



The Advent Story

This resource can be adapted for Key Stage 3 and above with a teacher or leader using the main text and promoting discussion with the questions in the purple boxes. The discussions can be as a class or in smaller break out groups. Watch the Advent Reflective Story video on the Cathedral website.

Did you enjoy watching and hearing the advent story?

It makes most people happy, and happy for different reasons – maybe we

have happy memories of hearing that same story every year since we were really small. Maybe we remember being in the story, and the part we played – some of you may even have the school DVD at home so that you can watch yourself being an angel, a shepherd or a king (unless you had a starring role which means your family will definitely have the DVD). Maybe hearing the story tells you that all the Christmas extravaganza of gifts, special food, parties and family celebrations is coming. Maybe you are someone who just likes the beauty and simplicity of the story.

But have you ever thought about why so many people hear or watch that story every year? Not just here and now, but people all over the world and for more than two thousand years.

Sometimes we try and change it, to make it fit in with the times, or make it funny, or see it from a different point of view, but it's still the same story, carrying the same message. So, what do you think makes it so special? Perhaps we need to look a little deeper and find out more about what the story is remembering and telling us.

Can you remember what the prophets did?

We could start with the prophets:

They studied the scriptures, they prayed, they came close to God and they tried to understand his messages and to tell others what they had learned. You can find out about the prophets in the Bible, and you can see them in the stained glass windows in the cathedral.

What about angels who brought the messages in the story – much harder to explain or understand! When we see the little people on stage wearing white sheets and tinsel, we think how sweet they look and they sing beautifully too.

But how can you explain the angels from the Advent Story? We read lots about them and we see so many pictures of them as other people see them, but how do you see them?

Messengers from God, bringing such important news and instructions to the people in our story. News and instructions that would change lives, and would be talked about by many millions of people for thousands of years. Each one of us will see them differently.

There are many images of angels in the cathedral for you to come and look at, or you could look at some of the paintings by famous (or not so famous) artists that have attracted so much attention over the years. You might like to make a picture of your own, or perhaps a picture in words of your idea of an angel. Remember that before the angels gave any instructions, they began by saying 'Do not be afraid'.

Now Mary. An angel told her she would have a baby and he would be God's son. Definitely not the way she thought her life would go. She was an ordinary girl, preparing to marry the man she was promised to. People didn't have a long life expectancy then, so it was usual to marry young. There was no education, so girls knew they would have children and keep house rather than looking forward to an interesting career. Mary was prepared for this, but suddenly her life was changed forever. She was to be the mother of God's son.....

What would her family have said? How would she have felt? How would she tell Joseph?

And what about Joseph? An ordinary man, a skilled carpenter, and preparing to marry the young girl who was promised to him, when he is told by one of those angels we talked about earlier, that Mary is going to have a baby but he is not that baby's father. God is the baby's father, but he, Joseph, must bring Him up as his own son. Do you begin to see that it's not quite as simple as the story that we've heard so many times over the years?

How would Joseph have felt? What would he say to Mary? What would he say to his family? What would his friends say?

Somehow, Mary and Joseph found the courage and the strength to do as the Angel instructed, and to serve God by doing as he asked.

The angels appeared to a group of shepherds next. At the time of Jesus's birth shepherds were among the poorest people in the land. They were social outcasts who spent most of their lives living rough while they looked after sheep. They didn't own their sheep, they just tended them for farmers, who paid them poorly. They had to travel long distances to find enough grazing for their sheep, far from the towns and villages, into rough, rocky areas where wild animals hunted. They had no light but their fires, and no way of communicating with their families – they were a few thousand years too early for mobile phones and SUVs. The angels convinced even these rough and ready shepherds to leave their work and go to Bethlehem to see the baby who had been born. Try to imagine what it was like to be a shepherd and how important looking after the sheep was to them. Leaving their flocks meant they risked losing sheep and so losing their jobs.

Were the angels asking them to do something easy? Why did they go to Bethlehem? Why were they so happy? Why didn't they just say no to the angels?

Would our story have been different if the shepherds had said no?

Why was it important that the shepherds were included in God's plan? Can we learn anything about our own world from thinking about why the shepherds were included?

Finally, the three wise men, the Magi or, in our school play, the three kings wearing jewelled crowns that make their ears stick out and someone's best curtains as their robes.

They were the clever people of their time. They studied and learned all they could. They studied the stars and learned much about the world from them. Today, they would be our inventors and creators, our technologists and scientists. Learning about the world and teaching others, always looking for something new. They saw the star that was different and followed it. They knew they would find a king at the end of their journey, so they took gifts for a king. The Magi were wealthy, they travelled well and comfortably, they took generous gifts and were very happy to find the baby at the end of their journey.

Can you remember what they took? Perhaps you could find out what those things were used for, and whether they are still used today.

If God wanted to send a message to the whole world today, who would be our equivalent of the magi? Who would you trust to spread good news?

Do you see that our Advent story is a bigger story than just our simple and beautiful tale? The people in the story all have their parts to play, but they are not simple parts for any of them.

Do you think it was hard to do as God told them to do?
Who had the hardest part to play to fulfil God's wishes?
Why do you think the shepherds and the magi are included?

If you come to the cathedral you will find many reminders of the Advent story, and some things that will explain the story for you. You will also see how the church is preparing for Christmas, as it makes its own way along the road to Bethlehem. You may begin to understand why the Advent story is still so important to so many people.