Faith Adventures for Children Together

Free to use – please acknowledge when using beyond local church children's and youth work so others can find and use the resource themselves.

Committed to URC Children Together: enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus together in the home, church and beyond.

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link: **www.bit.ly/FACT-how-to-sheet**

Title: Luke 2: 1–7

Theme: Advent in the style of… reflective storytelling
When a journey goes wrong

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning? Please use this section as a reference and information guide for leaders only – we don't expect it to be read out to the children.

This session explores the journey of Mary and Joseph, providing the opportunity to consider the reality of the trip.

This was not the journey often depicted in Christmas cards and in nativity plays, of a short donkey ride to the tune of "Little donkey"; it was a gritty, hard journey made by a young couple nearing the birth of their first child.

They had planned to go to be registered and then return home, but everything changed. They gave birth in Bethlehem and became refugees. God's plans and prophecies took over their journey. ("Prophecies" in this context relate to when God has placed a prediction about something that will happen in the future into someone's head and they have communicated it to others.)

This is a familiar reading and story but this session is an opportunity to look at it again through different eyes and see what is actually happening in this passage. To Mary and Joseph, the journey didn't go as they had planned; God's plan took over.

Trigger points might be felt by those who have experience as refugees or people in transition.

Together – prayer and games

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend,
(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today
(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,
(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,
(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,
(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better
(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family.
(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN.
(two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.
Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.
Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,
adventuring together with you wherever we may go.
Amen

The games begin to explore the idea that the journey wasn't what Mary and Joseph expected. They are full of risk and unpredictability.

Active game – Giant Board Game

Before the game starts:

Create your board using pieces of A4 paper to represent spaces on a game board – these could be placed in a variety of ways to best suit your space: in a large circle; in a straight line along a central aisle; or in a zig-zag pattern. Add in three or four A4 spaces with a large question mark drawn on. You will need a die.

Create **Risk** cards by cutting A4 card into four pieces, or by using pre-cut cards such as revision cards. Draw a large question mark on one side of the cards; on the other add instructions for a player to move backwards a number of spaces, miss a turn or roll again. Shuffle the cards well and position them near the board game. If players land on a space with a question mark, they must take the top card and follow its instructions.

Playing the game:

Each player begins at the starting space, taking it in turns to roll the dice and journey around the board the corresponding number of spaces. If you are playing in teams, choose one team member to be the giant board game piece.

The winner is the player, or team, that reaches the end of the journey first.

Quieter game – Story making (Pass the story)

A simple game that plays with the idea of your story being changed by others and not really turning out as you might have planned.

You will need paper and pens.

Give each child a piece of paper and explain that we will be creating simple stories. Encourage the children to write the title of the story they would like to write. Perhaps they could agree to write stories on the same theme, such as journeys.

Then they fold their page over and pass the paper to the person next to them. They then write the opener for the story. Give them a sentence starter to help e.g. "This is a story about…" (who is it about?).

Again fold the paper over and pass it on. This continues, covering the following pattern for the continued story:

1. Title
2. Opener – who/what is the story about?
3. And so it begins – tell us about the beginning of the journey
4. OH NO! – what goes wrong in the journey?
5. It's OK! – what do they do about the problem to continue their journey?
6. Finale – How does your story end?

Once the stories are complete, they are opened and read aloud.

Which stories were your favourite and why?

How did it feel when your story didn't go as you hoped?

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

When planning the session, the team of writers read many different Bible versions to find the one that is most suitable for the age range. We also look at vocabulary and how God/Jesus is described. We are aware that a lot of churches stick with one Bible version. We appreciate it can be difficult to have many different Bible versions and that access to them online isn't always easy. Therefore, we have provided the passage in the recommended version for your convenience.

For this story we recommend using the Good News translation
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%202%3A%201%20-%207&version=GNT

The Birth of Jesus

2 At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman
Empire. **2** When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. **3** Everyone,
then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

4 Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the
birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. **5** He
went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, **6** and
while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. **7** She gave birth to her
first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to
stay in the inn.

Good News Translation® (Today's English Version, Second Edition) © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved. For more information about GNT, visit www.bibles.com and www.gnt.bible.

Where can I find the story online?
Under-fives: The Difficult Journey, by Trueway Kids
https://youtu.be/zjgWULz0brM?si=JTCxDUWrJlJmneq0
Five-to-elevens: The birth of the humble king, by The Biggest Story
https://youtu.be/ti1r4FK89jc?si=zK1gLn9Pp13lvJmy

Songs to support the story
Under-fives: Jesus, Savior, by KidSpring Children's ministry
https://youtu.be/4MkVu5J_h8g?si=7xuLG837nUASWXqr
Five-to-elevens: Born is the King, by Hillsong Kids
https://youtu.be/tDYoZ2SPWrI?si=m1BsxZWbLua8-OFy

Explore – ways into the theme

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the theme

In this section we will provide you with the resources and ideas to explore the story of Mary and Joseph's journey and the birth of Jesus, beginning with what the children already know and then tracking back to reframe the facts in the story as needed.

Begin with a remembered Bible approach. Ask the group to help you to tell the nativity story including Mary and Joseph's story, up to the birth.

As they tell the story, create a timeline using key words or simple pictures to capture the story as told by the children.

Once complete, explain that our understanding of the journey is influenced by nativity plays, carol concerts and Christmas card images.

I wonder if we have missed any part of the story or added anything over time? I wonder what questions or thoughts you might have about this journey?

Revisit the story as follows, adding in some of the extra details. You could read the passage again and see how it compares. The black sentences below capture what we often hear in the retelling of the nativity story or what the children will probably have remembered; the red are the facts about those sentences.

Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem (Joseph's home town) to be registered. Both Mary and Joseph were from the town of David.

They walked to Bethlehem and rode a donkey. The Bible does not mention a donkey. It would have taken around seven days to walk the 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They would have been amongst many others who were also making the journey to register.

When they arrived, there was no room in the inn. The innkeeper gave them his stable. The Bible doesn't mention the innkeeper or a stable. Mary and Joseph may have hoped to have stayed with family but there certainly wasn't any room for them anywhere, so they ended up in a place where animals were kept, using a feeding trough/manger as a bed for the baby.

They slept in a stable, where Jesus was born. A stable is not mentioned but we presume it was a place where animals usually were kept. It may have been an extension to a house, like a back room.

He was wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger.

A star was over the stable and the angels sang. The Bible doesn't mention the star being over the place where Jesus was born. The star appears in the astrologers' story and leads them to the house where they find the toddler Jesus. The Bible also doesn't mention the angels being at the birth. They certainly appeared to the shepherds in the fields but we do not know if they were at the birth itself.

They went back home.

- How do these differences make you feel about the story?

Explain that Mary and Joseph probably thought that they would travel to Bethlehem, be registered and get back before the birth, or at least soon after. Their journey took many unexpected turns. Everything happened so that the prophecies could be fulfilled.

- Where can we see God's plans in Mary and Joseph's journey?
- When you look back in your own life where can you see God's plans?

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too. If you are to use the modern parable, consider buying a copy or borrowing it from the library so children see the actual book and can explore the illustrations more (and support the author).



Jesus was a Refugee by Andrew McDonough (2018: Sarah Grace Publishing)
ISBN 10: 1912863014

This story is based upon Matthew 2: 1–2. It tells the part of the Christmas story that is often left out. It speaks of unimaginable horror, the real fear Jesus' family felt, and their experience of becoming refugees.

- I wonder how it must have felt to flee and have to move to a different country

Talking together: How might we talk about the Bible story together?

- Why do you think Augustus wanted a list of everyone's names?
- What do you think the hardest part of the journey was?
- How long did you think Mary and Joseph were going to be away for? What were their original plans?
- What do think Mary and Joseph packed for the journey?

Wondering: ways to reflect on the theme

- If you had to walk back to the place where you were born, how far would it be? How long do you think it would take you?
- What's the longest journey you have ever taken?
- Have you ever had a journey that didn't go to plan?
- Have you ever had a journey that worried you? Who/what helped you?

What's in the box (for under-fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing, "What's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- Play people or natural objects – re-tell the story from today's Bible reading, moving the pieces around to help you tell the story.
- A small bag or suitcase – imagine packing your bag ready for a journey. You could take it in turns to name an object you would pack in the bag.
- Heart-shaped objects – talk about how the people in today's story felt – what made them happy and what made them sad.
- Toy vehicles – talk about how you like to travel – is it more fun to go somewhere by car or by bus? How did Mary and Joseph travel in the Bible story?
- Baby doll and blankets – wrap the baby carefully and talk about what babies need – how would Mary and Joseph have looked after the newborn baby Jesus?
- A tactile cross of wood or fabric (a cross shape reminds us of Jesus. Jesus/God loves us and it's always in the box because Jesus/God always loves us!)

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Prayerful activity



Every day is a journey! Draw a map from your house to the church. (It doesn't have to be correct.) Think about the different things you encounter on this journey. Where could it be a bit dangerous? This might be crossing a busy road, walking on a narrow path, going down some steep steps. Mark these places on the map.

Where do you see things that make you smile? It might be a park filled with children, or people walking their dogs. It might be a beautiful old building, or perhaps an ice-cream shop! Mark these on your map.

Are there parts of the journey that are really quiet, where there's hardly any people or traffic? Or perhaps there are parts where it's really NOISY! Mark these on your map.

As you go on your journey, map in hand, pray at each point you've marked. For bits that could be a bit dangerous, stop. Pray and ask God to guide you safely to the next bit of your journey. Pay attention and then go on.

At the points that make you smile, thank God for them. Tell God what it is about them that makes you smile. What are your favourite memories with these points?

For parts where your journey may be quiet, thank God for the quiet time and take a moment to think about where you have seen God in your life in the week. In the NOISY parts, look for where you can see God and say thank you for being there in the loud, distracting parts of life.

What other points will you mark on your map? What will you pray at those points?

Enjoy the journey, stay safe and look for where you see God at work.

Spoken prayer

Encourage your group to stand up for the prayers, if this is possible, and follow movement directions from the leader as you pray together.

God,
Thank you that you are with us.
Every time we start a journey
(Take one step forward)
Thank you that you are with us.
Every time we travel home
(Take one step back)
Help us as we explore new places.

(Take one step to the left)

Help us when we feel scared.
(Take one step to the right)

Amen

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond.

Chatterbox – you didn't make it



https://youtu.be/Tg0n9IKEFCw?si=uyEDTnyWpSnzi9WU by Simos 5inco

Create your own journey chatterbox! On the outside you could have North, South, East and West. Then pick a number from 1 to 8 and then lift the flap to see the prediction for your journey. Some ideas might be "Take an umbrella"; "Hole in your shoe!"; "No trips today"; "Sun and smiles all the way".

You could even do it with a Nativity theme – "Camel wandered off, you're going to be late"; "Clouds obscure star, delay journey by a day"; "Donkey is moving extra fast, get to Bethlehem ahead of time".

Now have some fun using your chatterbox with someone else.

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- Talk to someone older or younger than you and ask them to tell you about a special journey they have gone on.
- Try to notice this week all the times things go to plan. Make a note of them and remember to stay thank you to God.

We hope you enjoyed exploring **Advent in the style of… reflective storytelling** with us.

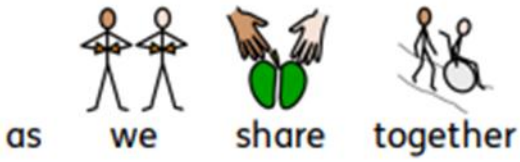
Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing **sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk**
Please join the Faith Adventures Facebook Group **bit.ly/FACT_FB**
Why not have a look at next week's resource on **Advent in the style of… Brick Church**


Jesus
our
friend,


Right middle finger touches centre of other palm, repeat with left hand


be
with
us
today




as
we
share
together


Alternate hands back and forth


pray
together

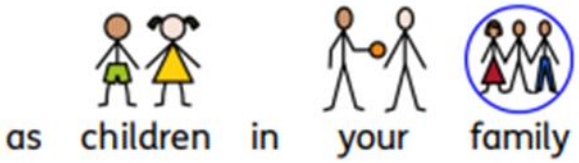



play
together



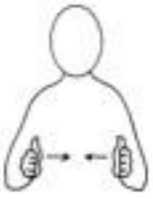

and
get to know
you
better




as
children
in
your
family




Amen



The Lord's Prayer





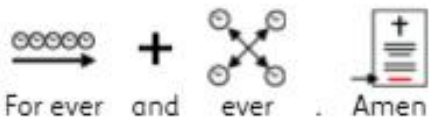


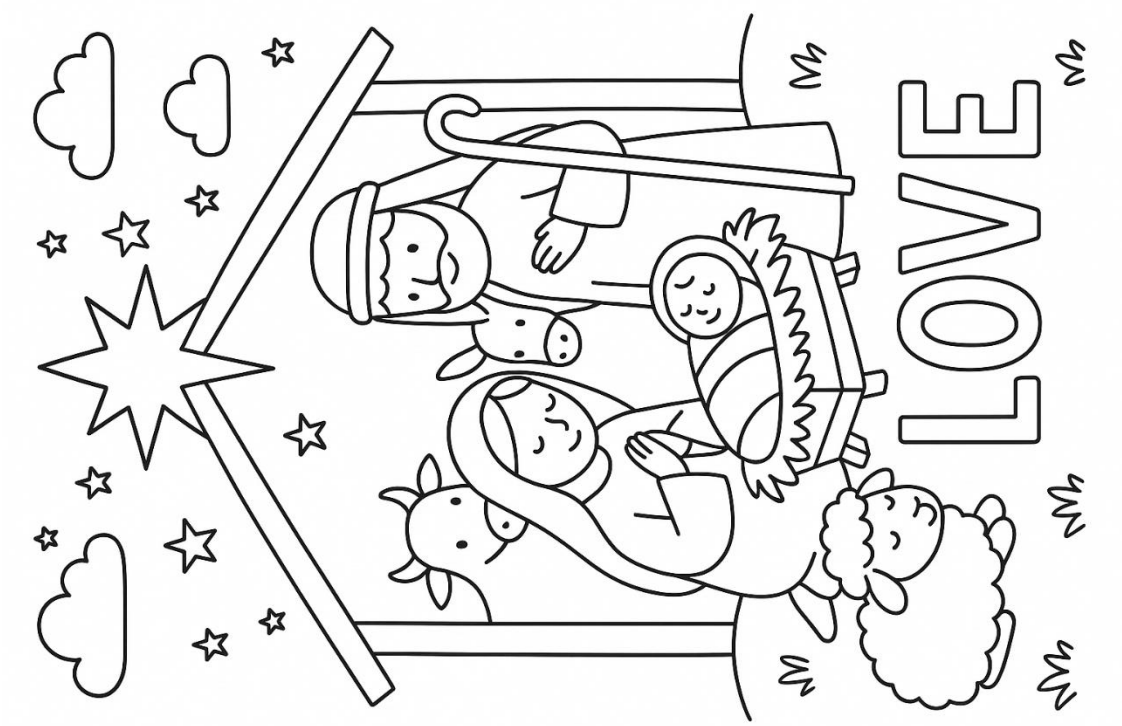


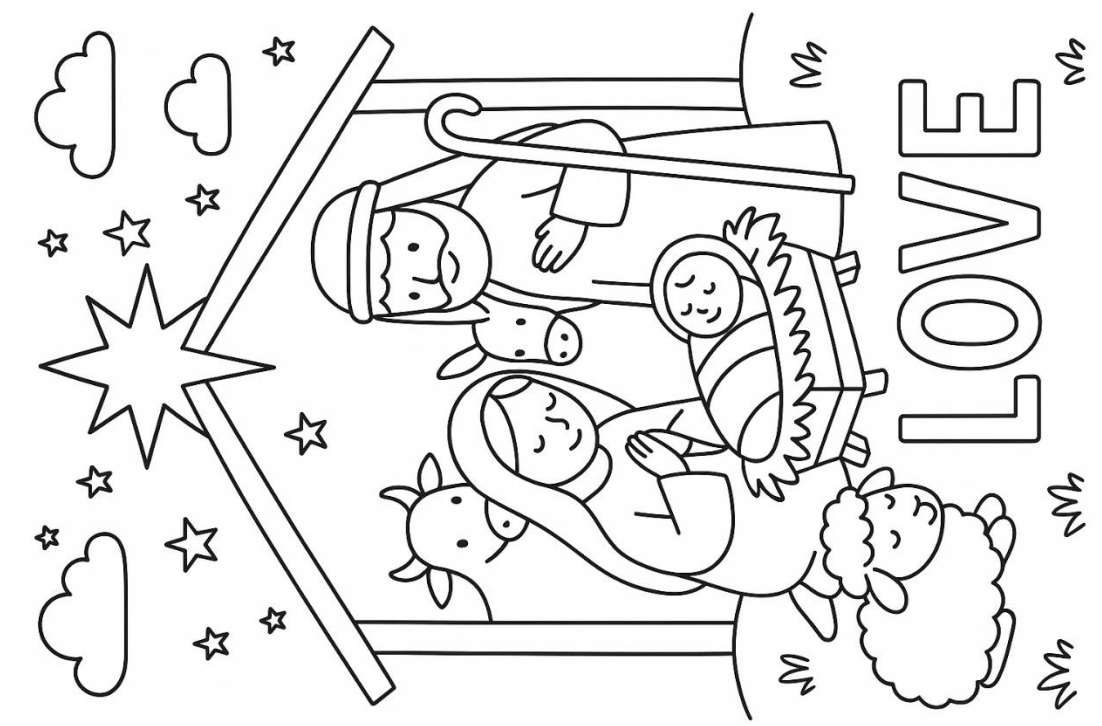









LOVE


LOVE


LOVE