

# ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

## I. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

(Mark 1:9-11 – First Sunday of Epiphany)

- At the time Jesus started his ministry the Jewish people were looking for a Messiah, a special person chosen by God, someone who would save them from everything that was wrong. What would the children be looking for in a ‘saviour’ today? Look at some posters/fliers/promotional videos for forthcoming films or CDs, and using their techniques as a model, get the children to design their own poster/flier or act out a scene for a video promoting a 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘Saviour of the World’

What the Jews got was Jesus – seemingly the son of a poor village carpenter. Get the children to imagine that everyone had been expecting the kind of person they’ve promoted in their posters etc, and they get a chippy from the local DIY shop. Ask them to talk about how people would feel.

- Get the children to talk about the presents they got for Christmas, (or at any other time) – particularly one’s they knew they were going to get and were looking forward to. Ask them if the presents lived up to expectations. Then ask them to talk about any unexpected presents or presents they didn’t particularly want, that turned out to be really good. They could cut out illustrations from catalogues or draw pictures and use them to make a table:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Expected</i>	<i>Not Expected</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Not so good</i>

Talk about the way Jesus wasn’t quite what people were expecting as a ‘saviour’ and ask them to wonder about whether he turned out to be ‘a good thing’ despite that.

- Use the *WHERE’S SPOT?* flap book (Eric Hill, Heinemann ISBN 0 434 94288 X). Talk about the way Spot’s mum looked in all sorts of strange places for him, but in the end he turned out to be very close at hand – in his basket. Get the children to describe times they’ve ‘lost’ adults they’ve been with and where they found them in the end. They could make a ‘Where’s Mum/Dad/Auntie/etc?’ flap book. Talk about the way the Jews were expecting their ‘saviour’ to be a ‘King of David’s line’, and ask them to suggest the places they might have gone looking for such a person. Remind them that Jesus wasn’t found in any grand or unusual places – he was just a man who stepped out of the crowd at the River Jordan. As an alternative to ‘Where’s Mum? etc’, the children could make a ‘Where’s the King?’ flap book.

- Get the children to talk about their favourite celebrities and ask them choose the one they would most like to spend a day with. Get them to think about the thing the celebrity might enjoy doing, as well as the things they would like to do themselves. Get them to draw up an itinerary for the day. As they are working on this, remind them that stars often wish they could be ‘ordinary people’ again – ask the children why they think this is. Remind them of the story of Jesus’s baptism – the voice said he was God’s Son – a pretty major celerity! – but he was there in the crowd and just wanted to be treated like an ordinary person. Ask the children why they think that might have been.
- Collect some photographs of well known adults in the congregation and photos of their children. See if your group can match up the parents with the children. Ask how they did it. Get a couple of pairs of parents and their adult offspring from the congregation to visit your group and talk a little bit about the things they have in common that shows they are related. Remind the children that God’s voice identified Jesus as his Son. Ask the children what Jesus and God might have in common that show they are related in that way.
- The voice in the baptism story says that God is ‘well pleased’ with Jesus. Ask the children about what they have to do for their adult carers to be ‘well pleased’ with them. Get the children to wonder about what Jesus had done, and would do to make God ‘well pleased’ with him.

## **2. THE DAY AT CAPERNAUM**

(Mark 1:21-28 – Fourth Sunday of Epiphany  
plus Mark 1:29-39 – Proper 1)

[Proper 1 is the Sunday between 3 & 9 February inclusive, if earlier than 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent]

Allan Barr’s six point structure for Mark actually identifies the appointing of the disciples (3:13-19) as the next important incident. However, this reading is not used by the Lectionary. I have substituted the ‘day’ at Capernaum, which represents a summary of Jesus’s activities, and is perhaps more useful in answering the question: ‘Who do you say I am?’

- This story shows Jesus with the friends he has gathered round him. Get the children to make a ‘people chain’:

Cut along the dotted line

Open out

Half an A4 sheet, folded in a zig-zag, will give 4 figures, which may well be enough. Ask the children to colour in the end figure as themselves, and the others as their friends – or people they would *like* to be their friends. (NB Colouring the figures to represent their favourite clothes is a good way of identifying the characters). As the children work, talk about why they have chosen those people. Remind them that Jesus chose friends too and ask them on what basis they think he made *his* choices. Ask them why they think people might have wanted *Jesus* as a friend.

- Watch a clip from a recent ‘Friends’, or ‘Neighbours’ which is illustrative of some of the qualities of friendship and use it as the springboard for discussion as to what makes a good friend, when people have been good friends to them, or they have been a good friend to someone else. Discuss how the disciples might have been good friends to Jesus, or he to them.
- Retell verses 29-39 in your own paraphrase, but without *naming* Jesus or any of his friends and substituting ‘the area’ for ‘Galilee’ – in other words, taking out all clues as to who the central character is. The story might start something like: ‘A man went to his friend’s house with a couple of other people he knew ... ‘ When you have told the story, tell the children there’s an investigation going on about this man. Ask them to tell you everything they’ve learned about him, from what you’ve just said. Collect all the information on a flip chart. Tell the children this man has broken a law, and that’s why there is an investigation – ask them if they can guess what he’s done wrong. When they’ve had time to speculate, tell them the story happened a long time ago in a place where you were not supposed to do any work on the sabbath day – not even make someone well – and the events happened on the sabbath day. Finish by letting them guess the man’s name, if they haven’t already.
- *Before* he’d cast out the evil spirit, the people in the synagogue were amazed by Jesus, just because of his teaching. Get the children to talk about any ‘amazing’ teachers they have come across, and what makes them amazing. They could each draw up a nomination for ‘teacher of the year’ from their school, then present their nomination to the group and have a vote on which they thought was the most ‘amazing’. Get them to wonder what it might have been that amazed the people in the synagogue so much about Jesus. What do they think ‘he taught them as one who had authority’ might mean?
- The morning after the ‘Day at Capernaum’ Jesus went out alone to a solitary place to pray. Ask the children to talk about any special places they have where they go to be quiet and to think (don’t pry if it’s private!). Ask them if they pray there – you could use this as an opportunity to talk gently about the role of prayer in their lives, and what they think prayer is all about. You could ask them what they think Jesus prayed for. You could end with the children finding a private place in your room, if space allows, and having a few moments of quiet in it, whilst music is played. Or you could do a ‘creative visualisation’, encouraging the children to imagine a special place where they can be alone and gain strength. (For examples of ‘creative visualisation’ techniques see *DON’T JUST DO SOMETHING, SIT THERE*, Mary K Stone, S Martin’s College, Lancashire ISBN 1 897805 01 2 – available for loan from the Diocesan Resource Centre, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, 90 Deansgate)

### **3. THE TRANSFIGURATION**

(Mark 9:2-9 – Sunday next before Lent)

- Talk about keeping secrets. Ask the children to tell each other about experiences they've had of times when someone has been asked to keep something secret (only old examples when it doesn't matter about the secret any more!) Discuss the reasons for people wanting secrets kept. Are there good secrets and bad secrets? Are there times when you shouldn't say you'll keep a secret? (NB this could lead into difficult territory if a child is/has been involved in abuse – but it could provide a valuable opportunity to support children in sticking up for themselves and not allowing themselves to be manipulated).

'Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen.' Get the children to wonder about why that might have been. Why do they think he chose those 3 friends to come up the mountain with him? Ask the children how they would choose who to tell something special to. What difficulties might the 3 disciples have faced? Get the children to improvise a scene when the 3 rejoin the other disciples – what questions might they have faced? How would they have responded?

- Hide a well known but reasonably complex household object in a fancy bag: (a) ask the children to guess what it is by asking questions to which you can only answer 'yes' or 'no'; or (b) describe what the thing is made of, its size, shape and colour(s), the different things you can do with it, and ask the children to draw it, just from the information you have given them. In either case, end by revealing the item, then ask the children what extra information they have gained now they can use their eyes. Point out that the disciples had had to do a lot of guessing about who Jesus really was, but in this story 3 of them get to use their eyes – ask the children what extra information they think the 3 got about Jesus from this experience. (For the visually impaired, the extra information could come through touch).
- Get the children to put together a 'dream team' for their favourite sport, or a 'super group' if they are more into music. They should put themselves into the team or group. Players/singers/musicians from any time, alive or dead, can be used. The children can design a strip for their team or stage outfit for their group and present the information in any way they want. Ask the children to imagine what it would be like if they were playing with the team or band they have created, and their friends came to see them. Improvise a bit of dialogue between some of their friends giving reactions to seeing them in 'star' company.

Ask the children who Moses and Elijah were. Help them find out a bit about them if they don't know, using Bible story books. Ask the children why they think Moses and Elijah were with Jesus on the mountain. How do they think the 3 disciples felt, seeing their friend Jesus with these 'star players' from God's team?

- Show some video clips of adverts containing celebrity endorsements, and collect examples from magazines. Discuss why celebrities are used in this way. Get the children to design a product and put together either a magazine advert for it, or act out a video advert, in either case featuring a celebrity to endorse the product. Discuss with them which celebrities they have chosen and why. Tell the children that Moses and Elijah were two ‘celebrities’ from Jewish history. Ask the children who they were. Help them find out a bit about them if they don’t know, then ask them why they think they were chosen to ‘endorse’ Jesus up on the mountain.
- Tell a story in which people’s views of the central character change according to the company he or she keeps or the context he or she is seen in. One example might be the story of Father Borelli who disguised himself and hung around with street gangs in Naples after WWII so that he could gain their confidence and get them to use a Christian hostel. It was only when the gang members visited the hostel and saw him in vestments with the other clergy that they realised he was a priest (see ‘Crooked Nose’ in *STORIES FROM THE CHRISTIAN WORLD*, David Self, Macdonald ISBN 0 356 11508 9 – available for loan from the Diocesan Resource Centre). Again, help the children to find out a little bit about Moses and Elijah, and ask them how the three disciples’ view of Jesus might have changed when they saw him in their company.

#### **4. PALM SUNDAY**

(Mark 11:1-11 – Palm Sunday, Liturgy of the Palms)

- Collect pictures of different forms of transport from magazines etc. and stick on separate cards. Give each child 3 or 4, with an equal number of blank cards. Ask the children to imagine a person who would use each form of transport and either draw them or write a sentence about each one on a separate blank card. Get the children to pair up and give their partner their transport cards and person cards shuffled up, and see if they can match up each person to their form of transport. Use the game as a prompt to discuss the assumptions that are made about people according to the transport they use. Ask the children what assumptions people might have made about Jesus, seeing him on a donkey.
- Watch a few minutes of a motor interest programme such as ‘Top Gear’ where different vehicles are being compared. Get the children to talk about the kind of people they think would drive each kind of car (sometimes the presenters will speculate about this) and to reflect on the assumptions they are making. As above, ask the children what assumptions people might have made about Jesus, seeing him on a donkey.

- Improvise a court scene, hearing the case of a donkey being taken without permission. Use the information from the Gospel story plus imagination. The case is heard post-Good Friday, so the court presumes Jesus cannot be called. Discuss the defence case for the disciples who took the donkey, and what the others might say when called to testify. Prime any other witnesses as to what they might say. Make sure one of the witnesses reports the words, “The Lord needs it” – the only use of this title in Mark – and that the case involves some discussion of the significance of this term. Appoint two confident children as Prosecutor and Defence Advocate to drive the improvisation along.
- Play a game that requires delicacy of touch eg ‘Pick up Sticks’ or ‘Jenga’. Then issue one child with a knight’s gauntlet (made from a glove covered in foil) and ask them to try and play the game again. Get the children to comment on the difficulties experienced. Discuss the way that some Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to be a military leader to fight the Roman’s, but they got Jesus. Talk about the way that, just as the gauntlet wasn’t much help with the game so a warrior isn’t always what’s needed in a difficult situation. Depending on the age and interest of the group, you could go on to tell them how the Jewish people took the military option against the Romans 30+ years after Jesus (Jewish Revolt 66-70AD) which resulted in disaster, defeat, and the destruction of the Temple.
- Make junk models of ‘vehicles fit for a king/queen’. Look at pictures of the Queen’s state coach or one of her limousines going past cheering crowds. Ask the children to imagine that they are in the crowd waiting for the Queen but instead of turning up in her coach or car (or the real version of one of their models!), she rides past on a donkey – what would they think, and how would they feel? Ask the children why they think Jesus chose a donkey to ride on? Add Zechariah 9: 9-10 to the discussion, explaining where the passage comes from and its significance to the Jews.
- To appropriate sound effects, mime a selection of driving/riding activities – eg driving an F1 car, a train, a lorry, riding a race horse, flying an aeroplane – making sure to include riding a donkey. Make up/act out a story about one of the drivers/riders they have just mimed plus a story about the donkey rider. Talk about the kind of person each character was. Read the story of Jesus on the donkey, and talk about what his mode of transport might tell us about the kind of person he is.

## **5. THE LAST SUPPER**

(Mark 14:22-25 – Palm Sunday, Liturgy of the Passion)

- ‘We are what we eat!’ Do one or more of the following activities to explore this point.
  - (i) Collect some ‘healthy’ diets from magazines; ask the children what foods their adult carers want them to eat and the reasons they give; refer to National Curriculum Science on ‘healthy eating’ (your local school could help with details).
  - (ii) Look at some food labels and notice all the detail given about ingredients. Discuss why people are so particular about knowing what’s in their food. Ask any vegetarians, vegans or others with special diets in the congregation if they would talk to the children about the reasons behind their diets.
  - (iii) Look at what foods do what (again National Curriculum Science can be a helpful link): which are sources of energy, which are for body building, what vitamins do. Cut out pictures of different foods and arrange under headings.

When Jesus said the bread he was sharing with his friends was his body, he was likening himself to a kind of food. In the light of the work they’ve done on food and what it can do for you, ask the children to discuss what point they think Jesus was making about himself.

- Seat the children round a table. Announce, ‘I have a gift to give,’ and place a cake in the middle of the table. Allow a pause, then ask the children what they are thinking. If no one comes up with the question, ask them if they know who is going to get the cake, if it’s for more than one person, or how it is going to be divided. Walk away with the cake, then come back with the cake and a knife. This time say, ‘I have a gift to give,’ and cut the cake into enough pieces for everyone, leaving it in the middle of the table again. After another pause, ask the children to contrast this giving with the previous occasion, then invite them to eat (if they haven’t already dived in!) Read verse 22 of chapter 14 and point out that Jesus *broke* the bread before offering it to his disciples. In the light of the cake exercise, ask the children what they think was the point of breaking the bread.
- Go through the different foods that Jews have at the Passover meal, and what they symbolise (see *EXAMINING RELIGIONS – JUDAISM*, Arye Forta, Heinemann ISBN 0 435 30321 X – available for loan from the Diocesan Resource Centre; or perhaps someone from a local synagogue could come to talk to the children). It would help if the children could see and taste the foods. Get the children to think of other kinds of food, and make suggestions as to symbolic meanings that could be given to them. Jesus likened himself to bread – ask the children to suggest symbolic meanings that could be given to bread. If you have invited a member of the Jewish faith to be with you, they will tell you that sharing bread and wine in the family on Friday night to start the Sabbath is a regular part of their faith. You could ask them if they attach any symbolic meaning to the bread on this occasion.

- Gather the children round a table covered with a white cloth on which has been placed a clear glass jug containing blackcurrant juice, one clear drinking glass, and a picture of the crucifixion. Pour juice into the glass, and say, “Jesus said to his friends, ‘This is my blood.’” Ask the children to spend a moment thinking what the disciples might have made of that. Then ask them to spend a moment thinking what *they* make of it. Now set out as many clear drinking glasses round the jug as there are children and adults present, and pour into them until all contain some juice and the jug is empty. Say, “Jesus told his friends, ‘This is my blood .. which is poured out for many’” and again, ask the children to think about what that might have meant to the disciples, and what it means to them personally. Leave the table and gather in a different part of the room for the children to share the thoughts they have had. Return to the table and spend a few more moments looking at the filled glasses and the empty jug as the words, “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many” are said. You could conclude by inviting the children and adults to drink the juice. Suitable music could be played at this point, and during each period of reflection.

(NB Start this activity by emphasising that the juice you will be using is not communion wine, but is just there to help the children think about communion and the Last Supper. If you want to finish with the children drinking the juice, make sure they understand they are not taking communion).

## **6. CAESAREA PHILIPPI**

(Mark 8:27-33 – Proper 19)

[Proper 19 is the Sunday between 11 & 17 September inclusive]

This incident is placed as a ‘hinge’ in the centre of the Gospel. However, the Lectionary makes use of it late on in the Trinity season, so if you cover this reading at the point in the year when it is found in the Lectionary, it will come as the last in your special series on Mark. You may well find this appropriate as the nub of the Caesarea Philippi story is Jesus’s question: “Who do you say I am?” and this is the question the earlier sessions have been designed to help with.

- If this is to be the culmination of your sessions on the Gospel of Mark, produce a reminder of each of the preceding sessions, and ask the children what they remember from each one. Those who were present can help those who were not – between them, the group ought to be able to recall some of the material covered in each session. Read 8:27-29a (ie leave out Peter’s answer) and ask the children what their answers would be in the light of all the work they have done about Jesus. Ask the children to reflect quietly for a few moments on the answers that have all come up with and decide which is the most important for them personally at this time in their lives.

- Get the children to nominate 6 well known celebrities. Ask a volunteer to choose to be one of the celebrities, but keep their identity a secret. The rest have to guess which of the 6 celebrities the child is imagining they are, by asking questions which only have a yes/no answer. Repeat as appropriate, then pick 6 occupations (teacher, gardener, shopkeeper etc) and get a volunteer to imagine being one of them whilst the others attempt to identify which with yes/no questioning. After more repetition, discuss how much a name and occupation really tells us about someone. Ask a volunteer to describe someone they know well – preferably in the group, or in church – without using their name, occupation, gender, age, or physical appearance. Can anyone guess who is being described? Ask the child doing the describing how they found out about the things they have just said. Ask all the children how they think the disciples gathered information to help them decide who Jesus *really* was.
- Read a Mr Man book out to the children without saying the character’s name – Perhaps blow a horn or similar noise, every time the name comes up in the story. Give the children a list of the Mr Men characters, or a photocopy of the pictures of the characters from the back of one of the books, and ask the children to guess which character the story was about. Repeat with other Mr Men books as appropriate. Ask the children how they make their guesses. Ask them how they think the disciples tried to work out who Jesus was.
- Give the children 5 pieces of card and on each ask them to write or draw a different feature of their life (possession, person, activity etc) that is important to them. Then ask them to set the cards out in rank order, starting with the most important going down to the least important. Now give them a series of ‘deals’: which important item(s) from their list would they be prepared to give up for – a chocolate bar; A ticket to whatever is the current hit film; a new Playstation game; a day at Disney land; a meal with their favourite star; the opportunity to cheer a friend up; the opportunity to help make someone well who is seriously ill; the opportunity to save someone’s life. Talk about how the activity made them feel. Remind them that Jesus said he would have to suffer many things and be killed – ask the children what they think might be worth going through that for.
- Ask the children to imagine that someone has just said to them, “I’m going to run into a burning building.” What would the children say to the person? You could act this out, with an adult leader playing the part of the person who is going into the building. The children can put forward whatever arguments they want, to stop the person; the person only responds by saying that they *want* to go into the building; it’s very important to them; it’s just something they have to do etc. After a few minutes, stop the scenario and ask the children why they think the person kept on saying they wanted to go into the fire. Re-run the scenario, but this time the person says, “I’m going to run into a burning building – I’m a fireman.” What do the children say to the person now? Read verses 31-33 and ask the children to discuss, in the light of the fireman exercise, why Peter and Jesus got cross with each other.

## **7. HOW DO YOU FEEL?**

The central mystery of Jesus is the union of the human and divine in his person. As we have seen, the Gospel of Mark stresses Jesus's humanity by reference to his feelings. In our work on the stories of Jesus this year, we could reflect this emphasis by using techniques that are designed to heighten the children's awareness of Jesus's feelings at important moments in the Gospel story. Here are some examples.

The children could be asked to:

- ~ Pick a colour or colours that seem to reflect what they think Jesus's feelings would be at a given moment, and use them in some abstract art work. (Material and cut or torn coloured paper can be used as well as paint).
- ~ Choose a song or piece of music that reminds them of the mood they think Jesus would be in.
- ~ Make up a rhythm or melody to illustrate Jesus's feelings as they see them, and dance to it in ways which also go with the feelings.
- ~ Imagine that the inside of Jesus's head is a room, and draw the decorations for it, to reflect how they think he's feeling.
- ~ As a leader reads a story of Jesus, take up physical positions that illustrate the feelings they think he is having.
- ~ Design masks to show how they think Jesus is feeling at the crucial moment in a story.
- ~ Draw cartoon frames telling a Gospel story, and put in 'thinks' balloons over Jesus's head, which they fill in to show the thoughts and feelings they imagine he is having.

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