

Advent and Christmas

In this unit students learn about Advent as a time of waiting and hoping. In Part 1 they explore the experience of waiting and ways in which the Church waits for and prepares to celebrate the birth of Christ. In Part 2 they explore the experience of Advent waiting from the perspective of Mary of Nazareth. In Part 3 students learn about Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus Christ and the visit of the Magi.

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:

#524 When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. (See *Compendium #102 How did God prepare the world for the mystery of Christ?*)

#672 According to the Lord, the present time is the time of the Spirit and of witness, but also a time ... of waiting and watching. (See *Compendium #142 What is the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary?*)

#526 To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become 'children of God' we must be 'born from above' or 'born of God'. Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this 'marvellous exchange':

O marvellous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

In Advent Christians read the prophet Isaiah who challenges his listeners to see the light that shines in their midst. As Advent begins, hours of daylight lengthen in our hemisphere and lifestyles change as we bask in the emerging light and warmth. What are the signs of God's light and hope in the midst of our own personal lives and in our world? Who are the leaders in our communities and world that engender hope?

In Matthew's Infancy Narrative Joseph is portrayed as a righteous Jew who lives out the Law with great mercy. This foreshadows the way in which Jesus Christ will live out the Law in this gospel. What are the places in your world that need God's mercy during this Advent time?

Mary says yes to God's call to be the mother of Jesus Christ. Who are the women in the past and in contemporary Christian tradition who are strong models of discipleship for you? Who are the women in your own life who embody the gospel?

LINKS WITH STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Christmas is a very exciting and hope-filled time for most children. They can be caught up in the anticipation of holidays and presents.

Students understand that each family has particular traditions, and that important traditions and customs are attached to Christmas. *What traditions are part of family life?*

Many students enjoy listening to and retelling stories. They have the ability to engage in the details of personal story. *What are significant stories in children's lives?*

Mothers are significant people in the lives of most children. They can give a child love, security and identity. *What qualities would children associate with mothers?*

EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

Isa 9: 1, 5–7 The People in Darkness ... A Child is Born

The prophet Isaiah in this first section of the Book of Isaiah is speaking in eighth century BC Jerusalem. 'A light has shone' (verse 1). The poetic image of light and darkness is sublime poetry and appropriate for a northern hemisphere Advent and Christmas where it is dark and wintry. Hence we focus on light as a decoration at Christmas time. 'There is a child born for us' (verse 5). Here Isaiah is referring to a child born into the royal Davidic family of his day (eighth century BC) with the hope that this child will be a great ruler. The prophets are very much persons of their times. They reflect on the signs of their times and direct people how best to live the covenant relationship with God.

This passage is a statement about the exalted position of the Davidic dynasty and ruler from that family. The Davidic house had been promised eternal existence in the second book of Samuel – 2 Sam 7: 8–16. Isaiah is not consciously writing about Jesus. He is writing for the people of his own time. However, the early Church quickly identified Jesus Christ in this and other Messianic texts. This is possible as the author, text and readers are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Hence, this prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. The passage is used during Advent and Christmas because it is a messianic prophecy and applies to Jesus. This passage speaks both of the prophet's own historical age and of all ages.

Mt 1: 18–25 The Birth of Jesus

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is quite sparse. It seems to be emphasising the extraordinary way Jesus Christ was conceived. What does this entail for his identity and status? Matthew was writing his gospel for a Jewish audience for whom identity was important. We get the story from the perspective of Joseph. Joseph was in a dilemma as soon as he knew that Mary was pregnant. At this point we need to understand that the relationship between Joseph and Mary was a marital one. As was the custom of the time, women were married at an early age. Because of their youth they often remained with their family for a while before moving on to the home of their husband. If Joseph knew that Mary was not pregnant by him then she was, in fact, guilty of adultery. If she was guilty she would be exposed to the Law and could be stoned as an adulteress, or at the very least open to public shame and public humiliation. The angel appeared to Joseph and told him not to be afraid as Mary had conceived by the Holy Spirit – the prophecy in Isaiah was to be fulfilled.

POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

- Use the hymn 'God of Abraham' by Bernadette Farrell to introduce the Jesse Tree. Hang symbols on the tree representing each of the people in the hymn. The lyrics speak about the story of our faith, the rich tradition that we share with those who have gone before us and those who will come after us.
- Help the students to become familiar with some Advent practices and symbols by experiencing them. Use an Advent wreath during class prayer. Discuss the use of the four candles and the themes associated with the four weeks of Advent: (1) watchfulness and waiting; (2) preparation; (3) rejoicing and bringing joy to others; (4) living in hope. Drape the prayer space with the appropriate liturgical colour of purple/deep indigo. Some examples of Advent prayer rituals can be found in *Welcome! Celebrations for Young Children for the Church's Year* (Jenny Pate, McCrimmon Publishing).
- Sing suitable Advent hymns such as: 'We Will Make A Place Ready' by Damien Halloran & Maria Millward; 'Watch Out! Wake Up!' by Michael Mangan; 'The Advent Song' by Chris Robinson; or another suitable hymn. *As One Voice, Volumes 1 & 2*, *As One Voice For Kids*, Peter Kearney, Monica Brown, John Burland collections all have appropriate selections related to the liturgical seasons.
- Darken the room as far as possible and light a large candle. Use the prayer from *KWL*, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 18, p. 177 for class prayer. Actions could be devised to accompany the words.
- Arrange the Nativity scene on a mat or cloth in order that the class may gather in a circle around it. Pray the prayer in *KWL*, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 19, p. 185, using the actions suggested. Conclude with a well-known Christmas carol.

Related Chapters: *KWL*, 2nd edn, Book 2: Chapter 18, Out of the Darkness; Chapter 19, A New Light.

Faith concepts: hope, tradition, story, customs, ritual.

Understandings:

Waiting and hoping are important aspects of life.

Advent is a time for waiting, hoping and preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ.

Mary said 'yes' to God's invitation to be the mother of Jesus Christ.

The people of the Old Testament waited in hope for a leader who would lead them to hope.

The gospels tell the story of Jesus Christ's birth.

Unit specific learning:

Students will learn about <i>Knowledge and Understanding</i>	Students will learn to <i>Reasoning & Responding</i>	Students will undertake to <i>Personal & Communal Engagement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advent as a time of waiting and hoping for Christmas.• Ways in which the Church prepares for Christmas.• Mary as the Mother of Jesus Christ.• The qualities of Mary.• Significant people and events from Matthew's story of Jesus' birth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Represent feelings and thinking associated with waiting.• Respond to artistic representations of Mary.• Compose a litany to Mary.• Develop messages of hope and suggest actions for the season of Advent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contribute to the class preparation of Christmas through their messages of hope.

Part 1: Advent: Waiting and Hoping

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>Advent is a season of past, present and future. In terms of the past, Advent prepares us for the celebration of the <i>historical</i> coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas.</p> <p>In terms of the present, Advent reminds us that God speaks to each of us <i>now</i>, through our own personal histories, our own experiences and daily living.</p> <p>In terms of the future, Advent points us <i>towards</i> the time when Christ will come again. The main focus is on hope, which gives meaning to our lives. Advent is a time of hope and trust that God, through Jesus, will make all things new.</p>	<p>Telling the Story Display the phrase '<i>Advent is a time of waiting and hoping as we prepare for the birth of Jesus</i>'. Brainstorm with students the season of Advent.</p> <p>Wondering What are things we wait for? How do you feel when you are waiting for these things? How do you prepare for these things? What do you hope for when you are waiting?</p>	<p>Assessment for Learning This discussion will indicate students' prior knowledge and experiences of waiting and hoping, and their understanding of the season of Advent.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers

The unit content includes these past, present and future aspects of Advent. Students explore the words of some prophets and recall key people they have learned about to put on the Jesse Tree. Through this exploration **Advent is presented as a time of joyful anticipation and hope**. Children learn about the rich history and tradition of which they are part. The *Jesse Tree* can be used to recall people that children have learned about, and their stories.

At this early stage children could draw the people and put them on the Jesse Tree. Some of these people would include: ***Abraham and Sarah, Noah, Joseph the Dreamer, Moses, David, Jonah, Elizabeth and Zachariah, John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, Jesus.***

Learning & Teaching Sequence

Responding

- Create a class H-chart to represent aspects of events we wait for.

	What are things we wait for?	How do we feel when we are waiting for these things?	How do we prepare for these things?	What do we hope for when we are waiting?
Individual				
School				
Community				

Students contribute to the whole class chart using cut-out pictures from magazines, or write words on strips of paper to glue to the class H-chart.

- Play charades based on the wondering questions. In front of the class, students mime an event they wait for, how they feel when waiting and what they do to prepare. The class guesses what the student is miming.

Assessment

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>It is not necessary to introduce too many explanations about the symbolism of Advent practices. It is better for students to learn by engaging in the activities and feeling part of the tradition. By changing the liturgical coloured cloth in the prayer space from green to purple/deep indigo, using an Advent wreath, a Jesse Tree and an Advent calendar, the students will become familiar with Advent practices.</p>	<p>Telling the Story Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 18, pp. 172–175.</p>	
<p>A new liturgical year begins on the first Sunday of Advent.</p>	<p>Wondering Invite students to wonder with you: I wonder what it is like to wait and hope for a long time? I wonder how you feel after you have waited for something for a long time and it finally happens? I wonder who were some of the people who waited for Jesus?</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment									
	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm with students a list of the ways in which families prepare for Christmas. Play <i>People Bingo</i> for the students to find out how other students and their families celebrate Christmas. Each student moves around the class finding people who fit the descriptions in the Bingo grid. No students should be recorded more than once. People Bingo Find someone whose family prepares for Christmas by: <table border="1" data-bbox="819 799 1415 1038"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Praying</td> <td>Writing Christmas cards</td> <td>Shopping for presents</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Visiting family</td> <td>Going to Mass</td> <td>Cleaning the house</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Travelling out of Melbourne</td> <td>Cooking</td> <td>Lighting a candle</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Praying	Writing Christmas cards	Shopping for presents	Visiting family	Going to Mass	Cleaning the house	Travelling out of Melbourne	Cooking	Lighting a candle	
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Travelling out of Melbourne	Cooking	Lighting a candle									
	<p>Wondering</p> <p>I wonder how the Church prepares for Christmas?</p> <p>I wonder what the Church celebrates at Christmas?</p> <p>I wonder what the Church hopes for at Christmas?</p>										

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Telling the Story Visit the parish church, look around the school, invite the parish priest or a parish representative to talk about how the parish prepares for Christmas. From these experiences identify ways the Church prepares for Christmas during the season of Advent.</p>	
<p>Purple is the liturgical colour of Advent. It is the colour of the sky just before the dawn. The symbolism of this is that we are waiting through the darkness of the night for the birth of the Light of the World. Now the time is drawing near.</p> <p>Advent Wreath: Many people celebrate Advent by lighting the candles of an Advent wreath each day, accompanied by a prayer. One candle for Week 1, two candles for Week 2, and so on. The wreath comprises three purple candles and one rose-coloured, for the joyful Third Week of Advent. They are set in a circle of evergreen leaves, symbolising God's endless life and love. A fifth candle, a white 'Christ' candle, may be placed in the centre to be lit on Christmas Day. The gradual lighting of the candles represents the increasing light of Christ as his coming draws near.</p>	<p>Responding Use a variety of 2D and 3D materials to create Advent symbols and prayer resources for the classroom sacred space.</p> <p>Choose from the following:</p> <p>Advent Wreath An Advent wreath can be made by tracing hands on green kinder squares or cover paper then cutting them out and gluing them onto a cardboard circle. Glue the palms so that the fingers are loose, similar to leaves. Use three purple candles and one pink candle on the wreath. In Week 1 of Advent light one purple candle, in Week 2 light two purple candles, in Week 3 light two purple and one pink and in Week 4 light all four candles.</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Present Box For each of the days of Advent students write a message of hope. The students write these on strips of paper. Place in a shoe box symbols of Jesus' birth (e.g. cloth, straw, animal figurines, star, a song, incense). Wrap the box with wrapping paper, tissue paper, cellophane or newspaper with enough layers for the days of Advent. Attach a student message of hope with each layer. During each day of Advent, unwrap a layer and share the message. Discuss how the message can become action that day. On the final day of school, open the box to reveal the symbols.</p> <p>Advent Action Calendar Brainstorm with students actions that they can do throughout Advent in preparation for Christmas. (Encourage both physical and spiritual activities, e.g. being kind to a friend, praying, helping at home, attending the school Christmas Carols night.)</p> <p>Create a class Advent Action Calendar. Use one piece of cover paper for each day of Advent. On the front write the number of the day and have students decorate it. On the back students write an Advent action (from the above brainstorm). Each day turn the piece over, revealing the action. Discuss with students what difference this action will make.</p> <p>Suggested Home Activity Design a modified Advent Action Calendar for students and families to do together.</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Telling the Story Divide students into four groups. Give each group one of the Sunday gospel readings of Advent. Students identify the characters, setting and story line, and discuss the message of the gospel. Create a role play to present to the class.</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning This activity will indicate students' ability to identify the key characters, setting and events of the gospel readings of Advent and relate the message to their own lives.</p>
	<p>Responding Students create an Advent Action Journal. Throughout the week students enter into their journals ways in which they are responding to the gospel message of the week (e.g. <i>I said 'yes' to God today when ... OR Today I prepared a way for Jesus by ...</i>).</p>	<p>Assessment as Learning Throughout this unit students will use an Advent Journal to reflect on ways they are integrating learning and living.</p>
	<p>Praying the Word Gospel Prayer Focus Each week throughout Advent the corresponding group presents their role play. (i.e. Week 1 – Group 1; Week 2 – Group 2; etc.). As a class focus on the message of the particular gospel reading throughout the week ahead and identify ways in which students can make this message an action.</p>	

Part 2: Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>Mary Especially important at this stage is the great truth that Mary is the Mother of God and also Mother of all of us.</p> <p>Advent is a good time for learning about and celebrating the motherhood of Mary, and the meaning of waiting, preparing, pondering and praying in her own life.</p> <p>Just as Mary longed for Jesus and looked after him carefully, so she takes care of the Church, the Body of Christ, of whom she is the mother.</p>	<p>Wondering Students wonder about Mary: Who was Mary? I wonder what she looked like? How old was she? Who were her parents? Where did she live? What stories do we know about Mary?</p> <p>Telling the Story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask an expectant mother to visit your class and tell students about the preparations she is making for her coming child. You might compare this to the story of Mary's pregnancy, noting similarities and differences. <p>Listen to songs about Mary. Discuss the lyrics and identify qualities of Mary from the songs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Forever I Will Sing</i> (Mangan, M). – <i>Mary's Song – The Magnificat</i> (Kearney, P). – <i>Gentle Woman</i> (Landry, C). – <i>Mary Mother of God</i> (Burland, J). – <i>Mary Said Yes</i> (Mangan, M). 	<p>Assessment for Learning This discussion will indicate students' prior knowledge about Mary</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The phrases of the <i>Hail Mary</i> are a summary of why Mary is so important to Christians. She:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is full of grace • has the Lord with her • is blessed among women • has the blessed One, Jesus Christ, as her child – ‘fruit of her womb’ • is the Mother of God • prays for us now and at our death. 	<p>Wondering</p> <p>What are the qualities of Mary? I wonder how you would describe Mary?</p>	
	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students create their own artistic representations of Mary using various forms and media. Students label their artwork with a title for Mary. Display through the season of Advent. • Create a prayer litany about Mary based on the qualities of Mary as identified by the students in their pieces of art, e.g: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mary mother of God <i>Pray for us</i> Mary mother who cares <i>Pray for us</i> Mary ... <p>Suggested Home Activity</p> <p>Students create a decorative version of the class litany of Mary. Take home and pray throughout Advent.</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning</p> <p>These activities will demonstrate students’ understanding of the qualities of Mary.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Praying the Word Hold a class prayer session incorporating the students' artwork, Mary litany, the <i>Hail Mary</i> and a song about Mary.</p>	

Part 3: Jesus With Us

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>Infancy Narratives: There are two accounts of Jesus' conception and birth in the gospels: one in the Gospel of Matthew the other in the Gospel of Luke.</p> <p>Luke's account is the more detailed and the one most filled with the light and joy so much associated with the celebration of Christmas. The manger, shepherds and angels are part of Luke's story of Christmas.</p> <p>Matthew tells the story of the visit of the Wise Men, and the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt.</p> <p>This unit content focuses specifically on the story in Matthew's Gospel of the Wise Men who followed the star and journeyed to visit Jesus. It presents Jesus Christ as the promised light.</p>	<p>Wondering What happened in the story of Jesus' birth? Mad Minute Brainstorm. Students have one minute to write and/or draw about the story of Jesus' birth. Share these with fellow students using 2, 4, 6, 8 Strategy.</p> <p>2, 4, 6, 8 Strategy: After working independently, students work with a partner to compile their information. Next, the pair joins another pair to make a group of four – the two compilations are put together to make one list. Each group of four joins another group of four and compiles their information to form one final list. The class will now have 3–4 compilations of what students know about the story of Jesus' birth.</p>	<p>Assessment for Learning This activity will demonstrate students' prior understanding of the birth of Jesus Christ.</p>
	<p>Telling the Story Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 19, pp. 178–183.</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment				
	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After listening to the Scripture use the T-chart below to compare prior knowledge of Jesus' birth with the content of Matthew's Scripture. <table border="1" data-bbox="819 483 1417 622"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="819 483 1117 552">What we knew</th> <th data-bbox="1117 483 1417 552">What we found out</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="819 553 1117 622"></td> <td data-bbox="1117 553 1417 622"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students create a Christmas card depicting the scene of the Nativity. Students write a Christmas greeting or message inside the card. Collect the class set of cards. Contact the priest or pastoral associate and ask them to pass on the cards to parishioners who may be lonely or in need of a Christmas greeting. Students learn and perform an echo mime about the birth of Jesus Christ. Use Mt 1: 18–25. Break the Scripture down into short, manageable sentences. For each sentence choreograph an action to match the sentence. To perform the mime, the leader says the sentence while performing the action, then other students repeat the action. (See <i>Epiphany-Magi</i>, Wintour, R.) 	What we knew	What we found out			<p>Assessment of Learning</p> <p>These activities will indicate students' own understanding of the story of the birth of Jesus.</p>
What we knew	What we found out					

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Praying the Word Students participate in a final liturgy with a focus on the birth of Jesus.</p>	

RESOURCES

To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition

Book 2: Chapter 18, Out of the Darkness; Chapter 19, A New Light.

Teacher Resources

Landry, C 1975, *Hail Mary Gentle Woman*, GIA Publications Inc., Chicago IL.

Mangan, M 2005, *The Promise Part II*, Litmus Productions, Albany Creek, Australia.

Mangan, M 2000, 'Mary Said Yes', *Sing Your Joy (1993–1997)*, Litmus Productions, Albany Creek, Australia.

Mangan, M 2000, 'Forever I Will Sing', *My Spirit Sings*, Litmus Productions, Albany Creek, Australia.

Kearney, P 1999, 'How Far to Bethlehem', *Mary's Song*, Crossover Music, New South Wales.

Wintour, R 2002, *Just Imagine 4: Many Creative Ways of Presenting Scripture*, Mountjoy Enterprises, Brisbane.

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 distinguish the key objects, signs, symbols and actions of the sacraments of Initiation and seasons of the Church by explaining what they mean.