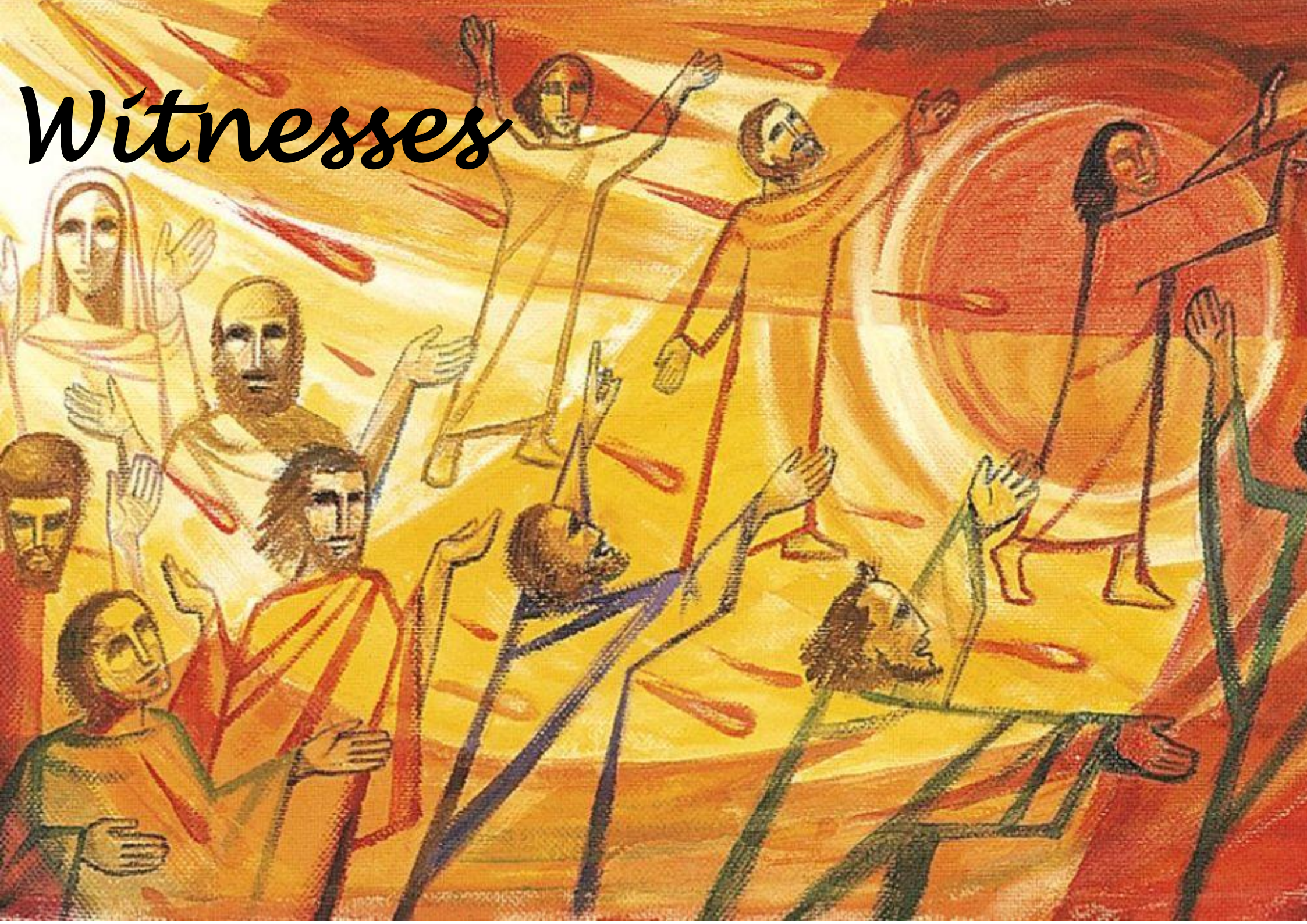


Witnesses



Key Questions for the Topic

Why does it sometimes need courage to be a witness?

How do you know when to speak out?

Key Words for the Topic

*witness, Holy Spirit, Witnesses, martyrs, courage, truth
inspiration, Good News*



The Holy Spirit enables people to become witnesses

Each of us, by the way we live our lives, the way we treat others, and by our words and actions, show if we have an attitude of service.

Often, we are especially influenced by those whose actions speak powerfully of a life of service.

Christians believe that the Spirit of God is active in each person and, in a special way, in the community of believers, which is the Church. It is the work of the Spirit to enable people to hear God's message and to live Jesus' way of service.

The courage to be a witness

Talk about the times you might have been in a situation when you saw something happen which was unusual, strange or even wrong and you knew you needed to tell someone. You were unsure for a number of reasons. Maybe you thought people would laugh at you, not believe you, or you might get into trouble.

What should Connor say?

Connor was cycling home from school when he saw his elder sister, Kylie, with a group of boys.

He knew some of the boys; they were tough and didn't care what anyone said to them. They were from the local secondary school, where Connor would be going in September.

Connor got off his bike and hid behind a parked car where no one could see him.

He was fond of Kylie, even though she was always

telling him he was stupid. He knew it was only teasing.

As he watched, he wondered why he had stopped. Was it curiosity? Was he spying or was he really concerned about Kylie? He wasn't sure.

Kylie was laughing. One of the boys offered her a cigarette which she took. Connor knew his parents would be cross if they found out. Kylie was only fourteen.

He could see Kylie shaking her head and beginning to walk away, one of the boys

held her arm and started arguing with her. Another pushed her, while another got hold of her bag. Kylie grabbed it back and started to run.

The boys let her go, but shouted after her; 'You'd better have the money tomorrow!'

Connor didn't know what to do. There were too many boys for him to tackle. Kylie was walking home now.

Connor got home first. His mother asked him if he had seen Kylie on the way.

Before he could answer Kylie arrived home.

Questions to discuss:

How do you think Connor felt?

As a witness to the incident what do you think Connor should do?

What are his choices?

Who do you think needs courage in this situation?

What do you think happened next?

What would you do?

Have you ever been in a situation where you have needed courage to witness? What happened?

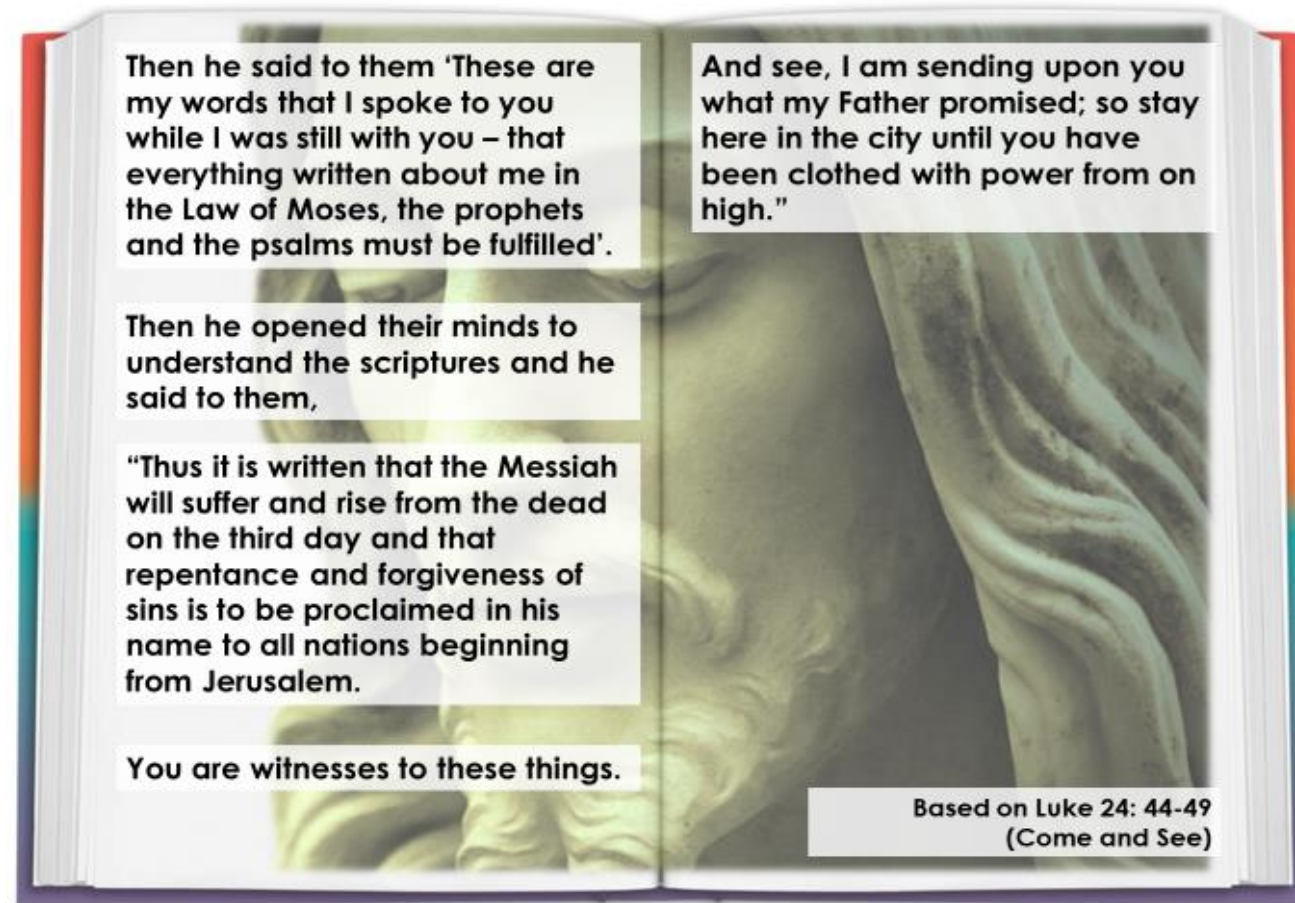
Task:

Continue writing the story, including feelings and beliefs which might affect the behaviour of the characters.

The Holy Spirit enables people to witness to the Easter message.

Jesus appeared to his disciples on a number of occasions after the Resurrection. He greeted them, shared food with them and then he sent them out to continue the message of the Good News.

Luke tells how, after his Resurrection, Jesus reassures his disciples that they will not be alone.



Jesus appears to his disciples.

In Matthew, Jesus is not only reassuring the disciples but telling of their future mission.

The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him they worshipped him even though some of them doubted.

Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples.

Baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And I will be with you always to the end of the age."

Questions to discuss:

How do you think the disciples felt when they heard these words? What did Jesus mean when he said "...the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled?"

What do you understand by the disciples being the witnesses of Jesus?

Why does Jesus want everyone to be baptised?

Why do you think some of Jesus' disciples were in doubt?

What mission did Jesus give his disciples?

Based on Matthew 28: 16-20
(Come and See)

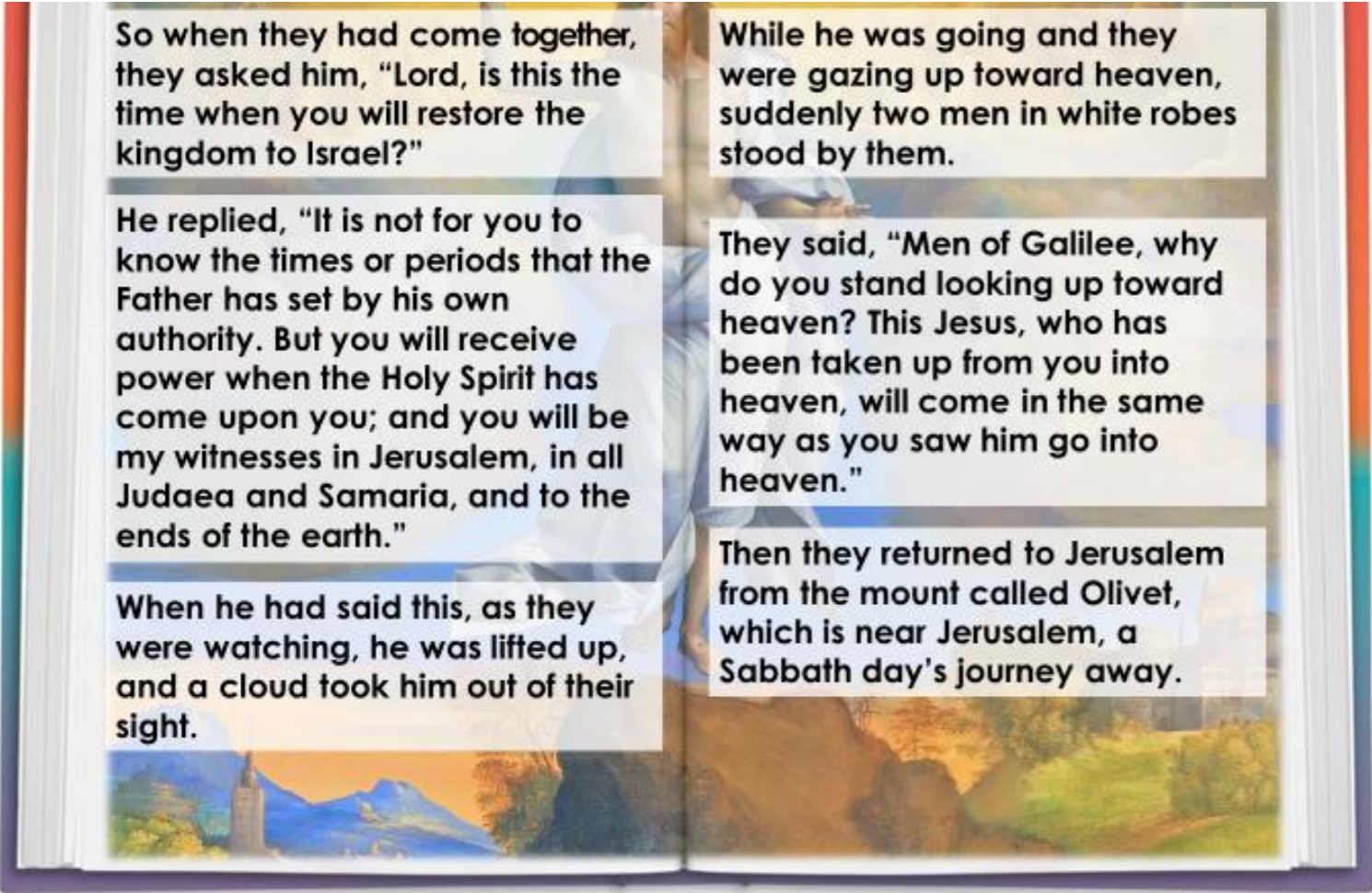
Task:

Write a diary account as one of the disciples. Show understanding of the account by making links to the Scripture and your experience and feelings of the events.

The Ascension of Jesus.

Before Jesus returned to his Father, he promised his disciples that he would send them the Holy Spirit to enable them to continue to spread the Easter message and be his witnesses.

In the Acts of the Apostles account of what happened after the Resurrection; the writer describes Jesus' return to his Father in symbolic language.



So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

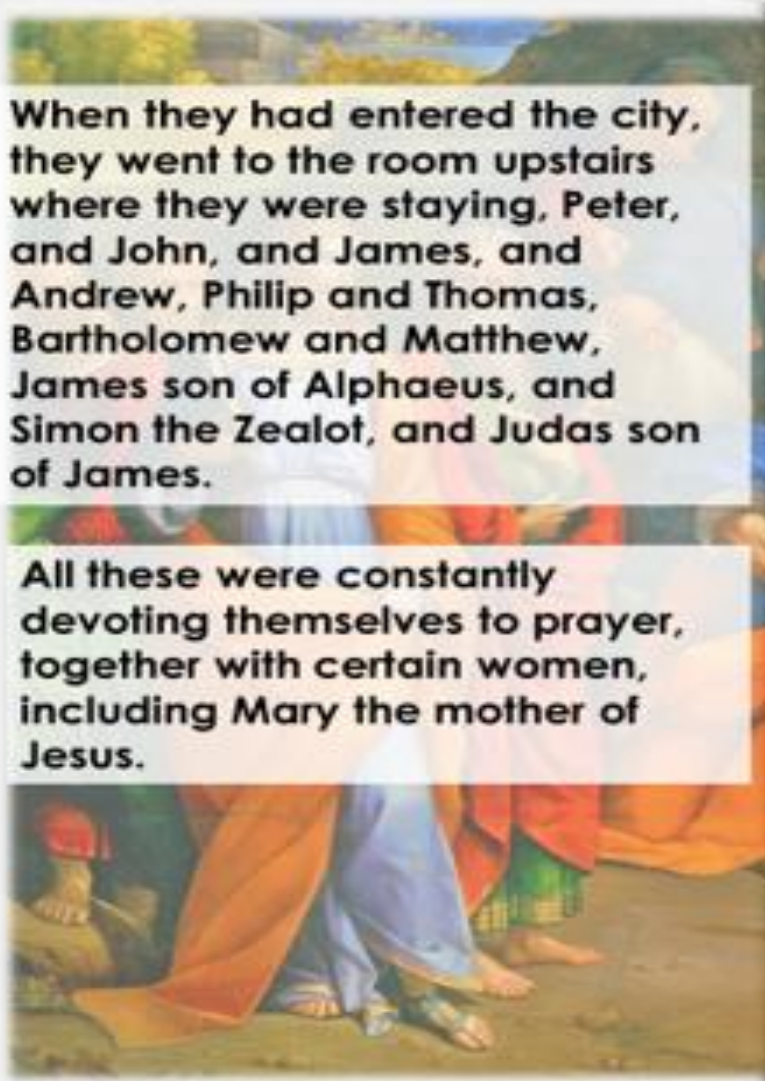
He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.



When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus.

It is important to note that it seems as if the disciples still had not understood that Jesus' kingdom was not an earthly one, but the kingdom of the heart.

The disciples, Mary and the women gathered together in Jerusalem to wait in prayer in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

It was coming up to the Jewish feast of Pentecost or Shavuot, that is the harvest festival. There were many people in Jerusalem at this time.

Questions to discuss:

Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus about 'restoring the kingdom'?

What do you think they meant and what does it show about their understanding?

What do you think the power of the Holy Spirit would enable them to do?

How do you think the disciples spent their time between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit who would give them the power to be witnesses to the ends of the earth?

Task:

Write the conversation which took place among the people in that upper room. Include any reference they would have made to the scriptures and the saying of Jesus. (Do not forget that the Gospels have not yet been written but they would be very familiar with the words of Jesus.) How would they describe their own beliefs, feelings and experiences and how would they have made links between them? Record in some way.

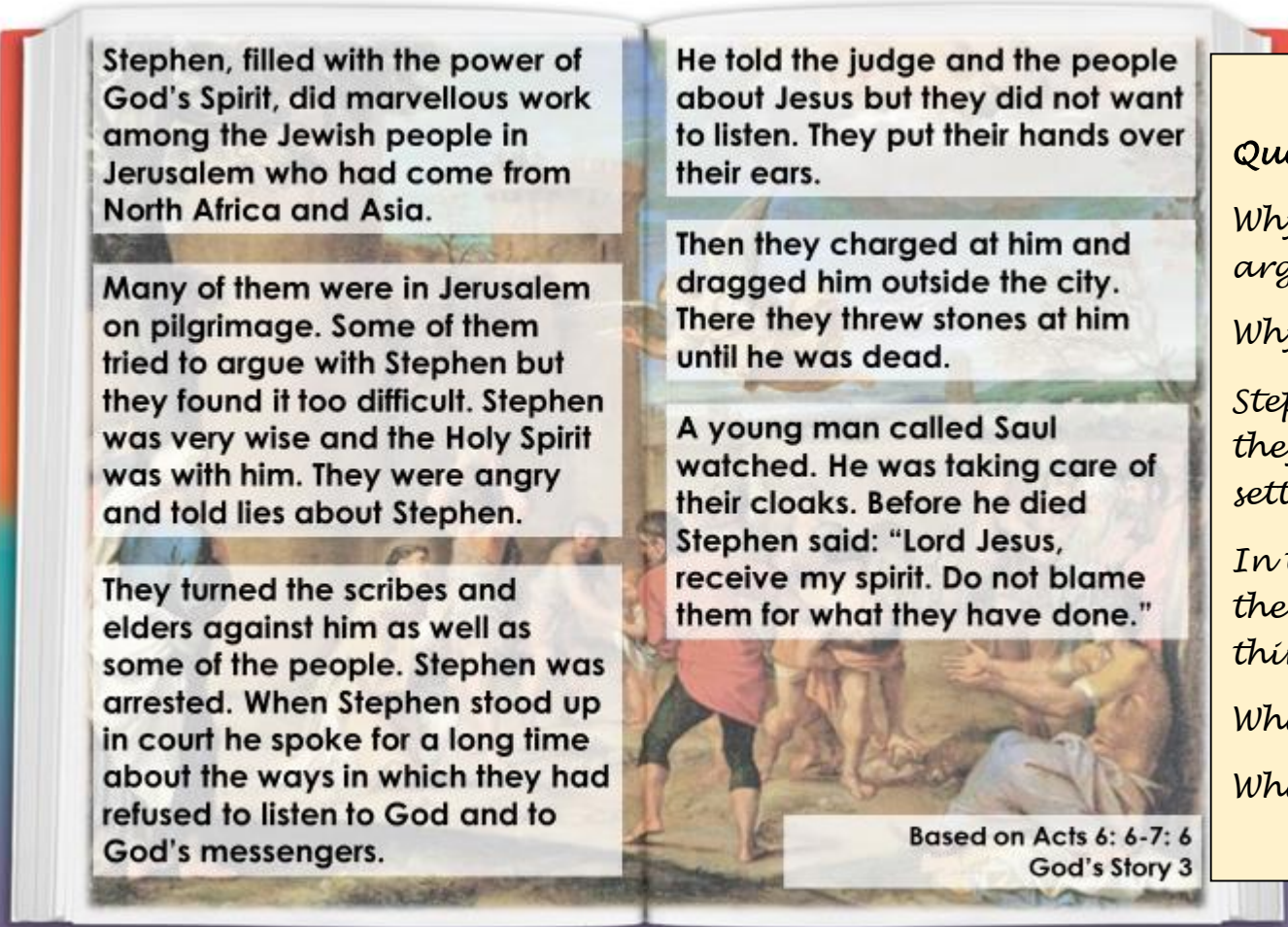


Stephen chosen to spread the Word

After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the number of those who became Christians grew so the early Church needed to be organised. One of the important works of those early Christians was to care for the poor as Jesus had done. The apostles were busy preaching and teaching, so they needed help.

Stephen was one of the people chosen to help in the distribution of food so that the apostles could continue to spread the word of God. The people chosen had to be filled with the Holy Spirit to undertake this work.

Stephen was the first deacon, deacons are called to serve and witness to the Word of God. The word 'deacon' is taken from the Greek word meaning 'service'. Eventually Stephen was arrested and sentenced to death for witnessing to the Good News of Jesus. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. A martyr is a person who holds to a belief so strongly that he or she is willing to die for it. Such was the faith that Stephen had in Jesus.



Stephen, filled with the power of God's Spirit, did marvellous work among the Jewish people in Jerusalem who had come from North Africa and Asia.

Many of them were in Jerusalem on pilgrimage. Some of them tried to argue with Stephen but they found it too difficult. Stephen was very wise and the Holy Spirit was with him. They were angry and told lies about Stephen.

They turned the scribes and elders against him as well as some of the people. Stephen was arrested. When Stephen stood up in court he spoke for a long time about the ways in which they had refused to listen to God and to God's messengers.

He told the judge and the people about Jesus but they did not want to listen. They put their hands over their ears.

Then they charged at him and dragged him outside the city. There they threw stones at him until he was dead.

A young man called Saul watched. He was taking care of their cloaks. Before he died Stephen said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Do not blame them for what they have done."

Based on Acts 6: 6-7: 6
God's Story 3

Questions to discuss:

Why were people finding it too difficult to argue with Stephen?

Why and how did Stephen remain strong?

Stephen said, "Do not blame them for what they have done." What example is Stephen setting by saying this?

In the Scripture reading it says '...they put their hands over their ears'. Why do you think they did this and what did it show?

What do you think about Saul's action?

What do Stephen's last words remind you of?

Task:

We are often called upon in school to fundraise or collect food for the foodbanks to help those who cannot afford or struggle to find food to eat. In doing this we are like Stephen, chosen to help in the distribution of food.

How might we continue to follow Stephen's example and witness to the Good News?

Ourselves as witnesses.

Through our Baptism and Confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are called to be people who spread the Easter message and to be witnesses in our present world.

There are many ways of being a witness - by prayer, our words, our life and kind deeds.



Fr. Balashowry: Providing refuge.

Fr. Balashowry is the director of the Don Bosco Centre for street children in Hyderabad, India. The centre rescues children from the streets and provides counselling, food, clothing, medicine, education, recreation, and aims at eventually rehabilitating the children to their families. There are currently over 50 boys at the centre. Most of them will have been found by the staff, begging at the train and bus station. Over a third of them are orphans and the rest have run away from broken homes. Fr. Balashowry offers a loving home for them in which they can feel safe and regain hope for their future.



Fr. Balashowry: Providing refuge.

As well as funding the children's education, the centre has workshops where it provides training in trades like carpentry, tailoring, and engineering. They also have a bakery where a former resident of the shelter now teaches baking to the children.

These classes all help to furnish the boys with the skills and motivation to find employment in the future. While the centre aims to rehabilitate children to their families, they are not forced back to their homes. The boys are encouraged to return to their families and spend some time with them, but they are welcome to return to the shelter and continue their studies. The boys need the stability and assurance that they will be supported and helped to finish their education. Fr. Balashowry is there for them until they are ready and able to move on.

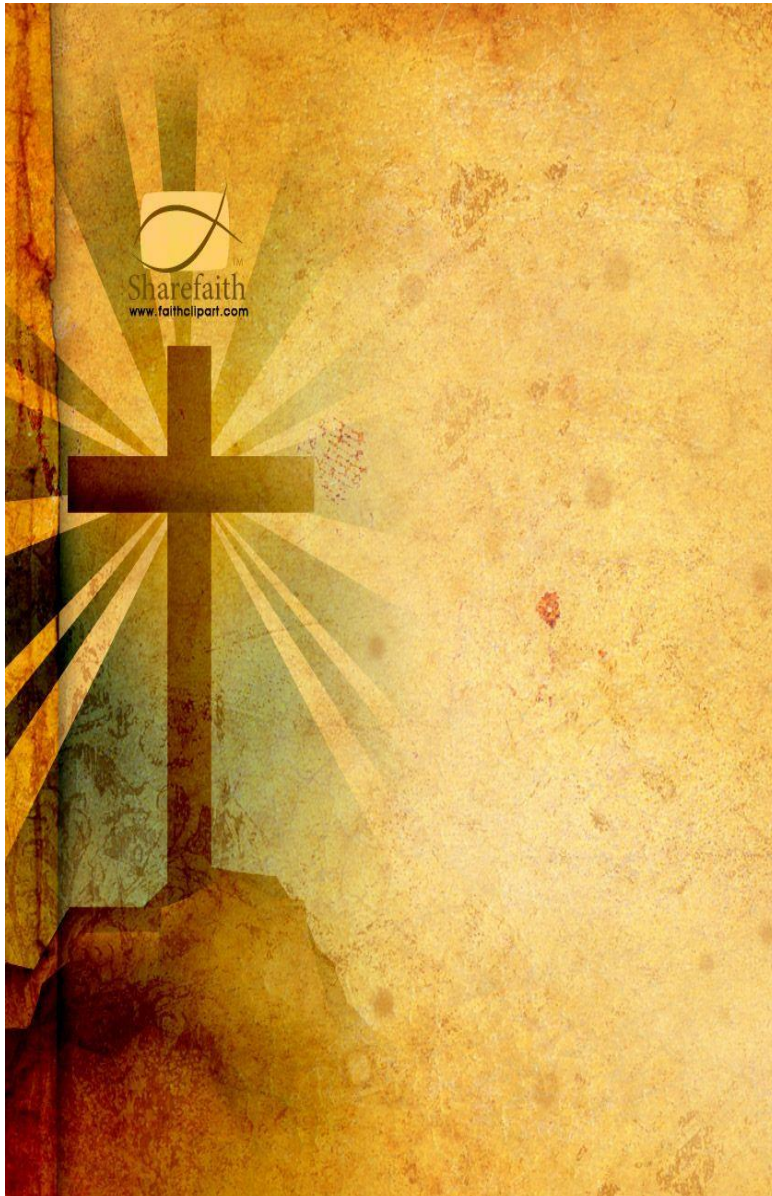
Fr. Balashowry: Providing refuge.

The staff at the shelter have to be available at all hours of the day. Sometimes, there might be a knock at the door in the middle of the night, and someone needs to be ready to let the child in and look after them. The centre is open seven days a week and staff are always available. Fr. Balashowry and the staff need to provide care and guidance and show the children that they are loved. When told he was inspirational, Fr. Balashowry humbly responded,

“It is God’s work”.

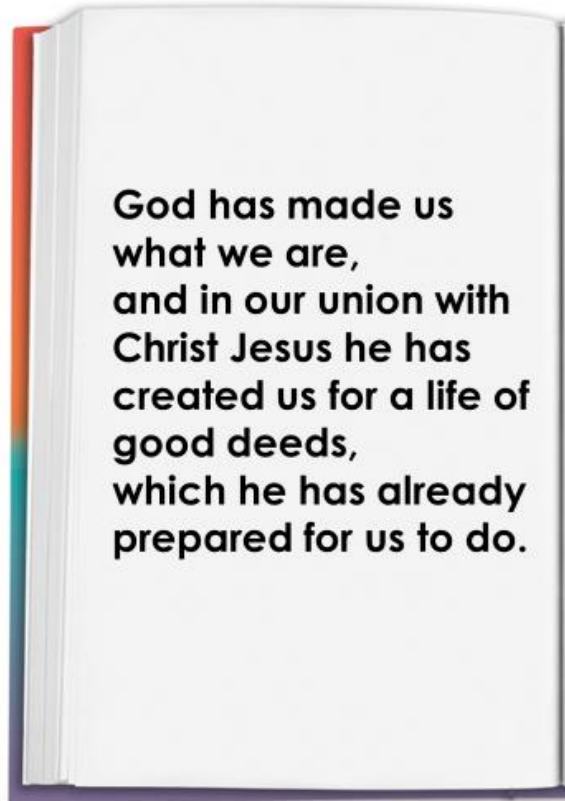


Inspired by the Holy Spirit...



You will find that, in your local area, there are many Christians inspired by the Holy Spirit who witness to the love of God by their care for those in need. They may visit the sick in hospital or at home, provide food and shelter for the homeless like The Mother of Mercy Society in Liverpool. Sometimes, it is the small things that you do in your life, a kind word, a smile, lending a helping hand and perhaps doing something no one notices that is a real witness to the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Paul's letter to the people living in Ephesus he writes:



Questions to discuss:

What do you think of Fr Balashowry and his staff?

What would you find challenging about his mission?

Why is their work so necessary?

What inspires Fr Balashowry to think of others first?

How are you a witness in your local area? (Hint: encourage the children to think about the ways in which they show kindness and care for others.)

How does your local chosen charity witness to care for others?

What can you do as a school, class or individual to witness to God's love?

Task: Write a report on how you are a living witness at school with others, at home with family and friends and individually. Describe your actions and give reasons why you do them. Say how your actions are shaping your life and others around you.

*The Holy Spirit enables people to witness to the
Easter message.*

*Father, pour out your Spirit
upon your people,
and grant us
a new vision of your glory,
a new faithfulness to your Word
and a new consecration to your service,
that your love may grow among us,
and your kingdom come:
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Respond

Now that you have explored all the Scripture for this topic, spend some time recording the key things you want to remember.

Listen to some quiet music and spend time recording what you found interesting and how you will spread the Good News. With your family, take part in a worship.