

IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE?
*(THAT THERE IS A STORY SO POWERFUL
IT CAN STOP WAR?)*
Written by Ray Friesen
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On the pages following is the script of a Christmas Eve service held at Zion Mennonite Church and offered here for use by anyone interested in using it.

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A few notes of explanation:

1. The choir songs were chosen largely by what was available in our choir's repertoire. At Zion the choir sings mainly during Advent and has basically 5 one-hour practices. You may have more options. Feel free to use other pieces of music as you see fit.
2. The song "*Christmas in the Trenches*" is essential to the script. There is another song, based on the same story, sung by Colin Raye on his CD, "The Gift." I became aware of this song on December 23, too late to incorporate into the script. I'm not sure where or how it would fit but you may want to try. If you use it, I would appreciate hearing about it. One place it might fit is on page 7, right after Reader 3 says: "If it has done it once, twice, three times, it can do it again, this story of a baby born."
3. The Grandmother. This could also be a Grandfather, or anyone else for that matter. I suggest a grandparent to create the effect of grandparents telling the stories of faith that are passed on. We include this every year in our Christmas Eve service and alternate between grandmothers and grandfathers.
4. We sing carols by candlelight at the end, for about 15 to 20 minutes. Since the purchase of the right equipment, we project the words onto a screen using PowerPoint.
5. If you have some lighting options, incorporate them into the script. I have not included them since each building is different in what it has available. The lights in the sanctuary would be off, of course, after the second congregational song.
6. We had the readers sitting on kitchen or bar stools toward one side of the stage, leaving room on the other half for the nativity scene. That left the centre for the solo and Isaiah.
7. In our service we had someone play the part of Isaiah. This was the only memorization that was required. He was in costume.
8. Pages 5-6 include 5 stories that give examples of people who knew the story and the difference it made. Use as many or as few of these as you think you have time for, or substitute stories of people you know. We used three in our Christmas Eve service—Martin Luther King, Jr., Columbia, & one of the other ones.

I hope you find this material helpful and that as the result of using it, your congregation will find Christmas meaningful and hopeful, as well as peace-full.

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(a table on stage should have the four Advent candles and the Christ candle, all lit. A table with stool is nice to have somewhere on stage, for Isaiah [see below]. Table should have an open scroll and a quill with ink pot.)

Choir: Sing a joyful allelujah

Congregation: Angels we have heard on high

Welcome

Congregation: Comfort, comfort, O my people (vs. 1 & 3)

*after verse 3, piano or organ continues to play while soloist and readers take their places.
Sanctuary lights off.*

SOLO: “Christmas in the Trenches”¹

READER 1: Do you think that’s really possible?

READER 2: Is what really possible?

READER 1: Do you think it is possible that there is a story so powerful that it could stop war?

READER 3: Probably not.

READER 2: Why not?

READER 3: Then people would be telling it and war would be no more.

READER 1: Think of the difference it would make, if there was really such a story, and if we could tell it!

READER 2: The difference it would make for the children of Iraq.

READER 1: The difference it would make for the mothers of Baghdad

READER 2: For the people of N. Ireland and Bosnia and Afghanistan.

READER 1: Istanbul and Ramallah and Jerusalem.

READER 2: For the people and churches and pastors of Columbia.

READER 1: If there was really such a story, so powerful, that it could stop war.

READER 2: There used to be someone who believed in such a story, or at least that such a story could be.

READER 1: There did? Who?

READER 2: He lived in Jerusalem.

READER 3: Jerusalem could use such a story.

¹ By John McCutcheon. I was introduced to it in a John McDermott concert. It is on his “Danny Boy” CD. The lyrics are available on the Internet at <http://www.catholic.net/RCC/music/midi/christmas/trench.html> among other places.

READER 2: He was a prophet.

READER 3: What's a prophet?

READER 2: A prophet is someone who sees all that is, but sees more.

READER 3: How can you see more than is? To paraphrase our former prime minister: What is is and if it is it is, and that is it. There is only what is.

READER 2: Are you sure? Maybe just you can only see what is. Maybe there is more than is, if you only had the right eyes.

READER 1: Could you two stop all this 'is' stuff and get back to this story that might be?

READER 2: Prophets saw all that is. This prophet's name was Isaiah.

READER 3: Do you mean Is -aiah?

READER 2: The prophet's name was Isaiah, and he had seen war. He wrote about war.

Isaiah: (*enters in costume with a staff from either left or right depending on your setup and moves to centre stage*) "The city writhes in chaos; every home is locked to keep out looters. Mobs gather in the streets; crying out for wine. Joy has reached its lowest ebb. Gladness has been banished from the land. The city is left in ruins, with its gates battered down. Throughout the earth the story is the same."² (*falls to his knees, or at least one knee with hand on his staff, bows head and is praying.*)

READER 1: Sounds like Baghdad. The news reports I saw just last night.

READER 2: Or Jerusalem, or Kabul, or Belfast, or . . .

READER 3: Okay, okay, we know war. You don't have to tell us. But that doesn't mean there is a story so powerful it could stop this war. Maybe it means there isn't such a story.

READER 2: War isn't all Isaiah saw. Isaiah looked at the war, saw the war, felt the war, and then he listened to something deep inside him, and heard another story, a story of "not war."

Isaiah: (*rises, a look of hope on his face*)

In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house

Shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

And shall be raised above the hills;

All the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the house of the God of Jacob;

That he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,

And the word of the lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,

And shall arbitrate for many peoples;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,

And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.³

READER 1: Now that's "not war"! That's powerful!

READER 3: Yea, right. Anyone can dream.

READER 1: And he really believed this?

READER 2: He believed that, and more.

² Isaiah 24:10-13, NLT.

³ Isaiah 2:2-4, NRSV.

Isaiah: A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
And a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, . . .
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
And faithfulness the belt around his loins.
The wolf shall live with the lamb,
The leopard shall be down with the kid,
The calf and the lion and the fatling together,
And a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
Their young shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
And the waned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.⁴
(moves to sit at table and alternates between writing, being in deep thought & praying)

READER 1: If that could really be true?! Imagine!

READER 3: Yeah, and if pigs could fly.

READER 1: Did the people believe the dream, that it was more than a dream, that the prophet was seeing things that could be, that WOULD be?

READER 2: They hoped, because they were tired of war. They longed for peace.

Choir: Messiah Song

READER 1: How was this going to happen? What kind of story would it take?

READER 2: The prophet Isaiah kept listening and looking and writing. Then it came to him.

Isaiah: *(gets up and moves to centre stage)*

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.⁵

For a child has been born for us,

A son given to us;

Authority rests upon his shoulders,

and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace.⁶

(Exits)

READER 1: Endless peace! Sounds wonderful, too good to be true.

READER 3: If its too good to be true, it probably is.

READER 1: Endless peace! Amazing! And all this from the story of a baby.

Choir: Soon a tiny child will come

READER 1: But when and where can we find such a story?

⁴ Isaiah 11:1-9 (excerpts), NRSV.

⁵ Isaiah 7:14, NRSV.

⁶ Isaiah 9:6 & 7, NRSV.

READER 2: A lot of people wondered when and people wondered where.

READER 3: Yada, yada, yada. That's all fine and good, some old guy dreaming dreams and writing them down and people wondering when and where. I've had dreams of a better life. I've done lots of wondering. That does not make me some special prophet and it sure as shootin' doesn't mean there is a story anywhere that could stop war. Dreaming and wondering isn't going to help the people of Iraq, and the US, and Afghanistan, and Northern Ireland, and Columbia. If there is such a story, we need to find the story. But before I go looking for it, you better convince me that I am looking for something real, something that is. I don't have time for some wild goose chase.

READER 2: Do you think we should tell him?

READER 1: Maybe we should.

READER 3: Tell me what?

READER 2: I'm not sure.

READER 3: Tell me what!?

READER 1: It might change his mind.

READER 3: Tell me what?!!

READER 2: Okay, you tell him.

READER 3: Finally.

READER 1: There are people who already know the story, and the story made a difference.

READER 3: There are?! Yeah, I'm sure! Some more of your dreamers, no doubt.

READER 2: They did dream, but they were able to dream because they knew the story, the knew the story to be true, and they felt the power in the story.

READER 1: In 1963 a man, a black man who had been beaten up, attacked by dogs, and thrown in prison simply because of the color of his skin, stood before thousands and made a speech:

READER 4: "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. . . . I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope.

READER 1: Martin Luther King Jr. believed the story and today much of what he dreamed for is true.

READER 2: Jill Olfert of Luseland, Saskatchewan knew the story. In grade 5 each student in her class was asked to memorize a war memorial poem. Instead, she wrote her own poem, and spoke it to the class.

READER 4: When we have peace, we are free
Free from everything that might want to get rid of us
Free from any fear that may come to us'
Free from ever having to go to war again
Free from killing and hurting others
When we have peace we have freedom to be different
To love instead of hate

So let us remember peace
Because it is much, much better than war.⁷

READER 1: Five year-old Larissa Friesen of Winnipeg, Manitoba knew the story.

READER 4: When her friend in the neighbourhood played war with the help of toy GI Joes and tanks, she decided that because of the story she could not participate in killing, even play-killing. So, she decided she would cook the meals for the soldiers. It was a form of alternative service that made sense to her in her setting, allowing her to play with her friends and stay true to the Story.

READER 2: Andrea Kraybill, a grade 8 student in Elkhart, Indiana, knew the story.

READER 4: Andrea was asked to be the narrator in her school's re-enactment of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, complete with Minuteman costume and wooden rifle. She took the role but negotiated a different costume—a lady of the era. During the battle itself she played the part of a woman crying because her husband died in battle. Andrea knew the story and witnessed by her actions to the difference the story can make.⁸

READER 1: People in Columbia believe the story.

READER 4: On October 23, 2003, Pedro and Juan met for the first time at the Iglesia Menonita de Villa de Granada. This was Juan's first Sunday in church. Six weeks earlier, had Pedro and Juan met, they would have killed each other on the spot. Pedro and Juan were sworn enemies in the civil war in Columbia. Pedro had been a commander in the paramilitary; Juan a commander for the guerillas fighting to overthrow the government. Now, this Sunday, they were here, together, brothers. Together their voices rang out in song:

Christ breaks the chains
You have freed me from sin and death
I don't know how I shall live without my Jesus.⁹

READER 3: And all because they heard this story you say exists?

READER 1: Because of that story, enemies were now men who loved each other.

READER 3: I want to hear that story. Please tell me the story, a story so powerful that it stops war, overcomes racism, and brings peace.

READER 2: Watch, and listen.

Choir: Peace, peace
Will we know him?
The Sun is now risen

Piano/organ play "O little town of Bethlehem" while nativity scenes forms in the darkness, along with grandmother in a rocking chair.

When light goes on, Choir & congregation, under direction of conductor sing vs. 1 of "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

Duet:: *(singers, at the back, one in each aisle, invite children from within congregation to come with them to the front. As they begin to make their way forward, they sing "O come all ye children". Once children are gathered around the manger, grandmother reads)*

⁷ "So Great a Cloud of Witnesses," *Peace Sunday Packet 2003* (MCC Ontario), 7.

⁸ Thanks to Nelson Kraybill, president of AMBS, for this story about his daughter.

⁹ I originally heard the story from Ferdinand Funk, pastor at Springfield Heights Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, MB. Names have been changed to protect the two men and their families.

Grandmother: Luke 2:1-20

Children & Congregation, lead by duet sing “Away in a Manger”

Children, grandmother & duet return to their places)

Choir: Calypso Carol
Rejoice, Rejoice
How shall a king come

Silence

READER 1: Well, aren't you going to say something?

READER 3: What can I say? What a story! There really is such a story, there really is a story so powerful that it can stop war.

READER 2: Because of this story

The cannons rested silent, the gas clouds rolled no more
As Christmas brought us respite from the war
As soon as they were finished and a reverent pause was spent
“God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen” struck up some lads from Kent
The next they sang was “Stille Nacht.” “Tis ‘Silent Night,’” says I
And in two tongues one song filled up that sky

Duet (*one in English, one in German*) Silent Night
(*sing verse 1, then on verse 2 more quietly while the narration continues*)

READER 2: Because of this story war turned into a soccer game and the killing fields of France hosted a wonderful Christmas party.

[They] shared some secret brandy and ... wished each other well

...

[They] traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home
These sons and fathers far away from families of their own
Young Sanders played his squeezebox and they had a violin
This curious and unlikely band of men

(proceed with narration after the end of verse 2 of Stille Nacht/Silent Night)

READER 1: Because of this story sons and daughters of former slaves and sons and daughters of former slave owners do now sit together at the same table and hold hands in joyful worship.

READER 2: Because of this story, Pedro and Juan in Columbia have put down their guns, live with their families, and worship together as brothers. Because of the story the war in Columbia is smaller.

READER 1: Because of this story, a story so powerful that it can stop war.

READER 3: If it has done it once, twice, three times, it can do it again, this story of a baby born. What can we do to help this story stop war today?

READER 2: We can tell the story.

READER 3: Tell the story?

READER 2: We can tell the story, to everyone we meet, wherever we go, whenever we have the chance.

READER 1: We can tell the story to our children and grandchildren, to our friends and neighbors, to everyone we meet.

READER 3: We can tell the story, and every time the story is told the chance of peace, an end to war and violence, grows brighter and bigger.

READER 1, READER 2 & READER 3: We can tell the story.

Choir/Solo: Go tell it on the mountain.

READER 1, READER 2 & 3: And live the story!

READER 1: at home

READER 2: at school

READER 3: at work.

READER 1 & 2: Tell the story and Live the story!

READER 3: And watch peace come to our world, one story-telling at a time.

Organ/piano: To us a child of hope is born

While Choir leaves Choir loft and nativity scene disbands.

Duet: We light a thousand candles bright

Shepherds and wisemen light the candles of the people in the audience, having lit their candles from the Christ candle.

CAROL SING