

Unit 4B Celebrations: Christmas journeys

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit involves children looking at the ways in which Christians today find meaning in the accounts and stories of Jesus' birth. Through the theme of 'journeys', using a variety of visual and written sources and music, children learn about and develop their understanding of some of the ways in which Christians celebrate Jesus' birth. They examine and reflect upon concepts of pilgrimage. They encounter biblical stories at first hand, and develop their understanding of the use of symbolic language. They develop their understanding of how religious beliefs and ideas can be conveyed through the expressive arts.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit links with units on Christmas in year 1 and unit 3C 'What do we know about Jesus' in year 3. It prepares children for further study of how faith can be expressed through the arts in unit 6F in year 6, and 'What does Jesus' incarnation mean for Christians today?' in year 8.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children have:

- encountered the Christmas story
- studied examples of special journeys in different religions
- some experience of Christmas songs and carols

VOCABULARY

In this unit children will have an opportunity to use words and phrases related to:

- the study of religion, *eg pilgrimage, pilgrims, wonder, awe, angel*
- the study of Christianity, *eg carol, Messiah, Saviour*

RESOURCES

- recordings of Christmas carols
- video and CD-ROM extracts showing Christians visiting Bethlehem
- world map
- postcard or poster reproductions of art showing the nativity scene
- versions of the birth of Jesus from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and other suitable retellings
- recording of Handel's 'Messiah'

EXPECTATIONS

At the end of this unit

most children will:

know and understand the concept of special journeys and their significance for believers; retell the nativity story, recognising the significance and the symbolism of the key characters; understand that religious beliefs and ideas can be conveyed through the expressive arts

some children will not have made so much progress and will:

know that some people of faith make special journeys; retell the nativity story, recognising the significance of some of the characters; begin to understand that religious beliefs and ideas can be conveyed through the expressive arts

some children will have progressed further and will:

know and understand that special journeys are related to the search for meaning; recognise the significance and symbolism of the key characters; understand that belief, faith and its expression are conveyed and illuminated by the use of the expressive arts

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

HOW FAR IS IT TO BETHLEHEM?

- that people make special journeys to places of religious significance
- about the importance of Bethlehem for many Christians
- Play a Christmas carol which refers to Bethlehem, eg *'O little town of Bethlehem'* or *'How far is it to Bethlehem?'*. Talk with children about how carols are Christian songs which were written to teach people about the Christmas story.
- Show a video extract or CD-ROM clip of Christians visiting the church of the nativity in Bethlehem. This may show people singing familiar carols such as *'Away in a manger'*.
- Discuss why Christians might want to make the journey to Bethlehem. Make connections with other journeys which people might make for religious reasons, eg *Walsingham, Makkah, Varanasi, Lourdes*. Introduce the word 'pilgrimage'. Discuss what a 'pilgrim' is. Compare and contrast the reasons people have for making a pilgrimage.
- Look at a world map, find Bethlehem: *How far is it from your school? Which country is it in? How far have you travelled? Who has made the longest journey? What is the purpose of some of those journeys?* Explore how Christians might feel when they arrive at the place where they believe Jesus was born.
- Ask the children to write a postcard from Bethlehem telling a friend about the importance of the place for Christians.

- explain the significance of Bethlehem for many Christians
- explain some of the reasons why pilgrimage is important to many religious believers

- Only Matthew and Luke have stories about the birth of Jesus. Their accounts focus on different aspects of the events: Luke has the story of the angels appearing to the shepherds and Matthew has the visit of the wise men. The accounts are in the Bible in Matthew 23¹⁻²³ and Luke 2¹⁻²⁰.
- Collect postcard-sized pictures from the internet and CD-ROMs showing Israel. Display these with the children's postcards.
- There are links with mathematics and geography in calculating distance.

JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

- that the story of the birth of Jesus is of central importance in Christianity and understand some of the reasons why
- know the story of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem
- Travel back in time with the children, 2000 years. Mary and Joseph are making a journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Use Luke's account of the story to find out why they have to go. Refer to maps to show their journey. *How far is it? How will they travel? What will the journey be like for Mary? How would it feel to make such a journey and then find no room at the inn?* Explore feelings and responses through drama or role play.

- identify the feelings and responses of characters in the story and make connections with their own experiences

- Select appropriate versions of the story. Retellings of the stories in children's Bibles may be more accessible for many children. The Revised Standard version, New English, Good News Bibles and other translations could provide opportunities for children to make interesting comparisons.

THE SHEPHERDS MAKE A JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

- to explain the significance to Christians of key features of the nativity story
- that they will have different views of a particular story and that people within a story will have different feelings, hopes and motives
- that music can be used to give a religious message and to appreciate that the basis of this music is the story they have listened to
- Tell the story of the shepherds. Emphasise the ordinariness of the shepherds, and how they would be least likely to expect the amazing appearance of the angels. Explore the idea of angels as messengers from God and contrast their glory with the shepherds. Explore the feelings of the shepherds and their response. *Who were they? What do they represent? Why did they come to Bethlehem?*
- Encourage children to explore the story of the shepherds from the viewpoints of different characters. Use 'hot-seating', asking the shepherds to talk about how they felt when the angels appeared. *What was it like in the stable? How did they feel when they saw the baby?* Explore feelings and responses through television-style interviews and reports to camera. Children could record this on video, making their own news programme.
- Listen to a short extract from Handel's 'Messiah', including the moment when the angels appear to the shepherds. Discuss how Handel has expressed the experience of the angels' message in his music. *What was the message of the angels?* That a baby had been born who was 'a Saviour', 'Christ the Lord'. The angels sang: 'Glory to God in the Highest and Peace on Earth'. Discuss what these words show about what Christians believe about Jesus.
- An extension activity could be to explore the children's ideas about what message God might want to send to the world today and why.
- Compose music to convey the feelings experienced by the shepherds to portray the appearance of the angels. *What instruments could you use?*

- identify and explain the symbolism conveyed through the characters in the story
- empathise with the feelings and responses of characters in the nativity story
- explain that religious beliefs and ideas can be expressed through music
- talk about the feelings they want to convey through music

- Children will be familiar with this part of the story. Take time to tell it, emphasising the awe and wonder of the experience.
- Luke had an interest in showing how Jesus came to ordinary people, making the point that the Messiah was for everyone. Contrast this with the visit of the wise men in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew is showing that great, affluent and powerful leaders recognised the coming of the Messiah. Contrast the poverty of the shepherds with the rich gifts of the wise men.
- Draw out links with literacy by showing the different versions and discussing how different writers may have different aims and different audiences in mind when they are telling the same story.

'THREE KINGS FROM PERSIAN LANDS AFAR'

- about ways in which beliefs and religious ideas can be expressed through words and music, art and literature
- Listen to the carol 'Three kings from Persian lands afar' and a more familiar one such as 'We three kings'. Tell the story of the visit of the kings. Ask the children to talk about how they picture the kings. Explain that the Bible actually calls them 'wise men', not kings, and that the story does not say that there were three of them. Look at examples of how artists from different periods and from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have represented this event. Discuss the different interpretations.
- Discuss the gifts brought by the kings. *Were they gifts for a baby? What could they mean?* Explore the symbolism.
- Contrast the visit of the shepherds in Luke with the visit of the kings in Matthew. *What do you think the stories are saying about Jesus?*

- explain how different people have tried to show the importance of the nativity story in different artistic formats
- show understanding of how symbolic language is used to convey religious beliefs and ideas
- contrast ways in which the writers of the nativity stories used different characters to convey their beliefs about Jesus

- The biblical account refers to 'wise men', not kings. There is no mention of how many there were. The assumption that there were three is based on the number of gifts.
- There is a wide range of Christmas carols and songs available; the children may be learning some in school at the time when this unit is being taught and these could be drawn on.
- Postcards and packs showing pictures are readily available from major art galleries and publishers, and are also on the internet. Christmas cards could also be used. If possible, use an OHP or epidiascope to enlarge images for class discussion.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

A DRAMATIC ESCAPE

- that although the people in the story lived in a very different world, their emotions would have been similar to those of people today and that fear and jealousy continue to cause problems
- Tell the story of Herod's jealousy and its terrible consequences. A carol which conveys this effectively is the 'Coventry carol'. Explore sensitively children's own experiences of extreme feelings and emotions, such as fear or jealousy.
- Emphasise the dramatic nature of the story and the sudden departure from Bethlehem to Egypt at night. Look at a map to find Egypt and work out how far this journey was. *How would they have travelled? On foot? By camel or donkey? What would Joseph have been concerned about? How might Mary have felt?* Explore the feelings of fear, threat, the experience of homelessness. Make links with present-day events, eg *the experience of refugees*.
- Follow-up tasks to this sequence of lessons:
 - drama or role play
 - sequencing the events of the journeys from Nazareth to Bethlehem to Egypt
 - showing the journeys on a pictorial map
 - writing a letter or diary account from the point of view of one of the characters
 - composing music to convey the events of the journeys or the moods of the characters
- ask questions about identity, recognising and expressing feelings about their own identity in the light of their learning
- explore something of the powerful emotions involved in the story
- Some children in the school may be refugees or have had similar experiences so this must be dealt with sensitively.

FUTURE LEARNING

Children could go on to:

- listen to other examples of music which portrays religious stories and experiences
- engage in further study of the gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING

Children could:

- research the work of charities and organisations which care for homeless people and refugees