

A Very Special Christmas Story

Version 2

an interactive service for all ages

Created by Rev. Micol I. Cottrell

Instructions:

For this service you'll need six decorative boxes/gift bags):

- Box 1: black cloth, candles, and matches
- Box 2: map, burlap, and animals
- Box 3: Mary and Joseph (a good nativity set helps)
- Box 4: white sheet, baby Jesus
- Box 5: microphone and shepherd
- Box 6: compass and star

Place these boxes throughout the church (on windowsills, at the end of pews, under a Christmas tree).

Exploring the boxes and explaining the contents is meant to be off-script (memorized), which allows for more interaction with the congregation as the items are explored. Instructions are in blue.

You may have to let people know at the beginning of the service that this is an interactive service so all people regardless of age are invited to respond.

This version of the service ran for 1 hour and 15 minutes with two special music numbers. The longer version led the year before lasted an hour and 15 minutes. It all depends on how interactive people are. Because it is interactive I noticed that the children (and the older people) did not become restless during the service.

Also, please feel free to use/remove parts of the service or to put in your own voice. Please change the hymns as needed. If you want to use just parts of it on other Sunday's, go for it. If you want to use parts of this version and parts of the previous version, do it. That said, please do not change the theological and thematic thrust of this service. If adapting please note adapted after the credit you give for using this service. Please feel free to change the hymns or to use candles instead of glow sticks.

Take your time, play with the congregation, let your holy imagination fly, and enjoy as the very special Christmas story unfolds.

Blessings,
Micol Cottrell.

Gathering

Hymn: Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Words of Welcome

Welcome to Christmas.

Welcome if you are here every week,
some weeks,
Christmas time,
or just tonight.

Welcome if tonight finds you in joy, peace, and celebration.
And welcome if this night stirs pain and loss.

Welcome if you are excited,
and welcome if you are not.

Tonight we are invited to celebrate Jesus' birth,
to hear the ancient stories of our people,
of our faith,
of our dreams.

We are invited to allow these stories to seep into our lives,
stir and mingle within our being,
drawing us into the hopes, dreams, and celebrations
of long ago that live on.

We are invited to
experience a birth of human and divine capacity,
of earthly and cosmic proportions,
and to remember that the birth long ago
happens again tonight
in each one of us
and all around us.

Tonight is an interactive service, as we open the gifts this night I invite you
to share with me in conversation.

So come, let us celebrate Christmas.

For Christ will be born.

Opening Prayer:

Together, we join in prayer

Holy One,

**as we enter into this time of worship,
help our minds to mingle, our creativity stir,
and our imagination take flight.**

**As we hear the ancient stories of faith and celebrate Jesus' birth
may we experience your presence guiding and inspiring us.**

Amen.

We Enter the Christmas Story

Tonight we are going to be telling a very special story. It's a story that stretches over many, many years. It is a story that is given to each one of us. It's a very special Christmas story.

Are you ready to hear the story?

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:2b, 6-7

Tonight as we hear the very special Christmas story we are going to be bringing presents to the front of the church. These presents are going to help us to think about the story. Are you ready to see one of these presents?

Box 1: black cloth, candles, and matches

(Bring Box 1 to the front but do not open it)

Look at this! I wonder what it could be?

It looks very special – a beautiful box.

I wonder what could be inside of this special box....

I wonder if you would like to see what's in this special box?

I wonder what this could be?

(Pause)

I wonder if it is a shadow.
I wonder if it is darkness.

I wonder how you feel in the really dark darkness?
(Pause)

A long, long time ago, before you were born, or your grandparents, or your great great great grandparents, there were people living in a country called Israel. These people were struggling. There had been a war and another country had taken control of them. Cities had been destroyed, people had been killed. The centre of their worship – the Temple, where people imagined God living among them had been torn down. Some of the people were taken away to live in another country.

Many years later around the time of the special birth we are celebrating today things were also difficult. Israel was again taken over by another country. Things were unfair, people were hurt, scared, and confused. Many people were waiting for a Messiah, someone who would save them from their pain and fear. I wonder how these people felt?
(Pause)

I wonder how these people felt. I wonder if they felt like they were covered in a very dark darkness.
(Place black cloth over table)

Maybe there is something in our box that can help us with this darkness?
(Look inside box)

Yes, there is something else in our box!
Do you want to see what it is?
(Pull out candles and matches and place on table)

Candles and matches! Have you ever lit a light when it is dark. What happens to the darkness when you shine a light into it?
(Pause to let people respond)

I wonder if our Very Special Christmas Story has something to do with light shining in the darkness?
(light candles)

Scripture Reading: Micah 5: 2-5a

I think it's time to open another Present.

(Open Box 2 and pull out map)

Look at this, it's a map.

How many of you like travelling? Now, think really hard. If you could go anywhere you wanted to, where would you go?

(Pause to let people respond)

Those sounds like very special places.

Maybe there is a place in our box, a special place, where our Special Christmas story can take place.

(Pull out burlap)

I wonder what this could be?

(Pause)

I wonder if it is hay. Maybe old smelly hay, maybe hay with snakes or mice in it. Maybe new hay, fresh and soft.

(Place burlap on table)

Wait... there is more things in this box...

(pull out animals)

Here are some animals... hmmm... Hay and animals! It is looking a lot like a barn!

Don't get me wrong I like barns, but barns are all around us. When I drive through the country I stop noticing the barns around me because they are an ordinary part of the scenery.

Micha says that something very special is going to happen in Bethlehem. Now, in the days when our special story takes place Bethlehem wasn't a very impressive place. Bethlehem was an easy to overlook place, it's was an everyday kind of place. It could be anywhere. It could be everywhere. It's as ordinary as a barn filled with hay and animals.

I wonder what kind of special things might happen in ordinary places?

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem

**Scripture Reading: Luke 1: 26-35, 38
Matthew 1: 18-25**

Box 3: Mary and Joseph

Let's open another box. I wonder what's in our box this time?
(pull out Joseph and Mary)

I wonder who these people might be? Maybe they are special people for our special Christmas story!

They don't look very special? Okay, they are dressed a little different, but they don't look special. They kind of look like every day, ordinary people. They kind of look like you and like me.

Wait... maybe he's a king or she's a queen! Do you see a crown?

Or maybe she's a strong and brave warrior! Do you see a sword?

No... just two everyday, ordinary people.

I wonder what might happen with people like you and me?
I wonder what special things they can do?

Hymn: Joy to the World

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Box 4: White sheet, baby Jesus

It's time for more Presents!
(Open box and pull out white sheet)

This looks pretty fancy! I wonder what this could be?
(Pause to let people respond)

I wonder with it looks like if I put it around my neck?
(place white cloth around your neck like a cape and pose like a superhero)

I looks like a superhero cape!
I wonder how many of you like superheroes?

I wonder what superheroes do?
(Pause to let people respond)

It sounds like Superheroes are very important people!
I wonder what a superhero looks like?
(Pause to let people respond)

Let me tell you something really great! Our very special Christmas story is about a superhero! Only we use a different name. Instead of superhero we use the word "Christ," which means messiah, which means one who saves people. We also call this person Emmanuel, a great name that means "God with us."

I wonder if there is a superhero in the box?
(pull out baby).

What is this?
(Pause to let people respond)

What do babies do?
(Pause to let people respond)

Ok, remind me what superhero's do?
(Pause to let people respond)

Hmmmm. A baby doesn't sound like a superhero.

I was expecting Batman, Superwoman, Spiderman, someone big and strong, or with super powers. Instead we have a wee tiny baby named Jesus.

I wonder how a baby could be a superhero?
I wonder how a baby, could be someone who saves others?

I wonder how people can experience God through a baby?

Hymn: The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Box 5: Microphone and Shepherd

How many more presents do we have left?

Let's open another one!

(Open box and pull out microphone)

Look, it's a Microphone. Microphones are great, they help us to speak really loud! If you had a very important message to tell you could use a microphone so others would hear you.

I wonder if you had a really important message who would you share it with?

(Pause to let people respond)

I wonder if you wanted other people to know the message who would you get to help you tell other people?

(Pause to let people respond)

Maybe there's someone in the box who will help us to share our very special Christmas story.

(Pull out Shepherd or Shepherds)

Well look at this, it's a shepherd.

Now, in the time of our very special story most shepherds didn't own their own sheep – they took care of other people's sheep. Many people thought they couldn't be trusted. Some people thought they were thieves. Some people thought they smelled badly, or that they were rough and mean. Many people didn't want to be near shepherds.

I wonder why shepherds are the first people to hear and share the very special Christmas story?

I wonder what it would have felt like to be a shepherd and to hear such great news?

Sharing our Gifts (Offering)

Our lives are filled with holy presents: people who fill our lives with joy, the beauty of the earth around us, the blessings of life! We take time to give thanks to God for the blessings of life, and to share our gifts of time, talent, relationship, and money with one another, with this church, and with our world.

Dedication of our offering

All: God of abundant life,

We thank you for the birth we celebrate tonight.

In response to your presence we offer our gifts to you

and pray that your love may be born within us now and always.

Amen.

Prayers of the People

Life-giving God,

Who's presence is proclaimed in angel song, in noise and wonder, and felt in the small stirrings of life: in a baby's cry and parents warm embrace, we give you thanks for the blessings of this night, for the peace of gathering here knowing that wherever this night finds us we are loved – by you and by one another. May the wonder of this Christmas Eve stir our lives that we may experience your deep holy presence born again in our midst.

We pray for all of the Bethlehem places of this world where hardship, injustice, and uncertainty are a reality.

We pray for those who find themselves like Mary and Joseph wanting and needing.

We pray for the shepherds of this world, those who live on the edges of our perception, who are easily forgotten, neglected, or worse, rejected.

We pray with the animals and the stars. We pray that we may see that your love story is for all creation and that we may live with greater respect and wonder as we celebrate our place within your great artistry.

We offer in the silence our individual prayers...

We pour out these prayers joining them with the prayers of all creation as we share in the Prayer of Jesus. Amen.

Scripture: John 1:1-14

Box 6: Star

There is just one more present tonight.
(open box and pull out star)

I wonder what this could be?
(Pause to let people respond)

I wonder if this is a star way up in the sky?

In the time when our very special Christmas story takes place stars were very important. People who traveled often used the stars to point them in the right direction. People also believed that stars announced very important events. The birth of kings and queens, emperors, heroes, and holy people were often said to be announced by stars. Stars announced that the whole cosmos was celebrating, and that the birth was so important that it was of universal proportions.

Did you know that we are made of stars? We owe our very life and this planet's growth to stars. From the exploding of stars, supernovas, the elements of creation flooded this place. We are literally made of stardust. The stars, the cosmos, fills our bodies.

The Gospel According to John tells our very special Christmas story differently than the stories in Matthew and Luke. In ancient Greece philosophers argued about what was the essence of all that is, what makes up all that is? Some said it was earth, others fire, other water, others air, and some said it was logos – word, wisdom. What is the essence of all that is?

In the beginning was the logos, the word, the essence
And the essence was with God and was God.
All things came to be through it,
And without it, nothing was.
And the essence is the light of the world.

We are guided by stars, inspired by stars, connected by stars. We are made of stardust. And we are made of the essence, the logos, the word, the Christ who was in the beginning, was one with God, whose birth in Jesus we celebrate, and whose birth we experience in the very essence of our being.

Lighting of the candles

We light the Christ Candle,
the eternal star that gives life to all.

And we take out our glow sticks.
and crack them.
For this sacred light fills our lives
– for Christ is born in us.
For us, and among us.

May the light within us shine brightly, spreading hope, peace, joy, and love.

Hymn: Silent Night

Blessing

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Whether you feel like you are covered in dark darkness,
or you feel like your life is filled with bright light;

Whether you look around and the place you stand feels importance, holy,
meaningful
or the place you stand feels overlooked, forgotten, ordinary;

Whether you feel like a queen or king, like a brave warrior, strong,
wondrous, filled with purpose,
or your feel the vulnerability and fragility of life weighing down on you;

Whether you are trusted with important messages,
or looked on again and again with mistrust and judgment;

Wherever we find ourselves in this very special Christmas story,

may we experience the presence of Christ
Born once more among us
and within us,
connecting us
and guiding us.

Let us be filled with the hopeful and holy vision of Isaiah and Micah,
let us say yes with the bravery and boldness of Mary and Joseph,
let us be open to the Angel songs and give witness to the holy things that
are all around us,
for the story happens again tonight and every moment of our lives,
the stars proclaim,
the stardust rings out in our body:
Christ is born
and our very special Christmas story continues in and through each of us.

Go out this night knowing that you are an important piece in a holy story
go and share God's hope, peace, joy, and love in this world. Amen.

Hymn: Go Tell it on the Mountain