

Christingle Talks and Sermons 2020

Introduction to Christingle and The Children’s Society

Christingle is a candle-lit, festive celebration that’s perfect for bringing families and communities together. It was first invented by the Moravian church in the 1700s, but the celebration as we know it was introduced to the Church of England by The Children’s Society in the 1960s.

The celebration is named after the Christingles that are lit during the it. Christingles are made from an orange decorated with red tape, sweets and a candle. They have been part of our history for over 50 years and have helped raise millions of pounds to help this country’s most vulnerable children. Each year we ask those who celebrate Christingle to hold a collection to support children and young people in some of the darkest situations imaginable.

The Children’s Society

Founded in 1881 by Sunday School teacher Edward Rudolf, for the last 139 years The Children’s Society has supported millions of this country’s children and restored hope to their lives. We believe in building a society that works for every child, so that they are safe, happy and free to fulfil their incredible potential.

We run vital local services that provide vulnerable children across the country with the support, advice and guidance that they need, and we also campaign to make children’s lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger.

Together with our amazing supporters, we’re improving life for children today and working to create a society where every child has hope for their future.

Jamie’s story

At school, Jamie faced bullying from his classmates who would often take his money and force him to buy things for them.Then at college his mental health declined further when he began to struggle with anxiety.

‘My life circumstances were not great. I kept on leaving classes. I feel like I didn’t want to live at that time’, said Jamie.

Jamie was referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), where he began receiving treatment. But he still struggled as between these appointments, as he had no one he could rely on or talk to. It was only when he was signposted to The Children’s Society by his college tutor that he received the support he needed.

At the easy-access drop in service for under 25's run by The Children’s Society, trained mental health practitioners provide immediate mental and emotional health support for young people, families, and professionals seven days a week.

‘I am glad I got help, because my life was a downward spiral’, Jamie told us.

At our service, Jamie was given a safe space where he was able to talk about his emotions and how he was feeling with someone he could trust. He was also given practical support and methods that he could use at home to help him manage his anxiety, and had access to the participatory groups where he could make friends and find support from the other young people who attend.

Jamie has been coming to The Children’s Society drop-in service for three years. He has made friends, gained confidence and has somewhere to talk to people about how he is feeling. He also regularly attends various workshops including creative writing and ‘Hot Topics’, a group where young people who may be feeling isolated can meet others and socialise.

Jamie said, *‘Friends are always good to have when you are down. Sometimes having that one person to talk to is really good so you can get your emotions out there like how you are feeling.’*

\* Jamie’s name has been changed in order to protect his identity.

Introduction to this resource

This resource contains talks and sermons suitable for any Christingle service, including socially distanced or online. Please feel free to use and adapt them for your context.

**Talk 1** is particularly suited to online services.

**Talk 2** reflects the adaptations we have all had to make because of the coronavirus pandemic, linking these to the work of The Children’s Society.

**Talk 3** reflects environmental concerns and the need to listen to the voices of children and young people.

**Talk 4** is a more traditional Christingle talk, involving a reflection on each part of the Christingle.

Contents

1. A Christingle scavenger hunt activity: **for online services 3**
2. Sharing the Light: Isolation, well-being and community (Based on John 1.1-5) **6**

 *Revd Jeremy Fletcher*

1. Sharing the Light: Caring for the Planet (Based on John 1.1-5) **7**

*Revd Jeremy Fletcher*

1. A reflective ‘How to make a Christingle’ talk 8

Revd Ally Barrett

Talk 2: Sharing the Light: Isolation, well-being and community

Revd Jeremy Fletcher

As this talk was prepared before the summer, it was hard to predict what restrictions might be in place when Christingle services are held. Masks and distancing may still be very current – please adapt accordingly.

**Key bible passage:** John 1.1-5. Light shining in darkness

You will need:

* Sanitiser
* A face mask
* Gloves
* Something which measures two metres (a garden cane, metal tape measure, very long ruler)

Talk outline

John 1.1-5 speaks of the light shining in the darkness and the darkness not overcoming it.

In 2020 the world was threatened by the coronavirus, and many countries made people stay at home for weeks and weeks.

What was it like to be at home, away from friends, not being at school? Can you remember what it felt like to have to avoid people? Are you still keeping a distance from people now?

What did you/ do you use to make sure you were/are safe? *(Use visual aids here: mask, gloves, sanitiser)*

What was/is it like keeping apart from people? *Use the two-metre stick to demonstrate.*

We had to isolate when the virus started, and when the lockdown began to lift we found out what it was like to meet people and connect again. Some people feel cut off from other people, isolated, lonely and frightened all the time. The Children’s Society supports people like Jamie\*, who felt himself to be isolated and suffered from mental ill health, like the worst of being locked down, but all the time.

When you were locked down, what ways did you use to communicate?

(Take suggestions, e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Houseparty, Zoom, Snapchat, a mobile phone, a landline, Instagram, Twitter, the website, YouTube, pen and paper, a card.)

Even though we were isolated, we shone light in the darkness by communicating and making sure everyone was included. Lots of people lit candles as the lockdown started to celebrate acts of kindness, healing and hope.

The Children’s Society works with those in the isolation of broken homes and communities, the isolation of exploitation and mental ill health, so that there is light, healing and connection for them.

Jamie found the light of hope when he found people who could communicate with him and understand him. Now he is able to help others who feel they are isolated, and brings them hope too.

Sharing the light during the darkness of the lockdown happened when people shared their stories, encouraged each other, communicated in safe ways.

God’s light was shared with the whole world through Christ the light, who came to bring God’s love to each person, and to bring us together across the barriers of isolation to be a new community.

When you light the candle on your Christingle, remember how you made sure you communicated and shared with people in difficult times. We shine with Christ’s light today, and bring love and hope and healing to young people who are isolated and need love.

How will you continue to shine with that light?

\**Jamie’s name has been changed to protect his identity.*

Talk 3: Sharing the Light: Caring for the Planet

*Revd Jeremy Fletcher*

**Key bible passage:** John 1.1-5. The light shines in the darkness.

You will need*:*

* Pictures of the climate protests of 2019, especially the ones led by young people.
* A globe, or a map of the world
* Some single-use plastic items
* A face mask
* A food waste container
* A Christingle

In 2019 the world’s attention was drawn to protests about the climate emergency, led by young people. *[Use the pictures to remind people about Greta Thunberg and climate protests.]*

The world *[use the globe or a world map]* is an amazing environment, which human beings can help or harm. Remember when we all got the message about plastic? *[Use the plastic item]*

In 2020 the lockdown reduced pollution and cleaned the air for a time. *[Use the face mask]* Before 2020, if you saw someone with a mask on, it was probably because they were worried about air quality. One of the things which happened in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus crisis and lockdown was that car and air travel was massively reduced, and the air got better to breathe.

Did you notice other ways in which the environment improved in 2020? People talked about rivers and seas becoming clearer, hearing more birds sing.

In early 2020 we saw the ways that human beings could change the environment for good. It’s a lesson we mustn’t forget as many of our activities have started again.

The orange of Christingle stands for the good world God has created, and the sweets and fruit are the seasons and the fruits of the earth.

*[Light the candle on the Christingle]* The light on the Christingle stands for the light of Jesus, who lived on this earth, the earth made by God.

We saw some of the creativity and care of God as the environment changed for the better. In a dark time one of the lights which shone was our care for the planet.

As the light shines now, can you think of other actions you can take to care for the planet? Can you join together, like young people did in 2019, so that we create community and change the world?

One very practical way is to make sure we use and reuse things from this service.

*Ask what use can be made of the leftover oranges: a juicer, marmalade, putting in a compost maker, or in a specialist food waste bin. [Use the food waste container]*

The message of the climate protests was that our young people need to inherit a thriving planet, not a broken one.

The message was given most strongly to us by young people. The Children’s Society takes the voices of young people very seriously, often giving them a voice where they haven’t had one before. The annual Good Childhood Report is full of the thoughts, words and challenges of young people to all of us, and The Children’s Society continues to give a voice to and advocate for the needs of young people. In 2020 those voices are challenging us about our being the light of Christ in caring for God’s good creation.

Looking after the environment is one way we will help each other and give thanks to God who made the world. Actions we take now will benefit the young people The Children’s Society serves, and all the young people of the planet.

They are one way we will shine with the light of Christ.

Talk 4: A reflective ‘How to make a Christingle’ talk

Revd Ally Barrett

You may wish to have all the ingredients for a Christingle handy as you read this:

* An orange, and a sharp knife
* A red ribbon (or red tape)
* Small piece of foil
* Four cocktail sticks
* An assortment of small sweets or dried fruit
* A 1x10cm candle
* A box of matches

The Christingle tells a wonderful story – the greatest story ever told.

It starts when God made the world and everything in it, out of nothing.
Although actually, he made it all out of love – he loved the world into being.

Hold the orange in your hand, and imagine that you are God, holding the world in your hands, and loving it so much.

And into the world God poured every good gift – the changing seasons, the plants and trees, the animal world, and human beings, with their variety and beauty, and imagination, and potential.

Push the dried fruit and sweets onto the cocktail sticks, and then push the sticks into the orange. As you do so, think about those blessings. What blessings would you like to thank God for today? What good things are you thankful for in your life? Think of them now, and be prepared to think of them again as you taste each sweet.

But even though God had blessed the world so richly, it was not the bright and light place that God intended it to be. Human beings have never really taken proper care of the world, or of each other, and we have often made the world a dark place.

What makes the world a dark place? What stops it being the place God wants it to be? ‘Name and shame’ the darkness now: war, famine, bullying, pollution…

So God sent his Son into the world to be the light of the world – not a light to shine on the world from heaven, but a light to shine from the earth itself – so Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God’s Son becoming a human being like us, to bring God’s light to a world in darkness.

Cut a cross shape in the top of your orange with a knife. Light your candle, and push it into the orange. Feel how firmly fixed it is.

And it was a very dark world that Jesus came to: his own people were oppressed, he was born in a dark and dingy stable, and if you read a little further in the story, you’d find out that Jesus and his family then became refugees – they had to run away to escape from King Herod, who wanted to kill the baby Jesus. There’s no doubt about it, he was born into a very dark world. But that’s exactly why he chose to go there.

When would you switch on a light, or light a candle? Only when it’s dark. Switch off the lights in the room where you are now. Enjoy how the light of a single candle flame takes the darkness out of a whole room.

But the world didn’t like the light – Jesus showed up all the wrong things that had been hidden in the dark. He showed up the injustice in the world, and lived a life that showed how we should treat people who are poor, or ill, or people we find difficult. He talked about how the leaders hadn’t been caring properly for everyone, and how people had forgotten what really matters.

But God still loved the world. On our Christingle we place a red ribbon around the orange – God’s love has always encircled the whole world…

Add the red ribbon to your orange. How do we see God’s love for the world and for us? How do we know that people love us? And how do we know we love other people? Think of as many ways as you can that God’s love breaks into the world.

…that love was shown most deeply when the grown-up Jesus died on the cross, so the ribbon is red, for Jesus’ blood.

Blow out your candle. Watch the last spark dwindle and die. Wait a moment and then re-light your candle.

But even though Jesus died, the candle flame still burns brightly, because Jesus came alive again, showing that the love of God was deeper than all the hatred of the world, and the peace of God was stronger than the violence of the world, and the light of God was brighter than all the darkness of the world.

That’s the story that the Christingle tells. The story of the light and love of God. Jesus came to bring the light and love of God to every dark corner of the world.

So where do you think the light and love of God are right at this moment? Where in the world, and in what situations, would you most like the light and love of God to be now? In all the war-torn places of the world, in every place where people suffer and die, in every place where there is still injustice and oppression, and carelessness of one another, in the lives of vulnerable children and young people who feel alone, afraid and with no one to turn to…

Let the images from the news, or your own memories and imagination, come into your mind now. Feel the weight of the ‘world’ in your hands, and feel the warmth of the candle flame, and see the light play on the surface of the orange.

Jesus said, ‘I’m the light of the world.’ And he also said, ‘You’re the light of the world’. But how does that light get from Jesus to us, and into the world? Christingles are best lit from one another: when our own flame has been lit with the light of God’s love, our next job is to pass it on – that’s how the light and love of God will spread through the world.

How will you share the light and love of God today, after this service, and over these next few weeks? What acts of kindness, of love? What words of peace? What prayers, what thoughts?\*

Today, and this Christmas, we remember how much God loves the world and each one of us. And we thank him for all his blessings. Just as he has so richly blessed us, we take those blessings and become a blessing ourselves to those around us and to the world.

**Note:** There are additional talks for Christingles held at Epiphany and Candlemas in the **Creative ideas for informal Christingles** available from **christingle.org/resources**

**\***This might be an appropriate point to mention the work of The Children’s Society and how to support it, for example by giving a donation or in other ways. Refer to the story of Jamie and the work done by The Children’s Society to support him (see introduction).

For over 50 years, donations from Christingle services have helped many young people get the care and support that they so urgently need.

The Children’s Society’s life-changing work is driven by the ideas and voices of young people, and because of the kindness of Christinglers like you, thousands of vulnerable children and young people will have light in their lives.