

## *Christmas: Expect the Unexpected* Upper School Assembly



A secondary school assembly designed to work alongside the **SGM Lifeworlds** resource *Christmas: Expect the Unexpected*.

### **1) Christmas QI**

Ask how well the young people think they know the Christmas story. To test this out, explain that you're going to run a QI-style Christmas quiz.

If you can, persuade four of the young people to take part; otherwise, split the assembly into four groups and get them to shout out the answers. For every obvious (but wrong) answer, the contestants give, they are awarded minus points. For every right answer they give, they are awarded points.

**Question:** When was Jesus born?

**Obvious answer:** 25th December

**Real answer:** In fact, no-one knows the actual date of Jesus' birthday. It's church tradition which means we celebrate Christmas on that day.

**Question:** How did Mary travel to Bethlehem?

**Obvious answer:** By donkey

**Real answer:** In spite of the famous song you probably all sang in countless school nativities, the Bible story makes absolutely no mention of a donkey.

**Question:** What does the innkeeper tell Mary and Joseph when they knock on his door?

**Obvious answer:** No room at the inn

**Real answer:** No innkeeper is mentioned in the Bible stories: the word 'inn' in the original language just means 'house' ... it's more likely that Mary and Joseph were trying to stay with friends or family, who had run out of room because of the census.

**Question:** Where was Jesus born?

**Obvious answer:** In a stable

**Real answer:** Again, no mention of a stable in the Bible. We get that from the fact that Jesus was laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Rather than being kept in a stable, animals would probably have been kept in a cave. So it's more likely that this was where Jesus would have been born.

**Question:** How many wise men came to visit?

**Obvious answer:** Three

**Real answer:** Traditionally called Balthazar, Melchior and Casper, these three are actually entirely fictional. The Bible only tells us about three gifts – the gold, frankincense, and myrrh they brought with them. There could have been any number of wise men.

[If you have time, you could begin the session with an additional warm-up round, before moving on to the Bible-based round above – see the optional questions at the end of this document.]

Following the quiz, explain that sometimes when we've heard a story lots of times, we think we know it backwards. We think there can't possibly be anything new to discover in it. We think we know what's coming. In fact, often, the opposite is true. And in God's story, which we're all invited to take part in, there is always something new to discover: a new plot twist, an unexpected surprise. And despite how well we think we know it, the Christmas story is a prime example of that.

## 2) What's your flavour?

Now ... ask one of the teenagers if they'd be willing to take part in a blind taste test. Explain that they're going to have to sample a number of different flavours of crisps, and tell you which flavour is which (the offer of food should mean plenty of willing volunteers)!

Have a table set up with three or four different flavours of crisps [make these easily distinguishable, standard flavours, not difficult: salt and vinegar, cheese and onion, smokey bacon, ready salted, etc], and display them in their bags so that everyone can see clearly which flavour is which. However, before the assembly begins, swap the flavours around, so that when your volunteer is given what everyone else thinks is salt and vinegar (for example), they are actually sampling ready salted ... and will therefore seem to be getting it wrong!

When the blind taste test is over, explain why your volunteer appears to have picked the wrong flavour every time!

Like your audience watching the blind taste test, God's people thought they had it all figured out. They thought they knew the answers. They knew from their Scriptures that they had been promised a Messiah, a rescuer, someone who would come and free them from oppression and make them into a great nation. They were expecting a warrior king; someone who would defeat their enemies, someone who would be able to change their lives, who would burst onto the scene with power and authority. What they got instead was a baby. Vulnerable, dependant, helpless. They're expecting the punch of salt and vinegar, and instead they get ready salted.

God didn't come in might and power and majesty. He did something far more unexpected – and far more significant. He became one of us.

### 3) Close in prayer if appropriate.

#### Optional opening quiz round:

Round one: Christmas traditions

**Question:** Also known as Father Christmas or Santa Claus, where was the original Saint Nick from?

**Obvious answer:** North Pole, or Lapland (Finland)

**Real answer:** The original Saint Nicholas was a bishop in Myra, in Turkey, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD. He is the patron saint of children, merchants and sailors, and was known for his gifts to the poor. In one story, he wished to give a poor family a gift without revealing who he was, so he dropped a purse full of gold down their chimney.

**Question:** What colour does Santa Claus wear?

**Obvious answer:** red

**Correct answer:** The jolly red Santa that we know today was popularised by Coca Cola in the 1930s. Traditionally, Father Christmas was depicted in Green.

**Question:** The Christmas tree came to us from Germany, but what was it traditionally decorated with?

**Obvious answer:** A fairy, a star

**Real answer:** The German tradition of the Christmas tree dates back to the medieval period, when the tree was decorated with apples.

**Question:** What is the traditional meat for Christmas dinner?

**Obvious answer:** Turkey

**Real answer:** the turkey was introduced to Britain from South America in the 1700s. Before that, poorer families would have had goose, and richer ones may have enjoyed ham, pheasant, or boar.