

THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

(Christmas in a Bag – A Christmas Day Family Celebration)

This idea was submitted by Major Sandra Budden and Nancy McBride, Heritage Park Temple, Prairie Division.



Sample of Gift Bag and Contents



Sample Gift Tag

DO: Print the following out on card stock and cut apart to use as a gift tag for each “Celebration of Christmas” gift bag. Prepare a gift bag for each family at your church to open on Christmas morning.

The Celebration of Christmas

As we celebrate the season of Christmas it is our wish to give to you this gift to be shared with your family on Christmas Day. Inside your bag you will find a devotional outline to help guide you, an empty Christmas tree ball and several small items which will guide your journey to Bethlehem. As each item is used you or a member of your family will place the item inside the ball. Once all the pieces have been placed in the ball, hang the ball on your tree as a reminder of the story of Christmas and of the birth of a newborn King – the LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

DO: Collect and place the following items into each gift bag. Tie each bag closed with ribbon and attach the above gift tag:

The Greatest Gift of All Devotional
Carol Sheet
Empty Ornament ball
Bell
A small Angel

Piece of Straw
Small Star
Tiny Bow
Strips of red and green coloured paper
A Salvation Army Christmas CD (from S & P)

THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

(Prepared by Nancy McBride)

Read:

As we get up on Christmas morning there always seems to be something magical in the air. Most of us wake up early with anticipation of a great day. We are excited for the gifts we will receive. We are excited for the people we will see and the time we will spend together as family. We wake up remembering that this is such a special day because of Jesus' birth! We remember the prophetic words given long before Jesus was born...

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
And the government shall be upon his shoulder:
And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,
The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6*

Remove the empty ornament ball from the bag.

Read:

Today we recount the story of Jesus' birth. On this holy day, we turn our hearts to you. You are our hope, our light and our salvation. On this holy day we celebrate the mystery of your coming. Awed at how you humbled yourself to be one with us. On this holy day we welcome the Christ child, born in a barn among animals, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. On this holy day we come to worship and rejoice in the birth of the newborn king.

Sing Together: Joy To The World

Remove the bell from the bag. Have one person in your family hold the bell quietly covered by their hands.

Read:

Throughout history bells have been used to celebrate special occasions. Their bright and cheerful sound was a reminder that something important was about to happen. In many villages throughout the world people would ring the church bell on special occasions. Bells announced the coming or arrival of an event. They were rung during Christmas to announce the arrival of the season and to announce the birth of Christ!

Inside each bell there is a tiny ball which makes the ringing sound as it bounces around the inside of the bell. In the same way we must ring out the meaning of Christmas for the world to hear. Let the holiday joyfully ring from

our hearts! The joy comes from within because He fills our hearts with hope and peace.

Pass the bell around and have each person ring the bell while you sing...

Come On Ring Those Bells

Remove Angel from the bag.

Read:

Long ago, about 2000 years, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young woman who lived in the northern town of Nazareth. The girl's name was Mary and she was engaged to marry Joseph.

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: 'Peace be with you! God has blessed you and is pleased with you.' Mary was very surprised by this and wondered what the angel meant. The angel said to her 'Don't be afraid, God has been very kind to you. You will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to a baby boy and you will call him Jesus. He will be God's own Son and his kingdom will never end.' Mary was very afraid but she trusted God. Gabriel also told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth who everyone thought was too old to have children, would have a baby boy whom God had chosen to prepare the way for Jesus. Mary said goodbye to her family and friends and went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah. Elizabeth was very happy to see Mary. She knew that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son. An angel had already told Zechariah that Elizabeth's baby would prepare people to welcome Jesus. He was to be called John. Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home to Nazareth.

Joseph was worried when he found out that Mary was expecting a baby before their marriage had taken place. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: 'Don't be afraid to have Mary as your wife.' The angel explained that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son and told Joseph that the baby would be named Jesus which means 'Saviour' because he would save people. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel had told him to do and took Mary as his wife.

Place the angel in the ornament.

Sing: Angels We Have Heard on High

Read:

At this time, the land where Mary and Joseph lived was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Augustus wanted to have a list of all the people in the empire, to make sure they paid their taxes. He ordered everyone to return

to the town where their families originally came from, and enter their names in a register (or census) there. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way (about 70 miles) from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because that is where Joseph's family came from. Most people walked but some lucky people had a donkey to help carry the goods needed for the journey. Joseph and Mary traveled very slowly because Mary's baby was due to be born soon.

Remove piece of straw from the bag.

When they reached Bethlehem they had problems finding somewhere to stay. So many people had come to register their names in the census that every house was full and every bed was taken in all of the guest rooms. The only place to stay that they could find was with the animals. People often kept animals in the house, especially at night, and used them like 'central heating'! People normally slept on a raised/upper level with the animals below to give them extra warmth.

So in the place where the animals slept, Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God.

In those days it was the custom to wrap newborn babies tightly in a long cloth called 'swaddling clothes'. Jesus' bed was the manger that the animals ate their hay from.

Sing: Away In A Manger

Place Straw in the ornament.

Read:

In the hills and fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds looked after their sheep through the long night. As the new day began, suddenly an angel appeared before them and the glory of God shone around them. The shepherds were very, very scared, but the angel said, 'Don't be afraid. I have good news for you and everyone. Today in Bethlehem a Saviour has been born for you. You will find the baby lying in a manger.'

Then many more angels appeared, lighting up the sky. The shepherds heard them praising God singing: 'Glory to God in highest, and peace to everyone on earth.' When the angels had gone the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem to see what has happened.' So the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph. The baby Jesus was lying in a manger as they had been told. When they saw him, they told everyone what the angel had said and everyone who heard the story was astonished. Then the shepherds returned to their sheep, praising God for sending his Son to be their Saviour.

Remove Star from the bag.

Read:

When Jesus was born, a brand new bright star appeared in sky. Some Wise Men in faraway countries saw the star and guessed what it meant. They were very clever men that studied the stars and had read in very old writings that a new star would appear when a great king was born. They set out to find the new king and bring him gifts. The Wise Men followed the star towards Bethlehem where it seemed to stop and shine directly down upon the place where Jesus was.

Place the star in the ornament.

Remove the Christmas bow from the bag.

The Wise Men entered the house where they now lived and found Jesus with Mary. The Wise Men spread the gifts they had brought before Jesus. The gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh. They bowed down and worshipped the newborn King.

Sing: What Child Is This

Place the bow in the ornament.

Read together:

*Unto you is born this day, in the city of David
A Saviour who is Christ the Lord!*

Christmas Day Family Prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather together with family and friends and celebrate the day you were born and showed your unconditional love to the world we say thank you! Thank you for sending Jesus to be born in a manger in Bethlehem. Thank you for living a perfect life and for dying on the cross for our sins. Thank you for the gift of family and friends that we can share this day with, thank you for the gifts we are able to share with each other in honor of the greatest gift ever given. As you have loved us, let us love and honor you this Christmas as we celebrate the ultimate love that is found in you.

Have each member take a piece of red or green paper and write on it something they are thankful for. Roll each piece of paper and place inside the Christmas ball.

Close the ball and hang on your tree.

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding
joy, Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love, And wonders of His
love, And wonders, wonders, of His love.



COME ON RING THOSE BELLS

Do a Google Search for “Come On Ring Those Bells Lyrics”

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

(Have fun with the Glo-ori-a ☺)
Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing over the plains
And the mountains in reply,
Echoing their joyous strains.

Chorus:
Glo-ori-a In excelsis de-o
Glo-ori-a In excelsis de-o

Shepherds, why this Jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly song?

Chorus

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee
Christ, the Lord,
The newborn King

Chorus

See Him in a manger laid
Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth!
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
With us sing our Savior's birth.

AWAY IN A MANGER

Away in a manger no crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing the baby awakes
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love you Lord Jesus; look down from the sky
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus I ask you to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

WHAT CHILD IS THIS

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and donkeys are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spears shall pierce him through,
the cross he bore for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The babe, the Son of Mary.

This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.