

# THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

## EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

### Do-It-Yourself

### The Christmas Story

### Key Stage 1 and 2

This is one of our range of DIY resources, which aim to provide you with what you need to teach your pupils in the galleries. We hope that the following tour outline will be enjoyable for your pupils. As we do not know the age of your pupils, or the specific aims of your visit, the tour may need adapting, but we hope that it acts as a springboard. Each idea includes signpost sequences all of which point to pupil interaction with the exhibits, *example prompt questions written in italics*, and information. “Into Action” sheets, which are linked to these teaching ideas, are available for pupils to use in the galleries.

### Aims of the Advent Tour session

- To remind pupils of the Biblical Christmas Story in contrast to the commercial version of Christmas we see all around us
- To enjoy the paintings and objects and to want to see more
- To understand that different artists depict things we cannot see in very different ways, eg. angels
- To know, through their own reactions, that paintings communicate many sorts of thoughts and feelings.

### Galleries used in this session:

Galleries 5, 6, 7 and 8

### You will need to bring:

- One clipboard for each pupil
- Paper and pencil for each pupil
- Photocopied Into Action sheets



Location: Gallery 5

Effet de neige a Erangy, avec un pommier, 1895  
Camille Pissaro, 1830 - 1903

Ask the children to find a winter picture in the Gallery and sit down in front of it. They may choose different pictures, and go round to them looking at their choices, but then bring them to the Pissarro snow scenes, which in our experience most of them choose anyway

*Why did you choose this picture? What is especially wintry about the painting? Can you think of anything we can add to make it more Christmassy?*

(Christmas tree, lights, Santa's sleigh etc) *Who's looking forward to Christmas? Has anyone already decorated one of these?* (put down Christmas tree picture and so on.)

So it's nearly Christmas – presents, trees, decorations, turkeys, pudding, lovely stuff But you know and I know that all that fun, all those lovely things are to help us remember three people who had no trees or decorations or turkeys or pudding. This is their story

Once upon a time a long time ago – to be precise 2013 years ago – there lived a girl called Mary. Mary lived in a tiny village called Nazareth. The houses were built from mud bricks. They had flat rooves – why? They had small windows – why? They were cheap to build – they needed to be because Mary's family were poor – as were all the families in the village, and life in the hot dry landscape was hard

Just imagine trying to grow things in that ground. The farmers had to work really hard to grow enough to feed their children. Everyone in the family had to work. Children didn't go to school, they worked. Mary grew up working. She cooked and spun and tended the sheep and goats and cleaned and cooked and looked after the younger children.

But when our story starts she wasn't a child any more she was quite grown up – when do you think people are grown up – well she was about 14 – quite old enough to be married. She became engaged to Joseph. Joseph lived in the village too but in another house with his family. When they were married Mary knew that she would go and live with Joseph and his family in their house. He was a carpenter – talk about what he would have made (essential farming tools) and what he wouldn't have made (highly decorated furniture).

But they weren't married yet. So Mary still lived at home with her parents. One day Mary was busy as always, perhaps she was sitting inside in the shade, perhaps she was spinning some wool or preparing some vegetables for dinner, we don't know, but we do know what happened next – something really extraordinary – come and see.



Location: Gallery 6

Annunciation

Spinello Aretino, 1346 - 1410

So here is Mary - sitting quietly - not doing the vegetables - *what's she doing?*  
And there is someone else, or something else - an angel called Gabriel. Are you little angels?

*Has she noticed the angel* - do you think you can see angels, can you hear them, can you feel them, can you smell them? Is this angel how you imagine angels look? Had this painter ever seen an angel?

*Come to that - do you think this is what Mary really looked like?* Do you think this painter or any of these painters had ever seen her? So this is how this painter imagined Mary and the angel. Look at her clothes, the pillow, the cloth behind her. Is she a poor farming girl in this picture? Why all this rich stuff? What's going on? *What's the painter trying to tell us?* (The use of gold, the robes that Mary is wearing and the rich setting in which she is sitting, all make Mary look grand, and was the way in which the artist, and the church which commissioned the painting, made Mary look important and chosen, in a way that the people seeing the painting would understand.)

Well we know she heard that angel because he talked to her, in her own language, in Hebrew and he said, "Don't be frightened Mary, I have a message for you from God, He has chosen you to have a very special baby, he will be the Son of God and you must call him Jesus."

*Well how do you think she felt?* Look at the painting. How would you feel if an angel came to see you and gave you a message like that? Etc.

Then of course she had a big problem - Joseph - she had to tell him that she was going to have God's baby. He wasn't too pleased, he didn't know what to think, this was the weirdest thing anyone had ever said to him - he didn't believe her - he

thought she was just making it up and that it must be another man's baby. He decided he didn't really want to marry her anymore. Can't blame him. But then the angel came to Joseph in a dream – the angel told Joseph that Mary was telling him the truth and that she was going to have God's baby. So all was well and Joseph and Mary got married, and the special baby got bigger and bigger inside Mary's tummy until when 9 months had gone past she was really pregnant and ready to have her baby.

And just then, just at the worst possible time, Mary and Joseph had to go on a long journey. The Romans, who were in charge of Palestine wanted to count everyone in the country (census) For some reason everyone had to travel back to the place they were born to be counted. Well imagine if everyone in England had to travel back to the place they were born, we'd all be whizzing all over the country, and that's what it must have been like then. Mary and Joseph had to go back to the place Joseph was born– Bethlehem – but there were no intercity trains, no planes, no buses, no cars, no bikes, there were just feet – yours or an animals. It was a long way, the roads were awful, it was boiling hot, and Mary was really pregnant so they needed a donkey for her. Long hard journey – no Little Chef's on the way – finally they got there along with everyone else who had to go back to Bethlehem and of course the whole village was crammed with people.

Knock knock knock knock Joseph tried here, there and everywhere to get them somewhere to stay – “full up full up” was all he heard all day. He was desperate, Mary was going to have her baby – time was running out. Then at last one of the pub keepers said they could have the stable. If it were today it would have been the garage round the back of the pub. Not a great place to have baby – but at least it was somewhere and it was just in the nick of time, because that night Mary had her very special baby. Look they're over there.



Location: Gallery 6

The Nativity

Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1449 - 1494

You can see the stable wasn't much of a shelter – the roof is falling to bits, and it was very open. *Who would normally have lived here?* Animals and you can see the ox and the ass. The only people in the stable are the baby Jesus, His mother Mary and Joseph – it's a very special moment for a family when a baby has just been born – normally the mum is cuddling the baby very tightly – she's been waiting months to meet him – *but what is Mary doing?* – praying Why? Because this baby is special, and because he is safe. *How else do we know he's special* – if you look carefully you can see that Mary, Joseph and Jesus all have haloes. Look even closer and you can see something extra on Jesus' halo – a red cross – a sign of what was to come for this little baby.

Well this moment of peace was not going to last for long. If you look in the sky you can see a huge star. That star was guiding some Wise Men from the east ... but we'll come back to them later. *What I want you to look at is what is going on in this field. What's in the sky here? An angel.* In the field are some shepherds. The night could be very dangerous for sheep with wild animals like bears and leopards and jackals around. Shepherds often stayed out in the field at night to protect their flocks, but they had never been visited by an angel before. The angel told them to go to Bethlehem to see the special baby who had been born in a stable, but who was God's special king. *If an angel came to see you and told you to do something would you do it?* Yes absolutely you would, and so did the shepherds – come and see ...



Location: Gallery 7

The Adoration of the Shepherds, 1620

Luis Tristán, 1586 - 1624

As you can see the shepherds were just poor and ordinary men. *Look at the clothes they are wearing and what have they got on their feet?* Can you see the way that they are kneeling before the baby Jesus, or the way they are holding their hands, which are all ways of showing their respect for the new King. *Some of the shepherds have brought gifts for the baby - can you see what they are?* Lambs and a pair of doves were things that people would take to the temple as offerings of thanks to God for the gift of a baby, and of course it was all that the shepherds had to give. *Do you think you can see God in this painting?* Well if you look at the top of the painting the light is coming from God to light up the baby Jesus and the angels are also watching over him. *Can you see the ox and the ass?* If animals could talk just think what they would be saying to one another!

*Do you remember the Wise Men...* well they were not poor like the shepherds and they came from a land far away. They were clever people who studied the stars because they believed that this was the way to understand science, medicine and dreams. You can see why God thought that a brilliant star would be the best way to guide them to the baby Jesus. They thought the star was a sign of the birth of a king and their journey took them over many miles of desert, until they reached the palace of King Herod in Jerusalem. He was not pleased at all at the idea of another king, because he was King wasn't going to let anyone else be. He quickly called together his experts in Jewish history. They remembered the prophet Micah had said an important baby would be born in Bethlehem. Again the star guided the Wise men - come and see what they found there...



Location: Gallery 8

The Adoration of the Kings

Master of the Munich Adoration

This stable is getting more and more crowded! We've come a long way since there was just Mary and Joseph and the baby with just an ox and an ass for company! *Can you see the Wise Men* (the three very well-dressed figures closest to Jesus)- look at their clothes, look at all the people they have brought with them - servants? They might have needed protecting on the journey. Do you think they look important and grand - and yet look how they are kneeling and bowing to the baby Jesus - There's no doubt who is the centre of attention and who is the most important person in this painting? *What are they giving to Jesus?* Their gifts were gold - the most precious metal fit for a king, frankincense, burnt in offering to a god, and myrrh - a sweet-smelling spice to anoint the dead - a sad reminder of what was going to happen to the baby Jesus when he grew up. .

As you know the Wise Men really believed in the importance of dreams - and God told them in a dream that they should not go back to King Herod as he had asked them to do, but to go home another way. King Herod waited and waited, getting crosser and crosser because he wanted to find out about this king. When he realised that the Wise men were not coming back - he worked out the most horrible and dreadful plan to get rid of this new king. He ordered his soldiers to kill every boy child in Bethlehem under the age of two. Jesus was in great danger.... Follow me.



Location: Gallery 5

Paysanne Française, after 1872 and before 1902

Aimé-Jules Dalou, 1838 - 1902

God would not let Jesus be killed – he sent an angel to warn Joseph in a dream. “Get up Joseph! Herod is planning to kill the child. Escape at once and go to Egypt – stay there until I tell you it is safe to come back.” And that is exactly what Joseph did. He woke Mary, and they picked up the sleeping baby, took the donkey and escaped in the dead of night. They were terrified that they would be heard leaving Bethlehem and had to be very quiet. It was another long hard journey across the sun-baked desert and they must have been very worried, because they were just two ordinary people, trying to look after the Son of God, and they were homeless. Like all babies, Jesus needed feeding. Every so often they would have to stop and Mary would need to nurse her baby, just like any other mother, and just like this. Mary Joseph and the baby Jesus stayed in Egypt until an angel was sent by God to tell them it was safe to return to Nazareth

But was she really an ordinary mum? Was this an ordinary baby? This was the beginning of an extraordinary life which is shown in hundreds and hundreds Of paintings and objects here ... but that’s another story