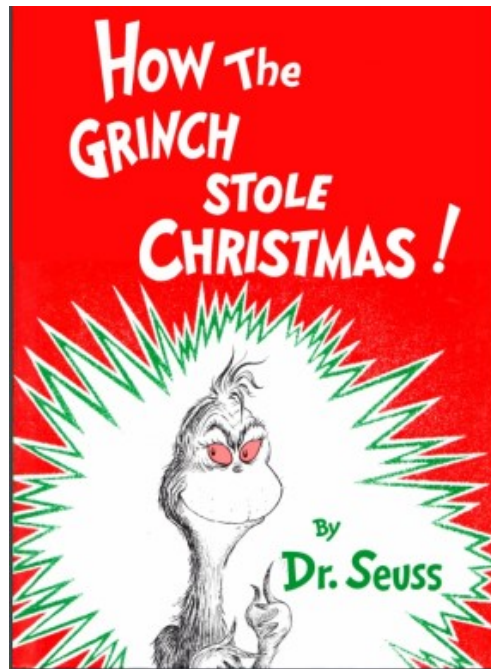




THE CERTAINTY OF CHRISTMAS



Dr Seuss tells the wonderful story of a Grinch who is not a fan of Christmas. It's too noisy and disruptive. So, he creates a plan to steal it. Late on Christmas Eve he sneaks down to the village below and takes all the presents, decorations and food. But the Whos of Whoville, in the village below are not to be stopped! Come Christmas morning, the Whos join hands in a circle and sing with joy! The Grinch cannot resist the sounds of joy, and the final scene sees him seated at the feast, invited to be part of Christmas.

As followers of Jesus we know that Christmas is more than the trimmings. It's more than just food or decorations or presents. God came to dwell with us. That's how much we are loved! That's worth celebrating.

Our focus this year is on 'The Certainty of Christmas'. In our uncertain times, people are looking for hope and meaning. They may well feel that the Grinch has stolen much from them this year, and is threatening to steal Christmas too. But in the midst of these challenges, we can be certain of God's love for us and presence with us. This is such an important message for 2020! The Grinch can't steal that!

The Certainty of Christmas

An Intergenerational Church service

This Christmas church service outline is based on the Dr Seuss book, 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas!'. It looks at the idea of certainty in the midst of uncertain times. This resource has been created with a Covid world in mind, and provides adaptations along the way to suit level 2-3 restrictions. This is a suggested outline. Adjust this to reflect the traditions and structure of your own church.

Top tips:

- A good intergenerational service is no longer than an hour
- Include different ages in the components of the service (e.g. Bible reading, candle lighting, greeting at the door, prayers).
- Give people time to prepare in advance. This is particularly important for any Bible readings.
- Check out the tips for how to adapt this resource for different Covid-19 restrictions

**Instructions are indicated by an asterisk*

You will need:

- A copy of 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas', by Dr Seuss. It is available [here](#).
- Optional: an old rocking chair and a lamp.
- [Josh Jones and the Communities of Hope - This is the Day \(Te Rangimarie\)](#)] (optional)
- Decide on how you will explore the Bible passage and check what you need to prepare.
- Large heart shapes, a whiteboard and markers, or small hearts (enough for one per 5 people) and pens
- Optional: print out copies of Romans 8:28 on pg. 10

All these resources are found online at
www.sunzbreakthrough.org.nz



The Certainty of Christmas Intergenerational Church Service

Opening and prayer: 2mins

*Service leader: Introduce yourself (for the benefit of those who are new to the gathering). "We have gathered together this morning to meet with each other and to meet with God. It doesn't matter how young we are or how old we are. God is present here with us all this morning. We are glad you are here. So, don't worry if your little ones wiggle or make noise. This morning let us help each other to worship God as a family, the family of God. Check to make sure that those around you are included and that everyone understands what is happening as the service unfolds."

Adaption: Play a YouTube clip of a carol to begin your service.

Here's a suggestion: [Josh Jones and the Communities of Hope - This is the Day \(Te Rangimarie\)](#)

Begin with the normal elements of your service (20mins approx.).

*Plan to include different generations in these elements.

This might include:

- A call to worship – make sure the wording includes an invitation to all ages
- Prayer –in 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

Adaption:
Share your screen and have the pictures on a PowerPoint.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas (8 mins)

- *Have someone sit at the front in a rocking chair with a copy of 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas'.
- *Have the pictures displayed on PowerPoint for all to see.

Reflection: (2mins)

* Service leader or someone of a different generation to read this out:

2020 feels a bit like this story. The Grinch has come and stolen from us. It might have been a school play or trip that got cancelled. It might have been your university classes. It might be your job or income, or time with family and friends. There are many things that have been stolen from us this year. We also acknowledge that there have been some good things too. You may have enjoyed parts of this year, especially spending more time with your family and your bubble. But, there is no doubt that as we are approaching Christmas there is uncertainty. What if the Grinch steals Christmas too!

The story by Dr Suess tells us that even though the Grinch stole all the trimmings of Christmas, he couldn't really steal it. 'The who's of whoville' knew this, and they kept on singing. What does the Bible tell us about the meaning of Christmas that can help us face the Grinch? What can we be certain of that the Grinch can never steal?



Bible Exploration: (15 mins)

The Grinch's heart grew:

"And what happened *then...*?"

Well... in *Who-ville they say*

That the Grinch's small heart

Grew three sizes that day!"

Did you know that the Christmas story tells us about someone's heart? Luke tells us in his gospel that this person treasured up all the things she saw and experienced and pondered them in her heart. Do you know who? Mary. She treasured and she pondered. Let's look now at the Christmas event and find out more:

* Choose one of these options to explore the event of Christmas:

- Luke 2:1-19: Use actions to explore the passage together. See pg. 7 for a simple and fuss-free suggestion.
- The 'No Rehearsal Nativity' (see pg. 8-9)
- Max7.org has free video clips that are simple and use the text straight from the CEV. You can download them [here](#).

Adaption:
Prerecord people of different ages reading different sections of Luke 2:1-19 in locations around your community. Play the video.

Response: (5mins)

I wonder what Mary stored up in her heart? Dr Seuss might say that Mary's heart grew three sizes with all the

treasures. This year at Christmas, there are treasures to be stored up. These are the things we can be certain of, that cannot be stolen by a grumpy Grinch. One of these certainties is found in the name EMMANUEL—God with us. We can be certain that God is with us in all the uncertainty of this year. I wonder what else we can be certain of and treasure in our hearts?

***Option One:** Display several large heart shaped posters at the front of the church. Invite people to call out their ideas. Have a volunteer at the front to write these ideas on the heart shapes. Alternatively you could use a whiteboard. (Here are some suggestions you could add in: God is not distant, God cares, God dwells with us, God understands our human frailty).

***Option Two:** Divide the church up into small groups. Give each group a red piece of paper in the shape of a heart. Have them write on their heart one or two things that they treasure about the Christmas story that they can be certain of. Give them 2 minutes as a group to discuss, then pass around some baskets to collect up the hearts. Read one or two out, and after church put all of the hearts up somewhere as a display for people to read later.

Adaption:
Ask people to put their ideas in the chat screen on Zoom, or add them to a Padlet* (A padlet is a free, online notice board: padlet.com)

The Certainty of Christmas (2 mins)

Romans 8:38-39 (NIV version) reads:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This Christmas we can be certain of this!

*Optional: Give out take-home cards with Romans 8:38-39 on them.

See pg. 10 for a printable sheet.

Adaption:

Attach the printable sheet to the chat screen so it can be downloaded and printed off at home, or send it out in an email.

Closing: (6mins)

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

- Carol x1
- Notices
- Closing prayer or benediction. Here is a suggested corporate prayer. Divide the church into two groups. One group read the A lines, the other group reads the B lines. Everyone reads the lines in **bold**.

ALL: In times of uncertainty we are convinced that:

A: Neither death nor life

B: Neither angels or demons

A: Neither the present nor the future

B: Nor any powers

A: Neither height nor depth

B: Nor anything else in all creation

ALL: Will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

AMEN

Luke 2:1-19

The Grinch's heart grew.
 "And what happened *then...?*
 Well... in *Who-ville* they say
 That the Grinch's small heart
 Grew three sizes that day!"

Did you know that the Christmas story tells us about someone's heart? Luke tells us in his gospel that this person treasured up all the things she saw and experienced and pondered them in her heart. Do you know who? Mary. Mary treasured and she pondered. Let's have a look together at the story in Luke 2:1-19.

Divide the church up into five sections. Explain that each section has an action to perform. Practice the actions by inviting each section to stand and perform their action.

1. 2v1-4: Walk on the spot
2. 2v5-7: Rock a baby in your arms
3. 2v8-12: Raise your hands in the air
4. 2v13-14: Shout hallelujah
5. 2v 15-16: Make the heart shape with your hands

To make this easier you could choose 5 people to lead each section. The leader stands at the front and leads their section to perform their action at the correct time.

Once the congregation is comfortable with their actions explain that they will be invited to stand and perform their action at the beginning of their section. Then they will sit down. Following this, someone will read the verses. You could display this on a PowerPoint or invite them to read along in their Bibles.

- Invite Section One to stand and perform their action (walking on the spot) and then sit down. Read 2:1-4.
- Invite Section Two to stand and perform their action (rock a baby in their arms) and then sit down. Read 2:5-7.
- Repeat the same process with Sections three, four and five.

At the end of the reading invite everyone to stay seated and make the heart shape with their hands. Read Luke 2:19 to finish.

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart".

No Rehearsal Nativity

This short nativity play can be used in several different ways.

1. Have a collection of props to go with the story. Give out these props to a range of people beforehand. Have someone read the poem. As they do, each person brings their prop forward and adds it to a nativity scene at the front.

You will need:

- a girl doll for Mary
- a boy doll for Joseph
- two angel figures
- shepherds and sheep
- wise people and presents
- manger
- baby Jesus

2. Use the 'Christmas on the Move' nativity figures to accompany the story. You could cut them out and blue tack them to a board at the front as you read the poem. You could have sheets available in the newsletter or at the door for people to pick up on their way in or out of church.

You can find them here: <https://www.strandz.org.nz/christmas-on-the-move.html>

3. Invite people to act out the play as you read. They can mime and spontaneously act it out as you read, no rehearsal involved.
4. Plan the telling beforehand and have your actors dress up as characters in the story, who act it out as it is read.
5. Prerecord the acting out the story beforehand and play the video during the service. You can do this very simply with a cell phone.

No Rehearsal Nativity

Verse One:

Once there was an angel
 Came down to visit Mary.
 She found Archangel Gabriel
 really rather scary!
 'Don't worry,' said the angel,
 'you'll have a baby son.
 Call him Jesus, if you please,
 he'll be God's chosen one.'

Verse Two:

Quick! Send another angel.
 Put Joseph's mind at peace!
 It wasn't hard for him to guess
 the baby wasn't his.
 'Don't worry,' said the angel,
 'the baby is God's Son.
 This is the Messiah,
 the prophets said would come.'

Verse Three:

At first it was one angel
 who flew above the hills.
 The shepherds were quite terrified,
 stood frozen – very still.
 'Don't worry,' said the angel,
 'at what I'm going to say.
 Good news I tell you! God's own Son
 has just been born today.'

Verse Four:

Then many, many angels
 filled the night-time sky.
 'Praise God who sends his Son down from
 his heavenly home on high.'
 The shepherds rushed to see the child –
 he was lying in the hay,
 Just like they'd heard the angel say.
 Christ was born today!

Verse Five:

Later some wise people
 Travelled from afar.
 They were coming to see Jesus
 Following a star.
 They carried with them gifts
 Myrrh, frankincense and gold,
 Worthy of a new born king,
 'God with us' as foretold.

(*Adapted from *More Christmas Wrapped Up*,
 published by Scripture Union 2007)

Romans 8:38-39

I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below.

Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

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Jesus our Lord!

Meri Kirihimete
Merry Christmas

Scripture Union New Zealand
www.sunz.org.nz

