

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

I've sat through roughly one hundred children's Christmas services so far in my life. Each one has been special—honestly. The familiar parts are like an old friend—comforting and steadfast—while the new elements often leave me breathless. More than anything, though, my favorite part of each service is watching faith passed on from generation to generation. Like Mary, I treasure these things and ponder them in my heart.

If asked to recall a specific memory from a service in the past—the challenge I posed to this month's "Parent conversations" authors—I would struggle. I don't remember moments so much as feelings. A feeling of being loved and cherished when I hear that God came down to earth to save me. A feeling of awe and gratefulness for all that took place in order for me to spend eternity in heaven. A feeling of urgency to tell others this amazing, true story. God's Word always has an effect, doesn't it, and that is on full display at a children's Christmas service.

—Nicole Balza

## A CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE TO REMEMBER

"HEY, REMEMBER that Christmas service when the AV booth started on fire?"

It's December 2021. After minimizing the service in 2020, we are excited to be back for a full Sunday school service! We're practiced up; we're dressed up; we're ready. We find our places in front of church.

As the director, I cue the sound tech volunteer for our recorded accompaniment . . . and nothing happens. *That's all right, no rush.*

As the silence stretches, I look back at the AV booth. The tech gives me a worried, "just a minute" signal. *Okay, take your time, I know technology doesn't always cooperate. . . .*

I smile and give the kids a thumbs-up to show everything's okay. We wait another few moments . . . still nothing, so I look again.

Then the sound tech says, out loud, "I'm sorry, we have to shut the system down."

We're ready to sing—but no music. Now what? I can feel the congregation getting concerned.

I take a breath and say to the kids, "Our music isn't working, but you don't need it. You know the songs. We're just going to sing without it, okay?" Most nod and smile. Challenge accepted.

And so we sing. No accompaniment, no fancy recordings, just the kids' voices.

"The Savior of the world is coming down!"

"Hark! The herald angels sing!"

"Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay . . ."

"Gloria in excelsis Deo!"

The congregation applauds.

Afterward I hear, "That was amazing! The kids sounded so good!"

And they did. I was so proud of them. A whole Christmas service a cappella? Extraordinary!

Afterward, I also heard: An old piece of sound equipment had started smoking. It wasn't *quite* on fire, but it was close. So yes, I remember the Christmas service the AV booth almost caught fire. It's one of my favorites.



*Kristen Koepsell is a staff minister at Cross of Christ, Boise/Nampa, Idaho.*

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THAT SOUND. I recognized it immediately. And I shuddered.

From my seat near the altar, I could see him bent over in the pew. The three kids on either side of him scuttled for safety.

The excitement of Christmas, the promise of Christmas presents, and an opportunity to be one of the featured worship leaders at the Christmas Eve service proved too much for my six-year-old friend's queasy stomach. For a moment, the worship service stalled.

Then peace arrived. The overwhelming peace of the Savior's birth. Christmas "angels" swooped in from around the auditorium. One ushered children out of the pew. One rescued the boy, whisking him away for cleansing. One covered the mess with VoBAN.

Heaven's praise that "a Savior has been born" seemed destined to be outshouted that night. But our congregation's angels transformed it into a testimony of the way forgiven, grateful people unselfishly live out their worship.

"Glory to God in the highest heaven," those cherubs proclaimed with their reckless, selfless service.

That Christmas Eve, we certain poor shepherds experienced an extraordinary Noel. The angels we heard on high didn't just shout their praise because of God's Bethlehem miracle; they demonstrated it.

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*



*James Aderman is a retired pastor.*

I'VE BEEN blessed to experience the children's Christmas service, one of my favorite services of the year, as a child, teacher, parent, director, and accompanist. Fondness for this service dates back to the wonderful ways my parents centered our young family's hearts on the coming Christ Child—nightly devotions around an Advent wreath; velvet pulled from my mom's sewing room dresser, then fashioned lovingly into each year's special Christmas dress; songs carefully memorized in English and German; and, in our Connecticut mission congregation, our own individual recitations perfected for our newborn King.

Recorded fragments of these songs and recitations for our faraway Wisconsin grandparents still remain, permanently documenting my younger brother's enthusiastic and innocent rendition of "Glory to the Burger King!"

Fragrant paper bags of candy, oranges, and nuts were our thanks, but the shining eyes of the congregation told us more. We, like the angels, but off-key and imperfectly, had proclaimed the great good news! "For unto you is born this day in the

city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11 King James Version).



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SHORTLY BEFORE mid-November 2021, my father-in-law, Pastor Don Thompson, had a gallstone that moved and blocked a duct to his pancreas. By the time he started having symptoms, he was already very sick. He was diagnosed with pancreatitis and, within a couple days, was septic and in multi-organ failure. His organs never recovered, and he died Dec. 15, 2021.

As Don's death was getting close, my mother-in-law, Maxine, said that she kept thinking of the lyrics to "O Come, All Ye Faithful" with the phrases of "choirs of angels" and "citizens of heaven." Then she started singing it: "Sing, choirs of angels." We all joined in, "Sing in exultation, sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!" and kept going.

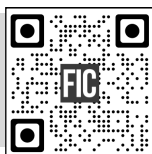
Don died as we sang this hymn to him. Hearing is considered the last sense to fade before death, so I like to think that as Don took his last earthly breaths, he heard us singing to him about choirs of angels. Then, in the next moment, he was a heavenly citizen with those very choirs of angels, face-to-face with his Savior who paid for his and all humankind's sins.

Shortly after Don's funeral, we found ourselves watching our children's Christmas Eve service. As the children sang this classic Christmas hymn, tears filled our eyes again.

Friends, that's what makes the blessing of Christmas so special. There are tears of missing the wonderful people God has placed into our lives, whether it's a parent, grandparent, spouse, or whomever it is, dear reader, you too are missing. Yet we also have tears of joy that God sent his Son, announced by angels, to this earth to make death but a door to heaven and to give us a citizenship that will never spoil, fade, or perish. My friends, sing with the choirs of angels that a Savior has been born to us. He is Christ, our Lord.



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