

Christmas Countdown Challenge – and beyond!

Christmas Countdown

The idea behind the countdown is similar to that of an advent calendar, or more correctly, a Jesse Tree. A Jesse Tree is decorated throughout advent with symbols retelling the story of the bible, including the story of Jesus' birth around December 25th. (the name "Jesse Tree" is taken from Isaiah 11:1 - "a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse" and is a bit like a God's family tree)

The Christmas Countdown Challenge will take our children on a journey through some of the big characters in the bible, showing how events point towards Jesus' arrival, and how we too are part of God's story.

How does it work?

For each day in December details will be provided about a biblical character or event. A relevant symbol is then thought of (or given to younger kids) and then attached to a tree, a poster, a collage or round a nativity scene. By the end of December, your family will have a visual display representing a range of biblical events. December 25th, somewhat inevitably, is the day where Jesus' birth is remembered within the countdown and part of the excitement with children can be waiting for Jesus' birthday and thinking of an appropriate celebratory symbol. The "and beyond!" part of the countdown refers to the remaining days in December, where further New Testament events are remembered and children are reminded that they have a part to play in God's story.

The Readings

- Choose whichever version of the story you feel is appropriate to your child(ren).
- Some of the actual bible references provided are quite long. You may feel it is more beneficial to recount the story from your own knowledge, or to get your child(ren) to do so. Or you can help them create a "summary" of the story.
- Any bible story books related to the themes can be a helpful alternative if you need a change, for example, most toddlers own at least one "Noah's Ark" book!
- If using The Toddlers Bible, it is often helpful to tell the story by talking about the pictures, rather than using the words.
- Each day, remind your child(ren) that this is God's story – and all the stories lead to Jesus being born. Get them to prepare an extra-special symbol for 25th December...
- There are a few stories which do not appear in the story bibles – these are provided in the "Supplementary Stories" sheet (denoted *supp.* *) or a bible reference is provided.

Additional Thoughts

- You may like to pray with your child(ren) while "doing" your Countdown each day.
- Where appropriate, you could ask your child(ren) to think about what each story teaches us about God. Encourage them to spot the themes of love, help, forgiveness...
- You could use other "props" or resources where appropriate, e.g. do your children know the songs from "Joseph and the Amazing

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Technicolour Dreamcoat?”, do you have CDs or videos relating to any of the stories?, would your child(ren) enjoy sitting in a tent while listening to a story about Abraham, or building a wall with lego while hearing about Nehemiah?...

The “Tree”

The original idea was to hang symbols from a tree, which could be a Christmas tree.

Alternative ideas include
creating a collage,
having a poster in 31 sections (one for each day),
setting the symbols out around a nativity scene



The symbols

What your symbols are depends on what your “tree” is. They could be:

Photographs

Drawings

Physical objects, e.g. a toy fish for Jonah, a tool for Joseph (Jesus’ dad)

Modelling Clay (or if you are really adventurous, baked dough) shapes



Images / clipart (older children may enjoy searching for appropriate images on the Internet, e.g. via Google images)
Magazine/catalogue cut-outs

Examples of symbols are given for each day – use them if you, or your child(ren) get stuck.

Process

For younger children (up to about 5)

- Read the story for the day.
- “Find” the symbol – the adults in the house are likely to have to provide the symbol, rather than the child(ren) thinking of it themselves. To add a bit of a game element, it can be fun to have the symbol hidden for the child to find. Alternatively, put the symbol in a designated bag or box and build the excitement by shouting “what’s in the bag?” each day.
- Attach the symbol to the poster, chart or scene that you are creating.

For older children

- Read the story for the day
- Think of a symbol that represents the story, and then find it.

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- Attach the symbol to the poster, chart or scene that you are creating.

Other suggestions

- Hide the verses for your child(ren) to find each day.
- Put the verses in pockets on an advent calendar (bearing in mind that you will need 31 spaces) – perhaps with a piece of chocolate.