



Advent and Christmas

The following material can be used as a learning journey during the Advent period or adapted to use during collective worship/assembly for a week in the lead up to Christmas. The learning reflects on the nativity story and on the work of Christian Aid. Use an age-appropriate Bible or short video to remind pupils of the Christmas story. Examples include:

- The Lion First Bible by Pat Alexander
- The Beginner's Bible by Karyn Henley
- The Lion Children's Bible by Pat Alexander
- The Lion Storyteller Bible by Bob Hartman

[The Christian Story of the First Christmas | Religions of the World – YouTube](#)



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The word Advent means 'arrival' – the arrival of a person or an event.

Explain to pupils that Advent is the name given to the four weeks leading up to Christmas – it is a time of waiting and anticipation. It includes the four Sundays before Christmas and always ends on Christmas Day. Christians look forward to celebrating Christmas and begin to think about elements of the Christmas story and reflect on the themes of hope, peace, love and joy. Many children and families have an Advent calendar or a candle which they open or light during this season to help count down to the Christmas celebration.

Christmas is traditionally celebrated with lights – as an image to show light shining in the darkness and, for Christians, the belief that Jesus was born to bring hope and peace to the world. Some people and churches have an Advent Wreath which they use to light a candle on each Sunday during Advent.

Background information for teachers: Christian Aid has created [an electronic Advent Wreath](#) which contains background information about this year's [Christmas appeal](#)



Introduction

Ask:

Who knows the Christmas story?

Take a straw poll to see who knows the story a little? Who knows it well?

Can you share one fact about the Christmas story? Can we piece together the story from our knowledge? Share ideas to see how much of the story outline and the details you can collectively remember. Explain that over the next few weeks/days you are going to take a deep dive into the story and reflect on the meaning and importance of the Christmas story for Christians and to ask if there are any unexpected and surprising aspects as the story unfolds.

Theme 1: Unexpected promise/king/Messiah

Background: The story of Jesus starts at a time when the Israelites were being ruled by the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire didn't treat the people they had conquered well. The people had no choice in who ruled them, they had to give a lot of their money to the Roman Empire, and the Romans didn't respect other countries' cultures, traditions, and languages. The Romans sent their armies and soldiers to make sure that their rules were obeyed.

The Israelites had prophecies, which are like stories that tell people about God's promises for the future, that told them of a king who would free Israel from outside rule. What do you think people would have expected this king to do?

These words were spoken by one of the prophets, called Isaiah, and they are words which are often read at Christmas carol services:

⁶ A child will be born to us.

God will give a son to us.

He will be responsible for leading the people.

His name will be Wonderful Counsellor, Powerful God,

Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Power and peace will be in his kingdom.

It will continue to grow.

He will rule as king on David's throne



and over David's kingdom.
He will make it strong,
by ruling with goodness and fair judgment.
He will rule it forever and ever.
The Lord of heaven's armies will do this
because of his strong love for his people.

Isaiah 9:6-7 ICB (International Children's Bible)

Use the version above or this one from the Easy Read Version:

⁶This will happen when the special child is born. God will give us a son who will be responsible for leading the people. His name will be "Wonderful Counsellor, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace." ⁷ His power will continue to grow, and there will be peace without end. This will establish him as the king sitting on David's throne and ruling his kingdom. He will rule with goodness and justice forever and ever. The strong love that the Lord All-Powerful has for his people will make this happen!

The Israelites were expecting a king who would fight the Romans and chase them out of their land. They might have imagined a mighty warrior, who was powerful and skilled in fighting.

Instead, in the nativity story, we hear about a baby! Remind the pupils that the nativity story is the story of Jesus' birth. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and he becomes human to be king of all of God's people. Jesus is given lots of names that describe him. When Isaiah gave his prophecy of the king that would free Israel – he called him the Prince of Peace.

When we explore the story of Jesus, we find lots of things that when we stop and think about them, might feel unexpected. We often have ideas in our head about how the world works, but when we look at the story of Jesus, we can find little unexpected details that can help us see and think differently about the world and how it could be.

Listen again to the words from Isaiah 9 :6-7

I wonder, which images or words stand out to you? Choose 5 words which stand out to you – share your thoughts. This could be a paired discussion activity.



Theme 2: The unexpected arrival

Ask pupils what they can remember about the *Unexpected King* from the previous session.

Read a summary of the nativity story. Remind the pupils that Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and he becomes human to be king of all of God's people. But not in the way that we might expect. Continuing our theme of the *Unexpected*, we are going to look a bit more at the story of Jesus' birth.

Ask the pupils if they have any ideas about what it looks like when King Charles travels somewhere? Does anyone remember seeing the coronation on TV? How do we expect royalty to travel? Would we expect a king to be born in a palace?

Think again about the Christmas story. It would be unexpected for the mother of a king to undertake such a long journey to Bethlehem, heavily pregnant and on foot. Kings and their families would be expected to have horses, carriages, guards and servants for the long journey. A king would expect to be welcomed with fanfare and stay in the best accommodation with the best food. But the Christmas story describes Jesus as an unexpected king – a baby born out of the spotlight. Jesus wasn't welcomed with great fanfare and celebration and didn't even get to stay in a humble inn or guest room. Instead, Jesus was welcomed into a stable and born among the animals that called it home. When Christians reflect on the story of Jesus' birth it gives them pause for thought about what sort of king the baby Jesus would be - what kind of person he would become, and what kind of freedom that he would bring! We expect kings to be born into wealth and power, but Jesus was born in a stable – his mother and father were not nobles, they were not powerful or wealthy.

What did you notice in the story - what drew your attention? Which part did you like best?

What do you like/dislike/find puzzling or surprising/challenging?



Theme 3: The unexpected visitors

Hide a nativity set in a box or story bag. Ask pupils if they can remember seeing a nativity scene in previous years and whether they can suggest which characters and creatures might be included in the scene. As pupils suggest characters/creatures remove them from your box/bag and begin to create a nativity scene.

I wonder, have you ever visited a family member or family friend who has just had a baby? Did you take a gift or say special words of congratulations? How did you feel seeing a very tiny, newborn baby? I expect you may have thought about how beautiful the baby was and about how special and unique each newborn baby is. When parents and their friends and family look at a newborn baby, I expect they have hopes for the baby's future life. What sort of things do you think they might hope for?

Provide an opportunity for some paired discussion and then share ideas. Hopes might include good health, to have friends, to go to school, to develop individual gifts and interests, to live a fulfilling life, full of love.

I wonder, who would we expect to visit a royal baby? Does anyone know what happens when a royal baby is born – or how their birth is announced? Who hears about their birth – just a few people or lots of people?

Mary and Joseph already knew that when their baby was born that he would be someone very special – can you remember some of the things they were told about the baby Jesus? Remind pupils about how the angel Gabriel visited Mary:

You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and people will call him the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. ³³ He will rule over the people of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end." *Luke 1:31-33 [ICB]*

Mary and Joseph must have been puzzled by the angel's words – they were, after all, just ordinary people. I wonder what they thought would happen when Jesus

was born – how they expected people would know he was a special baby? Who they expected might visit the baby? What they expected his future life to be like? Imagine their surprise when, first, a group of shepherds arrived to see the baby. How did the shepherds know that Jesus had been born? In the society that Jesus was born into, shepherds were looked down on by many people and were treated as ‘outsiders’ [marginalized] and not really welcomed into community life. They were uneducated and thought of as being rough and not to be trusted. How do you think Mary and Joseph might have felt when the shepherds first appeared?

When the day had started, the shepherds had no inkling that they would be visiting a baby born to be a king. Their day had been full of surprises and they had been singled out for a special role in welcoming baby Jesus - despite being those who often felt like the ones left out of special occasions. Listen to the shepherds' story again:

⁸ That night, some shepherds were out in the fields near Bethlehem watching their sheep. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord was shining around them. The shepherds were very afraid. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid. I have some very good news for you—news that will make everyone happy. ¹¹ Today your Savior was born in David’s town. He is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box.”

¹³ Then a huge army of angels from heaven joined the first angel, and they were all praising God, saying,

¹⁴ “Praise God in heaven,
and on earth let there be peace to the people who please him.”

¹⁵ The angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this great event the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they went running and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the feeding box. ¹⁷ When they saw the baby, they told what the angels said about this child. ¹⁸ Everyone was surprised when they heard what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ Mary continued to think about these things, trying to understand them. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen and heard. It was just as the angel had told them.

Luke 2:8-20 Easy- to- Read Version [ERV]

What might the shepherds have said to one another?



The shepherds must have had to make a decision about whether to stay on the hillside with their sheep or to go straight away to see the newborn child. Discuss the conversation they might have had.

I wonder what 'peace on earth' means? Do you think we still need this kind of peace today?

Mary was clearly surprised by the visitors and everything that had happened – the Bible says she 'continued to think about these things, trying to understand them.'

What did you notice in the story - what drew your attention? Which part did you like best?

What do you like/dislike/find puzzling or surprising/challenging?



Theme 4: Unexpected opportunity – Christian Aid Story

There is a short PowerPoint presentation to accompany this section.

Remind pupils that during Advent many Christians reflect on the importance of hope, peace, love and joy. Invite them to think back over the different elements of the Christmas story and ask if there are any parts of it where there is hope, peace, love or joy revealed?

At Christmas, many Christian families and churches also reflect on things they can do to show God's love, peace, joy and hope in the world and to live out these values through their words and actions. They may also learn about people and charities who try to live out these values. Sometimes they give a special gift of money to support individuals and organisations, or they speak up about an issue which makes life unfair for people.

One organisation which runs a special Christmas Appeal is called Christian Aid. Christian Aid is an organisation that works with global partners and communities to help build a world where extreme poverty no longer exists and where all people can live safely. Christian Aid also believes that by working together, it is possible to find ways to share the Earth's resources more fairly and to find ways to live peacefully and in cooperation with one another.

Explain that you are going to share a true story, from Christian Aid, about unexpected opportunities, hope and a group of young people who are shining like lights in their community.

Think back to the conversations you had about the hopes and dreams that families have when a new baby is born. Each baby that is born into the world has within them gifts, talents and unique potential - but not every baby can realise the unique possibilities for their life. In some parts of the world, there are barriers which make it difficult for children and young people to achieve their dreams. I wonder if you can think about some of the things that help a person develop their individual skills and talents? Share some ideas.



One of the most important ways we do this is through education and the opportunity to learn safely. Sometimes education transforms our lives when we discover something new that we can do or enjoy; it makes us feel that we can live our lives more fully.

Show slide 1

In Bangladesh, the effects of climate change hits people hard. For example, the Kurigram district is severely affected by floods each year. Every year major or minor floods occur, and houses are washed away and damaged. People become stranded. People in Kurigram rely on agriculture to make a living, but the floods destroy crops. Without crops to eat and to sell many people are living in extreme poverty and life is incredibly challenging. This means that often parents can't afford to keep their children in school and so young people don't have the opportunity to fully develop their unique gifts and learning.

For women, opportunities are even more limited and there are many young women who don't enjoy the freedom and security they need to develop their talents. Because of poverty they often have to stop going to school and are unable to complete their education and develop their careers, often marrying at a young age.

Show slide 2

But young women, like Kakoli, Morsheda and Khaleda, are finding new ways of developing and using their gifts and talents. Groups of gifted women artisans and entrepreneurs are embracing new technology, to revive ancient art forms, craft beautiful beadwork, or make colourful clothing, to sell online. Working with Christian Aid's local partners, Aid Comilla, they have undertaken training and developed new skills so that they can set up their own businesses online.

Show slide 3

Kakoli Khatun is 21 and studying for a degree at college. At the same time, she's running a successful business from home, making beautiful, embroidered quilts [Nakshi kantha] and selling them online. She supports her parents and creates employment for nine other young women.



Show slide 4

Invite pupils to look at the image of a quilt being created. – notice the design and how as the threads are added the cloth is transformed. As they look at the photo ask them to reflect on what they have learnt about the young women who make these quilts. Do they think there are examples of hope, peace, love or joy found in this modern-day story of opportunity and transformation.

Class Reflection

Use the template from the [Nakshi Kantha star craft activity](#) and invite pupils to make a paper star. Decorate one side with one of the patterns and on the other side write a 'hope for the world.' Create a star display called **'Time to Shine – light up the world with hope'**



Nakshi Kantha Star Craft Activity