



Nativity Services for church groups



By Jason Sime



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Explanation

This is a collection of nativity services, most of which have been used in local churches. These should not be considered as traditional nativity plays, instead they are a service with spaces left for congregational praise, prayer, offerings, readings and whatever else your congregation likes to fit into a service. Each service tells a story and shares the Gospel message presented in the nativity.

Each service has a subtle focus on a different aspect of the nativity. 'A Superhero Christmas' focuses on Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, 'The Royal Baby' introduces the lesser-known character of Simeon who did not die until he met the promised Messiah. 'The Tree of Life' frames the Gospel story as the bridge between Genesis and Revelation. The '12 Days of Christmas' is a time travelling story that visits 12 key scenes in the nativity story from the OT prophecies to the days after Jesus' birth. 'The Gift' highlights how Jesus is the greatest gift we could ever receive. 'The Herald' tells the story from the point of view of John the Baptist reminiscing.

The 'New King' is a reflection on power and leadership highlighting Christ's eternal rule. 'The Writer' is presented as a 'Back to Basics' attempts to remove all the added details that are never mentioned in the Bible but have become part of the traditional story we tell. The final piece is essentially an all-age carol service that encourages the whole congregation to be involved.

The hope is that there is a teaching point for someone of every level of faith in these services. Christmas is such a busy time and yet a time that flies by so quickly. We often struggle to draw all the teaching points out of the Gospel passages, so this makes it easier to pick a focus during the nativity service.

The children taking part and the congregation in attendance should be able to learn more about the Gospel story during these all-age services of worship.

These services were all initially written with a specific group in mind but have been tweaked to be more general and can be further tweaked by you to suit your group.

Acknowledgements

Almost all the nativities in this resource have been used as a nativity service in the past. I want to acknowledge the work done by staff and volunteers in Lisburn Cathedral, Greystone Road Presbyterian and, Alexandra Presbyterian for helping me to refine the ideas that led to the final versions of these nativities and for taking the initiative in helping the children and volunteers lead the services after I had provided them with an untested script.

Several of those people have encouraged me to make these available as a resource, so thank you for giving me the courage to do this.





A Superhero Christmas!



Our greatest
hero's origin
story

'A Superhero Christmas' tells the "origin story" of the ultimate hero who would save the world from sin.

We explore how God sent his "heroes" in the Old Testament but how they were never intended to defeat sin once and for all. This helps to frame the Christmas story in the context of the time. The people of Israel were waiting for their promised Messiah. Like every hero there is a villain, and while the real villain is The Evil One, he used a pawn of his own called Herod. We see how Herod's plot was foiled by divine intervention.

This service reflects on the miraculous birth of Jesus as being the culmination of what the Old Testament was pointing us towards, a moment in history that changed the path of all history after it.

Roles Needed

Speaking roles

Narrators x4

Gabriel/host:

Mary:

Joseph:

Wise men x3:

Shepherd x3 or just remove the extra shepherd lines or merge into one:

Herod:

Readers x3

Prayers

Readers and prayers can have another role if necessary.

Other roles

Joshua:

Daniel:

Elijah:

Esther:

Angels:

Shepherds:

Herod's guards:

Props needed

Capes x4 (for the narrators)

Trumpet

Lion toy

Bucket of "water" (Really confetti) `

Crown and tray

A doll

Sheep toy

3 gifts

Crown

A Superhero Christmas: A New Hope

Gabriel: Good morning everyone, my name is Gabriel and we are so glad to see you all here today. You are the lucky people who get to see the exclusive first showing of, 'A Superhero Christmas: A new hope.' So please turn off your mobile phones, make sure your popcorn is ready and we hope you enjoy the story of the world's greatest hero!

Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4:

Song or Congregational Praise

Narrators at the front, 2 on each side of the church ideally.

Narrator 1: In the beginning God created the universe and everything in it. God saw all that he had made, and it was good.

Narrator 2: But Sin entered the world and started to slowly turn everything that was good in the world bad. So, God sent in his heroes to help combat sin and make everything good once more.

Narrator 3: One of the heroes God sent was Joshua

(Joshua enters, perhaps carrying a trumpet, he gives us his superhero pose)

Narrator 3: Joshua led the Israelites after Moses; he led them into the promised land of Canaan and helped them topple the walls of Jericho by following God's orders and using their trumpets. Sin was defeated, but only for a while.

(Joshua exits)

Narrator 4: Another hero sent by God was Elijah!

(Elijah enters carrying a jug/bucket of water, he gives us his superhero pose)

Narrator 4: Elijah was one of the great prophets of God in a time when people believed in false gods. He remained faithful to the Lord and challenged Sin's minions to an epic battle of faith on Mount Carmel. The prophets of the false god were unable to set fire to their bull, but Elijah, after having the bull drenched in water, prayed to God and his bull was burnt to a crisp. Sin was defeated, but only for a while.

(Elijah exits)

Narrator 1: God sent another one of his heroes, Daniel!

(Daniel enters, perhaps carrying a cuddly lion toy, he gives us his superhero pose)

Narrator 1: God sent the hero Daniel to his people when they were living in a foreign land. The people in this land did not worship God and even made it illegal to worship God. Daniel showed great faith and continued to worship God, once he was caught, he was thrown into the lions' den as his punishment, but God protected his faithful hero Daniel, he sent his angels to shut the mouths of the lions. The next day the King discovered that Daniel was alive and ordered his Kingdom to worship God. Sin was defeated, but only for a while.

(Daniel exits)

Narrator 2: Another one of God's heroes was Esther.

(Esther enters wearing a crown, she gives us her superhero pose)

Narrator 2: Esther showed great faith in God at a time when God's people were being punished for worshipping God. With the help of her uncle Mordecai, she was able to marry the King and convince him to stop punishing God's people. Sin was defeated, but only for a while.

(Esther exits)

Narrator 3: There was a reason that God had to send his heroes, they were sent to push back the agents of sin!

Narrator 4: That's right, Joshua battled the powers that worshipped false gods in Jericho and Elijah faced off against Ahab, Jezebel and the prophets of baal.

Narrator 1: Esther foiled Mordecai's plans and Daniel was able to stay strong when those who hated God tried to defeat him.

Narrator 2: The latest agent of sin was a King called Herod, and he was determined to defeat God's hero.

Herod enters with his guards and addresses the church. Play ominous villain music if possible.

Herod: I have heard a rumour, a terrible rumour! God is going to send his ultimate hero to try to defeat sin! But the country is massive, how will I ever find him? How will I know his name?

I've got it! I will use the census the governor has called. That way I will have a list of names and addresses for everyone in the country. No one will be able to escape from me! Once this hero appears I will simply send my guards in and that will be the end of him!

Muahahahahahahaha

Narrator 3: Wow, that Herod one does not seem like a nice person at all, and he already has a plan to stop the next hero! God sent all these wonderful heroes and still they could not defeat Sin?

Narrator 4: Well, they all did beat sin, for a short while.

Narrator 1: Yes, but wasn't there any hero who was able to properly defeat sin, and stop it from returning?

Narrator 2: (Frantically leafing through the Bible)

Well.... um.... Hang on I'm sure I'll find one somewhere.

Gabriel: (Speaking from the back or amongst the congregation)

Wait! Wait! I can help you!

Narrators look a bit confused

Gabriel enters

Gabriel: Here I'll show you where to look, well this is the start of the story anyway, the part where God first sends his ultimate hero, the one who will save the entire world from sin and defeat in entirety!

(Gabriel either hands them a new script or finds the right part of the Bible for them)

Right, start reading this, but give me a minute to go and get ready, I'm in this one.

(Gabriel gives us a thumbs up and exits)

Reading: Isaiah 9:2 &6-7

Praise:

Narrator 3: It all started with a woman named Mary.

(Mary enters and kneels down to pray)

Mary was a faithful woman who always prayed to God. She was just a normal young woman when one day her life was completely changed. She was visited by an Angel named Gabriel who had some surprising news for her.

(Gabriel enters)

Gabriel: Hi Mary, I have come to give you a message from God.

(Mary looks up, a little confused)

Gabriel: I have come to tell you that you are blessed by God, and you will have a baby boy. You will name the baby Jesus because it means saviour. The baby will be the hero the world has been waiting for, the one who will save the world from sin!

Mary: But how can I have a baby? I am not even married yet! Joseph only proposed last week!

Gabriel: Don't worry Mary, you are blessed by God and will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Gabriel and Mary exit. Joseph enters)

Narrator 4: The news was to come as a shock to Joseph as well.

(Joseph enters and falls asleep)

Narrator 4: One night when Joseph was asleep, he was visited by an Angel of God.

(Gabriel enters)

Gabriel: Joseph! Joseph!

Joseph: (Still groggy) What? What is it? Who are you?

Gabriel: I am an angel sent by God; I've come to give you some good news. Your fiancé Mary will have a baby boy. You will call him Jesus, and he will be the hero to save the world from sin!

Joseph: But how can we have a baby? We aren't married yet? And I'm just starting my wooden floor business; I don't know if I have enough money to support a family.

Gabriel: Don't be so silly Joseph, this is a blessing from God!

Joseph: Well, I guess it would be kind of cool to have a son, he can come with me to all the matches!

(Gabriel and Joseph exit)

Praise:

Offering:

Prayer

Reading Luke 2: 1-5:

Narrator 1: So, Joseph took Mary with him to Bethlehem for the census, but they knew it was almost time for Jesus to be born. There was no room left, they had to make do with what they could find!

(Mary and Joseph enter, there is a manger with Jesus lying in it.)

Narrator 2: While they were in their makeshift accommodation Mary gave birth to a baby boy and named him Jesus, just as the angel had told them.

(Mary lifts Jesus out of the manger)

Song or congregational Praise: *Ideal slot for Away in a Manger*

Narrator 3: Meanwhile God had been sending messages to others about the arrival of the hero who would defeat sin.

Narrator 4: God sent a star as a sign to the Wise Men of the East that the ultimate hero would be born. They set out to follow the star until it led them to Judea. On the way they stopped off at the ruler, Herod's, palace to see if he knew where this new hero was.

(A video plays of Herod receiving news of the Wise Men approaching. Ominous music plays and he begins to make his way to his 'throne'. The video stops as he approaches the sanctuary, but the music continues. Herod and his guards/minions enter. He sits on a throne at the opposite end of the room looking mean, the music stops. If you cannot make a video just have Herod approach from the back of the church.)

Herod: Bring in the wise men!

(The wise men then enter and approach Herod)

Herod: Who are you and what do you want?

Wise man 1: Your majesty, we believe that God sent us a message that has led us to your Kingdom.

Wise man 2: We have followed a star all the way from our homes in the East because we believe a new King has been born.

Wise man 3: Not just a new King! But the hero who will save the world from Sin once and for all!

(Herod looks menacing and then looks cunning as if he has a plan and begins to speak to the wise men)

Herod: I don't know anything about a new king or a new hero, but if it's true, I would like to pay him a visit to give him some gifts, when you find him, come back here and let me know where he is.

Wise man 1: I guess we should just keep following the star then.

(The Wise men walk back out)

Herod: Ha! Those fools think I want to give this baby presents! I am the only king here! As for him being a hero? Ha! He will never defeat sin, no one has ever done it before, and they won't do it on my watch! Muahahahahah

(Herod leaves with his guards/minions, laughing menacingly)

Narrator 1: The Wise men weren't the only people who God told about Jesus being born. He also told the shepherds outside Bethlehem.

Narrator 2: I think this is the part where the angel comes back.

Narrator 3: What makes you say that?

Narrator 4: Well, he's/she's highlighted his/ her lines on the script he/she gave me!

(The shepherds enter and crowd round their sheep, possibly a teddy or something. Gabriel comes next)

Shepherd 1: (he is afraid) What is that?

Shepherd 2: Who is that?

Shepherd 2: Why is that?

Gabriel: Don't be afraid. I am an angel sent by God and I have come to give you some good news. A baby has just been born in Bethlehem, and this baby will grow up to be the saviour of the world, the ultimate hero who will defeat sin! His name is Jesus, go and visit him. Look for a baby lying in a manger and you will know it is him.

Shepherd 1: We should go and see this baby!

(The shepherds slowly walk over to where Mary, Joseph and Jesus are).

Shepherd 2: (Points excitedly) There he is! There he is! That's him! That's the baby in the manger!

Mary and Joseph: Shhhhhh! You'll wake him up! We just got rid of that Little Drummer Boy!

Shepherd 3: We're sorry, but an angel of the Lord came to us and told us that this baby will grow up to be the saviour of the world. We wanted to come and visit him and praise God for sending him to us.

Narrator 1: Meanwhile the Wise men had followed the star all the way to Bethlehem. Like the shepherds they also found where Jesus was.

Narrator 2: They approached Mary, Joseph and Jesus and presented their gifts for him.

(The wise men enter)

Wise man 1: We wanted to visit the ultimate hero God that was sending to us. We have brought some gifts for this new king. Gold!

Wise man 2: And frankincense!

Wise man 3: But wait! There's Myrrh!

Narrator 3: The wise men left, but they did not return to Herod because an Angel had told them in a dream not to.

(Gabriel stands up where they are and gives us a wink and a thumb up)

Narrator 4: I bet Herod wasn't pleased!

(Herod comes up to the front and sits on a throne looking angry)

Herod: Those wise men fooled me! I was going to help sin defeat this ultimate hero, and I would have gotten away with it too, if it weren't for that meddling angel!

Praise:

Narrator 1: So that's the story of Jesus being born! He was born in a manger, was visited by shepherds and wise men and got some pretty awesome gifts.

Narrator 2: The Wise Men went back home but avoided Herod and didn't give sin the chance to face God's ultimate hero. Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with Jesus and didn't return to Israel until it was safe.

Narrator 3: But this is only part one of the story. This is just our hero's origin story there is much more to come, like the miracles, the stories he told and that ultimate battle when sin lost for good.

Narrator 4: That's true, but every hero has a great origin story and Jesus' birth is the best one. This is the start of the story of Jesus, the saviour of the world and God's ultimate hero.

Gabriel: Thank you all for joining us this morning, we hope that you have enjoyed today's story and we invite you to stay for coffee after the service. Oh, and Happy Christmas from all of us!

Talk

Praise

Benediction

THE ROYAL BABY

**BREAKING
NEWS**



**“There is a new King born
today!”**

‘The Royal Baby’ is a fun take on the nativity story, told from the point of view of a news report. There is always a buzz of excitement when a Royal Baby is born, this tells the story of the ultimate Royal Baby, the Prince of Peace and King of all creation.

There are no narrators in this service, instead there are certain key characters who drive the service forward in the place of a traditional narrator.

The story allows us to encounter the key people in the story including the ‘Royal Family’, the famous innkeeper and a special panel guest Simeon. The news anchor will interview these people in various aspects of the story to understand what is happening in the country from their point of view.

The service culminates with the easel style announcement of the Royal Baby with Jesus’ titles on it.

Roles Needed

Anchor –
Gabriel –
Mary-
Joseph –
Simeon –
Wise Men –
Herod –
Guest 1-
Guest 2-
Shepherds-
Innkeeper-
Readers x3
Prayer x3

Props Needed:

Desk and chair
Fake Mic
Gifts
Sheep toy
Easel or announcement board
A news these sound effect

‘The Royal Baby’

Welcome & Announcements

Prayer

Immediately after the welcome and announcements, Mary is working away at some chore when Gabriel appears, Mary seems frightened.

Gabriel: ‘Hello Mary, The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, you have found favour with God. You will give birth to a baby boy, and you will call him Jesus. He will be the Son of God, and his Kingdom will never end!’

Mary looks confused

Mary: That can’t be right!

Gabriel: ‘You will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and your son will be the Prince of Peace, the Son of God.’

Mary: ‘Well, I suppose I have to trust in God. I am the Lord’s servant’

Mary Leaves, Joseph enters and sleeps.

Gabriel: ‘I should probably tell Joseph too!’

Gabriel approaches Joseph and speaks to him

Gabriel: Joseph! Wake up! I have news for you

Joseph is groggy and afraid

Gabriel: ‘It’s ok! It’s good news. Mary is pregnant. You have to call the baby “Jesus” because he will be a Royal Baby, the Son of God and he will save the people from their sins.’

Joseph: Is this a dream or is this real life?

Gabriel: ‘YES!’

Joseph looks confused but accepts the news. He and Gabriel both leave. If possible, play a fanfare sound effect.

Praise:

Play a news theme if you can. The anchor sits at the table with a special guest, Simeon. Simeon looks exceptionally old.

Anchor: Hello and welcome to another edition of Judea TV. Our headline story today: Actress Julie Andrews has ended her lucrative sponsorship agreement with a neon lipstick company. Apparently, the lipstick keeps breaking up and gives the wearer bad breath, she is quoted as saying, 'This super-coloured-fragile-lipstick-gives-me-halitosis'

Now, let me introduce this morning's guest, local man, Simeon. Simeon, what is it you want to talk about today.

Simeon: Many years ago, the Holy Spirit came to me, and God promised me that I would get to see the Messiah before I die. Now, I am a very old man, so I am sure that it is nearly time for the Messiah to come.

Anchor: What makes you so sure the Messiah actually will be coming?

Simeon: God has promised us the Messiah. It is in the Bible, and everything in the Bible is true!

Anchor: Thank you, Simeon, we will be back after a short break.

Reading: Isaiah 9: 2&6-7

News theme plays and a breaking news image flash up on the screen

Anchor: We are just receiving some breaking news this very minute! The Emperor himself has called for a full census of the Roman Empire. This means that everyone will have to return to the town of their birth. We will bring you more news as we get it.

Simeon: I am going back to Bethlehem, and I expect to see the Messiah there very soon.

They both leave

Praise:

Joseph enters. Mary is already sitting down with her feet up.

Joseph: 'Have you seen the news, Mary?'

Mary: 'I'm fed up with the news; have we left the Roman Empire yet or has that been pushed back again?'

Joseph: 'Well the emperor has just called a census, and that means we have to go back to Bethlehem.'

Mary: 'How can I travel? I'm ready to have a baby'

Joseph: 'I'll get something sorted, Trainline had a good deal on last week.'

Mary: 'Fine but make sure you book the Premier Inn! They have the best beds!

Joseph: 'Fine, but we have to be ready to leave soon.'

Prayer:

The Wise Men enter with telescopes; they are looking at the star. There is a huge star on the screen or someone dressed up as a star.

Wise Man 1: Do you lot see the size of that star? That can only mean one thing! There's going to be a Royal Baby! I bet he'll be called Edward!

Wise man 2: 'Nah, it'll be William!'

Wise man 3: 'Don't be silly, we already have a Prince William, they should just call him "charming" that the best name for a Prince.'

Wise Man 1: Right stop squabbling, let's go and see if we can find this Royal baby!'

The Wise men leave

Offering:

Prayer:

Praise:

The anchor arrives with Mary and Joseph travelling passed. Joseph has a lot of luggage

Anchor: Excuse me, do you have time for a brief interview?

Joseph: I suppose so

Mary: Make sure it is quick; we don't want to miss the train!

Anchor: Can I ask how you have been affected by the census announced by the Emperor?

Mary: Well, thanks to the Emperor we have to travel all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem for this census.

And I am pregnant, so it is not an easy journey.

Anchor: I see, have you had time to make plans for your travelling?

Joseph: Sorry, we have to go, I've just seen the train pull in, if we miss that we'll have to get 3 busses and walk for a mile! Quickly Mary!

Mary and Joseph move off as quickly as they can

Anchor: Well, we can see that this census has certainly caused a lot of problems for ordinary people. We are hearing stories of many others struggling to get to their hometowns in time for the census, and we have just seen the effect it is having on this young family. Back to the studio.

TV jingle plays (if possible) and the anchor leaves

Praise:

The Wise Men enter, Herod is sitting on his throne.

Herod: Why have you honoured guests come all the way from the east?

Wise Man 1: We have come to see the Royal Baby!

Herod: What Royal Baby? My wife has not had a new baby!

Wise Man 1: We have followed a star all the way from the east. We are sure this means a new Royal Baby has been born.

Herod: Perhaps that does mean a special child has been born. Keep following the star and let me know where you find this baby. I want to visit him and bring him lots of gifts.

Wise Man 1: Yes, your majesty

Herod leaves, the wise men stay and the anchor arrives.

Anchor: Excuse me, do you gentlemen have a moment for an interview?

Wise Man 1: Of course.

Anchor: Where is it you have come from, has the Emperor's census brought you to Judea?

Wise Man 2: We come from the east; we don't know anything about a census.

Anchor: So, if it is not for the census, then what has brought you here? Surely it has been a difficult journey, and the train only goes as far as Jerusalem!

Wise Man 3: We have followed a star because we want to see the Royal Baby!

Anchor: What Royal Baby? I haven't seen the easel outside the palace!

Wise Man 1: Yes well, Herod has told us he knows nothing about it, but we will keep following the star until we find him!

Anchor: There you have it, not only are people flooding into the country for the census, but we even have wise men travelling from the east to visit a Royal Baby. At the minute we know nothing about this royal birth, but we will bring updates as and when we get them. Back to the studio!

Anchor to herself: I wonder if this is what Simeon was talking about...

TV jingle plays

Wise Men and Anchor leave.

Reading: Micah 5:2

The Anchor is onstage with a panel around the table.

Anchor: The Wise Men from the East are here in Bethlehem looking for a Royal Baby, let's get the thoughts of our panel.

Guest 1: If they're looking for a Royal Baby they are in the wrong place! Buckingham Palace is in London.

Anchor: The wise men claim they have followed a star that has led them here to Bethlehem.

Guest 2: Don't talk about following stars, I followed Taylor Swift on Instagram and found out she doesn't like McDonalds, pure broke my heart so it did!

Anchor: I'm not sure it was that kind of star, anything to add Simeon?

Simeon: I don't think it is a Royal Baby like we are thinking. I think this baby will be the Messiah, the Prince of Peace.

Anchor: Yes, yes we have heard your theories before. Anyway, we shall let our viewers decide what they think. We'll be back after this short break.

Prayer:

The Innkeeper is standing behind his reception desk. Mary and Joseph enter.

Mary: Oh, thank goodness we are here, I can't wait to get into my Queen sized bed!

Joseph: Ok wait here, I'll get our room keys.

Innkeeper: Hello, what can I do for you?

Joseph: We have a room booked for Joseph and Mary.

Innkeeper: Can I have your reference number?

Joseph: I don't have one.

Innkeeper: Ok, when did you book this room?

Joseph: A few days ago.

Innkeeper: Yes, but the town is full of people coming back for the census, you must be double booked.

Joseph: Please, you have to help us. My wife Mary is about have a baby.

Innkeeper: I'm afraid the only thing I can do is let you stay in the stables, but it will be smelly.

Joseph: I'll take it! I'll give you a good review online!

They shake hands and then exit

Praise: Ideal slot for Away in a Manger

Mary and Joseph are sitting on the stage with the baby Jesus. The wise men and shepherds are standing at either side. The news anchor is standing at the front waiting to report on the story.

Anchor: Extraordinary scenes here in Bethlehem as the young couple we interviewed trying to catch the train have just had their baby. Why is that an interesting story? I hear you ask, well, this baby has been born in a stable and is currently lying down in a manger. Not only that, but this young family have attracted lots of visitors. Let's move closer and see if we can hear what is going on inside.

Mary: Joseph, do you know these people?

Joseph: Never met them in my life.

Shepherd: We were sent here by an angel. He told us that if we came here, we would see the son of God. We don't have much, but we can give him a lamb as a gift.

Mary: Thank you

Wise man 1: We followed a star all the way here. We believe it is the sign of a new Royal Baby.

Wise man 2: We tried looking at the palace, but this baby, must be a special kind of royalty. Let us give him our gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

They present Jesus with the gifts and they all leave.

The anchor walks to the front and sets up an easel, like the one used outside Buckingham Palace, which says 'Jesus: Prince of Peace' A fanfare plays (if possible).

Reading: Luke 2:22-40 This is acted out by Simeon.

Prayer: by whoever plays Simeon ideally

Praise:

The anchor is sat at the front with her panel around the table. Gabriel has replaced Simeon

Anchor: Well, what a story we have seen in Bethlehem. The son of God has been born into an ordinary family. What's more is, this royal baby wasn't born in a palace, but in a stable, surrounded by animals.

Guest 1: I can't believe a prince would be born in such a smelly place. At least those wise men gave him cool gifts.

Anchor: Don't forget the poor shepherds have him a lamb too.

Guest 1: Well, yes, I suppose

Guest 2: I can't believe nobody was live streaming the whole thing! Imagine the followers you would have got! I'd have added at least 500 premium tier subscribers! Like and subscribe to Guest2@Vlogspot! (*streamer pose*).

Anchor: Um yes... We have a different guest here, we couldn't get in touch with Simeon, what did you say your name was?

Gabriel: I'm Gabriel

Anchor: Do you have anything to add to this fascinating story?

Gabriel: You're right to say it's a fascinating story, but this is just the beginning. Jesus will go on to do amazing things. In fact, he will save all of humanity! We should celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace!

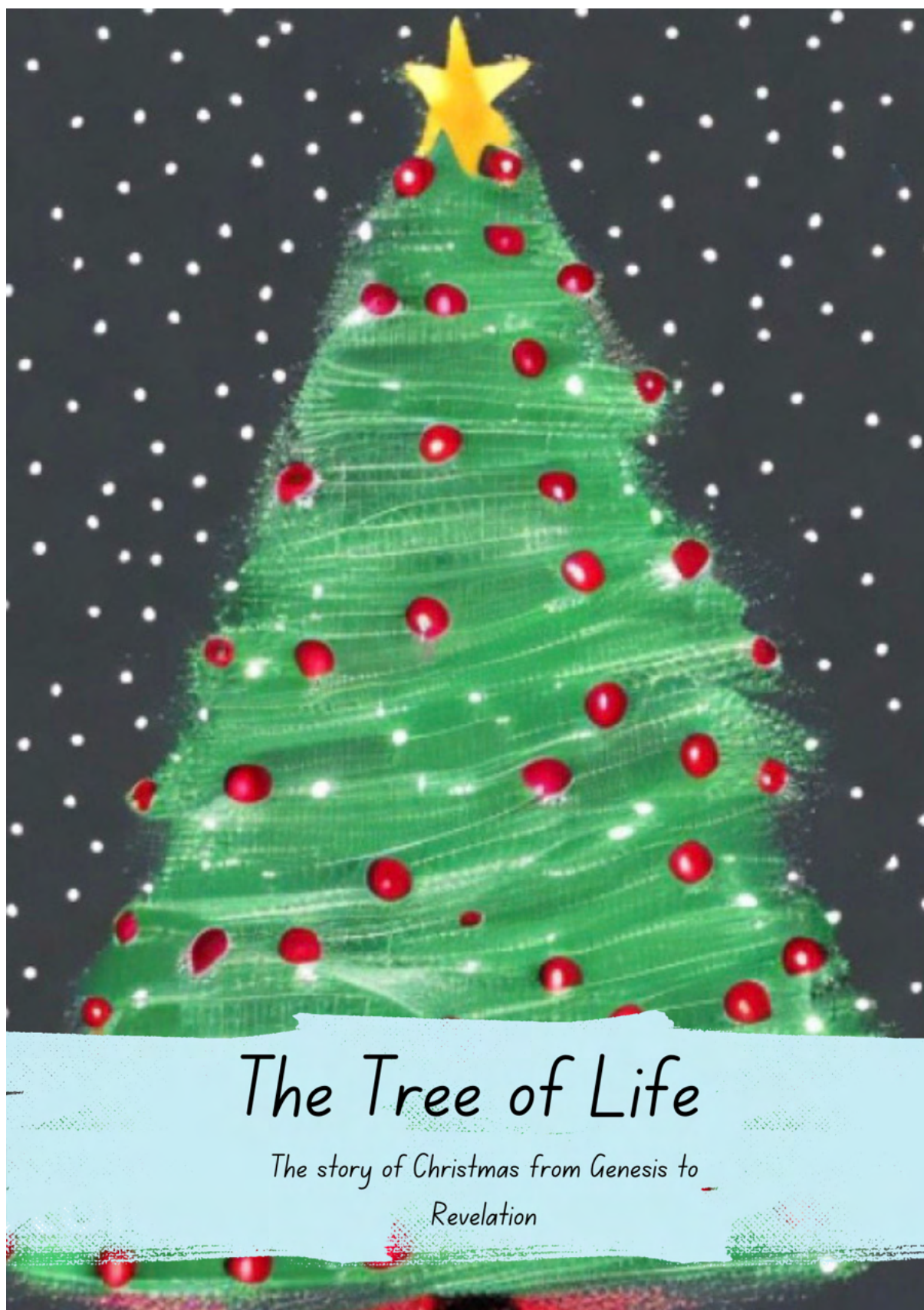
Anchor: And there you have it! The amazing story of a Royal baby born in Bethlehem, a child who would go on to rescue us all from sin!

News theme plays (if possible)

Talk

Praise:

Benediction



The Tree of Life

*The story of Christmas from Genesis to
Revelation*

‘The Tree of Life’ is a service that causes us to reflect on the modern symbols we associate with Christmas. The centrepiece of our Christmas decorations is the tree, but what do we decorate it with?

As the service advances your group will add different decorations to a bare tree at the front of the church as the narrators help the congregation to reflect on how they can remind us of key aspects of the Christmas narrative.

The symbol of the ‘Tree of Life’ appears in both Genesis 1 and Revelation 22, the first and last chapters of the Bible. This service helps us to show how Jesus connects the entire Bible from beginning to end and how the Christmas story is a key element in that connection.

The only speaking roles in this service are for narrators.

Roles Needed

Speaking Roles:

Narrators: x4 (or any even number up to 12)

Other Roles:

Mary

Joseph Gabriel

Wise Men x3 Shepherds Angels Herod

Props Needed:

Bare Christmas tree

Baubles

Candy Canes

Lights for a tree

Angels

A Star

Gifts

Nativity Scene Light board

There is an undecorated tree sitting at the front of the church right in the centre. It does have lights on it, but they are not turned on. Also have a light board with the words, "Jesus is here", but not yet turned on.

Welcome and opening Prayer

Praise:

Reading: Revelation 22: 1-5

Narrator 1: Have you ever read a book and skipped to the last page first, just to see how it ends?

Narrator 2: No, why would I do that?

Narrator 1: Well, I like to know if I am reading a happy or a sad story.

Narrator 2: But doesn't that spoil the whole story, if you know where it ends then there is no drama or danger or anything.

Narrator 1: I see your point, but sometimes the story is about the journey, not how it ends. You see, we can read about the ending in the Bible any time we want. In fact, we just have, and we all know how it began. But humans cut themselves off from God at the very beginning of the story, and yet at the end we are all there again with God.

Narrator 2: That's weird, how did that happen?

Narrator 1: Well, the Bible tells us that story, but today we are going to look at one of the key moments that helps us get back to God, one of the moments that helps us get back to the Tree of Life in the Garden, and it all starts with a young couple.

Mary and Joseph enter; Gabriel and the angels are just off stage.

Narrator 3: Mary was a young woman and engaged to marry Joseph. One day an angel appeared to her.

Gabriel and the angels enter. Joseph is off to the side. Mary looks terrified of the angel.

Narrator 4: Gabriel spoke to Mary and said, 'Greeting you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.'

Narrator 3: Mary was confused, then she was afraid, then she had a wee think and became happy.

(Mary holds up emojis for all these things, possibly on ping pong paddles, or simply acts out these emotions).

Once she had realised how amazing this news was, she visited her cousin Elizabeth and praised God for this wonderful news.

Narrator 4: Gabriel also told Joseph the amazing news. Joseph was asleep though, so Gabriel had to appear in a dream.

(Gabriel stands as if speaking to Joseph in his dream)

Joseph believed the angel and began to make plans to take Mary with him to Bethlehem, because the emperor had called a census.

Narrator 3: So, Mary and Joseph travelled all the way to Bethlehem. Sadly, all the rooms were filled and Jesus was born in a smelly stable, probably surrounded by animals. Definitely not the kind of place you'd expect the most important person in history to be born.

Narrator 2: Hang on, is this not usually the climax of the story? We've covered it in about 3 minutes!

Narrator 1: Well yes, but there is so much more that is still to happen.

Narrator 2: Also, why is that tree there? It doesn't have any decorations on it. It looks a bit silly.

Narrator 1: Ah, well, funny you should say that. Let's get started on that.

Mary and Joseph put some baubles on the tree.

Narrator 2: Ok, that looks a wee bit better, but it's still a bit bare.

Narrator 1: Keep your elf ears on, we'll get to it later!

Everyone goes back to sit down.

Praise:

Narrator 3: The next part of the story takes us a long way away from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It's here, in the East, where we meet the wise men.

Narrator 4: The wise men, or kings, or magi, were stargazers. They believed they would learn things from looking at the stars.

The wise men come in with telescopes. They are looking at the stars on the screen, suddenly one huge star appears. (This may be done as a video or just by changing

slides, you can even have them printed out if you want.)

The wise men begin pointing and muttering to themselves. It will look like a Parliamentary debate with one in the middle as the speaker/chair.

Narrator 3: The Wise men wondered what this new star could mean. They believed that it meant a new king would be born.

Narrator 4: They sat down and decided they would follow the star and visit this newborn king. But they could not go empty handed, they decided to bring some gifts with them.

The wise men place a large star on top of the Christmas tree, each picks up a gift and leave the stage, if necessary, have the wise men give the star to an adult and have them put it on top of the tree.

Narrator 2: So, these guys put the star on top, it still looks a bit bare, plus I usually put an angel on top of my tree.

Narrator 1: Yeah, we'll get to the angels soon enough. The star is on top of the tree because it reminds us that the star led the wise men to Jesus. Think of that Christmas tree like the tree of life that we read about from the Bible. Think of the star leading us to Jesus, who is the only one to lead us back to paradise, where the tree of life is.

Narrator 2: Ok, that's cool. But you didn't tell us why Mary and Joseph put baubles on the tree?

Narrator 1: That's part of the end. I thought you didn't like to read ahead!

Narrator 2: Ok, ok, I'm excited to hear what they are all about now! I think we're going to sing a wee tune now.

Praise:

Offering

Prayer

Reading : Luke 2:4-7

After the reading Mary and Joseph come back and put a manger scene down next to the tree.

Narrator 3: When Jesus was born God sent a host of angels to tell people.

The shepherds are sitting to one side of the church. The angels come in and approach them.

Narrator 4: The amazing thing is, they didn't go to the rich people, the powerful people or the cool people. They appeared to the people who were seen as the lowest in society. The smelly people, the people who spent most time outside caring for their animals. They appeared to the shepherds.

Narrator 3: Hey, don't knock them. Shepherds probably count as key workers!

Narrator 4: True, who'd have thought it!

Narrator 3: The angels spoke to the shepherds and said, 'Do not be afraid. I bring good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you; You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Narrator 3: Why is everyone afraid when they see the angels, aren't they sent by God

Narrator 4: Yeah, but I suppose it would be scary. Imagine you're sitting there in your field watching your sheep and suddenly a great light appears and there are angels telling you amazing things. Plus, you're not a king or someone especially important so you're also thinking about why they are appearing to you of all people.

Narrator 3: Ok, that makes sense. So the shepherds listened to the angels and went to visit Jesus in the stable.

Narrator 2: Oh, I can't wait to see what they place on the tree.

Narrator 1: You'll like this one, but the angels will go first.

The angels place some angels on the tree

Narrator 2: I know why the angels are there. They remind us that the angels told people about Jesus being born. Angels are messengers from God, but they also remind us of the Bible which is God's word and tells us all about Jesus and the tree of life at the beginning and the end.

The shepherds place some candy canes on the tree.

Narrator 1: This is an interesting one, because not a lot of people put candy canes on their trees anymore. But they are there to remind us of two things. One is that the first people who went to visit Jesus when he was born was just a group of ordinary people. The people who had to work every day to make sure they had what they needed to live on. That's why they're shaped like a shepherd's crook. The second is the colour of the candy canes. They are red and white, and that is supposed to remind us of the sacrifice Jesus would make for us. You see he would live a sinless life, that's what the white represents, and the red reminds us of the blood he would shed for our sins.

Narrator 2: The angels praise God after telling the shepherds about Jesus, and the shepherds stopped to praise God after they had seen baby Jesus. So I think we should sing some praise songs now too.

Praise:

Narrator 3: The wise men travelled for a long time to find where the star was leading them to.

The wise men enter, looking through telescopes and pointing at the star on top of the tree.

Narrator 4: They stopped off at the palace of Herod, because they thought he would be the first to know about a new royal baby.

Herod stand up and holds up a confused emoji, he turns it around to show an angry emoji, and then holds up a thinking or sly emoji, or he can act out these emotions).

Narrator 3: Herod didn't know a thing about this new royal baby, and he wasn't happy about it. He told the wise men to find out where this baby was and to report back to them.

Narrator 4: The Wise men continued to follow the star, and it led them all the way to where Jesus was, at Bethlehem. They visited Jesus and gave him the gifts they had brought. Gold, because he was a king, frankincense because he would teach us about God and His kingdom, and myrrh, because He would sacrifice Himself for our sins.

The wise men place their gifts down under the tree.

Narrator 3: The wise men left and returned home, but they didn't return to Herod. An angel had warned them not to because Herod had sinister plans for Jesus.

The wise men leave and sit down again

Narrator 1: The Wise men were some of the first people to see Jesus. That is interesting because they were not the people waiting for a promised Messiah. They were from a different country and probably followed a different religion. But, because they visited Jesus, we can learn that Jesus came to save everyone, not just the Jews who were waiting for a Messiah.

Narrator 2: They didn't put anything else on the tree, but they did put gifts under it. They gave Jesus gifts when he was born, and that is why we give gifts to people at Christmas. When we open our presents, we need to remember that Jesus was born at Christmas, and that He is greatest gift we could ever get because by believing in him we can have eternal life with him.

Reading: John 1:1-14

Praise:

Narrator 1: Some may have noticed that we didn't really start with a bare tree. There are lights on the tree.

Narrator 2: Yes, but they aren't turned on so it's silly having them there. Should we turn them on?

Gabriel comes back and turns on the lights. The church lights are turned down if possible so that the light of the tree is very clear.

Narrator 1: The lights remind us that Jesus is the light of the world, that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Narrator 2: The light represents Jesus. The world is full of sin because people disobeyed God way back in the Garden of Eden, and that is represented by darkness, but Jesus is the light and is the only way to beat sin. We cannot beat sin ourselves, but we can turn on the lights and use them to follow the right way. When we follow Jesus he can help us overcome our sin.

Narrator 1: I also told you I would tell you about the baubles we saw Mary and Joseph put on the tree earlier. You see, in the Garden of Eden stood the tree of life, and humans were not allowed to eat from that tree after we sinned. But that tree comes back at the end of the Bible too, it is there in Revelation when we read about Heaven. It is only because Jesus came into the world, lived without sin, and died to save us that we can get to heaven and eat the fruit on the tree of life and have eternal life with him.

Narrator 2: The baubles represent the fruit on the tree of life, the tree that is in the middle of the garden. The tree and the decorations we have put on it remind us of the story of Jesus being born, what it means and how it fulfils God's promises to us. When you look at your tree at home, remember what all of this represents, and take some time on Christmas day to thank God for this wonderful story.

Talk**Prayer****Praise:****Benediction**

Travel through time to see
12 days that made the
Christmas story so important



The 12 Days of Christmas

The 12 Days of Christmas is a time travel inspired setting for the nativity. Your narrators (ideally dressed as time travellers) travel in time to witness various key points in the story of Jesus' birth, from Isaiah writing his prophecy right up to Jesus being presented in the temple. It is a fast-paced story that ensures several of the overlooked elements of this story are slotted in, chronologically, to help the congregation understand all the different pieces of the story that we read about in the Gospels. There only need to be two speaking roles with the narrators ensuring everything moves forward, but you can have as many narrators as you like.

Roles Needed

Speaking Roles:

Narrators: an even number

Other Roles:

Wise Men

Zechariah

Gabriel

Mary

Joseph

Elizabeth

Innkeeper

Herod

Shepherds

Simeon

Anna

Props Needed:

Something to cover a mouth with

A doll

Throne

Charts and telescopes

Gifts

Narrator 1: Does anyone have a favourite Christmas song?

3 children answer:

1. The one about Santa in the chimney!
2. I want a hippopotamus for Christmas!
3. The one with the partridge in the pear tree!

Narrator 1: Why did nobody mention any with Jesus in them? There are loads of good Christmas songs about Jesus. How can we spend a church service talking about Santa in the chimney or wanting a hippo as a gift. They don't happen in the Bible... do they?

Narrator 2: No, they don't but, but we can work with that last one.

Narrator 1: A partridge in a pear tree? What book does that happen in?

Narrator 2: No, no, that's not in the Bible either, but the song is called the 12 days of Christmas!

Narrator 1: But that's not about Jesus being born, is it?

Narrator 2: No, it's not, but what if we look at 12 very important days in the Christmas story? These can be our own 12 days of Christmas!

Narrator 1: Ok, sounds good, let's try that!

Welcome and opening prayer

Praise

Day 1 slide on the screen. Play some sound to simulate time travel

Narrator 1: (person) is going to come and tell us about day 1

Reading: Isaiah 9:2&6-7

Narrator 2: Day 1 happened hundreds of years before the first Christmas, long before Jesus was born. God knew he had a plan for salvation, and he spoke to his prophets in the Old Testament so that they could get people ready for Jesus coming.

Narrator 1: This is just one time the Old Testament talks about Jesus. He is actually mentioned quite a lot there. This passage tells us how amazing he would be. I wonder if this prophecy made people excited to see Jesus.

Narrator 2: We have to skip a few hundred years to go to day 2. In fact, we will get to see day 2 this time!

Day 2 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 1: Wait! Wait! Wait! What is that sound?

Narrator 2: Oh that's just the time travelling sound, doesn't that always happen when you travel in time?

Narrator 1: I don't know I've never travelled in time! I just thought you were really hungry the first time I heard it!

Narrator 2: Don't be silly, if we don't hear that sound how would everyone know we have travelled in time?

Narrator 1: Good point, anyway, here is what happened on day 2!
Many years ago, there was a group of wise men, or maybe kings, living in the east.

The wise men appear. They have complex charts and telescopes etc.

Narrator 2: These men enjoyed looking at the stars. They wanted to learn about them because they could see them moving in the sky and they watched how the sky changed throughout the year.

A picture of a star appears on the screen, and the wise men point their telescopes at it.

Narrator 1: One day they saw something strange. Something they didn't expect and something that didn't make sense to them. They saw a star they had never seen before!

Narrator 2: These magi believed that this meant something. They looked at their star charts, they talked to each other, and they believed that this was a sign that a great king would be born.

Narrator 1: The wise men then packed up their things and set off to follow the star. They didn't know where it would lead them, but they knew they wanted to see this great king and tell him how important he was!

Wise men pick up their schoolbags and lunchboxes and leave.

Praise:

Day 3 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 2: Now, Jesus wasn't the only special baby born at this time. He had a cousin called John.

Narrator 1: Yes, John the Baptist, well he'd be called that someday. John's parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth, and they thought they were too old to have kids.

Narrator 2: One day an angel appeared to Zechariah while he was at work.

Zechariah is working away when Gabriel appears.

Narrator 1: The angel told Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth would have a baby, but Zechariah didn't believe it. He thought it was a lie or some kind of joke.

Narrator 2: Yes, and the angel wasn't happy about that. So, because he didn't believe, the angel made sure that Zechariah wouldn't be able to speak until his son was born!

Zechariah puts a piece of tape or a mask over his mouth and leaves. Gabriel also leaves.

Narrator 2: Oh Elizabeth must have been delighted, she must have had 9 months of peace without Zechariah speaking!

Narrator 1: Amazingly Zechariah was able to speak again whenever he wrote down that the baby would be called John. This is a story we often skip in the nativity bit we'll see a bit later why it's important!

Day 4 slide on screen and time travel sound

Mary enters doing some chores.

Narrator 2: Someone else was about to be visited by an angel. This time Gabriel was going to see Elizabeth's cousin, a young woman named Mary.

Gabriel appears to Mary.

Narrator 1: Mary was minding her own business when Gabriel appeared and told her she was going to have a baby, not only that, but this baby would be the saviour of the whole world!

Narrator 2: Mary had to sit down, this was a lot of news to process, she wasn't even married to Joseph yet!

Narrator 1: Gabriel told her that this would happen because it was God's will, he told Mary that she was blessed by God.

Narrator 2: Mary was still shocked, but she knew this was God's will and she praised God for it

Mary prays then leaves.

Day 5 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 1: Someone else was due a visit from an angel though; this time it was Joseph's turn!

Joseph comes on and lies down to sleep.

Narrator 2: Joseph must have been working hard because the angel appeared to him while he was asleep.

Narrator 1: Yes... anyway the angel told Joseph that Mary was going to have a baby. He was surprised by this too, not only was an angel talking to him, but he hadn't even married Mary yet!

Narrator 2: He was surprised, but he accepted Jesus as his son, and he knew that he would be someone really special.

Praise:

Day 6 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 1: Mary had accepted her news, but she just had to tell someone, someone who would believe her and not think she was mad!

Narrator 2: She decided to visit her cousin Elizabeth and tell her.

Elizabeth is sitting down and Mary comes and sits beside her; they both have a cup of tea.

Narrator 1: Mary is so excited to share her news with Elizabeth, she told her everything that Gabriel had told her, and she hoped that she would believe her!

Narrator 2: Elizabeth did believe her! But she had news of her own. She was glad Mary came to visit her because now she could tell her cousin about her own amazing news. She told Mary that she was going to have a baby too, and that it came with an added bonus of Zechariah not being able to talk!

Zechariah walks in and gestures as if asking for something and then leaves frustrated.

Narrator 1: Mary and Elizabeth knew that God was good and they started praising him. In fact, Mary sang a song of praise there and then!

Reading: Luke 1:46-55

Offering

Prayer

Day 7 Slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 2: When Mary was pregnant the Roman Governor decided to call a census. He wanted to know how many people lived in his territory and so everyone had to go to the town they were born in.

Narrator 1: Anyway, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. That's where Joseph was from. You see Joseph was a descendant of King David! And Bethlehem was the city of David.

Mary and Joseph arrive and sit down as if taking a short break from their journey.

Narrator 2: It was a long journey, and they didn't have busses, or trains or planes back then. They probably had to walk the whole way, plus Mary was pregnant so that would have been even harder for them.

An innkeeper appears at the side. He puts a sign on the table saying 'full'

Narrator 1: Mary and Joseph kept travelling and eventually they made it, they got to Bethlehem. They went to the local Premier Inn, but it was full, then they went to the Travel Lodge but that was full too. They couldn't even find an Air B 'n B to stay in!

Mary and Joseph approach the innkeeper

Narrator 2: They came to the last inn in Bethlehem and guess what? It was full too. Lots of people had to go to Bethlehem for the census and so there was just no space. But the innkeeper told them that they could stay in the stable if they wanted.

Narrator 1: So, Mary and Joseph made their way to the stable and set up there, surrounded by animals. I hope they got a discount. Remind me to check and see if they left a good review!

Day 8 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 2: So, think way back to day 2, when we saw the wise men looking at the stars. Well, they decided to follow this bright shiny new one and it led them west. Remember, they thought this star signalled a new king being born so they decided to find out more by asking some questions.

Herod is sat on a throne; the wise men approach him.

Narrator 2: Their journey took them to Herod's palace. Herod was sort of a king; well he was a king but only because the Romans allowed him to be king. The wise men, being very wise of course, believed that a new king would be born into the royal family.

Narrator 1: That makes sense, but Herod didn't know anything about a new king or even a baby being born in his family. But he was afraid. He was the king! He didn't want some new king coming along and taking all his power away!

Herod looks cunning

Narrator 2: The wicked king Herod hatched a plan. He told the wise men that he wanted to honour this new king and sent them on their way to find him. He told the wise men to visit him again after they had found him.

Narrator 1: So, the wise men left and continued following the star. They would follow that star all the way to Bethlehem, that little town that Mary and Joseph had travelled to.

The wise men leave.

Day 9 slide on screen and time travel sound

Mary and Joseph in the stable with baby Jesus

Narrator 2: When we last saw Mary and Joseph, they were relieved to simply have a roof over their heads even if they had to share that space with animals!

Narrator 1: Remember on day one we looked at one of the Old Testament prophecies? Well, another one of those prophecies said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem! (Person) is going to come and read one of them for us now!

Reading Micah 5:2

Narrator 2: So, not only did Mary and Joseph have to sleep in a room filled with animals but Jesus had to be born there! Most of us are born in nice clean hospitals, not surrounded by smelly animals!

Narrator 1: That's right, Jesus was born in a stable and he was placed in a manger. Most of us get nice cots or cribs to lie in but Jesus had to sleep in a box that the animals ate out of! Who would have thought that God's own son would be born in such a dirty smelly place?

Praise: Ideal spot for 'Away in a Manger'

Day 10 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 2: Have you ever seen when a new baby is born and they come to church for the first time? All the women pass them about and want to hold them, don't they? They know who they are! Well Jesus had lots of visitors when he was born.

The shepherds gather around the family.

Narrator 1: The first group of visitors was a group of shepherds. The shepherds had been told by the angels to visit Jesus because he was going to be the saviour of the world! I'm sure they felt right at home visiting a stable.

Narrator 2: I know it seems weird that a group of random shepherds would visit a baby born into a family they don't know, but the angels sent them there for a reason. Yes, Jesus was

God in human form and yes, he was going to be the saviour of the world, but the angels sent the shepherds so that they would understand that Jesus was there to help the poor as well as the rich like the wise men.

Narrator 1: Even more than that, the shepherds were the first people, outside of Mary and Joseph, to get to see Jesus! Imagine that a group of hard working but unimportant people were the first people to get to see the Lord of all creation in person that night in Bethlehem!

The shepherds leave looking amazed

Day 11 slide on screen and time travel sound

Mary sitting with Jesus, Wise men arrive with gifts

Narrator 2: The shepherds weren't the only visitors. The wise men kept following that star and after years of travelling they found a little house in Bethlehem where the star stopped and inside that house they found Jesus with his mother Mary.

Narrator 1: The wise men were amazed and decided to give Jesus some gifts. Now if I were giving a baby a present, I might give them a teddy or some clothes or a book for their mum or dad to read to them, but that's not what the wise men brought for Jesus.

Narrator 2: No, they brought some odd gifts. The first gift was gold; you see Jesus was to be a king and so a king needed to have gold. Then they gave him frankincense, that was because of who he was, God incarnate, this was to symbolise how important Jesus was for forgiving our sins and allowing us to get back to God. The third gift was myrrh, a weird gift to give a baby because this was something to use on dead people, but this was to symbolise the sacrifice Jesus would go on to make for us all.

Narrator 1: I like to get toys as gifts, but if someone wants to give me gold for Christmas I won't complain! Anyway, the wise men left after they had seen Jesus, but an angel had appeared to them and told them not to visit Herod again. Herod was a bad man, he didn't want to visit Jesus, he wanted to get rid of Jesus! So, the wise men returned home, and Herod never found out where Jesus was.

Day 12 slide on screen and time travel sound

Narrator 2: Shortly after a baby is born their parents might want them to be baptised or dedicated. Mary and Joseph did something similar, and they took Jesus to be dedicated at the synagogue, that's what they called their church.

Narrator 1: Jesus was popular at the synagogue. A man named Simeon came to see him and when he held Jesus, he praised God because he knew he was the Messiah who had been promised!

Narrator 2: Then a woman called Anna came to see him too. She was 84 years old! When she saw Jesus, she said that he would be the one to save us from sin. These two people had never seen Jesus before, but they knew who he was!

Narrator 1: After visiting the synagogue Mary and Joseph decided to take Jesus away to Egypt. You see Herod wasn't happy and an angel told them to take Jesus away for a while to keep him safe. Imagine having to get a passport photo taken at 13 days old!

Praise

12 Days of Christmas slide appears

Narrator 2: Well, that's our version of the 12 days of Christmas. 12 days in history that tell the Christmas story

Narrator 1: The song should be about these 12 days! Not about turtle doves and gold rings!

Narrator 2: There are lots of Christmas songs out there that don't teach us about Jesus, but maybe we can sing one that does to finish with!

Talk

Praise

Benediction

The New King

"He will sit on his glorious throne"

The New King was written in the weeks following Queen Elizabeth's death. It is partly a reflection on the role of monarchy and leadership both in the modern world and in a Biblical context.

This service reflects on the nature of the throne of Israel and its first two kings but highlights that there is also the eternal throne of God.

Jesus was the 'new king' in the eyes of the wise men, and Herod was terrified. The contemporary characters failed to grasp that Jesus' throne was spiritual, not physical and, eternal, not passing.

Roles Needed

Speaking roles

Narrators x4 (or any even number)

Readers x3

Gabriel

Mary

Joseph

Wise Men x3

Other Roles

Saul

David

Soloman

Herod

Shepherds

Angels

Herod

Props Needed

Crowns

Cuddy Sheep

Hymn book or musical instrument

Welcome and Prayer:

Praise:

Reading: Isaiah 9:2&6-7

Have someone represent Saul and another represent David. If possible, have a crown sitting on a table at the front to represent Jesus.

Narrator 1: You know Israel had lots of kings back in the day.

Narrator 2: The Kingdom of Judah did too! We can read about all of them in the Old Testament.

Narrator 1: Israel's first king was a man called Saul. Samuel anointed him as king because God chose him. He was a good king for a while, but then he abandoned God and so God deserted him. Soon Saul became a bad king, a very bad king.

Saul comes in and sits on his throne. After a few seconds he leaves with his head down in shame

Narrator 2: You know what is interesting about Saul's reign? His son didn't become king after him. His daughter didn't become Queen either! Instead, someone else became the king instead.

Narrator 1: This new king was a man called David. David was Israel's greatest king, even though he did some things that were wrong. David was famous for writing lots of songs and poems to praise God with. In fact, Jesus is mentioned in as early as the second chapter of Psalms!

David comes in and sits on his throne. He may have a cuddly sheep and a hymnbook with him, maybe even a musical instrument!

Narrator 2: A king who wrote songs. Does that mean he was like Elvis then? Uh-huh-huh!

Narrator 1: Not quite... David was a real king, who ruled over Israel. Elvis was just a great singer!

David leaves, possibly playing the instrument.

Narrator 2: David's son Solomon became the king after him. Solomon was not David's oldest son; he was one of the younger ones. But David knew he would be a good king. In fact, David was the youngest son in his family so it probably felt normal for his oldest son not to be made king!

Solomon enters and sits on his throne. He is reading a book and looking annoyed as if he knows it is wrong.

Narrator 1: Solomon was a wise king, for a while. He abandoned God too and then things went wrong for him.

Solomon leaves in the same way as Saul

Narrator 2: Solomon's son was a bad king; in fact he was so bad the kingdom split in two and the Israelites were led into slavery by the Assyrians.

Narrator 1: It's been a while since we had a bad King here in the UK, we had a great Queen recently as well!

Narrator 2: And Charles III might end up as the best King Charles ever!

Narrator 1: The passage we read from Isaiah talks about a Prince of Peace! Someone promised to come and save the world. He would reign on David's throne and have a kingdom lasting forever. Not David's literal throne though, because that was long gone, rather he would be the person to lead God's people.

Narrator 2: Israel had a king 2000 years ago though, a man called Herod. Herod was a bad king too, but he was a king who owed his allegiance to someone else, the Emperor of Rome! Herod and the Romans did not like anyone challenging their authority! I'm sure they did not like this new king!

Herod enters and sits on his throne. He looks cruel. He is wearing a crown but dresses as a Roman.

Narrator 1: No, they didn't. Have you heard the story about the King of Kings and the Prince of Peace being born? It's one of my favourites!

Narrator 2: No but let's hear it! I bet he was born in the most private ward of the best hospital in the country and then taken home to his huge palace to sleep in his crib made of pure gold while wearing silk pyjamas and having servants tend to his every need!

Narrator 1: Yes, you would think that the king of kings would have everything like this, but that's not exactly what happened. Let's see what happened in Bethlehem around 2,000 years ago!

Herod: They think I can't hear them. But I am the only king around here! If this new king is going to threaten the Emperor, I will have to let him know. There will be no new King on my watch!

Herod leaves

Praise:

Narrator 1: Mary was a young woman when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. Gabriel told her she was blessed and would become pregnant. She was to name the baby Jesus because he would be the King of Kings and saviour of the world.

A trumpet blasts, use a sound effect if needs be.

Gabriel: Hear Ye Hear Ye! Greetings fellow servant. The new king is coming and you, Mary, are so blessed for you have the high honour of being His mother!

Mary: Can you repeat that, but in smaller words?

Gabriel: Hi Mary, you will become pregnant and your son will be Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Mary: Oh wow! How will I tell Joseph?

Gabriel: Don't worry, I'll take care of that!

Mary leaves, looking excited but also a bit scared.

Narrator 2: Mary was afraid, this news came as a shock to her because she hadn't married Joseph yet. She turned to her cousin Elizabeth, who was very old, only to discover she had been visited by an angel and told she would have a child too!

Narrator 1: She was to call the child John, and he would prepare the way for Jesus. He was like a herald to the King. He would let people know the King of Kings was there and point them towards them.

Narrator 2: Gabriel appeared to Joseph too, because he had to be kept in the loop. No doubt he had to check his finances to make sure he was making enough furniture to suddenly support a family.

Joseph comes in.

Gabriel: Good morrow Joseph! I have come to proclaim the beginning of the new King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Ye be a blessed fellow for you will have the high honour of raising the boy!

Joseph: Come again?

Gabriel: Wow, must be the NIV generation. Your fiancé Mary is pregnant, but don't be afraid. She will have a boy, and you are to name him Jesus because he is God's own son and will be the saviour of the world, the King of Kings!

Joseph: Oh wow! I'm going to have to work more hours, do you know anyone looking for an apprenticeship? Maybe the governor still has that grant available for young workers!

Gabriel and Joseph leave.

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Mary and Joseph are at the front with the baby Jesus.

Narrator 1: So, there you have it. Jesus, the Prince of Peace and King of Kings was born in a stable and laid in a manger.

Narrator 2: That's disgusting! Did they even have hand sanitiser?

Narrator 1: I doubt it, but that's the point. Jesus didn't have to be born in a palatial mansion and have servants attending to his every need. Instead, he was born in a place we would never think is good enough for ourselves.

Narrator 2: He was also born in the city of David. David was Israel's greatest ever king and Joseph was his great-great-great-great-great grandson, or something like that. I suppose Jesus being born there, is like our monarchs being crowned in London, where the Kings and Queens have lived for hundreds of years.

Narrator 1: I wonder if anyone here has ever met anyone from the Royal family. The Royals love to meet people and people love to meet the Royals.

Narrator 2: Jesus had visitors when he was born. But he wasn't visited by King Herod, or Governor Quirinius, or Emperor Augustus. He was visited by normal people, by shepherds.

Angels appear and point the shepherds towards Mary and Joseph. The shepherds move towards them. Maybe they have a cuddly sheep to hand over.

Narrator 1: I wouldn't let anyone who had been working in a field with sheep all night visit a newborn baby, but Jesus was special, and it was right for ordinary people to visit him first.

Narrator 2: They visited because the angels told them to, they were the first people outside of his family to meet the King of Kings, but there was nothing extra-ordinary about them at all! Isn't that amazing?

Praise:

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Have Herod looking miserable on his throne while the wise men visit Jesus and give him his gifts.

Narrator 1: The wealthy people did eventually get to visit Jesus. The Wise Men were kings from the east and they brought fancy gifts for Jesus.

Narrator 2: It may have taken up to 2 years after Jesus was born for them to get there!

The wise men enter, one is pointing a telescope to the sky.

Wise man 1: That is one humongous star! I wonder if it signals the coming of the great King of Kings! I think we should follow it and see where it leads us!

Wise man 2: Now calm down, this requires more study. We aren't in a hurry, we are wise men, and what do we as wise men say?

Wise Man 3: Only fools rush in!

Wise man 1: But I can't help... following that star to see where it leads!

Wise man 2: Very well, I suppose we should go west

Wise Man 1: Where the skies are blue?

Wise man 2: Yes. This is what we're gonna do.

Narrator 1: On their way they stopped by the palace of Herod, after all if there was a new king, then he would probably be there.

Narrator 2: Herod received them in his palace. He was curious about why they were there.

Herod: Come in my honoured guests. Tell me what has brought you so far west.

Wise man 1: We have followed the great star which has led us here. We believe it signals the coming of the great King of Kings. Is he here?

Herod: I must be the King of Kings then, for I am the only King you'll find here.

Wise Man 2: Ah... no, we weren't born yesterday, though this new king may have been! He must only be a baby, no more than 2 for sure.

Herod: Then continue with your journey, and when you find him let me know, I want to worship him as well.

The wise men leave

Herod: They think they are wise men, but those fools will lead me straight to this usurper where he will meet his doom! Victory will be mine! (Evil laugh).

Gabriel stands up.

Gabriel: Spoiler! His plan failed!

Narrator 1: Britain's kings and queens meet tons of world leaders. All the world's powerful and important people have ways of meeting each other sooner or later.

Narrator 2: Jesus had kings visiting him when he was just a baby. Was he even able to walk or talk when these 3 kings visited him? The Wise Men knew how important Jesus was, they knew he was the King of Kings, sent by God to save the world and reign forever.

The wise men approach Mary and Joseph.

Wise man 1: The star has stopped here, but it can't be right, this is just a stable, not a palace.

Wise Man 2: Perhaps this King is truly special if he is born amongst the lowest of the low.

Mary: Have you come to see my son Jesus? He's been very popular since he was born!

Wise man 1: We believe he is the King of Kings; we have come to see the ruler of the world and to give him gifts.

Mary: If only you knew how right you are!

Wise man 2: We have brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. It is an honour to meet him.

Everyone leaves.

Narrator 1: There is another king in this story though, the evil king Herod. He told the wise men he wanted to meet Jesus and worship him, but that was a lie. He was afraid of Jesus; he didn't understand that Jesus was the King of Kings. Jesus didn't want to rule Israel like Herod did, Jesus was coming to save the world and rule for eternity in heaven.

Narrator 2: Herod wanted Jesus gone. He hoped the wise men would tell him where to find Jesus, but an angel warned them and they protected Jesus. Herod wasn't finished though, he ordered his soldiers to kill the babies in Bethlehem so Jesus, and his family had to flee to Egypt! Imagine having to run away from your own country to be safe. Some people have to do that today and I am sure they can be inspired by Jesus having to do it when he was still very young!

Narrator 1: The world has lots of kings, presidents, chancellors, emperors and prime ministers. They are all afraid of the same thing though, losing their power. Even their supporters are afraid of them losing their power.

Narrator 2: Jesus was never afraid of losing his power though. He will reign forever in heaven, and we can be there with him. He will not rule on a literal throne like David had, or like the Royals family has. His throne is in heaven!

Narrator 1: If you have ever met the King or Queen them you probably bowed to them. This is something we do when we meet royalty. We are showing that, in some way, that person is greater than us.

Narrator 2: David was a king, and people bowed to him, but he bowed to God. Elizabeth was a Queen and people, bowed to her, but she bowed to Jesus. When Jesus was born, those who visited him bowed down and worshiped him, because is he the King of Kings and Prince of Peace.

Narrator 1: This Christmas, many of us will watch the King's Speech. For years Queen Elizabeth used her speech to remind us of Jesus coming into the world at Christmas and how important it was for her.

Narrator 2: When you watch the King's speech this year, remember what the King of Kings wants us to know. Every King or Queen who has ever lived had their reign end when the passed away. But we have a king whose reign will never end. The King of Kings and Prince of Peace who we celebrate at Christmas.

Narrator 1: Three cheers for the King of Kings! Hip Hip! *(the congregation responds with hooray)* X3

Narrator 2: Heralds proclaim a new king. Let us all be heralds this Christmas.

Talk:

Praise:

Benediction



The Herald

Hear the nativity story told by Jesus' cousin!

The Herald takes a different approach to the nativity, only Matthew and Luke record the nativity narrative, and while John takes the time to explain why Christmas is so important. Mark's Gospel instead begins with John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus.

This service tells the nativity story as a recollection from John the Baptist; we take the chance to highlight what happened with his own family in the months before Jesus was born and culminates with John accepting that he has to baptise Jesus if he is really going to prepare the people for His coming.

This service encourages people to be inspired by John, who didn't feel worthy to baptise Jesus. We can all be witnesses for Him and be heralds of His coming at Christmas.

This is an extended version of the service found later in this resource.

Roles Needed:

Speaking roles

Narrators x3 (or as many or as few as you want)

Readers x3

John the Baptist

Gabriel

Zechariah

Elizabeth

Mary

Joseph

Jewish Priest

Shepherd

Wise Men

Other Roles

Shepherds-

Angels –

Wise Men –

Props Needed:

A whiteboard

A gag

A donkey prop or suit

Gifts

Lamb toy

Welcome and opening prayer

Praise:

Reading: Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist is sitting at the front. He has a towel sitting beside him. John is on his lunch break from baptising people so maybe he has a lunch box. It would be a nice touch to have a jar of honey and packet of 'Lotus Biscoff' biscuits there too. John should maybe just sit there and relax or eat for about 20-30 seconds before the narrator starts. The narrator is John's inner voice.

Narrator: Yep, that's me, John the Baptist, I live in the wilderness, eat locusts and honey and spend my days submerging people in the river Jordan to symbolise how God will wash away their sins, you're probably wondering how I ended up in this situation, well that's an interesting story to tell.

John is starting to have his lunch.

Narrator: You see I was born to have a very important job. God sent me to prepare the way for his promised Messiah. So, I have done that, how do I know God wants me to do this job? Well, my parents told me.

Zechariah and Elizabeth enter. (It is a good idea to have these 2 played by adults)

Narrator: I was born around 30 years ago, and I am the first one in my family to be called John, everyone thought I would be named Zechariah after my dad, but he and my mum Elizabeth said an angel told them to name me John.

Gabriel and Zechariah are at the front. Zechariah looks like he's tidying up and then makes to leave. Elizabeth is at the side.

Gabriel: Zechariah! Wait, don't go yet, there is something I need to tell you.

Zechariah: What are you doing here? The service ended ages ago! Have you nothing better to be doing? You're missing Songs of Praise!

Gabriel: I have good news to tell you! I am an angel, God sent me to speak to you.

Zechariah: Is that right? Aye? Well, what is it you have to tell me?

Gabriel: Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a baby, she is blessed by God, and it's really important that you name him John.

Zechariah: Aye right, I've heard enough of your nonsense! I'm not Abraham, my wife isn't Sarah and so we are way too old to have a baby! Stop playing tricks on me!

Gabriel: I promise you it's true, but since you don't believe me, you won't be able to talk until after the baby is born!

Tie a gag around Zechariah's mouth and Gabriel leaves

Elizabeth enters

Elizabeth: Oh, there you are! You're never going to believe this! I'm pregnant, we're going to have a baby!

Zechariah punches the air in joy, but then he tries to communicate with Elizabeth using frantic hand gestures

Elizabeth: It's great isn't it, I thought you'd have had something to say though!

Narrator: I'm sure my mum eventually loved those 9 months of peace and quiet!

Zechariah and Elizabeth leave.

Narrator: My parents weren't the only family to be visited by an angel 30 years ago though! My aunt Mary, well I call her my aunt, technically she's my first cousin once removed, anyway, she and her husband Joseph were also visited by an angel. They say it was the same angel who visited my parents.

Gabriel, Mary and Joseph enter. Mary and Joseph sit down, and Joseph lies down and puts his head on a pillow.

Gabriel: Hi Mary, I have amazing news, you're going to have a baby!

Mary: How can that be possible? I'm too young and Joseph and I aren't even married yet!

Gabriel: Don't worry about that, you've been blessed by God!

Narrator: The angel appeared to Joseph and told him the same thing. Joseph was asleep though, so Gabriel had to appear to him in a dream.

Mary goes back to her seat. Gabriel whispers to Joseph and Joseph wakes up and looks shocked!

Joseph: Mary! Mary! I had a weird dream!

Joseph runs back to his seat

Narrator: Mary was so happy she visited my mum! Mum says I started jumping about in her womb when Aunt Mary visited. She sang a song and thanked God for the news that they had both received. It's a pretty cool story, isn't it?

Elizabeth and Mary walk along the front of the church chatting. They sit down again.

Narrator: Gabriel told my dad to call me John, funny that he couldn't tell anyone for ages, he had to write my name down! That's when he was able to speak again!

Zechariah and Elizabeth are at the front holding a baby. A Jewish Priest enters.

Jewish Priest: What are you going to call him? Will he be Zechariah like his dad?

Zechariah stands up and frantically waves no! He pulls out a white board or large piece of card and it says, 'His name is John'.

Gabriel appears and takes the gag off Zechariah

Zechariah: His name is John, because that means 'God is gracious'.

Elizabeth: Oh, are you speaking again? Brilliant, I'm fed up with playing charades!

Narrator: John means 'God is gracious' in Hebrew. So, people would be saying that every time they say my name. But Gabriel also told Mary and Joseph to name their son Jesus! Jesus means, 'The Lord is Salvation'. I think God was trying to tell us all something through these two names!

John maybe sits down or lies down for a minute.

Praise:

John stands up and looks into the distance

Narrator: What?!!!, Who's that coming along the road? No! It can't be. What is He doing here? Surely, He doesn't want me to baptise Him. I'm not worthy to!

John is pondering.

Narrator: Maybe this is my chance to introduce the world to Jesus! To tell everyone who he really is! Is that why he's coming here? Or maybe he just wants to catch up on old times...

He always liked to tell us about his birth, kind of his go to story wasn't it! I remember the first time he told me about it!

Mary and Joseph enter and sit at the front. They both look tired.

Narrator: The emperor called a census, so Joseph had to take Mary all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. That was quite the journey, I can just picture Joseph walking beside a donkey carrying Mary...

Have someone hurriedly bring in a donkey prop, or someone dressed as a donkey.

Though now I think of it, they never did mention a donkey, maybe they walked the whole way! Maybe they hitch-hiked!

Frantically remove the donkey or lead away the person dressed as a donkey.

Narrator: The problem was, so many people had to go to Bethlehem for the census. It was called the city of David and David must have had thousands of descendants all flocking to Bethlehem. When they got there, they had nowhere to stay. The rest of the family arrived before them and had all the rooms; there were no rooms left anywhere in the city. They had to stay in a stable.

Stable image appears on screen

Narrator: That's when it happened! That's when Jesus was born! He was born in a stable and he was laid in a manger! I hope there was no food left in it. Mary and Joseph always laughed at the story, it wasn't what they had hoped for, but they were thankful in the end! I suppose it was at least a good thing that Joseph could talk to Mary for the whole 9 months! Or maybe Mary didn't see it that way...

Mary Holds the baby

Praise: (Ideal spot for Away in a Manger)

Offering

Prayer

John opens a book and starts reading

Narrator: We call Him Jesus of Nazareth, but he wasn't actually born there. He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David itself. His dad, Joseph, is a descendant of King David you know. Imagine that our greatest king's great great great great or whatever, grandson being born in a stable. Is he a king or a pauper?

An image of the stable appears on the screen

Narrator: Mary and Joseph couldn't find anywhere to stay, so he was born in a stable, might have even been a cave, I can't remember what mother said, but Aunt Mary definitely put him in a manger to sleep!

Narrator: I don't know if I got any gifts when I was born, nobody wrote that part down or bothered to tell me, but we know what Jesus got. I don't know if many people were told about me being born, but angels were telling people about Jesus! Some of them even visited Him and brought him presents.

The angels enter and point to Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Narrator: A group of shepherds brought him a sheep. Jesus was only a few hours old at this stage. They said a host of angels appeared and told them to worship Jesus, even though He was just a baby!

The shepherds enter with a sheep and put it in front of Mary and Joseph.

Shepherd: There he is! It's him!

Mary: Shhh! He's asleep!

Joseph: We don't need any more noise, please tell us that little drummer boy isn't with you!

Shepherd: Sorry, we'll be quiet. But we just wanted to see this amazing baby, angels told us to come and see Him. We also have a gift to give him, it's a lamb.

Mary: Thank you

Joseph: I'm not sure what a newborn can do with a lamb, but it's a lovely gesture.

The shepherds leave.

Narrator: He had other visitors too, kings from the East, wise men, came to see him too. They arrived a wee bit late though, a couple of years late in fact! They didn't have SatNav back then, so they had to follow a star, stars don't move very quickly do they?

The wisemen enter with their gifts and leave them in front of Mary and Joseph.

Wise Man 1: We have followed star all the way. We believe this star is telling us about a great king being born. Here, have some gold for the king of kings.

Wise Man 2: Not only a king, but a great high priest. Here is some frankincense for the one mediator between God and man.

Wise Man 3: He is also the saviour of the world. Here is some myrrh for the sacrifice he will make for us all.

Narrator: They brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh for the child Jesus. These gifts showed their amazing wisdom and understanding of who Jesus is.

The wisemen leave

Mary and Joseph leave

Praise:

John stands up and tightens his belt.

John: This doesn't feel right, maybe he just wants to talk to me, how can I be worthy?

Matthew 3:15 appears on the screen

Reading: Matthew 3:15-17

John: Ok, I'll do it, and I'm going to make sure everyone knows who He really is! Jesus, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the saviour of the world! What a story! It's worth sharing isn't it?

John leaves

Reading: John 1:1-18

Talk

Praise:

Benediction

The Writers

Recording the nativity



Tell the story!

'The Writers' draws our attention to the Gospel writers who recorded the nativity. The narrative is based around the accounts of Matthew and Luke while John addresses the meaning behind it all. Mark doesn't actually record the nativity and starts his Gospel with John the Baptist.

The 4 narrator roles in this story are the gospel writers, and it intended to look like a conversation between the four. It also helps us to better understand the audience they were originally written for while appreciating the timeless truth and wisdom of the Gospel accounts.

Roles Needed:

Speaking roles:

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Mary

Joseph

Gabriel

Zechariah

Wise Men x3

Shepherds x2

Non Speaking roles:

Wise Men

Shepherds

Angels

Elizabeth is optional

The Writers

Welcome and Prayer

Praise

Four people are sitting around a makeshift campfire. They all have books and they are writing in them and carefully checking them. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Have clear signs on them or their seats to show which one is which.

Matthew: Well lads, I think these books are pretty good.

Mark: Together, they are definitely the greatest story ever told!

Luke: And ever better than that, these stories are all true!

Everyone: Amen

John: I'm glad I waited to see what you guys had written before finishing mine. I don't have anything to add to the start, but I can do a bit of explaining in my book.

Matthew: Yeah, all of our books start differently don't they?

Luke: Yeah, but we cover different parts of the story, and it's meant to be read together.

Mark: I'm glad you two wrote that bit, the guy I spoke to didn't know much about it. Peter knew a lot about the other stuff though.

John: I was able to tie all three of your stories together to help people understand them all better. But can we make sure we have it all in the right order?

Reading: John 1:1-5

Matthew: It started when an angel appeared....

Luke: (Interrupting him) To Zechariah!

Matthew: How do you know that?

Luke: I spoke to people who followed John the Baptist, he was Zechariah's son.

Perhaps play a sound that makes it sound like a dream sequence; we are about to see the story Luke is telling.

Zechariah comes in and starts tidying up. Gabriel then enters.

Gabriel: Zechariah, I have great news, your wife Elizabeth is pregnant and is going to have a baby. Also, it's really important that you call him John! God has a special job for him.

Zechariah: Stop kidding around, we are far too old to have children, did you confuse us with Abraham and Sarah?

Gabriel: No, I didn't get the wrong person! Since you refused to believe you won't be able to speak until after the baby is born!

Zechariah: *Weird noises as if he is trying to talk but can't.*

Zechariah and Elizabeth leave. Gabriel leaves.

Luke: So Elizabeth was pregnant. That's when the angel appeared to...

Matthew: Joseph!

Luke: Yes, but not quite yet, you can help me tell the next bit...

Dream sequence sounds again.

Mary is sitting at the front and Gabriel enters.

Gabriel: Greetings Mary, you are highly favoured. God has blessed you and you are to have a baby boy. You should call him Jesus because he will save the world from its sin.

Mary: How can this be? I'm supposed to marry Joseph, but the wedding hasn't happened yet.

Gabriel: It's ok Mary, this is a gift from God.

Mary leaves.

Joseph enters and lies down to sleep, he is dreaming and maybe muttering in his sleep.

Gabriel approaches Joseph.

Gabriel: Joseph, this part isn't a dream! Mary is going to have a baby, don't be afraid, this baby is from God. Call him Jesus.

Joseph wakes up.

Joseph: That dream felt a bit too real... I need to speak to Mary.

Gabriel and Joseph leave.

Matthew: So, Joseph decided not to leave Mary and stick with her.

Luke: Mary then went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. No doubt they both spoke about these miraculous impossible babies.

Mark: John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, you know he actually baptised Jesus when they both older?

John: John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the world for Jesus. But which bit happened next?

Reading: Luke 2: 1-6

Praise

Luke: So, Mary and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem

Matthew: Meanwhile, God was sending signs to others that Jesus was going to be born. The Magi in the East had spotted a new star, one they hadn't seen before.

The Wise Men enter they have telescopes and charts etc.

Wise Man 1: Have a look at that star, would you?

Wise Man 2: Are you sure that's a star? I can't see it on any of my charts!

Wise Man 3: Are the charts wrong?

Wise Man 1: They can't be wrong; we look at them every night!

Wise Man 2: So, this is a new star? Can it mean?...

Wise Man 3: It must be the sign of a new king, a great king. We must go to meet him! The star will lead us to him!

The Wise Men exit.

Matthew: I don't know if that's how the conversation went, but I do know they made for Bethlehem because of the star!

Offering

Prayer

Praise

Luke: They weren't the first to visit Jesus though.

Dream sequence sound effect.

Shepherds enter and sit down.

Shepherd 1: I'm getting tired.

Shepherd 2: Well stop counting the sheep then!

Shepherd 1: I can't see Sean.

Shepherd 2: He's there beside BaBa and Fluffy!

Shepherd 1: Oh good, I thought we'd lost him.

The angels arrive, the shepherds scream in fear.

Gabriel: Don't be afraid, we are angels, God sent us to speak to you.

Shepherd 1: I didn't fall asleep when counting those sheep did I?

Gabriel: No, you are definitely awake. I have good news. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born, he is the Messiah, the Lord. Go and find him wrapped in swaddling cloths and worship Him.

The angels leave. The shepherds follow and take a toy sheep with them.

Praise

Mary and Joseph are sitting at the front with the baby Jesus.

The shepherds enter.

Shepherd 1: Excuse me, is this baby Jesus, the Messiah? The Lord?

Mary: Well, he's definitely called Jesus, how did you know?

Shepherd 2: A host of angels appeared to us earlier and told us to come and see him. They said he was the Messiah, God's promised Saviour!

Joseph: An angel appeared to both of us to tell us about our son too.

Shepherd 1: Here, we brought a lamb for you, he's called minty.

Mary: Thank you.

Everyone leaves.

Luke: Shortly after this Jesus was presented at the Temple, I'm told that is really important for Jewish people.

Matthew, Mark and John: Very important!

Praise: Ideal spot for Away in a Manger

Matthew: Meanwhile the Wise Men had been making their way to Bethlehem. But they were a bit confused, they went to Herod's palace first.

Herod enters and sits on his throne.

The wise men come in.

Herod: To what do I owe the pleasure? Are those gifts you have brought for me?

Wise Man 1: We have come to see the new King of the Jews, these gifts are for him.

Herod: Tell me, where is this king, for I much desire to speak with him.

Wise Man 2: I'm sorry, we've clearly got the wrong person, the new king we are looking for can't be more than 2 years old!

Herod looks angry, but then looks like he has an idea.

Herod: Hmmm. I see, I see. And you think you can find this new baby king?

Wise Man 3: We do, but we thought your amazing palace was the best place to start looking.

Herod: Ok, please go and find this new king of the Jews, I would very much like to meet him. When you find him, come back and let me know where I can find him.

Wise Man 1: Great, we'll do that! Let's go.

The Wise Men leave.

Herod: Pah, Wise Men, the three fools would be better, they can't even tell when I'm using them! (*evil laugh*).

Herod leaves.

Praise:

Matthew: After a couple of years, the wise men found their way to a house in Bethlehem where they found Jesus and Mary.

Mary comes in and sits at the front with the baby Jesus and the lamb. The wise men enter next.

Wise Man 1: Knock Knock

Mary: Who's there?

Wise Man 1: Sam!

Mary: Sam who?

Wise Man 1: Sam Wise of course! I'm one of the wise men! And I've walked a long way to bring this gift of gold. (*Ideally have him hand over a gold ring*). Begging your pardon, but he is the new king God promised, isn't he?

Mary: Well, an angel told us he would be a very special person.

Wise Man 2: I'm Dennis, and I've brought Frankincense for the one mediator between God and Man.

Wise Man 3: Um, my name isn't wise, but I've got 3 PhDs and a 7 Masters degrees so I think I qualify. I've brought some myrrh for the saviour of the world.

Mary: Thank you, I'm sure Jesus will appreciate them, he's grown very fond of Minty over there.

They all leave.

Praise:

Matthew: The Wise men left but they were told in a dream not to return to Herod and to leave a different way. An angel also told Joseph to lead the family to Egypt for some time, until the evil king Herod had passed away.

Luke: Jesus returned to the Temple when he was still a boy. He showed how special he was by asking some amazing questions.

Mark: When they were adults, John started baptising people, and he baptised Jesus before Jesus spent time in the wilderness and started his own ministry.

John: It's amazing to see how you've all covered different parts of the story, it's fun to piece it together. I decided I didn't need to tell the story again, this scroll isn't that long and there's a lot I want to fit in. But I decided to add a bit of an explainer for it all...

Reading: John. 1:1-18

Matthew: I was writing this to Jewish people; I think they'll enjoy it.

Luke: That's cool, I was writing to gentiles, I think they'll understand these bits well.

Mark: I was thinking of the Romans, they like us to be straight to the point.

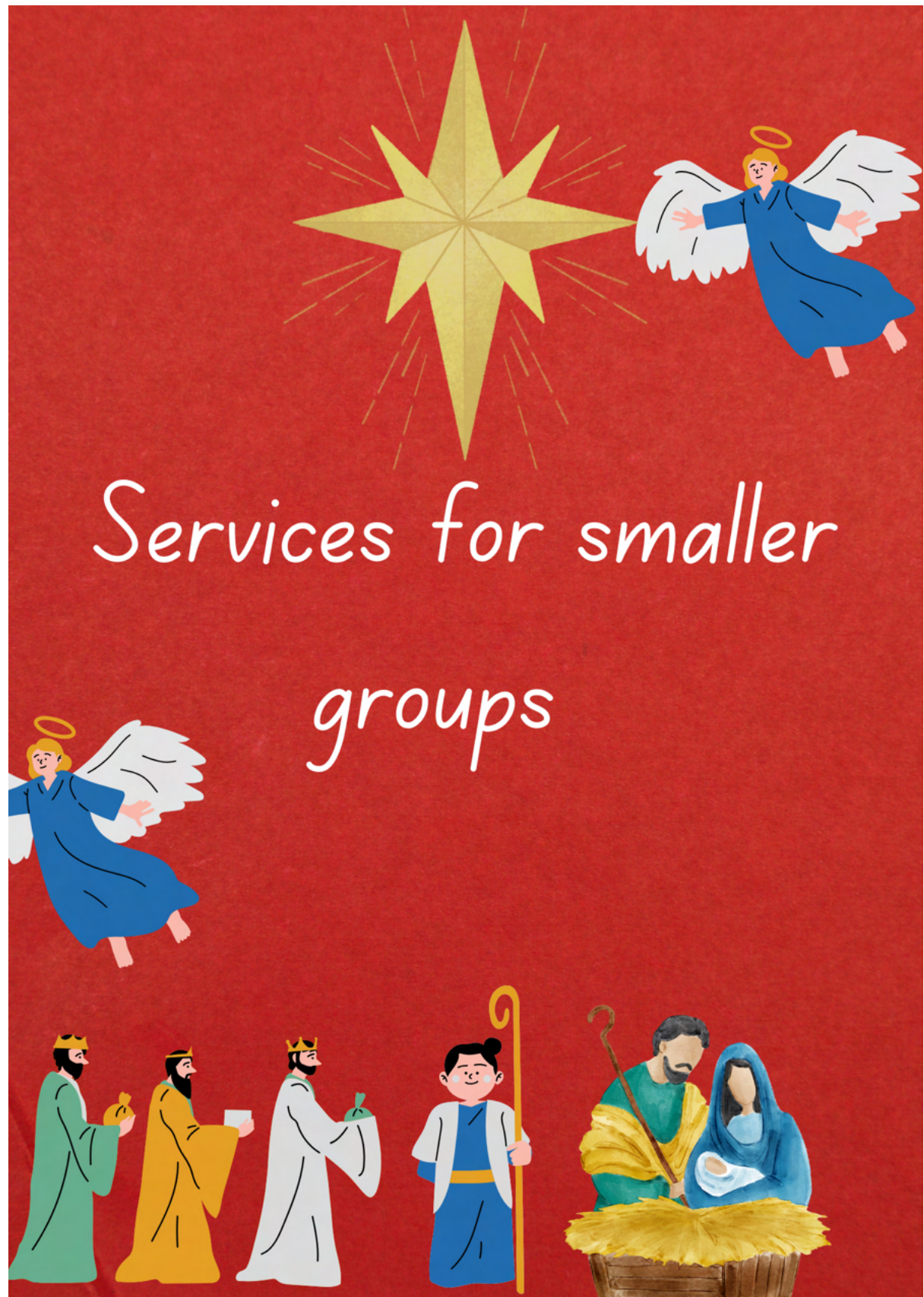
John: When we piece them all together, we get a story for everyone, because Jesus came to be the saviour of everyone. You know, other people have written books for the church too, all of them should be used to tell the same story. Jesus came into the world to save us all from sin.

Matthew, Mark & Luke: Amen brother!

Talk

Praise

Benediction





‘The Gift’ was written with a specific small group in mind, however it could actually be led with only the narrators and readers.

This service helps the congregation to reflect on the gift of salvation; the grace of Jesus that allows sinners spend eternal life with him in heaven. It is split into 7 sections focusing on a different kind of gift given throughout the narrative.

‘The Gift’ references several pop culture films or tv shows to highlight how the themes drawn out of the first Christmas continue to inspire even secular media today.

Roles Needed:

Speaking Roles:

Narrators: an even number

Other Roles: Mary

Angel

Joseph

Innkeeper

Shepherds

Wise Men

Props Needed:

Gifts

Doll

Sheep

Welcome and announcements:

Prayer

Praise

The gift of the promise

Readings: Either by one reader or by several one after the other

Numbers 24:17,19

Isaiah 42:1,4

Isaiah 9:6,7

Narrator 1: What gift are you hoping for this Christmas? Has anyone ever promised you a gift? Did you believe them? I usually do; someone surely wouldn't promise something unless they can actually fulfil that promise would they?

Narrator 2: Sometimes a promise itself can be seen as a gift. That promise of a car when you turn 17, or a family holiday to Disneyland once everyone is the right age and you've been able to save enough money. We can look forward to these promises being fulfilled.

Narrator 1: Have any of you ever seen, 'Home Alone 2: Lost in New York'? What a silly question, of course you have! In the film Kevin McAllister visits a huge toy shop and he speaks to the owner. He's a nice man who had promised to give one day's takings in the shop to a children's hospital.

Narrator 2: Except the shop got robbed by the 'Wet Bandits' and the money was taken! Later in the film Kevin made sure the money was given to the hospital after he defeated the 'Wet Bandits' again. Evil people got in the way of a businessman fulfilling his promise to the sick children, but they were defeated and the promise was fulfilled.

Narrator 1: Every year we have a promise of gifts at Christmas, not because someone has told us anything, but because it is simply expected. We always get gifts at Christmas! It would be weird if we suddenly didn't!

Narrator 2: The passages we just read cover just some of the promises God made about His Messiah. The people were waiting for Him to come, but I wonder if some of them had started to lose faith. It had been over 400 years since the last prophet of God said anything. They were still waiting on these promises being fulfilled.

Narrator 1: People had to wait but God kept the promises he made about the Messiah. Nobody could ever get in the way of God keeping these promises.

Narrator 2: We will see how later in the service, but let's get this service going properly with some praise.

Praise:

The gift of good news

Narrator 1: Have you ever received good news? It feels like a gift, doesn't it? It might feel like a weight has been lifted, it might feel like new opportunities, it might just make you feel really happy! That is what good news does, gifts make us feel like this as well.

Narrator 2: A Christmas Carol is one of the most famous Christmas stories ever told (I prefer the muppets version myself). The story centres around Ebenezer Scrooge, a businessman who cares more about his money than anyone he knows.

Narrator 1: At the end of the story Scrooge arrives at his employee Bob Cratchit's house to deliver some good news. Except usually good news for Scrooge meant an extra working day to make more money!

Narrator 2: Instead, he told the Cratchit family that he would be paying for their Christmas dinner! Scrooge had several experiences that showed him how mean he was and taught him to value his relationships with others. The good news changed everything for the poor Cratchit family.

Mary and an Angel stand at the front. The Angel is reading from something.

Narrator 1: One day Mary received some very good news. An Angel called Gabriel told her she was going to have a baby. This news came as a shock because Mary hadn't married Joseph yet, but this baby was going to be a gift from God.

Mary leaves and Joseph comes up to the front.

Narrator 2: The same Angel also appeared to Joseph. He told Joseph that Mary would have a baby boy and they were to call him Jesus because he would save people from their sins.

Narrator 1: So, both Mary and Joseph received good news about this new baby who would save the world. I wonder how they both felt after being told the news by an Angel.

Narrator 2: Good News isn't often a gift we get at Christmas, but we often yearn for it, whether it's a white Christmas, or hearing the whole family will be together. It's great, but nothing will top the good news Mary and Joseph received leading up to the first Christmas.

The gift of a worker

The innkeeper puts up a sign saying full. Mary and Joseph approach and plead for some help.

Narrator 1: Do you ever find it difficult to think of a gift for someone? I am sure we all know someone who is difficult to buy for. Often, we hear, “it’s the thought that counts”, and sometimes we don’t even need to rack our brains to think of something, sometimes the perfect gift is just what someone needs.

Narrator 2: In one of the Christmas episodes of, ‘The Big Bang Theory’ Sheldon is upset that his friend Penny wants to give him a Christmas present. He buys about a dozen different gifts in order to find the right gift to reciprocate with. In the end, the gift he is given is something that is priceless and he doesn’t know how to repay Penny.

Narrator 1: As a heavily pregnant Mary, and Joseph approached Bethlehem the only thing they wanted was a room to stay in and a bed to sleep and rest in. After a long journey they wanted to relax and be able to prepare for the coming baby. Someone was able to offer them something.

Narrator 2: There were no rooms left in Bethlehem but there was a stable. Rather than see Mary and Joseph left on the streets, or kick out one of his tenants, someone allowed the young family, to stay in the stable. It was far from perfect, but it might have been easier to simply send them away and say that it wasn’t his problem.

Narrator 1: The worker gave the only gift he could give, a stable. I am sure Mary and Joseph were relieved even though it would be far from their first choice.

Narrator 2: It might have been easier for God to say, ‘there’s the law, follow it even though you won’t be able to’ than to send a saviour to the world, but He chose to send Jesus to save the world from sin.

Mary, Joseph and the innkeeper leave.

Praise:

Offering

Prayer:

The gift of life

Mary and Joseph sit at the front with the baby. Jesus is born.

Narrator 1: Have you ever asked for a really unusual or difficult gift? Probably knowing right well how difficult that gift is for someone to get? Well in the 1994 film, ‘Miracle on 34th Street’ 6-year-old Susan Walker asks for a baby brother! I am sure that’s a very difficult gift to get, I’ve had a look at Argos, Amazon even Temu and I can’t see ‘baby brother’ listed anywhere!

Narrator 2: Susan Walker got that gift! At the end of the film, we see that she is going to get a baby brother! Any parent will tell you that their child is a gift from God, but Mary’s

child was a literal gift from God, and not just a gift for Mary and Joseph, but for the whole of creation!

Praise: (ideal Spot for Away in a Manger)

The gift from the poor

Angels lead shepherds to Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The shepherds may have a toy sheep which they leave in front of Mary and Joseph.

Narrator 1: Jesus had lots of visitors when he was born. The first of those visitors was a group of shepherds. The shepherds had been watching their sheep in the fields that night when a host of angels appeared and told them about this amazing baby who had been born in the local town, Bethlehem. They went to worship Jesus.

Narrator 2: The shepherds brought a gift with them. They were very poor and they could not afford anything flashy. They gave Jesus a lamb. I don't know what a newborn can do with a lamb but they gave what they could and I am sure it was useful for his parents.

Narrator 1: When people are poor, we often appreciate their gifts more. If someone is wealthy we expect something extravagant as a gift, but when they are poor, we are overjoyed to even receive a gift!

Narrator 2: At Christmas we remember how we are spiritually poor. We spend more time thinking about presents, food and snow rather than what Jesus did for us. The greatest gift we can give God is by making Jesus the centre of our Christmas, He is the reason for the season.

The gifts from the rich

Wise men enter with 3 gifts and place them in front of Mary, Joseph and, Jesus.

Narrator 1: The rich also appeared with gifts. Sometimes rich people buy things that are a bit weird, they buy them as gifts because they can, they have the money to. Did you know that in 2012 Angelina Jolie gifted Brad Pitt a waterfall? That's not even a gift you can take home with you!

Narrator 2: The rich gave Jesus gifts as well. They were also a bit weird, certainly for a newborn baby! The wise men might have been kings in the east and were probably very wealthy. They gave Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Narrator 1: These were a bit useless for a baby, surely some clothes would have been better. The gold could have been spent by his parents, maybe that's like giving a gift card today, but the other two items were really unusual. The wise men weren't called the wise men for nothing though, they were indeed wise and all of these gifts had a symbolic meaning.

Narrator 2: The gold represented the fact that Jesus was a king, not a worldly king but the king of all creation. The frankincense represented that Jesus was a priest, that he was sent to teach us about God and show us the way to heaven. The myrrh represented that Jesus would one day die for our sins and ensure that we could live with him eternally in heaven if we choose to accept him as our saviour.

Reading: John 1:1-5,9-14

The gift of salvation

Narrator 1: Elf is one of the best modern Christmas films. In the film Santa's sleigh fails because the magic it runs on will only work if enough people believe, and the people need to be seen to be believing too!

Narrator 2: At the climax of the film Jovie, who initially didn't believe that Buddy was from the North Pole, leads a chorus of people singing 'Santa Claus is coming to town' and that helps the sleigh fly again. People showing their belief, allowed for Christmas to be saved.

Narrator 1: Faith can be a hard thing. The people of Israel had been waiting for hundreds of years for their promised Messiah, maybe some had given up hope. Others hadn't though! After Jesus was born, he was presented in the Temple, just like everyone else would have been. There, the family met an old man named Simeon.

Narrator 2: Simeon was old, but he had been told by God that he would not die until he had met the promised Messiah. When he saw Jesus, he took him in his arms and thanked God for sending him. Simeon knew who Jesus really was, he knew he would bring the gift of Salvation.

Narrator 2: They also met a woman called Anna. She also thanked God for sending Jesus and declared that he would be the saviour of His people. They recognised God's promised gift of Salvation was going to be fulfilled.

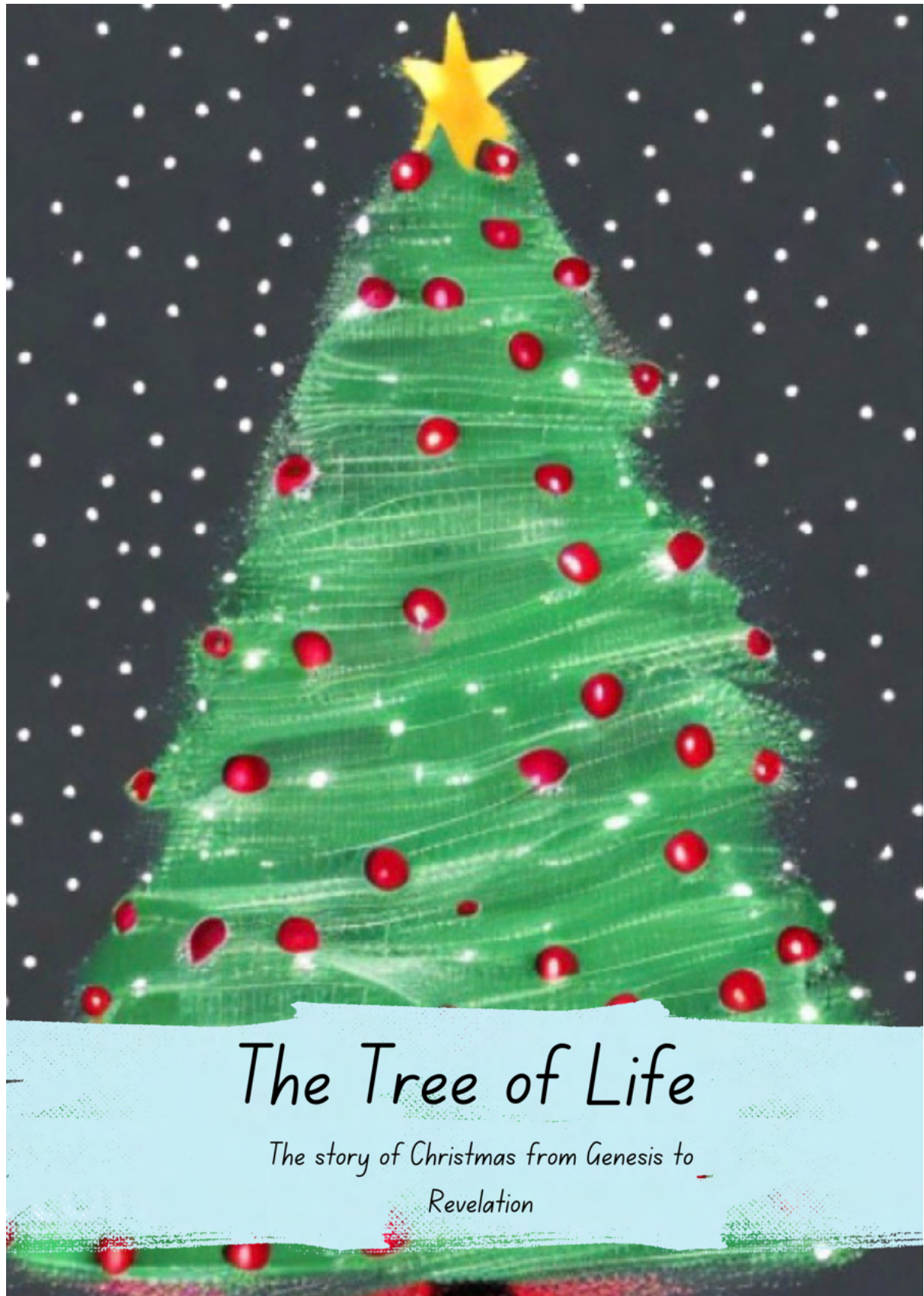
Narrator 1: We hope you enjoy all your gifts this Christmas, we hope you have enjoyed picking out gifts for others. Whether extravagant, or thoughtful, we hope everyone appreciates what they receive.

Narrator 2: At Christmas we have to remember God's countless gifts to us, but in particular the gift of salvation he offers us through His Son Jesus. Jesus was the gift the world needed, let us all receive that gift this Christmas.

Talk

Praise

Benediction



The Tree of Life

*The story of Christmas from Genesis to
Revelation*

‘The Tree of Life’ is a service that causes us to reflect on the modern symbols we associate with Christmas. The centrepiece of our Christmas decorations is the tree, but what do we decorate it with?

As the service advances your group will add different decorations to a bare tree at the front of the church as the narrators help the congregation to reflect on how they can remind us of key aspects of the Christmas narrative.

The symbol of the ‘Tree of Life’ appears in both Genesis 1 and Revelation 22, the first and last chapters of the Bible. This service helps us to show how Jesus connects the entire Bible from beginning to end and how the Christmas story is a key element in that connection.

The only speaking roles in this service are for narrators. This is a retooled version of a service above, made especially for a smaller group.

Speaking Roles:

Narrators: as many as you want

Other Roles:

Mary

Joseph

Gabriel

Wise Men x3

Shepherds

Angels

Herod

(People can be multiple characters)

Props Needed:

Bare Christmas tree

Baubles

Candy Canes

Lights

Angels

A Star

Gifts

Nativity Scene

Light board

There is an undecorated tree sitting at the front of the church right in the centre. It does have lights on it, but they are not turned on. Also have a light board with the words, "Jesus is here", but not yet turned on.

Welcome and Prayer –

Reading : Revelation 22:1-5,

Part 1

Narrator:

Have any of you ever been a bit cheeky and skipped to the final page of a book just to see how it ends?

Sometimes we like to know if we are reading a happy or a sad story. I know what some of you are thinking, how can we just spoil the story! The joy of a story isn't just about the ending but the journey of how we get there.

You see, we can read about the ending in the Bible any time we want. In fact, we just have, and we all know how it began. But humans cut themselves off from God at the very beginning of the story, and yet at the end we are all there again with God. How did this happen I hear you ask?

Well, the Bible tells us that story, but this morning we are going to look at one of the key moments that helps us get back to God, one of the moments that helps us get back to the Tree of Life in the Garden, and it all starts with a young couple.

Mary and Joseph and Gabriel enter.

Mary was a young woman and engaged to marry Joseph. One day an angel appeared to her.

Gabriel spoke to Mary and said, 'Greetings you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.'

Mary acts out the emotions described below.

Mary was confused, then she was afraid, then she had a wee think and became happy. Once she had realised how amazing this news was, she visited her cousin Elizabeth and praised God for this wonderful news.

Gabriel also told Joseph the amazing news. Joseph was asleep though, so Gabriel had to appear in a dream.

Joseph believed the angel and began to make plans to take Mary with him to Bethlehem, because the emperor had called a census.

So Mary and Joseph travelled all the way to Bethlehem. Sadly, all the rooms were filled and Jesus was born in a smelly stable, probably surrounded by animals. Definitely not the kind of place you'd expect the most important person in history to be born.

Now I know what you're all thinking, 'that was quick this morning, they've already reached the climax of the story' and yes that's true but there is much more to come!

Mary and Joseph place baubles on the tree.

Also, I'm sure you've all noticed this poorly decorated tree, well we will be fixing that this morning too, Mary and Joseph have something to put on it. Now that tree looks a bit better, but it still isn't great, we'll get to the rest later, and we'll tell you why we have just put these baubles on it too.

Praise:

Part 2

Narrator:

The next part of the story takes us a long way away from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It's here, in the East, where we meet the wise men.

The wise men, or kings, or magi, were stargazers. They believed they would learn things from looking at the stars.

The wise men can appear here with telescopes. If possible, have an image of a massive star on the screen, they'll point up and look through telescopes at it.

The Wise men wondered what this new star could mean. They believed that it meant a new king would be born.

They sat down and decided they would follow the star and visit this newborn king. But they could not go empty handed; they decided to bring some gifts with them.

The wise men are going to put a star on top of the tree, perhaps with the help of a leader or parent.

As you can see, they are putting a star on the tree. Some of you might put an angel on top of your tree but we will get to the angels later.

The wise men are putting a star at the top because they followed the star all the way to Jesus. When we put a star on our tree, we are reminded of how it is a sign leading us to Jesus, the Prince of Peace, our saviour. It goes at the top because it draws your attention and makes you look at it. We can remember how the wisemen felt when they

first saw it, and we remember how amazing it must have been for them to follow it and find Jesus beneath it.

Reading: Luke 2:4-7

Mary and Joseph come back and put a manger scene under the tree.

Part 3

When Jesus was born God sent a host of angels to tell people about it.

The shepherds are sitting to one side of the church. The angels come in and approach them.

The amazing thing is, they didn't go to the rich people, the powerful people or the cool people. They appeared to the people who were seen as the lowest in society. The smelly people, the people who spent most time outside caring for their animals. They appeared to the shepherds. Back in those days, shepherds were seen as key workers!

The angels spoke to the shepherds and said, 'Do not be afraid. I bring good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you; You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

In the Bible lots of people are afraid when they see angels, but I suppose it would be scary. Imagine sitting there in your field watching your sheep and suddenly a great light appears and there are angels telling you amazing things. Of course, you're not a king or someone who is supposed to be especially important so you're also thinking about why they are appearing to you.

The angels place some angels on the tree.

The angels are putting some angels on the tree. We are putting more than one on because then we can remember that it was a host of angels who appeared to the shepherds, not just one like with Mary and Joseph. Angels are messengers of God and angels were the ones who told people about Jesus being born and who he would be!

They told Mary and Joseph and then told the shepherds. When we see angels on the tree we remember how they brought the good news, but it also challenges us to take the good news of Jesus to those around us. We can be messengers too.

Offering

Prayer

Praise

Part 4

So, the shepherds listened to the angels and went to visit Jesus in the stable. They went in the middle of the night, when it was probably freezing and found the stable Jesus was born in. Isn't it amazing that the first people to visit Jesus were some of the poorest people in the world? Not only were they poor, but they had come straight from the fields so they probably weren't very clean either!

The shepherds place candy canes on the tree.

This is an interesting one, because not a lot of people put candy canes on their trees anymore. But they are there to remind us of two things. One is that the first people who went to visit Jesus when he was born was just a group of ordinary people. The people who had to work every day to make sure they had what they needed to live on. That's why they're shaped like a shepherd's crook. The second is the colour of the candy canes. They are red and white, and that is supposed to remind us of the sacrifice Jesus would make for us. You see he would live a sinless life, that's what the white represents, and the red reminds us of the blood he would shed for our sins.

Praise: (Ideal spot for Away in a Manger)

Part 5

The wise men come back.

The wise men travelled for a long time to find where the star was leading them to. They stopped off at the palace of Herod, because they thought he would be the first to know about a new royal baby, after all, he was the king at the time.

Herod didn't know a thing about this new royal baby, and he wasn't happy about it. He told the wise men to find out where this baby was and to report back to him. He told them he wanted to worship this new king, but really, he had more sinister plans! The Wise men continued to follow the star, and it led them all the way to where Jesus was, in Bethlehem. They visited Jesus and gave him the gifts they had brought. Gold, because he was a king, frankincense because he would teach us about God, and myrrh, because he would sacrifice himself for our sins.

The wise men place their gifts down under the tree.

The wise men left and returned home, but they didn't return to Herod. An angel had warned them not to because Herod had sinister plans for Jesus.

The Wise men were some of the first people to see Jesus. That is interesting because they were not the people who were waiting for a promised Messiah. They were from a different country and probably followed a different religion. But, because they visited Jesus, we can learn that Jesus came to save everyone, not just the Jews who were waiting for a Messiah and not even people who have grown up believing in Jesus, but everyone!

They didn't put anything else on the tree, but they did put gifts under it. They gave Jesus gifts when he was born, and that is why we give gifts to people at Christmas. When we open our presents, we need to remember that Jesus was born at Christmas, and that he is greatest gift we could ever get because by believing in him we can have eternal life with him.

Part 6

Reading: John 1:1-14

Some may have noticed that we didn't actually start with a bare tree. There are lights on the tree, but they aren't turned on. I think we should turn them on.

Gabriel turns on the lights.

The lights remind us that Jesus is the light of the world, that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

The light represents Jesus. The world is full of sin because people disobeyed God way back in the Garden of Eden, and that is represented by darkness, but Jesus is the light and is the only way to beat sin. We cannot beat sin ourselves, but we can turn on the lights and use them to follow the right way. When we follow Jesus, he can help us overcome our sin.

We also told you we would tell you about the baubles we saw Mary and Joseph put on the tree earlier. You see, in the Garden of Eden stands the tree of life, and humans were not allowed to eat from that tree after we sinned. But that tree comes back at the end of the Bible too, it is there in Revelation when we read about heaven. It is only because Jesus came into the world, lived without sin, and died to save us that we can get to heaven and eat the fruit on the tree of life and have eternal life with him.

The baubles represent the fruit on the tree of life, the tree that is in the middle of the garden. The whole tree and the decorations we have put on it remind us of the story of Jesus being born, what it means, and how it fulfils God's promises to us. When you look at your tree at home, remember what all of this represents, and take some time on Christmas day to thank God for this wonderful story.

Talk

Praise

Benediction

The New King

"He will sit on his glorious throne"

The New King was written in the weeks following Queen Elizabeth's death. It is partly a reflection on the role of monarchy and leadership both in the modern world and in a Biblical context.

This service reflects on the nature of the throne of Israel and its first two kings but highlights the existence of God's eternal throne.

Jesus was the 'new king' in the eyes of the wise men, and Herod was terrified. The contemporary characters failed to grasp that Jesus' throne was spiritual, not physical and, eternal, not passing.

This is a reworked version of the above service, written for a specific smaller church group.

Roles Needed:

Speaking roles

Narrators x4 (or any even number)

Readers x3

Other Roles

Mary -

Joseph –

Shepherds-

Angels –

Herod –

Wise Men -

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Praise

Reading: Isaiah 9:2&6-7

You can have people dressed as these kings during this part if you have enough people.

Narrator 1: You know Israel had lots of kings back in the day.

Narrator 2: The Kingdom of Judah did too! We can read about all of them in the Old Testament.

Narrator 1: Israel's first king was a man called Saul. Samuel anointed him as king because God chose him. He was a good king for a while, but then he abandoned God and so God deserted him. Soon Saul became a bad king, a very bad king.

Narrator 2: You know what is really interesting about Saul's reign? His son didn't become king after him. His daughter didn't become Queen either! Instead, someone else became the king instead.

Narrator 1: This new king was a man called David. David was Israel's greatest king, even though he did some things that were wrong. David was famous for writing lots of songs and poems to praise God with. In fact, Jesus is mentioned in as early as the second chapter of Psalms!

Narrator 2: A king who wrote songs. Does that mean he was like Elvis then? Uh-huh-huh!

Narrator 1: Not quite... David was a real king, who ruled over Israel. Elvis was just a great singer!

Narrator 2: David's son Solomon became the king after him. Solomon was not David's oldest son; he was one of the younger ones. But David knew he would be a good king; age didn't matter because David was actually the youngest in his family.

Narrator 1: Solomon was a wise king... for a while. He abandoned God too and then things went wrong for him.

Narrator 2: Solomon's son was a bad king; in fact, he was so bad the kingdom split in two and the Israelites were led into slavery by the Assyrians.

Narrator 1: It's been a while since the UK had a bad king or queen.

Narrator 2: And Charles III might end up as the best King Charles ever!

Narrator 1: The passage we read from Isaiah talks about a Prince of Peace! Someone promised to come and save the world. He would reign on David's throne and have a

kingdom lasting forever. Not David's literal throne though, because that was long gone, rather he would be the person to lead God's people.

Narrator 2: Israel had a king 2000 years ago though, a man called Herod. Herod was a bad king too, but he was a king who owed his allegiance to someone else, the Emperor of Rome! Herod and the Romans did not like anyone challenging their authority! I'm sure they did not like this new king!

Narrator 1: No, they didn't. Have you heard the story about the King of Kings and the Prince of Peace being born? It's one of my favourites!

Narrator 2: No but let's hear it! I bet he was born in the most private ward of the best hospital in the country and then taken home to his huge palace to sleep in his crib made of pure gold while wearing silk pyjamas and having servants tend to his every need!

Narrator 1: Yes, you would think that the king of kings would have everything like this, but that's not exactly what happened. Let's see what happened in Bethlehem around 2,000 years ago!

Praise:

Offering

Prayer

Narrator 3: Mary was a young woman when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. Gabriel told her she was blessed and would become pregnant. She was to name the baby Jesus because he would be the King of Kings and saviour of the world.

Narrator 4: Mary was afraid, this news came as a shock to her because she hadn't married Joseph yet. She turned to her cousin Elizabeth, who was very old, to discover she had been visited by an angel and told she would have a child too!

Narrator 3: She was to call the child John, and he would prepare the way for Jesus. He was like a herald to the King. He would let people know the King of Kings was there and point them towards them.

Narrator 4: Gabriel appeared to Joseph too, because he had to be kept in the loop. No doubt he had to check his finances to make sure he was making enough furniture to suddenly support a family.

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Mary and Joseph are at the front with the baby Jesus.

Narrator 1: So, there you have it. Jesus, the Prince of Peace and King of Kings was born in a stable and laid in a manger.

Narrator 2: That's disgusting! Did they even have hand sanitiser?

Narrator 1: I doubt it, but that's the point. Jesus didn't have to be born in a palatial mansion and have servants attending to his every need. Instead, he was born in a place we would never think is good enough for ourselves.

Narrator 2: He was also born in the city of David. David was Israel's greatest ever king and Joseph was his great-great-great-great-great grandson, or something like that. I suppose Jesus being born there, is like our monarchs being crowned in London, where the Kings and Queens have lived for hundreds of years.

Narrator 1: I wonder if anyone here has ever met anyone from the Royal family. The Royals love to meet people and people love to meet the Royals.

Narrator 2: Jesus had visitors when he was born. But he wasn't visited by King Herod, or Governor Quirinius, or Emperor Augustus. He was visited by normal people, by shepherds.

Angels appear and point the shepherds towards Mary and Joseph. They shepherds move towards them.

Narrator 1: I wouldn't let anyone who had been working in a field with sheep all night visit a newborn baby, but Jesus was special, and it was right for ordinary people to visit him first.

Narrator 2: They visited because the angles told them to, they were the first people outside of his family to meet the King of Kings, but there was nothing extra-ordinary about them at all! Isn't that amazing?

Praise:

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Herod is looking miserable on his throne while the wise men visit Jesus and give him his gifts.

Narrator 3: The wealthy people did eventually get to visit Jesus. The Wise Men were kings from the east and they brought fancy gifts for Jesus. It may have taken up to 2 years after Jesus was born for them to get there!

Narrator 4: They wanted to see the new king, but they were wise men and they took their time because, as the wise men say, "only fools rush in".

Narrator 3: But they can't help following... *(pause)* the star that led them to Bethlehem!

Narrator 4: They gave him Gold, because he was a king, frankincense, because he was here to teach us about what God wants us to know and, myrrh because he would die for our sins. Those were really weird gifts, but I'm not a king so maybe they were just what Jesus needed.

Narrator 3: The King and Queen get to meet tons of world leaders. All the world's powerful and important people have ways of meeting each other sooner or later.

Narrator 4: Jesus had kings visiting him when he was just a baby. Was he even able to walk or talk when these 3 kings visited him? The Wise Men knew how important Jesus was, they knew he was the King of Kings, sent by God to save the world and reign forever.

Narrator 3: There is another king in this story though, the evil king Herod. He told the wise men he wanted to meet Jesus and worship him, but that was a lie. He was afraid of Jesus; he didn't understand that Jesus was the King of Kings. Jesus didn't want to rule Israel like Herod did, Jesus was coming to save the world and rule for eternity in heaven.

Narrator 4: Herod wanted Jesus gone. He hoped the wise men would tell him where to find Jesus, but an angel warned them and they protected Jesus. Herod wasn't finished though, he ordered his soldiers to kill the babies in Bethlehem and Jesus, and his family had to flee to Egypt! Imagine having to run away from your own country to be safe. Some people have to do that today and I am sure they can be inspired by Jesus having to do it when he was still very young!

Narrator 3: The world has lots of kings, presidents, chancellors, emperors and prime ministers. They are all afraid of the same thing though, losing their power. Even their supporters are afraid of them losing their power.

Narrator 4: Jesus was never afraid of losing his power though. He will reign forever in heaven, and we can be there with him. He will not rule on an earthly throne like David had, or like the Royal family has. His throne is in heaven!

Narrator 3: If you have ever met the King or Queen then you probably bowed to them. This is something we do when we meet royalty. We are showing that, in some way, that person is greater than us.

Narrator 4: David was a king, and people bowed to him, but he bowed to God. Elizabeth was a Queen and people, bowed to her, but she bowed to Jesus. When Jesus was born, those who visited him bowed down and worshiped him, because he is the King of Kings and Prince of Peace.

Narrator 3: This Christmas, many of us will watch the King's Speech. For years Queen Elizabeth used her speech to remind us of Jesus coming into the world at Christmas and how important it was for her.

Narrator 4: When you watch the King's speech this year, remember what the King of Kings wants us to know. Every King or Queen who has ever lived had their reign end when they passed away. But we have a king whose reign will never end. The King of Kings and Prince of Peace who we celebrate at Christmas.

Narrator 3: Three cheers for the King of Kings! Hip Hip! *(the congregation responds with hooray)* X3

Narrator 4: Heralds proclaim a new king. Let us all be heralds this Christmas

Prayer

Talk:

Praise

Benediction



The Herald

Hear the nativity story told by Jesus' cousin!

The Herald takes a different approach to the nativity, only Matthew and Luke record the nativity narrative, and while John takes the time to explain why Christmas is so important. Mark's Gospel instead begins with John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus.

This service tells the nativity story as a recollection from John the Baptist; we take the chance to highlight what happened with his own family in the months before Jesus was born and culminates with John accepting that he must baptise Jesus if he is really going to prepare the people for His coming.

This service encourages people to be inspired by John, who didn't feel worthy to baptise Jesus. We can all be witnesses for Him and be heralds of His coming at Christmas.

There is only one small speaking role in this service for John the Baptist, the rest is led by narrators.

Roles Needed:

Speaking roles

Narrators x3 (or as many or as few as you want)

Readers x3

John the Baptist

Other Roles

Zechariah -

Elizabeth -

Mary -

Joseph –

Shepherds-

Angels –

Wise Men -

Welcome and opening prayer

Praise:

Reading: Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist is sitting at the front. He has a towel sitting beside him. John is on his lunch break from baptising people so maybe he has a lunch box. It would be a nice touch to have a jar of honey and packet of 'Lotus Biscoff' biscuits there too. John should maybe just sit there and relax or eat for about 20-30 seconds before the narrator starts.

Narrator: Yep, that's me, John the Baptist, I live in the wilderness, eat locusts and honey and spend my days submerging people in the river Jordan to symbolise how God will wash away their sins, you're probably wondering how I ended up in this situation, well that's an interesting story to tell.

John is starting to have his lunch.

Narrator: You see I was born to have a very important job. God sent me to prepare the way for his promised Messiah. So, I have done that, how do I know God wants me to do this job? Well, my parents told me.

Zechariah and Elizabeth enter. (It is a good idea to have these 2 played by adults).

Narrator: I was born around 30 years ago, and I am the first one in my family to be called John, everyone thought I would be named Zechariah after my dad, but he and my mum Elizabeth said an angel told them to name me John.

The angels stand up and wave.

Narrator: It's quite a funny story, because my dad, Zechariah, didn't believe the angel and because of that he wasn't able to speak until after I was born! I'm sure my mum loved those 9 months of peace and quiet!

A gag is tied around Zechariah's mouth! Zechariah and Elizabeth both leave.

Narrator: My parents weren't the only family to be visited by an angel 30 years ago though! My aunt Mary, well I call her my aunt, technically she's my first cousin once removed, anyway, she and her husband Joseph were also visited by an angel.

Gabriel, Mary and Joseph enter. Mary and Joseph sit down, and Joseph lies down and puts his head on a pillow.

Narrator: They say it was the same angel who visited my parents. Gabriel told Mary she was going to have a baby, even before she married Joseph, and then told Joseph the same thing. Joseph was asleep though, so Gabriel had to appear to him in a dream.

Joseph wakes up and looks shocked!

Narrator: Gabriel told my dad to call me John, funny that he couldn't tell anyone for ages, he had to write my name down! That's when he was able to speak again!

Zechariah stands up and holds up a whiteboard with the name John on it; he then takes the gag off.

Narrator: John mean's 'God is gracious' in Hebrew. So, people would be saying that every time they say my name. But Gabriel also told Mary and Joseph to name their son Jesus! Jesus means, 'The Lord is Salvation'. I think God was trying to tell us all something through these two names!

Elizabeth and Mary walk across the front of the church looking like they are chatting, the sit down again.

Narrator: Mary was so happy she visited my mum! Mum says I started jumping about in her womb when Aunt Mary visited. She sang a song and thanked God for the news that they had both received. It's a pretty cool story, isn't it?

John maybe sits down or lies down for a minute.

Praise:

John stands up and looks into the distance.

Narrator: What?!!!, Who's that coming along the road? No! It can't be. What is He doing here? Surely He doesn't want me to baptise Him. I'm not worthy to!

John is pondering.

Narrator: Maybe this is my chance to introduce the world to Jesus! To tell everyone who he really is! Is that why he's coming here? Or maybe he just wants to catch up on old times...

He always liked to tell us about his birth, kind of his go to story wasn't it! I remember the first time he told me about it!

Mary and Joseph enter and sit at the front. They both look tired.

Narrator: The emperor called a census, so Joseph had to take Mary all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. That was quite the journey, I can just picture Joseph walking beside a donkey carrying Mary...

Have someone hurriedly bring in a donkey prop, or someone dressed as a donkey.

Though now I think of it, they never did mention a donkey, maybe they walked the whole way! Maybe they hitch-hiked!

Frantically remove the donkey or lead away the person dressed as a donkey.

Narrator: The problem was, so many people had to go to Bethlehem for the census. It was called the city of David and David must have had thousands of descendants all flocking to Bethlehem. When they got there, they had nowhere to stay. The rest of the family arrived before them and had all the rooms; there were no rooms left anywhere in the city. They had to stay in a stable.

Stable image appears on screen.

Narrator: That's when it happened! That's when Jesus was born! He was born in a stable and he was laid in a manger! I hope there was no food left in it. Mary and Joseph always laughed at the story, it wasn't what they had hoped for, but they were thankful in the end! I suppose it was at least a good thing that Joseph could talk to Mary for the whole 9 months! Or maybe Mary didn't see it that way...

Mary Holds the baby.

Praise: (Ideal spot for Away in a Manger)

Offering

Prayer

John opens a book a starts reading.

Narrator: We call Him Jesus of Nazareth, but he wasn't actually born there. He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David itself. His dad, Joseph, is a descendant of King David you know. Imagine that, our greatest king's great great great great or whatever, grandson being born in a stable. Is he a king or a pauper?

An image of the stable appears on the screen.

Narrator: Mary and Joseph couldn't find anywhere to stay, so he was born in a stable, might have even been a cave, I can't remember what mother said, but Aunt Mary definitely put him in a manger to sleep!

Narrator: I don't know if I got any gifts when I was born, nobody wrote that part down or bothered to tell me, but we know what Jesus got. I don't know if many people were told about me being born, but angels were telling people about Jesus! Some of them even visited Him and brought him presents.

The angels enter and point to Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Narrator: A group of shepherds brought him a sheep. Jesus was only a few hours old at this stage. They said a host of angels had appeared and told them to worship Jesus, even though He was just a baby!

*The shepherds enter with a sheep and put it in front of Mary and Joseph.
The shepherds leave.*

Narrator: I'm not sure what he could do with a sheep at that age, but it was a lovely gesture. He had other visitors too, kings from the East, wise men, came to see him too. They arrived a wee bit late though, a couple of years late in fact! They didn't have SatNav back then, so they had to follow a star, stars don't move very quickly do they?

The wisemen enter with their gifts and leave them in front of Mary and Joseph.

Narrator: They brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Again, I don't know what Jesus could have done with those when he was only 2 but I suppose they were more symbolic anyway. The gold is because He is the King of Kings! The Frankincense because he was the High Priest and the myrrh to symbolise the death he would go on to suffer for our sins. I wonder how He feels about that.

The wisemen leave.

Praise:

John stands up and tightens his belt.

Narrator: This doesn't feel right, maybe he just wants to talk to me, how can I be worthy?

Matthew 3:15 appears on the screen

Reading: Matthew 3:15-17

John: Ok, I'll do it, and I'm going to make sure everyone knows who He really is! Jesus, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the saviour of the world! What a story! It's worth sharing, isn't it?

John leaves.

Reading: John 1:1-18

Talk

Praise:

Benediction

All Age **A CAROLLING NATIVITY**



An all age lessons and Carol service

This is essentially an all-age carol service using 4 Old Testament readings and 5 New testament readings intended to help us piece the nativity story together.

There are no set roles, but it would be good to encourage everyone who is reading, praying, speaking or leading praise to dress up as a role associated with the story. During the readings that involve Mary, Joseph, the wise men etc. you can have the children come to the front and act out the passage, but it isn't necessary.

Finish the service with an all age talk to tie together the narrative we find in scripture, one that highlights that Christmas is for everyone.

The praises listed are suggestions but provide a good balance between modern and traditional and reflect the all age nature of the service. Feel free to amend to whatever suits your group best.

Roles Needed

Speaking Roles

Readers x9

Other Roles:

Mary

Joseph

Wise Men

Shepherds

Angels

Old Testament prophets if you wish

A Carolling Nativity

Welcome:

Prayer:

Praise: O Come O Come Emmanuel

Reading: Genesis 3:1-15

Praise: Hear the Bells Ringing (Nick and Becky Drake)

Reading: Isaiah 9:2&6-7

Praise: Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Reading: Isaiah 11:1-9

Praise: Go Tell it on the Mountain

Reading: Micah 5:2-4

Offering

Prayer:

Praise: See Amid the Winter Snow

Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

Gabriel & Mary

Praise: Mary's Boy Child

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Gabriel & Joseph

Praise: Joy to the World

Reading: Luke 2:1-21

Mary & Joseph

Shepherds

Praise: Away in a Manger

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Mary & Joseph

Wise Men

Praise: What a Glorious Night (Sidewalk Prophets)

Reading: John 1:1-14

Talk

Praise: O Come all Ye Faithful

Benediction



‘Back to Basics’ starts by drawing your attention to all of the secular images we associate with the nativity. After they are removed the nativity is focused on people dressed up and acting out what is read from the Biblical narrative.

This strips back the Nativity to purely what we read in scripture. It challenges our beliefs about what Christmas is and even highlights some of the imagery we have added to the nativity story in traditional plays.

For this you need one person who is confident enough to do most of the speaking from the front.

Speaking Roles

The Group Leader

Santa

Readers x5

Other Roles:

Mary

Joseph

Wise Men

Shepherds

Angels

Herod

Other “Christmas” characters if you have enough eg. Rudolph, The Grinch etc.

Props Needed:

Gifts, and a lamb toy

Christmas character toys

Santa sack

Back to Basics

Welcome & Prayer

Praise:

Start the service with everyone at the front. Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the traditional position, shepherds, angels, wise men and animals all gathered around them. Make sure there is a star in a prominent position either someone dressed up or on the screen. Have this group stand there for about 20 seconds, then more people join. The new group should include Santa, some elves Rudolph, a little drummer boy, a nutcracker, the Grinch etc. Feel free to add whichever Christmas themed characters you want, either as people dressed up or as toys.

Once you have everyone at the front have them start to sing 'We Wish you a Merry Christmas'

After a verse 'the group leader' enters (this should be a child acting as you're your main group leader who usually organises the nativity service).

The group leader: Stop! Stop Stop! (waving hands frantically). What on earth is going on here?

Santa: We are doing the nativity!

The group leader: But this isn't the nativity! Why are you here?

Santa holds up a script saying, "The best Christmas play ever".

Santa: Says in here that I am in this one.

The group leader: But Santa wasn't at the nativity!

Santa: I was told Jesus got gifts. Who do you think brought them?

The group leader: The shepherds and wise men brought gifts, not you!

Santa: How do you know it wasn't me?

The group leader: I've read the story, hundreds of times.

Santa looks confused.

The group leader: Right, all of you away and sit down, Santa take off that beard, you aren't in this one. And someone get rid of all those toys. We need to do this right!

Everyone sits down and the front is cleared of all the extra bits.

The group leader: Ok, the first people I need are Mary and Gabriel, come up you two.

Mary and Gabriel come up to the front.

The group leader: I need a volunteer to read something for me.

Your assigned first reader comes up.

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Ideally Mary and Gabriel should act out the reading.

The group leader: Mary, you can sit down again for a bit, thank you. Gabriel, I need you to stay here, now where is Joseph? I need someone to do the next reading too.

Joseph comes up to the front and lies down. The next reader comes up.

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Ideally Joseph and Gabriel should act out the reading.

The group leader: Ok, so far so good. I'm feeling a bit flustered, so I need a quick break. Can we lift the offering now? (Perhaps address the church leader here).

Offering

Prayer

Praise

The group leader: I need, Mary, Joseph and the wee donkey, actually wait, maybe no donkey... no, no donkey. But I need another reader too.

The reader comes up. Mary and Joseph walk around the whole church during the reading before coming to the front and sitting down with a baby doll. They stay at the front for the next wee while

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Praise: Ideal spot for away in a manger.

The group leader: Next reader please! And if you are dressed as a shepherd I need you over there, angels, come over here and you need to walk towards the shepherds.

The reader comes up. The shepherds sit at one side of the church, angels stand at the other, they then walk to the shepherds and point to Mary and Joseph during the reading.

The shepherds then make their way towards Mary and Joseph and leave a lamb toy beside them. The shepherds leave.

Reading: Luke 2:8-21

Santa shouts from his spot in the congregation.

Santa: What about the presents?

The group leader: Yes, we are getting to that part! But we should sing first.

Praise:

The group leader: Right, who do I need next. Herod! Can you come up and sit on this throne? And the wise men, make sure you bring those gifts up with you. Oh, and the next reader as well please?

Herod sits on his throne, off to the side, not too close to Mary and Joseph. The wise men enter. They leave and approach Mary and Joseph leaving their gifts on the floor, they sneak away in a different direction, so they don't have to pass Herod and they sit down again.

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Praise

The group leader: And that's that then. This is what the Bible tells us about the nativity. No Santa, no little drummer boy, it doesn't even mention the donkey or the innkeeper! Just a simple story about a young family trusting God and some visitors wanting to see the new baby and saviour of the world. It's shorter than people think, but isn't it so powerful?

Well, done everyone, come on up and take a bow now, yes even you Santa, come on.

The cast bows and then sits down.

Talk

Praise

Prayer

