

Looking forward to Christmas with

Timothy Bear

18 five-minute stories and assembly outlines
for Advent and Christmas



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Introduction

Telling Timothy Bear stories to children

The name of the main character in the stories in this book is Timothy Bear, but he can easily change his name to suit another storyteller or story reader. He can even change his species!

I find that actually having a teddy bear with me provides a focal point for children while they listen to the story. Normally I hold him, but on occasions I might invite him to be looked after by a member of my audience. Sometimes I might place him in a special place for a particular story (by the side of a stage, say, for the 'broom-dropping' episode before I bring him to the centre for the snowy Saturday part of the story). Some stories lend themselves to asking a volunteer child to sit at the front to become a character in that particular story (a girl could be 'Linda the lights' for example, in her story). Again, it concentrates the mind and the attention of any child who might otherwise be disposed to daydream.

I am not gifted in the ability to produce a range of voices and accents. I am sure that those having such an ability add a dimension to storytelling, but I can manage a deep gruff voice that belongs to anything said by Timothy. Children seem to enjoy listening out for such input. I have never sung a solo on any public occasion in my life, but I can get away with Timothy singing the 'Away in a manger' version in the final story. He has even received applause for his rendering of it!

Having a main character that is the same in every story allows

you to add local colour to the telling or reading. Names of other characters can be used to hint at folk known to the audience. We had a minister at one time called Reverend Walker, who easily became Reverend Corker in stories that included a minister. Three schools figured in the life of our large village and one word taken from each of the names provided a fictional school to which all children could feel a sense of belonging. Adults in the audience seemed especially to enjoy these contributions. To suit my own interests, Timothy is usually dressed in the colours of our local football team, and this provides a ready means of introduction when children meet him for the first time.

My hope is that each story has a positive impact just through its telling or reading. If time is at a premium, it can be left to lodge in the imagination to allow each child to take away their own individual meaning and understanding. Stories will vary, too, in their appeal. What one child gains from a particular story will not necessarily be gained by another.

When time allows, stories may be unpacked. In an assembly, this can be done by answering a few well-thought-out questions as everyone else listens attentively to what is being said. Many children will contribute readily as they remember the story and apply it to their own situations. In this book, at the end of each story there are suggested questions that may be helpful. A session like this should be kept within the attention scope of a group as large as a whole school assembly or a whole congregation.

Follow-up can be even more valuable in a smaller group of, say, a class. It is not essential for the class teacher to have been present at the assembly or even to know the story. It is good for children to recount their own version of the story and the 'morals' they have taken from it themselves. After all, in assembly situations they will realise that stories are not told just for excitement or fun or interest (although these elements may be present) but mainly for what we can learn from them for our everyday lives.

As well as questions to check that the stories have been under-

stood, there are suggestions for follow-up activities. Then there are questions to help children apply the stories to their own world.

The thread for the stories in this book is the production of a nativity play in a Key Stage One department as part of its Christmas activities, taking place mainly in the second half of the autumn term. No particular nativity play is suggested. These days, a whole range is available and the nativity play is often part of a larger production. The stories may be used as one-offs as they fit into the school's established programme or they may be used as a series. If told as a series, it may be helpful to provide memory joggers as the stories are told. An artefact that goes with each story might be found or made, which could be placed on or around a Christmas tree or as part of an Advent calendar.

Material is also suggested that would include each story in the context of its own assembly. Suggestions for Bible links, as well as background prayers and songs, are therefore mentioned.

— Section One —

Preparing for Christmas



Introduction

The three stories in this opening section set the scene for Christmas. Miss Read is pointing her class towards the nativity play that they will perform at the end of term. She has the hard task of announcing the cast and Timothy has to cope with the disappointment of not getting the part he really wanted. Even at Christmas, not everything turns out as we might hope. Timothy's concern for Claude is an example to all. (The story of Timothy as the wise man who brings gold in his church's nativity is told on page 44 of *Through the Year with Timothy Bear*, Barnabas, 2006.)

The broom-dropping story comes out of the annunciation, the traditional start for the nativity play. Mary is portrayed busy at housework and dramatically letting her broom fall to the ground when she becomes aware of her angel visitor. The story suggests that we, too, can be on the lookout for our own 'broom-dropping' moments that might come through God's gifts to us or his direct activity in our lives.

The third story in this section centres on Timothy's part in the play as the innkeeper's boy and imagines the preparations that could have been made by the boy in Bethlehem's stable. One challenge of the story is for consistent good behaviour wherever we are. The possibility of the young influencing the behaviour of older people for good is also presented and could be usefully explored. (A version containing more fantasy, which has Timothy Bear arriving in Bethlehem and encountering the innkeeper's boy, is the Advent story on page 40 of *Through the Year with Timothy Bear*.)



Bible links

The cloak and the crown

Bible passage: Isaiah 11:1–9

Honesty and fairness will be his royal robes (v. 5).

Broom-dropping moments

Bible passage: Luke 1:26–38

One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary (vv. 26–27).

Ready for Christmas

Bible passage: Luke 2:6–7

Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn (v. 7).



Recommended songs

Wind through the olive trees (*Carol Gaily Carol*, A&C Black)

Mother to be (*Off to Bethlehem*, Out of the Ark Music)

Innkeeper's song (*It's a Baby*, Out of the Ark Music)



Suggested prayers

*Help us, Lord Jesus, as we get ready for Christmas, your birthday celebration. Prepare our hearts, our homes, our schools and our world.
Amen*

We thank you, heavenly Father, for the angels in the Christmas story—for the way they brought your messages to Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men. Help us to listen out for messages from you. Amen

Heavenly Father, you made such detailed preparations for Jesus to be born. Help us to carefully prepare as we celebrate his birthday. Amen



The cloak and the crown



Telling tip

If this is the first story about Timothy Bear that a group of children hears, it is a good opportunity to introduce his voice. His only direct speech comes very near the end, and the reader can underline what a significant part of the story it is by making him speak in a low, gruff voice.



Miss Read made the announcement to her class immediately after half-term.

‘We’re going to do a play for Christmas. Its main part will be about the birth of baby Jesus. It is called a nativity play.’

Timothy Bear’s class were listening very hard indeed. You might say they were all ears! They like learning new words, and ‘nativity’ sounded a good new word. Timothy Bear had actually heard the word before. He had been part of his church’s nativity play the year before. He had been the wise man who presented baby Jesus with gold. He still had the long flowing cloak that Mrs Bear had made for him and the shiny gold crown they had made together.

Miss Read looked round at all the bright, upturned faces of her class. She knew it would be one of the hardest things of

all, to announce who she had decided would play the main parts in the play. Most of her class were keen to be actors.

‘We will need lots of you to join the rest of the school as the children of Bethlehem. You will be our choir,’ she said. ‘But there are some particular parts to be taken in the play. Amanda, I wonder if you will be Mary the mother of Jesus.’

Amanda went pink with pleasure and nodded several times.

‘And Paul,’ went on Miss Read, ‘you should be a good Joseph as you’re good at making things.’

Paul was as surprised as the rest of the class that he had been chosen. He was not always the best behaved, but now he, too, nodded his head.

Miss Read went on to suggest children to be angels and shepherds, narrators and the innkeeper. Timothy Bear’s name had not yet been mentioned. He didn’t mind as he’d set his heart on being a wise man again. After all, he did have the cloak and the crown, and so many had said at church what a fine wise man he had made. He would like his gift to be the gold again, but he’d make do with the frankincense or the myrrh.

‘That leaves the parts of the three wise men,’ continued Miss Read. ‘Claude, I’d like you to bring the gold; David, you to bring the frankincense, and Michael to look after the myrrh.’

Miss Read caught sight of Timothy Bear’s earnest face covered with disappointment and it rang a bell in her memory.

‘Oh, and Timothy Bear, I want you to be the innkeeper’s

boy. Do you think a teddy bear can play the part of a boy?’

Timothy managed a watery smile. He felt a bit tearful but he nodded. It certainly wasn't the part he wanted. He had no idea what part an innkeeper's boy would play. But Claude had his hand up. Miss Read looked enquiringly in Claude's direction.

‘I'd like to be a wise man,’ said Claude quietly, ‘but I don't think my mum will let me. We're having an extension built at home, and Mum's so busy, she won't have time to get me ready.’

‘That is a problem, Claude,’ replied Miss Read. ‘We have to ask parents to see to the costumes and things like that. Yes, Timothy?’

Miss Read had spotted Timothy with his paw in the air. Perhaps he would volunteer to take Claude's place. She had wondered about Timothy being a wise man.

‘I already have a cloak and a crown,’ began Timothy. ‘I'm sure Claude can have them.’

Miss Read clapped her hands together. Claude's face lit up with delight. He would be able to be the wise man who brings gold to Jesus, after all.

‘Well done, Timothy,’ exclaimed Miss Read. ‘If we're all as helpful as you, this will indeed be a Christmas play to remember.’

Helping children get to grips with the story

- ★ What is a nativity play?
- ★ Which part did Timothy want to have most of all in the play?
- ★ Which part was he given?
- ★ At the end of the story, why did Miss Read say that Timothy had been most helpful?

Ways for children to express the story

- ★ Make a list of all the characters that you think are in the nativity play.
- ★ Make a crown, either to fit Timothy's head or your own head.

Helping children to own the story

- ★ Which part would you like to have in the play?
- ★ Who else in your group would make a good Mary or Joseph?
- ★ Why did Miss Read know it was going to be very hard to announce whom she had chosen to play the different parts?
- ★ Why did Claude think, to begin with, that he wouldn't be able to be a wise man? Have you ever been chosen for something and not been able to do it?

Ways for children to live out the story

- ★ What is it like to be given a part in a play and to perform it in front of an audience?
- ★ Think of a time when you felt like crying but went on bravely with a 'watery' smile.
- ★ Think of a time when you have been disappointed. Was there anything that you or others did that made you feel a bit better?



Broom-dropping moments



Telling tip

At the start of the story, Timothy could be placed at the side of the room as if in the wings for the play. Someone could act out the story of Mary with her broom. Then, when the action moves to Saturday, Timothy becomes central and should be held by the storyteller.



Amanda was very good at playing the part of Mary, right from the first rehearsal. Even before she had her costume, she entered into the part so well that the rest of the class forgot it was Amanda and really thought she was the young girl, Mary, living two thousand years ago.

The first scene began with Mary in her little home in Nazareth. She was feeding the chickens and tidying up, and then she would take hold of a broom to sweep the floor. The audience would clearly see the angel appearing on the stage before Mary realised he was there. After all, Mary was looking down at the floor.

Mary stopped sweeping as if something had disturbed her. She looked up and she, too, saw the angel. You could see the

surprise on Mary's face and her broom went crashing to the floor.

'It's a broom-dropping moment,' thought Timothy to himself as he watched from the side of the stage.

Moments later, Mary had been told she was to have a baby boy, God's Son, and she said, 'Yes, I understand. I am God's servant. Let it happen as you say.'

It was some opening scene, and Miss Read was thrilled with the way things were going. Amanda had been a very good choice. Timothy Bear thought it was a great start, too. What drama! To meet an angel! An angel with such a message! A broom-dropping moment, indeed!

The next Saturday, Timothy woke up and immediately felt strangely excited. There was a pale glow on his bedroom ceiling. He felt drawn to his window and, sure enough, he looked out on to a white world. Snow had fallen gently in the night. There was no thought now of getting back into bed. He launched himself into Mr and Mrs Bear's room.

'It's been snowing,' he gasped, waking them up. 'Please! May I get dressed and go outside?'

Mr Bear was nodding his head.

'Two jumpers, your woolly hat and boots,' said Mum.

'You might even clear the path for us,' added Dad. 'I put the broom in the porch last night, just in case, when I saw the forecast.'

'Certainly,' shouted Timothy, already halfway down the stairs.



What a morning it was! It was still so early that cars had not yet disturbed the snow in the road. Trees and shrubs looked like white umbrellas. The world was so still and so quiet. Timothy held the broom to clear the path. Then something made him look up. It was something on the whiter-than-white lawn. It was a robin. Its red breast looked brighter than usual in this white world. The robin was so close to Timothy, closer than any bird had ever been before. The surprise made Timothy drop the broom. Fortunately the snow muffled the sound of the falling broom and the robin was not put off at all. Bear and robin looked comfortably at each other and Timothy realised that the robin must be hungry. The usual food supplies for birds were buried under centimetres of snow.

‘I won’t be long,’ whispered Timothy.

Timothy had no doubt that the robin would be there on his return, and he was right. Timothy came back with a plate of breadcrumbs and a small beaker of water. Timothy wasn’t sure if birds knew they could get water from snow.

Timothy cleared the path, glancing across every so often at the robin having breakfast.

‘It’s another broom-dropping moment,’ thought Timothy to himself, ‘but I didn’t expect them to happen to me.’

It wasn’t quite all over. Path cleared and breakfast eaten, the robin hadn’t finished with Timothy yet. Three or four times it hopped backwards and forwards over the fence into Mrs

Centurion's garden. At last Timothy got the message that he should go round as well. Perhaps it would be a good idea to clear Mrs Centurion's path. But the robin led the way through the open gate into Mrs Centurion's back garden. The robin would go no further, but by now Timothy could hear a soft miaowing coming from the shed at the end of the garden. Mrs Centurion's cat, Marmalade, must be trapped inside.

Timothy Bear went to Marmalade's rescue. Somehow the door of the shed had closed on Marmalade the evening before and she had been imprisoned. She was only too willing to be cradled in Timothy's paws after he pulled open the door. Bear and cat made their way to the back door. Mrs Centurion came to the door in her dressing-gown. Her worried face broke into smiles as she was reunited with Marmalade.

'I was just wondering what had happened to her,' she said. 'Timothy Bear, you're an angel.'

If Timothy had been holding his broom, he would have dropped it! An angel! He modestly looked round to give the robin the credit, but the robin had flown away.

Helping children get to grips with the story

- ★ Why do you think Mary dropped her broom when she was cleaning her home?
- ★ What surprised Timothy when he woke up on the Saturday morning?
- ★ Why do you think Timothy dropped his broom when he was clearing the garden path?
- ★ What happened to Marmalade at the end of the story?

Ways for children to express the story

- ★ Make a broom from card or other materials.
- ★ Create a snowy picture.
- ★ Make a robin from card and colour it in.

Helping children to own the story

- ★ If it was a time of snow, what would you like to do out in the snow?
- ★ Share stories about animals being rescued.

Ways for children to live out the story

- ★ Timothy was surprised to have broom-dropping moments happen to him. Think of broom-dropping moments that have happened to you.
- ★ Mrs Centurion was so grateful to Timothy for rescuing her cat. Think of a recent moment when you have been grateful for the help someone else has given to you.
- ★ Think of times when someone has been grateful to you for help you have given them.