

# Footsteps to the Feast

12 two-hour children's programmes  
for Christian festivals and special times  
of the year

Ideal for  
**6-10s**



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Foreword by Mary Hawes,  
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# Introduction

Give a children's leader one good idea and it will soon multiply into two or three or four! This has been my experience during the last twelve years as a trainer with those who work with children in the church. They are a creative bunch, who are constantly on the lookout for new ways to pass on the stories of the Bible to those in their care, and new ways to take our story of faith out to other children in the community. Indeed, children's leaders have always been at the forefront when it comes to being mission-minded, ever exploring innovative ways to proclaim the gospel afresh to a new generation—a fact that the church has not always recognized.

It is with this understanding that I have gathered together the ideas in this book, confident that each chapter will spark off further inspiration and creativity in the minds of those who use it. During my years as National Children's Work Coordinator for the Church Mission Society and now as part of the *Barnabas* ministry team of BRF, I've had the privilege of working with children's leaders up and down the country, as together we have run special events for children and their carers that help to tell our gospel story. Again and again, when I have come along with an outline, I have seen my original ideas grow as the creative minds of the teams with whom I have worked have planned and developed the event.

The outlines for the events in *Footsteps to the Feast* are the product of just this sort of collaboration. Each of these festival specials started life as part of an event that was planned together by a local team and myself. I expect that some readers will recognize elements that first saw the light of day in a church or hall near to them.

Good ideas need to be shared, and so this book was born. I hope it will be of use to many churches around the country

looking for new ways to engage the children in their area with the Christian faith. Some churches still have the ability to put on the grand enterprise of a week-long holiday club once a year, but for many this is no longer possible. However, the idea of special half-day events is much more within their reach. In my experience, this approach has opened up new possibilities for churches, providing contacts with children on a more evenly spaced programme across the year. It is also an approach that works well with the fact that many children, even those who are part of our church family, cannot regularly come to a weekly event. These occasional festival specials are another way for those children to ‘footstep’ their way into the faith, as well as being attractive celebrations that can draw others from outside the church.

*Footsteps to the Feast* is offered as material for just this sort of approach to children’s work. In some cases, it may supplement the regular week-by-week diet while also enabling churches to reach a wider audience from time to time; for others it will provide a new way to pass on our faith by making use of the festival framework that already exists in the normal cycle of the Christian year.

I have enjoyed planning and leading these *Footsteps* specials and, as ever, working with children and their leaders, I have received far more than I have given. May this be your experience, too, as you use these outlines to help tell the good news of Jesus to the next generation.

## **How to use this book**

The twelve outlines for the special children’s events in *Footsteps to the Feast* focus on Christian festivals and special days throughout the year. Each session is designed to last up to two hours and is ideal for a half-day event, perhaps at the weekend, in the school holidays or possibly an early-evening after-school session. The outlines are also evenly spaced throughout the year and so offer a range of possible slots, which you might choose from to tell the

Christian story on a regular basis. Some churches use a day in the half-term weeks as a convenient time to offer this sort of annual programme, thus providing up to three special days a year. Each church, however, needs to work out its own pattern and, of course, it will depend on the resources it has and the availability of leaders.

Each session outline contains a wealth of ideas to deliver a balanced programme, including:

- ⊗ Background information to the feast itself.
- ⊗ Warm-up activities.
- ⊗ A festival chant.
- ⊗ A selection of games.
- ⊗ Ideas for storytelling, drama, music and craft activities.
- ⊗ A format for reflection and worship together.

In addition, for each of the chapters, there are some further storytelling ideas on the *Barnabas* website , using a more reflective approach to handling scripture in the style known as *Godly Play*. (Visit [www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk](http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk).)

Of course, you will need to gather a team to deliver these special events and, with them, plan carefully who will be responsible for each part of the programme. The team should include at least:

- ⊗ An overall coordinator who will keep an eye on all aspects on the day as well as organizing the planning beforehand.
- ⊗ One or two upfront leaders, who will take the opening warm-up session, and be responsible for the storytelling and possibly also the worship at the end.
- ⊗ Leaders for the craft, music and drama workshops.
- ⊗ Someone to coordinate the reflection and worship at the end, if this is not already being done by one of the upfront leaders.

In addition, there may need to be other leaders for registration, for the teams and as helpers with the workshops, all depending on the number of children involved at the event.

Each session outline includes a selection of ideas, so the first task of the team is to choose carefully from these ideas and plan the parts of the programme with which they want to work. In addition, they should take some time to read the Bible background together so that they are familiar with its content and fully aware of its potential for sharing and nurturing faith with children. Each chapter also contains suggestions for materials needed to deliver that session—items that may need to be bought or made for the day. The overall team coordinator should check that everything is in place.

The most important preparation for these events is prayer. It is vital to remember that these sessions are not designed just to entertain and occupy children but rather, through God's grace, to become a means of growing faith in the lives of those with whom we work. To this end, make sure that you keep your church fully informed of your plans so that they can support you, surrounding all your preparation, as well as the day itself, with their prayers.

The heart of each *Footsteps* session is the Bible story for that festival or feast day and the worship related to it. It is important that these two parts are given a priority and done well. The activities, games and other fun elements of the session are special, but what makes this day different from any other 'secular' children's event is that God's word is being shared and that there is an opportunity to come close to God in worship. All the other parts of the programme could be shortened in some way, but please don't cut down the Bible story and the worship.

Finally, templates are provided for some of the activities. They can be found on pages 226–229 of this book or can be downloaded from [www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk](http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk). Pages 232–234 give a list of books with further ideas for crafts, music and drama. These books can be obtained through the *Barnabas* website, which has an 'Ideas' section that can supplement what is already in this book.

It is such a privilege to work with children and I hope you will be enriched and blessed by using outlines from this book. I never cease to be amazed at the very special promise that Jesus gives us all, namely that in receiving a child we receive more of him, and that in

receiving Jesus, we receive the Father who sent him. The church has often underestimated or even ignored this fact. Giving to and receiving from a child is the way to grow in faith. May this be your experience, too!

# On your marks!

## A children's or all-age event to celebrate Advent

It's hard for all of us to have to wait for something special to happen, and this is especially true for children. However, the Christian Church has a long tradition of setting aside 'times of waiting' as a preparation for the great feasts of faith. Advent is one of those times.

Christmas, with its central story of God becoming human, is too important a festival for us just to stumble into it without being ready. The four weeks of Advent, which trace the story of how God planned long ago the great mystery of the incarnation, aim to help us be properly prepared for the great celebration ahead. The hopes of the patriarchs, the promises of our powerful God and the words of the prophets are recalled as we build up to the birth in the Bethlehem stable.

In contrast, the secular and commercial world's build-up to the Christian holiday break increasingly dominates the lives of our children, who are influenced by the hope of expensive presents, the promise of special foods and the glitter of the adverts luring them on to the New Year sales. For most children today, the Advent calendar is no more than a 24-compartment chocolate box that has nothing to do with the Bible story.

The following outline for an Advent party event aims to put the scriptural story of this 'getting ready' time back on centre-stage. It can be used at any suitable time in the weeks of December in order to help children arrive at the festival prepared for and excited by

the true meaning of Christmas. Using this outline, you will also be able to link the drama element into an opportunity to develop and rehearse a presentation for a special nativity service to take place on the Sunday before Christmas itself. It isn't always easy to do this during normal Sunday group meeting time, especially if attendance is variable. Building it in as part of this event, leading to a special service, also carries the hope of drawing in new families to your Christmas celebrations.

### Bible footsteps

The story can be found in Isaiah 6:1—9:7 and Luke 1:5—2:19.

### First steps

As children arrive and are registered, they should be put into four groups, each with a team base and team leaders. The team names and team bases should be linked to different parts of the Bible that point us forward to the coming of Jesus. Here are some suggested names:

- ☉ **Pioneers:** These are the patriarchs, whose stories and promises foreshadow the coming of Jesus.
- ☉ **Rulers:** These are the kings, whose lives point us to the coming king.
- ☉ **Messengers:** These are the prophets, whose words describe what Jesus' coming will be like.
- ☉ **Heralds:** These are events and people, such as the birth of John the Baptist and the words at the annunciation, that immediately precede the birth of the baby at Christmas.

Each team base should include a large signpost along with other visuals and Bible verses to highlight the various pieces of the Advent jigsaw that come together at Christmas. Examples are given overleaf.

## Pioneers

**Signpost:** A special leader.

**Visuals:** Names of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses).

**Bible promises:** Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you (Genesis 12:3b); He will choose one of your own people to be a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15a).

## Rulers

**Signpost:** A special king.

**Visuals:** Names of Bible kings (David, Solomon and Ahaz).

**Bible promises:** I will keep my promise to David that someone from your family will always be king of Israel (1 Kings 9:5); I have helped a mighty hero. I chose him from my people and made him famous (Psalm 89:19).

## Messengers

**Signpost:** A special person.

**Visuals:** Names of some of the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah.

**Bible promises:** A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler (Isaiah 9:6); Some day I will appoint an honest king from the family of David, a king who will be wise and rule with justice (Jeremiah 23:5); Bethlehem Ephrath, you are one of the smallest towns in the nation of Judah. But the Lord will choose one of your people to rule the nation—someone whose family goes back to ancient times (Micah 5:2).

## Heralds

**Signpost:** A miracle child.

**Visuals:** Names of those whom God's angel visited just before Jesus came into the world (Zechariah, Mary and Joseph).

**Bible promises:** Our God has given us a mighty Saviour from the family of David his servant (Luke 1:69); He helps his servant Israel and is always merciful to his people. The Lord made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his family for ever! (Luke 1:54–55).

Once all the children have arrived, gather them together for some warm-up exercises on the theme of ‘getting ready’. For example, include some rapid and repeated mime for the following situations:

- ☉ Getting ready to go on holiday
- ☉ Getting ready to go to a party
- ☉ Getting ready to take an important penalty kick
- ☉ Getting ready for an Olympic final
- ☉ Getting ready for a grand meal

Make this fun and fast moving!

You might also practise a few ‘on your marks, get set, go’ routines in various poses: for example, runners in a race, swimmers at the Olympic pool, cyclists, cricketers and so on.

Give a short introduction to the theme.

Part of the fun of special events is, of course, getting ready, but some things take longer to get ready for than others. God spent a very long time indeed getting ready for the miracle of Christmas—not just the four weeks before the day, but all the years since the very beginning of time. This unique moment in the Christian story didn’t just happen. God gave hints and signposts to what he was about to do.

Today we are going to explore this time of getting ready, which we call Advent, as we move towards Christmas itself. Advent seems to be suggesting that the very best things come not just to those who wait, but also to those who are ready.

Amazingly, however, even though God had given so many clues

as to what was about to come, most people were not ready when it did happen; they were taken by surprise. Very few had been able to work out what God was really going to do at Christmas to rescue the world he loves.

### **Footsteps chant**

Here is a special Advent chant that you could use during the day as you move from one activity to another, or if you want to call the whole group together. Initiate a simple clapping rhythm and then have the children echo each line of the poem after you, repeating this several times, varying pace and volume.

*We're on a special journey  
Of stories from the Book.  
To see how God surprised us all,  
Let's take a closer look.*

### **First footing**

Advent is a time to recall, one by one, the stages in the Bible story that lead up to the moment when God sent Jesus into the world. As the apostle Paul writes, 'when the time was right, God sent his Son' (Galatians 4:4). It seemed like a very long wait, but God in his grace took the trouble to prepare the world for what was about to happen. In the same way as we, on a much smaller scale, have to prepare and plan for Christmas (the meals, the presents, decorating the tree and so on), God prepared for Christmas Day.

There are clues to God's great rescue plan right throughout the Old Testament and, in some ways, Advent is like a treasure hunt as we search for and put together all these clues. As a way into today's story, you will need to collect pictures of the items below. They can be printed off from the Internet or computer clipart. Each one is a visual clue about how God will send Jesus.

You will need to make as many sets of these images as there are teams. Then, the pictures should be hidden around your meeting area for the Advent treasure hunt. Have a large sheet of paper, scissors and glue for each group so that they can make their pictures into a collage once they have collected all twelve images.

- ☉ **A star-filled sky:** representing God's promise of a worldwide family of faith one day (Genesis 22:17).
- ☉ **A roaring lion:** representing God's promise to the tribe of Judah about a ruler who would come (Genesis 49:9–10).
- ☉ **A royal crown:** representing God's promise of a future king like David, but one who would last for ever (Psalm 89:27–29).
- ☉ **A tiny baby:** representing God's promise to Isaiah of a special child who would have amazing names (Isaiah 9:6).
- ☉ **The branch of a tree:** representing God's promise of a special rescuer who would bring new growth and life for God's people (Jeremiah 23:5–6).
- ☉ **A village:** representing God's promise that this would all happen in a small place called Bethlehem (Micah 5:2–3).
- ☉ **A sheep:** representing God's promise that he would send an innocent victim to tackle death on our behalf (Genesis 22:13–14).
- ☉ **A group of camels:** representing God's promise that there would be visitors arriving with gifts from far-off countries (Isaiah 60:5b).
- ☉ **A man speaking to others:** representing the special prophet that God promised to Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18).
- ☉ **A picture of John the Baptist:** representing God's promise that he would send a messenger to prepare the way (Isaiah 40:3).
- ☉ **A little child:** representing God's promise that a child would usher in a new beginning for the world (Isaiah 11:6).
- ☉ **A shepherd:** representing God's promise that this new person would know how to care for us in a gentle way (Isaiah 40:11).

Once each team has collected all twelve clues, take some moments to run through the different images and see how they are clues to the coming of Jesus. Finally, work with the children on making the

twelve images into a single picture by cutting and pasting as a collage on a large sheet of paper.

## Footbridge

Here are some games to play as a group on the theme of Advent.

1. How good are you at keeping still and waiting for something? Waiting even for a very short time can be quite a challenge. Tell the children that they must walk quietly in silence around the room, but once they think a certain period of time is up, they should sit down immediately on the ground. The leader tells them the times they need to estimate, varying between half a minute and one and a half minutes. The leader calls out when the actual time has passed. Who was closest to sitting down at the right moment?

2. Waiting—at least in Great Britain—is usually a case of standing in a queue. Challenge each team to form a queue, but according to certain criteria. For example:

- ⊗ A queue in height order, the smallest at the front.
- ⊗ A queue in age order, the oldest at the front.
- ⊗ A queue according to the day on which the team members were born, with Sunday at the front.
- ⊗ A queue in order of how many people are in their family at home, with the biggest number at the front.

You could try asking that some of these queues be formed in silence. It is interesting to see how a group reacts to this, and how they quickly learn to ‘talk’ with their hands.

3. Challenge your teams to get one person among them ready for a fancy dress party. To do this, each team member will have to

fetch an item of clothing from the other end of the room. Collect together four or more equal piles of clothes, including things like hats, scarves, jackets, overtrousers, ties, huge shoes, embarrassing socks and so on—the more colourful and oversized, the better. When the game starts, one team member at a time runs up to the clothes pile and collects one item only to bring back and start dressing their ‘lucky’ teammate. Once that person has arrived with his or her item of clothing, the next person can go, and so on. You could introduce other elements to this game, such as an obstacle course to run through towards the clothes, only being allowed to run to certain rules or with a handicap, or blindfolding the person who is being dressed.

4. Another application of the ‘getting ready’ theme is a countdown. Challenge the group to form themselves into a unified team sculpture of various items, while the overall leader counts down from 5 to 1 (or maybe, for more complicated sculptures, 10 to 1). Teams could be challenged to make a sculpture in that time of:

- ⊗ A space rocket
- ⊗ Marathon runners at a start line
- ⊗ A racing car
- ⊗ Swimmers under starter’s orders
- ⊗ A church building
- ⊗ A table laid for a meal
- ⊗ A tent in the desert

## **Best foot forward**

Some of the Old Testament passages most often quoted at Advent come from the book of Isaiah. Over 500 years before Jesus was born, national events affecting the life of the kingdom of Judah, as well as personal events in the prophet’s own life, became not only significant for the people of the time but also pointers to the

mystery of the incarnation to come. These events and prophecies are recorded in Isaiah 6:1 to 9:7.

It is interesting that the outworkings of God's purposes at this point in history are all associated with the birth of children. Isaiah's own son's name is linked to the prophecy of hope and faith that God spoke to him on the day when he was overwhelmed by God's presence in the temple (see 6:1–11 and 7:3); a second child is named Emmanuel (which means 'God with us') along with the added warning that, before this child is about seven years of age (see 7:13–17), the nation will be in serious trouble; a third son has the longest name in the Bible, and this points forward to the awful day when the superpower of Assyria will overwhelm the kingdom of Judah (see 8:1–4); finally, a fourth child is spoken of, who has some incredible and mysterious names (see 9:6–7). Isaiah is now talking about something well beyond his own time, and Christians see this event as the birth of Christ, who brought light and joy into the world. Isaiah says that this fourth child will come from Galilee in the north, which is where Mary first heard the news that she was to be the mother of God.

These few chapters contain a whole heap of clues preparing us for Christmas.

Tell the following story of Isaiah to the children, inviting their participation with sound effects, reactions to the events and simple mime suggested by the words in bold.

Isaiah was a priest many hundreds of years before the first Christmas, but through the things that happened to him, God was preparing the world for what Christmas really means.

One day in the temple, Isaiah heard **angels singing**. He was **terrified** and felt that he didn't deserve to be there at all. But God wanted him to be a messenger. God warned him that he would be saying some things that **very few**

**would understand.** God promised Isaiah that, despite all that happened, there would be the **hope** of a new start one day. Because of God's message, Isaiah even gave his first son a name that meant something like 'hope one day'.

King Ahaz of Judah was **in a terrible panic**. The nearby countries of Syria and Israel wanted to force him to join them in a war against the superpower of the day, called Assyria. If he didn't do that, they threatened to get rid of him. Along with the whole country, the king was **paralysed with fear**. Isaiah knew what God wanted him to say. 'Trust in God' was Isaiah's message; 'if you don't, then the future's bleak.' Despite this message, King Ahaz **couldn't make up his mind**. But God sent a sign anyway, in the shape of a **baby** called Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'. It was God's way of saying that only by **trusting in God** being with them would there be any **hope** of a tomorrow. This is still true today, and Emmanuel was the name given by the angel to Jesus at Christmas.

Isaiah warned that before this child was about seven years old, Assyria would have beaten them all. Isaiah's second child was given the longest name ever! In English it means something like '**Quick, grab what you can; loot the lot**' (and you think a child named after an entire football team is sad!). It was Isaiah's dramatic way of warning everyone that things were going to be really bad. The enemy would get them all in the end. Indeed, within months of this birth, Syria and Israel were **swept away**, and not many years later Judah followed.

But Isaiah kept telling the people that if only they could **trust** in Emmanuel ('God with us'), things could be different. He went on to say that one day another child

would be born. This child would be born in the north of the country. This child would bring **light into the darkness**. This child would bring joy. This child would change everything. This child would be given incredible names, such as Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

No one at the time understood what Isaiah was talking about. Maybe even Isaiah wasn't that sure what it all meant. But it was a clue: it was God's signpost pointing to Christmas. This was going to be God's great plan to send Jesus, whose name means 'rescuer'. This time it wasn't just Judah that could be rescued, but the whole world.

You might wish to consider ending this retelling by playing 'For unto us a child is born' from Handel's *Messiah*.

## Footrest

At this point in the programme, take a break for a drink and biscuits. Those who finish eating and drinking quickly could return to their bases and help decorate the signpost and work on other visuals there.

## Footprints

Now there is an opportunity for the group to experience up to three different activities, depending on the time available. The suggested three workshops are based around drama ('Footlights'), music ('Footnotes') and craft ('Fancy footwork').

In this part of the event, you could include the opportunity for one group, or all of them, to prepare and rehearse a presentation for

a nativity play to be performed at the service nearest to Christmas. This would also be a good time to introduce and practise any new Christmas music that might go with the play. In the following outlines, there are ideas for resources for such a presentation.

### **Footlights**

Play some simple warm-up games with the group to get them ready for working on a short piece of drama for Advent and Christmas. Some suggestions are given below.

1. Advent is all about waiting. Begin by encouraging activities such as twiddling thumbs, yawning and stretching, looking anxiously around, and adopting puzzled and impatient looks. Then, on a sudden clap of the leader's hands, all should freeze into a position of shock and surprise, because the thing they been waiting for suddenly happens.

2. In small groups of three or four, ask the children to develop a mime in which they are waiting for something—for example, in a restaurant, at a bus stop, outside a sports ground or concert venue, or in a shop queue. After a minute or so of the mime, the group should stop the scene as a freeze frame (a still photo). Can the others guess where they are waiting?

3. With younger children, explore the build-up to a surprise. Mime with them the actions of slowly opening a mysterious door, gradually peeping out from under the bedclothes at night, cautiously opening a treasure chest or nervously pulling back the curtains. Then, at a given signal, everyone should react with huge surprise at what is seen. Ask the children for ideas about what it is they have seen.

4. Play a fruit salad type of game based around the animals of Advent. Give each child one animal name (sheep, donkey or

camel), and encourage some practice at appropriate animal noises. Now call out one of those words: the children allocated that name have to cross the circle, while one or two volunteers in the middle try to grab a place in the circle for themselves while the others are moving—thus stranding someone else in the middle. If you want them all to move, call out the words ‘Advent animals’.

Advent is the build-up to God’s surprise for the world. God had been preparing for this event from the beginning of time. Our world needs rescuing from all that is bad. To do this, God did not send a mighty warrior or a superhero but a tiny baby. This was the great surprise. There had been clues about the coming of a new leader, a perfect king and a special rescuer throughout the Old Testament, but no one had really understood them. Now, in this workshop, it is time to focus on the surprise itself: the first Christmas.

Set the children walking around the room in different moods that they can practise for use in a drama of the nativity story. For example:

- ☉ As bored people up on a hillside, on night duty with their sheep.
- ☉ As nervous people down in the town under the watchful eyes of the Romans supervising the census.
- ☉ As frightened people who have just seen thousands of angels.
- ☉ As angry people who can’t find anywhere to stay in the busy streets and inns of Bethlehem.
- ☉ As puzzled people who have been disturbed by the noisy visit of the shepherds to the stable.
- ☉ As searching people, looking up at a strange star in the sky.
- ☉ As amazed people who discover God’s great surprise.

Now divide the group up to work on some short improvised dramas under the overall title ‘Taken by surprise’. You could tackle all the scenes in one workshop each time, or divide the scenes up

among the workshop opportunities you have, so that different groups prepare different parts of the story. The different parts could then be drawn together later as your nativity presentation. Gather a few simple props for each scene as suggested below. Trust the children to create some dialogue and actions for each of these scenes.

- ❁ **The kitchen surprise:** Gabriel meets with Mary and, later, Mary talks with Joseph. You will need some kitchen items around a table and some indication of traditional Middle Eastern dress.
- ❁ **The hillside surprise:** The angels appear to the shepherds. You will need some indication of traditional Middle Eastern dress and some toy sheep.
- ❁ **The stable surprise:** Jesus is born among the animals at the back of the inn. You will need a box for the manger, some straw, animal masks and some indication of traditional Middle Eastern dress.

If you would prefer a scripted version of a nativity, *Barnabas* has a wide range of nativity drama ideas, some of which also include new songs for Christmas. See the bibliography on page 232 for a list of resources.

## Footnotes

There is no shortage of music for the Advent and Christmas season. This workshop will be an ideal place to rehearse traditional favourites as well as introducing some new songs. Songs could be sung just for this day's programme or, as in the drama workshop above, songs could be practised to go with the nativity play, ready for a presentation at a service in church. There are some splendid new songs in *Barnabas* publications (see the bibliography on page 232).

## Fancy footwork

Alongside the craft idea below, you may also wish to explore books in the *Barnabas* range that provide suggestions for things to make at this time of year. (See page 232 for details.)

### Advent signposts

**You will need** cardboard tubes from kitchen rolls, pieces of stiff card cut as long pointed signs, paints and/or colouring materials.

Cut small slits in the top of the cardboard tubes, into which the signpost arms will fit. Decorate the signposts and the signs themselves, adding words such as 'Advent signpost' or 'On your marks, get set!' for the main pole. On the signs, add some simple headline words that indicate the ways in which the Old Testament points forward to Jesus, such as 'A special leader', 'A special king', 'A special person' and 'A miracle child'.

## Foothold

Use the Footsteps chant (see page 20) to draw everyone together for a final time of reflection on the Advent theme. Each group should gather in a circle at their team base with their leaders. In the centre of each circle, you will need a simple Advent wreath with four candles around the edge and a large white candle in the centre. The four outside Advent candles are usually purple, but your church tradition may include a rose candle among the four. You will also need a candle snuffer and safety matches or a candle lighter.

Ask the groups to choose five people who will help a leader to

light the candles, and another five who will snuff out the candles at the end. This will happen at the appropriate moments as indicated in the following simple liturgy, which can be read either by each leader for their own group or centrally by one leader for all. Point out that the names needed for each part of the liturgy are displayed in the team areas. Wait until everyone is quiet and settled before you begin.

**Leader:** Today we have been celebrating the season of Advent—the time of getting ready for the unexpected surprise of Christmas, which God planned long ago.

God spoke to one family. That family grew into a tribe of people known as the Hebrews. To the great leaders of these people, God promised that one day an even greater leader would come.

*Light the first candle. Pause to enjoy the light before saying the words below together.*

**All:** Thank you for speaking to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses about Jesus, who is coming.

**Leader:** God spoke to one nation—the people of God. To the kings of this people, God promised that one day a special king would come.

*Light the second candle. Pause to enjoy the light before saying the following words together.*

**All:** Thank you for speaking to David, Solomon, Ahaz and others about Jesus, who is coming.

**Leader:** God spoke to the people of Judah and Israel, telling them to trust in God who was with them.

Through the prophets, God promised that one day a special person would come.

*Light the third candle. Pause to enjoy the light before saying the following words together.*

**All:** Thank you for speaking through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and others about Jesus, who is coming.

**Leader:** God spoke to ordinary people among this special family, both in Jerusalem and Nazareth. To them, God promised that very soon he would send a miracle child.

*Light the fourth candle. Pause to enjoy the light before saying the following words together.*

**All:** Thank you for speaking to Zechariah, Mary and Joseph about Jesus, who is coming.

**Leader:** And then God sent his great surprise, born in Bethlehem in a cattle shed. Shepherds and angels worshipped together the gift of Jesus to the world.

*Light the central candle. Pause to enjoy the light before saying the following words together.*

**All:** Jesus is coming. Jesus has come. And Jesus will come to us all.

*Now pass the snuffer around to those who have been chosen to 'change' the light. As they do this, say the following words.*

**Leader:** As the smoke spreads, so the story of Advent and Christmas has been passed around the world. Jesus came to bring peace on earth and good news for everyone.

*Watch the smoke drifting from the five candles for a while and then begin a slower, more reflective version of the Footsteps chant to end the session. Do take care as the groups move away from where the candles are, back to the centre of the hall.*

### **Footsteps to the feast**

Gather the children in a large circle as a final act before the finish of the programme. Everyone should hold hands, including the leaders. When this large circle is ready, have everyone stand still, and explain that you are all going to act out the surprise of Christmas that no one expected. This is how it goes:

God, who is greater and bigger than we can ever imagine or understand, decided to wrap himself up very small so that he could come alongside us and love us. This circle is huge, but we are now going to make it small to show how Christmas is about the great surprise and miracle of God becoming a baby.

Ask the children to pull closer together and then slowly shuffle forward towards the centre, gradually contracting the circle (taking care, of course, not to push or hurry any younger and smaller children). Do this until you all become as tight a huddle of people as is possible, and safe. When you are in this position, say:

This is what God did. The most high became the most low. The Almighty became the all-tiny out of love for you and me. Because of this, God is able to help us to become the best we can be. This was God's surprising way of rescuing his world and remaking it again.

As you say these words, ask them all to expand the circle again very slowly and carefully to its full extent.

Finish the exercise by repeating the Footsteps chant, but changing the last line to 'It's here that we have looked.'

### **Stepping out**

Conclude the event with a feast, inviting parents and carers to join you for some seasonally appropriate food and drink. This might also be a good time to have a small Advent gift ready for each child to mark today's footsteps and to include an invitation to the coming nativity service. (See page 233 for *Barnabas* books about the Christmas story that would make ideal presents.)

Ideal for  
**6-10s**

*Footsteps to the Feast* offers the opportunity to explore the 'big story' of God's purpose for his world and his people through 12 fun-filled two-hour special events. Each programme is packed with tried and tested ideas including icebreakers, team games, drama, music and crafts, all designed to explore the overall theme. At the heart of each event there is space for visual storytelling and reflection.

The feasts and festivals of the Christian year remind us that there is more to life than just the passing of days and months. The idea of special half-day events to mark the cycle of faith provides churches with the opportunity to help children to 'footstep' their way into the faith. In some cases, a special event may well supplement the regular week-by-week diet, while also enabling churches to reach a wider audience from time to time. For others, it provides a new way to pass on our faith by making use of the festival framework that already exists in the normal cycle of the Christian year.

The *Footsteps to the Feast* programmes explore the feasts and festivals of:

- |             |                    |                             |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| ❖ Advent    | ❖ Holy Week        | ❖ Harvest                   |
| ❖ Epiphany  | ❖ Pentecost        | ❖ Hallowe'en and All Saints |
| ❖ Candlemas | ❖ Trinity          | ❖ St Michael and All Angels |
| ❖ Lent      | ❖ The early Church | ❖ Bible Sunday              |

*Martyn Payne joined the Barnabas team in January 2003, having worked with CMS as National Children's Work Coordinator for several years. Martyn is a trained teacher, experienced workshop leader, accomplished speaker and Godly Play teacher. He has collaborated with children's advisers and education officers in major church, school and family events across the UK. Based in London, he is available to lead Barnabas RE days in schools, INSET, church-based training sessions and workshops and help run special events throughout the UK. Martyn is author of A-cross the world (Barnabas, 2004).*

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