

Fresh Ideas

There's an Angel on that Roof!

Stop Traffic with a Live Nativity Scene

by Diana Davis

Picture this: a simple, well-lit stable stands visibly on your church lawn. A lighted sign says "Turn here for free live nativity." Music is playing and costumed nativity characters create a captivating Christmas-card-like setting. People stop to observe, and church members welcome them with steaming cups of cocoa. The atmosphere is worshipful yet joyfully celebrative.

A live nativity can be an effective, unthreatening witness to your community and may attract hundreds—even thousands—to your church property. Add extra oomph to your church's nativity with a few of these fresh ideas:

Create interest

- A giant lighted star high above the church. A searchlight. Laser lights. A roped viewing area to increase street visibility.
- An invitation banner. Business card size invitations for church members to share. Hand-deliver invitations wrapped in small gift boxes to neighbors, media, businesses and city leaders.
- Stage the nativity on multiple evenings. How about a *Christmas Eve* date? A children's nativity night?
- Your nativity float in the town's parade has strolling shepherds distributing flyers about the live nativity scene.

Add details

- A stable built to hold angels on its roof. A few hay bales for seated viewing.
- Luminaries or staked Christmas lights mark a driving route. Light the church steeple or stained glass
- A life-like doll (or baby) represents Jesus.
- Add beards, wigs, shepherd staffs and creative headwear. Use interesting textured fabrics like fur, shiny lamé or sheepskin. Ask a ladies' class to craft elegant kings' gifts or crowns.
- Nothing stops traffic like live animals—a camel, sheep, baby goat, donkey or chickens in a wooden cage. Use safety precautions, of course, and remember that animals are merely props--not the focus.

Teamwork works

- Include many in preparation. Delegate costumes, props, music, construction, lighting, sound system, publicity, traffic plan, animals, literature, refreshments.
- Weeks ahead of time, church members sign up for shifts as a greeter, mingler, helper, traffic director or nativity character. Characters' shifts are thirty minutes.
- Include singles, widows, teens, new and peripheral church members. Involve all ages—an elderly king, a child shepherd holding a stuffed lamb.
- Two sets of costumes allow smooth shift transitions. Belts, safety pins, vests and draped fabric help size costumes to fit. The dressing area has an atmosphere of joy. And snacks.

Point to Jesus

- Each shift of characters prays together before reverently taking their place.
- Spotlighting focuses on the Baby. Costumed characters don't take their eyes off Jesus. Recorded or live music focuses on Christ. Singers sing only to Him, not to onlookers.
- Add bits of video, drama, live music or reverent choreography, i.e. characters rotate kneeling beside the Baby; angels with outstretched arms.
- Costumed instrumentalists humbly serenade Jesus, i.e. flutist, guitarist.
- A child sings "Happy Birthday" to Him. A trio of kings or angels sings to Jesus. A prearranged onlooker in the crowd sings "Silent Night" a cappella. The children's, youth or adult choir wears biblical costumes, worshipfully sing to Him.

Welcome to Christ-mas

- Give guests a candy cane, Bible, handmade ornament or a well-worded bookmark about the nativity and God's salvation plan. Every guest receives a verbal and printed invitation to Sunday worship.
- Allow individual children viewers to wear a robe and reverently join the nativity, standing near the manger for a minute or two. Snap a photo and invite parents to pick it up on Sunday.
- Assigned minglers chat with onlookers about the real meaning of Christmas.

Get the picture? A live nativity will stop traffic...and those cars are full of folks who need to meet the Christ of Christmas!

"So we tell others about Christ..." Colossians 1:28a

© Diana Davis is author of several church idea books (B&H Publishing). For more nativity ideas, see her blog at www.keeponshining.com