

Epiphany

To consider the meaning of the Christian festival of Epiphany.

by Rebecca Parkinson

Suitable for Whole School (Pri)

Aims

To consider the meaning of the Christian festival of Epiphany.

Preparation and materials

- A range of objects that could be given as presents to different people, for example, a baby's toy – for a baby; a doll – for a child; a mobile phone – could be for a variety of people; men's/ladies' clothes. The children will be asked to guess who might receive each gift.
- A present that you have received that was a complete surprise. Alternatively, ask another member of staff, who has received a surprise present, to talk about what happened.
- Have the following two definitions of Epiphany/epiphany written on pieces of paper or card:
 - Epiphany: a church festival that celebrates the visit of the wise men to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus
 - epiphany: a sudden and inspiring revelation.
- You may like to download or sing the verse from 'In the bleak midwinter' (see 'Time for reflection').

Assembly

1. Explain that as it has recently been Christmas, you are going to show the children a few different presents and ask them to guess who might like to receive them – baby/child/teenager/man/woman/old person, etc. Show the presents one at a time and ask the children why each present would be suitable for the person suggested. Ask why you wouldn't give certain presents to certain people – for example, why not give an old man a baby toy?
2. Ask: Did any of you have a present this Christmas that you particularly liked, or that was especially important to you? (Some children may like to tell you about their presents.)

Remind pupils that a special present doesn't have to be big or expensive; it may just be something you really wanted or like, or a gift from a special person.

3. Talk (or ask another member of staff to talk) about a time when you received a present that was a complete surprise. This may have been when you were a child or an adult; it may have been for Christmas or a birthday or even when you got engaged or passed an exam.

4. Explain that on 6 January each year Christians have a special festival called Epiphany. Epiphany celebrates the visit of the wise men to the baby Jesus.

Ask the children if they can remember anyone else who visited baby Jesus – hopefully, someone will say the shepherds! Explain that there were lots of differences between the shepherds and the wise men – see if the children can think of any.

- The shepherds were poor; the wise men were rich.
- The shepherds came from the same country as Jesus (they were Jews); the wise men came from a different country (they were Gentiles) – Jews and Gentiles didn't ever mix with each other.
- The shepherds were in the fields close by; the wise men travelled a long way.
- Angels appeared to the shepherds; the wise men followed a star.

Though they were so different, God wanted the wise men and the shepherds to see the baby Jesus. Explain that this shows us that God wants everyone to see Jesus. In God's eyes, it doesn't matter if we are rich or poor or what country we come from.

5. Explain to the children that just as the gifts that you talked about at the start of the assembly had a special meaning to the person who received them, so the wise men brought special gifts for Jesus. These gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Christians believe that the three gifts all had a meaning. You may like to ask the children if they can guess what each gift could mean.

- Gold is a gift fit for a king. It recognized that Jesus was a great king, the king of the world.
- Frankincense is a special kind of fragrance that was used by a priest.
- Myrrh was a sweet-smelling liquid that was rubbed gently into the skin of someone who had died. It indicated that Jesus' death would be important.

6. Ask someone to hold up the card on which you've written the first definition of the word 'Epiphany': 'a church festival that celebrates the visit of the wise men to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus'.

Explain that our word 'epiphany' comes from a Greek word which means 'making known'. The birth of Jesus was the beginning of God making known who Jesus is and God's plan for the world.

7. Ask someone to hold up the card on which you've written the second definition: 'a sudden and inspiring revelation'.

Explain again that at the time Jesus was born Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) never mixed. It would have been a hugely surprising revelation that God wanted Gentiles (the wise men) to see Jesus (who was a Jew).

One of the things that the festival of Epiphany reveals is that God doesn't have favourites but welcomes people from any background and any nationality.

Time for reflection

It seems that the wise men were rich enough to bring special gifts to Jesus. Even though it isn't recorded in the Bible, it's possible that the shepherds also brought gifts for Jesus. A well-known Christmas carol has this verse in it:

'What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part.

Yet what I can I give him – give my heart.'

Think about those words by Christina Rossetti. What do they mean to you?

Prayer

Dear Lord,

thank you that you wanted both rich and poor to see baby Jesus.

Thank you that as we think about Epiphany,

we are reminded that every person is important to you.

Please help us to use all the gifts that you have given to us.

Thank you for all the good things that you give.

Amen.

Song/music

'The wise may bring their learning' (*Come and Praise*, 64)

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[A Welsh version of this assembly is also available >>](#)

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