



# Love in Action

## Preparing and Nurturing the Garden of the Soul

All around the world people are preparing for Christmas. Some people are buying gifts, some are making special goodies, some are busy planning for guests, some are preparing their houses with special decorations. What are you, or your family, doing to prepare for Christmas this year?

This ADVENT (the lead-up to Christmas), we invite you to join us as we explore the theme 'Love in Action: Preparing and Nurturing the Garden of the Soul'.

Together, we'll prepare our hearts, souls, and minds for Christmas, and think about how we can love others in practical ways.

We'll also spend time making a wreath and focusing on Hope, Peace, Love, Joy and Jesus.

**For the next five weeks, there will be many activities that you can engage with. You can:**

- read about the theme of the week,
- do some garden imagining and praying,
- read and reflect on scripture,
- learn some garden fun facts,
- try some challenges, and
- make an Advent wreath.



However you prepare for Christmas, we pray that you will feel hope, peace, love, and joy, and that your soul will be nurtured.

**Our deepest thanks to everyone who has helped to bring together this resource. Special thanks to Kath Ruhle, Hannah Staines, Fiona Harris, Rachel Krohn, Steve Drinkall, Phil Smith, Bruce Moore, and Anneli Sinkko.**



# Hope in Troubled Times



CHRISTMAS CAN BE AN EXCITING TIME – A TIME OF CELEBRATION,  
GREAT FOOD, GOOD COMPANY, AND GIFTS.  
CHRISTMAS CAN ALSO BE A DIFFICULT TIME FOR SOME PEOPLE.



This week we encourage you to take some time to acknowledge the things in your life that may make this year's Christmas a difficult one. As you acknowledge, and work on the difficult things, we pray that you will see and feel glimmers of hope for what is to come.

## Imagine...

Take a moment to get comfortable, close your eyes and take some deep breaths. Imagine a garden that no-one has looked after for a very long time. What do you see? Maybe you see lots of weeds and dying plants all shrivelled up and brown... maybe there is rocky, dry soil where no plants can grow... or lots of tangled, overgrown plants. I wonder how you feel as you look at the garden. What would make this garden beautiful again?

Imagine yourself working in the garden... You start pulling out weeds – so many weeds... You remove rocks from the soil, add special nutrients, and dig, and dig, and dig... You water the shriveled plants and cut back the overgrown bushes. It's hard, tiring work but you know it needs to happen so the garden can be restored.

Now, take some time to sit with God, in the garden of your soul. Together, take a good look around. Are there parts of your life that are like the neglected garden? Are there parts that are dry and withered? Areas that are overgrown or full of weeds? As you look around, what is God saying to you? With God, the Great Gardener, by your side, what areas could you start working on this Advent?

Know that God is a God of HOPE and that even amid the shriveled plants, weeds, and dry places, God is at work in you. As you are ready, slowly open your eyes and pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. This week, take some time to think and chat about, what you can do to bring life back to the garden of your soul. What glimmers of HOPE do you see or feel?

## Read

Isaiah 64: 1-9,  
Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19,  
1 Corinthians 1: 3-9,  
Mark 13: 24-37  
Joel 1: 1-20,  
Genesis 2: 4-25, 3: 1-24,  
Psalm 63

## Pray

Dear God,  
You are a God of HOPE.  
Thanks for being with me  
when I'm hurting.  
Thanks for being with me  
when everything is going  
wrong.

Thanks for being with me  
when I feel like a  
shrivelled-up plant.

Please water me with your  
love this Christmas and  
help me show love and  
hope to other people.  
Amen.





God is a gardener. In the beginning, God planted a garden in Eden and then placed human beings in it so they could reflect God's image through gardening! (Gen 2:8-15) When we tend to the earth, we communicate God's love and care to our fellow creatures.

"Advent" means coming, or arrival. The Advent season is an opportunity to pay attention to God's gardening work in us. During Advent, we remember the ways God has cared for God's people in the past, and we look forward to Christ's return to earth when he will bring all Creation into order.

The prophet Isaiah longed for God's presence to be restored on the earth. Isaiah asks for God to "come down" (Isa 64:1) and remembers the way that God had previously "come down" (Isa 64:3), causing the mountains to shake. The author probably intends for us to think of Exodus 19, when "Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended upon it in fire... while the whole mountain shook violently" before God spoke the Ten Commandments (Ex 20).

God's "coming down" in this way was spectacular, loud, and scary – it was awe-inspiring, but also fearful. But perhaps even more than that, it was unexpected. Throughout history, God has done awesome deeds that human beings were not even waiting for! (Isa 64:3) Who would expect God to deliver them from slavery in Egypt, part the Red Sea, and provide dry land to walk upon? For centuries, God's people waited for a Messiah, but when Jesus came, most people did not recognize that this was the one they'd been waiting for.

We do not know how God will work in us this Advent season, but we can be assured that God will act for those who wait (Isa 64.4). As we prepare the soil of our hearts, let us wait in expectation for the work of our Gardener.

The psalmist writes, "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved" (Psalm 80.3). Just as fruit in a garden ripens in the light of the sun, let us turn our hearts toward the Son, that we might be saved.



## Love in Action

Do you know someone who is having a hard time at the moment? How can you show them 'love in action' this week? How can you bring them some HOPE?

Could you:

- phone them and tell them you are thinking of them,
- bake some biscuits for them,
- hand deliver a special card,
- offer to help them with a job?



## Weekly Challenges

This week, you might like to try some of the following challenges:

- Do some **gardening** – pull out some weeds, do some pruning, and/or dig some soil.
- Light a **candle** and watch it flicker. Breathe deeply and think about HOPE.
- Draw a **HOPE picture** or write a **HOPE poem** – what are you hopeful for this Christmas?
- Watch a **Before and After Garden Video**
- Read **I Hope** by Monique Gray Smith.
- Read **A Child's Garden** about the hope a garden brings during wartime.
- Watch or listen to three different versions of the song HOPE. **Enjoy** HOPE (Puppets), **Dance** to HOPE (upbeat), **Listen** to HOPE (Classical)
- Read **Psalms 63: 1-8**.
- Watch a very silly song about HOPE: **Hopeity Hope**.
- Listen to, or watch **Thankful** by The Juicebox Jukebox.
- Watch **Hope Is Alive**. You might even like to dance along.



Links and Videos





## Make an Advent Wreath



People decorate their houses in lots of different ways at Christmas – trees, lights, tinsel, nativity scenes, candles, etc. Sometimes people put up a Christmas wreath.

What I love about Christmas wreaths is that something so plain like twigs can be made to look amazing. You might like to look at some Christmas wreaths online and see all the creative ways that twigs and branches can be transformed into things of beauty.

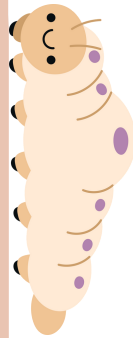
This week, we invite you to make the base of a Christmas wreath. You could use twigs, cardboard, or anything else that is lying around your home.

As you construct the wreath, you might like to think about your hopes for Christmas – for yourself, for your family, and for your community.

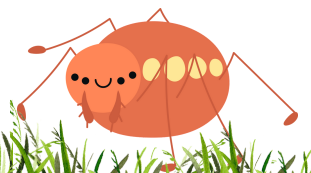


## Garden Fun Facts

- Weeds are estimated to cost our agricultural industry close to \$4.9 billion annually.  
*weeds.org.au*
- Most plants only produce several hundred seeds, but weeds are especially prolific. One single weed can produce anywhere from 10,000 to over 100,000 seeds. With these odds, it's easy to see how weeds can quickly take over your garden or lawn if left untreated.  
*preen.com*
- Soil is not dirt.  
*www.nomomente.org*
- There are more living organisms in 1 Tbsp of soil than there are people on Earth.  
*www.nomomente.org*



Wreath  
template





# Peace in the Preparation



CHRISTMAS CAN BE A VERY BUSY TIME – THERE ARE PRESENTS TO BUY, ACTIVITIES TO GO TO, PEOPLE TO VISIT, FOOD TO MAKE, DECORATIONS TO PUT UP, AND MORE. IT'S EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN ALL THE CHRISTMAS HYPE.

This week we encourage you to take time to plan and prepare for the Christmas that you want for you and your family. In the planning and preparation we pray that you feel a sense of peace.

## Imagine...

Take a moment to get comfortable, close your eyes, and take some deep breaths. Imagine a garden that has been weeded and prepared for planting. It is ready to be transformed into a flourishing garden. If you could do anything at all with the garden, what would you do?

Take a moment, to sit in that garden. What does it look like? What can you smell? What can you hear? How does this garden make you feel? Now, imagine yourself planning to make this garden a reality.

What do you need to do to get ready? Maybe you need to draw a design? Maybe you need to do some research or go to a nursery to buy plants, pots, or materials. Maybe you need to prepare some garden beds or need some others to help you undertake this project. Take a moment to sit with your plans. Breathe deeply.

Now, take some time to sit with God, in the garden of your soul. What would you like the garden of your soul to look and feel like? What would you like to grow in your life? As you sit in the garden, what is God saying to you? What needs to happen to make this garden of your soul a reality? What do you need to plan? What do you need to prepare? What do you need to change? Who might be able to support you? Take a moment to sit with your thoughts. Breathe deeply.

Know that God is a God of PEACE and is with you as you plan the garden of your soul. As you are ready, slowly open your eyes and pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. This week, you might like to take some time to think or chat about, some of the plans that you have for the garden of your soul.

## Read

Isaiah 40: 1-11,  
Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13,  
2 Peter 3: 8-15a,  
Mark 1: 1-8,  
John 1: 6-8, 19-28  
Joel 2: 12-32,

## Pray

This week, you might like to add a Breath Prayer into your busy week.

A breath prayer is a simple, short prayer said in a single breath. You can say it throughout the day as many times as you'd like. You can

Try the one below or make up your own.

Breath Out: Take my anxiety.  
Breath In: Give me Peace.

Breath Out: God.  
Breath In: You are my peace.





In the first chapter of Mark's gospel, we are reminded of words written hundreds of years before Jesus would actually arrive on earth as the promised Messiah. The prophet Isaiah suggests that as part of the plan, God would send a messenger beforehand to 'prepare the way for the Lord'. Mark is about to launch into a whole story about the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but before he gets started, he wants us to know that God has in fact been planning and working this through for a long time and is more than capable of seeing the story through to the end.

Mark, then goes on to tell us about who this messenger turns out to be. John the Baptist turns out to be a very unexpected person in an unexpected place. He is out in the desert, away from the seats of power and influence. He is clothed in a camel's hair jacket, is eating just bugs and honey and no doubt has a crazy and wild hairdo. John would hardly seem like an obvious choice for the key person to usher in the Messiah. But John's message is all about preparation. He is calling people to repent; to begin to deal with the pain in their lives. He is offering for people to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Or in other words, to prepare themselves spiritually for what is to come when the Messiah arrives.

It turns out that this was exactly the right message for the right time and many people traveled out to the desert and were compelled to repent and be baptized by John. But John was very clear that what he was doing was only dealing with the past, the real work was to be done by Jesus the Messiah. Jesus would be the one who would allow them to be filled with God's Spirit so that they were ready for whatever comes in the future.

This advent season may again turn out to be busy and overwhelming, but from this passage, we can be reminded that God is faithful to the long game of our lives, even though we might feel consumed by the present moment. We can consider the challenge that often our preparation is about letting go of things more than it is about taking more things on. Is there some painful or difficult thing that you can now begin to deal with, confess, or repent before we get to the celebration of Jesus' birth?

And lastly, I wonder as you prepare for this advent season whether you can allow yourself to be open to being filled with God's spirit so that you are ready for whatever the next season brings.



## Love in Action

This week, make a plan for how you could show love to five people over the coming weeks. It could look something like this:

My Plan to Show Love:

- Luke: Draw a picture for him (playing together)
- Mary: Make biscuits for her (choc chip are her favourite!)
- Food Bank: Drop off some food items for those who are struggling.
- Mum: Say thanks every day for something that she does.
- Grandad: Learn some Christmas 'Dad' Jokes to say to him.



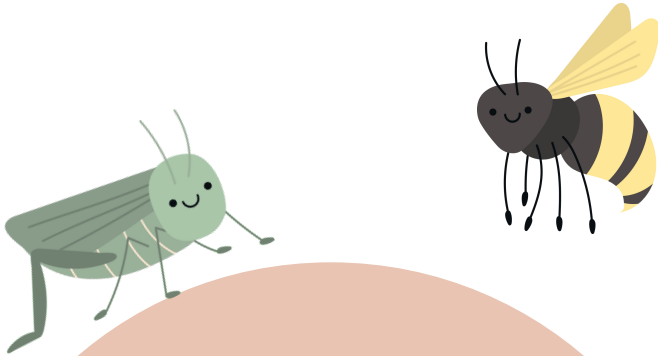
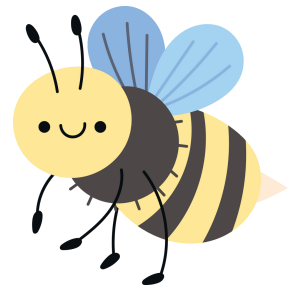
## Weekly Challenges

This week, you might like to try some of the following challenges:

- Do some research about **Daffodils**. What fun facts do you discover?
- Make some **plans** for one area of your garden (outdoor or indoors).
- Draw a **picture** of your dream garden.
- Read **I Grow in Grandad's Garden** by Brian Andrew.
- Watch a **Daffodil Time Lapse**.
- Watch young gardeners in action at the **Melbourne International Flower Show**.
- Read **Peace** by Todd Parr.
- Watch a 5-year-old sing **Peace in Christ**.
- Watch **Jesus, The Prince of Peace** a video about God's plan to bring peace to the World.
- Watch a lovely **Peace** video.
- Read **The Christmas Promise** by Alison Mitchell.

Links and Videos





## Make an Advent Wreath



This week, we invite you to start decorating your Christmas Wreath. You can make and glue on a Yellow Daffodil PEACE flower.

If you want to make more daffodils, you can glue them on a wooden skewer or paddle pop stick and put them in a pot.

As you make the flowers, you might like to think about the plans that you have for Christmas and what will bring peace to you, your family, and your community.

## Garden Fun Facts

- The largest seed in the world is the double coconut.  
[www.bbc.co.uk/gardening](http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening)
- Some orchid seed pods hold 3 million seeds  
[www.bbc.co.uk/gardening](http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening)
- Flowers can hear buzzing bees.  
[www.everydayflowersandballoons.com](http://www.everydayflowersandballoons.com)
- The daffodil symbolises rebirth and new beginnings. It's one of the first flowers to bloom at the end of winter, announcing the beginning of spring.  
<https://www.floraly.com.au/>

Flower template





# Love in Action



THERE ARE SO MANY WONDERFUL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS THAT PEOPLE CAN PARTICIPATE IN DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON – LIGHT SHOWS, PARADES, CONCERTS, CAROLS, FACE PAINTING, DINNERS, AND MORE. IT'S EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN DOING THINGS, THAT WE SOMETIMES FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES, OR LOVE OTHERS.

This week we encourage you to LOVE all that Christmas offers and think about how you can actively LOVE yourself and others, during this time.

## Imagine...

Take a moment to get comfortable, close your eyes, and take some deep breaths. Imagine a garden ready to be transformed. The soil is full of nutrients, the weeds have been pulled out, and the plans and preparations for the garden have been made. Everything is ready.

Imagine planting your garden. You start by wetting the soil. You gently make holes in the soil, carefully place the seeds into them, and lightly cover the seeds. Your new seeds are ready to grow. Day by day, you water them, and as you do, you see signs of new life. Green shoots spring out of the soil. New leaves unfurl. Small flower buds grow and suddenly the garden comes to life. Take a moment to sit in the garden. What does it look like? What can you smell? What can you hear? How does this garden make you feel?

Now, imagine lovingly working with God in the garden of your soul. Imagine gently and carefully planting seeds. What seeds are you planting? Seeds of peace? Seeds of love? Seeds of creativity? Seeds of confidence? Seeds of joy? Day by day as you work in your garden together, you watch as the seeds grow – slowly at first and then quickly springing to life. They are beautiful strong, and healthy plants. Take a moment to sit with God in the garden of your soul and appreciate the beauty. Breathe deeply.

Know that God is a God of LOVE who wants to see the garden of your soul flourish and thrive. As you are ready, slowly open your eyes and pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. This week, take some time to think or chat about, some of the changes you are seeing in your life. What are you actively doing to keep the garden of your soul healthy? How are you lovingly caring for your garden?

## Read

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11,  
Psalm 126,  
Luke 1:1-38  
Deuteronomy 6: 1-12,  
1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

## Pray

Dear God,  
You are a God of LOVE.  
Thank you for loving  
me even when I make  
mistakes.

Thank you for loving  
me even when I get so  
busy that I forget  
about you.

Please plant your  
seeds of love in my life  
so that I can love  
other people like you  
love me.  
Amen



Depending on your vintage, this week's theme; Love in Action, might have a couple of pop culture references.

A child of the sixties, seventies, and eighties might recall Action Man! He was a moveable figurine who could have a go at just about anything. On the other hand, it was in 2003 that we encountered the film, Love Actually; a story of eight very different couples in dealing with their very different love lives.

Love *and* Action take on many forms – Likewise, Love in Action. However, Paul suggests there could be some common starting points and outcomes.

Love will sometimes bring challenges, even pain, but it should make us rejoice always. I'd be so bold as to say our gathered prayers look more like lament and supplication, than thankful rejoicing.

"In Christ Jesus" we have:

- The gift of eternal life,
- Life now in all its fullness
- The Kingdom of God breaking through,
- The very Spirit that raised Jesus from death, dwelling in us!

You gotta love that! How could such loving gifts from God not kick us into gear? So, rejoice this season, constantly in prayerful thanksgiving; expressing our response to God's love.

Then we act. We don't ignore the Holy Spirit. Instead, we actively tune in; listening for prophetic words as God speaks to us through the Word, other's witness, and God's voice. Then we will be working things through – testing our limits – and pushing away that which is sinful while holding on tight to God's good stuff.

That's us in action. What about God's love in action?

God is acting in lovingly bringing together, (sanctifying), the diversity of our lives' experiences. Our whole selves need work; body, spirit, and soul. As we prepare for Christ's return – as we are the Body of Christ on earth, now – we're being purified and prepared for action. We'll be at work in God's world, just as God was and is through Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it, so rejoice and give thanks always!

## Love in Action

This week, bring to life some of the 'loving others' actions that you planned for five people last week.

Write your plan here and tick them off as you complete them

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## Weekly Challenges

This week, you might like to try some of the following challenges:

- **Work in your garden** – plant some flowers, shrubs, or vegetables.
- Read **A Garden in My Heart** by Nikki Rogers
- Watch **The Most Beautiful Gardens** (10 minutes of lovely gardens)
- Watch **Vegetable Garden Growing Time Lapse**
- Watch **Garden Time Lapse from Beginning to End**
- Read **The Extraordinary Gardener** by Sam Boughton
- Watch and sing along to **Love One Another**
- Read **Words to Love By** by Rick Warren. What loving words would you like to use this ADVENT?
- Watch a video about **John The Baptist** You can read more about John in the Bible.
- Sing and Dance along to **Grow** by Dan Warlow

Links and Videos





## Make an Advent Wreath



This week, we invite you to add to your Christmas Wreath.

You can make and glue on a red poinsettia LOVE flower.

If you want to make more poinsettias you can attach them to wooden skewers or paddle pop sticks and put them in a pot.

As you make the flowers, you might like to think about how you are loving yourself and others this Christmas.

## Garden Fun Facts

- A sunflower is not just one flower. Both the fuzzy brown centre and the classic yellow petals are actually 1,000 – 2,000 individual flowers, held together on a single stalk.  
[www.yates.com.au](http://www.yates.com.au)
- Plants really do respond to sound. Talking to plants to help them grow is a well-known old gardener's tale, but studies have shown vibration (like music, or perhaps even the sweet sound of your voice) can affect plant growth.  
[www.yates.com.au](http://www.yates.com.au)
- Some of your favourite fruits are actually in the rose family. Apples, peaches, and pears –oh my! Plus cherries, raspberries, strawberries, and more are Rosaceae, making them relatives to the long-stemmed Valentine's Day variety.  
[www.yates.com.au](http://www.yates.com.au)
- Poinsettias are native to Mexico. The ancient Aztecs used poinsettias to make red dye, and they used poinsettia sap to control fevers.  
[www.FFA.org](http://www.FFA.org)

  
flower template







CHRISTMAS IS GETTING CLOSER! EVERYWHERE WE GO WE SEE CHRISTMAS. WE HEAR CHRISTMAS. WE SMELL CHRISTMAS. WE MIGHT EVEN FEEL CHRISTMAS. WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN NOTICING? WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY?

This week, we encourage you to take some time to think about your Christmas traditions. What Christmas traditions have been passed down to you? What new traditions have you started in recent years? Are there any new traditions that you'd like to start this year? As you feel surrounded by Christmas, we pray that you may experience joy – not just moments of joy but a long-lasting joy.

## Imagine...

Take a moment to get comfortable, close your eyes and take some deep breaths. Imagine a garden full of life. There are brightly coloured flowers, healthy bushes, a veggie patch, green grass and so much more. There are bees collecting pollen and the birds are chirping happily.

You love being in the garden but there is something missing.....You'd love to have something in your garden that will last for many years. Something that could bring joy to people in 5 years, 10 years, or maybe even 50 years' time.

Take a moment to sit in the garden and think about what you could plant or add that would bring joy to people for many years to come. Maybe you could build a dry creek bed. Maybe you could plant a tall gum tree or a grass tree. Maybe you could have a special bonsai tree. Or maybe you could make a mosaic tile to decorate the garden.

Now, take some time to sit with God in the garden of your soul. What are you growing in the garden of your soul that will be long lasting? What are you growing that can be passed on to the next generation? What legacy items have you planted and nurtured? Ask God to reveal other areas of your life that may be nurtured to bring joy to others, now and into the future.

As you are ready, slowly open your eyes and pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. This week, you might like to take some time to think about, or chat about, the legacy that you'd like to leave behind, and how the garden of your soul brings joy to others now and into the future.

## Read

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16,  
Luke 1: 39-55,  
Romans 16: 25-27  
Psalm 78: 1-8

## Pray

Dear God,  
Thank you for the  
things in my life that  
bring me joy.

Thankyou for the  
people who have  
loved and  
supported me and  
brought me joy over  
the years.

Please show me  
ways that I can  
show joy in  
everything I do.  
Amen



Have you ever been in a place where you have jumped with great joy at hearing unexpected news? I imagine Mary's surprise discovery that she was pregnant would have brought mixed emotions. In context, this would have been scandalous, making very interesting headlines on the local social feeds. In our day this might simply be written off as a blip on the radar, and not even get a mention. In Mary's time, it would have been earth-shattering and the talk of the town.

Two thousand years of reading this story have set it in lead-bound stained-glass windows that do not fully capture the tensions that surround the story. We forget that these aren't pantomime characters running around in silk gowns with tea towels on their heads. Mary was a real girl, a very scared teenager, and her pregnancy would have been a disappointment to everyone in her hometown. It would have caused embarrassment and great shame felt by her parents, her betrothed, her rabbi... everyone. A teenage mum conceiving a child out of marriage was more than scandalous and the punishment could have been death.

So, if I were Mary... I'd want to get out of town with great haste. It makes sense that Mary found refuge for a while with her older cousin Elizabeth. When she enters Elizabeth's house she doesn't find judgment or doom and gloom, but is met with great joy. What it must have meant for Mary to have heard those words... "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" (Luke 1:42) After feeling shame, and having disappointed those around her... she was declared a blessing, and the child she carried.

There's a lot going on here, but what strikes me is that we need more Elizabeths in the world. This is totally counter-cultural and flips everything on its head. I think we need more people willing to move past judgment and shame and offer God's blessing. We need people who look upon the world and are prepared to be agents of God's free gift of grace, acceptance, and love, no matter what the cost. God's redeeming hand at work, does not look with judgment at the worst things in the lives of ourselves and others.

Mary rejoices in God's activity in her life. Does that find an echo in your own heart? She comes across as very much alive, with a revolutionary spirit: she is passionate about justice and the presence of God. Ask God to fire you up with the same passion!

My hope is that we can identify blessings within ourselves and others, like a child leaping within us. This is the good news of this season, that God brings hope, joy, and peace in times of tension, unplanned events, unrest, war, and personal judgment. God chooses us without judgment or conditions, no strings attached!

Finally, here is a Big Idea to consider... If there were more Elizabeths in the world responding with obedience to where the Spirit is leading us, there just might be more people breaking out into song like little Mary.... with joy in their hearts. It would be contagious and the world would be a different place!



## Love in Action

There are so many people who work during the Christmas season so that our Christmas season can be filled with joy.

Think about how you can show these people love this week. Could you:

- thank a supermarket worker on an extra busy day,
- give a card to the mail deliverer/courier?



## Weekly Challenges

This week, you might like to try some of the following challenges:

- Think about and plan a **new tradition** that you could start with your family this Christmas.
- Draw a **chalk garden** in a place where others can see and enjoy!
- Read **I Grow in Grandma's Garden** by Moira Andrew
- Watch Gardening Australia's **Gum Trees** video
- Read **The Little Book of Joy** by His Holiness The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
- Read **Joy** by Corinne Averiss
- Read and sing along with **A Rooftop Garden** by Danna Smith
- Watch **Mary's song of Praise** (Mary sang these words when she found out she was going to give birth to Jesus).
- Watch **Joy** song
- Listen to **I've Got Joy**

Links and Videos



## Garden Fun Facts

- Australia boasts the tallest flowering plant in the world which is a type of gum tree – the Mountain Ash, (Eucalyptus Regnans), also known as Swamp Gum. It's reported to grow up to 114m tall.

[www.natureaustralia.org.au](http://www.natureaustralia.org.au)

- The oldest known bonsai is the Ficus Retusa Linn, found in the Crespi Bonsai Museum in Italy. It is estimated to be over 1000 years old. [www.bonsai2u](http://www.bonsai2u)
- The oldest garden is The Gardens of Sigiriya (5th century, Sri Lanka – Lions' Rock).

<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20211205-sigiriya-sri-lankas-ancient-water-gardens>

- It takes 460 trees to absorb the annual CO2 emissions of a single car. Trees can absorb an average of 22 pounds of CO2 per year for the first 20 years of life. [www.onetreeplanted.org](http://www.onetreeplanted.org)
- Adding a single tree to an open pasture can increase bird biodiversity from almost zero species to as high as 80. [www.onetreeplanted.org](http://www.onetreeplanted.org)
- Gardens By the Bay in Singapore has seen well over 50 million visitors since its creation. [www.expatliving.hk](http://www.expatliving.hk)

## Make an Advent Wreath



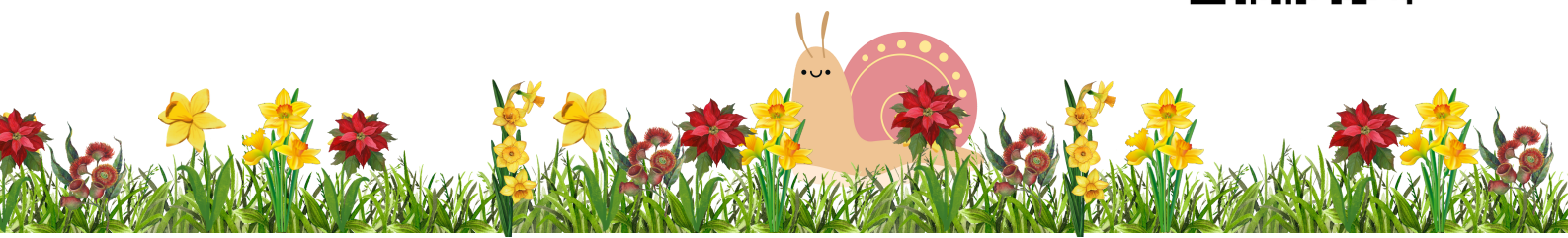
This week, we invite you to add to your Christmas Wreath.

You can make some gum nut flowers or find some leaves to glue on.

As you glue on the leaves, you might like to think about how you are experiencing JOY this Christmas and how you might bring JOY to others.



flower template





# Christmas



CHRISTMAS HAS ARRIVED! A TIME WHEN PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, ALL AROUND THE WORLD STOP TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

This week, you might like to take the time to read some books, watch some videos, or go to Church to learn more about Jesus. The wonderful thing about Jesus is that he invites everyone to follow him.

## Imagine...

Take a moment to get comfortable, close your eyes, and take some deep breaths. Imagine a well-loved garden that you've been working on for a long time. As you look around, you see many different colours, textures, and shapes. As you breathe in the air, you smell different fragrances, some subtle, some strong. As you close your eyes, you become aware of the different sounds coming from the ground, the plants, and the air. This garden is alive and flourishing! It's beautiful, wonderful, nurturing. How else would you describe it?

You've loved working in your garden, and it's brought you great joy and peace. But now it's time for you to share your garden with others. Who might you invite to visit? Who would you like to share this special garden with? Take some time to imagine people of all ages in your garden. What do they enjoy? What do they focus on?

Some people might enjoy smelling the flowers. Some might enjoy reading a book under the shade of a tree or running around on the soft grass. Some might enjoy picking herbs to take home for their dinner or finding all the little treasures hidden in the garden. How does it make you feel to see your garden full of life? How does it make you feel to see so many people enjoying your garden?

Now, take some time to sit with God in the garden of your soul. I wonder what God has been lovingly growing in your life. What's in the beautiful garden of your soul that brings you joy? And what brings joy to others? As you think about all the wonderful things that God has grown in your life, also think about who you can share those gifts with. How can you share God's love and blessings with others?

As you are ready, slowly open your eyes and pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. This week, take some time to think and chat about the wonderful things that God has grown in your life and how you might share those gifts with others.

## Read

Isaiah 9: 2-7,  
Psalm 96,  
Titus 3: 4-7,  
Luke 2: 1-21,  
John 1: 1-14

## Pray

Dear God,  
Thank you for the  
gift of Jesus.

Help me to follow  
Jesus and be more  
like him everyday.

Please help me to  
actively love my  
family, friends and  
others, and to  
show God's love  
and welcome to  
all.  
Amen



When I was a little child (growing up in Finland) Christmas was always a time of cold and darkness. I remember looking through the double-glazed windows into the night – all I could see was snowflakes that covered the land like a shroud. And between the windows, my mother had put white cotton wool and on top of it she placed red hawthorn berries that looked like drops of blood.

But then I heard the Christmas song: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned (Isa 9:2). And I thought: This song speaks about us Finns – We live in such a dark and cold country but when Christmas comes with all its lights – we no longer walk in darkness but have seen the great light – Jesus is born.

Little did I then understand that the darkness in the Book of Isaiah did not mean physical darkness but the darkness of the spirit. And I learned that the light was not the physical light of my childhood Christmases, but it was Jesus, the light of the world. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome or understood it (John 1:5).

When my youngest son was quite small, he often asked us to leave the light on in his room when it was sleep time. And we both as parents felt it was unnecessary – until one night: – Our son was calling again to turn the lights on – to no avail. After a short period of silence, he called, in a loud voice: Bring Jesus in! We could not but turn the lights on! Jesus truly is the light of the world.

Now I am 85 and my youngest son looks after me. And Jesus is still with us. But I can never forget the red hawthorn berries on our windowsill. They remind me of Jesus' suffering and death – we all know the story. But John adds something remarkable to Jesus' Passion: Gardens.

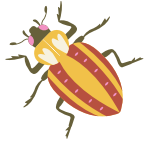
John does not tell what grew in the gardens of Jesus' suffering and resurrection; all we know is that it all happened in the garden – perhaps a reflection of the Garden of Eden. While the Garden of Eden was closed to humanity – anybody can walk with me into the Gardens of Jesus' suffering and victory.

Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Kidron (John 18:1); where Jesus was crucified there was a garden and in this garden a new tomb (John 19:41); and in this garden, Mary of Magdala saw the risen Jesus and thought he was the gardener (John 20: 14, 15) and this led to the wonderful event when Jesus calls Mary by name and she recognizes that it is her risen Lord who called her by name (John 20:16). Some three hundred years later, Cyril of Jerusalem (350 C.E.) reported, "The remains of a garden that had previously existed were still visible".<sup>[1]</sup>

So follow Jesus on this journey: from one Garden to another. Seek Him and you will find Him. He will call you by name – and you know who Jesus is. Everybody is Welcome.

[1] Brown, The Death of the Messiah, II, 1269–1270.





## Make an Advent Wreath



This week, we invite you to add your final special touches to the Christmas Wreath.

You can make a Star of Bethlehem flower which represents the star over baby Jesus.

As you do, think about how these flowers represent HOPE, PEACE, LOVE, JOY, and JESUS. Enjoy displaying this wreath this Christmas and in the future.

## Garden Fun Facts

- The 16th century monk, Martin Luther, is credited with the idea of lights on Christmas trees by adding candles to his tree to look like stars in a forest.  
<https://www.bctga.co.uk/>
- The first decorated Christmas tree was put up in Riga, Latvia in 1510  
<https://www.tourpoint.lv/en/blog/history-first-christmas-tree-riga-latvia-in-year-1510-/8/>
- The Star of Bethlehem flower represents the infant Jesus, linked to the symbolism of innocence, purity, redemption, and forgiveness.  
<https://www.petalrepublic.com/star-of-bethlehem-meaning/>

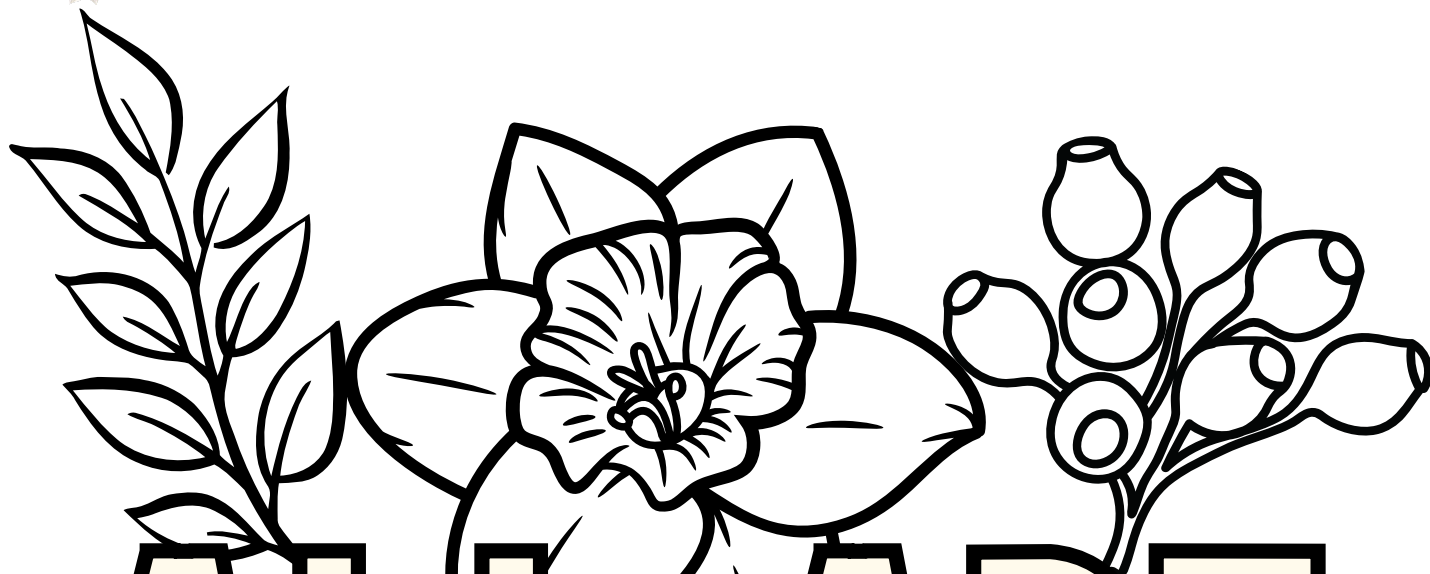


Links, videos  
and  
flower template





Wk 5



ALL ARE

WELCOME



