

Christmas resources

The peace of the manger

The Christmas story explored through drama and activity based on **Luke 2.1-20**.

How to use these resources

We intend for this set of materials to be used at any time when you want to celebrate and communicate the Christmas message. They are purposefully designed for all ages together.

We encourage you to use it in its entirety as a crib service or nativity play 'with a difference'. Or of course the various sections can be used separately at any point in your celebrations.

The use of drama builds the Christmas story bit by bit – most of which requires no rehearsal. The 'Scenes' alternate with activities, for the whole gathering to respond to the story.

With social distancing: the activities can be carried out in small groups or household groups as needed. The dramas can be performed by a few people keeping a social distance. Alternatively some of them could be pre-recorded as videos.

You can of course use some or all of this material as part of a service online. Or, if you need to offer the opportunity several times to cater for large numbers, these resources provide you with excellent content to use at each one.

Before you begin

All scripts available to download see [WEB](#).

For very young children

Provide a selection of: dolls, blankets, farm animals, tea towels with headbands, paper crowns and cardboard boxes. Put all the objects in a designated space and invite parents/carers and toddlers to create a stable out of boxes or make them into mangers, wrap the dolls in blankets and arrange the animals. The children and parents/carers can wear the tea towels and crowns and role-play different characters in the story.

Bible notes

RCL Christmas Day Year B Isaiah 9.2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2.11-14; **Luke 2.1-20**

The story of Jesus' birth begins with noise and busyness. Mary and Joseph are swept up in the mass movement of people returning to their family towns and villages for the census. This, alongside the noise and movement found in Isaiah 9 with its war imagery, and Psalm 96 with its song of celebration, gives us a clear example of the hectic nature which makes up human life. However, as the story zooms in on Mary quietly laying her newborn child in a manger, we are reminded that it is in a small, still moment, so easy to miss, that God is found.

Set the scene

Welcome everyone and introduce the theme by playing a game all together.

Busy, busy, STOP! Play some festive music and encourage everyone to act out busy Christmas activities, e.g. wrapping presents, decorating the tree, eating Christmas dinner, shopping. When the music stops, ask everyone to cease their busy Christmas activity and turn to face the crib scene, if you have one, or perhaps the church Christmas tree. Encourage the group to stay completely still in the silence, then start the music again. Repeat a few times.

Busy Bethlehem

This drama introduces the setting of Bethlehem and the beginning of the Christmas story.

You will need: two narrators, the whole gathering can join in, divided into six smaller groups.

Assign each group a different scenario: 'Crammed inn', 'Shepherds and sheep', 'Soldiers', 'Animals', 'Family get together' and 'Market place'.

Ask each group to come up with an action and a sound effect that they keep doing again and again to represent their scenario, e.g. the 'Soldiers' might swing their arms and shout 'left, right, left, right'.

Once all the groups have worked out what they are going to do, have a practise. When you point at a specific group, they start their action/sound effect until you gesture for them to stop. If you raise your hands, they get louder; if you lower your hands, they get quieter. Once you have practised with all the groups, you can start telling the story.

Narrator 1: Bethlehem was usually a pretty quiet town. (point at 'Market place' and raise your hand so that they increase their volume)

Narrator 2: Oh, much quieter than that. We're not in New York here! (wave hands down to quieten them. Keep them going as you talk)

- Narrator 1:** Yes, Bethlehem was a quiet sort of place. Things moved at a slow pace. The shepherds quietly shepherded...
(point to 'Shepherds and sheep', motion to keep them at a low volume)
- Narrator 2:** The soldiers quietly soldiered...
(point to 'Soldiers', motion to keep them at a low volume)
- Narrator 1:** The inn quietly inned...
(point to 'Crammed inn', motion to keep them at a low volume)
- Narrator 2:** The families quietly familialled...
(point to 'Family get together', motion to keep them at a low volume)
- Narrator 1:** And the animals quietly animalled...
(point to 'Animals', motion to keep them at a low volume)
- Narrator 2:** Oh yes, Bethlehem was a very, very, quiet place.
(as you speak, signal to all the different groups to stop)
- Narrator 1:** One day, that all changed. A census had been called. Everyone had to return to their hometowns to be counted.
- Narrator 2:** Bethlehem was busy! The markets were full of people selling and buying.
(signal for 'Market place' to get louder)
- Narrator 1:** The inns were swamped with people.
(signal for 'Crammed inn' to get louder)
- Narrator 2:** Families who hadn't seen each other in years were now all packed into the same house.
(signal for 'Family get together' to get louder)
- Narrator 1:** Stables were jammed full of donkeys and horses, sheep and cows.
(signal for 'Animals' to get louder)
- Narrator 2:** The shepherds were full of excitement as they headed to the hills to keep an eye on the sheep.
(signal for 'Shepherds and sheep' to get louder)
- Narrator 1:** Suddenly, guards were everywhere, keeping an eye on proceedings.
(signal for 'Soldiers' to be loud)
(as the next two lines are read, signal for the groups to get louder and louder)
- Narrator 2:** It was all too easy with the busyness and noise...
- Narrator 1:** The hustle and bustle to miss...to miss...
(signal for everyone to quieten down)
- Narrator 2:** It was all too easy to miss out on what was really going on. That something special was about to unfold.

Game

Before Scene 2 begin to think about Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. Choose a game to play which suits your gathering. Both games work in small groups or for the whole gathering.



What's in the suitcase? Explain that everybody is going to have 30 seconds to study an image showing the contents of Mary and Joseph's suitcase (download from [WEB](#)). The aim is to try and memorise everything Mary and Joseph packed. Then take the image away, and groups will have one minute to write down as many of the items as they can.

Journey to Bethlehem bingo (download from [WEB](#))



'Twas nine months before Christmas

This drama introduces Mary and Joseph and how they were asked to be part of God's plan.

You will need: two narrators. One or more actors will create a freeze-frame for each line. The congregation could either watch or join in.

- Narrator 1:** 'Twas nine months before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
(hold up nine fingers and then mime a 'mouse' action)
- Narrator 2:** But all of a sudden did an angel appear with Mary aghast and screaming 'Oh dear!'
(strike a pose like you are saying 'Ta-da', then mime being terrified)
- Narrator 1:** 'Don't be afraid,' the angel did say in the hope that Mary might not run away.
(move your hands down as if trying to calm people down, then pretend to run away)
- Narrator 2:** Confused and disturbed, she clung to the door desperately trying not to fall to the floor.
(sway on your feet and then clutch at each other)
- Narrator 1:** 'You've found favour with God,' the angel declared while Mary looked up, just a little bit scared.
(do a 'thumbs up' action and then nod as if you are in shock)
- Narrator 2:** But the good news continued of a royal, holy birth and the impending expansion of Mary's slender girth.
(mime putting a crown on your head and then move your hands to make a pregnancy bump)

Narrator 1: Praises to God, young Mary did sing
while Joseph was feeling a rather different sting.
(raise hands up, celebrating and then lower hands and look down to the ground)

Narrator 2: 'Whose child is this?' he wondered aloud,
breaking off the engagement,
saving Mary from the crowd.
(raise hands up to question and then mime 'snapping' something)

Narrator 1: But an angel arrived to set Joseph straight
for his own dear child, he would have to wait.
(pretend to be asleep)

Narrator 2: This boy would be the Lord's,
his name means 'God with us',
to which Joseph agreed
and headed for the census.
(point upwards and then nod and begin to walk)

Narrator 1: On the journey to Bethlehem,
the couple they did go,
but as for room at the inn?
Each one of them said, 'No!'
(shake your head and wag your finger)

Narrator 2: Would a stable make do? Young Joseph was torn,
but indeed, it was there that the baby was born.



Shepherd nativity

This drama would need to be rehearsed in advance. It introduces us to the shepherds who travel to Bethlehem to find the newborn Saviour.

You will need: three shepherds and two narrators who stand to one side. An additional six to eight actors are needed to stand behind the shepherds in a line.

Narrator 1: There were once three shepherds.

Narrator 2: Shane the shepherd.
(Shane waves enthusiastically)

Narrator 1: Seamus the shepherd.
(Seamus waves enthusiastically)

Narrator 2: And Derek.
(Derek waves half-heartedly)

Narrator 1: They looked after sheep on the hills.
(the line of actors say 'baa')

Line of actors: Baa.

Shane: Here, sheepy, sheepy.

Seamus: What good sheep, you are.

Derek: *(grumpily)* Keep the 'baa'ing down!
(the line of actors stop saying 'baa')

Narrator 2: It was windy up on the hills.
(the line of actors pretend to be wind, and the shepherds move as if blown from side to side)

Narrator 1: And cold.
(the line of actors and the shepherds shiver)

Shepherds: Brrr!

Narrator 1: And worst of all, it was lonely.
(the line of actors duck down and the shepherds look around)

Shepherds: Anyone there?

Narrator 2: No one was interested in them, no one came to visit them. It was just them and the sheep.
(the line of actors jump up again and begin to say 'baa' again)

Narrator 1: Often they were just bored.

Shane: I spy with my little eye, something being with 's'.

Seamus: Oh...I don't know...that's a hard one.

Derek: It's sheep. It's always sheep!

Narrator 2: And then one night, something amazing happened.

Discuss

Consider the feelings of Mary and Joseph as they travelled to Bethlehem. This would work as a whole gathering or in small groups.

Thought tracking

In each group, assign two people to the roles of Mary and Joseph, and invite another person to play the role of the angel. Explain that the 'actors' are going to begin to act out the story they have just listened to in *'Twas nine months before Christmas*. However, the action can be stopped at any point by someone from the rest of the group saying 'freeze'. When this happens, the actors should stop and begin a discussion with the audience about how they are feeling at that exact point in time.

For example, Joseph may start his scene trying to explain the situation with Mary. If he is asked to freeze at that point, the group may want to talk about how this makes him feel, e.g. cross, angry, worried, embarrassed. Once the actor has had a chance to discuss this with the group, they should unfreeze and continue acting out the story.

Narrator 1: You see, the sky was usually just full of stars.
(*the line of actors make 'jazz hands' and sing...*)

Line of actors: (*singing*) Twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder what you are.

Narrator 2: But suddenly an angel appeared.
(*one actor steps out of the line*)

Actor: Ta-da!

Shepherds: (*huddling together*) Aah!

Narrator 1: The angel said, don't be afraid.

Actor: Don't be afraid!

Narrator 2: I have come with good news!
(*line of actors give a 'thumbs up'*)

Narrator 1: Today, the saviour has been born.
(*line of actors mime rocking a baby*)

Narrator 2: Go and visit him, you will find him in a manger, wrapped in cloth.
(*line of actors mime wrapping a baby in cloth and setting him in a manger*)

Narrator 1: And then the sky was full of angels.
(*individual actor steps back into the line*)

Line of actors: Ta-da!

Narrator 2: And they burst into song.
(*line of actors sing from Handel's 'Alleluia chorus'*)

Line of actors: Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

Narrator 1: And then the angels disappeared.
(*line of actors turn their backs on the audience*)

Narrator 2: The shepherds were amazed.

Shane: Amazing!

Seamus: Incredible!

Narrator 1: Even Derek!

Derek: What are we waiting for? Let's go!

Narrator 2: And so, off they ran. Past their sheep...
(*line of actors jump around and 'baa'. The shepherds run up and down the line of actors*)

Narrator 1: Past the guards on patrol around Bethlehem...
(*line of actors march on the spot*)

Narrator 2: Past the people sleeping in their beds...
(*line of actors mime being asleep*)

Narrator 1: They ran looking for a baby.

Narrator: They ran looking for our Saviour.

Make

Work together to make a reminder of the angels who were messengers in Scene 3.



A giant angel!

You will need: an A5 piece of paper for everyone, coloured pens/pencils, scissors, glue, a large piece of paper (approximately 3x2 metres).

- Give everyone an A5 piece of paper. Ask them to draw round one of their hands to create a handprint outline.
- Invite them to decorate and colour in their handprints using the pens and pencils, and to make them as colourful as possible. Once the handprints are complete, encourage everyone to cut them out.
- Meanwhile, spread the large sheet of paper out at the front. Ask a volunteer from the group to lie in the middle with their arms by their sides. Draw round the volunteer to produce a person outline in the centre of the paper with plenty of space to spare on either side.
- Invite everyone to come and stick their completed handprints around the shoulders of the person outline – fingers facing towards the edges of the paper, to form two large wings.
- Once the giant angel picture is complete, add it to the nativity scene in your church/building, or at the front in a prominent place then move on to Scene 4.



Christmas carols

In this drama, Jesus has been born and we meet him in the stable. **You will need:** one narrator.

There will be some instances where the congregation will be asked to sing. If you have a choir or singing group, let them know in advance what the songs will be so that they can join in, singing loudly.

Before you begin, ask for two volunteers to dress up as Mary and Joseph, give them a doll/baby to hold and ask them to stand at the front. Ask for some other volunteers to dress up in simple shepherd costumes and stand at the back of the room.

Explain to everyone that you are going to tell this part of the story together. They need to just follow the words that appear on the screen (or you can provide song sheets).

Narrator: The baby had been born. Mary and Joseph held him in their arms. It was so quiet.
(*screen or sheet shows words and the people are invited to sing*):

Everyone: **Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright.**

Narrator: Except how quiet in a stable could it have possibly been?
(*encourage animal impressions, either using pictures on the screen or prompting the names of animals*)

Narrator: Yes, the cattle would have been lowing.
(screen or sheet shows words and the people are invited to sing):

Everyone: **The cattle are lowing,
the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus
no crying he makes.**

Narrator: Although how much chance was there really that the baby wasn't crying?
(encourage the gathering to make the loudest crying noise they can)

Narrator: And things were about to get even noisier, as a bunch of shepherds entered, looking for the newborn Saviour.
(invite those dressed up as shepherds to come to the front. Encourage them to mine looking around for a baby. As they move, encourage the gathering to make the loudest sheep noises they can)

Narrator: When they found the baby, they were amazed!
(ask the shepherds to look amazed and invite the whole gathering to say a loud, 'Wow!')

Narrator: They explained how they met some angels up on the hills.
(screen or sheet shows words and the people are invited to sing):

Everyone: **Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn king.
Peace on earth, and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled.**

Narrator: And when the shepherds had seen the baby, they went all across Bethlehem, telling people what they had seen.
(encourage the shepherds to scatter out around the congregation, looking excited)

Narrator: And everyone who heard was amazed.
(ask the whole gathering to say a loud, 'Wow!')

Narrator: And then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God.
(screen or sheet shows words and the people are invited to sing):

Everyone: **Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and
nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.**

Narrator: And then silence returned to the stable.
(screen or sheet shows words and the people are invited to sing):

Everyone: **Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright.**

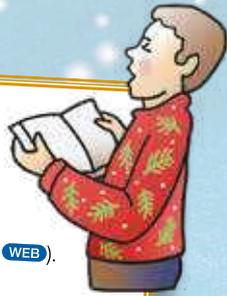
Narrator: Well, at least for a few minutes.

Sing

Join together to sing a song before Scene 5.

'There was a stable in Bethlehem' to the tune of 'Old Macdonald' with the suggested actions (see [WEB](#)).

Songs from Same Boat Music
O holy night (stars have come out) [WEB](#).



Peace at last

This drama reflects on the birth of Jesus from Mary's perspective.

You will need: one actor dressed as Mary to read or perform the following:

Mary: It was worth it in the end, though. Don't get me wrong, there were complications – we ended up having to shack up with some animals. Of course, there was the giving birth bit – well, that was more than a complication – it was sore...unbelievably sore! And then those shepherds showed up, shouting about angels and peace on earth. A crazy end to a crazy few months. It had been so full of noise and chaos!

And then at last, as I held him, held my baby in my arms, suddenly it all felt right. Don't get me wrong, I still don't really understand any of this. How can this little child be the Son of God? It's mind-blowing. But as I sat there, none of that mattered. That sleeping baby in my arms was a reminder that God's promise had come true. I couldn't ask for anything for more. This surely was 'peace on earth' and not just for me, but for the whole world.

Pray

You will need: an image of Mary and baby Jesus (download from [WEB](#)), or an actor playing Mary with a doll for Jesus to stand in a tableau.

Play 'A baby changes everything' by Faith Hill, as people think about the words in the drama and look at the image (or at the tableau).

Close with this prayer:
The birth of a child – God's promises made flesh.
Thank you, Lord, for the Christmas peace we have because of that birth.
Help us to live as people of promise and people of peace.
Amen.





God with us

This drama concludes the action as the meaning of Jesus' birth is explored.

You will need: two narrators.

Ask everyone to get back into their groups (see *Busy Bethlehem*) and practise their actions again.

Narrator 1: Bethlehem was a very quiet place.

Narrator 2: Until one day, that all changed: a census had been called – everyone had to return to their hometowns to be counted.

Narrator 1: Bethlehem was busy! The markets full of people selling and buying.
(signal for 'Market place' to do their action and make their noise loudly)

Narrator 2: The inns were swamped with people.
(signal for 'Crammed inn' to do their action and make their noise loudly)

Narrator 1: Relatives that hadn't seen each other in years were now all packed into the same house.
(signal for 'Family get together' to do their action and make their noise loudly)

Narrator 2: Stables were full of donkeys and horses.
(signal for 'Animals' to do their action and make their noise loudly)

Narrator 1: The shepherds escaped the busy streets by heading to the hills to keep an eye on the sheep.
(signal for 'Shepherds and sheep' to do their action and make their noise loudly)

Narrator 2: Suddenly guards were everywhere, keeping an eye on proceedings.
(signal for 'Soldiers' to do their action and make their noise loudly. As the next two lines are read, signal for the groups to get louder and louder)

Narrator 1: It was all too easy with the busyness and noise.

Narrator 2: The hustle and bustle to miss...to miss...
(signal for everyone to quieten down)

Narrator 1: It was all too easy to miss out on what was really going on. That something special was about to unfold.

Narrator 2: That God had quietly entered the world.

Narrator 1: God, the one who had created the world.

Narrator 2: The one had breathed life into the dust.

Narrator 1: The one whose power knows no equal.

Narrator 2: Had made himself small.

Narrator 1: Made himself into a baby.

Narrator 2: The king of kings lay in a manger.

Narrator 1: His arrival only noticed by a teenage mother.

Narrator 2: A concerned carpenter.

Narrator 1: And a bunch of shell-shocked shepherds.

Narrator 2: Life carried on as normal for most people.

Narrator 1: Hectic.

Narrator 2: Noisy!

Narrator 1: Swept up in the decisions of mighty emperors.

Narrator 2: And kept busy with everyday anxieties and worries.

Narrator 1: But little did they know, everything had changed.

Narrator 1: The Saviour had arrived.

Narrator 2: And his name was Jesus.

Narrator 1: Immanuel.

Narrator 2: God with us.



Send out

After Scene 6, invite the whole gathering to move out of their seats and gather near a crib scene, or other prominent Christmas decoration. Light a candle or indicate a change in atmosphere, and encourage everyone to pause for a few moments to think about everything they have taken part in.



Talk together

Ask people to reflect and/or talk with one another about these questions:

- Which part of this gathering was the most memorable and why?
- How have you been transformed during this journey we have taken together?
- How will the peace of the manger change you as you leave this place and head back into the busyness of Christmastime?

Then conclude with these words:

As we stand here quietly, allow yourself to feel the calm of this moment.

With all the noise and busyness of Christmas, let the silence of this place wash over you.

Let that peace surround you and go with you as you leave today.

Live your faith

Encourage everyone to put their faith into action when they go home using the idea below.

Find as many scenes of the manger as you can: on cards, as part of your Christmas decorations, in books and Bibles. Designate a space in your house to place a few of the images together. Each time you pass your manger scenes, pause, even if you are very busy, and remember the peace of the manger.