



*A small village nestled high up in the mountains had developed over the centuries a series of traditions by which they marked Advent every year.*

*All the men in the village used to dress up as shepherds and bring symbols of their trades to the little village church, as gifts for the Christ-child. The gifts were then distributed beyond the village, to people in need. Similarly all the women dressed up as midwives and brought gifts to the church, appropriate for a young child, which were distrusted in the same way.*

*All the young people, on finishing their education set out on a journey, as if following a star, to places well beyond the village to learn of different cultures, and they returned bringing new wisdom.*

*The young children created a nativity scene for all to see in the Christmas Day service in the church. And all the elderly women and men prepared food and drink that they would bring to the church for a gathering in which, like Simeon and Anna, they would share how God had spoken to them through their lives and especially in the past year, and share their dreams and hopes for the future.*

*But gradually, over the years, life in the village changed and these traditions fell away and were forgotten. People no longer brought their gifts to be shared, the young people lost interest in the wisdom of other cultures, and the elderly simply lost interest.*

*The village priest knelt and prayed each day in Advent, telling God of his sadness & despair: "what have I done wrong?", he asked God. And one day, to his surprise God answered him. "You have done nothing wrong. People may no longer bring their gifts to be shared. But I still come and share my gift with them. Listen to the young children, they still tell My story. In their innocence they will keep it alive. Trust them as I do."*