



The Christmas Journey by Moira Curry and Gill Morgan:
A guide for running your own Christmas Journey

Creating a team

- The event will need a team of enthusiastic people who are able to work together to provide an exciting and thought-provoking experience for the visitors.
- Even if your church is small you could use this event to invite other churches to work together to expand the team.
- *Churches Together* or a similar local group would be a good platform to share the vision and recruit helpers.
- It may be useful to ask for time in Sunday services at other churches to explain the idea and encourage helpers.
- Notice sheets, church magazines and personal invitations can be effective.
- Assigning helpers to a specific job or jobs helps the team to have clarity of purpose and a feeling of value and responsibility.

What you'll need:

- *Leaders and coordinators:* to oversee the whole event, take responsibility for the smooth running of things and to delegate and troubleshoot where necessary.
- *Administration:* to send out invitations to schools, book follow-up and transport, produce prayer cards and T- shirts ordered.
- *Publicity:* to generate posters, adverts and publicity in schools and churches.
- *Layout and logistical planning:* a small team can discuss ideas and plan the sequence and smooth transition between rooms.
- *Costumes and props:* to circulate in church a list of costumes and props required for the scenes.
- *Scenery:* preparation and design.
- *Crafts:* to purchase materials and assemble items such as glue sticks, felt tipped pens, card so that they are ready for children to use.
- *Refreshments:* to provide refreshments for the visiting staff and also for the team.
- *Journey guides:* to lead the children around *The Christmas Journey*, linking each scene together and encouraging the group to participate in the story.
- *Journey guides' assistants:* to help with organising children, helping with costumes, props and so on and, very importantly, leaving each scene ready for the next group by replacing items.
- *Puppeteers:* to pre-recorded script on to CD and work the puppets.
- *Storyteller:* to learn the scripts and tell the story with empathy and skill.
- *Technical support:* to switch on lights, DVDs and CDs at appropriate times.
- *'Gatekeepers', meeters and greeters:* to make sure that no child leaves the building during school visits, to make each new school feel welcome and to deal with coats and exits.

Framework of the presentation

The Christmas Journey is designed so that the whole experience lasts for an hour, suitable for groups of up to 30 children, allowing for a maximum of four school sessions per day.

Suggested daily timetable

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 9.00 am | Team meet for prayer and preparation |
| 9.30-10.30 am | School one |
| 10.45-11.45 am | School two |
| 12.45-1.45pm | School three |
| 1.45-2.45pm | School four |

Craft activity

Have a craft activity that takes no longer than eight or ten minute, such as a simple Christmas card using pre-cut shapes to glue on to the card and some opportunity for colouring or using stickers or glitter pens. Producing sticky labels on the computer with the school names and *The Christmas Journey* logo takes a little time, but gives a professional appearance.

The set

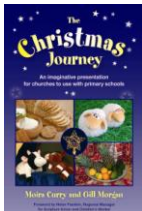
Buy or borrow good quality metal gazebos if this is to be an ongoing event as the plastic variety are more complicated to erect and less robust for attaching drapes. Depending on the space available, the gazebos can be placed in the corners of a hall leaving a central uncluttered area in which to tell the first part of the story. Each gazebo should be positioned slightly away from the walls to allow extra space for props and, in some cases, to make the storytelling room larger. For the final scene the children are led out of the last gazebo into a lounge area outside the main hall. This creates a feeling of travelling forward in time from a darkened area into the light of the present day. Link the gazebos together using dark fabric draped over poles or stapled to slats of wood. Take care that wood is secured safely to the gazebo in order to prevent accidents. Strong string can be used to fix the wood securely.

Lighting

Create a professional effect with simple lighting readily found in local furniture and DIY stores. Clip on spotlights, free standing up-lighters and strings of Christmas lights can all be used to good effect. Although the rooms should be as dark as possible, attention to health and safety is paramount and, for this reason, background lighting is advisable.

Budget

An important consideration is that most costs will be ‘one off’, so if you are planning this as an annual event, the overall cost will drop significantly in subsequent years. Setting up costs will of course vary depending on the materials you buy and what you already have, for example gazebos, fabrics, corrugated card, paint and timber.



The Christmas Journey by Moira Curry and Gill Morgan is available to buy through BRF and all Christian bookshops, priced £7.99. To buy your copy or find your nearest bookshop, call 01865 319700, or visit www.brf.org.uk.

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The Christmas Journey

*Martyn contributes storytelling sessions as part of the Christmas Journey
for Primary Schools in Frodsham, Cheshire*

This was the fifth year of 'The Christmas Journey' experience which a Churches Together Team offers to Primary Schools in and around Frodsham, Cheshire; and it was my 5th year of involvement too for Barnabas, telling stories that top and tail the journey for the Year 2 children, who come round during the week, and the groups of adults and children, who book in on the Saturday.

15 local schools sent classes, which in groups of between 12 to 17 children at a time travel through the events of the first Christmas. A wonderful team of actors, guides, storytellers, puppeteers, craft helpers and musicians (not forgetting the coffee and tea makers!) bring the whole experience to life again and again, so much so that each group feels that it is just for them.

After having learned a special song for their travels before they start, the journey begins by hearing the story of the biggest present ever – the great gift of this world to us from God. However, it is a gift that we have sadly misused and spoiled yet this Giver does not give up on his gift. But how is such a broken world to be mended? That's where the great surprise of Christmas comes in. The children now step back in time to hear about the story of God's second biggest gift – that of himself as a baby. They begin by meeting Mary in the kitchen making bread, when an angel visits; they become shepherds in the fields, when the heavenly choir breaks in upon them; they become visitors to the stable, where the animals have a tale to tell; they turn up in a rich palace where they help some wise men pack presents for a long journey. And finally the children meet me again in a modern-day sitting room, where we share the story of how this special gift of the baby Jesus is God's way of mending a broken world and of the beginning of putting everything back together again.

The Frodsham Team, led by Moira Curry and Gill Morgan, has built up such good relations with the local schools over the years that they now have no trouble in persuading them to come and experience the Christmas Journey – in fact it seems to have become a vital part of their Christmas curriculum for many. Everything is very professionally done with special packs for the schools to take away and the opportunity for the teachers to look at additional resources for their RE teaching, in particular some of our Barnabas books.

Both local authority and Church schools are involved in this well-established project and this year too we had a visit from a local special school where the children have quite severe special needs but who nevertheless enjoyed the high levels of tactile and visual input that are a vital part of a each aspect of the Journey.

The final part of the journey in the 'sitting-room' is also a chance for the children to reflect on what they have experienced and this year was no exception. There were some great comments, in particular about how the story of Jesus has 'two beginnings'. 'It's because Jesus goes on forever ' exclaimed one; while another child explained, 'God came to Mary and asked her to have his baby and then at the end God cared for him so much and he thought about it so deeply, that he decided to bring Jesus' back to life again'.

A long-standing BRF supporter from London came to visit us on the Friday, as he is hoping to persuade his own church to put on something similar in 2009. Having talked at length to the team and experienced the journey at least twice, he later wrote:

I found all the input very moving, and the reaction of the children was quite super... I think that the opening and closing stories were the factor that made the Christmas Journey a rounded whole experience, which must have stayed with the children as a world view, not just a pretty story, no matter how dramatically presented.

Of course it is to be hoped that many others will want to put on something similar for their local schools and to this end Barnabas is publishing the book of the Journey this coming summer – watch out for *The Christmas Journey* by Moira Currie and Gill Morgan.

Over 300 adults and children experienced the 28 journeys we staged this year and which in my case added up to 56 storytelling sessions! Phew! All of us in the team are very much aware of the prayer that goes on behind the scenes and which is the source of the strength we needed and the inspiration we were given to deliver this very special experience to so many children; all of which further develops the good relationships between churches and schools in this particular part of Cheshire.

Martyn Payne, December 2008