

Christmas at your church

Christmas is one of the loveliest times to visit a church. Many will have special services for children and families, such as christingles, carol services, nativity services, and more. Here's an outline of what to expect at your church over the festive season.

Your local church may well have lots of things to see and do over Christmas – great for helping children understand the meaning behind all the food and gifts, while having some fun too. To find out more about what's happening at your church, visit <https://www.achristmasnearyou.org/> from December 1st.

Services which are great for children

Christingle

Christingle services use a special symbol, a decorated orange, to explore the story of God's love for the world at Christmas.

- The orange represents the world.
- Fruits or sweets which are pinned to the orange represent God's creation and the blessings of the seasons.
- The candle embedded in the orange represents Jesus, the light of the world bringing hope to those in darkness.
- The red ribbon round the orange represents the love of God and the blood of Jesus.
- There is often a collection in aid of the Children's Society – you can read more about the work of the Children's Society and the meaning of the Christingle here: www.childrenssociety.org.uk.

Crib service

Many churches also do a service for children and families based on the Christmas story. In some churches this is done using puppets or by gradually bringing the nativity set figures to the crib and arranging them around the manger.

In other churches everyone is invited to dress up and act it out, singing favourite carols to help tell the story. There may be a traditional nativity play that you can go to or ask to take part in, or you may be invited simply to turn up in costume and join in, and it doesn't matter if there ten people all dressed as Mary!

Carol services

We hear Carols so often in the shops and on the radio that they're like a soundtrack for December. It's really special to hear them in church as part of the telling of the Christmas story. Sometimes the words are prayers for ourselves or for the world we live in, like these from 'Away in a manger':

“Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.”

Services and events for everyone

- 'Nine Lessons and Carols' – there's also one that's broadcast each year from King's College, Cambridge on Christmas eve.
- Midnight mass - this late-night service starts on Christmas eve and ends just after midnight, so you're among the first to celebrate Christmas! 'Mass' is simply another name of 'Holy Communion' or 'Eucharist' or 'Lord's Supper' and it is when the congregation shares bread and 'wine'.
- Christmas day - Your local church may hold its crib service on Christmas day, or Christmas morning may be much more low-key (if most people have been to midnight mass), or it may be a big service with lots of music.

Other services and events

- **Space for rest and remembering** - Some churches provide space to come just being quiet, or remember people who have died. The joy of Christmas can seem very far away if it's your first Christmas without that person.
- **Christmas fetes and events** - Many churches hold extra social or fundraising events in the run-up to Christmas, which can be a great place to meet other people from your neighbourhood, and pick up some last-minute hand-made gifts and produce. Some churches also hold special activities for children, with crafts and singing. Your church's website will tell you what's on offer where you are.
- **Festivals** - Many churches have a themed festival in the lead up to Christmas – this might be a 'Christmas tree festival' or a 'Nativity set festival' – usually this is an exhibition that gives local community groups the chance to get involved in decorating the church, and for everyone to come and enjoy seeing the church 'decked out' ready for Christmas.
- There may also be **concerts and other events** – check your local church's website to see what's happening.
- **A Crib Scene (Nativity Set)** - Most churches will have a crib scene – somewhere where the figures of the nativity story have been arranged around the manger. This is a great opportunity to share the Christmas story with your child.

If you ask around locally, check the church's website, or pop into church for a service during December and ask, you'll get a sense of which services feel like the right ones for you to go to. The timing of the service and the type of service can make a real difference to how easy it feels to bring small children to church, and many Christmas services are particularly family-friendly. Christmas is a great time to get involved.