

The Story of Christ's Coming

- A Christmas Worship Service

Opening Song: *Joy to the World* - congregation song led by Worship Team

Welcome: Minister

Song: *It's Christmas (Medley)* by Chris Tomlin- congregation song led by Worship Team
-Everyone seated

Introduction

Narrator 1. The Christmas story is a beautiful narrative of the birth of Christ Jesus. In the book of Luke and Matthew we read of the awesome happenings surrounding the miraculous event of God coming to earth as a baby. We read of the ordinary people whom God called to be a part of the storyline. They were men and women who were anticipating Christ's coming but never imagined that they would be woven into this narrative.

Narrator 4. It is a beautiful story. But it is an account that we hear every year, therefore we may get caught up in its sentimental portrayal and miss the depths of drama that this story reveals. It is a masterpiece of woven events and complex characters who are real in their faith, doubts, fears, and expectations.

Narrator 3. It is a story that brings forth new insights and depths each time you meditate on it. Each year we hear the same story, but WE are different. The events that we went through this last year have changed us and thus the story may reach out to us in different ways than ever before.

Narrator 2. It is God's story of hope and life and redemption. It is a story that can become your own. So today, we invite you to enter into this drama. Let's look at the characters of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wisemen, Herod and John the Baptist, Simeon and Anna- each life changed by the coming of Jesus. We think you will see a bit of yourself in each one of these characters as you also see how God authored your redemptive story.

Zechariah and Elizabeth (longing for God)

** Show Kids' VIDEO about Zechariah and Elizabeth*

Narrator 1. God chose Zechariah, a righteous man who feared to hope too much, and made him into a man who put all of his hope in God. He had longed many years plus nine months for the birth of his son, but as a priest he had longed much longer for God to show up and fulfill His promise to send a Messiah.

Narrator 2. God took Elizabeth whose barren state made her a disgrace among her people and showed her favor. What an awful thing to be known as “barren”-to be called incapable, unnatural, unfruitful. But God changed what Elizabeth was known for. He took away her disgrace and her unproductiveness. He demonstrated His delight in her by giving her a son who would play a key role in the coming of the Messiah.

Narrator 1. Can you relate to Zechariah and Elizabeth? Is there a longing in your heart that God has not yet answered? You are faithful; you love God, but you wonder if God will ever show up in your life. Zechariah believed and was rewarded. His son John's birth was followed months later by Christ's birth. Jesus was the answer to the priest's longing and He is the true answer to your every longing as well.

Narrator 2. Elizabeth's disgrace was replaced with God's grace. Her shame was removed and she became known as “Mother” instead of barren. Maybe this year has given you a label that hurts: cancer patient, unemployed, divorced, widowed, lonely, addicted. God wants you to trust Him in every circumstance. He wants you to rely on His grace and to receive a new label from this Savior born to us. Your name can be “Child of God”.

Leader 1 leads the people reading the following verse displayed on screen or in the bulletin

Psalm 38:9,15

"All my longings lie open before you, O Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

... I wait for you, O Lord;
you will answer, O Lord my God."

Special Music Song: "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" (Meredith Andrews version)

Mary and Joseph (open heart to God)

**Show Kids' VIDEO of Mary and Joseph*

Narrator 3. Don't you wish sometimes that you could've been a fly on the wall as this chapter of God's story unfolded? I would have loved to see the expressions of the angel Gabriel and the girl Mary. I would have loved to hear how the words were spoken, to watch how the words were received. Mary had to have been excited about the amazing thing that God was getting ready to do, but troubled by what it might mean for her life, her heart, and her family. Can you relate? Are you sensing that God is asking to do an incredibly intimate work deep within you? You are excited about it, but afraid of it all at the same time?

Narrator 4. God was asking something extremely demanding of Mary- total openness. He asked to come within and overshadow her. And she said yes!

Narrator 3. Mary was wholly open to His work in her; totally vulnerable, completely willing, fully receptive to whatever He might choose to do.

Narrator 4. Joseph's human reaction was to separate himself from these bizarre events. But when an angel came to him in a dream and explained God's desire for he and Mary, Joseph immediately obeyed and made Mary his wife. He staked his whole reputation on God's words, ignoring others' gossip and judgment. Joseph's impression of Mary's pregnancy was changed by the reality that God was doing something

incredible in her – and Joseph was going to be able to be a part of the story! However, Joseph had to let go of his expectations and receive this new thing that God was doing. Joseph’s own story had to become a blank page, and he had to allow God to write the next chapters.

Narrator 3. Are you receptive for what God has for you next? Are you ready for Him to do a new thing in you?

Narrator 4. Mary and Joseph were both open to what God was doing. It was not expected; it was not easy; yet it was a birthing process, physically and spiritually. When God brings a new thing in your life it requires labor. Labor means pain and struggle.

Narrator 3. Obedience is often hard. But the overwhelming joy of seeing the new come will outweigh the pain of the labor.

Leader 2 leads the people in the following prayer displayed on screen or in bulletin:

Most Holy God, awaken me from my soul’s deep slumber and bring my life under your complete control. By your grace, awaken me daily to the reality of your presence within and around me. And, by the power of your Spirit, make me responsive to your will and your direction. Amen.

Special Music Song: “Be Born in Me” (by Francesca Battistelli)

Shepherds and Wisemen (see, recognize, worship)

**Show Kids’ VIDEO of Shepherds and Wisemen*

Special Music: Kids’ Choir Sings, “Go, Tell It on the Mountain”

Narrator 1. The Christmas story is a story of seeing and recognizing.

Narrator 2. For the shepherds it was just an ordinary night of watching over their sheep. However the huge event of Angels proclaiming God’s

work quickly got their attention. The Shepherds *saw* the angels. They went to *see* this thing that the Lord had told them about. They *saw* the babe lying in the manger. They *saw* and they glorified and praised God! They *recognized* the significance of the heavenly announcement. They *recognized* that this baby was a gift from God and they worshiped.

Narrator 1. The Wisemen saw the star. Did they see the star because they were trained to notice such a thing? Or did they see the star simply because they were paying attention? Did anyone else see it? If so why did they not follow it? Maybe they were so preoccupied with their own lives and problems and ambitions that they did not see this star phenomenon.

Narrator 2. But when the wisemen saw it, they were filled with indescribable joy! They *recognized* the great hope that it announced. They followed it and *saw* the child with Mary.

Narrator 1 . Are you too busy to see and celebrate the coming of Christ? It might be good for us to pay attention not only to the big events of the season, but also to the small things...even the things that seem oddly out of place. The people that we gather with, the conversations, the circumstances may be much more than they appear to be on the surface. They could be opportunities to lead us and others to the Savior.

Leader 3 leads this Responsive Reading displayed on screen or in the bulletin.

Leader: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” -which means “God with us”. (Matthew 1:23)

People: We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (I John 4:14)

Leader: Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

People: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Leader: She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

People: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Leader: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

People: We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (I John 4:14)

Leader 3 prays.

Narrator 1: The wisemen pursued this significant star that led them to the baby. The infant Jesus was Immanuel, God with us, the Savior of the World, the Messiah, the Son of God. When they wisemen saw him, they bowed, worshiped, and then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts.

Narrator 2. Worship usually leads to this. When we are completely captured by the wonder of Jesus, we desire to give Him our best. Is this where you fit into the story? Do you see and recognize the significance of God's gift of Christ? Will you worship Him as Lord?

Narrator 1. How will you open your treasures of money, talent, and time to the only One who is truly worthy of them? How will you treasure Jesus today?

Time of Worship: (choose a song or two to be led by the worship team)

Leader 4 leads Offering prayer/ Offering is then collected

- *Special Music during Offering: "Little Drummer Boy" (we did an acapella version with 3 different sized djembes as accompaniment)*

Simeon and Anna (a soul pierced)

**Show Kids' Video of Simeon and Anna*

Narrator 3: Anna had been a widow for 84 years. She had faithfully served the Lord all of those years and God saw her. So when Mary and Joseph went to the temple to make an offering for their firstborn, God graciously blessed Anna. He opened her eyes to recognize the redemption of Israel, the Messiah, the Holy One. Her gratitude for being allowed this privilege filled her with thanksgiving and praise.

Narrator 4. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah, the Holy One. When Simeon was led to the temple courts and he saw Jesus, the Holy Spirit spoke through Simeon to Joseph and Mary. At first his prophecy was affirming. Jesus brings salvation. Jesus is light for all people. But the words became more disturbing. This baby will cause the rising and falling of many. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Narrator 3. Can you imagine how Mary and Joseph and even Simeon would have been startled by this message? Anna's thanks to God for this child affirmed all that Joseph and Mary understood about their new son. But Simeon's message would have been troubling. What did he mean when he spoke of salvation for all men- not just the Jews? How could one baby cause the rise and fall of many? And a sword piercing your body sounds painful enough, but a sword piercing your soul sounds like a whole different kind of pain.

Narrator 4. And what did he mean by too? Pierce your soul too. Is this baby's soul going to be pierced also? Why would God allow his Son's soul – God's very own soul to be pierced?

Narrator 3: Mary and Joseph may have thought, "No! Pierce me, but not this child whom I love." A parent would rather take this pain than have their child experience it.

Narrator 4. And that is exactly why God would later allow Jesus to be pierced- so that His children would not have to endure such pain.

Narrator 3. See, this is where YOU are personally invited into God's story. He experienced the soul pain of separation and death so that our souls could be made healthy and whole before God.

Narrator 4. As a man, Jesus would take our sins upon Himself so that we can now be forgiven and healed from sin and its effects of brokenness and death.

He was crucified on a cross and died the death that we deserve.

Narrator 3. After he died, the soldiers came to him and pierced his side with a spear. Jesus' heart and the sack of fluid around it was pierced and blood and water flowed from his body. His heart- his soul was pierced.

Narrator 4. This is when you can be written into God's redemptive story. Do you see your Savior on the cross? Jesus lay down his life because of His hatred for sin and of His love for you.

Narrator 3. Do you recognize your sin and your need for forgiveness? Don't fail to see the significance of this act of love. Christ died for you and then in three days He arose from the grave for you. When you see Him and recognize Him as your Lord and Savior, you too die in the waters of baptism and arise a new person. God writes your name in the Book of Life. He has given you victory over your sin and now His eternal life can give you life forever with God!

Special Music Song: My Eyes Have Seen Holy (by Bebo Norman) OR have a time of worship

Leader 5 leads in the following communion meditation and then leads in prayer:

We are going to remember through communion today that Jesus is God's gift of salvation to us. If you are already a believer, you are invited to partake of the bread and juice as they are passed. If you haven't put your faith in Christ and received His forgiveness and life, you have the

opportunity during this time to go to one of the elders standing at the back to ask any questions or to ask for prayer.

Let us remember that Christ was born for death and resurrection. His soul was pierced so that your soul would never have to be.

Communion Prayer/ Communion

Instrumental song during Communion

On the screen during Communion:

Isaiah 53:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ Surely he took up our pain

and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

Herod and John the Baptist (I must decrease, Jesus must increase)

**Show Kids' VIDEO of Herod*

Skit: The Most Important Person at Christmas (by The Skit Guys)

Narrator 1. Herod is definitely a villain in the Christmas story. Yet, in reality, his attitude is not that much different than ours at times.

Narrator 2. We don't want to be an insignificant secondary character in the story. We want to be the main attraction- or at least a main attraction. We want to be big in people's lives.

Narrator 1. But when we exalt ourselves, we do not give Jesus His rightful place. We need to ask ourselves, "Is my life going to be all about me or all about Jesus?"

Narrator 2: Zechariah and Elizabeth's son John would grow up to be called John the Baptizer. His whole life was dedicated to exalting the Messiah, not himself. He prepared people to be able to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. He pointed all to the Christ.

Narrator 1: When asked if he worried about his own popularity, John said, "Christ must increase. I must decrease." We are to have that kind of attitude!

Narrator 2: Our place in God's story is a good one, but it is not based on our own merit or ability. We are in God's story because Jesus made it possible to be a child of God. He is the true King and Lord and deserves to be the leader and master of our hearts.

Narrator 1. When we try to be our own Lord, we are lost. We will never be enough. But when we humble ourselves before God, He exalts us and makes us right with Him! When we exalt Jesus as the most important person of Christmas- we need to also exalt him as the most important person in our lives every day of the year. Only through him can we have the purpose and value that we desire.

...(This is where we used a "spoken word" piece -written and presented by one of our members. You may want to write one, or use a song, or have a time of meditation and prayer.)

Ending (Narrators 1-4)

Narrator 3. The Christmas Story is God's story of hope, redemption, and life.

Narrator 4. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wisemen, Simeon and Anna, and John could not see the entire story. They just faithfully obeyed God when He called them. Sometimes we think of them as more spiritual and other-worldly. But they were

ordinary people like us and because of their obedience to God's calling, they each got to be a part of the greatest story ever.

Narrator 1. However, the greatest story has not ended. This Christmas chapter tells us the story of Christ's first coming. The Bible tells us in its last chapters that Jesus Christ will come a second time.

Narrator 2. The men and women we looked at today were heroes of the first coming. But you and I can be the heroes of Christ's second coming.

Narrator 3. We too are loved by God. We too are called to His purposes. Yes, we are just ordinary people, but so were they. Flawed and scared, we can become heroes of faith as we willingly let God work through us. May our wholehearted obedience set us apart.

Narrator 4. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we are to long for Christ and His coming.

Narrator 1. Like Mary and Joseph, we are to open ourselves to His will and obey Him no matter what.

Narrator 2. Like the Shepherds, we are to go and tell everyone what we see and recognize in Christ.

Narrator 3. Like the Wisemen, we are to seek to see His face daily, to give of our best, and to worship Him sacrificially.

Narrator 4. We are to daily be thankful and faithful like Anna.

Narrator 1. Like Simeon, we are to keep our eyes joyfully on the pierced One, even when the world brings suffering and heartache.

Narrator 2. Like John we are to serve and obey selflessly, seeking to exalt the Lord and increase His Kingdom.

Narrator 3. Don't be like Herod!

Narrator 4. How will you wait for His second coming? Answer God's call to live by faith and obey Him completely and unreservedly.

Narrator 1. Be a hero of Christ's coming.

Narrator 2. Live for Christ as God weaves His masterpiece of events through your life.

Narrator 3. Make His story, your story.

Finale Video with song "My Story" by Big Daddy Weave and scripture:

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns." Philippians 1:6

Closing Prayer: Minister

Song (acapella): "This is My Story" (chorus 1x of the old hymn)

Closing Song: "It's Christmas (Medley)" by Chris Tomlin