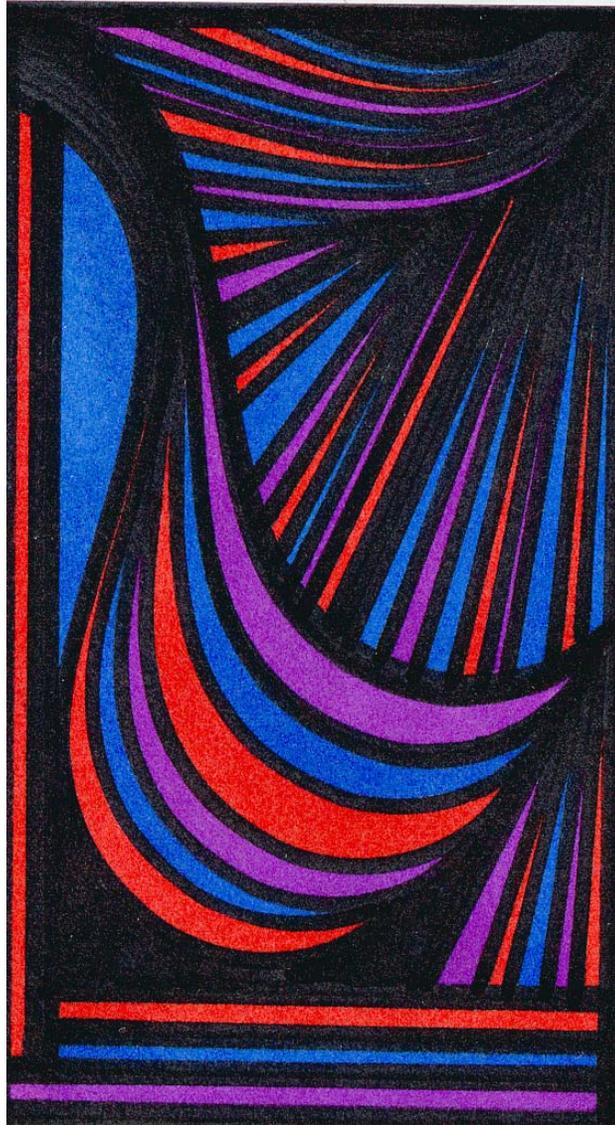


Prepare Ye the Way

A Complete Set of Advent Resources



Written by Tracey E. Herzer



LEADERRESOURCES

P.O. Box 302
Leeds, MA 01053
Phone: 800-941-2218
staff@LeaderResources.org
www.LeaderResources.org



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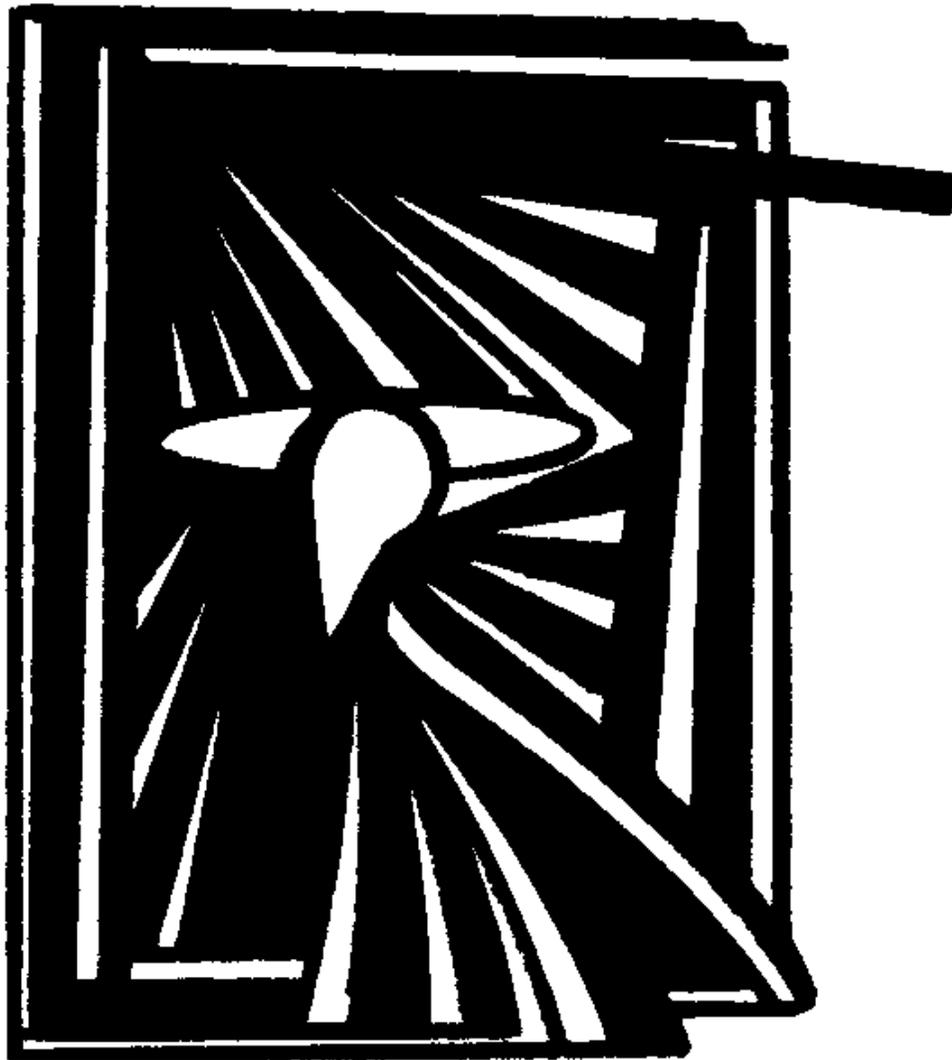
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Prepare Ye the Way

Advent Wreath Making Workshop



Written by Tracey E. Herzer

Developed at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, GA



Advent Wreath Workshop

Proposed Schedule

- 8:00 Parish Hall Set up
- Copies of handouts (See "*Learning About Advent Wreaths*")
 - Copies of liturgy (See "*Blessing of Advent Wreaths*")
 - Tables & Chairs set up for making wreaths
 - Table for drinks and snacks
 - Table for selling wreath forms and candles
 - Supplies (See "*Supplies for Wreath Making Workshop*")
 - Coffee & Wassail set up (See "*Recipes for Wassail*")
 - Pastries & Cookies set up
- 8:30 Last-Minute Set up
- Tables covered with disposable plastic tablecloths (purple or green)
 - Turn on CD player with Advent music
 - Set up table for selling wreath forms and candles
 - Signs with prices (See *Signs*)
 - Cash box for change
 - Boxes of forms and candles under the table – easy reach
 - Pen & paper
 - Volunteer #1: _____
 - Volunteer #2: _____
- 9:00 Welcome & Announcements
- Give basic Instructions
 - Show a completed sample wreath if you've done one
 - Tell people where to find additional supplies
- 9:10 Wreath Making – let the chaos begin! ☺
- 9:30 Announce 10 minute time limit
- Begin cleaning up trash
 - Walk around to each table with trash bags
 - Distribute liturgy (See "*Blessing of Advent Wreaths*")
 - Distribute handouts (See "*Learning About Advent Wreaths*")
- 9:45 Blessing of Advent Wreath Liturgy (See "*Blessing of Advent Wreaths*")
- 10:00 Dismiss
- People can continue finishing wreaths, if needed, until service time
 - Make sure tables are wiped off
 - Throw trash away

Recipes for Wassail

In Old England, it was a Christmas custom to drink to one's health ("was hail" = "be whole" in Saxon). A wassail bowl was filled with spiced ale or beer and served foaming hot with apples floating in it. "Wassaling" was the term used to describe people going from one house to another at Christmas time to sing good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Both of these recipes are non-alcoholic, but 1 cup of rum could be added to either recipe, if desired. There is a more authentic (and complex) recipe for Wassail in The Joy of Cooking made with sherry, brandy, eggs and various spices – rich, but delicious!

Easy Christmas Wassail

Serves/Makes: 12 | **Difficulty Level:** 1 | **Ready In:** 30-60 minutes

1 gallon apple cider
27 whole cloves
8 cinnamon sticks
1 quart pineapple juice
1 can (6 ounce) frozen orange juice concentrate

Mix all ingredients in a large crockpot and simmer. Serve hot.

Festive Wassail

Serves/Makes: 18 | **Difficulty Level:** 3 | **Ready In:** < 30 minutes

2 quarts apple cider
1 cup packed brown sugar
4 cinnamon sticks (about 3" each)
24 whole cloves
4 cups orange juice concentrate
2 cups pineapple juice
Additional whole cloves (optional)
9 thick orange slices, cut in half (optional)

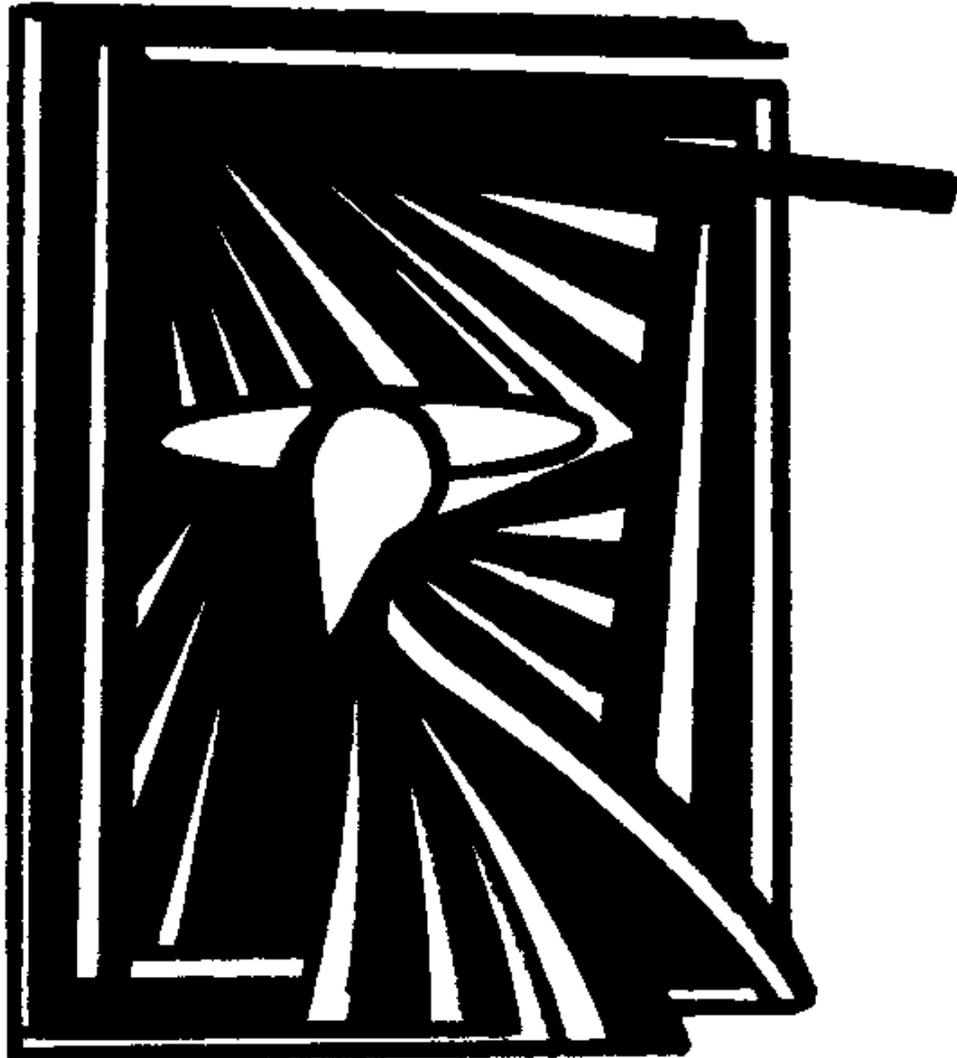
In a 3-quart saucepan, stir together apple cider, brown sugar, cinnamon sticks, and 24 cloves. Over medium heat, bring to a boil; reduce heat to low and simmer 5 minutes. Add orange juice and pineapple juice. Heat just until heated through (do not boil). Meanwhile, push additional cloves into rind of orange slices; set aside.

To serve, strain cider mixture and pour into a warmed pitcher or slow cooker. Place orange slices in slow cooker or one in each heatproof cup and serve.

*Both recipes are from CDKitchen www.cditchen.com © 1995-2004 CDKitchen, Inc.

Prepare Ye the Way

Readings for Lighting the Advent Wreath



Written by Tracey E. Herzer

Developed at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, GA



Advent Readings

In our church we always lit an Advent wreath before services, but usually an acolyte had done it and there was no reading or prayers to accompany the lighting. So, several years ago I wrote these brief meditations and prayers to be read at the beginning of the worship service each week in Advent while the wreath candles were lit.

I recruited readers from many different types of families. At the beginning of the service, the designated family for that week would come forward and one member (or an acolyte) would light the appropriate candle(s) while another member read the script.

The half-page meditation and prayer was run off on light purple paper and inserted in the bulletin. This worked great for us because people who had trouble hearing could still read all the words were being said. Also, we found that families really liked having the separate page insert so they could take it home and use it during the week with their own Advent wreaths.

In the pages following, you will find two different versions of the same basic reading:

- **The Original Version** – uses descriptive language to help create a holy space for prayer and meditation. A reader introduces the lighting and the people respond by singing a short line from a familiar Christmas hymn. Our choir was quick to lead, but everyone joined in and hearing the whole church sing just a single line *a cappella* (without instruments) was haunting and lovely. It was used at both our 8:00 early service and our 10:30 late service and mostly read by adults or families with older children or teens.
- **The Simplified Version** – was designed for families with young children and used at our 9:00 family service. Each week a reader (usually an elementary-school aged child) read the bottom part of the insert, although the top part of the page was included in the bulletin for context. Some people were initially skeptical about child readers, but it was amazing. Of course, the children had to be coached to read their parts slowly and loudly (but then again, so did some of the adults!) and in the end, the congregation was really touched by children leading our worship in this way.

I hope you find this information helpful. Please feel free to adapt these prayers as needed for your particular congregation -- editable files are provided.

Wishing you an Advent that is Less Hectic & More Holy,

In God's Peace,
Tracey E. Herzer

Volunteer Families

Advent I – November 28, 2010

Reader: _____

Advent II – December 5, 2010

Reader: _____

Advent III – December 12, 2010

Reader: _____

Advent IV – December 19, 2010

Reader: _____

Christmas Eve – December 24, 2010

Reader: _____

Christmas Day – December 25, 2010 (or Christmas I – December 26)

Reader: _____

**The following pages are appropriate
to use with child readers.**

**A second set of similar readings after this set
can be used for adult readers.**

THE PROPHET'S CANDLE OF HOPE

The First Week of Advent

Today we begin our four-week Advent journey to Christmas. As life gets busier, louder and more insistent, each week we will stop here and together seek a quiet, holy spot where we can rest and wait and watch for the coming of God's Kingdom.

We light the first candle in our Advent wreath: the Prophet's Candle of Hope. The Old Testament prophets urge us to pay attention and prepare for the coming of a Messiah who not only brings light to a cold and darkened world, but whose gentle glow can warm even the furthest reaches of our personal darkness.

READER: *Today we light the Prophet's Candle of Hope as we wait and watch and hope for the coming of the Christ Child.*

Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to be the Light of the World. Help us remember we are your Children of Light and that you travel with us as we begin this and every journey. Amen.

THE PROPHET'S CANDLE OF HOPE

The First Week of Advent

Today we begin our four-week Advent journey to Christmas. As life gets busier, louder and more insistent, each week we will stop here and together seek a quiet, holy spot where we can rest and wait and watch for the coming of God's Kingdom.

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Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to be the Light of the World. Help us remember we are your Children of Light and that you travel with us as we begin this and every journey. Amen.

**The following pages
can be used for adults readers.**

THE PROPHET'S CANDLE OF HOPE First Sunday of Advent

Leader: Today begins a four-week journey to Christmas and we begin our Advent work of watching, waiting and preparing. Each week, as the frenzied pace toward Christmas grows busier, louder and more insistent, we will gather in this holy spot where our hearts can find rest. We will light the candles of Advent and take a few quiet moments to contemplate and meditate and hope.

People: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel...*
(sung a cappella)

Leader: This first Sunday of Advent we light the Prophet's Candle of Hope. The Old Testament prophets urge us to prepare for the coming Messiah – a Messiah who not only brings light to a cold and darkened world, but whose warmth and light can stretch into even the deepest crevice of our personal darkness. We wait in hope and expectation.

People: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel...*
(sung a cappella)

Leader: As we light the Prophet's Candle of Hope, we hear the echo of the prophet Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined." (Isaiah 9:2) The time of salvation is at hand and the Messiah is on his way!

All: *God of Hope, thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to help us know we are Children of Light and no longer a people who walk in darkness. Give us strength to follow the example of the prophets of old who were ready and expectant. Be known to us during these Advent days that we may feel a keen awareness of the light of your love. Amen.*

THE PROPHET'S CANDLE OF HOPE First Sunday of Advent

Leader: Today begins a four-week journey to Christmas and we begin our Advent work of watching, waiting and preparing. Each week, as the frenzied pace toward Christmas grows busier, louder and more insistent, we will gather in this holy spot where our hearts can find rest. We will light the candles of Advent and take a few quiet moments to contemplate and meditate and hope.

People: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel...*
(sung a cappella)

Leader: This first Sunday of Advent we light the Prophet's Candle of Hope. The Old Testament prophets urge us to prepare for the coming Messiah – a Messiah who not only brings light to a cold and darkened world, but whose warmth and light can stretch into even the deepest crevice of our personal darkness. We wait in hope and expectation.

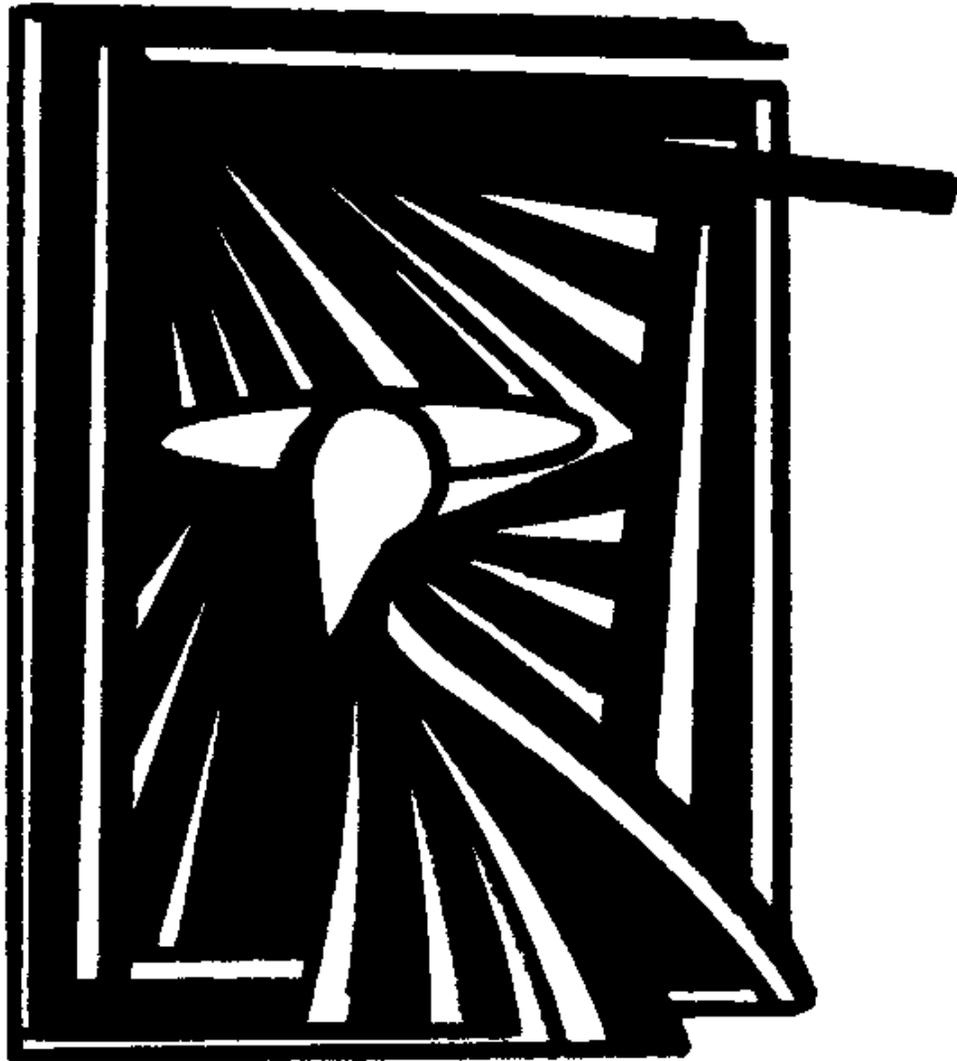
People: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel...*
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All: *God of Hope, thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to help us know we are Children of Light and no longer a people who walk in darkness. Give us strength to follow the example of the prophets of old who were ready and expectant. Be known to us during these Advent days that we may feel a keen awareness of the light of your love. Amen.*

Prepare Ye the Way

No-Rehearsal Christmas Pageant



Written by Tracey E. Herzer

Developed at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, GA



P.O. Box 302
Leeds, MA 01053
Phone: 800-941-2218
staff@LeaderResources.org
www.LeaderResources.org

About the No-Rehearsal Christmas Pageant

Rationale

After more than fifteen years in Christian formation and at least as many Children's Christmas Pageants, I discovered a new mantra for Advent: "Less hectic... more holy"

Like most Directors of Christian Education, I used to spend the entire month of December running around like a madwoman gathering costumes, finding or writing scripts, trying to schedule rehearsal times that didn't make everyone crazy and basically turning myself inside out to create the world's most "perfect" Christmas pageant... Ha!! Year after year, I was exhausted by all the work that went into the pageant, but always amazed by how touched I was during the actual pageant, watching how the children reacted to this special story.

A couple of years ago, I discovered a new format that made my life so much easier!

First, I realized that no matter how much we rehearsed (which wasn't ever that much) there was always going to be some element of chaos in the Children's Christmas pageant – it was simply the "nature of the beast".

Secondly, I realized that the chaos and unpredictability was part of the charm of the pageant and that people loved it anyway. So I took a leap of faith and said we were going to do a Christmas pageant with **absolutely NO** rehearsals. After all, Mary and Joseph didn't have rehearsals and they were certainly touched by the story! ☺

Directions

So, here's how it works:

- 1) In October, (after checking everything out with my rector) I told my Sunday School teachers we were going to have NO rehearsals for this year's pageant. They were thrilled because often pageant rehearsals ate up some of their already-limited Sunday School time during Advent!
- 2) In our church newsletter for November, I introduced the new format and explained a bit about why we were trying a No-Rehearsal-Pageant. The article also told parents to watch their mailboxes for more info. (*See newsletter samples*)
- 3) In early-mid November, I sent out a letter to the parents explaining more of the details about how the pageant would work (*See "Letter to Parents"*)
- 4) Then after Thanksgiving, I went through my various storage areas and gathered all the costume pieces we had accumulated over the years, as well as other things I thought might work. Here is some of what I found:

Newsletter Articles

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT – for November newsletter

We all know that Advent is supposed to be a time of quiet, holy mystery, but often it is the busiest time of our year. In an effort to simplify life for all our families so we can all focus on what is truly important, we are going to try a new no-rehearsals format for our annual **Children's Christmas Pageant**. This format has been hugely successful in many other churches and we are excited about how it will work here in our church. Parents, watch your mailboxes or call _____ for more info!

ADVENT: LESS HECTIC, MORE HOLY – for December newsletter

Advent is supposed to be a time of quiet, holy mystery, but often it is the busiest time of our year. In an effort to simplify and focus on what is truly important, we are trying to make this year's Advent "Less Hectic and More Holy" so we are going to try a no-rehearsals format for the **Children's Christmas Pageant**. As is our custom, the pageant will happen during the **5:00 pm** service on Christmas Eve. Bring your child to church dressed in one of these costumes: **stable animal, wise people (kings & queens), angel, shepherd or sheep**. Please use whatever costumes are easiest for you and your children – even recycled Halloween costumes. (I am absolutely certain the Christ Child wouldn't have complained if one of Disney's 101 Dalmatians had been present at the Nativity scene! ☺) If you don't have a costume to use or if you forget yours, we will also have some costume pieces available in the parish hall before the pageant, beginning at 4:00 pm. If you have any questions, please call the church.

Bulletin Announcement

Children's Christmas Pageant – Dec 24 at 5:00 pm

Come join us Christmas Eve at the 5:00 service for a special **No-Rehearsal Christmas Pageant** where everyone helps in the telling of the ancient nativity story. Bring children to church dressed as a **stable animal, wise person (king or queen), angel, shepherd or sheep**. Some simple costumes will also be available before the service. Please call the church if you have questions.



Pageant Volunteer Sign Up Sheet

Mary _____

Joseph _____

Gift Bearer #1 _____

Gift Bearer #2 _____

Gift Bearer #3 _____

Star-carrier _____

Adult to help me assemble & make ready the costume pieces:

Adult to set up and help children on the day of pageant:

Letter to Parents

December 6, 2004

Dear Parents:

As we enter into December, we become increasingly aware that Advent and Christmas are right around the corner, which means it's time to talk about the **Children's Christmas Pageant**. Each year we find ways to retell the good news of Emmanuel, "God with us", and the time when God became the Incarnation of Love wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. I believe the telling of this sacred story belongs in the context of worship and in keeping with that idea, we will offer our pageant as the homily during the **9:00 service on Sunday, December _____** in the sanctuary.

Advent is intended to be a holy, mysterious time of waiting and quiet... yet for many people this is often the busiest time of year! This year, in trying to SIMPLIFY and hopefully provide more opportunities for reflection or family time, we are introducing a new format for our pageant – one with **NO REHEARSALS!!** Here's the plan: Children will come to church in a costume (or use one provided here) and then sit with their parents during the service. As I tell the nativity story, I will ask for specific groups of characters to come up front. You may want to help your child listen for their group. You will not have to arrive at the church early, unless you need help with a costume.

On December 19th, please bring your child to church dressed in one of these costumes: **stable animal (donkey, horse, cow, camel, or even dog, cat, bird, etc.); wise people (kings & queens); angel; shepherd or sheep.** Please feel free to use whatever costumes will be easiest for you and your children. If it's easier to recycle Halloween costumes, please do so. In past years, I have included a moose, a bumblebee and several Disney characters – I am absolutely certain the Christ Child wouldn't have complained at these additions to the Nativity scene! ☺

We will also have simple costumes available at church before the service and extra hands to help pin on ears, wings, halos, etc. So if you don't have a costume – just dress your child in something white. Depending on accessories your child chooses, he or she can become a sheep or an angel. Or bring them dressed in whatever – we will drape them in some brown toga-like fabric, add a headpiece, and PRESTO: we have a shepherd!! The name of the game is DO WHATEVER IS EASIEST! **What the kids wear is NOT the important part of the story!!**

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to call me. I know this new format may seem very different and I appreciate your understanding and patience as we all make our way through this busy season. I wish you an Advent that is full of unexpected quiet, holy moments.

In His Peace,

Tracey E. Herzer
Director of Children's Formation

Our Christmas Pageant

The Gospel According to
The Children of All Saints'



Sunday, December 22nd
9:00 am service

All Saints' Episcopal Church

Notes for Parents

- ✠ All children are invited to participate as they feel comfortable. Parents and other adults are welcome to join in as well! ☺ Costumes for angels, sheep, shepherds, stable animals and wise people (kings & queens) are available in Ellis Hall starting at 8:15 am. Please return costumes there after the service.
- ✠ Children will sit with their parents during most of the service. When Tracey gets up to begin the homily, please alert your child and help them listen for their group. If your child is dressed as a king/queen, they will follow the Star and the Three Gift Bearers who will come in from the narthex at the appropriate time.
- ✠ After the homily/pageant children will remain in the front of the church and gather around the altar so they can see (similar to what we do when we have Eucharist in Children's Church.)
- ✠ Children will return to their families before communion.



Thank you for being with us today as we worship and retell the story of the Incarnation of Love, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger... Emmanuel – "God with Us"

*Tracey E. Herzer
Director of Children's Formation*

PAGEANT HYMNS

Children will be invited up by groups to come enter the pageant. The entire congregation is invited to sing the first verses of the following hymns while our pageant players get into place.

AWAY IN A MANGER *(All animals except Sheep come forward)*

Away in a Manger, no crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR *(Angels come forward)*

It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from Heaven's all gracious King"
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.

THE FIRST NOEL *(Shepherds & Sheep come forward)*

The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields as they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, Born is the King of Israel!

WE THREE KINGS *(Wise people follow the star and gift-bearers)*

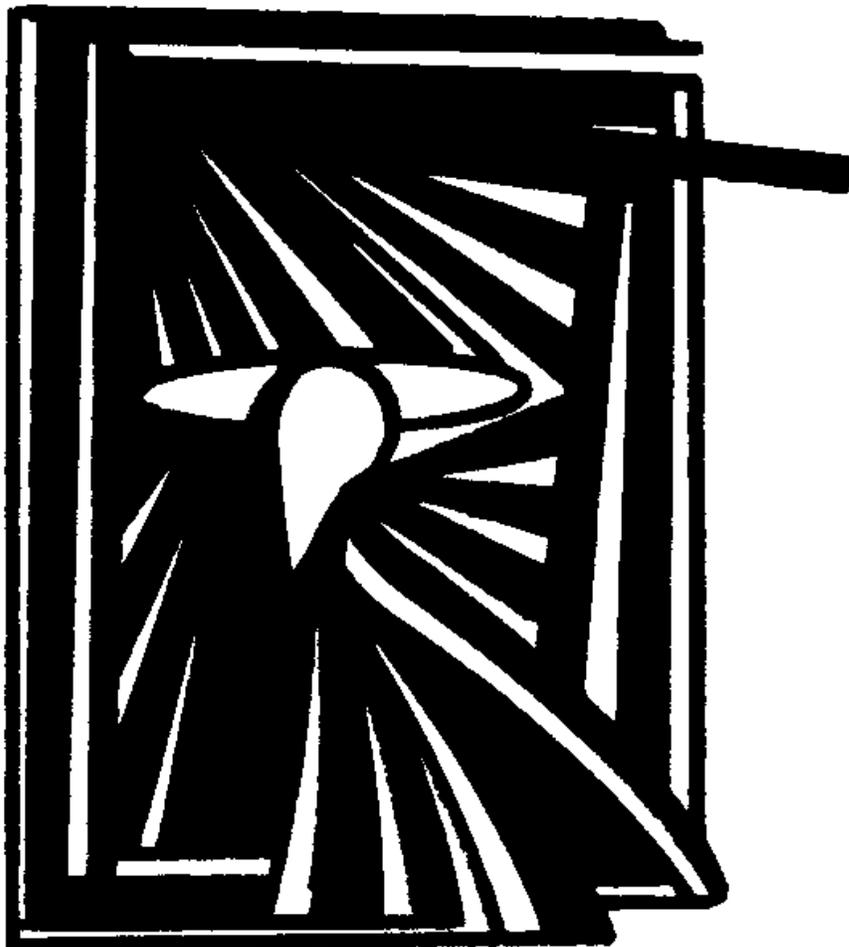
We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.
Oh, star of wonder, star of night, star of royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN *(End of Pageant)*

Chorus: Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.
Down in a lowly manger, the humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.
(Repeat Chorus)

Prepare Ye the Way

Adult Formation:
A Less Hectic, More Holy Advent



Written by Tracey E. Herzer

Developed at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, GA



P.O. Box 302
Leeds, MA 01053
Phone: 800-941-2218
staff@LeaderResources.org
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A Less Hectic, More Holy Advent Adult Formation Classes

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Living from a Place of Spiritual Abundance

About Adult Formation

Deciding Where to Begin

Most people live very busy, over-scheduled lives and this is especially true at the end of the year as we approach the holidays. Most of us have neither the time nor the inclination to add “one more thing” to our already-full plates, so where does that leave us in planning opportunities for Adult formation in our churches?

Well, in the first place, we need to step away from that “one more thing to do” mentality and really take a look at what we WANT... and what we need.

Take a moment and think: What is the best time you've ever had thinking-praying-laughing-learning? Was it in a Sunday morning class? A discussion with friends? A retreat? What do you think were the critical elements that created such an atmosphere?

What pieces of that experience were the most influential: The people? The leader? The subject? The atmosphere? The time when it took place?

There are many aspects to consider when it comes to adult formation, including:

- The curriculum or materials uses
- The targeted audience for participants
- The physical space where you will meet
- The day and time schedule
- Refreshments served?
- Childcare available?

Less Hectic, More Holy

Years ago, when asked what he wanted out of his Advent season, my spiritual director replied, “I want it to be less hectic... more holy.” This resonated so deeply with me and has become my annual mantra for Advent. This program comes out of my own struggle to create an Advent season in my life where I am not completely driven by the holiday chaos all around me and actually have some time for waiting and holy anticipation.

Most of us look forward to Christmas every year, but end up completely exhausted by it. One way to combat this is to look at some of the forces that come into play, sometimes without us even knowing it.

We will be looking at Advent from a variety of viewpoints and using different resources, but I want to call special attention to a book that made a huge difference for me and helped to inspire these pages: *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back into the Season* by Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli. If possible, I suggest you get a copy of this book to supplement the information here in these ideas. You may even want to purchase multiple copies to sell/give to participants.

Newsletter Articles

ADVENT: LESS HECTIC, MORE HOLY – for November newsletter

This month begins the season of Advent and our Adult Formation class will be discussing what Advent means to each of us. As life gets busier, louder and more insistent, it becomes increasingly important that we find ways to stop and breathe deeply. During Advent, we are going to use our adult formation time to talk about how we can simplify our holidays and focus on what the season is truly about. Come share your joys and frustrations about this special season and let's share ideas together for creating an Advent that is perhaps slightly less hectic and hopefully more holy. The class will meet in (room) at (time) , beginning on (date) . Please join us!

UNPLUGGING THE CHRISTMAS MACHINE – for December newsletter

Everyone knows Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. And while that may be true in many aspects, a lot of us would also have to admit that the weeks leading up to Christmas are frantic and exhausting, with a ridiculous number of things pulling at our time and our wallets. Come join us as we try to look realistically at the expectations we put on ourselves and discuss alternative ways to deal with holiday stress. We meet in (room) at (time) and we would love to see you there!

Bulletin Announcement

Adult Formation: Creating an Advent that is Less Hectic & More Holy – So much happens in December and although much of it is very joyous, we sometimes still need a break from blaring Christmas carols and incessantly blinking lights. Come meet other adults here who gather in (room) at (time) to look honestly at our expectations and priorities. We'd love to have you come join in our discussion of Christmas – the good, the bad and the ugly! ☺

First Week of Advent

NOVEMBER 28, 2010

This year, the first Sunday of Advent falls on Thanksgiving weekend. For many churches, this will be the day they do a parish-wide, intergenerational Advent Wreath-Making workshop where families can work on their wreaths together. Elsewhere in this packet are detailed instructions for making and blessing wreaths. (See **Wreath Workshop** files)

If you are not doing a Wreath-making workshop, you can create a simplified version of the workshop by following the instructions below:

PREPARATION

- If you'd like to serve wassail, there are recipes included in this lesson plan.
 - Wassail
 - Crockpot or other warming dish
 - Paper coffee cups
- You may also wish to bring an Advent wreath to show.

MATERIALS

- Copies of "Learning About Advent Wreaths" & "Blessing of Advent Wreaths" for participants. You can run both items off on a single sheet, double-sided copy.
- Flip chart & markers or chalkboard (optional, but helpful)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Arrive before class to turn on lights/heat, set up chairs, etc. If you are serving wassail, set that up as well to create a warm, inviting aroma in your meeting space.
- As people arrive, welcome them and invite them to sit down. When you are ready to begin, you may wish to open with a prayer such as this one:

We praise and thank you, Creator God, for you have not left us alone. Each year you come to us, Emmanuel, God with us in a manger. Each time you come to us in the broken bread and the cup we share. In time or out of time you will be revealed and we shall see you face to face. May Christ be our new beginning, the hope and salvation of all the world. Amen.

From the New Zealand Book of Common Prayer

- Begin your discussion by talking about the Thanksgiving holiday. If you have a group larger than 10-12, you may want to ask people to split into partners or small groups to answer questions such as:
 - How does your family celebrate Thanksgiving?
 - How is that similar or different to how the family of your childhood celebrated?
 - What differences are there in your celebrations of Christmas & Thanksgiving?
 - What are your thoughts right now about this year's Christmas?
 - What do you hope for?
 - What are you afraid of or dreading?
 - Where does Advent fit into your holiday plans?
 - What does Advent mean to you?
- If you brought an Advent wreath, place it in the middle of the group. Ask what people know about the symbolism or history of Advent wreaths.
- After a few minutes of discussion, distribute the handouts of "Learning About Advent Wreaths" & "Blessing of Advent Wreaths".
- Call people's attention first to "Learning about Advent Wreaths". Give them a moment to read over the sheet and then ask what stands out to them about Advent wreaths.
- If time allows, have everyone sit or stand around the Advent wreath and read through the "Blessing of Advent Wreaths".
- Introduce the book *Unplug the Christmas Machine* and give some overview of what is covered in the book and what will be happening next week.
- Thank everyone for coming and encourage them to come back next week!
- Close in prayer, using these words or words of your own choosing:

Gracious God, you give to us of your abundance and we are grateful. Rouse us from a life of mindless wanting and help us recognize what is truly important and what is expendable. Reveal to us unexpected places of peace and simplicity and let our hearts be content in you, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of our lives. Amen.



WorkshopCycles

EMMANUEL - GOD WITH US!

Developed by Tracey E. Herzer
This program was created at
All Saints' Episcopal Church in Atlanta, GA, 2003

Cycle Coordinator: Tom Williams
Creative Consultants: Lauri Begley, Judy Carter, Hank Harris,
Lillian Huber, Liz Jacobs, and Polly Williams.

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Theological Overview of this Cycle

This cycle is about the birth of Jesus and the amazing ways in which that Gift changed everything for all of us. Most of us live busy, overscheduled lives and for many people the holiday season becomes an even more frenzied schedule of shopping, errands, parties and family gatherings. In the midst of all this joyous chaos, our church calendar calls us into the quiet, holy bleakness of Advent. Advent is about much more than a countdown to Christmas. Advent is about waiting...preparing...being silent...being ready.

In as much as possible, I want this cycle to be about gifts and getting ready and not just about retelling the central Christmas story. Even very young children are somewhat familiar with the details of angels and shepherds and wise men, but how can we dig deeper than that? How do we talk with children about preparing ourselves for the gift of “God With Us” and what do we do with this precious gift we have received? I hope this cycle will aid you in these discussions.

By focusing on a broader picture than just the nativity, we help our children learn about Advent. Besides being a good way to teach our young charges a little something about the rhythm of the church year, this tactic also helps combat the “Christmas overload” that many of us experience as we move closer and closer to December 25th. Furthermore, it gives greater flexibility to the cycle because you can easily tie in the theme of “Gifts” to fall stewardship campaigns or Thanksgiving by looking at “what gifts we are thankful for?”

However you choose to use it, I hope this cycle will give you ways to create a small oasis of holy time in the midst of the busyness of Advent.

Advent Blessings!
Tracey E. Herzer

“And while God does not ask any of us to bring Christ into the world as literally as did Mary, God calls each of us to become a Godbearer through whom God may enter the world again and again.

-- from *The Godbearing Life*

by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster



Letter to the Parents for this Cycle

(We suggest you mail this letter to all parents with a copy of the cycle story)

Dear Parents –

For many of you, the Christmas machine is probably already beginning to churn. Most people find the weeks leading up to Christmas to be the busiest time of the year and this is especially true for parents. However, this is also the time that our church calls us into the quiet mystery of Advent and encourages us to find times for reflection and waiting, even in the midst of the chaos.

Advent is about preparing room in our busy lives for the coming of the Savior and finding ways to balance and tame the chaos of the season. Several years ago, my spiritual director encouraged me to strive for an Advent season that is “Less Hectic, More Holy” and that little Advent mantra changed everything for me. Leaving some space and silence during Advent gave me more room to be really ready for the joyous celebration of Christmas.

This cycle is about the gifts God gave us – not just the gift of Jesus, but the unique gifts that each of us possess. It is also about getting ready to receive the things God has in store for us. I encourage you to take some time as a family to observe Advent in ways that make sense for you. Here are some suggestions to make life a bit simpler:

- Light an Advent Wreath each night at the dinner table
- Offer an Advent prayer (such as “Lord, help us prepare our minds, hearts and home so we can be ready to welcome you.”) at bedtime or mealtime
- Keep one night each week when the family stays home
- Prepare simple meals
- Find one night to turn off the television, computer, phone, etc.
- Pick one holiday party, tradition or decoration you can live without this year

Use one of these ideas or come up with your own, but I hope you can find at least one thing to make your Advent less hectic and more holy.

Peace be with you,
Tracey E. Herzer



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Story for Cycle: Emmanuel

God's Greatest Gift -- To be read each week of the cycle

Chapter 1 – The Angel tells of God's Gift

One day God sent the angel Gabriel to give a special message to a young girl named Mary. So Gabriel appeared to Mary and said, "Do not be afraid. God loves you and is going to give you a very special gift. You are going to have a baby and you should name him Jesus." Mary was very surprised and she said, "How can this be true?" Gabriel told her, "Nothing is impossible with God." Mary decided to believe Gabriel and said she would do whatever God asked.

Chapter 2 - The Gift of the Animals

As the time got close for Mary to have her baby, a new law was passed that said everyone had to go be registered in their hometown. So Mary and her husband Joseph went to the city of Bethlehem. The city was full of people and Mary and Joseph had a hard time finding a place to stay. Finally, they found a little stable where the donkeys and horses and sheep and chickens lived and they decided to sleep there. The animals shared their home with Mary and Joseph. That night, the baby was born and Mary and Joseph named the baby Jesus, just as Gabriel had told them to do. They wrapped up the baby and nestled him in the hay so he would be warm. Mary loved him. Joseph loved him. And God loved him.

Chapter 3 – A Gift of Good News

That same night, out on the hills near Bethlehem, were some shepherds watching their sheep. Suddenly an angel came to the shepherds, shining with God's glory. The shepherds were afraid, but the angel said "Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news that will make EVERYONE happy: today in Bethlehem, God's son was born! You can go see him. He is in Bethlehem, wrapped warm and snug in a manger!" Then many angels came from heaven and they praised God, singing "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth!" When the angels left, the shepherds said, "Let's go to Bethlehem!" So they hurried into town and found Mary and Joseph and the tiny baby Jesus, sleeping in the manger. When they left, they thanked God for this very, very special gift.

Chapter 4 – Gifts from the Kings

There were wise men living in the east who watched the stars. After Jesus was born, they saw a special star in the sky and knew it must be an important message. They followed the star for a long, long way and the star led them right to the place where Jesus was. They were so happy when they found the baby Jesus. They knelt down and they offered treasure chests with special gifts inside and then they went home.

Stories re-told by Tracey Herzer
(Luke 1:26 – 2:20 & Matthew 2:1-12)



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Activities Overview for This Cycle

WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF PLANS	FOCUS
ART	Creating Wrapping Paper and Coupon Books	Offering ourselves as Gifts
COMPUTER	Computer Games Publishing the Good News	God's Gift of Good News
DRAMA	Charades	Responding to Gifts we are given
MOVIE	"The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" or other movies	Unexpected Gifts
STORY	Christmas stories	The Gift of Christmas and the gift of Story
KITCHEN	Baking Christmas cookies	Sharing our Gifts with other people
MUSIC	Advent / Christmas songs	Preparing to receive a Gift



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Emmanuel: Art Workshop

Bible Reference for the Cycle:

Luke 1:26-2:20 & Matthew 2:1-12

Main Verse for the Cycle:

“The young woman will conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with Us’” (Matthew 1:23 & Isaiah 7:14) *(Revised Standard Version Bible)*

Key Concepts and Life Application:

- God gave us the greatest gift in Jesus, who was called Emmanuel
- At Christmas we remember the story and celebrate the gift all over again
- We can give the gift of ourselves through our time or service to others

Summary of Class Plans:

Students will talk about how we can offer ourselves as Gifts and what that means. They will talk about “random acts of kindness” and create Coupon Books that represent the gifts we have to offer and wrap up their books in wrapping paper they have decorated.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles or copies of Matthew 25:35-40 (“Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me”)
- Construction paper
- Crayons, markers, pencils, etc. for children to use to decorate their project
- Scissors
- Pinking shears (optional)
- Glue sticks (regular glue works too, but glue sticks aren’t as messy!)
- Stickers – esp. stars or Christmas themes
- Hole punch
- Yarn or ribbon to tie coupon books together
- Newsprint (not newspaper) paper – lightweight paper that can be decorated and will still fold nicely as wrapping paper. Rolled butcher paper might work too.
- Stamps & Inking pads or Sponges & paint (optional for decorating wrapping paper)
- Other options for wrapping would be traditional wrapping paper or comics (which could be solicited from all parishioners 2-3 weeks before your cycle begins)
- Scotch tape for wrapping packages
- Bows or ribbons for wrapped packages

Workshop Lesson Plans:

- Read through the lesson plans and decide if you want children to create their own coupons or if you would like to use a template. For younger children (K-1) it may be easiest to use a pre-drawn template that they can simply color. There are many such templates available as free downloads on the Internet. One such site is <http://www.dltk-kids.com/t/christmas/bcoupon.html>



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- Before class you may wish to create a sample coupon book to show children. Also, you will need to prepare tables with newspaper and set out your supplies.
- You can refer to “A General Schedule for Class Structure” (included in the Introductory Materials) for ideas on how to introduce yourself and the story, as well as how to plan your class time appropriately.
- After reading the story, ask children what they like best about Christmas or about the Christmas story. Unless you have VERY unusual children, “presents” will be a pretty popular answer! ☺ Talk to the children about what it means to give a gift and what it is like to receive one. Talk about the Gifts that God offers to us.
- Talk about how you decide what gift to get for different people. Explain to students that we will be finding ways to offer ourselves as gifts. We will each be making a coupon book that represents some of the things we have to offer and then will wrap up that book in wrapping paper that the children create. Talk about what “coupons” or “gift certificates” are. Ask children why stores offer gift certificates.
- Read Matthew 25:35-40 and talk about what “the least of these” means. Read Matthew 2:23 and talk about what “God with us” means. Talk about what it means for us to be Christ-bearers and show God’s love to other people.
- Ask if anyone has ever heard the phrase “random acts of kindness” and talk about what that means. (Hint: Older children may have seen the movie “Pay it Forward” which would make a great discussion starter!)
- Ask students if they have ever made coupon books for parents, etc that feature coupons of things like hugs or extra chores. Tell students we are going to use the same idea to make a different kind of coupon book. This book will be a symbol of the gifts we each have to offer into the world.
- Help the class brainstorm a list of as many “acts of kindness” as they can think of. Have them work in teams or by tables if you have a large group. Stress that the list should include only actions that they could realistically accomplish. You might ask students to include items that apply to each of the following areas:
 - Their family (such as helping out with something that is not your job)
 - Their school (such as writing a thank you note to a teacher or principal)
 - Their community or city (such as helping with a local clean-up day)
 - Their country (such as writing a letter to a representative)
 - Their world (such as a recycling project)
- Other ideas for coupons
 - Pray for other people in your neighborhood or school
 - Light a candle and think about Jesus, the light of the world
 - Give someone an unexpected hug
 - Read the story of Simeon or Anna and learn how they prepared for God’s gift



- Do something nice for someone you don't know
 - Make a card for someone at church
 - Give part of your allowance to a charity or church
 - Do something nice for a neighbor
 - Write a letter to a grandparent
 - Help care for a pet
 - Pray the Lord's Prayer
 - Make someone laugh
 - Smile at someone you don't know
 - Say grace at dinner
 - Pray for someone in another country
- **DIRECTIONS FOR COUPON BOOKS:**
 1. Give each student 4-5 pieces of construction paper. Help students fold papers in thirds (or halves for younger children) and then cut their papers into strips. You may wish to create several "templates" out of cardboard (such as from the back cover of a construction paper pad) or poster board so that children can just trace the form with a pencil and still have reasonably straight lines.
 2. Punch two holes on one end of the strip (which will be used later to tie the coupons together into a booklet)
 3. Children use markers, crayons, etc. to create at least 10-12 coupons that represent things they can do for others and then create a cover for their booklet, drawing a picture or writing a special verse or title.
 4. After the coupons and cover are complete, use a piece of ribbon or yarn to tie the coupons together as a book
 - If time allows, after everyone is finished with their books, gather the group together and share some ideas from each area. Have each student pick at least one thing from their coupon book that they will try to accomplish before Christmas. You may want to close with a simple prayer such as *"Thank you, God, for all the gifts you have given. Help us to remember to share your love with other people. Amen."*
 - After students finish their coupon books and if there is still have enough time, they can create wrapping paper to wrap their books. Here are some ways to do that:
 - Students can cut out multiple pictures from magazines and tape them together to create wrapping paper
 - Students can use blank newsprint or other paper, which can be decorated using stickers, markers, stamps, sponge prints or even crayon scribbles
 - Comic pages make great gift wrap!
 - Another option would of course be to use regular pre-printed wrapping paper.

Filler Activities:

- Advent Calendars – If you have extra time, give children a pre-printed piece of paper that has a small square for each day of the Advent Season. Children can decorate



their calendars and then take them home to mark off each day of Advent as they prepare for Christmas.

- Advent Cards – All of us have seen Christmas cards, but how do we remember and observe Advent? Have students create Advent prayer cards or greeting cards they can use at home to remind their families about Advent. Prayer cards can easily be made by folding a piece of construction paper in half (or in quarters) to make a stand-up “tent”. Then both sides can be decorated with Advent pictures or scriptures that remind us of Advent, such as “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord” (Matthew 3:3)



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