

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS IDEAS 2020

Coronavirus pandemic, 'flu', climate crisis... the good news is, Christmas is NOT cancelled and we have the opportunity to remind our communities what there is still to celebrate in our faith and tell the Christmas story loud and clear.

Do use face-to-face or indirect contact with folk who aren't church regulars (such as a leaflet with a Christmas trail route), to share a list of any other Christmas-themed events and services you're planning, as well as your usual Sunday and other meeting times, plus ways folk can continue connecting with your church e.g. Facebook pages, website, Youtube, with a specific invitation and any contact details they might need to book a seat at a service or places at Messy Church.

Is there a way to offer folk a gift of hope from your church (e.g. a pot of bulbs)? Advertise with posters, flyers through letterboxes and also online. Don't forget to use local Facebook (what's on) pages as well as church pages.

The Congregational Federation Church Support Worker is also offering ideas: your church should already have the details of when these will be available.

If YOU have other ideas that churches in the Area could use, please send them to me and I'll forward them on. I hope you'll find something useful from the following, and please don't hesitate to ask for more details etc.

Jesse Tree – a journey through Advent

If you haven't come across this, there are explanatory books available (search on second-hand book websites) with a page a day through Advent of Bible story and picture symbol as well as many templates for homemade decorations on the internet. Simply search for Jesse Tree.

The idea is to be reminded of major Bible stories and their characters that lead up to the birth of Jesus. Each day through Advent, a symbol can be added to a small fir tree or branch in a pot; or a flat, poster-style tree; or strung together like bunting; so that the bigger story builds up. I've used this week by week in services, with children's groups and as a huge wall display in the Seafarer's Mission we worked in.

A script and outlines of symbols could be copied and given out to each family or household in your church to do separately-together through Advent, perhaps a week at a time, (and share photos as you go along) and/or each contribute a symbol (e.g. on a small paper plate) for a large display for your church building.

Think where you might display this. Have you (or a village shop) a large glass door or window that people can see as they pass by? Can you hang waterproof symbols and story outside on railings or a gate or door by a pavement?



In-a-bag 'kits'

As well as the Jesse tree, other kits can be delivered for the whole of Advent, or week by week, to families (and adults).

Caroline (Lapford) has created pom-pom nativity figures they're going to send out the instructions and kit for, PLUS they're producing a Youtube demo film with story and cooking activity. As soon as it's available, I'll send you all a link.

Kits can include any simple craft activity, with good instructions (and glue etc.); recipes for simple cooking activities (and maybe the ingredients); Roots (if you subscribe) or other story and activity / puzzle / colouring sheets etc. and...

'Round Robin' Christmas greetings

For folk unable to meet in person, booklet 'cards' could be circulated from person to person to which each person adds a greeting/seasonal poem/Christmas memory etc. Collect and pass on every few days. Cards are left with the last recipient.

Christmas pageant / nativity

... outside, to enable easier social distancing. Some villages have been doing this for many years in an open barn, with live animals. Is some version of this possible where you are? It can (and currently should) be short and simple. Everyone can be encouraged to come dressed up, with a jam jar lamp and/or star on a stick (bamboo cane) and for safety, folk could book in for repeated presentations.

The Bible Society published Ten-Minute Miracle Plays by Margaret Cooling (1995; ISBN 0-564-08775-0) with scripts and detailed staging, props and costuming advice which can be simplified. The story could be told with one narrator (making sound projection easier and safer) and mimed.

The Bible Society also have a free resource of a script with power point slides telling the story. Simply go online and register and you'll be sent the details via email. This of course requires you to be inside, with projection facilities.



Christmas story trail/route

Trails could be set out in chapel grounds or through streets round your chapel, and can take various forms such as:

a. Decide if you intend yours to be seen principally during the day or at night (in which case use e.g. tissue paper stained glass effect with lamplight behind). Set a theme for households to create their own designs, or decide a trail that e.g. follows a story/carol/poem from window to window in a given order. Provide a paper route for participants. (You can use a lidded box for this at the start of the trail.) Flat pictures, 3D pictures or dioramas (scenes) can be put in chapel/house/shop windows or gardens by pavements.

b. Provide a leaflet with the Christmas story (child-friendly version) BUT leaving out words (number them) that have to be found. The missing words can be displayed in house/shop windows, on noticeboards etc. together with the relevant number on the leaflet. You can use an object for children to look for by the word, such as a mini Christmas tree or star. Words can then be in a random order, within a given area.

Christmas Tree Festival

Advantages: People can come into a building a few at a time on a one-way system, and over a few days. Could you invite a local school (who'll be in bubbles) when no-one else is visiting?

OR have a 'trail' (as above) in your chapel and members' gardens where passers-by can see them.

Prepare printed out copies of words accompanying the trees, which may be the Christmas story, or carols, prayers... to take away, together with information about your church as above. For children, you could include a colouring/drawing competition, puzzles etc.



Inside, support the visual aspect with sound: play recorded carols and if you have projection facilities, screen a short film every so often

Real trees or artificial – do members have artificial trees to lend? Can you make one or more craft trees from slats/branches round a central pole?

1. Trees can be 'sponsored' (with or without a payment) by local groups to decorate
2. Your church can decorate all trees with a theme e.g.
 - a. dress with ivy 'garlands' and holly-shaped handmade decorations (what can you recycle??)
 - b. blossom: decorate in white
 - c. berry: decorate in red, including heart shapes etc. etc.

the carol Love came down at Christmas similarly

or a different carol per tree...

or the Bible story with each tree representing characters and associated colours e.g. Romans – for the census and background; Mary, blue; Joseph, tools, brown/bronze; angels, white/silver; shepherds and sheep, knitted/felted shapes, black/white, green; wise men and gifts, camels, purple; Jesus, stars, crowns, titles i.e. He shall be called Immanuel... etc., white/gold etc. etc.

perhaps together with a Jesse tree (see above)

and perhaps with a prayers and/or remembrance tree. To limit risk, a member could write up 'thanks' or 'please' prayers, and names of people remembered, all given verbally; or folk could email requests to be written onto scrolls to be (rolled and) hung on a tree.

Various churches have also themed trees for charities they support, groups within their church etc.

As well as pre-made decorations, including plastic baubles, you can use plastic lids (start your congregation collecting these) as a base, or cardboard (have you old Christmas cards??); cut out words from old magazines and stick them on a 2 or 3D shape e.g. joy, peace, love or titles of Jesus or lines from carols; use wire/pipe cleaners to create shapes and embellish with beads, buttons, threads; make mini recycled paper chains as garlands; make figures e.g. shepherds, from cardboard tubes, or angels from semi-circles of paper doilies or cardboard; and you may have knitters, sewers and felters in your church... Pinterest has ideas galore.

Plea from me: If you use glitter, please ensure it's biodegradable.

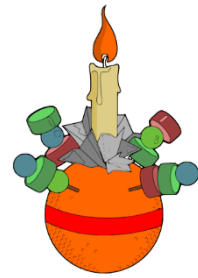
Christian Aid resources

... are free to download. Simply search for Christian Aid worship resources and you'll find a service, poster, candleholder and more suggestions for Advent prayer activities that can be done at home by all ages.

Christingles

Many churches have a Christingle service in early Advent. Others combine the symbol of Jesus as light of the world with Epiphany and the story of the wise men following a star to find Jesus.

If you have a tradition of making Christingles, could you make lots more for members to give to neighbours, together with an explanation (and invites etc. as above)? If you are not yet meeting for worship, including for Messy Church, Christingles can be a separate-together activity at home. Christingle 'kits' can be put together to enable folk to take part.



Christingle service If you haven't ever used Christingles, information and instructions, hymns to well-known tunes, and liturgies, are all freely available on the internet, or you can put your own together, using Bible readings with the theme of God's light in the world. For a service in church, have 3 large, unlit candles at the front to represent the Trinity. These will be lit first following suitable Bible readings. Further large candles will be lit in turn (with a taper lit from the previous one) after each reading. If possible, place these to encircle the congregation (e.g. if you have accessible windowsills). You can invite folk to bring pre-prepared Christingles to the service, or hand them out (lit) at the end. I have copies of services in this format I've put together in the past, so please ask if you want one. For each Christingle you need (per person)

- an orange, with a sliver cut from the base if necessary for it to stand firmly
- a small candle (special Christingle candles are available, or you can use a large cake candle)
- 4 cocktail sticks
- 4 different fruits e.g. raisin, glacé cherry, piece of glacé sliced orange/lemon, piece of dried apricot or date, soft sweet such as marshmallow or wine gum
- length of red tape/ribbon, enough to go round the orange and sticky tape to hold it

An adult should cut a cross in the top of the orange, so the candle can be inserted. The Christingle means and is made up thus:

- The orange represents the world
- The ribbon represents Jesus' (blood) life, given for the world in love. Stick in place.
- Spear 4 'fruits' with the cocktail sticks then insert the sticks by the other end round the top half of the orange. These represent the fruits of the earth: the good gifts of God given to us.
- Insert the candle in the top. This represents Jesus, light of the world.