

## **WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR JANUARY**

### **Parent, Son and Holy Spirit – the God-family**

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#### **THEME**

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Our year begins with Sundays which in many churches are following episodes in the early family life of Jesus – his Naming and Circumcision (January 1<sup>st</sup>), the visit of the Wise Men (January 4<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>), the Purification (February 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>). We may also be aware of the story of the Holy Family's escape into Egypt, and of the visit of Jesus to the Temple as a boy, and of Jesus' visit to a family celebration at Cana. Many churches will also be celebrating the Baptism of Jesus (in the Eastern Churches at Epiphany and in Western churches on the Sunday afterwards) That story also leads us to begin to think about the nature of the Godhead as a model of love, unity and family. It is also the month of the week of prayer for Christian Unity (Jan.18<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>) when we might think about the way in which Christians reflect their united belief in the one God.

How this theme is introduced will therefore depend on whether you are combining the theme of the God-Family with any of these feasts.

#### **HYMNS**

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Many hymns for this season can be found in hymn book indexes under Circumcision, Epiphany, Baptism of Christ, Purification, Trinity etc.

However for Churches using the Common Revised Lectionary readings :

Christmas 2 (January 4<sup>th</sup>), the epistle suggests

Master by your word of welcome (Christopher Idle) available on Hymnquest  
Send thy Spirit to thy child (W.Vernon Higham) available on Hymnquest

On the Baptism of Christ

To Jesus, wet with Jordan's waves (Brian Wren) available on Hymnquest

The Trinity

We bring to you our thanksgiving (Andrew Body) –see *IYF Anniversary Service outline*

O God whose love for all we see (Hymns Old and New RC New Century Edition 485)

The Trinity of mutual love (Faith Folk and Festivity)

## **PRAISE AND PRAYER**

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We bow before you, God, in the mystery of your being  
You who are three yet one, one yet three,  
In your nature is unity and love.

**We worship and adore you**

We offer to you in your oneness our brokenness,  
We place our imperfect love in the light of your perfection  
Our disordered relationships in the hands of your unity

**Forgive us and heal us**

We pray for all who care for others....., that they may mirror your love as  
Father and Mother of us all

We pray for all who are cared for....., that they may mirror your love and  
obedience in the person of Jesus

We pray for all who bring life and strength to others....., that they may be  
channels of your Spirit.

**Hear our prayers and help us trust your promise to answer them**

## **READINGS**

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Those who do not use Lectionaries might like to note some of the readings that those  
who do will be hearing during this month.

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| Jan.4 <sup>th</sup> (Christmas 2)                      | Ephesians 1.3-14; John 1.11-13            |
| Jan 4 <sup>th</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup> (Epiphany)        | Isaiah 60.1-6; Matthew 2.1-12             |
| Jan 6 <sup>th</sup> /11 <sup>th</sup> (Baptism of Xst) | Isaiah 43.1-7; Luke 3.15-7, 21-22         |
| Jan.18 <sup>th</sup> (Epiphany 2)                      | Isaiah 62.1-5; 1 Cor.12.1-11; John 2.1-11 |
| Jan 25 <sup>th</sup> (Conv, of St Paul)                | Acts 9.1-22; Galatians 1.11-16a; Matthew  |

19.27-30

## **ALL TOGETHER TIME**

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ideas for enabling all ages together to engage with the theme of the God-family

Activity 1

You can choose your friends, but not your family

Help people to share ideas of groups to which they belong by *choice* (clubs,  
interest groups etc), and then those to which they belong *anyway* (family,  
neighbourhood, human race etc)

Which list does the church come into? Maybe people can be encouraged to  
vote with their feet, and stand on opposite sides of the church according to  
their opinion

- ‘You have not chosen me, I have chosen you’ (John 15.16)
- We have been grafted into God’s vine (Romans 11.13-24)
- We have been adopted into God’s family (Ephesians 4.1-6)

Does anyone want to change their position?

## **Activity 2**

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The God-Family tree

Suggest that the congregation make a family tree of the Church, perhaps putting pictures of the members of the congregation (the children could draw them!) onto your old Christmas tree before it gets thrown out. Talk about how people feel about being in the family, how to involved those who might feel left out, or forgotten such as some of the older members of the congregation who cannot get to church, those who are ill, or those whose own family situation makes it difficult to get to church.

## **TEEN TIME**

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- What are the good and bad bits of being part of a family? Are there more good bits than bad bits, or the other way round?
- How important is it to know you are loved, despite what you might do?
- How much do you feel you belong to the family of God?
- Do you get on with some members of your family better than others? Why?  
Is that reflected in the way you think about God – do you find it easier to ‘connect’ with Father, Son or Spirit. Why?

## **FOR ADULTS**

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Take some of the phrases with which we talk about God’s relationship with us, and pull out

- Their strengths
- Their weaknesses
- The ways in which they can mislead
- The ways in which they can inform

Try that process with the following:

- God our Father
- God our Mother
- Jesus our brother
- Children of God
- The Church as the Bride of Christ

What does that discussion teach you about the nature of God, and the nature of your family relationships?

## **SERMON OUTLINE**

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One of the major ways we define ourselves is in relation to someone else. For example names may indicate it historically – Johnson, MacAndrew, O’Neill or p  
Parents do it at the school gate – ‘I’m Katie’s mother’.

Who we are is seriously affected by how we relate to others in our family. You could talk about the effect of parents on children and mention the nature / nurture debate. Perhaps you could mention responsibilities within family – caring for dependent parents, children with special needs.

The ancients in trying to talk of God found that using family relationships was imperfect, but better than silence. They used phrases like : Father of the nation, Children of God

The story of the Old Testament could be seen as people of Israel working out what such relationships meant. But a major shift in understanding came with the coming of Jesus, and the perception of his followers that they were in the presence of the ‘one God’ of the Shema. Jesus talked about his Father in a different way. It was to lead to his followers also finding a closer and more familial and familiar way of speaking of him – ‘Abba’. At the same time as they were discovering his divine nature, taking in what was heard at Jesus baptism ‘This is my Son’, Jesus was also demonstrating or modelling that new relationship to them. So he talked of his Father as separate from him, and spent time talking *to* his Father. Are those different kinds of sonship? – ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’

Although this caused untold headaches for later generations of Christians, right down to our own, and led to the writing of the classic conciliar creeds, it didn’t appear to be a problem to them, as far as we can see from the New Testament record.

Further complication of the events of Pentecost. Here too they found the reality of the presence of the one God, and indeed of the ongoing presence of Jesus. Hence the confusion in the texts of ‘Spirit of God’ and ‘Spirit of Jesus’. But again, this didn’t seem to produce problems for the first generation.

The root of it is that the seemingly abstruse doctrine of the Trinity (which no-one in their right minds would dream up) came not from philosophical meditation on the nature of God, but their living experience of God above them, alongside them and within them. The theory came from the experience, and not the other way around.

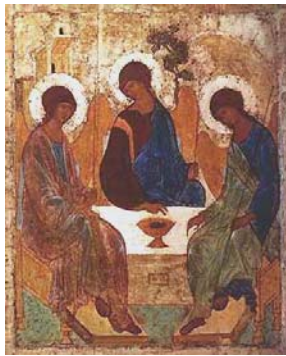
So close to our human experience of closest relationships. Ultimately you cannot teach anyone how to be husband, wife, father, mother, brother or sister, although we may be able to help people enrich what that experience can be for them. We ‘fall in love’ in an illogical, but very real manner. The bonding of a new parent to a baby is astonishing in its power, and changes every other relationship with it.

So no wonder that as Christians meditated on their experience, they began to find enrichment of their perceptions of what God is like, as they thought of him 'in relationship' as Father, Son and Spirit. Something the Eastern Church has done much more profoundly than the Western.

We need to keep the two-way thinking going. We are made in the image of God, and if we reflect his nature, we now know that nature to be one which can have love within itself. The primitive understanding that 'it is not good for man to be alone' actually pre-echoes that later understanding of the nature of God who is three in one and one in three. The Bible record of dysfunctional families from the very beginning – Cain and Abel, Abram, Sarai and Hagar, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers – all militate against too much anthropomorphism. God must be better than that lot! But becoming more and more aware of the nature of the love which is in God may enlighten and inform our understanding of what human love within families can be.

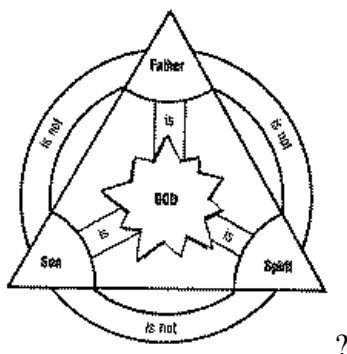
## ILLUSTRATIONS

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What does the Rublev icon of the Trinity say to you about the nature of God?  
(this can be found on the internet by using any of the search engines)

Is it more or less helpful than the traditional diagrammatic



Does it help you to have human representations of the God Head?

## ENDINGS

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May God from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, be with you and your family this day, and the blessing of God almighty, the divine family of Father Son and Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen

### **Questions for people to discuss in groups**

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Many of the suggestions under Teen time and adults can be adapted for bible study or midweek groups.

### **Points for prayer**

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- 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International year of the Family, for all of the opportunities through the year to support families
- for the work of voluntary agencies working with families such as those listed on the CTF website but also Home Start, Sure Start, One Parent families, the NFPI etc
- work of family mediation services
- family counselling services