

Ideas for your service



What can I bring?

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. And we wish you a very merry Christmas, from all of us here at Home for Good!

Gathering together

We know that Churches around the UK will have varying levels of restrictions in place, in keeping with COVID-19 guidance and to meet the needs of their congregations. While some churches will be enjoying some 'normality' compared to last year, some of you may still have social distancing measures in place this Christmas, or may still be gathering virtually or with a hybrid approach. These things can make a warm welcome seem a little more challenging.

Here are some ways you can make your service a space of welcome at this time when many might still be feeling isolated or apprehensive about gathering with other people:

- 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.
- Services often share The Peace at Christmas; think of an alternative to shaking hands this year. Perhaps you could sign 'Peace be with you' in British Sign Language? [Click here](#) to learn how to sign The Peace in BSL with an instructional video from the Church of England.
- Allow time for people to connect with one another – for some, this will be the first time they've gathered in a group like this in a long time! In accordance with current local guidance, you might want to schedule some time for discussion in small groups, over tea/coffee and a mince pie, or in a pre- or post-church video call.
- Encourage your congregation to send a hand-written card to someone else in church, maybe someone new to your church family.

Engage congregation members of all ages by kicking off your service with a game! Hide some jigsaw pieces around the room you gather in. Place some in easier-to-find spots – a windowsill or the armrest of a chair – to allow everyone to play, but don't be afraid to hide a few in some trickier places, such as slotted into a Bible or hymnbook, or in amongst the biscuits!

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Invite your church family to bring the piece they find to the front of the room, and create the picture together to illustrate the beauty and power to be found in what each of us has to bring.

Songs

Lots of carols and Christmas hymns remind us of God's heart for the lonely and marginalised, and of our call to pursue justice and care for the vulnerable:

- **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 resources this year are focused on the question, 'What can I bring?'. One carol which encapsulates this theme is 'In the Bleak Midwinter'. We're invited to respond to the Christmas story and consider what we can bring. Each one of us has something unique to offer in worship of Jesus and in service to others. You may want to include this carol in your service, placing a particular emphasis on the final verse by unpacking the lyrics beforehand or repeating it when you sing.

*What can I give him? Poor as I am,
If I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb,
If I were a wise man, I would do my part,
But what I can I give him?
Give him my heart.*



Bible readings

The Nativity story is full of individuals playing their unique part; bringing what they have, like the pieces of a jigsaw fitting together to make the whole picture of the scene at Jesus' birth. 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.

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 yet have so much contribute.

Use our words and our actions to lift those feeling low, to remind others of their worth, to speak truth when they can'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.

Open our eyes, Lord, to what we can bring.

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.

Open our eyes, Lord, to what we can bring.

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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 see the needs of the vulnerable.

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.

Open our eyes, Lord, to what we can bring.

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 vulnerable children through fostering, adoption, kinship care or supported lodgings.

We ask for more individuals, couples and families who will provide a place of safety, stability, love and encouragement to children and young people who need it. Show us, Lord, if this is something that we can do.

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

May we, your Church, be a people who step forward to meet the needs of those children who are waiting.

Open our eyes, Lord, to what we can bring.

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Emmanuel, God with us

Thank you that each of your children has something unique to offer in worship of you and service of others. Help us to see the gifts and passions you have given us, and help us to call out and encourage what we see in others.

You call your Church to take up the cause of the vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed.

Holy Spirit, equip us to do this – whatever our role may be.

Show us how we can play our part. Use us to make a difference.

Open our eyes, Lord, to what we can bring.

