



NATIVITY INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Mount Laurel Living Nativity and Merry Christmas!

We all celebrate Christmas in many ways: decorating our homes with trees and lights, exchanging gifts, and enjoying time with friends and family. At Fellowship, we celebrate when Jesus came to earth as a baby, some 2000 years ago, because he brings hope to our broken world.

We see that brokenness everywhere: floods, famine, war, disease, and death. Even our

hearts mirror the brokenness of our world. We can't seem to beat our addictions, bitterness, and greed. And worst of all, no matter how long we live, we die. For all of history we have tried, and failed, to make ourselves and our world better.

But it didn't used to be this way. It used to be perfect.

So to really explain why Jesus brings us so much hope today, we're going to have to go back to the creation of the world... to the very beginning...

(begin creation visuals and music)

In the beginning, God, King of the Universe, made everything with his mere words. And it was good. He is the one that created the entire spectrum of light, and decorated the cosmos with an infinite number of stars and

countless galaxies. With great artistry, the Father landscaped the earth with all manner of grasses, flowering shrubs and bushes, and fruit-bearing trees. He filled the seas and the oceans with teeming schools of fish and great sea creatures, and the sky with birds. With wonderful creativity, God brought forth an amazing variety of life on land: some animals ran gracefully on the earth, while others crawled close to the ground. Creation tells the story of God's power, intelligence, and sometimes his humor; it sparkles with the goodness of God, with the brilliance of a God-shaped design. Today we glimpse only a poor shadow of this goodness, and yet it still takes our breath away.

But God's creation was not yet complete: he had saved his most cherished creation for last. When the world was still perfect and

unbroken, God made Adam and Eve in his image and he put them in a garden to take care of it. He loved his children above all creation, and talked with them in the garden. They enjoyed a perfect connection with each other. Everyday was an adventure, with something new to discover and enjoy.

But one day, Satan, the enemy of God, came to the garden so that he could hurt God's precious children. Satan deceived Adam and Eve, and they believed they could be as wise as God. So they rejected God's goodness, chose their own way, and ate the fruit that God had forbidden. Ever since then, our world has been broken, and we became disconnected from God. Now, with sin in our hearts, we all go our own way, choosing death instead of life. It is this sinful brokenness that keeps us from

being able to connect with Him again. We are dead, and we cannot revive ourselves.

But Hope is not lost.

Even when Adam and Eve had just betrayed God, the King of the Universe had a plan to rescue his children. Because of his great love for us, He would send the Messiah, the Savior, his Son, to defeat the death in our hearts through his own death. The Messiah would have the power to make the world unbroken, bring us back to life, and back to being connected to God.

Scene 2: The Prophets

Narrator: Through the centuries, God spoke through his chosen messengers, the prophets of Israel, to give the people hope that the Messiah was coming. Isaiah, writing in 700 BC, proclaimed that

the Savior would be God himself and would be miraculously born to a virgin.

Isaiah: The Lord himself will give you a sign, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel: "God with us."

Narrator: The prophet Micah predicted the specific town in which He would be born.

Micah: But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come from me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Narrator: Hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah were written in the Holy Scriptures. These Scriptures tell of the Messiah's power and predict details of his

birth. So the people continued to look for the promised Savior, to fix our broken world.

Scene 3: The Annunciation

Narrator: As the time neared for the promised Savior to come, God sent an angel to a young virgin girl named Mary, who was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

Angel of the Lord: Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Narrator: The Angel of the Lord also appeared to Joseph, Mary's fiancé.

Angel of the Lord: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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.

Narrator: All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through Isaiah.

Walk from Annunciation Scene to the Shepherd Scene

Narrator: Shortly before the baby was due, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph and

Mary went to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Micah.

Scene 4: The Shepherds

Narrator: And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping a lonely watch over their sheep. Suddenly, the night was interrupted by a brilliant light, and an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them...

Angel of the Lord: Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is

the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Narrator: And there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

"Gloria, gloria, in Excelsis Deo.."
(Glory to God in the Highest)
(music: Angels We Have Heard on High)

(Shepherds excitedly talk about going to find the baby.)

Scene 5: The Town of Bethlehem

Head Shepherd After Angels: "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

- Shepherds run ahead through

Bethlehem and to the manger. (Luke 2:16)

-Guests slowly walk into Bethlehem, with their guide.

-When the crowd reaches Bethlehem, lively background music plays for 30 seconds

Narrator: The shepherds hurried off to Bethlehem, where it was packed with people. They had all come to be counted in the roman census. The shepherds found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger, just like the Angel had said. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

-Shepherds come running back into Bethlehem from the 'manger scene', spreading the word about what the angels had told them

“Our savior has been born. The Messiah is here!” (for about 20 seconds, until the music track gets quiet) Bethlehemites are amazed at what the shepherds say. Shepherds knock on inn door to tell the Innkeeper

Innkeeper: “What’s going on? My guests are all trying to sleep!”

Head shepherd: (ad-libbed this idea) The angels told us that the messiah was born today. They said we’d find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger, and we found him - lying in your manger!

Innkeeper: The Messiah, the one we’ve been waiting for!?! (ad-libbed excitement)

The innkeeper is amazed, and invites the guests to go to the stable and see the Messiah for themselves.

Scene 6: The Stable

Narrator: And so it came to pass that in the humble stable, in the presence of donkeys and sheep, that Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world as a tiny baby. There he lay, God clothed in human flesh: the Savior, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. Through Jesus, God's promise to Adam and Eve to rescue his people would be fulfilled. He would bring his children back to him, and restore our broken world. Jesus is the reason for our hope and why we celebrate Christmas.

Scene 7: The Wise Men

Narrator: A star in the sky also announced the birth of Jesus. Magi from the east saw it, and came to Jerusalem to worship the one they called the King of the Jews. When King Herod heard this he was

disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Herod: These men are asking about a child, born to be King of the Jews. Rabbi, what do you know of this? Where is this Messiah supposed to be born?

Rabbi: The prophet Micah wrote that a ruler who would shepherd Israel would come out of Bethlehem.

Herod: So, there you have it. He'll be in Bethlehem. Tell me, Magi, when did the star first appear?

Wise Man 1: Almost two years ago.

Herod: *(angrily)* So you expect a two year old to be king of the Jews?!
(more politely) Gentlemen, perhaps you are mistaken?

Wise Man 1: We are not mistaken.

We saw His star.

Wise Man 2: We will not rest until we find the King of the Jews.

Wise Man 3: And bow down and worship him!

Herod: Well then, go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.

Scene 7: The Wise Men, continued

(wise men advance to mid-scene)

Wise Man 3: Where do we go now? Surely this is the road to Bethlehem.

Wise Man 1: Yes but which house?

Wise Man 2: Behold! The star has reappeared! It shines on that house!

(Advance to the house)

Wise Man 1: Shalom. We have come to worship the Jewish Child

King. Is he here?

Joseph: Yes. Mary, bring Jesus, he has visitors.

(Mary leads toddler Jesus out to see the Wise Men. The Wise Men lay down gifts, and kneel down to worship Jesus.)

Jesus' Humanity and Ministry

Jesus was the Son of God but he was also fully human. And so, he grew up as an ordinary Jewish boy in a small town in Galilee, experiencing all the normal joys and sorrows that you and I are familiar with.

At the age of 30, Jesus began his public ministry. He called 12 men, his disciples, to be his closest friends and helpers. But he did not choose men that were powerful, extra spiritual or influential. The disciples included several ordinary

fishermen, a reviled tax collector, a political revolutionist and more, but they all found a new identity in what Jesus taught. He came to offer himself to everyone: rich and poor, men and women, adults and children.

As Jesus traveled from town to town, he taught people in a new way and he heightened the people's excitement for the coming of God's Kingdom. He told people that God is our father in Heaven, who loves us. He taught that the two most important commandments were to love God and love others - even our enemies. Vast crowds flocked to him to hear what God's kingdom is like.

But Jesus was not just a good teacher. He claimed that he had the power to forgive sins, to bring us back to God, and to fix what

was broken. His many miracles showed that he had the power to do what he promised.

Scene 9: The Storm

Narrator: One night, a great storm engulfed the small boat Jesus and his disciples sailed in.

(sound of the storm and crashing waves)

(The disciples panic about the storm. They worry that they are about to die. Jesus sleeps, and the disciples wake him, wondering if he cared if they lived or not.)

Narrator: He arose and rebuked the wind, and the sea was calm. Everywhere he went the miracles he performed provided undeniable evidence that he was indeed the Son of God, the promised Messiah. He made the lame walk and the blind see. He healed lepers and even raised the dead.

(The disciples are astonished at Jesus' power, and remark that he must truly be the Son of God.)

Scene 10: Lazarus

Narrator: Nowhere was Jesus' power more displayed than at the graveside of his friend, Lazarus. Word had been sent to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. When Jesus finally arrived at the grave, Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. After the stone was moved from the opening, Jesus cried out in a loud voice:

Jesus: Lazarus, come forth!
(Family and friends of Lazarus are astonished when Lazarus walks out of the tomb.)

Narrator: The dead man came out at the command of Jesus. Even the power of Life and Death rested in the hands of the Son of God.

Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies"

Follower: It's a miracle. You are the Messiah, the Son of God.

Narrator: Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, even while he knew that just a week later he would be betrayed by one of his own disciples and would fulfill more prophecies by his own death on a cross.

Scene 11: The Cross

Speaker: Have you heard of Him? Jesus, I mean? The One they just took down from this cross? I have been following Him - following from a distance, like you... in the crowds. I can't believe how angry they were today: They beat him and killed Him. Just hours ago. Right here on this cross. They did

this To HIM!

(music shifts to uplifting)

I was beginning to understand some of His teaching... Did you know that... He was the one who created the whole universe! He was the one the prophets foretold of in the Scriptures...He was the one the angels proclaimed to shepherds in Bethlehem where He was born... He was the one who calmed the raging seas with a single word... And they say He raised his friend- Lazarus??- from the dead...

And yet ... (slow) Jesus was also the one who came to Jerusalem, today, to carry this cross He didn't deserve; and from that cross he looked out into the crowd ...where I was... and said, 'Father forgive them, they know not what they do.'

Then I heard from his disciple that Jesus did this on purpose ... ON PURPOSE! This had been God's

plan all along ... ALL people are trapped in sin ... Separated from God. Jesus is the rescue plan. This day and this sacrifice: once-for-all will restore our relationship with God...if we would only believe... believe...

This must have been what He meant, when He said '...God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him will not die but have eternal life.'

A God that good! A love that great! Perhaps this cross is NOT the end of His story!

Scene 12: The Tomb

Narrator: The followers of Jesus took his body from the cross and put it in a tomb. For three days, his body lay there. A large stone barred the entrance to the tomb, and soldiers stood guard. Very early on the third day, there was a

violent earthquake, for an Angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled back the massive stone.

(sound of an earthquake)

The guards were so afraid that they shook with fear and fainted.

(women arrive, find the stone rolled away, and go in)

Narrator: Very early in the morning, some women that loved Jesus arrived at the tomb, and found the stone rolled away, but Jesus' body was not there. The angel said to the women, "

Angel: Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

Narrator: Jesus had risen from the dead. He is alive!

(Women talk excitedly about how Jesus has risen from the dead.)

Jesus is alive and offers us forgiveness and eternal life if we repent of our sins and put our trust in him as Savior and Lord. He died the death that we deserved, and because he rose again, we can live a renewed life through him.

Scene 13: The Ascension

Narrator: After Jesus' resurrection, he was with his disciples for forty days and spoke with them about the kingdom of God. He told them to go out into the whole world and tell everyone what He had done, and how to follow Him. Then Jesus was carried up to heaven.

(Jesus ascends into heaven while his disciples look on.)

Narrator: After Jesus left, an angel spoke to his followers:

Angel: Why do you stand here,

looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

Narrator: Even though Jesus returned to heaven, our story isn't finished. Jesus came as a savior who died for our sins - but he will return as the King and Lord of all. Jesus will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death will be no more. There will be no more grief, no crying, no pain. God's dwelling place will finally be with us again, like it was in the Garden at the creation of the world. Our earth will be a New Earth, and all the beauty and goodness and joy that we feel now is only a shadow compared to what we will experience then.

When Jesus comes again, He will make all things new. Amen!

(The disciples of Jesus celebrate the news that Jesus will come back.)

Please enjoy some hot chocolate and cookies, and remember that we do not accept donations in any form. The Mount Laurel Living Nativity is our gift to you, your family, and our community.

We'd like to hear from you! There are "Greeters" in the gym that would love to talk with you and hear your story. Also, when talking to us or sharing about our nativity via social media, you can use the following:

#livingnativitymtl

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fellowshipmtlaurel/>

Instagram: @fellowshipsj

Email: info@fellowshipsj.org

Church website: fellowshipsj.org

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