

Journey to Christmas Notes for Christian Educators

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Character Visits Introduction

To make the characters come alive from the stories for the six sessions, you could recruit four volunteers who enjoy storytelling or acting to share the included monologues with the congregation (each as written is 2-3 minutes long). The monologues are a springboard. Depending on the ages of your children, they may do better if shortened, with some details left out. It may be easier for your volunteers to use the monologues and character introductions in the Sessions as inspiration for what they share. More adventurous and confident actors might allow children and others to ask them questions. Be sure that the actors read the scriptural references to their character.

In your context, it may work well to have this happen during worship, perhaps at children's time each week of Advent and on Christmas Eve. It may make more sense to have recorded videos that can be posted to your website or facebook page or sent as an e-mail link for viewing. If you opt to post online rather than live in worship, those in the congregation without computers or reliable internet who are participating could request a personal visit from one or more of the characters during the week that they are highlighted.

You will want four volunteers able to portray among them an older man, an older woman, a young man or a young woman. For the sessions about John and Jesus, have one or both of the "parents" speak about their newborn son. They could bring an actual infant or a doll if they wish. Period costumes are optional. What is important is getting across the nature of who this person was and their place in the Advent and Christmas narrative.

Monologue for Session 1

Zechariah

I'm Zechariah. My name means "God remembers". I used to think that God had forgotten me, but now I know that's not true.

My family goes all the way back to Moses' brother Aaron who lived over a thousand years before I was born. He was the first priest of God's people. All the boys born into his family are priests too, including me. I go to serve God's people two weeks each year and at the big Jewish festivals at the huge temple in Jerusalem.

The last time I was there it was the Day of Atonement, when we celebrate being made right with God and our sins forgiven. I thought I might get one of the usual jobs, selling things or directing people. But this time I was chosen to go into the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwells, on the only day of the whole year a priest gets to go inside there. It is the most special place in the entire temple. This had never happened to me before and will never happen again. I'm getting old and I had started to wonder if I would ever have this honour in my lifetime. But the day finally came.

I took the strong smelling incense and went inside the Holy of Holies to offer it to God. I said the words I was supposed to say and suddenly an angel appeared next to the altar. I was terrified! I'd never seen an angel before. He told me to not be afraid and that my wife Elizabeth and I would have a son. After all these years! We'd wanted a child forever. We've always tried to obey God and to be faithful. I just couldn't believe it could be true. After all, Elizabeth is as old as me.

The angel said that our son would be named John and that he would prepare the way for the Messiah, the One who would save our people. The angel said that God's Spirit would fill him and he would be like the great prophet Elijah. By now I was beyond amazed. I asked him how I could know that this would happen. And Gabriel, the angel, got angry. He said that because he had come with this message for me by God's authority, and I didn't believe it, that I wouldn't be able to speak until my son was born.

I stumbled out of there into the courtyard where the people were waiting for me and wondering why I had taken so long. And I couldn't say a thing. They knew something important had happened in there. When my time of serving was done I went home and I still couldn't speak and tell Elizabeth what was happening. Gabriel was right. I wasn't able to talk again until just after John was born, nine months later. John, who would be our hope, preparing for the Messiah.

Monologue for Session 2

Mary

I'm Mary, Mary from Nazareth. I'm kind of a nobody, just a teenager living in a small village, but God chose me to do something amazing.

I was engaged to a carpenter, Joseph. He is a good and kind man. Our parents thought we were a good match. We're both descendants of King David and we're faithful followers of God. We had to wait a year before the wedding. We weren't supposed to live together or be too close until the marriage was final. If I had been unfaithful, Joseph would have been able to divorce me.

One day an angel came to visit me. The angel knew I was scared and told me that God was happy with me. Then he said that I was going to have a baby. Not just any baby, but a son named Jesus, the Son of the Most High God who would take over King David's throne forever. I knew the scriptures. I knew a Messiah was promised. We were all waiting for Him to come, but me? Why me? Joseph and I weren't even married yet.

Gabriel told me that the Holy Spirit's power would make it happen, and that Jesus would be the Son of God. And then he told me that my relative Elizabeth in Judea was pregnant too, in her old age. She was also having a son and his birth would be a miracle. Gabriel looked me right in the eye and said – "Nothing is impossible for God."

I love God. I have my whole life. I knew that an angel coming was important and that God was asking me to do this. I knew that I needed to trust that everything would be alright. Somehow, there was a peace that came over me as I thought about doing this for God. So I said yes. I said yes to letting baby Jesus grow inside me and to being a mom. I said yes not knowing how hard it might be, but trusting that God would be with me. I said yes, believing that I didn't need to be afraid.

I worried a lot about what Joseph would think. How do you explain something like this? I didn't want to hurt him. I decided that I just had to let God take care of it. And then I decided that I needed to go and see Elizabeth. She would understand.

Monologue for Session 3

Elizabeth

My name is Elizabeth and it means “God’s promise”. I would never have thought that my name would mean so much and that my life would change so completely, especially given how old I am.

Zechariah and I had been trying for decades to have a child. I wanted nothing more than to hold my own baby in my arms. We prayed about it, we trusted in God to provide for us, and year after year nothing happened. I tried to not lose hope, but it was very difficult. The neighbours thought that we had done something wrong and that God was punishing us. We knew we had been faithful to God, but it still hurt. We thought often of the story of Abraham and Sarah and how long they waited for baby Isaac. Could God do a miracle for us too?

When Zechariah came home from the temple and couldn’t speak, I knew something big had happened. It took a while but we figured out how to communicate. He let me know about when he was in the Holy of Holies and how the angel Gabriel had made him unable to talk because he questioned God’s message. When I became pregnant and Gabriel’s words came true, I couldn’t believe that my shame was finally gone and I was going to have a child.

Then one day, I heard Mary’s voice from the doorway. I’ve always loved Mary. She is a dear relative from Nazareth who I hadn’t seen in a while. I was excited that she had come to visit us. I had been pregnant six months by then. It was such a new and strange experience, and John had started kicking and jostling inside my belly as he grew and grew. The moment he heard Mary calling for me he leaped with joy inside me. I had such a warm and wonderful feeling inside. I knew that it was God’s Spirit filling both of us.

I couldn’t stop from talking to her before she could even say anything to me – “You are blessed among all women and blessed is the child growing inside you! How amazing that you’ve come to visit me, the mother of my Lord. As soon as he heard your voice, my own baby jumped for joy in my belly. You are so blessed for believing that the Lord would do what He said.”

We were both crying with tears of joy. My own pregnancy had been a huge surprise. I couldn’t imagine what she had gone through. She was just a teenager, engaged to a man named Joseph. She told me the whole story eventually, but first she gave praise to God for all that God had done for our people.

She ended up staying for three months. That time was such a gift to both of us. We talked and talked and laughed and cried. We knew that God had asked each of us to do something amazing. And God gave us the gift of each other so that we weren’t alone.

Monologues for Session 4

John – shared by Zechariah

Proud, excited, worried – I was filled with so many emotions when it was time for John to finally be born. I felt so badly that I couldn't speak to Elizabeth the entire time that she was pregnant. I tried to help in other ways, but when it was time for the birth there was little I could do. I knew it would be difficult. I was so relieved when I heard his first cry.

When he was eight days old the neighbours and family came and we did the ritual of circumcision as God commanded of Jewish males. I still couldn't talk and I saw the women giving Elizabeth a hard time. They wanted the baby named after me, which is what normally happens. But Elizabeth knew that Gabriel had told me that his name was to be John. The women came to me questioning Elizabeth, so I asked for a writing tablet and wrote on it – "His name is John". The women were shocked. They wondered what this could all mean. Elizabeth and I just smiled at each other.

Then, suddenly I could speak! Gabriel's words came true and I couldn't stop talking. I gave thanks to God for being faithful, keeping promises, showing mercy, rescuing us and inviting us to serve in holiness and goodness our whole lives. The Holy Spirit gave me the words to say about my son. He would be a prophet of the Most High, he would go before the Lord to prepare the way, and he would tell people about salvation and forgiveness. The people would find light in the darkness and their feet would be guided in paths of peace. My precious son would be and do all these things. I only hope that I can be a worthy and loving father to him. Praise God!

John – shared by Elizabeth

I had no idea what birthing a baby would be like, but I had been there when relatives had done it. I knew the hard work would be worth it. And then there he was, a perfect tiny person. The neighbours and our family came when he was circumcised and named and they couldn't believe that we weren't naming him after his father, Zechariah.

I knew that Gabriel had told my husband that his name was to be John. We don't know why for sure, but I do know his name means "God is gracious" and that is certainly true. The women wouldn't believe me so they went to Zechariah, who still couldn't talk, and he wrote John's name on a tablet. Suddenly he could speak again, and everyone there that day were amazed and told the story to anyone who would listen in all of Judea. They wondered what this all meant and what kind of person John would become.

Then Zechariah prophesied, speaking words from God. It was like everything he couldn't say for nine months came tumbling out and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He talked about God's goodness and faithfulness, promises kept and being our rescuer. He talked about who our son would be – a prophet of the Most High, preparing the way for our Lord, teaching about salvation and forgiveness, bringing light into darkness and guiding people in paths of peace. I wonder too what he will become. God is leading him.

Monologue for Session 5

Joseph

I am Joseph, and the last while has definitely been an interesting journey. I was so excited to have Mary promised as my wife. She is so kind and our parents were so pleased with us being together. Everything with the engagement was going well until I found out she was pregnant and I knew the baby wasn't mine.

You can't imagine the anguish I felt. I knew if I wanted to I could have had her stoned or at very least publicly shamed for being unfaithful. An engagement was as good as being married, really. It could only be broken by divorce or death. And she had done wrong, or so I thought. My heart was broken. I decided I cared too much for her to hurt her or the baby. So I was going to call off the whole thing privately and let us go our separate ways, which is kind of hard in a village as small as Nazareth.

But then I had this dream with an angel that told me that Mary had not been lying to me. The baby was by the Holy Spirit and would be a boy that we were to name Jesus because He would save our people from their sins. He told me to go ahead and marry her. When I woke up, I was so excited to know that she had been chosen for this amazing thing. God was with us and hadn't forgotten the promise of sending the Messiah. I was so happy that we could still get married. She was so relieved when I ran to find her and told her that I believed her. I've never seen her so happy. We had the wedding as soon as we could.

Then, when it was almost time for her to give birth, we got told that Emperor Augustus was demanding that all people in the region go to their hometown to be registered. It was just another way that the Roman regime could squeeze more tax money out of us. Because I'm a descendent of King David I had to go to Bethlehem. We decided that Mary should come with me. It was a long journey and then when we got there we had trouble finding somewhere to stay and a room. Finally, someone let us use the place where they kept their animals at night. That night, Mary gave birth to Jesus with the animals watching. She laid Him in the manger, the animal feeding trough, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth. She is such a good mother. I only hope I'm as good a father for the Saviour of the world.

Monologues for Session 6

Jesus – shared by Mary

God had chosen me to have baby Jesus and I said yes. It wasn't easy, but I knew God was with us. Then, we had to make the trip to Bethlehem because of the registration ordered by the Roman authorities. I wasn't happy about it. The trip to Judea had been tiring enough when I went to see Elizabeth and Zechariah, but it was so close to the time Jesus was to be born that I didn't want Joseph to not be with me. So, we made the trip and sure enough, I gave birth when we got there.

I would have liked to have family around and to be in a place I knew. Instead, we had animals around us as Jesus came into the world. The inn was full and someone had let us use their stable. Jesus was beautiful and slept all snugly wrapped up in the manger. How amazing to look at Him and think that He was the Messiah, Emmanuel – God with us.

And then in the middle of the night some shepherds arrived. An angel had told them to come and find us, that the Saviour of the world had been born. They were so in awe, so humble, as they watched Jesus sleep. Their eyes were full of joy of what His coming could mean for them, people who were treated worse than the poorest of the poor. My heart was so full that God included them. I'm so grateful that Joseph was with me and that we managed out on our own. Jesus is now with us, our perfect Son, the Son of God.

Jesus – shared by Joseph

Mary and I were only just getting to really know each other. There is nothing like a long, 90 mile trip to help with that. She was so close to giving birth that I knew she had to come with me to Bethlehem. Thank goodness someone showed us kindness when the inn was full, letting us use the space where their animals spent the night. It was just in time too, because Jesus wasn't waiting for an impressive place or our home back in Nazareth. He came right there in Bethlehem. And He was beautiful and Mary did such a good job. I can't imagine how stressed she was, especially with me being the only one she knew there to help.

Then these straggly shepherds showed up in the middle of the night. An angel had told them to come and find us. They knew that He was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God. And they just stood there in awe as He slept. I'm not sure how long they stayed before they realized they should get back to their sheep. They left praising God and with joy in their faces. Their eyes were full of hope and expectation.

Mary and I don't know what this new baby will bring into our lives, but we already know that He will bless so many people. Just laying there in that manger He has already brought hope to people so in need of it as He sleeps. The Son of God has become our Son, Emmanuel, God with us.