



## On your marks

Do you lead one of those groups that traditionally have a New Year's party in January? It's certainly a great way to kick off the New Year, if you do, as well as being an opportunity for the children to invite friends along to something linked to the church. The first festival of the New Year is Epiphany on 6 January. This is when Christians remember the visit of the wise men from the East with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. In fact a large part of the Christian world celebrates this as Christmas Day. It is when the light of Jesus is revealed (*hence Epiphany*) to representatives of the whole world. The wise men followed a star and so here are some ideas for a special event for your children that pick up on this theme.

## Get set

Select from the following suggestions for an Epiphany party. Make sure you advertise the event well and of course, if you decide that you will be looking after the children without parents present, you will need to observe all your church's guidelines for such events (see [Getting Going with a Special Event for Children](#)).

## Go!

1 Decorate your party area with all sorts of stars. Why not attach some of those florescent stars you can buy in packets to the ceiling. You could also use these as part of a reflection at the end. Place star candles/night lights around the party area, although of course in safe places and out of reach. Set up a large star as a focus at the front. During the craft time each child can come and use his/her hand dipped in paint to create his/her own personal star shape inside this larger one.

2 Epiphany could well be named **star-time** because of its story link to the visit of the Magi. Stars open up a connection to this and other Bible stories, alongside the spirit of our age with its obsession with stars and celebrities!

Set up an opening activity as the children arrive, in which they have to discover various 'stars' hidden around the room. For example you could use word clues such as:

A TV talent show? (= *Stars in their Eyes*)

Or a science-fiction programme? (= *Star Trek*).

Perhaps you could have picture clues to some of these as well.

Include some of the many other star-linked examples such as:

*Star Wars* (in all its various manifestations)

sweets such as *Starburst*, *Galaxy* or *Milky way*

TV and pop stars (why not see if the children can guess who they are just from a picture of their eyes!)

even stars that occur in famous nursery rhymes such as *Twinkle, Twinkle, little Star*

Perhaps the children can think of other ways in which stars are used?

For example, the way we grade the quality of a hotel or the stars used on some flags.

3 Gather the children and continue the star theme with some star-related warm-ups! For example:

- Plenty of star jumps
- Opening and closing hands to make 'stars that twinkle'
- In groups of 4 or 5 create star-shapes by linking hands and/ or feet. Go for 5, 6 or 7 etc. pointed stars. This may involve lying on the floor!
- Depending on the size of your group, sit in a circle and toss a ball of sparkly coloured wool back and forth to create a star web of connections.
- In teams you could have a race, in which each member of the team runs to a point to collect part of a star, which they bring back to assemble. To make it more difficult the star that they assemble could be made up of a star cut into strange jigsaw shapes. (N.B. this needs some forward planning of course!)
- Or why not just a simple star hunt, looking for cut out stars hidden around the meeting area?

4 Play a game that involves the children adopting particular shapes whenever certain star words are mentioned. Have music from one of the Star Wars films on as they walk around the room. When the music stops, the children should freeze and await the star word instruction. These include:

- *Black Hole* = curl up into as small a ball as possible
- *Supernova* = all the children must come together in one huge group hug
- *White Dwarf* = they should drop down and 'walk' on their knees
- *Galaxy* = children should join up into chains of five or six
- *Stars* = star-jumping on the spot
- *Shooting star* = running at top speed on the spot
- *Stardust* = all should lie still on the floor

5 Gather the group together to tell them the story of the star that the wise men followed. Use a version of this such as the one from the Lion Storytelling Bible.

Another approach would be to ask what gifts each **gave** for Christmas. Ask how they chose those gifts. Was it because they would like them or because they would suit the other person? The Magi chose gifts for Jesus that suited him and which told the world what sort of person he was going to be - a new sort of King, a new sort of Priest and someone who would have a new sort of death! You could unwrap some things that represent gold, frankincense and myrrh and show how these pointed to who Jesus was. You could also have other wrapped gifts for the children to unwrap, which in turn tell us more about the life of Jesus. Let the children tell you what they think each of these other gifts might mean. These gifts could include a torch, a map, a doctor's kit, a toy lamb, and a roll of bread. Bring these symbols together to help them see what sort of gift to the world Jesus is.

6 Spend time making a craft on the theme of stars and gifts. For example:



- Paper lanterns
- Decorating/Glass painting of a small jam-jar as a tea-light holder
- Ethiopian star crosses – you can find more details in [A-cross the World](#)
- Star-decorated boxes

7 Have a time to sing together using songs linked to light and stars

8 Draw everyone together for a time of quiet reflection at the end.

If you have attached florescent stars to the ceiling, turn the main lights down and have the children all lie down and look up at them. How many are there? How many are there in the sky outside? Link all this to God's special promise to Abraham that one day he would have a family that would be as many as the stars in the sky (see Genesis 22:17). This is the family of Faith made up of those who follow Jesus. But how did all this happen?

Ask the children to sit up where they are and show them a large elongated 4-pointed star that you have prepared beforehand. It was a star that pointed to the place where Jesus was born.

Now turn this star around and on the back you should have traced out clearly the cross that is at the heart of this star-shape. Jesus the baby in the crib became Jesus the man on the cross. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to rescue us from all that is bad, so we might become bright stars in his new family.

Have ready a small star for each child to take home with them, with their name on one side and a promise from God on the other, e.g. 'Arise Shine, your Light has come' Isaiah 60:1

9 Don't forget to include food at some point! Keep the theme here too with star biscuits, jellies in star-shaped moulds, sandwiches cut in triangles and arranged as stars etc.

Have fun!