

Called to Trust

In this unit students learn about the seasons of Advent and Christmas. In Part 1 students explore two Advent stories – the Annunciation and the Visitation. Mary is the key focus as the faithful disciple who listens to and trusts God's Word in her life. In Part 2 students explore and ponder Matthew's Infancy Narrative – the Wise Men and the Holy Family's flight into Egypt.

DOCTRINAL FOCUS

In planning to teach this unit the following references from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church are recommended:

#488 'God sent forth his Son', but, to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, 'a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary'.

(See *Compendium #95 'Born of the Virgin Mary': why is Mary truly the Mother of God?*)

#511 The Virgin Mary 'cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation' (LG 56). She uttered her yes 'in the name of all human nature' (St Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 30, 1). By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.

(See *Compendium #97 How does Mary cooperate in the divine plan of salvation?*)

#497 'That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit', said the angel to Joseph about Mary. The Church sees here the fulfilment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son'.

(See *Compendium #94 What is the meaning of the expression 'conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit'?*)

#1655 Christ chose to be born and grow up in the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than 'the family of God'.

(See *Compendium #104 What does the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth teach us?*)

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

Would you describe yourself as a 'trusting' person? What makes trust difficult in our society?

How does faith in God provide a basis for a trusting attitude? Look at the story of the annunciation to Mary to see the basis of her trust and obedience to God.

Trust is learned in families. Recall your own family and how it helped (or hindered) the development of your ability to trust God, trust others, trust yourself.

Joseph also put his trust in dreams sent by God to guide him when the ‘facts’ of the situation looked bleak. He allowed himself to be guided by intuitions given by God, and was enabled to make good decisions and protect his family.

LINKS WITH STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES

Trust is an important aspect of students’ lives. They can trust others when they feel hurt, frightened, happy, or when they have secrets to share and stories to tell. In order to understand trust, students need to have relationships of trust. Students’ experiences of relationships are diverse. *Are there students who do not know trusting relationships? How does the learning in this unit and in the classroom generally support these students?*

The Blessed Virgin Mary is a most significant figure in the Catholic tradition. Some students will have been exposed to this through Marian images in Catholic homes; listening to and watching adults pray the Rosary; participating in Marian feasts and devotions in the local parish or ethnic community. *What experiences and understandings of the Marian tradition do students bring to this unit?*

Mary is a sacred figure for Muslims. She is the only woman named in the Qur’an and is one of only eight people named in total in this sacred text. She is regarded as an ‘honoured servant’ and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is recognised. However, Jesus is not understood to be divine. *If you have Muslim students in your class what understandings and experiences do they bring to this unit about Mary? What understandings, if any, do students from other Christian denominations bring to the unit about Mary?*

EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lk 1: 26–38 The Annunciation

In the Gospel of Matthew the annunciation of Jesus Christ’s birth is made to Joseph by an angel in a dream. In that gospel Mary is a passive character. But here in Luke’s Gospel Mary is much more involved than Joseph, who is now the passive one. Thus the two different accounts of the annunciation of Jesus present different insights. The Lucan account focuses on Mary. Luke’s Gospel presents Mary as a young virgin just betrothed. She is described as deeply disturbed (verse 29) by the annunciation to her, although she has enough confidence to wonder within herself what it all meant. The text suggests that, like us, Mary had to reflect on the events of her life to understand what was happening. Most of the text is about the child she will conceive. Only at the beginning and the end of the annunciation do we have some insight into Mary’s reaction.

The very last verse indicates that she is willing to be part of the event even if she does not totally understand. She agrees, not acquiesces, and calmly says, ‘Let what you have said be done to me’. We tend to take this as a most natural thing, and accordingly we miss Mary’s quiet heroism. She was not yet married to Joseph. His reaction to her pregnancy might have been expected to be a strong one. While the death penalty for adultery (Deut 22: 23 - 24) does not seem to have been carried out often, it was still there. Mary could not have been sure that she would not have to suffer, but she recognised the will of God and trusted God with her acceptance.

Lk 1: 39–45, 56 The Visitation

The story of the Visitation is a woman's story. Two unknown and seemingly ordinary women of the first century met during their pregnancies for mutual support. Mary, the younger one, just pregnant with her first child, went to the older woman who was in a similar condition. Luke's intent is missed if Mary is presented simply as rushing to aid Elizabeth in her pregnancy. The focus seems to be on the two mothers-to-be coming together to praise the marvellous activity of God in both their lives. Elizabeth's child, John, leapt in his mother's womb as Mary greeted Elizabeth. He is the one who will prepare people to recognise and receive the promised one. Elizabeth, whom we are told is filled with the Holy Spirit, responded by telling Mary that she is blessed and the child in her womb is blessed. Elizabeth praised Mary for trusting in God. Elizabeth's words point to Mary as the model believer and 'the Mother of my Lord', mother of the Messiah King.

Mt 2: 1–3, 7–11 The Wise Men

The account of the visit of the Wise Men is part of Matthew's infancy narrative, but is not mentioned in Luke. As their portrayal suggests they symbolise wisdom, but they also represent the other nations, apart from Israel. The text does not mention exactly how many Wise Men there were, but we assume three because there are three gifts presented to the Christ Child. In later interpretations the gifts came to represent the royalty, divinity and suffering of Jesus; or virtue, prayer and suffering. They certainly are unusual gifts and do appear to be very symbolic, both in purpose and in fact. Gifts are now very much a part of Christmas for us. Thus, gifts such as these of symbolic meaning may be more appropriate than the blatant commercialism of Christmas shopping in our society. Herod the Great was a vassal king of the Jewish people under the Romans. He ruled from 37–4 BC, and was a very dominant and often violent autocrat.

Mt 2: 13–16, 19–20 Joseph's Dream/Flight into Egypt

Joseph received all his instructions in dreams, like his namesake in the book of Genesis. Herod was a very dominant ruler known for his cruelty to those who threatened his power. Matthew has a purpose here to portray Jesus Christ as one like Moses. The killing of children parallels the birth of Moses in the book of Exodus, Chapters 1 and 2. The escape to Egypt by Joseph, Mary and Jesus turned them into refugees. We have seen the plight of many refugees in recent years, be it from war or dictators or natural disasters. It is useful to remember that Joseph, Mary and Jesus were refugees too. Would we welcome them to our country?

POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

- Give each child a coloured paper flower on which to write a short phrase addressed to Mary, e.g. 'You loved God', 'You were Jesus' mother'. Gather around the prayer table. Place there an icon of Mary. Invite the children to read their phrases aloud, one by one, and place them on the table around the icon. As each one does so, all respond: 'Mary, you said "Yes!" to God.' Conclude with the song 'Mary Said Yes' by Michael Mangan. (This is available on the CDs *My Spirit Sings* and *Sing Your Joy*, Litmus Productions.)
- Lead the class in a guided meditation. Find 'A Visit to Mary' in *To God on a Magic Carpet* by Sr Anthony, Spectrum Publications

- Invite the children to take some moments to relax:
 - Close your eyes.
 - Imagine yourself in Mary's house.
 - Sit with her for a while (pause).
 - You see that she is going to have a baby. Tell her you are excited that her baby is going to be born (pause).
 - Tell her anything you need to tell her ... the things that make you worried and the things that make you happy (pause).
 - She listens to you (pause).
 - It is time for you to go. Say goodbye to Mary and ask her to pray for you (pause).
 - Now come back to the classroom and open your eyes.
- Using an Advent Calendar, mark off the days leading up to Christmas. This could be done as part of morning prayer with students joining in a suitable antiphon such as 'Come, Lord Jesus Christ. Come and be born in our hearts'.
- Learn a hymn such as 'Like Mary' in *As One Voice For Kids*.
- Encourage students to write and express their own prayers of thanksgiving for Mary who brings us the gift of Jesus Christ.
- Prayer Celebration:
 - Create a prayer space with a candle, a Bible, a picture of Mary and an empty crib.
 - Make the Sign of the Cross.
 - Proclaim Lk 1: 26–31, 38–42.
 - Invite students to share their own prayers of thanks for Mary and for the gift of Jesus Christ.
 - Slowly pray the *Hail Mary* together.
 - Conclude by singing 'Mary Said Yes', by Michael Mangan.
- Prayer – Sing an appropriate Christmas carol.
- Proclaim the Scripture – Mt 2: 1–2

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage'.
- Give each child a gold star to hold high and wave in the air as they sing 'Song of Light' by Michael Mangan. Conclude by placing the stars all around the classroom.

Related Units – *KWL*, 2nd edition, Book 1: Chapter 12, Mary Our Mother; Chapter 21, Jesus is Born.

Faith concepts: relationship, discipleship, trust, customs, rituals, symbol.

Understandings:

Mary shows Christians how to be trusting and faithful disciples.

Mary trusted in God's call for her to become Jesus Christ's mother.

At Christmas Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Celebration is an important part of life that involves offering gifts, giving thanks and using symbols.

Relationships need love, trust and courage.

Unit specific learning:

Students will learn about	Students will learn to	Students will undertake to
<i>Knowledge and Understanding</i>	<i>Reasoning & Responding</i>	<i>Personal & Communal Engagement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Qualities of Mary.• The events and characters of the Christmas story.• The symbols of Christmas and their meaning.• The season of Christmas as a time of celebration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a connection between their own experiences of Christmas and the Church's belief in Christmas.• Wonder about how they can give gifts or do meaningful things in order to make a difference to other people's lives at Christmas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in prayer, song and meditation.• Be part of an action that involves offering and giving of gifts.

Part 1: Mary, Our Mother

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>This unit focuses on the season of Advent as a time when the Church prepares with hope to celebrate both the birth and the promised return of Jesus Christ. Many prophets told of God's promise and prepared the way for the coming of God's own son, Jesus Christ. The mystery of God becoming 'flesh' in the person of Jesus is the Incarnation.</p> <p>The colour purple, used during Advent, symbolises the mood of darkness and waiting for the one who is promised</p>	<p>Telling the Story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students identify a time when they had to reach out and trust someone. In pairs, students discuss their stories. Each person thinks of questions to ask their partner about their story. • As a class, students brainstorm what they know about Mary. Create a word bank from their responses. • Students draw a favourite image of Mary and write a sentence about what Mary is doing. 	<p>Assessment for Learning</p> <p>This activity will demonstrate students' understanding of the concept of trust.</p> <p>Assessment for Learning</p> <p>This activity will indicate students' prior knowledge of Mary.</p>
	<p>Wondering</p> <p>I wonder why you drew Mary like that? I wonder what it would be like to be Mary? I wonder what kind of person Mary is? I wonder where we can find out more about Mary? I wonder who Mary reminds you of?</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>From the beginning Mary was chosen to be part of God’s plan. ‘Mary responded to God as a member of the Jewish <i>People of God</i>, even before Jesus was conceived, by hearing God’s word in the Hebrew Scriptures and treasuring it in her heart. Jesus’ conception was possible only because Mary responded to God in this way at the Annunciation’. God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus Christ, and Mary lived her ‘yes’ to God throughout her life. She shows us the way to Jesus (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 1990, <i>The Word Dwells Among Us</i>, Collins Dove, Melbourne, p. 114).</p>	<p>Responding Bring in some images of Mary to show the students. Discuss what things are common to all the images. Discuss the similarities and differences between the students’ pictures of Mary and the commercial images.</p> <p>Telling the Story <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 1, Chapter 12, pp. 88–93. Focus on the notion of trust.</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>It is important that students have a sense that when Mary said ‘yes’ she did not fully understand everything that was going to happen to her. However, she placed her trust in God. Mary visited her relative Elizabeth, who was also unexpectedly pregnant, and the two women offered each other mutual support. The stories of the Annunciation and the Visitation provide the opportunity for students to wonder at the amazing things that happen to those who trust in God.</p> <p>In a world where the lead-up to Christmas is often characterised by commercialism and an emphasis on receiving gifts, the unit content focuses students’ attention on Jesus Christ. With Mary, they are invited to prepare to welcome the gift of Jesus. Engaging students in wondering about this significant event will provide opportunities for them to discover that God is to be trusted, and to express their own response to God.</p>	<p>Wondering</p> <p>I wonder why God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus? I wonder how Mary felt about being the mother of Jesus? I wonder what qualities Mary would have needed to be chosen as the mother of Jesus? I wonder why Mary said ‘Yes’?</p> <p>Praying the Word</p> <p>Lead students through a guided meditation on the Annunciation.</p> <p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In pairs, students write a character profile on Mary from the student text, e.g. Mary lived in Galilee, etc. Students share their responses. <p>Sing ‘Mary said Yes’</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Telling the Story Students identify times when their mother says 'yes' to them and identify times when their mother needs to say 'no' to them. Discuss.</p> <p>Responding Arrange for an unexpected visitor to come to the class with an amazing message. The messenger should be a colourful character, and arrive accompanied by a fanfare or something to grab the class's attention. The message should be written on a decorated scroll and should announce that the class has been chosen to do something special for the school. (Choose a suitably challenging task that requires the class to do something of service for others. The task can be done during Advent.)</p> <p>Wondering After the messenger has gone, invite students to wonder with you: I wonder how you felt when the unexpected visitor arrived? I wonder what you thought the message was? I wonder how you felt when you heard the message? I wonder why our class was chosen for the special task? I wonder how we can prepare for this task?</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Responding Select one of the following scripture readings. As a class, look up the reference and read the story. Focus on the qualities of Mary reflected in the story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman of faith: Lk 1: 38 • Mother of Jesus: Lk 2: 7 • Mother of us all: Jn 19: 25–27 • Woman of prayer: Lk 1: 46 - 55 • Woman of trust: Jn 2: 5 <p>Add these qualities to the class list about Mary.</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning The list will demonstrate the qualities of Mary identified by the class.</p>
	<p>Praying the Word Learn and pray the <i>Hail Mary</i>.</p> <p>Students could write a special prayer to Mary.</p>	

Part 2: Jesus is Born

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>At Christmas, Christians are invited to reflect on the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives. It is a time when the Catholic tradition highlights the birth of Jesus Christ with great joy.</p>	<p>Wondering I wonder if you have had to prepare for a baby in your family? I wonder what Mary had to do to prepare for the birth of Jesus? I wonder how she felt when it was nearly time to have baby Jesus?</p>	<p>Assessment for Learning This activity will indicate students' understanding of the concepts of waiting and preparing.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The story of Jesus' humble birth into poverty is one that can speak to children and adults alike of the unexpected workings of God. It is important that children become familiar with both of the Christmas stories (Matthew's narrative and Luke's narrative).</p>	<p>Telling the Story Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 1, Chapter 21, pp. 154–157.</p> <p>Students write a recount of the birth of Jesus Christ. Illustrate</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning This recount will demonstrate students' own understanding of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ.</p>
<p>In our secular world gifts are often the main focus of Christmas time, and children at any age can lose sight of the real significance of Christmas. In this unit content, students are presented with the Christian meaning behind the tradition of giving gifts. The gifts given by the wise men were the first 'Christmas presents'. But the ultimate gift of Christmas is Jesus Christ – God's gift to us.</p> <p>By recognising the gift of Jesus and telling the story of the wise men and their gifts, students can ponder the Christian significance of giving gifts at Christmas.</p>	<p>Responding Sing 'The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy' by Peter Kearney on <i>How far to Bethlehem?</i></p> <p>Wondering I wonder why the wise men brought gifts? I wonder why King Herod was angry? I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt about having to leave their home and go to another country? I wonder why we celebrate Christmas?</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment				
<p>Christmas is also a time when attention can be drawn to the poor and suffering in our society and our world. Despite the young age of the children, they can be involved in contributing to various appeals during the Christmas season. This helps them to become aware that people suffer because of poverty and sickness.</p>	<p>Responding</p> <p>Students complete a Scriptural Think Pad on the text of Jesus' birth.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="819 448 1417 813"> <tr> <td data-bbox="819 448 1117 616">Words</td> <td data-bbox="1117 448 1417 616">Symbols</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="819 616 1117 813">Connection to Life What does this story remind you of?</td> <td data-bbox="1117 616 1417 813">Pictures</td> </tr> </table>	Words	Symbols	Connection to Life What does this story remind you of?	Pictures	<p>Assessment of Learning</p> <p>This task will demonstrate students' own understanding of the characters, events and symbols of the Christmas story.</p>
Words	Symbols					
Connection to Life What does this story remind you of?	Pictures					

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The story of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt puts before students the difficulties faced by Jesus' family and by all refugees who are forced to move away from their homes.</p> <p>Herod the Great was the king of Palestine at the time of Jesus' birth.</p>	<p>Telling the Story</p> <p>Prepare two decorated boxes; one wrapped beautifully with nothing in it, the other wrapped shabbily but containing a nativity scene – Mary, Joseph, Jesus, animals, etc. Ask students to select which gift they would rather receive at Christmas. Unwrap the beautiful gift, and show that there is nothing of value inside it. Next, unwrap the battered gift and carefully remove the nativity scene.</p> <p>Explain to the students that good things don't always come in beautiful packages. Jesus Christ was not born in a beautiful place or surrounded by expensive gifts, yet his birth was the most valuable gift we could be given by God. We celebrate this at Christmas.</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students write a letter of thanks to each member of their families, identifying what they are grateful for. Students then place each letter in a small box and decorate it. Students will give these as gifts to their families for Christmas. • Students respond through a variety of activities. These can be set up as whole class or rotations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using a Venn diagram students compare the way Jesus was born with the way babies are born in Australia today. – Invite the students to dress up and re-enact the Christmas story. – Retell the story using Godly Play dolls or feltboard characters. • Students identify ways they can give of themselves to others in need. They identify what it means to be less fortunate than others. • Students listen to a guest speaker from St Vincent de Paul or a similar organisation to hear how they support the needy in the local community. 	<p>Assessment of Learning This activity will demonstrate students' ability to identify and appreciate the giftedness of family members.</p> <p>Assessment of Learning These tasks may indicate how students understand the events, characters and symbols of Christmas.</p> <p>Assessment of Learning This task may indicate how students understand themselves as gift-givers at Christmas.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Praying the Word Students compose a prayer to God: 'Thank you God for the gift of ...' Students will participate in a liturgical celebration during which they can read their prayers.</p>	

RESOURCES

To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition

Book 1: Chapter 12, Mary Our Mother; Chapter 21, Jesus is Born.

Teacher Resources

Kearney, P 1999, *How far to Bethlehem?*, Little Portion Studio, Welby.

Mangan, M 2000, *Sing Your Joy*, Litmus Productions, Albany Creek.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDARDS

This unit may be used to assess some of the Level 2 standards.

Students interpret biblical stories and stories in Church Tradition by making a response and expressing their own ideas, feelings and perceptions. Students create prayers and responses of praise, thanks, forgiveness and petition with personal expression and insight. Students recognise the Christian messages of love and stewardship by identifying the strengths and shortcomings of both their own and others' ideas, actions and feelings.