

## Community-Developed

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## No Rehearsal Nativity

### Preparation beforehand

- The week beforehand, invite all the children (and adults, if they wish) to come dressed as their favourite character from the Nativity.
- Write 'messages' from God for Mary, Joseph, The Whole World, Angels, Shepherds, Magi, Everyone Here. Each goes inside an envelope. See Appendix for the messages.
- Provide some simple crowns, stars on sticks or star headbands, tea towels, dressing gowns etc. for make-shift costumes in case children arrive who would like to take part but haven't got a costume.
- Have two or three Baby Jesus dolls, in case Mary doesn't arrive with one. Provide a manger.
- Prepare large signs saying Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, sheep, other animals, donkey, Magi, Innkeeper, Star, Anyone else. On the day, give each of these to an adult – they will act as the rallying point for the different characters before the Nativity begins.

### On the day

*Just before the Nativity begins, ask the adults to hold up their signs and invite the children to go and sit or stand near the adult who is holding the name of their character. Place the manger at the front of the area where the tableau will happen. A Christmas carol could be sung while this movement happens.*

*Depending on the layout of the church or room, you might tell the story from the front (with adults shepherding the various groups into place at the right time) or move to each group as you deliver the message to them and lead them into their positions.*

*Don't worry if there are several Mary and Josephs – we don't know what they really looked like so cover by saying something like: Maybe Mary looked like this, or Joseph looked like this. We don't know so these Mary and Joseph's will help us imagine.*

*Tell the story in your own words adapting this outline to suit your situation:*

## **The Narrative**

This story begins a long, long time ago in a small town called Nazareth. A young girl called Mary lived there. *(Invite Mary/Marys to join you at the front.)* God sent an angel to Mary with a special message for her. *(Don't invite the angels at this point – just get Mary to pretend her surprise at the unexpected visitor.)*

*Open the envelope that says 'Mary' and read the message:* Dear Mary, I would like you to be the mother of my son. Will you say yes? Love from God.

*Ask Mary if she will say yes. (Hopefully she will.) Invite her to sit down near you.*

There are more people in this story. Mary was engaged to a carpenter who lived in Nazareth. He was called Joseph. *(Invite Joseph to join you.)* One night Joseph had a very surprising dream. He dreamt that he received a message from God.

*Open the 'Joseph' envelope:* Dear Joseph, Your fiancée Mary is going to have a baby who will be my son. Will you take care of Mary and the baby? Love from God. P.S. Please remember to call the baby Jesus.

*Ask Joseph if he will take care of Mary and the baby. Once he says yes, get him to sit down with Mary.*

Exclaim 'Here's another message!' *Open the envelope marked 'To the Whole World':* Listen up, everyone. I need to know how many people there are in my Empire. Everyone must go back to the place where they were born so that I can count them. By order of the Emperor Augustus'.

Oh! That message wasn't from God. It was from the Roman Emperor who was in charge! Everyone had to pay attention to what he said.

Joseph's family came from Bethlehem but Joseph lived in Nazareth. So he and Mary had to travel all the way to Bethlehem. *(If a donkey has turned up, invite the donkey to be part of Mary and Joseph's journey.)* It wasn't an easy journey, because Mary's baby was coming soon.

*Depending on the venue, send Mary and Joseph on a journey while you get the Innkeeper/s in place.*

At last Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. They were very tired and the baby was coming soon. Joseph needed to find somewhere for them to stay. But lots of other people had also travelled to Bethlehem and there wasn't anywhere to stay. (*Go from innkeeper to innkeeper (real or pretend), hammer on the door (or stamp your foot) and get Mary & Joseph to ask, 'Have you any room?' All innkeepers say No until the last one who says 'I only have a stable'.*)

(*Get Mary & Joseph to sit down by the manger.*) It was a smelly stable, but it was safe and warm. *If you have 'other animals' invite them to come and be in the stable.* Joseph and Mary settled down and that night the baby was born. (*Produce the Baby Jesus.*)

*Gather the angels together.*

Angels are God's messengers. And God had a very important message for the angels to deliver. *Open the Angel envelope.* Angels, I need you to fly to the fields outside Bethlehem. There are some shepherds who need to hear that my son has been born. Will you tell them the good news? Love from God.

*Get the shepherds and sheep to stand some distance from Mary & Joseph and have the angels 'fly' to them.*

That night there were shepherds in a field outside Bethlehem looking after their sheep. It was very late and they were very tired. But suddenly the sky lit up. There were angels everywhere (*angels cluster around the shepherds*) and they had a message for the shepherds.

*Open the envelope marked 'Shepherds':* Dear Shepherds, a very special baby has been born. He is in a stable in Bethlehem. You are the very first people to know! Will you go and see him? Love from God.

*Encourage the Shepherds to say Yes We Will! Then the Shepherds join Mary & Joseph and the Angels follow and stand behind them.*

In a country far away, some wise people, Magi, were looking at the sky. Suddenly they saw a very bright star which they had never seen before. That star is a message, they said.

*Open the envelope marked 'Magi':* Dear Wise People, This bright star is a message to tell you that a very special baby has been born. Will you follow the star and find him? Love from God.'

*Encourage the Magi to say Yes We Will. If you have a Star, the Magi follow the star to the stable. Otherwise they journey around the room to get there.*

It was a very long journey. When the wise people found the stable they were so excited! This was the special baby – a special king – God's Son! They gave him the very special presents that they had brought – gold and frankincense and myrrh.

*At this point, if you have children who have come as any other characters – and I've had cowboys, etc.! – say something like:* And ever since then people have come to find God's son, Jesus, born in a stable, but still here with us now. *Invite all the other characters to come to the nativity scene. At this point you could sing Away in a Manger or another simple carol together.*

*Show surprise that there is still one envelope left. Oh – this one is for Everyone Here: Dear Everyone at (name of church), My son Jesus was born in Bethlehem and I'm glad that you are remembering his birth. But Jesus is with you now, showing you how to live my way. Will you listen to what he says and do the things he does so that people will know me? Will you try to love other people the way I love you – not just today but every day? Love from God.*

*Thank the children for helping to tell the story and then introduce another carol to be sung as the children return to their families.*

## **APPENDIX**

Write out these messages and place them in labelled envelopes.

### **MARY**

Dear Mary, I would like you to be the mother of my son. Will you say yes? Love from God.

### **JOSEPH**

Dear Joseph, Your fiancée Mary is going to have a baby who will be my son. Will you take care of Mary and the baby? Love from God. PS Please remember to call the baby Jesus.

### **THE WHOLE WORLD**

Listen up, everyone. I need to know how many people there are in my Empire. Everyone must go back to the place where they were born so that I can count them. By order of the Emperor Augustus'.

### **ANGELS**

Angels, I need you to fly to the fields outside Bethlehem. There are some shepherds who need to hear that my son has been born. Will you tell them the good news? Love from God.

**SHEPHERDS**

Dear Shepherds, a very special baby has been born. He is in a stable in Bethlehem. You are the very first people to know! Will you go and see him? Love from God.

**MAGI/WISE PEOPLE**

Dear Wise People, This bright star is a message to tell you that a very special baby has been born. Will you follow the star and find him? Love from God.

**EVERYONE HERE**

Dear Everyone at (name of church), My son Jesus was born in Bethlehem and I'm glad that you are remembering his birth. But Jesus is with you now, showing you how to live my way. Will you listen to what he says and do the things he does so that people will know me? Will you try to love other people the way I love you – not just today but every day? Love from God.