

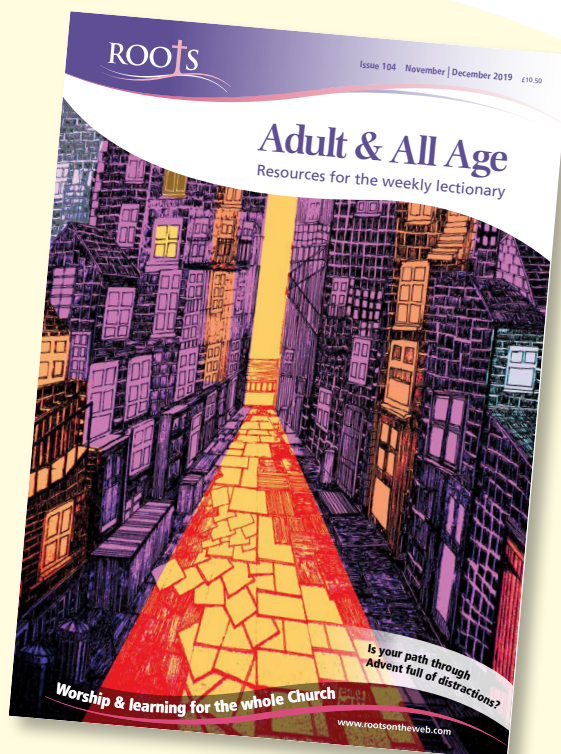
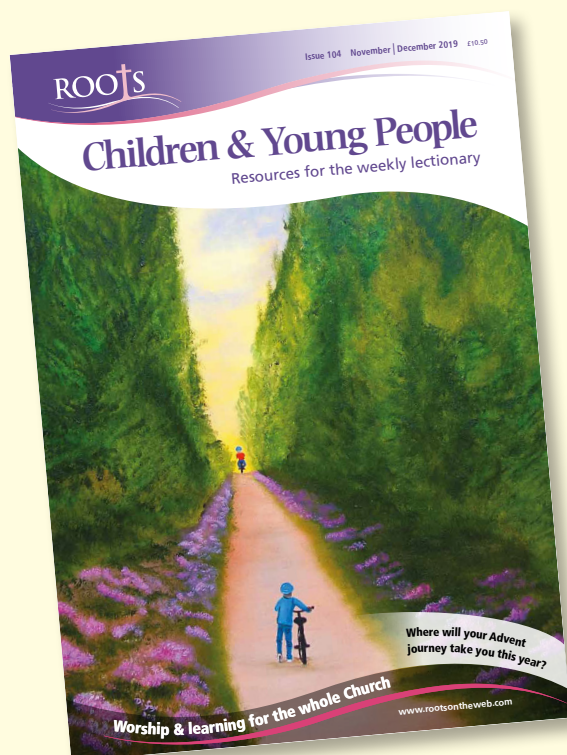


FREE sample week

15-21 December 2019

Adult & All Age resources

Enriching worship and learning
with adults, families and all ages



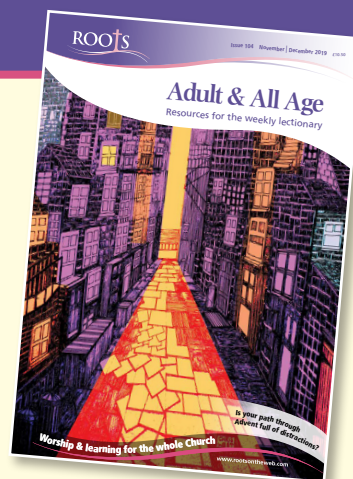
Children & Young People resources

Flexible, engaging materials for
toddlers to teens

Adult & All Age resources

The ROOTS worship and learning resources:

- offer brand new resources, all year round
- are used by ordained and lay leaders to prepare all styles of worship
- engage individuals and groups in different contexts – on Sundays and through the week.



For Children & Young People resources, go to page 8.

Free sample week: key highlights

Lectionary Bible readings

The ROOTS resources follow the Revised Common Lectionary. Where the Church of England's *Common Worship* Lectionary differs, ROOTS provides materials online.

Prayers

A variety of prayers for different times within worship. Welsh translations of all the prayers are also available online.

15-21 December 2019

What do you see?

Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah. Jesus invites John to look at his words and deeds – they fulfil Isaiah's prophecies; and he affirms John as the messenger, foretold by Malachi, sent to prepare the way.

This week's resources explore: acknowledging doubt and despair; sharing good things.

Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

Advent 3

Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Advent 3 Year A
Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:5-10 or
Luke 1:46b-55
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

Bible notes

Old Testament

Isaiah 35:1-10

A complacent people responded to Isaiah by becoming deaf and blind to God's healing (6:8-10). Now, after judgement, they are ready to see, hear and rejoice in the good news of salvation (see also 29:17-19). Seeing God's glory and feeling its strength, they will walk in God's way to the Temple (see Psalm 84:5). One biblical tradition sees the wilderness as the archetypal place of true worship (Amos 5:25; Acts 7:44-50), but here the desert's blossoming signifies God's renewed presence in Jerusalem. These themes are prominent in Isaiah 40 to 55, where the Babylonian exiles hear good news: 'I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert' (43:19). In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus points to this prophecy when replying to John's messengers who ask, 'Are you the one who is to come?'

New Testament

James 5:7-10

James draws on a Jewish tradition condemning the oppression of the poor and expecting the vindication of those who suffer unjustly. The corrupt treasure of the rich, particularly of those who exploit the poor by delaying to pay their wages (see Leviticus 19:13), will be evidence against them at the end of this age (5:3-4). James urges his disadvantaged congregation not to take out their frustrations on one another but to be patient in their suffering. There is encouragement in the Scriptures, from the prophets whose suffering was a sign of their closeness to God, and in the harvest that comes after the rain

has nurtured growth. Above all, there is strength to be found in recognising that the return of Jesus is near. To any who presume to judge one another, he will return as Judge. But to those who show endurance, 'The Lord is compassionate and merciful' (5:11).

Gospel Matthew 11:2-11

Uniquely in Matthew, both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near' (3:2; 4:17). Their stories intertwine from their meeting at the Jordan, where John is first characterised as Malachi's coming Elijah (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6), the messenger preparing the way by turning people to God and one another in readiness for the day of the Lord. And Jesus is the very presence of the Lord: 'I am with you' (28:20; see Exodus 3:14). After John is arrested, Jesus returns to Galilee to begin his ministry (4:12), and Jesus links John's fate as Elijah to his own suffering as the Son of Man, who will be raised (17:9-13). Recognition is central to this passage. In prison for denouncing the unrepentant (14:1-12), John wonders whether Jesus' ministry, casting out demons and healing the sick (8:1-9:38), and empowering his disciples to do the same (10:1-42), is really the proper work of 'the Messiah'. Jesus points to the consistency of what he says with what he does: 'Tell John what you hear and see', recalling the Baptist's message that a tree is known by its fruit (2:8-10), as 'wisdom is vindicated by her deeds' (11:19). And Jesus invites John, the biblical voice denouncing present corruption and looking for future justice, to believe that Isaiah's prophetic words (Isaiah 26:19; 35:5-6; 61:1) are already being fulfilled. The question and response remind us that there are always different expectations of renewal. John's focus is fasting and judgement and Jesus' is healing and mercy (9:12-14). But Jesus values John's work, and appeals to him to accept the blessing of taking 'no offence at me'. Recognising John as the climactic prophetic voice, ushering in his own messianic ministry, Jesus describes him as the greatest 'among those born of women'. We are reminded that for John himself being 'a child of Abraham' was not about physical descent but about God's power to give new life (3:9). Jesus is the child from the Holy Spirit (1:20), anointed by the Spirit at his baptism as 'my Son, the Beloved' (3:17). To even 'the least in the kingdom of heaven', to those he baptizes with the Holy Spirit (3:11), he reveals the Father whose will is to be comprehended by infants (11:25-27).

The links between the lectionary readings

Today's first reading is one of Isaiah's prophecies used to describe the deeds that indicate that Jesus is the Messiah. It was only after calamity that the people were ready to hear Isaiah's good news. Perhaps the Baptist's own imprisonment for his denunciation of hypocrisy made him ready to hear the good news of healing and liberation. To those who show endurance, says James, 'the Lord is compassionate and merciful'.

See www.rootsontheweb.com

With very young children: resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

Children's Sheet and Colouring Sheet (Welsh versions available).

Bible study: a selection of this week's resources to print out.

Prayers

Welsh translations.

Call to worship

Come and see the splendour of our God!
Worship his majesty, enter his presence with joy,
for this is the one who brings blessing, healing and strength.

A gathering prayer – with Advent candle lighting

Advent God, who gathers us as your people,
gather us today around this flame.
We acknowledge before you all our doubts and anxieties,
together with the good things you have given us to share.
Call us to hope, O God,
to place our faith in you,
the source of all light.
Amen.

A prayer of approach

O Lord our rescuer,
we come to you
with our disappointments and scars,
with our weaknesses and struggles.
We come knowing that you are the God of great reversal:
the captives are freed, the blind see,
the deaf hear, those bowed down will be lifted up.
Make your presence known to us, O great deliverer,
and may we rejoice in your promises to us today.
Amen.

A prayer of confession

O Lord, we are sorry for the times
when we shut our eyes to your goodness,
when we close our hearts to the joy you offer,
so busy doing our own thing,
trying to work in our own strength.
We are sorry when we ignore those
who are struggling with sadness we cannot comprehend,
those for whom colours have become grey,
those who need to hear about your love for them.
Give us courage and renewed strength
to share hope and joy with others,
and to witness to your unfailing love.
Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Lord, we praise you
for your transforming presence in our lives.
We thank you
that you are full of compassion and mercy.
Amen.

A prayer for all ages together

Use fingers to represent falling rain throughout the prayer.

God send rain on thirsty ground
and also on our thirsty hearts.
Let your Spirit flow into our lives
and fill us up, we pray.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, we wait.
We wait for the fulfilment of your promises
and the full and permanent coming of your kingdom.
In our waiting, we remember those grappling with
circumstances outside of their control,
those who feel that life is passing them by,
those who are waiting for hope that never comes.
We pray for those whose faith is wearing thin,
whose patience is strained by the length of their waiting,
for those whose eyes are tired
of watching for the dawn.
We wait for light to break on their horizons,
for your Spirit to work something new,
something bright, something enduring,
deep within those places
that seem the most hopeless.
Lord, lift up those who are bowed down,
those far from home, those estranged and those who are weary,
and encourage the hearts of all those who wait for you.
In the name of Christ.
Amen.

An active way into prayer

Give everyone a piece of blue tissue paper, a piece of cardboard
and a pen. Invite people to write on their tissue paper (using
the cardboard as a support) something that is causing them
pain or doubt. They can also write on behalf of someone else, if
they prefer – or leave it blank. Take some time to acknowledge
these things in silence before God. Thank God that he knows our
tears, our sorrows. Invite people to scrunch up their tissue paper
and place it in a box or bucket, as a way of offering God their
distress and pain. At the same time, invite them to take a fresh
piece of tissue paper from a pile or box, to represent a new start.

A sending out prayer

God, may we carry your light into this world,
bringing hope and encouragement
to everyone around us,
remembering that you are with us,
and that you can do all things.
Amen.

A personal prayer

Jesus, help me to see you.
Show me who you are.
Remind me of the things you have done,
how you can turn situations upside down,
and that nothing is impossible for you.
As I go through my days,
help me to recognise your work in my life,
to see what you have done for me.
Lord, increase my faith in you. **Amen.**

Bible notes

Brief notes on the lectionary readings and how they are related to each other provide a good starting point for personal reflection and preparation. There is also an introduction to each season called 'In conversation with the Scriptures' to give additional insight into the Bible book or season of the church year.

See these pages at full size: go to pages 4-7

Free sample week: key highlights *continued*

New ideas every week

All-age introduction

This offers a way to introduce the theme in a context relevant to all ages.

Present the readings


As an alternative to hearing the passage read from the front of the worship space, you could present the readings using props or images, making them memorable and engaging for the congregation.

Sermon ideas

Jumping off points for preaching preparation, *including:*

PostScript

Linking this week's reading to the news.

A  sign indicates that the idea links the Bible passage to everyday life.

15-21 December 2019

Advent 3

What do you see? • 15-21 December 2019

Gather

All-age introduction

A way to begin worship when all ages are present.

Keep looking

Display a selection of images of Christmas and show people a brief moment to look at it without comment. Remove the image (or blank the screen), then ask a question about it – e.g. How many sheep were in the picture? It is hard to find the answer when you didn't know the question beforehand! Congratulate anyone who gets it right. Repeat this with a few more images (you could make the question harder each time). End with an image of Christmas shoppers; this time leave it displayed and ask: Where is Jesus? How hard it must be for people who don't know about the good news of the Christmas story even to know what they are looking for in response to the question. Today we will be thinking about ways we can share the good news with people who may be looking for hope and peace in their lives, and how we too can discover afresh God's promise, 'I am with you'.

With very young children

Resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

Open the Word

To help the listener

The reader could use these words to provide context.

In the Gospel reading, Isaiah's prophetic words from today's Old Testament reading are used to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah. It was only after calamity that the people were ready to hear Isaiah's good news. John the Baptist encourages people to hear the words afresh, for the Messiah is about to come.

Present the Old Testament

There is a lot of visual imagery in this reading. Project or display images to illustrate and accompany the words. Introduce the reading by inviting people to listen for all the good things that are going to happen. What does God promise will happen to the land? And how does God encourage the people? And to draw out the contrast between the land and the people, divide the reading between two readers. One reads about the land (vv.1-2 and 6-7) and the other reads about the people (vv.3-5 and 8-10). After the reading, you could sing the chorus 'Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return'.

Present the Gospel

Script to print out.


You will need two readers: a narrator and John the Baptist, and a third person with no speaking part. It will be more effective if 'John' can learn the monologue below, and speak from a place of semi-darkness, as if in a prison cell.

Narrator: John the Baptist, who has been imprisoned by King Herod, who was upset by what John had said to him. He still for a moment to imagine what it might feel like in that prison, and in particular, how John might be feeling at this moment in his life.

John: I never thought it would come to this. To give so much of myself, and yet to finish up in here. I hate the darkness. How fruitful was the desert compared to these few square feet of emptiness. God, are you there? Do you still care? (pause)

My mind plays tricks in here. One minute I believe, the next I don't know what it's all about. I was so sure, so assured. Now I pace and pace, wondering what it was all for. And what of the Messiah? My cousin. My friend. (pause)

But is he really the one?

Script continues on the .

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But is he really the one?

Explore & respond

Sermon ideas

 **PostScript** Linking this week's reading to the news.

● In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela wrote: 'Strong convictions are the secret of surviving deprivation. Your spirit can be full even when your stomach is empty. I always knew that some day I would once again feel the grass under my feet and walk in the sunshine as a free man. I am fundamentally an optimist. Part of being an optimist is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward.'  John, in prison, seeks reassurance from Christ, and receives it in the news of all that is being done by him. Christians do not escape the great trials of the world – the difference is that we keep our heads pointed towards the Son, and our hearts marching forward.

● In the legend of Papa Panov , Jesus tells an old man, in a dream, that he will visit him on Christmas Day. All day Papa Panov watches for Jesus. When he does so, he shares his meal with a street sweeper, gives a young mother some warm shoes for her baby, offers hospitality to passers by. At the end of the day, saddened and disappointed by Jesus' non-appearance, Papa Panov falls asleep again, only to hear his dreams that Jesus did indeed visit him, for he was present in all those whom Papa Panov helped. Who are the people in whom we will meet Jesus today?

● John, in prison, has been stripped of all that that human life can offer. He has nothing left to hold onto, nothing left to give. He reaches out desperately to Jesus, seeking validation for his life's efforts. He is full of doubt and mourning despair. Why doesn't Jesus answer him clearly? It would be so easy simply to say: 'Yes, I am the one.' But Jesus knows that the most profound answers come from within, and he urges John to look at the evidence of his own eyes. He knows John will understand as he is familiar with the Scriptures. John must look within his own heart for the answer – so must we.

● Advent is traditionally a time of austerity within the Church – some churches don't have flowers during this season, and wait until Christmas Eve to put up a Christmas tree. Advent is also a time of reflection, of looking into our hearts and acknowledging our times of doubt and despair. And, just as Isaiah draws a picture of the desert rejoicing and blossoming, so from our times of darkness can come the hope of a new way of life, one that has long been promised to us and that is fulfilled in the Messiah. He may not arrive in the way that we expect, but we trust in his promise.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

Auk: What is good news? Encourage people to give examples of good news stories from the national or local press or media this week. Then invite people to share (recent) good news stories from their own lives. Next ask people to form small groups to discuss the following: In our lives, where do we find examples of any of these (based on Jesus' words): blind people seeing, lame people walking, skin diseases healed, deaf people hearing, dead being raised, poor people hearing good news? How might we encourage or help these things to happen? Can we, as a church or as individuals, commit to one or more of the suggestions we have made?

Active worship

Ideas to engage different ages, learning and spiritual preferences. Spiritual styles (as defined by David Cinnel) key: Word, Emotion, Symbol, Action. Find out more  **Worship and learning support.**

A simple worship activity for all ages

Divide your congregation into two. One half (Group A) will voice the question: 'What do you see?' The other half (Group B) will make the response: 'Go and tell everyone what you see.' Invite people to join in this act of worship and challenge, copying the actions made by the leader.

Group A: What do you see?
Leader: The blind can see (place hands over eyes, then remove).
Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?
Leader: The deaf hear (place hands over ears, then remove).
Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?
Leader: The lame walk (limp, then run on the spot).
Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?
Leader: Lepers are cleansed (brush your skin).
Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?
Leader: The dead are raised (srouch down and then leap up).
All: Go and tell everyone what you see. **W E A**

Rejoice!
Ask people to imagine that a part of your worship space is God's highway. Read Isaiah 35.8 and 35.10. Invite everyone to walk or dance along it while singing an uplifting worship song that you know well (no books/words are needed). Invite those who are unable or do not wish to join in the dance to play percussion instruments or wave ribbons as they sing. **W E**

Share it!
Give everyone a gift tag. As people hold their gift tag, invite them to thank God for good things they receive. Then, ask them to think about what good things they can give this week (it could be a gift or a practical action). Encourage everyone to put their gift tag somewhere prominent as a reminder. **W S A**

Paths in the desert
You will need large trays of sand. Invite people to reflect on (and share with God) any doubts or difficulties that they or someone they know may be experiencing, while tracing a pathway through the sand with their finger. Encourage people to ponder (and ask God) where their 'path' is leading them. **E S**

Picture pointers



Questions for reflection
• What do you see when you look in the mirror?
• How do you experience doubt and despair?
• What good things would you like to share?


Hymns & songs

Songs in italics are suitable for all ages.

All people that on earth do dwell
Blessed be brokenness, hope for despair
Can't stop talking 'bout everything he's done
Christ is the one who calls
Come and join the circle
E1-Shadeh, E1-Shadeh
Even though I walk through the valley of despair
God forgives my sin in Jesus' name
Great God, your love has called us here
How long, O Lord, will you forget an answer to my prayer?
I come with joy, a child of God
I love to praise your name
Lord, and as to the last
O for a thousand tongues to sing
The kingdom of God is justice and joy
There's a new day dawning now
Through you, we can do anything
Through you, the blind will see
When afraid, when in doubt

Send out

Live your faith

Encourage everyone to put their faith into action. Use the suggestion below or distribute the **Live your faith** sheet . Find out more about, and consider getting involved in, the work of the Barnabas Fund or the Prison Fellowship. **W E A**

ROOTS resources online

All the magazine materials that you see in this brochure are also published online.

But that's not all! In addition to the wealth of resources in the magazine, we offer a huge range of additional material online.

View all the online resources for the week of 15-21 December 2019:


Week by week page on the [ROOTS website](http://www.rootsontheweb.com)

What do you see?

Matthew 11.2-11

John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah. Jesus invites John to look at his words and deeds – they fulfil Isaiah's prophecies; and he affirms John as the messenger, foretold by Malachi, sent to prepare the way.

This week's resources explore: acknowledging doubt and despair; sharing good things.

 Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

Bible notes

Old Testament

Isaiah 35.1-10

A complacent people responded to Isaiah by becoming deaf and blind to God's healing (6.8-10). Now, after judgement, they are ready to see, hear and rejoice in the good news of salvation (see also 29.17-19). Seeing God's glory and feeling its strength, they will walk in God's way to the Temple (see Psalm 84.5). One biblical tradition sees the wilderness as the archetypal place of true worship (Amos 5.25; Acts 7.44-50), but here the desert's blossoming signifies God's renewed presence in Jerusalem. These themes are prominent in Isaiah 40 to 55, where the Babylonian exiles hear good news: 'I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert' (43.19). In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus points to this prophecy when replying to John's messengers who ask, 'Are you the one who is to come?'

New Testament

James 5.7-10

James draws on a Jewish tradition condemning the oppression of the poor and expecting the vindication of those who suffer unjustly. The corrupt treasure of the rich, particularly of those who exploit the poor by delaying to pay their wages (see Leviticus 19.13), will be evidence against them at the end of this age (5.3-4). James urges his disadvantaged congregation not to take out their frustrations on one another but to be patient in their suffering. There is encouragement in the Scriptures, from the prophets whose suffering was a sign of their closeness to God, and in the harvest that comes after the rain

has nurtured growth. Above all, there is strength to be found in recognising that the return of Jesus is near. To any who presume to judge one another, he will return as Judge. But to those who show endurance, 'The Lord is compassionate and merciful' (5.11).

Gospel Matthew 11.2-11

Uniquely in Matthew, both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near' (3.2; 4.17). Their stories intertwine from their meeting at the Jordan, where John is first characterised as Malachi's coming Elijah (Malachi 3.1; 4.5-6), the messenger preparing the way by turning people to God and one another in readiness for the day of the Lord. And Jesus is the very presence of the Lord: 'I am with you' (28.20; see Exodus 3.14). After John is arrested, Jesus returns to Galilee to begin his ministry (4.12), and Jesus links John's fate as Elijah to his own suffering as the Son of Man, who will be raised (17.9-13). Recognition is central to this passage. In prison for denouncing the unrepentant (14.1-12), John wonders whether Jesus' ministry, casting out demons and healing the sick (8.1-9.38), and empowering his disciples to do the same (10.1-42), is really the proper work of 'the Messiah'. Jesus points to the consistency of what he says with what he does: 'Tell John what you hear and see', recalling the Baptist's message that a tree is known by its fruit (3.8-10), as 'wisdom is vindicated by her deeds' (11.19). And Jesus invites John, the biblical voice denouncing present corruption and looking for future justice, to believe that Isaiah's prophetic words (Isaiah 26.19; 35.5-6; 61.1) are already being fulfilled. The question and response remind us that there are always different expectations of renewal. John's focus is fasting and judgement and Jesus' is

healing and mercy (9.12-14). But Jesus values John's work, and appeals to him to accept the blessing of taking 'no offence at me'. Recognising John as the climactic prophetic voice, ushering in his own messianic ministry, Jesus describes him as the greatest 'among those born of women'. We are reminded that for John himself being 'a child of Abraham' was not about physical descent but about God's power to give new life (3.9). Jesus is the child from the Holy Spirit (1.20), anointed by the Spirit at his baptism as 'my Son, the Beloved' (3.17). To even 'the least in the kingdom of heaven', to those he baptizes with the Holy Spirit (3.11), he reveals the Father whose will is to be comprehended by infants (11.25-27).

The links between the lectionary readings

Today's first reading is one of Isaiah's prophecies used to describe the deeds that indicate that Jesus is the Messiah. It was only after calamity that the people were ready to hear Isaiah's good news. Perhaps the Baptist's own imprisonment for his denunciation of hypocrisy made him ready to hear the good news of healing and liberation. To those who show endurance, says James, 'the Lord is compassionate and merciful'.

WEB Notes on Psalm 146.5-10 or Luke 1.46b-55 and ideas for using it together.

See www.rootsontheweb.com

With very young children: resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

Children's Sheet and Colouring Sheet (Welsh versions available).

Bible study: a selection of this week's resources to print out.

Prayers

WEB Welsh translations.

Call to worship

Come and see the splendour of our God!
Worship his majesty, enter his presence with joy,
for this is the one who brings blessing, healing and strength.

A gathering prayer – with Advent candle lighting

Advent God, who gathers us as your people,
gather us today around this flame.
We acknowledge before you all our doubts and anxieties,
together with the good things you have given us to share.
Call us to hope, O God,
to place our faith in you,
the source of all light.
Amen.

A prayer of approach

O Lord our rescuer,
we come to you
with our disappointments and scars,
with our weaknesses and struggles.
We come knowing that you are the God of great reversals:
the captives are freed, the blind see,
the deaf hear, those bowed down will be lifted up.
Make your presence known to us, O great deliverer,
and may we rejoice in your promises to us today.
Amen.

A prayer of confession

O Lord, we are sorry for the times
when we shut our eyes to your goodness,
when we close our hearts to the joy you offer,
so busy doing our own thing,
trying to work in our own strength.

We are sorry when we ignore those
who are struggling with sadness we cannot comprehend,
those for whom colours have become grey,
those who need to hear about your love for them.

Give us courage and renewed strength
to share hope and joy with others,
and to witness to your unfailing love.
Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Lord, we praise you
for your transforming presence in our lives.
We thank you
that you are full of compassion and mercy.
Amen.

A prayer for all ages together

Use fingers to represent falling rain throughout the prayer.

God send rain on thirsty ground
and also on our thirsty hearts.
Let your Spirit flow into our lives
and fill us up, we pray.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, we wait.
We wait for the fulfilment of your promises
and the full and permanent coming of your kingdom.

In our waiting, we remember those grappling with
circumstances outside of their control,
those who feel that life is passing them by,
those who are waiting for hope that never comes.

We pray for those whose faith is wearing thin,
whose patience is strained by the length of their waiting,
for those whose eyes are tired
of watching for the dawn.

We wait for light to break on their horizons,
for your Spirit to work something new,
something bright, something enduring,
deep within those places
that seem the most hopeless.

Lord, lift up those who are bowed down,
those far from home, those estranged and those who are weary,
and encourage the hearts of all those who wait for you.
In the name of Christ.

Amen.

An active way into prayer

Give everyone a piece of blue tissue paper, a piece of cardboard
and a pen. Invite people to write on their tissue paper (using
the cardboard as a support) something that is causing them
pain or doubt. They can also write on behalf of someone else, if
they prefer – or leave it blank. Take some time to acknowledge
these things in silence before God. Thank God that he knows our
tears, our sorrows. Invite people to scrunch up their tissue paper
and place it in a box or bucket, as a way of offering God their
distress and pain. At the same time, invite them to take a fresh
piece of tissue paper from a pile or box, to represent a new start.

A sending out prayer

God, may we carry your light into this world,
bringing hope and encouragement
to everyone around us,
remembering that you are with us,
and that you can do all things.

Amen.

A personal prayer

Jesus, help me to see you.
Show me who you are.
Remind me of the things you have done,
how you can turn situations upside down,
and that nothing is impossible for you.
As I go through my days,
help me to recognise your work in my life,
to see what you have done for me.
Lord, increase my faith in you. **Amen.**

Gather

All-age introduction

A way to begin worship when all ages are present.

Keep looking

Display a selection of images of Christmas card scenes. Show the first image and allow people a brief moment to look at it without comment. Remove the image (or blank the screen), then ask a question about it – e.g. How many sheep were in the picture? It is hard to find the answer when you didn't know the question beforehand! Congratulate anyone who got it right. Repeat this with a few more images (you could make the question harder each time). End with an image of Christmas shoppers; this time leave it on display and ask: Where is Jesus? How hard it must be for people who don't know about the good news of the Christmas story even to know what they are looking for in response to the question. Today we will be thinking about ways we can share the good news with people who may be looking for hope and peace in their lives, and how we too can discover afresh God's promise of 'I am with you'.

With very young children

WEB Resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

Open the Word

To help the listener

The reader could use these words to provide context.

In the Gospel reading, Isaiah's prophetic words (from today's Old Testament reading) are used to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah. It was only after calamity that the people were ready to hear Isaiah's good news. John the Baptist encourages people to hear the words afresh, for the Messiah is about to come.

Present the Old Testament

There is a lot of visual imagery in this reading. Project or display images to illustrate and accompany the words. Introduce the reading by inviting people to listen for all the good things that are going to happen: What does God promise will happen to the land? And how does God encourage the people? And to draw out the contrast between the land and the people, divide the reading between two readers. One reads about the land (vv.1-2 and 6b-7) and the other reads about the people (vv.3-6a and 8-10). After the reading, you could sing the chorus 'Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return'.

Present the Gospel

WEB Script to print out.

You will need two readers: a narrator and John the Baptist, and a third person with no speaking part. It will be more effective if 'John' can learn the monologue below, and speak from a place of semi-darkness, as if in a prison cell.

Narrator: John the Baptist has been imprisoned by King Herod, who was upset by what John had said to him. Be still for a moment to imagine what it might feel like in that prison, and in particular, how John might be feeling at this moment in his life.

John: I never thought it would come to this. To give so much of myself, and yet to finish up in here. I hate the darkness. How fruitful was the desert compared to these few square feet of emptiness. God, are you there? Do you still care? *(pause)*


My mind plays tricks in here. One minute I believe, the next I don't know what it's all about. I was so sure, so assured. Now I pace and pace, wondering what it was all for. And what of the Messiah? My cousin. My friend. *(pause)*

But is he really the one?


*Script continues on the **WEB**.*

Explore & respond

Sermon ideas

WEB *PostScript:* Linking this week's reading to the news .

● In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela wrote: 'Strong convictions are the secret of surviving deprivation. Your spirit can be full even when your stomach is empty. I always knew that some day I would once again feel the grass under my feet and walk in the sunshine as a free man. I am fundamentally an optimist. Part of being an optimist is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward' **WEB**. John, in prison, seeks reassurance from Christ, and receives it in the news of all that is being done by him. Christians do not escape the great trials of the world – the difference is that we keep our heads pointed towards the Son, and our hearts marching forward.

 In the legend of Papa Panov **WEB**, Jesus tells an old man, in a dream, that he will visit him on Christmas Day. All day Papa Panov watches for Jesus. While he does so, he shares his meal with a street sweeper, gives a young mother some warm shoes for her baby, offers hospitality to passers-by. At the end of the day, saddened and disappointed by Jesus' non-appearance, Papa Panov falls asleep again, only to hear in his dreams that Jesus did indeed visit him, for he was present in all those whom Papa Panov helped. Who are the people in whom we will meet Jesus today?

● John, in prison, has been stripped of all that human life can offer. He has nothing left to hold onto, nothing left to give. He reaches out desperately to Jesus, seeking validation for his life's efforts. He is full of doubt and nearing despair. Why doesn't Jesus answer him clearly? It would be so easy simply to say: 'Yes. I am the one.' But Jesus knows that the most profound answers come from within, and he urges John to look at the evidence with his own eyes. He knows John will understand as he is familiar with the Scriptures. John must look within his own heart for the answer – so must we.

● Advent is traditionally a time of austerity within the Church – some churches don't have flowers during this season, and wait until Christmas Eve to put up a Christmas tree. Advent is also a time of reflection, of looking into our hearts and acknowledging our times of doubt and despair. And, just as Isaiah draws a picture of the desert rejoicing and blossoming, so from our times of darkness can come the hope of a new way of life, one that has long been promised to us and that is fulfilled in the Messiah. He may not arrive in the way that we expect, but we trust in his promise.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

Ask: What is good news? Encourage people to give examples of good news stories from the national or local press or media this week. Then invite people to share (recent) good news stories from their own lives. Next ask people to form small groups to discuss the following: In our lives, where do we find examples of any of these (based on Jesus' words): blind people seeing; lame people walking; skin diseases healed; deaf people hearing; dead being raised; poor people hearing good news? How might we encourage or help these things to happen? Can we, as a church or as individuals, commit to one or more of the suggestions we have made?

Active worship

Ideas to engage different ages, learning and spiritual preferences. Spiritual styles (as defined by David Csinos) key: **W**ord, **E**motion, **S**ymbol, **A**ction. Find out more [WEB](#) in *Worship and learning support*.

A simple worship activity for all ages

Divide your congregation into two. One half (Group A) will voice the question: 'What do you see?' The other half (Group B) will make the response: 'Go and tell everyone what you see.' Invite people to join in this act of worship and challenge, copying the actions made by the leader.

Group A: What do you see?

Leader: The blind can see (*place hands over eyes, then remove*).

Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?

Leader: The deaf hear (*place hands over ears, then remove*).

Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?

Leader: The lame walk (*limp, then run on the spot*).

Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?

Leader: Lepers are cleansed (*brush your skin*).

Group B: Go and tell everyone what you see.

Group A: What do you see?

Leader: The dead are raised (*crouch down and then leap up*).

All: Go and tell everyone what you see.

W E A

Rejoice!

Ask people to imagine that a part of your worship space is God's highway. Read Isaiah 35.8 and 35.10. Invite everyone to walk or dance along it while singing an uplifting worship song that you know well (so no books/words are needed). Invite those who are unable or do not wish to join in the dance to play percussion instruments or wave ribbons as they sing. **W E**

Share it!

Give everyone a gift tag. As people hold their gift tag, invite them to thank God for good things they receive. Then, ask them to think about what good things they can give this week (it could be a gift or a practical action). Encourage everyone to put their gift tag somewhere prominent as a reminder. **W S A**

Paths in the desert

You will need large trays of sand. Invite people to reflect on (and share with God) any doubts or difficulties that they or someone they know may be experiencing, while tracing a pathway through the sand with their finger. Encourage people to ponder (and ask God) where their 'path' is leading them. **E S**

Picture pointers [WEB](#)



Questions for reflection

- ▶ What do you see when you look in the mirror?
- ▶ When do you experience doubt and despair?
- ▶ What good things would you like to share?

Hymns & songs

Songs in italics are suitable for all ages.

All people that on earth do dwell
Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair
Can't stop talking 'bout ev'rything he's done
Christ is the one who calls
Come and join the circle
El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai
Even though I walk through the valley of despair
God, fill our cup to overflowing
God forgave my sin in Jesus' name
Great God, your love has called us here
How long, O Lord, will you forget an answer to
my prayer?
I come with joy, a child of God
I love to praise your name
Lord, send us to the lost
O for a thousand tongues to sing
The kingdom of God is justice and joy
There's a new day dawning now
Through you I can do anything
Through you, the blind will see
When afraid, when in doubt

Send out

Live your faith

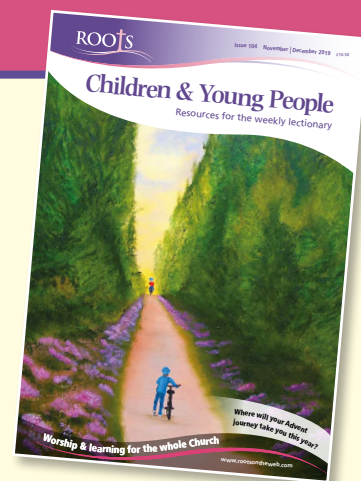
Encourage everyone to put their faith into action. Use the suggestion below or distribute the **Live your faith** sheet [WEB](#).

Find out more about, and consider getting involved in, the work of the Barnabas Fund or the Prison Fellowship. **W E A**

Children & Young People resources

Inspiring ministry with toddlers to teens – all year round

- **Reliable** – ideal for both Sundays and midweek, with either mixed-age or age-specific groups
- **Contemporary** – help connect faith to the everyday lives of children and young people
- **Flexible** – use the materials as they stand, or to spark your own ideas.



Your free sample week: key highlights

Leaders' Bible notes

Helping you reflect on the reading as you prepare.

Bible story

Having two different ways to tell the story helps you to provide variety and encourages children to participate.

Very young children resources

Enabling you to introduce the Bible passage to the very youngest members of your community.

15-21 December 2019

What do you see?

Matthew 11.2-11

John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah. Jesus invites John to look at his words and deeds – they fulfil Isaiah's prophecies; and he affirms John as the messenger, foretold by Malachi, sent to prepare the way.

This week's resources explore: acknowledging doubt and despair; sharing good things.

Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.
Download a Planning Sheet to help prepare your session.

Advent 3

Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Advent 3 Year A
Isaiah 35.1-10
Psalm 146.5-10 or
Luke 1.46b-55
James 5.7-10
Matthew 11.2-11

Open the Word

Present the reading Open the Bible at Matthew 11.2-11

John doubts who Jesus is, but Jesus sends a message sharing the good things he is doing.

Choose from these two ways of telling the story.

See I am sending Ask the children to listen to the story carefully. Demonstrate creating circles with your fingers to represent glasses and explain that during the story when they hear the word 'see' they are to do this action.

Message for the messenger Choose one child to stand at one end of the room as John and another child to stand at the opposite end of the room as Jesus. The other children are to be the messengers going between the two. Read the first section of the passage, and at the end of John's first message, the children run to 'Jesus'. After Jesus has given his reply they run back to 'John' once more. After this, the group of children can become the 'crowd' Jesus is speaking to.

Bible notes

- John was in prison because he had publicly criticised King Herod. He is having some doubts about Jesus and sends his followers to ask some questions. Jesus doesn't answer directly but tells the followers and John to look at what is happening. The presence of the kingdom of heaven is evident by what Jesus is doing.
- John the Baptist is down and has doubts. Yet Jesus does not rebuke him. Rather, he builds up people's appreciation of John and affirms him as an important prophet who was predicted by the ancient prophets in their Scriptures.
- The kingdom of heaven is topsy-turvy. For many of us, salary and position mean status and seniority, and society honours people because of where and to whom they were born. Jesus' kingdom is not like that.
- Truth is not found in palaces with people in robes. Truth is in the wilderness among the ordinary people. Just as Jesus was born not in a palace but in a tiny town of little regard, the good news comes to where people are, not to a special place where people go and find it. Isaiah heralds the arrival of this truth and God's coming kingdom as the 'Holy Way' for God's people.

Prayers

A gathering prayer
Jesus, Lord and King, just as John's disciples came to meet you, we have come to meet you today. Help us to recognise who you really are. Amen.

A prayer of thanksgiving
Thank you, God, that whether we are full of confidence, or finding it hard to see who you are, your love is constant. Amen.

A prayer for forgiveness
Response line: **Forgive us, Lord, and help us to see you.**
Heavenly Father, for the times we do not thank you: **Forgive us, Lord, and help us to see you.** For the times we do not ask for your help... For the times we doubt your authority... For the times we question who you are... Amen.

Prayers

A prayer for others
Ask the children to think of someone they want to pray for, that they would feel God's healing touch.
Lord Jesus, while you walked on the earth, you made the blind to see and the lame to walk; you healed the sick and gave hearing to the deaf; you raised the dead and gave hope to the poor. Today we pray for (insert names) and ask that you would heal them too. Amen.

A sending out prayer
Holy Spirit, fill us with your confidence, as we go out into the week ahead to face every situation that comes our way. Amen.

Gather

Choose a quiet or active way to begin your session...

Do you see what I see?
Display several pictures of optical illusions (link on). Ask the children: What do you see? Discuss how some might see something different from someone else.

Prayers

Pass the parcel
Wrap up something that all the children can share, e.g. stickers or sweets, together with a label that says 'When we receive good things, God wants us to share them'. Make sure the parcel has many layers to unwrap. Play some music and, when it stops, the child who is holding the parcel unwraps a layer. Keep going until the child who opens the final layer reads the label aloud. Then share the gift among the group.

Talk together

- Why do you think John had doubts about who Jesus was?
- When did you last doubt or feel sad about something?
- How can you help others who are feeling sad or unsure?

For very young children

Play and explore sharing good news and good things.

Play materials: large envelopes to open with the words 'good news' inside.

Storytelling
Invite the children to choose a puppet to help you tell the story – Jesus, John, disciples, people.

Jesus travelled around teaching the people. John the Baptist sent his friends with a message for Jesus: 'Are you the Messiah we have been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?'

Jesus said, 'Go back to John and tell him everything you have seen and heard – sick people are being healed and good news is being preached to the poor.'

Then Jesus turned to the people around him and said, 'John the Baptist is the one the Scriptures talk about: "Look, I am sending a messenger ahead of you. He will prepare the way for you."'

Play
Give the children baskets of jewels and sparkles, and small organza bags. Invite them to share out the 'good things' so they can all have some in their bag.

Create
Invite the children to make a 'good news' scroll. Decorate it by adding pieces of bandage, sticking plaster, Bible quotes and stickers, then roll it up and tie it with a ribbon.

Praise
Play 'Pass the parcel'. Add a party blower in each layer and some tiny Bible storybooks to share out in the middle.

Pray
Give each child a candle with a paper circle drip-guard. Light a large candle, then invite them to share the light as you light their individual candles. Say together:
Christ is our light.
We are waiting in the darkness.
Come, Lord Jesus.
Amen.

Find more prayers opposite and additional activities on the next page.

Very young children page with more activities, prayers and songs.

Open the Word

Present the reading Open the Bible at Matthew 11.2-11

John doubts who Jesus is, but Jesus sends a message sharing the good things he is doing.

Choose from these two ways of telling the story.

See I am sending Ask the children to listen to the story carefully. Demonstrate creating circles with your fingers to represent glasses and explain that during the story when they hear the word 'see' they are to do this action.

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Gather

Choose an active or a quiet way to start your session.

Prayers

The wording helps children to develop a sense of the language of prayer.

Talk together

Use these questions to spark discussion and help children see the relevance of the Bible reading to their own lives.

See these pages at full size: go to pages 10-13

Key highlights from your free sample week *continued*

See these pages at full size: go to **pages 10-13**

15-21 December 2019 Advent 3

Explore & respond

Select ideas to help children connect the Bible reading and their lives. [Explore](#) Templates and links to online resources. [Spiritual styles](#) (as defined by David Cincot) key: Word, Emotion, Symbol, Action. Find out more [in Worship and learning support](#).

Do

Good news! 10 mins **W E A**

Look at the good and bad things happening in the world

You will need: newspapers and scissors.

- Cut out some age appropriate good and bad news stories from the newspapers.
- Talk with the children about what makes each story good or bad news.
- Discuss the good things Jesus shared with his disciples to show who he was. Ask the children why they think it is important to share good news.

Question and answer 10 mins **E**

Ask questions to God and know he is always ready to answer

You will need: question marks and speech bubbles cut from card.

- Divide the children into two teams and split each team in half, one on either side of the room.
- Remind them that John was worried and asked Jesus a question. Jesus sent an answer back straight away to reassure him.
- Explain that you are going to have a relay race. The first runner leaves one side of the room carrying a question mark. They leave it at the opposite side of the room with the other half of their team. A new runner from that side takes the speech bubble to the opposite end. The next runner from that side of the room returns the speech bubble. The question mark returns to the original side with the next runner.
- Continue until every team member has run and the two halves have swapped sides of the room. Keep passing the speech bubble and the question mark between the two sides of the room.

Make

During Advent our 'Make' activities include 'Advent tree' decorations. Children could either take these home to decorate their own Advent or Christmas tree or you could make your group an Advent tree (see picture on [p.1](#)). (For more information see Welcome text on p.1.)

Good news scroll 15 mins **W E**

Advent tree decoration 3

Share the good news in your life

You will need: pieces of brown paper, pens, ribbon, sticky tape.

- Give the children a piece of brown paper each, and ask them to write some good news they are thankful for in their own life: 'Thank you, God for...'
- Help the children roll their paper up to make a scroll, tie a ribbon round it in a bow, then use sticky tape to attach another piece of ribbon as a hanging loop.
- If using the Advent tree, invite the children to hang their scrolls on it.

32 **ROOTS Children & Young People** Issue 104

Connect faith with everyday life.

Explore & respond

It's easy to keep sessions varied, with a range of activities. By taking different 'spiritual styles' into account, ROOTS helps you to engage everyone. Find out more at www.rootsontheweb.com/spiritualstyles

Send out

Encouraging discipleship during the week by connecting faith with everyday life.

Young People resources

With a wide mix of activities to choose from, these resources help young people to see the relevance of the Bible passage to their own lives and to today's world.

What do you see? • 15-21 December 2019

ROOTS' YOUNG PEOPLE

Go to www.rootsontheweb.com for all templates, links and images. Find Bible notes and more prayers on p.30. Use the **BIBLE** section below first, then choose activities from the other sections. Extra ideas can be found in [Explore & respond](#) opposite.

BIBLE Matthew 11:2-11

Warm up 5 mins **E S**

Bring in one bowl of sweets wrapped in blue, and another with sweets wrapped in red or orange. Take turns to share something from the past week that caused either despair or happiness. Anyone who shares something sad takes a blue sweet to cheer them up. If they share something positive, they take a red or orange sweet and pass it on, to share the joy.

Questions for Jesus 15 mins **W E**

The reading can be dramatised using different readers for the voices of John, his disciples and Jesus. John's disciples can walk from him to interrupt Jesus with their question. Jesus answers and then turns to the crowd and reads from verse 7 onwards.

Questions to discuss

- Why do you think John developed doubts about whether Jesus was the Messiah?
- How does Jesus prove he is the promised one?
- How would you feel if someone doubted your character?

CONNECT

Who does what? 15 mins **W E**

Look at the list of actions that Jesus refers to in verse 5. Ask the young people to think about people today who work as opticians, physiotherapists, doctors, audiologists. If you know of anyone who works in one or more of these roles, invite them in to share a little of what they do.

Prisoners 15 mins **W E A**

Discuss who it is who suffers when a person is sent to prison. Both the people who were the victims of the offence and the family of the prisoner suffer. Someone in your group may know someone in custody, so ensure sensitivity when discussing this.

Look up the Angel Tree Project (link on [p.30](#)). They support families of prisoners especially at Christmas by enabling prisoners to send a gift to their children. Consider how your group could support this work.

PostScript: Linking this week's reading to the news [p.30](#).

Listen

[Die Young People page](#) or [Hymns, songs & music](#) for links to these tracks.

Rejoice, Rejoice, All Sons & Daughters on Face
Take Up Your Cross, Indicator on The Last Emperor
Cover the Earth, Karl John Nae, Coby Carries on Cover the Earth

EXPLORE

Advent anagrams 5 mins **W**

Make anagram puzzles in large letters on A4 paper with an Advent/Christmas theme about light and dark. Words for light: star, shining candle, angel. Words for dark: night, Herod, myth, doubts. Reveal the words and see who can work out what the word is and shout it out first.

3D good news star 15 mins **E S**

Cut two identical stars (template on [p.30](#)) from sheets of A4 card. Cut one from top to centre and the other from bottom to centre. Slot the two together at right angles. Take turns to share some good news and staple an orange sweet wrapper - from the Warm up - to the star. Hang it up as a reminder of the good news you shared (image on [p.30](#)).

Picture pointers [p.30](#)

Questions for reflection [p.30](#)

- What do you see when you look in the mirror?
- When do you experience doubt and despair?

PRAY

Justice 10 mins **W E A**

Consider all the people involved in court cases that result in prison sentences. Write prayers for those who work in the justice system and those who encounter it as victims or offenders and their families. Someone in your group may know someone in custody, so ensure sensitivity when discussing this.

Thanks for people 10 mins **W E S**

Provide outlines of people on paper or card (template on [p.30](#)). Encourage the young people to think of someone they look up to who is an example of good news. Write a simple prayer, giving thanks for that person, on the person shape. Hang the prayers on your Advent prayer tree (see 1 December, p.25). Keep the tree to use throughout Advent (see Welcome text on p.1), as each week there are activities to add symbols/items to the prayer tree.

Live your faith [p.30](#)

Look up a news story this week, that involves a court case or prison sentence and pray for all those involved. **S A**

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ROOTS resources online

All the magazine materials that you see in this brochure are also published online.

But that's not all! In addition to the wealth of resources in the magazine, we offer a huge range of additional material online.

View all the online resources for the week of 15-21 December 2019:

Week by week page on the ROOTS website

What do you see?

Matthew 11.2-11

John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah. Jesus invites John to look at his words and deeds – they fulfil Isaiah's prophecies; and he affirms John as the messenger, foretold by Malachi, sent to prepare the way.

This week's resources explore: acknowledging doubt and despair; sharing good things.

 Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

 Download a Planning Sheet to help prepare your session.

Advent 3

Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Advent 3 Year A

Isaiah 35.1-10

Psalm 146.5-10 or

Luke 1.46b-55

James 5.7-10

Matthew 11.2-11

Bible notes

- John was in prison because he had publicly criticised King Herod. He is having some doubts about Jesus and sends his followers to ask some questions. Jesus doesn't answer directly but tells the followers and John to look at what is happening. The presence of the kingdom of heaven is evident by what Jesus is doing.

- John the Baptist is down and has doubts. Yet Jesus does not rebuke him. Rather, he builds up people's appreciation of John and affirms him as an important prophet who was predicted by the ancient prophets in their Scriptures.

- The kingdom of heaven is topsy-turvy. For many of us, salary and position mean status and seniority, and society honours people because of where and to whom they were born. Jesus' kingdom is not like that.

- Truth is not found in palaces with people in robes. Truth is in the wilderness among the ordinary people. Just as Jesus was born not in a palace but in a tiny town of little regard, the good news comes to where people are, not to a special place where people go and find it. Isaiah heralds the arrival of this truth and God's coming kingdom as the 'Holy Way' for God's people.

Prayers Welsh translations.

A gathering prayer

Jesus, Lord and King,
just as John's disciples came to meet you,
we have come to meet you today.
Help us to recognise who you really are.
Amen.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, God,
that whether we are full of confidence,
or finding it hard to see who you are,
your love is constant.
Amen.

A prayer for forgiveness

Response line: Forgive us, Lord, and help us to see you.

Heavenly Father,
for the times we do not thank you:
Forgive us, Lord, and help us to see you.
For the times we do not ask for
your help...
For the times we doubt your authority...
For the times we question who you are...
Amen.

A prayer for others

Ask the children to think of someone they want to pray for, that they would feel God's healing touch.

Lord Jesus,
while you walked on the earth,
you made the blind to see
and the lame to walk;
you healed the sick
and gave hearing to the deaf;
you raised the dead
and gave hope to the poor.
Today we pray for *(insert names)*
and ask that you would heal them too.
Amen.


A sending out prayer

Holy Spirit, fill us with your confidence,
as we go out into the week ahead
to face every situation
that comes our way.
Amen.

Gather

Choose a quiet or active way to begin your session..

Do you see what I see?

Display several pictures of optical illusions (link on ). Ask the children: What do you see? Discuss how some might see something different from someone else.

Pass the parcel

Wrap up something that all the children can share, e.g. stickers or sweets, together with a label that says 'When we receive good things, God wants us to share them'. Make sure the parcel has many layers to unwrap. Play some music and, when it stops, the child who is holding the parcel unwraps a layer. Keep going until the child who opens the final layer reads the label aloud. Then share the gift among the group.

Open the Word

Present the reading Open the Bible at Matthew 11.2-11

John doubts who Jesus is, but Jesus sends a message sharing the good things he is doing.

Choose from these two ways of telling the story.

See I am sending Ask the children to listen to the story carefully. Demonstrate creating circles with your fingers to represent glasses and explain that during the story when they hear the word 'see' they are to do this action.

Message for the messenger Choose one child to stand at one end of the room as John and another child to stand at the opposite end of the room as Jesus. The other children are to be the messengers going between the two. Read the first section of the passage, and at the end of John's first message, the children run to 'Jesus'. After Jesus has given his reply they run back to 'John' once more. After this, the group of children can become the 'crowd' Jesus is speaking to.

Although he had been thrown into prison, John the Baptist heard about the amazing things Jesus was doing. John sent his followers to Jesus with a question: 'Are you the one we've been waiting for, or should we wait for someone else?' He asked this because he wanted to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, whom God had promised to send, hundreds of years before. Jesus replied, 'Tell John what you hear and see: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead return to life and the poor are given good news. Tell him that anyone who accepts me is blessed by God.'

John's followers went away and Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'When you went to see John in the desert, what did you go to see? Someone who changes their mind like a reed shaken by the wind? No? What, then? Someone dressed like a prince? You need to go to palaces to see people dressed up in soft clothes. What did you go to see? A prophet? Yes, that's who you went to see.'

'And what's more,' Jesus said, 'John isn't just any prophet. Isaiah wrote about him in the Old Testament. Isaiah said, "I am sending a messenger ahead of you, who will prepare the way for you." Truly I tell you,' said Jesus, 'there is not one person on earth greater than John. But in the kingdom of heaven, even the lowest person is greater than he is.'



Talk together

- Why do you think John had doubts about who Jesus was?
- When did you last doubt or feel sad about something?
- How can you help others who are feeling sad or unsure?

For very young children

Play and explore sharing good news and good things.

Play materials: large envelopes to open with the words 'good news' inside.

Storytelling

Invite the children to choose a puppet to help you tell the story – Jesus, John, disciples, people.

Jesus travelled around teaching the people. John the Baptist sent his friends with a message for Jesus: 'Are you the Messiah we have been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?'

Jesus said, 'Go back to John and tell him everything you have seen and heard – sick people are being healed and good news is being preached to the poor.'

Then Jesus turned to the people around him and said, 'John the Baptist is the one the Scriptures talk about: "Look, I am sending a messenger ahead of you. He will prepare the way for you."'

Play

Give the children baskets of jewels and sparkles, and small organza bags. Invite them to share out the 'good things' so they can all have some in their bag.

Create

Invite the children to make a 'good news' scroll. Decorate it by adding pieces of bandage, sticking plaster, Bible quotes and stickers, then roll it up and tie it with a ribbon.

Praise

Play 'Pass the parcel'. Add a party blower in each layer and some tiny Bible storybooks to share out in the middle.

Pray

Give each child a candle with a paper circle drip-guard. Light a large candle, then invite them to share the light as you light their individual candles. Say together:

Christ is our light.

We are waiting in the darkness.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

Find more prayers opposite and additional activities on the next page.

WEB *Very young children page with more activities, prayers and songs.*

Explore & respond

Select ideas to help children connect the Bible reading and their lives. [WEB](#) Templates and links to online resources. Spiritual styles (as defined by David Csinos) key: **W**ord, **E**motion, **S**ymbol, **A**ction. Find out more [WEB](#) in *Worship and learning support*.

Do

Good news!

10 mins **W E A**

Look at the good and bad things happening in the world

You will need: newspapers and scissors.

- Cut out some age-appropriate good and bad news stories from the newspapers.
- Talk with the children about what makes each story good or bad news.
- Discuss the good things Jesus shared with his disciples to show who he was. Ask the children why they think it is important to share good news.

Question and answer

10mins **E**

Ask questions to God and know he is always ready to answer

You will need: question marks and speech bubbles cut from card.

- Divide the children into two teams and split each team in half, one on either side of the room.
- Remind them that John was worried and asked Jesus a question. Jesus sent an answer back straight away to reassure him.
- Explain that you are going to have a relay race. The first runner leaves one side of the room carrying a question mark. They leave it at the opposite side of the room with the other half of their team. A new runner from that side takes the speech bubble to the opposite end. The next runner from that side of the room returns the speech bubble. The question mark returns to the original side with the next runner.
- Continue until every team member has run and the two halves have swapped sides of the room. Keep passing the speech bubble and the question mark between the two sides of the room.

Make

During Advent our 'Make' activities include 'Advent tree' decorations. Children could either take these home to decorate their own Advent or Christmas tree or you could make your group an Advent tree (see picture on [WEB](#)). (For more information see *Welcome* text on p.1.)



Good news scroll Advent tree decoration 3

15 mins **W E**

Share the good news in your life

You will need: pieces of brown paper, pens, ribbon, sticky tape.

- Give the children a piece of brown paper each, and ask them to write some good news they are thankful for in their own life: 'Thank you, God for...'
- Help the children roll their paper up to make a scroll, tie a ribbon round it in a bow, then use sticky tape to attach another piece of ribbon as a hanging loop.
- If using the Advent tree, invite the children to hang their scrolls on it.

Questioning?

15 mins+ **W E S A**

Make biscuits reminding us that even John had questions and doubts

You will need: biscuit dough (recipe on [WEB](#)), rolling pins, several card question mark shapes for the children to use as a template to cut round, or a question mark cutter, icing and other edible decorations.

- Give each child a small amount of dough and ask them to roll it out.
- Remind the children that even a special person like John had questions about Jesus. Invite them to think of some questions they might have as they cut their dough into two question mark shapes.
- Bake the dough, leave to cool and then decorate the biscuits as desired. Allow the children to each take one biscuit home and encourage them to give the other as a gift for someone.

Pray

Sharing God's love in prayer

10 mins **E S A**

Pray to share God's love with others

You will need: a copy of the prayer of St Teresa of Avila (template on [WEB](#)), battery-operated tealights.

- Read the prayer aloud, then place it in the centre of the gathering. Remind the children that praying is a way of sharing God's love.
- Pray for people who are sad, for those in prison – like John, and for anyone else you want to share God's love with today.
- Light a candle for each one.

More prayers are on p.30.

Sing

[WEB](#) Abbreviations and music links* in *Hymns, songs & music*.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Under 5s | Deep and wide (CJP 35)*
If you're happy and you know It! |
| Under 12s | When you believe, Stephen Schwartz, Babyface
(Dreamworks, Prince of Egypt)*
Flabbergasted, Doug Horley* |
| 12+ | How can it be, Lauren Daigle*
So will I (100 Billion X), Hillsong UNITED* |

See www.rootsontheweb.com

Children's Sheet and **Colouring Sheet** (Welsh versions available).

Send out

Live your faith

Encourage the children to put their faith into action. Use the idea below or give out the **Children's Sheet** [WEB](#).

What good things do you have that you could share this week? **A**

ROOTS YOUNG PEOPLE

Go to www.rootsontheweb.com for all templates, links and images. Find Bible notes and more prayers on p.30. Use the BIBLE section below first, then choose activities from the other sections. Extra ideas can be found in *Explore & respond* opposite.

BIBLE Matthew 11.2-11

Warm up 5 mins E S

Bring in one bowl of sweets wrapped in blue, and another with sweets wrapped in red or orange. Take turns to share something from the past week that caused either despair or happiness. Anyone who shares something sad takes a blue sweet to cheer them up. If they share something positive, they take a red or orange sweet and pass it on, to share the joy.

Questions for Jesus 15 mins W E

The reading can be dramatised using different readers for the voices of John, his disciples and Jesus. John's disciples can walk from him to interrupt Jesus with their question. Jesus answers and then turns to the crowd and reads from verse 7 onwards.

Questions to discuss

- Why do you think John developed doubts about whether Jesus was the Messiah?
- How does Jesus prove he is the promised one?
- How would you feel if someone doubted your character?

EXPLORE

Advent anagrams 5 mins W

Make anagram puzzles in large letters on A4 paper with an Advent/Christmas theme about light and dark. Words for light: star, shining, candle, angel. Words for dark: night, Herod, myrrh, doubts. Reveal the words and see who can work out what the word is and shout it out first.

3D good news star 15 mins E S

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Picture pointers [WEB](#)

Questions for reflection [Globe icon](#)

- ▶ What do you see when you look in the mirror?
- ▶ When do you experience doubt and despair?

CONNECT [Globe icon](#)

Who does what? 15 mins W E

Look at the list of actions that Jesus refers to in verse 5. Ask the young people to think about people today who work as opticians, physiotherapists, doctors, audiologists. If you know of anyone who works in one or more of these roles, invite them in to share a little of what they do.

Prisoners 15 mins W E A

Discuss who it is who suffers when a person is sent to prison. Both the people who were the victims of the offence and the family of the prisoner suffer. Someone in your group may know someone in custody, so ensure sensitivity when discussing this.

Look up the Angel Tree Project (link on [WEB](#)). They support families of prisoners especially at Christmas by enabling prisoners to send a gift to their children. Consider how your group could support this work.

[WEB](#) PostScript: Linking this week's reading to the news [Globe icon](#)

Listen

[WEB](#) See *Young People* page or *Hymns, songs & music* for links to these tracks.

Paris (Refuge), All Sons & Daughters on *Paris*

Take Up Your Cross, Judicator on *The Last Emperor*

Cover the Earth, Kari Jobe feat. Cody Carnes on *Cover the Earth*

PRAY

Justice 10 mins W E A

Consider all the people involved in court cases that result in prison sentences. Write prayers for those who work in the justice system and those who encounter it as victims or offenders and their families. Someone in your group may know someone in custody, so ensure sensitivity when discussing this.

Thanks for people 10 mins W E S

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Live your faith [Globe icon](#)

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Online weekly resources at www.rootsontheweb.com

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But that's not all! In addition to the wealth of resources in the magazine, every week the website offers:

- **Support for your planning**
- **Extra downloadable resources and links**, such as drama scripts, images, links to relevant websites and templates for activities
- **A selection of the week's resources that you can use for a group Bible study**
For Adult & All Age subscribers
- **A *Live your faith* sheet to support discipleship during the week**
You could email this to your church community, or put the text on the back of a handout (e.g. a notice sheet)
For Adult & All Age subscribers
- **PostScript** – added to the site every Thursday morning. PostScript is a comment on the news, linked to the coming Sunday's readings
- **Children's Sheet** (in colour, black & white and Welsh versions)
- **Colouring Sheet** for very young children
- **A ready-made session to use with very young children** – including storytelling, craft, a Bible story and prayer activities.
You can use this during Sunday worship or in a midweek toddler group.

PLUS Online resource bank

ROOTS has been publishing weekly materials for over 15 years. As well as the freshly written materials for each week, subscribers can access **all** our past resources too!

Thousands
of prayers

Hundreds of
sermon ideas

16+ years of children's and
young people's sessions

**Just some of the resources that you can
download at www.rootsontheweb.com**

[illegible]

Download this week's resources for free at
www.rootsontheweb.com/sample

Planning resources

Nursery

Matthew 11:2-11

John said who Jesus is, but Jesus sends a message through the good things he is doing.

Roots

Children's Sheet

15-21 November 1997 Advent

Write

Imagine you are John in prison. Write a postcard to Jesus asking him some questions and for help to understand who he is.

Jesus (he, himself)
 Greetings

Family time

Tell: How do you think John felt in prison? How do you think the people Jesus helped felt?

Do: At the end of each day, give together one good thing that has happened, no matter how small, and give thanks to God for it.

Pray: We pray for people who are sad or in prison, and for all those who need God's help. We place them into God's hands and ask God to bless them. Amen.

Activity time

Add the change in expression to John's face when he receives the good news from Jesus.

Find the words you need to fill in the sentence out of the 10-shown here

nouns	money	life
see	clean	honor
trouble	dead	bones
	blind	

Jesus replied, 'Tell John what you and ———. The ——— see, the ——— walk, the lepers are made ———, the ——— hear, the dead return to ——— and the poor are given good ———.'

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Templates

Children's Sheet

Available in colour, black and white and in Welsh-language versions

Colouring Sheet

Images

Images for the week that you can download, print and project

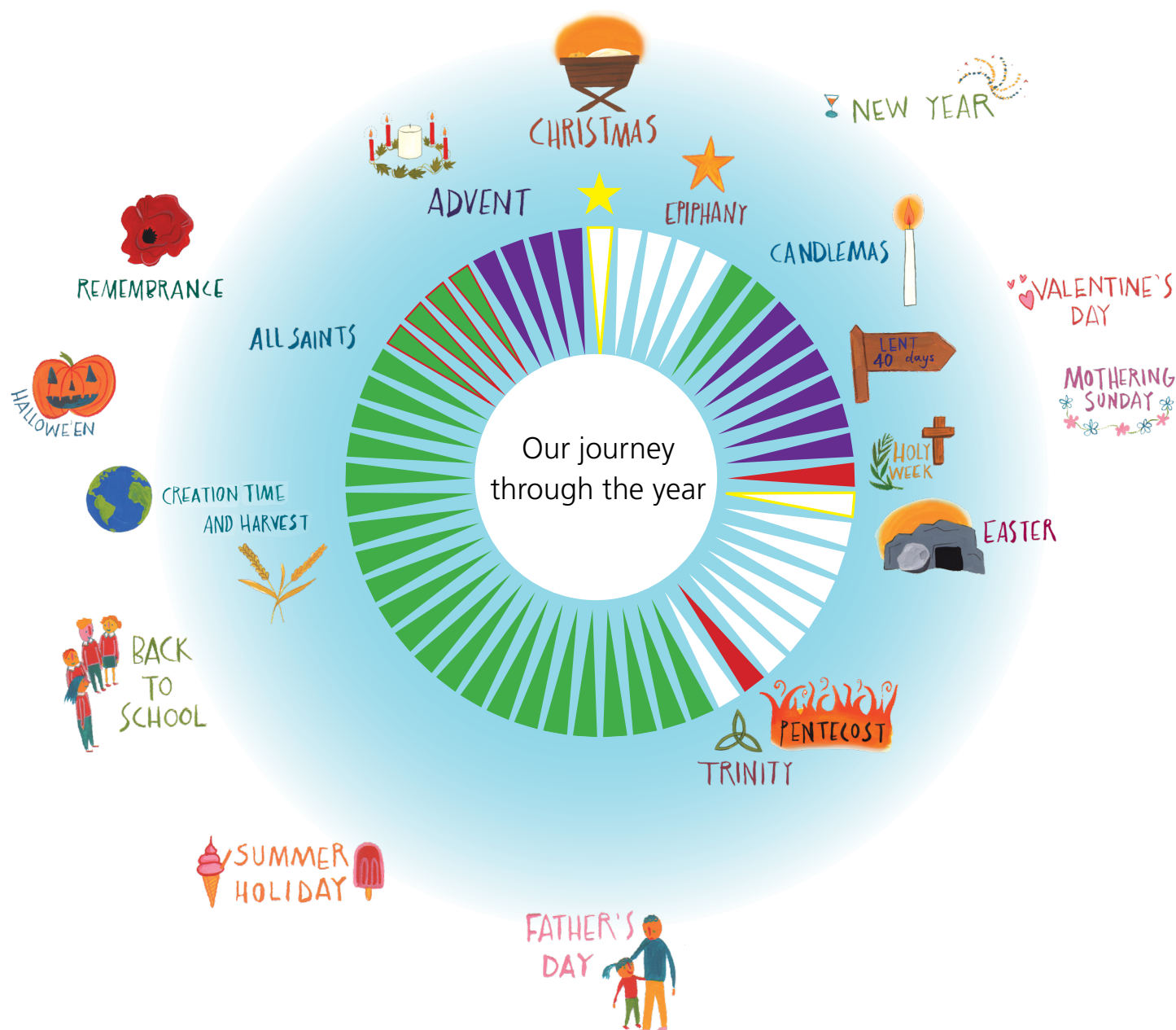
Live your faith Sheet

You could email this, or print it on the back of a news sheet

Seasonal resources

Our huge bank of online seasonal resources enables you to mark the church seasons all through the year.

As well as resources for many festivals and special Sundays, we offer biblical materials for 'secular' events. By enabling you to weave the sacred into the secular, the resources help you reach out to your wider community. See free examples at www.rootsontheweb.com



A selection of the types of resources you'll find in our seasonal resources bank

- All-age services
- Prayers and prayer activities
- Craft and other activities
- Drama sketches
- Holiday club resources
- Reflections and meditations
- Whole service outlines
- Poems, hymns and songs.

ROOTS SUBSCRIPTION PACKAGES

ROOTS offers two sets of resources: **Adult & All Age** and **Children & Young People**.

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or

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£53.50
for the year

Both sets of resources

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for the year

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With a sharing subscription, you can:

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- register a number of users on the ROOTS website. It's up to you who to give the magazines to, and who to register as users of the website.

Total number of magazines received per issue	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	More than 8
Total cost for the year	£104.00	£146.00	£189.00	£226.75	£264.50	£302.25	£340.00	£340.00 + £37.75 per extra magazine**
Number of web user accounts with this package*	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

*The subscription administrator will have their own, additional, user account, to manage the subscription. **You will have 2 more web accounts than the number of magazines.

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