

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 Uganda 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 in school or be used as an element in a global Christmas project for your classroom during the weeks of Advent.

Preparation

You will need:

- passion fruit, sweet potatoes and green matokebananas, available in international food outlets in the UK, for the suggested activity;
- picture of a Ugandan nativity, either printed or projected on to a screen
- glue, paintbrushes, plain fabric, cold water dye, rubber gloves, bowls, garden twist and a strong plastic bag for the craft activity;
- instrumental music for 'Joy to the world'.

Development

Background

- Uganda is known as the 'pearl of Africa' because of its shape and position in that continent.
- Of Uganda's 34 million population, very many are Christians - greetings of 'praise God' and 'hallelujah' are regularly exchanged between friends on the streets. It is more usual to talk about one's faith than the weather.
- Ugandan people are very generous hosts, even though this may often not leave very much for themselves. There are extremes of wealth and poverty, with great contrasts between life in the cities and in the countryside.
- The largest area of fresh water in Africa, Lake Victoria, lies in the south-east of Uganda. The Nile - Africa's longest river - passes through Uganda providing water, transport, food and electricity. Tourists also visit it to see the crocodiles, hippos and the many beautiful waterfalls.
- Uganda's official language is English. Other languages include Kiswahili and Lugandan.
- In 2012, Uganda celebrates the 50th anniversary of its independence from Britain.
- Everything stops for the Christmas celebrations - rooms are 'spring-cleaned', houses painted and new clothes bought.
- Christmas is not just about presents but sharing love and food, and family get-togethers.

- Everyone tries to have a chicken for the Christmas meal - usually smoked, seasoned and steamed in banana leaves.
- The weather at Christmas is often hot and humid.
- Homes are decorated with green paper and ribbons.
- The Christmas greeting in Lugandan is 'Seku Kulu'.

Activity suggestions

- Learn the Christmas greeting from Uganda, accompanying it with a handshake - which lasts a long time!
- Collect and taste some typical foods from Uganda - passion fruit, sweet potatoes, green matoke bananas - Uganda is sometimes known as the fruit basket of Africa.
- Make Uganda Christmas cards with wildlife scenes alongside the stable in Bethlehem and the words 'Webale Krismasi'.

Nativity scene

Display the Ugandan nativity picture - this crib set can be obtained from Uganda Direct via www.krdp.org.

Talk about the picture with your assembly/class:

- What do they like about this nativity scene and what puzzles them?
- Why might the shepherds be especially important in this scene?
- What sort of gifts are the wise men bringing?
- What other features are particular to this part of the world?

Focus on the gifts of the wise men:

- If you were bringing three useful gifts for Jesus from your part of the world, what would these be?
- What gifts would you choose today that symbolised what you think about who Jesus is - a king, someone who brings people close to God, someone who understands suffering?

Bible story

The history of the Christian faith in Uganda is only about 150 years old. Its national Church has been through some testing times:

- In 1884, Bishop James Hannington was killed along with his African porters.
- Some years later, young converts faced death by fire and are remembered today as the first African martyrs.
- In 1977, Bishop Janani Luwum was murdered because he spoke out bravely against the injustice of the government of his day.



Today, Uganda is a relatively stable and peaceful country, leading the way in this part of Africa. Bringing various tribal groups to work together peacefully is always a challenge, and the promise of peace through the birth of Jesus, is an important message for all Ugandans every Christmas.

Read **Micah 5:2-5** together: Bethlehem is to be the place where a new ruler will be born.

- What will he be like?
- What will he do?
- Why might the language of this passage be especially helpful to many Christians in Uganda?

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

Craft activity

Uganda is well known for a number of indigenous skills, including batiks, basket-making and decorative bark cloth.

The following idea for making your own batik pictures would need to be done over two sessions.

Using a paintbrush dipped in white glue, draw bold geometric shapes or stick figures on to a piece of plain fabric. When the glue is completely dry, prepare a cold water dye according to the package directions and, wearing rubber gloves, put the material into the bowl and leave for about 20 minutes. Take it out and leave to dry again. Only the areas covered with glue will remain white after the material is dyed. Finally, wash the fabric in soapy water until the glue is gone. Dry and iron.

Alternatively, try some simple basket-making: create a frame from pieces of garden twist stretched out as a many-pointed star but joined firmly at the centre. Cut a strong plastic bag into lots of long thin strips and weave these in and out of the garden twist. Make sure you pack the weave tightly as it develops and also begin to shape the whole into the shape of a small basket or bowl that is eventually secured by another piece of twist tied around the circumference at the top.

A song

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

*Fur-ah-a kwa- ulim-wengu
Bwa-na ame-kuja;
Ny-ote m-kar-ib-isheni,
Mi-oyo yenu na m-peni;
Wo-te wan-shan-gil-ie,
Wo-te wan-shan-gil-ie,
Na wo-te, na wo-te- wam-shan-gil-ie.*

A prayer



Here is a prayer used in Uganda:

Blessed are you, O Christ Child, that your cradle was so low that shepherds, poorest and simplest of earthly people, could kneel beside you and look, level-eyed, into the face of God.

(Anon)