

Sing the story

A carol service to celebrate the Christmas story

Christmas with children

Luke 2.18-20

Amid the busyness of the angels celebrating and the shepherds hurrying to Bethlehem, we find Mary quietly pondering what Jesus' birth means. Singing and celebrating go together with quiet wondering about this amazing story.

These four pages are an outline of a carol service for all ages to use at any time over the Christmas period, based on the Bible passage for Christmas Day. For very young children, offer dressing-up costumes, or crib figures to play with during the carol service. A session is available for this age group on the [WEB](#).

Preparation

The passage is divided into six sections – these, with the artwork are available in a slideshow to make it simple to **Share the story** (see [WEB](#)). The short sections are designed to be easy for children to read aloud as part of the service.

After each passage is a way to **Explore the story**, at which point leaders can help guide everyone by reflecting

on the Bible passage, exploring it through activity and introducing a way to join in with the next carol.

Sing the story follows the activity, at which point everyone sings the carol/song together, including ideas from the activities. Gather a music group together or use recorded music, and ensure there are plenty of people on hand to help everyone with their activities.

Bringing the sequence to a close, **Live the story** provides a sending out prayer and you can also give out copies of the Christmas Day **Activity sheet** and **ROOTS at home** resource at this point with all those who have participated in the service. Both can be found on the [WEB](#) along with additional prayers and songs, links, templates and images.

Begin the story

Start the carol service with this prayer.

God of singing and celebration,
our lives are full of big moments
like the extraordinary moment we celebrate today.
Help us to make sense of these moments
and celebrate the birth of your Son. **Amen.**

O little town of Bethlehem

Share the story

The Emperor, Caesar Augustus, sent out a ruling that everyone in the Roman Empire should be counted. Everyone had to go back to their home town to be registered. So Joseph set out from Nazareth to Bethlehem in Judea, with Mary, to whom he was engaged, and who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for the child to be born. Luke 2.1-5



Explore the story

You will need: for each row of chairs in the space provide a box, containing the following items: A4 paper, pens/crayons, glue, scissors, glitter, shiny paper, stars, ribbon, fabric, newspapers/magazines.

- Welcome everyone to the service and ask each household/group to create a collage using the materials in their box, representing what Christmas means to them, considering the line of the carol, 'the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight'. There might be anxieties as well as excitements, as lots of thoughts come together in a celebration of Jesus' birth.
- Give 10 minutes for this, then invite people to bring their creations to the front during the carol.



Sing the story

O little town of Bethlehem

It was on a starry night

Share the story

Mary gave birth to her first-born son. She wrapped him tightly in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, in a stable, because there was no room for them at the inn. **Luke 2.6-7**



Explore the story

- Talk about the collages that have been displayed. Pick out a few examples of what Christmas means and invite some groups to explain their creations.
- Draw out that Christmas is a time to celebrate, and it's become a time of traditions – with every person/family having their particular way of doing things. But among all the familiarity and traditions of Christmas, there are extraordinary moments to make sense of: God being born in a stable among ordinary people and animals; majestic angels appearing in the sky to tell dirty, ragged shepherds of the Saviour's birth; and the amazing message that God coming to earth means all people can know God.
- Encourage everyone to think about what it must have been like to have actually been there that first Christmas night – to wonder and to celebrate, as they sing the next carol.
- Show and ask people to join in with actions for the chorus of the next carol: 'twinkly' fingers for the stars, peaks with your hands for the hills, rest your head on your hands to mime sleeping, use both hands to be wagging ears for the cattle shed/manger bed, rock a baby for 'a boy was born' and pretend to place a crown on your head for, 'king of all the world'.



Sing the story

It was on a starry night

While shepherds watched

Share the story

In the countryside nearby there were shepherds, watching over their sheep. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Don't be afraid. I bring you news of great joy – joy to be shared with everyone. Today, a Saviour has been born. He is the Messiah that you've waited for. You will find him wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger.' **Luke 2.8-12**



Explore the story

You will need: shepherds' headdresses (tea towels and rope), angels' halos/wings.

- Invite some children to be shepherds, and others to be angels, then ask everyone to mime the story as you sing.
- You can practise this together beforehand, and ask everyone to join in with facial expressions and actions for the responses and feelings of the different characters. Encourage everyone to imagine the dark hillside and how the shepherds might have been feeling as the events unfolded.



Sing the story

While shepherds watched

Hark the herald angels sing

Share the story

Suddenly the skies were filled with God's angels singing, 'Glory to God in the highest; and peace to God's people on earth'. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

Luke 2.13-14



Explore the story

You will need: angel and wings (see template on [WEB](#)) printed on A3 paper, sticky tac, scarf, torches.

- As a celebration of angels as messengers, invite people up to play 'Stick the wings on the angel'.
- Attach the angel outline to a wall or board. Ask for a volunteer to be blindfolded (using the scarf), spun around and then aim to put the wings in the correct place on the angel outline using the sticky tac.
- After a few volunteers have had a go, ask everyone to imagine the sense of celebration. The sky filled with angels singing would have been incredibly loud, bright and celebratory.
- As you're singing the next carol, turn the lights down and invite people to turn on the torches on their mobile phones (provide torches for those who don't have phones). Wave these during the carol to represent the angels filling the sky.



Sing the story

Hark the herald angels sing

Away in a manger

Share the story

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem, where they found Mary, Joseph and the baby, lying in the manger.

Luke 2.16



Explore the story

You will need: paper and pens.

- Point out that the extraordinary moment of the angels appearing to the shepherds required a response (for the shepherds to leave the hill, and their sheep, and then travel to worship Jesus).
- The extraordinary act of Jesus being born on earth also requires a response from us today. Will we say yes to Jesus this Christmas? And what does this mean for our life? Explain that the last verse of this carol is a prayer, asking Jesus to be near us, to bless us and to help us to be 'fit' – or ready – for heaven. What might this mean for each one of us?
- When singing the next carol, pause before the last verse and ask everyone (individually or in groups) to write their own fourth verse to the tune of 'Away in a manger', as a response to Jesus being born on earth.



Sing the story

Away in a manger

Come and join the celebration

Share the story

Giving praise and glory to God, the shepherds told everyone what they had seen and heard, and everyone was amazed. As for Mary, she thought deeply about all these words and treasured them in her heart. **Luke 2.17-20**



Explore the story

You will need: balloons (not inflated), slips of paper, pens, biodegradable glitter.

- Before singing the final carol, emphasise that Christmas is a celebration! Explain that, although the next carol is loud and joyful, celebrations don't always need to be. Mary celebrated everything that had happened by pondering quietly in her heart. Encourage everyone to make time over Christmas to quietly remember what God did for us, through Jesus, on that first Christmas, and to consider what this means – and requires – for us today.
- As you sing this carol, invite people to collect a balloon, a slip of paper, a pen and some glitter. Ask them to write, on their slip of paper, one reason why Jesus being born is worth celebrating, then roll up the paper and put it inside their balloon, then ask them to add the glitter inside the balloon and blow it up.
- Invite everyone to take their balloons home and, when it pops or deflates – and the excitement of Christmas is over – their words inside will remind them of the reason behind the celebration, and the glitter will remind them that, because the Jesus of Christmas is always with us, the celebration continues.



Sing the story

Come and join the celebration

Live the story

Send everyone out after the carol service with this prayer.

Lord Jesus,
 may we be messengers of celebration;
 may our lives proclaim peace on earth;
 may our actions invite those around us to go
 and discover the Saviour who waits for them.
Amen.

If there is time before everyone disperses, sing more carols together, while also giving out copies of the Christmas Day **Activity sheet** and **ROOTS at home** resource.

