

On your marks

Advent is a time not only for getting ready to hear the story of the birth of Jesus once again but also the season to think about his second coming at the end of time. With all the hype and preparation for the Christmas festival this second aspect of Advent can sometimes be forgotten. The following presentation tries to combine the two ideas and is set within the context of thinking about our whole planet in the wider universe.

Get set

You will need some pictures to go alongside the different parts of the following presentation. You can download a [Power Point presentation](#) here.

Alternatively you will need:

- a picture of the earth in space
- a more detailed picture of the planet showing the large areas of water between the continents
- a picture that depicts some of the problems facing our planet today such as global warming, the advancing deserts, famine and disaster
- a dark picture of the planet where we seem to be shrouded in cloud and gloom
- a picture of the planet with the Christmas scene superimposed upon it with the manger visible
- a final picture of the planet surrounded by the glory of the risen Christ or a bright light suggesting the second coming.

There are various pictures of the world available on clip art from the computer and with careful selection you should be able to find a world picture to match each of the above situations.

Finally, you will need the letters e, a, r, t and h (that is, the letters that spell 'earth') cut out and mounted on a board so that the last letter (h) can be removed and put at the beginning to spell 'heart'.

Go!

The following words accompany the various pictures, which you have prepared beforehand.

1 At roughly 4,600 million years old, some 93 million miles from a star... which at 50 million degrees centigrade and about halfway through its life span is a fairly average star for the galaxy... and at 12,756 kilometres across, encased in an atmosphere of 70 per cent nitrogen and 21 per cent oxygen, we have, of course... **Planet Earth.**

show the first picture of the planet

2 Mind you, no alien visitor from outer space would ever be so stupid as to call this place we live...

Earth! It's a ridiculous name for a globe covered by over 70 per cent water. Surely any intelligent extra-terrestrial visitor would record in the ship's log that they had discovered... **Planet Water**. A water-filled planet bearing water-based life forms...including us!

show the second picture of the planet, where the emphasis is on the blue tracks of water between the continents

3 When our astronauts first left this earth they were quick to describe Planet Earth as a beautiful blue ball, hanging in the blackness of space. Certainly within our own solar system it is obvious that Planet Water - **the Blue Planet**- is unique because it has all the conditions that can produce life.

4 But that is not all that an alien visitor would discover, should he or she come across our world. Yes, it is the Water Planet and the Blue Planet but also sadly **the Dying Planet**.

show the third picture of the planet with the symptoms of self-destruction such as global warming, famines, advancing deserts and pollution

5 With its atmosphere crumbling over the poles and the sun's ultra violet rays free to bombard us and upset our climate, this world is in fact dying. Its deserts are advancing and the rain has turned acidic; 7 out of 10 people are unable to obtain clean water; oxygen supplies are threatened, as every minute the equivalent of 60 football pitches of forest are cut down; and more people have died of hunger on this planet over the last ten years than have been killed in all the wars and revolutions and murders in the past 150 years! There is no doubt about it... the Water Planet seems also to be the Doomed or Dying Planet.

6 Can you imagine the alien starship's on-board computer trying to make sense of all this incredible data? Why are these water-based humanoids letting this happen to their home? Why are they letting the Water Planet die? This beautiful Blue Planet seems doomed. Why? Because it is also **the Dark Planet**.

show the fourth picture of a globe shrouded in a dark, sinister cloud

7 There is a madness and a gloom that casts a terrible shadow over this beautiful world. A dark shadow that shows itself when people are prepared to plant bombs that kill or maim the innocent; a darkness that means that people take sides and shoot each other in crazy, suicidal civil wars; a gloom that means that even friends in a class or children's group fall-out and hurt each other all because of rumours, gossip and idle words. The Water Planet... the Blue Planet... the Dying Planet is also the Dark Planet.

8 But that is not the last word. There is something more. Christians believe that this world is also **the Visited Planet**

show the fifth picture of the world and superimposed upon it the scene in the stable in Bethlehem

9 Christians believe the Great Mastermind, whose idea the whole universe is, has visited us from



beyond. God came on a visit once. He came in disguise so he could get alongside us, understand us, help us and rescue us. He came as a baby and he grew up and experienced all the beauty and the ugliness of this crazy, dark, blue, water, dying planet.

10 Very soon we will be remembering again on Christmas Day that visit. But that isn't the end of the story. There is another description of our planet still to come. Christians don't just look forward to celebrating the first incredible visit at this time of year which we call Advent but they also look forward to an even more incredible return visit. We will be one day... **the Revisited Planet.**

show the sixth picture of the world caught in the glory of the resurrection or a bright light that suggests the second coming

11 While Jesus was here, he spoke about this second visit - this return visit - many many times. He promised it. He would definitely come back, he said. There would be signs but no one would know exactly when it would happen. There would be clues but even so many would be taken by surprise. In Advent Christians look forward to a promised second... not just the first coming of Christmas.

12 The Visited Planet will become the Revisited Planet. And, Christians believe, we all now live between the two visits, with time to make up our own minds about what it will mean for us. Christians believe that the only hope there is for the dark, dying planet earth is the visit and the return visit.

13 The only hope for Earth is if these visits don't just affect the earth but they touch our Heart

Turn the word 'Earth' into the word 'Heart' by taking the 'h' from the end and placing it at the beginning

A Christian in the Middle Ages once wrote that Christmas in Bethlehem could happen a thousand times but it would mean nothing until it happened inside our hearts. This is the only hope for Planet Earth to become again the beautiful place that God first created it to be.

One of Jesus' first followers, the apostle John, comforted his fellow Christians with these words about the return visit:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and earth had come to an end and there was no more sea...and I heard a loud voice from heaven's throne room that said, 'Look, God is now living alongside human beings again. He will live with them and they will be his friends and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will be no more dying, nor sadness nor pain, because all this will be gone for ever.'

Revelation 21:1, 3-4