

The new beginning

This reflective story has been used regularly by the Barnabas team as a presentation of the life of Jesus that links Christmas to Easter. These two festivals are often only months apart, which can be confusing for some children.

On your marks:

This reflective story helps to put the mystery of Easter into the wider context of the life of Jesus. It takes us from Christmas to Easter through the ministry of Jesus, and in so doing can help your group see the bigger picture of what Jesus came to do.

Ideally, this activity works best with a small group of children and adults gathered in a semicircle around the storyteller. However, by using larger objects, it can be told to a bigger audience.

Get set:

You will need:

- a long piece of black felt
- a set of seven coloured felt squares that together will fit along the piece of black felt:
 - two plain yellow
 - two plain green
 - one light blue
 - one light blue with a darker blue triangle across it dividing the square into two
 - one yellow with a black triangle across it dividing the square into two
- a wooden manger and baby from a nativity set
- a small model dove
- some seeds between tape and three small fabric leaves
- a tea light and small box of matches
- some small wooden shapes
 - of birds
 - a boat
 - a cross
 - a figure of Jesus with hands stretched out
 - of people.

Tell the story as you roll out the black cloth and put down each felt square, working from the storyteller's right to left. As you place each felt square down, then the objects for that part of the story, focus on these objects rather than on the group, so that everyone's attention is drawn to the story.



Go!

Lift up the wooden manger and baby.

In the beginning - the new beginning - was a baby. God chose Mary to become the mother of his only son.

Place the first yellow felt square and put the manger on it.

This baby was the light of the world. Mary and her husband Joseph looked after the baby. The baby grew and became a child, and then an adult. When Jesus was about 30 years old, he went to the river where his cousin John was baptising people.

Place the light blue felt square next to the first square.

John baptised Jesus - and he went down into the water.

Push your hand down into the square and then lift it up again slowly.

And John lifted him back into the light. Some people nearby said they saw a dove come down from heaven close to Jesus.

'Fly' the dove and place it on the light blue square.

Others heard a voice that said: You are my own dear son and I'm pleased with you.

Now Jesus began his work: to put God's world and its people back together again - to repair what had been spoiled. He began by telling stories.

Place the green felt square next to the light blue square.

His stories were like seeds, but not in the soil... in people's hearts.

Place the seeds along the bottom of the green square nearest to the group.

The stories grew inside people and helped them to learn more about God's love, more about what God is like, and more about God's great rescue plan to mend the world.

For each of the three things mentioned above, place a small leaf above the seeds on the green square.

What else did Jesus do? He challenged the darkness!

Place the yellow and black square next to the green square with one hand pushing against the black part of the square.

And Jesus came close to people, especially the ones nobody else cared about. Look...

Place a tea light on the black triangle of this square and light it carefully.

When people came close to Jesus, they changed. They saw things differently. They could do things they couldn't do before. They were healed. What else did Jesus do?

Place the dark blue and light blue felt square next to the yellow and black square.

He told everyone how much God cares for them. He cares for every bird that flies and every sparrow that falls.

Place the wooden birds on the light blue triangle of the square.

And if God cares for the birds of the air, said Jesus, then be sure he cares for you too.

Jesus once showed his friends how much God cared. They were out on a boat on a lake when a great storm came. They were tossed about on the water, and they thought they would drown.

Hold a small wooden boat over the dark blue triangle and move it as if on a stormy sea.

But Jesus stood up and ordered the winds and the waves to be quiet.

Place the boat down quietly and hold a hand in blessing over the square.

The more people got to know Jesus, the more they came close to him, and the more they knew deep peace on the inside.

Finally, Jesus knew that the only way to repair what had been broken was to go to Jerusalem for one last time.

Place the other green felt square next to the dark blue and light blue square.

And Jesus let himself be stretched out wide... and be killed on a cross.

Place a small wooden cross on the green square.

It was the only way to bring God close to people and people close to each other.

Trace your finger along the vertical, and then the horizontal, beam of the cross as you say the above words.

But then three days later.

Place the final yellow felt square next to the green one.

People saw Jesus alive again.

Place the wooden resurrection figure of Jesus on this last square.

And now anybody who wants to can come close to God. Anyone can be part of God's new beginning. And anyone can be filled with God's light, just as Jesus was always full of light.

As you say these last words, place some small wooden people around the figure of Jesus.

God did all this because his beautiful world had been spoiled.

God did all this to clear up the mess that people had made of his gift, starting with you and me.

And God did all this at Easter... but it's a story that began with a baby at Christmas... and even long before that!

Pause and then use these open-ended questions:

- I wonder which part of this story you liked the best.
- I wonder which part of this story is the most important.
- I wonder if any part of this story can be left out.
- I wonder which part of this story especially for you today.

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