

Advent, Christmas and Epiphany



Activities

Saviour of All Creation Mobile

Equipment: Paper plate; scissors; stiff paper or card; string, cotton or ribbon; paints, crayons or pictures from newspapers and magazines.

Activity: Make the mobile as follows:

- 🐾 Draw a spiral on the paper plate.
- 🐾 Cut along the spiral.
- 🐾 Glue or staple the top of the paper plate back together, where the cut of the spiral began. You should now have a ring, and a cardboard cork-screw dangling from it.
- 🐾 On the edge of the ring, draw or stick a picture of Jesus' crib.
- 🐾 From the corkscrew and around the edge of the plate, hang drawings or pictures of all kinds of animals. (You might also want to include planets and stars, and human beings of different ages, shapes, sizes, gender and ethnicity).

Purpose/teaching: Jesus didn't just come into the world to save human beings, but everything and everybody which God had made. The tiny, helpless baby in the crib at the top of the mobile saved the whole universe!

Camel Hobby-Horses

Equipment: Suitable length of plastic or wood (e.g. mop handle, several pieces of garden cane tied together), cardboard, marker pens, ribbon or wool for reins.

Activity: Make and use a camel hobby horse:

- 🐾 Print off and colour in two copies of the camel head in profile (or of course make your own if you prefer!)
- 🐾 Stick the two copies onto thick cardboard and cut out. Glue onto either side of the stick.

Purpose/teaching: These can make a good addition to a nativity play or tableau. Camels are incredibly well adapted for desert conditions, and without their help humans would have struggled to live and travel as successfully as they have done in beautiful but often hostile environments. The camels which the magi rode are a reminder of just how much human beings owe to domestic and helper animals, and the importance of treating them with respect.



Alternative Reindeer/Camel Food-Christian giving

Equipment: Plastic bucket, paper, sellotape, paper and pens.

Activity: Raise money for *real* horses, donkeys and perhaps even camels! There are many Christmas traditions involving leaving a thank you snack for animals who help in the delivery of presents: carrots for Santa's reindeer or straw for the Magi's camels. Some places now even sell 'reindeer food' for children. Whilst this is basically harmless fun, it is a shame to use resources on pretend animals when real ones are in desperate need. So:

- 🐾 Get Sunday school or Youth Group to write a funny letter from head reindeer/camel explaining that they have more treats than they need every year, and will soon be too fat to fly. However they very much appreciate everybody's generosity, and really wish that they could help some of their animal brothers and sisters in need.
- 🐾 Place letter on church notice board with accompanying bucket or collecting tin close by.
- 🐾 Choose a suitable horse/donkey sanctuary, or perhaps overseas charity helping working or abandoned animals. Put a poster for this charity beside the letter, with accompanying explanation of where donations will be sent.

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Purpose/teaching: Obviously this is a practical way of helping animals, but it is also a useful way of introducing a wider discussion about sharing our blessings and over consumption at Christmas. This makes the point too that caring about animals isn't an alternative to caring about people; compassion breeds compassion.

Animal Mothers and Babies

Equipment: Picture of Madonna and child, pictures of animal mothers with their babies

Activity: Look at these pictures together and discuss what things Mary had to do for Jesus, and what things these animal mothers do for their babies.

Purpose: To encourage a recognition that the Incarnation didn't just involve becoming human, it involved taking on flesh. Not only did Jesus share common experiences with every human being, he shared many common experiences with other animals/mammals too. An infant orang-utan needs milk and warmth and cuddles and play in much the same way as a human baby. Human beings are not separate from the rest of God's Creation, and Jesus entered into that Creation and that wider family which we all share. Recognising this is part of the wonder of the Incarnation. When we say 'The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' the 'us' encompasses more than human beings alone.

Worship Ideas

This time of year may not be ideal for arranging special animal themed worship events, BUT there are plenty of ways when it is natural (and in fact necessary) to talk about wider Creation during this period. Here are a few suggestions:

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Christingle

- 🐾 The symbolism of the Christingle orange as the world can be a helpful reminder that Jesus came to redeem *the world*, not just human beings! Here is a Christingle hymn (which can be reproduced without any copyright issues) which makes this point. It fits to the tune of 'One more step along the world I go'.

Big round orange is the world we see.
God made animals, and you and me.
Hills, and fields and deserts too;
Jungles, ice-caps and the ocean blue.
*As we see Christingle light shine bright and clear,
We remember that the Lord is here.*

Fruit and sweet things are the gifts God gives
To his people and to all that lives.
Monkeys, badgers, kangaroo;
Whales and dolphins, tigers too.
*As we see Christingle light shine bright and clear,
We remember that the Lord is here.*

Ribbon wrapped around the world so tight
Reminds us Jesus came to Earth one night.
God's love hugs tight all he made;
so our Jesus in a manger laid.
*As we see Christingle light shine bright and clear,
We remember that the Lord is here.*

Candle glowing so warm and bright
Tells us Jesus is the truth and light.
Lived, died, rose to set all free;
Whole and happy for eternity.
*As we see Christingle light shine bright and clear,
We remember that the Lord is here.*

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Christus Natus Est

- 🐾 There are numerous paintings, stained glass windows, poems and carols involving birds and animals proclaiming the birth of Christ. The creatures are cleverly given Latin words which tell the story, and which also mimic the sound which they naturally make. A common version is as follows:
- 🐾 COCKEREL - Christus natus est (Christ is born), GOOSE - Quando? Quando? When? When?), CROW -In hac nocte (On this night), OWL - Ubi? Ubi? (Where? where?), Lamb -Bethlehem! Bethlehem!
- 🐾 Getting children to dress up as the animal characters and act this out may be a fun reminder that there is nothing new or strange in the recognition that the joy and significance of Christmas touches all of God's Creation.

Crib Services and Scenes

- 🐾 If your church has a crib service or scene, make sure that the animals are more than just part of the scenery. If the other figures are placed in the crib with some explanation or comment, and include some for the animals as well. If nothing else, it is striking that Jesus spent his first night on Earth attended not by servants like most princes, but surrounded by animals. There is a legend that a cow in the stable breathed on the new born Christ to keep him warm; certainly the bodily heat from animals would have been welcome on a cold night.