

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES AND READINGS

The Christmas You've Always Longed For

This section of worship material contains selections that you can do with your church drama team or with individuals who are itching for an audience. We've provided four biblical and four contemporary monologues that can be done with very few props and little rehearsal time – your actor will simply need to memorize his or her script and perhaps practice once in the space to be used. Readings for groups of two or more are also included here. These will take a little more time to rehearse together, but they are touching and highly worshipful and are certain to be well worth the effort.

WEEK 1: SLOW DOWN FOR REFLECTION

Elizabeth

A dramatic monologue

By Nancy Gruben

(Elizabeth, an older woman with a shawl or a large scarf draped over her head as a covering, walks across the stage and shouts to someone ahead.)

It's okay John! Go on ahead! I'll be home as soon as I catch my breath. *(Sits down and faces audience)* That's my Johnny. Such energy! No, he's not my grandson—though I can't blame you for the mistake. He's my own son. A miracle baby some 'round here might say. And they'd be right! *(Reminiscing)* Oh, what a time that was—those days before John arrived! What a hubbub! Nobody, including my husband Zechariah, thought we could still have a child of our own *(Laughs)* Oh, the stir that caused! *(With confidentiality)* Sometimes I think that's part of the reason God took away Zechariah's voice—just to keep him from yakking my ear off the whole nine months, discussing how this could happen.

You haven't yet heard our story? Well, you must be new around here. Everybody from here to the temple was talking about it. You see, my Zechariah is a priest. And one day when it was his turn to go into the temple, an angel appeared to him—an angel! Told him we were going to have a baby, and to name him John.

(Laughs) Well, you'd just have to know my Zechariah. Nope, even an angel wasn't enough to convince him. Told the angel we were just plain too old. Then he asked the angel if he was sure

he got his facts straight. Mind you, that's when Gabriel told Zechariah he'd have to remain silent until little Johnny was born. And sure enough, when Zechariah came out of the temple, his voice was gone! He couldn't even tell the people what happened, except with gestures. (*Chuckles*)

Anyway, wouldn't you know it, before too long, I found out I was actually expecting a child. Oh, was I thrilled, excited, happy, amazed ... it's hard to describe all that I was feeling that day! But you know, that was just the beginning of the story. When I was about six months along, that very same angel—Gabriel—appeared to a young cousin of mine. (*Smile*) I'll tell you what, this angel must be in the baby-announcing business, because he told her she was going to have a child, too. But Mary's baby was to be the Son of the Most High!

I honestly don't know if I would have believed all of this, except for the fact that I'd seen all God had done for us. And because of something else that happened—a moment I'll never forget. You see, that baby I was carrying was real quiet. Hard to believe it now—seeing Johnny running through the streets, all arms and legs. But in my womb he was real still—too still, it seemed to me. And I confess, I sometimes worried—at my age and all. But then, Mary arrived at my door. The minute I saw her, John just leaped inside me! Oh, what a wonderful feeling that was! And at that exact same moment, the Spirit of God just touched my heart and soul. I knew without Mary even telling me, that she was carrying a child too -- the Son of God.

Well, Mary stayed with us until it was time for John to be born. What a help she was! Not just with the chores, either. It was her quiet spirit. *Peaceful* I guess is the best word to describe it. We spent a lot of time together, the two of us. We'd go for long walks, or sit out on the porch and talk and talk. She'd ask a lot of questions and I'd try to answer as best I could. Though, I never did see her doubt or question what God was doing. Instead, she showed me how to slow down, think about what was happening, and just praise God for the good things he had in store. I think even my Zechariah learned a lot from that girl—because when he finally regained his voice after John was born, the first thing he did was to start praising God.

And Mary? Well, she had a son, too. But not here at home like I did. She and Joseph, they—(*chuckles*)—well, actually, that's another story for another day. And somehow, I don't think we've heard the end of that one either. (*Begins to move off stage, hears shouting ahead*) Whoops! There's Johnny calling. He's a handful, all right. Coming, Son! Just give your old mother a chance to catch up with you!

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Barren Wives and Longed-for Children

A scripted reading for five voices

By Karen Mains

(The narrator of this reading should be male; four female readers comprise a chorus of barren wives. The narrator provides short commentaries, and the readers' words are taken directly from Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. The narrator stands aside from the chorus, either at the podium or at an opposite place on the platform. This material can be used as a call to worship or as a creative way to use Scripture before the sermon. It might also lead to a time of self-examination and quiet prayer.)

Narrator: Have you ever wondered why there are so many barren wives in Scripture?

Reader 1: There was Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Reader 2: There was Rachel, the wife of Jacob.

Reader 3: There was Hannah, the wife of Elkanah

Reader 4: There was Elizabeth, the wife of the temple priest Zechariah

Narrator: All of these barren women had a lament.

Reader 2: Sarah said, "The Lord has kept me from having children."

Reader 1: Rachel implored Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die."

Reader 4: In bitterness of soul, Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.

All Readers: *(Breathe together)* "Give me children, or I shall die."

Narrator: All these wives saw their barrenness as a sign that God was withholding his blessing. The words from Exodus promised, "Worship the Lord your God, and ... none will miscarry or be barren in your land."

All Readers: *(Breathe together)* None will miscarry or be barren in your land.

Narrator: The longing to give life was so great it drove many of these wives to desperate acts.

Reader 3: Sarah laughed at the three holy visitors.

Reader 2: Rachel gave her servant Bilhah to her husband and traded Jacob's sexual favors with her sister, Leah, for wild herbs thought to produce fertility.

Reader 1: Hannah bargained with God: "If you will only look upon your servant's misery and give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life."

Narrator: These barren women felt like a disgrace in their own eyes and in the eyes of their community.

All Readers: (*Joyfully*) But all of them gave birth to sons of promise! To Sarah:

Reader 4: I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her. Sarah will bear you a son and you will call him Isaac."

All Readers: To Rachel:

Reader 3: Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph.

All Readers: And Hannah:

Reader 1: In the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

All Readers: And Elizabeth:

Reader 2: The angel of the Lord said to her husband Zechariah. "Do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear a son and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth."

Narrator: The barren wives of Scripture are a picture of human longing. They are a prophetic type of nations looking for the promised Deliverer. They are a metaphor for each of us who wait

in sterile places, wait for the wilderness of our lives to give forth fruit. And for each of these wives and their unfulfilled longing, God tenderly made them into symbols of his covenant.

Reader 3: The Lord has done this for me!

Reader 2: The Lord has done this for me!

Reader 4: He has shown his favor!

Reader 1: He has shown his favor!

All Readers: (*Breathe together*) And taken away my disgrace among the people.

Narrator: We are all too often barren wives, people waiting for unfulfilled promises, our hearts heavy with longing. We want to be godly. But we fall far short of the possibilities.

All Readers: Give us children, or we shall die.

Reader 4: "This is how the birth of Jesus came about," wrote Matthew.

Reader 1: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God," wrote Mark.

Reader 3: "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph," wrote Luke.

Narrator: Every year Christmas comes, and comes again, and again. And we celebrate the birth of a longed-for child of promise. And every year, Christmas reminds us that promises *are* fulfilled. God does keep his word. Goodness can inhabit the earth. We will be barren no longer.

All Readers: Give us this Child, or we shall all die.

Narrator: This Advent, let us be bold to look at the emptiness in our own lives. Like the barren wives of Scripture, let us lament our own spiritual infertility. Then let us allow Christmas to turn our eyes to God's promises.

Readers 1 and 2: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Readers 3 and 4: For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

All Readers: For unto us a child is born.

Reader 1: In love he predestined us to be adopted as his children,

All Readers: For unto us a son is given.

Reader 2: In him we have redemption through his blood.

Reader 3: The forgiveness of sins

Reader 4: in accordance with the riches of God's grace, which he lavished on us,

All 4 Readers: (*Breathe together*) For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. We are barren no more. The Lord has done this for us! He has shown us favor! God has taken from us our disgrace among the people.

Narrator and Readers: Thanks be to God.

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WEEK 2: KEEP A CHRIST-CENTERED FOCUS

Bridgette the Baby's Place Sales Rep.

A dramatic monologue

By Melissa Timberlake

(Bridgette is a perky, well-dressed, middle-aged or older lady who uses a lot of space because of all her energy! She speaks with gusto—and a little condescension—to a customer whom the audience does not see. Props include a computer monitor and keyboard [may be pantomimed, if necessary] and a Baby Needs Checklist [a sheet of paper on a clipboard or simply folded in thirds, like a pamphlet].)

Hi, and welcome to The Baby's Place! I'm Bridgette, your personal sales representative, and you're--? (*Slight pause to listen*) Mary. Okay, Mary, before we begin, for our database (*walks over to an imagined computer and mimes typing on a keyboard*), I just need to enter the town you're from. (*Slight pause to listen*) Nazareth. Well, alrighty.

Here's a little map of our store, complete with an alphabetized listing of the many different baby ware manufacturers. (*Pointing to Mary's tummy*) And from the way you're looking, am I safe to assume your little bundle will be arriving soon? (*Listens*) Oh my, I see. Just a couple of weeks. How exciting! Not far off, not far off at all. So, have you been to The Baby's Place before? (*Listens*) Is that right? Your first time? And have you registered for your baby shower yet? No? Well, my, my, Mary—we certainly have our work cut out for us then, don't we? There's just so much to think about!

Now, Mary, for your convenience our store has published this little Baby Needs Checklist to provide assistance to soon-to-be moms like yourself. Do you know if the baby will be a boy or a girl? (*Listens*) A little boy? Oh, I'm sure he'll be a real cutie-petutie! Isn't it just amazing what those ultrasounds can determine? (*Listens*) What? You didn't have one? I see—are you carrying differently than the last time? (*Listens*) What? Oh, an angel told you. All right, dear, whatever you say. Angels, storks, mother's intuition—whatever.

Well, our first order of business is to prepare you for your little boy's arrival. What's the decorating theme for the nursery—choo-choo trains, airplanes, sea creatures? (*Listens*) A what, dear? Oh, a barnyard! How cute. I'm envisioning a big dairy cow, maybe a few adorable sheep. Good. That's got real potential.

Okay, let's move on—baby supplies. You're going to need onezees, bottles, diapers, a digital thermometer, pacifiers. (*Mustn't forget those!*) And, of course, baby powder, shampoo, wet wipes, lotion. A crib, a cradle, a bouncy chair, and a car seat—can't take him home without one! And then a diaper bag, receiving blankets, hooded towels ... and out of all those items what do you still need? (*Listens*) EVERYTHING?!? Mary, dear, your due date is only days away! If you don't mind my asking, what have you been doing with yourself these last nine months? (*Listens*) Focusing on the more important things? But don't you see? These *are* the important things. Mary, you simply can't have this baby without the supplies! Well, no need to fret. We're going to get you all straightened out. That's what I'm here for. (*Laughing as if it's quite a joke*) Focusing on the more important things. Oh, that's really a rich one. You had me going ...

Now, where should we begin? Shall we start with layette supplies? Or should we get your changing table all stocked up? (*Pauses*) Mary? (*Pauses to listen*) Well, dear, I understand that this all seems a bit beside the point. But, honestly, during this season of your life, things will seem busy, busy, busy! What could be more important than “stocking up”? (*Listens*) I see. It’s more important to think about all the good things God has done for you. How sweet, dear. (*Listens*) Yes, I’d imagine that does make a huge difference. (*Listens*) Yes, yes, it would keep you focused—and in your case, so focused that you’ve forgotten to get the essentials for your baby! (*Listens*) Oh, okay—to you, staying focused *is* the most essential thing. No offense, dear. It’s just that most new moms come in here a little more frantic and—shop, shop, shop!

Speaking of shopping, Mary, where *would* you like to begin. (*Listens*) I beg your pardon—you what? You brought your own list? Well, good. Why don’t we compare notes? (*Reads the list and is surprised*) Dear, you only have two items written down! You want a devotional book for new mommies? (*Listens*) Yes, of course. To help you keep focused. And second, you need swaddling clothes? (*Thinks for a second*) Swaddling clothes? Haven’t heard *that* request for—a long time. Um, okay, let’s see. Why don’t we wander over to our PJ selection and see what we can find ...

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A Synagogue Cantor

A dramatic monologue

By Karen Mains

It is not known when music entered synagogue worship, but it is surmised that certain Levitical singers may have continued to practice their art in the lay-oriented gathering. We do know that only one or two solo singers—cantors—were involved in a service. They chanted the scripture readings, the psalms, the post-biblical prayers ... In ancient Hebrew worship, the words of scripture were never spoken without melody; to do so was considered to be a minor sacrilege. They were always sung in a lusty cantillation (“Shout to God with loud songs of joy!” Psa. 47:1)

(Donald P. Husted, *Jubilate: Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition*, Hope Publishing Company, Wheaton, Ill., 1981, pp. 81, 86.)

(This monologue is a fictional moment from the day of Hebrew synagogue cantor, who is responsible to teach the children of Nazareth to sing. He is a warm and loving man who delights in his responsibility. His nurturing and exuberant manner shows itself readily in his teaching.)

Props might include a tambourine, a toy horn, and handbells. The spoken A sounds, like in the name Avram, are broad ahs, as in star; the r's should be slightly rolled, if possible. The cantor speaks to the audience, as if it were his children's choir. If your seating situation allows, he may even interact with the people on the front row, handing them the instruments and talking directly to them.)

Now, little ones. You must learn to sing for the festival! How can you shout forth the praises of the One Most High unless you learn to use your vocal chords? *(Clapping his hands to get the attention of his class)* Children! Children! It is here, here in this little village of Nazareth, here in this little synagogue building, that we learn to sing praises worthy of worship in the great temple. Avram, stop pushing Anna. *(Claps hands again)* Why do you hit Anna like this? *(Listens for the answer, then responds)* Oh, she is a girl. You think girls are dumb. You think girls cannot sing. Let me tell you a thing or two my little smarty-mouth Avram, Avram with the mean hands.

I have heard girls sing like angels. *(Closes his eyes and lifts his hand as though hearing the sweetest of sounds)* Like angels. You think Miriam was a man? You think the warrior Deborah was a wizened old wife? Avram, Avram. They were girls. They were girls. We chant their praises even now in synagogue. *(He sings/chants)* "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously ..." Miriam's song, Avram. She was a girl. Do not let this be forgotten.

Here, here, little Anna. Dry your tears now. Come sit by me. You shall lead the dance today. *(He makes small, soothing noises)* Here. You hold my *tabret*. *(Shakes a tambourine slightly to hear its cheerful jingle)* Soon you shall learn to make music on an instrument. We shall all learn. The lyre for you, David, like the shepherd/king long ago. And Avram *(Trying to catch the child's eye)* Avram! If you find good hands somewhere and lose these mean hands, you will play the *sopar*, the mighty trumpet, like the priests on the walls of Jerusalem blowing the wailing ram's horn. *(Enticing the little boy out of his pout).* The *sopar*, Avram? The *sopar*?

Good. Good. Now my little singers are all happy. What? What, Elkanah? *(Cooing to a very sweet and small child)* You shall have the *pamon*, the bells, my precious. Yes, you shall.

(Officially, in command) Now, class *(Lifts his hands to direct)* How can you learn to sing the praises of the One Most High unless you use your vocal chords? Unless you open your mouths wide? Like this. *(Opens his mouth into a big round O)* And lift your heads. *(Straightens his back and lifts his head)*

They all think Nazareth is a little no-nothing town. They laugh at us. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” they mock. But we will show them. We will have the finest *cantori* at next year’s Spring Festival. Yes. Next year in Jerusalem. And they will say “Nazareth? That little village with the children who sing like angels?” Oh yes, they will.

But you must be like Mary. Mary loved *cantori* practice. She was the first at the door of the synagogue. Every day. Every day. (*aside*) Another girl, Avram. You see?

She learned the Song of Hannah. With her pure sweet voice. Like an angel. An angel. And a little while ago. A little while ago, I heard her sing Hannah’s song in a new way. A whole new way. “My soul magnifies the Lord,” she sang. With power. Yes, with power. Her own words. I predict Israel will not soon forget Mary’s song. But Mary made herself ready to sing—such a sweet child!

And so must you. Make yourself ready. And you will sing. And you will dance. And you will play the instruments. And you must come to *cantori* practice every day. And you will make new songs like the beautiful Mary. But you must not forget, you must never forget that the Jewish child sings. The Jewish child shouts praises to God.

(*Lifting his arms again as though to direct*) We will make it so the rest of Israel will not forget Nazareth. Ready? Sing! “My soul magnifies the Lord ...”

(*Aside*) A girl’s song, Avram. A girl’s song.

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Magnificat

A choral reading

By Karen Mains

(*Here is a reading using Mary’s Song [Luke 1:46-55, NKJV] and praise hymns from the early church, which are still used in some churches today. This employs a chorus—or your church choir—with at least three voices, two readers, and one female reader, who reads or speaks from memory the biblical song of Mary, the mother of our Lord.*)

Mary:

My soul magnifies the Lord!

Reader 1:

How is he contained in a womb, whom nothing can contain?
And how can he who is in the bosom of the Father be held in the arms of his mother?

Reader 2:

Man fell from the divine and better life: though made in the image of God,
through transgression he became wholly subject to corruption and decay.
But now the wise Creator seeks to fashion him anew.

Chorus:

Christ is born, give ye glory.

Mary:

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

Reader 2:

Wisdom and Word and Power,
Christ our God is the Son and the Brightness of the Father;
and unknown to the powers both above and upon the earth,
he was made man, and so has won us back again.

Reader 1:

Calling the Magi by a star, heaven brought the first fruits of the Gentiles unto Thee,
a Babe lying in a manger: and they were amazed to see
neither scepter nor throne but only utter poverty.
For what is meaner than a cave, what is humbler than swaddling clothes?
Yet therein shone forth the wealth of thy divinity: glory to thee, O Lord.

Chorus:

Christ is born, give ye glory,
Christ comes from heaven, meet ye him.

Mary:

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

Reader 1:

From the night of deeds of dark error we watch vigilantly...
Come to us and grant us cleansing:
Make the path easy for us,
Whereby we may ascend and so attain to glory.

Reader 2:

The Master, by his coming in the flesh, has cut clean through
The harsh enmity of the flesh against him,
And has destroyed the might of the murderer of our souls.

Chorus:

Christ is born, give ye glory,
Christ comes from heaven, meet ye him.
Christ is on earth, be ye exalted.

Mary:

He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.

Reader 1:

The people that before walked in darkness
This day have seen a light from the beacon on high.
The Son offers to God the nations as his inheritance.
Bestowing grace past telling
Where sin once flourished more abundantly.

Reader 2:

Christ our God, whom the Father begat from the womb before the morning star,
has come, made flesh; and he who holds the reins of the undefiled powers
is laid in a manger of dumb beasts.
He who looses the tangled cords of sin is wrapped in swaddling rags.

Chorus:

Christ is born, give ye glory.
Christ comes from heaven, meet yet him.
Christ is on earth, be ye exalted.
Oh, all the earth, sing unto the Lord.

Mary:

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

Reader 2:

Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being,
And the earth offers a cave to him whom no man can approach.
Angles with shepherds give glory, and Magi journey with a star.
For unto us is born a young Child, the pre-eternal God.

Reader 1:

Bethlehem has opened Eden: come, and let us see. We have found joy in secret:
come, and let us take possession of the paradise that is within the cave.
There the unwatered Root has appeared, from which forgiveness flowers forth:
there is found the undug Well, whence David longed to drink of old.
There the Virgin has borne a babe,
and made the thirst of Adam and David to cease straightway.
Therefore let us hasten to this place where now is born a young Child,
the pre-eternal God.

Chorus:

Christ is born, give ye glory,
Christ comes from heaven, meet ye him.
Christ is on earth, be ye exalted.
O all the earth, sing unto the Lord,
and sing praises in gladness, O ye people.

Mary:

He has helped his servant Israel,
In remembrance of his mercy,
As he spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and to his seed forever.
My soul magnifies the Lord!

Readers 1 and 2:

Magnify, O my soul,
God born in the flesh from the Virgin.
Magnify, O my soul,

the King born in the cave.
Magnify, O my soul,
God worshipped by the Magi.
Magnify, O my soul,
Him who was revealed to the Magi by a star.

Chorus:

Christ is born, give ye glory
Christ comes from heaven, meet ye him.
Christ is on earth, be ye exalted.
O all the earth, sing unto the Lord,
And sing praises in gladness, O ye people,
For he has been glorified.

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WEEK 3: MANAGE THE INEVITABLE DISTRACTIONS

Naybon the Caravan Leader

A dramatic monologue

By Nancy Gruben

(Naybon, a middle-aged to older man with a bit of a grizzly personality, speaks to the audience)

How you doing there? Naybon's the name. Interested in traveling to Jerusalem for the Holy Days? Well, you've found your man. Puttin' together a group right now. Ask anyone around and they'll tell you I'm the best guide in the business. After all, holy pilgrimages are my specialty!

Not really a religious man, myself. But if folks want to visit the temple courts, see the walls Nehemiah rebuilt—then I'm happy to oblige. *(Quieter, as if telling a secret)* Don't be passing it around, but it's been quite a good year for the caravan business. Not that I'm much into politics, but this Caesar Augustus guy, he sure did me a favor—announced a census to be taken. Best thing that could have happened—everyone had to go back to their own town to register. Couldn't have come up with a better strategy for increasin' business myself!

Sure did change the regular customers, though. Saw a lot more older folks and families than usual. Even had a young girl come through who was expecting a child. Frankly, when she and

her husband joined the group, I wasn't too thrilled, I'll tell ya. Not that I'm in the midwife business or anything, but in my opinion, she was way too far along to be travelin' like that.

But they certainly weren't about to be turned away. No sir-ee! Especially that young gal. Almost seemed like she was on some sort of mission. She was determined she was gonna have her baby in Bethlehem no matter what—that's where they were headed to register.

Funny thing is, those two weren't a stitch of trouble at all. Guess I somehow expected complaints about all the walkin' and the sleepin' on the ground and the stench of all the animals. But she was different—special—confident, even. She just didn't seem to get distracted by any of those things. *Purposeful* is the word, I guess.

Odd trip—lots of travelers, and would you believe a new star in the sky? We all noticed it. And frankly, it kinda had everybody a little on edge. All but that young girl—if I recall, her name was Mary. When the traveling got rough she'd look up in the heavens and focus on that one bright star. Yep, she was a young one, but I guess she'd decided she was gonna make it to Bethlehem, no matter what—nothing was gonna turn her aside.

I wonder, sometimes, how those two made out. Felt kinda funny, leaving them like that. Not a room to be had, and she was getting near her time. It was plain as day—even an old bachelor like me could see that! And then, afterwards, when I heard about that terrible business with Herod killing all those little baby boys in Bethlehem, I just couldn't help wondering what happened to them.

I watched for 'em for a few months. Even now, I sometimes catch myself thinkin' about those two. They were so different than the others on the tour. Wonder if everything turned out all right with their baby and all. Never did lay eyes on them again though. Would love to know how things turned out.

Maybe I'll run into 'em again some day. Who knows? They might just be needin' a guide for a trip to Jerusalem. If so, I'm just the one they'll be lookin' for. After all, I'm the best man you'll find for gettin' you from here to there!

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Beatrice the Lamaze Instructor

A dramatic dialogue

By Melissa Timberlake

(If you can, get a woman who has had a child within the last couple of years to do this monologue; she will have a better idea how it should be played. Beatrice is dressed in sweats or comparably comfortable clothing. She wanders back and forth, ever so gently, from side to side of the stage, as if she were in the midst of a room full of “students.” She always speaks in a calm, soothing tone.)

Very good, class, very good. Now, keep breathing—keep breathing. *(Snaps her fingers to the beat as she begins to count rhythmically)* And in, two, three, four. And out, two, three, four. Keep your breathing at a nice slow pace. And out, two three, four. *(Stops snapping)* And now you're feeling a contraction coming on. Remember to focus! Focus and keep breathing. Husbands, count it out for her. Nice and slow. Grasp her hand ... help her relax with a gentle massage, encourage her—tell her she's doing great. *(Again snapping her fingers to the count)* And in, two, three, four. And out, two, three, four. *(Stops snapping)* And—contraction has ended. Take your cleansing breath—in and out—and relax! Good work, good work!

Okay, go ahead and pile your mats in the corner. *(Stops a moment, “seeing” the couples follow her instructions)* Let's gather in a circle and take the last few minutes to answer questions. Some of you are getting very close to your due dates. Any questions before we dismiss? *(Listens to a question and repeats it with a tone of amusement)*. Pain killers? Which one works the best? I realize most of us have this universal aversion to pain—so what about pain killers? I'm sure that's a question most of you want resolved. Unfortunately, we don't have time right now, but next week we'll discuss your options.

Anything else? *(Looks for a questioner, then listens)* How long will it take to get the weight off? It takes nine months to put it on. Expect nine months to take it off!

Next question? *(Listens, then dives into it)*. Okay, you've been practicing your breathing exercises at home, but you're afraid that when the time actually comes you'll go completely ballistic and forget everything. You're afraid you'll respond in some way that's totally out of character: Maybe you'll scream at your husband, tell your doctor he's an idiot, or bite your nurse. Honestly, ladies, so much of the way you respond at the time depends on how prepared you are. You want the birth to be a special time—not one that's chaotic.

And that's exactly why it's so important to see your pregnancy as a time to really slow things down. Every day, together, you both need to be focusing on what's really important. Now, I know

right now you're feeling enormous and seeing yourself grow bigger every day. You're getting just a little tired of going to the bathroom every five minutes, and you've forgotten what your feet look like.

But, believe me, before you know it, Baby will be here! So often women tell me they regret that they didn't take the time to really enjoy their pregnancies. It's easy to get all caught up in decorating the nursery, buying diapers, cleaning out closets, finding maternity clothes that don't make you look like a walking tent—but then you never really enjoy the fact that there is this miracle growing inside you.

Slow things down, Moms and Dads. Ladies, think about that little life inside you. Then when the time comes to deliver, you'll be ready.

Interesting—last week my husband and I took a weekend away for our anniversary. Wouldn't you know it (seems like I never really get away from work), I ran into this young gal—a teenager—who was pregnant. She's due any time now and is looking pretty large. We started a conversation. I told her I was a birthing instructor. She hasn't actually taken a class herself. But what struck me about her was her sense of confidence. She seemed so at ease and calm, really calm. You don't see that too often with first babies. I asked her if she feels ready for her baby to arrive. She just smiled and said, "Ready? Oh yes, I can't wait! I've been ready all along for whatever comes. Just after I found out I was pregnant, I took a few months away at my cousin's house to slow down and get prepared. And now—well, now I'm just resting, at ease, thinking about my baby every day. God is taking care of things. And I can hardly wait to see how it all turns out!"

She took time to focus and slow down, and I know she'll do fine when the time comes. And so will you, if you do the same. You'll be fine, just fine. Slow down, think about the baby, and make sure you really enjoy this special time. And don't forget—practice your breathing exercises! In, two, three, four. And out, two, three, four. Keep your breathing at a nice...slow...pace. Class dismissed. We'll see you same time next week.

* * * * *

Bob the Travel Agent

A dramatic monologue

By Doug Timberlake

(A travel agent, complete with Hawaiian shirt and fishing cap, addresses an unseen couple who have walked into his agency. If you can set up a small desk, that will give your actor more to work with. Otherwise, props could include a clipboard and pen, a portable CD player, and some "tickets" in his front shirt pocket.)

Come on in, come on in. Have a seat. Welcome to Nazareth and Beyond: Adventures in Travel. I'm Bob, and you're--? *(Listens)* Ahh, Mary and Joseph, glad to meet ya.

So where do ya want to go? Let me suggest the Caribbean—beautiful white sand beaches, fruity tropical drinks with those cute little umbrellas. *(Sings the Beach Boys song)* "Bermuda, Bahamas, come on pretty mama, to Key Largo, Montego, baby why don't you go?" So what do ya say? Ain't it about time you two love birds got out of the Middle East? Those ocean breezes'll do ya some good. I see you got a little one on the way, huh? *(Listens)* Any day now? Wow. Kids are—are—*(a little uncomfortable)* wow! Anyway, what do ya say? How about a nice little romantic cruise?

(Listens) You what? *(Listens)* You want to go to Bethlehem? To *Bethlehem*? But everybody and their wise men go to Bethlehem! No, no, no—that won't do! What you two need is something a little more fun. How 'bout some excitement? I've got just the thing—Vegas! The town that never sleeps! Little lady, you look like you'd do well on those quarter slots. Aren'tcha ready for one last fling before the little one arrives? Are you with me?

(Waits for response) Aw, come on folks. Think of this as ... as ... as the start of a college fund for your little tyke. *(Listens, then with disappointment)* I see. All right, all right, okay. So you're really set on this Bethlehem thing, huh? Of all places—Bethlehem.

Well, I can see there's no changing your minds, so okie-dokie. Let's talk travel. That's my game and value's my name. I've got a fabulous, almost-new minivan sitting out back, and it's got your name on it. *(Listens)* What? You want a donkey? Would you like that with cassette or the multiple CD changer? Ha, ha, ha! Just a little travel-agent humor. Now, are ya gonna need insurance on that donkey?

(Listens) Why yes, of course, ma'am. I've got an excellent map right here. Will get ya from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and back if you'd like. *(Listens)* You'll need water? Good thinking! *(to Joseph)* Mister, you've got a real sharp little lady here. I mean, she's prepared. Been thinkin' this one through, have ya? That's good! Never seen anyone so focused. You sure know what you

want, lady, and nothin's gonna distract you, is it? Well, old Bob here admires the fact that you're focused. Gotta know what you want, that's what I always say.

Now, one last suggestion: Don't miss stopping to see the Mirage on the way. It's about three days into your trip, depending on how hot it is. Beautiful marble fountain with a gorgeous garden. Plus, I just happen to have a couple of discount tickets. Ya can't go wrong. So what do ya say? Splurge a little? (*Listens*) Little missy, you *are* focused! I mean, I can't get ya to try nothin' extra. (*Listens, then sounding sincere*) Well, I'm sure it's a special trip...and...that's exactly why I recommend you stop to see the world's largest cactus needle. (*Listens*) Okay, okay, okay. I can see you're in a hurry. (*Yelling out back*) Louie! Pull the donkey around front—and throw a couple of nice blankets on it. Here's your map. They'll bring your water supply out front. Now, while we're waiting—how about we talk about starting a life insurance plan for the little one? You see, not only am I in the travel business, but last year I branched out and began sellin' insurance. So what do ya say? (*Listens*) No? What do you mean his father is in the life insurance business? I thought you said you were a carpenter! (*Listens*) All right, okay, all right, I hear ya. You just want to get to Bethlehem. Now why doesn't that surprise me?

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WEEK 4: CELEBRATE WHATEVER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

The Bethlehem Shepherd

A dramatic monologue

By Doug Timberlake

(You can have lots of fun with making someone up as an old shepherd. A fake beard, a long rod for a staff, and a natural colored bathrobe are all you need. He hobbles out onto the stage and addresses the audience.)

It's always around this time of year I begin thinkin' about that night. I'll never forget it. There I was, a young man, sittin' in a field outside of Bethlehem. I was minding my own business—minding my sheep. The other shepherds were lying near by.

It was one of those usual, nothing-out-of-the-ordinary nights—a few stars above twinkling. Old Zebaniah was starting to snore. We didn't mind, though. Tended to keep the wolves away.

Then suddenly, out of nowhere—*Whooshhh!* The sky lit up and there was this...we...he—she—it—was large, like a man, but b-b-b-bright. It was an angel of the Lord. And the glory of the Lord shone about us. Let me tell ya what, I hit my knees. *Whhonka!* I was kissing the ground. I was suckin' turf.

Then he says, "Fear not!" Well I was t-t-trying (*shakes staff uncontrollably*), but I couldn't hold my staff still. "For I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Why us? A bunch of lowly shepherds. However, there was no Q and A session. He just went right on: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You'll find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." What did he say? A baby lying where? I must have gotten some grass in my ears when I hit the dirt!

Then, out of nowhere, the whole sky explodes with light and there are hundreds, thousands...well, there were a lot of them—angels everywhere! And boy, could they sing! And then they were gone....

So, off we went to Bethlehem to see the Christ child, the Son of God, the King of Kings. Oh, this was going to be something! Something spectacular! Wasn't a long walk—we were more or less runnin'.

When we got there, Samuel, the youngest shepherd, said, "I've got an uncle who works for an inn just around the corner, and they've got a small stable there." So we checked it out. I slowly crept up to the barn doors. Oh yeah, it smelled like a stable all right. Didn't see much—except for a small light coming from the back corner.

I signaled the others to follow me.

We snuck around the donkeys, the goats, a couple of sheep, and a huge old ox. (*Steps in ox manure*). Oh, wouldn't you know it. My best sandals, too! (*Wipes off manure and continues on*)

There they were. Mary, Joseph, and the—the Christ child.

We had come to see the birth of a king—expected all kinds of grandeur. What we found, though, was this smelly old stable, packed full with animals. I must admit, I was a little disappointed. Had we somehow mixed up the angel's message? Were we in the wrong place? Surely no king would ever be born in a stable—let alone the Christ child.

Then everything changed. I looked into his mother's eyes and saw her sheer delight. She was glowin', smilin'—and simply celebratin' the birth of her new little boy. A miracle had taken place, all right! And in such an odd, smelly, dingy little place. But somehow we all knew we were in God's presence. No doubt about that one. And you could see it written all over her face!

I quickly explained to Mary and Joseph all about the angels and what they had told us about a child in a manger. Then we gathered around Jesus and just admired this wonderful little fella! Then Mary picked him up. Just a little guy, he was, all wrapped up tight in cloths. She handed him to me.

(He pantomimes holding the small infant, makes goo goo noises, showing him off to the other shepherds. Then he notices that the baby's wet, tries to get him to stop crying, finally frantically hands him back to Mary.)

Uh—you might want to take him, ma'am.

Every year around this time, I get to thinkin' about that night when I first met him and held him in my arms. I think about that brave young woman, Mary. And I marvel at the way she found joy. It's almost like she didn't even notice her surroundings. And if she did, she decided it didn't matter. She was gonna celebrate anyway.

Well, got to get back to my sheep now. But don't you forget. Be sure to take time and delight in the birth of the Christ child ... no matter where you find yourself!

* * * * *

The Word of the Lord

A reading for two voices

Arranged by Karen Mains

(This interpretive reading, adapted straight from Scripture [RSV, NRSV], should be simple enough to present after only two or three practice runs. Anyone can act as a reader, but you may find it best to use a man for Voice 1 and a woman for Voice 2. Both readers should be expressive, should have some sense of rhythm, and should be capable of a breadth of dynamics, with voices both strong and gentle. Occasionally you will notice the word beat, an acting term that means in reading "an inward count," a pausing and turning to a different conceptual direction, slight though

it be. After reading the piece through several times, you'll find these "beats" a natural aid to clear communication.)

Voice 1: First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Voice 2: And God said to Noah,

Voice 1: "I have determined to make an end of all flesh."

Voice 2: Then the Lord said to Moses,

Voice 1: "Go in to Pharaoh. . . .Stretch forth your hand. . . .Take a lamb."

Voice 2: No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Voice 1: Then the Lord said to Joshua—

Voice 2: And the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon—

Voice 1: And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson

Voice 2: (*Beat*) And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

Voice 1: And the Lord came and stood forth, calling as at other times, "Samuel? Samuel?"

Voice 2: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears."

Voice 1: The word of the Lord came to Nathan.

Voice 2: At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night.

Voice 1: And the word of the Lord came to Jehu the prophet.

Both: (*Take a breath together.*) Men and women, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God.

Voice 1: Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite.

(The following is spoken in the style of a “rhythmic round,” something like the way you’d sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” As with any round, it should be said twice to get the full effect. Voice 1 begins a line; Voice 2 chimes in at the slash mark (/), and so on, back and forth between the two voices. Be sure to read the phrases through in a natural rhythm, not stopping at the slash marks, which are only meant to show where the next reader should begin his or her phrase. See the Worship Sampler Video for a specific demonstration.)

Both: And after the wind / an earthquake,
And after the earthquake / a fire,
And after the fire / a still, small voice.

Voice 1: *(Beat, in a stage whisper)* What are you doing here, Elijah?

Voice 2: *(Beat, beat, beat)* To Ezra!

Voice 1: The hand of the Lord my God was upon me.

Voice 2: To Nehemiah!

Voice 1: The good hand of my God was upon me. *(Beat, beat)* To Isaiah!

Voice 2: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Voice 1: To Ezekiel!

Voice 2: The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, prophesy to those who prophesy out of their own minds.”

Both: Because no prophesy ever came by human will, but from God.

Voice 2: The word of the Lord came to Hosea *(Beat)* and to Joel and to Amos.

Voice 1: The word of the Lord came to Micah, to Nahum, to Habakkuk.

Voice 2: The word of the Lord came to Zephaniah, to Haggai,

Voice 1: to Zechariah, to Malachi.

Both: (*Beat, beat, beat, breathe together.*) Hear the word of the Lord!

(Take your time through the following section, a respite after the above flurry of words. Voice 1 speaks with strength, not too quickly, with only a slight, natural beat where indicated between lines; Voice 2 is an echo, softly speaking beneath Voice 1 as soon as he or she hears the words, as if Mary is reflecting in her heart.)

Voice 1: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

Voice 2: The Lord is with you ...

Voice 1: (*Beat*) “Do not be afraid, Mary,”

Voice 2: Do not be afraid ...

Voice 1: “for you have found favor with God. (*Beat*) And now, you will bear a son,”

Voice 2: A son ...

Voice 1: “and you will name him Jesus.”

Voice 2: Jesus ...

Voice 1: “He will be great, the Son of the Most High, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Voice 2: There will be no end ...

Voice 1: (*Fading*) There will be no end ...

Voice 2: (*In a whisper*) There will be no end.

Both: (*Beat, beat, beat. Breathe together and speak with strength.*)

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,

Voice 2: full of grace—

Voice 1: and truth

Both: (*Breathe together*) And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son.

* * * * *

CHRISTMAS EVEN/DAY: ENJOY A GOD-PLEASING CHRISTMAS

Benny the Motel Manager

A dramatic dialogue

By Joel Mains

(Benny is a laid-back personality who's overwhelmed and a little puzzled by people's complaints and demands. He may sit behind a desk, table, or counter, which should be a disorganized mass of papers and various items that have no obvious connection to motel managing. Props include two telephones [and a way to make them ring, if possible], a paper fan, a pitcher of water, and a half-full coffee cup.)

Y'ello—Benny's Bethlehem Inn, Benny speakin'. (*Listens*) Do we have air conditioning? No, but fans are given to each guest when they check in. (*Holds up a paper fan and breezes himself*) Speed's adjustable, too. (*Fans himself faster*) Just give me a reservation date, and I'll jot it down in the book. (*Buzzer sounds*) Hold, please! (*Places caller on hold and answers the other line.*)

Y'ello—front desk, Benny speakin'. (*Listens*) Look, ma'am, I'm sure ya got a towel in your room. Every guest gets a towel at check-in. (*About to hang up, then listens*) So ya've already used that towel, and now ya want a clean one? (*Listens*) Was the towel we supplied defective, ma'am? I mean, it did dry correctly, right? (*Gets a bit disgusted*) I thought so. Well, ma'am, the way I see it, you're the one who got the towel dirty. I don't see any reason for the Bethlehem Inn to supply ya with a new one. (*Listens, shocked*) Hey! You received a perfectly functioning towel, and already you're complaining. (*Listens*) Ma'am, just last week a woman gave birth in this hotel—actually it was in the utility shed. Was *she* complaining about not having "fresh" towels? No-o-o! She wasn't calling me, bugging me about it; she was too busy celebrating. I think you could learn something from her, ma'am. If ya don't mind, I got another customer on the line.

(Hangs up the phone and goes back to the first caller). I'm back with ya, sir. Did ya have a reservation date? *(Listens)* Tonight? Are you crazy? Sorry, no room left in the inn. *(Listens)* Now, don't start griping at me. I got nothing left. No room. No closet. No nothing—nada! *(Buzzer sounds)* Gotta get that call, be right back.

(Answering page on other phone) Yep, front desk, Benny speakin'. *(Listens, then frowns)* Sir, if ya'd asked for running water, I would have given you another room, but ya only asked for a room with a bath. There *is* a tub in the room, right? *(Listens)* well, we can't meet everyone's tiniest little needs. Some people want a bath, some people want a shower. *(Listens)* Ya want a shower? *(Pulls a large pitcher of water out from behind the desk and places it on the desktop with a thud)* Okay, come to the front desk—problem solved. *(Listens)* Hot water, too? You catch on fast. *(Stops to think for a moment, then pours his coffee into the pitcher).* Hot water, no problemo!

(Listens) Hey buddy, I had this couple come all the way from Nazareth last week in a Yugo. No air conditioning. No radio. Terrible shocks. This lady was nine months pregnant—have you ever been on those roads? She's bouncing up and down, up and down the whole way here. *(Holds his arms out front to suggest a very pregnant person bouncing up and down)* They walk in this place, and the first thing she says is, "God bless." Now, why can't more people be like that? "God bless." She sure wasn't worryin' about clean towels and hot water. She's about ready to pop, and I had to put them up in the utility shed. *You* got a room, so I suggest ya stop complaining about the hot water!

(Hangs up with a huff and picks up the other line) Benny back. *(Listens)* No, I don't need to recheck the books; we're full. *(Listens)* I understand you're desperate, but the only place not occupied right now is the utility shed. *(A short listen)* That's right, the utility shed. *(Listens)* Nope, no bed. It's packed full of stuff—a tractor, a mower, some sod, tools, old picnic tables, gas antifreeze, lots of other junk. Oh, the dogs and chickens sleep out there, too. *(Listening)* I didn't say it was nice, sir! It's a utility shed, for crying out loud! *(Listens, then erupts)* Hey, watch your language! Just last week a couple came through here and *they* took the utility shed. And they were happy for it, grateful even! The woman actually gave birth out there, and with a lot less complaining than *you*. In fact, she was celebrating, having that new little baby and all. Took a picture of them right next to the pile of sod and the tractor—nice shot. So, do ya want the shed?

(The caller hangs up on him.) Hello? Sir? Sir? *(Hangs up the phone—then, to himself)* Bunch of complainers—every last one of them! Well, except for that Nazarene couple. I should have

kicked someone else out of their room and given it to those two. Didn't hear one complaint from her—just too happy about that new baby. Ya would've thought she was stayin' at the Ritz Carlton or something. *(Buzzer sounds, and he picks up the phone.)* Front desk. *(Listens)* Your curtains are on fire? Well, put them out, will ya? Ya don't gotta ask my permission. *(Listens)* Your tub doesn't have running water? *(Takes a beat, looks at the pitcher of water)* Hang on! I'll be right over with some guy's shower! *(He picks up the water and is about to dash away. Stops, takes a breath, then—looks up and says before running off stage)* God bless!

* * * * *

A Celebration of the Firstborn

A choral reading (with optional sign language and/or liturgical dance)

Arranged by Karen Mains

(Here is a compilation of biblical [Colossians 1:15-20, RSV] and early church poetry that celebrates Christ's coming and urges the congregation to join in celebration. As written, five readers will be needed: two "soloists," and a chorus of three voices. If you're running short on readers, however, this will still be highly effective with one voice expressively reading straight through the script. Simply disregard all markings and read the piece as a poem, slowly and comprehensively.

A creative variation is to do this with one reader "accompanied" by sign language. Use a church member who knows sign language, or a recruited signer from your community, to sign all or parts of the piece [the Scripture passage read by Voice 1, for instance]. You'll find the flowing, visual movements a lovely way to rouse celebration within people's hearts.

Another innovative option is to follow the reading with a liturgical dance presentation. In biblical times, dancing accompanied by tambourine was a customary way to praise the Lord [Psalm 149:3, 150:4]. Many churches are discovering the beauty of this worship form and are incorporating it into their services. Perhaps someone on your worship team has experience in liturgical dance, or you may know a student who would like to use his or her gift to the glory of God. The end of this reading provides a wonderful spot for highlighting a joyful dance of praise to Christ in celebration of his coming.)

Voice 1:

He is the image of the invisible God,
the first-born of all creation;

for in him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—
all things were created through him and for him.

Voice 2:

Dance with me, Jordan River,
and leap with me, and set your waves in rhythm,
for your Maker has come to you in body!

Today the ranks of angels dance with gladness,
for Gabriel came and stood before the maiden and in greeting said:
“Rejoice, the Lord is with you!

Chorus:

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Voice 1:

He is the head of the body, the church;
he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead,
that in everything he might be preeminent.

Voice 2:

Today is revealed the eternal mystery:
The Son of God becomes the Son of Man.
By accepting the lowest he grants us the highest.
Let creation rejoice; let nature exult.
For the archangel stood before the virgin and saying, “Rejoice,” he brought her greeting
by which our sorrow is healed.

Chorus:

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (*repeat*)

Voice 1:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,

whether on earth or in heaven,
making peace by the blood of his cross.

Voice 2:

This is a festival day:
The Light of life has dawned;
Adam has risen and dances for joy.
Therefore, let us cry aloud and sing a song of victory!

Nations, let us dance and sing
to the music of the harp today
and greatly rejoice.
Let us give glory to Christ,
for he alone is blessed and greatly glorified!

All (5 voices):

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Chorus:

Celebration is an inward joy that finds some outward expression:

Chorus Voice 1:

King David dancing in the streets because the Ark of God was coming to Jerusalem.

Chorus Voice 2:

The prophets and priests and common folk receiving with joy the word of the Lord.

Chorus (3 Voices):

The Word—

Chorus Voice 3:

--by the power and light of the Holy Spirit,
becoming flesh, dancing life in Mary's womb.

Chorus (3 Voices):

For he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

All (5 Voices):

The celebration of the Incarnation—
begin the dance in your heart.

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