



The events in this story are not historical facts. Rather they are a vehicle to show us that God, in the person of Jesus is the Saviour of all.

So I use my imagination to try and visualise in as many details as I can the situation, the people, their clothes, their voices, the animals; I imagine I am present in the scene, accompanying the wise men on their journey. I may want to be an onlooker, or I may prefer to imagine I am one or other of the characters in this scene, or I can drift from one to the other, quite freely. I let the Spirit lead me
What am I hoping to discover on my journey?

Part of the Gospel for the Epiphany— Matthew 2: 1-3, 9-12

During the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the East. "Where is the infant King of the Jews?" they asked. "We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this he was perturbed...

Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; ...The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.



I read the Gospel again. This time I focus on the encounter between the Wise Men, Mary, Jesus and myself. With the Magi, I bow down in front of the Child Jesus.

What treasures can I offer him?

I spend some time looking at my own gifts. All I have God has given me. Can I give him my heart?

After the busyness of Christmas, the food, the visitors, I return, like the Wise Men, to my own country, to normality; but somehow the way back is different.

How have I been changed by the coming of Jesus on earth?

Christmas is usually a different time for all of us - whether we are mostly alone and quiet, or with others and much occupied. Our routines are changed - no two days are the same. So we should neither be surprised nor disappointed that our prayer seems to lack its usual pattern or rhythm.

Some days I may find I do have the time to ponder the crib at Bethlehem and slowly enter into that scene of mystery and truth. However, on many days my prayer may just be a line from scripture: it's there with me when, for example, I do another session of washing-up at the sink - perhaps with Jesus' mother! On other days, my prayer may be a type of Visitation to the sick, or the person who lives all alone - at Christmas!

*Let's remember Abbot Chapman's famous dictum:
"Pray as you can, not as you can't"*

The Opening Prayer of Christmas Day - The Dawn Mass

Let us pray that the love of Christ will be a light to the world.

Father, we are filled with the new light
by the coming of your Word among us.

May the light of faith shine in our words and actions.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

I try to become as still as I can - if only for a short time.

Day after day, I allow the words of this ancient prayer to "lift off this page" and speak to my mind and heart:

The Opening disposition; the statement of truth; the request; and finally I dwell on the magnificence and depth of the ending.

I let God's Spirit touch my heart and fill me with a deep joy - a joy I will try to share with others.

The Gospel from Christmas Day – The Dawn Mass

Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us."

So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them.

Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, it was exactly as they had been told.

[Luke 2: 15-20]

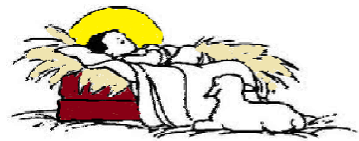
When I find that I have a little more time to pray I may try to "go to Bethlehem" and imagine I am in this scene which has inspired so many artists, saints and 'ordinary' people of faith. I may try to look at Jesus in the crib, and - with the eyes of faith - see myself wrapped in God's love for me.

The shepherds were so blest: in their openness of mind and heart they found what they were looking for. I watch and listen to them sharing Good News. Am I moved to do the same?

With the hidden help of the Holy Spirit praying within me, I try to imitate Mary. Like any parent, I treasure and ponder this mystery in my heart over this Christmas period.

Ignatius of Loyola is utterly amazed at the enormity of Jesus' love. Looking at the crib, he urges us to recall the poverty, hunger, thirst, heat, cold, injuries and insults of this scene, and then he adds - "all this that he might die on the cross for ME!" What love! What commitment to everyone!

Like Mary - I treasure and ponder. I beg for the desire to give Life to others - especially those whom I meet looking for Light and meaning in their lives.



The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ - God with us

We lead our children and grandchildren to the crib (in our church, or in our home). Fascinated, we watch them gaze in wonder and belief at "Emmanuel - God with us". Through the help they do not realise they are giving us, we make our act of faith:

"Yes, I believe that the Word was made flesh & dwelt amongst us."

'The words are simple and direct, but their meaning is far beyond our power to comprehend. The agnostic in us struggles with the believer we wish to be. Often we only half believe. But it is not flesh and blood that leads us to the truth. It is our Father in heaven with a gentle touch who gives us the light of faith...

...' We see one thing, a small child, we believe another, God made man.'

...'Would there be room for you and me around that manger in the crib?... Can we share a place among the angels and shepherds?

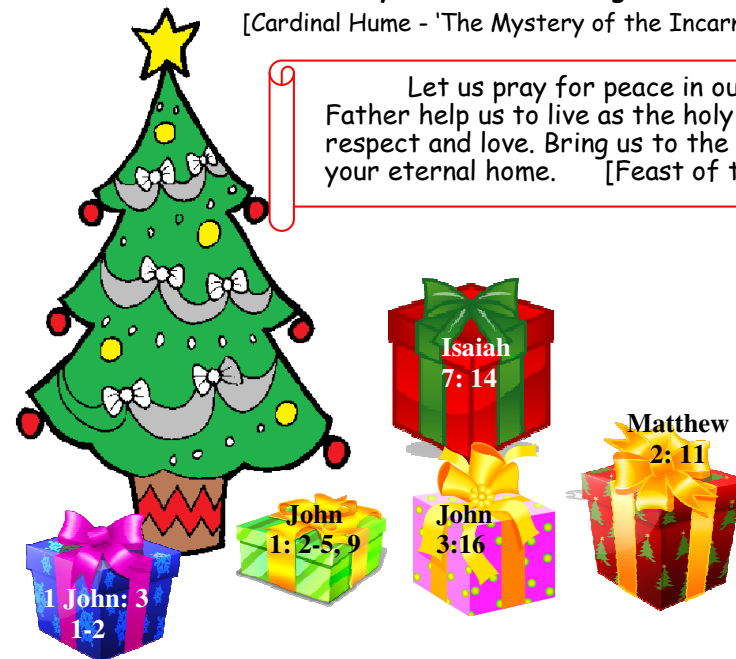
The shepherds did not see what the angels saw, and neither do we share that vision. The greatness of God is too much for our frailty. But in the presence of that small child we are at ease like the shepherds; we believe what the shepherds understood.

Faith, not vision, makes us sing the angels' song:

"Glory to God in the highest."

[Cardinal Hume - 'The Mystery of the Incarnation' - adapted]

Let us pray for peace in our families.
Father help us to live as the holy family, united in respect and love. Bring us to the joy and peace of your eternal home. [Feast of the Holy family]



On the days of Christmas my True Love sent to me ... His Word to guide my steps.