

Advent Unwrapped

Christmas Pageant Service

Preparation

Plan out staging that works well for your space. This pageant is a series of monologues with two narrators and additional speakers. You may want to have each character of stage until their part; once they have spoken, they can join a growing tableau of the nativity. Narrators 1 and 2 could be in a stationary place, like the lectern or pulpit. Narrator 1 purposely has fewer words so that it could possibly be a younger voice. Narrator 2 is meant to represent Christmas Past, and Narrator 1 Christmas Present (you may or may not wish to make this obvious). Be sure to have someone be able to dim the lights as appropriate.

You will need two boxes wrapped in Christmas wrapping. Box 1 contains the Christ candle and lanterns/fairy lights (enough to decorate the sanctuary). Box 2 contains the hope, love, joy, and peace candles, as well as enough taper candles with wax guards for the pageant participants.

Pageant participants with speaking parts: Two Narrators, Isaiah, Angel, Mary, Joseph, three Shepherds, Mouse, and Magi. Non-speaking participants are the animals: oxen, sheep, mice, goat, doves, etc.

Call to Worship

Come, let us go up to the mountain of God,
Let us enter the house of Jacob,
Let us follow the light of Moses,
Let us prepare for Christ's birth among us.

Land Acknowledgement

Opening prayer

Deliver us
So that we may know the wonder of waiting
 not the preaching of it
 not the praying of it
 not the formation of it
but the waiting.
Deliver us,
So that we may know the wonder of waiting.
Amen.

—Catherine Faith MacLean (adapted)

Hymn

[The Giver](#)

Candle Lighting

[The narrators pick up two boxes from under the Christmas tree. Narrator 2 unwraps their box. Inside of the box is the Christ Candle, and lanterns/ tea lights or a string of fairy lights.

Children are invited to string the fairy lights, or place the lanterns/ tea lights around the sanctuary. If possible, the lights are dimmed slightly while a hymn like *Way, Way, Way* is sung in the background.]

Hymn

Way, Way, Way (TLUS! 159)
Soon and Very Soon

Narrator 1: Can I open mine yet?

Narrator 2: Soon, and very soon. We are waiting until we are ready for Christmas.

Narrator 1: Well, how do we “get ready”?

Narrator 2: Isaiah, how do we get ready?

Isaiah:

Shalom. My name is Isaiah ben Amoz. My writings—the beginning of the Book of Isaiah—are now a part of sacred scripture. But I never imagined they would be. I simply had to write for love of the people. I wrote to bring good news in times of trouble, hope in times of despair, and faith in times of doubt.

I wrote to help people prepare for God’s love and justice.

You see, I lived about 800 years before Jesus’ birth. At the time, my people were not living very faithfully. They were forgetting to care about God. It pained me to see many cared more about their own wealth than about justice. Some were obsessed with idols made of gold and silver. They feasted on the finest bread and drank wine by the bowl, even as widows and orphans were left hungry and foreigners living among us were oppressed.

The faithlessness of my people broke my heart. I have wept for the love of my people many a night.

In my frustration and sorrow, God purified my soul. When God asked, “Whom shall I send to speak my truth?” I said, here I am. Send me and I will keep the people in my heart. And God gave me the courage to speak, the poetry to express, and the oracles to warn the people.

I tried to tell them that we were sowing the seeds of destruction when we disobeyed God’s commandments, and when we cared about no one else but ourselves. I tried to teach that being faithful means taking care of the least advantaged in the society.

My message to you is this. Please abide in God’s radical love. Our God truly cares about all people, and about justice. Engage in a process of reflection, confession, and repentance. God will forgive, and God’s love will surround you and redeem you. God will never abandon us. Thanks be to God.

—Won Hur (adapted)

Hymn

I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (VU 509)
Let Justice Roll Like a River (TLUS! 120)
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus (VU 2)
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming (VU 8)

Narrator 1: So, are we ready now for Emmanuel?

Narrator 2: Not quite. Angels, how do we get ready?

Angel:

My name is Angeline, I am one of God's messengers. It isn't as exciting as you think, trust me. "Vespers in 10 minutes", "Choir practice tomorrow".

But I just heard that God is going to start a revolution on Earth. Thank the heavens, Earth is a hot mess, we weep every day with God's creation. The cries are sooo deep. There is sooo much pain. Sooo much is broken.

I am so excited to finally be bringing a message of good news, to a place filled with fake and bad news. And I am also scared.

Rumour has it that the revolution will start with a baby, born to two Nazarene's. Can you imagine?

What a backwards way to start a revolution. Who fights the strongest with the weakest? The most holy with the most lowly?

I am afraid that no one will believe me.

I am afraid that they will reject God's plan. That they will reject Mary and Joseph, that they will reject the child, to be called Emmanuel, God-with us.

This plan of God's is very scary.

I am not sure how to prepare for it.

Hymn

Wait for the Lord (VU 22)
Don't Be Afraid
All Earth is Waiting (VU 5)
Angels We Have Heard on High (VU 38)

Narrator 1: So, the Angels aren't ready? How do we get ready?

Narrator 2: I wonder if Mary and Joseph are ready? Of course they aren't. Is anyone ever really ready to welcome a child into the world?

Mary:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar and all that fills it;
 let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy. (Psalm 96:11–12)
 For God has done something miraculous this night, and we are all a part of something amazing.
 All of these words, all of this music, all of this awe, all of this beauty, all of this love.
 This precious child. You precious children of God.
 I cherish and treasure in my heart.

Joseph:

We sing of Jesus, born to Mary and myself, royalty, even though we live in poverty
 in a time of social upheaval and political oppression because we are Jewish.
 Our son will know human joy and sorrow.
 He has always been so filled with the Holy Spirit
 that in him people will experience the presence of God among them.
 In our son, people will experience, Emmanuel. God with us.
 We sing praise to God incarnate.

(Adapted from *A Song of Faith*)

Prayer

**Baby Jesus,
 In your birth and in your infancy we are called to love, protect, and accept you,
 Just as you are:
 Making room when there is none,
 And creating new paths when we are uncertain of the road before us.
 Help us to grow with you Jesus,
 In faith, conviction and love,
 And may the wonder of your birth live in our hearts,
 Everyday.
 Amen.**

Hymn

Jesus, O What A Wonderful Child
 Go Tell it on the Mountain (VU 43)
 He is Born (VU 50)

Narrator 1: So the Angels, Mary and Joseph weren't really ready. But Jesus is born! Can we open this now? [pointing to the box]

Narrator 2: No, we still have a few more people to meet. Let's start with the shepherds.

Narrator 1: [groans]

Shepherd 1:

A shepherd protects, feeds, and cares for the sheep. This is important work, right? But out here on the Palestinian hills, this isn't how it's viewed by most people. For example, the Pharisees say we don't follow religion. But think about it! We cannot leave our sheep and we are constantly looking for fresh new pastures. This schedule doesn't quite fit with Jewish faith practice—or any other religion's rhythm of worship. So they call us Gentiles, which really implies we are outsiders.

Shepherd 2:

Living out here on the hills we have developed our own culture. We have no possessions and live on the barest necessities. We can be a bit rough around the edges. Protecting sheep from poachers makes us distrustful of strangers, so we tend to see the worst in people.

Shepherd 3:

It's not like people have a very high view of us either! We are often pushed aside, forgotten, and judged as inferior.

Shepherd 1:

So imagine our surprise when we heard the sound of angel voices. Angels!

Shepherd 3:

I don't even believe in angels!

Shepherd 1:

Yet, here they were on the hillside telling us they had a message from God!

Shepherd 2:

Folks were scandalized that we were the first to hear the news. Why wasn't the news brought to kings or Pharisees? Why was the news brought to the very people whom kings and Pharisees despised?

Shepherd 1:

After being told the good news, the angels urged us to go to Bethlehem to find the child. Seriously? We tend sheep not children. We protect our stuff, our flocks, and now these angels expected us to risk our sheep being stolen while we went to find a baby. What was God thinking?

Shepherd 3:

But what was really mind blowing was the fact that we went! It was just as the angels said. The child was ordinary and extraordinary all at once. There was such peace and joy in the air around the manger where the baby lay. I spoke to the boy's father, Joseph. He was a gracious host and treated us well. We didn't feel like lowly shepherds that night. When we told him about the angels, he believed us. He made us feel like we were the right people to receive the message from God.

Shepherd 2:

Joseph encouraged us to share our story, his story, and the baby Jesus' story. So as we returned to the hills, we told anyone who would listen. And we never stopped sharing the news. Everywhere we went, we told the story of a miraculous birth and how God had chosen us—those who were once so lowly—to tell the story.

—Bethe Cameron

Hymn

While Shepherds Watched their Flocks (VU 75)

Narrator 1: Ok, now are we ready?

Narrator 2: Humm, soon, lets check if the animals are ready?

Mouse:

Hello, I am Ya'akov the temple mouse.

I spend most of my days in the temple, but my family live in a stable down the road. I love to go the temple to hear scripture, particularly from the prophet Isaiah; he is my favorite. When I hear Isaiah, I hear hope. And who doesn't need a little hope? We all need some good news.

One night, when I returned to the stable there was a lot of commotion. Then midwives came in and spread fresh hay on the floor. They drag out a Jojo's manger, empty it, and place mounds of new hay in it. All of my friends, the other animals are shooed into the courtyard—that is, all but one little goat plus my family who are hiding in the corner; I join them.

A woman looking very uncomfortable is carried in and laid on the hay. The animals respect her privacy and don't look while she gives birth to a beautiful baby boy. The mother wraps the baby in clean cloth and places him in the manger while she rests.

A few sheep, Mila and Esther, wander back in from the courtyard and cuddle up to the mother, keeping her warm. The father milks the goat and offers the warm milk to the weary mother. The baby stirs and begins to cry (he is really loud!), but a few mourning doves who are perched in the rafters come nearer and coo a lullaby to the crying baby.

I watch all of this in the corner with my family, and I feel stronger than an ox, even though I am smallest mouse in my family. I remember the readings from Isaiah and wonder whether this could be the person Isaiah talked about. I can't wait to get back to the temple to hear more from the scriptures.

I may be the smallest, but looking at this baby, I know great things can come from even the smallest creature.

—Bethe Cameron (adapted)

Hymn

Jesus, Our Brother (VU 56)

[During the hymn all of the other animals join the tableaux]

Invitation to Offering

VU 55 V.4

Offering

Prayer of Dedication

Narrator 1: OK, ready or not, Jesus is here and everyone has gathered.

Narrator 2: Not yet, there are still a few more people who are ready to meet him.

Magi:

I'm old, and my eyes can no longer read the stars. There are holes in my cloak and my memories. But there are some things I will never forget. I'll always remember that spectacular star. We hadn't seen one like it before—and we haven't seen one like it since. It was breathtaking, mesmerizing, and it compelled us to follow. We wanted to try to understand its meaning and the story it wished to share.

I'll always remember that long treacherous journey. There were 12 travellers in our caravan and 20 camels. Oh, the stink of the camels in the relentless heat! We carried hidden gifts with us in case we had to barter for a safe passage through a strange land.

I'll always remember the terror in Herod's eyes and the scribes' quivering voices when they were summoned before him. They spoke of an ancient prophecy—a star, a new king, a descendant of King David. Glad to put Jerusalem behind us, we followed the star to David's town of Bethlehem.

I'll always remember that little family and the peace that seemed to embrace them. Although they were living in an obscure hovel, it wasn't difficult to find them: we stuck out like a camel's hump in Bethlehem, and the people were eager to share the rumours with newcomers—tales told by shepherds who had been captivated by sights in the night sky and the news of a newborn king.

And I'll always remember that child. His family members were poor and vulnerable, yet so loving and gracious. We offered our gifts, hoping they would in some small way honour, protect, and bless the child. Watching him, we knew that we needn't search further or travel farther. The same compelling light that shone from the heavens shone in his eyes. That kind of light is unforgettable.

—Robin Brown-Hewitt

Hymn

Narrator 1: So are we finally ready to celebrate Christmas, Jesus with us?

Narrator 2: I think so. We are all here: the prophets, the angels, the shepherds, the animals, the holy family, the magi and God's Beloved. We are all here.

[Each of the characters can wave their hands as the narrator calls on them]

Narrator 1: God's Beloved?

Narrator 2: You, me, each of us. We are all God's Beloved, and we are all a part of this amazing story, that God is with us always. And that each of us, with our unique gifts and stories has a part to play in welcoming Christ into the world. Just as the prophets, angels, shepherds, animals, the magi, Joseph and Mary had specific parts to play way back then, we each have a special and specific part to play today. Are you ready to play your part?

Narrator 1: Of course! I can't wait! I have been ready this whole time.

Narrator 2: Then you can open your box now.

[Narrator 1 opens the box, which contains the four Advent candles as well as individual tapers. The narrator puts the unlit candles on the advent wreath and the individual tapers are passed out to the participants in the pageant.]

Isaiah:

[While hope, peace, joy, and love are read, the corresponding candles are lit by narrator 2.]

Beloved, I tell you that those who are in despair will find *hope*, those who are conflicted will find *peace*, those who are downhearted will find *love*, and those who are weary with sadness will find *joy*:

"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

(Isaiah 9:6)

Angel:

[Narrator 1 lights the candles of the people in the tableaux. During the singing of the hymn the other candles are lit, and a circle is formed around the sanctuary (and/or around the Christ Child). Lights are dimmed.]

"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 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."
(Luke 2:10–12)

Closing Hymn:

Silent Night (VU 67)

Prayers of the People

Emmanuel,

As we encircle you with our love, accept our prayers of thanksgiving, our joys, worries, concerns and laments that we share in this silence...

We welcome you Emmanuel,

And ask for the courage to welcome you into every part of our lives,
so that, like Mary, we will hope for a better world,
like Joseph, the Shepherds, the angels and the Holy Family,

we will be brave and bold in our living,
like the animals, we will be welcoming of others,
and like the Magi, we will present our best selves to you always.
Amen

[Lights come back up]

Blessing

As we leave this circle and watch the Christ Lights that we hold transform

[Blow out your candle and watch the smoke rise]

Let us go into the world with Joy,

And be prepared to receive Christ,

In the most unexpected of places.

Don't be afraid, to welcome the stranger and the messenger,

For you are blessed and clothed with

the Grace of God,

the Love of Jesus and

the abiding friendship of the Holy Spirit,

Now and forevermore.

Amen.