

DISCIPLES WOMEN
GENERAL PROGRAMS

Date: 2015

Authored By:

Rev. Stephanie
McLemore
Chaplain,
Lynchburg College

Christmas Program



Christmas Program

Purpose:

We see the crèche in a certain configuration and with an idealized point of view, thanks to art and the glossy Christmas books, when really birth is a messy event. Giving birth in a stable with animals, flies and maybe alone might have been terrifying. Angels, shepherds and magi would have only confused the situation.

Suggestions for the leader:

- Gather one or more crèche scenes for your worship center. OR Ask participants to bring their favorite crèche with them.
- Study Option 1: Prepare a box or basket with several slips of paper, one for all or most participants, with characters from the Christmas story. (Mary, Joseph, Angel, Donkey, Sheep, Shepherd, Magi, Innkeeper, Star, Narrator etc.) Gather costumes for added fun.
- Study Option 2: Make copies of “And They All Showed Up” Christmas pageant scripts and ask participants to take a role as they enter. Gather costumes for added fun.
- Have different translations of the openings of Matthew (chapters 1 and 2) and Luke (Chapters 1 and 2) available.
- For the optional activity gather nativity stickers for the group. (Oriental Trading has several inexpensive options.)

Resources:

- Sojourner article, [“Why Are Manger Scenes So Weird?”](http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/12/15/why-are-manger-scenes-so-weird), <http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/12/15/why-are-manger-scenes-so-weird>
- [Nativity Stickers](http://www.orientaltrading.com/ui/search/processRequest.do?Ntx=mode%2Bmatchallpartial&Ntk=all&requestURI=searchMain&N=0&No=0&Ntt=nativity+stickers) <http://www.orientaltrading.com/ui/search/processRequest.do?Ntx=mode%2Bmatchallpartial&Ntk=all&requestURI=searchMain&N=0&No=0&Ntt=nativity+stickers>

Opening Activity:

Begin by asking participants to talk about their favorite crèche scene. It might be of sentimental importance, it might be a great work of art, it might be a gift from another country and it might be a preschool craft.

Ask women to place figures in the manger scene or to set up their own nativity set.

Notice how the figures are arranged in the manger or mangers. Notice that most often we set the figures in the same basic places. Ask, “What influences the positions we put the figures in?” or “Is this the way your nativity scene always looks?”

Study Option 1:

Ask each participant to draw a character role from the basket and to don a costume for their performance. Try to tell the story of the birth of Jesus as a group, each person playing her own part. A narrator should guide the process and you should work as a group to get all of the parts included. There is really not a “correct” order since the birth narratives are in different places in the Gospel and don’t overlap too much, so have fun in telling the story. Try to “be real” about the different perspectives, and it is fine to let the animals talk and be creative with the details. The objective of this activity is not to be literal but to work through our “cultural” nativity stories alongside of our “Biblical” stories.

Study Option 2:

Divide up the roles for the Christmas Pageant script, “And They All Showed Up,” and read through it. You may sing the first verse of the hymns or omit them depending on the amount of time you have.

Reflection Time:

Reflect together on your study time.

- Was there anything that surprised you about the Christmas story today?
- Was there anything missing that you expected?
- What is your favorite character in the story and why?
- What is your favorite part of the story and why?
- Do you have any memories of being in Christmas pageants as a kid? As an adult helping with the pageant?
- If you are prepared for the optional activity, give participants stickers and ask them to place the figures in the nativity with intentionality or ask someone to rearrange

the nativity on the worship center. Ask folks to explain why they put stickers in those places. Will anyone alter their traditional placement at home?

Worship:

Call to Worship from Chalice Worship:

Come to Bethlehem to behold God and humanity made one.

Here kneel before a humble child who brings God close.

O Christ, we come, just as we are to receive you.

We come that you may bless us with your reconciling peace.

Scripture: Read Luke 2:1-5

Wondering Together:

The Birth narrative is so simple that we cannot help but wonder about the details. As we interact with the story, I hope you have a sense of awe and wonder about this young couple birthing their first child miles from home in a manger. I invite each of you to complete the statement..."I wonder..."

Prayer:

Lord, as we come to the crèche this year, let us come with loving hearts, with open imagination and with childlike wonder. May we hear the story as it is told in scripture and hear it anew alongside our own experience. Help us to welcome new perspectives and crave new insights as we retell the centuries-old story about the night when you came to join us here on earth. AMEN

Benediction:

Go in peace to welcome the Christ-child. Go to love all, serve God, and share grace.
AMEN

And They All Showed Up

STAR: So I have a story to tell you about some earth- (and heaven-) shattering news.

I was a young star. I'd been burning for about fourteen generations plus fourteen generations plus fourteen generations, long enough to see Abraham and Isaac and Rahab and Jehoshaphat. Then there was the whole exile to Babylon thing and Zerubbabel all the way to Jacob. All those years, I had been happily twinkling in my special spot in the sky. I had been right where I belonged and where I planned to be for millennia. Being a star is a very stable job...get it, stable? But, one day I got moved. The star manual clearly says that we stars stay in our courses, but something really amazing happened that and I since I had the best view of the events I want to tell you about it.



There had been a lot of commotion in one area of the world. In the Roman area people had all been moving from one place to another causing a lot of extra dust and unhappiness. Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for.

I felt particularly sorry for one young couple. Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. They seemed like such a nice young couple, very poor, very young, but good people from good faithful families. I'm not sure they had much of a clue about starting a family or traveling, but they were trying to do what they were supposed to do—both legally and because they had been told that the baby Mary was about to deliver was special.

SING O Little Town of Bethlehem # 144

STAR: The birth of Jesus took place like this.

His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would

not be disgraced. While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's sermon to full term:

Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;
They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us").

This is where I come in. About the time I showed up, Mary went into transitional labor and things got bad, I got moved. I went from my own special place to a spot right here over this old barn. I'm still a little irked about the whole change thing, but the angels came to talk to me and told me that since the whole world was changing that night the least I could do was be a bit flexible. As it turns out I was actually going to be rather important and show others where to go to see this baby.

SING Away in a Manger # 147

MARY AND JOSEPH COME FORWARD

STAR: While Mary and Joseph were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

Joseph did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

MARY: God, help me. I am exhausted. This is just not what I expected, to be so far from home newly married and now a mother. I am out here with the animals with no one to help me, just trying to be faithful. Thank you so much for this child. I adore him. Joseph seems like a good man. He is as confused as I am. How can I feel so blessed and so lost at the same time? What next? I felt so safe when I was with Elizabeth a few months ago, so sure that you had called me to something spectacular. I showed up here, please help me dance again. Help me remember Your message that, "I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What You Have done for me will never be forgotten." You have sent me angels in the past, but I need another sign.

STAR: And then people started showing up: first came the Angels. Will all those who chose to dress as angels please come forward?

ANGELS ENTER

ANGEL 1: Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide.

ANGEL 2: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah.

ANGEL 3: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth.

SING Angels We Have Heard on High # 155

STAR: Will all the shepherds and the animals come forward?

There were sheep herders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified, but they left running and told everyone they met about what the angel had said.

SHEPHERD 1: The angels said to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger." Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves."

SHEPHERD 2: Wow! Seeing is believing. I wonder if the folks we told will show up too?

SING Silent Night # 145

STAR: Will the Magi please come forward?

This is where I get back into the story. After Jesus was born, more and more people started to show up. They saw me in my new spot...and I seemed to have more glow than usual. Next came some wise scholars from the East. King Herod is not a nice guy, and he noticed the buzz about the birth of the baby and some of the important visitors.

MAGI 1: Well, that was certainly an interesting visit to Herod. He's really nosy about this baby. He's looking for the King of the Jews, but he must be the only person in the hemisphere who hasn't seen the star. I don't need to ask for directions, that star is as plainer

than daylight. To think we are here to see the baby that will bring love and peace to the world.

MARY: Thank you for the gifts. Thank you for showing up. It means so much that you can take time out of your lives to come and help a bit. I was feeling so lonely, and now there really are quite a few people here. I suppose that even though my baby isn't the cleanest and can't even welcome you into a real home to see him, the fact that you are here—even with the chaos of all these animals crawling around—is the sign I needed that my Jesus really is a miracle.

STAR: And so the story goes that as more and more people heard about the birth of Jesus, more and more people showed up. They showed up not just to see him as a baby, but they showed up to follow this new way of living, this new way of loving and this new way of changing the world. We all showed up and we are glad you showed up too.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

SING Go Tell It On The Mountain # 167

Scripture references are taken from *The Message Bible*