

Christmas Eve

SERVICE GUIDE

In past years I've created Christmas Eve guides with just readings and underscores. Not so with this new guide - it contains *everything* you need (underscores, readings and Christmas carols) for your Christmas Eve worship.

Since praise team members are usually scarce on Christmas Eve, you can conduct this worship service with only 3 participants: a worship leader, a capable pianist and a pastor (for the sermon.)

You can get as elaborate as you want. Do all the readings with one person or select different elders/deacons and/or members of the congregation for each reading (make sure the people you select have expression and are committed to practicing with the included demos.) Or, just play the MP3 vocal demos of the readings. Have a pianist or a full band lead the carols. I actually prefer the more intimate setting of a piano, acoustic guitar and perhaps a bass guitar.

This guide is based on the "lessons and carols" format made popular by King's College in Cambridge, England. I've adapted the format with my own selections of Scripture and my HymnCharts.com contemporary carol arrangements and have used it successfully for many Christmas Eves.

The purpose of Christmas Eve is not to have a full-blown service but to simply have a time of reflection and worship. Many times our Christmas Eve service was only 45 minutes and never more than an hour (you might do several services back to back on Christmas Eve to accommodate your congregation.)

My prayer is that this guide will help your people catch their breath and remember the true meaning of Christmas as they worship the newborn King.

Don Chapman

Ideas for using the Christmas Eve Service Guide:

>What you'll need to provide for your Christmas Eve service:

1. Up to 6 narrators. One person can do all the narration or pick a different person for each narration. Burn a CD or email your narrators the MP3 vocal demo and MP3 track so they can practice their timing. *The key to the service guide is the uninterrupted music flow!*

2. Sermon. There's a slot for the pastor's sermon.

3. Alternate Scripture. The KJV version is provided here for the Scripture readings, but you may have a favorite translation you'd rather use. Try "The Message" version for a contemporary reading.

4. Candles. You'll need candles if you choose to have the congregation light candles during the *Silent Night* piano solo at the end of the service after the sermon (or receive the offering.) Find small candles with wax drip guards and purchase enough for every member of the congregation. Have the candles under their seats. The pastor, worship leader or ushers will light their own candles, then light the candles of people at the start of each row, then these people will light the candle of the person sitting next to them, and so on. All this will happen during the *Silent Night* piano solo. At the end of the piano solo, the worship leader will lead the congregation, with their candles still lit, in an acapella version of the first verse of *Silent Night*. You'll sing it in the same key as the piano solo so you can flow right out of the solo into the singing.

>Tips for using the Christmas Eve service guide:

1. Scarce musicians. It can be difficult for smaller churches to find musicians on Christmas Eve. Burn a CD of the underscores and vocal demos and play it in lieu of using musicians. An entire MP3 track combining all the underscores and music in order can be purchased separately, with or without vocal narration.

2. Keyboard player. The entire service can be conducted with a single, capable pianist. Have a keyboard player accompany the narration by playing the underscores under the narration (the underscores have chords so a guitarist can play along, too.) You will want to have a short rehearsal with the pianist and narrators to make sure their timing is perfect.

3. Change keys. Finale files are provided which will allow you to change the key if you own Finale or Sibelius software. However, *I do not recommend changing the keys as the underscores are designed to transition you from song to song in the keys I've selected.*

4. Logo. A Photoshop file and TIFF file is included of the "Christmas Eve" logo so you can reproduce it in your bulletin.

5. PowerPoint files. Standard definition PowerPoint files are provided for the songs. Widescreen blank slides are included if you want to build your own slides in that format.

6. Solos/Special Music. If you want a longer Christmas Eve service and have the musicians to pull it off, add a solo or choir special to the mix. You might include a favorite solo from one of your Christmas Sundays or a choir special from a cantata performed by a smaller ensemble if your full choir isn't available.

I've created the service to fit together perfectly by key (most of the underscores change key to segue into the next song) so I only see one good place to insert special music: **right after *What Child Is This* and before Underscore 3. A solo like *Mary Did You Know* would work great thematically here.**

7. Easy solo option: Since *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks* is a lesser-known carol and the range is quite wide, it would make a great vocal solo.

8. *What Child Is This* relies on an acoustic guitar to carry the first verse. If only a piano is used, let the congregation sing the first verse acapella, or have the pianist play the chord at the beginning of the measure.

How to use this service guide:

Each part of this Christmas Eve Service Guide is on one page. Print out all the pages for all your narrators so they can follow along and mark their parts.

The final page is a one page, at-a-glance overview so those involved can see the entire program.

If you're using the MP3 underscores, make sure the narrators have a chance to practice with them. Feel free to burn a CD or email the MP3s to them so they can make sure their narrations fit the music. The keyboard underscores are composed with repeats making them more flexible.

Dead space kills a worship service! Both the keyboard underscores and MP3 underscores are designed to help you flow directly into the next song. If you're using the MP3s, wait until you hear the final chord - the chord will ring out for a few seconds giving you time to start playing the introduction to the next song.

Questions or comments? Contact us at h2ghelp@heartstogod.com.