

Introduction

Christians believe that Jesus reflected most perfectly the light of God: 'He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of this nature' (Hebrews 1:3, RSV). He was the approachable light of God for people on earth, enabling them to come close to God, who is the 'Father of all lights' (James 1:17) and the one who otherwise 'in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen nor can see' (1 Timothy 6:16, NIV).

Jesus calls himself the light of the world. Christians believe that this is the light that enters into the deep darkness of Easter and emerges triumphant, enabling his followers to become the children of light. From the little light in the hay in the Bethlehem manger, through the dazzling light on the Mount of Transfiguration, to the light of the resurrection morning, Jesus reflected the light of heaven on earth. This is the theme of this outline with activities linked to aspects of the life of Jesus: his birth, his healings, his transfiguration and his death and resurrection.

Development

1. Compare the brightness of different sorts of light, including:
the light of a match, the light from a candle, the light from a torch, the light from various bulbs (40, 60, 80, 100 watt) and a flash bulb. Intensity of light is measured in lumens (*lumenis* the Latin for light).
Now ask the group to use their imaginations to think how much brighter the sun's light is at close quarters to that of any of the other giant stars in the universe.
Christians believe that the light of God reflected in the lives of people is like these 'lesser' lights compared to the full-blown light of God that shines in Jesus.

And yet we also use the word 'light' in another sense - something not heavy but easy to carry. Christians believe that Jesus *is* the full-blown brightness of God's light but when he came to earth he did not blind people with that light; they were able to bear it. Jesus is God's approachable light.

2. Play some light and dark games:
 - project a light onto a wall and then introduce a variety of silhouettes of different objects and animals or even cut out an outline from a photograph of someone the children might know. Can they guess what or who each silhouette is? Christians believe that God's light in Jesus shows up what they are truly like.
 - using blindfolds, challenge the children to accomplish certain tasks without being able to see what they are doing. Then allow them to do the task again but this time with guidance from a friend, who can see. Christians believe that God's light in Jesus helps them to find their way in life.
 - divide into teams and play a picture-guessing game, where one person at a time from each team goes to the leader to get a light-related word, which they must then go back to draw for the others to guess.
 - challenge the group to create some group sculptures of different light-related objects.

- ask a group work out a «page:freeze-frames=783» of a situation in which light is very important. For example: exploring a dark cave; attracting the attention of rescuers from a lifeboat at sea; putting on a play in a theatre. Then challenge the group to re-create the freeze-frame showing what happens if the lights go out.
3. Christians believe that God turned on the brightness of his approachable light when Jesus was born in this world. In one of the prophecies from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, you can read what this arrival will be like.
- Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.
Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*
- Isaiah 60:1-3 (NIV)

This light was first sung about on the hillside by the angels, then seen in the hay of the manger by the shepherds and also treasured in the hearts of Mary and Joseph.

Create a group collage to explore this understanding of Christmas by using bright yellow and black paper or yellow and black paints to illustrate:

- the sun breaking out over the horizon
 - the bright lights of the angelic choir on the hillside
 - the glow from the stable in the back streets of Bethlehem
 - the breaking out of light in many places on a dark circle of the earth
4. Jesus shone light into the lives of all the people he met, bringing them healing, hope and wholeness. Perhaps the best illustration of this meeting with the light is seen in the opening of blind eyes that happened again and again.

Read together the story of blind Bartimaeus in Luke 18:35-43.

It's a great story to act out as a group with the loud shouting from Bartimaeus, the busy crowds milling around Jesus, the annoyed reactions of some of the people (including probably the disciples), Jesus' own words to Bartimaeus and the excitement of the healing.

Step into this story with your group and capture the amazement of God's light opening up blind eyes.

5. There's one moment when Jesus allows three of his followers to catch a glimpse of the true brightness of his light. It happens on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36).

Peter, James and John were overawed by the brightness of that light that shone through Jesus, who for a moment steps 'out of this world' and indeed 'out of time' to be seen standing with Moses and Elijah, both of whom also shone with God's light in their generation.

There are famous icons of this particular scene. Print one of these from the web or project it on your white board, and see what your children make of this mysterious incident. There are no shadows in icons. Instead, the light comes out from the person of Christ himself to enlighten us. It is such a special event that Jesus tells them not to talk about it until after the resurrection. Peter, we know, never forgot this experience - see 2 Peter 1:17-18.

6. A key verse for this part of the story of Jesus is John 8:12. Print this off in large block letters so the children can then use colours and materials of their own choice to interpret the words of this verse.
7. After this, the light of God in Jesus had to 'go out' for a while (see John 12:35-36), as it plunged into the darkest places of suffering and death on the cross on Good Friday.

To end this lesson and give an opportunity for reflection on all that has been done, light a series of seven candles and then extinguish them one by one, as you briefly retell each part of the story of what happened on that day.

1. He was betrayed.
2. He was put on trial.
3. He was mocked.
4. He was tortured.
5. He was condemned to death.
6. He was put on a cross.
7. He died.

Pause after each extinguishing of a candle and watch the smoke drift off slowly to give space for reflection.

But the light of Christ is stronger than death. Now produce a new, larger candle, which you should place in the middle of the others after repositioning them in a circle. On the 'eighth day' - often interpreted by Christians as the beginning of a new creation - the light of Christ came back forever.

Read the story of the resurrection from a children's Bible. Talk about why these stories are so special and important for Christians.