

Assembly: A peaceful Christmas



This assembly starts by building a scene of chaos and noise. As the students begin to arrive for the assembly, the presenter and five or six students should be in the middle of the stage. Holding a range of props, the students should start asking the presenter lots of questions like, 'What should I do with this?', 'Where does this go,' and 'How do I fix this?'. The questions and props don't really matter – the point of the sketch is to give the impression of not giving the presenter any peace.

As the last students file into the hall, the students on stage should all stop moving and the presenter then says: 'I wish I could just have five minutes peace!'

(At this point the lights should dim and some calm, peaceful music could be played.)

[Presenter] I'd like us all to reflect on what peace means to us. Maybe it's some quiet time, reading a book; maybe it's spending time with family and friends; maybe it's being out in the countryside enjoying nature. Whatever it means to you, it's something we all appreciate once in a while.

(Ask the pupils to think about what peace means to them. They could have some paired discussion. Take some answers from the pupils.)

[Presenter] We are going to reflect on the Christmas story and think about how peace is at the heart of the true meaning of Christmas.

At the time of the Christmas story, people were waiting for a special king who would bring a kingdom of endless peace. They had been waiting for a long time and hoping for a promise to be fulfilled. God had told one of his special friends that he would send a king who would be a Prince of Peace. They were waiting for a special child to be born:

'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting God, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace.' (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Let's see how the story unfolds.

(Put the lights back on)

[Presenter] When Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, the first people to hear about it were the shepherds.

(Three shepherds appear on stage and start gathering sticks lying around to build a fire.)

[Shepherd 1] 'I'm cold.'

[Shepherd 2] 'Me too, and I'm bored. Nothing ever happens on this hill.'

[Shepherd 3] 'Oh do stop complaining you two.'

[Shepherd 2] 'Who are you to tell us to stop complaining?'

[Shepherd 1] 'Maybe if you spent less time telling us how bored you are, you could think of something to do!'

(The three shepherds carry on complaining at each other, until...)

[Shepherd 1] 'Hang on, what's that?'

[Shepherds 2 and 3] 'What?'

(An angel appears. The shepherds are very afraid.)

[Angel] 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

(The angel is then joined by lots of other angels who say...)

[All angels] 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!'

[Presenter] The shepherds gathered their belongings and agreed to go and find the child. They went to Bethlehem and found Mary and

Joseph with the baby, in the manger as the angel had described. They immediately went out and told everyone the good news they had heard, and praised God.

[Presenter] The shepherds in the Christmas story were the first people to be told of Jesus' birth, and the first to welcome him into the world. At this time, shepherds were generally seen as having little value in society and were not always welcomed by others around them. Yet the angels brought the message about God's Prince of Peace to them even though they were so often overlooked.

After they had seen Jesus, the shepherds were so excited that they shared God's message of peace with others. God filled them with his peace and they were no longer afraid because God's special king, the Prince of Peace, had arrived.

Like the shepherds, Christians today want to share God's message of peace through their words and actions. Christians are followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and they seek to bring peace to the world.

Christian Aid is a charity that works with partners across the world and often helps people who live in areas where there is fighting and war. They try to help these people feel safe and experience peace even when things are difficult. They help people wherever there is most need, and they help people of different faiths and people who don't believe in God – not just Christians.

In many parts of the world, young people live with the threat of violence and conflict. Christian Aid works with partners around the world to bring peace, hope and stability to young people's lives. One of the countries where they work is Lebanon, where 13-year-old Hamza lives.

Hamza has experienced lots of change in his life so far. He was born and raised in a refugee camp in Syria, where his family had lived for many years. However the war in Syria forced them to move, splitting the family apart in the process. Hamza made it to a refugee camp in Lebanon. Some of his siblings are in Europe and others are still in Syria. He misses his siblings a lot and has been very upset by what has happened.

However, a children's centre in the refugee camp, run by Christian Aid's partner Association Najdeh, is helping Hamza and other children recover from trauma and improve their wellbeing.

Since coming to the centre a year ago, Hamza has grown in confidence. The staff at the centre could

see he would become a good leader and put him forward for training as a youth volunteer. In this role he assists teachers with class activities aimed at younger children. Hamza is now able to bring peace to the lives of other children living in the camp.

This centre is a place of peace for the children: a chance for young refugees to find calm even in the middle of conflict. It has brought peace, hope and joy to many.

Thinking back to the beginning of the assembly, we talked about what peace meant to you and some of you gave us your suggestions. Here are some of the things that children in the camp gave as their answers:

Hamza, 13: 'Peace is not losing a friend and not making my mummy sad. Peace is seeing my brother.'

Naziha, 14: 'Peace means to all live in a place where there is no war and where we all live happily ever after.'

Reflection:

Pupils could be invited to think about ways in which the world needs peace. They could be asked to create a peace voucher for the world – what would they write? How could they share the gift of peace with those around them? How could they help to make the world more peaceful? This could be an imaginative guided reflection or an interactive activity in which pupils add their ideas to a large peace voucher (for display) or make small peace vouchers (using recycled paper) which can be joined together to form a paper chain for decorating a communal school space.

You could make a large mosaic dove, a symbol of peace that is often used at Christmas. Draw the outline of a large dove and give each pupil a small piece of coloured paper, or a mosaic piece, to add to the outline. As they do so, ask them to think about how they can help to bring peace to the world.

Alternatively, search the internet for the work of Michael Pendry and the doves of peace installed in Salisbury Cathedral. This is an installation displayed internationally and the artist works with visitors to create new doves that are then used in the next installation.