

Just Christmas!



Bodo Ayiso is a young farmer in South Omo, Ethiopia. He has become familiar with the way extreme weather affects his crops. But the locusts were a new and unwelcome challenge.

The Magnificat is a song of justice which resonates all year round. How do we celebrate Christmas while the world is in chaos?

When crisis threatens, love builds hope. Love builds hope in some of the world's toughest places. Love builds resilience in some of the world's fiercest climates.

We hope this workshop will inspire you to reflect on how we as Christians mark our celebrations in a world scarred by poverty.

Preparation

For this workshop, you will need:

- ALTERnativity 'Just God, Simply Christmas 2019' discussion cards which are downloadable free of charge from: alternativity.org.uk/content/resources/
- A copy of the words to When out of poverty is born. You will find this in either CH4 or on caid.org.uk/christmasresources

This workshop should last about 45 minutes. We have indicated roughly how long each section might take – but yours might take a little longer or a little less!

Remember that you can use break out rooms on Zoom for small group discussions.

Introduction and welcome (2 mins)

Today we will be thinking ahead to Christmas, reflecting on how we, as individuals and churches, celebrate well without losing hold of the central Christmas message. But before we start, let's take a few minutes to introduce ourselves.

Read (3 mins)

Let's read Luke 1 v 46-55

Mary's song, the Magnificat is one of the world's most famous songs. It's the song of a young woman first heard by an older woman, but heard and understood down the years by 'all those whose dreams and yearnings are given voice in its words'. It is a song so subversive and radical it was banned in Guatemala for fear it might inspire the oppressed people to riot. As American theologian, Ched Myers, puts it, 'A more revolutionary tune could not be found in world literature or music!'

Mary's song is a radical and revolutionary song of joy



BorgodoTsobe is a widow and mother of five. She saw huge plagues of locusts. 'The locusts suddenly came out of nowhere and ate every green plant in their path. They left us nothing useful,' she said.

and justice, an anthem for women and other oppressed groups who are denied a full and free life and who are seeking to uproot the structures and systems that keep them on the margins of society.

And it's that Biblical mandate that is at the very heart of Christian Aid's work – challenging and changing the systems that keep people poor, rather than merely continuing to respond to the symptoms of poverty.

Alternativity Card – Traditions (10 mins)

The Christmas story is a story of poverty, of a poor woman and man forced to go to Bethlehem to register with an occupying power and ending up in a stable.

Take a moment to read the ALTERNativity 'Traditions' card and discuss the points on the back with your neighbour.

Displacement Reflection (10 mins)

Not long into the Christmas story, the Holy Family is displaced. They flee to Egypt to escape the slaughter of the children, the unintended consequence of the Wise Men's visit to Herod. Read the Alternativity card 'Unintended Consequences' and if you have time, have a look at the discussion points. If time is short, just read the card out to your group before you continue.

But for now, let's think about displacement. Sit back for

a minute and, if you would like, close your eyes.

What makes you who you are?

It might be your nationality.

Your ethnicity.

Your religion.

Your gender.

Your family.

How much money you have.

Your qualifications.

The language you speak.

Who you voted for.

One thing is for sure: you are more than the details on your passport.

Now, imagine being forced to flee your home

Suddenly, with no warning.

You might never come back

What would your identity – all the unique characteristics which make you you - mean for the journey ahead?

What options would they give you?

Where would you go?

Discussion (10 mins)

If you're able to meet in person ask people to discuss in pairs. If you are meeting online, perhaps ask 3-4 people to share their thoughts.

The Holy Family was displaced just like over 65 million people in the world today. People are forced to leave their homes largely due to conflict or climate change. The vast majority of them never cross a border and so are not afforded the rights and status of a refugee. Instead they remain displaced within their own country.

Christian Aid was founded at the end of the Second World War to support those who were displaced in Europe. More than 75 years later, we still continue that work. We offer both immediate and long-term support to those who are displaced - or are at risk of displacement - all over the world.

Alternativity Card - Displacement (10 mins)

Read out the 'Displacement' card and invite people to reflect on the questions. If you're able to meet in person ask people to discuss in pairs. If you are meeting online, perhaps ask 3-4 people to share their thoughts.

Christian Aid Christmas appeal (10 mins)

We hear in Mary's song the prophetic joy of believing how things can be. Like Hannah in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 1:11 and 2:1-10), Mary believes in that day when the lowly will be lifted up and the hungry will be filled with good things.

In Ethiopia, people living in poverty are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Locusts are swarming, encouraged by the long droughts and heavy rains. The insects – not seen on this scale in Ethiopia for two decades – have been causing problems in the country since last summer.

Desert locusts eat their own body weight daily. A small swarm eats the same amount of food as 35,000 people in just one day. Almost 4 million hectares of crops – equivalent to half the size of Scotland – have been eaten by the locust swarms across Ethiopia this year.

Women like Borgodo Tsobe, a widow and mother of five, witnessed plagues of locusts larger than ever before. 'The locusts suddenly came out of nowhere and ate every green plant in their path. They left us nothing useful,' she said. Borgodo's crops were so quickly destroyed that she didn't know if anything would grow again.

Thanks to the Scottish Government's Humanitarian Emergency Fund, Christian Aid was able to act quickly to protect any existing crops and plant new seeds for the next harvest. But the extreme weather means that the threat of more locusts remains high.

This Christmas, we stand united with those facing drought in Ethiopia, and millions more families around the world battling the many effects of the climate crisis.

Ethiopian farmers like Mekonnen dig for water with their bare hands. 'We pray for rain', he says. 'But when there is no rain, we have to dig.' Friends, fellow herdsman and children have died through digging so deep that the dry bed collapses above them.

Christian Aid is working with families like Mekonnen's to provide community water sources and explore alternative means of raising income such as through making soap from aloe vera and planting drought resistant crops.

We give, we act, and we pray because love calls us to act justly.



Farmers like Mekonnen see the impact of climate change on their land. 'We pray for rain', he says. 'But when there is no rain, we have to dig.'

Carols for Christian Aid

Christmas Carols link us to the mystery and the moment of Christ's birth. We're inviting our supporters to lift their voices in song and raise life-changing funds. On the first Sunday of Advent, we sing together the Christian Aid carol and prepare the way for a movement for change.

About 20 years ago Kathy Galloway, former Head of Christian Aid Scotland, was asked to write a hymn for Advent Sunday. When out of poverty is born is Kathy's interpretation of the Magnificat. It shines a light on poverty and power and calls us to sing in protest against injustice.

Let's sing it together now to the tune of Kingsfold. You'll find the words on the next page.

Hymn: When out of poverty is born (CH4 291)

When out of poverty is born
a dream that will not die
and landless, weary folk find strength
to stand with heads held high,
it's then we learn from those who wait
to greet the promised day:
'The Lord is coming; don't lose heart.
Be blest: prepare the way!'

When people wander far from God,
forget to share their bread,
they find their wealth an empty thing,
their spirits are not fed.
For only just and tender love
the hungry soul will stay.
And so God's prophets echo still:
'Be blest: prepare the way!'

When God took flesh and came to earth,
the world turned upside down,
and in the strength of woman's faith
the Word of Life was born.
She knew that God would raise the low,
it pleased her to obey.
Rejoice with Mary in the call,
'Be blest: prepare the way!'

Words: Kathy Galloway, provided with permission.
Suggested tune: Kingsfold.

Closing blessing

Let's close our time together with a blessing.

May the love that has brought us close as communities
this year be the love that builds hope for communities
living through the crisis of climate change.

May this love that comes down at Christmas build in us
hope.

May you abound in the hope of the prophets, imagining
another way.

May you abound in the hope of a mother singing for
revolution.

May you abound in the hope of an infant, the
incarnation of love.

May you abound in the love that builds hope this day
and evermore.

And may you have a hopeful Advent and a comforting
Christmas. Amen.



ALTERNativity is a registered charity, SC032416.



When out of poverty is born

On 29 November, join supporters across the UK singing the
Christian Aid carol.

Want to find out more?

You'll find more ways to celebrate Christmas creatively
on our websites.

Find out more about ALTERNativity at:
alternativity.org.uk

For Christmas worship resources, campaign actions and
fundraising ideas, log on to Christian Aid Scotland:
caid.org.uk/ScotlandChristmas