

SESSION **3**

Jesus will return

**MEETING AIM**

To explore the promise of Jesus' return.

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

**BACKGROUND**

How do we tell a story that hasn't yet happened? The characters are known, as is the outcome, but the plot is a mystery to us all. This passage and the related prophecies about Jesus' return are loaded with a rich tapestry of imagery and concepts adults struggle to comprehend. Yet we do our children a terrible disservice when we fail to teach them about the promised return of Jesus Christ. This session has been designed to focus on that promise, looking at key elements of the passage rather than explaining every detail. Above all, it is an introduction to the topic and provides an opportunity for children to ask and explore some of their own questions, so it's important that we allow children to lead the conversation in order to measure the appropriate pitch for them.

+ CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and welcome parents to join you for this time, if appropriate. Encourage the children to share their stories and news from the week and celebrate special events that have taken place, such as birthdays. Ask the children what they are looking forward to in the near future, such as birthdays, holidays or special events within your group.

+ SNACK-MAKING

You will need: snacks that require some shared preparation, such as making sandwiches or a fruit salad

Gather the children to create some snacks in preparation for sharing them together. Pay attention to appropriate safety measures, but try to involve the children in all stages of food preparation and talk about the different things you have to do to get it ready. As you work together, encourage the children to share their experiences of 'getting ready', perhaps for coming to your group or bigger preparations for a special event at home or

school. When the food is ready, sit down to share your snacks with one another.

+ BIBLE STORY

You will need: battery-operated tea lights; a large battery-operated candle

Invite the children to sit together in a circle on the floor, and give each child a battery-operated tea light (not yet switched on). Spread a few extra tea lights on the floor in the centre of the group (also turned off), and hold the large candle in your hand with the flame lit. Begin the story by saying:

Long, long, long ago, Father God promised to send his son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus came as a baby and was known as the light of the world. *Place the large candle in the centre of the group.*

As he lived his life on Earth, Jesus taught people what God's kingdom was like, and he asked people to follow him. *Slowly turn on some of the tea lights on the floor as you say this, particularly those nearest the large candle.*

Jesus told his followers that they should let their light shine and point the way back to Jesus, so that other people could also follow him. *Continue to light more of the tea lights in the circle, but purposefully leave some unlit.*

Then the time came for Jesus to return to heaven. *Remove the large candle from the centre of the circle and place it out of sight.*

Over many, many years, those followers told other people, so Jesus' message spread throughout the world, until it reached us! *Invite the children to turn their lights on.*

We can shine our lights to tell other people about Jesus. But our story doesn't end there. Jesus has promised to come back to Earth one day. *Carefully return the large candle to the centre of the circle.*

We don't know when it will be, but he promises that, when he comes, all of his followers will be together with him. *Invite the children to put their tea lights and the other lit tea lights in the centre, close to the large candle.*

+ CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- What surprised you about it?
- How do you feel about Jesus returning?
- What other questions would you like to ask?

+ CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: tea lights from previous activity; tea-light holders; glass or ceramic paints or pens and other decorations

Distribute the tea-light holders and the assorted art materials, then invite the children to decorate a tea-light holder to take away, together with a battery-operated tea light. As the children decorate their holders, continue the discussion from the Chatting together time, as appropriate, talking about any particular questions they may have.

Invite the children to take their tea lights home with them to put on display in their homes. Ask them what the candle reminds them of: Jesus as the light of the world, Jesus always with them, letting their light shine etc. Try to be open and allow the children to initiate the conversation. This is a huge topic and it's important to pitch the conversation at their level of understanding.

+ PRAYER

As you pray together, there may be specific prayer points that have been raised through your conversations during the session. Invite the children to stand and ask them all to face away, looking over their shoulders. Say:

Thank you, Jesus, that you came and lived on Earth. Thank you for all your followers who have gone before and shown us how to follow you.

Ask the children to look down at their feet and say:

Thank you, Jesus, that you are with us now, helping us shine your light in the world.

Finally, ask the children to look ahead of them, and say:

Thank you, Jesus, that you promise to return and be with us again. Help us to be ready for that day. Amen.

BECKY MAY

is a writer who has worked with children and young people for many years, in a variety of different settings. She is the co-founder of The Treasure Box People.