Faith Adventures for Children Together

Free to use – please acknowledge when using beyond local church children's and youth work so others can find and use the resource themselves.

Committed to URC Children Together: enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus together in the home, church and beyond.

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link: **www.bit.ly/FACT-how-to-sheet**

Title: Isaiah 11: 1 - 2

Theme: Advent in the style of….Forest Church
What is Advent?

Contents:

Introduction 1
Together 2
Experience 3
Explore.....5
Express 7
Handouts.....12

Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning? Please use this section as a reference and information guide for leaders only – we don't expect it to be read out to the children.

At the start of Advent we can spend time together as a whole church, outside in creation as we think about beginning the journey of Advent leading to the celebration of Christmas. A Forest Church session is not simply a church service taken outside, it's an opportunity for people of all ages and stages to be in creation together and experience and explore Creator God together. It's not about taking books, papers and resources into the outdoors with you, it's more about using what we find in creation, within each season to worship and respond to God. Don't worry if you are a church based within a city landscape, you don't need a big forest or even a green area, you can use whatever outdoor space you have such as a car park. Or you could run the session inside by considering how you can bring the greenery and elements of creation into your context.

This session we have created explores the theme of journeying and waiting through Advent.

The spoken prayers are designed to be used at the beginning and at the end of the session.

Together – prayer and games

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend,
(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today,
(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,
(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,
(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,
(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,
(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family.
(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN
(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.
Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.
Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,
Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.
Amen

Active game - Wait a minute……



Advent reminds us that people were waiting for the Saviour God had promised, Jesus. Waiting can feel slow, especially when we're looking forward to something. This game helps us experience a little of the waiting and anticipation that Advent invites us to reflect on.

You'll need a timer on your phone for this game. Gather everyone together and explain that they must sit/stand quietly and raise their hand when they think one minute has passed. Start the timer and wait. Note who was closest to the minute, then continue until everyone has raised their hand. Who guessed too early? Who waited the longest? How did the waiting feel?

Quieter game - Signs of Life.

Advent reminds us that waiting does not mean nothing is happening. Invite everyone to work in pairs or small groups and look for as many signs of life around then as they can find, even in the middle of winter. Encourage them to take photos of their discoveries if they can but remind them not to pick or disturb anything. When everyone has finished, share your findings together. Who found the most signs of life? What did you discover that others missed?

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

When planning the session, the team of writers read many different Bible versions to find the one that is most suitable for the age range. We also look at vocabulary and how God/Jesus is described. We are aware that a lot of churches stick with one Bible version. We appreciate it can be difficult to have many different Bible versions and that access to them online isn't always easy. Therefore, we have provided the passage in the recommended version for your convenience.

If this session is taking place outside either take Bibles with you or print the passage out.

For this story we recommend using the New International Version
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2011%3A1-2&version=NIV

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Where can I find the story online?

Instead of watching clips on a screen consider these ways of story telling:

1. **Gather round the campfire.** Just like the ancient people of God would have gathered together and shared God's stories and prophesies verbally. Create a story circle, gathering round a firepit gives the mind something to reflect on as they listen. Try to retell the story of Isaiah and the two verses from today's passage from memory.
2. **Small group sharing.** Gather people into smaller groups, invite them to sit down and share the passage with each other. Phones are a great tool for people sharing the passage from different translations.
3. **Remembered Bible.** Ask the group to retell the prophecies that God gave over the centuries concerning the coming of Jesus.

Songs to support the story

Remember that Forest Church is not about taking PowerPoint and amplification outside, consider how you can enable the group to worship simply. Use songs that are familiar and

repetitive so people can access them and join in. Use of guitars, recorders and simple percussion can be very effective in outdoor sung worship. People can be engaged with clapping hands, clicking fingers, stamping feet.

You could write some words to a familiar tune or even nursery rhyme, here are a few we have had a go at producing.

To the tune of We will rock you – Queen

Begin by clapping twice and raising your arms on the third beat repeat x4, then sing

We will, we will praise you x 4

This is the chorus, a leader could then do the verses
Verse 1
Coming into our town, your town, my town
We're waiting for a new king today
Gonna stand in the crowd
Shout out loud
Won't be ashamed, gonna sing it out proud

Singing… We will, we will praise him x 4

Verse 2
Coming into our town, old town, this town
We're waiting for a new king today
Here he comes, God's own Son
Coming for the sake of every-one

Singing… We will, we will praise him x 4

To the tune of Twinkle, twinkle, little star

Twinkle, twinkle Advent star

Shining brightly from afar

Lead us on and show the way

To the Christ child in the hay

Twinkle, twinkle Advent star
Shining brightly from afar

Twinkle Advent star so bright

Lead us to the wondrous sight

Give us patience on the way

Keep us walking, night and day

Twinkle Advent star so bright

Lead us to the wondrous sight

Twinkle, twinkle little star,

Watching quietly from afar.

You wait to hear, angels sing,

All about the baby king.

Twinkle, twinkle little star,

Watching quietly from afar.

Explore – ways into the theme

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the theme

Tell me s'more (campfire storytelling)



Storytelling space

Create your storytelling space: you may encourage group members to bring blankets or camp chairs; have snacks or hot drinks ready to share or perhaps set up around a fire pit.

However you create your space, make sure there is a dedicated campfire storytelling area for this section of the session.

Remembering together

This week's bible passage is a prophecy of Jesus' birth. Ask the group what they remember about Jesus' birth story. Here are some ideas to give a little more structure:

- People may prefer the chance to talk in small groups first, then share their ideas with the whole gathering.
- Give themed prompts – What journeys can you remember? Who is in the story? What problems do the characters face? Where does the story take place?
- Encourage participants to embellish their answers by asking them to – 'Tell me s'more!'

The purpose of the exercise is to give people the chance to recall what they remember – rather than collecting answers that are right or wrong. The facilitator will need to gather responses carefully, using language that is encouraging. If there are sections of the story that are a little fuzzy, remind them that there will be a chance to learn more over the next few weeks.

Asking your own questions

After remembering the story together, encourage your group to think of questions for their Advent journey. What would your group like to find out about the Christmas story over the next few weeks? If they could ask the characters any question – what would it be? I wonder who (from the story) they would like to go on a journey with? Why?

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too. If you are to use the modern parable, consider buying a copy or borrowing it from the library so children see the actual book and can explore the illustrations more (and support the author).



The littlest watchman by Scott James – available to buy at The Good Book Company (£7) Published by Good Book Company 2017 ISBN 1784981400

https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/the-littlest-watchman

The site also has downloadable pictures that could be used to tell the story outside.

This story is wonderful to share around the fire circle as it tells the story of the root of Jesse prophecy from today's passage.

This tells the story of Benjamin, the littlest watchman, who is waiting for and then witnesses the first Christmas. He waits patiently by the tree stump as he knows the prophecy of a new root sprouting from the Jesse stump.

- I wonder what you are waiting patiently for?

Talking together: How might we talk about the Bible story together?

- If you could jump into any of the characters stories which one would it be?
- I wonder what people expected a royal descendent would look like?
- I wonder why they had to wait so long for the descendent?
- Who in the story had the hardest journey?
- I wonder what would have happened if the shepherds/ wise men didn't make that journey?

Wondering: ways to reflect on the theme

- What do you prefer - the journey or the destination?
- What does waiting look like?
- What have you waited for?
- What's the best journey you've been on?
- How is Advent like a journey for us?

What's in the box (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing, "What's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). Pull out the

things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- **Play people or natural objects –** Re-tell the story from today's bible reading, moving the pieces around to help you tell the story
- **Hats and gloves –** talk about staying warm and safe whilst being outside in Winter
- **Paper and crayons for bark rubbing –** explore the shapes and textures around you and take rubbings. If you are meeting in an urban context, this would also work for bricks and concrete. Notice together the types of textures around you
- **Paper bags –** Choose a leaf or stick to bring back to the box. Remember to leave no trace! Don't choose plants that are growing – only items that have already fallen from trees or plants
- **Seeds –** look at a selection of seeds together, think about what the seeds might grow to become. What would they like to do when they are grown-ups?

Be cautious with small seeds; make sure younger group members don't put them in their mouths, or swallow them

Alternatively…

You could also take your box into the session empty. Use some of the wondering questions to explore the space together. What would your group choose to put into the box? Why? How does the space help us explore this week's bible passage?

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Prayerful activity - Nature mandala



A mandala is a symmetrical design that reminds us of the circle of life and creation. Mandala means circle.

Invite the group to gather items of nature (leaves, moss, twigs, acorns etc) and then to gather into a circle. (or small groups if there are lots of you)

Leader begins by placing items on the ground that will become the centre of the mandala, whilst beginning the prayer by saying:

Creator God, we bring our prayers to you….hear our prayers.

Participants take it in turn to step forward and add to the design along with a spoken prayer if they have one, ending in hear our prayer.

Once the mandala is complete, pause to see what has been created and complete the prayer time by saying Amen together.

See here for examples **https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zgvsvwx**

Spoken prayer

Spoken prayers – to open and close the session

The same format can be followed to provide liturgy that opens and closes the session.

Thank you, God,

For…

A leader chooses things that they can see – making this prayerful 'shout out' specific to the space you are sharing. It could be layered leaves or swirling snowflakes; a wise gathering of trees or stubborn shoots escaping from concrete.

Creative God

We praise you!

Amen

Encourage the group to join in with the response **We praise you!** *After the leader has said the words* ***Creative God***

This pattern can be repeated several times – then closed with a communal **Amen.**

After the 'shout out' has been modelled at the beginning of the session, a group member can be asked to take the role of leader for the closing words. They don't need to repeat what has been said before, but notice the surroundings for themselves, and share with the group what they see.

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond.

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage the children to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

The Nativity story is filled with journeys. The star led the Wise Men on a very long and important journey. For this craft, you will need to go on a journey as well to find some twigs. Don't cut any off trees, look around on the floor to find some, or if there are trees that have been chopped down, you could take some off them. Ask an adult to help you. Once you have found them, you're nearly ready to make your own Christmas star.

NB - if you cannot find any twigs on the ground, you can buy some.

You will need:

- five twigs, roughly 15cm long (you can have them longer if you want a bigger star).
- twine or string.

- scissors.
- you may need secateurs to cut the twigs, ask an adult to help.

What you do:



Prepare your twigs! Get an adult to cut off any spiky bits or little offshoots.



Take two twigs and bind them together at one end, to create an upside down 'V'. Repeat with a further two twigs.



Take one bundle of twigs and turn them onto their side. Bind one of the ends with the other the end of a twig in the second bundle.



Place the remaining twig on top of the others, connecting the bottom left point with the top right. Tie the ends together.

Make a loop at the top of the star and you now have your own Christmas star. You can decorate this further by adding ribbon, coloured cotton, pom poms etc.



https://youtu.be/Xe9KNRPDf-0?si=BPKZmt7sO1HQFOIR

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- Talk to someone older or younger than you and ask them to tell you how they connect with God when in nature.
- Continue to focus on God when you are out and about in nature.

We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of **Advent** with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing **sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk**
Please join the Faith Adventures Facebook Group **bit.ly/FACT_FB**
Why not have a look at next week's resource on **Advent in the style of creative prayer.**

The United Reformed Church Children

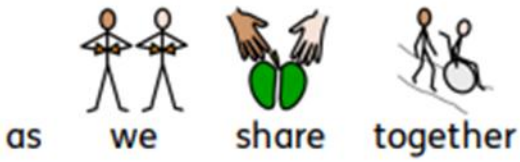
The United Reformed Church Youth


Jesus our friend,


Right middle finger touches centre of other palm, repeat with left hand


be with us today




as we share together

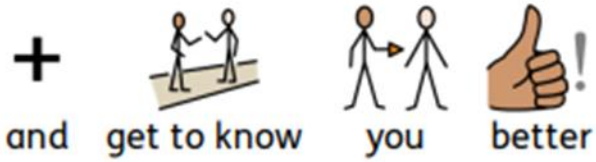

Alternate hands back and forth


pray together

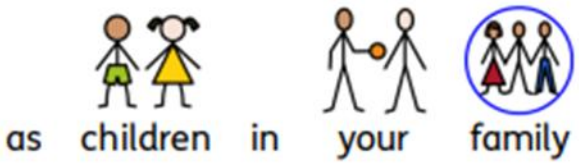



play together



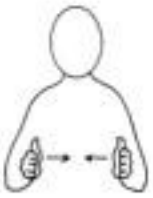

and get to know you better

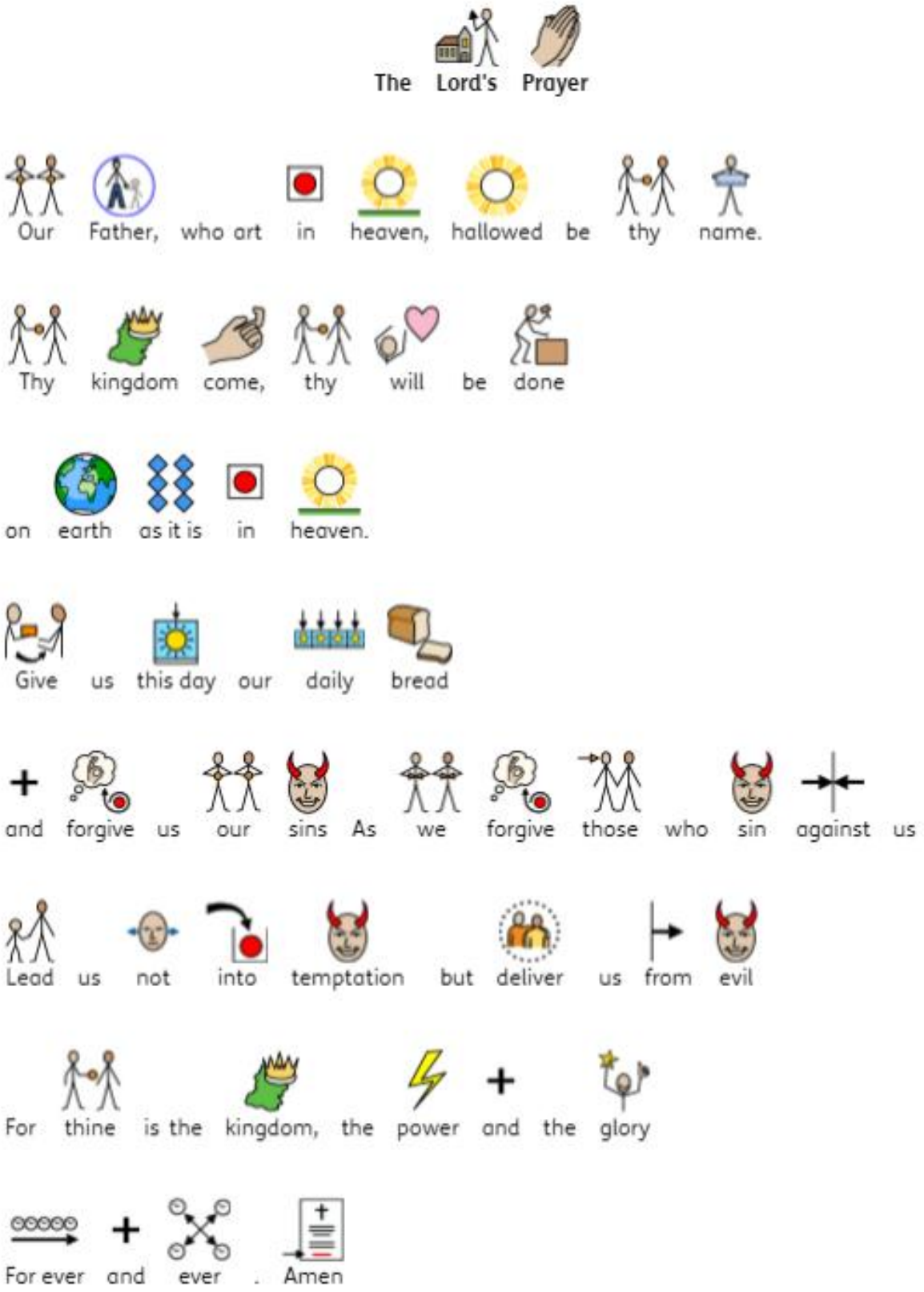



as children in your family




Amen




The Lord's Prayer
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever . Amen

Use some paper and wax crayons to take some rubbings. You could take a rubbing of tree bark, some indentations or an interesting stone.

Use some paper and wax crayons to take some rubbings. You could take a rubbing of tree bark, some indentations or an interesting stone.

Use some paper and wax crayons to take some rubbings. You could take a rubbing of tree bark, some indentations or an interesting stone.