

Creative Ideas For Engaging Families This Christmas And Advent



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

a unique challenge; a unique opportunity

The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture (University of York) is working with the Church of England to explore the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on churches and communities. This is happening through a national survey of over 2,500 people, including clergy, church members, and the general public, as well as in depth interviews with individuals from all three groups across the country.

COVID-19 has been hugely challenging for churches, with our resources in terms of people and finance often depleted, while at the same time we face many new demands on time and energy. However, the pandemic has also stimulated enormous creativity. Never in most of our lifetimes have people been so aware of their need for comfort and hope, and churches around the country have been devising and adapting simple, safe, affordable ways to reach out and show care to those who are grieving, anxious and afraid. Here we share some of the brilliant, easy-to-use, Advent and Christmas ideas we have heard – along with others that we have collected from dioceses and other sources across the country.

Advent, Christmas and New Year offer us chances to let people catch up with what has been happening to them, process their grief, and realise the relevance of the Christian message and its power to bring light into darkness. We can't put on big events this year but small, personal opportunities to experience beauty and comfort, feel connected to others, and create some positive memories, are probably what are needed most. Small can be very beautiful this year and we can create 'a Christmas like no other.'

All these ideas have been shared by churches and individuals based on their particular contexts. In every case taking up these ideas needs careful planning and delivery, thinking about physical distancing, good hygiene (such as regular opportunities for hand-sanitising) and wearing face coverings if inside, plus any additional guidelines operating in your area.



pyjama midnight mass

Survey Respondent

On/Offline: Online

Affordability: Free

The Midnight Mass is a beautiful and profound experience for a lot of people, but families are rarely able to experience that. As this year was going to be different anyway, we are planning on holding an online pyjama service at midnight on Christmas Eve to include families more in the service.





socially distanced nativity

Survey Respondent

On/Offline: Online

Affordability: Free

For our nativity service this year, we're going to do a socially-distanced Nativity - one member of the church is writing a script, and then we're going to get people to dress up and play their parts from their own homes, either on Zoom or pre-recorded onto YouTube



advent storytime

Survey Respondent

On/Offline: Online

Affordability: £

The Church Junior school are planning on videoing the children reading a chapter each day from "The Cat's Advent Calendar", a book produced by the Iona Community (available for £2.65). These will then be uploaded to our church Facebook page.

Link: <https://www.ionabooks.com/product/the-cats-advent-calendar-pl10069/>



On/Offline Christingle

Survey Respondent

On/Offline: Both

Affordability: £

For our Christingle service, we will only be able to have a limited number of people in the church but will be streaming it and distributing 'making Christingle packs' to those who can't be in the building but will be joining in with the Facebook livestream at home. The children can come dressed in Nativity Costumes. Instead of the usual Nativity Play, the Vicar and Curate are going to do a surprise dress up as Christingles as part of a sketch and give people a laugh at a difficult time. Will be using a cartoon clip nativity story from YouTube to bring the Christmas story to life and offer a spoken and interactive gospel message. Things will be more visual on projector/PowerPoint than ever before.





"it begins in Bethlehem" instant nativity

The Bible Society

On/Offline: Either

Affordability: Free

The Bible Society have again produced a range of resources to support churches explore the Nativity story this year, including a booklet (which you can buy for £2.00 each), a brand-new fun and interactive rehearsal free Nativity script with great new illustrations and versions for in-person and online services, an accompanying PowerPoint presentation, and a brilliant video animation of the Nativity rhyme. Other than the booklet all the resources are available for free, and everything is available in both English and Welsh.

Link: <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1604595334.pdf>



Christmas prayer stars

The Diocese of Bristol

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: Free

The Diocese of Bristol have suggested a great activity for households to do together. After cutting out enough star shapes for the entire household, each person writes a prayer on one side and decorates the other however they want. Punch a hole in the top of each, before threading through a piece of string and attaching this to an outward-facing window or your Christmas tree. Alternatively, this could also be used as a prayer space activity within church environments.

Link: <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1604595334.pdf>



covid-safe posada

The Diocese of Bristol

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: ££

The Posada is a Christmas tradition for many churches around the country, in which figures of Mary and Joseph visit a different household each night over Advent leading up to the Crib service. While it may be a bit different, the Diocese of Bristol have provided guidance for making sure this is possible and safe in a 2020 environment.

Link: <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1604595334.pdf>





when God showed up

Faith in Kids

On/Offline: Online

Affordability: Free

Nativity services in 2020 will have to be a bit different, and Faith in Kids have provided a full resource for carrying out a safe nativity over digital platforms. "When God Showed Up" is a series of short scenes telling the nativity story that can be either pre-recorded with different households before being broadcast online - on YouTube, for example - or performed live over Zoom in a single call. They have even provided original downloadable backgrounds to use during each scene! They have also offered guidance for how this could be simplified depending on the number of participants available.

Link: https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173_God-with-us.zip



"jumping in the darkness" prayer station

Survey Respondent

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: ££

Inside the church we have set up a gazebo and covered it in sheets to make it dark, and then inside we've got a light that reacts and changes colours based on sound. We've called it "Jumping in the Darkness", and the idea is that you go in and you jump as high as you can, and if you jump high enough the light changes colour (though it's not actually about how you jump but rather how noisily you land). Every time the light changes colour you say a prayer, and toddlers especially love just going in there and looking at the light and making it change colour and having fun.



Advent window bunting

The Diocese of Bristol

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: Free

The Diocese of Bristol are encouraging people to use their windows to create an Advent bunting display by cutting out 24 nativity characters out of paper and hanging them - one per day - on a piece of string across a window that is visible to the street. Each day the cast of the scene will grow, and you can complete it with a cut out of Baby Jesus on Christmas morning.

Link: <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1604595334.pdf>





Christmas "chat mat"

The Diocese of Bath and Wells

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: Free

The Diocese of Bath and Wells have produced a great free printable resource for starting up conversations around the Christmas story, particularly with children and young people. Part of a series with different Bible stories and themes, they suggest 6 tips to get the best from the Bible Chat Mats: "1 - Do this with others; 2 - Print a copy to colour and doodle!; 3 - Read the Bible story together in an age appropriate Bible; 4 - Discuss the questions together; 5 - Pray together; 6 - Grow in faith together"

Link: <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Its-Christmas.pdf>



bake-along-a-Christmas

Faith in Kids

On/Offline: Online

Affordability: £

Faith in Kids have been full of great initiatives this Christmas, and one of them is tapping into the Great British Baker in all of us! Over the weekend of 11-12th December, they will be broadcasting a 'bake-a-long' video on their YouTube channel, featuring a baker guiding viewers through making gingerbread men & women in real time, interspersed with short all-age talks about Christmas. Alongside this, however, they have also created a resource for churches to run their own sessions, possibly as a Zoom live event, including ingredient lists (these could be delivered as packs in advance to families - the instructions even show how to pack them!) as well as a full script for the baking and all the talks. For any concerns around health and safety, please check the Faith in Kids risk assessment.

Link: https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173_God-with-us.zip



family Christmas activity pack

Faith in Kids

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: Free

This free downloadable activity pack from Faith in Kids is great for handing out to children and families either during your Christmas events or along with promotional materials or support packages.

Link: https://faithinkids.org/download-resource/173_God-with-us.zip





2020 posada ideas

The Diocese of York

On/Offline: Both

Affordability: £

The Diocese of York has created a wide range of resources for different ways to approach the Posada this year, "encouraging churches and schools to adapt the traditions of Posada and create opportunities to celebrate the hope of Advent in the midst of a pandemic." Their resources include information letters to send out, prayers and liturgies, activity sheets, and images from Posadas around the world. Not only that, but they also include suggestions for 6 different approaches for a COVID-safe Posada: Postal Posada; Facebook Posada; Outdoor Posada; Socially Distanced Procession; Static and Silent Posada; and Posada Game

Link: <https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/schools-and-youth/children-young-people-churches/advent-and-christmas-in-a-pandemic/advent-posada-resources/>



gold, frankincense, and myrrh trail

The Diocese of York

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: ££

This trail from the Diocese of York comes with flexible and COVID-friendly instructions and ideas for 7 "stations" that tell the nativity story around a church building for all ages, including as a prayerful reflection activity for adults. It also has the benefit of being able to be carried out longer through the Christmas season: "As the family 'travels with the wise men' there is an opportunity for this 'event' to stretch all the way through the Christmas holidays from before Christmas until Epiphany. This means that if a booking system is required so that there are not too many people in the church building at one time, there should be enough time for everyone that wants to attend."

Link: <https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/schools-and-youth/children-young-people-churches/advent-and-christmas-in-a-pandemic/gold-frankincense-and-myrrh/>



paper city nativity scene

Made By Joel

On/Offline: Offline

Affordability: Free

Made By Joel have created a simple print and colour Nativity scene featuring a range of characters and animals, as well as the stable.

Link: <http://madebyjoel.com/2013/12/paper-city-nativity-scene-joyfully-expanded.html>





want more?

This file gives just a glimpse into the huge range of creative ideas that are emerging across the church this year as we approach Christmas. If you are looking for more, we will be providing three more PDFs - with ideas for community engagement, Christmas services, and discipleship - while the Church Support Hub also has a growing collection of ideas for Christmas 2020 (<https://churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/occasions-for-follow-up/christmas-2020/>). As seen here, many dioceses have also curated some brilliant ideas and resources on their own websites, and some have also created dedicated spaces for resources for children, families, and young people. For example, the Diocese of London's children and youth ministry team have compiled dozens of ideas and a detailed resources database from across the web - much of which can be adapted for Christmas and Advent. We'd encourage you to look outside of your own diocese and see what's happening around the country!

