

## God Is With Us!

In this unit students learn about the seasons of Advent and Christmas. They explore the concepts of waiting and joyful anticipation that are expressed through the use of the Advent wreath and the story of John the Baptist. Advent is introduced as a time of preparation that points us towards Jesus Christ. The Christmas story is told through the stories of the Annunciation, the birth of Jesus Christ, and the visit of the shepherds. In engaging with aspects of the story students are presented with the Good News that Jesus Christ is the promised Saviour, the gift of God.

### 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 coming of Christ?*)

**#148** The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that 'with God nothing will be impossible' and so giving her assent: 'Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word'.

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

**#719** John the Baptist is 'more than a prophet'. In him, the Holy Spirit concludes his speaking through the prophets. John completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah. He proclaims the imminence of the consolation of Israel; he is the 'voice' of the Consoler who is coming. As the Spirit of truth will also do, John 'came to bear witness to the light'. In John's sight, the Spirit thus brings to completion the careful search of the prophets and fulfils the longing of the angels.

(See *Compendium #141 What did the Holy Spirit accomplish in John the Baptist?*)

**#525** Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night:

The Virgin today brings into the world the Eternal  
And the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible.  
The angels and shepherds praise him  
And the magi advance with the star,  
For you are born for us,  
Little Child, God eternal!

(See *Compendium #103 What does the Church teach us about the mysteries of the birth and infancy of Jesus Christ?*)

### SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

Recall experiences of waiting. What did they show you about yourself? Allow experiences of waiting this week to lead to fullness rather than frustration.

With God, nothing is impossible. This was Mary's faith. How does it apply to difficulties in your own life?

What kinds of things do you search for, long for, look forward to?

What is the meaning of the poverty and simplicity of Jesus Christ's birth? How does it relate to the affluent, complicated world we live in?

Jesus Christ was born to show us how to live as God envisaged all human beings living. How can we live with joy and generous hearts? How will we allow Jesus' life to be a light within us that cannot be put out by our difficulties, pain or sorrow?

## LINKS WITH STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

For some students this may be the first time they have engaged with the religious dimension of Christmas. Allow them to enjoy and explore the stories and characters of the Christmas story and to ponder and wonder over them.

Students live in a fast-moving, immediate world. However, they are required to wait for important and ordinary things including birthdays, Christmas, meals, holidays, classroom experiences. Many students will have experiences of anticipating and preparing for significant times. *How can you encourage students to draw on these experiences in order to connect with Advent and Christmas?*

Students are beginning to understand that each family has particular traditions, and that important traditions and customs are attached to Christmas. *Do opportunities exist for students to share their family traditions and rituals?*

## EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

### Lk 3: 2–3, 15–18      John the Baptist

John the Baptist is a typical Advent figure as he too waits for the Messiah. The title 'Messiah' comes from the Hebrew word *moshiach* and simply means *the anointed one of God*. The Greek word for 'messiah' is Christ, meaning anointed one of God. Annas and Caiaphas, who are mentioned in verse 2, were high priests – Annas from 6 AD to 15 AD and Caiaphas from 18 AD to 37 AD, the latter during Jesus Christ's adult life and ministry. The people too were waiting and expecting something to happen as we are told in verse 15: 'A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people'. John knew he was not the Messiah but does not mention who is. So the writer of the gospel sets a scene of waiting and hoping. John baptises in the Jordan somewhere around Jericho. Some scholars suggest that this may be a traditional site of covenant renewal before going into the Promised Land, and thus a significant and traditional holy site. John baptises with water but the Messiah who is to come will baptise with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Christ or Messiah that people were waiting and hoping for. The involvement of the Holy Spirit is a characteristic theme in Luke's Gospel.

### Lk 2: 1–20      The Story of Jesus Christ's Birth

Luke's presentation of Jesus' birth establishes Jesus as the Messiah, Christ and Lord in the line of David for whom the Jewish people waited.

The vast Roman Empire at this time spread across the Mediterranean from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) to Syria and Judea – an area comparable to the area of Australia. Over this empire, peace (Pax Romana) was brought about by suppression and

oppression, and maintained by military force, the rule of law and the flow of commerce.

The helpless infant is an image in stark contrast to the powerful Roman ruler, Caesar Augustus. In Luke's Gospel we are shown that the infant Jesus will be the bearer of a different kind of peace. He will restore right relationships and walk with those who are marginalised or alienated, bringing wholeness and salvation. The events described are Good News, especially to those who enjoy 'God's favour' – for Luke this means the poor and the lowly.

Although its dating is uncertain, the Roman census is given as the reason for Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem from their home in Nazareth. Obedience to the civic laws places Mary and Joseph in the City of David, Bethlehem, where the birth of the Messiah was expected to occur (Mic 5: 1). This reinforces Jesus' connection with the royal Davidic line, already legally established through his foster father, Joseph.

Jesus is born into a hostile environment as there is no place for him to be born except a stable, a cave for animals. He is placed in a manger, the animals' feeding trough. Ironically, this helpless child will become the one who offers hospitality to others, who will give himself as food in the Eucharist. It is interesting to note that Bethlehem means 'house of bread'. Mary wraps Jesus in swaddling clothes, customary for security and to assure good growth, but also reminiscent of Wis 7: 4 where Solomon, son of David, is nurtured in swaddling clothes with every care.

## POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

- Decorate the prayer place in purple and pink. Place an Advent wreath centrally.
- Use the Advent wreath for morning prayer. Light candles each day according to the weeks of Advent. Pray a brief responsory prayer, e.g:

Leader:       Come, Lord Jesus!  
All:            *Come, Lord Jesus!*

Leader:       You are our light  
All:            *Come, Lord Jesus!*

Leader:       You bring light to the darkness.  
All:            *Come, Lord Jesus!*

- Sing a suitable antiphon such as Christopher Walker's 'Prepare the Way' from *Calling the Children* (OCP Publications).
- Lead students in a guided meditation to visit Bethlehem to meet the baby Jesus. A very good script is 'Magic Carpet – a Visit to Bethlehem' in *To God on a Magic Carpet* (Sr Anthony, Spectrum Publications). This can be extended with students responding to the experience in their prayer journals.
- Prayer Celebration:
  - Create a prayer space with a candle, Bible and 'crib' set, including the baby Jesus.
  - Gathering Rite:                'O Come All Ye Faithful' (chorus only)
  - Proclaim the Word:            Lk 2: 7–12, 15–20.

Prayers of the Faithful: Spontaneous prayers from the children.  
Concluding Prayer: Conclude with prayer from *KWL*, 2nd edn, Prep/Kindergarten, Chapter 20, p. 153.  
Dismissal Rite: Sing a suitable Christmas carol.

**Related Chapters** – *KWL*, 2nd edn, Prep/Kindergarten: Chapter 18, The Long Wait; Chapter 20, Jesus is Born.

**Faith concepts:** preparation, seasons, waiting, tradition, customs, celebrations.

**Understandings:**

People wait for many things.

God’s people waited for a promised leader.

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ.

Angels are special messengers of God.

During Advent the Church prepares to remember and celebrate Jesus Christ’s birth.

Christmas is the celebration of Jesus Christ’s birth.

**Unit specific learning:**

<b>Students will learn about</b>	<b>Students will learn to</b>	<b>Students will undertake to</b>
<i>Knowledge and Understanding</i>	<i>Reasoning &amp; Responding</i>	<i>Personal &amp; Communal Engagement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their own and others’ experiences of waiting.</li> <li>• Experiences of waiting times in the Bible (e.g. Abraham and Sarah, John the Baptist).</li> <li>• The liturgical season of Advent as a time of waiting and anticipating Jesus Christ’s birth, and ways that the Advent wreath expresses this.</li> <li>• Angels acting as special messengers of God.</li> <li>• The characters and events of Luke’s Infancy Narrative.</li> <li>• Christmas as a celebration of Jesus Christ’s birth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on their own experience of waiting.</li> <li>• Make a connection between their own waiting times and the Church’s season of waiting.</li> <li>• Wonder about what occurred at Christmas.</li> <li>• Represent their thoughts about the event of Jesus Christ’s birth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in class prayer sessions.</li> <li>• Engage in meditation sessions.</li> <li>• Be part of the lighting of the Advent candle.</li> </ul>

**Part 1: Waiting for Jesus Christ**

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p><b>Telling the Story</b>            Students brainstorm times when they have had to wait for something, e.g. holiday, birth. Invite the students to tell the class about these times and how they felt during these experiences.</p>	
	<p><b>Responding</b>            Students illustrate and/or write about a waiting time.</p>	<p><b>Assessment for Learning</b>            This activity will indicate students' experiences of waiting and longing.</p>
	<p><b>Telling the Story</b>            Read with the students from <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Prep/Kindergarten, Chapter 18, pp. 134–137.</p> <p><b>Wondering</b>            Invite students to wonder with you:            I wonder what waiting means?            I wonder what it feels like to wait?            I wonder if it is hard to wait?            I wonder what other stories from the Bible you know which tell about times when God's chosen people have waited (e.g. Abraham and Sarah)?</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p><b>Advent</b> comes from the Latin <i>adventus</i> which means coming. It is a liturgical season which marks the time of preparation for Christmas. It also marks the beginning of the Church year.</p> <p>Key symbols of this season are the Advent candles and Advent wreath. The wreath symbolises God's eternal love and presence in our lives. Over the four weeks of Advent a candle is lit each week, symbolising the journey from darkness to light.</p> <p>Purple is the colour of Advent, symbolising the darkness of the sky before the sun is born with the new day.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b></p> <p>Tell the students the Church has a special liturgical season in preparation for Christmas. The season is called Advent. Share with the students features of the liturgical season of Advent: the colour purple, changes in the church, and the Advent wreath.</p> <p>Organise the prayer place for Advent: purple prayer cloth and Advent wreath (with three purple candles, one pink candle and a white candle for the centre of the Advent wreath).</p> <p><b>Praying the Word</b></p> <p>With the students, pray the prayer from <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Prep/Kindergarten, Chapter 18, p. 139.</p> <p>Use the Advent wreath for morning prayer (see 'Possibilities for Prayer and Worship').</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach the students Advent hymns such as 'Watch Out!' (Mangan, M, <i>Sing Your Joy</i>).</li> <li>• Students trace one hand onto green cover paper, cut it out and, along the fingers, write names of people they would like to do something special for during Advent. The paper hands will be collected, formed into a circle depicting the Advent wreath, and placed on the wall.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b> This task will indicate students' ability to identify people they can reach out to this Advent.</p>

## Part 2: Jesus Christ is Born

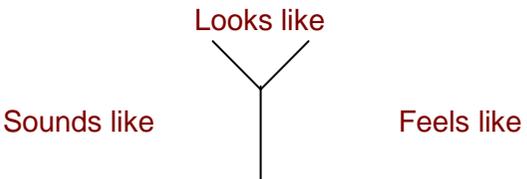
Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The word 'annunciation' means announcement or proclamation. In Christianity the <b>Annunciation</b> is the revelation to Mary, the Virgin mother of Jesus, by the angel Gabriel, that she would conceive a child to be born the Son of the 'Most High' (Lk 1: 32). The Christian churches celebrate this with the feast of the Annunciation on March 25, which is nine months before the feast of the Nativity of Jesus, or <i>Christmas</i>. Just as Mary waited for the birth of Jesus, so we wait with her in every Advent.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b> Read to the students the story of the Annunciation from Lk 1: 26–38.</p> <p><b>Wondering</b> Invite students to wonder with you: I wonder how Mary felt when the angel appeared? I wonder why God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus? I wonder why the angel told Mary not to be afraid? (<i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Prep/Kindergarten, Chapter 12, p. 152.)</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The word 'angel' means <i>messenger</i>. Gabriel means a <i>Master who is of God</i>. In the New Testament Gabriel is the angel who comes with/in the Holy Spirit and reveals to Zechariah that John the Baptist will be born to Elizabeth. The Angel Gabriel visits Mary to reveal that she will give birth to Jesus Christ.</p>	<p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students make the Angel Gabriel to hang up.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested Home Activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students take angels home to use as Christmas decorations.</li> <li>• Teach the students songs about the Annunciation, such as 'Mary said Yes' (Mangan, M, <i>Sing Your Joy</i>).</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Praying the Word</b></p> <p>Continue lighting Advent candles every morning (see 'Possibilities for Prayer and Worship').</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p><b>Crib or Nativity Scene</b></p> <p>Christian Nativity scenes usually show Jesus in a manger – a feeding box for animals – and Joseph and Mary in a barn (or cave) intended to accommodate farm animals. The scene sometimes includes the Magi or Three Wise Men, shepherds, angels and the Star of Bethlehem. The traditional scenes that show the shepherds and Magi together are not strictly true to the biblical accounts, since the Magi only appear in Matthew’s account, and the shepherds are only in Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus Christ.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell the story of Jesus’ birth using 2D and 3D materials. Prepare the prayer place for Christmas by adding a crib or nativity scene.</li> <li>• Read with the students the story of the birth of Jesus from <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Prep/Kindergarten, Chapter 20, pp. 147–151.</li> </ul>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The <b>Star of Bethlehem</b> was a star or star-like object that, in the account of Jesus' birth given in the Greek <i>Gospel of Matthew</i>, heralded his arrival and guided the Magi (better known in Christian tradition as the Wise Men) to the house where Jesus and his mother were (Mt 2: 11).</p>	<p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach the students the song 'Star Light' (Abba, K, Abrahams, J &amp; O'Brien, M, <i>Great Times with Jesus</i>).</li> </ul> <p>Students make and decorate the Christmas star.</p> <p><b>Suggested Home Activity</b> Students take Christmas stars home to use as Christmas decorations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide students with Christmas picture storybooks, bibles, Christmas cards, images of the birth of Jesus Christ and <i>KWL</i> student text. With these resources students choose an image they like the most. Students share the image, naming who is in the image, why they chose the image and what is present or missing from the image.</li> <li>Provide students with blackline masters of characters central to the Christmas story. Students create a diorama using a shoe box.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested Home Activity</b> Students take home their Christmas diorama to place near their Christmas trees.</p>	<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b> Both tasks will indicate students' ability to identify the central characters and setting of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. They may also indicate what students think about the event of Jesus' birth.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p><b>Christmas</b> celebrates the Incarnation or coming-into-flesh of God among us. The Incarnation brings simplicity and glory together in the person of Jesus Christ, God and man, fully divine and fully human.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b> Read to the students the story of the birth of Jesus Christ from Lk 2: 7–12, 15–20.</p> <p><b>Wondering</b> Invite the students to wonder with you: I wonder what it would be like to be born in a stable? I wonder why the angels sang when Jesus Christ was born? I wonder what angels are like? I wonder why God's angel told the shepherds about Jesus Christ? I wonder what the stable looked like on the night of Jesus' birth? I wonder how the shepherds found Jesus? I wonder how the shepherds felt when they saw the baby Jesus?</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students complete a Y-chart on the event of Jesus' birth.</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Looks like</p> <p>Sounds like                      Feels like</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach the students religious Christmas songs such as 'O Emmanuel' (Mangan, M, <i>Sing Your Joy</i>).</li> <li>Students use 2D and 3D materials to retell the Christmas story. Working in small groups students name the main characters and retell the story in sequence.</li> <li>Students complete a story ladder graphic organiser to sequence the key events in the story of the birth of Jesus Christ by writing the text about each event between the rungs on the ladder, e.g.:</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b></p> <p>These tasks will indicate students' ability to sequence the key events of the Christmas story. They may also indicate what students think about the event of Jesus' birth.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment							
	<table border="1" data-bbox="969 312 1267 794"> <tr><td data-bbox="969 312 1267 379">Shepherds visit Jesus</td></tr> <tr><td data-bbox="969 379 1267 446">Angel visits the shepherds</td></tr> <tr><td data-bbox="969 446 1267 513">Jesus is born</td></tr> <tr><td data-bbox="969 513 1267 580">No room at the inn</td></tr> <tr><td data-bbox="969 580 1267 647">Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem</td></tr> <tr><td data-bbox="969 647 1267 715">The angel visits Mary</td></tr> <tr><td data-bbox="969 715 1267 794"></td></tr> </table> <p data-bbox="909 831 1395 959">This story ladder is then cut up. Each rung is pasted on a page to make a Christmas storybook. Students illustrate.</p> <p data-bbox="819 967 1406 1062"><b>Suggested Home Activity</b> Students take their Christmas books home to read with their families.</p>	Shepherds visit Jesus	Angel visits the shepherds	Jesus is born	No room at the inn	Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem	The angel visits Mary		
Shepherds visit Jesus									
Angel visits the shepherds									
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No room at the inn									
Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem									
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Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p><b>Praying the Word</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the students through a guided meditation (see 'Possibilities for Prayer and Worship').</li> <li>• Students participate in a liturgy focusing on the journey from Advent to Christmas.</li> </ul>	

## RESOURCES

### *To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition*

Prep/Kindergarten: Chapter 18, The Long Wait; Chapter 20, Jesus is Born.

### Teacher Resources

Abba, K, Abrahams, J & O'Brien, M 2003, *Great Times With Jesus*, Willow Publishing.

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

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDARDS

This unit may be used to assess some of the Level 1 standards.

Students relate to sacred story including the image of the Good Shepherd by making connections to their personal experiences.