



An Upside-Down Christmas

Themes/Values/Keywords: God's plan for the birth of his son is not quite what you would expect for the King of Kings! His plan to most people would be considered completely upside down - Born in a stable rather than a palace or a hospital. To a young girl from an insignificant town. Unexpected visitors and very strange gifts! We might not always understand why things in life happen as they do, but Christians believe God's plan was perfect. God's **upside** love came **down** to earth for everyone and Jesus came to show us how we can turn our topsy turvy lives UPSIDE DOWN! **Hope, Love, Gifts, Plans, Change, Trust, Faith.**



Bible reference: The Christmas Story – Matthew 1-2 & Luke 1-2

Key Stage Relevance: KS1 & 2

Resources: Pictures of some of the Christmas Traditions around the world. 2 x Angel costumes and a kitchen roll tube as a telescope.

Introduction:

What's the most unusual Christmas you've ever had? Perhaps last year might not have been what you were expecting or planning? Maybe you had plans to see friends and family that were suddenly cancelled due to the Covid-19 Lockdown?

(Give a personal example). Last year, I planned to have a wonderful family Christmas Dinner with my children returning home from university and their grandparents joining us, as is always our tradition but unfortunately, I ended up cooking Christmas Dinner for my in-laws, and delivering it to their front door on a tray and we didn't get to see my daughter until Easter! But we had a great time then, meeting up and exchanging our Christmas presents! I might not have appreciated the sudden change of plans at the time, but in hindsight I can see that the plans were made to protect my family from the virus.

In our 'Upside Down' Worship this term we've been considering some of the things that Jesus taught people on how to live their lives from God's perspective, which may seem upside down to us until we understand the difference it can make.



Game/Activity:

People around the world have different customs and traditions for celebrating Christmas – some of these traditions may seem unusual, funny or even upside down to how you and I might celebrate but they all sound amazing! Our game today is to match up each Christmas tradition with the country where that celebration/tradition takes place.

1. What country has an upside-down Christmas Tree that first became a tradition in the Middle Ages when Eastern European Christians would flip them to represent the Trinity and Christ being Crucified. People use fruit, nuts, sweets wrapped in shiny paper, ribbons and gold painted pinecones to decorate the tree hanging upside down from the centre of the room. Thumbs up for ...POLAND or HUNGARY? The answer is **POLAND!**
2. In what country do people skate to church on rollerblades in the week leading up to Christmas and attend a daily church service called Misa de Aguinaldo (Early morning mass)? ... SPAIN or VENEZUELA? The answer is **VENEZUELA!**
3. In which country do people hide their brooms before going to sleep on Christmas Eve so that no witches can steal them and go flying on them! ... GERMAY OR NORWAY? The answer is **NORWAY!**
4. In what country is the traditional Christmas dinner for many Kentucky Fried Chicken? JAPAN or AMERICA? The answer is **JAPAN!** It has become so popular families have to order the Xmas Family Bucket online and have it delivered.
5. On the evening of 5th December, children in this country leave a boot or shoe outside their bedroom door. In the morning if they've been good, they will wake to find the shoes filled with sweets. If they haven't, they will find only a branch. Obviously best to leave out your cleanest pair of shoes! Is it GERMANY or ITALY? ... The answer is **GERMANY!**

What fun! Some of those ideas seem completely upside down to what we do, don't they!?



Main Content:

Today as we look at the Christmas Story, we will discover that although God's plan for the birth of his son Jesus may not have been what you might expect for the 'King of Kings', it was all part of God's perfect plan to show us how we can turn our lives upside down!

Bible Story: The Christmas Story (can be told as a story or acted out) – or use the YouTube Spinnaker video version.

Narrator	I want you to imagine the scene... We're in Heaven 2021 years ago, listening in on the Angel's conversation.
Angel 1	Shouldn't we be at choir practice?
Angel 2	Yeah, but don't get your halo in a twist – I've heard it's been cancelled because there are some angel delights happening down on Earth and can you believe it? Gabriel's got the job!
Angel 1	Really?! Gabe? Are you sure? You don't see him on Earth very often, I wonder what God's told him to do?
Angel 2	Well from what I can make out from my terrestrial telescope (<i>look through a kitchen roll tube</i>) He's at a young girl's house in Nazareth. Oh dear, I think he's really scared her! No, it's ok, he's just told her that she is blessed from head to toe, and the Lord is really pleased with her. Ah that's nice! That's just the sort of thing God would say. Oh no, what's that? He's just told her she is going to have a baby son, who she will call Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.
Angel 1	What! Surely Gabe has gone to the wrong house – she's just a teenager called Mary, from a working-class family, she doesn't have a husband yet and she lives in smelly old Nazareth!! Nooo! This is all wrong. The world is turning upside down. She can't possibly be the one to be the mother to the Son of God.
Angel 2	Oh, hang on (<i>look through telescope</i>), I think Gabe's trying to sort things out now. Let's hope he can persuade Mary's boyfriend Joseph to stand by Mary and help her raise the baby together.
Angel 1	How's he going to do that? He's fast asleep.
Angel 2	Gabe's going to have to teleport himself into his dream!
Angel 1	What's heaven coming to? An Angel talking in a dream to a carpenter! A workman!!
Angel 2	Heaven's coming down to earth, by the look of it. Standards are slipping! I'm going to have to have a word with God about all this.
Narrator	A few months later ...
Angel 1	Do you remember that job Gabriel had a few months ago, well he really must have messed things up! That young girl Mary is now heavily pregnant with the Son of God, and the poor lass has got to travel all the way to Bethlehem with Joseph to be counted in the Roman Census. Surely God could've timed it better for them?
Angel 2	Yeah, not only that it's such a long way to travel those Romans have been turning everyone's lives upside down! All for their silly census. It's senseless!



Angel 1	Well at least God will have reserved them a luxury suite at Herod's palace, or possibly even a private room at the Bethlehem Hospital for when the time comes for the baby. Let's take a look and see where they're heading for the birth. (Look through telescope).
Angel 2	This is not good! All the inns are full, the town is packed with travellers – there's nowhere for them to stay. I can see they are getting desperate now – Joseph is making arrangements with an innkeeper to stay in a stable. Urgh! That's disgusting – I wouldn't let my fluffy white rabbit stay there, let alone allow for God's son to be born among all those smelly farm animals. Poor Mary, I think it's nearly time for her new arrival.
Angel 1	Erm, you know we've missed choir practice again tonight? I have a feeling we should be there. I can hear the trumpets warming up. Ah look, there's the angel's band above that field of Shepherds.
Angel 2	I don't think we're missing anything special. I heard they were only going to sing to a bunch of scruffy shepherds. Angels belong in Heaven, not on earth. Everything is getting all mixed up, and upside down.
Angel 1	Well, I don't want miss out – I think this is an amazing occasion and I want to be part of telling everyone on earth the Good News – that Jesus is born! He is the Saviour of the world and will bring peace and goodwill to all men on earth.
Angel 2	Let's just hope after all these smelly shepherds have all been to see the baby Mary and Joseph might get some more dignified visitors.
Angel 1	That's more like it. Things are looking up. I can see some Wise Men from the East following the star God put over the place where Jesus was born. Now, these look like my sort of people. Nicely dressed, intelligent, educated, rich. There not the sort to let their lives be turned upside down by a baby in an animal's feeding trough!
Angel 2	Well, they may be intelligent and wise, but they've headed straight for Herod's palace. They are clearly looking for the New King, but they won't find Jesus there, and from what I know of jealous King Herod, he won't be happy to hear that they want to worship the new king.
Angel 1	Just what I thought. The wise men knew it would be worth giving up all their luxury to follow the star all the way to the cow-shed in Bethlehem. They are determined to worship Jesus wherever he is. (Shout) Keep going Wise Men – follow that star!
Angel 2	Mary's heart was filled with joy you know when the Shepherds saw Jesus. I can't wait to see her face when she sees the presents the wise men have wrapped up!
Angel 1	Surely being so wise they will have brought blankets and nappies and milk and toys. Oh gosh! Well I never...what's that I see...
Angel 2	Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh – Not quite what you might expect for a new born baby, but perfect Gifts for the King of Kings.
Angel 1	Actually – God's plan was perfect. He had it planned from the very beginning of time, it was foretold 600 years before by prophets in the Old Testament. God himself chose to be born in a stable as a man. God himself, come down to live on earth and show his love for all people and how to live life from his perspective.
Angel 2	That's so upside down, it's the right way up!



Pupil Response:

What things happened in the story that seem upside down to how you might have planned it?

Why do you think God chose for Jesus to come to earth in this way?

What difference can the birth of Jesus make to those who put their faith in him? (refer to other Worships in this series – shows us a different perspective for living).

Reflection: Sometimes our own plans are a bit upside down. We might not always understand why things happen to us in life. Sometimes it not until we look back at a situation that we can see some of the positive things that can come from it or that we can learn. In my case last Christmas, I can now see how the sudden change of plans helped to keep me safe and well from Covid.

We often need to put our trust in plans that we didn't make – even if we don't fully understand them. This can be quite unsettling, and scary but as long as the plans have been made by adults who love and care for us we can trust they are in our best interests.

Christians believe that God has a perfect plan for each one of us. His plan was and is to give each one of us the gift of His love through the birth of his Son Jesus. Jesus, through his life, teaching, death and resurrection came to show us how we can turn our topsy turvy lives upside down – by living our lives from God's perspective.

Let's spend a moment now thinking about the plans we have for Christmas and how we can share this message of upside love come down to earth for everyone.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for Christmas and for your perfect plan of sending Jesus into the world to be our Saviour. Please help us to understand the plans you have for each one of us as we learn to put our trust in you and those around us who love and care for us. Help us to share your love with others as we celebrate this Christmas. Amen.