

Brain and Soul Boosting at Christmas Time

A special Christmas edition of Brain and Soul Boosting with three sessions exploring the Christmas story



PILGRIMS'
FRIEND
SOCIETY

Introduction

Welcome to our special Christmas 2022 edition of Brain and Soul Boosting.

The Brain and Soul Boosting (BSB) series was developed to stimulate mental and spiritual health in older people meeting in small groups. It's also been found to work in pairs as a one-to-one.

If you've used BSB before, you'll know that it works best when the sequence of each session is followed.

Christmas BSB is an activity that exercises our brains, warms our hearts and brings us into the Spirit of Christmas. Questions prompt thoughts and discussions about Christmas, and there are activities that everyone will enjoy. Although BSB was developed for older people younger people are enjoying it too, which makes it ideal for Christmas and family get-togethers. It can even be done over Zoom at Christmas time!

This version follows the arc of the Christmas story, from the Old Testament to the New. It is brought out in three separate sessions, each drawing out a different aspect of Christmas and what it means in our lives. The first session looks at how Jesus' birth was planned and prophesied, the second the angel's announcement to Mary and the journey to Bethlehem, and the third the birth of Jesus that we celebrate on Christmas Day.



*Ideal for
Christmas
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get-togethers*

Each session is in five parts:

- 1 A short Scripture reading
- 2 Exploring what this day means to us, with points for discussion
- 3 An aspect of the biblical story of Christmas
- 4 A small activity to do together
- 5 Reflections and a closing prayer

You will need:

- A table to sit around
- A well-lit, warm room
- Pens and paper
- Materials for handiwork, e.g., some Christmas cards to write to others
- Time to be unhurried so you can enjoy the session

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Session 1:

The Anticipation of Christmas

1. Introduction

Read:

Every good story has a beginning and an end. The Christmas story began before the world was made. God knew that humanity would fall into sin, and that Jesus Christ would come to save us.

1 Peter 1:20 says, *‘God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but He has now revealed Him to you in these last days.’*

Around 700 years before Jesus’ birth God told Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, precisely where He would be born.

Micah wrote, *‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.’* (**Micah 5:2**).

The prophet Isaiah wrote, *‘Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.’* (**Isaiah 7:14**).

2. Discussion

Play the hymn ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem.’

- How much do you look forward to Christmas?
- What are your favourite Christmas hymns and carols?
- What was the best part of Christmas for you, as a child?
- Did you believe that Father Christmas would come down the chimney and leave presents on Christmas night?
- Did your family have a home-made Christmas pudding?
- Is there something you would like to ask God to give you, this Christmas?

3. Activity

Do a word puzzle

RSHAMITSC

How many words can you make from these letters? There is at least one word with nine letters. *(Answers on page 8)*

Make a Christmas table decoration

You can do this by putting a tall candle on a suitable plate and putting colourful berries and leaves around the base of it. You can find more ideas on the internet by searching 'How to Make a Christmas Table Decoration.'



4. Closing

Read:

'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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.' **(Isaiah 9:6)**

We see the prophetic words of Isaiah and Micah being fulfilled at Christmas time. Although we don't see it yet, ultimately Jesus Christ will rule the world, bringing peace and justice.

Let's end in prayer, remembering to thank God for this amazing gift of Jesus Christ, His son.

Session 2:

The Angel Appears to Mary

1. Introduction

Read:

Luke 1: 26 – 35 (from The Message)

‘God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin’s name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning! You’re beautiful with God’s beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you.

She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, ‘Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call His name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called ‘Son of the Highest. ‘The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; He will rule Jacob’s house forever - no end, ever, to His kingdom.’

Mary said to the angel, “But how? I’ve never slept with a man.’

The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you;

Therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God.’

2. Discussion

Play the hymn ‘Angels from the Realms of Glory’

- What do you think angels look like?
- Have you, or anyone you know, ever seen an angel?
- If yes, how did you feel?
- If you saw an angel now what would you say to him?

There's an account in the Bible of a man who told an angel he didn't believe what he was saying! The same angel, Gabriel, who spoke to Mary, had spoken 6 months' earlier to Zechariah, her cousin Elizabeth's husband. (**Luke 1:11**). Gabriel tells him that his wife will have a son, but Zechariah doesn't believe the angel. He says, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.'

- Was Zechariah telling the angel Gabriel that he was lying?
- What happened when Zechariah came out of the Holy Place? (**Luke 1: 17-25**)
- What does this story tell us about angels?

3. Activity

Make some pinecone Christmas trees

Get some simple pinecones, some silver stars and some small baubles. Stick the baubles on the pinecones and put a silver star on the top.

Make some Christmas paper chains

Cut some even size strips of different coloured paper and some glue make them into the old-fashioned Christmas chain decorations.



4. Closing

Read:

Mary's response to the angel Gabriel (**Luke 1:46-55**) has been called 'The Magnificat' which means my soul magnifies the Lord in Latin. It reads:

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

for God has looked with favour on the lowliness of the Almighty's servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name.

God's mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation.

God has shown strength with God's arm;

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

God has helped servant Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise God made to our ancestors to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

Imagine if we were to write our own Magnificats! We don't have a prominent place in Christian history like Mary, but God has given each one of us a purpose in life (**Ephesians 2:10**). We see God working in our lives and in others. Let's thank Him in prayer for all these things.

Session 3:

The Journey to Bethlehem and Christ's Birth in the Stable

1. Introduction

Read:

'And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child' (Luke 2:4-5).

There were no coaches or trains in Israel in those days!

Mary and Joseph had to travel more than 60 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to register in the Census that Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor had initiated. Bethlehem was where Joseph's family lived, so they had to go even though Mary was nine months' pregnant. Bethlehem was crowded with families arriving to take part in the Census, and **Luke 2:6-7** records, 'While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.'

At his birth Luke records the light of the Lord's glory surrounding shepherds guarding their flocks in the fields, and an angel appearing telling them that the Messiah has been born. The angels were terrified. Then a host of angels appeared, all praising God. The shepherds found their way to the manger and worshipped Him, then went and told everyone what had happened.

2. Discussion

Play the hymn 'O Holy Night'

- What do you think Mary and Joseph's journey was like?
- Have you ever ridden a donkey?
- What was the most memorable journey you have made?

- Have you made a journey to join family this Christmas?
- What is the best gift you could give to Jesus, now?

3. Activities

Make some Christmas puzzles

Cut up old Christmas cards and hand them out to be put together. You could use one of Pilgrims' Friend Society's Scripture jigsaws (visit the resources section of our website).

Write thank you notes

Write notes to people who have been a blessing to you this year. Thank them for their gift of faithfulness and love.



4. Closing

Read:

“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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Prayer:

‘Thank you for the best gift we have ever received, your Son the Lord Jesus, and the gift of eternal life. Thank you for planning our way of salvation from the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1: 3-5.**) Thank you for the faithfulness of Mary, in accepting the divine plan. Thank you for Joseph, who believed the ‘angel of the Lord’ who explained that Mary’s conception was not of man, but of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for inspiring the men who wrote the Scriptures so that we might learn from them, and give You glory! Amen. ‘

Answer to quiz in Session 1

How many words you can make from R S H A M I T S C

<i>Christmas</i>	<i>smart</i>	<i>sacred</i>	<i>maths</i>	<i>car</i>
<i>miscast</i>	<i>smith</i>	<i>crash</i>	<i>match</i>	<i>aim ...</i>
<i>racist</i>	<i>mastic</i>	<i>amiss</i>	<i>trash</i>	
<i>chasms</i>	<i>mirths</i>	<i>trams</i>	<i>charm</i>	
<i>charms</i>	<i>scars</i>	<i>carts</i>	<i>itch</i>	

There are many more words at: <https://wordmaker.info/how-many/christmas.html>

About Brain and Soul Boosting and Pilgrims' Friend Society

Created by Louise Morse and Janet Jacob, Brain and Soul Boosting sessions are designed to be actively relational, drawing participants into relationship with each other and are designed to strengthen participants' spirits and souls with Scripture and spiritual insights. Collaborative and fun, this guide helps the group leader to be part of the group, engaging in conversation with each participant and drawing them out of themselves. Although each session builds on what each person has learnt in the past, they are not encouraged to only remember the past, but to anticipate a glorious future in Heaven, as the Holy Spirit within each believer anticipates the future, a life more real and glorious than we can imagine.



Pilgrims' Friend Society has been supporting older people since 1807. We help older people to live fulfilled later lives in our independent living housing and residential care homes, and through the resources and training for Christians and churches in their ministry to older people.

Find out more about us at www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk and don't forget to explore our resources section.