

Bible background

Acts 12:1-19

Aim of lesson

To show that God cares for those who love him.

Preparation required

You will need a small paper bag for each child, crayons, scissors and either glue, sticky tape or a stapler. With a young class it would help to cut out the activity sheet beforehand.

Suggested outline of lesson

1. Give each child a paper bag and help them to draw a smiling face on one side and an angry face on the other. Suggest that they put their bag on one of their hands and show the happy or angry face at the appropriate points in the story. Talk about the followers of Jesus and how they lived in fellowship in the new church (happy face) then tell how other people, like the Jews, were jealous and unkind to them (angry face). Explain that Herod did not like the followers of Jesus. Do they remember what another Herod, grandfather of this one, wanted to do to Jesus when he was a baby? Herod had James, one of the disciples, killed and that pleased the Jews. Herod wanted to make people like him, so he waited until a feast time when there were lots of people visiting Jerusalem, then he arrested Peter. No-one could be killed during the feast time so Peter was put in prison until the seven days of unleavened bread following the Passover were over.
2. Let the children close their eyes and try to imagine they are Peter. Describe the cold, damp, smelly darkness, the chains and the constant guard and remind them that Herod meant to kill him. Ask the children how they would feel, then tell them that Peter, despite everything, would be happy because he was suffering for Jesus. There was no possibility of escape, or of persuading Herod to change his mind, so what do the children think his friends did? Tell the children how they met, night after night, to pray for his safety. Build up the tension as you describe the night before Peter's trial; everything seemed hopeless when an angel appeared. Describe the dreamlike escape and Peter's dawning realisation that he was really free.
3. Tell how Peter went straight to the house of Mary, a widow who was probably the sister of Paul's friend Barnabas, where he knew the disciples met. They were praying (for what?). Tell the children about Rhoda's incredulous but happy reaction to hearing Peter's voice and the disbelief of the others. Let them pretend to be Peter's friends and act out their joy and astonishment when Peter walked in and told them what had happened. Explain that he could not stay long, but had to get away before Herod's soldiers found him.
4. Ask the children how they think Herod reacted when he found Peter had gone. Describe the furious but futile search and tell how Herod vented his anger on the guards by having them killed. If there is time the whole of this lesson is suitable for dramatisation.
5. Teach the rhyme 'The Bible tells of Peter'. It can be sung to the tune of 'We Love The Good Old Bible' (Sing to the Lord No. 87).
6. Follow the instructions on the activity sheet to make the prison, Peter and the angel. It will be easier to colour before constructing the models. Let the children put Peter and the angel inside the prison then bring them out through the open door.

Alternative activities

1. Make a set of simple picture cards for the children to sequence. Make two sets and play pairs. Ask the children to identify the part of the story being portrayed in each picture they turn over.
2. Cut out a large paper door and stick one edge of it on to a piece of paper or card so that it forms a flap and can be opened and closed. Get the children to draw a picture of Peter behind the door.
3. Make a model of the prison out of Lego, blocks or Plasticine.

Relevance to the children's lives

Peter's friends could do nothing to help Peter so they asked God to help him. Do the children ever feel no-one can help them? Have they tried praying? When they pray do they ask for selfish things or do they think of others?

Prayer

Thank God for caring for us, and ask him to help us to serve him even if people try and stop us.

Verse

'So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.' Acts 12:5.

Rhyme

The Bible tells of Peter
Locked in a prison cell
His arms were chained to soldiers
And he was guarded well
His friends all prayed together
But things looked very grim
Until God sent an angel
Who came and rescued him.