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Hanging of the Greens

by
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SYNOPSIS

Hanging of the Greens is a great way to start your holiday season by setting our hearts and minds on Jesus through worship. Placing the signs of the seasons throughout your worship center will serve as reminders of God's love for us by sending His Son Jesus. Use the Readers Theater and congregation liturgy together to create a unique experience for your church.

CAST

Reader 1
Reader 2
Reader 3

Family 1
Family 2
Family 3

Child 1
Child 2
Child 3
Child 4
Child 5
Child 6
Child 7
Child 8
Child 9
Child 10

PROPS

Nativity Scene with Mary, Joseph, Angel, Shepherds, and Wisemen
Christmas Tree
Evergreen Wreaths
Garland

HOW TO USE THIS SCRIPT

What we've written is simply a guide to use for your service. Feel free to add or edit lines to make it your own and fit your church's service. There may be elements you'd like to use that aren't included in this script, so feel free to add them.

There are three liturgies included in this script. You will need to either print out the liturgies or display them on your screens. (*Only the liturgies need be displayed/printed, not the whole script.)

Here are some suggestions and ideas:

Individual Elements (Nativity, Wreath, Christmas Tree)

You can assign a family in your church to read the dialogue written for each element. These lines can be divided up between each family member, or simply read by one.

Have different demographics represented—young families, singles, senior adults, student ministry, etc.

Involve your children

There is a section written for the Nativity with children in mind. These lines may be read by children or an adult. The child can place the Nativity piece in its place if they are too young (or too shy) to read. We recommend assigning the lines to good readers or help your child memorize their lines.

Another idea is to have the children dress up as the Nativity characters—Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, Angel, Wisemen. You can also add animal costumes to include more children.

Have your children's choir sing after the Nativity liturgy is read.

Practice! If you have children that have never performed in front of people before, they will need to know what to expect. Have your children's group practice before your service.

Hanging your decorations

You can hang your decorations as you read each section, or they can already be in place. If your space is already decorated, another idea is to have each element symbolically represented.

We recommend that, before your service, everything is ready and in its place to be hung up. The last thing you want is a garland being hung and there are no hooks to hang it on.

Set up Christmas ornament stations

Have ornament stations set up so that when people arrive, they can create an ornament to hang on your church's tree. You can use an advent theme for the ornaments—Peace, Hope, Love, Joy. Or have different cutout Nativity pieces. Another idea is to have each family choose a word that means a lot to their family and write it on a Christmas ball (i.e. "thankful", "redeemed", etc.). You could also have them write their favorite verse. There are many ideas for homemade ornaments on Pinterest.

During the section for the Christmas Tree, give your congregation an opportunity to come up and place their ornament on the tree.

More ideas

Serve hot chocolate or hot apple cider in the foyer/atrium. Have an ornament station available for a couple of weeks after your Hanging of the Greens service for people who were not able to attend.

At the end of the holiday season, let each family take their ornament home to store and place on their own trees the following year.

Incorporate your choir with this script. We've made song suggestions after each element, but feel free to use whatever music works for your service.

We really hope you enjoy this Hanging of the Greens service and that you have a blessed holiday season.

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Readers address the audience.

Reader 1: As we begin this Christmas season, let us take the time to focus. Focus on His holy presence before our holiday busyness.

Reader 2: Before the shopping and the parties and the pageantry.

Reader 3: Before we become distracted by seasonal trappings.

Reader 2: Let us focus on the One who came to give us life.

Reader 1: Let us focus our mind's attention and our heart's affection on Jesus, the One who was born to save us from our sins.

Reader 3: "The people wandering in darkness have seen a great light. Light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness." (Isaiah 9:2)

Reader 2: Our hope, our deliverer, has come! So let us stop and take the time to worship as we celebrate the season.

Reader 1: As we celebrate the true reason, Jesus.

Song suggestion: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Nativity

Family 1: The Nativity is a reminder to us that the Creator of the universe is Emmanuel, God with us. The God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere all the time, the God who has the ability to unmake you humbled Himself to become like you.

"For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and is called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Philippians 2:5-8

The following can be read by children as they set out each piece of the nativity.

Child 1: Mary reminds us to willingly and wholeheartedly accept God's calling on our lives, no matter how impossible it may seem. When God has a will, He will make a way.

Child 2: The angel came to Mary and said, 'Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you' But she was greatly troubled by his words and began to wonder about the meaning of this greeting. So, the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God!'

Child 1: The angel told Mary that she would give birth to Jesus and that He would be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. But Mary wondered how all this would happen. And the angel said to Mary,

Child 2: "Nothing will be impossible with God.' So, Mary said 'Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word.'" Luke 1:37-38

Child places Mary in nativity.

Child 3: Joseph teaches us to trust in God's plan, no matter what others may think of us.

Child 4: "And her husband Joseph was a righteous man, and did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately. When he had thought about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will call his name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

Child 3: When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did what the angel of the Lord told him." Matthew 1:19-20, 24

Child places Joseph in nativity.

Child 5: The lowly shepherds teach us that Jesus is for everyone, no matter how rich or how poor.

Child 6: "Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified." Luke 2:8-9

Child 5: "When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, that the Lord has made known to us.' So, they hurried off and located Mary and Joseph, and found the baby lying in a manger."

Child 6: The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; everything was just as they had been told." Luke 2:20

Child places shepherds in nativity.

Child 7: The angel teaches us to share the good news of Jesus!

Child 8: "And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.'"

Child 7: "Suddenly a vast, heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among the people with whom he is pleased!'" Luke 2:10-14

Child places Angel in nativity.

Child 9: The wisemen teach us to always seek Jesus and trust in God's plan, no matter how long it takes.

Child 10: The wisemen, knowing the prophecy of the coming Messiah, followed the star to Bethlehem seeking the newborn King.

Child 9: "When they saw the star they shouted joyfully. As they came into the house and saw the child with Mary his mother, they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their treasure boxes and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Matthew 2:10-11

LITURGY/RESPONSIVE READING

Themes: Emmanuel, Rejoice, Joy, Hope, Salvation

You are a God of perfect schedules. Perfect timing.
Even when we don't understand.
You, who set Your people in deliberate places,
You determine our years and our boundaries.

Congregation: *You were not far from each of us.*

Of all the days in history, You chose this one
—the ideal place in time—
To send Your Son who wrapped on flesh
To bind our wounds with swaddled cloths
Sing over our grief that Joy has come.

Congregation: *You were not far from each of us.*

Thank you for the lives of these people, these creatures,
Each one who had a part
Each created and written here for Your forever glory

For every player in the redemptive story You've been telling.
We praise You for drawing close that we might turn and see:

Congregation: *You are not far from each of us.*

Song Suggestions: "Away in a Manger," "Silent Night"

Wreath

Family 2: The evergreen wreath that we hang is a circle, with no beginning and no end. It is a reminder of our eternal God. He is Yahweh, with no beginning and no end. He never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

"Even before the mountain came into existence, or you brought the world into being, you were the eternal God." Psalm 90:2

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is an eternal God, the creator of the whole earth. He does not get tired or weary; there is no limit to his wisdom." Isaiah 40:28

The wreath also symbolizes the crown of thorns placed on Jesus' head, the red berries the blood He shed for us.

"He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed." Isaiah 53:5

LITURGY/RESPONSIVE READING

Themes: Eternal God, Eternal Kingdom, Eternal Life

Patient Father, apart from You, "Eternal" is not a word we humans understand.

We are people of beginnings and endings and we've never known otherwise.

Thank you, God of Forever, for leaning toward us, for bearing with our lack of understanding.

Congregation: *Creator God, we praise You for remembering that we were formed from dust and breath.*

The start of our Christmas story was not the start of Yours. Into history, You lowered Yourself...embracing the limits of time that You authored.

You stooped to take on our beginning so that we could know life without end.

Congregation: *Because You were born, we can be born again.*

By Your will, we had a beginning.
By Your word, we know death is not the end.
We were made for more than time alone.

Oh, Holy One, who exists both inside and outside of time—we were made for You.

Congregation: *Because You died, even death will serve us.*

Let each decorative branch this Christmas season
whisper of the creative Voice that called them into being.
Infinite Jesus, You alone are ever-green, ever-life. Ancient and ever-new.
May each bough placed here be a remembrance

That just as green endures in the winter, so too will Your Light thrive in
our darkness.

Oh, God of every age and the spaces beyond, write eternity on our
hearts.

Congregation: *Because You live, we will live also.*

Song Suggestion: "Glory to God on High"

Christmas Tree

Family 3: The Christmas tree and Christmas garland are a beautiful and fragrant part of our Christmas celebration. Many families have their own traditions for decorating their trees. Ornaments are made out of popsicle sticks from school, bought from souvenir shops on our travels, or handed down from generation to generation. No matter how your tree is decorated, the Christmas tree, with its evergreen leaves that last throughout the harsh winter, reminds us of God's great love. God sent his son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. Because of that we can have everlasting life with Him.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23

"But God shows his great love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:28

LITURGY/RESPONSIVE READING

Themes: Salvation, Redemption, Family, Family of God

Maker of Stars, You were first to hang lights in the darkness
And whether we acknowledge You or not,
we find ourselves following Your lead on every Christmas tree.

Congregation: *We bring our lives before You, oh Root of Jesse.*

Some of us seemingly polished and gilded.
Some of us broken and glued and ordinary.
You invite us to hang the full weight of ourselves on Your branches.
And somehow there we find

Congregation: *You make us all-together beautiful.*

Christmas became to us a "come and see."
A "gather-round" and an "all-together."
Come and see the unexpected way
in which a family would be made.
In this place we gather
—all together—

Congregation: *We come close because You came near to us.*

We pause now to beautify this tree.
Planted here, it becomes a solemn remembrance
For it was by a tree that we were separated from You.
And by a tree that we'd be reconciled.
For this, an eternal King slept in a manger
and You draped humanity with compassion.

Unto us, a Righteous Judge was born
with an invitation and not a verdict.
You came to us an Ever-Present Stranger.
Our unrecognized Sustainer.

We didn't know -- we couldn't foresee
the peculiar way You'd make us family.
That by a baby in Bethlehem born
You'd call out brothers and sisters
from every nation, every people.

A mosaic of humanity, so unlike and unified.

Without us, Jesus,
You are Splendor Incarnate.
And somehow You see fit
to make our lives adorn Your beauty.

Congregation: *You make us ornaments of Your grace.*

Song Suggestion: "O Holy Night," "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

Take time through singing worship songs or Christmas carols for families to come and place their ornaments on the tree.

Closing

This next section is intended to start of with conviction and an understanding that we are sinners in desperate need of a Savior. At the turning point, the hope and excitement should start to build, ending with joyful exclamation.

Reader 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God.

Reader 2: The Word was with God in the beginning.

Reader 3: All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. (John 1:1-3)

Reader 2: God created man to dwell with Him, but man chose sin and rebelled against God.

Reader 3: But God was rich in mercy.

Reader 1: Man would repent time and again, God would forgive, but man would rebel again.

Reader 3: But God was rich in mercy.

Reader 2: Adam and Eve chose to listen to the enemy's lies and ate of the tree that was forbidden.

Reader 3: But God was rich in mercy.

Reader 1: Abraham and Sarah didn't trust God for the son promised to them and took matters into their own hands.

Reader 3: But God was rich in mercy.

Reader 2: King David, the man after God's own heart, even after all that God had done for him, disobeyed and fell out of God's will and killed a man to cover up his sin.

Reader 3: But God was rich in mercy.

Reader 1: We lost sight of you and worshipped other gods and made idols out of stone.

Slight beat. The past is now the present. Quiet, reverent building...

Reader 3: But God *is* rich in mercy.

Reader 2: We are sinful people. We lie, cheat, and steal. We are quick to anger and slow to forgive.

Reader 1: We forget to be grateful. We forget that every good and perfect thing comes from above.

Reader 3: But God...

Reader 2: God's people waited and longed for the Messiah, the One that Yahweh had promised. The One the prophets foretold. Through 400 years of silence, they waited.

Reader 3: But...

Reader 1: ...then one quiet night...because a young girl said "yes" to Jesus...Hope was here. Salvation has come! Love has come! The promise fulfilled!

With hope and excitement!

Reader 3: But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved! (*Ephesians 2:4-5*)

Reader 2: Joy to the World! The Lord has come! Let earth receive her King!

Reader 1: But the story does not end with His birth. In fact, it is still taking place.

Reader 3: God's story is eternal. His kingdom is forever. Like the wreaths on our door He is never ending.

Reader 2: Like the evergreens we hang and leaves on our Christmas trees, His Word stands through the harshest of times.

Reader 3: Instead of adding Jesus to our celebrations, may we, this holiday season, truly believe that He is the center of it all.

Reader 1: But above all pursue His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (*Matthew 6:33 NET*)

Reader 2: Merry Christmas.

Song Suggestion: "Joy to the World", "Angels We Have Heard on High"