



The focus for infants and toddlers

Faith development for children from birth to three years old is primarily a matter of trust. Infants and young children are totally dependent on the adults around them – for shelter, food, love, and care. Since their communication skills are limited, they rely on those people to anticipate as well as meet all of their needs. If children in this youngest age group can trust that those needs will be met, they will thrive and view the world as a supportive and good place. Of course any time they spend with new caregivers and in new environments may affect their sense of trust. A truly caring environment frees them to learn and explore with confidence. When caregivers at church also offer such a caring environment, children will come to trust in a loving and caring God as well. As you explore these activities with the children during the weeks of Advent, keep the focus on getting ready for an exciting event – the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the one who comes to show us more about God. As the children join in the excitement and preparation, emphasize that they can trust that God loves each one of them.

Preparation time

- ❑ Bring items for worship table: *a worship "candle," blue or purple cloth, Bible and an Advent wreath* (see p. 109 for wreath, candle and "candle" lighting instructions).
- ❑ Bring *Advent wreath nametags* (pattern on p. 122).
- ❑ Bring *books "Loving God Together" and "Welcome, Baby Jesus", and a sturdy, child-friendly nativity set.*
- ❑ Bring a *CD player, Seasons Growing Faith Songbook, and Music CD.* Become familiar with the songs "What If You Came to My Church" (p. 39, and #20 on the music CD) and "Jesse Tree" (p. 13, and #9 on the music CD).
- ❑ Bring *poster "Singing the Good News."*
- ❑ Choose *Advent activities* (see Activity time) that best suit the needs of your group and bring the materials required.
- ❑ Make *copies of Advent Family Letter* (p. 112).

Welcoming time

As children enter, greet each of them by name, with a smile and gentle contact. Say, "We're glad you're here at church with us!" as you place nametags on them. Talk with parents or guardians, noting any special instructions, especially for infants.

Gathering time

Invite children to gather near the worship table. Talk about each of the items there, and mention particularly the blue or purple cloth for Advent. Say, "Our worship table reminds us that God is with us. We will hear stories from the Bible, our book about God's love." Pretend to light the worship candle by pulling up the yellow tissue paper. Then have a child "light" one candle on the Advent wreath the same way. Continue having a child "light" one more candle each week during Advent.

Sing "Let's Come Together" (p. 108)
Pray Dear God,
thank you for this day,
and for our families and friends.
Amen.

"Extinguish" candles by pushing flames down to signal the end of the ritual.

😊 Walk around room with infants and quietly describe what is on the walls, shelves, and displays before settling them in cribs, seats, or on clean blankets with toys.

Story time

Gather any children who are ready for a group activity and introduce the action rhyme. Encourage children, as a group or individually, to join in the actions as they learn the words. Repeat the rhyme several times each week during Advent.

Action rhyme “Get Ready” (p. 105)

Choose from the following ideas to engage children in the waiting, preparing, and excitement that characterize the Advent season.

Poster *Singing the Good News* Talk about the excitement of waiting for something to happen. Say, “This time of the year is called ‘Advent.’ During Advent we get ready to celebrate something very special!” Briefly talk about what we do to get ready for this special event. Encourage children to look at the poster and touch all the angels who are excited. We are getting excited, too. How do we show that we are excited?

Nativity set Talk about preparations as you add a figure or two to the display each week. Say, “How do you get ready to go outside? How do you get ready to eat? How do you get ready for bed? We get ready for different things in different ways. Long ago people got ready for a special baby to be born. The baby’s mother and father

(*show the figures and invite children to place them in the scene*) travelled a long way on a donkey. They found a place to sleep – in a stable, which is like a house for animals (*invite children to play with the stable and animal figures*).” Add details (*such as shepherds waiting with sheep, angels singing*) as Christmas gets closer.

Storybooks *Loving God*

Together (show picture of the Advent wreath) and ***Welcome, Baby Jesus*** (first three pages). Build anticipation for the special event coming soon by talking about the storybook pictures and helping children connect them with their own families’ preparations to celebrate Jesus’ birth. Mary and Joseph, and also the angels, got things ready to welcome a new baby into the world. Are you making a special space at home with decorations?



Snack time

Ingredients: crackers, blueberry or grape jam, juice or water

Serve small amounts of blueberry or grape jam on crackers each week during Advent.

Pray Dear God,
thank you for this food
and our friends.
Amen.

Activity time

The following activities may be done once or several times during the weeks of Advent. Expect to do the activities with small groups of children, and with children individually, depending on the week and children’s ages. Encourage them to play at their own pace in one or two activity centres each week. Some children will need considerable help and others will need very little. Try involving every child in an activity each week.



Let's pretend

Materials: dress-up clothes (such as scarves, hats, and vests), small suitcases or travel bags, dolls, doll clothes, baby blankets

First weeks of Advent Children pretend to get ready for travel. Suggest that they pack and unpack bags, adding and taking off layers of dress-up clothes as they imagine the places, inside or outside, they will go.

Faith talk Where will you go on your trip? How will you get there? What kind of clothes will you need? God is with you wherever you go.

Let's pretend cont.

Last weeks of Advent Children dress up as “parents” and get a “home” ready to welcome a new baby. As children play, talk about the things parents do to get ready to welcome a new baby (place for baby to sleep, find clothes, diapers/nappies...)

Faith talk God gives us families (like Jesus’ family, Mary and Joseph) to be with us always.



Let's build

Materials: wood, plastic, or milk carton blocks, floor mats, large shopping bag, artificial flowers

First weeks of Advent Set out a large shopping bag with building blocks inside. Call it a “waiting bag” and invite children to play and build with the blocks only as you slowly remove them from the bag.

Faith talk: It's hard to wait – but in Advent we know something wonderful is coming. What do you think we are waiting for?

Last weeks of Advent Jesus’ parents spent time preparing for Jesus’ arrival much as parents prepare for the birth of a baby today. Invite children to use the building blocks to build a stable or a place to welcome a baby.

Faith talk Advent is a time when we get ready and then wait for something to happen. What animals will be in your stable? Or, what furniture are you putting in your rooms? How would you decorate your rooms?



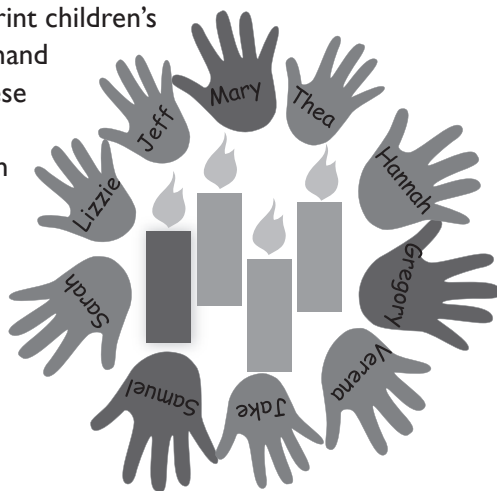
Let's create

Advent hand wreath

Materials: crayons, scissors, yellow, blue or purple, and green construction paper, tape

Beforehand: Cut four candle shapes and four flames. (See p. 125)

Children create the wreath poster at the beginning of Advent and then add a paper flame to one of the candles on the wreath each week. Invite children to decorate their green papers with crayons. Trace children's hands at least once on the green papers. Cut out hands and print children's names on their hand shapes. Tape these hand shapes in a circle to make an “Advent hand wreath” to display on the wall. Add paper candles.



Faith talk Our Advent wreath reminds us that we are waiting for Christmas. Christmas is when we celebrate the birth of baby Jesus. We'll light another candle each week and count one... two... three... four. Do you have an Advent wreath or Advent calendar at home?

Greeting cards

Materials: homemade stamp pads (p. 111), blue or purple watercolour paints, heavy paper, paint shirts

Beforehand: Fold papers in half to form cards. Inside, print messages such as “God loves you and I do too!”

Children can make greeting cards to give to people they love. Work with children individually to dip their fingers into paint and then press firmly on the front of the folded papers. Talk about the colour as they work. Allow time for clean up.

Faith talk Many people send greetings to friends and family during Advent. The cards remind us that we will be celebrating something wonderful because God loves us. Encourage children to give the cards to people they love.

Let's create cont.

Puppets

Materials: used Christmas cards, poster board, glue sticks, crayons, tape, craft sticks

Beforehand: Cut out poster board circles (10 cm/4 in) and pictures of angels, animals, and people from the cards.

Children can make puppets to accompany them as they wait for Christmas. Give each child a circle to decorate. Help children each to choose a picture to glue onto the decorated circle. Tape a craft stick handle to the back.

Faith talk You and your puppet friend can sing together, visit our nativity set together and count days and weeks before Christmas together – here and at home. It's fun to do things together, especially getting ready to celebrate.

Let's explore

Materials: pine needles, pine cones, a small Christmas tree, or other nature items available in your area at this time of year, a bowl of water, coloured construction paper

First weeks of Advent Guide children as they carefully examine, touch, and smell the pine or other items from nature. Look for pinecones and touch the pointy ends. Talk about how the branches or other items feel – prickly or soft, smooth or bumpy. Name the colours, and if you have evergreens, mention that they stay the same green all year round.

Faith talk God made every tree and plant, rock and flower. God made you, too. God is wonderful!

Last weeks of Advent Invite children to examine the nature items further by dipping them in water and “drawing” on coloured paper creating designs. Help them gently shake a little water on their hands or arms, too.

Faith talk Water is part of the world God made – and the water might tickle you! You can make beauty from things in God's beautiful world.



Although you may play the *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD* quietly in the background, focus on introducing the children to the following two songs.

1. **“What If You Came to My Church”** (p. 29, and #20 on the music CD) This song introduces children to what God's family does at church. Suggest that children move and clap with the music before they begin to learn the words. Add actions such as pointing to eyes for see, stretching tall for *big* and crouching low for *small*.
2. **“Jesse Tree”** (p. 13, and #9 on the music CD) Some churches have a “Jesse Tree” during Advent, with symbols representing Bible stories from Creation to Jesus' birth. Encourage children to wave their arms gently like tree branches. Near Christmas, remind children that there were some animals waiting for baby Jesus, too. Encourage everyone to make animal sounds and movements, as though they were preparing for someone special to come to their stable.

Faith talk We like to sing to God. Singing can make us happy inside. Getting ready for something we're excited about can be slow and that's hard. Singing helps! What else can we do to get ready?

Blessing time

Gather near the worship table. “Light” the candle.

Pray Dear God,
thank you for our time together.
We love you. Amen.

“Extinguish” the candle.

Offer each child a blessing with the words, “(Child's name), God loves you.”

On the first Sunday of Advent, distribute copies of the Advent family letter to parents and guardians as they arrive. On the next three Sundays, have copies available for those who have not yet received a copy.

Reflecting time

What activities went well today and were especially appropriate for the children who came? How did you connect with their families?



The focus for infants and toddlers

Young children are fascinated by the presence of a baby! They seem to respond enthusiastically not only to the real baby, but also to baby pictures, including their own. They will also respond with special interest to your announcement that Sarah and Abraham are having a baby. There is heightened drama and excitement because, as the story goes, it's clear that Abraham and Sarah were sad for a long time at not being able to have a child. And now they are. "Yes, that's right, a child just like you! Can you imagine how excited Abraham and Sarah were?" They had hoped to have a child for a long time, and now suddenly Sarah was going to have a baby. How many feelings can people have when babies are being born? For these young children, feelings are right there – bubbling over and being expressed with their whole bodies. Several activities, like the action rhyme and the cloth doll, touch on emotions and offer engaging activities for expressing those feelings. The name of Sarah and Abraham's baby, Isaac, may be new to these children, although it's not as uncommon a name as it was just a few years ago. Using Isaac's name, even as they celebrate with Sarah and Abraham the birth of a child, will make the whole story more real and immediate for the children. Pray that the very young children in your group will feel affirmed in their feelings for the wonder of birth and babies.

Preparation time

- ❑ Bring items for the worship table: *one worship "candle,"* (see p. 109 for candle and lighting instructions), *green cloth, non-toxic green plant,* and a *Bible.*
- ❑ Bring *leaf nametags* (pattern on p. 121).
- ❑ Bring book "*Sing, David, Sing.*"
- ❑ Bring poster "*David Sings to God*" and display it low on a wall or bulletin board in the story area at the children's eye level.
- ❑ Bring a *CD player, Seasons Growing Faith Songbook,* and *Music CD.* Become familiar with the song "*Family Thank You*" (p. 8, and #4 on the music CD), "*Abraham and Sarah's Song*" (p. 108 in this guide), and "*Would You Like to Hold the Baby*" (p. 30, and #21 on the music CD).
- ❑ Choose the activities (see Activity time) that best suit the needs of your group and bring the materials required.
- ❑ Make copies of *Season after Pentecost Family Letter* (p. 117).

Welcoming time

Welcome children by name as they arrive. Say, "I'm so happy that you can be with us today." Help children find their leaf nametags. Talk to the parents and make a note of any special instructions for the day, especially related to infants.

Gathering time

Invite children to gather at the worship table. Talk about each of the items there, especially the green cloth and plant. Say, "God's world is filled with so many wonderful plants, animals and people. Plants need love and care just like people do." Pretend to light the worship candle by pulling up the yellow tissue paper.

Sing "Let's Come Together" (p. 108)

Pray Dear God,
thank you for loving us,
our families,
and *all* families.
We love you.
Amen.

"Extinguish" the candle by pushing the flame down to signal the end of the ritual.

☺ Walk around the room with infants and point to magazine or calendar pictures of babies. Ask, "Where are baby's eyes? Nose? Mouth? Then, ask, "Where are your eyes? Nose? Mouth? Mention how very special they are to God. Then settle the infants in cribs, seats, or on clean blankets with toys.

Story time

Storybook Sing, David, Sing Read this storybook to the children to introduce them to the expressions of different emotions. Then say, “David loved God and God loved David.” Encourage children to show the following emotions on their faces as you slowly say each feeling word: When David was *happy*; when David was *sad*; when David was *lonely*; when David was *excited*, God always loved David.

Story “A Baby for Sarah and Abraham”
(based on Genesis 15; 18; 21)

Beforehand: Drape a sheet over a table or chairs to create a tent. Invite children to sit in the tent with you as you tell the story. Have a doll hidden nearby.

Sarah and Abraham sat in their tent.
They were sad. They wanted a baby.
They wanted a baby to love.
Sarah and Abraham prayed to God.
In the starry night, God listened.
God loved Sarah and Abraham.
“You will have a baby,” God said.
Sarah was so excited, Abraham was so happy.
They wanted a baby, they waited for a baby
And now their baby was going to be born.

What a wonderful surprise! Baby Isaac was born. Sarah laughed. Abraham laughed. And God listened.

“Thank you, God, for this wonderful baby. We will love and care for our baby always.” And God listened. (Pass around the baby doll and encourage each child to say, “Welcome (or hello), baby Isaac.”)

Action rhyme “Shhh”

Here’s a tiny little bed. (*cup hand*)

Here’s a tiny little head. (*put finger in cupped hand*)

Shhh! Baby Isaac is sleeping. (*put finger to mouth*)

Action rhyme “God Loves Me!” (p. 105)

Snack time

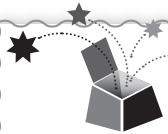
Ingredients: a simple healthy snack such as pieces of soft fruit

Serve a simple snack that children enjoy.

Pray Thank you, God,
for caring for us
and for the food that helps us to grow
just like Isaac did.
Amen.

Activity time

Set up several activity centres. Expect to do the activities with small groups of children, and with children individually, depending on the children’s ages. Some children will need more assistance than others.



Let’s pretend

Materials: dolls, doll blankets or pieces of fabric, doll beds or shoeboxes, toy dishes and utensils

Invite children to set up a nursery for babies. Use shoeboxes for beds with pieces of fabric for blankets. Provide an assortment of toy dishes and utensils. As they play with the baby dolls, encourage them to talk about what they could do to help their babies feel loved and cared for.

Faith talk Sarah and Abraham thanked God for their little baby. They loved their baby Isaac and took very good care of him.



Let’s build

Materials: chairs and/or tables, large sheets or blankets

Invite the children to use the sheets and blankets to drape over chairs and tables to make more tents. Encourage the children to invite each other into the tents. Ask, “How does it feel to be inside your tent? What would you like to do in your tent – sleep, eat, play?”

Faith talk I can see how happy you are when you are playing in your tents. That makes God happy, too.



Let's create

Baby Isaac

Materials: plain cotton fabric (or handkerchiefs), rubber bands, fiberfill or cotton stuffing, ribbon, markers

Beforehand: Read directions for Cloth doll (baby Isaac) (p. 109).

Encourage children to make their own baby dolls. Give each child a square piece of fabric to decorate with markers (tape corners to the table). As the children watch, create baby dolls out of their cloths. Help them to put simple facial features on their babies. Where will their babies sleep at home?

Faith talk God knows how special Isaac is to his family. God knows how special you are to your family.

Handprint

Materials: play dough #2 (p. 111 for recipe), paper plates, clean sand

Give each child a ball of play dough. Encourage them to squeeze and play with the dough before you flatten and cut a 15 cm/6 in circle for each of them. Place flattened play dough on paper plates. Invite the children to sprinkle a little sand on the surface of the play dough (press the sand gently into the dough). Help each child to press a hand into the play dough to make an imprint. Children love to see the size of their hands. Consider sending the play dough handprints home with instructions for baking, or set them aside to dry until next session.

Faith talk God loved you when you were a baby; God loves you now; and God will love you when your hand gets even bigger.



Let's sing

Consider playing the *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD* quietly in the background while children are playing in the activity centres. Gather the children together to sing these songs.

1. **“Family Thank You”** (p. 8, and #4 on the music CD) Add new verses with actions such as whisper, shout, and cry. Encourage children to pretend to rock a baby in their arms as they are singing.
2. **“Would You Like to Hold the Baby”** (p. 30, and #21 on the music CD). Encourage children to do some of the actions mentioned in the lyrics: smiling, holding their arms in the shape of a cradle, and pretending to rock the baby.
3. **“Abraham and Sarah’s Song”** (p. 108 in this guide)

This could be used as a fingerplay or as a song.

Faith talk Every family is special. God blessed Abraham and Sarah’s family. God blesses your family, too.



Let's explore

Materials: sand table or tray, combs, spatulas, spoons, beach shovels and funnels

Set up a sand table or a large tray with clean sand for their exploring. Provide tools for digging, scooping, and funneling the sand. Show the children how to make lines and designs with their fingers and the tools. Sarah and Abraham lived in a place with lots of sand. How do you think baby Isaac played in the sand?

Faith talk We can do many things with sand. Sand is part of God’s wonderful world.

Blessing time

Gather together near the worship table. “Light” the worship candle.

Pray Dear God,
thank you for loving us.
Thank you for the many people
who love and care for us, too. Amen.

“Extinguish” the candle.

Offer each child a blessing with the words, “(Child’s name), God will always love you.”

Distribute copies of the Season after Pentecost Family Letter (p. 117) to parents and guardians.

Reflecting time

In what ways were you able to help children celebrate babies and families? Which families have connected with one another over these weeks? How can you continue to support these church family relationships?