



How and why do Christians worship at Christmas? teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this [five-question survey](#).

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Slide 4:

Check students' understanding of the Eucharist or Holy Communion, where Christians come together to receive Christ's body and blood, through eating bread and drink wine and to remember how Jesus died and rose again so that all can have eternal life.

Slide 5:

Ask students if they have attended a Christmas church service to gauge the level of understanding.

Slide 6:

Share this example of a Christmas Day order of service at Westminster Abbey, an Anglican church. You can view the full order of service here: <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/order-of-service?id=11333>

Discuss the extract provided. Ask students for their first impressions. Draw attention to the words in bold, which are sung or spoken by the congregation. In the full order of service, this includes hymns, prayers, the Creed and the Peace. Talk through the way bold and colour are used to guide how the order of service is used:

Blue text: spoken by priest

Bold black text: spoken by congregation

Red text: instructions for the congregation on what to do or what is happening

Slide 7:

The main elements of the Christmas Day service are: Hymns; Prayers; Creed; Eucharist; Bible Readings (Old Testament, New Testament); the Peace; and the Blessing.

Why are these things important to Christian worship?

Hymns: Hymns are often older songs which can be long enough to allow processions to move around the church. Sung hymns are often accompanied by musical instruments. At Westminster Abbey (as in many other churches) there is an organ. The organ has hundreds of pipes through which air is blown, played using a keyboard. Singing hymns together gives people a feeling of community, a sense of continuity and link to the past. Singing creates a special atmosphere, where familiar words bring comfort and free up the mind to focus on God.



Prayers: There are different types of prayer in a church service. Some prayers (for example the Collect) are led by the priest. The whole congregation recites The Lord's Prayer. It is the prayer Jesus gave his followers when he was asked 'how should we pray?' It can be found in the Bible (Luke 11:1-4). All Christians communicate with God through prayer, but prayer can be done in different ways: out loud; quietly; formally; and informally. Prayer is having a conversation with God as a way of asking for his forgiveness, help and guidance. Praying is also about listening to what God wants people to do.

Creed: This is the formal statement about what Christians believe about Jesus. The congregation say the creed together because this is a public declaration of belief. One of the statements is 'For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man'. This statement sums up why Christmas is such an important celebration for Christians. Jesus (God) was born on earth as a human being. He was born on earth so that everyone could be saved.

Eucharist: The Eucharist (or Holy Communion) is a sacrament. There is a visible element to it (a person will drink wine and eat bread) as well as an invisible element (the receiving of Christ's Risen life). The night before his crucifixion, Jesus met his disciples and shared a last meal with them. This is called The Last Supper. During the meal, Jesus offered bread and wine to his disciples. The bread represented his body and the wine represented his blood. From Luke 22:19-20 'Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'. That event took place over 2,000 years ago. Ever since then, when Christians meet, they remember Jesus' sacrifice by eating bread and drinking wine.

Bible Readings: The Bible is made up of the Old Testament (compiled thousands of years before Jesus) and the New Testament (compiled in the years following Jesus' death). Christians believe that the Bible was written by men and inspired by God, and that it is important to have readings from both the Old and the New Testament. On Christmas Day the Bible readings refer to Jesus being a gift from God, the Saviour of all.

The Peace: Christians believe it is important to make peace with one another before they take part in the Eucharist so that they can receive God's blessing with a clear and open conscience. During 'The Peace' the congregation are invited to greet one another with a sign of the peace. This could be a handshake or by making a gesture such as hands in prayer or making a cross with two fingers.

Blessing: This is usually the final part of the service. The priest asks that 'the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always'. The congregation respond with the word **Amen**. Amen means 'So be it'. Christians believe that God is always with them, even through difficult times.

Slide 9:

The first hymn on Christmas Day is often 'O Come all ye faithful'. You can hear an excerpt of the hymn here, sung by the Westminster Abbey

choir: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4chLktqZec&feature=youtu.be>



- *How does this music make you feel?* Encourage students to watch and listen quietly, you may wish to play the clip through a couple of times.
- *Write down 5 words to describe this music.* Give students a few minutes to discuss with a partner first and then choose five words that describe the music. You could ask students to find other examples of carols from around the world and to compare styles. For example, you could look at The Kingdom Choir and the carol 'Go tell it on the mountain'.

Slide 10:

Lo! He abhors not the virgin's womb; very God, begotten, not created

Jesus IS God. He is not lesser than God, he IS God ('very God'). God was happy to take the form of a human (Jesus) and be born as a baby through Mary.

Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above

We are all invited to sing with the angels (the citizens of heaven).

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing

The Word is a title for Jesus. 'The Word' reveals God to the world. The Bible states that 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' (John 1:14) This is a reference to the birth of Jesus. Jesus was born as a human being (with flesh) and so revealed the nature of God to the world.

Slide 11:

You could check students' familiarity with the Lord's Prayer in this resource, slides 16, 17 and 18:

<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/teaching-resources/prayer-in-christianity>

Slide 12:

Allow time for students to discuss the phrase 'heaven touching earth', which refers to Jesus' birth.

To engage with prayer, the suggested activity is to create a piece of art. This could be a quick exercise, a collaborative task or set as homework.

Slide 13:

You may pause to discuss recently studied Bible passages at the point, depending on students' familiarity with the Bible.

Slide 14:

A prophet is a person chosen by God to explain God's will to others.

For Christians, there are numerous prophets. They include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

The Old Testament Bible passage chosen for Christmas Day comes from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah is believed to have been a prophet who foretold the birth of Jesus. This makes his writings a good choice for Christmas Day, the day when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Westminster Abbey

Learning



The '**messenger of peace**' throughout his teachings on earth, Jesus insisted on the importance of peace. Jesus said 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5:9) and 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you' (John 14:27).

'**Good news**' means the same as 'Gospel'. The good news is the news that God (in the form of Jesus) was born and died on earth as a sacrifice so that all who believe in him might be saved and have everlasting life.

Zion in this passage refers to the people of Israel. The passage is saying that God will return to the people and that they should celebrate. This is seen as a prophecy of Jesus' birth.

Slide 15:

A disciple is a personal follower of Jesus, during his life.

The New Testament passage comes from the book of John. John was one of Jesus' disciples and particularly close to Jesus.

'The **true light** which enlightens everyone' refers to Jesus and the idea that he was 'coming into the world' through his physical birth in Bethlehem. Christmas is a festival of light; candles are lit, lights are strung around Christmas trees, Christmas lights are switched on in houses and streets. The lights remind people of the 'true light' Jesus.

'He was in the world, and **the world came into being through him**' is a reminder that Jesus IS God. The passage states that '**his own people did not accept him**'. In other words, many people did not believe he was God.

'**And the Word became flesh and, lived among us**' refers to Jesus being born to a human mother, Mary and living a human life on earth. This is what Christians celebrate at Christmas.

Slide 16:

Recap the key learnings of this lesson. You may ask students to note down three pieces of information before showing this summary slide.