



Be a Star

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION DAY & LUNCH

A collection of ideas, resources and guidance
for planning a Christmas Celebration Day
& Community Christmas Lunch



Christmas
Appeal

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this resource which has been produced to support your Christmas lunch, whether this will be held on Christmas Day or another day over the Christmas period.

Our Christmas ministry and hospitality in our corps and centres of course serves all ages, but this resource created by our Older People's Ministries Team in collaboration with our Community Services Team has practical guidance, tips and resources to support your ministry.

There is a suggested timetable of events for the day to help you structure the Christmas celebration and lunch for your guests with ideas to help make the event inclusive for everyone, no matter their age.

Volunteering is key for the success of such a day and information for Befriending Volunteers is included with this resource. For further details around volunteering, please see information provided by the Community Services Team.

We truly hope this resource is helpful to you and thank you all for being stars to others who would otherwise be lonely and isolated over the Christmas period.

May God bless your ministry, and Happy Christmas!

Ali Thornton-Dean, Outreach Mission Partner

On behalf of Older People's Ministries and Community Services

GUIDANCE FOR RUNNING A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION LUNCH

Christmas is a very beautiful time, but also challenging for many. These tips and suggestions are simply to help us think about how we can make it a good experience for all.

This 'To Do' checklist below can be used as reference for before you begin organising the event, and on the day.

TO DO CHECKLIST

Before the event:

- Book venue and run checks (Wi-fi availability to play videos, speakers for music etc)
- Edit and print/email out invitations (see editable template)
- Print/distribute Guest Information forms (available with invitation template)
- Edit timetables (for printing and display)
- Purchase Christmas cards (Christian-themed cards recommended)
- Organise/collect donations for gifts
- Purchase gift-wrap: brown paper bags / wrapping paper, gifts tags/ribbons (optional)
- Teatime treats such as packaged sandwiches, cakes etc
- Wrap gifts and write personalised Christmas cards
- Create seating plan (optional)
- Recruit and delegate volunteers (welcomers, befrienders, Nativity narrators, servers, cleaners etc)
- Print and provide menus (ensure these are easy to read)

For the service:

- Advent candle wreath/candles (optional)
- Nativity set with individual character pieces and stable
- Extra table
- Christmas present bag
- Star decoration / handmade silver star

For the lunch:

- Tablecloths
- Napkins
- Name place cards
- Cutlery
- Plates
- Cups
- Self-contained candles
- Small vases / recycled jam jars
- Fresh flowers (divide up a bouquet)
- Bottled drinks (Shloer, juices, water etc)
- Gravy boats

For the games (optional):

- Pass the parcel (wrapped gift with small packets of Milky Way Stars tucked in between each layer)
- Soft ball

GUESTS

Take a moment to imagine you are a guest attending the Christmas celebration lunch on your own. Think about the feelings that a guest might have, such as concerns and struggles with socialising, unfamiliarity with the building and other guests, previous negative church experiences or difficult Christmas memories. This will help you to be a mindful host and get the right people in suitable volunteering roles so everyone feels safe and secure.

Things to consider when thinking about who to invite and getting word out:

- ask corps members to invite neighbours
- liaise with local external agencies, eg health and social workers, Housing Department, schools, local community groups, local Lifehouses etc
- identify local members of Enabled (Fellowship of Endeavour) by contacting our Community Services Team -communityservices@salvationarmy.org.uk

PRAY

Gather staff and volunteers for prayer in the weeks leading up to the lunch and before guests arrive on the day. Those using this resource throughout the UKI Territory will have access to the United Prayer so the whole event is underpinned by prayer, which is powerful and acknowledges our need of God's help.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers come in all ages and there is always a part someone can play. Here are some ways volunteers can take part ahead of the event:

- invite potential guests
- buy and donate gifts, eg chocolates, unisex gloves/scarves/hats etc
- ask people to write cards and wrap gifts
- children could decorate brown paper bags for 'teatime treats' for guests to take home
- help create little menus for the tables
- offer to provide transport for guests/decorations/food needed on the day

Volunteers on the day can:

- help decorate and set up the venue
- welcome and befriend guests
- share short prayers during the service
- provide general assistance to guests
- cook and/or serve food
- help wash up and clean up

The list is endless, so don't do it all yourself - get the whole church family involved.

Tip: If you can create a team of volunteers, ensure that people know they can do 'come and go volunteering', meaning they don't have to be around all day and can leave once they have done their part. People are likely to volunteer if they are only required to help for a limited time rather than a full day.

For those who volunteer who would normally be the ones invited to the meal, let them know they are needed and ask them to take on a befriending role (see next section). Visit OurHub for more advice on volunteering or contact the Community Team.

WELCOMERS AND BEFRIENDERS

Ensure welcomers and befrienders have been well briefed and know what they are doing before guests arrive. See the 'Be a Star Befriender' supporting resource.

Allow time and space to let befrienders introduce themselves to the guests they will be sat next to for the meal. Remember that it can be daunting going into a new place, with new faces and not knowing who you will sit with. Give each guest a 'specific befriending volunteer' who they can go to throughout the day should they need any help or support, eg letting them know where the toilets are.

Print and display a running order of the day for everyone to see. For guests who may not be able to read, however, please have befrienders explain the timetable to them at the start. People generally feel more comfortable if they know what is happening and when it will happen.

Tip: Create a seating plan and name place cards so that people know they have an assigned seat for the meal.

BE A STAR BEFRIENDER

We are looking for volunteers to come alongside our guests at Christmas, to sit with them, eat Christmas lunch together and simply be a friend.

This is a very important volunteer role as it takes someone with good listening skills, a heart for other's wellbeing and the desire to help someone enjoy their day at what can be a difficult time for many.

Some key guidelines for 'Be a Star Befrienders':

- Ask about your friend's day. How are they?
- We have two ears and one mouth, so remember to listen twice as much as talking!
- Give plenty of time for your friend to talk. You may be the only person they have spoken to in a long time, especially if they live alone.
- Share something from your own day, especially if you have encountered some unexpected kindness.
- If you're struggling to get a conversation going, you could ask 'Which character do you think you'd have liked to be in the Christmas story?' and other open-ended Christmas-themed questions.
- Listen to any concerns or questions your friend may have - no concern is too small, and it can be helpful to share something even if there is no immediate solution.
- Offer encouragement where possible and try not to speculate.
- Encourage them to keep in contact with other friends and family as we start a new year. This may be a sensitive topic, so carefully ask about friends and family beforehand.
- Treat your friend with respect, politeness, kindness and honesty.
- Respect your friend's right to confidentiality.

Be a star and be aware...

- Your friend may not have good past experiences of Christmas.
- They may want to share stories of Christmas, but they may not if this is painful.
- They may be bereaved of a partner, family member or loved one and they may find Christmas difficult.
- They may not be used to eating in a group setting, so a gentle encouragement along the way may be needed, guidance to where they need to be seated. Offer some assistance if needed etc.

DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

We have all been uniquely created. Some of us love to chat, others not so much. Some of us enjoy playing games (see supporting Be A Star fun and games resource), while others participate by spectating rather than doing. That's all OK - it's human nature to have personal preferences and boundaries! Accept that everyone is different but try to facilitate opportunities for befrienders to chat and encourage guests to take part if they wish to or not.

SETTING THE SPACE

The aim is to create an inviting, comfortable, and safe atmosphere. Here are some suggestions:

- move chairs into small clusters so that no one feels left out
- have welcome coffee and tea ready for people arriving
- play festive music in the background to avoid an awkward silence and calm any nerves
- have a screen with the lyrics for people to read and follow carols being played

Tip: Be aware of those who are sensitive to loud noises; could there be a designated quieter space in the room? If you are expecting families, consider creating a play area for toys/books. See section on including people with disability.

[Click here for the Safe Mission Guide No 24 'Older Person's Activities' on OurHub to identify any potential risks.](#)

SETTING THE TABLE

Lay out tablecloths, napkins, cutlery, printed menus, sauces, cups and bottles of drinks on tables. Ensure that gravy boats are provided rather than pouring it on someone's meal for them.

It may be the only time some people are joined with others around a table, so let's make it special. If safe to do so, place self-contained candles as table centrepieces alongside small vases or recycled jam jars filled with fresh flowers.

Tip: The flowerpots could be given as gifts at the end of the day to those volunteering as a thank you.

FOOD ALLERGIES / MEDICAL ISSUES

It is important to make note of any dietary requirements and food allergies (gluten, nut, dairy free etc) as all can be relatively easy to accommodate. Check Guest Information Forms carefully and consider gifts being offered, including chocolate which may contain unwelcome ingredients.

Tip: Highlight allergens in the menus provided, eg GF = gluten free, NF = nut free, contains egg/dairy etc. You can also make a note of allergies inside or behind name place cards for servers to see when serving food.

We recommend that you read and ensure you are implementing the correct Safe Mission procedures (requires access to OurHub):

- [Download Food Allergy and Intolerance - Guidance and Templates](#)
- [Download Safe Mission Guide No 06 - Catering Activities](#)
- [Download Safe Mission Guide - Safe Food Procedure](#)

(New legislation as of October 2021 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland requires all food businesses to list all ingredients on pre-packaged food including allergen labelling on foods packaged for sale on the premises. This does not apply to open food.)

GIFTS AND CARDS

Gifts could be confectionary, gloves, scarves etc. Perhaps ask for donations from the corps in the weeks leading up to the lunch and ask people to buy something they would be willing to wear themselves.

Volunteers can help wrap up the presents / write the tags and personalised Christmas cards if you have the names of guests in advance. This small gesture could mean so much to many.

Tip: Choose Christian-themed cards as this may be the only card some guests may receive.

TIME FOR TEA!

Have teatime goody bags ready for people to take home containing packaged food such as sandwiches and cakes. It would be helpful if this bag was big enough to also hold their gift, so they aren't worrying about how to carry everything.

Tip: Try to keep away from supermarket plastic bags and go more with a festive theme or brown paper bags decorated by children at the corps in advance.

TRANSPORT

Before offering transport to guests, consider seriously whether this is feasible, whether you have the resources to offer the provision and whether guests and volunteers would feel safe to share a vehicle. It may be that guests will need to find their own transport, but you could provide the contact details of any free local bus services, for example.

If you plan to use your corps minibus, then you should follow the guidance already in place in relation to:

- the training needed for the driver
- maintenance of the vehicle

- Risk Assessment for Use of Minibuses
- Guidance for Drivers checklist

All documents can be found on [OurHub Safe Mission Folder](#).

If you are asking volunteers to transport guests to the event, you will need to check whether they:

- have a valid driving licence and that their insurance will cover the activity
- have considered the need for a second volunteer in the vehicle
- are an established volunteer and have done relevant volunteer checks
- are clear about expectations around picking up and dropping off guests

Tip: Offer a secondary contact at the corps in case any issues arise, as you may be busy hosting and welcoming other guests.

Be clear as to whether their mileage will be reimbursed, what the rate will be (45p pm) and let them know about the expenses form to complete.

SAFE MISSION RISK ASSESSMENTS

All of the below can be found on OurHub Safe Mission Folder - click on the links below for the relevant documents:

- [Download Part B Activities - Reopening Cafes, Coffee Shops and Hot Meal Drop In Sessions](#)
- [Part B Activities - email Safe Mission for a template](#)
- [Download Guidance of Drivers Checklist \(Mini Bus\)](#)
- [Download Information for passengers for community transport services](#)

Including people with disabilities in Christmas activities



Christmas can be a very difficult and lonely time for people living with a disability. Research by the Office for National Statistics shows that 13.9% of people with a disability often or always feel lonely compared to 3.4% of people without a disability.



Below are some tips that you can use to help ensure that your Christmas event is as inclusive as possible.

Participation and engagement

Ask people:



- what activities they would like to see included and consider offering a mixture of different types of activities
- if they know anyone with a disability who may benefit from coming along
- what support they require on the day and how you can help.



Use different methods for inviting people and for advertising your events. This will help reach a diverse range of people in your community - for example emails, cards, letters, social media. If possible, follow up invitations with a telephone call or visit.



Include the planned programme of the day with the invitation so that people are aware of what to expect.



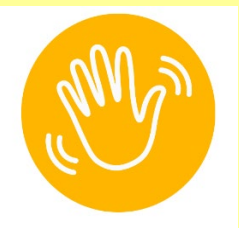
Provide information about transport to and from the venue.



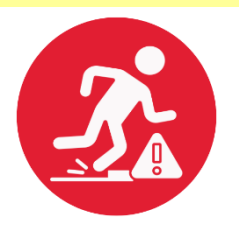
Arrange accessible parking spaces or drop-off/pick-up points.



Ensure the building entrance, activity rooms and toilets are accessible to those who use wheelchairs and walking aids.



Allocate a volunteer at the entrance to welcome people and offer support when required.



Ensure there is space to allow easy movement for wheelchair users and those with guide dogs and mobility aids.

Remove clutter and trip hazards from rooms and aisles.



Provide clear signage that is easy to read and placed at a height that everyone can see.

Communication



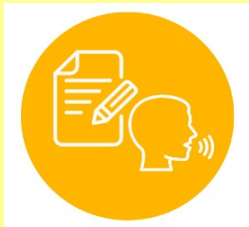
Ask people what their preferred method of communication is.



Provide materials in alternative formats such as large print or Braille.

Use Arial or Comic Sans fonts with a minimum size of 16.

Ensure there is a good contrast between the colour of the font and the colour of the background (eg a yellow font on a blue background).



Provide both verbal and written instructions using short and simple words with symbols and images.



Avoid overlaying text on images as this can make it harder to read.



Provide support to those that may need verbal prompts and sign language.

Food and drink



Consider asking people to let you know in advance if they have food allergies or dietary needs, such as on the invitation/form. This will help you to better prepare.

Include some options for different dietary requirements such as vegetarian, gluten free, soft diet, allergies.



Offer a variety of foods such as savoury, snacks, fruit, treats, crisps, and cakes.



Offer a variety of drink options such as hot/cold, caffeine free, fizzy, squash / diluting juice, water.

Noise and sensory awareness



Be mindful that too many people in a place can cause sensory overload for some people living with a disability. People with anxiety, those who are neuro diverse or individuals who have hearing loss may find the event overwhelming and struggle with overcrowded room noise.



Offer breaks between activities.



Reduce visual distractions, noise and sound, and ensure that lighting is suitable for people that are autistic.



Consider holding activities in smaller groups.



Consider using a buddy/befriender or having a support volunteer during activities.



Provide a quiet room or space for people who wish to take some time away from the noise.



SUGGESTED WORDING FOR INVITING GUESTS

Dear *(insert name here)*

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION LUNCH

You are invited to join us for Christmas celebrations and lunch on:

(Insert date here)

Christmas is a time when we remember that people gathered to celebrate the birth of Jesus long ago, and so we warmly invite you to join with us. We know it can be difficult for those who haven't joined us before, so if it is your first Christmas with us please don't worry - it was our first time once too, so we do understand and hope you will be able to come and celebrate.

You are invited to join us for coffee between 10 am - 10.30 am and our short morning celebration service starts at 11 am. Lunch will be served at 12 noon and the afternoon will finish at 2 pm. (There will be some teatime treats for you to take home.)

Should you require transport please make your request on the attached form.

Christmas blessings from

(Insert first name and corps name to personalise this)

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION LUNCH

Guest Details Information Form

Name:

Date of Birth:

Address:

Telephone Number:

Preferred name to be called by:

1. Do you require transport to attend the Christmas Celebration?
Yes / No (Please circle)

(Remove if you as a corps are not able to provide transport)

2. Any dietary requirements?

3. Is this your first time coming along to the Christmas Lunch Celebration with us? Yes / No (Please circle)

4. Is there anything you wish to tell us to help make your visit more comfortable for you?

5. In case of an emergency please provide details of someone we can contact and please state their relationship to you:

(If you prefer us to not contact anyone, please leave this blank)

6. In case of an emergency and a situation arising where we need to seek medical help on your behalf, please share any medication that an attending medical person would benefit from knowing:

7. Would you like us to keep you informed of any future events that may be happening? Yes / No (Please circle)

Signed _____ Date _____

PRINT NAME HERE PLEASE

The personal details you provide will only be used for this event unless you have indicated that you would like us to keep in touch with you in the future. We will keep your data safe. All your details will therefore be carefully disposed of after the event. Please see the privacy statement for further information: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/privacy-statement

SUGGESTED TIMETABLE OF THE DAY

(FOUR HOURS MAXIMUM)

Time	What's happening	Further Information
9.30 am	Gather volunteers/staff for United Prayer	See United Prayer provided. Explain how this will be used throughout the UKI Territory to pray for guests joining the lunch.
10.00 am	Guests start arriving	Have coffee/tea ready and a nice welcoming seating area. Have music playing or a screen with words of Christmas hymns or pictures playing.
10.30 am	Coffee and gift opening	Have a small gift wrapped and tagged personally for each guest and a hand-written Christmas card with a Christian theme to ensure that if this is the only card someone receives, it is a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.
11.00 am	Christmas Service	See service plan and sermon outline provided.
11.45 am	Comfort break and time to 'Meet your neighbour'.	Befrienders to guide people to meet who they will be sitting next to for the meal.
12.00 pm	Christmas Lunch	See guidance for set up, tips and suggestions.

Time	What's happening	Further Information
1.15 pm	Christmas fun and games 'Time to watch and play'	Remind volunteers/staff that it's OK for those who don't want to join in, as many find enjoyment in watching others taking part.
2.00 pm	Home time	Packed tea / goody bag ready to be given to each guest. If possible, avoid using plastic bags and use paper bags that look special. Perhaps the children of the corps could decorate brown bags for people and personalise them.

UNITED PRAYER

for volunteers and staff to pray prior to the Christmas Celebration

Dear Father God,

We pray for those who will share this day with us.
Give courage to those who are nervous and anxious.

Comfort those who are grieving.

Bring joy to all who will share this day with us.
Strengthen our hands and calm our anxious thoughts.

Lord, hear our prayers in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

CHRISTMAS SERVICE OUTLINE

Bible readings contained within the 'Sermon Outline':

Luke 1:28; Isaiah 9:6; Romans 10:9, 12:1

Handy music tip: Music to accompany the carols can be easily downloaded from

<https://samusicindex.com/celebrating-christmas-at-home/carol-accompaniments>

Handy monologue tip: These are intended to help build the story as you go through the service and are light-hearted. Download and print copies of the scripts for each of the characters. Choose readers of different ages who can bring a sense of joy and wonder to the reading.

1. Opening video clip: 'Today is the Saviour's Day' by Rend Collective
<https://youtu.be/5787vapqkXY>
2. Carol - 'O come, all ye faithful' (SASB 116)
3. Prayers (*If appropriate ask children and parents to come and light the Advent wreath*).
4. Carol - 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night' (SASB 132)
5. Monologue - 'The Extra Ordinary Shepherd'
6. Carol - 'Hark! the herald angels sing' (SASB 108)
7. Monologue - 'The Extra Ordinary Angel'
8. Carol - 'Away in a manger' (SASB 102)
9. Monologue - 'The Extra Ordinary Sheep'
10. Short Thought Outline - 'An Extra Ordinary Christmas'
11. Carol - 'Silent Night!' (SASB 124)
12. Benediction and closing music - 'Noel' by Chris Tomlin and Lauren Daigle
<https://youtu.be/wVY2F69qLps>

JUST AN EXTRA ORDINARY SHEPHERD MONOLOGUE

Costume: headdress - a tea towel with a band around to secure it on.

(Shepherd rising from slumber and yawning in a loud and exaggerated manner)

‘Hello everyone! My name is Simon. I have an ‘extra’ ordinary tale to tell you, so are you sitting comfortably? Yes? Then I will begin ...

One ordinary evening I was out on the hills of Bethlehem doing what I do every other ordinary evening. I was caring for my sheep. Now I’m not sure if you know a lot about sheep, but sheep have been my bread and butter (so to speak) since I was a young boy. My father was also a shepherd, and my grandfather and my great-grandfather! It’s the family business, you see, so I always knew that I would grow up and become a shepherd. Funny really, because I remember being at school and the teacher saying, ‘Simon what do you want to be when you grow up?’ and I would think what a strange question to ask! What do I want to be? I don’t think ‘want’ has anything to do with it. The question she should have asked me is ‘Simon, what do you NEED to be when you grow up?’ Then I could have easily answered her - I needed to be a shepherd, I needed to follow in my family’s footsteps.

Learning to be a good shepherd takes some time. Sheep need water, mostly all the time. But if water is hard to come by, which often it is on the hot hills of Bethlehem, then I have to make sure I can get them to water at least twice a day. Good job I like walking! Then sheep need to graze. They need a pasture, and I’ve found just the place that they like the best. It’s quite a way up this hill, I know, but they find the grass just lush! Greedy little sheep, they don’t half eat a lot! Then the

last thing they really need is shelter. Those pesky foxes get hungry too, you know, so I have to make sure my flock are safe, and so most evenings you will find me sleeping where they sleep.

I enjoy the cool night air on the hills, but mostly I enjoy the peace and quiet - well apart from Jim's snoring, that is. Oh, I should say, Jim isn't a sheep, he's a shepherd like me - my cousin in fact, and Jim was with me on the ordinary night that became quite extra-ordinary. Our flock had just settled down for the night, I had shhhhhhhushed the shhhhhheep (*give a wink*) and was just about to lay my head down when I caught sight of what looked like a star falling to Earth. The light got brighter and brighter as it headed towards us. I gave Jim a good shove and pointed to the sky and I could feel panic rising inside me. I looked at my sheep, and the only thing I managed to say was 'Jim, this is baaaaaad!'

The light was zooming closer and closer and getting bigger and bigger with every millisecond. We both covered our heads to shield ourselves, waiting for the thud of a massive star falling to Earth, waiting for us and our sheep to be blaaaaasted to infinity and beyond!

But ...

There was no thud.

There was no blasting to infinity.

There was ... wait for it ... a voice!

We looked at each other, Jim and I, wondering if we were going crazy. Then together, holding on to each other like small schoolboys, covering our eyes a little from the brightness which was like a glowing sunshine

- we looked up to see that the sky had disappeared and was replaced with ... angels!

The main angel spoke to us both very simply and very clearly. He gave instructions, and thankfully they were easy to follow! (*Use fingers to count*)

1. Go to Bethlehem (yes, I know how to get there!)
2. Find a baby (well, there must be a few around)
3. Remember the baby is the Saviour of the world! (Ah, a specific baby!)

Then to finish off this angel extravaganza, the angels began to sing! Yes, my friends, angels can talk and angels can sing! It was the most beautiful song I've ever heard. I could hear the words being sung over and over again ... 'Glory to God in the highest, Peace on Earth - Glory to God in the highest, Peace on Earth!'

I could have stayed listening to their song for ever, but before we knew what was happening the angels disappeared. The singing stopped. The light grew dim and the darkened sky returned.

Jim and I turned to each other, and without hesitating even for a millisecond we both shouted, 'Bethlehem, here we come!'

(Shepherd starts to exit the stage and turns back)

(Oh, and by the way the sheep have a favourite song they love Jim and me to sing in remembrance of that extra-ordinary night - you may know it ... 'Fleece Navidad ... Fleece Navidad ...')

(Shepherd leaves singing!)

JUST AN EXTRA ORDINARY ANGEL MONOLOGUE

Costume: headdress - silver tinsel or angel halo

(Angel enters singing - can be anything, or opening lyrics from 'Angels' by Robbie Williams)

Hello there, you wonderful sparkly people!

I'm Angelica, and I have an 'extra' ordinary tale to tell you, so are you sitting comfortably? Yes? Then I will begin ...

We had been waiting a long time for our extra-ordinary celebration. Years and years and years and years, in fact! Before I explain exactly what happened, perhaps it would be helpful if you understood a little of my heavenly world. You see, being an angel isn't all about sitting on clouds and playing harps, you know! Firstly, sit on a cloud and you fall right through! Secondly, harp playing just isn't my forte. I'm much more at home gardening, to be honest, and the gardens in Heaven are quite something. The flowers bloom more radiant than the morning glow of a new day, and the grass is so soft when you lie down to rest, making grass angels is just 'divine'! *(Angel waves arms and a leg!)*

Anyway, we had been waiting. We'd had choir practices for hundreds of years for this one special extra-ordinary celebration. As each day the 'Birth Day' got closer, our haloes glowed a little brighter and our hearts grew more and more with joy ... and then it happened. Jesus was born! Oh my angel days! It was the most wonderful thing I have ever seen. We were there watching, but Mary and Joseph were so preoccupied with their new arrival, who just happened to be the Saviour of the world, that they just kept their eyes fixed on their little one. Jesus - what a beautiful name! And I have to say, when you

watched Joseph, his eyes would just slightly move from Jesus to Mary and back to Jesus - the love in the room was extra-ordinary!

I could have kept watching on for ever, but suddenly we had a call from above. The call we had been waiting for, and the call that meant our choir practising would be used to tell the good news of the birth of Jesus, so it was time to fly ...

There were so many of my angel friends with me that even I knew when we reached those poor ordinary shepherds that they were going to be a little startled. I mean, most people never really see us ... as in 'REALLY see us'. They sometimes feel us, but it's not everyone who gets to see the real me. You see, it's not always appropriate to tap someone on the shoulder and say 'Halo! (*hello*), I'm an angel.' But on this extra-ordinary night the gifts we took to the shepherds were those of being seen, being heard and hopefully being reminded that they were chosen ones. There was nothing ordinary about those shepherds by the time they got to Bethlehem, and you know why? Because they were part of something extra-ordinary. Something so peaceful, so divine, yet so powerful. Well, it was the birthday of the Son of God after all. It's not like it only happens once, ever, in history! Nothing quite so ordinary about that!

But one thing struck me on that flight to earth that I will never, ever forget. It was how close Heaven really is to earth. How close God has linked Heaven with earth and earth with Heaven. How close Jesus brought Heaven to earth. And it's always been the same ever since. You might feel that Heaven is far away, out of reach, out of touch. But I assure you, my friends, Heaven is just a breath away, and the beauty of those sweet-smelling roses is something to behold. Perhaps I will

show you my garden one day. I think you'd like it; and I'm patient, I can wait for you.

(Angel cups her hand to her ear)

Oh, I'm so sorry - I have to dash, choir practice is starting shortly and they're short of sopranos today because some of the other angels are on 'earthly duties'. So if you don't mind, I have to fly. But don't worry - I'm never far away, and neither is Heaven!

(As angel is leaving, she turns back)

By the way, I've just had an incoming message and it's an important one. You need to remember that you are not ordinary but extra-ordinary, because you are part of this extra-ordinary story - oh, and something else I nearly forget to tell you! Do you know why angels smell so good? Because they are 'scent' from God!

(Angel leaves singing about Heaven)

JUST AN EXTRA ORDINARY SHEEP MONOLOGUE

Costume: Headdress - cotton wool attached to a headband or a headband with sheep ears

(Sheep enters singing 'Fleece Navidad')

Hi everyone! My name is Baaaaaaatimaus and I have an 'extra' ordinary tale to tell you, so are you sitting comfortably? Yes? Then I will begin ...

I remember the evening so well. I was actually in quite a stinking mood that night because some cows had snuck into our snuggly sheep pen and it had put me in a right old baaaaaad moooooood. Anyway, moooooooving on ...

I was snuggled down in the pen, surrounded by my brothers and sisters, and I felt safe which is all I need on an evening, you know what I mean? Just to lay your head down and feel safe? Well, it's mainly down to Simon and Jim, because they lay themselves in the entrance to our pen and I know that I can sleep in peace because they've got my baaaaaack.

Now I heard what Simon and Angelica had to say about the extra-ordinary night, but I have something to say too, you know. I might be a sheep, that is true. I might have four legs and a hefty coat for this time of year, but I'm important too, you know. I know I'm important, because if I get lost, Simon or Jim always come to find me. I know I'm important because if I need a drink, they make sure I'm taken to the watering hole, and I know I'm important because they always make sure I have a safe, clean pen in which to sleep and rest with the others.

You see, it was absolutely amazing - the bright lights of the angels, the heavenly singing, the look on both Simon and Jim's faces - it was truly extra-ordinary. But I want to tell you about what happened later.

There we were, safe in our pen, but the thought of Simon and Jim leaving us to head to Bethlehem in the middle of the night left me feeling quite baaaad, to be honest. What about the foxes, the predators who want to rip our woolly coats from us and eat us for a midnight snack? I wondered what was going to happen to us. But as soon as our shepherds went running down the hillside in the direction of Bethlehem, something extra-ordinary happened. Our guardian for the night turned out to be an angel. Just one left behind to keep us safe. His name was Adrian, and when it turned out that the excitement of the evening had left us not wanting to sleep but run after Simon and Jim in sheer sheep exuberance, Adrian calmed us down and said he would tell us a story, a true story! Oh my sheep-dip days, it was the most beautiful story. This is what he said ...

He told us that Baby Jesus would grow to be a man. He would teach thousands of people about God's love and care for them and that he would use us in his story! Use us? How can mere sheep be used to teach about God's love and care? We didn't understand. But then Adrian explained that Jesus saw our value. He wanted to be our shepherd too, to stand guard, to keep us safe - and not just us but our human friends too. Adrian said that Jesus would tell amazing stories about sheep and they would be based on us, the first sheep to hear the good news. If one of us was lost, Jesus would come and find us because he is the Good Shepherd. And there and then I realised I had my place in this world, in history, and my story would be told for ever.

You see I'm no ordinary sheep, Simon and Jim are no ordinary shepherds and Angelica is no ordinary angel. We are extra-ordinary because we are all part of this amazing story, the story that came to be known as 'The First Christmas', which really means the first Festival of Christ.

Remember what the shepherd gives me? Safety, sustenance and rest ... and he wants to give you the same. He doesn't mind that you don't have a woolly coat like me, he loves you just the same. And if you wander away and get lost, he will look for you and won't stop looking until you return. That's because he is the Good Shepherd. In fact, he's the very best!

So, my extra-ordinary friends - here's some advice from what you now call the Bible and was still being written when all this happened. I feel a little like a sheep prophet as these words are taken from a book called Romans ...

'So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking around life (and the hills and valleys of Bethlehem) and place it before God as an offering.'

Today could be the first day of your extra-ordinary life with Jesus!

Got to dash - I'm following the Good Shepherd - he has everything I need, and I don't want to be too faaaaaaar behind him. Baaaaa bye!

(Sheep exits)

AN EXTRA ORDINARY CHRISTMAS - SHORT TALK OUTLINE

Introduction

Well, what an extra ordinary day! We've met a shepherd, an angel and a sheep! Now that doesn't happen every day, does it?

Maybe when you woke up this morning you were super excited thinking 'This day is going to be extraordinary', or maybe you woke up and thought 'It's *just* another day!'

Christmas is a reminder about the most extraordinary event that ever happened in the whole of history - the birth of Jesus! So when we celebrate Christmas the extra-ordinary can come alive again for us, and the joy of the shepherds, the wonder of the angels and awe of the sheep become ours once again. The only problem is that that joy may be fleeting and only lasts for one day. But we have something very extraordinary to share with you today. It doesn't have to be just one extra ordinary Christmas Day - it can be about living extraordinary days for the rest of lives. Let's look at how we can do that. It is as simple as A B C.

A - ACCEPT that Jesus is the Saviour of the world.

Jesus was no ordinary baby. Jesus himself was extraordinary and his earthly parents were too. A very long time ago Mary, the mother of Jesus, was visited by an angel who had extraordinary news to share with her.

Luke 1:28,30-32 records the angel saying: 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be call the Son of the Most High.'

Mary must have been very special to have been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. And we can tell that is true, because she did a very beautiful and amazing thing. She ACCEPTED that Jesus was going to be the Saviour of the world and that she had been given a very extraordinary role in life. Mary had to ensure that Jesus had a mother who would love and care for him as he grew up. Mary's life changed from ordinary into extraordinary in the blink of an eye.

B - BELIEVE that you BELONG

Jesus wasn't born only for those who lived in Bethlehem at the time of his birth. Jesus was born for everyone. His birth helps us to understand the 'belonging' nature of God. We belong to him and he belongs to us.

Belongingness is a human emotion, it is a need to be accepted as part of a group of people, and Jesus calls us to belong to the family of God. That means that you are not ordinary, but extraordinary because you have a place in the Kingdom of God. When we belong to a group of people rather than trying to do

life on our own, we turn from saying 'I' to being 'us'. We hear this group belonging to God talking about the birth of Jesus in Isaiah 9:6:

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

So, the extraordinary news of Christmas is that you belong to the family of God and you are understood by the Wonderful Counsellor, you are strong in our Mighty God. You are unconditionally loved by the Everlasting Father and you are cared for by the Prince of Prince. Jesus belongs to you, and if you believe in him you will belong to him.

C - CONFESS that Jesus is LORD

'Confess' is a strange word for many, as it often makes us think about confessing our sins, confessing that we've messed up or even confessing to someone we care for that we have not acted as we should. Well, that kind of confessing can be good for the soul and necessary to living a good life, but today we want to think about confessing that Jesus is Lord. In that context it means that we simply say out loud that we *accept* that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, that we *believe* that we belong to God's family, and then we *confess* that Jesus is Lord - that Jesus is our Mighty God, Jesus is our Everlasting Father and Jesus is our Prince of Peace. We speak it out, whether loudly for all to hear or whispered in the depths of our hearts for Jesus to hear.

Romans 10:9 (ESV) says: 'If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord ... you will be saved.'

You see, accepting, believing and confessing is the best way to live an extraordinary life with Jesus Christ. And if you don't believe it, remember the testimony of Simon the shepherd, Angelica the angel and Bartimaeus the sheep. Jesus turns the ordinary into extraordinary.

Conclusion

Christmas isn't just about celebrating one day. Christmas is about turning our everyday, ordinary lives into something special and quite extraordinary. And to do that we simply have to follow some great advice written by the apostle Paul and found in Romans 12:1-2 (*The Message Version*).

'So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.'

Happy Christmas, everyone - go be extraordinary for Jesus!

FUN AND GAMES

Games are a great way of breaking the ice with people and making sure that people keep entertained and feel part of something. Remember that not everyone will want to take part in games. Often people enjoy watching others having fun, and this becomes their own way of joining in and being part of the activity.

Whatever games you play, ensure that they are suitable for all ages and abilities. Try not to do games that require people to read things out loud as this can be daunting for many. With any games that you do play, ensure that clear instructions are given so that no one is left feeling embarrassed or left out.

Some people love quizzes, while others hate them. If you decided to engage people in a quiz, ensure that everyone is either in pairs or small teams (up to three people), so that no one is embarrassed if they don't know an answer.

The main thing to remember is, this is about having fun - so getting people laughing and enjoying the game, or even laughing and watching those playing, is the goal. Often people love to play games but don't get the opportunity if they live alone, so give permission to play and have some fun. And one last thing: get the volunteers playing too. This makes everyone feel they are on the same level playing ground and that everyone is equal.

Suggestions for Christmas Celebrations Games

Pass the Parcel

Choose an inexpensive gift such as a box of chocolates to wrap up for the traditional game of Pass the parcel. Try to include enough layers, but not too many that it becomes tiresome. Between each layer or wrapping add a bag of chocolate 'Milky Way Stars', and each time tell everyone that they are all superstars because God loves them. Explain that if they win the chocolate stars, they can either keep them to take home or give them away to other guests. The choice is theirs!

Christmas Pass the Ball

Gather the guests into a circle, each with a chair to sit on, and have a 'leader' in the middle of the circle with a large soft ball. The leader throws the ball to different guests at random, ensuring that everyone has a turn without just going round the group one by one. When someone catches the ball, they have to shout out something related to the Christmas theme, eg baubles, kings, Mary, presents, turkey etc.

Have fun!



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