



General Resource Ideas for Christmas

Sheep sponge painting (very splodgy!)

What you will need:

- Cheap sponges from £ shops cut up for little hands. Squirt paint onto lids of ice cream boxes to reduce waste.
- black paper or card
- white, black paint
- bobbly eyes (optional) care re adult supervision or cut out paper eyes
- pva glue
- cotton buds

Children have fun splodging paint onto paper. White body first, then black circle on top to resemble sheep. Use glue on end of cotton bud to place eyes in position. Use paint on cotton bud to do nose shape.

Rock-a-bye Manger

What you will need:

- Paper plates (preferably with a brown side as well as white)
- Shredded paper or torn brown tissue paper for straw
- PVA glue and spreaders
- Baby Jesus template and text
- Gold or silver pipe cleaners or tinsel for halo



Fold plate in half with brown side facing out. (manger naturally rocks!). Children can apply glue freely to front side of plate and press on 'straw'. Attach 'halo' with sticky tape to back of head. Then stick on baby and glue text to back of plate.



Heart shaped bags

You will need,

- Two circles of card (your choice of colour) approx 10cm diameter but can be altered to suit
- A strip of matching coloured card for 'handle'
- Sticky tape or stapler and PVA glue for attaching decoration
- Decorative trimmings, tinsel, sequins, coloured shapes - whatever scraps you have!

First fold each circle in half.

Take one circle and slot it into the other folded circle to form a heart shaped 'bag'

Fix into place with a single staple on each side (or sticky tape) At same time of stapling, you can attach the card 'handle' linking each side of the bag.

The 'bag' is now ready to decorate.

For Christmas you could fill with small sweets or filled with shredded paper to resemble straw and a card cut out baby Jesus to put inside with a text.

Children can decorate these with tissue paper, stickers, or snippets of coloured paper or fabric scraps, sponge paint etc for a take home gift. Ideal for Mothers' Day, Valentines, birthdays etc

Paper Plate Angel

What you will need:

- Paper plates
- Card for face
- Shredded paper or tissue paper for hair
- Gold/silver tinsel or pipe cleaners for halo
- Doilies
- Gold/silver paint (form ELC) with PVA glue mixed in if glittering
- Glitter
- Elastic for hanging (optional)

Fold plate in half, white side out. Decorate with paint and glitter. Add circle for head. For face, draw eyes, mouth, attach hair and a halo of tinsel with glue or stapler.



Rocking Donkey

This is a popular craft for Easter or Christmas. It is a very effective result but offers opportunities for free painting for young children. Using paint rollers and lids or saucers onto which paint is squirted is more economical too and children love to use rollers - a good investment for the craft cupboard.

You will need:

Paper plate (make sure the finish of your plate will absorb paint)

Card cut out for head & saddle

String or 'rope' for tail

Sticky tape to attach

Grey paint

Rollers for painting (or sponge pieces)

Wobbly eyes (or cut out card eyes)

Small trimmings of fabric/ fur for fringe

Optional sticker for text

Braid, ribbon or coloured paper for reins

- Fold paper plate in half so it 'rocks'
- Get children to paint both sides with grey paint also paint head cut out
- Staple head onto plate
- Attach eyes, fringe, reins and tasselled tail with runny PVA glue (sets clear)
- When grey paint on plate is dry enough, add saddle cut out.
- When completed, donkey should 'rock' gently to and fro.



Note:

Once you have seen how well a paper plate rocks, you can develop the idea for all sorts of craft ideas - pecking birds, rocking sheep, cow, birds etc

Christmas spice pudding picture

Add Christmas spice mixture to paint for a festive smell to your pudding pictures!



Advent

Many groups make the most of the opportunities for starting off on the journey and preparations with the recognition of Advent. There is of course the idea of 'waiting' for the special king to arrive and the opportunities for thinking about waiting.



Godly Play has a story session for older children (the essence of which could be used to inspire toddler themes with the mystery of Christmas and a journey as we make our way to Bethlehem)



Dwelling on the preparations and waiting, can help families focus on the real meaning of Christmas when all around, we see glitz and tinsel in the shops!

Advent Calendar (see separate info re Advent Calendar Sheet). Use gold star stickers to mark off the dates or mark with a cross.

The delicious Divine Milk Chocolate Advent Calendar was made with the finest Fairtrade cocoa beans from Kuapa Kokoo, a cooperative of 45,000 cocoa farmers in Ghana, West Africa.

By guaranteeing a fair and stable price for their beans, Divine makes a real difference to the lives of Kuapa Kokoo's farmers and means they can plan for a better future. Choosing this Divine Advent Calendar means you can not only enjoy a special chocolate countdown to Christmas, you will also be helping to make change happen far away in Ghana.

Every year the calendar has a beautiful new illustration of the nativity. The Divine banner across the top of the calendar and the numbers are picked out in stunning Divine gold. The reverse of the calendar brings extra delights for children, featuring the story of a Kuapa Kokoo producer as well as a fun activity for children to complete. A delicious Divine milk chocolate heart is hidden behind every door.

See website pages for **Christingle** info and details of the Christingle Cube and links to Children's Society website.



St Nicholas Day is 6th December. See website pages on Gift Giving and St Nicholas Traditions.

Christmas Clipart

See this site for excellent images to build the Christmas Story - available in colour or black & white to colour in. Ideal for making laminated templates for re-telling with visual aids,

<http://ngfl.northumberland.gov.uk/christmas/christmasindex.htm>

Symbolic aids to worship and reflection through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

The Wreath

The Advent wreath almost certainly came to UK from Germany, along with many other signs of Christmas, the best known of which is the Christmas tree. It is likely that German Christians transformed a pagan winter custom of using circles of evergreen to symbolise the hope of new life at the end of dark winter days, by addition of four candles marking the four Sundays of advent. This seems to have been used in Lutheran households shortly after the Reformation. The tradition has been developed further with the addition of a central white candle to be lit at Christmas, marking the birth of Jesus.

The Crib

The crib is probably the most familiar: very many churches will display a crib scene somewhere in or around the building over the Christmas period. The tradition is attributed to St Francis, who sought to make the Christmas Mass come alive for his followers in the middle Ages.

The Jesse Tree.

The Jesse tree, perhaps the least known of the three, emerged as a way of depicting the family history of Jesus in medieval manuscripts. It was taken up by other artists, particularly stained glass makers and is now found widely in medieval glass and later windows in Europe.



My Advent by George and Angie Allen. Pub by Kevin Mayhew . £5.99 - a rich resource for Advent. (Also My Lent)

Have You Seen Christmas?

It's Christmas Eve, the snow is falling and the lovable scruffy dog named 'Christmas' has gone missing. Two children search desperately for the little hound, asking people where they can find Christmas. When they find their canine companion, they also find the real meaning of Christmas



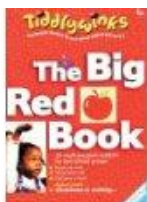
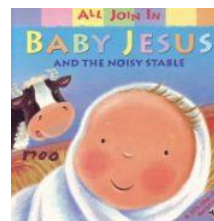
Vicki is well established as a Barnabas author with her range of popular Easy Ways titles including *Easy Ways to Christmas Plays*, *Easy Ways to Seasonal Plays*, *Easy Ways to Bible fun for the very young*, *Easy Ways to Seasonal fun for the very young* and *Easy to say... easy to play!* with its accompanying CD. She is also the author of *Knock, Knock! Who's there?* and *Open the Door*, seasonal board books for the under fives for Christmas and Easter respectively.

'Have you Seen Christmas?' is a storybook adaptation of a play written by Vicki, which first appeared in her book *Story Plays for Christmas* in 2005.

Vicki is local and was our speaker on storytelling and together times at our Crowborough Conference in March 2005.

This title may be more suitable for older children but the 'Knock Knock' lift the flap nativity storybook book is ideal for reading with under fives.

'All Join in Jesus and the Noisy Stable' (Pub by Lion ISBN 978-0-7459-6068-5 £3.99 A lovely board book. Other titles available.



A basic must from Tiddlywinks Scripture Union.

Put Christ back into Christmas
www.putchristbackintochristmas.org.uk

See website for more details. Car stickers and other resources to remind people of the central reason for Christmas.

Nursery Rhyme Nativity - a delightful resource for Christmas services by Alison Hedger. www.musicsales.com. Music scores and lyrics and a CD to play. Simple adaptation of nursery rhyme lyrics.

Simple biscuits

Use play dough cutters in farm animal shapes to make nativity theme biscuits. Stained Glass window biscuits - lay window shaped biscuit mould onto non-stick baking sheet on oven tray. Cut holes in shaped biscuit and pop a boiled sweet in the holes. As the biscuit cooks, the sweet melts, spreads and hardens on cooling creating window glass effect.

Play time

Convert the toy barn or farm into a nativity scene for children to play with rather than just looking at a delicate one. Early Learning Centre plastic figures are great for children to pick up and play with (not too precious to touch!)

Knitted Nativity figures - some gifted knitters with time to spare could knit a set using the pattern in Jean Greenhowe's 'Christmas Special' book no 507. Price £4.99



Jean Greenhowe has now included a pattern for a **donkey** in a 40 page 'Christmas Treasures- 40 page special' book. Probably too late for this year unless you have team of gifted knitters!



A response from a group in London-

'Thanks for this great idea! We are planning a "Glitter and Glue Nativity" one Saturday afternoon, where we make lots of crafts (older siblings come along, too), dress up and join in telling the Christmas story. We're in a multi-cultural, multi-faith area and it's exciting to see children from many backgrounds singing Glory to God!'

The use of candles or Christmas scents might not be part of your church's young children and adults alike!



Three purple, one pink (Mary Candle) and the large white one in the centre is the 'Christ candle'.

Explaining the tradition /symbolism of the coloured candles on an Advent wreath, or referring to liturgical colours and their meaning can be inspiring for grown ups and children but perhaps in a toddler group setting, we can give the wreath our own symbolism - perhaps the four candles to represent an angel, a donkey, a star and Mary (the pink one) finishing on Christmas Day with the white Christ candle.

Safety note - keep berries and poisonous ivy, laurel and holly from reach of young children and of course, don't leave candles unattended! (goes without saying!)

After lighting the candle each week and explaining its symbolism, you could give each child a little picture card with the angel, donkey, star or Mary for them to take home. (Clip art is useful here!) Explain that they need to come next time to hear the next part of the story and to collect the next picture. At the end, they could staple together their little pictures to make a four picture book reminding them of the Christmas events which they can retell to Mummy in their own words.

Frankincense and **Myrrh** can be bought as a fragrant oil or perfume, pot pourri or candles/tea lights to appeal to the sense of smell as well as eating seasonal goodies! (check re allergies)

Old Christmas Cards

Never underestimate the value of old Christmas cards with Nativity scenes and images. Useful for images for 'fuzzy boards', puzzles and crafts.

'Prayer Tree' - similar to a 'Jesse Tree'. - Hang star shaped cut outs made from Christmas cards from a Christmas Tree or use to decorate the room. Encourage families from your group to write their name on the back (or maybe a little 'thank you' or 'please' prayer from the child) Remember to inform the wider church that these stars each represent a family or child attending the PT group.

Advent Calendars with Nativity scenes - have them in your session or make your own with colouring and numbers to cross off as children make their way through the days.

Shoebbox Appeals

Young families seem to enjoy this activity as it helps to remind children (and grown ups) of those who have very little material things and it is something we can do to help whilst praying for the child who receives the Christmas gifts.

Songs

A popular adaptation of a nursery rhyme tune for Christmas (to tune of Mary had a little lamb!)

'Christmas is a happy time,
Happy time, happy time
Christmas is a happy time.....
Because its Jesus' birthday'

Christmas Parties

Can be great fun but can involve a lot of preparation. Keeping things simple is the key together with a team approach. If you don't have a team, you can often recruit or delegate tasks for the event.

Timing of your Christmas party is an important part of planning the celebrations, especially if children are likely to need a daytime snooze or get irritable around lunchtime!

'Less is more!'

Children think it's a party with simple additions like streamers or balloons. Celebrations work well if there is a little sit down snack ready plated with parental supervision. - mini sandwiches, satsuma slices, cheese cubes and hoola hoops often mean its 'party time in the eyes of a child'

Decorating the tables with seasonal coloured paper cloths and having a simple centre pieces can be really effective. An easy idea is to use flower pots (we found some red ones from IKEA which can be used again) Fill the pot with tinsel (or get children to help in advance) having first secured two or three helium balloons to the inside of the pot with tape. Attach gold stars to the ribbon of



the balloons. If you don't have helium, you could make a star on a stick and add twirling ribbon.

Safety

As with all activities, we must consider the safety aspects - garden canes on balloons or the specially made plastic rods supplied for balloons can still present a hazard for toddlers. Also the choking hazards of certain types of sweets which toddlers could swallow whole.

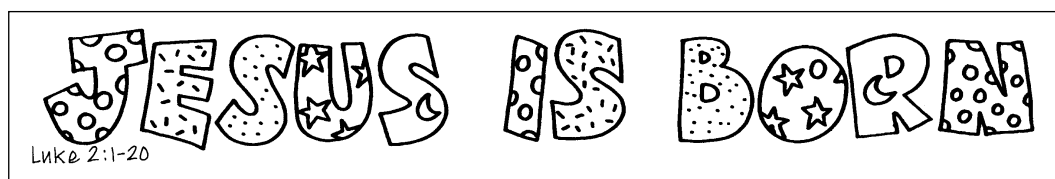
Christmas Gifts

Rather than spending vast amounts on end of term gifts, which some groups can't afford, why not give the family a pot of prayer bubbles wrapped in pretty tissue paper with a ribbon. Not all mums and dads appreciate copious quantities of sweets and sticky chews, so this is rather a nice alternative (as long as the toddler doesn't decide to drink the liquid!)

Storytelling

Once again, less is more and keeping it short and visual is the key. If you have access to an overhead projector (OHP) this can help keep the attention of children and parents. Images enhance the words. Children and adults may look rather than listen!

Puppets, a Christmas story-sack or box of books, nativity figures that can be handled, and old Christmas cards made into a matching or sorting game can help in the Christmas message during the Advent sessions.



Children's corner

If you have a spare corner in church, why not see if it is possible to provide a children's corner. Beautifully laid out children's toys and books with a biblical significance are provided for children to touch and play with as an alternative to Postman Pat and tired, ragged old things.

Colourful cushions, carpet squares (free from a local carpet suppliers), shoeboxes covered in gold paper to contain people figures, building blocks in rainbow colours etc; a nativity set and Noah's ark to play with... it invites children and adults to 'come and see! And as we know, we all learn through play.

Jesse Tree Devotions

This is a way of marking each day in Advent with a reading and hanging a little decoration on a 'tree', and is a visual representation of Jesus' genealogy dating back to the father of David who was Jesse.

The symbols span from Creation, through the Old Testament into the New and the final week includes John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Mary, and the birth of Jesus. Look on Google Images to see lots of versions. Also books and versions for children.



'Jesse Tree Devotions - A Family Activity for Advent'

By Marilyn S. Breckenridge (from Amazon) Pub/ Augsburg Fortress US

Opportunities to offer Christmas services

Your group may not have a bible story each week but you could offer a Christmas service in your church.

There are so many resources out there for Christmas ideas with this age group. What a wonderful opportunity to share the Good News with families you welcome throughout the year.

See also Bob Hartman's '**Lion Storyteller Christmas Book**' - Traditional Tales from around the world.

www.childrenssociety.org.uk/get+involved/christingle

Christingle Cube - describes the symbolism of the Christingle.

More info on our website re Christingles

Look out for other downloadable resources from the Children's Society and any free booklets.

Posada.

See separate website pages on planning a posada

