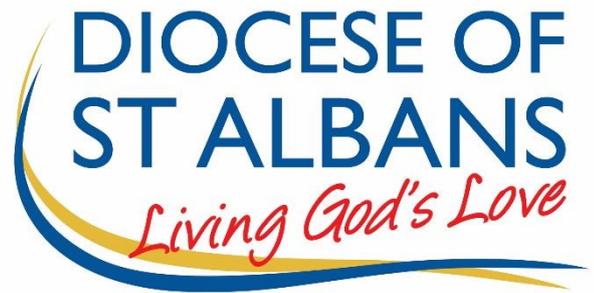


FAITH AT HOME IN ADVENT

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Dear parents and carers,

What is this about?

This is a free resource to help you and your children journey together through Advent. It was designed in 2019 to complement a set of devotions being put together for adults by Red Letter Christians, and updated for 2020, independently of RLC.

Red Letter Christians are a network of Christians who believe that Jesus' life and words move us to respond to poverty, injustice, and exclusion with compassion and action. This resource is designed to connect the Christmas story to issues of justice and inclusion, in a child-friendly way.

What's involved?

Each week has a Bible reading or two. There is a family activity suggested for Sunday – Friday of every week. Sunday is always reading and talking about the story together. You don't have to do every activity! There may be many days when you don't have the time or the energy. That's fine. The activities all stand separately from each other.

Some of the activities that rely on discussion and abstract thinking may be tough for toddlers. You may want to replace some of those activities with some from here:

<https://churchofenglandchristenings.org/after-a-christening/things-to-do-with-children-over-winter-and-christmas/> if you have primarily very young children in your household.

Do I need to buy a bunch of stuff?

You don't need anything new or expensive to do the activities – paper, marker pens or coloured pencils are the main things used. When there may be things you don't have (for example, a Nativity set), alternatives are suggested.

If you have any suggestions or feedback, I'd love to hear them so I can make this better for future years. Email me at cme@stalbens.anglican.org or find me on Twitter at @stalbensCME.

Thanks are due to the Rev Luke Lerner and the Rev Tim Lomax for supporting the development of this resource.

May you and your family have a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas.

- *Margaret*

Week One: Longing/expectation

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (November 29th):

Read Luke 1:26-56 together.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed

that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Mary’s Song of Praise

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Ask the following questions and allow anyone who wants to to share an answer (there are no right or wrong answers).

I wonder what your favourite part of that story was.

I wonder what the most important part of that story was.

I wonder why Mary sang that song.

I wonder how Mary felt when the angel came.

I wonder why Mary said yes.

MONDAY: Take one piece of paper for each member of the family. As a family, make a list of everything in the world that's hard or sad or scary. Write some of these things on each piece of paper. Then, turn the paper over, hand one paper to each person, and draw what you think God wants the world to be like (you can add words to your picture if you want). Finish by sharing what you drew and praying together for God to change the hard and scary places into what you've imagined.

TUESDAY: *If you are able to donate food:* re-read these lines from Mary's song as a family: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away." Choose a box from around your home and place it by the door. Every time you go to the shops between now and Christmas, get something extra and put it in the box. Around Christmas Eve, take the box to your local foodbank (find your nearest one here: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/>)

If you are not able to donate food: Re-read these lines from Mary's song as a family: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away." Take a walk around your neighbourhood and find any places where this is happening (or look on Google maps, if you have it and prefer to stay indoors). Where are people's bodies and souls being fed? Where are people being cared for and lifted up? Stop and pray for those places. You could even write a blessing and slip it through the letterbox if you like.

WEDNESDAY: Talk together: What are you waiting for in your life right now? What do you want God to do? Pray for these things together.

THURSDAY: Look together at photos of mum when she was pregnant with each of the children. If your children are fostered or adopted, and you have photos of their birth mother during pregnancy, you may share these if appropriate. Look at photos of when each child had just arrived into the family, whether through birth, fostering, or adoption. Share stories of the time spent waiting for each child, and what it felt like to wait, and long for, and expect them. (If there are children in your family who have died, you may also want to include stories about waiting for them, and share memories.)

FRIDAY: Look back at the pictures you made on Monday. Is there anything we can do to help make the world more like that?

SATURDAY: Rest and wait.

Week 2: Voices from the Margins

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 6th):

Read Luke 2:1-20 together.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the

shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Ask the following questions and allow anyone who wants to to share an answer (there are no right or wrong answers).

I wonder what your favourite part of that story was.

I wonder what the most important part of that story was.

I wonder why God chose to tell the shepherds first.

I wonder what the shepherds felt when they saw the baby.

I wonder why God chose to be born poor instead of rich.

MONDAY: The Kings and shepherds welcomed Jesus into the world. Think of a time when somebody made you feel really welcome, and like you belonged and were important. Share these stories together as a family. Think about how you can help make your home, school, place of work, church, etc, more welcoming to people.

TUESDAY: *If you can afford to donate:* Go to Good Gifts (<https://www.goodgifts.org/>), Oxfam Unwrapped (<https://www.oxfam.org.uk/shop/oxfam-unwrapped>) or a similar organisation. Choose together a gift that will help shepherds, or new mums and babies, in the world today.

If you can't afford to donate: God's first instructions to humans in the Bible were to care for the earth and everything in it. Mary and Joseph said yes to the job of caring for Jesus, God made human. The shepherds dedicate their lives to caring for the sheep. God is the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for all of us. Who cares for each of you? Who cared for you in the past? Pray together for all these people. If you want to, you can make thank-you cards for them. (Note: if this activity is painful, and one or more of you realises you have not been cared for as you should be/should have been, then extend this activity to think about who you can ask for help in being cared for, or in addressing old wounds. Your vicar? A friend? A family member? Your GP?)

WEDNESDAY: Read Matthew 2:1-12 together.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Ask the following questions and allow anyone who wants to to share an answer (there are no right or wrong answers).

I wonder what your favourite part of the story was.

I wonder what the most important part of that story was.

I wonder why the wise men wanted to come see the baby.

I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt when the wise men came.

I wonder what it feels like to go on a long journey.

THURSDAY: Jesus is called the Prince of Peace, and in yesterday's story he was called King of the Jews. In the story, wise leaders who might be Kings came to visit him. Make a list, as a family, of the things that make someone a good leader. Pray for everyone who has power, in your community, local government, national government, and around the world, that they show these values.

FRIDAY: Turn off all the electric lights in the house, all the TVs, all the radios, and put all your phones in another room. Light a candle (or download the free NIGHT CANDLE app, if you don't have a candle and lighter/matches). Sit in silence for one minute (if there are very young children) or two minutes. Pray for God's peace to come into the world. Pray for God to open your hearts to welcome Jesus.

SATURDAY: Rest and wait.

Week 3: Jesus as Other

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 13th):

Read Matthew 2:13-15 and 19-21 together.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

The Return from Egypt

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

Ask the following questions and allow anyone who wants to to share an answer (there are no right or wrong answers).

I wonder what your favourite part of that story was.

I wonder what the most important part of that story was.

I wonder what it felt like for Mary and Joseph to have to leave home in order to be safe.

I wonder what it was like when they arrived in Egypt.

I wonder what might have made them feel welcome and included.

I wonder why Herod wanted to hurt Jesus.

MONDAY: Talk together as a family about what you've heard about the word "refugee." What does it mean? Look up "what is a refugee" if you have internet? What do you discover? What kind of dangers might Mary and Joseph and Jesus have had to face along their journey? If you can, write an email or postcard to your MP asking them to help refugees be safe in this country.

If your family are refugees, spend some time today thinking about the ways in which your journey was similar to the one Jesus's family took. Who showed God's love to you along the way? What has made you feel safe/unsafe in this country?

TUESDAY: Take some time, as a family, to each draw a picture of a place where you feel really safe. If you need to imagine one, you can do an imaginary place instead. Share your pictures together. What is there? Who is there?

WEDNESDAY: Think about all the people Jesus has been with, or been like, in the stories you've read so far. Write what they're like, and anyone you know who might be like them. This can be an individual you know, or a group of people, or someone/a group you've heard about in the news. I've included some to start you off. Add your own!

Mary	Joseph	Shepherds
Young mum	Caring for a child that isn't his	Poor
Wise men	Jesus	Anyone else
Rich people	Has to leave home to be safe	

When you're done, pray for all the people in your list.

THURSDAY: Talk together as a family – what does it mean for God to become a person like us? Is that important? Why or why not?

FRIDAY: If you have a Nativity set at home, have the children spend some time today putting together their own show, using the characters, to tell the stories you've heard so far. Adults can provide refreshments if they want. Children could also make programmes, lighting effects, etc. Present the show for the adults.

If you don't have a Nativity set, you could either print off this paper one: <http://madebyjoel.com/2013/12/paper-city-nativity-scene-joyfully-expanded.html> or use other toys and household items to make the characters and settings of the story.

If your household has only one child, they can do this as a solo project, or draft one or more adult in to help. However, the child is in charge of how the story is told. They could also join up with friends over Zoom to do a "virtual Nativity play."

SATURDAY: Rest and wait

Week 4: God with Us

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 20th): Read John 1:1-5, and verse 14 together.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Ask the following questions and allow anyone who wants to to share an answer (there are no right or wrong answers).

I wonder what your favourite part of this reading was.

I wonder what the most important part of this reading was.

I wonder what the writer means when they talk about "the Word."

I wonder what the writer means when they say "the Word became flesh."

I wonder how this reading makes you feel.

MONDAY: Here are some of the ways in which Jesus describes himself, or is described, in the Bible. Which is your favourite? Would you add any others? If you want to, choose one or two and draw a picture of them.

WORD	KING	SHEPHERD	GATE
VINE	THE PATH	LIGHT	KING
PRINCE OF PEACE	COUNSELLOR/HELPER	TEACHER	Add your own!

TUESDAY: We talk about Jesus coming into the world as light shining in darkness. What do you know about light from Science lessons? Did you know that light looks plain, but actually has all the colours inside it? Try this simple experiment to make a rainbow out of light at home:

<https://www.physicscentral.com/experiment/physicsathome/rainbow.cfm> . How does the experiment work? What do the different colours make you think of? How is the light of God like a rainbow? How is it different? Did you make a rainbow for the NHS this year? Finish by praying for all the places in the world, or in your own life, that feel dark and sad, that God's beautiful rainbow light can come into them. Pray for all health care workers, that they can be signs of God's light in times of sickness.

WEDNESDAY: Set aside fifteen minutes as a family. Gather some things to make stuff with – Lego, or Play-doh, or paper and pens, or things from your recycling bin and Sellotape, or whatever you can find.

Re-read the Bible passage from Sunday of this week.

Spend five minutes making something in response to it.

Read the passage again, slowly.

Take turns talking about what you've made to each other.

Ask, "did you notice anything new in the Bible passage today?"

THURSDAY – Christmas Eve: Try to find ten minutes of peace sometime today. Gather together all the pictures you've made together as part of this Advent journey, along with any lists or prayers or anything else that have been part of your activities. Place them around your Nativity, or your Christmas tree. If you've been gathering food for a foodbank, from one of Week 1's suggested activities, bring that as well.

Light a candle or use the Night Candle app and turn off all the lights in the house. Gather children into laps, if they want.

Sing your favourite Christmas carol together. Then read the following. If you have lots of people who can read, you can take turns being the leader.

Leader: Thank you God, for becoming human.

All: Word made flesh.

Leader: Thank you, God, for loving and being with people who were poor, or vulnerable, or outcasts.

All: Word made flesh.

Leader: Thank you, God, for loving and being with people like us.

All: Word made flesh.

Leader: Thank you, God, for being part of a family, like us.

All: Word made flesh.

Leader: Thank you, God, for being a child.

All: Word made flesh.

Leader: Thank you, God, for always loving us, and for never giving up on us. Help us to welcome you into the world and show your love to everyone we meet.

All: Word made flesh.

Finish, if you want, with a big family group hug! (You might want to blow out the candle first!!)