

On your marks

This idea contains a variety of readings and poems that could be read by children or children and adults as part of a Christmas carol service, Christingle or special event.

Get set

Some of these pieces first appeared in [Bethlehem Carols Unpacked](#) (BRF, 2008). This book contains a wealth of creative ideas to use in your Christmas carol services and was written in partnership with [Embrace the Middle East](#).

Go!

This Christmas - a poem about Christmas that also invites us to do something

The census crowds were occupied
When God first breathed and tears he cried;
And for a world that's still in danger,
Won't you be his living manger - this Christmas?

A frightened girl, a worried spouse
Left on the streets, no room, no house;
And for a world that's still unsure,
Won't you be his human stall - this Christmas?

Nightshift workers, angel-driven,
See the join of the earth and heaven;
And for a world so full of woes,
Won't you be his swaddling clothes - this Christmas?

Far-travelled gold was a gift for him
Who came as our sacrifice for sin;
And for a world, so rich but poor,
Won't you be his bed of straw - this Christmas?

Hillside choirs sang out in chorus;
To sing again, they're waiting for us;
o, for a world that's tired and worn
Won't you be the place he's born - this Christmas?

An action poem for under-5s

Teach the following hand actions to describe the italicised words in the poem:

- *Stable* - hold up both hands facing each other (palms inward) and then bend the fingers to join in the middle to create a shelter
- *Star* - with both hands move fingers from turned into the palm to turned out - repeat this several times in a twinkling gesture
- *Baby* - rocking an imaginary baby in your arms
- *Jesus* - touching one wrist at a time with the fingers of the opposite hand - this is the sign for Jesus in British Sign Language

Here is the poem:

This is *the stable* where Jesus will lie
This is *the star* that appeared in the sky
This is *the baby* asleep on the hay
Jesus was born on the first Christmas Day.

A new version of 'O come, all ye faithful'

You could invite everyone to sing the traditional chorus of 'O come, let us adore him' in between the spoken verses.

Here's the invitation for all who are believers
Come close now, smiling like winners.
Bethlehem's the place where you should be
God's taken baby shape, just come and see!

God's wrapped up small - as small as could be
Changed his cosmic light into flame tiny.
God - yes God - has gone the whole way
The Unborn One now has a birth-day!

This blows heaven's mind and the angels go wild
A-shouting and a-singing about the God-child.
They all join in with a chorus of praise
God is amazing, in spectacular ways!

Yo! Welcome Lord Jesus, baby in a stall
Rescuer God, come to bless us all.
You deserve our applause and all our love
In baby clothes, we see God from above!

A poem that unpacks the amazing invitation of the gospel at Christmas

Lord, you never force us to believe in you.
You don't make us praise you.
You won't command us to love you.
But instead, *you invite us to come.*

Lord, you don't deliberately wait out of sight.
You don't always hide and leave us guessing.
You don't just hope we'll notice you.
But instead, *you invite us to come.*

Lord, you took such a great risk for us.
You let go of so much.
You made the first move.
Lord, *you invite us to come.*

Lord, you opened the door first.
You made it all possible.
You cleared the way between us.
Lord, *you invite us to come.*

Lord, you long for our coming.
You came to meet our longing.
You loved us first.
Lord, *you invite us to come.*

It's a birthday! - a poem

Introduce the poem by asking people to think about who they would invite to a party.

For Jesus' very first birthday party, God, to everyone's surprise invited:

- Unexpected guests - those who no one likes/aren't popular (*shepherds from the fields*)
- Unexpected visitors - strangers who no one understands (*the wise men would have probably spoken a different language*)
- Tired guests (*shepherds yawning!*) and weary guests (*wise men tired from their travels*)

Here is the poem:

It's a birthday, a birthday
Who must we invite?
Neighbours, friends and family
That surely must be right.
But 'no, not these' says God
'I've someone else in mind.
The outsider and unrecognised
The ones life leaves behind.
They'll be first to see
The baby come as God on earth,
And join in praise to me.'
Now I see that no one is



An outsider to our God.
Inside God's love, there's room for all
However strange and odd!

God knew and God knows - an action reading

Before reading the following, play some sleeping games (for example, dead lions), waiting games (can you guess how long 15, 30 or 60 seconds is?) and so on, then practise mimes for the various actions in the reading.

Dear God

Back then, at the first Christmas:

You knew about the shepherds, working late at night

You knew about the travellers following the light

You knew about the crowds with their hopes and fears

You knew about the stable and poor Mary's tears

So right now, because of Christmas:

You know about outsiders, who feel they don't belong

You know about the stranger who speaks another tongue

You know about the exile who's forced to leave her home

You know about the foreigner who feels so much alone

You know about the poor whom nobody will know

You know about the puzzled who feel they've far to go

You bring them close in Jesus, each specially loved by him

You turn things inside out and bring outsiders in.