

Keeping Christ in Christmas - Resources

Luke 2:10-11 *"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.'"*

People are most open to visiting church during Christmas.

Invite everyone you know. Also invite them to special church programs like a children's pageant, live Nativity scene, or Christmas cantata. Engage them in conversation afterward. Ask questions like: "Did your family have any religious traditions during the holidays?", "Where do you see yourself on your spiritual journey?" and "Would you like to know God personally?"

Go caroling.

Invite people in your small group to serenade your neighbors and at each home leave a printed invitation to your church. No singers? Form a kazoo band and "play" carols instead. You might want to leave a small gift, like a Christmas ornament or an evangelistic book, like Josh McDowell's *More Than a Carpenter*. The JESUS Film Project® offers discounts on bulk purchases of their DVDs based on the Gospel of Luke. Each version of the *JESUS* film invites the viewer to respond to what they've seen by surrendering their lives to Christ.

Volunteer.

You never know whom you might meet. Ring the bell for the Salvation Army, play Santa Claus, or serve in a soup kitchen. Visit prisons, hospitals or nursing homes. Talk about the reason for the season.

Do something nice for a neighbor.

Shovel someone's sidewalk or offer to help put up Christmas lights. It's not just about giving gifts; it's about giving of ourselves. You can bring up the fact that Jesus gave of Himself-the Greatest Gift of all-and we each can receive Him.

Bake cookies.

Get people together to bake cookies and put them into baggies to give out to non-Christian friends or to a particular nursing home. Tell people you are handing out these cookies to show the love of Christ.

Host a children's party and give Candy Canes as favors.

Invite your child's friends to a party and show the DVD of "Merry Christmas Charlie Brown" which includes the gospel. Have food, play a few fun games and maybe even make Christmas cookies. Attach the legend (below) behind the making of the candy cane to them with a ribbon.

*If time allows you could read the book *The Legend of the Candy Cane*, written by Lori Walburg. This book is a sweet book, which tells the story of the candy maker, John Sonneman, who is new to town. A curious little girl, Lucy, visits him, helps him unpack*

and then discovers a new candy, the candy cane. He explains the candy cane and they together give each family in the town a candy cane for Christmas.

Discussion #1 (recommended for K-1st graders)

Hold the Candy Cane upside down and say, “J is for Jesus, who was born on Christmas day. (Turn it upright) What does it remind you of? Who was the first to find out about Jesus’ birth? (After hearing their answers) The shepherds in the field watching their flocks at night were the first to hear the angels. This represents the shepherd’s crook that they used to herd sheep.

Do you see the stripes? The Bible says, “By his stripes we are healed.” See the red stripe? The red reminds us that Jesus gave His life for us. Red also reminds us how much He loves us. See the white stripe? The white is there because we often do bad things leaving us “dirty” inside. Christians believe when Jesus died, He took on Himself the punishment for our bad things which means that we can be “clean”, white inside.

So when you eat your candy canes this Christmas remember J is for Jesus. Remember the shepherds who were the first to hear about Jesus. And, remember the red and white stripes which show us how much God loves us and that we can be clean on the inside.

Discussion #2 (recommended for 2nd-5th graders)

Start with dialog above and add this paragraph after talking about the stripes:

What flavor is a candy cane? Yes, it is peppermint. Peppermint is a spice similar to hyssop. Hyssop is an herb used in the Bible for healing. Christians believe that Jesus can heal the inside of us He changes us from wanting to live bad to wanting to live good lives.

Discussion # 3 (read aloud or print the story on cards to tie it to the candy canes)

NOTE: there are several versions of the Candy Cane Story; we’ve chosen to include two of them.

The Legend of the Candy Cane

There once was a candy maker who wanted to make a candy that would be very special for Christmas. He decided to make a candy cane because he knew he could include a lot of signs and symbols to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

He began with a stick of pure white hard candy. He used white as a symbol that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary who was always so pure and holy. He made it hard and crunchy to symbolize the solid rock on which the church is founded.

He bent over the top of the candy cane to make a hook like a shepherd’s staff. He remembered that Jesus called himself “The Good Shepherd” The candy maker remembered too that the first people who come to worship Jesus at the manger after he was born were shepherds. Then the candy maker looked at his candy cane and thought it looked a little plain. “It needs some color,” he said. Something red,” he thought. “That will give it Christmas look!” So, he began to stain the white candy cane with red stripes.

First, he put on three thin red stripes. You see, he remembered that Jesus went through terrible torture before he died and was whipped across his back. The candy maker decided that the red stripes on the candy cane would remind everybody that Jesus shed his blood for us when he died on the cross on Good Friday.

The candy maker was doing well with his candy cane. He had a lot signs of Jesus in there but he wasn't satisfied. Then he began to pray, "Dear Jesus, help me to make my candy cane show the true meaning of Christmas." Then suddenly the candy cane slipped from his hands. It fell upside down on the floor. When he looked, he noticed that the candy cane was no longer a candy cane, but it was the letter "J". It stands for "Jesus." Jesus is really what Christmas is all about.

A Candy Maker's Witness

A candy maker wanted to make a candy that would be a witness, so he made the Christmas candy cane. He incorporated several symbol for the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ.

He began with a stick of pure white, hard candy: white to symbolize the Virgin Birth and the sinless nature of Jesus; and hard to symbolize the Solid Rock, the foundation of the church and firmness of the promises of God.

The candy maker made the candy in the form of a "J" to represent the precious name of Jesus, who came to earth as our Savior. It could also represent the staff of the "Good Shepherd" with which he reaches down into the world.

Thinking that the candy was somewhat plain, the candy maker stained it with red stripes. He used three small stripes to show the stripes of the scourging Jesus received by which we are healed. The large red stripe was for the blood shed by Christ.

In years to come the candy became known only as a candy cane - a meaningless decoration. But the meaning is still there for those who know. I pray that this symbol will again be used to witness TO THE WONDER OF JESUS AND HIS GREAT LOVE that came down at Christmas.