

COME TO BETHLEHEM AND SEE

by Ronald D. Vaughan



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Come to Bethlehem and See

A service of
Advent/Christmas worship

by Ronald D. Vaughan

CAST OF CHARACTERS

LEADER

SCRIPTURE READER

(May be one person or as many as nine)

ELIZABETH

JOSEPH

INNKEEPER

SHEPHERD

WISE MAN

HEROD

SIMEON

MARY

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Options for Presentation

Come to Bethlehem and See may be presented in one of several ways, depending upon the size of the worshiping group and the amount of resources you can dedicate to the presentation. Following are three suggestions for production.

1. Readers

Come to Bethlehem and See was originally written for a group of college students to celebrate Advent before leaving school for Christmas vacation. The service was very informal but very meaningful. Each person was given a copy of the service. Assignments of readings were made as students arrived for the service. Everyone shared in singing the carols in response to the readings. You may choose to use the script in a similar impromptu manner. You may assign parts in advance or as worshipers arrive. be sensitive that some persons are frightened by reading in public. Then simply follow the script and allow your imagination to take you into the Christmas story.

2. Actors with Congregational Response

Enlist actors to play the parts of the characters from the Christmas story. Enlist readers to present the Scripture passages. Print the responses in the bulletin in the order of worship. The worship leader can lead the congregation in responding to the character and in singing the carols. The worship leader and those reading Scripture may use a lectern on the side of the platform area. Characters may present their parts from the center of the platform. (The script reflects this option.)

3. All Actors

Change option two by enlisting persons in contemporary clothes to memorize and present the responses from the stage. The congregation will participate by singing the carols.

No props are necessary for this presentation.

Costume Suggestions

Leader: May wear “church clothes” or a pulpit robe.

Elizabeth: A dignified robe befitting her advanced age.

Joseph: Reflect the humility of Joseph with reserved colors and plain fabrics.

Innkeeper: The look of a working man, more prosperous than Joseph and Mary.

Shepherd: Rough outfit, dirty-looking, the clothes of a man who works hard in the outdoors.

Wise Man: Royal colors, such as purple and scarlet with a crown or hat that shows status. A necklace and other jewelry can underscore wealth.

Herod: Overdo the royal look. Herod can be showy, almost gaudy in appearance, as one who lives for position and power.

Simeon: Conservative and simple, a poor old man who has lived in tough times waiting for the Messiah.

Mary: Simple but beautiful. Use softer colors than the men to give a more feminine look.

Lighting and Blocking

The leader stands at a pulpit or lectern at the side of the platform area. If options two or three are chosen, the costumed actor may walk to the platform at the end of the Scripture reading preceding his or her part. After completing the monolog, the actor should remain in place until the singing of the carol begins, then quietly exit the platform. A spotlight can help to define the actor's place in the room. Each actor can step into the spot to present his or her monolog and then step out of the spot as the following carol begins.

Candles

The concluding dialog between the leader and the congregation celebrates the light of Christ. Candles may be given to worshipers before the service. The leader may enlist helpers to light the candles of the worshipers from an Advent wreath or the leader's candle before this closing dialog begins.

1 **LEADER:** The signs of the Christmas season are everywhere!
2 Shoppers, music, crowds, and decorations bring out the
3 special feelings we have for this season and its meaning
4 for us. We share these feelings in many ways — gifts,
5 cards, visits, or even a smile. Each time we see what
6 Christmas means to someone else, the coming of Christ
7 into the world becomes brighter and more joyful for us.
8 Imagine how wonderful it would be to share the feelings
9 of Christmas with those who first experienced the
10 miracle of the birth of Christ. This service of worship
11 will attempt to do just that. We will hear the words,
12 thoughts, and feelings of those who saw that first
13 Christmas and share with them the wonder and mystery
14 of Christmas.

15 **SCRIPTURE READER:** In the time of Herod king of Judea
16 there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to
17 the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was
18 also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were
19 upright in the sight of God observing all the Lord's
20 commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they
21 had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and
22 they were both well along in years.

23 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he
24 was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot,
25 according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into
26 the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the
27 time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled
28 worshippers were praying outside.

29 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing
30 at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah
31 saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.
32 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah;
33 your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will
34 bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.
35 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will

rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:5-17).

(ELIZABETH enters.)

ELIZABETH: How can this be? I believe that the Messiah will come. I pray daily for him to come and set us free. I want to play a part in establishing his kingdom. But Zechariah and I are just too weak, too old. We cannot be the parents of the Messiah's forerunner. How, God? How can this be?

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Elizabeth, we too are weak. We know the limits that time and space place upon us. We feel inadequate to play a part in establishing God's loving rule in this world. But God worked through your weakness, Elizabeth, and he can work through ours as well. God can only work through those who recognize their weakness and trust completely in his strength. God, help us to offer you our weakness as an opportunity to experience your strength. *(ELIZABETH exits.)*

CONGREGATIONAL CAROL: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;

1 Dear desire of every nation,
 2 Joy of every longing heart.
 3 Born thy people to deliver,
 4 Born a child and yet a king.
 5 Born to reign in us forever,
 6 Now thy gracious kingdom bring.
 7 By thine own eternal spirit
 8 Rule in all our hearts alone;
 9 By thine all-sufficient merit,
 10 Raise us to thy glorious throne.
 11

12 **SCRIPTURE READER:** This is how the birth of Jesus
 13 Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be
 14 married to Joseph, but before they came together, she
 15 was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.
 16 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and
 17 did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had
 18 in mind to divorce her quietly.

19 But after he had considered this, an angel of the
 20 Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son
 21 of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your
 22 wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy
 23 Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give
 24 him the name Jesus, because he will save his people
 25 from their sins.”

26 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said
 27 through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and
 28 will give birth to a son, and they will call him
 29 Immanuel” — which means, “God with us.”

30 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the
 31 Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his
 32 wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth
 33 to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Matthew
 34 1:18-25). (*JOSEPH enters.*)

35 **JOSEPH:** When I learned that Mary was pregnant, I

1 thought first of what this would do to my own
 2 reputation. I was angry that Mary made me appear to
 3 the community to be one who had abandoned his
 4 values and his faith. I could have had her stoned to
 5 death publicly in order to clear my name and denounce
 6 her sin. But ... I couldn't. I still loved Mary and decided
 7 to break our engagement privately. But now an angel
 8 has told me that I am to marry this woman! This
 9 unborn child who could have cost his mother's life is
 10 not the result of sin, but of God's grace. I don't know
 11 how, but God has caused all of this to happen in order
 12 to deliver Israel. I don't understand ... I can't
 13 understand ... but I believe, and I still love.

14 CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: We have reflected upon
 15 this miraculous and mysterious birth for centuries,
 16 Joseph, and we do not understand how God brought
 17 his salvation through this humble birth. But like you,
 18 we believe, and we love. (*JOSEPH exits.*)

20 CONGREGATIONAL CAROL: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

21 O come, O come Emmanuel,
 22 And ransom captive Israel,
 23 That mourns in lowly exile here,
 24 Until the Son of God appear.
 25 Rejoice! Rejoice!
 26 Emmanuel will come to thee, O Israel!

28 O come Desire of nations, bind
 29 All people in one heart and mind;
 30 Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
 31 Fill the whole world with heavenly peace.
 32 Rejoice! Rejoice!
 33 Emmanuel will come to thee, O Israel!

35 SCRIPTURE READER: In those days Caesar Augustus

1 issued a decree that a census should be taken of the
 2 entire Roman world. (This was the first census that
 3 took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And
 4 everyone went to his own town to register.

5 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth
 6 in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David,
 7 because he belonged to the house and line of David.
 8 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged
 9 to be married to him and was expecting a child. While
 10 they were there, the time came for the baby to be
 11 born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She
 12 wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger,
 13 because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke
 14 2:1-7). (*INNKEEPER enters.*)

15 **INNKEEPER:** What a crowd! The town is full of people who
 16 have come to take part in the census. How many days
 17 have I dreamed of more business, and now I am having
 18 to turn people away. I felt so sorry for that one poor
 19 couple. The woman looked as though she could have
 20 her baby at any moment. They both looked so tired. I
 21 was almost ashamed to offer the stable to them, but it
 22 was all that I had. It is certainly no luxury inn, but it
 23 must be better than nothing. I hope that they can find
 24 a room before the baby comes. The child deserves
 25 better than a stable, but I did what I could.

26 **CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:** If you had only known
 27 who that child is, you would have given him the best
 28 room. But you cared, and you lovingly gave all that you
 29 had to give. That's all the child could ask of you; it's all
 30 he's ever asked of anyone. (*INNKEEPER exits.*)

31
 32 **CONGREGATIONAL CAROL:** "Away in a Manger"
 33 Away in a manger, no crib for bed,
 34 The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
 35 The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,

1 The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

2

3 **SCRIPTURE READER:** And there were shepherds living
4 out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their
5 flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them,
6 and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they
7 were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be
8 afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be
9 for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior
10 has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will
11 be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths
12 and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host
14 appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
15 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men
16 on whom his favor rests.”

17 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,
18 he shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to
19 Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which
20 the Lord has told us about.”

21 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and
22 the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had
23 seen him, they spread the word concerning what had
24 been told them about this child, and all who heard it
25 were amazed at what the shepherds said to them (Luke
26 2:8-18). (*SHEPHERD enters.*)

27 **SHEPHERD:** I get so lonely out here, far away from most
28 people. All I ever seem to see are sheep and sky. We don’t
29 go to the city much. The people look on us as sinners.
30 “The people of the land,” they call us in ridicule. Because
31 we are treated as outcasts, we don’t have much to do
32 with the religious people of the city and the worship at
33 the temple. So why did the good news come to *us* first?
34 We were scared to death! This messenger was no
35 ordinary man. He appeared out of nowhere! He

comforted us by telling us that he had good news for all people: A Savior is born! Oh, the joyful singing we heard that night. We listened in awe until their voices faded and they were gone. We had to see this deliverer for ourselves, but we didn't find him in the temple or the palace, but in a manger. He is like one of us! You know, the good news *must* be for all people because it was told first to me.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Shepherd, we are sinners, too. We make ourselves distant from God and from other people we choose to see as "unworthy." The good news came to you first because you were ready to hear it. God, help us to see our sin, listen to the good news, and proclaim it to all people. (*SHEPHERD exits.*)

CONGREGATIONAL CAROL: "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"
 Hark, the herald angels sing,
 "Glory to the newborn King;
 Peace on earth and mercy mild;
 God and sinners reconciled."
 Joyful all ye nations rise,
 Join the triumph of the skies;
 With angelic hosts proclaim,
 "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
 Hark! the herald angels sing,
 "Glory to the newborn King."

SCRIPTURE READER: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child

1 was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On
 2 coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother
 3 Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then
 4 they opened their treasures and presented him with
 5 gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having
 6 been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they
 7 returned to their country by another route (Matthew
 8 2:1-2, 9-12). (*WISE MAN enters.*)

9 **WISE MAN:** I have watched the wonders of the sky all my
 10 life, but I have never seen anything like it. The sky
 11 declared that something extraordinary had happened!
 12 We decided to follow the star and find the one it
 13 welcomed into the world. A king would surely be in the
 14 capital, so we journeyed first to Jerusalem. No new
 15 king had been born in Jerusalem, but Herod was very
 16 interested in our search. After leaving him, we found
 17 the one for whom we had searched in Bethlehem. We
 18 are not Jewish men. We do not look for their Messiah.
 19 Still, there was something about that baby, something
 20 which compelled us to give him our very best.

21 **CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:** Like you, wise men, our
 22 world had been turned upside-down by this child. And
 23 like you, we feel the need to offer him gifts. But we need
 24 not bring gifts of precious metal, rare incense, or fine
 25 perfume. We can bring something he desires and
 26 deserves much more: the gift of our hearts. (*WISE MAN*
 27 *exits.*)

29 **CONGREGATIONAL CAROL:** "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

30 O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
 31 O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
 32 Come and behold him, born the King of angels!
 33 O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
 34 O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

35

1 **SCRIPTURE READER:** When Herod realized that he had
2 been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he
3 gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its
4 vicinity who were two years old and under, in
5 accordance with the time he had learned from the
6 Magi. Then what was said through the prophet
7 Jeremiah was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah,
8 weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her
9 children and refusing to be comforted, because they are
10 no more.”

11 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in
12 a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the
13 child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for
14 those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead”
15 (Matthew 2:16-20). (*HEROD enters.*)

16 **HEROD:** So, there is a new king in the land. The people are
17 so hungry for a leader that they will follow him without
18 question. This child is a threat to my power, so by my
19 power I must kill him. This so-called “King of the Jews”
20 will die before he is old enough to rule!

21 **CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:** You used your power,
22 Herod. You killed innocent children in order to selfishly
23 cling to what you had. We despise what you did, but in
24 doing so we also despise part of ourselves. We, too, end
25 the lives of starving children by selfishly clinging to
26 what is ours while they have nothing to eat. We, too,
27 attack anything which challenges our false belief that
28 we are independent from God and other people. But
29 Herod, your power did not stop God, and neither will
30 ours. All of the darkness in the world cannot overcome
31 his light. (*HEROD exits.*)

32
33 **CONGREGATIONAL CAROL:** “Silent Night”

34 Silent night, holy night,
35 All is calm, all is bright

1 Round yon virgin mother and child!
2 Holy infant so tender and mild,
3 Sleep in heavenly peace,
4 Sleep in heavenly peace.

5

6 **SCRIPTURE READER:** Now there was a man in Jerusalem
7 called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was
8 waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy
9 Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by
10 the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had
11 seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went
12 into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the
13 child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law
14 required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised
15 God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
16 you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes
17 have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in
18 the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the
19 Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

20 The child's father and mother marveled at what was
21 said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to
22 Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the
23 falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be as sign
24 that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of
25 many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce
26 your own soul too" (Luke 2:25-35). (*SIMEON enters.*)

27 **SIMEON:** All my life I have waited to see the one who will
28 deliver Israel. Somehow I knew that I would see him
29 face-to-face before dying. I felt led to the temple that
30 day, and when I saw the child, I knew that God's
31 promise to me had been fulfilled. Now I can live in
32 peace and die in peace, because God's great salvation
33 of his people has begun. But deliverance does not come
34 cheaply. I tried to prepare his mother for the pain her
35 child would face and the great hurt which she would

1 feel. The pain will be very real, but we can face it with
2 peace because in this child God's kingdom has come!

3 **CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:** Simeon, like you we see
4 so much promise and peace in this young child. We, like
5 Mary, need to be reminded that this deliverer did not
6 ascend to a throne, but a cross. We too must be ready
7 to face the pain which comes from doing God's work in
8 this world. But we do not suffer in vain because we
9 have the great hope of salvation. Uplifted by this hope
10 we, like you, can live and die in peace! (*SIMEON exits.*)

11
12 **CONGREGATIONAL CAROL:** "Joy to the World"

13 Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
14 Let earth receive her king;
15 Let every heart prepare him room
16 And heaven and nature sing.
17 And heaven and nature sing.
18 And heaven and nature sing.

19
20 He rules the world with truth and grace
21 And makes the nations prove.
22 The glories of his righteousness
23 And wonders of his love.
24 And wonders of his love.
25 And wonders of his love.

26
27 **SCRIPTURE READER:** Then he went down to Nazareth
28 with them and was obedient to them. But his mother
29 treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew
30 in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men
31 (Luke 2:51-52). (*MARY enters.*)

32 **MARY:** What God has chosen to do through me, I do not
33 understand. I can well remember my feelings of shock
34 and fear when I realized that I was with child, and my
35 sense of unworthiness when I was told that God was at



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