

PRECIOUS GIFTS

This year's Christmas resources explore Christian Aid's work fighting malaria in Nigeria, particularly among women and young children. They tell the story of people whose lives have been affected by malaria and show how the precious gift of a mosquito net could mean the difference between life and death. Use our activities, outlined below, with the children in your church groups and then use our other resources as part of your wider church Christmas celebrations.

Nets, nets, nets

Bring in one or more nets, or pictures of nets, to show the group and talk to them about various ways in which nets can be used, such as for catching fish, protecting crops, scoring and saving goals, covering your hair, as safety nets, cricket nets and so on. Can they think of other uses? Are each of the nets used to keep things in or to keep things out?

If nobody has mentioned it, explain that people can also sleep underneath nets to protect themselves against insect bites. Ask the children if they have ever had an insect bite. What did it feel like? Explain that, in the UK, insect bites are rarely serious (unless you are allergic to them) but that in some parts of the world, an insect bite can pass on serious illnesses such as malaria. Explain that it's very important in these places that people – particularly young children – sleep underneath nets to avoid bites, but that not everybody has access to suitable mosquito nets. Ask the children if any of them has a mosquito net on their Christmas wish list. Explain that we are going to hear about some people who have received the gift of a mosquito net.

Gifts at Christmas

Read a child-friendly version of Matthew 1:18-2:12 with your group. Talk to the children about gifts at Christmas – they could tell you about presents they are hoping to give and maybe receive. What do they think of the gifts the wise men and shepherds gave to Jesus? (Explain in more detail what the gifts represented, referring to our **Three Very Wise Men nativity play** for further information.) If the children were visiting Jesus, what gifts would they take, if any? Why?

Advent resource

Take part in our **Advent Adventure** with children in the lead up to Christmas. This resource could be used in groups or at home. It tells the story of Christiana, a young woman from Nigeria, and the positive difference that owning a mosquito net made to her and her family. Use Christiana's story to explain the importance of owning mosquito nets and to introduce the other activities you'll be doing as a group.

Play some games

- Use our template on page three to copy and cut out images of mosquitoes. Mark a red dot on some of the cut-outs. Hide the cut-out mosquitoes around the room. Split the children into teams and give each team a net. Teams have three minutes to fill their nets with as many mosquitoes as they can find. Afterwards, they count how many of their mosquitoes carry malaria (shown by the red dot). The team with the most malarial mosquitoes wins.
- Play net games such as basketball or netball (if you have access to a court) or a simple catching game using balls and nets.



Mosquito prayers

Cut out a mosquito template for each child in your group and ask them to write and illustrate prayers inside. Pray for Christiana and other young families in Nigeria. Pray that more people will be given mosquito nets and will learn about malaria. Place everyone's prayers into a net bag to symbolise their prayers being caught and held by God.

Get crafty

Make bug masks, bug magnets, bug badges, turn stones into bugs, or try any other insect-related crafts available from party and craft websites. Alternatively, photocopy the mosquito template, decorate it with glitter, tissue paper, googly eyes and so on and suspend it from cotton or fishing wire. Children can hang their friendly bugs in their bedrooms to remind them that they don't have to be scared of mosquitoes in this country.

Raise money for nets

Challenge your group to raise funds to support Christian Aid's work in Nigeria and around the world. Talk to the children about what they could do to help. You could:

- Offer a Christmas present-wrapping service to your church congregation, for a donation.
- Have a 'sponsored sleep' under mosquito nets or tents. Indoors might be preferable at this time of year; you could still use real tents or just hang sheets over chairs to make dens. Children could be sponsored per hour spent in a 'tent' or under a net, either together in groups or at home on their own. If together, make the evening fun by playing games, eating together, having a sing-song and so on.
- Fill net bags with sweets and sell them after church. Cut a piece of net and some tissue paper into large circles, place the tissue paper inside the net and fill with sweets before gathering in the sides and tying the top with a ribbon. Alternatively, buy pre-made net bags (available from party shops and craft websites).

- Go carol singing.
- Ask the children in your group to come up with their own ideas for how your church could raise funds for Christian Aid this Christmas.

Sharing the story

Our **Three Very Wise Men nativity play** and **Carol Celebration** help explain the issues facing parents and babies in Nigeria, and are ideal to share in your wider church services. Children could play the parts in the play or lead the Carol Celebration as part of your Christmas services.



Christiana Odey enjoys a precious moment with her baby boy after recovering from life-threatening malaria in pregnancy. Christian Aid is working with partners in Nigeria to provide care and education for families at risk from malaria.

Resources to download

The **Three Very Wise Men nativity Play**; **Advent Adventures**; and **Carol Celebration** can be found at christianaid.org.uk/christmas

Mosquito template for activity

