



*Story
summaries
Teaching Resources*

*Charlton Kings Junior School
Open The Book team*

Written by Alison Talbot

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Dedication

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Kate Alger, who died at the end of November 2018. Kate was a key member of the *Open the Book* team from January 2012 until July 2018 when illness forced her to retire.

Kate contributed to all aspects of the team's work. She did all the tasks associated with OtB presentations; she was especially good playing the part of a "baddie" and she was excellent with children who took part in presentations. Kate looked after many of the props and acted as our liaison with the OtB national organisation at the Bible Society. She was very conscious that we are guests of the School when we come in to do the presentations and always reminded us of this.

Kate was a strong and determined person who made a significant contribution to everything with which she was involved. Her son-in-law, Andrew Wise, provided a poetic eulogy for her funeral, including these lines.

"An amazing lady who walked tall, was loved and respected by all."



The photograph shows our presentation of *The Wedding at Cana*. Children in costume can be seen as the wedding couple, servants and guests. The role of lead servant is taken by Kate Alger (white apron). The water jars are projected images. (published with permission)

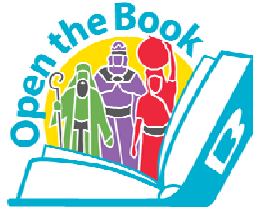
Acknowledgement of sources

'The Lion Storyteller Bible', (2008 expanded edition)
Bob Hartman & Krisztina Kállai Nagy, © 2008 Bob Hartman

Open the Book
Handbook 1 (first published 2008)
Handbook 2 (first published, 2009)
Handbook 3 (first published, 2010)
Storybook 2 (first published 2009)
Storybook 3 (first published 2010)

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Introduction



This Introduction provides a brief description of **Open the Book** using text from the official web site at <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/>

Open the Book (OtB) is a project which offers primary school children an opportunity to hear key Bible stories, from a team provided by local churches, who present the stories during assemblies (Acts of Collective Worship).

It began in 1999 when a small group of church volunteers started going into primary school assemblies in Bedford to read and act out stories using The Lion Storyteller Bible. After being inspired by this, the project spread into Gloucestershire in 2001. Later, in 2007, a national charity was formed. With increasing growth of volunteer numbers into the thousands, OtB joined the Bible Society in 2013.

The project is now fully supported by the Bible Society with a professional team. There is training provision for all volunteers and resources are available to support presentations, including ideas for props and costumes. OtB has been favourably received by OFSTED, ESTYN and SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) and helps primary schools in meeting their statutory collective worship obligations under the 1998 Schools Standards & Framework Act.

OtB is being used successfully in schools with wide ethnic and religious backgrounds. There is no coercive content. The time for reflection is suitable for children of all faiths and none. No attempt is made to impose the Christian faith on a child. OtB takes safeguarding seriously and all Storytellers are required to adhere to a Code of Practice, Code of Conduct and other Safeguarding guidelines.

Each presentation takes around 10–15 minutes and can be incorporated into a wider school assembly, or can stand alone. It is a three-year rolling programme supported by printed materials providing the text of the stories and guidance on how the stories are to be presented.

This publication is the Charlton Kings Junior School Team's contribution to the 20th year celebrations of Open the Book.

The Open the Book programme began locally at Glenfall Primary School (in 2008 with a team from St Mary's). This proved to be so helpful for teachers and popular with the children that the other schools quickly became involved too – CK Junior School (2009 with St Andrew's URC, CK Baptist Church, & St Mary's), Holy Apostles Primary School (2010 with Holy Apostles) and CK Infant School (2012 with St Andrew's URC, St Gregory's, Holy Apostles & St Matthew's). It is great fun for everyone!



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<https://www.ckjs.org.uk/>

We have enjoyed weekly visits from our Open the Book team for many years at CKJS. The combination of powerfully told biblical stories, beautifully made props, passionate engagement with each theme by the Team and active involvement of the children brings each message to life. The creation of this resource allows the teaching team and me, as Headteacher, to draw connections between school life and the stories themselves. The written synopsis and moral of each story supports the development of our weekly assembly themes: by prior knowledge of what is being covered, we can make stronger connections to current events and enhance the children's understanding of the story's connection to their lives today.

The OTB play a prominent role in our weekly assemblies and, a result of their hard work in creating this document, the messages conveyed have a stronger impact than before.

Lee Pajak, Headteacher

List of Stories covered

In order of appearance in the Open the Book Handbooks

Year 1

Title	Notes
"The First Christmas"	
"In The Beginning"	
"A Sad Day"	
"A Special Promise"	
"God's Friend"	
"Joseph the Dreamer"	
"Joseph the Ruler"	
"The Secret Baby"	
"The Great Escape"	
"A Long Journey"	
"The Walls Fall Down"	
"Samuel Hears a Voice"	
"David the Giant-Killer"	
"The Wise King"	
"Jonah The Groaner"	
"Daniel and the Lions"	
"A Time to Build"	
"The Wise Men's Visit"	
"The Boy in the Temple"	
"Jesus is Baptised"	
"Jesus' Special Friends"	
"Down Through the Roof"	
"The Storm on the Lake"	
"The Marvellous Picnic"	
"The Lost Coin"	
"The Big Spender"	
"Jesus and the Children"	
"Jesus and the Taxman"	
"The Great Parade"	
"An Important Meal"	
"A Dreadful Day"	
"A Happy Day"	
"Goodbye at Last"	

Year 2

Title	Notes
"The Helper Arrives"	
"Tabitha Wakes Up"	
"The Beautiful Gate"	
"Praying for Peter"	
"God Has No Favourites"	
"A Tale of Two Houses"	
"Hezekiah Trusts God"	
"Elijah and the Ravens"	
"A Jar and a Jug"	
"Walking on Water"	
"The Centurion's Servant"	
"The Good Samaritan"	"The Kind Stranger" (handbook title)
"I Can See"	
"The Big Party"	
"Big Bags of Money"	
"The Burning Bush"	
"The King Who Would Not Listen"	
"Down in the Well"	
"The Boys Who Were Strong Enough to Say No"	"The Boys Who Liked to Say No" (handbook title)
"The Men Who Were Brave Enough to Say No"	"The Men Who Liked to Say No" (handbook title)
"The Helpful Servant"	
"Snatched to Safety"	
"Small King, Big Task"	
"The Two Sons"	
"Be Like Me!"	
"The Bad Brother"	
"The Runaway"	
"Spies in Canaan"	
"Across the River"	
"A Brave and Mighty Man"	
"Joseph's Story"	
"The Shepherds' Story"	
"The Wise Men's Story"	
"John's Story"	
"On the Road to the Cross"	
"On the Road to Emmaus"	

Year 3

Title	Notes
"On the Road to Damascus"	
"Mistaken for Gods"	
"Prison Praise"	
"Problems for Paul"	
"Paul is Shipwrecked"	
"Tea at Auntie's House"	
"The Greedy Farmer"	
"The Unforgiving Servant"	
"Everyone gets the Same"	
"The Widow's Coins"	
"Samuel the Kingmaker"	
"The Two Kings"	
"Best Friends"	
"Run for your Life!"	
"King David Dances"	
"Lazarus, Friend of Jesus"	
"The Man Who Came Back"	
"Waiting for a Friend"	
"The Good Shepherd"	
"The Pharisee and the Tax Collector"	
"Esther was a Star"	
"Ruth Finds a New Home"	
"Deborah the Judge"	
"Hannah's Prayer"	
"Brave Abigail"	
"The First Passover Meal"	
"The Remembering Meal"	
"The Wedding Feast"	
"Sarah Spends Her Savings"	
"The Writing on The Wall"	
"Just Hoping"	
"Christmas Journeys"	
"God's Good Idea"	
"A Soldier's Story"	
"Peter's Saddest Day"	
"Peter's Happiest Day"	

Year 1

“The First Christmas”

This is our last Open the Book before Christmas, so this is our take on the famous story based on the Gospel of St Luke, chapters 1 and 2.

The story is very familiar so this way of telling it suggests to the school that they think of how it must have felt to be there. Then the Open the Book commentary speaks of why it is that we have so much to enjoy at Christmas time – and why it is good news.

“In The Beginning”

Our story to start the year is based on the first two chapters of the book of Genesis.

Back long long ago when the Bible was written, nobody knew about the Theory of Evolution, but they did know that God had made the world, creating it out of nothing with his imagination. So this is the story that they told each other, and then eventually wrote down.

At the very beginning, there was nothing there. No light, no ground to stand on, nothing. So God started to make the earth, first the light, then the earth and sky, then plants, then sea creatures, then birds and animals and finally people. Everything worked out just as God planned it, and he, and the people whom he had made, Adam and Eve, were very happy.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the beauty of creation, and invites the children to think about their favourite part of it.

“A Sad Day”

This week’s story is based on the book of Genesis chapter 3.

God has created the world and made it beautiful, and last of all called Adam and Eve into being, to enjoy it and look after it. Sadly, one of the creatures in the garden suggests to them that they don’t need to take any notice of God’s instructions – they can do anything they like. They pick and eat the fruit God has asked them to avoid and at once it makes them feel bad – not just in their stomachs, but in their consciences. The consequence is that they have to leave the beautiful garden and their easy life, and fend for themselves outside.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the disappointment when something you make is spoiled, and the times when we have ourselves spoiled something, and maybe missed out, because we made the wrong choice.

“A Special Promise”

This week’s story is based on Genesis chapters 6 to 9.

Although God had made a good world, everywhere he looked, the people were making a mess of it. He decided to sweep it all away and start again – with the exception of Noah and his family, the only ones who still remembered God. So God told Noah to build a boat big enough for his family and two of all the animals and other creatures, because there was going to be a great flood. Everyone was surprised as there was no sign of wet weather, but

Noah was determined went ahead. When he was finished, it began to rain, and it carried on raining until the whole world was under water. Eventually the rain ceased and the water level began to go down. To see if anywhere was dry, Noah sent out a dove – and when the bird did not come back, he knew it had found a safe place to live. At last the water was all gone, and God called them all out of the boat. It was a new start, and God promised never to take such drastic action again. As a seal on his promise, he drew a rainbow in the sky, so that every time they saw it, everyone would remember the flood and be glad that it wouldn't happen again.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of new starts.

“God’s Friend”

This week’s story introduces another well-known character and is based on the stories in Genesis chapters 12, 17, 18 and 21.

Abraham was a special person – not because he was rich (although he was), but because he had a very good relationship with God. So when one day God asked him to leave his home where he was happy and comfortable, he did just that. He didn't know it at the time, but the place he was going would make him even happier. Even more than that, his one sadness was that he and his wife Sarah had no children (this is a sad thing nowadays, but was even sadder back then). Because he and Sarah were so old, he thought all hope was gone, but God promised him a child, and descendants without number. They both had trouble believing this at first, but it did indeed come to pass, and they called their baby Isaac, which means “laughter”, because they were so happy.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of good friends whom you can trust.

“Joseph the Dreamer”

This week’s story is based on the Book of Genesis chapters 37 to 41.

Joseph had eleven brothers, but he and his younger brother, the two youngest of them all, were their father’s favourites. Joseph didn't understand how this might upset the rest of the family, and when his father gave him a special coat, he bragged about it. Worse, when he started having dreams about how special he was, he gleefully told his brothers all about it. Not surprisingly that made him very unpopular, and when the chance came, his brothers grabbed him and sold him to some passing slavers, then told his father he had been killed by wild animals. His luck seemed to turn when he was sold to a man called Potiphar, who recognised his talents and gave him an important place in the household. However, Potiphar’s wife recognised some other qualities of Joseph, and when she failed to seduce him, lied about him so that he ended up in prison. How could things be worse? Yet even at this low point, God was with him – and had a plan.

The Open the Book commentary speaks about jealousy and how it can be triggered by unequal possessions and made worse by bad behaviour.

“Joseph the Ruler”

This week’s story continues the tale of we started last week is taken from the book of Genesis, chapters 37 to 41.

We left Joseph in prison, but not in despair. As it turned out, a fellow-prisoner was Pharaoh's butler, who was troubled by dreams. Joseph helped him understand them, and asked the man to speak for him when he was let out, but the man forgot for a long time. Eventually Pharaoh himself started having bad dreams and his butler finally remembered the help he had received in prison. Joseph was sent for and helped Pharaoh too, so well that he was promoted to Prime Minister. The dreams had foretold famine, and as it started to bite, Joseph's brothers arrived, hoping to buy food. Instead of wreaking revenge, Joseph was overjoyed to see them. He understood that through his suffering, brought about by their bad actions, he was at last able to help, not only all the people of Egypt, but his own family too, and that this had been God's long-term plan.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the healing nature of forgiveness.

“The Secret Baby”

This week's story is taken from the first two chapters of the book of Exodus.

Joseph's family had moved to Egypt and lived there happily for many generations, but they prospered so well that Pharaoh became worried that there were so many of them. To deal with this he ordered that all Hebrew boy babies were to be killed. However, one Hebrew mother cleverly hid her baby in a waterproof basket at the edge of the river, where he was found by no less than Pharaoh's daughter when she came to bathe. She thought him so sweet that she adopted him, and so little Moses grew up in the king's palace, well fed, protected and educated to prepare him for the special work that God had in store for him in the future.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of growing up and wondering what life will hold, and what our particular special work will be.

“The Great Escape”

This week's story is based on the first two chapters of the book of Exodus.

The story is about how Moses and his brother Aaron led the Hebrew people out of Egypt when God set them free from the slavery they endured there. Moses asked Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let them go away, but they were useful as they were forced to work for nothing, so the king said no. Moses warned him he was in for trouble, and even though God sent flies, frogs and locusts as well as other bad things, it was not until people and animals started dying that the king agreed. The Hebrews set off, but once no-one else died, the king changed his mind again and chased them with all his soldiers. He thought he had them trapped against the edge of the Red Sea, but God dried up the water and held it back, and the Hebrews were able to cross on dry ground. The Egyptians followed them, but as soon as the Hebrews were across to the other side, back came the waters and washed all the Egyptians away. God had used some amazing miracles to protect his special people, and they were never slaves to the Egyptians again.

The Open the Book conclusion encourages us to think of people who are treated badly today.

“A Long Journey”

This week's story is based on the book of Exodus, from chapter 16 to chapter 40.

The story describes what happened to the people of the Hebrews between their escape from slavery in Egypt and their arrival at their own land of Canaan. It was a difficult trip, across desert wastes. It looked as though there was nothing for the people, or their animals, to eat or drink. Even though they had seen the amazing miracles that God had just done, they couldn't believe that they would be safe either on the journey, or when they arrived at a place they were told was lovely, but which none of them could remember for themselves. So like people everywhere, they moaned and complained. They complained either that they were tired, or thirsty, or hungry, or bored. Most of all they found it hard to do as they were asked without being told exactly what was going to happen, and when, and where. They found it really hard to trust God, and Moses, even though they had just seen how trustworthy God was.

The Open the Book commentary encourages the children to think about the food they eat, and who grows it, prepares it and does the shopping.

“The Walls Fall Down”

This week's story is the story of the fall of Jericho as told in the book of Joshua chapter 6.

After Moses had led God's people across the desert to the borders of the land God had promised they would live, they had a set-back. The border was defended by Jericho, a great stronghold. It seemed impregnable, but God sent an angel to Joshua, Moses' successor, with a strange plan of how to conquer Jericho and march on into the place God had prepared for them. Rather than fight, or try to knock down the walls, they should march round them for six days, and on the seventh day blow their trumpets and shout. The plan seemed foolish, but they went ahead anyway, and to everyone's astonishment, when the trumpets sounded the strong walls crumbled and fell. The city was theirs, and the people agreed that no-one but God could have achieved such a thing in such an extraordinary way.

The Open the Book introduction speaks of difficult thoughts which can go round and round your head, as the people marched round and round the fortress walls.

“Samuel Hears a Voice”

This week our story is based on the first book of the prophet Samuel, chapter 3.

Some time ago we heard a story about how Samuel was born – his mother couldn't have babies for a long time, but she prayed to God, and he healed her so that she could have a baby, which she called Samuel. Now Samuel is a little older and lives in the Temple with Eli, a senior priest. One night Samuel went to bed as usual, but was woken up in the middle of the night by someone calling his name. He thought it was Eli, so he went to see what he wanted. But it wasn't Eli who had called him! Mystified, he went back to bed – only to be woken again by the voice calling him. Still it wasn't Eli – but when this happened a third time Eli realised that God was speaking, and told Samuel to listen. That was the start for Samuel of a long life of listening to God, and passing on what he heard to all the rest of the people.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of not just speaking, but of listening too, to other people and to God.

“David the Giant-Killer”

This week our story is the well-known tale of David and Goliath, and is based on the first book of the prophet Samuel, chapter 17.

An army of fierce Philistines were attacking the people of Israel – and were winning. They had a special champion, a very tall strong man called Goliath. He shouted a challenge of single combat across to the Israelites, none of whom wanted to take him on. However, a boy shepherd who was used to protecting his sheep from lions and bears offered to take up the challenge, and confident of God’s blessing and in spite of his youth and small stature, killed the giant man with a sling-shot. He thus demonstrated that the will of God is a far greater guarantee of victory than physical strength or advanced weaponry.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of small people sometimes being equal to large problems.

“The Wise King”

The story is based on the first book of Kings, chapter 3.

Solomon, King David’s son, ruled after him. He asked God for wisdom rather than riches or victory in battle, and God granted his request. One day this was put to the test when two women appealed to him; both claimed to be the mother of a baby. King Solomon ordered the child to be cut in half and the mothers to be given half each. One thought this quite fair, but the other immediately gave up her claim, preferring to lose the child to another woman than to see it die. The reaction of the two women told the King who was the true mother, and this judgement, inspired by God, passed into history and into legend. This story is the origin of the familiar phrase “the judgement of Solomon”.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the need for wisdom for those who do difficult jobs, and have to make difficult decisions, not only ourselves, but people such as world leaders.

“Jonah The Groaner”

This week’s story is the famous story of Jonah and the whale. Jonah’s story is found in the Old Testament, and the relevant book is called simply “Jonah”!

Jonah was a prophet who lived not far from a city called Nineveh, which was full of wicked people. When he heard God’s voice asking him to go and warn the people of Nineveh to mend their ways, he was appalled at the magnitude of the task, and decided instead to run away, across the sea. However, you can’t get away from God by running! Once on the boat, the sea grew so rough the ship was near to sinking. Everyone on board knew someone was responsible and in the end Jonah had to own up – it was he, disobeying God, who was the cause of the storm. The only answer was to remove him from the ship, which, so far from land, meant falling into the deep sea.

Jonah thought he was going to die, but instead God sent an enormous fish which swallowed him, then coughed him up on the shore. There was nothing for it – Jonah had to go to Nineveh. To his astonishment – and disgust – the people listened to him and mended their ways, when he thought that after all that bad behaviour they should have suffered the penalty. God, however, doesn’t think that way. While Jonah was moaning about this, God caused a bush to grow up and shade him from the hot sun. He was glad about that, but

when it withered overnight he was fed up again, although he had had nothing to do with either the growth of the plant or its withering. All along, Jonah thought he was in the right – but his perspective was all wrong!

The Open the Book commentary talks about being asked to do things we don't like, or find difficult, and how to think about dealing with them without running away.

“Daniel and the Lions”

Today's story is the famous one. It is based on the Old Testament book of the prophet Daniel, chapter 6.

Daniel's home, Jerusalem, had been attacked by the Babylonian army and wrecked. A lot of the people who lived there had been forced to leave and go to Babylon, a long way from home. Daniel was one of them, but he made the best of his situation and worked hard, earning the favour of the king. However, his success provoked jealousy amongst the king's Babylonian officials, and they persuaded the king to pass a law preventing any religious observance not directed to the king himself. They knew that Daniel would defy this, and they were right. Daniel continued to worship God, not the king, and against his own wishes the king had to order him thrown into the lions' pit as punishment. However, Daniel's loyalty to God led to God being loyal to Daniel, and he sent an angel to keep the lions away. In the morning Daniel was unscathed – and not because the lions had become tame. In fact they attacked the men who devised the law that entrapped Daniel, when they in their turn were thrown into the pit of lions.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the courage we sometimes need to choose the right action over the wrong one.

“A Time to Build”

This week's story is called **“A Time to Build”** and is based on the first four chapters of the book of the prophet Nehemiah.

The People of Israel had ignored God again and again for years, so in the end they were defeated in battle and nearly everyone was carried off as slaves to Babylon. However, this was not for ever and after many years, when God felt the people had at last got the point, the king who held them captive allowed them to go home. In the meantime Jerusalem had fallen into a terrible state and took so long to repair, that a new king succeeded to the throne of Babylon before it was done. Not everyone had left, and Nehemiah was still serving at the king's table. He knew the problems his people were having rebuilding their city and at God's prompting, asked this new king for help, and permission to go home too. The king, who was pleased with his hard work there, not only granted this request but sent a military guard with them to see them safely home. Even with this help, the work wasn't straightforward, but the people knew they would get it finished – and they did! And now they knew deep down that because God took them seriously, they needed to take him seriously too.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how it might feel to come home after a long absence, and to be thankful for a second chance when we get things wrong.

“The Wise Men’s Visit”

This story is based on the story in chapter 2 of the Gospel of St Matthew.

This telling of the story centres more on the episode of the Wise Men's visit not to see baby Jesus, but to see King Herod, where they went first, to ask advice. Herod knew at once these men were telling the truth; they were important and respected academics and had travelled a long and difficult way. Unfortunately they asked one king about another one who they said had just been born, which upset Herod and worried him that he was about to lose his throne. Full of anger and fear, he sent the visitors in the right direction, asking them to bring back exact news of where the baby was, not so he could pay a friendly visit himself, but so that he could kill the baby and eliminate the threat to his power. Of course God could not allow this and warned the wise men by means of a dream not to go back to Herod, so when their mission was accomplished, they went home another way, rejoicing.

The Open the Book Commentary speaks of how a special event or present is worth waiting for, even for a long time.

“The Boy in the Temple”

This week’s story is an episode from Jesus’ childhood and is based on St Luke’s Gospel, chapter 2.

Jesus’ parents take him to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, but on the way home can’t find him. They search everywhere, getting more and more worried, and eventually run him to earth in the Temple back in Jerusalem, discussing points of theology with the teachers there. Of course they are delighted to find him safe, as well as a bit annoyed after all that searching. The temple priests and teachers were astonished that he was able to understand the temple teaching at such a young age – and so were his parents!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the love and care we have from our parents.

“Jesus is Baptised”

This week’s story is based on the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 3.

Jesus’ cousin John had a particular job to do – to get everyone ready to meet the special person, sent from God, that the Jewish people had been waiting for, for hundreds of years. He did this by explaining to them how they had to change their lives for the better, and as a sign that they were willing to do this, he washed them ceremoniously in the river Jordan. This washing was called “baptism”. One day Jesus himself came to John by the river, and although John felt that Jesus was the last person who needed to be baptised, he agreed to do it for Jesus too, and this baptism turned out to be the event that kick-started Jesus’ own special work for God.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of people who are special to us.

“Jesus’ Special Friends”

This week’s story is based on the Gospel of Luke chapter 5.

When Jesus started his work he formed a group of people to help him, who went with him from place to place. They came from all sorts of places and backgrounds, and this story

tells how he met and made friends with the first ones. He was a popular speaker and many came to hear him. At one point, speaking to the crowd from the edge of the sea, the press of people nearly pushed him into the water, so he asked to borrow one of the fishing boats drawn up nearby. After he finished speaking, he suggested a proper fishing trip, which the fishermen thought would be unlikely to be successful as they had already been trying all night. However, they did as he said and were immediately so successful that they needed the help of another fishing boat to haul the catch ashore. This was such a startling result, to men who knew the trade of fishing, that they recognised the difference lay in Jesus' special gift. When he invited them to take up a new career, helping him in his work, they immediately left fishing behind and joined him. They realised the quality of his offer and that it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of miracles, and the importance of having friends.

“Down Through the Roof”

This week's story is based on the Gospel of Luke chapter 5.

Jesus had become famous, not just because of the things he said, but because he could make sick people well. In the days before medical science, this was rare. One day a crowd surrounded him in the house where he was speaking, so thickly that two friends who had brought a paralysed friend on a stretcher, hoping that Jesus would heal him, could get nowhere near. Determined to succeed, they climbed onto the flat roof, and made a hole in it big enough to lower in their friend, stretcher and all. Jesus, seeing in him a sickness beyond the physical, offered him forgiveness of his sins. Religious leaders in the crowd asked how he could say such a thing, when forgiveness of sins belonged to God alone. Jesus' answer was to do an equally impossible thing: he told the man, very simply, to get up on his feet, gather up his stretcher and walk out. This the man did, proving that Jesus could not only cure impossible illnesses, but forgive sins as well.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of needing help when we are ill, and making changes in our life when we get things wrong.

“The Storm on the Lake”

This week's story is based on the Gospel of Mark, chapter 4.

This is the well-known story of how Jesus, after a long day's talking to and teaching large crowds, takes some down-time by getting away on to the lake in his friends' boat. When they set off the weather was fair, but storms can blow up quickly in that part of the world, and before long the sea was rough and the weather wild. The boat pitched and tossed and everyone was afraid they would founder – except Jesus, who was still fast asleep. His friends woke him in panic, whereat he rose to his feet in the heaving vessel, rebuked the sea and the storm, and made it die down. Even the wind and the sea had to obey when Jesus spoke!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of times when we feel worried or afraid, and how that situation might be addressed.

“The Marvellous Picnic”

This week our story is based on the Gospel of Matthew chapter 14.

This is the well-known story of how Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand people from a basket which only held five small loaves and a couple of fish. Jesus' fame had got around, and people flocked from miles around to hear him speak, and many also came hoping he could heal them of all sorts of ills. One day Jesus and his friends felt they had earned a rest, so they sailed across the lake – but when they reached the other side, people had seen them coming and gathered where they landed. Although he was tired, he was sorry for them as they had come so far, and had no-one else to teach them the truth about God. So he sat down to talk with them. At the end of the day everyone was hungry. Jesus suggested to his friend Philip that he should go and find food for the people to eat – but of course to feed so many would have been not only difficult in practical terms, but rather expensive. Andrew had another idea; he brought forward a young boy who had a basket holding five small loaves of bread and two little fish, which he was willing to share. No-one thought it would feed them all, but Jesus blessed the food and began to distribute it, and miraculously, it never ran out until everyone there had eaten all they wanted. There was even twelve baskets of left-overs which they gathered up. Once again, Jesus had done the impossible, because his friends trusted him.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how most of us have enough to eat and more, but in many places in the world, and sometimes even in our own country, there are people who go hungry every day.

“The Lost Coin”

This week's story is taken from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15.

Jesus told a series of stories to try to explain how much God loves us. In this story a woman has a number of coins which she has carefully saved up. She looks after them very carefully, but one day she finds one missing. Instead of forgetting about it and going out to earn another, she looks all over the house in great detail, and doesn't stop until she finds it. This makes her so happy that she throws a party for all her friends and neighbours. Jesus said that in a similar way, if someone loses touch with God, they don't just get forgotten or ignored. God works hard to make contact again, and when he does, he, and all the angels, are overjoyed.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how objects can be precious to us, and how much more precious we are to God, and to each other.

“The Big Spender”

This week our story is based on Luke chapter 15, and is the well-known story which Jesus told, normally entitled “The Prodigal Son”.

There was a man who had two sons. One day the younger son asked for his share of the inheritance immediately, without waiting for his father to die. His father was sad, but gave him the money. The younger son travelled far away and spent all the money in living it up with new friends, who left him as soon as the money ran out. The young man found a job looking after pigs, but it paid so badly he could hardly afford to eat and even the acorns the pigs ate looked appetising. Finally he thought to himself that back at home, his father's servants were better fed. He resolved to go home and apologise, and ask his father for a

job. He was worried about how his father would receive him, but when he went home he didn't even get through the door before his father ran out to hug him, overjoyed to see him again. He changed his shabby clothes for the best in the house and a special meal was prepared to welcome the son home.

At the end of the day the elder son came home from work. He heard the noise of the party and when he heard it was for his brother, he was jealous. He asked his father why, when this younger brother had behaved so badly, he was being treated so well, when he himself, who had worked hard and behaved as his father wanted, had never had a party thrown for him. His father gently told him that while everything on the family property was at his elder son's disposal, this was a special occasion because he had despaired of ever seeing his younger son again, and now here he was back again, and in a better frame of mind.

The Open the Book commentary introduces the idea that God has no favourites and when you make a mistake, he still wants to forgive you and help you get it right.

“Jesus and the Children”

The story this week is taken from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10.

In this story, Jesus is in the middle of a crowd of people who all want him to help them, and make them well. Some children are also there, but everyone thinks they have no chance of meeting Jesus or speaking to him - the adults are more important. However, when Jesus realises what is going on, he calls the children to him, telling everyone that they are just as important to him and to God as anyone grown-up. More so, in fact, because they have the ability to love and trust God in a way which adults find much harder to do.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how busy the adult world is, and how special we feel when someone takes the time to talk with us properly – just as Jesus does.

“Jesus and the Taxman”

This story is taken from the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 19.

By this time Jesus was both well-known and popular. Entertaining him to a meal was an honour sought by all, and everyone wanted at least to see him, and crowds followed everywhere. Zacchaeus was a tax-collector for the Romans, an unpopular job, and it was made worse because many tax collectors lined their own pockets in the process, and Zacchaeus was no exception. He knew he had no chance of meeting Jesus properly, but he wanted at least to see him. Being short, he climbed a tree, for both elevation and concealment. However, he couldn't hide from Jesus, who spotted him, called him down and announced he had chosen Zacchaeus as host for that day's meal. Everyone was thunderstruck, Zacchaeus included, and he was so overwhelmed by Jesus' loving initiative that he changed his ways that very day, announcing that he would repay all that he had wrongly taken.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of thinking of changing the way we treat others, when what we do now is hurtful.

“The Great Parade”

This story is based on the Gospel of St Matthew chapter 21.

By this time in his career, Jesus was very famous indeed and when he reached the outskirts of Jerusalem, instead of walking the rest of the way, he announced he would be riding instead. He asked his friends to collect a donkey, which the owner was surprisingly happy for them to borrow, and set off. The crowds which always followed him began to shout and sing, going ahead to spread large fronds and their own cloaks on the ground, and enjoying the occasion as if it were a great impromptu carnival. The Jewish authorities, however, were not enjoying themselves and told Jesus to call the whole thing off. In response he told them that the atmosphere of happiness was so great, that even if everyone kept quiet, the very stones in the pavement would get up and shout with joy.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the reason that Jesus was so beloved, and how we might know people who are so kind and good that we might aspire to be just like them.

“An Important Meal”

This week’s story is based on the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14. This story explains what happened on the day we now keep as Maundy Thursday.

Jesus and his friends met to eat the Passover meal. Passover is an important Jewish festival, when everyone recalls what happened when Moses and all the Israelites escaped from Egypt. Usually it is a happy time, but Jesus was sad. He told his friends what he knew was in store for him – that the Jewish authorities, who hated him, were going to arrest him and put him to death. He further revealed that one of his friends, now sitting with him, would betray him to those same authorities. They were all appalled and protested that none of them would let this happen, let alone help it along. Jesus didn’t argue, instead, to help them remember him and understand the meaning of what was going to happen, he took the bread and the wine on the table, broke the bread as his body would be broken, poured out the wine as his blood would be poured out, and gave it to them to eat and drink. He hoped that they would look back on this meal and through it understand why he had to die. Because he was willing to suffer, God could use this to wash out all the bad things that people had done. But it was a very sad meal.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of special meals with friends or family, and the importance of saying thank you to those who provide the food.

“A Dreadful Day”

This week’s story is taken from the Gospel of St John, chapter 19.

This is the story of the last day of Jesus’ earthly life, and tells how he died. He knew there was no way round it, the authorities were going to kill him and this would, confusingly, complete God’s plan. It would cancel out all the bad things people had ever done. He allowed himself to be betrayed, questioned, beaten up and finally nailed to a gibbet and left to die. He still took thought for those around him; he comforted the thief dying next to him, and asked his friend to look after his mother. But in the end, he did die, and it really was a dreadful day.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of times when we are sad, and things which can make us happy again. Even when we are sad, God will always comfort us.

“A Happy Day”

This is our last Open the Book of this term, and our story is based on the gospel of St Luke, chapter 24.

This is the mind-boggling story of how Jesus, although he had been killed, came back to life. It is the third day since Jesus died, and three of Jesus' women friends were on their way to his grave, mourning him very much. On the way however, they were frightened by an earthquake, as it seemed – the earth shook under their feet. When they arrived at the place where they had seen Jesus' body laid, in a special small cave carved out of the rock-face, with the entrance stopped by a large stone, they found the entrance stone shifted, and the cave empty – just the shroud and wrappings were left. The women were confused and frightened, and this just got worse when an angel appeared to them saying that Jesus was no longer dead. They didn't know what to think, but there was no point in staying by an empty tomb, so they set off homewards. They had not gone far when they met someone – who turned out to be Jesus himself! They could see he was no illusion and were distracted with joy. Helping them to pull themselves together, Jesus asked to do something for him. They were to tell the other disciples what they had seen, and give them a message that he would meet them himself on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where they first met him. This the women did, still full of surprise and joy, but no longer stunned into fear and inactivity.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of this story to Christians, because it tells how Jesus won the battle against everything that is bad, and proved his power by coming back to life. This is what Easter Sunday is all about.

“Goodbye at Last”

This story is about the last few occasions that Jesus spent with his friends, on earth, including the very last time, when he ascended into Heaven. It is based on the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24.

Jesus appeared many times to his friends after his resurrection. One of the first times was when he suddenly came into a locked room. His friends thought he was a ghost - but he wasn't. Another time when they were out fishing, they suddenly recognised Jesus on the shore. He was barbecuing some fish for breakfast, and called to them to join him. Finally he went with them up a hill near Galilee near where they had all met, and told them he had to leave them. They would meet again one day, but in the meantime he asked them to tell his story to everyone they met. He promised to be with them, even though not in the flesh, for ever. Then a cloud hid him from their sight, and they never saw him again on the earth. They were really sad, but full of hope, and set off to do what he had asked them.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of friendship, and thanking God for our friends.

Year 2

“The Helper Arrives”

Our first story of the year is based on the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2.

Just before Jesus went back up into Heaven, he told his friends to wait in Jerusalem for the “helper” that he had promised to send to them. They hadn’t much idea what to expect, but when the Helper, who is God’s Holy Spirit, arrived in the room where they were all together, it was an astonishing event. They heard a strong wind (although they were indoors) and saw firey flames touching each one of them (although no-one was burned). They started to talk with each other about the marvellous things God was doing – and then they found they were speaking in languages that they had never learned! They hurried outside, and all the people in the streets, who had come from all over the world for the festival, suddenly heard them – and could understand, because the languages they heard the disciples using were their own. No-one was able to explain it, because the disciples were known to be simple men from Galilee. Some thought they were drunk.

However, Peter stood up and calling for quiet, explained what was going on; that Jesus was the Messiah they had waited for, that the people had had him killed, but that God had brought him back to life and it was this power that was working now, in ordinary people. Everyone recognised that this was the truth, and asked how they could make amends. Peter told them to express their sorrow by being baptised in Jesus’ name – and then this power would come into them too – and it did! About 3,000 people believed Peter and received the power of the Holy Spirit that very day.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how good it is when there is someone to help us when we have to do something difficult.

“Tabitha Wakes Up”

Our story this week is taken from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9.

The story concerns a woman called Tabitha who spent her life helping people with small acts of kindness. When she dies unexpectedly, the whole town mourns. Peter the apostle is brought to her and, remembering the works of Jesus, he asks for God's power to come through him and bring Tabitha back to life. His prayer is answered and everyone rejoices as Tabitha is restored to life.

The Open the Book commentary speaks about helping other people, which is something that Jesus did too.

“The Beautiful Gate”

The story this week is taken from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 3.

Jesus’ two disciples, Peter and John, now known as “Apostles” set off to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray. They headed for the gate known as the “Beautiful Gate” because it was covered in polished bronze which shone in the sun. Outside the gate sat a beggar, lame from birth. Passers-by would give him a little money and then hurry away. He asked Peter and John for money, but instead they paid him proper attention, and through the power of the Holy Spirit Peter was able to heal his lameness, just as Jesus would have done.

The Open the Book commentary encourages us to think of ways we could help people who are often ignored by others, perhaps because they are old, or disabled, or just unpopular.

“Praying for Peter”

The story this week is taken from the book of Acts chapter 12.

The apostle Peter was in prison for talking about Jesus. His friends got together to pray for his release. While they were praying, an angel appeared to Peter in prison, releasing his chains and leading him to freedom. When he got over the shock, Peter hurried to join his friends, but the girl who answered his knock was so surprised that she left him standing there outside. The others in the house could hardly believe her when she said who was at the door – their prayer had been answered astonishingly, and so quickly. They were delighted to have their friend back safe with them again.

The Open the Book commentary explains that prayer isn't just talking to God, but that if we tell God when we are in trouble, he can hear us and help us.

“God Has No Favourites”

Our story this week is taken from the book of Acts chapter 10.

In the Israel of Jesus' day, there were lots of different people living there. However, the Jews underlined the fact that they were different and special to God by doing things like refusing to eat certain foods. Peter was an obedient Jew and he had never eaten anything he shouldn't. Also in Jerusalem was a Roman called Cornelius who was happy to eat anything at all. One day Peter had a vision of lots of forbidden foods, and a voice calling to him to eat some of them. At first he refused, but after it kept repeating, he realised that it was God telling him that it was not what food he ate that made the difference to God, but that God loved him as an individual, a special person, himself, Peter. So when Peter received an invitation to eat with Cornelius, he accepted and ate whatever he was offered, because God loved them both, and had given both of them lots of lovely food to eat.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how we choose our friends - and how we choose not to be friends with some people, which isn't the same with God - he likes everyone to be included.

“A Tale of Two Houses”

Our story this week is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7.

Jesus told a story about two men, who both set out to build their own house. The houses would need to be strong and keep out the weather. The first man started work and built quickly, but the ground he chose was sandy. This didn't worry him as the weather was fine, so he carried on. The second man took more time to choose his spot, and found a place where the ground was solid rock a little below the soil. He prepared the site and built slowly and carefully. Both houses were finished by the end of Summer. The weather worsened and gradually the house built on sand started to collapse. The other house, founded on a rocky foundation, stayed firm. Jesus compared these two men with those who heard what he had to say, but while some acted on his teaching, others took no notice and so their lifestyles, built on shaky foundations, eventually collapsed.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the wisdom of listening to good advice, which helps us to build a good life.

“Hezekiah Trusts God”

The story this week is based on the Second book of Kings, chapter 20.

King Hezekiah was that relatively rare thing, a good king who listened to God and refused to worship any of the local statues or poles which other nations built, and pretended to worship; in fact he had them destroyed. When a great army was sent by the Assyrians to attack Jerusalem, God helped the Israelite army, who were much smaller, to win the battle. However, one day Hezekiah fell ill and lay in bed feeling miserable. The prophet Isaiah came to him with a message from God – but not a good one. Isaiah told him that he should prepare himself for death. Filled with despair, Hezekiah prayed to God not to let him die, especially as he had tried so hard to be a good king. Within a short time Isaiah was back with a new message – God had heard Hezekiah’s prayer and would heal him. Of course Hezekiah was very relieved, but felt so low that he couldn’t quite believe the good news at once. He asked for a sign to confirm what Isaiah said. He had watched the sun come into the room and light up his staircase one step at a time every day – now he asked that the sunlight should go the *other way*, the opposite to the way it went naturally. Isaiah asked God, and God granted the king’s request. The next day, as Hezekiah watched, the sunlight went backwards up the stairs, and he felt better with every step. He recovered from his illness and reigned another fifteen years.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of thinking about who to listen to - who might "know best" - and about accepting that this can be true, even if we would rather not listen.

“Elijah and the Ravens”

Our story this week is based on the first book of Kings, chapters 16 & 17.

Elijah was a famous prophet in the time of King Ahab. Ahab was a bad king for all sorts of reasons, but mainly he worshipped a statue of a made-up god called Baal. Finally the real God sent a message to Ahab through Elijah the prophet, that if he would not stop this false worship, no rain would fall on the land. Unsurprisingly this message was very unpopular with the king, especially when it came true. Elijah was chased out of the community into a ravine in the desert. He was safe there, but there was nothing to eat. However, he trusted God to look after him. He was able to drink from the brook, and God sent ravens who brought bread and meat to him every morning and evening, until it was safe for him to return home.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how grateful we should be to have food to keep us alive, even if it isn't always our favourite kind.

“A Jar and a Jug”

This week's story is based on the first book of Kings, chapter 17.

This is the next installment of Elijah's story. He still has to keep away from the King, but when the brook he drank from dried up, God called him to move on and go to Zarephath. There he met a woman who was about to eat the very last of the food she had for herself and her son. After that was gone, they would starve. However, because she was willing to

share even that with Elijah, and did as he asked, she found that no matter how many cakes she made from the last of her oil and flour, there was always more left for next time. She trusted Elijah, and Elijah trusted God, and God honoured that trust by providing for their needs right through the tough times of drought and famine.

The Open the Book commentary reminds us of people who genuinely don't have food for more than one more day, and how we might help them, whether they live next door, or far away.

“Walking on Water”

Our story this week is based on the Gospel of St Mark chapter 6.

Jesus' friends had been having an amazing day - they had just helped Jesus feed thousands of people from just a few fishes and bread rolls. He needed some head-space and sent them off in their boat, but the weather began to turn, until the friends, fishermen though they were, became afraid. Then they became even more frightened, as they saw someone apparently walking, not swimming, on top of the water, coming towards the boat. As it came nearer they recognised Jesus. Peter, overcome with relief and euphoria, asked if he too could walk off the boat. Jesus invited him onto the water, and for a few moments, filled with faith, Peter was able to do it. Then as he realised what he was trying to do, he lost courage and began to sink. Jesus pulled him up and back into the boat, chiding him gently for his lack of faith. But Peter knew Jesus didn't love him any the less, and if he could manage really to trust this special friend, he need never be afraid again.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of knowing that someone you trust will always be there to help you in difficult times.

“The Centurion’s Servant”

This week’s story is taken from the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 7.

Jesus was teaching the crowd one day when he was approached by a Centurion – one of the occupying Roman force, a foreigner. The Bible tells us that this soldier tried to get on with the Jewish nation he was ordered to control, and had even built them a synagogue. The servant of the Centurion, a man he valued, was gravely ill and Jesus’ help was needed. The crowd was interested to see if Jesus would help someone who was not one of his own people – and of course, he did. However, when he offered to visit the sick man, the Roman asked him simply to give the order, assuming that, as in his world, to give an order, no matter of what sort, was to have that order carried out. Jesus was astonished and delighted with such a level of faith, and from a foreigner at that. He explained to the crowd that this demonstrated that God was interested in everyone, not just the Jews, and that it was how each person responded that made the difference.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the valuable work done by health professionals and how we, too, can help those who are not well.

“The Good Samaritan”

This week we will be telling the famous story of the Good Samaritan, which is taken from the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 10.

This is another story about Jesus. A man in the crowd that Jesus was talking with asked how he could achieve everlasting life. When Jesus told him to love God, and love his neighbour as much as he loved himself, the man asked who exactly his neighbour might be. So Jesus told the story of a man who was attacked, beaten and robbed while on a journey. Although two important and religious men saw him lying in the road, they both avoided him. The next person to see him was a despised outsider, but he did help the man, bandaged his wounds, took him to the nearest inn and paid his bill. Which of these three was a "neighbour" to the injured man, Jesus asked, and when the crowd had to say, the one who helped him, he replied "Quite right! Now go, and you do the same".

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how it might feel to be hurt, in need of help, but ignored, and how we might try to be "good neighbours" to others.

"I Can See"

Our story this week is taken from the Gospel of John, chapter 9.

It tells about the time Jesus cured someone who was blind. This person had never been able to see since birth and people wondered if it was to do with something bad that his parents had done. Jesus denied this, and to underline that God doesn't punish people for nothing, he healed the man's blindness. The crowd were astonished, but some were annoyed that Jesus had exercised healing on the Sabbath day, when no-one was supposed to work. They suspected a trick and pestered the healed man until he lost his temper. All he could tell them was that he had never been able to see anything before, and now – he just could!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the value of vision, and encourages us not to take it for granted.

"The Big Party"

Our story this week is taken from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 22.

Jesus was invited to a party and whilst there he told the host a story. A rich man, having sent "save the date" notices to his friends, prepared a special party. He then sent his servant off to call in the guests, but one and all gave excuses. The rich man was offended, but rather than waste all the food and preparation, he sent the servant out again, this time to call and invite those who don't normally get invited to parties, because of their poverty, or illness or lack of influence. This party went extremely well! Jesus explained that when God issues invitations, he includes everyone, not just the people who are special friends, or who are in a position to return the favour.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of those who are often excluded, in our own society, such as poor, homeless, disabled or unemployed people.

"Big Bags of Money"

Our story this week is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25.

Jesus told a story about a very rich man who went away, leaving his servants in charge. To the best servant he gave five bags of money, the next two bags, and to the laziest servant, one bag. He told them to use the money to do business with, so that it would increase for him in his absence. The first two servants doubled his investment, but the lazy servant just

buried it and did nothing. When the rich man came home he was pleased with the first two because they had worked hard with what they were given, but the one who had not even tried very hard, was sacked. Even his one bag was taken away from him and given to the hard-working servant with ten bags.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the value of our abilities and opportunities and encourages us to think how we might make the most of them.

“The Burning Bush”

The story this week is taken from the Book of Exodus chapters 3 and 4.

Moses had run away from Egypt where he was worried he might be arrested for murder, and was now making a bare living as a shepherd in near-desert conditions. One ordinary day he saw a far from ordinary sight - a bush, on fire, but remaining in good health in the midst of the flames. As he went nearer to see it, a voice spoke to him, out of the bush. The voice announced himself as the God of the Israelites, and that there was a job for Moses to do - asking the King of Egypt to set free the whole Israelite nation, who were held as slaves. Moses protested and argued, but God had an answer for everything, so in spite of feeling not up to the job at all, Moses had to leave his shepherding and set off to set God's people free.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of being asked to do a job that you think is beyond you, and the courage and determination that that might need.

“The King Who Would Not Listen”

Our story this week is taken from the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 36.

The king who ruled in the time of Jeremiah the prophet did not take criticism well, so when he heard that Jeremiah was warning him to change his ways, he tried to suppress him and banned him from the Temple. However, Jeremiah wrote down what he wanted to say and asked a friend to read it instead. The king confiscated the writing - he was curious to know what it said, but when he heard, he was angry and destroyed it. Jeremiah simply started again, telling the people over and over again, and especially the king, that they were behaving badly. But at the end he also told them that God loved them, and even though he was sad at what they were doing, he would really like to forgive them and be friends once more.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of listening to warnings from those who care about us, especially if those warnings are often repeated.

“Down in the Well”

This week's story is another one about the prophet Jeremiah. It is taken from the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 28.

Another king is on the throne, but he is doing just as his predecessor did, mistreating the people, ignoring God's ideas and worshipping pretend man-made “gods”. Jeremiah can see that this will bring disaster, a foreign army who will sweep across the land, and tries to tell the king, but to no avail. For his pains, the king puts him into a dried-up well, far from hope or help. However, Jeremiah isn't the only one who can hear God's voice. A servant

of the bad king, called Ebed-Melech, hears of the prophet's plight and knows God wants him rescued. This he does by forming a rope of his own clothes, and pulling Jeremiah up to the light of day again. Speaking truth to power, or if you are a student, speaking truth to your peers, isn't easy or popular, but God doesn't desert those who listen to him and try to do what's right.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the courage needed to resist peer pressure when it pushes us to do something we really know is foolish or wrong.

“The Boys who were Strong enough to say No”

Our story this week is taken from the book of the prophet Daniel, chapter 1.

The People of Israel didn't always have an easy time. They ignored God, who had given them a good land to live in, and so eventually they were defeated in war and carried off to Babylon. The king there tried to assimilate them, and offered them Babylonian food. However, four of the Israelite boys knew they were not allowed to eat all this lush food, and refused it. They offered to try eating only what they knew was good for them, for a while, whilst others ate everything on the menu. At the end of the trial, the four of them were even fitter than the others. They had obeyed God, and he had looked after them.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of those who feel that certain rules are important to follow, for instance in matters of food or dress, and whether there are certain rules that we might feel it right to follow, even if everyone else seems to think differently.

“The Men Who Were Brave Enough to Say No”

Our story this week is taken from the book of the prophet Daniel, chapter 3.

The boys we heard about last week, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are grown up now with important jobs in the government, but they have another problem. King Nebuchadnezzar is older too and has had a strange idea. He has built a golden statue and wants everyone to worship it whenever they hear music, or they will be burnt to death in a furnace. The three friends know that this is not only strange, but very wrong, especially for them, as they have promised to worship nothing other than their own God, who had looked after them so well. They refuse to do as the King says, and in anger he has them flung into the furnace. However, to the shock of everyone watching, the three friends are not harmed by the flames – an angel from God arrives to protect them, and the only thing burned is the rope they were tied up with. The king realises the friends have been proved right, and he was wrong. Calling them out of the furnace, he gives them even more important jobs, and also commands that everyone should respect their God, who was able to save them from the fire.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the courage needed, even today in some places, to do what is right even when it results in persecution.

“The Helpful Servant”

Our story this week is taken from the second book of Kings, chapter 5.

In the days of Elisha the prophet (not to be confused with Elijah), a commander in the army of neighbouring Syria was afflicted with a skin disease, which everyone thought might be

leprosy. If this was true, it spelt the end of his career. Some time before, the Syrians had captured a slave from Israel and she served the wife of this commander, Naaman. She told her mistress about Elisha's healing miracles, so Naaman set off to see him. When he was casually told to bathe in the River Jordan, he was offended at the lack of ceremony and respect, but was persuaded to try this cure by his own servant, anyway. He did so and was cured. Delightedly, he rushed back to Elisha to thank him and tried to give him money, but Elisha refused it. However, when Naaman understood that it was God who had healed him through the prophet, and not the prophet himself, he became one of God's followers, and went off to worship him in his own land.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance to us of those who help us when we are ill, even if they are quite unimportant in themselves.

“Snatched to Safety”

Our story this week is taken from the Old Testament – the second book of Kings, chapters 11 and 12.

At the time of our story the king of Israel had died, leaving only small children. The throne was usurped by Athaliah, who did her best to kill all these children so that she could be Queen. She was a bad ruler and made everyone miserable. One, a baby called Joash, was saved and hidden in the temple by his aunt. When he was only half grown, his uncle, a priest, crowned him and with the support of the army, protected him from the bad queen. As he grew up, the young King Joash was determined to be the best king he could, following God's laws (which the wicked Queen had ignored) and encouraging the people to worship God properly, just as they once had.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how much care a baby needs, and encourages us to remember those who live in parts of the world where they are in danger every day.

“Small King, Big Task”

Our story this week is taken from the second book of Kings in the Old Testament, chapters 11 and 12.

This is another story about a young king of Judah, King Josiah. In his time the Temple which was the focus of worship had fallen into ruin. The king and the people determined to restore it, and while they were working on the building, they discovered a copy of the scriptures, the Book of Teachings, which told them how to live in tune with God's laws. As the Temple was rebuilt, so the people started to follow the laws again, and found that they were much happier as they did so, learning to be a community again instead of a collection of individuals working only for themselves.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of clearing out our lives a bit like the way we need to clear out our rooms sometimes, and imagining what it would be like if everyone stopped lying and being nasty in a self-centred way.

“The Two Sons”

The story is taken from the Gospel of St Matthew, chapter 21.

The story is one that Jesus told. It concerns a family with two adult sons. When their father asked them to help work in the family vineyard, the first one refused – but then changed his mind and helped out after all. Thinking his first request had borne no fruit, the father asked his second son to help. This son said he would be glad to help – but then changed his mind and went off to enjoy himself elsewhere. Jesus asks his hearers to consider – who actually did what he was asked, and was helpful? The man who said yes at first – or the second who started off by saying no?

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of saying or doing the right thing, and that we can be forgiven when we are sorry if we make the wrong choice.

“Be Like Me!”

The story is taken from the Gospel of St Matthew, chapter 18.

This story describes an incident when Jesus’ closest friends were debating about who would be the most important in the Kingdom of Heaven. As often happened, they were thinking in worldly terms and had the wrong impression. Instead, Jesus explains that unlike in the kingdoms of the world, in the Kingdom of Heaven humility is prized far above success, prestige, wealth or any of the other things that marked out the sort of VIPs they were thinking of. To illustrate this, he called a child over and demonstrated in this way that those who think little of themselves, as a child does, would be amongst the most important in Heaven.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how special children are to God, just as special as adults.

“The Bad Brother”

The story is taken from the book of Genesis, chapter 27.

Abraham’s son Isaac and his wife Rebecca had two sons, Esau and Jacob. They were twins, but Esau was born first. Esau was an outdoors type, good at hunting and manly pursuits, and he was his father’s favourite. Jacob was a more complicated character, who stayed at home more, and was his mother’s favourite. When Isaac became old, he felt his death was near and it was time to give a special blessing to his first-born, Esau, so he told him to go out and hunt for meat, then prepare it for them both to eat, when he would give him his blessing. Rebecca overheard this plan, and in order to secure the special blessing for her favourite instead, she prepared some meat as her husband liked it, and gave it to Jacob to take to his father, whose eyes were too weak to see who he was. As the main difference between the brothers was that Esau’s arms were much hairier than Jacob’s, she helped him cover his arms with hairy goatskin.

Isaac was deceived – and no sooner had he given his blessing to the wrong brother, than Esau turned up, with the real meal. It was too late! Esau was furious; his rightful blessing had been stolen by a trick. But this was not the end of the story, because God was aware of what was going on, and had a different plan in mind, which we will tell you about next week.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how wrong it is to get what we want by cheating.

“The Runaway”

The story is about Jacob and Esau. It is taken from the book of Genesis, chapter 28.

After Esau, cheated by his brother Jacob, was threatening his life, to get him out of harm's way their mother Rachel sent Jacob off to find her brother, Laban. On the way, exhausted by his flight, Jacob stopped to sleep and in the middle of the night, God sent him a dream. He dreamed he saw a ladder going upwards, with angels going up and down between heaven and earth. He heard God's voice telling him that he would receive the same promise that was given to his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham – in spite of his bad behaviour! In the middle of the desert, unable to use his cheating ways, or depend on his mother's help, Jacob listened to God's voice and when he woke up, he said thank you.

He continued his journey to see his uncle, Laban, who introduced him to his two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Rachel was especially beautiful and Jacob fell in love with her. He agreed to work for seven years, if at the end he could marry her. When the seven years were done, they were married – but when she lifted her veil, the girl he had married was Leah, not Rachel at all. Laban had tricked him. However, he was allowed to marry Rachel as well, as long as he worked for another seven years.

At the end of that time, Jacob had lots of children and also flocks of sheep and goats. He decided it was time to go back to see his brother, even though he thought Esau would still be angry with him. When he finally saw his brother in the distance, he went forward alone, worried, but trusting that God would look after him. He apologised to Esau, who forgave him at once. During those fourteen years, Jacob had learned not to be such a cheat, and Esau had learned not to be so angry.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of saying sorry if you were wrong, so you can be friends again, whether you made that mistake a long time ago, or yesterday.

“Spies in Canaan”

The story is from the Old Testament, but set in a time a little closer to our own. It is based on the Book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14.

The story starts after the Israelites escaped from Egypt, and then crossed the wilderness to the edge of the country God had promised to give them. However, when they arrived, the people had second thoughts, and asked that the land be looked at first before they moved in. Twelve spies set out, and reported that the land was a good place – but that it was already inhabited by people who seemed too powerful to overcome. Only two, Joshua and Caleb, tried to remind everyone that they would be fine, because God had promised them they would be, but they were ignored. Fed up with this lack of faith, God sent the people back into the wilderness for forty years, by which time all the timid complainers had died. Then at last Joshua and Caleb were able to lead everyone across the Jordan River into the land that God had promised them.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of thinking about who to listen to, and who to trust.

“Across the River”

The story follows on from last week, with Joshua leading the people of Israel out of the desert.. It is based on the book of Joshua, chapter 3.

Because of their lack of trust in God when He said it would not be dangerous to enter the land of Canaan, the Israelites had had to go back into the desert for forty years. Many had grown old and died in those years, including Moses. Joshua, now no longer a boy but an assured leader, brought them to the bank of the River Jordan once again. The people were still nervous, but prepared to move when the word came that the time was right. At last they heard the word – and in front of them the waters of the Jordan parted as they had at the Red Sea all those years ago. The priests stood in the centre of the river bed, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, as the people passed them on their way. When all were across, the priests joined them and the waters flowed back. They had arrived!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of times when it really is important to do exactly what you are told, for instance during an emergency.

“A Brave and Mighty Man”

Our last story of the year is taken from the book of Judges, chapters 6 and 7.

This story is about Gideon, whom God called to lead the army when the Hebrews were attacked by the Midianites. Gideon was surprised and nervous, because he was a farmer, not a soldier. He was even more surprised and nervous when God instructed him to send most of his army home, because the Midianite army was very large. However, by an Old Testament version of “shock and awe” and a certain amount of trickery, all suggested to him by God, Gideon was able to rout the enemy so that Israel could live in peace.

The Open the Book commentary encourages us to think about someone who acts bravely, even when they don't feel very brave. Perhaps someone we know, or someone we have heard about.

“Joseph’s Story”

For our final story before Christmas we look at the nativity from Joseph’s point of view.

This story talks about Mary and Joseph and how they hear about the baby they will soon have. It also talks about how busy and tired they are as the birth of this special baby get nearer, just as many of us are tired and busy in the run-up to Christmas. But in the end it is all worth it; Mary and Joseph have a lovely, special baby, just as they were told, and we also are looking forward to a lovely, special day, the birthday of Jesus.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the preparations we make for Christmas, and encourages us to remember that it is all because it is Jesus' birthday.

“The Shepherds’ Story”

The story this week is taken from the Gospel of St Luke chapter 2.

This is the Christmas story told from the point of view of the shepherds who received an unusual visit. They were settling down for an ordinary night when, instead of just the stars in the night sky, an immense angel appeared to them. Naturally they were terrified, and

only a little less so when the angel explained that they were the first to hear the wonderful news that God had sent a baby, his very own son, to grow up to be the Messiah that the people had expected for so many centuries. At last it was happening, and to underline the event, all the angels in heaven appeared too, singing at full volume of their joy. The sheep weren't worried, but the shepherds were gobsmacked, so they set off, leaving the sheep unprotected, to see the baby for themselves. When they found him they told his parents, and everyone they met, about their experience so that everyone could share their happiness. And it gave Mary something to think about carefully, too.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how God sometimes chooses very ordinary people, not the great and the good, when he has good news to tell.

“The Wise Men’s Story”

The story this week is taken from the Gospel of St Matthew, chapter 2.

This is the Christmas story told from the point of view of the wise men who studied the stars. They were learned and experienced, and when they saw a new, very bright, star, they just knew they had to follow it towards the horizon to find out what it portended. They set off and after much journeying, came near Jerusalem, and naturally thought they would get news there. The star surely meant a new king, but regrettably the person they asked for news was the current king, a proud and cruel man called Herod. Herod consulted his advisors and told the star-gazers the truth - but he lied when he asked them to come back and tell him all about it, so that he could pay homage to the new king. In fact he meant to do away with this infant rival. To foil this plan, the wise men, after they had found the baby and presented him with the precious and significant gifts they had brought, all had the same dream. They were to avoid Herod, and go home another way, which they did. Baby Jesus was safe from Herod.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of giving thanks for all the wise and experienced teachers and helpers at school, who aid the learning process.

“John’s Story”

The story this week is taken from the Gospel of St John, chapters 19 and 20.

This story tells of John, now an old man, remembering the day when he discovered that Jesus was no longer dead, even after being crucified. He recalls, in flashback, how just before he died, Jesus asked John to look after his own mother, and the sadness they all felt at Jesus' death. He goes on to say how, a few days later, another Mary, a friend of Jesus, came panting back from visiting the tomb to say it was empty. John and Peter rushed together to see. John was faster, but paused at the entrance to the tomb, nervous of going in. Peter had no such hesitation, and as soon as he arrived scrambled straight in, and John followed him. It was quite true, Jesus was gone, leaving only a few burial cloths. Peter was baffled, but John began to wonder. That evening, nervous of the temple police, the friends locked themselves into their house and discussed this mystery. They were still at it when without warning, Jesus was there! When they realised that he was really back, wounded but somehow no longer dead, they were overjoyed. At last the strange things that had puzzled them over the last few years were making sense, and they had the most amazing story to tell - which they could swear was all true!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of sharing the important things that happen to us, with our friends.

“On the Road to the Cross”

Our last two stories of the term are looking forward to Good Friday and Easter. This week the story is taken from the Gospel of St Mark, chapter 15.

This is the story of what happened on the first Good Friday. Jesus is on trial for his life before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. As far as Pilate is concerned, Jesus is innocent, but the crowd, incited by the religious leaders who hated Jesus, persuaded him to have Jesus sentenced to crucifixion. Jesus didn't protest as this treatment; he didn't even answer the questions put to him by Pilate, or the taunts shouted at him by the crowd. He knew this had to happen, and he quietly accepted everything that was done to him. It was a dreadful day.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how difficult it is to be calm and brave when really you feel like being angry and upset.

“On the Road to Emmaus”

This is the second part of the Easter story which we began last week. It is taken from the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 24.

It was the third day after the dreadful day on which Jesus had been crucified. Two of his friends were walking from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. As they walked, they discussed the events of the last few days, how their hopes were ended – unless what the women had told them was true, that he had been seen alive and well, no longer in the tomb where they had buried him. On the way a stranger asked to travel with them on the road, and joined their discussion. He was surprised at their difficulty with what they had heard and talked them through many stories in the Bible which showed how this was bound to happen. Interested but still not quite sure, the party arrived at the inn in Emmaus and the friends invited the stranger to stay at the inn as well. They sat down to supper, and the stranger took the loaf of bread and broke it open, giving thanks to God as he did so. And as he did so, it burst upon the friends that he had seemed familiar because he was familiar – it was Jesus himself. No wonder he could explain things to them so clearly. They looked at each other in astonishment and delight – but when they looked back, Jesus was gone. Undismayed, and wanting to tell all the rest of their friends about this meeting, they set straight off back the way they had come, light of feet and light of heart.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how excited we feel when we have some really good and unexpected news, and how we always want to share the news with our friends.

Year 3

“On the Road to Damascus”

Our first story of the year is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 7-9.

A devout Jew called Saul hated what the followers of Jesus were doing and saying and persecuted them whenever he could. After he had allowed one man, Stephen, to be stoned to death for speaking of Jesus, he set off for Damascus to continue his work against Christians there. As he was on the road, he experienced a blinding light which knocked him flat, and before he could recover he heard a voice which said the speaker was Jesus, asked him why he was so full of hatred towards these people – and told him to carry on to Damascus. Saul, still blinded from the great light, could do nothing but obey. In Damascus, he was healed by one of the people he had set out to persecute, and from then on became one of the most convinced and fervent Christians of all. His experience on the road had completely turned his life around.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of people who are trying to make changes in their lives, of fresh starts and second chances.

“Mistaken for Gods”

Our story this week is taken from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 14.

Paul is in trouble again. He and his friend Barnabas have arrived in Lystra, where they spoke about Jesus as usual and also were able to help a man who had been born with weak feet, to stand up and walk for the first time. The people who saw this were so impressed they thought Paul and Barnabas were gods in human form and started trying to worship them. Of course this didn't please the local Jewish authorities, who turned the fickle crowd against the friends, and encouraged them to throw stones at them. Paul and Barnabas were bruised and shaken, so they left Lystra, but they continued along to the next town, where they started once again to tell the good news about Jesus to the people who lived there.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of times when we might get into trouble by accident or misunderstanding, when we might be misunderstood or treated unfairly, and the importance of not giving up.

“Prison Praise”

Our next story is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16.

Saul, now called Paul, is already in trouble. He helped a young slave girl who was ill, but her owners didn't want her cured as her illness was earning them money, so they threw Paul and his friend Silas into prison and had them beaten. The prison was a pretty miserable place with no way out, but Paul and Silas knew that God had not forgotten them, so they sang cheerful songs of praise, and they were right, because there was an earthquake and the prison was so damaged all the prisoners could have escaped. The jailer assumed this had happened and prepared to kill himself, but in fact Paul knew there were more important things than his personal comfort, so he stayed put and persuaded everyone else to stay too. The jailer was so impressed he became a believer on the spot, and even released and helped Paul and Silas as well.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of behaving rightly so that other people do not suffer unfairly.

“Problems for Paul”

Next Wednesday’s story is based on the Acts of the Apostles chapter 19.

St Paul arrives in Ephesus, famous for the temple of the Goddess Diana. As he sets about his usual work, telling people about Jesus, the local artisans, who make their living selling souvenirs to temple worshippers, get angry. They are afraid their business interests will be affected. Meanwhile there are other people who are glad to see Paul, as they appreciate his healing ministry. Eventually the dissatisfied artisans start a riot and attack Paul’s supporters. Although the rioters are dispersed before anyone is hurt, Paul, who has been kept away from the riot by others of his friends, realises he has become a liability to them and that he must leave Ephesus. He will still continue his work – but in another place.

The Open the Book commentary challenges us to think about whether it is more important to help people, or to make money.

“Paul is Shipwrecked”

This week’s story is based on the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 27.

St Paul is arrested for speaking about Jesus, and sent as a prisoner to Rome by sea. Against his advice (it was a bad time of year for sailing) the ship sails, but runs into a storm. Although a prisoner, Paul encourages everyone to work as a team, with the result that although the ship is wrecked on the shores of Malta and destroyed, nobody on the ship is hurt. Paul continues to Rome, and while under house arrest as he awaits trial, continues to speak about Jesus and to write letters to the churches he has already founded. Throughout he is calm as he is sustained by his faith in God.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how, when we are worried, we can always talk to God, who will always listen and help us to be calm.

“Tea at Auntie’s House”

The story this week is based on the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 10.

Martha and Mary were the two sisters of Lazarus, whom Jesus famously raised from the dead. Upon a different occasion, Jesus and his disciples visited these friends. Hospitality demanded that all the guests should be fed, which the two sisters would prepare, but Mary, instead of helping her sister, sat down to listen to Jesus instead. After struggling to cope on her own, Martha finally snapped and demanded that Jesus send her sister out to the kitchen to help. Instead, Jesus lovingly explained to Martha that although food was important, listening to what he had to say about God was even more so. So she forgot her bad temper and sat down to listen to Jesus too.

The Open the Book commentary challenges us to consider how to make space in our busy lives for each other, for things which are important, rather than urgent.

“The Greedy Farmer”

The story this week is taken from the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 12.

This is a story Jesus told, about a rich man, a farmer whose crops grew very well. He harvested great stores of grain, and stored it in barns – far more than he could use himself. He planned to sell it and get even richer. He chased away birds who might eat a few grains, and also poor people who hoped to collect a few scraps from the edge of the field to eat. He wanted every last grain to add to his riches. But just as he had worked out how enormously rich he was – he died, and all his wealth was no good to him. He didn't have time to enjoy himself and his riches didn't make him happy. No-one was sad that he died because he did no-one else any good with all his money. Jesus taught that being rich isn't the way to please God – or anyone else!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of working out what we think are the really important things in life. Is being rich important? If not, then what is?

“The Unforgiving Servant”

This week's story is based on Matthew's gospel, chapter 18, and talks about the unlimited nature of forgiveness.

Once there was a king who had a servant who owed him a large amount of money. Because he couldn't pay, the king decided to sell him and his family as slaves. However, when the man begged for mercy, the king took pity on him and forgave him the large debt. On his way home, the servant met another man who owed *him* some money – a trifling sum. He demanded payment, and when this man also begged for mercy, instead of pardoning him as the king had, had the second man thrown into jail. News of this reached the king, who was disgusted, recalled his original pardon, and sent the servant to prison until he paid the whole debt.

Jesus' point is that, as God forgives us again and again when we are genuinely sorry for all the bad stuff we do, we should find it in our hearts to do the same for others who have hurt us.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of God's constant forgiving of us when we get things wrong, and how he expects us to forgive other people too when they make mistakes.

“Everyone gets the Same”

This week's story is taken from the Gospel of St Matthew, chapter 20.

In this story a farmer employed seasonal workers to help him harvest the grapes from his vineyard. He started out at 6am, but the work was so great that he went out to find more people at 9am, then more at noon and at 3pm and even at 6pm. He agreed the same price with all of them, but at the end of the day those who had worked longest expected more, as they saw the last batch getting the agreed amount for such a short working day. They thought it wasn't fair. However, the farmer pointed out that they had received what they agreed, for the working day they had agreed. It was for *him* to say who was given how much wages. He was a generous man, and from his point of view it was a fair distribution. He had made a deal, they had all agreed, and the deal should stand – for everyone.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how we like to get more good things than we really deserve, and how good it is to be pleased for other people when they also get more than they expect of good things.

“The Widow’s Coins”

This week’s story is taken from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12.

Jesus and his friends are out in the street and watch people passing the charity collection box outside the temple. Although the rich and ostentatious put in large sums, making sure they are seen to do so, Jesus explains to the disciples that the greatest gift comes from a poor widow, who gave the whole of her savings when no-one else was looking, because this amounted to only two coins. The rich people gave a tiny slice of their wealth; she gave the whole lot, even though the amount was less.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of being generous, even when we don’t have much to be generous with.

“Samuel the Kingmaker”

Our first story this year is based on the first book of the prophet Samuel, chapters 8 to 16.

The story tells of how at first the people of Israel, God’s special people, were guided not by a king, but by judges, who helped them decide what to do on important matters. But later, they asked for a king to rule them – because other nations had one and they wanted to be the same. Samuel the prophet was sad, because God himself was the King of Israel. However, he did as the people asked and so he found them a king – a tall handsome man called Saul. Saul was a good king for a while and Samuel helped him, but then he started to ignore Samuel’s advice about what God wanted. So, God told Samuel to look for another king, and sent him to Jesse, who had seven sons. The six sons he met first seemed fine to look at, but God told Samuel to choose the seventh, the youngest and smallest, because he was the best on the inside, where Samuel couldn’t see – but God could.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of appreciating people for who they really are, and not just what they look like or how much they have.

“The Two Kings”

This week’s story is taken from the first book of Samuel chapter 16, and tells the next part of the story of King David.

After Samuel anointed David to be the next king when he was still only half-grown, he didn’t insist on ascending the throne immediately. After a while back with the sheep, learning to fight off wolves and bears, he found himself playing music at court for King Saul. Then he went back to shepherding, until he offered to fight Goliath, and won. Even then he didn’t take the opportunity to seize power, but waited for God to show him the right time, which we usually don’t know, but God does.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of learning from experience those unregarded things which might help in the future.

“Best Friends”

This week’s story is taken from the first book of the prophet Samuel, chapters 18 to 20.

David had made friends with King Saul’s son, Jonathan. This close friendship irritated Saul, as did David’s abilities and general popularity. David trod carefully, and when he received an invitation to a feast, worried that it might be a trick. Jonathan couldn’t believe there was anything amiss, so they arranged a test: David would miss the feast and if Saul was OK with that, good: if he was disproportionately angry, they would both know it was not safe for David to stay at court, and Jonathan would warn him. Saul was indeed angry, and with great sadness David went into hiding, leaving the good friend who had risked his father’s anger to help him.

The Open the Book commentary underlines how important it can be to help and support our friends.

“Run for your Life!”

This week’s story is based on the first book of Samuel, chapters 23 and 24.

King Saul, jealous of David, chased him away from court and out into the wild country. He has the life of a fugitive, even though he did no harm to the King and meant him nothing but good. Now he has a chance to prove it, when he suddenly finds himself within arm’s reach of the King in an isolated place. Instead of stabbing Saul, he proves that he wouldn’t do such a thing by cutting off a piece of the King’s cloak. When Saul is shown this evidence he realises the mistake he has been making, but David dared to do it because he felt that God was keeping him safe, even from the worst that Saul could do.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how good it is to feel safe.

“King David Dances”

Our story is based on the second book of Samuel, chapters 5 and 6.

In this story David finally becomes King. He captures Jerusalem and makes it his capital. Afterwards he wanted to demonstrate to the people that God was with them, so he brought the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were carved, into the city with a great procession and noisy rejoicing. He was so glad to be able to do this that, even though he was a king with a solemn and important position, he joined in the dancing. Sadly, his wife Michelle completely missed the point and despised him for what she saw as his loss of dignity. However, nobody let that spoil the great day and they just went on with the party.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how easy it is to make others feel bad, or sad, by making fun of them.

“Lazarus, Friend of Jesus”

Our story for a new half term is taken from the Gospel of St John, chapter 11.

Jesus had some good friends, Lazarus, and his two sisters Mary and Martha. When Lazarus fell ill one day, his sisters were unable to get him well, so they asked Jesus to come and help. But Jesus was delayed and poor Lazarus died before he arrived. His

sisters buried him in a tomb and mourned him deeply. A few days later Jesus arrived, and he also was very upset, but he asked the people there to open the tomb, even though in a hot country Lazarus' body would not be in a good condition. Jesus stood outside the tomb and called Lazarus to come out! No-one could believe their ears, but then – Lazarus appeared! He was still wearing his grave clothes, but he was well. This showed the sisters, and everyone there, how very special Jesus was.

The Open the Book commentary speaks to the children of how we can help our friends when they are sad – even if not quite as spectacularly as Jesus did.

“The Man who Came Back”

This week's story is based on Luke's Gospel chapter 17.

In ancient times leprosy was a dread disease. No-one knew how it was caught and there was no cure. The disfigurement that gradually grew upon sufferers was so terrible that no-one could bear even to look at it, and so they were driven out and forced to live in camps and caves on the edge of society. Sometimes the disease turned out to be something else, and when someone recovered, they had to be checked out by a priest who said whether or not they could go back and rejoin the community. News of Jesus' healing miracles had spread to everyone, so when he met ten lepers on the road they immediately asked him to help them, which he did, and all were cured. Overcome with joy, they all rushed off to see the priest – all except one, who remembered to come back and say thank you for the great gift of health that he had received.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how good it is to thank people when they do something special for us - even if they do kind or special things for us very often.

“Waiting for a Friend”

This week's story is based on St John's Gospel, chapter 4.

Jews and Samaritans lived in different parts of the same country, but they didn't mix, they didn't even speak to each other. Jews considered Samaritans were somehow unclean, and all women were considered inferior to men, so when a Jewish man speaks to a Samaritan woman, and a woman who was shunned even among her peers, so that she had to visit the well at the most uncomfortable time of the day at that, it was severe culture shock. Jesus pays Leah close attention, which she is not used to as most people look away from her. In return she listens closely to what he says, which not everyone else does. The conversation takes several intuitive leaps, but as it progresses Leah realises that Jesus is the Messiah that everyone is waiting for. In her excitement she runs to tell everyone else. The news is so good that those who previously despised her now listen to her, and believe what she says. She has found someone who values her in spite of her reputation, and is willing to treat her as a friend.

The Open the Book commentary and conclusion speak of friendship, how we all need it, and how sad it is not to have any friends.

“The Good Shepherd”

This week's story is based on St Matthew's gospel, chapter 18.

This is a famous story, often called “The Lost Sheep”. When only one in a hundred sheep is found to be missing, the shepherd goes to a lot of trouble to find and bring it safely home, instead of leaving it to its fate. Every single sheep is precious to this shepherd and he knows each one individually, by name. Even if the sheep had got into trouble by foolishness or disobedience, he was delighted to find it, because all his sheep, the ninety-nine in the fold, and the straying one too, matter to him.

The Open the Book commentary suggests that although sometimes we feel that we don't matter and no-one takes any notice of us, that isn't true; each of us is special, and precious.

“The Pharisee and the Tax Collector”

This week's story is taken from Luke's Gospel, chapter 18.

The Pharisees were religious leaders who were very strict about keeping religious laws. The trouble was, they started to believe that because they kept the laws better than most other people were able to, they were better than most other people. Tax collectors, on the other hand, were very unpopular because they worked for the Romans, who had conquered the nation and made everyone do what they said. Tax collectors knew that they were not better than other people.

One day a Pharisee and a tax collector went to pray in the temple, and both expected God to think of them as other people did. The Pharisee was proud of himself, and the tax collector very miserable. However, it was the man who knew and admitted that he had gone wrong, whom God approved, and not the proud man who thought he was doing so well.

The Open the Book commentary and conclusion speak about comparing ourselves with others, and how it is worthwhile to dwell on the positive features of those around us.

“Esther was a Star”

This week's story is based on the Book of Esther in the Old Testament.

When the Jewish people were defeated and carried off to Persia, eventually the King took a beautiful Jewish girl called Esther as his wife. The king's chief minister was a horrible bully who expected everyone to grovel before him. However, a brave Jew called Mordecai refused to bow to anyone but God. Haman was furious and persuaded the king to order the murder of all the Jews. The king didn't realise that this included not only Mordecai, but his beloved Queen also, and nor did either he or Haman know that Mordecai was Esther's uncle.

Warned by her uncle, Esther went bravely to the king – which could mean death if he hadn't wanted to see her. She exposed the plot and Haman suffered the fate he had planned for the Jewish people.

The Open the Book commentary explores telling someone in authority when you see something wrong, even if you are frightened.

“Ruth Finds a New Home”

This week's story is taken from the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament.

A Jewish family moved to Moab during a famine, where the two sons married local women. Sadly both these young men and their father died, leaving the three women alone. The mother, Naomi, decided to return to Israel and one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, went with her, to a land that was strange to her. In her new home, she took Naomi's advice about how to behave, and soon attracted a man of status in her new community called Boaz, who was also a kinsman of Naomi's. He married her and gave both women a home and protection – and soon babies to give them joy!

The Open the Book commentary speaks of helping and looking after other people, just as there are people who look after us.

“Deborah the Judge”

This week's story is taken from the Book of Judges in the Old Testament, chapter 4.

This story tells of the time when Israel was ruled by judges, not kings. Women could be judges as well as men, and decide the nation's policy as well as adjudicating disputes. At this time Israel was under attack from their neighbours who raided them continually. Under God's guidance, Deborah sent the Israelite army under Barak to fight the far larger enemy army. At the crucial moment the drought which they had been suffering broke with a torrential storm, which hampered the enemies so badly that they were decisively defeated by the Israelites.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of asking for help when in difficulty, and how things can turn out better than you think.

“Hannah's Prayer”

This story is from the Old Testament, based on the book of the prophet Samuel, chapters 1 and 2

A man called Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. He loved them both, although Peninnah had been able to give him lots of children whilst poor Hannah had none. In those times it was thought a disgrace for a wife to have no children, so as well as having no baby to love, Hannah found she was looked down on by everyone, even though her husband loved her. She took her sadness to the temple and prayed for a baby so earnestly that the priest thought she was drunk! God heard her prayer and she bore a son, Samuel. Because God had helped her, she promised that this, her first child, should be dedicated to God, and he went on to grow up to be a great prophet.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how it is possible to bring things that are worrying you to God.

“Brave Abigail”

This week's story is based on the first book of Samuel, chapter 25.

Nabal was an unpleasant man who gave his wife, Abigail, a hard time. He was a rich farmer, and his lands and servants had been protected by David from robbers for some time. Now David sent a message to Nabal asking for his help in feeding his men, who were hungry, but Nabal just sent back a rude reply. David was angry and prepared to attack him instead. However, having heard of this from a servant, Nabal's wife Abigail packed up a

load of food and set off to find David. When they met she offered him the food and asked him to reconsider, which he did, and was glad he hadn't had the chance to use violence to gain his ends. Abigail only told her husband what she had done after he had enjoyed a night's feasting, whereupon he suffered a stroke and a few days later, died. In gratitude for what she did, David, hearing of her widowhood, offered her marriage and looked after her from then on.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of sharing, rather than keeping everything for yourself.

“The First Passover Meal”

This week's story is taken from the Book of Exodus, in the Old Testament, chapter 12.

The story is set during the final night that the People of Israel spent as slaves in Egypt, immediately before they set out, following Moses, across the Red Sea. It tells of how God's people were told how they would avoid the final plague visited upon the Egyptians, the death of the eldest male of every household, by marking their doorways with blood from the meat they would eat as their last meal in that place – the meal which came to be known as Passover.

The Open the Book commentary encourages the children to think of other children who are given no freedom to enjoy a home, school or the comfort of growing up in security.

“The Remembering Meal”

This week's story is based on the Gospel of Luke, chapter 22.

This story explains the origins of the rite of Holy Communion. A grandmother tells her granddaughter about the last meal Jesus shared with his friends, the night before he was arrested. It was a Passover meal, as we talked about last week. This time, Jesus split up the cake of unleavened bread and passed it round, and also asked them all to take a sip from a shared cup of wine. He explained that this was to help them to remember that what he was about to do, which was to allow himself to be put to death, was done for them, and they should not forget it. And Christians do this to this day.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of remembering friends and family who live far away, even if you don't see them very often.

“The Wedding Feast”

This week's story is taken from the Gospel of St John, chapter 2.

This is the story of the wedding at Cana, when Jesus and his mother and friends were invited to join the feast. These feasts lasted for days and part way through the host was horrified to find he had not provided as much wine as would be needed, and they were running out. Jesus' mother Mary saw his distress, and when she heard the problem, took it to Jesus. Although at first he felt that it wasn't his time to help people in any other than ordinary ways, he soon relented. There were large jars nearby, used for holding water, for washing, not for drinking. He asked the servants to fill them right up, then take a sample to the Master of Ceremonies. This man found he was drinking fine wine and congratulated the host on keeping the best until far on in the celebrations. Neither of them knew where

the wine had come from, or that Jesus was involved, although the servants knew. The party went on in great enjoyment, and all because Jesus had helped – in a most surprising way.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of asking for help when we need it, and working out when to do it and who to ask. We can ask God for help with all sorts of things - even quite ordinary things, because some ordinary things are also important.

“Sarah Spends Her Savings”

This week’s story is based on a story Jesus told, written in St Luke’s Gospel, chapter 7.

Simon, a religious leader, had invited Jesus to dinner. Everyone was talking about it, and a woman who lived nearby, who had lived a disreputable life, heard about it too. She wanted to go straight but couldn’t get started. She had a bottle of very expensive perfume for which she had saved up for a long time, and decided to offer it to Jesus, hoping he would help her. When she came into the house where everyone was eating, she was overcome by sadness and shame and instead of trying to speak to Jesus, knelt weeping at his feet, and instead of giving her perfume to him, poured it over his feet. The host, Simon, thought Jesus should know what a bad character she had, and reject her, but Jesus saw in her true sorrow for her sins, forgave her for what she had done in her past life, and gave her the impetus to start again.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of how we can show how sorry we are when we have done something wrong.

“The Writing on The Wall”

This week’s story is from the Old Testament, based on the book of the prophet Daniel, chapter 5.

When the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and overthrew the city, they carried away all the best people back to Babylon. They also looted the Temple that Solomon had built, and took away all the gold and silver artefacts that were used in Temple worship. Now the current King of Babylon, Belshazzar, was throwing a great banquet to impress his nobles and neighbours, and as part of that he caused to be used for drinking and eating the precious objects from the Temple in Jerusalem. While he was still partying, a supernatural hand appeared and wrote on the wall. No-one could be found to read or interpret the writing, until Daniel, one of the exiled prisoners from Jerusalem, was called. He told the assembled company that by misusing the precious objects from the Temple, he had displayed profound contempt for God, believing himself to be greater than the Creator of the universe. In consequence, the writing was there to inform him that his kingdom was about to be invaded and divided amongst his enemies, and he himself would lose his life. The events foretold very shortly happened exactly as Daniel had said.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of the importance of respecting each other's things, and asking when we want to use them.

“Just Hoping”

As this is our last session before Christmas our story this week is called **“Just Hoping”** and is taken from both the Gospel of St Luke and the Gospel of St Matthew, from the second chapter of both.

All our stories this term have been about surprises. This story explores what hopes everyone might have had at that special time. It tells of what Mary was hoping for, what Joseph, the shepherds, the star-watchers, and the angels for the whole world – and the answer to the hopes of everyone was – a baby! The biggest surprise of all.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of those who have nothing to look forward to at Christmas, those who have ceased to hope, and how we might be able to help them.

“Christmas Journeys”

This story is based on the second chapter of St Matthew’s Gospel and the second chapter of St Luke’s Gospel.

It emphasises all the effort, both human and angelic, that went into Jesus’ birth. Lots of people were needed to join in and they all agreed to play their part. In the days before radio, television and social media, the news went out to the poorer people via the shepherds, and to the big city and to the intelligentsia via the wise men. Everyone was included, and everyone was involved.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of making journeys, or making efforts, to tell people we love them, as Jesus made the effort of many journey to tell us that God loves us.

“God’s Good Idea”

This story is based on the first chapter of John’s Gospel.

It introduces the idea of the mystery that is at the heart of the Christmas story. We are so used to the idea of a baby in a manger, that we forget that this very ordinary thing was also an absolutely extraordinary thing – the Spirit who imagined and created our complex world, condensing himself into an ordinary-seeming human baby, whom we could see, hear, touch and begin to know and love.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of making a good idea into a reality, as God did when he sent Jesus to help us understand how much we are loved.

“A Soldier’s Story”

Our last story of the term is based on the Gospel of Mark, chapters 15 and 16. It is a different slant on the Easter story.

One of the soldiers in the Roman army is a witness to the events of Jesus’ trial, death and resurrection, watching from a distance. He is first disturbed at the injustice of it, then accepting of this as the end of Jesus’ life, then rocked back on his heels by what he sees of Jesus rising to new life.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of watching things happening and how you feel if something just doesn’t seem right.

“Peter's Saddest Day”

“Peter’s Happiest Day”

The stories are based on Mark's Gospel chapter 14, and John's Gospel chapters 20 and 21.

Towards the end of his ministry Jesus knows that the authorities are getting more and more upset with what he says and does. He tries to warn his friends, knowing that they will desert him in fear. One of his best friends, Peter, declares that he will stay through thick and thin, but Jesus knows better. When he is arrested, Peter tries to stay near him but when challenged, loses his nerve. Far from supporting his friend, he denies he even knows him. Later, after Jesus' resurrection (which the friends find hard to understand even though it has been explained to them in advance) Peter is given a chance to redeem what is past, be forgiven by Jesus and to forgive himself.

The Open the Book commentary speaks of times when we might have hurt our friends by what we have said or done, and how good it is to find the right words or actions to put things right.

At the end of the school year 2018/19 the children presented the Open the Book team with a 'thank you' card.

Inside was a quote from every class.

This is typical of the type of feedback given to OtB teams across the country.



A quote from every class...

"I love open the book! Especially when the whole school gets to join in the fun!" '56'

"I love how the open the book team work together to put on this great show!" '50'

"It's great fun and I enjoy watching it!" '51'

"It's great that you put so much effort into pleasing everyone in T&A.S and G. Thank you!" '56'

"It very fun and I enjoy watching" '63'

"It's very entertaining" '64'

"It is amazing I really love it" '67'

"My favourite part of the open the book is that they bring the stories."

"I love the open the book, especially when children get involved." '58'

"They share the stories really well." '47'

"10/10 it's brilliant" '39'

"It is very entertaining" '44'

"It is interesting and I enjoy the stories" '42'

Dear O.T.B. team,

Thank you so much for our wonderful Wednesday assemblies, from all at C.K.J.S.