



# Bringing joy

where it's  
needed

*Action for  
Children*

A celebratory all-age Christmas service  
in support of Action for Children



# About Action for Children

**Our vision is that every child and young person has a safe and happy childhood, and the foundations they need to thrive.**

We take action to change the childhoods of those who need help to thrive. Giving vulnerable children and young people the protection and practical help they urgently need, and tirelessly campaigning for lasting change. Incredible people like you help our thousands of on-the-ground workers to support vulnerable children every day. And with your help, we were able to reach half a million children, young people and families last year through our 300+ services.

## **Dear friends,**

Thank you for your faithful support of Action for Children in 2026. Your tireless fundraising efforts and prayers are helping children, young people and families across the UK to thrive.

This year, we're especially grateful to have been nominated as one of the charity partners of the President and Vice President of the Methodist Conference for 2026/27. Their chosen words for the year, sorrow and joy, resonate deeply with our work.

Christmas is a celebration of the joy of God's love revealed in Jesus. Yet we know that for too many children it can also be a time of sorrow. No stockings, no presents, no festive food – often no food at all. Their memories of Christmas are of going to bed hungry and being too cold to sleep. At Action for Children, we see children carrying this sadness, and our response is to help them – at Christmas and all year round – with both practical help and joyful experiences. One example of this is Freya's story of a visit to Santa, which you can read on page 16.

We invite you to reflect on both these realities – sorrow and joy – as you use this worship outline to explore the theme, 'Bringing joy where it's needed'. Christmas reminds us that although Jesus was born into a world marked by challenge and uncertainty, his birth brought hope, peace and joy. It also reminds us that God is with us in every part of life – in our celebrations and our struggles. We hope the ideas in this booklet help your congregation explore that message and consider how, together, we can share God's love with children facing difficult times today.

We pray that your worship will be a fantastic opportunity to celebrate God's love and to reflect on how we can bring joy to children who need it most.

Thank you for all you do to support Action for Children. We're so grateful for your partnership.

From all of us at Action for Children, have a happy Christmas and wonderful New Year.



**Karis Kolawole**

Faith Partnerships Lead

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# Planning your Christmas service

We hope this booklet will help you to plan a special Christmas service in support of Action for Children. You're welcome to use it at other services or events too, adapting the carols, prayers and activities as you wish.

Your Relationship Fundraising Executive can help you plan and send you lots of useful fundraising materials, including **Gift Aid envelopes, posters and leaflets**.

To bring our work to life, you can invite one of our friendly speakers to talk at your church or share videos from our YouTube channel at your service or event. Get in touch with your Relationship Fundraising Executive. Their contact details are here: [actionforchildren.uk/your-local-fundraiser](http://actionforchildren.uk/your-local-fundraiser)

You can also find additional copies of this booklet, our newsletter and other resources at [actionforchildren.uk/faithFR](http://actionforchildren.uk/faithFR)

## How to send us your donations

Thank you so much for taking action for children. You can help us make your donations go further by choosing a direct payment option (1 or 2). Whichever method you use, **please add a reference to your payment**, which could be your Church ID or your Constituent ID, if you have one, so we can keep track and thank you. Feel free to ask your Relationship Fundraising Executive or contact Supporter Services if you're not sure of your ID.

### 1. Online:

Go to [actionforchildren.org.uk/donate](http://actionforchildren.org.uk/donate) and choose 'make a one-off donation'.

### 2. By bank transfer (BACS):

Our bank details are:

Sort code: **40-02-06**

Account number: **10950149**

Account name: **Action for Children**

### 3. By phone:

Our Supporter Services Team can take your payment by card. Call them on **0300 123 2112**.

### 4. By cash or cheque:

You can pay cash and cheques into our account using our details on this page (see point 2). You can do this in either a local HSBC branch, or by using an HSBC deposit card at your local Post Office®. Please contact our Supporter Services Team to have a deposit card sent to you.

You can deposit cheques to us by post (please note we can't receive cash by post), using the address on the back page of this booklet.

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A very warm welcome to our all-age Christmas service. Today we're thinking about some of the different emotions we see in the Christmas story, especially about sorrow (or sadness) and joy, and how Jesus coming to bring us joy is like a bright light in the darkness. We're also thinking about Action for Children and how they help to bring joy to thousands of children and families. We'll be praying for them, and there'll be an opportunity to donate to their work so they can help more children to experience real joy and hope with warm food, safe spaces, and loving support – at Christmas and all year round.

Let's start with our Bible reading.

*You might choose to have several people sharing this reading, or to ask the congregation to join in the words in bold.*

## Bible reading

**Isaiah 9:2–4a and 6,  
Good News Bible**

<sup>2</sup>**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.**

They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them.

<sup>3</sup>You have given them great joy, Lord; you have made them happy. They rejoice in what you have done, as people rejoice when they harvest grain or when they divide captured wealth. <sup>4</sup>For you have broken the yoke that burdened

them and the rod that beat their shoulders. ... **'A child is born to us! A son is given to us!'** And he will be our ruler. He will be called, **'Wonderful Counsellor', 'Mighty God', 'Eternal Father', 'Prince of Peace'.**

## Gather

Have you ever woken up in the night when it was still dark, and wished morning would arrive? Maybe you couldn't get back to sleep, or you were waiting for something exciting the next day, or the night just felt very long and very dark.

And then – what a relief when the dawn finally arrived and the sky started filling with light again. The

new day had come, and things could start to move forward.

The Bible uses this image of darkness and light in several places to illustrate the difference between sorrow and joy. The people in our reading felt as though they'd been waiting in the dark for a long time. Not just one night – they had almost forgotten what the morning felt like. This passage is prophetic, so they were looking forward to the time when their rescuer – the Messiah – would come and change everything, but that didn't happen for another 700 years. We now know his name is Jesus, but they had some other names for him too: 'Wonderful Counsellor', 'Mighty God', 'Eternal Father', and 'Prince of Peace'. They knew he was going to change everything when he arrived.

When Jesus was finally born after all that waiting, it was like the world could wake up out of the darkness and start living in full colour. As a picture of what that might be like, let's turn our whole room into the middle of the night – as dark and still and quiet as we can make it – and then see what happens when morning comes.

*Dim the lights. Give everyone an LED tealight – switched off. Then say:*

Now we're going to make ourselves as small and still as we can – or just to close our eyes – and pretend it's

nighttime. We're going to count down from five, and when we reach zero, we're all going to switch on our tealights together and hold them in the air.

Together: five – four – three – two – one – zero! Hooray!

*Switch the church lights back on, and hold up a large clear bowl or jar. Then say:*

Now I'd like you to bring your tealights to the front so we can collect them in this jar. We'll keep it at the front as an illustration of the light that has come into the world.

*Your worship team could quietly play a carol such as Joy to the World at this point.*

As you bring your light, this is also our moment to think about giving, which you can do at the end of the service if you're able to. Every gift given today goes to Action for Children, and could help bring joy to a child who is still waiting for it. However small a gift feels on its own, put together with everyone else's it becomes something bright and warm and real – just like our big bowl of light.

*Collect all the lights into the bowl, then say:*

When Jesus was born, he brought incredible light, and joy, and hope into the world. Jesus says in John 8: 'I am the light of the world ... Whoever follows me will have the

light of life and will never walk in darkness.' (John 8:12, Good News Bible)

And as a reflection of that, each of us is called to share his light, his joy, his hope, with the people around us. The bowl is a symbol of what can happen to the world if all of us share that light and joy and hope with others.

Jesus tells us: 'You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead, it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:14–16 GNB). Wouldn't it be pointless if I covered up this bowl with a blanket? The light wouldn't get out! Or if we left a torch in our coat pocket. That would be silly – we'd be stumbling around in the dark when we had the solution right there with us. No, light has to be out in the open, being shared with everyone around it, to be useful.

Let's think about how we can share our light and joy as we continue our service by hearing about a family who Action for Children helped.

*Someone reads Freya's or Natalie's story from pages 16/18.*



## Prayer

Father God, thank you that Jesus came into the world like the morning after a long, dark night, bringing light, joy and hope to people who had experienced so much sorrow. Help us as we think about what that means, and as we think about children who feel as though they are in the darkness, waiting for the light to come. Thank you that we can share Jesus' light and joy with them and with the community around us.

**Amen.**

## Sermon suggestion

Let's go back to Isaiah 9. It says, 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them. You have given them great joy, Lord; you have made them happy. They rejoice in what you have done, as people rejoice when they harvest grain or when they divide captured wealth.'

This passage is about a promise – a promise that joy was coming. The people of Isaiah's time heard this prophecy, but it was about another 700 years before the promise was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. They had to keep waiting and trusting and hoping, and passing on that hope, generation after generation. They were suffering, and often it's hard to believe that things are going to get better when you're struggling under that weight. That's what we remember all through Advent as we wait for Christmas to arrive.

Isaiah never pretends the sadness isn't there. In one breath there is 'great joy' (verse 3), and in the very next breath there's 'the yoke that burdened them and the rod that beat their shoulders' (verse 4). Joy and sorrow sit right next to each other. Isaiah isn't offering a happy feeling that floats above real life. He is offering joy to people

who know just how heavy life can feel. He says how tired the people are – the yoke, the rod, the beaten shoulders. He is talking about people worn down by hard work, unfairness and by unkindness.

And yet.

God's answer to a sad world is not to stay a safe distance away – he steps right into it. He kept his promise and Jesus arrived. God believes in getting his hands dirty, which is why Jesus was born in a stable, not a palace. The same Jesus grew up to be called a 'man of sorrows' (Isaiah 53:3), so he was someone who knows what sadness feels like. He doesn't skip past our sadness. He shares it. He comes to join us in it and to transform us where we are.

That's why the joy we celebrate at Christmas is never about pretending that pain isn't real. It's about the deeper gladness that God has come to be with us and won't leave us to carry the heavy load alone. Isaiah describes it as being like the joy people experience when they harvest grain. That is not a small or easy joy. It belongs to people who have watched the sky, worried about the crop, and worked until their backs ached, not knowing if anything would grow. Harvest joy runs deep because of the long, hard time that came before it. It isn't happiness

instead of sorrow. It is joy that has grown up through the sorrow, like wheat pushing up through the ground. And joy like that can't sit still. It goes looking for those still in the darkness and brings the light and shares the joy with them.

Today, 4 million UK children are living in poverty – that's 27% of all children. Families are making impossible choices between heating and eating. There are children sleeping in cold homes, not expecting any presents, not expecting a special Christmas meal together. As a church family, we support Action for Children, who take action when it is most needed and help families to heat homes and put food on the table. If you're able, there's an opportunity to donate at the end of the service – we could give the gift of a warm, happy, joy-filled Christmas to some of these children and families.

Let's hear from Shelley, a mum whose family received support from Action for Children last Christmas, as she tells us about the difference your support made to them last year.

*Play the video of Shelley's story:*  
[youtu.be/KDeA6jSP4QQ](https://youtu.be/KDeA6jSP4QQ)

## Explore and respond

### Action for Children quiz

See how many of these the congregation can guess. ???

★ In 2024/25, how many children, young people and families did Action for Children help?

- a) 226,700.
- b) 398,500.
- c) 551,400.

Answer: c) 551,400.

★ Which of these services does Action for Children provide?

- a) Family hubs that provide family support services for children and young people from ages 0–19.
- b) Short breaks for children with disabilities to have fun and learn skills in a safe environment away from home.
- c) Therapeutic support and a safe space for children who have experienced domestic abuse to talk, play and recover.
- d) All of these.

Answer: (d) All of these.

★ Action for Children was founded over 150 years ago by Methodist minister Reverend Thomas Bowman Stephenson. Why?

- a) To provide safety for children without a home or who couldn't live at home.

- b) To provide food for families living in poverty.
- c) To help make sure all children could go to school.

**Answer: a)** To provide safety for children without a home or who couldn't live at home.

**4 Action for Children's Secret Santa campaign aims to help children who are going without what?**

- a) Food.
- b) Christmas presents.
- c) Heating at home.
- d) All of these.

**Answer: d)** All of these.

**5 What's the missing word in the way Action for Children describe their work? 'Driven by \_\_\_\_\_, we take action for children.'**

- a) Joy.
- b) Love.
- c) Hope.

**Answer: b)** Driven by love, we take action for children.

## Discussion

*Questions on Isaiah 9:2-6 for discussion in small groups:*

- 1** Imagine you were one of the people Isaiah was talking to. They felt as if they were living in the dark and life felt very heavy. Which line in this reading would have given you the most hope? Why?

- 2** The great light Isaiah promises turns out to be a baby (verse 6). Why do you think God sent a tiny baby to help a world full of darkness, instead of a strong king or an army?

- 3** Verse 4 says God has taken away 'the yoke' and 'the rod'. A yoke was a heavy wooden bar put across an animal's shoulders to make it pull heavy loads. A rod was a stick used to hit it. So, this is a picture of people who feel worn out and are treated unkindly. What heavy loads do children and families carry today? How can we – and organisations like Action for Children – help to take some of that weight away?

- 4** This reading talks about darkness and great joy, almost in the same breath. What does it teach us about where we can find hope and joy when life feels dark?

## Collective craft

### From darkness to light – a congregation chain



You will need:

- Strips of paper (roughly 3 cm x 20 cm) in a range of colours, from dark blues and purples through to reds, oranges and golds.
- Pens or crayons.
- Glue sticks or sticky tape.

- A long piece of string, or the church's usual hanging points (optional).

Hand a paper strip to everyone as they arrive or pass baskets of strips along the rows. Invite each person to choose a colour – the darker shades for a long night, the brighter ones for the morning that is coming – and to decorate their strip however they like: a word, a doodle, a prayer, a Bible verse, or the name of someone who needs some light this Christmas. Then, working along the rows, loop and glue each strip through the one before to build a single long paper chain, starting with the night colours and moving towards the dawn.

Once every link is joined, carry the finished chain to the front, or drape it along the length of the church, so everyone can see it – one unbroken line travelling out of the darkness and into the light. It's a picture of our theme, and of the church itself – many different people, each adding their own small piece, together making something that carries the light much further than any one of us could alone. You might point out that this is just how Action for Children works too – each of our prayers and donations, linked together, helps to bring joy and hope to children.

## Prayer

*This could be read by the service leader or by children.*

Father God,

We thank you for our time together and for the work of Action for Children.

We pray for all the children and families who will receive support from Action for Children this Christmas – especially those for whom this feels like a long, dark night. Please be their great light. Bring them warmth and comfort, food and safety. Put presents into the hands of children who would otherwise go without, and let a little light break into every home that feels cold or sad.

We pray for the staff of Action for Children, whether they're working in an office or visiting people's homes. In the hardest and darkest situations, help them to carry your light and joy with kindness, patience, and hope. Bring them encouragement as they make a real difference to thousands of families, and may their own Christmases be a time of rest and joy.

Thank you that you came to us as a baby, bringing light into the darkness and joy where there was sorrow. Help us to be lights too, sharing what we have been given with those who need it most.

**Amen.**

## Sending

We joined our lights together in the bowl to create an illustration of the light of the world. Now it's time to carry that light back out with us and put it into action.

Wherever you're going this Christmas – to a house that's full and noisy, or one that feels quiet – remember that Jesus, the light of the world, goes with you. And remember that you can be a small light for someone else – with a kind word, a warm welcome, or a gift shared.

Let's say our blessing together. I'll say each line, and you shout back the words in bold:

May the light of Christmas shine in our hearts – **and fill us with joy!**

May we carry that light and joy to others – **at Christmas and all year round!**

And may God bless us, and every child still waiting for their morning – **Amen!**

*You might like to give everyone a tealight as they leave, as a symbol of carrying God's light out into the world.*



## Suggested songs

**Key:**

**StF** – Singing the Faith.

**SoF** – Songs of Fellowship.

**MP** – Mission Praise.



**Blessed Be Your Name** (*Matt and Beth Redman*)

StF 41/SoF 1193/MP1036

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/3798438/blessed-be-your-name/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/3798438/blessed-be-your-name/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/tTpTQ4kBLxA](https://youtu.be/tTpTQ4kBLxA)



**Come People of the Risen King** (*Keith and Kristyn Getty, Stuart Townend*)

SoF 2249/MP 1267

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/5232617/come-people-of-the-risen-king/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/5232617/come-people-of-the-risen-king/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/j8DkXwTymbI](https://youtu.be/j8DkXwTymbI)



**Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus** (*Charles Wesley, tune Hyfrydol*)

StF 169i/SoF 81/MP 102

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/31999/come-thou-long-expected-jesus-hyfrydol/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/31999/come-thou-long-expected-jesus-hyfrydol/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/vRAFQCOKjgE](https://youtu.be/vRAFQCOKjgE)



**Cornerstone** (*Hillsong, from Edward Mote's The Solid Rock*)

SoF 2976/MP 1334

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/6158927/cornerstone/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/6158927/cornerstone/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/Fl15U2iFYzo](https://youtu.be/Fl15U2iFYzo)



**Evergreen** (*Rend Collective*)

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/7280644/evergreen/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/7280644/evergreen/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/zCaRDqM7ucl](https://youtu.be/zCaRDqM7ucl)



**From the Squalor of a Borrowed Stable** (*Stuart Townend*)

SoF 1239/MP 1045

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/2733786/immanuel/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/2733786/immanuel/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/ahgrPbdFUcl](https://youtu.be/ahgrPbdFUcl)



**Hallelujah Anyway** (*Rend Collective*)

[songselect.ccli.com/songs/7204751/hallelujah-anyway/viewleadsheet](http://songselect.ccli.com/songs/7204751/hallelujah-anyway/viewleadsheet)

or [youtu.be/acMOWeAycBI](https://youtu.be/acMOWeAycBI)

★ **In the darkness we were waiting (King of Kings)** (*Brooke and Scott Ligertwood and Jason Ingram*)  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7127647/king-of-kings/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/dQl4izxPeNU](https://youtu.be/dQl4izxPeNU)

★ **It Came Upon A Midnight Clear** (Edmund Sears/Richard Willis)  
StF 205/MP 345  
[openhymnal.org/Pdf/It\\_Came\\_Upon\\_A\\_Midnight\\_Clear-Carol.pdf](https://openhymnal.org/Pdf/It_Came_Upon_A_Midnight_Clear-Carol.pdf)  
or [youtu.be/5hbEFQhfn8c](https://youtu.be/5hbEFQhfn8c) or [youtu.be/Hush56d-Omw](https://youtu.be/Hush56d-Omw)

★ **It Is Well With My Soul** (*Horatio Spafford/Philip Bliss*)  
SoF 2467  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/25376/it-is-well-with-my-soul/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/rhaTlu\\_k4w0](https://youtu.be/rhaTlu_k4w0)

★ **Joy Has Dawned** (*Keith Getty and Stuart Townend*)  
SoF 1931/MP 1319  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/4408246/joy-has-dawned/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/1zqAxtZvOEU](https://youtu.be/1zqAxtZvOEU)

★ **Joy to the World**  
StF 330/SoF 314/MP 393  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7128618/joy-to-the-world-joyful-joyful/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/-Xo64Q2ucQ8](https://youtu.be/-Xo64Q2ucQ8)

★ **Little Town** (*Words and Music: Phillip Brooks, Lewis Redner, arr Chris Eaton; Performed by Amy Grant*)  
[youtu.be/OD2BVp33QV0](https://youtu.be/OD2BVp33QV0)

★ **Lord From Sorrows Deep I Call (Psalm 42)** (*Matt Boswell and Matt Papa*)  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7127376/lord-from-sorrows-deep-i-call-psalm-42/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/U8An8LYuGJM](https://youtu.be/U8An8LYuGJM)

★ **Love incarnate, love divine (Noel)** (*Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash, Matt Redman*)  
SoF 2962  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7050419/noel/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/5Vwu-t7QRaE](https://youtu.be/5Vwu-t7QRaE)

★ **My Lighthouse** (Rend Collective)  
SoF 2887  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7002032/my-lighthouse/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/HA8VtUPgqTc](https://youtu.be/HA8VtUPgqTc)

★ **O Come, O Come Emmanuel**  
StF 180/MP 493  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/1936508/o-come-o-come-emmanuel/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/JfsTkkF17JU](https://youtu.be/JfsTkkF17JU)

★ **O Holy Night!**  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7095544/o-holy-night/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/Y1oLk54R5Xg](https://youtu.be/Y1oLk54R5Xg)

★ **Sing We the Song of Emmanuel** (Boswell, Getty, Papa, Townend)  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7078042/sing-we-the-song-of-emmanuel/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/kf1CRYsjc94](https://youtu.be/kf1CRYsjc94)

★ **There Is a Hope** (Stuart Townend and Mark Edwards)  
SoF 2558  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/5109647/there-is-a-hope/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/FVUFNEwRPno](https://youtu.be/FVUFNEwRPno)

★ **The World Waits for a Miracle** (Lauren Daigle, Paul Duncan and Paul Mabury)  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7023299/light-of-the-world/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/\\_cLhaZIBSpo](https://youtu.be/_cLhaZIBSpo)

★ **Way Maker** (Sinach, Leeland arrangement)  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7115744/way-maker/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/29lxnsqOkmQ](https://youtu.be/29lxnsqOkmQ)

★ **Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me** (CityAlight)  
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7121852/yet-not-i-but-through-christ-in-me/viewleadsheet  
or [youtu.be/hwc2d1Xt8gM](https://youtu.be/hwc2d1Xt8gM) or [youtu.be/rNXd0KQaYXg](https://youtu.be/rNXd0KQaYXg)

# Freya's story\*

Thanks to amazing supporters like you, Action for Children made sure Freya was fed, had a warm home, and got to experience some Christmas joy.

*\*This story is based on real examples of children Action for Children support, illustrating what they've been through while protecting their identities.*

Last winter, six-year-old Freya was so cold that as soon as she got home from school, she would climb into bed fully clothed to try to keep warm. Despite working long hours at their local shop, Freya's mum Jess couldn't afford to heat their home.

As costs kept rising, food and energy bills were harder to afford by the day.

***"I was working as many hours as I could, but it still wasn't enough. Freya was so cold but I could barely put the heating on and when I did, the choice was heating the flat or giving her a warm meal."***

As Christmas approached, Freya came home excited about her friends visiting Santa's grotto and going ice skating.



***"I knew I couldn't afford those things. The local Santa's grotto was charging more than I spend on food in a fortnight. I knew she'd miss out on the normal fun stuff that kids get to do at Christmas. On that magical feeling."***

Walking home one afternoon, Freya said she'd ask Santa for just one present – a toy farm. Jess explained they might not be able to visit the grotto.

***"The look on her face. All the excitement and joy just suddenly gone. She asked if Santa would still know what she wanted if she couldn't go and tell him. She looked so sad."***

When the gas meter ran out just weeks before Christmas, the flat became bitterly cold and Freya became ill. The GP referred the family to Action for Children.

Their Support Worker, Emily, provided supermarket and energy vouchers, so Freya could feel warm at home and eat fresh food for the first time in weeks. The vouchers also meant a little Christmas tree and lights. Then Emily told them about the Action for Children grotto.

***"Freya squealed and started jumping up and down saying 'Are we really going Mummy? Am I going to meet Santa?' She ran to the door – she wanted to go straight away! Visiting Santa, she finally felt like all her friends. Like she mattered. Like Christmas included her too."***

Emily also delivered a festive food hamper, a new coat and a bag of wrapped presents. On Christmas morning, Freya unwrapped the box and inside was the toy farm.



***"She was practically exploding with excitement saying, 'Mummy look! It's the toy farm I asked for. Santa didn't forget me!'"***

Playing with the farm at Christmas dinner, Freya told Jess, "I'm so happy, Mummy. It's the best Christmas ever."

Afterwards, Action for Children stayed in touch. Emily provided more vouchers and used the Crisis Fund to buy Freya a new bed, mattress and bedding, plus a school bag and shoes that fit.

***"It was truly the best Christmas ever."***

# Natasha's story\*

**Single mum Natasha\* was struggling financially, but found relief when Action for Children stepped in to offer support.**

Natasha\*, a single mum of two young children, was initially referred to Action for Children for support with her son's behaviour.

But after getting to know her support worker better, Natasha revealed that she was also unable to cope with the rising cost of living. She was dreading Christmas, wondering how she would afford to heat the house or buy her children the presents they wanted.

Natasha's 10-year-old daughter Rosie\* overheard her mum telling her auntie, "I don't know how I'm going to get through Christmas this year."

Natasha realised this because her daughter's Santa list was so short and included a food bowl for the family's dog and a £25 clothes voucher. Rosie told her mum she knew she couldn't afford Christmas this year and didn't want to burden her.

***"It just broke my heart," said Natasha. "It really was heartbreaking to realise a 10-year-old was worrying about the cost of living."***

Action for Children was able to help by paying for heating oil, school uniforms and supermarket gift cards. Natasha believes the financial support from Action for Children helped her get through the Christmas period.

***"Action for Children took so much pressure off me ... keeping the house warm for the kids when it was freezing last year, that really did take a huge amount of weight off my shoulders. I was able to make a really good Christmas dinner for the children – so Action for Children did make huge, huge impacts on our lives."***



But with money still very tight, Natasha says she's "dreading" this Christmas. Her son Rory has already been asking for large presents, with his wish this year being "that I get a go-kart or dune buggy". She's had to tell Rory that "Santa can't bring go-karts because there's no way to fix them if they break."

Daughter Rosie is more sensitive to the money shortages. Natasha says she's seen conversations between Rosie and her friends where they've been talking about money and how other parents are

struggling. Natasha believes Rosie isn't telling her about things she needs to buy.

When asked what she wanted for Christmas, Rosie said, "Some oil so Mummy doesn't have to worry about keeping us warm while we're home for the holidays."

While Natasha is approaching another Christmas with a worry about finances, she's so grateful for the support of Action for Children, knowing that she can reach out and get a helping hand again this year if she needs it.

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*\*This story has been made anonymous and photographs changed to protect the identity of the family.*

# Children's Christmas activities

## Paper suns

**Craft | 15 mins**

**You will need:**

- ★ Yellow or orange card, or paper plates.
- ★ Gold and orange paper for the rays.
- ★ Crayons or felt tips.
- ★ Scissors and glue sticks.
- ★ Lolly sticks (optional).



Give each child a circle of card, or a paper plate, for the middle of the sun. Ask them to cut wavy or triangular rays from the gold and orange paper (making sure they have help with scissors if needed) and glue them around the back so they poke out all the way round. Then ask them to decorate them with a smiling face. If they'd like to give them a handle, tape a lolly stick to the back of each one.

As the children work, you might talk about how the sun comes up every single morning, even after the darkest night – and how Jesus is like a light that comes to us when things feel dark and sad, bringing a new morning of hope and joy.

## Little jar lanterns

**Craft | 20 mins**

**You will need:**

- ★ A clean, dry jam jar for each child (or a cardboard tube).
- ★ Coloured tissue paper.
- ★ PVA glue, watered down a little.
- ★ A paintbrush.
- ★ LED tealights.
- ★ String for a handle (optional).



Ask the children to brush watered-down glue over the outside of their jar and press on small pieces of tissue paper until it is completely covered, then to add a final coat of glue over the top and leave it to dry. A length of string tied around the neck makes a handle for carrying.

Once dry, pop an LED tealight inside and watch it glow. Please use battery lights only, not real candles.

As they make their lanterns, you might talk about how one small light makes a real difference in a dark room, and how each of us can carry a little light to other people – with kindness by making others feel loved and welcomed, and by helping those who are having a hard time, as Action for Children does all year round. You could make a display of these in the church, or hang them on a Christmas tree if your church has one.

## Night-into-morning pictures

**Craft | 20 mins**

**You will need:**

- ★ A sheet of A4 dark blue or black paper for each child.
- ★ Bright sunrise-coloured paper (yellow, orange, pink).
- ★ Glue.
- ★ White crayon or chalk.
- ★ Cotton wool (optional).
- ★ Scissors (if adding a stable and star).



Ask the children to stick dark paper across one half of their A4 sheet for the night. Next, ask them to tear strips of bright paper and layer them across the other half for the morning. Ask them to add a few white dots or a moon on the dark side, and a sun peeping over the join in the middle to finish it off. A small piece of cotton wool makes a cloud, or they could add a tiny stable and star where night meets morning.

You can talk with the children about how the two halves side by side say something true about Christmas – that sorrow and joy, the dark night and the bright morning, often sit very close together, and that Jesus meets us right at the place where one turns into the other.

## Scratch-art sunrises

**Craft | 20 mins**

**You will need:**

- ★ White card.
- ★ Wax crayons in bright colours.
- ★ Black paint mixed with a drop of washing-up liquid (or a black wax crayon.)
- ★ A paintbrush.
- ★ Cocktail sticks.

You'll need to prepare for this in advance. Colour all over the white card with bright wax crayons – golds, oranges, pinks and reds – pressing hard so the colour is thick, then paint over the whole thing with black and leave it to dry. The drop of washing-up liquid helps the paint cover the waxy surface. Or use a black wax crayon as the top layer instead of painting.

At the service, hand out the black boards and let the children scratch a picture into the darkness with a cocktail stick – a rising sun, a star, a candle – revealing the bright colours hiding underneath.

Talk with the children about how their cards looked unexciting to start with, but then when they took action to create a picture, they revealed the colours underneath. Sometimes people need help to find the colours in their lives, and we can be like the cocktail stick that scratches away some of the darkness and shows them joy.



## Light-catcher stars

**Craft | 20 mins**

**You will need:**

- ★ Black or dark blue card.
- ★ Star template (see template on page 24).
- ★ Coloured tissue paper.
- ★ Scissors.
- ★ Glue stick.
- ★ Sticky tape.



Fold a piece of dark card and cut out a simple star leaving a thin border all the way round like a little window frame (helping any children who need it with cutting). Ask the children to tear the tissue paper into small pieces and glue them across the back of the frame, overlapping the colours so no gaps are left. Trim away anything poking past the edges. Tape the finished stars to a window.

The magic happens when the light shines through and the colours glow. You might point out that the star looks quite dull and dark until the light comes through it – a bit like the way God's light can shine through us and make even ordinary things beautiful.

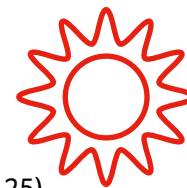
You can print these stars on cardboard, cutting around the outside and inside of the star, to use as stencils for the activity.

## A little light to give away

**Craft and discussion | 15 mins**

**You will need:**

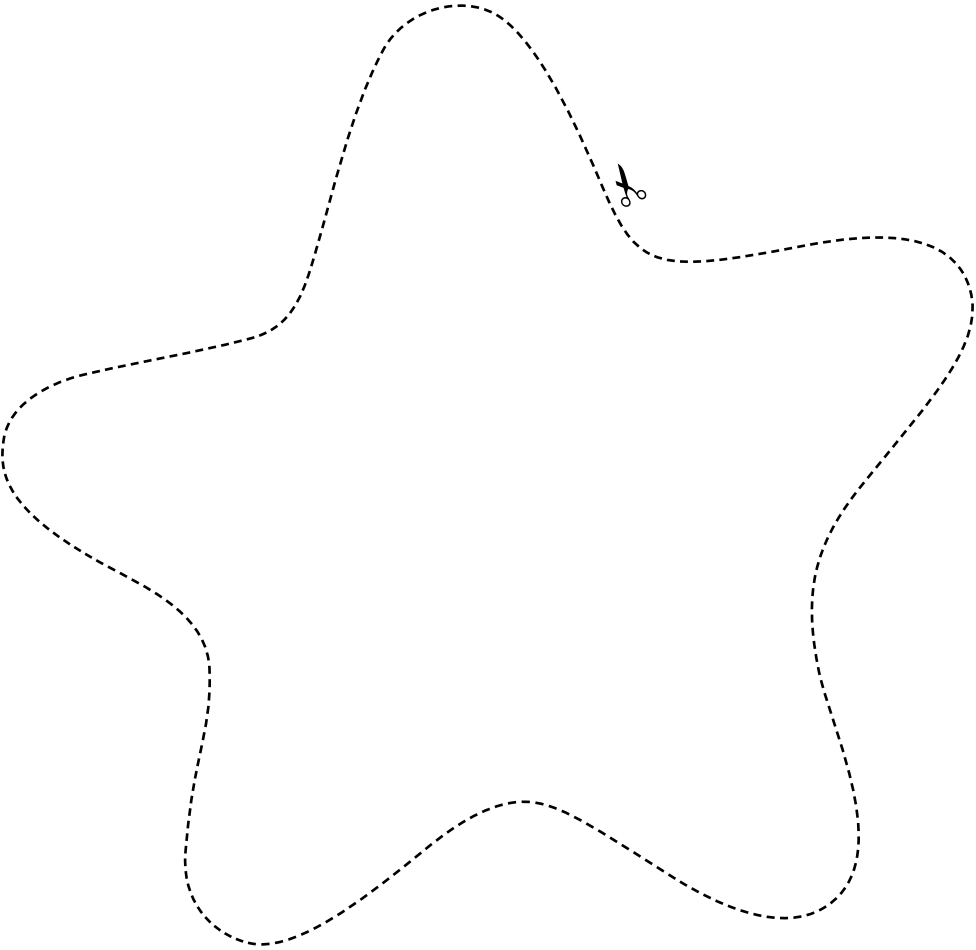
- ★ Small sun shapes printed on card (see template on page 25).
- ★ Scissors (or cut out the sun shapes in advance).
- ★ Yellow and orange pens or paper.
- ★ Glue.
- ★ A strip of card for a stand (optional).



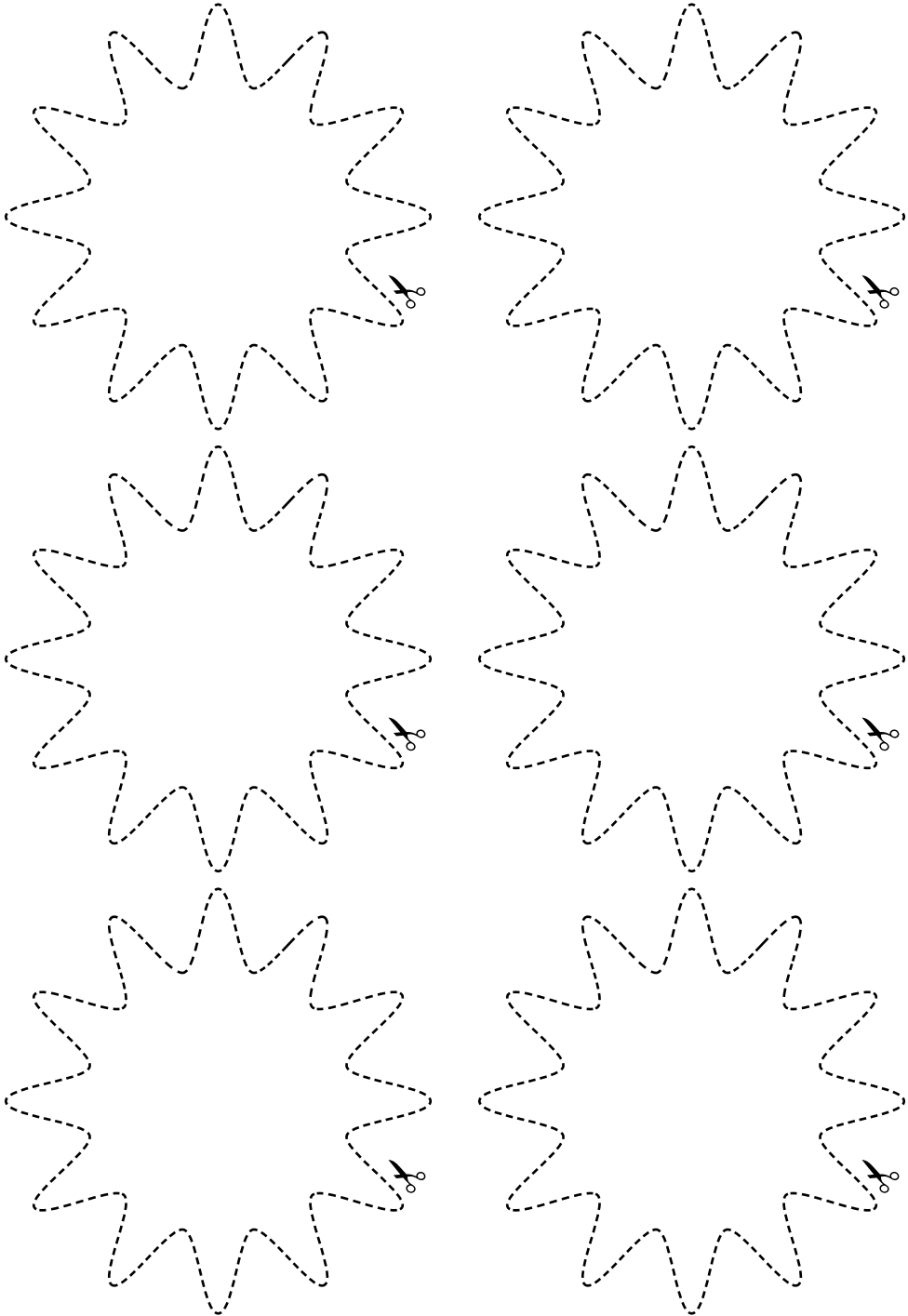
Ask each child to colour a small, simple sun – little enough to fit in a pocket. On the back, they can write or draw a short message of comfort, like 'A little bit of joy for you' or a Bible verse like 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). A folded card stand on the back lets it sit on a windowsill or a shelf.

This one is made to be given away. Talk with the children about someone who might be having a hard or lonely time this Christmas – a neighbour, a friend, a grandparent, someone who is poorly – and encourage them to take their little sun home and give it to that person. It is a small way of doing what the whole service is about – sharing the light and joy we have been given with someone who needs it.

Star template



Sun template





## Be a Secret Santa for a vulnerable child

**The magic of Christmas begins in childhood. It's a time for children to feel loved and make memories that last a lifetime.**

But for too many children across the UK, Christmas is anything but magical. No stockings. No presents. No festive food – often no food at all.

But you could help change that. Your gift could help a vulnerable child feel the magic of Christmas.

**Children across the UK need a Secret Santa like you.**

4 million UK children now live in poverty. That's 27% of all children. Too many families are at breaking point. And too many children are living a reality that should be confined to history.

Childhood is short. We only get a few chances to make magical memories. That's why we need your support now.

Donate today and could give the essentials of warm clothes, a hot meal, or a Christmas present for a child who wouldn't otherwise get one.

**Become a Secret Santa for a vulnerable child and you could help them feel the magic of Christmas.**

**[iamsanta.org.uk/hope](https://iamsanta.org.uk/hope)**



## Leave a Legacy of love

Until every child has food and warmth.  
Until every child goes to sleep feeling safe and happy.  
**We need your help.**

Order a free information pack to find out more about leaving a gift in your will to Action for Children:  
**[actionforchildren.uk/enquirypack-faith](https://actionforchildren.uk/enquirypack-faith)**

## Share your joy

We love seeing pictures and videos from your events.



Send them to us or post on social media.

 /ActionforChildren

 @actionforchildrenuk

 @actionforchildren

## Get in touch

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