

On the Journey of 'God With Us'

An Inter-generational Christmas Pageant/Worship Service

Opening Ritual and Litany

Invite a child to light the Advent candles before participating in this brief litany

Leader: We light these candles because Jesus brings light into darkness. We welcome the light of Jesus in our lives.

All: **Oh God, prepare our hearts and our eyes to discover the light of Jesus around us.**

(Time for silent reflection)

All: Amen

Suggested Songs:

Jubilee, God's Good News, Middler Teacher's Guide 94 The Advent Candle Song
Hymnal Worship Book 178 Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Introduction:

This Advent/Christmas season, we gather to remember the important salvation stories that surround the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will begin this narrative journey and prepare our hearts to receive the story of the birth of Jesus by remembering some of his ancestors. Families often include people from other nationalities who choose to join us. Think of how our Mennonite faith family has been enriched by people of many nationalities who have chosen to become Mennonite. Jesus' family also had a mixed ethnic heritage and included Ruth, a Moabite ancestor who chose to become part of God's family, and became a great blessing for the whole family of faith.

Scene 1: A Family for Jesus

Scripture Texts:

Ruth 4:13-17 and Matthew 1:1-17

- **Story Focus:** Jesus' family tree includes those who choose to join God's family.
- **Faith Focus:** Our families are important – even our great grandmothers
- **CASTING:** This scene lends itself to presentation by the Primary (K-2) age level, with teachers or gifted readers providing narration.
- **Format:** Narrated pantomime for 11 mimes, plus narrator(s).
- **Preparation:** Prepare a baby doll and name tags for Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, Josiah, Zerubbabel, Eliud, Joseph, Mary.

(Naomi, Ruth – with hidden baby, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David, Josiah, Zerubbabel, Eliud, Joseph, Mary are on stage)

Narrator: Ruth, the Moabite, was an ancestor who chose to become part of God's family. She has a whole book of the Bible dedicated to her story. Our pageant begins with Ruth's story.

(Ruth stands up, bows)

Many years ago, and far, far away, a woman named Ruth fell in love with and married Chilion, a man from Judah, who was making a living in her country of Moab because there was a drought in his homeland. His family loved and worshiped God but there was sickness around. Before they had any children, Ruth's husband died.

(Ruth hangs her head)

So did her father-in-law and her brother-in-law. Now there were three widows. Her sister-in-law went home to her parents, but Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law because she loved and served the God of the Israelites.

(Naomi stands up, hanging her head)

Ruth trusted God to help them. You see, in those days it was dangerous and difficult for women to live alone, so Ruth and Naomi went back to Judah, to the town of Bethlehem, to be with Naomi's relatives.

(Arm in arm, they make walking motions)

It was a long journey and Naomi was very sad, but she was comforted by the love and faith of her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Finally they reached family and

friends in Bethlehem. Ruth went to find food that was left in the field so they could eat.

(Ruth makes searching and gathering motions)

God was pleased with Ruth's faithfulness and brought to her a good man from Judah while she was gleaning the fields.

(Boaz stands up and bows, Naomi raises up her head)

His name was Boaz. Boaz loved God, and soon Boaz loved Ruth, too. They got married and had a son whom they named Obed.

(Ruth picks up the baby for Boaz to hold. Boaz hugs it and gives it to Naomi, who beams with joy)

Baby Obed grew up, married and had a baby named Jesse.

(Obed stands and receives the baby from Naomi)

Jesse grew up, married and had a baby named David.

(Jesse stands up and receives the baby from Obed)

Then he got married and had children...

(receives baby from Jesse)

...who grew up, got married and had children, who grew up and got married and had a baby named Josiah...

(stands up, bows and receives baby from David)

...who grew up, got married and had children, who grew up, got married and had a baby named Zerubbabel...

(stands up, bows, etc.)

...who grew up, got married and had children, who grew up, got married and had a baby named Eliud...

(stands up, bows, etc.)

...who grew up, got married and had children, who grew up, got married and had a baby named Joseph.

(Stands up, bows, etc.)

Joseph grew up and married Mary.

(She stands up, receives baby)

Joseph became the earthly father for Jesus.

Jesus, who had all these ancestors, is also the son of God, he is Christ, our Lord.

(Mary and Joseph hold the baby up in awe while all the ancestors bow around the Christ child).

Suggested Song:

Hymnal Worship Book 178 Come, thou long expected Jesus

Scene 2: Getting Ready for Jesus

Scripture Text:

Matthew 1:18-25

- **Story Focus:** *God told Joseph not to be afraid to marry Mary and to care for the baby Jesus.*
- **Faith Focus:** *God is with us in difficult situations.*
- **Casting:** *This scene is most appropriate for ages Junior Youth and up. Young Adults would probably be the most effective.*
- **Format:** *Dream dialogue for four.*
- **Preparation:** *Supply a cot and blanket for Joseph #1 to sleep on. Actors can be in traditional Christmas pageant wear.*

Introduction: Sometimes God expects us to do difficult things that require a lot of courage. Reflect on something courageous that God has expected of someone in your family. Did worrying about it keep them awake at night? Because we know the Christmas story so well, we sometimes forget how much courage and faith it took for Joseph to keep the engagement with Mary, his betrothed, after she told

him that she was pregnant but was still a virgin. In the following scene, Joseph has finally fallen asleep, but his worries are still with him in his dreams.

(Joseph is tossing in his sleep, stage right, while a 'dream Joseph' speaks, first with Mary and then with the angel)

Joseph: Mary, how could you do this to me? I would never have suspected that you, who seemed so sweet and pure, would cheat on me!

Mary: But Joseph, please believe me! I didn't cheat, it's like I told you! I was at prayer when this angel showed up and said I had found God's favor. The angel said God's Spirit would overshadow me and that's how the baby would begin growing. Believe me, I didn't cheat, but a baby is growing in me. *(Mary places hand on tummy)* It must be God's favor.

Joseph: Some favor! I'd like to give that angel a piece of my mind. If it really was God, surely he would have waited until we were married and saved us this disgrace.

(Mary fades back and the Angel steps forward)

Angel: So, Joseph, which piece of your mind would you like to give me?

Joseph: Huh? Who are you? Are you that same angel that Mary keeps talking about? *(Angel nods)* You are? *(Gulps)* Well, okay, I'll tell you. I'm not exactly impressed, no, I'm downright angry that my betrothed is pregnant, even if she is telling the truth and didn't cheat on me. What will people say? What's an honorable man to do? Mary is pregnant out of wedlock!

Angel: Well, that certainly is a good sized piece. But Joseph, you don't need to worry. You can be at peace instead. Mary didn't cheat. She did find God's favor, just like she told you. She's just as sweet and pure as you thought. God chose her to be the mother of his only son. And if God's Holy Spirit had waited until after the wedding, how would you know it was God's son? God's timing for the Messiah's arrival is now.

Joseph: The, the, the Messiah? The long awaited Messiah? *(Angel nods)* ...Then she is favored. But, but, but, my betrothed is still pregnant out of wedlock. What am I to do?

Angel: Well, it doesn't seem that difficult to me. Marry her. Soon. The sooner, the better. Then, after the wedding, maybe she'll want to go and help her cousin Elizabeth. She's having a special baby too, and at her age, she'll need some help. That way Mary will be out of the public view as the baby grows in her. And Joseph, the Holy Spirit that overshadowed her, will also give you peace as you parent the Messiah. By the way, it's up to you to name him. Check out the prophet Isaiah for help. Shalom.

(Angel and Joseph fade back while the real Joseph wakes up)

Real Joseph: What a sleep! I feel refreshed and calm. *(Joseph gets up and goes through washing and dressing motions as he speaks)* I wonder why? Oh, yes, I'm remembering now. I had a dream. Mary and I were quarreling and then this Angel appeared...So, Mary didn't cheat. She really is pregnant with the Messiah. And I was thinking of divorcing her? The Messiah, without an earthly father? No way! I'd better call the wedding planners, and, oh yes, I'm to pick a name...look in Isaiah...I think there was something about an ordinary name like Joshua or Jesus...I'll ask the others in the Synagogue next Sabbath, but now, I've got to go tell Mary all about my dream. Mary! Oh my sweet Mary!

(rushes off stage to find her)

Suggested Song

Hymnal Worship Book 182 Oh how shall I receive thee

Scene 3: Jesus is Born!

Scripture Text:

Luke 2:1-20

- **Story Focus:** *Hearing the good news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds, hurried to see Jesus.*
- **Faith Focus:** *We celebrate that Jesus is born.*
- **CASTING:** *Emperor's herald, Mary, Joseph, "donkey", three shepherds, angels – as many as practical. This text is well suited to being presented by children in the Middler (Grade 3-5) age range.*
- **Format:** *Drama for more than 6 actors.*
- **Preparation:** *Costuming is traditional. Mary should be wearing a 'snuggly' with a baby doll in it, but hiding it under a cloak until the 'birth'. You may want to add shepherd props and a stable.*

Introduction: Have you ever been asked to deliver an important message? The angels delivered a lot of important messages in the stories surrounding the birth of Jesus. Their messages were better news than the messages of the Emperor's messengers proclaimed in Nazareth and Bethlehem that year. Listen and compare them for yourself.

Emperor's herald:

Hear ye! Hear ye! The Emperor needs to know how many people are in his Empire. All must register for this census in their ancestral town. (*Aside*) This will make it so much easier to collect more taxes, heh – heh.

(Walks off stage, rubbing hands and chuckling)

Joseph: Mary, my poor tired Mary, did you hear this decree? This is the last thing you need.

Mary: Maybe it is what we need, Joseph. What did you find in the prophets about the Messiah's birth? Didn't you say there was mention of your ancestral town of Bethlehem?

Joseph: You're right! I had forgotten that. Well, I'll keep you as comfortable as I can and put extra blankets on our donkey. God will be with us on this journey.

Mary: *(nods and pats her big tummy before getting onto "donkey". She is wearing a cloth sling with a baby doll in it underneath her coat)* You are so right, Joseph.

(Mary and Joseph travel around the sanctuary while the congregation sings Hymnal Worship Book 175 O Savior, rend the heavens or 172 O come, O come, Immanuel)

Mary: *(sighing)* This has been a long trip. All those bumpy roads! And look at how full Bethlehem is! I sure hope you can find us a room. I'll rest here while you look.

Joseph: *(goes offstage to search and comes back with a frown)* Well Mary, I finally found us a shelter to stay in, but I'm warning you, it's not what we were hoping for.

Mary: As long as we get there, Joseph. Jesus is letting me know it's time for his entry.

Joseph: *(flustered)* Really? O my, oh my. Well then let's go and settle in. It's such a good thing we brought those extra blankets.

(They settle down on blankets, stage right. Mary removes her coat to reveal and cuddle the baby)

Suggested Song:

Hymnal Worship Book 173 Savior of the nations come, verse 1

Scene Change

Shepherd 1: *(stage left)* I sure hope our sheep don't get into any trouble with all those extra people the Emperor ordered to come to Bethlehem.

Shepherd 2: It's the extra dogs I worry about. Did he send the dogs to register, too?

Shepherd 3: Hey guys, look over there. *(points up)* Am I dreaming, or do you see what I see?

Shepherds 1&2: We see all right. Yikes! Heads down for cover!

Angel: Do not be afraid! *(aside)* Why are people so scared when I show up?...I've got much better news than that tax-happy, Emperor's herald. *(to shepherds)* I've got good news of great joy for all people. The Messiah has come, in Bethlehem. He's a baby in swaddling clothes, and he's lying in a cattle manger. This baby is here to save you, not tax you.

All Angels: *(stand up and recite or read Luke 2:11-14)*

Suggested Song:

Hymnal Worship Book 196 While shepherds watched (while the shepherds confer)

Shepherds: Let's go see this, man. This is awesome! *(they rush to Mary's side, and kneel before Jesus)*

Shepherd 1: *(whispering)* I can hardly wait to tell my family.

Shepherd 2: *(whispering)* Me, too. Just think, the angel told us first!

Shepherd 3: Shhh! Just look at him. Look at the Messiah. God with us.

(Mary smiles and pats him on the shoulder)

Joseph: *(beaming and whispering)* His name is Jesus!

(The Holy family should stay on stage for the next scene)

Suggested Songs:

Hymnal Worship Book 202 The virgin Mary had a baby boy, (change the reference in verse 3 from wise men to shepherds) and 201 Hark the herald Angels sing

Scene 4: Magi Search for a King

Scripture Text:

Matthew 2:1-15

- **Story Focus:** *The magi searched and found Jesus in Bethlehem; Joseph responded to a dream to protect Jesus.*
- **Faith Focus:** *We celebrate Jesus' birth in which foreign magi recognize Jesus as King.*
- **CASTING:** *Narrator, 2 magi, Casper and Melchior, King Herod, one Advisor, plus Mary, Joseph and the baby (from Scene 3). The script lends itself well to be played by Jr. Youth or middle aged adults.*
- **Format:** *Drama for narrator and 8 actors.*
- **Preparation:** *Select several appropriate backdrop slides and project them onto a wall behind but above the actors, changing them as the settings change. Having some props like scrolls, a throne and some gifts, would add to the scene, but they are not essential.*

Narrator's Introduction:

Have you learned anything new lately? Have you ever studied the stars? Studying stars led some ancient scholars from another land and culture to learn something new and to worship Jesus. They responded faithfully to God's call. We will worship Jesus with them today. I wonder what we can learn from cultures and people who are strange to us today.

While Mary, Joseph and Jesus were still in Bethlehem, these ancient scholars called magi came to visit. Watch, listen and learn.

Casper: Melchior, my friend and fellow scholar, do you see that unusual star? What might that be a portent of? Does it tell of fortune or woe?

Melchior: Well Casper, I remember reading something of a divining star in the scrolls of the distant Hebrews. Now, where in this library of ours will we find that set of scrolls?

Narrator: They searched frantically. Finally they found the scrolls and buried their heads in them, eager to learn something new.

Casper: I think I've found it, my friend! It says here in the scroll of Numbers that a righteous star will come out of Jacob!

Melchior: ...and here, dear Casper, in the scroll of Micah, it states quite clearly that a ruler of Judah will be born in Bethlehem. Might that be where this new star is rising from? We must be on our way to seek this King whom the heavens greet with a new star!

Casper: And gifts, we must not forget the gifts. Royal gifts for the righteous king!

Narrator: The magi, Casper and Melchior, set off on the long journey to the land of Judah. They stopped in Jerusalem to confer with the King and his scholars. King Herod was both surprised and upset.

(Change background projection)

Suggested Song:

Hymnal Worship Book 199 The first Noel, the angels did say, verses 1 and 2

King Herod: A new king you say? And greeted by a new star? Most interesting. I will ask my advisors. *(shouting)* Chief Advisor! Report Instantly!

Advisor: Yes, your eminence, what is it that we can do for you?

King Herod: These magi from afar are telling me about a new star and King. They say it is explained in our ancient scrolls. Why have I heard nothing of this from you!

Advisor: I don't know, your eminence, I'm sorry, I mean, we will consult immediately.

Narrator: Herod was furious. First of all, he was embarrassed to learn Hebrew prophecy from foreigners. More than that, the thought of anyone threatening his throne

made him very jealous. After hearing his advisor's report, he called the magi back.

King Herod: (*trying to sound pleasant*) You have searched well, my foreign friends. My scholars have confirmed your opinions. This new King is indeed to be born in Bethlehem, and the bright star may indeed be new. Follow the star, go, look for the baby king, and if you find him, come quickly and tell me, so that I, too, may come and worship him.

(*Change background projection*)

Suggested Song:

Hymnal Worship Book 199 The first Noel, the angels did say, verses 3 and 4.

Narrator: The magi left, following the star. It stopped over the stable where Joseph, Mary and Jesus were staying. The magi entered, bowed down, offered their gifts and worshiped Jesus. (*Act our scene of worship*)

Suggested Song:

Hymnal Worship Book 199 The first Noel, the angels did say, verse 5

Melchior: How strange, that one so holy is housed so lowly. Do they not know this is the righteous king, the star rising out of Jacob?

Casper: Perhaps he needs hiding, my friend. I fear King Herod hid an evil heart behind his smooth words. I dreamt last night that this holy child will soon flee. We cannot return as King Herod wished! I fear he would harm the newborn righteous king. (*They exit*)

Suggested Songs:

Hymnal Worship Book 200, Where is this stupendous stranger
206 Infant holy, infant lowly
207 *Nino lindo* (Child so lovely)
or 215 What Child is this.

Closing Ritual

Develop your own use of these actions, as the entire cast stands in a semi-circle to bless the congregation.

As we go out from here, *(spread both hands outward)*
may we see God at work *(raise a hand over our eyes to see)*
in our word, *(form a circle shape to represent the world)*
may we hear *(cup a hand behind an ear)*
the good news *(trace a smile on face)*
and wisdom of Jesus *(point to the temple of the forehead for wisdom)*
from our family and friends *(spread hands consecutively to each side)*
and may we follow *(footstep action)*
the gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit *(gentle elbow nudge)*
to lead us *(footstep action)*
in the path of life. *(both hands sweep outward and upward in praise gesture for "life")*

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