

An Advent Service for Non-Church Young Families



1. Welcome at the door

If possible, this could be done by two older children, supervised by their parents or other adults.

People are given big, coloured, sticky label badges for their coats or jumpers on which the welcoming children write the names of the people who come to the service. The badges are worn throughout the service and the snacks afterwards.

Perhaps carols can be playing very quietly in the background throughout the service up until the time when everyone comes together for the lessons and carols part.

2. Craft work (20 minutes?)

Series of craft stations in the church / room. e.g.



- ◇ Making angel mobiles out of card, with lots of glitter
- ◇ Decorating plain Christmas baubles
- ◇ Making a joint junk stable and crib

At each station, there should be space to move around freely and chatter openly. The conversations and new friendships are part of the value of the service.



The angels and baubles can be taken home after the service.

The stable and crib are brought to a central place – perhaps the communion table. The angels can be placed beside this and the baubles placed as decorations around the scene.

One or two older children or adults are at each craft station explaining how the activity links to the Christmas story.

NB Starting with this activity makes it easier for those who come late to join a craft station and fit right in without much embarrassment. It also provides a gentle introduction to the nativity story for those who are unfamiliar with it or who feel embarrassed at being in the church in this way – and perhaps for the first time.



3. Brief time for lessons and carols

All come together in the sanctuary, or in the same or another room, for a 10-minute version of the lessons and carols service.

If you have an Advent wreath or use Advent candles as part of your Advent traditions, begin by lighting the appropriate number of Advent candles for the week in which you are holding the service. Explain why you are doing this.

Perhaps a large rug could be provided for little children to sit on if there is no carpet in the sanctuary or room.

- * A traditional reading is read aloud from a children's version of the Bible
- * A well-known carol relating to the reading is sung
- * A second traditional reading is read aloud from a children's version of the Bible
- * A second well-known carol relating to the reading is sung

NB The traditional Christmas story is not as well-known as it was, so take nothing for granted and keep it very simple.

NB Decide whether to use words on a screen or to print sheets with the words of the carols and readings. If adults are trying to juggle young children, sheets are better than hymn

books and Bibles, and they can be taken away.

4. A brief time of prayer



NB Praying is not as common or natural to many people as it once was – including saying prayers with children before they go to bed – so take nothing for granted and keep it very simple. For example:

- Children are asked to close their eyes and are given a piece of fruit or other food to eat by their parent or other adult. They are asked to guess what it is.
- All are then invited to pause and think about those who may not have anything to eat this Christmas.
- Then a brief prayer about that issue.
- Children are then invited to light a tea candle, under supervision (battery operated versions are available), and to think of family members or friends that they won't see this Christmas.
- Then a brief prayer asking for Jesus' light to shine in the lives of those people this Christmas.
- Then close with a children's version of the Lord's Prayer.

NB This prayer is not as well-known as it was, so have a child-friendly version on screen or on a sheet for the older children and adults to read.



5. A hunt for the 'missing' nativity figures

These have been hidden before the families arrive. The organisers have to know who the figures represent and what part they play in the Christmas story. As they are found and brought to the stable a couple of older children or adults are there to receive them and supervise placing them at the scene.



As part of this, those older children or adults also explain who the figures are and the part they play in the Christmas story.



6. Around the stable, all sing the final carol, Away in a manger



7. Finally, a simple blessing and invitation to stay for refreshments

This is a time for sharing festive fare and friendly conversation. That may be enough for some people who come, and so it should be respected.

NB If people in the church like baking, they could be asked beforehand to make treats for this time.

NB If people make traditional Christmas treats, their significance for Christmas could be explained to people as they choose them.

Other things could also be considered for making available during this 'free' time.

Consider having simple but colourful invitation slips made for giving to people to invite them to other Advent and Christmas services. These could be designed and made by people in the church as part of their support for the service.



Consider a station for making Advent chains. Families can create a paper chain with Bible verses on each paper link to help them stay focused on Jesus as they count down to

Christmas Day.

You will need:

- ⇒ Pre-cut strips of red and green paper, long enough to be looped into links for a paper chain
- ⇒ Pens or markers
- ⇒ A list of Bible verses, one for each day from the day of the service until Christmas Day
- ⇒ Staplers or tape

Write each day's Bible reference on a strip of paper, then staple or tape the first one into a loop. Feed the next day's paper through the first loop and fasten the ends together to create the chain. Repeat until all the strips are in the chain. Families can hang the chain up at home and then tear one loop off the chain each day of Advent, reading it together.



Consider a photo shoot station. At this station, children and can dress up to create a nativity picture. This is a lot of fun for younger children, and it creates a keepsake of the evening. The parents and other adults will have cameras on their mobiles and other devices.

You will need:

- ⇒ Long pieces of fabric to wrap over participants' clothes or simple costumes that can be put on over clothing (some bathrobes are OK for this)
- ⇒ Hay bales, if possible
- ⇒ A blue or black backdrop with stars painted on it
- ⇒ Stuffed sheep (and other barnyard animals)
- ⇒ Shepherds' staffs (tree branches can work for these)
- ⇒ A cradle, if possible (a wicker basket on top or an upturned wooden box can work for this)
- ⇒ A doll to represent the baby, Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes