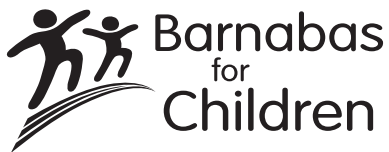


Easy ways to
**CHRISTMAS
PLAYS**



Vicki Howie



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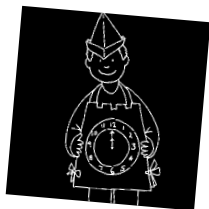
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Introduction

Christmas seemed such a long way off when you cheerfully agreed to put on a nativity play with your lively group of 3–7 year olds! Now, however, the play day is firmly in your church or school diary and fast approaching. Plans must be made! But where will you find a script that tells the familiar Christmas story in a new and exciting way and yet is easy enough for even the youngest child in your group? How will you produce an effective play in the short time available in a way that all the children (and the audience) will thoroughly enjoy? How will you manage to keep the attention of the three year olds? And how will you encourage the older ones to speak up and move confidently around the stage or hall?

This book, containing three simple plays, each with its own five-week countdown to the play day, is designed to show you how!

The plays

Each of the three plays, which have all been performed successfully by a Sunday school group of mixed ages and abilities, explores a different Christian theme and takes approximately twenty minutes to perform.

Come to a party! is the simplest play, and reminds the children that Christmas is Jesus' birthday. Most children love birthday parties, and the activities that lead to the play include party games, simple crafts with party cups and straws, and group discussions about balloons, jelly and birthday cake!

The star who couldn't twinkle is about a little star whose light fades away because he is too shy to make friends with God. Only baby Jesus can help him come closer to God and start to sparkle. Once again, the activities relate to the theme, helping the children to understand what their nativity play is all about.

Shine your lights! is the most challenging of the three plays and would suit a group of children at the top end of the age range, many of whom would like a line to say or a special part to play. It is set in a village in Victorian times and features a group of carol singers who discover the real meaning of Christmas one snowy Christmas Eve.

No two groups of children will be the same and so ideas are given in the introduction to each play on how to adapt it to suit your particular group—perhaps reducing the number of speaking parts for a younger group, or adding

more for an older group. Flexibility is the word!

Generally speaking, all the children remain on the stage (or stage area) throughout the play, to do away with any complicated entries and exits and to allow them to see the entire play instead of waiting off-stage for their special moment. Everyone is kept interested and involved during the play with lots of mimes, actions and songs.

Clues are written into the narrative to help the children remember when to say their line, move across the stage, sit down or stand up and also to help you remember what everyone should be doing. Some simple plans show you where the children stand at the start, middle and end of the play.

Countdown to the play day!

Can you remember your first appearance in a nativity play? Did you find yourself inexplicably dressed in strange clothes for a performance which you experienced in a terrified daze? Were you ready for the sea of faces that came to watch you? Afterwards, did you know what the whole thing was all about? Probably not!

The countdown to the play day was written with this in mind. It provides a complete learning experience for the children in your group, the play being the natural climax. It includes introductory talks with suggested visual aids, an illustrated story of the play, graded activity sheets, tips for each rehearsal and closing prayers all designed to help the children understand:

- at five weeks to go—the **theme** of the play
- at four weeks to go—the **characters** in the play (to include help with casting the parts)
- at three weeks to go—the **actions, mimes and movements** in the play (often practised in party-type games)
- at two weeks to go—the **costumes and props** (which are kept very simple)
- at one week to go—what will happen on the **play day**

One final section, *It's the play day!* gives some practical hints on preparing for the performance and on helping the children to feel happy and confident about their play.

Throughout, the emphasis is on learning through play rather than drilling the children to provide a polished performance. Only a few essential props are required and the children are encouraged to look for simple costumes at home.

The activity sheets

The photocopiable activity sheets are designed to back up the teaching elements in each weekly session. It is up to you to choose which activities you would like your group to do. Only you will know what the children in your group can manage and enjoy, but as a guide the sheets are marked

- with a **robin** for 3 year olds
- with a **snowflake** for 4–5 year olds
- with a **Christmas cracker** for 6–7 year olds

Suggestions are given in the text on the best way to make use of these sheets.

The activity sheets in the ‘Four weeks to go’ section contain the lines spoken by the children in the play, with helpful illustrations. Give them to the children to use in rehearsals and to take home for extra practice.

Those in the ‘Three weeks to go’ section can be used to tell parents which character their child will be in the play, and contain ideas on finding a simple costume at home.

The poster in the ‘One week to go’ section can be used to advertise the play and to inform parents of the date, time and place of the play.

Craft items

All the craft ideas in this book are very simple. It is assumed that pencils, crayons, scissors (for the older ones) and glue are available for the children to use. If any other craft material is required, advance warning is given in the ‘Memos for next week’ paragraph at the end of each weekly session. These additional items involve easy-to-find materials such as foil, paper plates or thin card.

The ‘Memos for next week’ remind you of everything you will need for the next session, including any cutting out for the youngest children. Don’t forget to save time by cutting out a pile of sheets in one go!

Songs and carols

Several new easy-to-learn songs, set to familiar tunes, are included in the play scripts. Elsewhere, appropriate carols and songs are suggested, or you may like to use your own favourites at these points. The less traditional carols suggested can be found in *Carol, gaily carol* published by A & C Black, with the exception of ‘A starry night’ which can be found in *Merrily to Bethlehem*, also published by A & C Black, or *Chester’s Easiest Christmas Music* published by Chester Music Limited.

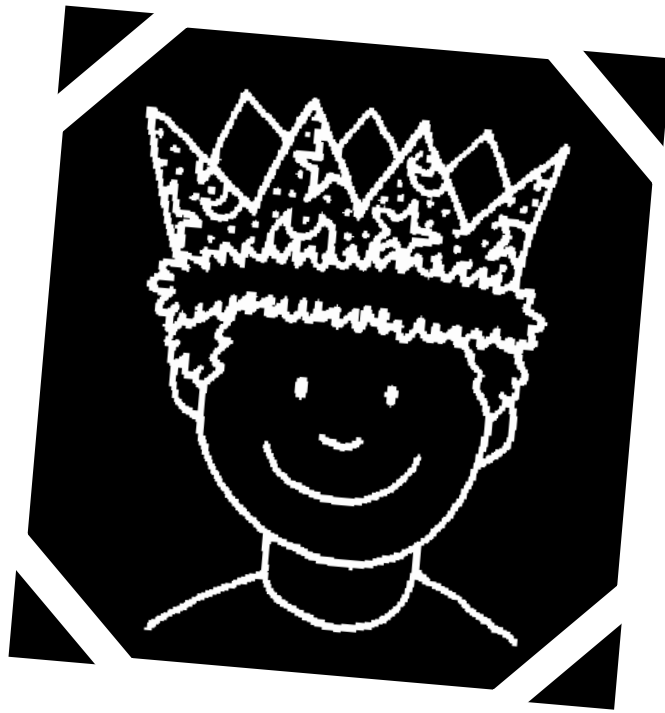
Practise your chosen songs and carols each week so that the children are familiar with them by the play day. Often just one verse will suffice, otherwise the play will go on for too long.

Where to begin

Read through the introduction to each play (which precedes the countdown) and the play scripts. Decide which play would best suit your group, remembering that you can always adapt it. Decide which songs to sing and write these on the script. From there on, follow the countdown to the play day, referring to the ‘Memos for next week’ in order to have everything ready for the next session.

Don’t forget that some children may not come from the ‘perfect’ family unit, or may not have a mum or dad coming to see them in the play. Bear this in mind and choose your words carefully, especially when talking to the children about the play day.

Give lots of praise ... have fun ... and enjoy these *Easy Ways to Christmas Plays!*



Come to a
PARTY!



INTRODUCTION

If you've just accepted an invitation to perform this nativity play in a few weeks' time, then welcome to the party!

The theme of the play is that Christmas is really a big birthday party to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and you will find that the story, activities and the play itself are written in 'birthday' language.

Before you start working with the children, read through all the material and familiarize yourself with the play. Give copies of the play to your helpers so that they will know how to help the children at the very first rehearsal.

Adapting the play to suit your group

Come to a party! was written specifically for a group of 3–7 year olds with only a short time to rehearse each week. It was designed to give the older ones a chance to say a line, while keeping the younger ones interested and involved throughout in actions and mimes.

However, if your group consists mainly of younger children, the play can be simplified further by reducing the number of innkeepers and glowing angels, or further still by integrating any or all of the speaking parts into the narration and simply letting the children mime the story.

Conversely, you could add more speaking parts with an older group, by giving lines to Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and kings, and by using more than one narrator. Look at the story 'A party for baby Jesus' on pages 11–14 for some ideas.

Casting

At this stage, it is helpful to have some idea about who will play the main parts, so you may like to pencil in some possible names beside the list of main characters below. (The activities in the 'Four weeks to go' section of the count-down, on pages 15–16, will help you to make a final choice, and you can then divide the rest of the children into three groups of shepherds, angels and kings.)

Main characters

The narrator—a leader or helper if your group consists of young children

Mary and Joseph—two enthusiastic children who can react well to the other children, but who don't need to speak any lines

The angel Gabriel—someone with a strong voice who could also be the leader of all the younger angels

Two grumpy innkeepers and one kind innkeeper—three children who would enjoy character parts!

Two glowing angels

The remaining children are shepherds, angels or kings.

(Note that the lines written in the play for the main characters are suggestions only, as the activities will encourage the children to make up their own words.)

Essential props

Four chairs or stools

Three cushions (one for each innkeeper)

A box or basket for the manger

A baby doll to represent Jesus

A big shiny star

After the performance

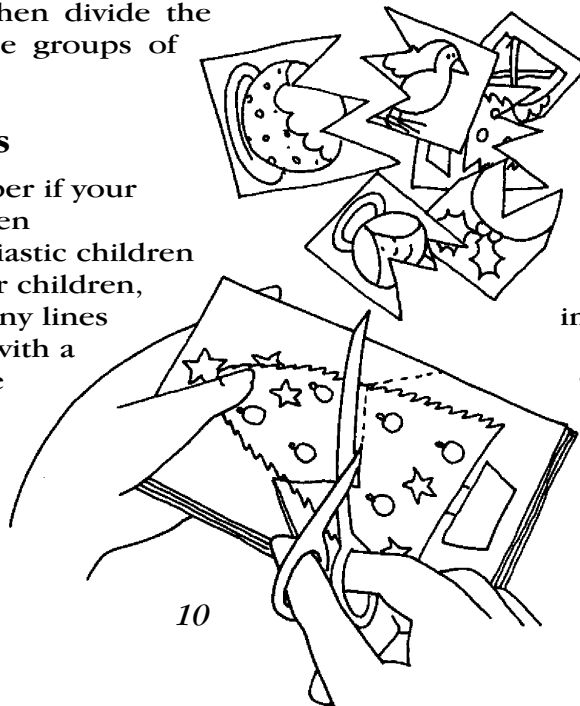
You may like to continue the party theme by asking the audience to stay on after the play for refreshments. This would be a good opportunity to reward the children for all their hard work and allow parents to get to know each other. Why not hang up some bunches of balloons and use birthday serviettes, paper cups and straws?

Memos for next week

- Read 'Five weeks to go'
- Take along a balloon to blow up
- Photocopy the activity sheets you want to use, and cut out the missing pictures for Jesus' birthday card ready for the youngest children

Depending on your choice of activities, you may need:

- an old microphone (or improvise with a cardboard roll)
- old Christmas and birthday cards, a hole-puncher and some thin ribbon
- old Christmas and birthday cards cut in half in a zig-zag fashion for the jigsaw game



5 4 3 2 1



Five weeks to go - Introducing the theme of the play

This week, the aim is to tell the children the Christmas story and to explain that Christmas is Jesus' birthday.

Ask the children to sit down quietly because you're going to tell them a story all about a birthday party.

Encourage them to start thinking about birthdays by saying, *Hands up if you like birth-*

days! ... Did you have a birthday party, Peter? ... Was it fun? ... Did you blow up any balloons? ... (Make everyone laugh with your attempts to blow up the balloon and ask them to blow when you blow! If you manage to inflate it, release it and let it whizz round the room!) ... What about you, Emma, did you eat ice-cream and jelly? ... (Get everyone to mime eating and say 'Mmm') ... Hands up if you blew out all the candles on your cake? ... Can you show me how hard you can blow? Wait for it! One, two, three, BLOW!

Explain that Christmas is Jesus' birthday party and that you are going to tell them what happened at the very first Christmas when Jesus was born.

Read 'A party for baby Jesus', making sure that the children see all the pictures at the appropriate moments.

A party for baby Jesus

This is the story of a very unusual birthday party. It didn't happen in a warm house with jelly and cake on the table, but in a chilly stable with horses and sheep and a manger full of hay. And there were no colourful balloons tied to the gatepost, but instead a big shiny star hung in the sky!

Angels held the party to welcome a very special baby into the world. This is how it happened.

Long ago, God wanted to say how much he loved us. He decided to send us a wonderful present. It was the best Christmas present anyone ever had. It was a baby boy—God's very own son.

God knew that the baby would need a kind mother and father to look after him in this world, so he sent his messenger, the angel Gabriel, to speak to Mary. She was soon to marry a carpenter called Joseph.

'Don't be afraid, Mary,' said the angel. 'God loves you so much that he wants you to have a very special baby. He will be God's own son and you must call him Jesus.'

Mary gasped. 'To think that God should choose me! I will do whatever he asks!'

Mary was very busy getting everything ready for the baby. She grew rounder as the baby grew bigger, and she needed lots of rest. But just when the baby was nearly ready to be born, Mary and Joseph had to walk all the way to Bethlehem to sign their

names on a register.

'Is it much further?' asked Mary. 'I'm worn out and I think the baby is about to be born!'

'Don't worry, we're nearly there,' said Joseph.

He put his arm around Mary and helped her along the rough road. But when he saw the busy town, Joseph began to worry. Bethlehem was positively buzzing with



COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!



people—it was bursting at the seams. If only he could find a room for Mary to rest.

They knocked on lots of doors. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. But the innkeepers were fed up with answering the door and said, ‘No room,’ or ‘Can’t you read the “full” sign?’ in grumpy voices.

At last, a very kind innkeeper said, ‘You both look so tired. Would you like to stay the night in my stable? Don’t mind the

animals!’

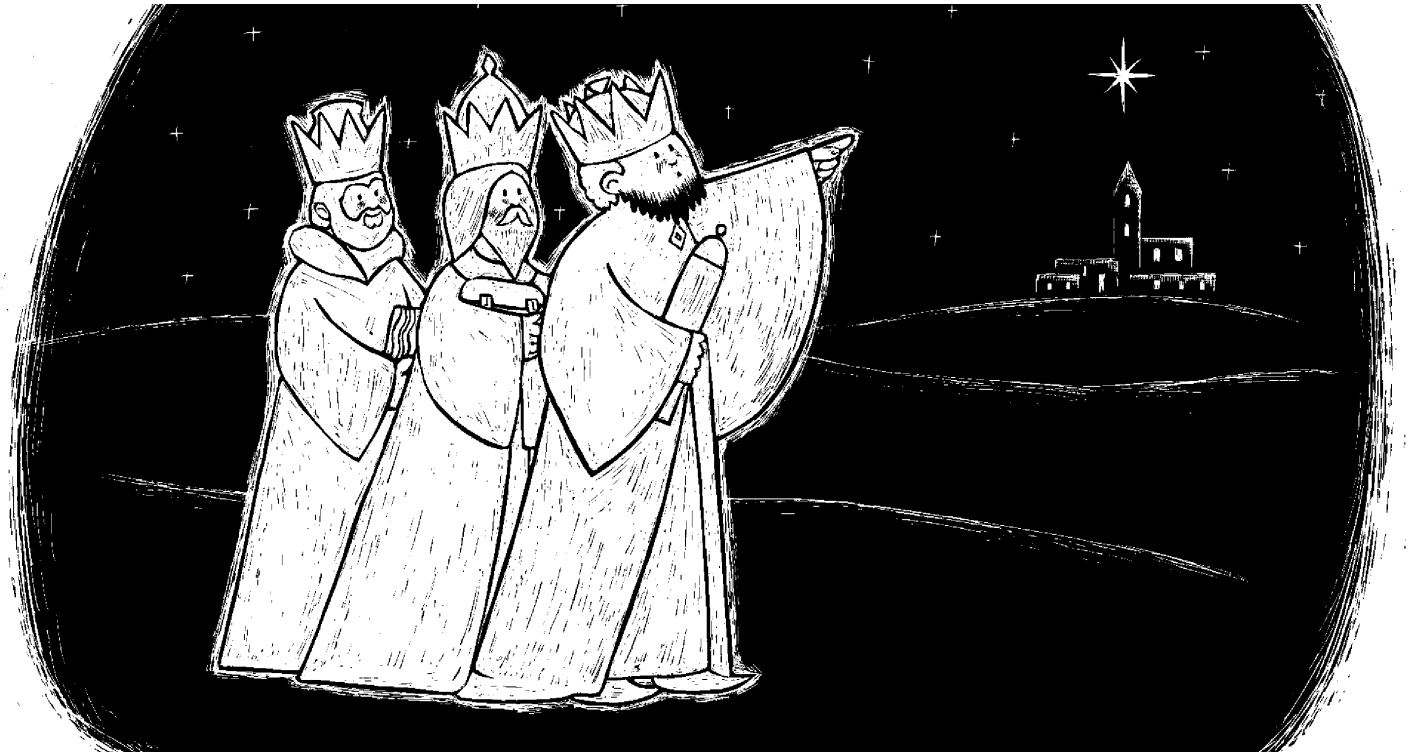
That night, stars glowed like birthday candles in the night sky. And that night, God sent us that wonderful present—his son, the baby Jesus.

‘I think you want to go to sleep,’ said Mary, wrapping the baby in cloths and giving him a cuddle. ‘Let’s see if you’d be happy in the manger!’

A huge crowd of excited angels played



COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!



'Follow my leader' all the way to the stable roof. They wanted to give a party for baby Jesus.

'Can you give us an extra twinkle?' they asked a big star. 'Then people will know the party is here!'

'But who can we invite?' asked a glowing angel. 'Everyone's asleep!'

'Everyone except those shepherds,' said

another glowing angel. 'Shall we fly down with a party invitation?'

The shepherds were terrified when the angels appeared, sparkling like party fireworks! They covered their eyes with their hands.

'Dear shepherds, don't be afraid,' said the angels. 'Please come to a birthday party in Bethlehem. It's for baby Jesus.'



COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!

You'll find him wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

'We'd love to come!' replied the shepherds. They gathered up some lambs to take to the baby and hurried down the hill into Bethlehem.

Far away in the east, three kings saw the birthday star.

'Someone special must be having a party!' they said. 'Let's take precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and find out who it is. We can follow the star.'

What a wonderful time they all had in that stable, talking and laughing and opening the presents... but most of all, admiring baby Jesus. Mary gazed around her, trying to remember everything, for she knew that such an unusual birthday party, with angels, shepherds and kings, would never ever happen again.



Snowflakes and Robins

Both groups can make and colour a birthday card for Jesus. (Make sure you have the cutting out done ready for the younger ones.) If you are short of time, leave out the cake and balloons meant for the inside of the card.



Show the front of the card (page 26) to the children and use the words on it to remind them of the Christmas story. For example, say, *At Christmas, Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem. At Christmas, Jesus was born in a stable. Mary had to put him in the manger. In a minute we'll glue the picture of Jesus on to the card. At Christmas, the shepherds came to see Jesus and they brought him a present. Can you remember what that was? ... etc.*



When the cards are complete, ask the children to colour them in and write their own names on the inside.

Activity time

Divide the children into groups according to which activity sheet you want them to do. The Christmas Cracker sheet (pages 23–24) is for the older children, with the middle and youngest groups (Snowflakes and Robins) making the birthday card for Jesus (pages 25–26).



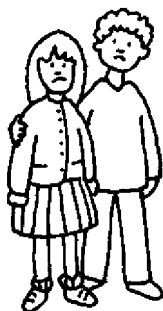
The Christmas Crackers

Birthday survey

With your microphone at the ready, interview some of the more confident children about their birthdays, using the questions on the clipboard as a starter, but developing the interviews to find out how each person celebrated their last birthday or would like to celebrate the next. Ask all the children to fill in the survey sheet (giving help where necessary) and to look for the clue about Jesus' birthday.

What's alike?

Look at Sam's two photographs with the children and talk about the two parties. Ask them to find the five things in common (pointing out that this is the opposite of a 'spot the difference' puzzle): *the cake, the cards, the candles, the presents and friends*. Encourage *all* their suggestions, just saying, *Well, does a cat help us to celebrate Christmas? Not really. What else can you find?* when they pick out any red herrings! Give clues if necessary.



Further ideas

Play the jigsaw game. Scatter the jigsaw pieces of old birthday and Christmas cards (see page 10) on the floor and see who can collect the most complete cards, either individually or in teams.

Make tags for Christmas and birthday presents. Suggestions are shown on the Christmas Cracker sheet (page 24).

Closing prayer

Thank you, God, for all the fun we have at birthdays.

*Thank you for balloons to blow up,
and candles to blow out.*

*Thank you for friends to play with,
and presents to open.*

*But most of all, thank you for baby Jesus
who was born at Christmas.*

*Help us to remember that Christmas is Jesus' birthday.
Amen*

Memos for next week

- Read 'Four weeks to go'
- Read the play again and study the 'starting position' for all the children
- Make sure you have the essential props ready to use straight away. (Try to set up the stage before the children arrive.)
 - If possible, take a music stand to put the play on when you are directing the action
- Take the figures from a nativity set, if you have any



- If you are intending to make the paper-cup characters, you will need paper cups, glue or sticky tape (and pipe cleaners if you wish). Try to make one of each in advance, if you have time. Do any necessary cutting out for the youngest ones



Four weeks to go - Introducing the characters

The aim this week is to encourage the children to think about the people in the nativity story: what they did, how they felt and what they might have said. The activities will help everyone to decide who they would like to be in the play and, in the case of the main characters, what they are going to say.

Ask the children about their favourite stories or pantomimes.

For example, ask, *Do you like the story of Little Red Riding Hood? ... Who did she go to visit? ... Can you remember what animal she met on the way? ... Do you think she was frightened? ... I wonder what she said to the wolf? ...* etc.

Remind the children about the story you told them last week of the very first Christmas. Emphasize that this is a true story and that you can read about it in the Bible.

Ask them if they can remember any of the people in the story. As they give the various names, briefly describe that person's role. For example, *That's right, the angel Gabriel. He was the one who told Mary she was going to have a baby called Jesus ... Yes, Joseph. He took Mary on the long journey to Bethlehem...* etc.

Show the pictures from the story again as you do this, or use the figures from a nativity set.



Activity time



The Christmas Crackers

Give the Christmas Cracker sheet (pages 27 and 28) to those children you think will be playing the main parts. Talk about the various situations, pointing out the expressions on the characters' faces and discussing how they must have felt. Then ask them to have a go at filling in the speech bubbles and the invitation. (Remind them about the 'helpful words' on each page.)

Ask the children to read out their ideas to the group and give lots of praise.

Decide yourself who is going to play each part, basing your decision on your knowledge of the children and on their responses to the activity sheet. (Don't force anyone to have a speaking part if they are too shy. Instead, you could make them feel important by asking if they'd like to be a chief shepherd, angel or king with responsibility for helping the younger ones, or the angel who gives baby Jesus to Mary.) However, the innkeepers could discuss between themselves who are going to be the grumpy ones, and who is going to be the very kind one who lends his stable to Mary and Joseph.

Write down the final decision for future reference and make sure everyone knows exactly who he or she is going to be. Give everyone an activity sheet to take home so that they can think again about what they are going to say in the play. They will find it easier to say their own words, rather than trying to remember set lines.

You may like to give the Snowflake sheet to anyone who has decided to be a chief shepherd, angel or king, or who simply wants to act with the younger ones.

Snowflakes

This activity sheet (page 29) is designed to encourage the children to think about what the shepherds, angels and kings did in the Christmas story and then to decide who they'd like to be.

It's a good idea to read out the party invitation and reply, asking for spoken answers before getting everyone to write in the missing words. Point out that the answers can all be found on the page.

When the children have coloured in the balloons and the star in 'Where is the party?'



COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!



and 'Where is baby Jesus?' (page 30) they can draw themselves in the picture frame, in costume if they wish.

Make a note of who each child wants to be, for future reference.

Robins

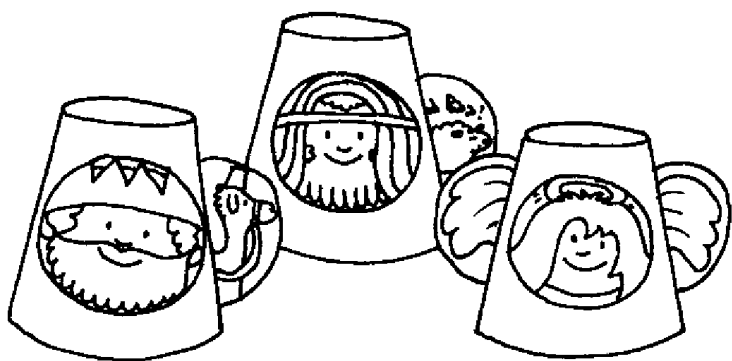
Show the children the angel, shepherd and king paper-cup characters if you have managed to make any in advance. Briefly remind them of their roles in the Christmas story.



Ask each child what they would like to be in the story and give them the appropriate face and accessory to colour in. Help them with the gluing or sticking, pointing out that they are using party cups because Christmas is Jesus' birthday.

(You can add a pipe-cleaner crook to the shepherd for the more dextrous.)

Make a note of who the children want to be, for future reference, and let them take their puppets to the first rehearsal. You can then see at a glance what character each child is in the play and so where they should stand.



It's play time!

Put the chairs, cushions and manger in position if you haven't already done so. (See stage plan on page 35.) Hide the star and baby doll behind the two chairs in the stable area.

Take each group of kings, angels and shepherds to stand in the appropriate place, and then ask Mary and Joseph and the innkeepers to sit on their chairs and cushions. (Don't panic if all this takes time; it's quite normal for it to be a noisy and confusing episode!) Refer to your notes if anyone has forgotten who they are supposed to be.

If possible, have an adult helper with each group. Identify your chief shepherd, angel and king and remind them to help the little ones.

Ask everyone to watch you and to copy what you do. Then, as the narrator starts to read the play, lead the children in the mimes. Smile, give lots of encouragement, and act as you



would if you were getting everyone to play an enjoyable party game.

As yet, the children will be hesitant when given any instructions to move around the stage, so step forward, take a hand and walk with them. (The activities for next week will help to build their confidence.)

Make sure that your narrator pauses long enough to allow for the mimes or other actions, but also keeps the story going fairly briskly. The children will lose interest if there are long gaps.

Sing any carols the children already know at the appropriate moments. Otherwise, say *This is where we'll sing... which we're going to learn later on.*

If you don't have time for the whole play (and you probably won't!), remind the children of the way the story ends and get each group to practise coming to the manger. Make a note to start next week where you left off.

Closing prayer

Thank you, God, for helping us with our Christmas play today.

Sometimes, Christmas seems such a long way away and we can't wait to get there.

Help us to be just as patient as Mary and Joseph were on that long walk to Bethlehem, when they were waiting for baby Jesus to be born.

Amen

Memos for next week

- Read 'Three weeks to go'

For *Pass the Parcel* you will need:

- a tape of carols or nursery rhymes or someone to play the carols on the piano. This will help the children to learn the tunes and they might even sing along!
- a small present wrapped in about eight layers
- the forfeits, cut up and placed in an envelope

For *Simon Says* you will need the list of actions on the activity sheet (page 32).

Music is also needed for *Musical Cushions* and *Follow my Leader*.

COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!



Three weeks to go - Let's play party games

This week, the children stay in one group to play party games designed to help them act their parts and move confidently around the stage in the play.

Say, *As Christmas is Jesus' birthday, we're all going to play some party games. Everyone sit in a circle, please, for Pass the Parcel.*

Pass the Parcel

Put baby Jesus in the manger in the middle of the circle with the forfeits in an envelope at his feet (see activity sheet, page 32.)

Explain that this is Pass the Parcel with a difference. When the music stops, the person holding the parcel must take off a layer, go to admire the baby in the manger and then hand you a forfeit from the envelope. (It doesn't matter which one.)

Read out the forfeit, which will contain an acting job for one or more of the characters in the play. When the appropriate child has done the forfeit and everyone has applauded, the game can continue.

When all the forfeits have gone, carry on with the traditional game until the present is unwrapped.

Remember that this is a good opportunity to encourage the children to act and speak out. Say, for example, *Did everyone hear that? I'm sure you could say that a bit louder! Have another go!*

Everyone can sing *Here we go up to Bethlehem* (or your chosen carol) when Joseph takes Mary on the long journey.

Give the forfeits to the appropriate children at the end of the game.

Simon Says

Ask your narrator to call out the instructions from the *Simon Says* list on the activity sheet (page 32), in any order.



Either play the traditional game, where the children should only follow an instruction if prefixed with the words 'Simon says', or ask the children to do everything just for fun. In the former case, those who are 'out' sit down, and the last one left standing is the winner.

Musical Cushions

Everyone sits in a circle, with the three innkeepers on their cushions in the centre. When the music plays, they must walk in a big circle around the three cushions. When the music stops, they must dash to sit on any cushion. After a practice run, take one cushion away in the traditional way. The innkeeper left without a cushion next time the music stops is out. Carry on to find out who is the winner.

Remind the innkeepers that they will *sit* on their cushions at the start of the play, *stand up* to answer the door to Mary and Joseph, and *sit down* again afterwards.

Follow my Leader

Seat everyone in a circle again, with the three cushions spread out in the middle and the manger a little way outside the circle. Ask the chief shepherd to stand up and the other shepherds to make a line behind him. Then say, *Let's play Follow my Leader. Ben, lead your shepherds in and out of the cushions, any way you like, and then take them to kneel at the manger.*

Play music while they do this, and if they carry on for too long, say, *Lovely, now off you go to the manger—whichever way you like!*

It's play time!

If you stopped halfway through the play last week, quickly talk and walk the children up to that point before starting in earnest where you left off. Otherwise, the shepherds and kings may feel they never get to their bit! Even so, practise the mimes at the beginning, and practise chanting *Rat-a-tat-tat*.

Give lots of praise and don't worry if the children seem to have forgotten everything from last week. It's still early days and the important thing is to make it all good fun.

Closing prayer

Father God, we thank you for all the happy times we have playing games with our friends.

We praise you that a great king like Jesus was born for us in a simple stable and came to be our friend.

Amen

COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!

Memos for next week

- Read 'Two weeks to go'
- Take along any pictures you can find of biblical costumes
- Photocopy the activity sheet on dressing up from page 33.

For the *paper crowns*, you will need:

- paper-crown shapes, stickers, glitter and tinsel for decoration, and sticky tape or staples for fastening

For the *precious gifts*, you will need:

- small boxes and wrapping paper or foil

For the *dressing-up game*, you will need:

- the dressing-up clothes, a toy sheep, music to play and a small present in an envelope



Two weeks to go - Costumes and props

Leave more time this week for practising the play.

Warn parents (perhaps via the activity sheet) that you'd like the children to come dressed in an appropriate, *simple* costume on the day of the play.

Introduce the subject of costumes. Say, *Put up your hand if you've ever been to a fancy dress party ... What did you go as, Radhika? ... What did you wear?*

Show the children any pictures you have found in nativity books or old Christmas cards (or use the pictures in 'A party for baby Jesus') of the different characters. Talk about what they are wearing. Ask, *Who's going to be a shepherd in our play? ... What do you think you could dress up in? ... Yes! A dressing gown would be good ... or a big stripey T-shirt, yes! ...* etc. Repeat this process with the other characters and make sure that Mary in particular has something suitable to wear or can borrow something.

Activity time

Keep this fairly short today to leave lots of time for the play.

The activity sheet should encourage everyone to look for dressing-up clothes at home.



Further ideas

Paper crowns

Help the children to decorate paper crowns with crayons, stickers, glitter, and tinsel glued around the base. Measure around the children's heads and staple or tape the paper into place at the right size.



Precious gifts

The children can make gifts for the kings to offer by wrapping small boxes (such as variety-pack cereal boxes) in foil or wrapping paper.

Dressing-up game

Everyone sits in a circle. Place a boy's dressing-gown, a tea-towel, a head-band and a toy sheep on the floor in the middle.

When the music starts, the children pass round an envelope containing a small present, such as a bookmark. Whoever is holding the envelope when the music stops must try to dress up as a shepherd before the music starts again. (You will need to give some help.) Allow too little time for each child to finish dressing up until you want the game to finish. At the end of the game the shepherd can keep the present.

It's play time!

Try to go through the entire play this week, singing all the carols at the appropriate moments. It's important that the children see the play as a complete story now, rather than in confusing bits and pieces.

COUNTDOWN TO THE PLAY DAY!



Call out *Follow my leader* to remind them to walk in a confident and orderly way to the stable.

Try to make the rehearsal as much fun as possible. If you are tense, this will communicate itself to the children. Remember that the teaching aspects of this play are far more important than giving a polished performance.

Closing prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all the fun of dressing up and pretending to be shepherds, angels and kings.

Thank you that we can come to your birthday party just as we are, because you love us so much.

Amen

Memos for next week

- Read 'One week to go'
- Photocopy the poster and complete the 'Please bring...' section for the youngest children
- Make sure that all your arrangements are in place for the day of the play, including any plans you have for refreshments afterwards



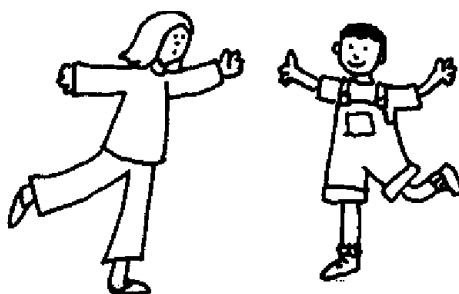
One week to go—

Come to our play!

This week, be determined to leave as much time as you need to rehearse the play without letting other activities overrun.

Talk to the children about the play day. Ask them who they are going to invite. Explain that the visitors want to hear the story about the very first Christmas and that's why you are going to act it out for them.

Ask everyone what he or she has found to wear in the play, as a reminder to any who may have forgotten to look. Some children may say they couldn't find anything to wear, so make a note to speak to their parents to see if you can help. Find out if anyone can bring a toy sheep or lamb.



Activity time

Ask all the children to colour in the poster advertising the play. The older children can fill in the 'Please bring...' section at the bottom. Use this as appropriate, for example, ...*cakes or biscuits, friends and relatives*, or simply, *Emma dressed in her costume!*

It's play time!

Get everyone to line up in the right order, ready to file on to the stage area. (You will find the order at the beginning of the play on page 21.)

Practise walking quietly on to the stage and into the starting position. Note that everyone should remain standing to begin the play, with the exception of Mary and Joseph and the innkeepers. Try this once more and then go straight into the play.

Remind everyone that they sit down after the narrator says, *I think we all need a rest!* (Mary and Joseph remain standing, of course, and the innkeepers stand to answer the door.)

Remind the angels to jump up quickly when the narrator says, *It's Jesus' birthday today and the angels are very excited!*

Ask the innkeepers to be ready to join the party in the stable at the end of the play.

If the mechanics of the play are all in place, concentrate more on the acting.

At the end of the rehearsal, give the children lots of praise and tell them you think that everyone in the audience will love their play.

Closing prayer

Father God, thank you for the angels who were so excited about baby Jesus and the shepherds who hurried to see him in the manger.

This week, help us to be so happy and excited that lots of people will hurry to see baby Jesus in our play.

Amen

Memos for the play day

- Read 'It's the play day!'
- Take the *Simon Says* list from page 32 and use it to 'warm up' your actors
- Take any 'thank you' presents or cards for your helpers
- Take some spare dressing-up clothes in case anyone forgets to come in costume

* It's the play day! *

The children will be very excited when they arrive in their costumes. Today is the climax of five weeks' hard work, so make sure that you and your helpers convey just how special today is and how much fun it will be performing the play.

You may have enough time for one last rehearsal before the performance. If not, it is essential to 'warm up' the children. Play *Simon Says* again and sing some of the carols. Get them to chant *Come to a party* from the beginning of the play several times, so that it gets off to a confident start.

Some of the children will be feeling nervous, so try to reassure them. Explain that you will be standing at the front as usual, doing all the actions. All they need to do is watch you.

Tell them that the mums and dads want to see lots of smiling faces.

During the play, don't be afraid to give any prompts quickly and loudly if the children are hesitant in front of an audience. No one should expect a perfect performance from such young children.

Check that the stage is properly set up and that you have hidden the baby doll and the star as usual.

If the shepherds and kings are carrying lambs and gifts, make sure that they put them on the floor before you start the play. Otherwise they won't have their hands free to do the actions.

It's time, everybody!

- Make sure that the children have all been to the toilet.
- Line everyone up in the right order.

When everyone is quiet, you may like to say this prayer:

A prayer for our play

Father God, please bless our nativity play.

Give us smiling faces and big loud voices

so that everyone will be able to hear the story of the first Christmas.

Please help us to remind everyone

that Christmas is Jesus' birthday.

Amen

On you go! Smile... and **enjoy yourselves!**

Come to a PARTY!

by Vicki Howie

All file on to stage in this order: Mary and Joseph, kings, angels, shepherds, and innkeepers. Mary and Joseph sit on the two chairs. The innkeepers sit on the cushions. Everyone else remains standing.

Narr: Birthdays are wonderful!
We ask our friends to a party...

All: Come to a party...
(All beckon to audience)

Narr: We blow up balloons...
(All blow three times)
We eat ice-cream and jelly...
(All mime eating and say 'Mmm')
And, if we've got any puff left, we
blow out all the candles on a cake.
One, two, three, BLOW! ...
(All blow once)
Well done!
Christmas is one big party for Jesus
because it's his birthday...
Let's sing 'Someone's coming'.

CAROL: Someone's coming
(to the tune of Frère Jacques)

Someone's coming
Someone's coming
A baby boy (rock baby in arms)
A baby boy!
Listen to our story (cup right ear)
Listen to our story (cup left ear)
Of great joy (hands on heart)
Of great joy!

Narr: This is the story of the very first
Christmas party... It all began when
God sent the angel Gabriel to tell
Mary some exciting news...
(Angel Gabriel comes forward)

Gab: Hello, Mary! Don't be afraid! God
wants you to have a special baby
called Jesus!
*(Angel Gabriel returns to his/her
place)*

Narr: Mary was very happy...
*(Mary stands, smiles and clasps
hands)*

But just when the baby was ready to
be born, Mary and Joseph had to go
on a long journey to Bethlehem.

CAROL: Here we go up to Bethlehem
During the singing, Mary and Joseph
walk across the stage, round behind the
children, and back to where they started.

Narr: What a long walk! I think we all need
a rest!

(All sit except Mary and Joseph.
Innkeepers stand up)
Bethlehem was buzzing with people...
(All buzz and flap elbows)
It was bursting at the seams! Where
would Mary and Joseph stay for the
night? They knock on a door...

All: Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat!
(All knock in air)

Narr: But the grumpy innkeeper says...

Inn1: No, I haven't any room. Go away!

Narr: They knock on another door...

All: Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat!
(All knock in air)

Narr: But another grumpy innkeeper says...

Inn2: Can't you read my sign? No room!

Narr: Desperately they knock on one last
door...

All: Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat!
(All knock in air)

Narr: And the very kind innkeeper says...

Inn3: Would you like to stay in my stable? I
hope you like animals!

**He shows them the stable and they sit
down—the innkeepers sit back down on
their cushions.**

CAROL: Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat!

Narr: That night, stars glowed like birthday
candles in the night sky...
(All raise hands and wriggle fingers)

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