

Emmanuel, God Is With Us!

In this unit students enter into the seasons of Advent and Christmas. They reflect on ways they experience God in their own lives and see signs of God's presence in their world during Advent. They analyse the characters and events of Matthew's Infancy Narrative; in particular the role of the Magi in recognising signs of God's presence in their midst. They consider the importance of the story of Jesus' birth in the celebration of Christmas. Students participate in daily Advent prayer and celebrate Advent and Christmas liturgies.

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:

#458 The Word became flesh so that thus we might know God's love: 'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him'.

(See *Compendium #85 Why did the Son of God become man?*)

#744 In the fullness of time the Holy Spirit completes in Mary all the preparations for Christ's coming among the People of God. By the action of the Holy Spirit in her, the Father gives the world Emmanuel 'God-with-us' (Mt 1: 23).

(See *Compendium #94 What is the meaning of the expression 'conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit'?* and *#95 'Born of the Virgin Mary': Why is Mary truly the Mother of God?*)

#725 Through Mary, the Holy Spirit begins to bring human beings, the objects of God's merciful love, into communion with Christ. And the humble are always the first to accept him: shepherds, Magi, Simeon and Anna, the bride and groom at Cana, and the first disciples.

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

#469 The Church confesses that Jesus is inseparably true God and true man. He is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother.

(See *Compendium #87 In what ways is Jesus true God and true man?* and *#88 What does the Council of Chalcedon teach in this regard?*)

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

Signs of God's presence in the world today are evident in the many ministries and works of ordinary people. Signs of hostility to God's presence are also evident. This is part of the ongoing story of salvation (Byrne, 2004). Where do you see signs of God's presence in your personal life and in the global world? Who are some of the 'Herods' in our world who are in conflict with this presence?

From the Arab world the Magi, Gentile worshippers, set out on a journey to find the Jewish king. It is a journey characterised by the observation of signs that lead the

way, interactions with people who threaten the journey, and culminating in joy and worship. How is your own faith journey like that of the Magi?

Through the mission of the early Church, groups of both Jews and Gentiles came to know and worship Jesus Christ as Messiah. In what ways does your school community continue this mission, inviting people to see, know and worship Jesus Christ?

LINKS WITH STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Through life experiences many students are developing an increased understanding of God's presence through local and global events. *How do students perceive God's presence in their lives?*

Students experience celebrations in various ways. *How can we lead students to make links between these celebrations and the Christmas story?*

Change is ever-present in the world that surrounds the students. Most students understand that they have the capacity to change their behaviours and attitudes to bring about a better world. *What are the significant changes they have seen in their lives that have resulted in positive ways of living?*

EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

Mt 2: 1–12 Journey of the Magi

The visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus is a rich story in the *Haggadah* tradition, i.e. a biblical account woven with symbolism and theology. The gospel writer has presented the story to point out to us who this Jesus is. For Matthew, Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God among us. He is the authentic king, the missionary to the Gentiles, who brings salvation and unity to the whole world. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of many people's searching and longing.

Matthew presents the infant Jesus in the social and political climate created by Herod the Great. Herod dominated and controlled the land we know as Palestine from 37 BC to 4 BC while in league with the Roman emperor. The power and outward show of this earthly ruler is in direct contrast to the infant born in Bethlehem, the place of King David's ancestry.

Matthew describes those who pay homage to the infant Jesus as Magi. They were wise men. Later tradition changed our understanding of these to kings, although this is not in the original writing. Tradition also leads to a specific number, three, to coincide with three gifts. These wise men giving homage to the infant King teach the listener that they must look for those who lead them in the lowly places. The Magi give a glimpse of a theme which will be further explored in Matthew's Gospel; the theme of mission to the Gentiles.

The gifts the Magi bring may be understood as symbolic of Jesus Christ's kingship (gold), his divinity (incense) and his redeeming passion (myrrh). The star, so prominent in this story, could indicate unusual astral activity around the time of Jesus' birth. Matthew shows that the star serves God's purpose, leading the Magi to find their quest.

POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

- Prepare a class prayer celebration for the beginning of Advent. Decorate the prayer space using the colours and symbols of the season. Sing a hymn or chant, e.g. 'Come Lord Jesus' (Br Michael Herry, *Sing Spirit, Sing Life*, Marist Brothers)

Music). The celebration could include a blessing of the Advent Wreath and the lighting of the first candle (see *Daily Prayer Under the Southern Cross* by Elizabeth McMahon Jeep and Sr Margaret Smith SGS).

- Prepare a simple reconciliation service (either sacramental or non-sacramental) related to our preparation for the coming of Christ.
- Commence each week with a prayer celebration prepared by the students. Include a gathering hymn with the theme of longing and waiting, an opening prayer, the ritual lighting of the next candle, a scripture reading (the Sunday readings could be used), prayers of intercession, a blessing (see *KWL*, 2nd edn, Year 4, Chapter 18, p. 148) and final hymn.
- Prepare a class celebration on the theme of journey. Include Mt 2: 1–12; a simplified version of the reflection from p. 66 of *Just Imagine 2*; prayers of intercession; and an appropriate hymn, e.g. 'Follow the Christmas Star' by Michael Mangan, 'Walk on to Bethlehem' or 'Christmas Star' by John Burland.
- Using Lk 2: 1–7 lead the students through a guided meditation of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.
- Contribute to a whole school Advent/Christmas liturgy celebrating Jesus Christ's presence with us on our journey through life.
- Pray the 'O Antiphons'. See *KWL*, 2nd edn, Year 4, Chapter 18, pp. 147–148, 'In Tradition'.

Related Chapters – *KWL*, 2nd edn, Year 4: Chapter 18, Advent and Christmas.

Faith concepts: change, seasons, presence, celebration, joy.

Seeking understanding:

What are the signs of God’s presence in the world?
How do Christians celebrate God’s presence at Christmas?

Understandings:

God is present in the world and is part of each person’s life journey.
Advent is a time for Christians to make changes in their lives so they can make Jesus Christ present in the world.
At Christmas Christians celebrate with joy the presence of Jesus Christ: Emmanuel – God is with us!
The people in the Infancy Narrative in the gospel looked for signs of Jesus’ presence.

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">• The setting, location, characters, signs and events of Matthew’s Infancy Narrative.• The role of the Magi in recognising and worshipping Jesus Christ as the King of the Jews, the Messiah.• Ways in which they experience God and recognise signs of God in their own lives.• Some of the ways in which Christians pray and celebrate in liturgy through Advent and Christmas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify ways in which they experience God and recognise signs of God’s presence in their own lives throughout Advent.• Represent their feelings, beliefs and ideas about the characters, events and themes in Matthew’s Infancy Narrative.• Express their views about the importance of the story of Jesus Christ’s birth in celebrations at Christmas in light of learning and reflection on Matthew’s Infancy Narrative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan and celebrate weekly liturgies during Advent.

PHASES OF STUDENT INQUIRY

Additional Reading for Teachers	Orientation to Inquiry <i>What do students already know, think or feel in relation to the topic? What are students' questions about the topic? What experiences and reflections can we offer students to become engaged with the topic?</i>	Assessment: for learning, as learning, of learning
<p>The Christmas feast is for many people the most significant festival of the year, but if it were not for Easter this feast would have no meaning. What we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of the saviour who lived, died and was raised from the dead – bringing us with him. Christmas celebrates the birth of God’s Son who shared our humanity so that we could share his divinity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Presence of God in My Life: Guided Meditation Prepare a space for guided meditation – music, candles, oil, etc. Lead students to relax, slow down and concentrate on breathing. Invite students to become aware of the presence of God with them, in a safe and beautiful place. What does this place look like? What is God saying to you? What are you saying to God? How do you feel being with God? Stay there for a time in silence. Invite the students to leave this ‘place’ gradually and come back to the classroom (see Reehorst, <i>Guided Meditations for Children</i>, pp. 156–159). 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journal Writing Write the questions asked during the meditation on the whiteboard. Invite students to write or draw their responses to the experience of being with God in their journal. Class debrief: talk about times and places where students feel the 	<p>Assessment as Learning Throughout this unit students will use a journal to reflect on and monitor their learning.</p>

	presence of God. Lead students to the understanding that in Advent Christians take time to look for signs of God's presence in the world, and at Christmas this presence is celebrated.				
The Advent wreath , consisting of four candles (one for each week of Advent), symbolises the light of Christ. The light grows greater and greater as we draw closer to celebrating his birth at Christmas. During the first week one candle is lit. Two candles are lit during the second week, and so on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the Prayer Place for Advent Cover the space or table in purple cloth. Introduce the Advent wreath and candles. Each week of Advent introduce a new proclamation (<i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Year 4, Chapter 18, pp.144–145). Refer to the 'Possibilities for Prayer and Worship' at the beginning of this unit for ideas for daily prayer. 				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Do You Know About Christmas? Prepare a chart where children brainstorm words with the various headings about the Christmas stories. <table border="1" data-bbox="842 975 1395 1114"> <tr> <td>People/places</td> <td>Key words and phrases</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signs/Symbols</td> <td>Events</td> </tr> </table>	People/places	Key words and phrases	Signs/Symbols	Events
People/places	Key words and phrases				
Signs/Symbols	Events				
Additional Reading for Teachers	Development <i>What experiences and religious texts will provide new learning for students? What skills will students need in order to work with these resources? What strategies and tools will enable students to think and reflect on these experiences and texts? How will students process their thinking and learning?</i>	Assessment: for learning, as learning, of learning			

<p>Characteristics of Matthew's account of Jesus' birth and infancy (1: 18–2: 18):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The story is told from Joseph's point of view. • Dreams, in which the Lord speaks, are important for guiding Joseph's responses. • There is no mention of a census, a journey to Bethlehem, a manger, shepherds or angels. • The visit of the wise men, and the star they followed, is described. • Jesus Christ's life is threatened by Herod. • Joseph flees into Egypt taking Mary and the child, Jesus. • Jesus Christ thus escapes the slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture Story Retell: Mt 2: 1–12 The teacher orally retells Matthew's account of the Visit of the Magi, using key words and phrases, as a story map on a whiteboard/butcher paper. Alternatively, tell the story with laminated pictures or 3D materials. 					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning About Scripture Students record the main elements of Matthew's Infancy Narrative on a data chart. <table border="1" data-bbox="842 986 1420 1126"> <tr> <td data-bbox="842 986 1133 1054">People and Places</td> <td data-bbox="1133 986 1420 1054">Key words and phrases</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="842 1054 1133 1126">Signs/Symbols</td> <td data-bbox="1133 1054 1420 1126">Events</td> </tr> </table> <p>Compare with students' brainstorm in the Orientation session. Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Which characters, places, events or symbols are not in Matthew's Gospel? – I wonder why some of the characters are not there? 	People and Places	Key words and phrases	Signs/Symbols	Events	<p>Assessment of Learning The data chart will indicate students' knowledge of the main elements of Matthew's Infancy Narrative.</p>
People and Places	Key words and phrases					
Signs/Symbols	Events					

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I wonder why Matthew has the Magi even though Luke doesn't? – I wonder why Joseph is a main character and Mary a minor character? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to Scripture Students explore a character from Mt 2: 1–12 and retell the story from the perspective of that character. Ask students to represent what the character was waiting for, and expecting. What signs did the character see? How did the character feel about this discovery? Present as one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a monologue – a rap chant – a cartoon strip – a 'live' interview. 	<p>Assessment of Learning This task will enable students to demonstrate how they have interpreted the character in Matthew's Gospel for themselves.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translating Scripture to Life Where do we find signs of Jesus in our own lives? Give students a picture frame to write or draw where Jesus Christ is present in school life or in their family life. 	<p>Assessment of Learning This task and the Scripture Graffiti will demonstrate if and how students perceive and understand the presence of Christ in their own lives.</p>
<p>Emmanuel comes from two Hebrew words: <i>immanu</i> (meaning 'with us') and <i>El</i>, a word for God. Hence God-with-us. Christians use this word for Jesus Christ. We use the word Emmanuel easily but it is beyond human understanding how God who is infinite could</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emmanuel! God Is With Us! Scripture Graffiti Students work in collaborative groups. Each group is given a large piece of paper with the words 'Emmanuel, God is with us'. They create a visual image 	

<p>become incarnate – that is, take on human flesh as a poor child born in poverty – and yet there is something very ‘right’ about it too. If God was a stranger to the human condition how could we find meaning, how could we find our way home?</p> <p>But the birth of Jesus ushers in a new era – indeed the world counts the years forward and backward from the approximate date of his birth. God now shares in the human condition: its joys and pains; its work; its emotions and relationships; its death; everything but its sin. We are no longer alone.</p>	<p>to highlight what this means. Students develop this idea on paper. Then as a whole group they discuss the similarities and differences in each group’s interpretation.</p>	
<p>Additional Reading for Teachers</p>	<p>SYNTHESIS</p> <p><i>How will students demonstrate their understandings, beliefs, values, skills and feelings in relation to the topic? How will students take action based on their learning? What strategies and tools will enable students to discern their action, to plan and implement action and to evaluate their action?</i></p>	<p>Assessment: for learning, as learning, of learning</p>
<p>The Magi, or wise men, were perhaps pagan astronomers and philosophers from countries east of Palestine, e.g. Persia or Mesopotamia. The gospel does not mention how many there were, but because three gifts are mentioned they are often depicted as three in number. The gifts have been interpreted symbolically thus:</p> <p><i>Gold</i> – a reference to Jesus’ kingship; <i>Frankincense</i> – a reference to Jesus’ divine nature; <i>Myrrh</i> – a reference to Jesus’ saving death.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Christmas Card Students create a Christmas card using pictures based on Matthew’s Gospel, to give to a person in their life who reflects Jesus Christ to them. 	<p>Assessment of Learning</p> <p>The Christmas cards produced will indicate what students have understood about the Infancy Narrative in Matthew’s Gospel.</p>

<p>The gospel account of the visit of the Magi is read on the feast of the Epiphany which celebrates the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles – non-Jews – represented by the pagan wise men.</p> <p>This highly symbolic account with its star, wise men, journey, gifts and dreaming explores the significance of Jesus' birth. It is a story about the great desire in human hearts to find God. The Magi had a long, hard journey with negative encounters and setbacks, and where did it lead them but to an apparently ordinary child in an ordinary house. They might have been disappointed or felt they were mistaken, but they recognised the divine in the ordinary and fell to their knees offering their homage and gifts to the child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloom's Dice Make a large die. On each face there are the following questions/statements based on Bloom's Taxonomy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Remembering: Who are the characters in Matthew's Infancy Narrative? – Understanding: What happens in Matthew's narrative? – Applying: Where is God with us now? – Analysing: Who were the Magi? Why do they search for Jesus and present him with gifts? – Creating: What would be your own proclamation for Advent/Christmas? – Evaluating: How important is it to hear the story of Jesus' birth at Christmas? <p>In collaborative groups students develop a group response to each of the questions.</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning The Bloom's Dice demonstrates the class's comprehension of Matthew's Infancy Narrative. It will provide evidence of students' knowledge of the elements of the story (characters, events), their ability to relate the themes in this story to their own experience and world, and the ability to evaluate the role of the gospel Infancy Narratives in the celebration of Christmas.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liturgy Students work in small groups to prepare a liturgy based on the proclamation for each week during Advent. 	

RESOURCES

To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition

Year 4: Chapter 18, Advent and Christmas.

Teacher Resources

Reehorst J BVM 2002, *Guided Meditations for Children*, Harcourt Religion, Florida.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDARDS

This unit may be used to assess some of the Level 3 standards.

Students identify with biblical characters and people in the past and present Church by making inferences about their actions, feelings and motives. Students collaboratively plan liturgy using appropriate symbols, words and actions, following a given liturgical form.