

I AM CHRISTMAS: A Dramatic Reading for Worship
Slayden Yarbrough
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Welcome and Explanation of the program "I AM CHRISTMAS" *Slayden Yarbrough*

I AM CHRISTMAS - What would the different characters say to us today about their roles in the Christmas story? Today, we will retell an old story in a new way. We will see the Christmas events through the eyes of those who are presented in the Gospel narratives. It will be fun!

I Am Christmas - An Introduction *Slayden Yarbrough*

I am history and I am tradition. Over two millennia have passed since my star illumined the sky over Bethlehem, directing to the Christ child all who would come and see. My significance is celebrated in numerous ways. Some read my story in the simplicity of a home warmed by an evening fire. Some prepare for my celebration by reading an advent book or by the lighting of advent candles. Many unite with others to remember and to praise the Christ child.

From the unadorned worship in a small, wood-framed structure of a country church, where age old hymns are loudly and joyously sung and my ancient story is repeated with renewed freshness in a simple parson's sermon - to a magnificent cathedral whose pipe organ reverberates amidst the beauty of stained glass windows and marble columns that rise to the heavens, whose music provides direction for other instruments, a choir, and talented soloists who perform a majestic cantata which reminds all who hear of God's incarnate Word - in such diverse forms my story is passed on from generation to generation.

Some look forward to strings of brightly-colored lights surrounding old and new ornaments decorating a carefully selected tree. Some anticipate spiced-cider and eggnog, pastries, nuts, and fruit, or red-and-white striped candy canes. Some love the carols, lighted candles, or nativity scenes. Others find warmth in the fellowship of old friends or relatives who have traveled from long distance. For some, Christmas is only crowded stores, long lines, and over-due bills, a reminder of unpleasant memories and missing love.

For all, however, my purpose is to remind men, women, and children that God loves you and that He has demonstrated that love by becoming one of you. That, and that alone, gives true significance to all that man does to celebrate my season. I am Christmas and I come to you once more with a message of hope, of love, and of peace.

I Am Christmas I am the day that is celebrated to commemorate the birth of the Christ child. I am celebrated every year on December 25th throughout the world. I am over 2,000 years old. Yet my relevance is as contemporary as the evening news.

I Am Christmas -The Prophets *Slayden Yarbrough*

My day was spoken of by the prophets of old. Isaiah signaled my arrival when he wrote:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace,

there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
Establishing it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever. (Isaiah 9: 6-7, NIV)

Isaiah also predicted that:

A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse;
From his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him -
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and power,
The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord -
And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11; 1-3, NIV)

I AM CHRISTMAS: I am Caesar Augustus!

Jerome HadleyDike

I am the most powerful ruler in the Mediterranean world! I govern the Roman Empire! Nations and kings look to me in respect and in fear. My power and my authority cannot be challenged by any other! How dare them! My world is a Roman world in government. My world is a peaceful world, for none dare challenge the power of the Roman military. My world is a Hellenistic or Greek world in culture, including language, which enables communication everywhere in my empire regardless of the diverse cultures that answer to me. It is to my capitol that those who seek favor and prosperity travel. The phrase "All roads lead to Rome" is no idle claim. Travelers from Egypt and Asia, from North Africa and the barbarian territories look to me and the splendor of this city with respect and fear.

A small, insignificant part of my world is a Jewish world called Palestine. Those who rule there, like Herod, and Quirinius who governs Syria, have been appointed by me. They answer to me! I demand that they keep the peace, that they collect taxes to support their work and my government, that they subject all of the people to my rule! None is so powerful, so important as I am? Do you not agree?

So what does the birth of a Jewish boy mean to me! Nothing! Can such a child challenge my rule? Can such a child insist upon the allegiance of millions such as I can do? Can such a child inaugurate a kingdom more powerful than that of Rome? Don't make me laugh! The world will long remember me when I am gone? Can you possibly say that, can you possibly believe that, about this insignificant, Jewish child, born in a stable, surrounded not by royalty but by shepherds and animals of the field? Of course not!

I am Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the Roman Empire, and no Jewish child can ever challenge me, or those who succeed me. Or, can he?

I Am Christmas - Elizabeth

Irish Brophy

I am the mother of a newborn son, one who came as a complete surprise. My husband, Zacharias, a priest, and I are old, too old to become parents. And yet, that is exactly what has taken place. Zacharias was chosen by casting lots to enter the temple and to burn incense. It was there in the temple that an angel of the Lord appeared and told him that we would have son, John, who would be filled with the Spirit, who would be a forerunner of the long awaited Messiah, and who would call the people back to God.

My Zacharias questioned this announcement, and why not? It seemed so absurd! So unbelievable! And what did his doubting get him? He was unable to speak until the birth of our son. That's quite a restriction for a man of God to be silent for that long! Don't you agree?

But there is more to the story. Mary, my much younger cousin, also found favor with in the most unusual circumstances, and was promised a son as well. Her situation - well, I'll let her tell you her story later on. She can do it so much better than I can.

As for me, John was born, and I shall always be amazed as to why God showed such favor to me and to Zacharias.

I Am Christmas - Bethlehem

Karen HadleyDike

I am a small town in Judea, about five miles from Jerusalem. I was the home of Ruth and Boaz and his fields, the home of David, the greatest king of Israel, and the burial place of Rachel, Jacob's wife and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. It was the prophet Micah who predicted long ago that a ruler over Israel would come from me, small though I might be. And it is on this day here in Bethlehem that a child named Jesus will be born to a young woman named Mary, who is betrothed to Joseph.

Have you ever considered how interesting it is that God chose to become a man when He wanted to reveal himself most fully, most completely? God did not send mankind a book telling who He was. He did not send you a set of principles or rules by which you should govern your lives. No. He became one of you. He entered into the mainstream of humanity and history, just as you did. He came in the birth of an infant, a child named Jesus who was born to Mary. This child grew and matured just as you should do, in all phases of life. The Gospel writer Luke tells you that He grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). What Luke was telling you is that Jesus matured intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially.

And why did he become a man? Why did this Word of God become incarnate? Because as a man he could communicate more effectively than by any other way the message that He wanted you to know and understand in order that you could receive His love and redemption. Well, enough of my sermonizing. There are others who want to tell you their stories.

Christmas Carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" vs. 1

I Am Christmas - The Innkeeper

Jack Fowler

My inn is full tonight. With the census being taken by Augustus Caesar for taxation purposes there are many travelers in the land. So, you must arrive early if you expect to find a place to sleep here. Tonight, unfortunately there are no rooms left. But the hour is late and the stable in the shelter of a cave, I suppose, is better than no shelter at all.

One would expect a king to be born in a palace. But this young prince is not like most royalty. And His Kingdom is not like those of this world. One would expect a prince to be clothed in the finest cloth and laid in the most expensive bed available. But this future king was wrapped in inexpensive material, swaddling cloth it is called, and placed on new straw in a manger. He was surrounded not by servants and handmaidens but by farm animals in the coolness of the night air. Yet, even such an inconspicuous beginning would not go unnoticed.

So, I guess that's my story. Looking forward, wouldn't it have been nice to have the child born in my inn. I could put up a sign that says "Jesus slept here!" I would never have an empty room. Alas, that is not to be. And, I suspect that all who listen will like the story just as it is.

Christmas Carol "Away in the Manger" vss. 1&2**I Am Christmas - Mary***Christina HadleyDike*

I must confess that I am certainly frightened by all that is going on. At the same time, if I understand correctly, I am greatly honored. I am soon to give birth to a child whose significance I simply can not understand.. Yesterday, it seemed that I was simply a young Jewish girl, pledged to be married to Joseph. Today, I am a woman and about to become a mother. The mystery of it all, I can not explain.

But God is about to do a great work. It was revealed to me - and to my most understanding Joseph - that God is ready to fulfill His promises found in the writings of the prophets of old. And, He has chosen me, insignificant though I might be, to play a role in this magnificent drama. That is so hard for me to comprehend. But that is what is now taking place, here in Bethlehem, in this stable, on this night.

Let me ask you a question. If God would choose one such as me for such an important work, could He not chose you as well? Is there something that needs to be done in His kingdom that you can do? It doesn't take courage or greatness to be used by God. It only takes a willingness to be the instrument of His work.

Christmas Carol "Silent Night" vss. 1&2**I Am Christmas -The Star***Evelyn Price*

We stars have been around for a long time, since the very beginning of time. We provide light and direction for those who wish to journey at night. But I am a special star. My light points to a stable in Bethlehem. I illumine the way for those who wish to see the newborn infant they call the Christ child. My light is for all who journey , whether they be king or commoner.

And this Christ child - and I really like this - He, I am told will be called "the Light of the World." He will brighten the lives of those who live in darkness. He will illumine the path of those who earnestly seek to find their way to the love and the light of God. So you see, I am a star who on this night is in very good company. I have been chosen to guide so many to one Who will become the brightest light of all time.

Christmas Carol "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" vs. 1**I Am Christmas - Shepherds in the Fields***David L'Hommediene*

We are watching our flock, as we do most every night. Ours is usually not a difficult or challenging work. But it is important. We are a dignified people. We are common, ordinary folk who have performed our task for generations with little or no change. We ask you, how hard is it to keep an eye on a bunch of sheep?

We shepherds are also simple folk. We are a part of those who are called "the people of the land." The religious leaders of Judah, especially the Pharisees, they despise us. They turn their noses in the air and then look down upon us. We are not good enough for them. But listen closely. We are good enough for God. And this child, He came into the world for all of mankind, and that includes the poor and the common people, the socially and religiously despised, the rejected and the weak, the rich and the not-so-rich, the princes and the paupers. This child, when he becomes a man, He will watch over all of

us, protect us, and care for us as no one else could ever do. When we stray from the fold, He will seek us until he finds and bring us back to shelter, safe and sound.

You know what we shepherds think. We think that maybe we should call Him “the Good Shepherd.” Certainly no name given to Him could ever say more about God’s concern and compassion for all of us. “The Good Shepherd,” that’s a good title. Don’t you agree?

Christmas Carol "While Shepherds Watched Their Flock," vs. 1

I Am Christmas -The Three Wise Men

John Williams

We are students of the stars. We will travel many miles in order to honor the newborn child. We are royalty from the Orient and we are convinced that the birth of this infant will have meaning for all of mankind.

We carry with us special gifts for the child - gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Our gifts symbolize His royalty, His divinity, and his humanity. The last gift, myrrh, is used to embalm a dead body. It reminds us of the time when this child will lay down his life that others may receive life from God.

Like us, the wise men, this child is also royalty. He will be called the Prince of Peace, as prophesied by Isaiah of old. He will be the King of Kings. But interestingly, His Kingdom will not be of this world. No, His kingdom will be found in the hearts of men, women, and children, who acknowledge His rule. And His kingdom will not be ruled by power and violence, like that of Herod and other earthly kings. His Kingdom will be ruled by love.

Well, the journey is long. There is no time to waste. My friends and I must be on our way. The Christ child awaits us. As we seek him, perhaps you should as well.

Christmas Carol "We Three Kings" vs. 2

I Am Christmas - Herod the Great

Bob Rothe

That’s fine by me. I am also known as the King of the Jews, at least that’s my role in these days. My people ought to love me. I rebuilt and added to the temple. I built a wonderful harbor at Caesarea. I keep the peace. Rome likes that. So what if I raise their taxes? And just because I have executed some of my own family, and probably will do in a few more before it is over, I just am not loved nor appreciated. What do these people want?

Oh, well. So, the others who have spoken before me on this day began by saying “I am Christmas.” Well, I suppose I could also say that. There are those who might identify with me at this time. But you won’t find me waxing eloquent about how wonderful is this new born infant.

For you see my jealousy of this child reflects the insecurity of those in this world who are not at peace with themselves nor with others. I am like those who hold on to temporal things but are unable or unwilling to grasp things eternal. I am a king with earthly power and political authority. Yet, as you know, I am threatened by the birth of a child. I am jealous, suspicious, and weak. Yet that which I seek the most - peace of mind, contentment, hope, respect, and a life that has meaning - that can be found in the child.

But I cannot see this. And when I am dead and gone, all the gains and all the glory of this world that I have achieved will mean absolutely nothing. Too many like me will fail to understand the significance of this child. Too many will be concerned about the things of this world and will miss God’s great gift to mankind.

I know what I'll do. I'll issue orders to have all of the infants in my kingdom eliminated. Maybe that will rid me of this child. Yes, I am Herod the Great! And no one seems to like me!

Christmas Carol

"I Heard the Bells" vss. 1, 2, last

I Am Christmas -The Challenge

Slayden Yarbrough

I have told you who I am in terms of people and places in the Bible. Now, let me try and tell you what I mean for ordinary people like you. I am Christmas, the day when you celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Christ and the Savior of mankind. I am redemption for those who are separated from God. I am the story of salvation for all who will seek God through His Son, the One Whose birth you honor on this day.

I am joy in a world of sorrow. I am peace to men and women of goodwill. I am love in a world of hatred. I bring unity in a world that is divided. I am light in a world of darkness. I am hope for all who despair. I am the celebration of God's great gift to the world, yes, that includes even to you.

But the most important question that I can ask is this. "What am I to you?" A tree decorated with tinsel, lights flashing, brightly-colored bulbs, and ornaments of angels? Beautifully wrapped packages tied with bows and ribbons? Family and friends gathered around a table covered with turkey and all the trimmings?

All of these things bring joy and happiness to you. They all have an important place in your lives? But when the tree has been taken down, when the decorations have been stored for another year, when the torn wrappings and broken ribbons have been discarded, when the table has been cleared and the dishes washed and put away, and when the friends and relatives have gone home, may you never be embarrassed to say, "In all of the glitter and sparkle a star still shines over this place, where the celebration of the birth of God's Son is the most important event of this season. In the midst of all our loved ones the Supreme visitor is still the One Who came to shepherds and kings, and to each and everyone of us as well."

All the gifts given and all the gifts received during this time are of little value when aAnd when this child, His Son, became a man, He offered to you the greatest gift that man, woman, or child could ever receive - the gift of salvation. And, He purchased this gift by paying the highest price any man could pay. He gave His life in order to give life to each and every one of you. To know this, to believe this, and to live in accord with this - this is to know the true meaning of Christmas.

I AM CHRISTMAS. I am a time of giving by God and a time of receiving for each of you. God has a gift for you on this Christmas day. He sent it to you a long time ago. It's not a free gift, but you can't buy it. Because God purchased it long ago with the sacrifice of His son. The gift is the offer of salvation. If you have never received this gift before, will you accept it this morning and make this the best Christmas ever?

If you have accepted this gift, will you commit yourself to making Christ central, not just on Christmas Day, but in every day of the year? Will you commit yourself to sharing the gift of God with others in the way that you live and serve and care? Will you begin right now by joining all of those others who have come to visit and know the Christ child who came to you so long ago on that first Christmas Day?

I AM CHRISTMAS. I am a child of God. I am love - and peace - and hope. And so are you, if you know and understand and accept this great gift of God to all the world, which you celebrate on this Christmas Day.a

Christmas Carol "Good Christmas Men Rejoice" vs. 1&3

Congregation: We Are Christmas

Lukas Graf, Reader

Reader: We are Christmas!

All: We are Christmas!

Reader: We all are children God who give witness to the Christ child. We reflect His light in a darkened world.

All: We are Christmas!

Reader: We sing of His joy when surrounded by sorrow and grief. We anticipate His hope for all who are hopeless. We share His gift to those who are in spiritual and physical need. We convey His love in an angry and volatile world. We are the Spirit of Christmas for this generation.

All: We Are Christmas!

Reader: We are Christmas and we rejoice in God's grace not just on this day but every day.

All: We are Christmas! We are light! We are joy! We are hope! We say again for all to hear, WE ARE CHRISTMAS!