



The Lockdown Nativity

For Mary's Meals

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Introduction

Everyone remembers who they were in the school Nativity play. Research shows that there's a correlation between the part you played and how you fared in later life.

Marys are likely to earn twice the national average wage and have a 92% chance of being content.

Kings often go into construction.

No one seems to know what happens to all the Herods. Nor does anyone know when the tradition started, though we do know that St. Francis staged a Nativity play – with live animals – in Greccio in 1223.

In a secular age, the Nativity play is one of the ways in which the story of the Incarnation is not only kept alive, but brought into our hearts and placed among our dearest memories.

This year, because of Covid-19, we may struggle to keep that tradition alive.

That's why Mary's Meals has produced these scripts. They are a Do-It-Yourself Lockdown Nativity kit for schools, parishes and adventurous families.

They're written in a series of simple, easy to memorise rhyming speeches. The idea is to use a smart phone or video camera to film the children reading these speeches straight to camera. The clips are then assembled into a single play. You'll find two scripts here. One is aimed at infants' school children, the other at juniors.

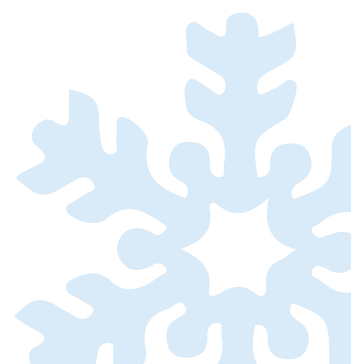
This means that if children are socially isolated at home, or if a parish – or a family – is divided by Covid-19 they can still participate in the play.

These Nativity plays can be as simple or as extravagant as each group is inclined. But for all the participants and their audiences they will be a lasting tribute to the faith, hope and resilience of Christmas 2020.

The times may demand that we be apart, but we can still be united around the crib.



Lockdown Nativity Infants' version



The Herald

The Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary.

Gabriel

Hello Mary, don’t be wary.
I’m God’s angel. I’m not scary.
I bring news from heaven above
Because you’re kind and full of love.

Mary

That angel was so big and bright!
He filled my kitchen full of light.
He says I am the chosen one.
He says my babe will be God’s son.

Joseph

I had a dream.
An angel came.
My life will never be the same.
My Mary will be God’s own mum.
And I’ll protect the little one.

The Donkey¹

I can’t believe what Joseph said!
That Mary must get out of bed!
Must walk to Bethlehem by road!
I’ll help them with their heavy load.

The Herald

And so they came to Bethlehem

Innkeeper’s Family 1

Our inn was packed full. No more room for a mouse.

Innkeeper’s Family 2

We were squished up and squashed up all over the house.

Innkeeper’s Family 3

But Joseph kept knocking and begged for a bed.

Innkeeper’s Family 4

We couldn’t say no, so we gave them our shed.

1. The speech could be split between two donkeys if required (change the I to we!)

Mary

(cradling baby Jesus)

My son was born in the shed that Night.

Narrators

The son of God. The Lord of light

Who could guess that one tiny boy

Would fill the world with so much joy?

The Herald

The choir of angels appeared to some shepherds.

Angel 1

Hello, shepherds please don't fear us.

Angel 2

We're God's messengers, so hear us.

Angel 3

Hear good news of Jesus birth.

Angel 4

You're first to know on all the Earth.

Shepherd 1

We’re so excited at this news.

Shepherd 2

We’ll leave our rams. We’ll leave our ewes.

Shepherd 3

We’ll bring a lamb, the nicest one.

Shepherd 4

The best we’ve got for God’s dear son.

The Herald

A new star appeared in the East.

King 1

We are three kings and we live far away.

King 2

But we found a new star, so we just couldn’t stay.

King 3

We knew we should follow it, find the new king.

King 1

But this poor smelly stable, we weren’t expecting

Animal 1

Then they gave them their incense,
their myrrh and their gold.

Animal 2

And worshipped the little king,
Just 12 days old.

Animal 3

And they felt so excited.
They felt so glad.

Animal 4

That even the stable did not smell so bad.

The Chorus²

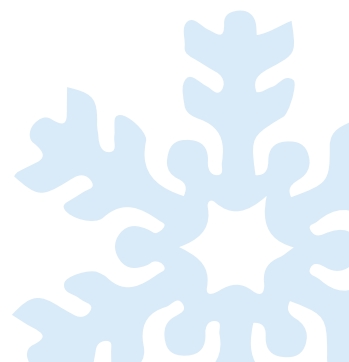
Then all in the stable began to rejoice.
Kings, shepherds, innkeepers sang with one voice.
Sang with the angels from heaven above.
Sang of Christ’s birth, and God’s saving love.

The End.

2. Give these lines to the most appropriate members of the cast.



Lockdown Nativity Juniors' version



Jesus

Here is my story the tale of my birth.
When I came to be born as a baby on Earth.
When I came down, to bless and to heal and forgive.
And to show all who follow me how they should live.

Gabriel

I am Gabriel fierce and bright!
I bring news of the Lord of light!
Coming to Earth to be born of this maid
I am God's messenger. BE NOT AFRAID!

Mary

I am Mary. I'm good and I'm kind.
I keep God's laws in my heart and my mind.
I can't quite believe I'll give birth to God's son.
I can't quite believe I'm the Chosen one.

Joseph

I am Joseph. The Angel's just gone.
He's told me my Mary will carry God's son.
He's told me to treasure and care for this boy.
That mighty rulers will seek to destroy.

Mary

Here I am now that my nine months is done.
I'm ready to meet my new baby son.
But Joseph said we've got to pack up and go,
To Bethlehem. The Romans said so!

Joseph

Oh Mary, we're here but it's dark and it's late.
And now you are saying the baby won't wait.
Oh somebody help us. Don't show us the door.
Even the donkey can't take one step more.

The Innkeepers

Innkeeper 1

Our inn was packed full. No more room for a mouse.

Innkeeper 2

We were squished up and squashed up all over the house.

Innkeeper 3

But Joseph kept knocking and begged for a bed.

Innkeeper 4

We couldn't say no, so we gave them our shed.

Mary

(cradling baby Jesus)

What kindness what mercy that innkeeper showed.
His wife offered help to strange folk off the road.
They gave what they could, with love and with joy.
And never suspected my babe was God's boy.

The Herald

The Choir of Angels brings the good news to some shepherds.

Angel 1

Hello shepherds please don't fear us.

Angel 2

We're God's messengers so hear us.

Angel 3

Hear our news of Jesus' birth.

Angel 4

You're first to hear on all the Earth.

Shepherd 1

We are all simple Shepherds, not used to God's glory.
Our hearts are excited by the Angels' glad story.

Shepherd 2

We must see at once where these Angels have said,
The little Lord Jesus sleeps in his bed.

Shepherd 1

We've brought him a sheepskin to keep out of the cold.

Shepherd 2

We've brought him the newest lamb born to the fold.

Shepherd 3

We've brought him our hearts full of wonder and love.

Shepherd 4

And joy that our God has come down from above.

The Herald

In the East, a new star appeared ...

First King

We three saw a star that is new in the sky.
God sent us this sign of a new king. But why?
We'll follow its movement wherever it goes.
Then we'll find the new babe. We'll see what God shows.

The Herald

The Kings lose their way

Second King

We've come to a Palace, though we've left the star behind.
But King Herod is so pleasant. Yes, King Herod is so kind.
He's really quite ecstatic to hear the news we bring.
He says he's very eager to find the new born king.

Herod

I'm Herod. I'm the bad king. I'm not ashamed to say –
That I've got no time for love and joy. I find they just don't pay.
So I've told these foolish wise men to seek and find the boy.
But when they tell me where he is, I'll seek and I'll destroy.

Third King

An angel has told us we made a faux pas (*say "foe par").
We should steer clear of Herod and follow the star.
It's led to this stable, so dirty and cold.
It's led to the Christ child, By prophets foretold.

First King

I bring some gold, the right gift for a king.
Gold for his crown and his sceptre and ring.

Second King

I bring some frankincense, fragrant and blessed.
This king is a God. Not like all the rest.

Third King

I bring some myrrh though it makes me feel sad.
To think what will happen one day, to this lad.
His life will be holy and perfect and good.
He'll save all creation with his precious blood.

Mary

All that's in the future. Tonight let's rejoice.
Inn-keepers, kings, shepherds sing with one voice.
Sing with the angels from heaven above.
Sing of Christ's birth and of God's saving love.

The End.

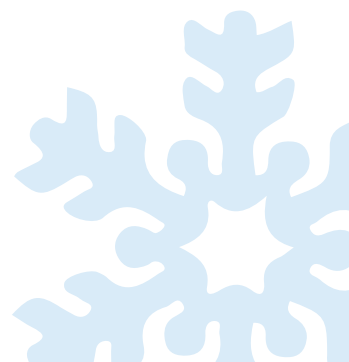


Handy hints

Each character in the Nativity speaks a separate passage which stands alone. The idea is that each of these speeches is filmed with a phone and the complete play is assembled afterwards on a computer. This means the speeches can be rehearsed and performed by a single class or support bubble. Or each child's performance could be recorded separately. If a participating child or class is excluded from school their parents or carers could record the child at home.

The play would be really enhanced if the children sang a verse from an appropriate Christmas carol at the end of each part. These could be sung as a solo or, even better, by the child's family if they are up for it.

The process is very simple but here are some of the lessons we have learnt by doing our own version.





Costumes

Be as extravagant or as simple as you like with the costumes. It's worth remembering that – unlike in a normal school Nativity – the children have only to wear their costumes for as long as it takes to film their speeches. Just a few minutes. So the costume doesn't have to be well-made. It can be held together with masking tape and pins if you like. And no one has to see the back of it. We made a lot of use of bedding!



Filming

Decide whether you prefer the pictures to be in portrait or landscape and stick to that. The finished film will look much better if all the clips are in the same format. If parents or carers are filming their sections make sure they know which you have chosen.

The speeches are in verse. Help the children find the rhythm of the lines, as that will help them to remember them, and to convey their meaning clearly.

Make sure that the children's faces are well lit. And do remind them to smile in the right places.

The scenes are designed to be shot one by one and edited together later so there's no need to rehearse. Shoot the speech a few times and chose the best clip.

Keep the background as simple as possible. Unless you've got the time and resources to build a fabulous set of course. However given the format we would say that it's probably worth putting the effort into costumes rather than sets.



Editing

If more than one person is filming the clips (eg. If a parent is filming one of the children), try to get them to send them to whoever is compiling the film by WeTransfer. That's a free website. Very easy to use – almost self-explanatory – and much the most convenient way of getting all the clips in one place



Both Windows Movie and iMovie are very simple to use. Your computer probably already has a free film editing package on it somewhere. Editing this should simply be a matter of putting the clips in the right order. There's no need to try fancy transitions or fades.

However you will end up with a lot of clips. The easiest way to keep track of these is to print out a copy of the script and simply write next to each speech the name or number of the clip you're going to use. I did this before I started editing. Actually I didn't. But I really wish I had.

Sound

The whole idea of this is to keep it as simple and basic as possible. Since there is only one speaker at a time and since the speaker is one-to-one with whoever is filming there really shouldn't be a need for microphone.

If there's a lot of back ground noise – especially sudden background noises – when a child is being filmed do stop and start again as it makes the continuity of the finished film really jarring.

Sharing

The finished film should only be a few minutes long so it's ideal for sharing on social media or a school website.

We encourage your school community to make a donation for the opportunity to use this wonderful resource.



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