

THE VERY FIRST CHRISTMAS

INTRODUCTION

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.” Galatians 4:4

This worship service is based on time travel. In it we'll travel from our children's service being presented this Christmas to **The Very First Christmas** service that took place in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. There we will visit the first Christmas church, meet the first Christmas worshipers, hear the first Christmas choir sing the first Christmas carol, listen to the first Christmas sermon, and witness the first Christmas offering.

To enhance the theme of going back in time, this service is actually a collection of bits and pieces gleaned from a historic collection of children's Christmas services owned by Kremer Publications, that date back as far as the late 1800's (with the exception of the song *“I Wish I Could Have Been There”*). That means songs, recitations, poems, responsive readings, and prayers are from these early worship services.

Each of the five service sections is also introduced by a mature Christian who relates his or her memories of children's Christmas services in which they once participated.

Plus, if you purchase the pre-service sing-along carol sheets you will receive a free PowerPoint that can be shown during the pre-service sing-along. This PowerPoint includes historic photographs of some of our churches decorated for Christmas that date back as far as the 1860's.

We hope you, your children, and your congregation will enjoy going back in time to **The Very First Christmas**.

AS WITH ALL KREMER CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICES, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE ANY CHANGES, SUBSTITUTIONS, OR DELETIONS THAT YOU WISH.

THE PRE-SERVICE SING-ALONG WITH POWERPOINT

Many churches conduct a pre-service Christmas carol sing-along for the early arrivers. This is an ideal way to give families and friends an opportunity to sing some of their favorite carols while they wait for the worship service to begin. Kremer Publications has made available song-sheets with the text for singing these carols. Simply distribute the song sheets with the bulletins.

These sheets are purchased separately from Kremer. With every order placed you will receive a FREE PowerPoint disk designed to add to the enjoyment of the pre-service time. This disk has been specially prepared to enhance the worship service theme of going back in time to the Very First Christmas service. The PowerPoint shows photographs dating back as far as the 1860's of our churches decorated for the Christmas season. (We wish to thank the churches and the WELS Historical Society and others for providing these fascinating historic photographs of their decorated church chancels. Each of the churches shown here was a predecessor of, or in affiliation with, the LCMS or the WELS.) This PowerPoint presentation comes with a narrator's script that is read before the singing of each carol. The PowerPoint also includes the text for each of the carols being sung. Total pre-service running time with songs is 25 minutes.

BANNER

This worship program includes a free banner pattern. The banner includes a stunning bright red background (similar to that used in the pre-service PowerPoint presentation) on which shiny gold letters are attached. The picture is done with black markers to give it an etched look. This would look beautiful

in the front of church surrounded by red poinsettia plants at the base. Directions for making the banner are provided with this program.

THE PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

The introductions for each of the five service parts are also intended to tell us about Christmases past. These personal reflections by mature Christians take us back in time as they share their memories of childhood Christmas Eve children's services in the early 1900's. We wish to thank our friends at Luther Haven in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for their heartfelt reminiscences.

SONGS

This service includes several traditional carols that were taken from many archived children's services. (The sheet music for ***Little Children, Can You Tell*** has been included on the music disk for your convenience.) Whenever possible, we have included the name and date of the program from which the songs came. Two songs include German text.

ACCOMPANIMENT CD

Each of the songs suggested for the children is included on the ACCOMPANIMENT CD.

God Loves Me Dearly (with German – suggested for lower grades)

Manger Song (suggested for upper grades)

In the Little Village of Bethlehem (suggested for middle grades)

I Wish I Could Have Been There (Optional - suggested for entire school)

Sheet music for these selections is included on the teacher/student disk.

For the two German songs, the music CD presents a spoken rendition of the German text so you can more easily teach them to the children.

NARRATORS

The narration for this service can be done by students, youth, or adults. One suggestion would be to have a separate individual read the reminiscences and another take us back to the very first Christmas service.

RECITATIONS

Recitations are provided in the form of Bible passages, poems, and responsive readings for your students to learn. Feel free to make any adjustments you desire. (One of the Bible readings is from the King James Version. Feel free to substitute ESB or NIV if you wish.)

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THE VERY FIRST CHRISTMAS

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.” Galatians 4:4

Processional (Congregation and Children): *Come Hither, Ye Faithful*

(To the tune of O Come, All Ye Faithful)

(As printed in a 1927 children’s Christmas program)

1. Come hither, ye faithful, triumphantly sing:
Come, see in the manger the angels’ great King!
To Bethlehem hasten, with joyful accord;
O come ye, come hither,
O come ye, come hither,
O come ye, come hither to worship the Lord.
2. True Son of the Father, He comes from the skies;
To be born of a Virgin He does not despise.
To Bethlehem hasten, with joyful accord;
O come ye, come hither,
O come ye, come hither,
O come ye, come hither to worship the Lord.
3. Hark, hark to the angels, all singing in heav’n,
“To God in the Highest all glory be giv’n!”
To Bethlehem hasten, with joyful accord;
O come ye, come hither,
O come ye, come hither,
O come ye, come hither to worship the Lord.
4. To Thee, then, O Jesus, this day of Thy birth,
Be glory and honor thro’ heaven and earth.
True Godhead incarnate, omnipotent Word!
O come, let us hasten,
O come, let us hasten,
O come, let us hasten to worship the Lord.

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen

Pastor’s Introduction:

Welcome to our children’s Christmas service. For some of you this may be your very first children’s Christmas service, while others may have been attending these worship services for many years. Our worship service tonight is all about the Christmas service. Within our service, we will look at other children’s services from Christmases past, and finally we will gather at the site of The Very First Christmas Service.

St. Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.” We will spend our moments today remembering the exact place and time when this miracle of God’s grace was fulfilled. We will do this by returning to The Very First Christmas service that took place many, many years ago in the little town of Bethlehem. Throughout this service we will travel back to the first church, the first worshippers, the first Christmas sermon, the first Christmas choir, and the first Christmas offering.

However, on our trip back in time to that Very First Christmas service, we will stop along the way to visit other early children’s Christmas worship services from years past. The wonderful tradition of having our children present the Christmas message has been a precious part of our churches for many years. Most

of the songs, recitations, and spoken parts for today's service have been taken from a historic collection of children's Christmas programs dating between 1898 and 1935. That means you may hear some archaic expressions and a few "thee's" and "thou's" during the service. Since German was the language spoken at many of our early churches, there will also be a few German verses included with some of the carols.

The opening narrations of each section of this worship service were written by men and women who reminisce about the children's Christmas services that were so dear to them.

What a blessing we have to be reminded once again of The Very First Christmas service where we meet the baby in Bethlehem who is still the same yesterday, today and forever.

Prayer:

(©1929, Lutheran Book Concern)

Dear Savior, once more we thank Thee that we have had the blessed privilege of celebrating Thy birth, and singing Thy praises. May our hymns, prayers, and all our service find ready acceptance with Thee. Take up Thy abode in the hearts of the many millions who these holidays are seeking to glorify Thy most holy name. Give us all a deeper, fuller love of Thee, our Lord and King, who didst first love us and become our Brother. Thine alone be all the honor and glory, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit livest and reignest forever. Amen.

Responsive Reading:

P: Let the earth now praise the Lord, who has truly kept His word.

C: And the sinner's help and friend now at last to us does send.

P: What the fathers most desired, what the prophets' words inspired,

C: What they longed for many a year, stands fulfilled in glory here.

P: Welcome, O my Savior now. Hail! My Lord and King art Thou.

C: Here too, in my heart, I pray, O prepare Thyself a way.

P: King of Glory, enter in; clean our hearts from every sin,

C: As Thou hast so often done; they belong to Thee alone.

P: And when Thou dost come again as a glorious king to reign,

C: We with joy will see Thy face, freely ransomed by Thy grace.

P: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

C: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

PART 1

**THE VERY FIRST CHRISTMAS CHURCH
AND CONGREGATION**

Narrator: The first recollection of a children's Christmas worship service was written by Lydia. This is what she remembers from her Christmas services past in rural Wisconsin.

"The Christmas Eve service was very special to me during my grade school years from 1929 to 1935. The tree in church was always a real big one, decorated with lots of glistening tinsel and many colored lights. The important thing I remember most were the beautiful songs I learned to sing. One song I remember so well was sung as a solo by one of my cousins. It was 'Gott ist die Liebe'. I remember that as being 'God Loves Me Dearly'".

SONG (Lower Grades): *God Loves Me Dearly*
(Text: August Rische 1819-1906)

1. Gott ist die Liebe, Laszt mich erlosen;
Gott ist die Liebe, Er liebt auch mich.
***Chorus: Drum sag' ich noch einmal: Gott ist die Liebe,
Gott ist die Liebe, Er liebt auch mich.***

2. God loves me dearly, Grants me salvation,
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.
***Chorus: Therefore I'll say again: God loves me dearly,
God loves me dearly, Loves even me.***

2. He sent forth Jesus, My dear Redeemer,
He sent forth Jesus, And set me free.
(Chorus)

3. Jesus, my Savior, Himself did offer;
Jesus, my Savior, Paid all I owed.
(Chorus)

(From children's Christmas service ca. 1910)

P: Of whom did you sing just now?

Children: We sang of the Christ child.

P: Who was the Christ child?

Children: The Christ child was the Son of God.

P: When was He born a child?

Children: He was born a child on Christmas.

P: For what purpose was He born a child?

Children: He was born a child to be our Savior.

P: Where was he born?

Children: He was born in Bethlehem.

P: Where did Mary, His mother, lay Him?

Children: His mother laid Him in a manger.

P: Why did she lay Him there?

Children: There was no room for them in the inn.

Narrator: Now we return to **the very first Christmas**. What would the very first Christmas be without the first Christmas church building? Today we can worship Jesus in our warm and nicely decorated churches. Here we are safe from the wintry weather, the noise of the streets and highways, and the concerns of the day. But that was not the case with the very first Christmas church. Jesus was worshiped in a stable or cave that had none of the comforts we have today. That first church had no electric lights, heat, doors, or comfortable places to sit. In fact the only furniture we know that was in the very first church was a feed box for the animals. The floors were certainly not swept, and the first church may well have included several animals as well. It was far from the ornate churches of today. Yet God came to earth in a simple way; the same way he still comes into our hearts today. As Jesus said in John 10:3, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

Recitation:

(From "New Ideas for Christmas for Sunday Schools and Day Schools" ©1917 J.H. Kuhlman)

Little Lord Jesus in the manger,
 Unto Thee Thy children pray;
As a child, and not a stranger,
 Thou dost come to us today.

Little Lord Jesus, now confessing
 Every need, we come to Thee;
Grant each one a Christmas blessing,
 Even little me.

Narrator: The dictionary tells us that a congregation is an assembly of persons gathering together to worship Jesus. That group of people can vary in number from service to service. If five or five hundred people gather in worship, that is a congregation. Everyone here today makes up our congregation. We are all here to worship Jesus. The very first congregation was rather small. In fact, it began with only two people who were tired, hungry, and exhausted. They had left Nazareth a few days earlier and traveled a difficult road, especially since one of them was almost ready to have a baby. Finally they reached their destination, a place called Bethlehem, where Mary gave birth to the Savior of the world. How many thoughts flooded these young minds as they bowed beside that little manger that held the King of creation? Tell us the story of the very first church and congregation.

Congregation: Luke 2:1-7

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 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, because he belonged to the house and line 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 firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

SONG (Upper Grades): Manger Song

(Text by J.H. Kuhlman b. 1868)

1. Sleep, O Son of Mary, gently, All through the night;
Eyes of love shall watch intently, All through the night.
Out of slumber none shall rout Thee; Herod's meanness shall not flout* Thee;
Mother's arms are round about Thee, All through the night.
2. Sleep, O Son of God, He holds Thee, All through the night;
In His Father's arms enfolds Thee, All through the night.
Waken not, O holy Sleeper, Though the darkness still grow deeper,
Israel's God shall be Thy keeper, All through the night.
3. Sleep, O Child of heav'n and slumber, All through the night;
Thine are guardians without number, All through the night.
God His white robed hosts shall send Thee, Golden legions shall attend Thee;
With angelic wings defend Thee, All through the night.

**flout = treat with contempt or scorn*

(Sections 2 and 3 are removed from this sample)

PART 4
THE FIRST CHRISTMAS SERMON

Narrator: Emily writes down childhood memories of her church Christmas service in South Branch, Minnesota.

"I was six years old in 1930 and in first grade. For the first years of my school days the church Christmas tree had real candles that were lit. Two buckets of water were placed near the tree and the elders of our church sat nearby to quench any fire that would start from the candles. There were other ornaments on the tree also. We thought it was beautiful. Hymns and carols were sung. Recitations were given in front of the altar by groups of children. At the end of the service our teacher gave each of us a book and the elders handed out bags with peanuts, candy, an orange and an apple.

"One Christmas a snowstorm began during the service. Since this was a country church many of the people could not go home. We lived close enough that we had over 40 people at our house for the night. The children were put to bed on quilts on the floor. Our disappointment was not being able to open our gifts that night."

Narrator: Now let's go back to **the very first Christmas**. One thing we find in most worship services is a portion of time set aside for the pastor to share a message from the Bible. We call that message a sermon. Sermons have been given in churches for many years. Some of those sermons were much longer than they are today, and might even have taken an hour or more. The sermon gives the pastor an opportunity to tell us again the good news of God's love.

What would the very first Christmas service be without a sermon? But who was there to preach it? Join us as we discover who gave the very first Christmas sermon.

Responsive reading by congregation and children:

(by J. H. Kuhlman from "Under the Christmas Star" ©1924 Lutheran Book Concern)

P & C: Shepherds, shepherds from the field, why have ye fared so far?

Children: A voice out of heaven said to us, "Go where the mangers are."

P & C: Shepherds, shepherds of the hill, where have ye left the flock?

Children: Asleep in the fold by the outer gate, sheltered from storm and shock.

P & C: Shepherds, shepherds of Bethlehem, what did ye find at last?

Children: We found a babe with wondrous eyes, a babe all unsurpassed.

P & C: Shepherds, shepherds, what of the Child, and how did ye give him heed?

Children: Down we fell and adoring said, "Thou art the Christ indeed!"

P & C: Shepherds, shepherds, whither away, now that your quest is done?

Children: On through the town and over the hills to tell everyone.

Recitation: Luke 2:17,18 (Children)

"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."

Song (Middle Grades): *In the Little Village of Bethlehem*

(By Wm. Neidlinger 1890)

1. In the little village of Bethlehem,
There lay a Child one day;
And the sky was bright with a holy light
O'er the place where Jesus lay.

Refrain: *Alleluia! O how the angels sang.
Alleluia! How it rang!
And the sky was bright with a holy light
'Twas the birthday of a King.*

2. 'Twas a humble birthplace, but O how much
God gave to us that day,
From the manger bed what a path has led,
What a perfect, holy way.

Refrain.

PART 5

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS OFFERINGS

Narrator: Lenore remembers her children's Christmas Eve worship service in 1929.

"My brother was three years old and I was four. We practiced our pieces from Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve. When Christmas came we were scared. My brother just hung onto me. I was scared too, but wouldn't admit it when the minister called our names. Somehow we made it.

"Two elderly men always donated the huge tree as high as the church. The tree was decorated with candles on each branch and it was decked out with pretty angels and tinsel. Two men would sit on the bench in front with two pails of water and dipper in case the tree caught fire. When we finally got electric lights on the tree the men still didn't trust it so they continued to sit there with two buckets of water. When they passed out the gift bags we were so excited. They contained hard candy, peanuts in the shell and apple and an orange."

Recitation:

(from "Easy Exercises for Christmas" by W.H. Kuhlman 1925)

I wish I'd been a shepherd's son,
When the angel came to them,
I surely would have gone along
On the way to Bethlehem.

I wish I'd been the little boy
Of one of the Wise Men three,
And dad had let me go with them
His star, His star to see.

I wish I'd been in Nazareth,
Up near its mountain top,
And could have played with Mary's son
In Joseph's carpenter shop.

I wish I'd been—but what's the use
Of wishing all this stuff,
The little Christ is here again—
And isn't that enough?

Narrator: Now let's go back to **the very first Christmas**. We certainly realize that the Wise Men probably didn't stop at the stable where Jesus was born. By this time Joseph's family was living in a house. In fact their visit may have been quite some time after Jesus was born. We set aside a special Sunday to look back at the visit of the Wise Men. It is called Epiphany Sunday. Although we don't know how many Wise Men there were, we must agree that these Gentiles were known for the offerings they gave to Jesus. We could probably say that theirs was the very first Christmas service offering ever made. The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were precious treasures that they willingly offered to their Lord.

Recitation: Matthew writes in chapter two verses 9 to 11. "And the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

Song (Congregation): O Night of Glory

(Tune of "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night". By Amelia Barr from "The First Christmas" 1929)

1. O night of glory, when the star lit all the Orient sky,
When hill and valley, near and far, rang back the angel's cry,
When man saw heaven's portals ope with sounds of holy cheer—
O night of glory! Night of hope! O night of all the year.
2. O day of joy, when peacefully upon the fragrant hay,
In childhood's helpless majesty the newborn Savior lay!
In silent awe, to see His face the shepherds crowded near—
O day of joy, O day of grace! O day of all the year.
3. To Him this day our prayers arise, each soul its tribute pays:
The precious myrrh of sacrifice, the incense sweet of praise,
The glowing gold of sacred love that knows no stain or fear,
These gifts we bring to Christ above this day of all the year.

Narrator: What a wonderful example of how we freely and lovingly give our gifts to our Lord as well. God gave to us the very best gift he could in his Son Jesus. In thanks we offer to him our most precious gifts in return.

Offering/Prayers/Benediction

Narrator (Pastor): We've spent these moments traveling back in time to the very first Christmas service. Our prayer is that you leave our worship service the same way Mary left the very first Christmas service.

Recitation: (All children) Luke 2:19

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Pastor: May the joy of the Savior's birth, the assurance of his gift of forgiveness, and the zeal to spread this good news to all the world, become a permanent part of your life as you leave our church service today, just as it was with those Christians who have gone on before us. With that thought in mind, let us look back one last time to the very first Christmas. Don't we all wish we could have been there!

Song (All Children): I Wish I Could Have Been There

By Reynold R. Kremer © 1994

1. I wish I could have been there on that blessed Christmas night.
I wish I could have seen the Baby's smile in candle light;
With Mary dear and Joseph near they wondered at the sight;
I wish I could have been there on that blessed Christmas night.
(Congregation joins) Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

2. I wish I could have been there in the shepherds' fields nearby.
I wish I could have seen them look into the dazzling sky;
'Cause heaven's choir did there conspire to preach a bold reply;
I wish I could have been there in the shepherds' fields nearby.
(Congregation joins) Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

3. I wish I could have been there just to hear the angels sing.
I wish I could have heard their sound of alleluias ring;
With noise that cried both far and wide o'er Bethle'm they did bring;
I wish I could have been there just to hear the angels sing.
(Congregation joins) Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Announcements

Recessional Song (Congregation and Children): *Silent Night/Stille Nacht*

1. Stille nacht! Heilige nacht!
Alles schläft, einsam wacht,
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in Himmlischer Ruh!
Schlaf in Himmlischer Ruh!

2. Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

3. Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing, Alleluia,
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

4. Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.