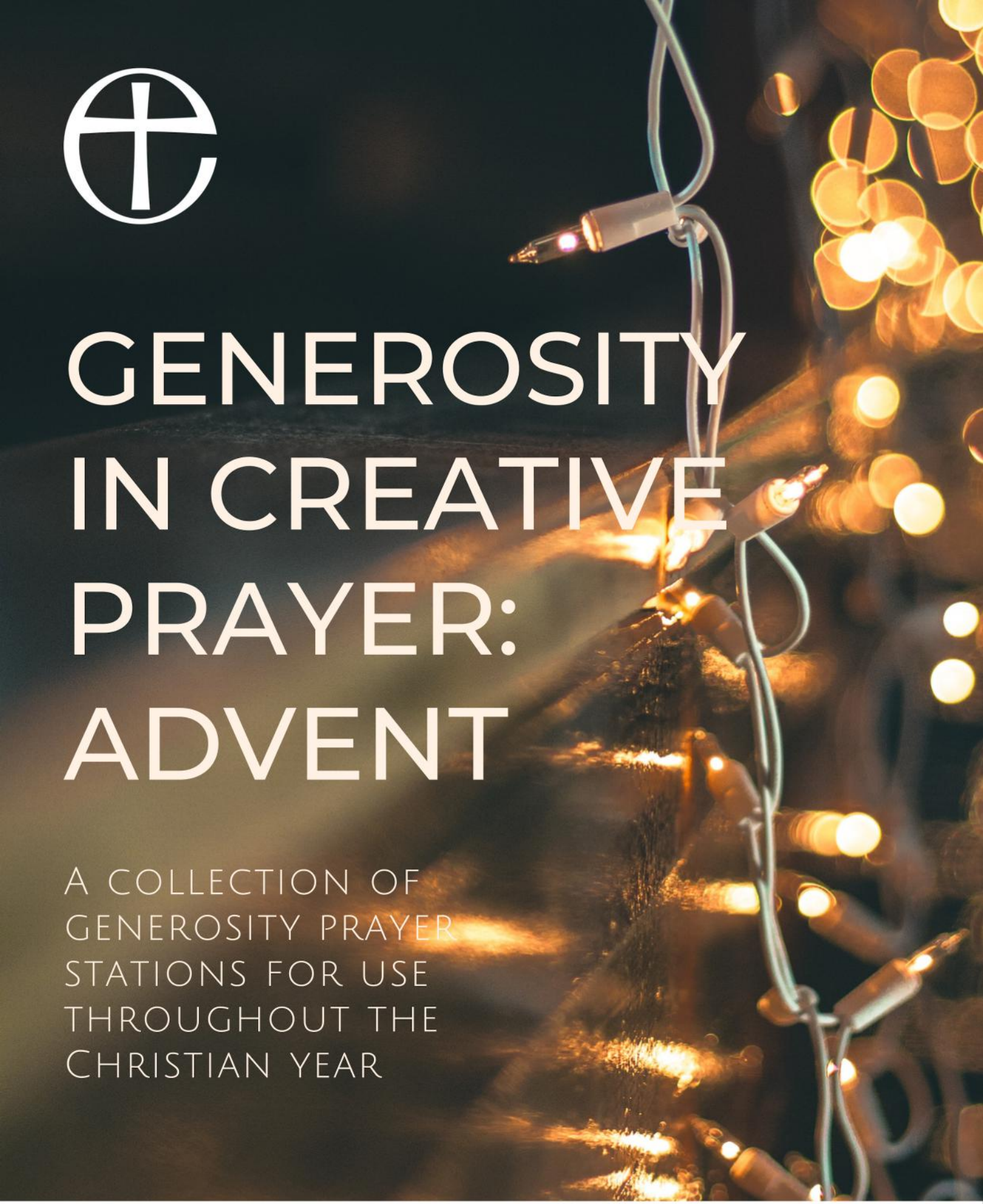

GENEROSITY IN CREATIVE PRAYER: ADVENT

A COLLECTION OF GENEROSITY PRAYER STATIONS FOR USE THROUGHOUT THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Diocese of Liverpool

DIOCESE OF YORK

Contents

Page 3 - About this resource

Prayer Activities

Page 5 - The Wonder of the Stars

Page 7 - Tree of Jesse

Page 10 - Remembering God's Generosity

Page 12 - Traditions of St Lucia

- Page 13 - Recipe: Biscuits
- Page 14 - Recipe: St Lucia Buns
- Page 15 - St Lucia Lights

Page 19 - Straw and Swaddling

Sunday Sessions

Page 23 - Stir-Up Sunday

Page 26 - Tree of Jesse

Page 34 - Appendix

Generosity in Creative Prayer

About this Resource

Prayer stations are prayer activities that can be set up and used anywhere – at home, at work, at church or outdoors. They are typically interactive, inviting people to read/listen/reflect and then respond. They enable us to connect with God in creative ways, often allowing the sensory experiences of sight and touch to inspire our prayer and nurture our spiritual lives.

Prayer stations are usually based on a theme, encouraging us to reflect on a particular topic. This collection are based on generosity, enabling us to connect and reflect prayerfully on how we can grow in Christlike generosity.

In this edition, you will find a collection of generosity themed prayer stations suitable for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. There are other editions of this resource for use during other seasons of the Christian year.

How to use this booklet

Each prayer station in this booklet comes with a cover page and an activity guide - you are welcome to print the activity guides to be part of your prayer stations, and would recommend laminating them.

About the contributors

This resource has been compiled by members of the Generous Giving teams in the Dioceses of York and Liverpool.

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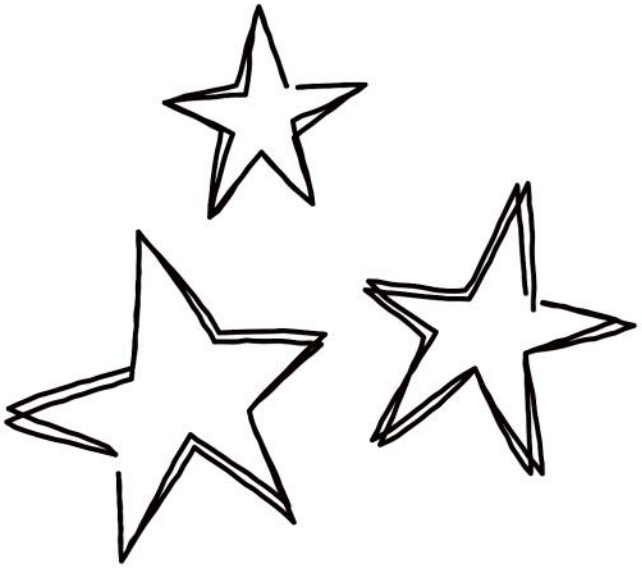

The Wonder of the Stars

YOU WILL NEED:

Large piece of fabric
String
Table
Clothes pegs
Paper or cardboard or foil stars
Marker pens

HE DETERMINES THE NUMBER OF THE STARS; HE GIVES TO ALL OF THEM THEIR NAMES.
PSALM 147.4

Preparation

Put up a large piece of fabric, and drape pieces of string across it. Cut out a large star to have in the middle, as well as the prayer activity guide. Put a small table to the side of this with the pens and star-shaped paper or carboard (you could buy these pre-cut as star parcel tags).

Activity

Ask people to reflect on God's creation of the stars - cast your minds to the wonders and the depth of the universe. Encourage people to wonder how we can each be a gift of God to those around us, and add their star to the station as we take our place in the gift of the universe.

The Wonder of the Stars

HE DETERMINES THE NUMBER OF THE STARS;
HE GIVES TO ALL OF THEM THEIR NAMES.
PSALM 147.4

Reflect on God's creation of the stars - cast your minds to the wonders and the depth of the universe. Think about how they shine and the beauty they give to us. Think about the infinite possibilities of their number, and that God knows each by name.

God gifts to us our very lives, and knows each of us by name.
How does it feel to be a gift from God?
How might you become a gift of God to others?

Write your name or your prayer on one of the stars and use a clothes peg to add it to the string.

Tree of Jesse

YOU WILL NEED:
Prayer tree
Luggage labels (these could be shaped like leaves)
String
Character cards
Small baskets
Bible

Preparation

Put your prayer tree in a space which suits your church - this could be on a table or on the floor. Put a table next to it, and place a collection of leaf-shaped luggage labels in the small baskets - on one side write the character's name and the other their connected bible verse. Place a few bibles on the table so that people can read the verses if they choose.

Activity

Ask people to reflect on the stories of each of the biblical characters, specifically on the way they expressed generosity in their lives.

Tree of Jesse: Characters

Below is a suggested list of biblical characters with related bible verses to write on your tags for the Generosity Tree of Jesse. There are many other examples so feel free to add your own!

David: 2 Samuel 24.18-25
Theme: offering to God things that cost us something.

David: 1 Chronicles 29.10-14
Theme: all things come from God.

Samuel: 1 Samuel 3.1-21
Theme: giving our lives to God.

Israelites: Deuteronomy 26.1-15
Theme: giving the very best we can offer.

Ruth: Ruth 1.6-22
Theme: generosity in relationships.

Abraham and Sarah: Genesis 18.1-8
Theme: generosity in hospitality.

Moses: Exodus 18.13-23
Theme: servant leadership.

John the Baptist: Matthew 3.1-12
Theme: humility, call to give to God's work.

Mary: Luke 1.39-56
Theme: generosity of spirit, offering whole self to God.

Generosity: Tree of Jesse

Our lives are shaped, influenced and nurtured by those gone before us. As we prepare for the gift of the infant Jesus, Advent is a wonderful opportunity to look back at biblical ancestors and the stories they had to tell, reflecting on how they inspire us today.

In this Jesse Tree, we are reflecting on how generosity in many forms was lived out through a series of biblical characters, before the birth of Jesus.

As you take each character card, read the related bible verse and place it on the tree.

Thank God for these stories of generosity, and prayerfully reflect on how they might influence your life this week.

Memories of God's goodness

YOU WILL NEED:

- Jumbo coloured chalk*
- Table Salt
- Paper
- Funnel (if you have one)
- Glass Jar & Lid
- Super Glue (to seal the jar, adult use only)
- Ribbon

I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, ***'There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.'***

Acts 20:35

Acts 20:35 Paul speaks to the elders in Ephesus
In the book of Acts, Paul is teaching and instructs us to remember what Jesus said about being generous to others, *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."* By making fun memory jars we can be reminded of God's goodness and generosity.

Each colour of chalk will represent a different meaning. This activity encourages people to think ABOUT their own memories of God's goodness and generosity.

Memories of God's goodness

Pour out the table salt onto your piece of paper. Take one piece of chalk and roll it over the salt. Once the salt has been coloured, carefully fold your paper in half and pour the sand into the jar.

Pour each colour of sand into your jar and you will see layers form. Once you have completed each colour, seal the lid of the jar with glue and add a ribbon to finish off the activity.

Green Chalk

A time when you have known God provided for you

White Chalk

A time when you gave out of obedience to Jesus' invitation

Pink Chalk

A time you gave to celebrate

Blue Chalk

A time you were generous towards someone who was sad.

Yellow Chalk

A time you gave to show your gratitude

"Thank you God for showing me your generosity. Help me to remember your goodness and share what I have with others."

The Traditions of St Lucia

Photograph by Claudia Gründer

The feast of St Lucia on 13th December is celebrated in Scandinavia, and in particular, Sweden. The tradition dates back to the original story of Lucia, who delivered food to the persecuted Christians. According to the legends, St Lucia would secretly bring food to the Christians hiding in Roman catacombs under the city. Lighting her way with candles in a wreath on her head.

The name Lucy is derived from the Latin word lux, meaning light, and it is the light that is the focus of the celebrations.

The festival celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, good overcoming evil and the renewal of life, and it is meant to bring hope and light during the darkest time of the year.

As well as being the 'bearer of light', St Lucia's main offering was food. Part of the tradition of sharing food is the giving of gingerbread cookies and saffron buns to people .

Throughout Advent as we prepare for the coming of Jesus , we need to remember all that God has given to us , and that we too need to "give" as a sign of generosity. What is given to us, is for us to then give away in generosity to our brothers and sisters.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Copies of the refection sheet laminated
- Copies of the Activity sheet laminated.
- Tables to work on suitable for all ages

The activity:

- A selection of either homemade/shop bought gingerbread biscuits
- Ready mixed icing
- Paper plates
- Bowls/spoons
- Wipes
- Hand sanitiser
- Small bags to take away the biscuits
- Printed copies of the Saffron bun & gingerbread recipes to takeaway

St Lucia - Biscuit activity

Choose a Gingerbread biscuit to decorate, while you are decorating it, think about...

Who could you give this away to, as an act of generosity?

When you have finished decorating, please take the recipe card for the St Lucia Saffron buns or gingerbread. You could make these together as a family& then give them away to friends and neighbours.

Remember St Lucia and her acts of kindness and generosity.

Who will you choose to give them away to?

Do not forget to do good to others and share with them what you have. These are the sacrifices that please God.
Hebrews 13:16

Recipe: Gingerbread

Ingredients

- 100g salted butter
- 3 tbsp golden syrup
- 100g dark muscovado sugar
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tbsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 225g plain flour
- 50g icing sugar

STEP 1
Heat the butter, syrup and sugar together in a small pan until melted, stirring occasionally. Set aside to cool slightly.

STEP 2
Mix together the bicarb, ginger, cinnamon & flour in a large bowl. Pour in the buttery syrup mixture , stir to combine, then use your hands to bring together to form a dough. Add up to 1 tbsp of milk to combine if needed. The dough will be soft at this point, but it'll firm up in the fridge.

STEP 3
Put the dough on a sheet of baking parchment, shape into a rectangle, & lay another sheet of parchment on top of it. Roll the dough out to a thickness of ½cm. Transfer to a baking sheet to keep it flat, leaving the parchment in place, then chill in the fridge for 1 hr.

STEP 4
Heat the oven to 190C/170C fan/gas 5 , line a large baking sheet with more baking parchment. Remove the dough from the fridge , cut out shapes using cookie cutters

STEP 5
Place the shapes, spread apart, on the lined baking sheet, and bake for 10-12 mins. (Depending on the size of the cutters you use, they might need a few minutes more or less cooking in the oven). Leave to cool completely on the baking sheet.

STEP 6
Meanwhile, mix the icing sugar with 1-2 tbsp water – create a consistency that's thick and pipeable, not too thin or it will run. Decorate the cooled biscuits with the icing using a piping bag with a thin nozzle.

Recipe:
St Lucia Buns

INGREDIENTS

- 300ml whole milk
- 0.5g pack saffron
- 75g unsalted butter, cut into cubes
- 500g strong white bread flour
- 100g golden caster sugar
- 7g sachet fast-action yeast
- 1 large egg, beaten, plus extra for egg wash
- a little oil, for greasing
- 24 currants

STEP 1

Put the milk in a small pan gently heat until it's steaming. Use a pestle and mortar to grind the saffron into a powder. Add this to the pan of milk along with the butter. Swirl to melt the butter, then set aside until lukewarm.

STEP 2

In a large bowl, mix the flour, caster sugar, 1 tsp salt & yeast together. Make a well in the middle of the bowl, pour in the milk mixture along with the egg. Mix together to form a sticky dough, then turn out onto the work surface. Knead until smooth and elastic (this will take about 10 mins)or use a dough hook in mixer. Put the dough into a lightly oiled bowl and cover with oiled cling film. Set the bowl in a warm part of the house and allow to rise for about 1 hr until doubled in size.

STEP 3

Knock back the dough and divide into 12 equal portions. Keep the pieces covered with the oiled cling film while you make the rolls – this will stop the dough from drying out. Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, roll out into a 30cm-long strand. Roll up one end into the middle, turn over and roll the other end into the middle. This will form the dough into an S-shape. Place the buns on a large (or 2 smaller) parchment-lined baking tray. Once all the buns are made, lightly cover with oiled cling film and prove until almost doubled in size. While the buns prove, heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6.

STEP 4

When ready to bake, brush the buns with beaten egg and press a currant into the centre of each spiral. Put the trays in the oven and bake for around 15 mins. Allow to cool before serving. These are best eaten on the day they are made but will keep for a couple of days.

St Lucia Lights

Throughout Sweden on 13th December the feast of St Lucia or festival of lights takes place.
Lucia symbolises light and you will find
“Lucy lights” lit in most homes.

Light is very important to us.

Light is a necessity when darkness sets in.
Yet we often take light for granted not just the physical light around us but also the light that comes from within us.

While we can switch lights on, watch a beautiful sunrise, or enjoy a bright sunny day, it is important that the light of Christ lives in each of us.

In a world which can often seem dark, selfish and greedy, we have the opportunity to be a “Light”

Living out our faith and sharing the Light of Christ with others.

St Lucia Lights

The Display:

- A table covered with a black cloth
- A large white “Christ candle “
- Tealights
- Basket to hold the tealights
- You could create a small St Lucia crown from greenery with four small candles to display

Appendix

As an alternative you could create a “Pathway of light” by laying the tealights along an aisle in church * Please be aware of safety/fire hazards should you choose to do this.

The Activity:

- Copies of the refection card
- Tealights
- A bucket containing sand to use for safety /used tealights

St Lucia Lights

This Advent focus on generosity, of sharing that light with others

“Our acts of generosity and giving reveal God's light to the world”

Take a tealight & light it from the Christ candle.

As you do this prayerfully reflect on your own generosity and giving.

Remembering that we are each called to carry the light of Christ to a world in need.

Look for the opportunities to be a light in the darkness

Activity: Straw and Swaddling

You will need:

- Copies of the Straw & swaddling cards
- Copies of the Activity cards laminated

The Display:

- Choose an appropriate focal point
- A manger from a crib scene
- A Bible open at the reading
- Straw (available in a pet shop)
- Strips of plain cloth
- A small twig style tree or use the church Christmas tree

The Activity:

- Copies of the activity card
- The bible passage printed & cut into strips & hole punched
- Strips of plain cloth to tie round the straw
- Basket containing straw

Activity: Straw and Swaddling

Quietly spend some time thanking God for all he gives to us, as well as what gifts we have that we can freely share with others.

When you are ready wrap a small bunch of straw in a strip of plain cloth & take a bible verse.

Place it on the tree or take it home for your own Christmas tree as a reminder of the reality of the Christmas story and the poverty into which Jesus was born.

But especially Gods generosity in sending Jesus, the first and the best Christmas present,

The Gift of Hope.
Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!
2 Corinthians 9:15

Straw and Swaddling

God's gifts to us, the gift of Jesus, the gift of eternal life.

Throughout advent we spend time thinking about who we will buy gifts for, and which gift will be "Just right"

Take a moment to think about the people on your Christmas list.
Now take some time to pray for each of them...

We encourage you to reflect on:

God's gift to each one of us this Christmas...

The gift of His son.

This gift is freely available to everyone.

Print and cut out these verses

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! 2 Cor 9:15

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Stir-up Sunday

The following could be used for a short all age slot at the beginning of a service before children leave for groups, expanded as part of a longer all age talk or within a Childrens group session.

Aim

To encourage a generous Advent through Stir Up Sunday & making a Christmas pudding

YOU WILL NEED:

A large mixing bowl, Wooden spoons
The following ingredients all weighed &ready in separate bags.
Christmas pudding ingredients

- 75g currants
- 75g sultanas
- 50g mixed peel
- 25g glace cherries
- 85g soft brown sugar
- 85g suet
- 100g fresh breadcrumbs
- 1 tablespoon self-raising flour
- ½ teaspoon ground mixed spice
- 2 medium eggs
- 1 grated apple
- A little orange juice (can be added later)

Stir-up Sunday - Session

Talk

Begin by explaining that Stir up Sunday is always the last Sunday before Advent and it takes its name from the tradition of “Stirring up” the ingredients for a Christmas pudding. However, originally it had nothing to do with Christmas puddings but came from the special prayer or collect that is said in church at this time each year.

"Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of Thee be plenteously rewarded, through Jesus Christ our Lord".

Go on to explain that this is to help us think about getting ready and the meaning of advent, also to “Stir us up” to be generous, to do good things and share the real message of Jesus and the Christmas story with other people. Advent isn’t all about chocolate or even about making a Christmas present list!.....even though we might enjoy both!

Part of the tradition of making the stir up Sunday Christmas pudding is that everyone has a turn to stir the mixture and make a wish or a hope.

- It’s not a wish for yourself but for others.
- It’s a time to think about how we can be generous and share what we have. How could we help make the world be a better place for others?
- I wonder what you might wish/hope for when it’s your turn to stir the pudding?

Did you know?
A Christmas pudding is supposed to contain thirteen ingredients which represent Jesus and all his disciples, and that when you stir it you have to do it from east to west (right to left) which helps us to remember the three wise men who visited baby Jesus.
So, let's all make a Christmas pudding together. There are lots of different ingredients on the table, if we added only a few of these I wonder if it would it make a good Christmas pudding? Probably not because it needs all of them to become something really good. It's like everyone here, we are all like these ingredients, on our own we can each do good and kind things , but if we all work together we can do something really amazing!

The Christmas story changes everything because when Jesus came into the world he told us that love and caring for others is the most important thing, so I wonder what ingredients you might need to help others in their lives? Maybe... being kind, being generous, remembering to share, being thankful for all you have.

Invite children/families up to add the ingredients to the bowl and give the pudding a stir, ask them to think about being a good ingredient.

When everything has been added go on to explain that we have to allow the pudding to stand and wait to be cooked very slowly, and then it will keep until its ready to share with everyone at Christmas.

It does take time and we do have to wait but it helps us to remember the importance of being fruitful, of all working together, of sharing and being generous with what we have. That together we can make a difference to others.

Prayer
Lord God,
This Advent stir us up to remember that Christmas isn't about what we want or need. but about being generous and sharing what we have with others.
Amen

Jesse Tree Session

The Jesse Tree is an advent tradition that introduces Jesus' ancestor, and is named from Isaiah 11:1:

"A shoot will spring forth from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch out of his roots."

It is a way to tell the story of God from the Old Testament, create symbols to hang on Jesus' "family tree" and connect the advent season with the faithfulness of God across 4,000 years of history. The Jesse tree offers children and families a different way to discover the characters and stories of Advent as they prepare for Christmas.

This activity session links with the theme of Generous Advent and could be run alongside any of the Advent generosity prayer stations if you choose.

Here is a suggested outline for a Jesse Tree activity session that you can hold in your church or Sunday club, based around some of it symbols & characters.

If using as an activity morning, choose your time & date, advertise and be sure to give families plenty of notice so they can get it in their diaries! As this session links with the Advent generosity prayer stations you may wish to have an offering plate rather than charging per family.

The focus is only on six of the characters, you can choose to use the simple colour in decoration option or offer the activity version. If the station is manned then the story and meaning could be told , if not print out the *Context & I Wonder question and leave on the table for families to read themselves.

All the other colour in symbols could be offered for families to takeaway & complete at home for their own Jesse tree or to decorate the church tree on Advent Sunday.

Jesse Tree Session

YOU WILL NEED
· A Christmas tree or branch from a tree, in a pot which is well secured
· Add white fairy lights to the tree.
· The required materials for each of the six tables (see each station)
· If there are not enough volunteers for each table to explain/read the story , each of the readings could be printed out on a card and placed on the tables
*Please ensure the Bible storybook you choose is all age friendly. Good versions to use include - The Big Bible Storybook: Scripture Union, Children of God Storybook Bible: Archbishop Desmond Tutu

<u>A suggested Outline</u>
10.00-10.15am Welcome & Introduction to the morning
· Outline how the morning will run to those attending
· Begin by explaining the meaning of the Jesse tree & describe the activities that are available to take part in
**(Decide in advance whether you will decorate the tree that morning or the following day in the Advent service)*
· Explain at each Station there is an opportunity to make a decoration & or activity discover its meaning by sharing the story from a storybook bible and think more about Gods generosity to each of us.

10.15am Children/families move freely between the activity tables
11.30am To close the morning you could hang the decorations on the tree with a short simple act of worship/closing prayer, then finish with simple refreshments
Or
Invite families back for the Advent service when the tree will then be decorated.
The 6 stations:

1.Adam and Eve /Creation	Doing what is right & following God
2.Noah	Trusting in God and caring for his world
3.Abraham	Nothing is impossible with God
4.Joseph	Forgiving & feeding Gods people
5.Mary	Gods servant, love &Obedience
6.Jesus	Gods generosity to us

Station 1

Adam & Eve **Tree Symbol: An apple** **Genesis 3:**

Context: Not simply doing what we want but doing what is right & following God.
Adam & Eve stopped trusting in God's goodness and instead did what was wrong, we need to remember all that God provides for us and care for his world.

I wonder: How we could do what is right and share what we have with others?

YOU WILL NEED
· The story printed out or available in one of the suggested books
· A print out of the Jesse tree decoration to colour
· Selection of colouring pencils

Or Activity: Apple decoration
· Red/green felt
· Ribbon
· Cut out an apple shape and two green leaf shapes & glue on
· Add a ribbon loop to the back to hang

Station 2

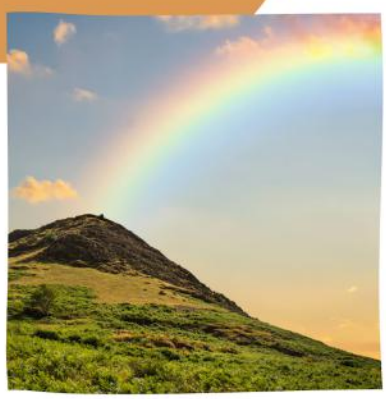
Noah **Symbol: A rainbow** **Genesis 6**

Context: Trusting in Gods faithfulness & promise for us all
The story of the flood shows how Noah trusted God and did what was asked of him. He believed God's promise that he would take care of his family and all the animals in the ark. We need to trust in that promise which is for us all, and be willing to be generous and help others too.

I wonder: How you could be generous and help others?

YOU WILL NEED
· The story printed out or available in one of the suggested books
· A print out of the decoration to colour
· Colouring pencils

Or Activity: Hanging rainbow
· Cut a paper plate in half
· stick lines of coloured gummed paper squares to make the rainbow effect
· Add cotton wool clouds on each end
Add a string loop to hang it from



Station 3

Abraham **Symbol Stars** **Genesis 15**

God promised Abraham that his family would number even more than all the stars in the sky.

Context: Nothing is impossible if we trust God
Abraham always had faith in God and was willing to do whatever he asked, he knew nothing was impossible with God. God always keeps his promises and Abraham trusted him. God blessed Abraham and his children so they could be a blessing to the people of the world.

I wonder: How you could be a blessing to others?

YOU WILL NEED
· The story printed out or available in one of the suggested books
· A print out of the decoration to colour
· Colouring pencils

Or Activity: A star scene
· Cut squares of black card
· Add Abraham character/wording *see appendix
· Add small self-adhesive silver star stickers to create a starry sky effect
· Punch a hole and add thread for a hanger

Station 4

Joseph **Symbol Multi coloured coat** **Genesis 41/45**

Context: God took care of his people through Joseph who fed his people

Even though Joseph brothers had tried to get rid of him, Joseph forgave them and he also made sure that everyone had enough to eat. Sometimes we want everything for ourselves just like Josephs brothers but God wants us to share what we have with others. God doesn't want his people to go hungry.

I wonder: What you could do to help feed others?

YOU WILL NEED
· The story printed out or available in one of the suggested books
· A print out of the decoration to colour
· Colouring pencils

Or Activity: A bunch of wheat decoration
· Bunch of dried wheat (available in florists /garden centres)
· Sellotape
· Ribbon for the hanger
· Take a few ears of wheat and make it into a small bunch
· Secure either with Sellotape or an elastic band
· Wrap the ribbon around the elastic band to hide
then tie to form a loop to hang it from.

Station 5

Mary **Symbol white Rose** **Luke 1 :26**

Context: Gods servant, love & Obedience

God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus even though she must have been frightened she obeyed God, she loved and had faith in God and knew he was calling her to do something very special to be the mother of Jesus. God calls us all do something special, to care for others.

I wonder: What you could do to show that you care for others

YOU WILL NEED
· The story printed out or available in one of the suggested books
· A print out of the decoration to colour
· Colouring pencils
. Ribbon to hang it

Or Activity A white tissue paper flower decoration
· Use four sheets of tissue paper cut into 4" by 6" rectangles on top of each other.
· Then concertina fold lengthways
· Round off the edges using scissors
· Tie thin ribbon/string in the middle tightly
· Then gently fluff out each layer
· Tie string into a loop and hang

Station 6

Jesus **Symbol Baby in swaddling clothes** **Luke 2**

Context: Thanks for Gods generosity to us

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a smelly stable, wrapped in cloth and placed in a manger surrounded by all the animals. He didn't need to be born in a fancy place or have expensive clothes. This baby was a light that would light up the whole world for each one of us. God was so generous in giving us his son, we need to remember to be a light to others too.

I Wonder: What you might do this Christmas to help people not as fortunate as yourself?

YOU WILL NEED
· The story printed out or available in one of the suggested books
· A print out of the decoration to colour
· Colouring pencils

Or Jesus in swaddling clothes
· Small square of white felt/fabric
· Small peg figure
· Glue
· Ribbon to hang the decoration

Appendix

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