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Quick & Easy Christmas Programs



More Than a Story

Laura and Robert Keeley

A Christmas Play for Children

More Than a Story

Laura and Robert Keeley



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Faith Alive Christian Resources
2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560-0001

1-800-333-8300
Fax: 616-224-0834
E-mail: editors@faithaliveresources.org

We wish to thank Laura and Robert Keeley for writing this play. The Keeleys are codirectors of children's ministries at Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. They have written and directed many plays for children, including six other dramas in the Quick & Easy Christmas Programs series published by Faith Alive Christian Resources.

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ISBN 978-1-59255-463-8

10987654321

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Preface

Everyone loves the Sunday school Christmas program. It's always fun to see how the young children will behave in front of the whole church. Who will sing the loudest this year? Who will turn his back to the audience? Who will wave to her parents? It's more than that, of course. Our hearts swell when we hear the children sing with the kind of enthusiasm and abandon that we adults left behind long ago. We treasure seeing and hearing these young children singing and speaking about the stories that mean so much to us.

For the people in charge, though, producing this wonderful program can be a big headache. As directors of children's programs at our church, every year we look for new songs and a fresh way to approach the Christmas story. The challenge, of course, is that the theme is always the same—Christmas! So we began to make some basic decisions about what we thought the program should and should not be.

What's the Purpose?

We started by thinking about the purpose of the Christmas program. We saw some things happening in churches that didn't fit with our idea of what the program ought to be. Sometimes, for example, children would be required to rehearse long in advance, taking weeks away from their Sunday school instruction or requiring parents to bring their children to church for after-school or evening rehearsals. The purpose, it seemed, was to present a program that was "just right," that came off without a hitch.

Eventually we decided that Christmas programs should have multiple purposes. In our church, the program was part of a worship service, so it had to have theological integrity and present something meaningful to the congregation. We also came to see the program as an opportunity for the church to demonstrate that it values children by giving them a chance to lead a worship service. And we concluded that a program put on by children should reflect their developmental level and should project a sense of fun and wonder. Since the Lord gave us children, we should be happy when they act like children! The program should not be so formal that the children are afraid to be themselves.

On the practical side, as parents, we didn't want to drag our children to extra rehearsals. And as directors, we didn't have the time for numerous rehearsals. The Christmas season is busy enough! We needed a simple program that we could present with just one rehearsal—and that didn't take time away from ongoing church school classes.

Things to Keep in Mind

Keeping those things in mind, we developed the following principles for directing our church's Christmas programs:

- The program doesn't need to be perfect. Of course, it's important to give our best to the Lord, but even with multiple rehearsals, children will still forget lines and get nervous. Frankly, that's often part of a program's charm. Parents and other adults love seeing kids act like kids, waving to their parents and siblings. That's OK!
- It's usually best for children to read their lines, not memorize them. When kids aren't required to memorize their lines, they generally feel more comfortable participating in the program (and are

more willing to be involved in next year's program). We usually provide music stands for the kids to put their scripts on so they don't have to worry about dropping them. We ask the kids to read with as much expression as they can, clearly and slowly.

- Include as many children as possible. If you have more actors than the play has characters, you can easily add a few lines and characters.
- Invite—don't pressure—kids to participate. They need to be comfortable doing so. We call parents at home and ask them if their child would like to participate. This way, there's less peer pressure and parents have some input. Because the children know they are not asked to memorize anything and that participating is “no big deal,” we've never had a child who didn't want to be included.
- Make a point with your program—and have fun doing it. Children and adults should enjoy the program and learn something from it. *More Than a Story* uses humor, but it also attempts to make a point. Even though the point may be more apparent to adults, the children hear it and will recall parts of it during the Christmas season. Don't underestimate what children pick up.

Using *More Than a Story*

It's important to adjust this play (and all others!) to the needs and skills of your children and to your congregation. Here are some easy ways to do that.

- As we suggested above, you can expand the character and lines in the play if you have more children than roles.
- When we performed this play we didn't have enough children for all the parts, so some children played two parts in two different scenes. Actors in scenes 2 to 5 can be repeated. For example: Rebekah in scene 2 can also play the part of Naomi in scene 4.
- While there are no “star” roles in this play, you will probably want to use older children for the longer parts (such as the Class Reunion). If you change characters' names, all roles can be played by boys or girls with the exception of Miriam—that part should be played by a girl.
- If you have a good group of singers, you may want to add more songs. If you have soloists, feature them in the songs. To minimize the time needed to learn a song, ask two or three children to sing the stanzas; the choir or congregation can sing just the chorus (or vice versa).
- Since we often have third-grade children reading Scripture, we have made the Scripture readings short, with each child reading only one or two verses at a time.
- As you assign parts, keep in mind the personalities of the kids and attempt to choose parts that fit them. Feel free to adjust some roles or lines to fit the child who reads them: for example, a shy child may prefer to have just one line at a time. You can simplify his or her lines or add a character and split the lines between them.

More Than a Story can be used alone or as part of a worship service. Depending on how many songs you sing, the play will take 30-35 minutes to perform. See the end of the play for a sample bulletin that shows how we used this program as part of a worship service.

Sit back and enjoy what the children in your church can do. The kids in our church amaze us every year. It's a joy and a privilege to be able to work with them.

—Laura and Bob Keeley

Plot Summary

Friends gather at a class reunion of Bethlehem High School. One of the classmates reminds them of the stories of Israel's past—of how Moses and Samuel talked to God, of how Josiah and all of Israel were changed by the reading of God's Word. Finally, they hear about how shepherds were changed when they saw Jesus in the manger and reflect on how their lives, and ours, can be changed forever through the birth of the Messiah.

Characters

Scene 1: The Reunion

- Rachel
- Nathan
- Ruth
- Abigail

Scene 2: Moses Hears God

- Rebekah
- Mary
- Elizabeth
- Miriam
- Abigail
- Nathan
- Ruth
- Rachel

Scene 3: Samuel Hears God

- Micah
- Daniel
- Joshua
- Nathan
- Rachel
- Ruth
- Abigail

Scene 4: Josiah Hears God

- Naomi
- Jacob
- Reuben
- Sarah

Scene 5: The Shepherds Meet Jesus

- Luke
- Esther
- Deborah

Scene 6: The Reunion—More Than a Story

- Nathan
- Rachel
- Ruth
- Abigail

Costumes

All the characters in this play should be dressed as first-century Israelites. At our church we dress them in robes, shawls, sandals, and sashes (Check the pattern books at your fabric store for Israelite costumes.) Solid-colored fabrics in earth tones such as brown, tan, green, rust, and dusty blue work well, as do textured fabrics. Choose cotton broadcloth or other lightweight fabric so the children can wear costumes over their regular clothes without getting too warm.

For a simple alternative, have the girls wear a shawl around the head or shoulders. A piece of fabric about 18 inches by 60 inches (46 cm by 152 cm) works well. For boys, use the same size fabric but fold it in half and drape it over one shoulder. You can also use the fabric for a sash by placing the midpoint of the fabric over the shoulder and then bringing the fabric across the chest and back, pinning it together at the hip.

The shepherds in Scene 5 could carry shepherds' crooks.

Staging

There are two main stage areas—one for the class reunion and one for the actors. You'll also need a place for the Bible readers and the choir. We had two choirs, one with younger children (preschool to second grade) and one with older children (third to sixth grade) because our children gather in two groups each week for singing. But arrange your choir however it best suits your group.

We have a fairly traditional church building, and we placed the actors for scenes 2-5 on the platform. The class reunion took place on the floor off to the side in a place where the actors could be seen. You can, of course, arrange them in any way that makes sense in your space, but having them in two separate places helps the audience understand that the people at the reunion are “telling” the stories that we see in the other scenes. Signs such as “Welcome Back” and a sports pennant that says “Go Rams” could be hung in the background of the class reunion.

If you have projection available, consider projecting the cover art from this book before and after the program. The name of each scene can also be projected as it is being performed.

Songs

We've suggested the following songs to sing with this play:

- “Away in a Manger,” traditional, *Sing With Me* #87
- “Holy Emmanuel” by Steve Hindalong and Terry Scott Taylor (*City on a Hill Christmas: A Worship Celebration for Youth*, Brentwood Benson Music Publishing, 2003)
- “How Did Moses Cross the Red Sea,” *Sing With Me* #73
- “O What a Night/ Glory to God” by Don Moen and Clarie Cloninger (“O What a Night”) and Graham Kendrick (“Glory to God”) from the CD *Emmanuel Has Come*, Integrity Music, 1996.
- “Oh, Shepherds, Wake Up” by Robert and Laura Keeley (see music provided at the back of this book)

- “The B-I-B-L-E,” traditional
- “The Counting Song,” *Sing With Me* # 204
- “That’s My King” by Sherri Youngward from the CD *The Sky Can Still Remember*, BEC Recordings, 2006.
- “When Israel Was in Egypt’s Land,” *Sing With Me* # 71

We selected these songs because we thought they fit well with the play, but there are many other songs, both traditional and contemporary, that would also fit. Feel free to substitute other songs.

Introduction

Bible Reading

John 1:1-5

Songs

- “Holy Emmanuel”
- “Away in a Manger”

Scene 1: The Reunion

[Rachel and Nathan enter, wearing nametags that say “Hello, my name is Rachel,” etc. Ruth and Abigail are backstage. Abigail is also wearing a nametag. Rachel is looking around, and then she spots Nathan.]

Rachel: Nathan? Is that really you?

Nathan: Rachel! Wow—you haven’t changed a bit! I was hoping I’d see you here at the reunion.

Rachel: It’s good to see you too, Nathan. You look great!

Nathan: Thanks! I can hardly believe it’s been thirty years since we were students here at Bethlehem High, can you?

Rachel: Hardly! Remember all the classes we had together? I had so much fun sitting behind you in Sheep Shearing 101.

Nathan: That’s right—remember when you sheared Joshua’s hair?

Rachel: Hey—that was an accident!

Nathan: Yeah. . . I never really believed that.

Rachel: You weren’t such a goody two-sandals either, Nathan. I remember when the teachers discovered that our school mascot was no longer a white sheep. Somebody dyed it pink!

Nathan: That was Simon’s idea. I wasn’t really involved.

Rachel: You can say what you want, but I heard they caught you pink-handed!

Nathan: OK, maybe I was involved a *little*.

Rachel: Oh look—here comes . . . oh, *what’s* her name again?

Nathan: I can't remember.

Rachel: She's not wearing a nametag.

Nathan: What do we do?

Rachel: Fake it.

[Ruth joins the group.]

Ruth: Nathan! Rachel! You guys look great!

Rachel: Wow, I can't believe it's you. You haven't changed a bit. How are you?

Nathan: Yeah, how you doing there . . . you?

Ruth: It's me! Ruth! From astronomy class!

Nathan: Of course, that's right. Ruth!

Rachel: I knew your name all along, Ruth. How are you?

Ruth: I'm doing great!

Rachel: We were just talking about some of our old classmates.

Ruth: Oh yeah. Remember those nights we used to sit outside and do our star charts together?

Nathan: Oh yeah—It was you . . . and me . . . and . . . who else was there?

Ruth: Abigail! I can't believe you don't remember Abigail. I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't recognize her, though. Let me tell you—she has changed a LOT since high school.

Rachel: Really?

Ruth: Oh yeah—and not just her looks. She's like a different person now. You can see for yourself. She's here tonight.

Rachel: What kind of work does she do?

Ruth: I think she's a shepherd.

Rachel: Really? Did she take over the family business?

Nathan: Not right away. She went to a special shepherding school.

Rachel: Really? Where did she go?

Nathan: I think she went to Woolsley College.

Rachel: Wow—that’s a great school. She must have done well on her S.A.T.s!

Nathan: I think she did—and those Shepherding Aptitude Tests are *tricky*!

Rachel: That’s impressive, but she’s still just a shepherd, you know?

Nathan: Yeah, a shepherd’s life can be pretty boring.

Rachel: Tell me about it! My brother-in-law is a shepherd, and when we get together all he talks about is sheep, sheep, sheep!

Nathan: Well, what do you expect? It’s not like there are any noteworthy shepherds.

Ruth: Of course there are.

Nathan: Really? Name one.

Ruth: There’s David. Everyone remembers the stories of David.

Nathan: Not fair—he’s famous for being king, not for being a shepherd.

Ruth: OK . . . what about Noah?

Rachel: Noah? He wasn’t a shepherd.

Ruth: Sure he was. Noah had at least *two* sheep.

Nathan: Very funny. But you better stop all this shepherd-bashing—here comes Abigail now.

[Abigail joins the group.]

Abigail: Hi guys, how are you doing? You look great!

Nathan: So do you, Abigail!

Abigail: It’s really good to see you. What have you been up to?

Rachel: Not much.

Abigail: How about you, Ruth?

Ruth: I started a tent-making company. It’s called Tents R Us.

Abigail: Really. Residential or commercial?

Ruth: Mostly residential. Our latest product is marketed to nomads. We call it “Home-in-a-Bag.”

Abigail: Nice—I think I've seen your ads.

Ruth: Yes, that's been a big seller.

Nathan: Abigail, we hear you're in the sheep business.

Abigail: That's right—I really enjoy it.

Ruth: I think sitting out there all day would be tough. I'd probably fall asleep.

Abigail: The only time I get sleepy is when I have to count the sheep.

Rachel: That always works for me.

Abigail: I get to spend a lot of time outdoors, and while I tend the sheep I do a lot of reading.

Rachel: What have you been reading? Anything good?

Abigail: I read some professional books of course—I recently read *Purpose-Driven Shepherding*.

Nathan: Doesn't it take you 40 days to read it?

Ruth: Yes, I think I've heard of that one.

Abigail: I've been reading a lot of other things too. And I've been doing some thinking.

Ruth: About shepherds?

Abigail: Yeah, about shepherds, and about priests and kings too!

Nathan: What a combination! Do they have anything in common?

Abigail: Yes, they do. I first noticed that when I was thinking about some things that happened when our people were slaves in Egypt. . . .

[Abigail, Ruth, Rachel, and Nathan exit.]