

The materials are designed to support the content of the GenR8 assembly "A Gift Worth Searching For", presented for Christmas 2019. Some useful background to Christian beliefs relating to festivals can be found here: www.reonline.org.uk/knowning/what-re/christianity/practices-and-ways-of-life

Focus	Questions to challenge and inspire	Suggested activities to deepen understanding
A nativity scene: Journeys to Bethlehem	<p>What are the key features of the nativity story? Can you empathise with the individuals mentioned?</p>	<p>Set up a crib scene as a focal point in the classroom. The scene will be built up in three stages for the journeys of Mary & Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi (wise men). Begin with the stable only-crib/manger, animals, sacking or straw (no star). Here is a site to engage the children with each of the individuals https://request.org.uk/restart/2017/11/03/whos-who-in-the-christmas-story/ You can read the Christmas story in the Bible: Matthew Ch 1 vs 18 – Ch 2 vs 12; Luke Ch 2 vs 1 – 20.</p>
Mary and Joseph	<p>How did Mary know she was to have a special baby? Who was/is He? Why and how did Mary & Joseph travel to Bethlehem? Can you compose some music or a poem linked to the journey?</p>	<p>Look at a map of Israel & work out the distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem (about 60 miles) https://www.bible-history.com/maps/palestine_nt_times.html Look at illustrations of the journey and area. Read the story from the Bible passages including the messages about Jesus, the journey and birth. Wonder together what it might have been like and how Mary & Joseph may have felt. Add Mary, Joseph and the baby to the crib scene. Compose journey music or poem(s) - could be a group poem for younger children.</p>
The shepherds and angels	<p>What is an angel & what do they look like? How do you think the shepherds felt when they heard the news of Jesus' birth? What did they do in response?</p>	<p>Discuss what the word 'angel' means (messenger) and what an angel is. Look at some pictures of angels by famous artists. Read the story of the shepherds and talk about the meaning of the message they received. Imagine you were one of the shepherds and write a story or poem about what happened that night. Add the shepherds and angels to the crib scene. Make angels from card, tinsel etc.</p>
The wise men (Magi)	<p>Why did the Magi travel to Bethlehem? What was their journey like? Who or what would you travel a long distance for? What special journeys have you made?</p>	<p>Look at a map and identify the journey of the wise men from modern Iraq, up the River Tigris, down the Syrian coast to Israel. Read the story of the wise men identifying the star and travelling on the journey via Herod's Palace. Why did the wise men set off and what was the journey like? Why did they give the gifts they gave? Remove the shepherds; add star and wise men to the crib scene.</p>

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Big gifts in small packages	In the assembly one of the team received a small gift that was very precious. What is the most special gift you have received? Did it look impressive on the outside?	Create a “pass the parcel” game for your class with an element of the nativity story in each layer – e.g. a picture of one of the people, a word or phrase. Jesus should be in the centre.
Christmas treasure hunt and search	Why do Christians believe Jesus was worth the journey?	<p>The assembly explored how Jesus is a gift worth searching for. Set up a Christmas or Nativity treasure hunt around your classroom with the final clue leading to Jesus. You could ask older children to design one themselves.</p> <p>Use a nativity wordsearch – e.g. on Pinterest</p>
Exploring a Song	What might people learn from this song? Does it have a message for everyone?	A Band of Angels, by John Hardwick www.genr8.org/songs/
Giving gifts to others	Why was Jesus concerned for others? Why do we receive gifts at Christmas? How can and why do we give gifts to others?	Talk about gifts children would like to receive at Christmas/why we give gifts. Find out about Jesus’ concern for the poor and look at Matthew 25:40 ‘Whatever you did for one of the least important of these brothers of mine you did it for me.’ Find out about Operation Christmas Child www.samaritanspurse.org or Link To Hope https://linktohope.co.uk/shoebox-appeal-2019 and consider taking part in a shoebox appeal.
Gifts and Saint Nicholas (Santa Claus)	Who was St. Nicholas?	<p>Tell the children the story of Saint Nicholas, perhaps around the school Christmas tree after children have made their own decorations and hung them on the tree, entering the hall without shoes. Ask helpers to hide chocolate coins in the children’s shoes back in classroom, whilst telling the story. When storytelling is finished, take the children back to class to find their coins.</p> <p>Useful sites for information about St. Nicholas: https://www.whychristmas.com/customs/fatherchristmas.shtml www.request.org.uk/festivals/christmas/Santa-claus/</p>