We come to know God through the stories Jesus told
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As we move towards Advent and the celebration of Christmas, God-with-us-in-Jesus, we are mindful of the great love God has poured out over all of creation. Becoming human in Jesus, the living, breathing face of God, is the gift our God makes to us. In Jesus, God is present in and with all our human delights, challenges, hopes and dreams. What an extraordinary gift, God became one of us and one with us. We are indeed one with our God.

ACTIVITY

Introduction
Young people encounter and experience God in many different ways. They are touched by traces of God throughout their day within their family, in the schoolyard, within the classroom, their encounters with significant others and their own inner moments of awe and wonder. As religious educators we guide and assist young people to reflect on their experiences and to lead them in recognising and naming the presence of God within the ordinary moments of their day. The gift of our incarnate God, celebrated at Christmas, is something we access through our many and diverse everyday experiences.

In the lead up to Christmas invite students to name the gifts that Jesus brings us through his life and stories; gifts that tell us about God.

Jesus tells us about God
As you prepare for Advent and the celebration of Christmas with your class, lead the students to name those gifts that Jesus has given us throughout his life, gifts that are available to us in our experiences today.

As you begin your lesson remind the children that Jesus came to tell us about God.

Create a Christmas crib scene and eventually surround it by words and pictures that celebrate something about the nature of God as revealed to us by Jesus.

A question worth exploring with young people is: ‘I wonder what Jesus tells us about God?’

Tell the children that Jesus told us many stories to tell us something about the nature of God.

Ask the children to share some of the stories they know that Jesus told.

An exploration of selected parables with students can be used to build up their understanding of the nature of God. For example:

The Forgiving Parent Luke 15:11-31
The Feeding of the Five Thousand Luke 8:10-17
The Parable of the Lost Sheep Luke 15:1-7

An activity in which students read and then enacted the parable of the Forgiving Parent would provide a concrete source of discussion with them.
A simple question to ponder with the children after the enactment might be:

*How would you describe the father in the story when the son came home?*

Some responses might include:

- welcoming,
- forgiving,
- open-hearted,
- generous,
- kind,
- friendly,
- warm,
- caring,
- loving,
- thankful,
- compassionate…

Build up a list of words on flash cards.

*Encourage the students recognise that the words they use to describe the father in the story are words Jesus wants us to know about God.*

Build up a list of these words on flash cards. Encourage the students recognise that the words they use to describe the father in the story are words Jesus wants us to know about God.

Build up a list of ‘prayer starters’ using the words shared from the parable. For example:

- Welcoming God…
- Forgiving God…
- Loving God…
- Compassionate God…
- Caring God…
- Inclusive God…
- Friendly God…
- Caring God…

These prayer starters could be written on individual cards or coloured stars and kept in a special container on the prayer table or placed around the class Christmas Crib.

Note that naming God by exploring various parables in this way can be done any time through the year. By enacting the story and naming what the story tells us about God, students will develop a broad understanding of the nature of God.

**CLASS PRAYER**

The following could be a simple class prayer that makes use of these words:

**Leader:** Let us pause for a moment to welcome and celebrate God-with-us
(pause)

**Leader:** We welcome and celebrate our God of compassion

**All:** *We welcome and celebrate our God of compassion*

**Leader:** Let us take a moment for quiet reflection.

- *Today I will show compassion by...* (Allow students to respond spontaneously.)
- (The card ‘Compassionate God’ is placed around the Crib.)

**Leader:** We welcome and celebrate our God of Inclusion

**All:** *We welcome and celebrate our God of Inclusion*

**Leader:** Let us take a moment for quiet reflection.

- *Today I will show inclusion by...* (Allow students to respond spontaneously.)
- (The card ‘Inclusive God’ is placed around the Crib.)
Leader: We welcome and celebrate our God of Forgiveness
All: We welcome and celebrate our God of Forgiveness

Leader: Let us take a moment for quiet reflection.
      Today I will show forgiveness by... (Allow students to respond spontaneously.)
      (The card ‘Forgiving God’ is placed around the Crib.)

Leader: We welcome and celebrate our God of Love
All: We welcome and celebrate our God of Love

Leader: Let us take a moment for quiet reflection.
      Today I will show love by... (Allow students to respond spontaneously.)
      (The card ‘Loving God’ is placed around the Crib.)

Leader: We welcome and celebrate our God of...
      (Invite students to respond individually)
All: We welcome and celebrate our God of...

Leader: We celebrate God-with-us-in-Jesus

Conclusion: (A Christmas Carol of your choice.)

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY

At the end of the day invite the students to sit in a circle and ask them to recall those things they wish to say thank-you for.

Student: Thank you, God, for gift of ............ that I experienced today.
      (Complete a round with the students and when you reach a natural conclusion invite the students to repeat the following.)

Leader: Thank you, God, for the many gifts you have given us today.
Students: Thank you, God, for the many gifts you have given us today.

Conclude with a song from the ‘Join the Circle’ CD or other song of your choice.