



Introduction

The story of Christmas is celebrated by Christians all around the world. Although many of our western Christmas traditions and carols can be found across the globe, nevertheless a number of countries and cultures mark the mystery of God coming to live on earth by using unique imagery and customs familiar to their own people.

Preparation

The following idea explores how Christians in the Philippines celebrate this season focusing on a nativity set, a song, a prayer, a Bible story and an activity from that part of the world. It could be used as part of a special feature in a carol service, become the focus for a Christmas assembly, or be used as an element in a global Christmas project for your classroom during the weeks of Advent.

You will need:

- rice cakes for the suggested activity;
- picture of a Filipino nativity, either printed or projected on to a screen
- ten craft sticks, coloured cellophane, glue, red and green tinsel, and a piece of string for the craft activity;
- instrumental music for 'Joy to the world'.

There is a retelling of this story in The Barnabas Children's Bible (story 195).

Further resources on the theme of Christmas around the world can be found in [Where in the World?](#) (pp. 47-50). See also two other related ideas [A Ugandan Christmas](#) and [A Peruvian Christmas](#).

Development

Background

- The Philippines is a country in the Far East, made up of over 7000 islands.
- It is the only Asian country, the majority of whose population are Christians.
- It is said that Filipinos celebrate Christmas the longest of any nation - the first carols can be heard on 1st September and Christmas doesn't end until 6th January.
- 'Happy Christmas' in Tagalog, the majority language, is 'Maligayang Pasko'. Pasko is also the word for Easter, which underlines the vital link between these two important Christian festivals.
- In the days leading up to Christmas, there are special services in the middle of the night, starting at 4 am. The final one is called the Mass of the Rooster.
- The grandma ('Lola') of the family is especially honoured in Filipino households.
- On Christmas morning, children and adults pay their respects to grandparents and

godparents.

- They have a special greeting, the 'mano', which involves the younger person taking the back of the elder's hand and politely bringing it to touch the younger person's forehead.
- Some church groups go from door to door on Christmas Day, with two people dressed up as Mary and Joseph, accompanied by a brass band, a choir and lots of lanterns. Finally, after gathering the congregation in this way, everyone arrives at church.
- Rice cakes in various forms are very popular as part of a celebration meal, along with chicken and pork. They are sometimes sweetened with coconut milk, sugar and wrapped in banana leaves.

Activity suggestions

- Find the Philippines on a map or globe.
- Teach the Tagalog for 'Happy Christmas'.
- Practise the special way of greeting those who are older.
- Try rice cakes, maybe with honey or another sweet spread.

Nativity scene

Display the Filipino nativity picture. Such scenes are called 'belen' and many homes and churches will have their own version.

Talk about the picture with your assembly/class:

- What do they like about this nativity scene and what puzzles them?
- Why do they think there is a rainbow over Mary?
- Why aren't the wise men on camels?
- What other features are particular to this part of the world?

Suggested development

- If you were to design a nativity set that truly reflected life in the UK today, what features would you include?

Bible story

Over the centuries, many different countries have either occupied the Philippines or have exercised a huge influence over the country. This includes Spain, China, Malaya, Japan and America. Today, it is an independent nation. Similarly, the land of Palestine, where Jesus was born, has often been overrun by outsiders. Indeed, at the time of the first Christmas, it was an occupied territory as part of the Roman Empire. The following prophecy of Isaiah which is often read at Christmas links the birth of a special child to the freedom and independence that the nation of Israel longed for.

Read **Isaiah 9:2-7** together.

- What images of joy can you find in this story?
- What difference will the new baby make?
- Which parts of this reading might mean something special for the people of the Philippines?

Perhaps some children might be encouraged to find out more about the Philippines today.

Craft activity

The 'parol' is a special feature of Filipino homes in the Christmas season. Just about every home, as well as every shopping centre, has one of these five-pointed 3D stars on display. They are also carried in parades and there are competitions to make the best and most colourful. They used to have candles inside but now, for safety, they usually have an electric light at the centre. They are made from bamboo sticks and rice paper.

Make your own 2D parol using ten craft sticks arranged as a five-pointed star and stuck on to coloured cellophane cut to the dimensions of the star shape. Decorate this freely with pieces of red or green tinsel or streamers. When dry, attach a looped piece of string to one point so that it can be hung up in a window to let the light shine through.

A song

Display the following words in Tagalog for 'Joy to the world'. Go over it, syllable by syllable, and then have a go at singing this Filipino version of the carol to the music.

*O mag-saya at mag-di-wang
Pag-ka't sumi-lang na
Ang Hari ng la-(a)hat*

*Ang Hari ng la-(a)hat
Kay-a't a-ting buk-san*

*Kay-a't a-ting buk-san
Ang pinto ng a ting pag-mam-a-hal*

An idea for writing prayers

Being together as an extended family is a very important part of a Filipino Christmas. Use the letters of the word 'pasko' to write your own Christmas prayer for all those who will be far from home and loved ones this Christmas. Here is an example to get you started:

P - Please...

A - Accept...

S - Speak...



K - Keep...

O - Open...