

YEAR LEVEL	5 & 6
TITLE	Feasts of the Christmas Season
STRAND	CHURCH AND TRADITION
SUGGESTED DURATION	5-6 weeks
ENDURING QUESTIONS	<p>What does the Church look like in our community?</p> <p>How can I be like Jesus in my community?</p>



Unit Focus

This unit examines the feasts and celebrations within the Christmas season. The unit explores the season of Christmas, in particular the feasts that follow Christmas within the first Octave through to the second Octave, with the Epiphany.

Achievement Standards

By the end of **Year Six**:

Students explore and identify the deeper significance of Lent and Advent as significant church seasons. They analyse and explain the significance of the colours, readings and rituals of Lent and Advent.

Unit Outcomes

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

1. Identify the major feasts of the season of Christmas - Christmas Day, the Feast of the Mother of God, the Feast of the Holy Family, and the Epiphany.
2. Explain the significance of the feasts of the Christmas season.
3. Examine and interpret the meaning of the metaphor, Jesus as light.

Key Understandings for Students

- The Season of Christmas begins with the Christmas Day Vigil Mass and finishes with the feast of the Baptism of Christ. This is also the First Sunday of Ordinary Time.
- On Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Son of God.
- Key feasts in the Christmas season are Christmas Day, the Feast of the Mother of God, the Feast of the Holy Family, and the Epiphany.
- Christians see the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as a model of family life.
- Mary Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church.

Student Context

Children in Years 5 and 6 may be less spontaneous but are generally more self motivated and capable of absorbing considerable information. More sophisticated reasoning gives them greater understanding of consequences and a greater capacity for using talk to justify assertions and opinions. Values and judgements by peers, and self esteem are partly determined by mastery of tasks.

Many students are unaware of the seasons within the Church's year and the feasts that are a part of the season. In Australia, perhaps because the long summer holidays are held over the Christmas Season, students are not aware of the feasts days that are held within the Christmas season, apart from Christmas Day.

Theological Background for Teachers

- The season of Christmas begins with the Christmas Day Vigil and finishes with the celebration of the feast of the Baptism of Christ, the First Sunday of Ordinary Time.
- Just as Lent and Easter time cannot be understood apart from the Easter Triduum so too the seasons of Christmas and Advent must be understood together.
- The first three centuries of the Church's existence, the only annual feast celebrated by Christian communities was Easter. By the fourth century, a growing trend developed to celebrate historical events of Jesus' life. The Easter Triduum had emerged from the original Easter vigil to include the commemoration of the death of Jesus on Good Friday and the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. This led the way to a celebration of Jesus' birth.
- As no precise date of Jesus' birth was known, two dates became associated with his birth, 25th December and 6th January. The Churches in the East celebrated Jesus' birth on 6th January, while Rome celebrated on 25th December. Scholars agreed with the Rome celebration, as it allowed for the Christianisation of a pagan feast. In 274, the Roman Emperor Aurelian had established a feast to honour Syrian sun god, Emsea, the feast being called Unconquered Sun God. The celebration occurred on 25th December, the winter solstice. However, from as early as 336 the Christians of Rome celebrated their own feast on 25th December, the Birth of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness.
- The association of the birth of Christ with a pagan feast of a sun god may seem strange, considering it is a commandment not to worship any other god. Yet the New Testament and early Christian writers place great emphasis on the symbolism of Christ as Sun of Righteousness, for in the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice is an appropriate time to celebrate the coming of Christ the Light into the world.
- The prayers and readings for the three Masses for Christmas (midnight, dawn and during the day) focus on creating strong images all associated with light. Midnight Mass we pray: "Father, you make this Holy Night radiant with the splendour of Jesus Christ our light."
- The readings and prayers of the Christmas Season clearly show that Christmas is a feast of our redemption and therefore it is intimately linked with Easter. The Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from the Mystery of Incarnation, the Jesus who became human to save us.
- The Holy Family is a recent feast, which originated from Canada, and spread throughout the world in the 19th century under the influence of Pope Leo XIII.
- The feast of the Epiphany, 6th January, is the original feast of Christ's birth in the East. The word Epiphany comes from the Greek epiphaneia meaning appearance or manifestation and like the choice of 25th December

in Rome, the date of this feast seems to have been influenced by a pagan feast in Alexandria, the birthday of the god Aion (god of time and eternity). Soon the Epiphany also became associated with the events that marked the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, his Baptism and the miracle at Cana.

Scripture

Lk 2:8-14 Nativity

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is the Messiah the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours.”

Lk 2:41-51 Holy Family

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And to all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Mt 2:1-12 Epiphany

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 was born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at the 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 in 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 the shepherd my people Israel’. Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time 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 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 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Major Assessment Task & Rubric – Years 5 & 6

Design and create a triptych of three (3) of the Feasts of the Christmas Season. Your work must:

- Show the connection of at least one person to each of the Feasts. This person will need to be represented in each panel.
- Each panel needs to illustrate the message/theme of the particular Feast.

N.B. examples of a triptych are in Appendix 1

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 Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing Activity:

Students name and list significant events that occur through the school year, for example, camp, sports carnival, sacraments, captains' induction, and so forth. Place these events on flash cards and get the students to put them in chronological order.

- Provide students with a copy of the Liturgical year, in a circle design. Explain to students the various colours associated with the seasons of the liturgical year. Students colour code the seasons, according to what the priest wears during the season.
 - Advent ~ purple
 - Christmas ~ white
 - Ordinary Time ~ green
 - Lent ~ purple
 - Easter ~ white
 - Pentecost ~ white (red on the day of the Feast of Pentecost)
- For each of the Feast days, students read the scripture passage, discuss their understanding of the person related to the feast, the possible importance of the feast and why it may be chosen as a feast within the first Christmas Octave.
 - The Holy Family: Draw outlines of the Holy Family. Inside each silhouette, write what each contributed to the family and how they are an example of family life.
 - Mary the Mother of Jesus: Use Braindrops (Online Teaching Strategies Resource Book) to describe Mary as the Mother of Jesus.
 - Epiphany: Find the Fib. (Online Teaching Strategies Resource Book)

N.B. The Feasts of the Christmas Season (Appendix 2) gives necessary information about each Feast. KWL Book 5 Chapter 18 is also helpful for Mary the Mother of God.

- In groups, students are assigned a particular feast day within the Season of Christmas. Students study the feast day, the scripture passages and any other appropriate research methods or materials, to find out more about the feast and the person involved. Students make a banner or poster, representing the feast in symbols, drawing and sayings or words. Students present the banner or poster to the class, informing the class about the importance of this particular feast, why it would be included in the Season of Christmas.
- Teacher creates a display of different lights – candles, torches, images of the sun and moon, etc. Students do a Think Pair Share about the symbol of light. What does light mean for us? When do we need light?

- Discuss why the metaphor of light is used for the birth and coming of Christ. Discuss how Christmas in the northern hemisphere differs from our experience of light. Christmas is in winter and so is usually dark quite early in the day.
How does the light differ in the southern hemisphere as we celebrate Christmas in summer? Talk about the colours of Christmas for us – bright blue skies, Jacaranda trees in bloom, etc.
- Students create an Inside Outside Circle, and discuss ways in which Jesus' light has shone throughout the world, when he was alive and preaching and now, through the efforts of his followers. How can we be the light? Record responses and display under the heading.

Prayer and Ritual

Children prepare a proclamation about each of the main figures of the Seasons of Christmas. Gather children in a circle around coloured cloths on which symbols representing the feasts of the Christmas season can be placed. For example, Mary: a plant in flower, Joseph: a carpenter's tool, Jesus: a manger or swaddling cloths, the Magi: gifts.

The symbols should be held high as the proclamation is made, then placed ceremoniously on the cloths. A period of quiet reflection should follow.

Appendices

Examples of triptychs

Appendix 2: Feasts of the Christmas Season explained