

FESTIVAL OF CAROLS AND CANDLES

by Susan Pargman



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**FESTIVAL OF CAROLS
AND CANDLES**

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Each year, on the evening of the last Sunday before Christmas, our church celebrates the "Festival of Carols and Candles." Our pastor and his wife act as the narrators. Although songs are suggested throughout this program, you may substitute music of your choosing. Information on the not-so-familiar songs is given in the "Music Sources" page at the end.

A brass candelabra placed Upstage Center holds 12 candles. The Candlelighter remains seated unobtrusively near the candles throughout the service. The choir may be seated Stage Right. Place a large, partially decorated Christmas tree Stage Left. The narrators' podium is Stage Left. They sit in chairs near the tree during choir songs. An Advent wreath is set Downstage Center on the communion table.

Children decorate the tree where indicated. As they decorate the tree, they lay gifts at the base of it. The gifts are those that church members have brought for the needy. They should be placed on a front pew beforehand so they are within easy reach.

For a special touch, church members may bring homemade desserts to share with people attending this service.

Note: As the congregation enters the sanctuary, ushers give all adults a small candle.

CAST

READER 1

READER 2

CHOIR and CHOIR DIRECTOR

CANDLELIGHTER

TREE DECORATORS (Children)

SONGS
(In order of appearance)

- "Oh, Hearken Ye" — Choir
 "Caroling, Caroling" — Choir
 "We'll Dress the House" — Choir
 "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" — Choir
 "O Little Town of Bethlehem" — Choir and Congregation
 "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" — Choir
 "O Holy Night" — Solo
 "Silent Night" — Choir and Congregation
 "Do You Hear What I Hear?" — Choir
 "While by My Sheep" or "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks"
 — Choir
 "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" — Choir and Congregation
 Offertory — A classical number from Handel's *Messiah* or
 "Angels We Have Heard on High" — Choir
 "I Wonder as I Wander" — Solo
 "Some Children See Him" — Solo
 "Away in a Manger" — Choir and Congregation
 "What Child Is This?" — Choir
 "The First Noel" — Choir and Congregation
 "We Three Kings" — Congregation
 "Carol of the Bells" — Choir
 "Joy to the World" — Choir and Congregation
 "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" — Solo
 "O Come, All Ye Faithful" — Choir and Congregation

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FESTIVAL OF CAROLS AND CANDLES

SETTING: Stage is set with partially decorated Christmas tree, the candelabra with unlit candles, Advent wreath, readers' podium, and chairs for readers. CHOIR members enter and take their places. READERS sit near podium. Lights in sanctuary dim; stage lights remain bright. CHOIR opens the service with "Oh, Hearken Ye." Then sit. READER 1 and READER 2 come forward to Advent wreath.

READER 2: Let us pray. (*A prayer for the evening.*)

READER 1: (*Lights candles as he names them.*) We light again the candles of expectation . . . preparation . . . the candle of joy . . . and the candle of love. And tonight we light the middle candle which represents the Christ who came into the world. (*Lights middle candle.*) Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (*John 8:12*) And to his followers, Jesus said: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." (*Matt. 5:14-16*) (*CHOIR stands; READER 1 takes center candle from the wreath*) Let us raise the light of Christ tonight and put it on a lampstand as we sing praises to our father in heaven. (*Immediately CHOIR begins singing "Caroling, Caroling." As the CHOIR sings, READER 1 hands center candle to CANDLELIGHTER; READER 1 and READER 2 sit; CANDLELIGHTER lights first candle in candelabra. CHOIR goes right into "We'll Dress the House," "Deck the Halls," "Oh, Christmas Tree," or any similarly-themed song. As they sing, READER 1, READER 2 and several children finish trimming the tree and plug in the lights. They pantomime talking to one another and having a fun time. They bring up the gifts from the*

front pew that church members have brought for the needy, and place them under the tree. *CANDLELIGHTER* lights another candle. *CHOIR* remains standing after song.)

READER 1: Every year tradition brings us back together again to celebrate Jesus' birth. We're not celebrating the actual day that he was born, but rather the fact that Jesus came into the world at all. And every year we tell the story once more in words and in song. It began hundreds of years before his birth. It began with the cry of a suffering people: O come, O come Emmanuel . . . (*Sits. CHOIR sings "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"; CANDLELIGHTER lights another candle. CHOIR sits after song.*)

READER 2: In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world . . . and everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first-born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (*Luke 2:1-7*) Let's stand and sing together "O Little Town of Bethlehem." (*CHOIR and CONGREGATION stand and sing. CANDLELIGHTER lights 4th candle*) You may be seated. (*CHOIR remains standing and sings. Suggestion: "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear." CHOIR sits after song. CANDLELIGHTER lights 5th candle.*)

READER 1: Was it a cold night? Or was there a warm breeze blowing through Judea, gently bowing the tall grasses in the meadows? If you breathed deeply, would you pick up the scent of incense or Mid-Eastern cooking? We know that Bethlehem was crowded that night, for there was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph. Were the crowds noisy? Was there music, perhaps? (*Begin musical intro to "O*

Holy Night.”) For the holy family the music would have been off in the distance — down in the town, away from the stable they were staying in. And the stars — I wonder how they looked that night . . . (*Solo: “O Holy Night.”*)

CHOIR DIRECTOR: Everyone join us as we sing “Silent Night.” (*CANDLELIGHTER lights 6th candle. After song, CHOIR stands and sings “Do You Hear What I Hear?”*)

READER 2: And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” (*Luke 2:8-14*) (*CHOIR sings “While by My Sheep” or “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks.” CANDLELIGHTER lights 7th candle.*)

CHOIR DIRECTOR: (*To CONGREGATION*) Join us while we sing “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.” (*CHOIR sits*)

READER 1: (*Short sermon*) Why shepherds? Why did the angels go to the shepherds? Hadn’t they ever heard of a press release? You know: “God’s Son is Born — News at eleven.” They didn’t “Go, tell it to the Governor” . . . They didn’t announce the First Noel “to certain poor Herod” . . . God didn’t even book them on the temple circuit with their new hit single, “In Excelsis Deo.” No, he sent the angels out into the night to the shepherds, who were lying in a field near Bethlehem watching their sheep. Let me speculate as to why. What is a shepherd? It turns out that a shepherd in those days had a pretty short job

1 description: to herd sheep. That means he stayed with the
2 flocks at night to protect them from being eaten by wild
3 beasts, and during the day he would lead them to a pasture
4 where they could find food and water. He doctored their
5 various skin irritations by anointing them with oil. If a
6 lamb wandered off from the rest of the flock, the shepherd
7 would go out looking for it. Oftentimes he could find it
8 just by listening for its cry, then pull it out of the narrow
9 ravine or thorn bush it was stuck in. A short job
10 description, true; but important, full-time work, all the
11 same. Did you ever think about what might have happened
12 if the angels had taken the news to the religious leaders
13 of the city? What if they had by-passed those fields of sheep
14 and flown into the city instead? They would have swooped
15 down on the local temple, flown over the fortress-like walls
16 and into the sanctuary with its elaborate pre-Renaissance
17 gold and silver decor and announced the news of Jesus'
18 birth. They would have told the stunned crowd of
19 clergymen that they could find God's newborn son
20 wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in the arms of a Galilean
21 peasant woman who was spending the night in a stable
22 outside of town. How would that have fit in with their
23 concept of God as King of Kings? Let's suppose that they
24 believed it. Now what? Do you think they would have left
25 him there? I think they might have taken Jesus to the
26 temple to give him the home they felt he deserved. He
27 could dress in fine clothes, eat rich food, and sit on a golden
28 throne. That kind of a life would have been far removed
29 from the life of a small-town carpenter's boy. No, the angels
30 didn't go to the temple. And we all know that Jesus wasn't
31 raised in a palace. He was born in a stable, a place of
32 humility. And God chose to announce his birth to
33 shepherds, because that was where Jesus belonged. He
34 came to bring the good news of reconciliation to you and
35 me; to the man who picks up your garbage in the morning;

to the cook who puts out 200 Big Macs a day; to the secretary answering phones and running the Ditto machine five days a week. God loves every man and every woman, no matter what their position. His humble birth tells us that. And the angels told us that when they first brought the Good News to the shepherds.

(NOTE: You may want to take the offering at this point if you plan to do so. If you take an offering, have someone play an instrument for the offertory. When the offering is over, the CHOIR sings. It may be a classical number, such as a selection from Handel's Messiah, or a familiar carol, such as "Angels We Have Heard on High." CANDLELIGHTER lights 8th candle. CHOIR sits after the song. Solo: "I Wonder as I Wander." Quiet music intro to "Some Children See Him" to play throughout next speech.)

READER 2: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. *(Luke 2:15,16) (Solo: "Some Children See Him." CANDLELIGHTER lights 9th candle.)*

CHOIR DIRECTOR: *(To CONGREGATION)* Join us as we sing "Away in a Manger." *(CONGREGATION joins CHOIR in singing.)*

READER 2: When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. *(Luke 2:17-20) (CHOIR sings "What Child Is This?" CANDLELIGHTER lights 10th candle.)*

CHOIR DIRECTOR: Join us in singing "The First Noel."

READER 1: The shepherds were not the only ones watching

the sky that night. There were Magi — or Wise Men — from an Eastern country who saw a miraculous sign and journeyed all the way to Judea because of it. They must have been astronomers of a sort, for they claim to have seen a star in the east; a star which they read to mean that a king had been born: the king of the Jews. Let's let the song tell the story as we all stand and sing "We Three Kings." (*CONGREGATION sings "We Three Kings"; CANDLELIGHTER lights 11th candle.*) You may be seated. The shepherds were the first to spread the news; to proclaim that God's light had come into the world. And ever since that time, Christians have proclaimed Jesus' birth again and again with great wonder and joy at a time we call Christmas. (*CHOIR stands as musical intro begins for "Carol of the Bells."*) They tell the story in song, in word, with musical instruments, ringing out the news from person to person, town to town, and throughout the world . . . (*CHOIR sings "Carol of the Bells."*) *CANDLELIGHTER lights 12th candle.*)

CHOIR DIRECTOR: Please stand and join us in singing "Joy to the World." (*CONGREGATION joins CHOIR in singing "Joy to the World."*)

READER 1: And here's the part that I like the best. Please remain standing (*Alternate instructions: "Please file out of the pews to form a circle around the sanctuary."*) We're going to pass the light along now to every person in this sanctuary tonight. Get your candles ready. From the original candle, representing Christ, the light of the world, we're going to share that light from person to person. As it reaches you and you pass it along, give your neighbor a Christmas greeting. It's the season to share God's love, his light, and the Good News that Christ came into the world to bring us the best gift of all: forgiveness for our sins and a new life in Him. Praise the Lord! (*Music begins for solo: "Go, Tell It on the Mountain."*)



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