

The Christian Aid What-if-ity

An alternative nativity.

Thank you for downloading this Christian Aid What-if-ity play.

While we've written this script with mainly adult participants in mind, you can use your own judgement as to what age of participants you wish to involve. Adapt and readjust to your setting as you wish.

Christian Aid What-if-ity play

**This script has
been written
for eleven
speakers:**

- **The star - narrator**
- **Mary**
- **Joseph**
- **Innkeeper**
- **Shepherd 1**
- **Shepherd 2**
- **Shepherd 3**
- **Magi 1**
- **Magi 2**
- **Magi 3**
- **Herod**

The star:

Hi. I'm a star. Not The star. He comes later, though you'd be forgiven for missing him since he doesn't even have a speaking part.

I'm your twinkling guide for this Christian Aid What-if-ity.

What is a What-if-ity?

Well, all over the world, right now, people have to make impossible choices.

No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.¹

No one gives their family leaves to eat in Afghanistan unless the harvest has failed, disrupted by climate change and fighting, again.

No one drinks polluted and dirty water in South Sudan unless they are absolutely parched with unimaginable thirst.

No one puts their brand new baby down to sleep in a smelly animal trough unless there is no room for them in the inn.

What if the choices weren't so impossible? What if things could be different?

What if we realised that our choices, our action and inaction, have the power to change the world?

What if each of the participants in that first nativity, the birth of Christ, had made a different choice. What would the consequences have been?

What if Mary had said no?

What if Joseph had rejected Mary?

What if the Magi hadn't gone by another way?

Where would we all be now?

Let us begin.

Mary and Joseph – over to you.

Mary:

I had just celebrated my 15th birthday.

Everything was going really well.

I was healthy and happy.

I had found the man who was going to be my husband.

Joseph:

I'm a lucky man, blessed with the chance of spending my life with a woman like Mary.

She's got a good head on her shoulders.

She knows her own mind – I like that about her.

¹ Home, Warsan Shire januarytwenty.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Home-Poem-by-Warsan-Shire.pdf

Mary:

I all happened a few months ago.
I'd watered the animals and shut them up
for the night,
I was just finishing sweeping the day's
dust from the floor when...

Joseph:

I was in my workshop on the other side of
town.
The blade on my plane had cracked and I was
trying to fix it.
It was going to be another late night for me.
I wouldn't be able to visit Mary until
tomorrow.

Mary:

I couldn't get my head around what I was
hearing.
Words of greeting and favour,
so unimaginable they just confused me.
It was only when the angel said: 'Do not
be afraid',
in such a calm and reassuring voice,
like liquid chocolate,
that I could begin to take it in.

Joseph:

I was stunned when she told me.
Amazed, frightened, full of questions.
Full of love and anger – all at once!
It was hard to believe her,
but this was my Mary.

Mary:

'God has chosen me to have a baby!
A special baby - son of the Most High'.
That was how I told Joseph,
quick and honest.
It was a lot to take in...
What if he hadn't believed me?

Joseph:

I'm all for the quiet life.
The smell of cedar, olive and oak.
The rasp of the chisel on the grain.
A weekly visit to the temple.
A partner who loves me.
I'm sure she said the right thing.
We didn't need all that fuss.

Mary:

And it wasn't just Joseph I had to consider.
What would the neighbours have said?
And it sounded like this little one
was going to face all sorts of struggle.
I sensed a whole lot of heartache ahead.

Joseph:

I'm so glad Mary told me –
it would have been too big a secret to keep.
And glad that she didn't say no to me.
But it's an incredibly courageous thing,
to say 'no' to God.

Mary:

How can you miss what you have never had?
How can you feel an emptiness
when your heart is so full?
What if I hadn't said yes?
What if...

The star:

What Mary actually said, of course, was:
'Hear am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be
with me according to your word.'
What courageous words.
What if we were to say them in our lives
today?
What dreams and possibilities might we open
ourselves up to?
What prophetic song might we sing and dance
to in joyful response?
Let us journey with Mary and Joseph to
Bethlehem.

The innkeeper:

I wonder sometimes what would have happened if my husband had answered the door that night.

It had been crazy at the inn for days, we were packed.

When people found out about the census, they'd reserved rooms weeks ahead.

Lots of travellers were staying with relatives, but not all families had a spare room. In fact I don't think there was a room to be had in the whole of Bethlehem that night.

If my husband had answered the door he probably would not have noticed how near she was to having her baby. He might have turned them away.

And what if he had? She might have had her baby on the street. She and the baby might have died.

Okay, our stable was packed as well, packed full of our animals, our guests' animals, mainly donkeys and mules but some horses and our cows and a camel too (the camel was a nightmare...spitting at anyone who went near him, his owner included). But it's easier to get animals to share a stall (apart from camels, that is) than to get strangers to share a bedroom, so the animals made room.

We filled the stall we'd emptied with fresh hay (her husband helped) and I brought her water and clean cloths. I told her husband to come and find me if there were any complications - I had to get back to work.

I wonder what the animals made of it all, perhaps they sensed what was happening; they were not strangers to new life, or death either, come to that. I hope that camel kept his spit to himself!

She gave birth safely. I was so glad. That isn't guaranteed for women in this world.

Later that night the yard filled up with a bunch of weird and noisy visitors claiming angels had told them to come and see the baby. I couldn't smell anything on their breath, but I'm sure that they must have been drinking. We managed to persuade them to leave once they'd seen the child.

What if the child had been born in a room in our inn? Weary travellers, noisy shepherds and crying babies in the middle of the night...not a good mix. Our 5 star rating on Tripadvisor would have been ruined (other reviewing platforms are available)!

Later I heard rumours of a special star and magi and gifts (and more camels!). Later still, Herod's soldiers came looking for the child, but they say his parents got him away safely to Egypt.

What if I'd told the soldiers the names of the couple they were seeking?

Might some of the blood-shed have been avoided? I doubt it.

What if they'd found the child?

The star:

'And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.'

Here is God in a smelly, high infection risk stable.

Surely this isn't how it should have been?

What if the innkeeper had known who this was?

Even their deluxe kingsize suite wouldn't have been good enough.

Where were all the fanfare and celebrations?

As it happens, the fanfare was to be found in a field on the outskirts of town.

But what if the Shepherds hadn't been fussed?

(Shepherds all generally sounding a bit bored)

Shepherd 1:

I was just staring at the flames of the fire when it happened.

Hoping it would stay lit long enough

to give me a bit of light and warmth

while keeping watch over the flock that night.

Shepherd 2:

I had just got myself comfy

and was beginning to slip into a light slumber.

You only really get a light sleep,
while keeping watch over the flocks by night.
One ear is always listening for a wolf.

Shepherd 3:

And I was out for the count.
I wasn't keeping watch over the flocks
until the middle of the night.
So, I needed to get a decent few hours
or I'd doze off mid-duty.

Shepherd 1:

Honestly if the other two hadn't woken up
(and there was no chance they'd have slept
through that racket),
I don't think I'd have believed it.
I do sometimes wonder whether one of them
maybe put something in our hot cocoa that
night.

Shepherd 2:

Well I'm not ashamed to admit it...
I was terrified, petrified,
most frightening thing I've ever experienced.
It's good to finally be able to talk about it – to
be honest.

Shepherd 3:

That's the thing, you see –
we've not been able to talk about it 'til now.
'Til you lot came asking: what if?
What if we'd not promised to keep quiet about
it?

Shepherd 1:

It was just a bit too incredible.
No one would have believed it.
What if we had said anything?
People wouldn't have paid a bit of attention to
us anyway.

Shepherd 2:

There was this whole host of angels,
saying the most ridiculous things –
(Incredulous tone)

That there would be great joy for all people,
that there was a baby lying in a manger
who was the Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord.

Folk would have thought we were
completely daft,

talking about peace on earth.

As if – have you seen the news lately?

Shepherd 3:

So that was it, when they left
we just looked at each other.
Wondered what on earth had just happened
and promised to never mention it to anyone.

Shepherd 1:

And there was no way we were going to go
snooping round looking for a child.

We couldn't leave the sheep. We're good
shepherds after all.

Shepherd 2:

I do sometimes wonder what would have
happened if we had gone to see him,
What if...?

The star:

'When they saw this, they made known what
had been told them about this child; and
all who heard it were amazed at what the
shepherds told them.'

'The shepherds returned, glorifying and
praising God for all they had heard and seen,
as it had been told them.'

What if we'd just been told the best news in
the world and decided to keep it to ourselves?

What if we knew that there was another way
for the world but just decided to stick to the
status quo?

What if we saw a marvellous twinkling unique
looking star and decided not to follow it?

What if...

The Magi:

Magi 1	What if ...	Magi 1 + 2	<i>(Look perplexed and unconvinced)</i>
Magi 2	No!	Magi 2	Gold, Frankin-whatsit, and a mirror. Just what every new parent dreams of. What if they want to swap all that for something fun? Did you keep the receipt?
Magi 3	But, seriously, what if ...	Magi 3	No, they won't. Gold for his royalty, Frankincense for his divinity, Myrrh for his humanity.
Magi 2	No! ...we have already decided.	Magi 1 + 2	<i>(Look perplexed and unconvinced)</i>
Magi 3	But what if we all get lost?	Magi 1	Either way, what if we brought gifts that were, less of the symbolic and... more of the practical. Maybe a casserole...
Magi 2	No, we won't. We'll follow the star there and come back the same way.	Magi 3	No. But...
Magi 1 + 3	<i>(Look very unconvinced)</i>	Magi 2	Maybe not instead, perhaps as well. What if that was all as well as your gifts?
Magi 1	What if we need to tell somebody the exact time the star appeared? <i>(Points at Magi 3)</i> You're especially bad with dates. You always forget my birthday.	Magi 3	<i>(Looks at the others, nodding)</i> Not a bad idea, not bad at all. Maybe three heads <i>are</i> better than one!
Magi 3	No I don't. It was last Tuesday...or was it Wednesday.	All the Magi	Wise-women and wise-men and wise children too. Wise people travelling together to another possible world. What-if-ity?
Magi 1 + 2	<i>(Roll their eyes)</i>		
Magi 1	Look, we'll probably be fine. At least I've got a shred of common sense. What if you didn't have me? You'd be falling for scams left, right and centre. <i>(Looks at others with raised eyebrows)</i> Like that timeshare on the Caspian Sea!		
Magi 2	Hmm, what about a gift? We don't want a repeat of that spitting camel at my nephew's Bar Mitzvah.		
Magi 3	Don't worry about it, I'm on top of it! The man in the shop has wrapped them as well. Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.		

The star:

'When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.'

What if that had been the end of the story:
And they were all overwhelmed with joy.
Amen. The end.

And not just because I have a starring role in that verse from Matthew.

But if we were to leave it there, we'd be leaving out the whole story.

Glossing over the most difficult part.

It can be hard to listen to difficult news – particularly at Christmas.

It often feels easier to stay with the tinsel and candles and familiar carols.

Or for some, Christmas is hard enough without adding to it with stories of the plight of others.

What if we look at that news together, knowing we do not face it alone?

What if things were different and we worked together to make them better?

What if those with influence and power prioritised the wellbeing of others rather than protect their own privilege?

What if...?

Herod:

When I say jump, people jump. High.

They do what I tell them to do. No arguments. No questions. I am in charge.

This is a difficult country to rule. I need to know my enemies - and destroy them.

Take those astrologers who came to my court last week, with their talk of a star and a baby king, a new Messiah.

What if people believed them?

What if a new religious cult developed?

I needed to find this child quickly and remove him.

What if these men were spies?

What if I'd had them killed?

The child and his parents might still escape me.

I questioned them thoroughly, had my servants water their animals and search their luggage, and came up with a plan.

I sent them, unharmed, on their way, with orders to find the child and to report back to me on their findings.

When they didn't return, my worst fears were confirmed.

Somewhere, if they are to be believed, somewhere in my kingdom is a child who may grow up and dethrone me.

What if that happens?

But it won't. I've made sure of it.

I sent out my soldiers today with orders to kill every infant boy-child in my kingdom.

So what if their parents cry out in pain and protest?

So what if the streets fill with civil unrest?

Would it be possible for people to hate me even more than they do already?

Could this galvanize one of the many plots against me?

All these things could happen. But I cannot allow myself the luxury of hesitation.

I am the king.

I am in charge.

I make the decisions it takes for me to survive.

There will be no 'what if's' in my kingdom.

The Star:

'A voice was heard in Ramah,

Wailing and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children;

She refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

And so continues the way of the world.

While power remains in the thrones of the few,

While poverty keeps the many low and downtrodden,

While the prophetic voice calling for another way remains silent.

But what if?

What if the dream born out of poverty were
not to die?

What if the landless weary are to find strength
and stand with heads held high?

What if the world was to be turned upside
down,

because a courageous young woman did say
yes,

because an innkeeper did make space,

because lowly shepherds refused to shut up
about the good news,

because wise people still seek to find and go
by another way?

Let us sing together the Christian Aid Carol,
When out of poverty is born.

And as we sing let us imagine our 'what ifs'
for the world,

and make this Christmas the one when
our dreams, ideas and words take on flesh.

And together we give, act and pray to make
a positive difference in the world,

As we all shine like stars.

Sing our Christmas Carol: When out of
poverty is born. Find it here **[caid.ie/
christmasworship](https://caid.ie/christmasworship)**

The logo for Christian Aid, featuring the words "christian" and "aid" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. "christian" is in red and "aid" is in white, both set against a red background that is part of a larger graphic element.