

# Christmas Pageants 2020

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# Introduction

If we've learned anything this year, we've learned to adapt. We've had to let go of a lot. For many or most of us, we'll also have to let go of the traditional Christmas pageant, seeing our kids on the altar steps, huddled together in their adorable costumes, leading the congregation in "Joy to the World" and "Silent Night." So, it's OK to grieve a little, as we console ourselves by remembering that Jesus will still come, traditional pageant or not.

However, we can also see this year as an opportunity to do something different. And maybe you're someone who has wanted to do something different with your pageant – you may even think it's gotten a bit stale – but there's always that person at the church meeting who says "But we've always done it another way!" Well, here is your opportunity to experiment and see what you can come up with.

You might want to check out another booklet on the PRC website called ["New Ways of Doing the Christmas Pageant"](#) for more ideas and links.

## Keep it simple

You may be doing your pageant in a different place than usual or doing it virtually, so you can expect to encounter some challenges. With all that's going on in the world, many of us are stressed and tired, so keep your pageant plans simple.

Have a simple script. You can take the words directly out of the Bible. The passages from Matthew and Luke are beautiful and meaningful to adults and it's wonderful for children to hear the actual passages from scripture.

Consider having no speaking parts and have participants act out the scenes read by narrators.

If you need to make costumes and props, keep them simple. Pinterest has lots of ideas for simple and no-sew costumes such as a shepherd's costume made from a striped towel and angel wings made from paper plates or coffee filters. For animal costumes, children can dress in solid colors like brown and grey. You can use a hat or headband to attach ears, noses, and whiskers. If you're doing a virtual pageant and you think they'll be OK with it, have your families create their own costumes. You can even give out prizes for most original costume, most colorful, etc. If you have costumes and props

already and you're doing a virtual pageant, you can drop these off at people's homes or have a drive-by drop-off at your church.

By simplifying your Christmas pageant, you may be able to get away with just one rehearsal, which might even be held right before the actual pageant, or even have a pageant without any rehearsals at all.

## Where to hold your pageant

You'll need to decide whether your pageant will be indoors, outdoors, or virtual. Take into consideration the COVID-19 safety guidelines for your local town or city, your state, and even your local denominational organization.

If you're considering an indoor pageant, then you'll need a large space with good ventilation. You really only want to consider an indoor pageant if you've already gone back to indoor worship and have protocols already in place. For the pageant itself, will you be able to socially distance children who aren't in the same household? Will the children wear masks? Are your children mature enough to follow instructions about distancing and masks? We all have stories to tell about runaway sheep or shepherds fighting with their staffs during rehearsal or pageants. Another consideration is that the high-risk people of your congregation won't be able to attend your pageant. So, if you do decide on an indoor pageant, make sure you livestream or tape it so that everyone can enjoy it. To me, all this adds up to a "no" for an indoor pageant this year, however, it may be possible with innovations. I know of one church which is offering a hybrid pageant. They have gone back to in-person worship but only have a few older children attend services. They've decided those children will be the narrators in the sanctuary and the younger children will be filmed ahead of time and the video shown as the narrators speak.

Some churches were offering outdoor pageants even before the pandemic. Outdoor possibilities include a Living Nativity, Drive-by Pageant, or Stations of the Nativity.

A Living Nativity usually includes live people and may also have live animals. Often there is an intergenerational cast who may pantomime actions as a narrator reads or a recording is played. This type of pageant with people standing close together is going to be difficult unless everyone is from the same household. You may be able to work around this by having siblings play the parts of characters who need to be near each other and having nonrelated groups social distance from each other. Another difficulty with a Living Nativity is it's usually performed before a crowd. If that's the case, they'll need to have mask wearing and social distancing.

For a Drive-by Pageant, you'll need a long driveway or stretch of road where you can set up various scenes from the Christmas story, so people can follow the story as they go along. If you're not using audio, you can put up signs describing each of the tableaux.

I've heard Stations of the Nativity referred to as similar to the scenes of the haunted paths you see around Halloween time. Families can walk a path to see scenes of the Christmas story, like those in a Drive-by Pageant. You may include live people or substitutes for them, or just scenery. To avoid overcrowding, families can sign up for time slots. Depending on your church building and safety regulations, stations could also be sent up in various areas of your church building or in your sanctuary.

Outdoor pageants can be difficult in cold weather and you may have people who will want to go inside your building to use the restrooms, so plan accordingly.

Whether you're planning an outdoor or indoor pageant, be aware that depending on the number of COVID cases in your area, safety regulations may change at any time.

## Going virtual

To keep your children and congregation safe, you may decide to do an online pageant, using meeting software or video editing software.

Whether you are going to offer your online pageant live or recorded is a big consideration. A live broadcast is exciting but also may necessitate rehearsals and there is always the possibility that something will go wrong. Recording your pageant ahead of time allows you to be more creative and have a more polished performance.

Whether you record your pageant or offer it live, you can use meeting software to see all your children at once if they are a small group. Zoom is the most popular meeting software and the one most people are familiar with. Zoom allows you to "spotlight" a particular video feed, so you have that featured as the most prominent window. You can also select "Active Speaker" so that the person speaking is automatically spotlighted. Other products may have similar features.

If you are going to record your pageant, one option is to ask parents to film their child's segment of the pageant and then send it to you or someone in your congregation who is willing to help you with the technical side of your pageant. You can then use video editing software, such as iMovie for Apple products. Windows PCs used to include Movie Maker but that's no longer the case for Windows 10. Instead, they suggest using the Photos app that comes with Windows 10; the latest version includes the ability to

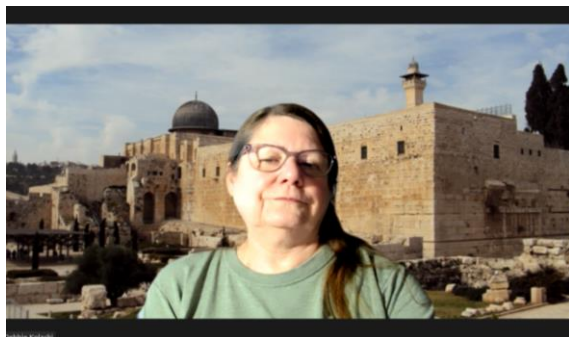
create and edit videos with music, text, motion, filters, and 3D effects. Video editing is not a field I'm knowledgeable about, so seek expert advice before selecting a video editor. PRC has a Facebook group called [Online Church from PRC](#) where you can ask questions and find links to information about technical and other aspects of doing church online. You can also check out the webinars on [PRC's website](#) and the articles and links in PRC's [Online Resource Center](#) on the website.

As many of you probably already know, group singing doesn't work online without some added help. There is an audio lag (latency) so by the time one singer's voice reaches another singer's speakers, there can be about a half-second delay. There are some ways to get around this. You can have recorded or instrumental music, or have children sing solos, or have each child sing one line from a carol. If you're musically and technically inclined or have someone with those gifts willing to help you, there is virtual choir software available so you can blend many voices together without the audio lag. PRC recently presented a series of webinars about virtual choirs and you watch the recordings of them by registering on our website: [www.prcli.org](http://www.prcli.org).

You might want to think about having an intergenerational online pageant. It can be fine for families to film their segments for a pageant together.

## Fun with Zoom

Zoom has some features which can be fun to use! You can create a virtual background from any photo. I found a holy land, sheep in the manger, and throne room photos on [Pixabay.com](http://Pixabay.com), which offers free copyright free photos.



Zoom recently added filters, which you may be familiar with from Snapchat. You can see two of the Zoom filters here – one is a halo and the other is a rabbit. Zoom has limited filters but you can add more using Snap Camera. [PC Magazine has an article](#) about how to do that.



If you plan carefully, you can make it look on Zoom like people are talking to each other or handing things to each other. One church asked each household to send video of them lighting a small white candle; then the videos were spliced together to produce a video of “Silent Night” playing. The instructions were to start recording with your right hand holding a lit candle out of the frame. Then move the candle into the frame and from your right hand to your left hand. (If there are additional people in the family, have them pass the light to each other down a line. The last person should move the candle out of the frame with their left hand.

For more tips about using Zoom for pageants and other dramas, check out the article from September 30, 2020, on the Building Faith website called [“Zoom Drama Tips: Using Technology for Biblical Storytelling.”](#)

If you are going to broadcast or post your recorded pageant video online where it can be accessed by people without a password, be aware that you will have to follow copyright guidelines for any copyright protected music, artwork, readings, etc.

## Do something different

Here are some fun ideas for an in-person or online pageant.

Instant pageants can be done with no rehearsals and may involve the whole congregation. They can also be a lot of fun. People can decide which character they want to be. Simple costumes can be distributed, or people can create their own costumes. A narrator reads the story and might say, “OK, now all the Marys wave. Now all the Josephs.” Or the narrator might ask all the sheep to say “Baa.” One type of instant pageant is the paper bag pageant where each person is given a paper bag which contains parts for the pageant and a simple costume. No one knows what’s in their bag. These can be dropped off ahead of time. After a signal is given, everyone opens their bags and puts their costumes on. A narrator reads the script and instructs characters about what they should do or say.

Why not have families film themselves talking about their favorite Christmas tradition, what Christmas means to them, or showing off their nativity sets or drawings of the Christmas story? You can even have them film themselves at familiar places around your town, looking for Jesus. Put all the segments together and then show the baby in the manger which they finally found.

Children can create paintings or dioramas of different parts of the Christmas story which are shown as the story is read.

You can create a stop-action pageant using Legos or clay.

Children can be news anchors and on-location reporters telling about Jesus' birth as it unfolds. They might interview the shepherds or the innkeeper. Linnae Peterson is in the process of writing a pageant in this format and is making it available at no cost. You can check it out at [facebook.com/LinnaeHPeterson](https://facebook.com/LinnaeHPeterson).

How about an online birthday party for Jesus?

You can use a children's Christmas book for your story. Have one or two narrators and various children acting out the actions of the characters. If you're going to make your online pageant accessible to people without using a password, then you will probably need to get permission from the publisher to do so. The same is true if you are using a purchased pageant script. During the pandemic, many publishers are being lenient about the use of their products online.

A fun intergenerational program could be based on Las Posadas, which is a traditional Mexican drama at Christmas time where children and adults go from house to house and sing about Mary and Joseph looking for shelter. Two children are dressed up as Mary and Joseph. They are refused at every house until they finally reach a destination called the posada (inn) where they are welcomed and allowed in. There is then a celebration party. To maintain social distancing, Mary and Joseph can be siblings and can be filmed separately from those refusing them shelter.

## Pageants to purchase

Karen Smith offers this list of pageants and pageant resources to purchase.

[Sanctified Art](#) is offering a bundle of 10 ministry resources for the season of Advent – Epiphany, following the RCL for Year B on the theme of “Those Who Dream.” A pageant script is not included but a creative person could be inspired to create their own from the materials. The resources are also sold separately.



[Group Publishing](#) offers two family ministry kits which can be used for in-person events or adapted for online use. They are The [Miracle of Christmas](#) and [A Night in Bethlehem](#).

[A Very Whirl Christmas](#) is based on Sparkhouse's Sunday school curriculum for children. It's a three-week curriculum that helps elementary students plan, practice, and perform a Christmas program in just three weeks.

[Ctainc.com](#) offers a free script and resource pack for [Miracle in the Manger](#), an interactive telling of the Christmas story told by a narrator and accentuated by the children responding "It's a Miracle!" Add-ons are available for purchase.

[Tumbuh](#) sells [The Greatest Digital Christmas Pageant Ever](#) which includes plans for a safe, socially-distanced alternative to traditional in-person pageants.

[Illustrated Ministry](#) will be releasing "Do Not Be Afraid" on October 20, 2020, a completely digital Christmas pageant than includes an illustrated family devotional and coloring page and poster.

## A closing prayer

As we plan for our Christmas pageants, let us ask God to use our time and efforts to help ourselves and others prepare our hearts for the birth of our Savior. Let us ponder what it means that Jesus is Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." He took on flesh and walked the earth with us, sharing in the delights and miseries of being human. Let it comfort us that, even in these sometimes-dark times, God is with us, now and always. Amen.

