

Introduction

The intended learning outcomes are that children will be able:

- to retell the story of the Magi accurately, according to Matthew chapter 2.
- to recognise the differences between the original story and later traditions
- to explore the beliefs expressed in the story and explain why this story is important to Christians
- to look at the idea of symbolism and explore some possible meanings for each of the gifts

Development

1. What do we already know?

Show a model of one of the Magi from a nativity set.

Ask: what is it? where would you find it? what occasion would you see it? why is it special to people?

This could be discussed in groups.

Explain that the figures are an astrologer and a religious leader, who was considered to be very wise. They were called Magi (we derive the word 'magic' from this title). There are Magi in the Christmas story. Have the children brainstorm all the things that they already know about the Magi/wise men.

2. Where do we find information about the Magi?

Recap on the brainstorm from the previous session. Ask the children to suggest where they could find information about the Magi (the Bible, carols, pictures, books).

From a carol:

Play a tape or look at the words of the Carol 'We Three Kings'. The children should record a picture of what the words/ music suggest to them after listening to the carol several times.

Look at the children's pictures. Ask the children where they might expect to find other information about these 'kings'?

From the Bible:

Read the story from the Bible (Matthew chapter 2 verses 1-12). Can they find references to kings? How many? Camels? Names? Or a stable? The children should record individually or as a class what they find from the Bible.

From pictures:

Look at a variety of Christmas cards and artists' pictures depicting the Magi. Discuss what the artists convey about the Magi and the significance of them within the story of Jesus' birth.

What do they think the people are saying? What is particularly cultural about these pictures? What is surprising? What do they like? What do they think is the most important part of each picture? What



don't they like? What would they leave out? What makes the image look special?

Children could write a caption for the pictures, answering some of these questions. As a group decide which picture is most/least accurate, referring back to the Bible story. Then decide which is most/ least liked and which is most/least special? Share this with whole class.

From a story:

Tell another story, which features the Magi - Baboushka or the video story 'A Lion for a King' (available from CMS -Church Mission Society) or 'The brave little camel',

3. Discuss the findings of these investigations.

Children can now do an individual sorting activity on a Venn diagram. Give the children a selection of statements (below) and have them sort them into whether they are Bible-based or part of tradition.

There were three wise men
They brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh
The visitors were kings
They visited Jesus and the family living in a house
They visited Jesus in the stable
The visitors were known as the Magi
The visitors came from three different continents
They came from the east
Their names are Melchior, Caspar, Balthazar
They followed an unusual star
The three wise men travelled on camels
They were looking for a new King
The visitors are called wise men
We do not know how many visitors came

The children could write their own version of the Magi story, using the evidence they have uncovered.

4. How can gifts be symbolic?

Show the sequence from the 'Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' or read the appropriate extract where Father Christmas gives the children gifts in preparation for the battle.

Discuss with the children the significance of these gifts. How are they symbolic? Discuss what Father Christmas means when he says 'These are not toys but tools'.

5. What might the Magi's gifts mean?

Remind the children of the Magi but focusing now on the gifts they are carrying - gold, frankincense and myrrh. If possible show pictures of these gifts or some small examples. Some shops



sell tea lights with the aroma of frankincense and myrrh. Talk through how these gifts might carry a secret meaning, i.e. be symbolic. How might they be 'tools'?

Discuss a range of possible meanings and allow each child to develop their own ideas, which can be recorded. What new meanings to the Christmas story might each child's chosen symbolism bring?