

PEPITA'S POINSETTIA

by Gail Gaymer Martin



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A Christmas Program for Children

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SYNOPSIS: Cheery poinsettias used to “deck the halls” over the holidays are the focus of this play within a play. Secular tradition just for show? Not so fast! A mother shares fun facts and little-known biblical symbolism of this crimson plant native to Mexico with her children. The scene comes to life in the old country, where children uphold tradition by going before the Nativity set in the chapel to lay a gift before the baby Jesus. One niña, Pepita, has nothing. In desperation, she grabs some weeds. As she shyly lays them at the manger, suddenly they turn a vibrant red! Her gift given with love becomes beautiful. Includes a song, “Flower of the Holy Night,” with original lyrics set to the familiar tune of the doxology. Features flexible casting, with any number of children participating as singers or gift-givers. Includes an optional Advent activity of making paper poinsettias for decorating or distributing to the audience. Your congregation will walk away with a renewed appreciation for the ubiquitous “Christmas flower.”

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 female, 3 male, extras)

DAUGHTER (f)..... (11 lines)

SON (m)..... (13 lines)

MOTHER (f)..... (16 lines)

GIRL (f) (4 lines)

BOY (m) (3 lines)

PEPITA (f) (4 lines)

PEDRO (m)..... (5 lines)

EXTRAS (m/f)..... Any number; children who place gifts at the Nativity without dialogue, and singers.

(ALL LINE COUNTS ARE APPROXIMATE)

DURATION: 20 minutes

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The Christmas program *Pepita's Poinsettia* may be performed at any time during Advent or as part of a Christmas Eve service. It may even be performed on or close to December 12, which is National Poinsettia Day. The characters' dialogue explains the poinsettia's symbolic shape and colors. The legend demonstrates the Lord's love for his children. Gifts offered with a pure heart please him.

This performance involves some memorization, but some of the lines may be hidden or glued inside the catalogue the children are holding, or disguised by other props used in the program. It may be performed in the church cancel area or on a stage with a limited set. Microphones should be used for a large audience.

This is a "play within a play." The legend portion begins as Pepita and Pedro approach a Nativity scene and watch other children placing their gifts at its base, as is the custom in Mexico. Ashamed at her lack of a gift, Pepita gathers a bundle of weeds, wraps them in her head scarf, but ends up dropping them into a trash basket, convinced they are an unworthy present. Pedro retrieves the bouquet (the second bouquet is the poinsettia blooms) and returns it to Pepita, as he reminds her that the Lord appreciates any gift given in love. Pepita listens and places the bouquet at the base of the Nativity. When she unwraps the scarf, miraculously, instead of weeds, the brilliant crimson poinsettia flowers appear! The legend cast retreats with joy and surprise as the original players return to finish the play.

The program is written to involve a small or large cast. The first scene includes a Mother, Daughter and Son, and Girl and Boy. If a small cast is needed, the Girl and Boys' lines may be delivered by the Daughter and Son. The Mexican legend has two speaking parts: Pepita and Pedro. The other children who place small gifts at the Nativity have no lines. The number of children without lines can vary. They may also participate in singing the closing song.

The song “Flower of the Holy Night,” with lyrics by the author, is sung to any hymn tune in the public domain with 8888 meter, such as “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” (the doxology) or the Christmas hymn “From Heaven Above.” You may find other hymns with the 8888 meter in the index of most hymnals. It may be sung by the cast only, by a soloist, or with the help of other Sunday school children. If the number of children is limited, the singers may include the audience. The singers will hold copies of the lyrics, and if the audience is included, the words should be printed in the program. To lengthen the program, congregational singing of Christmas carols may be added before or between scenes or at the end.

SETTING: A very simple set will suffice. It might be helpful to divide the stage in two, with the modern-day action on one side and the legend action on the other side. At the minimum, the modern side needs an easy chair. Other homey embellishments may be added if desired. A large Nativity set may be placed on the legend side. Position a large straw or reed waste basket nearby (to hide the second bouquet of poinsettia blooms).

COSTUMES: Costuming is simple. The mother and children wear everyday modern clothing. The boy and girl visitors wear winter coats over everyday clothing. The legend scene requires Pepita and Pedro and the extras to dress in colorful clothing to represent their Mexican heritage. The girls may wear colorful peasant tops and full skirts (with ruffles, if available), with scarves and/or flowers in their hair. Boys may wear black or solid-colored pants and long-sleeved shirts, with a *serape* or a vivid Mexican blanket over one shoulder, some wearing a sombrero. Pepita may be draped in a shawl and has a bandana or scarf tied around her head (two identical scarves that are large enough to cover the bouquets are needed for the program – one on her head and one holding the hidden bouquet). Pedro wears a sombrero or lets it hang down his back with string.

PROPS

- ☐ Easy Chair
- ☐ Christmas Catalogue
- ☐ Poinsettia Plant
- ☐ Large Nativity Set
- ☐ Gifts (wooden boxes or carvings, colorful woven baskets, gift-wrapped boxes)
- ☐ Bundle Of Weeds (such as dried hay or raffia; available at craft stores)
- ☐ Bouquet Of Poinsettia Blooms (real or artificial)
- ☐ and two colorful and identical scarves or bandanas (large enough to completely cover the bouquets).

ADVENT ACTIVITY

During Sunday school throughout Advent, the children may make colorful poinsettias. An Internet search shows a number of helpful photo tutorials online with step-by-step instructions for making folded origami poinsettias from construction paper or origami paper (including those with interesting textures and finishes, such as shiny metallic). Here is a very easy poinsettia:

Materials:

- Red and yellow construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Hole punch

Instructions:

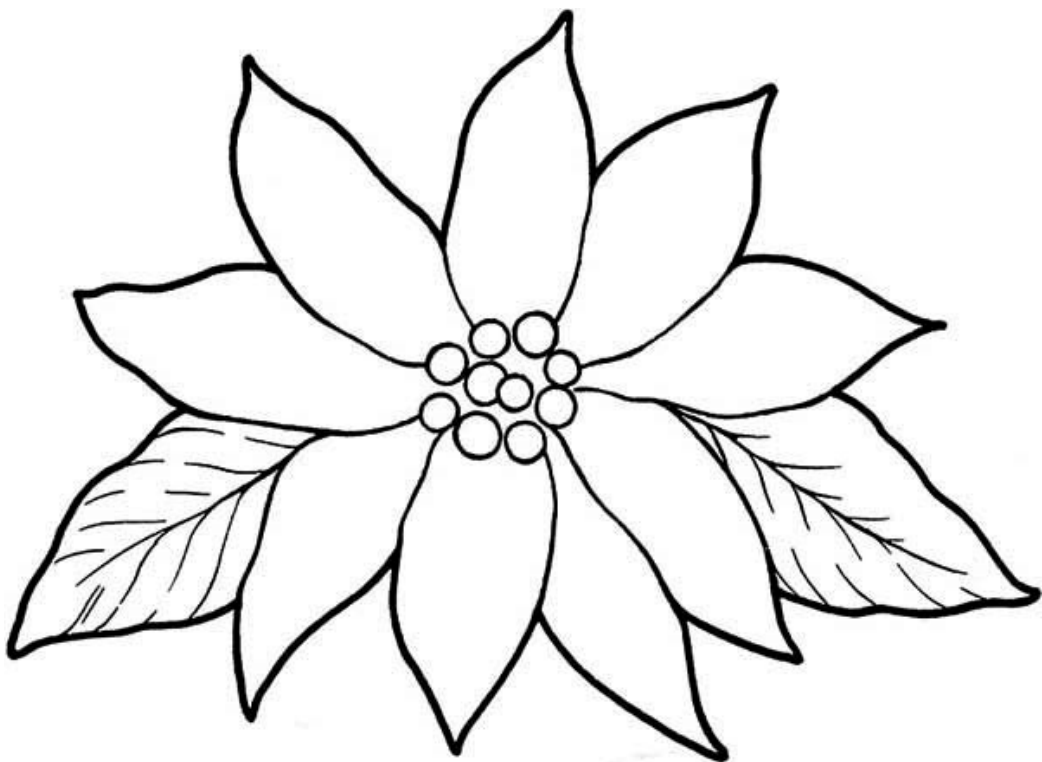
1. Fold a piece of red construction paper in half. Rub your finger along the crease so it's a nice clean fold. (Older children and adults can fold two or three times before cutting to make a group of petals. Young children should stick to a single fold.)
2. Cut a half petal shape out along the fold, so that when you open your petal it's symmetrical (the same on both sides) with a fold down the center (in the same way you fold and cut a paper heart).
3. Repeat this process until you have five petals.

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4. Use a hole punch to punch out a number of yellow dots from the yellow construction paper.
5. Assemble your flower by gluing the five petals in a circle and gluing the yellow dots in the center.

You can simplify even more by simply cutting petal shapes out of red card stock (or if only white is available, colored with red markers). Arrange five of them together, and then tape them together on the back. (Glitter may be glued to some or all of the poinsettias.)

You may hole-punch the flower and insert fishing line or red or green ribbon and tie into a loop. They may be hung on a Christmas tree or on doorknobs, or they may be used as gift-toppers. Additionally, they may be used to decorate the stage for the program. The poinsettias may be taken home by the children, or one may be presented to each family who attends the Christmas program.



AT START: Scarf-wrapped poinsettia blooms should be in the waste basket on the "legend" side of the stage. A bundle of weeds should also be Onstage. On the other side, DAUGHTER sits on easy chair studying a Christmas catalogue. SON leans on chair back, looking over her shoulder.

SON: I suppose you want another doll.

DAUGHTER: (*Frowns at him.*) Doll? Are you kidding? I want my own cell phone.

SON: Is that all? I want an Xbox and some video games.

MOTHER enters behind them carrying a poinsettia plant.

DAUGHTER: You won't get one.

SON: (*Looks over shoulder and sees MOTHER.*) You aren't getting a cell phone either, but I know what you are getting.

DAUGHTER: What?

SON: (*Chuckles.*) A flower.

During this dialogue, BOY and GIRL wearing coats walk to the front.

DAUGHTER: (*Frowns at him again.*) A flower? Who wants a flower?

MOTHER: (*Steps forward, showing her a poinsettia plant.*) Who wouldn't want this flower, especially at Christmastime? It's beautiful! It also reminds me of Jesus.

DAUGHTER and SON look at each other, confused.

DAUGHTER: Jesus?

SON: Why?

BOY and GIRL reach the front and move to Stage Right.

MOTHER: (*Holding the plant closer to them.*) Look at the shape of the flower. It looks like the Star of Bethlehem. The wise men followed that star, and it led them to the Christ child.

1 *DAUGHTER and SON study it and shrug. There is a knock.*

2
3 **SON:** (*Hurries to answer.*) Look who's here!

4
5 *Motions for GIRL and BOY to step inside. They enter.*

6
7 **BOY:** (*Looks at SON.*) What are you doing?

8 **SON:** Talking about Mom's flower.

9 **GIRL:** It's a poinsettia. It's the Christmas flower.

10 **DAUGHTER:** That's because it's shaped like the Star of
11 Bethlehem. Look – it's even the colors of Christmas!

12 **SON:** Red and green. (*Points to the yellow center.*) What about the
13 yellow in the middle?

14 **MOTHER:** The colors tells us more about Jesus. The yellow buds
15 of the poinsettia reminds us of the light from the Bethlehem star.

16 **SON:** And Jesus was the Light of the World.

17 **MOTHER:** I'm proud of you. That's exactly right.

18 **BOY:** The red is for Jesus' blood, isn't it?

19 **MOTHER:** Right. The blood he shed to save us. It's also the color
20 of fire that represents the Holy Spirit, who warms our hearts and
21 awakens our faith and our love of God.

22 **DAUGHTER:** I know what green means. It's like the Christmas
23 tree. It's ever green, like Jesus is always with us.

24 **MOTHER:** (*Rests her hand on her DAUGHTER's shoulder.*) You're
25 right. We have the greatest gift of all: eternal life. We will live with
26 Jesus forever.

27 **GIRL:** And that's why we celebrate Christmas, the day Jesus was
28 born.

29
30 *MOTHER gives her an approving nod and smiles.*

31
32 **BOY:** I wonder who decided to call it the Christmas flower.

33 **MOTHER:** The poinsettia's leaves turn from green to red each year
34 around the Christmas season.

35 **SON:** Perfect timing!

36 **MOTHER:** It needs long dark nights and bright sunny days in the
37 fall to produce the brilliant red color we admire at Christmas time.

1 **GIRL:** It's like it has to hibernate! Where did the poinsettia come
2 from?

3 **MOTHER:** It used to be that the flower only grew in central Mexico,
4 but when the Ambassador from the United States saw it, he took
5 seeds back to his home and grew them in a greenhouse. His last
6 name was Poinsett.

7 **DAUGHTER:** That's how the flower got its name!

8 **MOTHER:** That's right. Not only did the flower come from Mexico,
9 but so did several legends about the poinsettia.

10 **SON:** What kind of legends?

11 **MOTHER:** Would you like me to tell you one?

12

13 *DAUGHTER, SON, BOY, and GIRL respond with "Yes," "Please,"*
14 *or other approval and step to the side.*

15

16 There once was a girl from Mexico called Pepita, who had no gift
17 to give the baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve service.

18

19 *MOTHER speaks as she joins the CHILDREN at the side of the*
20 *stage so the legend scene may begin. Other CHILDREN go to the*
21 *Nativity scene and place gifts in front of the baby Jesus.*

22

23 As Pepita walked to the chapel with her cousin Pedro...

24

25 *MOTHER's voice fades as the legend play begins. PEPITA and*
26 *PEDRO enter. They watch the CHILDREN giving their gifts.*
27 *PEPITA looks sad as she draws closer to the Nativity set, empty-*
28 *handed.*

29

30 **PEDRO:** (To PEPITA.) Why do you look so sad, Pepita?

31 **PEPITA:** I can't go to the chapel, Pedro. I have no gift to give Jesus.
32 (She turns away.)

33 **PEDRO:** (Reaches out and stops her.) Pepita, I'm sure that even
34 the smallest gift given by someone who loves him will make
35 Jesus happy.

36



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