Living Nativity: Your Place in the Story

A Christmas Pageant for the Whole Congregation

Written and Provided by: Rev. Tom Lurvey

Living Nativity: Your Place in the Story was written for and performed by members of Sherwood Park Lutheran Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

The vision was that it be a Christmas pageant not performed by the Sunday School children alone but, involving congregational members of all ages.

The vision was that we tell the story of Christmas in the yard outside the walls of our church and invite the community to watch, listen, and participate in the story. The script was inspired by a traditional blessing used in our Christmas service. This Living Nativity concludes with that blessing.

You are welcome to use this script and produce it as you will for your situation. You may not have all of the suggested music available, so be free to use other appropriate music as needed.

We encourage you to use your imagination and creativity to adapt it in a way that will be interesting and engaging for your intended audience.

Creativity Notes:

The Cast

We intentionally sought out people of all ages and abilities to perform.

The story is told by narrators who are depicted as characters peripheral to the action, but who were present and witnessed and participated in the events depicted.

Others played the various major roles in vignettes without spoken lines and with limited action but provided the audience visual focal points.

All of the characters and narrators wore appropriate costumes.

- Elemiah was played by an adult who had the gifts of a good story-teller.
- Salome was an older teen or younger woman.
- Yaakov was an older man.
- Mordechai was a younger man with facial hair—maybe even the "mountain man" look—who could speak in a decidedly rustic style.
- Asad was a younger teenage boy.

- Angel Gabriel was a man or woman with a commanding presence.
- Miriam was a teenage girl.
- Yosef was an older teen or young man.
- Shepherds were played by children, youth, and adults.
- The Magi were three older adults. They journeyed with an entourage of servants of various ages.
- The Heavenly Host was the church choir, dressed in choir robes. They led the singing, which we invited the audience to join.
- We also needed a wrangler to handle the animals.

The Animals

We used two or three sheep for the shepherds to keep watch over, a donkey to accompany Miriam and Yosef to Bethlehem, and a llama to add an exotic touch to the journey of the Magi.

We rented the animals, with a wrangler, from a petting farm. The wrangler was also in costume.

The Set

We used the front exterior of our church. Several areas were simply set and furnished for the various vignettes:

- The front door was set up with a mic, lectern, and sound system for all of the narration.
- The front steps was the locale for the Heavenly Chorus dressed (over their winter garb) in choir gowns.
- The shepherds' field was the yard immediately in front of the steps. There was a fire surrounded by straw bales for sitting and a pen containing several live sheep.
- Far stage right was Nazareth, the locale where Gabriel appeared to Miriam and Yosef.
- The Magi made their appearance from around the corner stage left.
- Near stage right was a simple stable in Bethlehem.

As the story progressed, the characters in turn made their journeys to Bethlehem and took their places in and around the stable.

- Miriam and Yosef journeyed along with a live donkey (led by the wrangler) from Nazareth.
- The shepherds left their flocks and went with haste to see the thing that had taken place.
- The Magi journeyed with their entourage, including the llama (with wrangler), from around the corner.
- At the end, the whole audience was invited to gather around the stable for Silent Night and the blessing.

Equipment

We recruited people to build and furnish the sets.

- A 2x4 frame was the stable in Bethlehem. Straw bales provided some seating. A simple manger built

of 2x4s and filled with straw was the baby's cradle.

- Above the stable was a large star fashioned from Christmas lights attached to a frame.
- The shepherds in the fields needed a fire in a safe container, bales for seating, and a crude corral for the sheep.
- Nazareth was simply a space for the encounter between Gabriel and Miriam and between Gabriel and Yosef.

We used some portable stage lighting on a frame stand to illuminate the narrators and Heavenly Host.

We used a powerful spotlight aimed from the back to illuminate the various vignettes.

We used pilons to separate the audience from the sets, but at the end invited them to come through to find their place in the story.

Last Thoughts

When we were starting to envision a Living Nativity in mid-December, outside the church walls, someone said, "What about the weather? What if there's a blizzard? What if it's -30?" Our concerns were eased when someone said, "You can't buy special effects like that."

As it turned out, the weather for the most part cooperated wonderfully. At one point a gust of wind blew the Heavenly Host director's music off her stand. But just at that point, the Magi entourage was passing nearby and the llama stepped on the music to prevent its blowing away. We now call it, "The Llama who saved Christmas."

God bless your use of this material. We pray it would allow your congregation and community to participate and find their place in the story of Emmanuel, God with us.

If you have questions or concerns, please do contact me.

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LIVING NATIVITY:
Your Place in the Story

Script written by Thomas J. Lurvey

[Song:* O Come, All Ye Faithful, *283 v1]

Elemiah

My name is Elemiah. I'm an angel—a *messenger* of Yahweh God. In fact the word 'angel' literally means 'messenger'. Beyond that, many of us also have more specific jobs. Some are *guardian angels*, guiding and protecting humankind. Others are *worship leaders*, surrounding the heavenly throne of Yahweh. Then there are the *warrior angels*, sent by God to wreak judgment upon peoples and nations. And a few are *archangels*, chief among the angels, sent by Yahweh for the most important tasks.

I myself am an angel of *inward journeys*. It's my task to guide people to insights from the events of their lives and the world, to help them ponder what their observations and experiences might mean.

I want to recall with you an event that happened long ago, as you humans reckon time. It was an occurrence that changed the course of human history—so much so that the very numbering of your years begin with that event. And it was an event that has been at work in your life as well.

Today I want to help you recall, help you ponder, help you find your place in a story.

I've asked some people to tell the story. Like you, these are not the main characters. And yet, they were there, sometimes participating, maybe observing or supporting, always wondering, pondering what it all could mean.

Let me introduce to you Salome, our first story-teller.

Salome

I am Salome. Some of you will remember me as one of the women at the cross and at the garden tomb who first witnessed Yeshua's resurrection. My involvement in the story, though, goes much further back.

Miriam and I were best friends from the time we grew up together in Nazareth. You'll know Miriam better by her English name, Mary. I hope you'll forgive me if I keep on calling her by the Hebrew name I know.

One morning when we were still teenagers, Miriam came all wide-eyed and breathless, as if she wanted to tell me something, but didn't know if she should.

Finally, she spit it out: "Salome, have you ever seen an angel?"

Of course we *knew* about angels from the scriptures: the angel with the flaming sword who drove Adam and Eve from the garden; the three visitors to Abraham and Sarah with the news that they would have a child; the seraphim hovering around the presence of the Lord in Isaiah's vision…. But actually *seeing* an angel only happened to the patriarchs and prophets, never to ordinary people like us.

So Miriam's story was incredible.

[lights; angel and Miriam]

She told me an angel came to her in the night. "Greetings, favoured one!" said the angel. "The Lord is with you."

Miriam told me she was terrified. So the angel said, "Do not be afraid, Miriam, for you have found favour with the Lord."

Then came something even more unbelievable. The angel said, "You will conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Yeshua. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord will give to him the throne of his ancestor David, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Miriam couldn't believe what the angel was saying. "How can this be?" she asked. "I'm still a virgin."

But the angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called Son of God."

[lights fade; cue music]

Now, I have to admit I was sceptical. I had never known Miriam to tell a tall tale before, but this was too much. After a couple of months, though, it was obvious; all the signs were there: Miriam was pregnant!

***[Song:* My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness, O God,**
with prologue, from Holden Evening Prayer]

Elemiah

That angel who brought the news to Miriam was the Archangel Gabriel. This was a most important event with significance that even still is being played out. But that wasn't the end of Gabriel's work. Here I'll let Yaakov pick up the story.

Yaakov

My name is Yaakov. My younger brother is Yosef. You know him as Joseph. He married much too late. Always too busy working, he told me. Our widowed mother was worried, and nagged him about taking a wife.

Well finally, the matchmaker approached him about Miriam (you know, Mary). Maybe he was out of excuses; maybe he realized he wasn't getting any younger; I can't believe it was because he had noticed Miriam, who was always so quiet and serious.

One day after the official engagement, Yosef had to see me. We needed to have a talk, he said. You see Miriam was with child! And, he said, they had never been together.

Yosef was nothing, if not kind. He wouldn't make a scandal, he said. He would break off the engagement quietly. But I could tell, deep down inside Yosef was harbouring anger and shame.

[lights; angel and Yosef]

But the next time we talked, the story was much different. He claimed an angel had appeared to him in a dream, and told him not to be ashamed to take Miriam as his wife, because the child conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. Can you believe that?! "She will bear a son," he said the angel told him, "and he was a to name him Yeshua, for he will save people from their sins."

[lights fade]

Huh! I could only shake my head. I told him, as far as I knew there is only one way to conceive a baby. and anything else… well…… that's just plain crazy.

Elemiah

Yes, that was Gabriel again, with more work yet to do, more arrangements to complete. The prophesy said that the Son of David, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Yosef and Miriam were far away in Nazareth.

But Yahweh is Lord of history.

[cue music; Miriam & Yosef begin journey to Bethlehem]

The Roman emperor, always needing more tax money, was determined that no one would escape the tax collector. He ordered a census, person by person, family by family, of all the people in his vast empire. For Yosef that meant taking his bride and the unborn child she carried to his ancestral home of Bethlehem, the city of David.

It was there that the child was born.

[light stable; Song: **O Little Town of Bethlehem,** ***279 v1]***

Elemiah

Yahweh is Lord of history. But history is made not only by the powerful. God told Gabriel to announce the holy birth first to humble shepherds. Here is their story.

Mordechai

They call me Mordechai. I'm jus' a shepherd; but I don't mine tellin' you that King David started out tendin' sheep. We keep ours outside Bethl'em, where David was born.

We ain't never seen stars like that night. Even by the fire we could see 'em bright against the dark sky. An' one star—I don't think we ever seen it before—outshone 'em all.

As we was lookin', it was like the stars began to move, right toward us, an' that brightest one led the way. For sure, none of us ever seen that!

[lights; angel above shepherds; shepherds fall to ground]

Before we knowed what hit us, the bright light knocked us flat to the groun'. Then we heard someone say: "Don't be scared; I'm bringin' you good news of great joy for everybody: to all of you a baby is born today in the city a David, who is your Saviour, Messiah, the Lord. This'll be a sign: you'll find a chil' lyin' in a manger."

I ain't sure, but it had to be an angel, 'cause then there was a whole army of 'em, an' you should-a heard 'em sing:

[Choir: **Glory! Glory!** ***then lights fade]***

When the angels was gone, and we was tryin' to collect our wits from where they was scattered on the ground, somebody said, "Le's go to Bethl'em an' see what's goin' on."

[cue music; shepherds go to Bethlehem]

So we lef' the sheep, an' ran for a look-see. An' there we foun' a new ma an' pa, an' a baby lyin' in a manger. We told 'em what happened, that we was visited by an angel! An' now we seen with our own eyes what the angel tole us. The pa an' ma din't seem surprised. The momma only held the little-un closer to her heart.

[Song: **Love Has Come,** ***292 vv1-2]***

Elemiah

Miriam "pondered all these things in her heart". That's what your scriptures tell you. Not to be too modest about it, *that was me*, working in her heart that she might reflect on what all these things mean. Gabriel gets the grand announcements; I get the quiet, reflective moments. Just doing my job.

The last storyteller I want to introduce is Asad. He brings a different perspective, from Persia, far to the east.

Asad

Salaam! Yes, I am Asad. At the time of our story I was apprentice to Balthazar, the wisest of the Magi. In your time you might call me a sorcerer's apprentice. We were scholars, priests, philosophers, astrologers, seekers after the truth. On clear desert nights we would study the stars to see what wisdom they would impart to humankind.

[light star above stable]

One night we observed a new star rising. The Master was very excited. We consulted his books and charts to see what it might mean. The next day he hurried to consult further with his Magi friends, Gaspar and Melchior. They had seen it too. After much deliberation they concluded that the star signified the birth of a child who would be king of the Jews.

Never had the birth of a future king caused such a response from the heavens. The three decided they would journey to Jerusalem to see the child for themselves. So with their whole entourage, the three Magi set off following the star.

[cue music; Magi & entourage begin journey, pausing at Jerusalem;
Song:* We Three Kings, *Favorite Hymns of Praise 80 v1]

In Jerusalem, they knew nothing of this birth. King Herod, after consulting his scribes and elders and their scriptures, learned the prophesy that such a child would be born in the village of Bethlehem, the birthplace of their legendary King David. Herod bid us go find the child and then bring him word that he, too, might go and pay homage to his successor.

So, we set off again, still following the star until it led us to Bethlehem.

[Song:* We Three Kings, *v5;
Magi resume journey to Bethlehem]

Elemiah

The star? That was Gabriel again. We angels don't always appear in the way you've heard: hovering with wings and all. But we do come with messages from Yahweh God.

Gabriel's news brought people to Bethlehem for the birth of a child who was born to be King; born to be good news of great joy for *all* people; born to save people from their sins; born the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us; and born *for you.* You have a place in this story, because Yeshua was born for you too! One of the early church leaders once said: "What good is it that Mary gave birth to Christ so many years ago if we do not give birth to him today?"

You, like Mary, may not fully understand it all, but there is plenty to ponder and treasure in your hearts.

Come now, everyone gather 'round the manger, smaller ones in front and bigger ones in the back, and ponder these things as the Heavenly Host sings again. Then join them in a familiar song.

[Choir:* Silent Is the Night; *All:* Silent Night, *281 v1]

Pastor

Receive our Lord's blessing:
May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ Child. Almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever. Amen.