



At-Home Children's Time Reflections

This resource is a wonderful time of “play and pray” for young children throughout the Advent and Christmas season! Just follow the script (or putting in your own words, if you want).

All you need is a box! It doesn't have to be great big but using one big enough for your children to hang out in might be fun (do you remember how fun boxes were as a kid?).

You may want to encourage your children to decorate their boxes just as you may be decorating the outside of your home with art materials, bows, etc.

One last note. On the week after Christmas, the activity involves getting ready a couple of gently-used toys to give away to an organization that makes sure families in need get what they need. The toys can be gently used; they do not have to be brand-new. Allow the children to choose which of their toys they would like to donate. If you are doing this as part of a church community, they will be collecting toys in worship so connect with them about handing off the “chosen” toys. Thank you for supporting your children and their important work of hospitality, making “more room” in their rooms, literally, and in their hearts as they learn about sharing as a way of life!

Have fun!



Advent 1 – Hope

[Before starting, in secret, put a bow on a big box]

Today we start a special time of year called the season of Advent. For the next several weeks we will prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus. One way we can prepare is by making room in our lives for what matters most. Let's start with a call-and-response. I will say something and then you respond each time with – “We make room for Jesus.” And as you do, you can rub circles into your heart. Here we go.

Make room for family. Make room for friends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make way for love that never ends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room for others who need a hand.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room to listen, to understand.

We make room for Jesus. Amen.

You know, Christmas is still several weeks away...and we're not supposed to open gifts yet...but maybe we can open just this one.

Wow! That's a huge box. I hope there's something amazing inside.

Aw, man! Look. What's inside?

[Children will respond “Nothing,” or “It's empty.”]

It looks empty. But maybe not. We have something powerful on our side – hope. Hope gives us the ability to see things not just for what they are, but for what they can be. Hope gives us the power to take this seemingly empty box and know that it is filled to the brim with something amazing...possibility. When we put a little hope, heart, and God-given creativity into it, this box can be...

[stand inside it] A pirate ship. Ahoy!

It can be...

[stand beside it] A castle wall. Huzzah!

[brainstorm other things it can be]

Lots of boxes are filled with stuff. But a box like this isn't a disappointment for those who have hope. A box like this leaves room – room for imagination, room for the Spirit, room for possibilities. And friends, Advent is a season of possibilities, including the possibility that a baby born in a stable could change the world. Each week we are going to make something of this box together. I can't wait to see what happens next week!

Advent 2 – Peace

[Get out the box and place it bottom facing up]

Today is our second week in the season of Advent. Advent is a season when we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus. One way we can prepare is by making room in our lives for what matters most. Let's start with a call-and-response. I will say something and then you respond each time with – “We make room for Jesus.” And as you do, you can rub circles into your heart. Here we go.

Make room for family. Make room for friends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make way for love that never ends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room for others who need a hand.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room to listen, to understand.

We make room for Jesus. Amen.

Do you remember what we found inside this box last week? That's right... nothing AND lots of things. Last week we explored hope. When we have hope we can see a world of possibilities in a seemingly empty box. Today this box is going to be something special – a table. But this is no ordinary table. This is the Table of Peace. Wonderful meals take place around the Table of Peace. What is one of your favorite foods?

[Allow a child to share, for example “spaghetti.”]

Mm. That sounds delicious. We have spaghetti at the Table of Peace. But who is going to prepare the spaghetti? Because, at the Table of Peace, we don't serve ourselves. We serve one another. So, let's make the spaghetti. And don't worry that you don't know how to cook. We're using our imaginations right now, so you are the finest chefs in the land! *[Pantomime making spaghetti (or whatever) together.]*

Wow! That sure is a lot. But there is always room at the Table of Peace. And not only is there enough room for all the food we've prepared, but there's room for people...*all* the people. Through the peace God brings there's not one table for insiders and one for outsiders. There's not a table for “regular” people and one for kids. There is always room at the Table of Peace for everyone. When we make room for everyone at the table, there is peace on the outside because no one has to fight for a place. And there's peace on the inside because each person knows they belong! Thanks for dinner!

Advent 3 – Joy

[Get out the box and place it bottom facing up, just as last week.]

Today is our third week in the season of Advent.

We remember that Advent is a season when we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus. And one way we can prepare is by making room in our lives for what matters most. Let's start with our call-and-response. Here we go.

Make room for family. Make room for friends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make way for love that never ends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room for others who need a hand.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room to listen, to understand.

We make room for Jesus. Amen.

I see our big box is back. On the first Sunday of Advent, we explored hope. When we have hope we can see a world of possibilities, even in a seemingly empty box. On the second Sunday of Advent, we used our God-given creativity to imagine this box as the Table of Peace, a table where everyone has a place. It kind of looks like that same table right now...but it's *not*.

Our third Sunday of Advent is all about Joy – that feeling of well-being deep inside us. Joy is different than happiness. Happiness is when we smile with our faces. Joy is when we smile with our hearts. It's hard to think about joy at this time of year without thinking about all the musical moments that cause and express feelings of joy. So, we're going to reimagine our big box not simply as something we can see, but something we can hear. Today our box is...drum roll please...*[Play the big box like a drum and encourage children to play along with you.]*...the Drum of Joy!

Let's play some Christmas rhythms together. How about we start by imagining the clip-clop hooves of a donkey carrying Mary into the town of Bethlehem.

[Have the children pat with you as you play a slow clip-clop rhythm]

Next, let's imagine how frightened those shepherds must have been when the angel appeared. *[Have the children pat with you a fast heartbeat rhythm – lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub.]*

But when they heard the good news of the birth of Jesus, the shepherds were overcome with joy and ran to Bethlehem. *[Have the children pat with you a fast running rhythm.]*

Now let's imagine the joy we feel when we realize that God has given us enough, and that when we all share what we have, we can do more than feel joy, we can spread joy. Let's all play a joyful rhythm, whatever you want. Ready? Go! Joy-jam-session!

Advent 4 – Love

[Get out the box.]

Today is our fourth week in the season of Advent.

We've been spending this whole Advent season preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus. And one way we can prepare is by making room in our lives for what matters most. Let's start with our call-and-response. Here we go.

Make room for family. Make room for friends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make way for love that never ends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room for others who need a hand.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room to listen, to understand.

We make room for Jesus. Amen.

We still have our big box with us.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we explored hope. When we have hope we can see a world of possibilities, even in a seemingly empty box.

On the second Sunday of Advent, we used our God-given creativity to imagine this box as the Table of Peace, a table where everyone has a place.

On the third Sunday of Advent, we had a joyful time. Do you remember what musical instrument we made from this box? *["A drum," or "The Drum of Joy."]*

Right! Last week it was the Drum of Joy. But this is the fourth Sunday of Advent.

Christmas is getting so *close*. We should probably start getting things ready for the arrival of baby Jesus. We need a crib – a baby bed of some kind. Hmm. If only we had something that could make a crib...*[Hopefully, at this point, children will suggest the box. Otherwise, you might have to nudge them in that direction.]*

Ooh. I love the way you think. Yes. Let's give it a try.

[Turn the box right side up. Fold the flaps down into the box so that the top is open like a – very boxy – crib.]

There! Hey that's a nice crib. What a creative idea. Mary and Joseph had to be creative, too. They used a manger – a feed trough for animals - Jesus' crib. And they were so loving, even before he was born. When God called Mary to be the mother of Jesus, she knew it wouldn't be easy, but she said, "Yes!"

We show love every time we respond to God's call with a "Yes."

Let's play a game. Every time I mention a way we can show love, if you believe it's something *you* could do, say "Yes!" Here we go.

[Encourage children to say, "Yes!"]

Call a relative just to say I love you.

Yes!

Pray for someone else.

Yes!

Use kind words even when you really don't feel like it.

Yes!

Set up a playdate with a kid who seems lonely.

Yes!

Whenever we consider the needs of others, we show love. Whenever we reach out, we show love. Whenever we make room, we show love. Let's show some more love for this box and decorate it some more, take a photo, and send it to someone we love.

Christmas Eve

[Before worship, place the box in the worship space.]

Say: We've spent this whole Advent season preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus. And now it's Christmas Eve. There is still just a little more time to prepare by making room in our lives for what matters most. Let's start with our call-and-response. Here we go.

Make room for family. Make room for friends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make way for love that never ends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room for others who need a hand.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room to listen, to understand.

We make room for Jesus. Amen.

We still have our big box with us.

Tonight is Christmas Eve, an evening of wonder and light. And there are still so many things our box can be, so many possibilities. I wonder what we could do to make it a welcome place for the holy family.

I know! We could make it into a fort. *[You can stand the box on one end if that makes it taller. If the box is more cube-like, open up the flaps to make it seem taller.]*

I wonder if this fort will let the holy family inside.

[Invite a child to come knock on the fort.]

Hmm. I guess not. A fort is designed to keep some in and others out.

I know! How about a nice, sturdy wall?

[Turn the box lengthwise and invite a child to come knock.]

Apparently not. A wall is really more for keeping some people on one side, and some people on the other side. But what about an inn? People stay at inns all the time.

[Turn the box to where the top is facing forward, but the flaps are closed. Invite a child to come knock.]

[Listening] I don't hear any footsteps. It doesn't sound like anyone's coming to open the door. I was so sure there would be room at the inn. I mean, it's called an "inn" and here we are...out.

But we need a place for our holy family. All those years ago, there was one place that was open. Do you remember what it was? *[Hopefully, the children will say, "A stable," or "Manger," or "Barn."]*

A stable. There was room in the stable.

[Open the flaps to look like open doors.]

What beautiful, wondrous open doors. We open the doors of our house and our hearts, it's not just to let others in, but to let the light out – the light of hope, peace, joy, and love. The light that says:

We are open.

There is room.

You are welcome.

You have a place here.

This night we remember that because Jesus needed a place to be born, we can always make more room for anyone who needs a place to have hope, to feel peace, to know joy, and to be loved.

I wonder if you have a toy that you don't use anymore that we could pick out tonight as a gift for someone else who needs a toy. We can spend some time making a cozy house in our Inn box and then we can put that toy in it to get ready to give it a new home.

The Sunday After Christmas

We spent all of Advent preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus. And now it's officially the Christmas season. Jesus is here! We have made room for Jesus. Let's do our call-and-response together. Here we go.

Make room for family. Make room for friends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make way for love that never ends.

We make room for Jesus.

Make room for others who need a hand.
We make room for Jesus.
Make room to listen, to understand.
We make room for Jesus. Amen.

We still have our big box with us.
It's been a table, a drum, a baby bed, a stable.
What if today, it got to simply be a box?
But here's the deal...even boxes get a special day.

Did you know that today, December 26th, is a special holiday in many countries from Canada to Nigeria to New Zealand? It's known as Boxing Day, a holiday that started as a way for people to give gifts to those who have less. Isn't that lovely?

We are going to get your toy(s) ready to be given to someone who needs a toy. Just think – they toy(s) we have loved are going to go to good homes. And the box—it has all our hope, peace, joy, and love inside it as well! Because you have made room in your hearts, and minds, and homes, the wonder of Christmas will continue.

Now let's place a hand on the box and repeat after me:

Loving God... *[repeat]*
Please bless these gifts... *[repeat]*
We have loved them... *[repeat]*
And now it's time to share them ... *[repeat]*
So that we ... *[repeat]*
May share your love... *[repeat]*
Amen... *[repeat]*