**Light It Up**

**The Greatest Gift: Jesus is Born**

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**BIG IDEA: Jesus is the greatest Christmas gift of all time, so we can give glory and praise to God.**

**BIBLE BASIS: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20**

**KEY VERSE: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.” John 3:16 (NIrV)**



**7–15 minutes**

**30–40 minutes**

**7–15 minutes**

**15–25 minutes**

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**LEADER DEVOTIONAL**

This time of year I am always side-swiped by all of the glittery bows, to-do lists, decorating, baking and buying that bombards my brain. No matter how good my intentions are at simplifying and remembering the true reason for the season, I get lost in the hustle. At my son’s preschool Christmas concert years ago, they sang a song called “The Best Gift.” I still remember the words and recite them often in my head. It is a simple song for young kids, but the truth in it is profound. I hope as you read the lyrics below, you can slow down and remember the best gift given to you.

*The Best Gift*

*By Mary Rice Hopkins*

*Wrapped up in a manger, a long, long time ago*

*God sent his only son, so his love we’d know.*

*Jesus gave his life, so we could be set free*

*Find true forgiveness, God’s gift to you and me.*

*The Best gift to me, the best gift to me,*

*His name is Jesus, thank you God for Jesus.*

*The best gift to me.*

*Thank you God for all the gifts you give us every day.*

*The sun and moon and stars so bright and friends along the way.*

*Most of all I thank you for the precious son who came*

*So I could know and love like him, I’ll sing about his name.*

*The Best gift to me, the best gift to me,*

*His name is Jesus, thank you God for Jesus.*

*The best gift to me.*

*Mindy Rausch*

GO! Team Member

**LARGE GROUP SKILL BUILDING**

***The Basics of Blocking: Using Levels***

In our last “Skill Building,” we talked about “The Basics of Blocking: Movement, Planting and Stillness.” “Blocking” is a drama term that refers to how you move and position your body while acting or teaching. Good blocking is like visual candy for kids — it pulls them deeper into your message. Poor blocking, on the other hand, can put your kids to sleep. One of the most effective ways to employ blocking to your advantage is to use a variety of levels (the highs and lows of your space). In fact, at the moment you change levels, you’ll probably notice an increase in the kids’ attention. From high to low, here are some different levels you can use along with the message they convey:

**Elevated level:** If you stand on a chair, a ladder, or some other tall, stable object, you’ll be towering over the kids. This is the most dominant level and it’s great when you want to have an overbearing presence. Are you speaking as if you were Goliath or an angry king? Place yourself high above the kids to help them feel the overwhelming power of the situation.

**Standing level:** This is your baseline level — the one you’ll use most often. People often address kids from a standing position, so it’s one they’re very familiar with and it doesn’t necessarily convey either dominance or intimacy.

**Seated level:** This level is beginning to put you closer to the kids and therefore is a more relaxed and comfortable level. It’s a good level to be at when you want to share something from the heart. This might be a great level to use while sharing a personal story, depending on the nature and energy of the story.

**Kneeling level:** Kneeling puts you almost at eye-level with the kids and is therefore the most personal and intimate of the levels. You might employ this level near the end of a lesson when you’re sharing the truth about Jesus’ immense love for them. If you get on your knees, and speak softly and slowly, the kids will eat up every word you say!

**UNIT DESCRIPTION**

There are so many things to love about Christmas — the music, the presents, the decorations, the bad sweaters, and crazy uncle Sal dressed as Santa! And to top it all off, there are the twinkling lights. Christmas is sometimes referred to as the season of light. Not just because of the colorful lights you see hanging on houses and trees, but because we celebrate the birth of Jesus — the Light of the World. During “Light it Up,” kids will get clues about the contents of a present. At the flip of a switch, the present will light up, magically revealing its contents and shedding light on the amazing story of Jesus’ birth.

**SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS**

* Find 4 boxes that have at least one side that is larger than an 8½ x 11 piece of paper.
* In each box, cut a rectangle out of one side that is just slightly smaller than an 8½ x 11 piece of paper. (Approximately 8” x 10½”)
* Wrap the boxes in Christmas wrapping paper, but leave the 8” x 10½” hole uncovered. Consider putting a bow on top of each box.
* Print out the 4 black and white “Story Pictures” on 8½ x 11 paper. Each picture will be on a separate piece of paper. (See Resource Folder.) Tape one of the 4 pieces of paper over each open hole with the picture facing inward so that it’s not visible from the outside of the present.
* Place a small light inside each of the boxes. There are different ways to do this. The easiest way is to place a balled-up strand of white Christmas lights inside of the box. Make sure the plug comes out from the back of the box (opposite the hole.)
* Place all 4 boxes in order on a table in the teaching area. Put a power strip on the floor near the back of the table. Be sure the plug for each of the 4 lights can reach the power strip.
* When the box is lit up, the light will shine through the white portions of the paper, but not the black. This will reveal the picture to the kids.
* Tip: Save the boxes from week to week. Simply remove the old pictures and apply the new ones.
* Print the 4 “Clue Cards” on 8½ x 11 paper and cut apart. See Resource Folder. Fold each of the cards in half so that the clues are hidden from sight. Place each card on top of the appropriate present (ex. Card #1 on Present #1.)
* Place 1-2 strands of Christmas lights in the teaching area. The lights will be used to wrap around a kid during the “Light it Up” Christmas makeover. Be sure to have an extension cord or outlet nearby to plug the lights in.
* Load a fun, upbeat Christmas song into your media player. The song will be played during the “Light it Up” Christmas makeover.
* Put a pair of socks in a wrapped present or gift bag. Place the bag in the teaching area.
* Place a trash can near the teaching area.
* Optional: Load the song “Silent Night” or another favorite Christmas hymn or praise song into your media player to be sung at the end of the lesson.
* Choose which of the Reflect and Respond stations you would like to make available. Set out the appropriate materials for each of those stations.



**CG: “Light it Up” title graphic**

**Sound: Play upbeat music as kids move to large group area**

**Video: Play “Light It Up” Intro Video**

**LIGHT IT UP INTRO**

**Large Group Leader:** Hello everybody and MERRY CHRISTMAS!! Can you believe it? Christmas is *finally* here *(or almost here!)* No more wishing, no more waiting, now it’s time for celebrating! (Whoa — that rhymed!) Once again we are going to “Light it Up!” Before we get started, though, I think we need to fix something. You’re a great looking bunch of kids, but some of your outfits could use a little help! Some of you don’t look quite “Christmas-y” enough. Let’s see if we can fix that with a “Light it Up” makeover.

Choose a kid and invite them to the teaching area. Play some fun, high energy Christmas music while you wrap one or two strands of Christmas lights around the kid. **Music: PLAY fun Christmas music.** Start from the head and work your way down so the plug ends close to an outlet or power cord. If available, you may want to add some other fun light-up Christmas accessories such as glasses or hats. When finished, have the kids countdown from 3 and yell, “Light it Up!” Plug in or turn on the lights.

Wow — that’s more like it! This is the most fabulous Christmas outfit I’ve ever seen! In fact, Christmas lights are one of my favorite things about Christmas — they make everything (and everyone) look better. There’s just one problem with them — it seems like they’re always breaking! A lot of times, if just one light burns out, the entire strand stops working. *(Unplug or turn lights off.)* Then you have to check each bulb to see which one is burned out. *(Quickly inspect a few bulbs.)* Or you have to flick them to make sure they’re not just loose. *(Flick a bulb or two.)* Or you have to shake the whole tree to see if they’ll turn back on. *(Grab kid by shoulders and shake them.)* It can be *so* frustrating!

Fortunately for us, during Christmas time, we celebrate the birth of a light that *never* goes out! Who is that light? *(Kids respond.)* That’s right — it’s Jesus! He’s called the Light of the World because He overcame the darkness of sin and He shows us the way to Heaven. Best of all, you don’t have to check Him, or flick Him, or shake Him. Jesus’ light never goes out. It shines as bright today as the day He was born! Today, we get to hear the story of how that light first came into the world. *(Help kid take off lights and dismiss to audience.)* To get the story started, let’s see if you can guess what’s inside this present.

**CG: “Big Bible Story” graphic**

**THE BIG BIBLE STORY — GOD BECOMES A BABY: JESUS IS BORN**

Remove and open the clue card from present #1. Read each of the 3 clues one at a time and allow the kids to guess what’s inside. Following the final clue, have the kids count down from 3 and yell, “Light it Up!” Turn on the light inside the present. When the light hits the paper on the face of the present, it will reveal the picture for the kids to see.

It’s a heart! Mary and Joseph were in love and planned to get married. But then one day, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that God’s Spirit was going to be inside of her and make her pregnant with a baby. This wasn’t going to be any ordinary baby, though. Most babies have human dads, but this baby was going to be called the Son of God. There was only one problem with that. Joseph didn’t understand that God was going to be the father. So when He found out that Mary was going to have a baby and it wasn’t his, he thought about calling the whole wedding off. But then an angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that it was okay — the baby inside of Mary was from God. He told Joseph to take Mary as his wife and when the baby was born, to name Him Jesus. When Joseph woke up, he didn’t waste any time. He and Mary got married as soon as they could. Let’s see if you can guess what’s in the next present. *(Read the clues from present #2. Repeat the instructions from above.)*

It’s the world! After Mary and Joseph got married, Caesar Augustus, the most powerful ruler in the world, said that everyone had to travel back to their hometown and be counted. For Mary and Joseph, that meant a long trip to the town of Bethlehem. Unfortunately, there were TONS of other people in Bethlehem for the same reason! And because of that, all of the hotels and guest rooms were already filled. The Bible doesn’t say exactly where Mary and Joseph ended up staying, but we know there was a manger there. A manger is a feeding box for animals, so that probably means that they stayed somewhere like a barn or stable. It wasn’t much, but it came just in the nick of time. Let’s see what’s in the next present. *(Read the clues from present #3. Repeat the instructions from above.)*

It’s a baby! When the time finally came, baby Jesus was born. There wasn’t much in the barn for Mary to work with, so she wrapped Him in a cloth and laid Him down in the manger. Can you believe that?! Jesus — the Light of the World, the King of Kings, the Son of God — wasn’t born in a palace, or a hospital, or even a house. He was born in a dirty, stinky barn with a bunch of animals. He wasn’t wrapped in an expensive blanket; he was wrapped in an ordinary cloth. He wasn’t laid down in a baby crib, he was put in a manger — a feeding box for animals. But that’s exactly how God wanted it. He wanted to show the world that Jesus wasn’t just a gift for fancy people who lived in fancy places, He wanted to show the world that Jesus was a gift for everyone! We have one more present. Let’s see what’s inside. *(Read the clues from present #4. Repeat the instructions from above.)*

It’s heaven! The Bible says that after Jesus was born, an angel from heaven appeared to some shepherds in a nearby field. Listen to what the angel said to the shepherds. *(Open Bible to Luke 2:10-14.)* “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said, ‘May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!’” *(Close Bible.)* Instantly, the shepherds ran to find Mary and Joseph and the baby so that they could give glory and praise to God.

**CG: “Big Bible Story Questions” graphic**

**BIG BIBLE STORY QUESTIONS**

At the end of the Bible story have the kids turn briefly to their small groups and discuss the following questions: **For Younger Kids: What was your favorite part of this story? Why? Do you think Jesus is the greatest gift ever? Why or why not? For Older Kids: What do you think this story teaches us about God? Do you think Jesus is the greatest gift ever? Why or why not?** After a few minutes, draw their attention back to the teaching area.

**CG: “Light it Up” title graphic**

**Video: (Optional) Play “Journey Today Show” video *(requires Premium subscription)***

**SAMURAI 6000 KARATE CHOPPER MITTS**

What a great story, but do you think you can remember it all from the pictures? *(Kids respond.)* Let’s find out! I’m going to point to the pictures one at a time and you tell me what happened in that part of the story. *(Stand behind each present one at a time and have the kids briefly recount what happened.)* Way to go — you did it!

Isn’t that amazing?! The first Christmas gift ever was baby Jesus, wrapped in a cloth and laying in a manger. Not only was Jesus the *first* Christmas gift ever, He was the *best* Christmas gift ever. Now, I know some of you might be thinking, “Is Jesus *really* the best gift ever? I mean, He doesn’t fit under my tree, I can’t unwrap Him, or ride Him down my street, or download cool apps to Him. How could He possibly be the best?” Well, let me explain.

Imagine it’s early on Christmas morning when you wake up. You’re the first one awake, so you run around the house to wake everyone else up too. *(Run around room, shake a few kids and yell “wake up!”)* When everyone is finally downstairs and sitting around the tree, you see it for the first time. *(Pick up present or gift bag with socks inside.)* A beautiful gift, wrapped in beautiful paper, with the most beautiful name on it — your name! *(Begin opening present or bag.)*

When you open it up, there it is in all of its glory — the best gift you could ever imagine *(take out the pair of socks for kids to see)* — a pair of socks?!? Wait a second — time out! Socks are *so* not cool! Let’s imagine that they’re not socks. No way — not socks at all! They are…they are… *(appear to be thinking of what else they could be)* Samurai 6000 Karate Chopper Mitts! *(Put the socks on your hands like mitts.)* You can’t believe it! You’ve wanted Samurai 6000 Karate Chopper Mitts for as long as you can remember. And now that they’re yours, you can karate chop *anything* in half. *(After saying each item, turn and karate chop the air.)* Boards — karate chop! Cars — karate chop! Killer bees — karate chop! Your sister —  *(raise your arm to karate chop, but then stop.)* Um…maybe you shouldn’t karate chop *everything* in half.

For the first week, you wear the Samurai 6000 Karate Choppers *nonstop*! You even sleep with them on, which is why you accidently karate chopped your bed in half during a bad dream. But then, after a couple of weeks, you kind of run out of things to karate chop. *(Take off one sock.)* Then after a month, karate chopping starts to seem kind of boring. *(Take off the other sock.)* Then after a year, the Samurai 6000 Karate Chopper Mitts end up on the floor of your closet. *(Toss socks on the floor.)* Then after two years, your mom picks up the mitts and throws them in the trash because you never use them anymore. *(Pick up socks and toss them in a trash can.)* The Samurai 6000 Karate Chopper Mitts were kind of fun for a little while, but they didn’t do anything important, and they didn’t last forever. But God’s gift — the gift of Jesus — is different! Let’s look at our story pictures one more time to see why. *(Stand behind the light up story pictures from earlier.)*

**THE BEST GIFT EVER**

Not only do these pictures help to tell the story of Jesus’ birth, they also tell us today’s Bible verse. It’s from John 3:16. *(Encourage kids to open their Bibles to John 3:16.* *Be prepared to give younger kids more time and assistance in finding the verse.)* Take a look. *(Stand behind the heart picture.)* “God so loved *(stand behind the world picture)* the world *(stand behind the baby picture)* that he gave his one and only Son. *(Stand behind the heaven picture.)* Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.”

**CG: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.” John 3:16**

Jesus won’t fit under your tree, you can’t unwrap Him, and He definitely won’t karate chop your car in half! But there is one thing that Jesus can karate chop in half — death! The Bible says that we all sin. That means we all mess up and break God’s rules. The consequence for sinning is forever death and separation from God. But that’s not the end of the story. On the first Christmas morning, over 2,000 years ago, God gave us the best gift ever — Jesus! Later on, when Jesus died and rose again, it’s like He karate chopped death in half. And now, if you believe in Jesus and follow Him, you get to live with Him forever in Heaven. That is WAY better than anything you’ll find under the tree this Christmas!

Don’t get me wrong — opening presents on Christmas Day is *super* fun, but we already got the best gift ever. It’s Jesus! And to celebrate that gift, maybe we should do what the shepherds did when they found out about Jesus. Maybe we should give glory and praise to God. Let’s do that right now.

Optional: consider singing “Silent Night” or another favorite Christmas hymn or praise song.

**Music:** **Optional: PLAY Christmas hymn or praise song**

Close the Large group time by praying for the kids in whatever way the Holy Spirit prompts you. Following the prayer, explain to the kids which of the Reflect and Respond Stations will be available. Remind them to move about the stations very quietly. Tell them they are free to respond to God in whatever way the Holy Spirit leads them, but if they need suggestions, some of the stations will give them ideas for how to pray, write, or draw. Give each child one “GO! Home” sheet and instruct them to take it with them to the stations. Place small group leaders at the different stations to quietly help the kids. The stations listed below are just the ones that have prompts that are specific to today’s lesson. For more instructions on how the Reflect and Respond Stations work as well as a full list of possible stations, see the “GO! Guide.”

**CG: “Light it Up” title graphic**

**Music: Optional: Continue playing “Silent Night”**



**Prayer Station prompt:** Write a prayer to God and thank Him for giving you Jesus — the best gift ever!

**Journal Station prompt:** Imagine you were there when Jesus was born. What did you see? What did you say? What did you do? Write a story about it.

**Bible Station prompt:** Read it for yourself: Luke 2:1-20. Draw a picture of the story or write to God about your favorite part of the story. Tell Him why you liked it.

**Art Station prompt:** Draw a picture of baby Jesus in a manger. While you’re drawing, think about why Jesus is the best gift ever.