

Stewarding The Story

Kids and the Christmas story

Christmas and kids were made for each other. The main attraction in the story is a baby surrounded by animals after all. It's like God wrote this chapter with a younger audience in mind.

No different than us, the children in our care, need to hear and experience the story over and over. We are meant to steward this tale, to hold it for our generation and pass it down to the next so they can in turn pass it down someday. We know this miracle happened because there have been people of every generation since that have guarded and retold it. Now is our time, to tell and retell so our children will absorb it into the fibers of their hearts. Here are a few ways to present these characters to our kids:

It is a story! Use books. Illustrated picture books. Board books. Lift the flap books. It doesn't matter, just read them; a book a night (or before naps). Go to thrift stores and build your stock that you pack away and bring back out every year with your Christmas decorations. Go to the library and raid their seasonal collection. We all know reading to and with kids is good for them in all kinds of ways. Why not read them stories that capture their imagination around this beautiful truth we are collectively celebrating?

Be tactile Not every child learns by listening. Give kids tools to build and touch. Make a stable with blankets. Have nativity sets they can play with and move around (and don't be surprised to find Joseph in the fridge or baby Jesus in the bathroom sink). Use Play-doh to make a manger or a star in the sky. God needed to come in an incarnational way with skin and bones that could touch and hug. No surprise many of us need to touch and

feel details of the story for it to become more real.

Act it out Nothing helps children absorb the story more than playing it out. Whether holding figurines from a nativity set or holding a baby doll, kids can take on the parts of the various characters. What did they say? Do? Feel? How did the others respond? As children

consider what it felt like to journey on a donkey (and older kids make for great donkeys BTW) or to have an angel appear, the realities of the characters' experiences begin to sink in.

Sing the story. Christmas carols are a beautiful tradition that capture a small part of the larger story and focus in on it. Play *Little Drummer Boy* and ask kids what their gift to Jesus can be. Play *Away in A Manger* or *Silent Night* while your children lie with their eyes closed picturing the manger and the baby. Have a dance party to *Joy to the World* and remember that this is a birthday celebration we hold every year for God himself. Music speaks to our hearts and the lyrics of traditional carols help put the story on our lips.

Visualize the story. 'Tis the season to gather your friends and family, both young and old, furry or feather, to experience the first Christmas story as told by a donkey in Sony Pictures Animation's "The Star." Don't miss the opportunity this Christmas season to join in the journey and share the hope found in a savior for all.

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. I've heard you must hear a word seven times in a new language before you remember it. It takes 30 days to build a habit. So no surprise it takes repetition to remember and absorb a story. We need it and our children need it. And here's the benefit for us: when we repeat the story all of these different ways for our kids' sakes, we are repeating it for our own hearts too.

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