



## On your marks

St Boniface was one of England's great missionary pioneers from the early days of Christianity in these isles. We don't often focus on Christian heroes with our children or even in our Sunday congregations, but arguably we do need such stories more than ever today to inspire us to be pioneers for God in our generation.

St Boniface came from Crediton in Devon and he is known as the apostle of Germany. His special day is celebrated on 5 June. He was born in AD 680 and died in AD 754. His life story is one of bold evangelism and faithful mission. The following reflective story seeks to share this in a way that will get a group of children or an all-age gathering talking.

## Get set

Many children's leaders have found the style of storytelling that has been developed within Godly Play to be a very helpful and effective way of nurturing spirituality and opening up the Bible. In the Barnabas Children's Ministry team, we have experimented with some new stories presented in this style, which we are making available to you so you can try them out with your group. We would be interested in any feedback on how they were received.

Remember to tell the story slowly, focusing on the objects and the story itself, not on those who are listening. When you have finished telling the story, leave a short space and then use the wondering questions at the end of this outline.

For this story, you will need:

- a square of red felt as a base cloth
- an icon of St Boniface (search the Internet for this) and a small easel on which to place it
- a feather quill and a rolled-up piece of parchment
- a model tree
- a toy axe (maybe a picture will do)
- a small Bible (perhaps a cardboard empty book such as those available in Hobbycraft)
- a toy sword.

Keep all the objects together in a shallow basket.

## Go!

Watch where I am going to get the story for today.

*Put down the red square of felt*

This is the story of St Boniface. The church remembers him during the green and growing time of



the church year – after Pentecost. I wonder why we remember Boniface. Let's see.

*Put down the icon of St Boniface in the centre of the red square of felt*

The name Boniface means 'the one who does good'. And he did do good. In his long life, he brought the good news about Jesus to many people.

Boniface was born in Devon and grew up to become a fine teacher. He wrote a book on grammar, which was used by children for hundreds of years.

*Put down the quill and parchment to the left of the icon (your right) on the red square of felt*

But ever since he was young, he had wanted to be a missionary: to travel and tell people about the one true God.

Most people in England in his day spoke Anglo-Saxon, which was the same language as that used in Holland and Germany. But many of those countries still thought God was some sort of statue you had to worship, like a tall tree or a carved piece of rock. Boniface wanted to tell them about Jesus, who showed people what God is really like.

With the Pope's blessing, he left England and began to work among the tribes in northern Germany.

*Put down the tree and axe to the right of the icon (your left) on the red square of felt*

Once, he dared to cut down a huge oak tree the people worshipped as special, in honour of the thunder god. It crashed to the ground.

*Lay the tree flat*

Everyone thought the thunder god would punish Boniface but it never happened. Instead, there was the tree, lying on the ground in four big pieces like a cross. This was Boniface's opportunity to tell everyone about Jesus. Two chiefs believed and soon the whole tribe was baptised.

*Put down the Bible and the sword in front of the icon on the red square of felt*

Boniface became a bishop in Germany and travelled everywhere, setting up churches and helping people to believe in the one true God. He wrote lots of letters, and was trusted by kings and popes. Even when he was old, he wanted to keep on being a missionary. He especially wanted to tell the story of Jesus to the people in north Holland. Many did become Christians but it was there that he and the new converts were attacked by bandits. Boniface held up his Bible because this was the only true weapon he wanted to use. A robber's sword went right through it and killed him.

*Pause*

The people in Holland and Germany still remember Boniface today as the English bishop who was a missionary in their country. They remember how he pointed people to Jesus and put right their



wrong ideas about God.

### **Wondering questions**

- I wonder which part of this story you like the best.
- I wonder which part of this story is the most important.
- I wonder which part of this story is especially about you today.
- I wonder if there is any part of this story we could leave out and still have all the story we need.

### **A prayer attributed to St Boniface**

*Eternal God, the refuge and help of all your children,  
we praise you for all you have given us,  
for all you have done for us,  
for all that you are to us.*

*In our weakness, you are strength;  
in our darkness, you are light;  
in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace.*

*We cannot number your blessings;  
we cannot declare your love:  
for all your blessings we praise you.*

*May we live in your presence,  
and love the things that you love,  
and serve you in our daily lives;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*