

Advent Ideas: Lectionary Themes Year B

Advent Lectionary Readings

This year's Advent readings at first glance look difficult and definitely not child-friendly! However, a closer look reveals several themes, including one which caught my eye: the Isaiah readings in particular reveal a God of the unexpected – God doing unexpected things, especially in the midst of injustice, destruction and turmoil – very appropriate for our time.

The other theme in the Isaiah readings is preparing, waiting... which is picked up in the Gospel readings.

The following is a program of visual images and linked stories, songs and activities that could be used throughout Advent on the theme: God of the unexpected. These suggestions can be used in several ways:

- to set up a visual display, e.g. in the foyer or the sanctuary
- ☉ as a visual focus for school daily devotions
- ☉ as a prayer space at Kids' Club
- ☉ as a focal point for the unexpected which can be found in the readings for the day
- as a starting point for children's lessons or sermons
- as a source of related activities for your children's program.

As always, these suggestions are meant as a starting point for your own creativity. Substitute your own songs on the theme, tell your own stories... For alternate song suggestions, see David MacGregor's excellent website [see page 10 for details].

ADVENT 1: Isaiah 64: 1-9

Theme: In God's seeming absence, God does the unexpected...

Visual display:

A collection of filthy rags, shrivelled up leaves, with a beautiful piece of pottery in the middle



Light the Advent Candle: Pray:

Surprising God, God of the unexpected, we invite you into the mess, anger and despair of our lives. Surprise us with beauty and with hope.

Story: *Petar's Song* by Pratima Mitchell [published by Francis Nelson; available through Unichurch Books]: in the midst of turmoil and disruption, in the absence of his father, young refugee Petar rediscovers hope and his musical ability at Christmas time.

Alternate story: *Heart of the Tiger* by Glenda Millard [available from Dymocks \$14.95]: Out of death comes life to a parched land

Activities: *Focus:* Immanuel: God is still with us...

Activities continued...

- ◆ **Cards with loving messages:** e.g. God loves you... and so do I...
- ◆ **Surprise parcels:** Cover matchboxes or small boxes with Christmas wrapping paper, put something surprising inside (wrapped sweets, a small Christmas decoration or gift made by the children, a message of hope; a sweet with a message, a card with a pressed flower, a small bundle of lavender tied with ribbon ...)
- ◆ **Clay or playdough:** Children make models of something that appeals to them (or something surprising, unexpected), experiment, modelling and re-modelling until they get something with which they are satisfied
- ◆ **Plaster of Paris figures:** make your own or take the easy way out and buy ready-made shapes for children to paint: Christmas decorations or baby in a manger

Songs: How shall I call you? (ATN 43)
Change my heart O God (You are the potter, I am the clay...)

Alternate theme: *Waiting, signs, preparation...*

Mark 13: 24-37: end times, the fig tree (looking for signs); waiting and preparing (talk about waiting for something but you don't know exactly when it will happen, e.g. the birth of a baby, farmers waiting for rain)

Visual display: Baby clothes and other items you would prepare while waiting for the birth of a baby; pictures of parched earth

Story: *Two Summers* by John Hefferman [available from Dymocks \$14.95] A boy compares two summers on his outback property [CBCA award winner]

Alternate story: *Heart of the Tiger* by Glenda Millard [available from Dymocks \$14.95]: Out of death comes life to a parched land

Christmas Story: *Three Wise Women* by Mary Hoffman

Activities:

Prepare Christmas decorations: stars and angels (the star was a sign for the wise men in the east; the angels were a sign for the shepherds)



ADVENT 2: Isaiah 40: 1-11

Theme: Comfort in the midst of trouble

Visual display:



rough ground, withered grass, wilted and dead flowers with picture of shepherd carrying a lamb, or ewe with lamb,

or mother with baby in the midst of the symbols of decay

Light the Advent Candle: Pray:

God of unexpected comfort, we invite you to accompany us on the journey. Enable us to know your presence, smoothing the way. Surprise those who grieve or despair with your enfolding arms of comfort.

Story:

Instead of a story, invite people to listen to 2 songs from Handel's Messiah: "Comfort Ye" and "He shall feed his flock." Invite people to close their eyes as they listen and build up pictures in their minds of the imagery of the shepherd, etc. [If possible, get hold of a copy of *The Young Messiah* – a more up-beat version; may still be available from Word]

Activities: *Focus:* smoothing the way

◆ **Sand play:** hills, valleys, smooth the path...

◆ **Plaster of Paris** sheep to paint, wooden clothes peg shepherd (dress with scraps of material)

◆ **Wooden shapes:** use sand paper to smooth the rough edges. If you have access to a jig saw, cut out simple shapes – triangles, squares, circles – for the children to sand paper, then glue on a picture of a shepherd carrying a lamb, a ewe and lamb, or a mother and baby inside the shape.

◆ **Press flowers** to use later for a dried flower card, or use already dried flowers and grasses for simple gift tags. *Message:* Grass withers and flowers fade but God's love lasts forever...

◆ **Teddy bear cards:** Make simple cards with a teddy bear sticker on each one. *Message:* A hug from God for you today...

◆ **Arms of comfort:** Cut long strips of paper or cardboard; children trace their hands on paper, cut them out and stick them to each end of the "arms". *Message:* God wants to give you a hug today... Children can wrap the arms around themselves, or other people.

Songs to sing:

Comfort, Comfort (Robin Mann, ATN 25)

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Advent Ideas: Lectionary Themes Year B continued...

Advent Lectionary Readings *continued*

ADVENT 2: *Songs continued...*
Wherever I go...(ATW 508)

Alternate Reading: Mark 1: 1-8:
Theme: Good news: John the Baptist calls people to repent

ADVENT 3: *Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11*
Theme: Restoration and justice out of the ruins

Visual display:
broken bricks, bits of concrete, sand, concrete dust, bent nails, broken glass etc. with a pot plant containing a bright flower set in the middle (alternatively: a picture or model of a bride and groom set in the midst of the rubble)



Photo montage: cities in ruins, demolished buildings, ancient ruins, newspaper photos of the recent earthquake in Pakistan, the tsunami in Asia or the tornado in New Orleans.

Light the Advent Candle: Pray:
God of unexpected restoration, justice and peace, we invite you into the rubble of our lives today. Restore our broken dreams, bring justice to the poor and peace to the broken-hearted.

Story: Light the Lamps by Margaret Wild (this book is excellent but out of print: try your local library): a childless mother finds peace and restoration through the child Jesus

Activities:

- ◆ **Make simple candles:** *Christingle* (see KN Sept 2003 p24), *Tealight candles* (see KN Sept 2001 p20)
- ◆ **Tealight candles** float well in the glass lids from Moccona Coffee jars; use some glass-decorating paints (available from craft shops or Premier Art Supplies, Gilles St Adelaide) to paint small flowers, Christmas baubles or stars on the outside of the glass.
- ◆ **Jigsaw puzzles:** bringing order out of chaos/brokenness
- ◆ **Building** with blocks, Duplo or milk cartons
- ◆ **Build a City of Peace:** Collect a variety of recyclables: boxes, tins, plastic containers, lids, paper, cardboard, material, coloured foil... Invite children to imagine what a city of peace would look like and set up a project whereby they can construct it cooperatively...
 - ◆ [See also: **Isaiah 11: 6-9**]
- ◆ **Plant seeds** in a barren patch of ground or waste ground near your

building. Ask children to watch out for people's reactions when the plants appear and start to bloom.

- ◆ Dress paper dolls as bride and bride-groom

Music/Songs:

O Broken Town of Bethlehem
(AlterNativity book: Changing Stables)
Mary's Child (AHB)

Alternate Themes:

Luke 1: 47-55: the *Magnificat*. God chose the young, the ordinary, not the "special" to be the mother of God's son. See the VIC/TAS CECM website for some resources on this theme.

Visual display: Photo montage:
Collect photos of all the 14 -17 year old girls in your congregation/ families/ community group, and photos of current well-known expectant mothers (Princess Mary of Denmark, Bec Cartwright, Tina Arena, Katie Holmes...) *Caption:* Who would you choose to be the mother of God's son?

John 1: 6-8, 18-28: John the Baptist the messenger: prepare the way; John testifies to the Light

Activities:

- ◆ Candles as above;
- ◆ Christmas decorations (in preparation for the coming birth...)

ADVENT 4: Luke 1: 26-38: The angel's announcement to Mary ... Elizabeth is Mary's companion on the journey
Theme: God chose the young, the ordinary...and the barren (Elizabeth)

Visual Display: Birth announcements, baby photos, items collected to prepare for the birth of a baby (nappies, safety pins, baby wipes, baby clothes...), baby photo albums.

See if you can get photocopies of birth announcements of children in your congregation/ families/ group; parents often cut the birth announcement out of the paper and keep it in the child's photo album.

Enlarge for ease of reading.
Photo montage as for the *Magnificat* (see above).

Light the Advent Candle: Pray:
God of the unexpected, we invite you to surprise us again with the revelation of your extraordinary love. Open our eyes to see you in unexpected places, in the young, the old and the ordinary.

Story: Mary and Elizabeth's stories as in Luke's gospel; or dramatised: bring out the unexpectedness of Mary and Elizabeth's pregnancies.



Activities:

- ◆ **Card Game:** Happy Families
- ◆ **Conga line:** companions on a journey
- ◆ **Angel crafts** (See KN Spring 2004, Sept 2003, Sept 2002, Sept 2001)

Songs: Small World
One in the Family of God
Wherever I go...(ATW 508)

Alternate Theme: Journeying together: Mary and Elizabeth were companions on the journey

Christmas Songs

Christmas Music Website

For a comprehensive selection of contemporary Christian Music resources linked with the Revised Common Lectionary, see **David MacGregor's** excellent website:

Together to Celebrate:

<http://www.dovenetq.net.au/~macgd/index.html>

Resources especially for **children** are marked

kids! (in red)

Specific songs are listed for each of the readings for each of the four weeks of Advent. A great resource.

Seasons of the Spirit

Seasons of the Spirit song books and CDs are available for purchase without having to subscribe to the whole curriculum.

Available from **MediaCom**:
Toll free: **1800 811 311**

www.mediacom.org.au

Books 1-4: **\$14.98** each including CD

Some songs which fit the Advent themes in Advent Year B include:

Seasons Book 2:

This Joy (tune: *This Little Light of Mine*): joy, hope, peace, faith themes
Advent News – Isaiah themes

Seasons Book 3:

Christmas Bells

Also:

Like a Candle Burning: from *Living the Legend* (NCYC Tasmania):
Restoration theme

Faith, hope & love: *Altogether OK*

God Gives... Songs for Kids Book 4:

Follow the star
Jesus the only king
The special light of Christmas