Intergenerational Worship

Year A – Christmas Proper 1 Dec 24-25 Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

What is this: Intergenerational Liturgy of Prayers and stories to accompany Christmas Bowl offering.

Introduction
Two Stories
Opening Prayer
Bible Presentation
Offering Prayers
Music and Offering
Sending out
Additional Music ideas

Where it’s used: Christmas celebrations, assemblies, services; any intergenerational gathering, but specifically Lectionary based gatherings.

Time: 25 minutes (but can be used in smaller parts):


Two Christmas Stories, Two Christmas Gifts – Christmas Bowl liturgy resource.
For use with Act for Peace Christmas Bowl appeal

Introduction

Today we are thinking about two stories – side by side.
Both real.
Both important, and helpful for us as we try to live well in the world.
There are many things they share in common – that are close to the same. And there are some differences, too.

In Zimbabwe in 2016, a young woman called Beauty, is worrying about feeding her child. She is a poor farmer, she lives on the land.

In the Christmas story, from 2000 years ago, a young woman called Mary, is concerned about the safety of her little baby boy - Jesus. She is a poor peasant, she lives on the land too.

For the young woman called Beauty in Zimbabwe – there are many threats to her safety and to her child: war and conflict has affected her country. Powerful leaders make decisions bringing injustice and violence across the land. Mothers and children suffer harm, hunger, and homelessness.
For the young woman called Mary in the Christmas story - there are many threats to her and her child Jesus: conflict and the violence of powerful leaders will bring suffering and injustice to many, including children.

We pause to pray and remember all the families of the world, today, in the past, and those in the future who are vulnerable to violence, stuck in spaces of suffering harm, hunger and homelessness.

The birth of Jesus, which we celebrate each year at Christmas is like a huge sign post in history that God sees and cares about the lives of children, of struggling mothers, of those who are caught up in war and violence, injustice and pain. People in poverty, pain, worry and war matter to God.

Beauty and her child are a signpost in our time that what God cares about most isn’t made right yet. And that we can accept God’s call to help.

*Presentation Ideas

#1 Create two ‘models’ that represent Beauty and Mary
- **Dress two girls in appropriate approximations of contemporary Zimbabwean and Ancient Palestinian clothes**
- **Give them each a baby doll**
- **Surround them with ‘context’ items eg: crops, soldiers (of the correct period/style) made from sturdy cardboard and held in place by volunteers.**
- **Finally add a signpost over each girl (held by volunteers); over Beauty ‘Not right! Please help!!!’; over Mary ‘God sees and cares’.

#2 Create a slideshow that contrasts images of the two women in the narrative.
- **Use images form the Christmas Bowl resources to create a montage of Beauty’s life and context.**
- **Use news headlines to fill space creating context for Beauty and Mary.**

#3 show the video of Beauty from the Act for Peace
Opening Prayer

(Reader 1)
Great and Loving God,
You know all our stories – you know the big stories of the universe, the big stories of history, and the small stories of each person’s life, each family.

(Reader 2)
Great and Loving God,
You have given us other stories – old and strange stories that make us wonder. That help us to ask questions – Big questions about the universe, Big questions about how to live in the world, Big questions about being human together.

(Reader 3)
Great and Loving God
We are part of your amazing story, and you have made yourself an amazing part of our story too. Although we often imagine you, our God, as being very Big – In the Christmas story you appear very small – a tiny child. This is a mighty Big wonder to us. And makes us ask more Big questions about what is important – Big things, little things? It makes us look again at your Big story. And it makes us think again about the Big problems of the world – like harm, hunger and homelessness.

(All)
Great and Loving God
Be with us in this time today.

Amen

*Presentation ideas for Opening Prayer

- With a small team of volunteers, create a sequence of simple choreography which expresses the contrasts of Big and Small in this prayer.
- For example: use hands to make a simple ‘open book’ sign each time the word ‘Story’ or ‘Stories’ occurs.
- Use arms to gesture ‘Big’ and ‘Small’
- Divide your troupe in to two groups. Stagger the groups in two rows. When it is a group’s turn to gesture they step forward to execute their move. This will create an additional sense of movement and flow, as the rows are continually alternating backwards and forwards.

- Simply ask three readers of different ages to read each of the prayers.


Bible Reading Presentation

*This reading should be presented by one person completely genuinely as a 'straight' presenter. The second person ‘assistant’ should be clearly in exaggerated mime character. Some kind of simple costuming (all black, for example) will help define their role. This character will use large exaggerated actions to express the point in the text that refer to ‘Big’ and ‘Small’ things in the text. Use a range of generic ‘Big’ and ‘small’ actions, but vary these slightly to interpret the text.*

Introduction:

Our Bible reading today tells of one of the biggest moments in the whole of God’s story…but it’s the moment in which God comes as the smallest child.

As we read, we are going to listen for the Big stuff, as well as how God cares about the small stuff, just as much. My assistant here is going to help us keep track of the Big things (assistant extended arms to maximum breath exaggerating the strain it takes) and the little things. (assistant exaggerated action of straining to see something miniscule held between their thumb and forefinger.)

The reading is from Luke chapter 2, verses 1 to 20.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus (Big) that all the world (Bigger) should be registered.

This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. (Big)

All went to their own towns to be registered.
Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth (small)

in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting (Big – pregnant tummy) a child. (Small – cradle a child)

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 
And she gave birth to her firstborn son (Small)

and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, (Big) and the glory of the Lord shone around them, (Bigger) and they were terrified. (Small)
But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news (Big) of great joy (Bigger) for all the people: (Even bigger) to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child (Small) wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” (Smaller)

And suddenly there was with the angel (Big) a multitude of the heavenly host, (Bigger) praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Even bigger)

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child (Small) lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; (Small... but Big, Bigger, Biggest!)

and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. (Small) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God (Big) for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Music suggestions

**God in a Bod** – connect this song to the second gift – repeating the phrases used in the Offering liturgy to introduce the song:

‘The second gift is the child Jesus. And this is a very great gift. We might not guess it at the time, but this little child, is truly, really God. God in a Bod – a human body’

The print music has instructions for actions suitable for all primary ages. These should be led, preferably by students who have learned them well and can demonstrate and model them enthusiastically in a ‘larger than life’ way.

**Shepherd’s Song** (Beth Barnett, Christmas Resource) – This is a high energy, high action song which follows up the Luke narrative, and also connects particularly well with the offering prayer liturgy:

Angles sing it out.
Shepherds run and check it out.
Wise star gazers from the far east figure it out.
God arriving here in this little child Jesus, born to a poor peasant woman shows us who God cares about, and how God cares.
Offering Prayer
Along with our two stories, today we are thinking about two gifts.

The first gift is this beautiful wonderful world. God has given us a world that is made to work well and provide plenty for all. What a great gift! But a gift we all must decide what to do with – and how to share it amongst all of us. Not just us here – but us everywhere.

And so we pray:

_Loving God, today, as we bring our Christmas Bowl gifts we are joining in with what you want – that the gift of this world is shared fairly and generously with everyone, not just a few. Let it be so. Amen._

The second gift is the child Jesus. And this is a very great gift. We might not guess it at the time, but this little child, is truly, really God.

Angels sing it out.
Shepherds run and check it out.
Wise star gazers from the far east figure it out.
God arriving here in this little child Jesus, born to a poor peasant woman shows us who God cares about, and how God cares.

Who does God cares about? – Everyone! – because we all begin in the same way – as tiny little precious babies, God gives himself as a baby, so we know that we are all included in God’s care.

And so we pray:

_Loving God, We pray that our care includes everyone – Big and Small, too. We pray for the work of aid in Zimbabwe. We pray for women like Beauty, striving to feed their families with small resources against big obstacles. WE pray for the project to help farms flourish and foods supplies to grow. Amen._

How does God care? – God cares by getting involved. God gets close to us. He becomes a human and shares our experience: God shares in the experiences of being little, and in the Big stuff too - of suffering, of fear, of violence. God cares by getting involved.

And so we pray:

_Loving God, we pray that our care we get us involved with others too. Help us to come alongside others. Let no problem or issue in your world be too big or too little for us to care. We pray for the gifts we have brought for those who live in Zimbabwe, struggling in big issues of sustainability, power, conflict and fear. We pray these gifts would make a big difference. Amen._

So as we bring forward our Christmas Bowl gifts and symbols, we think and pray for the big and little problems of the world.
Music

As the offering is brought forward, play ‘The Voice’ (Beth Barnett, Welcoming Voices: Communities of Love and Justice. 2011) audio, slides and sheet music here: http://ctm.uca.edu.au/children-and-families/additional-advent-resources/

This song was written specifically for young people in school and community settings to connect the social justice themes and biblical themes of Christmas.

- Play the recording of this song with slide show as a reflection, as representatives from each class or group bring forward symbols of the gifts they have gathered for the Christmas Bowl.
- Or if you have a choral group, the song may be learned and presented live.

Sending out

Loving God –
Thank you for the Stories we have heard and told today, and the gifts we have given and received today. Thank you, especially for the gift of Jesus to the whole world, showing your love and care, and your call to us to join in with you as you set things right. Send us out into your Big wide world. May we take your Big Story with us. Whether we are Big or Small, we know you are with us, loving us and calling us to serve the smallest who need help in your big world.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit,

Amen.