**Messy Church – December 2021**

**Christmas – the birth of Jesus and what happened after**

The activities are:

1. Shepherds
   1. Zig Zag angels (in the celebration)
2. Wise men
   1. Paper plate puppets (in the celebration)
   2. Star decorations
3. General activities
   1. Story wheels
   2. Window clings
   3. Sun catchers
   4. Christmas tree baubles
   5. Mobiles
   6. Christmas stampers
4. Eating activities
   1. Decorated cakes
   2. Camel dung
5. Big picture – star scene with camel and wise men

**Stories and Activities**

**1 Zig-Zag Angel Choir – in the celebration**

**You will need:** a piece of paper, scissors, the picture of the final product, colouring pencils if you want to colour your angels.



Hold your piece of paper so that it is wider than it is tall, then fold it up in zig-zags, like a fan – you should have four or five layers. Make sure they are the same width. Draw an angel on the top fold, so that the wings and the skirt reach the fold. Cut round your person, through all the layers of paper, and carefully unfold the layers, so you have a chain of angels. You can colour them in if you want.

In the Bible, angels are God’s messengers. They go from God to the people God wants to do things. In the Christmas story, a whole host of angels appears to the shepherds, to tell them that the Messiah, their Saviour, long promised, has finally be born in Bethlehem, and suggesting that they can go and see. The “choir of angels” sing to the shepherds, praising God.

**Talk about:** messengers – who might employ them now, whether they are important, what they might tell us, and whether we listen to messengers!

**2 Wise men**

**a. paper plate puppets – in the celebration**

**You will need:** two paper plates per child (or circles of card), two sections of a moulded paper egg box, glue, stapler and staples, crayons or paint to decorate – large googly eyes would be good, but not essential, tinsel to make a crown, yarn or crepe paper to make hair

Stick (staple and/or glue) the cut paper plate around the folded one so that there is a pocket top and bottom to put your fingers and thumb in, to operate the puppet. Stick the egg box sections to the back of the top plate, and paint eyes on the front of them, (or stick googly eyes on the front). Put a tongue on the bottom half of the folded plate to show when the mouth is open. You could put “hair” around the sides, or make a crown above the eyes with tinsel.

**b. star decorations**

**You will need:** wooden or card stars with holes in them, gold and/or silver paint, or glue and glitter, string and thread, peg, paint trays.

Hang a length of string where it won’t be in the way, with newspaper or plastic on the floor underneath, so if your stars drip, they don’t damage anything. Tie a thread through the hole in the star, peg the thread to the string, and paint both sides of the star. If using glue and glitter, do each side separately, and then hang the star up. Remember to shake the glitter into the tray, and then back into the jar.

The wise men came from wherever they lived (traditionally one was European, one was middle-Eastern and one was African, but the Bible just says they came from the east to Jerusalem!). They were looking for a new-born King of the Jews, they said to King Herod. They had been following a star which they said represented the announcement of the birth of this new king. Herod was the king of the Jews, and because he was not a very nice person, who had already had at least one son killed, he was very upset. He asked his advisors where the promised King would be born, and when he was told that Bethlehem was the place the prophets said, told this to the wise men, and advised them to look there. He then asked them to come back and tell him about the child – intending to get rid of the baby as soon as possible.

The wise men went to Bethlehem, found Jesus and his parents, and gave him gifts – the Bible says the gifts were gold, frankincense (which was twigs which burned with a special smell), and myrrh (which was like a cream perfume). Then the wise men went home by a different route, which took them nowhere near Jerusalem. They had dreamed that going back to Herod would be a bad idea.

When Herod decided that the wise men had cheated him, he ordered his soldiers to go to Bethlehem and kill all the boys under 2 years old. He had worked out that Jesus had to be within that age group. Jesus wasn’t killed because Joseph had had a dream warning him about Herod, so he took Jesus and Mary away during the night, and they went to Egypt to live until after Herod died.

**Talk about:** People today who have nowhere to live, particularly refugees who have had to leave their homes and run away.

**3 General activities**

All these activities cover all or part of the Christmas story, including the bits before Jesus was born. You can choose to do any of the activities, telling any bits of the story, or, for the story wheels and mobiles, most of the story.

**a. Nativity story wheels**

**You will need:** two printed circles of card or paper (scanned images are available with this booklet\*), one with a section cut out, pencils, felt tips or crayons to colour in the pictures, and a paper fastener.

\* if you are using the scanned images, cut out the circles, and the yellow quadrant from one circle. There are three circles, as my scanner was not quite wide enough for the full circle. You can see where the overlap comes. Cut out or punch through the centre hole in both circles to fit the paper fastener in.

Colour in the pictures on each circle, and then pin them together with the paper fastener, with the circle with the cut out on the top. These circles tell the story, from the angel telling Mary that she would have a son, through to the visit of the wise men.

**b. Nativity window clings**

**You will need:** a printed film, glass pens

Choose one of the printed films, and use the glass pens to colour it in. The film will stick to a glass surface, so you can stick it to a window or a mirror.

**c. Nativity sun catchers**

**You will need:** a “leaded” piece of plastic, glass pens, length of gold thread

Use the glass pens to colour in the segments of the picture. Use the supplied gold thread to hang it in a window where it will catch the light.

**d. Christmas tree baubles**

**You will need:** two half globes, two printed cards – choose two the same or two different – colouring pencils or felt tip pens, length of gold thread

Colour in the two cards, put them back to back, and snap the two half globes together around them, with the hanging loops at the top. Thread the gold thread through the hanging loops, and hang the bauble on your Christmas tree.

**e. Christmas Mobiles**

**You will need:** a set of figures printed on card, thread (depending on how you use the gold thread provided), felt tip pens or colouring pencils or crayons.

Follow the instructions printed in the mobile set.

**f. Christmas stampers**

**You will need:** the stampers you want to use, a piece of paper to stamp on, any extra drawing things you want, stick on stars (if you want)

Make your own Christmas scene, just how you would like to think of it.

**Talk about:** the Christmas story – and that Christmas is just the beginning of Jesus’ life, not the end of the story!

**4 Eating activities**

**a. Decorated cakes**

**You will need:** fairy cakes (make your own, or buy some), icing (again, make your own, or buy), cake decoration trimmings

Decorate your cake to make a small celebration cake, like a birthday cake.

**Talk about:** celebrating birthdays, remembering that Christmas Day is Jesus’ birthday. If you have a Christmas cake at home, does it remind you that Christmas Day is Jesus’ birthday? If not, why not?

**b. Camel dung**

**You will need:** cocoa, ready to roll icing, icing sugar, paper plates

Work the cocoa into the ready to roll icing, using icing sugar to stop it sticking to your hands. Form it into lumps for camel dung, put it on a named plate.

Traditionally, the wise men travelled with camels. If they really did come from further east than Jerusalem, this is not unreasonable. They would have been travelling across desert areas where camels would be the most sensible animal to use.

**Talk about:** why a camel might be a sensible animal to use on a desert journey.

1. **Big picture – star scene**

**You will need:** large sheet of lining paper (if you are doing this at home, you might want to just use an ordinary piece of paper) paint brushes or sponges, camel template (if available, otherwise, a picture of a camel), stick on stars (again, if available)

Paint the wise men following the star.

**Talk about:** navigating by the stars. Could you use the stars to work out which way is north, for example?

**Celebration**

Song Come and Join the Celebration

<https://youtu.be/pMqG5M76tFE>

Celebration Stories

There was a young woman called Mary. Mary was engaged to be married and one day while she was busy around the house, an Angel appeared to her. Well, she was amazed. The Angel, who was called Gabriel, said to her: “Don't be afraid, Mary, I've come to tell you something from God. God has a special job for you. God would like you to be the mother of his son, his son who's going to be the Messiah.” “I'm not married, “said Mary, “how can I have a child?” “Well,” said the Angel” God can do anything. He will send his spirit to you and you will become pregnant and have a baby boy, who you will call Jesus.” “Alright, if that's what God wants, I'll do it,” said Mary.

Make angel Choir but leave it folded so it looks like one angel.

Mary was very worried about what Joseph, her fiancé, would think. When Joseph knew that she was pregnant, he wasn't happy at all. He was thinking that he'd break off the engagement. Then one night he had a dream, and in his dream, the Angel appeared. “Don't worry, Joseph,” said the Angel, “Mary's baby will be God’s son. God wants this so that his Messiah can come to the world.” So Joseph didn't call off the engagement, he got married to Mary.

Caesar decided that he wanted more taxes and to make sure he could get them, he wanted everybody in Judea to be counted. And you couldn't just go round and say 1, 2, 3, 4. No, they all had to go back to the place where they'd been born. Well, Joseph and Mary came from Bethlehem, and that was a long way away from where they were living now, so they had to travel all the way, walking. Now when they got to Bethlehem, they discovered that a lot of people had come there to be counted, so many that there wasn't any room for anybody else to stay. Mary’s baby was due anytime and so they had to find somewhere to stay, and there wasn't any room in the proper lodgings. Fortunately they could stay in a stable. It was a bit smelly which wasn't very nice but it was better than being outside. So when Jesus was born he was put in the food trough, the manger which the animals fed from.

Song Away in a manger <https://youtu.be/pVSoAM7YrxE>

Open out your angel choir at the right point in the story below.

Angels get a lot of jobs to do. They are God’s messengers and God sent his Angel to tell some people that his son had been born. Who do you think he told? Somebody important? Somebody powerful? Somebody rich? No, he told some smelly shepherds; smelly shepherds because anybody who spends a lot of time looking after sheep is going to be smelly, because sheep’s wool, when it’s still on the sheep, smells. The Angel appeared to the shepherds where they were looking after the sheep in a field one night, and said, “Hi folks, peace be with you! God has come to give you the good news that his son is going to be born in Bethlehem”. The shepherds were absolutely amazed, they didn't know what to think. They were a bit frightened, too. They were even more frightened when the one Angel was joined by lots and lots more; a whole choir of Angels singing: “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to people!” Well, just as suddenly as they had appeared, the Angels disappeared, and the shepherds looked at each other and said: “What are we going to do”. “Why don't we go to Bethlehem?” said one of them. “What, leave the sheep?” “Well, it's more important than sheep” said the shepherd. So they hurried to Bethlehem and they found the stable where Mary and Joseph were and where Jesus was lying in the manger. They told them what had happened and then they went back to their sheep.

Make wise men paper plate puppets.

A long way away from Bethlehem, far to the East, some men were looking at the stars. They were trying to decide whether there was a message for them in the stars; whether the stars could tell them what was going to happen. One night they saw a new and unusual star, a different star a star they had never seen before. “Well,” they said, “what does this star mean? And they puzzled and wondered and thought and tried to decide what a new star could mean. They decided that a new star must stand for a new King and that the King was being born. “We want to see this King”, said the wise men, because that was what they were. “We want to see this King; how can we find him?” “Look, that star’s moving. Maybe if we follow it, it will take us to where the new King is. So they packed up quickly and followed the star on and on and on, and we don't know how long they travelled, but we do know that it must have been something like 2 years, a long time to journey. So after some adventures, they got to a house and there they found Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. They brought gifts with them; gold for a King because that's who they thought was going to be born, and frankincense because that was for a priest, a person from God, and they brought myrrh which was a funny thing to bring because although myrrh was an expensive perfume, it was used for death, but they gave their gifts to Mary and Joseph for the baby and then they travelled home again.

Song Riding out across the desert.

<https://youtu.be/Mfhh-cBfS70>

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for Christmas and all the people who help make it fun. We pray for all the people trying to keep us safe this year as well.

We pray for all the people we can’t see this year. We pray for people who are missing their family and friends and who are lonely.

Amen

Enjoy our celebration.

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

Last month we couldn’t meet, so we’re glad we can this month. We’ll have a Zoom meeting open for those who can’t come to the church. Our end of Zoom will go on YouTube, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos>