

# 1 December - Time

Over 2020 years ago, Herod was King of Judea, Quirinius was Governor of Syria and Augustus was Emperor of Rome.

The Jewish people had suffered hundreds of years of oppression. Now they suffered under Roman rule. Taxes on wages, food, land, transport. Life was hard and dangerous. They were tired, dispirited and struggling to see a way forward.

For over 700 years, they had been waiting for a great King, promised by God. Prophets said this King would be born in Bethlehem and live in Nazareth. He would be called “Emmanuel” or “God with us”. He would be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and King David.

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light, those who live in the land of the shadow of death, upon them will a light shine. The yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, will be shattered. They will be full of joy and rejoice. For us a child will be born, to us a son will be given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He will reign with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever”.

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**“I love you with an everlasting love. I am with you always.”**

**“Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.”**

## 2 December - Place

### Bethlehem in Judea.

In Hebrew, Bethlehem means “house of bread”. It is located in a mountainous area, about six miles south west of Jerusalem.

King David was born and lived in Bethlehem. It was the City where he was crowned King of Israel around 1002 years before the birth of Christ.

“Bethlehem, you are one of the smallest towns in Judea, but out of you will come a great leader, whose family line will go back to ancient times. He will rule with strength and majesty. People all over the earth will acknowledge his greatness and he will bring peace” (Micah, written around 700 years before the birth of Christ).

### Woking

A town in the South-east of England, 23 miles south west of London.

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**“You are precious in my sight. Your image is on the palm of my hands.”**

## 3 December - Why?

Wars, violence, hunger, debt, homelessness, illness, fear, death - was this all there was to life?

God had promised to send a King who would bring a new way of living. He would bring good news to the poor and heal the broken hearted. He would comfort those who mourn, giving joy and gladness instead of grief, a song of praise instead of sorrow. He would wipe away their tears. Fear, darkness, grief and sadness would be overcome by love.

Every year at the Passover festival, Jewish families gathered to remember God's blessings and promises. They ate special food to remember the past and God's promises. Unleavened bread to remember there had been no time before leaving Egypt to wait for the bread to rise. Wine to symbolise joy at their freedom. An extra cup was placed on the table and the door opened for Elijah to come to announce the coming of the Messiah, the special King. But every year no one came and still they waited.

How long would they have to wait? When would He come?

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**“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son”.**

**“When I see you in great need, my love and compassion reach out to you. I long for you to turn to me.”**

## 4 December - Mary

In the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, a young woman called Mary was busy planning her wedding. She was engaged to be married to Joseph. He was the local carpenter with a good business and a little older than her. Her family thought it a good match with a secure future. Mary did too, but more than that, she was in love. The more she got to know Joseph, the more she fell in love with him. He was kind and generous and she was looking forward to making a home with him. However she was still young and now they were engaged they could take their time and plan it properly. There was so much to plan! What to wear, who to invite, how many bridesmaids. The wedding party would last a week or more, the whole village would be invited not to mention relatives she hadn't seen for years.

Mary was practising her cooking. With all the special food and preparations for the festivals there was a lot to learn. She loved all the festivals, but especially the Passover when all the family gathered to remember God's blessing and promises. She was determined to be a good wife, a good mother too when the time came, although that was too far in the future to worry about yet.

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**“In quietness and confidence will be your strength.  
Trust me.”**

## 5 December - Joseph

Joseph was the village carpenter. He was a good carpenter and a kind man who always tried to do what was right. He made furniture and tools, shaped timbers to build houses, made ploughs and yoke for the oxen. He came from an ancient family - he could trace his ancestors back hundreds of years to King David, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He had built up his business over the years and was well respected in the town. He had a reputation for good quality work at a fair price and his workshop was always busy. When he fell in love with Mary, he was afraid she would think he was too old. However their love had deepened and now they were engaged. He would work hard to give Mary the best future he could.

His customers asked about the wedding every time they came to the workshop - good natured banter about not waiting too long in case Mary changed her mind! He would have to invite them all. He must give Mary a list. Talking of which, he was responsible for ordering all the food and wine - he had better start his own list - it would be awful to run out of anything at the wedding feast and he still had the house to finish. It was exciting but there was so much to prepare!

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**“Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, for my yoke is gentle and well fitting and my burden is light.”**

## 6 December - Emmanuel

Mary was busy updating the guest list (Joseph would keep adding to it!) when she suddenly became aware of a stranger at the door. Mary jumped, she had been so engrossed she had not seen him approaching. She was about to ask him what he wanted when the stranger said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you".

Mary stared at the stranger. She started to feel frightened. In the silence she could hear her heart pounding. What on earth did he mean? What sort of blessing? Who was he?

The stranger continued "Don't be afraid Mary, God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God, Emmanuel, which means God with us. He will be given the throne of David and he will reign for ever. His Kingdom will never end."

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**"I have called you by name. Look at me and let my peace enfold you."**

## 7 December - Mary agrees

Mary was so shocked she was speechless for a moment. “How can this be,” she said to the stranger. “I am not married yet and how can any child of mine be a King?”

The stranger answered “God’s power will rest upon you. For this reason the child will be called the Son of God. Remember your cousin Elizabeth. It is said that she can not have children but she is now six months pregnant. There is nothing that God can not do’ .

“I am the Lord’s servant” Mary said, “may it happen as you have said” and the stranger disappeared.

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**“My love is unshakeable and instantly accessible. Here you find real security. Here you can surrender to my enveloping love and let everything else slip away.”**

## 8 December - Mary tries to understand

“Was that real?” thought Mary, “or was I dreaming?” She wanted to tell someone what had happened but she was too scared. She was sure no one would believe her. They would think she was mad, or worse. Yet she felt so close to God, so loved, so happy. Such a combination of joy and excitement that she wanted to dance. She didn’t know how much longer she could hide the joy, or cope with the fear. Telling anyone was impossible. No one would understand.

The stranger’s words kept going round in her head. She couldn’t sleep, she couldn’t eat. Even Joseph noticed she was distant and preoccupied and asked her what was wrong. Kind and generous though he was and much as she loved him, how could she possibly tell him this? Easier to pretend she was just tired with all the wedding planning.

“Maybe you need a break,” Joseph suggested, “a few days away somewhere.” Suddenly Mary remembered what the stranger had said about Elizabeth. If that was true, maybe Elizabeth would understand. Mary quickly packed a few things and arranged to travel to the town in the hill county of Judea where Elizabeth lived.

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**“Peace be with you. It is I, do not be afraid.  
I will hold you by your right hand.”**



## 9 December - Elizabeth

Elizabeth was married to a priest called Zechariah. They had been married a long time but had no children and they were both getting old.

One day when Zechariah was in the temple, in the most holy part of the Temple where only the priests were allowed to be, a stranger appeared by the alter. Zechariah was terrified, but the stranger said to him, "Do not be afraid, God has heard your prayer and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son. You are to name him John. He will be a joy and a delight to you and many will rejoice because of his birth. He will be filled with the spirit of God even before he is born. He will announce the coming of the Lord."

Zechariah said he didn't see how this could happen since he and Elizabeth were old. The stranger told him the message was true and Zachariah would not be able to speak until the child was born and named.

Shortly after, Elizabeth became pregnant and she was now in her sixth month and Zechariah was still unable to speak.

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**"Light has come into the world. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Believe in the light."**

# 10 December - Mary and Elizabeth

Mary arrived at Zechariah's house and greeted them both. Elizabeth looked at her oddly and ushered her inside, saying Mary must need a rest and a cool drink after her journey.

Elizabeth hugged Mary and told her she knew that Mary was pregnant. Mary told her what the stranger had said and after her own experience, Elizabeth believed Mary's story was true. "You are so blessed," Elizabeth said, "and blessed is the child you will bear. Even the baby I am expecting leapt for joy when I saw you. Blessed are you for believing God will fulfil his promises to you!"

Mary was so relieved that someone believed her. She began to understand what had happened and started to think about what this would mean. "My heart praises the Lord," she sang, "my soul is glad because of God my Saviour. From now on all generations will call me blessed."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about for three months and they talked long into the night about the future and how exciting it was to be part of God's plan.

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**"Rejoice in what I am bringing about."**

# 11 December - Joseph is worried

Joseph was worried. Mary was only supposed to be away for a few days. She had sent a message saying she was staying for longer to help Elizabeth, but he wasn't sure he believed the reason. Mary had been acting so strangely before she went. He began to wonder if she was regretting the engagement.

Still, Mary was due back tomorrow. He was sure it would be all right again once she was home. He had nearly finished the house. Maybe they should get married sooner than planned, perhaps a quiet wedding, less stressful for Mary. He would talk to her about it tomorrow - he was so looking forward to seeing her again.

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**“Do not be anxious about tomorrow. Even the hairs on your head have been counted. Your Father knows what you need.”**

## 12 December - Joseph finds out

Joseph was devastated. He could not believe it - Mary was expecting a baby. His Mary - after all she had promised. Not only that, but she had lied to him - a stupid story about a stranger who must be an angel and the baby being the Son of God. Did she really think he was going to believe that? No wonder she had stayed away for three months - better she had never come home than this.

The wedding would have to be cancelled of course. All his customers would know, all his friends, all the village. They warned him she was too young, too pretty. Some in the village would want Mary stoned, especially as she refused to admit who the father was and stuck to her ridiculous story. Even if he could protect her from that, Mary would be publicly disgraced. He might be angry and hurt, but he couldn't do that to her, he just couldn't. Somehow he would have to find a way to break the engagement quietly, in private and Mary would have to move away, where no one knew her or what had happened.

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**“Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful.  
You are my child - when you cry to me I will hear you.”**

## 13 December - Joseph's dream

Joseph lay awake, trying to work out how to break the engagement without anyone knowing the real reason. It was nearly dawn, he was going to have to think of something soon. He was so tired....

He woke with a start. He thought he had dreamt that a stranger told him that Mary's story was true, that he should not be afraid to marry Mary. She had not broken her promises to him. She would give birth to a son and they should call him Jesus and he would be called Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'

Was it a dream? Was it possible? Could Mary really be telling the truth? He knew all the prophecies of course, had heard them read in the synagogue, but hearing them was one thing, experiencing them was entirely another. That these great readings should be coming true and he and Mary were part of it - that was mind blowing to say the least. God may be great but this was impossible... wasn't it?

He must tell Mary as soon as it was light. How it would work, he had no idea, it was hard to take it all in. He could only hope if God was doing all this, He had a plan for the future.

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**“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord hear my voice. I wait for the Lord and in his word I hope.”**

**Spirit of God, rescue us from despair, give us hope, help us to live according to your promise of a world turned upside down, so our sadness is turned to joy.**

# 14 December - The Wise Men

Meanwhile, far away in the east, lived men who studied the stars and thought deeply about the past and the future. They studied charts and calculated the movement of the planets. They saw a new star, rising in the east. In their calculations, this star signified the birth of a new king, a king so special that there would be no one else like him.

They checked and double checked their charts and discussed it for months. There was no doubt about it. Something significant was going to happen and they had to be there to see it. Although it would be a long and dangerous journey, they had to visit this King and worship him.

They calculated from the movement of the star that he would be born somewhere around Jerusalem. This made sense, since a King would be born in a palace and the palace in the capital city of Jerusalem was the most likely place.

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**“I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. I love you in your past, present and future.”**

# 15 December - Presents

The wise men started to plan their journey. It was too dangerous to travel alone, but they could not reveal their real reason for travelling as that was dangerous too. They organised a party of servants to travel with them, plenty of food and water and their finest clothes to change into when they were presented to the King.

They would have to take presents of course. In their experience you couldn't just turn up and demand to see a great King. Only special people would be allowed to get anywhere near. There would be servants and guards. They would need money and gifts to buy entry. Gifts that were small enough to take with them hidden in the luggage, but valuable. What did you buy a King?

Gold for a royal birth. Frankincense, a perfume used in worship. Myrrh, an ingredient in the incense used in the temple in Jerusalem and in the holy oil used to anoint high priests and kings. It was important the gifts were expensive and suitable for royalty. It was a long and risky journey. They could only hope they would be able to see the great King when they got there.

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**“I will never turn away anyone who comes to me. My love is a free unconditional gift. It is available to everyone.”**

# 16 December - The Journey and The Star

The Wise Men set off on their journey with camels piled high with luggage. For months they travelled across desert and mountains. Dry, arid landscape, hot at day and cold at night. Water was rationed. Bandits, robbers and wild animals were always a threat. It was a hard journey, one problem after another. Several camels went lame and they had to stop while they recovered. They tried to travel in the direction the star seemed to be moving, but it was not always possible to follow the star in a straight line. There were mountains and valleys, crevices and rocky outcrops. Often they had to divert from the direction of the star in order to find a track the camels could manage.

Sometimes they wondered if they should stop and go back. Maybe they were wrong. Maybe this journey was just a waste of time and there would be nothing at the end of it. Night after night, under a sky ablaze with stars, they discussed it. Could they have miscalculated their charts?

Every night the star seemed to shine brighter and still it seemed to lead in the direction of Jerusalem.

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**“I am doing something new. I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland. Follow me.”**



# 17 December - The Census

Meanwhile, in Nazareth Mary and Joseph were also preparing for a journey. Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, had ordered a Census to be taken, in order to register people for more taxes. Everyone had to register at their home town and give details of their land and property and who lived there. As Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to register in Bethlehem, the city of David. Mary had to come as well, despite being heavily pregnant.

“At least I will be away from all the whispers and the stares,” thought Mary. Most people shunned her when she went out. Joseph might believe her but they had not dared tell anyone else the truth. No one could understand why Joseph didn’t just marry her quietly or break the engagement. It wasn’t what they expected of Joseph, such a good carpenter. So well respected in the town – or at least he had been. Mary too – such a sweet girl. Who would have thought it?

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**“I am your Shield, Saviour, Renewer of your spirit.”**

# 18 December - Mary and Joseph prepare to travel to Bethlehem

Crowds of people were travelling to Bethlehem for the Census and Mary and Joseph found a group to travel with. It was too dangerous to travel alone, with robbers and wild animals, wolves some said in the hills. It would take at least four days, maybe a week if Mary could not travel fast.

Joseph was hoping they could stay with his relatives when they arrived. The town would be packed and it would be difficult to find anywhere to stay. Mary was worried about the journey - she was tired enough at home and her back ached so. She was worried too that they would not return home in time for the birth. It had been hard enough finding a midwife to help in Nazareth – most did not want to be associated with an unmarried mother. Even more difficult in a town where they hardly knew anyone, especially in an emergency. She could only trust God and hope it would somehow be all right.

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**“Call to me and I will answer you. Even before you call, I will answer you.”**

# 19 December - Herod

The wise men from the east approached Jerusalem. From the hills above, the city glistened in the sunlight, tall columns and battlements and at the centre the Temple and Herod's palace. One last stop to wash and change into their finest robes and prepare a speech. Then down into the city, through the gates and into the outer courtyard of the palace.

It's hard to say who was more surprised - Herod's servants at the procession into the courtyard, or the wise men, finding no evidence of a royal birth. When they enquired about a new king, they were taken to see Herod. "Where is the baby born to be King of the Jews?" they asked him. "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Herod was furious. He hid it from the wise men, welcomed them, saying he would consult with his advisors. In secret he vented his anger - "I am the rightful King, appointed by the Roman Senate, no new King is going to take my place!" News of the travellers from the east spread quickly and people were worried. The Romans would consider a new King a challenge to their authority. There would be war and persecution and life would be even harder. Herod was disliked, but there was no guarantee a new king would be any better or reduce the taxes. As least they knew where they were with Herod.

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**"My Kingdom is not of this world."**

## 20 December - The Wise Men travel to Bethlehem

Herod called together his advisors and asked them, "Where will this new King be born?" His advisors answered, "The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. The prophets wrote, 'Bethlehem, out of you will come a leader who will guide my people.' "

Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, telling them, "Go and make a careful search for the child and when you have found him, let me know, so that I may worship him also."

Herod did not want to worship the new King, he wanted to find him and kill him but the wise men were too engrossed in their charts and their journey to see what Herod intended.

They followed Herod's instructions and set out on the short journey to Bethlehem. The star seemed to be moving in that direction too and they followed it into the town and started to make enquiries about any recent births.

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**God alongside us, take the fear, revenge and anger in our hearts and help us to turn it into a new understanding of our past and present, nourished by love and compassion. Help us to hold only love and peace in our hearts, our gift, as we journey towards the sacred birth.**

## 21 December - Shepherds

In the hills above the town, there were shepherds taking care of their sheep. They had to stay with the flock at night and protect them from wolves, sleeping across the entrance to the sheepfold. During the day, they would move the sheep to fresh pasture and to cool streams to drink. Sheep being sheep, there was always one that wandered off and got stuck and needed rescuing.

No one wanted to be around shepherds. For a start, they smelt of sheep. The pay wasn't good and after paying all the taxes there wasn't much money left. The Roman soldiers weren't above taking sheep when they wanted either. Shepherds tended to stick together, keep out of the way of the rest of the town.

It was a cold night on the hillside and the shepherds huddled round the fire for warmth, their cloaks wrapped around them. The town was full with everyone arriving for the census. The sound of partying drifted up from the streets, the packed inns were doing a good trade. The shepherds listened to the night sounds and watched for movement in the dark. It was difficult to stay awake sometimes, but the sheep depended on them.

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**“I lay down my life to save you as a shepherd lays down his life to save his sheep. I long to gather you into my safety and security.”**

## **22 December - Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem**

Mary and Joseph arrived at the town gates. Bethlehem was packed - it was hard to walk along the narrow streets. Joseph suggested Mary sat by the well while he went off to find somewhere to stay, but Mary was afraid she would lose him in the crowd. They found Joseph's relatives but when they saw Mary and realised they were not married, no one wanted them in the house.

Mary was exhausted. Her back ache was getting worse. Joseph was worried and trying not to show it. Mary was leaning on him more and more, sometimes they had to stop while she caught her breath. Every inn they tried was full. No one had any rooms. Where was God when you needed Him? Surely He would not abandon them now.

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**“Take my hand and give your concerns into my love.  
Never despair. I will not fail you.”**

## 23 December - The Stable

Joseph and Mary tried all the inns again and pleaded for somewhere, anywhere, to stay. The night was closing in and it was starting to get cold. One innkeeper, seeing the exhausted girl and the desperate man now practically holding her up, took pity on them. "I have a barn round the back," he said, "You can stay there if you want. Its not much but its warm and dry." Joseph would have said yes to anything by now, just to sit down out of the cold.

The inn keeper bought out some blankets and food and water. The straw wasn't too bad with a blanket over it and it was such a relief to sit. "I'm fine," Mary told Joseph. "Just tired, that's all. I'll be all right after a nights sleep." She didn't like to tell him the back ache wasn't going away. "We will find somewhere else tomorrow," Joseph reassured her. "Its just for tonight."

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**"I will be with you when you go through deep waters.  
My love is steadfast and encircles you."**

# 24 December -Christmas Eve

## Morning

It was just after dawn and Mary was starting to panic. The pain that had started as an ache was getting worse. She wanted to wake Joseph but he was so tired, maybe she could wait a little longer. Joseph turned in his sleep and Mary reached for his hand.

It was light now and the inn was starting to get busy. Joseph woke and was about to tell Mary he was going round all the inns again in the hope of finding a room somewhere, when he looked at Mary's face and realised - there was no time, he needed to find help. He didn't want to leave Mary on her own, but he had no choice. He gave Mary the food and water that was left and promised not to be long. He pushed his way through the crowds to find the innkeeper and pulled him to one side. The inn keeper fetched his wife - these things were better left to the women. His wife knew a woman in the town who might help and sent a servant with a message. Mary paced up and down, sitting, walking, lying, trying to get some relief from the pain. Joseph rubbed her back and prayed, harder than he had ever prayed before, that his Mary would be all right.

## Evening

The day was coming to an end. As the light faded, Mary's pain increased. The local woman said she was doing well and it wouldn't be long now, but how long was long? Mary didn't think she could take much more. She was so tired and the pain was so bad. She clung onto Joseph's hand and prayed for the pain to stop.



Out in the fields, the shepherds were gathered round the fire, watching and listening as usual. The light seemed odd tonight, it was strangely unsettling. Was that a wolf or just the sheep moving? That star, the new one they had only seen for a few days, it seemed brighter than usual. Afterwards, none of them could quite explain what happened next.

It was like they were surrounded by light, a warm light and voices, telling them not to be afraid. They were terrified! Again the voices said not to be afraid, for they had good news. A baby would be born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David. He would be a great King and would save his people. The baby was Christ the Lord. He would be born for them, for everyone, even for shepherds. To prove it, they should go down into the town where they would find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger. The singing seemed to get louder and louder - "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased."

Then the light faded and the shepherds looked at one another. What was that? Had they all seen it? The singing - it was so beautiful. What should they do? They couldn't ignore it. They would have to go down into Bethlehem and see if this was true.

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**“Arise, shine, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. “ “You are being led to a place filled with my love.”**

## 25 December - Christmas Day

Early in the morning, the time came for Mary's baby to be born. She gave birth to a boy and they called him Jesus. Joseph had prepared the manger with fresh straw and Mary wrapped the baby in strips of cloth and held him in her arms before laying him in the manger to sleep. Joseph held Mary and gazed at the baby's tiny face. So perfect in the lamplight, wisps of soft dark hair, brown eyes just like Mary. The baby stirred and Joseph whispered to him.

The woman from the town had cleaned up and was about to leave when a group of shepherds appeared at the doorway. She was going to shoo them out - great smelly louts, couldn't they see the girl had just given birth? Joseph moved in front of Mary and Jesus, his staff in his hand, ready to protect them. To everyone's surprise, the shepherds crept in, voices low and knelt by the manger. They told what had happened on the hill side and what had been said about the child. Mary let them see the baby, who stirred again, reaching out for comfort. The shepherds touched his tiny fingers. They returned to the hillsides singing praises to God for everything they had seen - it had been just as they had been told.

Shortly after, a group of visitors from the East slipped quietly into the stable. They were travel worn and dusty but even in the lamp light, they were obviously rich. They too knelt at the manger and gave Mary presents for the baby - Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Mary thanked them but was amazed by the presents and unsettled by what they might

mean. They explained what had happened and why they had come. As daylight dawned, the wise men crept away into the shadows.

The wise men knew now what Herod was up to, having been warned in a dream and planned to go home by a different route, so Herod would not find the baby.

Mary and Joseph praised God and held their newborn son. It was hard to imagine he was Emmanuel, Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace. He was so tiny, just like any other baby, yet so much had happened. They knew he had been born for everyone, but he was still their son, to look after and love and keep safe. Mary remembered all that had happened, for this was just the beginning.

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**“Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the Government will be upon His shoulders. He will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Almighty Father, Prince of Peace. His reign will last forever.”**

**“Do not be afraid, for I bring you good news. Today is born for you and for all people a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”**

**“Reach out to me, that you may live in a new way. I offer you life, abundant life in all its fullness.”**

## **Christmas**

Memories are like a wound that will not heal.  
The pain of something or someone not there any more.

This is too real, so much has changed, we live between the gaps  
where names and people should be.

The pain of loss and fear of what comes next.  
Another day, another empty day.  
How do we face these storms alone?  
Confused and grieving through the night,  
Our spirits at their lowest point.

Yet the love of God has the power to transform.  
Like spring sunshine touching the cold earth.  
God's love unites us, here and now.

May God give us the fire and energy to carry us beyond the past  
to the beginnings of a new world.

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There is a place beyond the borders where love grows. It is not an  
easy place to be. It is where you learn that there is more pain in  
love than in hate. More courage in forbearance than in vengeance,  
more remembering needed in forgetting and always new borders  
to cross.

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**I am coming for you, to bring you back home.  
A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put  
within you. (Ezekiel 36; 24-26)**

Written by Jill Willis, Woking Trinity Methodist Church

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Please respect the originality of Jill's words.