

## Why a Pageant in Pictures?

For the last number of years, my parish has been opting for an all-ages Pageant in Pictures rather than a classic, scripted Nativity Play. A few reasons. First, we're a really small parish. This is manageable for us. We simply do not have enough kids or the volunteer bandwidth to do a typical nativity play. Over the years, even in places with lots of kids and resources, we were finding it a challenge to get families to commit to rehearsals and so on. And it seemed that every year, an actor in a leading role would get sick or some families would feel left out because of scheduling issues at Christmas when the play was performed.

So with that experience in mind, I tried something different. I pulled out all the costumes one Sunday afternoon in mid-November. I had advertised for a few weeks inviting anyone who wanted to pose in a picture to stay after church. I invited all ages, the tall and the small. I pulled a script from Godly Play's "A Liturgy for Christmas Eve". Godly Play imagines slowly adding figures to the creche scene. I decided to do it big, tableau style, with costumed members of the parish.

A few things happened. The parish had fun doing it and the adults loved a chance to be playful. Taking the pictures way in advance resolved a lot of scheduling conflicts. A few extras could be added at a later date – we have generally done this with Baby Jesus. We rarely have an infant in the congregation, but we invited parishioners to source images of their new grandchildren posed in neutral clothing and we added the baby in. In addition, when we "air" the pageant, participants get the opportunity to see themselves in the story. One Christmas Eve, a little child cried out, "that's us! We're in the story!" What further sermon on the Incarnation could you possibly need?

The pictures go into a slideshow. We've been able to upload it as a video with the audio of the narrator and the carols to form an online option. This was particularly helpful in the COVID years and for families to circulate to loved ones at a distance. I have also reused the slideshow as part of other programs, like a PA Day camp in December. The script from Godly Play calls for snippets of several different Christmas carols to help tell the story. This resolved another problem. Every Christmas, someone tells me at the door "that was nice, Reverend, but we didn't sing my favourite carol." By incorporating so many partial carols, more folks go home feeling like they've sung and heard their favourites.

One of my favourite parts is that the work of the pageant can be done and dusted before the madness of Advent begins. It is easy to "air" on Christmas Eve – it just needs the congregation to sing a few carols and someone at the projector to advance the slides in succession. It is a huge piece of work off my plate at the busiest time of the year.