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# Bible Storybags®

Reflective storytelling for primary  
**RE and assemblies**



**Margaret Cooling**

To Doris Males, my mother, who is 80 this year.

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# Foreword

Bible stories deal with the big issues of life: love and faith, hope and despair, life and death. They are stories that engage with the big questions: ‘Who am I?’ ‘What is important in life?’ ‘What is God like?’ Unfortunately, for many children (and adults), the ancient and much-loved stories of the Bible appear irrelevant in their everyday lives. However, when invited to engage with the Bible fully, in an imaginative and meaningful way, children find that not only do the stories come to life, they can even be life-changing. Bible stories can be the vehicle that stimulates thinking, feeling and creativity, helping pupils to engage with key questions of life and express their own views in response.

Reflective storytelling is a vehicle that allows children to engage in a conversation with the Bible in a new and exciting way, which reflects their own thinking and personal learning styles. Well presented, a reflective Bible story will not only help the listeners to understand

the Bible, it will free them to wonder: ‘What would I have done if that had been me?’ ‘Perhaps I need to think some more about...’ ‘Do I agree when...?’

In this book, Margaret Cooling offers a variety of stimulating approaches to reflective storytelling, which can be used in primary school RE or collective worship. Teachers will easily be able to access these approaches at a level and in a manner that is most appropriate to their own school situation, and embed them in their school’s syllabus.

Use this book to give your children the gift of reflecting, but remember that thoughtful and reflective imagining takes time—and can last a lifetime. Ultimately, the best judges of the effectiveness of this book will not be you or me, but the children who have been given the tools to open up the Bible for themselves.

*Dr Shirley Hall, RE Advisor for Schools, Diocese of Ely*

# Introduction

The scripts in this book can be used in RE or assembly (Collective Worship / Religious Observance). In an assembly context, use a table so that all can see, or use a screen or whiteboard and the interactive website (see page 10). Make sure you lift items high before placing them on the cloth.

The book uses methods designed to stimulate both thinking and feeling—the creative and the cognitive.

In the scripts, meaning is conveyed by the rhythm of the language, the gestures, the objects and many ‘cues’ that the mind picks up intuitively. By the end of a story, children might feel they know what it means without being able to put their understanding into words. The biblical story and follow-up work often clarify what has been grasped intuitively. With this approach, there is room for the children’s ideas concerning the meaning of the stories and space for them to share the Christian community’s understandings.

The colour of the storybag® and many of the objects used are symbolic. The road often symbolizes a person’s journey through life. Teachers can follow up these symbols or leave them without comment, depending on the age and aptitude of the pupils.

## Learning from religion (Personal search): fulfilling the requirements

The approach used in this book enables teachers to deliver both attainment targets—‘Learning about religion’ and ‘Learning from religion’—as indicated in the Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education. It is particularly strong on ‘Learning from religion’—the part of RE that many teachers find most difficult. ‘Learning from religion’ is concerned with identity, experience, values, commitments, purpose, meaning and truth. It is about encouraging pupils to reflect, ask questions, interpret, apply, evaluate and express their own understandings. In Scotland, much of what comes under ‘Learning from religion’ is found under the heading ‘Personal search’. It is important in ‘Learning from religion’ and reflective RE that activities should not be intrusive. Keep questions general: for example, ask, ‘What type of things do people say sorry for?’

The assembly material in this book enables teachers to fulfil the law concerning collective worship (*1988 Education Reform Act*) in a way that is participative, as encouraged by circular 1/94. It can also help teachers in Scotland to fulfil the legislative requirements on Religious Observance (2004) and circular 1/2005, as it focuses on the reflective element and includes mystery, values, meaning, ‘otherness’ and challenge.

The book can be used as stimulus material for developing the five thinking skills (see page 11) listed in National Curriculum 2000.

Prayers and reflections are provided for teachers to use as appropriate. Pupils can be invited to participate in these elements but should not feel that they have to.

## Access for all

There are two scripts for each story, one suitable for younger pupils (4–7s) and one suitable for older pupils (7–11s). The scripts can be used in faith-based schools and community schools. Teachers will need to select from the follow-up material according to the age and ability of their pupils and their context. The methods used give access to pupils of all abilities, as different ways of knowing are used (intuitive, symbolic, reasoning and so on), and the physical and visual nature of the stories makes them particularly suitable for many children with special needs. The scripts have been designed so that pupils can learn at different levels; the meanings are layered so that gifted and talented pupils can dig deeper into the symbolism and ideas.

## Introducing and sharing Bible stories

Biblical stories can be introduced and shared with pupils using a form of words that earth them in the Christian tradition: for example, ‘Today we are having a story that is important for Christians’ or ‘Today’s story comes from the sacred book of the Christians, the Bible.’

This leaves the pupil free to identify with the story or not. They can respond with ‘That’s my story; we read

that at home / in my church' or 'Now I know why that is important for Christians.' It is important that pupils feel free to make their own response to the story, as long as it is respectful.

The scripts are deliberately ambiguous and relate to a biblical story without being that story. This stimulates curiosity—the basis for learning. They are designed to create conversation and discussion, encouraging the pupils to share their own ideas, and to be interactive. Different ways of using the scripts in an interactive manner can be found on page 12.

Pupils can become 'RE detectives' in order to work out what the script is about and how it relates to the biblical text. Packages such as 'WordArt' can be used to create badges, or you can photocopy the templates on this page.

The material in this book draws on insights from many areas: story sacks®, thinking skills, brain-based learning, Christian spirituality, Godly Play, the use of the creative arts, spiritual development and faith development. Each script is, however, original.

The scripts may be photocopied for use within the purchasing institution only.



### ● Websites

Some websites are indicated as sources for extra information or images. Generally, images can be found by using Google—typing in the subject and then clicking on 'images'. NB: Please check copyright on all websites before downloading any material. Please also note that websites do not necessarily reflect the views of this author.

### ● Health and safety

All activities should be carried out with due regard to health and safety. Teachers are referred to their health and safety document.



# Using the storybags® in RE and assembly

Select a story script appropriate for the age of your pupils. You can either use the script (followed by a few questions) and then tell the biblical story, or tell the biblical story first and then use the script as a way of reinforcing it or as a reflection.

When you are ready to use the script, start by showing the bag and asking some basic questions, such as:

- ❁ Why do you think my bag is patterned / brown / bright?
- ❁ What sort of story might be in this bag?
- ❁ Does it remind you of anything?
- ❁ What do you think is in my bag?

Once you have done this, move to 'Unpacking the bag'. Choose from the following two approaches: a) is more like a presentation; b) is more interactive. You should keep eye contact with pupils in both approaches.

- a) Read the 'Unpacking the bag' verse while the pupils listen. Take the items from the bag one at a time as they are mentioned. Lift them high so that all can see, then place them on the table or carpet in front of you, ready to use.
- b) Ask questions as you take items from the bag and ask the pupils to help you unpack.
  - ❁ What do you think this is?
  - ❁ Have you seen one of these before?

When pupils have offered their suggestions, read the 'Unpacking the bag' verse, lifting things up as they are mentioned.

## Tips

- ❖ Remember to pack the bag in reverse order—with items at the bottom if they are to come out last, and at the top if they are to come out first.
- ❖ Keep small items, such as 'tears', in zipped transparent bags.

## Ways of telling the story

The 'cloth' is the storybag® laid flat on the carpet or table. It becomes the arena on which the story is played out. There are suggested actions to use with the scripts, but you can create your own as long as they are appropriate. Whatever actions you use, they should always be unhurried and expressive.

Again, there are two approaches you can use, one more participative than the other:

- a) Presentation followed by participation: read the script as a presentation, waiting until the end for pupils' questions and participation.
- b) Interactive throughout: ask questions as the story unfolds; encourage children to take part in moving figures and creating sound effects. For example, say, 'I wonder how he feels now?' or 'Could we make wave movements?'

Choose the approach that suits you and adjust the scripts accordingly. Both have their merits: sometimes a presentation without participation can build an atmosphere and have impact, while interaction can make the story feel more 'owned' by the pupils.

You may choose to present the script and do the actions alone, or you may wish to use a helper: one person could read the script while another person does the actions with the bag and items. Alternatively, the script can be recorded beforehand and played while you do the actions.

When you have finished the story script, you might want to choose a few questions from those listed for Key Stages 1 and 2 on page 11, or from the end of the script.

## Making their own stories

Pupils can make up their own stories that are not the biblical story (do not use this method with sensitive

stories such as the crucifixion). Sometimes this is a good method to use before you present the biblical story. You could say, for example, 'We have a bag, a sun, moon and stars, a deep blue cloth and two people. What story could we make?'

Pupils look at the message of their own stories, then experience a presentation of the biblical story. What is the message of the biblical story? What makes the biblical story different from their story? Interview a Christian about what makes the biblical stories authoritative for them.

## Using the scripts with a digital projector

Go to the website [www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/cooling](http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/cooling). Select the script you want from the menu and follow the instructions. The story can be projected on to a screen with the teacher using the mouse or it can be projected on to an interactive whiteboard.

Pupils can use the interactive website in a number of ways. They can:

- Move the items on the board while the teacher reads the script.
- Use the scripts to retell the story themselves, adding gestures and expression.
- Use the biblical text as a framework to create their own script.
- Create their own stories (see 'Making their own stories', page 9).

### Guidance on using the interactive website

1. Some actions cannot be duplicated on a screen or whiteboard, so teachers should still use some physical props, sound effects and gestures. For example, follow instructions in the scripts such as 'point to self', 'throw streamers' and so on.
2. If an item is listed under 'You will need' in the script but is not on the interactive website, assume you will need the physical object (for example, a streamer).
3. Read the script and run through it using the website, adapting as necessary. As your cursor rolls over an item, it will enlarge. For 'Unpacking the bag', just roll the cursor over the items without moving them.
4. Generally, where the script says 'show', 'hold up', 'lift', 'indicate' or 'touch', you can just roll your cursor over the item.
5. Two items cannot be moved at the same time unless they are grouped. For example, the shepherd cannot hold the lost sheep and move. To move two separate characters together, just use small alternating movements of the cursor.

6. Drag and drop the items you want to move, then click on the item you have moved: this will 'set' it in place. Do practise!

In a few scripts, there are special instructions for the web version, as listed below.

- **The battle:** (For younger pupils) Have a paper crown to put on and off your head *as well as* indicating the crown on the interactive website. (For older pupils) Move the crown over the head of the figure on the whiteboard (not on the head), then place it elsewhere on the bag.
- **The footprints:** The people will go in the boat.
- **The seed:** Plants can be placed on top of each other and the seed.
- **The box:** (Both scripts) Use the small square of brown to 'bury' the treasure box.
- **The rocky road:** (For older pupils) You will need a paper heart to tear *as well as* indicating the heart on the interactive website.
- **The whirlwind and the calm:** (Both scripts) Use the patch of blue cloth when the script says 'show blue' or 'flip to the blue side'. (For older pupils) Use a paper weed *as well as* the one on the interactive website.
- **The monster:** (Both scripts) The people will go in the boat. Click on Jesus to make him stand.
- **The beginning:** (Both scripts) Click on the tomb to make it open.

# RE thinking skills and follow-up work

## A 'thinking skills' approach

The scripts can be used for thinking skills in RE across the age groups. (Pupils might like to use the 'detective badge' idea on page 8 as part of this approach.)

### Key Stage 2

After the presentation, use the initial questions to stimulate thinking. Suggested questions are as follows.

- What is interesting about this story?
- What is puzzling or surprising?
- What did you like?
- What did you dislike?
- Does this story have a message or meaning? What is it?

Ask pupils to formulate their own questions about the script (you may want to repeat the presentation, asking pupils to think of the questions they want to ask). They must be questions that concentrate on meaning, ideas and feelings, and cannot be easily answered from the text.

Write up the questions, grouping related questions together (for example, some may all be about right and wrong). Select a question or group of questions to discuss.

Introduce the biblical story that goes with the script as a way of responding to the questions. The biblical story should add to the discussion, not close it down. Explore how the story and the script might interact. Does the biblical story help us to understand the script? Does the script help us to understand the biblical story?

Reflect on what pupils have learned from their discussion. Encourage them to express what they have understood in any form—writing, art, dance and so on.

### Key Stage 1

Pupils watch a presentation, after which the teacher creates questions, as follows.

- Questions about feelings: 'Who in the story feels sad? I wonder why that is?'
- Questions about thinking: 'I wonder what the shepherd is thinking?'
- Questions about speech: 'I wonder what the women are saying to each other?'
- Questions about behaviour: 'Why did he stop and help?'
- Questions about meaning: 'What is this story all about?'
- Questions about symbols: 'I wonder why the bag is gold?'

The questions can be asked using the items from the bags, role play and drawings of faces showing different emotions. Wherever possible, reduce abstract questioning.

For more information, go to the site of Robert Fisher, a writer, on whose work this section draws: [www.teachingthinking.net](http://www.teachingthinking.net).

## Follow-up work

The following activities can be used with every script. Select according to the age and aptitude of your pupils and the time you have available. Further suggestions for follow-up work are given in the introduction to each individual script.

Discuss with the pupils the following initial questions:

- The significance of colours, including the colour of the bag.

- ☉ Their feelings about the story script. Do different parts of the story make them feel differently? How do characters feel at different moments?
- ☉ Who do they think the characters in the script are?
- ☉ The meaning of any titles used—for example, ‘Man all alone’ or ‘The one’.
- ☉ What do they think is the most important moment in the story and why?
- ☉ The meaning of the story script: does it have anything to say to us?
- ☉ Pupils can create a PowerPoint presentation of the script by using a digital camera, taking photographs of a presentation at key points.
- ☉ Create a drama from the script, using pupils rather than figures.
- ☉ Pupils can annotate a plain script for reading aloud, preparing it for presentation.
- ☉ Turn a script into a book. How will the pupils divide the text? How will they illustrate it?

Select from the following activities:

- ☉ Pupils can retell the story to themselves, using their own language and the items from the bag. (Make sure everything is safe, replacing items as necessary.) Pupils can make their own bag or box using simple and safe materials.
- ☉ Explore the relationship between the text and the story. Use the biblical story to unlock the meaning of the script. Use the script to help children understand the meaning of the biblical story.
- ☉ Pupils might like to hear the story again or read a book that is based on the story.
- ☉ Does the title help us to understand the story? Can the pupils think of a better title?
- ☉ Pupils can express their ideas in art, creating images for part of a story.
- ☉ Use a script to develop thinking skills (see page 11).
- ☉ Give pupils some new words for feelings. Move the characters about and remind them of how the people felt and why.
- ☉ Older pupils might like to write their own script.
- ☉ Do they think the author has got it right? Are there places where they would change things?
- ☉ Why do they think Christians still read this story?

### **Plain script**

A plain script can be created by photocopying the script and ‘whiting out’ the actions and the ‘Unpacking the bag’ verse. Use this as a photocopy master for activities requiring a plain script.

### **Using the scripts with older pupils**

Older pupils might like to try some of the following:

- ☉ Use the interactive website.
- ☉ Demonstrate the method using a bag and figures, then ask pupils to create their own script and bag for younger pupils, using a plain script and adding their own actions. Shoeboxes covered in giftwrap can replace bags.

# Creating the storybags®

Fabric bags are simple to make. Alternatively, you can use coloured paper bags. Shoeboxes covered in coloured paper could be used with young children, or you could omit the ribbon on the bags. You would need to adjust the wording of the scripts slightly and add a cloth to the box, in the appropriate colour.

To make a bag, take half a metre of fabric, about 115–122cm in width. Fold the fabric in half, right sides together, and sew down the longer sides (see figure 1).

To make a hem, turn over the top 1cm and iron in place, then turn over another 3cm and iron in place. Machine round the hem, leaving a 2cm gap. Fasten off securely (see figure 2).

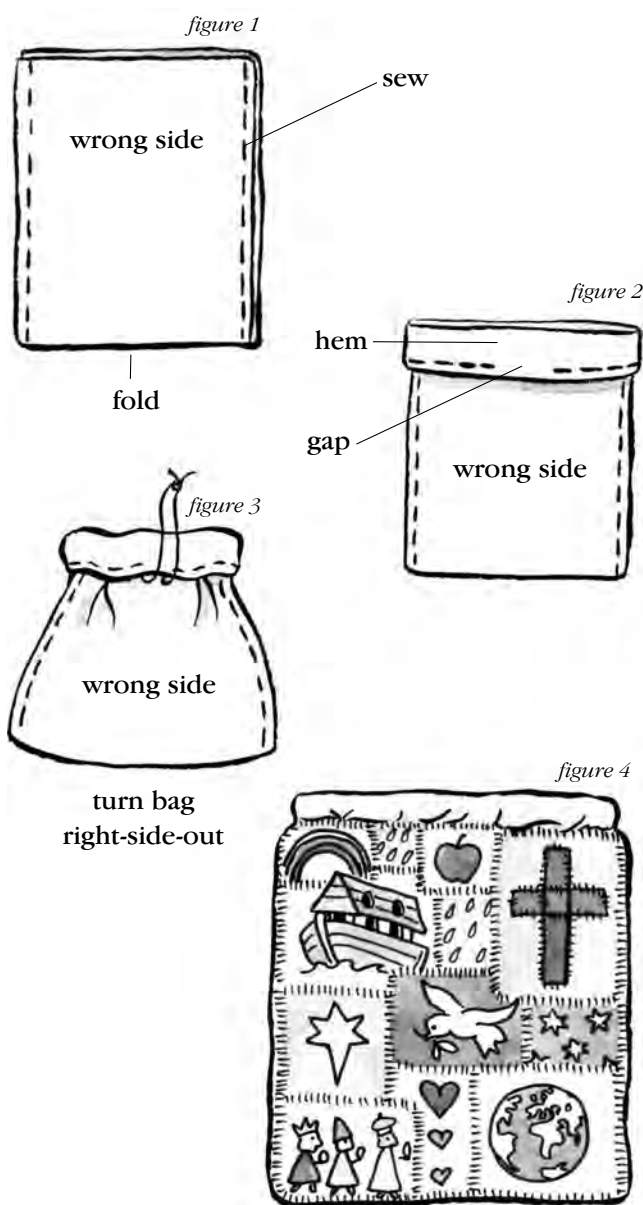
Thread 1.5m of ribbon through the hem, entering and leaving by the small gap. Tie the ends of the ribbon to stop them being pulled through (see figure 3).

Turn the bag right-side-out to finish.

**Note:** You may wish to create a giant Bible storybag® with different images of Bible stories on the front, to show that all the separate stories make one large story (see figure 4).

## Finding the objects

The objects suggested in the scripts can be easily found. Many of them will be available in the classroom. Play people or something similar can be used for the characters in the scripts. An easy pattern to make knitted people is provided on page 14. **NB:** All items used *must* be safe for the relevant age group.



# Pattern for knitted people

This is a very basic figure, knitted in stocking stitch (see diagram 1).



## You will need:

- ❖ Double knitting yarn in small amounts: body colour, face colour and hair colour
- ❖ 1 pair 3mm knitting needles
- ❖ Stuffing that conforms to health and safety regulations
- ❖ One large-eyed sewing needle

**Note:** Use different body colours to differentiate the figures.

## Body

Cast on 26 stitches in body colour.

Knit 1, make one in the next stitch. Repeat to the end of the row. You should have 39 stitches by the end of this first row.

Beginning with a purl row, stocking stitch for 9 rows.

Knit 8 stitches, knit 2 together. Knit 19, knit 2 together. Knit 8.

Knit stocking stitch for 5 rows.

Knit 8 stitches, knit 2 together. Knit 17, knit 2 together. Knit 8.

Knit stocking stitch for 5 rows.

Knit 8 stitches, knit 2 together. Knit 15, knit 2 together. Knit 8.

Knit stocking stitch for 3 rows.

Knit 8 stitches, knit 2 together. Knit 13, knit 2 together. Knit 8.

Knit stocking stitch for 4 rows. Change to face colour.

Purl 2 together to the end of the row.

Stocking stitch for 2 rows.

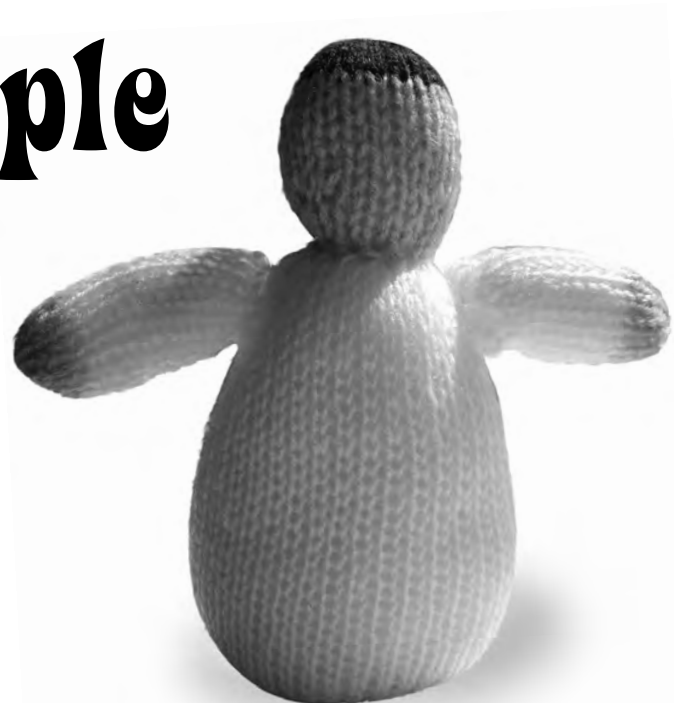


diagram 1

Knit 2 together. Knit to last 2 stitches. Knit 2 together. Knit 4, make one in the next 2 stitches. Knit to the last 6 stitches, make one in the next 2 stitches. Knit 4 stitches. Knit stocking stitch for 6 rows.

Knit stocking stitch for the next 3 rows in hair colour. Break the yarn, leaving a long end.

Thread the yarn through remaining stitches and pull up.

## Arms

Cast on 12 stitches in body colour.

Knit stocking stitch for 14 rows. Change to face colour. Knit stocking stitch for 4 rows. Break the yarn, leaving a long end.

Thread the yarn through the stitches, pull up, then sew up the seam to create a tube.

## Sewing up

Starting at the head, sew up the back seam in the matching colour. Sew down approximately 2.5cm into the body area.



diagram 2

Thread a piece of yarn through the base of the body and pull it until you have a circular opening about 2.5cm in diameter. Sew up the back seam, to approximately 2.5cm from the base. You should now have a tube with a gap in the middle of the seam.

Using a cereal packet, cut three circles of card, 5cm in diameter. Stick the three circles together, one on top of the other, push the card through the gap in the seam and press it down into the base. This will help the figure to stand. Push the stuffing

through the gap and into the head and body. This will keep the card in place and stiffen the figure (see diagram 2).

Sew up the back seam using matching yarn. Run a few stitches round, between the head and body, pull and fasten off to create a neck.

Sew up the arms, leaving an opening at the top. Stuff the arms and sew to the sides of the figure.

Using embroidery cotton or wool, embroider two eyes and a mouth if you wish.

**Note:** a version of this pattern originally appeared in *Firm Foundations Book 2: Exploring Christianity at Foundation Level*, available from [www.rmep.co.uk](http://www.rmep.co.uk).





# The scripts

# The coming of the king

## The nativity



### Using the storybag® in Assembly

To introduce the subject, talk about sending messages. Pupils can role-play sending different types of messages—by courier, by mobile phone (mime), in person, by letter and so on. Send a text message across the room to another member of staff. Discuss the messages that different people might bring. What message might a king bring?

Explain that today's story is about a special king who brought an important message from God. When he grew up, he spread that message through the way he lived and through his teaching. Introduce the Bible story (see Introduction, page 7).

Present the story using the storybag® or the web version (see pages 22–25) and the biblical material (see page 19).

#### Comment

Christians believe Jesus was the king that everyone had been waiting for. They believe he brought a message of love and peace that our world still needs to hear.

### Reflection

Hold up the ribbons one at a time and ask pupils to reflect:

- ☉ **Silver:** Sometimes we think we are not important, but the angels gave the good news to poor shepherds.
- ☉ **Gold:** The wise men left everything to travel to worship the king. They recognized an important moment.
- ☉ **Brown:** It was hard for Mary and Joseph to obey God. It can be hard for us to obey and do what is right.



### Prayer (optional)

*Father, we thank you that when we walk through life, whatever road we take, you are there beside us as an invisible friend.*



## Using the storybag® in RE

Introduce the subject using some of the material from the assembly introduction (see page 18).

Select the appropriate script and turn to pages 9 and 10 to find ways of using it.

### Biblical material

*Matthew 1:18–2:18; Luke 1:26–38; 2:1–20*

Mary was an ordinary girl from an ordinary town called Nazareth. Today, however, had not been an ordinary day! It had started as usual—she had washed the pots and swept the house—but, as she was busy making bread, suddenly the room was filled with light. Mary covered her eyes and wondered what this could be. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ said the angel. ‘I bring you good news: God has chosen you to be the mother of his Son, God’s special king, the Messiah.’

Mary thought about this. Every Jewish girl wanted to be chosen for this special job but it was a great responsibility. She thought about Joseph, the man she was about to marry. She thought about her plans for the future—they would have to change! Then she gathered up her courage and said, ‘Yes, I will do as God wants.’

Joseph, too, was given a special job by God. His task was to look after Mary and the baby. Together they planned for the birth of this child; this most precious of babies. Long ago, God had promised that a special king would come. For years, people had waited, hoping and dreaming of this king who would bring peace and love.

It was almost time for the baby to be born. Suddenly, all Mary and Joseph’s plans were ruined. The emperor, the king of the Romans, told everyone to go back to their home town. Joseph came from Bethlehem, and that was miles away. Mary and Joseph wearily packed their things and started the long journey. The way was difficult and the journey was tiring and, to make matters worse, when they arrived there was nowhere for them to sleep. The town was packed with people.

They went from place to place until finally someone pointed to a stable and said they could sleep there. Joseph did his best to make a bed

from the straw, and there in the animals’ barn the baby was born. They called him Jesus. Mary wrapped Jesus in a cloth and placed him in the manger—the animals’ feed box. No palace for this king!

Meanwhile, in a field near Bethlehem, some shepherds were looking after their sheep, when suddenly they were startled by a bright light. Angels lit up the sky, singing of the birth of a baby king, a king who came with a message of peace and love. Hurriedly the shepherds left their sheep and ran all the way to Bethlehem, where they found the tiny baby, and there they knelt before him.

In a far country, some wise men were gazing at the night sky when they noticed a bright new star. ‘This is the sign of a new king,’ they said. ‘We must go and find this king and offer him our worship.’ The wise men packed for a long journey and each added a gift to his bundle. One added gold, another added frankincense and the third added myrrh. Mile after mile they travelled, day after day they followed the star, until finally they came to Bethlehem. There they, too, knelt before the baby king and gave him their gifts.

\* The shepherds who had come to the stable went back to their sheep. The wise men who had followed the star returned to their homes. But Mary, Joseph and Jesus could not go home. Herod, the king of that country, had heard of the birth of the baby king and he was angry. *He* was the king and no one else! He would not let another king live. In the quiet of the night, God warned Mary and Joseph to take Jesus and run away to another country where they would be safe. Mary and Joseph obeyed and they took Jesus to Egypt. There they looked after him and kept him safe, but they were far from their family and friends. They were strangers in a strange land.

\* Can be omitted

**Note:** For a comment on this story, see the assembly section (page 18).

## Follow-up activities

(See also pages 11 and 12.) Select from these activities according to the age and aptitude of your pupils.

1. Create a display by covering a board with deep blue paper and adding two-dimensional versions of the items from the bag. Add questions and comments from the pupils. Sections of the script could act as captions. Explore with pupils how life can be like a road. Pupils can draw their own 'life road' and decide on a colour for it.

2. Create a Christmas card reflecting the ideas or symbols in this script and the biblical story—for example, a baby king, life as a road. What would you write inside? Alternatively, work with the children to create their own nativity play based on the script, that will communicate its message.

3. Encourage pupils to listen to music as they reflect on the story. They can express their own ideas and understanding through sound or music. Some suggested pieces are as follows.

- 🎧 CDs of carols and Christmas music from different cultures (available from Aid agencies and Christian bookshops)
- 🎧 'Unto us a child is born' from *Messiah* by Handel
- 🎧 *Christmas Oratorio* by Bach

4. In Script 2, Jesus is born where 'hopes, dreams and promises meet'. What do you think these 'hopes, dreams and promises' were? Explore some biblical prophecies: Isaiah 9:2; 11:1–9; Micah 4:1–4. Write them on scrolls and add them to the display. What hopes and dreams for a better world do people have today?

5. Use the technique called 'Time, place, weather and person'.

- 🎧 In one corner of an A4 sheet, choose a time and write it down, or draw a clock.
- 🎧 Choose a person from the story and draw them in another corner.
- 🎧 In the third corner, draw a place where that person could be at your chosen time.
- 🎧 Finally, decide on the weather and draw a weather symbol in the remaining corner.

For example, you might end up with midnight, Mary, in the stable, cold and damp. Write a poem or piece of prose from that person's point of view in that situation.

6. Explore how artists express their understanding of this story, and encourage pupils to do the same. Useful websites may include:

- 🎧 [www.Jesusmafa.com](http://www.Jesusmafa.com) > mini posters
- 🎧 [www.nationalgallery.org.uk](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk) > search 'nativity'
- 🎧 [www.mccrimmons.com](http://www.mccrimmons.com) > posters > seasonal > Christmas
- 🎧 [www.biblical-art.com](http://www.biblical-art.com) > biblical subject > New Testament > Gospels, Jesus: nativity and childhood > nativity
- 🎧 [www.biblepicturegallery.com](http://www.biblepicturegallery.com)
- 🎧 [www.heqigallery.com](http://www.heqigallery.com) (browse galleries)

Christmas images, activities and lesson plans can be found on the CD *Cracking Christmas*. Multicultural Christmas images can also be found in the pack *Born Among Us* (The Methodist Church/USPG/CMS). Both are available from [www.stapleford-centre.org](http://www.stapleford-centre.org).

## Symbols used in this story

- 🎧 Blue: the blue planet (earth).
- 🎧 The roads: a journey through life.
- 🎧 Stars and angels: guidance and messages from God.
- 🎧 The meeting place: where things came together (hints of fulfilment of prophecy).
- 🎧 Angels: messengers from heaven.
- 🎧 Gold: heaven, glory and celebration.
- 🎧 The voice: God.
- 🎧 Beginning and end: birth and death, the end of one era and the start of another.

**Note:** many nativity pictures carry a hint of the crucifixion to come. For example, in the *Mystic Nativity* by Botticelli (National Gallery), the ass has a cross in dark fur on its back.

## Reflective activity

Cover a table with an attractive cloth and lay out the storybag®. Add the angels' message: 'Peace on earth, goodwill to all people'. Place a question asking pupils to reflect on how they can bring peace and love at home and school. Add a basket containing pieces of coloured paper, pencils and mini Christmas crackers (with the bang and contents removed).

Pupils write, draw or dictate their suggestion and insert it in a cracker, close the cracker, add their name and keep it somewhere safe. The crackers can be opened at the end of term, but pupils only read their own suggestion unless they want to share ideas.

(‘Live’ crackers must be pulled with adult supervision.)

## Assessment

Assess the pupils' understanding by observing them replaying the script, or ask them to talk or write about the display.

## Background information and understanding the story

Christians believe that Jesus is God's Son, who came to earth to bring God's message of peace and love and to bring people into a never-ending relationship with God by rescuing them from wrong. These themes link Christmas and Easter together. Jesus lived his message and never tried to force people to accept it; that is why there is still war and wrong things in the world.

One of the titles Jesus is given is 'Immanuel', which means 'God with us'. Christians believe that Jesus experienced human life, so he knows and understands what it is like.

Various prophets spoke of the Messiah who would come ('Messiah' means 'the anointed one'). The Messiah was a special king sent from God. Kings were anointed with oil in biblical times. Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the prophets.

The Bible says that the baby Jesus was laid in a manger, which was an animals' feeding trough. It is not

unreasonable to deduce that the manger was in a stable, although there is no mention of a stable in the biblical story. Alternatively, the manger could have been in the animals' section of a poor person's house. Animals were often kept in the lower part of homes rather than in separate stables.

The wise men came from the area known today as Iran and Iraq. The gifts they brought have been interpreted symbolically as gold for a king, myrrh for suffering (it was used in pain relief) and frankincense for a priest (it was used in worship).

The shepherds were probably hired shepherds who lived out on the hills. They were of the lowest strata in society, so both rich and poor people are present in this story.

## Useful websites

The websites listed below are active at the time of writing.

- 🌐 [www.topmarks.co.uk](http://www.topmarks.co.uk) > search 'Christmas'
- 🌐 [www.request.org.uk](http://www.request.org.uk) > infants > festivals > Christmas
- 🌐 [www.refuel.org.uk](http://www.refuel.org.uk)
- 🌐 [www.textweek.com/art/art.htm](http://www.textweek.com/art/art.htm) > Jacob to Mustard Seed > Jesus/Christ > Birth of Jesus *or* Nativity



## You will need:

- ❖ A dark blue storybag
- ❖ Small paper stars
- ❖ One large star
- ❖ 10 'people':
  - 3 wise men,
  - 3 shepherds,
  - 1 angel, 1 man,
  - 1 woman, 1 baby
- ❖ Sheep

## Questions

(See also page 11.)

- ❖ Who are the people in this story?
- ❖ Who is the baby?
- ❖ Why did he bring a message of peace and love?  
(See Luke 2:14; John 3:16)

# Script 1

## Unpacking the bag

*My bag is blue, the colour of our world: the blue planet.  
There are stars in my bag that pepper the sky,  
and one large star that points the way.  
There is an angel in my bag with a message about a king.  
There are men in my bag who watch stars,  
and others who watch sheep.  
There are a man and a woman in my bag who care for a baby  
who comes with a message of peace and love.*

## The story

Our story takes place on a deep blue cloth (*show bag*) for it starts on an evening when the deep blue sky is darkening into night (*put bag down, and smooth*). A man and woman go from place to place, looking for a room (*lift and place man and woman*). They are tired, they are weary. They have walked a long, long way and the woman is about to have a baby (*walk man and woman*). They keep knocking on doors, hoping someone will give them a room for the night (*knock, shake head*). Every house is full (*move figures, knock and shake head*). All the inns are crowded (*move figures, knock and shake head*). There is no room for them (*move figures, knock and shake head*). In the end they find a stable and there the baby is born (*place baby with man and woman*)—a baby king, born in a stable.

Our story takes place on a deep blue cloth (*indicate bag*) because, on a hillside far away, some shepherds sit under the deep blue sky, looking after their sheep (*place shepherds and sheep*). Suddenly, they hear angels telling them a new king has been born (*place angel near shepherds*). Leaving their sheep, they go in search of the king (*move shepherds towards baby*). They find the baby king and worship him (*place shepherds close to baby*).

Our story takes place on a deep blue cloth (*indicate bag*) because, far away, men are looking at the midnight sky that is dotted with stars (*place three wise men and scatter small stars*). Suddenly, they notice a new star—a great star that tells them a special king has been born (*place large star*). Quickly they pack their bags and follow the star; travelling for miles, travelling for days, always going where the star leads (*move men and star around*). The men who follow the star find their way to the baby king and they, too, worship and bring him gifts (*place men and star near baby*). Everyone knows they have seen something amazing, the birth of a king who comes with a message of peace and love.



# Script 2

## Unpacking the bag

*My bag is blue, the colour of our world: the blue planet.  
 There are three roads in my bag:  
 the first road is the colour of starlight;  
 the second road is the colour of angels' wings;  
 the third road is the colour of the earth itself.  
 There are stars in my bag that pepper the sky,  
 and one large star that points the way.  
 There is an angel in my bag with a message from heaven.  
 There are men in my bag who watch stars.  
 There are shepherds in my bag who watch sheep.  
 There are a man and a woman who tread the hard road of obedience.  
 There is a baby, born into a world he came to change.*

**Note:** For layout, see picture 'The coming of the king' on inside back cover.

## The story

Our story takes place on a blue cloth, *Place bag*  
 the colour of our world.

It starts with three roads...  
 a star-lit road... *Place gold ribbon*

an angel-lit road... *Place silver ribbon*

a hard road. *Place brown ribbon*

This is the story of three roads, *Hold up three fingers,*  
 but one journey... *then fold down two*

a journey to a beginning  
 that is also an end.

In a land far away... *Place three men near gold road*

three men gaze at the stars  
 in the midnight sky.  
 Stars stud the darkness... *Scatter stars around them*



### You will need:

- ❖ A dark blue storybag
- ❖ Small paper stars
- ❖ One large star
- ❖ 10 'people':  
 3 wise men,  
 3 shepherds,  
 1 angel, 1 man,  
 1 woman, 1 baby
- ❖ Sheep
- ❖ A gold ribbon
- ❖ A silver ribbon
- ❖ A longer brown ribbon

# Older pupils



but one star shines brighter  
than them all...  
and calls to them.

*Place large star above gold road*

It calls them to leave their homes...  
and follow a star-lit road to a king.

*Place men on gold road*

It calls them to a journey to a beginning,  
that is also an end.

On a hillside in the country...

*Place shepherds near silver road*

shepherds listen to the silence  
of the midnight sky.  
Suddenly, the silence is split by  
the songs of angels.

*Place angel near shepherds*

One angel sings louder than them all,  
calling the shepherds to leave  
their sheep...

*Place shepherds on silver road*

and follow an angel-lit road to a king.  
It calls them to a journey to a beginning,  
that is also an end.

In a small town...

*Place man and woman at  
far end of the brown road*

a man and a woman wearily pack their bags.  
As they look at the midnight sky,  
no star calls to them.

*Lift and replace star*

As they listen to the midnight silence,  
no angels sing.

*Lift and replace angel*

The sky remains dark and silent.  
Before them stretches a hard road.

*Indicate road*

It calls them to leave their home...

*Move man and woman  
close to the meeting point*

it calls them to travel on a way  
unlit by stars and angels.  
It calls them to a beginning,  
that is also an end.



At a stable three roads meet... *Touch meeting point*

a star-lit road... *Lift and replace star*

an angel-lit road... *Lift and replace angel*

a hard road. *Touch brown road*

This is the place where hopes, dreams  
and promises meet. *Place baby where roads meet*

At the meeting place a baby is born...

born on the earth,  
born into the world he came to change.

Above the place a star shines... *Place large star near baby*

In the heavens the angels sing... *Move angel near baby*


And people who had travelled other roads  
come to worship. *Move shepherds and wise  
men near the baby*

But a voice calls to the family to  
leave this place,  
for it is dangerous. *Indicate family*

The man and woman know they must  
begin another journey.  
They look at the three roads... *Indicate each road in turn*

the star-lit road...  
the angel-lit road...  
the hard road.  
They step on to the hard road,  
the road where the voice calls. *Move family to the end  
of the brown road*

It is calling them to a journey to an end,  
that is also a beginning.



**Questions**  
(See also page 11.)

- Who is the baby?
- Whose voice is calling?
- What are the three roads?
- Can a beginning be an end?  
Can an end be a beginning?
- Can a baby change the world? Did this baby change the world?

# The voice

## John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism



### Using the storybag® in Assembly

To introduce the subject, talk about times when we do things wrong and we need to say sorry and start again. Using a felt-tip pen, write some things people say sorry for on laminated sheets of card—for example, lying, stealing, or hurting friends. The bad feeling we sometimes get when we do, say or think things that are wrong is called 'guilt'. Forgiveness is like someone wiping out the wrongs. It removes the guilt and gives a fresh start.

Ask pupils to wipe out the wrongs by washing the cards with water and a cloth. Do stress that forgiveness is not allowing the wrong to continue! Explain that today's story is all about being sorry and being forgiven. Introduce the Bible story (see Introduction, page 7).

**Note:** This story covers John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism. You may wish to use only one section of the story.

Present the story using the storybag® or the web version (see pages 29–31) and the biblical material (see page 27).

**Comment**  
Christians believe that God always forgives, but forgiveness is about being sorry and being willing to change, not just about being sorry.

### Reflection

Pour some water into a bowl and ask pupils to listen to the sound. As they listen, suggest that they might like to think of times when they have said sorry and been forgiven.



### Prayer (optional)

*Father God, we thank you that there is always forgiveness and there is nothing that can separate someone from your love.*

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