

WHAT A PARTY!

Here are some suggestions for a service or pre-Christmas event for older children and teenagers. They could form the basis of a sermon or talk; or alternatively might lend themselves to a series of group studies or activities.

Readings - Luke 2: 8-18; Matthew 2: 1-2, 10-11



Getting the word out

How's this for social networking? Bright lights in the sky, an angel, a star. Who says that Twitter and Facebook are the only ways to spread news fast?

And it wasn't just to give people news; it was also an invitation to a party. A party that anyone could gatecrash. Exactly the sort of event that you find on Facebook. The angel, and the star over Bethlehem, were like SatNav. They told people where the party was.

Which people heard - and responded?

Hearing - and responding

Let's look at the shepherds. What sort of people were they? (local, poor) How did they respond to the news? (immediately!) What did they take with them by way of presents? (nothing!) What did they take away? (Joy!) What did they do then? (Spread the word!)

And how about the magi, or wise men? Who were they? (were they really kings?) And how many were they? (we don't know) How were they different from the shepherds? (came from afar) What sort of gifts did they bring? (Valuable, their best!) And whom were they for? (Jesus, not each other!) What did they do at the party? (worshipped God incarnate!) And how did all this affect their lives? (went back by another way - what might that mean?)

So... what can we learn from these events that could affect us, 2000 years later?

First, it doesn't matter who you are. Big or small. Important or insignificant. Jesus was born for everyone and it was actually the 'small' people who saw him first.

Second, you don't have to have money, or any kind of gift, to celebrate Christmas. What the shepherds gave was their time. And their lives were never the same again: they suddenly became worth living.

Third, if you do give a gift, you give the best you can - and you give it to



God. Just as the wise men did. And it was a life changing experience for them too, 'going back another way'

And fourth, Christmas will change your life. Because you are getting the best gift of all: the gift of love. And it's a gift that gets even better if you share it. Have you noticed: the more you hug someone, the more hugs you get back? And the more people you hug, the more people hug you?



Partying with a difference

How might all this affect our Christmas preparations?

It could mean:

- Maybe we don't need to buy so many presents. Maybe we could think about giving *time* or *help* instead of *presents* to family and friends. If we're children, could we help with cooking the dinner, even making some of it? And if we're parents, how about taking the children on outings, sometime after Christmas? It would give everybody something to look forward to once Christmas Day is over.
- We could think about the sorts of presents we might give to God - and how to do this. Take biscuits to a housebound neighbour? Raise money by making cakes or pies, and giving it to a church or community project, charity etc? Or buy presents in the Boxing Day sales, and donating the money saved to your favourite charity?
- We might also think about doing more as a church to celebrate Jesus' birth in our communities. Could we have a Christmas meal (not necessarily on 25th Dec) for the neighbourhood? Open the church/hall for social events during the week after Christmas: games, coffees etc for families, those who are lonely?
- Could some of us welcome strangers to our homes at Christmas to share our meal: overseas students? asylum seekers? Even neighbours we don't know well but who may be alone?
- What else can you think of?

Partying with the guest of honour

After all, whose birthday are we celebrating on Christmas Day? How can we give him the best possible party? He isn't with us in person... or is he?