

A Christmas Tableau from the Godly Play style

This is the time of Advent, when we get ready for the mystery of Christmas. Lots of people are getting ready, they are rushing around the shops, getting ready, but they will miss the mystery of Christmas because they don't know or they have forgotten. The Church has set aside four Sundays to get ready for the mystery of Christmas and these are the Sundays of Advent. In some churches people remember the weeks with candles.

Show the Advent wreath – all the candles are unlit.

During Advent it is a journey towards Bethlehem with all the others who travel that way, the holy family, the prophets, the shepherds, the angels, the kings, everyone travelling to Bethlehem.

On the first Sunday of Advent we remember the prophets.

One or several prophetically dressed people enter!

A prophet is someone who comes so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know what is really important. The prophets knew that something important was going to happen in Bethlehem. They said, stop, wait, pay attention, get ready, something important is going to happen in Bethlehem.

The first Advent Candle is lit

This is the light of the prophets. See how it glows and shines!

On the second Sunday of Advent we remember the Holy Family.

Mary, Joseph and the Donkey enter.

Here is the mother, Mary and the father, Joseph. Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to be counted by the Roman soldiers. Mary was about to have a baby and it is difficult to walk when you are about to have a baby, so sometimes, when she could hardly put one foot in front of the other, she got onto

the donkey and rode. But when you are about to have a baby it can be difficult to ride on the back of a donkey! So when she couldn't face another step, she got off and walked. I guess they must have been about the last people along the road into Bethlehem that night, and when they got there they couldn't find anywhere to stay. They ended up sleeping in a stable.

The second Advent Candle is lit

This is the light of the Holy Family. See how it glows and shines, giving light.

On the third Sunday of Advent we remember the Shepherds

Shepherds and sheep enter.

The Shepherds were on the hillside watching over their sheep. It was very dark, and then all of a sudden there was a very bright light. It was so bright and they were really frightened. Then they heard a voice that said "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid". It was an angel. "Don't be afraid, for tonight in Bethlehem has been born a baby who will change everything. Go straight away to Bethlehem and see the king born in a barn." And suddenly the sky was full of angels singing "Glory to God in the Highest and peace to his people of earth!"

The shepherds left the hills and went to Bethlehem, where they found the baby, just as the angels had promised.

The third Advent Candle is lit

This is the light of the Shepherds. See how it glows and shines.

On the fourth Sunday of Advent we remember the three kings, the three wise men, the magi.

The Three Kings enter.

They seemed to know everything about everything. But the thing they knew most about was the stars. And they saw a wild star, that moved about the heavens. So they decided to follow it. And

it came to rest over Bethlehem. It had been a long journey and when they arrived the baby was already born. It was as if they were late – it's as if they are late every year! But they came in and gave the baby their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

The fourth Advent Candle is lit

This is the light of the Kings. See how it glows and shines.

The baby Jesus enters the tableau

On Christmas Day everything changes. Here is the Christ child. See how he has his arms out to give you a hug! And nobody was more surprised to see the Christ child than ... the cow!!!

The cow enters

Because where the cow normally found its breakfast, it found that someone had placed a blanket over the hay and made a bed. And on the bed lay the tiny baby. All the cow could do was to stare with its big, brown eyes.

The final Advent Candle is lit

And this is the light of the Christ child. See how it glows and shines and gives out light.

Now is a good time to ask some questions if appropriate and possible in the setting:

I wonder which bit of this story you like best?

Encourage people of all ages to say which bit was their favourite

I wonder which bit is the most important?

Be aware that there are no right and wrong answers here

I wonder if there is part of the story we could leave out?

I wonder which of these is most like you?

This may be a question to ask people to think about for a moment of share with the person next to them

Now we are going to do something very special, watch carefully so you don't miss it. We are going to change the light. Sometimes people don't see it, so watch carefully. At the moment the lights are all fixed in there places. They give light, but they are not free. Watch as we change the light.

The first candle is snuffed out and the smoke rises

Now anywhere in the church, you can come close to the light of the prophets, you can even breath it in.

The second candle is snuffed

Now you can come close to the light of the holy family

The third candle is snuffed

Now you can come close to the light of the shepherds

The fourth candle is snuffed

Now you can come close to the light of the three kings

Now the Christ candle is snuffed

And now, anywhere, you can come close to the light of the Christ Child ... and that is the mystery of Christmas.

Let us pray:

May you know the joy of the angels, the wonder of the shepherd and peace of the Christ child this Christmas Season and may you know God's blessing in the mystery of Christmas. Amen