

Away in a Manger - What's in the Bag?

The idea behind this activity is simple and fun. Start by gathering some items around your house that could represent different parts of the Nativity scene. After choosing 2-3 items, place each item in a gift bag and cover them with tissue paper. Place the wrapped items at the front of the room when you start primary. Ask the children about the best gift they've ever received.

Ideas for Items to Include:

- **Christmas Lights** - pull out your extra twinkling lights from home or grab some from the store while you're doing your Christmas shopping!
- **Blanket** - any fuzzy blanket will be perfect.
- **Hay** - I just bought some decorative shred at the Dollar Tree, but you can also find fake plastic hay on amazon for pretty cheap.
- **Large Stick** - You can use this to represent a shepherd staff
- **Toy animals** - You could use these to represent the animals that were in the stable when Jesus was born. Small, plastic animals work great if you have some laying at the bottom of your toy chest.

Invite a few children to reach inside the bag and guess what's inside. After a few guesses, allow children to open the gifts one at a time. You might choose to pass these items around the room to let every child feel them.

After all the gifts have been opened, begin a short discussion by asking some questions about the items they opened. Basically, you want to transition from the gifts to how the items relate to the birth of Jesus.

Sample Questions:

- What does the blanket feel like? What does the hay feel like? How about the lights?
- Did you know that when Jesus' mother, Mary rode on a donkey before Jesus was born? Do you think the donkey's fur would have been as soft as this blanket?
- When Jesus was born, there was a bright star in the sky that helped shepherds find him. How can you share the light of Jesus with others this Christmas season?
- Where do you find hay? Did you know that Jesus was born in a barn?
- What do you think it would have felt like to be there when Jesus was born?

After the discussion, you might ask children if they can think of a Christmas song that talks about the birth of Jesus. Then, sing *Away in a Manger*!

Extension Activities:

- While singing the first verse, invite a few children to stand at the front and hold the items up.
- To teach verse 2 of the song, compile sound clips that correlate with the song. For example, you might find the sound of cows and a baby cry. Have the children listen to these sounds and then teach them the words.
- While singing the song, pass around the items in a 'hot potato' style. When the music stops, invite the child to share their favorite part about Christmas.