



On your marks

Christingle services are now a well-established part of the Advent season. If, however, your church does not hold a Christingle service, here is a DIY version, which you could use for a midweek club or service. You could make the Christingles as the teaching and craft slot. Some children may be given one, at school for example, but making their own will be far more fun! It would also be a powerful piece of teaching for children with little knowledge of the Christian story.

Get set

You will need: oranges, birthday cake candles, candleholders, red self-adhesive ribbon, cocktail sticks, sweets or sultanas, ice cream boxes.

Go!

1. In preparation for this activity, make a *small* nick in the top of each orange and cut strips of red ribbon to go around the oranges with plenty for sticking. This is the only creative bit you need! If you are doing this with a larger number of children at a special event or midweek service, have an ice cream box for each row of seats. Allow for six people each row and put into the box: six pieces of ribbon, six candles, six candleholders, 24 cocktail sticks and 24 sultanas or sweets... and a few extras! Also arrange for one or two helpers to sit in each row to distribute them and help make the Christingles. Distribute the oranges to people as they arrive.
2. While talking about the symbolism of the Christingle, invite everyone:
 - to put the candle in the holder and then put it in the hole at the top of the orange to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world.
 - to put the red ribbon around the orange to remind us that Jesus died for the whole world.
 - to put the sultanas or sweets on the sticks and then push them into the sides to remind us of the fruits of the earth and the four seasons of the year.

I found through trial and error that it is best to leave the fiddly things to last! The children will eat the sweets anyway, so you could encourage them to do so, making a final point about God's goodness to us throughout the year.

3. For a Bible reading, the one about light from Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 or from Matthew 5:14-16 are good. Christingles can also be used to celebrate Jesus as 'a light to lighten the Gentiles' (Luke 2:32) at Candlemas or be linked to the visit of the Magi at Epiphany, in which case the Bible readings will be Luke 2:22-40 and Matthew 2:1-11 respectively.
4. A vital part of any Christingle service is to raise money for charity such as the Children's Society. There is information about that aspect on the website of the Children's Society.

The work of the charity could be the focus for your prayers. Illustrate the darkness of the huge need of many children by having the church lights switched off during the prayers and then lighting the



Christingles to represent the light that casts out darkness.

5. If your meeting area or church is big enough, you could finish by having a procession. This is not only exciting but it lends itself to all sorts of teaching points about our Christian journey with Christ our Light accompanying us. Birthday cake candles have small flames that blow out easily, so the possible dangers are minimized.

The symbolism of the service is so vivid that there's no need to overburden it with further teaching. The making and lighting of the Christingles with a procession can take quite long time, so beware of going on longer than you had expected.

6. If you are doing this in a club situation, sit the children in groups with an adult to distribute the oranges and things to be added. Encourage the children to make their own Christingles as you talk about the meaning of it (see above). This should take between 10 and 15 minutes. Use them during the worship time by lighting the candles and pray for children who are in need and remind everyone that Jesus is the light of the world.