



THE SALISBURY DIOCESAN
BOARD OF EDUCATION

'Working for children, young people, schools and parishes'

Mustard Seeds Advent and Christmas Newsletter 2011

from Barbara Meardon Salisbury Diocesan Children's Adviser

With thanks, prayers and blessings that all your hard work over the next few weeks lead to children and families knowing that advent and Christmas are about so much more than presents.

Advent, the season of preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas, should be a time for families to come together in prayer and devotion. In our hectic modern world, however, it is easy to get distracted, and the Christmas music on the radio and decorations in the stores tend to increase our anxiety. No wonder so many people are tired of Christmas by the time Christmas Day finally arrives!



The world may move too fast, but we can slow down.

I love Advent because of the way it prepares us for the great Feast – the coming of Christ into the world. I think it's particularly important to mark this season as a way of keeping our focus on what Christmas is all about. With so much to distract us in the world from the central message of Christmas, I am careful to do things that will call to mind that 'Jesus is the reason for the season'! Advent is the 'preparation' for Christmas rather than part of Christmas itself – otherwise we find Christmas is over before it's truly begun. So activities are more about 'getting ready' and waiting with eager anticipation, and developing a sense of awe and wonder in the children, rather than lots of parties and premature celebrations.

Suggestions for families/ schools / Sunday school/ toddler groups/ activities for messy church or other workshops in Advent

If you have young children activity is important – doing things, making things, times of prayer, making use of rich symbolism and establishing traditions effectively builds memories for them and helps them to grasp more easily what it's all about.

Suggest to grandparents or Godparents, that they should do some of these activities when their grandchildren or Godchildren visit. Send advent calendars, story or activity books, invite them to

services or workshops run by your church. Buy Christian Christmas books for schools, playgroups etc. Pray for all children and families over this season.

As soon as Advent begins explain the **visual changes made in church** don't assume that people know what they mean and suggest they can make the same sort of changes at home.

Make a simple '**advent wreath**' with the 4 red or 3 purple, 1 pink and 1 white candle. Light a new candle each Sunday of Advent, and relight them at every evening meal to provide a focus and a reminder of where we are in the journey towards Christmas. Light a new candle each week and use special prayers and bible readings e.g.

<http://www.loyolapress.com/advent-wreath-activity-center.htm> OR
<http://www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html>

Have an **Advent Calendar** that is biblical at least in picture although many also have bible readings for each picture.

Journey to Bethlehem Calendar – Scripture Union

Coming of the King Advent Calendar or Christmas Opened Up or The Real Christmas Tree

www.thegoodbook.co.uk or www.eden.co.uk

Redemptorist Publications www.rpbooks.co.uk

Have or make a wooden advent calendar with drawers (bought from Waitrose!) or a material one with pockets or peg packets along a line...At the beginning of Advent put a different scripture reference into the drawers, taken from the readings for that day. Each child takes it in turn to open the little drawer, look up the scripture and read it out. They could also get a fair-trade chocolate which is another incentive to opening the calendar!

Chocolate advent calendars and decorations

Traidcraft Meaningful Christmas decorations, divine advent calendar, divine fair-trade coins

Online Calendars

www.paperlesschristmas.org

Consider ordering **Advent Extra** a very good seasonal magazine from Redemptorist publications

http://rpbooks.co.uk/product_details.php?item_id=1033

Make Christian Decorations e.g. Jesse tree or Chrismon

<http://www.sundayschoolkids.com/activity-christmas/1-c-chrismons-kit-vol1-instru.htm>

Chrismon are decorations using the symbols of Christ their colours are always limited to gold and white. As monograms of Christ, they are all made in combinations of GOLD and WHITE. White is the liturgical color for Christmas and stands for our Lord's purity and perfection. GOLD represents His majesty and glory. On the Chrismon tree, tiny white lights symbolize Christ as the light of the world.

Jesse Tree is decorated with pictures and symbols of the Old Testament prophets to connect the Advent Season with the faithfulness of God across 4,000 years of history.

Explanation, bible readings etc at www.crivoice.org/jesse

Jesse tree symbols www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.../FRIDGE1.HTM or <http://www.shalfleet.net/advent/makeajesstree.htm>

Book: The Jesse tree by Geraldine McCaughrean

Shoebbox of good deeds for Jesus for Christmas

Children make 'gift boxes' during Advent. They have a small shoebox each, which they decorate, and throughout the week they individually (and with help!) write down their 'good deeds' of the day and put these into their box. By the end of Advent, (the aim is!) they should have a box full of good deeds. They then 'present' these gift boxes to Jesus on His birthday on Christmas morning, as His gift. This has worked really well over the last few years, and we have found it is a beautiful way to start the celebration of Christmas. When the children present their gift boxes at the crib which we've set up in our hearth, we all sing 'happy birthday' to Jesus and even put a candle in a mince pie! Have a time of prayer, as excited children give Jesus a present of all their good deeds.

Or everyone in the family places a piece of straw into the manger in our crib, each time they make a sacrifice, e.g. letting someone else play with their favourite toy, doing a random or hidden act of kindness etc. By Christmas time there should be a warm manger full of straw made out of our loving sacrifices ready to greet the baby Jesus!

Or make an **advent paper chain** of prayers or good deeds that gets bigger as you get to Christmas with everyone having numbered sheets to fill in. http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/advent_paper_chain.htm

Posada

I've recommended this before but it is a great way to share the message of Christmas around your parish. Many churches knit lots of extra sheep and one is left at each house where the Posada stops, they are then invited to bring the sheep to the Christmas service. Information can be found at www.churcharmy.org.uk/posada

Posada is an old Mexican tradition where young people dressed as Mary and Joseph. They travelled from house to house asking for a room for the night and telling people about the arrival of Jesus in the

lead up to Christmas. On Christmas Eve they would visit the local church to re-enact the nativity and place figures of Mary and Joseph in a crib.

Celebrate St Nicholas's Day Tuesday December 6th with a service/ a workshop or in after school club

There are many other traditions worth adopting in Advent to prepare for Christmas. On the 6th December you could celebrate 'St Nicholas's day'. Tell the story of his life to the children, which always ends with the giving of chocolate coins to the children (in their shoes), and affirming them for the good things they've done.

Have a **communal decorating of a holly tree** if you have one on the garden with the children at this point and sing some Advent carols maybe make or buy bird food decorations to use.

Go carol-singing with friends (which the children love) maybe raise money for a charity picked by the children and adults together.

At **Sunday school or Toddler Group** encourage the children to act out the stories using small figures and thinking about the scripture verses to help them understand and enjoy Christmas with Christ at the centre. Make Christian Christmas decorations, Keep developing church and family traditions because the understanding and enjoyment of Christmas with Christ at the centre is greatly enhanced by our proper preparation during Advent.

Nativity Sets

Make a nativity set - Mary, Joseph, the infant Jesus, angels, shepherds, animals - that your children can enjoy touching. Together, make figures out of construction paper... or wrap cloth onto wire figures...

Bought nativity sets - Set out one figure each day from a Nativity set until the complete set is ready for Christmas day – you could even hunt for the figure.

Play with a Nativity sets - knitted version/ playmobil/wooden one

Christmas Cards

Encourage all Christians to send Christian cards with biblical scenes especially to children

Books with ideas, activities, stories to share or as presents to give

Creative Ideas for Advent & Christmas by Jane Tibbs £8.99 www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk contains many of the ideas above which all use readily available materials and have instant appeal. Many can be slotted in to any situation, used to illustrate the story of Christmas, or just done for pure enjoyment as part of the exciting 'getting ready' time. Some use seasonal objects that are easy to find in the shops, such as paper chains, or things that many people will have in their Christmas box, such as last year's Christmas cards. The activities are ideal for children aged 4-11, but will be enjoyed equally by people of

all ages. There are 80 ideas in total, many of which could become part of traditional family, church and community celebrations each year.

Play and Pray through Advent Lynn Chambers, Kay Warrington and Nia Catrin Williams

£9.99 www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk

A family resource containing stories and activities covering the Advent and Christmas season.

Give a **Christmas Bible Comic** £1.99 to every child in your Sunday school/church:

For under 11's a comic-strip retelling of the Christmas story. High-quality illustration and text together with quizzes, puzzles, facts and information to help them engage with the story more fully.

www.scriptureunion.org.uk

The Christmas Bible Storybook

One of my favourites for the under 5s. The book features full-colour photographic spreads from the award winning Big Bible Storybook and the board book format is perfectly sized for small hands, with short text for a parent or carer to read to the child. www.scriptureunion.org.uk

The Shepherd Girl of Bethlehem by Carey Morning £5.99 A little shepherd girl loves her father greatly, and adores spending time with him on the hillside, tending his flocks. But one night, he is called away and she can't find him. She anxiously searches high and low, eventually finding him at a stable in Bethlehem, where her journey ends with a glorious discovery.

The Lion Storyteller Christmas by Bob Hartman £12.99

My Very First Nativity Play by Lois Rock links to their real life experience of Christmas in the 21st Century

The Advent Calendar by Steven Croft £9.95

Usborne Advent Nativity Book by Felicity Brooks

The Christmas Baby by Sally Ann Wright

A Christmas Journey by Susie Poole

Saint Nicholas the story of the real Father Christmas by Mary Joslin

Look out for books that relate how Christians belief in Christmas has changed their lives e.g. **The Miracle of Jonathon Toomey** or **Legend of the Christmas Stocking** or **A Circle of Wonder**

See many more books at www.eden.co.uk

Please email your address to barbara.meardon@salisbury.anglican.org if you would like to be on the Mustard Seeds mailing list. Thank You

