



The Tree with the Greatest Gift

Intergenerational Worship Service



Introduction

The Tree with the Greatest Gift Intergenerational Worship Service invites us to come to our Christmas trees and Christmas season, by unpacking the story of Christ's family tree. Jesus' family tree was a bit wonky, imperfect, and yet Jesus came from that family as a promise of hope. A promise that, no matter what our family looks like, God doesn't cut off messy, broken and imperfect people. He makes them His family. Imagine God has a Christmas tree... I wonder what it might look like. Would it be one of those magnificent, department store-worthy Christmas trees with everything in its place? Or could it, perhaps be adorned, with mismatched, worn down, beloved home-made ornaments, representing His people and their stories? His story with His people, His family. We hope that together, you and your congregation, will discover that God always makes room for us to be part of His family tree.

This service has been intentionally written as a worship gathering for all generations, all-in, together. The word 'intergenerational' can have different understandings and interpretations. As we have prepared this service, this has been our understanding:

Being intergenerational is:

Not just about children, it's about **people of all ages.**

Not just about what we do, it's about **who we are.**

Not something that just happens, it requires **intentionality.**

As you come together for this intergenerational gathering, everything you do is to remind people of all ages to genuinely interact and engage with each other. Every activity, song, prayer, bible reading, and story invites all generations in the room to make meaning together as they explore the heart of the gospel. God does and will reveal Himself to us through the connections that we have with each other.

Adapted from: [Engage Together - More Than Worship, more than Sunday](#)
and "[A Gospel for All Ages](#)", David M. CSINOS



Preparation

Top tips for intergen services:

- Aim to keep the service to run no longer than an hour.
- Give people time to prepare in advance. This is particularly important for any Bible readings.
- Plan and prepare for people of different ages to participate and contribute in the various components of the service, ie. Bible readings, dramas, singing, candle lighting, greeting at the door, prayers.

You Will Need:

1. *Décor*

We suggest that the congregation sit around tables throughout the service, if possible, as this gives a sense of participation and activity. You might like to add some simple table décor, such as mini Christmas trees, tree branch slice candle holders, small gift boxes with a Christmas theme, photo frames with images such as, the outline of family trees, the manger, the Jesse Stump, the cross.

2. *Pre-service activity*

- Templates of Tree Christmas Cards – enough for everyone. People could be directed to this activity to do before the service begins or the activity could be set up on each table. However, this could be a distraction once the service has begun.

[3D Pop Up Tree Card | AllFreeChristmasCrafts.com](#)

[51 Printable Christmas Tree Templates \(Free Download\) - PrintableTemplates](#)

- Materials to decorate cards.
- Envelopes to fit Christmas cards, so they are ready to post or give to someone.

3. *Story: The Beginning to Bethlehem*

- Christmas tree and ornaments – this could be your Corps' primary Christmas tree if this hasn't already been set up for the season.
- A gifted storyteller to read the story, "The Beginning to Bethlehem" (page 10) – someone who will engage and communicate to all ages, not just small children.
- Someone prepared to silently setup and decorate the Christmas tree during the telling of the story.



4. Stations

- Set-up an area for each station; you might like to use tables, wall space, the floor (consider accessibility for everyone gathered).
- Create instruction cards for each station.
- Gather the materials and equipment required for each station.

5. Reflection

- Source images/props needed, either:
 - A picture of a tree stump, a picture of a stump with a new shoot, a picture of a wooden cross, **or**;
 - An actual tree stump or a yule log cake (yum!), a piece of greenery to stand in as the shoot, a small, freestanding wooden cross.

6. Response time

- Christmas tree ornaments for people to write on – eg. a bauble-shaped piece of card, clear, plastic ornaments to put paper inside, slices of tree branch – be as creative or simple as you like.
- Felt pens/colouring pencils/etc. for each table.

7. Take-home

- Consider one or some of the following:
 - Printed copies of the [Family Prayer for Gathering Around the Christmas Tree](#) cards
 - Printed copies of the [Jesse tree ornaments and reading guide](#)
 - Printed copies of the [Adorn and Adore: Setting up Our Family Christmas Tree Party](#) resource



Service Outline

Pre-service activity

As people arrive prior to the service, have supplies available for people to make Christmas cards. Encourage them to think about someone they can give it too, with a Christmas message in it.

Have a visual countdown on the screen, so people know to get ready for the next part of the service. The cards can be completed at the end of service if more time is needed.

Opening & Prayer (2 mins)

Service Host: "Welcome to our Intergenerational Worship Service, 'The Tree with the Greatest Gift.' I am sure that you have already noticed that things are a little different today. Today is about being together in a more creative and interactive way. Today, it is about journeying together, to learn from each other, regardless of our age and what we can learn from each other. Today is about meeting God, together. I wonder what God wants to say to us to today. I wonder what God wants to show us today. So, while it might be a little different, all of today's service is for everyone."

Begin with the regular elements of your service (10 mins approx.)

**Be intentional about including different generations in these elements. This might include:*

- A call to worship – make sure the wording includes an invitation to all ages.
- Prayer – using words and language that all can understand.
- Worship songs x2 – choose at least one song that the children and the young people know. This doesn't have to be a 'kiddie song'. You could sing two carols to begin.
- Offering.
- Birthdays and notices.

Story: "The Beginning to Bethlehem" (5 mins)

Have a gifted storyteller read the story, "The Beginning to Bethlehem" (page 10) to the congregation – consider how they can be positioned to be most engaging, and to communicate that the story is for everyone (not just the small children).

During the story, have another person silently set-up, and then begin decorating, a Christmas tree. If this service happens at the start of the season, this could even be your corps' primary Christmas tree, which remains set up for the season.



Interactive stations (15 - 20 mins)

Service host, or another leader:

"As part of being together today, there are many ways that we can engage in learning about all the wonderful things that are in the Bible. This morning, we're going to spend a short time participating and contributing at the stations around the room.

There are 3 interactive stations around the room. You can do them in any order and as you take part in the activity, think also about who is doing the activity alongside you. What can you share with each other? What can we learn with, from and about each other, no matter what age we are?"

Very briefly explain the activity at each station, and then encourage everyone to go and take part at one or more of the stations over the next fifteen minutes.

- Station 1: Jesse Tree

Option A – Game. Option B – Colouring.

Participants are invited to engage with the story of God from Creation through to Jesus by either competing in a game using the Jesse tree ornaments or colouring in sets of Jesse tree ornaments that can be used to decorate your church this season or take home.

- Station 2: What About You?

Participants are invited to share their responses to the following questions by writing or sticking them on a wall display. What is the most exciting thing about preparing for Christmas? When you think about Christmas, what makes you sad? If you were to explain the real meaning of Christmas to a friend, what would you say? Thinking about Jesus' family tree, what words come to mind?

- Station 3: My Family Tree

Participants are invited to create a picture of their own family tree.

★ Consider using a visual countdown on the screen to wrap up this time and transition people back to their tables for the next part of the service, the Reflection.

Reflection: The Tree with the Greatest Gift (7 mins)

Leader to share reflection on page 13, utilising images or props. The reflection can be adapted to better suit the language and style of speaker. It would be best that the speaker is very familiar with the overall theme so the script doesn't have to be too heavily depended upon.



Response time (10 mins)

Leader who shared reflection, or another leader/service host:

"We've got this lovely Christmas tree here (*gesture to the tree that was decorated during the story*), a beautiful reminder of that promise – the best promise ever made and kept – that we have been chosen to be part of God's family.

Imagine for a moment that God has a Christmas tree – I wonder if it might be a lot like the Christmas trees many of us have at home. Adorned with handmade ornaments that are, perhaps, a little wonky, a little broken, worn down – but they're beloved. They're not perfect but we love them and keep them because of the people they remind us of and the memories they bring to mind.

I wonder if God's Christmas tree would be covered in ornaments like that – like His family tree is full of people like that, a bit wonky and broken, but chosen and made perfect by Him.

We're going to have a time of response now. I wonder what God has been saying to you..? What has left a little mark in your heart, in your mind, this morning?

- Would you like to respond to God, as your Greatest Gift, saying, "I choose you, I came for you. Will you choose me? Will you take me?"
- Would you like to dedicate this Advent season, your Christmas tree, your 'Christmas spirit' to opening up the pages of this story, His-story, and unwrapping the Greatest Gift?

Only you know what God might be whispering to you this morning, and only you can decide how you'd like to respond. But we invite you to do something with your hands and with your feet to respond. On your tables, you'll find some supplies to make a simple Christmas tree ornament – you might like to write your name or a word or phrase on it, then come hang it on this tree.

★ *Play an audio track during this time, rather than the music team playing – this allows everyone in the congregation opportunity to respond.*

"We invite you to continue exploring God's story, our story, this Advent. Because as you unwrap the story of Christ's family tree, your family tree, you unwrap the meaning of the Greatest Gift. What if your family dedicated this season to making space for Jesus? What if this season you pondered what you could give to God this Christmas? What if you woke up on Christmas morning with a heart that wants Jesus the most!?"

Offer take homes you have available:

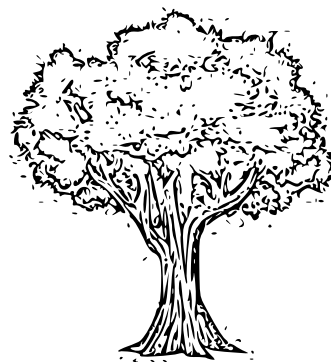
- Family Prayer for Gathering Around the Christmas Tree cards
- Copies of the Jesse tree ornaments and companion reading guide
- Adorn and Adore: Setting up Our Family Christmas Tree Party resource



Closing (5 mins)

Close the service in your normal way. You might like to include:

- Song/carol x1
- Notices
- Closing prayer or benediction, and reminder of take-home resources



Resources

Interactive Stations

Here are three suggestions for stations to support the theme of this service, however, please feel free to adapt and modify them, or even to substitute in your own ideas!

1. Jesse Tree station

Participants are invited to engage with the story of God from Creation through to Jesus by either competing in a game using the Jesse tree ornaments or colouring in sets of Jesse tree ornaments that can be used to decorate your church this season or to take home.

OPTION A: GAME

What you need:

- Create an enlarged set of the Jesse Tree symbols and accompanying Scripture passages – they should be able to stick to a board or wall (eg: velcro, blu-tac or magnets) and be reused by multiple people (so you might like to laminate them). [We like these ones from Scripture Union.](#)
- A stopwatch.
- Optional: a prize for the person with the fastest time.

What you do:

Have participants compete in time trials to see who can match each Jesse Tree symbol with the correct corresponding Scripture and then place on the board/wall in the correct order.

OPTION B: COLOURING

What you need:

- A large set of Jesse tree ornaments to colour to decorate your church, or Christmas tree. Or smaller, individual sets of [Jesse tree ornaments \(and accompanying reading guide\)](#) for people to colour and take home. [We like these ones from Ann Voskamp.](#)
- Colouring pencils, felts, etc.

What you do:

Invite participants to further engage with the Beginning to Bethlehem story by creating a set of Jesse tree ornaments. These are traditionally placed on a tree, and a corresponding piece of scripture read, each day during Advent.



2. What About You? (Feel free to create your own questions)

Participants are invited to share their responses to the following questions and stick them on a wall display.

1. *What is the most exciting thing about preparing for Christmas?*
2. *When you think about Christmas, what makes you sad?*
3. *If you were to explain the real meaning of Christmas to a friend, what would you say?*
4. *Thinking about Jesus' family tree, what words come to mind?*
5. *Thinking about your own 'family tree' what words come to mind?*

What you need:

- A large question mark placed on the wall (may like to give it a Christmas theme)
- A sign for each of the questions, to be placed around the question mark
- Sticky notes of all shapes and sizes
- Pens

What you do:

Invite people to write their responses to the questions on sticky notes and place them on the wall display. Encourage older generations to help younger generations to get their responses up on the walls, as some might need help writing up their responses.

3. My Family Tree station

Participants are invited to create a picture of their own family tree.

What you need:

- A huge piece of paper, eg. butcher paper
- Smaller pieces of paper, eg. A3 or A4 paper
- Tape
- Markers

What you do:

Invite people to create a picture of their family tree and display on the wall for others to see (they can draw directly onto the huge sheet of paper, or create it on a smaller piece and stick up). Invite them to wonder how many generations they can add, which gaps they have in their knowledge, etc. They can add names, locations, dates, etc as they wish.



The Beginning to Bethlehem story

His story and our story begins and ends with a tree.

In the beginning, God formed our beautiful home. This was called the Garden of Eden. And it was perfect. God welcomed the first people into this beautiful new home, and they spent time walking and talking with God, enjoying each other and all of creation.

This home was filled with amazing things – animals and plants and things we'll never know, and everything was in harmony.

There were many trees in this garden, but one was different from the rest. The first members of God's new family included Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve knew about the Tree of Knowledge and what it meant for them and what it meant to God.

When Adam and Eve chose to listen to the most-sneaky serpent (who only wanted bad things to enter this garden!) and disobey God by taking from that tree – everything changed. They fell away from God. They were shut out from the garden, harmony was lost and they had to begin again.

But, as you'll see, this is the family of God and so, outside of the perfect garden, now in the imperfect world, the imperfect family grew.

When God looked at the world and saw wickedness, He also looked upon Noah and chose rescue. Faith-filled Noah and his family, following God's blueprints for hope, built a large wooden ship that would save the family when The Flood came to start the world afresh.

Abraham and Sarah came along, hopelessness and brokenness in their bones and God gave hope – a promise not to end the family tree but extend the family tree. Their family was to be as many as the number of stars in the sky!

Then along came Joseph with his beautiful coat, abandoned, left for dead by the family, rescued in the miraculous way only God can. Miriam, who boldly followed into a hopeless situation to save the life of her baby brother, Moses. Moses who came so close to God and God came so close to him that he knew what God wanted him to do. Another rescue – the family of God, following Moses following God, making a way where there is no way, through the water into freedom. For awhile anyway.

Joshua, Rahab, Gideon; God with them, leading them, choosing them, despite their flaws, weakness and sin, as they fought through conflict and battles.



Ruth and Hannah; God turning their stories of brokenness into joy, stories of promises kept true, friendship and faithfulness.

Samuel, David and Solomon – men after God’s own heart, men of wisdom, but also flawed men who made awful mistakes.

And we can see, over and over – the family keeps trying, but the family keeps failing and falling. No matter what the family did, they just couldn’t get back to God. It’s like their family tree was a rotten, fallen stump. It wasn’t enough. Except... God kept coming close, choosing hope and rescue, over and over.

And again, when it all seemed hopeless, along came the Prophets, God’s messengers with special dreams and instructions for the family. Elijah, Jonah, Isaiah, Ezekial, Esther and Daniel – their stories with God whispering over and over – hope, the promise of a forever rescue.

Through all the waiting, waiting, waiting, years more of hurting, breaking and mistaking – when all hope seemed lost – the prophets pointed to something, someone, coming. “Out of the rotten, fallen stump of Jesse, a miraculous new branch will come and make the tree whole, full, well again.”

And then, just before that new really special branch, arrived John the Baptist with a special task – ‘Prepare the way for this new branch that will change everything. Tell everyone, so they can get ready! The Rescuer is coming!’

And Mary, young faithful Mary, the next in this long family line, had a most important task. She was to grow and protect this new young shoot. God sent His message with an angel - inviting Mary into the rescue plan – and she bravely and humbly said “Yes!”

Finally, in a beautifully chaotic, and overwhelmingly humble way, Jesus was born into the world. He was placed in a wooden manger, in a house for animals. And Mary wrapped up in her arms the promise come true, the most important branch – God with us, the One that saves and redeems, this amazing family tree.

(Pause) ... But that’s not all.

Jesus became a man and made a way, became The Way, for us all to become part of His family when He gave His life instead of ours. The tree looked different then. It was a tree that carried Jesus’ body, and the weight of the world on it. A tree so brutal yet so beautiful. A tree that meant we could all become part of God’s family tree, and walk in harmony with God forever. This is the hope of the cross.



The Tree with the Greatest Gift

Intergenerational Worship Service

So there stands this tree – Christ’s family tree – wonky and imperfect, made perfect by God. Branches and limbs, filled with people from all walks of life; those that had tried their best and still fallen short. Those that shared amazing visions, did brave things, and also hurt people and hurt God. But perfect Jesus takes that tree, that story and pours out forgiveness, grace upon grace, and redemption. And it becomes the story of a family reunited forever.

The family tree of Jesus, from the Beginning to Bethlehem to Forever, is a beautifully messy, overwhelmingly welcoming, full of people but never too full tree that has space for us all. A tree that welcomes us to climb up in, and become part of it. A tree offering hope, new life, arms to hold us and a new name. And that’s the tree with the greatest gift.



Reflection: The Tree with the Greatest Gift script

Message based on Ann Voskamp's written work –*The Greatest Gift, Unwrapping the Greatest Gift.*

Show either:

- A picture of a tree stump,
- Or an actual tree stump,
- Or a yule log cake made to look like a tree stump.

"When you think about a Christmas tree, this isn't the picture you think of is it? A fallen tree, or a chopped down tree – a stump all that is left. But if it had been up to us, we'd never have made it to the Christmas tree – this (refer to the stump) would have been the end.

Today, we've explored the story of the Beginning to Bethlehem. The story of God, His story. How all throughout time God keeps coming close to His people – speaking to them, working with and in them, showing that He keeps His word – to Abraham, to Moses, to Hannah, David, Esther, Daniel...

And yet, it's also a story about a family tree full of deceivers and cheaters, fighting families, hurting families, the broken hearted and the overlooked. It's a story about a family who failed each other and failed God. They had fallen away from closeness with God - this was what their family tree was like (refer to the stump). A chopped-off stump of a family tree.

But then, a promise. The best promise ever made and kept. God gave a message to a prophet. A prophet is someone who comes so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know what God wants them to say and do. God gave the promise to the prophet Isaiah, and Isaiah gave it to the people.

You may like to display this scripture on your screen:

"Out of the stump of David's family (that's King David, David as in 'David and Goliath') will grow a shoot – yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root... In that day the heir to David's throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to him, and the land where he lives will be a glorious place." Isaiah 11:1, 10

From that chopped-off stump of a family tree will come a shoot. This was the miracle this family, the people of God, so desperately needed. The promise of hope. The promise that the cheaters and liars and the broken and the fighting wouldn't be cut off, but that they would be redeemed, given a fresh start. The promise of God with us, and us with God. And so the people waited. And they waited, and they waited and for hundreds of years they waited...



And then, one night in the town of Bethlehem, like a tender, miraculous new shoot, Immanuel, God with us, quietly slips into the world.

Either:

- Show a picture of a young shoot growing from a stump,
- Or add a piece of greenery to your stump or yule log cake.

And most of us have seen that beautiful picture of the nativity before – the little baby Jesus, arms reaching out. But listen... *"If you don't come to your Christmas tree through Christ's family tree, you can miss the meaning of Christ's coming."* (Ann Voskamp)

Because when God took a fallen family tree – that's Jesus' family tree, Christ's family tree - and redeemed that family tree, God proved that He doesn't cut off messy, broken, imperfect people. He makes them His family. He gives them His name. He gives them His perfectness.

And each Christmas as we tell this story of Christ's family tree, from a chopped-off stump to a tender new branch, we're also telling our story. The story of us being grafted, adopted, born into Jesus' family. Because that little shoot would grow into a crown of thorns, a rugged cross, a ladder – your ladder back to God.

Show either:

- A picture of a wooden cross,
- Or place an actual small, free-standing cross (made of wood) alongside the stump or yule log cake.

This Advent, Jesus the Rescuer comes to your Christmas tree. He looks at your family tree – *and no matter what kind of family you come from is exactly the kind of family Jesus came from, and for.* And Jesus says, "I want to be with you. So I came to get you and make my home here with you and to rescue you from all the brokenness and sadness and sinfulness."

This story tells, screams, of God's impossible, miraculous, conquering love. God who came and made His home here with us, who came with, and as, the Greatest Gift we'll ever receive under any tree.

And so, this Christmas, amidst the messy, broken imperfectness, the question is no longer, "Does God love me? Will He take me? Will He want me?" but is instead, "Do I take Him? Do I want Him? Will I say yes to the Greatest Gift?"



