Christmas Crib Blessing

A prayer service for Advent

Guidance for teachers/leaders

To focus on the sense of waiting during Advent, we suggest this crib blessing takes place near the end of term in the school hall or prayer place, so that pupils can 'journey' to the crib. If singing the carols is not possible, please play instrumental versions of the suggestions. Having the Advent wreath close by and lighting the candles will echo the liturgical action in your Advent services.

Please refer to our guide Supporting children with prayer to prepare for this prayer service.

You will need:

- A Christmas Crib and set of figures
- Advent wreath

For the optional activity:

- Body outlines
- Pens/pencils

Gather

- Advent wreath: light the number of candles for the current week of Advent
- Entrance carol: Go tell it on the mountain
- Sign of the cross
- Introduction (page 2): We suggest this is read by an adult.
- Opening Prayer (page 2): Read by pupil.

Word

- Crib figures arrival (Joseph, Mary, angel Gabriel, shepherds, Wise Men, Jesus)
- Five pupils bring forward the crib figures and five read the accompanying script (pages 2-4). We suggest instrumental carols are played quietly as pupils present and introduce the crib figures.
  Please note: whilst there are no specific scripture readings, character descriptions are based on the Gospels and include scriptural quotations.

Response

- Carol: *Away in a Manger*
- Optional activity: Come to the manger (page 6). Prepared beforehand so pupils' pictures are ready to present during this prayer service.
- Carol: *Come, come, come to the manger*
- Bidding Prayers (page 5): read by pupils.

Send

- Closing Blessing (page 5): read by RE Lead, Senior Leader, or Parish Priest.
- Sign of the Cross
- Closing carol: *Silent Night*

Registered in England and Wales Charity No. 1056651

Opening Carol: *Go tell it on the mountain*

Introduction

Every year at this time something wonderful happens in churches, schools and homes around the world. Christmas cribs that have been stored away since January are unpacked and put on display. Friends and followers of Jesus gather around the cribs, to pray, to reflect, and to get ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Today we gather around our school crib to do the same.

Have you noticed anything unusual about our crib? Apart from the animals in the stall, it is empty! Who is missing? *Shepherds, wise men, angels, Mary, Joseph, Jesus.*

The Advent wreath we lit at the start of our prayer time reminds us that we are still waiting for the arrival of Jesus at Christmas. Today, we will wait a little while until all the characters arrive in our crib. They'll get there one by one and as they do, we will find out why God invited them to the first Christmas. Let's begin our prayer service.

Sign of the Cross and Opening Prayer

Reader: God and Father of our worldwide family,
today we gather around our school crib.
Help us to learn more about the birth of your son, Jesus,
so that we can prepare our hearts for Christmas day
and be ready to celebrate with joy and hope,
the love you have for all your children. **Amen.**

Arrival of crib figures: Joseph

Leader: Now let's welcome our figures to the crib. Let's begin with Joseph.

A pupil carries Joseph to the crib

Reader: Joseph lived in Nazareth and was a faithful man.
He was engaged to Mary, a life together they had planned.
Then one night in a dream to him, an angel did appear,
with news of Mary's baby, the saviour who was near!
God had chosen Joseph to care for Mary and her son,
They were to call him 'Jesus'.
Now a new life had begun.

Based on Mt 1:18-25

Arrival of crib figures: Mary

Leader: Now let us welcome Mary to our crib.

A pupil carries Mary to the crib

Reader: Mary was a humble girl who prayed to God each day,
So when the angel appeared to her, she didn't run away.
The angel said 'Rejoice Mary, for God has chosen you,
to give birth to our Lord Jesus, and give hope to our world too.
Mary answered, 'Be it done to me, just as you have said.'
And life changed the very moment Mary bravely bowed her head.

Based on Luke 1:26-38

Arrival of crib figures: Angel Gabriel

Leader: Now let us welcome the angel Gabriel to our crib.

A pupil carries the angel to the crib

Reader: God sent his angel messengers that first Christmas day.
To tell the shepherds Christ was born, and sleeping in some hay.
And as the shepherds ran to see, they heard the angels sing,
'Glory to God and peace to those who joyfully welcome our king.'

Based on Luke 2:14

Arrival of crib figures: Shepherds

Leader: Now let us welcome the shepherds to our crib.

Pupils carry the shepherds to the crib

Reader: Shepherds weren't much liked back then; the people thought them rough.
But in God's eyes the shepherds were children that he loved.
He sent his angels down to them, and although they were afraid,
They rejoiced when God chose them to see the saviour he had made.
So off they ran and found Jesus, not surrounded by luxury or fuss.
'Look' said the shepherds all smiling, 'at what they Lord has done for us!'

Based on Luke 2:1-20

Arrival of crib figures: The Wise Men

Leader: Now let us welcome the Wise Men to our crib.

Pupils carry the Wise Men to the crib

Reader: The Wise Men lived in Asia, very far from Bethlehem.
The star they followed to that town surprised and gladdened them.
It was leading to a saviour, God had promised through the years,
A saviour who'd reveal to us the things we need not fear.
When people seem quite different, as did the three wise men,
Some choose to turn away from those who do not look like them.
But God loves all our differences, and to help us understand,
He led the wise men to the crib, to hold Jesus' little hand.

Based on Mt 2:1-11

Leader: You may have noticed that there's still somebody missing. Who might this be? It's Jesus! In churches around the world, baby Jesus isn't placed in the crib until late on Christmas eve. But as we won't be here then, we are going to put Jesus in the crib now.

A pupil carries the baby Jesus to the crib

Carol: *Away in a manger*

Leader: Today we've heard how God called Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men and angels to the crib, to share the joy of Jesus' birth. God calls us to the crib too, so that we can be close to Jesus and – like the shepherds and wise men – leave the crib eager to tell others that God came into our world as a baby, to show us how to love and care for one another.

Optional activity

Leader: Now it is time for you to come to the manger! Before we came together to pray, you all drew a picture of yourself. One by one, I'll ask you to bring your picture forward and place it near the manger. As you do, ask God to help you do what you can to love and care for others.

Whilst this activity is happening, sing together…

Carol: *Come, come, come to the manger*

Leader: Let us now join with our bidding prayers. The response to our prayers is, **hear our prayer.**

Bidding Prayers

Reader: Heavenly Father, Joseph listened to your message and trusted in your plan.
Help us to be courageous and faithful and just as he was.
That we might do what is right, even when it is difficult.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Reader: Heavenly Father, Mary, heard your call with a brave and generous heart.
Help us to say "yes" to sharing your love, just as she did.
That we might bring goodness and joy wherever we go.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Reader: Heavenly Father, you sent your angels to deliver to the world a message of great hope. Help us to share words that are kind, welcoming, merciful, and true, so that we too can be messengers of hope for others.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Reader: Heavenly Father, you chose to welcome poor and unknown visitors to the manger. Teach us to see the value and dignity in everyone we meet, and to welcome others with kindness, respect, and love.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Reader: In a moment of quiet prayer, let us offer our own prayers to God, who loves us and always listens to us.
(pause for quiet prayer)
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Reader: Remembering that we all beloved children of God, let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us:
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses.
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Closing Crib Blessing

Leader: Heavenly Father, bless our school crib.
May Joseph remind us how to be faithful.
May Mary remind us how to be brave.
May the angels remind us how to share your joy.
May the shepherds remind us to receive God's blessings.
May the wise men remind us how to welcome others.
And may Jesus remind us how to love and be loved.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. **Amen**.

Sign of the Cross

Closing Carol: *Silent Night*

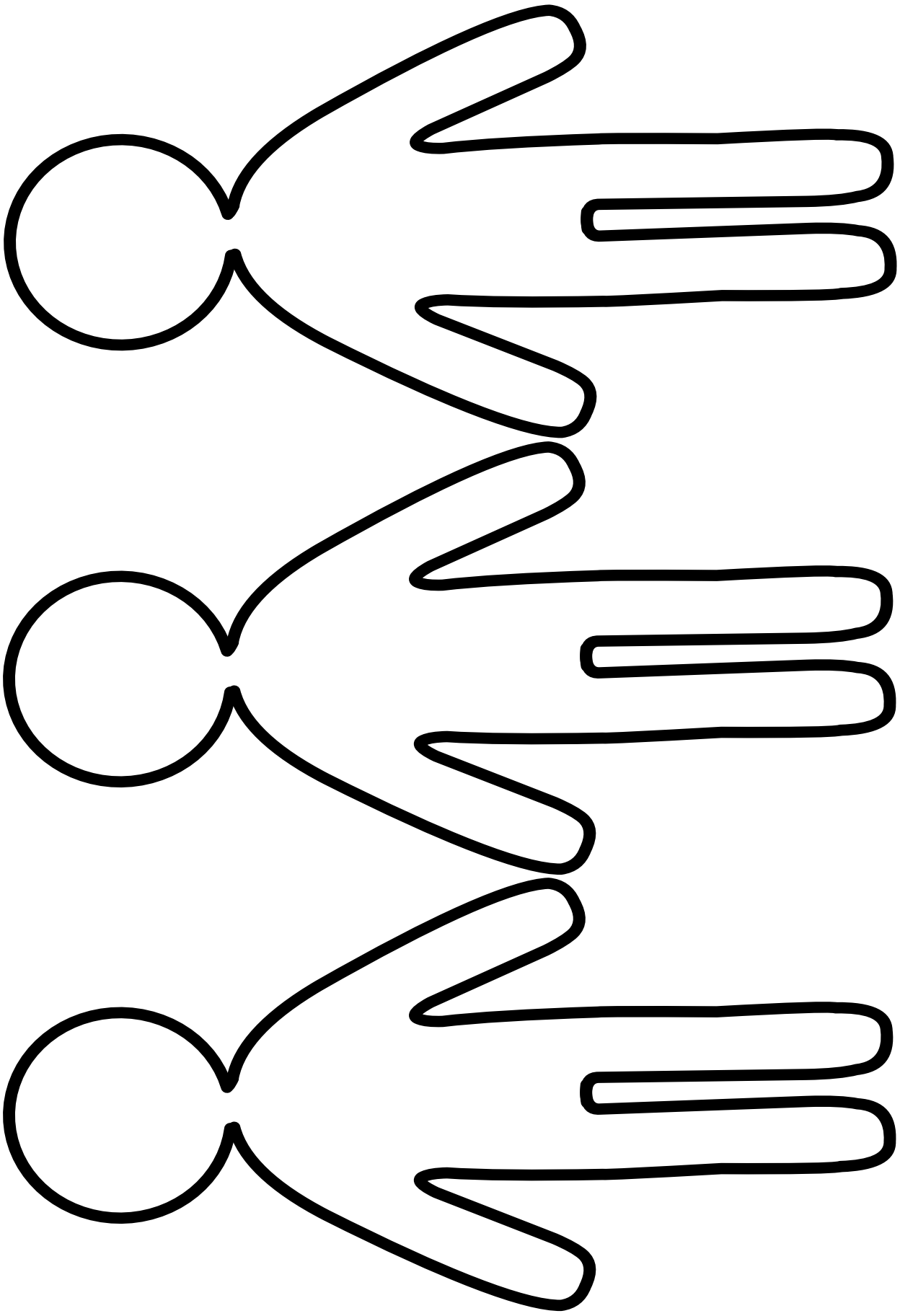
Optional activity: Come to the manger

God invites us all to come to the crib and draw close to Jesus.

Provide each pupil with a copy of a figurine (alternatively, they can draw their own). The children can create an image of themselves. They can decorate the figure as they wish and add items that reveal their personality and interests. We suggest these figures are created before the Christmas Crib Blessing, so that the pupils can present them as a prayer.

After the prayer service, you may wish to attach the figures to a display board alongside/behind your school crib. This is reminiscent of an Italian tradition, *Presepe*, where not just Mary, Joseph, etc. are seen at the crib, but also members of the local community!

Fundraising ideas

Carol concert or Nativity play: These are much loved Christmas events often with many people keen to attend, ask visitors to make a donation towards Mission Together to share the love of Christ at Christmas with children overseas. Did you know that Mission Together also have an EYFS Nursery Rhyme Nativity freely available from the Advent page of our website.

Christmas crafts: get the whole school involved in making and selling ornaments, wreaths, biscuits, and any other Christmassy gifts and treats you can think of. Donate the proceeds to Mission Together.