

Christmas Countdown



A hybrid resource
for GB's 10 to 18s
that can be delivered
face-to-face,
online,
or at home.



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HM Government

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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.

Candle of love

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: An advent wreath – if you're not able to light candles, battery ones can be used instead, Resource Sheet A (hearts), scissors, glue, paper, colouring pens, and decorations such as stickers.

Explain to your young people that over the next few weeks, in the run-up to Christmas, the period of time is called advent. Ask how many of the young people will have an advent calendar – what type of calendar will they have? 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. Light a candle to symbolise love.

Love plays a vital role in the Christmas story. Because of Joseph's love for Mary, he didn't leave her when he found out that she was pregnant. Mary has a natural motherly love for Jesus and we see God's love for everyone by His sending of His son to us. Jesus focused on preaching love through His ministry and two of His greatest commands are to love God and to love your neighbour.

Think about the different types of love - romantic, love for family and friends, love for pets, and love of doing activities etc.

Another type of love is agape. Agape love is love that comes from God. It's love that's undeserved, gracious, and sacrificial. We should love God and others with agape love.

Who, or what, do the young people love? Ask them to write names of people they love on the heart shapes. Remind them that, this year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we might not have been able to see the people we love as much as normal. Get the young people to make a collage with the hearts and decorate them.



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/Dy671B0SHGw>.

Sock snowperson

(Length of activity: 20 minutes.)

You'll need: Per young person – one white sock, one coloured sock, dried rice/beans, rubber bands or thread, colourful buttons, ribbons, glue dots, marker pen or paint, and orange mini pompom or similar.

One thing lots of people love about Christmas is the colder weather and the hope of a white Christmas. Your young people are going to make sock snowpeople.

Get your young people to fill their white sock with dried rice or beans to make the snowperson's body – when they've filled it sufficiently they should use a rubber band/thread to tie the top of the sock.

They should then take another rubber band and place it in the middle of the filled sock – more to the upper side to form the head shape. Cut the excess off. They can then glue the buttons onto the bottom side, draw the mouth and eyes with marker pen/paint, add pink cheeks, an orange mini pompom nose, and ribbon for the scarf.

Next they should cut the coloured sock (cut the foot part, without the heel). Roll it a bit and place it on the head of their snowman. They can leave it as it is or secure it with glue.

Encourage your young people to gift their snowperson to someone they love; 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.

Christmas quiz

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Paper and pens.

Run a Christmas quiz for your young people, using these questions. Who will get the highest score and be quiz-tastic?

- 1) Tradition has it that the three wise men came from different continents, which three did they come from?
Answer – Africa, Asia and Europe.
- 2) What song do these lines come from 'Let your heart be light, from now on our troubles will be out of sight'?
Answer: Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas.
- 3) Was Jesus Mary's first child?
Answer: Yes.
- 4) What meat is traditionally eaten at Christmas dinner in Sweden – pork, reindeer or eel?
Answer: Pork.
- 5) What's the second line of the carol *O Come all ye Faithful*?
Answer: Joyful and triumphant.
- 6) What do Chinese Christians use to decorate Christmas trees – fruit, paper lanterns or sausages?
Answer: Paper lanterns.

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- 7) According to Luke's Gospel, why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem?
Answer: Because a census was being held.
- 8) Traditionally people exchange kisses at Christmas under which plant?
Answer: Mistletoe.
- 9) What word, derived from the Latin word meaning "The coming", is applied to the period preceding Christmas?
Answer: Advent.
- 10) How many doors are there on an advent calendar?
Answer: 24.
- 11) According to the Bible, how did Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem – on a camel, on a donkey or it doesn't say.
Answer: It doesn't say.
- 12) On what date does modern English custom say that Christmas decorations should be taken down?
Answer: 6 January.
- 13) What was the name of the angel that appeared to Mary?
Answer: Gabriel.
- 14) What is the name of the Prince's valet in the pantomime Cinderella?
Answer: Dandini.
- 15) Which country originated the use of glass baubles on Christmas trees – France, Sweden or Germany?
Answer: Germany.
- 16) When is the first door normally opened on an advent calendar?
Answer: 1 December.
- 17) Does Frankincense come from - a mine, a tree or from the sea?
Answer: From a tree (it's a resin).
- 18) True or false: Christmas Day is not an official public holiday in the USA?
Answer: False.
- 19) Which carol contains the lines 'The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying He makes'?
Answer: Away In A Manger.
- 20) What snack is traditionally left out for Santa in Britain?
Answer: A mince pie.

Human Boppt

(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.

You'll need:

Explain the movements below:

- **Twist it** – do the twist down and then up
- **Flick it** – click your fingers
- **Spin it** – spin 360 degrees on the spot
- **Pull it** – jump in the air
- **Bop it** – high five in the air (not touching anyone else).

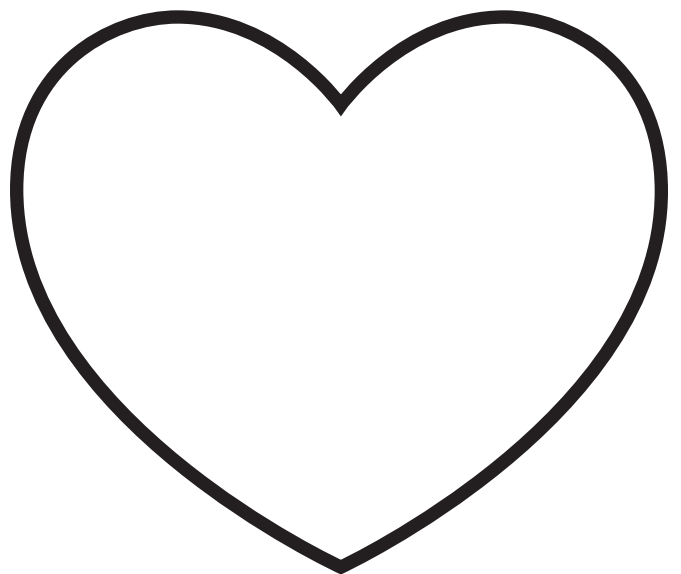
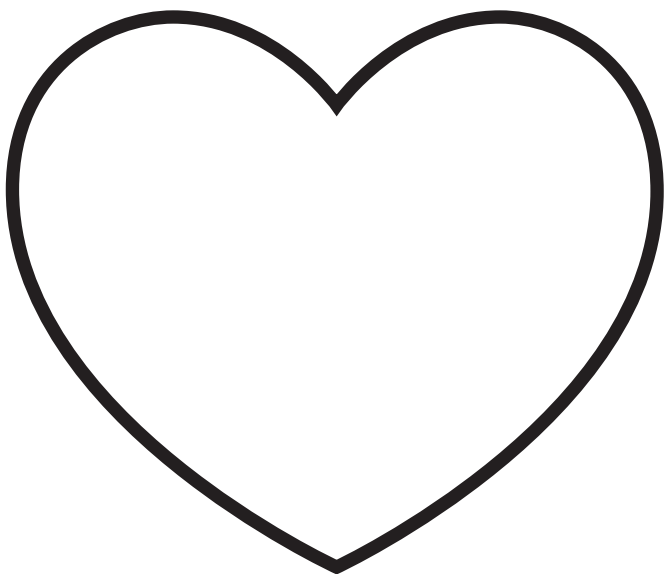
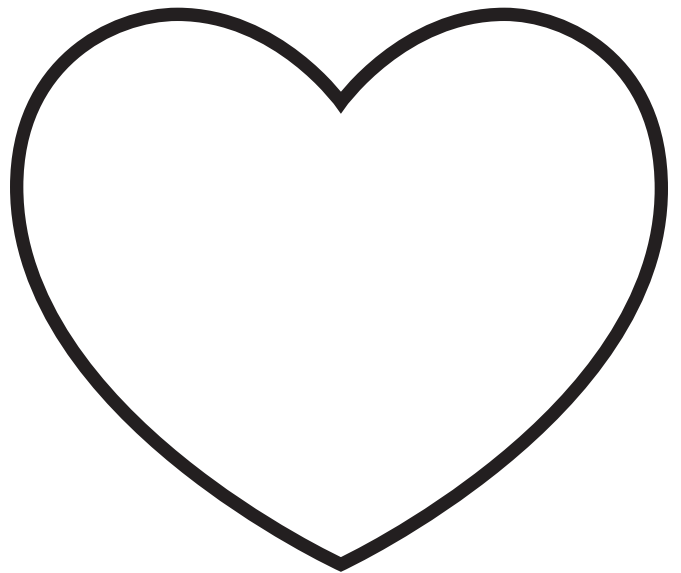
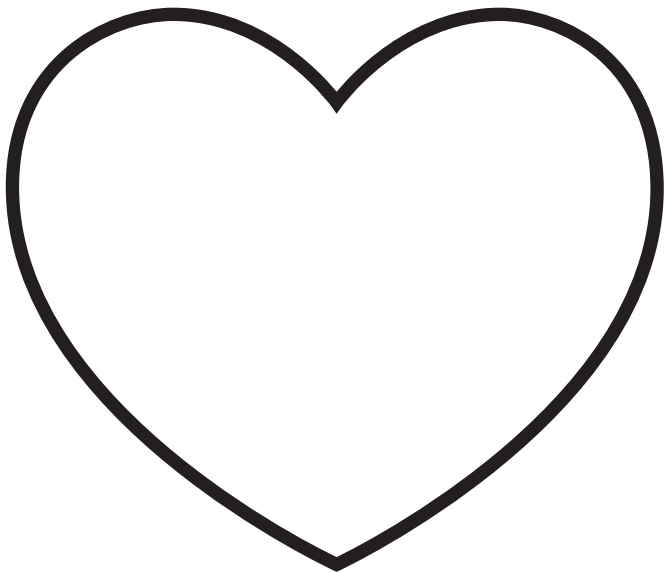
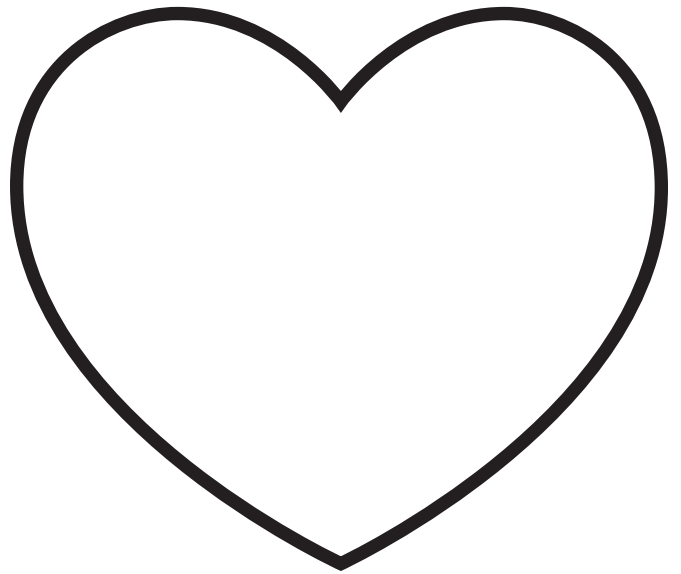
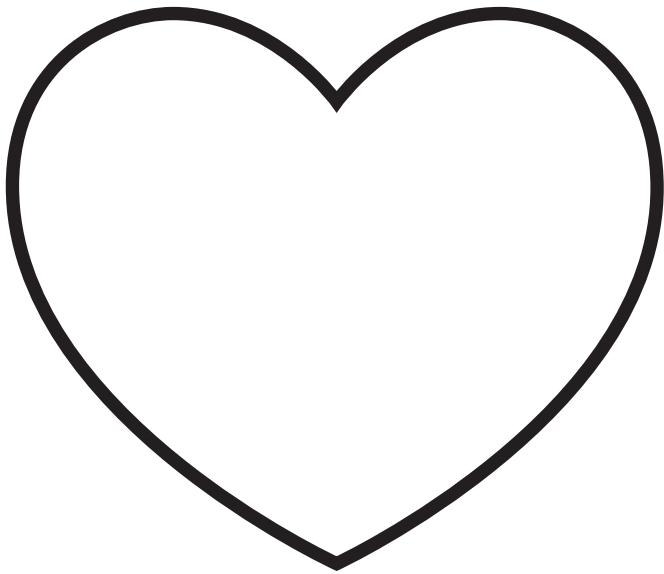
You must then call out either – Twist it, Flick it, Spin it, Pull it or Bop it. The young people need to respond by performing the correct movement. Start by calling out the words slowly and then speed up. If a player gets an action wrong they're out or lose a life.

Conclusion

After these activities, your young people should be able to understand all the different types of love and that God shows His love to us all.

Resource Sheet A

(hearts)



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.

Candle of joy

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: An advent wreath – if you're not able to light candles, battery ones can be used instead, and a Bible or look the passage up on www.biblegateway.com.

Remind your young people that over the next few weeks, in the run-up to Christmas, the period of time is called advent. 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. Light a candle to symbolise joy.

Joy plays a vital role in the Christmas story. 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.

Read Luke Ch.1:26-38 and get the young people to think about how Mary must have felt after the visit from the Angel Gabriel, she must have been bursting with joy. Discuss what it must have felt like for Mary.

Talk about what the Bible says about joy, such as:

- Romans Ch.15:13 – God fills us with joy
- Galatians Ch.5:22 – joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit
- John Ch.16:22 – no one can take joy away from us
- Psalm 51:12 – joy rests in things from God, such as salvation and righteousness.

Depending on the translation, joy appears more than 100 times in the Bible.

Encourage the young people to use joy as a focus for a prayer, firstly focusing on **J**esus, then on **O**thers and then **Y**ourself. Spend a few minutes in quiet praying together or out loud depending on your group.



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/PoA5m_bGjdw.

Christmas wordsearch

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet A (wordsearch) per young person and pens.

Give each young person a copy of Resource Sheet A (wordsearch) and get them to complete it.

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 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. Or you could show your screen and get the young people to take it in turns to find a word and then annotate it using the whiteboard function.

Box of Joy

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet B (box template) per young person on thin coloured card, ribbon, shredded tissue paper, sweets/chocolates, sticky tape, and pens.

Using Resource Sheet B (box template), get the young people to each make a gift box and put some sweets/chocolates inside it before taking it home to give to someone as a gift of joy. Maybe they could give 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:

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.

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 doing this online play Christmas Pictionary instead – for example you can use the Zoom chat function (copying another leader whenever you send a private message) to let the young people know what they have to draw and the online 'whiteboard' function for the actual drawing.

Christmas bring me

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: A number of Christmas pictures or old Christmas cards, and a pen.

Number each of your Christmas pictures/cards and place them around the room. Make a note of something you could give as a clue to the location of each card and which number card is where.

Split the group of young people into two socially-distanced teams. Number each young person in the team so you have two people as number 1 and so on.

Read a clue out from your list and a number from the teams. The young people with that number have to go and find the card that relates to the clue and run back to tell the leader what number the card is. Ensure they observe social distancing as they move around and that they know not to touch the cards. The first person to tell the leader the correct card number gets a point.

For example, number four go and find the card with three wise men. The card with three wise men is number seven. The young person finds it, then runs back to their designated home spot to tell the leader that the card is number seven.

Conclusion

After these activities, your young people should know that the candle of joy reflects the joy that came through Jesus' arrival and through the salvation He has gifted us.

Resource Sheet A

(wordsearch)

A	S	Y	T	V	K	A	D	O	G
G	A	B	R	I	E	L	Q	R	R
H	T	E	B	A	Z	I	L	E	L
P	D	F	T	C	M	E	D	E	N
E	K	I	W	B	T	E	G	P	I
S	T	Y	V	I	C	N	P	O	G
O	O	M	N	A	A	H	U	H	R
J	Y	G	E	S	D	R	O	L	I
K	S	P	I	R	I	T	C	L	V
N	A	Z	A	R	E	T	H	Z	Y

Angel

Joy

David

Lord

Elizabeth

Mary

Gabriel

Nazareth

God

Peace

Hope

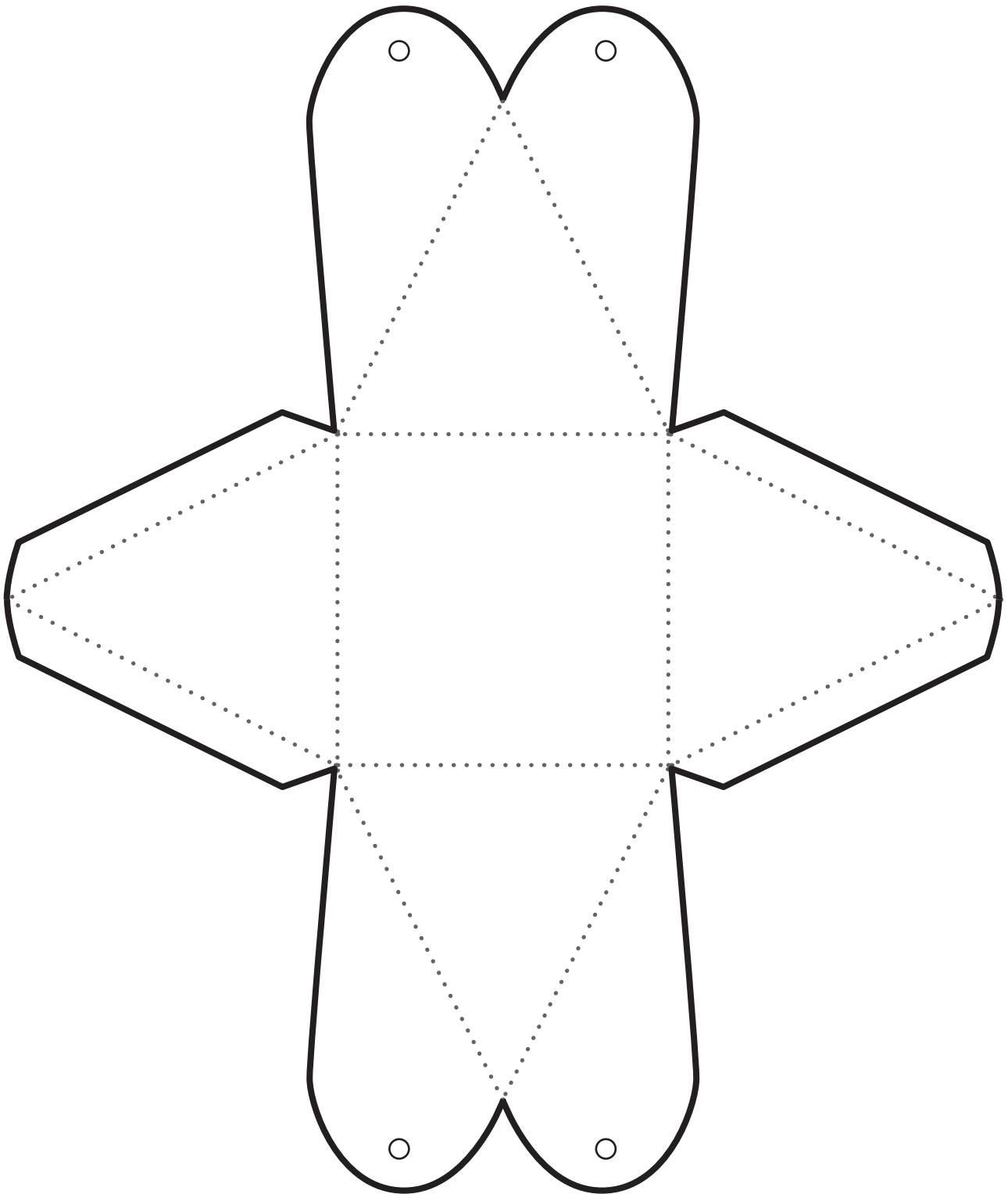
Spirit

Holy

Virgin

Joseph

Resource Sheet B
(box template)



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.



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/tMouiVCmpQg>.

Candle of peace

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: An advent wreath – if you're not able to light candles, battery ones can be used instead, and the ability to show <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWF2JBbIbvM> on YouTube.

Remind your young people that over the next few weeks, in the run-up to Christmas, the period of time is called advent. 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. Light a candle to symbolise peace.

Explain that there's so much turmoil and unrest in the world that this week you're going to look at peace. The peace of God allows us to look at others through heaven's eyes. Peace from God, Biblical peace, allows us to trust in God's promises.

The Bible has a lot to say about peace, and the word peace appears somewhere between 200-400 times in the Bible.

In the world we live in, the peace of God grants us tranquillity that can't be found anywhere else, and it offers a light to others who don't yet know that peace. The first Christmas when God sent His son Jesus, He sent one who is called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

We're able to have peace in our hearts on Christmas Day and every day. Nothing can separate us from God's love. He's good and His plans for us are good.

Share the YouTube video, which was the Sainsbury's Christmas advert in 2014, sharing the night when World War I stopped for Christmas and the Germans and British soldiers played football. Talk about what it must have been like in World War I in the trenches. The sound of gunfire was replaced by the singing of Christmas carols and a game of football. For those few minutes the war was put on hold and there was peace. How would the soldiers have felt? How have we needed to have peace this year with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Light of the world

(Length of activity: 20 minutes.)

You'll need: Small clear jars or votive candle holders such as from Baker Ross, glass paints with enough paint brushes for 1 each per colour or glass pens, and tea light candles.

Get your young people to decorate a small clear jar/votive candle holder with a Christmas theme. Encourage your young people to gift their work to someone they love; or could you make a display of them in the church or building where you meet.

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.

Word circle

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Resource Sheet A (word circle) for each young person and pens.

How many words of three letters or more can each young person make from the letters in the circle? No proper names can be used and no plurals. Give them bonus points for any Christmas/advent related words.

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 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. Or you could share your screen and get the young people to write in the chat function instead.

Tell me a story

(Length of activity: 10 minutes.)

You'll need:

You're going to tell a story which has a lot of characters in e.g. the nativity story or a pantomime/fairy tale.

Divide the young people into two socially-distanced teams sitting down. Choose a number of characters for the number of young people you have in the team and give a person in each time that character name. Both teams have the same characters and will be against each other.

As you tell the story, when you say one of the characters the two young people with that character name have to stand up – the first one to stand up has a point for their team. Slip in the title of the story e.g. nativity and make all the young people in the teams stand up.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

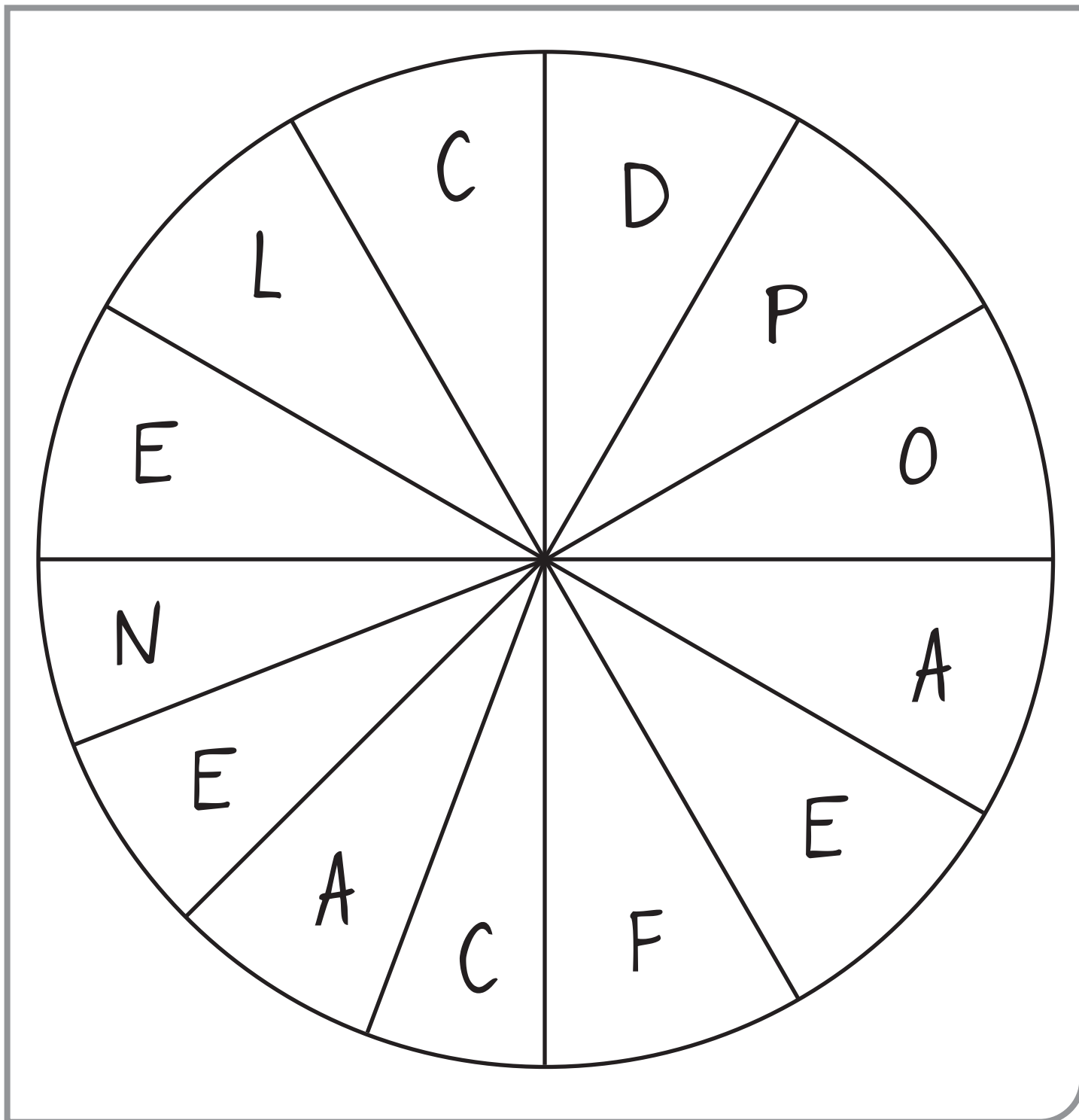
If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you play this game in a socially-distanced manner.

Conclusion

After these activities, your young people should know that when they see a flame from a candle they can be reminded of the peace of God.

Resource Sheet A

(word circle)



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.

Candle of hope

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: An advent wreath – if you're not able to light candles, battery ones can be used instead, the riddle below printed or written out or on screen, and a Bible or look the passage up on www.biblegateway.com

Remind your young people that over the next few weeks in the run-up to Christmas the period of time is called advent. 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. Light a candle to symbolise hope.

Explain that advent is a time full of hope – not just wishful thinking but confident trusting in God. It's a time of expectation and waiting for the birth of Christ.

Can your young people solve the following riddle? FYI, the answer is HOPE!

My first is in HIDDEN but not found in SEEN
My second's in COMING but not there in BEEN
My third's in PROMISE and also EXPECTANT.
My last is in EASTER as well as in ADVENT.
My whole is a word that can mean many things,
From confident trusting to wishful thinking.

Ask the question – what are we hoping for? It may be for the Coronavirus pandemic to be over so that we can get back to 'normal'. It may be that we hope for a certain gift at Christmas.

Explain the time leading up to Christmas is a special time for so many people as it's about hope – hope that one day Christ will come. We can see this so many times in the Old Testament. The candle of hope is sometimes known as the Prophecy Candle – referring to the Old Testament being full of verses explaining the birth and death of Jesus many years before His birth.

Some verses that you could look up and share:

- Isaiah Ch.9:6–7 – shows Jesus' birth
- Micah Ch.5:2 – this shows one of the clearest Old Testament prophecies of Christ's coming
- Isaiah Ch.53:3-7 – predicts Jesus' death.



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/EgoMpXduuW8>.

Explain that there are two types of hope:

1. **Wishful thinking hope**

If we hope something will happen, we have no control over whether it will take place

2. **Biblical hope**

Hope in the Bible, exists as a secure assurance, a trust placed in a trustworthy God. God hasn't failed us in the past, and therefore if He claims He'll do something in the future, we can have a hope that He will fulfil that claim. See Jeremiah Ch.29:11.

Get your young people to reflect on the question you asked at the beginning – what do they hope for? Have their answers changed?

Giving hope

(Length of activity: 10-20 minutes.)

You'll need: Equipment for your chosen activity e.g. donated second-hand items.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, times have been difficult for many people and communities. Would your group be able to donate gifts through a community group? Many areas have food banks, which may be run by a church or community group. There are also baby banks in some towns, which take good used children's clothes, or could your young people donate toys to your local social services that could be given to children who are known to them. Ask your young people who they'd like to support and bring hope to, discuss how you're going to do this, and then make it happen! You might need to follow up on this activity next week or send letters home with the young people to ask for donated items.

However small the gift is, it will show love and hope. You can also put a message of hope into the cards that are to be made in the craft session later in this week's activities, and send those too.

Note for leaders/parents/carers:

If you're face-to-face in a GB group, make sure you hand out or collect donations in a socially-distanced manner. Make sure you sanitise them where possible before donating them.

Send a card

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Blank cards and envelopes, stickers and topper pictures, and pens.

Get your young people to make a Christmas card and write a message of hope in it. These can then be donated to your chosen cause, as per the Giving hope activity. If you're stuck for design ideas, you could look at a website, such as Pinterest, for inspiration.

If you have time, they could also make a card for someone they're close to but haven't been able to see much because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

Christmas Shopping

(Length of activity: 15 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.

You'll need:

Get your young people to play a game based on the familiar game *My Grandmother Went To Market*.

Start instead with the saying 'I went Christmas shopping and I bought...'

The first person to start will say an item and then the next person will say the earlier item and add their own one. This continues until someone gets it wrong or forgets an item.

e.g. Person one - I went Christmas shopping and I bought... a Christmas tree. Person two – I went Christmas shopping and I bought... a Christmas tree and a turkey.

Conclusion

After these activities, your young people should know the difference between hope in God, Biblical hope, and hope in the world, wishful thinking.

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.

Candle of Christ

(Length of activity: 45 minutes.)

You'll need: An advent wreath – if you're not able to light candles, battery ones can be used instead, a Bible or look the passages up on www.biblegateway.com, paper/pens, and, if needed, a way of recording a video.

Remind your young people that over the next few weeks, in the run-up to Christmas, the period of time is called advent. 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. Light a candle to symbolise Christ – God coming close to us in the form of a human.

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 re-create a socially-distanced nativity story. One way of doing this would be for the girls to create a monologue of the main characters to share with your group. You could also film these to share with your church or for use on your website/social media channels or the young people might be prepared to perform their monologue at a Christmas church service.

The young people may want to think about the following questions as they write their monologue, as well as looking at Luke Chapter 2 and Matthew Chapter 2 in the Bible:

- What part did their character play in the Christmas story?
- How did they feel?

Depending on the numbers in your group you may just want to use the primary characters – Mary, Joseph, Gabriel, shepherds. If you have larger numbers you could include some of the secondary characters – innkeeper, Herod, donkey etc. This can be done in any way that suits your group it may be serious or they could add some humour.



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/EE7CcGlsWB8>.

Guess the drawing

(Length of activity: 15 minutes.)

You'll need: Flipchart and paper, pencils/pens, a timer, and a dice.

If you're a large group, split the young people into teams of two or three. Roll a dice and the person who rolls the highest number goes first. Give that young person a word from the list below, give a few seconds thinking time, and then they should attempt to draw what the word is. The other team members have one minute to guess what's being drawn.

Christmas cracker

Reindeer

Christmas pudding

A turkey

Christmas tree

Snowman

Christmas stocking

North Pole

Wrapping paper

Father Christmas

Grinch

Layla the Lamb

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 doing this online you could use the Zoom chat function (copying another leader whenever you send a private message) to let the young people know what they have to draw and the online 'whiteboard' function for the actual drawing.

Conclusion

After these activities, your young people should know about the greatest event – the birth of Jesus.