

A Very Merry Messy Christmas

Written by Jennifer Hughes with the Brougham Place Children's Ministry Team

Background

This year has been an out of the ordinary kind of year. This nativity invites participants to reflect on how God has sustained us, what gifts we have been offered and how God's love has been shared this year.

Just as it has been an out of the ordinary kind of year... so it was at the time of Jesus' birth. Things have been messy for us all this year and plans have been changed and then changed again...so it was at the time of Jesus' birth. Every year, all year, in the middle of the messiness of our lives, Jesus comes to be with us. But it's not in out of the ordinary kinds of ways, it's in middle of the ordinary things with ordinary people - like you and me that God is found.

Concept

The script invites everyone to participate in the nativity by choosing a character and sharing in this character's line each time it appears. People, especially children, may wish to dress as their chosen character. The nativity itself does not need a rehearsal - simply a couple of narrators willing to lead and reporters who have rehearsed their part. There are discipleship conversation starters for preparation with an intergenerational team or with children in the lead up to the nativity.

There are some special roles:

- Worship Leader
- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Pre-recorded or live: news anchor
- Pre-recorded or live: Reporter from Jerusalem
- Pre-recorded or live: Reporter from Bethlehem

Welcome

Worship leader: Do you think you can help tell a story? It is a pretty amazing story - one that people have been telling for 2000 years! You all have a part to play. It doesn't matter whether you are dressed up or not - I hope you will choose to be a character in the story. Who would like to be Mary?

(Go through each part and practice the line and the action)

... Mary said: *"It sounds a bit messy, but we'll make it work."*

... Joseph said: *"Well, that's unprecedented."*

... The angel Gabriel whispered: *"You can do this. Don't be afraid."*

... Donkey said: *"It's fake news."*

... The shepherds said: *"Could this be the new normal?"*

... The sheep said: *"We're all in this together."*

... The angels said: *"Can you hear me now?"*

... The travellers said: *"That's not what we had planned."*

... The camels said: *"We've got you covered."*

... The star said: *"One step at a time."*

... The innkeeper said: *"A little bit of kindness goes a long way."*

Worship leader: *(Once all of the parts are practiced...)*

Listen carefully to the story so that you can be ready to say your part. Let's begin!

Scene 1

Narrator 1: It was a strange year. Everything was a bit out of the ordinary. Tumultuous. Jerusalem was in a mess!

Play pre-recorded journalists

News anchor: Hello and welcome to 4CE morning news. I'm _____ and here are today's headlines:

- star gazers have been given a special treat as all eyes turn towards the skies;
- concerns rise for sheep missing across the border;
- Herod announces a census to appease Rome; and
- angelic sightings have sent rumours flying of a new leader to save the nation.

But first, let's cross live to our Jerusalem correspondent, Josephus, where scenes of panic and hysteria have broken out.

Reporter 2: Thank you _____. Last night violence broke out in the street as all of Jerusalem now fears for the future. It is rumoured that visitors arrived from the East asking after the child who was to be born king of the Jews. They in fact did not bow before Herod, but rather intend to honour another king. Herod has brought together the ruling elite and prophets, demanding answers. There are fears of riots and a resurgence of militants and radicals. Some wonder whether we are heading towards the bloodshed we saw just 8 years ago. Others are suggesting that that the strange star patterns might confirm the rumours of a new ruler. We'll keep an eye out for anything out of the ordinary. Josephus, 4CE News, Jerusalem.

Narrator 2: Jerusalem wasn't the only place where things were getting messy. There was other news in the lives of ordinary people too.

Narrator 1: In a small town in Galilee called Nazareth, a young couple were engaged to be married. Their names were Mary and Joseph. One ordinary day, something extraordinary happened.

Narrator 2: An angel came and greeted Mary. The angel told Mary, that she was going to have a baby, and that the child would be holy. He would be called the Son of God. Mary was so shocked! How was it that she was going to have a *baby*!? She wasn't even married yet.

Narrator 1: Whispering in Mary's ear, the angel Gabriel said:

Angel Gabriel: You can do this. Don't be afraid.

Narrator 2: The angel explained that everything was going to be ok. God was the baby's dad and Joseph would stick around to help raise the child. Mary said:

Mary: It sounds a bit messy, but we'll make it work.

Narrator 1: When Joseph found out, he wasn't so sure. Joseph said:

Joseph: Well, that's unprecedented.

Narrator 2: He was right. It was unprecedented. Joseph wasn't planning on sticking around. In Joseph's dream, the angel Gabriel said:

Angel Gabriel: You can do this. Don't be afraid.

Narrator 1: The angel was right, Joseph *could* do it. Joseph pulled it together. He had work to do.

(Worship Leader: Intro to song about things feeling strange this year.)

Song: Things feel a little bit strange,
things feel a little bit strange,
but I know that God is here with me.
I know that God is here with me.

Discipleship conversation:
This scene invites conversation about what has happened in 2020. What has impacted the whole world and what has impacted in our own lives?

Key ideas:
Courage (do not be afraid),
Resilience (we'll make it work).

Scene 2

Narrator 2: Joseph and Mary headed off to Bethlehem. But things were a bit out of the ordinary in Bethlehem too.

News Anchor: Good evening and welcome to 4CE news. As scenes of unrest play out here in Jerusalem, news is coming in from Bethlehem. _____, what can you tell us?

Reporter 2: Good evening _____. Well, things are rather busy here in town as families pour into the city to be registered. The roads continue to bring pilgrims but it's hard to see where any of them will find a room at this late stage. ____ 4CE News, Bethlehem.

Narrator 1: While the situations in the cities were messy, something out of the ordinary was happening in the countryside too.

Narrator 2: There were shepherds out in the field looking after the sheep. An argument had broken out. The sheep were all just too close together! New rules meant they needed to be 1.5m apart. The shepherds said:

Shepherds: *Could this be the new normal?*

Narrator 1: But oh the noise! There was so much baaing. The sheep simply would not cooperate. Suddenly a whole heavenly host of angels zoomed in. *(Image on screen of angels on zoom - with mute button on)* The angels said:

Angels: Can you hear me now?

Narrator 2: But they couldn't hear because the angels were on mute. *(Image on screen of angels on zoom - with mute button off)* The angels tried again. The angels said:

Angels: Can you hear me now?

Narrator 1: But the sheep were making such a racket no one could hear. Zooming in again, the angels said:

Angels: Can you hear me now?

Narrator 2: Finally, the shepherds heard the good news. A child was born in the city of David, who was God's own son.

Narrator 1: The shepherds looked at each other in dismay. How were they going to get the sheep to cooperate? But they needn't have worried. The sheep had seen the angels too. The sheep said:

Sheep: We're all in this together.

Narrator 2: They immediately got on board, ready to head to Bethlehem, all nicely spaced. In hope, turning to the sheep, the shepherd's said:

Shepherd: *Could this be the new normal?*

Discipleship conversation:
What has changed this year? Has this change been easy or hard? What has helped?

Key ideas:
Flexibility - adapting to new ways and new rules (a new normal)
Patience (can you hear me now?)
Collaboration and solidarity (we're all in this together).

Scene 3

News Anchor: Welcome to 4CE news. We are following the developments all across the nation as this most unusual year unfolds. Josephus is coming to us live from Jerusalem. What can you tell us, Josephus?

Reporter 1: Things here in Jerusalem seem to have grown quiet, at least for the moment. The visitors have moved on and Herod appears to be waiting, although no one is quite sure exactly what he is waiting for.

Narrator 1: The visitors had indeed left Jerusalem, but not everything was going to plan. They were following the star but the journey had been complicated. The star said:

Star: One step at a time.

Narrator 2: But bushfires destroyed the land along the route. The travellers said:

Travellers: That's not what we had planned.

Narrator 1: The camels said:

Camels: We've got you covered.

Narrator 2: Sure enough, they'd brought plenty of water. The star said:

Star: One step at a time.

Narrator 1: But then there was another challenge. Along the way, the borders closed. The travellers said:

Travellers: That's not what we had planned.

Narrator 2: The camels said:

Camels: We've got you covered.

Narrator 1: And they had. The camels had maps with alternate routes. The star said:

Star: One step at a time.

Narrator 2: But still there was more to come. There was a toilet paper shortage. The travellers said:

Travellers: That's not what we planned.

Narrator 1: The camels said:

Camels: We've got you covered.

Narrator 2: And what do you know?! The emergency supplies the camels packed included toilet paper. The star said:

Star: One step at a time.

Discipleship conversation:

Sometimes things change or don't go to plan. How can we be ready (emotionally and physically) when things don't go to plan? Consider a bushfire plan, changing schools or work place. When we are worried about change how can we help not to get too far ahead of ourselves? Consider meditation, deep breathing, talking to other people, planning ahead.

Key ideas:

Planning ahead and helping others (We've got you covered)
Going with the flow (That's not what we planned)
Coping with change (one step at a time)

Scene 4

News Anchor: In our nightly news update, we come to you live from Bethlehem. _____, what is the situation in Bethlehem?

Reporter 2: Things are quite out of the ordinary here still. The angelic sightings reported 9 months ago in Nazareth seem to have made a reappearance – this time here in the fields outside of Bethlehem. The town is bustling with all the families here for the census and they are being treated to quite the light show. The star that had stargazers in a frenzy in Jerusalem seems to have stopped here over Bethlehem. Unfortunately, the rush on rooms continues and there are simply not enough beds for everyone. There would need to be a re-count.

News Anchor: Thank you, _____, for the update. And now, in other news... *(fade out)*

Narrator 1: Mary and Joseph were tired. Mary was heavily pregnant. They tried the first place they could find. They knocked on the door and the very nice inn keeper said:

Inn keeper: A little bit of kindness goes a long way.

Narrator 2: But no amount of kindness could help Mary and Joseph – the inn was completely full. Joseph said:

Joseph: Well, that's unprecedented.

Narrator 1: And donkey said:

Donkey: It's fake news.

Narrator 2: But it was true. They tried another house a little further along. They knocked on the door and the very nice inn keeper said:

Inn keeper: A little bit of kindness goes a long way.

Narrator 1: But no amount of kindness could help them. Mary was pregnant and there wasn't enough hand-sanitiser to purify the house after

something like that! Joseph said:

Joseph: Well, that's unprecedented.

Narrator 2: And donkey said:

Donkey: It's fake news.

Narrator 1: But it was true. The whole house would be in trouble if the baby was born there. So on they went. They were getting desperate and it was nearly nighttime. They knocked on the door and the very nice inn keeper said:

Inn keeper: A little bit of kindness goes a long way.

Narrator 2: Joseph explained that they had tried everywhere and the baby would be here soon. The innkeeper thought hard. With a scratch of the head, the inn keeper said:

Inn keeper: A little bit of kindness goes a long way.

Narrator 1: And although no amount of kindness could fit the couple in the inn, a small amount of kindness could fit Mary and Joseph in the stable. The inn keeper disappeared inside. The inn keeper came back carrying towels, hot water and disinfectant. The inn keeper led Mary and Joseph to the stable. Mary said:

Mary: It sounds a bit messy, but we'll make it work.

Narrator 2: And the angel Gabriel whispered:

Angel Gabriel: You can do this. Don't be afraid.

Discipleship conversation:

This year we have heard a lot about "fake" news. How do we know what sources and voices to listen to? How do we know what to believe? Small acts of kindness can change the world for the better. How we treat each other matters. When have you offered or received a small act of kindness? Sometimes small things turn out to be big things.

Has this ever happened to you?

Key ideas:

Truth (It's fake news.)

Kindness and compassion (A little bit of kindness goes a long way.)

Scene 5

Narrator 1: No sooner than the baby had arrived and there was a great commotion outside. They had visitors! Visitors sent by God! They were looking for a king. Joseph said:

Joseph: This is unprecedented.

Narrator 2: They told Mary and Joseph about the star that had sent them to this very place. For a king, it all looked very ordinary. Donkey said:

Donkey: It's fake news.

Narrator 1: But it wasn't. This *was* the child they had been waiting for. The travellers knelt down and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh.

Not long after, the shepherds arrived with their sheep and *they* wanted to come and see this new baby too. There just wasn't space. The camels said:

Camels: We've got you covered.

Narrator 2: And so they did. The camels told everyone to wriggle over so that there *was* enough room. The sheep said:

Sheep: We're all in this together.

Narrator 1: In the middle of the mess, in a time when everything was a little bit out of the ordinary, Jesus was born.

Narrator 2: Out of the ordinariness of life – mangers, stars and stables – with ordinary people – Mary, Joseph, travellers and shepherds – the most extraordinary thing happened: the hope of the world, the prince of peace, the everlasting light, came to be born among us. And the shepherds said:

Shepherds: *Could this be the new normal?*

Narrator 1: And so it was. Every year, all year, in the middle of the messiness of our lives, Jesus comes to be with us. It **was** the new normal and it still is. God is here, even in the mess. This year, may we share a very merry messy Christmas.

Song: Merry Messy Christmas (Wheeler / James)

Discipleship conversation:

What does it mean to share a very merry messy Christmas? How is this year different to other years for you? How might you share joy and hope, love and peace with others?

Key ideas:

In the middle of the messiness of our lives Jesus is with us. Into the space where hope meets despair, peace meets tyranny, joy meets lament, love meets fear, God is made known. Out of the ordinariness of life – mangers, stars and stables – with ordinary people – Mary, Joseph, travellers and shepherds – the most extraordinary thing happened: the hope of the world, the prince of peace, the everlasting light, came to be born among us.