**BACKGROUND NOTES FOR TEACHERS**

**ADVENT/CHRISTMAS – LOVING**

**Context**

The Advent/Christmas – Loving theme considers Christians’ preparation for the gift of God’s love in Jesus which is celebrated by Christians at Christmas. It focuses on the witness of loving as a way of life.

**The season of Advent and the three-fold coming**

Advent marks the beginning of the Church’s year. The word ADVENT comes from the Latin word

‘adventus’ which means ‘arrival’, ‘coming’ or ‘a drawing near’. During Advent, Christians focus on preparing for a three-fold coming.

* The coming of Christ in history (the birth of Jesus which we celebrate on December 25) and a remembrance of how the people of God waited expectantly for the Messiah;
* How Advent encourages believers to prepare to meet Jesus who comes every day in their lives;
* That believers wait in joyful expectation for Jesus to come again in glory at the end of time (the Second Coming).

Therefore Advent affirms that

* Christ has come
* He is present in the world today
* He will come again in power. (The Second Coming is explored in Y6 Learning Focus 6 - ‘Christ will come again’. Waiting in joyful hope is covered in Y5).

Advent is a time of waiting in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus into the world. It is also a penitential season; one that prepares Christians for the Second Coming (hence the liturgical colour of the season is purple). Advent has a strong, positive message. Simply put it is – ‘get ready’! Or as the Scriptures put it – ‘prepare the way of the Lord’. For Catholics the call to work for charity and the common good are heightened during Advent. It is a time of renewal, personal growth and transformation.

The four Sundays before Christmas Day are known as the four Sundays of Advent. The themes for each week of Advent are: ‘Wake up’! ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’, ‘Rejoice’ and’ Emmanuel is with us’. These are sometimes translated as hope, love, joy, and peace.

The symbols, prayers and readings of the season help Christians to reflect on God’s love which is made known in the wonderful gift of Jesus. You can learn more about these and the Christmas Season in Church’s Story 3 pp86-96 as well as through the content explored in the Come and See books.

**AT1 iii**

**Knowledge and understanding of social and moral practices and way of life.**

**Learning About Religion**

The focus for moderation this term is AT1 iii. The overall focus of this strand is behaviour and way of life – or in other words, ‘everyday living’. It is concerned with how believers act within society and the world more generally. Rituals and celebrations (the Advent wreath, Advent calendar, Christingle etc - AT1 ii) are part of the way of life of a believer and how Christians prepare to meet Jesus at Christmas . Teachers will be exploring these rituals throughout the topic and will make links to them. However the primary focus for the assessment task should be ‘everyday living’.

Being kind to others, giving generously, being honest and trustworthy – in short treating others as you like to be treated – is not the sole prerogative of Catholic Christians. People who do not profess any faith can be just as kind, compassionate and generous as those who do. What marks the way of life of Christians is **why** they behave in such a way: beliefs about humanity, the world and a relationship with God prompt certain behaviours. This connection, albeit very simple, is present from the first level.

**Year 1 ‘Waiting’**

During the Reveal section in the topic ‘Waiting’, pupils explore Advent, a time of waiting to celebrate Jesus’ coming at Christmas. Within **Learning Focus 6** pupils will learn about the meaning of ‘Christingle’.

Using the key question, ‘What ways can we share our love at Christmas?’ as a starting point, adapt activity 3, to make a Christmas card. Inside the card the children need to show ways in which they share love at Christmas. They can choose from or draw their own (recognise) range of Christmas symbols, pictures and simple greetings (religious and secular) which express sharing love. They make their own simple collage of sharing (and showing) their love as Christians at Christmas time inside the card (Level 1).

These pictures will be related to helping the children to **recognise (L1)** **ways of behaving** to show love e.g. giving presents, helping to decorate the tree, helping to tidy up at home etc. Again the focus for assessment should be on ‘everyday living’, although reference may be made to the Advent wreath, Advent calendar etc.

To achieve **Level 2** pupils will be able to **describe** some of the things that believers do in their everyday lives to show love.

The move from recognition (L1) to description (L2) implies a more comprehensive knowledge of behaviours. Rather than just being able to recognise some of the things that believers do, pupils will be able to offer a detailed description of their actions.

**Year 2 ‘Preparing’**

During the Reveal section in the topic ‘Preparing’, pupils explore Advent, the four weeks of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Within **Learning Focus 1** the pupils learn about how Christians prepare their hearts for the birth of Jesus many years before.

Using the pictures from Church’s Story 2 pages 54 and 55 that are part of the content of the lesson, discuss these ways, and others, (reconciliation, acts of charity etc.) to show how Christians prepare during Advent .

Children are given the following activity (which is not one of the suggested activities in the Come and See book):

• Write a simple guide entitled ‘Let’s get Ready for Jesus,’ **describing** some of the ways in which Christians prepare for the birth of Jesus. **(Level 2).**

The pictures in Church’s Story and the added suggestions above focus on how believers act and behave to prepare for the birth of Jesus. They do not focus on prayer and ritual (AT1ii). And to achieve Level 2 pupils will be able to offer a detailed description of their actions.

If pupils **recognise** ways that Christians behave to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus but cannot offer a detailed description of actions they will be working at **Level 1**

Pupils will need to **give reasons** for the ways in which Christians prepare for the birth of Jesus to achieve **Level 3.** In Level 3, articulation of the relationship between belief and action is now expected of pupils: pupils will not only say what believers do, they will say why they do them.

**Year 3 ‘Visitors’**

During the Reveal section in the topic ‘Visitors’, pupils explore Advent as the time of waiting for the coming of Jesus. Within **Learning Focus 3** the pupils learn about how, during Advent, the Church prepares for the visit of God in the person of Jesus.

Teachers are asked to adapt Learning Focus 3, page 88, Activity 3.

• Using the scripture reading on page 87, ask the pupils to create a set of guidelines **describing**  how Christians might ‘live out’ the messages within the reading as children of the light e.g. explore the opposites of greed, lying, stealing etc - and the opposites of any other behaviours you might not want anyone else to see. These actions indicate what Christians might do to love their neighbour. **(Level 2)**

To achieve **Level 3** pupils can also give reasons for these actions. In Level 3 articulation of the relationship between belief and action is now expected of pupils: pupils will not only say what believers do, they will say why they do them. The obvious reason is that St Paul asks Christians to live like this in Romans 13 in order to live a life pleasing to God, if God was to visit them personally. This in turn is linked to the Advent season where Christians believe that they are asked by the Church to prepare for the coming of Jesus by changing their ways. In a previous lesson they learned how Isaiah brought this same message about preparing for a special visitor.

**Year 4 ‘Gift’**

During the Reveal section in the topic ‘Gift’, pupils explore Advent and Christmas – the Church’s seasons of preparing to receive God’s gift of love and friendship in Jesus. Within **Learning Focus 1** the pupils learn about God’s gift of love and friendship.

Teachers are asked to adapt Learning Focus 1, page 91, Activity 1.

• Pupils design a set of guidelines entitled: ‘Preparing for Jesus, God’s gift of love and friendship to the world’, which **describes and gives reasons** for the loving actions of Christians during Advent **(Level 3).**

If pupils describe (without giving reasons) they will achieve Level 2

[To achieve level 4 pupils need to show an understanding of how belief in being a child of God shapes their lives. This would only be suitable for Y6 children in a mixed age class using the Y4 Come and See book, as much extra teaching is needed. The following will help.

*A life shaped by belief in being a child of God. Level 4*

In Learning Focus 1 pupils will listen to St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 1:3-6. This is an early Christian hymn in which we are told that God’s plan for us was this: by giving us Jesus to make us sons and daughters, too. We are God’s children, blessed and loved like Jesus the Son.

In order to achieve Level 4 in AT1iii pupils will have to adapt Activity 2 rather than adapting Activity 1. In this activity pupils are asked to write a character sketch of God’s child, outlining ways in which that person, who knows they are blessed and loved by God, would act. Level 4 is much more than describing ways in which a child of God might live or even giving reasons for their actions. A more appropriate activity would be ‘Write a character sketch of someone who believes they are a child of God outlining how their whole life is influenced (driven, motivated) by that belief.’

Level 4 1iii is concerned with how belief shapes life. Pupils will need to describe situations in which there is a clear link between what a person believes (I am a child of God) and the way they live. They need to move beyond the individual specific actions of believers to draw wider conclusions about how belief in being a child of God shapes all of life. This level requires a more comprehensive view: ‘I believe I am a child of God and my beliefs impact on the way I choose to live’.

In order to do this, children will have to draw on previous knowledge e.g. ‘let the little children come to me’ means I live my life knowing God will never turn me away, I am important and special. Psalm 23 reminds me God will be with me in difficult times, Psalm 131 that I can trust God and be like a child in a mother’s arms, Psalm 63 that God will comfort me when I’m sad. So I live a life of hope and trust. ‘Our Father’ means all people are God’s children and therefore I need to care for my brothers and sisters……(this is merely an example – children will draw on their own knowledge and understanding.)]

**Year 5 ‘Hope’**

During the Reveal section in the topic ‘Hope’, pupils have been learning about Advent- the church’s season of waiting in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus, the promised one. Within **Learning Focus 1** the pupils learn about Advent as a time of waiting.

Teachers are asked to adapt Learning Focus 1, page 86, Activity 2.

Using Isaiah 25: 8-9/ 40:9-11, the children learn about the Church’s teaching on Advent and the meaning of the Advent wreath.

* Pupils write a script for a radio broadcast or design a PowerPoint presentation for school assembly which explores how the Christian belief in ‘Waiting in joyful hope’ is expressed in loving actions and gives shape to lives of Christians (Level 4)

Teachers may prefer to give this activity at the end of Reveal so that the work covered in all the learning focuses may be included. The following notes should be of help.

*Understanding the three-fold coming at Advent*

Remember that during Advent, which means ‘coming’ or ‘arrival’ Christians focus on a three-fold coming. Advent focuses on the coming of Christ in history (which we celebrate on December 25) and a remembrance of how the people of God waited for the Messiah; Advent encourages believers to prepare to meet Jesus who comes every day in their lives. They also wait in joyful hope for Jesus to come again in glory at the end of time (the Second Coming). In other words, Advent affirms that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in power. (The Second Coming is explored in Learning Focus 6 - ‘We wait in hope for Christ to come again’).

*Waiting in hope*

In Explore pupils look at what it means to wait hopefully. In Scripture, the word “hope” is an indication of certainty - a strong and confident expectation. In Learning Focus 1 pupils look at the prophet Isaiah who tells of the coming of the Messiah. The Jews - God’s chosen people - waited patiently for the coming of the Messiah, the Promised One of God, for thousands of years. They expressed patient hope in God even when going through difficult times – for example when they were taken into captivity and oppressed by the Egyptians and the Babylonians. They still believed that God would save them and bring peace, justice and righteousness to the world. Isaiah tells us what the Messiah will be like. In Learning Focus 4 pupils return to Isaiah who describes the Messiah as being like a light in the darkness.

In Learning Focus 2 pupils learn about another prophet, Jeremiah who also encouraged the Jewish people to wait hopefully for the Messiah who would bring happiness and justice.

In Advent Christians recall God’s promise to send a Messiah. Christians wait in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, when they celebrate the birth of Jesus in history, just as the people of God were waiting for the Messiah. Christians are also waiting in hope for the Second Coming of Jesus because at his second coming, he will put an end to all injustice, sin, evil, and suffering: he will finish the work he began with his first coming. Advent hope is about how God's people are waiting for his promises to come true. A Christian believes that in the end ‘all shall be well’. This is Christians’ reason for their hope that nothing can change or take away. Living a life where we stay near to God and keep alive our friendship helps to keep our hope alive.

*A life shaped by hope*

Level 4 1iii is concerned with how belief shapes life. Pupils will need to describe situations in which there is a clear link between what a person believes and the way they live. They need to move beyond the individual specific actions of believers to draw wider conclusions about how belief shapes all of life. This level requires a more comprehensive view: ‘I believe and my beliefs impact on the way I choose to live’.

Learning Focus 6 explains that hope is trust in Christ’s promises and knowing that God supports and helps his people. God is just, loving, merciful and turns everything to good.

For those who are finding these times difficult for one reason or another the message of Advent is “Wait for God in patient hope.” Christians believe that God has not abandoned them; God is with them though sometimes their lack of faith prevents them from seeing him. Wait in patient hope for God to fulfil his plans in his own way in his own time.

Here are a few examples of people whose lives were shaped by hope. They believed their suffering need not crush them and that in the end everything would be turned to good. To achieve Level 4 pupils will need to make links between how they lived, the Christian belief about waiting in hope expressed in the various scripture passages studied and link this to other sources such as the advent wreath, William Holman Hunt’s picture, ‘The Light of the World’, hymns such as, Christ Be Our Light, Bernadette Farrell and/or Let Us Build a City of God, Dan Schutte etc….

**Nelson Mandela,** who retired as President of South Africa in 1999, inspired many people throughout the world by the dignity with which he lived through many years of imprisonment. Turning it from a time when many people might have become bitter, to a time when the people of the world were inspired to look for a better way of living together. He believed his time of suffering could be turned to good.

**John McCarthy** became famous when he was held hostage in Lebanon. Imprisoned in horrific conditions, by people who felt they were doing God's will, he found comfort in a copy of the Bible he was given. He said that Psalm 69 reassured him that someone, although they lived 2000 years before, understood what he was going through, and the belief that he was not forgotten gave him hope.

Another famous example is how **Christopher Reeve** (Superman) turned his injuries to a positive purpose. He set himself a target to give use his tragedy to help others after facing this devastating life blow. His life has inspired - or shaped the life of - many who admired him and the example he provided.

Examples could be used of people who are not famous, but who have been an inspiration through their suffering and in how much they have loved God and others while they wait.

As Christians wait in hope for the Second Coming, what is important is how in their lives they love God and love other people. That is what will count. The work done on Advent preparations – love and service of others (as explored in ‘Servant King’, in the trust shown by Mary, how Christians ‘live in the light’, helping the poor and the marginalised etc.) are examples of how the lives Christians lead can be shaped by belief in ‘waiting in hope for Christ to come again’.

For pupils to achieve Level 3 they will give reasons for the actions of Christians such as those mentioned above or other Christians during Advent.

Pupils who simply describe actions will achieve Level 2.

**Year 6 ‘Expectation’**

During the Reveal section in the topic ‘Expectations’, pupils have been learning about Advent as a time of joyful expectation of Christmas, the Word becoming a human person, Jesus.

*Waiting in expectation*

In Explore pupils look at the meaning of expectation. In Learning Focus 1 and 2 pupils learn that the Advent ‘coming’ reminds us of the anticipation and the strong, confident expectation over hundreds of years of the people of Israel for their Messiah and promised King, Emmanuel (God with us). They expected the Messiah to come and bring peace, justice and righteousness to the world. Isaiah tells us what the Messiah will be like and the expectations placed on God’s people. In Learning Focus 3 pupils reflect on Mary’s anticipation and expectation at becoming the mother of Christ.

In Advent Christians recall God’s promise to send a Messiah. Christians wait in joyful expectation for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, when they celebrate the birth of Jesus in history, just as the people of God were waiting for the Messiah. Christians are also anticipating the Second Coming of Jesus because at his second coming, he will put an end to all injustice, sin, evil, and suffering: he will finish the work he began with his first coming. Advent is a time to reflect on how God's people are waiting for his promises to come true. A Christian believes that in the end ‘all shall be well’.

*A life shaped by belief in the coming of Jesus*

Level 4 1iii is concerned with how belief shapes life. Pupils will need to describe situations in which there is a clear link between what a person believes and the way they live. They need to move beyond the individual specific actions of believers to draw wider conclusions about how belief shapes all of life. This level requires a more comprehensive view: ‘I believe and my beliefs impact on the way I choose to live’.

**In Learning Focus 5** pupils reflect on the meaning of the words of John the Baptist – ‘Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel’. In adapting Activity 3 pupils are asked to design a set of guidelines entitled ‘How Christian belief in the coming of Jesus shapes Christian living’ (Level 4). They are expected to demonstrate the expectations placed on followers of Jesus.

A review and summation of the first 4 learning focuses will help them to do this. To prepare for the Coming of Jesus Christians are alert, stand firm in the faith, are courageous, strong and loving (1 Corinthians 16:13-14). Ways to live related to this will have been explored looking at expectations of how to live expressed in the advent calendar and rooted in scripture, the writings of Isaiah, the trust and faith shown by Mary, the ‘grace and truth’ expressed in the life of Jesus. The children can also be encouraged to call on their knowledge from previous learning – not just from this topic. In Year 5 the focus is on hope. Many of the children may remember the lives they studied during this topic last year (see notes on Year 4).

To achieve Level 4 they must link these expectations of how Christians live to the scripture they have studied and other religious sources such as, the hymn Maranatha, the Advent wreath and calendar, the work of CAFOD, the Angelus, any art which may have explored etc.

Pupils who only give reasons why Christians prepare for the coming of Jesus without making multiple links will achieve Level 3.