



Nine Lessons and Carols

A Service Guide for Christmas

Please use this as a guide for planning your own Nine Lessons and Carols service. We've suggested prayers, carols, and hymns, but feel free to choose different ones that are familiar for your congregation.

Prelude

Hymn - Hark! The herald angels sing

Bidding Prayer

Love is patient and kind. Justice struggles with waiting and so they hold hands, inseparable and committed to each other. Together they are a powerful force, holding an equilibrium only God could hope for. Prayer expresses the deepest desire of our hearts. As Advent holds us in expectant waiting, let love and justice embody us as they did the one upon whom we wait. God whose will courses through history, Yahweh, the Great 'I am' who cannot be contained, pour your spirit on our gathering, on our remembering, on our waiting. Your will be done, as the incarnate one comes into our midst and is reborn in our hearts.

Hymn - O come, o come Emmanuel

Lesson 1: Cain & Abel

Genesis 4:3-16

This text is charged with a tangible resonance for all who hear today – over a year has passed since unthinkable violence has gripped the Middle East and it cannot help but leech its way deeper and further. How do we begin to respond to the horror of war, the mockery it makes of our common humanity? In a provocative use of imagery, Cain cannot go home ever again, but is destined to wander. Nod means the land of wandering – violence, hate, anger, prejudice – they all make us lose ourselves, destined to wander. Today, we pray for peace, to an end to wandering, to a home, safe and secure, for all God's children. Christian Aid's partners are providing all they can, food, clean water and cash so people can make appropriate choices for themselves. They are providing shelter in a desperate place and psychological support for our traumatized siblings.

Hymn - In the bleak midwinter



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Lesson 2: Where is God?

Psalm 42

'So where is God today? I sense that God is in the brave front-line workers who sacrificially give themselves to the service of saving lives, in the young neighbour who volunteers to do grocery shopping for the elderly in their street... God is in the members of our church in Nairobi who have been giving food donations to families whose breadwinners lost their jobs. God is in the many churches and individuals in the UK, Ireland and beyond who have contributed through Christian Aid for people a continent away to not sleep hungry or cold. Around the world God is near through the hearts and hands of those who are reaching out to touch their neighbours. Were it not for the touch of God through your words and acts of kindness, the hearts of many would have been downcast and discouraged. But because of the actions of true neighbours – the neighbour down the street and the neighbour a continent away – many people when wondering where God is can now say to themselves – 'In each other, God is with us. We thank you, Oh God, that you are with us.'

Words from Bob Kikuyu, Christian Aid Global Theology Advisor. Taken from a sermon in 2020 during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Hymn - God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Lesson 3: Good News

Isaiah 61:1-4

Shede is a wife, a mother, and a grandmother. Before conflict forced her to flee Darfur, Shede worked in a restaurant and tended her organic farm. Now, she is living in a UN shelter at Wedweil Refugee Settlement in South Sudan. In the settlement, Shede looks after her youngest daughter and her granddaughter, both six years old.

South Sudan is a country ravaged by conflict and the climate crisis. Food shortages, high prices, lack of clean water, and poor sanitation make daily life an enormous challenge. With hunger, malnutrition, trauma, and violence against women rife, extreme poverty is deepening. And more families arrive to seek refuge each day.

Together with our trusted partners, Christian Aid supports communities in South Sudan to forge a new life while waiting for the end of war. Our financial assistance programme offers immediate emergency support to families seeking refuge, so they can protect themselves and their children from hunger, malnutrition, and ill health.

Hymn - O come, all ye faithful





Lesson 4: What is Required?
Micah 6:6-12

“Act Justly. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly.” These words were featured on Christian Aid placards at the Global Day of Action for COP26, the UN climate summit in Glasgow in 2021. Calling for world leaders to act justly in response to the climate crisis is one way that we can love our global neighbours. We walk humbly in solidarity with those on the sharp edge of injustice, not by speaking for them, but by amplifying their voices when they call for mercy from the impacts of climate chaos.

Hymn - O little town of Bethlehem

Lesson 5: Magnificat
Luke 1:46-55

The face of global poverty is a woman's face. She may have lost her livelihood due to climate shocks; she may have been displaced from her home due to conflict; she might not know where her children's next meal will come from; her day may be filled trying to keep herself and her family alive, leaving no time to participate in her community's decision-making if her voice were even welcome. But she is not helpless, do not believe that myth. She is resilient and determined in the face of adversity.

She doesn't need pity, she needs her calls for justice to be heard and realised. Will we listen to her prophetic voice?

Hymn - When out of Poverty is Born

Lesson 6: The Birth Account
Luke 2:1-7

The miracle of birth, and a gift that lives on. Beryl was a Christian Aid supporter for much of her life. Born in 1927, she worked as a nurse and midwife for many years. Later in life, she was shown love and kindness after an eye operation by a nurse, who originally came from Africa. It meant so much to Beryl that she decided to remember Christian Aid in her will. Beryl's legacy gift is providing healthcare, particularly maternal care to expectant mothers, in Sierra Leone, Burundi, and South Sudan. As we remember Jesus' birth in less-than-ideal circumstances, we are grateful for people like Beryl, who let their love live on.

Hymn - See him lying on a bed of straw





Lesson 7: The Shepherds
Luke 2:8-20

Shepherding communities today still live close to the earth, in tune with and directly affected by shifts in natural patterns. Whether lost livestock, flooded farmland, scorched crops, or destroyed homes, the climate crisis continues to disrupt lives and livelihoods, often in communities who have done the least to cause it. Justice for them is twofold – immediate resilience support and funding for loss and damage; as well as longer-term campaigning and advocating for changes in climate policy at a global level. As we celebrate the Good News, first told to shepherds on a hillside, let us remember those whose livelihoods are still inextricably interwoven with the livelihood of creation.

Hymn - The first Nowell the angel did say

Lesson 8: Magi & Herod
Matthew 2:1-12

Internally Displaced Persons are those who have been forced to flee their homes due to armed conflict, human rights violations, or loss of livelihood due to the climate crisis. They often move to areas that are difficult to reach with humanitarian aid, making them among the most vulnerable people in the world. As we reflect on the political uncertainty and climate of fear that Jesus was born into, we remember the millions of people who face fear, uncertainty, and continued instability today.

Hymn - Once in royal David's city





Lesson 9: The Incarnation John 1:1-4 (The Message)

Love and justice hold hands, and the world holds its breath. Christmas is coming, incarnation is imminent - the pregnant pause before the cry and the breath and the brand-new life, vulnerable - an astonishing mix of fragile resilience. As Advent holds us in expectant waiting, let love and justice embody us as they did the one upon whom we wait. His birth is only the beginning. After the cry and the breath, there is the becoming - the nurture and the needs. The story of the infant who will change our world, but whose very existence from the very beginning is challenged by the oppressive regime he is born under, poverty that pervades his community and the struggles of an uncertain world, that in the story, does not find room for him or his family. God whose will courses through history, Yahweh, the Great 'I am' who cannot be contained, pour your spirit on our gathering, on our remembering, on our waiting. Your will be done, as the incarnate one comes into our midst and is reborn in our hearts.

Hymn - Joy to the world

Closing Prayer

God of love and justice
As we anticipate your incarnation
Born of flesh and blood in a manger
To a couple on the margins
Announced first to lowly shepherds
We marvel at the ways you show up
In unexpected places
Through unremarkable people
In unlikely ways.

In our celebrations
Help us to remember
our global neighbours
Across the street and around the world
Those yearning and working towards
A full life, free from poverty
Grant us impatience
as we strive for justice
And patience as we love one another.
Amen

