



YEAR LEVEL	Foundation
TITLE	We Celebrate Christmas
STRAND	CHURCH AND TRADITION
SUGGESTED DURATION	3-5 weeks
ENDURING QUESTIONS	What does the Church look like in our community? How can I be like Jesus in our community?

Unit Focus

In this unit students will explore the celebration of Jesus' birth and explore the concept of waiting and preparing for special events in our lives. They will understand waiting and how it applies to their lives. They will be led to appreciate that Mary and Joseph waited for the birth of Jesus. They will be encouraged to relate their experiences of giving, receiving and celebrating to this important liturgical event.

Achievement Standards

By the end of **Foundation**:

Students identify that the Church celebrates special times in the year.

Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. Identify that Advent is a time of waiting and preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus
2. Explain that Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Key Understandings for Students

- Advent is a time of waiting.
- We wait for the birth of Jesus.
- We celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas.
- We celebrate Christmas with prayer, word, song and action.
- Jesus' mother is Mary.

Student Context

Students are often impatient and find it difficult to wait for anything. They have had many experiences of waiting e.g., birthdays, a new baby, tuck shop line. Often, when we are waiting, we prepare in some way e.g., by sending out invitations, cooking food etc. Preparing and waiting often make that event even more special.

Mary and Joseph are presented to the students as parents waiting for the birth of their baby. Perhaps someone in the class can remember a similar experience and the children could explore some of the ways life was different at the time of the birth of Jesus.

Students at this level best learn through practical experience, opportunities to explore the waiting process and to be involved in special preparations are essential. The use of an Advent Wreath would give the children an experience of a ritual that is both associated with this liturgical season of the Church and is reflective of the marking of time in preparation.

All students may not be familiar with the season of Advent. Activities planned prior to the commencement of this topic would enable students to develop an appreciation of 'waiting in hope and expectation'. For example, such activities as unwrapping a present layer by layer over a period of time, announcing a surprise treat for a week ahead, then giving a clue each day, or, marking off the days on a calendar leading up to an important event will assist students at this level to appreciate times of waiting.

When children come to school they come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The customs and rituals that they will have experienced regarding Christmas may vary greatly. Children at this age are very curious; they have a great imagination and will enjoy the use of story as a way of discovering details about Jesus' birth and why we celebrate this event.

The students will be excited by the prospect of Christmas and will enjoy making decorations and gifts, setting up a nativity scene and singing Christmas songs. For many, it will be important to develop the 'giving' aspect of Christmas, as this could be a new concept for them in relation to Christmas.

Theological Background for Teachers

- The infancy narratives are found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. They are interpreted as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.
- Advent is the liturgical season during which the church prepares to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is a time in the life of the church community characterised by waiting in hope and expectation.
- Advent helps us to become aware of Jesus' continuing presence in the Church.
- The Advent calendar could be explained as a way in which some people mark off the days of Advent leading up to Christmas. The season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas, therefore, the number of days in Advent varies depending on what day of the week Christmas Day falls.
- The Advent wreath is a symbol of hope in Jesus Christ, light of the world. By custom the wreath has four candles. Traditionally three of these candles are purple and one is pink or white. The purple symbolises penance and the pink or white represent hope. During Advent the four candles are lit. (One the first week, two the second and so on.)
- This time of waiting is also marked using the colour purple, for example, priest's vestments, altar cloths, banners and drapes.
- Mary responded to God by hearing God's word and keeping it. Jesus' conception was possible only because Mary responded to God in this way at the Annunciation.
- Mary lived as the Father wanted, even though at times she was disturbed (Lk 1:29), asked questions (Lk 1:34), wondered (Lk 2:33) and simply did not understand (Lk 2:50).

(Adapted from Diocese of Parramatta, Sharing our Story K-12 RE Guidelines Unit, *Advent: A Waiting Time* 1KC6 1999)

- These gospels relate the birth of Jesus to a specified period in history, namely the Roman occupation of Palestine during the reign of King Herod. They also tell us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but they do not determine the exact month or day.

- Christmas does not simply mark the anniversary of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. We celebrate the mystery of Christ's birth because we believe that the saving power of the historical event is present in our celebration of Christmas.
- The birth of Jesus, as well as his life, death and resurrection form one saving mystery that we celebrate throughout the liturgical year. At various times we focus our attention on one or the other of these historical events in which the mystery was accomplished.
- The custom of exchanging Christmas gifts began in remembrance of the gold, frankincense and myrrh given to the Christ child by the wise men. In some countries, children believe that Christmas presents come from kindly St Nicholas. Early Dutch settlers in New York called St Nicholas 'Sinter Klass' and he became known to children as Santa Claus.
- For many of the students the commercialisation of Christmas has affected their understanding of the meaning and significance of Christmas as a Christian feast.
- The actual date and day of Jesus' birth is unknown. The first mention of 25 December is in Rome in the mid fourth century. The strongest reason for the choice of this date seems to be because it was the winter solstice, and the church wanted to replace the Roman pagan mid-winter feast with Christian observances. The Roman feast celebrated the beginning of the return of light after the shortest day of the year, in the northern hemisphere. In Roman times December 25 was also the Roman feast of Sol Invictus, the unconquered sun. For the early Christians, Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, replaced the Sun God and brought light to the world.
- The celebration of Christmas has an historical dimension in that it commemorates the actual birth of Jesus. However, for Christians, the feast has a profound religious significance. Christmas is a celebration of the dawn of God's light and a preview of God's final self-disclosure when the kingdom will come in its fullness. The eschatological theme is beautifully expressed in the opening prayer of the Mass of Midnight: 'Lord our God...Through the night hours of the darkened earth, we your people watch for the coming of your promised Son. As we wait, give us a foretaste of the joy that you will grant us when the fullness of his glory has filled the earth.'
- It is in both the historical and theological themes that we may be able to find help for us to counter the commercialism and activity that now surrounds Christmas.

(Summarised from Parramatta Diocese RE Guidelines, *Sharing Our Story K-12 Unit, Christmas: Jesus is Born* 1KC7 1999)

Scripture

Godly Play - The Christmas Story Part 2

Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing activity

Read a story about waiting for a baby. Discuss the story. How do the people in the story feel?

Take home question: What did my family do when they were waiting for me to join the family?

Talk about waiting with the students. What do you wait for? When you are waiting for something, what does it feel like? Discussion about different things you could wait for e.g., holidays, birthdays, Christmas, special visitors, etc.

- Read Chapter 20 "**Jesus is Born**" (KWL Prep) Discuss the story with the students using the following I Wonder questions:

I Wonder...

- What angels are like
- What a stable is
- What shepherds did
- How Mary and Joseph felt when Jesus was born

Display the questions individually on a wall in the classroom. Add student responses underneath each question.

- Godly Play: **The Christmas Story Part 2.**
Allow students to respond in a variety of ways.
- Students draw images to show the Birth of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.
- Students complete the Retrieval Chart about the angels in Luke's Nativity Story. (**Appendix 2**)
- Students make a 3D angel using pattern. Display angels on a table or carefully attached to a pin up board. The teacher can use a banner over the display with the words "Peace on Earth" (**Appendix 3**).
(Explain to the children that the angels sang a hymn of peace called the **Gloria**. Read the words from Luke's Gospel to the class - Luke 2:14)
- Reread the story of the shepherds visiting baby Jesus from KWL Prep p149 -151. Show the students the pictures and ask them to respond to Story Senses. What did the shepherds See? Touch? Hear? Smell?

Prayer Ritual

Pray the following call and response prayer with the students:

Teacher: Dear God,
We thank you for giving us Jesus, the greatest Christmas gift of all.

Students: Glory to God in the highest heaven.

Teacher: We thank you for the gift of our families during the special time of Christmas.

Students: Glory to God in the highest heaven.

Teacher: We thank you God for everything we have to be thankful for.

Students: Glory to God in the highest heaven.

Sing a song together such as Andrew Chinn's *Under Your Star*.

Appendices

Godly Play: The Christmas Story, Part 2

Appendix 1: The Christmas Story

Appendix 2: Retrieval Chart

Appendix 3: Angel Pattern