Nine Lessons and Carols

A Service Guide for Christmas

We have designed this as a helpful guide to planning a traditional Nine Lessons and Carols service. You will find suggested prayers, carols, and hymns for the service but we want this to be a resource that can blend into what is already a familiar moment in your church calendar for your congregation and community.

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

Conflict and violence have gripped so many places. How do we begin to respond to the horror of war, the mockery it makes of our common humanity?

Through his own choices, Cain cannot go home ever again, but is destined to wander through Nod, a land filled with violence, hate, anger, prejudice.

Today, we pray for peace, to an end to wandering, to a home, safe and secure, for all God's children who have not chosen this path but have found themselves forced upon it due to the actions of self-interested powers and governments.

Christian Aid's partners in South Sudan, the Middle East, and many other places are providing all they can - food, clean water and cash - so people no longer have to wander and can make appropriate choices for themselves. As they find shelter and psychological support, let us hold our traumatised global neighbours up through prayer and action.

Hymn – Coventry Carol

christian aid

Lesson 2: Hold on to Hope
Psalm 42

Just like the psalmist, our global neighbours desperately hold on to hope, even in the face of incredible challenges. Climate and debt crises are colliding to trap millions of people in poverty. They live with the consequences of the broken systems and broken humanity that has come to define our times.

Over 60% of African countries spend more on debt payments than healthcare or education. These debts mean they cannot provide basic services for their citizens. In Ethiopia, because the government is unable to pay some doctors and teachers, vital hospitals and much needed schools have been forced to close.

Many of these debts held by African countries are owed to private creditors, regulated under UK law. If we want to stand for justice, in solidarity with those in poverty, we must call on governmental decision makers to deconstruct these systems in order for millions of people around the world to be lifted out of poverty and experience a hope-filled future.

Hymn – O Come, All Ye Faithful

Lesson 3: Good News
Isaiah 61:1-4

Christmas is the time when we gather with family and friends, sharing food and gifts, as we celebrate the birth of Christ. But for some communities in Ethiopia, homes, livelihoods and vital sources of food are disappearing overnight.

When deadly floods swept through Donnay's village, she and her children were forced to flee in the middle of the night. Donnay, who was pregnant, tells us: 'The flood was sudden and devastating. We escaped with our children without any belongings.'

As the climate crisis bears down on communities in Ethiopia, Donnay's situation is not unique. Climate shocks have intensified hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the region. Estimates suggest that more than half of under-fives are malnourished.

With Christian Aid funding, our trusted partner, Agri Service Ethiopia, is offering displaced families like Donnay's support so that they can recover from catastrophic floods. Agri Service Ethiopia provides seeds, livestock, tools and training so that families can farm further away from unpredictable rivers.

As we celebrate God's gift of love, will you share that love with our global neighbours?

Hymn – Silent Night

christian aid

Lesson 4: Peace
Micah 6:6-12

The war in Gaza has had a profound psychological and emotional impact on Palestinians in Lebanon. However, it has also reinforced the importance of unity and empathy.

Fidaa's family have lived in the Nahr el-Bared Camp for Palestinian refugees since 1948. Her parents sent her to the Najdeh centre for support as a child. Her own children now go there and she herself works there, providing psychosocial support to children.

Association Najdeh is a women-led organisation working with refugees in Lebanon and has been a Christian Aid partner since 1986.

In the Najdeh centre, where Fidaa works, children use drawing, Lego, writing, sport and dance to express themselves. They are encouraged to think about their hopes for the future, and about the plight of children in Gaza. Fidaa says, 'My work is deeply important to me, it helps children feel safe and leaves a lasting positive impact on their lives and the communities they will build in adulthood.'

Hymn –O Little Town of Bethlehem

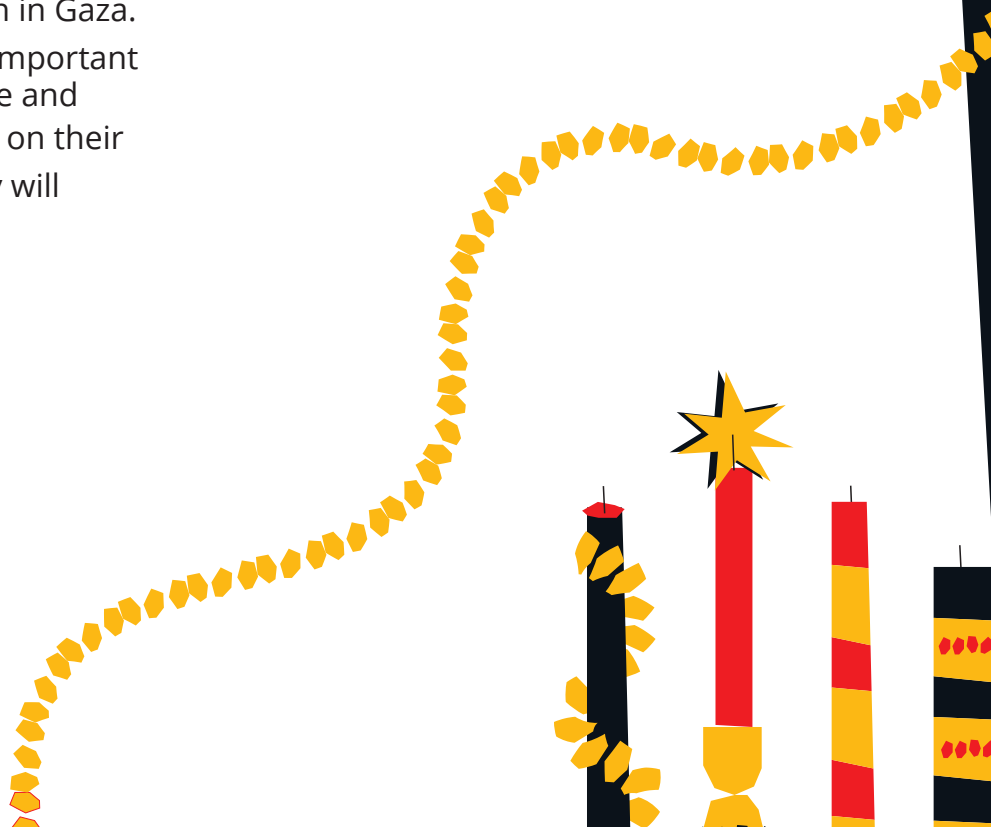
Lesson 5: Magnificat
Luke 1:46-55

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

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 the difficult circumstances faced by Mary and Joseph at Jesus' birth, we can also remember those people who, like Beryl, were motivated to change the lives of others and 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

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 – In the Bleak Midwinter

christian aid

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. This is the story of the infant who will change our world, but whose very existence is threatened by oppressive regimes, by poverty and the struggles of an uncertain world. This world cannot find room for him or his family. Can we find room for him today? 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



Christian Aid is a key member of ACT Alliance. Eng and Wales charity no. 1105851 Scot charity no. SC039150
Company no. 5171525 The Christian Aid name and logo are trademarks of Christian Aid. © Christian Aid September 2026 Photos: Christian Aid/Sosina Mengistu J553703