

A 'Make Room for the Manger' All Age Crib Service

Readings

Readings may be taken from a user-friendly translation of the Bible (for which chapter and verse references are provided), or from a children's retelling or other suitable paraphrase.

Choreography

This outline assumes that the classic Christmas nativity scene will gradually be created using real people, in costume, during the service – each new character introduced may come forward during the appropriate carol. Some churches have a procession during each carol up and down the aisles – if you decide to do this, you may wish to have Mary and Joseph and the Donkey all walking together during 'Little Donkey', rather than being added to the scene separately. Whoever is narrating the service may have to give directions to encourage people to come forward and take part. You might also choose to print instructions in your service sheet.

Stop & Pray

To reflect the Love Life Live Advent theme of 'stopping days', the idea of the service is to try and create moments of stillness and prayer during the nativity story. Depending on the make-up of your congregation, it may be quite hard to create moments of stillness – some congregations will cope with a period of silence, in others you may only be able to manage the time it takes to take a deep breath... but any stillness you do manage will be a gift to those who are there. Flagging up these moments during the welcome and on the service sheet may help, as may the suggestions given below in the service introduction. If your set-up allows, you might also choose to do something such as light a candle for each stop & pray moment, and/or dim the lights in the church. You may also need to introduce each stop & pray moment with an invitation to be still.

Costumes and props

The service can be advertised as a 'come along in costume' event, but if your church has a set of nativity dressing up outfits, make these available to children who arrive without a costume and want to join in. Items such as crowns, or crooks, may be used by adults or children who don't feel comfortable dressing up. You may wish to have several spare tinsel circlets available to enable people to become angels! If you have spare surplices hanging around in the vestry, these also make excellent angel outfits!

It is helpful to have a chair for Mary (or for one of the Marys, if you have more than one), a wooden manger complete with straw, and a baby doll. The instructions below assume that there is only one Mary etc, but the service can work just as well with more than one if you want to maximise participation.

Some churches have found that children come in all sorts of costumes (dog outfits, Christmas puddings, Spiderman, to name but a few) – if you are confident with improvising embellishments to the story (without detracting from it) so as to incorporate all of those who wish to be involved, good luck! One way of doing this is to invite everyone who has come in costume to come to the front if they're not already there as a celebration of the fact that all are invited into the Christmas story.

Music

Carols have been suggested to support the retelling of the story. In most cases, using all the verses of all the carols would make a service that is too long – and less accessible for those who find reading difficult, such as younger children. Some of the carols suggested below also have a selection of verses suggested – please do feel free to work out what would work best in your own context. Depending on the nature of your service, you may find that it's easiest to remain seated for most of the carols – the exception might be that it's good to stand for the first and last carol. If you choose to process round the church you may need more verses.

Additional Actions

You may wish to give out Christmas gift tags and pencils as people arrive, so that those who wish to can write a prayer (or just a name) on the tag and then place it in the offertory plate; the tags may then be hung on the church's Christmas tree. Some churches also give a gift as people leave a Crib service. This might be an origami Christmas star, a Christmas biscuit, or simply a Christmas card giving information about forthcoming all-age friendly services.

Order of Service

Welcome to this special crib service.

We will tell the Christmas story together, using bible readings, carols, actions and prayers.

Gradually, throughout the service, we will create our own living nativity scene, here in church, and you can be part of it! If you have come in costume, please come forward and join our living nativity scene at the appropriate moment.

[If you would like a costume, please (add your own instructions here)]

After each song, there is a chance to 'stop and pray' – we will all be still, and as we think about what we have just heard, and sung, and done, we will press 'pause' on our story for a prayer. In these 'stop & pray' moments you might like to close your eyes, or hold your hands out, or look at the nativity scene, or focus on one of the candles. These moments are a gift to you, to pause and be still. You might like to take this service sheet away with you, and use the 'stop & pray' prayers at other times during this busy time.

We will stand to sing the first carol and the last carol, but at other times, please do feel free to stay seated.

The Welcome

A minister welcomes the congregation and introduces the service in these or other appropriate words

We have come together as Christmas draws near to prepare for our celebration of the birth of God's beloved Son. We have made room in our busy lives to travel in spirit with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, to sing with the angels of the coming of the Prince of Peace. Through Scripture and action, prayer and song, let us tell again the wonderful story of our redemption, and rejoice and respond with lively faith.

(Adapted from Times and Seasons)

Almighty God,
as we prepare with joy
to celebrate the gift of the Christ-child,
embrace the earth with your glory
and be for us a living hope
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Times and Seasons)

The Light of the World

A large candle, or a candle on the Advent wreath, is lit

Reading: Isaiah 9.2,6,7

Carol

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold;
“Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From Heaven’s all gracious King.”
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.

We confess our sins

Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts.
In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

Christ came in humility to share our lives:

forgive our pride.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ came with good news for all people:

forgive our silence.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ came in love to a world of suffering:

forgive our self-centredness.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour

forgive us our sins and make us holy to serve him in the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Times and Seasons)

Glory to Christ, Son of Mary;
born a child, you are one with us.

Glory to God in the highest.

Glory to Christ, Son of David;
born to rule, you reign in our hearts.

Glory to God in the highest.

Glory to Christ, Son of man;
born to save, you are the light of the world.

Glory to God in the highest.

(Times and Seasons)

Carol

**O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.**

**How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.**

**O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!**

Mary and the Angel

Reading: Luke 1.26-38

Carol *During the carol Mary comes forward*

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame:
"All hail to thee, thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady." *Gloria!*

"For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee;
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favoured lady." *Gloria!*

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said.
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name."
Most highly favoured lady." *Gloria!*

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
Most highly favoured lady." *Gloria!*

Stop and pray...

Lord Jesus,
your birth turned the world upside down.
we pray for those facing change,
and coming to terms with unexpected news.
Bless us in the opportunities we are given
and in the challenges we face.
In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Mary and Joseph

Reading: (Matthew 1.18-24)

Stop and pray...

Lord Jesus, we pray for all
who have hard decisions to make,
and hold the lives of others in their hands.
Give them strength to do what is right,
and to walk the path you have prepared for them

with courage and with hope.
In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Carol

**Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.**

**He came down to earth from Heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.**

The journey to Bethlehem

Reading: Luke 2.1-5

Carol *During the carol, the Donkey joins Mary and Joseph at the front of the church*

Little donkey, little donkey

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Stop & Pray...

Lord Jesus,
we pray for those who cannot stop,
whose journey of life is hard and long,
who have heavy burdens to carry.
Give strength for each next step,
and light to show the way.
In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Jesus is born

Reading: Luke 2.6-7

Carol *During the carol the baby doll is added to the manger*

Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright,
round yon virgin mother and child,
holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Stop & Pray...

Lord Jesus,
your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder
at heaven touching earth.
Accept our heartfelt praise
as we worship you,
our Saviour and our Eternal God.
Amen.

(Times and Seasons)

The Angels and the Shepherds

Reading: Luke 2.8-14

Carol *During the carol the angels come forward*

Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

Stop & Pray...

Lord Jesus,
the angels were glad
to share the good news of your birth.
Help us to tell the world the good news
that you are still with us,
and will never leave us.
In your name we pray. **Amen.**

The visit of the shepherds

Reading: Luke 2.15-20

Carol *During the carol the shepherds and sheep come forward*

**While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.**

**"Fear not!" said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind.
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.**

Stop & Pray...

Lord Jesus,
you came in the silence of the night,
an extraordinary gift to ordinary people.
Help us to see the wonderful things you are doing
in the ordinary experiences of our lives.
In your name we pray. **Amen.**

The visit of the Magi

Reading: Matthew 2.1-12

Carol *During the carol the Magi and camels come forward*

**We three kings of Orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.**

***O star of wonder, star of light,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.***

Stop & Pray...

The kings, Lord,
brought myrrh, frankincense and gold.
Lord, we have nothing of our own to bring;
we bring you what you have given:
our lives for your life.

Amen.

(Times and Seasons)

A short talk may be given [a suggested outline available at www.liveadvent.net]

Stop & pray...

We have shared in the wonderful story of Mary and Joseph, of the Angels, the Shepherds and the Magi, and of Jesus himself: God with us. This Christmas, in the midst of our busy lives, we are invited to make room for the manger, and kneel in wonder at the miracle of heaven touching earth.

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us,
let us pray with confidence as Jesus himself has taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses**

as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Carol *During the song everyone returns to their seats. A collection may be taken.*

The Calypso Carol (See him lying on a bed of straw)

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We are sent out

May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ-child
be yours this Christmas;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

(Adapted from Times and Seasons)

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