



## ASSEMBLIES/COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

### Introduction

There are eight assemblies in this pack, two for each of the last four weeks of term leading up to Christmas. If you are invited to do an assembly each week, then choose which one of the two most suits your gifts and style of presentation. If you are just going in to a school once or twice during Advent, then find out if the school are going to be following the themes of the four weeks. If they are, check which theme coincides with your visit and choose one of the two assemblies for that week. If not, feel free to choose any assembly from the eight.

### Week one – Messages from God

Messages

The Annunciation by Filippo Lippi

### Week two – Journeys

A big walk

A long way from home

### Week three – Jesus, God's gift to the whole world

The parable of the goldfish

A present to the whole world

### Week four – Visitors and gifts

Christmas signs

What happened to the gifts?

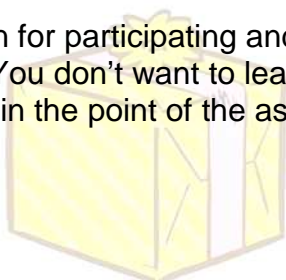
### Guidelines

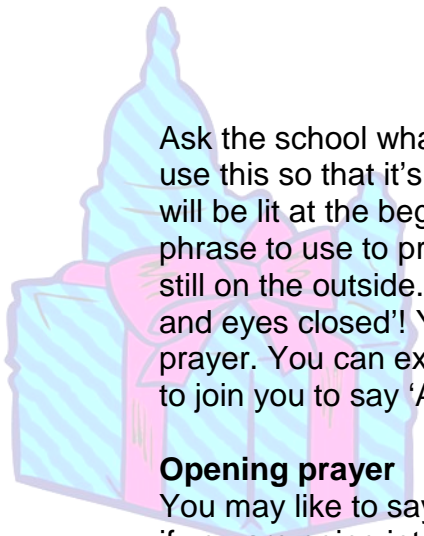
School assemblies are usually short, sweet and to the point. You are likely to be given ten or 15 minutes out of a total of twenty minutes allocated to the assembly. Adjust the material given in these assembly outlines to the necessary length. Make sure you stick to the time allocated to you; you will win no friends if you eat into the curriculum time.

Ask the school if they usually sing songs or hymns in assembly and if so, get them to suggest one that the children know well and that fits the theme.

Don't ever embarrass children by putting them on the spot, showing them up in front of their friends or by joking about a mistake they made. Several of these assemblies ask you to get children out the front to participate. You will probably have plenty of volunteers, but once they stand up they may suddenly realise that all eyes are on them. You can do a lot to affirm them and encourage them to participate.

Always thank the children for participating and get them to sit down once their contribution has ended. You don't want to leave them up there feeling awkward while you explain the point of the assembly.





Ask the school what routine they have with respect to prayer; you may like to use this so that it's familiar to children. For example, in some schools a candle will be lit at the beginning of a prayer and extinguished at the end. A good phrase to use to prepare children for prayer is 'Let's be still on the inside and still on the outside.' Don't use the traditional and outdated 'Hands together and eyes closed'! You can't assume that all children will want to join in the prayer. You can explain that you are going to pray and invite those that want to join you to say 'Amen' at the end.

### **Opening prayer**

You may like to say this prayer at the beginning of each assembly, particularly if you are going into the school more than once. Children love repetition and it will help to frame what you are doing in the school.

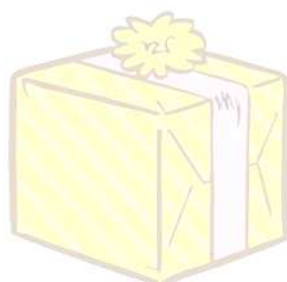
Dear God

Open our ears to listen carefully to the Christmas story.

Open our minds to understand what it means for us.

Open our hearts to receive your love and to share that love with others.

Amen.





## ASSEMBLIES

### Week one – Messages from God MESSAGES

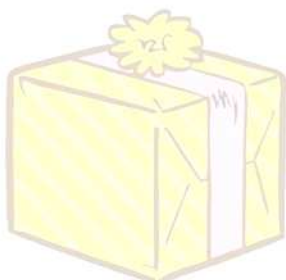
**Aim:** to think about all the different ways that God can speak to us.

**You will need:**

- a soft toy bird – ideally a pigeon but it could be a duck, an eagle or whatever you can find
- paper and pens
- elastic bands
- empty plastic bottle
- two mobile phones
- garden cane, card, yellow and red paint or paper, sticky tape to make flags
- pillow
- a Bible
- two large bags – reusable supermarket bags are ideal.

**Preparation:**

- Write 'you are invited to a party on ' and add a date that will be in the past when you do your assembly. Attach this with an elastic band to the wing of your soft toy bird.
- Write 'you've got tomato sauce on your nose' on a piece of paper. Roll it up and put it inside the empty plastic bottle, making sure that it will be easy to get out again.
- For authenticity, enter this message into one of the mobile phones: 'Gone shopping. C U l8r.'
- Make two semaphore flags. Use square pieces of card and paint them in red and yellow. Attach each to a short garden cane with sticky tape.
- Practice spelling 'HI' with the flags. If you want to read up on semaphore, visit the Scouting Resources website: [http://scoutresources.org.uk/SR/codes\\_semaphore.html](http://scoutresources.org.uk/SR/codes_semaphore.html)
- Put the bird, the bottle, the mobile phone and the flags into one bag.
- Write 'I love you' on two pieces of paper. Put one inside the Bible and one inside the pillow.
- Enter a message into the second mobile phone: I love you.
- Put this phone, the Bible and the pillow into the second bag.
- You probably won't have time to use all the snippets of information about different methods of communication at the start of the assembly so choose those which most appeal to you.





## The assembly INTRODUCTION

Explain that this assembly is all about messages. There are lots and lots of different ways we can get messages to each other. The items in your bag will give clues to some ways of sending messages.

**Pull out the soft toy bird.** Ask children what method of sending a message this reminds them of. Talk about carrier pigeons. They deliver a message that has been rolled up and attached to their foot. (If your bird looks nothing like a pigeon, explain that that was the only one you could find!) For example, pigeons were used in World War II to deliver messages that were not safe to send by radio in case the opposition were listening in. Winkie was a pigeon that flew 120 miles to deliver an SOS message from a crashed bomber in 1943. And he was given a medal for it! He was the first pigeon to be awarded the Dickin medal which is a special award for animals who are heroic in war.

Read out the message attached to your bird's wing and say 'This one obviously took rather a long time to get here!'

**Next pull out the bottle.** How do people send messages with bottles? They write their message on paper, roll it up and place it in the bottle. Then they throw the bottle in the sea or in a river, hoping that the current will take the bottle far away. Queen Elizabeth 1 used to get messages from her fleet of ships during the war with Spain. That was about 440 years ago. She had an official whose job it was to open bottles with messages in. He was called the 'Uncorker of Bottles' and it was illegal for anyone else to open a bottle with a message in that had been washed up on the beach. Open up the bottle and read out the message. Say 'Oh thanks!' and wipe your nose then look puzzled and say 'How did they know that?'

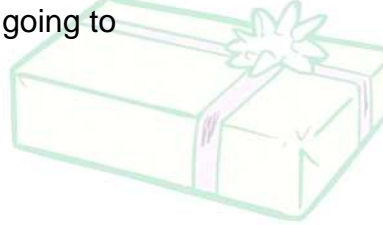

**Then comes the mobile phone.** This is a very common way of sending messages isn't it? We can ring and speak to someone, or leave a message on their answer phone. And of course we can use mobile phones to send text messages. Hey, I've got a message from my friend. It says 'Gone shopping.' Then there's a letter 'c', a letter 'u' and L eight R. What language is that? I don't understand! The children will willingly tell you that it means 'see you later'.

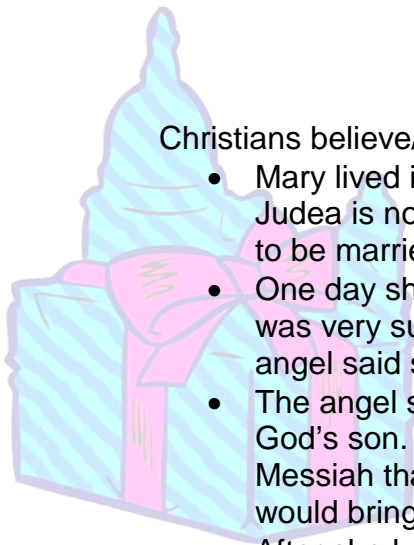
**Finally pull out the flags.** Ask children how these can be used to send messages. Talk about semaphore which is a way of sending a message to someone quite a distance away, using two flags. Each letter of the alphabet is represented by the flags being held in a certain position. Explain that you are now going to send them a message using semaphore and demonstrate the positions for 'H' and 'I'. Ask for guesses for what that spells and tell them you have just said 'Hi!' to them.



## MAIN CONTENT

So there are lots of ways that we can send messages. Today we're going to think about a message that God sent to a girl called Mary.





Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- Mary lived in a town called Nazareth in Judea over 2000 years ago. Judea is now part of the country that we call Israel. She was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph.
- One day she was at home, when suddenly an angel appeared! Mary was very surprised – you don't see angels every day. But then the angel said something that surprised her even more.
- The angel said that Mary was going to have a baby that would be God's son. She was to call the baby Jesus and he would be the Messiah that everyone was hoping for. Jesus would save people and would bring them back to God.
- After she had got over the shock of seeing an angel, Mary was very happy to get this message from God.

How many of you have seen an angel? Nor have I. But Christians believe that God does still speak to us today in different ways. And I've got some things in my second bag that will help us understand how that can happen. Pull these out one at a time and talk about them:

- **The Bible.** Christians believe that the Bible is a very special book that was inspired by God. Although it was written a long time ago, God can still speak to us through the Bible today.
- **Mobile phone.** Does God ring us up and have a chat? No! Who does ring us up? All the people that we know – our family and friends. Sometimes God speaks to us through those people. If we're not sure what to do, or we're feeling a bit sad, it's a good idea to talk about it to someone who loves God.
- **Pillow.** God sometimes speaks to us in our dreams. Joseph, the man that Mary was going to marry, had a dream where God told him to go ahead and marry Mary and to look after her baby as if it was his own.

So what might God say to us? Would he give us the same message that he gave Mary? No, her message was just for her. But God says something just as special to each of us.

Invite three children to come out and find the messages in the Bible, on the phone and in the pillow. Ask them to read out what they have found – 'I love you'. Explain that the message that God wants us to hear this Christmas is just how much he loves us.

### REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Invite children to sit quietly for a moment and to think about the message that God wants to give them. God says: I love you.

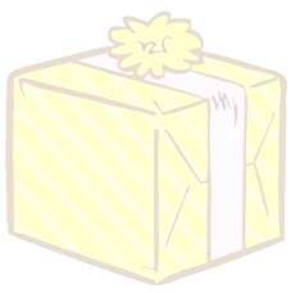
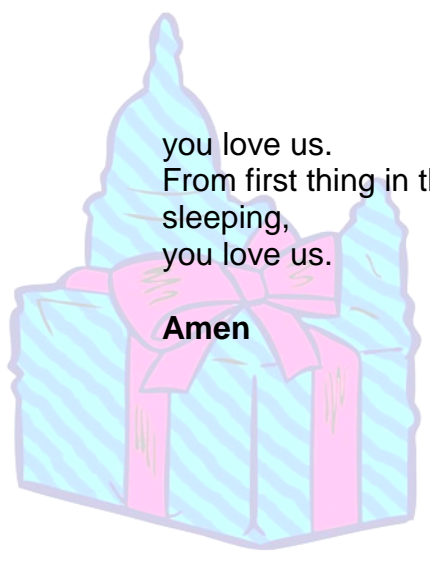
Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if they want to join in, they can say Amen at the end.

Dear God  
Thank you for the message that you send us every day,  
you love us.  
Help us to remember in all the fun of Christmas that



you love us.  
From first thing in the morning, to last thing at night, and then while we're  
sleeping,  
you love us.

**Amen**





## Week one – Messages from God

### THE ANNUNCIATION BY FILIPPO LIPPI

[to include a copy of the picture with the symbols that we talk about highlighted – particularly the hole in the dress as it's quite difficult to spot.]

**Aim:** to consider how God spoke to Mary and her acceptance of the message.

**You will need:**

- access to a data projector to project the painting, The Annunciation by Filippo Lippi
- a laptop or access to a school computer.

**Preparation:**

- The picture you need is on the resources disk. It can be easily projected in the assembly hall.

**The assembly**

**INTRODUCTION**

Tell the story of the annunciation (or recap if you told it in a previous assembly).

Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- Mary was a young girl who lived in a town called Nazareth in Judea about 2000 years ago. Judea is now part of the country that we call Israel. She was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph.
- One day she was at home, when suddenly an angel appeared! Mary was very surprised – you don't see angels every day. But then the angel said something that surprised her even more.
- The angel said that Mary was going to have a baby that would be God's son. She was to call the baby Jesus and he would be the Messiah that everyone was hoping for. Jesus would save people and would bring them back to God.
- After she had got over the surprise of seeing an angel, Mary was very happy to get this message from God.

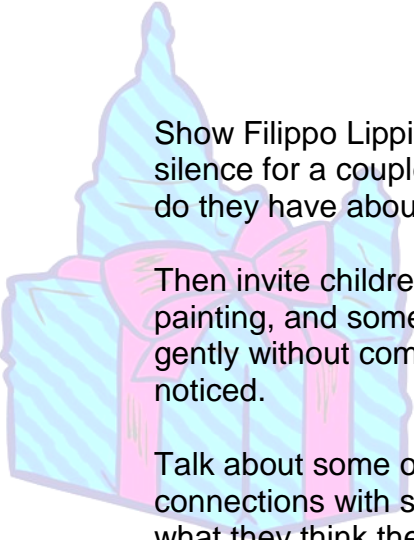
This story happened a long time ago, so we don't know what Mary or the angel looked like. But lots of artists have used their imaginations and have painted pictures that show what they think happened.

We're going to look at a painting by a man called Filippo Lippi. He was born around 600 years ago in Italy. He painted a picture of this story from the Bible. It's called The Annunciation and was painted between 1448 and 1450. [The National Gallery website says 1450-3] He had a very good imagination. He thought about what happened, but also about why it happened and what it meant. He put into his painting lots of symbols that show what he believed about it.



**MAIN CONTENT**





Show Filippo Lippi's painting, The Annunciation. Invite children to look at it in silence for a couple of minutes and to see what they notice. What questions do they have about the painting?

Then invite children to tell you some of the things they noticed about the painting, and some of the questions they have. Receive their contributions gently without commenting on them. Thank them for the things they have noticed.

Talk about some of the things you notice about the painting, making connections with some of the things that have been said. Ask the children what they think these symbols might mean.

**The hand at the top of the painting.** Whose hand do you think this is? Why is it there? This is God's hand. It shows that God is doing something in Mary's life and that he will be the father of her child.

**Lilies in a vase.** Why do you think the painter chose white flowers? They symbolise Mary's purity, the fact that she was good and loving.

**Dove hovering.** What kind of bird is this? (In a church school: Can you remember any other stories in the Bible that have doves in them?) What might the dove represent? The dove symbolises the Holy Spirit hovering over Mary and enabling her to have a baby.

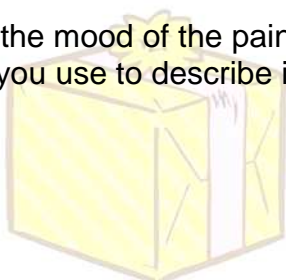
**Halos.** Why have Mary and the angel got gold circles around their heads? These are halos and show that they are holy.

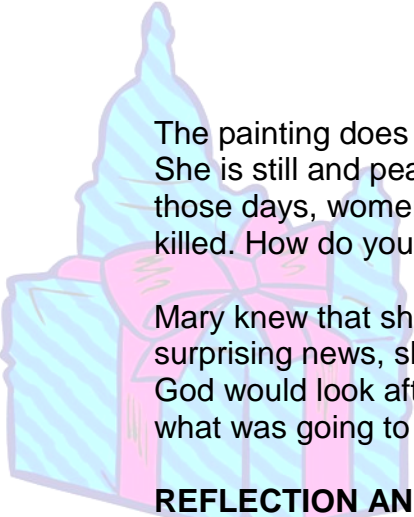
**Symbol in the stone under the vase.** Can anyone guess why this is here? It's actually the symbol of the Medici family who paid Filippo Lippi to paint this picture. So it doesn't tell us anything about the story, but it does tell us about how it was painted.

**Rays of light from hole in the dress.** If you look very carefully you can see a little hole in Mary's dress, with some rays of light coming out. What do you think that might be about? Why do you think this light is here? It shows that something very special is happening inside Mary. The Holy Spirit is enabling her to have a baby.

**The positioning of the angel and Mary.** What do you notice about the way the angel and Mary are sitting? They are mirroring each other, leaning towards each other. Then the curve of the painting mirrors them. This shows that Mary is not afraid of the angel. She accepts the message she has heard. The angel and Mary are right at the centre of the story.

Then go on to talk about the mood of the painting. How does this painting feel? What words would you use to describe it? Calm? Upset? Tranquil? Surprised? Happy?





The painting does have a very calm feel to it. Mary is not shocked or afraid. She is still and peaceful. But she's just had some very surprising news. And in those days, women who got pregnant when they weren't married could be killed. How do you think she managed to be so calm?

Mary knew that she could trust God. Even though she had had some surprising news, she knew that God wanted what was best for her and that God would look after her. God gave her his peace so that she could accept what was going to happen.

### **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

Invite the children to close their eyes and to think about the painting and the story.

Sometimes we get messages that are difficult to hear because they're about changes that are coming.

- Perhaps your family has to move house to a different town,
- or you hear that you're going to have a new baby in the family,
- or your mum asks you to do something that you don't want to do.

It's easy to be afraid, or angry, or upset. It's more difficult to be peaceful, to accept calmly what needs to change. But Christians believe that God can help us to do this if we ask him to.

Invite children to join in the responses in this prayer if they would like to.

Dear God,

Help us to learn from Mary's example.

**Please give us your peace.**

When we face difficult changes in our lives,

**please give us your peace.**

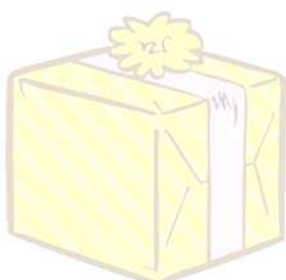
When we have to do things that we don't want to do,

**please give us your peace.**

In the busyness of Christmas time,

**please give us your peace.**

**Amen.**



## Week two – Journeys

### A BIG WALK

**Aim:** to help children understand what a crazy and difficult journey it was to walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem, but that God was with Mary and Joseph. To understand that God is with us throughout our journeys through life.

#### You will need:

- items that someone might take on a long walking trip – hiking boots (they don't need to be child sized); a back pack; water and food; a map of where to go; a torch for the night time; a waterproof coat and so on. Put these in a box so they are easy to transport.
- paper, pen and envelope.

#### Preparation:

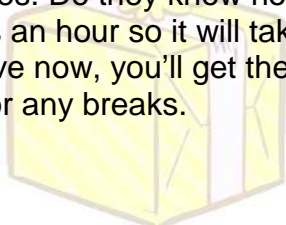
- Choose a town about 70 miles away from where you are doing the assembly. For example, Cambridge is just under 70 miles from central London, and Portsmouth is just over. We've used Cambridge in the text below, but do substitute a more suitable town if appropriate.
- Average walking pace for humans is about three miles an hour. Walking 70 miles at three miles an hour will take just under 24 hours, and that's without any breaks.
- On the piece of paper print or write clearly:  
It's your lucky day!  
You need to leave school straight away.  
But it's also your unlucky day.  
You have to walk to Cambridge!  
Put this inside the envelope.
- Talk to the Headteacher about what you want to do in the assembly. Ask him or her to suggest a child who will enjoy being the centre of attention and being given a ridiculous challenge. Discuss whether it would be best to warn the child what is going to happen in advance of the assembly, and take the Head's advice. Write this child's name on the envelope.

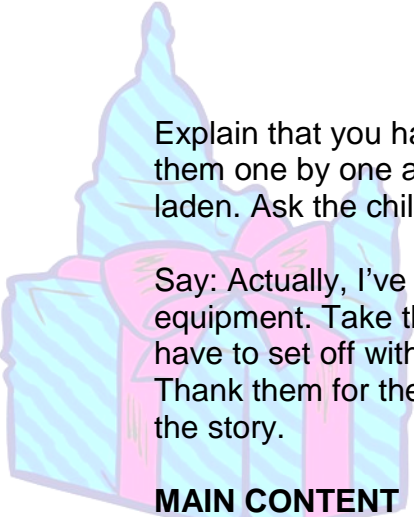
#### The assembly

##### INTRODUCTION

Invite children to tell you about some journeys that they have been on this year; get three or four suggestions and find out how people travelled. Ask the children how many of them like walking. What is the longest distance that they have ever walked?

Then say that you have a message for your chosen child and invite them out the front. Get them to open the envelope and to read out the message. Ask them how they feel! Do they like walking? Do they know how far away the town is? It's about 70 miles. Do they know how long it will take them? Walking pace is about three miles an hour so it will take you just under 24 hours if you walk non-stop. If you leave now, you'll get there this time tomorrow morning! That's if you don't stop for any breaks.





Explain that you have some things that will help them on the journey. Produce them one by one and get them to put them on or hold them until they are well laden. Ask the child how they feel about this challenge.


Say: Actually, I've changed my mind and I'm not going to give you all this equipment. Take the items back one by one. Tell your helper that they will have to set off without all this special equipment. How do they feel now? Thank them for their help and invite them to sit down at the front while you tell the story.

### **MAIN CONTENT**


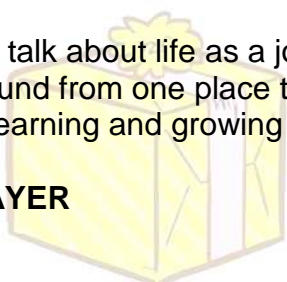
It seems mad to have to set off on foot to travel 70 miles to Cambridge. But that's what Mary and Joseph had to do. Ok, so they weren't travelling to Cambridge but they did have to travel a similar distance.

Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe:

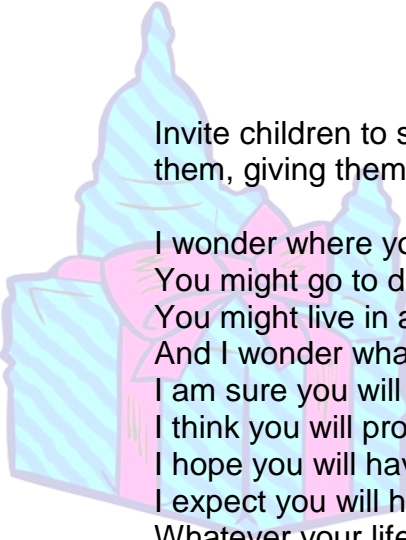
- It was a bit of a shock for Joseph when Mary first told him she was pregnant. But he trusted God and he loved Mary so he stood by her. But then came another shock. Joseph found out that they would have to travel all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem – about 70 miles.
- Mary and Joseph lived in Judea, which is now part of the country that we call Israel. At that time the country was ruled by the Romans. And the Romans decided that they needed to count everyone in the land. So they said that everyone had to travel back to their hometown. Joseph's family was originally from Bethlehem so that's why he had to go there.
- To add to the challenge, Mary was pregnant and the time for her baby to be born was fast approaching. I don't know if any of you with younger brothers and sisters can remember what your mum was like just before they were born. She was probably very tired, with a big baby bump. I don't think she would have been very keen on walking one mile let alone 70.
- But there were no trains, planes or cars. Mary and Joseph had to go on foot. They might have had a donkey for Mary to ride on; we can't be sure. But it was a long and difficult journey.
- They didn't have any special equipment to help them, which is why I took it all away from my helper. They had no hiking boots, no backpacks, no maps, or torches. They might have travelled with other people who were making the same journey but it still would have been hard work.
- But Mary and Joseph knew that they could trust God and that he would take care of them. From the surprise of finding out that Mary was having a baby, to the challenge of this difficult journey, they had to depend on God.



Explain that people often talk about life as a journey. That doesn't mean that we're always moving around from one place to another, but we do travel from childhood to adulthood, learning and growing as we go.



### **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**



Invite children to sit quietly and to think about the story. Read this reflection to them, giving them time to think about the situations it evokes.

I wonder where you will travel to in your life.

You might go to distant countries or you might stay at home.

You might live in a busy city or in a little village.

And I wonder what your journey through life will be like.

I am sure you will have happy days when laughter rings in your ears.

I think you will probably have sad days when tears run down your face.

I hope you will have exciting days full of adventure and challenge.

I expect you will have difficult days when life just feels too hard.

Whatever your life is like, I know that God journeys with you.

God walks beside you through good times and bad.

Invite children to say Amen at the end of this prayer if they want to join in with it.

Loving God

On the long, dusty road to Bethlehem, you were with Mary and Joseph.

On the long, exciting road through our lives you are with us.

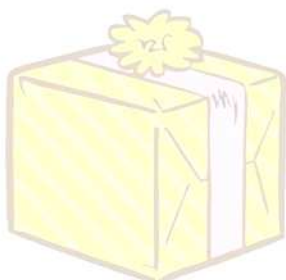
You are with us through times of laughter and times of joy.

You are with us through exciting times and difficult times.

Thank you for being with us always.

Help us to trust you.

**Amen**





## **Week two – Journeys**

### **A LONG WAY FROM HOME**

**Aim:** To think what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to have to leave their home and leave all they had behind.

**You will need:**  
A bag full of the things you would take if you had to put your whole life in a bag.

**Preparation:**  
The preparation is all down to getting the contents of the bag. The point of the assembly is to allow the children to think about what it would be like to have to leave their home and only be able to take with them what they can carry. You need to prepare a bag that reflects this for you. You may want to include; a treasured possession (although be prepared to tell the story as to why it's so precious), food, clothes, official documents and some things to entertain yourself. It doesn't really matter what you bring but try and make it reflect you as the children will enjoy getting to know you a bit.

### **The assembly**

#### **Introduction**

Invite the children to tell you what their most treasured possession is. You may want to explain that your most treasured possession isn't necessarily the most expensive thing you own, a car is expensive but replaceable; a wedding ring is not replaceable.

Explain that if that thing was your treasured possession you would definitely want to take it with you if you move. In fact you would even want to take it with you if you were only allowed to take one thing!

#### **Content**

Bring out the bag you have prepared and explain to the children that there are places in the world today where people have to make the choices you made when you packed this bag. Because of war or famine or poverty people have to leave their homes and can only take with them what they can carry. Explain that someone who has to leave their home like this is called a refugee.

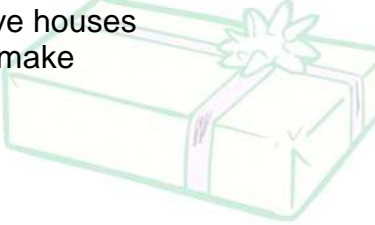
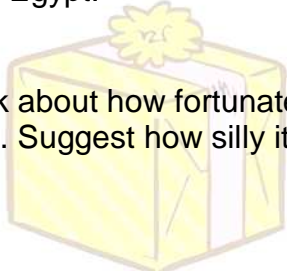
Go through the things in your bag and explain why you chose them. Also show some things you had to leave out because you didn't have room.

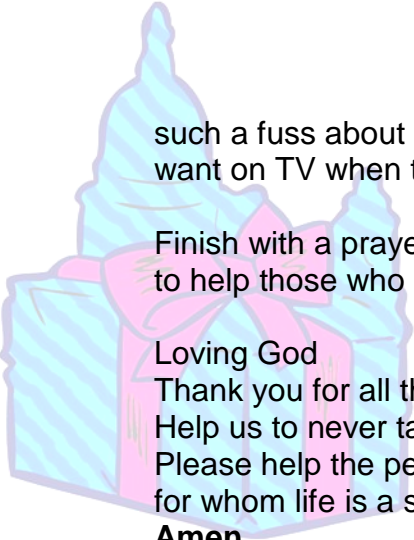
Explain that this happened to Mary and Joseph twice in the Christmas story. Once when they had to go to Bethlehem for the Census where Jesus was born and again later in the story when Mary and Joseph and their new baby had to flee King Herod to Egypt.



#### **Reflection and prayer**

Invite the children to think about how fortunate they are that they have houses and live in a safe country. Suggest how silly it is that we sometimes make





such a fuss about having to eat vegetables or not getting to watch what we want on TV when there are children in other countries who have very little.

Finish with a prayer that says thank you to God for all we have and asks God to help those who have so much less than us.

Loving God

Thank you for all the good things we have in our lives.

Help us to never take them for granted.

Please help the people in the world who have had to leave their homes and for whom life is a struggle.

**Amen**





**Week three – Jesus, God’s gift to the world**  
**THE PARABLE OF THE GOLDFISH**

**Aim:** to help children understand how amazing it was that God became a human being to show us his love.

**You will need:**

- three orange t-shirts or sheets of orange paper, three cereal boxes, scissors and glue.

**Preparation:**

- Make or get some costumes for your actors who will pretend to be goldfish. You could get hold of three orange t-shirts that they can wear; it doesn't matter if they are adult-sized. Or use three empty cereal boxes and some orange paper. Cut six large fish shapes out of the orange paper and stick one to both sides of each cereal box. Cut the bottom of each box away. The children can wear these as hats while they act out the story.
- Rehearse the story so that you feel comfortable telling it, preferably without a script.
- Talk to the Headteacher about the actors that you need in the story and whether he or she recommends that you pick children in advance of the assembly. If so, ask for help in organising this so that you have an opportunity to brief the children.

**The assembly**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Ask the children if anyone has a goldfish as a pet. Ask them a few questions about it – what is it called? What does it eat? Say that you are going to tell them a story about some goldfish that will explain something very important about Christmas. Ask for three people to act out the parts in the story. Give two of them orange t-shirts or fish hats to wear and explain that they will both be goldfish in the story. Introduce the third person as Jed and hang on to his t-shirt or hat for now.

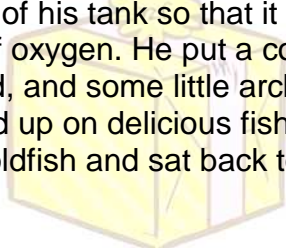
**CONTENT**

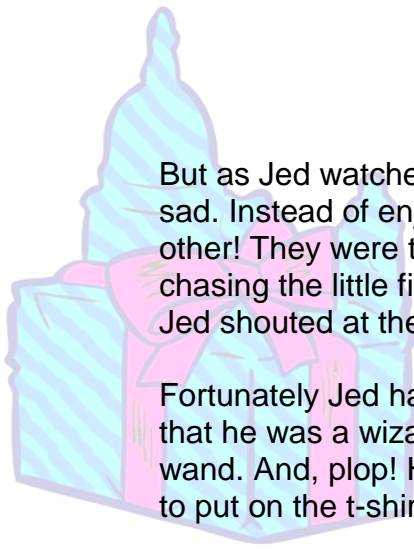
Tell this story, getting your three volunteers to act out the parts as you go.

Jed loved fish.

Not fish that you eat, but fish that are pets. Jed had a great big goldfish tank. He wanted it to be a wonderful place for his goldfish to live in.

So he put lots of tiny pebbles on the floor of the tank, just like you might find on the bottom of a riverbed. He grew flowing green plants in the tank, because they help to keep the water clean and they look very beautiful. He put a pump in the corner of his tank so that it would send tiny bubbles through the water to keep it full of oxygen. He put a couple of large stones in the tank for the fish to hide behind, and some little arches that they could swim through. Then he stocked up on delicious fish food. When it was all finished, Jed filled his tank with goldfish and sat back to watch them.





But as Jed watched, his smile disappeared. And then his face looked very sad. Instead of enjoying the beautiful aquarium, the fish were fighting each other! They were trying to bite each other's fins. Some of the big fish were chasing the little fish.

Jed shouted at the fish 'Stop!' But the fish ignored him and carried on fighting.

Fortunately Jed had an idea. Something that I hadn't told you about Jed is that he was a wizard! So Jed said some magic words, and waved his magic wand. And, plop! He found himself inside the fish tank as a goldfish! (Get Jed to put on the t-shirt or fish hat.)

Jed swam around the tank, and had a good look round. And then he started to make friends with the fish. When he saw two fish fighting, he encouraged them to make friends. When he found fish biting each other's fins, he taught them how to dance instead. When he saw big fish chasing little fish, he told them off and reminded them how important the little fish are.

Very soon, the fish tank changed. Instead of fighting, the fish were happy and looked after each other. Jed knew that his work was done. He needed to leave the tank and let the fish get on with each other by themselves. He needed to see if the fish would care for each other without him. So he said some magic words and waved his magic wand, and he arrived back in his living room again. (Get Jed to take off the t-shirt or fish hat.)

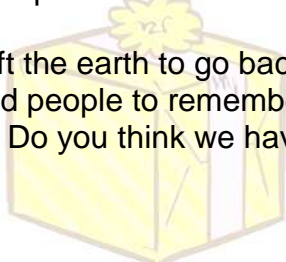
Would the fish stay friends with each other? Would they keep looking after each other? Would they remember what Jed had taught them? Jed would have to wait and see.

Invite the children to give your volunteers a round of applause for acting so well and get the three actors to sit down again.

But what has that story got to do with Christmas?

Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- God created a beautiful world for people to live in. God wanted people to enjoy living here, to explore the world and to invent new things.
- But people ended up fighting and hurting each other. They ignored God and didn't listen to him calling them to treat each other well.
- So God decided, like Jed becoming a fish in his fish tank, He would come to earth as the baby Jesus, which is what we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus grew up here on the earth, so he knows exactly what it's like to be a human being. When Jesus was a man, about 30 years old, he started to teach people how to love God and how to love each other. He taught people about what God had originally planned for them.
- And then Jesus left the earth to go back to be with his Father in heaven. He wanted people to remember what he had taught and to live in peace together. Do you think we have?





## REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Invite children to think quietly about the story of Jed and the goldfish. And then to think quietly about what we celebrate at Christmas. When God saw all the problems that there are in the world, he sent Jesus, to show us how to live as God had originally planned.

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if the children want to join in, they can say 'Amen' at the end.

Creator God

You made a beautiful world and gave it to us to live in.

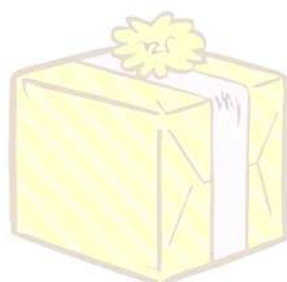
But we ended up fighting each other and spoiling your world.

Thank you that you didn't give up on us.

You sent your son Jesus to show us how to live and to help us to love you again.

Help us this Christmas to love each other and to remember why Jesus came to earth.

**Amen**





## Week three – Jesus, God’s gift to the world A PRESENT TO THE WHOLE WORLD

**Aim:** to explain that Jesus is God’s gift to the whole world.

**You will need:**

- a pair of hiking socks
- a box of chocolates
- a baby’s toy
- a garden trowel
- a board game, a restaurant menu (you could print one off from a website) and a holiday brochure or souvenir to represent presents that you might give to your whole family
- children’s books, a skipping rope, a football and a musical instrument to represent presents that you might give to a whole school
- a baby doll, a large picture of a baby or even a real baby!
- four sheets of card and a marker pen.

**Preparation:**

- Write one of these words on each sheet of card: Grandma, brother, niece, uncle.
- You’ll talk about God’s gift to the whole world at Christmas which was Jesus, born as a baby. Consider whether it is possible to take a real baby into the assembly. Perhaps someone in your church has a baby that’s a few months old and they may be happy to help by bringing their baby into the school. If they are, get them to stay out of sight during the assembly until the appropriate moment. You may need a helper who can give them a cue or bring them in. If you choose this option, remember that of course the baby may not behave exactly as you hope so you may want to have a picture or doll on hand just in case the baby cries or needs a nappy change at the wrong moment!
- Put the items in a bag from which they can be produced during the assembly.

**The assembly**

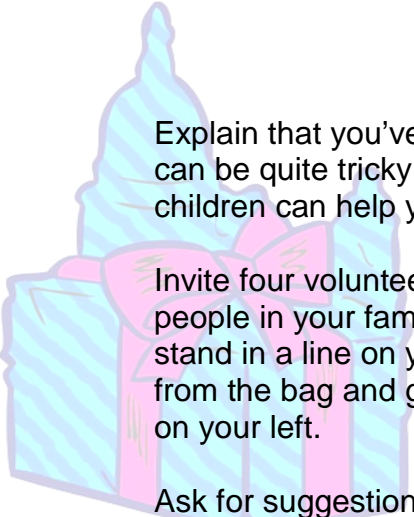
**INTRODUCTION**

Ask children to say the first word that comes into their head when you say ‘Christmas’. You could ask for volunteers to put their hands up if they want to take part. When someone says ‘presents’, ask for a show of hands to see who else thought of that word.

(Children don’t always produce the outcome we want in this kind of exercise! If no one says ‘presents’, then you’ll need to introduce the word yourself. You might say ‘when I think about Christmas, one of the first things I think of is presents’ or ‘when I asked my friend, she said presents’. Make sure that you affirm all contributions, even if they are not the word that you are hoping for!)

**MAIN CONTENT**





Explain that you've been buying Christmas presents for some of your family. It can be quite tricky deciding what to buy for different people. Perhaps the children can help you decide which present should go to which person.

Invite four volunteers, two boys and two girls, to come up and represent the people in your family. Give each one an appropriate card to hold. Ask them to stand in a line on your right facing the front. Then produce the four 'presents' from the bag and get four more volunteers to hold one each, standing in a line on your left.

Ask for suggestions for which present should go to which person, and listen to the children's contributions. Then say that it would probably help if they knew some more information about the people in your family. Introduce these facts:

- My Grandma is going on a walking holiday next summer.
- My niece is six months old.
- My brother is on a diet, AND his hobby is growing his own vegetables.

Ask again which present should go to which person. They will hopefully match the socks to your Grandma, the garden trowel to your brother, the baby's toy to your niece and the chocolates to your uncle. Get your second set of volunteers to hand over the gifts to the people with the cards as you decide which is the right home for them.

Thank your volunteers and invite them to sit down.

Then ask for suggestions of gifts that you could buy for your whole family. What could you get if you wanted to buy one thing that everyone in your family could enjoy? They might suggest a board game that everyone could play; or taking them all out for a meal together; or taking them all on holiday. Produce the items representing these as the children mention them or as you list them.

What about if you wanted to buy a present for the whole school? Again, invite ideas from the children. They might suggest some books for the library; or games that could be played in the playground; or sports equipment; or musical instruments. Again, produce the items representing these as the children mention them or as you list them.

What about if you wanted to give a present to the whole world? Does that seem a mad idea?! How could you give one thing to every single person in the whole wide world?

Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe:

- Well, that's what God did. God didn't buy chocolates, or socks, or a garden trowel. God gave something very precious. (Produce the picture, doll or real baby.) God gave his own son, Jesus, to the world and that's what we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus left heaven, where he lived with God his Father, and came to earth as a baby, as God's gift to each one of us.





## REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Invite the children to think quietly about the presents they might get this Christmas... And the presents that they might give this Christmas... Then invite them to think about God's gift to us this Christmas, his son Jesus.

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and if they want to join in, they can say 'Amen' at the end.

Generous God

We love presents!

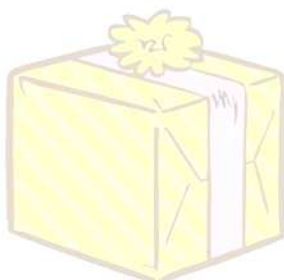
It's exciting to think about giving and receiving presents this Christmas.

Help us to remember that you have given us the best present of all.

Your gift to us is your son, Jesus.

Thank you, generous God.

**Amen**





## Week four – Visitors and gifts CHRISTMAS SIGNS

**Aim:** to help children spot the clues to Jesus' true identity in the Christmas story.

**You will need:**

- some clues to your identity, such as the clothes you wear, a book, a photo in your wallet. See preparation section for more details.
- a star – made out of cardboard, or tinsel wrapped round a wire star shape
- a 'Welcome to Bethlehem' sign, written on card
- a wrapped present
- a bag or box to contain these items.

**Preparation:**

- In the assembly, you'll get children to be detectives and to discover things about your identity through signs that you show them. So for example:
  - a photo in your wallet of your family or a pet.
  - your clothes. For example, your 'dog collar' that shows you are a priest, or your worn out trainers that show you do lots of running, or your football top/scarf that shows which team you support.
  - a book that you are reading. For example, reading 'It's not about the bike' by Lance Armstrong could show that you're a serious cyclist.
  - something that you use in a hobby in your pocket. For example a ball of wool could show you are a knitter, a screwdriver that you are into DIY.

It's probably best to think of three or four things that you want children to know about your identity and then to think of what could symbolise those.

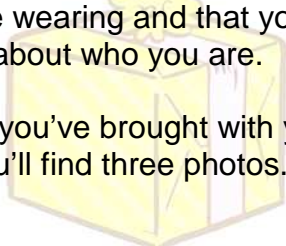
- Put the other items inside the box or bag.

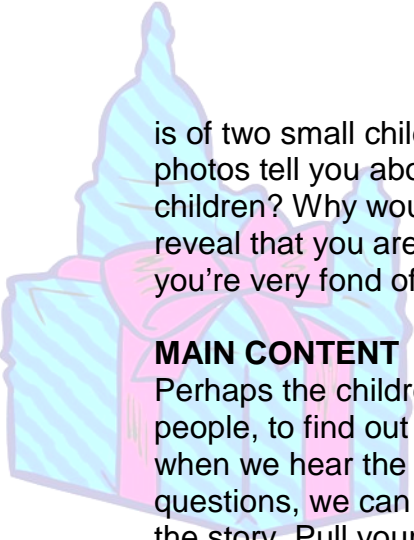
### The assembly INTRODUCTION

Tell the children that you hope they are feeling curious today, and explain what the word means – wanting to find out about things, ready to ask lots of questions. Say that you want them to be detectives, to look for clues, and to uncover facts.

Talk about how well the children know you – if you are a regular visitor to the school your face may be familiar; if this is a first visit they won't know very much about you at all. But if they are good detectives and look closely at some of the things you're wearing and that you've brought with you, they will be able to find out more about who you are.

Then point out the items you've brought with you one by one. For example, 'If you look in my wallet, you'll find three photos. One is of a smiling woman. One





is of two small children. And one is of a black and white cat. What do these photos tell you about me? Who could the woman be? What about the children? Why would I have a picture of a cat in my wallet?' The photos could reveal that you are married with two children, and that you have a pet cat that you're very fond of! Continue with the other signs you have chosen.

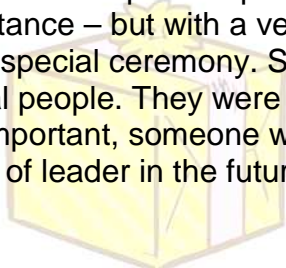
### **MAIN CONTENT**

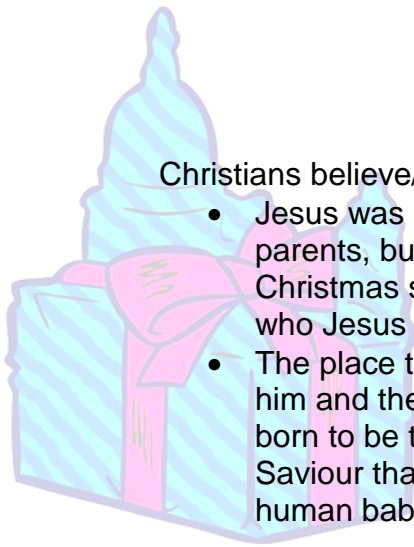
Perhaps the children could use their detective skills when they meet other people, to find out things about them. But we can also use our detective skills when we hear the Christmas story. Because if we're curious and ask the right questions, we can find out all sorts of things about who Jesus is from signs in the story. Pull your signs out of the bag one by one and talk about them.

**'Welcome to Bethlehem' sign.** Ask the children what they know about Bethlehem. It's the place that Jesus was born. Why was he born there? Because Joseph and Mary had to go back to the place where Joseph's family came from to be counted. But if we're curious, we'll discover that the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem tells us something very special about him. A long time before Jesus was born, a man called Micah said something interesting about Bethlehem. Micah was a prophet which means that he gave people messages from God. Micah said 'Bethlehem, you are one of the smallest towns in the nation of Judah. But the LORD will choose one of your people to rule the nation.' This told people that the Messiah they were hoping for would be born in Bethlehem! Could Jesus be that Messiah?

**The star.** Can anyone remember where there's a star in the Christmas story? Some wise men appeared in Jerusalem just after Jesus was born. They turned up because they had seen a star in the sky. They knew that the star meant a new king of the Jews had been born and so they had come to worship him. Now Jerusalem was the capital city of Judea so it was the place where you would expect a king to be born, but no one in Jerusalem knew what the wise men were talking about! Jerusalem was ruled by the current king, King Herod, and he got his people to do a bit of detective work. They came back to him with Micah's prophesy – that the new leader of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. Herod sent the wise men off to Bethlehem, and sure enough the star led them to the place where Jesus had been born. Could Jesus be the King of the Jews?

**The present.** The wise men brought gifts with them for the baby. What do people normally buy for babies when they are born? Probably baby clothes, or soft toys or rattles. But what did the wise men bring to Jesus? Gold, frankincense and myrrh! As you know, gold is a precious metal that would have been worth lots of money. Frankincense was something that was burned in the temple as part of the worship and it produced a beautiful smell. Myrrh was another smelly substance – but with a very nice smell. Sometimes it was used to anoint kings in a special ceremony. Sometimes it was used as an ointment or cream to heal people. They were all the type of gifts that would be given to someone very important, someone who was going to be a leader. Could Jesus be that kind of leader in the future?





Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- Jesus was a very special baby. Every baby is very special to its parents, but Jesus was really, really special! There are clues in the Christmas story that show us how special he was. These clues tell us who Jesus really was.
- The place that Jesus was born, the star that brought the wise men to him and the gifts that they brought with them all show that Jesus was born to be the leader of his people. Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour that everyone was looking forward to. Jesus wasn't just a human baby; he was also God's son.

### **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

Invite children to think quietly about what they have heard this morning, about the signs in the Christmas story that show who Jesus really was.

Explain that you are going to say a prayer, and that if they want to, they can join in by saying 'Amen' at the end.

Wise and loving God,

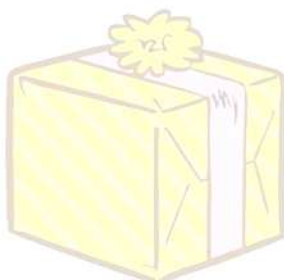
When Jesus was born on earth, you gave us signs to show how special he was.

The birthplace of a leader,  
a star fit for a king,  
gifts for someone important.

Help us to discover more about who Jesus really is.

Help us to discover just how much you love us.

**Amen.**





## Week four – Visitors and gifts

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GIFTS?

**Aim:** to explore the significance of the gifts the Magi brought and what might have happened to them afterwards.

**You will need:**

- some typical gifts that a baby might be given – baby clothes, a rattle, a soft toy. If you have children of your own, bring things that they were given at their birth.
- incense and an incense burner.

**Preparation:**

- You'll start the assembly talking about the gifts that babies normally receive when they are born. You could talk about your own children if you have them, or your nephews and nieces. Or talk to someone with small children about the presents they received at their child's birth, and ask to borrow some items.

### The assembly

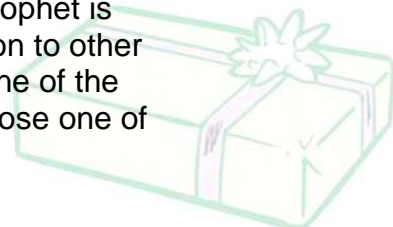
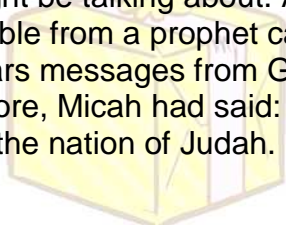
#### INTRODUCTION

Talk about the birth of a baby that was special to you – perhaps your own child, or a niece or nephew, or a child of a friend. Talk about some of the presents that you were given and how useful they were, or that you bought for the baby and why you chose them. Show the items that you have brought with you, and talk about why people buy this sort of thing for a baby.

When Jesus was born, he was given some presents. But they were very unusual presents.

Christians believe/the Bible teaches/I believe that:

- Just after Jesus was born some Magi arrived in Jerusalem, the capital city of Judea, the country in which Jesus was born. Judea is part of the country that we now call Israel. Magi were wise men from the East. They probably travelled from the country that we now call Iran.
- The Magi studied the stars, looking for signs that things were about to happen. They came to Jerusalem because they saw a new star in the sky. They saw this as a sign that a new king of the Jews had been born. So the logical place to go was Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews.
- But when they turned up in Jerusalem, nobody else knew anything about it! And Herod, who was the King at that time, was rather upset! He didn't want a new king to be born because that would mean getting rid of him!
- So Herod asked his own people to investigate what was going on, and what the Magi might be talking about. And his advisors found an old prophecy in the Bible from a prophet called Micah. Now, a prophet is someone who hears messages from God and passes them on to other people. Years before, Micah had said: Bethlehem, you are one of the smallest towns in the nation of Judah. But the LORD will choose one of





your people to rule the nation.' So Micah had said that a new ruler or king would be born in Bethlehem.

- When Herod heard this, he sent the Magi off to Bethlehem to see if a baby had been born there. And sure enough, once they set off the star led them to place where Jesus was.
- The Magi went into see Jesus and they bowed down and worshipped him. They gave Jesus presents.
  - Gold - a precious metal that was worth a lot of money
  - Frankincense - a kind of resin that was burned in worship to create a beautiful smell.
  - Myrrh – another substance with a beautiful smell that was used to anoint kings, or used as an ointment or cream to heal people.

### **MAIN CONTENT**

Now when you buy presents for people, you usually think hard about what that person would like and what would suit them. The Magi must have thought hard about what would make good presents for Jesus, and they chose gold, frankincense and myrrh. To us, they seem strange things to give to a baby, but I think that the Magi had good reasons for choosing them. They were thinking about the type of person Jesus would become and what he would need in the future. So I wonder what might have happened to those gifts? Let me tell you some of the things that happened to Jesus as he grew up, and some of the ways those gifts might have come in useful.

#### **Gold**

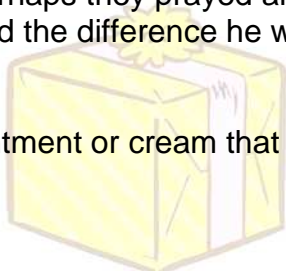
As I said, Herod was not happy to hear that a new king had been born. He felt very threatened. He asked the Magi to come back and tell him where the baby was, but they were warned by God that Herod wanted to harm Jesus and so they went home a different way. Herod was so angry that he ordered that all the baby boys in Bethlehem should be killed. What a terrible thing! God warned Joseph in a dream that this was going to happen, and so Joseph, Mary and Jesus escaped to Egypt, another country, until the danger was past. Perhaps the gold was very useful on this long journey. They would have had to pay a border tax to get into Egypt; perhaps they used the gold for this.

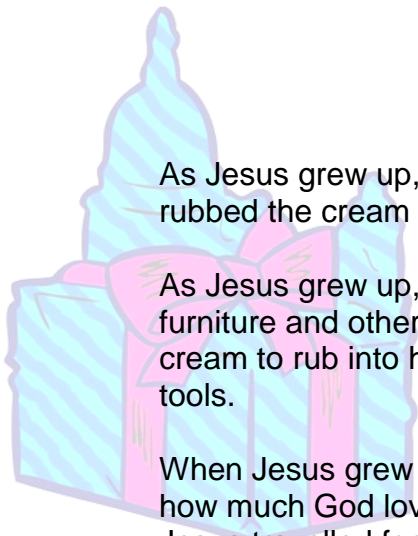
#### **Frankincense**

Frankincense can be burned to produce a beautiful smell. (If you have some incense and a burner, then get it going.) Maybe Mary used some of the frankincense to cover up the smell of all the animals that they had to share a room with! But frankincense was often used in worship in the temple. When people prayed, the smoke from the frankincense would remind them that their prayers were rising up to be heard by God. The smell would remind them of how pure and holy God is and how God was all around them. Perhaps Mary and Joseph used the frankincense to pray to God and to say thank you for their baby boy Jesus. Perhaps they prayed and thanked God for all that Jesus would do in the future and the difference he would make to the world.

#### **Myrrh**

Myrrh was used in an ointment or cream that people rubbed on themselves for healing.





As Jesus grew up, he would have played with his friends. Perhaps Mary rubbed the cream on Jesus' knee if he fell over and grazed it, just like you do.

As Jesus grew up, Joseph taught him how to be a carpenter, how to make furniture and other things from wood. Perhaps Mary gave Jesus some of the cream to rub into his hands when they were sore after a busy day using heavy tools.

When Jesus grew up, he started to teach people about God. He told people how much God loved them, and he invited people to do what God wanted. Jesus travelled for miles to heal people and to teach them. Perhaps Mary rubbed the cream into Jesus' feet when they were aching after a long day walking.

And then when Jesus was 33, he was killed. It was all part of God's plan to save us and it's what we remember at Easter. Jesus died on the cross and his body was put in a tomb. The next morning, Mary and some other women who were friends of Jesus went to the tomb. Perhaps Mary took the myrrh along to rub into Jesus body to stop it from smelling and to show how much he meant to her. But the women couldn't find the body, because Jesus had come back to life again!

So maybe they weren't such strange presents after all. They were presents fit for a king, presents that could be used as Jesus grew up and started doing God's work, presents that showed Mary and Joseph just how special their baby was going to be.

### **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

Invite the children to sit quietly and to think about the gifts that the Magi brought for Jesus.

Explain that you are going to say a prayer and that if they want to join in, they can say Amen at the end.

All-knowing God,  
You never make mistakes.  
Those unusual presents turned out to be really useful.  
Thank you that you know just what we need in our lives too.  
Thank you that you will provide for us.  
Help us to trust you.

**Amen**

