

A Fourfold Christmas Celebration

Global Exchange, IHQ Publication, London, England



This order of service could be used for a fellowship evening with invitations sent to women of the corps and community to invite friends and family for this celebration. For maximum effect, divide the hall seating into four distinct sections and aim to have some creative decor in each area relating to the following characters who will be acting out the Christmas story in this presentation:

The family: Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus (fellowship)

The angels (service)

The shepherds (worship)

The wise men (education)

The actors should be in suitable costumes and seated in their respective areas among the members of the congregation. They then move to the stage or centre of the hall to act out their part before taking up formation in the nativity scene.

A narrator is needed, as well as several readers who should also sit in their respective corners.

Prepare four baskets containing an equal quantity of small gifts, according to the number of people anticipated, and place one in each corner. Ideally, these gifts ought to have some connection to the above-mentioned characters or represent some part of their story, e.g. a candy cane, suggesting a shepherd's crook for the shepherds, a star for the wise men, etc. Alternatively, instead of the gifts, you might prefer to create attractive Christmas tags with pictures of the different characters printed on them for people to wear.

As people arrive, instruct them to choose a gift or tag from any basket and ask them to remain seated in the area surrounding that particular basket.

Program

Leader: Soon we will be celebrating Christmas Day around the world. December is a very special time of year as we look for the right gift for loved ones and friends. We enjoy the festive decorations in our homes, streets, and work places. Christmas, for Christians, is an important way of proclaiming the good news of Jesus' coming to earth to be the Saviour of the world. It is our privilege and our joy!

Today as we meet together, let us take the time to remind ourselves of God's wonderful gift to us all -- his Son, Jesus Christ. May our rejoicing and thanksgiving to Him today be from the heart!

Carol : *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*

Prayer: Spontaneous or by arrangement

Leader: Representing fellowship, the family corner focuses on Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.

Reader A:

We get our first glimpse of Mary in the opening chapters of the books of Matthew and Luke. They reveal to us that she was a modest and pure young woman who lived in Galilee. She was engaged to a mature, morally upright and good man called Joseph, with whom she was deeply in love. They were going to be married but God broke in upon their relationship in a dramatic way and changed the course of their lives.

(Reader B reads Luke 1:26-38, 46-49 while the person representing Mary takes her place on the stage or in the centre of the hall.)

Mary *(standing or walking around as she speaks, from memory if possible):*

You would think that if you had found favour with God, life would be wonderful, that there would be no problems and that you would simply be praising and honouring Him for all His blessings. But God does not promise an easy life to anyone. I certainly had some very big problems:

Who was going to believe me when I said I had an angel visit and speak to me?

Who was going to believe me when I told them that among all women I, Mary - a teenager - had found favour with God?

Who was going to believe that, when I told them I was pregnant, Joseph was not the father, but God?

Would my parents believe me? Most of all, would Joseph believe me?

I knew that, according to Jewish law, the religious leaders had a right to stone me to death when they heard about me, an engaged girl giving birth to a baby who had no earthly father! It was impossible!

Yet God, in a wonderful way, dealt with all my problems.

Reader C:

Mary had obediently complied to God's request, yet she was human and, as the baby grew within her, there would probably have been times of tears as well as times of sheer joy and praise. Through it all, however, God was with her, making his presence felt.

(Pause)

One of the key people often overlooked at Christmas time is Joseph.

(Reader D reads Matthew 1:18-25 while the person representing Joseph takes his place on the stage or in the centre of the hall.)

Joseph (standing or walking around as he speaks):

When Mary told me what had happened to her: about the visit of the angel, his message and request of her, that she had agreed to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and be the mother of God's Son, I was shocked. Was she really telling the truth? I knew the child could not be mine.

I still loved her, though, and I thought about ending our engagement quietly. But then the Lord spoke to me in a dream and told me that everything Mary had said was true.

I decided to go ahead and marry Mary although it meant putting my reputation on the line. It was also revealed to me that the child was not to be named after me, or by me, as was the custom, but had already been given the name *Jesus*.

Reader E:

God had chosen Joseph for the role of Jesus' earthly father. It was a very important assignment: husband to Mary and father, teacher, provider and protector of Jesus - God's very own dear Son. His faith and good name were greatly tested by the events that unfolded before him, yet he trusted completely in the infinite power and purpose of God and showed Mary great love, compassion and understanding.

When the order for the Roman census was issued, Joseph knew that he and Mary would have to travel to Bethlehem, King David's city, for he was a descendant of the king. He wanted to make the journey as comfortable as possible for Mary so he acquired a donkey for her to ride on, while he walked. The roads were rough and dusty and there were many hills to climb. Mary was almost due to have the baby but, in fulfilment of prophecy, His birth was to take place in Bethlehem.

(Reader F reads Luke 2:1-7, at the conclusion of which Mary takes the baby - a real one if possible - from the manger. A tape recording of a crying baby played at this point would add to the atmosphere.)

Reader G:

Mary and Joseph were in very close fellowship with God and because of this were given the opportunity to be the parents of God's Son. Their fellowship as a family was strong and their commitment and love for each other continued to the end of their lives.

Leader:

Because Jesus came to us as a tiny baby, the celebration of Christmas has special significance for all children. This wonderful story of Jesus coming to earth as a special gift for the world helps them to relate to God as a generous, caring God of love.

They eagerly anticipate Christmas, the gifts, the parties and the holidays. Their happiness, excitement and wonder have a special heart-warming effect on adults who would do well to share in their childlike faith.

Let us listen as they sing to us the children's carol.

Carol: All children present to sing- *Away in a manger*

Prayer in unison (*this prayer may be prepared for viewing on an overhead or PowerPoint projector if an order of service is not available to all the congregation. Invite those present to join hands as they pray*): Thank you, God, for fellowship with You and with Your Son

Jesus,

with each other in our own families, in our church and in our community. Amen.

Carol: *Once in Royal David's City*, verses 1 and 2



Leader:

The corner where the angels are found represents service.

Reader H:

The quickest way for any news to travel is by word of mouth - from one person to another. *Hot* news travels fastest of all!

The world was ready for good news and God is an excellent communicator. To convey the wonderful news of the birth of His Son to the world He did it not by road, nor by sea, but by air! This was instant communication directly from Heaven - a message that was clear and presented in a way that could never be forgotten!

(Two or three participants dressed as angels carry out the following discussion.)

Angel 1: What do you make of this assignment God has given us to carry out on earth?

Angel 2: I can't believe it!

Angel 3: Nor can I! Why would Jesus, God's beloved Son who lives here in Heaven with us, want to be born into such a poor family and take on the form of a human baby? He will be so vulnerable without the power that is normally His.

Angel 1: It is not for us to question God. Rather we need to obey His command.

Angel 2: Yes, let us go to earth and find the shepherds and proclaim to them the good news of Jesus' birth.

Angel 3: Together with the heavenly host we will praise God in a way that mortals on earth have never experienced before!

(Reader 1 reads Luke 2:8-14 which could be acted out as it is read.)

Reader J:

In Palestine it was traditional for local musicians to gather together at the house where a baby

had been newly born and greet it with music. Jesus was born in a stable far from home, possibly even a cave in the hillside; therefore it is unlikely that this ceremony was performed for Him. Mary and Joseph were just visitors to Bethlehem. They were from Galilee in the north. Why would Judean musicians want to play to welcome this foreign baby?

However, in the end, God provided both the musicians and the music!

Carol: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

Prayer in unison:

Dear God, help us each to become like one of Your angels, bringing the good news of peace and hope to our families, friends and community. We are at Your service to be of service to others. Amen.

Leader: In yet another corner are the shepherds, representing worship.

Reader K:

It is a wonderful thing that God chose a group of simple, illiterate shepherds to hear this wonderful news rather than the well-educated religious leaders.

However, it is possible that these were no ordinary shepherds. In the temple in Jerusalem, not so far from Bethlehem, an unblemished lamb was offered as a sacrifice to God every morning and evening. To see that the supply of these perfect lambs was always available, the temple authorities had their own private flocks, pastured nearby at Bethlehem.

There is a chance that these shepherds of the Christmas story were in charge of the flocks from which the temple sacrifices were chosen. If that is so, then it is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after the temple lambs were the first to be told the wonderful news of the birth of the *Lamb of God* who would take away the sins of the world.

(Reader L reads Luke 2:15-20 while shepherds walk around the hall 'looking' for the baby.)

Shepherds 1, 2 and 3 *(loudly and excitedly, they address about five people each anywhere in the hall):* Have you heard the wonderful news? Jesus, the Saviour of the world, has been born!

(They make their way to the manger- and kneel down in an attitude of adoration.)

Carol: *Christians Awake*

Prayer in unison:

Dear God, today we promise humbly to seek Jesus with all our hearts and to worship Him only, in reverence and awe. He came into my world to be my Saviour and Lord! Amen.

Leader: Finally we come to the wise men, who could be said to represent education.

Reader M:

The wise men, because of their great learning and diligence in study, recognized the star that heralded the birth of a new king.

There are times in the biblical narratives, and even today, when people who do not know God as Heavenly Father are drawn to seek Him with all their hearts by direct revelation of His power, His majesty and His love.

The words of God's promise to the wise seeker are found in Deuteronomy 4: 29, "*There you will look for the Lord your God, and if you search for Him with all your heart, you will find Him.*" (Good News).

Reader N:

At the time when Jesus was to be born, there was a widespread belief that a new Jewish prince would *arrive*. This was influenced by the Jews' own Messianic expectations. People also believed that the birth of great men was heralded by *signs in the skies*. God did not disappoint such thinking! The number of stars in the sky, even those we can see, is infinite. They simply cannot be counted. In Psalm 147: 4 it says that God knows the exact number of stars and even calls them by their names! His wisdom, power and infinite knowledge is beyond our human understanding. In Psalm 148: 3 the stars are described as praising God. Thus it should not surprise us that God should cause a special star to *praise the birth of His Son on earth!*

The wise men had probably never followed a star in this way before. What an exciting adventure they embarked upon! They never gave up, but journeyed on, following the star for nearly two years!

Reader O—*reads Matthew 2:1-12 while the wise men go in search of the Young Jesus. A child carrying a pole to which a large star has been attached could precede them, pausing as they stop briefly in a mimed encounter with Herod. When they reach the manger scene, they bow down before Jesus in worship and offer Him their gifts. In advance of this scene, baby Jesus could be changed for a toddler - if a cooperative one can be found.*

Reader P:

As Christians, we should be wise, for by our life and testimony, we can stand out like the stars and lead others to Jesus.

Carol: *Silent Night*

Prayer in unison:

Dear God, we look to You as the greatest mind of all to educate us in Your ways. Thank You for Jesus, whom You gave to this world as a living example of a holy and meaningful life, totally surrendered to Your will. Help us to be wise and follow in His footsteps. Amen.

Leader:

As we celebrate Christmas once again, we are reminded of God's eternal mission. Jesus Christ - God's Son - came to earth to be our Saviour and our Friend.

In terms of the fourfold aims of the Ministries to Women:

- His coming brought us into *fellowship* with Himself and His Father
- we have been given the responsibility and the opportunity to *serve* others in His name
- our *worship* is focused on a God who is alive and active in our world and in us
- we have access to His wisdom and resources beyond our comprehension as our spiritual *education* unfolds.

Repeat in unison: THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Carol: *Joy to the World!*

Prayer and Benediction

Refreshments: Enjoy some Christmas delicacies and fellowship

