



Two services for Christmas



SHARING IDEAS FROM:
CHRIST CHURCH, WARE

Francesca Proud offers two original approaches to Christmas worship, one all-age, and the other for the very youngest of God's children.

FRANCESCA PROUD

Big birthday party

INCLUDES:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Decorations
- Music
- Carols
- Film clips
- Candles

This service calls for a fair amount of preparation, but should pay dividends if you want a lively approach to your Christmas morning service.

Welcome

As people arrive, make sure that each receives a decoration. Explain that we're preparing a party and need help in getting ready. Invite them to place the decorations around the church as they wish.

Make sure that on the seats are enough gift tags for everyone plus pencils, squeaky balloons, blowers, party poppers, shakers and so on.

Welcome everyone to Jesus' birthday party. Ask for suggestions as to party games, and when someone mentions 'pass the parcel' take your cue and produce the prepared parcel. Say that you will need to pass the parcel in order to move to each new section of the service.

The verses revealed at each unwrapping are available as PowerPoint presentation on the website.

Cue music. Pass the parcel. Stop music. First unwrapping reveals:

- Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. (Luke 1:68)
- Carol: 'O come all ye faithful'

You will need

- Prepared parcel for 'pass the parcel'.
- Party streamers, balloons, strings of tinsel, gift tags, pencils, squeaky balloons, party poppers, shakers, blowers.
- DVD of *The Nativity Story* (PG, 2006, Entertainment in Video)
- Gift-wrapped box containing: a heart made from shiny material, a candle, a cut-out dove, large box of sticky plasters, a musical instrument.
- Candles, enough for one for every home represented at the service.



Go to the website to download PowerPoint presentations for both of these services.

Joyful noise

Cue music. Pass the parcel. Stop music.

Unwrapping reveals:

- Psalm 98
- Label 'Make a joyful noise!'

Comment that parties are often noisy so we're going to rejoice by making a joyful noise to celebrate the fact that Jesus has come to our world to save us. Encourage those who have keys to get them out and shake them, those with nearby noise-makers to use them, all to clap as indicated. Go to the website to find the Psalm text, with prompts.

Sing a new song to the Lord, for he has done wonderful deeds.

All: Hurrah!

His right hand has won a mighty victory; his holy arm has shown his saving power! The Lord has announced his victory and has revealed his righteousness to every nation!

All: Hurrah!

He has remembered his promise to love and be faithful to Israel. The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

All: Hurrah!

Shout to the Lord, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy!

All: Alleluia! (Play instruments. And shout!)

Sing your praise to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and melodious song (Let off squeaky balloons.) with trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn. Make a joyful symphony before the Lord, the King! (Blow hooters.) Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the earth and all living things join in. (Shake shakers and keys.) Let the rivers clap their hands in glee!

Let the hills sing out their songs of joy (Clap hands and beat on pews/chairs.) before the Lord.

For the Lord is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with fairness.

All: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (Play all instruments, clap, stamp!)

Gifts

Cue music. Pass the parcel. Stop music.

- Label revealed with word 'Gifts'.
- Carol 'Ding dong merrily on high.'

Show the arrival of the Magi from the 2006 film *The Nativity Story* (PG, Entertainment in Video).

We tend to think of Christmas as a time of receiving gifts. Invite people to say what they have received today. Ask everyone to think about what God gives to us as gifts. Produce the prepared 'gift box' and reveal with comments:

- a heart for God's love
- a candle for hope
- dove for peace
- a box of sticky plasters for healing
- musical instrument for joy.

Suggest that we follow the example of the Magi and give a birthday gift to Jesus. Invite everyone to take a gift tag and to write a 'thank you' (or draw a picture) of a gift for Jesus. Suggestions might include: time, love, following, finding out about him, getting to know him better. Collect the 'gifts' in a basket and place on Communion table or beside figure of Jesus in your church crib scene.



Birthday candles

Cue music. Pass the parcel. Stop music.

Unwrap to reveal:

- a candle
- Carol: 'As with gladness'

Make sure that each home represented receives a candle. Comment that the wise men were led to Jesus by the light of a star. Discuss in households regarding individuals who might need to receive the light of Jesus (healing, help, encouragement). Suggest that solo households discuss in pairs or small groups. Invite people to stick a star to their candle to represent the person selected.

Starting from a single candle at the front of the church, light all of the candles and pray this prayer together:

**All: God, you are the source of all light
We celebrate today the birth of your
Son Jesus, Light of the world.**

**May the light of these candle flames
remind us that you are full of love and
grace to us.**

**May they be a symbol of hope for the
people and places we have remembered
before you.**

**We pray that we might know and
reflect the light of Christ.**

**We ask this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.**

Suggest they light the candle later that day at home, perhaps making it the centrepiece of their dinner table.

Blessing

Cue music. Pass the parcel. Stop music.

Unwrap to reveal:

- wrapped boiled sweets, for distribution to all
- Carol: 'Hark the herald angels sing'

Final blessing:

Jesus, the light of God shines in the world.

Sing praises. Shout for joy.

Celebrate the hope and promise of this day.

Go with God's peace in your hearts.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

All: Amen



Francesca Proud worships at Christ Church, Ware.

We developed this service because our Christmas service for toddlers and carers was so busy that it might have been off-putting for those with babies aged under one year.



FRANCESCA PROUD

All about babies

You will need

- Christmas lights
- DVD player and screen
- CD player

Prepare five low tables as follows:

- blue and white table coverings, white flowers to represent Mary and the angel
- covered with a woollen blanket and displaying a sheepskin and some homespun fabrics
- draped with rich eastern fabrics and displaying some exotically wrapped gifts
- covered with gold fabric and displaying hearts cut from shiny red paper.

Text for cards to display on each of the tables may be downloaded from the website.

We used a room in our church centre, drew the curtains, and decorated it with many sets of twinkling Christmas lights to create an entrancing space which would attract the babies' gazes and at the same time make them feel safe and warm.

The carers (mostly mothers) arrived and sat with their babies in a semicircle at one end of the room. The 'service' was led by the toddler group leader.

She spoke directly to the adults, saying that all babies like their babies are special, but Jesus was very special. She

asked them to consider the wonder and mystery of the nativity, the fragility of a baby who was God coming to earth, vulnerable and helpless, and being cared for by Mary, his young mother. We then showed a clip from *The Nativity Story* which shows Mary and Joseph fearful of the future with their baby.

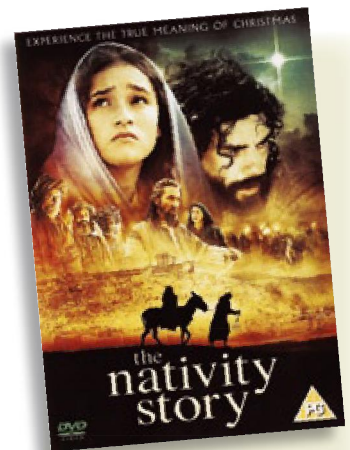
The leader commented that Mary and Joseph didn't necessarily know what they were doing, but that God trusted them to look after this most special baby. All they needed to do was to trust him. God looked after them as they went forward into the unknown.

The carers were then invited to take their babies on a journey around the room to look at the different tables. We played carols while they took an unhurried look at the decorated tables and read the cards we placed on each one.

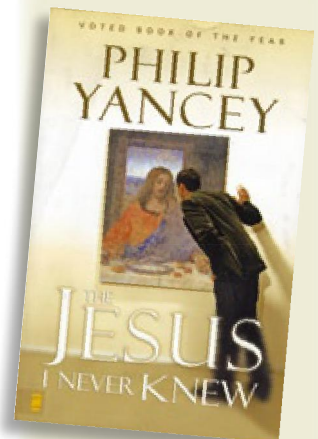
The service leader gave a short talk based on the first chapter of *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey. We sang 'Away in a Manger' together.

We served refreshments and gave each carer a Christmas tree decoration.

The babies gurgled, cried and wriggled throughout the service. The mums and carers loved it and said that we had made them feel very special.



Certificate PG, 2006, (Entertainment in Video)



Zondervan, £6.99

Both are available from your local Christian bookshop