



## Introduction for teachers

What can nativity sets tell us about the significance of the Christmas story for Christians around the world?

## Preparation - videos and images

One of the videos and accompanying stills:

- **Vietnam**- [video on YouTube](#) and [still images on Flickr](#)
- **South America**- [video on YouTube](#) and [still images on Flickr](#)
- **Russia**- [video on YouTube](#) and [still images on Flickr](#)

To make the most of this lesson, your pupils will need to be familiar with key aspects of the nativity story. Our Barnabas Schools' Bible provides an excellent retelling. For an investigative lesson that compares traditional versions of the story with the Bible, see 'What happened in the original nativity story'?

## Introduction: Christmas?

What does the word 'Christmas' mean to you? It means different things to different people, but for Christians the whole festival is based on a crucial story called 'The nativity'. Why? Because it tells the story of God appearing 2,000 years ago as a tiny baby called Jesus.

For Christians that's a massive idea, because the baby grew up to do all sorts of amazing things, and Christmas marks the beginning of his story.

## Development: looking at nativity sets from around the world

Around the world, the story of the nativity is celebrated in many different ways. One way is to re-create the original scene of Jesus' birthplace with model figures. These can be of any size. Some nativity sets are placed in homes; others are put on display in churches, schools, market squares or shop windows. The individual figures can be made of all sorts of materials and portrayed in many different styles of dress and ethnic origin. See what you can discover in this video.

*Show the video.*

Afterwards, discuss with a partner and share your thoughts:

- Which was the most interesting set for you and why?
- How is it similar or different to any nativity sets you've already seen?
- What further questions might you have about it?

Nativity sets aren't just Christmas decorations. For Christians and others, they can be powerful symbols of God's love for ordinary people, the love that people have for each other, and the changes that the arrival of Jesus could be bringing into the world. There are many more types of nativity sets, and of course Christians around the world use them in different ways. It's a lot to do with how they think about Jesus.

## Activities

Choose one of the nativity sets to think and write about.

- On a picture of this nativity set, neatly label the different figures. Who are they? How do you know?
- Pick one of the human figures and describe it in a few sentences. How similar or different is it to others you have seen? What makes you absolutely sure that this character is the one you think it is?
- What is your favourite part of this set? Explain what it is and why you like it. Would the set still 'work' if that feature was missing? What important part does it play in the story?
- For Christians and many others, the nativity story has been important for hundreds of years because it features God being born as a human being. Some have remembered it because they believe it shows that:
  - God was interested in the lives of everyone.
  - Jesus' parents weren't important people.
  - Jesus wasn't born in a rich, safe, comfortable place.
  - The first people to be told of his birth weren't important people.
  - Joseph and Mary had a difficult time, being forced to leave their home to move to Bethlehem and, later, Egypt.
  - Jesus and his family were refugees, having to escape from a cruel king and his soldiers.
  - Jesus' family had the same problems as everybody else.

Which of these might make this story popular today, and why?

## Shoobox design challenge (for creative KS2 pupils)

Although Jesus was born into one family living in first-century Palestine in the time of the Roman Empire, Christians see him as God's gift to the whole world, so they are perfectly happy to re-create the scene to look as if it happened in their own time or country. How do you think we could show the story today, as if it was happening in 21st-century Britain?

Try to imagine a 'modern British' nativity set. What might we see instead of:

- a traditional 'stable', where the baby was born?
- the manger (animal feeding trough)?
- the shepherds coming to worship Jesus?



- angels?
- wise men or 'kings' and their gifts?

Using the inside of a shoebox or similar cardboard box, create your own modern nativity diorama of two-dimensional figures. What could your set be saying about the importance of Jesus today?

## **Plenary**

Discuss: would you want to have a nativity set in your home? Why?

## **Background information for teachers**

The story of the nativity is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Traditional retellings of the story often add to or omit certain features of the original story, and many nativity sets reflect this. In some cultures, traditional local figures are sometimes added to the scene to convey the idea of God making his home with everyone.