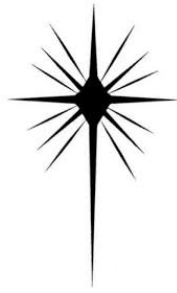


O come let us adore Him!



*A resource to help us pray at the Crib
at home or in church this Christmas*



THE CHURCH UNION



The Society

SUPPORTED BY  FORWARDINFAITH

Introduction

The Church of England's campaign theme for this Christmas is 'Comfort and Joy'. With the continuing pandemic and the affect it has had on our life together this year, comfort and joy are certainly needed at this time. For Christians we approach the crib at Christmas and see there, lying in the manger an image of Jesus – our comfort and joy. One of the names given to Jesus is Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us', and we are reminded that in Jesus, God took on human flesh to share in our hopes and joys, our fears and sorrows.

This Christmas why not set up a nativity scene, or crib, in your home as a focus for your prayers during this holy season? Nativity scenes can take many forms from models with moveable characters including shepherds, animals and Magi, through to scenes that focus on Jesus, Mary and Joseph or a simple image on a Christmas card. Whatever you use, put it in a place where you will see it, and can reflect of the message that it conveys – that God is at the centre of our lives. The manger, at the centre of the nativity scene, helps us to contemplate the mystery of God's love who revealed himself in the poverty and simplicity of the stable in Bethlehem.

The first recorded nativity scene was set up in 1223 by St Francis in Italy. He wanted something that would focus people's minds on Jesus and the mystery of the Incarnation; to place people's emphasis on Jesus rather than secular materialism. His first nativity scene was made up of real people and animals, and the popularity of this devotion spread and over time the living participants were replaced by statues.

To set up a crib at home can be a simple but effective way of talking about Christmas and the Christian faith to children. The crib can help us all to understand the meaning of the true Christmas, because it speaks of humility and the merciful goodness of Christ, who "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor" (*II Corinthians 8:9*). His poverty enriches those who embrace it and Christmas brings joy and peace to those who, as the shepherds, accept in Bethlehem the words of the angel: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (*Luke 2:12*).

In this booklet you will find some prayers that you can use as you contemplate the wondrous gift of Jesus this Christmas as you reflect and meditate on your nativity scene at home, or the scene at your local church.

On pages 9-12 you will find some prayers and activities that are suitable for use with children at Christmas.

May the coming of the Christ-child be your comfort and joy this Christmastide.

Prayers as you prepare the Crib

It might be part of your Advent preparation that you prepare the crib over Advent, and use the preparation of the crib as part of your preparation to welcome Jesus into your heart over Christmas, and meditate on each element of the crib. You might find these prayers helpful.

The stable:

Lord, we remember the stable. A cold, draughty, dirty place: not where we'd expect to find the only Son of God; not the sort of place we'd want to find any new born baby. We remember, this Christmas time, those without proper shelter because of poverty, homelessness, or war.

The animals:

Lord, we remember the animals who are part of the Christmas story: the oxen, the sheep, the tired donkey, who remind us that you have entrusted us with the care of your creation. We remember, this Christmas time, the ways in which we have exploited our world and ask for your help in using its resources wisely and well.

Mary and Joseph:

Lord, we remember their anxious journey to Bethlehem, their worry at finding no room at the inn; the excitement and fear at the forthcoming birth; their hopeful longing for your coming. We remember, this Christmas time, those who are anxious and fearful, who long for your hope and comfort to come into their lives.

The shepherds:

Lord, we remember how, watching their sheep on the cold, dark hillside, they were surprised by the warmth and light and joy of the angel song announcing your birth. We remember, this Christmas time, those who feel sorrowful or lonely who wait to hear your good news of love and joy and peace.

The Christ-child:

Lord, we remember your coming into our world, and into the life of humankind, as a tiny, helpless child. We thank you that you came to share our joys and sorrows and set us free from fear and despair. We remember, this Christmas time, all the children of our world, in need of love, food, and freedom.

At Epiphany – the Magi:

Lord, we remember the long journey they made to an unknown destination; a journey prompted and guided by the mysterious star they believed would lead them to a king worthy of worship. We remember, this Christmas time, our own, often perplexing, journey through life and ask that we might be led to you.

Dedication of the crib

Traditionally the image of the baby Jesus is placed in the crib after Midnight Mass, and you might want to say these prayers of dedication of the crib at that point or on Christmas morning.

A blessed day has dawned upon us.
Come and worship the Lord: for a great light has shone on the world.

From the prophet Isaiah:

The Lord himself will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means 'God is with us'.

God of every nation and people,
from the very beginning of creation
you have made manifest your love:
when our need for a Saviour was great
you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary.
To our lives he brings joy and peace,
justice, mercy and love.

Lord,
bless all who look upon this manger;
may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus,
and raise up our thoughts to him,
who is God-with-us and Saviour of all,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

If you are placing the image of the baby Jesus in the crib at this point, you might want to say the following prayer:

Lord, we remember your coming into our world, and into the life of humankind, as a tiny, helpless child. We thank you that you came to share our joys and sorrows and set us free from fear and despair. We remember, this Christmas time, all the children of our world, in need of love, food, and freedom.

Prayers around the Crib

To you, O Christ, Word of the Father,
we offer our lowly prayers and humble thanks;
for love of our human race
you most wonderfully chose to be born of Mary,
and to take our nature as nevermore to lay it by;
so that we might be born again by your Spirit
and restored in the image of God;
to whom, one blessed Trinity,
be given all honour, might, majesty and power,
now and for ever.
Amen.

O God the Son, highest and holiest,
who humbled yourself to share our birth and our death:
bring us with the shepherds and the wise men
to kneel before your holy cradle,
that we may come to sing with your angels
your glorious praises in heaven;
where with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign,
God, world without end.
Amen.

We pray you, Lord, to purify our hearts,
that they may be worthy to become your dwelling place.
Let us never fail to find room for you,
but come and abide in us,
that we also may abide in you,
for as at this time you were born into the world for us,
and live and reign, King of kings and Lord of lords,
now and for ever.
Amen.

Lord, by the song of the angels
you disclosed your birth to your own people,
and by the leading of a star
you revealed your glory to strangers.
Teach us to know you now,
and to make you known to all.
Amen.

The kings, Lord,
brought myrrh, frankincense and gold.
Lord, we have nothing of our own to bring;
we bring you what you have given:
our lives for your life.
Amen.



Lord, let me kneel before thy miracle.
An infant in a stable
on a human mother's breast,
from all eternity thine only begotten Son,
thy Word from before beginning,
God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God,
of his own choice, of thine own purpose,
made mortal man.

Christ, let me kneel before the wonder of thy Glory
thus made manifest to all flesh;
to be made one with thy lowliness,
one with thine obedience,
one with thy majesty of love,
in a union, that by thy grace
shall know no separation
unto the ages of ages. Amen.
(Eric Milner-White)



Lord Jesus Christ,
your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God.
Amen.



Other prayers for Christmas

Devoutly we approach your cradle, Lord, to find the one of whom the prophets spoke, and here behold the mighty God of thunders lying helpless in the straw. O grant us some of thy humility that we may conquer mightily the reign of sin within us. And grant us, too, the protection of your gentle mother, whose tender eye and loving heart attend your every wish. Amen



O sweet Child of Bethlehem,
grant that we may share with all our hearts
in this profound mystery of Christmas.
Put into the hearts of men and women this peace
for which they sometimes seek so desperately
and which you alone can give to them.
Help them to know one another better,
and to live as brothers and sisters,
children of the same Father.
Reveal to them also your beauty, holiness and purity.
Awaken in their hearts
love and gratitude for your infinite goodness.
Join them all together in your love.
And give us your heavenly peace. Amen.
(Pope John XXIII)



Good Jesu, born as at this time, a little child for love of us; be thou born in me, that I may be a little child in love of thee; and hang on the love as on my mother's bosom, trustfully, lovingly, peacefully; hushing all my cares in love of thee.
(Edward Bouverie Pusey)



Holy Jesus,
by being born one of us,
and lying humbly in a manger,
you show how much God loves the world.
Let the light of your love always shine in our hearts,
until we reach our home in heaven,
and see you on your throne of glory.
Amen.



Loving Jesus,
you were born in a stable but worshipped by the angels.
Be with (N. and) all who are lonely,
and with all who feel distant from celebrations.
Be for us a living hope that lightens their hearts.
Amen.



Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him,
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin;
grant that we being regenerate,
and made the children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit;
through the same our Lord Jesus Christ,
who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit
ever, one God, world without end. Amen. (*Book of Common Prayer*)



Prayers for Epiphany

Almighty and everlasting God,
who drew the Gentiles you your brightness
and made known to them the one who is our true light,
the bright and morning star:
fill the whole world, we pray, with your glory,
and by the radiance of your splendour
reveal yourself to your faithful people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ-child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our journey's ending - Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Prayers and devotions for use with children



Prayers as you prepare the crib

These can be used alongside the prayers that are found on page 3

The stable:

Take a small piece of straw or grass and hold it as you say:

There was no soft pillow to rest your head
earth and straw, your manger bed.

We pray and think of those today
who have no safe place where they can stay. **Amen.**

Place the straw or grass in the crib.

The animals:

Draw your favourite animal and hold it as you say:

Animals greeted your Son's holy birth
donkeys and sheep representing everything on earth.

You made the whole world and your love is for all
help us care for your creation; the great and the small. **Amen.**

Place your drawing in the crib.

Mary and Joseph:

Find a photograph of some family members you are unable to spend Christmas with and hold it as you say:

Mary and Joseph travelled through danger
to finally have their baby in the manger.

They were all on their own that first Christmas day.

we remember our family who are far from us today. **Amen.**

Place your photograph in the crib.

The shepherds:

Choose something which makes you happy and hold it as you say:

The shepherds had a special part to play in your story
from a quiet hillside to angels announcing God's glory.

They rushed down to see the new-born baby boy.

Help us share with others, Christmas love and joy. **Amen.**

Place your object in the crib.

The Christ-child:

Fold up a newspaper image/story of those in need as you say:

Father God we thank you for Jesus' birth

for the promise of love you have for all on earth.

We pray for those who don't have enough food, safety or shelter
please be with them now, today and forever. **Amen.**

Place the newspaper in the crib.

At Epiphany – the Magi:

Use a star from your decorations and hold it as you say:

The wise men followed a star to the king

not knowing just quite what his kingdom would bring.

At the beginning of this year we don't know what it holds

we ask you to guide us each day as it unfolds. **Amen.**

Place the star in the crib.



Dedication of the Crib

Light a candle and place it near the crib or switch on a lamp nearby.

It's Christmas day!

A brand-new day: with the new light of dawn!

A brand-new baby: with new light for us all!

Help us to live this day in your light and show your light to others. **Amen.**

From the prophet Isaiah:

The Lord himself will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means 'God is with us'.

'God with us' is a reminder that God who is everywhere, has come to be somewhere.

Thank you, God, for sending Jesus, your Son, to earth to be with us.

Thank you, God for sending Jesus, your Son, to be with me today.

Give yourself a big hug as you say.

God with us. God everywhere but somewhere. God close to us. God with me.

Place your hand on or near the crib scene.

We ask you, God, to bless this crib,

we ask you, God, to bless us as we gather around it.

Every time we stop and see this scene

we ask that you would fill us with your blessing again. **Amen.**

Prayers around the crib

This is a moment where we see salvation and celebration: we celebrate. *Put on a party hat.*

This is a moment where the whole world shines: we share in your light. *Place some tinsel around the crib.*

This is a moment where heaven and earth meet together with a loud bang: we are part of that story. *Pull a cracker with someone else.*

This is a moment where shepherds and kings gather together to greet your Son: we greet you, and we greet one another. *Open a Christmas card.*

This is a moment where we are given the greatest gift: we thank you. *Open a small Christmas present.*

This is a moment where we can see, hear, feel and taste your wonder: we sense your presence. *Eat a small Christmas treat.*

This is a moment where angels sing your glory: we sing with them. *Sing the first verse of 'Away in a manger'*

Other prayers and activities to use during Christmas

Use these short prompts for prayer/action each day from Christmas to Epiphany (ideally move the figures representing the wise men a short distance each day too as they move towards the crib and finally arrive on 6 January):

On the first day of Christmas...look at the stars and pray for God's guidance.

On the second day of Christmas...go for a walk and remember the wise men's journey, pray for all those who are far from home today.

On the third day of Christmas...draw a crown or use a party hat from a Christmas cracker to make into a card for someone to thank them for your Christmas gifts.

On the fourth day of Christmas...if you are able, go and light a candle in your church or light one at home.

On the fifth day of Christmas...think of five things you have done in the past year that you want to say sorry to God for.

On the sixth day of Christmas...write down, and thank God for, the blessings you have received in the past year.

On the seventh day of Christmas...write down seven things you want to learn about, help with or do differently this new year.

On the eighth day of Christmas...have a 'phone call or send a message to someone to let them know you are thinking of them.

On the ninth day of Christmas...think of the place you would most like to journey to. Talk to your family about this and make up a story about your own journey there.

On the tenth day of Christmas...find Bethlehem on a map and pray for the people who live there today.

On the eleventh day of Christmas...prepare a gift you can take to someone and pray for them.

On the twelfth day of Christmas...safely deliver the gift you prepared and let the person know you have been praying for them.

The cover illustration is the crib at St Helen's Church, Hemsworth

The photograph on page 9 is by Samantha Burgoyne

The resources for children are written by Clare Williams

This resource is produced by The Church Union and The Society, which is supported by Forward in Faith.