



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>

Psalm 72:10-11 - gifts from afar

Theme: People from all over the world are part of God’s story

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

“We three kings of Orient are”... What picture does that phrase conjure up? Three wealthy men on camels silhouetted against a desert sky? An image beloved of Christmas cards for many years. In truth, they were probably greater in number, riding horses, and had servants with them, but let’s not allow fact to get in the way of F.A.C.T.

You’d be right in thinking that the ‘three kings’ (or the three Magi, or the three wise men) don’t turn up in the Christmas story until after Jesus has been born – so why are we focussing on them in Advent?

We don’t know exactly who they were - although we’ve given them names – Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. We don’t know exactly what they were – Matthew’s gospel called them ‘Magi’ – astrologers or Seers – the idea that they were Kings came later. We don’t even know that there were three of them – we just assume that, because there were three gifts, there were three gifters! But they certainly belong in Advent because, although they didn’t turn up until after Jesus was born, their journey, just like our Advent journey, started a long time before. They had to prepare. They realised that something important was happening when they first saw the star. And they wanted to be part of whatever it was – they could have sent a messenger or a servant, but they travelled in person to Bethlehem.



We've looked at how the birth of the Christ-child meant that the shepherds, often seen as the 'least' or 'poorest' in 1st century society had a part to play in God's story, the inclusion of these, the 'most' or 'richest' in society, shows us that God's story is for everyone – and everyone has a role to play. In the same way, the shepherds were local people, in the fields near Bethlehem, while these travellers, just as in the psalm we are reading, were from distant lands and cultures.

After meeting Jesus and his family, they 'returned a different way'. We are given an explanation for this; they wanted to avoid King Herod, but it's also true to say that, having met Jesus, things changed. And maybe that is the same for all of us today. When we get to know Jesus Christ, things can never be the same.

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 – Corners

The kings travelled from far away lands to find baby Jesus.

Use a large space for this game and designate one corner as east, one as west, one as north and another as south, it might be helpful to have a sign in each so people don't forget which is which. Everyone is to stand in the middle of the room. Start the music. When the



music stops, everyone is to choose a corner to run to. The leader then calls out a corner, whoever is in that corner is out. Play continues until there is a winner/s. An alternative way to play this game is for everyone to be running round and the leader calls a corner, the last person to get to the corner is out. Have a couple of practices first.

Alternative game – Guess the gift

Fill 6/8 pillowcases (number can be dependent on the size of your group) with an item in each. Some easy and some hard. Perhaps items which are similar to those taken to Jesus by the three kings?

The aim of the game is for someone, without looking, to place their hands inside the pillowcase and try to guess what the item is just using their hands. If necessary, clues could be given. Give careful consideration to the items used, nothing scary or that could cause harm and be aware of those who are touch sensitive. You may want to have the pillowcases spread out and each person to go round, feel inside and write down their guess on a piece of paper. A point is given to each correct answer, whoever has the most correct guesses wins.

Experience

For this story we recommend using the Easy English version

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+72%3A+10-11&version=EASY>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: Jesus and the men from far away by Preschool Bible

<https://youtu.be/2poTJXrm6pw?si=SNGxdwvWadrwbQtm>

Over fives: The story of the wise men by Sharefaithkids <https://youtu.be/VySzDA07N-c?si=bRM3QgbHtvjF7On1>

A wordless (accessible) version by Crossroads Kids

<https://youtu.be/TCOW8NKfrBg?si=FSz2Bi8Qofflavvv>

Songs to support the story

Under fives: Jesus is the king by Big Big Worship

<https://youtu.be/Z56AWDpHzCE?si=DZScyFA7n970IG2r>

Five to eevens: God of all nations by Kingdom Kids

<https://youtu.be/Blobyzk7ajg?si=VZMtQdQmi5OeBSJg>

Explore

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

A new way to explore the passage

The visitors from the East are not always explored fully as part of the Christmas story. This is an opportunity to consider who these people were and what cultures they were from. It's also an opportunity to consider how cultures around the world relate to this part of the story as part of the Epiphany celebrations.



You will need: images of the 'wise men' from different sources, old Christmas cards, Google searches, or even different nativity sets. Encourage the children to also bring in examples to share.

What you do: Lay them out on the table as you ask the question, have you ever wondered who the wise men were? How many were there? Where did they come from? What did they look like? What did they sound like? And so on. You can invite the children to offer their own wondering questions about the wise men.

Here we have some examples of images of the wise men from different places. Let's look at them together.

Ask the children different questions, enabling them to explore and wonder together. Keep the pace quick with everyone joining in.

Some examples to keep the conversation going are:

- I wonder which is your favourite? Pick it up and tell us why. What can we tell about this wise man?
- I wonder which one surprises you?
- Do you have any questions about any of these?
- Which one do you think is most like the actual wise men and why?
- Where do you think each one of these wise men comes from?
- What does each picture tell you about people's interpretation of them?

After some exploring together, you could give some quick 'answers' using the information in this resource about who they were. Explain that in all countries around the world we have our own interpretations of the nativity scene, reflecting who we are and our own culture. You could show some examples if you like - see nativity scenes from around the world on Google.

This is also an opportunity to invite people from the congregation who represent different cultures to come and visit to share with the group their nativity scenes and talk about Advent/Christmas in their culture.

Response:

You will need: Toilet rolls or wooden people, materials and papers for decorating

Challenge the group to each make a wise man from their own culture or background – how would you dress them / what would they look like?

Once they are finished you could use them as a wandering wise men activity in your church right up until Epiphany. This is an activity where the wise men are slowly moved around the church building, getting closer and closer to the crib, until they are placed by the nativity scene in the church on the Sunday closest to 6 January which is Epiphany, the day we traditionally celebrate the wise men visiting Jesus. All you do is introduce them to the church congregation and explain that the children will be helping the wise men to come closer to the nativity scene in church. Each week the children move the 'dolls' to a different place in the church, finishing at the manger for Christmas or Epiphany, whichever your church prefers. Keep your eyes open for them on their travels!



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 Story of the Three Wise Kings

by Tomie dePaola

<https://youtu.be/goNbOOeFkpE?si=HWudnL24h9nkkmSH>

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

- I wonder who the wise people are today?
- I wonder if the wise men/kings travelled together or whether they met up there?
- How long might it have taken them to get there and what sort of things might have happened on the way?
- Why didn't they just send a messenger with the gifts?
- I wonder if they had servants travelling with them?
- What gifts might the others have brought if there were more than three kings?
- Do you think anyone else brought them gifts?
- Where did the kings/wise men go afterwards and what did they do?

Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- I wonder what you would have given the baby Jesus? Is there a gift that represents your culture?
- I wonder what the kings/wise men thought when they got to the stable – was it what they were expecting?
- I wonder what is the wisest thing you know?

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 star- the wise ones all saw a star in the sky where they lived.
- An atlas – they came from countries far away from Bethlehem.
- A gift – they took gifts to give to the baby King they were looking for.
- A camel/or horse – they travelled the long journey on camels or horses, I wonder if they used other forms of transport?
- A crown – a king wears a crown in this country. I wonder what the kings wore on their heads, a fancy hat, a beautiful turban or something else?
- 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?

Prayers for the world.

You will need:

Something to represent the world such as a map, poster or globe.

This type of prayer activity could be led in several different ways depending on the type of world you have to hand. If you were to use an inflatable globe then you could throw it from person to person, each time someone praying for or shouting out a different place.

If you have a poster or large map each person could place a sticky dot on the part of the world they would like to offer to God in prayer.

If you had a spinning globe, it could be spun, a finger placed on the globe to stop it and wherever that finger is, is the place to pray for, this could be repeated. Alternatively sticky dots could be placed on the globe itself.

Whichever prayer activity you chose, finish off with the following words, a leader saying the first part and all joining in for the words in bold.

Creator God,

Thank you for our world, for all the towns, villages, cities and countries and all the creatures who live there. As we journey through your world help us to take care of it.

This is our world.

Amen



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 3

Dear God,

This candle we light

is for the wise men

who travelled in faith and hope

following the star.

Help us to bring our gifts to the Christ Child

With faith and hope in our hearts.

As we journey with the wise ones,

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.

The wise men's journey

The wise men came from far and wide to visit Jesus. Their journey, which would most likely have been filled with many ups and downs, would have taken them quite some time. Use this activity to explore the journey the wise men may have taken.

You will need:

- Hair gel/ sand
- Plastic wallets
- Wise men (could be little people drawn and cut out or something like buttons)
- Double sided tape

What you do:

Before starting, ensure there is a line of double sided tape on the inside edge of the opening on the plastic wallet (*do not remove the top layer of double sided tape just yet*). Alternatively you could use a zip-lock bag.

Use the map at the end of this issue or let everyone design their own.

Use paper to draw, colour and cut out three wise men. Laminate or cover with tape and attach to a button.

Laminate the map, then slide it into the plastic wallet (you may need to trim it to size) along with the wise men. Should you not have access to a laminator, place the map on a hard surface, under the sealed wallet rather than in it or stick it to the back of the wallet with tape. Squeeze plenty of hair gel into the wallet.

Remove the layer of double sided tape and, while pushing some air out of the envelope, seal it firmly.

You should now be able to move the wise men around the map using your finger.

Alternatively you could use sand rather than hair gel and place map into the envelope.



Constellations

The travellers from the East were known to be astrologers who studied the stars. In ancient times people looked for signs in the stars and sailors used to use the pattern of the stars to help them navigate their ships. This activity involves making a constellation.

You will need:

- An artist's canvas
- Black paint and paintbrush or photo of dark sky and glue
- A bradawl to make holes in the canvas, and glue
- A piece of black card to cover the back of the canvas
- Short run of battery-operated fairy lights





What you do:

Paint your canvas black or glue the photo of the sky onto the canvas and allow to dry. Research some constellations – the Plough or Orion might be good ones to use, partly because they are fairly simple to reproduce and also because they are frequently seen in our night sky.

Plot the constellation onto the canvas. At the points where the stars in that constellation are found, make a hole in the canvas with the bradawl (an adult may need to help with this – we recommend putting a wedge of blutack or playdough underneath the canvas for the point of the awl to go into).

Place the fairy lights in the space at the back of the canvas so that one bulb goes through each hole. Tape or glue them into place. Glue the card onto the back, with the black side inwards, having first cut a hole in the card to create a flap that you can open to access the on-off switch for the lights.

Switch your lights on and see them glow, showing the shape of the constellation. You could use this as a nightlight at home or as part of your Christmas decorations. Once you have learned to recognise the pattern of stars, have a look in the night sky and see whether you can spot them. Remember how God is bigger than the whole universe and chose a special star to show people from distant lands the way to Jesus.

Alternative STEM activity:

The wise men were astrologers. They were possibly also alchemists – an ancient form of chemistry. You could create an alchemist lab and try experimenting with different combinations of these different items: baking soda, vinegar, water, cornflour, hydrogen peroxide, and rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol). You would need some beakers, test tubes and pipettes to handle the items with.

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 someone who comes from a different culture to you and ask them about what Christmas is like in their tradition. Do they celebrate Epiphany – the coming of the astrologers from the East to Jesus?
 - The Psalm this week tells us about people from all over the world bringing their gifts to Jesus. If you are wrapping any Christmas presents to give, why not pray for the person who will receive the gift? Ask God to bless them this Christmas time.
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We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of **Psalm 72 and the Astrologers** from the Nativity 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 birth of Jesus**

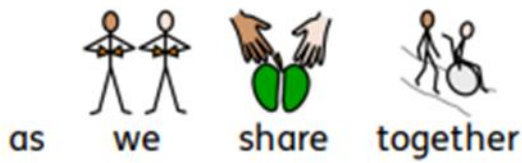




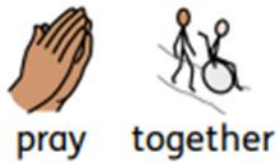
Jesus our friend,



be with us today



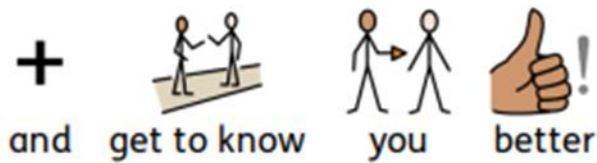
as we share together



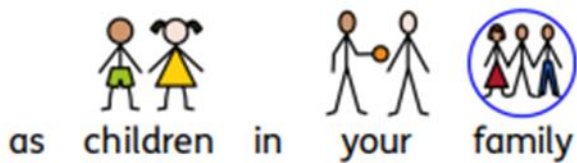
pray together



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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