Level: 4
Title: FEASTS OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON
Strand: JESUS CHRIST: Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour, Word Made Flesh.
Suggested Duration: 4-5 weeks

Unit Focus
This unit examines the feasts and celebrations within the Christmas season. The unit explores the season of Christmas, in particular the feasts that follow Christmas within the first Octave through to the second Octave, with the Epiphany.

Level Outcome
By the end of Level Four students should be able to:
Articulate an understanding that Jesus, present in our lives in many ways, offers hope to the world.

Unit Outcomes
By the end of this unit students should be able to:
1. Identify the major feasts of the season of Christmas - Christmas Day, the Feast of the Mother of God, the Feast of the Holy Family, and the Epiphany.
2. Explain the significance of the feasts of the Christmas season.
3. Examine and interpret the meaning of the metaphor, Jesus as light.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STRAND</th>
<th>DOCTRINAL CONCEPTS</th>
<th>CATECHISM REFERENCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ</td>
<td>1. Jesus is the Son of God, the Chosen One whom God promised.</td>
<td>436</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The Church honours Mary, Mother of God, and people from all ages who have been inspirational in carrying forward the mission of Jesus.</td>
<td>971</td>
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<td>Church</td>
<td>2. The Christian Scriptures teach us about Jesus and the early Christian communities.</td>
<td>126</td>
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<td>Scripture</td>
<td>6. The celebration of liturgical feasts is an opportunity for personal and communal prayer.</td>
<td>2655</td>
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<td>Prayer</td>
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Key Understandings for Students
- The Season of Christmas begins with the Christmas Day Vigil Mass and finishes with the feast of the Baptism of Christ. This is also the First Sunday of Ordinary Time.
- On Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Son of God.
- Key feasts in the Christmas season are Christmas Day, the Feast of the Mother of God, the Feast of the Holy Family, and the Epiphany.
- Christians see the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as a model of family life.
- Mary Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church.

Curriculum Links - VELS
Victorian Essential Learning Standards
The unit Feasts Of The Christmas Season can be used to assess a range of VELS. The table below gives examples of how Level 4 standards could be assessed. Those Standards identified with (P) are possible outcomes depending on the work undertaken by students.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Key elements of Standards Students…</th>
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| Physical, Personal and Social Learning | Interpersonal Development | Working in teams | - “work cooperatively to allocate tasks and develop timelines”  
- “accept responsibility for their role and tasks.” |
| | | Building Social Relationships | - “demonstrate, through their interactions in social situations, respect for a diverse range of people and groups.” |
| Interdisciplinary Learning | Communication | Presenting | - “summarise ideas and organise ideas and information logically and clearly in a range of presentations”  
- “identify features of an effective presentation and adapt elements of their own presentation to reflect them.” |
| | | Listening, Viewing and Responding | - “ask clarifying questions about ideas and information they listen to and view.” |
| Design, Creativity and Technology (P) | Investigating and Designing | | - “use a range of methods to research and collect data in response to.” |
| | Producing | | - “select and work safely with a variety of materials/ingredients and systems components to produce functional products and/or systems” |
| | Analyse and Evaluate | | - “reflect on their designs as they develop them and use evaluation criteria.” |
| Information and Communications Technology | ICT for Visualising Thinking | | - “use ICT tools and techniques that support the organisation and analysis of concepts.” |
| | ICT for Creating | | - “safely and independently use a range of skills, procedures, equipment and functions to process different data types and produce accurate and suitably formatted products to suit different purposes and audiences.” |
| | ICT for Communicating | | - “Using recommended search engines, students refine their search engines to locate information quickly.” |
| Thinking | Reasoning, processing and inquiry | | - “develop their own questions for investigation. They collect relevant information from a range of sources and make judgements about its worth” |
| | Creativity | | - “generate imaginative solutions when solving problems” |
| | Reflection, evaluation and meta-cognition | | - “use a broad range of thinking processes and tools and reflect on and evaluate their effectiveness.” |

Note (P) = possible, depending on work undertaken by students.
Curriculum Framework Context

<table>
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<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
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<td>The Message of Joy and Peace; The Promise is Fulfilled</td>
<td>The Birth of Jesus, the Messiah Feasts of the Christmas Season What was the Message of John the Baptist?</td>
<td>How can we make a difference?</td>
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Student Context

Level Four children may be less spontaneous but are generally more self motivated and capable of absorbing considerable information. More sophisticated reasoning gives them greater understanding of consequences and a greater capacity for using talk to justify assertions and opinions. Values and judgements by peers, and self esteem are partly determined by mastery of tasks.

Many students are unaware of the seasons within the Church’s year and the feasts that are a part of the season. In Australia, perhaps because the long summer holidays are held over the Christmas Season, students are not aware of the feasts days that are held within the Christmas season, apart from Christmas Day.

Theological Background for Teachers

- The season of Christmas begins with the Christmas Day Vigil and finishes with the celebration of the feast of the Baptism of Christ, the First Sunday of Ordinary Time.

- Just as Lent and Easter time cannot be understood apart from the Easter Triduum so too the seasons of Christmas and Advent must be understood together.

- During the first three centuries of the Church’s existence, the only annual feast celebrated by Christian communities was Easter. By the fourth century, a growing trend developed to celebrate historical events of Jesus’ life. The Easter Triduum had emerged from the original Easter vigil to include the commemoration of the death of Jesus on Good Friday and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday. This led the way to a celebration of Jesus’ birth.

- As no precise date of Jesus’ birth was known, two dates became associated with his birth, 25th December and 6th January. The Churches in the East celebrated Jesus’ birth on 6th January, while Rome celebrated on 25th December. Scholars agreed with the Rome celebration, as it allowed for the Christianisation of a pagan feast. In 274, the Roman Emperor Aurelian had established a feast to honour the Syrian sun god, Emsea, the feast being called ‘Sol Invictus’ - the Unconquered Sun. The celebration occurred on 25th December, close after the winter solstice. However, from as early as 336 the Christians of Rome celebrated their own feast on 25th December, the Birth of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness.

- The association of the birth of Christ with the pagan feast of a sun god may seem strange, considering it is a commandment not to worship any other god. Yet the New Testament and early Christian writers place great emphasis on the symbolism of Christ as Sun of Righteousness, for in the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice is an appropriate time to celebrate the coming of Christ the Light into the world.

- The prayers and readings for the three Masses for Christmas (midnight, dawn and during the day) focus on creating strong images all associated with light. At Midnight Mass we pray: “Father, you make this Holy Night radiant with the splendour of Jesus Christ our light.”

- The readings and prayers of the Christmas Season clearly show that Christmas is a feast of our redemption and therefore it is intimately linked with Easter. The Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from the Mystery of Incarnation, the Jesus who became human to save us.
The Holy Family is a recent feast, which originated from Canada, and spread throughout the world in the 19th century under the influence of Pope Leo XIII.

The feast of the Epiphany, 6th January, is the original feast of Christ's birth in the East. The word Epiphany comes from the Greek epiphaneia meaning appearance or manifestation and like the choice of 25th December in Rome, the date of this feast seems to have been influenced by a pagan feast in Alexandria, the birthday of the god Aion (god of time and eternity). Soon the Epiphany also became associated with the events that marked the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, his Baptism and the miracle at Cana.

Scripture

Teacher Reference (NRSV)

**Jn 1:6-14**
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 who 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.

Student References (NRSV)

**Lk 2:8-14 Nativity**
In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is the Messiah the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours.”

**Lk 2:41-51 Holy Family**
Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And to all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

**Mt 2:1-12 Epiphany**
In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the child who was born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at the rising and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem in Judaea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is the shepherd my people Israel’. Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him
homage.” When they heard the king they set out; and there ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star had stopped they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Suggested Assessment Tasks

Assessment tasks for this unit may include:

Outcome 1: Identify the major feasts of the season of Christmas - Christmas Day, the Feast of the Mother of God, the Feast of the Holy Family, and the Epiphany.
- In pairs, students examine a variety of Christmas cards designs and sort them into groups to show those that focus on the birth of Jesus, Mary, the Holy Family, the visit of the Wise Men, and other non-specific designs. Label the first three groups according to the event depicted, the name of the feast and the date of the feast, in chronological order.
- Students present their views to the class on which designs are most appropriate to the celebration of Christmas.

Outcome 2: Explain the significance of the feasts of the Christmas season.
- Students design a billboard to visually capture the key theme of a selected Christmas feast.

Outcome 3: Examine and interpret the meaning of the metaphor, Jesus as light.
- Students sit quietly around a lighted candle. After a time they complete a Y chart that describes what light looks like, sounds like, feels like. Respond to the question. “What does it mean to say that Jesus is Light for the world?” in a haiku poem, drawing on ideas from the Y chart.

N.B All of the above Outcomes lend themselves to reporting in the dimension of Knowledge and Understanding

Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing Activity:

Students draw a circle with four quadrants; label the Four Seasons around the outside with the date of the beginning of the season eg. 1st December for Summer on the points. Students write the events that take place during that time.
- Complete a KWL chart to review the students’ knowledge of the Christmas season. Students can add to the chart as they proceed through the unit
- Provide students with a copy of the Liturgical year, in a circle design. Explain to students the various colours associated with the seasons of the liturgical year. Students colour code the seasons, according to the colour of the vestments worn by the priest during the season.
  - Advent ~ purple
  - Christmas ~ white
  - Ordinary Time ~ green
  - Lent ~ purple
  - Easter ~ white
  - Pentecost ~ white (red on the day of the Feast of Pentecost)
- For each of the Feast days, students read the scripture passage, discuss their understanding of the person related to the feast.
- In groups, students are assigned a particular feast day within the Season of Christmas. Students study the feast day, the scripture passages and any other appropriate research methods or materials, to find out more of the feast and the person involved. Students make a banner or poster, representing the feast in symbols, drawing and sayings or words. Students present the banner or poster to the class, informing the class about the importance of this particular feast, why it would be included in the Season of Christmas.
- Design a Christmas card that is faithful to Matthew or Luke’s text of the Nativity.
Students do a think pair share about the symbol of light. As a whole class, students report back and discuss how and why the metaphor of light is used for the birth and coming of Christ. (refer to Jn 1:6-14)

Students create an inside outside circle, and discuss ways in which Jesus’ light has shone throughout the world, when he was alive and preaching and now, through the efforts of his followers.

Within the liturgical Season of Christmas, students label the feast days of Christmas, by dating and naming the feast in chronological order.

Use Liturgical Godly Play ‘The Mystery of Christmas’ to tell the story. Resource available on the CEOB Website/Religious Education/Encountering the Word through Godly Play.

Mt 2:1-12 To PREPARE TO HEAR the Word · Locate Bethlehem on a map; orientate students to the locations of Jerusalem and Nazareth. Remind the students of the royal origins of Bethlehem, having been the birthplace of King David. At the time of Jesus Bethlehem was quite an insignificant place. Herod was king at this time. The Romans occupied Judea. King Herod was understood to rule in a brutal way and levied the taxes that were paid to the Romans to support his indulgent lifestyle. Herod would have been threatened by the prophecy of a Messiah. The wise men were astrologers who were held in esteem at the time by the general population however they were treated with suspicion by the Jews.

Mt 2:1-12 To ENCOUNTER the Word after reading the text from the Bible, students present the events of this passage in word and image.

Mt 2:1-12 To ENCOUNTER the Word after reading the text from the Bible, locate images of the magi in classical artworks and contemporary images and discuss what message the image is trying to present.

Mt 2:1-12 To RESPOND to the Word – God entered the world when Jesus was born in the small, insignificant town of Bethlehem, where and how is God revealed to us today? Students complete a three part report on an event that shows how God is revealed through the everyday human experiences. e.g. Flood, a family member goes into hospital or unemployment e.g

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Response – God revealed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In January 2011 there were major floods in …</td>
<td>Many people lost their homes</td>
<td>People who didn’t even know the people who lost their homes came to offer help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prayer and Ritual

Children prepare a proclamation about each of the main figures of the Seasons of Christmas. Gather children in a circle around coloured cloths on which symbols representing the feasts of the Christmas season can be placed; for example Mary: a plant in flower, Joseph: a carpenter’s tool, Jesus: a manger or swaddling cloths, the Magi: gifts.

The symbols should be held high as the proclamation is made, then placed ceremoniously on the cloths. A period of quiet reflection should follow.

(Refer to Stead, Barbara M. (1994). A time of jubilee. p.25 for format.)

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](http://www.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au) and follow links to Resource Centre.