spill the beans
worship and learning resources for all ages

issue 14
advent, christmas, epiphany
30 november 2014 to
15 february 2015

for such a
time as this

A resource with a Scottish flavour for Worship Leaders, Sunday Schools, Junior Churches and Youth Leaders, based on the Narrative Lectionary.

spillbeans.org.uk
www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources
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introduction

At the beginning of 2009 a conversation began amongst a couple, then a few, then a group about collaboratively creating resources that enabled us to tell the story of faith in a worship context and within age groups for younger people and teens. Spill the Beans was born as the result of that conversation and has grown and developed over the intervening years.

The ethos has remained the same, however. It’s all about story. For 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.

Narrative Lectionary

Over the course of 2011-2014 the Spill the Beans Resource Team completed a full cycle through the Revised Common Lectionary. As we neared the end of that cycle we began discussion about what to do once we had completed that cycle. We considered the pros and cons of remaining with the RCL for another cycle or trying a different tack. We have decided, in a spirit of continual experimentation, to journey with the Narrative Lectionary which began a new four year cycle in September 2014. This is the second issue under the Narrative Lectionary. Note that a set of previous issues (1-12) which covered a cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary is available to purchase.

The Narrative Lectionary is a new four year lectionary that focuses on story and retelling the broad sweep of the biblical narrative in each year. We felt that this focus has a natural resonance with the ethos of Spill the Beans. This is still a new adventure. There are some other online resources that are using the Narrative Lectionary (NL) such as http://www.workingpreacher.org, but this is at an early stage, so Spill the Beans can play an important part in resourcing congregations who are considering moving towards the NL.

Why have we decided to do this? To fully understand this you need to know that Spill the Beans is a work of love. None of the contributors are paid for their contributions, these contributions are written and prepared with our own congregations in mind. Instead of working in isolation, we bring this work together, give it some spit and polish, and share it with others. This is how we can keep the cost so low.

Many of the team were attracted to the freshness of the different approach taken by the NL and see it as a means of sparking new ideas and experiences for our congregations.

We pray you will also be enthused and enlivened by a new approach within worship and in your age groups, engaging with the great biblical narrative so that all people will let these stories shape their own story of faith.

spilling the beans

In this 14th issue of Spill the Beans you will find an extensive collection of things to use each week. Each piece is written with specific congregations in mind rather than some average congregation. Thus there may be the need to be a little creative yourselves in adapting and evolving some of the ideas to suit your own place and culture and congregation. That is a good thing.

Of course, if you are creative and you’d like to share what you have done, then we have a place for that on our Blog (http://spillthebeans.org.uk). There you’ll find PowerPoint backgrounds for most weeks, a live discussion of the passages for that week and how we might be able to adapt and recreate what has been suggested.

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. We encourage you not to use these exactly as they are but rather edit, expand and enmesh these ideas within the culture of your own faith community.

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 rather to provide opportunities to begin conversations, build relationships, retell the story of the day, and talk about what it means for us today.

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 so use your own judgement about what will work with your group.
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 to expend some energy.
5. Use the gathering time exercise with the whole group to get into the story together across the ages.
6. We encourage you to retell the story together.
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 tasks” brilliantly, but rather to provide opportunities to begin conversations, build relationships, retell the story of the day, and talk about what it means for us today.
10. There are many websites that provide handout-type sheets that will have images, crosswords and wordsearches for the story of that week. They can be helpful in an emergency, but try to be more creative as leaders, the rewards are worth it.
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*Please remember you can use the bookmark system within Adobe Reader to quickly move around this document.*

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# ALTERnativity

In the last Issue we told you of the genesis of Spill the Beans and the support received from ALTERnativity to do so. That support was returned in kind in order to support ALTERnativity in developing new resources for Advent and Christmas.

With their previous resources these are available online from http://www.alternativity.org.uk.

Please do visit the website to find out more about the work of ALTERnativity in combating injustice, inequality and exclusion that are particularly prevalent during the Christmas season.

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# spill the beans resource team

For more information and extra materials, join us on the Spill the Beans blog: http://spillbeans.org.uk or join the community at http://www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources.

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# Key to Abbreviations

In the worship ideas section the following abbreviations may be used to indicate different sources of worship music:

- **ATAS**: All the Assembly Songs You’ll Ever Need
- **CG**: Common Ground
- **CH4**: Church Hymnary, 4th Edition
- **CH3**: Church Hymnary, 3rd Edition
- **JP**: Junior Praise
- **MP**: Mission Praise
- **SGP**: Songs of God’s People
- **WGRG**: Wild Goose Resource Group
through the season

Introduction

In this section you will find some ideas for scene-setting activities and a weekly 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.

For Such A Time As This

Advent – Christmas

During Advent and Christmas we are in a time of watching, waiting, preparing and expecting. This is a waiting time but it is not an empty time. The stories and words of Habbakuk, Esther and Isaiah as well as the stories Matthew tells us of the birth of Jesus make this a time for vision, action, promise, light and celebration.

In addition to the candles and calendars which we traditionally use to help mark the waiting time through Advent, this year we build our Through the Season visual around a clock. Each week during Advent a different section of the clock is highlighted and there are suggestions for decorating the clock which continue during Christmas.

Here you will find a few ideas to get you started. Please use and adapt these for your own worship space and let us know about the brilliant ideas you come up with.

Clock Ideas

Clock Chain

Make 24 card clocks about the size of a dinner plate, with numbers 1–12 around the clock face and hands drawn onto each clock with each clock showing a different time. String these together and hang them around your worship space starting with one on Advent 1, and adding one for each day, so with seven by Advent 2, and so on.

You could have clocks which co-ordinate with the colour of your Advent candles.

• On Christmas Eve add a stable to the chain.
• On Christmas Day add a heart to the chain.
• On 28 December add a star to the chain.
• On 4 January add a shoe to the chain.

Card Clocks

Make eight large clocks (one metre or more in diameter) from sheets of thick corrugated card. Decorate the clocks and add numbers and hands to each clock.

Decorate four of the clocks to co-ordinate with your Advent candles and display the clocks around your worship space, adding one clock each week.

Decide on suitable colours for your other clocks, for example silver for Christmas Eve, white for Christmas Day, gold for Christmas 1 and blue for Christmas 2.

Plywood Clocks

Similar to the Card Clocks but made from wood and with holes about 5 cm in diameter in place of each number around the clock face. Stick sellophane behind the holes and a lamp or Christmas tree lights (battery operated ones would work well so you are not relying on having to have a power source for each clock). Light then shines through from behind the clock face.

There are many possibilities, just let your imagination go and then find someone who can help you turn ideas into reality. What about a grandfather clock, or a clock tower with four clocks, one on each side of the tower, or a huge digital countdown shown on screens.
Weekly Suggestions

30 Nov  Advent 1
Title: Time for Vision
Activity: As we hear the words of Habbakuk, we add eyes to today’s clock to remind us of seeing the bigger picture and looking beyond ourselves.

7 Dec  Advent 2
Story: Esther 4:1-17
Title: Time for Action
Activity: As we hear the story of Esther, we add people to remind us of the need for us to take action. You could ask people to write their names on small paper figures as they come into worship and stick these to the clock during worship.

14 Dec  Advent 3
Story: Isaiah 42:1-9
Title: Time for All
Activity: As we read about the light for the nations, we add pictures of candles to the clock. If you create card candles for everyone, you could ask them to write a short prayer for the world before they add the candles to the clock.

21 Dec  Advent 4
Story: Matthew 1:18-25
Title: Time for Dreaming
Activity: As we hear the story of Joseph we add angels to the clock.

24 Dec  Christmas Eve
Title: Time to Watch
Activity: As we think about Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem and the shepherds on the hillside, we add a stable.

25 Dec  Christmas Day
Story: Luke 2:8-20
Title: Time for Celebration
Activity: As we join the shepherds in rushing to the stable to celebrate the news of birth and love and peace they have heard from the angels, we add a heart.

28 Dec  Christmas 1
Story: Matthew 2:1-12
Title: Time for Seeking
Activity: As we hear the story of the Magi, we add a star.

4 Jan  Christmas 2
Story: Matthew 2:13-23
Title: Time for Get Up and Go
Activity: As we hear of fleeing and travelling and reflect on our hopes for our journey at the beginning of a new year, we add shoe(s) as a sign of our willingness to step out in faith.
Living ‘In’, ‘With’, ‘By’ and ‘For’

Epiphany 1-5 – Transfiguration

During Epiphany and through to the Transfiguration, we are entering into a series based around ‘living’. That is living, truly living, as journeying people in the way God wants for us.

It is a time to reflect on our own homes and all the things we live ‘in’: flats, terraces, houses small and large, the solid, stable, (generally) immovable constructs around us.

It is time to reflect on what we live ‘with’: furniture and living equipment and gadgets. Some are necessary for survival, like cookers and heating. Some are gadgets and accessories that are considered not only desirable, but increasingly necessary in the modern world, making living lighter and easier on one hand, but also weighing us down with additional worries on the other.

It is time to reflect on what we live ‘for’: perhaps our families and/or our aspirations. Some of which will give us joy and some of which will disappoint. Some of which will challenge us to new heights and some of which will take us down dead ends.

This season also gives us a chance to think about what we live ‘by’: perhaps long held traditions that positively ground our existence or traditions that tie us down to a way that we should have given up long ago. They may be principles that can guide us into a better world or take us further from being and living the way that God intended for us.

God intends not for us to be settled people fortifying our lives with brick walls and impenetrable doors but to be journeying people, nomads in a world that is going somewhere good, whatever the news tells you.

Tent Ideas

During this season, set up a gazebo, tent or a movable shelter in your church. See the following pictures for ideas on what might suit.

We had a quick look online for some ideas. You may find something else more suitable or cheaper if you shop around. Or, ask around the congregation to see what folks already have available.

Gazebo, symbolising shelter and openness:
http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00BXZW6QM

Pop Up Beach Hut, bright and colourful and providing a private space yet can be folded up in minutes:
http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00JWTULKE

Beach Sun Shelter, again colourful, representing the rich colours and variety of life but more of an open space:
http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00KFDT4WM

Essentially they symbolise a moveable living space that is a place to settle and a place from which you can easily journey onwards.

Set your shelter with two deck chairs (even children’s ones for the smaller shelter) showing that each week is a time for settling and reflecting, to be in companionship with God.

At the entrance to what you choose post a placard above the door that says ‘Living With/In/By/For’ and the weekly theme attached underneath as outlined below, together with suggestions for other symbols of the theme placed inside or around the shelter.

You might come up with others. Let your imagination flow, or ask the congregation the week before. When a week is over you can either remove the items from the week or make ‘little altars’ at other points in the church to mark the journey we have been on during this season.
Weekly Suggestions

11 Jan  | Epiphany 1
Story:  | Matthew 3:1-17
Title:  | Living in Freedom
Symbols: | An image of a flying dove, open handcuffs (toy ones will work fine), printed paper footprints leading out of the shelter, basin of water for the waters of baptism, image of the cross.

18 Jan  | Epiphany 2
Story:  | Matthew 4:1-17
Title:  | Living with Temptation
Symbols: | Apples, snakes, stones, loaf of bread, earth globe/map, a sign with “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test”. You will find many images online with these themes and artist’s impressions of Jesus’ temptation.

25 Jan  | Epiphany 3
Story:  | Matthew 5:1-20
Title:  | Living in Righteousness
Symbols: | A large bowl of salt and a large candle, an encyclopedia or atlas standing open upside down next to a bible standing the right way up.

1 Feb  | Epiphany 4
Story:  | Matthew 6:7-21 (and/or 25-34)
Title:  | Living by Practice
Symbols: | A large readable version of the Lord’s Prayer (perhaps on a large scroll hanging from the tent) with feet, hands and hearts pinned around the edges of the prayer, an image (you will find many online) of praying hands, a large soup urn next to raggedy clothes (symbolising a homeless shelter), a sign saying ‘Christianity In Action’.

8 Feb  | Epiphany 5
Story:  | Matthew 14:13-33
Title:  | Living in the Now
Symbols: | A ‘Day at a time’ calendar showing today’s date or a large poster showing the date, bread and fish, shows in a shallow trough of water (a clear plastic storage box would be ideal), a cornucopia of fruit (to symbolise the fruit of the spirit), a large pile of coins spilling everywhere to symbolise God’s generosity.

15 Feb  | Transfiguration
Story:  | Matthew 16:24-17:8
Title:  | Living in Denial
Symbols: | A doll or Action Man with a blindfold on, next to a pair of oversized spectacles (something like this would work: http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00NB8AZC6), an image of the moment of transfiguration (many artist’s impressions are available online), an angel from a Christmas tree with a big question mark (this to symbolise that the angels still journey with us, but how do we understand that today?)

The Transfiguration of the Lord by D. Nollet (1694), St Jacob’s Church, Bruges.
blue christmas

ideas for service liturgies offering people space to remember in the midst of the festive season

bring it all to me

A Service For The Longest Night

Introduction

This service uses the song “Bring It All To Me” written by Stephen Fischbacher and Suzanne Butler from the new Fischy Music album of the same name with songs for all ages based on the emotions expressed in the Psalms.

This album and a resource pack on CD-ROM including musical scores, resource sheets, backing tracks and DVD videos is available to order online from www.fischy.com.

You need a small tree placed centrally and enough stars for the people present to each hang one on the tree. Have some spares near the tree, in case people want to hang more than one.

You could use an alternative action to tying a star on the tree, perhaps lighting a candle, building a cairn of stones, or making a paper chain from strips of coloured paper.

Call to Worship

Leader: Tonight we gather with friends and with strangers.
All: We come as we are to God.
Leader: Tonight we gather with hopes and with questions.
All: We come as we are to God.
Leader: Tonight we gather with doubts and with dreaming.
All: We come as we are to God.
Leader: Tonight we come as we are to God
All: and God has promised to meet us here.

Prayer of Approach

God, it’s nearly Christmas: the restaurants are full of turkey, the radio is full of carols, the shops are emptying of stuff.

We remember tonight the Christmas story: how you came as a baby, how you know what human life is like.

God, hear us: we come seeking healing for ourselves and others, we come looking for forgiveness, we come looking for love.

Meet us, God: in the words of the bible, in the words and lives of our neighbours meet us and hold us in love.

Amen.

Song

Readings

A selection of verses. You could use some or all of these suggestions, with different voices for each reading.

Psalm 107

Some people wandered in the desert where there were no roads and they could not find their way to a city to live in. They were hungry and thirsty they had given up hope. In the midst of their trouble they cried out to God.
John 11
Mary came to where Jesus was and she said to him: “Jesus if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”
Jesus saw her weeping and he saw how the people with her were also weeping, and he was deeply moved.
"Where have you buried him?” Jesus asked them.
"Come and see,” they answered.
Jesus wept.
"See how much he loved him,” the people said.

Psalm 130
From the depths of my despair
I call to you, God.
Hear my cry.
If you kept a record of the things I've done wrong
I would have no hope.
But you forgive me and love me.
In your word I trust.

Matthew 11
Jesus said, “Come to me all of you who are tired of carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest.”

An Invitation
God knows us.
God knows what delights us,
what makes us smile, what makes us sad.
In the next song, God tells us:
You can bring me everything.

You were given a star when you came in.
You are invited now to listen to the song and when it is over to come and tie a star onto the tree as a symbol of placing yourselves and those you love into God's love.

Bring It All To Me
Anything excited, anything inspired
bring it all, bring it all to me
everything that's lazy, everything that's tired
bring it all, bring it all to me

Anything that rages, anything that screams
bring it all, bring it all to me
everything that wonders, everything that dreams
bring it all, bring it all to me

You can bring me anything
you can bring me everything
just bring it all, bring it all to me

Anything that's easy, anything that's hard
bring it all, bring it all to me
everything that's perfect, everything that's scarred
bring it all, bring it all to me.

Anything you're proud of, anything you're not
bring it all, bring it all to me
everything you're hiding, everything you've got
bring it all, bring it all to me

You can bring me anything
you can bring me everything
just bring it all, bring it all to me

I know how you feel, because I know you
I know how you feel, because I made you

Anything that matters, anything that's real
bring it all, bring it all to me
everything you treasure, everything you feel
bring it all, bring it all to me

You can bring me anything
you can bring me everything
just bring it all, bring it all to me

© Stephen Fischbacher and Suzanne Butler/ Fischy Music 2014

Symbolic Activity
Play some quiet music (you could use the backing track for “Bring It All To Me” from the album) while people hang stars on the tree.
Readings

Another selection of appropriate verses. Choose some or all.

Matthew 5
Happy are those who mourn,
God will comfort them.
Happy are those who are kind to others,
God will be kind to them.
Happy are those who work for peace,
God will call them his children.

Psalm 23
God is my shepherd,
I have everything I need.
God gives me new strength
and guides me along the right paths.
When I go through the darkness
God is with me.
I am safe.
God will be with me all my life.
God’s house will be my home.

Revelation 21
God’s home is for everyone. God will live with everybody.
God will wipe away the tears from their eyes.
Anyone who is thirsty will be able to drink the water of life.
God is the first and the last, the end and the beginning.
God can be trusted.

Song

Blessing
Leader: May God bless us this night
with hope and with justice.
All: May those we care about be held in God’s love.
Leader: May Jesus bless us this night
with light and with courage.
All: May we know that Jesus loves us and he always will.
Leader: May the Holy Spirit bless us tonight
with tears and with laughter.
All: May we know the warmth and wonder of God’s healing love.
Amen.

Sending
Walk well your way
in the company of the Trinity.
You are God’s friends and family tonight
and all your nights and days.
Reading

This verse is from William Penn.

They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it.
Death cannot kill what never dies,
Nor can Spirits ever be divided that love and live
in the same divine principle;
the root and record of their friendship.
If absence be not death, neither is theirs.
Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas;
they live in one another still.
For they must needs be present,
that love and live in that which is omnipresent.
This is the comfort of friends,
that though they may be said to die,
yet their friendship and presence live on
In the best sense, ever present,
because their memory is immortal.
We think not that our friend is lost
when they go to another room,
nor even if they travel to a distant land
and into another world no one is gone.
For heaven, that God has created,
and this world are all one.

Song

Readings

Isaiah 25: 8-9
John 6: 37-40

Prayer for the Seasons & Lighting of Candles

Place four candles in silver on a tray centred on the table.

God of love,
today we share with you our feelings and our thoughts
at a time when our sense of loss is strong,
when we recognise that this season will not be the same
as it has been in years past,
because that special person who has journeyed with us
does so now only in our memories.
As we admit this to you today,
we bring to you our grief and hurt,
and ask that you make your presence felt as you accompany us.

As the year turns, and seasons come and go
we think of our loved ones:
In the Spring, defiant green shoots
break through the dark earth to show us signs of life
and the season of birth is upon us.
We think of those we loved and we think of those we have lost.
So we light this candle for those we loved in Spring.

Light first candle

In the Summer, the golden sunlight warms us,
the blue skies lift our spirits,
and the season of growth is upon us.

We think of those we loved and we think of those we have lost.
So we light this candle for those we loved in Summer.

Light second candle

In the Autumn, the trees turn gold and red and rich brown.
and the season of fruits and harvest is upon us.
We think of those we loved and we think of those we have lost.
So we light this candle for those we loved in Autumn.

Light third candle

In the Winter, the world turns white, the earth sleeps,
and the season of rest is upon us.
We think of those we loved and we think of those we have lost.
So we light this candle for those we loved in Autumn.

Light fourth candle

Time passes.
The cycle of birth and growth and fruit and sleep continues.
Time heals and memories sustain.
We do not get over our loss,
yet we do find a new normal:
a new way of living without those we held so dear.
We pray today for those who grieve.
We pray today for those whom we remember.
We pray today for all our loved ones:
brothers and sisters,
husbands and wives,
parents and children,
friends and companions,
that we each may find our way in this world
and be reunited with those we love
in spirit and in grace in the next.
Amen

Symbolic Activity

People are invited to bring their named cards forward and to
place them on the tree, quiet music playing as they do so.

Concluding thoughts

We have remembered. We have been still.
We have given support to each other.
We have received strength from God.
Our loved ones are freed from the chains of life on earth
to the liberty of their heavenly lives.
One day we will all be together,
united by our love for each other and our love for God.
Until that day we leave them in the care of the Creator,
the Saviour and the Inspirer:
God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Song

Love came down at Christmas (CH4 316 / MP 451)

Blessing

May God bless us and heal us and hold us in love
today, tonight and for evermore.
Amen.
This Sunday is St Andrew’s Day, the feast day to remember Andrew, one of the twelve, brother of Simon Peter, and a fellow fisherman. One of traits that marks a successful fisher is patient and persistent observation: knowing the waters in which you fish, studying the surface of the water, the circling of birds overhead, the flow of currents and the nature of the fish you are seeking to catch. All things that Andrew no doubt knew well, and perhaps it is not surprising that Andrew is the one (John 6:8-9) who spots a boy with loaves and fish amidst the multitude. A good fisher must have good vision to see what is happening around them.

As the season of Advent arrives, we embark on a journey towards Christmas that also entails a heightened sense of observation in order that the greater vision of God’s presence be recognised and celebrated even amidst the distractions of the festive season. The tinsel and glitter, fairy lights and raw consumerism can easily lead individuals and communities from the observation that Christmas is a time to renew a vision for the world that reconciles and brings peace. It is a vision the world is crying out for today as much as it did in the time of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk is a fascinating wee book. It is unique among the prophetic literature in questioning the earlier explanations that the prophets had raised about why the Israelites had been attacked by other nations. This was generally understood to be punishment meted out by God upon his people for their wayward path. Habakkuk questions how it can be possible that the disproportionate damage done by invading armies could be the actions of a just God.

In the manner of the psalms of lament, Habakkuk complains to God about what he sees happening. He is frustrated with God that there has been no intervention to stop the bloodshed: God will not listen, will not save.

Yet in the very act of observing and documenting what is taking place, and raising this to God, Habakkuk maintains hope that this is not the end of the story. There is still hope. Habakkuk has not given up on God.

That hope and trust is rewarded when God answers his prophet’s complaint. The crucial verse is verse four (particularly the second part) which Eugene Peterson paraphrases helpfully as:

“Look at that man, bloated by self-importance—full of himself but soul-empty.
But the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, really alive.”

The troubles and strife are not going to go away. The distractions and challenges of life are not miraculously vanished. The rampant consumerism surrounding Christmas is not going to be reversed. However, that does not stop those living in faithfulness from seeing beyond those distractions and finding a deeper more rewarding life.

Chapter 3 contains a theophany that depicts the power of God in terms that no other power can match. It is frightening to behold. There is an overwhelming sense of otherness to God, yet also an attraction that draws us towards that otherness, to an experience of the numinous.

After this revelation of God to Habakkuk, he is left a quivering wreck. Yet Habakkuk is also transformed. If you wear glasses you will know that feeling when you get a new pair of spectacles with the correct prescription and suddenly everything becomes clear, pin sharp, a new vision: it is transformational. Habakkuk’s vision also was expanded, he can see beyond the daily and seasonal travails—when no blossom forms on the trees, when no fruit grows and fields lie barren—and despite all that keep rejoicing in God. Ultimately, Habakkuk has learnt to set aside some of the questions that had tormented him, and instead has learnt how to rejoice in life.

Instead of complaining bitterly about the transformation of Advent and Christmas into one long buying season, perhaps we in the Christian community should learn better how to rejoice in life and celebrate the mystery of incarnation?
Waiting

Andy is standing staring into the sky as though he is waiting for something, checking his watch, looking right, then left, and so on.

Ada: What are you doing Andy?
Andy: Waiting!
Ada: Waiting? Waiting for what? A bus, a train?
Andy: Naw, I would be at the bus station or the railway station if I was waiting for them?
Ada: Well are you waiting for a friend coming?
Andy: Naw, I am not waiting for a friend coming. Lots of my friends are here already.

Ada points to people in the congregation.

Ada: I know, you are waiting on the Minister starting his sermon!
Andy: Maybe aye and maybe no!
Ada: Well, what are you waiting on?
Andy: I am waiting on God!
Ada: What do you mean you are waiting on God.
A little bit scared.

Has he arranged to meet you here? Are you going to die this morning? Is there something that you haven't told me Andy?

Andy: Oh don’t worry Ada it is nothing like that.
Ada: Well, what is it?
Andy: It’s about these words from the prophet Habakkuk.
Ada: Which words from Habakkuk do you mean?
Andy: Well the words that say God has a plan and I am waiting for that plan to work
Ada: Yes, Andy, but people have been waiting for that plan to work for thousands of years and it does not seem to be happening any time soon.
Andy: Yes, Ada, I know, but surely we can learn something from his words. I mean just look at what is happening in our world at this moment in time.

Substitute current news item here:

Those poor men having their heads cut off by Islamic State Militants, thousands of people dead from Ebola in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Then those Russian Soldiers fighting in Ukraine and the world sits back and is powerless...

Ada: Well there are certainly terrible things happening in our world, but how does it fit in with the words of Habakkuk and God’s plan?
Andy: It is kind of obvious to me, Ada. In Habakkuk’s day there was violence, disasters, conflicts and war was everywhere. His people worried about it and feared for their lives every day. We live in the same kind of world all these years later, but God has promised us that he has a plan, that things will change and we have just got to hang in there. We have to wait for God’s timing, so I am waiting!

Ada: Andy, I think when God says we have to be patient and wait, it does not mean we stand around watching and waiting, like we are waiting to see Santa arrive with our presents. It means that God calls us to be faithful. To stick to doing things his way no matter how hard and difficult life gets, and God will watch over us.

Andy: But Ada, you would think our governments and politicians could do something about it now. What about NATO getting involved?
Ada: I guess they are often part of the problem because they are more concerned with power than with peace.

Andy: Yes, And God is more concerned with justice and peace.
Ada: Exactly, and so we wait patiently, and faithfully for God to fulfil his promises, because he always keeps his promise to us.

Andy: And he will give us strength and encouragement to enable us to do the right thing, and when others catch on to doing the right thing, the world becomes a better place.
Ada: Well, something like that Andy.

Andy: So we just keep looking to God to do the right thing, rather than looking for God to appear and do it for us.
Ada: I think that is what Habakkuk tried to tell his people and our people today.

Andy: Clever man that Habakkuk!
Ada: Clever you to keep waiting on God!
Retelling For Young People

Moaning Michael

Michael was always complaining! He complained when his food was too cold and when his food was too hot. He complained when his friends invited him for a sleep-over and when they did not invite him for a sleep-over. He complained to the referee when he played football and he complained when his team lost that other people did not try hard enough. He complained that his seat was the wrong size and in the wrong place in class. He complained when his teacher picked him to do something and when she chose someone else. He complained about everything and anything.

Do you know anyone who moans and complains a lot?
Do you get annoyed or upset when people always seem to be so negative about everything?
Imagine what would happen if God suddenly answered Michael’s complaints?
Maybe it would sound something like this:

Michael, this is God speaking to you. Imagine if you had no food at all, and you were feeling really hungry. You would no longer care whether your food was hot or cold. Imagine if no one ever invited you to anything how lonely you would be. Imagine the mistakes you made in the game instead of seeing everyone else’s mistakes. Imagine if you had nothing to sit on, and no school to go to. Imagine if you were never asked to play your part in the life of the school what kind of place it might become?

What do you think Michael would say to God?

Do you think he would complain some more or maybe listen to God?

Or what if God said this to Harry?

Michael write down what I am going to tell you. Stop your moaning and complaining and start doing the right thing. I am in charge and not you. I am with you at all times in the good and bad times, and I am always looking out for you. When you follow me you will have nothing more to complain about.

Can you think about something you have thought was unfair and you have complained about recently?

What might God say to you?

Michael thought about all the things that God spoke to him about and so he made a promise to try and do the right thing and stop moaning and complaining in the future. He decided to trust God and he invites you to do the same today.
Prayer of Adoration and Confession

You are the God of time and eternity,
the God of now and infinity.

You, the God of the Universe
involve yourself with all humanity
and you wait,
sometimes with patience,
sometimes with anxiety.

You wait
until your people wake up
and sense your presence,
and then you wait
until your people wake up
and acknowledge your presence
there in all of life
and in death,
you wait.

We, your people, gather here
in this space and time.
We greet you, King of the Universe,
and our simple acknowledgment makes your heart glad.
How can that be?

We, who are so fickle,
who remember one moment
and forget the next,
who are loving in one breath
and unforgiving the next;
yet your heart gladdens when we turn to you.

God in this time of waiting,
when the world seems poised
between time and eternity,
keep us alert and awake
to the signs of your presence all around.
Keep us alert to the knowledge of your forgiveness
so that we can strive to be better,
fuelled by the knowledge
of your unconditional love and regard.

As we turn to you in worship
may we be filled with all that gladdens your heart,
freed from all that blights our awareness of your presence
and emboldened to serve you in all of life.
Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

Patient God, you play a long game;
only it is no game to you.

Your heart breaks
as your world suffers and dies,
rife with suffering and cruelty,
violence and war.

Your heart breaks
as you see children hungry and homeless,
unloved and unwanted,
with no place to call home.

Your heart breaks
as you see the beauty of the earth
ravaged and exploited,
torn up for short term gain.

You know that we are slow to learn the lessons of eternity.
Slow to catch on to the ancient rhythms of the ages.
Slow to see you at work healing and restoring
the damage we have done and continue to do.

God, give us your insight to curb our destruction,
your compassion to start the work of healing
and your patience to persist
when our efforts are rejected or seem futile.

Teach us that long game:
the dawning that light is persistent,
creeping in and slowly bringing repair and restoration;
the realisation that love is viral,
wrapping its tendrils around
clinging fiercely until change appears;
the knowledge that hope will not be overcome
while we persist in seeking and doing your will;
and, as we seek to bring your healing and Wholeness
wherever we can,
may we be filled with your strength and your peace,
discovering your rhythm
and walking in it.
Amen.

World AIDS Day

Note that this Sunday is the nearest to World AIDS Day which
is marked on 1 December each year. The Church of Scotland
provides some information and extra materials referencing
Reflection

This is a slowed-down reading of the Habakkuk passages. The idea is to let the words of scripture give space for people to reflect and respond to what they say about the human condition and the hope in which we live. Too often we can read them too quickly to give them a chance to sink in and to enable a call out within us.

You may not wish to read the whole passage but just selected verses with a long pause after each. Perhaps during this pause you can invite people to write things down on paper (which they will keep to themselves) or invite people to pray, or offer people candles to light whenever a particular verse speaks in them.

Take time to do this.

God, how long do I have to cry out for help before you listen? How many times do I have to yell, “Help! Murder! Police!” before you come to the rescue?

Pause for one minute

Why do you force me to look at evil, stare trouble in the face day after day?

Invite people to name those ‘evils’ they see in the world.

Anarchy and violence break out, quarrels and fights all over the place. Law and order fall to pieces. Justice is a joke. The wicked have the righteous hamstrung and stand justice on its head.

Pause

Though the cherry trees don’t blossom, and the strawberries don’t ripen,

Short pause

though the apples are worm-eaten, and the wheat fields stunted,

Short pause

though the sheep pens are sheepless, and the cattle barns empty,

Short pause

I’m singing joyful praise to God. I’m turning cartwheels of joy to my Saviour God.

Short pause

Counting on God’s Rule to prevail, I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I’m king of the mountain!

Pause for one minute

Take Home Ideas

Even in Biblical times, God saw a need to make His message known in an accessible way. Take time to reflect upon these questions:

- Do you think that your church succeeds in conveying God’s message to all the people of your congregation and, if applicable, Parish?
- If not...
- Where could you improve?
- What would you need to make these changes possible?

Look around your community be it by walking around, talking to people around the community or even looking at community Facebook pages.

- What issues are present?
- Did you hear of or see issues that your church could help play a part to address?
- Take time to pray for these areas and situations?

At the same time, perhaps you could pray about ways you and others bring light to dark places...

Sending

Leader: In our songs and in our prayers
All: **Our Father has been with us.**

Leader: In our the scriptures and the preaching
All: **Jesus has been with us.**

Leader: In our thinking and our fellowship.
All: **The Spirit has been with us.**

Leader: We go in faith knowing that in our time and in our space
All: **God is with us.**

Praise/Hymns

According to thy gracious word CH4 668
All is ready for the feast CH4 373
All over the world SGP 4 / MP 18
Be thou my vision CH4 465 / MP 51
Go to dark Gethsemane CH4 377
God is working his purpose out CH4 235 / MP 189
‘I have a dream’, a man once said CH4 710
I will rejoice, I will rejoice MP 311
If you’re feeling sad and weary ATAS 127
Lord, teach us how to pray CH4 545
O Lord, my God CH4 154 / MP 506
Praise to the holiest in the height CH4 378 / MP 563
Sometimes a light surprises available at [http://www.hymnary.org/text/sometimes_a_light_surprises](http://www.hymnary.org/text/sometimes_a_light_surprises)

Songs for ev’ry day ATAS 216
Though hope desert my heart CH4 464
Age group ideas

Introduction

We recognise that during Advent many of you will be working with the children in your groups on nativity plays, songs and special events for Christmas. Over the next few weeks we continue to give ideas for gathering activities and a couple of all age crafts as well as some games and activities.

We do not want our children to miss the Advent experience in the rush towards Christmas so we hope that these ideas will enable you to blend together your preparations for nativity plays (or whatever you have planned) with exploring the Advent themes.

It might be a good idea to have some activities and crafts which the children can work on fairly independently and pick up from one week to the next so that they are not spending too much time just ‘waiting’ for their turn in the nativity play. As well as the ideas in this material, craft sites such as Baker Ross, Crafty Crocodile, Religious Crafts and others have projects and kits to work on which require less preparation from leaders.

Gathering

Room Clock

_You will need: Large numbered A4 sheets (1 to 12)._ Place the sheets around the room in a clock formation, either sticking the numbers on the walls or around the edge of the floor.

Gather children in the centre of the room. A leader should then call out “o’clock” times with the children then running to the number where the hour hand would point.

Talk about how long children are at school, asleep, eating meals, playing games, reading, in the car or such like on a normal day. Talk about waiting for things to happen: counting down days and hours and use this as an introduction to Advent and the idea of waiting.

Advent Clock Ring

_You will need: strong paper plates, tinsel in a variety of colours, staples, stapler, felt tip pens, split pins, card, Christmas stickers._ Prepare beforehand a set of clock hands for each child, attach these to the centre of the paper plates with split pins. Cut A4 coloured card into strips of about 2 c.m. x 10 c.m. These will be used to make candles.

Give each child a paper plate with the clock hands already attached. Ask the children to write numbers 1–12 with felt tip pens around the edge of their plate like a clock face. Provide Christmas stickers with which the children can decorate their clock face.

Give each child a length of tinsel which will fit around the edge of the plate. Help the children to attach the tinsel to the underside of the plate. This way the tinsel still shows but the clock numbers are not covered up. It is best to attach tinsel with staples as it does not usually stick very well with sellotape or glue.

While leaders are helping with that, give each child four strips of card and get them to draw and colour a candle on each strip. The children can take these home and add a candle to their clock each Sunday of Advent. It would be good to have an Advent Clock in the place where you meet, so that you can add a candle each week and encourage the children to then do the same with their one at home.

Talk about Advent calendars and candles and about how they help us to wait for Christmas. Talk about the prophets, like Habbakuk, who waited for things to change and who trusted God as they waited and who trusted God as they waited and wanted to help things to change.

Advent Clock Chain

_You will need: sheets of card, paper punch, gift ribbon, felt tip pens, sellotape, scissors, small Christmas stickers._

Individual Advent Clock Chain for children to take home with them: prepare, using a variety of colours, 24 card circles of about 7 c.m. diameter. Give each child 24 card circles. Get the children to write numbers 1–12 around the edge of each circle using felt tip pens and to decorate each circle with stickers. Punch two holes in each circle, one at 1 o’clock and one at 11 o’clock. Thread gift ribbon through holes to form a chain. Secure the ends of the ribbon with sellotape. Children can take these chains home and draw hands on the face of a new clock each day.

Group Advent Clock Chain to hang up in the place where you meet. Prepare, using a variety of colours, 24 circles of dinner plate size from sheets of card. Divide card circles between the children so that each child has at least one circle to work on and proceed as above with the larger clock faces. Hang the chain in the room where you meet and draw hands on the days that have passed when you next meet.
age group ideas

activities

A Good Old Moan!  age 6-12
Ask the children to think of things that they do not like in the world today. If they are struggling you could give them choices to pick from: homework, in bed by a certain time, not allowed to join Facebook, the list is endless.

Let each child try to explain why they do not like something and then see if they can turn it around to find positive reasons why they may not be able to do what they have moaned about. For instance, children need to sleep longer for their health, homework involves mums and dads and it keeps the brain stimulated, some things on Facebook are not appropriate for children to see or hear about, carers are keeping their children safe, and so on.

For the older children you could talk about issues in the world today like poverty, human trafficking, slavery, and displaced people all over the world. Who should we turn to when we are annoyed or angry? Habakkuk’s experience is to take it to the Lord in prayer.

Patience  all age
You will need: chocolate bars, sweets, crisps, fruit, juice, cakes, biscuits.
This activity could be a bit pricey but it would be well worthwhile. You could ask the congregation for donations of the food to help out. Before the children enter the room you will need to have a table set up and filled with lots of goodies. Leave it sitting there for your whole time together and do not even look at it or refer to it.

God told Habakkuk to be patient, to wait, the time will come, have faith.

At the end of your time together allow the children to visit the table, look at all the goodies and ask them what should be done with all the goodies. No doubt some of the answers will be to eat it but nudge to see if someone will also suggest to give some away either to church members or to a food bank. God gives us the hope that we can help others out.

Tablets  age 9-12
You will need: a range of items which are tablets (e.g. tablet computer, paracetamol tablets, tablet (fudge-like sweets), picture of Ten Commandments on stone tablets, and so on.
Do not give the game away by mentioning the word ‘tablet’ too soon!

Ask the children to identify each item and what it is used for and then ask them what the connection is, you are, of course looking for the word ‘tablet’!

Habakkuk tells us that God’s vision was put on tablets, ask the children to come up with ways by which we could pass on God’s vision today using modern technology?

Plasticene Tablet  all age
You will need: enough plasticene for each child to make an A5 sized rectangle shape, toothpicks.
Show the children how to smooth out the plasticene into a tablet shape. Remind the children that Habakkuk was to use tablets to write his vision on. Let the children practise writing their names on their tablets (for younger children they could create a picture) using the toothpicks. Then have the children remould the plasticene and this time when they have a clean tablet to write or draw a vision from God. Ideas might be: peace, hope, love, friendship, and so on.

games

Old Favourites  all age
You could play some of the classic playground type games that involve time throughout this season, such as “Clock in the Tower” or “What’s the time, Mr Wolf”. You could change the wording used each week to fit the theme, so Mr Wolf (perhaps change to Lord God) could cry “Time to Listen” instead of “Dinner time” and so on.

You could also use “Chinese Whispers” as a way to think about passing messages on.

Breaking Free  age 6-12
For this game you need to have all the children in a circle with one person in the middle. You can talk about how Habakkuk was one of the few people who saw how things really were and he wanted change, but it was hard because everyone else was stuck in their ways. Everyone in the circle holds hands and the middle child has to try to break free from the middle of the circle. The children in the circle can move about, getting closer together, dropping their arms to try to prevent the person in the middle getting out.

Runners  all age
You will need: a pile of important messages, each with a simple task that a child could do (turn around three times, do five press ups, shout “I’ve got news!”, shake hands with the youngest person in the room, open and close the door, hop back to your team, and so on).

You will need to adapt this game to suit the age range of the children. Messages were passed by hand long ago, written down and runner would deliver the message.

For this relay game you will need to get the children into teams and at the end of the room have a pile of messages. Each child one at a time must pick up a message, complete the task and tag the next person.
discussion starters for teens seeing the bad and good

Preparation
This week you will need some newspapers, scissors, some freeze paper or wallpaper and glue.

Opening Activity
More Bad News?
Look through the newspapers and cut out all the bad news stories. Stick them on the freeze paper.
Spend some time reading and talking about the bad news.
Now look for some good news stories. Cut these out and stick them over the bad news.
• Does the good news make the bad go away?
• How does it make you feel to read the bad news stories / good news stories?

The Word
Ask everyone to sit quietly for a moment and then read aloud Habakkuk 1:1-4, pause for a minute, then read 2:2-4, again pause for a minute, and finally read 3:17-19.

Activity/Discussion
• What do you think about Habakkuk’s complaints in 1:1-4?
• Do you ever feel like he did?
• How do you feel about complaining to God or being angry with him? Is it ok?
• Who do you think is responsible for the violence, injustice and wrongdoing Habakkuk sees?
• In a world full of noise and distraction, how do we make the Good News known?
• Should we use social media? TV? Radio? Or is conversation and building relationships a better way to go?
• How do you feel about 3:17-19? Does it make sense to you?
• Why would Habakkuk want to praise God when there is no food?

During the holocaust in the concentration camps the Rabbis would gather together and shout at God.
How could you do this to us?
Why have you let this happen?
You promised to be our God!
They would say all the things they felt, all the hurt and anger and fear, and then they would go to prayers because they believed that God was beyond their understanding and there must be some greater plan that they just could not see from where they were.

• What do you think about that?
Martin Niemöller was a protestant minister who spent seven years in concentration camps for speaking out against the Nazis. After the war he famously wrote:
First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.
• Who are the people in our society that need us to speak out for them?

Living It Out
• Where do you see injustice today?
• What could you do about it?
• Who could you speak up for?
• How could you make a difference?
For Such A Time As This

Once upon a time. When reading this passage, one may have the feeling that this dramatic story should begin with those words. We have drama, of course, but also intrigue, romance and the interplay of power between important people and God. It is a story from a distant past, but like all “Once upon a time” tales, it is a story that also speaks into our present situation. As we take another step in our journey through Advent, we move from last week’s time of vision-casting with Habakkuk calling us amidst the distractions we continually face to renew our focus on God.

Last week’s call could be interpreted as a message primarily of internal change: a change of our own inner being in order that we focus ourselves on rejoicing in the presence of God. The story of Esther takes us on from that inner life to the outer life. This is a story about action, about doing. It is, in that sense, a more external story. Interestingly, God is never mentioned in Esther’s story, however that should not be confused with understanding that God is not present implicitly within the story. It should also be added that the Scroll of Esther has been the subject of great disagreement for its historical contradictions and place within the Canon of Scripture. It is included because it gives validity to the festival of Purim.

It may be worthwhile casting back into the story of Esther in order to bring your congregations up to speed with this fast-moving passage. You could have a bit of fun with this by doing something different. Perhaps have a newscaster give headlines and an outside broadcaster giving reports on what has been happening. You may consider a montage of newspaper headlines on a screen that you speak to, perhaps akin to BBC News or Sky News “The Papers” section with commentators giving their take on what the headlines say.

The key points to get across will be the banishment of Queen Vashti by King Xerxes, the search for a new queen, and the choosing of Esther, a young Jewish girl, to join the harem of the King from where she was picked by the King to be his Queen. At the same time Mordecai, a cousin of Esther, was elevated to become a government official, foiling an assassination attempt. The villain of the piece, Haman, meanwhile has become the right hand man of the King and loves his position of authority, requiring others to bow down before him. When Mordecai refuses to do so out of integrity to his faith, Haman is furious and becomes set on the destruction of Mordecai along with the entire Jewish community.

This plot leads to Haman wilfully deceiving the King in order to have the King sign an edict that will mean the Jews will be condemned to death. This brings us to this week’s passage where Esther’s mentor, Mordecai, tells her about this. As she ponders what to do, whether to stay quiet or to speak up, we have the famous verse, “Who knows if perhaps you were made Queen for just such a time as this?”

There are few of us who can tell a story such as Esther’s where we were faced with such a clear decision upon which lives depended. Nonetheless, the principle of making difficult decisions in dire situations, taking a great personal risk, is one for which we should all be prepared. Indeed, it is one that all disciples of Christ should be ready to take. This is what it means to be salt of the earth and light for the world.

Esther’s story reminds us that there can come times when we have to take action. It is not good enough to turn away, to turn a blind eye, to pretend that everything will be okay. In churches, we often live adrift from the present. We have one eye looking back at the past (often rose-tinted) and one eye looking to the future (and great plans or worries for what that future holds), when we should have both eyes set on the present, on making our lives count in the now, for God’s sake.
the story

Action Man

Andy is leaping about like a ninja action man hero.

Ada: Wow, Andy! You might dislocate a hip or something at your age!

Andy: I have decided to be a man of action! (more leaps and punches)

Ada: Oh you have, have you?

Andy: Aye.

Ada: Well, how about being a real action man and go and empty the rubbish bins and do a bit of hoovering?

Andy: Och Ada, they hadnae invented hooverin’ in the Bible.

Ada: Well, I don’t remember reading anywhere in the Bible about being a ninja or a karate expert either, so what makes you think all this prancing about is going to change anything?

Andy: I am taking after Esther.

Ada: Err… Andy, in case you didn’t notice, Esther is a woman who became a queen.

Andy: Well, that aside, she was a woman of action, and sometimes Ada we cannae just sit about and do nothing… we have to do something!

Ada: So, you think leaping about like some exotic dancer is what God wants you to do?

Andy: Em… well… I… I was just trying to think what an action man of God could feel like.

Ada: And you think an action man of God should be some kind of warrior?

Andy: Well, I think…

Ada: Andy, sometimes you just don’t think. Esther was queen in a time when her people were being overwhelmed. They thought that God had forgotten them. They were in mourning and they covered themselves in sackcloth and ashes.

Andy: We only put on a black suit and a black tie. I don’t fancy the sackcloth and ashes thing.

Ada: Listen, in those days it was a sign of repentance, of wanting to change. The problem was the people got stuck in mourning for what had happened and were afraid to do anything, until Esther became queen and called the people to order.

Ada: And you think an action man of God should be some kind of warrior?

Andy: What did the people order… a fish supper?

Ada: Andy, don’t be daft. She called them to action, laid down a plan even though it might cost her own life. Yes, she was willing to risk everything, and was brave, courageous and a great woman of integrity. She wanted to do something for her own community and her own people and maybe the actions we could take this Christmas could make a difference in our own communities.

Andy: So sitting waiting on God’s plan doesn’t mean that we sit and wait and do nothing. There are times where we have to be more active, like Esther asked of the people, when she called them to come together to pray and fast.

Ada: That sounds just about right to me Andy.

Andy: Do you know Ada, my hips are sore with all that leaping about? Following God’s way seems a lot easier after that!

Retelling For Young People

At Just The Right Time

In today’s story we want to make the children wait, so as they get the idea of how frustrating it might be just waiting and doing nothing. Then, get someone else to (Preferably a woman) who can tell Esther’s story.

Stand and smile at the Children.

Keep smiling and nodding, and pretend you are going to start the story. Keep this going for as long as you possibly can.

It’s not much fun waiting, is it?

It gets frustrating.

Some of you get bored.

Some of you just wanted to go home.

Some of you think I have the lost the plot.

Some of you cannot wait until Christmas day.

Some of you cannot wait until the school finishes.

Some of you cannot wait till you go on holiday next year.

Yet sometimes, we have to wait

Woman (Esther) enters, pushes you out of the way.

We have had enough of this waiting. My name is Esther. My uncle Mordecai was taken captive by the King of Babylon, but he ended up serving the king in his Royal Court. I was lucky. I got to marry the king and I lived as the queen of all Babylon.

One day, my uncle Mordecai heard two of the Kings advisors plotting against the King, and so he told me to tell the king what they were up to, and so we saved the King’s life. The King made an example of the advisors and had them sentenced to death.

However, although my uncle had done the right thing, there were many other advisors who hated him. One of these men was called Haman, and he wanted to get back at Mordecai and me. He went to the King and told him some terrible lies about the Jewish people. He said that they were making trouble all over Babylon by obeying God’s laws rather than the laws the King made. He suggested to King Ahasuerus that he should send all his soldiers to kill the Jews and take all their money and put it into the King’s treasury.

continued over page
the story

Mordecai was so upset with the news that he tore his clothes off and put on a sackcloth and covered himself with ashes, and he wondered about the city crying. He did this to try and get my attention, so as I could go and speak to the king and tell him that if he allowed Haman to carry out his orders, he might have to put me to death, also. Yet, I was unable to go straight to the King on this matter as the King had made a rule that he had to invite you to meet with him. If I went on my own, the law said I would be put to death.

I was worried about my people and so I told my uncle to gather all the Jews to fast and pray for three days, and then I would go and see the king and try and save my people from death, even if it meant I would lose my own life.

Well, the prayers of my people must have worked. I went to the King and he was so pleased to see me that he said that I could ask for anything in his name and he would grant me my wish. So I asked the King to come to a banquet I had prepared for him and Haman. At the banquet, the King again asked me what I wanted before his advisors and so I told him to spare my life and that of my people Israel, as Haman had ordered them all to be killed and their treasures confiscated.

The King was so shocked that Haman had planned to have me and my uncle put to death, that he was furious and removed Haman from the royal court and made my uncle a Royal advisor for his faithful service. I and all my people were saved.

worship ideas

Through the Season
Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season.

Gathering Activity
Encourage those who have gathered to think of a time in their life when an opportunity has come along that they failed to take or grasp. Very often those opportunities never come around again.

What about in our churches? Invite the congregation to think of opportunities that the church (locally or nationally) have not taken up or grasped.

There comes a time when we just have to act.

Call to Worship
God’s call is to all
to bring hope and change
when all around
despair and chaos reign.
God’s call is to speak,
God’s call is to act,
God’s call is to us.
We worship and serve.

Responses
Leader: For such a time as this,
All: God’s call is to all.
Leader: For such a time as this,
All: God’s call is to speak out.
Leader: For such a time as this,
All: God’s call is to act justly.
Leader: For such a time as this,
All: God’s call is to bring change.
Leader: For such a time as this,
All: God’s call is to me.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession
God of time and eternity,
you have time to wait with us.
To wait with us as we worry and fret,
to wait with us as we dawdle and dither,
to wait with us as we waken up
to your precious gift of time,
given to us.
We confess that often we do not honour time as it deserves.
When it drags, we become impatient.
When it races, we become anxious.
When it is full we long for space.
When it is empty we long for activity.

God, in our Advent waiting,
help us to view time as the gift that it is.
May we find ways to sit with you,
to acknowledge you present with us.
When days seem endless and lonely
and when hours seem to race by,
help us to carve out space
to check in with you as time rushes on.
And, as we recognise you in every moment,
may we take time to reveal your presence to others.

God of time and eternity,
you have time to wait with us.
May we make time to wait with you.
Amen.
Reflection

Do Not Keep Silence

A simple Advent activity.

Provide speech bubbles on white card about the size of the circumference of a Christmas tree bauble. Make a hole towards the top edge and provide a paper clip for each. The idea is for the congregation to hang these on the tree after a short reflection/activity.

Alternatively, if there is no Christmas tree yet, provide a number of large pillar candles and some Blu-tac. People are invited to stick their speech bubble on the candle (before it is lit!).

Remind people of the context of the story of Esther and the prejudice towards a certain group of people in the community and the rapid movement against those people. Then remind the congregation of Mordecai’s words: do not keep silent.

Invite people to hear this call and reflect on those in this season we will speak out for. Perhaps Gift Sunday is close and in bringing gifts we are in some way speaking out for those who are on the wrong side of justice. Perhaps you work with a local organisation during Advent and Christmas or perhaps there is a current headline that needs to hear Mordecai’s words.

Ask people: If you can speak out, what will you say? Instruct them to write those thoughts on the speech bubbles provided and hang it on the tree. That might be enough decoration this year: one loud voice against what is unjust. Alternatively, ask people to come and stick their speech bubble on the pillar candles. Once they have done this, light the candles.

Sing a hymn in the background such as ‘When out of poverty is born’ or ‘Tell out my soul’.

Reflective Prayer

For such a time as this, God give us courage.

For such a time as this, God give us vision.

For such a time as this, God give us hope.

For such a time as this, God give us joy.

For such a time as this, God give us the assurance of Jesus born among us enabling us to serve you in the world.

Prayer of Dedication

God, as Esther quietly lived out her faith and, in your time, brought salvation to her people, may we be faithful in loving and serving you, so that when the time is right, we can step up as witnesses to the God of heaven, present on earth.

Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

It was for such a time as this that Esther was queen and a people were saved.

It was for such a time as this that God call us to be whom we’re called to be: those who love one another, those who act justly, those who serve the world today.

In our communities and neighbourhoods, we are called for such a time as this: to serve the poor, to feed the hungry, to comfort the lonely, to befriend the broken hearted.

In our churches and congregations, we are called for such a time as this: to preach good news, to wait on God among us, revealing light in our darkness-in our world.

We are called for such a time as this: to reveal the God who loves the world and lives with us, bringing hope and joy and peace for such a time as this.

Amen.

Sending

Leader: It was in the past that God called us. It is into the future that God calls us. It is in the present we respond to God’s call.

All: We will go, Lord, because you call us. Today, now, in this moment, we will go.
worship ideas

Praise/Hymns
As a fire is meant for burning CH4 252
As stars adorn the night-veiled sky CH4 748
Be bold, be strong CH4 255
Father, hear the prayer we offer MP 192
God of grace and God of glory CH4 253
I, the Lord of sea and sky CH4 543
Inspired by love and anger CH4 705
It is God who holds the future CH4 251 / MP 857
Longing for light CH4 286 / MP 631
Make a difference “I Wonder... Why?” by Fischy Music
Now dawns the Sun of righteousness MP 484
Tell out, my soul CH4 291
This little light of mine JP 258
When out of poverty is born
You are an inspiration “We’re On This Road” by Fischy Music

Take Home Ideas
Today’s passage from the book of Esther shows us the tradition of prayer and fasting—something that many people still do today. For many, the concept of fasting is a way of humbling oneself.
Fasting does not necessarily need to be food-based.
Why not take a week off Facebook and catch up with people face-to-face or on the telephone? Perhaps you could even handwrite a letter to somebody...
Perhaps you could take this week to leave the car behind and walk?
Another issue raised in today’s passage is the need to make your place count; to act now with hope for the future.
What have you kept silent about? What situations in your community could you make a difference in? This week may be the time for you to stand up and be heard.

age group ideas

gathering
Hunt The Queen all age
You will need: a deck of playing cards or images of different people/characters including a queen.
If using a deck of cards, remove three of the four queens from the playing cards and hide as many of the cards as you wish around your space for the children to hunt for, including the one remaining queen. When the children have found all the hidden cards, flip them over to see who has found the queen. Use this as an introduction to the story.
If there are no playing cards at hand, this activity could be completed using hand drawn or printed images of different people that include a queen amongst them.

games
Clock In The Tower / What’s The Time Lord God all age
As per last week, but this week use the phrase “time for action” in the games.
Sack Race age 6-12
You will need: sacks.
After dressing up in the sacks, you could have a relay race with them, jumping down to one end of the room and back with legs inside the sack.
Relay Race all age
You will need: a baton or sceptre.
The king in the story would hold out his sceptre to someone, so for this game either design your own sceptre or use a baton shape object and hold a relay race. If you do not have room to hold a race, you could ask each child when they are holding the sceptre to do an activity or to talk for 1 minute without stopping on the subject of clothes, writing or money.
crafts

For Such A Time As This Crowns  all age

You will need: strips of gold or silver card long enough to wrap round child’s head with a little overlap, sheets of white A4 card, pencils, scissors, felt tip pens, glue sticks, staples, and a stapler.

Give each child a sheet of card and ask them to draw some symbols from the story, for example praying hands, a love heart, a thumbs up hand to represent courage, a person shape to represent taking action, doing something, and a clock to represent ‘such a time as this’. Give each child a strip of card and get them to work with a partner to ‘fit’ crown onto head and then staple or sellotape at appropriate point. Cut out the decorated symbols and attach around the crown using glue, sellotape or staples.

Talk about Queen Esther and how she prayed and acted to make a difference in her time. Discuss with the children their ideas of what they can do to make a difference now.

City Gates  all age

You will need: large cardboard boxes, masking tape, marker pens, junk (string, card tubes, plastic pots, and such like), sheets of card of any colour, scissors, and glue sticks.

Have the children work together in groups of four or five to make ‘city gates’. This could be done by placing three boxes one on top of the other to make pillars and then place three boxes side by side to form the lintel of the entrance. Join the boxes together with string and masking tape and then balance the top section on top of the two pillars. Again, secure the “gate” with masking tape.

Ask the children to decorate the city gates with the junk miscellaneous items. Instruct the children to draw and cut out clock faces. They can either stick the clock faces to the boxes or hang the clock faces from the top section of the gate using string and masking tape.

Talk about how the different people in the story met at the city gates or had to go through the city gates to meet other people and to pass on messages. Discuss how the messages and the meetings helped the people, including Esther, to take action which made a difference. Talk with the children about their ideas of what they can do to make a difference in their time.

activities

Pray  age 6-12

You will need: pictures of children in troubled parts of the world such as Syria, Iraq, Palestine, South Sudan and so on.

As appropriate for your setting, ask the children if they have written their Santa list yet? If so, what have they asked Santa for this year? Have they prayed to God to get some of things on their list?

At this point, bring out some newspaper pictures or photographs from the internet of children in Syria, Palestine, South Sudan and let the children take a look at them.

• What do they see in the pictures?
• What do they think these children would want from Santa this year?
• How can we help these children and others like them?

If your group has enough money, you could pre-purchase a gift from Christian aid, Tear Fund, or Water Aid in your groups name and present it to the children. What do think of this? Take a time to pray together for those who are ignored or left out and in need. Suggest to the children that they could maybe give up a snack one day this week and remember those in need.

Dressing Up  all age

You will need: sacks, bin liners.

Remembering how in the story Mordecai tore off his clothes and put on sackcloth because he was so upset, spend a bit of time dressing up in sackcloth, or if you can’t find any in bin liners. The older children could come up with creative ways to wear the bin liners.
Preparation
You will need a lipstick, peanut butter, or washable pen and something to clean it off someone's face. (Check for allergies before using makeup, peanut butter or wipes.)

Opening Activity
Hi Harry
Three or more people sit in a circle. As the game begins everyone is “Harry” (although this will change as the game continues). Choose someone to start. This person is player 1. Each player is numbered to the left but only for the purpose of explaining the game.

Player 1 says to the person on their right, “Hi Harry”. Player 2 then says “Yes Harry?”. Player 1 then says “Tell Harry”, referring to the person 2 spots away from player 1 (this would be player 3).

The play continues. Player 2 now says “Hi Harry” to player 3. Player 3 then says “Yes Harry?”. Player 2 then says “Tell Harry” referring to the next player in the circle beyond player 3.

This continues around the circle until someone makes a mistake. Speed up as necessary. When an error occurs, get out the peanut butter and put a spot on the nose of the person who gets it wrong. They are now no longer “Harry”, but instead should be referred to as “1 spot”.

So if the 1 Spot player is in the “player 2 position”, player 1 would say “Hello 1 spot”. 1 Spot says “Hello Harry”. Player 1 says “Tell Harry”. 1 spot then says “Hello Harry”. “Hello 1 Spot”. And so on.

If a person with 1 spot gets it wrong again they get a second spot on the face and are now referred to as “2 spot”. This is why it’s important to make the spots visible so that people know what you are.

This continues until someone gets 4 spots and they are out, but you can keep playing. The speed should increase throughout the game.

The Word
Read Esther 3:1-4:17. If you have time you might even want to read the whole book to get the full story, or use a paraphrase like The Children’s Bible.

Activity/Discussion
This week, the story is about a community saved from destruction.

Esther initially hides who she is so that she can be queen. It is only when her people are in danger that she is forced to act.

• When she does act in chapter 4, what does she do?

Even though Esther is the queen, she doesn’t have a lot of power. She tries to help but she eventually remembers that she should start from her faith tradition (v. 16) by fasting and praying.

• What are our religious traditions and practices? Make a list.

Fasting means deliberately giving up something for a period of time to remove distractions and focus on God.

• What are the things that distract you?

Apparently we check our phones more than 150 times a day.

• They keep us in touch with our friends and the world, and that’s good, but what do they distract us from?

• How hard would it be to give something like this up?

As Christmas approaches...

• Why do you think this is the story we are being told this week?

• How do you think Esther’s story is connected to Jesus’ birth?

• In what ways is this a story about making a change?

• Or about standing up against injustice?

• Or about challenging power and authority when it is wrongly used?

• What things might we want to challenge today?

• How could we tackle these problems?

• Would it be better to start with prayer?

Living It Out
Start the day with a short time of quiet prayer. Be still for 5 or 10 minutes. Listen for what God might be saying to you.
How much is this ‘Suffering Servant’ passage, as it has been known for many years, to do with the Messiah? There can be no doubt that many will read into this passage (particularly the first four verses) the prophecy of the coming Messiah. Much has been written on the subject, and in Acts 8 Paul uses an interpretation of one of the four servant passages to make a Christological point to the Ethiopian Church.

The subject of this passage has a lot to be getting on with. ‘Justice’ is mentioned three times within these short verses. As well as describing that justice will be brought to the nations, the passage, curiously, speaks of the way justice will be brought... or rather how it will not be brought. It would appear that justice will not be brought in a large public display of power or might, rather justice will be brought by working with what is left, what is good—the dim wick and the bruised reed. After the challenge and struggle, justice needs to be nurtured in order to root itself in society.

In the first two weeks of Advent we have seen the vision of God growing, and the ripples of justice travelling further and further. From Habbakuk, urging us to write the vision in order that people can read it, we moved to Esther and the story of God’s vision and love for a whole community. This week we see the vision of God growing even further, to encompass all.

In the second half of the reading a seeming change occurs. The focus of the passage seems to shift from an individual servant to a community. The covenant people are set to work to bring about the justice that is encompassed in the vision of God: to bring light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind and bring about the release of the prisoners. This is not only a vision of God for a covenant people, this is a vision of God for all.

The enlargement of the story’s scope in recent weeks is for those who are least within the social systems of the day. The vision of God is not only for the chosen people, for the blessed (rich and healthy), it is for the poor, the prisoners, the nations that are downtrodden, indeed it is a vision for all.

There is a school of theological thought that the ‘Suffering Servant’ passages in Isaiah were never meant to point to an individual Messianic figure, but rather to the people of Israel. With God’s blessing comes the responsibility of working to bring about God’s vision. Which begs the question, what difference would an interpretation of community responsibility rather than a distant messianic responsibility bring to our church communities?

What would our church communities look like, or feel like, if they were truly the people working to bring about God’s vision of justice for all? The light has been given to the people of God to light the way for others. With the story of the incarnation about to be read in our churches, lived by communities and experienced by individuals, the light of that incarnation helps the people of faith see and understand God’s vision.

The vision of God is for all. Through the Spirit, God’s servant will be a light to the nations, bringing justice, healing and wholeness, and release to prisoners. The people of faith are God’s servant, our church communities are God’s servant. May we think about this passage not in a distant way, as if someone else is the only servant of God called to undertake this work and bring about this vision. It is not about someone else, it is about ‘us’.

For such a time as this God’s servant(s) will work for justice... each and every one of us.
The Gossip

Ada: Andy, I have been thinking about these advent readings these last few weeks.

Andy: Well, it has to be said Ada, you tend to be the thinker and I am more the man of action!

Ada: (Ada looks witheringly at Andy) Anyway, I was thinking that Habakkuk was thinking more about himself and his relationship with God. Esther was thinking about her Community, and today Isaiah is thinking about everybody.

Andy: And...

Ada: Well, don’t you think that Habakkuk’s vision of God’s plan is beginning to unfold, as it goes from the very personal, to the community empowerment of Esther, and now we have Isaiah including everybody in the plan of God.

Andy: Er... well, you could be right there Ada, you could be right!

Ada: Yes, Isaiah was telling the people that God would send his Spirit upon everyone!

Andy: Everyone!

Ada: Yes, everyone!

Andy: Even Big Pete there, and wee Effie over in the corner

Ada: Yes, everyone, including Peter, and Effie and even you Andy!

Andy: What? God will pour out his Spirit on me?

Ada: Yes, that is what Isaiah says. And what’s more you are going to be a torchbearer for God?

Andy: Who me, just like in the Commonwealth games, but I get to carry the torch of God?

Ada: Yes, that’s right. You are to be light for other people.

Andy: Hey, did Jesus not say something about that also.

Ada: He certainly did Andy.

Andy: So God will send his Spirit on us, make us torchbearers for him and what else Ada?

Ada: Well, through us God will fight against justice, oppression, hatred. Through us God will transform the world. Through us God will bring liberation and peace.

Andy: You mean it does not matter whether we are rich or poor, black or white, Catholic or Protestant, God will still bless us and encourage us to work together for the sake of the Kingdom of God?

Ada: Exactly Andy. Through Isaiah God was telling his people that someone special would come and help us to do these things.

Andy: You don’t mean Santa Claus do you!

Ada: You know I don’t Andy. I mean Jesus, the Word made flesh for us.

Andy: And it’s getting near the time we celebrate his birth, the plan of God unfolds a little bit more with the arrival of Jesus who will do the things Isaiah said of him.

Ada: That’s it exactly Andy.

Andy: You know Ada, I sometimes never understood what these guys, who lived thousands of years ago, should matter to us today, but I am beginning to see how it is all part of God’s bigger plan.

Ada: Yes, God’s plans are always bigger than our plans. So we wait on God, we work for God, we become a light for God and we are given the Spirit of God to help us!

Andy: Ada, you are a clever woman.

Ada: Not as clever as God though!

Andy: No definitely not as clever as God!
Retelling For Young People

Isaiah’s Story

My name is Isaiah and I want to share my story with you. I have been involved in helping to raise money for charities and members of my local community nominated me to be one of the Queen’s Baton Bearers at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. The Baton bearers carried the baton sometimes for just a few hundred yards or longer from the day it left Buckingham Palace in London, until 288 days later it reached Glasgow for the opening ceremony, having travelled through over seventy different countries along the way. The baton is passed from person to person and it is to draw all the nations of the Commonwealth together for a celebration of sport and friendship.

It felt good to hold it in my hand. It felt good to see people in my community smile. It felt good to hear strangers cheer and applaud. It felt good to see all my friends waving their flags and banners at the side of the road. It felt good to be part of something much bigger than anything I had ever been involved in before. It felt good making new friends from other places who had also carried the baton for some little distance. And at that time and for a long time afterward I felt as though I belonged to a bigger and better world, and wished it could be like that all time, where people talked to one another, smiled with one another, helped one another, welcomed one another.

Yet thousands of years ago a man with the same name as mine had said that this sense of feeling good about one another, and helping one another, and caring for one another was the kind of world that God wanted. He spoke these words at a time when people were unhappy, frightened because of the wars and violence that were happening around them. He spoke these words when people were going hungry and had lost hope. He spoke these words of encouragement to remind people that God is with them and is watching over them.

I know how I felt carrying the baton for the Commonwealth Games, but imagine if the words of the other Isaiah came true today and all of us lived in a happy, positive and caring world. We could feel good about God and other people and build a better future together. I know it is possible, because I had lost someone I loved and instead of always being sad about it I decided to do something positive and help others, and I think of myself now as a baton bearer for God. You do not need to go through a selection process or be nominated by your friends, you just need to decide to follow God and do the things that Jesus did.

worship ideas

Through the Season

On pages 4 and 5 you will find details of the visual focus that can be used throughout this season to help link each Sunday through the Advent season.

Gathering Activity

As we approach the Christmas story we begin to think more about ‘light’. In what ways can our churches be beacons of light to our communities? As a lighthouse, sharing the light with those around us, how can we offer that light at Christmas time? Invite those who gather to discuss.

Call to Worship

Through the Spirit,
God’s servant will be a light to the nations, bringing justice and release to prisoners.
We worship our God, the God of freedom and justice.

Responsive Call to Worship

Leader: Through the Spirit,
    God’s servant will be a light to the nations, bringing justice and release to prisoners.
All: We are God’s servants and we will work for justice, for healing, to bring light to the world, for God’s vision to reign.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of love, we come before you this day with praise and thanks: praise for all that your hands have made; praise for all you do in our daily lives; thanks for this day and each day.

God of all, we come before you this day with our questions and our fears. We come seeking guidance and comfort. We come seeking a glimpse of your vision.

God of forgiveness, we take this time to say sorry for words said out of turn, for actions done before thinking, for harmful thoughts and deeds.

God of light, a light which breaks through all forms of darkness, shine upon us this day, light our path this day, be our beacon, showing the way, this day and every day. Amen.
Prayer for Ourselves and Others

In the midst of
a chaotic world,
a chaotic time of year,
a chaotic life.
We take time to be still once more.

Pause

With minds full of things to be done,
with hearts burdened with issues both personal and global,
with souls weary with anxiety and concern
we take time to bring ourselves before you once more.

Light of our world,
shine upon us today.

In a world of plenty
yet with so many doing without;
in a world of abundant love
yet overshadowed by hate and indifference;
in a world craving peace
yet tainted by war and mindless brutality
we take time to pray for our world once more.

In a time of quiet,
we bring before you places and people known to us
who live under such darkness.

Light of our world,
shine upon us today.

As we bring these prayers before you,
may we remember that we all have a part to play
in bringing light to the dark corners of this world.
Use us to bring hope, peace and love
to those known to us and those we may never meet.
Through our words and actions
may your light be shown.

Light of our world,
shine upon us today.

Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Heavenly Father,
may all that we offer
of ourselves and possessions
allow your church to bring
light to darkness,
comfort to pain
and hope to despair.

God of all,
use these and use us
this day and always.
Amen.

Reflection

For two voices or a dialogue with worship leader and congregation (reading the bold verses). Perhaps the word in inverted commas could be printed out or projected as a summing up of the passage.

Why this passage in the middle of Advent? Why these words for a time of expectation? Why these verses in a time when we are getting ready? Maybe if we refine these words we will re-find what it is we do in Advent.

Refine to re-find Advent:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

“Future”

Refine to re-find Advent:

He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

“Wait”

Refine to re-find Advent:

Open the eyes that are blind, bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

“Justice”

Refine to re-find Advent:

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you.

“Journey”

Refine to re-find Advent:

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.

“Light”

Refine to re-find Advent:

See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare.

“Advent”

Refine to re-find Advent:

Future
Waiting
Justice
Journey
Light
Advent
At Christmas

A reflection by Peter Millar (courtesy of ALTERnativity).

You are not mistaken
it's bells you hear.

The Bells of Christmas
sounding over
the bankers and brokers,
the bewildered and the beautiful,
the brightest and the betrayed,
the bingers and the bosses,
the bruised and the broken,
the bitter and the bejewelled,
for in a world of change
they still ring out
their Song of Hope,
even in the shattered places
where violence reigns
and blood flows freely.
For they are
the Bells of God—
touching the hidden places
in all our lives
and inviting us home.

So pause and listen,
for the Bells of Christmas
are for you.

Take Home Ideas

Our Scripture readings over the past three weeks have seen the
need for Christ, the light of the world to shine in dark areas in
individual’s lives in Habbakuk, and at the level of communities
as seen in the book of Esther. Today we see the need for a light
for all the nations.

Have a look at a world map or a globe and choose a country
that you know to be in a difficult place at this time be it through
conflict, disaster, famine, disease or otherwise and spend this
week praying for the people of that nation.

At the end of the week take time to pray for our world. Perhaps,
you could light a candle in a dark room of your home for an
hour each evening as a symbol of our prayer for Christ’s light to
shine across our world.

Sending

Leader: Through the Spirit,
God’s servant will be
a light to the nations.

All: Shine brightly in us as we go from this place.

Leader: Through the Spirit, God’s servant will
bring justice to the nations.

All: Bring justice through us as we go from this place.

Leader: Through the Spirit, God’s servants will
bring freedom to the nations.

All: Bring release through us as we go from this place.

Praise/Hymns

Bad times won’t last "We’re On This Road" by Fischy Music
Beauty for brokenness CH4 259 / MP 806
From heaven you came CH 374 / MP 162
God is love: let heaven adore him CH4 123 / MP 187
God of all ages and Lord for all time MP 190
God weeps at love withheld CH4 168
God working his purpose out CH4 235
Like a candle flame MP 420
Look to the skies MP 425
Mercy to the broken-hearted MP 1206
O for a thousand tongues to sing CH4 352 / MP 496
One more step along the world CH4 530
Sing a new song to the Lord MP 599
The kingdom of God is justice and joy MP 651
The voice of God goes out to all the world CH4 283
age group ideas

gathering

What’s This?  all age

You will need: different light-creating objects (e.g. torch, camera flash, light bulb, phone screen, candle, matches) and/or images (which will allow you to be a bit more creative: lighthouse, car headlight, beacon, traffic light, and so on). For an extra: granulated sugar, sugar cubes, white plate, flat-bottomed glass, access to a completely dark room or means to shut out all light with black out cloths.

Have a quiz or discussion based around the different objects to see if the children can guess what they are used for and what is the most important thing they create.

If you want to try the experiment with sugar which will allow the children to create light themselves, then sprinkle some sugar onto the plate, place a few sugar cubes on the plate, then crush the sugar cubes with the base of the glass (make sure it is a sturdy glass that will not break). Practice a couple of times, then do it in the dark room (it really needs to be completely dark as the amount of light given off is very small, it can also help to wait for a minute or so for everyone’s eyes to adjust to the darkness), or under a blackout cover. The act of breaking down the crystal structure in the sugar and the tearing apart of sugar molecules results in the release of light.

You can use this as a way to think about the importance of light in today’s Bible passage.

crafts

Candle Christmas Cards  all age

(Messy Version)

You will need: A5 card folded length ways to make a greeting card, poster paints in various colours (squeeze a little paint onto paper plate, best to have only one colour on each plate), glitter, Christmas greetings peel offs, felt tip pens, newspapers to cover the working surface, plastic aprons or old shirts for the children to wear, wet wipes to clean fingers.

Give each child a greeting card, work on the card with the long folded edge at the top. Ask children to write their Christmas message in the inside and to stick a ‘Happy Christmas’ sticker on the front of the card before beginning to work with the paint. Get the children to make a line of candles on the front of their card by pressing their finger (whole length) into the paint and then making a print on their card to make the candle shape. Wipe finger and repeat using a different colour. To make flame the children press their finger tip into yellow or orange paint and make a finger print at top of each candle. Sprinkle glitter on to flame shape before the paint dries.

Talk about the prophet Isaiah and his message of light shining for all the nations. Talk about the difference even one light can make in the darkness. Discuss with the children those they think who are living in darkness at this time, in their own community and around the world.

(A Bit Less Messy)

You will need: A5 card folded length ways to make a greeting card, felt tip pens, glitter, PVA glue, glue spreaders, small scraps of Christmas wrapping paper (left over from your wrapping of Christmas gifts!), Christmas greetings peel offs.

Give each child a greeting card and work on the card with the long folded edge down the side. Ask children to write their Christmas message on the inside and to stick Christmas greetings sticker on the front of card before beginning to work with the paper and glue. Get the children to draw the outline of a candle shape on the front of their card (or provide a template for them to draw around). Tear wrapping paper of various designs into small pieces and stick the pieces of wrapping paper onto the card, filling in the candle shape. Use felt tip pens to colour in a flame and then spread glue onto flame and sprinkle glitter on top.

You can use the same talking points as for the messy version.
Let Me Take You By The Hand  age 6-12

You will need: plastic or chocolate play money or Monopoly money.

God has taken us by the hand so we must do the same for others. If you have access to the music of ‘The Streets of London’ play the chorus for the children or have these words written out for them. This song is available online (http://youtu.be/DiWomXktf8).

So how can you tell me you’re lonely, and say for you that the sun don’t shine? Let me take you by the hand and lead you through the streets of London.

I’ll show you something to make you change your mind.

Discuss with children what it would be like to take a person new to the area around where they live and shop.

• What would they see?
• Would everything be good?
• Would everybody they see be happy?

If you know your area well have some photographs of areas that are not so good, perhaps showing litter on the ground, possibly homeless people, unemployment centre, and so on. If they were to meet someone who had never been to church or to your group what would they tell them to lead them through the life of Jesus?

Light Reveals All  all age

You will need: large white sheet suspended to form wall, bright light (a portable flood light would be good).

Have the children all gathered on one side of the sheet with the light shining onto the other side of the sheet. Then let one child at a time go behind the sheet so that the children in front of the sheet see the shadow of that child on the sheet.

Let them have fun making different shapes. You could turn this into a game by setting the child going back behind the sheet a challenge to mime an animal letting the other children guess what it is.

games

Clock In The Tower / What’s The Time Lord God  all age

As per the previous weeks, but this week use the phrase “time for all” in the games.

Set The Prisoners Free  all age

A tig game. When someone is tigged by IT then they stand still with their legs apart. To be freed someone who is not tigged has to crawl through their legs.

Balloons  all age

You will need: lots of inflated balloons, and a few left uninflated, optionally: rolled up newspapers.

God’s spirit is in us and everywhere. To start the game off blow a balloon up in front of the children to signify the Holy Spirit in all of us. The idea of this game is to keep all the balloons in the air either using your hands or by knocking them back up with rolled up newspapers.

Be aware of some children who may get upset at the sound of popping balloons.

Pass The Balloon  all age

You will need: a few inflated balloons.

Encourage the children to pass the inflated balloons on to each other in different ways. Start with throwing them to each other, then try to kick to each other, then header them to each other, and so on. The Holy Spirit cannot be contained, God is everywhere just like the balloons!

Hide And Seek  all age

If your space allows it then play a game of hide and seek emphasising that today’s story is about God’s care and concern for all people, not just for some.
discussion starters for teens
pass the message on

Preparation
You will need some torches that have a button that allows a flash (to facilitate learning a bit of Morse code signalling).

Opening Activity
Learn some Morse Code. A code key is available on page 112 or see http://morsecode.scphillips.com/morse2.html. Try to spell out some simple Christmas messages. If possible meet in a larger hall for this so you can form two groups and try to send and receive messages across the length of the hall, only use the torches.

The Word
Read Isaiah 42:1-4. Pause for a short while, then read verses 5-9.

Activity/Discussion
The passage today seems to be talking about two things.

• So, what, or who, do you think the first part talking about?
• What will this person do?
• How will he do this? Or, rather, what will he not do?
• Who is the second part talking about?
• Who is the ‘you’ in the passage?
• What do you think ‘righteousness’ means?

In the Bible there is a very strong link between ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’. ‘Righteousness’ can mean ‘already judged or reckoned with’ and it comes from an old word meaning ‘rightwise’ or ‘rightways’.

• What do you think living in the ‘rightways’ means?

As we get closer to Christmas and we look forward to fun and parties and presents talk about who Christmas might be difficult for in our world.

• Does Isaiah give us any clues?

Think about what Christmas would look like if this passage were the instructions for our Christmas party.

• Who would we invite?
• What would the gifts be?
• Who would we invite?
• What do verses 8 and 9 tell us about God?
• Do we listen to what God is telling us?

Living It Out
Think about what needs to be done to improve the situation of people you know either in your own community (perhaps at school) or in other parts of the world.

• What could you give that would shed just a little light in the darkness?
In music, an overture to a larger work serves to introduce the musical themes that will be found later in the work. It is often used at the beginning of dramatic works such as operas. The overture primes the listener for what is to come, setting the scene and the tone for the drama that will follow.

Over the past three weeks we have travelled with lectionary passages that have served a similar role of overture, preparing the worshipper for the celebration of the Christmas story that gathers ever nearer. This week we turn to Matthew’s gospel and his Christmas story finding that chapters 1-2 can also be seen as an overture for what is to come in the remainder of the gospel. Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan make this point in their book “The First Christmas” where they point out that the overture in Matthew’s story functions through five divine dreams and five scriptural fulfilments. Four of those dreams, those divine interventions into the story, are for Joseph. The other dream being one received by the Magi.

In this week's passage we have the first of these dreams to a confused and saddened Joseph who has just learnt that his fiancée is pregnant. Note that the Hebrew texts do not refer to Mary as a virgin, just as a young girl. The Septuagint does refer to a virgin but in a more matter-of-fact way (“the virgin will be pregnant and will give birth”) than the later traditions of miraculous virgin birth allow. Nonetheless Matthew’s story is crucial to that later interpretation.

What is undeniable is that it seems very odd to have a story about the birth of Messiah, the saving one, Emmanuel, entwined with questions of adultery from its earliest moments. This allows Joseph to be depicted as a just man for wanting to do the lawful thing—divorcing Mary—and thus a man of deep conviction to the law of God, but also a compassionate man for deciding to do so quietly and with no fuss.

There is no question that Joseph will do what God desires of him, and so is prepared to follow the law in annulling his marriage contract, yet Joseph also reveals the mercy that God desires of us too. But all that is rendered obsolete by the intervention of God in a dream to Joseph, a son of David. Joseph is not being written out of this story in the first chapter. He has a part to play in the story and his Davidic descent is one such important part, as is his naming of the child: symbolically taking on Jesus as his own son, engrafting this child into his family.

In those extraordinary moments when we linger between sleep and wakefulness, when our dreams are most vivid, and when we have the perception that we control, to a degree, the direction of our dreams, one cannot help wonder what our own reaction might be to having a dream like the one that we read Joseph experiencing. Vivid, clear, and yet otherworldly too. And this perhaps echoes for us the strange concept Matthew brings of a child who is on one hand not Joseph’s son, and yet on the other hand is Joseph’s son, a descendant of David.

Within congregations there is often the exhortation to dream dreams, to think about what the future might hold for that faith community in its particular context. What happens when those dreams are for something so strange and otherworldly that we cannot quite get our heads around it? Do we allow the space and grace for God to speak into the moments when we are most receptive to his leading without the temptation to limit those dreams only to what we see as possible, feasible or affordable?

Joseph’s time for dreaming both looks forward to Messiah and looks back to the story of God’s people in years past: of Joseph, Moses and David. What about our times of dreaming as we approach Christmas?
God Delivers

A dialogue between Joseph and an unnamed friend.

Friend: Still not sleeping, Joseph?
Joseph: Worse than that...
Friend: Worse? Nightmares?
Joseph: Not exactly... I don't know... I had a dream...
Friend: A dream? But you don't know if it was a nightmare? Usually there's quite a difference, Joseph. Nightmares are the scary, bad ones. Was it a scary, bad one?
Joseph: Scary... yeah... but not bad, exactly. Kind of good, in a weird way, but definitely scary...
Friend: Right. What was the good bit then?
Joseph: I think I've made up my mind.
Friend: Because of the good bit in an otherwise scary, weird dream?
Joseph: Yep...
Friend: Right. This is making perfect sense. So what are you going to do?
Joseph: I'm going to take her back. We're going to get married, just like we planned.
Friend: Brilliant, Joseph, that's fantastic! What a turnaround! You really mean it? Even after yesterday?
Joseph: Don't remind me... I'll have to go back and undo that quiet word I had with the rabbi. I can't believe I did that now. I can't believe I was ready to walk out on her.
Friend: So what was the divine intervention?
Joseph: I don't know if I can call it that... it was just a crazy dream...
Friend: I seem to remember Jacob had a few of them...
Joseph: I'm no patriarch.
Friend: ...and Joseph and Solomon and Daniel...
Joseph: I'm no prophet.
Friend: Joseph, you're about to be something just as important!
Joseph: What?
Friend: A Dad.
Joseph: Well, he'll still be half-mine...
Friend: It's a boy? Brilliant! See, you always wanted a boy! Um, what do you mean "half-mine"? Is your boy going to be a prophet? Is he to be dedicated to God, like Samson and Samuel?
Joseph: I... I don't know. But we've to give him the name Jesus.
Friend: Jesus? I love it...! Jesus—that means "God delivers"—beautiful! God delivers Mary from abandonment; God delivers you from tormented indecision, and that's even before God delivers the baby to the pair of you!

Retelling For Young People

Worried Dad

Have you ever heard a mum or dad say how hard it is to be a good parent? Or have you heard them say how much they worry about their children sometimes? Did you know that before Jesus was born, his dad felt really worried and unhappy. He knew that his partner Mary was going to have a baby but something didn't feel right about it. He wanted to be a good dad. But he was sure the baby was not his. He loved Mary and he did not want to lose her. He could not believe she would do anything to upset him. Poor Joseph! He did not know what to do. One night he eventually decided the best thing to do would be to quietly split up with Mary. He would tell her the next day...

But that night, when Joseph fell asleep, God sent an angel to speak to him in a dream. The angel told Joseph that he should stay with Mary and look after their baby, because the baby needed a really good dad and he would not just be Joseph’s son, he would be God’s son! The angel said that the baby should be called Jesus, and Jesus would have another name too: Immanuel. Joseph knew what an amazing thing it is to call someone “Immanuel”, because it means “God with us.” Whenever Joseph felt worried again about being a good dad, he could always remember that special dream, and think of Jesus’ other name—“God with us.” If God is with us, thought Joseph, maybe I do not need to worry so much.

The Diaries Of Joseph And Theodore

This is an excellent Advent script available in “Cloth For The Cradle” from Wild Goose Worship Group, in which the father and fiancée of Mary reminisce.

http://www.ionabooks.com/cloth-for-the-cradle.html
worship ideas

Through the Season
On pages 4 and 5 you will find details of the visual focus that can be used throughout this season, picking up on different aspects of our time theme.

Gathering Activity
Encourage those who gather to recall the strangest dream they can remember. What happened? Who was there? Did they escape? Sometimes dreams can live with us for many years and help shape our lives.

Ask those who gather to share with those around them a dream that they have for the church as they approach the Christmas season and a new year.

Call to Worship
The scene is set.
The angels are gathering.
The animals are sheltering.
The shepherds are hurrying.
A story will be told
and God will be with us.

Prayers for Others and Ourselves
Emmanuel,
you approach...
and today we approach you.
You will bring hope...
hope which we seek today.
You will bring light...
as we live in dark times today.
You will bring peace...
as conflict surrounds us today.
Emmanuel,
God with us today,
God with us tomorrow,
hear us,
heal us,
help us.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication
God of light and love,
we ask that you take
all that we bring before you now
of who we are and what we have.
May you use these gifts and use us
to help and nurture those who need you most.
For your love's sake we pray.
Amen.

Reflective Prayer
All light gathers in this moment,
ready to break into the world,
but not yet.
All song holds its breath,
ready to release hallelujahs,
but not yet.
All word holds silence,
ready to release the Good News,
but not yet.
And a mother's laboured cries
and a father's fraught attention
and a God's letting go
and a Son's pushing through
ripen this moment
of unease,
of sweat,
of fear,
of letting go
into a moment of salvation:
Ours.
Hold all breath.
The time is soon.
Reflective Monologues

Joseph
These past few months
have been the most demanding of my life,
the most emotionally draining.
I’ve known the fierceness of love and anger,
the depths of despair, the unravelling of joy.
But I’m a man.
I’m supposed to be hard,
demanding,
unforgiving.
I’m not supposed to be turned to mush
by watching the woman I love suffer.
She looks so beautiful carrying my child,
and it is my child.
I may not have planted the seed that grows within her
but I have watched her body change,
I have rubbed her swollen flesh
in the night when she aches.
I have felt our baby move and grow.
And I have felt her pain
as our friends have shunned us.
No cosy chats with the other women for Mary,
no swapping stories, normalising pregnancy
and no back slapping congratulations for me
or even leery comments,
Just menacing silence,
sizzling with reproach.
Little do they know, my former so called friends,
if they had stuck with me instead of cutting me off
they might, just might, have brought me to my senses
but Mary and I, pushed together in our adversity,
have learned resilience
and grown together, forced into maturity.
It’s not just us.
We have a little life to care for
and we will prove them wrong;
those who think we’ll never manage.
We will show them
that we are the people God calls us to be:
parents for the Son of God.

The Angel
I do not float on a cloud
strumming a golden harp.
I do not appear in a rush of air
and a carol of bells.
I am much more gritty
and down to earth.
I am the woman in the next street
deheading rose bushes
or sweeping up leaves
who shares a sympathetic look
as you struggle with your brolly on a windy day.
I am the man you passed
on the station platform
with the backpack
and the laptop bag
who raises an eyebrow
as the man across the aisle shares
too much information on his mobile phone.
Often I smile,
often I cry;
I try to create beauty
or bring light.
Once in a lifetime I will have
a special commission—or two.
I told Mary of the seed that was within her
and then persuaded Joseph
to go ahead and marry her.
On those assignments I carried
a frisson of fear
and left in my wake
a trail of chaos,
but also wonder
and promise.
Folk are free to reject me
or ignore my message
or blank me completely.
Mary and Joseph, though,
and, if not exactly welcoming,
they did not write me off,
but spent the rest of their lives
pondering my words
along with their import.
And, even if they never fully appreciated
their uniqueness,
they changed the face of history
by listening to me:
an angel sent by God.
Mary

God, you pick your moments and your people.
Talk about a big fat Jewish wedding?
Well, the big fat part came true as I swelled with the weight of the Son of God.
People thought Joseph was a fool but I knew differently.
It took guts to stick with me and not run from God and the crazy plans he’d racked up for us.
Once he had set his mind to it like everything else he did, Joseph made a great job of caring for me, the mother of God’s child.
What other man would be there at the birth and not leave it to the women.
Mind you, Joseph had no choice.
No one else would speak to us, disgracing them as we had.
It wasn’t really until the birth that I missed the other women folk.
Because Joseph was so loving and caring, he saw the hurt I felt and tried to make it up to me.
And, for a time, he did.
But, when the time came to push this fragile life out into the world that was when I needed another woman, one who knew what to expect, one who could talk me through the pain and reassure me that this was how it had to be to bring a new life to birth.
I couldn’t even blame Joseph.
He hadn’t planted this seed in me, but I cursed him anyway with every profanity I knew.
He had to stay and take it.
There was no one else to catch the Son of God as he was delivered onto a straw covered floor in a place hidden from sight.
No one else to bring him to my breast so that I could nurture God’s Son, the Light of the world.

Sending

Leader: God has presented us with a dream of a new kingdom.
All: We go to make the dream a reality!
Leader: God has blessed us with an insight into the kingdom.
Christ beside us, we will dream the dream.
All: We go with a vision.
We go with passion.
Leader: In Christ we imagine, we ponder, we aspire.

Praise/Hymns

Come, thou long-expected Jesus CH4 472 / MP 102
Emmanuel MP 120
Emmanuel, Emmanuel MP 121
Hark! the herald angels sing CH4 301 / MP 211
Jesus is the name we honour CH4 481 / MP 870
Jesus, name above all names CH4 774 / MP 375
Now my tongue the mystery telling CH4 667
O come, O come Emmanuel CH4 273 / MP 493
O little Love who comes again CH4 329
O little town of Bethlehem CH4 304 / MP 503
Of the Father’s love begotten CH4 319
Spirit of God descend upon my heart CH4 495
The King of love my shepherd is CH4 462 / MP 649
The Lord’s my shepherd CH4 16 / MP 660
The virgin Mary had a baby boy CH4 300
To the name of our salvation CH4 471
We have a gospel to proclaim CH4 363 / MP 728
We have heard a joyful song CH4 629 / MP 730
Word of the Father CH4 480

Take Home Ideas

This week can be a very difficult week for many people as they prepare to face their first or another Christmas alone. It can be a very difficult week for some as they struggle to get by financially after buying presents, cards and food.

Please take time this week to pray for all who find themselves in these dark places as we prepare to welcome the light of the World into the World this Thursday.

If you can spare the money and/or items, perhaps you could make up a bag to donate to a local foodbank to bring light to somebody’s life this Christmas?

Pray for those who will be working over the Christmas holidays in hospitals, foodbanks, soup kitchens, city missions and call centres. If you know someone who will be serving others at this time, why not take the time to thank them and tell them how much you appreciate what they are doing?
age group ideas

messages all age

You will need: items that can be used to send messages (for example, writing paper and pens, postcards, telephone, smartphone, torch, flags, tablet computer (email), and so on).

Hide around you space a variety of objects which can be used to send messages to other people.

Give the children time to find all the hidden objects and gather them together. Then talk with the children about what all these things have in common: namely to send messages.

Explain that in the Bible there was another way too that angels were often sent with messages and use this as a lead in to the story of Joseph.

Activities

celebration tea party age 3-5

You will need: dolls and teddies, items for play tea party.

Let the children play with all the different dolls and teddies, thinking about all the different characters, and then move this play into a celebration tea party for the birth of Jesus.

Angels Everywhere age 6-12

You will need: dolls and teddies, items for play tea party.

Explore with the children what they think about angels.

• What do you think an angel is?
• Do you know the names of any of the angels in the bible?
• Do you know how many angels are named in the bible?
• What other forms or ways might we have angels today?

Nurses are called angels, a postman can be an angel delivering good news or urgent news just like God’s angels. Sometimes we say that anyone who does something really good and helpful to and for another person is an angel.

Note that the two angels (not counting fallen angels!) mentioned in the Bible are Michael and Gabriel.

crafts all age

Sequin Mesh Angels

You will need: sequin mesh in gold or silver, gold or silver glittery pipe-cleaners 30 c.m. in length, wooden beads, black felt pens, ruler, scissors.

Prepare a piece of sequin mesh 30 c.m. in length and one of 20 c.m. in length for each child.

Giving each child a 30 c.m. piece of the mesh, show them how to ‘concertina’ it by placing it vertically in front of you and then making folds of approximately 3 c.m. width. Repeat this process using the 20 c.m. length but this time making folds of 2 c.m. width.

Note that the resulting 30 c.m. ‘concertina’ will make the body of the angel and the 20 c.m. part the wings.

Now for the tricky part!

Taking the pipe-cleaner thread about 10 c.m. of it through the wooden bead which will become the face of the angel and holding the wings horizontally thread it down through the centre of the wings. Then placing the body at right angles to the wings thread the pipe-cleaner through the top centre of it and then back up through the wings and into the bead once more. The part which is left of the 10cm and now sticking out the top of the bead, is then formed into a halo with the end being tucked back into the top of the bead for neatness. You will want to practise this before hand.

Using the black pen show the children how to draw a simple face on the bead using two small circles for eyes and a larger oval shape for a ‘singing’ mouth. Little V-shaped eyebrows can also be added. Now ask the children to gently open out their concertina shapes. The angel now takes shape. The angel can be hung on a tree using the remaining 20 c.m. length of the pipe-cleaner.

Talk with the children about the angels we hear of in the Bible and the angel which visited Joseph. Talk about other angels which they may know from the Nativity Story.
Edible Angels

You will need: plain ready made cupcakes (which can be bought in supermarkets or made at home), whipped cream or butter cream, white chocolate buttons, icing sugar, sieve, spoon, paper doilies, paper plates, knife.

Give each child a plain cake and show them how to make it into an ‘angel cake’ (akin to a ‘butterfly cake’ for readers in the USA) by carefully cutting a circle from the top of the cake and then cutting that circle in half. Fill the space at the top of the cup cake with cream or butter cream and place the two half circles on top of it to make the angels wings.

Then using a doily sift icing sugar over the cake. Add a chocolate button in between the wings to represent the face. A halo can be added by using a small circle of the doily and arranging it over the chocolate button.

Talk with the children about the angels we hear of in the Bible and the angel which visited Joseph. Talk about other angels which they may know from the Nativity Story.

games

Clock In The Tower / What’s The Time Lord God

As per the previous weeks, but this week use the phrase “time for dreaming” in the games.

Getting Ready

You will need: lots of items associated with birth/babies (for instance, bowl, water, towels, nappies, shawl, blanket, cradle, and so on).

Arrange the children into two teams to see how well they can do gathering all the things that Joseph might have had to gather together before Jesus was born. If you can have two lots of the items, do it as a relay race. If you only have one set, then you could do it as a timed race to see which team is fastest.

Grab The Bag

You will need: a small piece of luggage (e.g. a rucksack) into which you could place some of the items required for a new born baby from the previous game.

Group the children into teams of three. In each team, name the children Joseph, Mary and the Angel to represent the main characters in our story today.

Line up each team about fifteen paces apart with the luggage at the midpoint between the two teams.

As the leader, you say, “A baby is coming, a baby is coming, grab the bag... Joseph/Mary/Angel” The two children called then approach the bag (the others have to stay put). As they get near, they have to try to grab the bag and then run back to their team before the other person manages to tag them.

If they get back safely they can earn a couple of points. If they are tagged, the other player earns a single point for their team. After three rounds, with everyone having had a turn, the teams are changed.
Preparation
Today we tackle the story of the birth of Jesus. We will look at the relationship of Joseph and Mary and how Mary's pregnancy might have affected that fragile relationship.
Try not to avoid, but be mindful of the situations the young people find themselves in, especially around family, marriage and divorce.

Opening Activity

Who Do You Think You Are?
- How much do you know about your relatives?
- Does anyone have stories about their parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles?
- Do you know what they did?
- How do you know?
- When did they tell you?
- Did someone else tell you?
We all have lots of stories.
- Why do you think these stories are the ones you know and the ones people have chosen to tell?

The Word
Read Matthew 1:18-25 together.

Activity/Discussion

Joseph is often a bystander in the Christmas story. Today we are going to explore his part in the story.

Read the passage from Matthew again thinking about Joseph’s part in the story.

Read verse 18.
- How do you think Joseph would have felt when he found out Mary was pregnant?
- What advice would you have given Joseph if he was your friend who had found out his girlfriend was pregnant and he was not the father?

Read verse 19.
- What did Joseph plan to do when he found out? What does that tell us about the kind of man Joseph was?

Read verse 20-23.
- What changes Joseph’s mind?
At the centre of this story about the birth of Jesus is a very new relationship between Joseph and Mary. They are engaged and are almost at the point of getting married.

Read verse 24.
- What does Joseph do?
- How does that compare to your advice to him when he first found out?
- So, what does this tell us about Joseph?
- And what does this story tell us about who God chose to be the parents of his son, Jesus?

Living It Out

Life is messy.
Jesus was born into a difficult relationship where Joseph made a choice to do what God wanted rather than what the world said he should do.

Look out for that kind of choice over Christmas.
wednesday 24 december 2014
thursday 25 december 2014

christmas eve and
christmas day

a selection box of worship resources

**Narrative Lectionary Readings**

**Christmas Eve: Time To Watch**
Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)
(Psalm 96:10-13)

**Christmas Day: Time For Celebration**
Luke 2:8-20
(Psalm 95:6-7)

**Through the Season**
On pages 4 and 5 you will find details of the visual focus that can be used throughout this season, picking up on different aspects of our time theme.
Angie Tam is a very modern day angel, and can be adapted to suit your situation. He might be dressed as an angel, a postman or whatever occupation is relevant to your area. Angel Tam tends to have a distinctive Scottish flavour.

Angel Tam is sitting sleeping on the chancel steps. He comes awake during the singing of the first hymn!

Hey, what’s aw the racket! Can a man no get five minutes peace here! I mean, the church is where folk normally go to sleep, especially when some of those meenisters climb up into the pulpit!

Aye, and aw you lot sook your peppermints during the service! Don’t think I don’t know what ye get up tae!

Ye see, I’m an angel. Naw, misses no an Angel Delight. Nor wan o’ Charlie’s Angels! Nor am I anything like “granny’s wee angel!” Naw, I am a real angel, a messenger frae God above.

What’s that mister, you thought I was some dosser sleeping in the church for Christmas?

Well, let me tell you this, we messengers of God are pretty special. We are warriors of God. Much tougher than we look, because we are in a fight of life and death. We are the ones who deliver God’s Christmas cards and parcels.

Naw, I’m no a real postman, I deliver messages from God and we transcend time and space. It’s a’right missus, you can look up transcend when you go hame, pit yer phone away the noo!

Ye ken, a long time ago I brought a very important message to a wee lassie by the name of Mary! Ye ken Mary don’t ye? Her cousin Elizabeth got pregnant just about the same time as her. Och c’mon, Mary that was engaged to Joseph the carpenter, ye ken who I mean? Aye, that’s right, son, they were having a baby and they were no even married yet!

Och I ken a lot of ye widnae bat an eye about that nowadays, but back then it was a big thing, a huge thing, the talk o’ the steamie it wiz!

Ye see, Mary was God’s chosen one to be the mother of his only son! Aye, that’s right, wee Joe the carpenter wisnae the faither, nor was it his best pal Danny as some rumours had it.

God himself had sent his Holy Spirit upon Mary and she was a VIRGIN (mouth the word). That’s right. She was a V-I-R-G-I-N.

Not only did I bring this message to Mary that she was the chosen one, but I had a job convincing wee Joe that he should stand by his wumman!

Well, months later, Auld Ceasar, who was in charge of the country then, decided to have a referendum! Aye, that’s a shocker, you Scots weren’t the first folks to have one.

Caesar wisnae gieing you a choice of staying with him or no, he wanted to know where you could live so you could pay mair taxes to the government! Ah bet that sounds familiar to you as well in Paisley!

So wee Mary, heavily pregnant, had to walk all the way to Bethlehem frae Nazareth, maybe because Virgin trains hadn’t been invented yet!

Well, they only just made it to their destination in time, but all the hotels, boarding houses and bed and breakfasts had been booked out months in advance, and poor Joseph had forgot to book ahead!

Luckily, some wee innkeeper telt them they could sleep in the stable, because there was nae maternity unity in this tiny wee backwater. And guess what? There among the coos, and the sheep and the oxen, the Saviour of the world was born!

It was a beautiful moment. Mary and Joseph were beaming, as proud as punch!

Ma pals in God’s angel’s army got the message out very quickly. They nearly scared the life out of a bunch of shepherds like you lot did to me at the beginning with all that singing! They came to see what this wee saviour of the world looked like.

And then some foreign blokes turned up, kings or wise men who had seen a star in the sky and had followed it for hundreds of miles to this wee cowshed in Bethlehem. They brought gifts of Gold, frankincense and myrrh which were the favourite royal gifts that year!

And those shepherds and kings could’nae keep their mouths shut, and they told every body the Good News about Jesus.

And now all those thousands of years later you have come to church on this Christmas Eve in the hope you might get a real glimpse of this saviour also.

Let me tell ye, if you meet him here like those kings and shepherds your life to will change for ever!
Dialogue

It Was Dark

Voice A: It was dark,
Voice B: really dark,
Voice A: like completely dark,
Voice B: totally dark,
Voice A: couldn’t-see-your-hand-in-front-of-your-face dark
Voice B: so it was really, really dark.
Voice A: Next minute there was tonnes of light,
Voice B: like, mega-light,
Voice A: bright like you’ve never experienced before,
Voice B: needing-sunglasses light,
Voice A: light that burned into your eyes
Voice B: and left after-images.
Voice A: And it was caused by angels,
Voice B: real angels,
Voice A: dressed-in-white and wearing-halos angels,
Voice B: wings-that-beat-with-gold-flashes angels
Voice A: angels that just appeared in one instant from out of
Voice B: the darkness
Voice A: and exploded in waves across the sky.
Voice A: But they weren’t silent angels.
Voice B: Oh no, they sang like Metallica-angels,
Voice A: big-voices-that-roared-as-they-sang angels
Voice B: a-big-noisy-word-that-filled-the-sky-with-noise angels
Voice A: a-great-big-word-sung-together angels:
Voice B: ‘Alleluia’.
Voice A: The shepherds, they just stood there
Voice B: like totally still shepherds,
Voice A: statue-like shepherds,
Voice B: with-jaws-open shepherds,
Voice A: catching-flies shepherds,
Voice B: shepherds who had never seen anything like it
Voice B: before.
Voice A: Suddenly the song changed,
Voice B: like totally changed.
Voice A: The angel song morphed into an angel shout:
Voice B: voices-rising-to-a-new-level angel shout
Voice A: all-joined-in-together angel shout
Voice B: like a complete choral reading.
Voice A: The song of ‘alleluia’ became the shout of ‘peace’
Voice B: for-the-entire-earth peace,
Voice A: to-completely-everyone peace,
Voice B: total peace,
Voice A: to-the-whole-world peace,
Voice B: peace-takes-over peace.

Voice A: ‘Jesus is born,’ they shouted,
Voice B: like straight out they shouted:
Voice A: ‘Jesus is born, go and see him!’
Voice B: ‘Too right! Let’s go to Bethlehem right now
Voice A: and see this thing that has happened’ the shepherds
Voice B: shouted.
Voice A: Right then, to the stable,
Voice B: to that Bethlehem round-the-back-of-the-inn stable,
Voice A: in a world that was very unstable
Voice B: and saw there the one thing that brought stay-ability,
Voice A: alive in a manager.
Voice B: So let us stay close, and let him stay in us.

Call to Worship

Solo voice sings “Away in a manger”, verse 1, with accompaniment continuing through the following words.

In every manger tonight
there is wonder filled with wonder,
as the darkness deeply curves
under the anticipation of light.

For God’s ancient promise
is finding its way
into the world tonight,
rekindled with new words
that will awaken justice once more
and return the light to the world.

In every manger
there is a long wait tonight
and whispered questions ask
will this be the one,
will this be the manger
where God falls to earth
wrapped in skin.

Let us hold our breath
and wait with the night
for the gift
of word
made flesh
falling from heaven
and found
in fragile skin
and vulnerable promise
in this manger.

Solo voice sings “Away in a manger”, verse 3.
In The Darkness

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
some of us are happy,
some of us are sad.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
some of us are believers,
some of us are unsure.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
some of us have houses full of presents,
some of us are struggling to survive.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
we cannot see each other's faces,
we do not know each other's pains and joys.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
we wait for a baby
who is about to be born.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
we wait and we wonder,
we hope for love.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
we wait for Jesus
to bring light to our world.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas
and God waits with us:
God is here in this place.

In the darkness
we wait for Christmas;
and we hear the story
that tells of God's love.

In the darkness
the choice is ours.
Will we stay in the darkness
or follow the light?

Prayers of Waiting

Loving God,
impatient in the waiting
and struggling with skin,
we prepare a place here for you tonight
your bedding is the longing we harbour,
your swaddling are our hopes,
your stable is our unstable world.

And in our aching for love
to be born among us
in word and in flesh
wait with us
as we wait with you
to receive the child
that you let go,
in order to grow among us.

The angels are silent now,
the stars are in place,
the universe halts its movement
and the moon holds its place,
the hills are ready to gently bow
and the whole of creation
hesitates on the brink of incarnation.

It is a wonder:
the coming of love
into our world;
soon
the light
breaking through the shadows of untruth
and the brokenness of injustice.

This is our expectation, O God,
of what we have come to know
in this waiting time:
that in some manger,
in some stable,
in some other time,
this time is redeemed
and so are we.
So open us to this wonder
that we might hear the promise
uttered by dry old prophets in their tired longing
spark into life again
with the sound of God in skin.

Let us make space
for the birth of
promise,
justice,
love,
in this place	onight.
Amen.
Reflection

For Midnight.
When the light comes,
it will not be bright like a holy star,
but bright in the way a face full of the good news
of justice prevailing is bright.

When the light comes,
it will not be bright like angel light,
but bright in the way the grain of harvest
makes life possible for the hungry is bright.

When the light comes,
it will not be bright like heavenly glory,
but bright in the way a song of freedom
filling the lips of those oppressed is bright.

When the light comes,
it will not be bright like a manger glow,
but bright in the way children play
in the noisy peace after conflict is bright.

When the light comes,
it will not be bright like a sacred halo,
but bright in the way a baby crying
to fill their lungs with life is bright.

Bright like that.

When the light comes,
may we be found ready
for the transformation this moment brings
and witness a birth
not in stables and mangers
filled with straw and shepherds,
but a birth of hope and justice
for all people in this world
who have lived in darkness far too long.

Sending

Let us go, for Christ has come.
Let us go in celebration;
go in proclamation!

There is light in the dark,
There is joy even in sorrow,
There is hope in all the world.
Merry Christmas!

It is now.
It is today.
It is here,
in this manger,
among us
love is born.
I wish for you the good news of love,
enfleshed
and found among us.

Go in peace.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves
(post midnight)

In the crunch of midnight light,
seeping now into our lives,
we offer words of thanks for the Word
emerging in flesh among us.

May we stare into each others’ faces today
and recognise you—one of us.

May we pause before we speak
and listen for your voice in the other—one of us.

May we share together in this day
recognising we share with you—one of us.

May we laugh in the life the good news bring
and hear your laughter too—one of us.

May we hold each moment of wonder
and sense you among us—one of us.

May we search each other’s eyes
and find you looking back—one of us.

In this good news of incarnation
may the world know love is here,
justice is taking root,
life has come again,
the darkness is ending,
glory has been released,
the captive set free
and the word of life is born among us.
So be it.
Amen.
Storytelling

The Time Was Right

The time was right.
It was God's time.

At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census of the Roman Empire. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All the people went to register in the cities where their ancestors had lived.

The time was right.
It was God's time.

So Joseph went from Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a Judean city called Bethlehem. Joseph, a descendant of King David, went to Bethlehem because David had been born there.

Joseph went there to register with Mary. She had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant.

The time was right.
It was God's time.

While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her child.

The time was right.
It was God's time.

She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there wasn't any room for them in the inn.

The time was right.
It was God's time.

Shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem. They were taking turns watching their flock during the night.

An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The glory of the Lord filled the area with light, and they were terrified.

The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy.

Today your Saviour, Christ the Lord, was born in David’s city.

This is how you will recognize him: You will find an infant wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

The time was right.
It was God's time.

Suddenly, a large army of angels appeared with the angel. They were praising God by saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those who have his good will!”

The angels left them and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.”

The time was right.
It was God's time.

They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in a manger.

When they saw the child, they repeated what they had been told about him.

The time was right.
It was God's time.

Everyone who heard the shepherds’ story was amazed.

Mary treasured all these things in her heart and always thought about them.

As the shepherds returned to their flock, they glorified and praised God for everything they had seen and heard. Everything happened the way the angel had told them.

The time was right.
It was God's time.

Call to Worship

We've left the brussel sprouts boiling, the turkey is basting beautifully, the christmas pudding is on its second steam, the table is laid, the house is strewn with wrapping paper and empty boxes lie everywhere...

And in among all of this a light has been lit, a star has come to rest, angels have sung and a manger has been filled with God.

Good morning! It is Christmas day!
**All-Age Prayer**

On this day, O God,
may we change the headlines
now that Christ is born.

May we change the words in the headlines today:
words about conflict into headlines about peace,
for the prince of peace is born

May we change the words in the headlines today:
from words about hunger to headlines about feasting for all,
for the bread of life is with us.

May we change the words in the headlines today:
from words that bring hurt to headlines about healing,
for the one who brings new life is here.

May we change the words in the headlines today:
so the world realises not just the words have changed
but the word has moved from print into flesh
and is born among us.

So be it.
Amen.

**A Carol Prayer**

A prayer suitable for all ages, based on traditional Christmas carols.

Thank you, God,
that in a little town of Bethlehem,
away in a manger,
a child is born.

Thank you for the child in a manger
being born while the herald angels sing:
alleluia to the new born king.

Hear us, as we gather round this story
and see him lying in a bed of straw,
where all your faithful come
to Royal David’s city
where under a starry sky
we give thanks for this first nowell.

Thank you for the story
first told to humble shepherds
as they watched their flock
of the virgin Mary and her baby boy
and tells us love came down at Christmas.

Come on, may we celebrate
the message of these angels
from the realms of glory
that in the still of the night
they chant the news:
Christ the redeemer is here.

May we share it with them
and tell everyone this good news.

Amen.

**Christmas Agape Celebration**

An informal celebration of Jesus’ birth suitable for everyone. This is inspired by words from Francis Ballantyne.

**All:** God’s due time.

**Leader:** Not our immediate now,

**All:** God’s perfect timing;

**Leader:** not ours of impatience,

**All:** God’s timetable;

**Leader:** not our schedule,

**All:** God’s will;

**Leader:** not our self will,

**All:** God’s completion;

**Leader:** not our imperfect incompleteness.

**All:** God’s day of salvation,

**Leader:** not our day of self effort.

**All:** God’s finale celebrations,

**Leader:** not our man-made festivities.

**All:** God’s delivery date,

**Leader:** not our probable date.

**All:** God’s due time,

**Leader:** not ours to disagree about.

**All:** God’s time is now due.

**Leader:** As we look on the shepherds,
we pray for people who work through the night
while others sleep,
who have to stay awake for long hours,
receive low wages and are little respected.

**All:** We pray for all men and woman working on night shifts.

**Leader:** As we look on the wise men,
we pray for people who question the world
until they get the truth,
who are ready to take risky journeys
and go different ways to get home.

**All:** We pray for women and men journey in faith.

**Leader:** As we look on the nativity scene,
we think of the forces that gathered
in the darkness outside;
we pray for the soldiers who have orders to kill,
and for those who give them their orders.

**All:** We pray for the weak, and for the powerful who are afraid of losing that power.

**Leader:** As we look on the angels,
we pray for the people
who bring good news of peace,
who startle us with the chance that brings change.
We pray for messengers of hope.

**All:** And this will be a sign for us:
a child lying in a manger.

**Sharing of the Gifts**

**Leader:** We share a drink together in memory of the Christ
who took time for us.

**All drink.**

**Leader:** We share this cake together in memory of the time
we give to Christ.

**All eat.**
No and Yes

The innkeeper was used to saying ‘No!’ He’d been saying ‘No!’ all night.

‘No, you can’t get a room here tonight!’
‘No, you can’t have more towels!’
‘No, you can’t get another pudding!’
‘No, you can’t invite your mother-in-law and her whole family to share your room!’
‘No, no, no, no, NO!’

It has made him very grumpy. In fact he was always grumpy.
Even more grumpy than everyone here who is going to miss the beginning of the X Factor final.

Then the door bell went once more. ‘Oh NO!’ he said, ‘do they not KNOW, there is NO more room!’ he shouted.

He swung open the door and was about to launch into his usual spiel of there being no room when he hesitated and stuttered.

He was aware he was trying to say ‘No!’ because he was so used to saying ‘No!’ but this man and woman were clearly about to have a baby and his lips were moving in another direction and instead of ‘No!’ he found himself saying ‘Yes!’ and it surprised him how good that felt.

Mary and Joseph, who were the ones standing at the door, looked at each other and then at the innkeeper and said, ‘But we haven’t asked you anything.’

The innkeeper just said, ‘Yes!’
‘So you have room?’ asked Joseph.

‘Yes!’ said the innkeeper who was feeling particularly good now.
‘For two of us and perhaps a baby?’

‘Yes!’ said the innkeeper and a smile grew on his face.

‘In here?’ questioned Joseph ‘or round the back?’

‘Yes!’ said the innkeeper, he was positively beaming.

‘Which?’ asked Joseph.

‘Sorry’ the innkeeper replied coming out of his daze, ‘round the back!’

So he took them to a stable where it was warm, though the innkeeper’s smile was even warmer. Having let Mary and Joseph in he stood at the door of that stable while Jesus was born, guarding it.

As a bundle of shepherds arrived and three wise travellers too, asking to see the new baby, the innkeeper again found himself saying only one thing: ‘Yes! Come in. There is room. There’s always room.’

And such has been the way of all those in the Christmas story, Mary, Shepherds, Kings, Joseph and now the innkeeper: the answer is, ‘Yes!’ and it changes everything.

A Blessing for Christmas Day

When the presents are unwrapped and the living room strewn,
I wish for you one more gift:
God with us.

When the visitors have arrived and finally gone home again, I wish for you one more guest:
God with us.

When ‘Merry Christmas’ has been exchanged in words of greeting, I wish for you one more word:
Emmanuel, God with us.

When the crackers are pulled in an explosion of disappointment, I wish for you a better surprise:
God with us.

When the carols have been sung and the angels return to heaven, I wish for you a louder song:
Alleluia: God is with us.

When the TV takes over and the sofa’s cushions beckon, I wish for you a deeper peace:
God with us.

When the day is complete and the festivities ending, I wish for you a new beginning of God with us.

And when the Christmas tree lights go out and the dark of winter returns, I wish for you the eternal light of God now with us.

Sending

Believe: for light is now in the world.
Believe: for God has become one of us.
Believe: for Love is born in each of us.
Believe: for the manger is full.
Go and believe: it is as the prophets said and the blessing of Christmas, of family, of friends and of God be with you today.
time for seeking

bible notes

Seeking New Possibilities

Matthew 2:1-12

(Psalm 96:10-13)

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, in what had quickly become a dark and desolate landscape, something strange took place. In the devastation of the first months of war on the western front, where fierce fighting was taking place and soldiers were digging in and coming to terms with the fact that the fight was not going to be over soon, an unofficial and temporary truce took place.

Records suggest heavy fighting was experienced in places on Christmas Eve and there were many casualties, but late in the day British infantrymen were surprised to see Christmas Trees, branches with lights, appearing on the other side of No Man’s Land and accompanied by the sound of German voices singing. British soldiers sang their own carols and on Christmas Day many attended Christmas services behind the lines. Over the next few days, according to personal letters dating from that time, the truce continued with some gatherings between the lines where cigarettes and souvenirs were exchanged, the dead were buried, and a game of football may or may not have taken place.

That such a truce was experienced in the midst of the carnage of those early months of war, as the ferocity of fear and hatred grew in every soldier on both sides, is surely evidence of the way the Christmas story and its promise has the power to change perspective and reveal to people a different way. Exactly 100 years ago on this day the Christmas Spirit was evident as it influenced the soldiers of the Western Front.

This same Spirit was evident too as it intervened in the hearts of the Magi who experienced something amazing when gazing upon the infant Jesus that changed their perspective.

The Magi sought out the miracle of Jesus’ birth. They followed a route that led them to Herod. The narrative describes how they continued on their route following the star all the way to Bethlehem. The story does not say what the mind-set of Magi was as they left Herod. However there is a good chance they planned to return by the same route and do what Herod asked them—effectively becoming informants. Yet this did not happen.

The story continues with the description of an amazing encounter in a lowly stable where gifts were exchanged; lavish and extravagant gifts given to the baby but we might say that the most priceless gift of all was given in the other direction. Somehow what these men experienced brought a new glow, warmth, spirit to their hearts for the story makes clear that they were changed in attitude and perspective that they ‘returned by another route’. Their plans were changed. They had received something that moved them inside and turned them from potential informants into dreamers of the new possibility that God would do great things through this child.

For many of the soldiers on the Western Front extending from Ypres, through Armentieres to Givenchy, the Christmas Spirit sparked a different perspective for a while, and gave fuel to a human spirit that even in the depths of war brought a temporary truce.

This same Spirit was active in the experiences and dreaming of a group of men who returned from their encounter as changed men. Physically they took a different route (the word ‘different’ suggesting an alternative route to the one intended) that saw them give Herod’s Palace a wide berth. Perhaps more importantly for us however, spiritually they took a different road home too. The return journey was one that started with a transformed faith; they had developed a new sense of the possibilities of God, after experiencing his glory at first hand in the miracle of Christmas.

time for seeking

christmas 1
sunday 28 december 2014
the story

Born To Be King

A monologue by Herod, who should sound quite over the top and paranoid, swinging wildly between being sweet and threatening in tone.

It would be most effective if the monologue comes as an interruption to the Scripture reading after verse 4 when the Magi ask: “Where is the baby born to be King of the Jews?”

Once the monologue is finished, the reader should repeat that line and then continue the reading.

You’re in luck! He’s right here, even though you’re sixty years too late! Born to be King of the Jews, oh yes, born to be King, that’s me! So, come on in and show me your respect. On your knees and let me see how low you can bow before your superior. How wonderful that you’ve come to visit. Though it does seem to have taken a long time for news of my existence to reach your foreign lands. Better late than never. Perhaps you’d like a guided tour while you’re here. To let me demonstrate the extent of my greatness. They don’t call me Herod the Great for nothing. Look at this palace! And you cannot have failed to see the Temple! Be impressed! All this is my doing. Oh yes, the King of the Jews is worthy of all your worship!

And I am not deaf to the talk of freedom. Freedom is dangerous and I am trying to keep everything safe. I am the one who keeps peace in this land, do you hear me? It is for the people’s own good that I will not tolerate any stepping out of line. This land and its people are occupied and ruled by Rome. I work in the name of the Emperor and I will allow no-one—NO-ONE!—to give the Emperor reason to doubt I am serving him well. So the common people do not like me but they will not push me, they know better than to get above themselves. My own sons were rumoured to be plotting a rebellion, and I did not think twice about having her executed.

But a baby? Oh a baby, you say? Of course, how divine! What would worry me about a baby?

Retelling For Young People

Looking For Jesus

After Jesus was born, some important people were looking for him.

Some of them were wise men who studied the stars.

One of them was King Herod, who thought he was the only star!

The wise men lived far, far away from where Jesus was born. King Herod lived nearby.

The wise men brought wonderful presents for Jesus.

King Herod brought nothing.

The wise men were very happy because they thought Jesus was a king!

King Herod was very unhappy because he thought Jesus was a king!

The wise men felt excited as they looked for Jesus.

King Herod felt angry as he looked for Jesus.

The wise men couldn’t wait to find Jesus because they wanted to worship him.

King Herod couldn’t wait to find Jesus because he wanted to kill him!

The wise men ended up full of joy because they found Jesus.

And King Herod?

He ended up full of rage because he didn’t find Jesus.

Different Journeys

To emphasise the different route that the Wise Men had to take at the end of this week’s story in order to avoid Herod, you could play a game of Snakes and Ladders (either table-top or if adventurous mark a large board on the floor with masking tape) but reverse the usual journey by going up the snakes and down the ladders.
worship ideas

All-Age Worship

We assume that in most churches this week and next week there will not be children’s groups meeting and that worship will be all-age focussed. We do not provide separate age group ideas this week, but you will find some craft ideas and activities that could be used depending on your setting within worship.

Through the Season

Please remember to check pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season introducing symbolism for the theme being explored this week and encouraging a sense for worshippers that each week is thematically tied together.

Gathering Activity

Encourage those who gather to think of the year that is coming to a close.
- What are some of the things that they might have done differently?
- Would they have travelled a different road at any point this year?

Encourage people to sit and reflect for a few moments. You may want to play the song ‘A Different Road’ by Kathy Troccoli (http://youtu.be/-P2awWTJmGU).

After the song, encourage people to think about how we might travel a different road in our churches and communities as we seek to bring about God’s vision.

Call to Worship

Go this way.
Go that way.
Do it this way.
Do it that way.
Be here.
Be there.
However we feel, wherever we are on our journey, God is with us, here, now and always.

Responses

Leader: On the road,
All: God is with us.
Leader: In our joys,
All: God is with us.
Leader: In our challenges,
All: God is with us.
Leader: In our community,
All: God is with us.
Leader: In our church,
All: God is with us.
Leader: Let us go another way, and walk the road less travelled
All: because God is with us.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, you did a wonderful thing in bringing to life your Son. A child born in your image—a miracle of creation that brought light and glory to our world.

The celebrations in these last weeks have been bold, colourful, extravagant, and merry. The familiar carols tell us a story of loyalty and miracle. Your love for us is unconditional and only you could have gifted us the most precious gift available to creation—the gift of your very self.

In this Christmas Season, we seek to reflect the adoration of the Magi who, with the Shepherds, were the very first visitors to behold your Son.

We bring him our own gift today; more precious than gold or silver, or precious perfume. We bring him our gratitude and our heartfelt promise to live as his people.

Merciful God, you sent a star to guide the men from the East to the place where the baby lay. You helped them understand the significance of what they saw and allowed them to decide wisely on the best road to take home.

We are sorry for those times when we turn a blind eye to the guidance you give us as we seek to follow our own path of faith.

We are sorry for being slow to be moved by the miracles of your goodness that are made known to us day by day.

We are sorry for sometimes taking the wrong paths, for being led by others when their advice or ideas are wrong, for those times we have been diverted from the moral road, choosing instead a lesser code to live by.

Lord help us. Have mercy on us. Lead us by a brighter star, that we might walk the road that makes you happy. In your Son’s name we pray.
Amen.
worship ideas

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Heavenly Father,
after the time Jesus was born,
the world became a different place.
There was no turning back.
You revealed your hand and it was gracious and powerful.

After the time Jesus was born,
no more were we left in the dark as to what you looked like.
It was clear what you stood for
and clear what your people were asked to replicate.

After the time Jesus was born,
the tables were turned.
Born in a lowly stable, you claimed the poor,
the downtrodden, the victim, and those scorned
as the people who needed special protection:
who deserved, and deserve to this day,
the love of those whose lives were and are more comfortable.

After the time Jesus was born,
you, God, became one of us.
After the difficulties of a long journey,
the anxiety of finding a place,
the clamour of excitement as angels foretold the birth,
you gave Mary and Joseph,
the shepherds and wise men,
peaceful, precious moments
where the significance and joy of the Christmas miracle
was able to be absorbed more deeply.

Grant us that same peace now in these holy-days.
Let us enjoy the significance of the moment,
and the knowledge of that special protection
you grant us day by day through life.
For we are your people
and Christ was born for us,
Christ was born for us.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Lord, what can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man, I would do my part.
Yet, what can I give him? I give him my heart.

Nothing Lord can repay what you have given to us.
No riches of the world amount to the debt we owe you.
Yet, in your gracious love for us,
you demand only that we be faithful to you
and care tenderly for your people.
Accept these offerings as a sign of faithfulness,
and use them for the tender care of your people
through the mission and witness of your church in the world.
Amen.

All-Age Prayer

In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind might moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.

Lord, take us back to Christmas 1914, lest we forget
what people lived through and died for back then.
Far from home, no comfy bed to sleep on,
but rather endless noise,
an unrelenting threat to life
and the cold, the terrible bitter pervasive cold.

Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
in the bleak mid-winter, long ago.

Lord, in the darkness and the depth of human suffering,
in the poverty of human hope, even there
heaven could not hold him back,
nor the circumstances of the time prevent him
from touching the human spirit and re-igniting
the warmth of the good within.

Lord, when you touch us with your goodness,
you bring the possibility of a change in perspective.
We thank you for this eternal hope.

Bring us from anxiety to peace, fear to confidence,
lethargy to energy, self-focus to wider vision.

Grant us the miracle of Christmas Spirit,
that in our lives we might see before us the different route,
the different paths,
the different options that reflect your love:
the ones made visible only by the light of the Christ-child,
your Son.
Amen.

Activities

Ask everyone what languages they know. Then give people
a short phrase to say in that language, perhaps “Hello, I am
looking for a baby” or “I have gifts for the King.” Teach any
children present the simple phrases or words in a variety of
different languages.

What would it be like being from a foreign country and not
knowing the language everyone else spoke?

Then try a simple game of charades to get over the same short
phrases.
Craft Activities

Different Routes

You will need: black A5 card, gold or silver stick-on stars, dotty stickers (large selection of colours and sizes).

Prepare the A5 black card by placing a stick-on star in the upper left hand corner.

Give each child their piece of black card with the star in place and ensure it is in the upper left hand corner when they place it down in front of them. Explain that you would like them to journey from the star in the upper left hand corner to the lower right hand corner of their card. Explain that the way they are going to do that is to use the sticky dots and stick them on like a pathway so that they can make their own route to the lower right hand corner. Encourage them not to go straight there in a diagonal line. Hopefully their pathways will bend their way all over the card and when complete, all the pathways will be different routes to the same place!

Use the children’s different routes as a talking point and talk about the story and the different route the wise men were encouraged to take from the star back to their home in order to avoid Herod. Why was this necessary? Discuss why we might have to sometimes change our route or the way we are going in the way we live and why.

Spinning Shiny Star

You will need: star shapes for each child cut from shiny card and measuring approximately 8 c.m. across, very fine strands of tinsel or thin (streamer-like) strands of shiny holographic paper approx. 10 c.m. long, straws, PVA glue, glue spreader, sticky tape, and scissors.

Give each child a star and ask them to glue some of the tinsel or strands of holographic paper onto each point of the star on the front side. They should then turn the star over and attach the straw to the back of the star using the sticky tape, ensuring it is securely fastened. Once attached, the straw can then be rubbed between their hands to produce a spinning effect with the strands of shiny paper or tinsel adding to the sparkle effect.

Talk with the children about the star that the wise men followed. Discuss the story and why they then had to go home by a different route. Talk about times when we have to change our plans as we travel through life.

Reflection

A Time For Seeking

When we seek with a pure heart we find the joy of glad tidings, the excitement of a new king, the mystery of the starlit journey, the anticipation of those wise men—such innocents abroad!

They trusted the despot, but they also listened to the still small voice.

In this Christmas season it is not always easy to find Jesus.

We ask, we seek, we hope.

Where is he?
Is he here in our church building?
Is he out there in our community?
Or is he within us, gently pushing us on, and out, turning chance encounters with strange visitors into rich blessings?

If we need to go home by a different path, show us.
If we need to listen carefully, to discern who to trust, guide us.
If we need time to recognise the real riches presented to us this Christmas, let us be, simply be, until time and light and love penetrate the darkness and show us the right way home.
worship ideas

Take Home Ideas

Journeying Homeward, Seeing Christ and Journalling On

Print copies of the take home sheet available on page 113 so that everyone has a copy as they leave the service.

This sheet will encourage worshippers to continue on the journey homeward, seeing Christ at work around them in different aspects of their life, and providing a simple journalling activity to do each day of the week.

This could provide a lead-in preparation for Epiphany and a discussion point or activity or means to encourage sharing of ideas and thoughts amongst the congregation.

Sending

Leader: We have sought,
All: we have found,
Leader: we have looked,
All: we have been guided.
Leader: We go onward, ever searching.
All: We go forward, always seeking.
Leader: God has been here! God is here!
All: God will never leave us!

Praise/Hymns

Angels from the realms of glory CH4 324 / MP 35
As with gladness CH4 326 / MP 39
At this time of giving MP 42
Bethlehem, a noble city CH4 325
Carol of the Epiphany WGRG in "Innkeepers & Light Sleepers"
Come and join the celebration MP 83
In the bleak mid-winter CH4 305 / MP 337
Little donkey ATAS 314
O come and join the dance MP 489
Riding out across the desert ATAS 320
See him lying on a bed of straw CH4 310 / MP 589
The first Nowell CH4 323 / MP 644
We three kings of orient are MP 740
When he comes MP 752
Who would think that what was needed CH4 295
Wise men, they came to look for wisdom CH4 328
Running From or Running To?

A mid the revelry of Christmas Celebrations and the holiness of incarnation, the talk of the massacre of infants is rather hard to stomach. It is far easier for us to just ignore this part of the story, for we are not ready to be brought back to earth after the glory of the heavenly events occurring in Bethlehem. ‘Ignorance may be bliss’ when it comes to contemplating the suggestion that the birth of one child results in the slaughter of many other children.

If we choose not to ignore it, what do we conclude? Some might be drawn to talk of such things as collateral damage, good out of bad, and the necessity of a series of events that ultimately fulfil God’s plan. Others would prefer to talk of those things that are the unintended consequences of God’s creative interventions, his pain in the loss of any of his children, his agonising over the activities and actions of his people, to whom he has given liberty of thought and freedom to act, and which hurt whenever those actions divert from his loving plan for the world.

What we might agree is that rather than the birth of Jesus taking place in a pristine, sterile, and unrealistic backdrop, the fact it is set within the background of the despicable suffering of children, is good news for the world. God’s love comes to humanity, not in the circumstances of fairy tale, but in the mire and grit of real human suffering.

Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt and when told the way was safe, travelled to Judea and settled in Nazareth.

As we look at the story we can view the thought-processes and actions of Joseph and Mary in two ways. We can accept that it was all about flight. Facing the dangers and threats posed by Herod’s insecurity, they fled in an attempt to keep safe. They ran away and found sanctuary in Egypt.

We can also, however, view their actions as less reactive and more proactive. It was time to get up and go. Yes, they ran away from an immediate physical threat, but they were also running straight towards God and what he had in store for them, especially for his Son. In showing that Mary and Joseph faithfully trusted the ‘Angels of the Lord’ and did what they asked, Matthew reveals a proactive and faithful activity within the earthly family entrusted with the care and nurture of God’s Son. This family moved away from Herod and they moved towards and into the destiny of a child who would become Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ, Messiah, in due course.

There is much we can reflect on in this story. Some commentators would suggest there is strong emphasis made by Matthew on parts of the story that perhaps fulfilled older prophecies. Other commentators warn about making too much of this. Professor Willie Barclay, for example, pointed out that nowhere in the Old Testament does it say ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’. He suggests Matthew might be using a play on words, taking the word Nezer (meaning branch) and linking it to Isaiah 11:1 (and the branch that will grow from the stump of Jesse).

There is altogether too much choice in the particular focus to take in looking at a story such as this within the limited space of these Bible Notes. But what we might conclude with is the option which seems most appropriate as we step in to a new year:

Do we run from or do we run to something? As we greet this new year do we say, ‘let’s hope this year is better than last’, or do we say ‘let’s make this year the best we can’? Can we cultivate a get up and go attitude, and like Mary and Joseph, move in the direction of God, prepared to trust him and see where our journey with him will take us?
Night Flight

A dialogue between two unnamed neighbours of Bethlehem. 'A' begins in a state of panic, with 'B' not knowing why. After discovering the empty house, their conversation should be quieter and more reflective as they try to make sense of what has happened and seek to find hope in it.

Voice A: (Frantically) JOSEPH! JOSEPH!
Voice B: What’s all the yelling for at this hour of the morning?
Voice A: Have you seen Joseph?
Voice B: Of course I haven’t, he’ll still be in his bed.
Voice A: We’ve got to find him. He’s got to hide the wee one.
Voice B: He’s got to what? Goodness, what’s all that noise?
Voice A: Oh no, no, they’re still at it!
Voice B: Who? What’s going on?
Voice A: Soldiers! Rampaging everywhere! They’re after the children!
Voice B: Nooooo!
Voice A: Most of us heard in time. Most of the boys are safe. Hidden. JOSEPH!
Voice B: Oh no! Their wee Jesus! But why the children?
Voice A: I don’t know. Nobody knows, but they’ll kill whoever they find -any of them. JOSEPH!
Voice B: But they haven’t found any of them, have they? I mean, they haven’t, have they?
Voice A: Yes, yes they have. Daniel and Abad, and Musa’s twins, and Levi’s youngest... (exiting)
Voice B: God help us. Nooooo! JOSEPH!
Voice A: (re-entering, utterly bewildered and quieter) They’re not there.
Voice B: What?
Voice A: They’ve gone. The house is empty.

Voice B: Surely not.
Voice A: They’ve taken half of what they own. In the night. They must have left in the night.
Voice B: Do you think they knew? Did somebody warn them?
Voice A: How could they have known? And why would they not warn the rest of us?
Voice B: Where would they go?
Voice A: I don’t know.
Voice B: Do you think they’re safe?
Voice A: I don’t know. I hope so.
Voice B: Joseph would die if any harm came to his boy. I hope he’s far away and still running. I hope he never hears about Musa and Levi. I don’t blame him for not stopping to think of us. If he somehow felt the danger, of course he would just pack up and run.
Voice A: Maybe he left to protect us all. After all the fuss of those wealthy strangers putting the village on their map. Don’t you remember how nervous Joseph got? He prayed that they wouldn’t return to the palace and draw attention to a working man’s house and family.
Voice B: It does seem more than a coincidence—those visitors and now this? But why? Why five dear children to bury and ten grieving parents to console?
Voice A: But most are safe and one has escaped.
Voice B: I would have loved to see that boy grow up, you know. I can’t see Joseph ever bringing him back here.
Voice A: May God be with him. If he grows up to be half the man his father is, he will do well.

Retelling For Young People

Where Is He?

Do you remember King Herod, who was looking for Jesus when Jesus was still very young? Herod was very angry to hear Jesus being called a king.

"I am the King around here!" thought Herod.

He was determined to kill anyone who might one day try to be king. But at first he didn’t find Jesus. He expected the wise men to tell him exactly where this baby boy was—the baby they thought was so special. But the wise men went away from home—far, far away—without telling Herod a thing!

“How dare they! How dare they leave without reporting back to me exactly where to find the child they were searching for!" Herod was very angry, and very scared too.

"I know what I’ll do!" he said. And he sent out his soldiers. "To Bethlehem. I know the child king is somewhere in Bethlehem, so go and kill all the little boys in Bethlehem. Kill them all! Then I’ll know I must have got rid of the one who would have grown up thinking he’ll be king!"

But King Herod didn’t know he was already too late. Joseph and Mary and Jesus had already escaped. They had left their home and run away in the middle of the night, far away from Bethlehem, far away from the soldiers, far away from King Herod.

What a terrible day it was. Soldiers banging on all the doors in Bethlehem, breaking into people’s houses, searching for their children, killing any little boys they could find. But Joseph and Mary’s house was empty. Jesus was safe with his parents, and once again King Herod didn’t get what he wanted.
**worship ideas**

**All-Age Worship**

We assume that in most churches this week there will not be children’s groups meeting and that worship will be all-age focussed. We do not provide separate age group ideas this week, but you will find some craft ideas and activities that could be used depending on your setting within worship.

**Through the Season**

Pages 4 and 5 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season introducing symbolism for the theme being explored this week and encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together.

**Gathering Activity**

What are our resolutions? How many of us have kept them or broken them already? Encourage those who gather to think about something they could do to be more proactive in the way they engage with the church, or with their faith and service of God. As we stand at the threshold of a new year, what can we do to bring more ‘get up and go’ to our churches?

**Call to Worship**

As a new year dawns, God is with us.
In our service of others,
in our hopes and our dreams,
in our regrets and uncertainties,
in our church and our worship,
God is with us.

**Responses**

Leader: A New Year...
All: a new vision.

Leader: A New Year...
All: a new energy.

Leader: A New Year...
All: a new hope for change.

Leader: A New Year...
All: a new chance to bring about God’s vision.

**Prayer of Adoration**

God of past years and new years,
we recognise all time in your hands.

We set out on a new journey,
expecting twists and turns along the road.

We set out prepared for challenge,
and anticipating great joy.

We set out as believers,
believing that, no matter what, you will journey with us.

Help us have the ‘Get up and Go’,
to travel boldly with faith
and live expectantly under your Spirit.

Starting now, Lord, here in worship
on this first Sunday of a bright and promising New Year,
we commit to listening faithfully to your voice
and following your direction.

In the name of Jesus we pray.
Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

Merciful God,
sometimes the world can be harsh.
This is not of your choosing.

The weak and vulnerable find it hard
to escape from the challenges they face;
chased down by the dark forces of poverty, of hunger,
of poor health, the future looks bleak.
This is not of your choosing.

Those who live under the sceptre of violence,
domestic or more widespread,
hide away in the shadows trying to stay safe.
This is not of your choosing.

The power lies with a small proportion of individuals
and governments of the world,
with the result that some live feeling they have no voice,
no rights, no justice, no freedom.
This is not of your choosing.

And the children, Lord, yes the children,
those who are most precious in your eyes,
are so often ill-treated and poorly provided for
by those who should protect them.
This is not of your choosing.

Lord, it is too easy for us to say that little,
if not none, of this is our fault.
Too easy to say that we neither chose nor created such a world.

Yet Lord, today we recognise that together
with the whole of humanity none of us can escape blame.

So, for being part of a world where such harshness is known
and overlooked, we say sorry.

In mercy hear us.
In mercy release us.
In mercy help us.

Let us get up and go,
forward into a new and fresh start,
ready to receive direction from you,
and willing to be those who,
through love and justice for our neighbours,
effect change in the world.

Let it be your choosing Lord.
Amen.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Lord God,
seeking to look forward, we first look back,
recognising all that you provide for our lives.

We thank you for family, work, leisure-time and faith.
We thank you for a world, limitless in possibility.
We thank you for the opportunities that have come our way,
for friendship and love.

Lord God, having looked back,
we now look forward seeking more of the same.
Protect us from those things that challenge us
to the point of despair
and grant to us abundance in those experiences
that lead to knowing ourselves richly blessed.

Today we give thanks for those
who protect the weak and the vulnerable.
Often the first to make self-sacrifice,
we pray that they continue to be given strength
and that they receive support from the rest of us,
so enabling them to carry on
despite the dangers or the uncertainty.

Today we give thanks especially for those
who would protect the rights of children,
and for those who work with children already scarred
by the thoughtless and loveless acts of others.
We remember social and family workers,
teachers, and those who work for charities
and organisations who have a special interest
in looking after our young people.
May we be more ready to play our part
as we together create a safer world for the young.

Today we give thanks for those who care for older people;
a generation ever-increasing in our society.
We pray for those who look after relatives
and those who work in elderly care.
Let us not forget the needs of older generations
and let us not take for granted those
who take the time to look after them.

God, you sent your Son into the world,
to make it a better place for all people
and to bring us to eternal life.
With all our heart we bless you for this
and with all our potential
we commit ourselves to building your Kingdom on earth.
In your name we pray.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

God of goodness,
sometimes we look to our world
seeing only what is sad or bad:
the collateral damage of power being misused.
May we, today, commit to working for what is good,
with our time, our action, our resources,
that we look out for the refugee, the child in need,
the homeless and the families seeking shelter.

Commission us once more, Lord God,
that we might get up and go
in your name to fulfil your good purpose.
Amen.

All-Age Prayer

Travelling, travelling, travelling.
Forever on a journey that seems to never end.
Joseph and his pregnant fiancée
required to report to Bethlehem,
travelling, travelling, travelling.
A trip at the most inopportune of moments.
It was there the time came for giving birth.

A glorious son was born. God’s Son.
A time for rest one would have thought.
but not for Joseph and Mary and their new son.
Herod saw to it that there was to be no rest.

Off to Egypt they were advised to go.

Travelling, travelling, travelling.
Forever on a journey that seems to never end.
And then it was decreed once the way was safe
that the journey to Judea was now required.
Picking up where they left off, back on the road.
No rest. No rest.

Travelling, travelling, travelling.
Forever on a journey that seems to never end.
Yet, Lord, what faith they showed.
Tired and weary, yet prepared to go where they were told.
What faith, Lord, to journey like that!
To trust like that.

Lord, may we show such faith:
to journey where you decree;
travel on, even when tired.
Such faith, Lord, such faith.
Amen.
Reflection

Shall we play hide and seek?
You go hide and I will find you.
And if I find you, I’ll cut off your head!
Oh, God! How horrific is this event?
The Holy Family running for their lives,
hundreds of other families torn apart,
children ripped from mother’s arms,
and a jealous, suspicious, fearful king appeased.
The child was saved—but at what cost?
There was much rejoicing in heaven—but what about the lament?
It is not the first massacre of children in our Bible history.
It was not the last massacre of children in our world.
Lord, even in the despair of such pain,
there is such loss and such relief.
Show us the hope and expectation
that comes with new starts and new beginnings this new year.
So as we too travel back to where we belong,
as we begin this year anew,
may we seek you out
to find the Christ child in our lives
and follow him wherever he leads.

Activities

Getting Ready For The Journey

Arrange a heap of clothes of similar types in the centre of
the chancel area. These could include several pairs of gloves,
several jumpers, lots of socks, different coats, assorted towels
and so on.
Note, you will need one of each type of item for each team you
form.
Arrange the children into teams to play a relay-style sorting
game where each team has to gather together one of each type
of item as quickly as possible. The team which gathers together
all their items first wins the game!

Pack A Bag

Similar to the previous activity, have a selection of items you
might take with you on a journey and a travel bag. Arrange the
children into pairs and give them the task to see how much
they can fit into the bag in 30 seconds.
Talk about what they chose to take and what to leave, asking
what they would take with them if they ever had to leave their
own in a hurry.

Craft Activities

Looking Back—Looking Forward

You will need: wooden spoons, googly eyes, paints, wool,
scraps of material, coloured paper, coloured doilies, sequins,
paintbrushes, pens, PVA glue, and glue spreaders.

Give each child a wooden spoon and ask them to paint the
bowls of the spoon on both sides in a flesh colour. These will
become the faces of the person. Leave these aside to dry. Now
ask the children to create the bodies for their people, creating
two identical people from the materials provided and ensuring
they add outstretched arms to the person all in proportion to
the spoon size you have chosen.

When the bodies
are complete,
show the children
how to glue one
person’s body to
the front of the
spoon just below
the ‘face’ and one
to the back. The
children can then
add their googly
eyes to both sides of the spoon and create a face either side by
adding the features with a pen or paint and hair using wool or
material.

By holding the person at the bottom of the spoon, the children
can then twist their person to make it look forward and back.
Talk with the children about the story and how Mary, Joseph
and Jesus had to go to another land for a time and not look
back. Talk with the children about the New Year and New Year
resolutions. Then using their people, ask them to look back and
think about what they might like to change this year and then
turning their person around, look forward and decide how they
might make that change in their life

Bag Packing

You will need: blank craft bags (coloured or white (available
from Baker Ross or craft shops)), stickers, sticky letters, coloured
paper, scraps of material, sequins, sticky gems, and so on.

Give each child a bag and ask them to decorate it with their
name on one side and any design they wish using the materials
provided. They should decorate the bag on both sides if time
allows.

Talk with the children about the story and how Mary, Joseph
and Jesus had to go to another land for a time. Discuss what
it would be like to pack quickly and only take what they could
carry. Talk with the children about what Mary and Joseph might
have taken and then discuss what they would wish to take with
them in their bags if they had to go quickly to another place.
What would be their essentials and what would be precious to
them?
Take Home Ideas

Journeying Onward, Birthing Christ and Journalling Homeward

This is the follow-up to last week’s Take Home Idea. Print copies of the sheet found on page 114 so that every worshipper can receive a copy.

This sheet invites everyone to reflect on where they will commit themselves to turn their hope of the Kingdom come into a reality for God’s plan. There are seven activities in order to allow this to be a daily activity used throughout the week.

This activity encourages worshippers to begin a journal for determining prayer and action solutions (not New Year’s resolutions) in order to work towards the Kingdom of God.

This could be followed up sometime in the year. A perfect opportunity might be to create an ‘All Age Service’ when the Race For Life or something similar is being offered near you. Celebrate your own and God’s work in making the plan a reality, perhaps taking a retiral offering for Cancer Research UK. This allows people of all ages, abilities, locations or with other commitments (like church) to be a part of this UK wide initiative.

You can find the date of your nearest event for 2015 here: http://raceforlife.cancerresearchuk.org/choose-your-event/index.html.

Sending

Leader: We got up and came
All: because you invited us here.
Leader: We get up and go
All: because you send us forth now.
Leader: Into the world
All: we go with the Father’s blessing.
Leader: Into a new year
All: we go with Christ’s blessing.
Leader: Into the unknown
All: we go with the Spirit’s blessing.
Leader: Go! Go! Go!

Praise/Hymns

A voice was heard in Ramah available online at http://www.carolynshymns.com/a_voice_was_heard_in_ramah.html
Abraham journeyed to a new country available online at http://www.carolynshymns.com/abraham_journeyed_to_a_new_country.html
Angry Fischy Music on “It’s A Noisy World”
Bad times won’t last Fischy Music on “We’re On This Road”
Come on, let’s get up and go JP 31
For unto us a child is born MP 157
Going on a journey Fischy Music on “These Are Our Emotions”
O little love, who comes again CH4 329
Rumours of angels MP 922
The refugee WGRG in “Innkeepers & Light Sleepers”
The tyrant issues his decree CH4 330
There is a place prepared for little children CH4 746
This child MP 690
Unto us a boy is born CH4 331 / MP 714
When Christ was born in Bethlehem CH3 196
Watershed Moments

The so-called Great Divide or Continental Divide in the continent of the Americas determines whether water drains West or East. It follows the line of the Rockies and the Andes, an obvious physical distinction, carving the land in two.

Just as the Great Divide literally separates the waters out, figuratively "watershed moments" in life are significant times when something quite radical alters. It is as if there is a high peak of decision from which return will not now come.

In the world of modern computers, we are often shielded from the fear of significant and radical change by the "undo" button. There is a way back, a recovery, a start again. The watershed action need not cause the shedding of tears if it fails to work. Just click "undo" or load up the files from the latest backup and it can be as if no mistake was ever committed.

Real watershed moments have no undo button. There is a brink reached and once breached is past with no recovering.

Moses led the Israelites to the very brink of the Promised Land. In a chilling echo of the fate of Moses, Martin Luther King Jr addressed the multitude in Washington in his famous "I have a dream" speech, declaring, "I have seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you...". Moses died on the brink as, tragically, did Martin Luther King Jr.

But there was another echo of Moses long before that Washington rally. John the Baptist stood at a brink in time. It really was a watershed moment. John was calling on people to come for a baptism of repentance, a highly-charged ritual where figuratively the people were washed of a past that bound them and offered a future that could free them.

John was courageous. When Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptised by him, he turned on them with a venom that was bound not to win friends. His criticism of them was out of the mould of "show us your sincerity in the actions that you do, not the words that you speak". John seemed convinced about the cynicism of their coming for the ritual. In John's view, baptism was a watershed between the past and the future, but he was convinced much of their intention was, so to speak, to baptise and thus to bless the very past John called people to leave.

John was especially courageous because, like Moses before him and Martin Luther King Jr long after him, bringing people to the brink of a new life is sometimes the limit that is possible: pointing to the freedom on offer but spending our life in the process.

It can feel unsettling, but churches inevitably change. There are watershed moments for dearly-held traditions when truth gets newly expressed in ways that bring people to their own watershed moment of commitment to Christ.

It might seem strange to suggest it, but the Christian Church (in all its multiple manifestations) plays the role of John the Baptist for people, calling them to a brink of decision on the matter of faith. Indeed, it is most faithful when it seems to spend itself in the process. Is this something of what Jesus means when he calls followers to self-denial? And when the self is the institution of the church, the call might well be to be prepared to take risks for the sake of the freedom faith confers on seekers for truth, called to their individual watershed decision: to follow or not to follow. We cannot do both. The water gets shed.

Living in Freedom

Epiphany 1
Sunday 11 January 2015

Matthew 3:1-17
(Psalm 2:7-8)
The Preacher Man Song

With John's talk of wielding the axe of righteousness, the Spill the Beans team got sidetracked towards Monty Python, leading to a challenge to one of the team to create a parody of the Monty Python "Lumberjack Song" sung by Michael Palin. Here is the irreverent result.

YouTube has many variations of the original. Python fans in your congregation will find this brilliant.

Preacher Man: I always wanted to be... a preacher man!
Travelling from town to town, visiting churches along the mighty river Clyde, and climbing into pulpits in Wanlockhead and Beattock. Standing tall in Wishaw and Hamilton!
Proclaiming the gospel from the towering cranes in Greenock, and the Bridges of Renfrewshire! Proclaiming the old Rugged Cross on the oil Platforms of the North Sea! Delivering 'Thought for the Day' in the Scottish Parliament in Auld Reekie! Regaling the Good News of Jesus on the Islands of Bara, Iona, Millport and Bute! Fighting the good fight in Falkirk and in Denny! Covering the farmlands of Perthshire and the seaside towns of Montrose and Arbroath, to out Gospel Billy Graham!

With my best buddy by my side, we'd sing!
Sing! Sing!
I'm a preacher man, and I'm okay.
I pray all night and I talk all day.

Congregation: He's a preacher man, and he's okay.
He prays all night, and he talks all day.

Preacher Man: I read my bible, say my prayers, make notes on the lavatory.
On weekdays I go swatting, at the Uni libraree!

Congregation: He'll preach to one, he'll preach to all and simple clothes he wears.
A camel coat, a leather belt and sandals for the stairs!
He's a preacher man, and he's okay.
He prays all night, and he talks all day.

Preacher Man: I'll not miss anybody who thinks they're always right.
I will tell the Pharisees They talk a load of...

Congregation: He'll not miss anybody who thinks they're always right. He'll tell those Pharisees they talk a load of rubbish!

Preacher Man: I'll tell them of the greatest, the one who's still to come.
He'll come with greater powers and then my job is done.

Congregation: He'll tell them of the greatest, the one who's still to come. He'll come with greater powers and then his job is done.

Preacher Man: I preach to one, I preach to all and simple clothes I wear.
A camel coat, a leather belt and sandals for the stairs!

Congregation: He'll preach to one, he'll preach to all and speak of sin and shame.
He'll talk of God's forgiveness and baptise one or all.
He's a preacher man, and he's okay.
He prays all night, and he talks all day.
Retelling For Young People

Chop, chop, chop!

Chop, chop, chop.
The times they are a changing.
Chop, chop, chop.
The Baptist man is praying.
Chop, Chop, Chop.
Cutting back the dangers.
Chop, chop, chop!
John is calling on the strangers.
Chop, Chop, Chop!
A new path he is making.
Chop, Chop, Chop!
A Godward road creating.
Chop, chop, chop.
John’s clothes are quite amazing.
Chop, chop, chop.
His food was locusts grazing.
Chop, chop, chop.
Yours sins he wants confessing.
Chop, chop, chop.
Your life he is assessing.

Chop, chop, chop.
A cleansing in the river.
Chop, chop, chop.
A new life is forever.
Chop, chop, chop.
His critics he kept telling.
Chop, chop, chop.
Our John he was yelling.
Chop, chop, chop.
The past is ever present.
Chop, chop, chop.
Good fruit is heaven scented.
Chop, chop, chop.
John’s only the beginning.
Chop, chop, chop.
When Jesus comes were winning.
Chop, chop, chop.
The times they are a changing.
Chop, chop, chop.
Lord Jesus keep on praying.

worship ideas

Through the Season

Pages 6 and 7 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season introducing symbolism for the "living" theme being explored this week and encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together through Epiphany.

Gathering Activity

As people enter the Sanctuary, invite them to take a moment to place their hands above a glass bowl and close their eyes as water is poured over their hands from a jug. Invite them to think about the sensation created by the coolness of the water as it runs over their skin and to ask themselves to imagine how it may have felt to have been in the River Jordan like Jesus and so many others that day.

Then hand each participant a cut out dove with Matthew 3:17 printed on it to remind them of the scene they just imagined as they prepare for worship. A template is provided for this on page 115.

Call to Worship

Leader: As we gather to worship you this day,
All: we prepare a way for you.
Leader: As we answer your call to repent,
All: we seek to make a straight path for you.
Leader: Loving God, as we come before you this day,
All: may we know ourselves to be your children, with whom you may be well pleased.

Gathering Prayer

Like streams flowing towards one another and then on together, so we gather now, each of us to each other, to form together a flowing river of praise: to you, the God whose love sweeps us all up in its overflowing grace.

Prayer of Adoration

We praise you as the God who gets your feet wet!

It sounds strange to say it, but you did it, you got your feet wet in the Jordan, as Jesus was baptised by John, precisely to show you are God and the tide of your love will not be held back.

We praise you as the God who gets your feet wet and dusty and soiled.

For you are no aloof maker, never daring to be as we are, instead you precisely shared our life that we might somehow share yours: daring to dip our toes in the waves on the shores of heaven’s ways.

Amen.
worry ideas

Prayer of Confession
Forgive us our timidity, God.

When you draw us to streams of faith and yet we draw back from drinking for fear of facing the truth, forgive us.

When you call us to rivers of renewal and yet we will not bathe for fear of commitment, forgive us.

When you shower us with a flood of blessings yet we shield ourselves from them for fear we need to change, forgive us.

Forgive us our timidity, God. Encourage us to face our flaws and failings and find faith overflowing.

All Age Prayer
Thank you God, for water’s edges: for shores to paddle in the sun, our toes all tickled as each wave whooshes and sometimes dares to splash us!

Thank you, God, that we don’t stay dry always, but feel the spray and salt and breeze and know somehow that in their touch we sense you are around, washing us, and sometimes splashing us to wake us to your world of glorious wonder.

Prayers for Others and Ourselves
We live in a world of watersheds: of no going backs, of time moving on.

At times, it seems hope alone rules. Decisions loom, questions rise, challenges draw us to a breaking point.

And the breaking is not always bad. For sometimes we need to walk the new way, live the new life, find new faith deepened.

But we pray for all whose lives are at watersheds of an altogether more wounding kind: those whose lives are marred by illness, scarred by sorrow, seared by grief, submerged in doubt, and often coming all of a sudden, with no warning.

And we pray too for those who long that life might herald or require change, but know only too well that this is denied and their present is all too hard to bear.

And we pray for ourselves in all this, for none are immune from the challenges of change. We pray simply that we be faithful to your will and way.

Amen.

Prayer of Dedication
Listening to the voice of one calling in the wilderness, standing by the side of the river, are we prepared to take the plunge?

May we commit ourselves, Lord God, once again looking ahead to this week: to find ways to serve, to find ways to give, to find ways to use our abilities in bringing about change for justice and peace, to find ways to use these offerings in bringing about your Kingdom.

Amen.
Reflection

In the watershed moments of life, may we be like stones in the bed of a river, made smooth by the rushing water.

During times of change, through deep water and raging rapids, let us be ever aware of your calming presence around us.

As our sharpest edges are worn away, help us find purpose in our challenges, open to the river’s every changing course.

Free To Be?

How do I live?
As though I have been baptised into freedom or shackled by life’s demands?

It’s a big question and it’s not easy to disentangle one from the other!

There are people and things and activities I love. They give me a sense of connectedness and purpose. I cling to them for my own security and seldom do I ask the question: “Is this how I am meant to live?”

The answer on some points of course might be yes. I am supposed to love and care for and protect my loved ones. I am called to steward and share my gifts and talents and time.

But then there is that sneaking shadow that creeps over my mind and heart that reminds me that sometimes I give in to the demands placed upon me when I know that I could be, maybe even should be, living a more full life.

And the biggest shock of all, this shadow is not darkness, but the impression cast by God’s light!

Perhaps the biggest shackle of them all is my own fear of freedom: of become someone I do not yet know.

The sense of insecurity that change brings, of shifting sands, looking in the mirror of my own self-understanding and seeing someone I don’t recognise.

I am called for transformation, to be who God will make me. Help me, God my strength, to get to know this person, this stranger, who will do, say, and live in ways that I have not yet imagined but which reveal the image of God in me, still being realised in my heart and actions.

Freedom. What a scary and wonderful thing your gift. Let me grasp it, live it, and rejoice in it now.

Sending

All: We have gathered in expectation.
Leader: Go forward now, on the path that lies before us. And may God guide our footsteps.

All: May his light pave the way!
Leader: May our courage give us boldness

All: and God’s grace fill us with peace.
Leader: This day and all days.

Praise/Hymns

At the name of Jesus CH4 458 / MP 41
Christ is our light CH4 336
Christ, whose glory fills the skies CH4 578 / MP 79
Emmanuel MP 120
Father, we love you MP 142
For I’m building a people of power MP 151
Go, tell it on the mountain MP 179
Guide me, O thou great Jehovah CH4 167 / MP 201
Hail to the Lord’s anointed CH4 474 / MP 204
Have you heard the raindrops CH4 525
O Lord, thou art my God and King CH4 100
On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry CH4 334
Spirit of God divine MP 610
Spirit of the living God CH4 619 / MP 613
Take my life, Lord, let it be CH4 502

Take Home Ideas

A sheet is provided on page 116 which can be printed and passed to members to take away with them, or you can use those ideas/content in your own way.

The purpose is to encourage worshippers to expand their vision and begin to look out in a structured way to the months of the year that lie ahead.
Rivers

You will need: images of rivers (either photographs, magazine clippings, internet images).

Talk about rivers that are nearby to your location, then explore some of the images of other rivers (make sure you have a range of different rivers, some big, some small, perhaps including a picture of the Jordan river). What rivers have the children visited or walked alongside?

Use this as a way into this week’s story which is set at the Jordan river.

activities

A Baptismal What’s What? age 3-5

You will need: a baptismal font (if able to be moved), baptismal bowl, baptismal certificate, baby doll.

Talk to the children about the items. Have they seen them before? Would they like to touch them? Ask questions about baptisms at your church. What do they look like? Perhaps let the children take the doll and mime out what the minister does at a baptism.

The Lord Bless You age 6-12

You will need: copies of the traditional Aaronic blessing (CH4 796).

The children may be familiar already with this blessing, often sung after a child is baptised. Do they know it word for word? Try teaching it and explaining what each phrase means.

Rabble Rouser age 6-12

John the Baptist was a bit of a rabble rouser in the best of ways. Using the worksheet available on page 118, let the children come up with words for each letter for a good rabble rouser and also for a bad rabble rouser.

The Voice Of One Crying Out age 9-12

Provide a selection of images or headings for the children to look at. Instruct each child to select one image. The images should relate to poverty, homelessness, bullying, starvation, and so on. Who or what would they advocate for? Who cries out for these people?

Confessions age 9-12

The people that John the Baptist was baptising were adults. When they were baptised, they confessed their sins (wrongdoings) to God and asked for forgiveness. Discuss differences in baptisms by denomination. For example, you could explain that Baptists are baptised as adults and with full immersion. Some churches meet at their local river or lake where the baptism takes place. Other churches also baptise children. Explain that we can go to God at any time and talk to him about anything and tell him anything even when we have done something wrong and we can do that through our prayers.

crafts

Camel Clothes age 3-5

You will need: one roll of lining paper, thick crayons, scraps of material and wool in ‘camel’ colours, PVA glue, glue spreaders, scissors, and cord or string to make belts.

Before you meet, cut this into pieces of about 150 c.m., fold that piece in half at about 75 c.m. across width and then draw a semi-circle at the fold. Approximately 20 c.m. in from the outside edges, cut out the semi-circle and this will make a neckline of a simple tunic shape. Make a template for each child.

Give each child a ‘tunic’ and instruct them to decorate it by colouring designs on it with crayons and sticking scraps of wool and material on it. Let the children wear the tunics and tie a ‘belt’ of cord or string around their waists.

Talk with the children about how John the Baptist would have looked a bit strange to people around about him, but that he had an important message for the people. Discuss people who have important messages for us today: parents, families, church, other children, and so on.

River Pictures age 6-12

You will need: card photo frames or cheap wooden picture frames, scraps of wool in different shades of blue, PVA glue, glue spreaders, scissors, thin card cut to size that will fit inside the photo/picture frames you have selected, and felt tip pens.

Give each child a frame and instruct them to decorate the frame by sticking lengths of wool onto the frame. It is best to put the glue onto the frame in sections and to fill one section at a time. The wool can be laid in straight lines, waves, spirals or any other patterns the children like. While the glue is drying, give each child a card insert for their frame and get them to write their name and a symbol from the story (water, dove, sandals or some such) onto the card. Next, insert the card into the frame to complete the picture.

Talk about the story and the people who came to the River Jordan to be baptised by John. Discuss with the children why they think the people came to be baptised and how they think John felt when Jesus came to be baptised. Talk with the children about people who have helped them to understand more about God’s message.

River Walking all age

You will need: one large sheet of thick plastic or an old cotton bed sheet, PVA glue, glue spreaders, scissors, blue tissue paper, blue cellophane, scraps of blue fabric and blue wool, A4 card, and felt tip pens.

Instruct the children to cut materials into strips and then to glue the strips on to the plastic or cotton sheet to make a ‘river’. Have the children draw a sandal, footprint or shoe they would wear onto the A4 card, colouring it and cutting out the shoe/foot they have drawn. Stick these onto the ‘river’.

Discuss the message of John the Baptist and the people who came to hear him and be baptised in the River Jordan. Talk with the children about people who have helped them to think about things in different ways.
Use The Clues  age 3-5

You will need: image of stones, fruit, water, axe, fire, viper, fork or other objects from this week’s bible story.

Hide images of the objects mentioned in this bible passage. Then give the children simple clues for the object you want them to find. For example, ask the children to find an image of something that you might eat with. Carry on until all the images have been collected. Talk about how the images relate to the story.

Five Stones  age 6-12

You will need: five small stones.

This is the real old fashioned game of five stones. Instruct the children to throw five stones off the back of their hand and then catch as many as they can in the palm of their hand. Holding what they caught (if any) in the palm, they must throw them up and try and pick up one that is on the ground, which is far more difficult than it looks.

If you do not know this game, ask an older person in the congregation if they ever played it as a child. You can find different variations here: http://youtu.be/Uh79oPvULwY.

Locust Drive  age 6-12

You will need: copies of the Locust Drive sheet (see page 117) for each child, pencils, 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 game can also lead into telling John the Baptist’s story, as you share how much John loved to munch locusts.

Streams and Rivers  age 6-12

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.

Named Rivers (Jordan)  age 9-12

You will need: a list of river names for the country in which you live, or worldwide.

Many Christian names and river names are the same today, like Jordan. Let the children pick out the names of the rivers that are Christian names and then ask them to select two river names, one that could be turned into a boy’s name and then one for a girl’s name. What names would they like?

Froggy, Froggy  age 9-12

Play the game of “Froggy, Froggy may we cross your golden river” with the person in the middle calling out ‘not unless you have the colour … on’. Those wearing the specified colour walk across to the other side of the room and those who do not must try to get past the person in the middle without being caught.
Preparation
All you need for this week is your imagination and some bibles!

Opening Activity
I Went To The Shops
This is a memory game. Sit in a circle. The first player says ‘I went to the shops and I bought a… (item beginning with A). The person to the left then says I went to the shops and I bought an… (item beginning with A) and a (item beginning with B) and so on until you get to Z.

If a person forgets something, then help them out. You can use adjectives, but only if they begin with the same letter (eg for ‘P’: a pot of purple paint). The shop can sell anything at all from an aeroplane to a zebra.

The Word
Read Matthew 3:1-17. Be dramatic. John is a big character!

Discussion
This is a ‘watershed’ moment. Something new is happening but the Pharisees are stuck in the past, more concerned with their own power than following God.

John knows what is coming. There is a lot of imagery in this passage that echoes with the Old Testament stories. The wilderness, the Temple, the Jordan, the fruit tree and the axe, fire and water.

Ask the group to find as many comparisons and opposites as they can.

- What stories do these echo with?

Try and remember as many as you can. Spend some time telling those stories you remember. You could use some bibles with an index or even search an online bible if you get stuck.

Living It Out
- What’s next for you?
- What are you hanging on to?
- What holds you back from God?
Russell Crowe, as the character Noah in the film of the same name, played a scene where he came face to face with his own imperfections and anger despite being called by God in the story to be, effectively, a new Adam. Following a foray out to look at the wickedness of the city, he declared to his wife in despair, “The wickedness is not just in them, it’s in all of us. I saw it.” It is poetic license in the film, of course, but made a powerful point. God works through people despite their imperfections.

There is plenty of scriptural backing to disabuse us of any notions to perfection and sinlessness. The writer of the first letter of John in the New Testament gives a stark warning, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, bemoans his own inability to avoid doing the wrong thing even though he knows what was right. Even Jesus was subjected to temptation.

There was a horrified outcry in the wake of the film, “The Last Temptation of Christ”, directed by Martin Scorsese from the book by Nikos Kazantzakis. There were charges of blasphemy because in the film Jesus is depicted on the cross imagining, in his agonised ending, what it would have been like if his initial prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane had been granted and that the “cup of pain” had been taken from him and he did not have to endure the cross. In his imagining, he married and had children. If he really was “sweating blood” in Gethsemane (as Luke’s account suggests) when he prayed the prayer, why would such an imagining in the midst of the agony of the cross be so surprising?

The poetic license of the two movies mentioned above notwithstanding, Paul and the writer of First John show we are all in good company; temptations are inevitable. Yielding, however, is not. But the New Testament testifies to our being more sinners than saints in that regard. There are shadowed lands in the heart of all our beings. We all live with temptation. Acknowledging this to be so is not an end to hope but a start to salvation.

What is going on in this week’s temptations passage? Partly, it is Matthew showing the steadfast nature of Jesus despite having been in the wilderness and fasting for forty days and nights (hardly the ideal preparation for resisting tempting offers). Partly it is Matthew making sure that at every turn, Jesus fulfils Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. “This was to fulfil what was written...” is a refrain heard again and again in his gospel. But the passage is also another strike against power, as was John the Baptist’s criticism of the Scribes and Pharisees coming for baptism in last week’s gospel passage. Jesus is offered the whole world but rejects the offer because of the price it would exact of having to worship another and because power over people in that sense is the antithesis of the gospel way. Compelling faith in someone is a contradiction in terms. Living self-givingly is the call.

There are striking parallels between last week and this. Jesus, as John the Baptist before, was in the wilderness. Jesus, as John the Baptist before, speaks challenging words to power. Jesus, as John the Baptist before, preaches a challenge to repentance. John prepared the way. The brink was reached. The water shed. The fulfilment lay ahead. There was no doubt. The time had come. The one awaited was here. Scripture was being fulfilled.
The story

The Temptation Of Jesus

The other side of the temptation story.

Look at him. Sitting there praying and fasting. I mean, this is meant to be the Son of God? He could do anything he likes but creeps out to the wilderness after being baptised by his cousin John. He is the one who is greater than John? We shall see about that! It is time he had a dose of reality. The desert is not the real world, it’s time he saw for himself what he could be.

Let’s see if he can come on board with me, make a new merger, and create a “better world” for the likes of us!

Hey, Jesus. You must be starving by now. You must be ready for something to eat now. I mean, don’t you just love the smell of warm, freshly cooked bread? Biting into the hard crust and the warm doughy bit just melting in your mouth. MMM, delicious! Oh, I can see you are moved by the thought, but there ain’t no ovens out here for baking bread, just the sun and all those lovely stones.

But I don’t need to tell you this. You know yourself how easy it would be to turn those stones into bread. You only have to give the word; it would be easy, your hunger would be satisfied. Just think of all those hungry people you could feed with all those stones? 5,000 would be nothing! 500 million would be something else. We could do it together, you and I. We could get people on our side. They would do anything for us with their bellies full.

Hey Jesus, don’t tell me that we don’t live on bread alone. You try telling people who are hungry in the world, that God’s word alone will satisfy them. Get real man. They want real food. Jesus, you and I could be something special. You and I could have real power. We could conquer the world, you and I. I mean, we could make it big without God. Look at this city and beyond. The world is endless for you and me: we could have people eating out of our hands. No one could resist us and we would be unstoppable! I mean you could do anything you liked and God would rescue you. You could wow people by taking leaps off the top of buildings and letting God rescue you at the bottom. Folk go for those kind of parlour tricks. They love a gimmick, a miracle. You could do it Jesus and prove to them that you are the Son of God. Save all this fasting and praying for those religious types.

Come on Jesus! I am only saying that a wee bit of magic goes a long way. You’re not testing God, you’re proving God. It would be easy!

Anyway Jesus, what is God offering you? A chance to rule in his kingdom or in the whole world. Think big, Jesus. We could have everything we wanted: money, land, power and prestige. Why should God get all the kudos? We could have the whole world at our feet Jesus and all you need to do is give me the nod and we will sign the contract now. Food, miracles, power? That’s what we all want Jesus. Your talk of the future, about peace and harmony and forgiveness of sins? Where is that going to get you? How many people in the future will want those things?

Ach, Jesus! Away and serve your God then, but you better watch out: I am after you. You go and live in your wee backwater village, when the whole world could have been yours.

Retelling For Young People

Temptation or Right Choices

It is not easy making the right choices. Present the following scenarios of temptation or right choices to the children, and get them to stand for what they think is the right choice. Perhaps you could reward those who make the right choice with a sweet, and maybe you could suggest that in the temptation story Jesus had to make the right choices that in the long run would be the right way to live before God. When we make the right choices for God in our life we benefit ourselves and others.

“Hey Mum, I’m starving!” said Billy

“Well you just have to wait another hour until you get your dinner she replied. Go and get your brother to help you with your homework,” his mother replied.

Billy went off to find Josh to help him with his homework, but Josh had other ideas because he was also hungry. “Hey Billy! I will help you with your homework if you go and get me one of mum’s fresh baked new scones. Can’t you just smell them baking. Mum will never notice if you take a couple and you move them around on the plate!”

Which of these would be the right choice for Billy to make:

A) To steal the scone for Josh and himself.
B) To wait until his mum says it is okay to have a scone.
Through the Season

Pages 6 and 7 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season introducing symbolism for the theme being explored this week and encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together.

Gathering Activity

As people gather for worship, use your audio/visual equipment or printed orders of service (if you use either) to encourage people to talk with the people around them about ‘wilderness experiences’. If you have neither, perhaps those greeting people at the door could invite them to do it.

Questions to reflect upon could include:

• When have you felt ‘in the wilderness’?
• Are such moments always a negative experience?

Call to Worship

Leader:  Even when we feel alone in the wilderness,
         All:  we worship you and serve only you.

Leader:  Despite the temptations life may throw at us
         All:  we worship you and serve only you.

Leader:  As we contemplate the path ahead
         All:  we worship you and serve only you, wherever it may lead.

Jenny, on the other hand, had been busy practicing for her dance display all week. She had been out rehearsing every night and was feeling a little tired. When her teacher Mrs Wilson announced they were going to have a spelling test Jenny groaned, because she had not learned any of the words. She knew she should have studied some more, but she loved her dancing and wanted to do the best. Her best friend Pamela sat next to her. She was always top of the class at spelling. Jenny thought that maybe this once she could look at Pamela’s paper and copy her answers down. No one would know, she thought to herself, it would be just one time she promised herself.

What would be the right choice for Jenny?
A) To cheat and copy Pamela’s work.
B) Admit to Mrs Wilson that she had not studied for her spelling test.

Alice and Malcolm walked the same road to school every day. They walked through the park together, and on this one day they came across a rope tied to a tree that meant you could swing on the rope and it could take you out over a fast flowing river and back again. Malcolm thought that would be really thrilling and exciting. He thought it would be loads of fun, and it wouldn’t take long to have a quick shot on the swing and then rush to school. Alice did not think the rope on the swing looked very safe. It looked to be in poor condition, and the tree looked as if it was very old, and many of the branches had fallen off the tree. She thought the tree looked quite sick. She also thought it could be exciting to swing on the tree but she didn’t want to go first.

What choice would be the right one for Alice and Malcolm?
A) To have fun on the swing and enjoy the moment.
B) Think about how dangerous this swing could be for others and tell an adult.

Choosing to do the right thing is not always easy, but doing the right thing is what God asked of all us, even Jesus himself as today’s Bible reading reminds us.

worship ideas

Gathering Prayer

Leader:  From the busy, bustling world to this quiet centre,
         All:  God, gather us.

Leader:  From the noises all around to this silent sacred space,
         All:  God, gather us.

Leader:  From the constant back and forth to a stillness and a calm.
         All:  God, gather us.

Leader:  Gather us, we pray, in this time to peace,
         All:  in this place of praise.

All-Age Prayer

How could we not want to praise you?
You are not an option:
as if we can speak you into not being.
You are God, the Maker of all there is.
We cannot pretend otherwise.
And why would we want to?
You are a choice:
but it is take you or leave you.
There is no other,
waiting in the wings,
to sign us up.
So we really want to say,
we do take you,
and don’t want to leave you
and pray you never leave us.
Amen.
Prayer of Confession

Forgive us, God,
for leading ourselves astray
and pretending somehow
we are the victims and not the culprits.
Forgive us for appealing to our frailty
as if, somehow, just by saying so
we need face no charge for our own culpability.
Forgive us for hungering for what we do not need,
and thirsting for what will not satisfy,
when the feast is already offered to us:
the bread of life and living water.
Forgive the rootedness we welcome
in traditions that bind us
when faith spells liberation.
Forgive us for kissing the cheek of power
instead of the hand of righteousness,
when the world cries out for justice.
May we know your forgiveness in our hearts,
and be transformed and cleansed,
a new beginning from the temptations we have known.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

We are tempted to presume
that we have given enough
and more than enough already.
We are tempted to suggest compassion fatigue
is no trumped-up notion
but a a safeguard against over-generosity.
Yet you pour yourself out
for our sakes without measure,
without reservation, regardless of return.
And so we pray we stray and stray far away
from any notion that our hearts should be cautious
and our compassion strictly bound.
We pray we overflow in all we give:
in time, in talent and in treasure
for the sake of the world,
loved by you.
Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

In the midst of the bustling city,
still there is wilderness.
In the profound quiet of the empty glen,
still there is power.
Not to deserts alone need we wander
to find that we wonder
about life in its fullness and depth.
For there are still-centres
to the storms of activity
in the busiest places.
And some of those still-centres
are lonely.
We pray for a world often in wilderness:
finding hope a barren prospect,
feeling faith a dusty lie,
fearing doubt might just destroy.
Tall questions press,
searing truths pierce,
and hearts get laid bare.
And the temptation is to turn for ease and plenty
and safety and distraction:
turn life inwards selfishly;
chasing hollow dreams,
and empty promises.
Or the temptation is to meet the emptiness with anger,
lashing out as if inflicting pain eases the despair felt,
and so turn life outwards but again selfishly:
chasing a strange salvation
at the expense of others’ peace.
We pray for the hollow-dream-chasers:
confusing moral peace with material plenty,
and finding a strange and unsettling wilderness.
We pray for the lashers out:
confusing power with ambition
and finding the same strange and unsettling wilderness.
Amen.
A Trialogue On Temptation

The Whispers of Darkness and Light

*The person stands at front (or sits in the tent if using this from the Through the Season ideas).*

*If possible, Darkness and Light are voices heard only over the sound system.*

This is meant not to give a good, nice, Christian, outcome but to depict that we simply 'live with' temptation and have choices to make. It could be enacted in the middle of a sermon or stand alone and you can edit or add to it if you want to depict a definitive outcome.

Darkness: You could, you know.
Person: Could I?
Light: Should you though?

Darkness: Oh, go on!
Person: Maybe?
Light: No, Stop!

Darkness: It won’t hurt!
Person: Perhaps it won’t?
Light: Are you sure?

Darkness: I’m just going to speak louder!
Person: What a din!
Light: *(Whispering)* Can you still hear me? I think we’ve got a bad signal!

Darkness: I am determined to be the only voice.
Person: So that you sound like a big temptation?
Light: Hello, are you still there?

Darkness: You should you know!
Person: I’m not sure?
Light: *(Silence)*

Darkness: See, gone, won’t know!
Person: I don’t think it will do me any good.
Light: Aaaaahaa (a long sigh).

Darkness: Are you listening to me?
Person: Yes, but there is something else!
Light: What?

Darkness: What?
Person: Another choice!
Light: *(Cheers loudly)*

Darkness: Bad choice, loser!
Person: No, just my choice
Light: Which way will you go?

Darkness: Go on, take the easy route!
Person: And where will that get me?
Light: Now there’s a question!

Sendings

Leader: Struggle, temptation, desire, want.
All: All these longings rage within us.
All: So, we go with the assurance of God’s pardon,
the foundation of God’s love,
and the promise of God’s presence to guide and protect.

Be with you all.
All: And also with you.

Praise/Hymns

All that I am  MP 801
Beauty for brokenness  CH4 259 / MP 806
Come, thou long-expected Jesus  CH4 472 / MP 102
Come, let us to the Lord our God  CH4 482
Dear Lord and Father of mankind  CH4 485 / MP 111
Forty days and forty nights  CH4 337 / MP 160
God made me as I am  CH4 145
Great God, your love has called us here  CH4 484
It’s me, it’s me, O Lord  CH4 493
Jesus calls us o’er the tumult  CH4 509 / MP 359
Jesus is the name we honour  CH4 481 / MP 870
Jesus, tempted in the desert  CH4 338
Lead us, heavenly Father  MP 400
O breath of life come sweeping through us  CH4 595 / MP 488
Seek ye first  CH4 641 / MP 590
Tree of life and awesome mystery  CH4 401
When we are tempted to deny your Son  CH4 400

Take Home Ideas

Is The Glass Half Full Or Half Empty?

A sheet that can be printed for this idea is available on page 119.

At home, fill a glass half full of water and reflect on what you see. Is the glass half full or half empty?

It could represent the knowledge that there is as much of us that is half full of emptiness (sin) as there is of us flowing with living giving water.

It could represent how far we have come in God and encourage us to fill the glass with more despite the temptation just to drink now of what we have when we could have more.

Fill the remainder of the glass with diluting orange / blackcurrent juice (or be courageous and use wine) and see the glass filed and representing with the golden potential that each of us holds in God’s eyes, the new wine of life in God that is still to be discovered and enjoyed.

The plain old water has not disappeared... it is still a part of the whole.
Tug Of War

You will need: a long piece of rope.

Put the children into groups of varying age, size or height and then pairing the groups appropriately have them play together a game of Tug of War.

Discuss with the children how we can be pulled in different directions by all the temptations in our lives, for example whether to do homework or to watch television. Discuss how we might manage to overcome these temptations.

Use this as a way into the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert.

games

Tempted?

Will the children be tempted to cheat in this game?

Ask the children to take forty baby steps (heel to toe, heel to toe).

- Who has travelled the furthest?

Now do the same but taking forty giant steps.

- Who has travelled the furthest?

Next is forty jumps, hops, leaps, and so on.

You can link the number forty in this game to the forty days and forty nights that Jesus spent in the wilderness: a long time to travel on a fasting journey.

Which Way?

This game is the same as the traditional Port, Starboard!

Name each side of the room with a place name; Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum, Zebulun & Naphtali (combine these two). When you call out the name of the areas they must run to that wall.

For the activities to do you could mention sea (swimming movement), land (run on the spot), river (sit as though in a boat, rowing), baptise (in pairs one sits with the other with their hand on the head of their partner), stones (curl into a ball), mountain (jump on the spot as high as possible), and so on.

crafts

Desert Scene

You will need: polystyrene food trays or shoebox lids, sand, pebbles and stones of varying sizes, PVA glue, glue spreaders.

Give each child a tray or lid and allow them to create a desert scene on it using the sand, pebbles and stones.

Talk with the children about the story and what it might be like in the desert. Discuss with the children how they might feel if they had to stay in the desert for as long a time as Jesus did. Talk with them about someone perhaps offering them food and water during that time. Discuss if they might be tempted to take that food and water.

Tempting Sandwiches

You will need: large quantities of felt in varying colours (ensuring you have options for all sorts of sandwich ingredients), scissors, pencils, rulers, fabric glue, felt pens, paper plates.

Talk firstly with the children about sandwiches and ask them to describe what their favourite sandwich might be. Then ask the children to create their favourite sandwich using the materials provided. Once created the sandwiches can be displayed on their paper plate.

Talk with the children about how tempting all their sandwiches look and how if someone was really hungry they might not be able to resist these sandwiches: they would be tempted by them. Then talk with the children about the story and Jesus being in the desert for such a long time. Discuss the things which he was offered, the things which might have tempted him and talk about how he resisted them. Discuss with the children how they resist temptations.
Scripture Tablets  
**age 9-12**

You will need: ready-made card frames, (or home-made ones using a piece of A5 coloured card with a 2 cm. wide frame overlaid around its edge to create a card frame), plasticine or play dough, palette knife or glue spreaders, cocktail sticks.

Give each child a card frame and ask them to lay it horizontally and to then smooth a layer of plasticine or play dough within the frame up to the level of the frame to create a smooth writing surface.

Talk with the children about temptations and what might tempt them today by pulling them in a direction they perhaps feel they should not be going in. Discuss how they resist those temptations, and if they always do. Talk about the story and the tempting things Jesus was offered. Ask the children if they can identify how Jesus answered the tempter each time. Establish that he used scripture.

Now ask the children to think if there are any words from scripture or elsewhere that they might use in their lives to avoid temptations.

Now ask the children, using the cocktail sticks, to write their chosen words on their tablet.

Discuss with the children how these words might change and so the present ones can be erased by smoothing out the plasticine or play dough and other words put in their place.

**Keepsake Stones**  
**all age**

You will need: stones, paint, PVA Glue, water, paintbrushes, felt pens.

Talk with the children about the story and how Jesus was tempted. Discuss with them the things which tempt them which might pull them away from what they should be doing. Talk with the children about how Jesus resisted the temptations and always quoted scripture familiar to him back to the tempter. Discuss which scripture words or stories they might use to help them resist temptations today.

Give the children a few stones and ask them to paint on the stones either a picture from a story or some words from the bible which might help them to resist temptation today. Once dry, ask the children to ‘varnish’ their stone with watered down PVA glue and allow that to dry. These stones can then be kept in handy places as a sort of keepsake which the children can use as a reminder to help them resist anything which tempts them.

**What Tempts Today?**  
**age 6-12**

You will need: objects or images of things that take up lots of our time in a modern world or that may damage how we live with each other: mobile phones, game consoles, money, greed, bullying, peers, and so on.

We hear about what Jesus was tempted by in this week’s story. What tempts us away from God or church today? Ask the children what they think tempts them to do things they know they should not.

Show them the images you have.

- What (if any) are the ways these things are good, and in what ways might they tempt us to do things that are not good?
- Can you think of anything else that tempts people to make bad choices?
- Do we need to prove ourselves to anyone?

**The Past**  
**age 9-12**

You will need: copies of the quiz sheet found on page 120, pens.

Matthew clearly links the past to the present events so how much do the children know of the past. See the quiz sheet in the appendix. Answers below:

1. After 6 days or on day 7
2. Adam and Eve
3. Cain
4. Trick question, it was Noah on the Ark
5. Red Sea
6. Cheetah
7. Moses
8. Jonah
9. It is not named in the Bible
10. Daniel
11. Lot’s wife
12. David

**Breads From Different Lands**  
**all age**

You will need: many different types of bread from around the world, including the different types of bread you have in your own country, you could include gluten-free bread to see what difference that makes to the taste.

Discuss where the bread comes from and if Jesus’ word has spread as far as these lands.

**Sandwich Making**  
**all age**

You will need: bread, fillings, food dye, paint brushes, toaster.

With the various fillings you have available encourage the children to get creative and invent their own sandwich.

Alternatively, they could paint a design with food dye onto a slice of white pan bread. Toast the bread and the design will remain.
Preparation
You will need some paper or Post-Its and pens. Create a list of some famous bible stories and passages which people find helpful (you might be able to get some help with this from the minister or members of the congregation). Write these on pieces of paper or card.

If you can, get hold of a copy of the film “The Bible – Jesus” (available at http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0001EYT98) to show the various temptation scenes, either from the time of the wilderness, or when Jesus was tempted in the Garden of Gethsemane (both are handled creatively and powerfully in this film).

Opening Activity

Do This, Do That

Play ‘Do This, Do That’. Everyone stand up if they are able. Leader should face the group. Do actions saying ‘do this’ or ‘do that’. People should only copy when you say ‘do this’. Speed up to catch people out. If people get it wrong they are out.

The Word

Read Matthew 4:1-17 together.

Activity / Discussion

We live in a world full of temptation. Jesus did too. Even when he went off into the wilderness away from people there was temptation there too.

Here it would be effective to watch a clip from “The Bible – Jesus”.

• What were the things that Jesus was tempted with?
• What are the things that might tempt us today?

Have a conversation about whether those things are good or bad. They can be both. Perhaps what matters more are our motives and behaviour.

• How would our values change our view of these temptations?
• These temptations will always be around, so how does Jesus deal with the temptations he faces?

One of the things he does is to look to the past and the stories in scriptures.

• Are there stories or passages in the Bible that you find helpful?

Look at the passages other people find helpful and see if they have anything in common.

• Are there any you like or find helpful?

Living It Out

Ask each person to write a short note for the other people in the group telling them something you value about them. It could be a personality trait or a skill they have. Gather these and give them to each recipient to keep.
The Perspective Shift

Students or Lovers of Cinema will be very aware of the powerful ways in which we, the viewers, can be manipulated into perceiving a person or situation in a particular way because of the perspective we are given of that person. This can then be used to great effect to turn everything around during the film so that what we thought was the case turns out to be something very different.

Famous examples include Hitchcock’s Vertigo when we associate ourselves and our own better natures with James Stewart’s character, Scottie, whom we follow for the first half of the film. This perspective radically shifts after his stay in the sanitorium. Another example is the recent film Gone Girl in which we are led to believe one reality up to the point when our perspective on what has been happening radically shifts. Another is the film starring Bruce Willis, The Sixth Sense, which was, for your contributor, ruined by someone giving away the complete change of perspective a few hours before a trip to see the film at the cinema... a reveal which ruined the viewing experience. Harumph.

The point is that in all these films the viewer is understanding the film’s universe incorrectly or incompletely up to the point at which one’s perspective is deliberately shifted and we finally see the reality of what is going on.

Often when we talk about the collected teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, from the beatitudes onwards, there is a tendency to describe how Jesus turned the world upside down, how everything was turned on its head by Jesus’ teaching. It is perhaps not the best analogy to use. What Jesus really did was to turn our perspective right way up. He shifts our understanding of reality so that we can grasp that what had been thought to be the final word on what is objective reality was in turn an incomplete view. Jesus does not come to change everything completely, he rather comes to bring better clarity to what already is: “I have not come to abolish [the laws] but to fulfill them.”

When it comes to the teaching that follows, there is still some argument about whether it should be thought of as the natural response to the graciousness of God by his followers, or whether these exhortations are in some sense a requirement of being a follower. Perhaps there is something of both in the beatitudes. This is echoed in the title for this week’s worship: “Living in Righteousness”. To do so is to live in the gracious shadow of God’s loving forgiveness, a child of God, but it is also to make a commitment to live in the Way of righteousness that Jesus models for us.

If we turn our perspective on Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount we see within the words preached a summary of the life that Jesus lived. These are his actions put into words. This is the way he lived his life in written form. This is the man who could and did live in righteousness sharing what that means to all who have ears to hear and eyes to see. What a contrast to other lawmakers then and now who love to make the rules but who then fail to live according to their own rules.

The sad truth was that many people could not get beyond what they knew, or thought they knew, about God’s demands on them through the religious laws in order to grasp the fresh challenge of Jesus’ perspective.

What are the stumbling blocks today that prevent people hearing this teaching and letting it live in their hearts, transforming their way of living towards Jesus’ model of righteousness? How can the church enthuse people towards right living without that slipping into judgemental attitudes on the one hand or laissez faire accommodation on the other?
To Do Or Not To Do?

My name is Thaddeaus. I am sick fed up of those people who tell me all the things I cannot do rather than the things I can do. I mean, our religious leaders keep telling us how to observe the law, and every time someone asks for clarity they seem to make another rule to make the last rule clearer! I tell you it just does not make any sense. They get caught up in the tiniest details about what kind of work I can do on the Sabbath, what food to eat, when to wash, when to pray, when not to pray, when to help someone and when not to help anyone. It just gets all so confusing and makes our religion seem dull, legalistic and, yes, boring!

Yet today, I heard something different; something that made loving God sound like fun. It turned my world upside down. It made me see the light, and helped me to understand God in a new way! Who did I hear this from? Jesus.

Jesus just blew me away.

He made it sound so simple. He never spoke about what we cannot do, but what we could do. He spoke in a way that helped us to see God through our own eyes. No rules about mourning, and about purification rituals, he just told us that it was okay to mourn and that it was okay to comfort those who have lost a loved one. He never set impossible standards to meet with God's approval, but invited us to start with God now where we are, because he said: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God".

In fact hungering for God was not seen as a sin but a quest to really understand who God was! That's incredible! He told us to be merciful toward others and not hold grudges, and encouraged us to live life in a way that will enable us to see God more clearly. Then he spoke about us being peacemakers and salt and light for others.

It is incredible that someone like me could be doing all these things for others, rather than worrying about whether I have cleaned my bowl properly after dinner! I feel incredibly happy in my heart, blessed indeed!

Retelling For Young People

We Can Be Happy

We can be happy when we don't worry about what others have and are pleased with what we do have.

We can be happy when we can allow ourselves to be sad sometimes and know that God understands how we feel.

We can be happy when we take our time doing things and don't get angry if things don't always work out.

We can be happy when we try to do what Jesus would do and accept that God will be with us always.

We can be happy when we show love and kindness to others because God is kind and loving always.

We can be happy when our heart is strong for God because we are able to understand him more.

We can be happy when we try to keep the peace with others for God is upset by all the fighting in our world.

We can be happy when we don't always do things just for ourselves but try our best to include others.

We can be happy because God is on our side and will always be on our side when we do good things.

We can be happy if what we do makes others happy and that lets people get a taste of God's goodness.

We can be happy by lighting up the dark parts of this world and become a shining light for God wherever we are.
worship ideas

Through the Season

Pages 6 and 7 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together.

Gathering Activity

Think of ways in which we can be salt and light in our community and in our congregations. Things to consider may be:

- Do the things we come up with as ideas require a lot of work, money or time to become reality?
- Are we capable of taking these ideas forward either ourselves or with the help of others?

Share these thoughts with the people sitting next to you.

Call to Worship

Come, worship the Christ who tends to the poor.
Come, worship the Christ who wipes away our tears.
Come, worship the Christ who gives inheritance to the meek.
Come, worship the Christ who nourishes the hungry.
Come, worship the Christ who gives mercy to the merciful.
Come, worship the Christ who gives vision.
Come, worship the Christ who blesses the peacemakers.
Come, worship the Christ who remembers the persecuted.
Come, worship the Christ who finds the lost.
Come, worship the Christ who is with us now and always.

Prayer of Adoration

Holy God, to you be honour and praise.
You are the light that allows us to see
the glory of your creation,
and the glory of each living person.
You are the salt that brings out
the unique and special flavour
of all that exists and of all that can be experienced.
In Jesus Christ we have a teacher
who reveals to us what it feels like to be blessed,
and what it takes to be a blessing to others.
Today, grant us a spirit of discernment
that we may never remain blissfully unaware
of what it means to be truly blessed in your love for us,
nor ignorant of the many opportunities in our lives
to extend this blessing to all.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,
may we not think that blessings are earned,
in the same way as we earn a salary.
May we not think that blessings are the reward for faithfulness.
May we not think that blessings are reserved for the righteous.
Instead:
let us recognise that blessings are yours to give;
that you alone share out blessings.
Let us recognise that in Jesus Christ
we are given unequivocal proof
that your intention is that all may know blessing in their life.
Let us acknowledge that as your people,
you call us to be a blessing to others.

God, sometimes we tend to think of ourselves
as better than the scribes and Pharisees
whom Jesus criticised for their lack of living faith.
We see them as a people who went through the motions,
who knew the theory and yet were not good at action,
who thought too highly of themselves,
who were not in touch with the your invitation
to them and all to live merciful and loving lives.

Yet God, when we are honest with ourselves,
sometimes we are not as good as we think we are
in living the life you intend.

Being honest:
sometimes our attendance at church once a week,
or once a month,
is the extent of our living faith;
the only thing that differentiates us from those
who do not attend church.
Sometimes our actions are limited to the time,
commitment, and focus on others we can spare,
in the midst of our other priorities.
Sometimes we are too proud,
believing that our personal faith makes us superior
to those who have not found their way to a strong faith.
Sometimes we are no less judgemental or loving
in our attitudes towards others,
than those who do not describe themselves as Christian.

Give us a new spirit today that we might understand
that 'being right' with God means more
than just being in good standing with Him.
‘Righteous living’ means ‘being left’ with God
as the absolute ‘be-all-and-end-all’ of life,
and ‘being right’ beside Jesus, shoulder to shoulder,
in living out the active faith he exampled.
Amen.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Lord, we long for a world that knows peace.
For too long we have fought against each other,
threatened each other with our powerful armies,
conspired to grab more land, more wealth,
and lived with the wrong belief
that our different nationalities and religious associations
mean that we cannot live together
in a spirit of acceptance and trust.

Lord we long for a world that knows justice.
For too long we have tolerated the fact
that some have more food than others,
some live in societies where children have all they need,
while in some other places children
are made to work in order that their families can eat.
For too long we have tolerated the fact
that some have easy access
to medicine while others are denied it.

Lord we long for a world of tolerance.
For too long we have been slow to accept
that the differences between us,
are not reasons to be wary and fearful,
but instead should lead us to be ready to marvel
at the way creation allows each one of us to be unique,
and that your personal relationship with each of us
encourages us to be ourselves.

God, we thank you
for providing us with the best teacher possible.
His words and the lessons he has given us,
stand the test of time,
and apply now as much as they did in the past.
Help us continue to hear these teachings
as they were meant to be heard.
Help us understand what we can do to make sure that
more and more people
are able to describe their life as blessed.
Help us towards a position
where we cherish the blessings we already have,
rather than craving the ones we do not yet possess.
Amen.

All Age Prayer

Lord Jesus, you said:
Blessed are the poor in spirit,
blessed are those who mourn,
blessed are the meek,
blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
blessed are the merciful,
blessed are the pure in heart,
blessed are the peacemakers,
blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
blessed are you those who are insulted, persecuted,
lied about, spoken badly of on account of the integrity of
their living faith'.

With these words you sought to teach us
about the truth of God's Love.
Maybe you were not so much
trying to turn things on their head,
but instead putting right what had become wrong
in a society that had got into a muddle
about the things that were important,
and the thoughts and actions that were appropriate.

God help us learn again from your words.
Let us consider what our societies are like,
what our motives and priorities are.
Let us rediscover the truth about what matters and
where genuine blessing is found.
For that is what you want us to discover today,
just as much as you wished people
to discover these things back in the day.
Amen.

Reflection

Living in Righteousness

We seek to live, to know, to be known.
We seek to be:
good, righteous, liked, resourceful, useful, obedient.

And yet: our light shines but dimly,
our seasoning is faulty,
our hopes are dashed
and instead of being up on that pedestal for all to see
we hide away:
afraid of what other might say, afraid of their judgement.

Listen again!
There is only one judge,
there is only one law:
Love
and love again.
Love who came and showed us a loving way.
Love who sought us out.
Love who teaches us there is only one way.
Love.

Living in love is living in righteousness.
Living in love is living in hope.
Living in love is truly living.
Let that light of love shine for all to see.
Beatitudes for Today

When life makes you feel unworthy, the blessings of heaven will be yours.

When your heart is breaking, the blessings of comfort are yours.

When your fears hold you back, the blessing will be richly won.

When the world ignores and betrays you, blessings come from unknown sources.

When your heart is moved to mercy, the blessing is returned.

When your heart is pure and innocent, the blessing is knowing God.

When you are moved to see the best, sow seeds of peace and seek better ways, others will bless your heart.

When others take advantage and see you as weak, God’s place for you is undisputed

And when people of faith are cursed and mistreated, and others speak out against them, be blessed and joyful, your troubles are shared by the company of heaven

Take Home Ideas

Sometimes it is hard to do the right thing. At other times it is not so hard at all. Is there anything that makes you want to do the right thing? It is a lot easier to do the right thing if there is a reward or a prize for doing it. Today’s lesson is about doing the right thing. Jesus is teaching a group of people how they should act, how they should treat others, and how they should live. At the very end, Jesus says to “rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.”

Every day this week write down three positive deeds or thoughts that you did that Jesus would be happy to witness and then do the same for three acts or thoughts that were not so good. Take the time, even if just two or three minutes, to pray to God and thank God for the good and ask for forgiveness for the others. What came easier to write: the good or the not so good?

This passage is also known as the ‘Manifesto of Christ’s Kingdom’ why not write a ‘Manifesto’ for your church. Are all people welcome or is your church like the Pharisees: they teach but do not do!

Sending

Leader: Blessed be you who is poor in spirit.

All: Blessed be you in the sadness of mourning.

Leader: Blessed be you, the ones who are meek.

All: Blessed be you, the righteousness craver.

Leader: Blessed be you who is merciful to others.

All: Blessed be you who is pure in heart.

Leader: Blessed be you in peace making with others.

All: Blessed be you in persecution and insult.

Leader: Rejoice! Be glad!

All: Great is our reward!

Praise/Hymns

All hail the power of Jesus’ name CH4 457 / MP 13

Be thou my vision CH4 465 / MP 51

Beatitudes song video with words available at http://youtu.be/wZNz9v9uXKc

Blessed are the poor in spirit MP 58

Blessèd are the pure in heart CH4 341

Blest are they, the poor in spirit CH4 513

Courage brother! Do not stumble CH4 193

God is love; his the care CH4 192

God of grace and God of glory MP 192

‘I have a dream’ CH4 710

Make me a channel of your peace CH4 528 / MP 456

O for a thousand tongues to sing CH4 352 / MP 496

Put peace into each other’s hands CH4 659

Revive thy work, O Lord MP 578

Seek ye first the kingdom of God CH4 641 / MP 590

Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way CH4 79

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy CH4 187 / MP 683

This little light of mine JP 258

Touch the earth lightly CH4 243

When I needed a neighbour CH4 544

Will you come and follow me CH4 533
age group ideas

gathering

**Right Way Up**

>You will need: gather together a variety of objects that have an obvious right way up (for example a mug, wastepaper basket, plastic bottle, candle, photograph, lamp, salt cellar).

Place these on a table at one end of the room, the wrong way up. Divide the children into teams. Time how long it takes each team to put the objects the right way up. A team should line up and one person runs to the table, turns one object the right way up, runs back to team and tags next person, who runs to table and repeat until all objects have been turned the right way up.

Use this as an introduction to the idea of Jesus helping people to understand God’s ‘right way up’ world in his Sermon on the Mount.

crafts

**Candles**

>You will need: card tubes, thin card from which cut out flame shapes beforehand, tissue paper torn into narrow strips, PVA glue, glue spreaders, sellotape.

Give each child a card tube and a flame shape. Sellotape flame shape to inside of card tube. Lay out strips of tissue paper in a variety of colours and get the children to stick tissue paper onto the card tube. It is easier to put the glue onto the tube rather than the tissue paper. It does not matter if the tissue paper overlaps.

Talk about the difference one candle can make in the darkness and how the children can make a difference to other by a smile or a hug or saying thank you. Talk about Jesus saying ‘let your light shine’.

**Candle Holders**

>You will need: glass jars, stickers, sticky gems, sticky labels, felt tip pens, tea lights (either candles or battery operated).

Give each child a sticky label and get them to write their name on the label and to decorate round their name with patterns and designs, using felt tip pens. Give each child a glass jar and get them to stick their name label on the jar and then decorate the rest of the jar with stickers and gems. Place a tealight inside the jar.

Talk about the difference one candle can make in the darkness and discuss with the children their ideas of things that they could do or say which would let their light shine and let Christ’s light shine.

**Right Way Up Lamp Shade**

>You will need: lamp shades (either paper globe lamp shades which can be bought quite cheaply or old self coloured lamp shades from members of the congregation or from charity shops), acrylic paints, paper plates onto which to squeeze a little of each colour of paint, paintbrushes, PVA glue, glue spreaders, buttons, gems and other bits and bobs to decorate the lamp shades.

Divide children into groups of three or four with mixed ages in each group. Give each group a lampshade, a paper plate paint palette and a selection of collage material. Get the children to decorate the lampshade with paint and collage, perhaps they could include words and images from the story: blessed, candle, salt cellar, basket.

Discuss with the children the different kinds of lights they can think of and what lights are for. Discuss what would happen if a light was hidden under a bucket or basket. Talk about ways that they can be like lights shining ahead of others.
activity

Previous Activities age 6-12 & all age

If you have previous copies of Spill the Beans you will find a number of activities relating to the beatitudes and salt on pages 95 and 102 of Issue 10 when this same passage was previously covered.

Salt age 6-12

You will need: different types of salt (table, cooking, sea, rock).

Ask the children questions about salt and show them the different types of salt you have brought along.

- Where does salt come from?
- What do we use salt for?
- What difference does salt make to the boiling point or freezing point of water? (It raises the boiling point, and lowers the freezing point)

You could print off some pictures of salt mines. One of the most famous being the salt mine in Krakow, Poland for which you will find many images online. Talk about salt being scarce in the old days, how it was worth a lot of money, many people died trying to mine it, and so on. This may help the children understand that salt is precious and helpful.

Writing Tools age 6-12

You will need: a selection of writing tools; ball point pen, fountain pen, quiver and ink, chalk, crayon, pencil, paint brush and paints.

As a play on the verse about “not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law...” (verse 18), either give each child sheets of paper each or by putting up or down a large sheet of paper let the children try writing their name with the various writing tools.

Salt ‘N’ Shake all age

You will need: packets of Salt ‘n’ Shake crisps. containers with salt, sugar, flour.

Let the children try out the crisps both unsalted and with salt.

- What difference did it make?
- Which ones did they like?
- Who adds salt to their food?
- Why do they do that?

Have three containers with salt in one, sugar in another and flour in the other one but not marked. Let the children taste each substance and see if they identify the salt.

Where’s Wally all age

You will need: a Where’s Wally book (try your local library if you cannot lay your hands on one yourself).

Thinking about the crowds that gathered to listen to Jesus, you could let the children think about how hard it is to stand out in a crowd, let them try to find Wally in an image. Yet Jesus did so through what he said.

games

Blessed Are The Peacemakers age 6-12

You will need: balloons, rolled up newspapers for bats, a length of rope.

Split the children into two teams and then pair them up with an opposing partner and tie them together back to back using the rope. The idea is to bat the balloon into their opposing teams goal. As they play the game they will become frustrated being tied to someone and also that the person to whom they are attached is on the opposing team.

- Did they manage to come to a compromise at all or did they go against each other all the time?
- Was there any peacemakers?

B-L-E-S-S-E-D age 6-12

You will need: copies of the sheet available on page 122, pens.

Ask the children to think about Jesus’ message in the beatitudes and about whom he was talking in his message. Next to each letter of B-L-E-S-S-E-D ask the children to write a word or sentence about the people Jesus described.

Which Way To Listen? all age

You will need: chairs for each child.

Imagining everyone listening to Jesus, how would they have been sitting. There are many ways for children to sit and listen to leaders so why not make a game of it.

Each child will need a chair near to them. Call out the command ‘We will listen...” and then add: on bottom, kneel high up, kneel low down, cross legged, legs straight out, on tummy with hands under chin, on bottom with knees up to chin, on a seat, and so on. Mix the commands up and get the children going from one position to the other. Which way did they prefer?

The Blessed all age

You will need: large bucket in the middle of the room, lots of small play balls.

If you have enough of the play balls split them into separate colours and divide the children up also into different areas in the room. Jesus tells us that many, many people are blessed so the children are to try to throw as many of their balls into the bucket in the middle of the room as possible. How many did they get in? How many missed? Try it again! Any better?
Preparation
Print off the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) and the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) on separate sheets.

Opening Activity
Try a whodunnit type of game.

Heads Down, Thumbs Up
Ask two young people to stand up while all the others put their heads down on their desks with their eyes closed and thumbs sticking up. The two left standing must then creep around the desks and gently touch one person each on the thumb. Everyone is then told to open their eyes and those who were touched stand up and try to guess which of the two young people touched them. If they get it right they swap places, if not they have another go.

Mr Bear and the Honey Pot
Everyone sits in a circle, one person is chosen to sit in the middle to be Mr Bear. He is given a honey pot which he places beside him. Everyone calls on Mr Bear to go to sleep. At which point the person in the middle has to close their eyes.

At this point one of the folks from the circle can quietly creep forward to take the honey pot, returning to the circle at which point everyone puts their hands behind their backs and calls, “Mr Bear, wake up, your favourite honey pot is gone!”

The person in the middle then has to work out who has got his honey pot with three chances at which point he swaps with the person that he correctly identified. If unsuccessful, he has to go back to sleep and try again.

Sleeping Lions
All but one or two players are “lions”, and lie down on the floor, eyes closed, as if they were sleeping. The remaining one or two players (the “hunters”) move about the room attempting to encourage the lions to move. The hunters can’t touch the lions, but they may move close to them, tell things to them, or tell a joke. Any person who moves must stand up and join the hunters.

The Word
Read Matthew 5:1-20 together.

Activity/Discussion
What Jesus is doing in the beatitudes is teaching on the Law. Perhaps the beatitudes are Jesus taking the Ten Commandments, the foundation of the Law, and saying “Okay, do not murder. So we haven’t killed anyone, but have you ever thought about it? Even just for a moment? Blessed are the merciful…”

Compare the two lists and see if doing this works. It might take some creative thinking to get from the Commandments to the Beatitudes, but just keep making the next step.

Jesus talks in verses 17-20 about fulfilling the Law.

• When you look at the beatitudes next to the commandments, what do you think Jesus means?
• In what ways does it keep the spirit of the law?
• Is it about rather than saying that I have never killed anyone that we should be working to make sure that people never get to the point of wanting to kill anyone?

Now go back to verses 13-16 about salt and light.

• What do you think these mean now you’ve talked about the commandments and beatitudes?

People notice salt in their food. It makes it taste different and enhances the flavour. We notice light in the darkness. This week think about how you add flavour or light to the world around you.

• Could you live out these beatitudes in a way that flavours the world around you or adds light?
• What would that take?

Living It Out
Give it a go. Be salt and light. Bring some of the flavour of the beatitudes to those around you. Shed some of God’s light on a problem.
Bible Notes

Oor Faither In Heiven

Visitors to the Church of the Pater Noster in Jerusalem almost always come away struck by one of the features of the cloisters of the Convent of the Pater Noster. Inside the iron gate of the convent visitors see decorated plaques along the walls each containing the Lord’s Prayer. As you enter you see the prayer in Icelandic, Hebrew and Aramaic, and over a hundred other languages as you explore the cloisters. There are some eclectic languages represented from Tagalog to Ojibway, and even, remarkably, one of the languages high up on a wall is Doric, the North-East Scotland dialect. But no Klingon... yet.

It is a reminder of the timeless, cross-cultural nature of this simple yet profound prayer. It is, in some ways, a pro forma prayer. It is a guide to the nature of prayer, and perhaps the rote saying of the prayer as takes place in many traditions as the culmination of our communal prayers when we join “in the words taught us” have blunted the sense that this is a prayer given as a means of instruction in the manner of prayer. The Lord’s Prayer has taken on, for some, that other sense of pro forma: a perfunctory, minimum and rushed formality.

This is not to minimise the importance of rote learning. Anyone who has prayed with a person with dementia will be all too aware of the awakening, remembrance and peace this prayer can bring. Nonetheless, there is more to this prayer than simply the words that Jesus gives us.

In some ways it is strange that this simple prayer has been adopted within communal worship by so many denominations. It was intended as a model of private prayer, not as a corporate prayer. The original setting would be the traditional pattern for Jews to take a break from their activity around 3 o’clock in the afternoon to offer prayers, a private link to the corporate offering of sacrifices taking place at the temple. There were no prescriptions about the form of this prayer as it was private, but that did not stop some from using what should be a private affair as a means to impress their neighbours, rather than to show humility towards God. Jesus seeks to redress this bad practise, and to give guidance to those Gentiles who waffle without meaning what they say.

What is fascinating about the Lord’s Prayer is that it is at once a Christian prayer that echoes Jesus’ teaching, but it is also a thoroughly Jewish prayer, one that could easily be said by a Jew, as it has no overtly Christian imagery: no talk of Jesus as Messiah, of the coming of the Messiah, or indeed of praying in Jesus’ name.

It is perhaps sadly the case that today in the developed world the culturally shared knowledge of the Lord’s Prayer is all but lost. When previously one could assume almost everyone would know the prayer and thus it could be used in public worship, this is no longer the case, and to use the prayer without having it written down is now a means that will exclude people from worship rather than a means to include them. Perhaps this is sad, then again perhaps for those of us within churches it reawakens us to the original nature of this prayer as a means to encourage and guide us in our private prayers.

There is not the space here to unpack each line of this prayer, there are many other sources of such commentary available elsewhere. Perhaps when the prayer is approached with fresh ears and eyes, heard in a different way to the usual recited form, its simple power will be aroused in the hearts and minds of worshippers to take its message both of future hope and of the healing power of forgiveness and make this into a living practise. So be creative in how to encourage people to engage with this timeless, succinct and engaging prayer.

Matthew 6:7-21 (and/or 25-34)  (Psalm 20:7)
Not A Lot

Conversation between three hearers of Jesus’ teaching, to follow the reading. Should be read fairly slowly, with pauses, as though they are working out their thoughts as they talk.

Voice A: What did you make of his teaching today?
Voice B: (Slowly and deliberately, as if in deep thought) Not… a… lot.
Voice C: Oh? You weren’t impressed either?
Voice B: Not a lot. I think that was his main point. Not a lot.
Voice A: I don’t get you.
Voice C: I thought he was being really negative. Don’t do this. Don’t do that.
Voice B: Not a lot of this. Not a lot of that. I reckon he’s a minimalist.
Voice A: I reckon he just wants to be different for the sake of being different. Don’t be like the pagans. Don’t be like the hypocrites.
Voice C: And how often has he said, don’t be like the Pharisees.
Voice B: Just don’t do a lot of what they do. I think that was his point.
Voice C: Why? What’s his problem with long prayers? Surely the more we pray, the better.
Voice A: And why is it bad news if people notice that you’re trying to fast for the day? Surely people see that we’re taking our faith seriously?
Voice A: And everyone wants their home to look good and to own nice things. It’s something to be proud of.
Voice C: And I don’t think I mind being like a pagan when I’m just looking ahead to tomorrow’s dinner or providing for the future.

Voice A: Why does he see anything wrong with that?
Voice B: That’s exactly what I’m wondering too. Why does he think less… is more?
Voice A: You mean… prayer—not a lot of words
Voice C: …but kept short.
Voice A: Spiritual habits—not a lot of visibility
Voice C: …but kept secret.
Voice B: Homes and lifestyle—not a lot of wealth and possessions
Voice A: …but kept simple.
Voice C: Food and clothes—not a lot of work and worry and storing up for tomorrow
Voice B: …but kept to the needs of now.
Voice A: So if we do all this living with less, what is it that becomes more?

Longer pause, all three as though puzzled and thinking seriously about this...

Voice B: I wonder... more prioritising where our time and energy and attention is directed?
Voice C: More focus on the things that matter to God?
Voice B: More intent to be an answer to our own prayer—“your kingdom come, your will be done”.
Voice C: Wow. He doesn’t ask much, does he?
Voice A: (grinning and sounding cheeky!) Not a lot!
Retelling For Young People

The Lord’s Prayer In Song And Sign

A rephrasing of the Lord’s Prayer in song. These words will fit the tune of the Caribbean Lord’s Prayer (Junior Praise 192). You might want to devise some signs or actions of your own, but here are some suggestions to get you going.

Our Father, we want to know you,
holy is your name,
you are in heaven and you are beside us,
holy is your name.

Point up, thumb to forehead for “know”

May the world be as good as you dream,
holy is your name,
so that earth can feel like heaven,
holy is your name.

Flat palm, make circle in front of face; fingers touch lips

Give us today the food we need,
holy is your name,
breakfast, lunch and dinner to eat,
holy is your name.

Trace arc with outstretched arm; point to floor beside
(repeat as per second line throughout song (not final verse))

Forgive us for hurting other people,
holy is your name,
as we let go of the hurt done to us,
holy is your name.

Both hands make circle like globe; thumbs up

Please protect us from all danger,
holy is your name,
help us stay away from trouble,
holy is your name.

Arm shielding body

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
holy is your name,
here today and forever and ever,
holy is your name.

One hand out like ‘stop’ signal; take small step back

Amen, oh yes, this is our prayer,
holy is your name,
Amen, oh yes, this is our prayer,
holy is your name.

Reverse direction, skip and dance freely the other way
worship ideas

Through the Season

Pages 6 and 7 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together.

Gathering Activity

With the people sitting next to you, think about the different versions of The Lord’s Prayer that you may know (debtors, trespasses, sins, and so on) and think about how the differences affect your understanding of something we say so often in our lives.

Call to Worship

Leader: With words used by many each week, perhaps each day: words of a prayer that has travelled centuries, words of a prayer used across the world in countless languages, words which are a part of us,

All: we gather to say, learn and grow from them today and always.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Familiar words, and the start of a prayer that so many people know by heart, and so many people say regularly.

It is said by some that to answer the question, ‘what is the essence of the Christian Faith?’ we need only turn to these words.

Lord, we thank you for these words that mean so much, and say so much, for so many people.

We thank you for the people who taught us these words, and the opportunities we have had to join in fellowship with others as we say them together.

We thank you for the oral and written skills of those who can take the traditional words and make them speak into our contemporary setting, allowing us to read, say, and feel the words in new revealing ways.

We thank you for the times when the words of this prayer have been all that we can find to say, especially in those moments of fear, deepest challenge, or extreme anxiety.

We thank you for the way that these words lead us to know a warmth that comes from the reassurance we discover in reminding ourselves of your ongoing love for us.

Yet merciful God, we know that we also need to say sorry for there have been times when we have used this prayer, said the words aloud or recited them in our minds and barely taken notice of them.

Sometimes there is easy complacency in those things that are just too familiar.

Sometimes we recite the words and they become an empty chorus, with little feeling and little in the way of direct faith consequence.

Sometimes we become too reliant on these words as they easily slip off the tongue instead of really thinking about what we want to say to you.

what we should say, and how we should say it. Sometimes creativity can be lacking in the way that we communicate with you, and sometimes we get so caught up in the tradition of the words used that ‘tradition’ itself becomes more important than the freedom to be led by Your Spirit.

God, we are happy to have this prayer given to us by your Son, and we are happy to have the opportunities to recite it. But as you forgive us our complacency, our lack of feeling in prayer, our over-use of tradition, may we gain the right balance in our prayer-life within the church and at home.

Grant us the confidence to continue to explore how we can communicate with you, and imaginatively feel how you communicate with us, in order that our relationship with you always stays appropriate and fresh.

And now hear us as we pray together in Jesus’ words...

Congregations and Worship Gatherings are encouraged to either use here the form of the Lord’s Prayer that is commonly used and that continues to give blessing to worship, or experiment on this Sunday by finding new ways to express the wisdom of this prayer.

Prayer of Dedication

Lord, we bring you these gifts, for you are generous to us and we seek to return the generosity, We confidently present them knowing that, through the good stewardship of the Church, they will be used wisely to grow. Your kingdom in this place and beyond. Now may your Spirit sanctify these gifts, and bring blessing through them. Amen.
Prayer for Others and Ourselves

Inspiring, creating, loving God, listen to us a while, as we speak from the heart the words we would like you to hear this day.

So often today we live as independent people, rarely participating together in communal activities. We communicate through technology, not speaking directly to people in the way we once did. We sometimes eat on our own, even although with a little bit of planning and commitment the family meal could still be a feature within our homes. We exist at times locked in to our own world, as bedroom doors are closed and computers are powered up, as handsets are picked up as soon as they make a noise, or vibrate, and our eyes become glued to the screen and our fingers tap away as we send a message—all the while not noticing the people in the room with us, or beside us as we walk.

Lord help us see the benefits of time spent with others and encourage us to communicate and share experiences as we chat and do things together.

We remember people today who do not know how to pray and those who do not want to pray. As those who take prayer for granted, recognising that prayer is the chance to talk to you, we recognise that for some others they have no external focus to talk to—either to whom to express their thoughts or convey their feelings. Surely this can be hard, leaving the risk of a person bottling up their feelings, internalising their frustrations. We are glad that you invite us to share honestly and openly how we feel—even if there is anger or disillusionment present. We pray that your Spirit will awaken in people the understanding that you are a God who is ready to hear the prayers of all his people.

Lord, sometimes words are not needed. Sometimes a minister, pastor, priest or worship leader is not required to say out loud the words for us. So help us today in a period of silence to speak directly to you, as we each take the opportunity to tell you what concerns us, in our personal lives and in the world. Lord thank you for listening today, and for being available to us every day.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Reflection

Treasure in Heaven

The simplest of prayers, the most profound, perfect combination of words and phrases. All is in order: honour God, seek God’s ways, take and want just enough and forgive as you would seek forgiveness. Keep safe, honour and acknowledge God, always.

How perfect it is! How hard to live it out. Earthly things come and go but for the faithful one earthly things are transient and simply pass away. Earthly things will come and go yet earthly behaviours: goodness and mercy, peace and joy, love and honour are what we seek, what we need. For it is these which, gathered together, add to the heavenly stores.

Look deep within your heart: What is it that inspires you? What is it that drives you? You know and God knows. Store up the good, be honest about what is not, hand everything over to the one who knows you best for in heaven there are no secrets only open accepting love and therein lies your heart.

Learn all you can from this world in which we live, learn from the world not from humanity with all its flaws, remembering that God knows what is best for each of us and God watches over creation in all its myriad forms. Seek, then, goodness and light, seek the kingdom, seek and you will find.
worship ideas

Sending

Leader: Our Father is in Heaven
All: hallowed be his name.

Leader: God’s Kingdom will come.
All: Hallowed be his name.

Leader: He has given us bread, he has forgiven our sins.
All: Hallowed be his name.

Leader: May he lead us not into temptation and deliver us from all evil.
All: Hallowed be his name.

Praise/Hymns

Come and find the quiet centre CH4 716
Come, now is the time to worship CH4 196 / MP 1040
Hear my prayer, O Lord MP 1051
Here to the house of God we come CH4 195
I need thee every hour CH4 556 / MP 288
In the presence of your people CH4 121 / MP 341
Jesus lover of my soul CH4 490 / MP 372
Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders CH4 606
Lord, teach us how to pray aright CH4 545
Lord, teach us to pray MP 884
Loving God in heaven above CH4 711
Make me a channel of your peace CH4 528 / MP 456
O Lord, I turn my mind to you MP 531
Our Father ATAS 192 / JP 192
Our Father in heaven available online at http://www.familyworship.org.uk/pdf/ourfatherinlordsprayer.pdf
What a friend we have in Jesus CH4 547 / MP 746
When the storms of life are raging CH4 570

Take Home Ideas

We have left our New Year resolutions behind and it is getting near Lent and people are talking about giving up chocolate, crisps, wine or taking up walking, eating more healthily and on and on it goes but the discipline should last all year not just through Lent so from this week on start as you mean to go on. Change your diet, lifestyle, activities but do it quietly and not throwing it in people’s faces – look at me, look how good I am. Cut out one your snacks in the day, drink one less glass of wine, if you don’t drink enough fluids take an extra drink in the afternoon. When you do this repeat the Lord’s Prayer.

Aesop wrote, ‘familiarity breeds contempt’ and sometimes we just recite the Lord’s Prayer without taking in what we are actually saying. Over a billion Christians recite the Lord’s Prayer; there is never an instant when the Lord’s Prayer is not being said in one language or another. So as you say the Lord’s Prayer each day stop after each phrase and think what it means to you personally.

If you know someone who speaks another language other than English ask them to teach you a few phrases of the Lord’s Prayer in that language.

German

Vater unser im Himmel,
geheiligt werde dein Name;
dein Reich komme;
dein Wille geschehe,
wie im Himmel so auf Erden.

Unser tägliches Brot gib uns heute.
Pardonne-nous nos offenses
sondern erlöse uns von dem Bösen.

Denn dein ist das Reich und die Kraft
die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit. Amen.

French

Notre Père, qui es aux cieux,
que ton nom soit sanctifié,
que ton règne vienne,
que ta volonté soit faite sur la terre comme au ciel.

Donne-nous aujourd’hui notre pain de ce jour.
Pardonne-nous nos offenses
comme nous pardonnons aussi à ceux qui nous ont offensés.

Et ne nous soumetts pas à la tentation,
mais délivre-nous du mal,
car c’est à toi qu’appartiennent le règne,

la puissance et la gloire, aux siècles des siècles. Amen.
age group ideas gathering

Can You Remember? all age

You will need: cut out words from newspaper headlines, write out keywords from Lord’s prayer on newspaper (Father, holy, kingdom, daily, bread, forgive, debts, rescue, and so on).

Scatter all words around the room where you meet and have the children search for the words and to group together the words from the Lord’s prayer. Use this as a way into the story.

Grace Mat age 3-5

You will need: A4 card in a variety of colours, pictures of bread, words of a simple grace printed out, glue sticks, crayons, laminator, laminating pouches.

Have the children choose a sheet of card in a colour they like and ask them to draw designs onto the card using crayons. Then get them to stick pictures of bread and the words of a grace onto the card. Laminate the card.

Go over the words of the grace and talk about the importance of saying thank you to God. Talk about Jesus helping the disciples to understand more about praying. Discuss with the children what they would like to say thank you to God for and encourage them to use their grace mats at meal times at home.

Praying People (Individual) age 6-8

You will need: small plastic juice bottles, coloured craft sand, thin card, scissors, felt tip pens, sellotape, scraps of paper to make into small cones/funnels to pour sand into bottles.

Ask the children to fill bottles with coloured sand: making layers of different colours, tilt the bottle to the side when pouring in some sand to make a layer at an angle. Put a lid on the bottle. Get the children to make a simple face by drawing a circle onto card and then adding facial features. Cut the face out and sellotape to the bottle. Get the children to make arms with praying hands. This could be done by making long concertina type arms with hand shapes on the ends of the concertina so that hands can be glued or taped together in praying hands shape, stick arms to sides of bottle.

Talk with the children about prayers they know or have heard and times when they pray. Talk about how Jesus helped his disciples to understand more about prayer by giving them an example to follow. Discuss with the children their ideas about prayer: what kind of words can be used, when/where can people pray, what kind of things one might include in prayers.

Prayer Patterns age 9-12

You will need: buy a ‘Doodle’ book with detailed patterns or download doodle pattern sheets, fine point felt tip pens, black card, glue sticks, sticky gems.

Ask the children to choose a pattern they like and then have them colour it in with felt tip pens. Stick the pattern onto black card to ‘mount’ and give a border. Decorate the border and/or pattern it with sticky gems.

Talk about how Jesus helped his disciples to understand more about prayer by giving them an example, a pattern to follow. Discuss with the children their ideas about prayer. What kind of things do they think Jesus wanted people to include in their prayers.

Praying People (Group) all age

You will need: large plastic juice bottles (2 litre), small stones (lots of them), scrunched up coloured paper.

Ask the children to work in small groups and give each group a large bottle. Place a layer of small stones at the bottom of the bottle and then add layers of different coloured scrunched paper. Continue this craft as per the individual bottles.
activities

Prayer Time

You will need: a book of simple prayers for children.

Select one of the prayers and teach it to the children, try then to use it again in subsequent weeks to reinforce it with the children.

Grace

You will need: a selection of old, new or fun prayers/graces that might be used before a meal, small snack.

Talk to the children about the many different prayers, some that are already written others that you make up yourself. Have a look at some of the old prayers people have said in the past (For example, “As I lay down my head to sleep...”), some modern prayers or some fun graces for meal times. Try them out, reinforcing the message that these allow us time to pause and be thankful each day, then share a snack together.

A Daily Prayer

You will need: some copies of the Lord’s Prayer (using different styles of language), paper, pens.

Have a look at the Lord’s Prayer and the different parts to it and what they mean. Then encourage the children to write their own simple prayer that they might say each day. After they have done this, you could bring all their ideas together and create a prayer for the group from those ideas.

games

Treasure

You will need: a number of items on display that the children can see (wallet, pen, jewellery, ornament, video game, mobile phone, newspaper, and so on), some items that appear worthless (a photograph, a chipped vase, broken bedside light, medicine container, or similar).

Split the children into two teams and allow them to discuss what they think is the most valuable to the least valuable. Then one team at a time they are allowed to pick an item each until all the items are off the table. What they will not know is that in the chipped vase or broken light there is a £20 note that you placed earlier.

Sometimes we do not know the treasure before our eyes but God does. A photograph may appear to be of less value but it is worth so much to the person who owns it because of the memories they attach to the photograph. It is the same with the medicine, it may be worthless to most people but for the person who needs it this can be very valuable and life-giving.

Find The Heart

You will need: heart shapes cut out and hidden around the room.

Tell the children how many hearts are hidden and that they are to try find them all. For the older children they could collect the smaller heart shapes and then make them into a much larger heart shape. God is our treasure and we love him. Write a message on the heart to tell God why we love him.

Facial Expressions

You will need: write some facial expressions on slips of paper (happy, sad, thoughtful, angry, laughing, gritting teeth, annoyed, puzzled, frustrated, excited, and so on).

In the manner of charades, have one of the children stand in front of everyone else and give them a slip of paper with a facial expression to try to emulate. See if everyone else can work out what expression they are trying to conjure.

Of you could do this in pairs giving each pair a selection of slips and letting them try out the facial expressions with their partner. With younger children you could model the facial expression and have the children try to mirror what you are doing.

Sometimes it is easy to tell how people are feeling and at other times more difficult. Do we ever put on false faces so people do not see what we are really feeling? Why might we do that?
discussion starters for teens
what would I do?

Preparation
You will need a flipchart, large piece of paper or whiteboard and A4 paper and pens to write on.

Opening Activity
£1,000,000
• How would you spend £1 million if someone gave you it tomorrow?
Talk about why you would buy or do the things you choose.

The Word
Read Matthew 6:16-34 through twice with two different people reading if possible.

Activity/Discussion
• What’s all that about then?
Use a flip chart, whiteboard or large piece of paper to write down the verbs, the ‘doing’ words, in the passage. Write the ones we should do on one side and the ones we should not do on the other side. Use two colours if that helps.
Talk about the two lists.
• What should we do?
• What should we not do?

Living It Out
The Lord’s Prayer is all about doing what God wants, not asking God to let us do what we want.
• Think about why you are doing the things you do this week.
• Think about the things you want and why you want those things.
Now read Matthew 6:7-15
• How does it feel to know the disciples did not really know the right words to pray?
• How does this prayer relate to the rest of the passage?
• What seems hard?
• What is comforting?
Write your version of the Lord’s Prayer. Remember, each part is about an attitude, a way of living.
Share your prayers and talk about the bits you like in each other’s prayers.
As one story runs into another, as one encounter leads on to others, there is a sense, in this passage of the urgency and fervour of Jesus’ ministry: taking time out to grieve, to pray, to heal the sick, feed the hungry, teach the crowds, nurture the disciples, and so the list goes on, a life of ministry and service. There is a lot of praying, learning, teaching and growing to be done.

Jesus took himself off to pray because, among other things, he had just heard the news of the death, in prison, of his cousin, John the Baptist. As the news leaked out, others wanted to mourn John too and soon there gathered a community in mourning. It seems that then, as now, there is solace in the communal sharing of grief.

The crowd, having spent the day listening to Jesus teaching, witnessing his healing and compassion, discover that evening has come and they are hungry. At the urging of his disciples to send the crowd away so that they can find something to eat, Jesus tells them, “You feed them.”

He encourages the disciples to confront the needs of the crowd at that point and seek to provide a solution to their predicament by finding creative ways to feed them.

However you might choose or be led to interpret the Feeding of the Multitude, there is no doubt that a miracle occurred that day as a hungry crowd reached out to one another and discovered their needs met with abundance. Their homeward journey was coloured by wonder at the community they had experienced gathered around Jesus that day and by the abundance they had experienced in sharing.

As Jesus seeks some time to replenish his energy after a day of giving, the disciples move on to their next drama: a storm at sea.

Those of Jesus’ disciples who were fishermen when Jesus called them must have been used to the unpredictable weather conditions in the Sea of Galilee and would be respectful of the power of the elements. It is hardly surprising that it is Peter, of all the disciples who, literally throws caution to the wind, and enters the water to walk toward Jesus when he appears walking toward them in the midst of the storm. While Peter walks on water, he discovers that the wind still has the power to take the feet from him. So, although he stepped out in faith, he is buffeted by forces beyond his control that threaten to overwhelm him until Jesus intervenes.

There is a tendency to admire those who take risks in life, like Peter, while overlooking those who are quietly faithful but who nonetheless bring others into the kingdom by their steady commitment.

The community of faith requires trail blazers from whom others can learn and be inspired. But it also requires those who watch and pray, those whose example of discipleship is less scary and just as encouraging.

There is a common theme in each of these stories of “A day in the life...” of Jesus enabling the people around him to push the boundaries, to discover that they are capable of more than they imagined. We witness Jesus encouraging individual growth while cultivating shared community response to challenge. And, in that shared response, there is the potential to discover the abundance of God.

Perhaps there is an opportunity in taking this passage as a whole, to not become caught up in the mechanics of the individual parts, but to consider instead the overall sweep of the narrative, capturing something of the pace of discipleship in the fast lane.
the story

**We Can Do It!**

*Monologue by an unnamed disciple, reflecting on events. Could lead into discussion about trust and doubt - what helps us trust Jesus, what causes our doubts, how we understand Jesus’ trust in us, and how these affect our actions.*

It was a sensible suggestion and he knew it. We had every good reason to suggest that he send everyone away. He’d been trying to get away by himself and hadn’t had a minute’s peace all day. He was exhausted. It was a wilderness area and darkness was on its way. Trust him to have another plan.

Trust him! That’s always what it comes down to. What good reason did we have to trust him this time? No good reason at all... except past experience of course... and it has to be said we’ve have plenty of that now. Just when we think he’s asking the impossible, we keep finding out we can do it.

It looked deceptively easy this time. Just give away all we had between us for dinner. Great. A squad of empty bellies for the night; a bunch of grumpy growlers. Unless we could trust that something else was possible, which I couldn’t.

Anyway, we did it. I gave a chunk of bread to a woman with four children. She looked as guilty about taking it as I felt about not wanting to give her it. I just wanted rid of this crowd and rid of my own grumbling hunger. If nobody had been watching me, I would have stuffed that last crust in my mouth!

I saw Thomas stoically give away the last of his loaf, so I handed mine over too, to an old couple. They looked a bit bemused, but took it and said thanks.

I tried to pick my way through the crowd to find a quieter spot to sit and sulk. Then I saw Peter, and Matthew, and Jesus... all with bread and munching quite happily! How dare they? I thought we were supposed to give it all away?

"Mister!" A little voice was suddenly attracting my attention. "Here, mister, here’s some for you." The little boy was holding out not only bread but a handful of figs as well.

"Oh no, son, you keep it. You shouldn’t go hungry because of me." A man’s laughter made me turn my head.

"Please, take it my friend! My boy and I saw you and your friends give all your food away. What big hearts! Men giving their dinner away?! That’s unheard of! Look what you’ve sparked off. You’ve shamed us, everyone’s trying to be as generous as you guys!"

So I took and I said thanks and I ate. And I looked around to see that everyone had something to eat, in spite of all the good reasons it had looked impossible. We can do this, if we trust him.

Why, then, barely hours later, did all that trust and possibility desert us? Just when we know so powerfully what we’re capable of, we shrink back. Why? Peter at least had more courage than to sit there like the rest of us fainthearts.

Tell me to come to you on the water, like you told me I could feed a crowd! Peter did it, and then he couldn’t do it. The rest of us wouldn’t even try.

"Why did you doubt?" It’s a fair question. Why do we doubt? And Jesus, why do you still keep trusting us?

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**Retelling For Young People**

**Everybody Gets Enough**

*This rhyming retelling could be followed, or accompanied, by having the children take and share out some real food.*

On a long ago day, in a place far away nowhere near a village, house or tree, Jesus had a busy time making sick people fine, he didn’t stop for breakfast, lunch or tea!

It was getting pretty late when along came his best mates - "Let’s go home for dinner and to bed! Right now our greatest wish is for sannis with some fish!"

But this is what Jesus said— "Do you know what would be good? Go and share your food!"

Giving is a great thing to do, cos if you are kind, with helpfulness in mind, somebody will do the same for you!

Share what you've got, even if it's not a lot— give away your little bit of stuff. Coz if everybody gives then everybody lives in a world where everybody gets enough!
worship ideas

Through the Season

Pages 6 and 7 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together.

Gathering Activity

Think of a time when you have had something shared with you, which you did not expect.

• How did it feel to be provided for?

Now think of a time when you have shared with others when people have been in need.

• How did it feel to be able to provide for others?

Perhaps you could share your experiences with those around you.

Call to Worship

5,000 were hungry and all were fed with leftovers of fish and loaves of bread.

Imagine this moment, imagine this day, in sharing together they found a new way.

Let us be still in the quiet of this moment to reflect on how we too can bring joy to the lives of others with what we think is insignificant.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of wind and waves, of calm and storm, of cloud and sunshine and rain, may we know your presence beside us today bringing whatever we need in this moment, be it courage or daring, or comfort or sharing.

In this place may we be overwhelmed by the generosity of your Spirit which responds to our spirits with compassion and understanding, meeting us wherever we are on the path of discipleship.

Lord, forgive us when we are too busy fretting to notice you walking toward us when we are too busy grieving to notice you sitting quietly beside us when we are so wrapped up in ourselves that we lose sight of the abundance of the community that surrounds us and that waits to share your abundance of love and compassion and grace.

Forgive us and lift our eyes to see you present in every moment and in every companion that you send to walk the road beside us.

With renewed vision, help us to get back into the fray with an urgency to share the good news of your kingdom community: where all are invited to journey toward the abundance you provide, where we discover community together with one another and with you.

Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

Christ, who showed compassion and who took time to pray, we bring our prayers for our world and for our communities today.

We pray for those who wander aimlessly with no one to guide them through life. May they discover community to support and love them.

We pray for those who rush through life, never stopping to consider their effect on the those around them or on the environment. May they discover the ability to pause, to wake up and smell the coffee.

We pray for those who jump from one adventure to the next, scared to stop lest they sink, may they discover the safety net of people who care in the moments when support is needed.

We pray for those who are hungry, may they discover a community that will feed them in body and soul.

We pray for those who are homeless, may they discover shelter in the body of Christ.

We pray for those caught up in war and violence, may they discover refuge in communities of hope.

Christ who enabled your disciples to grow in ways they could never have imagined, may we grow and share the abundance of all the gifts with which you enrich us, may we be prepared to take risks for the sake of the kingdom.

But may we also be prepared to provide safety and solace for those whose need is for calm amidst the storms of life.

God equip and enable us to equip and enable others to journey together through all that confronts us in life, strengthened by travelling together with you in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

As we are swept up in the pace of everyday life, may we look for you in all the challenges and opportunities that come our way and may we be inspired to reveal you to others, O God of each and everyday.

Amen.
Reflection
In the drive to work with the sun in our eyes: there is God.
In the trudge through the damp and cold: there is God.
In the melee of a house waking up and getting ready for another day: there is God.
In the wait for the bathroom, in the discovery that there is no milk: there is God.
In seeing the last one out the door and taking a breath before you have to get on yourself: there is God.
God is with us, whatever a new day brings, in the joy, sorrow, anxiety or calm, God is right there walking calmly alongside or running to catch up, still there when we are too busy to notice, patiently waiting until we are ready to break out and be challenged by the presence of God.
Inspiring and enabling us to live less ordinary lives.
The lives of disciples.

Praise/Hymns
As the deer pants for the water CH4 550 / MP 37
Break thou the bread of life MP 64
Eternal Father, strong to save CH4 260 / MP 122
For everyone born a place at the table CH4 685
For the beauty of the earth CH4 181 / MP 152
for the fruits of all creation CH4 231
For your generous providing CH4 655
Great is thy faithfulness CH4 153 / MP 200
I believe in Jesus MP 264
Jesus cared about the people ATAS 140
Jesus’ hands were kind hands CH4 351
Lord, the light of your love CH4 448 / MP 445
My life is in you, Lord MP 895
Praise the one who breaks the darkness CH4 348
Says Jesus, ‘Come and gather round’ CH4 342
Sharing together he’s found see page 123
Tell me the old, old story MP 628
The Lord’s my shepherd CH4 14-17 / MP 660

Take Home Ideas
Stepping Beyond Our Limitations
A few weeks ago you may have reflected on filling a glass half full of water (no cost there) and then filling it up with diluting juice or wine.
How did that feel? Did you think it was wasteful, using far more juice than was needed? Diluting good wine in water?
Have you ever thought that that is how generous God is with us? Giving us whatever we need to grow and fulfil the vision of the Kingdom, even if there are big chances that the giving might go to waste because we are a risky choice.
This is God.
And what about us? Will we find the courage to step beyond our own limitations? Are we prepared to be wasteful with our own resources for God’s purposes? Would we take the risk?
This is what Jesus encourages us to do when he asks us, like Peter, to join him in walking on the water. God knows we can do it. Do we?
age group ideas gathering

Names

You will need: either pitta bread, chapatti, tortilla wrap, or sliced bread.

Sit the children in a circle on the floor, perhaps on or around a picnic blanket. Give one child one pitta bread or one chapatti or one tortilla wrap or one slice of bread and challenge that child to share the bread so that everyone gets a piece of it. This will obviously be an easier challenge if your group is a small one. So you could adjust the quantity the first child is given.

Use this as a way into the story of Jesus ‘Feeding the 5,000’ and by doing so from the resources he had that day meeting the needs of the people there and also as a way into the importance of sharing what we have to meet other’s needs too.

Loaves and Fishes

You will need: ready-rolled fondant icing, yellow and blue food colouring, rolling pins, blunt knives, spoons, cocktail sticks, small paper plates, cling film, silver ball decorations for eyes, pencils.

Prepare the fondant icing for the children by making some bluish fondant icing (for the fish) and some very pale yellowish fondant icing (for the loaves) by adding food colouring to the ready-rolled icing and kneading it in until the colour is evenly spread throughout.

Give each child a paper plate and ask them to write their name on the bottom of it.

Now ask the children to make five little balls out of their yellowish icing and then to roll each of these long and flat to make the loaves before placing once more on their plate. Again they can decorate the top of these to make them look like a loaf of bread.

Once complete cover the paper plate with cling film and allow the loaves and fish to dry out a little before they then take them home to eat and share.

Talk with the children about the story and the way a small amount of food was shared and as a result Jesus could use that and everyone could be fed. Discuss sharing what we have with others. Discuss how sharing makes them feel and how it might make others feel.

Woven Baskets

You will need: card bases for basket weaving and coloured raffia available from Baker Ross (http://www.bakerross.co.uk/basket-weaving-kits) or Craft Shops, tissue paper, pencils, scissors.

Give each child a basket base and ask them to write their name on the bottom of their base to avoid confusion later.

Now show the children how to begin at the bottom of their basket and weave lengths of raffia in and out of each alternate part of the basket as they continually move up towards the top of the basket. Also show the children how to add new colours by simply weaving the new colour of raffia under the end of the old colour.

Having demonstrated the process, give the children lengths of raffia and allow them to create a brightly coloured basket. When complete the basket can be filled with lightly crumpled tissue paper ready for filling with something for sharing later e.g. fizzy fish sweets or small bread rolls.

While the children are sharing the raffia and creating their baskets talk with them about the story and the way the boy was willing to share what he had for his picnic lunch and as a result Jesus could use that and everyone could be fed. Discuss sharing what we have with others and not just our possessions but our talents and abilities too. Discuss how sharing can make a real difference.

Picnic Blanket

You will need: white or plain coloured paper tablecloths (one per group), felt pens, crayons, coloured pencils, tissue paper, gummed paper, foil, sticker shapes, PVA glue, glue spreaders, scissors.

Give each group a tablecloth and ask them to decorate it as a ‘Picnic Blanket’. Encourage the children to share in the choice of theme for decorating their picnic blanket, to share the materials and to share in the workload involved in decorating the tablecloth. When complete the edges of the tablecloth can then be snipped all around to create a picnic blanket effect and perhaps a small picnic shared by each group as they sit around or on their blankets.

Talk with the children about times when they have gone on a picnic and what they usually took with them for their picnic. Talk with the children about the ‘Feeding of the 5000’ part of the story and the fact that the little boy shared what he had for his picnic and as a result of him being willing to share everyone had a little to eat. Discuss the importance of sharing what we have with others.
activities

Who Is It?  age 6-12
You will need: images of well known people (celebrities or locally known people in the church) that have been distorted to make it harder to recognise the people. For many examples of celebrity pictures visit http://www.funny-celebrity-pictures.com/ though be selective! Someone dressed up very differently.
Sometimes we are unsure of who people are and if we recognise them or not, a bit like the disciples on the boat looking at the figure in the distance.
If at all possible have someone come into the room who is dressed differently or wearing glasses, hat, scarf or some such that they look completely different from their normal self; maybe even wearing a mask!
• Did the children identify the people?
• Did they need a bit of help?
• Was it easy to identify them? Why was that?

Sharing  all age
You will need: a tube of Smarties or bag of M&Ms for everyone in the group.
Ask the children to put their sweets in front of them and count them. Anything over a number ending in a zero (perhaps 20/30/40) they must give away to someone else in the room.
So, if a tube holds 38 smarties then they need to give 8 away or find someone who is willing to give them 2 extra.
• Do the children try to help each other out?
• Are some children more greedy than others?
• Does one or two children have a lot more than the others?
When this is completed ask the children to make sure everyone has the same amount.
• If any are left what do they do with them?
If you are concerned about hygiene give each child some gloves that you use when handling food.

Pot Luck Meal  all age
You will need: ask leaders to bring in some food they have left over from the day before.
The children need to make something to eat from what is on offer. It will need to be presented in a good way for everyone to eat and enjoy.
• Did everyone get something to eat?
• How easy was this to do?

games

Children On A Journey  age 3-5
Take the children through the story and act it out using simple actions. For a boat: all the children behind one another rowing. Followed on foot: walk around the hall. Crowds of people: run around the room and cheer. It was evening: lie down as if sleeping. Crowds told to sit: sit cross legged. Broke bread: break some bread up and divide between the children. Full: rub tummies.
Talk about which bit of the story they liked.
Jesus then gets back in the boat: same as before. Wind and waves: side to side in boat. Walked on water: walk a straight line in the room. Peter starts to sink: children lie down and start swimming movement.

Movement And Song  age 3-5
Teach the children the song ‘Row, row, row your boat’. When they sing this they could be sitting in a boat position. You could also teach the children another version of the song, there are many, such as: ‘Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, throw your teacher overboard and listen to her scream’.

Concentration  age 6-12
Peter may have lost concentration when he was walking on the water or lost focus. So for this game let the children have a staring competition in pairs where the first to blink is the loser.

Alone Time  age 6-12
Jesus often went to be alone so for this game a bit like ‘islands’ you will need to put on the floor a number of sheets of newspapers. The children walk and run around and when you say ‘alone time’ each child must find a sheet of newspaper to stand on. Anyone without a sheet is out. When the game starts again remove one of the sheets of newspaper. Repeat.

Parachutes  all age
You will need: play parachute, soft balls.
This story is ideal for many parachute games. The parachute can be made into waves that go around and around and getting higher and higher. If you place a ball on the chute it has to stay on the chute.
Additionally it could be a game about crowds. Put lots of balls on the parachute and toss them into the air and catch as many as they can.
You could also try a game where each child is given a colour segment to hold and when the leader shouts that colour when the parachute balloons up those children swap places. When the leader shouts all-change everybody must change position when the parachute is in the air.
Preparation

Today we recommend you play a trust game. Be aware of safety and of people's willingness to get involved. Do not force people to participate but you might want to talk about why they did or did not feel they want to be involved.

Opening Activity

Flying Carpet

One person lies on the ground stiff, eyes closed, arms across chest.

The rest of the group kneels around person, with one person at their feet, one at their head, and three or four people on each side.

The group counts, “one, two, three, up” and lifts the person to their knee height. They repeat the count process and lift to waist, then to the shoulder height, and if the person is willing, over head.

The group then counts and returns the person to the ground in the reverse order.

The Word

Read Matthew 14:13-33 together.

Activity/Discussion

• What does Jesus do at the start of the story?
• When the disciples tell him people are going to be hungry what does he say?
• Who does he ask to feed the people?

The disciples do not believe they can do it so Jesus shows them how. So, the disciples have just seen Jesus heal the sick and feed loads of people. 5,000 is only the number of men who were there. If you do the maths, it could have been 15,000 people!

What happens next?

It is the middle of the night. It is cold and stormy. Only some of the disciples were fishermen. The rest had little or no experience of boats as far as we know. Jesus comes walking on the water out of the storm.

• How would you have felt as one of the disciples?
• What would you have thought of Peter getting out of the boat?

Peter walked on the water. He did it.

• But then what happened?
• What does Jesus say to him?
• Why do you think he said that?

Remind yourselves of what the disciples had seen that day...

• Does Jesus saying that Peter does not have much faith make more sense when we remember all the amazing things he saw Jesus doing?

Relying on Jesus allows us to do amazing things in his name.

• Do we really believe that?
• How often do we forget?
• In what ways is it easier to rely on Jesus when things are going well rather than in the stormy and scary parts of life?

Living It Out

Make a point of noticing when you have to trust something or someone this week. How does it make you feel?
living in denial

bible notes

Transfiguration Renewal

The Feast of the Transfiguration provides a transitional point in the Christian liturgical seasons. It marks the point between Epiphany and Lent. The point between a season of revelation and a-ha moments and a season of reflection and repentance.

Here is a big moment in terms of revelation, a significant landmark in the disciples’ discovery of who Jesus is.

As told in Matthew’s gospel, the Transfiguration also marks a transition point in the journey of faith of the disciples. Although not all the disciples are present at the event, they are all changed by the encounter and by the change in direction that follows.

Jesus has been pointing them towards his passion and death and outlining their call to be cross bearers. It is after the mountaintop incident that he more obviously turns his face to Jerusalem and his teaching becomes more persistent and focussed.

After the Transfiguration incident, there is a marked change in the pace of the journey on which Jesus and the disciples are engaged.

Matthew 16:24-17:8
(Psalm 41:7-10)

So let’s pause for a moment on this mountain of Transfiguration to take in the sights and the sounds and to discern the import of this life changing moment.

The mountaintop setting is evocative of so many other biblical encounters: the receiving of the commandments, the sacrifice of Isaac, the temptation in the wilderness, the Ascension of Jesus—all significant points on faith journeys in which the will of God was revealed and the glory of God unveiled.

On this mountain top, Moses and Elijah, leaders who journeyed in faith with God, appear with Jesus. There is a rooting of Jesus in the prophetic tradition but also a setting apart of Jesus as the one whose appearance is dazzling and as the one of whom the voice of God speaks: “This is my beloved Son with whom I am pleased. Listen to him.”

It would seem that as Jesus embarks on the final phase of his journey, there are echoes of the beginning of his ministry when he was baptised by John in the Jordan.

There is a moment when, it seems, Peter’s tendency to be impetuous threatens to derail the impact of the event and prevent its significance being captured and appreciated. Peter’s wish to deal with practical things, to get caught up in the minutiae could have cost him the ability to see the big picture and take on board the wonder of this revelation on the mountain top. But even practical, hands on Peter is overcome with awe.

As Moses and Elijah fade from sight and the voice of God recedes to a whisper, one might ask the question: Who, in fact, was transfigured on that mountaintop? For Peter, James and John who shared that moment with Jesus, there surely could be no turning back. Their journey of faith was emboldened and renewed. As we prepare to leave Epiphany behind, we carry with us all the new and enlightening discoveries of God revealed in Jesus and, changed by those encounters, we embark on the season of Lent, reflecting on all that has been revealed, refusing to live in denial, eager to discover more and emboldened to journey on in faith.
Listen!

One of the disciples reflects. Could also be split into 3 voices for Peter, James and John.

He took us up a mountain. Somewhere ordinary just wouldn’t have made it sink in.

He only took the three of us. We should have clocked that something significant was going to happen.

Yes, the look of him changed, it was like seeing the old tale of Moses unfolding before us. His face shone, there is no other way to describe it. Even his clothes seemed to turn whiter. It wasn’t just the light or the thin clear air. We were witnessing the presence of God in him.

We were in a sacred place. But still that wasn’t the point. That was only to catch our attention. And the great law-giver himself appeared like a vision. Standing right with us: Moses.

Not only him but Elijah too. The two of them and Jesus, what a holy trinity!

We all started talking at once, offering to put up shelters, to build a fire, to cook some meat. How ready we were to bask in the glory of it all! The cloud confirmed it for us, the strangely bright mistiness that came and wrapped itself around us. We were babbling like excited children: Lord it’s so good to be here! It’s so good to be here!

Then a voice cut in on us, interrupting and disregarding all our noisy chatter. It wasn’t Moses who spoke. Nor Elijah. It wasn’t Jesus for the voice spoke about him. It called him God’s son, his cherished pride and joy. And then, the strong word for us to heed: Listen to him! Listen!

We knew then what mattered most. In future, he shouldn’t need mountains or clouds, radiance or ancestors, excitement or terror, to get it through to us. It needs to be our daily default position: Shut up and listen!

Retelling For Young People

At The Top Of The Mountain

This is a story about three of Jesus’ disciples—Peter, James and John—and the day they had an amazing adventure.

Jesus took them for a long walk up a big mountain. Up, up, up they went, getting hot in the sunshine and tired in the heat.

The first amazing thing happened at the top of the mountain.

All of a sudden, Jesus’ face and clothes looked completely different! It was as if the sunlight had got right inside him and was making him glow and shine from the inside out!

Peter knew it wasn’t the sunlight. James and John knew it too. They all knew that Jesus was shining with the brightness of God! Wow!

Then the second amazing thing happened at the top of the mountain.

Two important people from long ago, appeared beside Jesus and started talking to him. One of them was Moses. The other was Elijah. Was it a dream? Was it a vision?

Peter, James and John rubbed their eyes in wonder. How did Moses and Elijah get there? Peter asked if he should pitch three tents so that Jesus, Moses and Elijah could have shelter from the sun.

Just as Peter was asking it, a third amazing thing happened at the top of the mountain!

A shining cloud appeared in the sky and came down, down, down, hiding everything from sight and covering them all.

That was when the fourth amazing thing happened at the top of the mountain.

There was a voice. It wasn’t Peter this time. It wasn’t Jesus or Moses or Elijah still talking. It wasn’t James or John speaking. It was someone else.

It was God! Wow!

It all felt a bit too amazing for Peter, James and John, and they fell down and hid their faces, feeling really, really scared.

But the voice had something amazing to say. God said something very important about Jesus. God said, “This is my son here. I love him and I’m proud of him. Please listen to him!”

Peter, James and John were so lucky to be the ones who heard God’s voice. From then on, they knew they should always listen to Jesus and do what Jesus asked. And they passed that message on, and it’s a message that’s been passed on for years and years through hundreds and thousands of different people.

Listen to Jesus! Listen to him, and do what he asks!

How amazing that we’re hearing what God said, even today!
worship ideas

Through the Season
Pages 6 and 7 contain ideas that can be used to help set the scene throughout this season encouraging a sense that each week is thematically tied together.

Gathering Activity
Have you ever had a mountaintop experience?
Talk with those around you about those times when you have looked out over the wonder of landscape, marvelled at its beauty, taken in the fresh air and contemplated the future with a greater hope and focus awaiting you upon your descent.

Call to Worship
Leader: From the rising of the sun to its going down
All: God calls his people.
Leader: From the mountaintop
All: God’s light, the perfection of beauty, shines out.
Leader: Today we remember the light that illuminated Jesus.
All: We celebrate his mountain top transfiguration.
Leader: Jesus the light of the world,
All: Jesus the light of love,
Leader: Jesus the light of delight,
All: Jesus the light that turns doubter into follower.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession
God we worship your majesty
in the beauty of sanctuaries,
in the ordinariness of community centres,
behind closed doors
and in open spaces.
Wherever your people gather
you are there
transfiguring every moment,
providing fresh revelation,
enlivening the journey.
God forgive us when we are so consumed
by minutiae that we fail to see you
in all your splendour.
And forgive us when we look for you in lofty places
when you are crouched down with the lowly.
Forgive us and free us to see you afresh
in every time and place,
sitting beside us in our rest
and walking with us on the journey.
Transfiguring Lord,
transfigure our lives
here in worship
and in our everyday.
Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves
God, we thank you that you do not dwell on the mountaintop
but walk among your people:
sometimes dazzling white,
sometimes incognito grey,
sometimes drawing attention,
sometimes fading into the background.
You point to a great tradition of priests and prophets
but also present a new vision
for all who walk by faith today.
May we be so altered by journeying with you
that we change lives and communities for good.
May we feed the hungry,
bind the broken hearted,
set prisoners free,
heal the sick,
find shelter for the homeless
and share what we have with the poor.
May we be changed in and by our service.
And, as though we had been on the mountaintop,
may we find renewed vigour to take up our cross
and journey on with you
changing the landscape through which we travel.
May we be led from lofty to lowly,
from the past to the present
and may we hear echoes of our calling in baptism
to listen and serve you now.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication
Stunned, amazed, awed, excited, enthused, scared:
such were the feelings the disciples knew
on the descent from their mountaintop experience.
As we dedicate ourselves and our contributions
today to the work of the Lord
may we all catch a glimmer of that same awed excitement,
ready for the opportunities that tomorrow may bring us
to live as your followers.
May it always be so.
Amen.
worship ideas

Reflection
Shiny things attract. So too do things of the past. And so we yearn for that one moment of triumph for that old familiar tradition.

The high points draw our attention and call us to pause and wonder yet our energy plummets as we descend from the summit.

Christ, transfigured on the mountaintop, leads us back to the plains changed by the intensity of an encounter with the living God, but renewed in energy and purpose to take up our cross deny ourselves and walk the way of Christ.

Transfiguring God transfigures disciples to transfigure the world.

Praise/Hymns
All heaven declares CH4 426 / MP 14
Be still, for the presence of the Lord CH4 189 / MP 50
Be thou my vision CH4 465 / MP 51
Bright the cloud and bright the glory CH4 353
Crown him with many crowns CH4 459 / MP 109
Fill the place, Lord, with your glory MP 145
Follow me ATAS 63
He is Lord, he is Lord CH4 443 / MP 220
Holy, holy, holy CH4 111 / MP 237
How great thou art CH4 154 / MP 506
Light of the world (Here I am to worship) MP 1086
Majesty MP 454
Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity CH4 356 / MP 465
Mine eyes have seen the glory CH4 476
Praise the One who breaks the darkness CH4 348
Praise to the holiest CH4 378 / MP 563
Shines, Jesus, shine CH4 448 / MP 445
The Lord is King CH4 129 / MP 656
We are standing on holy ground MP 1121
When I look into your holiness MP 754
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness CH4 201
You are holy MP 1244

Take Home Ideas
The question was raised this week whether there was also a transfiguration (at least a transformation) for the disciples as much as for Jesus. At the very least, the transfiguration is a way of expressing their expanded view of what is going on. It forced them to step back and consider what was going on.

This week is an opportunity to do the same: to try to stand witness to what is going on in your life, at your workplace, in your community with an eye on the big picture.

Whatever you are involved with this week. Pause, stop for a moment, particularly when the details begin to crowd in, and ask:

• What is at the heart of this issue?
• Who is at the heart of this issue?
• What would be a perfect resolution to this issue?
• What part can I play in bringing about that resolution?
age group ideas
gathering

Small But Special  all age
You will need: a variety of optical illusions (you will find many readily available online), particularly ones where two images are visible depending on how you interpret what you see.

Share the optical illusions around among the group. Talk with the children about what they see in the illusions and ask some of them to describe to the group what they can see. Then allow other children to comment on the same illusion and what they see in it.

Discuss with the children if they all see the same thing and if not can they see the second thing more clearly once it has been pointed out by someone.

Use this as a way into the story and seeing things and people differently.

I Can See  age 3-5
For this game you can go around the room and ask the children to find you something that is red, blue, green, yellow, and so on. Ask them what else comes in that colour. Red might be a fire engine; blue for the sky.

Then move onto white: how many are wearing something white? Do they find white bright? You may wish to hide a few objects in the room like a white table cover, pillowcase, sock, paper: everything that is white is to be found and brought back. What else is white? Moon, milk, paper, and so on.

True or False  age 6-12
The children will need to line up opposite each other in two straight lines and then be numbered 1 to 4, 5, 6... depending how many you have, but they need to be numbered from opposite ends. So number one will be facing number 6 on the opposing team. Set two chairs at either end of the space in the middle with the word ‘true’ on one chair at each end and the other ‘false’.

Ask questions about today’s bible story which can be answered true or false and direct the question to the numbered children. For example, "number 3: Jesus said, ‘take up your cross and carry it’—true or false?” The first child to reach the end and sit in the correct chair is the winner.

Hopscotch  age 6-12
This is a variation on the game hopscotch. On a large sheet of paper, possibly a wallpaper roll, draw out a large square and separate it into a grid of squares 8 squares by 8 squares. In each square write the letters of equal amount that spell out ‘Son of man’. Across the top should read the phrase as it is written but all the other squares are jumbled up.

For example:
S O N O F M A N
F M O N S A O
M A F S O N O N
and so on until you have the 8x8 grid filled.
The children are given a bean bag and as individuals or as a team they must throw their beanbag and spell out ‘Son of Man’.

Follow Me!  all age
The opening verse states ‘to become my followers’ so this game is about following.

Arrange the children in a circle sitting on the floor or on a seat. Ask a child to start off by doing an action; it could be touching their ear, tapping foot, clapping hands, or something similar. The child next to them does that action plus one of their own; the third child adds another and so on around the circle.

How far around the circle or how many times around the circle can they do these actions without making a mistake?
Transformation Time  age 3-5

You will need: pre-cut body shapes (a template is available on page 124, colouring pencils, felt tip pens, glitter, glitter pens, glittery sprinkles, shiny foil, stick on glittery shapes, PVA glue, glue spreaders, scissors. Note: all the sparkly materials should be on a separate table, a place where the children can go to ‘Transform’ their body shape once they have decorated it.

Give each child a pre-cut body shape and ask them to transform it into a person by decorating it using only the felt tip pens and coloured pencils.

When they have done so, ask the children to now take their ‘person’ to the ‘Transforming Table’ and make their person as colourful and bright as possible by adding glitter and sparkle.

Talk with the children about how their person, although quite bright and colourful before, was completely transformed by adding the glitter and sparkle. Talk about how we now see their person in a different way. Discuss the story and how Jesus was transformed by God on the mountainside and he became shining and bright. Talk about how the disciples saw Jesus in a different way too after he had been transformed on the mountainside.

Transforming Light  age 6-8

Suncatcher 1

You will need: holographic card, glitter, angel hair tinsel or strips of foil or shiny paper, pencils, PVA glue, glue spreader, scissors, thread for hanging.

Give each child a piece of holographic card and ask them to draw a spiral on it. Now ask them to carefully cut out the spiral. Once cut, the children can decorate the spiral to make it even more shiny by attaching angel hair tinsel, foil or shiny paper and by adding touches of glitter here and there.

Pierce a small hole at the top of the spiral and attach a thread for hanging. The children’s spirals can now be hung up in a bright spot to twist and turn and catch the light which will then transform the surroundings of the place it is hung.

Discuss the story and how Jesus was transformed by God on the mountainside and he became shining and bright. Talk of how the disciples then saw Jesus in a different way. Then talk about their spirals and how they are transformed when the light catches them. Discuss how the area around them is affected by the light as it twists and turns. Discuss how the places round about us might be transformed if we were like that light and bringing sparkle to those around us.

Transforming Light  age 9-12

Suncatcher 2

You will need: paper plates (one for each child), clear sheets of sticky-backed plastic (cut into circles about 1 c.m. wider all round than the smooth part of the plate (you need two per child), tissue paper in a variety of colours, ribbon, sellotape, felt pens, coloured pencils, glitter, shiny stickers, scissors.

To create a frame for their sun-catcher ask the children to cut out the centre smooth part of their plate to leave only the ridged edge intact as a circle and this will form the frame of their sun-catcher. They can do this by making a small hole in the centre of the plate with their scissors before then cutting outwards towards the rim before cutting around in a circle to leave the rim in tact.

Now give each child two pieces of clear sticky back plastic. Ask them to carefully peel off the backing paper from ONE of the circles and ask them to lay it in front of them with the sticky side upwards. Ask the children to make a face by tearing or cutting up pieces of the tissue paper and then to carefully place these pieces on the sticky plastic.

Note that they may want to lay out their pieces beside them first to see what the face look likes before actually sticking them on.

When each piece has been placed ask the children to remove the backing paper from the other piece of sticky backed plastic and to carefully stick it over their face picture i.e. sticky side to sticky side.

Invite the children to now decorate the frame of their picture as they please. The using sellotape fix the picture to the back of the frame.

To allow the sun-catcher to hang, the children should now attach a large loop of ribbon securely to the top of their picture using sellotape. The sun-catcher can now be hung at a window to catch the light and transform the area around with colour.

An ‘open’ pattern could be used instead of a face as long as it is ‘open’ enough to let the light catch it.

Discuss the story and how Jesus was transformed by God on the mountainside and he became shining and bright. Talk of how the disciples then saw Jesus in a different way. Then talk about their sun-catchers and how they are transformed when the light catches them. Discuss how the area around them is also affected by the reflected light. Discuss how the places round about us might be transformed if we were like that light and bringing sparkle to those around us. Discuss how we might do just that.
Stained Glass Windows  all age

You will need: black sugar/construction paper in A5 size, scissors, tissue paper in a variety of colours (just slightly smaller than A5), PVA glue, glue spreaders, pencils, half templates no greater than 9 cm tall by 7 cm wide (for example: half a butterfly, half a person, half an angel, half a tree, and so on). Give each child a piece of black sugar/construction paper and ask them to place it horizontally on their table. Now ask them to gently fold it in half. Allow each child to choose a half template and ask them to place it on the fold and carefully draw around it. Ask the children to now remove the template and carefully cut around the lines they have just drawn. When opened this should produce a frame with a space showing their full size chosen picture. Let the children choose a colour of tissue paper then ask them to glue around their frame and then place the tissue carefully onto the glue. When turned over the framed picture should appear. These can then be placed together on a window to create one large stained glass window in the space where you meet or the children can take home to place on their window there.

Discuss the story and how Jesus was transformed by God on the mountainside and he became shining and bright. Talk of how the disciples then saw Jesus in a different way. Then talk about their windows and how they are transformed when they are placed in bright light. Discuss how the area around them is also affected by the reflected light. Discuss how the places round about us might be transformed if we were like that light and bringing sparkle to those around us. Discuss how we might do just that.

Holy Illusions  age 6-12

You will need: A4 paper.

Sometimes our eyes can deceive us when we are not expecting it and sometimes we do not really understand what we see. For this activity give each child a sheet of A4 paper. Ask them to roll it up into a tube shape and put it to their right eye while holding it in their right hand. Ask the children what they see? Inform the children to put their left hand in front of their face with their palm facing their eye touch the tube and open both eyes with the right eye will still looking down the tube. What do they see? It should look as though they have a hole in their hand. Let the children move the palm of their left hand closer and further away on the tube to see what differences that makes.

The Bigger Picture  age 6-12

You will need: either PowerPoint presentation equipment with a presentation showing images with gradual reveals of objects that the children will recognise (could be animals or local buildings). If you do not have access to such equipment you could print out large pictures and cover them with sheets of paper, gradually revealing the image on a table with the children gathered around.

The disciples were not looking at the bigger picture, they were only focused on what they saw in front of them. Use images that the children will recognise; the church building, a symbol in the church, animals, a cartoon character, a book they are familiar with or some such. Show just a small section of the item on the PowerPoint or on paper and ask them to identify what it is. Did they see and identify the bigger picture from the small section that you showed them? You will need a quite a few images.

I Know You  all age

You will need: a room that can be blacked out (either with no windows or where windows can be blocked), alternatively you could use a tent in the hall, covered in black cloths but be aware of trailing cables if you do this, lamps, torches, tissue paper or coloured organza material.

Before the children enter the room set up a few lamps with dark coloured material over them. Ask the children what they think about the room. Can they see well enough to read? Can they identify each other? Change the material to orange/red/yellow, does that make a difference? Did the mood in the room change? Do they prefer the lighter glow? Take off all the covers and reveal the room at it brightest with lamps and ceiling light on. Is it much brighter? What do they think of the room now? Is everything in the room revealed? Darken the room again and give each person a torch. How bright do they find it with the white light in their faces? Let the children cover the ends with different colours of tissue paper.
discussion starters for teens
my treasured shelter

Preparation
Print off copies of the sheet with the outline plan for creating an origami/folding house found on page 125. If you have the facility, print this zoomed up to A3 size on card to create a larger, less fiddly house. You will also need scissors, double-sided sellotape and coloured pens.

Opening Activity
My Shelter
Use the sheets, cut out the pattern, then fold along the dotted lines and stick (double-sided sellotape along the tabs is the easiest and least messy way, though you can do the job with PVA glue).

Once created, the young people can decorate their shelters to make them truly their own with felt-tip pens.

The Word
Read Matthew 16:24-17:8 together. Read a verse each.

Activity/Discussion
This is a strange story of two parts.

• In the first part, what do you think Jesus means by ‘taking up your cross’?
• Do you think Jesus is talking about us actually dying?
• Or is this about something more symbolic? (Perhaps being ‘dead’ to a way of life and living in a new way?)
• What would that new way of life look like?

Six days later...
• Can you think of any echoes here from stories from the past?

Moses meets God on the mountain and his face shines afterwards. Elijah also meets God on the mountain. The voice from above says the same thing as at Jesus’ baptism.

• Does it matter that Moses and Elijah are there with Jesus?

Jesus is the same, but different. The ‘truth’ of Jesus is revealed to the disciples. Jesus is the Son of God. The disciples try to capture the moment by building shelters like little houses for Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

• What are the things we try to hold on to?
• Things we wish could last forever?
• What are the times you wish you could go back to?
• A place? A holiday? An experience?
• In what ways do we hide parts of ourselves so people do not see the ‘true’ us?
• Why do we do that?
• Are we scared? Embarrassed? Worried? Shy?
• Do you think the choices we make transform the world into a better place?

Living It Out
Choices, choices.
We all make lots of choices, and those choices have consequences.

Think about all the options you have this week, all the little choices, and think about what the outcome might be if you made a different choice.
extra resources and work sheets
MORSE CODE

A -
B -
C -
D -
E -
F -
G -
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I -
J -
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V -
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6 -
7 -
8 -
9 -
0 -

Period .
Comma ,
Question Mark ?
Apostrophe ‘
Exclamation Mark !
Slash, Fraction Bar /
Open Parenthesis (,
Closed Parenthesis )
Ampersand &
Colon :
Semicolon ;
Equals =
Plus +
Hyphen, Minus -
Underscore _
Quotation Mark “
Dollar Sign $
At sign@
The Big Day has passed and in our world there is a sense of completion, of having arrived. There may also be a sense of the emptiness left when all the glitz and glamour is past.

For the Christian it is different. The journey has just begun. The celebration continues as we, like the Magi, journey homeward seeing that the miracle of Christ has changed everything.

This week take a moment every day to see Christ in the midst of our world, concentrating on one area each day. Take the challenge of seeing Christ in the everyday events and create your own journal of his life in your life.

In my family life:

In my neighbourhood/community:

In the news:

In the wider world:

In my children/grandchildren’s school:

In a charity’s activities:

In my church:
Are we on the run in life or are we running the race of life? We all live in the hope of a better world. Our hopes are false if we don’t give ourselves to help God make our hopes becomes a reality.

Some of us will have made New Year’s resolutions. But have we thought of starting a journey/journal of prayer and action solutions? This week, take the time to think on areas of your life, of our world, where you will journey committedly in God’s plan for the reality of a Kingdom come, meeting Christ (at least halfway) on the journey onward. List the ways you will pray or act toward these goals. Think about where you saw Christ last week and help him live stronger. Think about where you didn’t see Christ last week and help him live in those places by your actions. Start a real life journal and talk with God about how it’s going along the way.

In my family life:

In my neighbourhood/community:

In the news:

In the wider world:

In my children/grandchildren’s school:

In a charity’s activities:

In my church:
And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.
(Matt 3:17)
Below is an image of a tent where the air flows freely through and the living conditions are blown by the winds of change. For that reason, there are 12 guy ropes pinning it down to make sure it doesn’t move.

Reflect on whether this is an image of your life and your life with the church. As Christians, as communities, we are meant to live in freedom, letting go of the past and reaching for the future, soaring as on eagles wings, letting peace be the updraft that helps us carry peace into a new world bravely. We are to be nomads, journeying people and our dwelling place is not the tent, this is just for cover, our dwelling place is the journey itself.

Over the next year, take the time each month to reflect on one of the 12 guy ropes that pin down the tent of your life. What is it? Is it something good you’d stake your life and faith on like you’ve already reflected on in previous weeks? Does it hinder you on the journey, hold you back? Decide whether you want it to remain or whether it is a cord that is frayed and needs to be replaced. Try keeping a simple journal of your thoughts.

At the end of the year see how you have been renewed and freed to dwell not in fear but where God encourages you to go.
Locust Drive

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.

Throws
6  Body
5  Head
4  Eyes
3  Legs
2  Feelers
1  Hind Legs
Rabble Rouser

John the Baptist was sometimes known as a rabble rouser, he sometimes caused trouble but he did so for the right reasons. See if you can come up with a good and bad description of a rabble rouser for each letter of the words. We have given you examples for the first letter.

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At home, fill a glass half full of water and reflect on what you see.
Is the glass half full or half empty?
It could represent the knowledge that there is as much of us that is half full of emptiness (sin) as there is of us flowing with living giving water.
It could represent how far we have come in God and encourage us to fill the glass with more despite the temptation just to drink now of what we have when we could have more.
Fill the remainder of the glass with diluting orange / blackcurrent juice (or be courageous and use wine) and see the glass filled and representing with the golden potential that each of us holds in God’s eyes, the new wine of life in God that is still to be discovered and enjoyed.
The plain old water has not disappeared... it is still a part of the whole.
What can you remember about stories from the past? Take this quiz and see how well you do. Write your answers next to the questions.

1. After how many days did God rest after making the world?
2. Who are the first couple mentioned in the bible?
3. Who was the eldest brother, was it Cain or Abel?
4. How many of each animal did Moses take on the ark?
5. What was the name of the sea that Moses and the Israelites passed over?
6. Which animal on the ark did Noah not trust?
7. Which prophet saw the burning bush?
8. What was the name of the prophet swallowed by a big fish?
9. What kind of fish was it?
10. Who prayed at an open window and met some lions?
11. Who was turned into a pillar of salt?
12. What is the name of the boy who killed a giant?
Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit; all God's realm is surely theirs. Those in mourning will find thirst for what is right. They will not be prone to bles-sings as God's own. Those oppressed for faith-ful

2. Blessed, too, are those who hun-ger and who com-fort as an answer to their prayers. Meek ones wan-der, for your will is their de-light. Those who liv-ing will call Hea-ven's king-dom home. When the

3. Those who share the peace God gives them will find whom this world de-spis-es will in-show God's care and mer-cy will re-

4. Meek ones will inherit every-thing, God, your king-dom still sur-ceive that mer-cy, too. God, in Christ you show us feel life's pain-ful sting, God, re-mind us of the

5. May we seek the reign you bring, clear-ly of the joy we have in you, bless-ings of the won-drous life you bring.

Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, copyright © 2009
Music: Traditional American melody.

Biblical Text: Matthew 5:1-12
Tune: Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, 1813
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This hymn is part of "The Sermon on the Mount: A Worship Service of Lessons and Songs" by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. A complete list of Carolyn's 200+ hymns can be found at www.carolynshymns.com Email: bcgillette@comcast.net
Beside each letter write a word or sentence about the people Jesus said were blessed. We have given you one example already.

B

L

E

S

Speak out for those who suffer

E

D
Chorus  
Praise to the God of all the earth,  
share in his grace and peace.  
Praise from his children who from their birth  
are welcome to share in his feast.

1. The wedding was fun, until no more wine,  
bottles lay on the ground.  
Jesus said, 'Fill them with water and taste.'  
Sharing together he's found.  
Praise to the God...

2. A boy gave his lunch: five loaves and two fish,  
wasn't a lot to go round.  
Jesus said, 'Thank you', and blessed what he had.  
Sharing together he's found.  
Praise to the God...

3. Breaking the bread with all of his friends,  
passing the wine around,  
Jesus said, 'Do this and remember me'.  
Sharing together he's found.  
Praise to the God...

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