
“The Shepherds of Bethlehem”

Advent Sunday School Lesson on Luke 2:8-20

In Nativity Noteworthy: Heroes of the Christmas Story (Celebrated and Lesser-Known)

There are a lot of great truths to take from the story of Jesus’ birth. There are also a great many clichés and worn-out elements of the Nativity narrative. In this series, we will encounter several characters and look at the story through the lens of various perspectives. Some of these figures are already well-known, but others will be among the unsung heroes, at least for many people. Lessons will highlight who they are and their significance to the life of Christ and to our lives today.



The focus of this lesson is the shepherds, who were first to receive the news of Christ’s birth. In these humble sheep caretakers we see God revealing Himself to average everyday people, and recognize that Jesus came for everyone. We also note the reaction of the shepherds, who were immediately full of joy and enthusiasm.

Character focus: Bethlehem shepherds, first century pasture. We don’t know the exact number present, but it is likely they were simple people, not very well off, and in great need of a bath. The monotony of their lamb-guarding duties was broken up by a heavenly host of angelic voices announcing the birth of a Savior.

Passage: Luke Chapter 2:8-20

Importance in the Nativity: God chose to announce the birth of Jesus to a pack of farmers on the outskirts of a tiny town. The shepherds were quick to follow the angelic directions, and they were also quick to spread the news to others around them.



Significance to us: We ought to rejoice and be glad at what God has done. Not only do we quickly listen and follow His instructions, but we should make it known to others that He is mighty and wonderful!

Materials Needed for this lesson: Paper, decorative materials, coffee filters, cups, glitter, pipe cleaners, paper plates, stapler.

Bonus Ideas:

Don't miss all our [Christmas lessons for Children](#) and [Christmas Coloring Pages](#)

- See the [Christmas Shepherds and Angels Crafts](#) and [Nativity Craft Video](#) we also have some [fun sheep Bible crafts](#)
- Compare our [Nativity Object Lessons for Advent Children's Sermons](#)
- For a simple printable option, use the [Angels and Shepherds coloring pages](#)
- Compare our other free [lesson on the Shepherds of Luke 2:8-20](#) and the full length [Sunday School Lesson from Luke 2:1-20](#)

Additional Advent Season Fun:

"The Shepherd on the shelf" Try this fun twist on the classic "Elf on the Shelf" craze. Adapt your Advent watchman into one of the Nativity characters! Create a paper bag, sock, or hanging puppet and name it after one of the features of the Christmas story (shepherd, angel, Magi, etc.). Move your puppet daily and remind children of the important parts of the Nativity. This is also a helpful reminder that God is always watching!



Lesson Introduction / Game

Lesson Opening: This lesson focuses on the shepherds who came to meet Jesus. It also involves light, sound, and a joyous announcement. Consider the following opening activities, adjusting to available timing and audience:

- Round up the sheep! Play a sheep game to introduce the topic of shepherds. Divide kids into teams. Scatter cotton balls around the room, and challenge students to run around picking up the cotton balls and placing them in a designated cup (one cup per team). The catch is that they can only use a clothespin to grab the cotton balls, and the other hand must remain behind their backs. This activity can be done as a relay race or a free-for-all, as space allows.
- Sing-off: Split kids into two groups. Challenge them to a singing match of the song “Halle-lu, Halle-lu, Halle-lu, Hallelujah/Praise Ye the Lord”, taking turns standing up when each phrase is uttered. See who can sing with the most gusto.
- Shadow charades: pull up a sheet with a flashlight behind it (representing the light of the angels). Have students place hands in front of the sheet and challenge them to make fun shadow shapes. Other students can guess what the shapes represent.
- Puzzle relay: in honor of the shepherds running around town to “relay” a message, have students complete a relay race in teams, running across the room to pick up their “message.” This message will be various jigsaw puzzles. As students race to pick up pieces, the team can put the puzzle together. See which team can be first to complete the puzzle.



Explain to kids that today they will be hearing about some more people in the Bible who received very important messages. These were shepherds, and they received some important and wonderful news.

Lesson: Shepherds of Bethlehem for Kids

Begin by talking a bit about shepherds. What is a shepherd, and what does a shepherd do? Discuss historical and current shepherds (yes, they still exist), and how important it is to take care of sheep. Sheep are not always the smartest creatures, and they need a guide who is willing to guard and care for them. Invite students to brainstorm any times or people in the Bible who were shepherds...Hint, consider:

- David was a shepherd before he became king
- Joseph and his brothers were shepherds
- Moses was a shepherd when God called him
- Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd

So it must be that God has a special place in His heart for shepherds. Well, in spite of some famous flock friends in the Old Testament, the shepherds at the time of Jesus's birth were probably not very popular or well-off. They likely were humble, not well-regarded, and not well-educated. One night these guys were out in the field watching their animals, like they did every other night, when something remarkable happened:

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. -Luke 2:8-9



Imagine, boredom and absolute darkness...and then suddenly a huge light appears out of nowhere!! It's no wonder the shepherds were ready to soil their loin cloths...

Many times in the Bible, angel visits are met with fear, and it makes sense. A sudden vision of a Holy host would be surprising if not disconcerting.

Ask children what they might think or feel if a huge Heavenly light suddenly appeared. These shepherds probably did act a bit nervous, because the first thing the angel told them was not to fear:

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" -Luke
2:10-14*

This is especially important to note. It is not too often in the Bible we see a "multitude of heavenly host". Angels often come one at a time to relay messages, but here there is a whole band of celestial beings giving praise to God. Clearly, this was a spectacular and special announcement. And they were giving the message to plain old shepherds! They were practically janitors or garbage men of the first century!

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying



in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. -Luke 2:15-17

So how do the shepherds react to this announcement? After a certain initial shock, they suddenly rush to find the holy family. Now, one has to wonder if they left the sheep or took the baa-ing herd with them. Scripture doesn't say, but it likely is not significant one way or another. The important thing is that the shepherds "went with haste", eager to see what the angels were talking about. They didn't doubt or question, but ran to find Jesus.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. -Luke 2:18-20

So after finding Jesus, what do the Shepherds do? It's particularly important to note this, actually. They visited Jesus, but did not merely hop back out into the sheep field. We see that they did return, but they were not the same as they had been. They "made known the saying that had been told them", proclaiming to others what they had seen and heard and letting everyone know the wonderful news. Then they glorified and praised God, grateful that the news had been given them and that they could receive such amazing and blessed proclamation.

It's also helpful to remember that Jesus is not only the "good Shepherd" who is willing to know His sheep and lay down His life for them...He is also the sacrificial lamb. It's possible that some of the sheep these guys tended might have been used for temple sacrifices. So the baby they visited in the manger would one day be the ultimate sacrifice for all people...

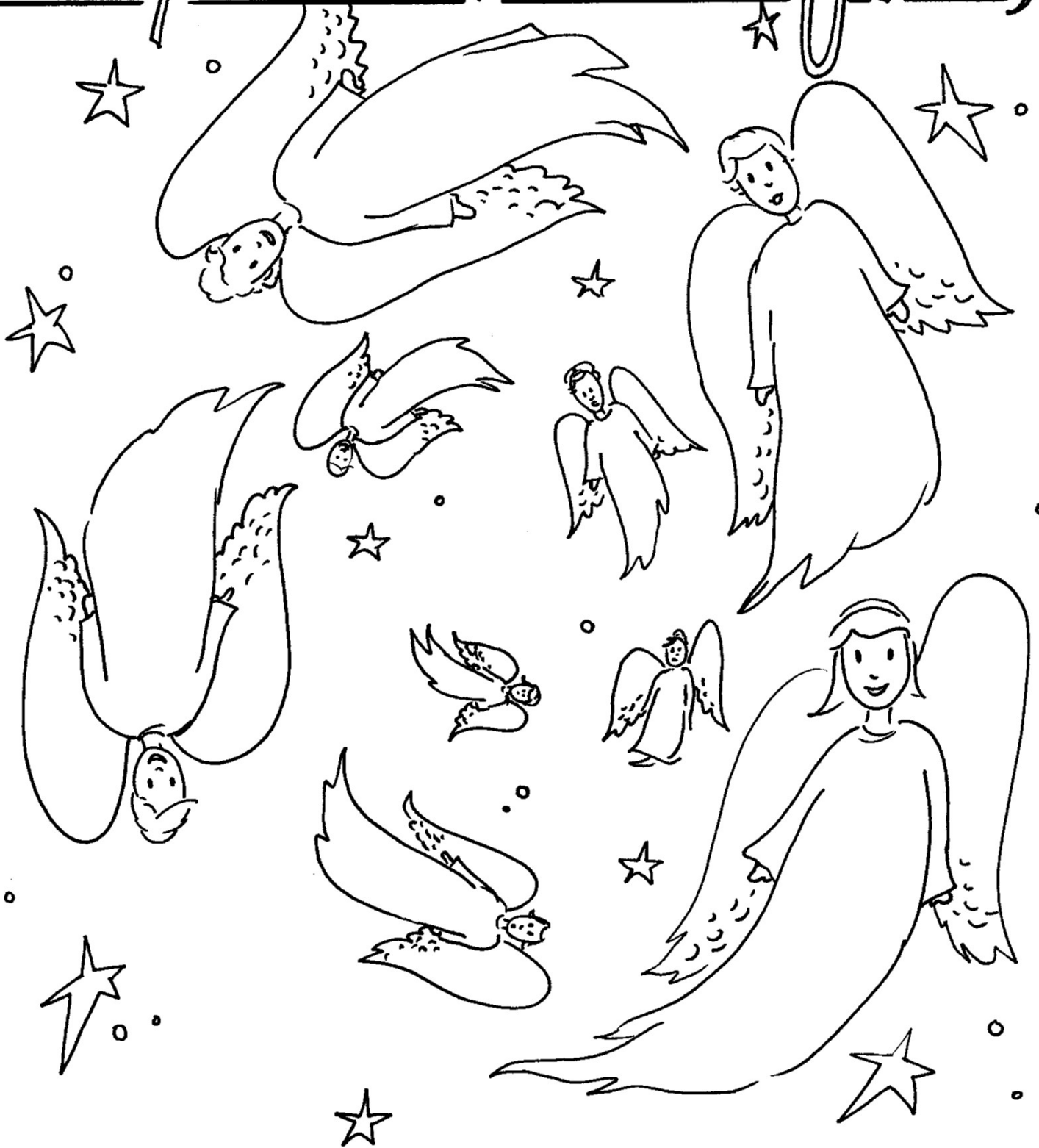


And what are we to take away from this story? We see that Jesus came for ALL people, and God cares about and shares His love with all people. We also note the reaction that the shepherds had, and which we can also have. Not only do we hear the story with joy and grateful praise, but we want to share the news with others, and to glorify God in all we say and do. That's something that lasts all the year through!

Close the lesson with prayer and thank God for loving us and coming to die for us. Thank Him for Biblical examples that paved the way for us, and ask for guidance in pointing the way to Christ. Pray for hearts open to His word and service throughout the season.

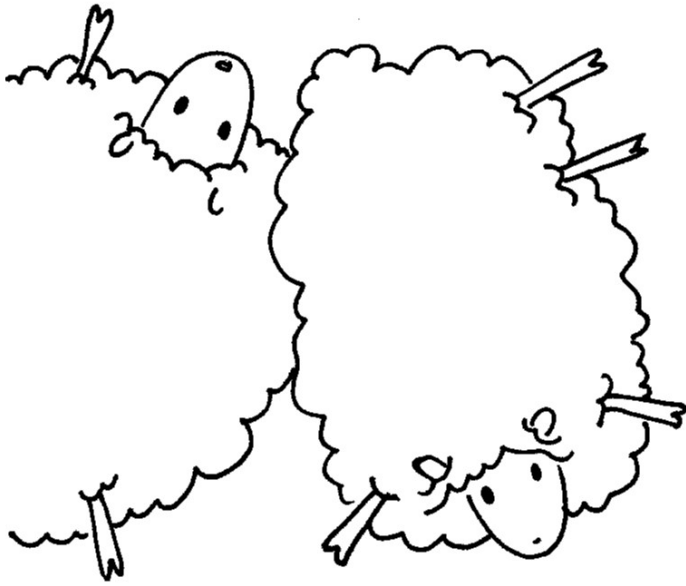


Glory to God in the highest;



and on [☆]earth [☆]peace [☆]among [☆]those [☆]
with whom he is pleased! [☆]

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Mandy Groce '11



Christmas Angels & Shepherds

Crafts for Sunday School

Tidings of Joy! Craft Ideas for The Shepherds and Angels

The Nativity story of the shepherds receiving good news is an exciting and tremendously joyous one. It lends itself to great songs and wonderful exclamations...as well as some fun craft possibilities! Angels are always quite craft-able, and these simple options can be used for all ages, and double as fun ornamentation, too. For the shepherd staff, you may wish to add an extra element of fun by inserting a candy cane within the pipe cleaners. You might also wish to create a [sheep craft](#) to accompany the shepherds!

- See all our [Advent](#) and [Christmas Coloring Pages](#) for kids
- See all our [Sunday School Lessons for Christmas](#) and [Christmas Crafts](#)
- Don't miss our [printable Advent Coloring pages](#) and [Christmas Sunday School Lessons & Activities for kids](#)

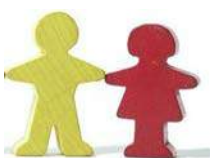
Verses or Captions to Consider...

Christ has come...rejoice! The angels sang...the shepherds ran...the world celebrated a new kind of king!

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. -Luke 2:10-11

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

*"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" -Luke 2:14*



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Craft one: “Angelic Plate”

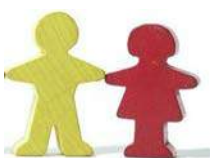
You will need:

- Scissors
- Paper plates
- Construction paper
- Glue, tape, or stapler
- Markers or crayons (optional)
- Hole puncher
- Pipe cleaner or string



Procedure:

1. Decorate the plate with markers to make an angel face. You can add google eyes and a paper mouth as well, if desired.
2. Cut one paper plate in half to create “wings” for the angel.
3. Decorate wings, if desired. Add glitter if you’re feeling brave.
4. Attach the wings behind the angel’s face. A stapler is recommended, but glue or tape would work as well.
5. Punch a hole at the top of the angel and attach a string or pipe cleaner “halo.” This doubles as a hanging device!



Craft Two: “Cup of Gladness” Angel

You will need:

- Scissors
- Tape, glue, or stapler
- Styrofoam or paper cups
- Decorative materials
- Pipe cleaners
- Coffee filters
- Jingle bell (optional)

Procedure:

1. Decorate the cup to be an angel, using markers or stickers for a face and features.
2. Fold a coffee filter in half to make wings (or use paper or cupcake liners if desired).
3. Attach the “wings” with a stapler, tape, or glue.
4. Insert a pipe cleaner into the top of the angel for a “halo” and hanger. *Option: add a jingle bell for fun and festive noise!
5. Attach a verse or caption. Display your angel and make a joyful noise!



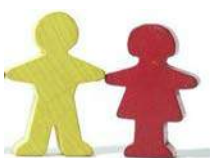
Craft Three: “Shepherd Staff”

You will need:

- Pipe cleaners (assorted colors)
- Candy cane (optional)

Procedure:

1. Allow students to select at least three pipe cleaners in their choice of colors.
2. Help children twist and braid pipe cleaners together, crossing over in an alternating left/right pattern as a braid.
3. Wrap around a candy cane, if desired.
4. Hook the pipe cleaners into the shape of a shepherd staff.
5. Attach a verse via hole punch, if desired.



Shepherds


A Christmas activity worksheet from ministry-to-children.com

The Angels Visit the Shepherds

The  said:

“This very day your Savior was
born – Christ the Lord!”

Luke 2:11

The  said:









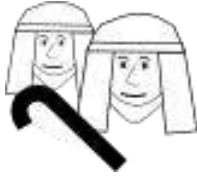
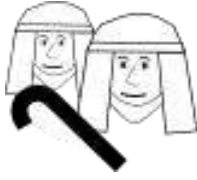
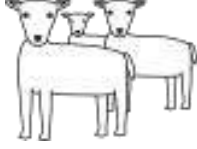
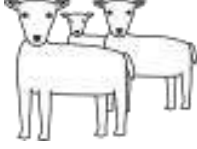
“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see
this thing that has happened.”

Luke 2:15

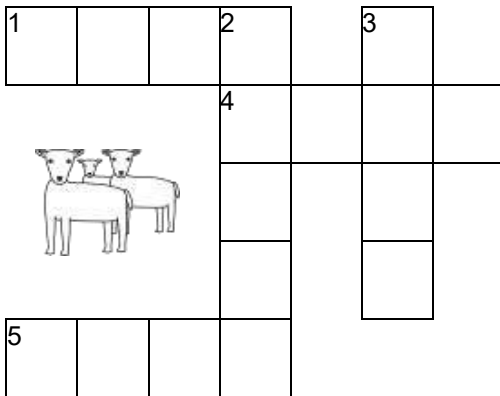
They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger.
Luke 2:16

Here is a game to help you remember the story of the shepherds.

- Color the cards and cut them apart.
- Put the cards face down on the table in rows.
- Turn over two at a time and try to find the matching cards.

 Mary	 Mary	 Baby Jesus	 Baby Jesus	 Joseph	 Joseph
 Angels	 Angels	 Shepherds	 Shepherds	 Sheep	 Sheep

Shepherds in the Bible



Across

1. Psalm 23 says "The _____ is my shepherd."
4. _____ the prophet was a shepherd.
5. Jesus said, "I am the _____ shepherd."

Down

2. King _____ was a shepherd before he was king.
3. Shepherds were the first visitors when Jesus was _____.

Word List

AMOS

BORN

DAVID

GOOD

LORD

The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen.
Luke 2:20

How do **you**
praise God?

G I N S

P Y A R

Y O B E

L E L T

Angels

An activity worksheet from ministry-to-children.com

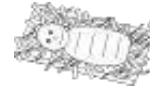
Here is a story for you to read.



Mary



Gabriel



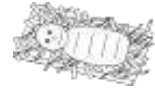
baby



was a young woman who loved God. The angel



visited .  said to , "You will have a



You will name the  Jesus."

All about Angels

Find these words in the puzzle.

Angels come from **HEAVEN** to bring a
MESSAGE from **GOD**.


CHERUBIM, **SERAPHIM**, and
ARCHANGELS are kinds of angels.


GABRIEL and **MICHAEL** are two angels
who are mentioned in the Bible.


A	R	C	H	A	N	G	E	L	S
A	K	H	O	B	Z	I	P	A	E
U	H	E	A	V	E	N	T	X	R
J	M	R	E	G	O	D	Y	H	A
O	C	U	Q	G	I	R	F	S	P
G	A	B	R	I	E	L	L	W	H
V	M	I	C	H	A	E	L	N	I
D	E	M	E	S	S	A	G	E	M


What did Gabriel say to Mary? Use the code to find out.


Luke 1:31


























A

B

D

E

F


G


H


I


J


L


























M

N

O

R

S

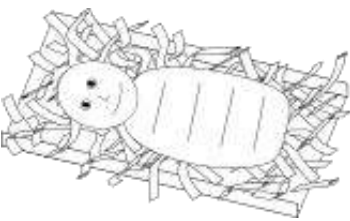
T

U


V

W


Y



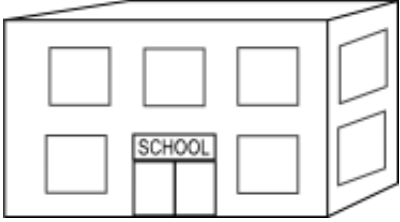
Gabriel came to Mary to bring a message from God. Circle each place where you can share God’s message.



home



church



school

I will share God’s message with _____.

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Help you tell kids about Jesus!

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- serving where God has placed you.
- telling children about Jesus.
- allowing us to be a part of your mission.

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2. Link to us from your blog or church website.
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4. Tell a friend to google "Ministry to Children."
5. Add me (and our team) to your personal prayer list.

I'd love to hear your feedback on this download. Tony@ministry-to-children.com

May God bless you and continue to bless your ministry!



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