Westminster Abbey
Learning

Why do Christians go on pilgrimage? – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this five-question survey.

Learning Objectives: To understand and explain why Christians go on pilgrimage

SLIDE 3: Today we will be able to:

- Explain why Christians go on pilgrimage
- Discuss the difference between a pilgrimage and a holiday
- Talk about what a spiritual journey is
- Discuss why pilgrims might travel to Westminster Abbey

SLIDE 4: Using the discussion questions about journeys, aim to link to holidays and school trips as the session will refer to these later.

Have you been on any journeys today? (School, childminder's, breakfast club, train station.) Remind children that walking is a journey and that it doesn't need to be a mode of powered transport.

What other journeys do we go on? (Visiting friends, holidays, school trips.)

SLIDE 5: Lead to the key question of 'why did we go on our last school trip?' We went to have fun, learn something, experience something different/in real life. Establish with children that there is often more than one single purpose.

Was the journey part of the trip? Perhaps they even enjoyed the journey as much as/more than the trip!

SLIDES 6 & 7: A Pilgrimage is a special journey

Explain that today we will be learning about a special kind of journey called a 'pilgrimage'. Has anyone heard this word before?

Where might people go on pilgrimage? We're going to use these images to help us work out what a pilgrimage might be. Work in pairs to discuss which might be places people go on pilgrimage. If you prefer, print the slide off and ask children to cut and sort the images.

Take feedback from students, exploring that pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place. Discuss why some journeys might be special, like a holiday to Disneyland, but that this place isn't 'holy'. A holy place is one dedicated to God, sometimes this is called 'sacred' too. Explain that today we'll be focusing on why Christians go on pilgrimages.

© 2023 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

Mecca is a holy site of pilgrimage for Muslims. Rome is one holy site of pilgrimage for many Christians.

SLIDE 8: Click to play the film about pilgrimage to Westminster Abbey.

SLIDE 9: Pilgrims

A person who goes on a pilgrimage is called a 'pilgrim'.

Why is a pilgrimage different to a holiday?

If you prefer, in their books ask children to draw two outlines of people/stick people, or print out the images in Activity 2 for children to annotate in groups or in pairs. Ask children to record what is the same between the two, and record what is different.

(Helpful questions for children might be: what are the people hoping to see? Do? Gain from the experience? Think about the senses, touch, smell, taste, see, hear? How will they travel? There might not be an answer for all of these!)

Collate feedback together on the board. Examples might include:

Similarities: travelling to locations, time to sit and think, experience a new location.

Differences: pilgrims might spend time praying, holiday maker relaxes on beach, holiday maker goes to have fun, pilgrim wants to spend time with God.

SLIDE 10: Spiritual journeys

Part of what makes a pilgrim's journey different to someone on holiday is that it is not just a physical journey to a place. It is also a spiritual journey. Explain to the children that to help understand what that is, we are going to go for a short walk. On the walk, ask the children to think quietly about how they have changed since starting at the school.

(The walk does not need to be longer than a couple of minutes. If possible, take the children briefly outside.)

SLIDES 10 & 11: Spiritual journeys

When you have returned and they are sat down inside, explain that the physical journey was the one we made with our bodies. The spiritual journey was the one we made in our minds, thinking about how we have changed. Did anyone notice anything on the physical journey that helped them remember how they had changed? (e.g. size of play equipment, reception playground, places they line up, classroom locations, where they go into school.)

Spiritual journeys happen inside of us, although other people might notice a difference in how we behave or think.

SLIDES 12 & 13: Spiritual journeys

© 2023 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

When a pilgrim goes on their journey, they might spend a lot of time thinking, looking at nature and the world around them as they travel, and praying.

What might pilgrims say to God and think about on their pilgrimage? (Ensure you use the word 'might' – there is scope for many right answers.)

Discuss in 'pair, square, share': children discuss initially in pairs, then 'square' with another pair to share ideas, then finally share their square's thoughts with the class. Ensure that discussions include that pilgrims might be saying thank you, sorry, or ask for God's guidance and help or blessing. They might be looking for an answer or thinking about what to do next in their life.

SLIDE 14: Why here?

One of the places a Christian pilgrim might travel to is a Cathedral or an Abbey. These are very large churches that were built to glorify or praise God.

Westminster Abbey was built in 1065 by St Edward the Confessor, although it has been altered and adapted by subsequent monarchs.

SLIDES 15 & 16: Westminster Abbey

Some Christians go on pilgrimage to the shrine (tomb) of St Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey. Westminster Abbey was built was because he had promised to go on pilgrimage to Rome, however due to the turmoil around the throne, Edward didn't think he could leave England. He asked for special permission from the Pope not to honour his commitment and go to Rome. Building the Abbey was what the Pope asked him to do in order to glorify God in a different way.

SLIDE 17: So why do Christian pilgrims go to Westminster Abbey on pilgrimage?

Use the stories about Edward to help children work out why people might come to Westminster Abbey and more specifically to the Shrine of Edward the Confessor. You might like to use this as a Guided Reading Activity, or have children work in ability groups for the different stories.

Once children have read the stories, share a summary and a reason why pilgrims might go to visit the Shrine of Edward the Confessor by using these two questions.

- What made Edward the Confessor special?
- Why might Christian pilgrims want to visit his shrine?

Stories about St Edward the Confessor:

<u>The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus</u>

According to a legend, in about 300 AD a group of young Greek Christians hid in a cave because being a Christian at that time was dangerous. God put these seven Christians to sleep for 200 years, and when they woke up they were no longer in danger. Soon after this they died and were buried lying on their right sides. Hundreds of years later, Edward had a vision that the Sleepers had turned from their right to

© 2023 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

their left sides. Messengers were sent from England to examine the tomb and when they opened it up they discovered it was true, just as Edward had said!

The Legend of the Ring

One day King Edward was visiting St John's Church. A poor man came up to him and begged for some money to buy food saying 'for the love of St John please help me'. Edward wanted to help him but when he checked his purse there was no money in it and he couldn't find his servant to help him. Edward remembered he was wearing a large and very precious ring. He took it off and gave it to the poor man saying 'for the love of St John please take this ring.' The poor man thanked him and went away. Edward gave him the ring because he was generous and wanted to love people like Jesus did.

On the same day, two English pilgrims had got lost while they were on pilgrimage in Israel. They were afraid of robbers and wild animals but then some angels appeared before them with an old man. The pilgrims explained that they were from England and on pilgrimage to ask forgiveness for their sins. The old man said he would take them to a safe place in the city. The next morning, they learnt that the man was St John. He gave them the same ring that King Edward had given him. He sent them back to England saying they would arrive safely back and should return the ring to the King. He also sent a message for Edward that he would go to heaven soon to be with John and Jesus.

The Viking King

One day, Edward the Confessor was attending Mass (a church service). While he was there he had a vision that a Viking King was preparing to invade England in a large ship. But in this vision as the king was stepping from his small rowing boat onto the ship, he slipped and fell into the sea. He drowned and the ship broke into pieces. At the end of the Mass, Edward found out that the Viking king had drowned at exactly the time Edward had experienced the vision.

Edward is made a Saint

One hundred years after Edward had died, King Henry II and the Prior of Westminster, Osbert de Clare, really admired King Edward. Osbert travelled to Rome, telling people about Edward on the way. When he got to Rome he asked the Pope to make Edward a saint for the miracles pilgrims had experienced when they came to his tomb. The Pope agreed to make Edward a saint. He was given the name 'Edward the Confessor' because he used to 'confess' or tell people about Jesus' love for them, and showed that love in his own life.

SLIDES 18 - 20: The Canterbury Tales and pilgrims

Westminster Abbey is the burial place of many monarchs and famous people. One area is known as Poets' Corner due the large number of poets and writers remembered or buried there. One is the grave of a writer called Geoffrey Chaucer who wrote the Canterbury Tales, a very famous story about pilgrims between 1387 and 1400.

Ask children which of these pilgrims he wrote about might have travelled on pilgrimage together? (Activity 3). This could be done in pairs and may be best done practically through printing the slide and

© 2023 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

children connecting the pilgrims with lines, or cutting them out and placing them together. Ask children to explain why they have said particular pilgrims might travel together.

Explain that they all travelled together. It didn't matter who was rich or poor or that these people were very different. Sometimes the journey would be very difficult (they didn't have cars and planes then) but everyone was also on their own spiritual journey. This is still true today - any Christian can go on a pilgrimage although it is not a compulsory element of the faith.

SLIDE 21: How would you recognise another pilgrim?

Pilgrims used to wear scallop shells so they could be easily identified as a pilgrim. It meant they might be offered lodging or food on their journey and could recognise one another. For children, this links to the idea of logos on their school uniform.

SLIDE 22: Why do Christians go to Westminster Abbey today?

Three possible reasons Christians might visit the Abbey as pilgrims are shared.

The Shrine of St Edward the Confessor is special as it is one of only two shrines still containing the body of a saint. Pilgrims visiting the shrine were said to have experienced miracles, and Edward himself is said to have seen visions that were true.

SLIDE 23: Pilgrimage

Christians are not required to go on a pilgrimage as part of their faith, however they might choose to because they want to go on a spiritual journey. The map includes some other locations that Christian pilgrims might visit in the United Kingdom. From North to South, the map shows Iona, Walsingham and Westminster Abbey.

SLIDE 24: Quick Quiz

How is a pilgrimage different from a holiday? A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred or holy place. It also involves a spiritual journey as well as a physical one. You might go on a holiday for fun but go on a pilgrimage in order to spend time with God.

What is the difference between a physical and spiritual journey? A physical journey is one made with our bodies and a spiritual one is made within ourselves.

What might Christians do while on pilgrimage? They might travel together, talk, look at nature, pray, say sorry or thank you to God, ask for blessing or healing.

Why do Christians travel to Westminster Abbey on pilgrimage? Christians go to Westminster Abbey to visit the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor.

Why was St Edward the Confessor special? He was the King of England from 1042 to 1066 and he was a generous and kind king. He had visions and was said to perform miracles.

© 2023 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

Discussion points

If you would like to discuss pilgrimage further with your class, here are some questions for them to think about and explore**.**

How might pilgrims travel?

Do you think it is easier to go on pilgrimage today?

Are there situations when pilgrimage might be harder for some people? (e.g. It might be harder for people with physical disabilities to make a physical journey. It might be harder for people with young children or older relatives to make a journey with them.)

© 2023 Dean and Chapter of Westminster