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Quick & Easy Christmas Programs



God With Us

Laura and Robert Keeley

A Christmas Play for Children

God With Us

Laura and Robert Keeley

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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 eight other dramas in the Quick & Easy Christmas Programs series 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 looked 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!
- We give the kids who have parts their scripts a week before and ask them to read their lines out loud once a day.

- 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 or email 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. *God With Us* 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 *God With Us*

Feel free to adjust this play to the needs and skills of your children and your congregation. Here are some easy ways to do that:

- As suggested above, you can expand the characters and lines in the drama if you have more children than roles.
- Some of the characters are in multiple scenes. You may want to have older children take these roles.
- Each character can be played by either a boy or a girl—just change the characters' names if you need to.
- During the reading of Luke 2:1-20 in Scene 4, the actors should stay on stage. A silent portrayal of the nativity scene could be presented with the reading. This will give you an opportunity to involve even more children.
- 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 the chorus.
- We often have third-grade children read the Scripture, giving each child only a few verses. We give the other parts to older children.
- Before the first song begins, the children should be waiting backstage for their cue.
- As you assign parts, keep in mind the personalities of the kids and attempt to choose parts that will be most comfortable for them. For example, a shy child may prefer to have just one line at a time. You can simplify this child's lines or add a new character and split the lines from one character in the play to make two characters with smaller parts. Feel free to adjust some roles or lines to fit the children who read them.

God With Us can be used alone or as part of a worship service. Depending on how many songs you sing, the drama will take about 40 minutes to perform. See the end of the script 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.

Plot Summary

A group of Sunday school students are sent to different rooms to study different stories of exile: Adam and Eve sent out of the Garden of Eden, the Israelites enslaved in Egypt, and the people of Judah sent as captives to Babylon. In two of these stories the people are restored, but not in the third, the exile from the Garden. In discussing these stories, the children realize that the Christmas story is the beginning of the great restoration that Adam and Eve looked forward to—God is once again in close relationship with his people. During Christmas, we really get to experience “God with us.”

Characters

Scene 1: Exiled from the Garden

Raphael
Sam
Jenna

Scene 2: Restored from Egypt

Mason
Anneke
Ian
Chloe

Scene 3: Restored from Babylon

Maya
Brooke
Keaton
Rebeka

Scene 4: Restored in Jesus

Chloe
Sam
Anneke
Brooke
Rebeka
Raphael

Costumes

No costumes are needed. In Scene 1, Raphael has an iPhone or similar device.

Staging

There is one main stage area for the actors. In our fairly traditional church building, we placed the actors in the center on the platform. You'll also need a place for the Bible readers and 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 feel free to arrange the staging 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. The name of each scene can also be projected as it is being performed. A PowerPoint

presentation of pictures that children have drawn of creation, the exodus, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and Jesus' birth could also be shown before the drama or during the offering.

Songs

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

- "Away in a Manger," traditional.
- "Born That We May Have Life," by Chris Tomlin, Matt Hoher and Ed Cash, from the CD *Glory in the Highest: Christmas Songs of Worship*, Sparrow Records, 2009.
- "Emmanuel," by Chris Tomlin and Ed Cash, from the CD *Glory in the Highest: Christmas Songs of Worship*, Sparrow Records, 2009.
- "For Unto Us," words and music by Kim Case, from the CD *The Sky Can Still Remember*, by Sherri Youngward, BEC Recordings, 2006.
- "God Has Come to Earth," written by Aaron Shust and Martin Luther, from the CD *When Love Was Born*, Word Entertainment, 2009.
- "He Came Down," *Sing With Me* 91.
- "Joy to the World," traditional.
- "Prepare the Way of the Lord," *Sing With Me* 84.
- "That Boy-Child of Mary," *Sing With Me* 100.
- "This Is How We Know," by Frank Hernandez, *Sing With Me* 127.
- "Your King Has Come," by Matthew Smith on the CD *Your King Has Come*, Detuned Radio Records, 2000.

Sing With Me is available from Faith Alive Christian Resources (FaithAliveResources.org).

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

Song: “He Came Down”

Bible Reading: Micah 5:2-3

Scene 1: Exiled from the Garden

(Sam, Raphael, and Jenna enter. Raphael is holding an iPhone or similar device.)

Raphael: It’s not my fault!

Sam: Yes it is. I wish you had paid attention.

Raphael: I *was* paying attention!

Jenna: You weren’t paying attention to the Sunday school teacher—you were paying attention to your iPhone.

Raphael: I was doing class work. I was looking for Christmas pictures of the five shepherds.

Sam: Five shepherds?

Raphael: Sure. Just like in the song.

Jenna: What song?

Raphael: “Five shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground.” I thought everyone knew that song—talk about not paying attention!

Sam: It’s not FIVE shepherds—it’s WHILE shepherds watched their flocks.

Raphael: Oh, OK. I was just a little bit off.

Jenna: So, how many shepherds were there?

Raphael: See, my phone is going to come in handy again—I’ll just look it up. *(Looking at his phone.)* How do you spell “shepherds”? This thing isn’t working.

Sam: Well, the Bible doesn’t really tell us how many shepherds there were.

Jenna: Besides, we didn’t get sent out of class to study the Christmas story.

Raphael: We didn’t? Then what *are* we supposed to be doing?

Sam: You'd probably know if you'd been paying attention.

Raphael: How was I supposed to know that we would get argyled?

Jenna: Argyled? What are you talking about?

Raphael: Now who wasn't paying attention, huh? "Argyled" is when you get sent away and you can't come back.

Jenna: We didn't get *argyled*—we got *exiled*. *Argyle* is a clothing pattern.

Sam: Yeah, it's the stuff with all the diamond shapes.

Raphael: OK, whatever—I still don't know what we're supposed to be doing right now.

Sam: We've been exiled from our classroom so we can study Genesis 3—the story of the fall.

Raphael: Like when you trip and fall? That kind of fall?

Sam: Sort of. It's about the fall into sin.

Jenna: Yeah. Adam and Eve were created and lived in a wonderful garden. They had plenty to eat and drink, and they talked to God.

Sam: God told them that they could eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except one—the one in the middle.

Raphael: That fruit must have been hard to resist.

Jenna: It *was* hard to resist. A snake came and convinced Eve to eat the fruit of that tree, and she ate it. Then she talked Adam into eating it too.

Raphael: That sounds bad.

Sam: It *was* bad.

Jenna: Yes, it was. God only made one rule about what they couldn't do, and they broke it.

Sam: They got kicked out of the garden, and they lost their really close connection to God.

Jenna: Hey—they were exiled just like we were!

Raphael: But *we'll* be able to go back to class later. Did Adam and Eve ever get invited back into the garden?

Sam: No, they didn't. That sin changed their lives forever. And it didn't affect just them. What they did was the start of sin for all of us.

Jenna: So when one of us does something bad . . .

Sam: . . . like not paying attention in class . . .

Jenna: . . . it's because we have sin inside us—and that sin came from what Adam and Eve did.

Raphael: Well that's a pretty sad story. I wasn't really in the mood for a sad story—after all, it is Christmas. We should be doing happy Christmas stories.

Sam: You're right. It's not a happy story.

Jenna: I wonder why our teacher assigned us this story to study at Christmastime.

(Sam, Jenna and Raphael exit.)

Bible reading: Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14

Songs: “God Has Come to Earth”
“This Is How We Know”

God With Us was written by Laura and Robert Keeley, codirectors of children's ministries for Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan. The Keeleys have written and produced many plays for children. They are firm believers in simple, biblically based productions that let kids be kids and that delight as well as inspire.

Convenient format allows you to purchase just one copy of *God With Us*—includes permission to photocopy the script for all members of the production.


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