



# RAGS TO RICHES

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## An Intergenerational Church Service

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"Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us"



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# FROM RAGS TO RICHES



## An Intergenerational Church Service

Each year we sing, 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night', but what do we really know about these early witnesses to the birth of Jesus? What did it mean for them to experience a sky filled with angels and be the ones chosen to hear the good news?

This year, our Christmas resources will focus on the shepherds and their rags to riches story. From the rags of the field to the riches of heaven, let us follow their journey and discover it anew for ourselves. How does God visit us in our rags and bring the riches of the good news of Jesus, news that changes our lives?

### **This series of resources also includes:**

- A Community Event resource
- A one-off afterschool programme for primary aged children
- Family and Whānau at Home resources

These are all free to download from our Breakthrough website:

**[www.sunzbreakthrough.org.nz](http://www.sunzbreakthrough.org.nz)**



## Preparation:

This a suggested service outline. You can pick it up and run it as it is, or adjust it to reflect your church. Adjust for your traditions and structures, and invite input from others into planning your service.

### Top tips:

- A good intergenerational church service is no longer than an hour.
- Include different ages in the components of the service (i.e. Bible reading, dramas, singing, candle lighting, greeting at the door, prayers).
- Give people time to prepare in advance. This is particularly important for any Bible readings.

### Simple Nativity Scene Dress Ups:

This service includes the use of nativity dress ups or costumes. Your church may have an excellent collection, or a willing person who is happy to sew some for you. If not, you can use simply head pieces or hats to set the scene. Here are some basic suggestions:

- Cloths and ties around the head to create head pieces. Choose one colour for the shepherds and different colours for Mary and Joseph.
- Create a simple halo from gold pipe cleaners, attached to a headband.
- Avoid using tea towels as part of any shepherd costumes. It is not culturally sensitive to use something from the kitchen to cover your head. Even if you don't have a problem with this, let's not cause unnecessary offense.

### Copyright:

Please confirm copyright requirements and your church's policy for all videos and songs used.



**Covid-19:** This resource has been created with a Covid world in mind, and provides adaptations along the way to suit level 2-3 restrictions in Aotearoa New Zealand. Look out for this little sheep along your way to see how to adapt each aspect of the programme for an online context.

## Rags to Riches—An Intergenerational Church Service

- The instructions are in *italics*, script in non-italics.
- Prepare and download videos or songs beforehand.
- Have nativity costumes ready to go.
- This service includes an interactive Bible reading and drama (pg. 6-8) You will need a narrator and two shepherds. Make sure they have the script early and practice beforehand. See our website for a copy of the script in an editable Word format.

### Links:

- Retelling the story: [Bible Society 'It Begins in Bethlehem'](#)  
[LUMO Gospel of Luke Chapter 2:1-21](#)
- Carols and songs: [The Angels Knew](#)  
[It Begins in Bethlehem](#)

### Opening and Prayer: 2mins

*Service leader:*

*Introduce yourself (for the benefit of those who are new to the gathering).*

We have gathered together this morning to meet with each other and to meet with God. It doesn't matter how young we are or how old we are. God is present here with us all this morning. We are glad you are here. So, don't worry if your little ones wiggle or make noise. This morning let us help each other to worship God as a family, the family of God. Check to make sure that those around you are included and that everyone understands what is happening as the service unfolds.

### Begin with the normal elements of your service (10mins approx.)

*This might include:*

- *A call to worship – make sure the wording includes all ages*
- *Prayer –in language that all can understand*
- *Worship songs x2 – choose at least one song that the children and the young people know. This doesn't have to be a 'kiddie song'. You could sing two carols to begin.*
- *Offering*
- *Birthdays and notices*

## Quiz (8 mins)

*Display the PowerPoint (or create your own)*

*Service leader/Quiz master:*

When we think about the Christmas story, it is easy to imagine a New Zealand scene. Rolling green hills and fluffy white sheep. It is hard for us to think about sheep farming without picturing our New Zealand landscape. This morning we are going to step into the shoes of some unlikely people, over 2000 thousand years ago, on the other side of the world, out in a field looking after their sheep.

What did this first Christmas look like?

## Small groups:

*Have people turn in their seats and create small groups of about 4-6 to decide on their answers together. Don't make people call them out in public or have to say how many they got correct. For people new to church or new to the story, we want to avoid making them feel inadequate if they get them wrong.*



*Covid-19 level adaption: share screen and have each household discuss and their answers and put them in the chat screen if they want to.*

Here's a quiz to help us set the scene. You will be given four options and your group will need to choose the option they think looks the most like Christmas. Give it your best guess!

1. Sheep: which of these four looks the most like the sheep in the Christmas account?
2. Shepherd: which of these four looks the most like the shepherds in Christmas?
3. Field: which of these four looks the most like the field in Christmas?

## Rags to Riches Intro (2mins)

*Service Leader or invite someone of a different generation to read this out:*

These pictures help us to imagine what life was like for the shepherds who turn up in the Christmas story. **Imagine the fields.** Rocky ground, dotted with olive trees. Not much grass to be found and certainly no fences. And in the darkness of night there were wolves and bears, out to steal the sheep. **Imagine the shepherds.** Many of the shepherds would have been young, charged with the task of looking after the family's animals. If you know the story of Samuel anointing David as King, you will know that David was a young guy out being a shepherd when Samuel called him.

These shepherds were people of the land, smelling like lanolin and dust. They were dressed in clothes covered with the dirt of their jobs. Rags. But as we often see in the Bible, this made them the best people for the good news to be announced to. God chooses the unlikely. These shepherds in rags received the message of the riches of heaven.

Let's hear all about it from a book in the Bible called Luke.

We pick up the story in chapter 2!

## In their shoes - Part 1 (8mins)

This is an interactive Bible reading and drama. You will need two people dressed up as shepherds and one narrator. Have the shepherds off the stage. The text for the Narrator is straight from Luke 2 in the NIV. This script is also available in an editable Word Doc from our website.



*Covid adaption: prerecord this as a Zoom chat between the three people. The simplest way to do this is to record an ordinary Zoom call. Choose a virtual background for your characters that shows a night sky. See our website for a free background you can download. Play the recording during your service.*

*Alternatively, play a video that tells the story. Here are two possibilities:*

*- Bible Society [‘It Begins in Bethlehem’](#)*

*- LUMO [Gospel of Luke Chapter 2:1-21](#)*

### Script:

Narrator: And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby...  
*Shepherds burst onto the stage and interrupt the narrator. The narrator looks puzzled.*

Shepherd 1: That’s us, he/she’s talking about us!

Shepherd 2: *(Turns to audience)* We were out in the fields near Bethlehem, that’s where the good grazing is. My poor sheep have been struggling to find enough food at the moment.

N: Keeping watch over their flocks by night.

S1: Every night! You can’t be too careful when your family depends on you.

S2: We have had a real problem with wolves at the moment, and Dad says if we lose too many more then we are in big trouble.

S1: Did you hear about Bartholomew and the bear attack?

S2: *...begins to speak but the narrator interrupts*

N: An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

S1: Well that’s an understatement if ever I heard one. Out at night, looking after my flock when the whole sky lights up. And God’s glory? It knocked me off my feet!

S2: Terrified? Absolutely petrified!

N: But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid’.

S1: The amount of times I have heard that from the Torah, an angel shows up and the first thing they do is tell people not to be afraid.

S2: And here we were, hearing those words for ourselves!

S1: Us, shepherds!

S2: Smelly, raggy, farmers!

## In their shoes cont...

- N: I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.
- S1: It's this part that I still find hard to put into words. Wow! That the God of heaven chose to share this good news with us.
- S2: The Messiah! (*turns to audience*) Do you know how long we have waited for a Messiah, a Saviour? Do you know how often we have wept and raged at God? Why is it taking so long? When will you come and boot out the Romans? When will we see justice?
- S1: And here we were, dressed in our rags, hearing this good news of God's riches, born in the small town just over there (*point off stage*)

*(All three pause and look off to the side of the stage. Pause as if they are contemplating how amazing this all is and letting it sink in)*

- N: This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.  
Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

*Worship team cued to start singing straight away. Shepherds and Narrator move off to the side.*

## Sung Worship: (8 mins)

Sing 1-2 songs in this bracket. Choose songs or carols that focus on the arrival of the angels to visit the shepherds.

Suggestions:

- Angels we have heard on high.
- Hark the Herald Angels Sing
  - [The Angels Knew](#)



*Covid-19 level adaption: Share screen and play this YouTube clip '[It Beings in Bethlehem](#)'. Invite people to listen and to respond with words of praise in the chat screen.*

## In their shoes - Part 2

*The Narrator and shepherds re-enter the stage.*

- Narrator: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, *(interrupted)*
- Shepherd 1: Let's go! That's what we said. Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.
- N: So they hurried off.
- S2: Sprinted actually. We left Esther and Benjamin to look after the sheep and we sprinted as fast as we could.
- S1: That's the benefit of working outdoors all the time, you build up your fitness.
- N: ...and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in a manger. When they...
- S2: *(interrupts)* Hold on! Let's not skip over that part! That's the most important part of the story.

*(Shepherds move off to the side of the stage, or join the nativity scene)*

## Nativity Scene: (5mins)

*Create a nativity scene at the front of your church to illustrate this part of the story. '*

*Top Tips:*

- *Have simple dress up options available along the front and call for volunteers, or give these out to people before the service.*
- *If your costumes are complicated to put on (tangles of angels wings) it is a good idea to dress the characters before the service begins.*
- *For a fast option, give out hats or headpieces to denote each character, see suggestions.*

*You will need: Mary, Joseph, a few shepherds of varying ages, angels and a doll (or a compliant baby!).*

*Invite people to come and dress up, or call to the front those you have prechosen.*

*Create the scene at the front. Once this is done, have them stay there and sing all together.*

- *You may like to sing 'Silent Night', or chose a song that fits with the arrival of Jesus. This is a good opportunity to invite children to lead the singing.*

*After the song, either send them back to their seats in costume (and collect them up later), or have them stay near the front. If they can remove their costumes without too much fuss then do so, but this can sometimes be distracting.*

- Narrator: When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.



## Rags to Riches (5mins)

*A short message. This could be shared between a couple of people, or choose someone from your church who is not often seen on stage.*

This group of shepherds had an extraordinary night. We can imagine them out in the field, under a starry sky, gathered around a fire. Theirs was not a life of glamour or privilege. Theirs was a hard life of working in the fields, with dirt under their fingernails. This night they are out in the fields near Bethlehem. That's King David's home town. I wonder if the shepherds took some pride in knowing that they came from the same place as David, who when he was a boy was also a shepherd? King David was a shepherd just like them.

Then the angel turns up to announce to them that a new king has been born. In fact, the angel reminds them that this new King is born in the same town! And they as shepherds are the first people outside the family to find out! God seems to have a soft spot for shepherds.

So they ran, the Bible says they hurried off. Imagine how keen they must have been to go and see for themselves what they had been told by the angel. They wanted to check it out for themselves.

I wonder what was going through their minds as they ran towards Bethlehem that night? What were they thinking and feeling?

And afterwards, as they walked back across the fields to their sheep, what did they feel then? I can imagine that the sun was just starting to rise. Luke tells us they were glorifying and praising God. What did that look like I wonder? Maybe they burst into song and dance?

And I wonder what happened next? I wonder if that one night changed the way they thought about themselves? That they, shepherds dressed in rags were witnesses to the riches of heaven come to dwell with us. They got to be a part of the story. I wonder what difference that made to the way they lived their lives?


As we jump forward a few thousand years, I wonder what runs through our minds as we read this story again? Can we imagine ourselves into this story? How does it feel to know that God announces this good news to us too? The same gift of Jesus that was offered to the shepherds is offered to us too. I wonder how that makes you feel? I wonder what questions it raises for you? I wonder what difference it makes to the way you live your life?

## Reflection: (5mins)

*A question and a thought. Choose the option that fits your congregation best.*

1. Small group discussion: *(Make sure all ages are included in the small group discussion).*

? Come up with one question you think the shepherds might have had as they ran to see the baby Jesus? (e.g. why has the Messiah come as a baby and not a King in a palace?)

 Come up with one thought you think the shepherds might have had as they walked back to their sheep after visiting baby Jesus. (e.g. isn't it amazing that God chose us to be the first visitors!)

2. Individual reflection or in family or whānau groups: Come up with one question and thought you have in response to this story.

## Feedback: (2mins approx.)

*Depending on your congregation you may choose to invite two people of different ages to share their question and thought with the whole church.*

## Closing: (5mins)

*Service leader or worship leader:*

God chose the unlikely shepherds to be the first visitors to the baby Jesus. Rags to Riches, the dirt of the field to the Kingdom of Heaven. And God calls us too, to experience the riches of the good news. Praise God that we are part of this story!

Close the service in your normal way. You might like to include:

- An invitation to respond or to receive prayer after the service
- Carol x1
- Notices
- Closing prayer or benediction



**FOR THE FULL RANGE OF OUR  
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