



*“Preserving tradition with imagination”*

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## *A note from the editors:*

*Greetings, All!*

*You might be surprised to see a smaller issue of our publication! We are now publishing on a bimonthly schedule, so the issues will be smaller but will come more frequently.*

*As we make this change, we would love to hear from you! Send us your ideas for topics, for writers, for music. We welcome all input and encourage you to write for an issue.*

*Thank you for all you do for so many. We are honored to serve with you as we all work to realize God's Love and Mission in the world.*

*John-Westley and Martha*



## Bible Stories as the Impetus for Musical Creativity in Worship

Andrea Baxter

Engaging children in worship is a passion of mine. I believe unequivocally that children are a full and equal part of the body of Christ, and that when they are not present in worship, the body is not whole. Marva Dawn, a theologian and author, says that children are the fingers and toes of the body. I've always loved that metaphor because of the delightful way that fingers and toes wiggle just like children in the pew. Another way to think of this is to imagine a body *without* fingers

and toes. What challenges does such a body face?

But even if we agree about the importance of the full inclusion of children, how do we as worship leaders in the church work to help children and youth with their unique set of gifts? How can we draw them into more full participation or even worship leadership roles?

One place to begin is with the church's story. Bible stories offer an opportunity for the creative use of musical, rhythmic, and dramatic tools. Furthermore, stories draw in people of all ages and allow us to take multiple learning styles into consideration. Here are four lessons I've learned about using stories in this way, and an example to go along with each.

***LESSON #1: When the story includes a pattern or repetition of some sort, this is a perfect opportunity for congregational participation.***

### 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany – Year B)

Prior to the worship service, prepare a children's choir or confident child soloists to lead sung motives, encouraging all in the assembly to become a part of the storytelling. Divide the congregation in half. Teach one half to be the voice of God with the instruction to sing each time Samuel hears a voice in the story. (fig. 1) The other half learns to be Samuel by singing his response to Eli. (fig. 2)

Figure 1



Figure 2



At the end of the story, when Samuel understands that the voice he hears is actually the voice of God, have the children sing the refrain to *Here I Am, Lord* by Daniel Schutte two times, inviting the congregation to join the second time.

**LESSON #2: When a choir is scheduled to sing on a particular Sunday, look at the scripture texts to see what musical, rhythmic or dramatic opportunities exist for them to lead outside the “anthem” spot.**

## **John 8: 31-36 – Reformation Sunday**

This short story came up on a Sunday that my youth choir was scheduled to sing, and it breaks down nicely into roles for Narrator, Jesus, and a few who are a part of the crowd of Jews. The Jews are holding chains in the picture below as a symbol of sin and to emphasize the irony when they adamantly proclaim they have never been slaves. Following Jesus’ final statement, the chains are dropped to the floor, making a sudden loud sound to represent the freedom we experience through Christ.

**Narrator:** Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him

**Jesus:** “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

**Narrator:** The Jews looked confused and answered him,

**Person 1:** We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone! (*All in the group nod and say, “Right! We’re not slaves! etc.”*)

**Person 2:** That’s right. What do you mean by telling us that we will be made free?

**Narrator:** Then Jesus answered them,

**Jesus:** “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”



**LESSON #3: Don't be afraid to ask pastors for permission to utilize the children's sermon. This is a great way to involve children from the congregation and give them a chance to experience rhythm/music in a creative way.**

### **Matthew 5:13-20 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany – Year A)**

My children's choir learned an anthem based on this scripture passage, and so we dug into it a bit in rehearsals. We decided to create some rhythmic ostinati for statements that summarized the themes of this passage. Children summarized and created the following:

Three musical staves showing rhythmic ostinati for the children's sermon. Each staff has a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff is for "You are the light of the world. (clap, clap, clap)". The second staff is for "You are the salt (ch, ch, ch) of the earth." The third staff is for "Give glo - ry to your fa - ther up in hea - ven. (Woo - hoo!)"

During the children's sermon, children's choir members taught all the rest of the children (and the congregation by default) these ostinati with my help. We then divided the congregation into three sections, and layered a new ostinato once each was established. Since the final ostinato is the ultimate reason for being light and salt in the world, we ended by speaking this all together with one big congregational "Woo-hoo!" Throw in a gong on the word "light", shaker eggs for the salt, and a drum to keep a steady beat, and suddenly everyone is engaged in something creative and fun. Adults and children alike reported that these phrases were "stuck" in their minds for the hours and days that followed.

**LESSON #4: When a story has characters or words that reappear often, this is an opportunity to assign instruments, spoken text, or sung phrases to children/the congregation, asking them to listen for the repetition of each and respond with the corresponding phrase.**

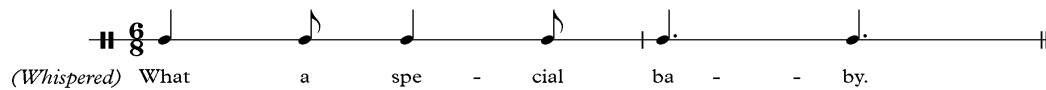
### **Luke 2:1-20 – Nativity of Our Lord I (Christmas Eve)**

One trick for encouraging careful listening is to invite the listener to perform a specific pattern or play an instrument each time a corresponding name or phrase is heard. Choose a number of names that will help young listeners achieve success (no more than 4 or 5), then introduce and practice these responses (see below). When choosing a name, be sure that it appears at least twice in the story, and look for opportunities to add the name another time or two.

*“Mary”*



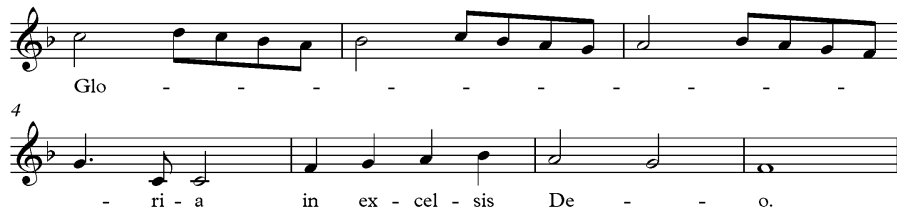
*“Child”*



*“Bethlehem”*



*“Angel”*



As church musicians and leaders in worship, we have a responsibility to help create worship that is warm, inviting, and engaging for all. Looking to the story can be the impetus we need to creatively work toward that goal!

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## **Leading the Assembly: Our Shared Vocation**

John Weit

I have long sensed my calling to be a leader of the church's song. In church as a young boy, I was amazed at how a single person could sit behind an organ console and use the various buttons and keys to make a multitude of different sounds. The best part was when this magnificent instrument and instrumentalist could lead the group gathered together in song.

Although I came into my vocation as a leader of church's song through the pipe organ, I have come to learn, experience, and model leadership through a variety of means. To this day, it never ceases to amaze me how me pushing some keys on an instrument or using my own breath and gesture allows for a group of people from all walks of life to come together with a common voice.

Those of us who regularly lead assembly song share in this common vocation. We are helping the assembly at worship to give voice to their own faith and belief, allowing opportunities to shape that faith, and giving voice to prayer, praise, lament, and thanksgiving to God. We come in different forms: full-time and part-time, paid and volunteer, leading with instruments or voice, working alone or in partnership. Regardless of style, method, or instrument, the task is the same: to lead our singing assemblies with confidence and skill. For me, this is much more than a job/career, or a way to earn some extra cash on the weekends. It is a true calling.

It is no surprise that as church musicians, we spend much time in rehearsal. We practice at our instruments to ensure correct notes and to master difficult passages. We work with choirs and other ensembles to achieve the best tone or rhythmic accuracy. But, how often do we rehearse our most essential task of leading the assembly? Do we practice playing with a steady tactus, monitoring our own breath as we encourage others to use theirs? Do we rehearse our introductions and gestures, registrations and progressions, to encourage vibrant singing? Do we make certain that the choirs and instrumentalists are confident in their leadership of the assembly?

How might we find ways to continue to cultivate the skills necessary to be effective leaders? We might record a liturgy and evaluate our own effectiveness in leading the assembly. We might ask trusted members of our choirs or congregations if they feel comfortable knowing when to sing. We can learn equally from when things go right and from when the unexpected occurs. Whether we have been at this for 30 days or 30 years, we all need to take time to evaluate our work as leaders.

In addition to self-evaluation, there are several continuing education opportunities for church musicians. I serve on the board of the [Leadership Program for Musicians \(www.lpm-online.org\)](http://www.lpm-online.org), one such opportunity. Originally growing out of the need to help equip musicians of "small" churches, the work of this organization has turned recently to offering online courses on various church music topics. Maybe this is one way you can set aside some time for study that doesn't require traveling for a class or conference.

Once we have strengthened and renewed our skills at the central task of assembly song, then we can continue to surround this song with the other music we make together as organists, pianists, bands, soloists, and choirs. Our leadership as church musicians holds much power and must be used with care and grace, always striving to love, teach, and lead those we serve as we help the assembly to participate in God's mission for the world. Blessings on your continued ministry of song, our sure vocation.

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## Gift Upon Gift

Beau Surratt

“What can I give Him, Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb,  
If I were a wise man I would do my part,  
-- Yet what I can I give Him,  
Give my heart.”

~Christina Rosetti,  
"A Christmas  
Carol: In the bleak mid-winter"

There has been a lot of talk going around social media lately about how 2016 was the worst year ever. And I'll admit I've bought into it a bit. We had more than our share of sorrow in my family this year. And I don't know if you're like me, but sometimes during seasons with lots of rehearsals, when it seems like everyone has something more important going on than being at choir rehearsal, I find myself despairing, comparing myself to colleagues who seem to have more robust choirs than I, and wondering what I am doing wrong. These are times when I am not my best self, and it is all too easy to focus on the challenge rather than the gift. In my better moments, I take the time to look for the gift in the midst of whatever circumstance in which I find myself. So, as I write this during Christmastide as we are beginning 2017, a time when gift giving is often at the forefront of our minds, I thought I'd reflect a bit on the nature of gift and where I discovered gifts during ministry in 2016.

- 1. The greatest gifts are often found in times of great sorrow.** The final liturgy I led in 2016 at the primary parish I serve was the funeral for a beloved choir member. It was the first time in 20 years of music ministry that a member of one of my choirs has died. Though she hadn't been well, her death was very sudden and particularly difficult for her sister, brother-in-law, and closest friend who also sing in our choir. The gift in the midst of this was the incredible beauty of the choir who assembled to "sing her to heaven." In addition to parishioners who hadn't sung with the choir in several months, a number of people from her former parish, which is now closed, including their former organist/choirmaster, came to sing. It was an Anglican funeral liturgy of the best kind with the absolute best music. The community that gathered was breathtaking. Gift upon gift. Gift in the midst of sorrow, indeed.
- 2. Gifts are not the result of any work of our own.** This year colleagues from two local ELCA churches and I decided to do a Beer and Carols event at a local Irish pub. We all thought this was a fabulous idea and it was so important that we make it happen in 2016 that we decided to do it the Monday before Christmas. As you might imagine, 2 church musicians and a pastor have more than a few things going on the week leading up to Christmas, and I don't think any of the three of us gave the planning of this event quite as much attention as we might've liked. As it turned out, the event was amazing! We had lots of folks from the three congregations and everyone had a wonderful time. The local Lutheran bishop was there; some folks from my congregation who had been somewhat estranged from the community in recent years came. The pub genuinely enjoyed having us, and we brought them much more business than they'd have on a typical Monday night. Gift upon gift. Not through our own merit, for sure.
- 3. Gifts often come to us at times when we think we're the ones who are supposed to be doing the giving.** It was our last Gospel Choir rehearsal before our fall Sunday to sing

(our Gospel choir rehearses for several weeks before each of the 4 or so Sundays they sing per year), and I was feeling a little nervous because not a lot of people had been to the previous rehearsals. Not only did the music for Sunday come together beautifully at that final rehearsal, we had a time of prayer and worship at the end of rehearsal. It ministered deeply to my soul and helped rekindle my faith during a time when I was struggling with it. I thought I was the one who was supposed to be ministering to the choir but this time they ministered powerfully to me.

4. **Sometimes the greatest gifts are to be found in the routines of daily life.** Every once in a while, when I pause from the busyness long enough to think about it, I am amazed at the almost daily miracles of church music ministry. At a Tuesday Bell Choir rehearsal I remember that the person who plays A5 and B5 had to rearrange babysitting for her grandchildren to be at rehearsal, and the person who plays B6 and C7 who was 5 minutes late had to drive in rush hour traffic from 3 suburbs away. I remember at a Sunday post-liturgical Parish Choir rehearsal that one of our basses is delaying taking his elderly mother home from church so that he can be present at rehearsal, and I remember that one of our sopranos, who has a newborn baby daughter, is singing her absolute best as she longs to be with her young child. The presence of each of these dear ones is an incredible gift. But sometimes, because rehearsals become routine and I focus more on the sound I'm looking for than the lavish offering of time and talent of the people who are making it, I lose sight of the gift upon gift happening before my very eyes.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany we hear Herod tell the wise ones, those sages of old, to go and search diligently for the child, Jesus, the One who is the greatest gift of God. Perhaps we leaders and singers of the church's song, too, need to search diligently for the extraordinary gifts of God that are always present if we would only seek them out. As we head into this new year 2017, my prayer is that each of us, especially when we are in the sometimes difficult and perplexing times in our ministries, will take time to pause, breathe deeply, and search diligently for the many gifts God is waiting for us to discover in the ministries we share.

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