

The Easter Journey

It is important that there is a smooth transition from scene to scene so that the whole experience runs seamlessly. Encourage group leaders to keep in role at all times to enable the children and helpers to take part in a thoughtful and focused way.

Introductory warm-up

On arrival, the children are welcomed to the presentation and are told that they are going on a very special journey. They are invited into the first space and are greeted by the storyteller who introduces him- or herself. The storyteller asks the children to join him or her on a very special journey at this special time of year.

(Throughout the presentation it is important to remember that children are used to drama and role-play as part of their everyday curriculum. A firm but friendly manner and high expectation of behaviour helps to establish boundaries with lively Year 5s. Teachers are there to supervise if needed, but it is also helpful if they are encouraged to join in the experience.)

Aim

To introduce the children to the storyteller and other team members; to introduce the story of Easter and the Easter journey presentation, and to help children settle in to the environment.

Setting the scene

The warm-up helps the children to understand that Jerusalem at that point in history was a place full of contradictions. It was ruled by the Romans and security was high because of the approaching Passover festival. Many travellers had come to the city to take part in the festival and the streets were crowded. Jesus enters this busy scene riding on a donkey—not at all what would be expected of a king. His reputation as a teacher, healer and worker of miracles had gone before him and there was much excitement and anticipation at his arrival. The children are asked to imagine how they would have felt being part of that crowd.

Character(s)

Storyteller

Costume

None needed

Scenery

No scenery is necessary, just a space large enough for the children to move around. No special lighting is needed other than a feeling of daylight.

Props

None needed

If space allows, rather than miming on the spot invite the children to wander about and capture in freeze poses the moods of that week, such as excitement; surprise; suspicion; fear; sadness; puzzlement; disbelief; shock and so on.

Storyteller: We are about to set out on a journey. We are going to travel through the days that led up to what we now know as Easter Day. They are dramatic days. There will be lots to see and do and touch and taste and feel. We want to try to work out for ourselves what we think this journey means for us today. The Easter story has meant a great deal to people down the ages and even changed lives. However, it has to be a story we work out for ourselves. I wonder what this Easter journey will mean for you today...

To go on our Easter journey we need to step into a story. In fact, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus and his friends in the most dramatic week of Jesus' life. Let's get ourselves ready to step into the story of Jesus' Easter journey.

During this week we will experience many different moods.

Some people have walked for miles to be in Jerusalem for the great festival of Passover (*start miming walking on the spot and encourage the children to join in*).

It was a week that began with processions and people running to join the crowds (*mime running and jostling, but don't allow the children to push each other*).

But in the narrow streets of Jerusalem you could not move quickly (*mime people shuffling along*).

And with such large crowds there were security fears, so there were soldiers about (*mime marching on the spot*).

It was a week full of highs and lows, hopes and fears. Sometimes in the story people thought it best to just creep quietly around in the dark (*mime creeping quietly*).

It was a week that ended in a most unexpected way. People began running about again because they discovered something that changes everything (*mime running in excitement*).

What they heard and what they saw stunned people and left many rooted to the spot (*mime standing stock still*).

So are you ready? Let's step into the story of the Easter Journey!

Staying in the same room or area, the storyteller leads the children straight into the next story.

Scene 1: Palm Sunday

Bible

Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19: 28-38; John 12:12-15

Aim

To introduce the idea that the people were looking for a special person or leader, perhaps a king who would lead them against the Romans and restore their country. However, they began to realise that Jesus was not that kind of king. What sort of king is Jesus? He is an unexpected king!

Setting the scene

Encourage the children to role-play the part of the crowds who welcomed Jesus into the city of Jerusalem.

Character(s)

Storyteller

Helpers join in the role-play to give a lead to the children.

Costume

None needed

Scenery

None needed

Props

Coconut shells to sound like donkey's hooves

An imitation microphone to use for interviews

Storyteller: It all began on a Sunday; the first day of the week. Rumours were flying around... (*encourage the children to whisper to each other*).

Jesus was arriving for the festival. Jesus said such wonderful things and did such amazing things that people always looked forward to his arrival. Somehow, whenever he turned up, unexpected things happened. Some people were even saying he was the new king—the one they were all expecting: the Messiah. They were hoping that he would rescue them from the Romans (*encourage the children to boo or hiss*).

Suddenly people heard the news that Jesus was arriving soon via the gate into the city known as Sheep Gate.

The crowds rushed to line the streets (*arrange the children in two lines*).

Everyone strained to see what was happening (*mime straining to see*).

Was he coming? Was that him? Hope was in the air (*encourage general excitement*).

Suddenly, people caught sight of Jesus in the distance. A cloud of dust... that must be him! Everyone began to shout and cheer (*encourage the children to cheer*).

Someone had a good idea. Why not welcome him like a real king and wave palm branches? They climbed the trees and cut down branches. Other people took off their outer cloaks and laid them on the road, so that Jesus would have a sort of royal carpet to tread on (*encourage the children to either mime waving palm branches or to pretend to take off an outer garment and lay it on the road*).

Everyone wanted a king who would rescue them from the Roman army, so they began calling out 'Rescue us', which in their language is, 'Hosanna!' (*encourage the children to call out 'Hosanna!'*).

Suddenly, a sound could be heard... it was the sound of donkey's hooves (*use coconuts to make the sound and encourage the children to look to the top of the room as if watching to see Jesus enter*).

The shouting died down (*encourage the children to be quiet*). But what was this? What was Jesus riding? A donkey? That was no way for a king to arrive. Surely he should be on a horse! A big, powerful horse would be much more suitable for a king!

(*Freeze the scene and interview some of the children using the microphone*).

What sort of king do you think Jesus is? What sort of person was God sending to rescue his people? What would you have expected Jesus to do? (*Encourage role-play answers from several children.*)

Scene 2: In the temple

Bible

Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46.

Aim

To show the children that Jesus was not afraid to upset people who were not following God's way. He was not a king who would be influenced by popularity, but would challenge the status quo if necessary. What sort of king is Jesus? He is a disturbing king!

Setting the scene

Following the entry into the city, Jesus visited the temple. The outer courts of the temple had become a market place for traders cashing in on the pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. There were people selling animals and birds, which would then be offered to God as a peace-offering, and moneychangers charging too much for people to exchange coins for temple money. The temple—God's house—had become a noisy place of dishonest trading rather than a quiet place of worship. Using the same space as before, the children are asked to play the part of the traders in the temple and enter into the drama of the event.

Character(s)

Storyteller (it is preferable for continuity if the storyteller is the same as before, although it is possible to use a second person if required)

Costume

None needed

Scenery

None needed

Props

Three large cardboard cartons, about 1m high to act as stalls for the traders. (*These are easily obtained from office suppliers and can be strengthened with parcel tape. They do not need to be decorated; they are simply representational.*)

Divide the children into three groups, each gathered around a cardboard carton. Each of these groups becomes some of the sellers in the marketplace of the temple. They each have their special 'group shout', such as:

- 'Sheep, sheep, two for the price of one!'
- 'Pigeons, pigeons, get your pigeons here!'
- 'Money, money, change your money now!' (or 'at our special rates!')

Invite the children to suggest some appropriate actions, such as scurrying feet when Jesus turns over the tables. The storyteller should build up the drama of this scene, by encouraging the children to shout out their wares, first one group, then adding the second and finally the third as the chorus of voices is added and grows louder. The leaders encourage their groups to shout out loudly above the other groups. The storyteller then acts as Jesus and ends the commotion by indicating for the children to stop shouting.

Storyteller: Stop! God's house should be a place of worship, but you have turned it into a place where robbers hide!

At this point the storyteller should (*carefully*) tip over the boxes and pretend to scatter each of the groups. He or she then asks the children to freeze in a moment of shock and surprise. The storyteller then uses the microphone again to interview the groups, asking what each thinks has happened? What do the children think of Jesus now? What sort of king do they think he is?

Scene 3: The stone that the builders rejected

Bible

Matthew 21:33-46; Mark12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19; Psalm 118:22

Aim

To familiarise pupils with one of the stories Jesus told during the week that has come to be known as Holy Week; to help them understand that Jesus often used stories with hidden meanings (parables) to explain things about God; to enable children to imagine for themselves what the story might mean. What sort of king is Jesus? An unwanted and a suffering king.

Setting the scene

During the days leading up to the Passover festival Jesus spent time talking to people, healing those who were unwell and telling stories. He challenged the teaching of the chief priests and leaders who were by now questioning his authority and feeling concerned about his influence on ordinary people. The story of the tenants in the vineyard tells of a land owner who put his tenants in charge of his vineyard while he goes on a journey. He sends back servants to get some of the harvest, but they are killed by the tenants. Eventually, the owner sends his son who is also taken and killed. Jesus asks those who are listening what they think the owner would do. He goes on to talk about the stone which the builders rejected becoming the most important stone of all. In saying this he is warning the chief priests and leaders that God will not allow his kingdom to be ruled by those who do not do as he commanded. Many people were puzzled by what Jesus said, but the chief priests and leaders knew that Jesus was talking about them.

Character(s)

Storyteller (this can be the same person as before or a different person, if desired)

Costume

None needed

Scenery

There is no need for scenery in the story although it is preferable if the children are taken to a different room to the first area where everything is ready for them. In the presentation in Frodsham the same room is used subsequently for the resurrection garden scene, so the room is already dressed as a garden, but the scenery is disguised with greenery and a piece of hardboard, painted to resemble a bush, covers the tomb. Flowers are added to transform the scene into the resurrection garden, so are not present when the children first enter the room.

Props

Some large pebbles are provided in baskets for the children to handle, and a large rectangular piece of rock sits in the middle of the room. The storyteller uses pebbles to create a wall effect for the vineyard.

The children should be invited to sit down in the room, which is scattered with pebbles. In the middle of the room is the large rectangular rock. The pebbles become the prompt for one of the stories that Jesus told during that last week of his Easter journey

Storyteller: Many strange things happened during the next days. Jesus and his friends stayed in a village outside the city near to a hill called the Mount of Olives. Each morning Jesus would go into town and join with the festival crowds and then, near to the temple, he would sit down and tell stories.

The temple was a magnificent building. It had taken years and years to build. It shone with its gold decorations. Its beautiful carved stonework gleamed in the sunlight, its towers and columns were overpowering in their splendour. In fact, the temple was still in the process of being built and there were stones lying around which the builders had rejected. It was near these that Jesus once told a very special story.

(Encourage the children to pick up the stones and feel them.)

Just think how old the stones in our story might have been. How far might they have come? They would have been cut from quarries, chipped and shaped to become part of the magnificent temple. But not every stone had been used. There was one stone in particular that caught Jesus' eye.

(Draw the children's attention to the big stone. Feel its shape as the story begins to unfold.)

Jesus pointed out that this was one of the stones that the builders had rejected. I wonder what they didn't like about it. I wonder why they decided they couldn't use it. Was it the wrong shape? Wouldn't it fit? Didn't they like its colour? It made Jesus think of a song from the Psalms. Jesus looked up and remembered words he learned when he was very young.

‘The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all.’

(Invite the children to touch and handle the stones. Ask them to look out for 'building' words during the story, and, of course, to watch out for the mention of stones.)

Let me tell you a story to show you what Jesus meant.

There was once a landowner who planted a vineyard. He wanted grapes to grow so he could make some fine wine. He called in the builders to make a strong wall right around his land to keep the vineyard safe.

(Make an outline with the stones.)

He got his men to dig a ditch to keep out the wild animals. He even prepared a great vat in which they could collect the grapes once they'd grown, to crush them for the juice to make the wine. This was his own vineyard; his special place.

Finally, he had one more building put up. On the edge of the vineyard he built a great tower, a watchtower to make sure no enemies came to steal the grapes.

(Build a small tower with stones at one corner of the vineyard.)

He did everything possible to make sure of a good harvest. But then the landowner had to go on a journey. So he left some hired servants to look after the vineyard in his absence. But he had to be away longer than he planned and he couldn't be there when the harvest time came.

The landowner sent some messengers to go and bring back a share of the harvest so he could at least taste the fine grapes that he had planted.

When those messengers arrived at the vineyard, the hired servants decided that they would not give up what they'd been looking after. They wanted the vineyard for themselves. Instead of giving the messengers some of the harvest, they told them to go away. They beat them up, chased them away and send them packing. When the owner got to hear what was happening, he sent some more messengers but they too were badly treated. They even killed one of the messengers and threw stones at others so that none dared go near the vineyard. Every group that the owner sent was treated in the same terrible way.

Finally, the owner decided to send his own son to the vineyard. They won't dare to treat him badly, he thought. They will respect him. They will hand over some of the grapes to him so he can bring them back to me.

When the hired servants saw the son coming, they began to plot. This is the owner's son, they thought. It will all be his one day. But, if we got rid of him, then the vineyard could truly be ours. So they ganged up on him. They grabbed him. They dragged him outside the vineyard and... they killed him.

(Bring one of the stones crashing down on to the large rectangular stone to indicate the moment of the son's death.)

The crowds near Jesus gasped. What a terrible story! Even as they were thinking that, Jesus asked a question.

'When the owner of that vineyard comes, what do you suppose he will do to those tenants?' he asked.

(Invite some responses from the children.)

You're right. They deserve to be put to death. The vineyard doesn't belong to the likes of them. They have rejected the owner's only son. But listen...

(Hold on to the big stone.)

'The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all.'

I wonder what Jesus was talking about? What has this got to do with Jesus' Easter journey? Many people in the crowd were puzzled... but some of them realised what the story was really about.

Scene 4: The last supper

Bible

Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; John 13:1-7

Aim

To help pupils to experience the story of the last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. This story is linked with the idea of Jesus serving his disciples by washing their feet. What sort of king is Jesus? A servant king and a mysterious king.

Setting the scene

Jesus and the disciples were in the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival. The sacrament or special ritual which we now know as the Holy Communion is based on the things which Jesus did and said at this meal. The meal took the form of the traditional Passover meal in which the Jewish people remembered how, led by Moses, the Israelites escaped from Pharaoh's Egypt after the angel of death had 'passed over' their houses. All the elements of the meal have meaning for Jewish people. A special plate called a Seder plate is used which holds seven foods, all with symbolic meaning.

- A lamb bone represents the lamb sacrificed on the last night.
- Bitter herbs remind the people of the bitter time as slaves in Egypt.
- Salt water represents the tears of the slaves.
- Unleavened bread (bread without yeast) was used as there was no time for the bread to rise.
- Charoset (a mixture of apple, cinnamon, nuts and wine) symbolises the mortar from the bricks which the slaves had to make.
- Roasted egg represents the new life after leaving Egypt.
- Parsley and spring onion provide a sign of new life.

Traditionally, the youngest child in the family asks the question, 'What makes this night so special?'

Jesus arranged to eat the Passover meal with his disciples in an upper room in the city.

Character(s)

Jesus and Peter

Narrator

The youngest child in the group (*previously arrange with the teacher to ensure that the child is happy to read a sentence*)

Costume

Jesus and Peter are both dressed in modern dress, such as white T-shirts and jeans.

Scenery

Two gazebos are placed side by side with an adjoining open side to create a large room. The lighting is dim and the walls are plain, created from either the sides of the gazebos or dark fabric and screens.

Props

Low tables are placed in the centre of the room to create a table long enough for the children to sit round either on the floor or on cushions. The table is covered in a white cloth.

A Seder plate is placed in the middle of the table with the items described above in place. These are: lamb bone, herbs, salt water, matzo bread, charoset, hard-boiled egg and spring onions.

Battery operated tealight candles help to give atmosphere and there are pottery jugs and beakers to represent the wine. Wooden plates of matzo bread and dishes of grapes complete the table setting. There should be enough plates of Matzo and grapes to pass round to everyone.

A large pitcher and a towel are placed near where Jesus is to sit.

For suppliers of Seder plates and battery operated tealight candles see resources.

Alternatively, a large platter or tray can be used with small dishes containing the food items. It may be possible to borrow a Seder plate from the RE department of a local high school. Some primary schools also have their own artefacts.

Battery operated garden lanterns are also useful to give atmosphere. For safety reasons, real candles or oil lights should not be used.

The groups are led quietly into the darkened room and the children are encouraged to sit down on the floor around the table. Jesus and Peter are already sitting centrally at the table ready to mime the story. Group leaders explain to the children quietly that they are invited to take part in the meal and are offered a piece of Matzo bread and a grape. Once all the children are settled and have taken some food, the narrator begins to read.

Narrator: On the Thursday of that week, Jesus' Easter journey takes us to an upstairs room in a street in the city of Jerusalem where Jesus is eating a special meal with his friends. When everyone had settled at the table, Jesus got up. He tied on a towel around his waist and fetched a jug of water and a bowl. He began to wash the dust from his friends' feet.

(Jesus mimes washing Peter's feet.)

The table was set with special food. There was lamb to eat and some flat bread that had not risen in the way that the bread we might buy in the shops does. This flat bread is called unleavened bread. Then the youngest person in the room spoke up.

Youngest child: What makes this night so special?

Narrator: Jesus told his friends that they were celebrating how God had rescued his people from slavery and brought them through the waters of the Red Sea to freedom.

God had told the people to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. The angel of death would see this and pass over their homes. They had to get ready to travel and quickly baked bread for their journey. There was no time to let the bread rise.

At the end of the meal, Jesus took a piece of the flat bread. He said thank you to God and then he broke the bread and handed it to his friends with the words...

‘This is my body, which is given for you. Eat this as a way of remembering me!’ (*Jesus mimes this action.*)

Then Jesus poured out some more wine and said to his friends...

‘This is my blood. It is poured out for you, and with it God makes his new agreement.’ (*Jesus mimes this action.*)

Whatever did Jesus mean? What was he talking about? Jesus was always saying puzzling things.

After this, Judas, one of Jesus’ friends, slipped out of the room. When the meal was finished, everyone sang a hymn. Then Jesus led them out into the night... (*Jesus leaves the room with Peter.*) They went to a garden beneath the city walls, where Jesus wanted to pray.

(After Jesus has left the room, the group leaders tell the children that they are going to follow Jesus into the garden. They encourage the children to creep quietly through the doorway into the next scene.)

Scene 5: The garden of Gethsemane

Bible

Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12

Aim

To help pupils to understand what happened in the garden of Gethsemane. To help the children experience how Jesus was arrested and how he and the disciples felt at this time. What sort of king is Jesus? A captured king and a lonely king.

Setting the scene

After the Passover meal, Jesus asked his disciples to go with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. When they got there, he left them for a while so that he could be alone to pray. The disciples did not fully understand the danger that Jesus was now in and they fell asleep. Earlier, Jesus had warned them that one of them would betray him, but they had all vehemently denied this. Late into the night, Judas led a mob, assembled by the chief priests and leaders, to arrest Jesus. He was taken away to be tried by Caiaphas the high priest and subsequently by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

Character(s)

None (the whole scene is based on a listening experience so that the children use their imaginations to understand what is happening)

Costume

None

Scenery

The children are led into a darkened area where they are asked to crouch behind bushes made from plywood and listen to the noises of the night. If possible, a painted scene of the distant city at night is the focal point. Many Christmas cards show scenes of a middle-eastern town and a scene can be copied from a card on to corrugated cardboard stapled to a wooden frame. Alternatively, the scene can be traced on to a piece of acetate and projected on to a large piece of card. The outline can then be drawn and painted with poster or emulsion paint. Dark buildings and lighted windows give the impression of a night scene.

Props

Stylised bushes can be made using plywood cut into simple bush-like shapes then slotted together (see www.easterjourney.org.uk for reference). The bushes should be 80 to 100cm high and approximately 150cm wide. You will need six bushes spaced evenly around the area, allowing up to five children to hide around each bush. You will also need a CD of sound effects, which can be recorded 'live' or downloaded from the Internet. For further details see the website, www.easterjourney.org.uk. The CD needs to include night sounds (cicadas and so on) to provide a continuous background beneath the following sequence of sounds:

- Walking in the undergrowth
- A person walking alone
- Sighing
- A voice whispering the words: 'Do what you want, and not what I want'
- People sleeping
- Marching feet coming closer
- A scuffle and raised voices
- A sword fight
- Footsteps running away
- Soldiers marching away
- Quiet night sounds
- A cock crowing

The whole sequence should last no longer than five minutes. If you have difficulty in putting the CD together, you could consider approaching a local high school or FE college where the project could be undertaken by a media student. As well as the sound effects CD, suitable dramatic music playing softly in the background can give a sense of continuity to the experience. The soundtrack to the film '*Narnia*' has some excellent tracks. Track 11, the Stone Table is very suitable as background music in this scene.

Lighting

It is important to provide atmospheric lighting to create a sense of mystery and anticipation. Although the scene takes place at night, there does need to be some ambient light in order for the children to see where they are. Also group leaders may find lanterns or torches useful. If professional lighting is used, a moon projected on to the scenery can give enough light for safe movement of the children. Also, coloured acetate sheets can be used in front of spotlights to create a sense of foreboding.

There is no script as such for the scene because it is based on listening to sound effects.

Jesus asks the children to follow him to the garden as he leaves the previous scene (the last supper). Group leaders allow Jesus and Peter time to get out of the way before they usher the children into the next space. It could be useful for the person playing the part of Jesus to go behind the scenery to switch the CD on once the children are settled behind the bushes. The leaders help the children to hide in the space and encourage them to listen carefully to the sounds so they can work out what is happening. The scene does not require too much explanation from leaders as it is revisited later in the journey. The sound effects CD lasts for about five minutes and experience shows that the children readily take part in the adventure, entering into it with imagination and enthusiasm. Leaders can encourage the children to quietly question what they have heard but hold on to those thoughts until the end of the journey. Once the sound effects of the garden have ended, leaders ask the children to move out of the bushes towards the other side of the room for the next part of the story.

Scene 6: The crucifixion

Bible

Matthew 26:47-27:65; Mark 14:43-15:41; Luke 22:47-23:49; John 18:1-19:37

Aim

To familiarise pupils with the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. To help the children understand the effect that this had on those who loved him and followed him. What sort of king is Jesus? A king who had to die.

Setting the scene

Following the scene in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest Caiaphas. Together with the priests and leaders, Caiaphas tried to find evidence of Jesus' blasphemy. Eventually, after some dubious plotting, they decided that Jesus should be put to death. He was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, to sanction this. Meanwhile, Peter told those who recognised him that he had not been with Jesus. Pilate could find no case against Jesus and tried to persuade the Jewish people to let him go, using the tradition at Passover time of setting free a prisoner. However, the leaders convinced the crowd to turn against Jesus and, in spite of his misgivings, Pilate agreed with the sentence. The scene was set for the ultimate penalty: a painful death on a wooden cross.

Character(s)

Narrator (pre-recorded on to the DVD)

Mary, mother of Jesus

Peter

Costumes

Mary is dressed in traditional eastern dress very much in the style seen in nativity pictures.

Peter wears a simple white T-shirt and jeans, or similar.

Scenery

A plain unadorned space, adjacent to the garden of Gethsemane scene.

Props

A screen with good visibility for the children.

A DVD of images, sounds and readings telling the story of the crucifixion (see suggested script below). Some ideas for reflections about the crucifixion are also available from sources, such as Lifeworlds.

DVD or video projector and compatible computer (for the presentation).

Lighting

The area needs to be dark for most of the time. A spotlight should be trained on the place where Mary and Peter speak. A domestic spotlight with a dimmer switch would be suitable. However, if a professional follow spot can be obtained, this adds atmosphere to the drama of the scene. Professional spots can often be borrowed from a local high school or hired from a theatrical lighting company.

The children are asked to move from the bushes and sit in a space near the screen. Gaffer or masking tape can be used to define the sitting area so that children do not encroach on the actors. Once the children are settled, the DVD is started.

The DVD comprises the following narration, accompanied by sounds and images.

Narrator: Many of the Jewish people were amazed at the things Jesus said and did and they believed in him. The chief priests and nation's leaders were very jealous of Jesus. They called a meeting at the home of Caiaphas, the high priest and secretly planned to have Jesus arrested and put to death.

'What do we do now?' they asked. 'If we let Jesus continue, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and take away what little power and privilege we still have.'

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the chief priests and asked

'How much will you give me if I help you arrest Jesus?' They paid Judas thirty silver coins and from then on he started looking for a good chance to betray Jesus.

A few days later, late at night, Jesus was alone with his friends in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas arrived with a mob of armed soldiers sent by the priests. He had told them beforehand, 'Arrest the man I greet with a kiss.' Judas walked right up to Jesus and said, 'Hello, teacher!' Then Judas kissed him and the men grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

Jesus was led off to the high priest. Then the chief priests and the nation's leaders tried to find someone to accuse Jesus of a crime, so they could put him to death. Finally, some men stood up and lied about him. The high priest stood up in the council and asked Jesus, 'Why don't you say something in your own defence? Don't you hear the charges they are making against you?' But Jesus kept quiet and did not say a word. The high priest asked him another question, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the glorious God?' 'Yes, I am!' Jesus answered. At once the high priest ripped his robe apart and shouted, 'Why do we need more witnesses? You heard him claim to be God! What is your decision?'

They tied up Jesus and led him off to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate questioned Jesus, but could find nothing wrong. Pilate knew that the chief priests had brought Jesus to him because they were jealous of his popularity, but, not wanting to cause trouble, Pilate sentenced Jesus to death. He ordered his soldiers to beat Jesus with a whip and nail him to a cross.

The soldiers made fun of Jesus and led him off to be nailed to a cross. At midday the sky turned dark and stayed that way until the middle of the afternoon. The sun stopped shining, and the curtain in the temple split down the middle. Jesus shouted, 'Father, I put myself in your hands!' Then he died.

(When the DVD ends a spotlight highlights Mary who walks in slowly from the side. She stands near the screen and delivers her script with overwhelming sadness.)

Mary: What have they done to my son? Why did they have to be so cruel?

Oh God, how could you let this happen? I trusted you! I trusted you and it came to this. Oh my son, why have you had to die in this way?

When I think back to the terrible journey to Bethlehem before you were born... and having to run away to Egypt to escape from King Herod when you were a tiny baby ... Remember how we thought we'd lost you that time in Jerusalem when you were only twelve years old?

All the wonderful things you did. You healed those who were unwell; you cured those who could not walk... you gave sight to those who could not see. How could it come to this?

So many people will remember what you did in your life... how you taught us about your Father God and helped us to understand about his kingdom.

I never thought it would be like this. I knew it would come, but, oh... it's so hard.

Oh Jesus, my son, I will miss you so much...

God, why did this have to happen?

It's so final.

(Mary quietly leaves as the spotlight fades. After a short space of time, Peter enters and the spotlight is brightened again.)

Peter: I'm a fisherman. I used to think a night at sea in a bad storm with no fish was bad enough. I thought I'd left that behind when I met Jesus. But now... I'm not sure... I'm so confused. Jesus is gone. They killed him. Three years of my life, everything I believed in... gone! I believed in Jesus. I gave up my home and my job. I left my family and joined him. The more I heard him speak, the more I saw what he did, the more certain I was that Jesus was special. I'll never forget the day that I suddenly realised so clearly... so clearly... that he was the Son of God. He was the one we had been waiting for. The one people had said would lead us to freedom. *He* was the one... but now he's gone... he's dead. I'm so confused. What did I do wrong?

Last week everyone was cheering and shouting when we came into Jerusalem.

What a day that was, everyone wanting to get close, everyone wanting to be involved. You should have been there! The next day, Jesus really upset the temple leaders, throwing the market traders out and upsetting the moneychangers. He seemed so angry, but people really approved of what he did. You should have seen the way he did it. You'd have loved it!

And then, at the Passover meal, as we were celebrating the way that God rescued our ancestors from slavery in Egypt, Jesus washing out feet like that and telling us to remember him as a servant. That was a strange but special time. He ate with us, washed our feet and then gave us bread and wine to remember him by. If you'd been there, you'd never forget.

I can't believe it's been just one day since we ate that special meal with Jesus. After the meal, we went to his favourite place: the garden outside the city. I wish I had stayed awake when Jesus went off to pray, but I didn't. And then the guards came to arrest him... that woke us up! I wanted to fight, to protect him. But Jesus stopped me. I'm sure we could have escaped, but he let them take him away.

They took him to the high priest's house. They were all waiting for him in the middle of the night. I followed. I wanted to see what was happening, see what Jesus would do. I wanted to be there. I was like a spy following right into the enemy camp, trying to keep away from the guards. It was there I said three times that I didn't know Jesus. How could I have said such a thing! But there was danger all around me. Jesus couldn't have heard me, he was too far away, but he turned and looked me straight in the eye. I knew I had let him down, denied him, betrayed him. I got really scared then and ran away.

As that dreadful night turned into dawn, I learnt that they had dragged Jesus in front of Caiaphas, the high priest, and then Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Troublemakers had stirred up the crowd and they were condemning Jesus to death. Pilate had handed him to the soldiers to be taken away. That was all before nine o'clock in the morning.

I heard that some of the women had seen Jesus die. The soldiers had beaten Jesus, and then they had killed him by hanging him on a cross. It was the middle of the afternoon when Jesus died, and there could be no mistaking that he was dead. The women saw his body taken down, wrapped in cloth and placed in a grave. It was a cave dug into the hillside with the entrance closed by a huge stone. I don't even know who owned the grave.

This is the worst day of my life. I did nothing. I just allowed it to happen. And now it's all over. I can't believe it's happened. I'm afraid the guards will come for me.

Somehow, I thought Jesus would always be with me, but that can't happen... can it? I want to leave Jerusalem... perhaps I should go back to fishing. I can't believe what's happened.

(Peter exits slowly as the spotlight fades. Depending on the attention span of the children, it may be necessary to shorten Peter's script, but the important elements of the story need to be retained.

After a short space of time for reflection the original storyteller appears from the direction that Peter and Mary left. He asks the children to quietly follow him.)

Scene 7: The day in between

Bible

Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42

Aim

To explain to the children what happened after the crucifixion and how Jesus' body was placed in a borrowed tomb, sealed with a large stone. This scene is a very short but necessary experience linking the darkness of the previous story to the light of Easter day.

Setting the scene

After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected Jewish leader, asked Pilate for the body. Along with Nicodemus, Joseph was a secret follower of Jesus. He had Jesus' body prepared for burial with spices and linen cloths and placed it in his own new tomb. He rolled a stone in front of it. The women watched as this happened but there is no mention of the disciples. The despair which they all felt can only be imagined. However, the chief priests still remembered that Jesus had prophesied that he would rise after three days, so Pilate ordered a watch to be put on the tomb in order to prevent false claims by Jesus' followers.

Character(s)

Storyteller

Costume

None needed

Scenery

A darkened bare space. A gazebo with dark walls can be used as a tunnel between the crucifixion scene and the resurrection garden. The children will only be standing in the space for a short time while the storyteller explains what happened on 'the day in between' but it is important that there are no distractions so that they get the idea of being suspended in time after the drama of the crucifixion.

Props

No props are required.

Lighting

This should be as dim as is safely possible.

As previously mentioned, the storyteller appears after Peter has left the crucifixion scene. He or she invites the children to come into the darkened room.

Storyteller: Today everything has gone quiet, as we await the greatest event in the whole history of time. Jesus lies buried in a garden tomb. It is the Sabbath and people have stayed indoors. One man, Joseph of Arimathea, dares to go and ask Pilate if he can take Jesus' body for burial and it is now laid in his family grave. It took courage for Joseph to go to Pilate, for he is a secret follower of Jesus even though he is also an important Jewish leader. Joseph brought a linen cloth and took Jesus' body down from the cross. He wrapped it in the cloth and put it into a tomb that had been cut into solid rock. Then he rolled a big stone against the entrance to the tomb.

Jesus' mother, Mary and his friend, Mary Magdalene, were watching and saw where the body was placed. Pilate, the Roman governor, ordered that the tomb should be guarded by soldiers.

All was dark and still. The disciples were still shocked and dismayed about what had happened to their friend. Their hopes and dreams for the future had been utterly destroyed. That is until God stepped in...

Come with me now into the light of Easter morning.

Scene 8: The resurrection garden

Bible

Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10

Aim

To enable pupils to realise that the crucifixion was not the end, but led to a new beginning when Jesus came back to life again. What sort of king is Jesus? A timeless king and a victorious king.

Setting the scene

The women who followed Jesus wanted to prepare his body for burial according to their tradition, using myrrh and spices. Early on Sunday morning, the day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb carrying the spices she had prepared. When she arrived, she was horrified to see that the stone had been rolled away, the soldiers had fled and the grave clothes were folded on a slab inside the empty tomb. She ran to fetch Peter and John to show them what had happened. They went home dismayed and puzzled, not knowing what to think. Mary was left alone crying outside the tomb when she had an amazing encounter—the person she thought was the gardener was actually Jesus himself!

Character(s)

Storyteller

Scenery

The children come from the darkened space into the resurrection garden room. There is a painted scene of the tomb on one wall. This can be a simple piece of corrugated card supported by wooden slats with a picture of a cave-type scene. For reference see the website, www.easterjourney.org.uk. A separate stone shape should be rolled to one side. If the room has also been used for Scene 3 (see page xx, the story of the stone that the builders rejected) the basic scenery will already be in place, with a bush shape to conceal the empty tomb, and can now be transformed into the garden background. A piece of cream calico is folded at the base of the tomb.

Props

The main impact of the room comes from the abundance of flowers and colour in the space. If you have used the room for Scene 3, pots of flowers can be placed on very low, flat trolleys and wheeled into the room at the appropriate time. Small pots of seasonal annuals, such as primulas are ideal, together with jars of daffodils and other greenery. It is often possible to get a special deal from a local greengrocer or nursery when buying in bulk. As a rough guide approximately 100 bunches of daffodils and 30 to 40 individual primulas would be ample, but much depends on space and budget. The idea is to create a riot of colour and scent as the children enter the room. If the room has already been used for Scene 3, some tall plants and greenery can be left in the room all the time. A water feature could be used to enhance the atmosphere and a hidden CD player could be playing suitable soothing music such as *Becoming Still* by Simeon Wood (*Celtic Heart CD from www.simeonwood.com*) as the children come in.

NB: It is important to leave the flowers overnight in a cool dark place and keep them well watered if you are expecting them to last for several days. They also make excellent gifts for the team at the end of the experience.

Lighting

The lighting needed depends on the room used. It is important to create a bright and cheerful space. If the space is naturally dark, then add up-lighters and lamps to enhance the natural light.

As the children come into the resurrection room, they should sit in groups of five or six with their leader.

Storyteller: Can you imagine it? On the Saturday of that week everything was very quiet. It was the Sabbath—a day of rest—and people stayed indoors. It was a day of great sadness for Jesus' friends. Their world had come to an end. Their leader had been killed and it seemed that nothing would be the same again. All they could do was to wait in stunned silence. It was as if the world was holding its breath.

But the women who had followed Jesus wanted to be near him one last time. They had seen where his body had been buried—in a cave in a garden. And so, very early on the Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene left the house where she was staying. She carried perfume with her, which in her tradition was used to give those who had died a proper burial.

As Mary Magdalene crept into the garden she was worrying because she knew that a great stone had been rolled across the entrance of the cave. But when she arrived she was surprised to see that the stone had been rolled back.

What's happened? Mary thought. Has someone taken Jesus' body away? She rushed back to tell Peter and John. They ran ahead of her and when they came to the garden Peter even dared to go inside the cave. There were the grave clothes lying neatly folded on the stone slab, but the body wasn't there. Something strange had happened. Worried, puzzled and thinking the worst, Peter and John ran back to tell the other disciples.

Mary was left on her own outside the tomb. She was crying. The person who had changed everything for her was gone and now even his body had been taken away. Through tear-stained eyes she saw a man in the garden. She thought he was the gardener and said, 'Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him.'

Then, quietly, simply she heard him say her name: 'Mary'. Immediately, Mary knew that it was Jesus. 'My Lord,' she said. Jesus was alive! He had said something about this before but his friends hadn't realized what he meant. 'After three days'... 'The stone that was rejected will become the most important'... Jesus was alive in a new Easter way. Jesus told her to go and tell the others and Mary ran overjoyed at the news that Jesus was alive.

Jesus was alive! The message began to be whispered around the streets of Jerusalem and that same message is still being passed around the streets of the whole world to this very day.

The children are led out from the final scene in groups. They enter the first area and sit on the floor with their group leaders.

Discussion and conclusion

Aim

To enable the children to reflect upon their experience and ask questions about what they have seen and heard.

Setting the scene

The children will have experienced the Easter story in an imaginative way. To some, the story will be familiar, to others it will be totally new, and many children will fall somewhere between these two positions. The group time is an opportunity for children to express their feelings about the things which happened to Jesus.

A basket of artefacts is provided for each group as an aid memoire of the scenes, but some leaders may prefer not to use these. The children are prompted to wonder why the things which happened were important. The leaders should be trained carefully to ask open questions and to encourage children to verbalise their thoughts. For this reason it is important not to give the children more information than they have received during the course of the journey.

NB: Group time is intended for open-ended questions, not as an opportunity for the leaders to recap the whole journey. Above all, the session must not be used to proselytize. The aim of the whole journey is to encourage further thought rather than asking children what they believe. Having sown the seeds, we must trust the Holy Spirit to enable children to grow and be nurtured in the Christian faith.

Character(s)

None

Costume

None

Scenery

None

Props

The open-ended questions below (one per group) to help the leaders begin the discussions

One booklet for each child if they are going to be used as a take-home gift.

A basket for each group containing artefacts to remind them of the journey, such as:

- A leaf
- A coin
- A stone
- A piece of matzo
- A small cup
- A nail

Discussion questions

- I wonder which part of this journey you like best...
- I wonder which part of this journey is the most important part...
- I wonder which part of this journey is most about you...
- I wonder why people still remember this journey every year at Easter...
- I wonder why Christians think this journey is so important that they tell it every year in their churches...
- I wonder what this journey has got to say to us today...

Take-home gift

As previously mentioned, we searched long and hard to find a suitable booklet for the children to take home as a memento of their Easter journey experience. There are many booklets produced by Christian publishers which contain the Easter message, but we were anxious to find something that was not confessional. We also wanted something which was quirky and interesting to the children. Eventually, we decided to design our own folding booklet to remind the children of the story. The booklet has been professionally drawn and printed and is colourful and easily produced. Further details of how to obtain copies of the booklet we produced can be found by contacting us at info@easterjourney.org.uk However, you may prefer to give each child a bookmark or other memento of their visit. Alternatively, it is not obligatory to provide a gift at all.

The conclusion

The children are led into a space in the final room and asked to sit in their groups while the discussion takes place. It is important not to rush this part, allow about eight minutes for the discussion. After the discussion, the storyteller then draws the presentation to a close by asking the children altogether to look at the small booklets. He or she helps the children to understand how the booklet opens and reminds them about the scenes as this is demonstrated. This part of the proceedings will need to be adapted depending on the style of booklet used. If there is no take-home gift, other visual aids can be used. For example, a cross shape can be torn from a sheet of A4 paper (see page 85 of *A-Cross the World* by Martin Payne and Betty Pedley, Barnabas 2004).

The storyteller invites the children to remember that they have been part of a very special journey, that the story goes on and on today and that as they leave the building they are taking that story back to school with them.