

MATT RAWLE

# EXPERIENCING CHRISTMAS

CHRIST  
IN THE SIGHTS  
AND SOUNDS  
OF ADVENT

CHILDREN'S  
LEADER GUIDE





MATT RAWLE

EXPERIENCING  
CHRISTMAS

CHRIST IN THE SIGHTS  
AND SOUNDS OF ADVENT

CHILDREN'S LEADER GUIDE  
BY ANITA PEEBLES

Abingdon Press | Nashville

**Experiencing Christmas**  
**Christ in the Sights and Sounds of Advent**  
**Children's Leader Guide Download**

Copyright © 2023 Abingdon Press  
All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act, the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Rights and Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 810 12th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203-4704 or e-mailed to [permissions@abingdonpress.com](mailto:permissions@abingdonpress.com).

ISBN 978-1-7910-2934-0

Scripture quotations unless noted otherwise are from the Common English Bible. Copyright © 2011 by the Common English Bible. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

# INTRODUCTION

This downloadable leader guide is meant for use with *Experiencing Christmas: Christ in the Sights and Sounds of Advent* by Matt Rawle. This guide includes four lessons, one corresponding to each chapter in the main book. The lessons in this guide, designed for children in kindergarten through sixth grade, require simple preparation and few materials.

The pattern of these lessons is as follows:

- **Lesson Objectives:** Contains goals for the session.
- **Prepare:** Lists preparation steps for the teacher before the lesson, including gathering materials and making example crafts.
- **Opening Activity:** Welcomes children to the space with care, calling each child by their name. The activity will introduce the Scripture stories or themes that are the focus for the session.
- **Choice of Activities:** Each lesson has 2-3 activities suggested, ranging from discussions to games to crafts focused on the theme of the day. These activities can each be done in 15 minutes, so feel free to choose as many or as few as fit the needs of your group.
- **Closing Prayer:** Gather the children into a circle to close your time together. Then, as children leave the space, dismiss and bless them by name.

Advent is the season of preparation leading up to the celebration of Christ's birth on Christmas. Traditionally, there are four Sundays in Advent, designed to be a "little Lent," a time when people would fast, pray, and prepare their hearts for the entrance of Christ into the world and into human lives.

In the main book, Matt Rawle says that the weeks leading up to Christmas, including Advent and Christmas itself, feel different from normal, everyday life. Rawle describes the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches that one might encounter throughout this season of preparation, recognizing that the traditions and practices observed in the northern hemisphere create a kind of unique quality to the season. Advent and Christmas are definitely sensory-heavy times, appropriate for a time of year when Christians remember the incarnation of the Christ, that God put on flesh and dwelled among us. God took on all that humanity is as Jesus lived a human life, having eyes to see and ears to hear and a body to feel.

Exploring the sensory nature of this season offers an opportunity for children to engage the Nativity story in playful and curious ways. For some children, this may be their first time exploring the stories surrounding Jesus's birth. For others, they will be challenged to hear and think and worship differently using their five senses. It is also important to be sensitive to how you talk about bodies throughout this season, recognizing the abilities and disabilities in the group you are facilitating. You may wish to talk to a pastor about how to make sure that children who have blindness or deafness can participate in activities about the sights and sounds of the holidays.

As you teach, know that you have what it takes to guide the children as they encounter the Christmas story using their God-given senses. Approach each lesson with an open mind, open heart, and careful preparation. God will do the rest.

You are encouraged to pray this prayer as you begin the study:

*Holy God, thank you for giving us bodies with which to explore and experience the sacred season of Advent. Be with us as we welcome the Christ Child into our world and help us use our senses to love and serve you always. Amen.*

May your fellowship be blessed during this Advent season as you engage with the stories of Christmas with the children in your care.

# SESSION 1

---

## DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

### Lesson Objectives

Children will . . .

- explore the visual symbols of the Advent season.
- consider what sights are important to them at Christmastime.

### To Prepare

#### *Gather Materials*

- Bibles
- Carpet squares (or other seat markers)
- Strand of string lights
- Plain paper
- Crayons
- Markers
- Small glass votives
- Multi-colored tissue paper
- Battery-operated tea lights or votive candles
- Regular white or clear glue
- Plastic cups
- Paintbrushes

#### *Prepare*

- Set up carpet squares in a circle on the floor.
- Cover a table or workspace with plastic or newspaper. Pour glue into plastic cups.
- Position your circle near an outlet or use an extension cord to get an outlet close to your circle

### Opening Activity

Welcome the children by name to the space. Invite them to sit in a circle on the floor. Have paper and markers ready nearby.

**ASK:** Have you heard the word Advent before? When? Where? What does Advent mean?

Invite the children to respond aloud one by one.

**SAY:** Advent is the season when we get ready for Christmas. During Advent, which is about four weeks long, Christians prepare to welcome the baby Jesus into the world. Even though Jesus was born long, long ago, it is important to the church to tell the story every year. So let's start at the beginning.

Invite a confident reader to read aloud from the Bible Genesis 1:1-5.

**ASK:** In the reading, what happened first? What happened next? What happened after that?

- Lead the children's discussion toward realizing that God spoke ("Let there be...") and then saw ("God saw how good the light was").

**SAY:** Right at the beginning of everything, when God was creating the universe, God spoke. And then, God saw that the creation was good. In the rest of that story in the Book of Genesis, this pattern happens over and over again. Today, we are going to explore the sights we see during the Advent season.

Invite the children to go around the circle and say two things: First, their name. And second, something they see during the Christmas season that starts with the same letter as their name.

- Make a list of the sights the children name.

After all the children have shared,

**SAY:** There are so many things to see during the time we are preparing to welcome the baby Jesus. We can even imagine what the world looked like when Jesus was born, long ago on that first Christmas.

### ***Opening Prayer***

Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *Holy God, thank you for the gift of your beautiful creation. As we prepare to welcome the baby Jesus into our world, show us the sights of Christmas: not just the twinkling lights and candy canes everywhere, but the vision of people helping each other make the world a better place. Amen.*

## Choice of Activities

### *The Season of Light*

Gather the children in a circle. If possible, turn out the lights in the room. Have the string lights ready to plug into an outlet.

**SAY:** At the beginning of everything, God created light. We read about this in the first book in the Bible, the Book of Genesis, chapter 1. People long ago told this story to imagine how everything was created. "God said, 'Let there be light.'"

Plug in the string lights.

**SAY:** And then, "God saw how good the light was." The light of the sun helps us see, and it helps plants grow so that we have clean air and food to eat.

**ASK:** What does light help you do?

**SAY:** In our part of the world (the northern hemisphere), in the wintertime, the days are short, with not very much sunlight.

Unplug the string lights.

**ASK:** What does darkness help you do?

**SAY:** A long time ago, God's people waited and waited for a messiah. A messiah is someone who would come to help people who were oppressed and treated badly. God's people listened to prophets who told them that a messiah was coming soon. When Jesus was born, God told his mother, Mary, that Jesus would be the Messiah and help lots of people. Sometimes during Advent, we say that "the light is coming into the world," when Jesus is born.

Plug in the string lights.

**SAY:** Darkness and light are both important. We need both of them to live. In the winter when the days are short, people hang up strands of lights on their houses and inside their houses and use candles so they can have a little more light. Whenever we see lights hung up or candles in windows, we can remember that God saw how good the light was. And we can remember that Jesus is the light of the world, and he came into the world to help people.

### *Looking for Symbols of the Season*

Gather the children at a table.

**SAY:** We've talked a little bit about what you see around you as we prepare for Christmas. Now, we are going to think about what images or symbols of the Christmas story we might see around us.

Invite a confident reader to read aloud Isaiah 7:14 (a recommended version is one that has the translation of "young woman," such as the New Revised Standard Version, updated version; Common English Bible; or New American Bible).

**ASK:** These words were said by the prophet Isaiah. What did Isaiah tell the people they should look for?

**SAY:** The sign that God was with the people was that a young woman would have a special baby. This baby would be important. So during Advent when we are preparing for Christmas, we often see pictures of the mother Mary and the baby Jesus.

**ASK:** What other pictures do you see as we get ready for Christmas? What is a sign that Christmas is coming soon?

- You may wish to prompt the children's answers with: Christmas tree, greenery, candles, stars, the city of Bethlehem outline, Advent wreath, the manger, shepherds in the fields, a Chrismon tree, and so forth.

Give each child a piece of paper and markers or crayons. Invite the children to draw pictures or symbols of Christmas they see during this time of year.

### *Christmas Candle Craft*

Gather children at a table or work surface that has been prepared. Give each child a small glass votive, a cup of glue, and a paintbrush.

Invite the children to pick two or three colors of tissue paper. Have them tear the tissue paper into small pieces.

Direct the children to use the paintbrush to lightly brush glue onto the glass on the outside of their votive. Then, put the tissue paper pieces onto the glue. Cover the whole glass outside of the votive.

Set to dry. While the craft is drying, invite the children to do one of the other activities.

### *Churchwide Sights of Advent*

If your church practices traditions such as the hanging of the greens or making Advent wreaths, you may wish to work with a pastor or other lay leader to include your group of children in these activities. Decorating the church can be a fun way to think about what Christmas looks like in your community.

As an alternative, you might choose to take the children on a tour of your decorated worship space, to explore the evergreen, lights, candles, Christmas tree, and other signs and symbols you use to observe the season of Advent in worship.

## **Closing Prayer**

Invite the children to join you in a circle. Revisit the list you made together at the beginning of the session.

**ASK:** Does anyone have other ideas of what we should add to this list of the sights of Christmas?

- Add items to the list as the children name them.

**SAY:** As you go through the next week, pay attention and look at the world around you. See if you catch sight of any of these things that show Christmas is on its way. You could even make a note of what things on the list you find!

Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *God, help us see you working in the world. Show us how we can prepare the way to welcome the baby Jesus. Amen.*

Dismiss each child from the session by offering them a blessing as they leave. **SAY:** NAME, may you see God's love in the world this week. Amen.

# SESSION 2

---

## DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

### Lesson Objectives

Children will . . .

- explore the sounds of Christmas, from loud music and joyful hymns to thoughtful silence.
- praise God by making a joyful noise together.

### To Prepare

#### *Gather Materials*

- Carpet squares
- Bible
- Device (CD player, computer, or phone) to play music
- Assorted instruments (jingle bells, xylophone, guitar, Boomwhackers, whatever your community has available for kids to play)
- Q-tips or cotton buds
- Lemon juice
- Plain cardstock
- Flashlight or lamp

#### *Prepare*

- Prepare a circle of carpet squares on the floor.
- Cue the songs you will play.
  - ◇ “Do You Hear What I Hear?”
  - ◇ Sing along Christmas songs (suggestions: “Joy to the World,” “Hallelujah Chorus,” “Jingle Bells”).

### Opening Activity

As children enter, encourage them to be quiet by whispering, “Welcome, NAME,” and then using silent gestures to help them find a seat in the circle. You may choose to dramatize the quiet by whispering “Shhh!” exaggeratedly.

When all the children have arrived, cup your hand by your ear as if you are listening to something. Then **ASK:** Do you hear what I hear?

After a pause to listen, **ASK:** What do you hear?

- Allow children to respond. Point out noises that go unnoticed, like the humming of fluorescent lights or the whirring of a heating system or birds singing outside the window.

**SAY:** You may remember that the season of Advent is a time of getting ready. During this season we are preparing our hearts to welcome the baby Jesus into the world. Part of the preparation that we do is listening for the sounds of the season.

Play “Do You Hear What I Hear?” on the music-playing device.

**ASK:** What sounds do you hear that tell you Christmas is on the way?

Invite a confident reader to read Luke 1:26-30 aloud.

**SAY:** Before Jesus came into the world, his mother, Mary, was visited by an angel from God. The angel told Mary some great, if surprising, news! Mary listened closely to what the angel said.

**ASK:** I wonder how it would have felt to get a message from an angel? What did it sound like?

Invite a confident reader to read Luke 2:13-14 aloud.

**SAY:** When Jesus was born there were angels and heavenly forces in the sky singing and praising God.

**ASK:** I wonder what that sounded like?

**SAY:** The sounds of Christmas may be loud and boisterous, like a big choir singing! Or, they may be quiet, or even silent, as we hear God’s message of love to us in our hearts. Today we will listen for God’s love surrounding us and showing us how to love our world.

### *Opening Prayer*

Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *Holy God, thank you for the gift of living in your amazing world. As we prepare to welcome the baby Jesus, help us listen to the sounds of Christmas: from the quiet pondering of your wonder to the joyful praises we sing to the sounds of gatherings with loved ones and in our church family. Amen.*

## **Choice of Activities**

Because this session is all about the sounds of Christmas, you may wish to play Christmas hymns or songs during the activity time using your device.

### ***Words to Live By***

Gather the children at a table or workspace. Give each child a piece of plain cardstock and a cotton bud.

**SAY:** While we are preparing for Christmas, we hear lots of special words about this time of year. The name of the season, “Advent,” is one of them. There are lots of words and phrases that we seem to hear only at this time of the year.

Invite the children to think silently about what words or phrases they hear during the Christmas season. If they need prompting, encourage them to think about or listen to an Advent hymn, or think about what Christmas cards might say.

When the children have thought of their word or phrase, have them dip their cotton bud into a cup filled with lemon juice. Then have them write their word or short phrase on their paper using the juice.

Let the papers dry. While the papers dry, you may wish to have the children participate in another activity.

When the papers are dry, pick one of the papers and shine a flashlight or a light bulb directly on the paper. You will soon see that the lemon juice writing stops being invisible and turns brown. This is from a chemical reaction that the lemon juice has when it is exposed to heat (like from a light).

As you turn each of the children’s writings to be visible, invite the children to share about why they picked their word or phrase and when they hear that word or phrase being said. Make sure everyone gets to share briefly.

**SAY:** Words or phrases that may seem invisible the rest of the year suddenly become very important and meaningful during the season of Advent. When we are paying special attention to the warmth of God’s love and Jesus as the Light of the world, the invisible words or phrases become visible in how we live and love each other.

### ***Readers’ Theater Christmas Story***

Invite the children to gather in a circle.

**SAY:** We know there are many sounds that remind us of Christmas today, but I wonder what the very first Christmas sounded like. Maybe it was quiet...but babies aren’t very quiet, right? Maybe it was really loud...but Jesus would need to sleep, so how would Mary and Joseph quiet the animals at the manger? Hmm...let’s read the story to find out.

As you read Luke 2:1-20 (CEB printed on the following page), pause for the indicated effects, prompting the children as you go.

Scripture	Sound effect
<p><sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. <sup>2</sup>This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. <sup>3</sup>Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled.</p>	<p>Trumpet announcement Traveling sounds</p>
<p><sup>4</sup>Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. <sup>5</sup>He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant.</p>	<p>Walking</p>
<p><sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. <sup>7</sup>She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.</p>	<p>Baby sounds "Awww"</p>
<p><sup>8</sup>Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night.</p>	<p>Sheep baa-ing and snoring</p>
<p><sup>9</sup>The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.</p>	<p>"Ahhhh!" (scared and surprised)</p>
<p><sup>10</sup>The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. <sup>11</sup>Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger."</p>	<p>Angelic "Ta-da!"</p>
<p><sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."</p>	<p>"Glory to God!" "Peace on earth!"</p>
<p><sup>15</sup>When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us."</p>	<p>Shepherds and sheep walking hurriedly</p>
<p><sup>16</sup>They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.</p>	<p>"We found them!" "Nice to meet you!"</p>
<p><sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. <sup>18</sup>Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them.</p>	<p>"Wow!"</p>
<p><sup>19</sup>Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully.</p>	<p>"Hmmm . . ." thoughtful sounds</p>
<p><sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.</p>	<p>"Praise God!" "God is good!" "Joy to the world!"</p>

**ASK:** What is your favorite sound in the Christmas story? What makes it your favorite?

If you have extra time, divide the children into small groups to make the sounds for each verse. You may wish to practice a few times.

If applicable to your congregation, talk with a pastor or worship leader about inviting children to share this “readers’ theater” version of the Christmas story during a worship service.

### *Joyful Noises*

Gather the children into a circle with your music-playing device nearby. Have each child choose an instrument.

- To help with any conflict as you choose instruments, consider using a scheme such as choosing in the order of birthday months or backwards alphabet with first names.

**SAY:** Part of praising God is making a joyful noise. And during the Christmas season, we hear lots of joyful noises, from music to laughter to people having fun exchanging presents or serving their community.

**ASK:** What joyful noises do you hear during this time of year?

Play the music on your device, inviting the kids to play the instruments and/or sing along if they know the words (or if you have a computer playing a video with words included).

**ASK:** Who do you want to encourage to make a joyful noise during this Christmas season?

## **Closing Prayer**

Gather children into a circle. Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *God, help us hear your message of love encouraging us to make the world a better place. As we prepare to welcome Jesus, show us where our joyful noises are needed the most. Amen.*

Dismiss each child from the session by offering them a blessing as they leave. **SAY:** NAME, may you hear good news in the world this week. Amen.

# SESSION 3

---

## DO YOU TASTE WHAT I TASTE?

### Lesson Objectives

Children will . . .

- consider the tastes and flavors that are special to the Christmas season.
- prepare to share food with friends and neighbors.

### To Prepare

#### *Gather Materials*

- Carpet squares
- Bible
- Snack packets (suggestions – see “Snack Packs for the Hungry” below)
  - ◇ Large Ziploc bags
  - ◇ Individual hand sanitizers
  - ◇ Individual wipes
  - ◇ Granola bars, individually packaged
  - ◇ Fruit snacks, individually packaged
  - ◇ Juice box or packet
  - ◇ Tissue packet
  - ◇ Hand warmers
- Plain cookies (sugar or gingerbread or shortbread suggested)
- Assortment of cookie-decorating supplies (icing, frosting, Red Hots candies, sprinkles, chocolate chips, and so on)
- Smooth plastic knives and spoons
- Plates
- Large trays or cookie sheets
- Assortment of styles of Christmas cookies. If possible, try to get different kinds of cookies from a few different countries.
- Device to play an online video
- Heatless laminating sheets
- Plain cardstock
- Markers and crayons
- Packet of M&M’s or other small candy

#### *Prepare*

- Set carpet squares in a circle on the floor.
- Cover a table with plastic or a tablecloth to create a workspace.
- Prepare an assortment of Christmas cookies/desserts on a tray or cookie sheet. Cut the desserts so there will be enough pieces for all children to have one of each kind.

- Cue up the *Ratatouille* scene, Anton Ego's flashback, on the device with access to online video (see "Opening Activity" below).
- Be aware of any food-related allergies among your class as you prepare to eat during this session. You may wish to check all ingredients in food for this session for common allergens such as peanuts, tree nuts, gluten, and/or dairy.

## Opening Activity

Welcome children as they enter by saying, "Welcome, NAME!" and inviting them to choose a place in the carpet square circle.

After all children are seated, pass out one M&M (or other suitable candy) to each child, inviting them to eat it as you give it to them.

After everyone has eaten their M&M, **ASK:** How was your M&M? What did it taste like? Do you like this candy? If not, what is your favorite candy?

**SAY:** M&M's have been around a long time. It is one of the most popular candies of all time! Lots of people have eaten M&M's as snacks, treats, gifts in their Christmas stocking or Easter basket, or concessions at a movie theater.

**ASK:** Do you have any special memories of M&M's?

**SAY:** Sometimes food can remind us of special times in our lives. Maybe we only eat a certain food once a year, like birthday cake on our birthdays. Or maybe we have a special meal at Christmastime, or on New Year's Day.

**ASK:** What are some special foods you eat at a specific time of year?

Use your device to play the clip from *Ratatouille* of Anton Ego's memory.

**ASK:** How did this movie clip make you feel?

**SAY:** When the character in this movie, Anton Ego, tasted the yummy ratatouille dish, he was reminded of how his mom used to make ratatouille for him when he was a child. After tasting that dish, Anton Ego remembered his childhood and how much his mom loved him. The food was a powerful reminder to him. The church has a special meal that we eat together; that is called Communion.

**ASK:** How does our church celebrate Communion? Why do we share the Communion meal together?

**SAY:** Communion is a reminder that God loves us and wants to be close to us. When Jesus was born as a baby, that was another reminder that God loves us and wants to be close to us.

### *Opening Prayer*

Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *Holy God, may the story of Christmas nourish our spirits, like food nourishes our bodies. Help us be sustained by your love and your Word, and help us make the world a better place for all those who are hungry. Amen.*

## **Choice of Activities**

### *A Place at the Table*

Gather children at a table.

**SAY:** In the Bible, there are lots of stories of people eating together. And there are not many stories of people eating alone.

**ASK:** Who are your favorite people to share meals with? Where do you like to eat with those people? What do you like to eat?

**SAY:** Christmastime is one of the biggest times in the year for gathering with family and friends and loved ones. Holiday meals are important times for spending time together, telling stories, and remembering together.

Give each child a plain piece of cardstock and markers.

Direct children to draw a place setting on their paper. A place setting could be different for people from different cultures, so make sure to encourage the children to draw what their table looks like when they eat with loved ones.

Around the edge of the paper, invite the children to draw pictures or write words that express how they feel about gathering with loved ones. You may wish to suggest that they include Christmas greetings or prayers in the drawing too.

After the children are done decorating their paper, follow the directions on the heatless laminate sheets to laminate the paper.

**SAY:** When you take this place mat home, you can share it with your loved ones. Tell them about the drawings and words you wrote on the paper. Maybe they'll want to make their own! The most important thing about this place mat is that it reminds you of sharing holiday meals with people you love, just as Jesus taught us to do.

### *Taste Testing Christmas Cookies*

Have children wash their hands. Then invite them to gather around the table or workspace you have prepared.

**SAY:** One of the main tastes of Christmas is desserts like Christmas cookies. All over the world, people have different styles of sweets that are special to this time of year.

**ASK:** What are some of your favorite Christmas cookies (or desserts)?

Give each child a plate with an assortment of Christmas cookies.

As a group, taste each kind of Christmas cookie one at a time. Point out any symbols or special colors on the cookies (for example, stars, church, cross, poinsettia, and so on). Using a paper and pencil, record the children's thoughts about each style of cookie as you taste it.

After the tasting is done, have children wash their hands again. Give each child a plate and a couple of knives or spoons. Give each child two or three cookies to decorate with the decorating supplies.

**SAY:** When we share special foods with each other, we are sharing our hearts with each other. Sharing food is like sharing a special message with someone we love.

**ASK:** How can you decorate your cookies so they will share a message about God's love or Jesus's birth? What kinds of colors or symbols could you use to decorate?

You may wish to work with your church coffee hour coordinator to share the cookies the children decorate with the rest of the church.

### *Snack Packs for the Hungry*

If possible, work with your church's outreach or feeding ministry group to gather supplies. Many organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness or seniors in need will publish lists of items they want to receive to share with their clients.

Gather children together around the items you will use to create a packet.

**SAY:** All year round, but especially during the Advent season, Christians try to help those in need. As we are thinking about people who do not have enough food, we can do something to help them.

**ASK:** How can you help people who need food? Have you ever helped feed people before? When? What did you do?

Have the children help form an assembly line with the items to put into a packet. You may wish to assign small groups of children a task that they will do together.

When the packets are assembled, invite the children to gather in a circle around the packets. Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *Holy One, may the food we share in these packets go to help someone in need. Help us make a world where no one goes hungry. Bless the people who receive this food, and may they get what they need to live a healthy and whole life. Amen.*

### ***Communion***

In accordance with your congregation's practices, you may wish to partake of Communion together. Talk to a minister about how best to observe this ritual with the children in your care.

## **Closing Prayer**

Gather the children in a circle. Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *God, you are so good to us, and we are grateful for the food of this world that nourishes our bodies. As we taste the special foods of Christmas, help us remember those who don't have enough food to eat. Help us take care of our neighbors, as you taught us to do. Amen.*

Dismiss each child from the session by offering them a blessing as they leave. **SAY:** NAME, may you taste love and community in the world this week. Amen.

# SESSION 4

---

## DO YOU FEEL WHAT I FEEL?

### Lesson Objectives

Children will . . .

- explore the sense of touch as an important sense for learning about the world.
- be exposed to the concept of consent and setting healthy boundaries for touch.
- consider how they can be helping hands in their lives throughout the whole year.

### To Prepare

#### *Gather Materials*

- Carpet squares
- Bible
- Crayons
- Wax paper
- Old towels
- Scissors
- Iron
- Cheese grater
- Green construction paper (different shades are OK)
- Markers
- Glue
- Paper plate
- Five or six shoeboxes
- Assortment of Christmas-themed items (wrapping paper, ribbon and bows, cookies, mittens, a branch of a Christmas tree, string lights, and so on)

#### *Prepare*

- Set carpet squares in a circle on the floor.
- Cover a table or workspace with plastic or a tablecloth.
- Make an example of the melted wax art (see “The Heart-Warming Season” below).
  - ◇ Cut out large (at least 6” wide) heart shapes from the wax paper, making sure they are identical in size. Make enough for two for each child.
  - ◇ If your group has primarily younger children, or if it would save you time, you may choose to grate the crayons before the session.
- Cut the center out of paper plates, leaving only the ring of the ridged edge.
- Put Christmas-themed items in the shoe boxes, one item in each box. Close the box.

## Opening Activity

As children enter the space, offer them a choice of a high-five, fist-bump, or hug as a greeting. As you do the chosen action say, "Welcome, NAME!" Then invite them to choose a rug square and sit.

**SAY:** During Advent, we have been talking about our senses. Our senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. All of these senses help us understand our world. Our senses are part of what makes us human! When Jesus was born as a little baby, he had a body, just like us. He had senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. As a baby, and then as he grew, he used his senses to learn about the world. Touch is especially important for babies because that is how they know they are safe with their grown-ups. Babies know the feeling of a soft blanket, of a parent's warm hands, of their food, and are figuring out the feeling of having a body!

**ASK:** What is a texture that you like to touch and feel with your hands? (Lead answers toward things like "soft wool," "grass in the summer," "my stuffed animal," "the water where I go fishing.")

**SAY:** Touch is important to us, like how hugs and holding hands show care for each other! It is also important to know when we like to be hugged, or when we don't want to hold hands. We can ask someone, "May I give you a hug?" or "May I hold your hand?" And it is always OK to say, "I don't feel like touching right now," and set your healthy boundary. And if you need to talk with someone about setting a healthy boundary, find a trusted grown-up who will listen to you and help you.

**ASK:** Who is a trusted grown-up in your life that you can talk to?

**SAY:** When Jesus was a baby, he had lots of grown-ups in his life who cared for him. His mother Mary and his father Joseph, the shepherds who visited him in the manger, the wise ones who traveled from afar to meet him, and probably friends and neighbors in his community too. We are going to read the story of one person who cared about Jesus and knew right away that Jesus was a special baby.

Invite a confident reader to read aloud Luke 2:25-32 from a Bible.

**ASK:** Where did touch show up in this story?

**SAY:** Simeon had hoped for a long time to see the Messiah, the special one sent from God to the world. And when he met the baby Jesus, he was overjoyed! And he took baby Jesus in his arms and blessed him and praised God!

## ***Opening Prayer***

Invite the children to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *Holy One, thank you for giving us our senses that help us understand the world. Help us use our sense of touch with kindness and gentleness and consent. Show us in this Christmas season how we can spread love in your world. Amen.*

## **Choice of Activities**

### ***What's in the Box?***

Gather the children in a circle on the floor. Hide the shoeboxes with Christmas items behind you.

**SAY:** One of the most important senses we have is touch. Touch tells us about the world. We feel the sun on our faces or the cold wind to help us know what the weather is that day. We feel a warm hug that tells us someone cares for us. We feel a sting that tells us not to get too close to a bee or a burn that tells us not to touch the hot stove.

**ASK:** What are some things that we know by touch?

**SAY:** There are a lot of aspects of Christmas that we can know by touch too. Just for a minute, we will take away the sense of sight and focus on our sense of touch to tell us what Christmas item is in the box.

One by one, pass a closed shoebox around the circle of children. Have them close their eyes, then open the box and help them put their hands inside. After a moment of feeling the contents of the box, close the box. Tell them to remember their guess about what is in the box. When all children have felt the contents of one box, ask them to guess what was in the box. Repeat with all the boxes.

**ASK:** What was it like to try to figure out what was in each box without looking? How did you figure out what item was in each box?

**SAY:** Some items that we have around at Christmastime are so familiar that we can tell what they are just by touching them! Touch gives us important information about the world and is an important part of our celebration of Christmas too. Jesus came into the world as a human baby, so he relied on his sense of touch to understand the world as he grew.

### ***Helping Hands Are Evergreen***

Have children gather around a table or workspace.

**SAY:** Christmas is a reminder that Jesus came into the world to love people and help people. As we get closer and closer to Christmas, people often think more about lending a helping hand in their community.

**ASK:** How do you act as a helper at home? at school? at church? in your community? What activities do you do to help?

**SAY:** It is really good to help family, friends, and neighbors during the holidays, but we should be doing that all throughout the year! As a reminder to lend a helping hand through the whole year and not just at Christmastime, we are going to make an evergreen wreath. Well, we won't be using evergreen trees, but we will be using green paper that will remind us of evergreens.

Divide children into pairs and give each pair two pieces of green construction paper, markers, and scissors.

Have the children take turns tracing their partner's hand on the green construction paper. Then direct the children to cut out the drawing of their hand.

Direct the children to write one or two activities they do to help others on their hand cutout.

Using the paper plate ring as a base, have the children glue their green cutout hands to the ring, forming a wreath. Take care to position the hands so the writing can be seen.

After the glue dries, hang the wreaths in your classroom or around your church, making sure they stay up longer than Christmas as a reminder to be helpers all year round.

### *The Heart-Warming Season*

Gather children in a circle.

**SAY:** During Advent and Christmas, we have a lot of feelings. Not just emotions like sadness, happiness, wonder, or joy, but touch-feelings. The feeling of holding a hand, of the prickle of a Christmas tree, of wrapping paper on presents, of holding candles in church.

**ASK:** What are some of the touch-feelings you associate with Christmas?

**SAY:** One way that we sometimes talk about feelings in this season is by talking about "warm fuzzies." Warm fuzzies are how some people describe feeling love or comfort.

**ASK:** When do you feel "warm fuzzies"?

**SAY:** Staying warm is important for all of us. I'm not just talking about the temperature outside, but also about how our heart feels. Is our heart warm and kind and generous? We are going to do a craft that can remind us to keep our heart warm, even so warm it can melt!

Using a supervised outlet near the workspace, plug in the iron to heat up. Always have an adult watching closely when using an iron in the presence of children.

Have children gather around a table or prepared workspace. You may wish to set up a spot for each child beforehand.

Give each child two towels and two wax paper hearts. Direct the children to place one wax paper heart on one towel.

If you have already grated the crayons, invite the children to pick some crayon shavings to scatter on their wax paper. Then, place the second wax paper cutout over the first one, sandwiching the shavings in the middle. Put the second towel on top of the wax paper.

Using an iron, iron all over the towels so that the heat permeates through to the wax paper and melts the crayons.

Let the craft cool and dry. When the wax paper hearts have cooled, you may choose to punch a hole in the heart to loop a string through to make an ornament or window decoration.

## **Closing Prayer**

Gather the children in a circle. Invite them to pray with you.

**PRAY:** *God, may your hand guide us as we get ready to welcome the baby Jesus. Help us share encouraging hugs, joyous high-fives, and loving smiles with each other, our family, friends, neighbors, and world during this Christmas season. Amen.*

Dismiss each child from the session by offering them a blessing as they leave. **SAY:** NAME, may love surround you in the world this week.

### ***P.S.***

But wait! You didn't cover all of the five senses! Where is the sense of smell?! Matt Rawle shares a little afterward in the main book about smell. In fact, he is sure that there were lots of interesting aromas when Jesus was born and laid in the manger next to all the animals! And, in ancient times, people observed the rituals of preparing a burnt offering to God, thinking that certain smells would please and honor God.

If you feel led, you may choose to explore the sense of smell with the group of children in your care. Maybe you will find some gold, frankincense, and myrrh to smell. Maybe you could bake together as a group, enjoying the aroma of rising bread or gingerbread cookies. Maybe you could make orange and clove pomanders, placing them around your house to remind you of the aromas of the season. Whatever you choose to do, four or five senses included, you have what it takes to help children explore Advent and Christmas with their bodies. Remember that Jesus was born in a human body and had human experiences, living among humanity and exploring the world with his senses. Let us do the same in this season when we celebrate his birth.