



## Someone to Believe In

### Session 1 Seeds of Faith

#### Introduction

We are beginning the headlong rush towards Christmas when the pace of life increases even faster than normal. It can be hard to remember what is at the heart of this special season. Our advent central series will try to refocus our minds and hearts on the central reality of Christmas – it is CHRISTmas, after all!

To help our journey we'll use the film *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*. Book by Sheila Jacobs uses clips from the 1947 version of the film. But we will have clips instead from the 1994 version with Richard Attenborough. The premise of the film is that the elderly gentleman who takes over from the drunken Santa Claus for the department store acts as though he is Santa Claus. Being the USA, the holiday season kicks off with a Thanksgiving Parade organised by the department store. The organiser is Mrs Walker a single mother with a young daughter, Susan. As the film is from the 1990s, we will need to let our safeguarding sensitivities drift away and allow ourselves to be drawn into the content of the film. We will watch a chunk of the film and after a brief reflection of what we have seen, we will split into groups to discuss a few of the themes that arise. After that we will come back together to share what we have learnt about Jesus and faith.

First we draw closer to the Lord so that he may draw us closer to the reality of Christmas and remind us that we are called to put our faith and trust in a someone rather than a something.

*Opening prayer*  
*Worship songs*

*Film*  
*Reflection and Bible passage*

*Groups*    *Introductions*  
              *Discussion questions*  
              *Bible passage*

*Gathering together*

*Final song, prayer and departures*

*Film sections - week 1    0 – 28 minutes*

#### **Bible passage**

Isaiah 9: 2 – 7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their

joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

### **Discussion questions**

- Do you think that it is right that Susan isn't allowed to believe in fantasies? Do you think that being encouraged to believe in fairy tales is harmful or not?
- Have your views about Jesus been coloured or influenced by someone else's thoughts, teaching or example?
- How can other's negative attitudes towards Jesus or faith influence our own faith journey?
- How differently might it feel to meet him face to face?
- Mr Bedford takes Susan to see Father Christmas at the store, why do you think he does this? What is he hoping for in the encounter between Susan and Father Christmas?

Susan's mother believes that children should be raised truthfully and realistically and not believing in myths and legends like Santa Claus. Mr Bedford wants Susan to have the opportunity to experience Father Christmas for herself rather than have her mother's negativity influence her daughter.

We can translate this into the Christian setting by thinking of how we introduce people of little or no faith into the relationship that they may have with the real Jesus. Many people are still left with a mythical view of what Jesus is like, either from their parents or a secularised viewpoint. With this standpoint, Jesus can easily remain simply a baby in a manger – helpless and dependent on others.

Isaiah points to one who would come who would change our ideas and attitudes about God by redeeming us and making all things and people new by faith. The challenge comes when our own cynicism or the negativity of others affects us. Jesus reminds us that we need to look at God and have faith with the attitude of children. Matthew's Gospel reminds us:

He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18: 2,3)

Jesus points to the openness of children and to their willingness to embrace new ideas as the secret to entering and belonging to the Kingdom of God. This is what Mr Bedford seems to be doing with Susan, allowing her to discover Santa Claus for herself and to decide what to believe rather than accepting without question her mother's cynicism.

This Advent, let us allow the real Jesus to focus our thoughts and lives on Him and to give ourselves to the Kingdom and all it means for us and the world.

**Prayer**

Loving heavenly Father, as we journey through Advent, let us keep in mind the real "reason for the season." Thank you for those who have helped us this far in getting to know you. Let us grow in faith as we walk towards Christmas, believing that the seed of faith planted in us can grow in the fertile soil of your love. Help us to come to you as little children and to live to please you. Amen.