**FIRST STEPS TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Session 1 of 4

# Easter Sunday

### MEETING AIM

To explore and celebrate the best day ever!

### BIBLE PASSAGE

John 20:1-18

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

This story is filled with wonder and amazement, and a journey from utter despair to outrageous joy. This session encourages the children to physically participate in that journey, as they empathise with those who witnessed events first-hand, and experience for themselves the celebration that Easter Sunday brings to all of us.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask the children to think about their best day ever – what made it so good? Do they have more than one best day ever? Invite them to share their stories and celebrate their happy memories together.

### PLAY – 10 mins

**You will need:** access to the internet, either during the session or beforehand if you learn the signs

Explain that during this session, you are going to be thinking about some different feelings or emotions, so you’re going to learn how to sign, using BSL, some of the different signs for our feelings.

You can use the [online BSL dictionary](https://www.signbsl.com/) to watch and practise the signs together, or rehearse them before the session, ready to teach them to the children yourself. Words used could include sad, frightened, surprised and happy. Talk about each of the different feelings as you practise them, and invite the children to briefly share their own experiences of these different emotions.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** a garden space to retell this story (alternatively, use potted plants, green blankets etc to create an appropriate space)

Gather the children together at the edge of the garden space and explain that you are going to think about what happened to some of Jesus’ friends a few days after they had seen him die on the cross. You may choose to find a space where you can sit together to tell the story, but it could work particularly well if you are able to move around as a group, as described below, linking movement to emotion to experience the story in a more direct way.

Ask the children how they think Jesus’ friends would have felt when they got to the garden, perhaps using the signs learned earlier, and say:

Very early on the Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus’ tomb to treat Jesus’ body with special oils. *Tiptoe through the garden, to an assigned place, perhaps a rock.*

But when she got there, she was amazed to discover the stone had been rolled away. *You could sign ‘Amazed’.*

She ran back to find Jesus’ friends. *Encourage the children to rush back to the garden entrance.*

The friends hurried back through the garden to see what had happened. *Run back through the garden.*

They couldn’t understand where Jesus had gone. Perhaps they were worried, perhaps they were confused. *Ask the children how they might be feeling right now. Use any signs that the children have just learned.*

Jesus’ friends left the tomb to tell the others what they had seen. Mary stayed behind. While she was there, two angels appeared. They asked her why she was so sad. Mary tried to explain that someone must have taken Jesus’ body away, when someone appeared behind her. *Turn around together, wondering who it could be.*

At first, Mary thought it must be the gardener, but when he spoke, she knew that it was Jesus! Not dead, but alive and standing right in front of her!

Jesus sent Mary to tell his friends that she had seen him, so she hurried off once more; it really was the best day ever!

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

* What is your favourite part of this story?
* Was there anything you didn’t like about the story?
* How do you think Mary must have felt when she realised it was Jesus?
* Why do you think this was the best day ever?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** trays; a selection of materials to create a garden (this could be playdough and artificial flowers or items collected from your time in the garden); peg people; stones

Invite the children to use the gathered materials to create an Easter garden; either individually or working together to form a larger group garden. Encourage them to think about what this place may have been like and what features to include: a tomb and a pathway, for instance. Provide blank peg dolls for the children to use as the key characters in the story. As you create your gardens, talk about the story and encourage them to ask any questions they may have.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** pens or pencils and paper; balloons

Tell the children that you are going to celebrate Easter in our prayers. Give each child a small piece of paper and invite them to draw or write their praise or thank-you prayers to God. It could be as simple as: “Thank you for Easter Sunday” or something specific they have discovered today. Invite the children fold the paper up and put their prayers into a balloon and help them to blow up and tie the balloons. Play some praise music and invite the children to celebrate who Jesus is and what he has done, dancing and throwing the balloons around. When the music stops, pop the balloons and invite the children to gather the prayers together in the centre of the group. Pray over these prayers and over the children, thanking Jesus for what he has done for us.

(Some children may not like balloons popping, so have some scissors ready to cut the top of the balloons if necessary.)

**BECKY MAY**

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