

Session 3 (After Lunch)

Aim

1. **To listen to how Simeon and Anna reacted to meeting Jesus at his dedication, learning what they saw ahead for him.**
2. **To consider what Mary pondered from her experiences, and what ponderings the story leaves for pupils.**

1. **Question: Why are Christians so pleased at Christmas to celebrate Jesus being born as a baby?**

Challenge every first answer that you are given, to yield deeper thinking (see examples below). Create a class mind map of ideas.

- 'Because he was God's gift to us.' Isn't that a rather strange gift? Why would you celebrate that?
- 'Because he is the centre of their religion.' Why is that? Isn't Christianity just about people being kind and loving?
- 'Because it gives us hope.' Why is that?
- 'Because he came to die for us.' Isn't it rather weird to celebrate someone's death – a bit macabre? Why was it 'good' that he died?
- 'Because it shows that God cares for us.' How?

2. **Role play: Sort the class into groups of four pupils (Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna).**

If numbers don't work out, have some groups of three and leave out Joseph. Pupils to role play being a modern family bringing their child for baptism (with Simeon and Anna being two older members of the church congregation). Role play arriving at church with their baby, meeting Simeon and Anna inside and the sort of 'nice' comments that Simeon and Anna might make to this visiting couple and their baby.

3. **Return to the story in Luke 2 (again using 'The Message' version) and read on (2v25-40) about Jesus' dedication at the temple.**

Notice what is strange about how Simeon and Anna react (in comparison to what they have just enacted as a group). Discuss as a class:

Q: How might the other people milling around in the temple have reacted to this poor couple who were bringing their child for dedication?

They might have ignored them, hurried on past minding their own business, some might have stopped and smiled to see a young baby with his parents, others might have looked down on them for being poor... etc.

Q: What is strange about how Simeon and Anna react?

The strength of their joyous response. They see this couple and they view Jesus as special - not just another baby. Simeon says he will bring salvation and be a light for all people. He says that reactions to Jesus will be divided—Jesus will be misunderstood by some and contradicted by others. But Simeon says that having met Jesus, he can now die in peace. Likewise, Anna is overjoyed to meet Jesus and declared that he is the person they are waiting for expectantly.

Q: Why did they react like this?

The Holy Spirit had shown them—God had told them to expect Jesus, and so they were patiently and expectantly waiting. Messiah is an old word for someone who saves people. They knew that the Jewish scriptures taught that there would one day be someone sent from God who would save the people. They were confident that Jesus was this person and so they were overjoyed.

4. **Hot seat Mary.**

Choose a Mary and get pupils to ask her questions about the different parts of the nativity story and how she felt. For example:

- How does this final scene in the temple leave her feeling?
- How does she react to Simeon explaining that Jesus will be misunderstood by many?
- The Bible says of her (Luke2v19): 'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.'
- What things did she treasure up?
- What did her experiences leave her pondering (what questions might she have had)?

5. **Quiet reflection time: pupils to have space to consider their day.**

Perhaps play the song 'Mary did you know?' (there is a spine-tingling version by Pentatonix) which poses the question – Mary, did you know who this child in your arms would grow up to be...? Perhaps put these questions on the board:

- What do you make of the angel's claim that Jesus' birth was 'good news of great joy for all people'?
- If you had the chance to meet Jesus now, how would you feel about that?
- What would you like to say to him? This is what Christians believe prayer is. As you listen to the song, remind the pupils that they are free to pray if they wish.
- What in today's learning might affect how you celebrate Christmas this year?

6. **Consider closing the day with a time of prayer after the song, giving thanks for the birth of Jesus.**

You might find that if you offer a simple, one or two sentence, prayer that some children may be happy to also join you in praying aloud. Alternatively, they might prefer to sit and take it in silently.