

November 30th

Memory verse

These all died in faith,
not having received the promises,
but having seen them afar off,
and were persuaded of them,
and embraced them,
and confessed
that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Hebrews 11:13

In this verse the writer is talking about the saints of the Old Testament times, who died **before** Jesus came into the world to die for sinners. It explains how they saw that event in the future in the same way that Christians now see it in the past – by faith. We, like them, are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth”. Very small children can learn the words in bold and understand that Christians are **strangers** because they do not belong here and **pilgrims** because they are travelling to heaven. The verse falls naturally into two three-line parts with a concluding line at the end. It can be split up for practice in a variety of different ways depending on the number of children learning it.

Something to read¹



As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was a den; and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and, behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled...

These are the opening words of what is perhaps the most famous fictional story ever written. Its author was a poor tinker with very little education yet this book has been popular for over 300 years and translated into over 200 languages.

The tinker-author, John Bunyan, was in prison when he wrote the book because in 1664 a law had been passed which forbade the holding of any church services apart from those of the church of England. The act was called the Conventicle Act because such illegal church services were called “conventicles”. John Bunyan preached at conventicles and so he was tried and imprisoned. Putting John Bunyan in prison did not stop him preaching because the book he wrote in prison, *Pilgrim's Progress*, is still preaching today!

¹ Illustrations by kind permission of the artist, Mrs Colette Harding.



John Bunyan was born on **30th November** 1628. He wrote many other books besides the *Pilgrim's Progress* including an autobiography (story of his life). He often put his own experiences into *Pilgrim's Progress*. In the picture above you can see a character called “Evangelist” talking to the Pilgrim. He is telling him to go to a little gate called a “wicket gate”. You can see that Pilgrim carries a great burden on his back which weighs him down. Bunyan himself knew what it was to carry a heavy burden for a long distance. He was a tinker who mended metal pots and pans. He travelled around Bedfordshire from village to village carrying his heavy tools on his back. But he also knew what it felt like to be conscious of his guilt as a sinner before God. That was a heavy burden to bear. In the story, the pilgrim cannot get rid of his burden until he comes to the cross.

At the cross the burden rolls off and away into the empty tomb as you can see in the picture. Bunyan knew what that felt like too. Burdened with his guilt he was walking through the Bedford streets one day when he heard “three or four poor women” sitting at a door, “talking about the new birth, the work of God in their hearts”. These women were like Evangelist in the story showing Bunyan the way to the cross where his burden of guilt could be lifted.



The rest of the story describes the Pilgrim's journey to the Celestial city.



Here you can see him on the edge of the river which he has to cross to reach the Celestial City at the end of his journey.

If you have not read *Pilgrim's Progress* yet, start now!² It is a wonderful book for reading aloud and, in fact, in the form that Bunyan originally wrote it, much of it is set out almost like a play with different speakers, so different family members could take turns at reading different characters.

A game to play

Girls who have read *Little Women* by the American author Louisa May Alcott might remember this episode from the opening chapter:³

Mrs. March broke the silence... by saying in her cheery voice, “Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrim's Progress when you were little things? Nothing delighted you more than to have me tie my piece bags⁴ on your backs for burdens, give you hats and sticks and rolls of paper, and let you travel through the house from the cellar, which was the City of Destruction, up, up, to the housetop, where you had all the lovely things you could collect to make a Celestial City.”

“What fun it was, especially going by the lions, fighting Apollyon, and passing through the valley where the hob-goblins were,” said Jo.

“I liked the place where the bundles fell off and tumbled downstairs,” said Meg.

“I don't remember much about it, except that I was afraid of the cellar and the dark entry, and

2 There is a project on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive which provides a step by step *Pilgrim's Progress* collage craft project, the complete *Pilgrim's Progress* in extra large print, worksheets and full instructions. For sample pages and to purchase go to <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com>.

3 They might also remember that in the story the girls and Mrs Marsh completely misunderstand what the burden represents. They speak of it as though the girls can get rid of it by trying to be good. Bunyan would have been horrified!

4 Piece-bag is an American term for a bag of scraps of fabric suitable for using for patchwork or mending.

always liked the cake and milk we had up at the top. If I wasn't too old for such things, I'd rather like to play it over again," said Amy, who began to talk of renouncing childish things at the mature age of twelve.

This is a dressing up opportunity not to be missed! Unlike historical costumes, which have to have some resemblance to accuracy, costumes for *Pilgrim's Progress* can be as imaginative as you like and adapted to whatever you have available. Adapt Louisa May Alcott's idea to suit your own house (and garden if appropriate) and work out which scenes you would like to include. If you like, you can even learn some of the words of the book and do some acting. Even one child alone can do this activity with a little help and it should be something to remember – just as it was for the “little women”!



Some art ideas

I hope you enjoyed the pictures from *Pilgrim's Progress* which I have included in this lesson. If you have looked at them closely you might have thought there was something rather unusual about them. You would be correct. They are from a work of art which Mrs Harding⁵ has made – on her stairs! You can see her in her artist's overalls on the left. Please don't paint your own stairs without asking permission but what she has done is certainly an inspiration.

If you would like to make your own series of pictures or scenes from *Pilgrim's Progress* which might remind you of stairs you could try a “concertina book.” Take a piece of A4 paper and cut it in half longways. Fold each piece in half and then half again to give a strip of four panels. Join the two pieces together with glue or a strip of sellotape on the back to give a strip of eight panels. For her stairs Mrs Harding has fifteen double panels (if you count each tread and riser pair as one double panel) and one initial riser. If you want to have that many double panels you will have to add more strips of paper.

⁵ You can find more of Mrs Harding's work on the *Mothers' Companion* including a project/unit study about *Work*. For sample pages and to purchase go to <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com>.