

Scene 1: In the beginning

Bible

Genesis 1:1—2:4 and 3:1-6

Aim

To introduce the idea that Christians believe that God created the world as a beautiful and special place, but that people have gone their own way, breaking their relationship with God and spoiling much of God's handiwork by being selfish. God needed to rescue his world and his people.

Setting the scene

The background to this scene is designed to put the whole story into context that God created a perfect world for people to live in and care for. People have misused their privilege of being put in charge of the world to spoil both the environment and their relationship with God. The Old Testament tells of the struggle to repair this relationship by adhering to the law, but this proved impossible. God's only option was for his Son Jesus to show people how to live, and ultimately to pay the price for the hurt world and its people. *The Christmas Journey* develops in such a way that the children are asked to wonder how God is going to mend and heal the problems of the world through the things which they see and hear.

Characters

Storyteller

Scenery

A plain, uncluttered space with little to distract from the story. Subdued lighting and quiet atmosphere.

Props

*A wooden tray, large enough to take the following items:

One piece of black felt measuring approximately 60cm x 10cm and rolled up in preparation for the story.

Seven 8cm squares of felt in the following colours: two plain yellow, two plain green, one light blue with a dark blue curve across the middle; one light blue with a dark blue triangle laid diagonally across it, dividing it in two, one yellow with a black triangle laid diagonally across it, dividing it in two.

Four small gift boxes each slightly different so that they are easy to identify.

These boxes correspond to a part of the story and are carefully revealed as that part is reached.

The following items, each group placed in one of the small gift boxes: a small fabric leaf and some small artificial flowers; a small sun made of gold card, a smaller moon made of silver card and some small silver confetti stars; small model fish and birds (either plastic ones from *The Early Learning Centre* or wooden ones from a craft shop); wooden animals (from a Noah's ark set or some plastic ones from *The Early Learning Centre*) and two small people figures (preferably made of wood); small pieces of grey felt, an uneven circle of greaseproof paper.

Pile the seven felt squares in the correct colour order with the first colour on top (see script). Place the felt squares, the rolled felt and the filled gift boxes on the tray.

You will also need:

*DVD of stars, planets and so on projected on to the ceiling or a wall behind the storyteller.

Quiet music playing in the background, such as *Becoming Still* by Simeon Wood (*Celtic Heart CD* www.simeonwood.com)

The children assemble outside the first space and are told that they are going on a special journey. The leaders build up a sense of wonder and quiet anticipation as the children wait to enter the room. They are asked to enter quietly—perhaps through a star lit doorway—and look around them. As they come in, there are images of creation to observe, which are projected on to the ceiling or a wall, along with appropriate music to set the scene. The storyteller is already in place, sitting on the floor, with the tray within easy reach. He or she welcomes the children and asks them to sit quietly around the carpet. The storyteller draws attention to the beauty of the images. The images cease and the music slowly fades.

The storyteller asks the children if they are looking forward to Christmas... and what presents they are hoping for. He or she then asks them what is the biggest present that they have ever received. Allow the children to give a variety of answers, expressing appropriate appreciation of these presents. This then leads into the story...

NB: Don't rush the storytelling and try to focus on the visuals that you will be presenting and not on the children.

Script: In the beginning

Storyteller: These are all big presents. They are wonderful presents. Yes, yes. That's a big present, too.

But, do you know that there are some presents that are so big that nobody notices them? They are so huge that they are really hard to see. The only way to see these presents is to go right back to when they were given... right back to the beginning...

In the beginning... in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...

...there was...

Slowly unroll the length of black felt, which is exactly the right length for the story to go on. Unroll it from your right to your left (so the children will read the story left to right).

Nothing!

The earth was barren, with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered in darkness.

But the Spirit of God was moving over the water...

Allow your hand to hover over the felt.

Then God said, 'I command light to shine!' And light started shining...

Take the top square (the plain yellow square) and place it on the black felt, starting at the far right hand side.

This light was the light of life. It was the light of God shining in the dark of the world. It was the light that all light comes from.

God looked at the light and saw that it was good. He separated light from darkness, and named the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night'.

Hold one hand, as if in blessing, above the yellow square then encourage the children to give a thumbs-up sign as you say 'It is good!' (Encourage this action every time God says this.)

Evening came and then morning—that was the first day.

Then God said, 'I command a dome to separate the water above it from the water below it. And that is what happened.

Show and then, next to the yellow square, put down the blue square with the darker blue curve across its middle...

God made the dome, and named it 'Sky'.

Place a hand of blessing above the blue square and encourage the thumbs-up sign, as before.

Evening came and then morning—that was the second day.

And then God said, 'I commanded the water under the sky to come together in one place, so there will be dry ground.' And that is what happened.

Show and carefully put down a green felt square in line next to the blue square.

God named the dry ground 'Land', and he named the water 'Sea'. God looked at what he had done and he saw that it was good. Then he said, 'I command the earth to produce all kinds of plants, including fruit, trees and grain.' And that is what happened.

Take the box containing the leaf and flowers, open it and place the items on the green felt square.

God looked at what he had done and saw that it was good.

Place a hand of blessing above the green square and encourage the thumbs-up sign, as before.

Evening came and then morning—that was the third day.

And then God said, 'I command lights to appear in the sky, to separate day from night and to show the time for seasons, special days and years. They will shine in the sky to give light to the earth. And that is what happened.

Show and slowly place down on the cloth the felt square divided into one yellow and one black triangle.

God made two powerful lights, the brighter one to rule the day...

Take the box containing the sun, moon and stars, open it and place the sun on the yellow section of the felt square.

...and lesser one to rule the night.

Place a white moon on the black section of the felt square.

He also made the stars...

Scatter the stars around the moon on the black section of the square.

He placed the lights in the sky to shine on the earth, to rule the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God looked at what he had done and saw that it was good.

Place a hand of blessing above the yellow and black square and encourage the thumbs up sign, as before.

Evening came and then morning—that was the fourth day.

And then God said, 'I command the sea to be full of living creatures, and birds to fly in the air.' And that's what happened.

Show and place the felt square that is made up of two triangular parts, light blue and dark blue...

God looked at what he had done and saw that it was good. He gave them his blessing—he told the sea creatures to live everywhere in the sea and the birds to live everywhere on earth...

Take the box containing the fish and birds, open it and place some little fish on the dark blue yellow section of the felt square. Ask the children for suggestions of other creatures that swim...

...and countless birds in every colour and size...

Place down some little birds and ask children for suggestions of different types of bird or other creatures that fly.

Evening came and then morning—that was the fifth day.

And then God said, 'I command the earth to give life to all kinds of tame animals, wild animals and reptiles. And that is what happened.

Show and place the second green felt square. Take the box containing the animals, open it and place two animals on the square.

God made living creatures to run and jump and skip and hop and creep and crawl in every corner of the world. He looked at what he had done and saw that it was good.

Place a hand of blessing above the square and encourage the thumbs-up sign, as before.

And then God said, 'Now we will make humans; they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures. So God created humans to be like himself.

Place a couple of small wooden people into the palm of your hand.

He made people and breathed his life into each one of them.

Breathe into your closed palms and then place the models on to the green felt square among the animals.

God gave them his blessing and said, 'Have lots of children!

Hold your hand over the model in a sign of blessing.

Fill the earth with people and look after the land. Take care of the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky and every animal on the earth. I have provided all kinds of fruit and grain for you to eat. And I have given green plants as food for everything else that breathes.

God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good!

Sweep your hand over the whole cloth in a sign of blessing. Encourage the thumbs-up sign as before.

Evening came and then morning—that was the sixth day.

So the heavens and the earth and everything else was created. By the seventh day God had finished his work. God blessed the seventh day and made it special, because on that day he rested from his work.

Place the final yellow square on the black felt. Pause.

On this day, people go to different places to remember the great presents. Only you know what you would put there for your favourite place to remember. It might be in your garden by a tree, in a church, or in your bedroom. It might be in the mountains or by the ocean or a lake. I don't know where your place is. Only you know.

What I do know is that Christians often mark this day with a cross.

Draw an imaginary cross as a bold gesture in the air above the whole story, then sit back and pause a while.

The storyteller then asks the following three questions one at a time, allowing children to respond.

I wonder which part of God's present you like best...

I wonder which part of God's present is the most important part...

I wonder if we can leave out any part of his present and still have all the present we need...

The storyteller now asks the following rhetorical questions, asking the children not to answer but to hold on to their thoughts and to reflect. If children are anxious to speak, ask them to hold on to what they would like to say for the time being.

I wonder what would happen if people chose to live in darkness rather than light...

Place the people on the edge of the black felt underlay.

I wonder what would happen if people began to destroy some of the creatures that swim and the birds that fly... and some of the animals and reptiles...

Turn over one fish, one bird and lay down one animal.

I wonder what would happen if people destroyed some of the plants and trees...

Turn over some of the leaves and flowers.

I wonder what would happen if people messed up the water...

Put small pieces of grey felt on to the second square.

I wonder what would happen if people filled the air with dirt and pollution...

Put the uneven circle of greaseproof paper over the 'day and night' square.

I wonder what would happen if people didn't rest and remember all the amazing presents...

Move the seventh square way from the rest and turn it over.

I wonder what would happen if people turned away from the light that all light comes from...

Dramatically detach the first square from the rest and 'toss it' away to land upside down outside the darkness.

I wonder what you would do to put right all this mess...

I wonder what God would do if his present got spoilt...

Pause.

Perhaps you will be able to find out some of the answers as you travel round the journey. I wonder what God will do to begin to mend all that has been spoiled? Will you watch out on the journey and see what God does? I'll see you later and you can tell me what you have discovered...

The storyteller remains in place while leaders quietly ask their group to follow them into the first gazebo.