

Christmas Countdown



A hybrid resource for GB's 4 to 11s that can be delivered face-to-face, online, or at home.



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Week 01

Love

The *Christmas Countdown* programme is a look at the themes of advent as we journey together towards Christmas.

We'll learn about God coming close to us... and consider that although we might not have been physically close to those we love this year, we can be close to them in other ways.

This week's session will help children and young people to understand more about love.



Types of love

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're leading this session online or doing it at home, you could share our video of this activity at <https://youtu.be/elpKxfLRkus>.

You'll need: A Bible or look the passage up on www.biblegateway.com.

Share with the children the Bible verse John Ch.3:16-17. It says 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.' (NIV).

Explain that this verse is a summary of Jesus' life. God sent Jesus to earth as a baby. When He grew up, Jesus died on a cross in place of us and all the wrong things we do, sometimes called sin. His death means we can be friends with God. God loves us unconditionally, which means He loves us no matter what we say or do. This type of love is called Agape.

Agape love is unconditional love – like the love God shows for us and the love that we, as Christians, people who follow God, should show to others.

There are several other types of love mentioned in the Bible:

- Storge – this is love between family members
- Philia – this is 'brotherly' love – the love between close friends
- Eros – this is 'romantic' love – such as that between husband and wife.

This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we might not have been able to see the people we love as much as normal. Ask the children to share ways they showed family members and friends they loved them when they couldn't see them in person.

Advent wreath candles

(Length of activity: 20 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet A (advent wreath candles), white card, green card (cut into a wreath shape), colouring pens, scissors, and glue.

During advent, most churches usually have an advent wreath, which includes five candles - one for every week leading up to Christmas and one for Christmas day.

These candles symbolise hope, peace, joy, love and Christ.

Using the templates from Resource Sheet A (advent wreath candles), get the children to cut five candles, five flames and some holly leaves (as many as they want to add to their wreath) on white card.

Next they can colour in all the components. They could add the words hope, peace, joy, love and Christ on the candles.

Glue the leaves around the green card wreath.

Attach the flames to the candles and then add the candles to the wreath. They can use their finished wreath as a decoration in the countdown to Christmas.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you hand out the craft equipment in a socially-distanced manner. If you're doing this online make sure you let parents know the equipment their children will need in advance of the session or deliver it to their house beforehand.

Love charades

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet B (love charades).

Give each child one of the charades on the resource sheet. Use the spare boxes to add any extras you might need or to think of some more. You could cut these up to give out one per person.

In turn, each child should act out the scenario whilst the others guess what they're doing.

Explain that all of the charades are acts of love. Encourage the children to try and carry out some of the actions over the next week (and going forward).

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you hand out the resource sheets in a socially-distanced manner and play this game in a socially-distanced manner. If you're doing this online you could send a message in the chat facility to the children when it's their turn – make sure you copy another leader in too.

Love prayers

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: Paper, felt-tips, gentle music and the ability to play it.

Get the children to write the word 'Love' in bubble writing with space inside each letter to write. As some suitable music is played, ask them to write:

- The names of people they love in the 'L' shape
- Words describing God's love for them in the 'O' shape
- Words of things they love that God has created in the 'V' shape
- The bit they know best from the Christmas story in the 'E' shape.

Close this activity in prayer using some of what the children have written or by using this prayer.

Dear God,

As we prepare for Christmas, let us love each other. Remind us to be kind and show love to our family and friends during the festive period and throughout the year. Thank you God for creating all the things that we love and help us to remember that you love each and every one of us.

Amen.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

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Making sacrifices

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: The film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (modern version by Tim Burton featuring Johnny Depp from 2005).

Show the children the following clip – *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – 00:23:30 – 00:31:43.

Highlight the scene when Charlie offers to sell his golden ticket.

Ask the children:

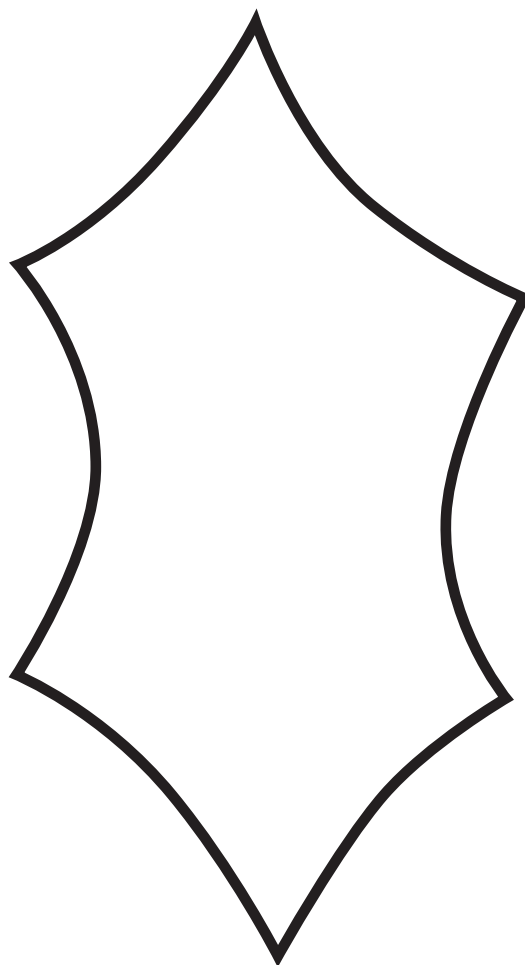
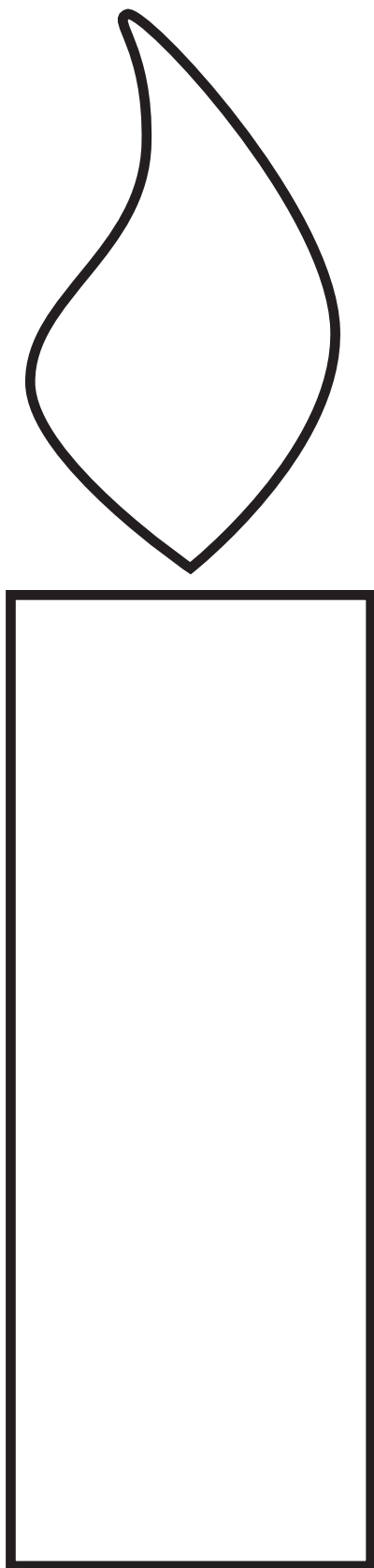
- Why was Charlie offering to sell his golden ticket?
- Do you think it would have been hard to give up his ticket? Why? Why not?
- Why did his family not want him to?
- Can the children think of a sacrifice they've made for someone they love?

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you have time at home, maybe you could have a movie night and watch this film in full.

Resource Sheet A

(advent wreath candles)



Resource Sheet B

(love charades)

Pray for a friend	Help with cleaning in your house	Give a gift to someone
Write a letter to someone	Hold the door open	Set the table for dinner
Hug someone	Take the dog for a walk	Help a sibling with homework
Help someone to carry their shopping	Donate something to a food bank	Give flowers to someone you love

Week 02

Joy

The *Christmas Countdown* programme is a look at the themes of advent as we journey together towards Christmas.

We'll learn about God coming close to us... and consider that although we might not have been physically close to those we love this year, we can be close to them in other ways.

This week's session will help children and young people to understand more about joy.

Jesus makes us joyful

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: A Bible or look the passage up on www.biblegateway.com.

Share with the children the Bible verse Matthew Ch.2:1-2. It says 'After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him"' (NIV).

Explain that Jesus' birth prompted Magi, another word for kings, from far away to come and worship Him.

Being happy is something that depends on the situations we find ourselves in. Joy, a form of deep happiness, sticks around regardless of our circumstances because it's a lasting gift from God and a characteristic of God's people, Christians.

The kings would have felt great joy knowing the Saviour, Jesus, had been born.

Ask the group: 'What about Jesus makes you happy or joyful? Highlight that we can have joy because of what Jesus did for us.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're leading this session online or doing it at home, you could share our video of this activity at <https://youtu.be/jlYZsXWTphc>.

Give joy craft

(Length of activity: 20 minutes.)

You'll need: Beads, string/elastic, tissue paper, and a gift tag.

Get the children to use the beads and string and make a bracelet or necklace. Once finished, they can wrap it in tissue paper and add a gift tag.

Encourage them to take their handmade jewellery home and give it to someone as a gift. Discuss the joy this will give the recipient. Maybe they could give it, or post it, to someone they didn't see as much as normal during this year because of the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

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Joy in action

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're doing this online you can ask the children in the order they appear on your screen.

You'll need:

Get the group to form a socially-distanced circle. Ask each child, in turn, one way they can bring joy to someone else during the week.

For example, "Say 'Merry Christmas' to everyone I see."

Give them 30 seconds to think, then begin with the person on your left and go around the circle quickly. Ask them to try and think of something new so that ideas aren't repeated.

When everyone has shared an idea, ask the young people to choose one of the ideas someone else mentioned and do it this week.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

Action prayer

(Length of activity: 5 minutes.)

You'll need:

Use the following JOY acronym to lead your prayers and ask the group to do the relevant action for each one.

J is for Jesus (point to the sky) – say thank you to Jesus.

O is for others (gesture to others in the room) – pray for your GB group and everyone in it, your church, and the local community.

Y is a prayer for yourself (point at themselves) – ask each young person to say a prayer for themselves.

Close the prayer by shouting 'joy' and waving your hands in the air before you say 'Amen'.

A sense of joy

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you have time at home, maybe you could have a movie night and watch this film in full.

You'll need: A video clip from *Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs* available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6E7QiU8xk4>.

Show the children the clip of Cal's birthday and discuss:

- Why does Cal's dad want to do something special?
- What does Cal do with the gift? Does he keep it for himself?
- How does it make the community feel?
- How does Cal respond to the gift?
- Have you ever received a gift that made you feel joyful?
- Has anyone ever done something for you that made you feel joyful?
- What did you do with that feeling? Did you share it with others?

Emphasise that receiving 'stuff' doesn't necessarily make us joyful. It's important to share what we have and to share our feelings of joy with others. Discuss whether happiness and joy are the same things. It doesn't really matter what conclusion the children come to as long as they have a real sense of what the word joy conveys.

Week 03

Peace

The *Christmas Countdown* programme is a look at the themes of advent as we journey together towards Christmas.

We'll learn about God coming close to us... and consider that although we might not have been physically close to those we love this year, we can be close to them in other ways.

This week's session will help children and young people to understand more about peace.

Jesus brings peace

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: A Bible or look the passage up on www.biblegateway.com.

Share with the children the Bible verse Luke Ch.2:8-14. It says 'And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests"' (NIV).

Explain that this part of the Bible is about the shepherds hearing about Jesus being born. Although they may have been excited by this news, they may also have been worried – an angel was telling them to go into the town and find baby Jesus.

Discuss:

- What would you advise a friend who was worried or scared to do?
- What do you do when you're worried or scared?
- Why do you think the Bible says when we're serving God, Jesus brings us peace?
- How does Jesus bring you peace? Maybe share some examples of how Christians could have peace during the lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic this year.

Close in prayer, thanking Jesus for the peace He brings us.



Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're leading this session online or doing it at home, you could share our video of this activity at <https://youtu.be/2mOMXp6p40c>.

Dove tree decorations

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet A (dove) printed or photocopied onto card, colouring pens, glitter/sequins/stickers etc., ribbon/string, and glue.

Get the children to cut out the dove shapes and make a small hole at the top of each one.

They can then decorate the doves by colouring or using glitter, sequins, stickers etc. Once they've finished, they can thread a piece of ribbon or string through the top and tie it.

Encourage the children to hang their decorations on their Christmas tree as a symbol of peace.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

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Christmas word finder

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: A display board and chalk or flipchart and marker pen, paper and pencils.

Write up a word or phrase connected with Christmas and see how many small words the group can find using the letters in the word(s).

Words and phrases that can be used include:

- Christmas joy
- Frankincense
- Mince pies and cream
- Angel Gabriel
- Wise men from the east.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you hand out the equipment in a socially-distanced manner. If you're online or at home, prepare the words and phrases on a Word document to show online by sharing your screen.

Peace around the world

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: Strips of paper, glue/sticky tape/stapler, and pens.

Give each child some strips of paper.

Encourage them to write prayers for people around the world, asking God for peace. Maybe share, in a child-friendly way, some situations in the news that they could pray about.

They could write the names of countries or full prayers.

Each individual should make their strips of paper into a prayer chain.

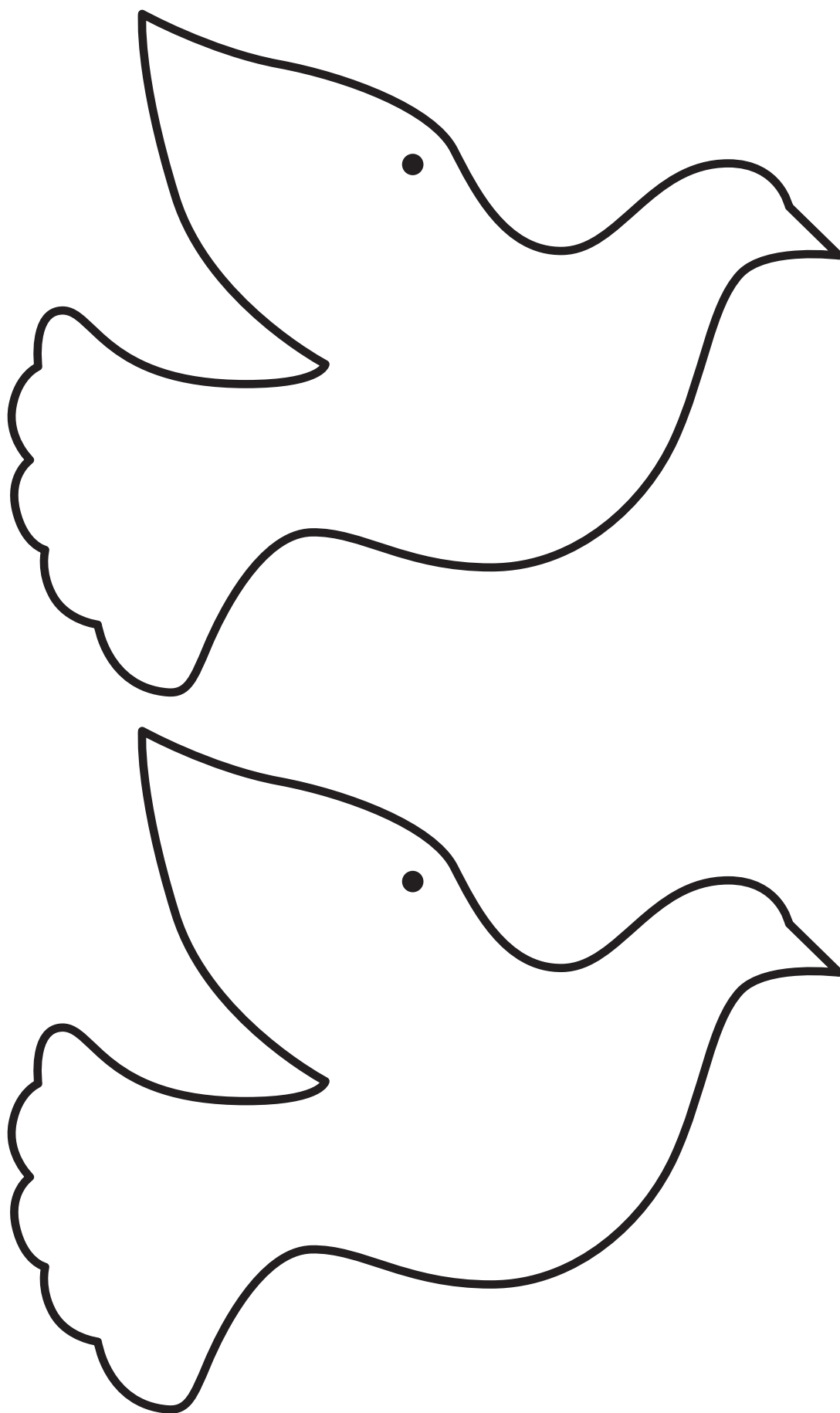
These can be taken home and hung up as a reminder to pray for peace around the world.

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Resource Sheet A

(dove)



Week 04

Hope

The *Christmas Countdown* programme is a look at the themes of advent as we journey together towards Christmas.

We'll learn about God coming close to us... and consider that although we might not have been physically close to those we love this year, we can be close to them in other ways.

This week's session will help children and young people to understand more about hope.



Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're leading this session online or doing it at home, you could share our video of this activity at <https://youtu.be/O5j6zwwzoNQ>.

Hope for the future

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: A Bible or look the passage up on www.biblegateway.com.

Share with the children the story of the angel appearing to Mary (Luke Ch.1:26-38).

God chose Mary to have a baby. God wanted Mary to get pregnant and give birth to baby Jesus, so He did just that. Mary was confused about why God had chosen her and what the angel's message might mean. She might have felt too young or unimportant for such an important task but she knew how special her baby would be. She would have had hopes for His future.

When we talk about hope it commonly means to wish something would happen. But, in the Bible, hope means to be confident in what God has promised. In Mary's case, that her son would grow up to change the world. 2020 has been a strange year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we can have hope because God is with us.

Advent calendar

(Length of activity: 20 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet A (advent calendar) with enough tags for 24 per child, old Christmas cards/stickers etc., colouring pens, scissors and string.

The children are going to make an advent calendar, which includes daily activities to do at home. They should each decorate 24 tags on one side with pictures or stickers, making sure to include the date on each one.

On the reverse of the tag they should write or draw one of the daily activities from the list on Resource Sheet A (advent calendar) or use their own ideas. The tags can be cut out and a piece of string should be threaded through the top of each one.

Get the children to take all of their tags home and display them on a piece of string or on a branch of their Christmas tree. Encourage them to do the daily activities over the month of December as a countdown to Christmas.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

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Strike a pose

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you play this game in a socially-distanced manner. If you're online, the children can pose one at a time by their computer.

You'll need:

Ask the children to spread out around the room and think about something they hope to get for Christmas, without telling anyone.

When you call their name, they must strike a pose of the item they hope to get for Christmas. For example, someone who wants a bike would freeze frame as if riding a bike. Explain that when someone strikes a pose, everyone else will try to guess what it is.

When everyone has had a turn, ask: How is hoping for a gift like, or unlike, the true hope of Christmas — Jesus? If you could share one of these kinds of hope with someone less fortunate than you, which would you choose?

Then on the count of three, get the young people to strike a pose that represents the true hope of Christmas.

Link this back to the Bible passage.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you do this activity in a socially-distanced manner. If any children are afraid of balloons bursting, think of an alternative ending to the prayer such as clapping hands to represent popping the balloons.

Prayer balloons

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: A balloon for each child, and felt-tips.

Encourage the children to write a prayer of hope on their balloons. When everyone is ready, toss each balloon in the air as a sign of offering the prayer to God.

Burst the balloon to signify that God has heard the prayer.

Resource Sheet A

(advent calendar)

1. Go to a carol service or find an online carol service
2. Decorate a Christmas tree
3. Wrap a Christmas present ready to gift it to someone else
4. Do some Christmas baking – gingerbread men/Christmas cake/mince pies etc.
5. Put together a nativity scene
6. Say a prayer for people who are homeless and hungry
7. Donate an item to your local foodbank – maybe a special box of biscuits, a selection box or other Christmas treat
8. Make a Christmas decoration
9. Put together a shoebox for a local homeless charity
10. Watch a Christmas film
11. Have a Christmas disco at home – get dressed up and dance to Christmas songs
12. Create a Christmas themed mocktail and serve it to your family
13. Say thank you to God for your family and friends and pray for those who might be lonely over the festive period
14. Have a walk or drive around your local community and look for Christmas lights on decorated houses
15. Take a family photo/selfie in front of a Christmas tree
16. Pray for anyone you know who is poorly or someone who might be spending Christmas in hospital
17. Make a Christmas card
18. Decorate some biscuits with Christmas sprinkles/icing
19. Shout 'Merry Christmas' three times
20. Have a go at writing a Christmas poem
21. Say this short prayer... Jesus, you know us and love us, you share our lives and hear our prayer. Amen
22. Make a crown
23. Say thank you to God for the food and gifts we'll enjoy at Christmas
24. Phone or video call a relative and wish them a merry Christmas

Resource Sheet A

(advent calendar cont.)



Week 05

The Christmas Story

The *Christmas Countdown* programme is a look at the themes of advent as we journey together towards Christmas.

We'll learn about God coming close to us... and consider that although we might not have been physically close to those we love this year, we can be close to them in other ways.

This week's session will help children and young people to understand more about the Christmas story.



The nativity

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: A nativity picture showing the shepherds visiting the baby Jesus, and, if needed, a Bible or look the passages up on www.biblegateway.com.

Explain that this year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been many things that we've not been able to do or to be involved in and we may have missed seeing family or friends that we are close to.

Now at this time of advent and Christmas we'd normally be looking at the nativity story and re-enacting it in some way but this year is different we're not able to do this in the normal way with using props and costumes and maybe the singing of carols.

But you're not going to miss out... together you're going to hear the nativity story. Then read the details below or read the Bible passages in Luke Chapter 2 and Matthew Chapter 2.

Share that Christmas is the time when we remember how Jesus was born in a stable. Jesus was such a special baby – God's son – and so we want to remember His birthday each year. We call this Christmas.

One day an angel appeared to Mary and told her she was going to have a miracle baby, who would be the Son of God and called Jesus. Mary was shocked and worried as she was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph and thought he might be angry. But the angel appeared to Joseph too. Around the time Mary was due to give birth the couple had to go to Bethlehem to register for a census, a survey of the population. They set off together on the long journey.

When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem Mary was ready to give birth to the baby that would be the Son of God. But there was no space at any of the inns. Eventually a kind innkeeper said they could take shelter in his stable. Jesus was born in the stable with straw for a bed.

Show a picture of Mary and Joseph in the stable with the shepherds. The shepherds had been visited by angels who told them where to find baby Jesus.

Ask the group who else visited the baby. Tell them how the wise men were not visited by an angel like the shepherds. They were very clever men who understood and knew all about the stars. One night they saw a new star in the sky and looked in their books (scrolls) to see what it was. They discovered it was a sign that God had sent His son to earth. The wise men were so excited that they decided to find this new baby king.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're leading this session online or doing it at home, you might want to make use of some great Christmas resources from the Bible Society. This year they have created an instant nativity which can be used face-to-face or via Zoom, and a nativity video animation. You can see these resources and find out more at <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/christmas/>

The first place they looked was in the king's palace. There they met King Herod who wasn't at all happy that there was a new king in the world. He pretended that he wanted to see the new baby and asked the wise men to let him know when they found it.

The wise men found the baby, in a stable, in Bethlehem. There they gave Jesus their very strange gifts – gold, frankincense (a type of oil) and myrrh (a type of perfume). These all had special meanings linked to how His life would be.

Herod wasn't a nice man and the wise men were warned in a dream not to go back to him so they travelled home a different way. King Herod started searching for baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to a different country until it was safe to return.

Jesus grew up from a baby, to a boy, to a man. And He did amazing things – He healed the sick, He told great stories, He stood up for people, and He even walked on water. When He was a young man Jesus died and took the blame for all the wrong things we've ever done so we can be friends with God. But something amazing happened, because He's the Son of God, Jesus came back to life and we can be friends with Him today. He's always with us.



Paper plate angels

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Paper plates, scissors, glitter/glitter glue, felt-tip pens, paper, pipe cleaners, glue, and sticky tape.

The children are going to make paper plate angels. They start by cutting a deep triangle out of a white paper plate. Next decorate the big part of the plate using glitter/pens – this will be the angel's wings.

Cut out a face and hands from paper and stick to the small triangle – the thin end is the head end. Draw on facial features and hair.

Bend a pipe cleaner to look like a halo and tape it to the back of the head.

Tape the bottom part of the plate on to the larger wings, with the cut out shape above the angel's head.

Encourage your group to take their angel home as a Christmas decoration or could you make a display of them in the church or building where you meet to make people smile.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you hand out the craft equipment in a socially-distanced manner. If you're doing this online make sure you let parents know the equipment their children will need in advance of the session or deliver it to their house beforehand. If you're leading this session online or doing it at home, you could share our video of this activity at <https://youtu.be/lzrq0m5IV4I>.

Angel race

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet A (angel), dice (one per child), and colouring pencils.

Each child will need their own copy of Resource Sheet A (angel). Children should take it in turns to roll their dice and colour in a shape that corresponds to the number they throw.

The first child to colour in the whole angel is the winner.

If you have a large group, you could split them into two or three smaller groups.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

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Nativity prayer

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need: A nativity set or a photo of the nativity scene.

Ask each child, in turn, to choose one of the people in the nativity scene.

Discuss:

- Who are they?
- What part did they play in the story?

Each piece is important and plays a special part in the Christmas story and can remind us of special things to pray for in our lives and other people's lives.

As each child chooses someone from the nativity scene, use the below points to say a short prayer.

Jesus: Give thanks for the birth of Jesus, His life, His stories, teaching, miracles, and His sacrifice.

Mary and Joseph: Give thanks to all the people who look after, love and care for us. Particularly this year with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown/restrictions.

Angel: Say thanks to God for always being there and for having an amazing plan for our lives.

Wise men: Help us to use the gifts and skills we learn at school and throughout our lives.

Shepherds: Pray for those who protect us including police, the government, soldiers etc.

Donkey/cow/sheep: Pray for pets, farmers, cruelty to animals etc.

Stable: Pray for our homes, giving thanks for security and for luxuries such as water, heating and food.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're doing this online you could share your screen and show a photo of the nativity scene.

