

Nine Lessons and Carols

A Service Guide

Please use this as a guide for planning your own Nine Lessons and Carols service.

The guide offers a range of reflections rooted in Christian Aid's work in 2025, with a particular focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We've suggested carols and readings to include but feel free to choose different ones, as appropriate to your setting.

Carol: O Come, O Come Emmanuel



Bidding Prayer

Love is patient.

But justice struggles with waiting.

And so love and justice hold hands, inseparable and committed to each other.

Together they are a powerful force.

As we await the day we celebrate Jesus' birth, let us pray together that love and justice will be embodied in us, as they are in the child upon whom we wait.

Abundantly loving God, you are the Great 'I am' who cannot be contained.

Pour your Spirit on our gathering, on our remembering, and on our waiting.

Your Kingdom of love and justice come, your will be done.

As your Incarnate Son comes into our midst, may we be renewed, ready to serve you and one another.

Amen.

The First Lesson: Genesis 4:3-16

This year conflict surrounds us. We have seen devastating violence in the Middle East where Jesus was born. How must we respond to the horror of war and the mockery it makes of our common humanity?

We must listen to the story of Cain.

Cain cannot go home ever again. He is destined to wander. Violence, hate, anger, and prejudice – they all make us lose ourselves and lose our connections to one another. They leave us wandering, alone.

Today, we pray for peace, to an end to wandering and loss. We pray for safety and security for all God's children. We pray for the work of Christian Aid and their trusted partners, as they support people in conflict zones. May we move together as one away from violence and towards peace.

Carol: Once in Royal David's City



The Second Lesson: Psalm 42

Hope can be hard to find. The Psalm calls us persist in hope and faith, trusting in the steadfastness of the living God.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo Christian Aid's Senior Programme Officer, Obed Buhendwa, knows the importance of hope. 'We find ourselves faced with an extremely serious crisis situation', he says 'where millions of people, especially women and children, are affected'.

Yet Obed does not despair. 'I am a believer', he says, 'and I believe that hope keeps us alive. I still have hope that life here in the DRC can improve ... that the end of war is possible.'

Obed is clear that he and his colleagues cannot do their work alone. He has a message for Christian Aid supporters in the UK: 'We are counting on international solidarity to help keep our hope alive ... We are calling on everyone to advocate for peace in Congo, so that war ends and the Congolese people can live in dignity.'

The Third Lesson: Micah 6:6-12

Act Justly. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly. Are we following God's call to justice, compassion and humility? Who has inspired us as we walk together?

This year the former Head of Christian Aid Scotland, Rev Kathy Galloway, passed away. Kathy was a passionate and committed campaigner for the dignity and equality of all people. She led by example, putting her faith into action every day. She held a lifelong commitment to supporting people living in poverty.

At Christmas, we remember and thank all of those who have journeyed with us and those who have journeyed on. We hold before God those who we love and miss.

As we pray for those whose example has been a lamp to our feet, lighting the path ahead, we sing the Christmas hymn that Kathy Galloway wrote.

Carol: When Out of Poverty is Born

The Fourth Lesson: Isaiah 61:1-4

Chance lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo with her eight children. In February this year armed conflict swept through her community, forcing her to run from her home. Chance had just given birth and was clutching her newborn baby with her other children around her. Her husband remained behind and she has had no news of him since then.

With great courage, Chance sought out the relative safety of Katashola Camp for displaced people. But there are severe shortages in the camp. Her children are hungry, and at grave risk of malnutrition and malaria.

Chance worries that her children will face lives shaped by conflict. Yet she hopes for a different future. She told Christian Aid that she dreams her new baby Siborge will grow up to be 'a journalist to report the news to the whole world'. If Siborge can tell people what is happening in the DRC, Chance says, then 'our cause will be pleaded everywhere' and this will bring about change.

Christian Aid's partners are delivering cash assistance to Chance and families like hers so they can protect themselves and their children from malnutrition and illness. These cash grants bring choice, hope and dignity to people who've lost so much.



Carol: O Little Town of Bethlehem

The Fifth Lesson: Luke 1:46-55

Joyce, a farmer and mother of four in the DRC, has faced unimaginable challenges. Fighting came to her family's village when her youngest child, Emiliana, was just two months old. Joyce and her family were forced to run and hide in a nearby forest. 'I was scared and thinking: Will I die? Will my children die too?', she told Christian Aid. The family eventually made it to Bulengo Camp but faced hunger and thirst in the camp.

Christian Aid supports communities in the DRC to forge a new life while waiting for the end of war. Joyce's family has been able to return home and Joyce has received support with her farming. She has many aspirations for baby Emiliana. She hopes Emiliana will go to school, 'love learning' and live a full life. When the family returned home, Joyce told Christian Aid, 'we had a little celebration, we ate, the neighbours came and saw the baby.'

Carol: In the Bleak Midwinter



The Sixth Lesson: Luke 2:1-7

During this season we reflect on the gifts we offer one another. Some gifts have an impact beyond what we imagined.

Beryl was a Christian Aid supporter. Born in 1927, she worked as a nurse and midwife for many years looking after her patients. Later in life, she was shown love and kindness after an eye operation by a nurse who originally came from Africa. That gift of kindness meant so much to Beryl that she decided to remember Christian Aid's work in Africa in her will. Now Beryl's legacy gift is providing healthcare, particularly maternal care to expectant mothers, in Sierra Leone, Burundi, and South Sudan.

As we remember Jesus' birth, we are grateful for people like Beryl, who are changing the lives of babies born today around the world.

Carol: See Him Lying on a Bed of Straw

The Seventh Lesson: Luke 2:8-20

Shepherding and farming communities today still live close to the earth, responding to natural patterns and rhythms. The climate crisis disrupts these rhythms and the lives and livelihoods of many people. Whether it's lost livestock, flooded farmland, scorched crops, or destroyed homes, the climate crisis is devastating communities around the world.

Christian Aid's Restore Campaign invites you to join in God's work to restore creation, as we address the joint crises of the climate emergency and unjust debt. United we can stand with those pushing back against poverty and unjust structures. We can change unfair systems and amplify the voices of our global neighbours.

Carol: The First Nowell the Angel did Say



The Eighth Lesson: Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew's Gospel shows us how power can be used to intimidate, to exclude, or even to destroy others.

Today more than 70 million people around the globe are displaced within their own country. Power is used unjustly and violently to force people to leave behind their homes. Displaced people often move to areas that are difficult to reach with humanitarian aid, making them among the most vulnerable groups in the world. As we reflect on the misuse of power that Jesus faced from the moment of his birth, we remember the millions of people who are living with fear, uncertainty, and continued instability today.

In the DRC Christian Aid's partners seek to protect and empower communities affected by displacement, restoring their freedom to make their own choices and defending their rights.

Carol: Away in a Manger

The Ninth Lesson: John 1:1-4

Love and justice hold hands.

And the world holds its breath.

Christmas is coming, Incarnation is imminent - the pregnant pause before the cry and the breath and the brand-new life.

As we await the day we celebrate Jesus' birth, let us pray together that love and justice will be embodied in us, as they are in the child upon whom we wait.

This is the story of the infant who will change our world, but whose very existence is threatened by oppressive regimes, by poverty and the struggles of an uncertain world. This world cannot find room for him or his family. Can we find room for him today?

We pray once more:

Abundantly loving God, you are the Great 'I am' who cannot be contained.

Pour your Spirit on our gathering, on our remembering, and on our waiting.

Your Kingdom of love and justice come, your will be done.

As your Incarnate Son comes into our midst, may we be renewed, ready to serve you and one another.

Amen.

Carol: Joy to the World



Closing Prayer

God of love and justice,
Born to a couple on the margins, forced to move from place to place;

God made flesh, laid in a manger,
Your arrival proclaimed from heaven to shepherds in the fields;

God Incarnate,
We marvel at the ways you show up
In unexpected places.

In our celebrations help us to remember our neighbours,
Across the street and around the world.

Be present with those
yearning for and working towards
A full life, free from poverty.

Grant us impatience
as we strive for justice
And patience as we love one another.

Amen

Carol: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

