



On your marks

The following outline for a short all-age celebration explores the story of the birth of Jesus from the starting point of journeys. Many people travel at this time of year to visit family and friends - or perhaps just to get away from it all! The story of Christmas is also full of people travelling, but who travels the furthest?

Get set

The outline includes Bible links, a way into the story, a way to tell the story together, suggestions for a song and a prayer activity.

Go!

Bible links

- Luke 2:1-8
- Matthew 2:1-12
- Philippians 2:6-11

A way into the story

Christmas is one of the busiest times in the year when it comes to holiday travel. And in an age, particularly in the western world, where families are often living far from each other, there is even greater pressure to get to visit relatives at some stage over the Christmas period, which means that everyone seems to be travelling!

Ask:

- Who will be travelling somewhere this Christmas?
- Who will you be visiting?
- How will you travel? By car? By plane? By train? Some of you may even be going by boat... to escape Christmas on a cruise!

Hear some of the stories from people and their travel plans this Christmas, asking young and old.

So much travelling! No wonder people say that Christmas can be one of the most exhausting holidays ever - buying presents and wrapping them up is tiring enough, but buying tickets and packing bags as well is a recipe for a Christmas meltdown.

If only we could get back to the simplicity of the first Christmas!!

A way to tell the story together



But hang on a minute – there was plenty of travelling then too!

As you bring together the elements of the story below in terms of who was travelling where, invite actions from everyone to accompany each person/group who was travelling then:

- The angel Gabriel travelled from the courts of heaven to the village of Nazareth – *soaring through the air like a superhero*
- The virgin Mary walked from Nazareth down to see her cousin in Judea – *walking on the spot up and down the hills with appropriate actions for exhaustion and effort*
- The wise men began their long desert journey from far in the east towards the country of Judah – *bobbing up and down on the backs of camels*
- Joseph and Mary with the crowds travelled down from Galilee to Bethlehem because of the census – *shuffling along in crowds jostling into each other*
- The angel choir travelled from heaven to a Judean hillside to sing to the shepherds – *soaring through the air again like a superhero*
- The startled shepherds ran from the hills down to the stable in Bethlehem – *running on the spot enthusiastically*
- The young couple with a baby travelled as refugees west to the land of Egypt – *walking nervously, glancing over their shoulders and looking frightened*

Yes, there's a lot of travelling in the Christmas story. It was as exhausting then as it is now, it seems. Nothing has changed! But all this travelling is nothing compared to the biggest distance travelled at Christmas by someone. This person travelled:

... further than the shepherds (*everyone repeat the running action*)

... further than the wise men (*everyone repeat the bobbing up and down on camels*)

... further than Mary and Joseph (*everyone repeat the tired walking up and down the hills and jostling with the crowds*)

... further even than the angels (*everyone repeat the superhero zoom*)

This person travelled further than anyone – the journey was from the heart of the universe itself and the throne of God, right down to an animal feeding box in a stable. And who travelled this massive journey? Jesus, of course – Jesus travelled the furthest at Christmas.

And he not only travelled the furthest, he gave up the most:

- He packed himself up into the size of a small baby.
- He wrapped himself up in human flesh and blood.
- He made himself a special present for the world to receive.

Christians believe that this is the miracle and mystery of Christmas. God cares about this planet and about you and me so much that Jesus travelled the greatest distance ever to come close to each one



of us.

Suggestions for a song

- 'From heaven you came'
- 'The virgin Mary had a baby boy' (He comes from the Glory)
- 'See him lying on a bed of straw'

A prayer activity

It's beyond our imagination to understand just how far Jesus travelled to reach us at Christmas. In contrast though, it is only a very short journey for us now to come close to God. He doesn't meet us halfway in Jesus... he comes the whole way... with only the short step of prayer left between us

Invite people to pray by stretching their arms out wide to each side, holding their palms facing the other at a distance ready to come together in a traditional prayer position. As you pray each line below, slowly bring the two palms closer and closer to each other:

- Lord, thank you for travelling the greatest distance ever to come close to us as a baby at Christmas.
- Lord, thank you for the angels who travelled to tell us that we can now have peace with you forever.
- Lord, thank you for Mary who travelled with Joseph to Bethlehem to show us how to say 'yes' to you.
- Lord, thank you for the wise men who travelled across the desert to remind us to offer our best to you.
- Lord, thank you for the shepherds who travelled over the hills to remind us that finding you is the most important thing ever.

(By now the two palms should be together in a traditional prayer position)

- Lord, thank you for coming so close to us in Jesus that now we only have to ask you to be with us forever and you will be.

(Separate the palms and go wide again before ending with a noisy clapping together of hands on the Amen)

- Thank you that because of Christmas you are never far away from any one of us, ever! Amen.