

Paperless Christmas 2009

The Adventures of Mary and Joseph – The Road Movie

Episode 6: The shepherds

Introduction

The following lesson outline offers you a way to work through the story in the video with your class group. There are a variety of possible activities. There are also links to other related videos and to further web resources and books available from Barnabas.

Preparation

Download the episode and any associated videos in advance (www.paperlesschristmas.org.uk/downloads) so that these are easily accessible to use on a whiteboard during the session. Print off a copy of the Bible story as well as the discussion starters and activity suggestions to be used with small groups.

Development

1. First Impressions – [The shepherds](#)

Play this episode to the class. This tells the story of how the shepherds heard of the birth of Jesus as reported by a host of angels.

Ask the class:

What did you like best about this episode?

What made you smile?

What did you find surprising?

What didn't seem to make sense?

What would you say was happening in this episode?

What makes you think that these shepherds were unlikely people to be invited to celebrate the birth of Jesus?

What do you think surprised them most: the angels or the news the angels brought?

Which part of this story made the biggest impression on you?

2. Group work – surprise, surprise!

Hand out the following discussion starters to small groups.

- What's the biggest surprise you have ever had?
- Make a list of the most unlikely people to be invited to: a school carol concert; a friend's wedding; your own birthday party.
- If you were planning to invite a surprise visitor to your school, who would it be?
- List as many unpleasant things you can think of about the job of shepherd in the olden days.
- What ideas can you come up to attract someone's attention in the countryside at night?
- What news would be important enough for you to abandon your most treasured possession in order to follow it up?

Allow ten minutes for this and then ask one child per group to report back on what they talked about and what ideas they came up with.

Play the video [A Great Light](#). This graphically illustrates Isaiah 9:2, which is part of a Bible passage that is read in Christian carol services during Advent.

3. The Story in the Bible

Read the Bible story for episode 6. You will find this below in the Contemporary English Version (CEV). There is also an easy-to-read retelling of this story in [The Barnabas Schools' Bible](#), story 248.

Luke 2:8-20

The Shepherds

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, 'Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's home town a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.'

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: 'Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.'

After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.' They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Here is a [word search](#) based on this reading.

Talk about the Bible story:

- What is in the Bible story that is not in the video? What is in the video that is not in the Bible story? Does the video help you understand the Bible story better? Which parts of the Bible story do you find puzzling?
- I wonder what it felt like to see hundreds of angels in the sky? I wonder what angel song sounded like? I wonder what the angels' song meant to the shepherds?

4. A Carousel of Group Activities

- It is perhaps not that strange that it were shepherds who first heard the news about the birth of Jesus. God is often described as being like a shepherd in the Old Testament. Read Psalm 23 and find out the sort of things a shepherd did in those days and how God was like a shepherd for David, who wrote this song. There is an easy-to-read re-telling of this famous Psalm in [The Barnabas Schools' Bible](#), story 119.
- When this story was told as street theatre in the Mystery Plays of the Middle Ages, the shepherds were usually cast as comedy characters. Decide together on ways you could rewrite this story to get as many laughs as possible!
- There is a group activity based around the carol 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night' in [Bethlehem Carols Unpacked](#) published by Barnabas, pages 137-8 and a story (God's own special lamb) on pages 121-3.
- The angels sing that the birth of Jesus will bring 'peace on earth'. But there have been so many wars since then and war still happens, so what sort of peace is this? Explore and illustrate the different sorts of peace that we need, for example, peace between friends, peace in our families, peace in our hearts, peaceful places to go, and so on.

- The video [The shepherds](#) ends with a host of angel vans all shining their bright lights into the shepherds' eyes. Bright light is often associated with the presence of God. Can you work on a light picture that tells this part of the Christmas story? Include the contrasting lights of the night fires, the stars, the moon, the shepherds' faces, Gabriel and the rest of the angels.

- Listen to the ways that various composers have tried to capture the mystery of the angels' song (called the 'Gloria in excelsis'), by, for example, Vivaldi, Poulenc, Handel and Rutter. It has also inspired many carols, e.g. 'Angels from the realms of glory' and 'Hark, the herald angels sing'. Which versions do you like best? Which come closest to sounding like the sort of music angels would make? Which instruments would you choose to accompany angel song?

5. **Classroom Drama Ideas**

Play the video [The shepherds](#) again and use this to prompt some drama exercises:

- In turn, put the two shepherds from the truck in the [hot seat](#) - give one an enthusiastic and excited character and the other a sceptical and grumpy disposition.

- Create a scene set in a shepherd's family hut later that night after the visit to the stable. Give out the roles of different family members to a group, who should proceed to ask about what had happened. Who will believe the shepherd and who won't? Who will respond to his 'good news' and who will dismiss it as rubbish?

6. **Final reflection questions looking back on the session**

- How would you respond to someone who said they had seen lights in the sky and had heard singing?

- I wonder what this episode of the shepherds adds to the Christmas story? Does it make it more, or less, believable?

- Why do you think that it was important for Mary and Joseph to hear about what the shepherds had seen (see Luke 2:19)?

- Why shouldn't God do something surprising like this?

- Later in the Bible Jesus is described as 'the lamb of God'. Maybe this shepherd story is more special than it at first seems?

7. **Further web links and useful Barnabas books**

- [The Shepherds' Journey](#)

- [A Special Birthday](#)

- [Angels , angels everywhere](#)

Useful Barnabas books

[Bethlehem Carols Unpacked](#)

[Easy Ways to Christmas Plays Volume 2](#)

[Getting Ready for Christmas](#)

[Make & Do Christmas Puppets](#)

[Make & Do Christmas Cards & Crib](#)

[Christmas Make & Do](#)

[Have you seen Christmas?](#)

[The Road to Christmas Day](#)

[The Christmas Journey](#)

8. **Play Episode 6 again to finish off the lesson and as a taster to the next session**