

# LOVE LIFE LIVE ADVENT MAKE ROOM FOR THE MANGER

**SUGGESTED WEEKLY CHILDREN'S GROUP ACTIVITIES  
& HOW TO ADAPT THEM FOR ALL-AGE USE**

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## Advent 1 (30<sup>th</sup> November 2014)

### The Patriarchs and Matriarchs - Abraham and Sarah's story (Genesis 12.1-3)

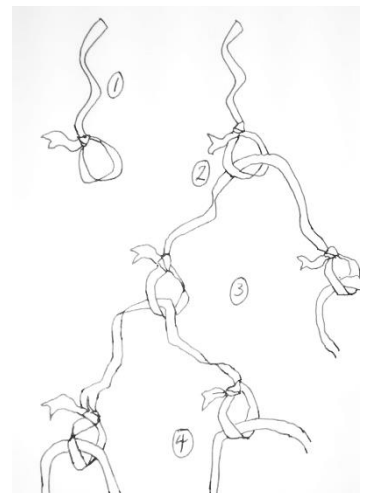
Today's Old Testament reading invites us to look backwards. Abraham and Sarah heard God's call and followed it, becoming the father and mother of our faith. God blessed them with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and through the generations God's blessing has been passed on. Advent is a good time for us to look back at the blessings we have received, and to work out ways of passing those blessings on to others.

### Activity suggestions for children's groups

*Preparation beforehand:* Prepare lots of lengths (c.12-18 inches) of ribbon (or wool). One of them should be tied into a loop at one end, while all the others will need a loop at both ends.

*Reading:* Read the Bible passage through from the LLLA booklet, emphasising God's promise of blessing, and how Abraham and Sarah's response enabled that blessing to be passed on to 'all the families of the earth'.

- *Hold up your first ribbon (with the loop at just one end).*  
This represents God's promise of blessing.
- *Take another length of ribbon.* This is Abraham and Sarah. God called them, and made a promise, that they would be the mother and father of his people, and that they would have the biggest family on earth.  
*Thread the second length of wool or ribbon through the loop in the first, so that you now have two ends.* God kept his promise.
- Through the generations, God kept on making wonderful promises, and giving people his blessing, and every time someone heard God's promise and did what God asked, the blessing got passed on. *Keep adding a ribbon to each new empty loop – you can point out that you are creating a sort of family tree, each new 'generation' doubles the number of loops you have available for the next 'generation', as the blessings of God's promises are shared. If they are enjoying it, you can carry on, making a network of blessing that will spread to touch the whole room and require everyone to join in.*
- Who has blessed you? If you traced back the blessings in your life, who would you want to name in your own 'family tree' of blessing? Some of them might be members of your own family, some might be teachers, friends, people who shared their faith with you. Then think about who you have blessed – the people you care for, teach, support, and share your faith with. We receive God's blessing and we are also a blessing to others.
- Ask, how many times do you think this can happen? How many times can we receive God's blessing and pass it on? If each person who heard God's call passed on God's blessing to just two other people, who then passed on that blessing to two people each, think how much blessing there would be in the world!
- What would happen if we did that during Advent – starting today, with just one person, if they passed on a blessing to two more tomorrow, reaching four people the day after etc., how many new blessings would there be by Boxing Day? (Answer: 67,108,864 – enough for the entire UK population!)
- Links to the daily actions: Today's story reminds us to look back at the past year to see how we have been blessed (see daily actions for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> December), and to look forward to how we can respond to God's call to be a blessing to others (see daily action for 2<sup>nd</sup> December).
- *You may wish to give everyone a ribbon with loops tied in it to take home – as a reminder of God's blessings, God's promises, and the ways that we can use Advent as a time to bless others.*
- End with the prayer from the LLLA booklet for the First Sunday of Advent.



## ***If you do this activity with an all age congregation***

- you can potentially end up with a really big network of ribbons – make sure you have plenty!
- it would work as a useful way of enabling those who won't want to speak up or get up from their seats to become involved in what's happening
- if you have any mathematicians in the congregation they may know or be able to work out the maths question!
- It would be good to be able to celebrate the family trees in your congregation, if you have any (eg children, parents, grandparents, even great-grandparents) – older members of the congregation may be more aware of the grand scale of the passage of time through the generations, but equally, some of the children may have learned about family trees at school – it is the sort of activity that can enable different age groups in church to have something to talk about.

## ***Song suggestions***

*For children: This song includes the option of adding actions between repetitions – it may be known to some through school. Sheet music and guitar chords are widely available online.*

**Father Abraham had many sons,  
many sons had father Abraham,  
I am one of them, and so are you,  
so let's all praise the Lord.**

*For an all age congregation: this song reflects the dual Advent themes of 'being ready' and the progression of patriarchs and matriarchs, and prophets etc. The tune is 'Sing Hosanna'. The words are free to use.*

1 There's a story to tell of creation,  
And the patriarchs' faith of old,  
There are stories of prophets and sages,  
We'll repeat them 'til the world's been told:

*Refrain:*

*Sing together! sing together!*

*Sing to welcome in the King of Kings.*

*Sing together! Sing together!*

*Sing to welcome in the King.*

2 There are stories of sin and forgiveness,  
Of a Kingdom of truth and love.  
Of a girl who gave birth to a baby,  
To fulfil God's promise from above:

3 As God's people prepare for his coming,  
And remember those days long gone,  
Our own stories are yet to be written,  
As we live to make God's kingdom come:

4 We must each of us wait for the morning,  
Through the night we will watch and pray,  
As we look for the light that is dawning,  
We'll be ready at the break of day:

## Advent 2 (7<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

### The Prophets – The Promise of the King (Isaiah 11.1-3a)

Isaiah's words remind us that Advent means 'coming' – it is a time of looking forward, both to Christmas and the celebration of Jesus' birth, and also to the time when Jesus will come again to gather all his people.

#### Activity suggestion for children's groups: "tree of hope"

Read through the reading from Isaiah in the LLLA booklet. Emphasise the image of the old tree stump with the new branches growing from it. The stump looks dead, but God promised to make it live again.

Make connections with the natural world in winter: the leaves all fall off the trees, the plants seem to stop growing, and it can seem as if spring and summer were a long time ago. It can even feel as if Spring will never come again – although it does, every year.

*Link to daily action (13<sup>th</sup> December): Plant some bulbs inside or outside, ready for spring. This is an act of hope and faith for the future. If the weather isn't too cold, the children might like to plant some bulbs in the churchyard (or in pots to take home). If it's very cold and frosty, a nice instant way to see growth from what seems dead is to grow carrot tops – send the children away with a cut carrot top, and a jam jar lid (or similar) lined with damp cotton wool – if they keep it moist, they will have fresh green sprouting before next Sunday.*

God's people felt like they were living in winter – life was hard, and they were looking forward to a time when it would be better – they wanted peace, and happiness, and freedom. They had hope because of God's promise.

Wonder together what we have to look forward to over the next few weeks. We're looking forward to Christmas – this might include particular presents(!), and also seeing family that we don't normally spend time with, having a break from school, and having time to rest. Beyond Christmas, it might include things like learning to ride a bike, a birthday, the arrival of a new baby brother or sister... ask the children for their own ideas of what they are looking forward to personally.

*Link to daily action (8<sup>th</sup> December): Take time out and do something really nice that you have wanted to do for a long time. You may not be able to do this exactly on 8<sup>th</sup> December, but you could start planning something special.*

Wonder together about what the world is looking forward to and hoping for now: older children may talk about peace, enough food for everyone, for nobody to be lonely at Christmas....

Give each child an old, dry twig – ideally one with a few branches, so that it looks like a miniature tree – link this with the reading. Also give out plenty of leaf shapes cut from green paper. Ask the children to write words or draw pictures on their leaves that represent things they are hoping for and looking forward to – for themselves or for the world. Stick the leaves to the twigs using sticky tape.

Finish with the prayer for the Second Sunday of Advent from the LLLA booklet.



### ***If you do this 'tree of hope' activity with an all age congregation:***

- You will need a much bigger twig, and more leaf shapes – don't forget to provide pens and pencils. If you are feeling adventurous you could cut leaves of different shapes.
- Some churches will already have a Christmas tree and a Jesse tree, and perhaps also a prayer tree. Try and find a way for your 'tree of hope' to be distinct from these others.
- If you don't want to use a real bit of twig, you could cut a shape from brown or black paper – this is the easiest version of the tree, since the leaves can be provided with double sided sticky tape already on the back – even people who don't think they're good at cutting and sticking should be able to manage sticking a paper leaf to a paper tree!
- It works well if people can come forward to stick their own leaf on whatever tree you use, but with large congregations (or with people who don't like to get up out of their seats), you could ask that people put their leaves in the collection plate, along with their offering, and then get a team of people to work quietly and quickly to stick them all on your tree by the end of the service.

### ***Song suggestions:***

*For all ages:*

Give me joy in my heart – *you can add verses to this one, such as 'Give me hope in my heart, keep me faithful' or 'Give me faith in my heart, keep me hoping'*

*For adults:*

Of the Father's love begotten

## Advent 3 (14<sup>th</sup> December 2014)

### John the Baptist – Prepare the way (Mark 1.1-4)

John the Baptist is the ultimate warm-up act. He describes himself, using Isaiah's words, as "A voice" – his whole role is to be the one who speaks about who Jesus is, and what it all means, before Jesus himself arrives on the scene. John's words are so simple: repent, be baptised. His message is all about reconciliation between heaven and earth, between people and God. He is the one who starts to tell the world that God is walking amongst his own people, and that we can know him for ourselves and become part of his kingdom.

### Activity suggestions for children's groups

Preparation: you will need art materials and writing materials, and a selection of short Christmas poems (U A Fanthorpe's poems are very thought-provoking, and the simplest of them are accessible to older children), and works of art (perhaps taken from Christmas cards, or from 'The Christ We Share' resource pack, published by USPG/Methodist Publishing House).

Reading: read the bible passage from the LLLA booklet, emphasising John as the voice in the wilderness, and his message to 'change their hearts and lives'.

Introduce John as a messenger – it was his job to introduce Jesus and get people ready for him. He had to work out what the most important things were to say, and he chose words that were about making peace between earth and heaven, and how we all needed to change our hearts and lives to make room for Jesus. This is one of the things we have been thinking about all the way through Advent, through the daily actions of LLLA.

Wonder aloud together about what we would want to say, if it was our job to get everyone ready for Christmas. What is the most important thing we would want to say? Here you may like to share some of the poems. If we had to choose one picture of the Christmas story, which part would we choose? Share some of the artwork. There is no one correct answer to these questions. There are many aspects of the Christmas story that are important, and different parts of the story will resonate with different people. If the children are having a hard time thinking about which is the most important thing, you could try borrowing a question from Godly Play: "Is there any part of the story we could miss out and still have all the story that we need?"

Invite everyone to create their own piece of art or poetry. Link to daily actions (15<sup>th</sup> December): Write a poem or draw a picture that says something about what Christmas means to you. If you like, take pictures or scan the items created, and send them in to the LLLA team so that they can be added to those already received. [add instructions/contact details]

Your group may wish to work collaboratively – tell the whole story, comic strip style, in a series of pictures or poems, with each child contributing a different part of the story. It may be that some parts of the story get more responses than others – older children may wish to reflect on why this is.

Whether or not you send in everyone's contributions to @LiveLent on Twitter or Instagram, why not display them in church so that the whole congregation can enjoy them?

Finish with the prayer for the Third Sunday of Advent from the LLLA booklet.

## ***If you do this activity with an all age congregation:***

- It's sad how many adults think they cannot draw or are not creative. You may need to give them the option of simply writing a straightforward description of the moment in the story that they have identified.
- Artwork, poems, or descriptions might also include a note as to why that part of the story felt so important.
- If you issue your whole congregation with the same size paper (though you could use different colours) you could ask people if they were willing to 'hand in' their artwork so that you can hole-punch it and bind it with ribbon or string to make a book (which might be in chronological order according to the Christmas story, if the contributions lend themselves to this.) The book might be displayed somewhere prominent in church, such as by the crib or tree, so that visitors can look at it.

## ***Song suggestions:***

### ***All age congregations:***

- *Go tell it on the mountain*

### ***Songs for children:***

Sing of the time the angel came, the angel came, the angel came,  
Sing of the time the angel came to bring the news to Mary.

Sing of the birth at Bethlehem, at Bethlehem, at Bethlehem,  
Sing of the birth at Bethlehem, the baby in the manger.

Sing of the time the shepherds came, the shepherds came, the shepherds came, the shepherds came,  
Sing of the time the shepherds came to worship in the stable.

Sing of the brightly shining star, the shining star, the shining star,  
Sing of the brightly shining star, that led the kings to Jesus.

Sing of the love of God on earth, God on earth, God on earth,  
Sing of the love of God on earth, that brings us close to heaven.

*[Tune: Here we go round the mulberry bush. Words: free to use]*

## Advent 4: 21<sup>st</sup> December

### Mary and the Holy Family

This reading begins with the angel telling Mary not to be afraid – the angels makes it sound as if everything is fine, better than fine, in fact! But when we read on with the rest of the Christmas story what we find is that while the heart of the story is the wonderful news of God coming to be among his beloved people, this central message is wrapped up in a story that is full of things going wrong. Today's activity explores how we find peace and joy in times of chaos.



### Activity suggestions for children's groups

*Preparation: Put a heart shape (ideally something tactile like a cushion), a candle, and a smile (a paper cut-out smiley face, or similar) into a box, and wrap the box in plain paper.*

**Reading:** Read the reading from the LLLA booklet, emphasising the angel's words to Mary, "Do not be afraid."

Wonder together about why Mary might be afraid – think through the Christmas story together, checking off all the things that went wrong. Each time something goes wrong, write it on the box wrapping.

You might include some or all of the following, depending on the age range of your group:

- They hadn't planned on starting a family yet – the angel's news was a complete shock
- Mary didn't even know if Joseph would stay with her, now that she was going to have a baby
- Just when she was starting to get really big and tired, she and Joseph had to go on a journey
- They had nowhere to stay when they got there
- They baby ended up being born in a stable, where it was all dirty
- "Random" people kept visiting them (!)
- They learned of a plot to kill them and had to run away to another country as refugees

No wonder the angel had to say, "Don't be afraid"! There were lots of good reasons to be scared, and a lot of things went wrong, or made life really difficult.

But Mary still managed to find something wonderful in all this chaos. Perhaps it was in the quiet time after the shepherds had left, and the stable animals had gone to sleep. Perhaps it was when Jesus first opened his eyes, and looked up at her – a moment of heaven touching earth! There must have been a moment when everything around them just stopped, and Mary could experience that peace and joy and love with her new son: God's Son.

*Unwrap the box, and get out the items and show them. Light the candle (carefully!).*

The peace and the love and the joy are the real gift, and all the other stuff was just the wrapping it came in.

One of the best things we can do during these last days of Advent is find moments of peace and joy in the midst of our own particular combination of Christmas chaos, expectation, and tiredness! Wonder aloud together what bits of Christmas for us are the wrapping, and which bits are the real thing. Sometimes the wrapping is lovely (many of the distractions around Christmas are great fun, as long as they don't take over and make us all exhausted!) and sometimes the wrapping is hard (like being away from people you love, or finding the people around you difficult to get on with). Sometimes the wrapping can distract us from what's inside the present.



Wonder aloud together about ways to find moments of peace and joy and love, even when everything seems busy, or chaotic. Link with daily action (24<sup>th</sup> December): As you make your final preparations for Christmas, take a moment to thank God for what he has already given you. Practice being still, using the candle flame (or taking it in turns to hug the heart cushion) as a focus.

Finish with the prayer for the Fourth Sunday of Advent from the LLLA booklet.

### ***If you are doing this activity with an all age congregation***

- You will need a bigger box, for sufficient visual effect – it might be useful to ask someone (perhaps an older child or teenager) to write on the box for you.
- You will have more people for whom Christmas is stressful and difficult – some of them may not wish to confront these issues, particularly if the stress is around family dynamics or financial worries. Be gentle, and allow people to participate (or not) as they feel comfortable. It may be helpful for families to think together about how they can help each other find moments of peace.
- On a practical level, it will be harder to pass a heart cushion round a large congregation (though you can certainly try!) – if you want everyone to take something home, you could use stickers with suitable images printed on them (see below), inviting people to stick them somewhere that they associate with being busy or stressed, as a reminder of the need to find a moment of stillness, calm, and peace.



### ***Song suggestions***

#### ***For children:***

- Share the light of Jesus (Bernadette Farrell)

#### ***For all age congregations:***

- Calypso carol (See him lying on a bed of straw) – *some children may know this from school, and the refrain is easy to join in with.*
- The Angel Gabriel – *children may join in with the 'Gloria' even if they can't keep up with the verses.*
- Thou didst leave thy throne (Refrain: O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee) – *the verses for this one may be hard to read quickly for children, but they can probably join in with the refrain*