

Introduction

The season of Advent helps Christians not only to prepare for the celebration of the birth of Christ but also for his return. Between those two events lies the mystery of the cross and resurrection, which of course have been there since the beginning of time. For Christians, the cross reveals the depths of God's love for his creation and is God's unique signature over all that he has made. If we do not recognise this, it is possible to sentimentalise the Christmas story or sanitise the impact of the second coming. With this in mind the following outline offers a way that links the cross into the story of Advent and Christmas.

The following presentation is a simple, visual way to demonstrate the link between Christmas and Easter. The wooden planks that would have made up the manger become the wood that makes up the cross. Along the way there are other shapes that help tell the story of God's love in Jesus.

Preparation

You will need eight lengths of firm card or light planks of wood, as long as children can easily and safely handle them. Each piece should be about one metre in length and about a quarter metre wide. One side should be painted red and the other side a bright silver or yellow.

As a further development of this theme the famous story of the three trees would provide a useful compliment to this presentation. There are various published versions of this story.

Development

1. You will need to rehearse the different positions into which the eight pieces of wood or firm card are moved by the children. If possible they should wear dark clothing so that they more easily become background to the shapes they create and do not distract from them. The six different shapes are these:

i) The eight pieces should turn into a star (yellow or silver side), facing the congregation. This can be achieved by creating first an equal armed cross from four of the pieces and behind that a St. Andrew's style cross, where the four arms fill in spaces between the arms of the first cross. Some of those holding the different planks or pieces of card will need to sit or kneel down to make this possible.

ii) The same star shape is repeated but this time with the red side showing.

iii) The eight pieces now turn into a manger or crib shape (using the red side). Two legs splayed outwards at the bottom; two more pieces in a line above that to be the base of the manger; two further pieces for the sides to the manger, splayed slightly outwards and upwards from the manger's base; and finally the two remaining pieces across the top. Again everyone will need to work out where they should stand or sit to help create this shape.



iv) The pieces should now come together to make a table (red side) facing the congregation. Four of the pieces become legs, two either side, and the other pieces become a double layered tabletop.

v) Next the eight pieces become the cross on which Jesus died (red side) facing the congregation. Four of them create the upright with a double thickness, two on top of two, and the others create the two sides of the cross piece, one on one.

vi) Finally the star should be re-created as at the beginning but this time the equal armed cross at the centre should be in red and the St. Andrew's style cross behind be in yellow or silver.

2. You will need narrators to speak the words for this presentation. Choose those who can speak clearly and slowly and also be sensitive to the time taken to reshape the props for each section.

3. Here is the text for the presentation:

(yellow or silver star shape)

The Star maker smiled. It was just as he had planned it. Swirling galaxies, beautiful suns, myriads of planets and endless space. And most importantly light... bright, clean, pure light. Each star was named and numbered. Each part of the universe reflected his glory.

(red star shape)

But then the Star maker watched as one star with its solar system dawned. His face saddened as He saw how things gradually began to change. Something was wrong. Something about this star and its system would not shine as he had planned. A deep red stain had put out the light. It was no longer as it should be.

(red manger/crib shape)

The Star maker knew what he must do. He took off His own light and made himself very small. He descended into the emptiness and became a thing that he had made. He shared the experience of not being light. He awoke on a bed of straw and the people of that place called it Christmas.

(red table shape)

And the Star maker grew up. He tasted life in the place where the light had grown dim.

He began to shine back into it with his own inner light.

He made tables in a carpenter's workshop.

He sat around a family table in a poor home.

He was invited to meals with people of all sorts.

He shared the light of heaven with everyone he met.

And finally at a table in an upper room he taught them about bread and wine.

(red cross shape)



Then he went into a final battle with the darkness.
He took on all that was spoiled. He even let his own light eventually be put out.
The Star maker became the sin-breaker.
The One who made the stars became scarred,
so that he could bring back the light.

(red star centre on a yellow or silver star background)

This amazing story began at Christmas.
The Christmas star was only the star..T of the greatest rescue story ever.
And at the heart of the Bethlehem star you can see the reason for his coming.