

# PLAY and PRAY through Advent

**A family resource:**  
with stories and activities for the  
Advent and Christmas season



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# Comments from field tests

All the material in this book has been field tested before publication. For your interest and encouragement, here are some of the comments that were subsequently fed back to the authors.

'Monday Club meets during the lunch break. Led by a team of five members of local churches, it is open to anyone who wishes to join in at any time. The aim is to learn about the Christian faith and about caring for one another and for all of God's creation, through stories, songs, craft, puzzles and games. It is intended to be a time of fun as well as a considering time. *Play and Pray through Advent* has helped us to explore Bible stories in a simple visual way and talk about our understanding of God. We have prayed together and sung together and crafted reminders of what we have shared to take home. The resource was easily adapted to suit the situation and the time that is available to us.'

*(Knelston School, Swansea and Brecon)*

'This method of teaching was completely new to people in our congregation and the response has been amazing. The story cloth earned respect and was considered a sacred space. The children all responded well and discussions were sometimes very funny and at other times quite touching. As a new teacher, I am learning so much myself through *Play and Pray through Advent*. Truly, for me, it has been a Godsend.'

*(St Paul's Llansamlet, Swansea and Brecon)*

'We used *Play and Pray through Advent* with our children's craft group which meets on Saturday morning and it has been great fun for us and the children. Well done for creating a programme appropriate for those with experience and those just starting out on their journey, working with children in the church.'

*(Llysfaen, St Asaph)*

'We were absolutely delighted to pilot *Play and Pray through Advent* with our midweek club as it did 'exactly what it said on the tin'. The diversity of the craftwork was excellent, the stories first class and the songs to familiar tunes very easy to pick up. The proof of the pudding, though, is in the eating and our children thoroughly enjoyed all the different aspects of the course. I am delighted to say that I can commend it to colleagues in Sunday school, junior church and, as in our case, midweek club.'

*(Aberedw, Swansea and Brecon)*

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# Foreword

If you wish to communicate the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in your family, primary school, Sunday school or children's club, you have an immensely valuable resource in your hands.

A good deal of what is here is based on the idea of *Godly Play*. This was in many ways a new concept at a time when ever more sophisticated media were being tried in the classroom and church. In contrast, *Godly Play* emphasizes the telling of stories and the vital component of human interaction. That interaction is not simply between storyteller and 'audience' (a better word would be 'participants') but also between the participants themselves.

The fundamental concept has much in common with good liturgical practice. Effective public worship is unself-conscious; it's about a conversation and a relationship between a congregation (including its leader) and God. When a congregation celebrates, let's say, Christmas, it's not simply celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Christ—that would be to turn Christmas into nothing more than a birthday celebration. Good liturgy invites the congregation back to Bethlehem, to experience afresh the tent-pitching of the divine Word among us, and leads us to pray that Christ may be 'born in us today'. That's the way this book works: it invites all its participants to bring the stories of the gospel to life in themselves.

The book is full of great ideas to suit every context in which it may be used and, most importantly, it links with the worship of the church. Far too much activity with children in church is tokenism. We shuffle them off somewhere else to be creative; then, when they are nicely wound up, we bring them back for a blessing at a moment in the service when the adults are at their most spiritually focused. Result: frustration for the children, annoyance for the adults. This book provides the material for vitally blurring the age-divide, allowing children to share with adults at least a little of what they are discovering of the gospel, and encouraging adults to share with children a little of what they, too, are experiencing of God.

I remember having a copy of the pilot version of this book and being most impressed with it, not least because I had first-hand experience that its compilers know what they're writing about. I hope you'll want to share this book with others: why not get some copies for friends with children of primary school age or for children's group leaders?

*Robert Paterson, Bishop of Sodor and Mann  
(Formerly Principal Officer of the Church in Wales  
Council for Mission and Ministry, 2000–2006)*

# Introduction

*Play and Pray through Advent* unites the world of the child with the themes we experience in church during the period of Advent and Christmastide. This innovative programme, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, suggests ways in which children can engage creatively with the story at home or in midweek groups and clubs, by exploring themes from the Gospels and preparing for the Sunday worship of their local church.

The material is based on the methodology of *Godly Play*, using story cloths and simple visuals to tell the story. *Godly Play* is a teaching method developed by Jerome Berryman in the United States. Play is nature's way of extending the child's horizons and understanding of life. The *Godly Play* approach draws on this natural sense of playfulness and creativity to enable the spiritual growth of the child.

## Advent and Christmastide

*Play and Pray through Advent* encourages children and families to participate in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, his early years and the beginning of his ministry. During the four Sundays of Advent, Christians get ready for Christmas by reflecting on how the birth of the Saviour was heralded in the Old Testament scriptures and the New Testament Gospels. Messages were brought by the prophets, John the Baptist and angels.

Christmas celebrates the birth of the promised Saviour. After Christmas we celebrate the visit of the wise men and the presentation of Christ in the temple (known as Candlemas and celebrated on 2 February in some church traditions), when we celebrate the presentation of the Christ-child in the temple and his recognition as the light for the world. The story of the presentation of Christ in the temple ends the 40 days of Christmas and Epiphany. This story is a pivotal feast between Christmas and Easter, when Christians look back again at Christmas before turning towards the cross.

## How to use this book

This programme enables families to prepare in a creative way for the worship each Sunday and may also be used in Sunday school, midweek clubs, children's groups or circle time in primary schools. Each week has a double-page spread comprising three distinct sections:

### Getting ready

- ✦ Theme for the week
- ✦ Bible focus, providing the background for the story cloth activities
- ✦ Story for the week, telling the Gospel story in simple language

### Let's play and pray...

- ✦ Story cloth activities for each day of the week
- ✦ Talk-about ideas, suggesting daily topics to talk about together
- ✦ Prayer for the week to end each day's activity

### Song for the week

On pages 50–67, you will find suggestions for a song for each week, which may be sung at home as part of the daily activities and also incorporated into the Sunday worship. The songs are all sung to well-known nursery rhymes or other popular melodies.

### Craft for the week

On pages 70–74, simple crafts have been suggested, primarily for those who are completing the week's activities in one session. The cloth would be used to tell the story, using the appropriate artefacts. This would be followed up with 'Talk about' and the prayer and song for the week, then lead into the craft activity.

### Celebrating on Sunday

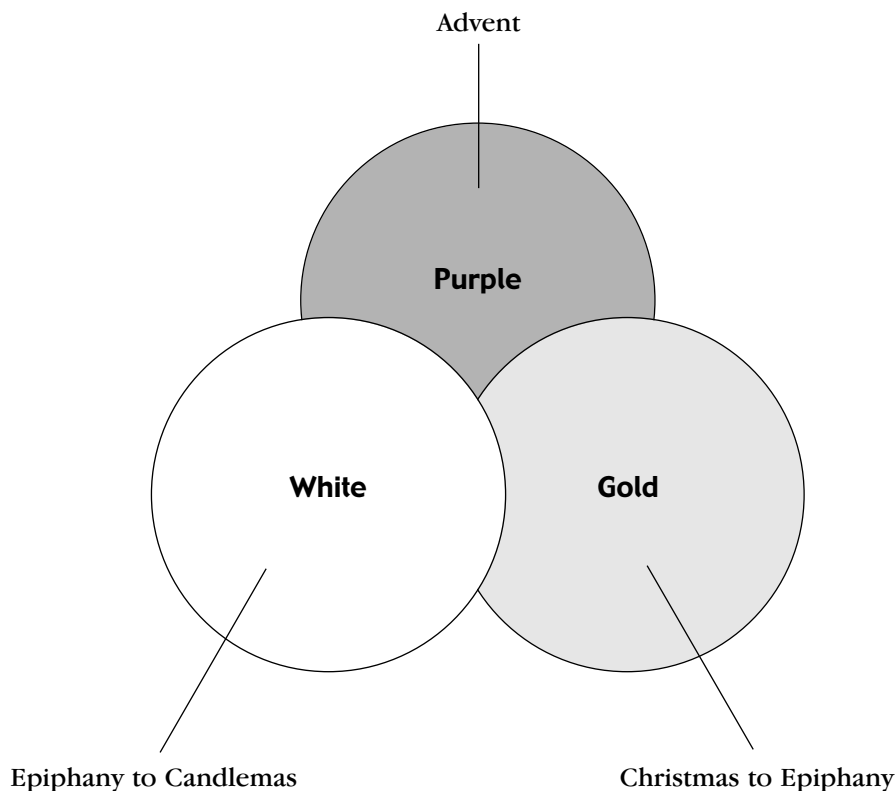
- ✦ Take-to-church suggestions for items to be brought to church each Sunday
- ✦ Sunday worship suggestions for how the minister or worship leader might link the project into the Sunday worship. This may take place at any appropriate point in the service and could be used as the sermon slot. The prayer for the week may be used in addition to, or in place of, the Sunday Collect.

## Practical points

You will need:

- ✦ a small box
- ✦ a circle of purple-coloured cloth (Advent), 70cm in diameter
- ✦ a circle of gold-coloured cloth (Christmas and Epiphany), 70cm in diameter
- ✦ a circle of white-coloured cloth (Epiphany to Candlemas), 70cm in diameter
- ✦ a space set aside at home to carry out the story cloth activities
- ✦ a larger space in church or junior church
- ✦ card copies of the templates
- ✦ scissors
- ✦ felt-tipped pens
- ✦ Blu-tack

As the programme develops, the circular coloured cloths should be placed so that they overlap, as below.



The cloths and other items may be stored in the small box and laid out each day. However, if room allows, the relevant cloth should be left on display throughout the project, providing a 'special' or 'sacred' space in the home. Similarly, in church, this 'special' or 'sacred' space may be maintained throughout the programme so that anyone entering the building may witness the church's journey through Advent and Christmas to the presentation of Christ in the temple (Candlemas).

## When to start and finish

You will need to start *Play and Pray through Advent* on the Monday of the week before Advent Sunday.

The programme provides for four Sundays in Epiphany, but in some years this fourth Sunday will not be used. The last week of the programme should always be 'The presentation of Christ in the temple (Candlemas)', which falls on 2 February.

YEARS  
A=C

# First week of Advent



## Getting ready

### Theme

Jesus tells us to get ready

### Bible focus

Always be ready! You don't know when the Son of Man will come.

MATTHEW 24:44

### Story for the week

Advent is the time for getting ready. It is the four weeks when we prepare for Christmas. We think about Jesus coming to us as a baby, and we think about Jesus coming again. Long, long ago, God made a promise. God promised that one day he would send Jesus back to us as a glorious king. Also, God said that he would send angels to his people (Mark 13:27). No one knows the day or the time, but God wants us to be ready for when Jesus comes. To be ready, we must keep on praying to God.



## Let's play and pray...



### Story cloth activities

#### Monday

One day Jesus will come to us as a king.

Cut out the candle with a crown from the template on page 76 and place it on the purple cloth.

#### Tuesday

Jesus will come in glory.

Cut out the candle with a trumpet from the template on page 76 and place it on the cloth.

#### Wednesday

God made a promise long ago.

Cut out the candle with a scroll from the template on page 77 and place it on the cloth.

#### Thursday

God will send angels to his people.

Cut out the candle with an angel from the template on page 77 and place it on the cloth.

#### Friday

God told us to be ready.

Cut out and colour the 'get ready' card from the template on page 77 and place it on the cloth.

#### Saturday

God told us to keep praying.

Light a tealight candle and put it by the candle with a crown.

## Talk about

- Monday** I wonder what it feels like to meet a king.  
**Tuesday** What do you think 'glory' means?  
**Wednesday** Talk about keeping promises.  
**Thursday** Have you ever had to give someone an important message?  
**Friday** Talk about getting ready.  
**Saturday** Where is a good place to pray?



### Prayer for the week

*Loving God, you asked us to get ready.  
Help us to be ready to celebrate the event of  
Jesus' birth. Amen*

## Song for the week

Wait with us (Tune: Jingle bells)  
See page 50.

Years A-C

## First week of Advent

Tune: Jingle Bells

Wait with us, wait with us,  
Wait with us and pray,  
For we know the Son of God  
Will come to us again.

Sing with us, sing with us,  
Sing with us today,  
For we know the Son of God  
Will come to us again.

Oh!  
He is king, we will sing  
On this happy day!  
Wait with us, wait with us,  
Wait with us and pray.

Oh!  
He is king, we will sing  
On this happy day!  
Wait with us, wait with us,  
Wait with us and pray.



## Celebrating on Sunday

### The first Sunday of Advent

#### Take to church

Take to church the 'get ready' card.

#### Sunday worship

*For the minister or worship leader*

#### You will need:

- ✦ extra 'get ready cards' for everyone in the congregation

#### During the service

The minister or worship leader may explore and develop the talking points, then say the prayer for the week, inviting people to bring 'get ready' cards to place on the cloth. The children may end this time by singing the song for the week (see page 50).

YEARS  
A=C

# Second week of Advent



## Getting ready

### Theme

A messenger is coming

### Bible focus

It began just as God had said in the book written by Isaiah the prophet, 'I am sending my messenger to get the way ready for you.'

MARK 1:2

### Story for the week

Long, long ago, there was a prophet called Isaiah, who wrote a book that is in the Old Testament part of the Bible. It is called the book of Isaiah. In this book, Isaiah says that God will send a messenger who will come from the stony desert and bring us good news about a Saviour. In the New Testament, we are told that the messenger will be called John the Baptist. John will help people to get ready for Jesus. He will clear the way for Jesus, just like clearing away stones to make a straight path through the desert. We must get ready, too. We must be sorry for the wrong things we do, think or say and must live in a way that pleases God.



## Let's play and pray...



### Story cloth activities

#### Monday

A long time ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote a book.

Cut out and colour the open book shape from the template on page 78.

#### Tuesday

Isaiah said, 'God is sending a messenger.'

Cut out the messenger shape from the template on page 78 and place it next to the book.

#### Wednesday

The messenger is John and he brings good news about Jesus.

Cut out and colour the word 'Jesus' from the template on page 78 and place it on the book.

#### Thursday

The messenger will come from the desert.

Use some stones to make a stony desert.

#### Friday

The messenger says, 'Clear the way for Jesus.'

Clear a path through the stones.

#### Saturday

The messenger says we should say 'sorry'.

Say a sorry prayer. Light a tealight candle and place by the candle with a trumpet.

## Talk about

- Monday** Talk about your favourite Bible story.  
**Tuesday** How do you think the messenger felt?  
**Wednesday** What is the best news you have ever had?  
**Thursday** Talk about what it is like to live in the desert.  
**Friday** Talk about what paths are for.  
**Saturday** Why should we say sorry to God?



### Prayer for the week

*Loving God, your messenger brought good news of Jesus. Help us to share the good news with others. Amen*

## Song for the week

Isaiah wrote a book (Tune: One man went to mow)  
See page 51.

Years A-C

### Second week of Advent

Tune: One man went to mow

Isaiah wrote a book, a long, long time ago.  
Isaiah wrote a book, a long, long time ago.

A messenger, he said, will come out from the desert.  
A messenger, he said, will come out from the desert.

The messenger will come to clear the way for Jesus.  
The messenger will come to clear the way for Jesus.

'Get ready all,' he said, for Jesus brings us good news.  
'Get ready, all,' he said, for Jesus brings us good news.

'We are sorry' they said, 'for the bad things we've done.'  
'We are sorry,' they said, 'for the bad things we've done.'

Isaiah wrote a book, a long, long time ago.  
Isaiah wrote a book, a long, long time ago.



## Celebrating on Sunday

### The second Sunday of Advent

#### Take to church

Take to church one of the stones from the desert.

#### Sunday worship

*For the minister or worship leader*

#### You will need:

- ✦ extra stones for everyone in the congregation

#### During the service

The minister or worship leader may explore and develop the talking points, then say the prayer for the week, inviting people to bring stones to place on the cloth. The children may end this time by singing the song for the week (see page 51).