

# A REHEARSAL-FREE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

## THE NARRATION SCRIPT

Based on the script by rfour.org

Preparation Notes: We rehearsed songs with the children for many weeks before Christmas. We announced the “interactive Christmas pageant” for several weeks prior to it taking place and asked both children and adults to sign up if they wanted a speaking part. We had great interest and broke up the speaking parts into enough sections so everyone who wanted to speak got a part.

We allowed children to select whatever costume they wanted for the pageant. We also had costumes in the entry area by our sanctuary on the afternoon of the pageant and encouraged adults to take a costume s they arrived to attend/participate in the pageant. We specifically had angel and shepherd costumes available for adults, but could include as many types of costumes as you wish. We had group speaking parts for the angels and shepherds and had copies of those available to give to any adults or children who opted to wear one of those types of costumes. We had wonderful feedback from the congregation about how the enjoyed feeling a part of the pageant. Adapt to fit your church!

The organist will play a Prelude to ‘O Come, All Ye Faithful’.

The Girls’ Choir will begin singing the refrain and lead the procession of children into the sanctuary. Everyone will sing verses 1 and 2. Children will sit in the front pews, we will have “pew parents” also sitting in each pew to help kids know what to do; first group of readers will go to the front of the church and get ready to read.

All Sing "O Come All Ye Faithful (ELW 283) start w/refrain, sing verses 1 and 2

**Welcome and Introduction:** (all are standing at the lectern in a queue, in order of speaking part.

**Speaker 1 (speaking from lectern):** Welcome to our Christmas Celebration. There are many amazing aspects of the Christmas story. One of the many amazing aspects is that it can't happen without the people who are in the story. God does not just swoop in and make this story happen all by Himself. Instead, for the story to happen, there need to be willing people in the story. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and even the angels are obedient and follow through with what they are told to do.

**Speaker 2 (speaking from pulpit):** And so tonight, we will have an opportunity to do the same thing: by choosing to participate in the story. We will make the story happen. With this in mind, we would like to briefly explain what "participation" looks like. First, the hymns are all taken from the Evangelical Lutheran Worship, the cranberry hymnal in the pew racks; or are printed in your bulletin, along with any instructions regarding who will be singing particular verses or sections.

**Speaker 3 (speaking from lectern):** Second, you will notice that after some of the hymn titles and readings, there is a second set of instructions in italics. These instructions are the interactive portion of our worship service. As we listen to the story and sing the hymns together, we will create with our bodies and costumes our very own live Nativity scene. The costume that you selected when you first arrived will help you know when to come up to take part. For example, during the singing of 'The Friendly Beasts' you'll notice that the animals are to gradually come up, and will stay in front until the end of the worship service. Be sure to bring your bulletin with you when you come!

**Speaker 4 (speaking from pulpit):** The third thing to share is that if you didn't choose a costume, but do want to participate in the Nativity scene, you may consider yourself a towns person and come up during 'Go Tell it on the Mountain'. And if you would rather stay seated in the pew, you are welcome to do that as well.

Finally, after we sing 'Joy to the World', we invite everyone to come together in the Fellowship Hall downstairs to enjoy a celebratory potluck meal and assemble Christmas food baskets. We will also go to our neighbors to do some caroling. Even if you didn't bring anything for the meal, please feel free to join in. There is plenty to share!

Because this will be an interactive Christmas Celebration, there will be some movement and some noise, just like the wonderful noisy busy night in Bethlehem so long ago.

**Speaker 5 (speaking from lectern):** We hope you have picked up a star as you entered the Sanctuary. Please feel free to write or draw a picture of a gift that you would bring to the baby Jesus. A note in the bulletin will tell you when to bring them forward.

(Pause) Please stand as you are able and join in the opening litany

## CALL TO WORSHIP

**Speaker 6 (Leader) (speaking from pulpit):** Come, holy people, called by God, let us follow the way prepared for us.

Congregation: Glory to God in the highest, and peace on Earth among all of God's Creation.

**Leader:** Once again the world is surprised at a manger, as the glory of God surpasses what is expected.

Congregation: Let us go to Bethlehem to see what God has made known to us.

**Leader:** There in Bethlehem and here today at Good Shepherd, we are reminded anew of the wonder of God's ways.

Congregation: Let us glorify and praise God for all that we have seen and heard!

**Leader:** Please join in the opening prayer, followed by the Lord's Prayer.

All:

Amazing God, on that night so long ago, You gathered a group of unlikely outsiders – Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and others to be part of a great miracle: the birth of Jesus, our Savior. Today You have sought us out and brought us to the manger. You have interrupted our routines with Your Good News. You have gathered this unlikely assortment of people to become a holy people, a community of faith. We want to respond. Show us how. Help us to receive Your renewing love as we praise You for offering us salvation in the name of Jesus, Who taught us to pray,

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

**Please be seated. (First group of speakers sits as the Creation children and next group of speakers come to the front. Creation children will each have a large posterboard with a picture of one thing God created on it. Once all readers and children are in place, all lights are turned off except at the lectern and pulpit. Will need one person at the front of church to turn off lights and one person at the back to turn off lights.)**

## THE PAGEANT BEGINS

**Speaker 7 (from lectern):** Today, we gather together to be a part of a story – not a “once upon a time” imagination story, but a true story that is so wonderful that we tell it over and over. This story comes from the Bible and tells how God takes care of His people and saves His people from sin and death. We call this the story of God’s salvation, and it is a story for all people. This story began more than 2000 years ago and it is still unfolding today. To really understand this story, let’s go back to the beginning, to the time of creation when God spoke and the earth and all living creatures came in to being.

**Speaker 8:** (reading from the pulpit) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was barren with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness. But the Spirit of God was moving over the water. God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. (Spotlights over altar come back on.) God looked at the light and saw that it was good. And in this same way, God spoke and created all things: the sun and moon (pause for sun and moon children); planets and stars (pause); plants (pause); trees (pause); flowers (pause); fish (pause); birds (pause); insects (pause); animals (pause); and people. (Children will remain holding up posters.)

**Speaker 9:** (reading from the lectern) This story continued. In the wonderful world God created, the people were given the ability to think and make decisions. Some of the choices they made were not really what God wanted for His people. God came up with a plan to bring people back into a healthier way of living and into better relationship with Him. Over the years, God sent prophets to speak to the people and assure them that there would be a special gift from God to His people. This is how the prophet Isaiah shared that message of hope:

**Speaker 10:** (reading from a scroll, standing in the middle of the front area, wearing a cordless microphone) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. They rejoice before You as with joy at the harvest. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon His shoulders; and he shall be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onwards and forevermore.

*Choir sings, 'Comfort, Comfort Ye My People' arranged by Ferguson, with youth accompaniment. At conclusion, choir returns to seats and readers take places.*

**Speaker 11:** (reading from the lectern) In Genesis, God speaks the Word and there is creation and light in the darkness. In Isaiah, the prophet speaks and shares a picture of light and joy. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we hear again about creation and the power of the Word and the way that God brings light into darkness.

**Speaker 12:** (reading from the pulpit) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

**The Sunday School children come forward to the steps to sing 'This Little Light of Mine'. As they do so, an acolyte will walk up the center aisle, bringing the light through the congregation, and light the three candles on the Advent wreath. The acolyte will sit in the front pew. The children will sit at the front of the Sanctuary. The next readers take their places.**

**Speaker 12 (from lectern):** So what is this light? Of course, it is the brightness that allows us to see. But it is also God living in us and being shared with the world. It is the beauty and purity of God's goodness. Not only does God share the light with us, God goes even further and shares a part of himself with us: His very own Son. Let's hear how the story continues.

**Speaker 13:** (from the pulpit) In the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we meet Mary, a teenage girl, and we learn of Mary's willingness to do as God asks, even though it will not be easy. Mary finds out she is going to have a baby, when she is not yet married; this is against the laws at the time and place where Mary lives. There are some very hard consequences for breaking those laws, and Mary knows what may happen to her. Yet she says "yes" to what God has asked her to do.

**The Girls' Choir: *Magnificat***

**Speaker 14:** (from the pulpit) In Luke, Chapter 1, we hear more about what happened to Mary. (As speaker reads, the angel Gabriel enters from the Sacristy and approaches Mary, who is sitting in the congregation by the aisle in the second pew.)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Gabriel, the messenger of God, was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to an unmarried woman engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The young woman's name was Mary. And Gabriel said to her,

**Gabriel:** "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

**Speaker 14:** But Mary was much perplexed by this and wondered what sort of greeting this might be. Gabriel said to her,

**Gabriel:** "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great; he will be called the "Son of the Most High", and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

**Speaker 14:** Mary asked,

**Mary (standing):** "How can this be, since I am unmarried?"

**Speaker 14:** The angel said to her,

**Gabriel:** "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; the child to be born will be holy; He will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

**Speaker 14:** Then Mary said,

**Mary:** "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

**Speaker 14:** Then the messenger of God departed from her.

*Gabriel exits down aisle and sits on the pulpit side with other angels. Mary sits.*

Children rise to sing, "Get Ready". Adult volunteer moves manger during song from beside the backdrop and places manger in the center on the steps, so it is angled. At conclusion of "Get Ready" readers go to places. Children remain in front and sit.

**Speaker 15 (from pulpit):** The place of Jesus' birth is in Bethlehem, a small town a few miles south of Jerusalem. But Bethlehem was not Joseph or Mary's hometown. They had to go to Bethlehem because the ruler of their country, Caesar Augustus, had made a law that everyone must be counted in the towns where their great-great-grandparents – their ancestors – had been born.

**Speaker 16 (from lectern):** This was a long trip to travel by foot, about 60 miles, or 3 days' worth of walking. It would have been even more difficult, since Mary was pregnant. When Mary and Joseph finally got to Bethlehem, the inns were already filled with people, and there was no place for them to stay. But there was a stable, where the animals rested, that Mary and Joseph were allowed to rest in as well.

**Hymn: Away in a Manger (children v.1; girls' choir, v.2; all, v.3)**

**During song, Joseph escorts Mary to the front to stand beside the manger. After song, children remain at front and sit.**

**Speaker 17:** In this stable, Mary gave birth to a baby boy. She wrapped Him in bands of cloth and laid Him in a manger. Mary and Joseph named the baby Jesus, as Joseph had been told to do in a dream sent by God.

(Mary picks up baby and holds it; she can also hand the baby to Joseph. Children dressed as shepherds go to "hills of Bethlehem" at back of the sanctuary on the lectern side; children dressed as angels go to the Heavenly realm at the back of the sanctuary on the pulpit side; other children return to front pews.)

**Both Choirs: "Mary, Mary, Rock Your Little Baby" by M. Donnelly and G.L.O. Strid**

**(When song is finished, CHOIRS return to sit in pews; PERSON LIGHTING STAR comes and turns on star as part of the Bethlehem backdrop.)**

**Speaker 18 (reading from lectern):** Now, it was nighttime and in the fields nearby, shepherds were watching their flocks of sheep. Then an angel appeared before the shepherds and the glory of the Lord shone all around them. And the shepherds were terrified!

**All Shepherds (loudly and in unison):** What is that light? What is going on? This is very strange – we are so afraid!

**Speaker 18:** But the angel of the Lord said to them,

**Head Angel:** “Do not be afraid, for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

**Speaker 18:** And suddenly there were many angels praising God and saying,

*All angels stand.*

**All Angels:** Glory to God in the highest and peace on Earth.

**Speaker 18:** Then the angels left the shepherds, and the shepherds said to one another:

**Shepherds (loudly in unison):** “We should go see this baby!”

**(Readers are seated; angels and shepherds go to front and join the Nativity scene whilst**

**CONGREGATION sings:**

**Angels We Have Heard On High (ELW 289)**

**Speaker 19 (from lectern):** This stable where Mary and Joseph were staying was the home to some of the animals of the village of Bethlehem. And these animals must have been pretty curious as to what a baby was doing sleeping in their feeding trough. After all, it probably wasn't often that the place where they went to eat held not their dinner, but a newborn baby! So the animals, along with the shepherds, gathered around Mary and Joseph and Jesus for a closer look.

**CONGREGATION sings “The Friendly Beasts”**

(Everyone playing an ANIMAL should now come to the manger.)

**Speaker 20 (at the lectern):** Now when the Shepherds saw Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the stable, and realized that what the angel had said to them was true, they went out and made it known to whomever they met. Which means it's very probable that some of the townspeople went to the stable that very night to see and maybe even to help Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, because of what the shepherds had told them.

**Go Tell It on the Mountain (ELW 290)**

**\*\*Congregation sing verses; children sing refrain**

(As CONGREGATION sings, Shepherds "go tell" Townspeople; they all join the Nativity.)

**Townspeople (all of congregation):** We are the people of Bethlehem; old and young, women and men. Welcome, little Jesus!

**Speaker 21 (from lectern):** What an exciting story. But the story doesn't end there! After Jesus was born, Wisemen from a distant land in the East followed a star to find the place where Jesus was. They came and worshipped Him and brought gifts. Then they returned to their country and shared the news of what they had seen.

(Wisemen come to the manger, kneel down, and offer gifts. Joseph hands the kings the microphone(s) and they speak.)

**Wisemen (in unison):** The ancient prophecy let us know, a baby would be born and grow into a king with power and might. So we come with treasures this night. Welcome to the newborn king! Let us bow down and worship Him.

**"What Can I Give Him" v.3 (sung by CONGREGATION)**

During singing, the Congregation may place their stars in the manger and then return to the pew.

**Speaker 22:** The Bible tells us how Jesus grew up, taught people about loving God and loving each other, died for our sins and then rose again to give us eternal life. The story keeps going as disciples and missionaries kept telling it over and over to people around the world...God filled these people with His light and gave them the courage to go out and tell the story. And today it is our job to keep telling the story and to share God's love and light with others. God loves us so much that He created us in this amazing world, promised to keep us close to Him, and made a plan to send His Son Jesus to teach us how to live and to be our Savior. I can't think of a better story to keep sharing.

**Congregation sings "Do You Hear What I Hear?"**

**PASTOR:** (from pulpit) Look at us! What a full and busy stable we are! In all this busyness and moving around, it's possible to forget why we came here in the first place. So I remind us tonight that we celebrate and remember the birth of Jesus not just because He was born, but because of the life that Jesus lived. The baby Jesus grew into an adult Jesus, an adult who chose to live according to God's will, all the time.

It *is* exciting that Jesus was born in a manger. But what is even *more* exciting is that Jesus was born of a mother, just like us; that He grew up, just like us. Then, when He was all grown up, He chose to live God's way, and said to us, You can do this, too, and here – I'll show you how: just follow me."

This is the Good News today, and why we celebrate Christmas, because Christmas is the story that reminds us that any and all of us can choose to live God's way as God's sons and daughters. So let us go from here today, giving thanks to God for the gift of His Son, Jesus.

**As organ begins to play, Congregation will rise to sing,**

**Joy to the World (ELW 267)**

**Speaker 23:** Children of God, share God's light!

**Congregation:** Thanks be to God!