



Supremely gifted

BY SIMON MARSHALL

SHARING IDEAS FROM:
ST MICHAEL'S, SOLIHULL

Simon Marshall offers a gift-wrapped Christmas service in the Nick of time!



Music

Various Christmas carols and songs, but particularly:

- O Little Town of Bethlehem (Various)
- At This Time of Giving (*The Source, Songs & Hymns of Fellowship*)
- What Kind of Greatness? (*The Source*)
- Every Christmas (*Kidsource 2*)
- There's a Special Feeling (*Kidsource 2*)
- There's a Star (*Kidsource 2*)
- In the Bleak Midwinter (Various)

Entering into worship

As people come into church, give to each one a heart-shaped gift tag, cut from thin card with a loop of thread attached, and a pencil or pen. Ask each person to write or draw on the gift tag something they have been given for which they are grateful. It could be a material object, a talent or skill, a

person or relationship or something else.

If you are using a projector in this service, you could display these instructions on the screen as people enter so that they can do the activity while others arrive. It is good to give people plenty of time for this activity as parents and carers may need to help their children to complete it before doing their own tag!

Just before the service begins (if you are able to) you may want to collect in the pens and pencils from those who have completed the activity. Then, at the beginning of the service, tell people to keep their gift tag safe as it will be needed later on in the service.

Opening responses

The congregation greet one another using one of the following:

Leader: Christ has brought us out of darkness:

All: to live in his marvellous light.

Leader: Brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome to ... today.

All: We have come together in the presence of God our Father to rejoice in the gift of Jesus to us as the light of the world, to hear and receive the story and message of the coming of Christ, and to offer to God our thanksgiving in prayer and song.

or

Leader: Today we remember Jesus and the story of his birth;

All: Jesus is our King.

A candle may be lit.

Leader: Jesus Christ is the light of the world;

All: Jesus is our Way.

Leader: With Jesus even dark places are light;

All: Jesus is the Truth.

Leader: In Jesus we shall live for ever;

All: Jesus is our Life.

Or, especially if the Christmas story is to be told or performed in the service:

Leader: I bring you good news of great joy:

All: a Saviour has been born to you. Alleluia.

Leader: Unto us a child is born,

All: unto us a Son is given. Alleluia.

Leader: Hear the words of St Luke: When the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that





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has happened which the Lord has made known to us.' So they hastened, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

He is Christ the Lord. Alleluia.

All: We worship and adore him. Alleluia.

From *New Patterns for Worship*, Church House Publishing

Confession and forgiveness

Leader: As we kneel with the shepherds before the newborn

Christ child, we open our hearts in penitence and faith.

From *New Patterns for Worship*, Church House Publishing

In the following confession an appropriate picture could be displayed on a screen via OHP or computer projector at the beginning of each section. Some examples are given at the beginning of each bidding. If pictures are to be used, these confessions need to be led slowly, so that the operator has time to change the pictures and the congregation has time to dwell on the images before the words are spoken.

(A picture of the world seen from space)

Leader:

God our Father, you sent your Son full of



grace and truth: forgive our failure to receive him.

Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

(A picture of the angel visiting Mary)

Leader:

Spirit of Love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call: forgive the hardness of our hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

(A picture of the child in the manger)

Leader:

Jesus our Saviour, you were born in poverty and laid in a manger: forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.

Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

The following prayer is very suitable for services where there are a large number of children present, or at a service which is designed for small children. It could be said by the leader saying a short line and then the children repeating that line, for example:

Leader: Father God...

All: Father God...

Leader: we are sorry...

All: we are sorry..

Father God,
we are sorry
for the things we do and say and think
which make you sad,
and for not thinking of others
before ourselves.
Please forgive us,
and help us to love you and other people
more and more.
Amen.

Words of forgiveness

Leader: May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw you to himself and cleanse you from all your sins, that you may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From *Times and Seasons*, Church House Publishing



Talk

Show a picture of St Nicholas, either on the screen or a large printed picture. Many suitable images are available on the website www.stnicholascenter.org. Simple copyright guidelines are given on the site. Ask the congregation if anyone can guess the identity of the figure in the picture.

St Nicholas was a real person who lived in the fourth century; he was a bishop in what is now southern Turkey. Many stories and legends are told about Nicholas: they tell of him caring for children, feeding hungry people and healing the sick. Christians all over the world honour St Nicholas for his generosity, love and concern for people in trouble and for his strong faith in God.

One of the best-known stories about Nicholas is of how he saved three girls from being sold as slaves. They were the daughters of a poor man. Sadly, in those days a girl needed to be able to hand over 'dowry' money to the family of her fiancé. It was very difficult for a girl who had no dowry to find a husband. These three girls had no money to get married. Worse, they were going to be sold as slaves.

Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home, providing the money they needed. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. Kind Nicholas



Check

www.church-leadership.org

for **Christmas is Coming**, an exciting all-age Christmas resource from Dave Hopwood, author of the popular **Telling Tales** books.

had heard of their plight and was secretly helping them out. His 'through-the-window' method may have led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas.

Now switch off or put away the picture of St Nicholas.

At this time of year, we follow the tradition that St Nicholas is said to have begun: we also give and receive presents. It's a vital part of what it means for us to celebrate Christmas. St Nicholas gave the three girls bags of gold, but what are we hoping for?

Now ask the congregation what presents they hope to receive (or what they have already received, depending on the date and/or time of your service!). You may want to focus this question to the children, but try to include the adults too!

Many of our presents are wrapped in beautiful paper, perhaps decorated with ribbon or bows. We take time in choosing presents for people, because they are a sign of our love for the people we're giving them to. The presents we receive are a sign of the love the giver has for us. Receiving and giving presents is a good thing to do!

Now bring out a large box, wrapped as a present, which has inside it a heart-shaped helium balloon (usually available from party shops). Place it where the congregation can easily see it, but do not open or refer to it yet.

The Christmas story tells us that Jesus was born in a poor and simple place, a stable or shed behind an inn. Our Christmas presents are beautifully wrapped, but Jesus had no rich home, no beautiful clothes and the first people to visit him were a few shepherds from the nearby hills. Not much of a beginning for God's Son, but that was how God planned it to be: Jesus came to be one of us, to live the life we live, to love us and to show us how to love.

Open the box and let balloon float out (NB: ensure that it is fastened to the bottom of the box so that it doesn't float up to the ceiling!)

The good news of Christmas is that God gives us a gift: Jesus, his Son. Jesus is God's Christmas present to you, me and the whole world, a gift that all of us can unwrap and receive today and every day of our lives.

Leave the balloon visible for the remainder of the service.

Response

After a few moments of quiet tell people that we are now going to have the opportunity to respond to God and to offer him our thanks for the things we have been given.

Invite people to bring their gift tag and place it in the centre of the worship space as an offering of thanks to God. This could mean placing the tag on the altar or holy table, hanging it on a small Christmas tree or placing it in front of the Christmas crib. Where the tags are placed will vary according to the layout and nature of your church. However, try to ensure that the place can be accessed easily and that, once the tags have been placed, they can be seen by the congregation. It is also important that there is a sense of 'journey' involved in coming to place the tag: there is a greater sense of engagement if people come and place the tag themselves than if someone walks round and collects them from the seated members of the congregation! Also, when planning the location for this activity, bear in mind any individuals who have mobility difficulties or who need wheelchair access so that they can also make their 'journey'.

While people come and place their gift tags you may want to have some quiet music playing to provide an appropriate

atmosphere. Once all the tags have been placed, invite people to reflect quietly for a few moments on what it means to them that God gave Jesus as a gift to us. A short prayer – the following prayer or some other – is a helpful way to bring the time of response to an end.

Leader:

The wise men, Lord,
brought myrrh, frankincense and gold.
Lord, we have nothing of our own to bring;
we bring you what you have given:
our lives for your life.
Amen

As people leave the service, give each person a small gift as a symbol of God's generous giving to us. Giving something as simple as a chocolate or wrapped sweet can be an effective way of reminding people of the theme of the service.

