

# Creative Service Ideas For This Christmas And Advent



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND



# *a unique challenge; a unique opportunity*

The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture (University of York) is working with the Church of England to explore the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on churches and communities. This is happening through a national survey of over 2,500 people, including clergy, church members, and the general public, as well as in depth interviews with individuals from all three groups across the country.

COVID-19 has been hugely challenging for churches, with our resources in terms of people and finance often depleted, while at the same time we face many new demands on time and energy. However, the pandemic has also stimulated enormous creativity. Never in most of our lifetimes have people been so aware of their need for comfort and hope, and churches around the country have been devising and adapting simple, safe, affordable ways to reach out and show care to those who are grieving, anxious and afraid. Here we share some of the brilliant, easy-to-use, Advent and Christmas ideas we have heard – along with others that we have collected from dioceses and other sources across the country.

Advent, Christmas and New Year offer us chances to let people catch up with what has been happening to them, process their grief, and realise the relevance of the Christian message and its power to bring light into darkness. We can't put on big events this year but small, personal opportunities to experience beauty and comfort, feel connected to others, and create some positive memories, are probably what are needed most. Small can be very beautiful this year and we can create 'a Christmas like no other.'

All these ideas have been shared by churches and individuals based on their particular contexts. In every case taking up these ideas needs careful planning and delivery, thinking about physical distancing, good hygiene (such as regular opportunities for hand-sanitising) and wearing face coverings if inside, plus any additional guidelines operating in your area.



## *pyjama midnight mass*

Survey Respondent

*On/Offline:* Online

*Affordability:* Free

The Midnight Mass is a beautiful and profound experience for a lot of people, but families are rarely able to experience that. As this year was going to be different anyway, we are planning on holding an online pyjama service at midnight on Christmas Eve to include families more in the service.







## socially distanced nativity

Survey Respondent

*On/Offline:* Online

*Affordability:* Free

For our nativity service this year, we're going to do a socially-distanced Nativity - one member of the church is writing a script, and then we're going to get people to dress up and play their parts from their own homes, either on Zoom or pre-recorded onto YouTube



## nativity voices

Survey Respondent

*On/Offline:* Online

*Affordability:* Free

On Good Friday this year, when we were also in lockdown, we held a live virtual Passion Play with around 20 different voices from across the parish reading different sections of the passion narrative along with times of prayer and reflection throughout. It was really poignant and moving, and we are planning on doing something similar - from a more joyful perspective - at Christmas, celebrating the Nativity story.



## On/Offline Christingle

Survey Respondent


*On/Offline:* Both

*Affordability:* £

For our Christingle service, we will only be able to have a limited number of people in the church but will be streaming it and distributing 'making Christingle packs' to those who can't be in the building but will be joining in with the Facebook livestream at home. The children can come dressed in Nativity Costumes. Instead of the usual Nativity Play, the Vicar and Curate are going to do a surprise dress up as Christingles as part of a sketch and give people a laugh at a difficult time. Will be using a cartoon clip nativity story from YouTube to bring the Christmas story to life and offer a spoken and interactive gospel message. Things will be more visual on projector/PowerPoint than ever before.







# "it begins in Bethlehem" instant nativity

The Bible Society

*On/Offline:* Either

*Affordability:* Free

The Bible Society have again produced a range of resources to support churches explore the Nativity story this year, including a booklet (which you can buy for £2.00 each), a brand-new fun and interactive rehearsal free Nativity script with great new illustrations and versions for in-person and online services, an accompanying PowerPoint presentation, and a brilliant video animation of the Nativity rhyme. Other than the booklet all the resources are available for free, and everything is available in both English and Welsh.

*Link:* <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1604595334.pdf>



## blue Christmas service

Survey Respondent

*On/Offline:* Either

*Affordability:* Free

We're going to hold a Blue Christmas service for the first time for people who struggle with Christmas. Many find it difficult time anyway, but this year seems really appropriate to start it because there's probably more people who are going to struggle this year. We're doing that online, but with the option that if we're able to we'll do an in person one as well.

*Link:* <https://churchsupporthub.org/article/blue-christmas/>



## car park carols

Faith in Kids

*On/Offline:* Offline

*Affordability:* £££

We may not be able to do carol services as normal this year, but Faith in Kids have come up with an idea to ensure the show will still go on - An all-age drive-in Christmas carol service in a car park. They suggest using a supermarket car park, particularly as they are usually large and otherwise empty after 4pm on a Sunday. This provides an opportunity for an unforgettable Christmas service, and could involve a Nativity (Mary in a trolley, perhaps?) or household activities in the car (such as a Christmas Car Decoration competition) alongside the events taking place up front. Faith in Kids have provided a resource with more ideas along with a full scripted running order, as well as a risk assessment and advice for technology required.

*Link:* [https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173\\_God-with-us.zip](https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173_God-with-us.zip)







## when God showed up

Faith in Kids

*On/Offline:* Offline

*Affordability:* Free

Nativity services in 2020 will have to be a bit different, and Faith in Kids have provided a full resource for carrying out a safe nativity over digital platforms. "When God Showed Up" is a series of short scenes telling the nativity story that can be either pre-recorded with different households before being broadcast online - on YouTube, for example - or performed live over Zoom in a single call. They have even provided original downloadable backgrounds to use during each scene! They have also offered guidance for how this could be simplified depending on the number of participants available.

*Link:* [https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173\\_God-with-us.zip](https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173_God-with-us.zip)



## socially distanced choir carols

Survey Respondent

*On/Offline:* Offline

*Affordability:* Free

IWe're going to do a carol service with a choir singing live, but all socially distanced. We counted how many chairs we can get at an appropriate distance from each other on the stage - around 15 - and people coming in, not singing but listening to the choir sing carols on an Advent Sunday evening.



## "Christmas came to me" doorstep carols

The Diocese of Bristol

*On/Offline:* Offline

*Affordability:* Free

One way to get your community involved in a carol service safely this year is to follow Faith in Kids' idea of a 'Christmas Came To Me' doorstep sing-along. They describe this as "an opportunity for those in the church family to gather our neighbours outdoors for a local event, tailored to that particular corner of the community", being a "simple approach to holding a form of carol service outside our own front doors." Along with a full running order and script for a suggested service, they have also provided ideas and resources for activities with kids, as well as ready-to-print songsheets for all the suggested carols from <https://christmascametome.com/>. They've even created an invite template to help promote your event in the local community.

*Link:* <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1604595334.pdf>







## zoom crib service

The Diocese of St Alban's

*On/Offline:* Online

*Affordability:* Free

The team for Children's Ministry at the Diocese of St Alban's have provided everything you need to run a crib service over Zoom, including a full running order and a series of PowerPoints for telling the story.

*Link:* <https://stalbanscme.com/2020/09/22/crib-service-on-zoom/>



## virtual Christingle

Faith in Kids

*On/Offline:* Online

*Affordability:* Free

The Children's Society, who have overseen many of the Christingles in this country for over 50 years, have released a guide for holding a virtual Christingle, including guidance on the different platforms you could use, how to do it totally offline (by, for example, doing it via a conference call), and links to their resources for hosting it across of different contexts (e.g. depending on how easy it is to distribute materials etc).

*Link:* [https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/How\\_to\\_christingle\\_virtually\\_guide.pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/How_to_christingle_virtually_guide.pdf)



## Christmas service for the bereaved

The Diocese of St Alban's

*On/Offline:* Offline


*Affordability:* Free

Christmas can be a difficult time for many people, and particularly those who are mourning a loved one. With the COVID crisis not only leading to untimely deaths but a significant reduction in funeral capacity and ability to carry out other bereavement rituals with loved ones, Christmas this year could be even more tough. The Diocese of St Alban's have created this full service outline to help churches run Christmas services for the bereaved.

*Link:* <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Christmas-Service-for-the-Bereaved.pdf>







# Christmas choral recordings


Peterborough Cathedral Choir

*On/Offline:* Online

*Affordability:* Free

Peterborough Cathedral Choir has made an extensive series of live recordings available for churches to use for their services over Advent and Christmas. These mostly come in a video format, and anyone who would like to use them is invited to email [music@peterborough-cathedral.org.uk](mailto:music@peterborough-cathedral.org.uk) for access, though the church must have the necessary licenses and give appropriate credit for the recordings.

*Link:* <https://crosskeysmag.org.uk/?p=4296>



## want more?

This file gives just a glimpse into the huge range of creative ideas that are emerging across the church this year as we approach Christmas. If you are looking for more, we will be providing three more PDFs - with ideas for community engagement, Christmas services, and discipleship - while the Church Support Hub also has a growing collection of ideas for Christmas 2020 (<https://churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/occasions-for-follow-up/christmas-2020/>). As seen here, many dioceses have also curated some brilliant ideas and resources on their own websites. We'd encourage you to look outside of your own diocese and see what's happening around the country!

