

On your marks

The theme of the light shining in the darkness is at the heart of our Christmas and Advent story. The traditional carol service reading from Isaiah 9:2 reminds us that ‘the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light’. In Isaiah 60:19 we are told that it is the Lord who will be our everlasting light—hence the title of this idea: ‘The light that lasts forever’. Using some simple illustrations, this activity leads into the Christmas truth of Jesus being the light that all light comes from and builds upon that into some prayers for the world, the church and each other to use with your group.

Get set

You will need to collect together the following items for this presentation:
A box of long-life matches; a tea light; a long-life bulb; Christmas tree lights; one of the Advent candles; a picture of the sun; and some circles of orange-coloured paper (about 10 cm in diameter and enough for one each).

Go!

1. Invite the children to wonder about how long different lights might last. Will any of the following lights last forever?
For example, strike a long-life match and watch it burn slowly.
Then light a tea light, like one you might use in the home for atmosphere at Christmas or in an act of worship.
Show a long-life bulb and then read from the packet how many hours it is meant to last. Introduce some Christmas tree lights—there may be some laughter here because a few bulbs always seem to be faulty, plunging the whole tree into darkness!
Or what about one of the Advent candles, which by now may have already burned down considerably?
Finally show a picture of our own sun—the biggest burning light that we can see clearly, yet even this will not last forever.
2. None of these lights, special and beautiful as they might be, will last forever. But one of the prophets in the Bible, who looked forward to the coming of Jesus, describes a different sort of light. Isaiah writes about the Lord who will be our everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19, 20). This is the light that lasts forever. Repeat this phrase and use it at different points in the presentation as a chorus in which everyone can join.
3. Christmas is the time we remember the coming of the light that lasts forever.
The light that lasts forever is Jesus.
Jesus is the light that cannot be put out. (John 1:5 says: ‘the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it’).
Jesus’ light will outlast the sun and the stars. (In Revelation 21:23 we are told that it is God and the Lamb who will be the light and the lamp of the New Jerusalem.)
Jesus is the light that lasts forever.

4. Hand out the orange circles of paper and explain that we're going to make together from this different sorts of lights that will help us remember the light that lasts forever and use them to help us pray some simple prayers this Christmas.
5. First, the circle helps us to think of the sun burning in the sky. This is the light that lights up our world.
In the beginning... God said, 'Let there be light. And there was light...' (Genesis 1:1-3). And later God created the two great lights—the great light to rule the day and the lesser lights to rule the night.

Dear God, thank you for lighting up our world.

Thank you for the light that shines into the darkness.

Take our prayers this Christmas and, like the sun's rays, use them to penetrate the dark and troubled places of our world. Where there is war... fear... and despair. May your people be light in these places. May your bright glory be seen. May the Christmas light that lasts forever be made known and received in people's hearts across the globe.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who is the light that lasts forever.

6. Now fold the orange circle in half to create a semicircle. Delicately tear the rounded edge of the semicircle in a wavy pattern to create a shape like a crown of flames burning. This represents all of us together, lit up with the light that lasts forever—the combined flames of his people, the Church.
Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world... let your light shine before everyone' (Matthew 5:14-16).
We are not meant to hide the light that lasts forever.

Dear God, we pray for your people, your Church, on whom the light from heaven fell as fire at Pentecost.

May we be light in the darkness in this area and in the places where we live.

Inspire with your light all who lead, speak, sing and pray in our services this Christmas time.

May your light be seen and heard as we sing carols around the streets and share the story of the light that lasts forever.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who is the light that lasts forever.

7. Now fold your crown of flames in half again and re-tear the jagged edges as best as you can to create one single flame. Each one of us can be like a candle lit by the light that lasts forever.
Jesus is the light of the world, the light of his people and is the light in each one of our hearts.

Dear God, we pray for every light here that is burning, but especially those which are burning low at the moment and hold on to your promise that 'a dimly burning light, you will not let go out' (Matthew 12:20).

Keep us burning until the day of that great light when you will come again.

Help those who are feeling weak, sad or sick to be aware of your light burning deep within their hearts.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who is the light that lasts forever.



You could finish this time of prayer by all saying together some personalized words from Isaiah 60:19:

*The sun will no more be our light by day,
nor the brightness of the moon shine on us,
for the Lord will be our everlasting light,
and our God will be our glory.*

Amen