

Thank you for choosing to use our Christmas resources this year. Along with our new short film, we have compiled some additional suggestions below to help shape your service this year. We recommend that you tailor these suggestions to fit your congregation. We hope you find this material helpful, and that it's a blessing to your church family. And we wish you a very merry Christmas, from all of us here at Home for Good!

Gathering together

The Christmas season may draw people into our church services and gatherings who aren't usually there; visiting friends and family members, children, young people and families from local schools, individuals for whom attending church at Christmas time is especially important or part of tradition, guests. It's also, for many of us, a time wherein our church families and communities feel especially dear to us; we love to gather together for services, to pray, to sing and to have fun.

Here are some ways you can make your service a space of welcome – to those who have never stepped foot in your building before, and to those who are present more often than not:

- Write 'Merry Christmas' or 'Welcome' in different languages on your screen or your Order of Service handout.
- Have a diverse range of voices, ages and faces contributing to your service, through readings, worship and prayers.
- Good coffee and delicious biscuits (or mince pies!) go a long way in showing value and breaking the ice as people enter and settle into the service.
- Consider how your church can ensure that your services are accessible to all.

Songs

Lots of carols and Christmas hymns remind us of God's heart and of the radical compassion and hospitality He showed through Jesus, and invite us, the Church, to respond.

O Holy Night

Truly He taught us to love one another; his law is Love and his gospel is Peace. Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, and in his name all oppression shall cease.



Once in Royal David's City

With the poor, and mean, and lowly, lived on earth our Saviour holy.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

...and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Our Christmas resource this year is inspired by the words of **Joy to the World**: Let every heart prepare him room! It's a classic, a Christmas favourite. We'd love you to include these words and this melody in your Christmas service this year, and reflect on what this beautiful invitation could mean for your community.

Bible readings

The Nativity story is full of individuals playing their unique part; doing what they can to prepare to welcome Jesus. You may want to use some or all of the following verses to illustrate the different roles and parts played in the story of Jesus' birth, either as readings, to guide moments of reflection, as points for a sermon or for children's and youth ministry.

Angels (Luke 1: 26-32, Luke 2: 10-13, Matthew 1: 20)

Angels were sent from God to deliver the good news.

Elizabeth (Luke 1: 39-45)

Elizabeth celebrates and blesses her relative Mary upon hearing she is going to have a baby who will be the Son of God

The shepherds (Luke 2: 16-20)

The shepherds – the first to hear the news – hurry to the manger to see what has happened, and they praise and worship God and spread the word among others.

The Magi (Matthew 2: 1-12)

The Magi travel from the East to worship the new King, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They protect Jesus from Herod's plan by choosing to travel home by another route.

Mary and Joseph (Matthew 1: 18-25, Luke 1: 26-38, Luke 2: 1-7)

Mary carries her baby and gives birth, laying him in a manger as there was no room for them anywhere else; Joseph commits to Mary and the child who is not his by blood. Both raise and love their son.



Congregational prayer

God of Elizabeth,

Who celebrated and blessed her relative Mary upon hearing her good news.

Thank you for the power of relationships, and the difference our words, prayers and actions can make.

May we be a people who celebrate and bless others.

Make us encouragers, Lord. Give us eyes to see the gold in those around us, especially in those who are often overlooked.

Use our words and our actions to lift those feeling low, to remind others of their worth, to speak truth when they don't hear it and to let them know they are loved.

Fill us with your joy, that we can't help but rejoice when we see what you are doing through others in our lives, our communities and our world.

Let every heart prepare him room.

God of the shepherds,

The first to welcome and worship the newborn King.

Thank you for your Church.

May we, the Church, be a people of welcome and hospitality.

May we always be receptive to those on the edges of our congregation, and invite them in.

Will you help us notice those with an empty seat beside them, and be the ones to fill it.

Draw our attention to those who are missing from our church family. Help us create an environment where they feel safe, valued and that they belong. May we bend so that others can fit in.

May our welcome of others be worship to you.

Let every heart prepare him room.

God of the Magi,

Those wise individuals who studied, and who engaged with rulers, leaders and kings.

We thank you for those who lead us – locally, globally, academically, politically, spiritually, in community. We pray for our policy-shapers and decision makers, and for the next generation of leaders, who you are already raising up.

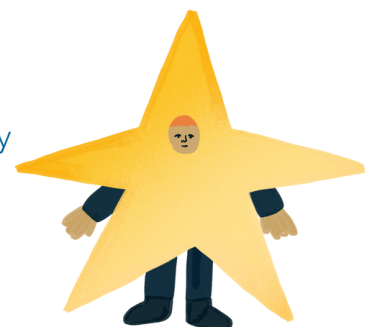
May those of us with influence use it to help others notice the disadvantaged and marginalised.

May those of us with skills to listen, learn and investigate use them to search for solutions.

May those of us with a platform step aside to make room for and amplify the voices of those who aren't heard enough.

May we be filled with and driven by hope. May we be passionate about and committed to justice.

Let every heart prepare him room.



Congregational prayer continued

God of Mary and Joseph,

Who raised and loved your son, Jesus.

We thank you and we pray for those who open their hearts and homes to children and young people through fostering, adoption, kinship care or supported lodgings.

We ask for more individuals, couples and families who will provide a place of stability, where children and young people will be supported to thrive. Show us, Lord, if this is something that we can do.

And if we can't, help us step in to wrap around families with encouragement, prayer and practical support.

May we, your Church, be a people who care deeply about children, young people and families in our community.

Let every heart prepare him room.

Emmanuel, God with us,

We give you our hearts. We prepare you room.

Amen.



Activities for children, youth and families

The following activities can be adapted to use with church childrens' groups, youth groups, as part of an all-age service or even with families at home.



Gingerbread nativity characters

To make delicious gingerbread, you need lots of different ingredients. Without even one, things just don't work the same way!

Create some gingerbread nativity characters together. You can adjust the difficulty level depending on the age group you're working with, and how much time you have – you can bake the gingerbread from scratch, or buy some pre-made gingerbread people and coloured icing. Depending on your gingerbread construction skills, you could build an entire nativity scene – manger, animals and all!

Discuss with your group the ingredients needed to make gingerbread – perhaps as you add them to your mix, if you're making your own. There are so many different things – flour, sugar, butter, spices – and every ingredient is a little different, and does a different job. Every ingredient is important. Without the rising agent, our gingerbread would be flat. Without the sugar, it wouldn't taste right. Without the spices and syrups, it would just be a normal biscuit.

Chat about how in the Christmas story, there are so many people and so many parts. Reflect on how every role was so important in preparing to welcome Jesus into the world.

Talk about how we, the Church, are a bit like an amazing gingerbread creation. All of us are a little bit different; we like different things, we are good at different things, we each look and sound different, we have our own feelings and ideas and stories. Celebrate that God can use each of us individually, and, importantly, together, to show His love.

Finish decorating your gingerbread nativity, and then tuck in – but not before taking a photo of your creation, and sharing the picture with us! You can tag us on Instagram (@homeforgood.org.uk) or email us at info@homeforgood.org.uk.

Nativity collage

The Christmas story is like a beautiful collage!

Prepare a collage together as you reflect on the Christmas story. You could give each individual their own page, but we'd encourage you, if you can and if it's appropriate for your group, to source a huge sheet and create a collective masterpiece!

You'll need to collect some collage materials. Again, please adapt this to suit the ages and preferences in your group. Some ideas include pages from magazines and newspapers (take a look at both sides of the page as you prepare to ensure all images and words are appropriate), used Christmas cards, tinsel, wrapping paper, lollipop sticks – but the list really is endless, so empty out your craft drawer and use whatever you can find!

Share the Christmas story with your group, and as you do, begin to create your collage. You might want to assign a different character or scene to different individuals or smaller groups, but it could also be a lot of fun to give your kids or youth the freedom to respond to whichever part of the Christmas story they feel most drawn to in that moment. Some might need some more guidance and assistance than others, but however you choose to approach this activity, remember that the final product doesn't need to be perfect or beautiful – in fact, that would kind of be missing the point!

When all the gaps on your page are filled, stand back to admire your creation. Reflect on what this image can teach us about the Christmas story, and the Church – both made up of different images of different sizes and shapes, and of things that have different purposes and tell different stories. When these things work together, they create an amazing, beautiful, often messy and a little chaotic, special picture.





Christmas to-do list

Christmas is a busy time for lots of us. Our to-do lists can get pretty long! But maybe there's room for one more thing?

Our Christmas resource this year takes a look at the Christmas story through the eyes of school children, who share with us that it's a story lots of people playing their part to prepare to welcome Jesus – to 'prepare Him room!' We feel it's a story that connects really closely to our vision at Home for Good – we believe that each and every person has a part they can play to show welcome, care and love to others in our community.

So, we invite you to consider how you might play your part – as an individual, as a family, as a church – and to help others do the same!

After discussing the Christmas story with your group, and reflecting on the different parts and roles, invite your group to think about their own circumstances. Where are there opportunities to share God's love and special welcome? How can we 'prepare room' this year? Create a Christmas to-do list, finishing the following sentence:

This year, we'll prepare for Christmas by making space to...

Some ideas to get you started:

- This year, we'll prepare for Christmas by making space to invite our neighbour for dinner.
- This year, we'll prepare for Christmas by making space to tell my granny something I love about her.
- This year, we'll prepare for Christmas by making space to write a thank you card for the gifts I receive.
- This year, we'll prepare for Christmas by making space to speak kindly to someone in my class.



It's our privilege to provide resources like this Christmas package free of charge to churches across the UK. At Home for Good – at Christmas, and always – we passionately believe that every person, family and church has a part to play to help achieve our vision of a home for every child who needs one. One really significant part your church family can play is supporting Home for Good with a one-off or regular donation.

Churches across the country support Home for Good either through hosting a special collection during their services or making a monthly or annual donation. This Christmas, please consider:

- 1. Hosting a special collection for Home for Good**
- 2. Committing your church to a monthly or annual donation**

There are three ways that you can donate:

By bank transfer

You can make a donation into Home for Good's bank account using these details:

Name on account: Home for Good

Bank: CAF Bank, 25 Kings Hill Ave, Kings Hill, West Malling ME19 4JQ

Sort code: 40-52-40

Account No.: 00029458

To help our finance team identify your donation, please also send an email to fundraising@homeforgood.org.uk to let us know the name and address of your church, and the date and amount of your donation.

By cheque

You can send a cheque made out to 'Home for Good' to 8 Angel Court, Copthall Avenue, London EC2R 7HP. Please also include the name and address of your church along with the cheque.

Online

You can donate with a debit or credit card online at homeforgood.org.uk/donate. Please ensure that, unless it is your own personal money, you do not tick the Gift Aid declaration.

If you have any questions about how we use donations to facilitate our work, or would like to know more about giving as a church, please contact our Head of Fundraising, Bethan Spencer via fundraising@homeforgood.org.uk.

Thank you. Together we can find a home for every child who needs one.