

PAGEANTS OF PRAISE

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DEDICATION

TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS
AND CHILDREN
OF
OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
COLONIE, NEW YORK

INTRODUCTION

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

The presentation of the annual Christmas pageant is a solidly entrenched tradition within most Christian churches, Sunday schools and day schools. Children, and particularly their parents, eagerly look forward to this very special event. Unfortunately, in many instances this annual nativity celebration is more a showcase for amateur talent than a truly spiritual experience.

This compendium is based upon three fundamental assumptions: 1) that the Christmas pageant offers a unique opportunity for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, 2) that the pageant as a dramatic reenactment of the Christmas story offers a particularly powerful way to spiritually involve everyone concerned in a true celebration of the birth of the Savior, and 3) that most directors of Christmas pageants – “Who’s turn is it this year?” – earnestly desire to make the pageant as spiritually powerful as possible.

CELEBRATING THE MYSTERY OF THE WORD MADE FLESH

How many times have Christians looked at the world at Christmas time and sadly bemoaned how “secular” our Christmases have become? How often have we cried out to “put Christ back into Christmas”? How deeply we yearn to see our Lord and Savior assume his rightful “starring role” in all our Christmas celebrations!

But to truly put Christ back into Christmas means, first and foremost, to put the Gospel of Jesus Christ back into Christmas and to surround it with the praise, worship and honor rightfully due our Almighty God. For Jesus, as the Scriptures plainly tell us, is the Word, the Way, the Truth and the Life for all mankind. Any celebration of Christmas that lacks the Gospel as its living cornerstone will fail to show the way, or bring the truth, or give life to a darkened and lost world – in short, will never succeed in putting Christ back into Christmas.

Regardless of how many joyous remembrances of angels on high, or shepherds watching their sheep, or mangers, or wise men, or guiding stars, or “silent nights” we might share with one another, they represent dead and meaningless activities unless they point plainly and directly to the greatest fact of history: that Jesus, born of a virgin, was sent by the Father – because the Father so loved the world – to be born a man, to die on a cross, and be raised up again victoriously. And that whosoever accepts this “Babe of Bethlehem” as his or her personal savior shall not die but have eternal life.

This is the only celebration worthy of Christmas. But it is often hopelessly lost amid rhyming jingles, colorful and clever pageantry, and the overriding determination that each and every child in the pageant have the opportunity to “shine” for the proud and adoring

parents and relatives filling the pews.

But there is only one who should “shine” at Christmas and that, of course, is Jesus. For Christmas time is a time for remembering, retelling, celebrating and holding forth the glorious solution to the mystery of the ages – the mystery of the Word made flesh in the birth of a child, in the giving of a Son, and in His proclamation that the Kingdom of God has come to dwell among us.

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are small among the clans of Judah,
yet out of you will come one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from old, from ancient times.”

We truly celebrate Christmas only when men and women are confronted by the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ; and when, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are led personally to the revelation of the mystery of the Word made flesh. Anything less than that only strengthens the grip of “X-mas” in a world that already has too many Xs against it.

THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT AS AN OFTEN LOST OPPORTUNITY FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL

If the annual Christmas pageant primarily elicits responses of “Aren’t they cute,” rather than “Thank you, Jesus,” then it has essentially failed; and a great opportunity to bring the healing ministry of the Gospel to sinful man has been lost.

If the annual Christmas pageant is approached simply as a “kiddie show,” rather than as the revelation of the mystery of the ages, then it would be better if it were not presented at all. How easily Satan can use such occasions to further harden the hearts of unbelievers or to weaken the faith of believers. Simply put, if the “kiddie show” isn’t preaching the Gospel, then it is hardening hearts or, at the very least, demeaning the great miracle of Christmas.

Rather, the children’s pageant presents us with an ideal and unique opportunity for worship, for preaching and teaching, and for assisting the Church in carrying forward its Great Commission. It should receive the same care and reverence accorded other celebrations within the Church.

THE PAGEANT AS RELIGIOUS DRAMA

The form of the pageant is dramatic. It tells a story in an immediate and visual manner, inviting its audience not only to “stop, look and listen,” but also to spiritually enter into the great action that is being portrayed. It is both an historical drama – the reenactment of the birth of God in human form – and a spiritual drama that grapples with the events and

basic needs of our daily lives.

In preparing to produce a pageant, it is extremely helpful to remember its several audiences. First and foremost, the pageant is presented before the Lord himself in a form of praise and worship: a living sacrifice of our time and talents gratefully offered to the Lord and Savior. Every aspect of the pageant must be presented in a spirit of joyful reverence and thanksgiving. Hence, it must be our best gift. "Good enough" is simply not good enough.

There is, of course, an important secondary audience. This is the congregation, its ranks often swelled by numerous unsaved family members and friends who have come primarily to see "the kids" in action; or perhaps simply because "what would Christmas be without a children's pageant." Here is a field ripe for the seeds of the Gospel according to our Lord's promise that, if we will but faithfully spread the Gospel seeds, they will accomplish the purpose for which they have been sent forth. Hence, in addition to praise and worship, the pageant reaches out as a powerful tool of evangelism to the unsaved and the weak in faith, and acts as an uplifter and encourager of all the saints.

Finally, an audience often overlooked is the pageant participants themselves, the children and adults who gather together to say the lines and sing the songs that worship and preach. Their spirits and faith too can be strengthened and uplifted through the drama of the Christmas story as they enter, in a direct manner, into the ageless mystery and joy of Christmas. One of the primary responsibilities of the pageant director is to keep in mind that rehearsals are not just "work sessions" and the presentation not simply "show time," but opportunities for ministry to the lives of each and every participant.

In short, the audience for a pageant is everyone involved with it – the Lord, the congregation and the participants. There is not "us" and "them" but a continuous flow of Gospel ministry from participants to congregation, and together, to the Lord. Everyone is both audience and participant. Through praise and worship the presence of the Holy Spirit fills every aspect of the service. Everything flows together to the glory of God.

CONCERNING THE FOLLOWING SCRIPTS

The following scripts, which have been used and tested in an actual pageant presentation, are offered to the church with the prayer that some may find them useful additions to their Christmas celebrations. Each lasts approximately one hour.

The scripts themselves seek to reflect the threefold ministry opportunities of the pageant drama. Each is represented in three "acts" or sections. The initial section begins with familiar secular objects and events in order to place the Christmas story firmly where it belongs, within the common circumstances and concerns of everyday life. Quickly, however, the drama moves from the secular to the spiritual, to the fact that the message

of Christmas is about the great love and sacrifice of God, rather than about man.

The introductory section is then followed by the second “act.” This is the visual reenactment of the original events of Christmas as recorded in the Scriptures, when the word is made flesh and comes to dwell among us in a lowly stable in Bethlehem, pointing the soul of men toward the great, eternal and blessed mystery of the Gospel.

Finally, with our eyes firmly focused on Jesus, the third section of each script presents the Gospel call to repentance and salvation. It reminds us of the great mystery of God’s love and his coming return to earth as victorious King, and it urges us to carry the Christmas message within our hearts, not only at Christmas, but throughout the year.

The focus throughout all scripts, even though they differ in particulars, remains trained on a constant theme – the changeless love of God in a ever-changing and darkened world.

Each script includes an extended prologue that sets the “spiritual scene” and introduces the dominant overall theme. Each script reflects an entire service, including a suggestive responsive reading, a place for a message from the pastor and an offering, all interspersed with suggested songs that can be sung by a choir, a group of children, the congregation as a whole, or not at all. As an aid to pageant directors, there are also a number of technical and directorial references included at the conclusion of each script.

Each script offers active roles (speaking and non-speaking) for around 40-50 participants. Since there are normally many more children available than can be used actively in the scripts, it is important to include sufficient additional pageant-related activities to meaningfully involve every child. Additional opportunities for participation exist in a variety of ways, such as songs organized by age groups, special large group activities in which each child can participate (for example, signing of name to a banner prominently displayed throughout the service) and frequent vocal interaction with active pageant participants. It is vital that no child feel excluded from a personal involvement in the service as a whole. Directors are urged to devise creative ways for such general involvement wherever possible.

The Narrator has the most critical role in each script. It is one of only four roles that is most effectively performed by an adult (the Three Kings in the Christmas Story portion are the other three). The Narrator has, by far, the greatest number of lines, is constantly on the move and bears the primary responsibility of involving all of the children through constant vocal and physical interaction. He/she is, in fact, the “master of ceremonies” for the action part of each script.

As for costumes, sets and props used in the pageant, they can be as elaborate or as simple as desired. The few objects essential to the scripts are identified and discussed in

End of Freeview

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