



Easter Reflection Day

A Teaching Resource for Key Stage 2

The Easter story can be tricky to handle in schools. At its core, it raises uncomfortable questions and focuses upon the death of a man in the most shocking of circumstances.

The Christian claims about the cross and empty tomb are huge – that Jesus was God's Son; that his death was a beautiful choice; that he rose from the dead; and that his resurrection offers humanity an everlasting, restored relationship with the God of the Universe.

These are huge claims and have been contentious throughout history, but those who believe them profess great blessing from them.

This Easter Reflection Day is for schools to share a day off-timetable so that classes can slow down and look afresh at the Easter story. Pupils can consider how the Easter events were viewed by those involved at the time, and what relevance these events could hold for people today.

Equipment You'll Need for the Day:

- Dressing up clothes/props: to support your retelling of the Easter story.
- A retelling of the Easter story: a version is included at the back of this resource.
- Clay/plasticine/salt dough for each pupil to create a model figure: recipes for salt dough are available on the internet.
- Paper speech and thought bubbles.
- Netballs, cylinders (e.g. glue sticks or toilet rolls), rulers, balances.
- Range of art equipment: a wide selection of media will help spark pupils' creativity.

Session 1 (Before Break)

Aims

- To retell the Easter story, remembering the main events.
- To explore the emotions experienced by characters in the Easter story and how these resonate with pupils.
- To consider why the Easter story is so important for Christians.

1. Host a circle time to explore with pupils what Easter means for them. Set up your circle with an additional space.

Q: Does your family do anything special at Easter? What?

Q: Do you receive chocolate or have an Easter egg hunt? Is there a reason for this?

Q: Does anyone go to church or attend a sunrise service? Why?

2. Remaining in the circle, introduce the day.

We are going to be using drama to help us look more deeply at the Easter story, wondering together what it would have felt like for some of those present as they participated in the events of Easter week. Before we start, we shall first examine some of our own emotions that we might bring with us today.

Ask the children to remain in silence for this next activity. There is no need for them to explain their movements. Do not ask questions about any of their movement choices. If any of the statements that you read out apply to them, the pupils can choose to stand up and travel across the circle and take a different seat. [Have an additional space present in your circle so that if only one child moves, there is a new space for them to go to.]

Read through the statements below. You may wish to skip or replace some statements if they could be too personal or painful for some of your pupils.

- 'You may choose to cross the circle to a new space if...'
- 'You ate toast for breakfast.'
- 'You walked to school today.'
- 'Your favourite lesson is PE.'
- 'You have a brother.'
- 'Someone has read a story with you this week.'
- 'You have moved house during your life.'
- 'You have ever been on a really long journey that took more than half a day.'
- 'You have been part of a really large crowd (like a football match, concert or protest).'
- 'You have a special friend who knows you really well.'
- 'You have ever had a close friend or family member die.'
- 'You have ever been let down by a friend or family member.'
- 'You have ever been made to feel left out of something.'
- 'You have ever been lost.'
- 'You have been so excited for something that you have struggled to go to sleep.'
- 'You have ever been mean to a friend, or let a friend down.'

- ‘You have ever spent time on your own pondering ‘big’ questions like: ‘Why are we here? Why is so much wrong with the world?’ Or other big questions about God or death.’
- ‘You have ever felt really alone or lonely.’
- ‘You have ever been asked to do something really painful or challenging that you did not want to do but were brave enough to do it anyway.’
- ‘You have ever been really confused by something.’
- ‘You have ever been so shocked or surprised that you were speechless or cried.’

As we look at the events of Easter, you may find that your experience of these emotions connects with those of the crowd, disciples or Jesus at different points in the story.

3. **Drama warm-up.**

Just as we warm-up for PE or do ‘mental maths’ to warm-up for maths, we are going to warm-up for drama. Have the class stand in the circle facing outwards. Explain you are going to give them an emotion and then count down from twenty (thinking time) and on ‘zero’ they have to spin around and give you their best ‘freeze’ pose to show that emotion. Praise pupils for elements that really express that emotion.

**Fear
Anger
Joy
Anxiety
Excitement
Guilt**

4. **Retell the Easter story, broken into chunks. (The story is at the end of this resource).**

We are about to work together to retell a shocking story. Some of it is extremely uncomfortable and troubling. However, it is important that we engage with this event as it has had such a huge impact on the world. Even locally, we find roads, buildings, schools, hospitals and more are still named after the characters in this story. And our calendar has been organised around the central character (BC and AD)!

Looking at the events just before the climax of the Easter story will help us to better understand why the eyewitnesses were so amazed...

Seat the pupils back in the circle and go round numbering them from 1-6. Start with all the #1’s in the middle. As you read the first chunk of the narration, pupils are to spontaneously work together to act out the story (for classes that need support with this, consider having a few simple props to denote roles e.g. a staff for Jesus, headdresses/headscarves for disciples or crowd, a religious artefact for the Jewish leaders to hold, a sword or a shield for soldiers etc.). Continue rotating through the groups until the story is told and all groups have had a turn to act.

5. **Interrogate the story.**

We are going to think about why the Easter story is pivotal to the Christian faith.

- Set up stations for pupils to experience different definitions of the word ‘pivot’. For example:
 - Pupils could work in threes to receive a netball pass, pivot and then pass the ball off in a different direction. Can they think of other sports where they have to pivot/suddenly change direction? (It can be a good strategy in tag!)
 - Pupils could also work in groups to play with cylinders (e.g. toilet rolls or glue sticks) and rulers to see if they can find balance points.
 - Pupils could play with old-fashioned scales to find the equilibrium (use weights on one side and objects on the other).

b. Ask the question: **In what ways does the Easter story act as a pivot point for the Christian faith?** Answers might include the below:

Type of Pivot	Purpose of Pivot	How does this relate to the Easter Story being a Pivot point for Christians?
Netball	Sharp change of direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many disciples, followers and witnesses turned from not seeing Jesus as God to seeing differently and believing that Jesus is God. • Christians believe that Jesus' death and resurrection enable them to turn from their old life (as enemies of God) and start a new life (as friends with God). • Christians believe that meeting Jesus today will be the most significant turning point of anyone's life.
Scales / Ruler	Show when things are in or out of balance.	The accounts of the crucifixion and empty tomb need to be weighed to make sense of the events and work out if they have any relevance for us today.

c. Tell the pupils how St Paul writes about this in the Bible, and that his words were recorded in **1 Corinthians 15:17**:

**‘Unless Christ was raised to life,
your faith is useless, and you are
still living in your sins.’ (CEV)**

d. Why might St Paul have said these words? Why does he see the resurrection as the pivot point of faith? Possible answers include:

- The resurrection shows the power of God.
- It validates who Jesus claimed to be. Jesus claimed to be God, performed miracles that only God could and prophesied that he would die and rise again after 3 days (Mark 8:31).
- It sets us free from our sin. 1 John 4:10 says: ‘Real love isn’t our love for God, but his love for us. God sent his Son to be the sacrifice by which our sins are forgiven.’ (CEV)
- It gives hope for when we die. Jesus said (John 3:16): ‘God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die.’ (CEV)
- It is possible to examine the evidence for and against whether or not it happened by asking questions such as:
 - ◇ What is the evidence that Jesus actually died?
 - ◇ What happened to his body?
 - ◇ What do you make of accounts that people saw him alive again, e.g. the disciples (John 20:19-29), and 500 others all at once (1 Corinthians 15:6)?
 - ◇ Why would the disciples be prepared to suffer extremely painful deaths if they knew the resurrection was not true?

Session 2 (After Break)

Aim

- To consider what the onlookers to the Easter story might have seen, felt and pondered as the events unfolded.

1. **Give the pupils some clay/plasticine/salt dough** (salt dough can be made at home very inexpensively, there are lots of recipes on the internet) and ask them to make a model of the character that they enacted earlier during the telling of the story. As they sit quietly doing this, ask the following 'wondering' questions, giving space to allow the pupils to think:

'I wonder...'

- 'What was Jesus up to in your scene?'
- 'What conflicting emotions Jesus might have been experiencing?'
- 'What gave him the strength/peace of mind/ability to keep going?'
- 'Who else was present?'
- 'Whether they wanted to be there?'
- 'If they didn't want to be there, how it was that they found themselves in this scene?'
- 'What they thought of Jesus at that moment?'
- 'Whether this was different to how they had previously thought of Jesus?'
- 'If they could have said something to Jesus, what might they have said?'

2. **Give each child a paper thought bubble and a paper speech bubble.**

Ask them to record what their character might have been feeling and saying. Who might they have been talking to? Other disciples, Jesus, members of the crowd?

3. **Group the pupils again into their drama groups (1-6), sitting the pupils around a table.**

Pupils to arrange their models to represent the scene they enacted, choosing to also add their thought/speech bubbles if they wish. Ask each group to choose from the questions above and to discuss these together, seeing whether they can reach a consensus.

4. **Feed back to the class.**

Give each group time to feed back their discussion, working through the story in sequence. As you listen to each group, draw out the journey of emotions and thoughts that the crowd, disciples, religious leaders and Jesus went on.

5. **Crowds...** Look at a photo of a sports crowd together (find a photo of a football crowd as a good example):

- What reactions can you see amongst the people?
- Can anyone spot an enthusiastic supporter?
- What about a bored person?
- Who looks cold or disengaged?
- Are there two people who look as though they may be supporters of opposite teams?! How can you tell?

Crowds are never made up of people who think exactly the same. How about friends — do they always think the same? You could illustrate this by getting them to talk with their friends and find three topics that they have different opinions about. There are even differences of opinion between people who believe or follow the same faith or religion.

Can anyone think of an example to illustrate this? For example, Shiite and Sunni Muslims or Evangelical and Liberal Christians. Some Muslim students will not go to university because they believe it to be against their religion to take on a loan, others do not feel tied by this. Some Christians believe you should wait and only baptise people as adults, others think they should baptise babies...

6. **Class discussion:** What different opinions were there of Jesus? Challenge the pupils to think of as many different reactions as they can to how people at the time responded to Jesus. Record as a corporate mind map on the whiteboard. If pupils need supporting with this, they could be given the following Bible passages to look at:

- Mark 1:27-28 – People amazed at his teaching and what he did.
- Mark 3:2 – People were looking for a way to accuse Jesus—why/of what?
- Mark 3:7-11 – Large crowds follow him, coming from miles away—why?
- Mark 3:21 – His family think he’s gone mad!
- Mark 3:22 – Teachers of the Law think that he’s demon possessed.
- Mark 4:35-41 – Jesus calms a storm. Witnessing this miracle terrifies his disciples and leaves them wondering who he is.
- Mark 5:17 – Jesus heals a demon possessed man—but the locals respond by wanting Jesus to leave. Why? Were they scared/threatened/uncomfortable/angry...?
- Mark 8:27-30 – Peter, one of the key disciples, states that he thinks Jesus is God.
- Mark 9:20-27 – Jesus heals a boy with an evil spirit. The father says ‘I believe but help my unbelief!’
- Mark 11:7-10 – Crowd celebrates Jesus as their king.
- Mark 14:1 – Teachers of the Law scheming to arrest and kill Jesus. Why did they want him dead?
- Mark 15:27-32 – Insulted by many whilst on the cross.
- Mark 15:41 – Women who throughout had faithfully followed and cared for him.

Session 3 (After Lunch)

Aim

- To consider why there were (and are) such a range of responses to Jesus.
- To create a piece of art where pupils can explore their own response to Jesus and the Easter narrative.

1. **Class discussion: Look again at the mind map from before lunch – why might there have been such huge variety in how Jesus was viewed?**

Some people wanted to kill him, whilst at the same time he drew enormous crowds from a huge area, many of whom wanted to crown him as king...

Look at this paraphrased quotation from C.S. Lewis (a Christian and author of the Narnia series) from his book Mere Christianity:

‘People often say a foolish thing about Jesus: ‘He was a good teacher, but I don’t think he was God’... A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher...’

Jesus claimed to be God. His claim hugely irritated the religious leaders. A good person does not claim to be God. C.S. Lewis goes on...

‘...Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.’

Can anyone summarise C.S. Lewis’ argument? It is often summarized as: ‘Jesus cannot be just a good man. He is either mad, bad or God.’

2. **Mad, Bad or God.**

Let's think about the scales from this morning to weigh up each of these options. For each, have two buckets (one for each side of the scales, six buckets total) and give the pupils space to weigh the ideas for themselves.

Mad	
Bucket 1: 'What would a mad person do?'	Bucket 2: 'What did Jesus do?'
Speak rubbish, frighten people, pretend to be someone else, not listen to others...	Spoke powerfully and with authority, calmed people and helped them not to frighten others, let others say who they thought he was, listened to people, healed people, asked more questions than he answered, made a storm be still, fed 5,000 people...
Bad	
Bucket 1: 'What would a bad person do?'	Bucket 2: 'What did Jesus do?'
Tell lies about others, tell lies about themselves, steal, put themselves first, get others into trouble, be angry with other people...	Told the truth, told stories that helped people to lead better lives, put others first, put himself into trouble, was angry with people who treated others badly, made people better, gave people food, had compassion...
God	
Bucket 1: 'How might you expect God to behave?'	Bucket 2: 'What did Jesus do?'
Answers may encompass ideas around power, miracles, judgement or mercy - will largely depend upon how the pupils view God.	Answers may be drawn from details already known about Jesus' life, but the circumstances of his death and the empty tomb are worth pausing on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Supernatural darkness at the crucifixion. b. Temple curtain tearing. c. Jesus knowing what was coming - prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane shows this. d. Empty Tomb. e. Jesus appearing physically to the disciples.

3. Show the class some examples of artwork of the various stages of the Easter story.

Choose your selection to include some mixed-media artwork. To encourage the pupils to look carefully at the artwork, consider initially only revealing a small portion of it and examining that first. Repeat with other interesting sections before allowing sight of the full artwork. Ask questions of the artwork, for example:

- Why do you think the artist selected those colours?
- What details have been chosen for the background — is it a suggestive background or realistic one? Why might the artist have painted it this way?
- (Mixed-media): Why did the artist choose those specific materials to create their piece? What impressions do the different textures leave you with? Is the artist trying to emphasise something in their work?
- What other details are there in the artwork (aside from the main subject)? Why have these been chosen? Which other characters feature and why might they have been selected?
- How has the main subject been portrayed?
- Does anyone have any other questions to ask of the artwork?

4. Pupils to create a piece of artwork depicting their scene from the morning.– it should incorporate bystanders, including someone to represent themselves.

They will be writing a gallery display paragraph to sit with their artwork and so should consider the following questions as they set about their creation:

- How are you going to portray Jesus? (Mad man/bad man/God man? Face on/side on/rear on? What was he feeling or thinking?)
- How will you create the background to your work? Are there details or pieces of scenery you want to include? Does the scene feel hopeful/fearful/confusing/sad/energetic/other... How could you show this through your choice of colours or materials for the background?
- Which other characters will be in your work? Are they conflicted? How can you indicate their response to the scene that they are participating in?
- Which figure is representative of you? Why?

Finish preparing them for this activity by examining the array of art materials available to them and the opportunities and ideas that this might spark.

5. To maintain a calm environment, put on some gentle, reflective music whilst the pupils create their artwork.

6. Once finished, ask the pupils to write an accompanying paragraph to explain their piece.

Often, in art galleries, there is a short paragraph on the wall near pictures explaining some of the symbolism or significance of the piece that is being viewed. Pupils might want to use the questions above (4) as a guide for their writing.

7. Reflection: To close the day, draw the class together and provide an opportunity for those who want to share their work to do so. Others may prefer to keep their reflections to themselves.

- Sit round in a circle together again.
- Remind the children that the day began with an activity of walking across that circle if they identified with any of the experiences or emotions mentioned.
- Perhaps today has raised new emotions or reflections.
- Christians believe that God spent 33 years on earth in human form (in the person of Jesus) and so is familiar with human emotions — he's felt them too. He knew the joy of close friendships

and the pain of betrayal. He knew despair and anguish. He knew what it was like to be loved and to be hated. He knew what it was to be misunderstood or unheard. He knew unbelievable suffering and sacrifice. He knew what it was to love. In fact, the Bible says, he gave his life for his friends. Christians believe he invites each one of us to be his friend. Imagine being a friend with God!

- Light a candle in the centre of the circle and read these words from the Bible...
- The Bible records in John 15:12-15 that Jesus said these words to his disciples at his final meal with them before his arrest and crucifixion:

'Now I tell you to love each other, as I have loved you. The greatest way to show love for friends is to die for them. And you are my friends, if you obey me. Servants don't know what their master is doing, and so I don't speak to you as my servants. I speak to you as my friends, and I have told you everything that my Father has told me.' (CEV)

- Put some music on and give the pupils space. The Bible claims that Jesus understands our deepest reflections and feelings. If we want, we can talk to him — this is prayer. We can pray by thinking our conversation inside our head to God, or we can whisper or speak our words aloud. Some people write letters to him as a way of praying. As we listen to the music, you have space to pray. Equally you may prefer to simply sit quietly and think through the day — what you have enjoyed and what you have found challenging or difficult.

A Retelling of the Easter Story

Session 1

This retelling can be read aloud whilst the pupils re-enact it together. It has been divided into six chunks. To give them sufficient time to act, and ideas to support this, it pulls in some of the background and contextual information to enrich the retelling. Close physical contact (e.g. the kiss of Judas) has been carefully adapted due to COVID.

Group 1: Palm Sunday

Characters: Jesus, several crowd members, a disciple or two.

It was soon to be the festival of Passover and Jews from around the nation were making their way to celebrate together in Jerusalem. What was this news, spreading through the crowd...? Jesus was coming? Jesus who had recently healed Lazarus and brought him back to life after Lazarus had been dead and mourned for three days? This was a man not to be missed. The news spread quickly, passed from one to another amongst the crowds that were already gathered there. Excitedly, they went out to meet him. What might he do next? Was this the man who would lead them in an uprising to overthrow their Roman rulers? Would he perform other miracles?

And now here he was, riding into sight. Alongside him were his disciples. There was Peter, impetuous Peter. Peter who acted first and thought second. And there were John and James, looking around, taking it all in. And the others. And what was Jesus riding? He was close now. Not looking all victorious and powerful on a horse, strutting his authority like the Romans did. Rather, he was coming towards them on a donkey. A strange choice. People in the crowd didn't seem to mind.

They had cut branches off nearby palm trees and were waving them with joy. Smaller children were on their parents' shoulders so they could see. Shorter people on tip toes. Others jumping up and down to catch a glimpse. Jesus serene in the midst. Accepting their praise and worship. Those kind eyes looking out over the crowd, occasionally catching the eye of one of his disciples and sharing the moment with them. Such a powerful feeling of hope and excitement was bubbling up. Now people were calling out, shouting praise. 'Hosanna!' Now someone laid down their cloak for Jesus to ride over. 'Here comes the King of Israel!' Others were copying now. They laid down cloaks and branches. Some knelt as he passed by. The cheering and laughter and joy swelled. More and more people joined the throng, processing with him into Jerusalem.



Group 2: The Last Supper

Characters: Jesus, man in the city, some disciples.

When it was time for the Passover meal, Jesus sent two of his disciples into the city on a bit of a strange mission. By now they had been with Jesus for several years, following him, listening to him, watching the crazy things that seemed to unfold around him. So they didn't worry too much. They knew to go along with whatever Jesus said. They laughed and chatted as they wandered into the city. That evening they would share a very special meal together where they would retell the story of how God had rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. They did this every year at Passover. All the Jewish people did. Around the city rooms were being readied and meals prepared. The disciples' conversation soon turned to other Passovers that they had celebrated — good memories of friends and family gathered together.

And here he was. The man they had been told to look for. The man carrying a water jar. It looked heavy. He was straining under its weight as he carried it. As Jesus had told them to, the two disciples fell in step behind him, following him home. The man with the water jar glanced back every now and again. Were these men following him? He'd spent all morning preparing the room for his master, setting up for the Passover meal. This was the last thing to do – collect some more water so that the guests could wash. He was tired from the work. No energy to worry about why these strangers seemed to be following him or what they might want with him. Soon they reached the house – the master seemed to be expecting them. They were welcomed in and shown to the prepared room. The disciples immediately set about the final arrangements.

That evening, Jesus and the disciples were all together in the room. As they lay on their sides, reclining at the table and eating together, they shared stories of the things they'd done together. This was a time for closeness. Such a special meal with the closest of friends. Suddenly Jesus cut in and said, 'One of you who is here eating with me will betray me.' That cut things dead. The disciples all looked shocked and puzzled, each thinking 'surely it's not me?'

This pronouncement by Jesus unnerved them all. Betrayal? One of them? To whom – the Jewish leaders? The atmosphere of the evening had shifted. No longer the warm closeness of shared memories. Now big questions, sad and scary questions, hung unspoken in the air. Jesus carried on. He took the bread in his hands, said a prayer over it and then broke it and shared chunks of it with each of them. As he did so, he said: 'Take; this is my body.' Without pausing he lifted up the cup of wine. Again he gave thanks for it and gave it to them for them all to drink from. Then he spoke these words, 'This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until I drink it in the new kingdom of God.'



Group 3: Garden of Gethsemane

Characters: Jesus, John, Peter, James, Judas, and other disciples, soldiers.

When they had sung a hymn together, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus told them how they would fall away because of what was coming in the night ahead, but that after he was raised up, he would go ahead of them to Galilee. What strange, unfathomable words for the disciples. They furrowed their brows and tried to think through these hard words. Aside from Peter, that is. Always the one to act first and think later. Always the one who wore his heart on his sleeve. He jumped in immediately and promised he would never fall away. But Jesus foretold that before the night was ended and the cock had crowed, Peter would deny him three times. Truly this was turning into a strange and unhappy Passover night. They plodded on as a group, shoulders slumped, the weight of all the things spoken pushing them down.

Then Jesus took them to a place called Gethsemane. He asked the disciples to sit and wait whilst he went on a bit further with James, John and Peter. And he began to be deeply troubled. He was struggling hugely. He seemed restless and pained. His usual calm, reassuring presence had vanished. And now he needed these three special friends to be with him, to support him, to watch through the night with him. As they sat, they found their eyes were heavy. The past few days had been full and long. They were well fed from the Passover meal and tired. Their eyes drooped. Jesus, meanwhile, had stepped on a little further off from them and fallen face down to the ground, beseeching God for it not to be this way. Was there another way through? Please not the shame, the mocking, the cross. And yet, he concluded: 'Not my will, but your will be done.' Returning to his closest friends, to Peter, James and John, he found them asleep. Could they not have stayed awake? Could they not see how deeply he was struggling and how in need of their support and company through the anguish of this night? He woke them and gently chided them. Oh, how badly did they feel. Jesus was obviously in such a dark place, and they had let him down. They would fight to stay awake. Again, Jesus went off a short distance and prayed. Such pain. Such a struggle to lay himself down, to choose to follow the course set before him. Again, the eyes of the three disciples grew heavy, heads nodded, and once again they feel asleep. Jesus returned to them, shrugged and left to pray a third time.

Now there were lights in the distance. Torchlight flickering on metal armour and swords. The sound of a crowd approaching rose to break through the quiet of the garden. Once the crowd was closer the disciples could see that it was a band of soldiers and some officers of the chief priests. They were approaching with such confidence and strength. This didn't look good. The disciples glanced fearfully at each other. The situation was hopeless. What could they do? Hang on... There was Judas in the midst of the crowd? He stepped forward to Jesus, and the gaze of the two men met. Such disappointment and sadness from Jesus. Such guilt and shame from Judas.

Peter, rash and impulsive as ever, drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting his ear clean off! But this was not the way it was to be. Jesus touched the man's ear and it was healed. He submitted to the arrest. Violence was not his way.

Group 4: Before the Jewish Leaders and Pilate

Characters: Jesus, Peter, High Priest, Pilate (and servant girl and soldiers).

Jesus was brought by the band of soldiers to the house of the high priest. Peter, faithful Peter, had followed cautiously at a distance and sat down amongst the rest of the crowd near a fire in the middle of the courtyard to await news of what would unfold inside the house. As he warmed his hands at the fire, one of the servant girls of the high priest looked at him and recognised him as a friend of Jesus'. But Peter shook his head vigorously and denied it. After she went back to her business, Peter moved from the fire, keen not to be noticed. He did not feel comfortable here but did want to know what was happening to Jesus. Inside, the chief priests and whole Jewish Council had come together and were seeking testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. Never mind that this was an illegal hearing, for it was being held at night. Never mind that many witnesses gave false testimony meaning that their statements did not match up.



Surely there was a way to have Jesus condemned? Eventually, the high priest stood up, frustrated. Angry. He demanded of Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make to these men who testify against you?' But Jesus remained silent. Outside, Peter had moved closer in to the shadows and was trying his hardest to be inconspicuous. But the servant girl was back out and would not let the matter drop. She began telling others in the crowd that Peter was one of Jesus' friends. But again he shook his head furiously and denied her claims. He needed to get away from her and from the suspicious glances he was receiving. But he didn't want to leave the courtyard, he had to know what was happening... And what was happening? The high priest was getting more wound up by the minute. 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' To which all ears heard Jesus answer, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' This was it for the High Priest. He tore his clothes and declared that there was no need of further witnesses. It didn't take long for the council to decide he should be condemned to death.

Back outside, the evening continued to get more awkward for Peter. For now someone else claimed to recognize him, pointing out that his accent was not local – he was from Galilee, like Jesus. The vigorous denial that Peter made, lasted a matter of minutes until the cock crowed. Peter heard it and broke down and wept.

As soon as it was morning, Jesus was bound and led to Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem. Naturally, Pilate enquired as to what charges were brought against Jesus. When asked by Pilate whether he was King of the Jews, Jesus merely replied, 'You have said so'. But when he was then accused by the chief priests, Jesus made no answer. Pilate said to him, 'Do you hear how many things they testify against you?' But Jesus made no answer. This amazed Pilate.

Pilate knew it was out of envy that the chief priests had brought Jesus to him, wanting him killed. But he needed to keep the peace and the chief priests and the crowd they had brought with them were a threat to that. What to do? At Passover, it was customary for the Governor to release a prisoner – someone whom the crowd wanted. So he put it to them: Barabbas or Jesus? Who would they like to have released? Again and again, the crowd called for Barabbas. And when asked what they would like him to do with Jesus, the shout came back: 'Crucify. Crucify. Crucify.' Fearing that the angry crowd might soon be turned to riot, Pilate took some water in a bowl and washed his hands before the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves.'

Section 5: The Crucifixion

Characters: Jesus, Soldier(s), chief priest, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene.

The soldiers led Jesus away from Pilate and into the palace. There they put a purple robe on him and set a crown of thorns on his head. Sneeringly they bowed down in mock worship before beating him and spitting on him. Eventually the bullying stopped and they put his own clothes on him and led him out to be crucified. By this point, Jesus was so exhausted from the beatings and all that he had endured that he struggled to carry the heavy wooden cross beam. A passing man was forced to carry it out to Golgotha for him, whilst Jesus stumbled along behind. Each step was a painful exertion. Once there, he was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh to dull the pain, but Jesus refused to take it. So it was that his hands and feet were nailed to the cross and he was hoisted up high for all to see. Next to him, two other criminals also hung on their crosses. People who passed by hurled insults. The chief priests mocked him. 'He saved others, why doesn't he save himself. Let him come down from the cross and then we'll believe him.' Beneath the cross, the soldiers cast lots for his clothes. They made no attempt to silence those who were insulting him – some even joined in. Mary Magdalene and the other women stood at a distance and watched. It was unbearable to look and yet how could they turn away from Jesus?

At noon time, the middle of the day, a strange darkness came over the land for three hours. Without the sun, it was suddenly extremely cold and with the darkness, it was hard to carry on as normal. People stopped and shivered and wondered what was occurring. Why this strange happening? Then at 3pm Jesus cried out, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' The people standing nearby wondered at this. One ran to fetch a sponge filled with wine vinegar which they put on a long stick and offered up to Jesus so he could drink. With a loud cry Jesus breathed his last breath. At that moment, the ground shook and back inside the city walls, in the heart of the temple, a strange thing happened: the thick curtain that hung in the middle, separating the holy place, suddenly ripped in two. It tore straight down from top to bottom, exposing the holy place at the centre where God dwelt.

Back at the cross, now that Jesus was dead, the crowd began to disperse. The women didn't. They continued to stand at a distance, not really knowing what to do with themselves. Not really wanting to accept that Jesus was dead. One of the soldiers, who had been there throughout and had seen the strange events unfolding, was terrified and exclaimed: 'Surely he was the Son of God!'

The next day was a very special Sabbath so the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses. So Pilate instructed his soldiers to break their legs as this would hasten death. Instead when they reached Jesus, the soldiers found that he was already dead. So instead of breaking his legs, the soldier stuck his spear in Jesus' side and out flowed water and blood – a sure sign that Jesus had died. Joseph of Arimathea was given permission to take down Jesus' body. He wrapped it carefully in linen cloths and took it to a new tomb, freshly cut into the rocks nearby. He rolled a heavy stone across the entrance. The women, who had been at the cross, followed and saw where the body was laid. Then they went home and prepared the spices and perfumes ready to take back after the Sabbath.

Because Jesus had spoken about rising again after three days, the chief priests were worried about the safety of Jesus' body. So the next morning, with Pilate's permission, they went to the tomb with soldiers. They sealed it more carefully and left a guard there to ensure that nothing untoward happened.

Group 6: The Empty Tomb

Characters: Mary Magdalene, Peter, John, Jesus and optional angels.

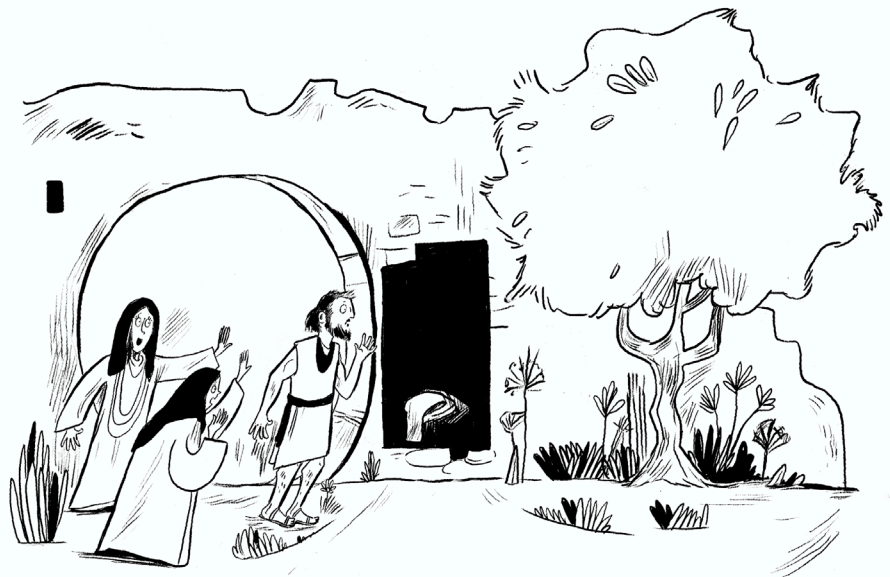
Due to the Sabbath laws, nothing could be done the day after Jesus died. But first thing the morning after, Mary Magdalene set off with some spices for the tomb. She walked slowly, not really wanting to get there and see the dead body. Not really sure how she was feeling – just numb with grief. What hope was there to live for now? She looked at the ground, lost in her thoughts as she walked. What a shock it was then to look up as she approached and to see no stone in front of the tomb. She must get Peter and the others. Without thinking, she dropped the spices and ran full-pelt back to where they were staying. She was panting hard when she arrived but from the shock and confusion on her face, they guessed at once where she'd been. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him,' she panted to the men. At this unexpected news, Peter and John set off running for the tomb. John got there first and stopped at the doorway and leaned in, seeing the strips of linen – no sign of the body that had been wrapped in them. Peter, in his usual style, didn't stop to think. When he arrived, panting, he plunged straight inside the tomb. Now John joined him and both men stared. How was this? Who would take a body but go to the trouble of leaving the wrappings!? Could it be...? Jesus' words flooded back to them. Hadn't he talked about being rejected by the religious leaders but that after three days he would rise again? They must tell the others. Grinning now from ear to ear, with heads held high, they turned and headed back to find the other disciples.

Mary had followed them more slowly back to the tomb. Now she stood outside weeping. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and stopped. Her mouth dropped open and she gasped. There were two angels seated where Jesus' body had been. 'Woman, why are you crying?' Having told them, she turned and saw someone, she supposed to be the gardener, standing nearby who repeated the question. 'Sir,' she answered, 'if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him and I will take him away.'

Then the man gently replied, 'Mary...' and in that one word, she realised it was Jesus she was speaking to. She ran to him and fell sobbing at his feet. Gently he waited as her emotions came pouring out and when she was ready, he told her to go tell the disciples.

On the evening of that first day, the disciples were together in a room with the door firmly locked, for they were afraid that the authorities might come for them next. Suddenly Jesus was standing there amongst them. 'Peace be with you,' he began and then showed them his hands and his side. They could see it really was him.

Alive! It was crazy. How could it be, and yet it was? They stood there, smiling, laughing, soaking in the joy and the madness of being together with Jesus again. Wow.



A Retelling of the Easter Story

Session 1

This retelling can be read aloud whilst the pupils re-enact it together. It has been divided into six chunks. To give them sufficient time to act, and ideas to support this, it pulls in some of the background and contextual information to enrich the retelling. Close physical contact (e.g. the kiss of Judas) has been carefully adapted due to COVID.

Group 1: Palm Sunday

Characters: Jesus, several crowd members, a disciple or two.

It was soon to be the festival of Passover and Jews from around the nation were making their way to celebrate together in Jerusalem. What was this news, spreading through the crowd...? Jesus was coming? Jesus who had recently healed Lazarus and brought him back to life after Lazarus had been dead and mourned for three days? This was a man not to be missed. The news spread quickly, passed from one to another amongst the crowds that were already gathered there. Excitedly, they went out to meet him. What might he do next? Was this the man who would lead them in an uprising to overthrow their Roman rulers? Would he perform other miracles?

And now here he was, riding into sight. Alongside him were his disciples. There was Peter, impetuous Peter. Peter who acted first and thought second. And there were John and James, looking around, taking it all in. And the others. And what was Jesus riding? He was close now. Not looking all victorious and powerful on a horse, strutting his authority like the Romans did. Rather, he was coming towards them on a donkey. A strange choice. People in the crowd didn't seem to mind.

They had cut branches off nearby palm trees and were waving them with joy. Smaller children were on their parents' shoulders so they could see. Shorter people on tip toes. Others jumping up and down to catch a glimpse. Jesus serene in the midst. Accepting their praise and worship. Those kind eyes looking out over the crowd, occasionally catching the eye of one of his disciples and sharing the moment with them. Such a powerful feeling of hope and excitement was bubbling up. Now people were calling out, shouting praise. 'Hosanna!' Now someone laid down their cloak for Jesus to ride over. 'Here comes the King of Israel!' Others were copying now. They laid down cloaks and branches. Some knelt as he passed by. The cheering and laughter and joy swelled. More and more people joined the throng, processing with him into Jerusalem.

Group 2: The Last Supper

Characters: Jesus, man in the city, some disciples.

When it was time for the Passover meal, Jesus sent two of his disciples into the city on a bit of a strange mission. By now they had been with Jesus for several years, following him, listening to him, watching the crazy things that seemed to unfold around him. So they didn't worry too much. They knew to go along with whatever Jesus said. They laughed and chatted as they wandered into the city. That evening they would share a very special meal together where they would retell the story of how God had rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. They did this every year at Passover. All the Jewish people did. Around the city rooms were being readied and meals prepared. The disciples' conversation soon turned to other Passovers that they had celebrated — good memories of friends and family gathered together.

And here he was. The man they had been told to look for. The man carrying a water jar. It looked heavy. He was straining under its weight as he carried it. As Jesus had told them to, the two disciples fell in step behind him, following him home. The man with the water jar glanced back every now and again. Were these men following him? He'd spent all morning preparing the room for his master, setting up for the Passover meal. This was the last thing to do — collect some more water so that the guests could wash. He was tired from the work. No energy to worry about why these strangers seemed to be following him or what they might want with him. Soon they reached the house — the master seemed to be expecting them. They were welcomed in and shown to the prepared room. The disciples immediately set about the final arrangements.

That evening, Jesus and the disciples were all together in the room. As they lay on their sides, reclining at the table and eating together, they shared stories of the things they'd done together. This was a time for closeness. Such a special meal with the closest of friends. Suddenly Jesus cut in and said, 'One of you who is here eating with me will betray me.' That cut things dead. The disciples all looked shocked and puzzled, each thinking 'surely it's not me?'

This pronouncement by Jesus unnerved them all. Betrayal? One of them? To whom — the Jewish leaders? The atmosphere of the evening had shifted. No longer the warm closeness of shared memories. Now big questions, sad and scary questions, hung unspoken in the air. Jesus carried on. He took the bread in his hands, said a prayer over it and then broke it and shared chunks of it with each of them. As he did so, he said: 'Take; this is my body.' Without pausing he lifted up the cup of wine. Again he gave thanks for it and gave it to them for them all to drink from. Then he spoke these words, 'This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until I drink it in the new kingdom of God.'

Group 3: Garden of Gethsemane

Characters: Jesus, John, Peter, James, Judas, and other disciples, soldiers.

When they had sung a hymn together, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus told them how they would fall away because of what was coming in the night ahead, but that after he was raised up, he would go ahead of them to Galilee. What strange, unfathomable words for the disciples. They furrowed their brows and tried to think through these hard words. Aside from Peter, that is. Always the one to act first and think later. Always the one who wore his heart on his sleeve. He jumped in immediately and promised he would never fall away. But Jesus foretold that before the night was ended and the cock had crowed, Peter would deny him three times. Truly this was turning into a strange and unhappy Passover night. They plodded on as a group, shoulders slumped, the weight of all the things spoken pushing them down.

Then Jesus took them to a place called Gethsemane. He asked the disciples to sit and wait whilst he went on a bit further with James, John and Peter. And he began to be deeply troubled. He was struggling hugely. He seemed restless and pained. His usual calm, reassuring presence had vanished. And now he needed these three special friends to be with him, to support him, to watch through the night with him. As they sat, they found their eyes were heavy. The past few days had been full and long. They were well fed from the Passover meal and tired. Their eyes drooped. Jesus, meanwhile, had stepped on a little further off from them and fallen face down to the ground, beseeching God for it not to be this way. Was there another way through? Please not the shame, the mocking, the cross. And yet, he concluded: 'Not my will, but your will be done.' Returning to his closest friends, to Peter, James and John, he found them asleep. Could they not have stayed awake? Could they not see how deeply he was struggling and how in need of their support and company through the anguish of this night? He woke them and gently chided them. Oh, how badly did they feel. Jesus was obviously in such a dark place, and they had let him down. They would fight to stay awake. Again, Jesus went off a short distance and prayed. Such pain. Such a struggle to lay himself down, to choose to follow the course set before him. Again, the eyes of the three disciples grew heavy, heads nodded, and once again they feel asleep. Jesus returned to them, shrugged and left to pray a third time.

Now there were lights in the distance. Torchlight flickering on metal armour and swords. The sound of a crowd approaching rose to break through the quiet of the garden. Once the crowd was closer the disciples could see that it was a band of soldiers and some officers of the chief priests. They were approaching with such confidence and strength. This didn't look good. The disciples glanced fearfully at each other. The situation was hopeless. What could they do? Hang on... There was Judas in the midst of the crowd? He stepped forward to Jesus, and the gaze of the two men met. Such disappointment and sadness from Jesus. Such guilt and shame from Judas.

Peter, rash and impulsive as ever, drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting his ear clean off! But this was not the way it was to be. Jesus touched the man's ear and it was healed. He submitted to the arrest. Violence was not his way.

Group 4: Before the Jewish Leaders and Pilate

Characters: Jesus, Peter, High Priest, Pilate (and servant girl and soldiers).

Jesus was brought by the band of soldiers to the house of the high priest. Peter, faithful Peter, had followed cautiously at a distance and sat down amongst the rest of the crowd near a fire in the middle of the courtyard to await news of what would unfold inside the house. As he warmed his hands at the fire, one of the servant girls of the high priest looked at him and recognised him as a friend of Jesus'. But Peter shook his head vigorously and denied it. After she went back to her business, Peter moved from the fire, keen not to be noticed. He did not feel comfortable here but did want to know what was happening to Jesus. Inside, the chief priests and whole Jewish Council had come together and were seeking testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. Never mind that this was an illegal hearing, for it was being held at night. Never mind that many witnesses gave false testimony meaning that their statements did not match up.

Surely there was a way to have Jesus condemned? Eventually, the high priest stood up, frustrated. Angry. He demanded of Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make to these men who testify against you?' But Jesus remained silent. Outside, Peter had moved closer in to the shadows and was trying his hardest to be inconspicuous. But the servant girl was back out and would not let the matter drop. She began telling others in the crowd that Peter was one of Jesus' friends. But again he shook his head furiously and denied her claims. He needed to get away from her and from the suspicious glances he was receiving. But he didn't want to leave the courtyard, he had to know what was happening... And what was happening? The high priest was getting more wound up by the minute. 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' To which all ears heard Jesus answer, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' This was it for the High Priest. He tore his clothes and declared that there was no need of further witnesses. It didn't take long for the council to decide he should be condemned to death.

Back outside, the evening continued to get more awkward for Peter. For now someone else claimed to recognize him, pointing out that his accent was not local – he was from Galilee, like Jesus. The vigorous denial that Peter made, lasted a matter of minutes until the cock crowed. Peter heard it and broke down and wept.

As soon as it was morning, Jesus was bound and led to Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem. Naturally, Pilate enquired as to what charges were brought against Jesus. When asked by Pilate whether he was King of the Jews, Jesus merely replied, 'You have said so'. But when he was then accused by the chief priests, Jesus made no answer. Pilate said to him, 'Do you hear how many things they testify against you?' But Jesus made no answer. This amazed Pilate.

Pilate knew it was out of envy that the chief priests had brought Jesus to him, wanting him killed. But he needed to keep the peace and the chief priests and the crowd they had brought with them were a threat to that. What to do? At Passover, it was customary for the Governor to release a prisoner – someone whom the crowd wanted. So he put it to them: Barabbas or Jesus? Who would they like to have released? Again and again, the crowd called for Barabbas. And when asked what they would like him to do with Jesus, the shout came back: 'Crucify. Crucify. Crucify.' Fearing that the angry crowd might soon be turned to riot, Pilate took some water in a bowl and washed his hands before the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves.'

Section 5: The Crucifixion

Characters: Jesus, Soldier(s), chief priest, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene.

The soldiers led Jesus away from Pilate and into the palace. There they put a purple robe on him and set a crown of thorns on his head. Sneeringly they bowed down in mock worship before beating him and spitting on him. Eventually the bullying stopped and they put his own clothes on him and led him out to be crucified. By this point, Jesus was so exhausted from the beatings and all that he had endured that he struggled to carry the heavy wooden cross beam. A passing man was forced to carry it out to Golgotha for him, whilst Jesus stumbled along behind. Each step was a painful exertion. Once there, he was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh to dull the pain, but Jesus refused to take it. So it was that his hands and feet were nailed to the cross and he was hoisted up high for all to see. Next to him, two other criminals also hung on their crosses. People who passed by hurled insults. The chief priests mocked him. 'He saved others, why doesn't he save himself. Let him come down from the cross and then we'll believe him.' Beneath the cross, the soldiers cast lots for his clothes. They made no attempt to silence those who were insulting him – some even joined in. Mary Magdalene and the other women stood at a distance and watched. It was unbearable to look and yet how could they turn away from Jesus?

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