

The First Christingle

The first ever Christingle service took place a long time ago – in fact over 200 years ago. It happened in a castle in Marienborn in Germany in 1747. A Bishop called Johannes Watterville took the Christmas Eve service. He wanted to do something special for the children, to help them go deeper into the mystery of Christmas.

First they sang some hymns, and then Bishop John read some verses that the children had written to honour the Saviour Jesus' birth.

After that the bishop explained that such happiness had come to all the people of the earth when God sent his son to be born as a baby, that He "kindled a little flame in each heart, which keeps burning forever, filling God with joy and us with happiness."

But words were not enough. Bishop John wanted to show the children what he meant.

Hold up candle tied with red ribbon

He gave each child a lighted candle, tied with a red ribbon, to remember the coming of the Saviour. He prayed "Lord Jesus, kindle a flame in these dear children's hearts, that theirs may be as filled with love as yours is."

It is said that the children went out of the chapel with their little lighted candles, filled with joy, and went happily to bed.

Bishop John's special candles became known as Christingles – which means Christ lights.

Hold up Christingle

Even more symbols and meanings were added, to tell even more of the mystery of Christmas.

The candles were placed in an orange, which shows that Christ came for the whole world.

The red ribbon represents the blood that Jesus shed when he died on the cross to save us all.

The ribbon is held in place with four wooden sticks, which represent the four corners of the earth, and the four seasons – because Jesus came for people everywhere and all year round, not just Christmas.

Fruit and nuts were placed on the sticks to show the fruits of the earth that God has provided for our food.

Then sweets were put on to represent the good things he has given us.

The candle itself represents the great light shining in the darkness when the baby was born.

Now Christingle services are held all over the world.

When Jesus was a man, he said took a small child and placed it in the midst – in the middle of a group of adults. He said that unless they became like a little child, they would not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Bishop John wanted a celebration for children. Children come into the middle of the congregation to receive their Christingles, and then take the light of Christ out in a circle around the church. The Christ child is in the midst – laid in the manger – at the centre of the festival of Christmas, and the centre of all our lives.

In our church, the children lead the way, but the adults follow and get their own Christingles as well. Their lights shine out together in the darkness – filling it with the sign of Christ's love.

Based on traditional stories