** ‘Prepare the Way’ Advent Activities **

These family activities start on Advent Sunday, providing something for a family to do in the home or outside every day during Advent.

**Preparation - Family map**

You will need a large sheet of paper (A3 or roll of plain wallpaper) and some pens. Draw a line from left to right, writing ‘now’ at the left and ‘Jesus is born’ at the right. Then talk about all that is happening during Advent and each person write or draw along the line events, performances and activities that are coming up. Finish by remembering that Christmas Day isn’t just about having fun and presents – it is the day we remember that Jesus is born.

29th November 

**Advent Sunday – Advent prayer**

Write a prayer in your family to say each day during Advent, using the following as a template, and allowing everyone to suggest a word or phrase for each:

Living and loving God, you are ……..

Thank you for Advent, as we look forward to …….

We’re excited by ………………

Help us to remember that we are getting ready for Jesus. Amen

30th November

**The Patriarchs**

During this first week of Advent many churches remember the ‘patriarchs’ – the key leaders who were the foundations of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Here are a few things to remember and talk about for some of them:

Abraham – married to Sarah, whose son Isaac was born to them when they were very old. God promised that Abraham would be the foundation for a very many people who would follow God.

Isaac – Abraham and Sarah’s son, also a great leader. Sarah laughed when she was told she would have a child when old, and so the name Isaac means ‘he will laugh’.

Jacob – he was a great leader whose 12 sons formed 12 families and tribes. His son Joseph was famous for his coloured coat and rise to power in Egypt.

David – he was a king who was called by God when he was young, and despite failing sometimes he became a great leader of the people. Bethlehem was known as ‘David’s city’, and Joseph was a descendent of David.

The patriarchs received promises from God, which gave them hope.

Spend a short time thinking about what you hope for this Advent, and talk about your family hopes.

1st December

**Names of Jesus**

The words ‘Christ’ and ‘Messiah’ mean anointed or chosen one. Immanuel means ‘God with us’. All of those names are given to Jesus, and the names have real meaning and power.

Try to find out what the names of those in your family mean, and talk about how we are all special and different, made by God.

2nd December 

**Getting ready**

You will need a small candle or tealight. Talk as a family about what you have to do to get ready for a day at work or school, or to get ready for a holiday away. Think about what we now need to do to get ready for Jesus again, including times of quiet, thinking about Jesus and remembering him. Then sit really quietly for five minutes, share any ideas and thoughts, and light a candle if that helps people to focus.

3rd December

**Drawing the story**

Work together, drawing and colouring up to eight pictures that go together to tell the story up to the birth of Jesus. These may include:

Mary and Joseph…the happy young couple!

The angel that visited Mary

Mary’s surprise!

Mary visiting Elizabeth

Mary and Joseph travelling

Bethlehem

A stable or cave

Angels in the sky

Shepherds on the hillside

Once they are completed, stick them around the house in difference places as a reminder of the Advent season and the things that led up to the birth of Jesus.

4th December

**The vine and grapes**

You will need a bunch of grapes. Together, count out the number of grapes needed to have one each day from now until Christmas Day. Then look at the stalks and stem left behind – we are called to be like the grapes – good fruit growing on what Jesus tells and shows us. Pray a simple prayer asking that, this Advent, we would all be good fruit. Then eat the grapes!

5th December 

**Carols and Christ**

You will need a hymn or carols book. Choose a verse from a favourite Christmas carol, read it out or sing it a few times, and talk about what it says and what it means for us. Is it true to the Gospels? Is it something we can all learn from? What does it tell us about Jesus?

6th December

**Sunday – Avoid the rush**

Make a promise to yourselves as a family that you will not do any shopping today, or on the other Sundays of Advent. Instead, take the time to cook a meal together, preparing food as a family to share. Then play a game or go for a walk all together. This time together is really important as a positive reminder that getting ready for Christmas is not all about buying things!

7th December

**The Prophets**

During this week of Advent many churches remember prophets, and the writings hundreds of years before that predicted the birth of Jesus. There are over 40 references to the Messiah or saviour in the Old Testament. God showed his love for all people by promising to send Jesus, the saviour. Remembering God’s love, tell someone else in your family that you love them.

Think and talk about how hard it is to look forward and know what is going to happen. Pray, thanking God that he has a huge plan for all people and for all time.

8th December 

**Collecting cones**

You will need access to pine cones and spray paint. If possible, make a little time today to go out and collect pine cones in a wooded area or forest. Once they are collected, try to count how many scales a cone has, and talk about how God knows all those scales, all the people in the world, and even all the hairs on our heads! Thank God that he sent Jesus for all people. Then you could spray the cones with silver or gold paint and use them as Christmas decorations.

9th December

9th December

**Look ahead**

Look at the family calendar for this week, and each person choose one event or activity that they are concerned or worried about. Pray this simple prayer for each person, asking God to be with them and help them, and don’t forget to find out how it went afterwards.

Loving God, give your love to ……… Help him/her as she ………., and show him/her that you are there helping and loving. Amen

10th December

**Words to share**

You will need pens and paper. The prophets spoke words of joy and hope for the people, promising that the Saviour was coming. Write a list of good, positive words that would encourage and help others. Each person should then choose a word that they will use that day to say to other people to build them up and give them joy.

11th December 

**Angels**

You will need some costume items, white material, and so on. Dress a member of the family as an angel and take a photo! Then talk about what an angel might really look like, and where angels are in the story leading up to the birth of Jesus:

Visiting Mary and telling her she would have a child

Visiting Joseph in a dream and assuring him that God is in control

Visiting the shepherds on the hillside

12th December

**Advent Acrostic**

You will need pens and paper. Write an acrostic poem to the word ADVENT, with each line beginning with the next letter of the word. Try to work on a mix of spiritual things and other things that point to Christmas.

13th December

**Sunday – A rough day**

Talk about what it would have been like for Mary and Joseph as they arrived in Bethlehem and ended up in a room, cave or stable that was rough and unpleasant. Spend some of the day without some of the usual comforts, so have a light and plain meal, turn the heating down, sit on the floor instead of comfortable settees, and so on. Finish by praying, thanking God that Mary and Joseph were willing to put up with rough times for all of us.

14th December 

**John the Baptist**

During this week of Advent many churches remember John the Baptist. He was a cousin of Jesus, and went ahead preparing the way for Jesus and calling people to be baptised. John lived a wild, rough life to serve God and do what he had been called to do. Have a talk together about how comfortable life can be, and what it may mean to be called by God like John was. Remember that Jesus came to bring joy to the world, and we can find joy in each-other. Ask each person – who makes you feel joyful?

15th December

**Fast quickly!**

Plan a day of simple and easy food for breakfast and evening meal, and (for those who are able) try to fast. Use the time saved being quiet and reading stories from the Bible about the coming of Jesus, particularly Luke 1 and Luke 2 up to verse 15.

16th December

**Finding the story**

You will need pictures of key elements of the Christmas story – manger, baby, sheep, shepherds, star, Mary and Joseph, and so on. Hide them around the home and (if appropriate and the weather is good) the garden. Ask everyone to search out as many pictures as they can in 5 minutes. Once time is up put all the pictures together in the right order, and then briefly tell the story through the pictures.

17th December 

**Star gazing**

You will need some blankets. Take a short evening trip to a park, the countryside, or another dark area where streetlights don’t pollute the sky. Lie on your backs on the blankets and look up to the lights in the sky, remembering that the God who made it all sent his son Jesus to us all. Say a few words of thanks for God’s greatness.

18th December

**Blessed**

You will need paper and pens. Write the word ‘Blessed ‘ in big letters on the paper, and put it on a table that you can all sit around. Remind everyone that we are looking forward to presents, but God blesses us all the time with really good things. Then ask everyone to write or draw some things they are really blessed by on the paper, and put it on the wall as a reminder.

19th December

**Sharing Jesus**

You will need some small presents and wrapping paper. Wrap up some small presents (chocolate bars, Christmas tree ornaments, and the like) and take them around your neighbourhood, handing them out freely. As people ask why you’re giving our presents, tell them that it is to remember that Jesus is coming…for everyone!

20th December 

**Sunday – A Candle for Christmas**

You will need a large plain candle and permanent felt pens. Pass the candle around the family, asking each person to write a word and draw something about Jesus and Christmas. Look at each of the suggestions, and light the candle as a reminder of the light of Jesus coming to the world.

21st December

**Sunday Extra – Mary, Jesus’ Mother**

On this Sunday of Advent many churches remember The Virgin Mary, the young girl who was willing to obey God and have a child who would be the saviour of the world. She risked everything, and her life as a parent was not easy as she saw her son become loved and then hated by the people. Jesus came to bring peace, even though his life was not peaceful.

Parents and carers – ask your children to lay their hands gently on you, and if they are able, to pray for you that you would be good, caring and peaceful parents, however tough it can be.

22nd December 

**Shells**

You will need some shells…scallop shells are ideal, water, and a towel. Traditionally scallop shells have been used in baptisms in different areas of the world. Talk about the story of John the Baptist, who baptised people with water to help them ask God for forgiveness, change their behaviour, and get ready for Jesus. Then get a little water and, each person in turn, gently pour water on the head of the person next to them as a sign of being washed clean by God and being prepared for the coming of Jesus.

23rd December

**King Jesus**

You will need some cardboard or thick paper, scissors, and pens. Make a crown fit for a king! Then write on the crown words that each person suggests when you think of Jesus. Allow even the youngest to make suggestions – they may have surprising spiritual insight.

24th December 

**Christmas Eve - The final hours**

Try to pause for one minute each hour as a family during the main part of this busy day to think about the Christmas story as it unfolds. Here are some suggestions:

1. Joseph and Mary nearing the end of their journey

2. Sheep out in the fields grazing

3. The busy inns and streets of Bethlehem

4. The owner of the stable shutting in his animals for the night

5. The town of Bethlehem as the evening darkness draws in

6. The angels assembling in the sky to surprise the shepherds

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Written for Southwell Cathedral by © Nick Harding

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