



OpenDoors

Finding family

ADVENT ADVENTURE

FIND THE FAMILIES THIS CHRISTMAS!

The Christmas story tells how the shepherds and the wise men went on a bit of an adventure – and found a family. This Advent we're going to go on our own adventure. Each week we're going to find out about different children and their families.

But these aren't ordinary families: these are all Christians who have been persecuted for their faith. That means they have all suffered because they are followers of Jesus. Some of them have been forced to leave their homes, others have been bullied or even attacked.

This Advent, we can help them by praying for them and for the work of Open Doors partners who make sure that persecuted Christians are looked after wherever possible.

We're also going to think about our own family, and other families that we know.

ALL AROUND THE ADVENT WREATH

Many churches use an Advent 'wreath' of four candles to mark each Sunday in Advent. Each week they light a candle on the wreath as a kind of countdown towards Christmas Day.

So we're going to start by making an Advent wreath. And then, every week we're going to:

- Do an activity
- Light the Advent candle
- Read the Bible
- Find out about a family who need our help
- Think about the story
- Pray for the families we have discovered, for our own families, and for others.

A BIT ABOUT ADVENT

Advent is the period leading up to Christmas. It starts on the fourth Sunday before Christmas.

Advent means 'arrival': and that's what this period is all about. We're excited because it leads up to the celebration of Jesus' birthday – when He 'arrived' on earth as a baby!

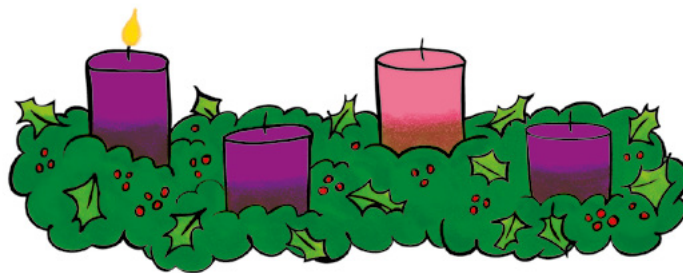
Notes for adults

Some of the activities in this resource will require adult supervision. Making the Advent wreath – week one – involves handling evergreen plants (potential irritants) and using sharp tools. During week two there is an invitation to cook a meal and every week candles are lit on the Advent wreath.

This resource includes Bible readings, but depending on the age of the children you might like to substitute your own version or paraphrase it as appropriate. All readings are taken from the Contemporary English Version (CEV).

One of these stories – week three – is about a pastor who was killed for following Jesus and the effect on his family. We have tried to deal with this in a sensitive way. There is a video online which tells a bit of the story and shows the children being cared for. Please do watch it beforehand and decide whether it is suitable for your child.





FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: 29 NOVEMBER 2020

ACTIVITY: MAKE AN ADVENT WREATH

You will need:

- Four candles: it's nice if they are different colours, but you can use any colour
- A base to put the candles on: this needs to be something that can catch the wax. You might already have four candle holders that you can use
- Decoration from evergreen plants like holly, ivy, laurel, etc. See what you can find from the garden (ask a grown-up to help you cut these)
- A pair of gloves to protect your hands when handling evergreen plants
- String and scissors or florist's wire and wire cutters

STEP 1. ARRANGE THE FOUR DIFFERENT CANDLES ON YOUR BASE

If your base is round, arrange them like a clock, with one at 12, 3, 6 and 9. (Or like the points of a compass: north, east, south, west.)

If your base is rectangular you can arrange them in a line. It doesn't matter really: it's up to you.

You can make the candles stick to the base by melting a bit of the wax at the bottom and sticking them on. (Ask a grown-up to help.) You can stick them into lumps of blu-tack or plasticine. Or you can use small candle holders. You can even make candle holders out of old jam jars.

STEP 2. DECORATE YOUR BASE

Wearing gloves, arrange the evergreen plants around your candles.

You can use special wire (called florist's wire) to do this. Or you can tie them together with string. (Ask an adult to help you if you're using florist's wire.)

Now you have your own Advent wreath, ready for each week's journey!

LIGHT ONE CANDLE AND READ THE BIBLE

Now we've made the wreath, it's time to light our first Advent candle and read the Bible. Light one candle on your wreath and read this passage:

"A child has been born for us.

We have been given a son who will be our ruler.

His names will be Wonderful Advisor and Mighty God,

Eternal Father and Prince of Peace.

His power will never end; peace will last forever." **ISAIAH 9:6-7**

Isaiah was a prophet, a person chosen to speak for God, who lived many centuries before Jesus was born. But Christians see these verses as a foretelling of Jesus' birth. And the angels who announced Jesus' arrival to the shepherds sang about peace on earth.

And that's what we're going to be thinking about this week: peace.



★ FIND A FAMILY

This week we're thinking about children and families in Iraq. Perhaps you can find Iraq in an atlas or an online map?

What do you want for Christmas? What present would you really like to get?

Fakhri is an 11-year-old boy in Iraq. And what he really wants is peace.

Seven years ago, Fakhri and his family had to leave their home very quickly. Some soldiers were coming who hated Christians and wanted to kill them. So Fakhri's family, along with many others, bundled up everything they could and left their home town of Mosul. They ended up living in Erbil, which is 50 miles away.



When the families from Mosul first arrived in Erbil, Open Doors helpers gave them emergency supplies and helped them to find somewhere to live. Later, they provided education and even helped some of the parents to start small businesses. There are also activities at church, including the 'Kitabi club', which means 'My Book club': the children receive a children's Bible or read other books from the library.

Although some places in Iraq are now safe for Christians to return to, Mosul is still too dangerous.

So Fakhri and his family will be celebrating Christmas in Erbil this year, as he has done since he was four. With other children, he celebrates Christmas at church. In some ways it looks like a lot of churches at Christmas: there is a tree, sparkling lights, and they are singing Christmas songs.

But it's not their home. Their home is 50 miles away.

That's why Fakhri has one wish for Christmas: "I pray that there will be no terrorists in this world, so we can live in peace," he says.

You can see a video of Fakhri and his friends at opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily

THINK

- What do you think a peaceful life would look like for Fakhri, his family and the other children?
- What about your own family?
- What do you think of when you think of peace? What stops life being peaceful?

PRAY

Let's pray now for Fakhri and for his friends. And for their families.

- You could pray that they might one day have the kind of peaceful life you imagined for them.
- And ask God to keep them safe, provide for their needs, and help them to know that God is with them.





SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: 6 DECEMBER 2020

ACTIVITY: COLOURING AND CURRY!

Here's what you can do this week:

1. Download the colour-in picture of the Christmas party which is featured in our story. Colour it in with your brightest colours!
2. In our story, we're going to meet a family in Bangladesh who had a very special Christmas party meal. So maybe you could cook an unusual Christmas meal for your family?

In the story, the people have curry, daal and rice – you don't have to have that if you don't want to. But why not cook up a crazy Christmas dinner? You can go as wild and wacky as you like. Then you can share a meal and light the candle and read the story together!

You could even print out more copies of the colouring-in picture and have everyone colour them in - then use them for placemats!

LIGHT TWO CANDLES AND READ THE BIBLE

This week, we're going to light two candles.

Last week, we lit our first candle and thought about peace. This week, as well as the first candle, we're going to light the second candle. And we're going to think about parties.

Our Bible reading this week comes from the book of Luke.

"That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, 'Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.'" LUKE 2:8-12

The birth of Jesus was a time of great joy, even though He was born into a very poor family. The angels sang to the shepherds with joy – it's a kind of angel birthday party for Jesus. Maybe they even danced a bit!



★ FIND A FAMILY

This week we're thinking about a family in Bangladesh. Can you find out where Bangladesh is?

Bijli* is ten years old. She lives in a village in Bangladesh with her Mum and Dad, and her five-year-old brother Mohon*.

But in her village, a lot of the people don't like Christians.

Bijli's Mum, Maya*, says, "In the village, Muslims are the majority. They tell us, 'Go away, you are Christians, you should not mix with us. You are not the same as us.' They drive us away."

Bijli finds it hard to make friends. She has Mohon* to play with. But she can't play with the Muslim children. "My mother says that your family are infidels," a girl at school told Bijli.

Sometimes, Bijli comes home crying from school.

"At school," she says, "some friends push me and make me cry." When her mother asks her why they do this, she says, "Because I am a Christian." They can't even celebrate Christmas because it would make a lot of people angry.

But some friends of Open Doors arranged a special Christmas celebration for them in a safe place. And it wasn't just them: around 100 Christian families came together. For some, it was the first time they had ever properly celebrated Christmas.

They even had a special Christmas dinner: daal (which is a kind of lentil stew), chicken curry, and rice. Everyone dressed up in their best clothes. There is dancing and singing and a band playing music.

And Bijli and Mohon have other children to play with.

They even had a birthday cake to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

Maya adds, "I love the songs, cutting the cake, I love everything! When we come here we have joy and peace, we sing songs and dance. We do not get to celebrate like this in the village."

Bijli says, "I like the songs, dancing and celebrating Jesus' birthday."

You can see a video of Bijli and her family at opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily

*names changed for security reasons



THINK

- Why do you think that Bijli and her family were so happy and joyful to be celebrating Jesus' birthday?
- What parties have you had in your house or with your family?
- What's the best party you've ever been to? What made it special?

PRAY

Let's pray now for Bijli and her family. And for all Christians who are not allowed to celebrate Christmas.

- Pray for them wherever they are, that they would feel joyful this Christmas.
- Pray that they might have enough food to eat, and that they would be protected from any harm.
- Give thanks for all the fun and joy we can have together.

WEEK 2 ACTIVITY: COLOUR-IN CHRISTMAS PARTY!





THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT: 13 DECEMBER 2020

ACTIVITY: SPOT THE SHINIEST STAR

This week, we have an activity that you have to do in the dark!
Wait until it is dark and then go outside (make sure you have an adult with you).

Look up into the night sky. How many stars can you see? I bet there are loads! But which one do you think is the brightest? You should also see a full moon – or almost.

What are stars? Do you know? And what is it that makes the moon shine?

LIGHT THREE CANDLES AND READ THE BIBLE

This week we're going to light three candles.

On week one, we lit our first candle and thought about peace.

Last week, we lit two candles and thought about parties.

This week, we're going to light our third candle. And we're going to think about people.

We have two Bible verses this week:

*"Those who walked in the dark have seen a bright light.
And it shines upon everyone who lives in the land
of darkest shadows."* **ISAIAH 9:2**

*"Once again Jesus spoke to the people. This time he said, 'I am the light for the world! Follow me, and you won't be walking in the dark. You will have the light that gives life.'" **JOHN 8:12***

In our part of the world, Advent takes place at the darkest time of the year. And these two readings are about people who are walking in the dark, in a way.

Jesus is described in the Bible as 'the light of the world'. He came to drive away the darkness.

That's very important to remember when we think about all those Christians around the world who are bullied or attacked for following Jesus. Sometimes, life must seem very dark for them.

★ FIND A FAMILY

This week, we're thinking about a family in Colombia. Can you find out where Colombia is?

Daniela and her family come from Colombia. Her father was the pastor of a church in a city called La Caucana. That city is home to a lot of drug gangs, and they didn't like Daniela's father telling people the good news about Jesus and helping them to stop taking drugs and committing crimes.

So, they did a very bad thing: they killed Pastor Plinio.

This has been very hard for the family. Especially at Christmas.

That's why Open Doors invited Daniela, her mother, and her brother Sebastián to spend Christmas, at the Open Doors Children's Centre in Colombia. This is a place where lots of children live who need looking after.

It was a long way to the centre, but even though the family arrived in the darkness very late at night, all the staff and the children were waiting there to welcome them! They had made a big banner saying 'Welcome'.

"I didn't expect so many people," Daniela said later. "I was so surprised to see all of them, singing a welcome to us. It made me feel so good."

The family spent four weeks at the centre, playing with the other children and being helped to talk about what happened. It helped that Daniela met many other children at the centre who, like her, were going through bad times.

"I learned that, although there are difficult times in life, there are also times when Jesus helps us to overcome through people and prayer," says Daniela.

Open Doors also arranged a new house for them, a better one in a much safer area.

Daniela adds, "It is very important to know that this Christmas there are people around the world praying for me and my family. I am very grateful for that, because I see that God works through these prayers."

"Sé valiente y fuerte, sigue confiando en el Señor," she says. Which means, 'Be brave and strong, keep trusting in the Lord.'

You can see a video of Daniela and her family at opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily



THINK

- What difference did it make to Daniela to meet with other children who have suffered for following Jesus?
- Are there special people who help you when you are sad? Perhaps they are family or friends. How do these other people help you?

PRAY

Daniela likes to draw. She gets inspired by looking at the sky – just like we did earlier. When she grows up, she wants to be an artist. Pray for her and her brother, that they would be happy in their new home and do well at school.

- Pray for all those children who are sad or lonely this Christmas. Pray that Jesus would shine His love on them.
- Some people in this world do some very bad things. But God still loves everyone. Pray for them. Ask God to shine a light into their lives, to show them that what they are doing is wrong.



Presents



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: 20 DECEMBER 2020

ACTIVITY: JOIN THE DOTS

Download the Join the Dots drawing sheet from opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily
Join the dots on the sheet to see what you can find!

LIGHT **FOUR** CANDLES AND READ THE BIBLE

This week, we're going to light four candles.

On week one, we lit our first candle and thought about peace.

On week two, we lit two candles and thought about parties.

Last week, we lit three candles, and thought about people.

This week, we're going to light our fourth candle. And we're going to think about presents.

Our Bible reading this week comes from the book of Matthew.

"The star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star. When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshipped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him." **MATTHEW 2:9-11**

This tells the story of the final part of the adventure of the wise men. Their journey brought them to Jesus and they gave Him their gifts – all of which were very valuable.

Today, many people discover Jesus after their own long search. And it costs them a lot – maybe not frankincense, gold and myrrh, but other, equally precious gifts: their freedom and their safety.





★ FIND A FAMILY

This week, we're thinking about a family in Iran. Can you find out where Iran is?

I wonder if you can remember the first time you celebrated Christmas?

Most of us can't, because Christmas has been a part of our lives since we were born. But Nava*, a young woman from Iran, can remember it. Because she had only just become a Christian.

And it wasn't like our Christmas celebrations. Iran is a country where Christians are often arrested and put into prison. The government doesn't want people following Jesus. So Christians have to celebrate in secret.

That's what Nava did with her family.

"From the outside, it was nothing special," she recalls. "It was just me, my mother and my little brother sitting at the dinner table, like we do each night."

But this time they felt like they had an extra guest. "This night, somehow automatically, I put down a fourth plate: for Jesus," she says.

"It felt like Jesus was really present," Nava said.

The family had managed to get hold of some Christmas decorations, but the family were taking a risk even putting them up. Often around Christmas, the police raid the houses of people they suspect of being Christian. But Nava believed it was worth the risk.

"I am a young believer, but I have thought the dangers through carefully," she says. "The Lord is my ultimate power."

It might not seem like much of a Christmas celebration. But, as Nava says, "It is not about physical presents, it's really just about spending a special time with Jesus and my family."

*name changed for security reasons

THINK

- What do you think it has cost Nava and her family to follow Jesus?
- What could you give to your family this Christmas? It doesn't have to be gold or frankincense, or anything expensive. Maybe you could write a card or a letter to a family member? Or spend some time with someone?

PRAY

Let's pray now for Nava, her family, and all Christians who risk it all to follow Jesus..

- Pray that, wherever they are, they would be able to celebrate Jesus' birth and that they will be protected from being arrested or hurt.
- Pray that persecuted Christians would feel that Jesus is present – that He is really there with them.
- Pray for our own families, that Jesus will be as real to us as one of our own family members this Christmas.



WEEK 4 ACTIVITY: JOIN-THE-DOTS





Thank you for joining us on this Advent Adventure.

We've come to the end of our journey. But, if you want, there are some more things that you could do.

MAYBE INCLUDE AN EXTRA CANDLE?

Some Advent wreaths include an extra candle – one right in the middle, which you light on Christmas Day. This indicates the birth of Jesus and reminds us that He is always with us.

MAYBE INCLUDE AN EXTRA PLACE?

Perhaps you could even do like Nava did and put down an extra place for one of your Christmas meals?

This could remind us of all of the Christians around the world who cannot sit down and celebrate Christmas the same as us. But they are our brothers and sisters, in a way. Because we are all part of the same Christian family.

And at Christmas, no matter where we are, we can remember each other, and share the joy together.

MAYBE LEARN MORE ABOUT CHRISTIANS WHO ARE PERSECUTED?

On our website you can find lots more activities and videos about persecuted Christians. And you can find out how you can help them and pray for them. Go to opendoorsuk.org/resources/children-at-home to find out more!

WRITE TO DANIELA

There are currently over 70 children at the Colombia Children's Centre. You can now write to them, along with Daniela and Sebastián! Send a picture, postcard or short message to let them know they're not alone. Go to opendoorsuk.org/act/letter

