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| YEAR LEVEL | Year 1 and 2 |
| TITLE | The First Christmas |
| STRAND | CHURCH AND TRADITION |
| SUGGESTED DURATION | 3 - 4 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 the students will explore and deepen their knowledge of key people and events described in the Infancy Narratives. They will be encouraged to relate their experiences of giving, receiving and celebrating to this important liturgical event. They should understand that the bible contains many stories that tell us about Jesus' life on earth, including the story of his birth.

Achievement Standards

By the end of Year Two:

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. Recount the story of the first Christmas from Matthew's Gospel.
2. Know that Christmas is a time when together we thank God for the birth of Jesus.
3. Know that Christmas is a time of giving, receiving and celebrating in our family, school and parish.

Key Understandings for Students

- Each Christmas we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus.
- We celebrate in different ways, using rituals that can involve prayer, symbols, song and silence.
- Jesus is a member of a family. His mother is Mary. Jesus is a human being like us.
- Christmas is a time for thanking God for the gift of Jesus his son.
- The Gospels tell us about Jesus' birth and his life.
- Christmas is a time of giving and receiving in our family, school and parish.

Student Context

As students at this level develop, they learn to separate fantasy from reality and to understand the meaning behind the symbols. They possess a vivid imagination which gives rise to lifelong religious images and concepts; incorporating images of God from loving and powerful adults, and from stories and symbols.

When children come to school they come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The customs and rituals that they will have experienced with regard to 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.

Children at this level are already aware that special events require preparation and part of the enjoyment that comes with celebrating is found in preparing for the event.

In the previous Advent unit students participated in "getting ready" activities. It is important to develop the "giving" aspect of Christmas, as this will probably be a new experience for some children.

Theological Background for Teachers

- Advent and Christmas present opportunities for us to reflect on Jesus' presence in our lives, to seek renewal as people of faith, and to take up the challenge of living as true followers of Jesus.
- At the school level, Christmas is a time for celebration with carols or a class liturgy. As Year One and Two students participate in school celebrations, they experience how the school community is filled with the Christmas spirit. It is also a time of reflection as the students wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Teachers need to relate the celebration of God's gift of Jesus with the custom of gift giving of Christmas.
- 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 Son of God became man, was born at Bethlehem, and by his death and resurrection saved us from sin and made us children of God. The birth of Jesus, as well as his life, death, and resurrection form one saving mystery, which we celebrate throughout the liturgical year.
- 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 pagan mid-winter feast with Christian observances. 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 into 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 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'.
- 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.

- Christians celebrate the fulfilment of God's promise to send a Saviour. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, reveals God's great love for all people. We rejoice in the coming of Christ.
- Christmas is a time when the attention of students can be drawn to the poor and suffering in Australian society: the sick, the unemployed, refugees, immigrants, the homeless and the frail amongst the elderly. Students can contribute to various appeals during the Advent and the Christmas season that are organised annually in their own parish community.

Scripture

Mt 2:1-11 The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of king Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When king Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out: and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Godly Play: Jesus is Born

Major Assessment Task

Students create a collage that depicts the story of the birth of Jesus. (In Matthew's Gospel) They are encouraged to use various materials to create their visual, (e.g. using small twigs or straw for the manger, glitter or sequins for the headwear of the Magi, coloured paper for the gifts, etc.).

Students can then write about their collage in a few sentences and add this explanation to their artwork. They can present their collage to their family to be a visual focus for Christmas.

Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing Activity:

Read a picture story book about giving meaningful gifts at Christmas. (eg. 'The perfect present' by Stella J Jones or 'Penny's Christmas Jar Miracle' by Jason F Wright. Use process questions to unpack the story with the students. (Who, What, Where, Why and How).

- Discuss why we give gifts at Christmas. What makes a gift special? How does it feel to give a gift to someone else?
- Lead students into the understanding that at Christmas we celebrate having been given the greatest gift of all by God, Jesus. Why do you think this is the best gift from God? Record students' responses on a display under the heading 'The Gift of Jesus at Christmas'.
- Godly Play "Jesus is Born". Allow time and resources for children to respond in a variety of ways. **(Appendix 1)**
- Talk to the students about The three wise men travelling a long way from far away places to visit the baby Jesus. They brought gifts and followed a great star in the sky which led them to the place where the baby Jesus was. Explain what gold, frankincense and myrrh are. What would you take as a gift for the baby Jesus? Students draw a response in the outline of a gift box.
- Read Chapter 21 KWL Book 1 (pages 154-155). Following the telling of the story, students recount the story in four frames. Display the students' work and engage in a Gallery Walk. What did the students notice from looking at each other's work? Did everyone choose the same four parts?
- Discuss how the stars twinkle and light the sky at night. Talk to students about the star that led the wise men to Jesus. Students make stars using icy pole sticks, sequins, paint, glitter glue, etc. The stars could be hung on a tree branch in a container or pinned to a display board.
- Students create their own Nativity card or scene using the figures in **(Appendix 2)** The students can write a Christmas Prayer on it for their family.
Dear God, may we always remember that Jesus is the true gift of Christmas. Amen.

Prayer Ritual

Arrange the students in a circle around the class Advent wreath.

Leader: Begin with the Sign of the cross.

Listen to and sing 'These Hands' by Andrew Chinn.

Ask students to share ways they are preparing their hearts to welcome Jesus. Allow students to refer to previous lessons on this if needed.

Pray the following prayer, incorporating relevant actions where appropriate:

Jesus be in our eyes and in our looking,
Jesus be in our ears and in our listening,

Jesus be in our hands and in our making,
Jesus be in our minds and in our understanding,
Jesus be in our hearts and in our loving.

Leader: Amen. Conclude with the Sign of the cross.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Jesus is Born - Godly Play

Appendix 2: Construction templates