

PLANNING GUIDE



the
Light
OF
CHRISTMAS

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR
CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
GETTING STARTED	6
What's Inside the Church Kit	8
STEPS FOR SUCCESS	10
Plan	10
Promote	14
Host	19
Connect	21
NEXT STEPS	23

INTRODUCTION

The Christmas season is a beautiful time of year full of family and fun, food and gifts. But it can also be a season of stress, loneliness, fear and pain. And that is exactly the world God sent his Son into as a baby born in a stable on that first Christmas. When we look at the Christmas story, we see that the people God invited to the manger were all different, but they were all broken and in need of a Savior—just like we are today. Whatever this Christmas season brings to you, the invitation is open to celebrate the light and love that God offers through his Son, Jesus Christ, this Christmas Eve, Day, and always.

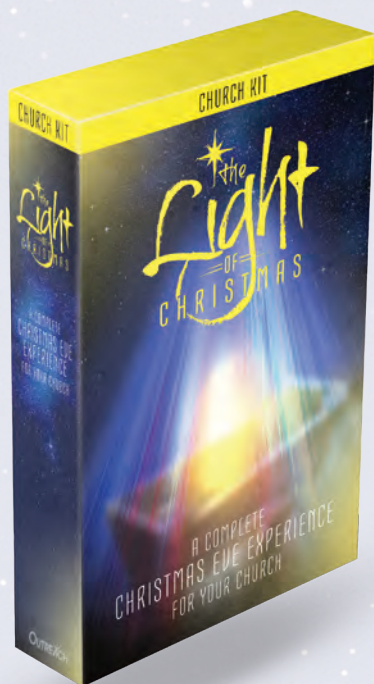
The Light of Christmas kit is designed to help your church do just that—to celebrate the true Light of Christmas, to share it with the community around you, and to make your service an extra special experience that your members and guests will remember. The kit contains everything you need to plan and host a powerful Christmas Eve service based on the theme of Jesus as the Light of Christmas. That includes practical resources for reaching out to your community, promoting the service, and even a complete sermon to take the pressure off during this busy season.

One of the most valuable pieces of *The Light of Christmas* is a gift book that you can provide for your church members and visitors alike to help make their individual and family celebrations more meaningful than ever. Filled with creative activi-

ty ideas, the book also provides devotions for each day and a beautiful original fiction story to read together and remember the beauty of the Light of Christmas. The book is designed as a resource to be customized to fit the schedule and style of each reader. And the resources in this book encourage and equip readers to carry *The Light of Christmas* beyond a one-night event and throughout the new year.

This season offers a unique opportunity to experience God's love and grace in the midst of real life. And it offers an incredible opportunity for your church to reach out in love to the people around you. Jesus came as the light of the world. That means the world, like much of our lives today, was dark and in need of light. His coming brings light, warmth, peace, and joy. Those are the true gifts of Christmas. May *The Light of Christmas* be a tool that opens hearts and minds to receive those gifts this Christmas.

GETTING STARTED



The Light of Christmas Church Kit gives you and your congregation the tools and insights you need to experience a life-changing Christmas Eve full of wonder and light. Christmas Eve is one of the most attended church services of the year, and it provides a unique opportunity to draw the church family together as well as reach out to the community. As you plan your holiday service, we've included the following suggestions to help your church make the most out of this special night.

- ◆ Begin with prayer. Ask God to use *The Light of Christmas* to speak to you, your leadership team, and your church members.
- ◆ Read over all of the materials in the Church Kit and make notes about what you think will work best for your church.
- ◆ Plan your Christmas Eve service. Read through the sermon provided in the kit, plan to show the welcome video at the start of the service, explore music that supports the theme of light, decide what messages and announcements you want

to share, determine who will be involved in the service, and plan for special parts of the service such as the lighting of candles.

- ◆ Present the concept of the service as well as the overall promotion of *The Light of Christmas* concept to your leadership team and ask them for insights and suggestions.
- ◆ Schedule a time to speak to small group leaders and present the materials to them. Ask for their input about what will benefit their group members, as well as ways they'd like to be involved in supporting the community outreach.
- ◆ Schedule a kick-off date to begin promoting your Christmas Eve service using your church bulletin, website, and social media sites.
- ◆ Show the promotional and invitation videos to your entire congregation and ask them to invite friends and family to attend the Christmas Eve service.
- ◆ Collect comments from small groups and members of your congregation, asking them to share what Christmas Eve means to them, and how they'd like to see the light of Christmas carried into the new year through your church.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE CHURCH KIT

This Church Kit includes everything you need to plan and lead a meaningful and memorable *Light of Christmas* service on Christmas Eve.

Church Kit Digital Resources DVD

The Digital Resources DVD includes all of the digital content you need to plan and promote your service.

- ◆ **Christmas Eve Invitations Video:** Remind your congregation to invite their family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to church during the season with this festive invitation video. Show it in the weeks leading up to December and your Christmas Eve service! It's also great for sharing on social media and your website.
- ◆ **Promotional Video:** Show this video in the weeks leading up to your service to get your members excited and planning to attend.
- ◆ **Countdown Video:** Play it before the service begins.
- ◆ **Christmas Eve Service Welcome Video:** Show this video at the start of your service to help the congregation prepare to celebrate and worship together.
- ◆ **PowerPoint Template:** Customize these slides to use throughout your service while carrying the design and theme of *The Light of Christmas*.
- ◆ **Bulletin Insert Template:** This file enables you to create and print 5.5" by 8.5" inserts for your church bulletin. The bulletin insert is designed so that you can easily add text for announcements, sign-ups, or sermon notes.

- ◆ **Web and Social Media Graphics:** Banners and buttons you can use on your website and social media channels to help promote your *Light of Christmas* service with attractive and consistent visuals.

Light of Christmas Sermon

The Church Kit contains a complete sermon to be given on Christmas Eve. The message is prepared for the pastor or church leader and provided as a resource to use as-is or adapt and personalize. The sermon points out the different ways the people in the Christmas story experienced wonder and light at the birth of Jesus. And it invites each person listening to follow God's call to Bethlehem and experience the Light of Christmas this Christmas Eve.

Light of Christmas: A Family Guide for Celebrating Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

This book is designed as a gift to be given to church members and visitors alike. You may want to order them to distribute early in the Christmas season, as well as have plenty on hand to give as gifts for visitors and every family attending your Christmas Eve service. This book is full of creative, fun, active, and meaningful ideas to fill Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and the whole season with light.

Sample Invitational Tools

Get a firsthand look at some of the resources you can use to promote your service. See the Resource Flyer for more information on invitational tools like direct mail postcards, Door-Hangers, posters, banners, and more. This kit includes a few samples of these tools.

STEPS FOR SUCCESS

STEP 1: PLAN

A great Christmas Eve service begins with prayer and planning, and this section of the guide helps you think through the planning steps and schedule for your *Light of Christmas* service.

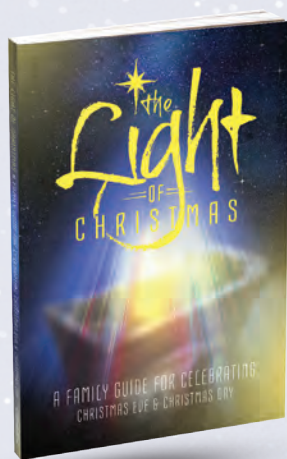
- 1. Pray.** Begin asking God to direct and inspire your plans for *The Light of Christmas* service and to begin moving in the hearts of your members so they will be open to God's call to worship this Christmas season.
- 2. Read.** Read through *The Light of Christmas* book, the sermon, and then read the files on the Digital Resources DVD and watch the videos. Also review the Resource Flyer and the sample invitational tools.
- 3. Cast the Vision.** Before launching the planning phase of *The Light of Christmas*, meet with your leadership team and cast a vision for how you believe this service will affect your church and your community. Consider using these methods for creating a shared vision:
 - ◆ Show *The Light of Christmas* videos to your team.
 - ◆ Use one of the activities from *The Light of Christmas: A Family Guide for Celebrating Christmas Eve and Christmas Day* book to engage people in preparing their hearts and minds for the Christmas season.

- ◆ Pray together for the success of your service.
 - ◆ Pass around samples of *The Light of Christmas* promotional materials from the Church Kit.
4. **Engage Your Leaders.** Many of your church's ministries will be affected by *The Light of Christmas* service, so plan to meet with all of your ministry leaders to ask for their help and support. One of the keys to a great service is focus. Keep your ministries working together and supporting the overall goals of the church.
- ◆ **Small Groups:** If you plan to invite visitors and church members to sign up for small groups after *The Light of Christmas* service, make sure to talk with your small group leaders in advance. Encourage your leaders to develop a short, simple explanation of their small group and its purpose. You may want to ask small group leaders to put together a listing of small groups that are available to send out to people who attended your *Light of Christmas* service. Be sure your leaders plan for new members and are prepared to smoothly integrate them into their groups. You may even want to do a training session for your leaders and talk with them about how to welcome new people and help them feel comfortable in a new church setting.
 - ◆ **Parking, Greeters, and Ushers:** The logistics of getting a family to church on Christmas Eve can be overwhelming. The experience people have getting *to* your service may be the most important part of helping them have a meaningful experience *in* your service. Planning for

additional people and recruiting plenty of volunteers are both crucial. Start in advance and encourage your church members to make it a family event to volunteer and welcome guests to your church. You may want to establish a logistics team to focus on traffic, parking and seating. Another hospitality team can focus on welcoming people, providing information and possibly food/drink and even small gifts. Christmas Eve may be the only time many families attend a church service with their kids. Having coloring sheets and crayons or other small activities for children when they walk in the door can help families feel welcome and comfortable. While these things seem secondary to the important message of Jesus' birth, they are vital to making people feel comfortable and open to hearing to the message of the Christmas Eve service.

- ◆ **Children's Ministry:** Since you will have new families visiting your church, you can also plan on having more children in your children's ministry or nursery. Talk with ministry leaders about lesson plans, visitor gifts, information packets for visiting parents, and child-care volunteer requirements. See the Step 3: Host section for more information.
- ◆ **Assimilation:** Talk with your assimilation team about plans to follow up with visitors through phone calls, e-mails, and letters.
- ◆ **Prayer:** Encourage your prayer team to pray for the service and all the outreach plans.

5. **Create a Detailed Plan.** Use the Event Planning Template on the Resource DVD to create a detailed plan and schedule that includes action steps, owners, and deadlines.
6. **Get What You Need.** Review the materials in this kit, and then order the invitational tools, banners, and resources you need for your church members at Outreach.com/LightofChristmas.
7. **Order Gift Books.** *The Light of Christmas: A Family Guide for Celebrating Christmas Eve and Christmas Day* book makes an excellent gift and follow-up tool for your church members and visitors. Decide how you will distribute them and order plenty of copies to give out during the Christmas Eve service. You may want to order them far enough in advance to have a team of people wrap them in ribbon to set them apart as a special Christmas Eve gift from your church to each family.



STEP 2: PROMOTE

1. **Start Early.** Begin promoting *The Light of Christmas* service at least four weeks before Christmas Eve. You'll want to make sure both the church family and the community know about your service so they can make their Christmas Eve plans ahead of time.
2. **Cast a Vision for Your Congregation.** Good leaders are critical to the success of any effort. Most members of a congregation rise only as high as the expectations set by their leaders, so cast a vision of complete participation.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. (Nehemiah 2:17-18, NIV)

Good leaders cast a vision for what the group can do together that they can't do as well on their own. Ask everyone to pray for the success of the service and outreach efforts—and for personal growth and richer worship during the Christmas season.

3. **Send Invitations.** Use creative ideas and high-quality communication tools to reach out to your community!

◆ Use a direct mail postcard to tell your community about your *Light of*

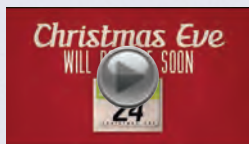




Christmas service. Visit Outreach.com or call an Outreach Specialist at 1-800-991-6011 for assistance in planning a direct mail campaign.

- ◆ Hang an eye-catching *Light of Christmas* banner outside your church to attract people passing by. Remember to include your service times and either a phone number or web address.
 - ◆ Organize volunteers to distribute *The Light of Christmas* DoorHangers in the neighborhoods closest to your church.
- 4. Get the Church on Board.** Get your members excited about this Christmas Eve service and about inviting new people to your church. Share some of the details about the service and follow-up events. Also, ask for additional volunteers to act as greeters, child care helpers, ushers, parking lot attendants, and hosts.
- ◆ Include information about *The Light of Christmas* in your church newsletter and in the announcements during your weekend services leading up to Christmas.

- ◆ Use a Connection Card or *The Light of Christmas* bulletin insert to create a volunteer sign-up for the service and events.
- ◆ Let the congregation know this will be a special, unique service and encourage everyone to make time in their holiday schedule to attend as well as to invite at least one friend or family member to the service.
- ◆ Send an e-mail to your church list. Share your vision and plans for *The Light of Christmas* service and encourage everyone to take part.



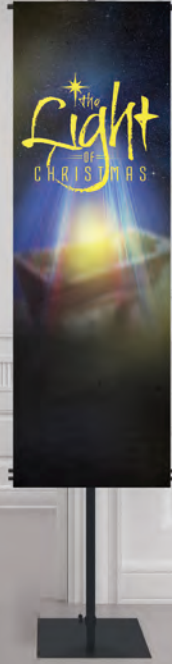
- ◆ Show the Promotional Video and the Christmas Eve Invitations Video during Sunday services on the four Sundays before Christmas to be sure everyone knows about and gets excited to be part of *The Light of Christmas* service.

5. Equip Your Members to Be Inviters.

- ◆ Use the Bulletin Insert Template on the Digital Resources DVD to create a *Light of Christmas* prayer list. Include three to five blank lines, and ask your members to list friends and church ministries they will support in prayer. Make this list available to all who will commit to praying; you might mention it in your bulletin three to four weeks before Christmas.
- ◆ Help your members extend winning invitations by providing themed DoorHangers or small postcards to invite friends, neighbors, and co-workers to your service.

6. **Get Online.** Place a banner or button on your church's home page and create a web page about *The Light of Christmas*. Web images are available on the Digital Resources DVD.
7. **Maximize Social Networks.** Announce *The Light of Christmas* service and any follow-up events on your Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, or other pages. Create a Facebook event, and ask each church member to like, share, and comment on the page. Encourage them to post photos of their preparation for Christmas. Use other social media sites as appropriate, and see the Social Media Handbook on the Digital Resources DVD.
8. **Tweet and Text.** Send announcements through your church Twitter feed, or enlist volunteers to do this. Ask members to retweet. You can also send suggested text and web links for church members to use to invite friends to your service. Example: *Taking the whole family to the #LightofChristmas service on Christmas Eve. Who wants to join us?*
9. **Post on Community Calendars.** Contact newspapers, TV and radio stations, local magazines, mail-out coupon flyers, recreation centers, or clubs—anyone who posts a calendar of events. Make sure they have the times, location and important information about your *Light of Christmas* service.
10. **Get on the Air and in Print.** Ask local radio stations and newspapers to promote your Christmas Eve service. Develop a press release for local news outlets (see the Press Release Template on the Digital Resources DVD).

PROMOTIONAL TOOLS



SEE THE RESOURCE FLYER FOR MORE INFORMATION

STEP 3: HOST

1. **Get Your Members Involved.** A Christmas Eve service requires the teamwork of many people, so make sure your members know how they can get involved.

- ◆ **Invite Ministry Leaders to Participate in the Service.** Introducing ministry leaders is just one way people can find out about opportunities to get involved in the church beyond Christmas.
- ◆ **Host a Ministry Fair.** Be sure to include each ministry in the church: Nursery, Children's Church, Visitation, Small Groups, Worship Team, and more. Using God-given gifts is an act of worship. Ask ministry leaders to prepare handouts to give to those who are interested.
- ◆ **Use Bulletin Inserts.** The Digital Resources DVD contains a Bulletin Insert Template. Make a list of the ministries available in your church and include the leader's name and contact information.
- ◆ **PowerPoint Slides.** Highlight one or two ministries using the PowerPoint Templates included on the Digital Resources DVD.
- ◆ **Social Media.** Encourage ministry leaders to blog or participate on your church Facebook and other social media pages.



2. **Get Ready for Visitors.** Not only is *The Light of Christmas* service a time to energize your congregation around the Christmas season, it's also a time to welcome new families into the church and reach out to the community in

meaningful ways. People are often open to an invitation to a Christmas Eve service when they wouldn't attend a regular service. Let your regular church attendees know that their participation is valuable and appreciated.

- ✦ **Create a Welcoming Atmosphere.** Encourage regular attendees (whether they are official volunteers or not) to greet visitors and help them find the nursery, children's ministry rooms, and even the restrooms. Encourage them to watch for people who may be alone this Christmas Eve and invite them to sit with them and join them for refreshments after the service.
- ✦ **Give Visitors a Welcome Packet.** Welcome packets can include pen and paper, a coupon to the church coffee cart, or a magnet with contact information and the church web address. The goal is to encourage visitors to learn more about your church.
- ✦ **Invite Visitors to Return.** This sounds simple, but issuing a clear invitation to return and become part of your church family is an important way to make visitors feel valued and welcome.
- ✦ **Connect Visitors to a Small Group or Sunday School Class.** New people will be more likely to keep attending if they can make a friend or two and feel like they belong quickly. Small groups or Sunday school classes are a great way to facilitate this connection. While you don't want visitors on Christmas Eve to feel pressured into attending, you do want them to feel welcome and

to have the information they need to make the choice to get involved with your church beyond *The Light of Christmas* service.

- ◆ **Serve Refreshments.** After the service, have a clearly marked area with drinks and snacks. Not only does this demonstrate that you value your attendees and their comfort, but it also encourages everyone to stay for a while and meet new people.

STEP 4: CONNECT

The overall goal for *The Light of Christmas* service is to help people connect more deeply with God this Christmas and beyond. Church is where we gather to worship collectively, including through music and study and service, and where we find encouragement. Offer church members and visitors opportunities to connect both inside and outside of the church to experience and continue *The Light of Christmas* in their own lives.

- ◆ **Host a Ministry and Event Fair.** As mentioned earlier, a ministry fair is a fun way to introduce families to the various opportunities to carry *The Light of Christmas* in their lives throughout the year.
- ◆ **Create Family-Centered Events.** *The Light of Christmas* is not contained to just Christmas Eve. There are so many opportunities both in the season leading up to Christmas as

well as in the new year to use the ideas and resources provided to create family-centered events. Let people know that you love their families and want to keep them connected to your church through fun and meaningful events. Chapters 6 and 7 in *The Light of Christmas: A Family Guide for Celebrating Christmas Eve and Christmas Day* are full of ideas for activities and events that can be used by individual families or easily adapted into small-group or church-wide events throughout the coming year.

- ◆ **Set Up a Care Committee.** Let families know whom to call when they're facing an emergency. Do they need someone to sit with the kids? Meals? Help moving? Let your members know they can get in touch with a care committee member and get help from their church family. Help each other worship through suffering and hard times by supporting and serving each other.

NEXT STEPS

While *The Light of Christmas* service is a one-time event, it is also simply a starting place for so much more. It is a chance to focus on the incredible gift of Jesus at Christmas and then allow the light He brings to shine on in our hearts, church, community, and world all year long. It is an opportunity to be purposeful in welcoming old and new people into your church family and to live out God's call to be a light to the world.

However your church engages the community this Christmas season, *The Light of Christmas* is intended to be an inspirational and memorable celebration. Use it to supplement and add creativity. Take the ideas, activities and devotions and adapt them as you see fit to help your church celebrate the miracle that is the birth of Jesus Christ. We hope the resources you find here will help you answer God's invitation and let His love light your way as you journey to Bethlehem this Christmas.



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