

PRAYER BEFORE LIGHTING THE CHRISTMAS DAY CANDLE

CANDLE LIGHTING CAROL “Like a candle flame”

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS AND SHOWING OF PRESENTS

FAMILY FORTUNES

Let’s play the North Kirk version of the TV game show, *Family Fortunes*...

Questions and answers

Name the five worst things about travelling at Christmas.

Traffic / busy roads

Children asking ‘Are we there yet?’

Arguments in the car

Weather concerns

Boredom

Name five people you associate with travel at Christmas.

Father Christmas/Santa Claus

Rudolph the reindeer

Mary and Joseph

The wise men

The angels

Name five modes of transport associated with Santa or the Nativity.

Santa’s sleigh

Mary’s donkey

The wise men’s camels

Angel wings

Walking – the shepherds!

CAROL “Hark! The herald angels sing”

LISTENING TO GOD

THE READING OF THE BIBLE 1: Luke 2:1 – 20 (1 – 7 and 8 – 20);

CAROL “Jesus is born”

THE READING OF THE BIBLE 2: Matthew 1:18 – 2:15 (1:18-25 and 2:1 – 15)

THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE

You don’t need me to tell you about the traditional scene of a thousand school and church nativity plays – the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, and a whole variety of animals all crammed into a small stable, pushing and shoving to get a closer look at the baby Jesus being lovingly gazed upon by Mary and Joseph! But we don’t often focus much attention on the journeys that the various characters in the nativity scene – particularly the shepherds and the wise men – made to get there.

Unlike in a school nativity play, the wise men from the East didn't just walk from the classroom to the assembly hall, they probably travelled all the way from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) to Bethlehem. And of course, the distance travelled by the wise men almost certainly means they weren't at the scene of Jesus' birth with the shepherds – a point backed up by Matthew. And it's worth noting that while the angels play a big part in the biblical story, nowhere do we read that they accompanied the shepherds to the scene of Jesus' birth.

We will all now have the chance to imagine what it might have been like for some of those who travelled to be part of the first Christmas.

CAROL “Angels from the realms of glory”

MONOLOGUE 1

‘Are we nearly there yet?’

I will never forget my first visit to earth. We were all so excited. I mean it wasn't just a trip to earth – it was like a really important trip to earth, if you know what I mean. God had given us the words for the people of earth. Nothing unusual about that I hear you say. Well, true. But these words were about his Son!

Basically it was our job to tell the people, shepherds as it happened, about God's Son being born into their world! So we set off in high spirits, as you can imagine. But coming from heaven to earth can seem to take forever! And it wasn't long before the little ones started whining and whinging, ‘Are we nearly there yet?’, ‘Are we nearly there yet?’ We older angels tried to distract them with games of ‘I spy with my angelic eye’ – and we had to try and spot distant constellations! But they got bored of that after a while. Space can be quite boring, there's not much going on out there. And so it wasn't long before they were at it again: ‘Are we nearly there yet?’, ‘Are we nearly there yet?’

We journeyed on until at last we spotted the Milky Way in the distance. Again someone asked, ‘Are we nearly there yet?’, and this time the reply came back, ‘Yes, actually we are!’ Then it was only a matter of minutes until we began our descent into the world of water, air and land. I remember that breathing oxygen took a bit of getting used to! I can also remember feeling very curious about the people of the earth – these creatures so special and so dear to God that he was giving them his Son!

Anyway, once we had adjusted to the place and had ‘composed ourselves’, we delivered our message to those poor, terrified shepherds and began to sing out praises to God. Bless them – they didn’t have a clue what was going on at first! But they must have got the message in the end, because they went to the stable and found God’s gift to them just as we told them!

We all felt a bit sad when it was time to go. We would have liked to have stayed and explored the world of people and other creatures and forests and oceans. But the thing we felt saddest about was leaving God’s Son behind, not knowing whether the people on earth would welcome him and love him. As we began our journey back to heaven we were very aware that Jesus’ journey on earth was just beginning.

CAROL “Come and join the celebration”

MONOLOGUE 2

‘A wise man remembers’

I can remember receiving Ashar’s letter, informing me of his findings as if it were yesterday. I could tell from the tone of his letter that he was very excited. My own star gazing had led me to exactly the same conclusion, so I was excited too. It was funny actually, us star-gazing old men had all seen the star at more or less the same time and had all sent letters to each other at more or less the same time! The day after receiving Ashar’s letter, I received several more letters conveying the same information and the same excitement! We informed the king immediately and advised him that the stars had spoken! When he asked us what they had said, I replied, ‘Your Highness, we have seen a star. This star indicates an event of cosmic significance. Naturally we have discussed the various interpretations and we have concluded that this is the star of a great king for the Jewish people. We request permission to travel west and welcome this king.’

Within the month a group of us star-gazers set off on our long journey westwards. Now, years after our great journey, they call us wise men. Ha! Well, that’s not what they said at the time, I can tell you! ‘Fools!’ ‘Crazy old men!’ ‘Even my wife thought I’d lost my marbles!’ You’re an old man with arthritis, a weak heart and you’re half-deaf!’ she yelled at me as I clambered up on to my camel (with a little help). ‘Ah!’ I responded, ‘But my eyes are still sharp, woman. And if you had seen what I have

seen, then you would not stand in my way!’

‘But’ she pleaded, ‘What about your poor heart?’ ‘My heart? Dear lady, my heart will soon stop beating, that is true, but do not deny my heart the chance to beat like that of a fearless young man one more time. When my eyes have seen the new king, then my heart will be content to rest.’ She sighed, stepped aside and waved me on my way.

Now I am a very old man and my voice fails me. I have no breath in me to speak at length so I shall not bore you with the details of our journey. Needless to say that the desert was intense and gruelling, as we all knew it would be. But the star never failed us. She never grew dim and not once did she mock our youthful enthusiasm! We found her to be the perfect travelling companion. But the star was merely our guide, not the goal. And, after many months, as we approached Bethlehem, we took our eyes off the star and searched the horizon for a palace. Yet again we needed the assistance of the star and she helped us to see the palace – a palace that looked like an ordinary Bethlehem home. And there in that house our tired eyes saw the young king and our hearts felt full and strong. We offered gifts and worshipped the in infant Jesus, though we did not and could not have known back then the full meaning of his birth.