



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. The following idea explores how Christians in Peru celebrate this season focusing on a nativity set, a song, a prayer, a Bible story and an activity from that part of the world.

The following idea 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.

Preparation

You will need:

- fruit cake and/or raisin bread for the suggested activity;
- picture of a Peruvian nativity, either printed or projected on to a screen – for a picture, [see our Flickr album](#).
- matchboxes, air-drying clay and paints for the craft activity;
- instrumental music for 'Joy to the world'.

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 Filipino Christmas](#).

Development

Background

- Peru is on the west coast of South America, bordering the Pacific Ocean, with Ecuador to the north and Chile to the south. Colombia, Brazil and Bolivia are to the east.
- Christmas celebrations in Peru are a combination of traditions brought over from Spain and the traditions of the Native American Indians.
- Christmas was first celebrated in Lima, the capital, in 1535.
- The festival is marked by street processions with statues of the Virgin Mary, church services, sometimes fireworks and certainly plenty of salsa dancing.
- Many families have a picture or model of the Christ child in their homes. Traditionally, the baby Jesus has a thorn in his foot to remind people of the day he died on a cross to rescue the world.
- Nativity sets are common and families regularly add new pieces, representing contemporary figures from their community, such as the local baker or the ice-cream maker. Sometimes the wise men are depicted as arriving on llamas.

- Figures for these nativities are bought at the huge Christmas markets in a town called Santurantikuy(which means the place to buy the saints).
- Jesus is known as El Nino Manuelito – the newborn one, who is Emmanuel.
- Manger scenes are traditionally carved by the Quechua Indians, out of wood or from the local white alabaster stone (Huamanga).
- Christmas Eve is known as Noche Bueno (the good night) and this is when the main meal, the church service and the celebrations happen.
- Happy Christmas in Peru is ‘Feliz Navidad’.
- When visiting friends and family, it is customary to take cake. Two delicacies are Chancacacake (a sponge cake topped with sweets) and Paneton (a bread with dried fruits). Hot chocolate is the drink of choice to accompany both.

Nativity scene

Display the Peruvian nativity picture. Portable Peruvian nativity scenes are known as ‘retablos’ and are very popular. This custom dates back to the time of the first Spanish missionaries who would carry small altars around with them for festival days. These gradually developed into portable boxes with saints above the altar and scenes from everyday life below it. Now the retablos depict Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, with local people crowding around.

Talk about the picture with your assembly/class:

- What do they like about this nativity set and what puzzles them?
- Pottery nativity figures are very common in Peru. Why do you think it is important that they are painted so brightly?

Families in Peru often make or buy new figures for their nativity sets.

- Who from everyday life in your part of the world today would you include?
- What do you think this has to do with Christmas?

Bible story

The first missionaries to Peru taught the people to call Jesus ‘Emmanuel’, which means ‘God with us’. The fact that God chose to become a person and to live a human life with all its pains and troubles is a key part of Christian teaching, and this seems to have made a deep impression on the Native American Indians. They had once been a proud people with their wealthy Inca Empire but were now conquered, so a God who comes alongside ordinary, lowly people was a God they could believe in.

Read **Isaiah 7:10-14** and **Matthew 1:20-25** together. Joseph didn’t know what to do when he discovered that Mary was having a baby. He needed a sign from God. He heard God speaking in a dream in which he was reminded of what had happened long ago as a sign for King Ahaz.

- Do you think it is right to ask God for signs?



- What is so special about the name Emmanuel?

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

Craft activity

Miniature nativities are very popular in Peru. [Infinite Crafts](#) have a simple kit for making such a miniature nativity - you can purchase 10 for £1. Or you could try making your own tiny set to fit into a matchbox, using air-drying clay for the little figures, which you can then paint in bright colours.

A song

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

*Al mundo Paz, nació Jesús
nació ya nuestro Rey,
el corazón ya tiene luz,
y paz su Santa Grey,
y paz su Santa Grey,
y paz, y paz su Santa Grey.*

*Al mundo Paz, el salvador
en Tierra reinará
ya es feliz el pecador
Jesús perdón le da
Jesús perdón le da
Jesús, Jesús perdón le da.*

A prayer

The pan pipes are a Peruvian wind instrument with a distinctive sound. In this genre, listen to the following music from the web and use it to create space for some quiet prayer: [A Peruvian Prayer](#).

Christmas can be a very difficult time for some people. Perhaps the word 'Emmanuel' with its special meaning could be the basis for a prayer that remembers all those for whom Christmas can be a sad reminder of what they don't have. Ask children in your class who this might mean, and compile a list on display - for example:

People who are feeling lonely...

People who have lost someone precious...



People living on their own...

For a prayer time, ask for volunteers to chip in with suggestions from the board:

'Father God, we remember...' ('People who are...') and each time all say *'Emmanuel'* as a refrain.