



User Guide

Christmas in a Box – User Guide

Christmas in a Box is a resource aimed at primary school children in Years 1-6. It can be facilitated by a local church volunteer, volunteer team or delivered to the school for a member of staff to facilitate.

Curriculum

It enables children to explore two **key questions**:

- **What do Christians believe about the characters in the Christmas story?** *Learning ABOUT Christmas*
- **What can I learn from the characters' stories and apply to my life?** *Learning FROM the Christmas story*

It provides a simple, spiritual development and learning opportunity for children of all faiths and none as they are invited to make their own meaning from the story and apply it to their own lives.

Christmas in a Box encourages **RE skills**. It develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christian belief about the Christmas Story and provokes reflection, questioning, responding, expressing and application of what they learn.

It enriches the **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural** development of pupils by encouraging reflection, understanding and celebrating differences and respect for people who are different to me.

It encourages good **mental health and wellbeing** through activities which promote a sense of self-worth, belonging, acceptance of difference, reflection and autonomy as the children choose their own responses.

What's in the Box?

Christmas in a Box is **one large box** containing **several smaller boxes**. The smaller boxes are:

1. **God's Big Story Box**
2. **Mary's Story Box**
3. **Joseph's Story Box**
4. **Shepherds' Story Box**
5. **Wise Men's Story Box**
6. **The Story Ends – and Begins**

Boxes 1 and 6 provide the introduction and summary of the Christmas Story. Boxes 2 – 5 tell the stories of the main characters in the story.

Takeaway Mini Box

Box 1 contains a wooden peg and a Mini Box for each child which they decorate and take with them on the journey through Christmas in a Box. The wooden peg represents themselves as they learn from the stories. The Mini Box is for collecting and storing objects from Boxes 2 - 6. At the end, each child takes their Mini Box and contents home as their own 'Christmas in a Box'.



How Do We Unpack the Box?

The boxes are unpacked in numerical order one at a time. You could unpack all the boxes at once in one session, taking around 70-90 minutes. Or you could unpack one or two boxes in shorter sessions, for example in a series of class collective worship sessions.

There is a rhythm and a pattern to the unpacking of each box:



Step 1 – What's in the box? Open the box, take out the story objects and ask three questions:

- What is this?
- How are these things connected?
- Whose story is being told?

The box name is then revealed by opening an envelope in the box which holds the name card of the relevant character.



Step 2 – Tell the Story: tell the story of the box using the prompts provided for each object.



Step 3 – Wonder Moment: time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.



Step 4 – Activity: a practical task enabling pupils to apply and remember their learning (differentiated where appropriate).

What Supervision is Required?

The resource could be used in a range of ways:

- one adult working with one small group at a time
- one adult with a whole class
- several adults in a class with children split into small groups (in this case, it works well to explore the first and last boxes as a whole class as an introduction and summary, and to split the children into small groups for Boxes 2 – 5)

Christmas in a Box could be run in a church hall, a school hall, a classroom, a library or around a single table. The size of the space needed will depend on the size of the group and how you decide to run the sessions.

What Resources Do I Need?

The resources for each box are listed in the script and include the Story Objects (the objects in each box with which to tell the story) and the activity resources. You will also need an envelope for each box containing that box's name card. A complete list of all the resources you need is included in this pack. Some are available to download - contact BSC via www.bristolschoolsconnection.co.uk

Health and Safety

If the session(s) are being led by a church volunteer(s), they should produce a short risk assessment for Christmas in a Box. This should include COVID-SAFE measures. They should also familiarise themselves with the school's risk assessment for visitors in school.

PLEASE NOTE: all church volunteers should assess the risk of working in school for themselves according to their own situation.

How to Follow Up

If you are a volunteer from the local church and facilitating the session yourself, you may want to provide the school with a personal story about what you have learnt from the Christmas Story and how it has made a difference to your life. Make sure you rehearse this and use appropriate, non-jargonistic language. If you are unable to visit school, you could produce a short video instead. This could be posted on YouTube (share the link with the school) or you could 'appear' in the classroom live via video conferencing software.

If you are a teacher, you could ask the children to:

- think about what you have learned about the characters in the story – think of two questions you would like to ask each character
- pick your favourite character and write them a letter telling them how their story has inspired you
- use the objects you have collected from the story boxes to write your own Christmas story
- draw the main characters from the story as you imagine them and label it with words you would use to describe them



Christmas in a Box

Introduction

If you are a member of school staff, please adapt this introduction accordingly.

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm from _____ Church.

Today I've brought something to share with you – it's called Christmas in a Box! Together, we're going to unpack this box which tells us all about Christmas, what it means for Christians and what we can all learn from it – whether we're Christian or not. Inside this box are some more boxes – and as we unpack them, we're going to discover some amazing things! Shall we get started?!





Box 1: God's Big Story

Story Objects: globe, 'I love you' poster, Bible, promise scroll, gift box, wooden 'Jesus' figure, manger



What's in the Box?

In this box are some objects linked to a story. Let's unpack it and see if we can guess what the story is.

Bring out the objects one by one, encouraging a sense of wonder – let the children see them, pass them around if possible. Ask the children:

- What is this?
- How are these things connected?
- Whose story is being told?

Open the envelope to reveal the box name: God's Big Story. Then tell the story using the story objects.



Tell the Story

These objects tell us something about God's Big Story.

1. **Bible:** For Christians, God's Big Story is written in the Bible – and the Christmas story is a part of it, written down about 2000 years ago.
2. **'I Love You' poster:** Christians believe that God's Big Story is that God loves us
3. **Globe:** In fact, they believe God loves the WHOLE world – the sea, the sky, the stars, the trees, the animals and all the people.
4. **Promise Scroll** ***"But the Lord will still show you this sign: The young woman will become pregnant and will give birth to a son. She will name Him Emmanuel, which means 'God with us' (The Bible - Isaiah 7:14) 720BC"***: These words were written down hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Christians believe that God promised to send Jesus into the world long before it happened.
5. **Gift Box labeled 'Jesus' with wooden 'Jesus' figure and manger inside:** the Christian Bible says that God gave Jesus to the world as a gift, to show how much God loves us and that God's love can change us and change the world.
6. **Manger:** Jesus wasn't born in a palace but in a smelly, dirty stable. He was laid in a manger like this one – a feeding trough for the animals.



Wonder Moment

I wonder what we can learn from the objects in this story box.

(Allow time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.)



Activity: Peg Colouring

You need: wooden pegs (one per child), flat-packed mini boxes (one per child – children could make these up and decorate them as part of this activity or before you begin unpacking Christmas in a Box), felt pens

Christians believe that God wants everyone to be a part of God's Big Story. Even if we're not Christian, we can all learn from the Christmas Story. These wooden pegs are going to represent us. We're going to take them with us as we unpack Christmas in a Box, to help us think about what we can learn from it.

Use the felt pens to colour in your peg.

This mini box is your story box. As we unpack Christmas in a Box, there will be a few things for you to collect in your box which will remind you of the story and what you have learned from it. Write your name on your box and put your peg inside.

So, we've looked at God's Big Story and the Christmas Story is part of it. In this box are some more story boxes which tell about the characters in the Christmas Story. We're going to unpack our next box now (tomorrow, next week) and see if we can guess whose story it tells.



Box 2: Mary's Story

Story Objects: photo of Mary's house, engagement ring, Menorah, Bible Scroll, wooden 'Mary' figure



What's in the Box?

In this box are some objects linked to a story. Let's unpack it and see if we can guess whose story it is.

Bring out the objects one by one, encouraging a sense of wonder – let the children see them, pass them around if possible. Ask the children:

- What is this?
- How are these things connected?
- Whose story is being told?

Open the envelope to reveal the box name: Mary's Story. Then tell the story using the story objects.



Tell the Story

These objects tell us something about Mary's Story.

- 1. Photo:** This house is like the one that Mary lived in, about 2000 years ago – in a small town called Nazareth, in Israel. She was from a poor family.
- 2. Engagement ring:** Mary was about 14 years old at the time of our story and, like many girls of her age, she was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph.
- 3. Menorah:** Mary would have had one of these special candle holders in her home – in her Jewish religion, it represented the Light of God.
- 4. Bible Scroll :** One day, an incredible thing happened to Mary – an angel visited her and gave her this very important message: ***“Don't be afraid, Mary, because God is very pleased with you. Listen! You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You will name Him Jesus. He will be great. People will call Him the Son of the Most High God.” (The Bible - Luke 1:30-32)***
- 5. Wooden 'Mary' figure**



Wonder Moment

God could have chosen anyone to give birth to God's special baby.
(Allow time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.)

I wonder why God chose a poor, young girl from a small town in Israel.



Activity: Precious Stones

You need: bowl of polished stones individually wrapped in baby muslin cloth (one per child)

On the outside, Mary's life was quite ordinary, like this cloth. But God saw something special in Mary and knew that she was just the right person to give birth to Jesus.

Do you ever feel ordinary – like you don't have anything special to offer?

I wonder what Mary would say to you about that.

Key Stage 1: Draw Mary speaking to you on your piece of muslin, wrap it around your stone and put it into your box.

Key Stage 2: Write Mary's message to you on your piece of muslin cloth, wrap it around your stone and put it into your box.



Box 3: Joseph's Story

Story Objects: wood shavings, toy hammer, engagement ring, Torah, map of route from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Bible Scroll, wooden figures (Joseph and donkey)



What's in the Box?

In this box are some objects linked to a story. Let's unpack it and see if we can guess whose story it is.

Bring out the objects one by one, encouraging a sense of wonder – let the children see them, pass them around if possible. Ask the children:

- What is this?
- How are these things connected?
- Whose story is being told?

Open the envelope to reveal the box name: Joseph's Story. Then tell the story using the story objects.



Tell the Story

These objects tell us something about Joseph's Story.

1. **Wood shavings, hammer:** Joseph was a carpenter who lived in Nazareth in Israel - he was a good, hard-working, man.

2. **Engagement ring:** Joseph was engaged to Mary. He liked things to be neat and tidy and for things to go to plan, so he would have spent months getting everything ready for their marriage, including building them a house to live in.

3. **The Torah:** Like Mary, Joseph was Jewish and lived by the Jewish Holy Book – he loved God and tried to follow God's ways.

4. **Bible Scroll:** ***"Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they got married, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. It was by God's Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that. Joseph was a good man and decided to take care of things quietly...While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: 'Joseph, go ahead and marry Mary. It is God's Holy Spirit which has caused her to become pregnant. She will give birth to a son, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus which means 'God saves'" (The Bible - Matthew 1:18-21)*** In those days, hardly anyone had a baby before they got married – Joseph was embarrassed and decided to end their engagement. But after the angel spoke to him, Joseph decided to trust God and do as God said. So, he went ahead and married Mary.

5. **Map of Nazareth to Bethlehem:** When Mary was nearly ready to have the baby, Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register to pay his taxes – it would have been a very long for Mary who was by now very pregnant!

6. **Wooden Joseph and donkey figures:** Here are Joseph and the donkey.



Wonder Moment

I wonder how Joseph felt when the angel in his dreams told him to go ahead and marry Mary. (*Allow time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.*)



Activity: Finger Labyrinth

You need: *finger labyrinth cards with instructions (one per child), candle (Optional – if you are using a candle, as you light it, you could say ‘Christians believe that God is Light and shows us the way’)*

Key Stage 1

Mary and Joseph had a wibbly wobbly journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Put your finger on the start of the labyrinth. See if you can follow the wibbly wobbly pathway to the middle.

Sometimes we can feel a bit wobbly too – when things don't go the way we want them to. Close your eyes and take two deep, slow, gentle breaths. Think about the kind people who can help you when you feel scared or upset or lonely. Joseph knew what it was like to feel like that - I wonder what he would say to you today.

Key Stage 2

Be still and quiet as you hold your labyrinth card. I'm going to ask you some questions. I want you just to think about the answers.

Think of a time when it felt like things were going wrong – they weren't going the way you planned or wanted them to. It might be something at home, or at school, something to do with a person or something you're worried about. It might be a time in the past or it might be happening now.

Put your finger on the start of the labyrinth and move it slowly along the path to the middle. Like Joseph's life, our lives don't always go in a straight line – they don't always go the way we want them too. Think about how you feel when this happens.

When you get to the centre of the labyrinth, think about Joseph, and how God spoke to him in his dreams. This seemed to really help Joseph. Who can help you when it feels like things are going wrong?

Some of you might want to ask God to help you when things seem out of control. It can also help to breathe slowly and deeply. (Pause)

Now slowly move your finger out of the labyrinth and back to the start. Remember, Joseph found a way out of his problems and went on to raise God's special Son! I wonder what advice he would give you today. If you want to, you can write any thoughts or feelings you had on the back of your labyrinth. Then put your labyrinth in your box.



Box 4: Shepherds' Story

Story Objects: *sheep wool, tatty old shepherd's head dress with cord, sticks for bonfire, rustic pot of edible seeds, Roman toy sword, Bible Scroll, photo of Bethlehem and surrounds, several Subbuteo (football) figures, wooden shepherd and sheep figures*



What's in the Box?

In this box are some objects linked to a story. Let's unpack it and see if we can guess whose story it is.

Bring out the objects one by one, encouraging a sense of wonder – let the children see them, pass them around if possible. Ask the children:

- What is this?
- How are these things connected?
- Whose story is being told?

Open the envelope to reveal the box name: Shepherds' Story. Then tell the story using the story objects.



Tell the Story

These objects tell us something about the Shepherds' Story.

- 1. Sheep wool:** these shepherds lived about 2000 years ago – they were poor because they weren't paid very much for looking after the sheep.
- 2. Photo of Bethlehem and surrounds:** they lived on the hills outside Bethlehem, looking after their sheep.
- 3. Tatty old head-dress and cord:** these shepherds were homeless – they slept out in the countryside or in barns or shelters - so they were probably quite scruffy and a bit smelly because they didn't have nice homes with showers to go back to at night.
- 4. Sticks and seeds (pumpkin):** life was difficult for shepherds – they probably had to hunt for their own food, perhaps picking things like seeds and berries from the plants they came across.
- 5. Subbuteo figures:** The shepherds were a bit like a really bad football team! The ones who always lose by lots of goals and are always at the bottom of the league. Nobody supported them or even noticed them.
- 6. Roman toy sword:** the country where the shepherds lived, Israel, had been taken over by the Romans. They could be quite cruel so the shepherds were longing for a King who would get rid of the Romans and make life safe again for them.

7. **Wooden shepherd and sheep figures:** here is a shepherd with one of his sheep
8. **Bible Scroll:** This is the story of what happened to the shepherds one dark night 2000 years ago: ***“That night, some shepherds were out in the fields near Bethlehem watching their sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord was shining around them. The shepherds were very afraid. The angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. I have some very good news for you—news that will make everyone happy. Today your Saviour was born in Bethlehem. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box.’ Then a huge army of angels from heaven joined the first angel, and they were all praising God, saying, ‘Praise God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please him.’ The angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this great event the Lord has told us about.’”*** (The Bible - Luke 2: 8-20)



Wonder Moment

Think of someone who might, in some way, be like the shepherds: someone not so popular, or someone who is treated unfairly, perhaps someone who doesn't have all the latest gadgets or toys or who is poor or homeless.

I wonder what we can learn from this story about how to treat those people. (Allow time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.)



Activity: Football Flags

You need: felt pens, mini flags (one for every child)

Have you ever felt like the shepherds - like an outsider, ignored, forgotten or rejected?

I wonder what the shepherds would say to you today.

Key Stage 1: Draw yourself on one side of your flag and the shepherds on the other. As you do this, think about what the shepherds would say to you today. Now put it in your box.

Key Stage 2: Draw yourself or the shepherds on one side and write the shepherds' message to you on the other side. Now put it in your box.



Box 5: Wise Men's Story

Story Objects: Wooden 'Wise Men' figures, fancy cloak/hat, map of night sky, route map from Persia to Bethlehem, large star, gold, frankincense, myrrh



What's in the Box?

In this box are some objects linked to a story. Let's unpack it and see if we can guess whose story it is.

Bring out the objects one by one, encouraging a sense of wonder – let the children see them, pass them around if possible. Ask the children:

- What is this?
- How are these things connected?
- Whose story is being told?

Open the envelope to reveal the box name: Wise Men's Story. Then tell the story using the story objects.



Tell the Story

These objects tell us something about the Wise Men's Story.

- 1. Wooden 'Wise Men' figures:** these are the wise men – in some ways, they aren't the kind of people you might expect God to invite into God's Big Story.
- 2. Route map:** they came from a different country, a long way from Bethlehem where Mary had her baby. We don't know exactly where they came from, but it was probably in this area (indicate Persia on map).
- 3. Map of the night sky:** they spent a lot of time studying the stars to look for signs - they believed you could tell what was going to happen by noticing changes in the pattern of the stars. They weren't Jewish or Christian – they followed a completely different religion.
- 4. Fancy cloak and hat:** they were most probably rich.
- 5. Large star:** one night, they spotted a very bright star in the sky. They knew that this could be a sign that God's special King was going to be born. So, they set off on a long journey to find Him, travelling for about 5 weeks to get to Bethlehem.
- 6. Gold, frankincense and myrrh:** they took gifts for the baby – I wonder why they took these gifts. I wonder if they somehow knew something about Jesus and what would happen in His life. (*Gold for a king; Frankincense for prayer; Myrrh – an expensive burial oil*)



Wonder Moment

Even though the Wise Men were from a distant country and another religion, God invited them to be part of the Christmas Story.

I wonder what I can learn from this story about how to treat people who are different to me. *(Allow time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.)*



Activity: Star Colouring

You need: star colouring-in template (one per child), felt pens

All sorts of people were invited to be part of God's Christmas Story - some were rich, some were poor, some were young and some older, some were born in the same country as Jesus, others were born in different countries, some were very clever and others probably never went to school. But they all had their part to play.

Have you ever felt different to the people around you?

I wonder what the Wise Men would say to you today.

Colour in your star using different colours – make it look as beautiful as you can. On the back write down what you think the Wise Men would say to you. Now put it in your box.



Box 6: The Story Ends – and Begins

Story Objects: Map showing all the characters' journeys to Bethlehem, wooden figures (Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherd, Wise Men), stable



What's in the Box?

This is our last story box – I wonder what it's about...

Bring out the objects one by one, encouraging a sense of wonder – let the children see them, pass them around if possible. Open the envelope to reveal the box name: The Story Ends – and Begins.



Tell the Story

Do you remember what our first box was called (God's Big Story Box)? The objects in that box told us what Christians believe about God's Big Story...that God loves the whole world and gave Jesus as a gift to us.

The Christmas Story is part of God's Big Story in the Bible. We've unpacked the boxes of all the main characters of the Christmas Story.

1. **Wooden figures:** all these people were invited to be part of the amazing story of Jesus' birth. They're all so different, but they all had an important part to play.
2. **Map of journeys to Bethlehem:** this map shows the different journeys that the characters took to get to Bethlehem. (*The children could move the pegs along their journeys and place them in the stable.*)

3. **Stable:** when they got there, they found the baby Jesus, wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger in a dirty, smelly stable – probably not where they were expecting to find God's special gift to the world!

All of these people had an invitation to be in God's Big Story and it totally changed their lives:

- Mary, an ordinary young girl, became the Mum of Jesus, God's special gift
- Joseph, who liked everything to be tidy and in order, married Mary - even though she was pregnant with a mystery baby - and ended up raising God's Son
- The shepherds - poor, rejected, homeless – realised that they mattered too when God invited them to come and worship baby Jesus
- The Wise Men - from another country and religion – realised that they too were included in God's Big Story as they received an invitation in the sky to go and find God's special King.

And this story has changed the lives of many, many people across the world for two thousand years. Even people from many different religions, and no religion, have learnt some important things from it.



Wonder Moment

Let's look at the things we've collected in our Mini Boxes.

I wonder we've learnt from this story. (*Allow time to wonder, reflect, question, express, respond.*)

We're coming to the end of Christmas in a Box. We've learnt about the stories of the characters in the Christmas Story. It all happened a long time ago. But stories can change us today. They can give us a new beginning because of what we learn from them.



Activity: Decorate a Heart

You need: *mini-wooden heart (one per child), felt pens*

Decorate a heart and put it in your box. This can remind you that, for Christians, the Christmas story is about love: God loving the world and all the people, and giving Jesus as a gift. As you colour it in, think about all the things you've learnt from Christmas in a Box.

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Bristol Schools Connection is a Bristol-based charity providing support and spiritual development resources to churches so that they can serve their local schools.