stick and think about the light shining in the darkness. Encourage everyone to place their stick onto a dark cloth and ask God to shine light in their life.

The children collect the third symbol of a candle and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Isaiah promised a great light,
a great light, a great light.
Isaiah promised a great light,
light in darkness.**



Christmas story



Mary's story based on Luke 1.26-38

Free play

You will need: doll's house, angel and woman play figures.

Invite the children to play with a doll's house and figures of an angel and a woman, to symbolise Mary.

The children collect the fourth symbol of a speech bubble and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**The angel spoke to Mary,
to Mary, to Mary.
The angel spoke to Mary,
'God is with you'.**



Story time

You will need: glove, finger or wooden spoon puppets for angel, Mary and Elizabeth.

Use the puppets to tell the story:

Angel: Greetings, Mary. The Lord is with you!

Mary: I am confused.

Angel: Don't be afraid. God has chosen you to be the mother of his Son.

Mary: What does this mean?

Angel: You are going to have a baby, and you must call him Jesus.

Mary: How can this happen?

Angel: The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of God will come over you. Your son will be holy. He will be the Son of God.

Mary: I am worried, but I am ready to serve God.

Angel: Your cousin Elizabeth is also going to have a baby, even though she is old.

Mary: I must go and see her.

('walk' Mary and swap puppets behind your back)

Mary: Elizabeth, I have come to visit you!

Elizabeth: Mary, when I heard your voice the baby in my tummy leapt up and jumped for joy! God bless you and your baby!
Mary: My soul praises the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God!

The children collect the fifth symbol of a spring and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Elizabeth's baby jumped for joy,
 jumped for joy, jumped for joy.
 Elizabeth's baby jumped for joy,
 at Mary's visit.**



Creative prayer

You will need: musical instruments, praise music and equipment to play it.

Ask the children to choose an instrument and make music to praise God, joining in with the familiar hymn or song of your choice.

Music suggestions:

- Tell Out My Soul
- Boyce and Stanley, Magnificat

The children collect the sixth symbol of a musical note and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Mary sang a song of praise,
 song of praise, song of praise.
 Mary sang a song of praise,
 praise to God.**



Christmas story

The story of Jesus' birth based on Luke 2.4-7

Free play

You will need: sand tray (or sand-coloured cloth), play materials, e.g. pebbles, gravel, pieces of bark, sticks; people and donkey figures.

Give the children the play materials and invite them to make a road for Mary and Joseph to travel along.

The children collect the seventh symbol of a pathway and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**On the road to Bethlehem
 Bethlehem, Bethlehem.
 On the road to Bethlehem,
 to be counted.**



Story time

Use simple actions (see *italics*) and repeat the story so the children can join in.

The Roman Emperor, Augustus, ordered that everyone should be counted. (*'count' on fingers*)

All returned to their home towns to sign up for the counting. (*pretend to write*)

Joseph came from King David's family, and King David came from Bethlehem. (*make a 'crown' on your head*)

Joseph set off from Nazareth with his fiancée Mary. (*'walk' your fingers*)

Mary was about to have a baby. (*indicate a tummy bump*)

After days of walking, they arrived in Bethlehem. (*walk on the spot then sit down*)

Whilst they were staying in Bethlehem, Mary's baby was born. (*'rock' your arms*)

She wrapped him up snugly in strips of cloth. (*pretend to wrap*)

There was no room for them to stay, so she laid him in a manger, the animal's feeding trough. (*mime laying the baby down*)

The children collect the eighth symbol of a piece of white cloth and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**Mary had a baby boy,
 baby boy, baby boy.
 Mary had a baby boy,
 baby Jesus.**



Creative prayer

You will need: a large sheet of paper, sticky-tape, pens/pencils, manger (or a picture of a manger/stable).

Draw a simple labyrinth on a large sheet of paper then tape it to the floor and place a manger in the middle. Invite the children to find a place on one of the pathways and help them to draw around their feet.

Then say together:

Thank you, God for making a way,
 even when there was no room.
 Thank you, God for baby Jesus, born in a stable.
 Help us to make our journey to him.
Amen.

The children collect the ninth symbol of footprints and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

**We can go and visit him,
 visit him, visit him.
 We can go and visit him,
 baby Jesus.**



Christmas story



Our story – the story of angels, shepherds, kings and all those who encounter Jesus based on Luke 2.8-20 and Matthew 2.9-12

Free play

You will need: a selection of nativity costumes and/or dressing up materials, e.g. wings, tea-towels and crowns to symbolise angels, shepherds and kings.

Lay out a selection of nativity costumes and invite the children to dress up and act out the visitors coming to Jesus.

The children collect the tenth symbol of a trumpet and add it to their story trail sheet.



Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

Angels told of Jesus' birth,
Jesus' birth, Jesus' birth.
Angels told of Jesus' birth,
told the shepherds.

Story time

You will need: a white cloth, nativity figures, e.g. angels, shepherds, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, a star and three 'treasure chests'.

Lay out a white cloth, and use the objects as you tell the story:

There were shepherds watching their sheep in the fields nearby. Suddenly, an angel appeared in a burst of light, and they were terrified. But the angel said: 'Don't be afraid! I bring good news of great joy. The Saviour has been born today in Bethlehem. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.'

Then the whole sky was filled with angels singing and praising God. The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem, and found the baby just as the angel had said. They went home, singing and praising God.

About that time wise men from eastern lands saw a star rising in the east. It guided them to Bethlehem and stopped over the place where the child was. They found the child with his mother, Mary. They knelt down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The children collect the eleventh symbol of a star and add it to their story trail sheet.

Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.



The star was shining in the sky,
in the sky, in the sky.
The star was shining in the sky,
at the stable.

Creative prayer

You will need: craft boxes, items to decorate, e.g. gem stickers, pens/pencils, paper hearts, a candle, frankincense/myrrh resin.

Give the children small craft boxes to decorate, then invite them to place the paper heart inside to think about God's gift of love for them and their love for God.

Then, light a candle and burn small pieces of resin, ensure the children are at a safe distance. Invite the children to be still and smell the aroma as they give thanks for the birth of Jesus – God's gift of love.

The children collect the twelfth symbol of a gift and add it to their story trail sheet.



Sing this song as you move along the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

The gift of love at Christmastime
Christmastime, Christmastime.
The gift of love at Christmastime,
Jesus loves us.

Step four

When you come to an end

When you have finished the trail, gather everyone together. Recount the Bible stories you have explored and encourage the children to look at the symbols they collected. Explain that they can take the story trail sheet home and use it to tell the story again with their parents/carers. Finish by reminding them that, although this is the Christmas story, we are still in the season of Advent, so our journey will continue until Christmas day is here.

Sing this song as you finish the trail:
To the tune of London Bridge is falling down.

Step by step we're travelling,
travelling, travelling.
Step by step we're travelling
On our onward journey.



Illustrations by Mary Hall



Nourish and inspire children, young people, families, adults and all ages together

Find more free resources at
www.rootsontheweb.com/sample

Plus resources for very young children every week!
Go to www.rootsontheweb.com/toddlers