

CHRISTMAS RESOURCES

Part I – Instant Christmas Cards

Some Christmas cards for you to print out and use. [These cards are available directly from the Christmas Resources page of the website.]

Part II - Ideas For Christmas Cards

Good God! Fancy seeing you here!
Jesus! What a Godsend!

These are some of the wordings I have used, and are detailed below. But first, a standard A4 sheet folded into four – either lengthways or upright – can make a cheap Christmas card. Years ago Rosemary and I felt we had to decide whether to send fewer increasingly-expensive Christmas cards to fewer people, or devise a cheap card and keep our numbers up. We opted for the latter in the belief that a once-a-year contact is better than no contact at all. We decided that it was part of our Christian caring to make an annual contact with the many friends who have enriched our lives over the years, and not to 'drop' them purely because of cost.

We send out a simple A4 sheet printed/copied one side only, usually on coloured paper, and folded twice. (It does not need to be card, because it stands up all right.)

Society at large expects and welcomes cards to arrive on the celebration of Christ's birth. It may not always do so. It seems to me a lost opportunity when Christians send *non-Christian* cards at the major Christian Festival! Christmas cards provide a still-open door for proclaiming facets of the Gospel. We would be foolish to miss this.

My own style of doing this has sometimes been to have cards with a part-message on the front and something like the 'punch line' on the inside. Our personal Christmas greetings to the recipients come on the opposite inside page.

One that received a warm response from Christians had on the *front* simply–

HAPPY BIRTHDAY:

Inside, on the left hand page, it said – ***MY LORD!*** with a little drawing of the Christmas crib. An asterisk alongside those mentioned below (*) denotes the use of a crib drawing, which I explain at the end of this section.

Another split message had ***SPECIAL DELIVERY*** on the front, with a GPO-style crown, and inside – ***Today in the City of David a Deliverer has been born to you****

Another ran ***We wish you a merry,*** and continued ***anniversary of God's appearing****

Another - ***Wishing you a very happy*** and overleaf - ***Birthday Celebration!****

With a Father Christmas figure on the front, one said *Have a Happy* then **inside** *But Real Christmas**

Word-play catches folk's attention, and may even make them think. For example –

Christmas! I think it's a real COMEDOWN! But isn't it really a GODSEND?

Good Heavens! What on EARTH? and inside the answer: **GOD!***

*Good GOD – Fancy seeing YOU here!** plus the crib.

*My WORD – Look who's here!** Plus a verse '*And the Word was made flesh*'.

*JESUS! – What a Godsend!**

*To Mary a Son; to all a Saviour**

We wish you a Mary Christmas & a Holy New Year

We have included on our cards various verses, e.g. my paraphrase from the *Benedictus* [Luke 1:78-79], of which I am, quite unashamedly, very fond –

*God's heart has gone out to us!
He is visiting us!
The sunrise of his love is here;
He will shine in our lives,
Drive away all darkness,
Enlighten us in death,
And set us on the road to peace.*

CRIB

Since I'm no good at drawing people, a convenient and easy way visually to pinpoint the Christmas story is to draw a crib. This need be nothing much more than something like: X=X ! To indicate the presence of the Holy Babe in it, I use a half halo at one end, the centre of which is down below the level of the crib top. It can be elaborated by some indication of bits of straw on the ground and a few stalks spilling over the edge of the crib itself.

The card which ran **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** and then turned the page to the words **MY LORD**, had under them the crib. (Reminder that the asterisk (*) in the above list refers to the use of the crib symbol.)

So the reader knows exactly to whom one is referring, and the status the sender is giving the Babe of Bethlehem.

If we are taking up two sides of the card with Christmas proclamation, it is important that the 3rd. side has a warm personal message lest the receiver feels that they are only being sent a tract, not a personal greeting!

Do copy, use or modify these ideas as you wish, and may your use of them bring Jesus – the centre of Christmas – closer to your loved-ones and friends, and particularly to those for whom Christmas does not centre on him.

Help for Christians is pleased to make these ideas freely available. If you use any of them it would do us a good turn if you added something like -

'main wording from helpforchristians.co.uk'

Thank you – and happy Christmas!

The following poem was written mainly for use in a Carol Service, but do adapt it.

WHAT ON EARTH DOES CHRISTMAS REALLY MEAN?

And now some verse. This slot, in recent times,
is sometimes filled with Betjeman's Christmas rhymes.
(No 'thee's' or 'thou's'; nor language old and odd,
but speaking plainly of the things of God.)

Events so strange no one could ever guess -
God's intervention, and young Mary's 'Yes!'
Then, nine months later, in a cattle stall
to have her baby born - who's Lord of all!

We've heard it all. It's nice. We know the scene.
But what on earth does Christmas really mean?

Two questions:

Is it **true** - and if so - **Why?**
(It seems more odd than reindeer in the sky!)

Well, yes, it's *true*. We're quite sure of our facts
God stepped right into history. *Why?* He acts
in love to save us from our sin and doom,
to bring his Light into our world of gloom.

Of God's great rescue Christmas is the start,
but makes no sense without a second part.
So Christ *arrived*. But what then did he *do*?
The mystery is, he died - for me and you.

For somehow by his death upon a Cross
he bridged the gap to God; made good our loss;
dealt with our sin; and by his strife
regained for those who follow him - eternal life!

This loving act - momentous yet none stranger -
began, of course, at Bethlehem, in the manger.

So there once more, our thoughts and hearts now go,
to thank our God who saves and loves us so.

This final poem is designed for an Advent/Christmastide use.
This is a '**resource**' poem and can be used in part(s) or as a whole.
Changes can easily be made (suggested below) to suit different situations.
Lines are numbered for easy reference, and for easy substitution by alternatives.

If you are thinking of using this, **do read the notes that follow it** for more ideas.

Meanwhile note that its **structure** is as follows:

Verse 1	The Biblical <i>Promise</i> of Christmas
Verses 2-3	The Biblical <i>Account</i> of Christmas
Verse 4	The Biblical <i>Meaning</i> of Christmas

THE COMING OF CHRIST

1.

- 1.1 The shops and decorations have sufficed
- 1.2 to turn our thoughts towards the baby Christ.

- 1.3 The Scriptures tell of God's great rescue scheme -
- 1.4 beyond his greatest prophets' wildest dream.
- 1.5 To those who walked in darkness would come Light!
- 1.6 The God of Wonder, Counsel and of Might,
- 1.7 the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,
- 1.8 whose rule and government would never cease,
- 1.9 would come from Judah's Bethlehem (but little known)
- 1.10 as God's Anointed One for Israel's throne!

2.

- 2.1 And so to Nazareth God's angel came
- 2.2 to Joseph's girl-friend; Mary was her name.
- 2.3 Thus favoured, and so called by God Most High,
- 2.4 he trusted her to give the right reply;
- 2.5 she did! "*I am the servant of the Lord.*"
- 2.6 *Let all things be according to your word.*"

- 2.7 Thus her assent made possible God's plan:
- 2.8 that our Creator should be born as man.
- 2.9 So when God's choice of time had fully run,
- 2.10 his Spirit gave to Mary's womb – a son!

3.

- 3.1 Elizabeth, her cousin, pregnant too,
3.2 on meeting Mary cried, "How blessed are you!"
3.3 Then Mary's praises rose and God-ward soared,
3.4 as Spirit-filled she magnified her Lord.
- 3.5 Months later, when the birth was due quite soon,
3.6 at Bethlehem the couple found no room,
3.7 so joined the cattle in their night-time shed
3.8 and used the hay as Mary's make-shift bed.
3.9 She bore a son, but had no cradle there
3.10 so laid him in a feeding-trough with care.
- 3.11 Upon this birth rests all true Christmas joy:
3.12 that God should visit us as baby boy!

4.

- 4.1 God's *Word made flesh* was he! The babe she fed
4.2 would one day fight and crush the devil's head!
4.3 For, born to die, death's victory Christ would break
4.4 up on the Cross – and suffer for our sake.
4.5 They named him 'Jesus' for he frees from sin
4.6 all those who turn, in faith, to trust in him.
- 4.7 Our Christmas theme – 'Goodwill and peace on earth'
4.8 arises solely from our Saviour's birth.
- 4.9 By shepherds *then* – and *now* by us – adored;
4.10 through Cross and grave, he reigns – our Risen Lord!

NOTES – including alternative lines and words.

1. **Scripture can get lost** when services are short and/or include non-Biblical readings.
The poem provides, therefore, a *summary of the Christmas Biblical material*.
2. Since **non-Churchgoers appear at Christmastime** –
 - a) I have avoided archaic language.
 - b) I wrote stanza 4 to explain the *meaning* of Christmas.
 - c) I included a final couplet [4.9-4.10] which states that Christ is alive, victorious and worshipped, lest those unfamiliar with the Christian faith see Christ only in terms of his past human life.

3. Christmastide can swamp the Gospel in sentiment

I used down-to-earth language – the most appropriate style for the incarnation!

4. Various Uses

Feel free to adapt it as you wish, and make your own changes.

For instance:

- a) Bearing in mind its structure, the poem could be used in part, or split, or divided by music.
- b) It could be read by different readers.
(A woman's voice might particularly suit 2.1 - 3.10)
- c) Any six lines (three couplets) e.g. 2.1 – 2.6 could be sung as a verse to the tune 'Yorkshire' (often used for 'Christians awake...')

5. Alternative words, etc.

1.1.

If you would like a more 'churchy' start than the *shops and decorations*, then either an Advent or a Christmas line can be substituted thus:

Our Advent hymns and readings have sufficed...

or

Our Christmas hymns and carols have sufficed...

1.1 – 1.2

Could have a more liturgical start, e.g.

1.1 *Our Advent hymns and readings have sufficed*

1.2 *to turn our hearts towards the coming Christ.*

1.3 – 1.10

Could, if it was felt necessary, replace the Old Testament readings

2.1

If the first stanza was omitted, stanza two could begin –

'One day to Nazareth...

2.6 - 2.7

The gap between the lines is to give readers and listeners a breather, and to emphasise the couplet that follows [2.7 - 2.8]

I have used a similar device later between

3.10 and 3.11, 4.6 and 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9

3.4

'Magnified' is, of course, the traditional verb of Mary's Magnificat.

If listeners are unfamiliar with the word used in this way, you might try:

as Spirit-filled she glorified her Lord.

4.4

Up on the Cross. This is not a misprint for 'upon the Cross'.

I wanted the wording to force the reader to echo a little of St. John's use of Christ being lifted up

[John 3:14-15, 8:28, 12:32, 34.].

4.9 - 4.10

Christmas is not emphasised by the four Gospels nor is it central to the Gospel message. This final couplet is an attempt, in just two lines, to put Christmas in its wider Christian context.

It is not inappropriate for Christmastide; writers of many traditional hymns and carols have also felt it necessary, e.g. –

For that child so dear and gentle | Is our Lord in heaven above...

*Though an infant now we view him. | He shall fill his Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to him; | Every knee shall then bow down.*

Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ | For to redeem us all...

6. Help others?

If you work out a creative use for the poem or other useful changes, please leave some Feedback via the website. We shall display any ideas that others might find helpful.

Part IV - Christmas Readings

The following passages of Matthew's Christmas stories are from the CONCISE GOSPEL. (For a similar translation of the stories of Luke, see the article "**Spirit of Christmas**" on the helpforchristians website.)

- This translation reduces the number of words by about a third, while aiming to omit nothing.
- Unlike all previous shortenings of Scripture it aims to *condense* the text not to delete sections from it.
- The pastoral relevance of this is obvious among children and the sick whose attention span may be short.
- In addition, if Scripture has to be 'fitted in' to a tight schedule, e.g. a school assembly or a carol service, the CONCISE GOSPEL translation enables *more* scripture to be read in the time available.
- For non church-goers too, the CONCISE GOSPEL makes Scripture passages shorter than is usual for most church-goers.
- The translation aims to help those unfamiliar with Scripture. Thus 'David' is described as *King David*; Joseph is not described as David's 'son' but his *descendant*.

The CONCISE GOSPEL – *Maximum Meaning, Minimum Words* is copyright John Richards 2000, but its use from this Help For Christians website is copyright free.

MATTHEW'S CHRISTMAS STORY

Matthew Chapter 1, verses 16-24.

Jesus's Birth

Jesus's birth was like this.

During Mary's engagement to Joseph, before they slept together, she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph, a righteous man, was considering freeing Mary from their engagement quietly to save her from public disgrace, when the Lord's angel addressed him in a dream: 'Joseph descendant of King David, fear not to take Mary as your wife, since her son is from the Holy Spirit! Name him 'JESUS' because he 'SHALL SAVE' people from their sins.'

This occurred to fulfil the Lord's prophecy

A virgin will bear a son named EMMANU-EL meaning GOD WITH-US. [Isaiah 7:14]

Joseph obeyed, he took Mary as his wife, but refrained from intercourse until she bore her son whom he named 'JESUS'.

Matthew Chapter 2, verses 1-12.

Jesus – 'King of the Jews'

After Jesus's birth in Bethlehem, and during Herod's reign, astrologers from the east arrived at Jerusalem asking, 'Where is the child to be born King of the Jews? When home, we saw his star and have travelled to worship him.'

Herod and the townsfolk were alarmed by what they heard, so he assembled the chief priests and the religious teachers to discover the Messiah's birthplace. They said 'In Bethlehem for the prophet wrote:

Bethlehem in Judah, you are not unimportant among Judah's rulers, for from you will come a ruler to shepherd my people Israel. [Micah 5:2]

Herod secretly summoned the astrologers, learned the date the star appeared, and sent them to Bethlehem saying, 'Make detailed enquiries about the child. When you find him inform me so that I too may worship him.'

They left, and the star which they had seen went ahead of them but stopped where the child was. They were utterly overjoyed! After entering the house they saw the child, with Mary his mother, so they bowed low, worshipped him and offered their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

They were warned in a dream to avoid Herod, so took another route home.

Matthew Chapter 2, verses 13-23

Joseph's obedience saves Jesus

The Lord's angel appeared in a dream to Joseph, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt and remain there until further notice, for Herod is plotting Jesus's death.'

Joseph obeyed, fled at night to Egypt and remained until Herod died. This made the Lord's prophecy come true – *Out of Egypt I called my son.* [Hosea 11:1]

Meanwhile, Herod was livid at being tricked but as he knew Christ's birth-date from the astrologers, he ordered all boys under three in the Bethlehem area to be killed. This answered Jeremiah's prophecy

*A voice is heard in Ramah – weeping and mourning,
as Rachel weeps inconsolably for her dead children.* [31:16]

After Herod's death, the Lord's angel instructed Joseph in a dream, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and return to Israel, as those who wanted Jesus killed have died.'

Joseph again obeyed, but on returning to Israel was afraid because Herod's son Archelaus* now ruled.

Again warned in a dream, Joseph settled in Galilee at Nazareth. Prophets had said: *he will be called a Nazarene.*

[*usually pronounced *Ah-key-lay-us.*]

Part V - A Christmas Round

COMMENT:

Congregations enjoy singing rounds - and not simply the children!

The verse below is written to fit the well-known tune '*Frère Jacques*'

The tune is so constructed that a congregation may be divided into **two** - with the second group starting half-way through.

The tune may also be sung by **four** groups, one starting at the quarter, the next at the half, and the last at the three-quarters.

(Before singing it as a round, it may be necessary for everyone to sing it through once to get the tune. This could be done before the service starts to avoid too much musical direction within the worship itself.)

The words are deliberately simple enough not to require them to be printed or displayed. If the leader **says them twice** that should be sufficient.

Those who are familiar with the style and role of '**worship songs**' might note that sung at about half speed it could be used as a worship song. If sung by four groups, the diminishing volume of the final line dwelling - as it would - eight times on '**God with us**', could lead into silence or 'open worship'.

A CHRISTMAS ROUND

Suggested Tune: '*Frère Jacques*' (Trad.)

**Come and worship, come and worship,
Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
Baby in a manger, baby in a manger,
God with us, God with us.**

If you find that the 'round' style works with your group/congregation, it is not difficult to write lines for other seasons, for example at Easter:

**Christ is risen! Christ is risen!
from the dead, from the dead.
Death has no dominion, death has no dominion
Over us! Over us!**

and:

**Here we worship, here we worship
Christ as Lord, Christ as Lord,
Risen and ascended, risen and ascended,
Glorified, glorified.**

Part VI - A Merry Christmas Song

Tune: *We wish you a merry Christmas*

NOTES

General

This has two completely different sections.

Up to the last verse it is meant to be a fast and jolly romp (clap, dance, etc. as you wish).

But then the final verse is taken at only a third of the speed, and could even lead into silence.

This would need to be announced or conducted – or both.

(More detailed notes on tempo are below.)

Tune

The tune is so well known that it can be done unaccompanied if music is unavailable.

Note carefully that:

The tune simply repeats the traditional melody of the verse.

It does *not* use the melody of the traditional refrain (*Good tidings we bring*, etc.).

Tempo

It is in 3/4 time and, depending on the size of the building, the main section could be taken up to nearly a **bar a second** (168 crotchets a minute).

The final verse drops right down to nearly a **note a second** (54 crotchets a minute).

As mentioned above, the worshippers need to know this in advance!

The change could be mentioned within the printed words (as below). It could be announced, and/or conducted.

A competent musician could introduce the final verse by a 'bridge' passage, of, say, four bars that reduced the tempo from *molto allegro* to *largo*.

Pitch

While actually written in B flat, for unison singing, G is better, with the melody starting on D.

Chords

If played in G, the chords are as below.

A slash = a bar line, and the lines correspond to the word lines.

D7 / G G G / C C
C / A A A / D D
D7 / B B B / Em Em
G / C D7 D7 / G

Words

The words deliberately slide between past and present tenses, since:

not only is the Jesus of *past* present *today!*

but as we reflect on the first Christmas, we move back to the *past!*

Optional Verses

The last two verses about the Wise Men may be used if Epiphany will not be celebrated by those present.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS SONG

- 1 We wish you a MERRY CHRISTMAS!
Though some sing of figgy puddings,
We'd much rather sing of Jesus –
For Jesus is here.

- 2 God's angel came down to Mary.
He asked her to bear the Saviour.
She answered 'I am your servant!'
So Jesus is here!

- 3 In due course she had her baby,
at Bethlehem in Judaea,
she laid Jesus in a manger.
But Jesus is here!

- 4 The angels gave God the glory,
then sent off the local shepherds
to go find their nation's Saviour.
Yet Jesus is here!

- 5 The shepherds soon reach the stable;
it is as the angels told them
with young Mary and her Joseph –
And Jesus is there!

Final Verse

(Change of tempo, very slowly...)

And so we've come like the shepherds,
in wonder, and in thanksgiving,
to worship God born among us –

(Even slower and getting quieter)

F o r
J e s u s
i s
h e r e.

[Optional verses –

6

From lands far away came Wise Men,
To worship the Kingly baby,
This put Herod in a panic!
For Jesus was there!

7

The star which the Wise Men followed
Stood over the humble stable.
They went in, and knelt, each knowing –
That Jesus is here!]