

Nativity Treasure Hunt in Hitchin

Welcome to our Nativity Treasure Hunt in Hitchin, where young and old are invited to reimagine the story of the first Christmas on the streets of Hitchin. There are 9 stops where you will be given something to think, find and do. You might wish to linger at each stop to consider the significance of the story, or you may prefer to race around and accept every challenge. You can visit the stops in any order, but the story will make more sense if you do them in the order listed. You can visit them all on one day, or over a few separate days, or you might just pick and choose which you like the sound of! There is a separate Treasure Hunt with Pictures, which can be used alongside this one, and which both children and adults can enjoy.

Please adhere to the government's Covid-19 rules at the time you do the hunt. Please avoid crowds, socially distance and take sensible precautions. Although we cannot be altogether in person, you are invited to send a picture or film of what you did at each stop to the Treasure Keepers on treasure@christchurchhitchin.org.uk by December 20th. These films and pictures will then be shown at our Zoom Nativity Service on Christmas Eve, which all are invited to attend.

Please take what is meaningful to you from this amazing story. Please join us for our Nativity Service when we will celebrate this story, and view your photos and films together.

1. Mary & Joseph: The Coopers

Go to Coopers Yard, at the Paynes Park end, and stand either on the grass next to the library or along the side of the car park across the road. You'll see this steel sculpture of two coopers (who made wooden vats and barrels) taking a rest from their labours on a bench. The sculpture was created by Godfrey Phillips of Offley in 2011.



The story starts with Mary, a normal 16 year old girl who was engaged to a carpenter called Joseph. The last thing Mary expected was to have a baby. However, an angel told her this is exactly what would happen, and that he would be not just any baby but the Prince of Peace, God with us. When Mary was heavily pregnant, Caesar Augustus, who was in charge at the time, issued a population census. In response, Mary and Joseph travelled on a donkey to Bethlehem, Joseph's home town. This journey would have taken them about 3 days.

Think: Take a moment to look at these two labourers; consider how exhausted Mary and Joseph must have been on this journey.

Find: What are the coopers holding?

Do: Find a creature or person who works hard to do a job. Send a picture or film to the Treasure Keepers.

2. The Christ Child: Christchurch



Go to Christchurch on Bedford Road, opposite Waitrose.

Mary was told by the angel that Jesus would be a great king, whose kingdom never ends. “Christ” means anointed one, someone who is very special, who comes from God. In fact, over 700 years before Jesus was born, it was predicted that a child would be born who was a “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9)

Think: Does this Christ child have any relevance today? In our times of a global pandemic, in our local communities, in our families or in our personal lives?

Find:

- To whom is the bench outside the main door dedicated?
- How many composters are there?
- What three things are depicted on the image engraved into the glass on the door facing the road, closest to the car park?

Do: Make a peace symbol. It can be an object, a collage using things you can find, a pose or even a chant or song! Send a picture or film to the Treasure Keepers.

3. The Moving Star

There are so many stars to find at this time of year in Hitchin. Start looking for them now!



The star is important in the Christmas story because it shows the way – it was the signpost for the Magi when they went on their journey to find Jesus. These Magi would have followed the patterns of the stars religiously. They had seen this unusual new star in the sky, and knew that it told of the birth of a special king in Israel. No one really knows what the new star in the sky was, and there are many theories including comets, supernovas, a conjunctions of planets or something supernatural!

Think

The Wise Men didn't have all the answers then. In modern times it's easy to think that humans know everything there is to know. But we are still discovering new creatures at the bottom of the ocean, new stars, and we don't know all there is to know about the human body. One of the amazing things about being in God's creation is that it is still mysterious and wonderful to us.

Find: How many stars can you find on your travels throughout the treasure hunt?

Do

Send a picture or film to the Treasure Keepers of a star or some stars! You could take a picture of the stars you find, make it into a little collage and send it to us. You could be really imaginative and make the shape of a star out of something natural, like leaves, or your arms and legs! Or why not send us a film of you doing star jumps!

4. Frankincense: The Physic Garden



Go to the Physic Garden, just next to Hitchin Library. The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. One of these was frankincense, a type of incense produced by a tree resin in North Africa. Even today, it is thought to have healing properties. Frankincense was very expensive, which precluded it from common use, but instead it was used for ceremonial worship of a deity. The inclusion of this as a gift would have indicated that the wise men believed Jesus was God.

Think: Are there any treasures or objects which inspire you towards God or a greater being? What has the most healing properties for you?

Find:

- Which plant was used for a dislocated shoulder?
- Which plant might have been applied to someone suffering with breathing problems?
- Which plant was used for a wobbly tooth?

Do: Send a picture or film to the Treasure Keepers of something you see or have that inspires you towards God or a heavenly being.

5. Gold: Market Place



Go to the old Market Place in the town square. Find this lamp at the Rose and Crown pub.

Another gift that the Magi brought to Jesus was gold. Gold was costly and associated with kings and royalty. It is still special now but it was especially precious when Jesus was born. The gold that the Magi brought to Jesus would have been a symbol that they recognised that Jesus was a King, not just a baby.

Think: Do we value costly things in our culture? Do we live in a throwaway culture? What can we celebrate about the things we value? What can we work to change?

Find:

- To whom, when and why was the flagpole on the town square presented?
- What do you think is the oldest jewellers in Hitchin? They have been in business for 260 years! And they sell lots of gold jewellery.

Do: What can you do to show you value our town? Maybe a picture, maybe a thank you, maybe a decision to shop locally, maybe an act of service to someone, maybe a more active presence in a virtual or actual community? Send the Treasure Keepers a picture or film of what you have done or what you are planning.

6. Myrrh: St Mary's Graveyard

Go to St Mary's Church and Graveyard, just off the Market Square.



The third gift that the Magi gave to Jesus was myrrh. This is a fragrant spice which comes from tree sap. In the ancient world it used as anointing oil, and it was a key ingredient in the mixture of spices that were used to prepare bodies for burial. Perhaps the wise men intended this gift as an indication of the manner in which he would save his people—namely, that he would die for them.

Think: The Magi chose their gifts carefully for Jesus, based on prophecies they had heard and believed. What gift have you received or given that had meaning, and what meaningful gift do you hope to give and receive at Christmas?

Find:

- How long has St Mary's been a place of worship in Hitchin?
- On the Remembrance record of names, which name is closest in alphabetical order to the word myrrh?

Do: Send a picture or film to the Treasure Keepers of a crazy, funny or unusual gift! It could be something you see around you, a message, a song, a poem, an action or a dance!

7. Inn: The Sun Inn



The Sun Inn is half way down Sun Street, just off the Market Place. When Mary and Joseph got to Bethlehem, it was really busy, because of a national population census. There was no room for them at the inn. In those times, there weren't really such things as hotels or inns; you normally would have stayed with some extended family or relations. A more accurate translation of 'inn' would be 'guest room'. However, since it was a busy time the guest room was already full so there was no room for Mary and Joseph.

Think: How can we provide hospitality during a global pandemic?

Find: The Sun has been an inn since at least what year? What did it host?

Do: Find or make a shelter for any creature with what you have with you and around you (or what you have at home)! Send a picture or film to the Treasure Keepers.

8. Stable: Charlton Piggery

From Sun Street, walk up to the Three Moorhens pub. From the car park, you can walk over the footbridge and follow the path across the field. Bear left into a tree-lined path down a hill, and follow it to reach Charlton Piggery.



There was no guest room available for Mary and Joseph. Mary may well have gone into labour by now, so they desperately needed somewhere to shelter. Instead of a guest room, they were given the animal's quarters within a house, described as a stable. Houses had two levels, the upper/mezzanine level where people slept and the ground floor where the animals slept at night and the family lived during the day. The animals were a kind of 'central heating' at night keeping the house warm! Mary gave birth to Jesus here and put him in a manger, which was an animal's feeding trough.

Think: The one who was thought to be God, a king with an everlasting reign and a prince of peace was born in an animal's home. The squalor, smell and discomfort must have been overpowering. Many find it comforting, however, that God the King would find rest in the most humble of circumstances. Can you identify with this?

Find: How much does the pig feed cost?

Do: Make your best animal noises! Send a film of them in to the Treasure Keepers.

2. Shepherds & Angels: Windmill Hill



Take a little walk up to the top of Windmill Hill. There are some benches at the top that have a beautiful view of our lovely town. Sit down and have a rest and take a moment to appreciate the quiet and the view.

We're up here to think about the shepherds. The shepherds were special people in the Christmas story. They led an isolated and quiet life, away from crowds and keeping themselves to themselves. They were looking after their sheep when a group of angels came to visit them and tell them to go

to Bethlehem to find the baby Jesus.

Think

The Shepherds were obedient! Can you imagine a group of angels visiting you at work, or at home, surprising you, and giving you a command?! Would you get up and do it straightaway? It must have been such a shock. Would you be afraid, excited? What do you think the angels looked like? What or who is asking you to be obedient to something today?

Find

How many benches are there on Windmill Hill in total? Find them all!

Do

Which is your favourite view? Take a picture and send it to The Treasure Keepers.

Now you have finished

Thank You for taking part! We hope you have enjoyed exploring the Christmas story in person. You might have learned something you didn't know about the story, or perhaps remembered something. The story does not end here! Jesus was a historically documented figure who lived a remarkable life and made claims that shook the world then, and which shake the world now. If you would like to know more about the Christmas story and the Christian faith, please contact our minister, Val Reid, on minister@christchurchhitchin.org.uk, or Louise Selby, our Family Worker on familyworker@christchurchhitchin.org.uk.

Please send your films and images to treasure@christchurchhitchin.org.uk no later than December 20th. Any film or image sent may be used in our Zoom Nativity service, but will not be posted on line, or stored after December 24th.

You are warmly invited to join our Nativity Service on December 24th at 4pm; Zoom details can also be obtained from treasure@christchurchhitchin.org.uk.