

A SHOESTRING NATIVITY

by
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My friend's face was a mixture of fear and doubt. Clearly, being part of an amateur theatrical, even a Christmas one, was not Katie's "thing." "Do we really want to do this?" she asked.

"Sure, it'll be fun. You'll see," I reassured her. Then turning to the other adult members of our Families Bible Study Group, I added, "It'll be very low-key. We'll do it right here in the living room. Nobody will have to memorize lines. We'll make our own costumes from paper, scotch tape and odd pieces of cloth. And remember, we won't be doing it for an audience. It'll just be for us. It'll be our way of telling each other the Christmas story," I enthused. I looked at each of their faces. They seemed less doubtful than Katie, but only by a hair.

On the day of our "Shoestring Nativity," I felt more than a few butterflies. Katie gave me a brave grin. Bless her! Encouraged--I took the plunge.

I began by explaining to everyone that we would divide up into five groups of players. Then I gave each group a task sheet and the materials and tools they needed to finish constructing their costume pieces and props. (I already had done some of the work at home.) Each group then went to a work area to complete their tasks.

After about fifteen minutes, everyone was ready. We gathered in the center of the living room. I appointed a place in the room to be the stable. There I placed the box that would act as the manger. A couple of feet behind the box I placed a chair and explained that the person (Katie) playing the star would stand on the chair on her cue.

Reader #1 began. I stage whispered to the children playing Mary and Joseph, asking them to come out of the audience, circle the room and then take their places at the stable as Reader #1 read. The children's excitement was only slightly concealed by the solemnity with which they played their parts.

Checking the director's cue sheet, I saw it was now the shepherds' and angels' turn. "Let's have this be the fields." I said, pointing to an area to the right of Mary and Joseph as I staged our play as we went along. Quietly, the shepherds, with the angels off to the side of them, took their places as Reader #1 read, "And in that same region . . ."

When the reader came to "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them." I pointed to Nancy and she, as the angel of the Lord, stepped forward, waited for the reader to finish and then read/gave the angel's message from Luke. As Nancy finished, the other angels grinned and turned expectantly to me. I nodded and they began singing "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing."

I looked around at the faces of our group. Moms, Dads, preschoolers, older boys and girls--we were all excited. We were sharing the Christmas story. We were somehow a part of it. Then the time came for the Bethlehem star to rise. Katie climbed on the chair. She lifted the yellow paper star high over her head and a broad smile of pleasure broke across her face. Her smile wasn't as bright as the original Christmas star, but it was probably a close second.

You can do a "Shoestring Nativity" with your children, your neighbors, your friends. Following are the tasks for each group and the materials and tools they will need. If you have a number of children participating, I recommend that you ask four adults or teenagers to act as group leaders and give assistance and supervise. Readers should be at least in the fourth grade. If the groups will include many smaller children, ages 5-7, you will need to do more of the cutting

ahead of time. But leave a point of two on the crown or a small part of the wing for them to cut. Then give them the joy of coloring jewels on the crowns and feathers on the wings.

MATERIALS AND TASKS:

READERS:

Materials: 2 Bibles

Tasks for Readers:

- Reader 1: Find and read over Luke 2: 1-9, 13-16.
- Reader 2: Find and read over Matthew 2:1-11.
- Practice song: “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”

NATIVITY PEOPLE:

Materials for Mary, Joseph and the Star:

- 1 large (24” x 36”) sheet of yellow construction paper, cut in half.
- A doll wrapped in a blanket. The doll will portray the baby Jesus
- A box, big enough for the doll to lie in and with shallow sides. This will be the manger.
- 3 sheets of construction paper with Wisemen's gifts already drawn
- 2 cloth remnants (about 23” x 27” and 24” x 36”) to be used as a veil for Mary and a Middle Eastern head covering for Joseph. (A shawl or a long dark oblong scarf could be used for Mary’s veil)
- A thin strip of cloth or bakers twine long enough to wrap around Joseph's head and be tied
- Printed sheets of paper with words to “O Come All Ye Faithful”
- Scissors (blunt edged for children)
- Colored marking pens

Tasks for Mary and Joseph:

- Tear yellow paper to use as straw and put in box
- Cut out and color the gifts of the Wisemen. Then give these to the people playing the Wisemen before the performance begins
- Put on veil and head covering
- Lay the doll beside the manger (box) on the side away from the audience
- Practice song: “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”

Tasks for the Star:

- With other half of yellow construction paper draw the star and cut it out.
- Find a chair for standing on and place behind the box (the box is the manger).
- Practice song: “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”

SHEPHERDS:

Materials for Shepherds:

- Sheets of brown wrapping paper (1 for each shepherd. If you have a large group, you might want to have shepherds' vests for one half of the group and head pieces for the other half.)
- Strips of cloth or baker's twine to use to help secure head coverings
- Macrame cotton rope to be used as belts
- Cloth remnants for the head pieces (about 23" x 27")
- Printed sheets with words to "Silent Night," verse 1 and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."
- Scissors, scotch tape, colored marking pens

Tasks for Shepherds:

- (Shepherd's vest is only the front side of the vest. It does not go over the head and it does not cover the back of the player.) At the middle of the top of the brown paper, cut a slit--about the length of your hand. Fold the edges of the slit back as if it were an open collar.
- Cut lengths of macramé rope to be used as tie belts.
- Cut twine for headbands (if you don't use strips of cloth to tie on head pieces).
- Tape the half vest to the front clothing. Tape below the shoulder rather than on it so that it is a little more comfortable to move in.
- Put on belts and head coverings.
- Practice songs: "Silent Night" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

ANGELS:

Materials for Angels:

- 1 (24" x 36") piece of white construction paper or gold wrapping paper for each angel, cut in half with wings already drawn
- A spool of gold wrapping ribbon
- Printed sheet of words to be spoken by the angel of the Lord. Luke 2:10-12.
- Printed sheets of words to "Hark, the Herald Angels Sings," verse 1, and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."
- Scissors, scotch tape, colored marking pens

Tasks for Angels:

- Decide who will be the angel of the Lord. That person should read over his/her lines a few times.
- Cut a head band from gold ribbon for each angel. For each angel, wrap a band at the forehead and tape at the back of the head.
- Cut wings. Draw feathers on wings. (If you are using white paper.)
- Attach wings to clothing with tape.
- Practice songs: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

WISEMEN

Materials for Wisemen:

- 3 pieces of white or yellow construction paper with crowns already drawn or cut lengthwise a piece of yellow tag board, 22" x 28", into 3 pieces and draw a crown on each length.
- Printed sheets of words to "We Three Kings" verse 1, and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."
- Scissors, scotch tape, colored marking pens

Tasks for Wisemen:

- Cut out crowns and decorate using colored pens
- Fasten crowns with tape.
- Practice songs: "We Three Kings" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful."
- After the Director gathers everyone for the start, receive the Wisemen gifts that have been created by the players acting as Mary and Joseph.

DIRECTOR'S CUE SHEET:

During the "performance" the director acts as a narrator and speaks directly to the players, gently cueing the readers when to read, telling the players when and where to enter, etc. and everyone when to sing. (Check out the story above to see how I handled it with my family Bible study group.)

Mary and Joseph enter at "and Joseph also went up . . .," circle the room and take their places in front of the manger. At "she brought forth her first born son," Mary picks up the doll.

Shepherds, angels take their places at "in the same region . . ."

At the end of "with whom He is pleased," angels sing, "Hark, the Herald Angels"

Shepherds go to manger at "and they came in haste."

At the end of v.20, "just as had been told them," shepherds sing, "Silent Night, Holy Night".

Wisemen enter Matthew 2:1, circle the room slowly. Star rises. At "Magi from the east . . .," everyone sings "We Three Kings" .

After Wisemen lay gifts before Jesus and Mary, all sing "O Come All Ye Faithful"