

# **THEME: Christmas Around the World**

## **Outline**

This programme lets Beaver Scouts explore how other cultures around the world celebrate the birth of Christ with many different Christmas traditions. The meeting takes the form of 3 Colony activities and a number of 'mini bases' with a variety of activities based on the traditions of each Country – for these divide the Colony into Lodges or small groups. A Leader/Helper would be required for each base. This is a good way to involve parents, but they must have been checked through completing the appropriate vetting application form for adults working with young people (information is available from The NI Scout Office). Or use some enthusiastic Scouts or Explorer Scouts! There are opportunities to meet some of the requirements of the Creative Activity Badge and the GLOBAL and FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

<b>Programme zone: Global</b>		
<b>Time (mins)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Equipment</b>
5	Register, Opening Ceremony, Introduction	
5	<b>GAME: POLAND – Festival of the Star</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Hide lots of stars all around the hall. The Colony has to try and find them all and bring them back to the Leader!!</i></li> </ul>	Lots of shiny card stars
10	<b>BASE 1 – SPAIN – Midnight Procession</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Make tambourines from 2 paper plates decorated with Christmas scenes, either draw or cut and glue motifs from old Christmas cards.</li> <li>○ Fill with a few dried peas and staple around the edges.</li> <li>○ Attach brightly coloured streamers made from crepe paper.</li> <li>○ Have a mini procession; shake the tambourines to the beat of a drum!</li> </ul>	Paper plates, stapler, dried peas, drawing equipment/old cards, scissors, glue, crepe paper Toy drum
10	<b>BASE 2 – GREAT BRITAIN – Christmas Crackers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Wrap the crepe paper around the card board tube and secure.</li> <li>○ Tie one end with ribbon, drop in a small wrapped sweet and tie other end. Decorate with stick-on motif.</li> <li>○ A simple tissue paper hat and a silly joke could be added!</li> </ul> <b>GAME: Put the Holly on the Plum Pudding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Blind fold Beavers in turn and let them try to place the picture of the springs of holly on the plum pudding!! Either give each Beaver a 'sprig' or use the same one each time.</i></li> </ul>	Small card tubes Pieces of crepe paper, several cms. bigger than tube, tape Gift ribbon, motifs Wrapped sweets. Picture of pudding Pictures of sprigs of holly, blutack, blind fold
10	<b>BASE 3 – ITALY – Saint Francis' Crib</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Beaver Scouts should sit in a circle around an empty 'stable'.</li> <li>○ The Leader reads the story of Saint Francis' Crib and they take turns to place the 'characters' in position.</li> </ul>	Model of crib Story
10	<b>GAME: AMERICA - Popcorn</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Beavers jump around the hall (like popcorn popping in a pot).</i></li> <li>○ <i>The Leader calls out a number and the Beaver Scouts must get into groups of that number, '4' would be 4 Beaver Scouts stuck together like a lump of sticky popcorn!</i></li> <li>○ <i>Any Beaver not in a group goes to another Leader who has a length of string, large darning needle and a bowl of popcorn and some dried cranberries/sultanas. The Beaver threads popcorn or fruit onto string and then rejoins the game.</i></li> <li>○ <i>By the end of the game a tasty strand of popcorn and fruit has been completed to hang out for the birds in the cold weather!</i></li> </ul>	Length of string Large darning needle Bowl of plain popcorn, cranberries or sultanas

5	<p>ACTIVITY - FRANCE &amp; AUSTRALIA – Chocolate Logs ‘on the beach’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Spread a large yellow cloth on floor – the beach – with Colony seated on or around edge, depending on size!!</li> <li>○ Serve chocolate mini rolls and tropical juice drink!</li> </ul>	<p>Chocolate mini rolls Tropical juice Large yellow cloth</p>
5	Closing, Home	

## **Christmas Traditions Around the World**

### **POLAND**

In Poland Christmas Eve is called the Festival of the Star. People go without food all day and begin the Christmas feasting as soon as the first star is seen in the sky. A place is always left at the dinner table for the Christ Child. When everyone has finished eating, the Christmas tree candles are lit and carols are sung. Boys dress up as the Wise Men (who followed the star to find Baby Jesus in the manger) and bring presents for everyone (just as the Wise Men brought gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense).

### **SPAIN**

After a Service in Church at midnight on Christmas Eve, people walk through the streets of Spain carrying torches, playing guitars and beating tambourines and drums. Another procession takes place after Christmas at Epiphany, or King's Day on 6<sup>th</sup> January - the time when the Wise Men from the East arrived to give their gifts to the infant King. At this festival Spanish children leave their shoes on the windowsills or balconies to be filled with gifts!

### **GREAT BRITAIN**

On Christmas Eve in Great Britain children are excited by the thought that during the night Santa will visit in his reindeer drawn sleigh! On Christmas morning they expect to find their stockings filled with presents!! People look forward to the whole family celebrating Jesus' birth with a feast of roast turkey with all the trimmings followed by generous helpings of plum pudding. They pull brightly coloured crackers containing paper party hats, tiny gifts and a silly joke!

### **ITALY**

Long ago, Saint Francis of Assisi did something special to teach the story of God's love for everyone, no matter who they were. Saint Francis was born more than 800 years ago, although from a wealthy family, he chose a life of poverty, prayer, helping the poor and sick and he loved nature and animals. He founded the Franciscan Brotherhood of Monks and is Patron Saint of merchants, animals, animal welfare societies and ecology. One Christmas Eve Service, he made a real manger scene and songs were sung that everyone could understand and join in. The people sang them as they wandered home after Saint Francis' sermon and so the traditions of making a Christmas crib scene and of singing carols began and spread all over the world. Around Christmastime, Italian children also have an extra treat - on Twelfth Night, the night of Epiphany, 6<sup>th</sup> January, when the Wise Men brought their gifts to Jesus, a legendary old lady called 'Befana' leaves sweets in socks hung by the chimney!

## The Ox, the Ass and the Child of Bethlehem

Francis was always doing the unexpected. He was full of surprises, and one of his loveliest, happiest surprises happened at Christmas time.

About three years before he died Francis and some brothers were living in some caves on a mountainside, close by the small town of Greccio. It was nearly Christmas, his favourite festival. He called it the Feast of Feasts.

Francis was thinking about the birth of Jesus. "I wish I could make it real," he thought. "So that everyone could see for themselves the poor, humble place where the Child of Bethlehem, Christ the King, was born. Not in a palace, but in a stable." Suddenly his eyes lit up. He knew what he was going to do.....

Francis had been ill and was often in great pain, so he found John, a brother who was a very close friend. "I need your help," said Francis. "For something special. On Christmas Eve, this is what you must do...." Then Francis explained his plan. "But keep it secret. It's to be a surprise."

On Christmas Eve John called at the home of an old peasant. "May I borrow your ox?" he asked. "Brother Francis needs it tonight, for something special."

"You can borrow anything for Brother Francis," said the old man, who like many people loved Francis dearly.

"May I borrow your ass too? And some hay and the manger?" said John.

"Of course," said the old man. "But what for? Tonight of all nights! It's Christmas Eve!"

John raised a finger to his lips. "It's a secret. A big surprise," he whispered. "Come to Midnight Mass at the church in the woods, and you will see!"

So the animals' manger, stuffed with hay, was loaded on to the back of the little ass, and away went John, driving the ass and the hefty ox before him.

All day the news flew round the small town. A big surprise...tonight...Midnight Mass at the church in the woods...Francis will be there.

Late that evening, doors were flung open and banged shut. Young and old came skipping, walking, shuffling and hobbling out of their houses, everyone holding high a candle or flaming torch to light up the dark night.

Laughing and singing, they wound their way through the woods. One by one, they entered the church, and then "Ohhh!" they gasped. What a surprise!

There, in the church, was a manger full of hay and standing beside it were the hefty ox and the little ass. Close by was Francis, thin and frail, in his brown patched robe - but smiling as he gazed lovingly at the manger, as if baby Jesus lay there.

The service began. The priest celebrated mass over the manger. Then Francis sang in his beautiful, clear voice the words from the Gospel describing the birth of Jesus. When he finished, he spoke of the Child of Bethlehem, Christ the King.

"He was not born in a palace, but in a stable," said Francis. "Look and always remember. He was poor, and he was humble."

To the people in the church, it seemed then as if there was a baby lying in the hay, in the simple roughly made manger, just as there had been in Bethlehem, long ago.

And so the night of celebration ended, with young and old walking back through the woods, full of wonder and joy and peace.

Francis' lovely, happy surprise has been copied in different ways ever since. Today, throughout the world, nativity scenes are set up at Christmas to make more real to everyone the poor and humble birth of Jesus, the Child of Bethlehem.

This and other stories about the life of Saint Francis can be found in Brother Sun, Sister Moon - The Story of Saint Francis by Margaret Mayo and Peter Malone, published by Dolphin ISBN 1-85881-770-6

## **AMERICA**

People from Europe who settled in America brought their Christmas customs with them so America enjoys a wide variety of many old traditions! It was in America that an artist first drew the picture of Santa Claus as we know him today - prior to this Santa has been dressed in green but Coca Cola preferred a jolly red-coated fellow!! Christmas presents are opened after a brunch of pancakes or waffles, or a dinner of roast turkey and ham. Afterwards families often read the Christmas story together from the Bible and sing traditional carols. The Christmas tree is decorated with strings of popcorn and cranberries, which are later fed to the birds to help sustain them through America's wintry weather!

## **FRANCE**

Part of the celebrations in France included eating thirteen different desserts made with a variety of fruit, nuts and pastries. At the end of the Christmas dinner a special chocolate log is eaten!! On 6<sup>th</sup> January the 'Fête de Rois', or the 'Coming of the three kings', is celebrated. A flat almond cake called 'galette des rois' is baked which has a token or tiny crown inside and is decorated with a crown made from gold paper.

## **AUSTRALIA**

In countries where the weather is hot in December, new Christmas customs have evolved. On Christmas Eve thousands of people gather in parks, each carrying a lighted candle, and sing carols by candlelight. Single candles and single voices join together to make a great light and a sound of joyful singing. Some people eat their Christmas dinner picnic-style on the beach and Father Christmas has been known to arrive on water skis!!