



SMALL GROUP OUTLINES



INCARNATION

These Small Group Outlines are produced by the Youth and Children's Ministry Unit in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview). They are available every month from our website.

For more information and other resources, visit salvationist.org.uk/resources/youth-ministry-resources

INTRODUCTION

The Incarnation is one of the unique and defining beliefs held by Christians and is why Advent and Christmas are so important. We celebrate 'Emmanuel' – God with us. The ultimate expression of witness – 'The word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood' (John 1:14 MSG). The divine became human to make perfect relationship – with him and one another – possible.

Session One explores the theme of Incarnation. What does it mean? Why is it significant? It also gives young people an opportunity to discuss Doctrine Four of The Salvation Army and articulate their own beliefs about who Jesus is.

Session Two digs deeper into the meaning of the Incarnation and the way Jesus was fully God and fully man. We explore the beliefs of the early Church about Jesus through Paul's letter to the Philippians. God wanted to be with us, connect with us and be present with us. He sent his son Jesus to dwell with us, the perfect example of humility.

In Session Three Mark Lowry's lyrics of the song 'Mary, did you know?' are used to explore the life of Jesus and what his presence on Earth meant to those he met. If we are called to be Christ-like, then what does that look like in reality and how can we live like him in relationship with others?

Any text in italics represents notes for the leader. It gives more context around the Scripture/activity. You may choose to share verbatim, summarise or not share at all.

DIVINE AND HUMAN

LEADER'S NOTES - This session explores the theme of Incarnation. What does it mean? Why is it significant? It also gives the young people an opportunity to discuss Doctrine Four of The Salvation Army and articulate their own beliefs about who Jesus is.

WELCOME

TRUE OR FALSE CHRISTMAS TRIVIA

All these Trivia questions are based on the book *Christmas, Tradition, Truth and Total Baubles* by Nick Page. Nick also features in a clip later on in the session.

1. Christmas has always been the biggest Christian festival.
FALSE – The early Church didn't really celebrate Christmas, as the death and resurrection of Jesus was considered a lot more important.
2. Jesus wasn't born on 25 December.
TRUE – It would be highly unlikely for Jesus to be born in the winter as the shepherds would not have been out in the fields with their sheep. It's more likely that Jesus was born between March and November.
3. Mary and Joseph stayed in the stable as there was no room at the inn.
FALSE – There was no 'inn'! The word kataluma is often translated as 'inn' but it was more likely to be a spare room or guest room.
4. Jesus was laid in a manger.
TRUE – Peasant families didn't have enough money for separate stables so they kept the animals on the lower level of their houses. Jesus was laid in a manger because the rest of the house was full of family and visitors.
5. Joseph was an old man.
FALSE – The normal age for marriage in New Testament times would have been around 16 for a man, and about 14 for a woman. Although we don't know for definite, there is no evidence in the gospels that Joseph was an old man as he is often portrayed.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Read the words of the carol below. Why do you think the author Nick Page finds the carol 'Away in a Manger' so annoying (especially verse 2)?

**The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes...**
— ANON


Leader's Notes: You might want to come back to this question when the group have discussed Jesus being fully human. The only way that babies can communicate their needs is through crying. If Jesus didn't cry then he wasn't fully human!

WORD


In the previous set of set of small group sessions, we looked at the supporting characters in the Christmas story. In these sessions our focus is on the main character, Jesus Christ.


The story of his birth is mainly found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.




 **The Birth of Jesus: Luke 1-2 Bible Project (5 min 5 sec)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OLezoUvOEQ

 In what ways did Jesus turn the way the world works upside down?

 What would that look like in our modern world?


At Christmas we talk about the incarnation of Jesus Christ.


 What does the word incarnation mean?

The word incarnation means 'the act of being made flesh'. Theologians use it to indicate that Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh. It is a central Christian belief and is found in The Salvation Army Doctrines.

Doctrine Four:

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

 Why do we need to know that Jesus is both fully God and fully human?

 Why is it important?

When we read about Jesus and get to know him, he is showing us what his Father God is really like.

Read John 14:9 and Hebrews 1:3. What do we discover about Jesus in these verses?

Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

— JOHN 14:9

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

— HEBREWS 1:3

In other words, if we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus. Jesus is God perfectly revealed in human life. Jesus is the human face of God.


When Jesus lived on Earth in human form, he lived a completely holy and sinless life. He had to do this in order to become the perfect sacrifice for our sins when he died on the cross and rose again. Through Jesus we can find complete forgiveness and new life with the Father.

Reflecting on what you have learned about incarnation, discuss the following quote:

“ Without the incarnation, Christianity isn't even a very good story, and most sadly, it means nothing. 'Be nice to one another' is not a message that can give my life meaning, assure me of love beyond brokenness, and break open the dark doors of death with the key of hope. The incarnation is an essential part of Jesus-shaped spirituality. ”

— MICHAEL SPENCER

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

 **3 Minute Theology 1.5: What is the Incarnation? (3 min 30 sec)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6XMn-yH71E>

 How have people become confused about the meaning of Incarnation?

Ebionism – Jesus was a great man that achieved special status with God.

Docetism – Jesus was not really human, he just appeared to be.

Arianism – Jesus was not fully God, he was a lesser secondary God.

Apollinarius – Jesus had the body of a human and the mind of God.

WORSHIP

As you listen to the music, reflect on what the incarnation of Jesus means for you personally.

-  **'Noel' – Chris Tomlin ft. Nativity Story video**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-dGh5E_AQw

Love incarnate, love divine
Star and angels gave the sign
Bow to babe on bended knee
The Saviour of humanity
Unto us a Child is born
He shall reign for evermore
Noel, Noel, Come and see what God has done
Noel, Noel, The story of amazing love!
The light of the world, given for us, Noel


Son of God and Son of man
There before the world began
Born to suffer, born to save
Born to raise us from the grave
Christ the everlasting Lord
He shall reign forevermore
Noel, Noel, Come and see what God has done
Noel, Noel, The story of amazing love!
The light of the world, given for us
Noel, Noel, Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel, Noel
The story of amazing love!
The light of the world, given for us
Noel, Noel

Source: LyricFind

Songwriters: Edmond Martin Cash / Matthew James Redman / Christopher D Tomlin




Noel lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

-  What difference does it make in the world that Jesus was 'born to suffer, born to save, born to raise us from the grave'?

WITNESS

It's not enough to rely on the faith and understanding of others when it comes to following Jesus. It is important to think through why we believe what we believe and find a way to share that with others. At Christmas the story of Jesus is placed front and centre and questions about Christianity are bound to increase. As you watch the clip, start thinking about the following questions:

-  Who was Jesus?
 Why was his birth so important?
 How is the incarnation of Jesus a message of hope for our world today?

-  **Nick Page – Who was Jesus?**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCPsf16VQQw>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Although they might be reluctant to admit it, there may be some people within The Salvation Army who are unclear what Doctrine Four means and why we believe in it.

Create a blog/vlog that explains what you have discovered today and share it on your corps website / social media.

PERFECT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD




LEADER'S NOTES - This session digs deeper into the meaning of the Incarnation and the way Jesus was fully God and fully man. We explore the beliefs of the early Church about Jesus through Paul's letter to the Philippians. God wanted to be with us, connect with us and be present with us. He sent his son Jesus to dwell with us, the perfect example of humility.

WELCOME

At Christmas we are all young at heart. According to *Time Out* here are the top 20 children's Christmas films to watch this year.

(<https://www.timeout.com/film/the-20-best-christmas-movies-for-kids>)

1. *Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey* (2020)
2. *Klaus* (2019)
3. *A Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992)
4. *A Boy Called Christmas* (2021)
5. *Home Alone* (1990)
6. *Elf* (2003)
7. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993)
8. *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)
9. *The Grinch* (2018)
10. *A Christmas Story* (1983)
11. *Dr Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1966)
12. *Frozen* (2013)
13. *The Polar Express* (2004)
14. *Jack Frost* (1998)
15. *Miracle of 34th Street* (1947)
16. *Arthur Christmas* (2011)
17. *The Christmas Chronicles* (2018)
18. *Noelle* (2019)
19. *Jingle All the Way* (1996)
20. *The Santa Clause* (1994)

-  How many of them have you seen?
-  Which is your favourite?
-  Which ones are you going to watch this Christmas?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

-  Which is your favourite Christmas film not on the list?

Are there any films that are 'debatable Christmas movies'? For example, is *Die Hard* actually is a Christmas film!

WORD

 Read Matthew 1:20-23 (TPT)


While he (Joseph) was still debating with himself about what to do, he fell asleep and had a supernatural dream. An angel from the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Joseph, descendant of David, don't hesitate to take Mary into your home as your wife, because the power of the Holy Spirit has conceived a child in her womb. She will give birth to a son and you are to name him 'Saviour,' for he is destined to give his life to save his people from their sins.'

This happened to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through his prophet:

Listen! A virgin will be pregnant,
she will give birth to a Son,
and he will be known as 'Emmanuel',
which means in Hebrew,
'God became one of us'.

 How do you think the Jewish people expected God to 'become one of us'?

Think back to Session One and answer the question:

 What is incarnation?


Last session we also looked at Doctrine Four of The Salvation Army:

'We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.'


Today we are going to focus on what it meant for Jesus to be 'truly and properly God and truly and properly man'. The Apostle Paul is going to help us think this through.

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians around 20 years after the death of Jesus. In that letter we find what most scholars believe to be a poem or hymn that was well known throughout the early Church. It gives us a picture of what the early Church believed about Jesus and it is known as the 'Christ Hymn'.

Before Paul shares the hymn about the character of Jesus, he writes: 'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ' (Philippians 2:5).

 How do you think that changed the way the Philippians read the next part of the letter?


Give each member of the group the 'Christ Hymn' handout which shows three translations of Philippians 2:5-11. Read through the three translations and answer this question:

 According to the 'Christ Hymn', what is the mindset of Christ?

Encourage the group to present their ideas in a creative way. Alternatively they can compile a list.

Ask the group to share what they have discovered.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

 How did Jesus humble himself when he became human?

 Why do you think humility was so important to him?

WORSHIP

Reflect on all we have thought about today as you listen to the beautiful words of Audrey Assad's 'Humble'.

**We bow our knees
We must decrease
You must increase
We lift you high**

 **Audrey Assad – 'Humble'**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy8Jl0ZKx-M>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Ask the group to create a 'Humble King' Spotify playlist that they can listen to throughout the Advent period. They could include the songs we have listened to so far and add their own suggestions from a range of genres. The playlist link could also be shared with the rest of the church / group.

Here are some options:

'Humble King' – Vineyard Worship

'What a Beautiful Name / Agnus Dei' (Live) – Travis Cottrell feat. Lily Cottrell

'Messiah' – Francesca Battistelli

'Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus' – Meredith Andrews

'Hallelujah, Light Has Come' – BarlowGirl

'O Magnum Mysterium' by Morten Lauridsen recorded by Voces8 among many others

'For Unto Us / Open the Eyes of my Heart' – Paul Baloche

WITNESS

Watch the clip and discuss the questions below. You can either watch the whole clip through, or stop at the timings suggested to break the video into smaller chunks and discuss the questions.


 **How can Christians Imitate Christ's Humility?**


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqSry3ycWYo>

Stop at 2 min 4 sec

 Why is it difficult to directly apply Philippians 2:5-11 to our own lives? (2 min 4 sec)

Stop at 3 min 1 sec

 What biblical lens can we view verses 5-11 through? Read Philippians 2:2-4 to find out.

 What are the three key words that sum up the themes of verses 2-4?
– Unity, Humility, Selflessness.

Watch to the end of the clip.

 How is the life of Jesus an example of unity, humility and selflessness?

Ben Gutierrez finishes this clip with these words:

“ ‘I’ll never be able to save the sins of the world. I’ll never be able to do everything Jesus did. But I can thank him and resemble his heart by living unity, humility and selflessness.’

— BEN GUTIERREZ

Share examples of living in unity, humility and selflessness.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

God became fully human so that he could walk the Earth with us. The 'Christ Hymn' found in Philippians 2:5-11 describes in detail what that meant for Jesus.

Write a prayer of thanks to Jesus who humbled himself just for you.

THE CHRIST HYMN

New International Version:

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
⁶ who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

— PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 (NIV)

The Message paraphrase:

⁵⁻⁸ Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that – a crucifixion.

⁹⁻¹¹ Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honoured him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth – even those long ago dead and buried – will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honour of God the Father.

— PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 (THE MESSAGE PARAPHRASE)

Amplified Bible:

⁵ Have this same attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus [look to Him as your example in selfless humility], ⁶ who, although He existed in the form and unchanging essence of God [as One with Him, possessing the fullness of all the divine attributes – the entire nature of deity], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped or asserted [as if He did not already possess it, or was afraid of losing it]; ⁷ but emptied Himself [without renouncing or diminishing His deity, but only temporarily giving up the outward expression of divine equality and His rightful dignity] by assuming the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men [He became completely human but was without sin, being fully God and fully man]. ⁸ After He was found in [terms of His] outward appearance as a man [for a divinely-appointed time], He humbled Himself [still further] by becoming obedient [to the Father] to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹ For this reason also [because He obeyed and so completely humbled Himself], God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow [in submission], of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess and openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord (sovereign God), to the glory of God the Father.

— PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 (AMP)

PERFECT RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

LEADER'S NOTES: In this session the lyrics of 'Mary, did you know?' are used to explore the life of Jesus and what his presence on Earth meant to those he met. If we are called to be Christ-like, then what does that look like in reality and how can we live like him in relationship with others?

WELCOME


 **Guess the Christmas song (4 min 33 sec)**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eaP_p_Gspk

Answers

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' | 9. 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' | 16. 'The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy' |
| 2. 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing' | 10. 'Silent Night' | 17. 'God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen' |
| 3. 'Jingle Bells' | 11. 'We Three Kings' | 18. 'I Saw Three Ships' |
| 4. 'Joy to the World' | 12. 'Away in a Manger' | 19. 'Go Tell it on the Mountain' |
| 5. 'The First Noel' | 13. 'Here we Come a-Carolling' | 20. 'Up on the House Top' |
| 6. 'O Holy Night' | 14. 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' | 21. 'I'm a Little Snowman' |
| 7. 'O Come, All Ye Faithful' | 15. 'Ding Dong, Merrily on High' | |
| 8. 'Deck the Halls' | | |

(The last two may not be too familiar in the UK!)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

 What is your favourite Christmas song? Explain why you love it so much.

WORD

The song 'Mary, did you know?' by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene has become a Christmas favourite and was recently made even more popular by the group Pentatonix. Through this song we are going to explore how Jesus demonstrated his love for others.

Give each group member a copy of the lyrics (found at the end of this document, or share an online link) and listen to the song together.

 **Pentatonix – 'Mary, did You Know?' (Official Video)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE>

LEADER'S NOTES - In this activity the group members will review the lyrics of the song 'Mary, Did you Know?' and find Scripture references that link with each lyric. There are a few options to complete this activity depending on your group.

1. Guide the group through the lyrics, sharing the Scripture references as you go along.
2. Give the group the lyrics and the Bible references in random order. Ask them to match the Bible reference with the lyric.
3. Give the group the lyrics and ask them to search for Bible references to match them. You can use the suggested Bible references as a prompt if necessary.

The Scripture references given on the last page are just suggestions, so encourage the group to search for other biblical links to the lyrics.

 What have you discovered about Jesus in this activity?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Answer the question:

🗣️ Did Mary know?

Use the following Bible references to help you answer the question:

Luke 1:26-33; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 2:8-19; Luke 2:25-35; Luke 2:26-33; Luke 2:46-51

Read an extract from a *Christianity Today* article and discuss.

“The question ‘‘Mary, did you know?’’ is not a factual one but a rhetorical one. It opens space for contemplation, curiosity, and wonder. The song invites us to peer over Mary’s shoulder as she rocks the Christ child to sleep, to witness the vulnerability of God, to meditate on the vastness of Heaven contained in tiny fingers grasping for the comfort of his mother’s hand.’

— JOY CLARKSON – ‘YES, MARY KNEW’, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/december-web-only/mary-did-you-know-yes-mary-knew.html>

WITNESS

📺 **Jeff Vanderstelt, Incarnational Mission (4 min 23 sec)** Start the clip at 54 secs if you want to skip the introduction.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYNbHvWs0ok>

🗣️ What do you agree/disagree with in this clip?

🗣️ What do you think Jeff Vanderstelt means by ‘if missional is go, then incarnational is stay’?

“Jesus came and he dwelt among us for 30 years. Have you ever thought about that? The God of the Universe comes and dwells in obscurity for 30 years and he’s not noticed.’

— JEFF VANDERSTELT

🗣️ How is being willing to ‘not be noticed’ countercultural in our society today?

🗣️ Thinking about everything you have discovered in the sessions so far, what does incarnational living mean for you?

🗣️ What is your response to this quote and how does it impact the way we live our lives as followers of Jesus?

“Jesus tied his humanity to those on the margins, and the most vulnerable. He showed us that it is in those spaces that we are most connected to the divine.’

— JO TAYLOR – YOUTH SPECIALIST (DISCIPLESHIP)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

As we dig into the idea of ‘incarnational living’ and all that it might mean, there is much discussion and disagreement in the world of theology. We can easily get caught up in endless discussions about what ‘incarnational living’ is or wonder whether our service to Jesus is currently adequate.

As always, the apostle Paul speaks directly about this topic. In the last session we looked at the ‘Christ Hymn’ in Philippians 2, but it starts with this statement:

‘In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.’

— PHILIPPIANS 2:5

🗣️ How does this verse challenge you to live your everyday life like Jesus?

WORSHIP

During Christmas we sing 'Hark! the Herald Angels Sing'. It is hoped that these sessions have given you a fresh understanding of what these words from verse two mean:

**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.
— (SASB 108)**

Share in worship together as you listen to 'Hark! the Herald (Sing Out Loud)' and feel free to join in singing!

 **Hark! the Herald (Sing Out Loud) – The Spirituals Choir**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmtKLOB-0-I>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Share in prayer together.

In a world where worry, not peace, prevails, stir up that good news again. This Christmas, make it real in our hearts. Never have we needed your joy and peace more than now. Thank you for the gift of Jesus, our Immanuel, the Word made flesh. Forgive us for forgetting – that your love never changes, never fades, and that you never abandon the purpose for which you came: to save us from our sinful condition, and to give us life eternal, the joy of relationship with a holy God. Your birth –and your death – sealed your promise to us forever.

— REBECCA BARLOW JORDAN

<https://www.countryliving.com/life/g30243110/best-christmas-prayers/>