**Advent Week 4**

**Guided reflection – Joy**

**Teacher notes**

The traditional theme for the fourth week of Advent is Mary, mother of Jesus. This reflection explores the theme of joy, linked to the children’s story Augustus and His Smile. For those with younger children, there are lots of teaching ideas related to this story on the [Little Tiger website.](http://www.littletiger.co.uk/image/data/Augustus_TeachRweb.pdf)

Luke’s Gospel explains how the Angel Gabriel visited Mary, who was probably 14 or 15 at the time, to explain that she had been chosen by God to have a baby who would be ‘Saviour of the World.’ This must have turned her world upside down, yet her response is one of trust - that God will work everything out – and joy – that God has chosen her and is turning the established world order upside down by using insignificant, ordinary people to achieve his purposes. Her song in Luke 1:46 – 55 is known as ‘The Magnificat’ from the opening words in the traditional version, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord.’ It celebrates her belief that God is bringing in a new world order. The Message version of the Bible paraphrases it like this:

*‘I’m bursting with God-news;*

*I’m dancing the song of my Saviour God.*

*God took one look at me and look what happened -*

*I’m the most fortunate woman on Earth!*

*What God has done for me will never be forgotten,*

*The God whose name is holy, set apart from all others.*

*His mercy flows in wave after wave*

*on those who are in awe before him.*

*He bared his arm and showed his strength,*

*scattered the bluffing braggarts.*

*He knocked tyrants off their high horses,*

*pulled victims out of the mud.*

*The starving poor sat down to a banquet,*

*the callous rich were left out in the cold.*

*He embraced his chosen child Israel,*

*he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.*

*It’s exactly what he promised,*

*beginning with Abraham and right up to now.’*

Some Advent traditions use a pink candle for week 4, to remember Mary and her song of joy. Her song can be thought of as an Advent carol; it’s not about a baby, but celebrates God bringing down the powerful and arrogant and filling the hungry with good things.

Traditionally Mary’s words were sung every week in Anglican churches. However, they have often been seen as subversive. For example, when the British ruled India, they banned churches from singing the Magnificat, because of its message of overthrowing the powerful. In Guatemala in the 1980s the government thought the words were revolutionary and banned them, because the poor took it as a message of hope, that one day God would liberate them. With older children you could discuss whether Mary’s song of joy goes hand in hand with a call to justice. Is it possible to be joyful when there is so much wrong in the world?

**Reflection**

**PowerPoint Slide 1** Remind the children that in the previous weeks of Advent, we have explored the themes of Hope, Peace and Love. This week, we will be exploring the theme of Joy. If you have made your own Advent wreath, you may wish to light the fourth candle and say these words (you may wish to build the words each week as the additional candles are lit):

As we watch and wait for the coming of Jesus,

We remember that he came to bring:

Hope where there is despair,

Peace where there is violence,

Love where there is hatred,

Joy where there is sorrow,

And light where there is darkness.

**PowerPoint Slides 2 - 3** What is joy? Is it the same as happiness? Ask the children which of the photos shows joy and which shows happiness – there is no correct answer here, it’s a matter of opinion, but encourage them to give reasons for their choices. Do we need certain things to be joyful (money, possessions, health, family, friends?) or does it depend on something else? Something inside us?

**PowerPoint Slide 4** Ask the children to show you a shy smile, a nervous smile, their happiest smile, their most fake smile, their best smile. Why do we smile?

Play the video of Catherine Rayner reading her story ‘Augustus and his smile.’ Ask them to listen for the moment when Augustus finds his smile again; what does he learn? There is an [alternative video here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLnm6QGAyQo) which you may decide is clearer.

**PowerPoint Slide 5** Do the class agree that it’s things like dancing in the raindrops and splashing in puddles that makes them smile? Do they agree with Augustus that happiness is everywhere in the world? Can we be joyful even when there are sad things in the world?

**PowerPoint Slide 6** Explain that in our Advent reflections this week, we’re going to think about Mary, Jesus’ mother. When the Angel Gabriel told her that she was going to have a baby, everything in her life changed. She must have had very mixed feelings. What would she say to her parents? To Joseph? To her friends and the neighbours? In those days people didn’t approve of girls having babies if they weren’t married! However, Mary chose to trust God and she celebrated, because God has chosen her, a poor, ordinary person, rather than somebody rich and important, to be Jesus’ mother.

There is a link on the slide to a version of Mary’s song. (You will have to decide if you think this is suitable for your class, for example, you might choose to stop it at 2:35 before it shows the crucifixion.)

Alternatively, you could read these words, adapted from the Message paraphrase of Mary’s song.

*‘I’m bursting with God-news;*

*I’m dancing the song of my Saviour God.*

*God took one look at me and look what happened -*

*I’m the most fortunate woman on Earth!*

*What God has done for me will never be forgotten.*

*He saw the rich and the powerful, he noticed the poor and the oppressed.*

*He knocked tyrants off their high horses,*

*pulled victims out of the mud.*

*The starving poor sat down to a banquet,*

*the callous rich were left out in the cold.*

*He remembered his promises,*

*made to Abraham and the prophets, right up to now.*

**Prayer and reflection**

I’d like you to close your eyes and think about the things that we’ve talked about.

How we can find joy and happiness in ordinary, unexpected places, even when things are difficult.

How Mary chose to trust God and to rejoice, even though her life was going to change forever and things would be hard.

How she had a generous, positive attitude to life and said ‘Yes’ to God.

I’m going to finish with a prayer now and if you would like to, you can make it your prayer by saying amen at the end.

**PowerPoint Slide 7**

Dear God,

Thank you that we can find joy and laughter in ordinary, everyday things.

Thank you that Mary trusted you and was glad that you had chosen her.

We pray for people who don’t feel joyful at the moment and ask that you will help them find smiles in unexpected places.

Amen.

