

*A gift of*

# Christmas



The **Methodist** Church 

Christmas is a time **for giving**



Giving presents at Christmas goes back to the Wise Men, who gave gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant Jesus.

There is also the tradition of St Nicholas. He was a fourth-century Byzantine monk who secretly handed out bags of money to the poor. This practice still takes place on St Nicholas' Day, 6 December. And some people think that Santa Claus can be traced back to this generous monk.

God and every person involved in the first Christmas brings something different to the story of Jesus' birth.

**“It’s not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.”**

*Mother Teresa (1910-1997)*

# Angels bring **the message**

Angels play a central role in the Christmas story. It is the angel Gabriel who brings the news to Mary that she will give birth to God's son, Jesus. And an angel announces the good news to the shepherds.

Angels are messengers of God.



Christmas is a time when many people send messages by giving Christmas cards.

This custom goes back to the nineteenth century when

Sir Henry Cole commissioned about 2,000 cards as a way of increasing use of the newly-founded Post Office. It is reckoned that a billion cards are now sent each Christmas in the UK alone.

What messages are you sending this year?

Hark! The herald-angels sing  
glory to the new born King,  
peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with the angelic host proclaim:  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)  
*Singing the Faith, hymn 202, v. 1*



# Mary, the mother of Jesus

Mary was the mother of Jesus. Some Christian traditions call her *theotokos*, the God bearer or Mother of God. This was her gift to Christmas, for the birth of Jesus, the son of God, could not have happened without her.

Who do you see bringing Jesus into the world today?

*“The angel said to her, ‘You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, ... and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ ... Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”*

Luke 1:31-33, 38

Mary's gift, beyond all telling,  
was to give Christ room.  
She gave God a human dwelling  
in a mother's womb.  
Who could guess the final story?  
– cross and glory;  
empty tomb!

Mark Earey (b. 1965)

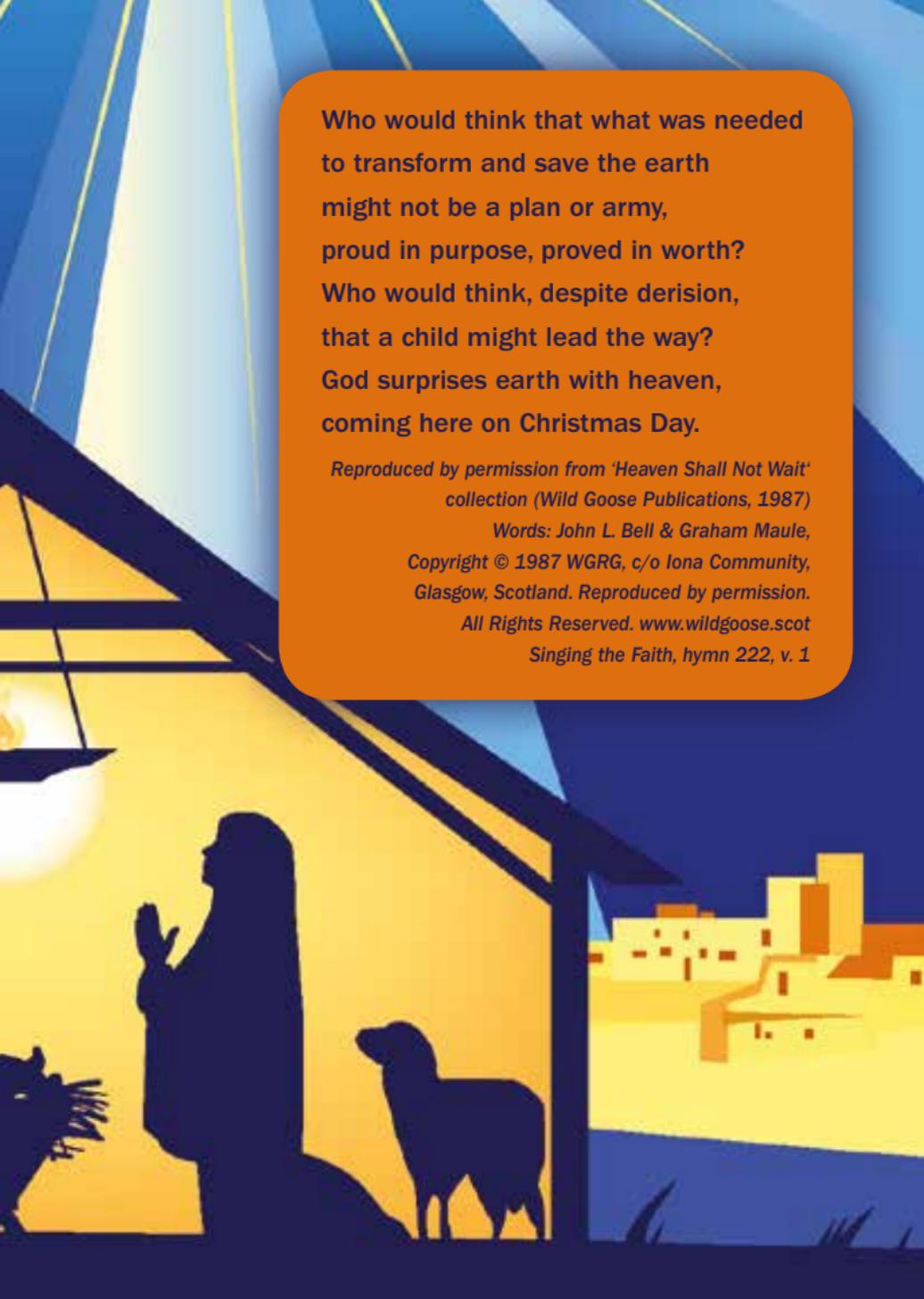
© Mark Earey, *Singing the Faith*, hymn 165, v. 4



*While Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, “the time came for her to deliver her child. 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.”*

*Luke 2:6-7*





Who would think that what was needed  
to transform and save the earth  
might not be a plan or army,  
proud in purpose, proved in worth?  
Who would think, despite derision,  
that a child might lead the way?  
God surprises earth with heaven,  
coming here on Christmas Day.

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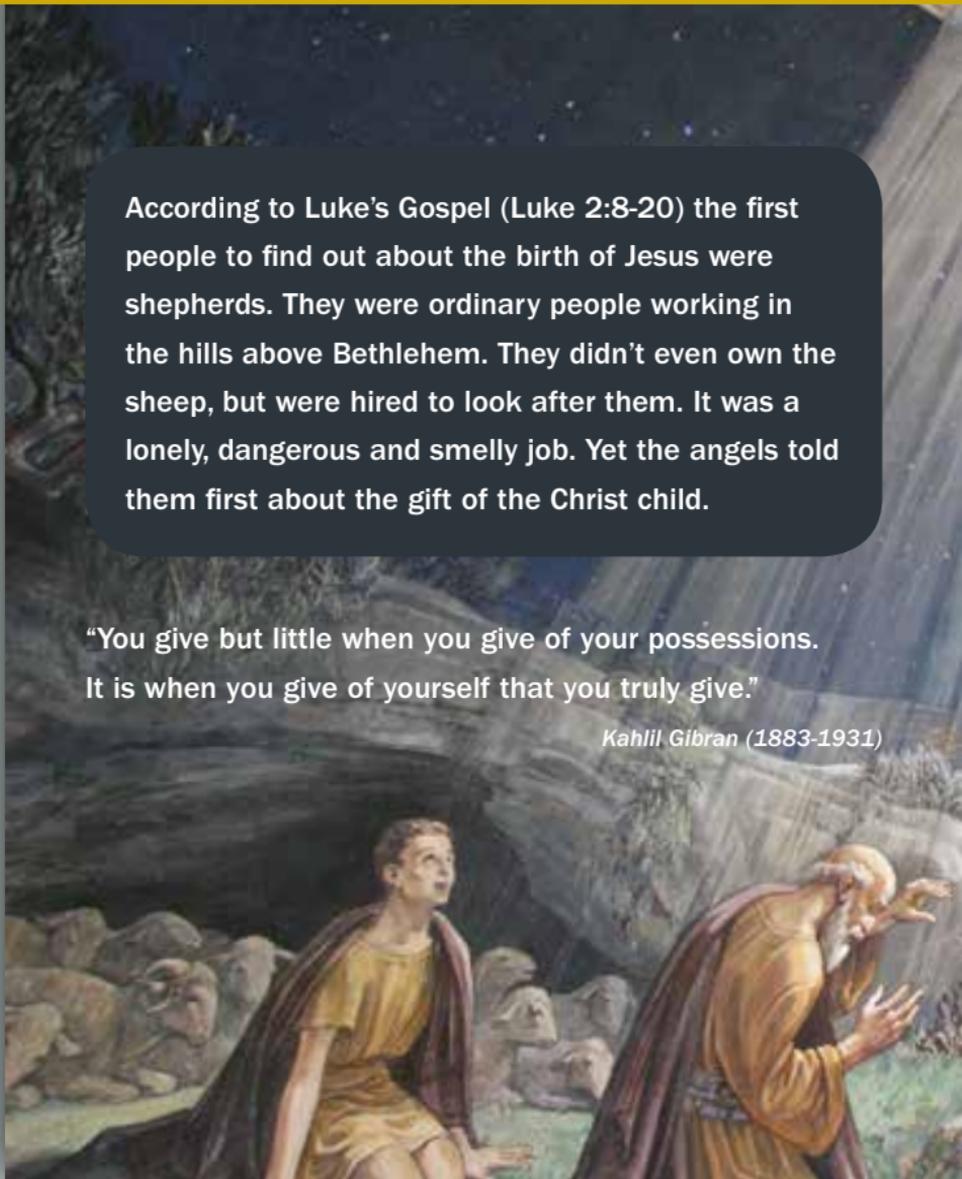
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Singing the Faith, hymn 222, v. 1*

# See the **shepherds** hurry down

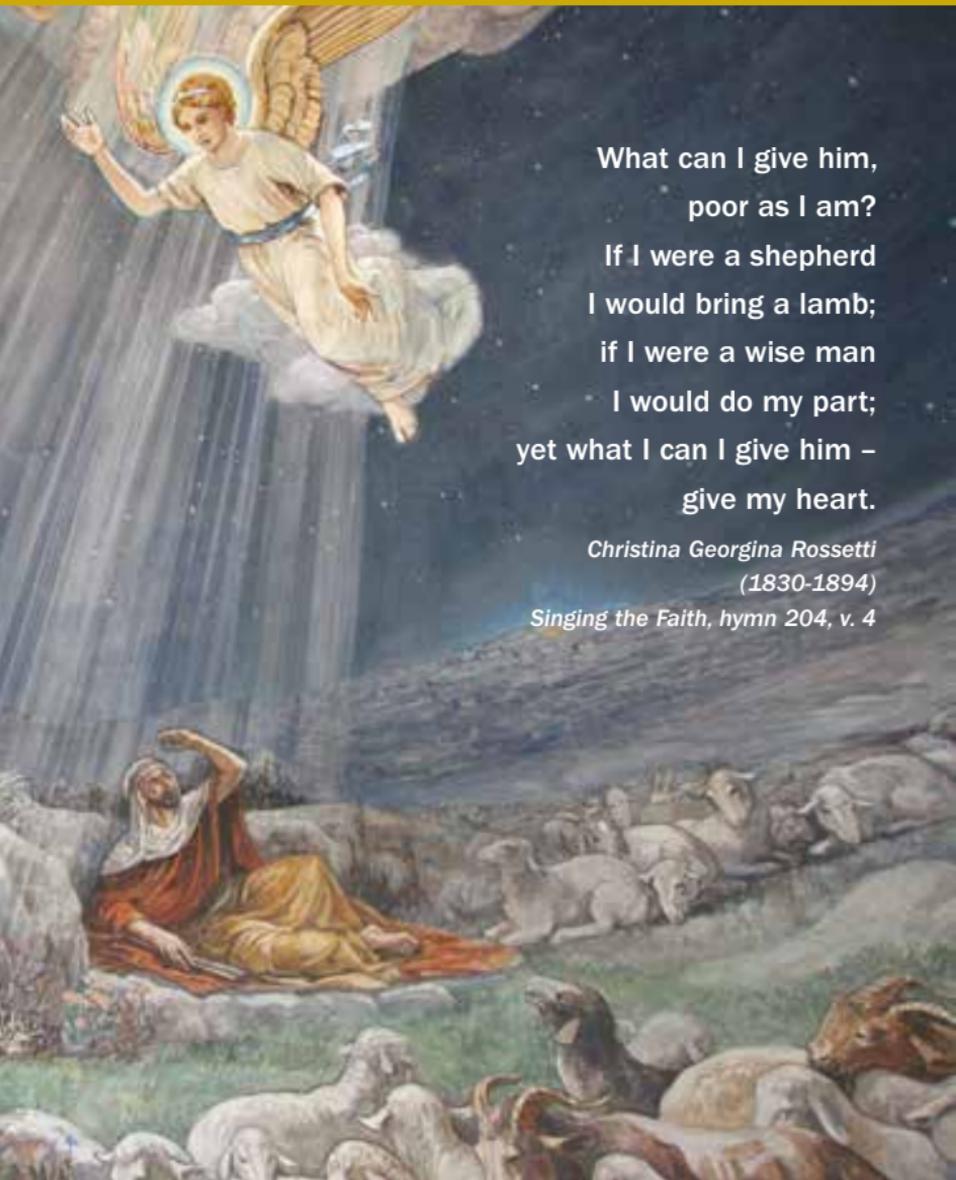
According to Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:8-20) the first people to find out about the birth of Jesus were shepherds. They were ordinary people working in the hills above Bethlehem. They didn't even own the sheep, but were hired to look after them. It was a lonely, dangerous and smelly job. Yet the angels told them first about the gift of the Christ child.

"You give but little when you give of your possessions.  
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give."

*Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)*



# to Bethlehem



What can I give him,  
poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise man  
I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him –  
give my heart.

*Christina Georgina Rossetti  
(1830-1894)*

*Singing the Faith, hymn 204, v. 4*

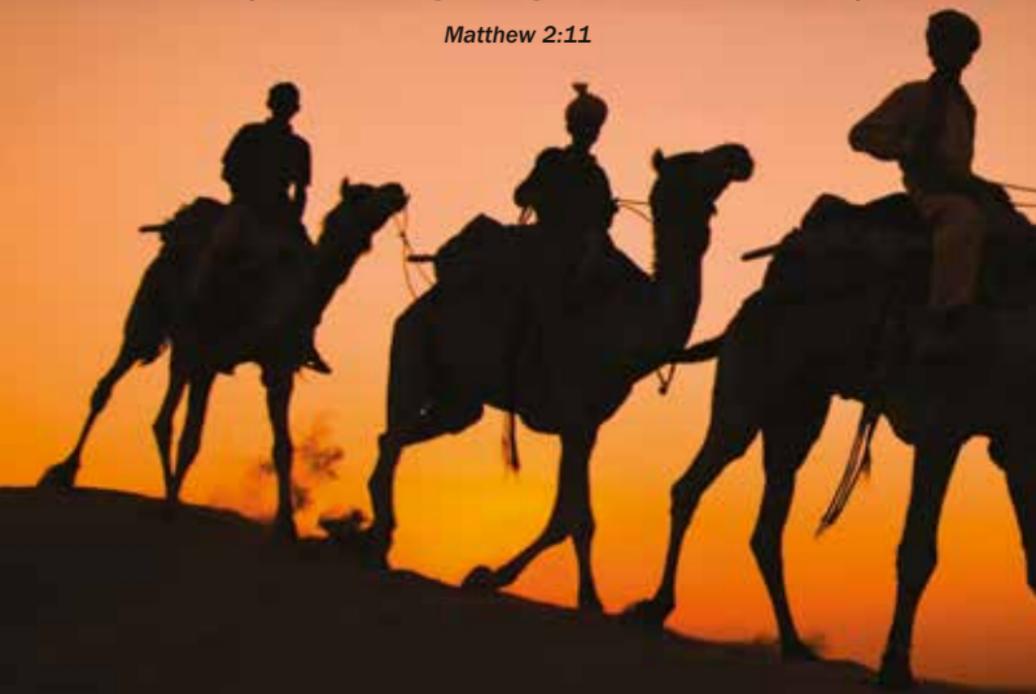
# Wise men came from the East

While Luke's Gospel features shepherds, Matthew's Gospel describes the visit of the Wise Men (Matthew 2:1-12).

Very little is known about these visitors from the east. We do not even know how many there are – the number three comes from the three gifts.

*“The wise men saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”*

*Matthew 2:11*



Some people have used the gifts that the Wise Men brought to describe Jesus:

- Gold – a gift for a king
- Frankincense – incense is used in some churches, and is a reminder that Jesus is holy and worthy of worship
- Myrrh – an oil used for embalming dead bodies, and points to the fact that Jesus would suffer and die.



Wise men journey,  
led to worship by a star,  
kneel in homage,  
bringing precious gifts from lands afar, so,  
*Come and join the celebration,*  
*it's a very special day;*  
*come and share our jubilation,*  
*there's a new King born today!*

Valerie Collison (b. 1933)  
*Singing the Faith, hymn 196, v. 2*

# God with us

But the greatest gift of Christmas is  
the gift of God's Son Jesus for all people.

*"Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness."*

*Philippians 2:5-7*

*"They shall name him Emmanuel,  
which means, 'God is with us'."*

*Matthew 1:23*





*A gift of*

# Christmas

*is a gift from*

The **Methodist** Church



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Compiled by Ken Kingston. Design and production: Methodist Publishing, on behalf of the Methodist Church in Britain, registered charity no. 1132208 © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2016

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from Methodist Publishing **[www.mph.org.uk](http://www.mph.org.uk)**  
13a Hellesdon Park Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR6 5DR  
Tel: 0845 017 8220

PA619-CT-16