

Messy Adventures celebrations

This document provides a template of eight short steps for an outdoors celebration for any of the Messy Adventures.

What works for you in your context may not work for a different group, so please adapt, reimagine, reword, or change completely to suit your group.

The general Messy Church principles still apply:

- Keep it shorter – some people may be unfamiliar with worship, plus it may be cold.
- Be participative – make it a joint effort, not a one-person show.
- Keep Jesus at the centre.
- Do things by heart wherever possible: singing, praying, storytelling. Remember, many of your group may not find reading easy yet and service sheets might get rained on or dropped as litter.
- Make the most of the setting itself to share your worship, speak of the story and help people pray.
- Find ways to enable people to connect to God throughout the gathering, not just the final celebration. Just as in any Messy Church, the whole gathering is worship, not just the celebration at the end. All our explorations of science and nature give thanks to our creator God and invite God to speak to us through the natural world.

There are many Bible stories and verses shared during each Adventure. Below is a suggested list of a key stories about Jesus himself, his teaching or his life, to focus on in the celebration for each unit. This list could help avoid repeating the same passage too many times. But if you want to choose a different story, maybe because it's a particular time of year, festival or you simply feel led towards a different story or verse, do what you feel is right for your group. For example, 'Wild and wilderness' could be used in early spring to look at Jesus' temptations in the season of Lent. 'Wild me!' and 'Wild life!' can be used to explore the story of Holy Week and Jesus' death and resurrection at Easter.

Don't worry if the story has been mentioned or referred to in another session or earlier in the session you're doing now. Repetition is a tried-and-tested way of meditating on a story and seeing it from different angles, and people love hearing a familiar story.

1. Wild and wilderness! Jesus tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1–13) (though Mark's version includes wild beasts, which is fun)
2. Wet and wild! Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan (Mark 1:9–11)
3. Wild and rocky! Jesus' parable of the two builders (Matthew 7:24–25)
4. Wild and weedy! Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–13)
5. Wild woods! Jesus' parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18–19)
6. Wild weather! Jesus calms the storm (Mark 4:35–41)
7. Wild on the wing! Jesus teaches about faith by pointing out the birds (Luke 12:23–25)
8. Wild and wiggly! Little things, little people, little details matter to Jesus; Jesus meets Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)
9. Wild safari! Jesus' teaching on the good shepherd (John 10)
10. Wild me! Jesus turns over the tables in the temple (Mark 11:15–18)
11. Wild on the move! Jesus walks on the water (Matthew 14:22–32)
12. Wild life! Change, growth, life, death, birth, seasons, rhythms: Jesus' death and resurrection (any of the gospel accounts)

Gather

If you've been doing a dispersed activity, bring everyone together in a way that suits your group: suggestions could include a drum, a vuvuzela (ouch), an energetic child running round telling everyone...

Pause

Either

Pause: stillness

Develop a habit of pausing at the start and inviting people to think for a moment about where you are, just to enjoy the awareness of being outside in that particular spot. You could say something like:

- 'I wonder which of God's creature's call this place their home? Can you hear any of them?'
- 'As we gather here with God, which other of God's creatures are with us in this place? (Look behind you and in various directions, in the sky, under your feet, touch the ground – who is under the soil?)'
- 'As we stand here in (autumn/winter/spring/summer), what does that mean for the natural things all around us here?'
- 'Is there anything around us you're noticing in particular?'
- 'What can you spot in this place that's whispering about God without words?'
- 'What's the world shouting at us today?'
- 'Spend a moment just listening before we begin.'
- KEEP SILENCE (yes, with children! Though it may need to be brief!)

Or

Pause: seasons

Sometimes it's helpful to connect the season to a Christian theme at the start and comment, for example, on:

- Winter: light in the darkness. Holding on to hope when all is dark and everything looks dead. The coming of light in Jesus, the turning, the beginning John 1:4–5.
- Spring: new life – Easter – remembering where we came from and that we had to go

through the 'death' of winter to get here. Death and resurrection. Looking back and looking forward.

- Summer: nature at its fullest – fullness of life John 10:10. Also harvest of the grain – harvest season is over several months, not just September–October.

- Autumn: dying back and death. Letting go. John 12:24 – letting go into death, new hope will come. Connecting to the sure and certain hope of springtime.

Opening prayer

You could use the straightforward version of this prayer to start with, then over the year, as people get familiar with it, vary it with the suggestions in brackets or versions you improvise according to where you are.

The group could use simple actions to go with their responses as they say them. The BSL ones are simple, and you can watch videos at signbsl.com to practise.

In faith: touch your forehead and bring the side of your hand down on to your other hand in a chopping action

And hope: cross your fingers on both hands

And love: cross your hands over your heart

Leader: We've come together on this patch of earth

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together under this sky

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together with the creatures we can see and those we can't

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together with the people we can see and those we can't

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: Creator God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, we've come together in your name

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Ideas for variations on the same prayer, but invent your own:

Leader: We've come together on this patch of (green/boggy/soggy/precious...) earth

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together under this (bright/gloomy/dark/huge...) sky (rain)

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together with the creatures we can see (hear/smell) and those we can't

All: *In faith and hope and love.*

Leader: We've come together with the people we can see (hear/feel)
All: *In faith and hope and love.*
Leader: Creator God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, we've come together in your name
All: *In faith and hope and love. Amen*

Sing (or not)

Work out what's right for your group. If in doubt, leave it out. If you have suggestions of songs that work well for all ages in an outdoors setting, or ways to accompany songs that don't reduce instruments to soggy firewood, please feedback to us messychurch.org.uk/contact-us.

Story

Don't underestimate the power of telling a story in a significant setting – it will almost certainly make it very memorable without you having to try too hard.

Tell the story by heart if you possibly can, though use notes or headings if you need to, and connect it to the experience you've just had and the place you're in.

The group could be invited to act it out as you tell it (possibly to keep warm by keeping on the move).

The group could be invited to go round and retell the story with each person adding on a line, episode or even just a word.

You could tell the story as a game, with everyone given the name of one of three characters or objects in the story (e.g., the father, the older son, the younger son for the prodigal son; the boat, the wind, the waves for calming the storm). Every time they hear their character mentioned, they swap places by running across the circle.

Response

Invite the group to respond to one or more of these, but don't force anyone to answer:

- How has today helped us think about the earth in a new way?
- How has today helped us think about God in a new way?
- How has today helped us think about other people in a new way?
- How has today helped us think about ourselves in a new way?

Or one or more of these:

- What's the most interesting thing you'll take away from today?
- What's the most puzzling thing...?
- What's the most disturbing thing...?
- What's the most wonderful thing...?
- What's the most...? (your own inspiration)

Or one or more of these:

- Look at the landmarks around you: which one reminds you of something about this story?
- Look up at the clouds: are any of them the shape of something from the story?
- You have one minute to find something in this area that has something to do with today's story.
- If the story was happening round here today, where do you think it would take place?
- Show a dead leaf and a green one. Ask if these remind anyone of anything they've thought or felt today.

Prayer

Action prayers

- You could use the Lord's Prayer with actions that many Messy Churches use.
- You could pass round a prayer bear or prayer stick so that whoever holds it prays silently or out loud, then passes it on.
- You could tie pieces of grass or twine onto a prayer tree.
- You can draw prayers in the sand or the mud.
- You could drop or throw pebbles in water as you pray.
- You could pray, holding – or writing on – a pebble, then hide it somewhere in the space.
- You could mark out a labyrinth and walk it.
- You could turn to face the different compass points and pray for everything that lies ahead of you in that direction.
- You could walk around the boundaries of the space you're in and pray for God's protection for all living things in it as you notice them.

Noticing prayers

- You could spend a moment with your hands cupped in front of you, imagining you're holding the earth in your hands before God.
- You could be very still for a moment to listen to the noises around you; then thank God for what's making each sound and the life it represents.
- You could find one thing to hold and spend a moment noticing every detail about how it looks, smells, feels, moves, how much it weighs; then pray for all it represents to you as you place it back where you found it.
- You could stand, sit or lie down and feel the earth beneath you and see the sky above you and express to God how you feel about your connection to the planet, about things we take for granted, like air to breathe and gravity to hold us down.
- You could spend a moment imagining Jesus next to you. What is he doing?

Spoken prayers

You could pray with the words that come to you naturally in the moment, of course.

You could try out any of the prayers below or make up your own and send them to us. The idea is for nobody to need words printed off except the leader. Everyone can learn the response, as it's short and repeated.

Tread gently on the earth

(You could walk on the spot in time with the line 'Let's tread gently on the earth' if you want to add an action or indeed, stay warm.)

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*

Leader: Out of joy for the life under our feet...

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*

Leader: Out of awe for the wonders above our heads...

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*

Leader: Out of expectation of the secrets you want to show us...

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*

Leader: Out of hope for the time before us...

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*

Leader: Out of respect for the people around us...

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*
Leader: Out of love for the God whose earth it is...

All: *Let's tread gently on the earth.*
Leader: Let's tread gently on the earth.

Lord of the animals and birds

Leader: Jesus, you care for all the life on earth.
All: *Help us care as you care for all the life on earth.*

Leader: Jesus, you were there when the first bird sang the first song; you smiled at the birds of the air; you noticed when the smallest sparrow died.
All: *Help us care as you care for all the life on earth.*

Leader: Jesus, your first night on earth smelt of cows; you met wild animals in the desert; you saw the pain of farm animals badly treated.
All: *Help us care as you care for all the life on earth.*

Leader: Jesus, you watched nets fill with fish; you saw sheep lost and found; you knew the fierceness of wolves.
All: *Help us care as you care for all the life on earth.*

Leader: Jesus, you rode the gentlest of donkeys; you knew sadness when the cockerel crowed three times; you are the lamb of God.
All: *Help us care as you care for all the life on earth.*

Weather

Leader: For wildness and wetness and wellies
All: *Thank you, Lord*

Leader: For sunshine and sunrise and sunset and starlight .
All: *Thank you, Lord*

Leader: For cumulus, cirrus, stratus and nimbus and clouds of all colours.
All: *Thank you, Lord*

Leader: For breezes and freezes and thunder and wonder.
All: *Thank you, Lord*

Leader: For your soggy and sunny and wild and windy and wonderful world.
All: *Thank you, Lord*

The first book of scripture

Leader: In the centuries of rain and sunshine distilled into this trunk and branch and bark; in the patient witness to years gone by and hope for years to come

All: *We read about you*

Leader: In the unique detail of every leaf, the leaves we see and those that die unseen by any squirrel, jackdaw, bat, owl or human.

All: *We read about you*

Leader: In the light and shadow of the branches, in the colour-shading of the leaves, in the graceful sweep of the smallest twig dancing with the wind.

All: *We read about you*

Leader: In the stillness and the steadiness, the satisfaction with the here and now, the reaching-out of roots and fungi underground, the secret messages from life to life.

All: *We read about you*

Leader: In the beauty of the autumn fruiting, in the beauty of the winter death, in the beauty of the spring rebirth and the beauty of the summer glory.

All: *We read about you*

Genesis 1 prayer

You could make a habit of praying for something inspired by each 'day' of creation, or a selection of them, that go well with the theme of your session. You could even roll dice and pray a prayer corresponding to the number for that 'day' (and include day seven at the start or end):

1. Light: we pray for light to shine in...

2. Land/water: we pray for our country and other countries, like.../for areas of flooding... drought

3. Plants: we pray for harvests/rainforests...

4. Sun, moon and stars: we pray for (countries with too much heat/people scared of the dark/the way humans explore exploit space...)

5. Fish and birds: we pray for (fishing and overfishing/rare species/battery farms...)

6. Animals and humans: we pray for people in particular places/pets, farm animals, animal welfare/family and friends/ill people, people who can influence how land is used...

7. Rest: we pray for rest for the fields/for people overworking...

There are other versions of this that would be fun to play with, such as an 'I wonder' version. (You could create a thanksgiving version or a confession version.)

I wonder version:

I wonder what the light needs us to pray for...

I wonder what the land needs us to pray for...

Psalm prayer

You could pick a verse from the Bible and use it as inspiration to create a 'call and response' prayer, making up your own words based on what you see around you, between the repeated parts. For example:

Psalm 65:8 (in an urban setting)

Member of group: God you're amazing! We look at the people going down this street and everyone is different and loved by you!

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

2nd member: We look at the hospital on the corner and praise you, God, for the amazing healing going on inside it.

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

3rd member: We look at the bus stop and thank you, God for every unique person who'll wait there today.

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

4th member: We look at the flowers growing through cracks in the pavement and thank you for how your life and growth always finds a way.

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

5th member: We wonder which ones of God's creatures (Foxes? Squirrels? Birds?) sneak in and around our houses, giving thanks that they have a bit of space to live, even here in our city.

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

6th member: We look at the trees in the park, wondering which of God's creatures share our city home and give thanks for the variety of all that God has made.

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

Encourage the group to improvise depending on the details of your urban landscape and end with:

Leader: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders.

All: *Where morning dawns, where evening fades, we'll sing you songs of joy.*

Other examples

Psalm 100:1

Leader: Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth

All: *Worship the Lord with gladness.*

Isaiah 42:10

Leader: Sing to the Lord a new song

All: *Sing praise from the ends of the earth.*

Matthew 11:25

Leader: We praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth

All: *You've hidden these things from others, but shown them to us today.*

Revelation 5:13

Leader: To God who holds the universe and to Jesus

All: Be praise and honour and glory and power, forever and ever.

Other suggestions for nature psalms (there are plenty more!)

Psalm 19:1 – 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands...'

Psalm 33:6–9 – 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made...'

Psalm 95:4–5 – 'In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.'

Sending out

Traditional liturgies end with some sort of sending out. When you're 'out' already, this part of the liturgy becomes more of a blessing to take with you into your walk in the world. For worship outdoors in particular, it is important there is also an element of commitment to living well with creation, in everyday life.

It's good to have a set of words you use every time so that everyone gets to know the prayer and recognises it as signalling the end of the session. Many Messy Churches use the Messy Grace with actions. Or you might want to choose your own sending out prayer from a source you enjoy. Or pioneer a new Messy one, such as this one that draws on Philippians 2:15 and 4:8:

Wherever you go, walk lightly.
(Point out the way in front of you or in any direction.)

Wherever you go, shine brightly.
(Raise your arms above your head like a star.)

Wherever you go, hold tightly
(Hold hands with people next to you, possible option here to hold a leaf or something – hold tightly to nature as well as people.)

To everything true and pure and good, both daily and nightly.
(Shake hands on each beat.)

In the name of Jesus Christ
(Let go of hands and touch each palm of your own hands.)

Amen
(Punch the air.)

Suggested liturgy resources

Here are some suggestions for ideas and inspiration. They are written to be used with the words typed out, so for Messy Church Goes Wild, it may be best to adapt them so that there is a response that is easily memorised, or for the leaders to pray aloud. These writers pray in a way that notices the seasons and nature, naming God's creation in the prayers (hares, frogspawn, flowers by name, buds and blossom...) There are many more writers, of course. Why not add your own favourite authors to this list?

- Tess Ward, Celtic Wheel of the Year (O Books, 2007)
- Steven Shakespeare, Earth Cries Glory (Canterbury Press Norwich, 2019)
- Jon Birch websitefaithandworship.com/seasons-of-the-year.htm (especially the seasons of the year sections)