

Turn up and join in Nativity Service

In advance:

- Ask a child to do the reading and to practise ahead of the day.
- Discuss the long list of carols with the musicians.
- Pick a **narrator** and **lead/stage manager** who will hold the whole service together. They will need to rehearse!

Before the service:

- Set up manger scene at front but cover up for first half.
- Put up sign on A3 for 'Nazareth' at front. Place 'The East' and 'Jerusalem' on different sides. Also place 'Nearby fields' to one side.
- Hide baby so he can be presented to Mary at the appropriate time.
- Birthday bucket near front.
- Candles and lighter on table at the front.
- Take socks and place near "Fields nearby".
- Pick a person to light candles at start and one for the end.
- Slips of paper to write name on for jar, plus jar.
- Place all the costumes out to the side of the church.

Script

Welcome

I want to start by reading from Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 to 10

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Please bow your heads in prayer...

God. This is a busy time of year and there are only a few days left until Christmas with so much to pack in but as we come before you now - let us clear away the thoughts and worries of this world that keep us from focussing on you. Let us remember, who you are. The Creator God of the universe; the Prince of Peace born into a stable; the Holy Spirit living within us. We ask that you bless this time with you. Amen

This is a service that needs everyone to take part. The first way you will be active is in picking one of the carols. Everyone should have been given a slip of paper to put their name on. If we pull your name from the jar, then you can pick one of the ten carols listed on the screen to be sung by the worship team – don’t worry: we won’t make you come up and do a solo!

The other thing that needs to happen is that everyone, including the adults, needs to put on a costume. We need Marys, Josephs, donkeys, wise men, shepherds, angels, inn keepers and at least one Herod.

So you’ve got 5 minutes to put on a costume and get your name in the selection jar.

1st Carol

Name out of hat to choose carol. Choose from:

- Come and join the celebration – 3 verses, 4 chorus (start with chorus)
- Joy to the World – 3 verses
- O Come all you faithful – 3 verses
- O Little Town – 4 verses
- Once in Royal – 4 verses
- Calypso Carol (see Him lying...) 3 verses
- It came upon a midnight clear – 2 verses
- Little Donkey – 3 verses, 3 choruses?
- Away in a Manger
- Silent Night

Notices and prayer for the upcoming work of the church

Before we sing our first carol, I want to ask you to share some of the things that are coming up so we can be praying for them.

There is the carol service this evening at 6pm which XX is running. XX ,can you share what we should be praying about for that?

Etc....

And of course there is Christmas day. Really we all need to praying for each other to get on well with the people we are shut in a room with all day but also that we really experience God over this period.

Is there anything else happening that we need to know about?

Let's pray-

Father, thank you that you care about our lives and the plans we have. Thank you that you delight in our desire to please you. Father, we lift up to you all of the things we have listed. We know you can calm storms, heal the sick and soften the human heart. We ask that you are with us as we put on these events. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Birthday and Candles

Before we go any further, we need to do the birthdays. Who here has had a birthday recently?

Child to light 2 purple candles and the pink candle.

It is the fourth Sunday in advent and so today we will light four candles. But to start with, we will only light three – we'll light the fourth towards the end. The first three candles represent Hope, Peace and Joy. Lots of religions use candles in their spiritual practice but for Christians everything we do points us to Jesus. The light of the candle represents Jesus as the light of the world and the hope, peace, joy and love that he brings to us as we live out our lives in the reality of a life filled with ups and downs.

Reading

Luke 2:4-18 (NLT)

because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,

and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished,

Introductory Message

Have you ever wondered why we do all this? ... Why do we put on the nativity year after year? Why have we put cards through hundreds of doors? Why are we singing carols in Harwood Park tomorrow? The answer is written at the end of what XXX just read – *After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone and all who heard the shepherds' story were astonished.* This is news that they couldn't just hold inside. It's news that – if we've really comprehended it – we can't just hold inside. --- The play you are about to watch, and hopefully take part in, will be amazing because the truth it conveys is astonishing. Just like the shepherds and angels, you will sing and glorify our God in the highest heaven. Just like the shepherds you will hear all about the baby Jesus. But will you go the extra step? Will you hurry to meet him? Will you recognise him? The shepherds needed someone to tell them how to find this heavenly saviour. The "God with us". Now it is our job to find out more about Jesus and how we can have God with us.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father. When the shepherds arrived at the manger, they knew who was lying there. And after seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened. Father-God As we watch this play, we ask that our hearts are opened and we see who Jesus is. And we

ask that you give us the same joy that the shepherds' had, so we want to tell everyone all about the Emmanuel. The God-with-us. Amen

2nd Carol

Chosen from jar

Nativity (Part 1)

I'm usually in favour of creative licence, but this story is a special instance, so I might add bits, but I won't change the important parts, because this story is about the birth of Jesus the King. And everyone needs to take part in this, so when I say, "Christmas story!" please reply – "It's all about Jesus!"

Okay – Let's have a practice. [Narrator] will say "Christmas story!" and we'll all respond "It's all about Jesus!"

Christmas story. **It's all about Jesus.**

So we'll start with Mary, a quiet village girl.

Who never expected to become known across the world.

Can all the Marys, come and stand in the front, and look like you're busy, sweeping the floor, baking bread or washing up the pots and pans.

That's great, and everyone else keep paying attention, because this is only the start of the Christmas story – **It's all about Jesus!**

So, all our Marys are toiling away,

Not expecting anything special to happen today.

But God was going to interrupt her cleaning,

With some news an angel would be revealing.

Mary was just sweeping under the chair,

When she got the feeling someone else was there.

Can all our angels come to the front, and each pick a Mary – you’re going to scare her!

[Repeat instruction] So after three, all the angels and the whole congregation will say “boo”

and all the Marys will freeze and say “who are you?”

Ready to say “boo”? 1, 2, 3, “boo!” “Who are you?”

[Angels & Marys stay standing in pair]

The angel Gabriel told Mary not to fear,

He had a wonderful message she needed to hear.

God had been looking for someone to give birth to his son,

And Gabriel was here to tell her she was the one.

But Mary said, “How can this be?”

I’m not really in a position to have a baby.

[Repeat instruction] The angels need to say “Don’t be afraid, you will have God’s son” and

Mary’s say, “How can that be?”

Ready? 1, 2, 3...

Mary wondered how Joseph would take the news.

She thought he might be annoyed and confused.

“Don’t worry about that,” the angel said.

God has it in hand and you will still be wed.

Mary accepted God's job for her, feeling amazed,

And she and Gabriel went their separate ways.

That's how Mary found out her part in the Christmas story. **It's all about Jesus!**

[Angels & Marys shake hands] **So Marys and angels go back to your seats and Josephs it's time to come to the front and start miming being a carpenter. Maybe drink tea, read the newspaper and bang some nails.**

Now Joseph was a carpenter who was kind and good.

He made a modest living working with wood.

He'd been looking forward to married life with Mary,

But she'd told him something that was really scary.

All of the plans were in place for them to be wed,

But could he really believe all that she'd said?

His head was in a spin; his mind was reeling;

He couldn't work out what he was feeling.

Now, let's see our acting skills. [Narrator] will read out some emotions and the Josephs have to act them out with their faces and bodies.

Was he shocked? **Shocked faces.**

Was he sad? **Sad faces.**

Was he confused? **Confused faces.**

Was he angry? **Angry faces.**

He still loved Mary but the wedding couldn't go ahead.

He decided on that as he got ready for bed.

Josephs lie down to have a sleep. [They lie down]. Okay.

While [Narrator] reads the next part can the angels come up to the front and stand by a

Joseph but be really quiet so you don't wake him?

When Joseph was having a much needed snooze,

An angel came to explain the news.

He said Mary was still the right girl to marry.

It really was God's baby she had been asked to carry.

The angel told him not to be afraid,

And filled him in on the plans God had made.

He told him about the baby and that Jesus would be his name,

And Joseph decided the wedding was back on again.

So that's why Joseph decided to stay in the Christmas story. **It's all about Jesus!**

Can all the Josephs jump up excitedly and all the Marys come and join them and give them a hug.

The Roman Emperor Caesar had told everyone in the land,

Some concerning news that a census was planned.

Everyone had to make the journey to their home town,

Where they would need to write their details down.

So, Marys & Josephs and donkeys will make their way round the whole church back to the stage that will be transformed into Bethlehem during the carol. Try to time arriving on the stage for the end of the song. [Swap sign from Nazareth to Bethlehem]

3rd Carol

(Chosen by congregation)

Nativity (Part 2)

I need some innkeepers to come up to the front. Stand around the stage and while [Narrator] reads the next part, the Josephs will be going round and round miming asking for a room and you'll shake your head and point to one of the other inn keepers.

Mary was tired and wanted to sleep,

So they looked for an inn that was comfy and cheap.

No-one had room and they nearly lost hope.

Mary was wondering how she was going to cope.

They were offered a stable and had to make do,

With a dirty floor and the smell of animal poo!

And that is how an innkeeper got involved in the Christmas story. **It's all about Jesus!**

The innkeepers can sit near the front. Can all the Marys and Josephs come and sit in the stable. If there are any animals, they can come and sit here too.

Baby Jesus was born in this dirty place,

God's own son- sent to save the human race.

[Bring a wrapped baby doll to lay in the manger.]

This is the most important part of the Christmas story. **It's all about Jesus!**

So, any shepherds and sheep who are here today, please can you gather at the side, [Point them to field area] and make yourselves comfortable, on the ground, around the fire, some of you sleeping others counting sheep.

[Get the socks ready]

Some shepherds nearby were watching their flocks.

Keeping warm by the fire and washing their socks.

[Throw some socks at the shepherds]

Now shepherds weren't considered holy men,

But on that night – God chose them!

Angels - Please sneak up on the shepherds and get ready to make them jump. After three -
1...2...3..“Boo!”

The shepherds were completely petrified,

They hugged each other, shook and cried.

Hug each other.

But the angel said to them, “Don't you worry.

Run to the town; make sure you hurry!

Look for a baby born in a stable,

Give him a gift, if you are able.”

Angels lit up the sky - It was dazzling bright.

And the shepherds never forgot that amazing night.

Altogether angels – After 3, I want you to say [say twice] “Go and look for the baby in a manger”. Ready - 1, 2, 3...

Shepherds now say to each other [repeat instruction] “Let’s go straight away”. Ready – 1, 2, 3...

This is the part in the bible where it says a “*vast host of other angels*” say “Glory to God! So I need everyone in the congregation to stand up and play the part of the “vast host”. After three, shout “Glory to God!” Ready – 1, 2, 3...

Angels go and stand behind the stable. Shepherds and sheep run round the back of the church and up to the baby Jesus and kneel down in front of him and then sit to the left of the stable.

The shepherds soon found the new-born king

And gave him sheep as their offering.

They knelt by the manger, watched the baby sleeping,

But the shepherds weren’t the best at secret keeping.

Then ran into town, told the world and his wife,

Then went back to the hills and their predictable life.

That’s how the shepherds ran into the Christmas story. **It’s all about Jesus!**

Wise men come and gather in the east! Any stars can you go and stand by the stable and wave at the wise men.

In the East, wise men were gazing into the night,

When they spotted a star unusually bright.

So they checked all their charts peering into the sky,

Could it be announcing the son of the most high?

They conferred for a bit more, considered just maybe.

Yes! There was no doubt – it's a new royal baby.

With a message like that, they should follow the star."

They looked at their maps. It won't be too far.

Wise men can you travel around the back of the church to Jerusalem where Herod is waiting. Can someone please be Herod and wait for them in Jerusalem.

But their journey was long, travelling night after night.

And they wondered a bit if they'd read the stars right.

They stopped at the palace, to find the babe there,

but all that this did was give Herod a scare.

Let's have all the wise men ask, "Where is the new King?" and Herod replies "I'm the King."

Ready Wise Men – 1,2, 3...

Where is the new King?

I'm the King!

Oh no you're not!

[Encourage King to say "Oh yes I am, etc."]

We'll stop that now – this isn't a pantomime! Wise men go to the manger and give Jesus your gifts and then sit on the right of the stable.

While Herod came up with a dastardly plan,
The wise men said, “What now? We’ve done all that we can.”
But at last, in Bethlehem, the star settled above,
What they later described as a baby glowing with love.
They gave him their gifts and bowed down on their knees,
Before they returned to their land overseas.
And that’s how the wise men entered the Christmas story. **It’s all about Jesus!**

[Encourage wise men to sit down and complete the tableau]

But there’s more to this story than a miracle birth,
Jesus had come to save all on the earth.
There were many more parts of this wonderful plan,
Jesus lived in this world as an amazing man.
He was kind and caring; he healed and taught.
He challenged the ways people behaved and thought.
But not everyone liked his example for living.
They disapproved of loving and forgiving.
He was betrayed and eventually killed on a cross.
But God had a plan and all was not lost.
He came back to life, spent more time with his friends,
But even that isn’t where the story ends.
He said God has a plan for each one of you,

If you follow him, he'll be your friend too.

He wants your life to be full of good things.

And the invite isn't just for shepherds and kings,

He has love for each one of us – so much to share.

We'll finish here but it doesn't end there...

Because that's how you can be part of the Christmas story. **It's all about Jesus!**

4th Carol

ALL SIT!!

We will now light the fourth candle which represents Love. The Bible says that God loved the world so much that he gave us Jesus.

4th Candle

Person chosen at start comes up and lights it.

Closing Message

As well as representing love, the fourth candle is known as the angel candle. Have you noticed what a big part angels played in the story? Angels – spiritual beings. There is more to this universe than just the physical things that we can see and these angels are bringing that spiritual dimension right into ordinary shepherds' lives. There are people in our church who can tell stories of times they've been visited by angels, others can give accounts of hearing the voice of God talking to them. I'm sure that most of us here can describe times when something has happened that just seems to go beyond what can be explained in

rational terms. Hopefully that has been a good experience because not all spiritual journeys lead to the Light of the World: not every spiritual journey leads to Jesus. You may not meet angels on a hillside or see a sign in the stars guiding you to God but there are people here willing to help you on your spiritual journey of discovery. Maybe you need to start that journey by staring up at the stars at some point over the next few days and seeing the wonder of the universe realising that the God who made it loves you. Maybe you need to ask someone to pray with you - there are plenty of people here who can do that, just head to the prayer area at the back. Maybe you need to join a life group to journey with God with friends and I'd love to speak to you about the groups we have running in the evenings and afternoons. But whatever you do, don't let the moment pass. The shepherds didn't mess around and nor should you.

Closing Prayer

Let us say the closing prayer together:

God, I pray that we experience the joy of knowing the Prince of Peace this Christmas.

I pray that we know the comfort of spending time with Jesus our wonderful counsellor.

I pray that everyone here may come to know you as their everlasting saviour.

Thank you Lord for your love this Christmas.

Amen.

5th & Final Carol

(chosen by congregation/Calypso Carol if not already chosen)

Thank you everyone for coming. Please grab yourself a mince pie and a cup of tea and stay for a chat!

Sunday 22nd December 2024

Nativity Service

Welcome

1st Carol

Birthdays & Candles

Notices and prayer for the upcoming work of the church

Reading

Introductory Message

2nd Carol

Nativity (part 1)

3rd Carol

Nativity (part 2)

4th Carol

4TH Candle

Closing Message

Prayers

5th & Final Carol