Church nativity play

Preparation
Invite the children to come to the service dressed as angels, shepherds or wise men. It would be useful to walk three older children through the roles of Gabriel, Mary and Joseph before you begin.

The children dressed as angels, shepherds, and wise men should sit together with an adult primed to ‘shepherd’ them on at the appropriate time. Try to include all the children (dressed or not!). If very young children wander onto the stage area, do not worry (unless they are endangering themselves).

Set the stage with a simple bed. This is the only prop you need.

Before you start, get the congregation to practise the responses to ‘good news’ and ‘bad news’: ‘pass it on’ and ‘oh dear, oh dear’.

Scene one

Narrator:
Tonight we are going to retell a true story which changed the whole world – the birth of Jesus.

The story starts – not under a Christmas tree, or on a sleigh with reindeers. This story begins with an angel, a messenger from God. His name was Gabriel. God had told him to find a young woman called Mary who lived in the town of Nazareth.

Enter Mary and Gabriel

Narrator:
Now Gabriel didn’t need to use sat nav – he knew exactly where he would find Mary – kneeling by her bed saying her prayers.

Mary’s eyes were shut tight but suddenly it didn’t seem dark anymore. She blinked and looked. The angel Gabriel, dressed in white, was standing in the corner. Mary gasped!

Gabriel:
Don’t be afraid Mary. God has chosen you to be the mummy of God’s baby – Jesus.

Narrator:
Mary gasped again.

Mary:
But I haven’t married Joseph yet.

Gabriel:
Don’t worry. Your baby is God’s special baby.

Narrator:
Mary thought about what Gabriel was saying. She thought so deeply that many minutes passed. Finally she looked up into Gabriel’s kind face. His eyes blazed like diamonds.

Mary:
I will do what ever my loving heavenly Father wants.
Narrator:
Good news…

Congregation:
Pass it on, pass it on.

Scene two
Enter Joseph

Narrator:
When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he shook with shock.

Joseph:
She’s going to have a baby – and … and I’m not the dad!

Narrator:
In bed that night Joseph tossed and turned. He was confused and didn’t know what to do.

Enter Gabriel

Narrator:
Eventually he fell sound asleep and … the angel spoke to him in his dream. Suddenly he woke up. He had an answer.

Joseph:
I’ll look after Mary and her special baby. I’ll treat him as my own.

Narrator:
Good news…

Congregation:
Pass it on, pass it on.

Scene three
Sound of school bell ringing

Narrator:
‘Hear ye! Hear ye!’ cried the town crier. ‘The emperor has said that everyone’s names must be put on a very big list. Everyone is to register in their home towns.’

When Joseph heard this he thought, bad news…

Congregation:
Oh dear, oh dear.

Joseph:
Poor me – my home town, Bethlehem, is such a long way away.

Narrator:
But when he discovered that Mary, who was very pregnant by this time, would have to come too, he sat down and cried.

Joseph:
Why does it have to be like this, God?

Narrator:
Bad news…

Congregation:
Oh dear, oh dear.

Sing:
O Little Town of Bethlehem

Scene four
Narrator:
When they arrived in Bethlehem, the town was full of people too busy to notice them. Suddenly Mary felt her baby jump in her womb. She knew they must find shelter quickly. But where?

Joseph tried all the lodging houses but nobody could help. Then he saw the light of an inn down a dingy back alley. Maybe there would be a small room there? But the man who answered Joseph’s knock, shook his head. Joseph thought all was lost and whispered to Mary…
Joseph:  
Bad news…

Congregation:  
Oh dear, oh dear.

Narrator:  
All Mary could do was pray. Maybe that angel would return and light up a dark spot underneath a hedge.

Mary:  
Please God help us.

Narrator:  
Suddenly, the man at the inn, called out ‘If you don’t mind the animals – I suppose you could kip down with them’.

Sing:  
Away in a Manger

Scene five

Narrator:  
When Mary saw the animal stalls, she was too tired to worry anymore. Joseph fetched a light and made a cradle from the feeding trough. It looked rather cosy… 

… which was just as well because, very soon, Mary’s baby was born.

Mary placed Jesus in the cradle and it was as if all the darkness had gone and everywhere looked warm and cosy. Even the animal sounds were comforting.

Good news…

Congregation:  
Pass it on, pass it on.

Sing:  
While Shepherds Watched

Scene six

Children dressed as shepherds come onto the stage.

Narrator:  
… and the Angel Gabriel did pass the good news on.

On the hills outside Bethlehem, shepherds had been watching their sheep. Hungry wolves hid in the shadows and sheep made them a tasty supper. It was cold and demanding work and nobody wanted to do it. The village folk called them names and avoided the shepherds because they often smelt.

Bad news…

Congregation:  
Oh dear, oh dear.

Children dressed as angels come onto the stage.

Narrator:  
Suddenly the sky grew light and Gabriel appeared. The light was so bright that the shepherds had to hide their eyes. They were so scared but then they heard a voice saying…

Gabriel:  
Tonight, in Bethlehem, God’s son has been born. He will be a great king. Glory to God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone.

Narrator:  
The shepherds blinked and rubbed their eyes. It was such a wonderful sight. The whole sky had come alive and the stars shone like diamonds. It was a heavenly fireworks display. And then … everywhere fell silent and calm.

Good news…
Congregation:
Pass it on, pass it on.

Narrator:
The shepherds sang songs of joy as they rushed down to greet the baby Jesus.

Sing:
Silent Night

Scene Seven

Narrator:
Later. Much later … Mary and Joseph received another surprise. It started when they heard a strange noise outside. Joseph peeped out and said,

Joseph:
Mary … you are never going to believe this! There are camels out there and men dressed in beautiful clothes. They look like kings.

Children dressed as the wise men come onto the stage

Narrator:
Mary tried to do a quick tidy up but it was too late. Before Joseph and Mary could say anything at all, their wealthy visitors were kneeling down in front of Jesus and offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It was such a happy celebration. What wonderful gifts to bring!

Good news …

The End
Now rejoin the service booklet at the point of passing on the candle flame.