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## What is All Age Worship?

### It IS

- An opportunity for people of all ages, understandings and experiences to come together to offer God their praise and worship
- A time when the whole family of God can learn from each other and grow together
- Recognisably part of the church's regular worship pattern
- A concept which requires us to think what we mean by "worship" and "family of God"

### It's NOT

- A children's service with adults present
- An adult service with children present
- A children's performance
- A chance to sing the butterfly song again
- Reaching only the lowest common denominator
- An unstructured free for all



## All Age Worship that really works

It's high up on the cringe scale. Ask virtually any minister for their opinion on all-age worship and you'll be privy to a cocktail of various frustrations. Elderly people get annoyed; children hate it; most people stay away; leaders simply don't know how to make it work. You know the sort of thing.

But Tim Carr, commissioning editor for New SALT for all ages, is upbeat about this form of worship: "It is not a children's service with adults present; neither is it a service for adults with children present. It is not merely a service for families or households with children in them. Rather it is a worship time for the old, young, married, widowed or single. It is for all who have faith in Christ, including the children, and can be a powerful way to reach out to "seekers"."

### A little history

At some point during the 1970s, all-age or family worship slid into the church calendar, becoming a regular feature in churches and chapels across the nation.

This type of worship probably arose out of the dramatic decline in Sunday School numbers after the Second World War and the steep increase in the number of children born in Britain during the same period. Many churches sought to reach out to children and their families but had to experiment with new methods.

Today, such worship is an accepted part of the UK church scene. Whether it's a weekly event or an experience that is shared on a monthly, quarterly or every fifth Sunday basis, all-age worship is a familiar congregational guest.

### But what is it?

Critics of all-age or family worship accuse it of being a form of worship that offers nourishment to neither children nor adults. More often than not, such worship is based around an "adult" structure, attempting to accommodate children.

In criticising this approach, Graystone and Turner (*A Church for All Ages*, 1993) point towards a more holistic practice:

"Adding a children's talk does not make an adult service suitable for all ages. Worship that meets the desire of many generations to bring their own needs of the world before God begins when the leaders ask themselves: 'How can we best use the special dynamic created by putting adults and children next to each other, while staying faithful to the tradition to which we belong?'"

## Mixing with the generations

Meeting the desire of many generations sounds very worthy and probably unattainable! But it's essential to recognise that a local church is a community of generations.

At a time when society is fragmenting into niche consumer markets, the Church represents God's activity amongst all people. All-age worship asserts that we are not defined by Prada, New Look, Tesco, Sainsbury's or Vodafone, but presents a vision of an entire community under God.

Tim Carr believes that all-age worship offers a glimpse of God's sovereign reign over humanity: "Many would still say that all-age worship is both essential and central to the life of the faith community because in that approach the Lord is consciously placed at the centre of the community to rule over the lifestyles and relationships within it."

### All-age worship can

- Enable different ages to contribute to worship and learn together
- Encourage people to see church as "shared experience" and recognise we need each other
- Mark special occasions
- Make worship more accessible to newcomers and outsiders
- Give a break to children's leaders
- Provide a change



## More than a few songs on Sunday morning

John Hattam, a retired Scripture Union evangelist and recognised authority on all-age worship, has a radical view of church life. He believes that there is a need for a shift from all-age worship to all-age church.

“Worship comes out of what the church is in its “guts” rather than being allocated in a regular slot for so-called “All Age Worship”. It’s difficult to have any meaningful worship if old and young are meeting as comparative strangers. Thought needs to be given to how the church functions throughout the week in terms of all ages getting to know each other better.

“Keeping everyone compartmentalised during the week and then putting them together “cold” on a Sunday morning, will only leave everyone demanding the kind of service they want.”

Tim Carr suggests a check list for those leading all-age worship:

- Not too much talking
- Not too much singing
- Involve people – enable them to participate
- Use one simple, relevant theme/Bible truth
- Use variety – engage all the senses (particularly the visual) and include movement
- Keep it fairly short – maximum 60 minutes
- Be bold – not hesitant or timid

# Worship with children

Let's start at the very beginning .....

Before you start think about

- Physical access – wheelchairs, buggies
- The welcome should be “on the level”
- Everyone needs a service book or leaflet
- Where are we going to encourage families to sit?
- What messages have we conveyed before the service begins?
- Do we need gathering activities?

Countdown – the transition

**What is worship?**

- Putting oneself consciously into the presence of God
- Learning to recognize God's voice
- Sensing the presence of God

???

**Worship** is innately within humans – we do it naturally, so children have to be developed from where they already are, not from scratch.

**How do children learn to worship?**

Through

- participation
- role-modelling
- being an active member of a worshipping community
- being given a vocabulary to express themselves
- a sense of belonging
- creativity
- expectation

We need **worship and faith development coaches**, just as we need people to teach us to ski, garden, cook or use a computer.

When we approach worship, or any experience where we want people to learn or to participate fully, whether children or adults, we need to remember the different ways people learn

- **Visual learners** – 37%
- **Auditory learners** – 24%
- **Kinaesthetic learners** – 39% (of whom 60% are male!)

We all have a preference for one of these styles, although it might be a blend.





## Features of effective (all-age) worship are

- Multi-sensory – visual, tactile, aromatic, auditory
- Building relationship across generations
- Multi-cultural – taking the best of all traditions
- Participatory for all
- Insightful and inspiring
- Addressing multi-intelligences – small groups; 1-1; environmental; numerical; creative; musical; scientific; linguistic

## It is not

- child-focused
- dumbed-down
- entertainment
- performance-based
- segmented
- nor children being treated as tiny adults

When we are learning to do effective multi-generational, multi-intelligence, multi-sensory worship it is helpful to analyze which aspects of the worship meet the needs of which groups.

**Consider:** Simplicity; Visual; Tactile; other Senses; Participation; Symbols  
Short Sections; Reading not Necessary; Opportunity to Move

## Remember!

The average reading age in the UK is **10**

16% of adults have a reading age of 10 or lower

Only 40% of adults have a reading age equivalent to GCSE grades A-C or higher

Use a Children's Bible for one of the readings plus

- Hymns with a chorus
- Hymns with repetition
- Regular repetition of standard liturgy

Familiar core repertoire

The average attention span is **4 minutes**

**Children under 8, and everyone with autism, need 'concrete' examples, not metaphors – no 'hide Jesus in your heart'**

## Anglican All-age (non-eucharistic) Worship should include

- Greeting
- Confession & Absolution
- Collect for the day
- Reading from Scripture
- Psalm or scriptural song
- Sermon
- Creed
- Prayers including the Lord's Prayer
- Blessing, Grace and dismissal

Remember the needs of everyone including poor and non-readers

### Creating sacred space

- A special area reserved for worship if at all possible
- Well and appropriately furnished and resourced, comfortable
- Focal point to draw attention – candle, flowers, liturgical colours
- Music or silence to create responsive atmosphere
- Body language and tone of voice; expectation
- Create a ritual to help everyone enter the sacred space

### Promoting prayer:

- Prayer as an integral part of every children's programme
- A prayer board or box available at every session
- Teaching the 'great' prayers by heart
- Role-modelling
- Psalms
- Everyone praying aloud
- Prayer Trees, answered prayers?
- Active prayers: bubbles, post-its, leaves, tissue paper, newspaper pictures, photos, water, flowers, seeds, wool web, Powerpoint display, writing or drawing

### **Other issues:**

- Creating the shape of worship
- Music – traditional or contemporary
- Lectionary or themes?
- Access
- Books, leaflets, multimedia
- Marketing and publicity
- Faith Development and Nurture
- Family Shape
- Child Theology
- What will it be like 40 years on?

**British Sign language** works well rather than actions which may be regarded as cheesy. Actions are not popular with 9 to 19 year olds!



# Some ideas for creative worship

## Worship

Keep it short, lively and simple. Check songs for words and concepts that some may find difficult to understand. Use or live or recorded music to help create an appropriate "mood". Give simple instruments and/or banners or streamers for children to use in the worship times.

## Bible Reading

Consider using different Bible translations, sound effects, pairs or group reading, visual aids to illustrate the story, and readings that involve the whole church (eg. for crowd responses).

## Talks

Keep them short, prepared, visual and interactive. Keep one simple clear message in mind.

## Drama

Bring the theme to life through scripted or improvised drama sketches, mime, raps or poems, or storytelling.

## Prayer

Use objects, create post-it note prayers and put them on a board, pray as groups in twos or threes, or use music and responsive prayers. Give opportunities for the children and young people to minister to the rest of the congregation in prayer. Ask family or other inter-generational groups to prepare short prayers on a theme.

## Responses

Again, use post-it notes, "letters to God", silence or drawing as ways for people to respond. Give opportunities for guided meditation, shouts of praise etc

Persevere with all-age worship, and explain and teach as you go along why the church feels it is important to have times of worship with everyone present. It can take a while to break down the resistance and objections from some people, especially those who find it hard to concentrate with children around, for example. However, the rewards of getting the whole church to be able to express worship with one heart and voice are well worth persevering for. Just as an earthly father would take delight in a meal with all his family eating happily at the same table, imagine how our heavenly Father feels when he sees all his children, young and old, joining together as one to worship.





We have come together in the name of Christ  
Encourage everyone to look around and nod or smile a greeting to all in the congregation

To offer our praise and thanksgiving  
Lift up hands high as an act of praise

To hear and receive God's holy word  
Arrange the upward facing palms of your hands in front of your body, shaped as a 'V' formation like the open pages of a book

To pray for the needs of the world  
Put hands together, palm to palm and fingers pointing upwards, as for prayer

And to seek the forgiveness of our sins  
Hold out your hands in front of the body – palms up – ready to receive

That by the power of the Holy Spirit  
Link thumbs and gently 'flap' the fingers as wings, imitating a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit

We may give ourselves to the service of God  
Put both hands across your heart and then move them outward in a gesture of self-giving



Here is an alternative way to begin a service, this time with responses from the congregation to words said by a leader. This celebrates the extraordinary nature of Christian fellowship and the privilege and purpose of worship.

We are not once a week friends  
We are the family of God

We are not a cosy club  
We are the body of Christ

We are not just strangers meeting  
We are temples of the Holy Spirit

We are not here by accident  
Our Father has called us to worship

We are not just filling up an hour  
Jesus wants us to know him better

We are not just going through the motions  
The Holy Spirit has some special words for us

So come; draw near to our God  
And God will draw near to us





## Some practical pointers for all-age worship

- Use a variety of songs, and don't "label" songs as being just for children, or just for adults, but rather encourage all ages to join in every song
- Avoid having slots or items "especially for the children", because the implication can be that the rest of the service is therefore not especially for them
- If you use action songs, explain why we do them (eg. expressing unity with our bodies as well as with our voices adds an extra dimension to our worship. The Psalms are full of encouragement to clap, dance, shout etc.) Never force anyone to join in (especially teenagers), but do set a good example yourself, and make sure that other leaders and musicians also set a good example, and don't hide behind their responsibilities or instruments!
- If younger children are present, be clear in your instructions as to what you expect from them, and be firm if they become distracted or a distraction. It can be helpful to have a few parents or helpers on notice to help with younger ones if necessary
- Be enthusiastic yourself about praise and worship – your enthusiasm will be contagious. Children learn best by observation and repetition, so give them good role models of worshippers and they will become good worshippers themselves. (On the other hand, it has been said that "you can con a con, fool a fool, but you can't kid a kid!" If the adults are merely "going through the motions" in worship but aren't entering in with their whole hearts then children will quickly pick that up and become bored)
- Be visual where you can ie don't just talk and sing, but incorporate dance, visual illustrations, anything with movement. We live in a visual age where people, and especially children, are far more used to watching than they are to listening. It frustrates me greatly to think that an average 9 year old will sit for 3 or 4 hours at a time on a Saturday morning glued to children's TV, but the next day in our churches we often fail to hold their attention for more than a few minutes. I'm not suggesting that worship should be entertainment (although it should be fun – "serious fun"), but well thought out visual elements will stimulate peoples' imagination and provoke responses of worship. Think how visual the worship in the temple of the Old Testament would have been, and how visual and evocative, for example, the act of communion is
- Use contributions from as many different ages as you can, eg prayers, readings, testimonies, songs, dances, drama etc. Teenagers especially prefer to be active contributors rather than passive participants. Follow the 1 Corinthians 14 model for worship where there is an expectation that when we come together, everyone should have something to contribute, not just those up the front
- Be practical about the length of time that children can concentrate for. It's better to have a shorter time of quality worship than a longer time that might deteriorate as some children switch off. (It's certain, by the way, that if some of the children are getting bored then so too are some of the adults, but children are just more honest about showing their feelings!)
- Ask for feedback from different ages as to what they do and do not enjoy in worship and ask for feedback from other leaders that you can trust as to how they feel that it's gone

# Planning Intergenerational Worship – some practical suggestions

## Keep things brief

Keep prayers short, particularly if they will be read by just one person.

## Explain things

People need to know what's going on. The words we use for parts of the liturgy and for actions we perform are a significant part of our identity. Surprisingly, not everyone knows the meaning of words like introit, doxology, Agnus Dei etc. Take the opportunity to explain the words' meanings whenever possible.

## Involve as many senses as possible

- Sight – keep things visual. Use banners that can be added to during Advent or taken away from during Lent. Use visual aids: if you're talking about water, have some jugs, glasses, ice cubes etc. If you're talking about love, hand out paper hearts. Use lots of colour in worship. Use liturgical colours and others as appropriate
- Sound – music is a vital part of worship. Remember to use a variety of styles. Children need to learn the great hymns of our past and adults need to learn new music too. (Don't call them Children's hymns if you want everyone to sing them!) And be sure to invite everyone to participate in hymns with actions, to the extent that they are able and comfortable. What about other sounds? Clapping, bells, percussion, nature sounds, running water: all these can enliven and enhance worship. The actual sound of tearing up a piece of paper on which we have written our prayers of confession can be a powerful assurance of pardon. Having key words spoken by people throughout the congregation adds intriguing variety in this age of "sound bites"
- Taste – most obvious here is sharing in Communion or Eucharist. But there are other opportunities for taste as well. A meditation on the salt of the earth can be amplified if people have just nibbled on a crisp or tasted a pinch of salt
- Smell – some churches have a familiar smell of incense or wax. Or maybe the comforting aroma of fresh brewed coffee! Smell is one of the keenest senses in the body, and can be a great enhancement for worship. Bring an electric bread maker to church and set the timer so that the bread will be ready just before Communion. Consider other ways of involving this important sense but be sensitive to people with allergies or asthma
- Touch –hugging, embracing and handshaking during the Peace are becoming more and more familiar in worship but do be sensitive, especially with children. Some people are embarrassed by touch, too. Touch is important but it can be threatening

### Move around

Experiment with clapping or swaying during a hymn. Try some liturgical dance, drama or mime.

### Involve all ages in the liturgy

Make sure that you have adequate amplification if children or young people are speaking. It is important that voices be heard, out of respect for both speaker and listener. Involve people in dramatic readings of the scriptures, in leading prayers, in greeting, as ushers, as candle lighters etc. It can be effective to invite a multi-age group of people to participate as a unit – a family, perhaps.

### Use a Bible translation that is easy to understand

A vital part of our tradition is reading the scriptures in the language of the people. If you want people to get something out of worship, make sure they can understand the Word that is being proclaimed.

### Use hymns with accessible language

This may seem obvious, but who can understand penitential, consubstantial etc? Hymns with repeated choruses can be helpful. Talking about words to some hymns can help people to feel at ease with new hymns.



# Using the Bible in All Age Worship

## Some points to consider

- The primary aim of reading Scripture in public worship is to communicate God's word to people. The secondary aim is to involve people in doing it. However the Bible is read or presented, we should not let great, glittering, attention-grabbing ideas (or poorly prepared, badly mumbled words) detract from the content
- Consider the translation to be used. Is it appropriate? Is the language accessible to the majority of the congregation? Is it possible to use a dramatised version of the Bible?
- Select readers with care. Give them training in how to stand, make eye contact with the congregation, how to introduce and end the reading, how to pronounce difficult words. Encourage them to read with a sense of life and vitality. Train them to vary the volume, pace and pitch
- Reading doesn't have to just be done by one person – use two or more voices, have choral or responsorial reading
- Invite the congregation to join in with parts of the passage – as responses or antiphonally
- How is the reading introduced? Does it need to be put in context? Is there some background which, if explained, will help to bring the reading to life?
- Make use of the overhead projector. Could key words or phrases be displayed? Could pictures or symbols help people follow what is being said?
- Make use of the notice sheet. Illustrate one or two episodes from the main reading. Include a sentence or two about it to help people both anticipate what is coming and reflect on what they hear. Have a space where people can draw or write their responses. Could you include an activity or puzzle for the younger members of the congregation?
- Could a mime or tableau add a contemporary context to the passage?
- Does the reading of Scripture always have to be from the same place? Use the whole of your church. Have people reading from the centre of the congregation. If you have an amplification system, consider how it could be used to best effect
- Are you including a balanced diet of scripture so that people can gain some idea of its wholeness?
- Remember that the "reading slot" is not the only place where the Bible is read in worship

**Let's try to rediscover the excitement of reading the scriptures in worship, as something that makes the people of God what they are**

# Choosing and using music in All Age Worship

MUSIC is an expression of a corporate feeling. Worship, especially Eucharistic worship, is a shared activity of the people of God. Singing “with one voice” is an expression of our unity with Christ and with each other.

Music also expresses emotion that is deeper than words. We can offer everything to God through it. It is abstract and intangible so it also shows us something of the timelessness and mystery of God.

Music should be planned as an integral part of the worship to enhance and identify with it, not slotted in after everything else is arranged or to give the children or the choir something to do.

## Use of music in corporate worship

- An entity in itself – a hymn or a psalm
- Part of the set text – versicles and responses, Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Amen
- Accompaniment to movement – procession or during Communion
- Setting an atmosphere—voluntaries, anthems, accompaniment of speech or chant

SIMPLICITY is the key word for all age worship. Well written tunes are easily learned, whatever the style. One does not have to aim for the lowest level of thought or words or the most banal tune to involve everyone. Children need beauty as much as adults. Equally, there is no music that is “unsuitable” for offering to God. The needs and composition of the whole congregation need to be constantly borne in mind.

HYMNS should be a mixture of styles and moods. It is inadvisable to reserve one hymn book for a particular type of service. A short congregational practice of new music before the service can also be a chance to involve visitors and to set the scene for a moment of quiet after it.

RESPONSORIAL MUSIC is increasing in popularity. It goes back to the early Church and was also used in the mission field. It gives a chance for everyone – soloist, choir and congregation – to have a musical role. Much is learned easily by rote – psalms, Taize chants etc

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC can be used before and after the service but also as an aid to meditation – after the sermon, during Communion or the Offertory. It can be played on the organ or another instrument. **Many youngsters are capable musicians.** There is also a role for using recorded music to set an atmosphere but it is not very successful as an accompaniment to singing.

ARRANGING MUSIC FOR INSTRUMENTAL GROUPS is not as difficult as one might think. Most people who can play an instrument and read music can do it with a few guidelines. The biggest task is writing out the parts.



TRADITIONAL HYMNS are usually written in parts for four voices – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The important ones are the soprano, the top line with the tails of the notes pointing up (because it is the melody) and the bass, the lowest line with the tails pointing down. The simplest way to arrange a hymn is to leave the alto and tenor parts to the organist or pianist. You could arrange as follows:

**Melody:** violin, recorder, flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, cornet

**Bass:** cello, left hand on a keyboard, bass recorder, bass guitar, bassoon

MODERN HYMNS are usually written with unison singing and guitar, keyboard or piano accompaniment in mind. Guitar chords will be written above or below the music. Use these for the guitar and keyboard. The letter names can also make a simple cello part or played on chime bars etc. Arrange the melody the same way as with traditional hymns and let the guitar or keyboard fill in the accompaniment.

### **Which instruments to use**

Violin, cello, recorder, flute and oboe parts are easiest to arrange for. The flute sounds better played an octave higher, but this does not usually involve writing a special part.

The easiest chords for guitar players are: D E A C D7 E7 A7 Emin Amin Dmin. A keyboard player can double this as a bass part.

Clarinets and trumpets sound a tone lower from the one written. Don't worry about this – the players will understand. Use them for pieces in C and G or those written with flats and get them to write out their own parts. Clarinets are good for low-pitched, reflective hymns.

If you have quite a big group, try giving some of the violins the alto part or to the viola if you are lucky enough to have one. Ask the players to write out their own parts.

Having made your arrangement, the secret is not to use every instrument at once as it is tiring for both players and singers. Save the trumpet for the last or very triumphant verses. Have a solo for a reflective verse. Don't use the drum kit all the time!

REHEARSAL TIME – Clergy and worship committee need to remember that even the best music groups and choirs need to rehearse the music and maybe to write arrangements of particular hymns and songs for the resources that are available. This needs commitment and time as well as skills so forward planning is vital. The organist and leaders of any music group need to be involved in the planning of all services which include music.

... AND A FINAL THOUGHT ... the majority of Christians in every culture and period of history, including today, have worshipped God with nothing more than unaccompanied singing.

# 10 Principles

## **It's not the lowest common denominator but working at all levels**

If you aim at 7 year olds everyone is frustrated.

Worship at different levels.

Children and adults learn at different levels but teaching needs to take place.

## **It's simple**

Not trivial. The truths deep at the heart of the Christian faith are simple.

Rejoicing that God loves us.

Saying sorry for wrong thoughts, words and actions.

Praying for people who are sick to be made well.

Hearing the timeless story of what Jesus did.

More to be investigated about grace, sin, healing, Christology –but on other occasions.

## **It is not childish ... or embarrassing for adults**

The object of putting adults, teenagers and children together is not that adults should pretend to be kiddies – even those adults who enjoy “making a fool of themselves”.

We go to public worship ready to meet God as we are, not wearing a mask.

No one to feel belittled by it.

Teenagers in particular need to find in all age worship the freedom to be themselves, not a self appointed section of the church.

## **It is visual where possible**

Previous generations taught by murals and stained glass.

Limited attention span caused by and fed off television.

Need to respond not only with stained glass but also with Power Point, OHP, puppets, visual aids, drama, video, banners, drawings and symbols, flowers ...

## **It is interactive**

Firstly there is interaction between the leader of the services and the congregation. Prayers in which the congregation responds to the leader, sometimes with a repeated line of praise, thanksgiving or request, are tremendously helpful for children.

Informal comments and questions increase attention.

Interaction can also take place with the congregation itself. Adults learn as much from children as children learn from adults.

But just putting different generations in the same room does not guarantee such learning will take place.

There is a huge potential for learning within the words “turn to the people you are sitting beside, adults and children together, and talk about .... ”

This may take some getting used to for congregations who are new to it – children leap to it enthusiastically, but adults find themselves taken by surprise that their opinions are being sought.

## **WARNING!**

It is vital to offer an opt out – “if you prefer to think about it quietly by yourself, that’s fine..”

Explain instructions carefully – “swivel on your seats or pews so that you can talk comfortably to the two or three people next to you”

Make sure that no one is unintentionally excluded –“if you are with friends or family, look round to see whether anyone would like to join your conversation”

The kind of situations that help people learn in these settings are open ended ones – those which ask for an opinion or give a chance to share experience –“tell the others in your group about a time when you prayed for something and God answered”

## **It’s accessible to children rather than them having to perform**

In churches where adults and children begin apart, but join together toward the end of a service, there is a great opportunity to respond to what has been learnt.

Children show adult congregations models made, drama prepared or new songs learnt – as their contribution to the shared worship of those present BUT NOT PERFORMING. Someone could also explain to the children what the grown ups have been learning to give a sense of the adult life of the church.

Prayers with long, and many, clauses are a huge obstacle for children to climb over; they assume it is not meant for them.

## **It’s a mixture of traditional hymns and simple all age worship**

Children need to learn hymns (and so do adults!)

## **It’s brief**

Be aware of time. It is not only difficult for children when a service stretches beyond their natural span of comfort; it is also hard for the adults who have brought them.

## **It’s true to the tradition but adapted to be appropriate**

In some respects, the content of all age worship is dictated by the tradition to which a church belongs.

It is good for children to see the whole range of expression to God that makes up the worship of the church. When all generations are together for a whole service, children need to glimpse everything into which they are growing – including prayer, teaching, baptism and communion.

## **It’s part of an integrated intergenerational policy of the whole life of the church**

All age through the week

Any group is stronger when it does a whole range of activities together

All age worship needs to be owned by leadership



# Sample Services



# Faith and Offering

## an all age service for Epiphany

The Wise men saw the star and knew that it had something to do with the birth of a King, they undertook a long and arduous journey, bringing gifts, and their trust was rewarded. This service tries to emulate that trust, the journey and the offering. The quiz is designed to illustrate faith; the idea is to include some ridiculously easy questions relevant to the theme, and alongside these, put in some that are hard to answer. The lesson is that even though we do not know all the answers, we have a sufficient knowledge to trust in God. During the offertory hymn, people place the figures of the Wise men in the crib, and also leave a "gift for Jesus", a toy or any other useful gift to be later given to someone in need. This service includes Holy Communion but it could end with a blessing after the offertory hymn. The Eucharistic prayer has been adapted for Epiphany-tide.

### The service

**Hymn** This is the day you may like to add verses such as This is the day when the Wise Men came and This is the day when the Christ-light came.....

### Opening prayer

God, creator of this whole world,  
we have seen your star in the east and come to worship you.  
The light of the Christ child pierces the darkness of our human world,  
bringing times of peace and love.  
Illuminate our lives, by the brightness of your Spirit,  
making clear our path to you.  
Amen.

### Confession

Wise Men from the east worshipped Jesus and brought their gifts. We, too, have seen your glory, but turned away. We, too, have gifts but have not offered them to you or used them for you. We, too, have said you are a King, but have not served you as we should. And so we confess our sins:

**Lord Jesus forgive us and help us**

When our trust is less than certain

**Lord Jesus forgive us and help us**

When our love is less than bright

**Lord Jesus forgive us and help us**

When our prayer is less than frequent

**Lord Jesus forgive us and help us**

### Absolution

May we, like the Wise men, who were once far away from Jesus, be brought nearer to him, who gives us forgiveness and peace. May God forgive us, and help us to overcome our faults. Amen.

## Readings

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 7, 39-40 (Teaching about faith, with Noah as an example)

Matthew 2: 1-12 (The Wise men follow the star)

**Hymn**     be bold, be strong

## Quiz

To show us how, even though we may not know all the answers, we can still trust in God.

Suggestions for quiz:

- What made the Wise Men start their journey? **A star**
- Who did they give presents to? **Jesus**
- What were the presents? **Gold, frankincense, myrrh**
- How many Wise Men were there? **Accept any answer – the Bible doesn't say, thought tradition has held for centuries that there were three.**
- Why did they bring gold? **Symbol of kingship**
- Why did they bring frankincense? **Symbol of priesthood**
- Why did they bring myrrh? **Symbol of death**
- Which Old Testament prophet told that something great like this would happen in Bethlehem? **Micah**
- What does the Greek word, Epiphany, mean? **Showing, appearance**
- How can a star lead you to a house in a town? ?....

What did the Wise Men do when they got home? ?...

## Statement of Trust (faith)

We continue our journey of faith using our hearts and minds, and affirm our trust in God who leads us on.

Do you believe and trust in God the Father who made the world?

**I believe and trust in God**

Do you believe and trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us?

**I believe and trust in Jesus Christ**

Do you believe and trust in God's Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God?

**I believe and trust in the Holy Spirit**

## Intercessions

Suggested response: **Help us to show the light of Jesus**

## The Peace

God gives us a peace which passes all understanding, and which we reach through trusting in God. Let us share that peace with each other.

The peace of the Lord be always with you

**And also with you**

Let us offer each other a sign of peace

**Hymn**     We three Kings of Orient are

During which the Kings are placed by the crib, and gifts are offered to Jesus

The lord be with you  
**And also with you**  
Lift up your hearts  
**We lift them to the Lord**  
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God  
**It is right to give him thanks and praise**

## **The Eucharistic Prayer**

It is always right to give you thanks and praise, Holy Father, Heavenly King, because you have sent Jesus into the world, born in a stable, to be our light, to bring us your love, and to give us your peace. Through him you have prepared a place for us at the heavenly feast, and by your grace you have made us ready to receive him with joy. And so, with the Angels and Saints, and with all the members of your Church we say..

**Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of power and might.**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosannah in the highest!**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosannah in the highest!**

God our father, hear our prayers and by your Holy Spirit, make these gifts of bread and wine a sure sign that Jesus is with us. On the night before he went to the Cross, he took bread, gave you thanks, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Take and eat it, and remember me." In the same way, he took the cup and gave you thanks. He gave it to his friends, saying, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is given for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Drink this, and remember me".

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people on earth.**

We remember Jesus, born into our world at Bethlehem, and then going to the Cross for us, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven. We wait eagerly for his coming again in glory, and here on earth we offer ourselves in his service. We pray that, as we receive his blessing and gifts, we will see his light, and know his power within us.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people on earth.**

We make our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## **Invitation to Communion**

Here is Christ the Light of the World

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people on earth**

All may come to Communion or receive a blessing.

**Hymn**     The Virgin Mary had a baby boy

### Prayer after Communion

God our Father, by the guiding light of the star, you have shown Jesus to the Wise Men and to all people. By the light of faith, lead us all to your glory in heaven, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Everyone turns to face the church door, which is opened.

To a troubled world  
Peace from Christ  
To a searching world  
Love from Christ  
To a waiting world  
Hope from Christ



## Service for Ascension: Lifted up

### Set the scene

Draw people's eyes upwards. Hold the service in the garden or park, or decorate the ceiling of the worship space. Medieval Christians used an artificial pair of dangling feet, complete with nail holes.

### Call to worship

Jesus, Son of God, who was lifted into heaven,  
**we worship you with great joy.**

Jesus. Son of God, raised far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come,

**we worship you with great joy.**

Jesus, Son of God, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and whose kingship is one that shall never be destroyed,  
**we worship you with great joy.**

**Song** such as You are the King of Glory or We have come into his house

### Pray

A prayer of praise and confession

God of glory and love and power and possibility,  
we celebrate with you the work of Jesus,  
his humility and care, his love for the truth,  
his commitment to your plan up to and through and beyond his death,  
his achievement of reconciling the world to you.

We celebrate his homecoming with you and with all the angels of heaven.

We bend our knees in awe and we lift up our hearts and our hands in worship.

Forgive the lack of worship in our lives.

We are grumpy and self-centred.

We refuse to lift up our eyes to see you

and to open our ears and hear your wonderful commission,

and so our lives fail to speak of you and to serve you.

Today, your day of glory, draw us to yourself.

Accept and heal and empower us.

Draw us into your life and your work

so that we may draw others, too,

to love and praise and live for you.

**Amen.**

## Share the word

Read Luke 24. 44-53 and any of the following readings:

Acts 1.1-11

Ephesians 1.15-23

Daniel 7.9-14

## Lifted up

This is the day when Jesus finally gets what he deserves; he returns to his home to experience the glory that belongs to him. It is cause for the wildest of celebrations. Our worship today is a faint echo of the welcome Jesus receives in heaven on his return. On Ascension Day in particular, we can let rip with the praise. Let the focus be not on our needs and wants, but on Jesus. It's his day!

Don't get stuck on worrying about 'what actually happened'. This is an important story for Luke – he uses it as a pivot, both to close his Gospel and to begin the story of Acts. He want us to be clear that the work of the bodily, tangible Jesus is complete and the work of the Church is just beginning. It closes the resurrection appearances and sets the scene for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the birth of the Church.

In both of Luke's stories, Jesus commissions the disciples to be his witnesses, beginning from where they are and moving out 'to the ends of the earth'. That commission is ours, too. Today, do not feel it as a burden but receive it as an incredible privilege.

Let today's spirit of self-forgetting worship become a habit, the centre of our personal life and of our life in the church and as the church.

**Song** such as The golden gates are lifted up or We want to see Jesus lifted high

Bless this neighbourhood and let your kingdom come.

We bring to you its need for healing (...)

and reconciliation (...).

We thank you for those who are working for justice and peace in our area (...)

## Prayers of intercession

A prayer for the world

As you leave the world, Lord Jesus, you continue to care for it.  
You have made us your witnesses,  
so bless your Church throughout the world  
that your disciples everywhere may be continually telling the Good News,  
by word and action.

We pray especially for (this group or church, local churches,  
any particular projects or difficulties)...

Bless this neighbourhood and let your kingdom come.  
We bring to you its need for healing (...)  
and reconciliation (...).

We thank you for those who are working for justice and peace in our area (...)  
and ask that we, your commissioned witnesses, may work  
both with them and with you for the good of all.

Bless the whole world and reign in it.  
We pray for the world's troubled areas (...)  
and for places where people don't have the basic necessities of life (...).  
We cry out to you against the things that threaten life on this planet (...).

You send us to proclaim the Good News to the ends of the earth, so activate us to  
be involved and let what we do and say be a blessing for your creation.  
**Amen.**

God of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
we ask for a spirit of revelation as we come to know you;  
open our eyes to the hope you have called us to,  
and the greatness of your power for we who believe,  
so that with you at the centre of our lives  
we may live and die for you  
and bring others into the circle of your love.  
**Amen.**

**Song** such as Christ is alive! Let Christians sing or O for a thousand tongues to  
sing



## Closing responses

Holy Jesus, we have seen you and known you.

We know your glory and your love.

**We lift up our hearts to bless you.**

As you lifted up your hands to bless your disciples  
you lift them today to bless us, and in response,

**we lift up our hands to bless you.**

You have promised us the power of your Spirit  
to guide and empower us in the work you call us to.

**We lift up our lives to bless you.**

A **blessing** or say the Grace.



# Celebrating the Saints of God

An idea for an all-age service



Give everyone a cut out paper person as they arrive, and a pen or pencil. Have a large sheet of card ready to use as a background and glue sticks available for the intercessions.

## Welcome

**Opening sentence** For all the saints who from their labours rest  
Who you, by faith, before the world confessed  
Your name, O Jesus, be forever blessed!

Let us come into God's presence. Holy Spirit help us to pray

**Give to God the praise and glory**

Fill us all with power today

**Give to God the praise and glory**

Though we cannot see, we know

**Give to God the praise and glory**

You are here like years ago

**Give to God the praise and glory**

Give us voices full of praise

**Give to God the praise and glory**

Pleasing God in many ways

**Give to God the praise and glory**

**Hymn** To God be the glory

**Reading** Luke 7: 36-50

This reading can be done very effectively in four sections. For each section, ask the congregation to close their eyes and listen, while someone reads very clearly. In the meantime, children at the front pose in relevant positions as if for a photograph. After each section, invite the congregation to open their eyes and spend a moment looking at the scene and thinking about the feelings of the biblical characters.

**Read** verse 36  
**Scene** Pharisees and Jesus reclining

**Read** verses 37-38  
**Scene** Woman and Jesus, Pharisees looking on

**Read** verses 39-43  
**Scene** Jesus explaining to Simon, woman and other Pharisees looking on

**Read** verses 44-50  
**Scene** Woman being raised up by Jesus and forgiven

**Hymn**            Jesus' love is very wonderful

**Talk**

A person can walk through any book shop today and find shelves and shelves of "self-help" books. Books on dieting, exercising, looking your best, achieving the most, climbing the corporate ladder, improving your attitude are among the subjects covered. Strangely enough, there are no books on a topic in which we are all interested – how to become a saint.

Ask the following questions

- What is a saint?
- Who is your favourite saint?

How can a person become a saint?

One book which has been a best-seller for many centuries is the Bible. A prescription for sainthood is described within its pages. For some, becoming a saint may sound impossible, but in fact, it is not! There are many people around us who live the life of a saint here on earth now. We probably know some of them.

Do you know people who depend on God, no matter how difficult life becomes for them? Tragedy, ill fortune, loss of job, death – none of these events seem to phase them. People who depend on God alone cannot be shaken; they seem to worry less than the rest of us. They lead simple lives, trusting in God's love. They are saints in the making.

Jesus tells us simply to love one another. If that is our first consideration, everything else falls into place.

Just think about someone like Mother Theresa. She always put her own needs last and saw the face of Jesus in each person she cared for. Her life was simple and her needs were few.

Share the story of someone you might know who is saintly, or perhaps one of the saints.

Today as we celebrate All Saints Day, we not only celebrate the lives of those great men and women who have lived before us, but we also know that Jesus has shown us how we, too, can become saints. Most of us will not be called to lead the life of a great person, but we can all be saints in our own way. Take time this week to think about how we can become more saintly.

**Hymn**            Father we love you

## Intercessions

On the paper saints, ask everyone to write the initials of someone they think is saintly. Ask everyone to come and stick their saint onto the large piece of card. (you might want to have some quiet music playing while this happens)

## Prayer of confession

Holy God, parent of us all, we know we don't always treat each other as you want us to. Lord God, forgive us,

**And help us to be more loving**

There are times when we insist on getting our own way, despite what others feel.

Lord God, forgive us,

**And help us to be more loving**

Sometimes we increase the tension when we ought to be seeking to make peace.

Lord God, forgive us,

**And help us to be more loving**

Often we say things which hurt each other. Lord God, forgive us,

**And help us to be more loving**

For our jealousy, our lack of respect, and times when we won't listen to those we live with, Lord God, forgive us,

**And help us to be more loving**

And because we sometimes just get bored with each other. Lord God, forgive us,

**And help us to be more loving.**

## The Lord's Prayer

Hymn            O when the Saints go marching in

Grace or blessing

## Checklist for Worship

- Is there a balance between word, prayer, praise and action?
- Is the service moving towards Holy Communion? If so, it must include an authorised form of penance, a Gospel reading and a creed or affirmation of faith
- What space is there for silence and reflection?
- Is there a balance between receiving and responding?
- Does the service have an overall coherence and flow, without the need for additional “sermons” in between items?
- Is the service tending towards entertainment rather than worship?
- Is the music being used to develop the main thrust of the service?
- Does the service enable the gifts of a variety of people to be used in both planning and taking part?
- Is the structure and content familiar? Or will the pattern serve to confuse and unsettle people?
- Does the service allow all ages to hear, see, do, say and respond?
- Will the service help everyone feel welcome and at ease, regardless of age, marital status, familiarity with church life ...?
- Does everyone involved know what he or she is supposed to be doing?

## And afterwards ....

Did the service ...

- Express a biblical truth?
- Encourage people to listen to and learn from God?
- Encourage people to approach God in praise, intercession, repentance etc?
- Flow from one item to the next?
- Allow for different levels of understanding, spans of concentration?
- Involve the participation of all ages?
- Allow movement?
- Enable people to learn and worship by looking, hearing, doing?
- Contain something appropriate for every age?
- Help everyone feel welcome, at ease and accepted regardless of age, marital status, familiarity with church life ...?

## Resources

Together for a Season Additional Collects	CHP 2006 isbn 9 780715 140628 Church House Publishing 2004 isbn 0715120875
Children in the Church	John Muir and Betty Pedley isbn 0-7151-4885-0
Children at Worship; Congregations in Bloom	Caroline Fairless isbn 0-89869-361-6
Building FamilyFriendly Churches	Mike Bossingham isbn 1-85852 254 4
'Multi-sensory' series	Scripture Union
Creating a learning church	Margaret Cooling isbn 1-84101 347
Step into the Story	Margaret Spivey & Anna Jean isbn 9 781841 010021
Creative Communion	Tim Sledge & Margaret Withers isbn 9781841 015330
Rural children, Rural Church Rona Orme I	sbn 97807 151 4126 7
The Passionate Life	Breen and Kallestad isbn 9780781442695
All-Age Service Annual	Scripture Union isbn 978 1 84427 316 4
Light for the Lectionary	<a href="http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light">www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light</a>
Seasons of the Spirit	<a href="http://www.spiritseasons.com">www.spiritseasons.com</a>
Roots	<a href="http://www.rootsontheweb.com">www.rootsontheweb.com</a>





