

# Counting the Days:

## An Advent Celebration for Kids

**From Beaches Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Ontario**

Thanks to Beaches Presbyterian Church, particularly Laura Alary, for sharing this Advent Celebration. This celebration was done from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. early in Advent. Six adults provided leadership for 15 children. Each congregational situation is different. Feel free to adapt to your circumstances.

### Advertising your event

Early in November begin to make church announcements—verbal and written. Invite children to pre-register. If you have a church newsletter or website, put an ad in a fall issue. It is also effective to send out a “You are invited...” card with an RSVP request to the children in your church.

### Outline of event

1. Gathering time (9:00 – 9:15)
  - i. Name tags
2. Introduce the theme (9:15 – 10:00)
  - i. The story of salvation
3. Activities (10:00 – 11:45)
  - i. Cookies
  - ii. Greeting cards
  - iii. Helping-hands wreath
  - iv. Beeswax candles
  - v. Stained glass
  - vi. Nativity figures
4. Share a meal (11:45- 12:30)
5. Gather to go out (12: 30- 1:00)
  - i. Worship
  - ii. Reading table

### 1. Gathering Time - name tags

Gather these supplies: pre-cut name tags in advent shapes such as candles or stars, markers, glitter, glue, stickers, yarn, hole punch, small table and chairs, star stickers in different colours to identify groups.

Assign someone to do a simple ice-breaker/group builder when the tags are complete.

### 2. Introduce the Theme

Use the story-telling in *Resources*, p. 5, to place the story of Jesus’ birth in its larger biblical context. Plan to move from space to space. Ask someone to lead in singing *Counting the Days*. (See *Resources*, p. 11.)



### 3. Activities

Provide 6 activity centres. (The children may be divided into groups according to the stars on their name tags and rotate from centre to centre.) The six centres are:

- Cookies
- Greeting cards
- Helping-hands wreath
- Beeswax candles
- Stained glass
- Nativity figures

The co-ordinators of all centres should be prepared not only to help participants but also to introduce each activity and explain how it helps us celebrate advent.

Provide paper or plastic bags for children to take crafts home.

#### **i. Cookies (Service to Others)**

At the beginning of this activity the leader should explain that an important part of Advent is sharing with other people the love that God gave us in Jesus. One of the ways we get ready to welcome Jesus is by welcoming and showing kindness to other people. The cookies will be given to a group/organization that enjoys, appreciates and needs them for the Christmas season.

Gather together: spatula and rolling pins, flour (for rolling), pre-mixed sugar-cookie dough, cookie sheets and parchment paper (or non-stick spray), icing and food colouring, pastry bag and tips for icing (or waxed paper tubes), decorative sprinkles, cookie cutters in advent shapes (stars, candles), oven timer of some sort, oven mitts, cooling racks, containers to package the baked cookies, waxed paper.

Hint: Someone else in the congregation may prepare the cookie dough.

#### **ii. Greeting Cards (Service to Others)**

Another way of sharing God's love during Advent is by sending cards of encouragement to people who are shut-in, lonely or far from home. Encourage the children to think about people who might be happy to know that someone is thinking of them. There are two options for cards: 1) the younger children can use sponge shapes to stamp in paint; 2) older children can use rubber stamps and embossing supplies.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Supplies:**

Gather up these supplies: blank cards and envelopes to fit, supply of sponge (or potato) stamps cut in advent shapes (stars, candles, trees), washable acrylic paint, shallow containers for paint, white glue, glitter, markers, tables and chairs, plastic cover for table, paper towels for cleanup, old shirts to use as smocks.

#### **iii. Helping Hands Wreath (Service to Others, *Counting the Days*)**

Gather up these supplies: paper plates with centres cut out to form a wreath, green construction paper, scissors, pencils for tracing hands, glue sticks, markers, gold cord for hanging the wreaths, hole punch, extra pieces of green paper for each child to take home, ziploc bags to hold the extra paper, small instruction sheet for parents (see below), table and chairs.

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<sup>1</sup> If someone in your congregation does scrapbooking/embossing, invite her to help older children with this activity. You will need rubber stamps pigment ink, embossing powder, heat guns, paper and spoons for embossing powder, extension cord.

**Instructions for Parents:** This is a Helping Hands Advent Wreath. Each day throughout Advent, as your child does a kind or a loving deed for another person, have him or her trace one handprint onto a piece of green construction paper and glue it to the paper plate. By adding one handprint each day, the wreath should be full by Christmas, becoming a visual reminder of how we share the love of God with others during the Advent season.

#### **iv. Beeswax Candles (Advent Symbols)**

This simple craft introduces small children to the advent symbol of light. Some children may have experienced being afraid of the dark and will relate to the biblical promise that God would send someone to be like a light for people who sit alone in the dark.

**Gather up** these supplies: rolls of candle wicking, sheets of beeswax (preferably blue and a contrasting colour for decorating),<sup>2</sup> scissors, table and chairs, haird ryer.

Roll the beeswax tightly around a piece of candle wicking. Cut an Advent symbol from the contrasting wax. Mould it onto the rolled candle and, using the haird ryer, warm the wax symbol and gently mould it on to the candle.

#### **v. Stained Glass Windows**

**Gather up** these supplies: construction paper, a Christmas shape (angel, star, bell, manger), clear adhesive covering (e.g. MacTac, Con-Tact), multicoloured tissue paper, scissors.

Trace a Christmas shape on a piece of construction paper. Cut out the shape, leaving a “hole” in the construction paper. Place a piece of clear adhesive covering, with backing removed, over the opening and press. Working with the sticky side of the construction paper face up, press small multicoloured items on the shape. Finally, lay a single sheet of tissue paper over the adhesive covering.

The stained glass window may be given as a gift or taken home to put in a window to remind the children of Christ’s presence.

#### **vi. Nativity figures**

Each child decorates a different figure from the nativity story. For instance, a child will decorate or draw a sheep. Figures may be pre-cut by leaders or drawn by the children. Then, using a Polaroid camera, a leader takes his picture. As you wait together for the photo to develop, talk about waiting for Advent and anticipating the coming of Jesus . The leader cuts an H shape on the figure to form a window. The developed photo is taped to the back of the nativity figures, into which small doors have been cut, so that when the doors open, the children see their own faces. The point of this activity is to allow the kids to re-tell the story of the birth of Jesus as a group, to picture themselves there, and to have something to take home with them.

**Gather together** a Polaroid camera and film, construction paper of many colours, scissors, glue sticks, markers or crayons, glitter, magic tape, exacto knife and metal ruler (to be used by co-ordinator or adult helper to cut window), cardboard pre-cut into shapes of characters from nativity story—Ma ry, Joseph, shepherds, angels, sheep, cows, donkey. (If you have the book *Young Children and Worship*, it contains good patterns.)

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<sup>2</sup> Beeswax may be found in most craft shops.

## 4. Sharing a meal

**Gather together:** enough pizza for everyone, napkins, cups and plates, juice or water, dessert of some kind (cookies or squares or cupcakes or fruit), tables and chairs, plastic table cloths.

## 5. Gathering to go out

This brief time of worship uses the nativity figures made that day. If possible, use a digital camera to take a photograph of all of the figures. The photo may then be printed off and distributed to the children, used on the church website or for a bulletin cover or in a church newsletter.

### i. Worship

Invite children to bring their nativity figures to the worship area. On a table place a small advent wreath and four candles.

Sing together: *Counting the Days*

**Liturgist:** *Even though it is the beginning of Advent, I am going to light all the candles on our wreath. When I light the third candle and we remember the birth of Jesus, you may all come forward and put your nativity figures on the table.*

*As we light the first candle we remember how God created the world in the beginning and called it good. This is advent, the season of waiting.*

**Light the first candle.**

*As we light the second candle we remember how the people of God waited so long for a saviour to come.*

**Light the second candle.**

*As we light the third candle we remember the birth of Jesus. (Wait for the children to come forward with their figures.) We remember how Jesus lived and showed God's love.*

**Light the third candle.**

*As we light the fourth candle we remember how Jesus died and how God made him alive again. We remember that Jesus promised to come back again. We remember how he asked us to watch and wait.*

**Light the fourth candle.**

**Liturgist:** *Please repeat after me. We are waiting. (Children repeat, "We are waiting.")*  
*Come, Lord Jesus. (Children repeat, "Come, Lord Jesus.")*

Benediction

### ii. Reading Table

Gather books in a comfortable setting so children can read as they wait for parents/guardians.

# Resources

## The Story of Salvation

### Introduction (location one)

**Storyteller:** *It's Advent! Do you know what that means? Advent is the first season in the new church year. It is the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day. During Advent we count the days until Christmas.*

**Song:** *Counting the Day*, verse 1 (see resources, p. 12)

**Storyteller:** *The word Advent means "coming". Do you know who is coming? The one we've all been waiting for! Come with me and I'll tell you the whole story...*

[Lead the children into location two, which has been darkened. In the centre of the room there is a single unlit candle and a box containing story materials. Ask everyone to sit in a circle around the candle.]

### Part One: Creation (location two)

**Storyteller:** *In the beginning, before anything came into being, there was God.  
God was all alone in the darkness.  
So God decided to make a world.  
God said, "Let there be light!" (Light the candle.) And there was light.  
God created stars and moons and suns and planets and galaxies spinning in space.  
God made the earth, with its mountains and valleys, deserts and seas, lakes and woods.  
God made plants and animals to live on the earth.  
Last of all, God made people.  
God looked at the work and said, "This is very good."*

*But something went wrong.  
In the middle of the earth God planted a garden. (Put down green underlay.)  
The garden was beautiful.  
It was filled with animals and flowers and fruit trees. (Place props.)  
And of course, the people were there to look after everything. (Place figures.)  
Life in the garden was very good.  
The people loved to explore.  
They gave names to all the animals and ate fresh fruit from the trees.  
Best of all they walked and talked with God  
and came to know the One who had made them and who loved them so much.  
God told the people the garden was theirs to enjoy.  
Except for one thing.  
There was one tree (place tree) in the centre of the garden which they must not touch.  
At first the people did what God asked.*

There were lots of other things to see and do.  
But after a while they began to wonder about that tree.  
They walked around it, closer and closer, and looked at it.  
One day when they were near the tree they heard a voice.  
It seemed to be coming from a snake which was wound around one of the branches.  
"People," said the voice, "you really should taste the fruit from this tree. It's delicious."  
"Oh no," said the people, "We can't do that. God said we must not touch this tree."  
"Don't worry about what God said," replied the voice.  
"It's only a tree. It won't hurt you. Besides, God is nowhere around.  
God will never know if you just take a little bite."  
For a moment the people paused; then they slowly reached out, picked some fruit from the tree and ate it.  
  
At first nothing happened.  
But God knew what they had done, and God was angry and hurt and sad because the people had not listened.  
"People", cried God, "what have you done?"  
But the people did not answer.  
They were hiding because they knew they had done wrong and they were ashamed.  
Then God said, "Go. You cannot stay here in the garden any longer.  
Because you disobeyed me you must leave your home here and go out into the world."  
So the people left the garden and went out.  
As they left, they wondered whether they would ever come home again.  
And they wondered whether God would ever walk and talk with them again.  
It seemed like the light had gone out. (Extinguish the candle.)

**Song:** *Counting the Days*, verse 2

Lead the children into another area which is also dark. On the table is another candle and storytelling materials. Put down a grey underlay and put human figures on it.

### **Part Two: Waiting for the Light (location three)**

**Storyteller:** *Life in the world was very hard.  
Very few people even remembered what it had been like in the garden with God.  
Now everything was so different.  
People had to work very hard just to get food to eat.  
Sometimes they got sick.  
Sometimes they were lonely and afraid.  
People did all sorts of things that God did not want them to do.  
Sometimes they were cruel to each other.  
There were fights and wars and many people suffered.  
Sometimes it felt like they were all alone in the dark with no one to help.  
(Place a chain around the group of people.)*

But then God said,  
My people, I hear you.  
I hear you crying. I love you and I will help you.  
I will come to save you and bring you home.  
And when I come it will be like light shining warm and bright in the darkness. (Light the candle.)  
Then you will know that I am with you.  
Wait and watch. I am coming.  
So the people waited and watched for the light.

**Song:**        *Counting the Days*, verse 3

Lead the children to another area, if possible a worship area. If possible, gather on the floor in front of a communion table. On the floor there is a candle, and two boxes containing storytelling materials, one for the nativity story, the other for the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

### **Part Three: The Birth of Jesus (location four)**

For a long time the people waited and watched and hoped.  
Now and then they wondered whether God would ever come.  
Then one day a strange thing happened. (Spread out a blue underlay.)  
An angel—a messenger from God—spoke to a young woman named Mary.  
(Place Mary and angel figures on the underlay.)  
Good news, said the angel.  
Now is the time.  
God is coming to save his people.  
But God will come in a surprising way.  
You will have a baby and you will name him Jesus.  
Jesus will be God-With-Us.  
Jesus will be the One we have all been waiting for.  
  
Mary did not understand.  
But for nine months she waited for her baby to be born.  
When the time came Mary had a baby and she named him Jesus.  
(Put the nativity figures in place.)  
On the night Jesus was born angels appeared in the night sky and sang a song:  
  
    Good news!  
    Tonight a saviour has been born!  
    Glory to God in heaven  
    And peace on earth!  
  
When Jesus grew up he did many things. (Bring out an adult Jesus.)  
He told stories about God. (Place listeners around Jesus.)  
He healed sick people. (Make the crippled figure stand up.)

He was a friend to lonely people. (Move Jesus figure over to a person standing alone.)  
Everywhere he went he showed God's love.  
When people were near Jesus they knew God was with them.  
Jesus was like a light in the darkness. (Light candle.)

**Song:** *Counting the Days*, vs. 4

Stay in the same place but change the underlay to black and get out new story telling materials, including the cross and the tomb and the crucified Jesus figure.

#### **Part Four: Jesus Goes Back to God**

Many people loved Jesus. But some did not.  
One day some people who did not like Jesus took him.  
They hurt him and made fun of him.  
Finally, they nailed him to a cross.  
Jesus died.

It seemed like the light of the world had gone out. (Extinguish candle.)

Jesus' friends took his body and wrapped it in a cloth (Wrap the Jesus figure and entomb it.)  
and put it in a tomb—a special place for the dead.

The tomb was in a garden.

On the third day some of Jesus' friends came to the garden.

When they got there the tomb was empty.

God had made Jesus alive again!

Jesus came to his friends and they talked and laughed and ate together.

Then Jesus said,

"I cannot stay here with you. I must go to be with God.

But one day I will come again.

So watch and wait.

And while you are waiting, live the way I showed you.

Tell my stories.

Sing songs about me.

Heal people who are sick.

Be friendly to people who are lonely.

Show God's love to everyone.

Be like lights in the darkness." (Light the candle.)

**Song:** *Counting the Days*, repeat verse 4

As an optional fifth part of the story, gather around the communion table where there is another candle, a Bible, and the communion elements.

## **Part Five: The New Creation (Optional)**

*For a long time Jesus' friends watched and waited for him to come again.  
While they waited they tried to live as Jesus had showed them.  
Sometimes they got tired of waiting and they wondered, "Will Jesus really come again?"*

*One day God spoke to a man named John.  
God said,  
John, look at what I am about to show you.  
Write it down so that everyone will know.  
John looked and wrote down what he saw.  
We can still read what John wrote. It is the last book in our Bible.  
If you close your eyes you can imagine what John saw.*

*God said to John,  
"Look! I am going to make a new heaven and a new earth."*

*John looked and he saw a beautiful city.  
Its walls were made of gold and jewels.  
It had twelve gates and each one was made from a pearl.  
In the middle of the city was a garden.  
The garden was full of flowers and birds and animals and fruit trees.  
There was a lovely fountain with water so clear it looked like crystal.  
The garden smelled like summer and fresh grass  
and it was filled with the sound of gentle wind and rustling leaves.  
John saw people in the garden.  
They were all singing.  
No one was sick. No one was crying. No one was lonely.  
No one was sad or angry or ashamed.  
And God was there with them, just like in the very beginning.*

*And God said,  
"This is the new creation.  
When the time is right Jesus will come again  
and bring his people home to this beautiful place.  
It will be like life in the very beginning, only better.  
So watch and wait."  
Jesus is coming!*

**Song:** Jesus is Coming! (Verse 2 of Hymn #725, The Book of Praise)

**Reflection:** Celebrating Advent

**Liturgist:** *That, my friends, is the whole story...  
Advent is all about waiting.  
We wait with the people of God long ago who hoped that God would come to save them.  
We wait with Mary as she gets ready for her baby to be born.  
And we wait for Jesus to come again.*

*In the Church we do things to help us wait.  
What are some of the things you see around you that help you to know it is Advent?*

*We light candles on the Advent Wreath. (Show the Advent wreath.)  
Each week one more candle is lit.  
This helps us remember how God's people waited and waited for a saviour to come  
and bring light to the world.*

*We add figures to the nativity scene. (Show figures of a nativity scene.)  
Each week we put a new character in place.  
This helps us remember the story of the birth of Jesus who was the promised saviour.*

*We change the colour of the pulpit falls to purple. (Show the pulpit fall.)  
Purple is the colour of royalty — of kings and queens.  
When we see purple we remember  
that one day Jesus will come again  
not as a little baby but as a king who will reign over a new world.*

*We help others.  
Out in the narthex there is a basket of food for the food bank.  
Soon we will begin to collect gifts and food for a family who does not have enough.  
We send cards to people who are lonely.  
The youth group collects sleeping bags and warm clothes for teenagers who live on the street.  
We do all these things because Jesus told us to live the way he did,  
to show the love of God to everyone and to be like lights in the world.*

At this point, divide the children into groups according to the coloured dots on their name tags and lead them into the area where the activity tables are set up.

## Song: Counting the Days

Try singing this song with a jazzy swing. To keep the beat, have children slap their thighs then clap their hands. You can also divide the children into two groups: have the first group sing a part of the line (for example, "Oh we're counting the days"), and while they are holding the long note ("days"), have the second group echo what the first group just sang.

Oh we're counting the days 'til Christmas Day.

Oh we're counting the days 'til Christmas Day.

Oh we're counting the days 'til Christmas Day.

These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

We sit in the dark and we wait for the light.

O we sit in the dark and we wait for the light.

Watching and hoping, we wait for the light.

These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

O life in the world can be lonely and cold.

We want to go home, 'cause we're lonely and cold.

O life in the word can be lonely and cold.

These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

O Jesus says, that he's coming again.

Watch and wait, 'cause he's coming again.

Show God's love, until he comes again.

These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

Oh we're counting the days 'til Christmas Day.  
Oh we're counting the days 'til Christmas Day.  
Oh we're counting the days 'til Christmas Day.  
These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

We sit in the dark and we wait for the light.  
O we sit in the dark and we wait for the light.  
Watching and hoping, we wait for the light.  
These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

O life in the world can be lonely and cold.  
We want to go home, 'cause we're lonely and cold.  
O life in the word can be lonely and cold.  
These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

O Jesus says, that he's coming again.  
Watch and wait, 'cause he's coming again.  
Show God's love, until he comes again.  
These Advent days, glory, hallelujah Lord,  
We're counting the days.

