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# “How Jesus’ Cross Connects to Christmas”

Sunday School Lesson from Luke 23:33-43

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The Greatest Gift of all: Christmas and the Cross  
Sunday School Lesson on Church Seasons and Advent  
Opening

As the season of Advent approaches, it is easy to become caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holidays, the anticipation of giving and receiving, and the joy of Christ’s birth. Before that comes, though, we take time to reflect on the reason Jesus came to Earth in the first place. The Sunday before Advent marks the end of the church year, and we look to the cross upon which the Messiah took His final breath. This may seem full of sorrow, but we know that the cross is joy and life to us if we believe what death and resurrection mean. It’s a great reminder for present-hungry youngsters to contemplate what Jesus came to do.

**Lesson focus:** Jesus came to earth as a humble baby, but He ultimately came so that He could die on the cross. In so doing, He saved us from our sin consequences and allows us to live forever with Him!

**Passage:** Luke 23:33-43

**Target Audience:** Kindergarten-6<sup>th</sup> grade (See notes for specific age modifications)

**Materials Needed:** Cross-shaped construction paper or card stock; decorative supplies; beads; string; envelopes; jingle bells; balloons; large paper or poster board; Bibles.

- See our preschool lesson on [Luke 23:33-43 Jesus is Crucified](#) and [He is Risen Lesson plan for kids from Luke 23-24](#)
- Get more ideas for your [Luke 23:33-43 Sunday School Lessons](#)



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# Game Activity to Introduce the Lesson

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Happy New Year! This might seem out of place, but open the lesson by explaining to kids that this is the last Sunday in the “church year”. See if they can name any of the seasons in the church year (Lent, Pentecost, etc.). Explain that Advent, which is about to start, is the beginning of the church year. But today we are both looking ahead and looking at the end of something. In honor of “new year”, play a couple of opening games that might also be features of an end of year celebration:

- (Younger students) Balloon races or balloon volley: have kids blow up a balloon, and release it before tying off. See whose balloon goes the farthest! Or provide each child with a balloon and bat them around, trying to keep their balloon in the air as long as possible.
- (Any age) random countdown: without looking at any clocks, have students try to guess when an exact minute ends. Tell them the start time, but let them guess by raising hands when they think a minute (or longer) is up.
- (Older) How many can you juggle? Also using balloons, have each student blow up 3-4 balloons, and try to keep them in the air as long as possible.
- Minute to win it, cup transfer: Give each student a long straw or stir stick. Without using hands, see how many Cheerios students can move from a bowl into a cup. Only the straw may be used.
- Minute to win it, jingle bell style: place jingle bells in several boxes (shoe boxes or tissue boxes), putting 1-7 bells in each. Have students race to put the boxes in order according to how many bells are in each.

These might have seemed like silly games, but explain that today we are going to discuss something that is actually quite serious, though also joyful. As they prepare to dive into Scripture, remind students of the upcoming Advent and Christmas season soon to be upon them.



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# Sunday School Lesson (Luke 23:33-34)

## Jesus is the Greatest Gift

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Start out by talking with children about Christmas upcoming...ask what some of their favorite gifts have been, and what they are hoping to receive or looking forward to getting this year. How about giving...do kids think about or enjoy giving others gifts? What are some great things they have given people in the past?

Explain that today we will be discussing the greatest gift ever given...do students know what it is? As Advent approaches, we talk about the birth of Jesus. This was important, and essential to understanding how God fulfilled His promises to us and granted a savior. But why did Jesus come?

Invite students to look into the story of Christ's crucifixion. For younger students, you may wish to read a story adaptation. Older children can take turns reading from the Bible.

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*And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." -Luke 23:33-34*

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Jesus had been convicted of crimes, even though He did nothing wrong. He was brought out to die a criminal's death, a death on a cross. But even while His killers were preparing this, He asked God to forgive them! This was a dark time for Jesus...

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*And they cast lots to divide his garments. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup> The*

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*soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” -Luke 23:35-38*

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People were mocking Jesus, making fun of Him, taking His clothes, saying all sorts of mean things. Ask students if any of them have ever been teased or bullied. It doesn't feel good! Jesus knows this.

He was ridiculed and hated and tormented, but He let it happen. He could have come down from the cross and shown those naysayers who He truly was. But He stayed. He suffered so that we wouldn't have to! He knows what it is like to hurt, and understands our pain and sorrow, because He hurt too.

So why did Jesus go through all of this? Remind kids why it was necessary for Him to die. He took on our punishment. We do bad things, and really we deserve the consequence of death. Because Jesus, who didn't do bad things, died instead, we can rest assured we'll go to Heaven. And what does it take to go to Heaven and be with Jesus? Only faith in who Christ is!

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*One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup> And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” -Luke 23:39-43*

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Jesus died for everyone. Not just people we might think are “good” or “bad”, but everyone. We all mess up and do things wrong, but Christ loves us anyway. He



wanted His accusers and tormentors to be forgiven. He told the repentant man next to Him that He was forgiven, also. This is what He came to Earth for. It's great to rejoice in His birth and coming. But let's not forget why He came. The grace of God and salvation in Jesus should make us rejoice every day.

We know that this is the greatest gift we could hope for! It can't be wrapped or boxed up, exactly, but it is a blessing and a beautiful thing. God loves us enough to die. He wants us to be with Him eternally. Jesus promised life. What an amazing present!

**Close** the lesson with prayer and thank God for loving us and coming to die for us. Pray for hearts open to His word and service throughout the season.

### **Bonus Sunday School Coloring Pages:**

[J is for Jesus](#), from our [Free Bible Alphabet Coloring Pages](#)

[C is for Christ](#), from our [Printable Bible Alphabet Coloring Pages](#)

[Coloring Pages Jesus Crucified on Good Friday](#) and [Jesus the best Gift](#) (included in the PDF download above)

[Bible Worksheet about Jesus](#) (included in download)



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# Craft: Cross or Advent Preparation

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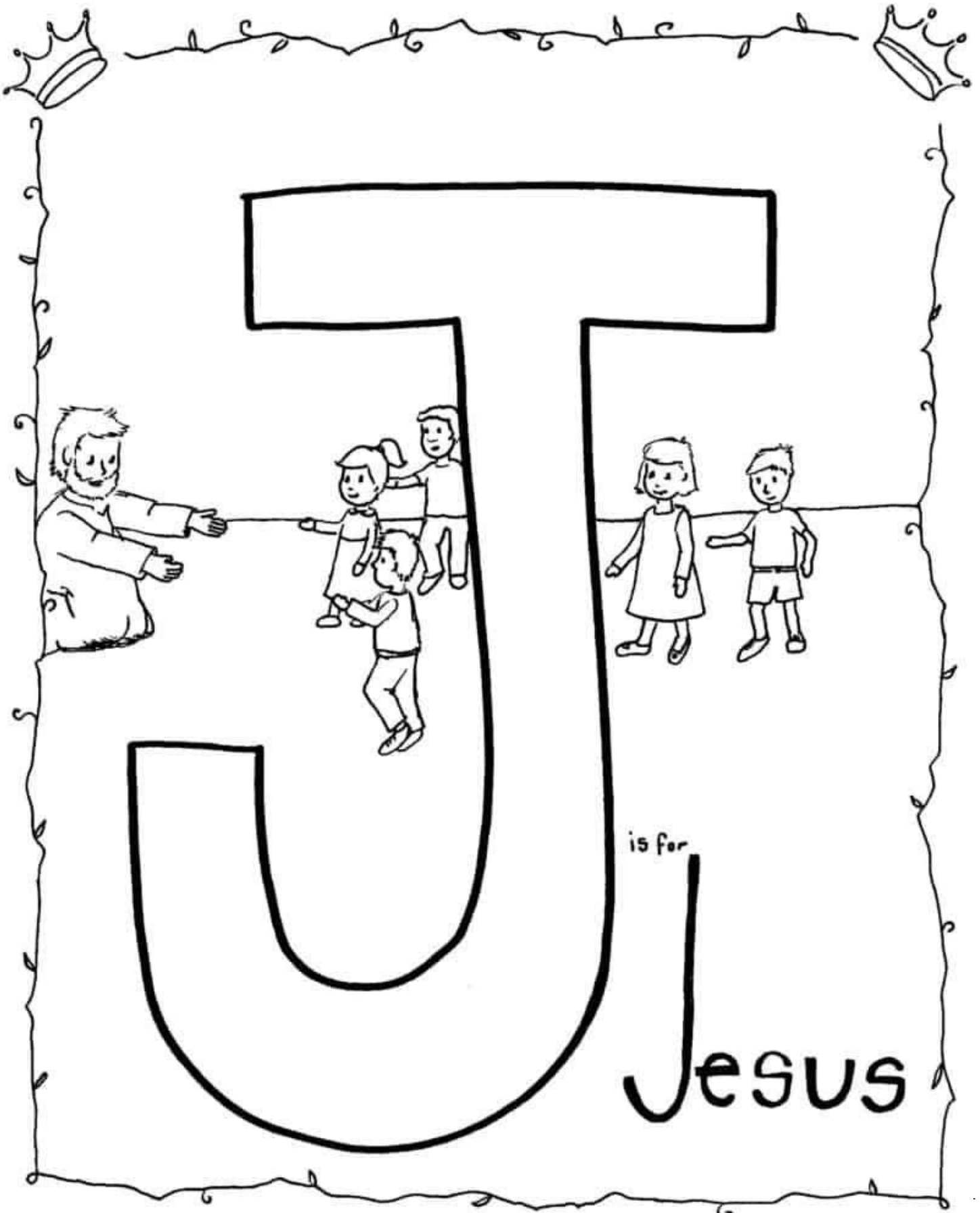
You may choose to focus on the element of the cross, or on the upcoming Advent season. Here are a few activities to consider as possibilities:

- Decorative cross: allow students to color and decorate a paper or cardboard cross, adding color and verses. This can be hung on pipe cleaner or string to mount.
- Bracelets: bead bracelets are a classic way to remember the story, or just have a special craft. Use colors with representative meaning (red for Christ's blood, black for the dark night, white for our sins washed clean) to contemplate what the story was all about.
- Advent calendar: help students brainstorm ways that they can be helpful or do something special for Advent season. Write these down on note cards or slips of paper, and place each one in an envelope. Glue or tape envelopes onto larger poster board, and decorate as desired. Open one each day leading up to Christmas (This might be a good one to do if you have extra time, helpers, or families working together to finish).



Don't miss our [painted cross craft from Easter](#) with [video demonstration](#).



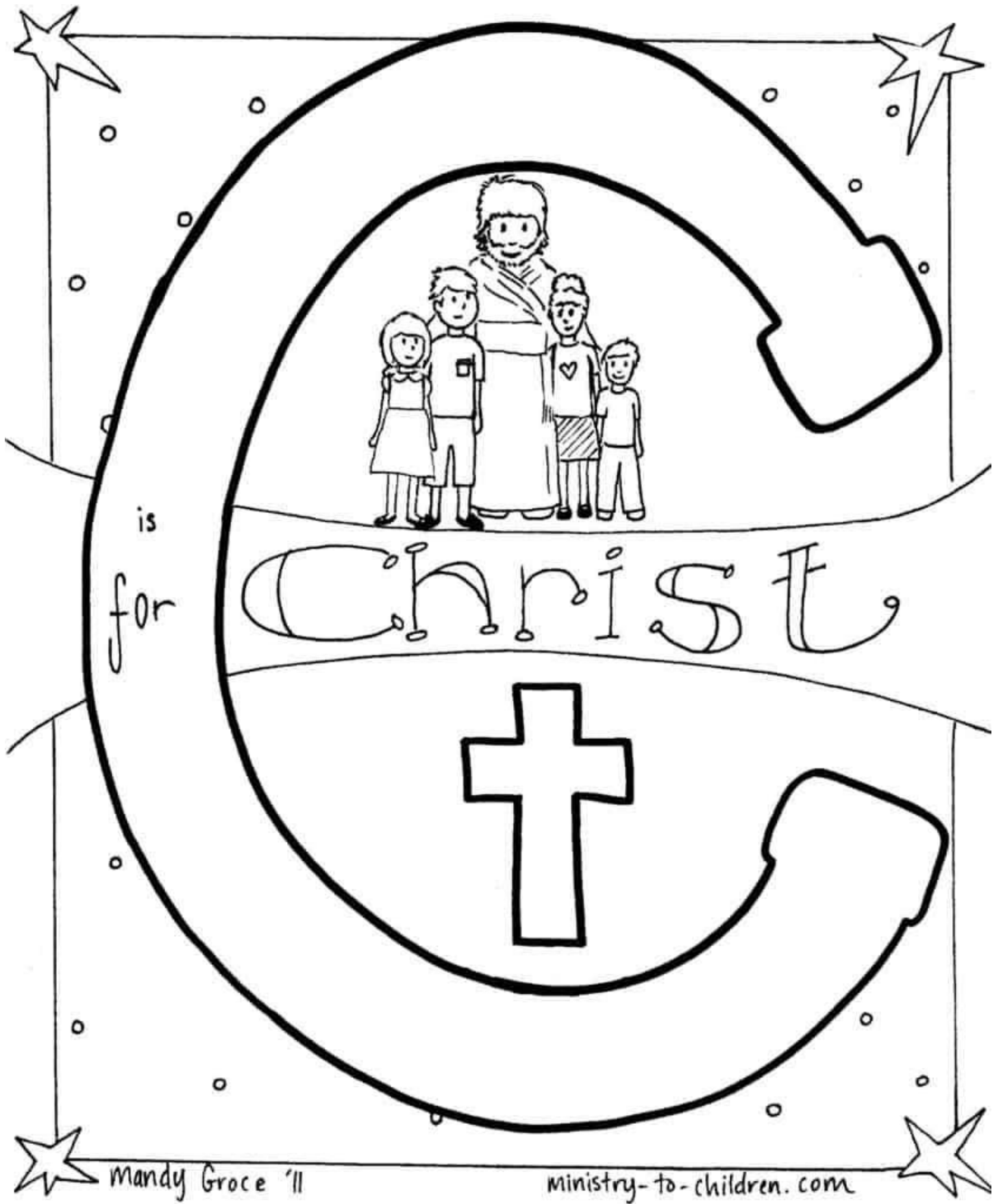


Mandy Grace '12

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# Luke 23:33-43 (NIV) Jesus is Crucified

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<sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”<sup>[a]</sup> And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

<sup>35</sup>The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

<sup>36</sup>The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar <sup>37</sup>and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

<sup>38</sup>There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

<sup>40</sup>But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup>We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

<sup>42</sup>Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”



Learn About  
**Jesus, God's Son**

The Trinity

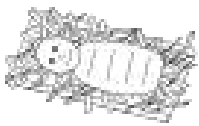
God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons who are all the same person – God. This is called the Trinity (Trinity means three).

When God decided to come and live on earth with people, he came in the form of Jesus, God's Son. Jesus is the most important person who ever lived on the earth. But Jesus is more than just a person. Jesus is **all God** so he knows and does everything that God does. Jesus is **all human** (people) so he can understand how we feel and act.

Names for Jesus

The Bible uses many different names for Jesus.

Find the names for Jesus in the puzzle.



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



Jesus is God's **SON**.

The name **JESUS** and the Old Testament name Joshua both mean **SAVIOR**.

**EMMANUEL** means God with Us.

**CHRIST** means the Chosen One or Messiah.

Jesus is our **LORD**; he is the master and we are the servants.

Jesus is the **PRINCE** of Peace.

Jesus is the **WORD**; he brings us God's message.

Jesus is the **BREAD** of life.

Jesus is the **LIGHT** of the world.

Jesus is the Good **SHEPHERD**, and we are his sheep.

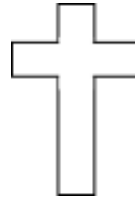
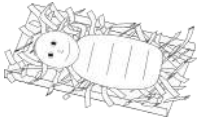
Jesus is the **VINE**, and we are the branches.

Jesus is the **WAY**, the **TRUTH**, and the **LIFE**.

# The Story of Jesus

Look up each verse and number the events in Jesus' life in the correct order.

- |   |              |       |   |
|---|--------------|-------|---|
| 1 | Luke 2:7     | _____ | Jesus went back up to heaven.                                   |
| 2 | Luke 2:52    | _____ | Jesus grew and pleased God.                                     |
| 3 | Mark 1:9     | _____ | Jesus was crucified on the cross.                               |
| 4 | Matthew 4:23 | _____ | Jesus was baptized.   |
| 5 | John 19:18   | _____ | God raised Jesus from the dead.                                 |
| 6 | Luke 24:6    | _____ | Jesus came into the world as a baby.                            |
| 7 | Acts 1:9     | _____ | Jesus traveled around, teaching, preaching, and healing people. |



## Why Did Jesus Come into the World?

Reason 1:

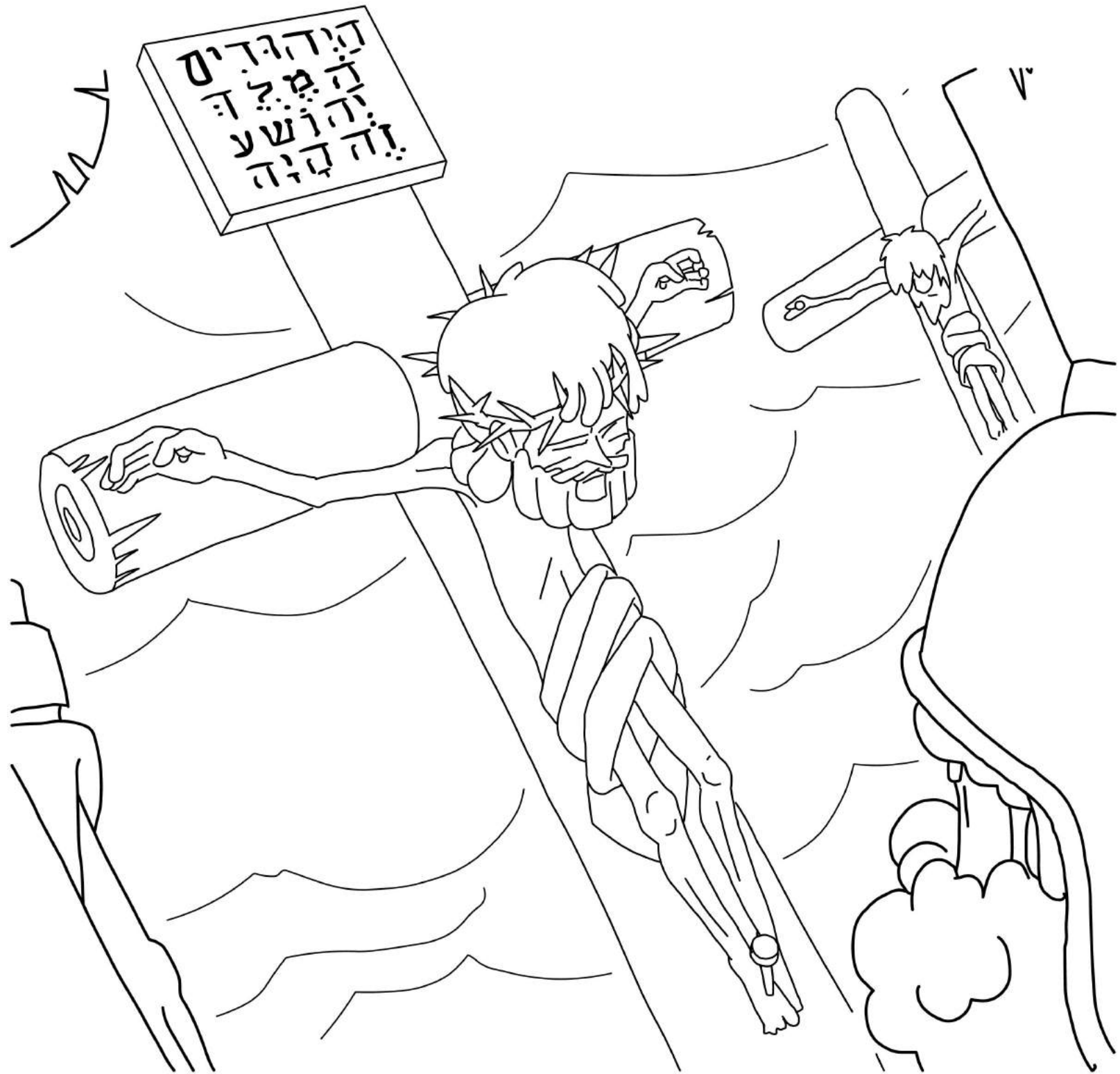
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
G	L	G	V	Z	X	S		
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Z	Y	L	F	G	T	L	W	

Reason 2:

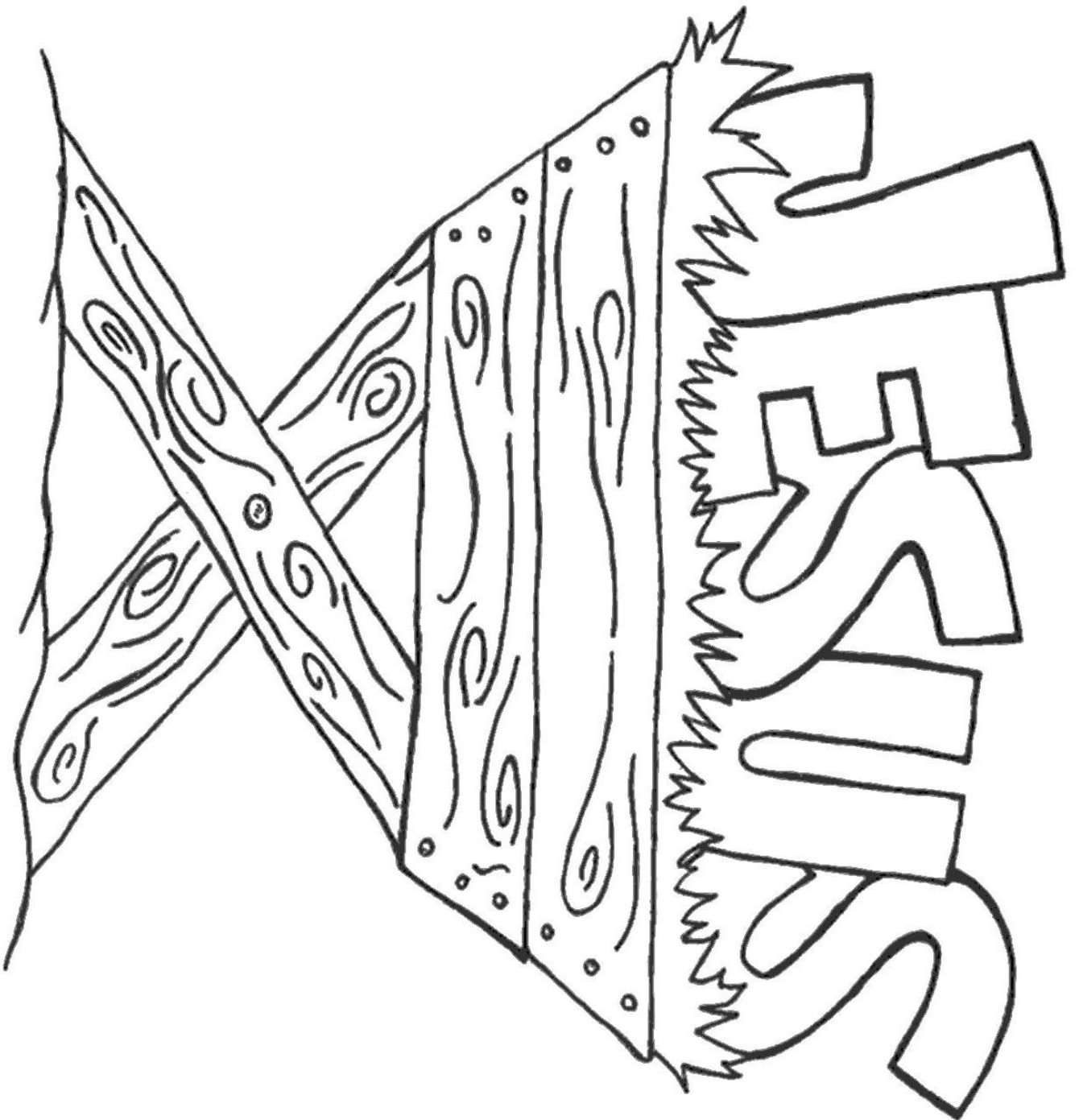
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
G	L	W	R	V		U	L	I	
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	
F	H	L	M		G	S	V		
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____					
X	I	L	H	H					

In this code, A stands for Z, Z stands for A, etc.

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



תורה  
משנה  
גמרא  
מדרש  
זוהר



No gift compares to Jesus!



Look at the Candy Cane

What do you see?

Stripes that are red

Like the blood shed for me

White is for my Savior

Who's sinless and pure!

"J" is for Jesus My Lord, that's for sure!

Turn it around,

And a staff you will see

Jesus my shepherd

Was born for Me!



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# Candy Cane Poem about Jesus

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 [ministry-to-children.com/candy-cane-poem-about-jesus](http://ministry-to-children.com/candy-cane-poem-about-jesus)

Felicia Mollohan

November 13,  
2009

Here is a popular poem about the Christmas candy cane and how it can remind us of the Gospel. I have seen this used alongside the legend of the candy cane, but I think it's better to *leave the legend part out*. Just use it as an object lesson or children's sermon for the children. Say, "Let me teach you a poem about the candy cane that will help us to remember Jesus this Christmas season."

We have prepared a handout of this poem that you can download and print. Each page is divided into four parts and includes the poem alongside a simple graphic of a candy cane. [Click here](#) to download the Candy Cane Poem.

## Christmas Candy Cane Poem about Jesus

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Look at the Candy Cane  
What do you see?  
Stripes that are red  
Like the blood shed for me  
White is for my Savior  
Who's sinless and pure!  
"J" is for Jesus My Lord, that's for sure!  
Turn it around  
And a staff you will see  
Jesus my shepherd  
Was born for Me!

Browse our [Christmas lessons](#), [Christmas crafts](#), or most popular [Christmas printables](#).



We hope you enjoy this free resource.

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I'm Tony Kummer - I started this website in 2007, but God is using it beyond my imagination. The mission is simple.

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*Help you tell kids about Jesus!*

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- telling children about Jesus.
- allowing us to be a part of your mission.

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4. Tell a friend to google "[Ministry to Children](http://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](mailto:Tony@ministry-to-children.com)

May God bless you and continue to bless your ministry!



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