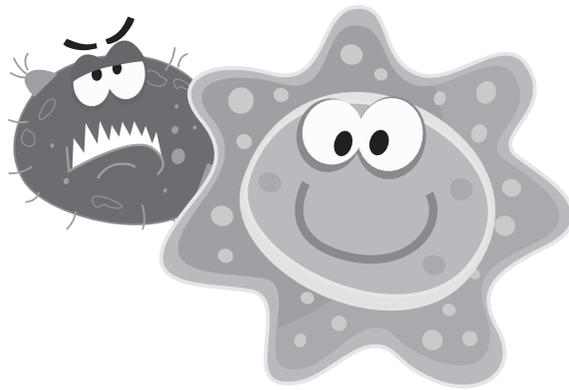


All-sorts Worship

Complete all-age services for every
Sunday of Common Worship Year C



Claire Benton-Evans

Illustrations by Melody-Anne Lee

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mayhew

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About the author

Claire Benton-Evans studied English at Oxford before teaching English and Drama in London, North Devon and Cornwall. Claire's consultancy work includes all-age worship workshops and children's spirituality training for clergy, worship leaders, head teachers and school governors. The creative arts inspire her, exclusion makes her angry and family life keeps her feet on the ground. Claire likes long walks, good food, live theatre and the Greenbelt festival. She lives with her husband – now a minister in the Scottish Episcopal Church – and three children in the Scottish Borders.

All-sorts Worship for Years A and B are already available. Details of Claire's other titles can be found at the end of this book and also on her website at: www.clairebentonevans.com

Fourth Sunday of Advent

It's you!

Theme Recognising God's goodness

Scripture Luke 1:39-55

Running order Total: 50 minutes

Welcome/Activity Making footprints to mark the Advent countdown
(10 minutes)

Introduction Opening the theme

Music Like a candle flame (5 minutes)

Storytelling Mary and Elizabeth – sketch (10 minutes)

Exploring What happens when Mary meets Elizabeth?
(10 minutes)

Music Tell out, my soul (5 minutes)

Prayer action Glitter prayer (5 minutes)

Music Lord, the light of your love (5 minutes)

Conclusion Closing prayer and invitation

Resources

- Music and words
- Thin card for Advent footprints
- Scissors
- Felt pens
- Stick-on numbers, 1–24
- *(Optional)* Christmas stickers, self-adhesive stars and glitter glue for decorating the footprints
- At least two bowls of loose gold or silver glitter

Leaders

Minimum: 3

- Leader
- Cast x 2

Optimum: 8

- Leader (*Introduction and Conclusion*)
- Storyteller
- Cast x 2 (wearing traditional robes):
Mary
Elizabeth
- Music Leader
- Explorer
- Activity Leader
- Prayer Leader

Suggestions for additional music

- See him lying on a bed of straw
- The angel Gabriel from heaven came

Service

Welcome/Activity

As people arrive, invite them to make footprints to mark the Advent countdown. You will need 24 footprints (individual or pairs). Encourage people to draw round their feet, with shoes on or off, then cut out the footprints and decorate them with a Christmas theme. Stick numbers on the finished footprints. Invite everyone to return to their seats as you and some volunteers lay out the footprints in order, leading from the church door to the front. If your church has a crib scene, end the line of footprints there.

Introduction

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and our Advent countdown is almost over! This line of footprints leads us through the church and reminds us that Christmas is nearly here.

Music

Like a candle flame

Storytelling

Leader

Previously in the Christmas story . . . Mary was visited by an angel who told her she was going to have a baby – God’s Son. The angel also gave Mary a second piece of amazing news: her cousin, Elizabeth, was six months pregnant, even though she was an old lady. Without delay, Mary hurried off to see Elizabeth. This meant a five-day walk from Nazareth to Elizabeth’s home in the Judean hills. In our story today, the two cousins remember what happened.

Mary

I couldn’t talk to anyone about the angel’s visit without them shouting at me. My parents were horrified that I was pregnant before I was married. Joseph was furious. People in the market place yelled insults at me.

Elizabeth

So you came to see me. I couldn’t talk to anyone, either, since my husband, Zechariah, was struck dumb after a visit from an angel. Whenever he needed anything, he scratched out messages on a writing tablet, but that’s no way to hold a conversation. He was left speechless because he didn’t believe the angel’s news that I would have a son. Me! At my age! We’d both given up hope of ever having children. But

the angel said it was so, and sure enough, in the weeks that followed my body began to change.

- Mary By the time I arrived, you were six months gone and you looked radiant!
- Elizabeth And you looked as white as a sheet, bless you. I think you were still in shock.
- Mary I was so relieved to have arrived in one piece, I called your name across the fields!
- Elizabeth And my boy gave the most enormous kick! As if he was leaping for joy.
- Mary You called me over and I tried to tell you what had happened to me –
- Elizabeth But I wanted you to feel my baby move. What a welcome for you and your son!
- Mary I wanted to explain, so you wouldn't judge me and shout at me like everyone else did, but –
- Elizabeth I understood, and I told you that you were blessed!
- Mary And my baby was blessed, too!
- Elizabeth I was right. Suddenly all those extraordinary promises which Zechariah had scratched out on his tablet made sense. My son was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he was going to prepare people for the Lord! Even before our boys were born, my John recognised your Jesus!
- Mary I was so happy! I knew I was welcomed by you and completely loved by God. My joy overflowed in a great rush of words. Do you remember what I said?
- My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
- Elizabeth His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

Mary and Elizabeth

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.

Exploring

This meeting between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth was very special.

Bring forward Elizabeth.

First of all, there was Elizabeth, six months pregnant in her old age. Her baby was miraculous: he had been announced by an angel, who told his father that he was to be called John. The angel promised that John would be filled with God's Holy Spirit and would prepare his people for the coming of their Saviour. Elizabeth knew this, but she didn't know where or when the promised Saviour would arrive. Then Mary turned up, out of the blue, and Elizabeth's unborn baby *leapt* at the sound of Mary's voice. All heavily pregnant women feel their babies move, but there must have been something special about that kick! As Mary's news tumbled out, Elizabeth knew for certain that Mary was carrying the Saviour – the One whose arrival her own son was destined to herald.

Bring forward Mary.

Then there was Mary, exhausted from four or five days' walking. She had set off, the Bible tells us, 'with haste' as soon as she had received the angel's life-changing news. The journey would have given her time to wrestle with the things she was now required to believe. Could she, a virgin, really be pregnant? There were no pregnancy tests in those days! And as for her elderly cousin Elizabeth, also expecting her first child – could that really be true? But as soon as Mary saw Elizabeth, and saw her great round belly, she knew that the angel had been right. She had real proof

that God's miracles were taking place, and that the biggest miracle of all was happening inside her own body: God's Son was getting ready to be born into the world.

For both Mary and Elizabeth, this meeting was a wonderful moment of recognition. They both suddenly realised that God had kept his promises to them and to their people. That realisation was like a great big wonderful 'YES!' It was so big that Mary couldn't keep it in: elsewhere in the Bible she is quiet, pondering things in her heart, but at this moment she overflowed with a song of praise.

This moment of recognition marks the real beginning of the Christmas story. Before long it was the turn of the wise men to realise that God had kept his promise to send a Messiah. Then it was the world's turn, and ours. At Christmas we celebrate that wonderful moment when we know, beyond all doubt, that God loves us and keeps his promises to us. We know it because he gave us his Son. That is what our Advent countdown looks forward to: in church today, our numbered footprints lead us towards Christmas and our celebration of the moment when human beings first met God in the baby Jesus. We can still meet him today and, like the baby leaping in Elizabeth's womb, say, 'It's you!'

Music

Tell out, my soul

Prayer action

When Mary poured out her joy in a song of praise, she described God's great goodness and rejoiced at how much he had done for her and her people – far more than anyone could possibly deserve. In our prayers today, we will give thanks for God's goodness, and to help us we will use this glitter.⁷

Hold up a handful of glitter and let it fall from your fingers.

7. Thanks to Jim Benton-Evans for this inspired idea.

Like loose glitter, God's goodness gets everywhere. It shines in the light and in the darkest corners. Like glitter that sticks to our fingers and clothes, or turns up unexpectedly in our hair, God's goodness won't give up on us. Even if we don't notice it at first, we may suddenly be surprised by the realisation that his love has never left us.

Pass the bowls of glitter to the people sitting closest to you.

Pass round these bowls of glitter and let some run through your fingers. As you do so, give thanks for the good things in your life. Let us pray.

Pass round the bowls of glitter and pause for a moment of silence.

God of love,
in your goodness, you shower us with the shining gifts
of your grace.

We thank you for your lavish generosity.

Amen.

Music

Lord, the light of your love

Conclusion

After this service, when you find bits of glitter stuck to your clothes, remember that those sparkling fragments are like God's goodness, which finds its way into all our lives. Let us pray.

God of grace,
help us to recognise you
wherever we may find you,
in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Give notices, announce the next all-age service and invite everyone to the feast.

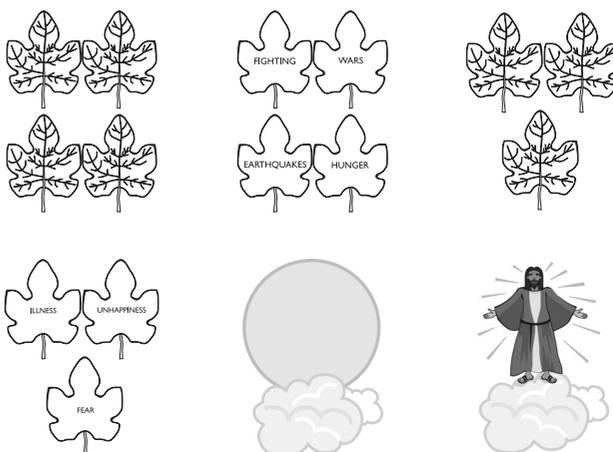
Appendix

Resources for Activities

First Sunday of Advent

Fig tree illustration

Print the double-sided leaves on green card and cut out. Print the double-sided sun picture on white card and cut out. You may like to enlarge these visual aids to A3.



Timeline

You will need a 5m long roll of paper – lining paper is ideal. Draw a horizontal line along the length of the paper and mark it at 10cm intervals. Label the marks from 1–46.



Numbers 1–24, cut out of paper

Print on white paper and cut out.

Third Sunday of Advent

Charity information

Many resources can be downloaded from the internet, or obtained directly from organisations and charities such as the United Nations, Amnesty International, the Fairtrade Foundation, Traidcraft, Oxfam, Christian Aid,

Save the Children and many others. Provide information from local charities, too. Select eye-catching pictures and simple, factual information to display around the church. You may like to enlist the help of local charity representatives – such as the Mother’s Union – for this service: they could provide their own display and literature.

Boo!

**So what
should
we do?**

SO WHAT
SHOULD
WE DO?

Two cards with the crowd’s lines

Print each on A4 then enlarge to A3 and stick onto a piece of card.

Title: ‘So what should we do?’

Print on A4 then enlarge to A3. Cut out the words and stick them on the display you produce during the Activity.

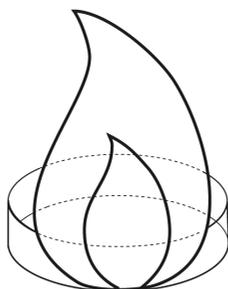
Roman armour

English Heritage or National Trust shops attached to Roman sites usually stock Roman armour and toy weapons for dressing up. You could also try toy shops and fancy dress stores.

Christmas Eve

A flame headdress

Cut flame shapes out of red and yellow card or paper and attach to a circlet of card, like this. Add a second flame to the back of the circlet and staple the points of the flames together, so that they stand up.



A very large map of the world

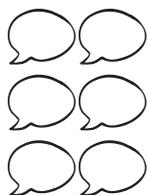
A great resource is the giant, brightly coloured, plastic floor mat in the children’s game, *Globe Trotting*, produced

by the Early Learning Centre. If you can't get hold of this, you could stick some large pieces of card or lining paper together and paint on the outlines of continents and countries with a thick brush.

First Sunday of Christmas

The contents of Jesus' family campsite

You need items which suggest a makeshift pilgrim's camp in the Middle East – rugs and cloths for a Bedouin-style tent, plus any of the following: an iron cooking pot, wooden spoons and bowls, hessian sacks, sticks for firewood, a traditional terracotta oil lamp, some sand and pebbles on the ground. You could also throw in anything that might suggest a hastily abandoned family campsite, such as a leather sandal, some dropped grapes or a couple of child's wooden bricks.



Speech bubbles

Make lots of copies on A4 paper and cut out. Leave a pile in each pew or row of seats.

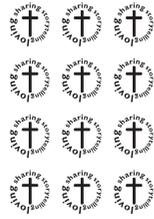
Epiphany

Treasure hunt items: gold, frankincense and myrrh

For the gold, use gold chocolate coins, hidden individually around the church. Frankincense in granular form is available from church suppliers and, often, gift shops connected to religious houses and cathedrals. Spoon some granules into small organza bags or tiny plastic bags, which you can then hide. Myrrh is sold as an essential oil: it can be found with aromatherapy oils in health shops. Wrap the little bottle in shiny paper and hide it.

A copy of *Three Wise Women* by Mary Hoffman

(Frances Lincoln, 1999) This lovely story complements the story of the wise men's visit. It has been in and out of print: if you need a second-hand copy, it should be available from Amazon and elsewhere.



Insert for each gift tag

Make several copies, cut around each circular text and stick one inside each gift tag.

First Sunday of Epiphany

Meditation montage based on Isaiah 43:1-7

This is a slideshow of images, shown with lines from Isaiah 43:1-7 either with the images or in between them. (See service for details of images.) The aim is to encourage reflection and deepen our understanding of God’s promises here. The best computer programs for creating slideshows are PowerPoint for PCs and Keynote for Macs. Look on the internet for copyright-free images, for example at www.shutterstock.com or www.dreamstime.com.

Second Sunday of Epiphany

Two speech bubbles

Enlarge a copy of each to A3 and stick it on a piece of card, then cut out the speech bubble.



Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

Knitted heart

Ask a confident knitter in your congregation to knit a simple heart shape in stocking stitch. It must be big enough to be clearly seen by all: about A4 size should be fine. Explain how it will be used, so that your knitter understands why it needs to be easy to unravel (and also so that they are not upset when this happens!). The last stitch should not be tied off, and – most importantly – the wool should not be cut. Instead, the heart should remain attached to the ball of wool so that there will definitely be enough to stretch around your congregation.