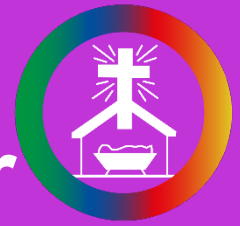




Faith Adventures for Children Together



*Committed to URC Children Together:
enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus
together in the home, church and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link:

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

Tobit 13:11 and Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11

Theme: Our ordinary lives can lead us to extraordinary Godly encounters

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

Matthew and Tobit

This week we consider “ordinary” stargazers. It could be argued that they were far from ordinary – they came from a position of privilege as educated people with the resources to embark on a long journey carrying precious gifts – but they were busy doing what they “ordinarily” did and were led to an extraordinary encounter. It adds another layer of meaning to see these privileged people, who themselves were accustomed to being revered, kneeling in homage (a public show of respect) to the baby and his very ordinary parents.

The star could be compared to the ‘bat signal’ from Batman in that it appeared in order to call the stargazers to action. It leads us to ask what signs give us the prompt to seek God? What is our motivation for the things we do? They had been waiting to see a star like this – it was an expected thing, though they did not know when it would appear – so it might prompt conversations about things children are looking forward to, and signs that Christmas is getting closer. Be aware that not all children might be looking forward to Christmas.

Tobit is a book from the apocrypha. Christians (and indeed members of the United Reformed Church) disagree about the apocrypha. It is a set of writings that were written in the period between the old and new testaments. The word apocrypha means “hidden”. During the Reformation, Martin Luther and Protestant Christians argued that everyone should be able to read the Bible in his or her own language. When they went back to the Hebrew texts of the Old



Testament, they realized that the Latin Christian Bible included a number of books that Jews did not consider scripture. The Reformers stripped these books from the canon, calling them the “Apocrypha” or hidden books. They are a diverse set of writings which were respected from early times and were written in the time between the Old and New Testament. They are still included in some versions of the Bible. Within the URC we do not usually treat them as part of the Bible but many people recognise that, like many other writings, they can sometimes help us understand things. This passage from Tobit helps us, like the story of the stargazers, to think about God’s light reaching out to call people from all times and all places to an extraordinary Godly encounter. The Bible Project includes a really clear explanation you may wish to watch while you think about whether or not to include this passage in your session: <https://youtu.be/ak06MSETeo4> .

Together

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,

(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three ‘steps’ as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN

(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,

Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.

Amen



In-person game

The star gazers followed a bright star to find baby Jesus. This led to an extraordinary encounter with baby Jesus.

Find a space which you have the ability to make darker. As you shine a torch or lazer pointer around from place to place, everyone is to try follow/stand in the light. To make the game more challenging move the torch at different speeds and heights. While this is a very simple game, it is fun to play. Just watch out for children pushing.

Online game

This game could be played inside, online or outside (as long as it's not too windy)

Provide a large paper star and a few pages of folded newspaper to each player. Decide a start and finish for the race.

Place the star on the floor in front of you and use the folded paper to flap the air around the star to make it move. The aim is to be the first person to get the star to the finish line.

This could be played in teams if you have a large group.

Experience

For this story we recommend using the Good News Bible for the Matthew reading <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1-2%2C+9-11+&version=GNT>

And the Common English Version Bible for the Tobit reading <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Tobit+13%3A11&version=CEB>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: Three wise men by the Holy Tales <https://youtu.be/Cfno8QNZ1Lc>

Over fives: The three wise men by Sharefaith Kids <https://youtu.be/VySzDA07N-c>

Songs to support the story

Under fives: God Made Me by Raising Up Champions <https://youtu.be/0v5yfgNpuko>

Over fives: I am a city on a hill by Becky and Nick Drake <https://youtu.be/ITEadEftdnM>

Extra: We three kings of Orient are by Geethanjali Kids <https://youtu.be/SUBTERdTKUg>



Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A way to explore the story

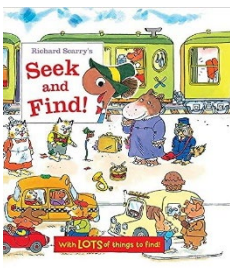
The Gospel reading reminds us of the stargazers coming to find Jesus from a distant country and the Tobit reading also calls to mind people across the world and through time seeing God's light and following it to Jesus. We too, whoever and wherever we are, can follow the signs God sends to lead us in the right way.

One way of exploring this theme is through a treasure hunt. Attached below are twelve cards. Each card tells a little bit about how Christmas is celebrated either in another part of the world or how it was celebrated in the past, reminding us that Jesus came for everyone – thousands upon thousands of people are celebrating the birth of Christ as we do.

On the back of each card, write or draw a clue of where the next card might be found. You can make these as simple or complex as you choose, depending on the age and interest of the children. Then hide each card, again judging by the children how hidden the card should be but give the first card to the children so that it gives them a clue as to where to find the next. As the group find each card, one child could read out what it says on the card and everyone could join in with the Christmas greeting written there. The final card should lead to where a nativity set/crib is set up, either the one in the church itself if they have one and it is accessible, or to one which the children can set up in the room where they are meeting.

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too.



“Seek and Find” by Richard Scarry OR play this similar online game from Storytime Pup <https://youtu.be/PVOo3x7FpIQ>

Talking together: How might we talk about the story together?

- We don't meet God in person so how do we encounter God today – what is a Godly encounter?
- The stargazers followed the star and it led them to Jesus – what guides you, what do you follow? And where might it lead you?
- I wonder how the people left behind felt when the stargazers just packed their bags and left?
- I wonder if and how God guides us today?



Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- The stargazers were looking forward to something special happening? I wonder what you are looking forward to most at the moment?
- I wonder if there's been a time you've felt close to God or seen something God is doing?

What's in the box (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing "what's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- Stars (cushions/ toys/glow in the dark stars) – play with the stars, talking about how they help light the way at night. Talk about how the stargazers in the story followed a very bright star to find baby Jesus.
- Light sources (torches/ night lights/ fairy lights) – Have a variety of different light sources, use them to light up dark places where you are meeting (all create your own dark places to light up)
- Maps/ atlas/ world globe/ compass – Explore the maps and compasses and talk about how we find our way to places, what are our favourite places and what we can find there.
- Gifts – wrapped up presents of different shapes and sizes, perhaps containing things for a baby – talk about the stargazers going to see a new baby
- Kaleidoscope – look through like a telescope, see the lovely colours and shapes as you play with it. Talk about looking out for beautiful things – the light reminds us of God
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (e.g. stones, felt, twigs etc)

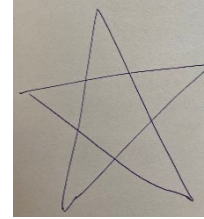


Express

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Star Prayers

You will need – Paper, Pens, Scissors, Bowl, Water



Draw and cut out star shapes from a sheet of paper.

Think about the things that you would like to bring to God in prayer and write or draw these on the stars.



Fold each of the points of the star into the centre, so that the writing is covered.

Place the star gently into a bowl of water so that it floats on the surface. Watch as the star slowly opens and reveals the prayer.



Spend some time reflecting on the prayers and offering them to God. Close by inviting participants to join together in saying AMEN!

Spoken prayer

Have the children stand in a group pointing in different directions as you say the prayer:

Whether we are journeying **N**orth, **E**ast, **W**est or **S**outh, Lord,

May your star shine above us to light our path

as we walk in your way

and spread your good NEWS. Amen

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond. [See here for more suggestions.](#)

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.



Stargazer glasses

As we remember the stargazers from today's story, we remember that our ordinary lives can lead us to Godly encounters if we keep our eyes open and look for signs of God at work in our world.

You will need: Card, scissors, craft knife, colored pens or crayons, a drinking straw (Or similar), sellotape/glue

Draw two circles, using a small glass or similar to draw around, onto a sheet of card (or Use a template from <https://www.firstpalette.com/craft/paper-eyeglasses.html>). Cereal box card works really well and is stiff enough. Make sure you leave a LOT of card around the edges for the 'frame'.

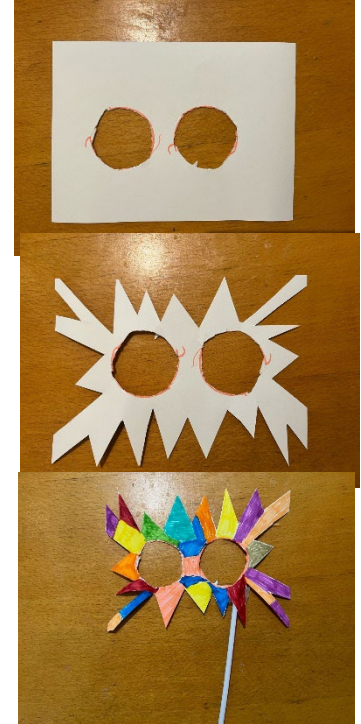
Use a craft knife to remove the inner circle (so that the wearer can see where they're going!) Adults should help with this – maybe even prepare the card beforehand.

Using scissors, cut different-sized triangles into the 'frame' so that the frames are star-shaped.

Use the pens/crayons to colour in your creations (or decorate them with stickers) We know it's Christmas... but glitter might get in the eyes so be very careful!

Using sellotape, or glue, attach a straw to the frames so that they can be held over the eyes (this will mean that children who already wear glasses can still take part).

Why not create a photobooth and take photographs of the children wearing their stargazer glasses? (If you have the necessary permissions filled in, perhaps you could share some on our facebook page!)



Homemade Compass

The stargazers followed a star – quite an ordinary thing for them – to find their way on a journey that took them from East to West to find Jesus. We can use ordinary things to help us tell what direction things are in (though we can find God wherever we go!)

You will need – sewing needle/pin, paper, bowl, water, magnet

Magnetise the needle by holding the metal needle between your fingers and stroking the length of the needle across the magnet around 30 times. (You should stroke the needle in one direction only, not back and forth)

Tear a small piece of paper and place the needle on top. Float the paper and needle on the surface of a bowl of water.





Watch as the needle slowly turns on the water to face North to South.

You can check the accuracy of your homemade compass by using a compass app on a mobile phone, or comparing with a navigational compass. Now we know where North and South are, we can work out East and West.

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- This week try to be extra focused on spotting God at work around you or things that help you think about God, maybe even go on a prayer walk around your neighbourhood and see what signs of God you can see.
 - It's one week before Christmas – take some time to read a book or watch a video of the whole Christmas story, maybe with someone in your family, or to use a nativity set to retell the story yourself.
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We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of **the stargazers** with us.

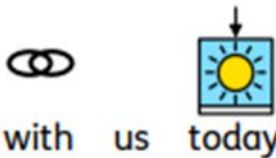
Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk

Why not have a look at next week's resource on **The Birth of Jesus**

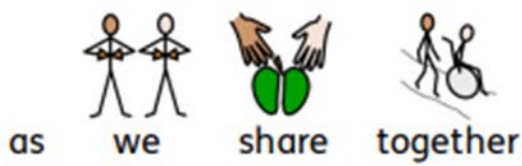




Jesus our friend,



be with us today



as we share together



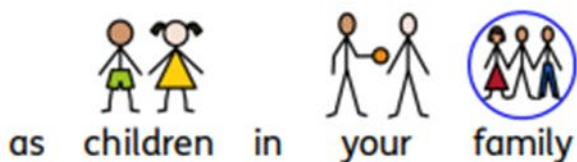
pray together



play together



and get to know you better



as children in your family



Amen



Right middle finger touches centre of other palm, repeat with left hand



Alternate hands back and forth



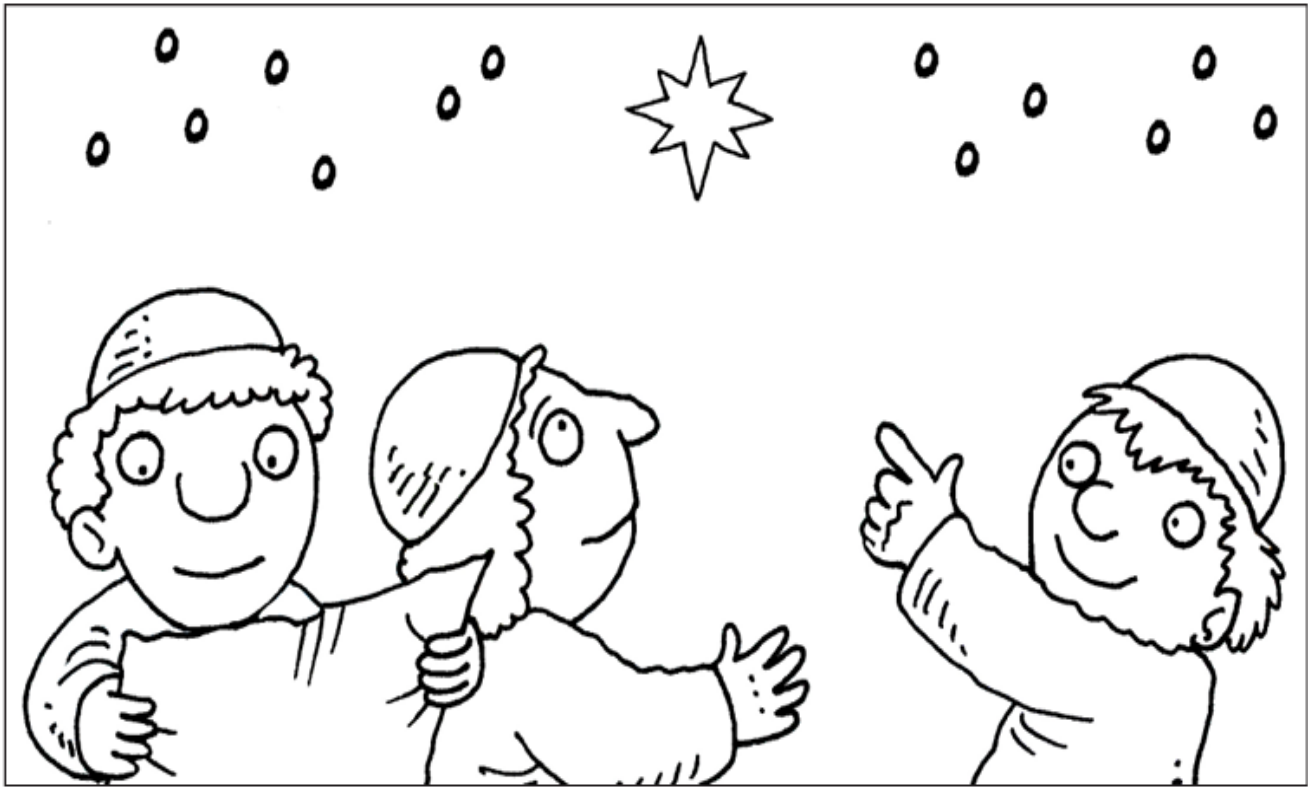


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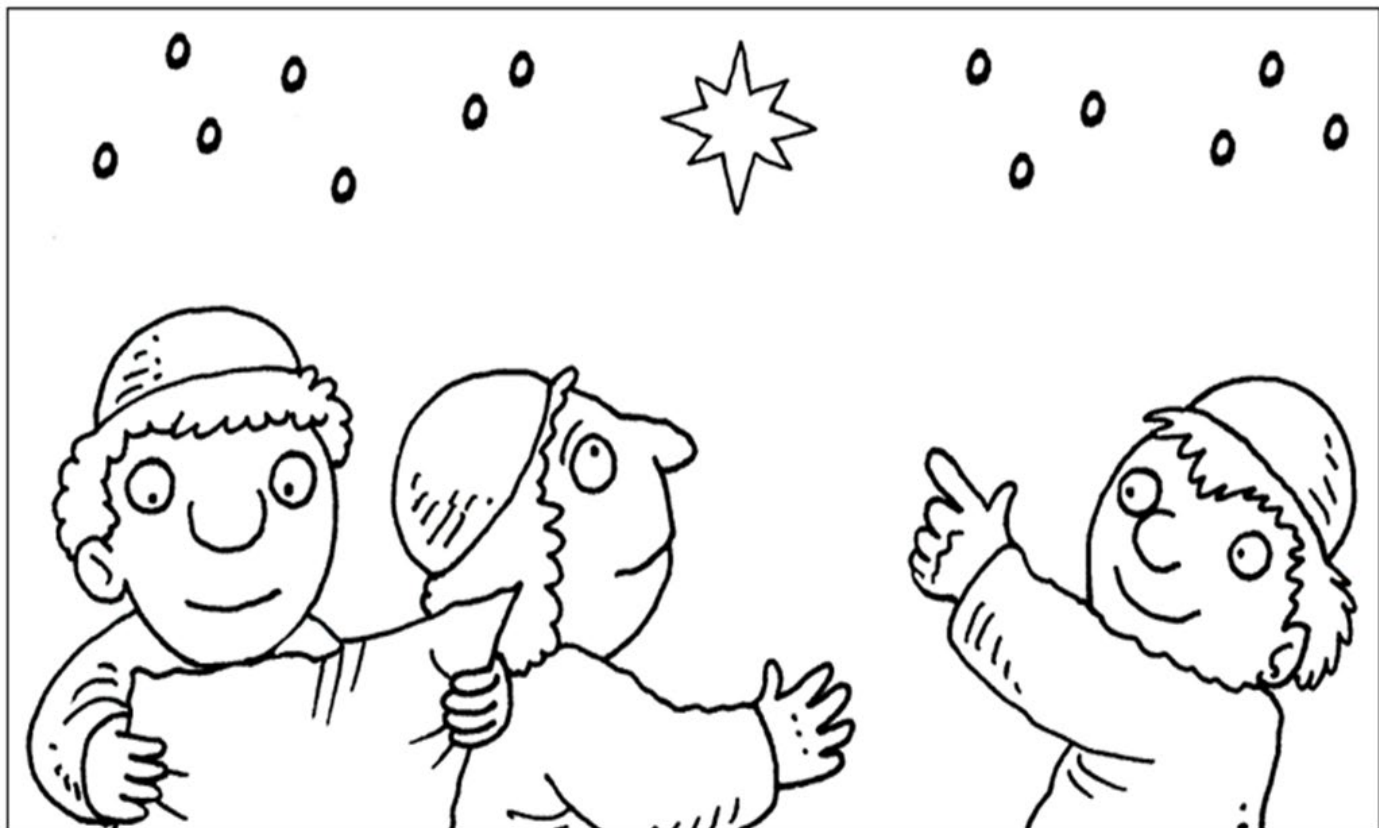




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