issue 2
advent, christmas and epiphany
27 november 2011 to 12 february 2012

spill the beans
worship and learning resources for all ages

A lectionary-based resource with a Scottish flavour for Sunday Schools, Junior Churches and Worship Leaders

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ethos

There is a particular ethos behind this material: it’s all about *story*. When we spill the beans about anything, we tell the story of what happened and we share the story of what that means for us.

We believe *story is the lifeblood of faith*. In story we can tell the truth and speak with honesty about things for which there are not yet words. Story contains mystery and is the poetry that forms faith. Stories grow as we grow and can reveal new truths at different times in our lives.

So we believe *giving stories* to people is one of the most important things we can do in sharing our faith. Children and adults hold stories in their being and keep coming back to them throughout life. Our culture is stored in story. The same is true for our faith.

We believe in telling story. This material is simply the retelling of our faith stories. It always starts with the story each week.

Then each activity is simply a way to engage the story and enable children and adults to imbed the story, capturing different aspects of it, highlighting different images that help us hold the story in our beings.

But we believe these faith stories ought to be able to *mingle with our own life stories*, our day-to-day experiences. So as activities are engaged, it is important to ask people to retell the faith story along with their own story of that week. It’s the tangle of life stories with faith stories that perhaps make both real.

We believe *one story is the lens through which we hear other stories*. Faith narratives create a web: if we think about water, then what other stories involving water do we find in the Bible; if we are reflecting on forgiveness, what other stories of forgiveness can we hear. During activities the question ought to be asked: does this story remind you of other stories in the Bible? Stories don’t exist on their own but in a diverse web, each feeding the other.

We believe that *as we grow we reflect in different ways* on the faith stories we hold. Our idea is to invest these stories in people, offering each as a gift of faith. The story may be understood in a literal way during younger years, then with questions about their historical accuracy as people move into teenage years and then move into a third stage where we hear the story again for the first time, but this time holding the meaning, the deep down truth in the story that helps it shape our living and how we understand and engage with the world in justice and in grace. Story holds the faith more honestly and in a much deeper way than any creed and doctrine.

Join us and spill the beans.

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For more information and extra materials, join us at the Spill the Beans blog: [http://spillbeans.org.uk](http://spillbeans.org.uk)

**Key to Abbreviations**

In the worship ideas section the following abbreviations are used:

- CG Common Ground
- CH4 Church Hymnary, 4th Edition
- JP Junior Praise
- MP Mission Praise
- SGP Songs of God’s People
- WGRG Wild Goose Worship Group
Welcome to Issue 2 of Spill the Beans!

This experiment in sharing resources that have been written and prepared by working ministers and church members for use in our own congregations continues for the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

It is our hope that with every week of Spill the Beans you will find a range of different ideas that will encourage you to explore the depth within each week’s story.

Like a huge bowl of multi-coloured jelly beans of assorted flavours, or a table laid out with a rich feast, no one should be expected to consume everything!

Introductions

Here are some helpful tips to guide you in your use of the material in age groups:

1. It presumes some introduction to the story will have taken place in worship together or will play a part in the service when children join it later.

2. Depending on the make-up of your own groups of children you will need to remain flexible in how you use the material.

3. Each idea has been given a guide age range to help your planning, but this is only a guide and your own circumstances may make certain crafts or activities more or less successful.

4. Before the sit-down activities if you have a group of young children or lots of boys, you may want to add a run-around type game before the gathering time to expend some energy.

5. Use the gathering time exercise to get into the story. Begin with a circle where the whole Sunday School is together and do this activity together (gathering time).

6. Then retell the story together (it should have been told already in worship if you begin together there).

7. Follow that by choosing as many or as few activities your space and time allow. You could offer a number of activities each at different stations all at the same time for all ages to self-select with a teacher staffing each one, or have traditional classes.

8. During activities, ask children to retell the story to you and ask about their week, what was happy and what was sad and if this week’s story reminds them of other biblical and personal stories.

9. The intention is not to complete “the task” brilliantly, but rather to provide opportunities to begin conversations, build relationships, retell the story of the day, and talk about what it might have felt like then and what it means for us today.

10. There are numerous websites that will provide handout type sheets that will have images, crosswords and wordsearches for the themes of these weeks. While helpful in a pinch, try not to rely on these!

Worship Ideas

Each week we provide a selection of words, ideas and creative moments to take the theme and the passage a little further. We do not provide a ready made service or perfect prayers but ideas and pointers that hopefully scratch at your own creativity and provoke heaven’s imagination within you.

Age Group Ideas

These are a few ideas that possibly expand upon the story offering words, phrases, poetry and ideas that could be used in some way in worship. They are not to be used exactly as they are but ought to be edited and expanded to suit the culture of your own faith community.

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through the season

Here are a couple of ideas that can help build up a visual focus as you move through the season. These ideas are provided for you to use and adapt depending on the size, shape and layout of your worship space and whether you have access to or expertise in using projected images and audiovisual elements.

These ideas provide possible ways of linking all the weeks together which can be a helpful reminder to people of the thread of the story and the key aspects being focused on during worship.

These ideas can be used independently or together and can also be linked with other elements of the worship material. They can also be adapted to be used within age groups.

From the beginning of Advent right through to the end of Epiphany, we are focusing on the general theme of ‘Light’ but with a different emphasis in each of the sections of this thirteen week period.

• Advent: Preparing for the light
• Christmas: Celebrating the light
• Epiphany: Revealing the light

A ‘candle’ will be the main visual focus through Advent and Christmas. During Epiphany the main visual focus will use mirrors.

Advent and Christmas

You could set the scene by having a display of candles in your entrance / gathering area or as a focus on a table at some appropriate place in your worship space.

Place pillar candles of various sizes (purple or white or gold or a mixture of those colours would be good) on a large tray or dish and place the dish on a table covered by a piece of cloth and set in prominent place. It’s best to light the candles only if you can have someone positioned on guard duty, so that no-one bumps into the candles and so that candles are not left lit in a vestibule when no-one is around!

Listed here are three possibilities for your main ‘candle(s)’. Depending on your situation use whichever one suits you best or use the ideas to develop something different and then please send us a photo.

Whichever one you decide to use for your main ‘candle(s)’, you could make one of the others to display, perhaps even in a different part of your building, so that people who are not involved in worship, get an idea of the message of the season.

You could get a wee group of people of various ages together to work on the display each week.

1. Frieze

Draw or get people to draw candles of various sizes and shapes onto thin white card, colouring flames and adding glitter to edges of candles. Cut these out and stick them onto a large piece of purple frieze paper and then put this up on the wall. Make sure that there are at least 5 prominent candles which are big enough for words to be stuck onto. Words will be added to the frieze each week.

2. Mega candles

Make or get people to make mega paper candles. Make a piece of purple frieze paper into a large tube, gathering one end of tube together and adding yellow tissue paper flame by scrunching up tissue paper and putting it into the middle of the gathered top before taping it together. Make 4 mega candles of slightly different heights. Make one white mega candle for Christmas Day.

Fill mega candles with scrunched up newspaper so that they stand freely and do not lose their shape. If you are going to be moving your mega candles around, make sure you cover the bottom, perhaps with netting material, so that the newspaper doesn’t fall out. Words will be stuck to the mega candles each week.

3. Lamps

Buy large free standing ‘paper tube’ lamp(s). Either one lamp to which you will add different words to different parts during advent or 5 lamps, one for each week.

Ikea is a good source for these lamps, e.g. DUDERÖ floor lamp (£11.99) or HOLMÖ floor lamp (£6.99), or RUTBO (£31.99 but is segmented in five sections, perfect for Advent and Christmas day).

Alternatively, buy a smaller table lamp, e.g. GRONÖ table lamp (£4.49 from Ikea) onto which add words to different sides of the lamp or you could buy 4 table lamps, one for each week of Advent and 1 larger floor lamp for Christmas Day.

Theme Song

During Advent it would be possible to use the traditional song from Cameroon “He came down that we may have love” (CH4 359) and adapt the words of the simple verses week by week to fit the theme, (e.g. using light each week and adding joy, love, hope, peace, faith, trust as you journey through advent).

Or why not write your own theme song and forward a copy to us which we can make available to others via the spill the beans blog [http:\spillbeans.org.uk].
Whether you are using the mega candles or lamps, you could also think about moving them around your worship space week by week, at the back, by the font, amongst the people, at the front, into the centre, bringing them from further out into the heart of things as the light is gifted to the people.

Some suggestions for each week:

**27 Nov**
- **Story:** Isaiah 64:1-9
- **Theme:** Promisers of Light
- **Word:** Hope

**4 Dec**
- **Story:** Mark 1:1-8
- **Theme:** Preparers of the Light
- **Word:** Peace

**11 Dec**
- **Story:** John 1:6-28
- **Theme:** Witnesses to the Light
- **Word:** Joy

**18 Dec**
- **Story:** Luke 1:26-38(56)
- **Theme:** Bearer of the Light
- **Word:** Love

**25 Dec**
- **Story:** Luke 2:1-20
- **Theme:** Gift of Light
- **Word:** ‘Christ Child’ or ‘Jesus’

**1 Jan**
- **Story:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 & Revelation 21:1-6a
- **Theme:** Light for our time
- **Action:** Give everyone a large tealight in a glass holder with sticker on holder saying ‘Go to be light in our time’ (GLIMMA candle holders from Ikea would work well, £1.49 for 6).

These ideas are not intended to replace a traditional Advent candle ring, where one more candle is lit each week, but to further emphasise the light theme.

If you have a Christmas tree in your worship space, you have to think about where the visual focus will be placed in relation to your Christmas tree. With this theme, you could emphasize the lighting of the Christmas tree during worship, rather than it already be lit one week when people arrive.

If you are using PowerPoint, you could also find a suitable image of candle(s) and add the key words in each week. See images ideas in week by week material for further ideas.

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**Epiphany**

You could set the scene by having a display of mirrors / mirror balls on a table or on the wall in your entrance / gathering area or on a table at the front of your worship space. One white candle could be placed on top of the mirrors to link with the Advent / Christmas visual and to remind us that Christ’s light shines today and that is the light we are revealing through our lives and in our world.

The main visual focus for Epiphany will be a display of mirrors around which words will be added each week.

Design your display to suit your worship space, using either a large free standing mirror or wall mounted mirror or mirror tiles (which can be bought from a DIY shop) and CDs stuck to a board which can be placed at the front of worship space, perhaps resting on a table covered in shiny gold or silver fabric. You could hang a large framed mirror to the wall. If you used one of the lamps during Advent, you might be able to position your lamp close to your mirror display so that the light is reflected within the mirror. A small adjustable desk lamp would also be useful here.

Here are the themes to add to the display week by week:

**8 Jan**
- **Story:** Mark 1:4-11
- **Theme:** Bathed in Light

**15 Jan**
- **Story:** John 1:43-51
- **Theme:** Experiencing the Light

**22 Jan**
- **Story:** Mark 1:14-20
- **Theme:** Trusting the Light

**29 Jan**
- **Story:** Mark 1:21-28
- **Theme:** Bringing Light

**5 Feb**
- **Story:** Mark 1:29-39
- **Theme:** Touching the Light

**12 Feb**
- **Story:** Mark 1:40-45
- **Theme:** Unsettling Light

**19 Feb**
- **Story:** Mark 9:2-10
- **Theme:** Dazzling Light
At this time of year, in the midst of the Christmas shopping frenzy, travel agents try to get us to look forward to quieter sun-filled days by the poolside or a relaxing cruise on the Med. For those with cash to spare, or even those ready with Credit Card to hand, the temptation is great in the midst of the longer hours of darkness and the bitter cold of winter to not just dream of sunny days but to turn that dream into a reality.

In the midst of a particularly bad winter it is good to have something to look forward to. Yet in today's difficult financial climate such hopes all but disappear for many. And when we look a bit deeper the reality for many is that the prospect of "sunnier days" seems quite slim with endless troubles and traumas piling pressure upon pressure: many find themselves in a rut that is hard to escape from.

In this reading from Isaiah there is a sense of darkness, despair and even the feeling of being in some sort of spiritual rut as the writer continues a prayer started in the previous chapter. At first glance it seems that a bleak picture is being painted in this passage relying on an earnest prayer to God. It is a heartfelt cry rising to God asking for his help as the writer seems to go from one extreme to another—from questioning to acceptance, from despair to hope. But isn’t that the way when we are down and feeling vulnerable?

In this instance Israel needed to hear again the promise of something better to get them through this dark time as they looked forward to "sunnier days" with the promise of light for them and light for the whole world.

Verse 8 is the turning point, “But you are our father, Lord.” The light slowly comes to life in the hope of what God was yet to do, our God who never changes, is faithful and whose love is new and fresh each new day. The one who had brought them to life would, like a potter working with clay, work with them to re-create them and, with the fire of the furnace, fire them to new life and new hope.

Questions are always in order and as we wrestle and pray; God listens then takes us and makes us new. Being people of the light in this Advent season is not about being people who passively wait for something to happen. This is an active waiting when God’s people put their lives into his hands and allow him to hold them in the darkness until they see the light again; that we might in turn do the same for others.
the story

Are you ready?

Andy: Did you hear that noise?
Ada: What noise dear?
Andy: That rumbling noise?
Ada: Och, it will just be your stomach?
Andy: Naw. It wisnea ma stomach. I had sausages, haggis, black pudding, bacon, eggs, fried bread, beans and porridge for breakfast. I'm stuffed!
Ada: Well what did it sound like?
Andy: It was like wood cracking on the fire, and a big drum beating in the distance?
Ada: Maybe we are in for a storm?
Andy: Naw, it cannae be a storm, the suns splitting the trees out there!
Ada: So how can we know God is real?
Andy: I think he changes us from the inside out. He shapes and moulds us into the people he wants us to become. He forgets all the mistakes we have made, and suddenly we begin to radiate God's light in our own lives and in the world.

Ada: What do you think God is like now?
Andy: Well, I haven't seen him myself. He came to Moses as a Burning Bush, a whispering voice to Isaiah, and as a wrestler to Jacob, so I guess he could be anything today.
Ada: Maybe, he could be a hurricane, or a sunset, or a footballer!
Andy: Aye, and we would still not recognise him then either. Most of these footballers think they are god anyway.
Ada: How about I make you a nice cup of tea, and that will calm your nerves. Camomile?
Andy: Canon mile! That sounds a bit explosive. Wait, Ada, I can hear it again?
Ada: Hear what again?
Andy: The sound? The rumbling and the crackling.
Ada: Maybe its God trying to tell you something?
Andy: Aye, my mammy used to tell me that the sound of thunder meant that God was angry!

Retelling for young people

In the past the people believed when God was close there was quaking (can you quake?). In the past the people believed when God was close everyone would tremble (can you tremble?). In the past people believed when God was close even the mountains would shake with fear (can you shake?). But no one had ever heard of a God who did good things to those who did good things to others, except our God. People believed God smiled on those who did right things (can you smile?). People believed God forgave and was kind to those who did wrong (can you be kind?). A long time ago, the city people lived in was attacked and ruined and they asked God, “what are you being to us: happy, kind or angry?” And God said... well for the next four weeks we’ll find out how God answered that question.

worship ideas

Through the Season

Don't forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Welcome Discussion

As people welcome each other to worship, ask them to share with the person next to them a couple of thoughts on waiting... both an experience of excited waiting (e.g., a child waiting for a birthday, or waiting for a roller coaster ride) and of fearful waiting (e.g., waiting on a dentist appointment, or results from the doctor).

Gathering Activity all age

Before the Advent Candle Liturgy, “hide” the various parts needed for the advent candle ring, i.e. the candles, the ring, the stand, matches, lighter, taper, douser, etc. around the worship space. Seek the assistance of some of the younger members to search for all the different parts that are required to make up the ring, they become people who help to prepare for the promised light themselves as they help to build the advent candle ring before the first candle is lit.

Call to Worship

Leader: In the times when we tremble
All: The Light is with us
Leader: In the times when we fail to hear
All: The Light is with us
Leader: In the times when we dare not look
All: The Light is with us
Leader: In our worship, in our lives
All: Let us prepare for the Light to come among us.
Advent Candle Liturgy

Leader: In the story of God, we read of the light that has shone into the world, a light that brought hope to all. The light is all around us, the light is always with us, when we dare to hope and when we fear to dare. God challenges us to be alert and see the light around us… even in those people and places we would rather think of as dark. The light is coming, Christ is coming. The light is with us, Christ is with us. Dare to hope that we might be the light.

All: Today we light a candle… a candle of hope as we enter this season of preparation and waiting. May we prepare for the coming of the light, by seeing the light in those around us. Show us your light as we prepare to welcome you, as we dare to hope for a new way of living and being, of living and being as children of light.

Prayer of Approach

God, out of the cold and the dark, the wind and the rain, we are swept into the warmth of your embrace.

From the stresses and strains and the to-ing and fro-ing, we are cradled in your calm.

As we seek refuge in your house, may we know your presence nursing us back to health, restoring our soul, calming our fears.

And, more than that—may we know you stirring us gently to expectation and hope, planting in us a warmth that will carry us through the coldest day and a light that will see us through the darkest night.

Advent God, meet us here today. Amen.

Prayers for Others

God, in this advent season of hope and expectation, may we carry your hope into lives chilled by unrelenting darkness, may we encourage others to expect good things—and then ensure, by what we do, that they are not disappointed.

There is so much darkness in our world, so many folk for whom hope has long been extinguished. The darkness of war and injustice, of oppression and want; the darkness of fear and rejection, of violence and hate; the darkness of loss and loneliness, of longing and need.

So much darkness and so little hope. Lift up those eyes, O God, that are downcast, rekindle hope that has all but died.

Do a new thing, O God. Confound our expectations and surprise us with joy, the joy of those who know that the God of Advent comes to change the world. Amen.
Reflection
Waiting, we do a lot of waiting.
Waiting for friends, waiting for transport, waiting for news.
Waiting for an appointment, waiting for treatment, waiting for release.
Waiting at the corner, waiting in the rain, waiting in a drab and impersonal hospital room.
Sometimes we wait patiently. Sometimes we wait anxiously. Sometimes we wait with hope. Sometimes we wait with dread.
We are people who wait.
And, as time goes on, who can blame us if our waiting is without expectation?
Is it any wonder that we simply wait as a matter of course?
It's been so long since anything amazing happened.
We've come to expect nothing.
But it wouldn't take too much to re-ignite that ember that still burns within us.
To fire up that distant memory of a time when things were very different.
When God was one of us.
If God would only tear open the heavens and let us glimpse joy and wonder once more—then waiting would never be the same again.

Sending
In the midst of winter, we find ourselves waiting.
Warm us, O God, with the hope of Advent.
Chase away the chills and surprise us with love.
Brace us as we leave this place to live with great expectation.
Go with us, Advent God.

Praise Songs / Hymns
All my hope on God is founded (CH4 192, MP 16)
Awake, awake for night is flying (CH4 278)
Change my heart, O God (MP 69)
Christmas is coming (CH4 282)
Comfort, comfort now my people (CH4 274)
Great God of every shining constellation (CH4 246)
Have thine own way, Lord (MP 212)
He came down that we may love (CH4 359 which can be used as an Advent theme song, adding a verse with 'light', etc.)
Hope is a candle (CH4 284)
Immortal, invisible (CH4 132, MP 327)
Jesus, lover of my soul (CH4 490, MP 372)
Jesus, you are changing me (MP 389)
Let there be love (MP 411)
Longing for light (CH4 543)
Lord of all being (CH4 125)
O Lord of creation (CH4 500)
Advent Preparation  all age

You will need: a box containing various different items, e.g. bowl, wooden spoon, apron, map, compass, rucksack, water bottle, balloon, invitation, party poppers, party hat, Bible, candle, Christmas nativity card, Advent calendar.

Show the children a variety of items and get them to group the items together and discuss how those items help us to prepare for some activity.

For example, a bowl, wooden spoon and apron could be getting ready to make a cake. Or a map, compass, rucksack, water bottle, could be preparation for going on a hike. Or a balloon, invitation, party poppers, and party hat are all needed in getting ready to have a party.

Leave to the end a Bible, candle, Christmas card with nativity scene, and Advent calendar, which can be used to introduce the theme of getting ready to welcome Jesus.

crafts

While the following crafts and activities are being done it is important to connect the activities with the story. As they create Advent crafts talk about how many people had been looking forward to the coming of someone special to help God’s people, some waiting patiently, some impatiently. The prophets encouraged people to prepare themselves, to be ready.

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story.

Advent Candle  age 3-5

You will need: candle shapes cut from card (enough for each child), small pieces of tissue paper in varied colours, PVA glue.

Get the children to scrunch up the pieces of tissue paper and stick them onto the candle to decorate the candles as colourfully as possible. Talk about getting ready for something special, and the things you need to make sure are done. Perhaps talk about preparing for a party.

Advent Candle  age 9-12 Pots

You will need: air-drying clay.

Encourage the children to make a pot using the clay which can hold a tealight and discuss with them how God makes us into people who can prepare the way for the coming of the light. If you choose this craft you need to leave time next week for painting the pot—it must be fully dry before painting. Note the clay is fragile!

Mini Advent  age 6-8 Wreath

You will need: a cardboard ring for each child with hole cut out in the middle (see page 85), holly leaf shapes, green paint, card candle shapes, colouring pens, stickers, glue.

The children can decorate their ring either by painting it or by sticking holly leaf shapes on it. Then provide each child with 4 cardboard candles which they can decorate and stick to the ring at home, adding one candle each week of Advent. This craft activity can prompt a conversation about how during this time we prepare for the coming of the light.

Mixing It Up  all age

You will need: paints, brushes, paper.

This activity could be used for young children and older alike.

Let the children move the brushes about the paper as they wish and let them use the colours all over the place, mixing in with one another and then ask them to tell you about the colours, the shape, the design. This lets the imagination flow and as God moulds us, we are moulding our own design.

Activities

Make Believe  age 3-5

You will need: plasticine or play dough (lots of colours), depending on numbers either have an A4 piece of paper per child or a large piece of paper/wall paper with mountain, river and grass shapes outlined on it.

Let the children fill in the shapes on the picture with the play dough or plasticine, putting in an appropriate colour in the right area.

Ask the children about the colours, about what flies in the sky, what swims in water, what eats grass. With the additional play dough make animals to put on the grass, in the sky, in the river. Talk about the Bible story pointing out the mountains that trembled, etc.

Movement  all age

You will need: source of music (CD player, mp3 player).

This is a bit like ‘follow the leader’ but with the help of music. The music piece you pick should have lots of variety, like loud and quiet sections, slow and fast. As the music is playing get the children to walk tall, stretch, skip, jog walk, etc. in a way appropriate to the music.

For additional fun and significance to shaping give the children crepe paper streamers to wave about and make shapes as they go along. This activity can be used to emphasise the importance of listening to know what to do, like the people listening to the prophets.
games

Story Game  age 3-5

You will need: cushions, blue fabric, chairs.

The cushions in this game can represent mountains, the blue material the sea/river, and chairs can represent boats on the water.

Tell the children a story that involves them moving from one area to another and then start taking away one item at a time so they all have to eventually try to fit on one of each object.

Instruments  age 3-5

You will need: a selection of percussion instruments (hand-made equivalents like rice in a plastic cup will suffice).

Retell the Bible story using musical instruments to make the appropriate noises. Tambourines could be used to represent the shaking sound, drums for quaking, shakers for leaves blowing in the wind.

Plastic Cup Phone  age 6-9

You will need: a large space, plastic cups (ideally with small holes drilled into the base of the cups), large ball of string, scissors, a written message for each team (different messages of the same length would be ideal).

Talk about how the Prophets like Isaiah often spoke to God in their prayers and then passed on what they learnt to the people. They will have a chance also to pass on a message in this game.

Split the group into smaller teams, say of teams of four. They work first on making their plastic cup phones, feeding the string through the hole in the base of the cup, tying a knot, and then stretching the string across to the other side of the hall, cutting the string and attaching the other cup.

Once complete the teams, with two people on either side have to send their messages to their teammates at the other end of the line. The quickest most accurate team is the winner.

Promised Change  age 9-12

You will need: a chair for every other young person.

Place the chairs in a circle facing inwards. Split the full group into two equally-sized groups. One group sit on the chairs, the others stand one person behind each chair.

The young people seated on the chairs make a promise to each other by making eye contact and winking, they then quickly get up and swap seats. While they attempt to do this, the people stand behind them with arms at their sides, but when they see the person in the chair in front of them move they try to keep them from changing seat by grabbing their shoulders. They have to stay standing behind the chair. If they fail, then they will find a new person in their seat to try to stop from moving again. If the swapping pair are restrained (one or both) then they need to stay in their seats until they can try again.

Swap groups so that everyone gets a chance to play.

This game can be used to talk about the hope of wanting to change, about the promises that we receive from others that encourage us to change (like the prophets), but also that there are pressures and people who try to stop us.

your notes
discussion starters for teens

God: near or far?

With Issue 2 of Spill the Beans we have introduced some resources for teens (we have 12-15 year olds in mind). We hope these prove helpful and encourage your feedback.

**Opening Activity**

*You will need: soft balls or small bean bags, old lamps or buckets.*

The purpose of this activity is to explore the concepts of near and far.

Divide into teams of 3 or 4. Place an old unbreakable lamp (or empty bucket) for each team at one end of the hall and line up the teams as far away as reasonably possible. Give each team a soft ball or bean bag. Each person in the team gets a shot of trying to throw the ‘ball’ or ‘bean bag’ nearest to the lamp (or into the bucket). Find out who was nearest and who was furthest. Repeat but move the teams an equal amount of length towards the buckets. Repeat this about 4 times until everyone is reasonably near the lamp/bucket.

**Discussion**

Talk about the positives and negatives of being near and far away from the lamp (or bucket). When you are closer you are more likely to get the target, but when you are further away you have to be more skilful and put in more practise, etc.

**Explain**

Explain what Advent means: dictionary definition, in respect of the Christian calendar, pick up stuff already alluded to in church earlier in the morning: for example, the lighting of an advent candle.

**Graffiti Wall**

*You will need: large sheet of paper or lining paper, felt pens.*

Place the large piece of paper on wall or floor, hand out big felt pens to each young person and ask them to graffiti their ideas about why people around them feel or think that God is near or far away.

**Looking at the Evidence**

*You will need: printed copies of Isaiah 64:1-9.*

Give out the printed copies of today’s Bible story. In groups of 3 or 4 ask the young people to read the passage and list what kind of things in it might make people feel near or far away from God.

Examples, if necessary, could be:

**Far away**

Verse 1: God seems physically far away;
verse 7: when God’s face is hidden from us;
verse 5b: “we continued to sin…you were angry”;
verse 6 “our sins sweep us away”.

**Near**

Verse 8: God is a hands-on God;
verse 5: “God comes to the help…”;  
verse 3: God does awesome things.

**Graffiti Wall 2**

Is there anything else from this passage the groups would like to add to the graffiti wall they were working on earlier?

**Personal Reflection**

*You will need: A4 paper sheets, pens.*

Give each young person two pieces of writing sized paper and pen; sit in 1 or 2 circles with a bucket in the middle of each circle.

Ask everyone to write ‘Near’ on one of the pieces and ‘Far Away’ on the other and ask them to write anonymously something about what makes them feel/know that God is near or far away. There are no right or wrong responses to this.

Explain that you would like to rewrite/photograph/type what they have written with no names attached and display on the Graffiti Wall. If they are okay with that they can put their papers in the bucket if not they keep the paper themselves.

Note, as a leader do not intrude in the young person’s privacy here. Also please add to the wall in time for next week without any comment.
bible notes

The Good, the Bad, and the Gospel

Being the messengers of news can be both exciting and daunting because, depending on the circumstances, the news can be, on one extreme, uplifting when it’s good and devastating when it’s not. News, especially if it comes out of the blue, can pull the rug from under your feet and very often can be life-changing.

This impact on our lives might be because the news offers the prospect of something new and exciting that we would relish or it might bring to an end something we would rather have held onto.

Then there comes the dilemma for the bearer of the news: what is the best way of conveying the news? How do I set the scene? Do I build up to it? Is it better phoning, or writing, texting or going in person? Do we obfuscate: ‘Do you want the good news or the bad news first?’

The best way, yet not always the easiest way when the news is particularly challenging, is not to beat about the bush but to get straight to the point. This may sound harsh but the longer it takes to pass the message along, the more painful it can be in the telling.

The Good News, as we read it in Scripture and encounter it in Christ is both welcoming and challenging which is a challenge for preparers of the light.

Mark’s Gospel has a sense of this urgency in conveying the Good News, a sense of not beating about the bush which can be seen in how the stories are told and in the stories themselves.

In this particular passage it is seen firstly in the opening sentence, “This is the Good News about Jesus Christ”. There is no build up, no lead in, no introduction about Christ’s family history but a declaration of some amazing and life-changing news. This is a declaration of intent that is short, sharp and very much to the point.

This sense of urgency is heightened in the opening character, John, the messenger who came to prepare others to receive the promised light. Like the opening sentence there is a sense getting straight to the point. From nowhere came the message and the messenger; from the desert place came hope. He doesn’t dress up for the occasion in any way that might attract others to him or what he had to say, neither does he dress up the message: he tells it as it is.

It may be Good News but it is life-changing and, as such, is disturbing. To receive the light it is necessary to turn towards it. Many were not in the right place but had turned from God and therefore from the light, or perhaps circumstances had drawn them further and further away isolating them in their own desert places.

There is such a temptation at this time of year to dress up the message in the glitz and the glamour, the tinsel and the trappings that it gets dumbed down, lost even. As preparers of the light, in attracting the attention of others it is easy to emphasise the good and conveniently neglect the disturbing side of the Gospel.

We are sometimes called to go to take the message to challenging places: the dark, uninviting wilderness places of the world, and we shy away from the challenge. Jesus came to bring the full Gospel and it is that full Gospel that his own are called to share and live out.
Prepared to Prepare?

Everybody was talking about him. Everybody had an opinion on him. Everybody was going out to see him, so I wanted to go and see for myself what this man was like. I made some enquiries as to where I could find this man and the people said just follow the crowd. I thought I would only have to walk around the corner and I would find him, but I ended up walking miles outside of the town and into the desert.

I expected I would meet a kind, intelligent, well dressed man, but what I found was a man who looked as if he had lost his senses. His dress-sense left a lot to be desired, and it was hard to take anyone seriously who dressed in a camel coat and sandals! The best teachers at least looked pretty smart.

And this guy did not mince his words. He told us what we were doing wrong. He told us that we had to change. He told us that he was not the real deal, and someone better was to come whose shoes he was not fit to tie.

I thought to myself, maybe this other person will be better dressed, and use more appropriate language when addressing the crowds. However, this man they called John the Baptist seemed to know all my secrets, for he shouted them out at the top of his voice! I was blushing bright red, and I felt angry at what he was saying, and I thought how dare he!

Maybe this other person he talks about will be more circumspect, maybe he will be polite and not so direct. Maybe I will warm to him better than to this John person. At my age I don’t want to start changing things in my life, and living differently. I am not ready to give up my lifestyle, which is extremely comfortable, thank you very much! I do my religious duty, and I am happy to wait. I’ll get ready for the real deal, and not the messenger.

I could not sleep, despite all my walking and fresh air. The words of John were still ringing in my ears, and the things he mentioned about my life made me realise that a lot of my religiosity was little more than a sham. If he could see through me, then the one to come, who was going to be greater than John, might unearth other things in my life that I don’t yet recognise.

Maybe I should change now while I still have a chance? Maybe I should turn my life around in the way John suggested, so that when the real deal comes I will be able to recognise him?

I am going to go back to that river and get myself baptised. John might not be conventional or politically correct, and he certainly calls a spade a spade, not like my minister who seems very nice, but he does not get under my skin, like the Baptist has done.

So, in the morning I am going back to that river, to get a good soaking and start to live in the ways that God has called us to live, and get ready for the time when the Messiah comes!

Retelling for young people

Have the letters that make up the words ‘John the Baptist’ hidden around your worship space or meeting room, along with various clues as to who John was. These could be sand, water, honey, plastic insects, toy camel, newspaper, U-turn sign.

Encourage the children to go on a hunt to find these clues and then put these clues in the correct order and use them to tell the story of John the Baptist in your own words. Once you have gone through the story play a few story games with them: ask if people can remember the story from the objects; see if they can tell the story backwards with the objects; find out if they can think of other stories in the Bible using the objects as clues.

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

It might be an idea to place John the Baptist into our Nativity scenes, in whatever form they may be. He would be an incongruous figure—not quite fitting—but a stark reminder of the one who prepares the way.

‘Once met, never forgotten.’ Ask people to turn to a few folk round about them and discuss this phrase. Can people think of someone for whom they would use this phrase? Could this phrase be applied to John the Baptist?

Call to Worship

Leader: Come with all your cosiness
All: and prepare to be surprised
Leader: Come with your traditions
All: And prepare to be surprised
Leader: Come with all your cosiness
All: To be confronted by the stark reality of God.

Prayer of Confession

God forgive us
when we see you as ‘our God’
as though we had exclusive rights
to your comfort and your blessing.
Forgive us when we look on others as not worthy of your care.
Forgive us when our self righteousness puffs us up with pride
and makes us think that nothing can ever harm us, because you are on our side.

Keep on confronting us with our need to let you be God, beyond our control, beyond our measure, beyond our understanding.

And then, when we’ve given up even trying to fathom you out, give us a wee glimpse of your divine smile lighting up our darkness.
Prayer of Commitment

God, you sent John the Baptist to confront folk with the need to repent; he came bursting into the lives of the great and the good like a bull in a china shop.

May we stop slithering around like the brood of vipers we are, and start living out the good news we proclaim.

May we stop watering down the demands of the gospel and start living up to the faith we profess.

And when we begin to feel the burn of costly service, then, and only then, may we feel we can claim to be your disciples.

Reflection

They flocked to see him, this wild prophet. Out of curiosity? Out of novelty? Out of boredom?

He was certainly a sight to behold.

And he didn't mince his words. He told it straight.

Dressed nothing up.

Yet, still folk wanted to listen. Maybe tired of being spoon fed and molly-coddled.

They realised they needed to hear something more challenging.

It wasn't a message of comfort but, in a strange way, it was a message of hope.

And, somehow, the starkness made it more real.

What if we stopped dressing up the story and allowed the truth to emerge?

Being a messenger might involve saying the things that no one wants to hear and showing a way that no one wants to follow.

Shaking folk out of their complacency to look toward the light.

Prayers for Others

God you loved the world so much that you sent your Son to be born in poverty and to die in agony.

We pray for all those who know poverty today: poverty of mind, body or spirit; and for those who live daily with agony: agony of mind, body or spirit.

Restore your children, O God, in mind, body and spirit.

Before Jesus, came John to prepare the way. We pray for all people today who are messengers: messengers of hope, messengers of light, messengers of love.

We pray too for those who, like John, bring messages that folk don't want to hear: police officers bringing bad news, medical staff confirming worst fears, employers caught up in the demands of recession.

God, whether our lives are filled with things we're happy to hear or things we dreaded ever being told, may we know your presence through it all: healing bruised minds, bodies and spirits, bringing your own brand of hope, light and love.

Keep on confronting us with the harsh demands of the gospel until we too become harbingers of light in all the dark corners of your world and our world.

May we always stand out and stand up for hope, light and love.

Amen.

Sending

Restore us again, O God our Saviour, let your Spirit prepare us to welcome the living Word.

Revive us again, O Lord, to be preparers of the Light in this generation, in this place, in this community.

Praise Songs / Hymns

All (The) earth was dark (MP 8 or 643)
Christmas is coming (CH4 282)
Come, thou long-expected Jesus (CH4 472, MP 102)
Don't let my love grow cold (MP 978)
Emmanuel (MP 120)
He came down that we may love (CH4 359 which can be used as an Advent theme song, adding a verse with 'light', etc.)
Make way, make way (CH4 279, MP 457)
O come, O come Emmanuel (CH4 273, MP 493)
O laughing light, O first born of creation (CH4 135)
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (CH4 334, MP 538)
Prepare ye the way of the Lord (from Godspell by Stephen Schwartz)
The Kingdom of God (MP 651)
age group ideas gathering

Locust Drive  all age

You will need: copies of the Locust Drive sheet (see page 86) for each child, dice for each group.

Play a round or two of what is a typical game of ‘Beetle’ but using a Locust bug shape instead.

The children do this in small groups of four, sharing a common dice that goes around the group, the first person to complete the Locust is the winner. This should be done as quickly as possible.

Rules are included on the prepared sheets, and there is space for two rounds, should time allow.

This activity can lead into telling John the Baptist’s story, as you share how much John loved to munch locusts.

crafts

The crafts and activities are great opportunities to talk about the story for the day in a natural way. The intention is not to create perfect craft pieces, but rather to use this time to engage in conversation about the story. This week, there is plenty of scope for talking about the strange character John, an eccentric man, but also a man with a very clear purpose to prepare the way for Jesus. Sometimes we find and hear truth from unlikely sources.

Paper Plate Faces  age 3-5

You will need: paper plates, wool, crayons or colouring pens.

Each child receives paper plate. On one side they can make a picture of John’s face, using the wool for hair, crayon and pens, and so on. You can talk about what John might have looked like while they decorate this. Then talk a little about how he told everyone that Jesus was coming.

On the other side of the plate they can make a picture of their own face after they have heard John’s good news.

Puppet John  age 6-8

You will need: plastic tubs (you could use margarine tubs covered with plain paper), sand, glue, crayons, blue cellophane, card, lollipop sticks.

To encourage a retelling of the story of John with the children acting out John’s action, they can make a mini puppet stage.

Give each child a plastic tub which will have a slot cut into the base. The tub should be covered with plain paper which can be decorated on one side to represent the wilderness: stick play sand onto one side or to colour one side in yellow crayon. The other side will represent the river: stick small strips of blue cellophane or colour with blue crayon.

Get the children to draw, cut out and colour a small figure representing John the Baptist and to stick the figure onto a lollipop stick. Place the lollipop stick through the slot in the tub and they have their own puppet which they can use to retell the story.

Advent Candle  age 9-12

You will need: the pots made last week, paint, brushes, newspaper.

If you made the advent candle pots last week, then you could spend some time this week painting and decorating them.

Dark to Light  age 9-12

You will need: white card, poster paints, brushes, newspaper.

Provide each child with a piece of strong white card (slightly smaller than A4) and set out a variety of colours of poster paints. Each child then chooses one colour and starting with the darkest shade of that colour at one side of the picture they gradually mix in white until the colour becomes lighter and lighter as they paint across the paper.

Have photocopies of important words from today’s reading (good news, river, prepare, turn away, John, Baptist) already prepared and as the paint is drying get children to cut the words out and use this as a way of talking about how John prepared the way for Jesus. When paint is dry, stick words onto picture.

Good News  all age

You will need: blue frieze paper, glue, newspapers.

Get people to work together to cut big letters or words from newspaper titles or adverts which tell a message from today’s reading.

Examples could be ‘good news’, ‘someone is coming’, ‘prepare for the light of the world’. Stick the letters and words onto blue frieze paper, reminding us of the river where John baptised and preached.
activities

Dressing Up  age 3-5

You will need: dressing up clothes, old towels or bed sheets cut into dress or apron shapes.

This is a simple and fun way to encourage the children’s imaginations, using outfits that are from a different time. Let the children dress up and let them tell you who they are. They may still be themselves or they may tell you they are someone different. You can talk about the funny clothes that John wore, made out of camel skin.

Noisy Table  age 3-5

You will need: a table covered with toys, books, instruments that make noises (e.g. pasta in a box, coins in a tin, nuts in plastic tub).

Encourage the children to experiment with the noises they can make with the different objects. Do any of them make the sounds of locusts? Water rushing down the river? End this activity with a song during which the children can accompany with their ‘instruments’.

Who am I?  age 3-5

You will need: selection of cuddly toys, dolls, action figures, etc.

Get the children to pick a toy and talk to them about the different parts of the bodies. God gave us ears so that we can listen, eyes to see, hands to do things with, legs to walk on. John the Baptist wanted us to use all parts of our bodies to prepare for his cousin Jesus coming by listening, watching and doing good things.

Jigsaw  age 3-5

You will need: a Jigsaw with alphabet letters on (you may be able to borrow a big floor jigsaw from a local nursery).

God speaks to us through the words we read and hear. You could make up some very simple words using the letter pieces of the jigsaw puzzle as you talk with the children, perhaps spelling some of their names, or John, locust, camel.

Then let the children put the jigsaw all together.

Honey  age 6-12

You will need: a variety of different honeys, spoons, plates, napkins.

Allow the children to try the different types of honey. Where does the honey come from? The nectar from different flowers means the honey tastes different. Honey bees make the honey by regurgitating the nectar they swallow in the flowers. What do we eat/make with honey today? What nutrients are in honey? (As ever, wikipedia is a great source of information here!)

Honey is mentioned in several places in the bible, not just relating to John the Baptist. For instance, the Promised Land would be a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 33:3).

games

The Jordan  age 3-5

You will need: soft balls, blue material or blue bin.

Tell the children the balls are people who came to the Jordan river to meet John the Baptist and the blue material/bin is the Jordan. They have to get as many balls into the Jordan that they can. You can also do this with older children but make the distance greater and the target smaller.

Washing Line  age 6-9

You will need: washing line rope, clothes pegs, clothes, letters cut out of paper or material.

Secure the rope between two chairs or get two leaders to hold it. Split the children into teams and give each team a selection of clothes and letters: note that all teams need the same things.

As a relay race get the children to run to the washing line one at a time when you tell them what you are looking for. For example, a sock, a pair of socks, belt, hang up the word John (they have to take 4 letters and 4 pegs).

Streams and Rivers  age 6-9

This game is just like Cat and Mouse. The children are in uniform lines (grid-like) 3 or 4 deep with finger tips touching each other so that there are clear paths between the rows of children.

At the start of the round you have one person amid the lines and the other standing beside you. When you say go, the person beside you must try to catch the other person. As they get nearer by going down the columns you shout “rivers” and the children all turn 90 degrees to “change the flow” of the river, once again finger tips touching but facing a different direction to create new columns to walk down. Both the children in the middle cannot break the arms that are out to the sides. Shout “streams” to revert back to the original layout.

If child 1 is caught pick two new people and start again, if not give the game a time limit, then change the players.

Have you heard?  age 6-12

You will need: make up a list of headlines on separate sheets of paper.

This game encourages imagination and thinking about the differences between bad news and good news.

Play this game in a circle or in lines facing each other. Player 1 reads from the slip of paper: Have you heard the bad news? The church doors are locked. Player 2 responds by thinking of something good about it, for example, “Yes, but the good news is we can worship outdoors today.”

Another example: Person 1 “Have you heard the bad news? It’s snowing again.” Person 2 “Yes, but the good news is we get a day off school.”

Are you being served?  age 6-12

You will need: slips of paper with the following scenarios: practising a tennis serve, self-service in a supermarket, a butler serving drinks, dinner ladies serving lunch, soldiers storming a building, John baptising, writing a letter and posting it, plus any others you may require so that each child has a scenario.

This can be done in teams. Allocate the slips to each child and they have to mime what is on their slip while the other team has to guess what it is. A point to each team if they can correctly work out what the mime is.

advent, christmas and epiphany 2011/2  17
Preparation

If you haven’t done so already, make sure to add any of the anonymous comments from last week’s personal reflection to the Graffiti Wall that was also created before the group meets.

Recap

Take a few moments to recap last week’s activities, and to allow space for any further thoughts or questions from the young people on what they did last week.

Opening Activity

You will need: old lamps or buckets, newspapers or magazines, scissors.

Place buckets (or old unbreakable lamps) used last week at one end of the hall/space and divide into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group several newspapers or magazines and explain that it is their job to make a path from their starting point to their bucket (or lamp) making their path with good news or hopeful stories cut or torn from their papers (this is not a race but rather a process of looking for good news stories and preparing the path).

Make the path a reasonable length. If possible, take some photos with a digital camera of the process and progress. You may need to check about parental permission for this if you do not have a blanket permission. Try to print some of these photos out for the following week.

Discussion

How easy or difficult was it to find good news, or hopeful stories? Do they feel from their own experience of living now that there are more good news stories than bad or vice versa? Do they have their own good or bad news stories to share from this past week?

Looking at the Evidence

You will need: printed copies of an image of John the Baptist (lots available via Google Images), and a copy of Mark 1:1-8.

With everyone sitting along their paths give out copies of picture of John the Baptist and copies of today’s story. Read aloud emphasising the first phrase ‘The beginning of the good news about Jesus…’

Around their picture of John the Baptist ask the young people to write down everything they can learn about John the Baptist from this passage.

Discussion

Discuss what they think about or have learned about the person and role of John the Baptist in the story of Advent.

In what ways can we try to prepare the way for more good news or good things to happen in our families, or schools, or community?
advent 3

witnesses to the light

sunday 11 december 2011

john 1:6-28

bible notes

Pointing to the Light

With a plethora of crime programmes on TV almost every night, terms like “witness” and “testify” conjure up a particular image that brings with it some very negative connotations. The whole idea of witnessing brings with it the unfortunate idea of “grassing someone up” and pointing the finger accusingly at another.

Any positive side of being a witness seems to have been lost in today’s society. Yet being called to be a witness does not need to be seen only in such negative terms as today’s passage suggests. When we witness something, it is not always a bad thing. We can also point to and witness to something that is good.

A witness points away from self to another and that is just what John came to do, to point away from himself to Jesus as he “came to tell people about the light” (v. 8).

John did not point in an accusing way but in a way to direct folk’s gaze and move both their eyes and indeed their lives towards that light, a light that came into the world to shine upon everybody.

John pointed to Jesus through his words as well as his actions. Everything he said and did prepared the way for Jesus as he introduced people to the light and the life to light up our lives as well as shed on our path through often dark and dismal times. This is what others must be able to see and, in turn, direct their lives towards.

There are, however, circumstances when the light might also bring out and show up all that we would rather hide. It is a welcoming gift that lights up the way in front of us and brings warmth into our lives. But it is also a searching light that seeks the darkest corners of our lives and the life of our world: the dusty, uninviting corners we would rather were kept in the dark, hidden away from the glare.

How can we effectively point to the light that brings life? We do so by living in the light and introducing others to it by our words and our actions, especially ones that give us the courage to travel to the dark corners of our communities and world. By seeing Jesus in the glaring needs around us, reaching out and moving out. As we point to those who are struggling we point to Jesus with them and in responding we are demonstrating how his love and his grace is alive and at work.

Weblink: http://isanglitrongliwanag.org/
The Light!

Andy: You’ll never guess what happened to me today?
Ada: You won the Euro Millions Jackpot?
Andy: Naw!
Ada: You discovered a way of clearing the world’s debt crisis?
Andy: Naw. I am being serious. I saw something today that changed my life.
Ada: You mean, you saw the new Scottish Slimmer’s diet!
Andy: Naw! Ada! I saw the light!
Ada: Whit, the light on the fridge, on the cooker, in the hallway? Whit light are you talking about?
Andy: You know, THE LIGHT!
Ada: Andy, I don’t know what you are talking about. All this talk about light is leaving me in the dark.
Andy: The light of the world: Jesus.
Ada: Ah, that Light. Why did you no’ just say that?
Andy: Well, meeting Jesus is one thing, but you can meet him lots of times, and still stay the same, but when you see the Light, Jesus becomes real in you, and the light of Jesus shines out from you.
Ada: Ah thought you were looking a wee bit lighter today.
Andy: Lets not go back to Scottish Slimmers!
Ada: No, honestly Andy, you don’t look so drawn or tired or weary or old today. You look happier and more content in your life.
Andy: Aye, the light changes you right enough. But getting the light means that you have to tell others about the light. You have to witness to the whole world about the light.
Ada: Do you mean you have to go to court and stand in the dock and say, “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’.
Andy: Well, not quite that Ada, but it helps to tell other people about Jesus, by sharing how the light has changed you.
Ada: You mean, share my story about being an alky till I found Jesus!
Andy: That would be a start.
Ada: Or could I tell them about helping wee Jessie wi’ her messages because Jesus said to love yer neighbour.
Andy: That would be a good one.
Ada: I could tell them about the time I said a prayer in the church for the first time and my face was beaming.
Andy: Aye, you had a right red face that day.
Ada: So this witnessing to the light is really about us sharing the stories of Jesus and helping other people, and doing things that help to build up the Kingdom of God?
Andy: Aye, that’s just what we all have to do to let the light of Christ shine!

Retelling for young people

A long time ago there was a man called John. But people didn’t think that was his real name. They thought he was someone else. They asked him, “Who are you?” But he would not reply.

So they asked him, “Are you the Messiah?” And John said... “NO!” (have everyone shout it out)

They asked him, “Are you Elijah?” And John said... “NO!”

They asked him, “Are you the prophet?” And John said... “NO!”

“Well who are you?”

“Are you N _______ (insert names of well known people, or other children)”

And John said... “NO!” (repeat these two lines as often as you wish with different names)

“They then tell us, who are you?” they asked.

John decided that he should tell them, so he said, “I am.... the voice, the messenger, the shout, that wants you to know there is someone else coming who is greater than all the people you have asked me about. He will arrive soon, so hold your breath, keep waiting, and it won’t be long now. When he comes, you will find out his name”

And John left them there, wondering.

Who do you think he is talking about?”

worship ideas

The story

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

As people come into the worship space have a couple of folk engaged in some sort of scene at the front and then before worship begins they leave. Then ask folk to describe to one another what they have just witnessed.

Call to Worship

Leader: Come, bearing light
All: we come to dispel darkness.

Leader: Come, bearing hope
All: we come to banish despair.

Leader: Come, bearing love
All: we come to bear witness to the one who brings light, hope and love.
Prayer for Ourselves

God, as we rejoice to receive your light, the light that shines in the darkness, and cannot be extinguished, may we also welcome that light into the darkness in us that we'd rather hide.

In the light of your love, may we be changed so that there is no need to fear the light. May we believe that you can change us. May we believe that your love and your light can penetrate the walls that we build.

So make us open and by your light and your love set us free from the prisons we make for ourselves.

In this place, built to reflect your light and your love, we confess all that mars your image in us, all that diminishes our witness to you.

Silence

God of light and love, scare out those dark corners with the assurance of your forgiveness and make us beacons for you, witnessing to all around. Amen.

Reflection

Not the light, just a lamp bearer. Not the promised one, just a messenger. Not the hope of the world, just an inkling of things to come. The witness.

Signalling light, promise and hope to a world worn down with waiting, a world that needs time to get ready to rejoice in the one who comes after.

Prayers for Others

Lord God, as we today uphold the testimony of John the Baptist, we remember all those called to testify. May they do so in truth and in love.

We remember those whose lives have been blighted by false testimony; those who have had no one to speak up for them; those whose testimony has not been believed; and those who were convicted without hearing.

You, whose Son knew all these injustices still keep on bringing light.

You brought light into the darkness of death and, despite all the world's best efforts, that light has not been put out.

May all those whose lights have been extinguished through injustice and prejudice, through violence and fear, hear testimony to you and, in believing, know hope once more. Amen.

Sending

Go and testify to the God of all hope who promises to light up every darkness with love that cannot be defeated.

Praise Songs / Hymns

As stars adorn the night (CH4 748)
Christ, whose glory fills the sky (CH4 578, MP 79)
Colours of day (MP 1039, SGP 22)
Hark, the glad sound (CH4 277, MP 210)
He came down that we may love (CH4 359 which can be used as an Advent theme song, adding a verse with 'light', etc.)
Lord, the light of your love (CH4 448, MP 445)
Make way, make way (CH4 279, MP 457)
O Word of God incarnate (MP 527)
One shall tell another (MP 541)
Wait for the Lord (CH4 276)
We are marching in the light (CH4 516, MP 954)
We are one in the Spirit (SGP 111)
We have a gospel to proclaim (CH4 363, MP 728)
Who's the king of the jungle (JP 289)
The Grinch  all age

You will need: a copy of the film “The Grinch” (PG), TV or Projector, DVD player, laptop, make sure you have sound that will be loud enough.

“The Grinch” is a film based on the Dr Seuss book “How the Grinch Stole Christmas”. The Grinch doesn’t like Christmas because when he was younger people made fun of how he looked. The Grinch steals all the Christmas presents in Whoville hoping to make everyone sad. However, he hears the Whos singing and happy even after he stole the gifts. The Grinch realises that he cannot stop Christmas. Christmas came without ribbons, lights, boxes… but he gives them back! You could show this clip, which lasts around 4 minutes, approximately 1 hr and 22 minutes into the film.

Christmas Cards  age 3-5

You will need: card, tissue paper, Christmas-themed stickers, particularly candles, glue, scissors.

Give each child a piece of thin card, folded over to make a greetings card. Cover the front of the greetings card with strips of coloured tissue paper, then add stickers of stars, candles and ‘Happy Christmas’ and talk about how we can point to Jesus this Christmas.

Pointer  age 6-8

You will need: thick card, template with large pointing hand shape (see page 87).

Give each child a piece of thick card with the template printed on, or provide the template already cut out for children to draw round and cut out in their own card.

Children should then colour and decorate the hand and write their own name and ‘Jesus’ on the hand.

Discuss how the things we doing in our lives and what we say can point to Jesus.

Stained Glass Window  age 9-12

You will need: black card, different coloured cellophane (from craft shops), glue or sellotape, scissors, pencils.

Cut out arched window shapes in black card and give one to each child. Ask the children to draw a candle shape onto the card and then to cut it out, leaving a candle-shaped hole in the arched window. Then tape or glue pieces of differently coloured cellophane across the candle shape. When finished, turn over to show the stained glass window.

Talk about how light shining through window reveals colours and brightness and how John let God’s light shine through him and he helped point to Jesus.

Cress People  all age

You will need: kitchen towel (4 sheets deep and cut into gingerbread men shapes), plastic plates, water, cress seeds.

Give each child the gingerbread shape made up of 4 sheets of kitchen towel. Place it on the plastic plate, get the children to wet it (not drown it) and then sprinkle their seeds evenly over it.

Let them take these home with instructions to keep the paper moist and see new life grow.

Talk about how the way we live and grow as people shows God’s love.
activities

I Am  age 3-5
Encourage the children to be their own witnesses, to tell everyone about themselves. Get the children to start by saying I am (name), I am (age) years old, I am happy/sad, I am tall (stretch up), I am small (curl up), etc.

Shine, Jesus, Shine  age 3-9
You will need: shiny material, holographic paper, tin foil, mirror, sequins, etc.
Let the children see and touch these items. What do we use them for, do they shine the light, reflect it, talk about who is our light. For older children you can talk about the fact that light shows up good and bad points. A photograph taken with too much light can show up blemishes and marks on the skin, with not enough light it can make it dull and unpleasant. Light on something can make something appear brighter, no light can be scary.

I Am  age 3-5
You will need: lots of small cards with faces drawn or printed showing many different emotions (happy, sad, puzzled, frowning, laughing, sticking tongue out, etc.).
You could make this into a relay race by getting the children to run to the pile of cards, picking a picture and then trying to mimic the face on the picture before running back. This encourages them to look carefully at the picture, being careful observers or 'lookers' is important in being a good witness.

Match Up  age 6-9
You will need: enough separate post-its with words written on them for each child or you could use small pictures on paper. Suggestions: Sun, rays, torch, battery, candle, flame, lips, words, lamp, plug, moon, darkness, lighthouse, rocks.
Each child gets a post-it or picture put on their backs and they have to find their matching partner. They can only do this by asking the other children questions about their words/pictures but no one can tell them outright what their word/picture is.

Book Spotting  age 6-9
You will need: depending on how long you want the activity/game to run have 1, 2 or 3 books, preferably children's books or bible books.
Get the children into a circle and start to pass the first book around. Each child is allowed to hold onto the book for 20/30 seconds before passing it onto the next person. They should be encouraged to have a good look at the book, inside and out.
Once it has gone around ask the children some questions. For instance, who wrote the book, title of book, how many pages, main picture, price, bar code, were there pictures inside, and so on. What did they witness as the book was passed around?

Lightning Lists  age 9-12
You will need: paper, pens, timer.
Give each child or team a pen and paper. When you say go they have to list an association with the word light. For example, torch, candle, wick, match, batteries, lighthouse, sea, rocks, bulb, darkness, sun, moon, lamp, oil, paraffin, etc. They try to create as long a list in the time allowed (perhaps two minutes). The person or team with the longest list wins.
You can then use the lists created to talk about light, and to introduce the concept of people being our light? Who is our light? Who helps to show us the way? Ultimately this is Jesus.

The Real Deal  all age
You will need: items made out of real gold and silver which have hallmarks on them, plus other gold and silver items without hallmarks on them, a little online research into hallmarks.
Gather together and get the children to describe the pieces that they see or that they are holding. Did they notice the hallmark? If you have done your homework you will know where the hallmark is from.
If doing this with older children give them the details of the hallmark and let them find who made the design.
Was Jesus the real deal for people or where they unsure? Did John act like a hallmark for Jesus, assuring people that Jesus was the real deal?

My Face  age 3-5
You will need: two cuddly toys that look different.
Once they are into pairs get them to tell you about light, power, darkness, and what these mean to them.

Jesus/John  age 6-9
You will need: two cuddly toys which look the same.
Once the children are in a circle give one child both of the toys and call them 'Jesus' and 'John'. The child passes Jesus to her left and says to the person next to her, 'This is Jesus'. They reply, 'Who is it?' and the first child replies, 'Jesus'. This pattern continues as that person passes the toy to the person on their left, and so on.
As soon as the first child has passed Jesus to their left, they automatically pass the other toy called John to the right, using the same pattern, 'This is John', etc. It soon becomes very confusing when the toys start to cross over, meaning you have to be watching very carefully and think about which toy you have in your hand. Go as quickly as possible.
This can be used to talk about both the importance of witnesses watching very carefully, and also how John passed on the mantle to Jesus, letting Jesus grow in importance as he lessened himself.
Recap

Think back on what you have already discovered about John the Baptist: about what kind of person he was and the job he was doing—preparing the way to bring man and God near through Jesus. Read aloud John 1:6-8.

Opening Activity

Either

Split into groups of 3 or 4 with pen and paper and get them to list as many kinds of light that they can: for example, headlights, miner’s lamp, torch, street lights. Allow 5 – 7 minutes to do this and then ask them to write a word or short sentence beside each light on their list to describe what this light can do for us. For example, torches can ‘guide’, headlights ‘light up the way’; lamp provides ‘comfort’; floodlight provides ‘security’, and so on.

If possible have some digital cameras available and go out in groups to take photos of as many kinds of light as possible (or arrange for the young people to do this during the week). Mobile phones might also be used, if your young people have them.

See if you can get help from the young folk or someone in the know to put these photos on to a laptop and make into a PowerPoint for use in church on Christmas Sunday using the photos and words. This could be a little project over the coming couple of weeks for some or all of the young people to pursue next week too. A challenge to find the strangest looking light could help to encourage creativity.

Or

Try to arrange for someone in the congregation to visit your group for an informal interview on what it is to ‘witness’ or experience darkness at first hand.

Perhaps an ex-miner, someone with experience of war time black out, or someone with childhood memories of being scared of the dark (your minister might be able to suggest someone).

This should last for about 5 – 7 minutes. Get the interviewee to tell their story, describe what the darkness is/was like for them; what it’s like being cut off from light; describe anything or anyone that comforted/helped them; explore their experience of ‘light’ in the story if any.

You should come with a list of appropriate questions, but give time for the young folk to ask their own questions too.

Explain

Jesus is the one for whom John the Baptist had been preparing the way. In today’s evidence Jesus is referred to as ‘the light’ (and ‘the Word’).

Looking at the Evidence

You will need: printed copies of John 1:6-15.

Split into groups of 2, 3, or 4 and place in the middle of each group a lamp—if possible have it switched on. Give out copies of and read John 1:6-15. Ask the young people to discuss and write down what they find out about ‘the light’/Jesus from this passage.

Feedback

After an appropriate time get feedback from the groups and write up the ideas on a flipchart or equivalent.

Which answers show how Jesus is God’s way of making himself ‘nearer’ his people? Discuss.
bearer of the light

sunday 18 december 2011
luke 1:26-56

bible notes

Privilege and Responsibility

Quite often when someone hears about a bargain or a deal of some description the response is, "what’s the catch?" Something really good, amazing even, can also seem just too good to be true.

If truth be told we have all been caught up at some time by what we thought was a good deal. Or when rather unexpectedly, someone is being buttered up by another person and gives the sharp response, "Okay, what do you want?"

In reading today’s gospel passage the reader can almost hear Mary respond in similar terms following on from the Angel’s initial words to her.

The conversation starts well, so much so that without knowing the story, the reader might easily guess that a bombshell is about to be dropped. That Mary is troubled and confused is an indication of how much this comes out of the blue and how absolutely overwhelming from start to finish this would be to a young girl living in a wee rural town.

We read the build-up in the patter of the Angel, and then the bombshell in the news that she is soon to become pregnant. ‘Pregnant’ is a word that in this context seems to sit uncomfortably with many in the church. Perhaps it is a bit too real? A bit too messy?

Then comes the assurance that everything is going to work out okay, for God will be with Mary throughout.

It is then that Mary is left on her own which, given the nature of the visitation and the content of the news, might seem a bit strange. It might seem a bit hard or even harsh. There are, however, times when we need to be alone, when time and space are needed to take in news such as this. Mary was going to bear a child, a child who himself would come to bear the burdens of others. The story leaves it to our imaginations to think about how this young bearer of the light would be feeling. How much did she understand? How much could you understand of the future for the child of Light within her womb?

There would be a sense of the privilege in being chosen for such a task. As many have known from experience, privilege brings with it greater responsibility, and this was certainly true for Mary. Like any child he would be vulnerable but no-one was to know how vulnerable, not even Mary herself.

Although a single candle light is enough to banish darkness from a room, at the same time it is so easily extinguished. Indeed, it is not long in the nativity story before the Light that Mary bears is endangered even as the child issues its first gurgling cry.

The glorious song, Mary’s Song, the Magnificat, an early expression of Christian hope and fulfilment, encompasses the personal and worldwide scope of the Light that Mary bore. This was a Light that would overturn all our understandings of power and wealth: and this begins through the nurture and care of an unlikely bearer.

God’s people are entrusted with the same life-giving gift in Jesus as they are called to bear his Light and carry the knowledge of him into the life of the world. Like Mary, we are overshadowed by God’s eternal Light in Christ. It is a privilege which comes with great responsibility.

We might enjoy the privilege but how enthusiastic are we for the responsibility of “walking the talk”, in living the Gospel in such a way that the Good News is carried into the life of the world and the lives of God’s people?
The Angel Tam

Wander into church dressed like a fairy!
You may want to change town names for your own locality.

I am the Angel Tam.
I am meant to be a Messenger from God.
I am supposed to inspire awe and terror into the hearts of men and woman and wee weans that look at me.

But because of the credit crunch this year, all they could give me to wear was this left over fairy costume from last year’s Christmas Panto!

Och, it’s no easy being a messenger of God today.
I mean we turn up in all sorts of costumes you know.

We don’t often appear today with wee angel wings and halos round our heids! Sometimes we appear in jeans and t-shirts. Sometimes we turn up dressed like neds in tracksuits and bunnets, or in the latest designer gear wi a great big cheque book in our hands tae help some worthy cause.

Sometimes ye’ll see us dressed up in black, and the halo has slipped around our necks tae look like a dog collar. Sometimes in the schools we come dressed in trendy ties or our shorts on tae impress the wee weans that look at me.

You know, its no wonder today that folk dinnae understand our message. A lang time ago, God said me, “Haw Tam, I’ve got a wee job for ye” (My name is no really Tam, I am supposed to be Joseph’s relative) and I’ll square everything with Joseph fur the baby you are going tae huv.

Poor Mary nearly died when I appeared out of nowhere and said: “Mary doll, I have some good news and bad news for you. The Good news is that your going have a wedding soon, but the bad news is, it will no be quite a white wedding… and bye the way, you are gonnae hae a wee boy soon and ye huv tae call him Jesus.”

Poor Mary was fair flabergas... fluberg... was fair shattered wi the news. She tried tae tell me that she was as pure as the driven snow and that no man had so much as kissed her, and how dare I come and cast aspersions towards her womanhood.

And then it happened.
Wee Jesus was born, in the stable that night, sleeping wae the cows and sheep.

But because of the credit crunch this year, all they could give me to wear was this left over fairy costume from last year’s Christmas Panto!

Don’t be frightened, Mary. I have a message. God loves you so much God wants you to be the mother of Jesus, God’s son.

Once there was a young person called Mary.
One day Mary met an angel.
The angel had a message for Mary.

Mary, you are a wonderful person. God loves you.”

Mary had never seen an angel before so frightened.

“Don’t be frightened, Mary. I have nothing but Good News for you!”

Mary still didn’t say anything.

“I have a message. God loves you so much God wants you to be the mother of Jesus, God’s son.”

Mary couldn’t think of anything to say because she didn’t understand what the angel meant.

“Mary, trust God. God has everything worked out. God will take care of you.”

Mary still remained silent.

“Jesus is going to be a great person. He is going to rule over the whole world and his reign will never end Will you be his mother?”

Mary still didn’t understand, but she knew she trusted God and quietly, and softly just like a whisper she said one word: “Yes!”
Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

In many churches in Scotland today, the Nativity will be performed by children. As they get ready, donning their tea towels and dressing gowns and angel wings and crowns, ask folk to share their favourite character in the Nativity story with those people next to them.

Call to Worship

It’s getting very near we’re very nearly there just a few more visitors to enter our Nativity And, as the stable fills up we’re almost ready to let God be born.

Prayer of Praise

God of surprises, this is your creation, and we rejoice in the wonder and majesty of this world. We stand in humble contemplation, of the stars and planets, too numerous to count. We would expect the arrival of Jesus, the Light, the one who shows us the Way, to be epic, amazing, a celebrity event, red carpet and flashing bulbs, but you surprise us again.

A young girl in a small town, no one special, we might think, but made surprisingly special by her role as bearer of the Light.

God of fertility, we praise you for the rich fecundity of life on earth, and we thank you for all those who bear young, who bring a new generation to being, and who tend and care for them when they are most helpless and vulnerable.

God of compassion, you recognise that while Mary has a task of immense privilege, she is not left alone to face those responsibilities.

We praise and thank you for the example of steadfast Joseph, and supportive Elizabeth.

Prayer

Nights get longer, days get colder, the lonely despair of the darkness and the homeless huddle together for warmth: so many souls left outside, weary, hungry, troubled.

So many with no invitation to join us at the fireside and hear again the story of that first Christmas, when God entered our world, homeless, hungry, poor, left out of respectable circles, finding a place with the outcasts.

God, may our horror at such a notion encourage us to serve the poor in our midst today and to receive from them the gift of knowing God with us. Amen.

Nativity Reflection

Tea towels that simply won’t stay, tied on with dressing gown cords, halos lopsided or sagging, slipping down over eyes lit with mirth. Crowns that are coming unstuck as the tinfoil decides to unravel, yet, together creating a scene of such harmony and tranquillity that it tugs at the heart strings and reminds all who look on of the chaos and the holiness that unfolded so long ago in a stable in Bethlehem, when God was born in a feeding trough.

Sending

Go to prepare for God’s advent not by wrapping more presents and cooking more food, but by getting down and dirty in the places that God would choose to be born today.

Cosy Café Nativity

Available on YouTube is a video presentation of the Nativity story created with a Playmobil Nativity set, including a visit by ‘Angel Tam’ to ‘Mary, doll’.

This was made by young people from Cosy Café Sundays in Blantyre and Hamilton, and is available to be used by others.

http://youtu.be/Y9zFPRAdNcY

Praise Songs / Hymns

Behold the great Creator makes (CH4 308)
Come, thou long-expected Jesus (CH4 472, MP 102)
Hail to the Lord’s Anointed (CH4 474)
He came down that we may love (CH4 359 which can be used as an Advent theme song, adding a verse with ‘light’, etc.)
Jesus Christ is waiting (CH4 360)
Jesus, how lovely you are (MP 361)
Living under the shadow of his wing (MP 423, SGP 68)
My soul doth magnify the Lord (MP 479)
Name of all majesty (MP 481)
No wind at the window (CH4 287)
Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice (MP 574)
Safe in the shadow of the Lord (CH4 55, MP 583)
Since the day the angel came (MP 928)
Tell out, my soul (CH4 286, MP 631)
The angel Gabriel from heaven came (CH4 285)
We are marching in the light (CH4 516, MP 954)
age group ideas

gathering

Chinese Whispers  all age

You will need: a copy of the words the angel said to Mary.

Get everyone together in a circle and play a game of chinese whispers, passing round the circle the words the angel said to Mary.

crafts

The crafts and activities are great opportunities to talk about the story for the day in a natural way. The intention is not to create perfect craft pieces, but rather to use this time to engage in conversation about the story. Today think about privileges and responsibilities, being able to do a new thing (maybe stay up later as you get older) while recognising you have to be responsible (you still have to get up in the morning for school).

Sparkling Angels  age 3-5

You will need: simple angel-shapes in thin card, plain card, glue, scissors, pencils, colouring crayons or pens, glitter.

Provide each child with a basic 'angel shape' of head and dress cut from thin card and then get children to draw round their hands and cut the hand shapes out. Stick the hands to the back of the dress of the angel shape at the appropriate place to make wings and then turn angel over and decorate with crayons/ felt tip pens and glitter on the wings. Talk about how the angel brought news to Mary of baby Jesus.

Angel Decorations  age 6-8

You will need: A6 pieces of paper, pencils, sheets of white funky foam cut to A6 size (craft scrap stores are great for this), glitter glue, sequins, scissors, hole punch, thin ribbon strips.

This craft allows the children to make angel decorations to take home and put on their Christmas trees and provides another good way to talk about the angel bringing news to Mary.

Give each child a piece of paper (A6 size would be fine) and get them to draw their idea of an angel. Cut out the drawing and use it as a template for funky foam. Provide each child with a piece of white funky foam. Get them to draw round their template onto the foam and then cut out shape.

Decorate foam angel with glitter glue and sequins. Punch a hole in the top of funky foam and thread with a piece of ribbon to hang the decoration from their Christmas tree. Be warned, the glitter glue should be used sparingly to give it a chance to dry!

Christmas Cards  age 9-12

You will need: A5 card folded in half, stickers of angels and Christmas greetings, colouring pens.

Give each child a piece of A5 card folded in half to make a Christmas card using the stickers. Encourage their imagination as they design their own card. Inside the card include some of the words from today's reading. Talk about how the angel brought news to Mary of baby Jesus and how they think Mary would have felt.

Awesome Angel  all age

You will need: large sheets of paper or card, sellotape or glue, scissors.

Use the large sheets of paper/card rolled into cone shape so that it stands on the floor, add wings, head, halo, and so on. Write words from today's story and your reactions to the story onto the angel itself.

activities

True or False  age 6-8

You will need: a list of weird but true statements for you to read out.

Do not tell the children all these facts are true, let them discuss and guess which ones they think are true or false. Some statements are just too weird to believe, and perhaps we might think this about today's story this week. Mary, however, is an example to us of someone who believed and trusted.

Examples you could use are:

- No piece of paper can be folded in half more than seven times.
- More people use blue toothbrushes than red ones.
- Slugs have 4 noses.
- Clinophobia is the fear of beds.
- Fingernails grow faster than toe nails.

True or False 2 age 6-8

Linking to the above activity ask the children to say one true thing about themselves and two false statements. Can the other children work out which statement was the truthful?

Question Mark  age 9-12

You will need: a large sheet of paper with a big central question mark, pens.

With the large sheet of paper either on the floor amongst the young people or up on a wall, ask the children to think about how they treat information they are given. When someone tells you something, do they believe it or question it? Some people say if you believe something you treat it as "gospel", which gives space to talk about why people use that expression. Sometimes we accept what we are told, at other times we question it. Is this because we cannot relate to the situation that is at hand or because we think it is untrue or wrong? What would Mary have felt?
games

Angels Fly  age 3-5
Sit all the children on the floor with both hands on the ground. The leader says ‘angels fly’, and all the arms shoot up and wave about as though they are angels. ‘Angels land’, the arms come down.

The game continues with arms up and down, you could add different shapes, and eventually the angel is exhausted and lies down.

Who’s Home Is This  age 3-5

You will need: pictures of the types of home animals or people stay in.

Print out a range of different images of homes, e.g. castle for a King or Queen, sty for a pig, kennel for a dog, holt for a badger, barn for cows, house for us, nest for birds, stable for Jesus. See how many the children can work out. This can help lead to talking about the strange place in which Jesus ended up being born.

Homes To Live In  age 3-5

You will need: mega blocks, lego, or cardboard boxes.

See if each child is able to build a towering home that is the same height as themselves. If using cardboard boxes, you could help the children decorate them with windows and doors, curtains, brick shapes.

Good News!  age 6-9

You will need: identical newspapers for each team, a list of news stories that you will ask them to find, scissors.

The angel brought good news to Mary very directly. In this game the children will do the same thing.

Give each team of players a newspaper (they need to be the same for each team) and a pair of scissors. Shout out the bit of good news that you want them to find (this could be a news headline, a picture of a celebrity, a TV programme listing, a sports score, and so on). The children have to find it as quickly as possible, cut it out, and bring it up to the leader.

Recap
Take a few moments to think back to last week’s activities and allow any comments or questions.

Opening Activity
It is old-fashioned but still fun... have a game of ‘pin the tail on the donkey’ with some daft prizes for the nearest and furthest tails.

Graffiti Wall
Recap and reflect on all the thoughts put down on the graffiti wall. Perhaps circling in different colours the ideas of what makes God feel near or far from them.

Looking at the Evidence
Pass round the Bible story, arrange the young people in small groups with pen and paper. Read the passage out loud and then ask the young people to imagine that Mary had been asked the same question that they had been asked earlier in Advent, i.e. what makes people think or feel that God is near to or far away from them.

Ask them to jot down their answers in their groups. Then go round each group and get one answer at a time and either add it to the graffiti wall in a unique colour (e.g. gold) or in chalk or circle in the same colour or with the same medium one of the existing descriptions if it tallies with what they think Mary would have felt.

Discuss
Talk about how similar or different Mary was from people today or themselves in respect of how near or far God seems to them.

Reflection
Do a kind of grown up ‘circle time with everyone sitting round in a circle. Pass round a safe lit candle or a switched on torch or lamp asking various questions. The candle gets passed around the circle to give each one an opportunity to respond, like a talking stick, but if they don’t want to say anything they just pass the candle on to the next person. You may like to play some quiet, possibly ‘Christmassy’ music in the background. You would be better making up a list of questions in the light of your experiences over the past few weeks as a group but questions may include things like:

• What kind of things make you feel near to God?
• What kind of things make you think God is far away?
• It’s Christmas next week, could you see it far enough or can it not come quickly enough and why do you feel that way?
• Have you learned something new about the Christmas story over the last few weeks? If you have, what has that been?

PowerPoint
If you have managed to make a PowerPoint as per Advent 3 show it to the group. Another possibility might be for some of the group to finish off the PowerPoint to make it ready for next week.

discussion starters

nearly there...
christmas day

celebrating the light

sunday 25 december 2011

luke 2:1-20

bible notes

Surprises and Expectations

Heightened anticipation can be thrilling as we count the days to something we have long looked forward to, but it also has the power to lead to great disappointment.

There can be such a build-up at Christmas, with great expectations when it comes to the gifts, the parties, the many plans that people may have made. If all goes well this can lead to a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, but it can also lead to disappointment.

From those whose hopes are built up only to be dashed, to those who might even be looking and waiting in the wrong places, hope can yet be born anew with the Good News that the greatest gift, the gift of God's Light, appeared in the darkness of an out of the way place.

Because we know the whole big story of Jesus, it is difficult at times to get our heads around how the appearance of the Messiah, and the manner of that appearance, would not have fulfilled the expectations that most people had for the one who was to lead them into the future.

A humble family, not a royal one, were the first to welcome the one who was to change their lives and the lives of countless others since.

The place of shelter for animals, not a royal palace, was to be where he first laid his head and shone a fragile light that became the dawning of a new day leading beyond the darkness of even the longest of nights. The first to see the light with their own eyes was not the great and the good in society's eyes but the outcast and the stranger.

The light still comes when we least expect it, in the longest night when we think that there is no end to the darkness. It can come to us in and through the most unexpected of people. It is piercing, searching and life changing. When it breaks through it is an exciting moment and, at the same time, a scary one, as the shepherds discovered. It comes to us where we are in our daily living as it did on the hillsides, in the everyday routine and the messiness of life.

It comes and overshadows us so much that even the hearts within us bow before him.

So enjoy this day, celebrate the coming of Light, bask in the incarnational illumination of the Christ child, sing songs of joy, and relish the sense of expectation that things can be different.

Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20
the story

The Proud Dad

This is a wee monologue of how Joseph might have felt on the day Jesus was born.

I was tired and weary. I had not slept for the last few days, and we had walked from Jerusalem all the way to Nazareth. My relatives would have nothing to do with us because Mary was pregnant, and we were not married at this point. Even my own brother turned his back on us. The innkeepers all said they were fully booked until one kind person finally offered us the cave he used as a stable at the back of his hotel.

By then, Mary had gone into labour. The Baby was about to arrive at any moment, the women were fussing over her, and handing out orders at what I had to do, but they made it quite clear I was not a part of this.

It’s strange really, because I never felt I was a part of this baby. When Mary told me she was pregnant I knew for certain that I was not the father. She swore she had never been with another man, and that it was God who had made her pregnant through the Holy Spirit. I just could not believe her, and I wanted to break the engagement. A few days after that I had a restless nights sleep, and I kept hearing a voice telling me that I should stick by Mary, that she was telling the truth, that this child was special, and I was to have a roll in caring for and bringing this child up within our faith tradition. It sounded like the same voice that Mary talked about.

Well, I loved Mary. I really did love her, and after days of wrestling with what she told me I said I would stick with her. And now look at that baby lying there wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. Look at that smile, those eyes, those tiny fingers and toes, his wee nose and mouth, and everything about him looks just perfect. I feel like any other dad! Dad, could I really be a dad to this child. This was God’s son not mine, yet because he is God’s son he is also a child of mine.

None of the family came to visit us when news broke that Jesus was born. But there were shepherds who came in from the cold having witnessed choirs of angels telling them that Jesus the Messiah has been born. There were kings from the east who had followed a special star to be at the birth, and they brought expensive and unusual presents for our special baby.

Something very wonderful has happened today. The Light of the world has come, and I believe we all have something to live and hope for now. Whatever lies ahead for Mary, Jesus and me, I trust that God will see us through it, and because of today I just know that he will.

worship ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

All-Age Worship

We assume that you will be gathering together for a time of all age worship on Christmas Day and the following are some ideas you might want to incorporate. We are not providing separate age group ideas for today.

Gathering Activity

Provide a variety of Christmas cards, scattered on the floor or on a table and ask people to come forward and choose one that appeals to them. They can be religious cards with nativity scenes, or traditional scenes, or modern funny cards, a good range of cards.

In pairs or small groups invite people to tell each other why they chose their particular Christmas card.

Retelling for young people

There are many good story books which retell the story of Christmas and which you could use in an all age Christmas Day service.

Here are some which we have found to be good:

The Fox’s Tale

The Not-So-Wise Man: A Christmas Story
Alan McDonald and Andrew Rowland (ISBN 978-0802851963)

Jesus’ Christmas Party
Nicholas Allan (ISBN 978-0099725916)
Call to Worship
God invites: come away, ben bide here awhile, put your feet up if you need to, enjoy the peace if that’s what you crave, watch the bairns if it’s them you miss, feel free tae have a wee greet if you want to. Because God is here in the real world, with real people. We worship the baby God.

Prayer of Gathering
We gather here with friends, with family, with visitors, with those we know well and those we’ve yet to meet, and it’s good to be here for this brief time coming to kneel at the manger. The angels and the shepherds have long since returned to their chores. The baby stirs, restless for something, crying to be fed and held and welcomed into our lives even in the mess of discarded wrapping paper and kitchens in disarray. Help us, O God, as we hold out our arms to you, to also hold out our arms to embrace all of humanity, just as you did, by coming into our world showing us how to live, how to give, how to share, and how to care. God be born in our hearts this day and every day. Amen.

Reflection
If the teenagers have been working on a PowerPoint presentation of photographs of different sources of light, then make sure to use this today to help people reflect on the coming of the ‘Light of the world’. This idea was suggested in the teens material on Advent 3.

Activities
Pass the Parcel
Play Pass the Parcel with the whole congregation. When the music stops, whoever is holding the parcel takes off a layer of paper and each layer reveals another part of the story which can be read aloud.

The Digital Story of the Nativity
There is an amusing and very ‘Web 2.0’ retelling of the Nativity story available on YouTube that could be downloaded and shown.

Nativity Snap
Give each person a wee card with one of the characters from the nativity story on it either by name or picture, e.g. shepherd, wise man, angel, innkeeper, Mary, Joseph. Ask people to find others who have the same card and then discuss in that group the nativity story from that character’s point of view. Any insights could then be shared with everyone else.

Sending
Go, to celebrate the Light that has come into the world, by living as Children of Light, as followers of Jesus, and as those with a gospel to proclaim. Celebrate, enjoy, relish, the good news proclaimed today. Go, to tell the world, for this is news too good to keep to ourselves.

Praise Songs / Hymns
Angels from the realms of glory (CH4 324, MP 35)
Away in a manger (CH4 312, MP 47)
Christ’s is the world’s true light (CH4 456)
Come and join the celebration (CH4 321, MP 83)
From the squalor of a borrowed stable (MP 1046)
Hark, the herald angels sing (CH4 302, MP 211)
He came down that we may love (CH4 359 which can be used as an Advent theme song, adding a verse with ‘light’, etc.)
O come and join the dance (MP 489)
O come, all ye faithful (CH4 306, MP 491)
O little town of Bethlehem (CH4 304, MP 503)
Once in royal David’s city (CH4 315, MP 539)
See, amid the winter’s snow (MP 588)
See him lying on a bed of straw (CH4 310, MP 589)
Seel in yonder manger low (CH4 313)
A one-time Bishop of Durham, Handley Moule, was called out to a rather bad mining disaster. As he prepared to meet with the relatives he was unsure of what he might say to the people devastated by their loss and the tragedy that had befallen them. In his uncertainty, he saw a bookmark that his mother had given him. He picked up the hand woven bookmark and all he could see were the loose silk threads which seemed to have no set pattern, in fact they looked a bit of a tangled mess, a mistake even. It was only when he turned it over and saw beautifully and boldly sown the words, “God is Love” which gave him the words to help folk to at least start to make sense of what happened and where God was in that terrible situation, in the midst of the mess and entangled threads.

The passage from Ecclesiastes, at first glance, seems quite chaotic, even fatalistic. Although written in beautiful poetic language that trips off the tongue in all its familiarity, we have a depiction of the bare threads hanging from our world. These verses reveal the stark reality of a world full of contrasts, and lives that are equally made up of contrasting situations.

The reader would be forgiven for thinking that seen in isolation this well known passage in Ecclesiastes offers no hope in a world and a life where we have no real control over what befalls us.

Taking a closer look at this passage, a clearer picture emerges, especially if our eyes are also drawn to some future day, as depicted in the vision contained in Revelation. We get a clearer vision when we are able to step back to see the bigger picture, the picture that God sees from the beginning of time until those last days when he shall make all things new. In the same way, looking too closely at the stitching pattern in a piece of cross-stitch means we miss the bigger picture. Only when our vision encompasses the whole needlework creation, and not just a tiny part of it, do we understand what the picture reveals to us.

There are times when it is only the close-up picture that we see, and we get bogged down in all the conflicting details and challenges. Sometimes life seems out of control, but God comes to centre us again with the assurance that all time, and our time, are in his hands. Hope is in God’s handling of things, in his ultimate plans and in the light that shines in Jesus.

In the midst of the complex and tangled threads that all too often make up our lives, what is God saying? He is inviting us not just to be passive spectators watching from the side but to be active participants, taking hold of situations, both within and beyond our control, that we might face up to them and find a way through.

How can our churches be a Light for our time in our own communities?

A New Year, with all its new possibilities, offers many of us the chance to re-evaluate, to step back and look at our lives, and could acts as an encouragement for a new start as God’s light shines to light up a different and exciting way.
the story

I Don't Have Time
Can you help me bud,
Spare a bob or two,
Feed a homeless soldier,
Make me feel brand new?
I'm sorry mate, I haven't got the time,
My bus is late, I start at eight,
I haven't got the time.
Can you help me sir,
Spare a crumb of bread,
My sister here is dying,
From the lack of medical science.
I'm sorry mate, I haven't got the time,
My bus is late, I start at eight,
I haven't got the time.
Can you help me please,
listen to my cry,
There's people dead and dying here
And the world can only sigh.
I'm sorry mate, I haven't got the time,
My bus is late, I start at eight,
I haven't got the time.
And so we're all too busy
No time to stop and care,
But there will come a day,
So they all will say,
When God will have his say!

Through the Season
Don't forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

All-Age Worship Ideas
We assume that you will be gathering together for a time of all age worship on New Year's Day and the following are some ideas you might want to incorporate. We are not providing separate age related material for today.
If it's likely that a smaller number of people than usual will attend worship today, you might want to try a different format, e.g. worship in-the-round or café style worship.

Gathering
Set out a table with visual reminders of new year 'traditions' e.g. lump of coal, boot (for first footing), black bun, list of resolutions, brush and ask people to talk about their memories of these traditions, where the think the traditions come from and how they feel about these traditions now.

Call to Worship
Replace candle with new one, replace cloth with fresh one, but leave Bible
What was old has become young again.
What was weary, fresh and new once more.
What was spent, given new life,
and what was worn out, reborn.
But one thing remains:
the Word,
anient and new,
old and fresh in one moment.
Our story and every story
bound together in the One,
the Word,
the Light,
the Beginning.
May we begin anew

in the wake of God,
who always renews
and calls us into life once more.
May this year be blessed
with the work of justice,
and the love of this community,
and the word that binds us together.

Prayer
Fresh is the morning,
the day and the year, O God,
as we long for light
in this crossing point
between old and new,
remembered and not yet begun
story and hope
Fresh is the morning
and our hopes with it, O God,
as we face the days,
dark now but growing ever lighter,
from solstice to summer,
frost to sunlight,
Christmas to Epiphany.
Fresh is the morning
along with our prayers, O God,
as we renew our relationship with you,
listening anew,
speaking afresh,
loving again.
Fresh is the morning.
Fresh is the year.
Fresh is the day.
Fresh is your love for us in each of them.
So be it.
Amen.

Reflection
Give each person a tea light in a holder
(see the Through the Season ideas).
As appropriate music is being played,
either live or recorded, give people the opportunity to reflect on how they can show God's light in their lives in this new year.

Retelling for young people
You could use the old Pete Seeger song “Turn, Turn, Turn” which was made famous by The Byrds and has the record as the Number One hit song with the oldest lyrics, taken, as they are from the Book of Ecclesiastes.
Perhaps use suitable images on PowerPoint during the song, or create a video clip with images, lyrics and the song.
A possible YouTube video:
http://youtu.be/Wb6hbtDUzd
Prayer of Intercession

God of this time and every time, may this be the time for peace in Israel and Palestine.

A time not for mourning and weeping, but a time of living and seeking transformation in Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Congo.

A time for planting promises and harvests a time for dancing with neighbours of every creed and culture.

A time for embracing each other, embracing joy, embracing diversity and colour.

A time for breaking down prejudice in our community and ingrained sectarianism.

A time for building up the capacity of people, building up the strength that comes through the gifts of our neighbours and the future of our community.

A time for throwing away those biases against each other.

A time for losing that selfish approach, conceit in the world, greed for creation and a time for keeping the beauty of our world.

A time for speaking out against all that hurts and harms and a time for keeping silence instead of adding our voice to injustice.

A time for birthing the future and a time for dying to all that corrupts and tarnishes our living together.

A time for healing all the hurts we have been part of in the past and a time for ending the ways of living that cause pain and brokenness.

God of this time and every time, hear our prayer for the right time, this time, our time, your time, now time. So be it. Amen.

Activities

Calendar Collage

You will need: cuttings (words and pictures) from newspapers and magazines, photographs of the local area, verses from the Bible, calendar (these can readily be printed with the computer using programmes like Microsoft Publisher).

Ask people to work together to make a collage using the images and words available. Add a calendar to the bottom and this can be displayed in the worship space throughout the year.

Calendar Kit

Alternatively provide a table, within the worship space, and one or two helpers who are able to help any children present to make up their own calendars (kits/templates/ideas are available from Baker Ross or Religious Crafts).

What Time do you have?

Create credit card-sized cards each with a phrase from Ecclesiastes printed on it. Tell people that these could be our New Year resolution. Which ones would you choose?

There is a time for everything, but perhaps ours is to choose one in response to the question: What time is it for you…? What does this new year need us to do…? What do we need to do for ourselves to deepen our relationship with God…? May we find it among God’s words today…

You are invited to come forward as some music is played (perhaps The Byrds) to choose and take away a card that has one of these words printed on it, a word that shapes the task for you, that speaks into what time it is for you and God together.

It’s a way of dedicating ourselves to God’s Realm, to place ourselves in the activity of growing the reign of God in our place and in our time. It’s a means of saying: this is my task, or my way of being with God at this time. Please do come forward, take a card, and know it is God’s joy for you to be with God in this way at this time.

Statement of Faith

Leader: We believe
All: There is a time to proclaim God’s justice and a time to work for it.
A time to protest for peace and a time to live in it.
A time to preach the Good News and a time to practice it.
And a time to choose.

Leader: We believe
All: There is a time to speak out for God and a time to listen in to God.
A time to share with the world and a time to be angry at it.
A time to harvest the land and a time for jubilee.
And a time to choose.

Leader: We believe
All: There is a time to hesitate and a time to follow.
A time to be busy and a time to be still.
A time to shout and a time to be silenced with disbelief.
And a time to choose.

Leader: We believe
All: There is a time to forgive and a time to be forgiven.
A time to believe and a time to doubt.
A time for creeds and a time for doing.
And a time to choose.

Leader: We believe
All: There is a time to celebrate God and a time to wait on God.
A time to linger with Jesus and a time to move on with Jesus.
A time to dance with the Spirit and a time to conspire with the Spirit.
And a time to choose.
We believe.
worship ideas

Time

You will need: Two voices and a metronome to add a ticking sound where marked to begin and end.

Voice A: There’s an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

Begin metronome

Voice B: A time for birth and another for death,
a time to plant and another to reap,
a time to kill and another to heal,
a time to destroy and another to build,
a time to cry and another to laugh,
a time to weep and another to cheer,
a time to love and another to abstain,
a time to embrace and another to part,
a time to search and another to lose,
a time to hold and another to let go,
a time to tear and another to mend,
a time for silence and another to speak,
a time to love and another to hate,
a time for war and another for peace.

Stop metronome

Voice A: But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does? I’ve had a good look at what God has given us to do—busywork, mostly.

True, God made everything beautiful in itself and in its time—but he’s left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he’s coming or going.

Voice B: A time
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A season
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An age
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A past
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An era
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A tide
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An instance
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A chance
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A future
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An aeon
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A rhythm
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A span
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A phase
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A now
Voice A: A time

Let metronome beat a wee while longer then stop sharply.

I’ve decided that there’s nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That’s it—eat, drink, and make the most of things. It’s God’s gift.

Begin metronome again

Voice A: A time
Voice B: A place
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A season
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An age
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A past
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An era
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A tide
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An instance
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A chance
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A future
Voice A: A time
Voice B: An aeon
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A rhythm
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A span
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A phase
Voice A: A time
Voice B: A now
Voice A: A time

Sending

The light is rising, the star guiding, the year opening, the way lengthening, epiphany revealing, God moving, Jesus journeying, Spirit disturbing, the time welcoming. Go and live fully, completely, in God’s time.

Praise Songs / Hymns

Fresh as the morning (by Tony Alonso)
God is working his purpose out (CH4 235, MP 189)
In the bulb there is a flower (CH4 727)
It’s a world of sunshine (CH4 245)
Look forward in faith (CH4 237)
Longing for light (CH4 543)
Lord, for the years (CH4 159, MP 428)
Neither life nor death (by Marty Haugen)
O God, our help in ages past (CH4 161, MP 498)
Put all your trust in God (CH4 270)
The right hand of God (CH4 709)
This is a day of new beginnings (CH4 526)
We’ll walk the land (MP 743)
When we are living (CH4 726)
epiphany 1
bathed in light
sunday 8 january 2012
mark 1:4-11

biblical notes
Spectator or Spec-actor?

When we read Scripture, inwardly or aloud, what voice do we hear or adopt? Do we read lightly or portentously? With a reverential tone, a pulpit voice, in Received Pronunciation? Do we speak in our own accent? Is there a twinkle in our eye? Do we read it as historic literature? As transforming text? I recall a heartfelt debate in our church one Christmas. Matthew’s nativity had just been paraphrased in Glaswegian as ‘Jojo’s story.’ This was rather controversial. One person’s lively, vivid retelling was another’s sacrilege.

The reason I bring this up, is the gritty urgency of Mark’s Gospel. Wasn’t it written in rough and ready rather than literary Greek, famously abrupt, full of ‘and suddenly’ moments? Ched Myers and colleagues describe two kinds of reading: one called spectating and the other spec-acting. The first is when we read for entertainment or distraction, the second when we read to be moved, changed or challenged.

Mark is for spec-actors, more manifesto or manual than diverting read. Mark wants us to be followers of Jesus. This is committed writing inviting commitment.

In Chapter 1 at the ‘Genesis’, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are introduced to John, in the wilderness. There is no nativity, no angels, shepherds or inn. Cut to the chase, action! According to Myers and company, Mark invented a new literary genre, ‘gospel’. The Roman Empire might have announced the Gospel of an emperor’s enthronement, here Mark heralded the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. Wasn’t the Emperor entitled to be called ‘son of god’?

If I read this passage as a spectator I can sit back and appreciate that John is presented as a backward and forward looking figure. His dress sense and location hark back to the prophet Elijah, (2 Kings 1:1-17 and 2:6-14). I might be struck by the sense of urgency. People are coming to hear what John has to say. There are crowds. What he has to say is interesting.

When I read as a spec-actor there is added value. Elijah had been taken up into heaven by the Jordan. Is Elijah, or someone like him, back? Has something that had seemed closed, finished, over and done with, suddenly sparked into life again? What do I make of that? Is this a living story more than a historic artefact?

John calls for people to repent, to turn around, to change their lives. If that was good enough for them what about me? Us? Besides, who were these people, from Judea and Jerusalem, from the edges and the centre of their world? Revelation is happening at the edge. How would that seem from Jerusalem’s point of view? What a turn around. Imagine one having recently learned Isaiah 4:5ff, 18:7 or 60:10-14. What is it like when the light starts to shine from an unexpected direction?

What about the man this Gospel is all about, the ‘stronger one’? He is not from Jerusalem but from Nazareth of Galilee. He does not ask John to untie his sandal. Instead, Jesus goes and gets himself baptised and sees heaven opened.

As spectators we might think, ‘he is an interesting character’, ‘has he had some kind of vision?’ ‘Is he enlightened in some way?’ We might imagine a title on the ‘Body, Mind, Spirit’ shelf in a book shop: Jesus, the Enlightened One. We might be drawn to that. Why not?

As spec-actors, we might find him compelling, or unsettling. A man with a vision that he enacts. He sees heaven opened, torn apart, the Spirit-dove descending and leads people the same way. In the light of day, is he acting out the pattern of dying and rising? Bathed in light today, who knows what dark turns his story might take in days to come? ‘Take up your cross’ may never be far from our minds. And this is good news?

Further Resources

Ched Myers et al, Say to This Mountain: Mark’s Story of Discipleship, Orbis Books,1996. ISBN: 978-1570751004
http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1570751005

A good depiction of Jesus’ baptism can be found in the Time Life film Jesus.
http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0001EYT98
the story

What did it for you?

Voice A: It was the locusts.
Voice B: It was the water.
Voice C: It was the repentance.

A: He came out from the desert. He just came walking out of that wilderness, with roasted locusts in his hand, sticky with honey and he wrapped himself in camel hair skins. That's what did it for me, that set him apart.

B: He stood there in the water of the Jordan inviting us all in. Anyone and everyone, no fear of the authorities standing there with smirks upon their faces trying to make him look a fool. That's what did it for me.

C: He shouted at everyone: “Repent!” Really shouted. It wasn't some polite invitation but some urgent call that was meant to frighten us as well as invite us. It was his shouting that did it for me.

A: It was the silence.
B: It was the water.
C: It was the voice.

A: He came out from the crowd and stood in the water facing John.
B: He came out of the water and stood facing heaven.
C: He came out of himself and smiled as if he heard a voice.

A: You are my son.
B: The beloved.
C: With you I am well pleased.

A: It was the moment.
B: It was the time.
C: He was The One.

Retelling for young people

This could be told with a rhythmic beat, with the storyteller saying one line at a time and children repeating, with appropriate simple mimed actions if desired, for example with the belt tied round waist, and so on.

There was a man, his name was John, in the desert was his home. He wore a coat of camel's hair and tied a belt around it there.

For tea he ate bugs and honey, yes, bugs and honey, how very yummy!

Now John took people to the river: they waded in, it made them shiver!

John said, “This water is a special sign that God is saying, ‘You are mine!’”

Then came Jesus to the river too, God said, “You're mine! And I love you!”

Yes along came Jesus to the river too, God said, “You're mine! And I love you!”

worship ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering Activity

I am Loved

Place the filled font centrally, if possible. Get the children (and adults) to come to the font, place their fingers in the water and be reminded that they are beloved children of God.

You could play Yvonne Lyon’s song I am loved during this activity, from her album ‘Ashes & Gold’.

Discussion

Ask folks to share what they remember—or have been told—about their own baptism. There will be some folk who have never been baptised, encourage them to share too why that is if they are willing.
Call to Worship
Leader: Who are we?
All: Beloved children of God.
Leader: What are we?
All: Beloved children of God.
Leader: God is pleased with us.
All: We worship God together.

Gathering Reflection
Gently pour water into a bowl.

God has chosen the rolling tide, the flowing river, the rushing stream, the flooding burn, to hold all of heaven and her promise.

Pour water more fully into the bowl and let it overflow quite a bit.

In the pouring and stirring and spilling and running comes the act of heaven and her promise.

Scoop up water from the bowl and let it dribble through your fingers.

So come and be soaked in the spirit as the story of salvation teems around us, parables whispered in the drenching, and baptism becomes the soothing rush of heaven and her promise of Jesus.

Prayer of Commitment
Lord God, may we never again see baptism as merely a rite of passage, but as a wondrous affirmation of your love: that love that comes to us undeserved, sometimes even unbidden; that love that comes freely and eclipses our lives. And may we, wondrous God, live as beloved children. Knowing ourselves loved may we go and love others, taking seriously the privilege that is ours may we go and serve others. And so may baptism make a difference everyday in our lives and in the life of the world. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession
God, so often in baptism we celebrate the gift of new life: life that is conceived in love and received with joy. Our children are, on the whole, nurtured and fed, nourished and cared for, their whims indulged, their exuberance encouraged.

Out of our shroud of privilege and materialism may we be forced to see how things are so different for children throughout the world.

Where the ravages of the earth prevent access to good food and clean water; where the ravages of war enforce a nomadic existence and constant fear; where the ravages of human failings lead to neglect and abuse.

God, these too are your beloved children so help us to care, to interfere, and to intervene to live out our baptism promise to welcome and share God's love with all God's children. Amen.

Reflection
This could be used with two voices, the second voice as God's voice.

All around us, life conspires to trip us up and bring us down. But God says: “You are my beloved child!”

Even those who love us sometimes expect so little from us But God says: “You are my beloved child!”

We emerge from the waters of baptism cleansed and renewed. And God says: “You are my beloved child!”

So with heads held high and with full hearts we live into that baptismal promise. And God says: “You are my beloved child!”

All-Age Prayer
Splashing swimming paddling diving jumping throwing washing drinking swallowing cleaning bathing soaking plunging dunking cooling showering spraying warming cooking heating wading splashing dribbling flooding squirting dripping spilling cleansing all the things you can do with water.

But God, you do something better: you baptise cleanse renew transform bless hold name us.

Thank you for water and the love it contains. So be it.
Contemporary Reading

Adapt movement for your own setting for this reading which uses three voices and someone to play the role of Jesus.

Jesus stands at the crossing in the church.

Voice 1: He was watching.
Voice 2: He was watching by the shores of the Jordan and chose this moment to give himself over to John's Baptism.
Voice 3: It was a baptism of repentance, of renewal and not a little fire and anger. And Jesus chose to offer himself to John's fiery preaching, and angry prophecy against the institutional religion makers who stood watching all this happen. He chose to commit himself to this brand of God.

Jesus slowly moves to the steps of the chancel.

Voice 1: So Jesus found himself on the edge of the Jordan and chose this moment and this means as the time and way to make himself known. He moved through the crowds towards the river and kept going till he was side by side with John.
Voice 2: John hesitated. His hoarse voice silenced for a moment. His stoop straightened and the crowds noticed this change. Something just happened and they weren’t very sure what it was. So they fell silent themselves and waited.
Voice 3: Crowds have good intuition. They sense when two different worlds come together. They feel it when there is a paradox when two time-zones clash, two eras converge: an old world of prophecy and expectation and a new world of salvation fulfilled.
Voice 1: And so they hushed to see what would happen. And very little did. For a while. Jesus stood there and so did John as if both were reading each other thoughts. It takes a while for the balance to be found again when the fiery preaching of a prophet comes face to face with the one the prophecy is about.

Voice 3: For now. Let it be for now. Says Jesus. For now. This time. The time has come. This is the way one era slides into another. The water becomes a border and Jesus fell back with John holding him into the water and went under. And the water covered him. Filled in his place. Smoothed out the disturbance. Calmed the disturbance.

Jesus kneels down but face looking upwards and arms stretched out to the side. Then after a pause he pulls himself up, arms still outstretched staring at the cross.

Voice 1: But then Jesus broke through and the new era was born. The chaos began with the throwing back of the water and the Saviour coming through. Ripples became waves that spread across this new time. Flooding became rapids that caused ripples of light through the universe. And the sharp intake of breath as the Saviour rose from the water because the symbol of resurrection of tombs of graves and crosses. Defeated.

Voice 2: And when one era takes over from another the balance is undone once more and causes disruption through the continuum. The border has been crossed. The water has been broken through. So great is the clash that when prophet gives way to Saviour all Heaven feels it.

Jesus looks up.

Voice 3: And so it burst open with a great rending mirrored in the water of the river. And Justice fell down into the world, and with it came Comfort, and Anger, with Challenge too along with Kindness. There was Peace and Grace and Truth also. All fell from the sky in the echo of a dove, who spread her wings with slow beauty and purpose as if she was the muse herself.

Voice 1: And in this wilderness place, beyond the cities and the synagogues and temples and churches, the two ages moved past each other. One fell away and the other rose. This was Salvation's time.

Voice 2: The disruption felt from that first Baptism had just begun. The border had been crossed.

Sending

In the darkness of winter may we experience light that comes from heaven.

In the January cold may we know the warmth that comes from being loved.

In the stormy blasts may we know the peace of being God’s child.

Light, love and peace be ours forever.

Praise Songs / Hymns

Abba Father (MP 3)
Beloved and Blessed (MP 1033)
Child of blessing (CH4 633)
Christ is our light! (CH4 336)
Emmanuel (MP 120)
Father, we adore you (MP 139)
God is good (MP 185)
Here in this place (CH4 623)
I come with joy, a child of God (CH4 656)
Lord, the light of your love (MP 445, CH4 448)
Make way, make way (CH4 279, MP 457)
O come, let us worship (MP 492)
O let the Son of God enfold you (MP 502)
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (CH4 334, MP 538)
Out of the flowing river (CH4 335)
Spirit divine (CH4 583, MP 614)
Spirit of God, descend (CH4 495)
Spirit of God (MP 609)
age group ideas

gathering

Baptisms  all age

You will need: photos of baptisms from the church/family, baptismal certificate, baptismal register, cradle roll, examples of cards. Font or jug and bowl.

Talk about what happens at baptisms. You might want to ask your minister whether he or she has information that they give out to families seeking baptism.

Advance Planning

If you can, intimate to parents the week before to bring in photos of their children’s baptisms, and if leaders have photos of their own baptisms too, that would be great. See if everyone can guess who is in the photos.

crafts

The crafts and activities are great opportunities to talk about the story for the day in a natural way. The intention is not to create perfect craft pieces, but rather to use this time to engage in conversation about the story.

As baptism is something that many of the children will have experience of, if not of their own baptisms, then of watching them take place in church, it allows you to explore what a baptism would have been like for John and Jesus. Exploring the link between the Light that breaks through to shine on Jesus and the Love of God is important.

Dove Puppet  age 6-8

You will need: white felt, cut into finger puppet shape, card, glue, scissors, googly eyes.

Provide children with white felt finger puppet shapes and get them to make a dove finger puppet by adding wings, beak, eyes.

Recount the story of Jesus’ baptism as you make this craft, particularly noting that God made sure Jesus knew he was loved.

Dove Mobile  age 9-12

You will need: garden cane, white funky foam or card, simple dove template (see page 88), ribbon, shiny blue, silver and gold materials, thread, glue, scissors.

Give to each child two pieces of garden cane bound together to form cross shape with arms of equal length. Provide a selection of materials to make a mobile: white funky foam or card and dove template, ribbon or shimmery material in shades of blue to represent water and silver or gold to represent light. Attach dove to sticks with thread and tie ribbon/narrow strips of material on to sticks. Be careful to get reasonable balance. Talk about story.

The Dove  age 3-5

You will need: a card dove body shape (see page 88) and wings, colouring crayons/pens, gold or silver pens/glitter.

While making this craft you can talk about the symbol of the dove, such abstract talk is difficult for such young minds, so keep it very simple: the dove was bringing a good message that God loved Jesus.

Provide each child with a card cutout dove body and wings and get them to colour their ‘dove’ with blue representing water and silver and gold representing light, you can either laminate the two pieces before fitting them together so that they have a ‘dove’ with flapping wings, or concertina the wings as in the template available online:

http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/mflyingdove.html

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Mega Mobile all age

You will need: canes, ribbon, card, funky foam, scissors, blue, silver and gold shiny materials, glue.

This is the same as the Dove Mobile craft but make it on a much larger scale so that it can be displayed in the church.

Origami Doves all age

You will need: paper, origami instructions (see page 89), some practise!

You could simply create origami doves using the instructions provided. This is a real team work exercise as you need to all help each other to create the birds.

You really need to make sure you know how to do it yourself!
age group ideas

activities

Sand and Water age 3-5
You will need: trays of sand and jugs of water, toys that you find in the sea and beach (e.g., fish, fishing net, bucket and spade, boats).

Let the children play with the sand, digging, turning over, making shapes, get them to make handprints or footprints in the sand. Let them add water and play with sand, water, toys. Let them use their imaginations. Talk about how much we love to be at the beach, and times that Jesus spent on the waterside, particularly his baptism, but also could mention calling disciples, breakfast on the beach, etc.

Made Clean all age
You will need: 2 large bowls with water, soap, a towel, dirty cloth, dirty bib, dirty glass, a doll with a dirty face.

While you wash the dirty items one by one in the first bowl with the soap and water talk to the children about what you are doing, then rinse the clean item out in clean water.

We have washing machines to clean our clothes, dishwashers for dishes, baths and showers for us. Leave the doll to the end and say that we can clean ourselves up on the outside but no one but God can see how clean we are on the inside.

Link to Baptism: the origins of baptism lie in a Jewish act of ritual cleansing. While we tend to concentrate more on the symbolic message that baptism is a sign of God’s love today, there is still an element of cleansing that is attached to the sacrament, particularly for people who come to be baptised when they are older.

Clean Up Quick all age
You will need: small bowls of water for each child, towels, dirty potatoes, carrots, stones, etc., toothbrush or vegetable brush for each child.

Each group has a time limit to make their items clean, then tidy up the mess before they are judged to see who cleaned their items and workstation the best.

games

Pass the Parcel age 3-5
You will need: small gift with layers of paper around it and a gift under each layer of paper.

Baptism is a gift to us given by God. Play pass the parcel and let every child receive a gift.

In and Out of the Jordan age 3-5
Get the children into a circle to represent the crowd and one child in the middle as John the Baptist. The children act out the commands as follows. Good listening is required.

In the Jordan: jump into middle of circle.
On the bank: jump backwards.
On the Jordan: nobody moves.
In the bank: nobody moves.

The Chosen People age 5-8
This is a simple game of elimination. Play a game of tig or traffic lights and at every command eliminate some people until only one is left.

If you have blue eyes leave the floor, if you are wearing trainers, if your hair is brown, etc.

Repeat the game only this time you pick items that will not eliminate them to make the point that we are all chosen. If you don’t have hair leave the floor, if your eyes are not blue, brown, green leave the floor, if you don’t have trousers, skirt, dress on leave the floor, if you cannot say your name leave the floor, etc.

New Followers age 6-8
You will need: a piece of chalk and brightly coloured paper, at least A5 size, for each child, safety pins / sellotape.

The children have to get from one side of the room to another. Tape or pin the paper to the backs of each child and give the chalk to another child who stands in the middle of the room.

When you say go the child in the middle wants more people to be like them so they have to ‘chalk’ a person on the paper as they run past.

Baptism Chain age 6-8
You will need: chairs, 2 buckets/large pots per team, 1 plastic cup per team, towels.

The children sit on their chairs in a straight line facing their opposing team. At the beginning and the end of each line you place a bucket. The bucket at the starting line has water in it and the plastic cup.

The aim of the game is to baptise as many people possible, so the team have to put water in the cup, pass it down the line and empty it into the bucket at the other end. The team that has the most water in the bucket are the winners. To make sure it is fair pour 1 or 2 litres in to each team’s bucket and measure it at the end.

The Cross age 9-12
You will need: one cheap loo roll per team, one box wrapped up and decorated with every imaginable glitzy trimmings (holographic paper, ribbons, bows, stickers, etc.) with a loo roll inside it.

Once the children are gathered in their teams bring out your fabulous present. Give it to another leader who will make a big show about the gift (oh how beautiful, gorgeous, is it for me, I wonder what’s in it?)

You ask, ‘Aren’t you going to open it?’ ‘Oh no, it’s too lovely and I don’t want to spoil it.’ ‘Do you want me to open it children? Once open it is the loo roll – a bit of a disappointment. People on the outside can be glitzy but inside a bit of a disappointment but Jesus is helping us to be better on the inside.

Give each team their loo rolls and they need to make a cross from it that is secure and firm. They will not be given scissors or sellotape or glue.

Sunday 8 January 2012
Post the Parcel  
**age 9-12**

**You will need:** old newspapers, sellotape, string.

Split the children into teams and give them the items above. The object of the game is to wrap one of their team up like a parcel so that they can be posted.

The person would be best to sit with knees bent, hunched over and clasp their knees with their hands and arms, in order to make a small shape. Remember to put newspaper underneath them before they start.

It is great to receive a gift through the post just like baptism is a gift to us.

**Recap**

Take a few moments to think back to the last activities to recap and catch up, it may have been some weeks since the group met together.

**Preparation**

Gather together various pictures of light; lightning, sun, moon, Christmas decorations, candles, Chinese lanterns, light sabres, etc. Picture of sun and planets in space.

You could have a torch, floating candles, camera with a flash, mobile phones have a torch/camera flash at hand.

**Looking at the Evidence**

**You will need:** copies of Mark 1:4-11.

Pass round the Bible story, read the passage aloud and ask some of the group to imagine that they were there as members of the crowd, that someone was John and someone was Jesus. After reading the passage, get responses on what it would have been like to have seen this happen. Do you think there was really a beam of light from the sky, or is this poetic language?

**The Science Bit**

The first recorded discussion of the speed of light (we think!) is in Aristotle, where he quotes Empedocles as saying the light from the sun must take some time to reach the earth, but Aristotle himself apparently disagrees, and even Descartes thought that light travelled instantaneously.

The first real measurement of the speed of light came about half a century later, in 1676, by a Danish astronomer called Ole Romer working at the Paris Observatory.

Now we know that the speed of light (c) is 299,792,458 metres per second.

For the last century it was believed that nothing could travel faster than the speed of light, but results in the last few months from CERN in Switzerland are throwing some doubt on this with measurements that seem to show particles moving faster than light.

In other words, we are still learning!

**Discuss**

Talk about the speed of light, have pictures of space and the planets and earth.

- What are the good points of light?
- Does light have bad points? What are they?

For example, a burglar does not like light! Photographers love light, because it is light that the camera captures to create the images. Photographers talk about their art as ‘painting with light’. They are always looking for just the right light to show their subjects in the ‘best possible light’. Both too much light, or too little light, or light in the wrong places can be a problem.

Sunrise brings the joy of a new day, Jesus is the light of our world and he brings us hope for each new day.

- What does the light in our life show up (the bad points and the good points)?
- How does Jesus bring light into our lives and into our communities?
epiphany 2

experiencing the light
sunday 15 january 2012
john 1:43-51

bible notes

Come and See

Some say that ‘John’s is the most spiritual gospel’? Which sometimes seems like code for ‘most difficult to understand’!

What is the fourth Gospel talking about? Is the stress on every-day or eternal things, the homely, the historic or the heavenly? Even apparently ‘holy’ words seem to fall short of the meaning demanded of them. Is anything here what it seems?

However, we do not give up the task, for “the deep eye sees the shimmer in the stone…” (The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke, p. 92).

Perhaps it is best to see John’s Gospel as one in which we, with Philip, Nathaniel, Peter and company, are called to ‘come and see’. We travel with them on a journey of enlightenment from recruitment to discipleship. In Chapter 1, Jesus’ titles seem to grow in significance as their developing appreciation matches the changing status of the people who use these titles—outsiders become insiders. (See The Gospel of John, Jerome Neyrey, SJ, New Cambridge Bible Commentary CUP 2007 pp. 54-61).

This incident, involving Philip and Nathaniel, happens in Galilee, the next day after Simon Peter’s call. There’s a sense of gathering momentum, word spreading, Gospel gossip, sharing testimony. We, the readers, are told where Philip was from. And we know also from the start of this chapter that Jesus is from God, in the beginning.

It seems that Nazareth, west of the Sea of Galilee, was considered too insignificant to be the place of the Messiah’s origin. Hence Nathaniel’s rude comment. It seems too that the fig tree was a place and symbol for the study of the Scriptures. Neyrey cites various Rabbinic sources comparing the Torah to a fig tree—the more one searches it the more figs one finds there to be relished.

Is Nathaniel therefore a student of Scripture, versed in the Torah? If the Hebrew Bible is predictive of Jesus, and the fig tree suggestive of Torah, then isn’t Nathaniel well placed to ‘see’ Jesus? Nathaniel means ‘God has given’, and Jesus’ apparent quip about his lack of deceit, calls trickster Jacob/Israel to mind. Here is a ‘what you see is what you get’ kind of guy. Nathaniel, open to Jesus, open to his Scriptures, will see Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man, as mediator between heaven and earth.

We might recall from Mark 1 last week, when Jesus was baptised and had a vision of the heavens torn apart. Here in John, Jesus says that Nathaniel will see something akin to Jacob’s dream and more... Jesus, crucified and buried, is the ladder. We could pause here and remember the ways in which other characters in John’s Gospel come to ‘see’ Jesus.


“John stooping and looking in, ‘seeth the linen clothes lying’—and the Greek verb simply denotes the act of turning the head in good light, and keeping the eyes open. Peter ‘beholdeth linen clothes lying, and the napkin that was upon his head not lying with the linen clothes but rolled up in a place by itself’—the Greek verb now used is one which denotes looking with an eye to detail. But ‘then entered in the other disciple also, and he saw and believed’, and yet a third different Greek verb is used which included physical ‘seeing’ but goes far beyond it to discernment, a response to a disclosure; it is as if something breaks in on us, and the ‘penny drops’.

Come and see—experience the light.

As a word of warning, you might want to express some sensitivity when using (possibly misusing) sightedness/seeing as metaphors, when there may be people with impaired vision in the congregation.
the story

Come join me and follow

This retelling offers the story divided into small sections and the chance to reflect on each section during some music or the singing of a song. After each section the congregation could sing a verse from “I heard the voice of Jesus say” or “Take this Moment” or another suitable song of discipleship.

Jesus decided his journey was to turn towards Galilee. In the turning he found Philip and said to him, “The light is this way. Come follow!” And he did.

I heard the voice of Jesus say...

Philip was from Bethsaida. This was the city of Andrew and Peter. On the way Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found the light, the one the stories of old talk of, and the prophets of the ancient ones dreamed of and he is called Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.” And Nathanael wondered and was amazed, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” And Philip turned and said, “Come and see.”

I heard the voice of Jesus say...

“Here is one of Israel born!” said Jesus. “He has nothing hidden or false in him!”

“I saw you waiting under the fig tree just as Philip invited you to join the journey.”

“You are the One Israel seeks.” Nathanael responded. “You are the Son of God!”

I heard the voice of Jesus say...

“Just because I said I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe me?” asked Jesus of Nathanael. “If you are convinced of that, then you shall see much greater things. You will see the very gates of heaven open and angels descending. Come join me on the journey into the light.”

I heard the voice of Jesus say...

Retelling for young people

Calling of Philip and Nathanael

A chance to ponder together, encouraging interaction and responses to the wondering about Jesus’ choice of companions. Ad lib as you see fit, and without labouring the point, show up that the gospel account leaves many gaps, to which we can bring our imagination.

When Jesus was looking for people to be his friends, I wonder what sort of people he asked. I wonder if he asked clever people? I wonder if he asked good-looking people? I wonder if he asked rich people?

Well, one day he asked a man called Philip to be his friend. I wonder if Philip was clever? I wonder if Philip was handsome? I wonder if Philip was rich? We don’t really know what Philip was like! But we know what he said to Jesus. Do you think he said yes, or no? He said, yes!

Then Philip went to ask one of his friends, Nathanael, to come and meet Jesus. Maybe Jesus and Nathanael would like to be friends? I wonder if Nathanael was clever? I wonder if Nathanael was handsome? I wonder if Nathanael was rich? We don’t really know what Nathanael was like! But we know what he said to Jesus. Do you think he said yes, or no? (ask children/congregation to vote by putting hands up for ‘yes’ and ‘no’)

He said... “Hmmmmm, I’m not sure.”

Nathanael didn’t know if he liked Jesus at first. He didn’t know if they could be friends. Have you ever tried to make friends with someone who wasn’t sure if they liked you or not?

I wonder how Jesus felt about that? I wonder if Jesus liked Nathanael at first? We don’t really know what he felt. But we do know what happened next. Do you think Jesus and Nathanael became friends? Yes they did!

worship ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

Take a picture of a piece of the church with which folk are familiar or look at every week and crop to just a small part of it, so that it is difficult to place it immediately. Part of a stained glass window would be ideal, but adapt to your setting.

Either print copies or project and get folk talking about what they think it is. Even the familiar can be seen in a new light.

Call to Worship

Leader: Who is the God we worship?
All: Come and see.

Leader: Who is the Son who calls us?
All: Come and see.

Leader: How can we follow too?
All: Come and see.

The God of adventure meets us here.

Reflection

Come and see,
We’ve found the one.

Come and see,
This is for real.

Come and see,
Prepare to be changed.

Come and see,
God’s own Son.
Prayer
When we think we’ve seen it all, surprise, O God, with something new. When our sight becomes jaded, surprise, O God, with something new. When we are bowed down with all that is depressingly familiar, surprise, O God, with something new.

When we feel stuck in the same old routine, beset us, O God, with the spirit of adventure. When we experience boredom with our daily tasks, beset us, O God, with the spirit of adventure. When the familiarity of life leads us to contempt, beset us, O God, with the spirit of adventure.

Surprise us, beset us and confront us, O God, to follow wherever you lead. Amen.

Prayer for Others
‘Come and see’, you say, Lord Jesus, ‘follow me’, you ask us to respond. As we bring our prayers for your church, our communities, and this world, we recognise that each and every one of us faces the challenge to come and see, to recognise what is really happening, to learn from our experiences, and to acknowledge the limitations of our own knowledge and perception, to trust you with our lives and our futures.

Come and see, help us to follow you, dear Lord.

In your church, Lord, let us appreciate the diversity of those called to follow and serve. In humility and grace may we listen to the stories of our sisters and brothers, while sharing also our own perceptions and experiences of your presence.

Be with those who lead our church, that they may have wisdom and discernment, encourage them in enabling us all to serve you in all that we do.

Come and see, help us to follow you, dear Lord.

In our community, Lord, we pray for those who serve others, for those who often see what we do not: for those in the medical services, for those who care for others, for those who look to maintain law and order, for those who educate and teach, for those who run businesses and provide employment.

We pray for those who are struggling, for those who see little positive in their future, for those who are unemployed, for those who have ill health, for those who grieve, and we particularly remember...

Come and see, help us to follow you, dear Lord.

In this world, Lord, we pray for a just sharing of all the rich bounty in this creation, for a greater equality of opportunity between developed and undeveloped nations, for a desire to see and learn, to plan responsibly, and that we might give space for world leaders to make decisions that do not just benefit their own nations, but all nations, rich and poor.

Come and see, help us to follow you, dear Lord.

Sendings
Now go and see, experience the living love of our Lord, know the grace of God, share the spark of the Spirit and be a witness to the eternal Light.

Praise Songs / Hymns
As the deer (CH4 550, MP 37)
Children of God (CH4 521)
Come all you people (CH4 757)
Come and see (MP 85)
Come and see the shining hope (MP 86)
Come, now is the time to worship (CH4 196, MP 1040)
Dear Lord and Father of mankind (CH4 485, MP 111)
Focus my eyes on you, O Lord (CH4 528, MP 456)
I have decided to follow Jesus (MP 272)
I, the Lord of sea and sky (CH4 251, MP 857)
I want to serve the purpose of God (MP 859)
I want to walk with Jesus (MP 302)
In the streets of every city (MP 866)
Lord, you have come to the seashore (CH4 532)
Make me a channel (CH4 528, MP 456)
The Church is wherever God’s people (CH4 522)
The great love of God (CH4 358)
When Jesus saw the fishermen (CH4 340)
Will you come and follow me (CH4 533)
age group ideas gathering

**Come and See all age**

Divide children into teams. The first person in the team runs to the other end of the hall and back and when he/she comes back he/she collects next person in the team using the phrase “Come and see!” and they hold hands and run to other end of hall and back. This process is repeated until everyone in the team is formed into a chain.

**This very simple activity emphasises the importance of passing a message on and how much easier it is to persuade someone to come with you when there is a big group of you, rather than just you on your own. This the basics of how mission and evangelism works!**

**Crafts**

The crafts and activities are great opportunities to talk about the story for the day in a natural way. The intention is not to create perfect craft pieces, but rather to use this time to engage in conversation about the story.

Use today’s craft time to talk about who we follow, and whether we would follow Jesus if he came to ask us. The link between the response to this call and being a member of the church will be too much for the younger children but could be mentioned with the older children.

**Tissue Bodies age 3-5**

You will need: card templates of a body outline, coloured tissue paper and wrapping paper, scissors, glue.

Make enough body-shaped cards so that each child can have one. Cut or rip up the tissue paper and let the children decorate their card bodies with as many different colours as they wish. By the end of the activity you should find lots of bodies that all look very different to each other.

Each person is different, we see this in the people Jesus asked to follow him: they were all different.

**The Chain of Followers age 6-8**

You will need: strips of coloured paper (approximately 30cm x 3 cm), colouring pencils or pens, googly eyes, stickers, glue.

Give children strips of coloured paper. On some strips they can draw eyes, on other strips they can stick stickers of eyes or googly eyes, on other strips they can write their names. On other strips have the words ‘Come and see’. Form one strip into a circle by taping the ends and then loop the next strip through and tape and continue until all strips are added to the chain (like the old paper chains you used to make at Christmas) which can then be hung on the wall.

You can talk about the story and how we are invited to join the chain of Jesus’ followers which extends from then all the way to today.

**Come and See Jesus all age**

You will need: large sheet of paper (lining paper would be perfect), marker pens in various colours.

Ask one of the smaller members of the group to lie on the paper and then get someone else to carefully draw round the person lying on the paper to make a body shape.

At the top of the sheet get someone to write ‘Come and See Jesus’.

Ask someone to draw rough sketch lines of features on face and body: eyes, ears, mouth, nose, fingers, clothes, etc.

Then get people to write on those rough lines with words they would use to describe Jesus, e.g. friend, teacher, welcoming, caring.

Younger children could draw pictures of people on A4 sheets which can be cut out and stuck around the main picture.

**Love Shine a Light age 9-12**

You will need: a copy of the song ‘Love shine a light’ by Katrina, lyrics to this song (available online), large card sheet, tissue paper, pictures and words cut from magazines, shiny paper, glitter, glue.

Listen to the song, share copies of the lyrics if you have them. Then set to work in making a collage of what the song represents to them. As you do this you can talk about how coming to see Jesus and meeting him makes a difference in the way we see other people.
Bag of Books  all age

You will need: a bag filled with a range of story books about Jesus and the gospel stories, parables, etc., ensure they are age-related for your group.

Either the leader or one child at a time takes out a book relating to stories of Jesus. Let them experience the book/colours/textures/pop ups themselves and point out informative facts about the stories.

The point of this activity is that the children are coming to see what is in the bag and have to use their skills in observation, much like the disciples watched (and listened) carefully what Jesus was doing.

Catch the People  age 3-5

Get the children into one end of the room/hall and in the middle have the leader and a child who will play the role of Jesus. When Jesus says, ‘I need you to follow me’, the children must run across the room and try not to be caught. If they are caught, they join Jesus in the middle holding hands and start again. Eventually all the hands will link in the middle.

Find a Friend  age 3-5

You will need: upbeat music.

Get the children to sit on the floor and as the music is playing get them to clap along in time to it. When the music stops they have to put their hands on their heads.

After doing this a few times get them to stand up and try dancing but when the music stops this time, they have to find a friend and hold their hand.

Once they have said hello my name is......, start the music again and repeat.

Simon Says  age 3-8

The traditional game, but always a good way to get over the message of following someone’s lead, while also listening carefully to those instructions.

The leader starts this game with ‘Simon says do this’ and follows it with an action (hands on head). The children follow every action, but if leader does not precede instruction with ‘Simon says...’ the children should not move.

Skittles  age 3-8

You will need: soft balls, lots of empty 2 litre soda bottles.

Get the children to roll the ball to each other and after they get the hang of that make up a bowling alley with the empty bottles at one end of the hall so that they have to knock them down just as with ten-pin bowling. Can the children knock them all down? Don’t worry if they don’t get them all. Jesus only picked some people to help him at first—not all.

Fishing for Workers  age 6-9

You will need: ruler per person, string, magnet and small metal objects (safety pins, paperclips, and so on).

Give all the children a ruler with a piece of long string attached to it with a small magnet at the end, like a fishing line. In the middle of the area have the small metal objects. The team that picks up the most objects in a specified time are the winners.

The connections to Jesus looking for his disciples, and his comments to Peter about becoming a fisher of men can be included (Luke 5).

Blindfold Eating  age 6-12

You will need: blindfold for each team, chocolate bar or fruit for each team.

Split the children into teams like a relay game. The first person is blindfolded and their team has to guide them to an area where you have set out the chocolate/fruit. They will hear lots of instructions from their own team and the others which makes it difficult for them to know who to follow. There were competing voices at the time of Jesus proclaiming that they had special knowledge and people should follow them, but Jesus was different.

Musical Knees  age 6-12

You will need: chairs (one less than the number of players), music.

Set the chairs out in a circle facing outwards. When the music starts they walk round the circle and when it stops they find a seat. If someone has no seat instead of being ‘out’ as in musical chairs, they instead must sit on someone’s knee.

Start again and take away another chair, more people have to sit on knees until there are too many people looking for a knee and too few knees available leading them to fall off people’s knees.
Bell Tag  
**age 6-12**

**You will need:** blindfolds for every person bar one, a small bell.

Another illustrative game of the challenges of following someone else. Each person is blindfolded and spread about the room. The person with the bell is not blindfolded and has to avoid being tagged by the ones who are blindfolded. The person with the bell has to ring the bell every 30 seconds while the blindfolded people have to try and tag him/her.

Random Tag  
**age 6-12**

Get the children to sit randomly around the room on the floor with an arm’s length, at least, between them. The person who is ‘IT’ walks round the room and tags someone. They have to jump up and try to tag the person who just tagged them, but they have to follow the same route that the person took. If they do not, the children have to shout “failed!!!”

Again, a good illustration of how challenging it is to follow someone else, and how we have to concentrate carefully on what they do so that we can do the same, something the disciples took a lot of time to learn.

Knock it Off!  
**age 6-12**

**You will need:** four tablespoons, four tennis balls / table tennis balls.

Split the children into team A and team B. One member from each team picks a person to stand in the middle holding a spoon in each hand with a ball on each spoon.

The children have to try and knock off their opponents ball in a fencing style, while keeping their own balls on the spoons.

The winners are allowed to pick the next person in their team to play and the also who in the opposing team they have to face.

Recap

Take a few moments to think back to last week’s activities to recap and catch up, take time to catch up with news.

Preparation

Mobile phone, pictures of a facebook page, or, even better if you have internet access a laptop where you can look at some facebook pages.

Modern smartphones will have apps that allow you to access facebook if there is no internet access in your church. The chances are that at least one of your young people will have this on their phones.

Note, if you don’t know anything about social networking websites like facebook, please try to encourage someone who does to come along to help the discussion.

Looking at the Evidence

**You will need:** copies of John 1:43-51.

Pass round the Bible story, read the passage together. There is also a chain taking place here, but at a time of no internet connections or phone messages, it had to be old school. Philip went to find Nathanael to speak to him face-to-face about Jesus.

Discussion

Mobile phones for texting and internet connections like facebook, twitter and Bebo are great for communicating with friends and family. It is an easy way to communicate and let people know what is happening in your life.

Some churches have their own facebook pages for communicating with church members via this medium.

However there are very serious dangers to going onto these sites and giving people a lot of information. You have to be careful as well with texting.

Reflection

- Do you always follow the crowd?
- Are you pressured by your peers to do things?
- Do you have the conviction to stand up and say no?
- Do you have the conviction to be a good leader yourself so that people may follow your good example?

Generation Text

**Infographic**


Talk about what happens when word gets around that youths have an ‘empty’.

Talk about the BBM (Blackberry Messaging) that went on when the riots happened in London in 2011: a chain of messages asking people to join in the rioting. Using Twitter is also a way for information to be circulated around the world incredibly quickly.

Talk about chain texting, chain emails, chain facebook updates: send this to 6 people in next 30 minutes etc.

- Do you always follow the crowd?
- Are you pressured by your peers to do things?
- Do you have the conviction to stand up and say no?
- Do you have the conviction to be a good leader yourself so that people may follow your good example?

Looking at the Evidence

**You will need:** copies of John 1:43-51.

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Reflection

- Do we prefer online communication or face-to-face?
- What is the difference?
- Which is better, and why?
- What do you think Jesus would have done if he was alive today? Texted or spoken to people directly?
- How can we spread a message of love both using our phones and computers, and in our face-to-face encounters?
trusting the light
sunday 22 january 2012
mark 1:14-20

bible notes

Time to Catch the Big Fish and the End of Business As Usual

Given our title, *Trusting the Light*, it is tempting to think ‘Don’t worry, it’ll all be alright’. Isn’t it striking that this reading begins with John’s arrest? Hardly an encouraging development on the face of it! We are in the world of politics and intrigue. Yes, trust the light, but remember, it is darkest just before dawn.

If we needed evidence that this is committed literature for committed spec-actors (see Epiphany 1) here we have it. If we were writing ‘holy scripture’ afresh, would it look like this? Is John’s arrest the obvious moment to announce that times are being fulfilled: good news is here? What would a Galilean focus group make of that? How does John’s arrest prepare the way for this ‘kingdom’? How has it come near? What is it to fish for people? How are the kingdom and repentance related? Why does it say, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news,’ and not, ‘The time will soon be fulfilled, the kingdom of God is coming, repent and avoid the bad news’?

Myers and company (see reference in Epiphany 1) locate Mark’s use of the Kingdom (Sovereignty) of God in early Israel’s anti-monarchism: the traditions of Judges not Kings. (Judges 8:22ff, also 1 Samuel 8:5,7, 11-17). Is Jesus taking sides in an intra-Biblical debate about Sovereignty? In other words, is he arguing that God alone is sovereign? What would that mean at a time of Roman rule?

Is there maybe a sense of anti-climax? From announcing Kingdom Come, we hear that Jesus recruits fishermen as followers. Why not a Zealot or two first of all? Or a mercenary: always handy in a tight situation? Is God’s reign shown in practice when some men down tools and set off as trainee disciples? Just how are they ‘repenting’? On the face of it, are fishermen obvious ‘sinners’ anyway?

Some, perhaps with justification, say that Christian ‘fishers of men’ often pick on the vulnerable or the needy. Now, we can argue that point, but here Jesus is calling men in their workplace. Is that not a place where they are strong, rooted and resilient? They are called away from this to do a new thing. This is quite a break in a settled social and family fabric. What would happen to those left behind?

Myers offers a suggestive way to interpret this: “Follow me and I will show you how to catch the Big Fish!’ Quoting Jeremiah 16:16, Amos 4:2 and Ezekiel 29:3ff the writers assert that Jesus is calling his fishermen to hook and drag in the abusers of power and privilege. Not so much pick on the vulnerable but pull down those who appear invulnerable.

Malina and Rohrbaugh, (Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, Fortress Press, 1992), tell us that fishermen themselves gained little from their work. The system was profitable for the estate managers and the King’s finances. Furthermore, fishing was part of the tax system, with fishermen leasing rights from toll collectors who took a percentage.

Of course it may seem a long road from Roman Empire to contemporary western liberal democracy. How do we translate these matters from there and then to here and now? How does the Kingdom (Sovereignty, Reign, Rule, Longing... can you think of other names for it?) of God relate to our systems of decision making, taxation, working, community structures and politics?

If Mark is leading us to believe that God’s Kingdom was shown to have drawn near in the decision of some fishermen to leave their nets and become disciples of Jesus, then what would a Kingdom community look like nowadays? What happens now, where people trust this light that has come into the world?

How does day to day church/life business fit with the kingdom of God’s end of business as usual?
Come join me and follow

Voice A: I never signed up to be a lifeguard!
Voice B: And I can hardly swim!
A: Are you not meant to have some kind of certificate and training to be one of those?
B: And the goggles and rubber ring too!
A: What does Jesus expect us to do? We're good at fishing but catching people is a different ball game altogether.
B: How did we end up signed up for this when only a few minutes ago we were casting our nets into the sea?
A: I didn't even have time to haul in the net, let alone see if we had caught anything for supper. Now we're off, following his shadow.
B: It was so sudden. One minute we're by the lakeside and the next we've already got James and John in tow off somewhere to who knows where.
A: Did you see old Zebedee's face when both his sons dropped everything and came with us.
B: He just stood there, fishing net in his hands and his jaw on the bottom of the boat.
A: There was that look of, “What am I going to say to your mother?”
B: Which reminds me, what are we going to say to everyone at home? How are they going to get their supper each night?
A: Do you think Jesus has thought about where he is going to get his supper each night? He seems like a man on a mission.
B: An impossible mission: to catch people. I always knew we were in the wrong business.
A: But what kind of business is Jesus in?
B: People catching. How do we go about doing that?
A: Is there a net big enough?
B: Or strong enough?
A: There are 153 kinds of fish in the sea and I don't think there is a net big enough to hold them all
B: Nor strong enough. Surely it would tear. It would take a lot to hold all of them.
A: And if we are off to catch people...
B: What kind of idea is that?
A: Is there a dream big enough?
B: Or a hope strong enough?

The story

Retelling for young people

Calling of four fishermen

This could be enacted as a story-game, with children being Jesus and the four disciples-to-be, either coming up front or into the centre of a circle where others sit.

The repetition allows for children to pick it up easily and join in the words with a bit of encouragement. Add appropriate mimed actions for characters or everyone to do, if desired.

Four fishermen working by the sea going in their boats to catch some fish for tea
Along came Jesus, what did he say to Simon, Andrew, James and John, on that day?
Simon the fisherman working by the sea going in his boat to catch some fish for tea
Along came Jesus, what did he say? “Simon, follow me!” so he went right away.
Andrew the fisherman working by the sea going in his boat to catch some fish for tea
Along came Jesus, what did he say? “Andrew, follow me!” so he went right away.
James the fisherman working by the sea going in his boat to catch some fish for tea
Along came Jesus, what did he say? “James, follow me!” so he went right away.
John the fisherman working by the sea going in his boat to catch some fish for tea
Along came Jesus, what did he say? “John, follow me!” so he went right away.
Four fishermen, not working by the sea; not going in their boats to catch some fish for tea!
But following Jesus, cos what did he say? “Come, follow me!” and they went right away!

Image from Time Life film ‘Jesus’.
wonderful ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

Provide a net in the centre of the worship space. Invite people to write their name or names of family on paper fish and ask them as they gather to place their fish in the net.

Call to Worship

From shoreline to roadway, net mending to discipleship, fishing to journeying, slipway to Calvary, sunrise to resurrection, this is the long view, the story of God begun in one generation and growing through countless others.

A tale of a fisher, becoming the epic of faith.

A single word becoming the word of God.

One act of kindness becoming the movement of justice.

The long view, the story of God.

Prayer

God, forgive us, when we clean up the gospel, domesticate it in an attempt to make it less offensive.

Your good news is offensive—to church going folk, to politicians, to high living folk, to governments.

Sanitising the gospel makes it weak and insipid and reveals you as a chocolate teapot God.

So forgive our attempts to water down the challenge and the fervour of your call to follow you.

May we take seriously all that following you demands.

Following you may result in us being rejected by friends, dumped by acquaintances and treated with suspicion by authorities.

Following you calls for us to not only rock the boat but to overturn it, exposing injustice and corruption that keeps your children in oppression.

Following you demands that we get involved, become unpopular and stand up for what is right.

So, revolutionary God, make us cautious when speaking of the good news because that good news is very bad news for some.

But give us boldness and your revolutionary spirit to take it seriously.

Amen.

Meditative Prayer

Followers who were fishermen, disciples who were just teenagers, apostles who were arguing, friends who misunderstood, supporters who were women, missionaries who were children, witnesses who were foreigners, believers who were doubters.

You found them on beaches, on roadways, up trees, in houses, by lakesides, with the Romans, in the wilderness.

But each held something you needed for the reign of God: a hope, a passion, a longing, a voice, an anger, a kindness.

You have found us, O Jesus, and called our names.

We are your latest followers: willing, questioning, enthusiastic, concerned, trusting, worrying.

Make us your own. So be it.

Dialogue

All four carry a bible each, a different version or size illustrating the variety of Bibles there are as perhaps the way Bibles are used to identify followers: floppy, large, electronic, Good News. This reading illustrates that while we can all judge people by their Bibles, we follow the one way.

Voice A: I was a fisherman, now I’m a disciple. I have left my nest and picked up a word about life.

Voice B: I was a tax-collector, now I’m a follower. I have left my accounts and picked up a word about renewal.

Voice C: I was a zealot, now I am a traveller. I have left my prejudices and picked up a word about justice.

Voice D: I was a family man, now I am a pilgrim. I have left my community and picked up a word about kingdom.

A: A word about life.

B: A word about renewal.

C: A word about justice.

D: A word about kingdom.

A: I have heard many words.

B: But only one that has become flesh.

C: It is that word I listen to.

D: And that word I follow.

A: Life.

B: Renewal.

C: Justice.

D: Kingdom.
A: Listen to the word, it is the word of life.
B: Follow the word, it is the way of renewal.
C: Enflesh the word, it is the life of justice.
D: Live the word, it is the body of the kingdom.

A: Here is the word.
B: Here is the way.
C: Here is the now.
D: Here is the future.

A: The word of God.
B: The way of God.
C: The now of God.
D: The future that is God.

A: Listen to the word.
B: Live into the word.
C: Follow the word.
D: Trust the word.

A: Life.
B: Renewal.
C: Justice.
D: Kingdom.

A: Alive
B: In me,
C: In you,
D: In us.

Reflection
Gospel, Good News, demanding, challenging, subversive, revolutionary.
This is the message we preach. This is the story we live. It’s not for wimps or for those lacking courage.
The call is to stand up and be counted, to put ourselves into the firing line, exactly as Jesus did: going after the big fish, leaving the games behind.
Time to step up embrace adulthood break cover and follow Jesus.

Sending Out
May the grace that is eternal wrap our living today and everyday.
May the ancient light that lit the heavens light our living today and tomorrow.
May the movement of salvation begun in history shape our living today and in the future.
May the love that was born first, and will be the last, call us into living today and always.

Praise Songs / Hymns
Big man standing by the blue water (JP 16)
Come with me, come wander (SGP 23, WGRG)
Follow me (All the Assembly Songs You’ll Ever Need, 63)
Heaven shall not wait (CH4 362)
I will make you fishers of men (JP 123)
James and Andrew, Peter and John (WGRG)
Jesus and me, that’s the best combination (old Fischy Music song)
Jesus calls us, o’er the tumult (CH4 509, MP 359)
Lord, you have come to the seashore (CH4 352)
Oh where are you going (WGRG)
Sing of Andrew (CH4 339)
The kingdom of God (MP 651)
We are climbing (All the Assembly Songs You’ll Ever Need, 253)
We’re following Jesus (JP 487)
When Jesus saw the fishermen (CH4 340)
Will you come and follow me (CH4 533)

your notes
age group ideas gathering

crafts

Following all age

Play a ‘follow-the-leader’ game. You could try What can you do, Punchinello, little fellow?

Everyone stands in a circle, with one child in the middle. The song goes:

Look who comes here, Punchinello, little fellow, Punchinello little man.

What can you do, Punchinello, little fellow, Punchinello little man.

The child in the centre chooses an action and everyone copies him/her.

We can do it too, Punchinello, little fellow, Punchinello little man.

(The child in the centre chooses an action and everyone copies him/her).

If in doubt, ask a seasoned Brownie leader, this is a favourite in most companies!

Go Fish all age

You will need: lots of fish (fish-shaped pieces of paper) hidden around the room.

Not the card game! Hide lots of fish shaped bits of paper around the room or hall. Send the children off to go fishing and bring their catch in to the shore.

Once they have brought all those fish back, you can recap the story of Jesus calling the first disciples and how he told these fishermen they would no longer be fishing for fish, but fishing for people.

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story. The craft activities give you an opportunity to talk about what life was like as a fisherman in Jesus’ day, and what it must have been like to give up your job to follow Jesus. What would the fishermen’s families have thought? Where would the food and money come from? Some of the children might have first-hand experience of a parent who is unemployed and the insecurity this brings, whether they are conscious of it or not.

Printing Fish age 3-5

You will need: cut out fish shapes, potatoes with cut-out designs in the inner half of them, paint of various colours, newspaper/sheets.

Give each child one of the paper fish shapes and then encourage them to decorate their fish as they choose using the potato stamps.

Seascape age 6-8

You will need: large sheet of white card, paint, brushes, card, scissors, colouring pens, glue, netting (the net bags oranges come in would work well).

This is a group craft activity to make a large sea-scape. Firstly get them to paint the large card with different shades of blue paint in wavy lines to create the sea.

While the paint is drying, have the children draw a fish shape on a piece of thin card, cut it out and decorate it. When the sea is dry, these fish can be stuck to the sea, along with some netting. As you make this craft, talk through the story of how Jesus chose fishermen to be his first followers.

Icthus Fish age 9-12

You will need: card icthus fish (a template is available on page 90 with greek letters, you can use outline if not wanting the lettering), funky foam, or bathroom tiles and mosaic tiles, glue.

Provide each child with an Icthus fish and decorate in mosaics style. This can either be a card fish and decorate with funky foam cut into small squares or a fish drawn onto a bathroom tile with glass painting outliner paint and decorate with mosaic tiles, available from craft shops).

You can discuss how the disciples might have felt as they left their old fishing behind and started this new fishing with Jesus. You could also mention how the fish symbol became a potent image for Christianity (almost as well-known as the cross).

Window on the all age World

You will need: corrugated cardboard, paper, string, sellotape, glue, paint, scissors.

This is a big craft project. Get people to work in teams of mixed ages to make ‘fishing boats’ which they can stand inside.

These could be used for retelling the story with everyone participating.
activity

Fishing Trip  age 3-5
You will need: large cardboard boxes for the children to sit in (if you have the time cut them into boat shapes), paper fish shapes.
The children could decorate the fish shapes with glitter, paper, pencils etc beforehand.
Get the children to sit in their boats and start fishing for fish. They could be lying around on the floor beside the boat or if you want it to be more involved you could add paperclips to the fish and have rods with magnets so they can catch their fish.

Knowing How to  age 9-12
Follow
You will need: download and print a wide selection of road signs (both common and include some weird ones!).
Show the different road signs, signs that help us to know what to do when we travel on the roads either as drivers, cyclists or pedestrians. See if the young people can work out what the signs are instructing: you might want to do this in teams.
We have to know the rules before we start to use the roads if we want to use them well, wisely and safely. Is it the same for following Jesus, do we need to know the rules?

Good News  age 9-12
You will need: local newspapers, church magazines, etc.
Simply get the children to identify the good news stories amidst the other stories and explain why these are good news.
We have to use our eyes to see what is around us, then we will see the good news happening.

games

Happy Families  age 3-5
You will need: a set of Happy Family cards, or lots of pre-cut small cards and colouring pencils/pens.
If you do not have a set of Happy Family cards available, you could let the children make their own cards with pictures of family members or friends, or just simple designs, remembering they need to make two of the same picture.
You can use these to play snap, or do a memory game by laying them all down on the floor face down and in turn everyone gets to turn over two cards. If they match, then they keep them. The winner is the person with most pairs when all the cards have been matched.
Trying to find the pairs is like fishing for people.

Follow Me  age 3-5
Get the children to sit in a circle and pick a leader. This child stands up and walks around the circle saying, ‘I went out for a walk one day and name followed me.’
The named child gets up and follows on behind the first child saying the sentence again and this time he picks another child’s name, and so on until everyone is following on.

Port/Starboard  age 6-12
The traditional game with the group running around the hall to your rules and instruction, emphasising how we follow rules.

One Day I...  age 6-12
A story-chain game where people have to listen and remember well so they can participate.
Start the story off by saying, “One day I went to market and saw…” Ask someone next to you to complete the sentence.
Each child then has to retell part of the story. For example, “One day I went to market and saw a man talking to some fishermen.”

Flapping Fish  age 6-12
You will need: newspapers, paper fish shapes.
A fun and loud relay game. Children can get in teams and have to move their fish from one end of the room to the other by flapping their newspapers at the paper fish. When they get to the other side, they pick up their fish and return it to the next player.

Famous Fives  age 9-12
You will need: lists of the subjects you want the children to answer, pen and paper or can be done verbally.
Split the children into two teams and, in rounds, give them 20 seconds to name: 5 disciples, 5 places Jesus visited, 5 people Jesus knew other than the disciples, 5 kinds of fish, 5 jobs that the disciples used to have, 5 alternative words for ‘immediately’ and so on.
Each team gets a point for each correct answer, a bonus of 5 if they get all five names in a section but they lose 2 points per wrong answer if you are being really competitive!

Backward Spelling  age 9-12
You will need: a list of words for the children to spell.
The Good News is lost on some people, it is as though they don’t understand it. Try getting the children to spell words backwards. You can make it more complicated with each round. The first round may have four letters, the second round five letters. Good: doog, news: swen, Jesus: susej, etc.

Team Charades  age 9-12
You will need: a list of sayings of Jesus.
The children have to take a word each and act it out in the game of charades. Four people would be needed for ‘come and follow me; for instance.
discussion starters for teens sharing the good news

Preparation

- Make up a sandwich board with “Repent and Live” on one side and “John 3:16” on the rear panel.
- Find images of people wearing sandwich boards online and print some.
- A list of words to spell if you use the opening activity game.

Recap

Take a few moments to catch up on news, to hear if there are any comments or questions from experiences during the week in response to last week’s discussions.

Opening Activity

You will need: see games on page 55.
You could play the Backward Spelling game as a starter. See how complex you can get with the words. Try and get the young people to do this as quickly as possible.

Make the point that the Good News that Jesus came to share through his life and teaching was not heard by everyone. Some people just couldn’t understand what Jesus was telling people, perhaps because they chose not to listen.

Discussion

Sandwich Boards

What do you think when you see people who walk about with sandwich boards for advertising? You often see this in large cities—does it work?

Some people, who have been unemployed for some time, have taken to walking around cities advertising their CV on their sandwich boards in the hope of getting a job (you will be able to find pictures online). How do you think this makes these people feel? (Note that many people did this after the Second World War last century too.)

Have you seen someone walking around with Bible verses on their sandwich board? What do you think of people who do this and those holding up a bible shouting the good news of Christ to anyone who might listen?

Has anyone seen Die Hard with a Vengeance (the third film in the series) when Bruce Willis has to put on a sandwich board criticising black people?

Looking at the Evidence

You will need: copies of Mark 1:14-20.
Read the passage from Mark’s gospel and note that Jesus doesn’t shout or yell at the fishermen, but they must have seen something in Jesus that made them want to know more and follow him, leaving behind all that they knew.

Reflective Activity

Get the group to create their own sandwich board with messages of good news. If anyone feels up to it, could they wear the board during tea/coffee after the service?

Discussion

- Do you think the sandwich board method of sharing the good news works?
- Or do we share the good news by attending church?
- Or is it by the way you live your life that others will know about Jesus?
It still happens, but it is increasingly rare in the UK for a minister to be called out because someone is concerned about the need for an exorcism. In other parts of the world it is very different. A young person recently returned from a mission project in a Nairobi slum told of the intensity of worship services in which exorcism rites were taking place. Taking a moment outside, she was approached by a young child who asked what was wrong because “all we’re doing is getting rid of the demons.” A powerful moment.

In this week’s passage we have an account of an exorcism framed by verses about Jesus’ teaching, each helping interpret the other. This passage has been described as Jesus’ assault on the Capernaum social order. Hisako Kinukawa relates Mark to his own context as a Japanese Christian. Acutely aware of his country’s history, he “questions the internalised and individualised faith commonly found among many believers...(so that Japanese Christians)...might adopt a post-colonial and post-imperial discipleship in line with Jesus’ teaching.” (Global Bible Commentary, Abingdon Press, 2004, p. 368)

According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (see last week’s notes) it was shocking when someone acted from outwith their station in life as expressed by their name and title, e.g. Jesus of Nazareth. Would a craftsman’s son be expected to speak in public? Mark’s readers may know that Jesus is the Christ or the Son of God (see Mark 1:1) and that he has something to do with God’s reign (God’s empire?). However, does anyone else in the Synagogue congregation that is the setting here know this? Is this the cause of their amazement? Is Jesus acting with an authority stemming from this hidden status, known to us and the unclean spirits, but not to the audience? At the end of the story a centurion will confess who Jesus is (Mark 15:39). Demons and Romans know.

To name a person aloud was to claim power or authority over them. Naming an opponent was an attempt to overpower them, but Jesus has mastery over the unclean spirits. Later, Jesus’ exorcisms are claimed to manifest God’s kingdom (3:22-30). Here, the exorcism is sandwiched between reports of his teaching. He taught with an authority not as the scribes, the legislators of Judaism, who decided how the law was to be applied to new situations or when laws clashed. Are these the beginnings of the opposition between the Scribes and Jesus? Where will this lead?

Jesus’ authoritative presence and teaching cause the unclean spirits to cry out. Does Jesus’ teaching bring things habitually hidden to light? Moses and Jacob wanted to know God’s name and thus have knowledge of divine nature and power and influence over the deity. The unclean spirits and Mark’s readers know who Jesus is but not the congregation.

Jesus overpowers the spirits. Their exclamation lets the proverbial cat out of the bag: Jesus’ status is broadcast and onlookers are let in on the secret. Jesus of Nazareth is the Holy One of God. Gospel gossip takes place and word of Jesus’ new honour status spreads. The man possessed by unclean spirits is ‘brought to the light’ and restored to society.

It is another powerful moment, and we might rightly ask whether we try to avoid or to control the light Jesus brings?

And while we are asking difficult questions, we might also ask what demons have control over us? We might not know them in the same personified manner as people did then or do today in the slums of Nairobi, but nonetheless we can sense the lure of voices within us that encourage us towards wealth, materialism, and idolatry. These can possess us, hidden in plain sight, only to erupt into view in the presence of Jesus. Do these reveal something of Jesus?

For worship leaders and preachers, there are yet other questions: do those of us who lead worship or interpret scripture take authority from Jesus? Or are we like the scribes in the story? How do we react when the normal order of worship is interrupted?

You can read more about Capernaum here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capernaum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capernaum)
Not Easily Surprised

Capernaum is a crossroads, of trade and of armies. It’s not your normal sleepy village where nothing happens. This place is a centre of different cultures, Roman and Judean, invader and oppressed, Greek and Hebrew. Stories abound here. Rumours begin and end. So to make your name in this place means you’ve done something to shock a town that has seen everything and isn’t easily shocked.

So today in the synagogue will be a talking point for a long time. We discovered that Capernaum isn’t just a crossroads of trade and culture, but also of heaven and earth.

Jesus, whom we had seen around but didn’t know (there are a lot of people passing through this place), had come in with his band of fresh-faced followers and, as is the custom, had taken his chance to teach.

Even that was a unique moment because he spoke as if he owned the texts. He wasn’t just reading them and chastising us. He read them and they came alive as he folded them into what he was saying. But he kept being interrupted by the one with an unclean spirit.

He normally shouted out and most people just accepted him. We’ve seen strange things here and stranger. But today he was particularly agitated. “What have you to do with us?” he kept repeating.

As he shouted he kept getting closer. People who normally just put up with him were becoming more anxious and shifted in their seats. Some even told him to sit down and be quiet. He ignored them.

“Have you come to destroy us?” the man shouted. People looked round and then looked away, muttering, asking where his family was and can he not sit down.

“I know who you are, Holy One of God!” he continued. That got people whispering even more, “Holy One of God!”

At that, Jesus rebuked him answering him back, “Be silent and leave him!”

There was a pause and everything in the man went silent. He stared at Jesus, his head twisting slightly as if he saw who he really was and then suddenly he was thrown back onto the ground possessed, unable to control what was happening. Then there was one last shudder and the man lay still, eyes open, as if he had just woken up from a long sleep, wondering where he was and how he had got there.

The crowd crept towards him, Jesus stared. “What is this?” they began whispering.

“A new teaching” as they gathered in slow-motion round the man.

“With authority!” confirmed others. “He commands devils and they obey!”

At that, the crowd turned towards Jesus, but he was gone and in his place another rumour was added to the great stream of rumours that pour through this town. Only this one spread like wildfire.

Retelling for young people

Healing from an evil spirit

Children taking the part of the crowd reacting to a strange healing. Have fun making a big deal of the raised eyebrows, and any other actions and emphases you can give it!

Jesus you’re amazing, always raising an eyebrow! That man was so unwell, but he’s alright now! And we want to say, “What?” And we want to say, “How?” but most of all, Jesus, we want to say “Wow!”

sunday 29 january 2012

the story
worship ideas

Through the Season
Don't forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age
As people gather have someone stand up every so often in their seat and read out a line from the reading and sit down again.
Let people wonder what is going on and, once everyone has arrived, ask them to reflect on how this made them feel.

Call to Worship
When we've finished with the theological discussion and the denominational differences, may we discover you, O Jesus, laughing at our debates.
When we've repeated all our creeds and affirmed all our doctrines, may we discover you, O Jesus, looking for hands to feed the hungry.
When we've preached all the sermons and established all our church credentials, may we discover you, O Jesus, drinking tea with the left-outs.

Healing Saviour
and human friend,
Prince of Peace
and heavenly rebel,
Wisdom to the wise
and Comforter to the lost,
Lord of glory
and Companion on the road.

We come to meet you:
the Jesus we miss,
who explains all of heaven
in the squeezing of our hand.

All-Age Prayer
Jesus,
where can we look to find you:
in stained glass
or playing in the streets with us?
Focus our eyes on you:
may we find you
where the world needs you,
among the people feeding the hungry,
with the visitor visiting the lonely,
in the friend who comforts the sad.
May we find you living in your people,
in the kindness they show,
the love they share,
the grace the offer,
the justice they make.
May we find you in the people here,
your people,
and in us,
your friends.
So be it.
Amen.

Prayer of Intercession
Hear our prayers for the world.
Liberating God,
we pray for those who suffer
under the oppressive abuse of authority—
the disappeared,
abused children and vulnerable ones.
Bring your healing, O God.
We pray for those who struggle daily
because of mental and physical illness,
debilitating pain, trauma,
or other ailments.
Bring your healing, O God.
We pray for those
who experience alienation—
immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees,
children and the aged,
or those who have been marginalised
and silenced.
Bring your healing, O God.
O God, show your healing power again
for we know you have authority
to cast out every darkness
and all that ails us.
Your healing power repels
that which stands between
communion with you and others.
By your loving hand, we are drawn
into a community of wholeness.
Bring your healing, O God.

Reflective Prayer
Creating God,
in words of love you speak to us
about justice and living a balanced life.
Hear us when we confess that our living
is not that balanced at times
and celebrate with us when it is.
In the call to justice that comes
from someone who lives justly,
may we pick up the task of justice
and live in your way.
In words of grace you forgive us
of living that does not speak of your reign.
Hear us when we confess that our living
does not always show your way
and celebrate with us when it does.
In the call to forgiveness that comes from
someone who forgives unconditionally,
may we pick up the task of forgiveness
and live in your way.
In words of hope you call us to life:
life to be lived full,
completely,
with each other.
Hear us when we confess that our living
does not always let that happen
and celebrate with us when it does.
In the call to full living that comes from
someone who fully lives
may we pick up the task of life
and live in your way.
May we find your authority
in the way Jesus lived
and in his Spirit may we live also,
becoming the justice you call for.
Forgiveness we seek,
new life we need.
Hear us confess,
hear us affirm
and hear us dedicate ourselves
to your way
and your reign.
Amen.
Reflection

One of the things Presbyterians say has authority is the Word of God. We've even called one version of the Bible the Authorised Version, but the authority of the Bible is often at the root of the conflict between Christians of different backgrounds and theological traditions.

Some talk about the Authority of the Scriptures and mean the inerrant word, that the Bible is infallible as originally given, some thinking the Authorised Version is as close as it gets.

Others, even from the same denomination, when they talk about the Authority of Scripture mean that the word on the page is not inerrant or always literal, but nonetheless contains truths that influence and shape how we live and experience God.

This reading picks up the parts that are most often debated over…

Voice 1: I am not sure the world was created in six straight days, but I am convinced God is the word of life and all creation is held in the palm of God's hand.

Voice 2: I am not sure Noah's flood covered the entire earth and that two of every animal could be collected and fitted into that ark, but I am convinced God's rainbow covenant is real, that God's love for the environment is so great it will bloom again in flood or in drought.

Voice 1: I am not sure Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 at the birth of their first child, but I am convinced God talks of destinies and brings in the kingdom through the communities who take risks and dare to step out onto an adventure in faith.

Voice 2: I am not sure bushes burn without being consumed, but I am convinced God notices when people are enslaved and chooses those least expected to liberate the captive.

Voice 1: I am not sure the Red Sea parted just as we are told in Exodus and that God drowned every Egyptian who dipped their toe in the water, but I am convinced God longs that all people should be free from slavery and live in freedom with each other.

Voice 2: I am not sure the walls of Jericho came tumbling down after seven days of trumpet blasts, but as with Rahab I am convinced God notices and values every act of kindness done.

Voice 1: I am not sure there is a fish anywhere that is big enough to swallow a human and regurgitate him on a beach three days later, but I am convinced God calls us all to take dangerous journeys that we do not always like in the name of the Good News.

Voice 2: I am not sure Jesus was born of a virgin or exactly where he was born, but I am convinced God has put on flesh and dwells among us.

Voice 1: I am not sure God likes the place the Bible gives to women to wear hats and to remain silent in church, but I am convinced God invites each of us, of whatever gender, into the place of acceptance and grace and listens to each one's needs.

Voice 2: I am not sure if the four horsemen of the apocalypse will ever ride into town but I am convinced no matter what ever happens that because God is both Alpha and Omega love is always stronger than evil and evil will always be defeated.

Sending

We go now in the presence of Christ to walk highways and byways in the light of grace and with a story to tell And the grace…

Praise Songs and Hymns

Be still and know that I am God (CH4 755)
Jesus' hands were kind hands (CH4 351)
Jesus is King (MP 366)
Lord, speak to me (CH4 542, MP 444)
Majesty, worship his majesty (MP 454)
O for a thousand tongues to sing (CH4 352, MP 496)
Praise the One who breaks the darkness (CH4 348)
Rejoice, the Lord is King! (CH4 449, MP 575)
The one who longs to make us whole (CH4 719)
We cannot measure how you heal (CH4 718)
We lay our broken world (CH4 721)
When Jesus the healer (CH4 350)
When our Lord walked the earth (WGRG)
Who spoke words of wisdom and life? (All the Assembly Songs You'll Ever Need, 275, also found in Kidsource)
Zip bam boo (All the Assembly Songs You'll Ever Need, 292)
Find the Light  
**all age**

**You will need:** symbols of light, either real thing or pictures (candle, torch, light bulb, lighthouse, etc).

Hide the various symbols of light around the meeting place. Ask the children to find them and talk about light making a difference in dark places.

Ask children if they have ever been in a really dark place, e.g. out in the country at night where there are no streetlights. What was it like to have no light?

The craft is not an end in itself but a way of engaging in conversation with people and to help focus on the story. Use this time to think about the story while making the crafts, don’t be driven solely by a desire to finish the craft: far better for the children to have thought about the story than to have the collage finished perfectly!

This week you could emphasise how Jesus reached out to help people who others ignored. Jesus had power, but he always used it to make life better for people.

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This week you could emphasise how Jesus reached out to help people who others ignored. Jesus had power, but he always used it to make life better for people.

Community Collage  
**age 3-8**

**You will need:** large frieze paper, A4 sheets, colouring pencils and pens, drawing or picture of Jesus, scissors, glue.

This activity could be done with an extended age group all working together to make a large picture that could be displayed prominently.

Ask the children to think about different people who help them in their school, church, community and family and make a list of all these people. This could be roles (e.g. teacher, doctor, mum) or named individuals.

Once you have an extensive list, give each child a sheet of paper and ask them to draw a picture of one of the people on the list. Once finished, these can be cut out and stuck onto the frieze paper. Centrally, add a picture of Jesus.

No matter who we are, Jesus came to tell everyone about God’s love.

Community Messages  
**age 9-12**

**You will need:** sheets of paper, pens, card, decorative paper, glue, some research on Homelessness Action Week.

Encourage the young people to think about people who are left out and rejected in our time and society. You could relate this to Homelessness Action Week, which is this week.

Then ask them to write messages of hope and welcome to these people in big speech bubbles, cut out the bubbles and stick them onto a big poster. Make a fancy frame for the poster and display alongside the frieze made by the younger children.

Talk about how Jesus spoke to those who were left out and rejected in his own society, which made other people very uncomfortable about Jesus.

For more on Poverty and Homelessness Action Week:

http://www.actionweek.org.uk

Broken in Pieces  
**all age**

**You will need:** broken crockery in different colours and patterns (if you don’t want to smash your Denby, you can get crockery cheaply from charity shops or pound stores).

Ensure the broken crockery pieces do not have any sharp edges that could cut the skin.

See if the children can work together to put the pieces back together to make up the plates, cups, etc.

Talk about how people are sometimes ‘broken’ and how we can help each other. Talk about story and Jesus’ power to heal people.

You could also use children’s jigsaws which feature people.
All Better  age 3-5

You will need: first aid kit, a children’s doctor or nurses set/kit, dressing up clothes for a nurse or doctor, some broken items: like a pencil with the lead broken, sharpener to fix it; a paper plate that is ripped, sellotape to fix it; a doll with a red mark on the arm, a plaster to cover it, and so on.

Ask the children what some of the items in the kit are for: Elastoplast, bandage, etc. Who uses them? (doctors, nurses, mums and dads) What do we do with them? Why do we need them? Get the children to fix some of the broken items.

Do As I Command  age 3-5

Jesus had authority over the evil spirits so this game is just a command and action game, emphasising authority.

Get the children to run around and when you shout a command they must obey.

- ‘The wind was howling’: children stop put their hands to their mouth and blow.
- ‘Asleep’: lie on floor eyes closed.
- ‘Rowing a boat’: sit on floor legs straight out and arms moving backwards and forwards.
- ‘Be still’: freeze.

You can relate some of the action to today’s story.

Who am I?  age 6-12

You will need: a list of names that the children are to act out. This can be done verbally or by putting Post-it’s on their foreheads. Mix names from the Bible and from today’s world (sports, celebs).

The children have to identify their own person if the Post-It is on their head by asking questions of the others and only asking closed questions: the children can only answer yes or no.

Or, if it is done in a group situation, give the children 15 questions to find out who they are.

Some people are really well known. But most people are not like that, they are only really known by a few family, colleagues and friends. Are they less important?

Referee’s  age 6-12

Footsteps

You will need: small red card and yellow card, a whistle.

Get the children to one end of the room with the person who is the referee at the other end. The children start walking slowly to the referee and when the referee blows their whistle the children must stop.

The referee decides if anyone gets a red card for moving about too much, a yellow card for moving just a bit or no penalty at all.

If they awarded a red card they leave the floor, for a yellow card they miss a turn and cannot move until the next round, no penalty they continue to move.

Who can get all the way to the other end of the hall? Do the children respect the authority of the referee?

Who’s in Charge?  age 6-12

You will need: either picture cards of people or cards with the names written down on them. For example, teacher/pupil, general/soldier, referee/player, captain/stewardess etc.

Place the mixed up cards face down on the floor or table. This is a matching game, with the children taking turns turning two cards over to try finding a matching pair.

A general and a referee would not go together so they are put back and the next person takes their turn. When a matching pair is found they have to say who has more authority and why this is the case.

This emphasises authority and hierarchies, who is in charge. And Jesus clearly had authority, but was it the same kind of authority based on power, or was it something else?
discussion starters for teens sharing the good news

Preparation

• Do some research on Bing/Google looking for statistics in Scotland for young people with mental health problems.

• What are the mental health issues that most affect teens? (suicide, self-harming, depression, bulimia)

• What proportions of young people face problems, are some areas more affected than others?

Recap

Take a few moments to catch up on news, to hear if there are any comments or questions from experiences during the week in response to last week’s discussions.

Looking at the Evidence

You will need: copies of Mark 1:21-28.

Read the passage from Mark’s gospel and gather reactions to both the man who called out to Jesus and to Jesus’ reaction to him. Note the authority that Jesus has, and which everyone else notices.

The Bible passage talks about demon possession (beloved of many horror films), but today we might think more in terms of mental illness when hearing these symptoms.

Discussion

Mental health issues used to be hidden away but not so now, they are open and discussed just like most other health problems.

• What kind of problems can affect young people today that may make them feel they cannot cope? (exams, bullying, drink, etc.).

• Do young people know where to go to get help?

• Would it be wise to talk to your peers about your problems?

• Why do most teenagers not talk to their parents when they are in trouble?

• Is it the rich, the poor or anybody that can be affected?

Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

Today is Homelessness Sunday. Further information can be found online.

• Do all homeless people have mental health issues?

• If not, what else may lead them to become homeless?

• Do you know of any organisations who help people who are homeless?

• Is there anything we can do to help the homeless?

Film Clips

Relating to authority and leadership, there are two film clips that could be used to illustrate this.

Gladiator

01:28:30 to 01:32:00

Maximus wins a great battle and the Emperor wants to meet the gladiator. When he comes face to face with him the gladiator says with all authority, ‘My name is Maximus Decimus Meridus, commander of the armies of the north, general of the Felix legions, loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius, father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next.’

Remember the Titans

00:29:15 to 00:30:45

Gerry berates Julius for not listening and not sacrificing for the team. Julius responds, saying that leaders must lead, and he accuses Gerry of not guiding the white players to sacrifice for their black teammates. Gerry shakes his head at Julius’ poor attitude.

Discussion

• Do you think you are a good leader?

• What would others say about your leadership?

• How could you support each other better, rather than looking to one person to lead?
Mark's day in the life of Jesus continues. Fresh from the stramash in the Synagogue, Jesus and company head to Simon and Andrew's house. Simon's mother in law's presence there may mean she was a widow. She is ill. Is there a link between her fever and the Synagogue episode?

Marked, Steve Ross’s graphic novelisation of the gospel of Mark (St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 2009) certainly imagines one. Jesus (unnamed) lives in a world of occupying soldiers, razor wire and checkpoints. A boy, witnessing the violence of the invading forces is then possessed, “SLAM”, by an unclean spirit. “I swear he’s not contagious. He’s just ...”, “Please... someone ... Help me” as people walk by, blindfolded. In a place of public worship, Jesus cuts the preacher's microphone cable, tears blindfolds from people in the congregation and is ‘outed’ as the holy one of God by the voice of our old friends, the unclean spirits... Ross depicts this visually, his Jesus reaching into the throat of the man possessed tears the spirit from him. The spirit then runs for it.... until cornered in a house, where an unnamed woman is lying fevered in bed. Ross links the possessing spirits and the fever. The woman, released, then cooks him breakfast... “You kids today! You think you can tear around, saving the world, without a proper breakfast. Sit!” At this moment in Marked, Jesus expels the spirit, dumping it in a bin. Witnesses, catching on, are soon selling tickets for the healer cum exorcist and crowds gather. Mark tells us that this takes place at sundown, the Sabbath over. Time to go to work!

In his controversial The Historical Jesus: the Life of a Mediterranean Peasant (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991), John Dominic Crossan argued that Jesus was actively itinerant, moving on before any one particular site became the brokering place for healing and exorcism. For Crossan, Jesus’ view of mission was radically itinerant whereas Peter would have centred mission from the base in Capernaum. Elsewhere, Crossan links demon possession to the possession of God’s people by Rome (Crossan, p. 313ff). The more orthodox N.T. Wright argues that Jesus’ exorcisms signal his ‘head on war with the satan’ (Jesus and the Victory of God, SPCK, London, 1996, p. 195ff). For Wright, Jesus’ real battle was with the accuser, the satan. To have ‘faith’ was to recognise that the God of Israel was alive and active in Jesus—in his teaching, healing and exorcising. Hence the comments about his authority and the interest in his actions.

Mark tells us that Jesus retreated and prayed. Is this a clue as to the source of his authority? According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (see Epiphany 3, pp. 182-3) people of New Testament times and places conceived a hierarchy: God Most High > lesser gods, archangels > angels, spirits, demons > humans > creatures lower than human. Each could influence those below them. As an agent of God, Jesus overcame unclean spirits with the clean or holy Spirit of God. He restored people to their proper place in their social world.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are united in testifying to Jesus and his authority over unclean spirits or demons. What do we make of this today? Have we a straight either/or choice between reductionist and supernaturalist explanations? Can the narrative allow us to touch the light, even if it feels other worldly?

Images taken from Marked by Steve Ross. Published by St Andrew Press, 2005. Copyright © Steve Ross. Used by permission of St Andrew Press. [www.standrewpress.com]
the story

Healing of Simon’s Mother-In-Law

A dialogue between two women, Beth and Rosana, following on immediately from the gospel reading, no introduction required. They should ideally speak from a slight distance apart.

Beth: You should be in bed!

Rosana: How many times do I have to tell you? I’m fine!

Beth: (sarcastically) Yeah, yeah, miracle cure, so you keep saying…

Rosana: And I mean it, Beth! And I’m as surprised as you, and I’d be as sceptical too, except for what I know I feel in my own bones.

Beth: That fever nearly had you… you were nearly gone!

Rosana: I know. (pause) Maybe you wish I was.

Beth: (deeply hurt) Rosanna!

Rosana: I know. (pause) Maybe you wish I was.

Beth: That fever nearly had you… you were nearly gone!

Rosana: I know. (pause) Maybe you wish I was.

Beth: (after a slight pause) Well, am I wrong?

Rosana: (interrupting) No, don’t be sorry! I’m the one who’s sorry. Watching you and Peter grow together, trying to keep proving to myself that you couldn’t do without me, yes, trying to hold on to my children, him and you. (pause) And lying there, sweating and frightened and delirious, losing my hold on life, but worse, losing my hold on what I thought was the place I still had here.

Beth: I’ve been so mad at you! But then, seeing you so ill… I couldn’t bear to lose you. (lighter) Even though you drive me crazy!

Rosana: Can we find a better way, from here on?...

Beth: Well, it’s looking like twelve plus whoever else for dinner. They’ll be celebrating the recovery of that wee woman who had the leg paralysis. How about I do the stew and you do pudding?

Rosana: Sounds good, for the time being…

Beth: (puzzled and slightly suspicious) For the time being?

Rosana: Yes. In future, maybe we can encourage Jesus to take Peter and his pals by the hand and cure them of the paralysis of their culinary skills.

Beth: It would be a miracle just to take Peter by the hand into the kitchen. Might even cure my terrible attack of scepticism too.

Rosana: I’m a believer!

Retelling for young people

This short retelling (which can be expanded) uses a chorus that everyone can join in with actions fitting the rhythm.

Work, work;... Care, care; Help, help; Pray.

Here is a day in the life of Jesus. Work, work;... Care, care; Help, help; Pray.

After the synagogue, Jesus went to Simon’s house with the four disciples he had just invited to follow him. Simon’s mother-in-law was ill and in bed and they told Jesus who came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. The fever left her and she began to make them a meal. Work, work;...

As the sun set that day people brought all who were sick and ill to be cured by Jesus. Soon the whole town was gathered round the door to Simon’s house. And Jesus cured all sorts of people. Work, work;...

There were people who couldn’t walk, many who had been ill for years, some just who wanted to see who he was and hear what he said. It was always a busy day for Jesus. Work, work;...

In the morning, after a long busy night, Jesus got up before everyone else when it was very still outside and found a place that was empty and there he sat down and prayed. Work, work;...

Then the disciples came for him. They had been searching everywhere. Jesus said, let us go and speak in the other towns. He was quite sure the next day was going to be the same as the last. Work, work;...
worship ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

Invite people to ask themselves what clutter they want to let go of in their lives. How would they do that?

Ask them to take out keys or credit cards or diary or other item that symbolically binds them into the speed of life and lay it down on the pew in front of them or on a seat. What does it feel like to let go?

Call to Worship

**Beforehand create a clutter of religious symbols on the communion table, waiting as people arrive. Remove whatever is on the communion table except the candle. Light it at the end.**

Let us rid ourselves of all the clutter, removing the symbols that stand between each of us and the holy.

Let us take away those things we prefer to speak to, like some holy middle person, rather than directly to Godself.

And may we find faith enough to leave ourselves raw, exposed, fragile, pared, ready before God, as we really are, and find God before us, as God really is.

Come to the quiet centre where God is waiting.  

*Light candle.*

Prayer

What shall we call you, O God, when we speak to you: Almighty God or friend?

Where shall we find you, O God, when we look for you: on mountain side, or bedside?

Where shall we seek you out, O God, when we search for you: on journey’s long, or walking companion?

How shall we speak to you, O God, when we begin our prayers: with long rehearsed words, or silence?

How shall we stand before you, O God, when we come in prayer: prostrate kneeling, or as we are?

What should our prayer be, O God, when we pray to you: poetic words or just as we always speak?

God may we know: every word we use, can be a word of prayer; every place we go, is a place of prayer; every question we have, is a prayer in itself; every posture we make, is a way of praying; every name we call, is your name, for now.

May we know that you know us, completely,

And as we pray, you hear, whatever words we use, even when there are none.

Hear us now. So be it.

Amen.

Reflective Prayer

**Pause**

In every quietness whisper our names, O God, so familiar to you, well spoken, well rehearsed, known and loved so fully.

**Pause**

May love grasp us when we feel we are only just holding on.

May your voice call us when we seek other pleasures or pain.

May your story heal us when ours is too sore to tell.

May your patience wait for us when we are not yet ready to hear you.

May your spirit fill us when we have been emptied by life.

And may all our living find it’s source in you.

**Pause**

So in this place, where generations have lived before us, and many have still to come, may it be us you know fully today.

May it be us who speak into you offering our longings and questions, our doubts and our promises, our hesitations and commitment to follow you, to keep up with you, to accompany you, to break bread and sup with you, and proclaim your reign in all our living.

So be it.

Amen.
Reflection

For three voices. The voice of Jesus is heard off-stage

Jesus was often found in a lonely place. It always happened after a busy day. As he gave, he needed to be given. This contemporary reading simply makes the point that Jesus and prayer go together, and perhaps makes us unexpectedly aware, if we haven’t thought about it already, that the Saviour of the Universe himself needed the moments, the reflection, the time out with God to be Jesus. To take it to God in prayer. There was no magic. It was all about relationship with God.

Voice 1:
The world is very silent when you are unclean.

I had been bent double for a decade, always unclean in the eyes of men. A flow of blood that never stopped, an ailment that sapped me of my energy and my pride. It was never anything I could talk about.

I prayed nightly that this would be taken away, but still I was the unclean one, and their sacred purity and pious religion prevented me from talking to everyone.

But I stopped Jesus when he arrived. I didn’t stand in his way, I didn’t even call out to him, I simply touched the hem of his garment. And he knew, and he spoke. He spoke with authority and healed with love.

And I prayed once more: O Jesus you broke into my silence, you filled my world with sound, and I could stand straight again for I knew you listened, heard me and helped me.

May I be your help in the world.

Voice 2:
It’s a lonely place in a crowd.

He found me in a circle of religious folk, their cries of ‘sinner’ and worse. Only I knew that their pious shouts betrayed their very selves.

He was drawing in the sand, listening in to the demeaning cries. Still he drew, and then without looking up spoke with the authority of heaven: ‘Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone.’

It didn’t take long before it was just him and me left.

And then he looked up: ‘No one left to accuse you? Well neither do I. Go and sin no more.’ And with that I was transformed.

And I prayed:

O Jesus, you wanted me for a relationship rather than for business. You brought me back into community, no longer lonely, you healed me and helped me.

May I be your help in the world.

Voice 3:
The world changes when you come back from the dead.

I was growing up, and suddenly I was dying.

I was sure I was.

I shut myself in my room. I wanted no one there. This was something I had to do on my own.

Just me, my God, and my prayers: ‘Take me, O God, into your atoning. Hold me close for this journey.’

And I was ready, until Jesus came in! And took my hand.

And said things were okay.

And I knew my father, Jairus, was worried about me.

And I knew I wanted to live.

And that I was alive.

A brush with death always makes you see things anew: everything is more valuable. No longer do you take things for granted.

He brought me back into life: new eyes to see the world.

I had been brought back into the circle of care, new worth to hold the world with, and my prayer was rewritten: ‘O Jesus, you gave me back my life, brought me back into this world: grounded me, and called me, healed me and helped me.

May I be your help in the world.

Jesus:

Jesus went to a lonely place to pray. There he could be found talking to his creator.

In the small early hours before dawn he was found in prayer.

The prophet says:

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall rise up on wings like eagles, run and not be weary, shall walk and not faint.’

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Sending
May you find grace in the moments you need it most.
May renewal bind itself around you and lead you on.
May you hear the word speak your name into every silence.
And may God fill you with the possibilities you bring to the world.

Praise Songs and Hymns
Be bold, be strong (MP 49)
Come on, let’s get up and go (JP 31)
Hands of healing (by Marty Haugen from the collection and CD The Song and the Silence)
Jesus Christ is waiting (CH4 360)
Jesus’ hands were kind hands (CH4 351)
Jesus’ love is very wonderful (JP 139)
Lord, it is eventide (MP 434)
Lord Jesus, think on me (CH4 491)
Make me a channel (CH4 528, MP 456)
O Christ, the healer, we have come (CH4 717)
Take my life (CH4 502, MP 624)
Take this moment (CH4 501)
This little light of mine (JP 258)
We cannot measure how you heal (CH4 718)
When Jesus the healer (CH4 350)
When to our world the Saviour came (MP 761)

Go To Your Room!  all age
You will need: prepare the floor of the hall/room with house plan.
Mark out basic floor plan of house on floor (with chalk or masking tape) indicating bedroom, kitchen, living room, hallway.
Play a game where children have to run to different areas, then discuss where people would be welcomed, where food would be served, where people would go if they were ill, where conversations would take place.
Use this to help children think about their own situations and then you could go over the story moving from room to room as you tell it.

crafts
This week’s story is a very personal story, as Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law in her own home. Some of the children may have relatives who are unwell at home, whom they visit regularly. Using this craft time to talk about the story in a conversational way may provide a non-threatening and positive way to talk about illness and healing, also to recognise that sometimes people do not get better.

Kind Hands  age 3-5
You will need: paper plates, poster paint, basins of soapy water, towels, baby wipes.
Provide children with a paper plate. Have some paper plates on a table with a thin layer of poster paint on each (different colours). Get children to choose a colour and place hands in the paint and then onto their own clean paper plate to make hand prints.
Quickly get those hands clean in a basin of water or using baby wipes!
Talk about how we use our hands to help others and that sometimes when we are sick we are not able to do that and how we have to let others help us. Talk about the story of Simon Peter’s mother in law.
When hand prints are dry put: ‘Jesus hands were kind hands’ on plate and attach a loop of ribbon or wool to the back of the plate so that it can be hung up and displayed.

Gift Basket  age 6-8
You will need: baskets, fruit, wrapping paper, cellophane, card, pens.
Talk to the children about how in the church we try to make sure we look out for people who are unwell, by praying for them and visiting them. Sometimes we bring simple gifts.
Get the children to make up fruit baskets which can be given out to those who are ill. This can either be to folk the children know themselves, or to those on the church’s own pastoral/sick list.
On the cards a simple message could be written and decorated: “We’re thinking about you...”

Gift Mugs  age 9-12
You will need: plain white ceramic mugs, ceramic pens/paints (readily available from BakerRoss).
Like the Gift Basket idea above, this is a way for the young people to do something for somebody else.
Ask the children to decorate a mug as a gift for someone. Talk about how, after Simon Peter’s mother-in-law was healed, she got up and served food to Jesus and his friends.
activity

**Knit One, Perl Two**  all age

*You will need: able and willing knitters, wool, knitting needles.*

This is a good activity for getting involvement from some members of the congregation who may not ordinarily help out in the age-groups.

Find some knitters who would be willing to share their skills (knitting is making a comeback as a trendy activity, with people gathering together for knitting circles).

Get your instructors to share their skills and teach others how to knit, giving those who have never tried knitting a chance to have a go.

Talk about how Simon Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed and how she no doubt snuggled under a blanket. A comfort blanket can be very important to us, especially when we are feeling sad and unwell. Care and concern can help people feel better.

You could also find out about organisations which help others by gifting knitted teddies or special quilts. See websites below for more details:

- [www.ukhandknitting.com/data/knitting_for_charity.htm](http://www.ukhandknitting.com/data/knitting_for_charity.htm)
- [www.teddiesfortragedies.org.uk](http://www.teddiesfortragedies.org.uk)
- [www.comfortquilts.co.uk](http://www.comfortquilts.co.uk)

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games

**Quiet and Still**  age 3-5

This might be a good remedy game if you have been involved in a noisy activity before.

Remembering Simon’s mother-in-law stuck in her bed, lying flat out not moving. See how long the children can lie on the floor, absolutely still and quiet. Anyone moving is out, the last person left wins.

**Heal Me!**  age 6-8

*You will need: space for running around in.*

A bit of sensitivity may be required with this game, which is adapted from the game *Jack Frost* where one player ‘freezes’ others and they have to stand in place until touched by one of the other players.

To pick up on the theme of Jesus healing people, one person could be ‘the bug’, which could be introduced to be like a flu bug that when it gets you means you are stuck in bed feeling miserable.

Everyone else spreads around the hall and when you shout go, the bug tries to tig as many people as possible. When someone is touched by the bug they have to freeze in place. But they can shout, “Heal me!”

If they are touched by one of the others then they are made well again and can run around.

The sensitivity comes in being aware that if any of the children are unwell or have family members who are seriously ill, then this might not be appropriate.

**Hum Tig**  age 6-12

*You will need: everyone to be in groups of three.*

This very silly tig game can be used to emphasise the importance of the care of others, and hands that help to protect us.

Once you have all the children into groups of three pick some to be IT, one from every other group. All the time these ITs have to keep a hand in the air so everyone knows who is IT, or perhaps have a bright cloth.

The only way to stay safe is to gather in a circle of three, all holding hands and humming! If you need safety, you must find two other people who are not IT to form a group and start humming. But, you are only safe until you run out of puff.

When you have to take a breath, then you must let go and run to find another pair to join hands with.

The ITs can tig anyone who is running around, not in a group humming away! If you are tigged, then you become an IT and they are free to join a group for safety, you are not allowed to tig the person who just tigged you.

To ensure that the tigged person knows they are IT, the player who was IT hooks their arm around the arm of the other person and gives them the “transfer stare” for 5 seconds!

**Parachute House**  all age

*You will need: large play parachute.*

Always a favourite with children, when the parachute comes out.

Thinking about the house in which Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law, you could see how tall a house you can make with the parachute by trying to lift it as high as possible.

Then you can make a home with the parachute by lifting it up high, then pulling it down behind you and sitting down on the floor so that it makes a roof with everyone inside: you can even tell some of the story from within the tent house.
discussion starters for teens healing hands

Preparation
- Have a copy of Elton John’s Healing Hands available to play (from the album ‘Sleeping from the Past’), a copy of the lyrics may be helpful (easily available online).
- Invite a church member who is a First Aider to join you for this session, or, even better, a trainer if you can arrange this.

Recap
Take a few moments to catch up on news, to hear if there are any comments or questions from experiences during the week in response to last week’s discussions.

Looking at the Evidence
You will need: copies of Mark 1:29-39.
Read the passage from Mark’s gospel. Note that there is a lot of healing going on, both of people that Jesus would have known (Simon’s mother-in-law) and total strangers that came to Jesus. Jesus does not discriminate or say he will only help some and not others in this passage.
What reactions come from the story?

Reflection
Listen to Elton John’s song Healing Hands. The bridge and chorus of this song are quite apt both in talking about our ability to bring healing and our need for healing, but also in the commitment we need to make to bring light into dark situations.

But giving into the nighttime
Ain’t no cure for the pain
You gotta wade into the water
You gotta learn to live again
And reach out for her healing hands
Reach out for her healing hands
There’s a light,
where the darkness ends
Touch me now and let me see again
Rock me now
in your gentle healing hands

Discussion
- Could the words in Elton John’s song also apply to Jesus? In what ways?
- How do you think people might have felt who were healed by Jesus?
- If we see someone who is hurt, what is our first reaction? Do we run to help or hope someone else will help?
- We all have the power to heal in our hands, if we learn how to use them. How can we do this?

First Aid
Take some time to go over some basics of first aid, the things that anyone can do. It would be great to have a trained First Aider to lead this part, but if that is not possible, you can find websites that give you simple details of basic first aid practices that anyone can do.

Encourage the young people to think about being properly trained as First Aiders. This can be done from the age of 12 up.
NT Wright argues that Jesus bestowed "the gift of shalom, wholeness, to those who lacked it, bringing not only physical health but renewed membership in the people of God" (Jesus and the Victory of God, SPCK, London, 1996, p. 192). Jesus touched a leper, ritually excluded and socially ostracised. The man was reintegrated into the worshipping community without recourse to the temple.Jesus offered membership to the renewed covenant people "on his own authority and by his own process". Repentance did not involve going to the temple and giving sacrifice but reporting to the temple not to obtain healing but to gain public certification of it (Wright, p. 257).

"In contrast to the traditional view that uncleanness was contagious, Jesus regarded holiness / wholeness as contagious" (Walter Wink, The Powers That Be, Doubleday, 1998, p. 75).

Some might remember the powerful impact Princess Diana had at a time of great fear about HIV/AIDS when she visited patients in hospital and held their hands, breaking a cleanliness taboo in some people's minds.

At the time of writing these notes, the film Contagion is in the cinemas with a plot involving a contagious disease and the tagline: 'nothing spreads like fear'. Does it betray a social fear or unease we still feel today, akin to those behind this Sunday's passage from Mark?
A dialogue between a disciple and the healed leper. No need for introduction.

Voice A: Where’s Jesus?
Voice B: Who’s asking?
A: I am!
B: And who are you?
A: Oved, the Overnight Sensation!
B: Well, well, well…
A: Indeed I am, very well indeed thanks, for a week now. Which is why I’m looking for Jesus. To tell him ‘thanks!’ Is he still in town?
B: How could he still be in town after all the fuss you caused?
A: The fuss I caused? Heeeeyyy, a week ago I had leprosy, man! I was shut out of my own house, my own street, my own family! Jesus cured me, he saved my life!
B: The fuss I caused? Heeeeyyy, a week ago I had leprosy, man! I was shut out of my own house, my own street, my own family! Jesus cured me, he saved my life!
A: Yeah, we know, he saved your life and you messed up his.
B: What are you on about, man?
A: Do you remember the one thing he said to you when all the feeling came back to your fingers and toes, and all the scabby bits disappeared, when he looked straight at you and said just one thing, before you started dancing about?
A: OK, OK, so I didn’t go see the priest, I didn’t think Jesus was too keen on their kind anyway, and I didn’t want to wind them up and rub it in what a great guy he is.
B: Before he even mentioned the priest, there was just one thing he asked you not to do.
A: Oh come on, how could I not tell anyone? He couldnae be serious.
B: He was very serious.
A: What, is he too modest for his own good? He deserves the fame! His reputation will go before him now, and so it should!
B: And what if his reputation had gone before him a week ago. Would you have got anywhere near him? Don’t you get it? He doesn’t want attention or fame or groupies. He wants to hang out where folk as ill and cut off as you were, can spend time with him without an audience.
A: Oh no… he meant it, didn’t he? I should have kept my mouth shut.
B: Ach, don’t give yourself a hard time. He’s still finding ways to escape the crowds.
A: I just wanted to tell him thanks. That’s why I blabbed, you know, I was just so thankful.
B: I’ll tell him. I’m heading for a wee rendezvous now, out of the limelight.
A: So where is he?
B: He told me not to tell anyone.

Healing of a Leper

There once was a leper who met Jesus, and the leper said, “If you want you can make me well!”

And Jesus listened and felt sorry for the man and said to the leper, “I do want to. Be healed!”

Immediately the leper, who had been so ill, was now so well that he leapt for joy.

But Jesus said to the man, “Say nothing to anyone, not even a word, but go to the priest and pray thanks to God. Give joy for your healing, telling only the priest, then go live your life more fully again.

But the leper went away and told all he could find of what Jesus had done and how he was well.

And Jesus knew, because everyone else knew, he couldn’t go back to the town where he was.

So he stayed in the country where everyone searched and eventually came to hear what he said.
worrying ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Gathering all age

If you normally light a candle at the beginning of the service, try using a different shape and colour of candle this week. Ask if anyone noticed. Then invite people to wonder what it may mean?

The idea is about recognising differences and seeing through any misunderstanding in order to celebrate diversity.

If you do not regularly use a candle, perhaps do so this week, or find some other way to do something different: perhaps place the Bible in a different place than usual.

Call to Worship

We open our doors to you for this is your home.

We spread the table for you for you belong here.

We pour water for you as a symbol of our welcome to you.

We tell the story with you for eternity is yours too.

We celebrate the word in you for it is at home in you.

We call your name for we are one family.

There is no stranger here, only angels in disguise.

God is waiting, we have come home.

Symbolic Welcome

Ensure the font has water in it.

A large board is covered in headlines from the week, including topics like asylum seekers, hungry, same-sex relationships, etc., many minority groups who are often excluded from our normal radar.

During this litany (or after it when singing) people are invited to come forward, dip their hand into the baptismal bowl and leave hand print on the newspaper headlines.

This is a sign of welcoming and inclusion, both because it is water from a baptismal bowl, itself a symbol of welcome, and leaving a hand print, a touch that welcomes folk.

The song ‘Love is the touch’ is sung, during or after this. (CH4 115)

Nearly every story about Jesus, and story he told, was about welcoming people, bringing them back into community. With a touch, a word, or a meal, Jesus was always stripping away the ways of the world, and bringing people back into the community, healed, restored and forgiven.

Voice A: A leper
Made well
Welcomed
And returned

Voice B: A prostitute
Excluded
Affirmed
And forgiven

A: Tax collector
Tree climber
Made to dine
And renewed

B: Bent over woman
Blood flow
Touched hem
Restored

A: Welcomed and restored
B: Welcomed into the kingdom
A: Born blind
Left alone
Eyes bathed
Back with family
B: Foreign woman
Looking for crumbs
Beneath the table
Given a place beside the rest
A: Prodigal son
Losing his way
Rock bottom
Then welcomed home
B: Lost sheep
Searching shepherd
Found
Carried home
A: Welcomed and restored
B: Welcomed into the kingdom
A: World divided
Them and us
Black or white
Rich or poor
B: Excluded by colour
Denied by gender
Separated by language
Isolated by culture
A: Banned through religion
Neglected by gossip
Prohibited by background
Ill-favoured by circumstance
B: Welcomed by water
Called to belong
Named in heaven
Brought home
Love is the touch

Sing ‘Love is the touch’
Prayer of Confession

When we make our table open only to members, may we find a new table.

When we open our community to only those who are polite, may we find a new community.

When we sing the song familiar only to us, may we find a new song.

Oh that the Gospel were for nice people, the beautiful, the famous, and the clean.

But God, you welcome the lost, you feed the hungry, you honour the prostitute, you sit with the leper, you eat with the sinner, you break bread with the stranger.

It is a hard Gospel for our world, all closed up against what we do not know, protecting ourselves from what challenges us, avoiding what we do not understand.

It is a hard gospel to be open, welcoming, affirming, growing, faithful, redeeming. But it is the gospel nonetheless.

When we use our faith to shift us away from the stranger, may we find a new faith.

When we use the church to avoid what happens on the outside, may we find a new church.

When we use the law to divide us into sheep and goats, may we find a new law.

Hear us, O God of welcome, O God of grace, O God of love. So be it. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Eternal God, we pray for the world and those people and issues the world forgets about, pushing them to the side, letting another generation sort it out.

We pray for those whose lives have been in conflict too long: for the wars that have gone on for years in Darfur, in Gaza, in Zimbabwe, in the Congo. Too long we forget the real people, the real effect. Hear us.

We pray for a world always facing change: debating rather than working for environmental balance, sustainability, where people and planet live together. Hear us.

For our own communities where folk are forgotten, ignored, isolated, where agencies do what good neighbours used to do, and people live more privatised lives. Hear us.

And for our families and friends, those who change our living, support and encourage, and for the lonely and the ill, the recovering and the seeking, the anxious and afraid... Hear us. Amen.

Reflection

Two shadow mime artists engage in the retelling:

A leper came to him, begging on his knees, "If you want to, you can cleanse me."

While this is read, one person (Jesus) standing facing congregation. A second (leper) on knees at the side facing Jesus.

Deeply moved, Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, "I want to. Be clean." Then and there the leprosy was gone, his skin smooth and healthy.

Jesus turns head towards leper and touches leper’s head. Leper slowly stands up staring amazed at hands.

Jesus dismissed him with strict orders: “Say nothing to anyone. Take the offering for cleansing that Moses prescribed and present yourself to the priest. This will validate your healing to the people.”

Jesus points off to the side, the leper turns as if to go, taking a few slow steps.

But as soon as the man was out of earshot, he told everyone he met what had happened, spreading the news all over town.

Jesus turns his back to leper. Leper changes direction and goes and shows hands to people in pews.

So Jesus kept to out-of-the-way places, no longer able to move freely in and out of the city. But people found him, and came from all over.

Leper goes off to sit down in pew. Jesus moves off down side aisle of church with hand shadowing is face as if not wanting a photograph taken and sits down.
Sending
The word has been spoken.  
The community has been enriched.  
Love has touch the world.  
Go into the world,  
new,  
and ready to touch it once more  
with love.

Praise Songs and Hymns
All my days (CH4 467, MP 1024)
All people that on earth do dwell  
(CH4 63, MP 20)
Chain of Love (by Garth Hewitt, from The  
Feast of Life: A Musical of Hope for Christian  
Aid)
Children of God (CH4 521)
God forgave my sin (MP 181)
Here in this place (CH4 623)
Hungry, I come to you (MP 1061)
I believe in Jesus (MP 264)
I’m going to shine, shine, shine (JP 392)
I want Jesus to walk with me (CH4 539)
Jesus Christ is waiting (CH4 360)
Love is the touch (CH4 115)
Men of faith (Shout to the north)  
(MP 1094)
My God is so big (JP 169)
O for a thousand tongues to sing  
(CH4 352, MP 496)
O God, you search me and you know me  
(CH4 97)
Oh, kneel me down again (MP 1098)
Purify my heart (MP 921)
River, wash over me (MP 581)
You are called to tell the story (CH4 680)

age group ideas gathering

The Pox  
_all age_

You will need: someone willing to share  
what it is like to have chicken pox.
Ask leaders if they are willing to describe  
what it was like to have chicken pox or  
something similar which has obvious  
effect on skin.
Children might join in with their stories  
of such illnesses but make sure no one  
feels embarrassed or under pressure.  
Alternatively find a story book which tells  
of a child with such an illness. There will be  
some in your local library.

Smiley Gloves  
_age 3-5_

You will need: cheap gloves, wool,  
buttons, felt, thread, needles, etc.
Provide each child with a cheap pair  
of woollen gloves. Using the materials  
available help the children to decorate the  
backs of the gloves by making a smiley  
face. Depending on the kind of gloves you  
have, the children will need help once they  
have designed their happy face to attach  
(sew) this onto the glove.
Talk about how the man with leprosy  
got away with happy face after Jesus  
had touched him and helped him and  
about how we can use our hands to help  
others, not least by the leaders helping the  
children to finish making their gloves!

Hand Planner  
_age 6-8_

You will need: thin A4 card, coloured  
pens, laminating sleeves, laminator.
Get children to draw round their hands  
on the card, colour and write their name  
and ‘5 things I have done to help this  
week’ on the card. Laminate the cards and  
encourage children to take them home  
and display them.
They can note in felt tip pen one thing  
they have done to help on each finger.  
At end of the week they can wipe writing  
away with baby wipe and start again.
Talk about how Jesus reached out to touch  
the man with leprosy and helped him to  
get better. How can we use our hands to  
help others?

Hand Clasps  
_age 9-12_

You will need: card template of small  
hand-shape, funky foam, clothes pegs  
(spring-type, not fixed), magnets, glue or  
double-sided tape.
Get the children to draw round the hand  
template onto funky foam and cut out:  
two for each child, preferably of different  
colours. Give each child a clothes peg  
and get them to glue a handshape on  
each side to make a clip which holds  
things together. Stick magnet onto one  
of handshapes so that clip can stick onto  
fridge.
Talk about how Jesus reached out to help  
others, how do we do the same?
age group ideas

activity

Gingerbread Men  all age

You will need: gingerbread men, icing pens.

Either buy enough gingerbread men biscuits for each child to have two, or put in an order with a friendly home-baker in the congregation.

Give each child two biscuits. Get the children to decorate the biscuits with the icing pens: one biscuit with dots, showing skin disease and a sad face, one with no dots and smiley face to show how the man felt after he'd been cured.

Lepra  all age

You will need: a laptop, materials printed from Lepra website, large card, pens.

Research the Lepra website [http://www.leprahealthinaction.org](http://www.leprahealthinaction.org) where you can find leaflets about their work.

The motto of Lepra is ‘Fighting diseases of poverty: see me... hear me... touch me... feel me.’

If you have an internet connection in the room where you meet or mobile internet access, you could show images from the Lepra website.

You could create a poster with the Lepra logo under which you could show information and put somewhere visible for all the congregation.

Text the Priest  age 6-8

You will need: pre-prepared cards with the words LET, THE, PRIEST, MAKE, SURE, YOU, ARE, WELL on the cards (one word per card), paper, pencils.

Divide the children into teams. One person from each team will be the ‘priest’ and stands at the opposite side of the room from the rest of the team. The person who is the priest will have a piece of paper and a pencil. Each person in the team gets a card and reads and remembers their word. The children take it in turns to run to the ‘priest’ with their word. The ‘priest’ writes down the words (they can be in a random order) and then tries to make them into a sentence.

You can use this to talk about Jesus’ instructions to the healed man to go to the priest: which was a part of the process of being brought back into the community.

Handy Helpers  all age

This is a group game that is reliant on using our hands to help someone, and thus a good and fun way to encourage thoughts about how we can help others in practical ways, following the example of Jesus.

Tig Games  age 6-12

You will need: space for running!

As with last week, you could play some tig games and emphasise what it must have felt like for someone with leprosy to have everyone run away from them and try to avoid them.

All Spotty  age 6-12

You will need: lots of coloured sticky dots.

Stick 10 dots on each child’s hands, making sure there is a mixture of colours. Place big sheets of cards in each corner of the room. Each card should have a large hand shape on it and drawn in one colour: red, blue, green, yellow (the same colours as the dots).

When you say ‘go’, the children have to run to the different hand shapes in the corners and take the dots from their hands and stick them onto the matching coloured hand. The first child back in the middle with ‘clean’ hands is the winner.

Touching Games  all age

You will need: a bag containing a range of different objects that are age-appropriate for the group.

Place a number of different objects in bags (heavy cloth bags would be idea, you must not be able to see the objects). Have the children take turns in feeling inside each bag to try and guess what the objects are.

If doing this with an older group, ensure the objects are that much harder to determine by feel.

Make the point that many diseases of the skin (some of which are commonly called leprosy—though note that leprosy is not a single condition, but rather a blanket term covering many different diseases) mean that you can no longer feel with your hands. You cannot feel pain: which can be very dangerous.

Tig Games  age 6-12

You will need: space for running!

As with last week, you could play some tig games and emphasise what it must have felt like for someone with leprosy to have everyone run away from them and try to avoid them.
discussion starters for teens giving and receiving thanks

Preparation

- Find some video clips that show people saying thank you. Some are suggested below.
- A large sheet of paper and pens.
- A4 sheets of card, colouring pens.
- Do a little research online about leprosy so you can answer any basic questions that may be raised about the types of skin conditions and diseases this term covers.

Recap

Take a few moments to catch up on news, to hear if there are any comments or questions from experiences during the week in response to last week’s discussions.

Opening Activity

On a big sheet of paper write ‘Thank You’ in large letters in the middle, then get everyone to suggest or write other forms of saying thank you around this. For example, ‘well done’, ‘good job’, ‘cheers’, and so on. Are there phrases used at school? Try to think of as many as you can, maybe in different languages also.

Looking at the Evidence

You will need: copies of Mark 1:40-45.

Read the passage from Mark’s gospel. Ask half of the young people to try to put themselves in the shoes of the man with leprosy, the other half in Jesus’ shoes. It would be helpful to fill in some details about what was meant by leprosy in this passage, see the Bible Notes on page 71, before reading the passage. Someone with leprosy did not just have to face the problems of their disease, they also faced being banished from their community.

What reactions come from the story?

Discussion

- What is good about receiving thanks?
- Why do you think Jesus did not want the man to talk about what had happened?
- Have there ever been times when you did something and did not want to receive thanks? What were the circumstances?
- What is good about saying ‘thank you’?
- Is it easier for you to give thanks or to receive thanks from others? Why do you think that is?
- Do you write thank you letters when you receive a gift? Whatever your response, what is the reason?

Reflective Activity

Take some quiet time and give every young person a piece of A4 card to fold into an A5 folded ‘Thank you’ card. They can decorate it as such on the outside, but encourage them to write on the inside some people or activities for which they want to give thanks in their own lives. This can be private, and can be described as a form of a prayer of thanks.

Acknowledge that a big part of the prayers in church are usually devoted to giving thanks to God for all he has done for us. Giving thanks is a very Biblical thing to do.

Saying Thank You

Two clips of people saying thank you that teeter between incredible and excruciating! And one more serious video, but well worth watching. Note, using free software like RealPlayer you can download video clips like these to use offline.

For sheer awesomeness, actor Cuba Gooding Jnr winning an Oscar:

http://youtu.be/cnCMqr1QRQw

For tears and tears and more tears, Gwyneth Paltrow also winning an Oscar:

http://youtu.be/NG9p1FFwxbE

Laura Trice talks about why we should say thank you in a short but enlightening 3 minute video:

http://www.ted.com/talks/laura_trice_suggests_we_all_say_thank_you.html
transfiguration

dazzling light

sunday 19 february 2012

mark 9:2-10

bible notes

Peter Dumfoondert, Law, Prophets and the Way of the Cross

Six days earlier, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked, ‘Who do people say I am?’ Peter confessed, ‘You are the Messiah.’

Trumpets? Banners? Publicity? No. Jesus began to teach that the Son of Man must be rejected, put to death and rise to life

(4 Mark 8).

This Jesus, soon to be killed Messiah, is seen transfigured by Peter, James and John on a mountaintop. Jesus is often called a teacher. Yet his teaching is wrapped in disturbing talk of his dying and rising.

Is this a warning or a promise? Both? Follow me to Jerusalem, to my death, like people returning from exile, like the Lord returning to Zion. Evil and death will be overcome, through the apparent victory of evil and death. This is kingdom business. It has to do with chief priests, death sentences, crowds and crosses.

Mark’s account of the transfiguration is full of biblical typology: Moses, Elijah, a mountain, light, a cloud. Moses and Elijah, represent the Law and the Prophets. Both had mountaintop epiphanies. Both, discouraged, afraid, met the ineffable God on mountaintops and were sent back to face their conflicted situations. There is some mystery about what happened to each of them after their death (2 Kings 2:9ff and Deuteronomy 34:1ff).

It was also on a mountaintop that Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac (Genesis 22).

Cloud and light signify God’s presence, hidden and yet revealed. These may also allude to worship in the Temple. Is this a vision of a new cleansed Temple not built of stone? And on top of all that, white robes are the dress of martyrs (for example Revelation 3:5).

Mark 1:1 asserted that Jesus is the Son of God and a voice attested this at his baptism (1:11). Unclean spirits also spilled the beans about Jesus. In Mark 8 a blind man came step-by-step to enlightenment, Peter saw and didn’t see who and what a Messiah is. Now we come to a disclosure point, as we are all let in on the secret. Jesus, is the crucified Messiah, the victor who seems to be the vanquished. Later, a Roman centurion will say, ‘Truly this man was the son of God’ (Mark 16).

This confronts us with Mark’s provocative mysticism of discipleship. Mystical. Spiritual. Enlightenment. How do those words sound? It can be all too tempting to seek an easy life and let what passes for ‘spiritual’ to be more about a warm glow, a cocoon. But mountains are hard to climb. The way is hard, the air is rarified and going back down has its own challenges. What if the way back is the narrow way that leads to life? What if there are oppressed, possessed people, crowds and crosses waiting at the bottom?

Mark’s story both hides and reveals who Jesus is and the nature of true power and glory. Isaiah 45:15:

Verily thou art a God

that hidest thyself,
O God of Israel, the Saviour.

We could ask ourselves, what bedazzles us and holds our attention? Which powers influence our decision-making, exercise us and take up our time? What gets results? What or whom do we really follow and worship?

The inner core of disciples are afraid. Peter is dumfoondert, confused, lost for words. “Let’s stay here” he says in effect. “Build shrines for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Catch the moment.” Before they ascend to heaven?

In Marked, the graphic novel by Steve Ross, someone attempts a snapshot (see next page). We might use a mobile phone today and upload the resultant video to YouTube within minutes. Instant memories.

Is Peter reflecting our need to worship here, not there, in this place not that place? “Listen to him” says the voice. Listen to the anointed one who will be executed. This mystical experience creates disciples. This dazzling, visionary moment sends us back into the world. The transfiguration is not a trophy for divine souvenir hunters, or a meaningless mystery, it is rather a motivator for action.

Dumfoonder, v. To dumbfounder, confuse, amaze. pt. pp. dumfoondered, dumfoondered

adj. Dumfoundered, confused (from the Online Scots Dictionary).
The Transfiguration

A pensive monologue by the disciple James, no introduction needed.

This might sound strange, but it would have been a whole lot harder if he had told us, “Go tell everyone what happened up there! Go speak of what you saw!”

Keeping it to myself was no problem at all. I didn’t fancy having people look at me like I was crazy or talking nonsense or sounding like a religious nutter. I mean, what are the most outlandish but precious things that have ever happened to you? What have been the moments you have known God was right there? Have you ever heard a voice? Have you ever seen a vision? What happened for you? How has God broken through into your reality, but left you wondering, was that for real?

I just remember the whiteness… the pure, searing whiteness… I could see it in him, in his shirt and robe, but it was more than that, it was in me, this energy, like white waves rippling over me, through me.

John says he saw Moses and Elijah. Peter says he started talking to them. I can’t tell them no they didn’t, when that’s what they say they remember.

All I knew next was the cloud. A cloud, a mist, swirling like smoke, but fresh as the mountain air. And we all say we heard the voice, but to Peter it sounded like “Listen!” and John is sure it said “This is my Son!” but I just thought I heard “My beloved!”

Did we want to hang on to it? Did we want the moment to last? It has lasted! It lives on in me.

Whenever I watched Jesus after that, among the people, tousling the hair of some wee kid, steadying the steps of a woman set free from her lameness, accepting the embrace of a weeping old man with his sight restored… oh how I heard that voice echo… “my beloved, my beloved”.

Funny, but it was only when it came back to me like that, in the dust and the crowds and the pain and the need, that I knew that whatever happened up there, it was for real.

worship ideas

Through the Season

Don’t forget the seasonal ideas on pages 4 and 5 that can be used to help set the scene throughout this theme.

Installation

If you have someone with an artistic and creative talent, set them the challenge of creating a dazzling focal point for the worship space. An example could be a backlit cloth with shadows projected onto the cloth of three people (card cutouts placed near to the light source).

Retelling for young people

Actions go with this retelling.

Shiny, shiny, shiny, shiny (cover eyes). Jesus glowed with the brightest light they had ever seen.

Scary, scary, scary, scary (cover mouths). It looks like ghosts because Moses and Elijah seemed to be talking to Jesus.

Awesome, awesome, awesome, awesome (open mouths in surprise). The disciples were amazed at what they were seeing.

Build, build, build, build (one fist on top of other). Peter the disciple asked if he should build houses for these important people.

Listen, listen, listen, listen (hand to ear). Suddenly a voice came from a cloud saying: ‘This is my son, listen to him!’

Gone, gone, gone (hand to forehead, searching). Then everyone was gone except Jesus who looked quite normal again.

Wonder, wonder, wonder, wonder (stroke chin). And they all asked, ’what was that about?’
Call to Worship
From seashore to mountain top,
from lonely place to hillside,
from touching lepers to touching glory,
this has been the reign of God.
From baptism’s water
to mountain top glory,
from calling disciples
to the healing of many,
from synagogue exorcism
to transfiguration,
we have moved in the glory of God.
The revealing,
the making known,
the unfolding,
the manifesting,
the unveiling,
the unmasking,
of Jesus.
From the Jordan to the present,
from the beginning to here,
from the Galilee to this place,
let us gather
in the transfigured light of God.

Gathering Prayer
We found you standing in the river Jordan
and heard your call to be baptised.
We found you wandering along the beach
and heard your call to follow.
We found you healing
in the local synagogue
and heard you call the man a friend.
We found you at night alone and praying
and heard you call on God for help.
We found you touching the unclean leper
and heard you call him back.
May we find you again Jesus
among us now
and hear you call our names.
So be it.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession
In purple and peach sunsets there is a glory full of heaven.
In a child’s conversation about the taste of ice cream there is a glory full of heaven.
In the silence of sharing an emotion far beyond earthly words there is a glory full of heaven.
May our souls always be open to the hidden glory, O God, of life lived fully.
And may our senses be alive to the tangible touch of what sends our souls beyond this world, knocking on the door of somewhere else.
Yet forgive our eyes for ignoring those who lives are so bound up with poverty or depression that there is no living to be done, no glory to find, buried so deep it is out of touch.
Forgive our faith for imagining this glory cannot be shared, cannot be opened up in others, through compassion and kindness, support and company towards folk, pulling away the brokenness, and setting free all that still lives.
May our living reveal the light that is filled with hope of what is possible and longs to be made real, transfigured and renewed. Not as some flame glowing in the dark, but the light in which to see each other anew.
Hear us, God of light and God of glory. So be it.
Amen.

Prayer of Intercession
Creating God, hear our prayer for a world transfigured in the light of justice and peace.
And give us eyes to see that glory in the works we do, the truth we speak, and the hope we bring.
Hear us for all conflict: O that it could be transfigured into something else, in a moment of glory; yet ours is to pray on our feet, changing things one touch at a time, that duller glory, yet more real.
Hear us.

Hear us for our community, our neighbourhoods and streets, for those isolated and those lonely, those ostracised and those ignored.
Transfigured in a moment into the richness of life yet the glory is piece-meal, bit by bit, word by word, effort by effort, more tangible, more human, yet more real.
Hear us.

Hear us for our families and friends, those we live life through, and for those we know who are stressed and anxious, ill or recovering, lost or grieving.
If only to be transfigured by a single word, yet transfigured by love instead, moment by moment, breath by breath.
Hear us.

Grant us the hope and the chance to be the means of transfiguration, the opportunities to bring life, to enrich and fulfil living, unbreak and renew life in those around us, transfiguring the world, word by word, moment by moment, breath by breath.
Hear us.
Amen.
Reflection

Three people back to back turning to face the congregation when they speak.

Each carries a lit candle.

Voice 1: Transfiguration: the act of transforming so as to exalt.

Voice 2: Transfiguration: a marked change in form or appearance; a metamorphosis.

Voice 3: Transfiguration: a striking change in character or circumstances.

Voice 1: I have been transfigured. You can see it in my eyes, for they used to dance, but now they are dull and dying; for I am a slave, trafficked and exploited, silenced by fear, hidden among you. You can see it in my eyes.

Voice 2: I have been transfigured. You can see it in my eyes, for they see too many memories that keep replaying. Then I was free until the flash, the shockwave, the silence, and now there is nothing left except an invisible poison seen haunting eyes.

Voice 3: I have been transfigured. You can see it in my eyes that have forgotten how to see past that mountaintop experience: so comfortable, apart from this world where heaven was just a reach away. But now the valley beckons and the vision is gone. But you can still see it in my eyes.

Voice 1: Transfiguration: the act of transforming so as to exalt. Come Lord Jesus, from your glory, to this darkness, and set free the oppressed, the enslaved, those who live in bondage, to power and to poverty. Come dare us to tarnish your glory in transfiguring the lives of the bound up, for your glory is the mess of touching and being touched by human suffering.

Voice 2: Transfiguration: a striking change in character or circumstances. Come, Lord Jesus, from your glory mountain, to the darkening valley, and set free our living from what is moribund, to what has fullness: where a faith risks being made a fool, and a church hazards to speak in love. Come dare us

to tarnish your glory in transfiguring the lives of the bound up for your glory is the mess of touching and being touched by human suffering.

Voice 1: Transfiguration: a striking change in character or circumstances. Striking being the world; a radiant God beyond what we had managed to accept, wild with light and a glory the world would only tarnish. The glory was locked away.

Voice 2: Transfiguration: a striking change in character or circumstances. Come, Lord Jesus, from the mountaintop, into the valley.

Blow out candles.

Sending

From the glory we turn towards the darkness, the mountain top back to the valley floor the colours change and the light is different but the journey is always onward. Go now, the time of preparing is near, and come back ready for the journey, the cross is looming.

Praise Songs and Hymns

Be still, for the presence of the Lord (CH4 189, MP 50)
Bright the cloud (CH4 353)
Fill the place, Lord, with your glory (MP 145)
How lovely on the mountains (SGP 45, MP 249)
Jesus is greater (from All the Assembly Songs you’ll ever need, 144)
Longing for light (CH4 543)
Lord of wonder (by Karen Harbison to tune Jesus loves me, see page 82)
Lord, the light of your love is shining (CH4 448, MP 445)
Lord, you are the light (JP 424)
Meekness and majesty (CH4 356, MP 465)
Mine (Our) eyes have seen the glory (CH4 476, MP 549)
O come, let us worship (MP 492)
Shine bright (JP 453)
You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd (CH4 355)
Lord of Wonder  age 3-8
You will need: music for 'Jesus loves me'.
You could use these words to sing about the mountaintop experience with Jesus.

Lord of wonder, Lord of light,
Lord of mystery, Lord so bright,
we're like Peter, James and John,
wondering what is going on.

Now we see your light,
yes, we see your light,
yes, we see your light,
it shines on us today.
(Words: Karen Harbison)

Mountaintops  age 6-12
You will need: pictures of mountaintops.
Use pictures of mountaintops (old calendars seem to be full of these images) to talk about what it might feel like to be on a mountain top and what you might see from there. Some children may have been skiing or hillwalking and will be able to share their experience of being on the mountaintop.

Use this discussion to lead into story and what the disciples saw on a mountaintop.

Embosed Names  all age
You will need: foil, modelling clay/plasticine.
Give everyone some foil and a roll of modelling clay or plasticine. Ask the children to write their name using the modelling clay then cover this with foil and press down so their names form a raised, embossed image on the foil. Carefully peel the foil off and then place the names on a wall display or table.

Magic Appearance  age 3-5
You will need: 'magic painting' books, brushes, water.
Let the children have a go at painting with water on the blank pages of the magic painting books. A picture will be revealed.

Encourage a sense of awe and wonder at how from nowhere the image appears, and link to the sense of wonderment that we read about in Mark's gospel today.

Reveal the Image  age 6-8
You will need: scratch art cards (available from craft shops or Baker Ross online who have a wide selection from standard images to bookmarks to key rings to wristbands, each pack coming with the required scraper).
Give the children a blank black scratch art card. When black coating is scratched away bright colours are revealed. There will probably only be time for simple images, but following a pattern it is possible to create an amazing picture from what had been a blank black sheet.

Talk about amazing 'story of mountain top and how Jesus seemed to shine. Talk about how things we do can let God's love and glory shine through.

Scratch Cards  age 9-12
You will need: scratch art kits (some with silver, bronze, gold colours can be found at Card Warehouse at around £1 each).
This is basically the same as the previous craft idea, but with the older group you could work on a pattern. This is time consuming and requires patience so you would only be starting the process during the time you had, but the young people could take them back home to finish. You could encourage them to bring them back to let the group see the finished images a later week.

Helter Shelter  all age
You will need: garden canes, bendy willow-type sticks, lightweight material, large sheets of paper or lining paper, sellotape, sting, scissors.
Using the materials provided encourage the whole group to work together to create a shelter or tent, just as Peter wanted to do in the story.

You can talk about the story and about why Peter wanted to build the shelters (to try and make this fleeting moment permanent).
**activity**

**In My Backpack**  
_all age_

You will need: backpack filled with items required for a day hillwalking (map, compass, first aid kit, water, food, wooly hat, waterproof jacket, torch, foil blanket, mobile phone, groundsheet.

Gather the children around in a circle. Bring things out of pack, lay them on a table and let all the children look at them for 1 minute. Quickly put all the items back in the backpack and see how many items the children can remember.

Use this to talk about James, Peter and John joining Jesus on a trip up a mountain.

**Dazzling Light**  
_age 3-8_

**Hunt**

You will need: lots of pieces of shiny paper hidden around the room/hall (some in dark corners or under things).

Divide the children into teams and get them to search for the ‘dazzling light’. The team which collects the most bits of shiny paper is the winner.

Talk about how the dazzling light appeared to the disciples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>games</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Dazzling Light**  
_age 6-12_

**Word Search**

You will need: copies of the word search found on page 91.

This word search uses words from the Good News Bible version of this week's story from Mark's gospel.

| games |

**Jigsaw Relay**  
_age 6-8_

You will need: draw some large simple images of mountains, a tent shape and a human figure onto card. Then cut out each image into jigsaw shape pieces.

Divide the children into three teams. Line up each team so that they are facing the opposite wall, one behind the other.

At the opposite wall place each jigsaw. When you start the game the children, one at a time, run to the jigsaw puzzle and remove one piece which they bring back to the team. The next person then runs to get the next piece and so on until all the puzzle pieces are back with the team.

The team then proceeds to make the jigsaw puzzle. The first team to complete the puzzle is the winner.

You might want to have a copy of each completed puzzle available so the children can see what picture they are making.

| games |

**Turn On!**  
_age 9-12_

You will need: a copy of the today’s Bible story, preferably paraphrased to make it easier to follow for young people. Particularly good would be The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories, Mary Batchelor, Lion Publishing, Oxford.

Gather the group together in a circle with everyone facing in to the centre. The leader stands in the middle of the circle.

Firstly, teach the neutral position to the young people: stand with feet spread at shoulder-width, hands relaxed at the sides and with a neutral expression on your face. This is the position to adopt when the leader says, “Neutral”.

When the leader says, “Turn on!” then the young people have to assume the body posture that would express the feeling of the story at that moment. Thereafter, when the leader says, “Neutral”, they return to the neutral position.

Then simply go through the story and use this technique to encourage the young people to listen well to the retelling.
discussion starters for teens
mountaintop moments

Preparation

• Find some pictures of famous mountains to print out.
• Find a couple of video clips that give examples of mountaintop inspiration. There are two examples below.
• Large card sheet, paints.
• Post-It Notes.

Recap

Take a few moments to catch up on news, to hear if there are any comments or questions from experiences during the week in response to last week’s discussions. Did anyone try to say ‘thank you’ more actively, or notice when others said or didn’t say ‘thank you’.

Opening Activity

Look at the pictures of mountaintops, talk about any experiences of hillclimbing, or mountain climbing. What feeling do you have when you reach the summit of a hill/mountain? Perhaps watch the video of Jeb Corliss “falling in style” to quote from Toy Story.

Looking at the Evidence

You will need: copies of Mark 9:2-10.

Read the passage from Mark’s gospel. Tell the young people to first listen to the story with ‘literal ears’ on and ask any questions they want about what they think about what happened. If you are not sure about the responses to some of their questions, don’t be afraid to admit it.

When this has been explored for a few minutes, then ask the young people to read it again or listen again with ‘meaning ears’ on to think about what this story might mean. Whether or not the events happened just like this, what is the purpose of the story?

Discussion

• Have you ever felt a moment when you were totally overwhelmed? What was the cause? Have you ever been able to recapture that moment?
• Why did Jesus go up the mountain? Did it help him? Why did the disciples get to look on?
• Show the video clip of the end of Martin Luther King’s final speech. This is a very famous speech.
• Can the mountain top experiences we have help us to get through the difficult times?
• Have we ever felt that God was especially close to us?

Reflective Activity

Cut out a mountain shape with the large card and paint it appropriately.

On the Post-It notes ask the young people to write down a message and place it on the mountain. Ideas could be:

• A message of hope that they would like to make real.
• A prayer for someone in need.
• A memory of an event or occasion that they wish had never stopped.
• A dream or vision for the future.

Awe-inspiring Mountaintop Videos

Martin Luther King referenced the mountaintop in his final speech, the day before he was assassinated, harking back both to this moment of transfiguration and to the earlier story of Moses seeing the Promised Land before he died. It is powerful, a man of faith assured that his cause was utterly right and God-blessed, even though he also knew there were many people out to stop him.

http://youtu.be/o0FiCxsZKuv8

Jeb Corliss, wing-suit guru, in an extraordinary display that makes you want to try climbing to the top of a Swiss mountain only to leap off for yourself... maybe.

http://youtu.be/TWfph3iNC-k
mini advent wreath
LOCUST DRIVE

1. [Blank]

2. [Diagram of beetle with numbered parts]

Throws

6  Body
5  Head
4  Eyes
3  Legs
2  Feelers
1  Hind Legs

Rules

Players must first throw a ‘6’ to make the body. Afterwards the parts can be added by throwing the appropriate number.

A throw of ‘5’ for the head must be scored before eyes and feelers can be added.

The winner is the player who completes the beetle the quickest.
dove templates

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(1) 

(2) Rabbit folds to form a fish base

(3) 

(4) Collapse like a waterbomb base

(5) 

(6) 

(7) 

(8) 

(9) 

(10) The finished dove

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from http://origami.island-three.net/dove.html
icthus fish
A Dazzling Word Search

Words and phrases to find:

amazing  build  cloud  dazzling  elijah  frightened  god  high

james  jesus  john  listen to him  moses  mountain  my beloved son

peter  shining  six days  tents  transfiguration  white