



On your marks

Sadly, by the time many of us get round to Christmas itself, there is a very real danger that we have already begun to tire of hearing about it! Christmas begins in the shops in October (or even earlier); it is on the TV and in the magazines from November (or earlier); it is on the minds of children's leaders and ministers from December onwards (or earlier!!) Packing up presents to go overseas; packing in extra shopping to feed the hordes; packing in carol concerts and family visits can leave us feeling like wanting to pack in Christmas altogether. The following activity ideas pick up on this theme and are ones that could be used with your children's group in the weeks leading up to the day itself or as part of an all-age activity time together. You might even find you could use some of the suggestions below as part of your Christmas service!

Get set

Only a few simple props are needed but the main requirements are a sense of fun, an imagination and a willingness to try something different! With each activity, there is a simple Christmas thought that the leader could use and also a Bible Link.

Go!

1. Christmas has so much to do with presents, parcels and packages! Packing precious gifts into neat bundles can be a challenge:
 - How small a package can each person make his or herself into? Challenge the group to pack themselves up into as tight bundles as possible.
 - How much can you get into a package? Put down on the floor a half sheet from a broadsheet newspaper and then challenge the whole group to stand together tightly packed within this small area.
 - How much can you pack into a parcel? Hand out some boxes of equal size (a set of food cartons for example) and now produce a huge pile of broadsheet newspapers. Who can pack the most sheets of newspaper into their box? The challenge needs to be refereed carefully!

Christmas thought: At Christmas, God decided to wrap himself up as a very small parcel and become a baby in order to come and live a fully human life. This is the miracle and mystery of the incarnation.

Bible link: Matthew 1:20-23

2. Getting something big into something small is another packing challenge at Christmas. It might be bringing home the surprise bike in the back of the car boot; hiding the surprise trampoline in the garden shed; or fitting a bulky new overcoat into a manageable sized box for wrapping.



Try the following well-known challenge.

Produce a large Christmas card with the Nativity scene on it. Can the group think of a way that a fully grown human being could literally get inside this picture? I mean really inside!

It is possible!

Take some scissors and then make a series of cuts from the folded side of the card towards the opposite edge but stop about two centimetres from that edge. Now turn the card around and do the same from the open end of the card, cutting in between the cuts you have already made but again stopping about two centimeters before the fold. Now slowly open the card and it should unravel to become a big circle of card into which you can literally step! You might even be able to get your whole body through it.

Christmas thought: At Christmas God Almighty decided to step into this world and into the picture of our lives so that God could be with us in all that life is and through all that life throws at us.

Bible link: John 1:14

3. Play a consequences game with paper that is folded over and over again to make a small concertina story sheet. For groups with younger children it would be a good idea to prepare the folds beforehand and write out part of the sentence into which they will insert some missing words.

Hand around a piece of letter-writing paper.

Fold it over and over about ten times so that each fold hides the fold before it.

Now unfold it.

Now the first person should write their name in the top space and then fold that over and pass it on.

The next person then writes the words 'at Christmas', folds that over and passes it on.

The next person writes the words 'gave a...' followed by an interesting choice of present; fold that over and pass it on.

The next person writes 'to his or her...' and then fill in a relative; fold it over and pass it on.

The next person adds 'wrapped in...' with an interesting choice of wrapping; fold it and pass it on.

And then the next adds 'tied up with...' with a possible tying material; fold it and pass it on.

The next person then adds 'which was sent by...', choosing a way of sending the present.

The next person adds 'and also by...' choosing another means of transport.



The next person adds 'It took...', putting in how long it took to get there.

And the last person writes 'and it was that best Christmas surprise ever!'

Finally, pass the multi-folded piece of story to the next person, who should open it out and read the strange and mysterious story of Christmas that has been created.

Christmas thought: God planned the miracle of Christmas long ago. It had so many twists and turns throughout the Old Testament. There were plenty of clues but still in the end the gift of Christ at Christmas took everyone by surprise

Bible link: Hebrews 1:1-2

4. There is so much packing, wrapping and decorating at Christmas that the real story just gets lost! It is there somewhere but sometimes you have to look hard to find it. Within the following crazy story are 14 Christmas related words or phrases. You will have to look hard to find all but one of them in between the words of what is written. When you find them out, you will discover the true meaning of Christmas. How many can you find? Challenge the group to work in teams on this:

Christmas is packed up there somewhere!

Christmas?! Just a time for seeing people who don't normally say hello very often.

Just arguments about who will visit.

Just about who is best able to put up with whom for how long!

Or it's family squabbles about who did or didn't like Abba by the Mamma Mia cast.

Last year we had overseas visitors from Oman, Germany and Australia.

Who will forget when Jose phoned to say she was packing socks full of alcohol yoghurt as presents - can you believe it?

And Hans, who emailed to say he was coming by train tomorrow or ship at the weekend - how inconvenient!

And when he did come, he and his friends sang Elvis songs but not one crooned on key.

And as for Sheila, I just hope a CEO near the dessert trolley doesn't spot her again.

And, to crown it all, Omar came late!

[Words to find: kings; peace on earth; baby; camel; Joseph; worship; star; crown; holy; love; angel; manger; stable; donkey.]



Christmas thought: A baby in the back streets. in a stable, somewhere in a crowded Bethlehem was easy to overlook! Today we highlight the scene with the shepherds, stars and other visitors, but at the time most people wouldn't have noticed what was happening right in the midst of them

Bible link: Luke 2:5-7

5. 'Packing up' Christmas altogether is a great temptation when the sellotape and your patience finally run out! However, try this final activity on the packing theme.

Prepare some large capital Gs out of the card and also some smaller, half-size capital Os and Ds, which together spell the word GOD, of course.

Now God at Christmas packed himself into the space of a baby.

Challenge the group to put the letters together so they become a baby snugly wrapped up in the papoose.

To do it, turn the letters D and O on their sides. Put the D into the lower half of the large capital G like the blankets at the bottom of the papoose.

Put eyes and mouth on the O and place it in the upper part of the capital G.

Hold the GOD baby now at the top and gently rock him in his cradle.

Christmas thought: Here is the miracle of Christmas - the child born to us according to Isaiah's prophecy. This child was also Almighty God and Everlasting Father.

Bible link: Isaiah 9:6-7

Have fun... and please don't pack up Christmas but celebrate it!