



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: Matthew 1: 18-25

Theme: Love actually

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

Welcome to the final week of our Advent material. This week we'll be focusing on the final Advent candle – which traditionally symbolises love.

The passage we have chosen to explore doesn't actually mention the word 'love' at all, but it is implicit in the relationships involved; Joseph's love for Mary, Mary's love for Joseph and God's love for them both (which was reciprocated) and God's love for the world.

There is much we don't know about the relationship between Mary and Joseph. We can make assumptions that he was probably significantly older than she was (and she was likely to be about 14 years old). We don't know how they met, whether the marriage was arranged or a freely chosen relationship.

We can assume that Joseph's willingness to end the engagement quietly to spare Mary's blushes was a decision taken out of love. Mary's decision to remain with Joseph could have been pragmatic (she'd need a father for her child) but could also have signified love – and the hints in some of the Gospels that Jesus had a younger brother, suggests that the relationship was strong and long lasting.



Along with the suggestions in this session, there are many other activities and crafts on the theme to be found in the 'Love Is...' resource book published by the United Reformed Church. Each local URC was sent a copy but it can be downloaded here: [Love Is...: 2023 Children's and Youth Work Theme - United Reformed Church](#)

We hope that some of the suggestions offered here might be used to form part of a service led by your young people, or others.

It is possible that you will have children and young people as part of your group who have experience of difficult or dysfunctional relationships at home or as part of their friendship group. Spend some time thinking about how you will reconcile these experiences within the theme of 'Love'.

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



Active game - How much do you love me?

This is an adaptation of Grandma's Footsteps, just for a bit of love themed fun.

Choose a leader to be 'IT'. They stand facing the wall at one end of the room. The group stand at the opposite end.

The group shout 'How much do you love us?'

The leader answers with a number e.g 'I love you 5 lots' and the group take that amount of steps forward, edging closer to the leader each time.

When ready, the leader will respond with 'I love you Forever!!!!' and will turn around trying to catch one of the group who are running away to the far end of the room again.

Whoever is caught can be the leader role next.

Quiet game - Recognise my voice

The group sit in a circle and a leader sits in the middle blindfolded.

A child is chosen, who then says 'I love you', trying to disguise their voice. The leader tries to guess who it was.

If they guess correctly, the child then becomes the leader role.

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

For this story we recommend using the Good News Bible

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201%3A18-25&version=GNT>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: An angel visits Joseph; Matthew 1:18-25 by The Barefoot Evangelist

https://youtu.be/bMaARmPEYxQ?si=_oj-nl8CNrq6nlvL

Five to elevens: The Plan for Jesus' Birth Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25 by Saddleback Kids

<https://youtu.be/a1yOY62GFKU?si=ruTlbUobo52IWRZt>

Songs to support the story

Under fives: God Gave Me Jesus by KidSpring Children's Ministry

<https://youtu.be/WHUpCJmFbQo?si=fz2D4Ad1Ki1u1229>

Five to elevens: Angels we have heard on high by Hi Heaven

<https://youtu.be/hFLh5KrB7XA?si=15MzqTD-0xL9CsRg>



Explore – ways into the theme

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

A new way to explore the theme

It's Christmas week and a lot is happening, therefore the Explore section is a simple and straight forward activity which could be lifted and used in many settings.

The following video clip is a Christian remake of the famous Christmas adverts we see on telly, this has taken inspiration from a John Lewis advert and used to depict God's love being gifted to us at Christmas in the shape of Jesus. Watch the clip together and use the following questions to prompt discussion.

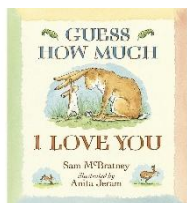
John Lewis Christmas advert 2015 – remake by Dan Rackham:

https://youtu.be/KoxTF_31yyE?si=JmmWmqRjgp0wkgoR

- Why is Christmas about love?
- How do we know God loves us?
- How can we share God's love this Christmas?

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).



Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney and Anita Jeram
1994: Walker Books

CBeebies Bedtime Stories - Ash Malkin

<https://youtu.be/m0Mkw4siGyg?si=NDfrGGIB4JRE33I4>

Little Nutbrown Hare tries to come up with creative ways to show Big Nutbrown Hare how much they are loved. Like this week's bible passage, it shows different ways for people to show others that they love them.

- What is your favourite thing to share, with somebody that you love?

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

- What is the difference between liking and loving?
- What different types of love can you see in the Bible passage?
- What do you love most about Christmas?
- Was Jesus like other babies? How was he the same or does he differ?

Wondering reflect on the theme



- I wonder why you don't see hearts on Christmas cards?
- I wonder if Joseph loved Mary? How did he show it?
- I wonder how we can share God's message of love?
- I wonder why Mary always wears blue?

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:

- Nativity set. Could have a range of different ones, knitted, toy, Lego, wooden, to act out and explore the Christmas story.
- Baby. God came down as a baby, take turns holding and loving the baby.
- Present with hearts inside. Discuss how Jesus is a gift to us, a gift of love.
- Straw. Play with the straw talking about where Jesus was born and why he was born in a stable.
- Cloth. Feel the texture of the cloth, take turns wrapping the baby in the cloth.
- Nappy. I wonder what else baby Jesus might have needed when he was born? I wonder who would have helped?
- 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!)
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (eg stones, felt, twigs etc)

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Prayerful activity - Prayer manger

Set up a manger with a baby in it lying on hay. Add into the hay, strips of gold paper with 'God loves you so much, he sent Jesus' written on it (or some similar sentence).

Gather the group around the manger and give every child a strip of yellow paper. Invite them to write their prayers on the paper and when ready, they approach the manger, placing their prayers into the manger and taking a strip of gold paper with the message on. A piece of music could be played during this reflective personal prayer.

A leader could say a simple closing prayer to end.

Spoken prayer

Thank You, God, for showing us love through Jesus.

Thank You for Mary and Joseph, who trusted You.

Help us to share Your love with our families, our friends, and everyone we meet.

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.

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Heart nativity card

You will need:

- a piece of coloured card folded in half
- red heart
- a brown heart
- a blue heart
- two small circles of brown paper
- one smaller circle of brown paper
- one oval of white paper

What you do:

Cut a hook shape from the blue heart to create Mary's body. Glue this shape onto the brown heart.

Position the small circles to create Mary and Josephs' faces

Position the white oval shape for Jesus body and then glue the smaller circle onto it, to create Jesus' face.

Glue the bottom edges of this heart onto a card.

Write on the Red heart "God loves (insert the name of the person you what to Share God's love with)".

Insert this heart into the back of your heart nativity scene, and then the person you give the card to has a gift of a heart to keep, which reminds them they are loved by God.

Jesus came to earth the show and share God's love with us all.

Stained glass heart biscuits

You will need:

- 175g/6oz chilled butter, cubed
- 225g/8oz plain flour
- 75g/2¾oz caster sugar
- one tsp vanilla extract
- one large egg, beaten
- about twenty boiled sweets (in a mixture of colours)

For this recipe you will need a large and small biscuit cutter – stars, circles and other





Christmas shapes all work well.

What you do:

You can prepare the biscuit mixture in advance to save time.

Preheat the oven to 180C/160C Fan/Gas 4. Line two baking sheets with baking paper.

Place the butter, flour and sugar in a food processor and pulse until it resembles breadcrumbs. Add the vanilla and beaten egg and pulse until it forms a smooth dough.

Using a rolling pin, roll out on a lightly floured work surface until the dough is about 5mm/¼in thick. Use your large cutter to cut out the shapes. Then use a small cutter to remove the middle (where the 'glass' will sit). If you don't have any small cutters you can cut the middle out by hand, leaving about 1cm of biscuit around the edge. Use a cocktail stick or skewer to make small holes if you want to hang them by thread or ribbon.

Re-roll any scraps of dough to make more biscuits.

Separate the sweets into their colours and put them in plastic bags (one colour in each bag). Crush using a rolling pin until broken into fine grains. Sprinkle these grains in the middle of each biscuit in a generous layer that covers the hole. You can stick to one colour per biscuit or create a rainbow effect by mixing the colours. Bake for about 15–18 minutes or until the biscuit is a pale golden brown and the sweets have melted.

Leave to stand on the trays for about 5 minutes, or until firm enough to move. Carefully transfer to a cooling rack and leave to cool and firm up.

While you are eating them remember for God so loved the world that they gave their only son.



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 **what is the most special part of Christmas for them?**
- Prepare a special message or picture for someone at home that you could leave under the Christmas tree for them to find on Christmas morning.

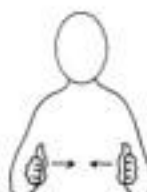
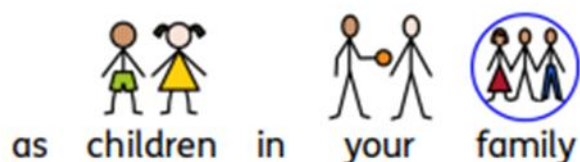
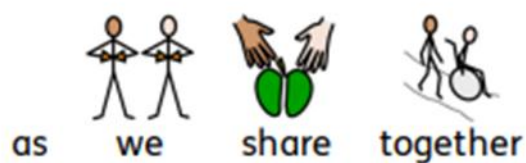
We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of **Love at Christmas** with us.

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







The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever . Amen



