



Church of Ireland Children's Ministry

ADVENT NEWSLETTER

Advent is a time of waiting and we need to use this time of waiting to prepare for Christmas. It is so easy to fast forward through Advent and go straight to Christmas but if we do that we are missing out! Our newsletter is focusing on Advent. Julie Ryan, co-owner of The Bookwell in Belfast shares how she celebrates Advent with her husband Richard and their two boys Jack and Ben.



Handmade Family Advent

Way back in 2013 Jack celebrated his first Christmas when he was only 10 months old. We wanted to make his first Christmas special and help him learn about and experience the love of God but I wasn't sure what to do.



So I did a bit of looking around online and found a few fantastic posts on Pinterest that had Advent calendar ideas for all the family to do. I took a few ideas from each of the blogs and put some more of my own in and put them up in a homemade advent calendar made of little envelopes of folded paper, paperclips and string - no expense spared!! We did things like having an indoor snowball fight (in the bath with foaming soap - Jack wasn't that impressed), reading stories about the birth of Jesus, watching a Christmas movie,

making handmade ornaments, going out to see the Christmas lights and donating a toy to a Christmas family appeal. Many of these things were activities that we would probably have done anyway but the most important part of our Advent journey was the stopping and appreciating our time together and being thankful. December is such a busy time of year and it can feel like it is whizzing past, so taking a few minutes out of each day to stop and be thankful were much needed and appreciated.

We have 2 boys now, Jack is 6 and Ben is 4 and we have carried on celebrating our handmade family Advent. We've tailored it each year adding in new and different activities to help the boys learn more about Jesus and caring about the world around them in ways that they can hopefully understand. Over the years I have found a few family Advent books (owning a bookshop has its benefits!) which have lots of fantastic ideas and devotionals for us to do as well as keeping some of our favourite activities that we love to do each year like having an indoor picnic under the Christmas tree, donating food to the food bank or shelter, and Richard's favourite which is to 'hunt the wise man', where he hides a wise man from the nativity set and the boys have to run around the house trying to find him.



As the boys have gotten older we are able to talk more about the meaning behind each activity and hopefully help them to understand the importance of Jesus and that there is more to Christmas than presents and Santa. For the last few years we've been reading from the Jesus

Storybook Bible which is a beautiful and powerful children's picture book bible in which every story points to Christ. The Jesus Storybook Bible Advent reading plan covers 21 stories of the Old Testament and 3 stories from the New Testament, so that by the time we get to Christmas Day, we're reading about the birth of Jesus. It's a lot like the Jesse Tree Advent which tells the story of God's plan for salvation through the genealogy of Jesus - Jesse is the father of David and ancestor of Jesus. 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit'. Isaiah 11:1

Not every activity works and sometimes (most times) our family discussions go way over the boy's heads - (especially Ben who never seems to pay attention), but it's about spending time together as a family, taking the time to enjoy each other at the busy time of year. And if even the smallest crumb of Jesus' message sticks with the boys and helps to guide them, I will be happy, for as it says in Proverbs 'Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.' Proverbs 22:6

Some of the books that I would recommend are Live Life, Love Advent from the Church of England, Wild Advent by Rachel Summers, A Jesus Christmas by Barbara Reaoch and The 25 days of Christmas by James Merritt which we used last year which had great activities but is aimed at older children than ours, but we managed to tweak the discussions to make it easier for the boys. Our website <https://www.thebookwell.co.uk/> has all these books and more for you to have a look at with regards to family Advent books available. Or have a look too at some blogs or Instagram posts online and make up your own handmade advent to suit your family needs.



Advent Wreaths

Each week in Advent we light a candle on the Advent Wreath that is normally at the front of Church.



This happens every year but do we know the meaning behind the candles we light? Spiritual Child have given some simple ideas to share the meaning of each of the candles. <http://spiritualchild.co.uk/adventprayers.html>. Could you have a separate Advent Wreath for the children to explore? This could be made from felt so the flames 'stick' on, or use LED lights to make sure it is safe. Each week there are prayers and symbols to show the meaning of the candles. You can download 3 different versions of the prayers, choose your favourite and enjoy exploring Advent together.

Week One Patriarchs – Sarah and Abraham

Use a tent as a reminder of all those in the Old Testament who listened to and trusted God, going on a journey to obey God. We also go on journey of faith to get to know God.

Week Two Prophets – Isaiah and Jeremiah

Use a scroll to remind us of all the prophets, including Isaiah and Jeremiah who listened to God's message, and then told others all about it. They helped people understand the meaning of God's word and told their friends and neighbours God's promises for the future. We need to listen for the voice of God, help people to understand the meaning of God's word, and share his promises.

Week Three John the Baptist

Use a Camel Hair Coat as a symbol of John the Baptist who helped people have a new start with God, baptising them in the river. John also pointed people to Jesus. We are also followers of Jesus who are looking for signs of his coming.

Week Four Mary

Use a Rose as a reminder of the love Mary had for her son. Mary was willing to say yes to God. When God asked her to be the Mother of Jesus she said yes. May we be willing to say yes to God when he asks us to do something.

Christmas Eve/Day – Jesus

The final candle is a reminder that Jesus is here! We welcome Jesus as we celebrate Christmas.

OR

Week 1 Hope

Use a Globe to represent hope. Hope for everyone, for all the nations, for all those who have lost hope and those who are hopeful in the presence of God. We are asking that our hope will be fixed on God.

Week 2 Peace

Use a dove as a symbol of peace. We are praying for peace for everyone, especially those in conflict situations. We are asking God to give them a sign of his peace.

Week 3 Joy

Angels brought joy throughout the nativity story. We are praying for everyone to experience the beauty of joy and ask that those who may not be experiencing it will see a hint of joy.

Week 4 Love

We are praying for the love that we experience, and for the love that others may be looking for. We are asking God to help us show love to one another. Use a heart as a reminder of God's love.

Christmas Eve/Day

The final candle allows us to rejoice that Jesus is born. Jesus the hope, peace, joy and love of the world is now here!

Hope
Peace
Joy
Love
CHRIST



Advent Craft Ideas

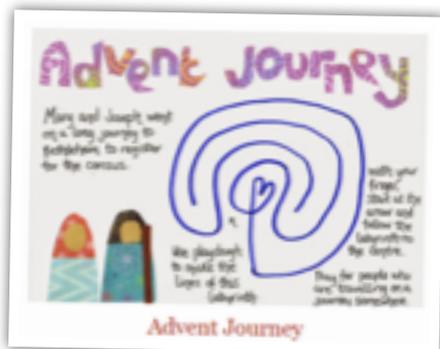
For a brilliant selection of free downloadable Advent colouring pages be sure to check out <https://ministry-to-children.com/advent-coloring-book/>



There are colouring pages for each day in Advent and are all based around the Christmas Story and the promises of the nativity.

As usual Flame Creative Ministry has an amazing collection of Advent ideas including playdough mats (a firm favourite) as well some great craft ideas and reflective colouring pages.

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/p/25-advent-activities.html>

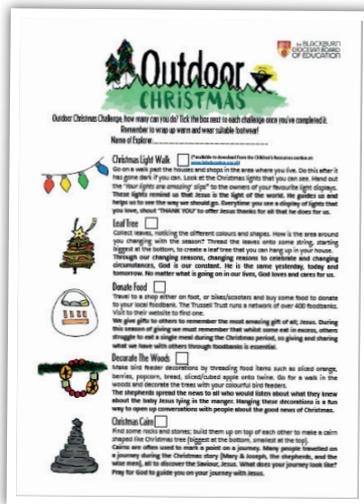


Chrismons



These are a beautiful way of celebrating the symbols of Christmas. Chrismons are symbols from the Christmas Story. They are plain white or white and silver. These decorations can be put on Christmas Trees.

For patterns and ideas see <https://www.whychristmas.com/customs/chrismons.shtml>. These would be a simple craft to do during a busy time for Sunday School.



Blackburn Diocese Board of Religious Education produce resources for families to engage with seasonal worship.

For Advent they have created two sheets of activities for families to complete called Outdoor Christmas. These are free to download and are full of ideas for families to engage with Advent in a fun way. To download the resources go to their website (<https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product/outdoor-christmas/>)

Christmas Songs Suggestions:

• Born is the King – Hillsong Kids (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qf6OoAZbAQg&list=OLAK5uy_ld6aCSBQZk2xPznYLzbslgG7o611o_6n4)

Full of Joy and excitement a song that children can easily pick up and join in with.

• Oh What a Glorious Night – Side Walk Prophets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aGLV5CfoTU>

A very catchy song that celebrates the glorious night Jesus was born.

• He Chose the Shepherds – Friends and Heroes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McaM1YMXOYe&t=27s>

The significance of the shepherds is often overlooked – this beautifully illustrated song shows the importance of their role in the story and how God shared the Good News to the shepherds first.





All Age Talk

Matthew 1:18-23
focusing on verse 23

Resources Needed:

Nativity Set, Christmas jumper, wrapping paper, tub of sweets, party invitation, Christmas Decorations.

Explain that you are really looking forward to Christmas and that you cannot wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus – after all that's what Christmas is all about. Bring out your nativity set and show various parts of it and again emphasise how much you are looking forward to celebrating the Birth of Jesus. Set the Nativity where people will be able to see it.

Before we celebrate Christmas we need to prepare – that's what Advent is all about – preparation. First I have to have the best Christmas Jumper. I like this one because it lights up (or whatever special feature it has) Big up the importance of wearing fancy or new clothes. Its all part of Christmas. Set your jumper on-top of the nativity.

So now we have clothes sorted we need to get ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Next we need to think of all the food we have to get. Turkey, ham, brussel sprouts, roast potatoes etc. My favourite part is the sweets. The chocolate ones that you only get once a year. Delicious. Put the sweets in front of the nativity.

Next up is all the Christmas parties we get to go to. Lots of celebrations. Place a few invites on top of the nativity.

Then we have to decorate the Christmas Tree! All the decorations need to be just right! The tree needs to be perfect with the shiniest star on top! Put the decorations on top of the nativity.

Finally say I need to make sure all the

presents are wrapped and ready to go. I spent so much money making sure everyone has got an amazing present and they need to be wrapped perfectly! Lay the wrapping paper over the nativity.

Now we are ready to celebrate Christmas – we have the presents, the food, the clothes, the party and most importantly the reason we are celebrating – the Birth of Jesus. But wait a minute! Where has the nativity gone? That's the reason we are celebrating but I can't find it because of everything else we have added to Christmas! Rummage through til you can get the Nativity. We need to make sure we do not get so caught up in the trappings of Christmas that we forget why we are celebrating! It is not about the food, clothes etc – they are fun but they cannot take over Christmas! Make sure we remember the reason we have Christmas and be sure to keep it in our minds as we celebrate Christmas. One of the names given to Jesus is Immanuel which means 'God with us'. We need to focus on the real reason we celebrate Christmas – God being with us!

Engage Worship



<https://engageworship.org/ideas?bible%5Bbook%5D=0&season%5B%5D=1&functionOpen=&themeOpen=&mediatypeOpen=&seasonOpen=>

Engage Worship is a website jam packed with ideas for all age worship. It includes videos, dramas, poems, PowerPoints, and prayer ideas. You need to register an account but this will give you free access to thousands of resources. You will get sent email updates with seasonal material or you can use the search function.

Posada

Posada – have you considered doing Posada in your parish? Mary and Joseph (and the donkey if you wish) are introduced to the congregation on Advent Sunday and travel around families in the parish until Christmas Eve where they are placed in the stable. This activity allows Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem and engages families in their journey as well. You can print off a diary for Mary and Joseph to take with them that families complete to show what they have been up to or you could set up a Facebook group to share the adventure. Church Army have produced a guide and a full set of resources which can be found on their website: https://churcharmy.org/Groups/330097/Church_Army/web/What_we_do/Resources/Posada/Posada.aspx



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