**Christmas Around the World**

**Narrator 1**

Welcome to this year’s Sunday school Christmas program.  This year’s theme is Christmas Around the World.  Join us today as we hear the story of the first Christmas and share the many traditions of the children in our multi-cultural parish.

*Santa and children enter from Narthex.*  *Children crowd Santa and each shouts what they want for Christmas.*

I want a doll, I want a video game, I want a iPad….

**Santa:** Kids, Kids, all I hear is I want, I want, I want.  Christmas is not all about getting things.  It’s about giving.  Giving to those whom we love, giving to have been kind and generous to us and giving to those who are needy.  The history of giving at Christmas dates back to the very first Christmas over 2,000 years ago.

**Child 1:** Can you tell us the story of the first Christmas?

**Santa:** Better yet, let’s take a look……

**Narrator 1:**  The Romans had conquered much of the then known world. Judea and Samaria, what we know today as Israel, were included in their conquests. The Emperor Augustus ordered that a census be taken in all his lands. He needed to know how many people lived in the empire so he could tax them. Everyone had to go to the town of their family's origin to register for the census. This meant that Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem.

**Narrator 2 :** Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth and it was a great distance from Bethlehem. It was about 100 miles over very rugged roads. Mary was expecting the baby and it was almost time for her to give birth. Bethlehem was a small town. By the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem there was no place for them to stay. Joseph tried very hard to find a place to sleep that evening. There was no room at the inn.

*Mary and Joseph enter from the Narthex, stopping at two spots before they reach the altar. Approaching first Innkeeper*

**Joseph** Is there room here for us to stay?

**Innkeeper 1 :**We have no room for you here. Check down the road. Maybe you will have better luck there.

*Approaching the second Innkeeper and child, Joseph asks:*

**Joseph :** Do you have any place for us to rest?

**Mary:** I am very tired and we have had such a long journey

**Innkeeper 2:** I’m sorry there is no room at the inn but there is a shelter in the back you can use for the night.

**Innkeeper’s child :** It’s where the animals stay!

**Mary:** Thank you

**Narrator 3:** Finally, Joseph found a cave-like place where they could rest. This place was used by shepherds to protect their sheep in stormy weather. It was here that Mary gave birth to Jesus. The baby was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the straw in the manger.

*Shepherds enter from Narthex herding their sheep. As they approach right side of altar the Narration continues.*

**Narrator 4:**  Now, that night the shepherds were out in the fields guarding their sheep. Suddenly, there was a bright light which startled the shepherds. The light was so bright that it turned the night into daylight. The shepherds were afraid.  Nothing like this had ever happened. Soon an angel appeared and calmed them. The angel said:

*(Children hold up stars with a large bright star one in the center. Shepherds react to bright light and cower as an angel approaches)*

**Angel :** "Fear not for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior; which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12).

**Narrator 3:** Then a larger group of angels appeared. They praised and glorified God and sang,

*Angels* in unison:  "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

**Narrator 3** When the angels finished singing, they disappeared and the light began to fade. It became dimmer and dimmer until it was dark again. The shepherds were awed. They didn't know what to do. Finally, they decided to leave their flocks of sheep and go to Bethlehem. They decided that they wanted to see for themselves what the angels had told them. When they got to Bethlehem, they found Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus. They fell to their knees and adored Jesus.

**Shepherd 1:** Look over there, there is a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes!

**Shepherd 2:** We have found the Son of God!

**Shepherd 3 :** Let us fall on our knees and offer him our love. That is all that we have to give.

**Narrator 4:** Some Wise Men came from the East for they knew of the coming of Jesus. They had seen a star that told them that a new king had been born to the Jews. They followed the star and were looking for the child. At this time the governor of Judea was King Herod. He was a wicked man and was feared and hated by the people.

**Wise Man 1 :** King Herod, thank you for the invitation to your palace.

**Wise Man 2 :** We are looking for he who has been born King of the Jews?

**Herod :** I know you are looking for this new king.  Go out and find him so I can go and worship him also.

**Wise Man 3 :** We are following the star and will let you know when we find him.

*(Wise Men Depart)*

**Narrator 5 :** The Wise Men went on to look for Jesus. The Star led them to Jesus and Mary. When the Wise Men found Jesus, they fell to their knees and worshipped Him. They gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Wise Men left but did not return to Herod. They had a dream that warned them that Herod wanted to harm Jesus. Instead, they returned to their native country by a different route.

**Child 2 :** I see.  Gold, frankincense and myrrh – those were the first Christmas gifts!

**Child 3 :** These wise men didn’t ask for anything from the Son of God but gave gladly.  Can we go back and give Baby Jesus gifts too?

**Santa –** Of course you can.  So many of you have relatives and friends from all over the world.  Why don’t you give the baby Jesus something from their culture or tradition?

**Child 4 –** I’ll go first.  I come from the country of Georgia.  In Georgia the biggest celebrations are on New Year’s Day. We visit each other’s home and share a cheese and bread called Katachapouri.

*Each child offering a gift approaches the infant Jesus and faces the audience to present and explain their gift.*

**Santa :**  It looks like we all now have a good idea of the true meaning of Christmas.  We have many Saints who we honor that gave selflessly to others.  St. Nicholas, the original Santa Claus, had a reputation for secret gift-giving to the poor.  He would put coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him.  In Germany, December 6th is St. Nicholas' Day and "der Nikolaus" brings some small gifts, such as sweets and chocolate, to the children. He comes in the night between the 5th and the 6th and puts the presents into the shoes of the children.

**Narrator 1:** The tradition of giving and generosity to the poor has been handed down from the teachings of Jesus to modern times.  Let us all take away the lessons of kindness and good will. Please join us in singing “Joy to the World”

Possible Countries:

Russia, Ethiopia, Greece, Syria

Lebanon - People in Lebanon often decorate their Christmas trees with orange peels cut into different shapes. They also serve sugared almonds. I have a gift of oranges and almonds.