

Scene 4: The stable

Bible

Luke 2:5–7

Aim

To help the children understand that Jesus was born in difficult circumstances, yet he was a special baby, visited by both those who were rich and those who were poor.

Setting the scene

In this scene the animal puppets tell the children what has recently happened in their stable. God didn't choose a palace for the baby to be born in, but a humble stable. Jesus was born into a working class family in difficult surroundings. He spent his first couple of years as a refugee. He knows what it is like to be an outsider and to live in a foreign land.

Characters

Four large hand puppets: a horse, a sheep, a cow and a donkey. These can be obtained from specialised stores and can be operated by two to four people. Details of suppliers on website.

Scenery

Dark walls draped with fabric. A half sized screen of corrugated card is fixed to one wall of the gazebo, painted to look like a timber wall. This is high enough for the puppeteers to sit behind to work the animal puppets. Behind them, more dark fabric is hung.

Lighting

Subdued to create a dark and cosy atmosphere with spotlights on the animals.

Props

Models of Mary, Joseph, and a manger in which baby Jesus has been placed. (These are stylised figures approx 40cm tall, easily made with papier mâché on a wire frame then painted. There are photographs of the models on *The Christmas Journey* website. Straw and sacks to give a stable effect, CD recording of the script so that the puppeteers can mime (this allows different members of the team to work the puppets when appropriate).

The Journey

Children walk through the passage from the hillside scene and enter the stable where the animal puppets appear to be resting. The model crib scene is placed to the side of the animal screen. Leaders encourage the children to think where they might be and make sure that they have noticed the baby lying in the manger. They point out that this is most unusual. Once the children are seated on the floor, the animals come to life and talk about what they have just experienced in the stable. The script appeals to both children and adults and lasts for approximately four and a half minutes. It is pre-recorded so that anyone is able to work the puppets. The puppeteers switch the CD on when the children are settled and move the puppets as indicated by the script.

Script: The stable

- Horse:** Who's this lot coming into our lowly cattle shed now?
- Sheep:** Ooooh, I don't know. Probably more visitors to see where a mother laid her baby, in *our* manger for his bed.
- Cow:** Let's have a look... who we have now? There have been school children and grown-ups, teachers and bus drivers...
- Horse:** It was peaceful before, wasn't it?
- Donkey:** Aye.
- Horse:** Until late last night. We'd all gone to bed and it was nice and peaceful... a silent night. Then the door crashed open and since then it's been like a city centre.
- Donkey:** Aye.
- Sheep:** The innkeeper's wife brought them in—the girl and her man—brought them to my stall and said they should sleep with me as my stall was the cleanest in the whole stable. (*Looks smug.*)
- Horse:** You could tell she was going to have a baby. I could tell straight away.
- Sheep:** So they settle down on my clean straw. People in my stall!
- Cow:** Yes, then just when we'd all settled down to go to sleep, the girl starts to cry out to the man. Desperately crying out that 'her time had come'.
- Sheep:** The poor man goes running off to get help. The door crashes open again, and help comes.
- Horse:** The man was no use, just stood there looking worried. Kept saying he knows about carpentry, but not about childbirth.
- Cow:** Then the baby was born. Didn't he make a noise... until his mother comforted him... she wrapped him in a cloth and... (*interrupted*)
- Sheep:** Used our manger, our food trough, for a cot for the baby.
- Cow:** Well, she couldn't have put him on the floor—it was so cold. She had to find somewhere to lay down his sweet head.
- Horse:** Then all the helpers left and I hoped we could go back to *sleep*, but no! It was like there was a new light, a big light, left on over our stable.
- Donkey:** Aye.

Horse: It was dark all around, but seemed to be light just where we all were. It was strange.

(Long pause. All the animals look at horse.)

Donkey: Aye.

Cow: Then the door bursts open again and in came a bunch of shepherds.

Sheep: I wished they'd brought their sheep with them. I could do with meeting some nice sheep.

Horse: When they saw the baby in the food trough, wrapped in cloth bands, they were sooo excited. They said it was a sign. I thought they'd had too much mint tea!

Donkey: Aye.

Horse: They kept saying a light had appeared in the sky and an angel had told them not to be afraid, and 'this day in King David's home town a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.' Then the angel said the shepherds would know it was true because the baby would have no proper cot and no proper bedclothes, but would be lying in a bed of hay. *(Laughs)* Definitely too much mint tea!

Donkey: Aye.

Cow: Then they said a whole lot of angels appeared saying 'Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.'

Horse: Definitely too much mint tea.

Donkey: Aye.

Pause

Sheep: I know shepherds look after us sheep, but when they sleep rough on a hillside, in the bleak mid winter, they smell worse than a dead wolf. Why couldn't the angels have told someone posh?

Cow: Like who?

Sheep: Someone different, why not... mystical men from the east, who travel on camels, wear rich coloured clothes and bring exotic gifts... and smell nice?

Horse: Oh, people like that wouldn't believe what they were told, even by an angel. They'd need a sign to follow, something in the sky or stars.

People like that wouldn't come. Some people will never believe what they are told.

Donkey: Aye.

Cow: Then when the shepherds left they just couldn't stay quiet or keep still.

Sheep: They must have told everyone what they had seen.

Horse: Yes, since then we've had nothing but people, people, people: children, grown-ups, old and young. I wonder how long people will come seeking for this baby. What did they call him? Jesus?

Donkey: Aye... Jesus!

The puppets then return to sleep and the leaders ask the children to move quietly on to the next room.

NB In the original script, *mint tea* is actually written as *mint beer*, which we feel is more amusing to the accompanying adults. We have used this without causing offence for the past six years. However if you prefer to use mint tea as the shepherds' preferred beverage please feel free to do so.