



Scripture Union

CHRISTMAS PARTY PACK 2018

INSIDE

Christmas
crafts,
games and
prayer ideas

Sharing
Advent with
families in your
community

All-age
Christmas
service and
family fun day



'I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people... a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'

Luke 2:10,11

Hello

.....

Welcome to your Christmas Party Pack 2018!

When Christians in the fourth century made the decision to place Christmas on 25 December they did a brilliantly wise and forward-looking thing.

By fixing the date at a time when the pagan festivals of Sol Victor, Yule, and Midwinter were being celebrated, they tapped into the human need to celebrate in the midst of darkness when hoping for the return of light.

They also established a festival that has resonated not just with non-Northern Europeans, but also non-Christians down the years – to the extent that in 2018 Christmas continues to be celebrated enthusiastically and joyfully across the globe regardless of religious belief. This makes it a wonderful opportunity to once again share the amazing story of Emmanuel, God with us, declaring the glorious truth that God dwells among us and humbled himself to death on the cross.

In predominantly non-Christian countries, from Myanmar to Nepal and Tajikistan to Gambia, I have witnessed churches and solitary Christians be overwhelmed by non-Christian neighbours who are so eager to share in Christmas festivities and hear the good news that light has for ever conquered darkness.

It has been extraordinary to see how Christians (even those who exist as tiny minorities in their nation) have ‘permission’ to share their faith through the joy and celebration of Christmas. And they do this so well – even in nations where it is technically illegal!

So don't be afraid of holding a Christmas party. And don't feel that it has to be a rather sombre and gloomy affair to show that it's Christian!

Invite friends and neighbours to come and celebrate with you, and to find the real reason for a celebration that can and should last all year!

Tim Hastie-Smith

Rev Tim Hastie-Smith



Contents

4

Keeping children and young people at the heart of Christmas

Carolyn Edwards

6

Advent in your community

Rachel Turner

8

Everyday God

All-age service plan

12

Community Christmas celebration

Family fun day

16

Christmas activities

16 Games

20 Prayers

22 Creative makes

24

The First Christmas

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A POSTER AND
INVITATIONS FROM
THE RESOURCE CENTRE**

SCRIPTUREUNION.ORG.UK

26

Activities for younger children

28

Involving young people



Keeping children and young people at the heart of Christmas

By Carolyn Edwards



The first image many people bring to mind when Christmas is mentioned is children, wide-eyed with happiness, a pile of presents, a decorated tree, maybe watched over by a whiskery, doting aunt.

'Awww,' I can hear you say, 'Christmas is all about the children.'

But is it really? Instead, I would like to suggest it's about the start of the revolution when, completely unexpectedly, the divine became human. It's about the start of the journey to the preferred item of torture at the time, the cross, through an infanticide and a perilous journey into another country by a refugee family.

My rant might sound bit bah humbug for the time of year, certainly not the kind of thing doting aunties want to hear, and certainly not in front of the children. But, if we really want to keep children and young people at the heart of Christmas, we have to stop pretending it's about getting lots of stuff, eating lots of stuff and award-winning adverts on the television.

Don't get me wrong, I love Christmas. I am obsessive about decorating my house.

I love buying, making and wrapping presents (yep, I still do stockings for my children, all now very grown up), and I love carol services and Christingles, readings from Isaiah and all the trimmings. But, as I am doing these things, I hold the narrative of hope, peace and joy – not because John Lewis has made us all cry again, but because God's big rescue plan,

the one that had been promised for hundreds of years, swung into action.

Years ago, theatre company Riding Lights did a sketch where the characters talked about this thing 'thebebbjesus' – but nobody knew what it was, and they therefore dismissed it as irrelevant. They were right to make the point, that Jesus didn't stay in the manger, he became a man who told us marvellous stories about God, which eventually got him crucified by those who couldn't hack his truth. But Jesus started as a baby. What a risky rescue plan that was! God was made human without clothes, and without the ability to regulate his temperature or even feed himself. He was born into a filthy animal shelter, completely vulnerable to the care of a teenage first-time mum and a reluctant carpenter. My goodness, there must have been a lot of angels holding their breath in those first few days and months, wondering how it was all going to work out.

Children are fascinated by babies; their faces light up with wonder at this little squirming, gurgling thing. They want to touch it to see how it works, and this often prompts questions about their own birth and place in the family.





At Christmas it is important that we give them time to gaze in awe and wonder at the infant face of the Almighty Creator. So often it can become such a busy time of year, full of concerts and parties, but, as parents and workers, let us help children experience again and again the awe and wonder of Christmas. Let us work hard to create the space for time to metaphorically tiptoe up to the manger and take a look-see at the child that started it all.

While Jesus was still only a toddler, he and his family narrowly escaped a genocide and travelled to unknown lands, looking for shelter and refuge. When the grown-up preacher Jesus placed a child in the midst of a gathering of his disciples and followers, he asked them to take a different perspective on what was important. I wonder if he was reminded of his own childhood, or if in the eyes of that single child he saw reflected all the children he would love – some who would be blessed and others who would never enjoy a ‘happy Christmas’.

Christmas is a time to celebrate, to enjoy the company of family. But it can also be a time when pain is made worse, when the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ is

brought into sharp focus. Putting children and young people at the centre of Christmas might mean rethinking what is important. We might want to talk with our children and young people about how we can make Christmas better for others, maybe taking big risks together like giving the money that would have been spent on presents to children’s charities. How exciting would that be! Even simple things like giving away the money you would have spent on a real Christmas tree can have an incredible impact on everyone seeking the real meaning of Christmas.

One of the most profound Christmas services I ever attended was with a group of youth work students in Oxford. We stood around one of the life-like dolls we used to train teenagers for parenting, which was wrapped in a grubby blanket and shoved in the church doorway where the homeless guys normally sat. As we read Scripture and prayed, someone high or drunk berated us asking, ‘What’s your God gonna do about it?’

The good news is that God had already done something about it, but it was a helpful reminder that we have our bit to do now too. With the ubiquitous nature of media, children are very aware of the evils and trials of this world, and many are asking God what he is going to do about it. Perhaps to help them ‘get’ Christmas, we have to facilitate them being Christmas for others.

Every year we celebrate God’s rescue plan, but it swung into action when a teenage girl said ‘yes’ to God. Facing humiliation, rejection and pain, she said ‘yes’ because through the Holy Spirit working within her she knew that God was going to change things.

All over our country there are teenagers saying ‘yes’ to all sorts of harmful ideas and activities, perhaps more so at Christmas when there is even more pressure to be beautiful and successful. God first shared his Christmas message of peace, hope and joy to people with no status – a young woman, a carpenter and shepherds. We need to ensure that

our children and young people hear that God does not care about our status or how many mistakes we have made. His offer of peace, hope and joy is for all.

Presenting the Christmas story in a way that is fresh and relevant can be challenging. The Bible

is a great place to start as we read again for ourselves the story at the beginning of the books of Matthew and Luke. It is not long, it is not hard to read (and there is no donkey!), but we can help children and young people put themselves in the place of the main characters and discover for themselves what it would be like if these characters really were at the centre of Christmas.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Carolyn Edwards has over 25 years’ experience in evangelism and mission. She is a lecturer in evangelism, mission and ministry at Cliff College, where she is also researching children’s spirituality.

Advent in your community

By Rachel Turner

Do you remember your first Advent calendar? My mother sewed a felt one when I was very small that looked like a Christmas tree, and every day I was giddy to put on a new felt bauble. Eventually the tree was full and Christmas day had arrived. Others will remember opening little doors with chocolate behind, or opening bags on a line.

No matter how you did it, or do it now, it seems like the Advent season is just one big countdown to Christmas.

For many of the families in our communities, Advent is, at best, an excuse for a daily piece of chocolate from a supermarket calendar. But church tradition gives us a gift in the Advent season that so many families are missing out on.

Christmas can so easily become a one-off moment for the families in our community, centring on the nativity. But the nativity isn't a stand-alone story. It doesn't make sense alone. The nativity is one foundational moment in the whole story of God and people. The whole of Scripture tells the story of God's heart for people, of his love and holiness, and of his determination to restore people to relationship with him. The traditions and story of Advent try to give people this whole story. They place the nativity right in the middle

of the whole biblical journey that continues to this day, and into the future. Christmas without Advent is like only telling people the middle bit of a story.

To take a silly example, if we only told the middle bit of the Cinderella story, then we would only tell the story of a good party with a lot of dancing. Although the party is a centrepiece of the Cinderella story, it's the details before and after that help us understand the significance of that central event.

Our community families need us to give that to them this Christmas. To show them that Christmas is about the whole story of God's history with people that continues on until today and into the future. It is not just a story about a birth. It is about how the same God who was there at the beginning of the world is full of love for us today.



That the God who came to earth as a baby on a day we celebrate at Christmas, even now is with us, right this moment, and inviting us into a life with him. We need to tell our children and families that they are a part of the same story that has Christmas in it. The story of God's heart to be with his people.

Whether your church celebrates Advent or not, the principle that Advent brings us can be used to strengthen how we encourage children and families this Christmas.

- As you tell the nativity story to children or families, try starting at creation and ending at today. It doesn't have to be a big amount of time. Adding a few sentences at the beginning or end can make



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Turner is an author and pioneer for The Bible Reading Fellowship's Parenting for Faith programme (www.parentingforfaith.org.uk), equipping carers of all kinds to raise God-connected children and teens. She has been a children's, youth and family worker in churches around

a huge difference to helping children and families understand why the nativity is so significant and relevant to their lives today.

- If your church does celebrate Advent, or if you have the opportunity to do Advent with your clubs or schools, then take some time share the 'grand story' as well as just the traditional Christmas narrative. The grand story is so exciting and perilous, it can be a wonderful build up to Christmas.
- Give people a chance to respond to God's invitation to them. Jesus came so that we could be reconciled to God, today. Be bold and give people some time to respond to God in a way that is comfortable to them, whether it be a bit of silence for reflection, some time in prayer or connection, an invitation for a practical outworking like putting up sticky notes or an art response.

Whatever the Advent season looks like for you, use this traditional time to help those we serve in our communities see how they are part of God's great story that began at creation and continued through history, through Jesus' birth and death and resurrection, to this day and to his eventual return. It is a powerful story they are being invited into, and we get to tell them about it. Happy Advent!

the UK and the National Children's Work Coordinator for New Wine.

She continues to write books, consult, speak at conferences and run training days for parents and carers, church leaders and youth and children's workers around the UK and Europe.

HOW CAN WE QUICKLY DESCRIBE THE 'GRAND STORY' DURING ADVENT?

Here are a few points you may want to cover:

- God made people for relationship with him. We were created to always know his love, guidance, care and voice. It's how we were designed to function best: filled with the confidence, safety, peace and joy that come from knowing we are loved by God.
- People chose to walk away from God, and we choose our own path. When we are apart from God, our hearts can forget all of his love, guidance and care. Instead, we can begin to feel fear and worry, and feel lost or helpless. When people feel these things, they can make bad choices. They can hurt others and themselves, and can become so focused on themselves that they forget to care for others. It can make the world a tough place to live in.
- God loved people so much that he kept calling to them, and inviting them to come back to him, so they could live in connection to him and be filled with the confidence, safety, peace and joy that come from knowing him. He invited a group of people to be in a special relationship with him, and he gave them guidance on how to live close to him, but they kept getting distracted and forgetting. He sent messengers over and over to remind them of his love, and he rescued them from lots of dangers, and yet they still found it hard. And so, he decided to take away as many barriers as possible between him and people.
- His plan can be seen in Jesus' birth, which is what we celebrate at Christmas. God himself came to earth as a person to be close to people, and the story continues through his death and resurrection that we celebrate at Easter. Jesus came to remove all the barriers between us and God.
- All of this means that, today, we can connect with him, just as we are, and our lives can begin to find that love, confidence, safety, peace and joy that he always wanted us to have.



All-age service

Everyday God



Welcome your congregation and explain that today you will be investigating together how to find God in the everyday bits of life.

Then explain that, throughout the service, there will be songs to sing together. The Bible talks a lot about singing, and even tells us that God sings over us (Zephaniah 3:17)! Share that, by singing songs, we remind ourselves of truths about God, and music can help us say things to God that we sometimes find hard to just say by ourselves.

Sing together as you begin your service.



INTRODUCTION

This part uses an illustration of something mechanical and personal. Feel free to use any item you wish, one that authentically fits with you. While holding and showing your item, describe why it means so much to you, describe its quirks, what it does well, what it doesn't do so well etc. For example – I might talk about my 'wheely' box...

Have you ever seen one of these? It's one of my favourite items in my life. It's a box on wheels. I use it all the time. It may look silly to you, but to me, it means I don't have to carry things all the time, and that is marvelous to me.

Look how it works. Isn't it great?



YOU WILL NEED:

Safety pins (one for everyone in the service)

Flash paper (like magicians use – paper that easily lights and burns out).

Alternatively, you can use a candle or anything that catches fire safely

A clear bowl of water

Pictures of art depicting 'God with us', either drawings from your church members or (copyright-free) art from the internet

Stickers or sticky notes (to be given out as people arrive)

Matches or a lighter

A mechanical, personal item to talk about



Although, I have to say, sometimes the wheels get stuck. Leaves can clog this bit up and, all of a sudden, my wonderful box on wheels stops working the way it was designed to. I have to drag it around and it's heavy and isn't doing what it was made to do. It is such a great design, but when it doesn't have everything it needs to work right, it is so sad.

Then ask everyone:

Have you ever had something that had something wrong with how it worked?

Take a few answers.

Continue:

People can be like that too. My box was designed with all the right parts to make it work beautifully, but sometimes something gets in the way. We as people were designed to work best when us and God are together. Because when God and us are together, then we can feel his love for us, we can know his truth so we don't get confused, we can live in his love, and joy, and peace and all his wonderfulness.

DEMONSTRATION PART 1

Continue speaking:

But sometimes we struggle to find God in the everyday bits of life, and we notice that fear and worry and stress are creeping into our hearts and getting in the way of how we were designed to be.

When we try to live without God being close, our hearts and minds are trying to work without one of the most important pieces – God – as part of our lives. It can make our hearts and minds quick to fear, worry and stress. Like this piece of paper.

Hold up a piece of flash paper shaped like a heart.

It can feel like any little spark in life can so quickly set us off...

Light the flash paper – it will ignite in a little ball of flames and get a fantastic 'ooooo' from the congregation.

Continue speaking:

God loves us so much that he wants something better for us. He wants to be with us so we can experience his love and joy and peace with us always. He wanted it so much for us that he chose to come to earth, to live right with us, and to remove all barriers between us and him. The Bible says that his name on earth would mean 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23). We celebrate Christmas because we are grateful for God coming to be with us. He came as a baby called Jesus.

READING: ISAIAH 9:6,7

If possible, ask a child well in advance to practise this reading so that they feel confident and able to deliver it on the day.

DEMONSTRATION PART 2

Continue speaking

The Bible tells us in Isaiah 9:6 that Jesus came to be our 'wonderful counsellor, mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'. Paul, someone who followed Jesus, said that when we talk to God the 'peace that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:7). You see, when we live close to God, it's like his love, wisdom and peace surround us.

Like putting this piece of paper in water.



Put another piece of flash paper in a clear glass bowl of water. Then light a match.

Do you think I can set this on fire now? Why not? Yes, because the water is protecting it. When God is with us, God's love and peace can be so strong that even though not so good things are happening in our lives, our hearts and minds can be protected by his love and peace.

Sing an appropriate song.

ACTIVITY

Have pre-placed pictures and drawings positioned around the church. If you have a willing congregation, over the previous weeks ask individuals from your church to create an image/drawing/sculpture/poem of what 'God with us' or 'God with me' means to them. You may want to supplement these pictures with some printed from the internet of artists' interpretations of what 'God with us' means.

Around this room are pictures and quotes from people who are describing what 'God with us' means to them. Over the next five minutes, we will play music as you wander around the room looking at the pictures and reading the words.

Share the real meaning of Christmas

...WITH THE UK'S MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Can you/your church make a donation to help us give *The First Christmas* story to children facing tough situations this Christmas?

There are a number of ways to donate:

- Print this page and fill in the form below.
- Give online at su.org.uk/christmasgift
- Send us a cheque made payable to 'Scripture Union'.
- Donate over the phone 01908 856000
- BACS - Bank account: HSBC, 24 College Green, Avon, Bristol, BS1 5TD.

Sort code: 40-14-12 Account No: 91050478

Please include in the reference: 55299/1

Share this amazing initiative with your church by showing our campaign video, using our prayer card and taking a collection.

Visit su.org.uk/christmasextras for more information and to order your collection envelopes (you can also order these using the form below).

...WITH THE CHILDREN IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Get some copies of *The First Christmas* story to give away to children in your local community. To do this you'll need to be part of The 95 Campaign. The 95 Campaign is all about encouraging and equipping those with a heart for the 95% of children and young people not in church.

To join visit the95.org.uk or fill in the form below.

If you sign up online or you've already joined the campaign, you'll hear from us in the next few weeks with how to order these free books, or join below and pre-order your books.

I/we would like to share the real meaning of Christmas with children who don't know Jesus!

Return form to: Scripture Union, Trinity House, Opal Court, Opal Drive, Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0DF or Freepost SCRIPTURE UNION without a stamp.

Title	Forename
Surname	
Home address	
Postcode	

If you would rather not receive updates, by post, about the difference you are making to children and young people's lives through your giving, or about any further opportunities to ensure the good news is shared, please let us know here

Daytime phone (In case of queries)

Email

Please keep me up to date by email about the difference I am making to children and young people's lives through my giving and offer me further opportunities to ensure the good news is share

Church name

Church town

Church website

Church denomination

We take your privacy seriously. For details of how we use your data and your rights please see our privacy notice at su.org.uk/privacy.

I would like to join the 95 Campaign

Keep me informed with updates by email on the 95 campaign, including new resources, news and stories plus ways in which I can help to reach more of the 95% of children not in church.

(Please ensure you have filled in your email address in the left panel).

I would also like pack(s) of 10 copies of *The First Christmas* to give away to children in my community. Please note: if you require more than 500 books (50 packs) please email christmas@scriptureunion.org.uk

DONATION

My donation of £

Please find enclosed a:

Cheque CAF voucher Stewardship voucher

Cheque/voucher number

OR Please debit my Visa Mastercard

Card number

Start date Expiry date Security Number

Name on card Date

Signature

COLLECTION ENVELOPES

I would also like to order packs of 25 collection envelopes for my church.

You were given a sticker/sticky note as you walked in. As you find your favourite image or description of what 'God with us' means to you, please stick your sticker beside it. You may want to chat to the people you came with to share why that is your favourite one.

Play music gently as people move around looking at the pictures and putting stickers on. When you feel they are done, move on to the next bit.

YOUR STORY

Tell briefly your story of what 'God with us' means to you. Big story or small story, the important thing is that it is your story of the reality of God in your life.

Here's mine:

I remember the first time I knew that God was with me. I was four years old, and I remember hearing about how Jesus came to take away all the sin that got in the way between me and God, and I was so grateful. I told God I always wanted to be together. That night I remember lying in my bed and just chatting away to him, just talking about anything. It was amazing. I still do that. I chat to him in my car and while I'm watching TV; when I make mistakes and when I'm scared. He chats back and encourages me, and tells me truths about him and me. When I got cancer I was so shocked, but I just went and sat in my car and I felt his hug around me. I knew that whether I died or not, he was with me.

God is real, and he came to be with us. All around we can see ways in which people have tried to describe this. But what is it you want with God? Jesus came to take away anything that stands between us and God. Bad things we've done, fear or selfishness, worry or fear. Is there anything that is stopping you from inviting God to be with you?

RESPONSE

Continue speaking:

We are just going to take one minute for you and God to chat, if you would like to. If you don't want to do that, please feel free to just reflect and relax in the silence. But for those who do, take this time to chat to God about anything. There is nothing that you can't say to him. You can just chat to him in your head, if you want. Can you say your name in your head right now? That's a place where you can chat to God and he can hear. If you would prefer, you can whisper to him. Take a moment, and tell God about anything that is stopping you from letting him be with you. Ask him to take it away and to

give you his love and joy and peace. We'll just be quiet together as you do that for a minute.

Wait in silence.

Continue speaking:

I have some safety pins up here in a bowl. It's just something small and silly, but it might help us remember that God is with us. As we sing our final song together, feel free to come and collect a safety pin, and attach it to a piece of your clothing. Whenever you see it, you can be reminded that God is right there with you, with all his love and peace and joy ready for you. When you throw your clothes in the wash, remove the pin and attach it to a new piece of clothing, to surprise you when you find it and to remind you again.

Sing an appropriate song as people collect and attach safety pins.

FINAL PRAYER

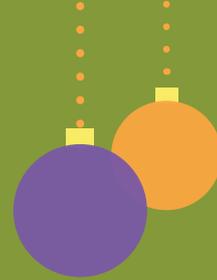
Feel free to pray in whatever tradition you are comfortable with. You might like to use these words:

God, thank you that you came to be with us. Thank you that we don't need to function without you, without your love and peace surrounding our hearts. As we go during this Christmas season, help us to live in the joy of having you with us every day.

Amen



Family fun day



COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Christmas is a great time to bring people together, and a community celebration, if well planned, advertised and executed, is a wonderful opportunity to invite local families to join your church community.

You could host a community Christmas celebration perhaps a few days or weeks before the big day itself – but if possible you should choose a day within the school holiday season as more families are likely to attend.

What: Two to three hours of fun, building relationships and sharing the significance of the birth of Jesus.

A friendly event where the church family can play host to the local community.

Who: Everyone and anyone. This outline describes an inter-generational event, with a bias towards engaging children.

Where: If your church building is warm, welcoming and flexible, then that would be the most obvious location for your celebration, but a shared space such as a community centre, sports centre or school would also work well.

When: Whatever date and time you choose, try to make sure your event is accessible for younger and older children. Also, consider scheduling your event at a time that allows food to be a major part of your celebration – this always goes down well!

What: The suggested outline below is intended as a guide only. You should feel free to adapt it for your own context.

YOU WILL NEED:

copies of the downloadable *Christmas Carol Challenge quiz sheets* – enough for one per group of 4 to 5 people

Crazy Christmas Contest bags (enough for one per group of 5 to 6 people)

A paper or plastic bag containing: *Crazy Christmas Contest instructions sheet* (available to download from su.org.uk/cppextras) with the words of ‘*While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night*’ printed on the reverse (with a different verse highlighted for each group)

A pen, a sheet of paper, large marshmallows, raw spaghetti, sticky tape, chenille wires, toilet rolls, coloured paper and child-safe scissors
Christmas-themed snack food for all attending – taking into account any food allergies or intolerances, and adhering to your organisation’s food hygiene regulations

Bags of treats or other suitable prizes

A giant Christmas cracker (optional)

Publicity/invitations to future events and/or Christmas services





TOP TIPS

- ❄️ Make sure your celebration space is warm, colourful and inviting – perhaps have some Christmas music playing quietly in the background.
- ❄️ Have a team of people whose sole role is to welcome families as they arrive. During your event this team can wander around and make sure families have everything they need.
- ❄️ Don't overrun – younger children will need to go to bed and others may have later commitments. If time is running out, cut out some of the programme rather than run on by 20 minutes.
- ❄️ Focus on fun and engagement. The purpose of your event is to celebrate God's amazing love as revealed through the Christmas story – there's not much worth celebrating more than that!

SUGGESTED OUTLINE

Time: 15 mins

Opening activities

As people arrive, you should provide activities that are open to all and easy to join in with. Each activity that you offer should have a volunteer 'host' who is able to direct and assist as necessary. Activities might include:

- Christmas-themed games (see pages 16 to 18)
- Christmas creative makes (see pages 22 and 23)
- themed puzzle sheets (you would need to obtain or create these in advance)
- a reading corner (a quieter space where you might choose to feature something like the mini version of *Diary of a Disciple* – which conveniently retells the Christmas story from the first three chapters of Luke's Gospel)

Time: 5 mins

Welcome

After the majority of people have arrived, call everyone together and give an outline of your event. You will also need to include:

- an explanation of your facilities (toilets etc)
- fire safety notices
- any other relevant notices.

Time: 20 mins

Christmas Carol Challenge

Working in small groups of no more than five people (ideally each group should have a mix of ages), invite everyone to take on the Christmas Carol Challenge. Using the downloadable challenge sheet, groups will need to identify which carol they think is represented by each line of symbols. Alternatively, if you expect only a small number of people to attend your event, you could display one line of symbols at a time using a projector and screen – inviting everyone to guess the carol together. Ensure you give the answers at the end – and perhaps award a prize for the highest score(s)!



Answers: 1 'The Holly and the Ivy', 2 'Little Donkey', 3 'Once in Royal David's City', 4 'While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night', 5 'Away in a Manger', 6 'We Three Kings of Orient Are', 7 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing', 8 'Silent Night', 9 'See Him Lying in a Bed of Straw', 10 'I Saw Three Ships'

Time: 60 mins

Crazy Christmas Contest (and food!)

Invite everyone to form new small groups (this time of no more than six people, and still with a mix of ages). Explain that each group will now have one hour to complete a number of small challenges, the resources for which are all contained in their 'Crazy Christmas Contest' bags.

As a volunteer distributes the bags to the small groups, explain that all instructions are contained inside, and that there will be a prize (if appropriate) for the group that produces the best results! If possible, you should form a judging panel from a group of impartial volunteers!

If you are providing snack food as part of your event, explain how this will be distributed during the Crazy Christmas Contest. (You might have a food station from which people can help themselves during the activities, or you might have a team of volunteers bringing a selection of food to each group.)

Make sure the Crazy Christmas Contest is primarily a time of fun and celebration and doesn't become overly competitive.

You should have a team of volunteers who are able to make sure the groups have everything they need, and to encourage them to take time to eat.

Depending on how groups progress with their activities, you could shorten or lengthen the amount of time for the contest as you see fit.

Time: 30 mins

Performances!

This is an opportunity to showcase some of the triumphs (and failures!) of the Crazy Christmas Contest. You should ensure that different teams win, and also reward good efforts.

You could judge the contest activities as follows:



- Ask all the groups to stand, and when you say the number of words they managed to make they should sit down. Begin at three words and continue to increase the number until you have only one group remaining. Give a big cheer and a bag of treats to the winning group.
- Invite one person from each group to display their sleigh and perhaps give them 20 seconds to sell its finer points. Your judging panel could score each sleigh out of ten, giving a cheer for every group, and awarding a bag of treats for the best sleigh and pitch.
- Invite each group in turn to perform their 15-second film. After each performance the other groups should try and guess which film they've just seen! Judges should then rate each performance out of ten, giving a cheer for every group, and awarding a bag of treats for the best performance.
- Explain that everyone will now perform 'Watched Shepherds While, Night by Flocks Their'. If possible, point to each group and conduct them (somewhat over-enthusiastically!) as they sing their verse(s). When a group is singing they should stand, and then sit down straight after their verse(s), so as to keep the momentum of the carol between verses. Encourage everyone to cheer at the end, and issue a bag of treats to every group.



Time: 15 mins

The real Christmas story

Depending on your context, choose an appropriate way to share the real Christmas story.

St Pauls Church in Auckland, New Zealand, has put together a wonderful video, retelling the Christmas story with children acting various parts. It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY>

If you show this, or a similar video, you could encourage people to discuss the following questions in their small groups afterwards:

- What do you think is the most amazing part of the Christmas story?
- Why do you think God chose to send his only Son Jesus to earth as a baby?
- What would you like to say to God this Christmas?

Alternatively, you could retell the Christmas story as follows, with the aid of a giant Christmas cracker (you will need to make this beforehand).

Invite two people to come forward and pull the cracker. Note the different parts of the cracker, and relate them to the Christmas story:

- The bang reminds us of the surprise the shepherds had when the angels appeared to them.
- The toy reminds us of the gifts that the wise men brought for the baby Jesus.
- The paper hat is in the shape of a crown, reminding us that Jesus was a king.
- The joke, motto or message reminds us that there is a true message of Christmas – that God loved us so much that he sent his Son Jesus to live among us. Make sure that everyone understands that the Christmas message you're sharing is true – it's definitely not a joke!

Challenge people to remember these four points when they pull their crackers on Christmas Day.

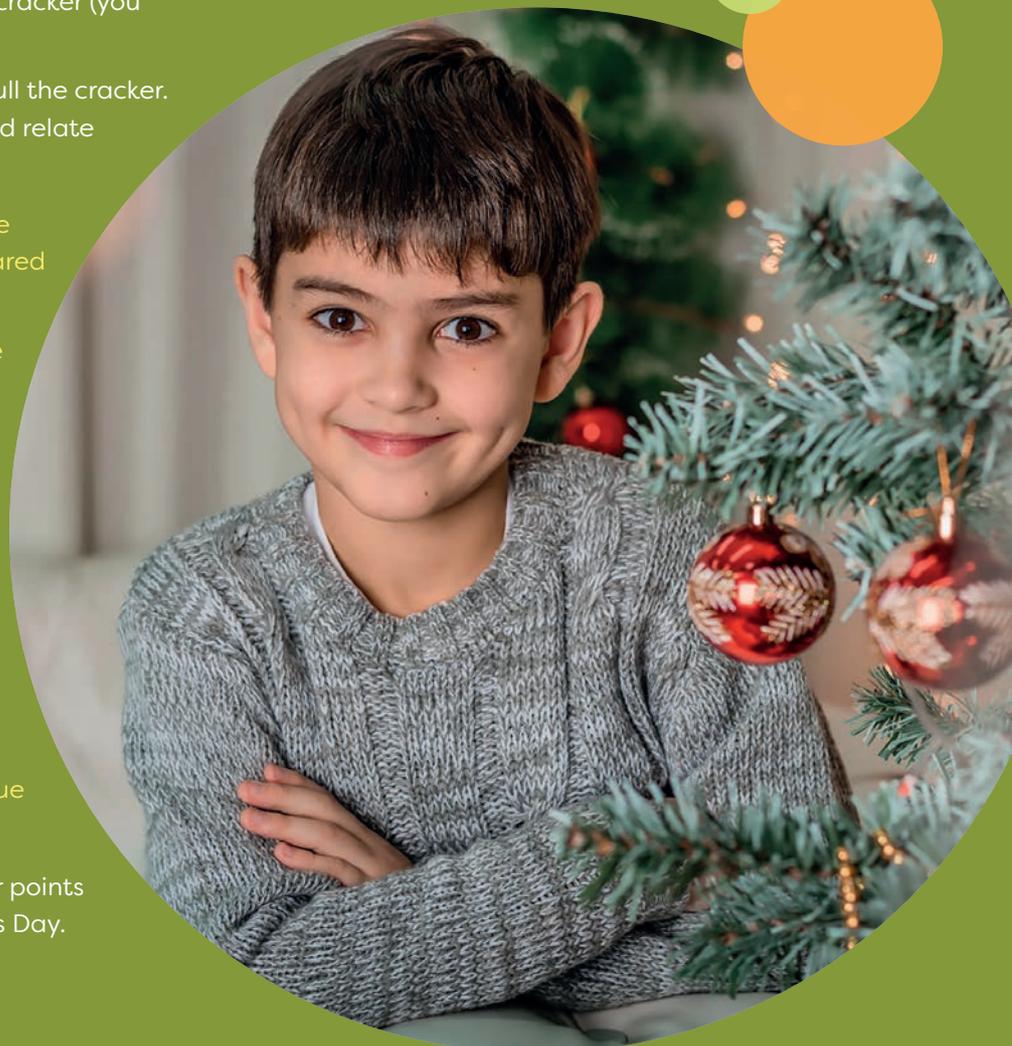
Time: 5 mins

What next?

Draw matters to a close by thanking those who have worked hard to make the event happen.

Make sure you mention (and have invitations for) any upcoming Christmas events and services. If you have them, you could also invite people to follow your organisation's social media accounts so that they can keep in touch.

Wish everyone a Merry Christmas, and close with a short prayer.



Games

LAYERS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

PASS THE PARCEL

SUITABLE FOR: all ages

YOU WILL NEED:

wrapping paper, sticky tape, scissors, several small prizes, Bible story excerpts, a larger prize, Christmas music and the means to play it

INSTRUCTIONS:

Before your time together, create a layered parcel with a larger prize in the centre that is appropriate for your group. In each layer place a small prize and an excerpt from the Christmas story taken from Luke 1 and 2. The Christmas story excerpts should be placed inside the parcel layers in reverse order – with the ending of the story in the centre of the parcel.

Play a standard game of Pass the Parcel, with Christmas-themed music; when the music stops and a child opens a layer they should read out their excerpt of the Christmas story. (You may need to provide help with reading aloud, depending on the ability of your group).

You can download 20 story excerpts from su.org.uk/cpextras

A CHRISTMAS CHARADE

CHARADES

SUITABLE FOR: ages 8 and ups

YOU WILL NEED:

a list of possible charades, a timer

INSTRUCTIONS:

Divide your group into two teams, and explain that you will now play a simple game of charades. Invite each team to select their first actor, both of whom should then stand up in front of their team. Whisper the first charade to both actors, instruct them to start acting at the same time and set a timer for 3 minutes.

The first team to guess the charade successfully wins a point. Select a new actor from each team, and begin another round.

If neither team guesses a charade after 3 minutes, discard it and move on.

The team with the most points after a fixed time period are the winners.

Charades might include: turkey, Brussel sprouts, Mary, three wise men, star, Angel Gabriel, baby Jesus, cracker, manger, present, bauble, fairy lights, Christmas pudding, Joseph, shepherds, pigs in blankets.

RACE FOR CHRISTMAS

RELAY RACE

SUITABLE FOR: ages 5 and up working in teams of 6 to 8 people

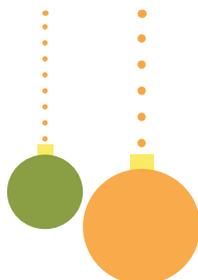
YOU WILL NEED:

a number of Christmas-related items (see below), a timer
Collect together a number of Christmas related items (eg wrapping paper and tape, tinsel, baubles, a non-fragile nativity set, Christmas pudding, sprouts, Christmas-themed hat etc). You will need two of each item.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Lay out your items in two lines (each line the same) from one end of your meeting room to the other. Depending on the size of your group and the number of teams you create, you may need additional lines/items.

Divide the group into two teams and explain the rules of your relay race. If using the items listed above, you will need to place your items in the following order and then explain how the race will work:



- 1 The first person in the team runs forward, picks up the Christmas-themed hat, puts it on and then runs back to their team.
- 2 The second person runs forward and picks up the Brussel sprout. They place the sprout between their knees and run back to the rest of their team without dropping the sprout – if they drop it, they must return to the pick-up location and try again.
- 3 The third person runs forward and collects a piece of tinsel, which they must wrap around their head, and then runs back to the team.
- 4 The fourth person runs forward and collects two baubles, which they must hang from their ears, and then runs back to the team.
- 5 The fifth person runs forward and collects a nativity set (non-fragile!) without using their hands (arms are fine!) and carries it back to their team without dropping anything. If they drop anything, they must return to the pick-up location and try again.
- 6 The sixth person runs forward and collects a bowl of cooked Christmas pudding, which they then carry back to their team.
- 7 Then the entire team runs to the other end of your meeting space, with the seventh team member collecting a small pile of wrapping paper and tape along the way.
- 8 The whole team must then place all the collected items in a pile and wrap them up into one big present. While the wrapping is happening, the team must also eat the Christmas pudding (be considerate of allergies or intolerances) as quickly as possible.
- 9 The team that completes all the tasks in the fastest time wins!

WHERE DOES JESUS GO?

PIN THE NATIVITY ON THE STABLE

SUITABLE FOR: all ages

YOU WILL NEED:

flip-chart paper, pens, sheets of paper, sticky tack, a blindfold

INSTRUCTIONS:

On a large sheet of flip-chart paper, or similar, draw an outline of a stable. Stick this up on a wall or other suitable surface in your meeting space.

On a separate sheet of paper, draw one of each of the following characters/items and cut them out. If you're not confident of your drawing ability – there are plenty of templates for nativity shapes available online.

Characters/items required: Mary, Joseph, Jesus, manger, cow (x2), sheep (x2), shepherd (x2), wise man (x3), star.

Once you have your collection of characters and items, place some sticky tack on the back of each one. Depending on your group, you could take some time to colour-in or decorate your characters and items and the stable.

Invite each person in your group to come forward and choose a character or item. They should then be blindfolded and asked to place their character or item into the stable. You will likely end up with several unexpected nativity scenes!

You may wish to have an outline of a traditional nativity scene, consisting of all your characters and items, available for reference!



IF IT'S CHRISTMAS AND YOU KNOW IT

ACTION SONG AND GAME

SUITABLE FOR: all ages

YOU WILL NEED:

a few confident singers!

INSTRUCTIONS:

Invite your group to join in with a silly Christmas-themed version of 'If you're happy and know it, clap your hands'. Using the following words below, sing and act each verse together, adding a new verse each time through. Once you have added all the verses, speed up the song and the actions. Anyone who makes a mistake is out and should sit down. The winner is the last person standing.

- 1 If it's Christmas and you know it, be a tree (put arms up to the sky with hands touching making a point)
- 2 If it's Christmas and you know it, wrap a present (mime wrapping a present – including pulling sellotape, and holding a box)
- 3 If it's Christmas and you know it, twirl the tinsel (spin around on the spot)
- 4 If it's Christmas and you know it, be a turkey (squawk and flap arms like wings)
- 5 If it's Christmas and you know it, be baby Jesus (make noises like a crying baby)
- 6 If it's Christmas and you know it, sing 'Gloria' (all sing Gloria with arms raised up!)

CAROL THE REINDEER

WORD PUZZLE

SUITABLE FOR: all ages working together in small groups

YOU WILL NEED:

copies of the 'Carol the Reindeer' story, pens, prizes (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Download and print several copies of our 'Carol the Reindeer' story from su.org.uk/cppextras. Invite your group to read through the story and identify as many phrases from Christmas songs and carols as they can in a fixed amount of time. There are a total of 25 phrases to be found. You might consider giving a small prize to anyone who finds all 25.

(Answers available at su.org.uk/cppextras.)



Can you help share *The First Christmas* with children like Alex?

Last Christmas Alex got to know his dad again. His dad was serving time in prison. Alex was invited to a family day, at which his dad read him the story of *The First Christmas*. Since then his dad has been released, and they see more of each other. It was that moment, while reading the true meaning of Christmas, that Alex's dad realised what was important. His son.

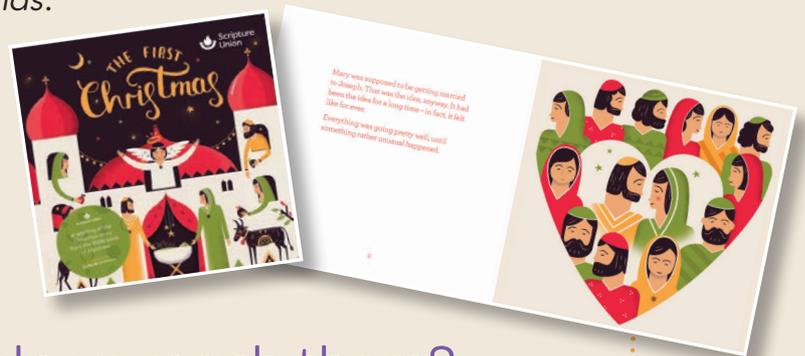


This is just one of the fresh starts Jesus has enabled. SU's nativity storybook introduced them to a story of hope and healing. Showing them that God loves them, and that second chances are possible.

Through our partners in prisons, food banks, debt relief agencies and hospitals, thousands of children have the opportunity to hear the good news this Christmas by receiving this free book.

Scripture Union is aiming to give over 100,000 children a copy of our Christmas storybook, *The First Christmas*.

Could your church make a donation or hold a collection to help share the good news this Christmas?



Will you help us reach them?

A gift of **£100** could help put a copy of *The First Christmas* in 100 Christmas hampers – enough to resource one local food bank.

A gift of **£500** could fund a local Christmas Unwrapped event, enabling an SU volunteer or local worker to share the Christmas story with 500 children.

● Visit su.org.uk/christmas

● Or complete the form on page 10

PLEASE
DONATE
TODAY



Prayers



A CHRISTMAS LETTER TO GOD

SUITABLE FOR: over 8s

YOU WILL NEED:

a selection of Christmas cards, envelopes and pens

INSTRUCTIONS:

You could start this activity by asking people to share about their experiences of giving and receiving Christmas cards. The following questions might help to prompt discussion:

- How many cards do you typically send? Why? How do you decide who to send a card to?
- What would you normally write inside a card? (Eg the person's name, leave the existing greeting and then add your name; write the person's name on the envelope and only write your name in the card; a long and detailed personal greeting.)
- What kind of Christmas card would you like to receive, and why?

Alternatively, or in addition, you could show the '5 things you might not know' video created by Solopress:

<https://www.solopress.com/blog/holiday-inspiration/why-do-we-send-christmas-cards/>

Explain that many Christians choose to send Christmas cards that display a traditional Christmas scene or cards that contain Biblical text because they want to remind people of the real meaning of Christmas – a celebration of God's love for all people, demonstrated by his sending of his Son Jesus to earth as a baby.

Depending on your group, you may want to take this opportunity to explain the Christmas story in more detail.



Then, invite everyone to choose a Christmas card and envelope and explain that they will now have the opportunity to write a Christmas card to God. Encourage people to write a personal letter, reflecting on their life over the past year and sharing their thoughts with God. Once complete, invite each person to place their card in an envelope and to take it home with them. Remind everyone to look out for ways in which God might respond to their letter in the coming days, months and even years!

PRAYING FOR THOSE AROUND YOUR TABLE

SUITABLE FOR: all ages

YOU WILL NEED:

blank place cards, pens, sequins, glue

INSTRUCTIONS:

Invite everyone to think about who they will be sharing their Christmas Day with. (Be sensitive to anyone in your group who may be spending Christmas alone – and ensure they are invited to join in with a community celebration.)

Ask each person to take a place card for each person they expect to be sharing Christmas day with, write their name on the front and decorate it with sequins (or similar decorations). Then, invite everyone to pray for each of the people represented by the place cards, asking God to bless and encourage them. Suggest that people write a 'message from God' on the inside of each placeholder – either something they feel God wants to say to that person, or perhaps a Bible verse from the following list: John 3:16, Isaiah 9:6, 1 John 5:11, Romans 15:13.

Encourage everyone to take their place cards home and use them during a family Christmas meal.

If you think a large number of your group are likely to be spending Christmas alone, you could modify this activity as follows:

Instead of inviting people to think about who they will be sharing their Christmas Day with, suggest that each person in the group creates a place card and prayer message for the person on their left. This will ensure no one is left out – and everyone will have a place card of their own.



SNOWFLAKE PRAYERS

SUITABLE FOR: all ages

YOU WILL NEED:

squares of white paper, scissors and pens

INSTRUCTIONS:

Invite everyone to create a paper snowflake (folding their square into four, using scissors to round off the edge and then adding decorative cut-out shapes).

Once this is complete, encourage everyone to take a pen and write or draw on their snowflake – reflecting their responses to the following questions:

- What would you like to say to God today?
- What would you like to thank God for this Christmas?
- How might God want to use you to show his love to others this Christmas?

After a suitable length of time, you could invite people to hang their snowflakes up in your meeting space, or suggest that they are taken home and hung somewhere prominent as a reminder to keep talking with God over the Christmas period.

HEARING GOD SPEAK

SUITABLE FOR: over 5s

YOU WILL NEED:

a quiet space, some comfortable seating or cushions, fairy lights (optional), the *Diary of a Disciple* Christmas reflection mp3 from su.org.uk/cppextras

INSTRUCTIONS:

Create a peaceful environment in a quiet space and explain that you're going to play a recording of the Christmas story that includes some questions to think about and some suggestions for talking with God.

Suggest that everyone finds a comfortable position and closes their eyes. Then play the *Diary of Disciple* Christmas reflection mp3.

When the mp3 ends, provide plenty of time for people to remain still and to continue in prayer, if they wish. You might also like to offer to pray with anyone who would find it helpful.





Creative Makes



ADVENT PAPER CHAINS

Description: create a paper chain kit that retells the Christmas story over the course of Advent

Difficulty level: ●

Bible link: Luke 1,2; Matthew 2:1-12

YOU WILL NEED:

coloured paper (a mixture of colours), double-sided sticky tape, coloured pens and pencils, scissors, copies of 'Paper chains Christmas story' from su.org.uk/cppextras (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Cut 24 strips of coloured paper.

Write or draw snippets of the Christmas story (in order) on one side of each strip of paper. (Alternatively, cut out the 24 snippets from 'Paper chains Christmas story' and glue them onto your paper strips.)

On the other side, number the strips 1 to 24.

Place a strip of double-sided sticky tape at one end of each strip.

Over the 24 days of Advent, join the strips together into a paper chain, one day at a time, reading and reflecting on each snippet of the story.

ALL-AGE EXTRA:

You could create a giant version of the Advent paper chain to hang in your meeting space, adding to it every time you meet together over Advent.



RECYCLED NATIVITY

Description: create a traditional nativity scene out of recycled materials

Difficulty level: ●●

Bible link: Luke 1,2; Matthew 2:1-12

YOU WILL NEED:

an assortment of clean, dry recycling items such as: plastic bottles, cardboard boxes, cardboard tubes, paper, plastic trays, scraps of fabric, odd pieces of string or wool, packing materials; glue, scissors, sticky tape.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Either individually or in small groups, create a small version of each of the following nativity characters and objects from a selection of recycling items: Jesus, Joseph, Mary, two shepherds, three wise men, a sheep, a cow, a large star, a stable, a manger.

Once all the characters and items are made, arrange them (and possibly fix into place) into a traditional nativity scene.

ALL-AGE EXTRA:

You could create a giant version of your recycled nativity scene for display in your meeting space.

GINGERBREAD STARS

Description: create edible gingerbread stars to be hung on a Christmas tree

Difficulty level: ●●

Bible link: Matthew 2:1-12

YOU WILL NEED:

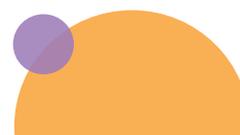
ingredients for making gingerbread (a suitable recipe is featured at bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/gingerbread_men_99096), several different shaped star cutters, blunt knives, rolling pins, rolling mats or a table cloth for rolling dough, baking facilities, baking trays, a wire rack, icing, edible decorations, ribbon

INSTRUCTIONS:

Consider allergies or intolerances of those attending your event before using this activity. You should also ensure you are able to adhere to your organisation's food hygiene guidelines.

Depending upon how much time you have, you may wish to prepare a large batch of gingerbread dough in advance. Alternatively, making the dough could form part of this activity.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out the gingerbread dough to approximately half a centimetre thick.



Use star cutters (or blunt knives) to cut out star shapes, and place on a lined baking tray. Once on the tray, make a hole in each star (wide enough for a piece of ribbon to pass through) at the top of one point.

Bake for 12–15 minutes at 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4, or until lightly golden brown and dough springs back to the touch.

Remove from the oven and cool on a wire rack.

When cold, decorate with icing and edible decorations, and allow icing to dry.

As you decorate your stars, talk about what it might've been like to follow the star to find Jesus. You might like to use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- ❄️ Would you have followed a star to find a newborn king?
- ❄️ How would it feel to arrive and see the baby?
- ❄️ If you could've taken a gift to give to Jesus, what would it have been?
- ❄️ Why do you think people still follow Jesus today?

Tie a piece of ribbon into a loop through the hole in each star and hang on a Christmas tree.

ALL-AGE EXTRA:

You could work together to create stars to decorate a large Christmas tree in your meeting space. This could form part of an all-age service or activity. Collecting and eating the stars might be a feature of your Christmas Day celebrations.

MEANING OF CHRISTMAS BRACELET

Description: an easy-to-make bracelet that reminds the wearer of the real meaning of Christmas

Difficulty level: ●

Bible link: John 3:16

YOU WILL NEED:

a selection of red and green beads, a large selection of alphabet beads, lengths of elastic

INSTRUCTIONS:

Invite everyone to take a handful of red and green beads.

As they hold their beads, invite them to talk about their favourite thing about Christmas.

Encourage them to imagine that the beads represent all the extra things that surround Christmas celebrations in the UK – eg special food, Christmas trees, Christmas lights, presents, Christmas TV etc.

Then invite everyone to take a set of alphabet beads with which they can spell 'Jesus', and give each person a length of elastic.



Invite everyone to thread their 'Jesus' beads onto their elastic, and then explain that they should place all their red and green beads at either side of 'Jesus'. They should continue adding beads to their elastic until the bracelet is large enough for their own wrist. They should then tie the two ends of elastic together, completing their bracelet.

As people thread their beads onto their elastic, talk about how important it is that, despite all the other wonderful things about Christmas, the birth of Jesus is at the very centre of what Christmas is all about.

ALL-AGE EXTRA:

Depending on your context, and the amount of time you have, you could invite people to make a large number of bracelets that could be given out at your Christmas celebrations/services.

SHINING ANGELS

Description: create a glowing angel as a reminder of the angel's message to the shepherds

Difficulty level: ●●●

Bible link: Luke 2:8–14

YOU WILL NEED:

empty jam jars, battery-operated tea lights, a selection of brightly coloured paints (that will stick to glass), printed copies of the 'jam jar angel' template from su.org.uk/cppextras, double-sided sticky tape, scissors

INSTRUCTIONS:

Cut out the 'jam jar angel' template and stick it onto the jar with double-sided sticky tape.

Paint the rest of the jar with bright colours (taking care not to let any of the paint seep under the angel template).

Wait for the paint to dry and then carefully peel off the angel template.

Turn on the tea light and place it inside the jar before fastening on the lid.



The First Christmas: Making the Christmas story relevant and fun



When Becky Tomlinson discovered Scripture Union's book *The First Christmas*, she bought enough copies to give out to almost 300 children – nearly ten times the number of her church congregation.

Becky works at The Church on Oakwood, on Derbyshire's Oakwood Estate. It's Europe's largest housing estate with over thirteen thousand residents, many of them young families. She joined as the church administrator in 2011.

The Church on Oakwood's Sunday congregation is just thirty-five people, mainly pensioners. Becky was keen to reach out and build relationships with the community, so in 2013 she founded Walkers and Talkers, a group for children and their parents and carers in the local area. Today, up to 40 children attend each week.

Subsequently, Becky took on the additional part-time role of family worker, and has created partnerships with two local nurseries and a primary school, and a Catholic school in a nearby village. As well as Walkers and Talkers, she holds a monthly Messy Church session, which attracts 60 non-church children and their families.

Becky says, 'Last December, we'd got pre-Christmas activities organised with each of these groups, and I

wanted to use the opportunity to gift each child a book that would share the good news about Jesus' birth.

'I was so happy when I came across *The First Christmas* – it's such a breath of fresh air! The quality of storytelling is brilliant – there's a strong biblical message, but it's in language that children without church backgrounds can understand. And it's humorous – children love sharing humour, and in doing so they share the story. When I handed out *The First Christmas* at one event, a little girl was giggling as she read the story during her picnic lunch. And, of course, everyone around her wanted to know what she was laughing at!

'I ordered 290 copies of *The First Christmas*, bagged each one with a chocolate lolly and details of our church activities and handed out a bag to every child. I said, "Have a read and let me know what you think." Many children and parents later came to tell me how much they'd enjoyed it and what they had liked in particular. Five families said that they loved reading the story to



their children at bedtime, and one family said they'd added the book to their Christmas Eve box so their children could enjoy it every year. And one of the nurseries requested two extra copies for regular use in their book corner.

'I'd really recommend *The First Christmas* if you want to share the story of Jesus' birth this Christmas – and share it in a way that children will really enjoy and remember!'



BECKY'S TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CHRISTMAS OUTREACH EVENTS

Although Becky's church is small and she only works part time, she has built relationships and shared the good news of Jesus with an extensive network of non-church families. Here are her top tips:

- 1 **Give a gift to each child.**
The First Christmas is an ideal book for non-church children at Christmas.
- 2 **Make use of all the resources available to you.** Scripture Union offer lots of free resources (visit www.scriptureunion.org.uk and sign up for their updates so you hear about new ones). Get practical advice from SU's regional teams. Talk to local churches already doing outreach. They may be able to provide volunteers to help at your first few events.
- 3 **Get out and meet people!**
For example, have a stand at community events and hold a competition to win a prize (eg a hamper). It draws people in, starts conversations and, when visitors give their contact details in case they win, you can ask permission to keep in touch.
- 4 **Listen to children and young people who aren't in church.**
Get their ideas and invite young people to help out at events, especially if your church is small and you're short on volunteers.
- 5 **Get feedback.** Hand out feedback forms at events and groups. It helps you to improve what you offer, and to convince your church that investing in outreach is worthwhile.
- 6 **Practise hospitality.** It doesn't cost much, and speaks volumes about what God is like.
- 7 **Accept that church doesn't need to be on a Sunday.** Many families are away on Sundays, or parents are working or children involved in sports.
- 8 **Think outside the box and give it a go.** You won't always get it right – but don't worry, just learn from your mistakes.
- 9 **Be relevant.** For example, during the fidget spinner craze, the children brought theirs in and we used them to discuss the Trinity.
- 10 **At every event, have the next one planned and invite children to it.** If you don't have anything ready, you risk losing the continuity of the relationship.



For younger children

CHRISTMAS BUNTING

YOU WILL NEED:

triangles of red and green card or paper, glue sticks, glitter, a stapler, sparkly parcel ribbon

INSTRUCTIONS:

Give each child a triangle of card or paper and help them to decorate it by writing their name (or first initial) with a glue stick, and covering the glue in glitter.

Once finished, staple each triangle onto some sparkly parcel ribbon. If possible, display your bunting publically – eg in church during a Christmas service.

To extend this activity, and incorporate a time of prayer, help each child to draw around their hand on a second triangle. Invite each child to think of something they are thankful for, and help them to write or draw this onto their triangle, inside their hand shape. During this activity, remind the children that Christmas is a time for thanking God, because he sent everyone the greatest gift of all – baby Jesus!

Make sure you staple these thankful hand triangles onto the sparkly parcel ribbon alongside the others.

STARS AND ANGELS

YOU WILL NEED:

yellow chenille wires, silver ribbon, a stapler.

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is a simple, yet entertaining, activity for little fingers, and can help younger children to focus on different parts of the Christmas story.

Using the chenille wires, work together to create a simple star outline shape, or get a bit creative and help the children make an angel. As you make the shapes together, talk with the children about the parts of the Christmas story in which stars and angels feature.



PASS THE PARCEL

YOU WILL NEED:

a layered parcel containing a sweet or chocolate and a Christmas story image in each layer, Christmas music and the means to play it

INSTRUCTIONS:

Very young children may find the Pass the Parcel game (on page 16) a challenge. This simpler version may help them to engage more easily with the Christmas story.

Sit together in a circle, and explain to the children that they should pass the parcel to one another when the music plays, and that when the music stops whoever is holding it should take away the outer layer of paper. (Very young children may need some help with this task.)

When a child removes a layer, help them to find the picture inside. Talk together about what each image means as part of the Christmas story. The following pictures, and themes for discussion, are suggestions only – feel free to add your own!

A donkey – the journey to Bethlehem

A star – that showed the way

A manger – where Jesus slept

A shepherd – who looks after sheep and visited Jesus

Mary – Jesus' mummy

Sheep – looked after by shepherds

Wise men – visited Jesus and brought gifts

SHEEP, SHEEP DONKEY

A Christmas version of Duck, Duck, Goose that younger children can enjoy.

INSTRUCTIONS:

With all the children sitting in a circle, walk around gently tapping each child on the head or shoulder and saying 'sheep' each time you do so. Every so often you should say 'donkey' and, when you do, the 'donkey' should stand up, run around the circle and back to their place.

Depending on the age of the children you are working with, this may be enough to provide several minutes of fun!

You could add in the traditional 'chase' part of the game, if you think it will suit your group.

When the 'donkey' runs around the circle, they should try to return to their place before the person who tapped their head catches up with them. If they manage to get back before being caught, the game continues as before. If not, the 'donkey' now becomes the person walking around the circle tapping heads, while the original 'head tapper' takes their place in the circle.

STORY PRAYER

YOU WILL NEED:

a sack or box containing: a star, a small manger, a present, Mary and Joseph nativity set characters

INSTRUCTIONS:

Gather the children into a circle around the sack. Invite a volunteer to come forward and take an item out of the sack. Once the item is removed, ask the child if they know what it is. Then explain how the object relates to the Christmas story. Finally, pray together using actions as suggested below. Repeat this until the sack is empty.

Star: Thank you, God, that you made a special star to show the way to the baby Jesus, and thank you for still guiding us today.

Action: jump up and do a star jump

Manger: Thank you, God, that you keep us safe and warm.

Action: pretend to cuddle and rock the baby Jesus to sleep

Present: Thank you for the presents the wise men brought to Jesus, thank you for the presents and food we get at Christmas.

Action: rub tummies and say mmmmm yummmm yummmm

Mary and Joseph: Thank you, God, for the people you have put in our lives who look after us.

Action: put our arms out and thumbs up to the adults in the room with us





Involving young people

Although many of the activities suggested in this pack are suitable for 'all ages', it can sometimes be helpful to provide specific ways for young people (11 to 18s) to engage with the Christmas story. It's easy for young people to perceive many traditional Christmas activities as being childish or immature, so we'd like to suggest a few different ways to open up the Christmas story in an age-appropriate way.

The Christmas story is most often explored through the lens of positivity and celebration – this is no bad thing! But, within the narrative of the very first Christmas lie a number of other, less-explored, but significant themes.

For young people who may be going through some of the challenges of life, the Christmas story can still reveal God's message of hope and love in an authentic and meaningful way.



CHALLENGING FAMILY DYNAMICS

An unmarried teenager, engaged to a man who isn't the father of the baby she is carrying... sounds more like a contemporary TV drama than the biblical Christmas story.

Mary was no stranger to the challenges of family dynamics. And yet, it's in the middle of this non-traditional, unexpected, socially-rejected family context that God is at work.

You might like to invite young people to reflect on the messiness of families, either their own family or the families of those they know, inviting God to be at work in their contexts. You could do this simply through discussion and quiet prayer, using art materials or even through creating a drama or spoken word piece.





WHEN PLANS DON'T GO TO PLAN

Most young people find exams stressful. (If you've ever spoken to a young person, you'll know this to be true!) This is usually because they fear the outcome of 'poor grades', and how this could impact their future. They have a plan – the perfect university, the dream career, the growing bank balance, the symbols of success. If anything or anyone derails the plan, it's as if life is over.

You might like to spend some time asking a group of young people to imagine they have been given the task of planning the arrival of God's Son on earth. Putting aside anything they already know about the Christmas story, what would their plan include (or not include)? It's unlikely the perfect plan would include God's Son showing up as a baby, especially a baby who was born in a back room that was usually meant for animals, or that the

baby's mother would suddenly have to make a long, uncomfortable, potentially dangerous journey in the final stages of her pregnancy, or that, while the baby drew his first breaths, someone else was plotting to kill him off...



In fact, if we'd been there at the time and known that God was sending his Son to earth to save all of humanity, we might think his plan wasn't going very well at all.

Even amid the chaos when, from a human point of view, it seems that 'the plan' has gone wrong, God makes a way for incredible things to happen. Mary learned to trust God (and that didn't mean everything worked out just as she would've liked it to!) and allow him to work through her.



You might like to provide some time for the young people to write out their life plans (whether those plans are still firmly in place or it feels like their plans have fallen apart). Encourage them to spend some time talking their plan through with God in prayer – asking him to help them trust that he will make a way for incredible things to happen, and inviting him to work through them.



LIVING WITH POVERTY

Jesus was born with nothing. Absolutely nothing. Not even any kind of social standing or position. He didn't have any baby clothes or a cot to lie in, and he wasn't born in a family home or given a traditional family name. Although traditional nativity sets often present the birth of Jesus as a happy little scene in a clean and shiny stable, with friendly cows around a manger, and a radiant Mary and Joseph cooing over their son – in reality, Jesus was born in poverty.

Poverty, whether on a global or local scale, is something most young people are passionate about changing – and it's something God is passionate about changing too!

Depending on your context, select a global or local charity (such as The Salvation Army) that seeks not only to meet the needs of those in poverty, but seeks to change culture and practice, lifting people out of poverty for good. Consider together how you might contribute to the work of your chosen charity, whether through fundraising, giving of time or raising awareness this Christmas.

If possible, you could extend your commitment to challenging poverty for the next 12 months – and be sure to review the impact of your efforts next year.





What next with Scripture Union?



CAN YOU HELP SHARE *THE FIRST CHRISTMAS* WITH CHILDREN LIKE TOBY?



Toby spent last Christmas in hospital. It was a tough time for him and his family. During his stay, the hospital chaplain read him SU's nativity storybook *The First Christmas*.

It introduced him to the real Christmas story – one of hope and healing. Through our partners in prisons, food banks, debt relief agencies and hospitals, thousands of children have the opportunity to hear the good news this Christmas by receiving this free book.

Could your church make a donation or hold a collection to help share the good news this Christmas?

Visit su.org.uk/christmas or go to page 10.

GET FREE CHRISTMAS STORYBOOKS TO SHARE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

The Christmas story is one we all know and love, where a loving Creator sends his only Son. God with us.

But many children just don't hear this anymore.

A recent survey revealed that:

35% of children think Jesus was born in the North Pole

Together we can help them hear the whole story for themselves!

We'd like to give you some copies of *The First Christmas* storybook to offer to children in your neighbourhood who don't know Jesus. Why not give them as a gift at your Christmas party or maybe through another form of outreach?

Visit su.org.uk/christmas or go to page 10.



MORE OUTREACH TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

This is just your first step. Join with us and we'll provide you with the resources you'll need to run an outreach event every season.



What to expect

CHRISTMAS PARTY



A suite of resources and ideas to inspire your church's Christmas outreach.

EASTER OUTREACH



New for 2019, resources to help your church share Easter with children and families who don't go to church.

SUMMER SPORTS



From running a football competition to a mini Olympics, there are so many ways to use sport to spread the good news.

LIGHT PARTY



Halloween doesn't have to be about ghosts and ghouls - hosting a Light Party is a great alternative.

To be kept up to date with the latest ideas, resources and support, join The 95 Campaign (see page 10 or visit www.The95.org.uk). If you've been sent a Christmas Party Pack, we'll keep you updated on new ways to share the good news.

Help is at hand to get started

We have Scripture Union teams working across the country, ready and waiting to connect with you and your church. Our regional teams are passionate about sharing the good news of Jesus with children and young people in their region. In conjunction with churches and other local partners, they're involved in some amazing things, all aimed at making Jesus known in their area. Our teams can provide advice, support and training for your ministry with children and young people. To find out more and to get in touch with your local team, please visit www.su.org.uk/local





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