



## On your marks

Here's an idea for some free-ranging art based on the Christmas story. The idea is not so much to produce a beautiful Thing at the end (though you might!), but to give space to talk about the different parts of the story together as you create it. The original idea was Peter Privett's and there's also a Lord's Prayer version in [The Lord's Prayer Unplugged](#). You can actually do it with any story, as you'll have noticed: here's a way of going about it with the Christmas one.

## Get set

You'll need an enormous piece of paper (the bigger, the better) and a supply of felt tips or pastels or paints and brushes, depending on how messy you want to get.

You'll also need the Christmas story divided into about five sections. Of course, different groups might focus on different aspects.

For little ones, you might have something like:

- 1 Gabriel comes to Mary
- 2 The journey to Bethlehem
- 3 The birth of Jesus
- 4 The shepherds
- 5 The wise men.

Or you might concentrate on different themes like the traditional Advent ones, for example:

- 1 Abraham and Sarah having faith in God that their descendants would be as many as stars in the sky
- 2 Isaiah the prophet foretelling Jesus' birth as king or suffering servant
- 3 John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus
- 4 Mary being obedient to God's call
- 5 Jesus being born

Older children might explore themes of Christmas like God's concern for all people:

- 1 Children (Jesus born as a baby)
- 2 Homeless (no room at the inn)
- 3 Refugees (flight to Egypt)
- 4 Every nationality (magi)
- 5 Outcasts (shepherds)

Or you could choose just one part of the story: Mary's story, the wise men's story, the shepherd's story, Herod's story... and divide that up into five parts.

## Go!

- 1 Spread the paper out, either on a table, if you have children who find it hard to get on the floor, or



ideally on the floor. Put the drawing materials in the middle (optional: draw a circle in the centre of the paper).

2 Ask the children to 'take a line for a walk' with their favourite colour, drawing a smoothly wavy line from one side of the paper to another. (A hint: some children want to turn this into a messy scribble - encourage them to make it as wandering and slow a line as they can, rather than a scribbly one, but it's not the end of the world if scribbles happen.) If you have a circle drawn, ask them NOT to draw their line through the circle, but to leave it empty until you say.

3 Once all the lines are on the paper, dividing the paper up into wobbly sections, you can start to draw.

Tell the story of your first subheading of the story and ask the children each to choose one of the sections on the paper and fill it with anything they like to do with that part of the story: doodles, a picture of the scene as they imagine it, words, symbols... They can all draw at the same time.

4 Then all move round the paper to a different point, tell the story of subheading 2 and repeat the process. Encourage them throughout to draw imaginatively: 'I wonder how this part of the story makes you feel? Can you draw that?', 'I wonder what it looked like?', 'What pattern comes into your head when you think of this part of the story?' 'I wonder what colours are right for this part?' Remember, as well as giving an opportunity for a free response to the story, this activity is all about talking together, so if appropriate, comment on the drawings and use them as starting points for conversations about the story and its links with the children's own lives.

5 Repeat for all five points, then if there are sections left empty, ask the children to fill them all with doodles, patterns, Christmas shapes and symbols, colours...  
If you have a blank circle in the middle, ask 'With what should we fill this? What is at the centre of the Christmas Story?' Decide what needs to go there and all fill it in together. You might even put on some quiet music while this is done, to make it a more reflective moment.