

All Age Worship: The People of Advent

Aim: To introduce the idea of Advent and the characters we may meet in the lead up to Christmas

Materials needed

- A selection of non-religious Advent Calendars with a range of characters on them (there are many with cartoon characters on them for example or super heroes)
- The Real Advent Calendar

Overview

1. Discuss the statement, 'They're my favourite character.' When do you say this? Usually when you are talking about a book or a film or something on TV. Ask them to name some of their favourite characters and explain their choices. What adjectives keep coming up? Funny? Strong? Friendly? How do our favourite characters make us feel?
2. Go through some of the non-religious Advent calendars and ask if they can explain why all of these characters are on the calendars. There will be lots of good points. Some of the characters will be there because the kids like them, some, like snowmen, will be there because we associate them with the fun of the season and some may be there because they are famous people who the kids look up to.
3. Ask: If you were to think of the perfect Christmas character, what would they be like?
4. Now show the Real Advent Calendar and ask the group if they can identify all the characters: they should get the angels, shepherds, the wise men, Joseph, Mary and Jesus.
5. Ask: How would we describe each of these characters?
 - **The Angels** filled the night sky with song and light. They showed that Jesus' birth was an amazing thing. The best word to describe them might be...joyful?
 - **The Shepherds** were terrified when the angels appeared to them but they hurried off to Bethlehem when they heard the news that Jesus was born. The best word to describe them might be ...excited?
 - **The Wise Men** followed the star believing it would lead them to a King. The best word to describe them might be ...hopeful?
 - **Mary and Joseph** agreed to have the Son of God as their child and to care for him. The best word to describe them might be ...faithful?
6. Now ask how many of these words apply to them at Advent. What are we hoping for? What are we excited about? It is fine to be excited about our presents, and dinner and seeing family and friends but is there anything else?
7. Reflect that Faithful is a tricky one to apply to ourselves. Ask: What sort of things do we have faith in at Christmas?
8. Use the following readings to see how Joseph and Mary showed their faith that first Christmas?
Read Luke 1: 26-38
Read Matthew 1: 18-24
Explain that they had faith that God was coming to be with us. And that His purpose was to show us His love. Throughout his life Jesus would show us the truth that God loves us like His

children and not even death is stronger than the love of God. He showed that love is God's truth and that God wants us to love one another as He loves us.

9. Explain that the one character on the calendar who we haven't described yet is Jesus.

Explain that Jesus is who we are waiting for at Advent. The best way to describe him is love. God loved us so much he came to be with us as a helpless child. That child would not have survived without Mary and Joseph's love.

10. So when we look at the Real Advent Calendar we can think about how we too are characters in the Advent story. We are joyful, excited and hopeful. We have faith that God is with us. And we remember that at the heart of Christmas is love.

Reflection

Let's take a moment now to think about what each character in the Christmas story must have been feeling that first Christmas. How relieved the wise men must have been to find that their hope was rewarded and how happy the shepherds were to see their excitement paid off because they got to see Jesus, the God who came to live with us.

Let us take a moment to be grateful for those who make our Christmas special. Our parents and guardians who prepare for the day; our friends who take time to write cards and buy presents; the doctors and nurses and all those who work over Christmas so we can be safe and happy, and the members of our church and community who prepare with us and share our joyful journey.

Let us also remember those who may find Advent lonely or sorrowful. They may be lonely or have lost loved ones. They may be fleeing war and situations where there seems to be no love. They may be ill. Let us promise ourselves that we will try to reach out to someone in need this Advent and share our joy, hope and love.

Finally let us take time to remember ourselves. We are characters in God's great story that lasts beyond Christmas and even beyond death. We are so precious to him that He came to share our story. So let us take a moment to remember that we are loved, and worthy of love, this Christmas.

Prayer

Lord, fill us with the joy of angels and the excitement of the shepherds this Advent.

Like the wise men, may we travel in hope, and like Mary and Joseph may we keep our faithful eyes on You.

Help us share the love that You came to share with us at Christmas.

We thank you and praise You for this blessed time.

Amen