PLANNING GUIDE
HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

THE GIFTS OF Christmas

HOPE LOVE JOY PEACE
INTRODUCTION

This Christmas, share in the magic as we unwrap four of the most important gifts we could ever receive. This Christmas Eve, dive into the meaning of hope, love, joy and peace, and help your members and visitors prepare their hearts to celebrate the coming of the ultimate gift, Jesus Christ.

The Gifts of Christmas: Christmas Eve Event kit is designed to help your church celebrate the true gifts of Christmas, to share them 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 themes of hope, love, joy, and peace. That includes practical resources for reaching out to your community, promoting your service, and even a complete sermon to take the pressure off during this busy season.

One of the most valuable pieces of The Gifts of Christmas is a gift book that you can provide for your church members and visitors. This book contains devotions for each of the 30 days based around the weekly Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, and there are seven devotions for each theme. There is also one devotion for Christmas Eve and one for Christmas Day. In addition, each of the sections contains an introduction page with verses to memorize, a song to sing, and a verse to focus on throughout the week. We encourage your members to use these sections as a guide for a weekly lighting of their own Advent wreath. Whether done alone,
as a family, with friends or a small group, taking the time to practice the tradition of the lighting of the candles will add to the richness of their Advent experience.

In a season often marked by frenzied busyness, Christmas is an opportunity to set aside time to prepare our hearts. The tradition and the devotions in this book are designed to help us place our focus on a far greater story than our own—the story of God’s redeeming love for our world.

So no matter what the department stores try to tell us, Christmas has not yet arrived. There is value as well as excitement in patient, expectant waiting. May this be a time of wonder for your church as you discover the gifts Jesus brings at Christmas: hope, love, joy, and peace.
GETTING STARTED

*The Gifts of Christmas: Christmas Eve Event* Church Kit gives you and your congregation the tools and insights you need to experience a meaningful Christmas Eve service, as a time to celebrate the coming of the ultimate gift, Jesus.

- Begin with prayer. Ask God to use *The Gifts 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 invite video and promo video before your service, 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 the Christ candle on the Advent wreath.

Order "The Christmas Eve Event" Church Kit Now
• Present the idea of the service as well as the overall promotion of *The Gifts 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 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 service.

• Collect comments from small groups and members of your congregation, asking them to share what Christmas means to them, and how they’d like to see the wonder 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 Christmas Eve service.

Church Kit Digital Resources
The Digital Resources include all of the content you need to plan and promote your service.

• **Invite Video:** Remind your congregation to invite their family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to church with this festive invitation video. Show it in the weeks leading up to your 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.

• **PowerPoint Template:** Customize these slides to use at your service while carrying the design and theme of *The Gifts 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 service with attractive and consistent visuals.
Customizable Sermons
The Church Kit contains a complete sermon to be given on Christmas Eve, about the coming of the ultimate gift, Jesus. The message is prepared for the pastor or church leader and provided as a resource to use as-is or adapt and personalize.

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 season, as well as have plenty on hand to give as gifts for visitors and every family attending your Christmas Eve service. This book contains devotions for each of the 30 days leading up to Christmas. Based around the weekly Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, there are seven devotions for each theme. There is also one devotion for Christmas Eve and one for Christmas Day.

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, DoorHangers, posters, banners, and more.
STEP 1: PLAN

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

1. **Pray.** Begin asking God to direct and inspire your plans for your service and to begin moving in the hearts of your members so they will be open to God’s call to worship this Christmas.

2. **Read.** Read through *The Gifts of Christmas* book, the sermon, and go through the digital resources 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 Gifts 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 videos to your team.
   - Plan on also using *The Gifts of Christmas Advent Series Kit* during the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas. This all-in-one kit contains sermons
on the Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, as well as weekly bumper videos, that lead up perfectly to your Christmas Eve service. Learn more at Outreach.com/TheGiftsofChristmas.

- Pray together for the success of your service.
- Pass around samples of *The Gifts of Christmas* promotional materials from the Church Kit.

4. **Engage Your Leaders.** Many of your church’s ministries will be affected by your 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 your 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 *Gifts 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 comfort-
able 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 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 in the church kit 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/TheGiftsofChristmas.

7. **Order Gift Books.** *The Gifts of Christmas: Devotions on Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace* 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 in December and at your 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 gift from your church to each person.

Order the Gift Book Now
STEP 2: PROMOTE

1. **Start Early.** Begin promoting your service at least four weeks in advance. You’ll want to make sure both the church family and the community know about your service so they can make their 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 Gifts 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 Gifts 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 Gifts of Christmas DoorHangers in the neighborhoods closest to your church.

4. Get the Church on Board. Get your members excited about this 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 Gifts of Christmas* in your church newsletter and in the announcements during your weekend services leading up to Christmas.

• Use a Connection Card or *The Gifts 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 service and encourage everyone to take part.

• Show the Promotional Video and the Invite Video during Sunday services leading up to your service to be sure everyone knows about and gets excited to be part of *The Gifts of Christmas*.

**5. Equip Your Members to Be Inviters.**

• Use the Bulletin Insert Template in the church kit to create a *Gifts 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 the service.

• 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 Gifts of Christmas*. Web images are available in the church kit.

7. **Maximize Social Networks.** Announce *The Gifts 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 in the church kit.

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 #GiftsofChristmas service. 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 service.

10. **Get on the Air and in Print.** Ask local radio stations and newspapers to promote your service. Develop a press release for local news outlets (see the Press Release Template in the church kit).
PROMOTIONAL TOOLS

 Invite Cards

 Postcards

 DoorHangers

 Posters

 SEE THE RESOURCE FLYER FOR MORE INFORMATION
FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN
ISAIAH 9:6

I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS THAT WILL CAUSE GREAT JOY
LUKE 2:10

HOPE
ONE WHO WILL ARISE TO RULE OVER THE NATIONS; IN HIM THE GENTILES WILL HOPE.
ROMANS 15:13

LOVE
FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON
JOHN 3:16

JOY
I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS THAT WILL CAUSE GREAT JOY
LUKE 2:10

PEACE
FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN
ISAIAH 9:6
STEP 3: HOST

1. Get Your Members Involved. A 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 Services. 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 church kit 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 in the church kit.

   • 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 Gifts 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 invita-
tion 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 season 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 during the season 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 your 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 Gifts of Christmas* 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 Gifts 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 get involved in your church.

• **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

*The Gifts of Christmas* is 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 Gifts 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 ultimate gift of the birth of Jesus Christ. We hope the resources you find here will help you answer God’s invitation and let His hope, love, joy, and peace light your way this Christmas.

[View All "The Gifts of Christmas" Resources]