



Diocese of Bristol

Advent & Christmas ideas

shining Light in the festive season

Creative ways for your whole church to celebrate
the birth of Christ and grow in faith together.



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This Christmas is likely to be different for us all, not least in the way we gather, prepare and celebrate with children, young people and families in our churches and across our communities.

At this time, priorities will be more about providing ideas and resources that enable scattered communities to connect, rather than gathering together in one place. With a little imagination shining the 'light' of the Christmas message and placing the story of Jesus' birth at the heart of your church and community's countdown and celebrations is possible.

This resource aims to provide church leaders, lay ministers, and those involved in youth/children's/families ministry, with creative Christmas ideas that can be used in homes and in the local community.

All the ideas comply with all the current COVID-19 restrictions in mind and with a particular focus on activities that families can do as a household. Many of the ideas can be adapted to a variety of contexts, ages and abilities of those involved. A huge thank you to the 'Go Team' (Andy, Cheryl and Tony) at Bath and Wells Diocese for permission to adapt their brilliant resource.

If you are planning activities and events for a group you will of course need to adhere to the Government restrictions and guidance in place at the time, ensuring necessary hygiene and social distancing precautions are kept in place and that you have an up to date Risk Assessment. All the latest information and guidance for churches can be found at - www.bristol.anglican.org/covid19/

As you seek to live and tell the story of Jesus this Christmas, may you be inspired and filled with hope and joy as you creatively share the message of Jesus's birth - the ultimate gift to the world!

For further help and support please contact Dan Jones (Diocesan Youth & Children's Adviser) on daniel.jones@bristoldiocese.org - and if you decide to do anything 'different' this Christmas, Dan would love to hear your stories and experiences.

Comfort and Joy



'Comfort and Joy' is the Church of England's Christmas campaign for 2020.

Over the last few months the Digital Team have worked with dioceses across the Church of England on a new Advent and Christmas theme that reflects the current COVID context.

The campaign draws on St Paul's words in Romans 12:15 - "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." The CofE website says:

'Comfort and Joy' holds together the hope that Christmas will bring joy and celebration during a uniquely difficult year with an acknowledgement that this year the Church's role, both nationally and locally, will be to provide consolation, rather than assume everyone will be ready to join in jubilation.

A number of resources have been produced to support the campaign including - "Comfort and Joy - Nine lessons and carols for Christmas". The booklet of short daily reflections from Christmas Day until 2 January can be purchased from Church House Publishing. It features contributions from well-known figures including the Revd Kate Bottley, Jonathan Bryan, Chine McDonald, Sally Phillips, and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The reflections are also available, free via an app, smart speaker, audio, and email. A series of reflections for young people will be published in December. Other resources include:

- Weekly reflections, youth devotions and family activities during Advent:
- Nine online services and events (BSL interpretation and subtitles).
- Daily Nine Lessons and Carols from Christmas Eve to 2 January 2021
- Printed and online materials - bookmarks, prayer cards etc
- Free content for churches to reuse
- Prayers and other social media content

The national Church will also be producing nine online services, in collaboration with charities and organisations, during Advent and Christmas. These will include an online service for each Sunday of Advent, a Christingle service hosted with the Children's Society, a Nine Lessons and Carols, and a midnight mass.

During Christmas, churches are encouraged to list their own services on the 'A Church Near You' website, which includes a Resource Hub with videos, images, and methods of online giving containing content that can be adapted by parishes. Churches will also be able to upload pre-recorded or live services on 'A Church Near You', as well as on their own websites and social-media accounts.

Comfort and Joy



Advent Angel trail

During the summer many towns and villages do Scarecrow Trails. This involves organisations and individuals making 3-D scarecrows and placing them where people can see them. Each scarecrow is given a number and people get a worksheet with clues of where to find each scarecrow. A cup/prize is often given to the winning scarecrow entrant and a small fee for those doing the trail raises money for local causes.

In a village near where Dan lives, the scarecrow trail is organised by the Anglican church and hundreds of individuals and families take part. This year, the church considered cancelling it, but instead they waited until lockdown was eased. They were not able to serve refreshments, but it was a big success with more families than usual joining in. There was a real sense of community, especially as most households had been behind closed doors for weeks.

Christmas is going to look very different this year and churches will need to be more creative and think outside the box where possible. Advent is a time when we prepare for Christmas. We are reminded of this in the Christmas story as different people set out on journeys. As they journeyed, angels appeared to them and directed them towards the coming of Jesus. Could your church consider doing an adapted version of a Scarecrow Trail, replacing scarecrows with Advent Angels?

Christmas Crib adventure

Many churches host a Crib service as part of their Christmas celebrations. Often these Services attract a lot of young families and provide a fantastic missional opportunity to connect with a group of people that have little or no connection with church.

A typical Crib service retells the nativity story with the relevant characters being added to the crib as the story unfolds. Similar to the Advent Angel Trail, the Christmas Crib adventure begins at church on a particular day and time (e.g. 3-5pm on Saturday 19 December). Families are given a map explaining the adventure they are embarking on. The map also provides directions to the places, gardens, windows etc. that retell the Nativity, finishing back up at the church. To make the experience more interactive, church members can welcome families at each part of the story and give treats like individually wrapped chocolates (e.g. Celebrations). How about giving families as they return to church an activity pack to do at home?

Advent Collection collage

Every day during Advent, go for a walk with others in your household. As you walk collect small items that have fallen from trees or bushes or other things that you find on the floor like stones or discarded bits of plastic. This can be one item each day or several different items, you decide. (Please be careful when picking things up, especially if they are sharp or mucky, wearing gloves might be useful). Take these home each day and store them safely to be used later.

By 23 December you should have quite a collection. On Christmas Eve set aside time where your household gather around a table to make a collage together. Have a sheet of A4 or A3 paper or card, some scissors, PVA glue or sticky tape. Spread your collected items on the table, and together make your collage. If you have collected lots of items you may want to make more than one collage. The collage could be of a nativity scene or simply something relating to Christmas. As you make the collage talk about what Christmas means to you. Or widen the invitation and encourage other households do take part in the activity (like a Christmas challenge), take pictures and share them on social media etc.



Christmas Prayer space

As the annual Carol, Christingle and Crib services will look very different this year, this resource is suggesting several alternatives using the outdoor spaces around the parish/benefice to creatively engage with your local community. However, if you do not have the resources why not consider setting up a prayer space in your churchyard?

Set up a gazebo or sheltered space in your churchyard - make the area look festive with lights, decorations etc. play Christmas music/carols and have a nativity scene set up to encourage people from the community to make the journey there. If you support a local foodbank encourage people to bring donations along - you need to be careful that any items collected can be kept safe and dry and are not left out for too long.

When people arrive inspire them to spend some time reflecting on the reason for the season. Create a reflective space with simple creative prayers (check out the creative prayer ideas in this resource) and have some battery operated tealights available for people to light as they leave, encouraging them say a prayer to Jesus, Light of the World. Provide details of other Christmas services (online or otherwise) to take away.

Christmas Nativity lights

To generate some Christmas spirit, encourage your congregation to decorate the front of their houses and gardens (if they have one) with lots of Christmas lights and to leave them on during the hours of darkness. This might be a good way of bringing some community Christmas cheer but it will not be good for the environment. Why not run a competition for children to design a poster that will also be placed in the windows?

As an alternative to Christmas lights why not create a 3-D nativity scene in front gardens. The Nativity scene could be large or small, traditional or abstract. Be creative! If you don't have a front garden, a window can easily be used.

To help show community solidarity, agree with all those taking part to light up your nativity scene for two hours each evening during Advent. This will be similar to many of those households that lit candles at 19.00 each Sunday during lockdown to represent hope against Coronavirus. If it is done early enough, it might encourage households with children to walk around their community to view them before bedtime.

Angels & Baby Jesus

Decorating the outside of your house is not everyone's cup of tea! Instead, encourage members of your congregation to choose one window that people can see from well from the outside and focus on decorating that. One idea is Angel bunting. Fix a few lines of string across the inside of the window. Cut out 24 **Angels** using this template. These can all be the same size or each one can be different. Also make a baby **Jesus** in a manger.

During Advent angels are added each day to the string. Leave a space in the centre of the window where you can place Jesus on Christmas Day. There are lots of creative ideas around for making your own paper or fabric angels. You could even knit some of them! Here's one **idea** you could try!

Advent photo challenge

This is a brilliant all-age activity for your church community - the challenge of taking a photograph a day throughout Advent.

You may like to suggest a theme such as light or hope for the whole of Advent, or you may like to have a word for each day which inspires a photo. It doesn't have to be a competition or about photo quality. You may like to provide some verses from the Bible to read each day, or create a collage of their images at the end which could be shared in your online Christmas service, or you could turn it into a social media challenge posting a photo each day (please be aware of the age restrictions of social media platforms).

Below are 24 words you could use:

Light, Patience, Journey, Trust, Inspire, Preparation, Courage, Waiting, Joy, Hope, Grace, Kindness, Peace, Family, Faith, Promise, Prayer, New Life, Holy, Rest, Wonder, Blessed, Gentleness, Love.



Candles of hope & light

Wouldn't it be great to fill your town or village with a message of light and hope this Christmas? Here is a great idea to promote this...

Purchase a large quantity of candles/tealights and print a message small enough that can be attached to the candle/tealight with string or an elastic band. Place them around your neighbourhood for people to pick up and take home. Remember to wash hands before assembling the candles and wearing gloves when placing them around your village or town. Think about how you can get all ages of your congregation involved in preparing and distributing the candles. Also use this as an opportunity to invite people to join in with the Christmas services (online or otherwise) but make sure you include a message about light and hope. You may even like to add a reflection they could do when lighting their candle such as:

Happy Christmas from all at *insert name of church*

*Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." **John 8:12***

As you light your candle you may like to listen to your favourite Christmas Carol. Read the Bible verse above and give thanks to God saying the things you are thankful for this Christmas.

Christmas stars & Nativity scene

Another simple festive craft idea that can be displayed in a window or tree during Christmas. Find a simple star template online (examples [here](#)) and cut out enough stars for everyone in the household. Invite everyone to write one-line prayers of thanks on one side. Decorate the other side of the prayer stars with colour, glitter etc. punch a hole in the top of each one and attach a piece of thread so that they can be hung on a window or the Christmas tree. Check out this fantastic travel size Paper City **Nativity!**

Christmas Carol countdown

If you are looking for a creative idea that does not require a huge amount of preparation and resources, how about journeying through Advent with a carol a day? Explore using various platforms and recordings from CD, YouTube, online, on your device e.g. Spotify and ask Alexa! This activity can be done alone or as a group – share your favourite finds with others on social media. Classic FM have a list of 30 you could try or check out Rend Collective, For King And Country and Lauren Daigle for contemporary versions. If you are doing it as a group, share lyrics that you find encouraging, insightful and use them as a quiet time.

Virtual Carol singalong

Christmas feels like it is the only time of year when people let their guards down and sing along to Christmas hits and carols. So many churches are using Zoom to connect people and with this in mind, how about singing a version of classic 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' online?

Add some creativity, and include as many people/households to the fun rendition The results may not be musical harmony but they could be hilarious! (Dan hasn't tried this yet but he'd love to know if it works).



Virtual & Doorstop Christingle

Christingle is a joyful celebration that brings families and communities together to share the light of Jesus and spread a message of hope. Remember the time when health and safety raised questions around young children holding lit candles? Churches got creative and found ways to still hold Christingles, so use your imagination again during the pandemic.

If your church normally hosts a Christingle service have you thought about hosting a virtual or doorstep Christingle this year? Volunteers from the church can 'safely' create Christingle bags that contain an invitation, instructions and the components that can be delivered to homes.

Or how about encouraging people/families to host a doorstep Christingle in their street? Every household in the street joins in and makes their Christingle with a simple Carol, message of hope and a prayer to finish.

Whether you're a first time Christingler or seasoned organiser, The Children's Society have plenty of ideas and resources to help with your planning to help make your **Christingle** event as memorable as possible.

Church@Home resource

Are you looking for a practical 'easy-to-use' resource to help and encourage church families to enjoy a time of worship together this Christmas?

Church@Home is a fun, engaging and easy-to-follow session every Sunday using a Bible reading selected from the Church of England Lectionary. Church@Home is ideal for parents/guardians looking for faith-related stuff to do with their children but lack confidence leading and talking about faith with their children. Each session lasts approximately twenty minutes and provides age-related material for toddlers to teenagers to accommodate everyone in the family. Thought-provoking questions, fun activities and crafts bring the Bible story to life as well as creative prayer ideas to help families focus, learn and grow in their faith together.

Church@Home can also be used as a fun way to help families connect with other families during this time of distancing. Invite everyone to begin Church@Home at the same time and set up a WhatsApp group where families can share what they have done together.

During Advent and the Christmas holidays the Church@Home resource can be found and downloaded from the Diocese of Bristol **website**.

Exploring Posada

Many churches celebrate **Posada**. Spanish for 'inn', Posada is a Christmas activity when small versions of Mary and Joseph travel around different households in the community. The characters stay for one night, are delivered the next day to the next house until they are finally placed in the Nativity scene on Christmas Eve during the Crib Service. Could your church do a COVID-friendly Posada by providing a wipeable Box and contents? Families can take a photo of the Posada in their house which is added to an online display of the Posada journey. Here is a list of things to consider...

- Use wooden painted and varnished Holy Family, animals and crib that are easy to wipe with anti-bac wipes or gently washed in warm soapy water.
- Photocopy relevant parts of the Nativity story and laminate them (again, easily wipeable with anti-bac wipes).
- Posada prayer photocopied and laminated
- Include laminated instructions in box for cleaning box and contents.
- Include small packs of anti-bac wipes for each household to use.

Posada prayer for families:

We pray for families in our community and around the world.
For our own families that are part of our church family;
That Christmas may be a time of laughter and joy;
That Jesus will be at the centre of our lives;
That we may unite and forgive each other;
That we may look forward with confidence,
Showing true love for one another. Amen.



Virtual all age talks

Many churches have embraced 'virtual church' during lockdown. To help you find new ways of telling the Christmas story this year here are two 'fun' all-age talks for inspiration and maybe a time-saver in preparation too!

Gabriel: You will need a fancy dress for an angel costume; a post bag, a mobile phone and other tools for sending messages...

Dress up yourself or someone else as an angel. What should an angel have? Wings? A halo? A white robe? When you/volunteer is looking a bit like the traditional image of an angel, give them a bag of letters, a mobile phone, a megaphone, a signpost and other things that are useful for sending messages. Hopefully, your angel should begin to look a bit silly!

Explain that angels in the Bible are not the flying babies with wings that we sometimes imagine, they are God's messengers and the most well-known angel is Gabriel. He had special messages to deliver to people in the Christmas story.

Briefly tell the Christmas story from the Angel's perspective...

No wrapping: You will need three similar sized boxes, wrapping paper, an image of a cross or an actual wooden cross, concertina-folded paper with the word LIFE cut out so as to make a string of letters, a sack or bag to put presents in.

Make up the following three presents using the boxes. Present 1 contains junk but is beautifully wrapped; present 2 contains the cross and is plainly wrapped, and present 3 contains the string of letters.

Take present 1 from your sack or bag. As you take off the wrapping, comment on how beautiful the wrapping is and then express shock and disappointment when you see what is inside. Relate this to the way we often have junk in our lives that we would rather hide away, but when we do get a glimpse of it, we can be shocked and disappointed.

Take present 2 from your sack or bag and open it. Comment on it being a rather unusual gift. Explain that the cross represents salvation and the fact that God sent his Son to get rid of our clutter and give us the best present we could ever hope for. Say how it was not neatly packaged, with sparkly glitter and fancy bits of ribbon. It was gruesome and painful, but means we can have...

Now open present 3 and reveal the string of LIFE – and as you do so say the words 'eternal life' to complete the talk.

Christmas Chat Mat

If you are not familiar with the 'Chat Mat' illustrated by Andy Gray (a Mission Enabler in Bath and Wells Diocese), this fantastic resource is a series of modern colouring-in sheets that provide a great way to engage all ages in Jesus's teachings. The Chat Mat can be coloured in and doodled on, allowing young and old to chat about the Bible story in their own unique way. The Christmas edition tells the story of the birth of Jesus from Luke chapter 2 and the pdf can be downloaded for free by clicking on this [link](#). And don't forget to find all the hidden sheep and angels!

How about sending a copy of the Chat Mat to the families you are in touch with as a church in the lead up to Christmas? The Chat Mat is a great addition to activity bags that can be delivered to families as a gift or used as part of an interactive Christmas activity e.g. The Advent Trail and Christmas Crib Adventure. Provide a simple guide to encourage families to read the Bible passage together and discuss what they have read using the questions as a guide. The Chat Mat will also encourage families to reflect and pray together. Another great addition to any activity bag is this great **Happyland** Christmas Story booklet from HopeTogether.

