

Resources in This Set

The children's Christmas service for all ages includes these editable files: this script, a children's message, a bulletin file for your service bulletin, and a lyrics file. Also included are a recommended planning timeline, a copy of the indicia, and a list of suggested announcements. An optional Christmas service for young children (early childhood) includes a corresponding set of editable files.

A selection of recorded songs and correlating song scores are provided. Some songs are used for both options. Some are used only with the all-age children's service. Others are used only with the early childhood program.

Music Overview

Songs with recordings in the all-age service:

- "O Come, All Ye Faithful"
- "Of the Father's Love Begotten"
- "God Loves Me Dearly"
- "Now Sing We, Now Rejoice"
- "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
- "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"
- "Gentle Mary Laid Her Child"
- "Angels We Have Heard on High"
- "As with Gladness Men of Old"
- "Joy to the World"

Songs with recordings in the early childhood service:

- "O Come, All Ye Faithful"
- "God Loves Me Dearly"
- "In a Little Stable"
- "As with Gladness Men of Old"
- "Joy to the World"

Songs are provided as MP3 files that play on your computer or in any MP3 player.

Each song has two recorded versions: one with vocals, and one with accompaniment only. Some leaders use the vocals version while the children are learning the songs, and then they switch to the accompaniment-only version for the service. Music scores are also provided for each song. Use the resources that best serve your purposes and the abilities of your participants.

The script suggests having the congregation sing specified hymns, but you may change this to whatever works best for you. Permission is given to print all congregational responses, readings, and lyrics in your worship bulletin. You may delete or substitute songs, but if any songs are not

in the public domain, you must get permission from the copyright holders to use those songs and print the lyrics.

If you like, let the children use rhythm instruments to accompany some songs, perhaps even on the songs sung by the congregation.

Mark up a copy of the worship bulletin to guide an accompanist. Ask him or her to provide soft background music as the children move into position for their parts. Note, however, that some hymns and songs are strategically placed to accommodate for such transitions.

Involving Your Pastor in the Service

If your service happens on a Sunday morning, your pastor will likely be involved already. If your service happens during a different time period, be sure to include your pastor in the planning as appropriate, asking what level of involvement works well for him. Don't forget to let him know that there is an optional children's message that he may want to use or adapt. During this busy time of year, it can be a real help to provide him with ready resources!

Individual and Group Parts

The following parts are available for children and youth participation:

- 13 readings

- 2 responsive readings

- 5 rhyming verses, currently divided into 5 age-group recitations

- 3 children's hymns (one is divided into three verses for different groups)

- Costumed nonspeaking characters: Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, sheep, Wise Men

- Musicians or soloists

The following parts are available for young children's participation:

- 9 readers (adults or older children; parts may be divided further)

- Costumed nonspeaking characters: Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, sheep, Wise Men

- 3 rhyming verses

- 2 children's songs

Group Parts

For the all ages service, "The Message Presented by the Children" follows a basic pattern: symbol placement or presentation, congregational hymn, readings that include Scripture verses, group rhyme, and group song. The readings may be read by older children or youth. The readers

and designated group of children can come up during the congregational hymn. Have each group of children memorize their rhyme together to avoid stress and complications from absences, or divide the rhyme among the children.

For the early childhood service, “The Message Presented by the Children” follows a basic pattern: symbol placement or presentation, reading with Scripture, group rhyme and/or song. Have each group of children memorize their rhyme together to avoid stress and complications from absences.

Staging

How you set up the presentation area and where children sit and stand depends on your facility, the number of children, and your local preferences. Keep in mind that smooth transitions help minimize behavior issues and that young children can stand for only so long!

Think about how you can avoid moving groups of children during the service. For example, it may be easier to seat everyone up front to avoid moving groups in and out of the presentation area. If you can do this, have children stand when it’s their turn to present something or to sing. Or you may want to seat them in the front pews or seats, with the tallest children up front and the smaller ones closest to the rest of the congregation. Then, have children stand and turn around when it’s their turn to present or sing.

Costumes and Props

For the all ages service:

One option for this service is to have different groups of children wear different costumes, such as angels and shepherds. Another option would be for costumed volunteers to come up during the nativity portrayal. You may choose one or both options.

Dress the children who act the parts of Mary, Joseph, and shepherds in simple tunics or robes to represent biblical attire. Choir robes or white tunics can be used for angels. These children can come forward during the reading that corresponds to their character. If you choose to have children dress up as sheep, a headband with felt ears and a white robe or large white T-shirt makes an easy costume.

Wrap a baby doll in a blanket to represent Jesus. If you do not have a manger, use a cradle or even a box to represent one. Set two chairs (for Mary and Joseph) in an area up front with the manger. Younger children may play shepherds and sheep, as these characters could sit and kneel.

You may choose to use physical props for the service, you may project the provided digital images on a screen, or you may choose to make a poster of each symbol to display at the appropriate time.

If you are using physical props, place two Christmas trees at the front. Place a few round, red ornaments on the first tree, and drape a red cloth around the base. The second tree should have white lights (unlit, but ready to be lit) and a star at the top. Use the included graphics to prepare angel and manger paper ornaments to place on the tree at the proper time.

For projections, load the images in order. This download contains the symbols that could be projected as you choose.

For the early childhood service:

Think about the context of your church when deciding about how to include costumed children to act the parts of characters. If your families dress up their children for this Christmas service, you may want to use only minimal costumes: garland halos for angels or small sheep props for shepherds. If you do go with costumes, simple tunics or clothing representing biblical attire can be adapted in a simple way for most of the roles. If you choose to have children dress up as sheep, a headband with felt ears and a white robe or large white T-shirt makes an easy costume.

Wrap a baby doll in a blanket to represent Jesus. If you do not have a manger, use a cradle or even a box to represent one. Set two chairs (for Mary and Joseph) in an area up front with the manger.

You may choose to use physical props for the service, you may project the provided digital images on a screen, or you may choose to make a poster of each symbol to display at the appropriate time.

If you are using physical props, place two Christmas trees at the front. Place a few round, red ornaments on the first tree, and drape a red cloth around the base. The second tree should have white lights and a star at the top. Use included graphics to prepare paper angel and manger ornaments to place on the second tree at the proper time.

For projections, load the images in order. This download contains the symbols that could be projected as you choose.

Other Symbols of Salvation Gifts and Resources

This Christmas service is designed to align with several other resources! Consider giving each child a copy of the book *Symbols of Salvation: The Story of Jesus' Birth* (CPH item no. 562567) or a homemade keepsake as a Christmas gift. You may choose to print out the manger and angel ornament images for each child to decorate. If you choose to keep the two Christmas trees up in the church or in the narthex after the program, the decorated ornament images could be hung on them.

Let your pastor and church leaders know that there are several resources your church can use during Advent and Christmas with the *Symbols of Salvation* theme. See cph.org for more details.

The Message Presented by the Children

Leader Notes:

- If you choose to use physical props for the service, place two Christmas trees at the front. Place a few round, red ornaments on the first tree, and drape a red cloth around the base. The second tree should have white lights (unlit, but ready to be lit) and a star at the top. Use included graphics to prepare angel and manger paper ornaments to place on the second tree at the proper time. Alternatively, each symbol could be projected onto a screen at the time indicated in the script.
- The reader roles are great for older children or youth. They can stand behind a podium, reading from the script or straight from the Bible. Memorization is not necessary, but it is an option. To include more volunteers, break the reader parts into smaller sections.
- Rhyming recitation parts weave throughout the service and assist with memory, but the language matures with the age group. To ease stress for children, have them say the rhyme together. You may choose to divide the rhyming pairs and assign them to individuals to memorize if you'd prefer.
- The program follows this general pattern: (1) A symbol is placed. (2) The congregation sings while a group and readers get into place. (3) Readers give the context and share Scripture. (4) The group recites a rhyme. (5) The group sings a song. You might want to replace some of the congregational singing with some special music by older students (solos, ensembles, or the like).

The Christmas Tree

Preschool–Kindergarten Children

(Point to the first Christmas tree or project the unlit Christmas tree symbol.)

(Children in Preschool–Kindergarten assemble during the hymn.)

Congregational Hymn: Of the Father's Love Begotten

LSB 384:1, 3

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.

This is He whom seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word.
Now He shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.

Reader 1: Not only is the Christmas tree more than just a pretty decoration, but it is also a symbol that tells God's story of salvation. Many years ago, two trees were sometimes placed in the church at Christmastime. The first tree reminds us of our sins, for it was through a tree in the Garden of Eden that sin came into the world. God said to Adam and Eve, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16–17).

Reader 2: But Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the fruit of that tree. The red ornaments on the tree remind us of that fruit and the first sin. Since Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, everyone is born a sinner and is condemned to death. The apostle Paul writes in the Book of Romans: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (5:12).

Reader 3: The base of the tree is draped in red to remind us that our sins are like scarlet and red as crimson (Isaiah 1:18). There are no lights, because this tree symbolizes the dark night of sin. But Jesus came and took away the dark night of sin! "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Reader 4: The evergreen tree reminds us of the tree that Jesus died on, because the tip of each branch is in the shape of a cross (*hold up a branch for congregation to see*). Christmas trees are green all year round, which reminds us of the eternal life we will have with Jesus one day. Even the shape of evergreen trees reminds us of Jesus. They point straight up to heaven! The Christmas tree is a symbol of salvation!

Recitation

Through one tree came sin and death;
Now the world was broken!
Through one tree came life and breath:
God Himself has spoken!
Thank You, Jesus, for Your grace.
I will see You face-to-face!

Children's Hymn: God Loves Me Dearly

LSB 392:1, 3

God loves me dearly,
Grants me salvation,
God loves me dearly,
Loves even me.

Refrain:

Therefore I'll say again:
God loves me dearly,
God loves me dearly,
Loves even me.

He sent forth Jesus,
My dear Redeemer,
He sent forth Jesus
And set me free. *Refrain*

(Preschool and kindergarten children return to their places while the congregation sings the next hymn. Readers and children in grades 1–2 get into place.)

The Lights

Children Grades 1–2

(Light the second Christmas tree or project the lights symbol.)

Congregational Hymn: Now Sing We, Now Rejoice

LSB 386:1, 4

Now sing we, now rejoice,
Now raise to heav'n our voice;
 He from whom joy streameth
Poor in a manger lies;
 Not so brightly beameth
The sun in yonder skies.
 Thou my Savior art!
 Thou my Savior art!

Oh, where shall joy be found?
Where but on heav'nly ground?
 Where the angels singing
With all His saints unite,
 Sweetest praises bringing
In heav'nly joy and light.
 Oh, that we were there!
 Oh, that we were there!

Reader 5: We put lights on a cake when it's someone's birthday. The lights on the Christmas tree tell us it's Jesus' birthday! The prophet Isaiah foretold the Light that would come into the world to dispel the darkness: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone" (Isaiah 9:2). Again, Isaiah said, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:1–3).

Reader 6: King David proclaimed, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus shows us the way to heaven. Jesus *is* the way to heaven! Lights at Christmastime are a symbol of salvation!

Recitation

Sometimes, sin is like the night:
Dark and even lonely.
But our Savior is the light:
We can trust Him only.
Thank You, Jesus; light the way;
You take all our fear away!

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

(During the next hymn, children in grades 1–2 take their seats. Readers and children in grades 3–4 assemble.)