



Introduction

The following first-person dramatic story leads into a simple presentation about the meaning of Christmas.

Preparation - getting dramatic

The reader should dress up in middle-eastern costume or at least wear a middle-eastern headdress (a *kafir*).

You will also need nine copies of the letter 'G' in diminishing size - initially very large, then becoming smaller and smaller, linking up eventually with the small word 'us'.

Development - Hassan's story

Excuse me... excuse me... has anybody got any money for the meter?

I've left the camel running and it's on a double yellow line.

Perhaps I'd better introduce myself. My name is Hassan.

I'm from the Middle East. That's between the near East and the far East. You know... roughly... east of here.

Do you like my clothes (headgear)? The genuine article from the markets of Damascus. Great for protecting yourself from sunstroke and sand storm. There are a lot of deserts where I come from. A bit like a party I suppose. A lot of desserts (deserts)... get it?! (Please yourselves.)

Now I've been asked to come here for a reason... now, what was it?... Ah, yes, to tell you a story.

Do you like stories?

Well this one goes way back - back to a relative of mine. To my great, great, great... great, great, great... great, great, great... great (x100)... **great** grandfather.

And guess what? He was called Hassan, too. We like to keep the name in the family.

Now my great, great... well, you know, my grandfather is famous! Because he was very wise. He knew a thing or two. He could do exams standing on his head... which is a very odd way to do exams!

And more than that, he *knew* things... know what I mean? And it was because he knew things that he got in the Bible. He was one of **The Wise Men**... Well, to be truthful, he *almost* got in the Bible and was *almost* one of the Wise Men... and he should have been there, after all it doesn't say how many



wise men there were... but the truth is he is the other one; the one who didn't quite make it, and I'll tell you why.

About 2,000 years ago, this very bright star appeared in the sky. It caused quite a stir. Hassan knew it was some special sign and he began to do some research... Books and charts and stuff. And he wasn't the only one. There were other wise men in other parts of the Middle East and beyond. They had spotted the same star and were doing the same thing as Hassan. They'd all worked it out. The star meant that... **God was doing something special.**

Well, the Wise Men knew about each other - as they would, being wise men - and they soon all got together to work out what to do next with their discovery. They eventually decided to follow the star and see where it was leading. They fixed a day and a time to start their journey.

Now that is where my relative, Hassan, made his big mistake. You see, despite being very wise about most things, he was hopeless in one department. He was always *late* for things - often *very* late. And so it was, that poor old wise Hassan never got to the meeting point on time. He was a whole week and many hours out and, of course, they'd left without him.

When he eventually got going, he had to rely on others to give him details of where they went and at every crossroads, it seems, he'd go and choose the wrong direction to turn and so on. He knew roughly where to go because of the star but not exactly. He began to despair. He'd never find out what **that special thing was that God was doing**. He'd never get to find **God's great secret**.

Months later he eventually arrived in the city of Jerusalem and got his first really firm lead - Bethlehem... they'd gone to Bethlehem.

He was way behind the others at this stage, but he still had hopes of discovering **God's great secret... the special thing that God had done**. Bethlehem, though, was deserted. Everything shut up; no one on the streets. A great sadness everywhere. No children's voices at all. The few faces he did spot in the corners of the open windows had fear in their eyes. Could this be the place?

If only the other wise men had left him a message. Some clue as to what it was all about. What was **God's great secret**?

Well, let me tell you, after a long search he did find something. It was hidden in a back room in an old house on the edge of town. The house looked as if it had been abandoned in a hurry. And I've brought the message along for you. It was left by wise men, remember, so I wonder whether you will be wise enough to work it out. Wise enough to work out **God's Great Secret!**

(Produce the 9 letters 'G', each one getting smaller and smaller, and the word 'us'. Put the 'G's in descending order. Finally, add on the 'us'. It should all be in one long line, left to right, and visible to all.)

What is **God's great secret**?



Who is it?

Gs... us = **Jesus!**

God - the Big G - becomes smaller and smaller, coming down to meet us. Down to our level so we can know him.

You see, that's the big idea that makes Jesus so important for Christians, and for lots of other people too. They believe the secret is this.

That God came to share himself with people - as Jesus. As a real living human being. There's even a special word for it: **Incarnation**. It's about God making people new. God working with people to change the whole world.

This is **God's Great Secret**. God's **Open Secret** for the whole world.

And if you think that's a really strange idea, then it is! It's a bit like...

like an artist painting herself into her own picture
like an author writing himself into his own novel
like a dramatist acting in her own play
like the club chairman turning out for the first team
like the head teacher starting with Reception
like the king or queen becoming the poorest in the kingdom
like the president becoming a refugee

... like God becoming a baby at Christmas

And that's why Christians celebrate Christmas.

Meditation/Prayer

Think about it - God, the creator of the universe, becoming a real human being. I wonder what your biggest question about this could be? And what might the answer be?

Here's a Christian prayer. At the end, if you want, you can say, 'Amen'. That means 'That's for me, too.'

Father God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for this amazing thought - that you love people so much, you want to come and live with them. This Christmas season, help me to think about it more. Amen

Background information for teachers

The original story of the visit of the wise men is found in the Bible at Matthew 2:1-18.



Epiphany means 'revealing' or 'revelation', as in 'I had an epiphany and suddenly everything made sense.' For Christians, these early stories of Jesus' birth reveal much about his future destiny. The visiting wise men, or Magi, were possibly Babylonian stargazers, whose gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are thought to provide symbols of Jesus' future. Gold signifies kingship, frankincense signifies worship, drawing people closer to God, and myrrh signifies a significant death. These might seem strange gifts for a baby, but may well have provided valuable financial security when the family had to flee for their lives towards Egypt, whose coastal city of Alexandria was an official city of refuge with a significant Jewish population.

Incarnation is a key Christian concept - that God could become literally 'in flesh', as a human being called Jesus Christ, sometimes called Immanuel (which means 'God with us'). This idea forms a key point of theological difference between Christians, Muslims and Jews, who all view Jesus very differently. For Christians, one implication of the incarnation is that our human bodies (as part of the created order) are fundamentally good... but spoiled, but similarly capable of being redeemed (mended or revalued) by God.