

# A Very Special Happy Birthday

A Very Special

## Happy Birthday

An interactive way to teach children  
about the beginning of the church  
(From Acts chapters 1 & 2)

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Every child can relate to the idea of a birthday party. Try this interactive story-telling method to help children celebrate the beginnings of the church.

## Background:

The “birth” of the church was long-anticipated and expected. From the beginning chapters of Genesis and onwards, we read how God, the Father, worked out a plan to redeem imperfect people back to himself. In the Gospels, Jesus speaks of building “his church”. Then, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit ushers in a new age and the birth of the church.

Among the crowds gathered in Jerusalem, there were one hundred and twenty believers gathered and waiting just as Jesus had told them to do. By the end of the festival, specifically the Day of Pentecost, three thousand others had been added to this group of followers. The Day of Pentecost marks the beginning of an age when imperfect people could have their sins washed away in baptism and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was the beginning of the church.

## Items to Gather:

- 12 cupcakes topped with soft icing or whipped cream
- A plate or platter for the cupcakes
- 12 candles
- Matches or a lighter
- “Sprinkles” or “Hundreds and Thousands” (or any tiny cake decorations)
- A gift box and wrapping paper.
- The following verse that you have transcribed on an index card or piece of paper:  
*“Peter said to them, “Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38 ICB*

# Prepare:

- The words below are provided as a guide and are not meant to be read like a script. Keeping this in mind, read and become very familiar with the events of [Acts 1:12-2:41](#) so that you are able to share the story with the children in a natural way. For additional help, refer to the lesson: [Sermon at Pentecost](#).
- Place the verse card inside the gift box and wrap it like a birthday gift.

## How to Tell the Story:

1. Introduction: Ask the children to share their experiences of birthday parties.  
As you and the children are talking about this, set out the 11 cupcakes and the gift box on a table in front of the children. (Keep the 12th cupcake hidden from view.)
2. The church had a beginning: Explain that birthday parties are a way of remembering and celebrating the birth or beginning of a person's life. "Today, we are going to talk about a different kind of beginning. It is not the beginning of a life of one person. This is the beginning of the church."
3. One hundred and twenty followers of Jesus: Just before his ascension, Jesus had told the apostles to go to Jerusalem and wait for a special gift to arrive. ([Luke 24:49](#)) Tell the children about the 120 followers who had gathered together with the apostles. Now, add a few sprinkles to the tops of the cupcakes. Ask the children to help you estimate 120 sprinkles in all.
4. Eleven Apostles: Ask the children to count the cupcakes and point out that there are only 11. Talk about how Jesus had chosen 12 Apostles, but after Judas betrayed Jesus and died, there were now only 11. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. This is the time to bring the 12th cupcake out from hiding.
5. Arrival of the Holy Spirit: Have the children make sounds like the wind and then talk about how the apostles heard a sound like a mighty wind. Place a candle in each of the cupcakes and, as you light them, talk about the flames of fire resting upon the head of each apostle. The sound of wind and flames made it clear that the Holy Spirit was there that day. We cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we know he was there because of these things. Jesus said that the Spirit would give power. Explain the power these 12 men now had to speak in languages they had not even studied.
6. Peter's Sermon: The Holy Spirit also gave Peter the power to courageously preach a sermon to a huge crowd of people that day. Push one of the cupcakes in front of the others as you talk about the sermon content. Jesus wanted all of the Jews to have good hearts and turn to God. Peter told this crowd of Jews that, instead of following Jesus, they had crucified him.
7. "What should we do?": The people felt terrible (quietly blow out the candles and set them aside). They had done a terrible thing. How could they ever make it right? They asked Peter.
8. The gift for everyone: Peter knew that the Holy Spirit had given the apostles a special kind of power, but the Holy Spirit was also a gift that God wanted everyone to have in their life. Peter knew exactly what to say to the people that day. Now, you or one of the children can open the gift and read [Acts 2:38](#).
9. Three thousand people were baptised: As you discuss this, group the cupcakes back together and bring out the sprinkles again. Remind the children that there were 120 believers at the beginning of this day. Begin adding more sprinkles to the cupcakes so that you cover them with what seems like 3,000. These may even spill over onto the plate. Talk about how 3,000 people were added to their number on that day.
10. Conclusion: This was the beginning of the church. In the book of Acts, we read that, from that day forward, more and more people began to follow Jesus and were baptised. And even today, when people are sorry for their sins and are baptised, God still adds them to the church as well. Some day, I pray that even you will be added to that number.

And now it is time to celebrate and eat those cupcakes!

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# Never a Truer Word

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Do you remember the first words you recognised when you began to read? The three and four-year-olds that I teach are so pleased with themselves when they begin to realise that they can spell the word B-I-B-L-E.

We work on this skill for quite some time. Each week we sing the [B-I-B-L-E song](#). I display the letters, and we point to each one as we sing it. When I pick up my bible, I point out the letters and say them.

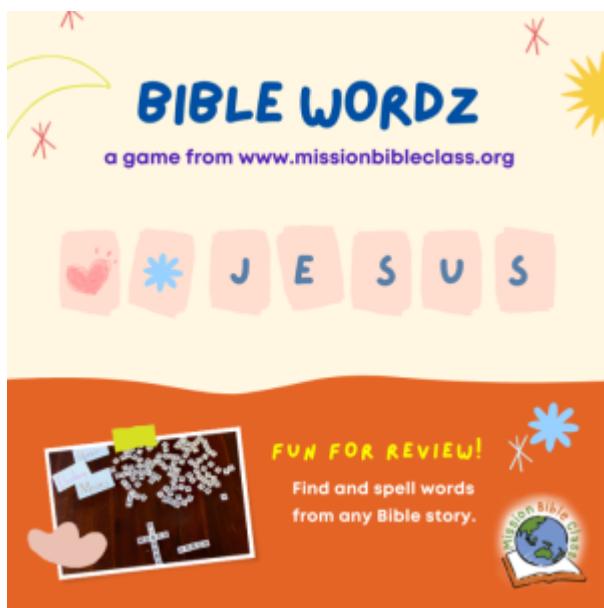
For a while, the children just mimic me. I can tell that they have not quite figured it out. Then, one day, it "clicks". That's what happened this past Sunday. For the first time, one of the children realised that those letters spell BIBLE!

We sang the song as usual, and he pointed to the letters. But, this time, he then looked at me and said, "That says BIBLE!". He then looked all over our classroom, pointing out the word everywhere he saw it. It was on each bible in the room. It was on a room poster. The word BIBLE was outlined on the bulletin board. He was so excited!

Recognising words as we read our Bible is another way of learning. Pointing out and talking about words like "Jesus" and "forgive" can be life-changing.

I'm always looking for games that help children learn and are adaptable to any lesson. The [Bible Wordz game](#) is one of those.

In this adaptable game, children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson. Thanks to Tamako Weiss for putting this game together for me.



## Supplies:

1. Individual letter tiles: Use tiles from games like Scrabble or Bananagrams. Magnetic letters are another good choice. Alternatively, make your own from paper or bottlecaps. You will need enough tiles to form multiple words
2. Index cards or paper to create word cards
3. A flat surface, like a table, on which to play
4. (optional) 30-second timer
5. (optional) Prizes. These can be stickers, candy bars, bookmarks, or inexpensive toys

# Preparations:

1. Collect or prepare letter tiles.
2. Create the word cards by writing a keyword on each card.

# How to play:

1. After telling the bible story, show students the keyword cards. Take time to explain the meaning of each word.
2. To begin the game, the students spread the tiles (face up) on the table surface.
3. Set the timer for 30 seconds. When the time begins, students try to spell as many keywords as possible before the time is up.
4. Students can use word grids or make the words individually.
5. This can be done as a group or as a competition. If competing, whoever spells the most words in 30 seconds wins.

# Ways you can adapt this game:

1. Ask the children to use a bible and choose the keywords on their own. They can then create their own word cards and play the game.
2. Use very simple words for younger children and more complex ones for older children.
3. Use review questions instead of word cards. Plan ahead so that you can ask questions that have one-word answers. Ask the review question, and the students spell out the answer using the letter tiles.  
The following example is from the story [Moses Does Not Honour God](#).  
Question: Who struck the rock twice? Answer: Moses.  
The first child to guess and spell M-O-S-E-S wins the round.
4. Skip the cards and timer and play straight from the Bible. Choose a set of verses and form as many words as possible from those verses.
5. There are many ways you can adapt this game. Choose what is best for your class and students.

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# Yes, This Counts at Home

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# PRAYER CARDS:

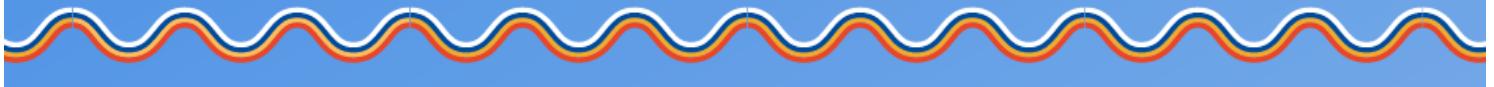
Reminding us to pray for our brothers and sisters



The troubling story of Joseph and his brothers leads to good discussion about getting along with siblings.

Genesis 35:23-26; 37:1-36

another teaching idea from [www.missionbibleclass.org](http://www.missionbibleclass.org)



The best lessons are not what goes on in my Bible class. The best lessons are what the children take with them when they leave.

Years ago I was teaching children about the [Fruit of the Spirit](#). One young child was in total agreement with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness. These were great concepts and he loved learning about them and exploring how they apply in church and in school and with his friends. But I'll never forget his reaction when I mentioned that the Fruit of the Spirit should also be displayed to our brothers and sisters in our family.

This young man, moments before, had been enthusiastic when talking about these concepts in various other settings. Now, he looked at me in shock and horror and said, "What! This counts at HOME too?"

This child realised a truth that is for all of us. It is God's intention that we apply what we learn to ALL parts of our lives.

[Prayer Cards](#) are one way to help children understand this important truth.

I was able to use these recently when teaching about [Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery](#). As we explored the tense relationship between Joseph and his brothers I asked the children in my class to consider relationships with their own siblings. Even if we do not always get along we should want the best for them. One way to do this is to pray for them.

I supplied paper, scissors and pens. As we talked about our siblings we wrote their names on cards. In class we prayed for each one. Then, the children took the cards home so they could remember to pray for their siblings.

Yes, prayer counts at home, too.

[Full instructions for prayer cards](#)



# Am I Willing to Sacrifice?

Some stories in the Bible lend themselves to crafts and colouring sheets. This is not one of them.

There is no way to lightly depict a father being asked to kill and sacrifice his precious son. The story of [Abraham Preparing to Sacrifice His Son](#) is a test of faith like no other.

Of course, even as Abraham was about to carry through with what God had told him to do, an angel intervened and stopped him. Yes, Abraham had reasoned that God would not ask this unless he planned to bring his son, Isaac, back from the dead after the sacrifice ([Hebrews 11:17-19](#)). But even so, there was a father and a son and a knife.

As difficult it is to comprehend the events of [Genesis 22:1-18](#) they are only a foreshadowing of another time, later in history, when another father allows his son to be sacrificed on a cross.

I wanted the children in my Bible class to contemplate sacrifice. I wanted them to think about what it would mean to love and trust God so much that we would be willing to give up something we hold precious. Abraham passed the test and showed he was willing to go to any extreme God asked of him. Would we pass that test?

The following activity meant a lot to my group of kids so I thought you might like to try it too. Like Abraham, they will be taken to the very edge in contemplating sacrifice but then they will not actually be sacrificing.

I would suggest you speak calmly and not too fast so that you create an environment of contemplation among the children.

## Supplies you will need:

- Enough paper so that each child will have a few small sheets of paper
- Pens or pencils
- Some flat stones
- Something upon which to place the stones (I used a round metal pizza pan)
- An empty box of matches

## Instructions:

After telling [the story of Abraham and Isaac](#) further discuss how God was more important to Abraham than anything or anyone. Abraham proved that he was willing to sacrifice even the most important thing in his life, his son. Is God that precious to us? What would we be willing to sacrifice if we were tested?

1. Have the children write or draw what is important or precious to them on small pieces of paper. One item on each piece of paper. As they write you can already begin asking them whether the thing written on their paper is as important as God.

Keep in mind that this is not about good or bad. They will be writing down some very good things and people. This is about whether or not God is more important than even the MOST precious things.

2. After they have written for a little while then bring out the stones and stack them together to form an altar. My class was sitting at a table so I placed the stones on the metal pizza pan in the centre of the table. The children immediately recognised it was an altar.
3. Now ask the children to think carefully about what they have written on their papers and whether or not they would be willing to give them up (sacrifice them) if God asked them to. If they are willing to give it up then have them scrunch up the piece of paper and place it on the altar. Don't rush this. Allow them to really consider. More than one child in my class was not ready to "sacrifice" what they had written but, after some thought, bravely decided to do so. When they place something on the altar be sure and tell them you understand how difficult it is and are proud they have made that decision. After all, sacrifice is difficult for children just like it is difficult for us adults!
4. Once the papers are all on the "altar" then bring out the matchbox. When you seem to be ready to burn all of these sacrifices then open the matchbox to show that it is empty.

At this point continue the conversation to relate the activity back to Abraham. Here is what I said, "Of course we are not going to burn all of these things. God wants us to enjoy all of these blessings in our lives. After all, many of these people and things are very good for us and he does not want us to give them up.

But God DOES want us to understand that HE is more important than even the best things in our lives. Isaac was the best thing in Abraham's life but Abraham's willingness to sacrifice him showed that God was even more important than his beloved son.

In today's bible lesson we learn that God tested Abraham to see if he was willing to give up Isaac if it was for God. Abraham passed the test.

And guess what? Today we have had a kind of test. YOU were willing to give up your precious things if it was for God. You showed that God is more important than all of these things. You passed the test. I am so proud of you."

At the conclusion of the activity I prayed out loud for each child individually.



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# I Say L.O.V.E

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# I SAY L.O.V.E

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to go away? This week a friend of mine shared a song with me that has done exactly that.

The song is not fancy. It only has six words. It is a teacher training video and not a performance for the Grammy Awards. Even so, it is stuck in my mind like glue. Listen a few times and I dare you to forget it.

Everybody needs some love.

## Lyrics:

I say L  
I say L-O  
L-O-V  
L-O-V-E

Everybody needs some love. L-O-V-E!

Everybody needs some love. L-O-V-E!

Everybody needs some love. L-O-V-E!

Everybody needs some love.

For more songs and free teaching resources visit [Mission Bible Class](https://missionbibleclass.org)

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