

Christmas Resources

Thank you for using our Christmas resources in your church. We hope that they bless and encourage your congregation, whether they're hearing about Jesus' birth for the first time or the 100th time. We pray that as you explore together the radical hospitality at the heart of the Christmas story, people will be challenged to consider their response to Emmanuel, God with us.

Home for Good

Home for Good is a UK-wide charity with a huge vision: a home for every child who needs one. We want every child to have a stable, loving home where they can thrive. We know that for children in care, it's crucial to find the right placement at the right time - whether that's a short-term foster placement in an emergency, a long-term foster placement or a new adoptive family.

Currently, this isn't always possible. In the UK there is an urgent need for 7,000 more foster families and there are not enough people coming forward to adopt children who wait the longest for adoption - children over the age of four, with additional needs, from black and minority ethnic communities and who are part of a sibling group.

Could your church give a gift to help many more people make room for vulnerable children?

Your church's gift will make a big difference for us as we help many more people make room for children in care.

Thousands of the most vulnerable children in our country are still waiting for someone to make room for them. Many of them live with the trauma of neglect and abuse. Home for Good wants to help as many children as possible to thrive in the loving family that's right for them. With your help, we can make this a reality.

Gifts like your church's Christmas offering changed Thomas'* first Christmas.

Taken into care shortly after he was born, he needed a foster family while his social worker found an adoptive family for him.

Robert and Sarah felt that their family was complete with their three birth children, until Robert saw a film by Home for Good. He and Sarah read the Home for Good book and were challenged to consider whether they could make room in their home for a vulnerable child.

They became foster carers when their youngest child turned two, and Thomas came to live with them for eight months. On his first Christmas, Thomas awoke to find his own stocking, presents under the tree, and an excited family ready to shower him with love.

Since Thomas moved to his forever family, Robert, Sarah and the children have been looking forward to welcoming the next child. Sarah says,



“ We are ready – the bedroom is ready; the cupboards are full of warm clothes and blankets and toys, and we are looking forward to sharing this Christmas with whoever comes through the door. We hope to share with them some of the love we feel so fortunate to have. ”

*Names have been changed

£75 could help towards setting up a peer-led support group for foster carers and adoptive parents.

£250 could enable us to respond to 10 people through our enquiry line about fostering or adopting and send them an information pack, to support them on their journey towards providing a loving home for a child.

£500 could train a group of children’s and youth leaders from different churches to help make their groups accessible and welcoming to fostered or adopted children, and to equip them to be part of the support network for the child.

Paying in donations

Online: Give online at homeforgood.org.uk/give

BACS:

Account: CAF Bank

Sort Code: 40-52-40

Account Number: 00029458

Please drop us an email at info@homeforgood.org.uk so we know to look out for it.

Cheque: Send a cheque made payable to ‘Home for Good’ to 176 Copenhagen Street, London, N1 0ST.

We hope that you find our resources helpful. Do let us know if there’s any other way we can support you. We are praying for you and your church this Christmas.



Ideas for your service

Before the service

Play Home for Good's version of "In the Bleak Midwinter", performed by Cathy Burton:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/album/in-bleak-midwinter-all-i-can/id1065481145>

Welcome

Model a greeting that welcomes everybody. Invite your congregation to welcome one another informally and inclusively.

Idea: Write 'Happy Christmas' in different languages on your screen or in your newsletter, and ask the congregation to see if they can find someone in church that speaks that language.

Songs

Many traditional Christmas hymns have a theme of welcome and invitation. You could include:

- Joy to the World, the Lord is Come!
 - O Come, All Ye Faithful
 - O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
 - O Holy Night
-

Choir

To the tune of "*In the Bleak Midwinter*"

In the Bleak Midwinter, far away from home
You huddle on a dusty floor,
Cold and all alone.
Tears have fallen, tear on tear, fear on fear
In the bleak midwinter, not so far from here.

Our God was once in your shoes,
a child far from home
Displaced, at risk, impoverished,
For him there was no room.
In the bleak midwinter a makeshift place sufficed,
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

He was once a refugee, now the King of all,
Tells us we must welcome you,
Will we heed his call?
Escapees and refugees, whether here or whether
there
Motherless and fatherless, need our loving care.

What can I do now, at this time
of Christmas cheer?
If you need a friend, then you'll be welcome here.
If you need a champion, I will speak for you.
My voice, my hands, my heart, my home
I'll do all I can do.

Gift

"Strange Christmas" is a resource you can give away at your Christmas service. Inspired by Krish's best-selling book 'God is Stranger', it is designed to help everyone who comes to your service consider the meaning of Christmas and its radical message for today.

Visit homeforgood.org.uk/christmas to order your copies before 20 November.



Christmas Sermon

Welcome for the stranger

by Krish Kandiah

Based on the familiar words of Luke 1 and 2, the sermon explores the radical hospitality at the heart of the nativity. You can adapt these notes to develop a sermon that is appropriate for your church setting.

There are three main points:

1. The Christmas story has hospitality at its heart
2. Jesus' life is a witness of welcome
3. We can become people of welcome

Reading

Luke 2: 1-20

Introduction

Many of us have heard the Christmas story countless times. Every school nativity play, carol service and advent calendar, tells and re-tells the story.

The story is so familiar to us and yet, at its heart, it is so strange.

In this narrative we find a collection of people – many of whom don't know one another – who find themselves in a peculiar place at a strange time. They are all faced with the same question: will they show hospitality? Will they step into the unknown, or choose to cling to the familiar?

As we explore this story again, let's seek to understand and grapple with its strangeness, and consider what it means for us in our lives today.

1. The Christmas story has hospitality at its heart

Consider Mary:

- She is a nobody, an insignificant teenage girl, and yet God chooses her and invites her to welcome His very Self – how strange!
- Mary agrees to His plan, submits to His ways, welcomes His Son, despite what it will cost her
- She is at significant risk of losing everything, of being excluded from society and cut off from everyone, and yet she humbly welcomes Jesus

Consider Joseph:

- He is faced with shame and ridicule, and yet still decides to welcome Mary and the baby, even though they will likely be shunned by society
- Joseph goes on to care for and raise Jesus, including Him in His family, even though He is not Joseph's birth child



Consider Mary and Joseph:

- In the most private of moments, they welcome strangers: shepherds, despite their physically unclean state, and the magi, despite their spiritually unclean state
- They make space for the outsiders even though they have nothing themselves. Despite being in a mucky, dingy stable, their 'home' and hearts are open and welcoming
- They must become refugees as they flee Herod's soldiers, leaving behind everything in order to protect their baby

Consider Herod:

- In contrast to Mary and Joseph, we see someone of political, social and economic power, who initiates infanticide to protect his position
- He has no room for the stranger or for the strange
- He has no welcome for Jesus

2. Jesus' life is a witness of welcome

Through Jesus' birth God is no longer a stranger to us. He is Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'. The great God of the universe, the One who created the cosmos, the King of kings and Lord of lords, came to earth as a baby in a shed. The story of Jesus' birth sets him amongst the poor, the unclean and the unwelcome. He limits Himself to human flesh, becoming one the most vulnerable of society. A newborn baby. An illegitimate child. A refugee.

Through Jesus' life He stands with the oppressed and the outsiders; the sick and the separated; the last, the least and the lost. He, who came to teach us about being welcoming, was time and again the least welcomed. He was hunted by Herod, deserted by his disciples, crucified by the crowd, and yet, in His life, Jesus showed welcome to everyone He met.

Through Jesus' death He welcomes sinners. He willingly sacrifices Himself, taking on the sins of humanity and the punishment that we all deserve, to ensure that we can be reconciled with God and welcomed into His family. Because of Jesus' death on a cross, we can have a relationship with God. God sent His Son to be born as a child and to die at the hands of soldiers so that we can know Him today.

3. We can become people of welcome

As we look to the example of Mary and Joseph, and the ultimate example of our Lord Jesus, we are compelled to respond. The Christmas story is packed with radical and risky hospitality.

Could we be like Mary and wholeheartedly welcome God into our lives, submitting to His will for us, despite what it might cost?

Could we be like Joseph and willingly commit to loving and welcoming those who need it, perhaps even a child who is not ours by birth?

Could we be like both Mary and Joseph and open our hearts and welcome strangers, embracing those who were unfamiliar?

Could we be like Jesus and walk with the unclean, fight for the oppressed, restore the broken, advocate for the vulnerable, even though we may be rejected?

Will we receive God's invitation and welcome Him into our lives? And will we in turn welcome the stranger?



Children's Church ideas

Story

1) Video: "The Unexpected Christmas" www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY

This fictional story shows God deciding how Jesus should enter the world. The phrase "they won't be expecting that" is repeated throughout the video, underlining the strangeness of God's plan. It shows how God chose the ordinary, lowly and unexpected people to be part of Jesus' life. He welcomed those who were usually not welcome.

2) Story 1: "He's here" from the Jesus Storybook Bible.

This version of the story encapsulates the enormous heart of God being brought to Earth in the form of a small baby.

3) Story 2: "Jesus' Christmas Party" by Nicholas Allen. Buy the book here:

www.amazon.co.uk/Jesus-Christmas-Party-Nicholas-Allan/dp/1849415269 or buy the script to act it out here: www.starshine.co.uk/jesus-christmas-party

This story shows that welcoming Jesus was a surprise to the innkeeper – and came at a cost. It could be acted out in an impromptu way, or there is a full scripted musical available.

Discussion

Following a story, emphasise the people and the place that God chose to welcome his Son to Earth. You could use a nativity scene or book, or print and laminate a picture of each person and place:

- Mary and Joseph: they were ordinary people who loved God, and He chose them to be the parents of the Son of God.
- The baby: God could have chosen to send His Son at any age, but Jesus came to Earth as a small baby who needed protection.
- The stable: it was cold and smelly, and we wouldn't expect royalty to be born there, but it was the place that God chose, and a place that the other guests could visit.
- Shepherds: God sent his angels to tell shepherds about Jesus' birth. The shepherds were seen as ordinary, smelly, and unimportant, but they got to meet the Son of God!
- Wise men: these men were not welcome in Bethlehem because they were different, but God helped them to travel a long way, following a star, to meet his Son on Earth.

God chose ordinary and unimportant people to meet his Son for the first time on Earth – what an honour! It's so different to what we might have expected. God also asks us to welcome people who are seen as unimportant or different to us, because that is what He did and continues to do!



Craft

Invitations

- For younger children under 3 or 4, decorate pre-printed invitations (see Appendix 1) with pens, stickers, glitter, etc. Ask them to think about someone that they would want to spend time with and encourage them to use their invitations to do that!
- Children over 4 years old can make invitations from blank paper or a template (see Appendix 2) to give to someone from school or a club, who they wouldn't usually invite. They can choose what to invite them to; for example, a game of football, dinner at their house, or a trip to the farm. Alternatively, they could use the invitation to invite Jesus into their heart.

Party

Draw a long rectangular table on a piece of A3 paper, or across a number of A4 pages. Encourage the children to think of, or ask God for, someone who they would want to feel included and loved by them and by God. Ask the children to draw that person at the table in a seat. You can pray for the people at the table, as well as put the picture up on the wall to talk about next week.

Prayer

Thank you, God, that you love us all so much and that you want everyone to be included and to know your love. Help us to be like you by welcoming and showing love to people who others think are not important. Amen.



Appendix 1

You are my friend

You are my friend

Appendix 2

Dear

I would like to invite you to

From

Dear

I would like to invite you to

From