

## Dear Pastor,

These are monologues for use as part of the series “To the Manger” for this advent season.

There are a number of ways you can use them. We suggest using them as part of your weekly candle lighting, with a performance followed by a candle lighting. However, you could also use them as part of your Christmas Eve or other Christmas services in their entirety without the candle pieces, or simply use one or some of the monologues as you feel is suitable for your context.

If you don't have people able to “act” out a monologue, you could also simply read them out, inviting people to picture them as the person for whom you are reading. You could also prerecord them as videos if this is easier.

Some tips:

- For costumes, keep it simple. We suggest using one element to show who someone is, as sometimes biblical era costumes can look cheesy. Suggest people wear all black with one article to represent who they are:  
Mary: Head piece (simple scarf)  
Joseph: Head piece or simple rob  
Shepherd: Staff/Head piece  
Magi: Robe  
Of course, if you have strong costumes on hand, those are great to use.
- If you have the technology, you can use screens at the back of your sanctuary to put the words for your actors to read in case they lose their spot
- Please mic your presenters, even if they say they can speak loudly. There is nothing wrong with them holding a mic as well. It is better for people to hear than not hear!
- As the characters jump right into their story, you'll want to announce who the monologue is or have it on a screen, ie: “Monologue: Mary”
- It would be fitting to read the Scripture associated with the character before the monologue, especially if you have people who may not know the Christmas story well.

Please also feel free to edit, shorten or change any of these pieces.

In terms of staging, monologues need little staging. Your only prop needs to be a manger. There are a few options for staging week to week:

- You can have only the person doing the monologue at the front each week
- Each week, you could “add” a person to the stage. For example, while Joseph shares the second week, Mary could be sitting at the manger. The next week, Joseph and Mary would be at the manger as the shepherd speaks, and so on (If you have room in your space for this)

Please also find included a final piece to use for Christmas Eve, if this is a service you use. Again, feel free to tweak or modify this as best suits your context.

We pray that these will help your church meet Christ “At the Manger” this Advent season.

## Week One

# To the Manger: Mary

## The Candle of Hope

### Direction Notes:

*There are many ways that we could present this narrative, and our temptation may be to share this as a woman who is angry or bereft. After all, wouldn't we feel this way if we were forced to give birth in such unusual circumstances? However, Scripture does not present Mary in this way. When we read Mary's words in Scripture as presented in her prayer and song, we see that Mary humbly submits to God's call on her life. For this reason, this monologue is best performed as a woman who is thoughtful, reflective and hopeful.*

### Casting Notes:

*Mary was likely much younger than we may even be comfortable recognizing. Women typically got married in their early-mid teens. While you may not wish to cast a woman quite this young, it is fitting to cast a woman in her late teens or early adulthood to accurately reflect Mary's circumstance.*

### Stage Notes:

*Use a simple manger each week, with blankets inside to give the appearance of an infant in the manger.*

*At the start of this monologue, Mary should be sitting and looking into the manger.*

### Monologue:

And now a manger (smiles, and look into the manger, touching the child). What next, my love, what next?

I guess it makes sense, doesn't it dear one, that I would be surprised again? From the beginning your birth has not followed any plans that I held for my life, any ways that I thought my first child would be born. How *you* would be born. Yet here you are, in a manger (smiles, in awe)

(Rises and stands as she continues the monologue)

Of course I should have expected the unexpected for a birth first told to me by an angel. An angel that told me that you were the *Son of God*. Who said that my dear cousin Elizabeth, so long without a child and at an age when her friends were grandmothers and great grandmothers, would have her own baby and would be the sign that what he said was true, as incredible as it seemed. I would have a baby. For me, the angel was enough to ensure me that God was doing something magnificent. But it still seemed so far fetched. Even after I saw Elizabeth, felt the baby kick in her womb, it wasn't until I felt the first flutters of your little hands and tiny feet that I knew I was with child too. A child that came to me without marriage, or any of the acts that go with it. (Look back at baby). A child from God.

No one believed me of course. And why would they? I'd never believe it if someone told me the story I heard myself telling my mother, my grandmother, my father, my aunts...An angel came and told me that I would give birth to the Son of God! (laughs) But Elizabeth – she believed it. And then, my fiancé, Joseph – he believed it too. They had had their own angels. Their own ridiculous stories to tell. It was a relief to have people who had their own stories no one believed to join with mine.

Can I tell you something? I was a little bit glad when Joseph said we had to go to Bethlehem to get counted for the census. I know a lot of women would not want to have to travel from when they were as pregnant as I was. But I was relieved to take our story and go. I knew the baby might come when I was here. I knew I would be far away, that mom and granny would not be here to hold my hand and stroke my hair. But I guess I also thought that God would have something figured out for the birth of his son.

I didn't think Bethlehem would be SO crowded. I didn't think we'd have such trouble finding some place to stay. I didn't think the pains would come so quickly, that it would be so hard, so lonely.

(Goes back and sits by the manger)

I didn't think my baby's first bed would be the cow's food dish. (smiles). But I didn't think a lot of things, did I, dear one?

You know what I'm starting to understand, my sweetest? I think that a lot of us who think we understand how God works don't know much at all. I think God surprises us. God has sure surprised me.

Everyone I know is waiting for God to do something big. Waiting for God to show up and shake the heavens and make a spectacle for all to see. Their hope is that God will overthrow Rome and prove we are God's chosen. They're looking for God in palaces and army barracks. And all along they don't know - To look in a manger (smiles again).

Oh dear heart – I hope our people will find you. I hope the world will find you. I hope they'll learn to look where they do not think to look. I hope they'll feel the hope that I feel looking at you right now.

Hope in a manger.

Who'd have thought?

### **Candle Lighter Reading:**

**Today, we begin the season of Advent. Advent is the time leading up to Christmas that we remember the waiting of those who longed for a Messiah, and make space for our own waiting in a world that longs for Christ's return. Each week we light a candle as we journey to the manger together.**

**Today, we light the candle of hope. We remember, with hope, that God often reveals God's self to us in unexpected ways. We hope in the Christ who came to us in a manger at Christmas, and hold onto hope that Christ is with us still.**

## Week Two

# To the Manger: Joseph

## The Candle of Peace

### Direction Notes:

*We know little of Joseph's story, except what is told to us about his response to hearing Mary's news: that he would at first divorce her, but chose not to after an angel appeared to him a dream. Joseph's response to consider divorce was reasonable at the time – engagements were as binding as marriages, and he would have logically assumed she violated their engagement.*

*It would again be tempting to play Joseph as angry. Yet, we do not see this in Scripture. In playing this role, consider Joseph as someone processing his life, someone who is making sense of what this means for him as a man and new father.*

### Stage Notes:

*Have a manger on the stage with blankets to look like an infant is in it; Joseph will stand some distance from it.*

### Casting Notes:

*There was likely an age gap between Mary and Joseph. Someone in their twenties or early thirties would be appropriate to play Joseph, even with Mary's young age.*

### Monologue:

(Gazing at the manger from a distance as he stands):

And now, a manger. (Shakes head) Dear Lord, what next?

I guess I should have anticipated that things would not go according to plan, since nothing has looked like I planned since all this started. Sometimes I think back to a year ago – when I was busy building the house where Mary and I would live after the wedding. It's true that I hoped that by this year this time, we would be blessed with a son to start filling the rooms in our little house. And now here we are – so far from that house in Bethlehem. No family gathered to sing and celebrate the birth of our new son. The women who should have helped Mary so far away. The image of everything I thought about our family so different than any dream I had while building that dwelling.

(Chuckles). Ah, dreams. I thank God for gracing me with the dream that made clear that Mary's story, as ridiculous as it was to everyone, was true. After weeks of doubting everything Mary said, I suddenly knew how it felt to have a story that nobody believed, to have a word from God nobody thought that you should have. It was a gift, this dream. An angel, speaking to me! A simple carpenter. But when I woke I knew that many other dreams would disappear along with the sleep of that night. Our lives would look nothing like I planned.

I knew I could still divorce her. I knew that everyone still expected me to. I knew that I could find another bride to fill that house with a family. But now I also knew what I was called to do. I knew that God had something in store for this child Mary carried, and for some reason, God had decided I would be a part of it.

And so I had peace. Peace in marrying a woman amidst the rumblings and mutterings of our whole village. Peace in packing the items in that house and walking to Bethlehem when Mary was so pregnant.

And now, peace with placing our baby in a manger.

Oh Mary, how I had pictured this time for you comfortable in your own bed, with a fire burning in your own hearth, with your own people caring for you as you gave birth to our son! I assumed you would lay our newborn son in the arms of those who knew and loved you, instead of in the embrace of a box of oats and hay!

But I assumed a lot of things. I assumed a lot of things would be my source of peace. And I know even now, if the men of the village could see me they would ask me the same questions I would have asked of them if the circumstances were reversed. Are you disappointed, Joseph, to have not provided something better for your wife? Are you anxious, Joseph, for what the future holds? Are you worried, Joseph, about what this means?

And I know I would never be able to explain to them what I feel as I look at this manger. This manger that to many would be a sign that I am not in control, that my family is in turmoil, that I have not provided as I should. That I am a poor husband, a failing father, a weak man, an insufficient provider. (smiles). How could I tell them I feel none of those things? That looking at this manger, I feel peace like I have never felt before?

I feel peace because I know the God who showed up to Mary and showed up for me is somehow right here, right now in the most unbelievable place: God is here, at this manger.

### **Candle Lighting:**

**Today, on this second Sunday of advent, we light the candle of peace. When the circumstances of our lives and our world seem beyond understanding, we trust in the Prince of Peace, who was born in a manger.**

## Week Three

# To the Manger: A Shepherd

## The Candle of Joy

### Direction Notes:

*Once again, we know little about the shepherds, except that they quickly go to Bethlehem to worship the newborn baby the angels told them about. We do know quite a bit about shepherds at that time. While their jobs were important, they typically lived on the outskirts of society. Their jobs were dirty and often made them ritually “unclean.” They were not people of prestige or privilege.*

*We can imagine how these shepherds felt seeing that Jesus was now sleeping in a manger, a place that would have been far more comfortable to them than any palace. For this reason, this shepherd should be played with joy and delight. This week the theme is joy, and this monologue should feel joyful and even make people laugh.*

### Casting Notes:

*Shepherds could be any age so you can have just about anybody play this part. The role is played with a lot of excitement and energy so someone who can play that up is ideal. Even though shepherds were men, it would work fine to have a woman fill the role.*

### Staging:

*Eagerly speaking to the whole room; often looking back at the manger; lots of movement and energy.*

### Monologue:

A manger! Did you see it? A manger!!! A MANGER!

This night keeps getting more and more incredible! (takes a breath)

Where do I even begin?

It was a pretty typical day in most cases. True, there’s been a bit more energy and bustle in the air with all the people in Bethlehem for the census. But out on the hills, the sheep don’t really notice that too much. We do what we’ve always done. Get the sheep out of the pen, find some good grass for them to eat, keep our eyes out for any robbers. Of course we were a little more on guard with so many strangers around. More travellers is always riskier for shepherds and sheep out at night. You never know who is coming through. So we were definitely a little more alert than usual.

But we didn’t even need to be alert for what we saw - I don’t know how anyone will EVER believe us, but we were just sitting there, when the sky...OPENED. Okay, I admit, I screamed at first. It looked like the sun had exploded and I won’t say his name but I wasn’t the only one who screamed.

But you know what I noticed next? The sheep weren’t making any noise at all. You’d think, right, that

with the sky exploding that the sheep would start to bleat and run – they’re so easily spooked – but I swear on my life, they all just stopped and stood perfectly still. Not a sound.

That’s when I noticed what I thought was the sun was people – well not people I realize now – but... ANGELS! Real life, honest to goodness ANGELS. Like in the SCRIPTURES. And you know what? Nothing I could say could describe them to you – nothing. Except that it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen – and then - the angels were SINGING – Glory to God in the highest, they said. And I felt every word of that, let me tell you. I don’t know when I happened, but eventually I realized I was on my knees – in fact, all of us were. All on our knees, looking up at these angels, us and the sheep stunned into silence. I could have stayed there forever. And then they told us – a baby was born in Bethlehem, who was Christ, and we should go and look for him in a MANGER.

Then they were gone! And we looked at each other and started laughing. I mean we knew we had to go find this baby, but we had to look in a manger! That is hilarious. We knew all about mangers. Sheep gotta eat after all. But babies in mangers aren’t so common, you know? But we had just seen angels, and they told us there was a baby in a manger, and trust me you don’t doubt what angels say.

Well we got into town in about a minute and we started asking around: Anyone seen any babies? We were knocking on doors and asking people on the street. And finally someone mentioned that they heard of this couple who came for the census who’d been asking around for a place to crash and hadn’t been able to find one and apparently they’d had a baby. We got pointed in one direction and then another, and now HERE WE ARE, and LOOK!

(Points excitedly at manger)

LOOK!

There the baby is! IN A MANGER!

Friends, the angels said this was the son of God! And you know? He’s like ONE OF US, you know? I mean I’ve heard the teachers talk about the Messiah coming back. I’ve been hoping just like the rest of us. I figured there would be a big announcement one day, we’d hear of this fancy general taking over the army, or a King would step out and impress all of us. But this is a baby in a MANGER.

And you know what I’m thinking? If God sends angels to shepherds like us, and if the Messiah is born in a place just like the rest of us – maybe God is a lot closer than I ever thought. I think that’s what the angels meant when they were singing and they said that there was good news for all people. All people includes me!

And now that I’m here – at the manger – I can hardly contain my joy!

(Rushes over to kneel at the manger as candle lighter comes forward)

### **Candle Lighting:**

**Today on this third Sunday of advent we light the candle of joy. Joy can often feel like an elusive feeling, even at Christmastime. The realities of our lives can make Christmas joy feel far away. But today we light this candle not because our lives are without sadness, but because Christ has come to bring joy to the world, a joy that is not contingent on circumstance, but found in the hope of eternity.**

## Week Four

# To the Manger: The Wisemen

## The Candle of Love

### Direction Notes:

*The magi would have met Jesus some time after the birth of Jesus, and likely long after his sleeping in the manger, so this is always a tricky line to walk. You will notice in this monologue that we try to be sensitive to that reality. We know little of the specific Magi in this narrative, but we do know that the Magi were a priestly class, who would have been well educated scholars. Picture this person as regal, thoughtful and elegant.*

*This role would be played with a sense of surprise and intrigue.*

### Casting Notes:

*The magi were generally slightly older men, as they would have been learning for a long time. An older gentlemen would be most accurate, but any age works if needed.*

### Monologue:

Well no wonder King Herod didn't find him! This whole situation is nothing like we would have expected, but oh how delightful it has turned out to be!

As a member of the Magi, I have spent my life studying the stars. Of course, since the days of the Babylonian exile, we were told that the people of Israel believed that God would send a great Saviour to them one day. The Jewish people are so very ...optimistic! Their hope never made much sense to me, but of course it was their story, not ours.

Then my colleagues and I saw that magnificent star! Believe me when I tell you that many of my ancestors hoped their whole life to see a star like we saw and never did. We knew we had to come this way to see this King that had likely been born after all, just like the Israelites had said.

We did what was only logical – we went to the place, to King Herod. We were not without trepidation of course – Herod is not an easy man, and we could not be sure of his hospitality. But we did assume that any King would be thrilled to welcome guests such as us who had come to celebrate the birth of his son. Especially when he saw the gifts we brought.

Imagine our surprise when we found out that there was no baby born in the palace on the night we saw the star! We knew we needed to look elsewhere, and Herod did too. He got some of his advisors to search their texts to find out where the prophecies said the Messiah would be born (I'm not sure why he did not know this himself – he obviously hadn't spent much time reading the Scriptures), and we set out to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was another surprise. It was nothing but a small village, and we weren't even sure where to start. There were no palaces or even interesting buildings, just a lot of huts and small homes. And



nobody knew what we meant when we said we had come to find the king of the jews. Our only hope was to go back to the day it all happened, quite a few months back now. We explained the dates and the season we first saw the star, and eventually they pointed us in the direction of a couple who had come to town for the census and had not yet gone home. There were lots of fascinating stories about this couple, but when I saw them they certainly weren't impressive. Yet the stars do not lie. This was the baby the star had told us about.

It was little wonder Herod hadn't been able to locate him. This family, their dwelling, their situation was very simple. And if you can believe it, they told us – the night the child was born – the region was so crowded that they had to put the baby in the animals' feed trough. That's right – the newborn king in a manger! (laughs) I'm certain Herod would not have done that with any baby of us.

Our gifts felt opulent, yet fitting, in the humble settling in which we found ourselves. It was nothing impressive, but this, we are certain was the King we had sought to find. A King born in a manger!

I know it doesn't make much sense for someone like me to be impressed by baby like him. But I was. I worshipped him, gladly. I've thought about it a lot ever since. I've thought about how much we missed the mark thinking Herod's son was the great King we were hoping to find. I've thought about what his parents, Mary and Joseph, described to us about what they believed and how Jesus was part of that. And I've thought about the star.

Why did God show the star to us – to *me*? I had heard about the God of the Israelites. They believe in only ONE God if you can believe it, and they talk of this God as a God of LOVE. It is absurd, I know, or at least I once thought. A God who loves his people! A God who talks to His people! A God who wants best for his people. This is different than the gods we are always eager to please. It's a nice idea, this God, but it is, or at least I thought it was – their God. Not mine.

But now I ask why the star, shown to us? Why the chance for us to worship this new King? And I wonder, is it possible that this story may include us too? I admit, I cannot stop hoping that this is true. Maybe this King in a Manger, this story of love, isn't just for Mary and Joseph and their people. Maybe it is bigger. Maybe it is as big as the stars can shine. Maybe it's for me. Maybe this God of love? Loves me too.

### **Candle Lighting:**

**Today, on this fourth Sunday of advent, we light the candle of love. The story of the magi reminds us of God's great plan to share His love with all people. We have all been invited into the story of God's love.**

# Christmas Eve: A Seeker

## The Christ Candle

### **Direction Notes:**

*For this final piece, pick any person from your congregation. They are representing the modern seeker looking for Christ.*

### **Monologue:**

Where is God?

I know, it's a big question. I've been asking it my whole life, and sometimes it feels really hard to answer.

I don't understand where God is in the midst of war, suffering and indescribable loss.

I don't understand where God is when I see tent cities or crumbling shelters or the family up the road who couldn't afford a gift for their child for Christmas.

And I don't understand where God is in the midst of complicated political climates and church scandals and fights on the internet.

I have wondered, and I do wonder.

At Christmas, we are told that God is in a manger.

I wonder if we really consider how ridiculous this notion is. A manger was where people put food to feed the animals. Imagine telling someone that God was in your dog dish. Yet, here we have a story where the God of the universe is nestled in the most unlikely of places, which leaves us with the question: What does it mean?

To me, this Christmas Eve, it means that God is found in places that are messy.

It means that God is found in places we don't expect.

It means that God is found in places that might make us uncomfortable.

It means that God is found in the ordinary.

It means that God *can* be found.

It means that God is not lost to us.

It means that God came for us, and allowed us to find him in places of hurt, struggle and confusion.

It means we can find God at the mangers of our lives – the dog dishes of disappointment, the feeding troughs of tragedy, the canisters of confusion.

Where is God?

One night, 2000 years ago, God was in manger. And tonight, we find God still in this place, this hour, as we turn to Him.

*Have choir or special music sing “Away in a Manger,” and as you do, have each of the characters from the Advent series come to the stage one at time. Have them each light the candle for their week, and then go and kneels at the manger.*

*After they have all knelt/the song is over, light the Christ candle:*

### **Candle Lighting:**

**Tonight we light the final candle, the Christ candle, remembering the birth of Christ who was found At the Manger. As we light this candle, we do so with gratitude that Christ is with us in this Christmas season and always, and we await for the return of Christ in His glory.**

If your whole church lights candles, from here, take the Christ candle to light the first candle in each role as the congregation lights their own candle, while continuing to sing Away in a Manger as a congregation, or singing Silent Night.

**Close in prayer.**