



*Before the service, invite children to come in fancy dress. Ideally, nativity themed: Angels, Shepherds or farm animals. Or anything else. We can work with this. And/or bring a teddy.*

## You will need:

- *Some kind of bed that's visible to everyone. A folding camp bed or row of chairs covered with a blanket would be fine*
- *Pyjamas, dressing gown, nightcap*
- *Teddy*
- *Clean metal dustbin or very large catering saucepan*
- *White or silver cape*
- *Babygro with the names Jesus and Immanuel written on it*
- *Baby doll, manger*
- *Alarm clock*
- *Just married sign*
- *Confetti*

Leader: Welcome to our Nativity service. Christmas is coming and surely we are all very excited. So, two questions to talk about with someone near you, as we begin. Here's the first: What's your favourite thing about Christmas?

*People chat for 30-60 seconds and then get the bravest people to shout them out. Respond encouragingly to answers.*

Leader: Christmas is exciting and special, and because of that, there are lots of ways it could go wrong. Your turkey might not fit in the oven. Your Christmas tree might fall over. Your dog might start eating the presents.  
*Leader could share their own personal Christmas disaster here*

What would ruin Christmas for you? What would be a Christmas disaster? Why don't you have a think about that for a moment with someone next to you?

*People chat for 30-60 seconds and then get the bravest people to shout them out. Respond encouragingly to answers.*

Leader: Let's come back to those a bit later but why don't we get in the Christmas spirit by singing a Christmas carol?



## Carol: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Leader: Please sit down.

We might be focussed on the Christmas that's coming, but for now, we're going to think about the first Christmas and the birth of Jesus. If we want to find out about Jesus, we can do two things. We can wait around for an angel to turn up and tell us things, which happens in the Christmas story; but angels are normally terrifying and they don't appear very often.

Instead, we can look in the Bible which is all about Jesus and tells us loads more than an angel ever could. So we're going to read the story as told to us by Matthew which is right at the start of the New Testament part of the Bible.

[Name(s)] are going to read it for us, and then we're going to think about it.  
*The reading is Matthew 1:18-25 (International Children's Bible). Either have it printed on a sheet, get people to turn to it in actual Bible, or put it on a screen. For the reading, it would be best to prep some people in advance (perhaps involve older children or the youth group) or get one person to read the whole thing.*

Reader 1: The mother of Jesus Christ was Mary. And this is how the birth of Jesus came about. Mary was engaged to marry Joseph. But before they married, she learned that she was going to have a baby. She was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reader 2: Mary's husband, Joseph, was a good man. He did not want to disgrace her in public, so he planned to divorce her secretly. While Joseph thought about this, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said,

Reader 3: "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name the son Jesus. Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins."

Reader 1: All this happened to make clear the full meaning of what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Reader 2: "The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel." This name means "God is with us."

Reader 3: When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord's angel had told him to do. Joseph married Mary. ... She gave birth to the son. And Joseph named the son Jesus.



Leader: Thank you.

This is a story of the first Christmas, which is about to go very wrong for Joseph. It's about to be a disaster. So to help us think about Joseph, we need someone to volunteer to be our Joseph. Is a brave dad willing to do that?

*You might want to prime someone for this too, but it'd be better if you didn't tell them much about what was going to happen.*

Joseph has had a really bad day, hasn't he? Look at Joseph. He looks worried. *(to volunteer Joseph)* Look worried! He's pacing up and down. What do you tend to do when your stressed? Snacks?

*Leader offers Joseph some snacks or stress ball or whatever they think we combat stress.*

Why is Joseph stressed? He's meant to marry a lady called Mary. And Joseph was excited that they were going to be husband and wife and start a family together and it was all going to be brilliant. BUT!

Joseph's found out Mary has got a head start on the family, and there's already a baby on the way. Joseph is not the father of this baby, so he's upset

*Leader passes Joseph tissues/hankerchief.*

He doesn't know that this is a very VERY special Baby, with a very VERY special father, God himself.

So he decides that in the morning, he's not going to make a big fuss. He'll tell Mary that maybe they shouldn't be married after all. And that will be that. He's basically going to cancel Christmas! Disaster.

But Joseph is good man. He doesn't rush into it. And it's time for bed. Look, he's yawning. *(Yawn, Joseph!)* He's going to sleep on it. Which is why we've got a bed here. Bedtime, Joseph. Jammies on and brush your teeth, please.

So, Joseph, we're going to sing a carol while you go and put these pyjamas on.

*Leader points Joseph to an area where he can change - where there are some big pyjamas that can be pullover over regular clothes, plus a dressing gown, and maybe a night cap.*

Leader: Let's stand together and sing [Carol].

Carol



Leader: So, let's welcome back Joseph and put him to bed.  
*Joseph comes back in pyjamas, with a dressing gown, and get him to get into the bed.*

Leader: Remember Joseph is sad because he's going to tell Mary in the morning that they can't get married any more. It's going to be a lonely Christmas for him. So right now he probably wants two things. The first is a teddy.  
*Leader could ask the dad/Joseph if he had a Teddy when he was little, and what its name was. Leader could ask if any of the children have a teddy that Joseph could borrow. Maybe there are lots. Give one/lots to Joseph.*

Leader: So now Joseph has a teddy. And he needs one more thing. A bedtime story. Joseph's in the New Testament, so maybe his bedtime stories could have been in the Old Testament. So Joseph? Here's a story from a thousand years earlier; we have to do the wobbly lines you get on TV screens because we're going back in time. Wobbly lines?

*Leader gets everyone to do wobbly lines.*

Leader: Once upon a time, there was King called Ahaz. He was the King of Judah, and he wasn't doing a very good job. And at one point, a man called Isaiah spoke to him. Isaiah was a prophet, which means he spoke God's words. So we'll need a bit of echo. Which is why our next reader is going to say them into an echoey metal bin.

*Reader 4 speaks into echoey metal bin, with a microphone. This needs to be practised!*

Reader 4: Ahaz, descendant of David, listen very carefully! Isn't it bad enough that you wear out the patience of people? Do you have to wear out the patience of my God also? But the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel.

Leader: Did everyone get that? God is saying God will give a sign, and cause a woman to become pregnant without a normal Dad being involved. Does that remind you of anyone you know, Joseph? Well, time for bed. Okay, Joseph. Night night. Let's all say 'Good night Joseph!'

Everyone: Good Night Joseph!

Leader: Let's all say 'Sleep well, Joseph.'

Everyone: Sleep well, Joseph!

Leader: Let's all say 'Sweet dreams, Joseph'



Everyone: Sweet dreams Joseph.  
*Leader could activate a little music toy.*

Leader: In fact, let's sing Joseph to sleep with another carol. O Little Town of Bethlehem?

**Carol :** O little town of Bethlehem

Leader: Please sit down. Right, Joseph is asleep. And he's having a weird dream. We're going to have a look into his dreams. He's already had a dream about taking his exams, and the question paper is blank, and everyone else knows the questions and the answers. And now he's going to have a strange dream. Is anyone dressed in something not related to the nativity? Any Star Wars heroes or anything?

*This is the chance for any children dressed in non-nativity to come up and walk round the bed. Get them to make spooky nightmare noises and pull faces at Joseph.*

Leader: Joseph, you don't like this and hide under the duvet! Right, that's enough nightmares for now. *Children return to their seats.*

Leader: There we go. Lots of thoughts are going through Joseph's mind. He's sad. He's stressed. He's worried about being alone on the very first Christmas, and he loves Mary and doesn't want to ruin hers.

But now here comes the big one. Joseph, come out from under the covers. The angel is about to appear. Can we have some angelic music please?

*Band/PA plays something Angelic. Leader puts on a white cape.*

Leader: An angel has appeared. That's me. And I wonder if anyone else here is dressed as an angel, because now is the time to step forward and stand next to Joseph's bed. *Angels can come to Joseph's bed.*

Leaders: Now the angels have a special job. When you hear one of the readers say 'Jesus', you need to lead everyone in saying 'Jesus means God saves'. Okay. Jesus means God saves. Can we practice that?

*Practice with the angels and the whole congregation.*

And when you hear the word Emmanuel, you say 'Emmanuel means God is with us.' Okay? Emmanuel means God is with us.

*Practice with the angels and the whole congregation.*



Leader: So, back to Matthew's Gospel: While Joseph thought about this, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said,

Reader 3: Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name the son Jesus.

Angels: Jesus means Gods saves.

Reader 3: Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins.

Reader 1: All this happened to make clear the full meaning of what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Reader 2: "The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel."

Angels: Emmanuel means God is with us.

Leader: Thank you Angels. Your work here is done. Take a seat while we think about these two names. Poor Joseph is a bit bamboozled. It sounds like Mary is having twins who will be called Jesus and Immanuel. But don't panic. It's only one baby. And he has two names.

*Leader gives Joseph a baby doll in a babygro with "Jesus" on one side and "Immanuel" on the other.*

Leader: What do these two names mean. First name, from the angel, is Jesus. Which means... Joseph?

Joseph: God saves.

Leader: Very good. The dream worked. You were listening. 'Jesus' means God saves. This baby is going up to be a man who will save us. He will save us from ourselves, he will save us from our sins, he will save us from being God's enemies. Jesus is the true saviour at Christmas. All those Christmas disasters we thought about earlier are bad, but Jesus saves more than Christmas. He saves the whole world by being born, living a perfect life, dying on a cross, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven.

So we don't need to panic about Christmas. Or anything. Jesus is the Saviour.

And then second name, from Isaiah the prophet to King Ahaz. The name 'Immanuel', which means... Joseph?





Joseph: 'God is with us'.

Leader: That's the miracle of Christmas. God didn't stay in heaven as he had every right to do. He came down to earth and became like us. He taught us how to live. He healed sickness, raised the dead and then, after he died and came back to life, he went to heaven. But he sent us his spirit to live with us all the time.

So we don't need to feel alone this Christmas. Jesus is with us.

The fact is, God knows what he's doing. He's got it all planned out. He knew about this a thousand years earlier in the time of Isaiah and Ahaz.

God knew exactly what we needed, and it's JESUS – God knew what needed to happen and He planned it all ... Mary, Joseph, the stable and the animals. Let's get the scene ready. Do we have any animals here? Let's see them. *Animals comes up and parade around the bed in front of Joseph and stay there.*

And then the baby!

*Drum roll/big pop noise. Place doll in manger in the centre of the group of animals.*

They're going to be visited by shepherds and kings.

*Invite shepherds and kings up too. Include anyone else who is left in other costumes, to form a group around the baby.*

Leader: There at the heart of the scene is a baby called Jesus: And the name Jesus means... God Saves! He is who all these people need, He is who we need – He is GOD with US, God with YOU, God with ME.

Let's celebrate all that by singing a Christmas classic, Once in Royal David's City.

**Carol:** Once in Royal David's City

*ALARM CLOCK RINGS.*

Leader: Joseph wake up! Out of bed! The dream is over. And Joseph knows one thing. He's going to ask Mary to marry him.

Can we have a volunteer to be Mary?

*Leader gets a volunteer – and could put a cushion up her jumper to look pregnant.*



Leader: Okay, Joseph. You know what to do. In case you don't, you need to go down on one knee, and ask Mary to marry you. At which point, we all go crazy and kids can throw confetti.

Joseph: (to Mary) Mary, will you marry me?

Leader: Please say yes.

Mary: Yes!

*Wedding March music. Kids throw confetti.*

Leader: Congratulation to the happy couple. Off they go to Bethlehem. And here's a 'Just Married' sign for your donkey.

*Hand Mary and Joseph a 'Just Married' sign.*

Leader: Let's pray.

Leader/Prayer: Dear Father God, we thank you that you sent your Son Jesus to save us. We thank you that we can celebrate him at Christmas. We pray that we have a brilliant time this Christmas, full of fun and friends, but also that we know what it means to be saved by him.

We thank you that you sent your Son Jesus to be God with us, to live on earth, to show us how to live, and then to die and rise again for us, in our place.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit who is with us now. We pray you would help us to show your love to those around us who need help this Christmas and that Jesus would get all the glory and the honour. Amen.

Leader: Let's finish with our final carol.

**Carol:** Either Hark the Herald Angels Sing or O Come All Ye Faithful