

OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

by Gail Gaymer Martin



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Old-Fashioned *Christmas*

A program of crafts and carols

by Gail Gaymer Martin

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MOTHER

CHILD 1
(Girl)

CHILD 2

CHILD 3
(Boy)

COUSIN 1

COUSIN 2

COUSIN 3

COUSIN 4

CAROLERS

(Any number including congregation)

CHOIR

(Carolers and cast)

INTRODUCTION

Christmas is a special time of year that inspires curiosity in children and adults alike as to the origin and reason for our celebrations. Families enjoy old traditions which grow in significance with the passing of each year, and they make and share memories. Grandparents and great-grandparents enjoy reminiscing about their childhood Christmases. Recreating an old-fashioned Christmas means “everything old is new again.” Your church children will enjoy experiencing what life was like back when their grandparents were growing up. The one truth that connects all Christmases, past and present, is that along with the Christmas gifts, cards, cookies, carols, decorations, and dinners, Christians focus their eyes on the reason the special day is celebrated: the birth of Jesus Christ, God’s son given to the world.

This program highlights qualities of an old-fashioned Christmas and reminds us that whatever our traditions, Christians center the holiday around the blessed gift from the Father, the babe born in Bethlehem, so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The program may be presented on a simple stage or in the chancel area in a worship setting. The cast may be comprised of a few children or many. The children's parts may be divided among more children to meet the needs of a large Sunday school. For example, the Carolers who sing in the middle of the play and the Choir, which includes the cast and the Carolers, may include other children as well. Child 1-3 and the Cousins may be either boys or girls unless specified in the cast list. When the Carolers sing, the congregation may be asked to join in some or all of the songs. The Carolers may sing two or three carols, singing all verses or only the first verse. Music folders may be used for the Carolers and the children's Choir. The final song, "Old-Fashioned Christmas," may be sung by all of the children or only a few at the discretion of the director. Lyrics for "Old-Fashioned Christmas" were written by the author, to the public domain tune "Deck the Halls." Microphones may be used if available. No special costuming is needed for the children, other than scarves for the Cousins. The Mother may be played by one of the older children or an adult. The Carolers should wear scarves (coats optional) to suggest that they have been outside.

At the end of the program, as the old-fashioned Christmas tree is lighted, the stage and houselights may be dimmed to emphasize the tree and that Jesus is the light of the world. The lights may be brought back up for the singing of the final song, "Old-Fashioned Christmas."

The speaking parts are brief except for the Mother's lines. When she enters and sits on the chair, she will be holding a letter from "Great-grandmother," and her lines may be printed on that letter if needed. Child 1-3 may enter carrying a toy, such as a toy truck, a book, or any other appropriate toy. If necessary, their lines may be printed and concealed on or in the toy they carry.

Since children will decorate the tree as the dialogue continues, rehearsing doing both is important. It is easy for them to get distracted, so they must be reminded to follow the dialogue as they select and hang the ornaments. Since the children's lines are spaced far apart, reminding each child to hang his or her ornament during a time when he or she has no dialogue is recommended.

The Carolers enter from the back of the church or auditorium and sing as they walk down the aisle. The song may be repeated at the front to include the other children and congregation.

The program will take approximately twenty to thirty minutes, depending on the amount of songs sung by the Carolers.

Props

The props are easy to obtain. A folded paper serves as a letter for the mother. Her chair will be at Upstage Left. The children may carry a toy chosen by the director on which to conceal their lines. When the Carolers arrive, they will stand at Downstage Center while a table tree or slimline tree is added to the right of Mother's chair. This tree should be pre-decorated with a string of lights with a foot pedal to turn them on during the dialogue near the end of the play. A card table or any table of a similar size with a chair or two will be added to the setting at Downstage Left at a later point. The table holds samples of materials used to make the tree ornaments, as well as some finished ornaments. The garland and other ornaments may be placed in a container so they are hidden until it is time to decorate the bare Christmas tree. The Cousins wear regular clothes and add scarves. The Decorations section on page vi has simple instructions for making a variety of old-fashioned garland and tree ornaments.

Prop checklist:

- Chair and letter for mother
- Three appropriate toys for the children, if desired
- Small table holding a tabletop Christmas tree or small slimline floor tree decorated with lights
- Card table to hold the following:

Sample of materials used to make the tree ornaments
Some of the old-fashioned tree ornaments made by the children

A box containing more ornaments to decorate the tree
Music folders for song lyrics, one per caroler and choir member

Advent Activity

You will need several old-fashioned ornaments to decorate the Christmas tree. If possible, extras may be made to use as gifts for the families in attendance. Children may stand at the exit and present one of the ornaments to each family in attendance. There will be a variety of ornaments handmade by the children as part of their Advent Sunday school activity. If time is not available during Sunday school, a Saturday or evening event may be suggested to allow the children time to create the ornaments.

Ornament choices may come from this list, or any other that the director or Sunday school teachers may suggest. They should be simple to make for all ages of children. The suggestions included here are paper chain garlands, strings of popcorn and/or cranberry garlands, pinecones, framed wrapping paper designs, cookie cutter tracings, Christmas card cutouts, and cinnamon stick ornaments.

Supplies needed are listed in the how-to instructions in the Decorations section — simple items such as glue, spray paint, glitter, markers, gold Christmas string, card stock, thin cardboard, construction paper, wire, ribbon, and ornament hooks, along with other materials, such as plain popcorn, cranberries, Christmas wrapping paper, old Christmas cards, pinecones, and cinnamon sticks. Tip: Spray painting pinecones should be done by adults. Blunt scissors should be used for younger children. Children can usually handle glue, glitter, and markers. Cover their clothes with old T-shirts to prevent stains.

Music

The director may choose selections for the Carolers, or the director may involve the children in selecting their favorite carols. Some possibilities might include “Silent Night,” “Away in a Manager,” “Joy to the World,” or any other well-known carol. A pianist or keyboard player may accompany the Carolers. Music for the final choir number’s tune, “Deck the Halls,” may be found in most books of Christmas songs, and many carols may be found in church hymnals. The director may decide how many verses will be sung, depending on the amount of time available for the program. Though most carols are well known even by children, a rehearsal should be held to arrange the children on the stage so all may be seen.

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Decorations

Below are some suggested homemade ornaments that may be used to decorate the old-fashioned Christmas tree. Most of these have been mentioned in accounts of Christmas in various time periods of history. Those selected are fairly simple so that the children can see them demonstrated once and be able to follow the instructions.

Paper Chain Garland

Materials:

Colorful Construction Paper

Scissors

Glue

Ruler

Directions:

1. With a ruler, measure strips of construction paper for your chain garland. Keep them the same size, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ wide by $5 \frac{1}{2}$ inches long. Cut out as many as you want to make a long paper chain or several short ones.
2. Take one strip and glue the ends together, overlapping about an inch, so it makes a round chain link.
3. Take the next strip and place it through the first chain link and glue the ends of that link together. The two pieces should now be connected, with one through the other.
4. Repeat steps two and three as often as needed to make a chain long enough to wrap around the tree.
5. Allow sufficient time for the glue to dry before decorating with it.

Popcorn and/or Cranberry Garland

Materials:

Stale plain popcorn

Cranberries

Needle

Waxed floss or button thread

Directions:

1. Make plain popcorn by placing 1/2 cup of popcorn kernels into a large pot with 3 tablespoons of oil. Cover with a lid, allowing it to vent, while shaking the pot over high heat. When the popping stops, remove from heat.
2. Let the popcorn set, preferably for one to two days so it becomes stale. Fresh popcorn breaks too easily.
3. Take the waxed floss or button thread, which is stronger than regular thread, and pull out double the length you want the strand to be. If you want a three-foot strand, pull six feet from the spool. Tip: The popcorn and cranberries will slide easier on the dental floss than thread/string. The two pieces of floss will literally fuse together which makes tangles and knots unlikely.
4. Start putting the popcorn and cranberries on the floss. Create a pattern, such as four pieces of popcorn to one cranberry. Repeat for the entire three feet. Tie off the end. When making long strands, have each child string only three feet of popcorn and cranberries and tie off the end, leaving a long strand to attach to another three-foot strand. Another safeguard is to make a knot of thread after six inches or so, and then continue stringing. This safeguards the work in case of breakage of the thread.
5. Tie together as many strands as needed for the size of the tree. Shorter strands leave less opportunity for tangles.

Easy Glitter Pinecones

Materials:

Pinecones — either purchased in a craft store or hand-picked

Glitter in a variety of colors

Glue

Wire

Ribbon

Ornament hooks

Spray paint (Optional and should be used by an adult only)

Directions:

1. Paint the pinecone with glue and roll in one color of glitter.
2. Tie a wire through the “blades” at the base of the pinecone.
3. Create a bow and anchor it to the wire. Add an ornament hook. For variety, a sprig of artificial greenery or small bell may be attached also.

Option: Before adding glitter, an adult may spray paint the pinecone in gold, red, or green, and then after drying, follow steps 1-3.

Framed Wrapping Paper

Materials:

Gift wrap (Scraps are fine)

Thin cardboard or card stock

Scissors

Ribbon

Marker to draw a frame on the ornament (Optional)

Nickel frames from a craft store (Optional)

Directions:

1. Select gift wrap that has a small, clear design and cut two of the same design from the paper.

2. Glue one of the designs to card stock or cardboard and when dry, cut around the design.
3. Turn the design over and glue the matching design on the other side.
4. Punch a small hole in the top of the design and thread a piece of thin ribbon through. Tie or knot the ribbon and use it for hanging.
5. Though the ornament may be hung as is, there are two more options. One is to use a thin marker to draw a frame around each side of the design. Option two will make the job easier. Follow step one by cutting out designs that fit into purchased nickel frames. Feed the ribbon through the loop and tie to hang on the tree.

Cookie Cutter Ornaments

Materials:

Christmas cookie cutters

Heavy felt fabric or heavy card stock

Markers, glue, and glitter for the designs

Ribbon or metallic string for hanging

Directions:

1. Use Christmas cookie cutters as a template and trace the design on felt fabric or card stock.
2. Cut out the designs and decorate as desired with colored markers and glued-on glitter.
3. Punch a hole at the top and thread ribbon or metallic string through it to form a loop for hanging.

Christmas Card Ornaments

Materials:

Christmas cards, used or extra

Scissors

Ribbon or metallic string

Directions:

1. Select a picture or design from a Christmas card and cut around it carefully.
2. Punch a small hole at the top and thread the ribbon or string through to hang.

Optional: Use the blank side to date and sign or to print a Christmas message or Bible verse using a thin marker.

Cinnamon Stick Ornaments

Materials:

Ribbons

Metallic string

Cinnamon sticks — available at grocery or craft stores

Scissors

Directions:

1. Use approximately four-inch-long sticks of cinnamon.
2. Tie three sticks together with a metallic string.
3. Thread a red or green ribbon through the string and tie a bow with a loop for hanging.

- 1 *(MOTHER enters carrying an open letter. She sits on the chair*
2 *at Stage Left. As she sits, CHILD 1, 2, and 3 enter from right.)*
3 **MOTHER:** *(Looks up from letter.)* **There you are.**
4 **CHILD 1:** *(Notices letter.)* **What are you doing?**
5 **MOTHER:** Reading a letter from my grandmother.
6 **CHILD 2:** From Grandma?
7 **MOTHER:** No, from GG — your great-grandmother.
8 **CHILD 3:** What did she say?
9 **MOTHER:** *(Looks up and grins.)* For one thing, GG is visiting us
10 for Christmas!
11 **CHILD 2:** Yippee!
12 **CHILD 1:** *(Wanders over and looks at the letter over MOTHER's*
13 *shoulder.)* What else did she say?
14 **MOTHER:** She was thinking about Christmas in the past.
15 **CHILD 2:** Last Christmas?
16 **MOTHER:** No, about Christmas when she was a girl visiting
17 her grandmother.
18 **CHILD 1:** When Jesus was born?
19 **CHILD 3:** *(Covers his ears with his hands and rocks his head from*
20 *side to side, as if he can't believe how silly his sister is.)* Not
21 that long ago, _____. *(Insert CHILD 1's name.)*
22 **MOTHER:** *(Chuckles.)* But Christmas was different back then.
23 **CHILD 1:** Different? How? Did they have a Christmas tree?
24 **MOTHER:** Yes, but many people went into the woods and
25 chopped down a tree and carried it home. And in the
26 olden days, they lit the tree with real candles.
27 **CHILD 3:** Wouldn't the house catch on fire?
28 **MOTHER:** They only lit it once or twice, and they kept a
29 bucket of water nearby.
30 **CHILD 2:** That sounds scary. What else did they do? Did they
31 have turkey dinners?
32 **MOTHER:** Some did. They had turkey or chicken, and they
33 had to pluck the feathers off the birds before they could
34 roast them.
35 **CHILD 1 and 2:** *(Look at each other.)* Yuck!
36 **MOTHER:** Another difference is that longer ago, people
37 didn't buy presents in the store. They made the gifts
38 themselves.

1 **CHILD 3:** How did they make an iPad?

2 **MOTHER:** No one ever heard of an iPad back then, but they
3 knitted scarves and mittens, whittled toys, sewed all
4 kinds of things, baked cookies, and made figgy pudding,
5 and homemade candy.

6 **CHILD 2:** What else did they do for fun?

7 **MOTHER:** *(Points to the letter.)* Let's see what GG says. *(She lifts*
8 *the letter and reads.)* They made garland from paper
9 chains or popcorn and cranberries strung on string,
10 and they made pinecone ornaments, and decorations
11 from gift wrap and old Christmas cards.

12 **CHILD 2:** How would they do that?

13 **MOTHER:** They would find the prettiest Christmas picture
14 on the card, then cut it out and glue it to a heavy paper
15 and then hang it with a ribbon. They would also tie
16 cinnamon sticks together and add a bow. Sometimes
17 they used cookie cutters to trace Christmas symbols on
18 heavy paper or felt and then cut them out, decorated
19 them with glitter, and hung them on the tree with
20 ribbon. All kinds of pretty ornaments!

21 **CHILD 1:** Mom, would GG like a tree with homemade
22 decorations?

23 **MOTHER:** *(Nods.)* I'm sure she would love it.

24 **ALL CHILDREN:** *(Each says a line, overlapping the others*
25 *excitedly)* Can we? Let's make some! I get to help! *(From*
26 *the distance, singing interrupts their excitement.)*

27 **MOTHER:** We can, but I hear carolers. Let's listen. *(She walks*
28 *closer to where the CAROLERS are entering from the center*
29 *aisle.)* Come in!

30 **CHILD 3:** Hey, there's our cousins! *(He waves and four*
31 *COUSINS wave back. CAROLERS gather in front of the play*
32 *area and sing the carols selected by the music director. CHILD*
33 *1, 2, and 3 and the congregation may also join in. While the*
34 *CAROLERS sing, the bare Christmas tree is added at Upstage*
35 *Right. At Downstage Left, a work table is added, holding some*
36 *of the materials used to make the ornaments and some finished*
37 *ornaments to decorate the tree. Some of the tree ornaments and*
38 *garland will be in a container On-stage. At the end of the*

1 *caroling, all CAROLERS leave except for the four COUSINS,*
 2 *who remove their scarves and join CHILD 1, 2, and 3 On-*
 3 *stage.)*

4 **MOTHER:** I'm glad you came. *(She greets the COUSINS with a*
 5 *hug.)* You're just in time to help us decorate the tree for
 6 **GG.**

7 **COUSIN 1:** Is she coming for Christmas?

8 **MOTHER:** Yes, and we're making her an old-fashioned
 9 Christmas tree. *(She returns to the chair. All CHILDREN*
 10 *admire the ornaments already made, and a couple may pretend*
 11 *they are working on new ones.)*

12 **COUSIN 2:** Aunt _____, *(Insert MOTHER's real first name)*
 13 what else did they do years ago on Christmas?

14 **MOTHER:** Good question, _____. *(Insert COUSIN 2's first*
 15 *name.)* One of the most important things they did was to
 16 read or tell the Christmas story. While you decorate the
 17 tree, would you like me to tell you the Christmas story?
 18 *(All CHILDREN nod or say "yes" or "please.")* All right, and
 19 you can help me tell it. *(As MOTHER begins, the two oldest*
 20 *CHILDREN will put the garland on the tree, followed by all the*
 21 *CHILDREN, one or two at a time, who select an ornament and*
 22 *decorate the tree as the dialogue continues.)* In the days of
 23 Emperor Augustus, all of the people had to be
 24 registered for the tax in the city of their ancestors. Do
 25 you know where that was for Mary and Joseph,
 26 _____? *(Insert COUSIN 3's first name.)*

27 **COUSIN 3:** They went to Bethlehem.

28 **MOTHER:** Very good. When they arrived at Bethlehem,
 29 Joseph and Mary knew it was time for the baby to be
 30 born, so what did they need?

31 **COUSIN 4:** A place to stay.

32 **MOTHER:** Yes. But did they find an inn?

33 **CHILD 1:** No one had any room.

34 **MOTHER:** That's right. So when they found one more inn,
 35 they met a kind innkeeper, and he had a solution. Who
 36 knows what it was?

37 **CHILD 3:** He let them sleep in the stable because he didn't
 38 have any rooms either.

1 **MOTHER:** Excellent. (*CHILD 3 polishes his fingernails on his*
2 *shirt, gloating that he had a good answer.*) So Jesus was
3 born in the stable, and they wrapped him in bands of
4 cloth and made a bed for him. Who knows what they
5 used for his bed? (*CHILD 1 waves hand. MOTHER nods at*
6 *CHILD 1.*)

7 **CHILD 1:** They put him in a manger.

8 **MOTHER:** What is a manger? (*Selected CHILDREN raise their*
9 *hands, and MOTHER points to CHILD 2.*)

10 **CHILD 2:** It's a trough for the animals' food.

11 **MOTHER:** Very good, _____. (*Insert CHILD 2's first*
12 *name.*) Now out on the hillside, who was told about the
13 baby born in Bethlehem?

14 **ALL CHILDREN:** (*Together*) Shepherds!

15 **MOTHER:** How did they know?

16 **COUSIN 1:** An angel appeared in the sky and told them.

17 **MOTHER:** And what did the angel say?

18 **CHILD 3:** The angel told them not to be afraid.

19 **MOTHER:** And what else?

20 **COUSIN 2:** They should go to Bethlehem and see the baby.

21 **MOTHER:** Right, but how did they know exactly where to
22 go?

23 **COUSIN 4:** The angel said the baby was in a manger.

24 **MOTHER:** That's right. So they knew to look into the stables
25 until they found the baby. And when the shepherds
26 found Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, what did they
27 do next?

28 **COUSIN 2:** They were excited and told all the people what
29 they had seen.

30 **MOTHER:** Wonderful. So now what does that tell us to do?

31 **COUSIN 3:** We can tell people about Jesus.

32 **CHILD 1:** Even though we didn't see him in the manger, we
33 feel him right here. (*CHILD 1 puts her hand on her heart.*)

34 **MOTHER:** (*Tender smile*) That's right. We can all tell others
35 about Jesus who was born in a manger and one day dies
36 for our sins so we could have what?

37 **ALL CHILDREN:** (*Ad lib different comments*) Eternal life,
38 heaven, be with Jesus, etc.



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