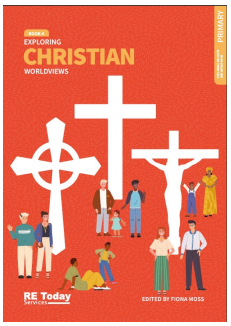
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SOCIOLOGY THEOLOGY

What do Christians mean when they say Jesus is the light of the world?



Prior knowledge

In order to access the learning in this unit, pupils should have learnt about:

- Christian beliefs in God and Christmas as a celebration

Assessment for 4–6s

The statements below suggest expected outcomes from this unit for 5-year-olds and are based on the Early Learning Goals (England, 2021). Adapt them for the age of pupils you are teaching. You may need to adapt them slightly for the syllabus or guidelines you follow.

Expected outcomes

- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class – comparing how Jesus was born to how babies are born now.
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in the Christian story of the Nativity.
- Describe what 'light' and 'dark' mean and how they might make them feel.
- Know some similarities and differences between religious and cultural communities: look at varied pictures of the Nativity around the world and say what is similar and different about them.

This unit helps pupils in Scotland to achieve RME 0-01a and 1-01c.

Welsh RVE sub-lenses for this unit can be found at **www.natre.org.uk/exploring-religion-and-worldviews**

Background knowledge for the teacher

- Most Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God. The act of God 'taking flesh' and appearing in human form is known as the Incarnation.
- Christians use many metaphors to describe Jesus. In John 8:12 Jesus uses the metaphor of light to describe himself: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.' This has inspired many Christian artists over the centuries.
- The Nativity story that is so familiar to us via Christmas cards and Nativity plays is an amalgamation of two stories. The Gospel of Luke sets out the visit of the Angel to Mary, the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus in a stable and shepherds visiting the baby. In the Gospel of Matthew, we find the visit of the magi, and King Herod. Most Christians bring these stories together to create the familiar sequence.
- The birth stories of Jesus were written by the Gospels' authors to make it clear that this was no ordinary baby, but the promised Messiah the Jews at the time were waiting for. Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Tanakh (Old Testament). Luke offers a universal Jesus for all peoples.

This unit offers pupils an opportunity to investigate the nature of how Christians see and describe Jesus using the Nativity narratives as an entry point. Pupils will begin by noticing how they are unique and so are those around them. From this starting point that we are all diverse and this is normal, pupils will investigate the person of Jesus by investigating the ideas of light and darkness. They will consider how light and dark make them feel, and what Christians might mean when they talk about Jesus as the light of the world. From this, they will go on to compare images of the Nativity from around the world. They will make links to diversity as normal and spot signs that artists portray light in their work. They may make connections with light in other stories they have read, including the story of Ram and Sita told at Diwali. Finally, they will use contemporary Christmas links to retell the story using their understanding so far.

For those using RE Today units of work and syllabuses, this work could form part of the learning for F4 'Which times are special and why?' or F2 'Why is Christmas special for Christians?'

Essential knowledge

By the end of this unit pupils should know:

- most Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God
- the Nativity story shows that Jesus was born as a human to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem
- at Christmas, many Christians retell the Nativity story, and give thanks for the birth of Jesus
- many Christians describe Jesus as the light of the world because they believe that God can make them safe and cared for in the world

Key vocabulary

Jesus, light, Nativity, birth, God, Incarnation, Bible

Next steps

- Pupils could look at other stories from the Bible that describe Jesus as a healer, teacher and friend to those on the edges of society.

Classroom ready resources

Go to www.natre.org.uk/exploring-religion-and-worldviews to access the links and resources below:

- links to online images of the Nativity scenes
- Online Resource 2.1, a checklist of resources for activities

Members are able to download extra resources to support this unit:

- a copy of the unit
- a PowerPoint presentation to use with your class

Step 1

What is in the box?

ASK QUESTIONS

Before the lesson has begun, prepare a box with a lid so that pupils cannot see what is inside. Within the box, stick a mirror so that when it is opened it can be seen plainly. Gather the pupils into a circle on the carpet. Say to them, 'Look at this beautiful box. I wonder what is inside?' Look in the box yourself and then pass it around.

Say to the pupils, 'Have a good look inside but do not show the person next to you what is inside. Do not tell them. Take a few seconds to look at what you see because what you see is very important.'

Once the box has been around the circle, say to the pupils, 'So, what did you see?' Establish that they saw their reflections.

Ask the children if any of them saw happiness. What does a happy face look like? Did any of them see bravery? Courage? Kindness? Strength? Say to them, 'That is what I see when I look at all of you, but when you look at yourself what do you really see?'

Pass the box around again and ask the children to say what they see as they look. You might want to start with more physical features, such as 'I wonder how many freckles you have' and 'I wonder what colour your eyes are.'

Encourage them to look at their physical appearance much more closely, and then begin to look at each other more closely.

If you want, you can use the words 'I wonder': 'I wonder what you see', 'I wonder if you see … bravery/courage/excitement', and so on.

Talk to the pupils about the fact that we are all humans, but we are all different and diverse. We all look different, but we share characteristics. We also share emotions, but they may look and feel different in each of us. Record observations in learning journals or floorbooks.

Step 2

What is light? How does light make me feel?

ASK QUESTIONS OBSERVATION

Setting the scene: Create a Tuff Tray for pupils, and on it have a variety of light sources and reflective strips. Have various shapes and types for pupils to explore. See Online Resource 2.1 for ideas.



Examining light: Allow the pupils to explore the lights and think about their textures – whether they are human-made or natural. Ask some 'I wonder' questions:

- I wonder what all these objects have in common.
- I wonder if you have seen these before in your own home.
- I wonder why this object emits light.
- I wonder how it works.
- I wonder why we need light.
- I wonder when we might use these different kinds of lights.
- I wonder which is your favourite, and why.
- I wonder if you can say how light makes us feel.

Take photos and record observations. You might link to any work you are doing in science comparing light and dark.

Use this activity as an opportunity to allow pupils to think about the idea of light as an opposite to darkness, and of light being used to help us see better, keep us safe and allow us to do things we could not do if it was just dark.

Step 3

What is similar and different in images of the Nativity?

OBSERVATION

The Nativity: a very special birthday. Read a version of the Nativity story to pupils. As part of the reading, bring their attention to some of the key details that are so important to many Christians:

- Jesus was not just a human baby; to most Christians he was God coming to Earth as a human.
- God announced this news to Mary through an angel – many Christians describe them as being made of light.
- Jesus was not born at home or in a hospital like most babies are now, but in a stable surrounded by animals.
- Shepherds and wise men called magi came to visit him to show that this was not an ordinary baby, but God on Earth.
- The magi travelled a long way and followed the light of a star to the stable.



The Nativity: investigating different presentations. Explain to pupils that they are going to investigate how different artists have painted the Nativity scene. Show them Resource 2.2. Have the pictures stuck on large sheets of paper so that pupils can investigate them. Consider giving out magnifying glasses so that they can zoom in on certain parts of the pictures. Ask pupils to look carefully at all three pictures. Allow them to make their own comments and observations, but you may also want to ask directed questions:

- Which part of the story do the pictures show?
- Can they recognise any of the characters in the Nativity story, such as Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the magi?
- What can they see that is similar about each picture? What can they see that is different for each picture?

Notice the use of light in the pictures: haloes to represent that people are special or holy, the light of the star in the sky, people holding candles. Explain to pupils that one painting was painted a very long time ago, in the Middle Ages, by an artist living in Italy. One is by an artist who lived in India, and one by an artist living in Nigeria. Make links back to Step 1.

Explain that Jesus lived a very long time ago and there were no cameras to take photos of him. There are no pictures from that time, so we do not know what he looked like. Artists from different countries have drawn Jesus and his family like people around them. When we looked in the box, we saw lots of different people. So, many Christians show Jesus in lots of different ways as he is very important to them.

Step 4

What might Christians mean by saying Jesus is the light of the world?



Set up a dark den in the classroom. This could be made from a small tent or draped cloths, or even an outside gazebo.

Depending on the size, you could bring either the whole class or small groups into the dark den.

Begin with a level of darkness. Ask children to sit and think for a short moment:

- How does the darkness feel?
- What is it like to wait in the dark?
- Does it feel less noisy? Less safe?

Pupils might comment on how darkness feels less safe; it might even be quite boring waiting in the dark with nothing to see or do!

After a short time, present the pupils with a light source – ideally one that has a switch on it. A light-up globe would be perfect for this activity.

Carefully hold the globe or other light and switch it on. Notice how the light fills the space and drives away the darkness.

Ask the pupils:

- Does it feel different now the light is on?
- How do things look different?
- How might you feel if you had waited for a long time and then the light came on?

Collect some of the contrasting words and record them.

Ask the pupils to imagine how they felt in the darkness and how the light made them feel.

Explain that many Christians talk about the baby Jesus as being a light that came into the world.

Before Jesus was born, many people had been waiting a long time. They felt unsafe and worried. Many Christians say Jesus is the light of the world because he brings light to them and makes them feel happy and safe.

Step 5

Can I make links with different ideas of light?

OBSERV





Recap the idea that many Christians describe Jesus as the light of the world, and by this they mean he brought safety and happiness to the world when he was born as a baby.

Show pupils Resource 2.3, and the picture by Sister Claire in Resource 2.2. Ask if pupils can find any images of light in the pictures. They may spot candles and stars.

If you have taught the Diwali story, make strong links with it. You may have some *diwa* lamps or images from your storytelling of the Ramayana. What did the *diwa* lamps represent? Explain that many Hindus light these on Diwali to remember the lights that led Rama and Sita back to safety after their adventures.

Sister Claire lived in India, and she used these *diwa* lamps to represent Jesus as well.

Ask pupils to talk about these ideas and how Sister Claire was trying to show that Jesus brought light to the world.

Step 6

Retelling the story of the Nativity

LOOKING AT STORIES

Ask pupils to think about Christmas. Where do we see lights at Christmas? Pupils might think about Christmas lights, lights on trees, candles, advent wreaths and Christingles. Draw out the fact that light is a big part of Christmas celebrations.

Over time, save up a big pile of different Christmas cards that have Nativity images on them.

Explain to pupils that they are going to retell the Nativity story using these cards. Allow them to cut out and choose different images from the cards. Stick these on to big sheets of paper and allow pupils to write words or record their thoughts.

Can they use these collages to retell the story to the class or to each other? Can pupils include images of light? Discuss:

- What role does light play in the story?
- Why might Christians describe Jesus as the light of the world?

Continuous provision ideas

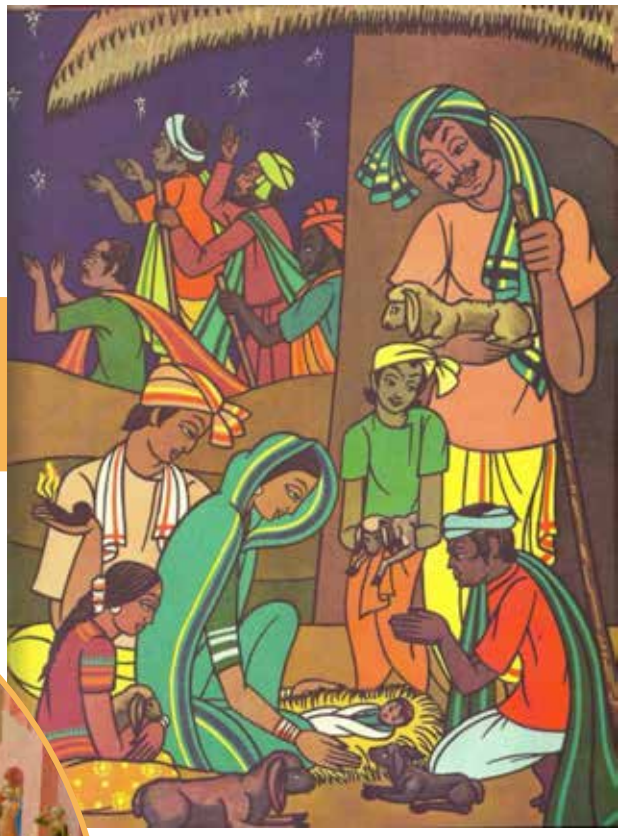
- Keep the light Tuff Tray in the classroom. Allow pupils to explore the light sources and reflect on their use and words associated with them.
- Keep the images of the Nativity, so that at different times pupils can name the characters and think about what is happening. If you have a wooden or other type of Nativity set, allow pupils to reenact the story and see if they can link to the pictures.
- Allow pupils to choose to enter the dark den, and if you have supervision, switch the light on and off. Encourage conversation about the difference between darkness and light and how that makes them feel.
- Have some of the artefacts from teaching Diwali available – especially *diwa* lamps so pupils can link with the Nativity images.

Opposite: *Visit of the Shepherds* by Sister Claire © SMMI Provincialate, Bangalore. Used by kind permission. *The Adoration of the Magi* by Fra Angelico & Fra Filippo Lippi, Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Samuel H. Kress Collection. *Yoruba Nativity* from the Kevin Carroll collection used with thanks to the Society of African Missions, Archives, Ireland (copyright holder).

Resource 2.2

Images of the Nativity

OBSERVATION



Visit of the Shepherds by Sister Claire



The Adoration of the Magi by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippo, 1440/1460



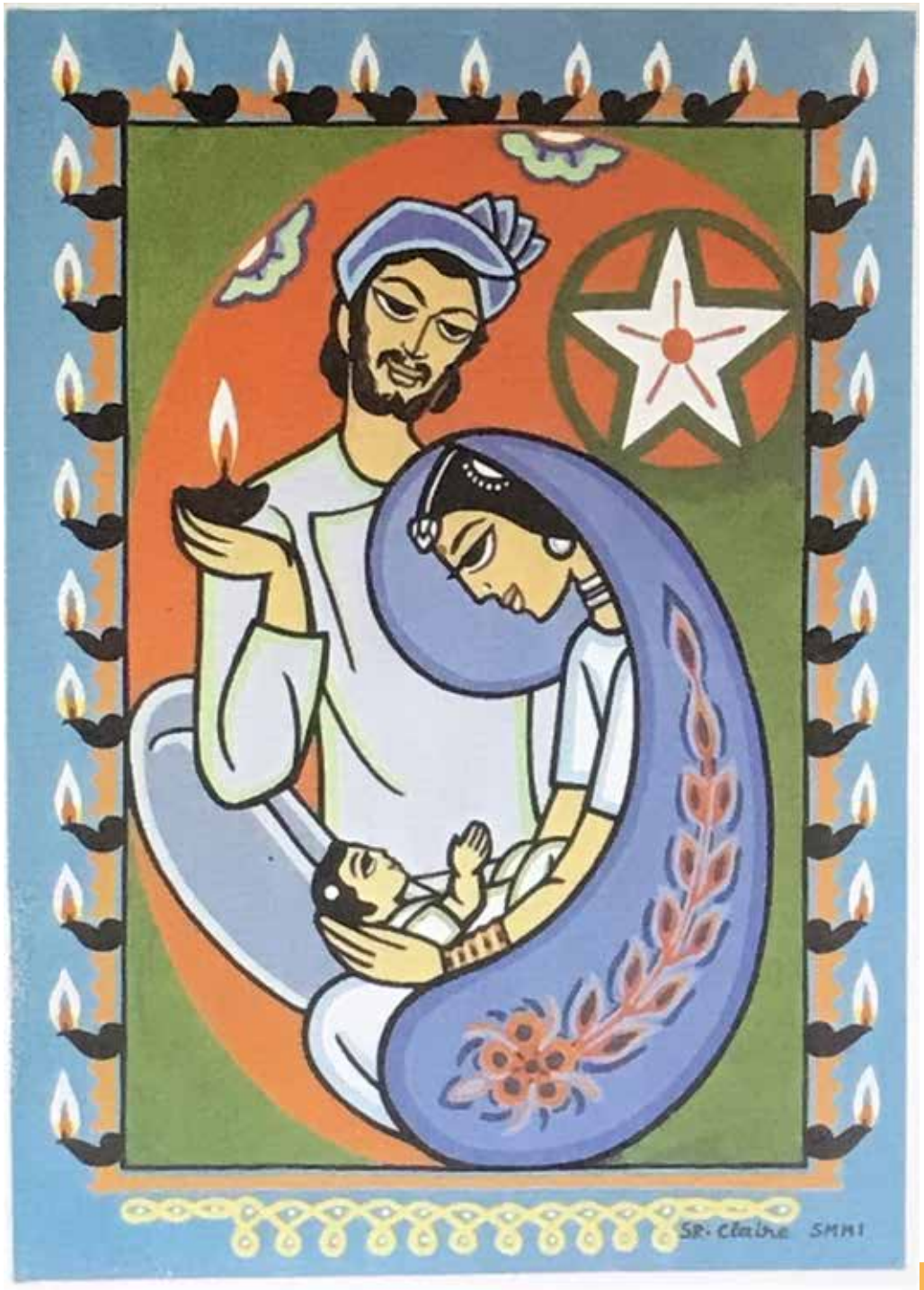
Yoruba Nativity. Artist unknown, photo by Kevin Carroll

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Resource 2.3

Images of light

OBSERVATION



Christmas story art by Sister Claire



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