



**The
Children's
Society**

**No child
should feel
alone**

Messy Christingle

By Lucy Moore and Miriam Thurlow
Messy Church



Christingle
50
YEARS





Messy Activities

The activities are based around the theme of 'first Christmas' and 'community' – sharing the concept that some children have such difficult or disrupted lives that they don't experience their first Christmas until they are much older. These children can be hidden from sight and hidden from help. The Children's Society is one example of an organisation that helps us to be a better community and support young people so they too can enjoy life's light and not remain in dark places, following the example of Jesus.

This year, The Children's Society Christingle celebrations are 50 years old. Over the past half-century, Christingles have brought communities together to celebrate the light of Christ, while also raising awareness of The Children's Society and raising millions of pounds for its work. So this year is a great time to celebrate a Christingle in your Messy Church. (Find out more about Christingle and the work of The Children's Society at christingle.org)



Messy reflection

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:4-7 (NRSV)

The stark simplicity of Luke's account of Jesus' birth gives us pause in our complicated 'thing-heavy' Christmas celebrations. For many people, a Christingle service is 'the start of Christmas' or 'what makes Christmas special' so it may be our one chance to remind people of the simplicity at the heart of all the celebration: God coming to us to bring about his Kingdom.

For all of us, team as well as families, we need to put the preparations down for a moment and simply think about that first Christmas. We need to recapture the perspective that makes all the hard work and fun of oranges and candles make sense: The vulnerability and fragility of God in a human form echoed in the vulnerable young lives supported by The Children's Society over the last fifty years. The wordless message of the child in the manger mirrored in the meaning of every child's life and being. The mind-blowing potential for changing the world inherent in one hidden life.

It was a great privilege for Mary and Joseph and the community of Nazareth to have the care of Jesus as a child. It is our great privilege to care for the children and young people in our own communities and to do what we can on every level to ensure they have the best chance of life in all its fullness. Who knows what candles we will be lighting for today and tomorrow?

#discipleship: team



Messy team theme

- Go round the team and ask where they've seen God's light shining recently.
- Ask each other how the young people are in your community – how is their general wellbeing and quality of life, for example.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

The themes of the Christingle this year make the easy link between the mystery of Christ coming to earth and our possible responses towards God, towards vulnerable children and towards ourselves. The 'First Christmas' theme makes space for retelling the old story of Jesus' birth, wondering at it and considering our compassionate response to those who have never had a Christmas. The theme of 'community' affirms the Kingdom element of God's plan for us to live in healthy community with others. Every activity is an opportunity to think about our gratitude for what we have, our concern for those who have less and the bigger reason behind our compassion.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

What was most fun today?

What made you think most today?

When did you feel closest to God today?

What did the lighted candles make you feel?



Take-home ideas

- When you've eaten the edible bits of your Christingle, use the candle as a focus for praying as a family in the run-up to Christmas – maybe just before a meal or at bedtime. Take it in turns to light it, pray or blow it out.
- Make a Christingle at home for a lonely neighbour.
- Read about the work of The Children's Society online (childrenssociety.org.uk) and talk about it as a family.

Question to start and end the session

So... what is Christingle all about?





Activities

1. Christingle Treasure Hunt

You will need: lots of recycled envelopes (A4 size is best if you are using the actual objects; used and personal details removed), oranges, cocktail sticks, sweets, dried fruit, candles, foil, 'vouchers' that read 'red ribbon'. (NB The ribbon has a voucher because most of us use red sticky tape which is impossible to put in an envelope!).

If it's just too much work to put the actual component parts in envelopes, simply put a voucher with a picture of that component part on it in the envelope instead)

Beforehand, put each component part of each Christingle into a separate envelope marked with a large letter on the outside, as follows:

Orange: H

Cocktail sticks: I

Sweets and dried fruit: D

Candles: D

Foil: E

Red ribbon 'voucher': N



Hide the envelopes around your building. Invite everyone to search for the 6 different things they will need to make their Christingle. When they've found them all, invite them to see what word the letters make.

Talk about: how the envelopes were hidden and the word 'hidden' reminds us of the children and young people hidden from help, hidden from sight – these are the children The Children's Society is trying to find and help.



2. Make a Christingle

You will need: the component parts of a Christingle as above, plus sticky red tape

Invite everyone to make their own Christingle.

Talk about: what each part of the Christingle represents (see [link](#))

3. Fifty Years of Christingle

You will need: a long piece of paper (like wallpaper lining paper) with the years from 1968 to 2018 written along the middle; inkpads or kitchen sponges with glitterpaint soaked into them, handwipes or washing up bowl of water and towel, felt tips

If you feel inspired, you could glue pictures of major events near the appropriate years, or pictures of different fashions / cars / tv programmes beforehand.

Invite people to put a thumbprint against the year closest to the year of their first Christmas and to sign their name next to it. (If they have ever been to a Christingle service or event at church or school, they could also add that).

Talk about: what their earliest memories of Christmas are. Remind them that The Children's Society Christingle service is 50 years old this year. How much has changed in that period!



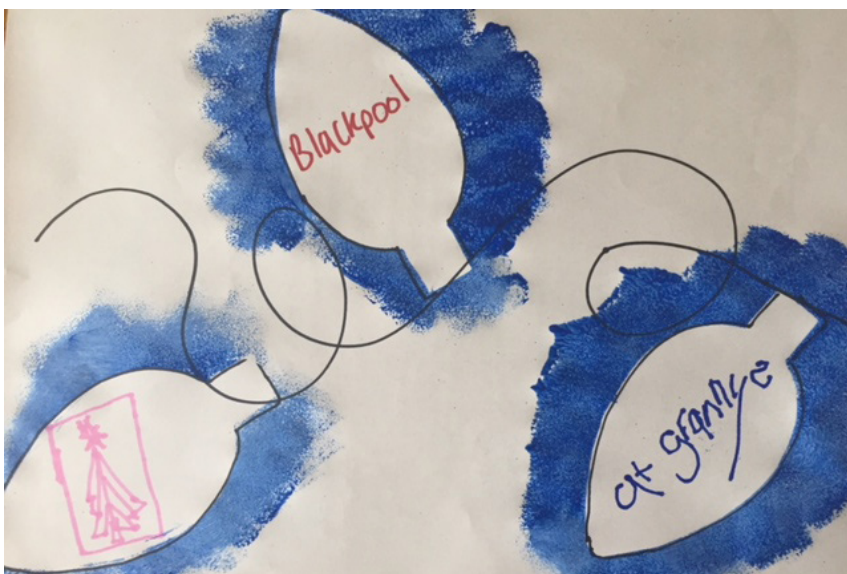
4. Christmas Lights

You will need: identical Christmas lightbulb-shaped card templates about 10cm high, pens, sponges, dark blue paint, a long sheet of paper, handwipes or similar.

Draw a curly line across the paper from left to right and draw on several bulbs as examples. It should look like a string of Christmas lights eventually, with the line being the wire. Invite people to think of the first Christmas lights they remember seeing and to either draw them or write down where they were inside the bulb shape.

Then place the card template over the writing and sponge-paint around it so that when you peel off the template, the shape of the lightbulb remains bright against the dark background.

Talk about: the stories people have of those Christmases. Say that today we're helping The Children's Society make happy Christmas memories for children who have never had a proper Christmas.





5. Blingy Baubles

You will need: plain gold baubles (Pound shops do them very cheaply); Sharpie pens, cotton buds, PVA glue, glitter (you can get eco-glitter which is better for the environment), a 'washing line' or similar where they can dry

Invite people to decorate a gold bauble – gold because it's the Golden Anniversary of Christingle services in aid of The Children's Society in the UK! The theme of the bauble is 'First Christmas'. First write on the bauble in Sharpie pen 'Name's First Christmas' then why this Christmas will be a first: 'Sam's First Christmas with green hair' 'Sam's First Christmas in Eastleigh' 'Sam's First Christmas with Chris', 'Sam's First Christmas as a vegetarian', 'Sam's First Christmas aged 56'. Or if it's for a baby, simply, 'Sam's First Christmas'. You might want to include the year as well.

Trace patterns around the writing with glue, using the cottonbud, then sprinkle glitter on and leave to dry. (Tip: sprinkle glitter inside a box so it's easy to reuse the excess).

Talk about: how The Children's Society wants to give children and young people who feel unloved, unsafe and alone their 'First Christmas' and help them look forward to Christmas for the very first time.





6. Orange lifejacket

You will need: oranges, a large glass vase or jar, water

Ask whether people think your orange will sink or float, and why they think it will do that.

Fill the jar with water and see what happens when you put the orange in.

Now peel the orange. Discard the peel. Do they think the peeled orange will sink or float? Why?

Repeat with the peeled orange.

Why does it float when it has the peel on, but sink when the peel is off?

The peel acts as a life jacket, and has air pockets in which increase the buoyancy. It also makes the orange slightly bigger, so more water is displaced, increasing the buoyancy. (For more detailed explanations, search online for 'Floating Orange Experiment').

Talk about: how bright orange lifejackets help hidden drowning people to be seen. The Children's Society helps hidden children and young people to be seen and helped. There are different 'lifejackets' in people's lives that help them to be resilient when life is stormy: community around us, Jesus beside us, family looking after us... what other 'lifejackets' can you think of?





7. The world is my orange

You will need: oranges, card, scissors, pens, bright adjustable desk lights or torches, some world map examples. For younger people, some heart punches will be easier.

Invite people to draw a simplified world map on the card, leaving a broad border. Cut out the countries so you have a sort of 'stencil' of the world (see photograph). Now with a friend, see if you can project the countries onto the orange and rotate/move both orange and map to get the sharpest possible result. Younger people can punch heart shapes in the card and project Jesus' light and love shining onto the world.

Talk about: what it means to you personally to bring Jesus' light and love into the world.

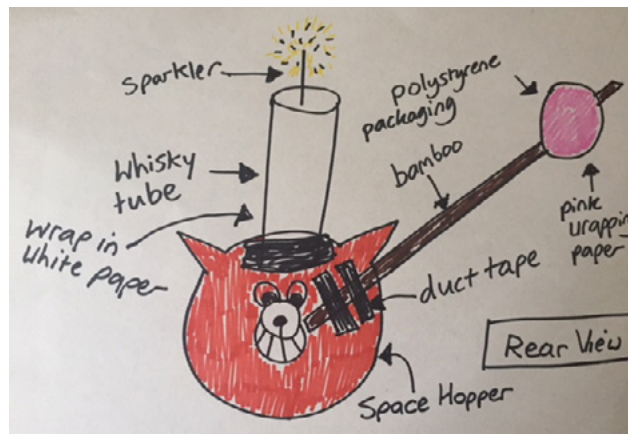




8. Giant Christingle

You will need: appropriate junk, orange crepe paper or tissue paper, plus whatever your imagination dictates

You can be as tame or adventurous with this one as you want to be. Orange space hoppers or gym balls make a good base for the orange, but you might also use a plastic hoop or a structure you devise yourself.



The sticks could be garden canes or broom handles; the sweets might be chunks of polystyrene or foam; the raisins could be crumpled balls of black paper. The candle might be a large real candle or a simple cardboard tube with a shiny card flame in the top. Or you might have someone who could make a battery powered lighthouse structure for it that actually switches on. The main thing is to have fun and make a community model that everyone feels they have contributed something to.

Talk about: how important community is and how good communities look out for the most vulnerable and support them. Talk about your community in church today and in your neighbourhood. Share your pictures using #Christingle50.



9. Strong Community

You will need: toothpicks as used for the Christingles or sticks from the garden, red tape as used for the Christingles

Ask how easy it is to break a stick. Let someone show you how easy it is. Then ask, how easy is it to break a stick when they're tied together like this? (Show them a fat bundle of sticks tied tightly together with the red tape.) Can you break these? Experiment to find out how many you need in a bundle to make sure that even a really strong person can't break them.



Talk about: community. Talk about how much stronger each person is when they have a tight community around them. Church is one of the ways of being community in your neighbourhood. School is another. What others can you think of? How big a problem is loneliness where you live? What can you do to help create a community of people who have others to rely on?



10. Gift tag

You will need: pins with big heads, lots of corrugated cardboard for bases, plain gift tags or card, holepunches, pencils

Lightly draw the outline of a candle on the gift tag. Place it on a pad of corrugated cardboard and perforate the outline with a pin, sharp pencil or holepunch. Invite people to use them this Christmas, perhaps to give a present to someone who is a little lonely.

Talk about: the way the light shines through the holes when you hold the tag up to the light. There are lots of ways to bring light into dark places, and joining in this Christingle service and supporting The Children's Society is one of them.





Messy Celebration

Use the following questions:

I wonder what you remember about Christmas last year.

I wonder what's your favourite memory of any Christmas you've ever had.

I wonder what's the earliest Christmas anyone here was alive?

Which year would that be? (compare with your thumbprint timeline)

Of course, the very first Christmas was even longer ago than that!

I wonder what it was like for Mary and Joseph that very first Christmas of all, before it was even called Christmas! There were no Christmas trees, no Santas, no stockings or turkeys. Do you remember? The angel had told Mary she would have a baby who would be God's son and she would call him Jesus. The Roman Emperor said everyone had to go and be counted in the town they came from, so Mary and Joseph set off for Bethlehem. While they were there, the baby was born, but Bethlehem was so crowded, Mary had to give birth in the room they used to keep the animals in. And that night some shepherds came to see Jesus and said they'd heard about him from a sky full of angels singing God's praises. So now every year at Christmas time, we remember Jesus' birth in all our celebrations.

We remember the world (take an orange) that Jesus came to.

We remember the love of Jesus going all round the world (wrap it in a ribbon) to every person, young and old, hidden or famous, those who have nothing and those who have everything.

We remember the good things God gives us all (take the sweets / fruits on sticks and stick them into the orange).



And we remember the light of Jesus (complete the Christingle with the candle) coming into the world that first Christmas and changing darkness to light wherever he went. (Light the candle)

His light keeps on shining even today, so many years later, though many people, churches, groups and families. Today we particularly think about the light he brings through the work of The Children's Society. Your gifts will enable young people to look forward to Christmas for the first time.

Some children have had such disrupted lives that they can never look forward to Christmas. Until now, they've been hidden from sight and nobody has been able to look after them, like the parts of the treasure hunt you did just now. The Children's Society helps these children, giving them someone to support them and talk to them, to make sure these children can enjoy their first Christmas free from fear.

And money raised from Christingle services has been helping children for 50 years: that's a lot of light brought into a lot of lives, though there is still so much to do. When we look at that red ribbon encircling the world, let's think of what they do and what we can do to bring our community together in love. When we light the candles in our Christingles later, let's think of the light of Jesus shining into the lives of children and young people. Let's think of the 50th birthday of The Children's Society's Christingle. And let's take that light out of here into the dark places of our own community this Christmas.



Prayer

If you have a giant or tiny Christingle at the front of church, ask for a few volunteers to come and be ready to point at the relevant part of it during the prayer. If people are holding their Christingles, ask them to touch the relevant part of it during the prayer.

We think about our world.....Jesus, please let your love and light fill the whole world, especially the darkest places (you might name some).

We think about your love wrapping the world like a beautiful gift ribbon and we pray for anyone who feels they are outside that loving hug.

We think about the gifts you've provided for us – the fruits of the seasons and the abundance of good things ... Please help us to enjoy what you've given us, to be thankful and never take it for granted, and to make sure everyone in our community has a fair share.

Song suggestions

See the Christingle song book (available from christingle.org) for song suggestions and see christingle.org/song

Meal suggestion

Messy Church celebrations usually include a meal as a way to welcome and include people. Hotdogs are unthreatening for people who may be in your church for the first time and weren't expecting to be given a meal.



Donating to The Children's Society

If people would like to make a donation to The Children's Society, they can do so in several ways:

- You could leave out some collection envelopes into which people can insert their donation. Do remind them that if they are UK taxpayers, it is important to fill in the Gift Aid information so their donation goes even further.
- You could leave out a Christingle and an orange plate or box and ask people to add their donations to it.
- People can give £5 by texting ORANGE to 70800.
- People can donate online at: **christingle.org/give**

(The Children's Society has posters available that show various ways to donate. These may be ordered from **christingle.org/shop**)

The authors

Lucy Moore is the founder of Messy Church. She promotes Messy Church nationally and internationally through training and speaking events, and is the author of a number of books for BRF. Miriam Thurlow was the Messy Church intern at BRF 2017-18.

Messy Church enables people of all ages to belong to Christ together through their local church. It is a way of being church which is particularly suited to families, but welcoming to all. It meets at a time and on a day that suits local families and is particularly aimed at people who have never belonged to a church before.

Messy Church is part of The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF), a Registered Charity.

brf.org.uk/messychurch