Faith Adventures Youth Resource

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

Embedded in Faith Adventures: Children Together, this youth resource is intergenerational in nature and designed to foster God-connection in church, home 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/How-To-FAYR**

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

Let's start our time with God and each other well

Use this opening prayer or encourage young people to open the session with a prayer of their own.

All mighty God,

Be with us as we learn more about you through stories and people in the Bible.

Help us to walk in your way and follow your path.

Be with us as we make decisions that affect our lives, and the lives of those around us.

Amen.

Alternatively, you may join with the widgit prayer found in Faith Adventures: Children Together, or else the Lord's Prayer found at the end of this session.

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 – Were Mary and Joseph…

This game is based on online celebrity interviews, where well-known figures are encouraged to guess the most popular questions asked about them on the internet – then answer them.

In teams, or as individuals, guess the top five results requested of search engines that start with "Were Mary and Joseph…" Participants can get extra points for questions being in the correct order, or knowing the correct answer to the questions.

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

This link takes you to Luke 2: 1–7 in the Easy English translation
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%202%3A%201%20-%207&version=EASY

You may wish to research different versions of this reading on **www.biblegateway.com**
Recommended versions to try are NRSV, Easy-to-read, The Message, NIRV

2 At that time, Caesar Augustus made a law. He told his men to count everyone who lived in the countries that he ruled. **2** This was the first time that the Romans had made a list of everyone's names. Quirinius was the Roman ruler of Syria when it happened.

3 Everyone went to his own home town for the Romans to count them. **4** So Joseph went to his home town, Bethlehem. He was living in the town of Nazareth, in Galilee. Bethlehem was in Judea. King David had been born there, so Bethlehem was called the town of David. Joseph belonged to the family of David. That is why he went to Bethlehem.

5 Joseph took Mary with him so that the Romans could count them. She went because she had promised to marry him. She was pregnant.

6 While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her baby to be born. **7** This was her first baby, and it was a boy. She put cloths around him. Then she put him in an animal's food box. She did this because the rooms for visitors were full of people.

Watch: Take a closer look at the story of Jesus birth with the Bible Project
https://youtu.be/_OLezoUvOEQ?si=M_n9xfhNEqdGG_QU

Questions for discussion

- What stood out for you in this retelling? What do you think is often missing in our retelling of the nativity each year?

Explore

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 journey?
- When you look back in your own life where can you see God's plans?

How do these differences make you feel about the story?

Modern parables

This section includes references to TV programmes, films, books, TED talks, TikTok etc aimed at this age group that will have been widely seen, or where a clip is available to use as a stimulus for discussion. You may also enjoy the picture book recommended for Faith Adventures: Children Together and explore the relevance of the story to the theme of the session in more depth – young people and adults are often well tuned in to the deeper meanings in materials aimed at younger people and the authors are often very aware of the adults reading the books to or with younger ones.



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?

Group discussion

- They were not yet married when they went on the journey, Mary had promised to be with Joseph and Joseph had promised to stay with Mary. Whose promises do you trust?
- How would this story have been different if either Mary or Joseph had said no at any point in the story?
- Mary and Joseph are the focus of this huge powerful story, how much do you think they realised this?

Personal reflection

- Mary loved God enough to say Yes and Joseph loved God enough to stay with Mary. How does your love for God affect your daily walk and decisions

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Praying together

Prayers Respond to the theme by writing or saying a short prayer. Alternatively, use the creative prayer from Faith Adventures: Children Together for this session, or use the prayer activity below. Alternatively, light a candle and play some music while you listen and talk to God together.



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 prayers

Explain, before beginning the prayers, that there will be spaces of silence after each section of spoken prayer to allow the group to mention specific people or places that they would like to pray for.

Loving God,
We pray for those who face impossible journeys,
Filled with dangers and uncertainty;
For those who are a long way from home,
Needing to rely on the kindness of strangers.

We pray for:

(In the silence – name places where people may be on dangerous journeys)

Hear our prayers, God.

Help them feel safe.

Nurturing God,
We pray for those who have moved somewhere new;
For those starting a new adventure.
If they feel anxious,
Or if they feel excited…

We pray for:

(In the silence – name people who may be starting something new)

Hear our prayers, God.

Help them to know your peace.

Compassionate God,
We pray for those who feel afraid,
Who don't know which way to go;
For those who feel lost
And those who feel alone.

We pray for:

(In the silence – name people who may be starting something new)

Hear our prayers, God.

Help them feel calm.

Amen

Responding together

This is an opportunity for a social justice challenge, some research, craftivism, or a craft or STEM activity. You may have a specific activity chosen but free choice is also an option. Here are some suggestions for this week's theme. Choose whatever will work best for your group.

The Journey

Re-read this week's Bible passage. Find the start and end locations for Mary and Joseph's journey. Discuss the possible dangers and challenges they faced on their journey together.

Use mobile phones, or a shared device, to find these locations using a maps app such as Google maps. Use the app to explore the terrain between the two locations, considering the kinds of dangers travellers would encounter if they took this journey today. Would the route require different types of transport? Are there dangers in the modern journey that Mary and Joseph wouldn't have faced?

Challenge

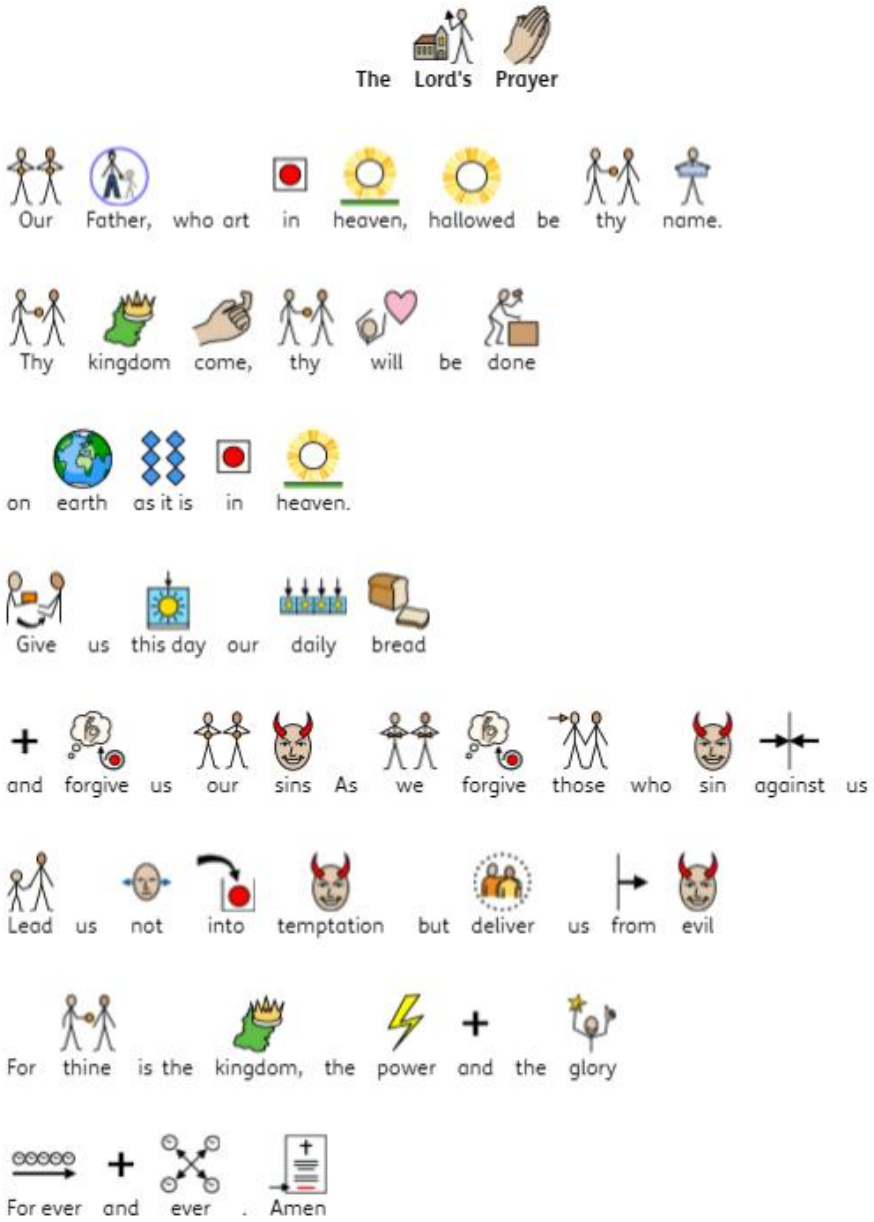
Discipleship doesn't stop when you walk out of the church door – it is a part of everyday life. Take a challenge with you and try to make it part of your week.

You may think of your own suggestion of what you as an individual or a group might do in the coming week in response to what you have explored today. If not here are some suggestions:

- Use one of the "conversation starter" questions or the question below to talk with someone of a different generation or from a different setting and share your questions, thoughts and insights together. **I wonder which part of Mary and Joseph's journey you think of when you hear the Christmas story.**
- Research something suggested by JPIT Resources (**jpit.uk**) or *Commitment for Life* (**cforl.co.uk**)
- We are counting down the days to Christmas Day – not long to go. I wonder if you have been doing anything through December, through Advent, to help you explore the Christmas story. If not, it's not too late to start. You could buy a food tin each day this week and donate it to a food bank. You could find an online Advent Bible app such as this one: **https://missiontogether.org.uk/digital-advent-calendar/**

Thank you for exploring the Christmas story in **Luke** with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing **sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk or by sharing it on www.bit.ly/FACT_FB**


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


PEACE