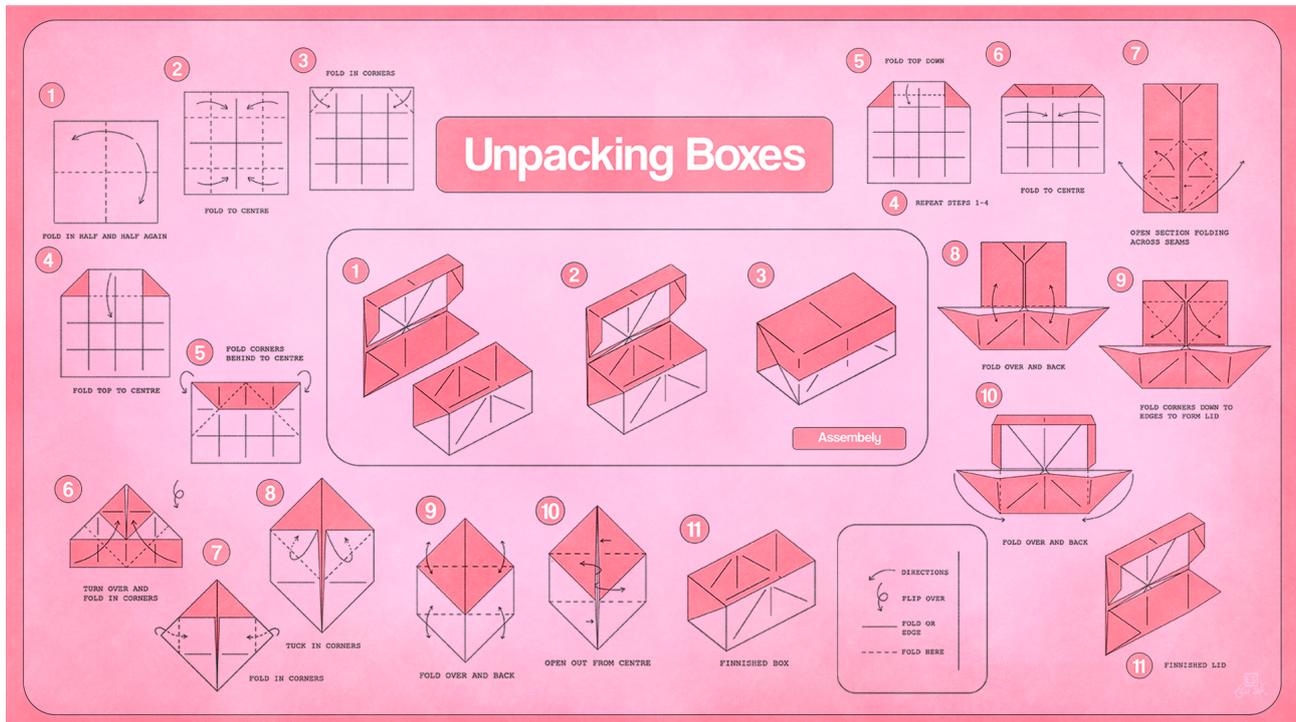


Unpacking Boxes

New Year 2022 (26 December - 29th January)



Pack them, stack them, unpack them. Tick them, cross them, leave them blank. Wrap them, post them, play with them. Treasure them, dread them, bury them. Stay inside them, leap out of them, flatten them.

From the beautiful to the bureaucratic, the loving to the limiting, the playful to the prosaic... our lives are full of boxes; attempts to sort, categorise, organise, arrange and make sense of life.

This month join us as we think inside, outside and all around 'the box'. What gift is Jesus boxing up for you this year? Are there humdrum boxes in your life that could be reimagined as a play-fort, a ship, an obstacle course?

What do you need to get out of storage? What needs packed away? What needs boxed up to find a new home with someone else?

Over the weeks we'll be thinking about what it means to build, fold, re-use, re-purpose and recycle with God. What does the origami of God's grace look like? How do we work with God to tackle the glut of packaging in our world and the ecological cost that comes from it?

It's time to open the box and find out...

Each week of the five week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

Unpacking boxes (26 December)

After Christmas – perhaps surrounded by packaging and wrapping paper – let's begin to unpack the idea of boxes. Boxes as repositories for gifts, for memories, for regret, for hopes, for our love...

1. 1 Samuel 2: 18-21 (Boxing Day)

2. Psalm 148

3. Colossians 3: 12-17

4. Luke 2: 41-52

5. Mark 14: 3-9

6. Luke 11: 5-13 (Hogmanay)

7. Your choice... (New Year's Day)

1. **Baby boxes.** Hannah makes Samuel a little robe every year. This Boxing Day what are we boxing up for the children in our society? What are the hopes and gifts we have for them?
2. **Unboxing creation.** Reality comes with incredible packaging...
3. **Out of storage.** Where are your clothes of compassion? Are they in storage? Are they folded in a box in the back of cupboard covered in mothballs? Are you worried they're no longer in fashion? Or that they won't fit anymore? Get them out... you might be surprised how comfortable they feel.
4. **Looking in the wrong boxes!** Mary and Joseph, at their wits' end, terrified, desperately trying to find Jesus but looking in all the wrong places. Who hasn't looked for Jesus in all the wrong places at this time of year?
5. **Breaking open, emptying out.** What are the boxes we need to break open and empty out to demonstrate our love?
6. **What are we asking for this year?** God does not leave us empty-handed.
7. **Opening up another year...** What reading do you choose to start the year with? What reading do you want to 'open up' with God?

Playing with boxes (2 January)

Boxes aren't just boxes. They can be bricks, canvasses, cars, mountains, pirate ships, robots, submarines, and much more besides... What happens when we use our God-given imaginations to respond creatively to our circumstances?

- 1. Jeremiah 31:
7-14**
 - 1. A vibrant vision of praise.** All sorts of people, in all sorts of ways, from all sorts of places... worship with multiple points of entry. How can we expand our understanding of worship to be more varied, more engaging, more playful (see verse 13)?
- 2. Psalm 147:
12-20**
 - 2. Playing with language.** Just as we play with and rearrange boxes we can play with language (like the psalmist in verses 15-18 and indeed across the psalms) experimenting and combining and juxtapositioning to learn new things about our God.
- 3. Ephesians 1:
3-14**
 - 3. The Holy Courier has stamped us with the seal of the Holy Spirit!** The Body of Christ is like a giant box fort made of boxes of all sorts of shapes and sizes and materials... but each stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit.
- 4. John 1: 1-18**
 - 4. Unboxing the universe...** A beautiful, creative force set loose in the cosmos...
- 5. Matthew 2:
1-12
(Epiphany)**
 - 5. A Baby Box with a twist.** Scotland now offers every family expecting a newborn a 'Baby Box' full of practical things infants need in their first months, additionally the box itself is fitted with a mattress for the baby. But Jesus didn't have a baby box or health visitors or a national health service. If you were putting together a baby box for the baby Jesus — what would you put in it?
- 6. Isaiah 60: 1-6**
 - 6. Time to shine!** How can we be creative and even playful with our radiance — responding to God's generosity with our hopes, lives and imagination?
- 7. Your choice...**
 - 7. Play time...** What Bible reading makes you think of play or fun or the imagination?

Repurposing boxes (9 January)

Boxes can have many different lives. Some deserve to be treasured, others need to be flattened...

1. Isaiah 43: 1-7
 1. **'Put in a box'**. Have you been put 'in a box'? Stereotyped, filed away, dismissed, limited or constrained by how other people see you. God calls you out of that box — by name.
2. Psalm 29
 2. **The voice of God cuts through all**. As we've explored already this month boxes can be helpful and fun, a way of organising our lives, of being generous and imaginative but of course boxes can also be constricting. The voice of The Lord breaks cedars and oak, it can break through the harmful boxes that limit us too.
3. Acts 8: 14-17
 3. **Baptism... more than box ticking**. Unpacking baptism.
4. Luke 2: 1-5
 4. **Joseph and Mary had to schlep to Bethlehem for a box ticking exercise**. Even the *Sagrada Familia* had to juggle with bureaucracy. To the families today facing upheaval, applications, assessments, waiting lists, unstable housing and all the uncertainty... Jesus says, "I get that. I'm here to listen."
5. Luke 3: 21-22
 5. **"I love you, I'm proud of you, you're great."** Words we all want to hear, and can hear echoed at our baptism too! How can we redraw our purpose in light of our baptism? Flattening the boxes we no longer need.
6. Luke 12: 22-34
 6. **Transforming the treasure box**. God often invites us to rearrange and reorganise how we picture things. An anagram of 'HOARDINGS' is 'DO SHARING'. As disciples following the way, loving one another, we are called to share, not hoard.
7. Your choice...
 7. **New purpose...** Choose a reading about being given a new purpose.

Folding boxes (16 January)

This week we think about folding, flatpack, geometry, origami, and flattening what needs to be flattened. Oh, and wine boxes...

1. Isaiah 62: 1-5

1. **Folding a diadem.** From a battered old box God can origami a beautiful crown. The wonderful thing about origami is that without making a single cut you can make incredible, beautiful shapes. How can God refold your life into a new shape today?

2. Psalm 36: 5-10

2. **Enfolded in your wings.** God folds each of us in.

3. 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

3. **Flatpack gifts...** Here's an idea, do you think God sometimes gives us flatpack gifts that require self assembly? And do you think sometimes there are parts intentionally missing... so that we have to find the corresponding parts in other people?

4. John 2: 1-5

4. **Opening the Wine Box I.** The DJ is set up, uncle Silas has got his dancing shoes on, but the wine boxes are empty... flattened, ready to for recycling. Time for Mary to have a word with Jesus.

5. John 2: 6-8

5. **Opening the Wine Box II.** While uncle Silas starts strutting his stuff Jesus has a look at the wine boxes. Spend some time in the middle point of this story as the anticipation builds rather than rushing to verse 9.

6. John 2: 9-11

6. **Opening the Wine Box III.** A small, humble gathering of humans getting together to celebrate something meaningful is blessed with extraordinary abundance and richness and generosity — because that's the sort of person Jesus is...

7. Your choice...

7. **New purpose...** Choose a reading to conclude the week about transformation.

Recycling boxes (23 January)

Boxes can be useful but our world suffers from a glut of disposable packaging. How can we harness our potential and become more responsible and considerate of how we package, transport and store goods to protect the precious gift of the world that we have been given?

1. Nehemiah

8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

1. **Shoulder to shoulder.** As we think this week about the collective action we need to take to heal the planet let's look at this vivid sequence of a people coming together to focus, learn and understand together.

2. Psalm 19

2. **True worth.** When our economic systems put so little value on vulnerable communities and the natural world we've lost our true priorities. How can we rediscover the golden sweetness of God's plans for us?

3. 1 Corinthians

12: 12-18

3. **One big system I.** As a church, as a human race, as a planet — we need to be mindful that we are part of one big system.

4. 1 Corinthians

12: 19-26

4. **One big system II.** Cutting off our hands and feet. Where have we been neglecting to value and include people? Given our theme this week let's think especially of the circumstances where our economic choices have an impact on others.

5. 1 Corinthians

12: 27-31

5. **One big system III.** The power of difference. Our strength as a church, as a human race, as a planet comes from being a complex system. Monoculture in agricultural, politics or spirituality is not the answer.

6. Luke 4: 14-30

6. **Jesus and the planet.** This sequence contains what is sometimes referred to as the 'Jesus Manifesto' or the 'Nazareth Manifesto'. How does this manifesto inform how we think about ecology, sustainability, and climate justice?

7. Your choice...

7. **Recycling...** Can you think of an example of something being recycled (or repurposed, reimagined or reclaimed perhaps) in the Bible? Close the week and the theme with that reading.