



SESSION 1 of 4

Palm Sunday

MEETING AIM

To explore the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem and how the crowds responded to him, an incident that enabled children to thank and praise Jesus for themselves.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 19:28-44

BACKGROUND

It is important to include as much of the story of Jesus' death and resurrection as possible, which is what we will be doing over the next four sessions, using Luke's Gospel. Enjoy celebrating Jesus' arrival together, but leave some space to wonder about who Jesus is with the children.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share any refreshments you have. Together, think about different ways to make a loud noise, for example using musical instruments or parts of the body (voice, feet, hands and chest thumping). Do these noises sound happy, excited, shy or fierce? Focus especially on happy and excitable sounds.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: A4 white paper leaves; green and brown felt-tip pens or coloured pencils; green crêpe paper; glue

Cut out large A4 leaves from the white paper. The children can colour them and stick on green crêpe paper. These will be needed for the Bible storytelling, response and prayer. As you work, chat together about any recent celebrations you have attended.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: the children's coats; shawls or scarves; the leaves from 'Intro activity'

Sit in a circle, ideally around a parachute or circular mat. Children should put on a shawl or scarf if they are not wearing a coat and put their leaf in front of them. Read the story and act it out as follows:

Jesus and his closest followers were travelling down to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. At this festival, Jews celebrated the time when God had rescued them from Egypt. It was a long way. The road was rough. They got tired. Their feet

were sore. *Everyone walks around the circle, stopping every now and again to rub their feet, then sits back in their place.*

As they were getting close to a village near to the city of Jerusalem, Jesus said to two of his friends: "Go into that village. You'll find a young donkey. Untie him and bring him back to me!"

"What if someone asks us what we're doing?" they asked.

"Just say: 'The Lord needs it,'" Jesus replied. *Everyone walks around the circle looking for an imaginary donkey. Once each child 'finds' their donkey they untie it. Everyone freezes.*

"Hey!" said a voice. "What do you think you're doing with my donkey?" *The children can say that in different ways: loudly, crossly or quietly.*

What were the friends told to say? *Wait for the children to say: "The Lord needs it."*

"Oh!" the voice said, not loudly or crossly this time. "Then take the donkey. It's OK." *The children go back to their places.*

Then Jesus did a surprising thing. He got on the back of the young donkey and headed off toward Jerusalem. Crowds of people in Jerusalem saw him coming and got very excited. You see, long ago, King Solomon – one of the greatest kings ever – had ridden a donkey into Jerusalem when he was crowned king. Jesus must have been someone special if he was acting like King Solomon. Would Jesus rescue them from the Romans?

Then the crowds did something surprising. As Jesus came into the city, they took off their coats and threw them on the ground in front of the donkey, like a special carpet! *The children stand up and throw their coats and scarves into the middle of the circle. The crowds shouted: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hooray for Jesus! Make way! Make way!" Talk about the different sounds you made earlier, then shout out happily and excitedly: "Make way!" The children can walk around the circle as they do this, all the way back to their original place.*

Jesus got closer and closer to the city gates. Lots of other people rushed toward him to see what was going on. Then they did something else that was surprising. They snapped off branches and leaves from nearby trees and began to wave them, shouting, "Hooray for Jesus! Make way! Make way!" *The children stand up to wave their leaves and everyone shouts out "Make way!" three times, getting louder each time. They were so excited and happy that Jesus had come!*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- How do important people usually travel around?
- Show the children a picture of a donkey. What do donkeys usually do?
- Would you expect the Queen or someone important to ride a donkey? How might you react if you saw someone important on a donkey?
- Would you have felt pleased or surprised if you had been there?

5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

Tell the story again, but this time ask the children to think about and make appropriate noises to accompany the storytelling, for example shuffling or stamping feet, rubbing hands as the donkey is untied, clapping of donkey feet and heehawing, snapping of twigs, running feet, out-of-breath panting and shouting – whatever the children can think of.

10 PRAYER

You will need: leaves from 'Intro activity'

Just as the people praised God, so we can praise God. Talk about what the children want to thank God for, and what they want to tell him.

Encourage them to stand and wave their leaves as they sing the song 'We have a king who rides on a donkey' to the tune of 'What shall we do with the drunken sailor':

We have a king who rides on a donkey (x3)
And his name is Jesus.

(Chorus)

Hooray his name is Jesus (x3)
Riding on a donkey.

We have a king and we will love him (x3)
And his name is Jesus.

(Chorus)

We have a king and we will thank him (x3)
And his name is Jesus.

(Chorus)

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SESSION 2 of 4

Good Friday

MEETING AIM

To listen to the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, death and burial.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 22:39-23:56

BACKGROUND

In this session we will be exploring a simpler version of the story of Jesus' arrest and death as Luke told it, using colours and shapes to help children remember and retell the story. Jesus' pain and suffering should not be majored on, but it shouldn't be avoided either. The next session will also use coloured shapes to retell the story.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share any refreshments you have. Chat together about their favourite colours. Why do they like them? Which colours do they think of at springtime? Explain that for this session and the next one you'll be exploring the colours of Easter.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a set of six small cards for each child in the following shapes (either white for the children to colour or coloured as instructed): a square (dark blue), a rectangular 'sleeve' (purple), a cross (brown), a skull-shaped hill (green), a circle of sun (half yellow, half black) a circular stone (grey); crayons or felt-tip pens
Give each child a pack of cards to colour in the appropriate colour. Make sure their name is written on each card. If the shapes are already cut out from the coloured card, hide them around the room so that each child can look for a set.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: set of coloured and shaped cards for each child from 'Intro activity' (and one set for you. This could be a large set so the children can see what you are doing)
Sit the children in a circle with their cards in front of them. Hold up the cards as indicated. The children could place the cards in front of them in chronological order. Tell this story:

It was night-time and very quiet, but it wasn't totally dark because there was a full moon. There was always a full moon at the time of the Passover festival. The sky was probably as blue as this square. *Hold up the dark blue square.*

Jesus was in a garden with his friends. They were all very tired. *Everyone looks tired and yawns.* But Jesus was more than just tired. He was very scared because he knew his enemies wanted to arrest him. *Everyone looks frightened.* He was also very sad because he knew his friends were going to leave him. *Everyone looks sad.* Jesus had talked with his father, God, about all this.

They heard voices coming closer and closer, getting louder and louder. It was a crowd of soldiers and people who didn't like the things Jesus had been telling them about God. They grabbed hold of him and took him as their prisoner to be judged by the religious leaders and the Roman governor. All of Jesus' friends ran away scared, except Peter.

Peter followed the crowd to see where Jesus was being taken. Later that night he said three times, very loudly, that he didn't even know Jesus! How sad. *Everyone looks very sad.*

The religious leaders and the Roman governor decided that Jesus deserved to die even though he had done nothing wrong. It wasn't fair. While Jesus was a prisoner, the Roman soldiers in charge of him laughed at him. They got hold of a purple coat and put it on Jesus. *Hold up the rectangular purple 'sleeve'.* Purple was the colour a king wore. This rectangle is the shape and colour of a purple sleeve. They pointed at Jesus and cried out: "Call yourself a king!" Jesus didn't say anything.

Jesus was to die on a cross, that is two pieces of wood stuck together in this cross shape. *Hold up the brown cross.* His hands and feet would be nailed to the wood. He was taken to a hill outside the city of Jerusalem called 'the place of the skull', probably because it was a hill shaped like a skull or a head. *Hold up the head-shaped hill.* He was in so much pain. His family and friends stood and watched him on the cross. They couldn't do anything to help him. *Everyone looks sad.*

For three hours the sky turned dark. The sun stopped shining, not because of the clouds or a storm. It may have been an eclipse of the sun. *Hold up the yellow and black sun shape.* Everyone watching held their breath and wondered what was happening. Suddenly, Jesus shouted: "Father, I put my trust in you!" Then he stopped breathing. He had died. His family and friends were heartbroken. *Everyone looks sad.*

One of Jesus' friends was a religious leader. He hadn't wanted Jesus to be put to death, but he had been unable to do anything about it. He took Jesus' body down from the cross, wrapped it in fine cloth and laid it in a

cave. This was a place where dead bodies could be laid. A large stone (it was a round shape because it was so heavy it needed to be rolled along) was rolled across the entrance to stop anyone from getting in and anything from getting out. *Hold up the grey circle.* Everyone went home feeling so sad, so scared and so disappointed. *Everyone looks sad, then scared, then disappointed.* Jesus, whom they loved so much, was dead!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- Place your shapes in the order of events. Which part of the story makes you sad? Which is the saddest bit?
- What do you think Jesus' friends did next?
- Why do you think we tell such a sad story?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: cards from 'Intro activity'; the means of attaching all six cards to each other in the right order, eg a cross-shaped piece of card, some wool or sticky tape

Stick the shapes together in some way, for example sticking them to a card cross, with one at the top, three on the crosspiece and two below. Alternatively, you could attach them to a piece of wool or stick them together to make one long strip with sticky tape.

Explain that Good Friday is a sad day because we remember that Jesus died. But it is called 'good' because it's also a day of happiness. Jesus died so that it would be possible for anyone to know just how much God loves us. That is very good news. That's what makes Good Friday a good day. As you work, chat through any questions the children have.

5 PRAYER

As a prayer following on from the discussion you've had, sing the song 'When I think about the cross' (Mark and Helen Johnson, *Out of the Ark Publishing*) or any song about the cross that your children may know.

Given that you have spent time thinking about being sad, you could pray for anyone you know who is sad.

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SESSION 3 of 4

Easter Sunday

MEETING AIM

To reflect on how the women first heard Jesus had come back to life and then shared the good news with his disciples.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:1-12

BACKGROUND

As this is Easter Sunday, the service may contain different elements, some children may be away, and there may be visitors, so there is a need for flexibility. Check with parents and carers that they are happy for the children to take part in an Easter egg hunt, and decide beforehand when they can eat their eggs.

5 CIRCLE TIME

You will need: small wrapped Easter eggs; empty yoghurt pots (one per child)
Before the session, hide the Easter eggs around your meeting space. Welcome the children by name. Make some obvious and others harder to find. To make it fair in a group with a wide age range, give each child an empty yoghurt pot to store the eggs they find. The eggs can be divided out equally once they have all been found.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a set of six cards for each child in the following shapes (either in white for the children to colour or coloured as described here): a crescent for happy / sad lips (red), a circular sun (yellow), a square garden (green), a circular stone (grey), two angelic rectangles with thin wispy cuts on one side (white); crayons or felt-tip pens
Give each child a pack of cards to colour in the appropriate colour. Make sure their name is written on each card. If the shapes are already cut out from the coloured card, you could hide them around the room, so that each child can look for a set of six. This could be combined with the Easter egg hunt. If you have them, use the cards from last week to review the story of Jesus' death.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: cards from 'Intro activity' (one set of coloured, shaped cards for each child)

Sit the children in a circle with their cards in front of them. Display the cards as you tell the story. The children could place the cards in front of them in chronological order as the story is told:

On Friday evening, Jesus' friends, who had watched him die, went home. They were very sad. *Hold up the red, downturned, sad lips.* All day Saturday they stayed at home. This was their day of rest. *Everyone looks sad.*

Early on the Sunday morning, some of the women got up very, very early, before the sun had come up. *Make your yellow circle sun rise slowly from the floor.* They had gathered together lots of sweet-smelling perfume, which they wanted to put in the cave beside Jesus' body. This was what people did in hot countries.

The cave where Jesus' body had been laid was in a garden. *Hold up the green square.* It was springtime. The grass was fresh green, like this green square. The women were very sad. *Show the downturned mouth again.*

Can anyone remember what this grey circle stood for last week? *Hold up the grey circle.* An enormous stone had been rolled across the entrance to the cave to keep people from going in and to stop anything from getting out. The women may have wondered how they were going to get into the cave with their perfume to put around Jesus' body, but they needn't have worried. When they got there, the stone had been rolled away. They could see right inside the cave. *Roll the stone over and over.*

What they saw made them step back in shock. First thing...Jesus' body had disappeared. Gone! Second thing (which made them tremble inside and out)... *Hold up the two angelic rectangles.* Right beside them were two men in shining white clothes, bright and dazzling. Angels! Wow! The women fell down with their faces to the ground. *See if the children can do that.*

The angels spoke calmly to the women. They said: "Jesus isn't here. He was dead but now he is alive again." Then the women remembered that Jesus had said something about coming back to life, but they hadn't understood. *Hold up the red, upturned, smiling lips.* The women were suddenly happy and full of joy. They rushed to tell the rest of Jesus' friends what they had seen.

At first, Jesus' disciples didn't believe the women. They thought it was nonsense. *Show the downturned lips.* They were still sad. But Peter ran to check things out for himself. *Show the green rectangle and the grey stone.* He ran into the garden. He saw

the cave. He saw the rolled-over grey stone. There were no angels, but he could see that Jesus' body was not in the cave. Jesus was gone! The women were right!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- What sort of things surprise you in your life?
- What things surprised the women and Peter?
- I wonder what the women talked about as they ran to tell Jesus' friends what they had seen!
- How do you think they told Jesus' friends? Would they have whispered or shouted?
- How would you describe what happened on the first Easter Day?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: a circle of card for each child with the words 'Jesus is alive!' in bubble writing at the centre; the sets of cards from 'Intro activity'; glue; crayons

Give out the circles and encourage the children to colour them in and stick the cards around the outside. Talk about the story as you do so.

5 PRAYER

You will need: Easter songs and the means to play them; musical instruments (optional)
Choose one or two celebratory Easter songs for the children to sing, and rejoice in song that Jesus is alive! Play along with musical instruments if you have them.

Conclude by standing in a circle and saying the following acclamation together, with actions (which may need explaining in advance):

- Jesus was arrested! *Cross your wrists and shake them.*
- Jesus has died! *Stretch your arms out in a cross shape.*
- Jesus was buried. *Close your eyes and bend over sideways.*
- Jesus has come alive! *Dance around on the spot three times.*
- Alleluia! *Shout this three times, getting louder each time, with your arms stretched in the air.*

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SESSION 4 of 4

Road to Emmaus

MEETING AIM

To hear how Jesus met two of his friends on the road out of Jerusalem. They were among the first to see him alive and rushed to tell the others.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:13-43

BACKGROUND

This is the last of the four sessions concentrating on the Easter story. It would be constructive to look back over the last three weeks to reflect on the long and sometimes complicated story

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share any refreshments you have. Sit around in a circle and look at one another's shoes. What is different about them? Notice the size, colour, heels, laces or Velcro, function and age. Who has had a new pair of shoes recently? What makes a pair of shoes a favourite pair?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

Ask for suggestions of different ways to move with our feet, for example hopping, jumping and taking big strides. Practise each suggestion as you move round the room or organise some simple hopping or big-stride races.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: three large card pairs of feet; two red sticky dots; building bricks (wooden or Duplo)

Sit the children in two lines facing each other while you sit in the middle of one of the lines. Tell this story:

It was Sunday afternoon. Jesus' friends had had a tiring day. They would never forget how awful it had been to watch Jesus die on the cross late on the Friday afternoon.

From early in the morning that Sunday there had been rumours that Jesus was alive, and they didn't know what to make of them. Two of Jesus' friends (one of whom was called Cleopas) had been in Jerusalem all day. As the sun was dipping lower in the

sky, they decided it was time to walk home to their village, Emmaus. It was about seven miles away and would take them more than two hours to walk there. *The children at one end of the lines should build houses to represent Emmaus. Place two sets of feet at the other end.*

How do you think the two men were feeling? What do you think they talked about? *The children move the card feet to where you are sitting.*

As they were walking, a stranger caught up with them. *Place the third pair of feet beside the other two.* The stranger asked them what they were talking about, so they told him. *Ask the children again what they had just suggested. Expand on what Luke tells us: that they had hoped Jesus would set people free from the Romans, the great things Jesus had done, how he had been killed, the women talking about angels and Jesus being alive. The children slowly move the feet toward Emmaus, one foot at a time for each fact the disciples tell the stranger.*

Then the stranger took a deep breath and began to tell them how Jesus had needed to die, how this had been part of God's plan and how the first part of the Bible pointed to this. On and on he went. The two listened. Time flew by. They arrived at their home in Emmaus.

"Stay with us for a meal and for the night," the two said. "It's getting late." So the stranger went into their house. *The three pairs of feet are at Emmaus by now.* The three of them were hungry. As they sat around the meal table, the stranger picked up a piece of bread. He broke it. The two men looked at the stranger, looked at one another, opened their mouths to say something and...the stranger was gone!

"That was Jesus!" one of them said.

"I know! We didn't recognise him until he broke the bread."

Remove the third pair of feet. As you do so, stick a red dot on each foot. Ask the children why you have done that.

The two disciples got up straight away. "We must tell the others in Jerusalem that we have seen Jesus. He really is alive!"

They raced back as quickly as they could, taking another two hours. *Pass the two pairs of feet back along the line to Jerusalem.*

They told the others what had happened. As they were doing this, Jesus suddenly came into the room. All his friends thought he was a ghost and were really scared. Jesus said to them: "Why are you so scared? Look at my hands and my feet. *Show the feet with the red dots.* Use your eyes. Look at me. Touch me. I am no ghost."

Then the disciples believed Jesus really was alive. For 40 days he walked and ate with many other people, at least 500 more. They all knew this truly was Jesus, who had died but was now alive again!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- Why did the two people not recognise Jesus, whom they had known well? If necessary, offer suggestions such as: it was dark, they were tired or weren't expecting him, or Jesus didn't want them to recognise him at first.
- These two friends just had to tell people about Jesus. What would you like to tell someone else about him? Why is the Easter story so important?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: thin elastic bands or wool; small foot shapes cut from card or foam; a hole punch; felt-tip pens

Punch a hole in each foot and give each child three pairs. Put a nail-print dot on one pair. Using an elastic band/wool, attach all three pairs to a child's shoe to act as a reminder. As you work, chat about the story and the children's response to it.

5 PRAYER

Explain that Jesus was alive and walked with the two friends on the road to Emmaus. He is still alive and walks with us today. Even though we can't see him, he has promised to be with us and to listen to us. His Spirit explains things to us, which is what Jesus did on the road.

Talk about where the children will be going over the next few days. Decide where in the room the imaginary school, grandma's house, party venue or whatever they have mentioned is going to be.

Line up in pairs and set off on a prayer walk around the room, each child being encouraged to thank Jesus that he is with them when they get to where their school, grandma or party is.

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