



Faith Adventures for Children Together



*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:
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

Micah 5:2: The Christmas Prophecy

Theme: Planning and preparing through advent for Christmas where you are

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

This month we will be exploring the season of Advent. The writing group have ensured that these sessions will be complimentary to, but different from, the Advent Resource available from the URC Children's and Youth Work Team so, if you have both, you won't need to worry that there are duplicated activities.

Advent is not a time of waiting, it is a time of preparation. Just as parents expecting the imminent birth of a child have lots of things to get ready (buying a cot, maybe, or 'child-proofing' the house) Christians also have to prepare for the birth of Jesus.

The reading tells us that God prepared for the birth of Jesus for a long, long time.

We are also told that Bethlehem, about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, is 'a little town, among all the many towns in Judah'. At the time of Jesus' birth it had a population of between 300-1000 people and covered only about 60 acres (about 60 football pitches), but this is the place God chose, and prepared, for the birth of Jesus. Bethlehem provides proof that small, seemingly insignificant places can have a great and lasting impact on the world.

Bethlehem today is bigger – home to about 25,000 people – and is situated in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is cut off from Jerusalem, and Israel, by a security wall that makes travel to and from Jerusalem difficult, and often impossible, for residents. If you want to look at this further, you can find material in the URC resource Go with Greta to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory https://bit.ly/Greta_Connect



Jewishness is matriarchal – that means that the women are very important to the faith – you can have a non-Jewish father but, if your mother is Jewish, you are considered to be a Jew. Did the Romans understand this? If they did, why did Joseph and Mary have to travel to David's ancestral home rather than Mary's?

As we look at the twin themes of preparation and small things making a big difference, is there something your group, in your church, could do in the run up to Christmas that would have a big impact in the community served by the church? If you follow this through, there is the possibility of achieving the Lundie Award for individuals or the Group Award for your group. Details can be found on the URC website (www.urc.org.uk/your-church/family-friendly-church/lundie-memorial-awards/).

Together

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

In-person game - Decorate a tree

What you need:

- Christmas decorations such as tinsel and baubles, etc.
- Paper chains



- Small Christmas trees
- Timer

What you do:

Divide into two or more teams, giving each team a Christmas tree. Set a timer for five minutes and challenge the teams to decorate their tree. You could set rules such as what the tree needs to have on it e.g. three paper chains, four baubles, two different colours of tinsel, etc. The aim is to decorate the tree in the time given following the rules set. Perhaps you could give a prize to the best dressed tree.

Alternative game - The unprepared relay race

Have an array of resources which could be used in a relay/ obstacle course. Task the children with planning and preparing the race. Once the course has been decided and prepared, then split into teams and actually do the relay. Each team could be timed to see which team can complete the race the fastest.

Experience

For this story we recommend using the Easy English Version

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Micah+5%3A2&version=EASY>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: An unexpected Christmas – St Pauls Auckland

<https://youtu.be/TM1XusYVqNY?si=r1Ot6aq6b18e3zWW>

Over fives: Christmas according to kids – Southland Church

[suowe2czxcA?si=ZJoXXXgLfcmrTCoL](https://youtu.be/suowe2czxcA?si=ZJoXXXgLfcmrTCoL)

Songs to support the story

Under fives: Jesus, born in Bethlehem

<https://youtu.be/zZVCWnwCFR4?si=mEf38YgXxYzs03z8>

Five to elevens: The King is born in Bethlehem

<https://youtu.be/Bvp0MyIYUdU?si=0Kqp2SPS7cTerNle>

Or We made it to Bethlehem <https://youtu.be/chdJiRcZcDQ?si=JfNzOLVTtfQiCFgu>

Explore

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

A new way to explore the passage – God's Big Plan

You will need:

- A picture of the nativity or a nativity set
- A card with Micah's prophesy written on it (Micah 5:2)
- Coloured wool or ribbon
- Spare cards and paper



You can do this activity physically on a table or visually on a flipchart. For a flipchart you may also need glue, Blu-Tack or sellotape

Explain that this week's reading is a prophecy that Micah spoke around 800 years before Jesus was born. A prophecy is a message from God given through a prophet.

As you explain this, place the prophecy at the top of the table/flipchart.

Then right at the bottom of the table/flipchart, place the picture of the nativity Bethlehem scene and explain that 800 years later the prophecy came about.

Sit back and look at the large gap in between the prophecy and the nativity scene. I wonder what needed to happen for this prophecy to take place? What other plans did God have to put in place? I wonder how God got from here (the top) to here (the bottom)?

As a group, work backwards from the nativity to the prophecy, creating words and images that are placed between the two, think about and show what else needed to happen.

For example: Joseph needed to be with Mary; they needed to be in Bethlehem at the time of the birth (not where they lived in Nazareth); Jesus' earthly family tree needed to lead back to King David; a new star needed to appear when Jesus was born; wise men needed to see it and follow it for many months and so on.

Younger children will simply map out the elements of the nativity story, older children may like to look up the dates associated and place it more as a timeline.

However your group do it, the task is to explore together all the parts of the nativity scene that needed to be planned in advance by God.

Sit back and look at your finished 'chart'. You may like to use some wondering questions at this point, to include:

- I wonder how long God had been planning this before giving the promise to Micah?
- Are there any older prophecies?
- Is God always putting plans in place?
- I wonder what God is planning at the moment?

You could also wonder about one part of these plans hadn't gone through, would the story have looked different, and how?

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.



'The Most Magnificent Thing' by Ashley Spires
https://youtu.be/UM8oN4yzJqw?si=QCvafKXCCUR5T_uP



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

- What do you know about the start of the Christmas story? About Mary and Joseph's stories?
- Did Mary and Joseph know they were part of God's plan right from the start?
- Why Bethlehem and why that time?
- I wonder what else God might be planning and preparing right now?

Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- I wonder what you'd like to be planning or preparing for Christmas this year?
- I wonder if you can take anyone out of the Nativity set without it mattering?

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). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. 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:

- A map with Bethlehem on it – talk about Bethlehem being a very small place where something very big happened.
- A party popper – this is a small thing which has a big impact, just like Jesus' impact as he came into our world.
- An instruction book for creating a model – God planned for the big event of Jesus birth for a long time, making plans and preparations.
- A small nativity scene or farm scene with people – put the scene together as a farmyard scene. Talk to the children about when we add Jesus, the scene becomes extra special because Jesus make a huge difference.
- A heart – God loved this world so much that he made plans to show his love to us all.
- 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

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Advent Journey prayer spiral

This creative prayer helps us journey with Mary and Joseph towards Bethlehem, thinking about our own advent waiting and getting ready for Jesus.

You will need:

- Air dry clay, plasticine or salt dough
- A birthday candle or small candle

Take your ball of clay, plasticine or salt dough and roll it out into a long sausage shape. Press down with your fingers to flatten it out slightly and make into a spiral.

Using the candle, make 25 indentations deep enough so that the candle will stand freely.





Allow the spiral to air dry (or bake the salt dough)

Each day, or weekly, move the candle along the spaces and light it. As the candle burns, sit quietly and think about a person or place that you want to pray for. Pray that they will know God's light this Advent time. *(Adapted from an idea from Flame Creative)*

Spoken prayer

You will need an advent wreath with four candles: this can be as simple as you like. Each week of Advent we will add a prayer for each of the candles.

Candle 1

Dear God,
This candle we light is for the prophets who told of your Kingdom of Peace and the plans you have made for us. As we journey with Mary and Joseph in this time of waiting and getting ready, may our hearts be filled with hope. 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. <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

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.

Advent Wreath

An advent wreath traditionally counts down the four Sundays of Advent leading up to Christmas. It is a time of planning and preparing for Christmas. Each week one more candle is lit. I wonder what planning and preparing you are doing this Advent in order to be ready for Christmas?

You will need:

- Circle of card or cake board
- Green, red, purple, pink, white, orange and yellow paper

What you do:

Cut holly leaf shapes out of green paper.
Cut small circles of red paper for berries.
Cut three rectangles of purple paper, one of pink and one of white to make the candles.
Cut some flame shapes from orange and yellow paper.
Glue the holly leaves around the circle of card or cake board.
Glue the red circles to represent berries.





Glue the flame shapes onto the rectangles of paper to make candles and then glue them in place to create your advent wreath – if you wish, you can add the candles each week during advent.

The pink candle traditionally represents the third week of Advent. The white candle traditionally stands in the centre of the wreath and is lit on Christmas Day, representing the light of the world.

You could make an advent wreath from salt dough or natural materials instead of paper and could use LED candles or even birthday candles (under supervision) instead of paper ones if you choose.

Big things from small places

This Bible passage reminds us that God chose the smallest of towns, little Bethlehem, to bring about the birth of Jesus; out of the smallest came the biggest thing in history, the one who would have great impact.

This is an opportunity for your group to research your local area to find out if there is anyone who has done something great, or something that has had a great impact. Could they share the story with your church or community to inspire others?

This can lead to a conversation about whether we can make a difference too. What could we do as individuals this Christmas that might impact the whole church/town. Let's plan it together and begin to prepare it. Then let's go off and do it, coming back next week to share the stories. For example, the group could make Christmas cards and hand deliver them to the lonely in their neighbourhood.

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:

- Find a version of the Christmas story to read or watch and remind yourself of what happened at that very first Christmas. As you read or watch it, remember that every bit of the story was planned in advance by God – nothing happened by accident. God planned to send Jesus to step into our story and bring God's love closer to all.
 - Play your part in carrying out the plan your group came up with to make a difference in your church or community. If they didn't come up with a plan, maybe you could come up with a plan of your own.
-

We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of Micah's prophesy with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk

Why not have a look at next week's resource on **The Shepherds' story**

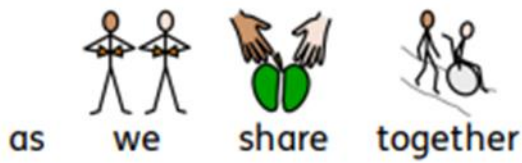




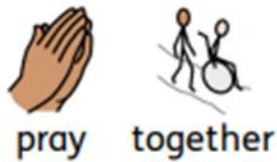
Jesus our friend,



be with us today



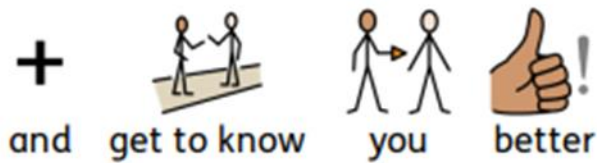
as we share together



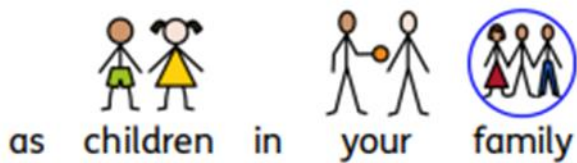
pray together



play together



and get to know you better



as children in your family



Amen



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



Alternate hands back and forth





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