**Messy Church – October 2022**

**Saul to Paul**

The activities are:

1. Stephen – distribution of food – what people need to live – biscuits to share
2. Saul – make a label for your bedroom door
3. Where did Saul come from, where did he grow up? Maps
4. Saul – education, cultural mix - scroll
5. Stephen – distribution of food – biscuits – what people need to live
6. Travelling – walking – shoe prints to use in the celebration
7. Saul – light on the road – pipe cleaner model
8. Saul – blind – cardboard glasses to decorate
9. Ananias – paper chain to link Saul to Jesus – in the celebration

We don’t know a great deal about Saul’s early life – we know where he was born (in Tarsus, in Cilicia, in what is now Turkey), and we know he had part of his education in Jerusalem, so he moved between the two places at least once. Travelling would usually be done on foot, probably about 15 miles a day, but if you look at the map, Saul and his parents could have come part of the way by boat. There would have been inns to stay in along the way, as lots of people travelled all over the Roman Empire. Because he was born in a Roman town, he was a Roman citizen, but he was also Jewish. Roman towns had schools for boys – they learned to read and write and do arithmetic. They wrote on wax tablets so the writing could be rubbed out, but their textbooks were scrolls, with the subjects written on them. In Jerusalem, he said he studied with Gamaliel – who taught Jewish law to boys who wanted to be lawyers. The textbooks there would also have been scrolls.

As a young adult, living in Jerusalem, Saul came across the Christian faith, then a very new grouping within the Jewish faith. He would have been told that the founder of the group had been executed for blasphemy – claiming to be the Son of God was not allowed under Jewish law.

The Christians in Jerusalem helped each other. Many of them were very poor and they put all their things together and shared them out. Now most of the people who became Christian were Jews. A while before Jesus was born Alexander the Great had conquered Judea and a lot of other countries. It became the done thing to speak Greek. However, after Alexander died, his empire was split up between his generals. Their descendants ruled. One of them tried to get rid of the Jewish faith. In the time of our story there were many Jews who spoke Greek and used the scriptures translated into Greek (The Pentateuch) and others who only spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. In Jerusalem, these formed two opposing groups. As the number of Christians grew, there were some from each group. There was a dispute about fair treatment. The Apostles appointed 7 people to make sure things were done fairly. One of these was called Stephen. When a group of people who hated Christians killed Stephen, Saul gave them his support (looked after their coats).

Saul became very determined to make sure that Christianity could not spread, and he was given permission to go to Damascus and bring back all the Christians he could find, to be tried (and probably executed) in Jerusalem.

On the way to Damascus, he was suddenly surrounded by a blinding light, and heard a voice, asking him why he was persecuting the voice. Saul couldn’t see anyone, so he asked who the voice was. The answer from the voice was that he was Jesus. The people with Saul heard the voice, but they didn’t see anything. The voice told Saul to go to Damascus, and there he would be told what to do next. When he opened his eyes, Saul couldn’t see, so the people with him led him into Damascus, holding his hand, and found him somewhere to stay. There he waited for three days.

In Damascus, there was a Christian called Ananias. God told him that there was a man named Saul, who had had a vision of a man called Ananias coming and healing him. Ananias told God that he knew about Saul, and that he had come to Damascus to arrest Christians. God said that he had chosen Saul to spread the stories of Jesus to people who were not Jewish, as well as those who were. Ananias went to Saul, and healed him so that he could see again. Then Saul was baptised, in the name of Jesus. His “Christian” name was Paul.

**Stories and Activities**

**1 Saul – what does your name mean, where does it come from – make a door label**

**You will need:** a piece of heavy card, or paper, which you can stick to card, long enough to write your name one, and paint or crayons or felt tip pens to colour in

Write your name on the card or paper, and decorate the card to make a fancy label for your door. You could decorate the card with pictures you like, or pictures of things you like. Before you attach it to your door, check with your parents how they would like you to attach it!

**Talk about:** what your name means, if anything, or where it comes from – different names are popular at different times, and in different places.

**2 Where was Saul born, where did he grow up – where were you born, and where did you grow up? Look at maps**

**You will need:** a map of the middle east (in the information pack) and a map of where you live – you might need two maps if you were born some distance from where you live now. Maps can be found on the internet if you don’t have paper maps!

Saul was born in Tarsus, in what is now Turkey. At the time he was born, it was a Roman town, and anyone born there who was not a slave was a Roman citizen. It was unusual for Jews to be Roman citizens as well, because most Jewish towns were not Roman towns. When Saul was a child, his parents took him to live in Jerusalem. Can you find Tarsus and Jerusalem on the map?

Look for where you were born, and where you live now – if you have a large scale map you might even be able to find the house you live in! Ask your family why you live somewhere different, if you do – the story might be a long one!

**Talk about:** moving house. Why might people move from one place to another? Would moving make you happy or sad – you might have to leave your school, and your friends, or you might move because it was not safe to stay where you are.

**3 What sort of school did Saul go to – what sort of school do you go to? Make a scroll**

**You will need:** a piece of paper, scissors, glue and/or sticky tape, two pieces of garden cane or small dowels, just a little wider than the paper, something to write with, a short length of ribbon or yarn to tie up your scroll

Put the paper on the table so that the short end of the paper is at the top. Put one of the garden canes at the top of the paper, and stick it to the paper. Put the other cane at the bottom, and stick it to the paper as well. Roll up the paper from each end, so that they meet in the middle, and tie up the scroll. If you want, you can write on the inside of the scroll – write the subjects you like to do at school.

**Talk about:** how boys were educated (and girls – but differently) in Roman communities and Jewish communities. What they learned, what they used as textbooks.

**4 Stephen – feeding the hungry in the Christian community – make biscuits**

**You will need:** a copy of the recipe, the ingredients and the tools listed. (The recipe is in the pack.)

Make the biscuits as stated in the recipe. Share them with anyone in the house.

**Talk about:** people who don’t have enough to eat – because they don’t have enough money to buy food, or because the food they have is given to other people, or because they live somewhere where there is not enough food to go round, for some reason. How could we help them? Do we like to share our food? Is there someone in your home who would like a treat, who usually makes sure you have a treat?

**5 Travelling – walking – make shoe prints to use in the Celebration**

**You will need:** paper (more than one sheet, if you can – you could use scrap paper, rather than clean paper), something to draw with, scissors.

Put your foot (with your shoe on) on the paper. Draw round your shoe. Try to do both feet – and if you have the paper, more than one of each foot. Cut out carefully around the outline. Put the footprints on one side to use in the celebration.

If you have time, look again at the maps of the middle east – find Jerusalem again, and then find Damascus. How long would it take to get from one to the other?

**Talk about:** moving from place to place. Today, we would go any distance by car – or for really long distances, by train or aeroplane. In Saul’s day, most people walked, as he did on the way to Damascus. If they were very rich, or they were in a hurry, they might ride a horse, or go in a chariot. It might sometimes be possible to go by boat – but not for this journey!

**6 Saul meets Jesus on the road and is dazzled – pipe cleaner model**

**You will need:** two pipe-cleaners, and the picture of the finished model,

Bend one pipe-cleaner in half, make a loop at the bend, and then twist the two halves together for about half the length of what is below the loop. Bend the second pipe-cleaner lightly in thirds. Twist the middle third of the pipe-cleaner several times around the body you have already made, so that the ends stick out to make the arms. Bend the ends of the legs to make feet.

Talk the story about Saul’s journey to Damascus through, or ask an adult to read it, and when Saul falls down on the road, bend the figure’s knees so that he kneels in the road.

**Talk about:** what happens when you are dazzled – perhaps someone turns the light on in a dim room, or your car turns so that the sun comes through the window and dazzles you. Imagine that you are walking along and suddenly you are dazzled. Would you fall over?

**7 Saul is blind – make and decorate cardboard glasses**

**You will need:** a piece of thin cardboard or heavy paper, long enough to go across your head from one ear to the other, something to draw with, scissors, glue and glitter to decorate.

If you have someone in your house who wears glasses, ask to borrow them to copy. Otherwise, do your best – remember that the lenses need to be separated the width of your nose, and that the lenses themselves are only big enough to cover your eyes. Cut out the glasses – but leave the lenses uncut!

**Talk about:** what it would be like to be blind, and unable to see. In the time of Saul, there were no guide dogs, so Saul had to rely on his friends. What would you miss most if you couldn’t see.

**8 Ananias to Saul – make a paper chain – in the Celebration**

**You will need:** paper – plain or multicoloured – scissors, glue

Cut the paper into strips about 2 cm wide. Glue one into a ring, and then thread the next one through it before gluing that into a ring – see how long a chain you can make in 2 minutes.

**Talk about:** Ananias is one link of a chain linking Saul to Jesus. If you were thinking about links for you to Jesus, who would come in between? Your mum? Your dad? A teacher?

**Celebration**

We’ll start by singing Our God is a great big God <https://youtu.be/8Hi8jW1qYsw>

Look at the verse where it says “he’s known me and he’s loved me”.

Saul, who became Paul, was born in Tarsus. This meant he was a Roman citizen, something that becomes important in another part of our story. What is more important for today is that he was a Jew, and a very thoroughly educated one. At some time he moved to Jerusalem, and there he learned about Jewish teachings and rules from a famous (in his day) teacher called Gamaliel. Paul knew lots and lots about being a good Jew. He was worried and annoyed, though. There had been a teacher, called Jesus, and he didn’t follow the Jewish rules the way Saul understood them. He had been so bad (or so Saul thought) that he had been killed. That ought to have been the end of it, but Jesus’ followers suddenly started talking to everyone about Jesus, saying he had come back to life then gone to heaven. They worked miracles, they healed people just like Jesus was said to have done. Lots of people started to follow this new way. They got called “Christians”.

Saul hated Christians. When one of them, Stephen, was killed by a mob, Saul approved. He got letters from the Jewish leaders to allow him to go to Damascus to catch more Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem.

If you cut out shoe prints, let’s put them down on the floor to mark how Saul might have walked to Damascus.

While Saul was going to Damascus something strange happened. All of a sudden a bright light shone on him and he heard a voice asking him why he was persecuting him and telling him that he wouldn’t be able to see, but if he went to a house in Straight Street a man called Ananias would come and heal him. And that is what happened. When he was healed, Saul became a Christian and his name was changed to Paul.

We’ll make a paper chain. This represents the people who are links in the chain bringing us to God. For Paul, Ananias was an important link.

A chain also stands for the way Paul had intended to bring people back to Jerusalem. Later on Paul was put in chains, but that is a story for another session.

Even though Paul started off hating Jesus and the Christians, God still loved him. We’ll sing Jesus’ love is very wonderful <https://youtu.be/WcgplHIntJc>

Our prayer

Dear God, thank you that you love us no matter what. Help us to learn to love you. Amen.

We’ll sing Walk in the light <https://youtu.be/SDcbYk-9C-Y> to think about Paul walking, about the light, and about Jesus.

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We’ll have a Zoom meeting open for those who can’t come to the church. Our end of Zoom will go on YouTube during the celebration, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos>