

# The Gospels unplugged



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# The Gospels unplugged



Lucy Moore

52 poems and stories for creative writing, RE, drama and collective worship

For Kirsten Hall, Elizabeth Hall, Sally Hall, Michael Hall,  
Sam Harvey and Phoebe Ainesaz, with much love

**Thanks to...**

*Eric Guthrie for the love of rhyme; Sue Doggett for the wisdom culinary, piscicultural and editorial; Paul for being a theological sounding-board; Sue Smith for a teacher's eye; Crossroads Drama Group, especially Lesley Baker and Denise Williams, and the congregations at St Wilf's and Westbrook for being such willing and supportive testbeds; Karen and Lisa for the inspirational hygiene; the cast of The Mystery Tour for happy memories. And, of course, to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John for doing the hard work.*

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# Foreword

When it comes to telling Bible stories, just about the worst thing we can do is to make them boring. The second worst thing, however, is to try so hard to make them ‘fun’ that we trivialize them. That place in the middle, where the story is told creatively in a fresh and vital manner, and yet still communicates God’s love and truth, is the place that Lucy Moore has found in this book.

These re-tellings are hugely entertaining—bursting with inventiveness and wit. And this is a great help, particularly for those teachers and church workers who have told some of the more familiar stories time and time again. There’s nothing better than discovering a new way ‘in’ to a story, or a different angle from which to tell it. This not only helps you to see the story in a fresh light, but it also creates a new enthusiasm for that tale—an enthusiasm that the children will hopefully catch as well. And so, Lucy not only offers us different points of view, but different literary forms, as well—mixing poetry and drama and rap—so that the audience never quite knows what to expect.

The fact that Lucy obviously enjoys telling these stories, and that children have a great time when they experience them, never obscures the equally important fact that there are some very serious things going on here. She deals with the hard issues of loving your neighbour, forgiveness, fear and temptation (just to name a few) with the honesty and gravity they deserve. And her introductions do an excellent job of tying the biblical text to her particular take on the story and then to questions that will help children to explore the story even further, in their own terms and from their own experience.

As far as I can tell, there are three things that are evident in this book. Lucy loves stories. Lucy loves kids. And Lucy loves God. It’s just the right combination for a book like this. It’s good—in every sense of that word. It’s fun. And I think you’re going to have ‘good fun’ using it!

*Bob Hartman*



# Introduction

Have fun with *The Gospels unplugged!* The pieces have been great fun to write and perform and I hope you'll enjoy them too. The idea is that they will help bring the Gospels to life—make the stories jump off the page, into the imagination and from there into daily life. Each piece comes with a short introduction, partly so that you can see where I'm coming from, and partly to suggest some ideas for discussion raised by the passage, in case you want to take it further. You also have the relevant Bible passage for reference.

Of course it's been a nail-chomping job, deciding which passages to include. I've deliberately chosen many pieces that include children, bearing in mind the intended users of this book, but beyond that the passages try to reflect a balance between those that show us who Jesus is, what he did and what he said—history, actions, miracles and teaching, if you like. Some of the pieces, such as 'Zacchaeus', tell the story, while some, such as 'Jesus angry in the temple', explore an aspect of the original account.

While I've been writing, I've had in mind a fictional Key Stage 2 teacher who despairs of teaching RE, is fed up with the same old stories and wants something with a bit of bite, preferably that could be used in a drama or literacy session as well. I've had in mind a Year 6 class who've heard the Good Samaritan fifteen times now and are sure they've got Christianity taped. I've also had in mind church children's workers and youth leaders who know that their groups love drama and want a resource book that can be picked up and used at the drop of a hat. From school assemblies to all-age worship, I hope you will find something that will engage your audience and actors with the living power of the Gospel stories.

Some ideas for using the book: if you're reading to an audience, I'd suggest you read the *Gospels unplugged* version of the story, then read the words from the Bible, rather than the other way round. Photocopy the passage, and read it in parts like a script. Add some percussion if it's a rhythmic number, music or sound effects if it's atmospheric. Give your readers or listeners permission to *enjoy* what they're reading. Have a good laugh if it's that sort of piece; compare it with other styles of writing or other pieces written in the same style;

follow it up with people writing their own creative piece on the same subject, or drawing or painting to show the pictures it has inspired in their imaginations.

Many of the questions in the introductions are open-ended. I believe it's important for people to wonder, to want to find out answers for themselves and to realize that Christianity opens up huge areas of questioning. It's OK for the teacher or leader to say, 'I don't know'! (At least, I hope it is—I say it all the time.)

Teachers and church leaders have endless demands on their time and energy. That's why the Gospel passages are extensively indexed by reference and theme. (From experience, I know the need for '*something—anything!—on forgiveness, now!*' and the frustration of not being able to remember which pieces deal with which subjects.)

Many of the pieces, such as 'The paralysed man through the roof', work best in performance and look bizarrely colloquial on the page. Other pieces, such as 'Perfume', are too dense to be performed and work better enjoyed quietly. Some beg not to be taken too seriously—how much wisdom can you fit into a limerick, after all? Others, like 'The quiet man' (pp. 129–130), touch on the power, mystery and majesty that echo through the original Gospels. It's been a humbling experience, plunging into the work of these four great writers, and predictably they're an impossible act to follow. At best, this book is merely a snack, whetting the appetite for the real meal within their pages.

Many of the pieces in this book come from my work in schools and churches in association with the Barnabas RE Days, in which the creative arts—drama, movement and storytelling—are used in performance and workshops within primary schools to bring the Bible to life.

To find out more about these, write to Barnabas Ministry, BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon OX14 3FE.

# Why Luke wrote



LUKE 1:1-4

Many people have tried to tell the story of what God has done among us. They wrote what we had been told by the ones who were there in the beginning and saw what happened. So I made a careful study of everything and then decided to write and tell you exactly what took place. Honourable Theophilus, I have done this to let you know the truth about what you have heard.

Why did the Gospel writers write their books?

Luke probably wrote his book round about AD60 —only thirty years or so after Jesus died. Think of someone who died about thirty years ago. If you

were writing a book about that person, how easy would it be to make people believe anything you wanted to tell them about him or her? What would you do to find out about your person? Why might you want to write a book about somebody you'd never met face to face?

Read this poem, then read the opening of Luke's book from the Bible: what was Luke trying to do? Do you trust him to tell 'the truth about what you have heard'?

Many people have tried to write  
The story of what God has done among us. So I  
Have watched and wondered and studied and read  
And listened to what those who knew him said.  
I have been a detective, a historian, never satisfied  
With those who exaggerated, told part-truths, or lied.  
A scientist, a doctor, a writer, I have done my best  
To put each witness of those days to the test:  
Questioned and queried and challenged and argued  
With Mark, with all who knew him  
Face to face, so that you'd  
Know  
The truth,  
As far as

I can  
Write  
Truth,  
About  
This  
Man  
Called  
Jesus.



# Annunciation



LUKE 1:26-38

God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, ‘You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you.’

Mary was confused by the angel’s words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, ‘Don’t be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High...’

Mary asked the angel, ‘How can this happen? I am not married!’

The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God’s power will come over you...’

Mary said, ‘I am the Lord’s servant! Let it happen as you have said.’ And the angel left her.

We don’t know much about Mary’s background. She was probably a young teenager, and had a good relationship with God. So here she is, a modern teenager (when she says ‘thank God’ she means it!), just home from school, when she has an unexpected visit.

How do you imagine angels to be? Have you ever seen one? (Lots of people claim they have met angels.)

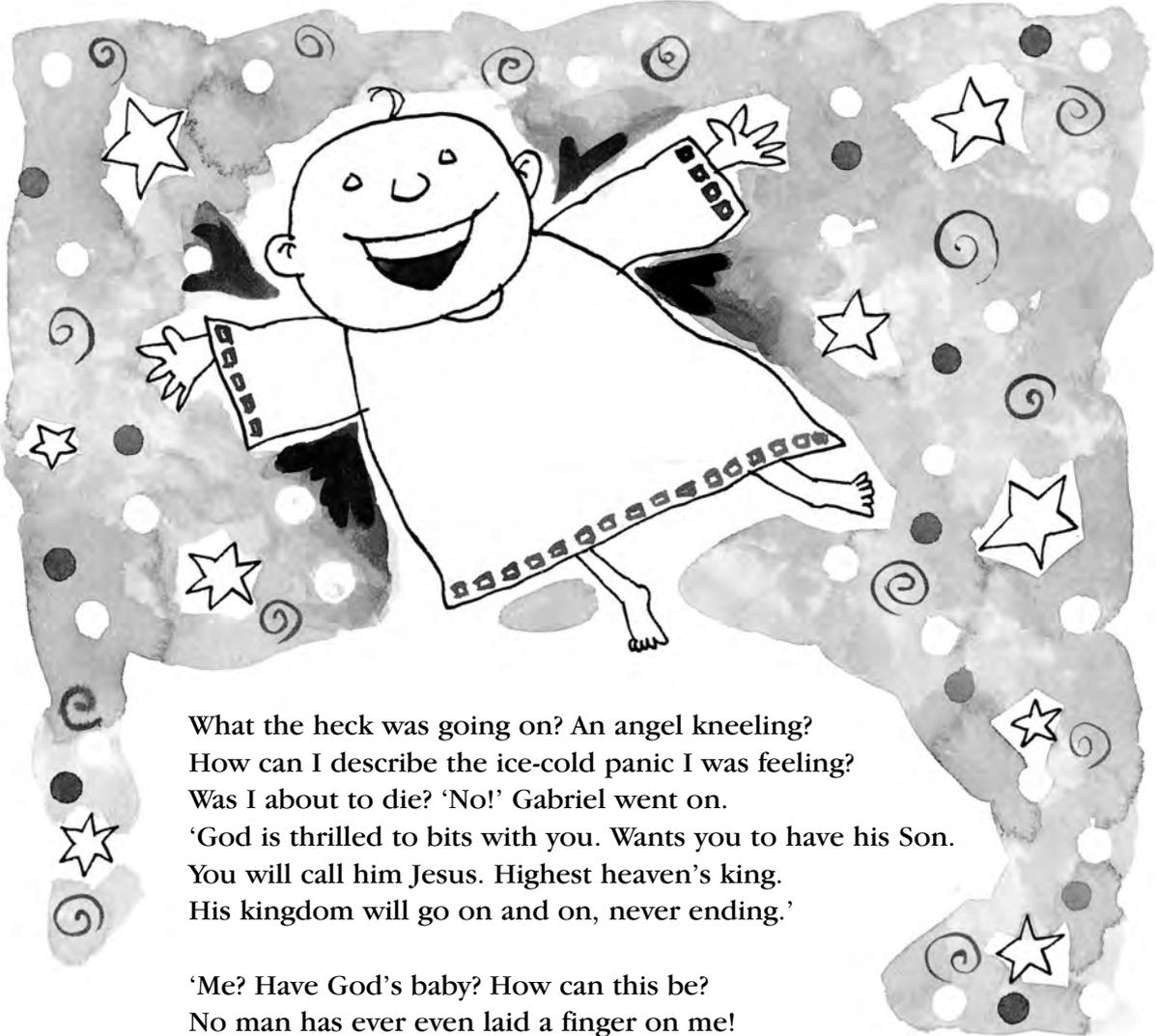
If you felt that God was calling you to a difficult, apparently impossible job that meant you’d be in danger, whispered about, gossiped about, cut off from your friends or worse, would you react like Mary? In the Bible she says, ‘I am the Lord’s servant! Let it happen as you have said.’ Can you think of a time when it hasn’t been easy to do what you believe is right?

Called goodbye to Kylie and Cherie.  
Unlocked the door—no one home but me.  
Made myself a milkshake, turned the CD up loud.  
No French homework, phew, thank God.  
And the Physics test was cancelled, even less to do.  
Loosened my tie and kicked off my shoes.  
Turned to get my magazine but stopped. Phased.  
This angel was staring me right in the face.

I'm not talking a fairy off a Christmas tree.  
This angel stooped to fit the room—was eight foot two or three,  
Muscles like a fireman. If he'd spread his wings out more  
They'd have smashed out both the window and the door.  
Towering over me, shoulders arched high,  
One flick of his finger and I'd be splatted like a fly.  
The CD stopped. Felt like the silent room would burst.  
Should you scream or pray at times like this? But Gabriel moved first.  
Dropped down to his knees and bowed his head before me  
And spoke—his voice like Andrex—some words to reassure me:

'Mary, feel God showering down on you like a rainbow.  
The Lord is with you, by you, around you, in you.  
Bask in him, dance with him, spin in him,  
Relax into the peace he's bringing.'





What the heck was going on? An angel kneeling?  
How can I describe the ice-cold panic I was feeling?  
Was I about to die? 'No!' Gabriel went on.  
'God is thrilled to bits with you. Wants you to have his Son.  
You will call him Jesus. Highest heaven's king.  
His kingdom will go on and on, never ending.'

'Me? Have God's baby? How can this be?  
No man has ever even laid a finger on me!  
I'm not married, though I'm going steady—  
Hang on a minute—I don't think I'm ready...'

Gabriel rose up from the floor and spread his wings around me.  
I thought that I'd drown in their perfume. Heaven surrounded me.  
The white wings blinded, dazzled, and like widescreen there I saw  
If I said 'yes', visions of glory, pain, the agony in store.

'God's Spirit will come down to you  
And his power will come to rest in you.'  
And I nodded, safe in that feather-light cuddle,  
Certain that God would sort out the muddle  
I knew was to come. 'I am in God's hands.  
Whatever you say. Whatever he wants.'

And I was alone in the room once more  
With a song on the hi-fi that I'd never heard before.