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Story Assemblies of 24 Saints

24 off-the-peg assembly plans for the school year

Heather Butler

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Introduction

Story Assemblies of 24 Saints contains 24 complete assembly plans ready for teachers to pick off the shelf and deliver as a whole-school, year-group or classroom assembly. The material is designed to meet the needs of busy teachers looking for flexible and creative material to take them through the school year. Each assembly plan includes a creative mix of elements, designed to put the life of the featured saint in context and, through storytelling and focused reflection, help children think about what the message of the saint's story might mean to their own lives today. A suggestion for a relevant symbol is provided with each story, designed to highlight a special feature about the saint and help children use their imaginations to ground the story.

The 24 saints' days are spread across the school year from September to July, so teachers can opt in at any time. Each assembly provides:

- Teacher's notes, giving background details and essential information to help set the scene and ensure that the teacher has everything to hand for the smooth running of the assembly. Information includes:
 - ❖ Theme: A short phrase to instantly identify what the assembly is about.
 - ❖ Bible link: Helpful Bible verses written out in full, with a short commentary about how the Bible story fits into the theme of the storytelling.
 - ❖ Resources: Suggestions for visual aids and props to help bring the story to life during the storytelling.
 - ❖ Saint in context: Background information to place the saint in the context of his or her culture and time.

- ❖ Entry point: Topical introduction to the theme of the story and questions to help children see how the theme is relevant to their own lives.
 - ❖ Reflection: Imaginative guide to help children reflect on the story and what its message might mean for them.
 - ❖ Suggested songs: Songs that reflect the theme of the assembly.
 - ❖ Optional prayer: Suggestions for a Christian prayer, picking out the main themes of the story.
 - ❖ 'Build a saint' activity: Classroom follow-up to help build a full picture of the saint, explore a symbol to help children remember how he or she is traditionally recognised, and create a classroom display. In general, the activities use simple, readily available objects, drawing and colouring materials, air-dry modelling clay or play dough.
- The story, offering a choice of two storytelling methods: a simple retelling, ideal for younger children, and an interactive questioning alternative for older children. Many of the interactive options also include ideas for children to act out the story as it unfolds.



— 16 September —

Ninian

Teacher's notes

Theme

This assembly is about who guides us.

Bible link

I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep.

JOHN 10:11

Jesus described himself as a shepherd who knows and looks after his sheep. We read in the Bible that Jesus said he would even die for his sheep, which Christians believe he did at Easter time. The story of Ninian is a story about a shepherd in the Christian tradition.

Resources

A toy sheep, a container for soup such as a flask or bottle, a walking stick or shepherd's crook, a blanket for the elderly man

Saint in context

Traditionally, it is thought that Ninian was born in Cumbria and went to Rome as a young man to study Christianity. He was made a bishop and returned to Britain around AD397. After building a stone church in Whithorn, south-west Scotland, he began converting the Picts to Christianity. Ninian, whose Scottish name is Saint Ringan, is first mentioned by the historian Bede (AD673–735).

Entry point

Talk about how large ships are guided into harbour by small tug boats. Alternatively, talk about how dogs help guide people who have difficulty seeing.

Everyone needs to be guided. Ask the children to think of someone who has guided them recently. Share how the children were helped, and by whom.

Reflection

Talk about people who help and guide us. For example, people give us guidance about eating the right foods, crossing the road safely and knowing how to look after our pets. Invite the children to think of someone who guided them and helped them to find something... learn something... avoid getting something wrong... go somewhere. Who guides us the most? Does anyone ever guide us to do things we know are wrong?

Suggested songs

- Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning (*Come and Praise* 43)
- If I go to the furthest place (*Songs for Every Assembly*, Out of the Ark Music)

Optional prayer

Dear God, thank you for being like a shepherd who cares and wants the best for his sheep. Thank you that when we ask, you will help us to make good decisions and will guide us.

'Build a saint' activity

Use pipe cleaners and cotton wool to make fluffy sheep. Add the sheep to a classroom display as a symbol to remind children about the story of Ninian and the shepherd boy. Jesus described himself as the 'good shepherd' and his followers as sheep. Draw

a sheepfold with a shepherd guarding and guiding his flock. The drawings can also be added to the display.

The story retold

NB: This story happened a long time ago. People shared what they had, and shepherd boys were usually teenagers.

A shepherd boy worked on a hillside, looking after sheep, making sure his sheep were safe and had enough food to eat. Each evening he counted them as they passed into the sheepfold where they spent the night. He would see the short sheep (their tummies scratched across the grass when they walked), the shooting-up sheep (they seemed to grow taller every day) and the shabby sheep that needed a wash. He knew each of them by name.

Tonight was Christmas Eve and the boy was keen to return home as early as possible. He herded the sheep back to the fold and counted them as they went in. He was one short sheep short.

What a nuisance—and tonight of all nights, when his family would be waiting for him! As quickly as he could, he set off back to the hills to look for the short sheep that was missing, taking with him some soup in case he became hungry.

Well, that short sheep was nowhere to be found. Absolutely nowhere! The shepherd boy looked in the fields, behind rocks, under trees, down holes, beneath bushes and over hills. But he was still a short sheep short.

‘Short sheep, where are you?’ he sighed. ‘It’s Christmas

Eve and I need someone to show me where to look.’ He sat for a while, wondering what to do, pouring himself some soup while he thought, then pausing as he heard footsteps behind him.

‘You’ll find the sheep over there,’ an elderly man said, pointing into the next field. The boy was more than surprised. What was an elderly man doing on the hills at this time of night, and how had he known why the boy was there?

The shepherd boy offered the elderly man some of his soup and they sat together, drinking it.

‘I’m on my way to Bethlehem,’ the elderly man told him. ‘Something special is happening there tonight and I don’t want to miss out on it.’

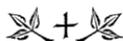
Bethlehem! That was miles away.

‘I must be on my way,’ the man said, ‘and you must go and find your sheep.’ With that, he stood up and walked on.

The boy, too, stood up and went to the field the elderly man had pointed to. There was his woolly friend, waiting for him.

‘I’m not a short sheep short any more!’ the shepherd boy laughed. ‘Now let’s hurry up, because my family will be waiting for me.’

No one knows for sure, but tradition has it that even though he had died many years before, the elderly man was St Ninian—doing what he had done when he was alive, helping others and guiding them whenever he could.



Interactive retelling

Choose a child to be the shepherd boy and act out the story as it unfolds.

Story: A young shepherd boy is on the hillside, looking after his sheep. It is Christmas Eve and he is looking forward to going home early to be with his family.

Interactive question: What would it be like to be a shepherd boy?

Story: At the end of the day, he counts the sheep's legs and divides the number by four. (He doesn't actually do this, but he does count the sheep.)

Action: Ask several children to be sheep and supervise them being counted.

Story: That night, the shepherd boy is one sheep short—one short sheep short. The tall sheep are all here. So are the shabby sheep. It is a short sheep he is missing. 'Surely I'm not one short sheep short,' he shivers. The shepherd boy counts again. He is still one short sheep short.

Interactive questions: What are his options now? What would you do? Why?

Story: The shepherd boy cares about his sheep. So he makes sure the other sheep are safe, then sets off, back to where the sheep have spent their day on the hillside.

He takes some soup with him in case he becomes hungry. He looks in the fields, behind rocks, under trees, down holes, beneath bushes, over hills. Is that short sheep anywhere to be found? Of course he isn't. The boy sits down and sighs. 'I need someone to help me and tell me what to do,' he says. He slowly begins pouring out some of his soup.

Interactive question: What could happen next?

Story: As he begins to drink his soup, there is a rustling behind him, but it isn't the short sheep. No. It's an elderly man, who begins chatting to the boy.

Action: Choose a child to be the elderly man and sit next to the shepherd boy drinking soup.

Story: The shepherd boy offers the elderly man some soup and they sit together, drinking it. 'I'm on my way to Bethlehem,' the man tells the boy. 'Something special is happening there tonight and I don't want to miss out on it.' Bethlehem! That is miles away, the boy thinks. A short while later, the elderly man says, 'I must be on my way... and the sheep you are looking for is in the field over there.' With that, he stands up and walks on. The boy checks out where the man had said and there is his short sheep's shadow, shamelessly shivering in the cold damp night. The boy picks up the short sheep and heads for home.

No one knows for sure, but tradition has it that, even though he had died many years before, the

elderly man was St Ninian—doing what he had done when he was alive, helping others and guiding them whenever he could.

Interactive question: Imagine you were the shepherd boy, telling your parents or friends about what had happened. What would you say to them?

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