

**The No Rehearsal Pageant: A Living Nativity Story (as of  
12/12/2018)**

**UUCWI - Dec 16, 2018**

**Introduction Before Prelude: Mavis**

Good morning and a warm welcome on this cold day!

It's a season of gratitude and I'm grateful you chose to be here this morning.

Thank you to all who volunteered to participate -- and to those who came to witness. It's no fun doing a program without an audience!!

Today's service is a departure from our more usual format.

Many years ago we presented a couple of more traditional pageants, but it was challenging to schedule rehearsals during this busy season for families in this day and age. Two years ago we presented our first "no rehearsal pageant" -- so that's what we're repeating today.

(Do we have any unclaimed costumes? If so, does anyone else want to participate?)

It's easy -- no spoken lines and all stage directions will be given by Ruth or me. You simply follow directions!)

I hope everyone enjoys this special program -- after all, I don't know any child - or adult, for that matter! - who doesn't enjoy putting on a costume and doing a bit of play acting once in a while. But this is more than simply a fun way to reenact the Christmas story.

We will remain reverent even in our not-too-serious version and the story itself is still highly relevant.

As context for our pageant, I would like to share words from Tom Ewell, a member of the Quaker Friends who meet in this space every Sunday afternoon. This is an excerpt from a piece Tom wrote on the eve of our first pageant in 2016 and it seems even more relevant today.

**(from 2016 msg written by Tom Ewell)**

The Christmas story is one of a baby born in deep poverty, to an unwed, homeless refugee of sorts, in a time of oppression and cruelty.

This birth was the beginning of a dangerous, radical life and teaching that [monumentally] upset the power structure. It is a message of the power of love and nonviolence to overcome the indifference and oppression of those with political power and privilege and to replace that oppression with a culture of inclusiveness that affirms the value of “the least of these” that would include many concerned about their safety today. The Christmas story, then, provides a prophetic, historical assurance that a morality of love will ultimately overcome a culture of greed and oppression. It is a matter of faith to make that proclamation, especially when the oppression is brutal and based on values so contradictory to our values of compassion and empathy. We will need a deep faith in the power of love and nonviolence to counter those powerful and contradictory values in the days ahead.

So we remember that Mary and Joseph were poor, displaced people. And whom did Jesus associate with? Not the rich and famous! He spent his time and attention on the poor, the sick, the marginalized. His message of inclusive love remains powerful today - especially in light of what's happening on our southern border.

A few years ago the choir sang a Christmas song with lyrics by a UU musician named John Metz. John has since died, but that song embodied our UU principles and made a deep impression on me.

The first and recurring phrase is:

Noel, noel, glad tidings to tell.

A child is born on this starlit night to bring a message of truth so bright,

a prophet, exemplar of love's delight!

Jesus set an example many strive -- yet fail -- to emulate.

But the striving is what matters!

**Choir: The Holly and the Ivy**

**Mavis --- Chalice Lighting by David Breeden:**

**In this holiday season**

**May we find peace inside ourselves;**

**May we be peace for those around us,**

**And may we renew our commitment**

**To bring peace with justice**

**To our community and to the world.**

### **Narrator 1 (Mavis):**

Each year at Christmas we recall the story of Jesus' birth. This morning, you are invited to hear this ancient and familiar story once again.

The story of a baby born in a stable,

The story of shepherds and magi,

The story of angels and a shining star.

We appreciate those of you taking part today in the telling of this story. You will help us to experience this old story in a new way.

### **Narrator 2 ( Ruth ):**

As Mavis and I narrate the story we will let you know when it is your turn to come up front. Don't worry about doing things "right" or making mistakes because there ARE NO mistakes.

There is only us, telling the story of the birth of a little baby named Jesus, who was born in such modest surroundings ... who grew up to have a hard and important life and whose teachings were all about love - inclusive, accepting, challenging love.

Let us all rise in body or spirit and sing *#248, O We Believe in Christmas.*

## **Narrator 1:**

There is only us, bringing the story of that birth joyfully and messily and chaotically to life. And joyful and messy and chaotic is how new life usually comes into being, so that is exactly how it should be here this morning too.

So, if Mary and Joseph and their donkey will please go to the sanctuary doors and wait - and a certain Roman Emperor named Caesar Augustus please come up to the front, our story can begin!

**[Caesar comes to front and says]:**

**A long time ago in a place called Palestine, the Roman Empire ruled the land and everyone had to do what the Emperor (that's me!) told them to do, whether they liked it or not, even if it meant people had to travel a long way to give me money. And that is exactly what happened. In those days, a decree went out from the Emperor Caesar Augustus (that's me!) and this is what the decree said:**

**All the world should be registered so they can pay taxes ... to me!**

**(Caesar can go and be seated)**

## **Narrator 2:**

So all the people had to go the city or town where they had been born to register. For some people, that meant a very long and hard journey. Joseph, a carpenter, and Mary, the woman to whom we was engaged to be married, lived in the town of Nazareth and had to go a long way to the town of Bethlehem.

Mary and Joseph and donkey, will you please begin your slow journey from Nazareth, around the back and up the center aisle and stop at the front row of chairs?

[Joseph and Mary and Donkey begin slowly making their way up the aisle to the front. They should stop at the front row of chairs. ]

## **Narrator 1:**

Mary and Joseph traveled from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. Mary was about to have a baby and she was tired and uncomfortable. Walking was hard and riding on the donkey wasn't much better. But there was nothing that could be done about it; they had to go. So, they travelled, sometimes even travelling through the nights, which were lit only by bright stars.

We really need some bright stars to light Mary and Joseph's journey.

Will the stars please come forward and hold your light up high so you can shine on the rest of the story?

Eileen, could you please play some twinkly music while the stars get into place?

(Narrator 2):

When the time came near for Mary to have her baby, she and Joseph went to the Inn in Bethlehem. Innkeeper, would you please come up front to answer your door? The innkeeper answered the door and told them:

**INNKEEPER: Sorry, there is no room for you here!**

Bethlehem was crowded with people who had come to be registered for the census so all the rooms at the inn were already taken. But the innkeeper saw how tired they were, and how pregnant Mary was and he felt terrible to have to turn them away. So he told them they could stay in the stable behind the inn. Innkeeper, would you please lead Mary and Joseph and their donkey to the stable?

(Mary and Joseph come forward and Mary sits on the stool. Joseph stands and the donkey kneels by Mary's feet.)

### **Narrator 1:**

Now the stable was just a small barn. And like most stables, it had animals in it. The innkeeper kept his own cow there. And maybe there could have been a dog and a cat or two and maybe there was even a (fairy princess or \_\_\_\_\_ - add whatever we have -). The sheep will come in later, but would all the other animals come on up and gather in the stable? You can crawl or slither or hop or fly up here, depending upon what kind of animal you are. If you didn't chose a costume, but you would still like to be an animal in the stable, come on up, there is plenty of room for you.

The animals welcomed Mary and Joseph and were even kind enough to give up their hay-filled manger or feeding trough so the baby could have a bed. As soon as Mary and Joseph got settled in, it became very clear that it was time for the baby to be born.

**Choir Sings: A La Nanita Nana**

**(During singing, Mary cradles the doll.)**

**Narrator 1:**

And so, Mary gave birth to a son, in a simple stable, surrounded by animals. Joseph and Mary wrapped their baby up warmly in bands of cloth and named him Jesus. The animals welcomed the baby by making all their animal noises for him, but gently so that they wouldn't scare him.

(To children:) Animals, would you like to make your noises very softly to welcome baby Jesus?

### **Narrator 2:**

In that region, there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. They were up high in the hills, keeping their sheep safe on a dark and quiet night.

So now, we need the shepherds and sheep. Will all the shepherds and sheep, please gather at the back of the sanctuary. Shepherds, bring your crooks. When you are ready, our border collie, who is very experienced at sheep herding, will lead you half way down the aisle to your hills where you will wait because something special happened to the shepherds and sheep that night. Let's stand and sing *#237 The First Nowell*, while the sheep, shepherds and border collie make their way to the hills, halfway down the aisle.

**[Border Collie leads sheep and shepherds down the center aisle slowly herding their sheep. Sheep should crawl on all fours if they are able. They should stop halfway.]**

**Narrator 1:**

While the shepherds were watching their flocks by night, suddenly an angel of the Lord stood before them.

Eileen, could you please play a short burst of angel music and could the angel Gabrielle please come up in front of the stars?

**(Gabrielle comes up front)**

When the angel was before them and the glory of the Lord shone all around them, the shepherds were sore afraid. But the angel said to them,

Gabrielle : Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you;

Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

## **NARRATOR 2:**

And suddenly, there was with the angel Gabrielle a whole choir of angels. Will all the angels please fly over and join Gabrielle?

Eileen could you please play a little more heavenly host music while the angels get in place?

**(Narrator pause for angels to join Gabrielle.)**

So the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place!" So the shepherds went quickly to Bethlehem with their sheep and gathered around the stable.

While the angels and stars are lighting the way and all the shepherds and sheep come to Bethlehem, let's stand and join in singing,

***#231 Angels We Have Heard on High***

**(Gabrielle and the angels gather ... They can sit down on the floor if they want. Shepherds and Sheep come forward rest of the way and gather, leaving space in the center for Wise people to walk through.)**

The shepherds and their sheep found the baby lying in the manger with Mary and Joseph beside him, just as the angel Gabrielle had said it would be. When the shepherds saw this they were amazed. Mary quietly kept all these things in her heart and treasured them. The shepherds and sheep gathered around the manger glorifying and praising God for all the wonders they had heard and seen.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, three (or four or five depending!) wise persons who were kings and queens from the Far East came to Jerusalem, traveling on camels. Will the wise people please go to the back of the Sanctuary now? Don't forget your gifts!

The wise people had learned about a prophecy, or prediction, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. So they set out on a long, difficult journey to Bethlehem, bearing special and beautiful gifts for the baby because they wanted to honor him.

## **NARRATOR 1:**

In the same spirit of generosity in which the Wise People give their gifts to the baby Jesus, let us give our financial gifts to support this congregation.

Let's remain seated as the baskets pass and the Wise people make their way to Bethlehem. join in singing

We're going to sing #259 We Three Kings ---

Let's have all the low voices sing the verses on the FIRST page and EVERYONE sing the chorus on the second page.

As we sing and collect our offering, would the wise people please come down the aisle and assemble by the manger, placing your gifts on the floor beside the baby.

**(Wise persons (and camels) come slowly down the center aisle and assemble, giving gifts to Joseph or placing them on the floor.)**

When the wise persons found the baby in the stable, they were overwhelmed with joy. There they saw the child with its parents and they knelt down to honor him. They opened their bags and brought out gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Now we have gathered everyone together who is a part of this story.  
Let us pause for a moment and just look.

Look at the shining stars and angels

Look at the shepherds and sheep and wise persons  
and animals all gathered together in the manger.

Look at the parents and their baby.

This old story is a story about hope and yearning. It is a story about  
love and mystery and wonder and it is all here, it is all still here.

In closing, WE are the Christmas Pageant.

We are the ones able to live in such a way that the dreams of  
Christmas come true.

Let's give all our participants in the pageant a round of thanks as  
they return to their seats. Thank you ALL!

**(Narrator 2 can sit down)**

The Moment of Magic By [Victoria E Safford](#)

Now is the moment of magic, when the whole, round earth turns again toward the sun,

and here's a blessing:

the days will be longer and brighter now,  
even before the winter settles in to chill us.

Now is the moment of magic,  
when people beaten down and broken,  
with nothing left but misery and candles and their own clear voices,  
kindle tiny lights and whisper secret music,

and here's a blessing:

the dark universe is suddenly illuminated by the lights of the menorah,  
suddenly ablaze with the lights of the kinara,  
and the whole world is glad and loud with winter singing.

Now is the moment of magic,  
when an eastern star beckons toward an unknown goal,

and here's a blessing:

those who follow the star find nothing in the end but an ordinary baby,  
born at midnight, born in poverty, and the baby's cry, like bells ringing,  
makes people wonder as they wander through their lives,  
what human love might really look like, sound like, feel like.

Now is the moment of magic,

and here's a final blessing:

we already possess all the gifts we need;  
we've already received our presents:  
ears to hear music,  
eyes to behold lights,  
hands to build true peace on earth  
and to hold each other tight in love.

Let us rise in body or spirit and sing as our postlude Handel's [Hallelujah Chorus!](#)