



Advent Resource

This resource has been developed by the Chaplaincy at MHA and seeks to be inclusive to those living in later life. It takes the form of four sessions during Advent.

Although the resource has been developed with care homes and retirement schemes in mind, it could also be used in house groups and other settings.

Each session follows a theme taken from the words of 'One Red Candle' (page 2).

It is suggested that the song is sung at the beginning of each session and incorporates an Advent ring.

You are invited to use as much or as little of this resource to create something fitting to your own context.

For each session you will find a reading, object, reminiscence activity, reflection, prayer ideas and carol suggestions.

The object provides a focal point for the session, and can be passed around and talked about. The final session suggests a silver bauble (shatterproof) as the object. The suggestion is that each person is given a bauble so that they can take it away with them as a reminder of the session.

The reminiscence activity provides opportunity for people to share their stories and memories.

The prayer ideas provide prompts on what to pray. You may want to have cut out stars or other shapes for people to write or draw their prayers on that could be hung on a Christmas tree.

We hope that you find this resource useful and that you and your group gain a lot from it. We would be really pleased to hear how and where you have used this resource so please do let us know: chaplaincypa@mha.org.uk

One Red Candle - *To tune: Frere Jacques*

One red candle
Burning slow
Advent weeks of waiting
Three to go

Mary's waiting
Joseph too
Waiting for the baby
Coming soon

Two red candles
Burning slow
Advent weeks of waiting
Two to go

Shepherds listening
In the night
Will they hear the angels
Sing tonight?

Three red candles
Burning slow
Advent weeks of waiting
One to go

Wise men watching
For a star
Going on a journey
In the dark

Four red candles
Burning slow
Advent weeks of waiting
Not long now

We are waiting
Watching too
Soon it will be Christmas
For me and you

One white candle
Christmas Day
Welcome, baby Jesus
Come and stay

*From 'Candles and Conifers' (Wild Goose Publications, 2005)
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A suggested order of service

Advent candle ring – light whilst singing 'One Red Candle'

Introduce theme

Carol

Reading

Object and reminiscence

Carol

Reflection

Prayers

Carol

Blessing

Advent 1

TITLE: Joseph

THEME: Facing change

READING: Matthew 1.18-25

OBJECT: Wooden holding cross (and/or carpenters' square)

Reminiscence Activity:

Times when life has changed

Facing difficult decisions

Giving support to loved ones

Reflection:

Joseph, a small-town carpenter, was looking forward to the future. It was all arranged – he and Mary were going to settle down together and raise a family. But everything has changed. Mary is expecting a child. Whose? Now the future looks so different. Joseph, a just man, feels trapped in a dark and lonely place. Lots of questions are going round and round in his mind. Why is this happening? What will people think of me? What am I to do?

Help comes from a direction Joseph could never have imagined. A strange dream and a night-time visitation from an angel shine a light on his dilemma and point the way forward. Mary had said “yes” to God. Now Joseph for his part is being asked to give his “yes”. Mary is going to need his care and support in the challenging times ahead. Is he willing to trust God’s plans and purposes for himself, for Mary and for this very special child?

That night-time encounter was a turning point for Joseph. He accepts that life will never be the same again yet he is willing to go along with God’s promise for the future. He takes Mary into his home. He shares her hopes and joys, her struggles and fears. Together they journey to Bethlehem and he is there when she gives birth to a son, who Joseph names Jesus. They wrap the baby in swaddling cloths and place him in a manger. This small, vulnerable child who is Immanuel, ‘God with us’, the hope of salvation.

Joseph, so often a bystander in the nativity story, stands as an inspiring example of an ordinary, unassuming person chosen and called by our extraordinary God. Faced with his life being turned upside down Joseph, like Mary, shows us the way of willingness and trusting faith. “Joseph ... did as the angel of the Lord commanded him”.

Prayer ideas:

Those facing difficult decisions

People whose lives have changed in ways they find hard to accept

Carers

Anyone feeling trapped in a dark and lonely place

Carol suggestions:

Hark the herald angels

Silent night

Little donkey

Blessing:

May God who calls the humble and lowly
fill our hearts with wonder as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus,
who is Immanuel, God with us.

May we be inspired by the example of Joseph
to trust God in the face of change and challenge.

May we know ourselves held in God's love and purposes
even in the darkest of times.

Bless all who watch and wait;
shine your light upon us and help us to follow you always.

Amen

Advent 2

TITLE: While Shepherds watched

THEME: Night-time

READING: Luke 2: 8-14

OBJECT: Sheep, battery operated candle

Reminiscence Activity

Ordinary Jobs

A long hard night or a night to remember

WW2, air raids and shelters

A Light in dark times

Reflection

It was an ordinary night, nothing special or so it seemed. The moon shone through an occasional cloud; the stars twinkled in the sky and the breeze blew softly, wafting the scent of the sheep through the night. Ordinary sheep too, fat ones, thin ones, straggly ones, just doing what sheep did. Some wandering and meandering, munching on the grass others catching a snooze. Then there were the shepherd's, ordinary men, peasants, not very important in the grand scheme of things. Only shepherds and bandits wandered at night, one watching out for any danger and the other causing it. One trying hard to stay awake to watch the sheep and keep them safe, just simply doing their job through the long night and the other hoping everyone was fast asleep, so they could steal and harm.

An ordinary night, full of ordinary happenings. But God can make the most beautiful of transformations in the most ordinary people and places.

It was enough to be afraid of wolves, lions, bears and bandits. But to see the sky burst with light and a heavenly angel talk to ordinary men, to give them, just simple shepherds, as they were, the most important of messages was terrifying. It is a good job the shepherds didn't run for the hills in fear, but stopped and listened to the whole message, telling of the child that was born in a manger, wrapped in ordinary swaddling cloths, simple shepherds to bear witness to the heavenly host glorifying and praising God. Out of that dark ordinary night came a light so bright it would shine in the darkest of places forever. Out of great fear came a peace that the world alone could never give.

Prayer ideas:

Night-time workers

People living in fear

Sleepless nights

Dark times

Carol Suggestions

While shepherds watched

It came upon a midnight clear

Angels from the realms of Glory

See amid the winter`s snow

Blessing

May the light of the Christ child shine and comfort us in our darkest times, and the peace of God free us from all stress and worry.

Let the glory of the angelic host and the joy of the message they bring touch our hearts and lives this Christmas.

Bless those that are awake, at work or in fear or pain through the long night. As we go about our ordinary lives may we be always watching and waiting for your presence. Amen.

Advent 3

TITLE: The Wise Men

THEME: Journeys

READING: Matthew 2:1-3; 9-12

OBJECT: Map and compass

Reminiscence Activity:

Special journeys

Difficult journeys

Getting lost

Reflection:

The Wise Man's Journey

There will be no camels;
we are going on horseback,
at least for some of the way.

And we won't arrive there
a few hours after everyone else.
It will be weeks, perhaps –
or months.

We are not in a hurry.
That is not the way we work;
we are not Europeans.

We will discuss the phenomenon – the star –
and if it does not go away,
and if we still feel curious,
we will travel.

We will look in the wrong place.
Yes I admit that,
because wise men, potentates, intellectuals –
call us what you will –
are not infallible.

We expect a new power
to emerge from the side of the old one.
We expect the destination we seek

to resemble what our common sense deduces.

We will be upset, angry even,
to find that Herod is ignorant
and that his living space is not the birthplace.

We will find it hard
and intellectually demeaning
to bow to the son of refugees.

And all this....
all this upset will be compounded
when it comes to journeying back
and we discover
we have to go home by another way.

That is the trouble with God.
He does not let you leave as you came.
He sends you back,
stripped of your presumptions,
making for home by another way.

*From 'Cloth for the Cradle' (Wild Goose Publications, 1997)
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Prayer ideas:

Families travelling for Christmas

Refugees making dangerous journeys

People far from home, separated from loved ones: hospital, prison, armed forces

Those working in the travel industry

Carol suggestions:

We three kings

The first nowell

In the bleak mid-winter

As with gladness men of old

Blessing:

May the God who guided the wise men, lead us on through advent.

When we take the wrong road, draw us back to your way.

Bless us on our journeys on the road and on the journeys of our hearts.

Whether we travel far or stay close, may we know your presence,
this Christmas and always. Amen

Advent 4

TITLE: US

THEME: Waiting and watching

READING: John 1:1-5, 14

OBJECT: Silver bauble

Reminiscence Activity:

Christmas memories

Reflection:

What do you watch and wait for.

What is Christmas for you – happy, sad, lonely, fun, family, gifts...

...for others? – carers working

Who will visit? Who won't visit?

Christmas is God coming to us, God humbling himself to be with us. God comes to you, in the darkness and in the light, God comes along the journey, God comes in the questioning and wondering. God comes to the ordinary and the simple. God comes in unexpected ways at unexpected times. God comes to you, you who are made in the image of God, loved and held and worth dying for.

When you look in the bauble what do you see?

May you see this Christmas a reflection of the image of God.

May you be reminded that you belong to God.

Take the bauble away with you, hang it somewhere in your room. Every time you see it be reminded that you were created in the image of God, that God is with you, day and night, every hour, every minute, every second.

Prayer ideas:

Your hopes and dreams for this Christmas

Carol suggestions:

Angels from the realms of glory

O Come O Come Immanuel

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Blessing:

God has come to us and has promised to be with us, and calls each of us by name. May we open our hearts and our minds to the gift that is the loving presence of Christ this Christmas, and may his peace surround us, and all those we love, now and always. Amen.