

faith at home

Weekly Resources for Schools

PHASE: PRIMARY

THEME: Christmas
Comfort and Joy



KEY CONCEPT/MESSAGE:

Christmas – a time of Comfort and Joy

Christmas can be a time of real joy for many people – a chance to see family, give gifts, sing, rest and eat together. However, for some people it can be a time of sadness, being reminded of what's missing.

For Christians, Christmas is a time of many different emotions. Joy comes not from what they have, but from celebrating the birth of Jesus. In fact, as it says in the video, they believe it is still possible to be joyful without all the trimmings of Christmas. It is also a time for comfort; Jesus, whom Christians believe is God in human form, entered the world in a humble condition. Therefore, he is able to empathise with difficult circumstances. He was born in a dirty stable and his family became refugees – fleeing from King Herod. Yet even so, there were reasons to celebrate his birth.

Both lowly shepherds and lofty Magi brought gifts for the Christ-child. Christians similarly give gifts, remembering that God has given the greatest gift of all – his son. In response to God's generosity, Christians believe they should be generous too – especially to those in need – bringing comfort and doing so joyfully.

BIBLE STORY OF THE WEEK:

The Birth of Jesus

[Luke 1:26 – 56; 2:1-20](#)

[Matthew 1:18 – 2:23](#)

'I bring good news of great JOY that will be for all the people.' Luke 2:10



Gathering

To prepare:

Use a wooden crib set or printed-out pictures of the different characters in the Christmas story. Or you could simply write the names of those characters on post-it notes, ready to distribute.

Let's begin

(You may light a candle – or at this time of year, your Advent wreath - and have a special welcoming prayer or response you use as you start worship)

Today, we are thinking about what makes Christmas so joyful! I wonder, what makes Christmas joyful to you? (be sensitive here to the circumstances of families – where Christmas may be a stressful time)

Share some examples of the sorts of things people might say when asked this question (eg. Christmas trees and decorations, Christmas presents, Christmas songs, Christmas food).

I wonder whether it would still feel joyful if we didn't have those things? Is a Christmas without presents, decorations and food still Christmas?

Why don't you take a moment to talk about this together?

Optional: Watch this [clip of The Grinch](#), where the people of Whoville, whose presents and Christmas trimmings have been stolen away, sing joyfully anyway leading the Grinch to wonder: 'maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store?'

Today, we are going to think about what the Christmas story can show us about what JOY really is. And how it can bring COMFORT to those who are having a hard time.

Engagement

We are now going to think about the different ways people in the Nativity story must have felt.

Distribute the crib characters, printed pictures of post-it notes to the class. As well as the 'main parts' you could include the animals, innkeepers, King Herod and Mary and Joseph's family.

Throughout the story of the first Christmas, people will have felt all kinds of emotions. So many strange, challenging and wonderful things happened!

How do you think the character you've been given felt about what happened to them in the story?

As we read through the story, think about the different characters and how they would have felt. When we get to the part where your character features, I'm going to ask for your reflections on that person/ animal's emotions.

For example – I wonder how the innkeepers who had no room felt, turning Mary and Joseph away?

I wonder how the sheep felt, who were disturbed by a very bright light (angels) and then were taken (or left behind) to go and see a new baby?

I wonder how Mary and Joseph's family felt if they heard about Herod's anger, but had to wait several years before Mary and Joseph returned?

Either retell the story in your own words or use a children's Nativity storybook.

Which characters in the story felt JOY? What was it that made them feel that way?

Try to focus in on how concepts like HOPE, GOOD NEWS, ENCOURAGEMENT, GOD'S WORD might have enabled that joy.

Christians believe that Jesus' birth is a reason to be **JOYFUL** because it shows that **God** came to live among his people, to bring them freedom and new life. It is a sign of **HOPE**.

'I bring good news of great JOY that will be for all the people.' Luke 2:10



Which characters felt sad, anxious, frightened, angry or bereft? Which messages from the Christmas story might help them with their feelings? How would you **COMFORT** that character? What might you say?

Refer back to the worship on 'How do we make sense of our feelings' to talk about how all emotions are important and some healthy ways we can express and process those emotions.

Christians believe that because of Jesus, they can trust God and don't need to live in fear.

'Do not be afraid' the angels said. Luke 2:10

They find COMFORT in knowing that God is with them, and that he knows what it's like to live on earth in a difficult, dangerous (and smelly) situation!

Response

Let's look at Mary through this story.

At some moments, she is full of joy and excitement. At other moments, she must have been really worried and anxious.

Mary shows us that it is completely human to feel lots of different emotions.

I wonder how Christmas makes you feel? It's unlikely you will feel the same about every aspect of the Christmas season – some of it may feel joyful, some of it may feel harder. For example, remembering someone who used to be with us who isn't now, feeling disappointed about missing out on something you wished for or getting excited about a special Christmas activity.

Can you plot your emotions on a zigzag like this?

(Or use a character from the story if it's too hard to show personal feelings)

Perhaps use your finger to draw the ups and downs over your other hand.



What helps you in the 'down' moments? What brings you COMFORT? How might you bring comfort to others in their down times?

Remember, it is healthy to have both up and down times in our life (this [clip](#) from Inside Out is a reminder of the need for all emotions).

Christians believe they can come to Jesus with their worries, fears and sadness knowing that he empathises with them. He has felt all those feelings too – right from when he was a baby.

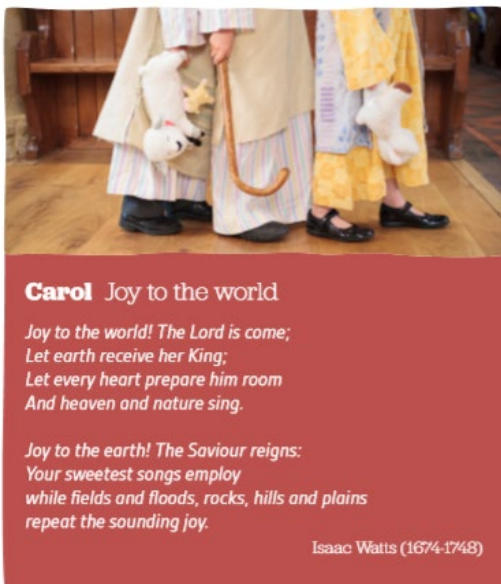
His birth was not in a clean, safe hospital but a noisy stable. His family had to run away from a jealous king and he began his life in hiding, as a refugee. But he also experienced love, the excitement of visitors who thought he was special and the joy of angel choirs!

What does it feel like when you hear someone else understands how you feel?

Who can you talk to this Christmas about the different feelings you have?

Sending

'Do not be afraid, I bring good news of great JOY that will be for all the people.'



Who might need some joy in their lives at the moment? What 'good news' might you be able to bring?

Perhaps someone in your class? In your family? Or in your community?

Find out, through the charities your school supports, who around our country and our world needs COMFORT and JOY today.

How might we demonstrate comfort and joy to those around us, this Christmas?

Heavenly Father

We thank you for sending Jesus into the world to live like us. We are so grateful that he knows what it's like to feel sadness, pain, fear but also excitement and joy.

Please help us with all the different emotions we feel over the Christmas season – with anticipation, gratitude, disappointment and grief. Help us to know your comfort when we feel down, and to delight in your joy as we remember Jesus' birth.

May we show understanding to those who struggle during this time, looking to bring them comfort and to share our joy.

Amen

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

(practical ways to help us explore faith and develop spiritually at home together)

EXPERIENCES that can help us ENCOUNTER:

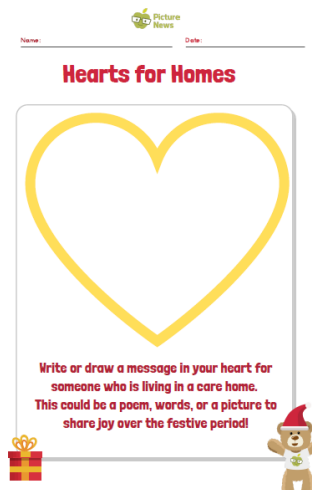
Reflect on COMFORT by listening to this famous solo from [Handel's Messiah](#)

Reflect on JOY by listening to this *acapella* version of the carol [Joy to the World](#)

What's your favourite Christmas carol? Could you record a special version to share with your community?

Explore the #heartsforhomes campaign – to give some comfort and joy to people living in care homes this Christmas:

<https://www.picture-news.co.uk/blog/hearts-for-homes-picture-news-christmas-campaign/>



Here, we can see the pupils from Holy Trinity Gee Cross School bringing some comfort and joy to residents of their local care home. Their idea, sparked the Hearts for Homes project – which any school can now get involved in! Who could you bring comfort and joy to this Christmas?

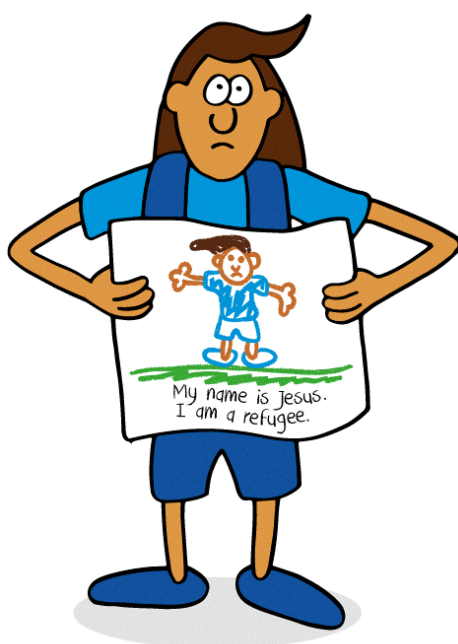


Image taken from ['Jesus was a Refugee' book](#)

The Bible tells us that Jesus and his family had to flee from Bethlehem because King Herod was angry and jealous. They had to run away to Egypt, as refugees.

Why don't you find out about what it's like to be a refugee this Christmas?

This [Prayer Spaces in Schools](#) activity, focusing on children travelling alone as refugees, gives practical ways to reflect and act.



Use the Church of England's COMFORT and JOY Advent Calendar to reflect on what brings us JOY and who might need COMFORT over the next few weeks:

<https://churchsupporthub.org/download/comfort-and-joy-advent-calendar/>

Or perhaps make your own...

| Date | What brings joy today? | Who needs comfort today? |
|------|------------------------|--------------------------|
|------|------------------------|--------------------------|

ACTIVITIES that can develop PRACTICES-HABITS:

Christmas Stars



Cut out star shapes and punch a hole in the top, ready to hang.

On each, ask the children to write their wish for Christmas – for themselves one on side and for other people (in their community or around the world) on the flip side.

How might they wish to experience COMFORT and JOY this year?
How might they bring COMFORT and JOY this year?

Use the **EXAMEN** prayer to reflect on our CHRISTMAS emotions. It has 5 steps, so you might like to count them on your fingers.

1. GIVE THANKS for people, experiences and situations that have brought you joy.
2. ASK FOR HELP with the times where I actually needed to be comforted.
3. REFLECT on the Christmas season – which parts are you excited about, which parts feel more worrying?
4. SAY SORRY for the times that you expected something from others that they couldn't give.
5. DECIDE how you will seek out COMFORT and JOY this Christmas, for yourself and others.

Here is a family [EXAMEN](#) – about the Christian belief that everyone can be part of God's family

CONVERSATIONS which CONNECT COMMUNITIES

Which part of the Christmas story do you find most JOYFUL? Why is that? In what way is this part 'good news' for humankind?

Who might need to hear 'good news' today?

What do we need in order to feel JOY? Is it possible to feel joyful without having very much?

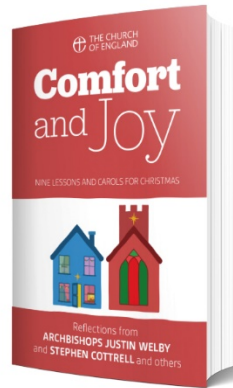
Is it possible to have everything one might want, and still not experience JOY?

Which characters in the Christmas story need COMFORT? Why is that? Which emotion were they feeling?

Have you ever felt like that? What brought you COMFORT?

How might you bring COMFORT to others today?

Find out more about 'Comfort and Joy' from the Church of England by clicking on this image:



COLLECTIVE WORSHIP – OUR APPROACH

INVITATIONAL

Everyone is welcome to take part in collective worship, as much or as little as they or their parents and carers are comfortable with. This means we use invitational language and consider carefully our choice of words and songs. Children are invited to pray but are not compelled or expected to do so; they always have a choice. We invite them to pray or reflect in whatever way they would usually as a family, if that is part of their home experience.

INCLUSIVE

Acts of worship need to be inclusive of all. Therefore, we choose topics and ideas that are shared by different faiths and worldviews. When we present Christian teaching, we make it clear that this is 'what Christians believe', saying things like:

'I wonder why this story might be important to Christians?'

'The story today comes from the Bible (the holy book of Christians), which teaches that ...'

Our worship should be accessible for children and young people with a range of different backgrounds, and so we take care that activities do not require expensive resources. We also offer a variety of activities, so that children and young people with differing needs can all find something they can engage with.

INSPIRING

We aim for our acts of worship to inspire those engaging with them. How might it engage their emotions, enabling a sense of peace, comfort, hope or motivation? How might it inspire them into action, into thinking differently and considering their behaviour or actions? How might it inspire them to reflect on their faith or beliefs, and on the faith or beliefs of others?