

Explore It

FOR LEADERS



TRAVEL TO FOLLOW THE STAR

Matthew 2:1-12 Wise men come to visit Jesus

The wise men followed the star to discover the fulfilment of God's promise in Jesus. Along the way they met a king who was not willing to bow down and worship. Following the wise men's story, we will discover more of what it means to have a covenant relationship with God and be reassured of the many promises God has made to those he loves.

Each child will need:

- Bible verse wristband
- A strip of white paper (A4 paper cut in quarters, lengthways), scissors and pens/pencils
- Access to a Bible: book, online Bible or Bible app
- Covenant Sunday prayer cards (optional)
- Printable Covenant Sunday prayer cards are also available (optional)
www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/covenantsunday2023
- Pens/pencils and paper

You will need:

- To display this month's memory verse
- To display the Bible promises references – see Action It section

Start It

Ask: Have you ever made a promise and then regretted making it?

- **Say:** To get ready for our opening game, watch this *Bluey* clip. In the clip Bandit, Bluey and Bingo's dad, has promised to play in the library a game of toddlers – without finding out what it is first.

Video

Promises Bluey Official Website (34 secs)
www.bluey.tv/watch/season-3/promises/

- **Say:** So, I have a question for you. Do you promise to play my game?

Discuss the children's responses to your question. This will depend on your group, but some of the children may want to know more detail about what is involved in the promise. They may have some questions they want answering first – for example, 'Will you make me look silly?' Others in the group might say yes straight away. Explore why that's the case. Is it because they trust you?

- **Say:** The game we're going to play is 'Simon says'.

Play a game of 'Simon says' with the children to get them moving. The aim of this starter is to get the children thinking about what decision goes into making a promise. What do we need to consider before we promise to do something? Does it depend on who is asking us to make the promise? In the end, the children were only promising to play a game of 'Simon says', but at the time they made the promise they had no idea what was ahead.

Sing It

🗨️ **Say:** Today's song reminds us that we serve a faithful God who keeps his promises.

'Promises' by Horizon Kids (2 mins 41 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns0MZ2-0DUY

Tell It

🗨️ **Say:** In our last session we looked at two important characters in the Christmas story. They had waited many years for God to fulfil his promise.

Ask: What were their names and what do you remember about them?

🗨️ **Say:** Simeon and Anna were waiting for God to keep his promise, and then met Jesus in the Temple. It's a special feeling when someone keeps a promise. Simeon and Anna trusted God and believed that he would keep his promise.

🗨️ **Say:** In today's story we meet another group of people who trusted God to fulfil his promises. Their story is found in the book of Matthew.

'Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. After Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east. We have come to worship him."

'When King Herod heard about this new king of the Jews, he was troubled. And all the people in Jerusalem were worried too. Herod called a meeting of all the leading priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ would be born. They answered, "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this in the Scriptures:

**'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are important among the rulers of Judah.**

A ruler will come from you.

He will be like a shepherd for my people, the Israelites." [Micah 5:2]

'Then Herod had a secret meeting with the wise men from the east. He learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. Then Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem. He said to them, "Go and look carefully to find the child. When you find him, come and tell me. Then I can go worship him too."

'The wise men heard the king and then left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east. It went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. They went to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary. They bowed down and worshipped the child. They opened the gifts they had brought for him. They gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went home to their own country by a different way.'

— (Matthew 2:1-12 *ICB*)

🗨️ **Say:** The wise men followed the star to find the promised baby boy, Jesus, King of the Jews.

Ask:

➔ Why do you think King Herod was 'troubled' by this news?

➔ What was he afraid of?

🗨️ **Say:** The wise men spoke the words found all the way back in the Old Testament book of the prophet Micah that shared the promise of Jesus. They were excited to meet Jesus, but Herod was afraid. He did not want a new king, even if that king was promised by God.

Ask:

➔ King Herod told the wise men he wanted to worship the new king. Would you have believed him? If not, why not?

➔ The wise men went to worship Jesus. What gifts did they bring?

🗨️ **Say:** The wise men didn't just bring gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh; they brought the gift of themselves.

Ask:

- ➔ What do you think that means?
- ➔ How do we bring ourselves as a gift to Jesus?

🗨️ **Say:** When we say we believe in Jesus, he becomes part of who we are. We are part of a covenant with God. This may sound like a strange word, but it means we bring all of ourselves to him, and he brings all of himself to us.

🗨️ **Say:** Our memory verse for this month helps us to understand this more.

Display the memory verse for the group and read it together.

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

Spend some time going over the memory verse for this month and create a set of actions to go with the words. Give each member of the group a memory verse wristband to help them learn the verse when they get home.

Action It

🗨️ **Say:** The wise men followed the star to discover Jesus, God's promise fulfilled here on earth. Today we are going to make a star garland for you to hang up at home, which will remind you of the promises of God.

Star craft

Show the children how to make a star garland.

Video (for leaders)

How to make a star garlands – Christmas garland decoration ideas by Helpful Arts & Crafts
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jz7FfewidVrQ

Once the children have made their star garland, they can write the reference to a different Bible promise on each star and decorate it. Take some time to show the children how to look up verses in their Bible or use an online site (like BibleGateway) or a Bible app. The garland will be used as part of the 'Explore It At Home' activity, so they will be able to get additional help at home.

🗨️ **Say:** Hang up your promise garland when you get home. Each day, follow a different star to discover one of God's promises.

Promise Bible references

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| ➔ Isaiah 41:10 | ➔ Romans 8:28 | ➔ Philippians 4:19 |
| ➔ Deuteronomy 31:8 | ➔ Isaiah 40:29 | ➔ Proverbs 3:5-6 |
| ➔ John 16:33 | ➔ James 1:5 | ➔ Isaiah 41:13 |
| ➔ Psalm 32:8 | ➔ 1 John 1:9 | ➔ Joshua 1:9 |
| ➔ Psalm 37:23-24 | ➔ John 3:16 | |
| ➔ Exodus 14:14 | ➔ Mark 11:24 | |

Pray It

The 'Pray It' section today will depend on whether the children have had an opportunity to read and respond to the Covenant Sunday material. During this part of the session, you can either reflect on the promises the children have made and read the prayer together, or give the children an opportunity to read and sign the Covenant Sunday prayer card.

Video

If you would like some music to share during this time of reflection, then some music by Paul Baloche fits with the theme of the session.

'Offering' (Christmas version) by Paul Baloche (4 mins 11 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-Z2NxURQ6s

Dear God,

Your love for me never ends, no matter what I do.

The amount of love you have for me is too much for me to understand!

I hope to get to know you better and show your love to others in everything I think, say and do.

I am going to write my name on this card to show that I want to be close to you and always have you in my heart.

Help me bring your love to this world and everyone in it.

Amen.

Explore It

Remember to send home the *Explore It Ideas* for children and families.

Explore It

IDEAS

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.

JANUARY
SESSION 01

TRAVEL TO FOLLOW THE STAR

 Matthew 2:1-12 Wise men come to visit Jesus

FOR ME



Create

Our memory verse for this month is:

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

See if you can remember the actions you made up together in this week's session.

Create a version of the memory verse to put up at home and help you to learn the verse by heart. This could be: a drawing, a poster, Lego characters holding up different parts of the verse ... Be as creative as you wish!

TOGETHER



Share

In this week's 'Explore It' session you made a star garland filled with promises from God. Hang it up at home, and each day look up a different Bible verse and share it with someone.



Song for the week

'Promises' by Horizon Kids

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns0MZZ2-0DUY



Memory verse

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

KIDS ALIVE! ONLINE

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/kidsalive>

Kids Alive! The UK's only weekly Christian comic – is filled with jokes, competitions, Bible-based cartoons and much more... and is now available to read online!





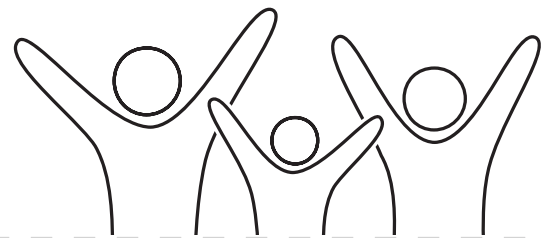
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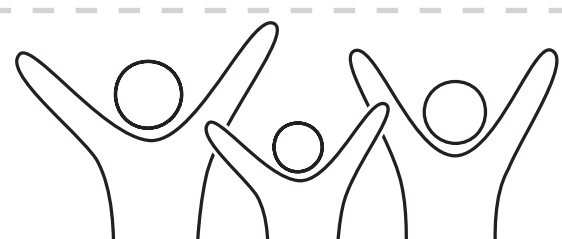
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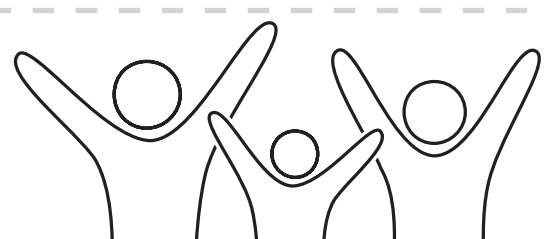
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Explore It

FOR LEADERS



TRAVELLING TO SAFETY

Matthew 2:13-23 Jesus' parents take him to Egypt

In today's session we continue our travels with Jesus. Filled with anger and jealousy, King Herod made a terrible decision that would impact many families. Jesus and his family fled from Judea to safety in another country. Many Christians in the world today face dangerous circumstances because they follow Jesus and are not afraid to tell others about him. In today's session, the children will have an opportunity to grow in confidence to answer the question, 'What is it like to have a friend like Jesus?'

Each child will need:

→ Session Two's handout, pens/pencils

You will need:

→ Pen and paper

Start It

Once the children have settled down and are listening, then the following instructions should be given using a whispering voice.

● **Say:** Last week we played 'Simon says'. This week we are going to play the same game, but I am only going to whisper the instructions.

Play a game of 'Simon says' with whispered instructions, and then discuss with the children how the game changed when all the instructions were so quiet. What made it more challenging? How was the game different from when we played it last week?

● **Say:** Today, we are learning all about the way that God guides us in our lives. Sometimes we are so distracted by the noises around us that we are not quiet enough to listen to him. Just like in our whisper game of 'Simon says', we need to spend time quietly listening to God's guidance so that we can be more like him.

Sing It

● **Say:** When we believe in Jesus, we want to be more like him every day. Our song for today is all about being like Jesus.

'Be like Jesus' by YSPC Children's Ministry (1 min 58 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqquxi0B4oY

Tell It

● **Say:** In last week's session we heard the story of the wise men as they travelled to worship Jesus. They went to see Herod to ask where the new king was born.

Ask:

→ What did Herod ask them to do?

- Why did he want them to come and tell him where Jesus was?
- What did the wise men do instead?
- 💬 **Say:** The wise men were warned by God that they should travel away from Herod and return home.

Video

Here is a recap of last week's story.

The story of Christmas (Jesus and the wise men) by Saddleback Kids (3 mins 30 secs)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk1LhnqROCM

- 💬 **Say:** The clip didn't really say what happened to Herod when he heard that Jesus and his family had escaped.

Ask: How do you think King Herod reacted?

- 💬 **Say:** Herod was filled with rage. He hated the thought of Jesus being worshipped instead of him.

Read:

'When Herod saw that the wise men had tricked him, he was very angry. So he gave an order to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and in all the area around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger.'

— (Matthew 2:16 *ICB*)

Ask: Why do you think Herod felt so threatened by Jesus?

- 💬 **Say:** Even today, people can feel threatened by those who believe in Jesus. In many places in the world it is dangerous for people to worship Jesus and churches have to meet in secret.

Video

Hami's story by Open Doors UK and Ireland (1 min 57 secs)
www.vimeo.com/showcase/8767245/video/396427169

- 💬 **Say:** Pastor Milad knew that he needed to follow Jesus no matter what. He listened to God's guidance and trusted that God would keep him safe. Just as the wise men followed the guidance of the angel and Joseph listened to God's wisdom, Pastor Milad held strong to his belief in Jesus.

Ask:

- Have you ever faced opposition because you believe in Jesus? (Rephrase for younger children: Has anyone made you feel unhappy or made fun of you because you follow Jesus?)
- If so, what did it look like?
- If not, how do you imagine it feels?
- Do your friends away from church know that you follow Jesus? How do they react?
- If you haven't told your friends that you love Jesus, why is that? Are you afraid of what they'll say?
- 💬 **Say:** Jesus guides us to stand strong and share with others that we believe in him. Just like the wise men, Joseph and Mary, and Pastor Milad, we can trust God to guide us through any situation we face.
- 💬 **Say:** Our memory verse for this month reminds us that if we believe in Jesus, then he is within us, always there to guide our path.

Remind the children of the actions you created together in the last session and share the memory verse.

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 *ICB*)

Action It

- **Say:** Believing in Jesus can be tough sometimes, especially in a world where people ask challenging questions and make fun of our faith. Just like the characters in the stories we have read today, Jesus is always there to guide us.
- **Say:** We are going to think about how we would answer someone if they asked us why we believe in Jesus. The character in the clip we are about to watch faced the same challenges as Pastor Milad, but we can learn a lot from his story.

Video

You may want to point out to the children that the King Herod in this story is not the same as the King Herod that threatened the life of Jesus when he was a baby.

What is it like to have a friend in Jesus? by Bible Kids (3 mins 41 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Fcp0Q6FYcU

Handout

Ask: What's it like to have a friend in Jesus?

Jot down the shared ideas, and then ask the children to write their own answers to the question using the handout. Divide the children into pairs and give them an opportunity to answer the question out loud to each other.

Explain that if anyone ever asks them why they believe in Jesus, they will have a prepared answer that they can use as a starting point for discussion.

In the clip Peter prays for guidance from God. Ask the children to write their own prayers asking for God's guidance, using the second half of the handout.

- **Say:** In today's session, we have discovered that there are people who strongly dislike that Christians believe in Jesus. There are other groups of people that do not understand why we believe the things we do.

Ask: Today you have had a chance to write down why you believe in Jesus. In what way do you think it will help you to share your faith with other people?

Pray It

- **Say:** As well as answering the question 'What is it like to have a friend in Jesus?' we have also thought about the importance of God's guidance in our lives. The wise men listened to the angels and made sure that King Herod did not find out the location of Jesus and his family. Joseph listened to the guidance of the angel and moved his family to Egypt to keep them safe. By following God's dreams, all of the characters in the story followed Jesus.
- **Say:** Today you have had the opportunity to write your own prayers, asking for God's guidance, and we're going to share them together.

Give each child the opportunity to share the prayer for guidance from their handout. Bring the time of prayer to a close, drawing on the themes covered in today's session.

Explore It

Remember to send home the *Explore It Ideas* for children and families.

Explore It

IDEAS

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.

JANUARY
SESSION 02

TRAVELLING TO SAFETY

 Matthew 2:13-23 Jesus' parents take him to Egypt

FOR ME

TOGETHER



Create

The angel came in a dream to guide Joseph. The angel warned him about King Herod, so Joseph led his family to safety in Egypt. Create a cartoon version of what happened while Joseph was fast asleep.



Share

Today we spent time thinking about Christians who are treated badly because of what they believe. Look at the children and families' resources on the Open Doors website with someone at home. Is there anything that your family could do to support persecuted Christians around the world?

www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/families/



Song for the week

'Be like Jesus' by YSPC Children's Ministry

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqquxi0B4oY



Memory verse

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

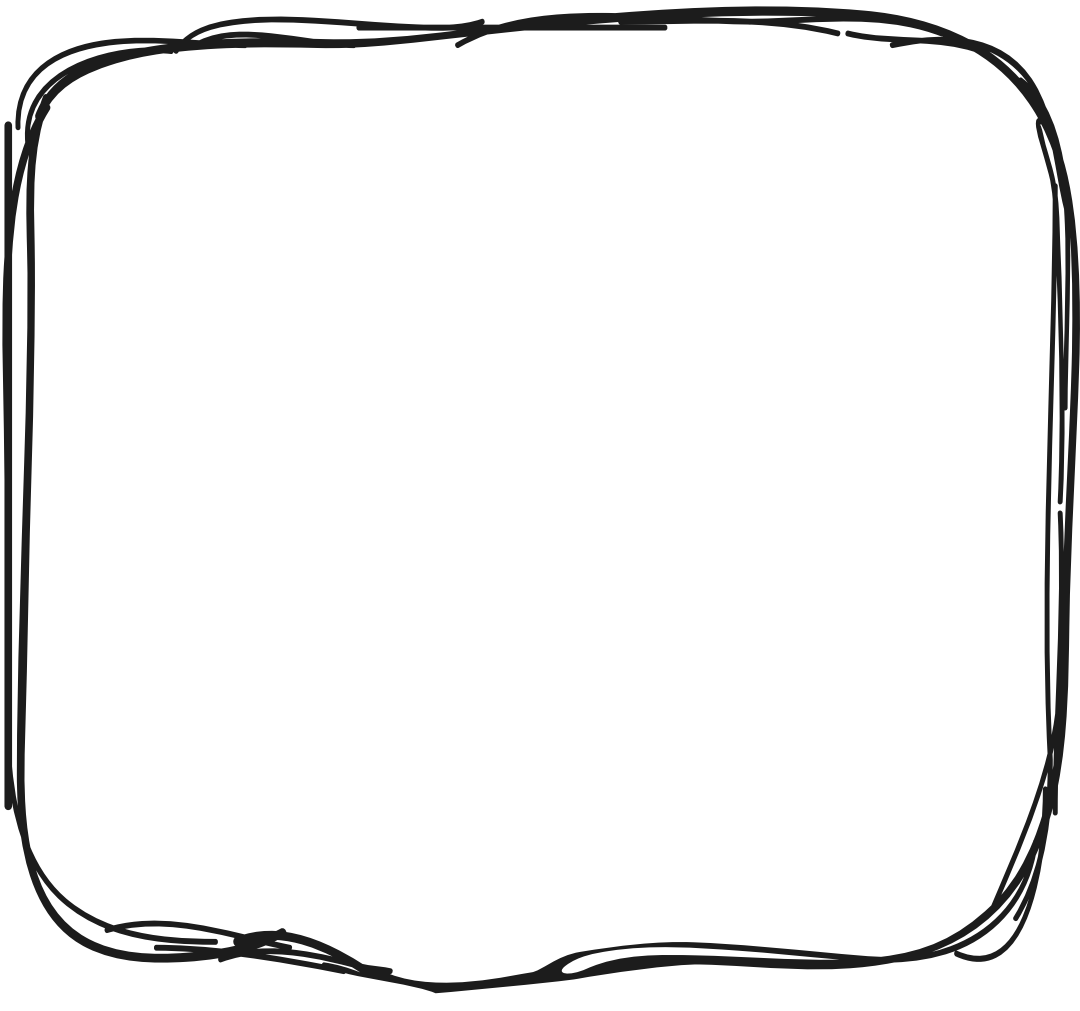
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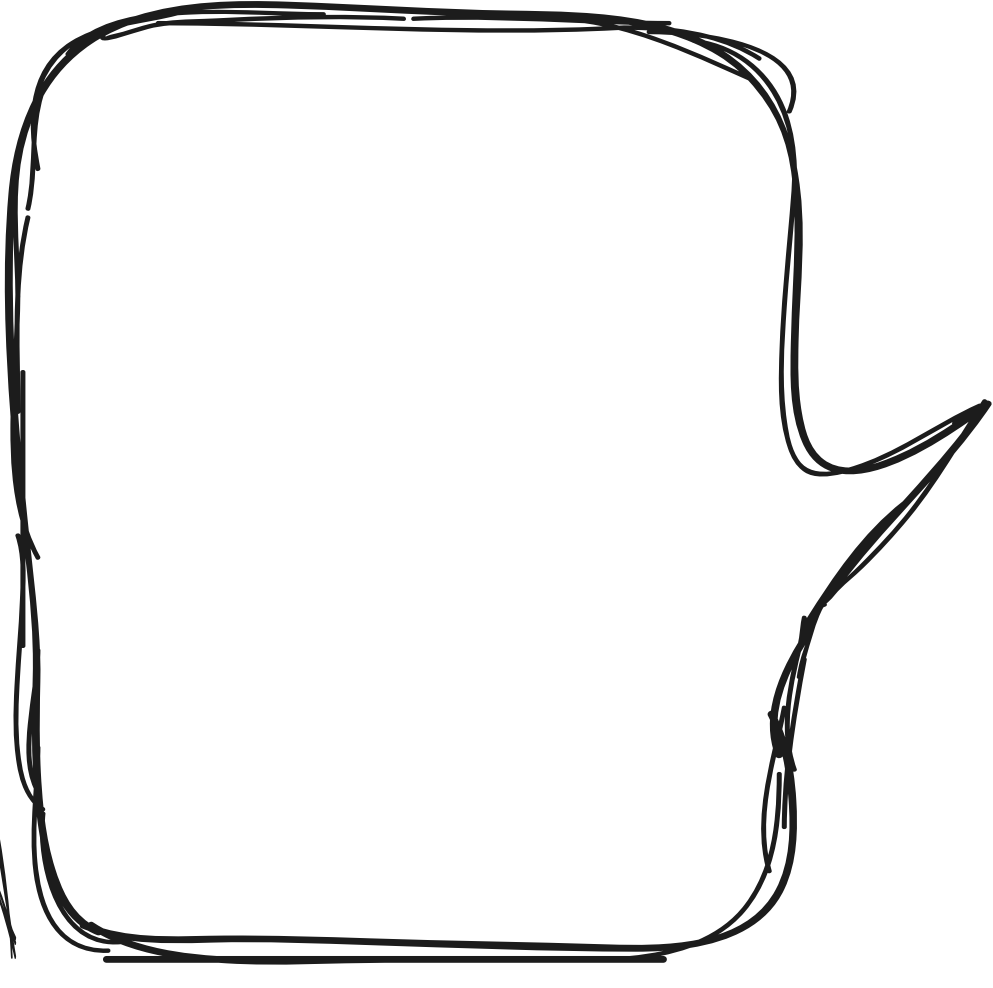
Kids Alive! The UK's only weekly Christian comic – is filled with jokes, competitions, Bible-based cartoons and much more... and is now available to read online!



My prayer for God's guidance



What's it like to have a friend in Jesus?



Explore It

FOR LEADERS



TRAVEL TO THE TEMPLE

Luke 2:41-52 Jesus as a boy

Jesus travelled with his family to the Temple to take part in the Passover festival. On their way home Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was missing. In today's session we find out where Jesus was and how we can follow his example as we journey through our own lives.

Each child will need:

- Small slips of paper
- Pens/pencils and paper

You will need:

- A small container, large sheets of paper or a large wipe board
- Flip chart paper and pens

Start It

- **Say:** In today's story Jesus went on a journey with his friends and family to Jerusalem. Imagine you are going on a trip. Have a think about the kinds of things you might take on a trip but don't share them with the rest of the group.

Play a game of Pictionary using the children's ideas for things you would take on a trip. Ask the children to write one idea on each slip of paper. Depending on your group it might be a good idea to prepare some of your own as well! Put all the clues in a container and let the children take turns drawing the travel item and see if the rest of the group can guess what it is. Draw on large sheets of paper or a wipe board.

Sing It

- **Say:** In today's story Jesus and his family travel to Jerusalem to take part in the Festival of Passover. This was a time of celebration for the Jewish people. Our song for today reminds us how important it is to spend time praising God and hopefully will bring a big smile to your face.

'Praise ye the Lord hallelujah' (new version) by Listener Kids (Stop the clip at 1 min 41 secs)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuODF9Kbgnw

Tell It

- **Say:** Over the past few 'Explore It' sessions we have:
 - travelled with the wise men to visit Jesus,
 - travelled with Joseph and Mary to Egypt as they tried to keep Jesus safe,
 - travelled to Nazareth where Jesus and his family made their home.

Today we will make a different journey with Jesus. We find this part of the story in chapter two of the book of Luke. Jesus and his family had travelled with a huge crowd of friends and family to take part in the Jewish Festival of the Passover.

Read:

'Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the [Festival of the Passover]. When Jesus was 12 years old, they went to the [festival] as they always did. When the [festival was] over, they went home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Joseph and Mary travelled for a whole day. They thought that Jesus was with them in the group. Then they began to look for him among their family and friends, but they did not find him.'

— (Luke 2:41-45 ICB)

Ask:

- How do you think your family would react if they suddenly discovered you were missing?
- What would they say, and what would they do?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph reacted when they discovered Jesus wasn't with the group?

Read:

'So they went back to Jerusalem to look for him there. After three days they found him. Jesus was sitting in the Temple with the religious teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and wise answers. When Jesus' parents saw him, they were amazed. His mother said to him, "Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I were very worried about you. We have been looking for you."

— (Luke 2:45-48 ICB)

Ask: How many days was it before they noticed Jesus was gone?

💬 **Say:** In our modern-day society, it may seem terrible that Joseph and Mary didn't realise Jesus was missing until a whole day had passed, but families and friends would often travel together and take care of each other. Once they discovered that Jesus was missing, they began the search and found Jesus in the Temple.

Ask:

- Do you understand why Mary and Joseph were so upset with Jesus? If so, why?
- What explanation do you think Jesus had for staying at the Temple?

Read:

'Jesus asked, "Why did you have to look for me? You should have known that I must be where my Father's work is!" But they did not understand the meaning of what he said. Jesus went with them to Nazareth and obeyed them. His mother was still thinking about all that had happened. Jesus continued to learn more and more and to grow physically. People liked him, and he pleased God.'

— (Luke 2:49-52 ICB)

💬 **Say:** The Temple in Jerusalem played an important part in the story of Jesus. When Jesus was a small baby, he travelled with his family to meet Simeon and Anna. Watch the clip to see how that first visit to the Temple is connected to today's story.

Video

Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2) by Saddleback Kids (3 mins 15 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho_3gviWzbw

Ask: Why was the Temple such a special place for Jesus?

💬 **Say:** Although Jesus could always be with his heavenly Father, the Temple was a special place where he felt at home. He spent time there to learn and grow.

Ask: How does your church help you to learn and grow?

Action It

Ask:

- How else do you grow as a Christian?
- Who are the people who help you to grow and learn like Jesus did?

Discuss with the children all the different ways they grow as Christians and what we can learn from Jesus in today's story. Jot down all their ideas on some flip chart paper.

Imagine

Ask the children to imagine a game that helps people to discover how to grow as Christians. This could be a board game, a starter game for an 'Explore It' session, or they could imagine what it would look like as an app or computer game. The children can use this opportunity to get creative. They may wish to draw some of their ideas.

While they are thinking through and discussing their ideas, there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss what it means to grow in Jesus but also clarify any misconceptions. For example, when it comes to growing as a Christian, is there a game to win or are we travelling on a journey just like Jesus did? Give the children time to plan their ideas (the more creative, the better) and share them with the rest of the group.

- 🗨️ **Say:** The main aim of the life of a Christian is to follow Jesus and be like him. Our memory verse reminds us that we can only do that if Jesus is living within us. Let's share our memory verse together.

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

Pray It

- 🗨️ **Say:** For our prayer time today, we are going to sing together. This song is a prayer to God where we tell him how much we want to be like Jesus.

Video

'Just like you' by Kids Praise 3 (3 mins 14 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftUadO6vaAU

- 🗨️ **Say:**

Dear God,

Help us to follow the example of Jesus.

We want to grow in our faith and become more like you.

Help us to travel through our lives with you as our guide.

Amen.

Explore It

Remember to send home the *Explore It Ideas* for children and families.

Explore It

IDEAS

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.

JANUARY
SESSION 03

TRAVEL TO THE TEMPLE

 Luke 2:41-52 Jesus as a boy

FOR ME

TOGETHER



Watch

Watch the clip to remind you of today's story.

Jesus teaches in the Temple (Bible Heroes of Faith episode 3) by Bible Kids

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYMcR6HFpL4

What do you learn about following Jesus from this clip?



Create

Create a game for your family to play on a trip. Think about the mode of transport you use the most and keep that in mind when you create the game. Teach it to the rest of your family and play it on your next trip together.



Song for the week

'Praise ye the Lord hallelujah' (new version)
by Listener Kids

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuODF9Kbgw



Memory verse

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

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Explore It

FOR LEADERS



TRAVEL TOWARDS THE RIVER JORDAN

Matthew 3:1-6,13-16 Jesus is baptised by John

In today's session we travel with Jesus to the River Jordan and find John the Baptist waiting for him. We will explore what it means to be baptised and discuss why The Salvation Army chooses not to baptise. Our final session brings together the journey of Jesus from birth through to starting his ministry as a grown man.

Each child will need:

- Resources to create a large story picture – see Action It section

You will need:

- To display the Covenant Sunday prayer or share copies of the prayer card
www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/covenantsunday2023

Start It

- **Say:** On Friday 3 February it is the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's Number Day, a day to fundraise while enjoying maths challenges. You may be taking part in this special day at your school. For today's starter you will need to use your maths and concentration skills to help you.

Decide on a number that you are going to count to. Let's say 21 for this example. Ask the children to make a circle and ask one child to start the counting. That child should say 'one', then the next child should say 'two', and so on clockwise around the circle. The child who says '21' gets to decide on a new word for one of the numbers, an item that you would take on a journey together. Eg number three = passport).

Next, the counting starts again, but this time instead of saying 'three', the children should say 'passport'. If a child forgets, and says 'three', then the counting starts again at one. If they count to 21 without making a mistake, then they choose another number to replace with a travel word. The children will need to use all their skills of concentration once there are a few travel words have replaced the numbers.

Sing It

- **Say:** Today's story is all about John the Baptist. He pointed the way to Jesus and encouraged people to follow him. Our song for today is an invitation for us to do just that.

'Follow Jesus' by Superbook (3 mins 02 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mwtGTJkGbM

Tell It

- **Say:** Last month we discovered more about the Christmas story, and we learned about two women who gave birth to baby boys.

Ask: What were their names?

🗨️ **Say:** Mary was visited by an angel and was told that she would give birth to Jesus. But a few months before that, an angel visited another person.

Ask: Can you remember who it was and what happened?

Encourage the children to retell the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah found in Luke 1.

🗨️ **Say:** When the angel visited Zechariah, he had important news to share about the child.

Read:

‘But the angel said to him, “Zechariah, don’t be afraid. Your prayer has been heard by God. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son. You will name him John. You will be very happy. Many people will be happy because of his birth. John will be a great man for the Lord. He will never drink wine or beer. Even at the time John is born, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will help many people of Israel return to the Lord their God. He himself will go first before the Lord. John will be powerful in spirit like Elijah. He will make peace between fathers and their children. He will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking. He will make people ready for the coming of the Lord.”’

— (Luke 1:13-17 ICB)

🗨️ **Say:** Just as with Jesus, God had a special plan for John the Baptist even before he was born.

Video

The baptism of Jesus by Saddleback Kids (1 min 50 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VMNO2MAMwA

🗨️ **Say:** Throughout this month, we have met many people who travelled to see Jesus. We met people who followed a star in the East and people who searched for him in the Temple. John the Baptist’s main purpose was to guide people on their journey toward Jesus.

Ask: How did John the Baptist lead the way to Jesus?

🗨️ **Say:** John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the Son of God and wanted as many people as possible to follow him. He baptised people in the Jordan River, and when Jesus came to visit, he baptised him as well.

Ask: But what is baptism?

The following section aims to teach the children about baptism in the context of the whole Christian Church and discuss why The Salvation Army chooses not to baptise.

🗨️ **Say:** You may have Christian friends at school who have been baptised or christened. Different denominations dedicate themselves to God in different ways. So, what does it mean to be baptised or christened?

Video

Baptism for Kids! What happens at a baptism? by Twinkl Teaching Resources (5 mins 16 secs)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHTtHHdzgZs

🗨️ **Say:** The Salvation Army chooses not to baptise with water because we believe that the Holy Spirit does the job represented by the water used in baptism. If a member of The Salvation Army wants to be baptised they can do this at another church, but it is not something that we do in our meetings.

🗨️ **Say:** Instead of a child’s christening, The Salvation Army has a ceremony where babies are dedicated to God. As they grow up, there are different ways people can show that they are committed to God and believe in Jesus within The Salvation Army. But the most important thing is that we are all travelling on the same journey to be more like Jesus.

Action It

● **Say:** Over the past month, we have been on a special journey. We have watched Jesus grow from a tiny baby into a man ready to start his ministry.

Story picture

Explain to the children that they are going to create a large story picture that follows the journey of the characters we have met over the past month. Recap the sessions from this month to see which parts of the story need to be covered.

The picture could contain a large pathway for people to follow and track the different parts of the journey of Jesus from a baby to a full-grown man ready for ministry. The picture could also show the journeys of other characters within the story, eg the wise men returning home and John the Baptist going ahead of Jesus.

How you complete the story picture is up to you and depends on the resources you have available. You could use large sheets of paper and paint. Or perhaps mixed media like wool and fabrics, and make plasticine people. This is an opportunity for the children to be creative but also see that our journey with Jesus often has many twists and turns.

Once the picture is completed, discuss each part of the journey through the beginning of the life of Jesus.

● **Say:** The wise men chose to travel to see Jesus, and John the Baptist went ahead of Jesus to prepare the way. Today we are called to travel with Jesus as we journey through our lives.

● **Say:** Our memory verse reminds us that Jesus is always with us on that journey.

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

Pray It

● **Say:** In our first session this month, we shared a prayer of commitment to following Jesus throughout our lives. Let's have another look at the prayer.

Display the prayer from Covenant Sunday or share copies of the commitment card with the children.

Ask: The prayer asks God to help us bring love to this world and everyone in it. What do you think that looks like in our everyday lives?

● **Say:** You are just starting out on your journey with Jesus. Try to remember that, as you travel, the aim is to become more like him. Let's share the commitment prayer together.

Dear God,

Your love for me never ends, no matter what I do.

The amount of love you have for me is too much for me to understand!

I hope to get to know you better and show your love to others in everything I think, say and do.

I am going to write my name on this card to show that I want to be close to you and always have you in my heart.

Help me bring your love to this world and everyone in it.

Amen.

Explore It

Remember to send home the *Explore It Ideas* for children and families.

Explore It

IDEAS

Here are some ideas for you to explore at home.

JANUARY
SESSION 04

TRAVEL TOWARDS THE RIVER JORDAN

 Matthew 3:1-6,13-16 Jesus is baptised by John

FOR ME

TOGETHER



Watch

Spend time watching the journey of Jesus.

The journey of Jesus in 3½ minutes by Bible Society

www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9GSs5B-0yQ

What new things do you learn about Jesus from this clip?



Play

In today's session you learned how to play a new numbers game. Teach it to the people at home and have fun playing it together.



Song for the week

'Follow Jesus' by Superbook

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mwtGTJkGbM



Memory verse

'If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," then God lives in him. And he lives in God.'

— (1 John 4:15 ICB)

KIDS ALIVE! ONLINE

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/kidsalive>

Kids Alive! The UK's only weekly Christian comic – is filled with jokes, competitions, Bible-based cartoons and much more... and is now available to read online!

