

## On your marks

Christians believe that the Christmas story is not just a convenient piece of make-believe around which to build a frenzied commercial spending spree during the winter months but that it is a real historical event at the heart of the Christian faith. Nor is Christmas the preserve of Victorian England with its nostalgia and raft of traditions to help us escape the end of year weariness; Christians believe that it celebrates the dramatic turning point of human history... the moment when heaven and earth are truly united again for the first time since the Garden of Eden. This story is not just for a few faithful believers to keep them cosy, nor is it only a western, white event for those who can afford it; Christians believe that it is about God breaking into our planet's story for all people, all cultures and all colours, in every place and in every time. The Christmas festival is a shared moment of celebration... shared in fact with some 2 billion Christians around the globe, almost a third of the world's population. As such, the images and customs surrounding the incarnation are much more varied and rich than we usually see from our mono-cultural viewpoint.

What follows are ideas for a few activities that will help your children tap into how this special festival is celebrated all around the globe. Why not introduce them during the weeks leading up to Christmas and then include some of them as part of an all-age nativity service or end-of-term assembly?

## Get set

Each of the sections below sets out some ideas of how to go about exploring a global Christmas theme. You will need to do some research and preparation for some of them. A useful pack of materials for this is 'Born among us' - an all-age Christmas resource inspired by the world church, containing pictures, music and activity sheets, and available from the Methodist Church. Visit their websites: [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk) or [www.uspg.org.uk](http://www.uspg.org.uk).

## Go!

1. Collect together from clip art sets of images relating to Christmas from around the world. Include:  
a star; a poinsettia; a camel; a crib scene; an Advent wreath; candle; an angel; shoes (put out for presents in central Europe on 6th December - St Nicholas' day); holly; a Christmas cactus; mistletoe; bells; a Christmas rose; a Christmas tree; a stocking.

Hide these around the room and begin with a 'Christmas treasure hunt', challenging the children individually or in small groups to collect a full set of the images. Use these images as a discussion starter about the wide range of symbols used for this festival.

You could hang these onto a *Jesse Tree* alongside other symbols that will remind them of the Bible stories that lead up to Christmas, thus making visible the global dimension to your preparations for the day. There are instructions about making a Jesse Tree in various books and also on the web.



2. Introduce some Christmas related songs from other cultures, such as:

'He came down' from the Cameroon (see *Many and Great* - songs of the world church published by Wild Goose) and 'Jesus Ahatonhia' from Canada (see *Sent by the Lord* - songs of the world church published by Wild Goose)

3. Read together a story from another part of the world that is told at Christmas time; see for example 'Joy to the world' - Christmas stories from around the globe by Saviour Pirotta, ISBN 0711212546

4. Learn how to say happy Christmas in various languages:  
Here are some to set you off!

Albanian: Gezur Krislinjden

Arabic: Idah Saidan Wa Sanah Jadidah

Bengali: Shuvo Naba Barsha

Bohemian: Vesele Vanoce

Brazilian: Boas Festas e Feliz Ano Novo

Chinese (Mandarin): Kung His Hsin Nien bing Chu Shen Tan

Dutch (The Netherlands): Prettig Kerstfeest

Eskimo (Inupik): Jutdlime pivdluarit ukiortame pivdluaritlo!

Esperanto: Gajan Kristnaskon

Finnish: Hyvaa joulua

French: Joyeux Noel

Gaelic (Irish): Nolag mhaith Dhuit Agus Bliain Nua Fe Mhaise

Gaelic (Scots): Nollaig chridheil agus Bliadhna mhath ùr!

German: Fröhliche Weihnachten

Greek: Kala Christouyenna!

Hausa: Barka da Kirsimatikuma Barka da Sabuwar Shekara!

Hindi: Shub Naya Baras

Indonesian: Selamat Hari Natal

Iraqi: Idah Saidan Wa Sanah Jadidah

Italian: Buone Feste Natalizie

Japanese: Shinnen omedeto. Kurisumasu Omedeto

Korean: Sung Tan Chuk Ha

Maori: Meri Kirihimete

Norwegian: God Jul, or Gledelig Jul

Philippines: Maligayan Pasko!

Portuguese: Feliz Natal

Singhalese: Subha nath thalak Vewa. Subha Aluth Awrudhak Vewa

Spanish: Feliz Navidad

Swedish: God Jul and (Och) Ett Gott Nytt År

Tagalog: Maligayamg Pasko. Masaganang Bagong Taon

Ukrainian: Srozhdestvom Kristovym

Urdu: Naya Saal Mubarak Ho

Welsh: Nadolig Llawen

Yoruba: E ku odun, e ku iye'dun!

5. Give your craft ideas a worldwide flavour, too. For example:

- Use the seven shapes that make up the Chinese puzzle of the *Tangram* and challenge groups to create various characters and symbols from the Christmas story using these pieces, such as a camel, a manger, Mary kneeling, a star.
- Create some three-dimensional stars like those that are hung outside Christian homes during Advent and Christmas. See [Make an Indian Christmas Star](#).
- Make some special Advent biscuits such as those enjoyed in Ethiopia during this season

These are called *Dabo Kolo* (literally bread nibbles!). You will need:

650g plain flour, 2.25 dl of water, 3 tablespoons of sugar, 4 tablespoons of oil and a pinch of salt. Mix the flour, sugar and salt. Add water, a little at a time, and mix well. Add the oil and knead to a stiff dough. Roll into long, thin rolls, no more than 1 cm in diameter. With scissors, cut shapes no more than 1 cm wide, turning the roll every time you cut to get different shapes. Roast on a baking tray for 5 - 10 minutes at 150 C until light brown, moving them around now and again. To add variety, add cinnamon; use less sugar and add paprika for a savoury version; add vegetable colourings to make colourful *dabo kolo*.

- There are a number of paper craft ideas for making special decorations associated with Christmas in different countries, including:

Sunburst designs from Sweden, *Weihnacht* angels from Germany, Kalanda stars from Greece, interlocking bells and woven hearts as tree decorations from Germany and Denmark, Santa Lucia hats from Sweden (for December 13th), Pinata for posada parties in Mexico and a Farol star from Spain. Ideas for making these can be found in a paper crafts books such as *Papercrafts from around the World* by Phyllis and Noel Fiarotta, ISBN 0806939907 or from the web.

6. Investigate other special customs linked to Christmas from around the world. There are many websites dedicated to this topic. Why not ask some groups to do some research of their own and report back to the others?