



Weekly Resources for Schools

PHASE: SECONDARY

**THEME: Christmas -
Comfort & Joy**



KEY CONCEPT/MESSAGE:

"God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If He gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it." Pope Francis

"It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving." Mother Teresa

Shops start stacking shelves in September. The adverts start in October. The music starts in November. The places where we live seem to change in December. All because of Christmas.

Christians have two major festivals, Easter and Christmas, both are times of celebration and wonder.

Children in school prepare for plays, learn carols and songs and focus on it.

But - Do we focus on the right things? Do we remember the right parts of the story?

How can we focus on the right things? Should we focus more on Christ at Christmas?

BIBLE PASSAGE OF THE WEEK:

The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** All went to their own towns to be registered. **4** Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. **5** He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he



was engaged and who was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around

them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: **11** to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"^[c]

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Gathering

Encourage everyone to share something about Christmas that they are looking forward to...gifts, family time, sweets, trips, decorations.

Encourage everyone to think about the things in the story that they don't understand or that they found confusing or complicated...decrees, place names, why shepherds, angels.

We think we know the story but when we really look into the meaning behind the story, it becomes more amazing. Christmas is all about surprises and amazement. Now let's engage with the amazing story.

Engagement

Look at the story from each character's point of view:

The journey meant walking 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, whilst Mary was pregnant, maybe even walking in the night to avoid the heat of the day. How long would it take? Unable to plan ahead.

The destination: Joseph's hometown – with no relatives prepared to take them in, no stranger able to give them a room, only a place set aside for animals, only a manger for the baby they had been told would save the world.

Ask some of these questions: What do they have to be afraid of? What do they have to be joyful about? What might their future hold after the birth of Jesus?

- Mary – unmarried, very young mother who is in danger of becoming an outcast because she is pregnant early. The mother of the long-awaited Messiah (Messiah meaning Saviour of the people, God's chosen leader).
- Joseph – engaged to an unmarried mother, thinking it might be easier to break off the engagement than to endure the hardship of being seen at this time as an outcast.
- Shepherds – often the outcasts of the community, unable to wash and therefore attend the synagogue as everyone else could, eating, sleeping and walking through the hills with the sheep for weeks at a time, financially responsible for other people's sheep that they safeguarded from predators.

Response

Watch some of these Christmas adverts from the last few years:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n731CQ6k3CA>

(The whole clip is more than 11 mins but maybe choose specific ones to show, or search for this year's adverts or your all-time favourite if you would like. The last one needs to be handled with particular sensitivity in the current circumstances.)

What is their focus? What is it making us think about or learn? Is it a good focus?

Does it matter that it doesn't remind us of Jesus? Can you have Christmas without Christ?

Now watch this to finish watch this clip included in the Advent Faith at Home episode:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOByXwK-g94&feature=emb_logo

Sending

Think about what makes Christmas special.

What wishes would you make for everyone?

A wish for happiness, for good health, for fun times together, family visits, rest and relaxation, for warm homes, for safe spaces...

Why not give an opportunity to share Christmas wishes – if it is something they would wish for themselves, they might respond “Amen” or “Let it be” or “So be it” – they all mean the same. This could be done with post-it notes to help those who may not want to share their ideas out loud but would be happy for them to be read by others.

(If you would like to finish by listening to some (non-Christmas) music why not play Let it Be by The Beatles)

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

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

EXPERIENCES that can help us **ENCOUNTER**:

The Gift of Love.



Write on a piece of paper ‘The Greatest Gift’ and on the reverse ‘Is Love’. Put it into an envelope and seal it. Put the envelope in a bigger envelope or small box. Seal it.

Place that box or large envelope in a larger box (shoe box?) and wrap it like a Christmas gift.

Show the class the gift. Ask them what they think is in it?

What are the best gifts they've ever had? Would they fit in a box this size?

Choose one person to unwrap the first layer and open the box.

What does it feel like to still not know? Have they ever had to wait for something – how did that feel? Was it worth the wait in the end?

Choose a different person to unwrap the next layer. They will be left with an envelope. Have your hopes gone down now that you have seen it's an envelope? Why is that?

What could it be do you think? Money? Would it be worth it if it was money? How much is worth it?

Get a different person to open the last envelope. It's not money. It's the greatest gift.

How much is love worth? Can you buy it? Can you wrap it? Can you give it? Can you tell if you haven't been given it? Is it really the greatest? Is there anything greater do you think?

For Christians, Jesus is the embodiment of Love. He is the incarnation of a God of Love.

For Christians, Jesus is the greatest gift the world has ever received.

Christmas represents the moment when the greatest gift was given by God.

ACTIVITIES that can develop PRACTICES-HABITS:

Set up a Christmas tree in your classroom or create a display showing a Christmas tree.

- Cut out card shapes to make tree decorations or baubles.
- Write Christmas wishes for the world on them.
- Decorate your tree with characters from the nativity story.

Write Christmas Cards to local organisations that care at Christmas:

- Are there local foodbanks, homeless shelters, refugee charities, care homes, churches?
- Send Christmas messages of hope, love, peace and joy to these groups.

If you would like to connect your message to those in the story Christmas story. You could end with a blessing like this: *'May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this Christmas;'*

PRAYERS that can help us REFLECT:

Use the Examen prayer to reflect on the meaning of Christmas:

It has 5 steps:

GIVE THANKS ...for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, for the celebrations we have in our homes and communities, for the gifts given and the love that goes into them.

ASK FOR HELP ...for those who find Christmas a hard time, for the anxious times and the stressful times. For those who will have no home, no safety, no food, no idea what next year brings.

REFLECT ...on the hope, love, joy and peace that Christians understand Jesus brought. The hope for all people, the love for this world, the joy of heaven and the peace that the world cannot offer.

SAY SORRY ...for the times when presents have been your focus, for the time not spent with those whom you love but on devices that take your time and focus.

DECIDE ...what you will focus on this Christmas, how you will be a bringer of hope, joy, love and peace in your home, school or community, and what makes Christmas for you.

If you have the ability to light 4 candles one at a time –

Light the first and think about our hopes – for ourselves and the world.

Light the second and think about the ways the ways we might spread peace.

Light the third and remember those we love and those who love us.

And light the fourth and think of how we could bring joy to others.

Spend a moment in silence before ending your time of prayer.

Alternatively – Watch this film and think of how important it is to keep the flames of love, peace, faith and hope alight in our lives and in our communities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jclpM8cVXQU>

Or - Here are some sites where virtual candles can be lit or where students could see the candles lit by others. These could be shared for those who may want to do this again later:

e.g. <https://gratefulness.org/light-a-candle/>

Coventry Cathedral have a link to light a virtual candle and add a prayer to their virtual prayer wall: <http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/candle/>

Some hospices hold events at Christmas where people come together to light a candle to remember a loved one who has died, to help bring comfort and good memories in focus. The Church of England website provides a place where this can be done virtually:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals/light-candle-remember-someone>

CONVERSATIONS which CONNECT COMMUNITIES:

Discussion starters for groups:

What are the different things that take our focus away from the Christian meaning of Christmas?

Receiving gifts, buying food, having new and expensive things...are these shops or businesses trying to make money from our happiness? How easy is for you to keep focussed on non-material things?

Some Nativity Story books for small children tell the story of Mary and Joseph but omit the part about the baby being God's son. How important is it that we know that Christians believe it is God's son being born and not just a special baby that has angels in the story?

How can people who do not believe in God celebrate Christmas? What does it mean to them?

During the First World War soldiers in the trenches laid down their weapons on Christmas day, climbed out of their trenches and swapped possessions with 'the enemy'. Although they were different, they still found Christmas united them. What unites us at Christmas?

Explore ideas about the kind of Christmas advert you would film if you were reminding people of the birth of Jesus and its significance for Christians.

What do you want Christmas 2021 to be like?

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?