

From our Churches

Author: Ray Friesen

Church: Zion Mennonite Church

Date: Christmas 2003

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.

Do You See What I See?

A Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Here is my submission of a piece that can be used by the missional church. It is a Christmas Eve candle light service. I attempted to do a few things"

- 1. Be culturally relevant, using Harry Potter as a starting point. I realize Harry Potter has caused some controversy, but in our congregation, most kids & teens and even some adults are reading the books. I think it important to try and hook into the things that catch the imagination of the people we wish to communicate with.*
- 2. Hope to catch the imagination of the children and adults.*
- 3. Be "missional." Invite people to see God at work, even in unexpected places.*
- 4. I wanted to be both evangelistic and yet not "in your face," and at the same time encourage long-time Christians to look again to see what they are missing*

Some production notes:

- 1. The choir songs were chosen based on the repertoire of our choir. If your choir has other songs they want to use, make the changes. The same is true of whether you use a choir or small group.*
- 2. Where the scene changes happen we played a recording of Christy Lane. Use another recording or live solo or group (marked Group/tape/CD in the script).*
- 3. The lighting and stage area instructions made sense for our building. Make the adaptations to fit your facility.*
- 4. On page 8 Reader 2 speaks the words of the angel chorus, "Glory to God..." I think if there was an appropriate choir piece that could be used instead, that would be wonderful.*
- 5. Grandfather. I had a grandfather read the Christmas story to create the effect of grandparents passing on to their children the important stories of faith. We have a grandparent read the Luke 2 story each year and alternate between grandfather and grandmother. The year we presented this service (2002) it was a grandfather's turn.*
- 6. After the play, the wise men and shepherds light their candle at the Christ candle and then light the candles of the audience. This hopefully communicates that the ones who first saw the Christ Child, spread the news and told others.*
- 7. We used PowerPoint. The pictures were taken in a living room, suitably decorated. We had the same people in the picture who were reading the father/daughter/mother parts in the script. Another option is to use slides. A third is to use live actors. This would require some decorating and memorizing, as well as changes in the staging instructions to accommodate. But, it would be great.*

8. *We do a carol sing by candle light at the end. Since having purchased the necessary equipment, we project the words onto a screen using PowerPoint and so do not need hymnals.*
9. *I have put a copyright symbol on the script so I maintain some control over what happens to materials I write. However, feel free to make copies of the script and use this material in your congregations. If you know of others who want to use it, they are free to use it as well. I ask only that they let me know that they have used it (just my curiosity as to what happens to stuff I “throw out there.”)*

My hope in sharing this is that you will find it a means of making Christmas meaningful for the people of your congregation.

(Have table centre stage, toward the back with 4 Advent candles and a larger Christ candle, all lit throughout the service)

Congregation: *Angels from the realms of glory*

Welcome

(sanctuary lights off)

Choir: *The Messiah*
When will we see the little one?

Group: *Do you hear what I hear?*

PowerPoint picture: *Parent and daughter are sitting by a fireplace, decorated for Christmas, with a tree in the corner.*

DAUGHTER: Dad, I like this time of the year. Snow outside is sparkling, lights on the tree twinkling, the fire crackling. It feels like magic.

FATHER: It does, doesn't it? Like things could happen, just like that, out of the blue. Not scary things like at Halloween but good things, things that don't happen any other time. Like, we just have to look, and we will see things we've never seen before.

DAUGHTER: Like angles?

FATHER: Maybe.

DAUGHTER: Ah, you're just joking. Things like that don't happen.

FATHER: Don't be so sure...

DAUGHTER: Dad, would you read to me?

FATHER: Sure, what would you like me to read?

DAUGHTER: Would you read *Harry Potter* again?

FATHER: You really like *Harry Potter*, don't you?

DAUGHTER: I do! It's all about magic, and things start to happen. In *Harry Potter* things do appear all of a sudden, but some people don't see them.

FATHER: Sure, I'll read *Harry Potter* again.

(Read from Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, (Raincoast Books, 1997) pages 7 & 8. I suggest two sections. One: "Mr and Mrs Dursely, of number four,...such nonsense. Two: "When Mr and Mrs Dursely woke...past the window.")

DAUGHTER: They were real Muggles, weren't they?

PowerPoint – same scene but with Mother as well.

MOTHER: What are Muggles?

DAUGHTER: Mooom!!

MOTHER: Just curious. I've heard you and Dad talking about Muggles before and wondered what they were.

FATHER: Why don't you tell Mommy what Muggles are?

DAUGHTER: In Harry Potter, Muggles are people who don't want to see the magic. They just live plain ordinary lives, and miss all the fun, exciting stuff that happens to Harry Potter. When they do see the magic, they try to pretend it isn't there. Sometimes they try to stop it.

FATHER: Good thing Mary wasn't a Muggle.

DAUGHTER: It's Harry, Dad, not Mary.

FATHER: No, I mean it. Good thing Mary wasn't a Muggle, or else Christmas might have been postponed and she would have missed it.

DAUGHTER: What's Christmas and Mary got to do with being or not being a Muggle?

FATHER: If Mary had been a Muggle, if she had refused to believe in things other than the normal, everyday, God would have had to make new plans, maybe even postpone Christmas, and Mary would have missed it.

DAUGHTER: Whaaaat?

FATHER: Listen, and watch.

PowerPoint – scene fades

Group/tape/CD: Do you see what I see? Vs. 1

On stage Mary sits in rocking chair, with cloth as if sewing, stage left.

R1: In the spring of the year 4 B.C., a young girl sat in her room, sewing and daydreaming. What would it be like to be married, to Joseph, tall, strong quiet Joseph? As she mused, her sewing stopped, a smile shaped her lips, a smile that came from a heart deeply in love.

PowerPoint – angel looking at Mary

R1: And then Mary looked up with a start. Something was different. The light, or maybe it was a noise, but something was different. She looked around and gasped in fear. She couldn't breathe. She couldn't scream. She couldn't move.

Hymn: *The angel Gabriel* vs. 1 & 2

R2: "Don't be afraid," the angel said. "God has his eye on you and has chosen you for something special. Nine months from now, you will have a baby, a special baby. You will call him Jesus and he will do things never done before, teach things never heard before, help God's people in ways they never even dreamed of. He will be the king everyone has waited for."

R1: Mary was confused. None of this made sense. Her, have a baby? How could this be? She had never been with a man in that way. The angel must be mistaken. This must be a dream.

R2: "It's no dream," the angel said. "This is God's work and God is not stuck to normal ways. When God is at work, strange things happen, things you never dreamed possible. Believe it Mary. Don't be a Muggle."

Hymn: *The angel Gabriel*, vs. 3

PowerPoint – *angel fades and parent/child scene returns.*

Mary exits. Lights off

DAUGHTER: The angel didn't say, "Don't be a Muggle."

FATHER: Okay, maybe the angel didn't say that. But, do you see now what I mean when I said, "good thing Mary wasn't a Muggle?"

DAUGHTER: Is there really another world, like in *Harry Potter*, from which angels come and God talks?

FATHER: What do you think? Oh, listen and watch. Here's another story.

Group/tape/CD: *Do you see what I see?* vs. 1

PowerPoint – *scene fades. Joseph takes his place, sleeping on floor, tossing and turning, stage right.*

R2: A week later, in the same village of Nazareth, a young carpenter was tossing and turning on his mat. Sleep seemed long in coming. His mind was just a whirl. His heart ached

with a pain he had never felt before. His dreams of marrying the prettiest girl in the village lay shattered, like a clay pot thrown from the window.

Anger, grief, love, pain. They took turns overwhelming him. How could Mary have done this to him? And then, this story about God making her pregnant. As far as he knew, God had always needed a man's help to make a woman pregnant.

By rights he could break the engagement and publicly shame Mary. But, he loved her. how could he do this to her? Yet marriage wasn't an option any more either. He would break the engagement, but privately, and leave Mary whatever dignity she might have left.

PowerPoint – angel

R1: Joseph sat up with a start. Something wasn't right. A brightness filled the room, like the moon was hanging in his window. He rubbed his eyes. Was this a dream? A vision? The end of the world? And then he saw it, her, him, a person, something, taking shape in the light. An angel!

R2: "Joseph," the angel said. "Sorry for listening in on your thinking, but this thing with Mary, you've got a problem, a big problem."

R1: No kidding.

R2: Listen, Joseph. I've got your solution. Don't be a Muggle now, this comes straight from the Head Guy himself – God. Mary is right. God did this. God is her baby's father. Here's what God wants you to do. Marry the woman, for goodness sake. You love her and together with her, God's got a job for you to do. That baby needs a father on earth – you. You've got to name him – name him Jesus. Raise him. Teach him how to build furniture. Teach him to be a man. It's a big job.

R1: No kidding.

R2: And, one more thing, every time you see your son – he'll be your son – every time you see your son, remember, it's God visiting your village.

PowerPoint – angel disappears

Joseph exits. Lights off

Song: Love came down at Christmas time

PowerPoint – father and daughter

DAUGHTER: Good thing Joseph wasn't a Muggle.

FATHER: You're right. He could have easily said, "Aah, it's just a dream." Then he would have never married Mary. He would have never been Jesus' father. Imagine what he would have missed. God would have visited Joseph's village, and Joseph would have missed it all.

DAUGHTER: You think we're missing God by not taking note, by being Muggles?

FATHER: Maybe, but listen, there's more story.

PowerPoint – scene fades

Group/tape/CD: *Do you hear what I hear?* vs. 2

Shepherds take their place, with a few blocks of firewood over a red/orange light – a fire, stage right.

R1: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field,...

DAUGHTER: What's "abiding"?

R1: What? Abiding? Well, its, er, its...

R2: Here, let me tell the story. On the rolling hills outside the village of Bethlehem shepherds were grazing their sheep. Many would stay out in the fields with the sheep at night, keeping a lookout for animals and sheep rustlers. Watching sheep at night meant trying to stay awake. It meant trying to keep warm. Sheepskin coats helped. A small fire helped. So did a little jug they passed from shepherd to shepherd.

R1: Even so, Jake and Sam found the night watch long. Sleep had a way of sneaking up on them. A two-minute nap wouldn't hurt. There was no one anywhere close.

PowerPoint – angel

R2: Jake jerked awake. Oooh, he had liked the jug too much. He was seeing things. But then, he saw Same was also looking, mouth wide open.

R1: "This ain't the jug, Jake," Same said. "This is for real."

R2: "Can't be," Jake said. "Angles only visit priests and prophets. You know, ain't neither one of us ever going to be no priest or prophet. Only good guys get those jobs."

R1: "Don't know about no priests or prophets," Sam replied, "but this thing is real. Don't be a stupid Muggle. Look, it's going to talk."

R2: "Don't be afraid," the angel said.

R1: Yah, right! Don't be afraid. Jake's knees were shaking so bad he thought he would dislocate one. His teeth were just a hammering and even his goosebumps had goosebumps.

R2: Don't be afraid. I've got the best news you guys are ever going to hear. God has decided to pay a visit and he wants you at the party.

R1: By now Sam had got his wits back/ "Scuse me, your honour or your highness or your, well, whatever, but you must have the wrong guys. Jake and me here, we ain't no priests or prophets. We're just ordinary shepherds, and to be honest, we like the jug too much and don't make it to synagogue much."

R2: There's been no mistake, the angel answered. God was clear, very clear about this one. I checked it myself because I wasn't about to believe it either. But, God said – It's Jake and Sam, the shepherds outside of Bethlehem, I want them there when I visit Planet Earth. So listen up. Go to Bethlehem. When you get there, find the inn, but don't go inside. It's just filled with sleeping Muggles. Go to the stable behind the inn. Open the door slowly and enter quietly. Inside you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, sleeping in the manger. That's it! That's God visiting Bethlehem, God, in fact, visiting the whole world.

R1: Suddenly, there was a whole choir of angels in the sky, bursting into song.

R2: Glory to God in the highest heavens and Peace on earth among all people God loves.

R1: Then the angels were gone and the darkness surrounded the stunned shepherds. For a moment all was silent. Then they jumped up in excitement. God was in Bethlehem, sleeping in a manger. They were going to get to see God, tonight, in Bethlehem, in a manger. There was no time to waste. They were headed for Bethlehem.

Shepherds exit. Lights off

PowerPoint – *father and daughter*

DAUGHTER: Whew, I bet it was hard for Jake and Sam to believe this was really happening.

FATHER: I think so. But, they believed, and just think what they saw because they believed there was more than just sheep and grass and tomorrow's breakfast. They believed God could send angels and God could visit.

DAUGHTER: God in a manger? This is even stranger than *Harry Potter*, and more exciting. This is real.

FATHER: That it is. But, listen, the story's not done.

PowerPoint – *scene fades*

Group/tape/CD: Do you see what I see? vs. 3

Wise men take their place, with telescope, stage right

R1: Miles to the east, days of travel, in fact, by camel, it could take a year or more, easy, a couple of men were studying the stars. These men could not get enough of studying because every day brought new insights, every night new discoveries. By day they would read books,

all the books they could get their hands on. At night they studied the stars, mapping them, charting them, naming them, finding new ones.

DAUGHTER: When did they sleep or watch TV?

R1: They didn't need TV. I don't know when they slept.

R2: One night they both saw it at the same time.

PowerPoint – star

R2: In the west, low on the horizon, a star they had never seen before. As they looked, it grew brighter, and seemed to beckon them. Quickly one of them grabbed a book they had often read over the last 10 years, and found the page. There it was, the text about a star marking the birth of a king. This had to be it.

Wise men exit

R2: Within a week, they were ready and they set out. However long it took, they were going to find this king. All their studying had not closed their minds to the idea of a world bigger than what could be seen. They knew God could still break in and make things happen. They knew things were not always what they seemed. They knew, and because they knew there was more to this world than first met the eye, they were about to see something many people did not get to see...God visiting, God in a manger.

Men's group: *The Star and the Wise Men*

Lights off

PowerPoint – father and daughter

DAUGHTER: The wise men weren't Muggles.

FATHER: They sure weren't. Good thing for them, or they would have known everything there was to know, except what was most important to know.

DAUGHTER: I bet there is one more part to the story, the best part.

FATHER: There sure is. Let's watch.

*Screen goes up, choir moves to choir loft and nativity scene forms on stage. All the while organ plays "Do you see what I see?"
Lights on nativity scene*

Solo: *O Holy Night*

Choir and audience: *Joy to the World* vs. 1

Choir: *Rejoice*

Soloist (*From back, invites children to join her, then sings “O Come All Ye Children” as she walks down aisle and gathers children around her. They gather around the manger.*)

Grandfather: Luke 2:1-20

Children & Congregation: *Away in a Manger*

Children, soloist and grandfather return to seats

Choir: 2 pieces

Nativity scene leaves, except for manger

R2: Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, they all saw what many would have loved to have seen. They got to be part of the greatest event ever, because they were willing to open their eyes and ears, willing to open their hearts and minds, to life being more than what is usual and normal.

R1: “If I had been out on the hills of Bethlehem on the night of the birth of Christ, I think that I should not have heard the angels singing. The reason why I think so is that I do not hear them now, and there is no reason to suppose that they have stopped.”¹

R2: Would you have heard the angels, believed their unbelievable story, taken their unreasonable advice? Do you hear them today?

Choir: *It came upon a midnight clear*

R1: This Christmas, don't be a Muggle. Open yourself to what can be. God still visits. Angels still sing. Stars still shine. See them. Hear the music. Believe the story. Welcome the visit.

R2: Let Christmas and a visit from God change your life as it did Joseph's and Mary's. Let it fill your life with singing and dancing as it did the shepherds. Let it make sense of life for you, like it did for the wise men.

R1: As the shepherds and wise men share the light of Christ with you, let its warmth fill your heart and its glow light your path, making it possible for you to see what you may never have seen before, or to see again the extraordinary things God is doing in your world.

Organ: *What Child is This* *Choir makes its way out of choir loft; duet prepares to sing and shepherds and wise men prepare to light candles.*

Duet: We light 1000 candles bright

Light congregational candles

Carol singing

¹ Northrope Frey as quoted by Henry Paetkau in his December 2002 letter to Mennonite Church Canada pastors.