

Assembly / Collective Worship ~ January

The Three Visitors	The Bible Matthew 2:1-12	<i>Some key values found in this story</i>		
		respect/ reverence	hope	compassion

Background:

In each of these acts of collective worship the key value stressed is HOPE although other values such as those highlighted above may provide a focus in this particular story. However, during Year of the Child 2009, it is right to celebrate the possibility of new hope through the children of our community who 'bless' us with their resourcefulness, cheerfulness and energy. It is also right to commit ourselves to supporting and publicising the United Nations' 'Rights of the Child' and the responsibilities which accompany them (see www.unicef.org.uk). Each act of worship in this series either makes a direct reference to these or enables links to be made to them, for example, through circle time.

In this assembly we hear a story from the New Testament of the Bible in which three wise men from the East, possibly kings or 'magi', visit the child, Jesus. The 'Adoration of the Magi' is celebrated at the Feast of the Epiphany when Jesus is portrayed as the hope of the world by his 'epiphany' or 'showing forth' to these wise men from distant lands.



In a European custom at Epiphany, chalk is used to mark houses and acts as a symbol of the Christian story of God becoming human, taking on flesh as part of the earth. The belief in God being born as a child, with name, nationality and family ties, links well with the Convention on the Rights of the Child which stresses that

Governments should respect children's right to a name, a nationality and family ties. (Article 8)

The story of the visit of the Wise Men goes on through the horrific 'Massacre of the Innocents' and the Holy family escaping from Palestine to live in Egypt as refugees. Several other 'Rights of the Child' deal with refugee issues, loss of country, language and so on.

Preparation

You need:

- ❖ Three crowns – shiny cardboard with glitter placed on prominent table

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- ❖ Three presents labelled Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, in a large sack and a large shiny card star on cane – also on the table
- ❖ Three shiny robes hanging on chairs / hat stand near the table – names pinned on back of robes to say – Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar
- ❖ Chalk and a large piece of card / marker pen and small white-board for marking the code
- ❖ Bible / Bible story book

You may wish to:

- ❖ Play a recording of 'We three kings' as children enter.
- ❖ Display a picture e.g. a copy of 'The Adoration of the Magi' by a famous artist such as Giotto, Rembrandt, Rubens, Fra Angelico, Murillo, Durer, Leonardo da Vinci or a more modern picture of the Three Wise Men e.g. from www.jesusmafa.com.
- ❖ Find and use pictures of the house-marking custom. These can be found in an image search on the internet under terms such as: epiphany, stersinger or star-singers.

Follow-up

- ❖ Read the story of 'Nothing' by Mick Inkpen to illustrate the idea of having no name and then introduce children to the 'Rights of the Child'. Discuss the right to have a name, nationality and family ties.
- ❖ Gathering support for children in need is part of the practice of 'Three Kings' Day'. Compare this with charities the children support in school and outside. Link it with the Convention on Children's Rights which says:
 - Children have the right to good quality health care, to clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment, so that they will stay healthy. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this. (Article 24)
 - Children have a right to an education.... Primary education should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this. (Article 28)
- ❖ Hold an Epiphany Party with a visit from the Magi (maybe the school governors dressed up), star biscuits and crowns. Parade round school to write a blessing over classroom doors as children read blessing prayers.
- ❖ Put 'stersinger' into an internet search engine to find clips of 'Star singers' visiting houses and singing traditional songs and blessings.

The Assembly

Gathering:

1. As the children come in:
 - ❖ *Give 3 volunteers a card each with a crown drawn on it and 1 volunteer a card with a star. Ask them to come to the front and don the robes / hold the star when invited.*
 - ❖ *Put on music and display pictures of the 'Adoration of the Magi' if wished.*
 - ❖ *Put out the props on and near a central table.*
2. When you are ready, greet the children as usual in your school e.g.
Greeting: **Peace be with you**
Response: **and also with you.**

Engaging:

1. The mystery

Write the following up on card or a board: $20 + C + M + B + 12$

Ask if children have any suggestions for an answer to this strange sum. Allow a few seconds for a quick chat in pairs and then take some ideas.

2. The story

Invite the children with 'crown cards' to come and dress in robes and crowns. Take presents out of the sack and hand one to each. Invite the 'star' child to come and take the star and stand in front of the newly-created 'kings'.

The Bible (hold an open Bible / Bible storybook – even reading the opening words of the story from the book) tells that wise men or kings, magi, came to Jerusalem from the East, men who studied the stars.

Traditionally they are known by these names (see names on the cloaks).

They arrived asking about a baby. They had seen a star which meant a new king had been born. They had come many miles to worship him.

The palace could not help – the king, Herod, was very upset – there was no new baby king in his palace; he had no new son. Herod's own wise men consulted the books of the prophets and reported that a king may have been born in Bethlehem so the wise men went there next.

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Much to their joy the star re-appeared; they followed it – it stopped right above the place where the child was. Not a stable but a house, not a tiny baby but a small child.

There they saw the child with his mother Mary and they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and presented them to him.

Do you know the name of the child?

Point to the displayed picture and talk about what you can see briefly.

Jesus was no longer a little baby – maybe two years old by now.

This story is celebrated on Jan 6th – Epiphany – by many Christians. It celebrates the showing of the new king, Jesus, to the world.

3. Cracking the Code

Show slides of the European custom of 'marking houses' or walk the children dressed up as kings, following their star-child, across the hall to a door.

Explain:

The custom at Epiphany in Germany, and several other European countries, is a children's festival - Three Kings' Day. After a service at church, children go from house to house to gather offerings for children in need in developing countries.

They are dressed as the three kings and carry sticks with stars on the top. At the homes they sing songs and remember the birth of Jesus. They are known as 'sternsinger' or star-singers.

This year at each house they visit they will paint this code:
"20+C+M+B+12".

The numbers stand for the year: 2012.

The crosses are not 'pluses' but reminders of Jesus Christ and his cross.

The letters are the first letters of the traditional names of the wise men: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar but more importantly they stand for the Latin *Christus Mansionem Benedicat* (May Christ bless this house).



(If more preparation time was available, children could act the custom out and volunteer this information as if being interviewed out on the streets.)

4. Asking God's blessing

All around the world people would like their homes to be filled with joy and blessing. That's why Christians like to re-enact the story of the wise men being led to Jesus, visiting him at his own house. Finding Jesus brought them joy and blessing; they returned to their homes with new hope.

Responding:

Choose from the following or create your own opportunity for children to respond.

Quiet moment for reflection:

This is your quiet moment to think or pray. Look at the picture of Jesus being shown to the wise men. Imagine you are there.

You are looking at Jesus and he is looking at you. Say his name quietly. Tell him your name. I wonder what else you'd say to him.

Allow at least 5 seconds quiet and then put on music for a song.

Prayer:

Maybe you'd like God to bless your home. Copy the inscription (20 + etc) onto your hand, drawing with your finger. Listen to this Christian prayer.

Bless, O Lord God almighty, our homes, this year,
that in it them there may be health and friendship,
kindness and goodness, love and forgiveness,
through Jesus the King, we pray, Amen

Sing e.g.

- 'He came down that we may have love' (Sing with the World - GIA Pubs)
- 'There is someone who knows me' (Share the Light – Farrell)
- 'May God bless' (Songs for Every Assembly - Out of the Ark)
- 'Peace, perfect peace' or 'The wise may bring their learning' (Come and Praise - BBC)

Sending

- ❖ You could use the dismissal: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord / In the name of Christ, Amen.
- ❖ Send the star child and the kings with a teacher to put the blessing above the main entrance of the school.
- ❖ Hand out a package to each class teacher - a star on a cane, three crowns and bag with the prayer and a strip of paper, blutack and a marker pen / chalk. Send them back to hold their own class blessing ceremony.

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Sternsinger

