

Christian Prayer 5a ii

Guided meditation - Nativity

It is helpful to begin the meditation with a brief quietening-down exercise, using breathing or a mantra to quieten and centre the group.

Luke 2:1-14

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered.

So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took it in turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour.'

Nothing really turned out like we had planned. We were getting everything ready for the birth of our child at home, with help on hand.

But then we were told we had to go to Bethlehem for the census. And off we set, me, Joseph with Mary, my wife, heavily pregnant, and the baby due any day.

We set off in the dark of winter, from Galilee, over the hills and down the valleys of Samaria, and then up again to Judaea, the country of David, my ancestor. And we arrived in Bethlehem, the ancestral town, the town the family came from, but there was no warm welcome. The town was full of other strangers registering for the census. No welcoming place for us.

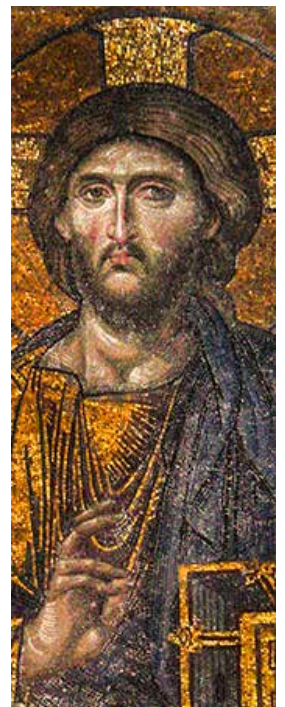
And then Mary's labour pains began, and we searched for somewhere to stay and eventually we were offered a space in a cave, in with the animals. But it was a safe space, dark and smelly, but warm and safe and private – apart from the animals.

And there, warm, safe, and private, Mary gave birth to our son.

PTO

★ *The exercise is written as a script. You can read it to a class. But leave lots of pauses, to allow people to notice how they are feeling etc.*

An accompanying PowerPoint includes the script read for you. The 2nd screen with the scripture passage runs for just over 2 mins; the meditation screen - the 3rd screen (which will play without being preceded by the scripture passage) lasts c.7 minutes. There is a 4th screen which includes the sound of a concluding bell.. All you need add is the closing 'Glory be...'



But later on, just as we were going to get a little sleep, we heard a kerfuffle outside. Men's voices outside the cave, raised, excited, saying they want to come in and they know there's a mother inside and a new baby. 'And no they won't go away until the morning'

We didn't know what to think or what to do. Mary was worried they were going to wake Jesus, and I thought we might have a fight on our hands any minute.

The door to the cave opened and in came, I don't know, about half a dozen men carrying lanterns. Shepherds from the hills, it turned out. Couldn't see them all, but you could smell them coming!

And in they came, crowding into the already tight space. But when they came in, they were not rough, they weren't threatening. They saw Mary and me, and our baby, our Jesus and those hefty fellas all fell to their knees. And it's dark but there are tears in their eyes.

Mary and me, we were dumbstruck. We didn't know what on earth was happening. But then one of the shepherds, the oldest of them it seems, began to speak of heaven come to earth, of angels telling them to come to Bethlehem to seek out the new-born son of David, who is to be our saviour... Of angels singing to the glory of God; singing blessings to the peoples of the world.

Mary speaks out, of when she had seen and spoken with an angel. And she told them of that meeting and God's asking her to bear this son, our son, Jesus. And of the name he was to have: Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua: God who saves.

I could have told them of the angel that came to me later, in a dream and told me to take Mary as my wife, because I had not believed her story, or not understood what she was telling me, or I was afraid of what others might say. But the angel of God gave me courage, and we've not looked back from that day. But I wasn't ready to tell shepherds, even these shepherds, all of our business.

But then the old shepherd spoke up again. 'Everything the angels have said has come true. God has visited his people. God has come to save us. In this new-born son'.

- *For a minute or two let us join the holy family, the shepherds and the animals in the dark of the night, in the gloom of the lantern lit cave, cramped in that little space - and let us quietly wonder at the wonder of it all.*
- *And know that God has come for us, that Jesus came for you - for all of us - to help you to new life and better life. To save us from sin and bring us to the life of heaven, even here on earth.*
- *For a minute or two, let's sit still now, and place our thanksgiving, our hopes and our fears before the living God.*