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Quick & Easy Christmas Programs



Child of God

Laura and Robert Keeley

A Christmas Play for Children

Child of God

Laura and Robert Keeley



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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We wish to thank Laura and Robert Keeley for writing this play. The Keeleys are codirectors of children's ministries at Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. They have written and directed many plays for children, including seven other dramas in the Quick & Easy Christmas Programs series published by Faith Alive Christian Resources.

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Preface

Ah, time for the Sunday school Christmas program! Everyone loves to see how the young children will behave in front of the whole church. Who will sing the loudest this year? Who will turn his back to the audience? Who will wave to her parents? It's more than that, of course. Our hearts swell when we hear the children sing with the kind of enthusiasm and abandon that we adults left behind long ago. We treasure seeing and hearing these young children singing and speaking about the stories that mean so much to us.

For the people in charge, though, producing this wonderful program can be a big headache. As directors of children's programs in our church, every year we look for new songs and a fresh way to approach the Christmas story. The challenge, of course, is that the theme is always the same—Christmas! So we began to make some basic decisions about what we thought the program should and should not be.

What's the Purpose?

We started by thinking about the purpose of the Christmas program. We saw some things happening in churches that didn't fit with our idea of what the program ought to be. Sometimes, for example, children would be required to rehearse long in advance, taking weeks away from their Sunday school instruction or requiring parents to bring their children to church for after-school or evening rehearsals. The purpose, it seemed, was to present a program that was "just right," that came off without a hitch.

Eventually we decided that Christmas programs should have multiple purposes. In our church, the program is part of a worship service, so it has to have theological integrity and present something meaningful to the congregation. We also came to see the program as an opportunity for the church to demonstrate that it values children by giving them a chance to lead a worship service. And we concluded that a program put on by children should reflect their developmental level and should project a sense of fun and wonder. Since the Lord gave us children, we should be happy when they act like children! The program should not be so formal that the children are afraid to be themselves.

On the practical side, as parents, we didn't want to drag our children to extra rehearsals. And as directors, we didn't have the time for numerous rehearsals. The Christmas season is busy enough! We needed a simple program that we could present with just one rehearsal—and that didn't take time away from ongoing church school classes.

Things to Keep in Mind

Keeping those things in mind, we developed the following principles for directing our church's Christmas programs:

- The program doesn't need to be perfect. Of course, it's important to give our best to the Lord, but even with multiple rehearsals, children will still forget lines and get nervous. Frankly, that's often

part of a program's charm. Parents and other adults love seeing kids act like kids, waving to their parents and siblings. That's OK!

- It's usually best for children to read their lines, not memorize them. When kids aren't required to memorize their lines, they generally feel more comfortable participating in the program (and are more willing to be involved in next year's program). We usually provide music stands for the kids to put their scripts on so they don't have to worry about dropping them. We ask the kids to read with as much expression as they can, clearly and slowly.
- Include as many children as possible. If you have more actors than the play has characters, you can easily add a few lines and characters.
- Invite—don't pressure—kids to participate. They need to be comfortable doing so. We call parents at home and ask them if their child would like to participate. That way, there's less peer pressure and parents have some input. Because the children know they are not asked to memorize anything and that participating is "no big deal," we've never had a child who didn't want to be included.
- Make a point with your program—and have fun doing so. Children and adults should enjoy the program and learn something from it. *Child of God* uses humor, but it also attempts to make a point. Even though the point may be more apparent to adults, the children hear it and will recall parts of it during the Christmas season. Don't underestimate what children will pick up.

Using Child of God

It's important to adjust this play (and all others!) to the needs and skills of your children and to your congregation. Here are some easy ways to do that:

- As we suggested above, you can expand the characters and lines in the drama if you have more children than roles.
- To make a cover for the program, we used the website Wordle (www.wordle.net) and made a word cloud. We entered the first names of all the children and the words "Child of God" three times. We refreshed the image until we got a design that we liked. The cover could also use the names from Matthew 1.



- When we performed this play we didn't have enough children for all the parts, so some children played two parts in two different scenes. Actors in scenes 2 to 5 can be repeated. For example, Ben in scene 2 can also play the part of Philip in scene 4. The characters in the first scene (Margaret, Ryan, Mitchell, and Rueben) can't easily double up since they have lines in every scene.
- While there are no "star" roles in this play, you will probably want to use older children for the longer parts. All the roles can be played by boys or girls.
- If you have a good group of singers, you may want to add more songs. If you have soloists, feature them in the songs. To minimize the time needed to learn a song, ask two or three children to sing the stanzas; the choir or congregation can sing just the chorus (or vice-versa).
- We often have third-grade children read the Scripture passages, so we make the readings short, with each child reading only one or two verses at a time.
- As you assign parts, keep in mind the personalities of the kids and attempt to choose parts that fit them. Feel free to adjust some roles or lines to fit the child who reads them. For example, a shy child may prefer to have just one line at a time. You can simplify his or her lines or add a character and split the lines.

Child of God can be used alone or as part of a worship service. Depending on how many songs you sing, the drama will take about 45 minutes to perform. See the end of the script for a sample bulletin that shows how we used this program as part of a worship service.

Sit back and enjoy what the children in your church can do. The kids in our church amaze us every year. It's a joy and a privilege to be able to work with them.

—Laura and Bob Keeley

Plot Summary

During a Christmas program the director is explaining that this year's performance is based on Matthew 1. One of the participants questions the wisdom of a program based on the begats. As the passage is read, the stories of Judah and Joseph, Ruth, Josiah, and Jesus' birth are told. Finally, the group reflects on how we, too, are children of God.

Characters

Scene 1: Matthew 1

- Mitchell
- Reuben
- Margaret
- Ryan

Scene 2: Judah and Joseph, Sons of Jacob

- Ben
- Noah
- Anneke
- Kate

Scene 3: Ruth, Wife of Boaz

- Keaton
- Rebeka
- Derek
- Ian

Scene 4: Josiah, a Son of David

- Jael
- Maya
- Philip

Scene 5: Jesus, Son of David, the Son of Abraham

- Mason
- Jenna
- Autumn
- Casey

Costumes

The people in the first scene can wear everyday clothing. All the characters in scenes 2-5 should be dressed as ancient Israelites. At our church we dress them in robes, shawls, sandals, and sashes. (Check the pattern books at your local fabric store for Israelite costumes.) Solid-colored fabrics in earth tones such as brown, tan, green, rust, and dusty blue work well, as do textured fabrics. Choose cotton broadcloth or other lightweight fabric so the children can wear costumes over their regular clothes without getting too warm.

For a simple alternative, have the girls wear a shawl around their heads or shoulders. A piece of 18" x 60" (46 cm x 152 cm) fabric works well. For boys, use the same size fabric but fold it in half and drape it over one shoulder. You can also use the fabric for a sash by placing the mid-point of the fabric over the shoulder and then bringing the fabric across the chest and back, pinning it together at the hip.

Staging

There are two main stage areas—one for the children in the Matthew 1 scenes and one for the story actors. You'll also need a place for the Bible readers and the choir. We had two choirs, one with younger children (preschool to second grade) and one with older children (third to sixth grade) because our children gather in two groups each week for singing, but you should arrange it in a way that best suits your group.

We have a fairly traditional church building, and we placed the actors for scenes 2-5 on the platform. The children in the Matthew 1 scenes stood on the floor off to the side in a place where the actors could be seen. You can, of course, arrange them in any way that makes sense in your space, but having them in two separate places helps the audience understand that the people in the Matthew 1 scenes are “telling” the stories that we see in the other scenes.

If you have projection available, consider projecting the cover art from this book before and after the program. The name of each scene can also be projected as it is being performed. We also made a PowerPoint presentation of the word cloud cover with the names of each child coming on the screen one at a time before the program began. A PowerPoint of the children's faces with the words “Child of God” would also work. We also put a picture of a “Child of God” nametag on the screen as the children put the nametags on in the last scene.



Songs

We suggest the following songs to sing with this play:

- “Away in a Manger,” traditional, *Sing With Me* 87
- “For Unto Us” words and music by Kim Case from the CD *The Sky Can Still Remember* by Sherri Youngward, BEC Recordings, 2006
- “Hallelujah (Your Love Makes Me Sing)” by Brenton Brown and Brian Doeksen from the CD *Shout Praises! Kids: God Is Great*, Integrity Music, 2006
- “Holy Emmanuel” by Steve Hindalong and Terry Scott Taylor from the CD *City on a Hill: It’s Christmas Time*, Brentwood Music, 2002
- “Joy to the World,” traditional, *Sing With Me* 94
- “Glory to God in the Highest,” *Sing With Me* 96
- “Matthew’s Begats” by Andrew Peterson on the CD *Behold the Lamb of God*, Andrew Peterson, Fervent Records, 2004
- “This Is How We Know” by Frank Hernandez, *Sing With Me* 127 (changing the words “Jesus Christ laid down his life” to “Jesus Christ came down to earth”)
- “We Bow Down” by Twila Paris, *Sing! A New Creation* 42
- “Your Everlasting Love” by Bill Batstone, *Sing With Me* 53

The books *Sing With Me* and *Sing! A New Creation* are available from Faith Alive Christian Resources: 1.800.333.8300, www.FaithAliveResources.org.

We selected these songs because we thought they fit well with the play, but there are, of course, many other songs—both traditional and contemporary—that would also fit. Feel free to substitute other songs.

Introduction

Song

“Away in a Manger”

Scene 1: Matthew 1

[*Mitchell, Reuben, Margaret, and Ryan enter.*]

Margaret: Hello! Welcome to our Christmas program! Thank you for coming.

Ryan: We’d like to begin our program at the beginning of the New Testament, with the first chapter of Matthew.

Mitchell: I don’t think that’s a very good idea.

Ryan: What do you mean it’s not a good idea? It’s in the Bible! Of course it’s a good idea!

Mitchell: I know it’s in the Bible, but seriously, have you ever actually read the first chapter of Matthew?

Margaret: Of course we have! You don’t think we’d plan a program like this without doing a bit of research, do you?

Mitchell: I’m just saying that I think anyone who spent a little time actually *reading* Matthew 1 wouldn’t pick it for a program.

Reuben: What’s the problem, Mitchell? We’re supposed to be presenting a Christmas program, and you’re interrupting. See? [*Gestures toward audience.*] All these people are here to watch us.

Mitchell: Yes, I see them. This *is* a little awkward. But I still think you didn’t really think this through. Matthew 1 is the chapter with all the begats in it.

Reuben: The what?

Mitchell: The begats. You know, Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, and so on. Except in the case of Matthew 1, it goes on and on and on. Nothing personal, but if you read that chapter all of these people [*points again to audience*] are going to be asleep by the time you get to Jehoshaphat.

Reuben: Gesundheit!

Mitchell: Thanks, but I’m not sneezing. Jehoshaphat was one of the kings of Israel.

Ryan: And he was in the line of Christ.

Reuben: What do you mean—“the line of Christ”?

Margaret: That's what the begats in Matthew 1 are all about. Matthew begins his book by listing Jesus' ancestors—his father and his father's father and so on—all the way back to Abraham.

Reuben: So it's a list of names? Are you sure that's a good way to begin the Christmas program?

Mitchell: See? I'm not the only one who thinks it's a bad idea!

Ryan: But there are lots of cool stories that go along with those names.

Reuben: OK, I like a good story as much as the next person. I'm just not sure I'm ready to hear a long list of names. But you can get started if you think you need to.

Mitchell: I think it will be boring.

Reuben: Mitchell, let's just get on with the program. After all, how many names can it be?

Mitchell: Forty-two.

Reuben: No way! Is he serious?

Margaret: Well, let's see—14 plus 14 plus 14—yeah, 42 names.

Mitchell: I told you—*boring*.

Ryan: Just give it a try.

Margaret: OK, here we go. "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah. . . ."

Reuben: Wait! You just said Isaac's name twice and Jacob's name twice. Does that count as two names or as four names?

Mitchell: It only counts as two.

Reuben: So there are actually a lot more than forty-two names here—this is going to take forever!

Mitchell: I told you.

Ryan: Margaret, let's start again.

Margaret: "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. . . ."

Reuben: Wait. Why is Judah mentioned? I thought Joseph was the most famous son of Jacob.

Ryan: That's a great question, Reuben. And it leads into one of those stories I mentioned. Let's take a closer look.

[*Mitchell, Reuben, Margaret, and Ryan exit.*]