



PALM SUNDAY

MEETING AIM

To enter into the joy and excitement of Palm Sunday.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 13:44-46

BACKGROUND

At the start of the dramatic Easter week, Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph. Telling the story from the viewpoint of the donkey that carried him will help young children to 'feel' the noise and excitement. Here is a gentle king who rides, not on a war horse, but on a young colt; a 'people's' king who knows each one of his subjects.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning). Show pictures of crowds waiting to see someone famous such as the Queen. Chat about what it is like to be in a big crowd (noisy, exciting, sitting on a parent's shoulders, waving flags).

PLAY

10 MINS

Ask everyone to stand up and to imagine that they are a young horse or donkey in a field. They have never given anyone a ride yet. What colour is their coat, mane and tail? Practise walking, trotting and galloping about. Make ears with hands on heads. Put the ears up (to be curious or happy); lay them back (to be scared or unhappy). Swish tails (wiggle bottoms), lift chins and make a loud neigh or 'hee-haw' sound!

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: a toy donkey; coconut halves for sound effects (optional)

Gather the family and tell this story, encouraging them to join in with the actions:

A little donkey lived in a village not far from Jerusalem. He had big brown eyes and long pointed ears that he could move

backwards and forwards...Do 'ear' action each time you hear the word 'ears'.

The little donkey loved to stand in the shade of the olive trees, or to gallop over the hillside and gaze at the city of Jerusalem on the next hill.

One day, as the donkey stood tied to a tree, he heard voices. Who was that? He put his ears right forward...Two men were coming through the gate. They had smiling faces and stripy cloaks.

"Ah, here's the little donkey Jesus was telling us about," they said.

"Come on, let's untie him!"

The donkey didn't belong to these men. Back went his ears...Then he opened his mouth, and gave a very loud: "Hee-haw!" *Everyone makes the noise.*

"Hey! Why are you untying my donkey?" called the owner.

"Jesus, our Master, needs him," said one of the men.

"But we'll bring him back soon!"

The donkey trotted out of the gate between the two men. His hooves made a funny sound on the road. *Use your coconut shells or make a clip-clop noise with your voice.* What an adventure! He put his ears forward again...

Soon they came to some people laughing and chatting at the roadside. Back went the donkey's ears...until they touched his mane. But a man stepped out of the crowd and came towards him. "Don't be frightened," he whispered in the donkey's ears. "I'm your friend, Jesus. I sent my disciples to fetch you. Will you carry me on your back all down the road and up the hill into Jerusalem?"

The donkey wasn't sure. He hadn't given anyone a ride before! But he stood quite still as the men draped their cloaks over him, and he let Jesus climb onto his back. Then they all set off along the road. *Use your coconut shells or make a clip-clop noise with your voice.*

"Look who's coming!" shouted crowds of people who were waiting to see them. "It's Jesus, our gentle king, riding on a little donkey!"

As they started to go down the hillside, the disciples began to shout for joy! The little donkey twitched his ears and listened...

"Thank you, God, for all the wonderful things we have seen Jesus do!" they sang out.

"Hosanna!" cheered the people on

either side of him. They waved branches of palm trees and laid their cloaks upon the ground. *Muffle the coconut shell clip-clop.* The little donkey wasn't worried or scared by all the noise anymore. His ears stayed pointing forwards and he just kept walking up the hill and through the gate into the city of Jerusalem.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- What's your favourite part of the story?
- I wonder why the people were so excited to see Jesus.
- I wonder if Jesus knew each person in the crowd.
- The little donkey helped Jesus. Do you think Jesus needs our help sometimes?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: a large sheet of paper; felt-tip pens; crayons

Write: "Here comes Jesus..." at the top of a large sheet of paper, and then pencil in lots of circles to represent the heads of a crowd. Encourage everyone to colour in their own faces and those of family and friends. Chat about how they would feel waiting to see Jesus. Add green spikes to represent palm leaves (waved to welcome someone very important).

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: paper palm leaves made in advance by cutting leaf shapes from green paper and snipping V-shapes from the edges

Give everyone a leaf and stand as if waiting for Jesus to ride by. Encourage them to think quietly about what they would like to say to Jesus (a thank you, a request for help or a word of praise, perhaps). After thanking God together for all the joy and excitement of Palm Sunday, wave the palms and shout: "Hosanna!"

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THE LAST SUPPER

MEETING AIM

To discover that a meal can have a special significance.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 22:7-22

BACKGROUND

When Jesus ate the Last Supper with his disciples, he changed the old Jewish Passover into a meal with special meaning that Christians still celebrate today.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting lately.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: five pictures or items of food that symbolise something (eg Christmas cake, hot-cross bun, Easter egg, communion bread and wine)

Place the items around the room and ask the children to find them. When they sit down again, discuss what each item made them remember, leaving the bread and wine until last. Lead into the story by explaining that just before Jesus died, he ate a very special last supper with his friends, when they shared bread and wine together.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: a tablecloth; bunch of herbs; jug with water; breadbasket with flat breads; jug of red juice; cups

Explain to your family that today's story is about a boy called Dan:

"I can't wait for our special supper this evening!" said Dan, dancing about with excitement.

"Not long now!" said Mum, as she chopped sweet-smelling herbs.

Hand out a bunch of herbs to pass round and smell.

Today was a celebration – it was Passover! Later on, Dan would sit down with his family to share a delicious meal. There would be roast lamb – oh, and that funny flat bread that Mum made without any yeast. He felt hungry just thinking about it!

Ask the group what their favourite celebration meal is.

Dan went outside. He climbed the stone steps that led up the side of the house, past the guest rooms and onto the flat roof. Down below, he spotted his brother coming back with a water jar filled to the brim. He was walking slowly so that he didn't spill any precious water.

Pass the jug round, challenging the children not to spill it.

Two men were following his brother – Peter and John! He'd met them the other day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a little donkey. What did they want, he wondered?

Dan ran back down the steps and listened at the door.

"Jesus wants to know, where is the guest room that you are going to lend him and his friends for the Passover meal?"

Ask if the children can remember where the guest room was.

"Come with me," Dan heard his father say. Quickly he scampered back up the steps, dived into the guest room and hid under the long table.

Soon, Peter and John came in to get everything ready. They grinned when they saw Dan under the table.

"Come out and give us a hand!" they said.

Ask the children to help you lay out your 'meal' on the tablecloth.

Later on, Dan had a wonderful celebration meal with his family. But the best part was when Dad told them the Passover story again! He loved to hear how God had rescued their ancestors from Egypt and taken them to a land of their own.

After supper, Dan went to peep around the door of the guest room. Jesus was sitting between his disciples at the table.

"My friends, I've been looking forward so much to eating this last supper with you," he said. Dan was puzzled. Was Jesus going away again so soon?

Jesus took the wine, thanked God for it, and shared it among his friends.

Pour juice into everyone's cup.

Then he took some bread, thanked God for it, broke it and gave it to them saying: "This bread is like my body which will be broken for you. Please do this to remember me."

Break some bread and give everyone a piece to eat.

Next Jesus took the wine and said:

"This wine is like my blood which will be poured out for you. Please do this to remember me."

Ask everyone to drink their 'wine'.

Dan thought Jesus looked very sad as he looked round at his friends. "One of you is going to hand me over to my enemies," he said.

Dan shivered. Surely nobody would want to hurt Jesus, would they? He went back to join his family, wondering what was going to happen next.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- What's your favourite part of the story?
- Why is it called the Last Supper?
- What do you think was going to happen to Jesus?
- Do you think people still remember Jesus with bread and wine today?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: paper plates or circles; felt-tip pens; crayons

Ask the children to imagine that Jesus is coming to supper with them. What would they give him to eat? Invite them to draw this on the plate. As they work, ask why they have chosen this particular meal. Can they remember what Jesus gave his disciples to eat? Chat about the bread and wine bringing us close to him.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: paper plates from 'Creative time'

Ask the children to hold their decorated plates as you pray together:

Dear God,

We thank you for feeding us with so many different kinds of food.

We thank you, too, for special celebration meals we enjoy with our families and friends. We're all going to think about one of those special times now.

Pause.

Amen

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GOOD FRIDAY

MEETING AIM

To hear the story of Jesus' death.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 22:47-23:56

BACKGROUND

The story of Jesus' betrayal, trial and death is central to our faith and yet can be an upsetting one for younger children. As we explore this story with younger children we need to tread the line between discovering the events of the story while not distressing them. However, helping children to engage sensitively with this story will help them to build a picture of the gospel from an early age.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: a card for everyone, with a happy face drawn on one side and a sad face on the other

Give everyone a happy / sad face card and ask them to think about the situations you're going to describe and decide whether that would make them happy or sad, and show that side of the card:

- Your mummy gives you a new cuddly toy.
- You have a sore tummy and you have to stay in bed.
- You go out for ice cream.
- It's raining, but you want to go to the park.
- Your grandad falls over and has to go to hospital.
- Your best friend tells lies about you.

You could add your own ideas too. The children might want to say that they would feel something other than happy or sad. Let them express those ideas if they have them. Ensure that the children know that these situations are pretend.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: cards from 'Play'; *The Big Bible Storybook* (SPCK)

Gather everyone together and make sure every child has a card from 'Play'. Tell them that you're going to tell them a story about Jesus and they have to decide if that makes them happy or sad.

Explain that there were some people who didn't like Jesus. They wanted to find a way to get rid of him. Jesus made them angry, and they didn't like what he was doing. One of Jesus' friends, called Judas, decided to help the people who didn't like Jesus. He led them to the place where Jesus was and they took Jesus away.

Ask your children if that makes them feel happy or sad and to show that side of their card. They may want to chat about this a bit more. Let them, if they're engaging with the story.

Remind your children that Peter was one of Jesus' best friends. Read the story 'Peter lets Jesus down' from page 204 of *The Big Bible Storybook*. Show them the picture of Peter and the girl by the fire. Ask your family if that makes them feel happy or sad and to show that side of their card. Again, let your children talk about this, if they would like to.

Go on to read the story 'Jesus dies' from page 205 of *The Big Bible Storybook*, showing them the picture of Jesus. Once more, ask everyone if that makes them feel happy or sad and to show that side of their card. As before, let the conversation flow if your children want to chat.

It's important not to leave children with no idea about the next part of the story, so say that this story is very sad, but it's not the end! Something very surprising happens in the next part of the story, but that is for the next session!

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- What did you notice about this story?
- What made you happy? What made you sad?

- If you were one of the Jesus' friends, how would you feel?
- What do you want to say to Jesus?

CREATIVE TIME

0 MINS

You will need: lolly sticks; short lengths of string; pens

Give everyone two lolly sticks and a piece of string. Help them to tie the two sticks together into a cross shape. If this will be too fiddly, then you could use a spot of PVA glue to fix the two sticks together. Help your children to write their names on the cross.

Show them how to hold the cross in their hands. Explain that some people hold a cross when they pray to help them focus on what Jesus did for them. Say, in the simplest way possible, what the death of Jesus means to you..

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: *The Big Bible Storybook*; crosses from 'Creative time'

Show everyone the picture from page 205 of *The Big Bible Storybook*. Remind them of the story and ask them to hold their cross in their hands. What do they want to say to God because of what they have heard today? Some children will be happy to think about this, others will want to tell you. Run this activity in the way that will most benefit your group. After a minute or two of quiet (or chat), close with a prayer like this one:

Father God,
This story makes us sad
But thank you that there is a happy ending.
Be with us when we are sad.
Help us to talk to you when we are upset.
Amen.

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EASTER SUNDAY

MEETING AIM

To get excited because Jesus is alive!

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:1-12

BACKGROUND

After the sadness of the previous session, which saw Jesus' crucifixion, this session is full of the joy and excitement of his resurrection. Children may not understand fully what is happening here, but you're laying the foundations for future encounters with this story. Help young children to be happy that Jesus is alive and wants to be their friend.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments and chat about what your children have found exciting today (or yesterday, if you're doing this in the morning).

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: small Easter eggs (chocolate, plastic or if none are available, foil-covered chocolate balls); baskets or yogurt pots

Before the time together, hide the eggs around your house. Make some of them obvious, hide others better, so that everyone has a chance to find something.

Give your family a basket or yogurt pot each and send them off to find the eggs. At the end of a set amount of time, bring everyone back and congratulate them on their searching skills! If some people have more than others, invite them to share some with those who don't have as many.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: child-friendly version of the Bible; tray filled with sterile compost; items to make an Easter garden; stones to make the tomb; play people (such as Playmobil)

Remind your family about what

happened in the previous session – Good Friday. Some people didn't like Jesus and, even though he had done nothing wrong, they told lies about him. Jesus was nailed to a cross and he died. All his friends were very upset. They took him down from the cross carried his body to a garden nearby.

Show the children the tray of sterile compost and the items you have gathered to make a garden. Spend some time placing twigs, moss, small plants etc into the compost to create your garden. In one corner, use stones to create the tomb. Admire your creation together for a moment.

Tell the children that Jesus' friends put his body in a tomb. Then a stone was rolled over the entrance. Cover the entrance to the tomb in your garden with a stone.

Read out Luke 24:1–12 from your child-friendly version, re-enacting the story in your garden, using the play people. Once you have finished, read out the story again, and let the children move the figures themselves. Do this as many times as the children would like to.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Chat about the story using these questions:

- What was your favourite part of this story?
- If you were one of the women who went to the tomb, how would you feel? Happy? Sad? Excited? Confused?
- Where do you think Jesus has gone?
- What do you want to say to Jesus?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: 'corner' yogurt pots; sterile compost; items to make a garden; small stones

Give each family member a corner yogurt pot. Show them how to (or help them to) bend the small corner up so that it is at right angles to the larger corner. This small corner is the tomb. Fill the larger corner with compost and then let them 'plant' their garden however they like. As you work, continue your chat about the story. What has happened to Jesus? Is he alive? How did

this happen? Share your own thoughts about this amazing story. Talk about how Jesus has come alive again.

Once everyone has finished their garden, give them a stone to place next to the opening of the tomb. Let the family play together with their Easter gardens. They can retell the story using their own creation or simply play with what they have made. Engage with this play and answer any questions your children might come up with as they play.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: small stones; felt-tip pens

Give everyone a small stone and ask them to hold it in their hand. Encourage them to feel how smooth or rough it is, to feel the edges and the flat sections. Ask them to think about today's story. What do they remember about it? What surprised them? What excited them? Invite them to think about that as they feel the stone in their hands.

Together, brainstorm some of the things the children thought about. Help them to write or draw that on their stone. Once everyone has finished, ask the group to hold their stones in their hands once more. Say this prayer (or something similar in your own words):

Thank you, Jesus, that you are alive again!

Help us to remember this story and to keep thinking about the amazing events!

Help us to remember that you are alive today!

PARTY IDEA

You could hold a 'Not-at-Easter' Easter party for your family. This would be a good chance to play games, share food and explore this amazing story outside the pressures of school holidays and family events. There are plenty of extra Easter ideas online or from publishers such as BRF and Scripture Union.

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