

Who is welcome at the crib?

These are the words we used for the Christmas Eve Crib Service: Who is welcome at the crib? You are welcome to use them or adapt them.

Welcome and opening prayer

Lighting of the Advent wreath

Leader: We will begin our retelling of the Christmas story by singing "Once in Royal David's city". During the first verse will all the children who have been given a figure card, please go to the back.

(Children with figure cards for Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, donkey, shepherds, sheep, angel. star and wise men go to the back of the church)

Carol: Once in Royal David's city

Leader: Tonight we are going back over 2000 years to Bethlehem, a little town in the hill country of Judea. As darkness falls a weary couple are making their way up the road. Will there be a welcome for them in this town that has taken three days to reach? Everywhere is full, but eventually a space is found for them with the animals.

We will now bring Mary and Joseph and the donkey to put in the crib. ***(Mary, Joseph and the donkey are put in the crib)***

Leader: We will now sing "Little Donkey"

Carol: Little Donkey

Leader: This is the moment when everything changes... the baby has been born... We will now put the baby Jesus in the crib.

(Baby Jesus is put in the crib)

Leader: Outside Bethlehem on the dark hills, there were shepherds looking after their sheep. Suddenly a great light shone in the darkness. The shepherds were terrified...

Angel: Do not be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy. Today, in Bethlehem, a saviour has been born who is Christ the Lord. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Leader: We will now put the angel in the crib. *(Angel is put in crib)*

The sky was filled with angels singing: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.” When the angels had gone and the sky was dark again, the shepherds did as they had been told and made their way to Bethlehem.

(Shepherds start to make their way to the crib)

Voice 1: (Stepping forward into the aisle) Wait! Stop! Hang on a moment! Look at you lot - dirty and smelly, sleeping rough all the time. The people in Bethlehem never want much to do with you. Will you be welcome at the crib? You’d better wait here. *(Shepherds sit down)*

Leader: We will now sing “It was on a starry night.”

(“Children” go to the back. Cross carrier collects cross and goes out of south door to the west door)

Carol: *It was on a starry night*

Leader: Far, far, away a new star appeared in the east. The learned men - the wise men - the magi studied the star. They knew it meant the birth of a king. The wise men chose to follow the star to find the baby king. After a long and weary journey they eventually arrived in Bethlehem *(Star and magi start to make their way to the crib)*

Voice 2: (Stepping forward into the aisle) Wait! Stop! You are strangers here... foreigners... you don’t even speak the same language. Will you be welcome at the crib? You’d better wait here. *(Magi sit down on way to the crib)*

Leader: Who is welcome at the crib? The dirty shepherds or the rich foreigners? What about this family who have just been to the foodbank? *(Family enters)*

Voice 1: Stop! Wait! This is a king, we have here. Do you think you are the right people to visit a king? Will you be welcome at the crib? You'd better wait here. ***(Family waits)***

Leader: Who is welcome at the crib? What about this busy executive, rushing from meeting to meeting, constantly checking her phone? ***(Executive enters)***

Voice 2: Stop! Wait! Do you think you are the right person to visit the baby Jesus? Will you be welcome at the crib? You'd better wait here. ***(Executive waits)***

Leader: Who is welcome at the crib? What about these children? ***(Enter children)***

Voice 1: Stop! Wait! Look at you all. Shouting, giggling, squabbling. Do you think you will be welcome at the crib? You'd better wait here. ***(Children wait)***

Leader: Who is welcome at the crib? Who is welcome to visit the baby Jesus, the king of kings, the saviour of the world? Are any of us welcome at the crib?

Voice 3 (coming forward from the back): We are all welcome. For this is just the beginning of the story. The baby Jesus ***(collect baby from manger)*** grew up to be a man. ***(move to stand next to a few different people)*** He came alongside all kinds of people – rich tax collectors, outcast lepers, Roman soldiers, blind people, women, little children... He died on the cross...

(Enter the cross which is carried up the nave to the stable. The baby Jesus is put back in the manger)

Leader: But even that is not the end of the story for on Easter Day Jesus rose from the dead... He is now in every time and every place, ready to welcome all of us... shepherds and wise men, rich and poor, old and young, friend and stranger – all are welcome to the crib... even these two ***(indicate Voice 1 and Voice 2)*** who have tried so hard to stop others from coming to the crib.

We are going to invite the shepherds and the magi, the poor family, the busy executive and these noisy children to make their way to the crib while we sing "Girls and Boys leave your toys." If you are children stay seated as after the carol we will invite all the other children to bring their wooden figures to place in the crib.

(All come to the crib and kneel)

Carol: Girls and boys

Leader: So now we all come to Bethlehem. We come as people have come all through the ages to follow the Christ child because everyone in all times and all places is welcome at the crib. We ask all the children to come forward now. Bring your wooden people to place around the manger.

(Children and wooden people to the crib, sit down)

Leader: We will now sing Away in a manger. The children will sing the first verse, then we will all sing the second and third verses.

Carol: Away in a manger

(Children return to seats)

Short prayers including Lord's prayer

Leader: We will finish by singing "In the bleak mid-winter" There will be a collection during this carol

Carol : In the bleak midwinter

Blessing and dismissal

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