



# From our Churches

*Author: Lynette Schroeder Wiebe*

*Church: Charleswood Mennonite Church*

*Date: Christmas Eve*

---

This resource is part of a larger **From Our Churches** archives available as an inspirational resource to teachers, ministers and others of Mennonite Church Canada. Posted by permission of the author. Permission to reproduce and distribute is granted.

## O Holy Night

A Christmas Eve, Candle-light service

**Hymns** taken from *Hymnal: A Worship Book (HWB)*

### Participants:

Leader: (opens and closes the evening)	Innkeeper
Narrator (reads the Biblical passages throughout)	Mary
3 Readers	Shepherd
Joseph	

### Ingredients:

- Instrumental prelude – *(vocal or instrumental solo or group of instruments play O Holy Night as people file into church with candles & then plays again as people file out, following the singing of Silent Night at the benediction)*
- Candles *(lit at the church door and given one or two per family—making sure that smaller children share with a grownup)*
- Hymnal *(for every other person—have them hold the music for those holding candles)*
- Fire extinguishers *(any time there are candles in church, this is a MUST)*
- Readers *(at music stands lit by a candle or music light - candle being held by a helper)*
- Characters *(spot light or separate area light and microphone for Joseph, Innkeeper, Mary and Shepherd – they come up just before their lines)*
- Costumes *(Joseph, Mary, Shepherd and Innkeeper could use a shawl or cloak – optional)*
- Posted hymn order (with specific verses marked) – where people can see it. *(no speaking is them required to begin the singing – the introduction is played, and the congregation comes in naturally)*
- 10 copies of the script – each participant and the pianist (an instrumental group could share one script or be given a list of cues)
- Hymns are listed but can be replaced with other favourites, or special music available in your congregation

**Prelude** – during candle lighting and entering sanctuary

**Leader:** The world waits in darkness for the light of the world to come!  
Let us sing together and join with the children of Israel to call for the coming of the Messiah.

**Hymn:** #172 *O come, O come, Immanuel*  
(solo instrument once through first, then congregation joins)

**Leader:** As we now extinguish our candles, we remember the darkness that engulfed the people of Israel. We listen to the longing in our hearts of those waiting for Emmanuel, God with us.

**Narrator:** Israel bends under Roman rule.  
Everywhere there is unrest and uncertainty.  
What new rules and regulations will apply to the people of Israel at the capricious will of the Roman Emperor?  
The people remember the prophecies of old, and wait. They remind each other that the day is coming when the God of Israel will send them a Saviour, a liberator – one who will free them and set in motion a path to liberty and justice.

**Hymn:** #174 *Bless'd be the God of Israel*

**Narrator:** *In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.*

**R1:** Registration

**R2:** Taxation

**R3:** Enrollment

**R1:** Involvement

**R2:** In government

**R3:** Intolerant?

**R1:** And without choice, the people came down from the hills,  
left their villages,  
and started along the roads – each to their own city  
to be registered.

**R2:** They picked up sleeping children,  
gathered their food and their blankets  
and began the journey “home.”

**R3:** The ways were narrow and rough,  
the paths full of stumbling.  
The night winds whispered the fear of darkness  
and stirred the uncertainty of their steps.

**Hymn: #211 Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming**

**Narrator:** *Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.*

**R2:** A royal line.  
The blood and lineage of David!  
The house and family of David.

**R3:** The founder on which was built a royal lineage,  
Full of promise  
Full of prophecy.

**R1:** David.  
A king.  
God's chosen one;  
Sitting in judgement...  
Great and mighty.

**Joseph:**  
Not like me at all is he?  
David was not just a man,  
but someone who was called by God –  
by the words of prophecy and the reflection of purpose in the history of Israel.  
And I am of that same lineage.  
See my worn clothes?  
Don't I look like I am a descendant of a King?  
King David, no less?  
Do you think that King David ever wore brown? *(or any drab colour being used)*  
Sometimes I think that if I were truly of David's line  
I should have more to offer Mary.  
More than a donkey,  
a dark cold night,  
stony roads,  
and no comfort for her aching back.

How far **is** it to Bethlehem?  
The hills go on and on.  
Can the God who made these hills  
want Mary to suffer each stone and donkey stumble?  
Will we get there tonight,  
or will the darkness overtake us and leave us without shelter, or warmth, or safety.

**Narrator:** *He went with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*

**Hymn: #180 The angel Gabriel**

**Mary:**

I know you are there God,  
Somewhere in the distance, beyond the stars.

I saw your messenger,  
the flurry of ice and wind and holy breath  
and I am convinced that this child I carry  
is yours,  
coming to work your purpose here.  
Whatever that purpose is.

I only know that my back hurts.  
Is it really possible for me to have this child you have given me?  
How will I be able to manage, without my mother or my sisters to help –  
with only Joseph, who looks more lost and worried with each step of this poor donkey.

How did you decide to use me, God?  
Are you near enough to know how hard this is?  
Do you realize how much Joseph has struggled with the knowledge that I am pregnant?  
Not his child, but yours.  
Not a child with no past and no set future;  
for us to shape and nurture –  
but a child of mystery and myth –  
a miracle even I am unable to fathom.  
How will we do it?  
Raise our child to be good and kind, knowing that your eternal eyes are there;  
A divine seed inside a small screaming bundle.

**Hymn:** #178 *Come, thou long-expected Jesus*

**Narrator:** *While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.*

**R1:** The time came.

**R2:** Time.

**R3:** It comes whether we are ready or not.

**R1:** Time to get up.

**R2:** Time to go.

**R3:** Time to finish whatever it is you are doing and move on.

**R1:** Time to dance.

**R2:** Time to laugh.

**R1:** Time to groan.

**R2:** Time to breathe.

**R3:** Time to suffer.

**R1:** Time to down in pain,

And pray to surface in peace.

**R2:** Time to deliver her child.  
**R3:** to deliver:  
**R1:** to surrender, to bring, to transport  
**R2:** Give forth  
**R3:** Produce  
**R1:** Set free.

**R3:** Delivered from the depths of God's knowledge,  
to the uncertain habitation of humanity.  
**R1:** Time to move on,  
Move forward.  
**R2:** Move toward life.  
**R3:** A new life,  
brought by a child.

***Hymn:** #181 My soul proclaims with wonder*

**Narrator:** *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 room for them at the inn.*

**Innkeeper:**

There **was** no room.  
Really – I could do nothing for them!  
Could I put **out** other families staying here?  
They were tired too – but not in labour like the woman I put in the shed – so pale and tired,  
and in pain.  
I guess the shed was better than nothing – but not enough.  
We are so crowded here tonight, even the chickens are complaining.  
They get stepped on and moved from their favourite laying places.

Bethlehem has never seen so many dirty, tired, worn-out and anxious people.  
It's not a travelling party anymore.  
There is no singing along the road, with animated stories of growing up in another town.  
Now, everyone just wants a place to lay their heads after dealing with the dust  
and the bitter wind.  
I hope the shed is warm enough; and the straw enough to keep away the chill.  
It's clear tonight.  
The stars are bright.  
But the wind is bitter.  
Bethlehem sleeps.

***Hymn:** #182 O, how shall I receive thee*

**Narrator:** *And there were in that country  
Shepherds abiding in the fields*

**R1:** Abiding  
**R2:** staying  
**R3:** waiting  
**R1:** continuing to be sure and firm  
**R2:** conforming to  
**R3:** complying with  
**R1:** Yes – abiding.

**R1, R2, & R3:** Keeping watch over their flocks by night.

**R1:** Sitting on the rocky slopes;  
Waiting and watching.  
**R2:** Seeing nothing  
**R3:** Watching nothing.

**R1:** But never resting their vigilance.  
**R2:** The wolves could snatch away their newborn lambs.  
**R3:** The sheep could wander off,  
trap themselves in bramble,  
and struggle themselves to death.

**R1, R2, & R3:** So they watched.

**Narrator:** *Keeping watch over their flock by night.*

**R1:** Not a job of daylight hours.  
No 8 hour shifts.  
No rolling out of bed at 7 AM  
to hot coffee and breakfast rolls,  
hot from the toaster oven.

**R2:** No... - keeping watch at night.  
A night where insects fall silent,  
fingers of cold creep along the spine,  
and fingertips tremble.

**R3:** Watching.  
Hoping something will happen –  
and yet hoping that whatever happens  
it will not mean fewer sheep on the hillside,  
or less meat in the pot over the fire.

**R1:** Tonight, the watching has a metallic taste in the back of the throat,  
a buzz or wondering;  
not a noise, but a motion,  
a blurring of the senses;  
a rapid fluttering of winds and wings.

**Narrator:** *Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified*

**Shepherd:**

My God, why are you doing this to us?  
We are humble and poor, looking only to keep our sheep in safety.  
Do not punish us  
Do not curse us with your holy wrath!  
What have we done to make you send this host upon us?

Are these angels?

Have you sent your messengers to us on purpose?  
or was it a divine mistake of sorts?  
Do you know that we are despised?  
People scoff at us in the towns,  
they say we are dirty and uneducated –  
certainly not visited by angels!  
Why do you come here –  
to this windswept, star-studded hillside?

**Narrator:** *But the angel said to them “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

**R1:** The anticipated deliverer,  
**R2:** the long awaited leader of God’s people;  
**R3:** who comes bringing freedom  
**R1:** and hope and vision to a dark and trembling world

**R2:** King of the Jews.

**R3:** Jesus.

**R1:** Saviour.

**R2:** Liberator

**Narrator:** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: **Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours.**

**Hymn:** #201 Hark! The herald angels sing

**Narrator:** *When the angels had left them and gone to heaven, the shepherd said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

**R1:** And the despised ones  
The dirty, ragged, cold and fearful folk of the hillsides  
Looked at each other, and at the empty skies,  
Echoing with silence.

**R2:** They wondered  
**R3:** They marvelled.

**R1:** They were filled with curiosity  
**R2:** filled with doubt;  
**R3:** surprised.  
**R1:** astonished,  
**R2:** delighted  
**R3:** that they were to witness this wonder  
and bear the news of such joy.

**R1:** They picked up their feet, gathered their robes about them,  
and hurried into the night  
looking ahead to the flickering points of light  
that marked the sleeping Bethlehem.

**Narrator:** *So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in a manger.*

**R2:** And it was, just as the angel had told them.  
The child, soft and warm in his mother's arms –  
She, aglow with the light of wonder;  
A miracle in her arms –  
Shining in the darkness, a child that would change the world –  
Life by life.

**Hymn:** #206 *Infant holy, infant lowly*

**R3:** The child that would change the world.  
The shepherds knew.  
They were already changed.

**R1:** The kings would be changed.  
**R2:** Even the night had changed.  
**R3:** The stars rang with a new joy.  
The light held a new intensity.

**R1:** Changed – the hillside, the night, the shepherds, the mother, the father, the innkeeper,  
the air – the earth, and all things:  
**R2:** Modified  
**R3:** Become different.  
**R1:** Transformed.  
**R2:** Altered.  
**R1:** Each one – each point of light – each person – each life –  
touched by the child.  
Changed.

**Narrator:** *When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.*

**Hymn:** #212 *O Come, all ye faithful*

**R1:** Could anyone not be amazed?

**R2:** Could angels in their fearsomeness be wrong?

**R3:** Could anyone doubt that the prophecy of old was being fulfilled?

**R1:** Here was God's message to the world –  
the sinful, hurting, cold and dreary world.

**R2:** A message of hope and wonder – of light and joy.

**R3:** A message not only meant for might leaders and famous people, but a message for shepherds and innkeepers, for tax collectors and lepers,

**R1:** In the form of a child.

**R2:** A soft, warm, trusting, loving, new life.

**R1:** Come to bring new life.

**Hymn:** #194 *Away in a manger*

**Narrator:** *But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.*

R1: Treasured them.

Mary treasured these words.

R2: Prized them.

R3: Cherished them.

R1: Pondered them in her heart.

Stored them away for the days of darkness and uncertainty;

wrapped them in significance and tucked them into the recesses of her heart,  
where time and turmoil would leave them unscathed;

Waiting for the time which would surely come

the long expected Kingdom

when God's covenant with Israel would extend to all people.

**Hymn:** #213 *Let all together praise our God*

**Narrator:** *The Shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

**R1:** And so we return

Glorifying and praising God for what we have seen and heard.

**R2:** We return year after year,

**R3:** to the manger,

**R1:** to the shepherds,

**R2:** to Mary and Joseph,

**R3:** to the Kings,

**R1:** to the child.

**Narrator:** *For it has been told us once again,  
“to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

**R1:** And in the silence after the angels have gone;  
The echoes of holiness linger on in the still night air.

**R2:** The silence rings

**R3:** The silence reigns

**R1:** And God is there.

**R2:** The eternal Word

**R3:** The endless silence

**R1:** The everlasting hope.

**R2:** The infinite love.

**R3:** The timeless Truth.

**Leader:** The music of the spheres tuned itself to the birth of the Christ child.  
In the silence after the angels departed, the hills echoed with the fragile, newly born strains of hope and joy.

We tune ourselves to Christ’s working in our lives – and the melody is the gift of love.

As we file by the Christ candle, beginning at the centre aisle, and light our own small flames, we can rejoice that we can share the light.

As we encircle the church, mindful of the lights around us, let us remember that the encircling love of God is around each of us.

The resonance of love moves through our hearts and around this fellowship as we listen to the familiar songs of Christmas. When all the candles are lit and we have circled the sanctuary, let us join together to sing Silent Night.

**Hymn:** #193 *Silent Night*

**Leader:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with all of you on this holy night,  
and in the days to come.

Go in peace.

**Instrumental postlude** (*O Holy Night*)