

YEAR LEVEL	5 & 6
TITLE	The Birth of Jesus, The Messiah
STRAND	CHURCH AND TRADITION
SUGGESTED DURATION	5-6 weeks
ENDURING QUESTIONS	What does the Church look like in our community? How can I be like Jesus in our community?



Unit Focus

This unit examines the importance of stories. In particular, the story of the birth of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew is studied. Its symbolic value is explored and the implications of the Christmas event are named.

Achievement Standards

By the end of **Year Six**:

Articulate an understanding that Jesus, present in our lives in many ways, offers hope to the world.

Unit Outcomes

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

1. Know that Matthew's infancy narrative was written for a specific audience and has particular symbolism.
2. Articulate the meaning that the story of the birth of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel had for Matthew's community and for us today.

Key Understandings for Students

- The Christmas story, as described in Matthew's Gospel, is based on the historical birth of Jesus.
- Matthew used references to the Hebrew Scriptures, symbols and actions to show that Jesus was the Messiah.
- The birth of Christ two thousand years ago still has meaning and challenges us today.

Student Context

Today it appears that the message of Christmas is often lost in the commercialism that surrounds Christmas. Students' thoughts are occupied with presents and holidays. However for many Catholics this is one of the few times of the year that they attend Mass. All know that it is a special day because it is the day of Christ's birth, however few know of the importance of Christ's birth. This unit tries to show students the importance of the birth of Jesus for Christians.

At this level of their schooling students in upper primary school should be introduced to literary forms such as myth, legend, history, poetry and narrative in the Bible. This is the time for the teacher to help children continue their journey of understanding the ways the Bible conveys truth. They are at an age when they want to know about the people, beliefs and rulers of their religious community. Story is a major way of identification and appropriation through which children in this age group can enter into the perspectives of others to gain meaning for life. (Liddy & Welbourne, 1999).

This unit takes advantage of the fact that students at this level may question inconsistencies in the beliefs and behaviours of adults and are developing a more profound empathy with others.

Theological Background for Teachers

- Early in their history the Jewish people recognised that their past as well as their future had significance. This sense of history made Judaism a religion shared best through the telling of great stories about the acts of God in their history. For example, the Jews yearly celebrated the feast of Passover as a memorial of their liberation from slavery in Egypt. What has been called *salvation history* is grounded on this new understanding of history. That is, both Jews and Christians share the conviction that God's plans for us are being worked out through the events of history (Zanzig, 1988, p. 119).
- The Jews of Jesus' day were a people who staked their lives as individuals and their history as a nation on the experience of waiting – waiting for the promises of their God to be fulfilled. The Old Testament records the tension and occasional trauma that all waiting seems to carry with it: the rising hopes and the shattering failures, the tremendous sense of expectation, and the seemingly endless disappointment. The Jews kept waiting, hoping for the Messiah who would set them free, who would fulfil all their dreams, who would end their long history of waiting and give them total peace and justice (Zanzig, 1988, p. 125).
- The value of the Jewish Scriptures was not debated in the early Church. These Scriptures were the only ones available to the early Christian community. Consequently, the Church prized the Jewish Scriptures highly. In fact, Christians believed that the Jewish Scriptures helped to explain the meaning behind Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Christians came to believe that Jesus fulfilled many of the passages and prophecies of these Scriptures and that he was the Messiah of whom so many key passages spoke. For example:
 - We have heard about Adam, the first man in creation. Jesus was now understood as the New Adam, as the founder of a whole new age and a whole new people.
 - The Law for the Jewish people were laid down with the Ten Commandments. Jesus was now seen as the giver of a New Law.
 - In the Sinai Covenant, a special relationship between God and the Jewish people existed. Christians now recognise that in Jesus' life, death and resurrection a New Covenant had been established between God and all people.
- The Church today continues to recognise the Jewish Scriptures as the inspired word of God (Zanzig, 1988, p. 195).
- Messiah is the Hebrew term for Christ (The Anointed One). The Scriptures taught the Jews to expect salvation to come from God in the person of a kingly Messiah.
- The one to bring salvation is also called Saviour. Joseph was told that Jesus will save his people from their sins (Mt.1:21) and the angel announced to the shepherds the birth of a saviour who is Christ the Lord (Lk 2:12).

- The Word became flesh, he lived among us (Jn 1:14). Mary conceived Jesus, the Son of God. In the incarnation God becomes human. This doctrine is central to the whole theology of Christianity.
- With the coming of Jesus, it became possible for people to know and relate with God personally. They could also learn about God by listening to Jesus and observing him. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is exactly what happened (*The Word Dwells Among Us*, 1990, p. 42).
- At the feast of the Nativity, the Church recalls the historical birth of Jesus. We recall the infancy narratives found in the gospels of Luke and Matthew. These are interpreted as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.
- We remember the presence of God-with-us in our world today. Christians realise that the Christ event in history signals that the reign of God is at hand and the Kingdom of God is among us. Evidence of this reality will be found where love, joy, peace and justice flourish. In the light of this, Christians work to promote truly human values in our world today: *I come that they may have life and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10).
- Epiphany is the Church's solemn feast day on which Catholics celebrate liturgically the manifestation of the divinity in Jesus of Nazareth. The solemnity of the Epiphany was traditionally celebrated on 6th January. One of the key events in the life of Jesus, especially commemorated on this day, is the visit of the magi (or wise men) to the newborn Jesus and to Mary, his mother, and Joseph, her husband (Mt 2:1-12). Epiphany has Greek and Middle English roots that connote an appearance, a manifestation, or to show forth. First celebrated in the 3rd century, writings indicate that it predates the current Western Church custom of observing Christmas. By the time of the Middle Ages it had become a common custom among Catholics in some places to have their households blessed in association with the Epiphany. A main part of the blessing ceremony of the time was the inscription (with chalk) of the names traditionally given to the wise men (magi) – Melchior, Belthasar, and Caspar – above the doors of Christian family homes (Ekstrom, 1995, p. 93).
- The Christmas season continues until the feast of the Epiphany, which was traditionally celebrated twelve days after Christmas, but in current Church practice is celebrated on the first Sunday in January.
- The Epiphany of the Lord Jesus celebrates the manifestation of Jesus as the Word of God to the world. Three celebrations of events are used to proclaim this:
 - the Adoration of the Magi;
 - the Baptism of Jesus;
 - the Wedding Feast of Cana.

This unit will focus on the revelation of Jesus to the Magi.

- Epiphany – A Christian festival (6 January or first Sunday in January) which commemorates the showing of the infant Jesus to the Magi (Mt. 2), the manifestation of Jesus' divinity at his baptism (Mt. 3), and his first miracle at Cana (Jn 2). Its eve is Twelfth Night. In some countries gifts are exchanged at Epiphany rather than at Christmas (Chambers, 1992, p. 162).
- The Davidic line was established around 1000 BC when David became King and conquered the city of the Jebusites, which he made his capital, Jerusalem. "So in the political sphere Israel had a king like other nations. That raised a question for some believers: was not Yahweh the only king? The prophet Nathan then came to play a key role. To consecrate the king in Babylon or Egypt, the priest would proclaim an oracle from the national god over him, in these terms: 'You are my son: I am your father'. Through Nathan, God declares that he will take responsibility for a formula of this kind; on the day of his consecration, the son of David – that is, each of his legitimate successors – becomes the son of God." (Charpentier, 1987, p. 34).

- When the promised Messiah–King is called Son of God, it does not necessarily imply that he was more than human, according to the literal meaning of these texts. Those who called Jesus Son of God, as the Messiah of Israel, perhaps meant nothing more than this (CCC, # 441).
- The whole of Matthew 1:1-25 serves both to situate Jesus firmly within God’s people and to call attention to his extraordinary status. On the one hand, he is the descendant of Abraham and David and the fulfilment of the promises and hopes attached to those great Old Testament figures. On the other hand, the mode of his birth is highly unusual, and the names given to him – Jesus and Emmanuel – suggest that he far surpasses any of his ancestors (*The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, 1986, p. 865).

Scripture

Mt 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem,² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage.”³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born.⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘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^[d] my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.⁸ 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.”⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was.¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy.¹¹ 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.¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Major Assessment Task

Design a Christmas card that depicts Matthew’s story and include a Scripture text from the story inside the card. ***It is expected that students and teachers will co-construct an assessment rubric for this task. Teachers are encouraged to assess skills and knowledge from other learning areas that may be included in this task.***

Suggested Learning Experiences

Focusing Activity:

Students are given a questionnaire to be filled out at home with members of their families. It is important to keep in mind the variety of family situations and the right to privacy for each family, therefore the following questions may be helpful:

My family name is ... it comes from ...

My ancestors came from ...

Lots of people in my family have been ... e.g. farmers, teachers, fruit growers, etc.

Important/ Well known/Colourful/Famous people in my family are or have been ...

Something I would like everyone to know about my family is

Students create a "This is My Family" mural. It is not a family tree; it is a visual that shows parts of their family history and tells part of their story. It may include words, pictures, images. Display in the classroom.

Matthew included a theological genealogy of Jesus. It is not his actual biological ancestry but Matthew wanted to tell his audience that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, who would restore the covenant promised to Abraham. By the time of Jesus, it was already commonly understood that several prophecies in the Old Testament promised a Messiah descended from King David. Thus, in tracing the Davidic ancestry of Jesus, Matthew aims to show that these messianic prophecies are fulfilled in him.

- Read Mt 1:1-17 and discuss: **(Appendix 1 shows the annotated text of the Genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17)**
 - What is the significance of the names listed?
 - Why begin with this information?
 - Why was it important to establish a link between Jesus and his ancestors?
 - What was the Davidic line?
 - What does Messiah mean?
- Read Matt 2:1-12 Explain that the three men who came to visit Jesus are not kings but Magi.

Magi were mystics of the East who followed a new star that directed them to the birth of Jesus. The magi were wise men, seers or diviners of wisdom from Persia, Babylon, Syria, Arabia, or Egypt. They are mentioned on the Gospel of Matthew.

- Discuss the story of Jesus' birth. Is this the whole story you know? What's missing? Explain that there are two Infancy narratives for very different purposes and that we are familiar with these as one story. St Francis of Assisi put the two stories together to give us a bigger understanding of the importance of Jesus' birth for all people. (**Read Learning Links: Christmas by Maurice Ryan [Library Link](#)**)

What was St Francis trying to teach his followers?

Why does the Christmas crib form an integral part of the Christmas liturgy?

- Look at the following people or symbols in the story: Mary, Joseph, wise men, gifts, star. Research the origin of these symbols and the stories of the people using a Catholic dictionary. Prepare a glossary of terms to explain your learnings.
- Reflect: What does Jesus' birth mean to you today? What gifts would you take to Jesus? Why? Record your response on a card.

Prayer and Ritual

Gather students in a circle around a Christmas Crib. Read the text from Matt. 2:1-12 and allow students to sit in silence and reflect on the story of Jesus' birth. Students name aloud the gift they would give to Jesus and place their card around the crib.

Read the following prayer:

"God of Love, thank you for giving us the gift of Jesus, the greatest Christmas gift of all. May we all live in the peace and harmony that is the message of Jesus' birth. Amen"

Light three white candles: Love, Peace and Harmony. Students think about what the three words mean to them whilst listening to *Jesus, Joy Of Man's Desiring* (J S Bach)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLPbmITTYE>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Genealogy in Matthew