



On your marks

After the events in Bethlehem at Christmas, Luke's first story about Jesus takes place in the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, Luke's Gospel starts and ends with events in the temple, and also includes several visits there in between. It was here that Jews believed that God was especially close to his people, so by associating it so often with Jesus - as a baby, as a boy, as an adult and in the final week of his life - Luke is making the point that Jesus is now the new temple and therefore the place to come close to God - and not just for Jews but for everyone in the whole world. This outline has ideas for exploring the story of Jesus when he was taken to the temple as a six-week-old baby.

Get set

You will need:

- a baby doll wrapped in a shawl
- some strong packing cases for steps
- some carpet rolls or something similar for temple columns
- a bath robe
- a granny shawl
- musical instruments
- some white felt
- two pillar candles
- a tea light.

You can find the story in Luke 2:22-40. There is a retelling of the story for Key Stage 2 in The Barnabas Children's Bible (story 249). For another way to tell the story, see the idea [Candelmas - Great Grandma Anna](#).

Go!

Opening up the story

Today's story is about a family who wanted to say a special thank you to God for the birth of their new baby. They travelled to the big city of Jerusalem, to the special 'church' - the temple. They brought a gift to say thank you. At the special service, an elderly man and an elderly lady, who were a little like grandparents to the baby, had some special things to say, which the baby's parents never forgot.

- Who has had a baby brother or sister recently? Who came to visit when the baby was born? Did you have a special party? Were special presents given? What were they and who gave them?
- Who has been to a special service in a church to say thank you for a baby? Was it a christening? Or a dedication? Or a special thanksgiving? What happened? Who was there?

- Who has been to visit their grandparents recently? Does anyone have their grandparents living nearby? What sort of things do you do together? Are there things you can say and do with your grandparents that are special?

Here are some ideas for games with your group to open up the story further:

Just a minute: This story is about a dedicated life of waiting for God's moment. Imagine how it felt for Anna waiting up to 84 years for this big moment. Play some waiting games with the children. For example, one in which the children have to guess whether a certain amount of time has elapsed. Have the children sit in a circle and then ask them to stand up when they think a certain number of seconds have passed. Begin with short periods like 15, 20 or 40 seconds and then work up towards one minute or two (for older children). Who was closest each time?

Fit or miss: Clearly, the years of watching and praying had prepared Simeon to recognise God's rescuer when he came, even though this rescuer was wrapped up as a baby. He was able to see what God was doing when many others missed it. Arrange to hide a series of items around the room in places that are not normal for those objects. For example: a cup not in the kitchen cupboard but down the back of the piano; a spoon not in the cutlery drawer but balanced on top of a picture on the wall. Each time, send off the children to look first of all in the obvious place for the item you mention and then free them to go and look for it in an unusual place.

Telling the story

In the four corners of your room, hall or church, set up four focus areas to represent the four sections of the story. Move around from corner to corner, as you tell the story.

Focus 1: A baby doll wrapped in a shawl

(After you have told the story here, take the baby with you on the journey.)

Mary and Joseph were so excited. They had been given the gift of a baby boy. Jesus was their miracle child, promised by God and named by an angel. After about six weeks, it was time to take the baby to Jerusalem, the capital of their country, to visit the temple for a special thanksgiving service. They wanted to offer their baby back to God and brought a special gift to dedicate him to God's service.

Focus 2: Some packing cases arranged as the steps of the temple and two carpet rolls on end, representing two of the temple pillars

Mary and Joseph arrived in the busy capital and made their way through the streets to the huge and impressive temple building. There were many steps to climb in order to reach the courts where they would have the special service for their child. It must have been very frightening and overwhelming for them compared to the small village they had come from.

Focus 3: Dress up a leader (or maybe a granddad from your church family) in a bath robe to represent Simeon

As they were involved in the service, an elderly man arrived looking for something or someone. When he saw the baby, his eyes lit up and with permission from Mary, he took the baby into his arms and began to sing a song. He sang that this was God's special rescuer, come to bring hope to Israel and the whole world. He would be a light that would lighten up everyone's lives. However, he warned Mary that her heart would one day be broken by what will happen to this child but that also many people would be rescued.

Focus 4: Dress up another leader (or maybe a granny from the church family) with a long shawl to represent 'grandma' Anna

Just after Simeon finished singing, an old lady called Anna arrived. She too had been on the lookout for God's special rescuer and she became very excited when she heard Simeon's song and saw the baby Jesus. She began to rush around and tell everyone she met that God had kept his promise.

Talking about the story

Spend a moment identifying the different emotions and moods in the story, and create statues of these emotions.

Now, as a group, create a series of freeze-frames for different parts of the story. For example:

- Mary and Joseph with others and donkey on the road to Jerusalem
- Mary and Joseph and strangers on the steps of the temple
- Mary and Joseph and worshippers at the service
- Mary and Joseph and priests hearing Simeon sing his son
- Mary and Joseph watching Anna tell everyone about Jesus.

When each freeze-frame is ready, you could take a digital photograph and create a storyboard from the children's mimes. Alternatively, you could interview briefly the people in each frame and see what feelings and perspectives they have on the story of which they are now a part.

With older groups, it is fun to imagine what other characters must have been part of this story but are not mentioned in the Bible - fellow travellers, fellow worshippers and other friends and relatives of the main characters. Hotseat these characters and investigate how they see the story and what happened.

Playing with the story

Have a range of instruments ready to create sounds for the story and to accompany any songs that you teach.

Begin by using a celebration song for the baby that has been born. Perhaps you could go back to a verse of a Christmas carol or maybe you could teach a simple lullaby - the sort of song Mary might have sung to baby Jesus to keep him from becoming restless on the long journey.



Using percussion instruments, recreate the sounds of the walk to Jerusalem. There may also have been other noises on the way apart from footsteps, such as the donkey's hooves on the stones.

Use wind instruments to create the more mysterious sound of the worship at the temple. You could sing together a song such as 'We have come into his house to worship him' (Mission Praise 729, verse 1 only).

Teach the group a version of the 'Nunc Dimittis' (the song of Simeon). There are various versions, for example: Faithful vigil ended (Psalm Praise); Lord, now let your Servant (Psalm Praise); Let me now depart in peace (Psalm Praise). Alternatively, use other songs on the theme of light, such as: Keep me shining Lord (Junior Praise); Lord, the light of your love is shining (Mission Praise); Jesus bids us shine (Junior Praise); or This little light of mine (Junior Praise).

End on a celebratory song with musical accompaniment that picks up the joy Anna showed as she told others about Jesus. You could sing one verse of 'Go tell it on the mountain' (Mission Praise 179) plus the chorus.

Reflecting on the story

Sit the group in a circle (or several circles if your group is large or all-age). At the centre of the circle (or each circle,) place a circular piece of white felt. Put on to this two tall pillar candles and a small tea light. Light the candles carefully, explaining that these are going to represent the granddad and granny from our story - Simeon and Anna - and the baby Jesus.

Jesus is the light. He is the hope that had lit up Anna and Simeon's lives and he will be the light for the whole world.

The candles can also represent two grandparents and a child. Encourage the children to pray for their grandparents or other older people they know. Whether the candles are tall or small, the same light of Jesus can burn as bright for both.

Thank you Jesus that you came to be the light
for grandparents and grandchildren
for young and old
for me and for those I love.