



Nine Lessons and Carols

A Service Guide for Christmas

Please use this as a guide for planning your own Nine Lessons and Carols service. We've suggested prayers, carols, and hymns, but feel free to choose different ones that are familiar to your congregation and community.

Welcome

Hymn - Hark! The herald angels sing

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We read in your word that love is patient, but as people who look around our world and desire justice for the poor, the displaced and the marginalised – we can find ourselves filled with impatience and, therefore, less love.

We pray that you would fill us with a holy patience this Advent. Help us to understand your purposes as we, like your people before us, wait for your Kingdom to come amongst us, once again. And, like the prophets of old, sustain us as we continue to call for justice and mercy while walking humbly beside you all of our days.

Let the love of Christ be our guiding light this Christmas, just as the star appeared above Bethlehem two thousand years ago to guide us to Emmanuel.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Hymn - O come, o come Emmanuel

Lesson 1: The Fall

Genesis 2:8-13, 21-24

The world we live in is not how God intended it to be. The beauty and intimacy of Eden-living has been lost to us. Global conflicts in 2024 have torn communities apart in ways that reflect the despair of the banishment from the Garden. Over a year has passed since the outbreak of horrific conflict in Gaza and later Lebanon, the war in Ukraine continues unchecked, and mass displacements are ongoing as a result of unprecedented violence in Sudan. As the people of the Prince of Peace, how can we respond to the horror of war, the mockery it makes of our common humanity? We can pray expectantly for peace, for a return to Eden – a holy place that will be a home for all God's people. We can also pray for Christian Aid's partners who can respond immediately to the needs of the victims of violence and conflict, providing shelter and psychological support for those whose blood cries out to the Lord for justice.

Hymn - In the bleak midwinter





Lesson 2: Where is God?

Psalm 42

I want to share with you words from Bob Kikuyu, Christian Aid's Global Theology Advisor based in Kenya.

'So where is God today? I sense that God is in the brave front-line workers who sacrificially give themselves to the service of saving lives, in the young neighbour who volunteers to do grocery shopping for the elderly in their street... God is in the members of our church in Nairobi who have been giving food donations to families whose breadwinners lost their jobs. God is in the many churches and individuals in the UK, Ireland and beyond who have contributed through Christian Aid for people a continent away to not sleep hungry or cold. Around the world God is near through the hearts and hands of those who are reaching out to touch their neighbours. Were it not for the touch of God through your words and acts of kindness, the hearts of many would have been downcast and discouraged. But because of the actions of true neighbours – the neighbour down the street and the neighbour a continent away – many people when wondering where God is can now say to themselves – 'In each other, God is with us. We thank you, O God, that you are with us.'

Hymn - God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Lesson 3: Good News

Isaiah 61:1-4

Shede is a wife, a mother, and a grandmother. Before conflict forced her to flee Darfur, Shede worked in a restaurant and tended her organic farm. Now, she is living in a UN shelter at Wedweil Refugee Settlement in South Sudan. In the settlement, Shede looks after her youngest daughter and her granddaughter, both six years old.

South Sudan is a country ravaged by conflict and the climate crisis. Food shortages, high prices, lack of clean water, and poor sanitation make daily life an enormous challenge. Hunger, malnutrition, trauma, and violence against women rife. And with more families arriving to seek refuge each day, these problems could continue to deepen.

However, together with our trusted partners, Christian Aid is dedicated to supporting displaced people to forge a new life in South Sudan while they wait for the war to end. Our partners are binding up the broken hearted and helping those who mourn the loss of loved ones find comfort in the safety of their settlements. One day they will find freedom from the captivity of war, and until then Christian Aid will continue to provide for those who grieve – as Isaiah proclaimed thousands of years ago.

Hymn - O come, all ye faithful





Lesson 4: What is Required?

Micah 6:6-12

What could the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth possibly require from us? Micah answers, 'to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' How can we go about doing this? One way that we can unite as God's people and live out this call on our lives is by demanding that our political leaders act justly in response to the climate crisis. We know that our global neighbours who have least to do with causing climate change are suffering most from its impact. We want to walk humbly in solidarity with those on the sharp edge of injustice, not by speaking for them, but by amplifying their voices when they call for mercy from the impacts of climate chaos.

Hymn - O little town of Bethlehem

Lesson 5: Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55

The global poverty has a woman's face. She may have lost her livelihood due to climate shocks; she may have been displaced from her home due to conflict; she might not know where her children's next meal will come from; her day may be filled trying to keep herself and her family alive, leaving no time to participate in her community's decision-making even if her voice was welcome. But she is not alone. Like Mary, the Lord is with her and is mindful of her humble state.

Through faith in Him and with support from her global brothers and sisters, she can grow her resilience just as her crops grow, and face the future with hope, determination and rejoicing. God chose Mary, a humble, unknown woman of deep faith from a small rural town, to be the mother of the saviour of the world. Today, we see him working through women in rural towns around the globe to bring transformation to their communities. As Mary prophesied, 'He has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things.'

Hymn - When out of Poverty is Born

Lesson 6: The Birth Account

Luke 2:1-7

Benjamin William Hastings wrote, 'You're the God of greatness even in a manger, For all I know of seasons is that You take Your time, You could have saved us in a second, instead You sent a Child.' A seed was sown in Bethlehem's soil that would take 30 years to grow into Christ Jesus. Try to imagine the people who will have tended to the soil of his life over those years? Caring for him, loving him, guiding him and teaching him. His human experience was not supernaturally accelerated, Jesus lived as we live surrounded by clouds of witnesses whose legacy is imprinted onto us. How are you tending to the soil of the next generation? What will your legacy be?

Hymn - See him lying on a bed of straw





Lesson 7: The Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20

Farming communities today continue to live close to the earth, in tune with, and directly affected by, shifts in natural patterns. Whether lost livestock, flooded farmland, scorched crops, or destroyed homes; the climate crisis continues to disrupt lives and livelihoods, often in communities who have done the least to cause it. Justice for them is twofold – immediate resilience support and funding for loss and damage; as well as longer-term campaigning and advocating for changes in climate policy at a global level. As we celebrate the Good News, first told to shepherds on a hillside, let us remember those whose livelihoods are still inextricably interwoven with the fields nearby that they keep a constant watch over. Let the good stewardship of those shepherds and the Good Shepherd motivate us to protect the natural world that we share with our global brothers and sisters.

Hymn - The first Nowell the angel did say

Lesson 8: Magi & Herod

Matthew 2:1-18

If we were telling the story of Mary, Joseph and Jesus' escape to Egypt, Christian Aid would use the term 'Internally Displaced Persons' to describe them. They have been forced to flee Herod's order to kill every boy under two years old. A horrifying circumstance completely out of their control. All they can do is run. Today, Internally Displaced Persons are similarly forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, human rights violations and loss of livelihood due to the climate crisis. They often move to areas that are difficult to reach with humanitarian aid, making them among the most vulnerable people in the world. As we reflect on the political uncertainty and climate of fear that Jesus was born into, we remember the millions of people who face fear, uncertainty, and continued instability today.

Hymn - Once in royal David's city





Lesson 9: The Incarnation John 1:1-4 (The Message)

Advent holds us in a state of expectant waiting. Christmas is coming, incarnation is imminent - the pregnant pause before the cry and the breath and the brand-new life. Jesus' birth is only the beginning. After the cry and the breath, there is the becoming - the nurture and the needs. The story of the infant who will change our world, but whose very existence from the very beginning is challenged. Challenged by the oppressive regime under which he is born; challenged by the poverty that pervades his community; and challenged by the struggles of an uncertain world in which he must establish his ministry. Yet all of this darkness couldn't prevent his salvation light from shining. The darkness couldn't prevent his dwelling being made among us so that we could witness the true light. Through Christ God is made known to us. Through his ministry we are witness to his Kingdom of grace and truth. And, as his followers, we are commissioned to make disciples of all nations until the end of the age.

Hymn - Joy to the world

Closing Prayer

God of love and justice
As we anticipate your incarnation
Born of flesh and blood in a manger
To a couple on the margins
Announced first to lowly shepherds
We marvel at the ways you show up
In unexpected places
Through unremarkable people
In unlikely ways.

In our celebrations
Help us to remember
our global neighbours
Across the street and around the world
Those yearning and working towards
A full life, free from poverty
Grant us impatience
as we strive for justice
And patience as we love one another.
Amen

