

### **Scene 3: A hillside near Bethlehem**

#### **Bible**

Luke 2:8–20

#### **Aim**

To show the children that even ordinary people like the shepherds were able to follow Jesus.

#### **Setting the scene**

The shepherds would have been rough men living out in the cold on the hillside looking after their sheep. They would probably have been uneducated and not respected among the good citizens of Bethlehem, yet God chose them to be the first to know that Jesus had been born. They were so convinced by this message that they left their sheep and went to the town to find the newborn baby. This part of the story shows how much God cares for those who are poor and dispossessed.

#### **Characters**

The angel Gabriel  
Children dressed as shepherds

#### **Props**

A basket containing tea towels to distribute to children for headaddresses. (The easiest way to secure the tea towels is by making headbands by plaiting some strips of stretchy fabric and tying them into a circle, roughly the size of an average child's head. **A simpler band can be made using decorative shirring elastic tied into a circle.**) Recorded music to herald the entrance of the angel Gabriel, such as the beginning of the *Messiah* track from the CD *Heatseeker* by Tribe (Warner Resound 1998)

#### **Scenery**

The scenery can be simple: cut out shapes of hills glued or stapled to corrugated card and tied to the side of the gazebo, or a painted scene with the lights of Bethlehem in the distance and fields in the foreground. Large rolls of corrugated card can be obtained from an educational supplier, or, alternatively, a shop which sells large white goods can often have spare corrugated card packaging. It is worth investigating your *Local Education Authority* supplier as, often, churches are able to register to use these stores and items can be easily purchased at a discount. For more substantial scenery, a simple timber frame can be made for the card to be stapled to. If used carefully, this is easily dismantled for use in subsequent years. Don't forget to label rolls of card and wooden slats for the next year—it's very easy to forget what you have done! Poster or emulsion paint is readily available and suitable for the purpose. The painting can be very simple. Collect old Christmas cards showing the hillside and Bethlehem (these are useful to copy). Children's Christmas storybooks are handy sources for copying simple scenery, too. Pictures can be traced then put on an OHP and projected on to card to enlarge them for painting. Christmas lights help to create the illusion of a starry night (the hanging variety are ideal). There should be one bright star shape more obvious than the rest.

## **The Journey**

The children are led along the covered passage into the second gazebo (see page xx). As they enter the room the children are encouraged to look around the scene and imagine where they are. They are asked who looks after the sheep... and if they would like to be shepherds. To help with this, they are asked to wear a tea towel headdress. Helpers are useful here to speed the process of dressing up. Some children may not want to take part, which is fine.

Once the children have put their headdresses on, the leaders ask them to imagine that they are shepherds looking after their sheep on a cold night. Leaders help to create the atmosphere by building up a sense of mystery and slight apprehension, talking about the wild animals and the dark. Nothing too scary, but children enjoy a mild sense of danger. At a prearranged signal, for example, 'Isn't it cold here?', a loud piece of music heralds the entrance of the angel Gabriel who has been hiding behind the scenery. (Mary could operate the music from behind the gazebo where a CD player is hidden.) Gabriel then tells the shepherds not to be afraid, but that a special baby has been born that night in Bethlehem and that they are to leave their sheep and travel to the town to see the child.

Gabriel then exits, in the opposite direction to that which the children will use, so that he is ready for the next group. Leaders then discuss the surprising news with the children and ask them to quietly follow them to the next room. On the way, they quietly sing *Where are you going, shepherds?* (see website for details).

### **Script: The angel Gabriel**

**Angel:** (*Appearing from behind a screen*) Praise to God in heaven and peace to his people on earth! Don't be afraid, little shepherds. I have brought you good news. God has sent a Saviour into the world. He has been born today in Bethlehem. You will know who he is, cause you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.

Praise to God in heaven and peace to his people on earth!

*The angel exits through the door by which the shepherds entered.*