

Jonah and the Whale



Jonah and the Whale

Here are some ideas for your toddler group based on the story of Jonah and the whale. They could be used prior to a summer break when families might be going away.

Ready:

You could create a seaside play area. Make a friendly whale by draping a blue cloth over an empty cardboard box resting on its side. Tape the cloth into an inverted V shape over the open end (the mouth) and stick on some big eyes and jagged teeth! Use the cardboard flaps to make a tail for the other end. Add buckets and spades, toy boats, shells, etc.

You will need a ragdoll to be Jonah and a pot of bubbles for prayer time. You might like to ask your church leader to make the point that we can never sink so low that God cannot rescue us.

Teddy:

Dress Teddy for the seaside! You could pack his bag with useful items for travelling (eg a book, a game, a sun-hat, a healthy snack, etc).

Go:

Your aim is to show that wherever we go, we are always within God's love and protection.

Storytelling tip:

Before the story, encourage the children to mime swimming, building a sandcastle, jumping over waves and opening and shutting their mouths like fish! Ask everyone to sit in a boat shape for the story with the storyteller at the prow.



The story: Jonah and the whale

Leader:

One day, Jonah (*use the doll throughout*) was just enjoying a lovely snooze ... (*snoring sound*)

All:

(*All make snoring sound*)

Leader:

... yes, a wonderful snooze, when he heard God speaking to him. Listen!

"Wake up, Jonah! I've got a very important job for you". "What's that?" asked Jonah, yawning.

"Please take a message to the people at Nineveh!" "Nineveh!" cried Jonah, sitting up. "I'm not going to that horrible place. All the people there are baddies!"

"I know!" said God sadly. "That's why I want you to speak to them. Off you go, now!"

So Jonah packed his bag and set off – in the wrong direction. He didn't go the way God wanted him to go (*point one way*) – he went towards the sea! (*point opposite way*) He was running away from God! Oh, deary me!

When he reached the seaside, he found a ship (*indicate your boat shape*) and came aboard – just to get away from the Lord (*point upwards*).

"Hee, hee, hee," laughed Jonah. "God won't find me! Bye, bye!" (*wave*)

All:

Bye-bye! (*all wave back*)

Leader:

The sailors pulled up the anchor with a loud, "Heave-ho!" (*all mime pulling*)

All:

Heave-ho!

Leader:

Then Jonah yawned (*yawn*) and fell fast asleep in his cabin down below. Come on everyone, while Jonah's asleep, let's help the sailors row the boat out to sea!

Song:

(*all mime rowing*)

Row, row, row the boat,
Gently out to sea,
Jonah is trying to hide from God,
But we'll see, we'll see! (*Repeat*)

Leader:

Do you think God could see Jonah on the boat? YES, he could! Of course he could! And he wasn't very pleased with Jonah!

"I'll show that rascal," said God, and he blew upon the water. Pssssh! Waves crashed upon the deck! The sailors were badly frightened.

"Our boat will be a wreck! God must be cross with *someone*. Now who do you think could that be?"

All:

JONAH?

Leader:

"Yes!" said Jonah bravely. "I think the answer is ME! I have upset the God of land and sea, so toss me over the side with a one, two, three ..."
Ready everyone?

All:

One ... two ... three ... *Whee!* (*swing and throw Jonah overboard!*)

Leader:

Poor Jonah's sinking down, down to the bottom of the sea! Now Jonah was very sorry that he'd ever jumped aboard. He cried out in a frightened voice, "Can you hear me, Lord? There are bubbles up my nose and seaweed round my toes! Glug, glug, pull out the plug! Please come and rescue me!"

Do you think God could hear Jonah at the bottom of the sea?

All:

Yes!

Leader:

YES! God **did** hear Jonah call. And he sent a BIG fish to swallow Jonah – seaweed and all! (*ask someone to put Jonah in the whale's mouth*) Gulp!

Well, Jonah went slipping and sliding like a mouthful of jelly, from the whale's big mouth ... (*point inside mouth*) down to the whale's big belly! ... (*slide finger down to tummy!*)

Then, with Jonah safely inside, the whale swished his tail ... *swish* ... and took him for a ride!

"Oh, what a wonderful God you are!" cried Jonah. "You heard me pray! From now on I promise that I'll do what you say!"

So God told the whale to swim to the land. And the whale gave a hiccup ... hic! ... and spat out Jonah on the sand! (*ask someone to put Jonah on the 'beach'*)

"Now then, Jonah," said God, "To Nineveh, off you go!" (*point again*) And do you know? Jonah set off walking the *right* way. Hooray!

All:

(*arms raised*)

Hooray!

Prayer:

Dear God,

How wonderful you are!

When I am playing, you look after me.

When I am asleep, you watch over me.

Wherever I go in the whole wide world,

You are there to care for me.

Thank you, God!

Amen.

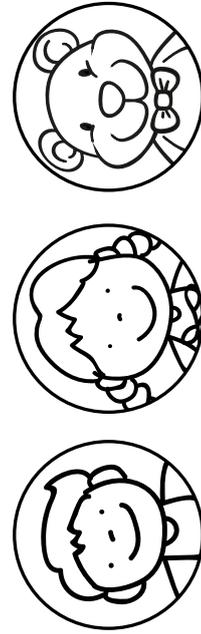
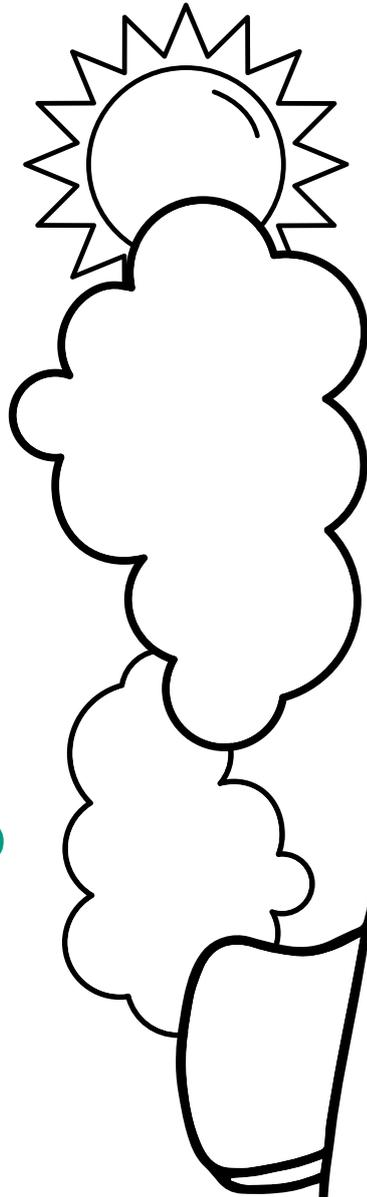
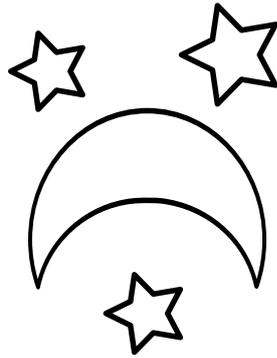
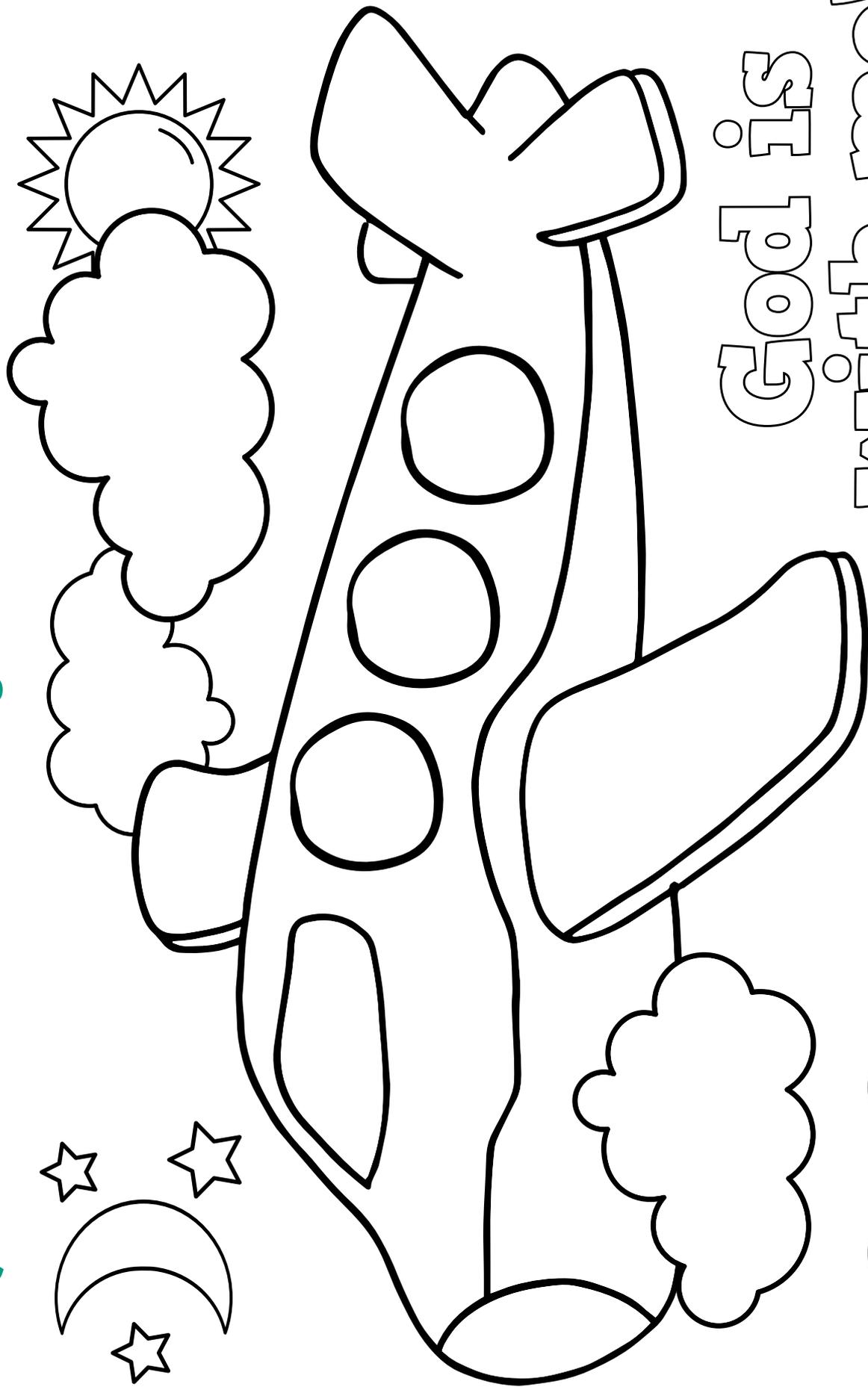
Blow some bubbles to represent everyone's prayers going up to God. If appropriate, wish everyone a happy holiday!

Party bag:

You could encourage parents to continue the theme of God's love and care at home by giving them the activity sheet, "Wherever I go ..."

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Activity sheet: Wherever I go ...



God is
with me!

Have fun colouring these pictures together! Then cut out the window shapes and glue them on the plane. You could glue cotton wool on the clouds. Chat about God taking care of us wherever we go in the world.

Activity sheet: Jonah and the Whale

(Jonah 1:1-3:10)

Just for parents:

In this story, God asks Jonah to tell the people of Ninevah to lead better lives. Jonah refuses because he doesn't want them to be forgiven by a loving God! Instead, he runs away to sea. When a fierce storm rages, he admits that he was wrong and asks the sailors to throw him overboard. In deep trouble, he says sorry to God, who hears his cry for help and sends a whale to rescue him!

None of us are perfect parents. It's good to be real about our struggles in conversations with friends at toddler groups and to learn that 'it's not just me!' God is always with us to listen and help. He wants us to tell our children all about his love and care. Perhaps these activities will provide some opportunities.

Bedtime story:

Retell and play the story of Jonah, perhaps at bath time, using a playmobile man, toy boat and fish. Wonder about it together:

- I wonder how Jonah felt when God asked him to do something. Do you ever feel like that?
- I wonder if God could still see Jonah when he ran away to sea?
- I wonder what it was like at the bottom of the sea? How do you think Jonah felt?
- I wonder how God felt when Jonah said he was sorry. How did he rescue Jonah?
- I wonder what we can do when we have made a mistake or we feel frightened or sad?

Prayer:

Blow bubbles to remember Jonah's underwater prayers rising to God. Encourage your toddler to ask God for help, to say 'sorry', or 'thank you' with each batch of bubbles!

Dear Jesus, Sometimes I find it difficult to pray to you when I need help, or I need to say sorry. Please help me to trust in you and to come to you when I feel sad or I need to forgive. I know you are always with me. Amen

Games:

Fishy snack: Cut out a big circle of bread or melon and remove a smaller circle leaving a ring shape for the whale. Add a triangle of bread, melon or cheese for the tail. Add an eye, mouth and spouting bubbles using cherry tomatoes, grapes and raisins. Use a cocktail sausage or baton of carrot for Jonah and place inside the whale! Chat about God keeping Jonah/us safe.

Yes or No? Don't despair if your toddler's favourite word is 'No!' This is a common phase! Look out for the hilarious picture book 'No!' by Tracey Corderoy and Tim Warnes, published by Little Tiger Press. Praise your toddler whenever they say 'Yes!'

Magic carpet: Sit on a rug or mat together and say, "*Magic carpet, take us to ...*" (the top of a mountain, the bottom of the sea, the seaside, etc). Mime climbing, swimming, etc. Chat about God taking care of us wherever we go. (See also Psalm 139:1-18)





Playtime

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