

THROUGH THE YEAR WITH JESUS!

A once-a-month children's programme
for small churches

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CONTENTS

Foreword	6
How to use this book.....	7
Introduction.....	9
Themed programmes	
Theme 1: Baptism	20
Theme 2: Faith	30
Theme 3: Prayer	44
Theme 4: Miracles.....	56
Theme 5: Parables	66
Theme 6: Blessings	81
Theme 7: Forgiveness	93
Theme 8: Transfiguration.....	104
Theme 9: Jesus' friends	114
Theme 10: Jesus and me	127
Theme 11: God with us	136
Summer activity programme or stand-alone activity days	
The 'I am' sayings of Jesus	150
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Sample programme plan	182
Appendix 2: Templates	
<i>Dove mobiles</i>	183
<i>Stained-glass window candles</i>	184
<i>Acorn badges</i>	185
<i>Paper chain people</i>	186
<i>Cockerel feather collage</i>	187
<i>Tessellating birds</i>	188
<i>Activity figures</i>	189
<i>'I am' display: world stencil</i>	190
<i>Sheep frieze</i>	191
<i>'I am' display: Hebrew letters</i>	191
Bibliography.....	192

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book contains all you need to plan through-the-year workshop programmes for children, exploring themes surrounding the life of Jesus. There is material for eleven workshops (one for each month except August, if you wish) plus a five-day summer activity programme. Each programme is designed to last approximately two hours, although this timescale can be shortened or lengthened according to need. Each workshop contains:

- ★ Suggestions for Bible stories based on the theme
- ★ Suggestions for creating a display for the church
- ★ Craft activities
- ★ Games
- ★ Suggestions for prayer

The ideas are intended to be used on a pick-and-mix basis to help you create your own programme. Since so much depends on the age, interests and abilities of the children, you may find that activities will take longer or much less time. Therefore, the timings given are guidelines only. Activities could also be run simultaneously, so that the children move in groups from one activity to the next if time and space round the tables is short.

TIMING

Each activity is designed to last between 10 and 15 minutes. Sample plans for each workshop, showing an outline programme for younger and older children, can be found on the website:

www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/throughtheyearwithjesus.

The suggested activities for creating a display for the church are designed to last between 15 and 20 minutes. However, depending on the age and ability of the children, more time can be spent on them if required.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Visit the Barnabas website, www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk, for additional material, including extra ideas and articles on integrating children's work into the wider congregation (especially important if your children meet at a time other than Sunday morning).

All the templates for the activities (see pages 183–191), as well as the sample plans for each workshop, can be downloaded free of charge from the website:

www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/throughtheyearwithjesus

INTRODUCTION

THE RURAL CONTEXT

The material in this book is based on the experience of working with children in a rural context. However, many of the principles applied to the rural setting are equally relevant to an urban, suburban or larger town situation. Due to low numbers and the dispersion of the community, children's work in small rural communities can be immensely challenging, and it is often not possible to presuppose that the work can follow the traditional model of meeting each week on Sunday morning while the adults attend the morning service. Therefore, it is paramount to consider a range of concerns, which may, of course, also apply to non-rural situations. The concerns include:

- ★ The best day and time for your children's work.
- ★ The best place to hold your meetings.
- ★ The best mixture of activities.
- ★ Who will be responsible for which task.
- ★ How to advertise your club.
- ★ How to identify suitable sources of funding.
- ★ How to ensure that all child protection and health and safety measures are in place.
- ★ What to do about potential difficulties, such as lack of toilets or kitchen facilities.

OPPORTUNITIES AND ADVANTAGES

The challenge of working with a small number of children also provides an ideal opportunity for encouragement and reward. For

example, small numbers mean that you will be able to get to know and serve individual children far better. Also, you have the advantage of being able to tailor your children's work to your own individual requirements.

Don't worry if you don't have a limitless expenses fund and all the state-of-the-art technology on the market. Concentrate instead on making your programmes imaginative, creative and unique. The enjoyment the children get out of your sessions will not depend on technology; that is only a means to an end. Also, if you are lacking a nicely furnished, carpeted, warm room, make sure you use the symbolism, images and atmosphere available in the building you do use—especially if it is the church. The church building is entirely different from any other the children are likely to enter on a regular basis. The children will appreciate that it is special, particularly if you make their time there special too.

Don't worry if you are unable to run a Sunday school on a Sunday morning. It is far better practice and richer in spiritual terms if the children are welcomed as part of the normal pattern of worship along with adult members of the congregation. Having the children present will also help adults and children to learn from each other in their understanding of faith and the Bible, so encourage your church leadership to ensure that provision is made to include children fully in Sunday worship.

Use your workshop times productively by keeping the teaching focused. Rather than coming to church on a regular basis, some children may only attend the monthly workshop, so this will be a golden opportunity for them to hear the basic stories of Christianity—perhaps for the first time.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

As you would expect, if children's work is to be successful it needs careful planning and preparation. Some of the activities in this book

require more preparation than others, but time spent in this area is always worthwhile. Make sure you give the children good-quality resources to use. It is a good idea to try out the ideas at home first, so that you know how they work and can show the children a finished example.

Alongside the workshop ideas, you may wish to add songs or percussion music to your programme. As well as using your own style of music and favourite songs, it is a good idea to find out what songs the children sing at school and use this information to enlarge your repertoire.

You will also need to give some consideration to the presentation of stories. This can be varied from programme to programme by using different storytelling methods. For example, you could use a child-friendly Bible translation, such as the Contemporary English Version, or a children's storytelling Bible, such as *The Barnabas Children's Bible* (Barnabas, 2007). Alternatively, you could tell the story using visual aids, actions, mime or drama, or by using the methodology of Godly Play (see www.godlyplay.org.uk).

INTEGRATING CHILDREN'S WORK WITHIN THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

One of the problems that may arise if your children's work does not operate on a Sunday morning is that the adult congregation may forget, or be unaware of, what is available for children. The ideas below should ensure that the profile is kept high and that everyone is encouraged to pray for the children's activities.

IDENTITY

Choose a suitable name for your group and display it prominently in the church building. For example, you could make a simple

banner with the name painted on it and children's handprints to decorate it. Also, make sure there are articles and advertisements in your church magazine, using your group name.

CHILDREN'S COUNCIL

Having a link between the children and the church council (or your equivalent) is a very useful way to ensure that your church leaders are informed about the children's work. This can also serve as a valuable way of setting up communication links, but make sure that it is two-way communication. You might want to consider having your children's leader or a representative specifically for children and young people on the church council.

To make the communication process easier, you might consider setting up a children's council. Many schools have children's councils, so children are often used to being asked for and articulating their views. If children's opinions are sought and respected in schools and other contexts, churches need to make sure children are also given a voice in the church setting. A children's church council will give the children a chance to air their views, with regard to their own activities and to the life of the church as a whole. Adult members of the congregation may learn more about the spiritual maturity of children in their midst from this process than they might anticipate.

WORSHIP

If the children's activities are run outside normal service times, there is a danger that all-age worship may be put slightly lower on the list of priorities. To remedy this, and to remind the rest of the worshipping community about the children, it is important to ensure that children and their families can be welcomed at any service. Families need to have the opportunity to worship together, as well as provision being made for children to learn about faith together, with suitable activities

and stories. Alongside the mainstream services, you may wish to find ways for the children also to make a special contribution to the celebration of a major festival.

LOCAL LINKS

Local organizations, of which your church is one, can provide useful links. For example, your local school might find the resource of your church building very useful, not only for the provision of the RE curriculum but also for holding large festival assemblies, attended by parents as well as children. Schools often invite professional people to take assemblies, and children's work leaders are likely candidates for an invitation. An added bonus to visiting the school is that pupils will get to know you and what you do. Word of mouth spreads quickly, and more children may be interested in coming to church-based activities and events. Also, the local school may be a willing source for items such as harvest gifts or displays to decorate the church.

Other organizations or clubs might be able to contribute specialist themes. For example, a flower arranger could help the children to create special church decorations or something for Mothering Sunday, someone from the historical society could talk to the children about the locality, a local artist could demonstrate different media, and so on.

LONGER-TERM PROJECTS

The children may enjoy being involved in slightly longer-term projects, such as producing their own version of the church guide. You could use the celebration of Pentecost as a starting point. Think about how the church is the people rather than the building, and invite the children to write and draw pictures about how different people contribute. Don't leave out the fascinating information about

the building, but present it in a way that interests and involves the children. You could include a plan of the church and a treasure hunt, which sends them round the building looking for historical clues. A photograph of a stained-glass window could be traced to produce a colouring page for younger children. Include children's pictures and ideas mixed with photographs, and adult-produced maps and puzzles.

If you have any keen needleworkers, you could organize a design-a-kneeler project. If your church already has modern handmade kneelers and you know of a supplier, you simply need to measure your existing kneelers. If this is not the case, suppliers can be found via the Internet or through church journals. The children draw their design on a piece of A3 paper, using bold shapes and bright colours. Members of the adult congregation can then get involved by either stitching the designs or sponsoring the materials needed to make up the kneelers. The number of designs needed will depend on the number of stitchers and sponsors.

You can buy blank kneeler kits from suppliers and, using a squared grid, you will be able to work out how much of each coloured thread you will need to complete each design (not forgetting the sides, of course). You may need to adapt colours slightly for financial and aesthetic reasons. Transferring the design itself is easy: by placing the picture (or a copy of it) underneath the canvas, the design can be drawn on using felt-tipped pen. After a few weeks' work, you will have a series of colourful, original and highly unusual kneelers for your church. It's a nice idea to stitch the designer's name and age on the side of the kneeler for posterity. Fuller instructions for this activity can be found on the website: www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/nsns (Click on 'Download the additional material'.)

CHILD PROTECTION AND HEALTH AND SAFETY

It is essential that you give both child protection and health and safety considerable attention. Your diocese (or equivalent) should be able to provide you with detailed information about what is required and how to go about fulfilling the requirements. It is vitally important that all your helpers have Criminal Records Bureau clearance and that you comply with the law by making sure that you run your sessions with proper attention to child protection and health and safety. Remember that the safeguards are there to protect not only the children who are in your care but also the adult helpers. Where you need assistance, ask for help. Obtaining clearance and holding records can easily be done by someone who wishes to support your children's work but may not be able to offer any physical help.

CHILD PROTECTION

Make sure you know how a child's disclosure of neglect or abuse at home should be handled. Check this with your diocese or equivalent. You are likely to find that there is someone nominated by the diocese to deal with these issues, which will avoid the situation (particularly destructive in close-knit communities) of neighbours being told, or perhaps the minister becoming aware of too much detail, which could make it difficult for him or her to continue to support the whole family. You may think that this scenario is unlikely in a small community where everyone appears to know everyone else's business, but we can never be sure what goes on behind closed doors. Waiting until after the disclosure has been made before finding out how it should have been handled is too late.

Check the requirements for the ratio of adults to children at your sessions. This will depend on the age of the children present, but you should always have enough adults to ensure that there are at

least two present at any time with any child. Allow for the possibility of one adult having to leave the room for some reason: there should always be two left behind.

FIRST AID

At least one adult in each session should be a qualified first aider. If you need more people to be qualified, find out about local training courses for child first aid.

REGISTRATION

Make sure you have documentation giving information about the children in your care. A simple registration form will suffice. It should give the name and date of birth of the child, contact details including emergency contact details, information about any allergies and the name of the child's doctor. Permission for things like administration of first aid and taking of photographs could also be included.

A signing in and signing out form for parents as they drop and collect children will ensure that you know which children are present at any time. You will need to know exactly how and when this form will be completed so that it is always accurate. The form should include space for a parent to notify you if someone else will be collecting their children.

Sample forms for registration, parental consent and signing in and out can be found on the website: www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/nsns (Click on 'Download the additional material'.)

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Carry out a risk assessment by viewing the building or room(s) you will be using from a child's point of view. Take particular note of doors that may need to be watched to ensure that children don't escape during the session.

If you are using an ancient church building, be aware of steep stone steps, unguarded heaters, things that are shouting out to be climbed, or other hazards. Such hazards may not preclude the use of the building, but some will need to be dealt with, for example, by placing secure guards around heaters and designating certain areas as out-of-bounds. No room can ever be completely safe, but you must take every precaution to safeguard the children in your care.

Make sure that the electrical checks on wiring and equipment, and the fire extinguisher checks, are all up to date and that you have appropriate insurance cover. Check this with your PCC or governing council if you are unsure.

Some of the activities in this book suggest lighting candles, so for these you will need to make sure that children keep a safe distance. In addition, you should have fire precaution materials to hand (water or sand), and a candle extinguisher.

Finally, make sure you know where the fire exits are, and that they are accessible in the event of fire.



THEMED PROGRAMMES



Theme 1

BAPTISM: THE NAME GAME

KEY BIBLE FOCUS: MATTHEW 3:13–17

Although many children may be familiar with the term ‘baptism’, some may not have experienced a service of baptism or seen photographs of their own baptism. The symbolism associated with baptism is particularly rich and worth exploring to help children gain an insight into God’s care for us.

BIBLE STORIES

The story of Jesus’ baptism at the very beginning of his ministry provides an ideal introduction to the theme. The story can be told by using a children’s storytelling Bible, such as *The Barnabas Children’s Bible*, or a modern version of the Bible, such as the Contemporary English Version. Alternatively, the story can be told using visual aids, such as a story cloth and simple figures. You may also wish to tell the story using a simple version of the baptism liturgy, lighting a candle for each child present and using a doll to show how baptism is performed. There is a helpful script for a re-enactment of a baptism in the book *Living Church* by Murray McBride (Barnabas, 2006).

DISPLAYS FOR THE CHURCH

You could make a display using the dove mobiles activity below. However, the range of items used in the craft activities picks up the symbols of water, oil, the dove and the scallop shell, all of which are key symbols associated with baptism. These craft items would therefore make an ideal display to set up in the church building. You might also include artefacts used in the storytelling and a printed copy of the story itself. The display could be placed on a table covered with a blue cloth, or set up in front of a display board decorated with photographs of the children's work.

CRAFT ACTIVITIES

DOVES MOBILE

You will need: pre-cut dove shapes with slots cut in them (see template on page 183); strong cotton thread; hole punch; coloured paper for wings; garden sticks; felt-tipped pens or collage materials; PVA glue.

Chat about it

The dove is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit, which was seen to alight on Jesus as he came up out of the water after his baptism by John the Baptist.

Make it

Give each child a dove shape and ask them to decorate their doves using felt-tipped pens or collage materials. Make sure they keep the wing slot free. Fold the paper for the wings concertina-style and thread the folded paper through the wing slot. Open the folds out on either side to make the wings. Punch a hole in each dove as marked, and thread with cotton. Hang the finished doves from the garden sticks, tying them at different heights to create a mobile. For the wings, paper that has a different colour on each side can be very effective.

PAINTED SHELLS

You will need: scallop shells; acrylic paint; water; brushes.

Chat about it

Scallop shells were used as an emblem for Christian pilgrims in the Middle Ages and a shell is often used in baptism to pour water over the person being baptized. Once a person is baptized, he or she becomes a Christian pilgrim, seeking to follow Jesus.

Make it

You may be able to obtain scallop shells from a local fishmonger, or look out for them on the beach or in tourist shops in seaside holiday resorts. You will need to wash the shells thoroughly and dry them. Invite the children to decorate the shells using acrylic paint. They may find it easier to follow the grain of the shell than to make patterns across the grain. Older children may wish to attempt a picture across the grain, but younger children may enjoy following

the grain with different colours and patterns. Allow time for the shells to dry before giving them to the children to take home.

MARBLING

You will need: a water tray; water; marbling ink (available from craft shops); paper; plastic spoons.

Chat about it

Water and oil are both key symbols in baptism. Water symbolizes purity and sustenance (washing and living). Oil is used to anoint the baptism candidate, marking him or her as a member of God's family. It is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Make it

Pour some water into the tray so that it is roughly 2–3cm deep. Ask each child to write their name on a piece of paper. In turn, each child will need to choose which colour inks they want to use. (It is best to use no more than three colours for each piece of paper.) Add a dose of each of the chosen coloured inks and give the water a very gentle swirl with a spoon if required. Then invite the child to lay the paper very gently on top of the water. Remove the paper after a couple of seconds, allowing the water to drip back into the tray. Put the paper to one side to dry. It is a good idea to take a second 'copy' to use up any remaining ink before the next child has his or her turn. You will need to experiment before the session starts so that you can judge how much ink you need for each paper.

OIL PASTEL PICTURES

You will need: oil pastels; good-quality paper.

Chat about it

The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity. Explain to the children how God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all present at Jesus' baptism.

Make it

Show the children how to experiment with blending colours on the paper and smudging them to obtain interesting effects. Invite them to make some pictures connected to the symbols of baptism (such as oil or water), or showing their own ideas about how God's Holy Spirit became visible at Jesus' baptism.

ILLUMINATED NAMES

You will need: book of babies' names; paper; ink; small brushes (alternatively, you might wish to use tempura paint or gel pens).

Chat about it

Discuss with the children why we have names. Talk about surnames or family names; perhaps some children will have been named after other members of their family. Then talk about the fact that names often have a significant meaning. Use the name book to look up the

meanings of the children's names. If anyone's name isn't in the book, the child might know an interesting story to go with his or her name.

With older children, you might like to take the discussion further by talking about what they would like to be called and why—concentrating particularly on the meaning of names. Then you might ask each child to think of an appropriate name for someone else in the group. Make sure that they consider good qualities only. Children might want to make up their own names for their friends to indicate their positive characteristics.

Make it

Show the children a book of illuminated manuscripts and look at how the initial letter or word is often decorated and embellished. If you are using tempura paints, older children could help to mix them. While you are mixing, explain that tempura was used before there were oil paints, and artists often had their own recipes for the various colours. Invite the children to make an illuminated picture of their name using the chosen materials. They could add things to the picture that are precious to them, or pictures of important events in their lives, their homes or school or friends.

STAINED-GLASS WINDOW CANDLES

You will need: black card; cellophane or tissue paper; glue sticks; scissors.

Chat about it

Remind the children that candles are given at baptism to the newly baptized person as a symbol of Christ's light in their life.

Make it

In advance, cut a candle design stencil (see page 184) out of the card. Invite the children to glue pieces of tissue paper or cellophane to the back of the stencil. Cellophane will give a clearer, brighter colour; tissue paper will diffuse the light more readily. Display the candles in a window for a stained-glass effect.

GAMES

BUBBLES

You will need: bubble mixture and blowers (one per child).

Chat about it

Think about the times when we find bubbles, such as when we are washing or cleaning our teeth. Remind the children that part of the symbolism of baptism is about spiritual washing.

Play it

Playing with bubbles is always irresistible and the idea is really to let the children have fun. Either allow the children to play freely with the bubbles or set up competitions, such as seeing who can blow the biggest bubble, the most bubbles in one go, the bubble that lasts longest or the bubble that floats highest. Make sure that the children observe basic safety measures, such as not pushing each other or indulging in horseplay.

WATER-CARRYING RACES

You will need: water; containers.

Chat about it

Talk to the children about how water is used in baptism to symbolize spiritual washing: the person being baptized shows a desire to turn away from wrongdoing and follow Jesus. Remind the children that in some parts of the world (including the Holy Land) water is scarce and therefore a precious commodity.

Play it

If your session takes place in the summer, it may be possible to go outside and hold water-carrying races. The idea is simply that children carry as much water as they can from one end of the course to the other in various containers as quickly as possible. Fast runners could be handicapped with leaky containers!

PRAYERS

BUBBLES

You will need: bubble mixture and blowers.

As well as generating great excitement, bubbles can also be used for prayers. Blow bubbles in the thinking time between sections of prayer, and watch them float away. (If you are using bubble-blowing

as a game, it might be wise not to expect the children to behave more seriously with them only minutes later in prayer time!)

PRAYING WITH WATER

You will need: water; a container such as a font or glass bowl.

A font makes a wonderful focus for prayer, but if you don't have access to a font, a glass bowl will be fine. Fill the font or bowl with water. Talk about the children's own baptism, whether it is past or still to come (you will need to be sensitive to those children who have not been baptized), and its importance. Invite those present to come to the water and dip their fingers in. Let them think about what a wonderful part of creation water is. If they wish, they could make the sign of the cross on their own foreheads.

ACTIVE CONFESSION

In each line in the confession below, perform the action indicated by the words in the line.

Leader: When we come to say sorry to God, we can say it
in a very special way.

First of all, we wash our hands for the wrong
things we have done this week.

All mime washing hands.

Leader: Then we gently wash our eyes for the wrong things
we have seen.

All mime washing eyes.

Leader: Then we wash our ears for the wrong things we have listened to.

All mime washing ears.

Leader: Then we wash our mouths for the wrong things we have said.

All mime washing mouths.

Leader: Then we very gently wash our minds for the wrong things we have thought.

All mime washing minds by rubbing forehead.

Leader: Then we gently wash our hearts for the wrong things we have felt.

All mime washing hearts by rubbing chest.

Leader: When we say sorry to God, he forgives us for all the times we have turned away from him and wraps us in the big, warm towel of his love.

All mime being wrapped up in a fluffy towel.

Leader: Thank you, Lord God, for making us clean.

All: Amen