

R.E. News

Diocesan Adviser, Education Secretariat,
Archbishop's House, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
Ph: 837 9253 Fax: 836 8393

Welcome to the second edition of R.E. News

This Advent edition contains some useful resources for the season. I welcome your thoughts and comments and look forward to supporting you in whatever way I can as we journey in faith together. If you have any interesting events coming up please let me know, as I would love to feature them in the next R.E. News.

Resources are always available on our website www.education.dublindiocese.ie under Religious Education, Post-Primary. Over 200 teachers have already signed up to receive regular updates. If you would like to join the mailing list, please send an email with your name and school to garyabrahamian@gmail.com

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We wish you every blessing this Christmas and hope you all have
a very happy and holy New Year.

Our Experience of World Youth Day in Madrid

By Katie Lynch and Meabh Grogan - Loreto College, Swords (Given as the Homily at the Opening School Mass).

We were privileged to have travelled to Madrid for World Youth Day in August of this year along with six fellow students and other Loreto students from around Ireland including Loreto Kilkenny, Beaufort and Bray. For those who may not know what World Youth Day is, it is a gathering of millions of young people from all over the world to celebrate our faith. World Youth Day was started by Pope John Paul II in 1985 and is celebrated at a week-long international level every two to three years at different locations throughout the world. It was celebrated in Sydney Australia in 2008, Madrid 2011 and in 2013 it will be celebrated in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

WYD is open to all young people and is a fantastic opportunity to experience first-hand the love that God has for each and every one of us. It was amazing that everyone at WYD spoke different languages, had different cultures and family backgrounds but the one thing we all had in common was our commitment to God and serving others. It was a great way to deepen our faith but also to meet thousands of other young people sharing the same ambitions and interests as us.

Although we were there for nearly two weeks the main WYD celebrations spread over a 4 day programme beginning with the opening mass celebrated by the Pope in the centre of Madrid. During these 4 days we stayed in a Loreto school in El Soto with Loreto boys and girls from Spain and England. Each day we attended workshops which included video making, the life and teachings of Mary Ward, Justice and Peace, equality issues and music and dance. In our works shops we worked



alongside many different cultures which was definitely one of the highlights! In the evening we would travel into Madrid for the main celebrations with the Pope. These included Stations of the Cross through the streets of Madrid and the all-night vigil with the Pope. This was an amazing and unique experience, especially when the sheer force of the hurricane winds blew the Pope's hat off and a spectacular thunder and lightning storm made the night sky light up in a way none of us had seen before. At that time we saw the force, the complexity and the beauty of God's world right before us. It was definitely an experience we will never forget. People danced and sang all night long and we had a chance to meet some amazing and interesting people that you would never have had an opportunity to meet before. We also saw the Pope drive by us on a few occasions which was a surreal experience.

The atmosphere on the streets of Madrid and indeed the Loreto School was incredible and none of us will ever forget the feeling: the singing, cheering, dancing everywhere we turned, the crowded trains full of excited pilgrims dancing and singing. We even had

sing-offs with other groups of pilgrims on the trains!! The joy that radiated from each person there was spectacular. We speak on behalf of all the girls when we say it was the most influential and most positive experience we have ever had in our young lives.

Not only did we fully participate in the WYD programme but we also got a chance to experience the Spanish culture when we went on day trips to Segovia the home of the most significant and best-preserved ancient monuments left on the Iberian Peninsula, the El Escorial the burial place of the Spanish Royal family and into Madrid for some of the amazing shopping it has to offer. We got to experience the culture, food and history of these places that would not have been on offer to us if we did not go on the trip. We even had time to rest and relax by the pool. During this time we had a chance to get to know the other girls and reflect on our experiences. It has been said that “something as powerful and unique as world youth day can light a fire within us that will hold in good stead for all our lives.” It centres us and gives us a fresh perspective on life in which no challenge or burden is too big for us to take on.

We would like to thank especially Sr. Kathleen McLennan for making this experience possible and also our Religion teacher Ms. Sheelan and Sr. Phil for looking after us with more love and compassion than we could have ever thought possible. We find it amazing how being a part of a community like Loreto can make you feel like you are part of a wider family and network of people even though you may be sleeping in a school hall, a thousand miles away from Ireland and staying with students that you have never met before. We felt very welcome and so at home with our Loreto Family.

We would like to conclude by saying if you have never been to a World Youth Day or would have never considered going, give it a try. It is a small investment that will reap huge rewards and benefits for the rest of your life and can have a powerful influence on the lives of others around you.

WYD was indeed an event that will help us live out the vision of Mary Ward to be:

“Seekers of Truth and Doers of Justice”



Advent 2011

Advent means ‘the coming’ of something.

- Advent is a period lasting FOUR Sundays (not weeks!) preparing for the celebration of Jesus’ birth.
- The first Sunday of Advent also marks the beginning of the Christian Church’s year.
- Because the celebration is such an important event, Christians want to make themselves completely ready.



Why is the Advent Wreath so special to Christians?

- The circle of the wreath reminds Christians of God, His eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end.
- The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that Christians have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal, of eternal life.



Why have four candles on the Advent Wreath?

- The four outer candles represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent
- The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that Christians have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal, of eternal life.



The four traditional advent themes

- The Candle of HOPE
- The Candle of PEACE
- The Candle of LOVE
- The Candle of JOY
- A fifth candle is sometimes lit in the middle to celebrate the birth of Jesus



The Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree is a very ancient custom. It is like the family tree of Jesus. Its name comes from Jesse, who was the father of King David. Jesse and King David were ancestors of Jesus. The Jesse tree shows us more of the important people in the Old Testament. It shows us how long they waited for a king. We know that Jesus is the king that God promised to send. We use the Jesse tree to remind us of God's promise.

Make a Jesse Tree

Place the branch in a pot of dirt or gravel and cover the bucket with Christmas paper.

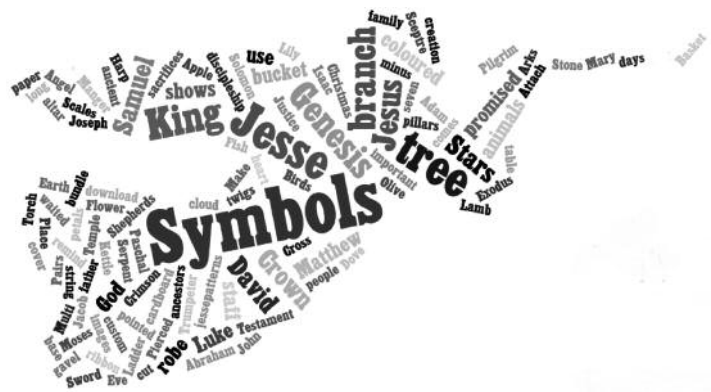
Just use a dead branch, or draw and cut out a branch on cardboard.

You can download symbols from <http://images.rca.org/docs/discipleship/jessepatterns.pdf>

Attach a string or coloured ribbon to hang them from the branch.

Symbols

1. The seven days of creation around the base of the tree (Genesis). Symbols: **Sun, Moon, Stars, Animals, Fish, Birds, Earth.**
2. Adam and Eve (Genesis 2-3). Symbols: **Tree, Serpent, Apple minus a bite.**
3. Noah (Genesis 5:25-29). Symbols: **Arks, Pairs of animals, Dove and Olive branch.**
4. Abraham. Symbols: **Torch, Sword, Pilgrim Staff.**
5. Isaac (Genesis 22, 24, 26, 27). Symbols: **Stone altar of sacrifices, bundle of twigs.**
6. Jacob (Genesis 25/21-34, 27/1-41, 28/10-22, 29:30, 50/1-14). Symbols: **Kettle, Ladder, Flower with twelve petals.**
7. Joseph (Exodus 2:3:1/21-22, 14/15-31, 16, 17/1-7, 20/1-17). Symbols: **Bucket, Well, Multi-coloured robe.**
8. Moses. Symbols: **Basket, table of law, Paschal Lamb, pillars of cloud and fire.**
9. Jesse (Samuel 16). Symbols: **Crimson robe, Shepherds' staff, rose.**
10. David (1Samuel 16/1-23, 17/41-54, 2 Samuel 2:4, 1Kings 2/1-9). Symbols: **Harp, Crown and Sceptre, Key, Six-Pointed star.**
11. Solomon. (1Kings 5-9: 10/4-25). Symbols: **Temple, Scales of Justice.**
12. Mary (Matthew 1/8-25, 2/1-12, Luke 1/26-38, 2/1-35). Symbols: **Lily, Stars around crown, Pierced heart.**
13. Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). Symbols: **Manger, Cross, Crown, Trumpeter Angel.**



Advent Prayer Service

Introduction

Advent, the “Coming Season” begins a new Church year and all Christians are asked to “wake up” and to “stay awake” to the real meaning of Christmas. We are a people expecting something. This is the season of change, of preparation, of looking forward to welcoming the child Jesus into our world.

- What am I waiting for?
- What am I looking forward to?
- A couple of weeks off school at Christmas?
- The arrival of family and friends?
- Maybe something more, something deeper inside me – inner peace, transformation, change?
- Am I prepared to change?

Waiting

You are always there in a quiet room
Waiting for me to come to you.

This morning in a hilly field,
Sitting on the corner of a stone cattle trough,
Listening to the water tumbling down the hill
Into the silent river,
Watching the crows fly to work across the sky,
Why was I surprised to find you there?

Lord, teach me to leave space in my mind
So that you can always be there.

Alice Taylor, Praying Place



Intercessions:

1. We await your coming and with joyful hearts we pray:
All: Come, Lord Jesus.
2. You come to bring us hope and courage:
All: May our actions of justice and care reflect this same love.
3. You come as a reflection of God’s love:
All: May our actions of justice and care reflect this same love.
4. You come to show us ways of compassion and mercy:
All: May we reach out to all people in our society with that same spirit of compassion and mercy.

1 Corinthians 13 – A Christmas Version

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the spouse. Love is kind, though harried and tired. Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way. Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of LOVE will endure.



Conclusion:

A constant feature of Christmas decorations is light. We see coloured lights on trees, in the shops, on the streets. Many who see Christmas lights will hardly remember that the reason for the lights is Jesus Christ, the light of the world. When we say that Jesus is the light of the world, we are also thinking about darkness. The darkness of the world is sin, anger, hatred, division, violence, greed and selfishness of every kind. Jesus came to point another way, so that the most characteristic Christian word about Christmas is not 'merry' but rather 'Peace'.

Our world and the attitudes need to undergo a change if Christ – the light of the world is to find a welcome in it. Will we allow the infant Jesus to make this change in our lives?

Song:

Man in the Mirror – Michael Jackson

Advent Wreath Ceremony

At the beginning of each week of Advent, celebrate a wreath ceremony in your prayer room. Make a semi-circle around the Advent wreath. Choose persons to light the candle, start the hymns, and read the introduction and Scripture reading.

Pray together the Psalm, the Our Father, and the final prayer.



1. Gather around the Advent wreath.
2. Light the candle(s).
3. Sing a hymn.

4. Read the introduction.

We come together in prayer and to celebrate Advent. We think about the mystery of Jesus, the Son of God, born in a manger in Bethlehem. He was the fulfillment of the Father's promise- the long-awaited Saviour of the world. As we light this candle (these candles), may it/they remind us of Christ, who came to us as a light shining in the darkness

5. Prayers for the four weeks

Week 1

Read Isaiah 9:1-2: 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest.'

Pray together Psalm 43:3-5: 'O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.'

Week 2

Read Micah 7:7-8: 'But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.'

Pray together Psalm 27, verses 1, 13, 14: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Week 3

Read Isaiah 60:1-2: 'Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will appear over you.'

Pray together Psalm 25:4-5: 'Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.'

Week 4

Read John 8:12: 'Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'

Pray together Psalm 36:7-9: 'How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.'

Sing a hymn to end the ceremony (for example, 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel', 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing')

Advent Reflections

ADVENT 1955

The Advent wind begins to stir
With sea-like sounds in our Scotch fir,
It's dark at breakfast, dark at tea
And in between we only see,
Clouds hurrying across the sky
And rain-wet roads the wind blows dry
And branches bending to the gale
Against great skies all silver-pale.
The world seems traveling into space,
And traveling at a faster pace
Than in the leisured summer weather
When we and it sit out together,
For now we feel the world spin round
On some momentous journey bound —
Journey to what? to whom? to where?
The Advent bells call out 'Prepare,
Your world is journeying to the birth
Of God made Man for us on earth.'

And how, in fact, do we prepare
For the great day that waits us there —
The twenty-fifth day of December,
The birth of Christ? For some it means
An interchange of hunting scenes
On coloured cards. And I remember
Last year I sent out twenty yards,
Laid end to end, of Christmas cards
To people that I scarcely know —

They'd sent a card to me, and so
I had to send one back. Oh dear!
Is this a form of Christmas cheer?
Or is it, which is less surprising,
My pride gone in for advertising?
The only cards that really count
Are that extremely small amount
From real friends who keep in touch
And are not rich but love us much.
Some ways indeed are very odd
By which we hail the birth of God.
We raise the price of things in shops,
We give plain boxes fancy tops
And lines which traders cannot sell
Thus parcell'd go extremely well.
We dole out bribes we call a present
To those to whom we must be pleasant
For business reasons. Our defense is
These bribes are charged against expenses
And bring relief in Income Tax.
Enough of these unworthy cracks!
"The time draws near the birth of Christ",
A present that cannot be priced
Given two thousand years ago.
Yet if God had not given so
He still would be a distant stranger
And not the Baby in the manger.

John Betjeman

What the Donkey Saw

No room in the inn, of course,
And not that much in the stable,
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary,
Joseph, the heavenly host -
Not to mention the baby
Using our manger as a cot.
You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in
For love nor money.

Still, in spite of the overcrowding,
I did my best to make them feel wanted.
I could see the baby and I
Would be going places together.

U.A. Fanthorpe (1929-2009)

BC - AD

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

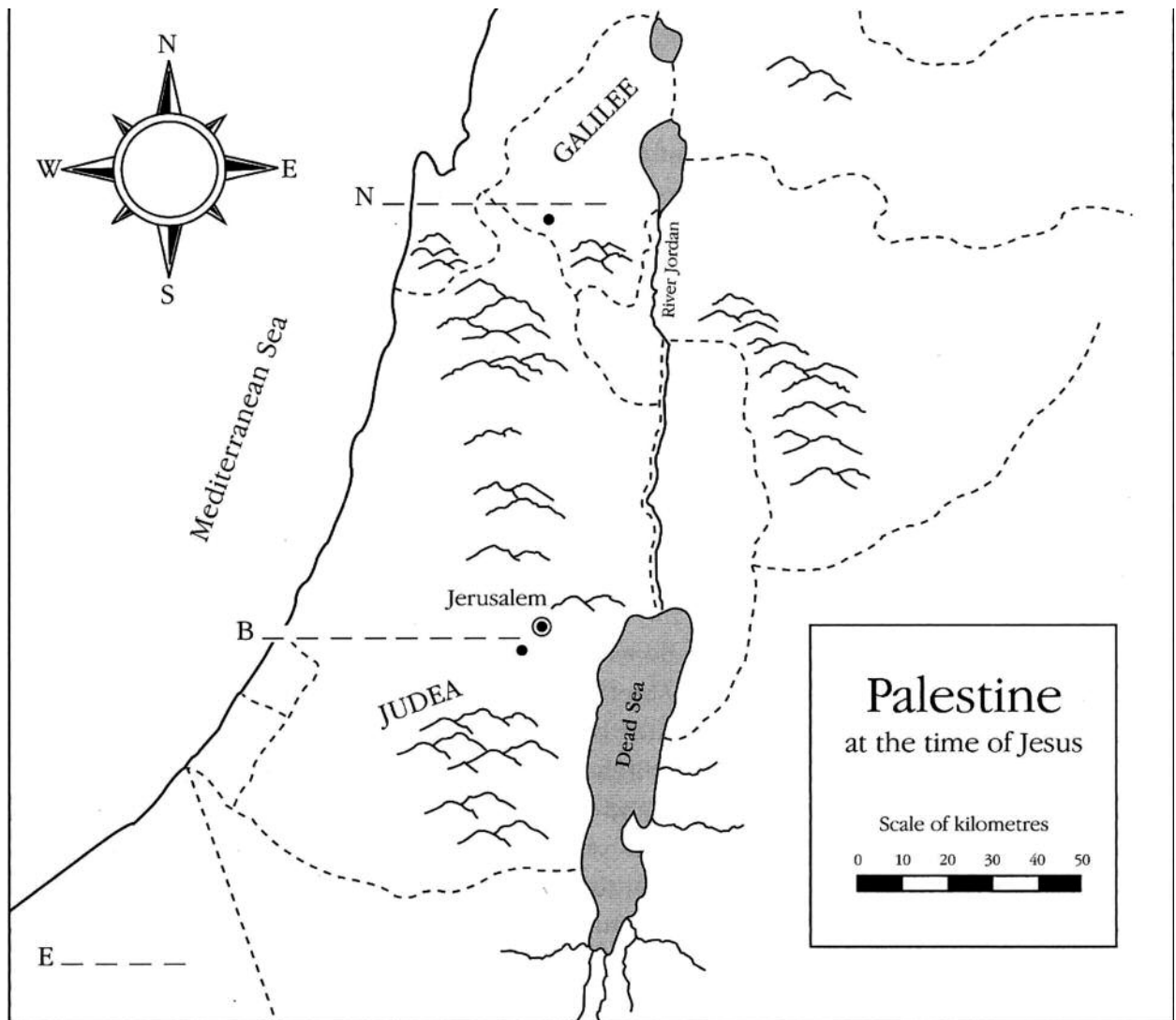
This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect

Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.

Advent Classroom Resources

A Map of the Holy Land – Worksheet 1



1. Underline all the place names mentioned in the story 'The wise men visit Jesus'. (Worksheet 2)
2. Now find them on the map. Fill in the letters for the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth and the country of Egypt.
3. Read the story on Worksheet 3, 'The birth of Jesus' and, using pencil, lightly draw a line on the map showing the journey that Mary and Joseph made. When you are sure it is right, you can go over it in colour.
4. Work out approximately how far the journey is, using the key.
5. How long do you think it would have taken Mary and Joseph:
 - To travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem? (One donkey between them.)
 - To travel from Bethlehem to Egypt? (One donkey and a baby.)
 - To travel from Egypt to Nazareth? (One donkey and a toddler.)

The Wise Men Visit Jesus – Worksheet 2

Read the account of Jesus' birth below and use it to answer the questions on worksheet 1, 'A map of the Holy Land'.

This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learnt that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to call off the wedding quietly.



While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' . . . After Joseph woke up, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do. . .

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, 'Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'

When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, 'Where will the messiah be born?'

They told him, 'He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote. . . ' Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, 'Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too.'

The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshipped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.

After the wise men had gone, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him.'

That night, Joseph got up and 'took his wife and the child to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod died...

Then in a dream he was told to go to Galilee, and they went to live there in the town of Nazareth.

MATTHEW 1:18-21, 24, 2:1-5, 7-15a and 22b-23a.

The birth of Jesus – Worksheet 3

Read the account of Jesus' birth below. This story is from Luke's Gospel. Compare it with the account of Jesus' birth from Matthew's Gospel on Worksheet 2, 'The wise men visit Jesus'. You will see that there are many similarities, but some differences between the two versions of the story of Jesus' birth. Can you work out an order for them so that the whole story fits together? You could make a chart or use notes like this:

1. Mary and Joseph get engaged.
 2. An angel visits Mary in Nazareth.
- ... and so on. . .



God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, ' . . . Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. . . '

About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. . .

Everyone had to go to their own home town to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's home town, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.

Mary. . . travelled with him to Bethlehem. . . and while they were there, she gave birth to her firstborn son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's home town a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.'

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. . .

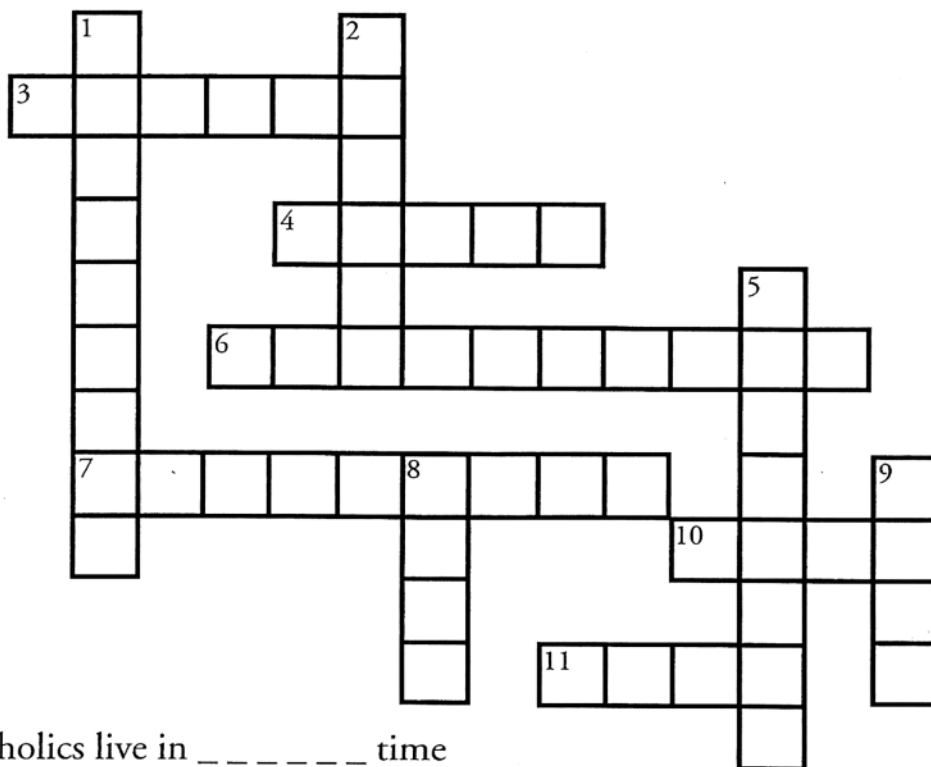
After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.' They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

LUKE 1:26-32; 2:1, 3-13 and 15-19

The New Liturgical Year

Catholics celebrate a year that is based on the events of Christ's life.



Across

3. Catholics live in _____ time by following the events of Christ's life.
4. During Advent we remember how long people had to wait for _____.
6. The _____ or church year begins with Advent.
7. On _____ we celebrate Jesus' birth.
10. Celebrating the year around sacred time reminds us there is another _____ beyond this life.
11. Only by living in sacred time do we start to understand how much God loves us and how to live in his _____ more deeply and truly.

Down

1. _____ celebrate a year that is based on the events of Christ's life.
2. _____ begins a new liturgical year.
5. During the Christmas season we remember Jesus' life from when he was born to when he was _____ and began his ministry.
8. There is the _____ of this world, and also sacred time that happens at the same moment.
9. A _____ in the outside world begins January 1 and ends December 31.



Liturgical Calendar for Ireland 2011-2012



HOLYDAYS OF OBLIGATION

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| • Epiphany | Friday 6 January 2012 |
| • St. Patrick's Day | Saturday 17 March 2012 |
| • Ascension of the Lord | Sunday 20 May 2012 |
| • The Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) | Sunday 10 June 2012 |
| • Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary | Wednesday 15 August 2012 |
| • All Saints Day | Thursday 1 November 2012 |
| • Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary | Saturday 8 December 2012 |

OTHER IMPORTANT DATES IN 2011-2012

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| • St. Brigid's Day | Wednesday 1 February 2012 |
| • Ash Wednesday | Wednesday 22 February 2012 |
| • Good Friday | Friday 6 April 2012 |
| • Easter Sunday | Sunday 8 April 2012 |
| • Pentecost Sunday | Sunday 27 May 2012 |
| • First Sunday of Advent | Sunday 27 November 2011 |

DAYS OF PRAYER IN 2012

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| • World Day of Peace | Sunday 1 January 2012 |
| • Week of Prayer for Christian Unity | 18-25 January 2012 |
| • World Day of Consecrated Life | Thursday 2 February 2012 |
| • World Day for the Sick | Saturday 11 February 2012 |
| • Women's World Day of Prayer | Friday 2 March 2012 |
| • World Day for Vocations | Sunday 29 April 2012 |
| • 50th International Eucharistic Congress | 10-17 June 2012 |
| • World Communications Day | Sunday 20 May 2012 |
| • Mission Sunday | Sunday 21 October 2012 |

Christmas Symbols

We all know, or think we know, the Christmas story – how Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, how there was no room at the inn, how Jesus was born in a stable, and how he was visited by shepherds and wise men. But what has this got to do with the strange traditions we have today? Why is Christmas celebrated in the middle of winter? Why do people stand fir trees in the corner of their living rooms? Why do they hang up branches of holly and wreaths of ivy? Why do couples kiss under the mistletoe? Why does Santa Claus come down the chimney? And what have robins got to with it?



Before Christianity began, there was often a winter solstice festival to cheer everyone up when it was cold, dark and depressing. This fell around the 21st December when the days are at their shortest and the nights are at their longest. Offerings were given to the pagan gods, asking for light to return to the days and for crops to start growing again. Houses were decorated with evergreen plants which people believed had magical powers because they remained green throughout the winter. Each plant had its own meanings: holly was supposed to bring good luck, ward off evil spirits and protect a house from lightning; ivy was supposed to bring fertility to women; mistletoe was used in medicines, and again, it was believed to bring fertility and to scare off evil spirits. The custom of kissing beneath sprigs of mistletoe was a way of wishing for fertility (or to put it another way - babies). The deep green leaves and the bright red berries also added some welcome colour at a time when most of nature seemed dead.

The Romans had a festival called Saturnalia which started on the 17th December and lasted a week. The god Saturn was worshipped because they believed he would help the crops to grow. It was a time to eat, drink and be merry with your friends and family. Presents were exchanged and this is possibly when the tradition began.

After St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland in the 5th century it was still very difficult to persuade everyone to stop their pagan traditions, so they were adapted to suit Christian beliefs. “The Light of the World” is one of Jesus’ titles in the Bible, so the mid-winter festival was chosen to celebrate Jesus’ birth because the slowly lengthening days were seen as a symbol of “The Light” coming into the world. Decorations of evergreen plants became a symbol of the eternal life that Christians are promised in Heaven. Holly symbolised Jesus’ crucifixion – the red berries represent the blood he shed on the cross and the prickles represent the crown of thorns he was forced to wear. One story said that the cross itself was made from a holly tree. Ivy clings to walls and trees for support so this was seen as a symbol of humanity’s need to depend on God. Kissing beneath the mistletoe became a symbol of peace and Christian love.

Christmas trees were made popular in Ireland by Queen Victoria’s German husband, Prince Albert, who brought the tradition from his homeland. There are several stories to explain how the custom began. Some say that bringing an evergreen into the house was another pagan symbol of fertility. A different explanation comes from a story about St. Boniface, an early Christian missionary who lived from 672 to 754 AD. St Boniface travelled from Devon to northern Germany where most people still worshipped the traditional Norse gods. He cut down an oak tree

that was sacred to Thor, the god of thunder, and a fir tree grew in its place. St Boniface said that the fir tree was a symbol of Christianity, taking the place of the old religion. He suggested that Christians should have a fir tree in their houses as a sign of their faith in Jesus. When the Protestant Church began in the 16th century, a leader called Martin Luther said that Protestant Christians should have a Christmas tree instead of the nativity scene that was traditional in the Roman Catholic Church.

Father Christmas or Santa Claus was originally St Nicholas who lived from 270 to 346 AD. He was the bishop of Myra, which is in modern day Turkey. He used to give money to the poor, but tried to keep his generosity secret. He would go out at night to put coins in the shoes that people left on their doorsteps. If there were no shoes outside, he would drop some coins down the chimney. One story tells of a man who could not afford to look after his three daughters. St Nicholas threw three purses of money down the chimney which fell into the stockings that the daughters had washed and hung to dry by the hearth. This is where the tradition of hanging up a stocking comes from, and possibly why children believe that Father Christmas comes down the chimney. His red clothes are possibly an echo of a bishop's red robes, although in Ireland, early pictures of Father Christmas have him dressed in green



to go with the evergreen leaves. The belief that he flies through the sky on a sleigh is a Christianised version of a story about the Norse god Odin, who was supposed to lead a hunting party across the sky during the mid-winter festival. This might also be why Father Christmas is believed to live in the snowy North. In Ireland, he was usually called Father Christmas and he lived in Lapland. In America he was called Santa Claus and he lived at the North Pole. This version of the story has become more popular in Ireland because of American films and books.

Robins are more common in the winter because their numbers are swelled by robins migrating to Ireland from Northern Europe. They were associated with the Norse God Thor and were a sign that bad weather was coming. Robins have now become a symbol of Christmas. There is a legend that when Jesus was on the cross, a plain brown robin settled on his shoulder and sang to comfort him in his suffering. Blood dripped from the crown of thorns onto the little bird and ever since then all robins have had a red breast.

The exchanging of presents has several meanings. Firstly, it remembers the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that the Magi gave to Jesus. Secondly, it remembers the gifts that St. Nicholas gave to the poor. Thirdly, and most importantly for Christians, it remembers the gift of Jesus to the world.

FOR YOU TO DO:

Complete the worksheet on Christmas Traditions.

Christmas Tradition	Original Meaning	Christian Meaning
Celebrating in the middle of winter		
Holly		
Ivy		
Kissing under the mistletoe		
Christmas trees		
Santa Claus		
Christmas robins		
Giving presents		

Finding Christ in Our Neighbour



The primary duty of Christians is to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We have been told this again and again since we were very small. When it comes to loving God, there are major problems. Every day we seem to face further difficulties... small ones, and sometimes major ones. Why does God arrange things the way they are, causing us worry, anger and frustration? A Benedictine abbot once said,

Life in a monastery is like life on the outside.

It's just one damn thing after another.

Over the centuries, some of the best spiritual writing in the Catholic Church has been done by saints and mystics who complained about how difficult it was to love God.

Whose Neighbour?

When it comes to loving our neighbour, we are faced with even more difficulties:

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. (Rom 13:8)

This is easier said than done. Since it seems impossible to love some people, we are tempted to abandon the effort completely. But when we understand what the Gospels mean by the word 'love', we discover that it is indeed possible to love others.

When we say that someone loves someone else, we usually mean that the two people are very close and intimate with each other... such as a couple 'in love' or when a parent adores a child. When someone loves someone else, they are delighted to be in the company of the other. They enjoy each other. Personal satisfaction is included when we use the term 'love' in this sense.

We even use the word 'love' for things: a pet cat or dog, a band, a football team, fish and chips...



Widespread Love

But the Gospels use the term 'love' in a much broader sense. Eugene Boylan, a Cistercian monk, said that the Gospels command us to love *everybody*, but they do not command us to like *anybody*. He says that to love everybody means to wish them well – regardless of how we might actually feel about them. We often have little control over what we feel, but we do control what we wish and what we do. We are not the slaves of our feelings. What we actually do, is what we have decided to do:

Do not to others what you wouldn't want done to yourself.

This is the whole of the Law of God, the rest is just commentary,

... said Rabbi Hillel, a great Jewish teacher who lived a generation before Christ.

Wise Words

Christ himself prayed for those who were crucifying him:

Forgive them, Father; they don't know what they are doing.

Likewise, Mother Julian of Norwich, a great hermit of the Middle Ages, warns us that...

Looking at another's sin clouds the eyes of the soul, hiding for the time being the fair beauty of God – unless we look upon this sinner with contrition with him, compassion on him, and a holy longing to God for him.

Summary

To love everybody means to wish them well – regardless of how we might actually feel about them.

Prayer

Lord, help me to see clearly the goodness in other people.

Activities for the classroom

How is loving God related to loving my neighbour?

Design a poster on the theme

'Love God, Love others'.



A FILM TO WATCH AT SENIOR CYCLE



SOUL SURFER is the inspiring true story of teen surfer Bethany Hamilton, who lost her arm in a shark attack and courageously overcame all odds to become a champion again, inspiring millions worldwide through the love of her family, her sheer determination, and unwavering faith. The film features an all-star cast, including Anna Sophia Robb and Helen Hunt, with Carrie Underwood in her film debut and Dennis Quaid.

PLOT

In 2003, teenager Bethany Hamilton lives in Kauai, Hawaii with her parents and two brothers, Noah and Timmy. All are surfers, but she and her best friend Alana Blanchard have grown up with a passion for the sport and enter a competition. Her church youth ministry leader, Sarah Hill, is disappointed when she has to withdraw from a planned missions trip because of the contest.

Bethany and Alana place first and third, respectively, while the second place winner, Malina Birch, proves to be resentful. Bethany invites both girls up on the winner's box with her, but Malina ungraciously refuses. The Rip Curl surfwear company offers to sponsor her and Alana in competition.

The night before Halloween, Alana and Bethany sneak off with some friends to go night surfing. Later, while her dad goes to the hospital for knee surgery, both girls go surfing with Alana's father and brother. As Bethany dangles her left arm in the water, a tiger shark appears out of nowhere and sinks its teeth into it, biting it off near the shoulder.

Alana's father gets Bethany out of the water and puts a tourniquet on her while his son Byron calls 911. An ambulance meets them on the way to the hospital. Just before starting her dad's surgery, Dr. Rovinsky is called to the emergency room to treat Bethany. She has lost her left arm, along with 60% of her blood and he calls her survival a miracle.

Bethany's injury disqualifies her from the Rip Curl photo shoots, but she wishes Alana well. Rip Curl is supportive of her, providing a prosthetic arm. It is cosmetically perfect and has bendable joints, but she angrily rejects it when she learns it will not help her surf. The onslaught of paparazzi also proves to be a great strain on her family and their privacy.

The family, however, bears no ill will towards the Blanchards for taking her out to the place where she was attacked, and her mother even tells Alana's dad that she is grateful he was there, for his quick thinking and decisive action saved her life.

Bethany perseveres and, after a recuperation period, gets back in the water and learns to surf with one arm, eventually re-entering the

competition. She tells her rival Malina not to take it easy on her, and rejects a five-minute head start offered by the judges. She doesn't perform well because she can't stay on the board long enough to go out and catch a competitive wave, and Malina wins. Disheartened, she decides to give up competitive surfing.

She sees the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami on television, which places her own problems in perspective. She decides to surprise Sarah, the youth ministry leader, by joining the youth group on another mission trip to help the devastated people of Thailand. She finds that the local people are understandably afraid of the water and she notices the fear of one little boy in particular. Bethany decides to go into the sea with a surfboard, hoping this will coax him in. It works, and the realization she can use her gift to inspire people motivates her to take up surfing again.

Her dad, Tom, rigs a handle on her surfboard which she can use to prevent falling off while paddling out to the waves, which is not prohibited by the competition rules. He also voices the belief that she possesses a great surfer's instinct for sensing when the best waves will form. She enters the regional championship, thanks Malina for treating her as a serious competitor, and performs respectably, though she is still chasing third place. Suddenly, with only minutes left on the clock, the waves die down and all the surfers can only loiter, waiting for them to start back up. Tom's belief in his daughter's instinct is proven when she is the only one to sense a big wave forming, and she alone paddles out.

When it forms, the others can't get out in time and she catches it just as the horn sounds. If it is in time, she will win, but the judges rule that the time has expired. Malina is the winner, but she has finally gotten over her differences with Bethany, inviting her up on the platform to share first place.

Subsequently, Bethany lets the reporters interview her. One asks her what she would do if given the chance to undo the loss of her arm. She says that she would still lose it because she can embrace more people now than she ever could with both.

Soul Surfer: Searching for Something Bigger

An experienced surfer has a perspective on the surf conditions that people who don't surf cannot see or understand. Surfers sit on their boards out in the ocean and watch the horizon—waiting for something bigger than their last ride. The swells slowly build until they reach a peak and begin to peel in one or both directions; this is the moment that the fun begins for a surfer.

Then, it is experience that gives a surfer the necessary perspective to read the wave and decide if it is the right one to catch.

God's plans, like the waves in the ocean, are more easily seen and understood by people who build up experience. Those who are dedicated to following God and accustomed to listening to Him and His Word are more likely to read "God waves." This ability to discern God's plans and purposes is not, however, out of our reach, nor is it reserved for only a sacred few. God longs to give us the desires of our hearts, and fulfilling God's purpose for our lives is what brings true happiness. Bethany understood that even surfing could not be more important to her than her relationship with God and His plans for her. Bethany yearned for *something bigger*—something only God could create.

The Bible makes it clear that God has a good plan and purpose for our lives (Jeremiah 29:11). The Bible also tells us that God who created the universe knows each one of us intimately (Psalm 139). He knew each of us before we were born. He knows the number of hairs on our heads and everything about our daily lives (Matthew 10:29-31). He knows when we are ready for something bigger! Not only does God love us, He has good plans for us, bigger plans than we can imagine. He has the big picture, the perspective to see what we cannot see. He is waiting for each of us to be ready to trust Him and jump into something bigger.

Just as Bethany moved from searching for bigger rides in the ocean to searching for a purpose bigger than surfing, we too can search for something bigger. God's purposes and plans for our lives are bigger than anything we can dream up.

Classroom Discussion Questions:

- Even as a little girl, Bethany Hamilton seemed to be "searching for something bigger". Why do you suppose she was so spiritually sensitive at such a young age?
- In the movie after her recovery, when Bethany returns to the water to surf her father encourages her to be patient. How does this scene in the movie inspire you? In what ways do you find it difficult to be patient? Describe a time in your life that required patience and share how it led to you overcoming a challenge or obstacle.
- After her accident Bethany decided to travel with her youth group and serve others. How do you feel that changed her circumstances and outlook in life? She used her God-given talent to bring the love and hope of Christ to a young child and ultimately a larger group. What gift(s) has God given you and how have you (or could you) used them to help others? Discuss how focusing on others shapes who you are and fulfills God's purpose.
- Bethany's story underscores the strength of "family". In what ways do you feel God's design of the family unit is critical for individuals and communities? What role has your family played in your life? How can a larger group of friends come together as a family and support each other?

ON THE WEB

Inter-Faith Calendar

Mission Alive, the outreach office of the Irish Missionary Union has produced a calendar for schools, colleges with a difference. The calendar tracks significant UN dates and Feast days and important religious days from September 2011 to August 2012. The calendar looks at some important dates from the Christian faith, Jewish Faith and the Islamic Faith. The calendar is available to download from www.imu.ie



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Run4Unity 2012

Focolare in conjunction with the International Eucharistic Congress (www.IEC2012.ie/) have prepared a Youth Pastoral programme using the medium of Sport-Run4Unity!



The Run4Unity is an International Sports Marathon which in 2005 and 2008 involved over 100,000 young people in 182 cities. Irish teenagers will join with tens of thousands of their peers in significant locations around the globe, in this world wide relay race to express their desire for a more united world and to raise funds for scholarships in developing countries.

Your School is invited to participate by:

1. By engaging in the preparation programme for the year; see the 6 Maths symbols. Each one is linked to a sentence of the Gospel. The proposal is to start living one each month commencing in November, and to communicate the experiences of your class through emailing; Run4UnityIEC2012@focolare.ie A selection will be published on the IEC website/ IEC Facebook page each month.
2. Enrol for the Run4Unity! Your students will then be issued with sponsorship cards. The sponsorship money will go directly to the teenagers in developing countries (as in 2005 and 2008) to help them receive an education. For those who wish, there is the option of linking in with a class in a developing country by contacting or going directly to www.school-mates.org. Run4UnityIEC2012@focolare.ie
3. You have the option of arranging your own Run4unity to coincide with the International Event. This could be part of your schools sports day in the weeks leading up to the International Event on 12 May 2012.
4. You can also send your winning runners/team to represent your school at the National Run4Unity in the grounds of Stormont in Belfast on the **12 May 2012**.
5. The culminating celebratory Youth festival for all participating schools/ Youth clubs will be held as a central part of the International Eucharistic Congress programme in June 2012. All students will be invited to send in their photos and School-Mates contributions. Awards will be given by key personalities.

To facilitate the above a Resource pack will shortly be available.

It consists of;

1. **DVD** which gives an introduction to Students
2. **4 Posters** around each of the goals.
3. **6 Math Symbol** A4 pages to live from Jan 2012
4. **PowerPoint** outlining in more detail the School-mates projects

Run4Unity is organised by the Youth4Unity, the teenagers of the Focolare (www.focolare.org). They commit themselves to build bridges wherever they are, spreading a culture of giving, peace and fraternity amongst their peers. It is for Young people of every race religion and creed who wish to work towards the goal of universal fraternity.

You can order a complete resource pack for your classroom by contacting Ms Irene Jovras - run4unityIEC2012@focolare.ie / Tel: 086-0898740



Catholic Schools Week 2012

Seachtain na Scoileanna Caitliceacha 2012

29 January - 4 February

The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2012 is “Catholic Schools: Christ’s living body active in our world.” The theme is taken from the anthem of the 50th International Eucharistic Congress, *Though we Are Many* - (Bernard Sexton), and reflects the overall theme of the Eucharistic Congress - The Eucharist: ‘Communion with Christ and with one another.’

Verse 3 of the Anthem:

“And through this shared Eucharist we are a living Church. We witness to Christ’s love His living body active in our world.”

This year Catholic Schools Week reflects on the school as a community having as its goal the full development of the pupil.

Catholic schools consist of pupils, staff members, parents, school management and patrons. They form a vital part of the local community. The proverb says “it takes a whole village to rear a child” and in its own way each school mirrors the local community in its nurturing concern for its pupils. When the Catholic school community celebrate Mass they partake of the body of the Lord by participating in the elements of the liturgy.

Truly the school is taken up into communion with Christ and all members of the school community with one another. “Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of His Body, (1 Cor 12:27) “but severally members one of another”. Rom. 12:5.

Time and again attention is drawn to the identity of the Church as the living body of Christ.

The school community is made up of people who form part of each other as the limbs of a body.

The Catholic school community, at a crucial time in the lives of young people, is for them the local Church making Christ present in new and unexpected ways but especially by being caring.

So the mission of all is to be witnesses and ambassadors of the love of Christ in the world. (LG. §7,8; Eph6:20).

To help schools celebrate Catholic Schools Week 2012 resources have been prepared and will be circulated to schools in January. The resources will also be available to download before Christmas at www.catholicbishops.ie/education