



Carol event plan



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HOPE UP CLOSE AN INVITATION TO IMAGINATION

WELCOME (FACILITATOR)

“The word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes... generous inside and out, true from start to finish.” (John 1:14, The Message)

HOPE arrives – unexpected. Not neatly packaged.

Small, insignificant, hardly visible. Almost unrecognisable.

HOPE arrives – easy to miss. Hard to grasp. Elusive, almost. And yet very present. Very close. Next door. No – closer.

HOPE arrives – UP CLOSE. Up close and personal.

A very warm welcome to our Christmas carol event.

Hope is what we need right now, because we are going through a difficult year.

A time that none of us asked for. A time that has shaken us.

A time that has kept us apart but also brought us closer together.

In light and despite of all this we are here today to celebrate. To acknowledge that HOPE has come.

We are going to go on a journey of HOPE – reflecting on the Christmas story through the eyes of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi and looking at how that hope is becoming tangible around the world today through stories brought to us by Church Mission Society.

Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, is the one referred to as “Emmanuel” – which is a Hebrew word meaning “God is with us.”

Jesus is here bringing HOPE up close – defying social distancing rules and inviting us to imagine what it means to have his hope arrive on our doorstep.

Carol:

O come, O come, Emmanuel (two verses)

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come thou rod of Jesse free
thine own from Satan's tyranny
from depths of hell thy people save
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

HOPE UP CLOSE – FOR MARY

Luke 1:26b–41, 56 (New Living Translation)

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of

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his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail.”

Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit...

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.”

Poem: Hope for the world

Confused and shocked
My soul magnifies the LORD
Up close
My Spirit rejoices
This close?
In God my Saviour
Didn’t see this coming
“Highly favoured”
Savouring the sound
Call me “blessed”
Severely ostracised
From this day forward
Reality hits
give birth to a son
With child at 15
But how?
Shame on the family
He will be called

Dad not impressed
Mum might let it rest
Son of the Most High

And Joseph
Will he believe me? Expose me? Leave me?

The Almighty has done great things for me

Can’t do this on my own

Must get away

Be with the one

The other one carrying promise

Pregnant

Can barely believe

He looked with favour

Except for the life

The joy – the HOPE growing

Holy is his name

inside of me

HOPE for the world

That HE has come

My future family

has remembered his promise

God with us

mercy from generation to generation

HOPE for the world

Hope bigger than my own

(Frauke Eicker)

Refrain (facilitator):

Dawn breaks – the baby awakes –
HOPE has come – Up close and personal

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Carol:

O come, O come, Emmanuel – (three verses) (alternative: Joy to the world)

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine Advent here.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Refrain

O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heav'nly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high
and close the path to misery.

Refrain

O come, Desire of nations bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid thou our sad divisions cease
and be thyself our King of Peace.

Refrain

(John Mason Neale)

HOPE UP CLOSE – FOR JOSEPH

Matthew 1:18–24 (NLT)

His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,

and they will call him Immanuel
which means 'God is with us.'"

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Poem: Joseph's Story (set a few years on)

I was dreaming.
Do you take notice of your dreams?
Not the mad ones, of course.
But the ones that seem to have weight,
and texture. Strength.
Like wood.
You can build things with dreams.

I was dreaming.
Of our life together.
Of the house I would soon be building for us.
What it would be like to share rooms.
Meals together. Our bed. Children
laughing.

It was good. A good dream.

All seemed quiet and well.

How soon and how fast everything falls
apart.
One sentence. A few words from her
mouth.
Joseph, I'm pregnant.

The breaking of dreams in a moment.
Cold fear. Anger. Nausea.

For days I couldn't steady my hands to
work the wood.

But the wood remained steady under my
shaking hands.
Like my love for Mary.

I couldn't understand her explanation.
But I knew that I would always love her.

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Whatever needed doing
needed to be done quietly.
Yes, a quiet letting go.

Good luck that with that in this place.

For days I was deep in a pit.
Thinking of our life apart.
Imagining Mary, hidden, afraid.
Her sadness. Her child, unknowing.

Sleep was difficult to find.
But in God's grace it seemed to find me.
And one night it carried a dream.

I hesitate to speak of this.
But I will share it with you.
Something, someone. So strong. So calm.

*Do not be afraid.
Take Mary as your wife.
The child is from God's Holy Spirit.
He will work with wood
to bring salvation.*

Now the child is as skilled in my workshop
as any apprentice.
Has an eye for the grain, a sense for the
balancing of a beam,
of the load it can bear.

He handles the wood with love.
As he does everyone he meets.
So strong, so calm.
It's as if, it's as if God is with us.

Do you take notice of your dreams?
Not the mad ones, of course.
But the ones that seem to have weight,
and texture. Strength.
Like wood.
You can build things with dreams.

(Ian Adams)

Refrain (facilitator):

Dawn breaks – the baby awakes –
HOPE has come – Up close and personal

Carol:

O come all ye faithful (alternative: Joy to the world if not used above)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him born the King of angels;

Refrain:

O come, let us adore him;

O come, let us adore him;

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

God of God, Light of Light;

lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;
very God, begotten not created;

Refrain

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
glory to God, all glory in the highest;

Refrain

HOPE UP CLOSE – FOR THE SHEPHERDS

Luke 2:1–16 (NLT)

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.

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Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others – the armies of heaven – praising God and saying,
"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom
God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

Poem: Shepherds

You can argue all you like about how reliable a witness I am, how far up or down the social scale you put me, whether I deserve anyone's respect.

I know what I saw. Though I admit I'd doubt myself – if I had ever been able to shake off the memory of how it *felt*.

My friends and I saw a story unfold that night. A story that stretched as far back and forward as the bare night sky we slept under.

Oh yes, shepherds can do poetry – have you forgotten that's how that golden boy King David started out? In these very fields, I like to think.

Admittedly, some look down on us. It is, I'll grant you, smelly work. And socially distant, out here in the fields. But at

least we look after our flocks, not like our leaders.

We love to put the world to rights, sitting round on cold nights, reciting the old poems – the words of the old prophets give as much heat as our camp fire.

We smile at the way they called kings "shepherds" – a thin code as they roasted them with the word of the Lord:

*"You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.
You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured.
You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost."*

So that night when God's words came crashing down on us, we were... well, let's go with surprised, shall we?

That shining presence all around. The announcement. History has been re-made tonight – and just down the road. The anointed is here! Here is your king. And he is one of you.

Words too big to be real but so gently spoken they reached in and undid our fear.

And then so many voices it was like an army but their marching song sang of glory in heaven and peace on earth and though you listened you couldn't make out where one ended and the other began.

Words too big to be real but that they rang so *true*.

Then when we found the baby – oh I do love a baby – a shiver went down my spine. Such a beautiful, fragile thing all wrapped up in swaddling like the lambs we take to the temple for sacrifice. I couldn't help wonder how long this little one would last in this cold world. Was this really another golden boy like David? A new shepherd king? Someone actually worth our allegiance?

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I'd doubt the story myself if I couldn't
right now feel that same shiver down my
spine that I felt then, with the angel-song
ringing in my ears and the words of the
old prophet rising up within me...

*"I myself will search for my sheep and look
after them...."*

*I will search for the lost and bring back the
strays.*

*I will bind up the injured and strengthen the
weak,*

but the sleek and the strong I will destroy.

I will shepherd the flock with justice...

I will make a covenant of peace with them...

*They will live in safety and no one will make
them afraid."*

(Jeremy Woodham)

Refrain (facilitator):

Dawn breaks – the baby awakes –
HOPE has come – Up close and personal

Carol:

**Angels from the realms of glory
(alternative: While shepherds watched
their flocks by night)**

Angels, from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story,
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain:

Come and worship,

Christ, the newborn King.

Come and worship,

worship Christ, the newborn King.

Shepherds in the fields abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing,
yonder shines the infant light:

Refrain

Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen his natal star:

Refrain

Saints before the altar bending,
watching long in hope and fear,
suddenly the Lord, descending,
in his temple shall appear:

Refrain

All creation, join in praising
God the Father, Spirit, Son;
evermore your voices raising
to th'eternal Three in One:

Refrain

(James Montgomery)

HOPE UP CLOSE – FOR THE MAGI

Matthew 2:1–12 (NLT)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:

'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

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After this interview the wise men went their way.
And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.
When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!
They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

Poem: Men and Power

These were important men.
Astronomers and star gazers
Revered in Babylon
For their wisdom, knowledge, power.

Strange events in the heavens
Presaged a new king.
Discomforted, they travelled to see
Another powerful man.

This man was troubled.
Could his power be usurped?
Secretly he ordered the strangers
To seek out this pretender.

The three important men
Followed the star.
They found the woman,
They found the baby.

Then they knew. These important men.
They knew.
These scientists from Babylon,
They knew that he is the one.

This baby boy is
The one to unmask all powers.
The one to heal all wounds.
The one to gift us hope.

Comforted, these important men
Returned home a different way,
Their gifts offered,
Their lives changed.

(Cathy Ross)

Refrain (facilitator):

Dawn breaks – the baby awakes –
HOPE has come – Up close and personal

Carol:

We three kings (alternative: As with gladness men of old)

We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

Refrain:

*O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright;
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

Refrain

Frankincense to offer have I:
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, gladly raising,
worship him, God on high.

Refrain

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Refrain

Glorious now behold him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice;
"Alleluia, Alleluia!"
sounds through the earth and skies.

Refrain

(John Henry Hopkins Jr)

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A MOMENT OF REFLECTION

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light*

*On those living in the land of the shadow
of death a light has dawned*

We light this light, in memory...

For the people we have lost
For goodbyes that went unsaid
For celebrations that never happened
For jobs that came to an end
For times we felt alone
For the silence and the waiting
For the loss of things hoped for
For the days that never came.

[Light a candle]

We light this light, in thankfulness...

For those, in every occupation, who risked
their lives for others
For friends and neighbours, and the kindness
of strangers
For the things we tried out
For signs of hope in unexpected places
For rediscovering our need of one another
For encountering beauty on our doorsteps
For creation's space to breathe
For the faith and hope that sustained us in
the darkest places.

[Light a candle]

We light this light for the Kingdom coming.

We hold our flickering light before the pain
and suffering of our world
Longing for the yoke of injustice to be lifted
For the rod of oppression to be broken
For bloodshed and conflict to cease
For the reign of justice and righteousness
For the coming of the Wonderful Counsellor,
the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the
Prince of Peace.

[Light a candle]

We light these lights

For the source of all light
For the Light of the World
For the One who fills us with light and life
and hope
For Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Carol:

O little town of Bethlehem (alternative: Once in Royal David's city or instrumental)

O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by:
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
and peace to men on earth.
For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wond'ring love.

How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still,
the dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!

(Phillips Brooks)

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VIDEO (INTRODUCED BY FACILITATOR)

“The word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes... generous inside and out, true from start to finish.” John 1:14 (The Message)

We have heard the story that reminds us of how God has come in ways surprising for a king. In ways that inspire HOPE in us today.

And we now turn to see what Jesus coming up close and personal can look like practically today – for a modern-day Mary perhaps. Or a Joseph. We look at three brief stories brought to us by CMS people in mission from around the world.

[Play video]

BRIEF TALK OR RESPONSE

Response

Like Mary, who said YES to carrying God’s HOPE in Jesus into the world in order to give us life,

All: May we say YES to Jesus coming close to us today.

Like Joseph, who, defying human reason, chose to HOPE in love and to stand by Mary,

All: May we be generous with the love we share with friend and stranger.

Like the shepherds on the hill, who, with a shiver down their spine, gained HOPE because God chose to meet them first,

All: May we hear the angelic song of heaven calling us to come home.

Like the Magi, who travelled far in the HOPE of paying tribute to a baby king bigger than them all,

All: May we be searching until our restless hearts find their HOPE fulfilled in you, eternal king.

Hope of all ages,
bringer of love and mercy,
healer of the outcast and the stranger,
near to those who draw near to you,
to you we cry:

**All: O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!**

Carol:

**Hark the herald angels sing
(alternative: Oh worship the Lord
in the beauty of holiness)**

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies,
with th’angelic host proclaim:
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Refrain:

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

Christ by highest heav’n adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold him come,
offspring of a Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
hail th’incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Refrain

Hail, the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
ris’n with healing in his wings.
Mild, he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth.

Refrain

(Charles Wesley)

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BLESSING

Like Mary, be blessed with HOPE in your waiting,
Like Joseph, be blessed with HOPE for your loving,
Like the shepherds, be blessed with HOPE in your hardship and pain,
Like the Magi, be blessed with HOPE for your seeking and finding.

Be blessed in the name of HOPE,
the king who comes close
and is alive with us today.
It is Christmas.
HOPE has come.
Amen.

END



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