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Quick & Easy Christmas Programs



What Did I Miss?



Laura and Robert Keeley

A Christmas Play for Children

What Did I Miss?

Laura and Robert Keeley



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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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 *Manger King* and *Born for You and Me*, also published by Faith Alive Christian Resources.

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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. *What Did I Miss?* 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 *What Did I Miss?*

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 drama if you have more children than roles.
- While there are no “star” roles in this play, you will probably want to have older children read the longer parts.
- As you assign parts, keep in mind the personalities of your kids and attempt to choose parts that fit them. Feel free to adjust some roles or lines to fit the child who reads them. A shy child, for example, may prefer to speak just one line at a time. You can simplify his or her lines or add a character and split the lines between them.
- Boys or girls can read all the roles, but scene 2 (“At Elizabeth's Home”) will work best if it includes a couple of girls.
- 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: Madeline in scene 2 could also play the part of Rachel in scene 5).
- If your church's children's program is called something other than Sunday school, change the name of scene 1 (“In a Sunday School Classroom”) to reflect your church's program, for example, “In a Kid Zone Classroom.”
- In scenes 2, 3, 4, and 5, a reader is directed to “use quotey fingers.” This actor should raise both hands and make imaginary quotation marks in the air.
- Since we often have third-grade children reading the Scripture, we have kept the Scripture readings short, with each child reading only one or two verses at a time.

- 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 cut down the time needed to learn a song, ask two or three children to sing the stanzas and have the choir or congregation sing just the chorus (or vice versa).
- With younger kids, we often sing the first verse of a song two times.

What Did I Miss? 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

A Sunday school class gathers for a lesson about the birth of Jesus. When one member of the class arrives late, the class wonders if anyone was late in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. We look at four stories: the visit of Mary to Elizabeth's home, Mary and Joseph coming to the inn, the angels announcing the birth to shepherds, and the magi's visit to Bethlehem. After these scenes, the class reflects on how they are just as much a part of the story as if they had been right there in the stable with Joseph and Mary. They realize that because we're children of God, we haven't missed a thing!

Characters

Scene 1: In a Sunday School Classroom

- Micah
- Reuben
- Mitchell
- Margaret
- Anneke

Scene 2: At Elizabeth's Home

- Madeline
- Ian
- Kaitlin
- Rebeka

Scene 3: At the Inn

- Luke
- Britta
- Noah

Scene 4: In the Fields

- Jill
- Ryan
- Derek

Scene 5: At the University

- Phil
- Rachel
- Keaton

Scene 6: What Did I Miss?

- Micah
- Reuben
- Mitchell
- Margaret
- Anneke

Costumes

The children participating in scenes 1 and 6 can wear everyday clothes. Those in scenes 2, 3, 4, and 5 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 18" x 60" (46 cm x 152 cm) fabric 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 mid-point 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 4 could carry shepherd's crooks.

Staging

There is one main stage area. 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 grades) because our children gather in two groups each week for singing. Arrange it in a way that best suits your group.

If you have a projector available, consider projecting the cover art from this book before and after the program. You might also want to project the name of each scene as it is being performed.

Songs

We've suggested the following songs because they fit well with the play. Of course there are many other songs, both traditional and contemporary, that would also fit. Feel free to substitute songs you and your children are familiar with.

- "Away in a Manger," traditional.
- "Child of God" by Grant Cunningham and Matt Huesmann, on the CD *One Silent Night*, Myrrh, 2000.
- "Come and See," *Sing With Me* 108, Faith Alive Christian Resources.
- "For Unto Us" by Sherri Youngward (from the CD *The Sky Can Still Remember*, BEC Recordings, 2006.
- "Joy to the World," traditional.
- "Magnify the Lord," *Sing With Me* 82, Faith Alive Christian Resources.
- "O What a Night/Glory to God," Don Moen, from the CD *Emmanuel Has Come*, Integrity Music, 1996.
- "Oh Shepherds, Wake Up" by Robert and Laura Keeley (see p. 31).
- "We Have Seen His Star" by Bill Batstone, from the Martins' CD *Light of the World*, Spring Hill Music, 1997.
- "Rock the Baby," *Sing With Me* 105, Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Scene 1: In a Sunday School Classroom

[Micah, Reuben, Margaret, and Mitchell enter.]

Micah: Are we all here? It's about time to start the lesson.

Reuben: No, Anneke isn't here.

Mitchell: It's 9:03 and we are supposed to start at 9:00.

Margaret: Yeah, she's always late. I'm not—I'm usually early.

Reuben: I wonder why she's always late.

Mitchell: She has plenty of clocks in her house—I checked.

Micah: Well, some people are just always late.

Reuben: Why?

Micah: I don't know.

Mitchell: It is now 9:04.

Reuben: *[to Margaret]* Why are you always early?

Margaret: I make sure that I have plenty of time because I hate being late. If I know it will take me ten minutes to get somewhere, I leave fifteen minutes early—just in case.

Reuben: Just in case what?

Margaret: Just in case I get delayed.

Mitchell: How often do you get delayed?

Margaret: Almost never. But I'm also almost never late—and I like it that way.

Mitchell: It is now 9:05. We were supposed to start at 9:00. See, Margaret? You could have been late and you still would have been early.

Micah: Thanks for the help, Mitchell. Why this sudden interest in time?

Mitchell: I got a new watch. It not only tells the time, but I can also use it to check the barometric pressure.

Reuben: You know, I'm always saying to myself, I wonder what the barometric pressure is?

Micah: Yeah, Mitchell—that's cool but it doesn't seem all that useful.

Mitchell: Well, it also has a calculator and a can opener!

Margaret: What, no global positioning system?

Reuben: Yeah, if it had that you could tell us where Anneke is.

Micah: I think I can tell you that—she's right here. Hi, Anneke.

[Anneke enters.]

Anneke: Hi everyone—sorry I'm late. What did I miss?

Margaret: Mostly you just missed us talking about you being late—again.

Anneke: I'm really sorry. I know this is something I have to work on. You'd be surprised how many things I miss because I'm late.

Reuben: Why were you late this time?

Anneke: I got this new pair of pajamas and I wanted to see how well they work.

Margaret: So, do they work well?

Anneke: They're great—I slept right through my alarm!

Mitchell: Does everyone realize that it is now 9:07?

Micah: We're all here now, so let's get started. Today we're going to focus on the Christmas story.

Reuben: I wonder how many people in Bethlehem missed that big event because they were late.

Margaret: Well, they didn't have watches to keep track of time.

Mitchell: Or the barometric pressure!

Micah: That's true. It's amazing that they survived without knowing the barometric pressure!

Reuben: But what about all the people in Bethlehem? Do you think some of them missed the birth of Jesus because they were late?

Margaret: You think there were people in Bethlehem who didn't realize that Jesus was born?

Anneke: Of course there were. Think about it. That scene in the stable is pretty empty. Where were all the other people of Bethlehem?

Micah: Not only that—but Mary and Joseph seemed all alone. Where was their family?

Margaret: I wonder how many people missed Jesus' birth.

[Micah, Reuben, Margaret, Anneke, and Mitchell exit.]