



# all-age ideas

## Christmas

### Advent Crown liturgy

Use this responsive prayer during the lighting of the advent candles. The leader says the bits in normal text and the congregation responds with the text in bold. It can add some depth to the ritual of lighting the candles, whilst being simple enough for all ages to understand.

As we light our advent candle  
Light of the world, shine on us.  
As we prepare for Christmas time  
**Light of the world, shine on us.**

In this world of pain and darkness,  
Light of the world, shine through us.  
To all the people who don't know you,  
**Light of the world, shine through us.**

Jesus you are coming again,  
Light of the world, light the way.  
In our service here today  
**Light of the world, light the way.**

### Christmas tree Prayers

Use a fun activity like decorating the Christmas tree for a creative prayer time.

Give each person an outline shape - it could be a person shape - like a gingerbread man or it could be shaped like a star or candle etc. Have a hole punched at the top and allow time for the children to decorate the shape on one side.

On the other side, ask them to write or draw a simple prayer - if using people shapes prayers could concentrate on praying for family and friends and asking God to bless those we love. Ask the children to collect the decorations and come up one by one and read out or explain their prayer and then hang them on the Christmas tree. A small table top Christmas tree works well too.

### Blessing prayer

God be in our worship  
**and in our celebrations.**  
God be in our feasting **and in our giving.**  
God be in our loving **and in our living,**  
this Advent **and into the future. Amen.**

### All-age talk: 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.

### Video clips to brighten up a message:

**He chose the shepherds:** a great video from the production team that produce "Friends and Heroes" - watch it here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=McaM1YMXOyE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McaM1YMXOyE)

**Christmas in a Nutshell:** another animated short! Simple mix of graphics and words bring home the true meaning:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXgH8Zlz9jQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXgH8Zlz9jQ)

**Gifts you can't wait to give:** From several years ago, the John Lewis advert is a bit cheesy, but it does make great point:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSLOnR1s74o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSLOnR1s74o)

**A Facebook Christmas:** What if social media had been around 2000 years ago? How would the birth of Jesus have been announced and celebrated? Maybe like this:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sghwe4TY18](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sghwe4TY18)

### A Christmas blessing

And now may we be as faithful and obedient as Mary and Joseph,  
as full of wonder as the shepherds,  
and as persistent and generous as the wise men,  
as we celebrate the coming of Jesus the Messiah into our world,  
and may the blessing of God almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us, with our families, our friends and neighbours,  
today, this Christmas, and for evermore. Amen



## Christmas day all-age talk: Gifts

**You will need:** four large gift tags with the following words written on them and each one needs to be attached to a chocolate Christmas tree decoration:

- Gift tag 1: 'A gift ... from God';
- Gift tag 2: 'A gift... for all of us';
- Gift tag 3: 'A gift... of new life' ;
- Gift tag 4: 'A gift... through Jesus'

Hang the decorations on a Christmas tree. Many churches like to include a short time on Christmas Day when the people are encouraged to show one of their Christmas gifts. This would be a suitable time to do this. Make the point that the best Christmas gift of all didn't come in a box or Christmas stocking.

Proceed with the talk by asking each question below in turn. (Each time take the appropriate gift tag from the Christmas tree and offer it to a member of the congregation, inviting them to read out what it says and then allowing them to keep the small chocolate gift to eat later.)

Who is it from? (Give gift tag 1 to someone.)

Read Romans 5:15 and explain briefly what 'grace' means. It means something given out of kindness, not because we deserve it. God himself has sent this gift because of his great kindness.

Who is it for? (Give out gift tag 2.)

Read Romans 5:15 again. Explain that God's gift was not just for a few special people, or for the people who were living when Jesus came as a baby, but it is for everyone.

What is it? (Give out gift tag 3.)

Read Romans 5:18. Explain that ever since the time of Adam, the first man in the Bible, people have done wrong things that did not please God. This is sin. Sin creates a barrier between God and us, but instead of punishing us for our sin, God's gift is that he sent Jesus to take the punishment for us so that we could be forgiven. Then God can accept us and offer us a new life.

How do we get it? (Give out gift tag 4.)

Read Romans 5:19. Jesus was punished in our place and we can receive God's gift through accepting what Jesus has done for us.

## Opening Activity: Gabriel

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

Dress a child (or an adult) up as an angel. What should an angel have? Wings? A halo? A white robe?

When your 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...

You could play the short film 'An Unexpected Christmas' by St Pauls Arts & Media, New Zealand available on YouTube - copy and paste this link into your browser...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY&feature=youtu.be>

## Christmas confession:

This is a nice prayer of confession that flows alongside the Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,**

Father, forgive us for those times when we have done wrong, and not glorified you by our actions.

**Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

Forgive us for those times when we have acted according to our own desires, and done what is wrong in your sight.

**Give us today our daily bread.**

Forgive us for those times when we have acquired the things we need at the expense of others, who strive for a fair wage.

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive  
those who sin against us.**

That there might be peace in the world.

**Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

That there might be justice in the world.

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.**

## Christmas Stars

This is a great prayer idea that personalises your tree in church.

Cut out enough stars for everyone in the congregation to have one, or make some star templates and let every member make their own star. Invite everyone to write one-line prayers thanking God for the gift of his own Son on that first Christmas.

Decorate the edges of the prayer stars with glitter, then punch a hole in the top of each one and attach a piece of ribbon so that they can be hung on the Christmas tree in church.

## Paper chain prayers

Give each member of the group a strip of coloured paper and encourage them to write a one-line thank you prayer. Fasten all the strips together to make a festive paper chain that you can hang across your meeting room. If you have a small group you might want to give each person two or three strips of paper or add to the chain week by week. The prayer paper chain is particularly effective on special occasions like Christmas, Easter and church anniversaries when a long chain can be made during an All-Age service.



## Looking forward

This is an alternative take on an Advent liturgy - reminding people the true reasons why we should look forward to the Christmas season:

**We look forward** - to seeing a new star appear in the sky, prompting those far off to draw near to you.

**All: Lord Jesus, draw us to you.**

**We look forward** - to the familiar stable scenes, their mangers standing empty, waiting to receive you.

**Lord Jesus, come to us anew.**

**We look forward** - to hearing again the angels singing "Glory to God and Peace to all the earth".

**Lord Jesus, let us take up their song.**

**We look forward** - to seeing shepherds and kings alike, poor and humble, noble and wealthy, all bowing before you.

**Lord Jesus, unite us in worship.**

**We look forward** - to remembering a humble girl, with an ordinary background, chosen to bring your hope into the world.

**Lord Jesus, bring new hope through us.**

**We look forward** - to a child, wrapped in linen, lying in a manger, weak and helpless, small and completely reliant on others.

**Lord Jesus, teach us to depend on you.**

**We look forward** - to seeing, hearing and knowing afresh how you - infinite and incomprehensible God - freely entered your creation, becoming humble and tangible so that we might freely enter your presence.

**Lord Jesus, we look, we wonder and we worship. Amen.**

## Advent Crown liturgy

It's worth getting the congregation to rehearse an echo before you use this for the first time - encourage them to say the word 'come' loudly to begin with, but then quieter and finally as a whisper. The leader says the words in bold, and everyone responds with the words

**Into the darkness of our world...**

Lord Jesus come.  
Come, come, come (*echoes*)

**Into the darkness of our homes...**

Lord Jesus come.  
Come, come, come (*echoes*)

**Into the darkness of our hearts...**

Lord Jesus come.  
Come, come, come (*echoes*)

## All-age talk: Twelve hours of Christmas

A revamped 'Twelve Days of Christmas' is a great alternative to a traditional talk - you will need to take a deep breath!

At the first hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the second hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
Sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the third hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
In Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the fourth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born

At the fifth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the sixth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
Angels are singing  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the seventh hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay  
All heaven blazing, angels are singing  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the eighth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
With shepherds watching, all heaven blazing, angels are singing  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the ninth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
Many sheep are bleating, with shepherds watching, all heaven  
blazing, angels are singing  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the tenth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
Local people dozing, many sheep are bleating, with shepherds  
watching, all heaven blazing, angels are singing,  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the eleventh hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay,  
Dawn's light has broken, local people dozing, many sheep are  
bleating, with shepherds watching, all heaven blazing, angels are  
singing,  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

At the twelfth hour of Christmas, the world in darkness lay  
Wise men are riding, dawn's light has broken, local people dozing,  
many sheep are bleating, with shepherds watching,  
all heaven blazing, angels are singing,  
P-e-a-c-e o-n earth.  
For on Christmas Day, in Bethlehem, sheltered in a stall,  
Our Saviour Jesus is born.

## All-age talk: Labelling Jesus

A talk which challenges popular views about who Jesus is.

**You will need:** A4 sheets of paper, a flip chart or whiteboard, marker pens, Blue-tack

Before the service use the sheets of paper and marker pens to prepare examples of some of the labels that have been associated with Jesus. Examples should include the following, as well as any others that you wish to add: 'Son of Man'; 'Great teacher'; 'Magician'; 'Son of God'; 'A good man'; 'Healer'; 'Someone who cared'; 'Invention of the Gospel writers'.

Hide the labels around the meeting room. Draw three columns on the flip chart or whiteboard and head them 'Label', 'True' and 'False' respectively.

Introduce the activity by remarking that different people have had different opinions about Jesus over the years. Explain that some of those opinions are hidden around the meeting room. Invite people to hunt for the hidden labels, and return to their seats, with any that they find. When all the labels have been found, ask for them to be brought to the front one at a time and glued in the first column on the flip chart or whiteboard. As each label is placed on the board, ask the congregation to vote on whether the statement is true or false, and put a tick in the appropriate column. Be sure to fully involve the children and young people in the voting and discussion activity.

Be prepared for some disagreement on statements like 'A good man' and be prepared to comment. Sum up by saying that some of the statements are obviously out of line with what the Bible teaches and that some others are true but don't go far enough. (For example: 'great teacher' and 'good man'.) You may also need to add when the 'Invention of Gospel writers' label goes up, that there is good evidence outside the Bible for the existence of Jesus, and that it is hardly likely that the early Christians would have given up their lives for something they knew to be a lie.

Finish by drawing their attention to the label, 'Son of God'. Read Luke 1:26–33 and comment how it was an angel from heaven who told Mary that her child would be the Son of God. She found it hard to understand but was willing to trust God. This Christmas, God invites each of us to believe that Mary's child is his Son, trusting that nothing is impossible for him.

## All-age talk: C.H.R.I.S.T.M.A.S

Here is an idea for an all age service that provides involvement especially for young children. In the week beforehand, have the children make the large letters C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S, decorating them as they like. Before the service, hide the letters around the church. During the service have the children find them. As they do, encourage them to think of words that have meaning for Christmas starting with that letter.

C – Crib, Census, Christmas, Christ child

H – Hope, holy, humble, homeless, Herod

R – Royal, refugee

I – Ignored, incarnation

S – Stable, star, shepherds

T – Travellers, tremble, tremendous

M – Mary, Magi, magnificent, mystery, miracle, myrrh

A – Animals, adore, angels

S – Stable, star, shepherds

## Advent confession:

Lord God,

We praise you for sending light into this world.

We confess that we live as though the light had never defeated darkness.

We confess that we ignore the Savior you sent to be among us and to live in us.

We've kept the birth of your Son confined to the Christmas season and do not yearn for his coming each moment in our waiting hearts.

Forgive us for not opening our eyes to Jesus. Prepare us for His return.

Help us rejoice in the light, so that your grace can illuminate the darkened places of our hearts. Amen.

## Pass the parcel prayers

Make up a pass the parcel and in each layer stick on a prayer to be read out. This could either be: A short prayer that is simply read out and everyone says Amen. A prayer starter which the child reads aloud and then finishes themselves and everyone says Amen. A response prayer - everyone repeats a line after the prayer is said. Or why not ask approach people before the service starts and ask if they are happy to make up a prayer.

Play pass the parcel with music (why not play a popular song like Slade?) and after the final prayer close with the following:

**Father God,**

**Thank you** for Christmas cards and presents.

**Thank you** for Christmas trees and fairy lights

**Thank you** for parties and special outings,

**Thank you** for turkey and mince pies,

**Thank you** for carol singing and concerts,

**But most of all, thank you for Jesus.**

## Advent candle prayer:

**Leader:** As we light our advent candle

**All:** Light of the world, shine on us.

**Leader:** As we prepare for Christmas time

**All:** Light of the world, shine on us.

**Leader:** In this world of pain and darkness,

**All:** Light of the world, shine through us.

**Leader:** To all the people who don't know you,

**All:** Light of the world, shine through us.

**Leader:** Jesus you are coming again,

**All:** Light of the world, light the way.

**Leader:** In our service here today

**All:** Light of the world, light the way.



## Advent Calendar prayer

Hold up the Advent calendar introducing the theme of waiting (invite a child to open the relevant door). Ask the congregation for other examples of what we wait for.

Advent is a time of waiting; anticipating the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. Think about God's perfect timing.

Jesus was born at the time appointed by God; the Jews had been waiting a long time for His arrival. God had promised a Deliverer and God always keeps His promises.

Be encouraged that God hears your prayers and God's timing is perfect.

*"For with God nothing is ever impossible and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment."* (Luke 1:37)

In silence, pray through the questions.

What are you waiting for right now?

Do you need an answer to prayer?

Do you need a miracle?

Lift up your prayers to God with confidence.

God hears your prayers.

Be expectant, dream big dreams,

what are your hopes for the future?

Remember - do not measure God by your own expectations. God is able to do far more that we can imagine.

## Christmas intercession

A lovely prayer that can be incorporated into any part of an all-age service:

Jesus Christ, born in a stable.

Be with the poor and homeless this Christmas time.

**As we pray, live and give, shine Your everlasting light.**

Jesus Christ, visited by shepherds.

Be with all who have to work this Christmas, and those who long to work.

**As we pray, live and give, shine Your everlasting light.**

Jesus Christ, born of Mary.

Be with young mothers across the world this Christmas time.

**As we pray, live and give, shine Your everlasting light.**

Jesus Christ, who became a refugee.

Be with those who fear their lives, and those who have left homes and families this Christmas.

**As we pray, live and give, shine Your everlasting light. Amen.**

## Advent crown reflection

**A lovely reflection for Christmas Day or any other day during advent if you're happy to light all the candles (albeit for a brief moment):**

In the beginning, God allowed for chaos, for troubled dreams, and uncertain sounds, and fear in the darkness. Then, when chaos was most threatening and hope was bleakest;

God said, 'Let there be light'

And there was light (*main candle is lit*).

So, remember the chaos, the uncertainty, the confusion in which you once floundered, and give thanks for the light.

*Pause/Silence...*

In the course of time, God allowed for a journey from ourselves to other people, from restriction to freedom, from a forgotten place to a promised land. And when the journey was hardest, and the way ahead unclear, and the temptation to turn back most alluring; God said, 'Let there be light,' And there was light (*a second candle is lit*). So, remember your journey and how far you have travelled, and give thanks for the light.

*Pause/Silence...*

Later yet, God allowed for the special: for friendship to grow for truth to be discovered for faith to become real. On the mountain top and in quiet places, God blessed us, saying, 'Let there be light.' And there was light (*a third candle is lit*).

So remember not why, but how and when and where you've been blessed, and give thanks for the light.

*Pause/Silence...*

And then, when the light was brightest, and life was good, despite our better judgment, but in solidarity with all humankind, we chased shadows, and chose darkness.

*Candles extinguished.*

So, remember how and when and where and perhaps why you have wandered from the light.

*Pause/Silence....*

Because God loves us, there will be light again. Not first in chaos, not first on the journey, not first for the special place, but on the ground and in a hidden place, God will come, offering a baby's hand to greet us (candles are re-lit).

*Pause/Silence...*

Lord Jesus Christ, who chose at Bethlehem to meet us, make us ready to lose and leave all that makes us proud and sufficient. Let our knees bend to you, our hearts cradle you, our lips sing you songs of love. Amen.

## More ideas if you need them...

All of these advent ideas (and more!) can be found on the following websites:

[scriptureunion.org.uk](http://scriptureunion.org.uk)

[engageworship.org](http://engageworship.org)

[barnabasinchurches.org.uk](http://barnabasinchurches.org.uk)

[going4growth.org.uk](http://going4growth.org.uk)

[churcharmy.org.uk](http://churcharmy.org.uk)

[thebillabong.info](http://thebillabong.info)

[christmasstartswithchrist.com](http://christmasstartswithchrist.com)