Level: 1
Title: WHY DO WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

SCRIPTURE:
Word of God, alive and active, Foundational Story of Christianity.

Suggested Duration: 3-4 weeks

Unit Focus
In this unit students will explore the celebration of Jesus' birth. They will be encouraged to relate their experiences of giving, receiving and celebrating to this important liturgical event. It will be reinforced that the Bible contains many stories that tell us about Jesus' life on earth.

Level Outcome
By the end of Level Two students should be able to:
Recall and reflect on familiar scriptural material.

Unit Outcomes
By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. Recognise that the gospels tell us about Jesus' life.
2. Explain that Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus.
3. Recall memories and customs associated with the celebration of Christmas.
4. Understand that Christmas is a time of giving and receiving in our family, school and parish.

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<th>CATECHISM REFERENCE</th>
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<td>1. Jesus invites people to be part of the Church.</td>
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<td>Scripture</td>
<td>1. The Scriptures tell us about God's love for us and we learn from and pray with them.</td>
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<td>2. The Gospels are part of the New Testament and tell us about Jesus' life.</td>
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Key Understandings for Students
- We remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas.
- We celebrate in different ways.
- One way we can celebrate is with rituals that involve prayer, symbols, song and silence.
- We believe that Jesus is God’s gift to us.
- Jesus is a human being like us.
- Jesus’ mother is Mary.
- The Bible is an important book.
- The Gospels tell us about Jesus.
Curriculum Links - VELS

Victorian Essential Learning Standards
The unit *Why Do We Celebrate Christmas?* can be used to assess aspects of VELS. The table below gives an example of how Level 1 standards could be assessed.

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<td>“They contribute to the development of positive social relationships in a range of contexts. Students describe basic skills required to work cooperatively in groups.”</td>
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### Curriculum Framework Context

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### Student Context

When children come to school they come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The customs and rituals that they will have experienced with regard to Christmas may vary greatly. Children at this age are very curious; they have a great imagination and will enjoy the use of story as a way of discovering details about Jesus’ birth and why we celebrate this event.

The students will be excited by the prospect of Christmas and will enjoy making decorations and gifts, setting up a nativity scene and singing Christmas songs. For many, it will be important to develop the ‘giving’ aspect of Christmas, as this could be a new concept for them in relation to Christmas.

### Theological Background for Teachers

- The infancy narratives are found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. They are interpreted as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.
- These gospels relate the birth of Jesus to a specified period in history, namely the Roman occupation of Palestine during the reign of King Herod. They also tell us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but they do not determine the exact month or day.
- Christmas does not simply mark the anniversary of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. We celebrate the mystery of Christ’s birth because we believe that the saving power of the historical event is present in our celebration of Christmas.
- The birth of Jesus, as well as his life, death and resurrection form one saving mystery that we celebrate throughout the liturgical year. At various times we focus our attention on one or the other of these historical events in which the mystery was accomplished.
- The custom of exchanging Christmas gifts began in remembrance of the gold, frankincense and myrrh given to the Christ child by the wise men. In some countries, children believe that Christmas presents come from kindly St Nicholas. Early Dutch settlers in New York called St Nicholas ‘Sinter Klass’ and he became known to children as Santa Claus.
- For many of the students the commercialisation of Christmas has affected their understanding of the meaning and significance of Christmas as a Christian feast.
- The actual date and day of Jesus’ birth is unknown. The first mention of 25 December is in Rome in the mid fourth century. The strongest reason for the choice of this date seems to be because it was the winter solstice, and the church wanted to replace the Roman pagan mid-winter feast with Christian observances. The Roman feast celebrated the beginning of the return of light after the shortest day of the year, in the northern hemisphere. In Roman times December 25 was also the Roman feast of Sol Invictus, the unconquered sun. For the early Christians, Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, replaced the Sun God and brought light to the world.
The celebration of Christmas has a historical dimension in that it commemorates the actual birth of Jesus. However, for Christians, the feast has a profound religious significance. Christmas is a celebration of the dawn of God’s light and a preview of God’s final self-disclosure when the kingdom will come in its fullness. The eschatological theme is beautifully expressed in the opening prayer of the Mass of Midnight: ‘Lord our God, Through the night hours of the darkened earth, we your people watch for the coming of your promised Son. As we wait, give us a foretaste of the joy that you will grant us when the fullness of his glory has filled the earth.’

It is in both the historical and theological themes that we may be able to find help for us to counter the commercialism and activity that now surrounds Christmas.

**Scripture**

**Teacher Reference (NRSV)**

**Isa 9:6-7**

For a child has been born to us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

**Heb 1:1-6**

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

**Jn 1:1-18**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ”) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

**Student References (CEV)**

**Lk 2:1-20 The Birth of Jesus**

About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. These first records were made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David’s hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David’s family. Mary was engaged to Joseph and travelled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon going to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn. That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness...
of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay." Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God." After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay. When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant. As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Mt 2:1-11 The Wise Men
When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?" They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote, 'Bethlehem in the land of Judea, you are very important among the towns of Judea. From your town will come a leader, who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.' " Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too." The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star. When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him.

Suggested Assessment Tasks

Assessment tasks for this unit may include:

Outcome 1 Recognise that the Gospels tell us about Jesus' life
   ● Complete the sentence: “The Bible is a special book because … “.

Outcome 2 Explain that Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus.
   ● Story Sequence. Using pictures of the story of Jesus' birth, have children paste them in the correct order. (Ryan, Maurice. Expressions: Book 1. p.77)

Outcome 3 Recall memories and customs associated with the celebration of Christmas.
   ● Draw a picture of something that we do at Christmas time e.g., give/open presents, go to the church, visit someone, sing carols, send Christmas cards.

Outcome 4 Understand that Christmas is a time of giving and receiving in our family, school and parish.
   ● On the shape of a gift box, children write or draw some gifts that they could give, such as helping at home, being an extra good friend, etc.
   ● Draw/write about a time of giving/receiving.

N.B All of the above Outcomes lend themselves to reporting in the dimension of Knowledge and Understanding.
Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing Activity:

Read a picture story book such as “Brand New Baby” (Graham, Bob). Discuss the story: the changes and preparations involved.
Feely bags containing objects related to Christmas – both religious and secular, students take turns to chose things from the bag and describe what they are and there relevance to Christmas

- Lk 2 1-20 To PREPARE TO HEAR the Word locate on a map place names mentioned in the text; Bethlehem, Judea, Nazareth, Galilee and Syria. Prepare a class census of birthplace of students or birthplace of ancestors e.g. grandparents
- Lk 2 1-20 To ENCOUNTER the Word, after reading the text, students write character profiles ie, what do the characters see, hear, say, do
- Lk 2:1-20 To ENCOUNTER the Word after reading the text, students use Godly Play materials to tell the story
- Lk 2 1-20 To RESPOND to the Word. The shepherds were the first to hear about Jesus’ birth. List the things the shepherds did when they heard the news? What might we have done if we had been there to hear the news
- Brainstorm things that they have waited for. Talk about their feelings during this time and things they have had to do while waiting.
- Discuss how Mary may have felt while waiting for the birth of Jesus.
- Make a crib scene using cardboard shoe box and cut out figures.
- Create a photo montage of families celebrating Christmas. Discuss differences/similarities.
- Listen to Christmas stories.
- View videos/photos of Christmas in other parts of the world.
- Think/pair/share what happens at Christmas in my house? (refer to icon in Planning Tool)
- As a class create a “Y” chart. Record what Christmas looks like /sounds like /feels like. (refer to icon in Planning Tool)
- Invite a guest speaker to talk about Christmas traditions from another country.
- Set up a nativity scene; discuss the various figures placed there.
- Sing Christmas carols/songs and discuss the themes.
- Prepare a class liturgy and invite parents and /or some older people from the area.
- Bring gifts/food for the ‘Giving Mass’. Discuss the type of things that can be brought.
- Prepare for the ‘Giving Mass’. Involve students for example, singing, presentation of the gifts, writing simple prayers of intercession etc.

Resources

For resources to support this unit, refer to the online planning tool. For additional resources, refer to the Resource Centre Catalogue: http://www.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au and follow links to Resource Centre.