

Advent Assembly Notes

Week Four: Love



SLIDE ONE – HOLDING SLIDE

TEACHER'S NOTES

This presentation lasts up to 20 minutes. **We recommend you deliver the whole assembly but please feel free to use the slides and script as time allows.**

This and corresponding Missio Advent assemblies employ scriptural readings from the liturgical season. These help pupils consider how the weeks leading up to Christmas help us to prepare for the gift of God's love to the entire world, made present in the birth of Christ at Christmas.

This assembly has been prepared by **Missio**, Pope Francis' worldwide charity for overseas mission. Through educational, medical, welfare and formation initiatives, Missio brings the hope of the Gospel where there is turmoil, poverty and uncertainty in the world.

Missio projects are almost entirely funded by supporters' donations. With the exception of Gift Aid, we receive no UK government assistance. **Your support enables our work to continue overseas and at home.**



START OF ASSEMBLY

SLIDE TWO

ADVENT WEEK FOUR. You may wish to omit the following INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL ABOUT ADVENT'S DEFINITION AND ADVENT WREATHS if you have already used MISSIO'S WEEK ONE ADVENT ASSEMBLY.

Explain to students that this assembly is going to help us find out more about the season of Advent.

Question: Ask students if they know what the word 'advent' means and where else they might have heard it.



Answer: The arrival of a notable person or thing, an appearance

In the four weeks leading up to Christmas, we await in hope the arrival of Jesus. Throughout the season of Advent, the Church uses many symbols to help us understand the significance of God becoming one of us, through the birth of Jesus.

One of the most recognised symbols is the Advent wreath. The Advent wreath is an ancient symbol of the Christian's journey towards Christmas. Every element of the wreath communicates something special about this journey.

Its circular shape represents God's eternal loving presence; it has no beginning and no end. The evergreen leaves, which never fade in colour, also signify God's constancy.

The candles represent hope, peace, joy, love, and the light of Christ, which shatters all darkness. You can see that three of the candles on the wreath are purple. In the Catholic Church the colour purple symbolises new beginnings and times of change. Indeed, the birth of Jesus was to bring about enormous change across the world, over time, and in our lives.

We continue to bring about change for the better when we chose to be missionaries of God's love; delivering hope to the world.

SLIDE THREE

On the fourth week of Advent we focus on the message of **love**.

In Advent the Church has carefully selected readings from the Bible that help Christians around the world journey together towards Christmas. Today's reading is taken from the Gospel according to St Matthew and recounts the visit paid by the angel Gabriel to Joseph.

Joseph was engaged to Mary, but news of her pregnancy shocked him deeply. It looked to Joseph and everyone else like Mary had been disloyal. Upset and embarrassed, Joseph was ready to call off the wedding. But before he did, the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph in a dream and reassured him of Mary's faithfulness. The baby she carried was Emmanuel, God with us.

Let's listen to the encounter between Gabriel and Joseph now, paying special attention to the last section of the reading, the words of which are on the screen.

You are encouraged to read out the entire passage (see below), however on the slide only the lines in bold are shown.



*The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
for it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.”*

All this fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet:

***Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means “God is with us.”***

SLIDE FOUR

Joseph had a very strong faith; he trusted God and the message sent through the angel Gabriel. No doubt many in Joseph’s community would have found it hard to trust as Joseph did. For them the idea that God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, was going to be born into our world was unbelievable.

In Judaism, God is too awesome to be depicted or given a name, so taking on the form of a human and being born into a poor family from a disreputable town, to an unknown teenage mother, would have sounded outrageous.

Why would God, with all that power and glory, choose to become one of us?

Invite answers to the above.

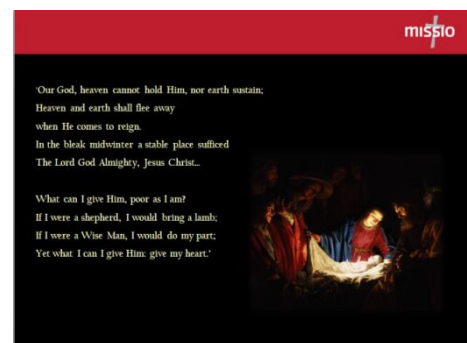
Suggestions could include: To show us how to love. To share our sorrows and joys.

And why, with all that power and glory, would God choose not to be born in a palace as would be expected, but in a rough-and-ready stable on the fringes of a small town?

Invite answers to the above.

Suggestions could include: To help us see that God values all people, whatever their background. To help people see that all can play a part in building God’s kingdom whether they are rich or poor; everyone has gifts and talents they can share to make our world better.

The words on screen from the Christmas Carol, ‘In the Bleak Midwinter’, capture these lessons well.



SLIDE FIVE

Jesus' birth helps us see that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. As such, all people regardless of race, gender, belief, or background, have a God given worth that is beyond measure.

By choosing to become present in humanity, God also helps us recognise the gift of our bodies. They are incredibly special; whatever their shape, whatever their ability. The birth of Jesus at Christmas should remind us to treasure and care for our own bodies and other peoples. Our body is one of the most precious gifts we will ever receive.



Missio supports many projects across the world that aim to care for the body, mind, and soul of those in need. The images on screen are taken from such a project in Mongolia. Mongolia is a country very close to Siberia and China. The winters there are harsh, with heavy snow falls and temperatures sometimes plummeting to -40°C . As more than a quarter of Mongolians live in extreme poverty, the lives of many, especially in the winter, can be very hard.

The children on this slide and the next slide all come from very poor families. Some of the children also have disabilities and learning needs. Although they are loved by their families dearly, their parents were struggling to feed, clothe and care for their children as they should.

Recognising a need to help these children and their families, a group of missionary religious sisters (you can see one of them on screen) decided to set up the Verbist Care Centre in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital.

Missionaries are individuals who have committed their lives to sharing God's love with people in a different country and often from a different culture. Missionaries travel into unfamiliar lands to encounter Christ in the poor and forgotten.

SLIDE SIX

The missionary sisters at the Verbist Care Centre provide nutritious meals, a primary and secondary education and basic medical care for around sixty children. Among these children is Soko (pictured on screen wearing a red top). Before she was brought to the Centre at only two years old, Soko and her family had been living underground next to the hot water pipes that run beneath Ulaanbaatar. They like many other families, were poor, homeless, and forced to stay where they could.



The heat from the pipes may have saved Soko's family from the cold, but an accident underground changed her life forever. The space the family stayed in was so small that one day Soko's mother tripped and spilled a pot of boiling water all over Soko's face and body.

The physical and emotional scars of the accident caused Soko much pain, but thanks to the support of the Centre, her future is looking brighter. As well as providing education and medical care, the sisters are helping Soko understand that while some may reject her family for being poor and others flinch at Soko's scars, she, her family, all of us here, and everyone on earth, are more beautiful and valuable than any 'thing' that can be bought.

By sharing God's love with others, as Christ came down to show us and as the sisters continue to witness, Soko is realising that we can all become gifts to the world. And there is no better gift than loving and valuing someone as they are, just as God loves us.

SLIDE SEVEN

In this season of gift giving, it is lovely to give and receive presents, but material things are not the only, or the best way to show we care. Let's finish by thinking about providing others with gifts that money can't buy:

The gift of listening – no picking up your phone, no walking away, no interrupting.

The gift of a visit – remember to spend time with friends or relatives who may be feeling lonely this Christmas.

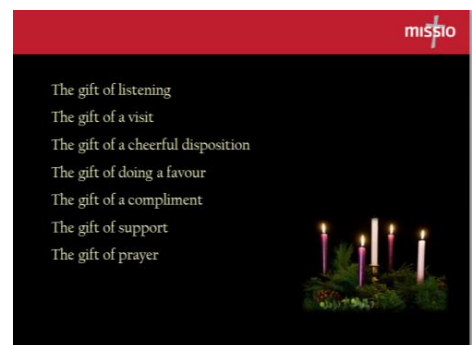
The gift of a cheerful disposition – no feeling sorry for yourself, no nasty comments, no complaining.

The gift of doing a favour – do chores at home, babysit, run errands. This gift is more valuable when it anticipates a request rather than responding to one.

The gift of a compliment – build someone's confidence by noting their goodness, ability, or true beauty.

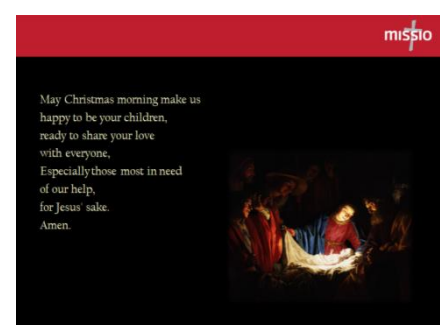
The gift of support – be there for others, be someone on whom people can rely. Be a supporter of Missio too, think about how you could help others like Soko through fundraising and prayer.

The gift of prayer – Praying for someone is like saying, "You are so special to me that I often talk to God about you." Pray for the sick, the lonely, the poor, and for all at the Verbist Care Centre.



SLIDE EIGHT

Prayer may seem a strange gift, especially when those we pray for may not know anything about it! But it is one of the greatest gifts of all. Being held in the prayers and hearts of others, reminds us that we are held in God's heart, too.



In a way that goes beyond explanation, prayer strengthens those we pray for and strengthens the person who prays.

With this in mind, let us finish this assembly with a prayer.

Click in sequence to reveal the prayer.

Loving Father,
help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the joy of Mary,
the faith of Joseph,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.
Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift and every greeting.
May Christmas morning make us happy to be your children,
ready to share your love with everyone,
especially those most in need of help,
for Jesus' sake.
Amen.

A Christmas Prayer (adapted) by Robert Louis Stevenson

SLIDE NINE – Closing holding slide

The following text is not to read out. They are additional notes of interest.

This assembly was brought to you by Missio, the Pope's official charity for overseas mission. If you would like to know more about Missio and support projects like the Verbist Care Centre, please visit: missio.org.uk

- *Missio is a Catholic charity that relies entirely on public donations; it does not receive matched funding from the UK Government*
- *We build Church infrastructure and support those in need, regardless of background or belief, in 157 countries*
- *Our work is mainly focused on areas of the greatest need. Currently these include Africa, the Indian sub-continent and Asia*
- *Missio works 'Local Church to Local Church', ensuring that money goes where the need is greatest*
- *Local parish communities request global assistance for their project through their bishop and must make a local contribution, be that through practical help or financial support*
- *Missio money goes towards the running of every mission parish overseas as well as the Church's health, education and faith projects for children in developing countries.*

Missio education welcomes feedback and suggestions on this assembly and other resources. Please contact us by email through: education2@missio.org.uk