



CLOSE to
HOME

LESSONS FOR CHILDREN

Advent Year C

by Rev. Anna Strickland

The holidays are a magical time for children. We've created these children's lessons to be used with our *Close to Home* series for Advent–Epiphany (Year C) in worship, Sunday School, or at home. Each week includes a scripture to read from the International Children's Bible, some “wondering” statements, a good news statement, a prayer, and extension activities for home or church.

We invite you to leave some time for silence between each of the “wondering” statements. Often, children will volunteer their thoughts freely, but phrasing these questions as statements of wonder serves a few purposes. First, it takes pressure off of children to have an immediate response. When used in worship, it also invites the entire congregation into wondering. And in an era of livestreaming and pre-recorded videos, it allows for a more comfortable way to deliver a children's message without immediate feedback from the children.



The First Sunday of Advent HOMESICK (HOPE)*

Luke 21:25-36 | 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Read: This is what Paul wrote to his friends in the city of Thessalonica while he was away:

“We pray that we can see you again and give you all the things you need to make your faith strong. We pray that our God and Father and our Lord Jesus will prepare the way for us to come to you. We pray that the Lord will make your love grow more and more for each other and for all people. We pray that you will love others as we love you and that your hearts will be made strong.”

—1 Thessalonians 3:10b-13a (ICB)

The First Sunday of Advent

HOMESICK (HOPE) *cont.*

Wonder: I wonder what Paul was feeling when he wrote this letter. I wonder if you've ever felt those feelings, too. I wonder what you do when you miss someone. I wonder if you've ever missed your home. I wonder what it feels like to have to leave your home.

Say: The good news is that God is always with us, even when we are away from home, even when we miss the people we love, and we can wait with hope for the day we get to see them again.

Pray: Let's pray. Dear God, we pray for the people we love who are far away from us. We pray for everyone who misses their home or who can't go back home. Keep them safe until we can see them again, and make their hearts strong. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Extend:

- Write a letter to or draw a picture for someone you miss seeing. Ask a grown up for help mailing it to them.
- Tell a story about a place or activity you miss. What did you love about it?
- Read *The Bear and the Piano* by David Litchfield. United Kingdom: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2016.
- Learn about the lives of refugees. Find out what organizations serve refugees in your community and learn more about how you can help.

**Note: Younger children may have never been away from home, especially with the pandemic putting a hold on many sleepaway camps, sleepovers, and vacations. The concept of "homesick" might need some extra explanation for children.*



The Second Sunday of Advent

LAYING THE FOUNDATION (PEACE)

Luke 1:57-80 | Philippians 1:3-11

Read: This is what Paul wrote to his friends in the city of Philippi while he was in prison for preaching about Jesus:

"I thank God for the help you gave me while I preached the Good News. You helped from the first day you believed until now. God began doing a good work in you. And he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again. I am sure of that."

—Philippians 1:5-6 (ICB)

The Second Sunday of Advent

Laying the Foundation (Peace) *cont.*

Wonder: I wonder how Paul's friends helped him. I wonder whether Paul helped start the "good work" he talks about. I wonder what good work God is doing in you. I wonder who is helping you right now like Paul helped his friends. I wonder what kind of person you'll grow into.

Say: The good news is that we are always growing. Your family and your church and your teachers are all helping you to learn and grow into the person God has created you to be.

Pray: Let's pray. Dear God, we are so glad to always grow and learn and change. Thank you for the people in our lives who laid a good, solid foundation for us to build upon. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Extend:

- Build a story together, one sentence at a time. One person starts the story with one sentence, then the next person continues the story with another sentence. Keep going until the story is finished.
- Interview a family member about the past, perhaps when they were a child. What has changed?
- Draw a picture or write a story about who you imagine being when you grow up.
- Learn more about how architects design homes with blueprints. Find out what organizations help build homes for people in need in your community and learn more about how you can help.



The Third Sunday of Advent

A HOME FOR ALL (Joy)

Luke 3:1-18 | Zephaniah 3:14-20

Read: This is what happened when John the Baptist was preaching in the desert:

"The people asked John, 'What should we do?' John answered, 'If you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that too.' And John continued to preach the Good News, saying many other things to encourage the people."

—Luke 3:10-11, 18 (ICB)

Wonder: I wonder whether the people who heard John went and did what he told them. I wonder if you've ever shared your things. I wonder what it feels like when you share. I wonder what it feels like when people share with *you*. I wonder if your family or your church ever shares with you. I wonder how we could make sure everybody has what they need.

Say: The good news is that we get to help each other create God's home for all people by sharing our food, our clothes, our time, our space, and our love, because God's home is a home for *everybody*.



The Third Sunday of Advent

A HOME FOR ALL (JOY) *cont.*

Pray: Let's pray. Dear God, thank you for giving us what we need. Help us to share so that the world can be a home where everybody is included, fed, housed, clothed, listened to, and loved. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Extend:

- Build the biggest fort you can out of things you have around the house like cardboard boxes, blankets, and pillows. See how many people, pets, stuffed animals, or dolls you can fit inside.
- Tell a story about a time when you shared or someone shared with you. How did it feel?
- Go through your things to find items you can donate.
- Learn more about the lives of people who are experiencing homelessness. Find out what organizations serve unhoused people in your community and learn more about how you can help.



The Fourth Sunday of Advent

SEEKING SANCTUARY (LOVE)

Luke 1:39-55 | Luke 1:46b-55

Read: This is what happened after Mary found out she was pregnant with Jesus:

“Mary got up and went quickly to a town in the mountains of Judea. She went to Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the unborn baby inside Elizabeth jumped. Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

—Luke 3:39-41 (ICB)

Wonder: I wonder why Mary needed to go stay with her cousin Elizabeth. I wonder if she felt safe at Elizabeth’s house. I wonder if Elizabeth needed Mary like Mary needed Elizabeth. I wonder if Mary felt like Elizabeth knew what she was going through, since they were both pregnant. I wonder if there are places where you feel safe and understood.

Say: The good news is that we have a safe place with God, and we can be a safe place for other people when we listen to what they need and take care of them like Elizabeth did for Mary.

Pray: Let's pray. Dear God, thank you for the places where we are safe, cared for, and understood. Watch over the people who aren't in a safe place right now, and help us to be that safe place for others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

seeking sanctuary (love) cont.

Extend:

- Read *What Is God Like?* by Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Paul Turner. Illustrated by Ying Hui Tan. United States: Convergent Books, 2021.
- Make a card for someone who makes you feel safe. Tell them how you feel when you are together.
- Check in on a friend. Listen to what is on their mind.
- Learn more about the lives of people and animals living in shelters. Find out what organizations offer shelters in your community and learn more about how you can help.



Luke 2:1-20

Read: This is what happened the night that Jesus was born:*

“While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed. That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. An angel of the Lord stood before them. The angel said to them, 'Don't be afraid, because I am bringing you some good news. It will be a joy to all the people. Today your Savior was born in David's town. He is Christ, the Lord. This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box.' So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph. And the shepherds saw the baby lying in a feeding box. Then they told what the angels had said about this child.”

—Luke 2:6-17, abridged (ICB)

Wonder: I wonder what Mary and Joseph felt when there was no room for them. I wonder what it felt like for the shepherds to get invited to meet Jesus. I wonder if the stable was crowded that night. I wonder what the animals thought of all these people in their home. I wonder what it feels like when you get invited to something special.

Say: The good news is that God invites all of us to be close to Jesus, and anywhere we are together, even in a barn, God is there, too.

Pray: Let's pray. Dear God, thank you for inviting us to be close to you, just like you invited the shepherds and the animals and the angels. Help us to remember that no one gets left out from your invitation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Christmas Eve INVITED HOME *cont.*

Extend:

- Create an invitation for a friend to come to church with you.
- Play Sardines. One person goes to hide and the rest of the people seek the hider. When you find the hiding place, squeeze in until everyone is together.
- Read *Room for a Little One* by Martin Waddell and Jason Cockcroft. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2006.
- Learn about how other countries celebrate Christmas. What kinds of celebrations do they have? Which would you like to be invited to?

***Note:** Many churches and families read the full Christmas story, either from the bible or a picture book, on Christmas Eve. Any telling of the Christmas story will work great here.



The First Sunday after Christmas CHOSEN HOME

Luke 2:41-52 | Colossians 3:12-17

Read: This is a story from when Jesus was twelve years old:

“Jesus was sitting in the Temple with the religious teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I were very worried about you. We have been looking for you.’ Jesus asked, ‘Why did you have to look for me? You should have known that I must be where my Father’s work is!’”

—Luke 2:46b, 48b-49 (ICB)

Wonder: I wonder what Jesus was asking the religious teachers. I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt when they found Jesus in the temple. I wonder if you’ve ever gone off to play somewhere and worried your parents. I wonder how it felt for Jesus to be in a place where he could be himself and be close with God. I wonder if there’s a place where you feel like you can be completely yourself.

Say: The good news is that God made us unique with different gifts and talents, and there is a place just for you where you fit in and can be exactly the person God made you to be.

Pray: Let’s pray. Dear God, we are grateful that you have made us each unique. Thank you for the places where we can be ourselves. Please help everyone find that kind of place. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The First Sunday after Christmas

CHOSEN HOME *cont.*

Extend:

- Draw a picture of a place where you feel like you belong.
- Put a jigsaw puzzle together with your family. Remember how each of us is unique like a puzzle piece and each piece has a place where it belongs.
- Watch the Disney movie *Frozen*, *Frozen II*, or *Hercules*. How does Elsa or Hercules feel at the beginning of the movie when they don't think they fit in? How do they feel at the end of the movie? What helps?
- Read *King of the Sky* by Nicola Davies. Illustrated by Laura Carlin. Candlewick, 2017.



Epiphany

HOME BY ANOTHER way

Matthew 2:1-12 | Ephesians 3:1-12

Read: This is what happened after Jesus was born, when wise men from another country saw a star over Bethlehem:

“When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. They went to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary. They bowed down and worshiped the child. They opened the gifts they brought for him. But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went home to their own country by a different way.”

—Matthew 2:10-12 (ICB)

Wonder: I wonder how the wise men felt after their dream. I wonder how far out of their way the wise men had to go to avoid King Herod. I wonder if you've ever had to change plans like the wise men. I wonder what you were feeling when that happened.

Say: The good news is that when plans change, we can be brave and follow God like the wise men. Because even when we feel like we're lost, God knows the way home.

Pray: Let's pray. Dear God, change is hard. Thank you for being with us, even when things don't turn out the way we expect. Help us be brave when we aren't sure what the future holds. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Epiphany

HOME BY ANOTHER WAY *cont.*

Extend:

- Go on a walk around your neighborhood or in a park with your family. Take turns choosing which direction to go.
- Draw a map of where you live. Label the places you know.
- Read *Home By Another Way: A Christmas Story* by Barbara Brown Taylor. Illustrated by Melanie Cataldo. Flyaway Books, 2018.
- Learn more about the history of maps and mapmaking. How have maps changed over time? Do you think the wise men had a map home?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Rev. Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a native Austinite and graduated from the University of Texas where she now works as a college minister, especially serving LGBTQ students.

A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshipping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God. Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.

