

# Youth Worker Movement

Contemplative  
Christmastide  
Worship



# Why is a Contemplative Christmastide Worship?

## Or better yet, what the heck is a Contemplative Christmastide Worship?

As you may know there is a ton of things going on during this Advent / Christmastide. Parties, finals, buying presents, extra work, travel, family, church, and probably a few other things. Claiming an hour or so of sacred space in this manner during a church gathering time is a great way to help people refocus and refresh during a chaotic time. It is my hope that this gives you some inspired ideas to provide such sacred space.

Contemplative Worship, in my view & shared in this outline, is a worship experience that give open space to its participants to encounter and actively engage God through prayerful active experiences. The critical key that I can give to you in putting this together is to consider it prayerfully. Control is something you do not have when giving open space. That we leave to God to fill & in my decade of doing worship services similar to this one, God hasn't let me down showing up.

### **What You'll Need & What is so great about Christmastide**

The most awesome part about experiential worship this time of year.. It is practically spoon fed to us. There is so much rich imagery and experiential aspect to Christmas that you can't go wrong. Our aim here is to flip them a bit on the corner of their traditional usage. If you find yourself without one of the items in the materials list, no worries, find another item that could alternate.

### **What do I do?**

In my preparations, I do a lot of mediation and prayer over the scriptures and who our participants might be. To me, this is my worship experience. Beforehand the worship I gather all my materials ahead of time, then spend time setting up the prayer stations in areas of our worship space that allow for people to move freely without running into one another. Big rooms work really great, but you can use a series of rooms if needed. Sanctuaries can be cool spaces as well, just know you might have to ask forgiveness from those who protect the carpets.

Have some prepared thoughts to share on why you are offering open space (especially if it's the first time for something like this). Lead the liturgies and such, offer the sacred space, then let God take over from there. I'm giving you some ideas with some specifics, but not all. As I mentioned, the set up is part of your worship, so I'd hope you prayerfully consider the meditations specific for your group. But if it helps, I try to be descriptive enough where you can tell where I'd go normally.



# Order of Worship

gather everyone together in central spot

## Call to Worship

We welcome everyone to this sacred space and time of worship. We light this candle as a sign of Christ among us during this night

Response While Lighting the Candle: Christ be With Us

## Opening Prayer

Use a prayer from the Book of Worship for the Season, Lots of good stuff in there

## Opening Song

my suggestion "What Child is This"

## Open Sacred Space

Give permission to move about the room and engage in the prayer stations, or to just sit and be. This is a chaotic time in life, here is some time with God for however you all see fit to use it.

## Call Together

Have mentioned some method for signifying that you are going to re-gather. Ending of music, start of music, sound of bell chimes, etc.

## Sharing

It is always a good practice to have a time sharing what some experienced through the space.

## Closing

Close with a song then a simple prayer. Dismiss respecting the silence of the space



# Prayer Wreath

## Items Needed

- Wreath - Any one would do, but I like those which are made of weaved sticks
- Markers / Crayons / Pens - Okay, a writing implement
- Slips of paper - quarter
- Some fabric
- Table & Some Chairs
- Candle - Note: Battery Operated ones work well without fear of burning down the church
- Optional : Gardening Wire

## Prayer Wreath

At this wreath we are accepting the intercessory prayers of the worshipers. This is that space where we want participants to share who & what is on their hearts in prayer. The request is that they think about all the people that they coming in contact with over the season and who is in need of prayer, and what are they in need of prayer for. Write those people, the names, the things, that are on their heart to pray for. Roll up the slips of paper and stick them into the wreath.

## Set Up

Set up table and chairs where you desire, cloak the table with the fabric and place the wreath in the center (or at the side if you are needing the table for a second prayer station). Spread the papers around the wreath as well as the writing implements. Write the meditation on a sheet of paper or two. (for purposes of first time, I've included a sheet on how I'd write it.. well, type it).

## Options

If you have a large group then you can try doing a wired wreath without pine & seeing that the group will fill out the wreath with just the papers containing their prayers. Youth especially really get into intercessory prayer practices. Other options could be to draw a Christmas tree on a large poster board & then use post it notes to stick on it, much like an ornament. Some of you fancy office supply people are probably thinking you can get ornament shaped sticky notes. Some of you children's ministry types are thinking you can do a die-cut of an ornament.. Those are all awesome!

# Prayer Wreath

The Wreath is a symbol of eternity in our faith. God is eternal and our life with God is eternal.

*Hebrews 13 : 8 Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

**Take a moment to imagine all the people you know and will come in contact with this Christmastide.**

**Take a moment to imagine many of the people you do not know that you will pass by or hear about this Christmastide.**

**What are the Needs? What are the Joys? Who is Special?**

Write a prayer to God on behalf of these people and things. Use as many sheets as you need. Roll up the paper when you are done.

Stick the papers with your prayers on them into the Prayer Wreath as a symbolic lifting up to God's eternal.



# How Far Would You Go?

## Items Needed

- Printed maps of Holy Land or State & US Maps
- Big fancy White Light
- Chairs or Pillows
- Bibles
- Fabrics
- Candle or Lights to help read

## How Far Would You Go?

One of the remarkable stories of Christ birth is the actions of the wise men and shepherds. Now I don't know about you, but I've heard about the birth of a lot of children, but never have I made more than a 30-40 minute drive to downtown to go and see one. If they are in another town, well, I'll just wait to see them on Facebook. It really takes some commitment to embark on a trek, and to see a child of people you've never met. Maybe it is me, but I find that fascinating. So we sit here and ask our selves as we read the scriptures of the two groups of people. How long did they go? What kept them going? Surely they wanted to stop? What did they tell people along the way? How far would I go for you Jesus? If you want, have the group draw on the maps with markers or crayons what their answers to those questions might be.

## Set Up

The key to this set up is to get a light that can symbolize the Star of Bethlehem. In the past I have used a disco ball (which was probably my favorite), some balled up rope lighting (very accessible this time of year), a flood lamp behind some black butcher paper with a hole punched in it.. You get my idea. Stage seating in front of the light with bible bookmarked for Luke 2 & Matthew 2. Also have maps; topographical, highway, old Holy Land print outs, whatever you prefer.

## Options

You can also do this as a walking path. Use roll of butcher paper with drawings and sayings on the pathway of paper. Can weave it in and out of the rest of the worship space if you like. Don't have paper? Can use masking or painters tape to highlight a pathway.



# Choir of Angels

## Items Needed

- Hymnals - Bookmarked to the Christmas Hymns
- Caroling Song books - Cokesbury & UpperRoom have versions of these
- Some lighting - Candles or Lamp
- Angel Imagery - Powerpoint or Large print
- Bible

## Choir of Angels

In Luke 2 we hear of the Choir of Angels bursting into song. Have you ever just burst into song? It's a pretty cool feeling, a lot of fun and joy when that happens. Have you ever just burst into song during a Christmas service? I'm not sure I have ever done that. Here give an open space to say, grab another person, find a song and then start singing. Get a third person, then sing some more. Find another person and sing another song, or the same song again. Welcome others to your choir.

## Set Up

This one is rather simple, the most complicated part is figuring out how to make it easiest to offer song options. The caroling books are great for their size and concentration of content. The hymnal is a bit more expansive. I might suggest making copies of songs if that didn't infringe on some copyright issues. Maybe you can type a song sheet. Make the space open, maybe even central to the rest of the worship area. Finding imagery could be easy, just do an image search on Google for Choir of Angels, you'll get some interesting results, but some great ones as well. Print those out, put them in some picture frames. If you can do powerpoint set up a rolling series of images.

## Options

You can use this prayer station to close the worship as well, ending in a song that you heard sung.



# Part of the Story

## Materials Needed

- Nativity Scene
- Clay - Sculpty Playdough
- Fabric
- Bible
- Wipes
- Tables / Chairs

## Part of the Story

Nativity scenes are all over the place when it comes to Christmas. I personally have our family nativity scene (the nice fragile one) we have two kids nativity's (one is plastic cartoony animals & the other is cloth dolls, Mary is kind of scary in that version). What is so bothersome to me is that we hardly ever assume we can insert ourselves into the nativity.. Until today. As a practice similar to guided meditation, we want read through the scriptures of the birth of Christ. Imagine the scene at Christ's birth. Imagine, where are you in that scene of Christ's birth? What are you doing? Who and what is around you? Take the clay or sculpty playdough and create yourself and the things around you that belong at the nativity, because you belong there.

## Set Up

You will want to set up table with fabric covering. Have one or two nativity scenes on the table. Set the sculpting clay in bowls or free standing around the tables edges. Put the meditation nearby the clay. Have some wipes on the floor for cleaning hands, depending on the type of clay you might use.

## Options

You could just have the participants create the nativity with the clay, but in my opinion, they'd probably just start creating a nativity scene they've already conceived of.. But if you are without one, that could be an option. If you can't get clay material you can do paper dolls. Remember, it isn't so much the end result as the active meditation on the scriptures we are looking for.





# Make One on Your Own

## Materials Needed

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### **I'm calling this one?**

My inspiration is?

My imagery is?

The active encounter is?

I want it to look something like?

### **Set Up**

How will people best engage this?

How don't I burn the building down?

### Options

I believe that these types of experiences are very community specific. So making one with your community in mind and from your heartfelt meditations is going to make this so much better. We've got you started, now work with God to put a capsule on it.

Thanks for checking this out!

I'm a 16 year youth ministry veteran of short term mission camps, junior high volunteering, small church staffing, large church staffing, and even spent some time as a retreat worship leader (even though I can only play a few chords on the guitar and generally can't sing in tune).

I started developing contemplative worship experiences 8 years ago when my pre-school teacher trained self got involved with my monastic tendencies. It was a strange mess. Not to long ago if you typed in 'prayer stations' in google you'd find a resourcing from my blog. I'm sure I'm somewhere around there still, but there are a lot more people trying this out these days.

You can find more ideas from me on the Worship Feast Prayer Stations CD-Rom (yes, that old) that I did for Abingdon Press. My friends Lilly & Dan have a cool book Sacred Spaces you should check out. But for you liturgical types, check out the UK's "Alt Worship" scene.

You can find more of my thoughts on my blog <http://www.gavoweb.com> or on twitter @gavoweb or facebook <http://www.facebook.com/gavoweb>

shalom  
-gavin

