

Paperless Christmas

The Adventures of Mary and Joseph – The Road Movie

Episode 3: The journey to Bethlehem

Introduction

The following lesson outline offers you a way to work through the story in the video with your class group. There are a variety of possible activities. There are also links to other related videos and to further web resources and books available from Barnabas.

Preparation

Download the episode and any associated videos in advance (www.paperlesschristmas.org.uk/downloads/) so that these are easily accessible to use on a whiteboard during the session. Print off a copy of the Bible story as well as the discussion starters and activity suggestions to be used with small groups.

Development

1. First Impressions – [The journey to Bethlehem](#)

Play this episode to the class. It tells the story of the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem from Nazareth. The demands of the Roman census meant that each head of the household had to return to his place of birth. Joseph was from Bethlehem.

Ask the class:

What did you like best about this episode?

What made you smile?

What did you find surprising?

What didn't seem to make sense?

What would you say was happening in this episode?

What must it have been like for Mary who was nine months pregnant by now?

What do you think was on Joseph's mind during the long, slow journey?

Which part of this story made the biggest impression on you?

2. Group work – when things are tough

Hand out the following discussion starters to small groups.

- What is the hardest thing you have had to cope with?
- How do you react when everything seems to be against you?
- What is the best way that you have found to stay calm in a crisis?
- Talk about a time when you have been stuck for ages in traffic. How did you cope?
- Which is worse, worrying about yourself or worrying about a friend?
- How long can you cope when things are tough before you give up?

Allow ten minutes for this and then ask one child per group to report back on what they talked about and what ideas they came up with.

3. The Story in the Bible

Read the Bible story for episode 3. You will find this below in the Contemporary English Version (CEV). There is also an easy-to-read retelling of this story in [The Barnabas Schools' Bible](#), story 246.

Luke 2:1-3

The Birth of Jesus

About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. These first records were made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed.

Here is a [word search](#) based on this reading.

Talk about the Bible story:

- What is in the Bible story that is not in the video? What is in the video that is not in the Bible story? Does the video help you understand the Bible story better? Which parts of the Bible story do you find puzzling?
- I wonder what it felt like to live under the Roman occupation? I wonder what it felt like for Joseph to have to take Mary on such a long journey in her condition? I wonder how helpless they felt in the face of the power of the Roman Empire and its laws, which had to be obeyed?

4. A Carousel of Group Activities

- Paul says something intriguing about the Christmas story in one of his letters. It's really his only direct reference to Christmas. Read Galatians 4:4.

He says that Jesus came 'when the time was right'.

List some of the aspects of the particular time and place when Jesus was born that you know of. Why might that make this the right time for God to send Jesus?

- Find out about travel in Roman times, using reference books from the library or the web. How would a poor couple like Joseph and Mary probably have travelled?
- Find a map of modern Israel/Palestine. What might be the route from Nazareth to Bethlehem? What modern cities and towns are en route? Find out about this journey: how far is it? Are there any problems with the route? How long would it take to walk it, averaging about three miles an hour (remember Mary was pregnant) and travelling for about seven hours a day?
- What sorts of dangers might they encounter on the way? Write an illustrated, imaginative diary of the journey. You can choose to write it either from Joseph's or from Mary's point of view.
- In the video, it is clearly very hot weather. Find out from the web what the climate is like in that part of the world. It was in fact probably summer, not winter (when we traditionally celebrate Jesus' birth) as the Roman census would have been scheduled for the best time of year for travelling.
- Do a survey of your class, finding who would have to travel where, if the rule was that every family had to return to the father's birthplace to complete an official census. What travel problems might we all face if this really did happen for us?

5. Classroom Drama Ideas

Play the video [Choosing where to be born](#). This is a reflective piece on the contrast between where people expect great leaders to come from in contrast with what happened in Jesus' case. Use this introduction to prompt some drama exercises:

- Put God in the [hot seat](#) - why did God choose the little village of Bethlehem and not some great city or some grand palace for his Son? (Hint: Look up Micah 5:2-5 for one reason.)
- In pairs act out the dialogue between Mary and Joseph as they are in the queue of traffic. You could try introducing other characters with their opinions, including the man from the car in

front, who has got out and is wandering up and down the line; a passing cyclist; a passing pedestrian.

6. Final reflection questions looking back on the session

- How might your life have been different if you had been born elsewhere? Perhaps in another country or at another time in history?
- Why do you think it might be important that the Christian story begins in a stable and not a stately home?
- The majority of the world's population lives in crowded, urban areas and often in poor housing. Does this help make sense of the Christmas story or does it make it even more irrelevant?
- There is much debate as to exactly where Jesus might have been born: in a cave outside Bethlehem; in the lower part of a peasant Bethlehem home; or at the back of a Bethlehem inn with the animals. Do you think it matters when and how Jesus was born?

7. Further web links and useful Barnabas books

- [Lesson outline: Mary and Joseph's Journey – Foundation](#)
- [Lesson outline: Jesus is born – Foundation](#)
- [Mary and Joseph's journey – early years](#)
- [Jesus is born – early years](#)

Useful Barnabas books

[Silent Night](#)

[Who's Hiding?](#)

[Countdown to Christmas with Timothy Bear](#)

[Joseph's Story of Christmas](#)

[Our Christmas Play](#)

[Emmanuel... assemblies for Christmas](#)

[Easy Ways to Christmas Plays 1](#)

[Nursery Rhyme Nativities](#)

[Bethlehem Carols Unpacked](#)

[Easy Ways to Christmas Plays Volume 2](#)

[Getting Ready for Christmas](#)

[Make & Do Christmas Puppets](#)

[Make & Do Christmas Cards & Crib](#)

[Christmas Make & Do](#)

[Have you seen Christmas?](#)

[The Road to Christmas Day](#)

[The Christmas Journey](#)

8. Play Episode 3 again to finish off the lesson and as a taster to the next session