



Las Posadas: On the Road with Mary and Joseph

All-Church Christmas Pageant

How to use this resource

This *Las Posadas* Pageant is basically a procession with Carols that moves from station to station; it is written to be used on one night, at a local church location, but it may be adapted for use in many ways. At each Posada, or Inn, Mary and Joseph ask for shelter, and their companions – immigrants, refugees, seekers – tell their stories and ask for shelter, too. At each Posada they are refused, and the company moves on to the next Posada, until finally the Holy Family is recognized, and they and their friends are welcomed in with celebration.

Some adaptations:

- One church may want to stage the pageant entirely within the sanctuary, to accommodate members who have difficulties in moving around.
- Another church may want to spread the procession out over the four Sundays of Advent, and conclude each week with the recognition of the Holy Family and increasingly festive celebrations.
- A group of local churches may collaborate, each sponsoring a couple of “Posadas,” again concluding at each place with recognition and celebration.
- It may be adapted to be more like the traditional structure described below, celebrated over multiple nights and visiting different homes.
- Although the traditional number of stations is nine, a church may want to do fewer stations.
- If there is an ethnic or social group in your church that is not represented in this liturgy, you are encouraged to write or adapt a reading that would include them and allow them to tell their unique story of immigration or search for refuge.

Tradition of las Posadas

Las Posadas, which means “The Inns,” is a traditional Advent/Christmas celebration in Latin America, particularly Mexico, and among many Mexican Americans. It dates back more than 400 years to Spain, when Catholic priests found they could best teach many of the biblical stories to illiterate believers by using drama. *Las Posadas* traditionally is celebrated for nine nights from December 16 through 24, culminating in the Christmas Eve worship service. It is designed to reenact the story of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem and search for lodging.

Each night of the traditional *Posadas*, pilgrims gather and process to a different home of a host family. The procession is often led by a child dressed as an angel. Two other children are dressed as Mary and Joseph. Other children may be dressed in gold or silver. Songs are sung as the procession traverses the streets, often lit by *farolitas* (little lights), or *luminarias*. When the group arrives at the home, they knock at the door.

The host family answers. The group then divides into two. One group takes the role of the Innkeeper with the host family, and the other group stays with Mary and Joseph representing the weary Travelers looking for shelter. A short litany is recited usually in the form of a song. Finally, when the Holy Family is recognized, everyone is welcomed into the home for celebration including many traditional foods, candy, and singing. Each evening culminates with the breaking of a *piñata*. On Christmas Eve, the celebration is particularly festive, and ends with the Christmas Eve Mass or worship service.

Las Posadas and UCC Extravagant Welcome

As the United Church of Christ celebrates its 50 year history, we reflect on our faith heritage. We have a clear historical connection with many who sojourned to a new land or a new life. We hear a clear call to give extravagant welcome to those who are fellow travelers, strangers, refugees, and immigrants. It is truly one of the outstanding values of our unique faith experience in the United Church of Christ. It harkens us back to that weary family so long ago simply seeking a safe night's lodging, and place of respite. Las Posadas can help us retell the story of our own sojourns to new life. It can remind us of those who continue to cross geographic borders, psychological barriers, and social boundaries in search of newness of life, justice, and safety. Like Mary and Joseph in Las Posadas, as pilgrims we often at first meet with rejection, misunderstanding, and prejudice. But by God's incarnational grace, we may be welcomed, and in turn, are called to welcome others who may knock at our "doors."

Preparation:

- Identify nine posadas or stations in your church or neighborhood. If they are all contained within the church, mark a path to follow as a symbolic journey between the posadas (i.e. walk once around the building or the parking lot, or through the inside hallways.)
- You might mark the path using farolitas or luminarias, paper bags containing sand at the bottom to weight them down, with lighted tea candles to illuminate them from the inside. The farolitas may be prepared ahead of time by the youth or children. They can be decorated, or cut with simple Christmas designs, or just kept plain.
- Have a few "Residents" positioned as the hosts of each station. Preferably each station is behind a closed door.
- The Travelers gather at the first station, perhaps in a fellowship hall. One or more of the children may be dressed as angels. Two of the children are dressed as Mary and Joseph. You may use as many Readers as you want and assign their parts as is most appropriate for your group.

Gathering: “A Journey with Mary and Joseph”

A Leader may welcome everyone and give an introduction to the tradition and meaning of Las Posadas.

READER: At the time of Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was governor of Syria, a census was ordered.

Everyone was required to travel to their own home town to be registered. So Joseph traveled from where he lived in Nazareth to his ancestral home in Bethlehem. His betrothed, Mary, accompanied him on the journey despite the fact that she was pregnant. Scripture tells us that when they arrived in Bethlehem, they had difficulty finding lodging in the crowded town and finally had to settle for an animals' stable. It was there that the road-weary parents gave birth to their first-born child, and made a bed for him in the hay of the animals' feeding trough because there were no better accommodations.

READER: The story of Mary and Joseph seeking refuge is a story repeated by refugees, immigrants and exiles in many times and places throughout the world. It is the story of the Sojourner, the Pilgrim, searching for a new land and a new life. It is our story as well. We have all been sojourners of some type at some time in our lives. We have all sought refuge and safety, sustenance and security. Tonight, let us rejoin the journey of the refugee, the immigrant, the forced traveler, and in the spirit of this holy season welcome one another by the grace of God into La Posada, the Inn: God's house of refuge and hospitality.

The group of Travelers now walk the path to the first Posada. The children who are angels lead, followed by Mary and Joseph. As they walk, the group can sing verses of a Christmas Carol. Our suggestion: “I Wonder as I Wander,” or “Born in the Night, Mary’s Child” TNCH 152.

The First Posada: Our Biblical Wanderings

When the group arrives, Mary and Joseph knock on the door. The Residents of the Posada open the door, and some of the group joins them in singing the Posada Song as the “Hosts.” The other group represents the “Travelers” with Mary and Joseph, and they begin the song.

TRAVELERS: (Begin)

1. From our long, long journey
We are very weary!
We are seeking shelter
For our rest and safety.

2. Who will give us lodging?
We are travelers weary,
So very, very tired
Trudging roads so dreary.

3. We can only ask you
In your heart to trust us.
Just give us a corner,
We won't make a great fuss.

HOSTS: (Reply)

Who arrives at our door
On this stormy ni-ght?
Who comes pounding rudely
Giving us such fri-ght?

Who asks us for lodging?
We can't answer such fuss.
You could be a robber
Come to steal, or hurt us.

There's no vacant corner
No place we can rent you.
Fields are free and plenty
Stay out there and make do.

READER: From the earliest ancestors of our faith, we have been a wandering people. Listen to the writing from Genesis 12: “God told Abram: ‘Leave your country, your family, and your parents’ home for a land that I will show you. I’ll make you a great nation and bless you....all the families of the Earth will be blessed through you.’ So, Abram left just as God said, and Lot left with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.”

READER: Centuries later, Abraham’s descendents, who had sojourned to Egypt, were held as captive slaves. God called Moses to lead them to a new and promised land of freedom. Yet, they wandered in the desert wilderness for decades before they were led to that promised land.

READER: Centuries after that, the nation of Israel rarely knew times of settled security. Kingdoms rose and fell. Foreign empires invaded and occupied the land. God spoke through prophets who promised that One would come to bring everlasting peace and security. A messiah, a savior, would be born who would create a realm of justice and peace, where there would be no fear or enemies, where lions and lambs, wolves and calves, children and snakes would play together.

READER: Let us continue to search for la Posada of God’s promised realm of shalom!

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” TNCH 116

Second Posada: In a Land of Immigrants

The ritual is repeated. Mary and Joseph knock on the door; the group divides and sings responsively.

Travelers: (Begin)

1. From our long, long journey
Very weary are we!
We are seeking shelter
For our rest and safety.
2. Who will give us lodging?
We are travelers weary,
So very, very tired
Trudging roads so dreary.
3. We can only ask you
In your heart to trust us.
Just give us a corner,
We won't make a great fuss.

Hosts: (Reply)

Who arrives at our door
On this stormy ni-ght?
Who comes pounding rudely
Giving us such fri-ght?

Who asks us for lodging?
We can't answer such fuss.
You could be a robber
Come to steal, or hurt us.

There's no vacant corner
No place we can rent you.
Fields are free and plenty
Stay out there and make do.

READER: In many times and many places people have had many reasons to leave their homes and families behind, to emigrate to a new place. Many have called the United States of America a nation of immigrants.

READER: From the earliest migrations of human tribes across the ancient land bridge between the continents of Asia and North America...

READER: to bold explorations by Europeans who thought they were coming to wild, uninhabited lands beyond the known ends of the earth...

READER: to the clashes of imperial conquests, and powers seeking colonization...

READER: to the various migrations of ethnic and religious groups seeking freedom of expression, escape from persecution, or economic opportunities...

ALL READERS IN UNISON: Many immigrants have come knocking on the doors seeking refuge throughout our nation's history.

READER: My name is John, and history has called me a “Pilgrim.” My family and I escaped persecution in England for the way we practiced our faith. We heard of a new land where our families and friends could live in peace and freedom, and worship God the way we wanted. We were frightened to come to this strange new world and many of our people died during the first years trying to make a home for ourselves in a land we didn’t understand. The only thing that saved us was the help of the strange inhabitants who lived here. We were not sure if they were really human. But they helped us survive and became friends to some of us. Unfortunately, in following years and decades, in our mis-directed religious zeal, ignorance, and paternalism, we often brought violence, destruction, and death to those who originally offered us help and refuge.

READER: This pattern of European colonization was repeated many times and in many ways during the next centuries. In the worst times, indigenous people did indeed find themselves caught in cycles of betrayal and violence by the invaders who sought to control their lands and their cultures. However, there were times and places when residents of the land benefited by the gifts of the visitors, who brought education and medical enhancements, and shared a living, transforming faith that offered justice and reform, and new spiritual understandings.

READER: Come with us, Traveler, come join us, Hosts! We will continue to search for la Posada of God’s promised realm of new life and freedom for all!

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing, “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming,” TNCH 127.

Third Posada: Refuge from Political Oppression and War

The ritual is repeated: Mary and Joseph knock on the door; The Posada Song is sung responsively when the door is opened; following the Song, the Readers speak.

READER: Many who leave homelands in search of new homes and new lives, do so to escape political oppression and the horrors of war. Like Mary and Joseph, who lived in a land occupied by a foreign power, people come to the doors of our nation, our states, our communities and neighborhoods seeking asylum and safe sanctuary.

READER: My name is Gerta. I come from Russia, but I am of German descent and language. I arrived in this country in 1920. My family had first immigrated to Russia because of its promise of freedom of worship and land to work. But, in later decades when ownership of land was restricted, and religious intolerance grew, we followed many of our friends to America where land was plentiful and we hoped that the practice of our religion was more tolerated. We found, however, that it was still difficult to make a place for ourselves, a real home. We did not seem to fit anywhere at first, not with the German immigrants, not with the Russians. We kept to ourselves.

READER: My name is Gorun. I am an Armenian immigrant who came to this country escaping the genocide of my people by the Turks of the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1922. My family sought refuge from the atrocities inflicted on us during the First World War.

READER: My name is Katya, I am from Hungary. My parents died in concentration camps during World War II. I left with my aunt and uncle who came to the United States. We were part of a fourth wave of immigrants from Hungary. While others came following revolution, and seeking freedoms of expression and education, we sought refuge from the horrors of war.

READER: My name is Thao. I left Viet Nam after Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese army. I was rescued after many weeks on a boat, nearly dying of hunger and thirst. Almost one hundred people were on our small wooden boat, packed together like sardines. Some other boats stopped, but only to rob us and rape us. Finally we were rescued and taken to a refugee camp. I eventually came to the United States to make a home. In Viet Nam, I was a teacher. In Los Angeles, I work at night as a housekeeper.

READER: Come with us, Travelers! We will continue to search for la Posada of God's promised realm of safety and peace!

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing, "All Earth is Waiting," TNCH 121.

Fourth Posada: Escape from Slavery and Exile

The ritual is repeated: Mary and Joseph knock on the door; The Posada Song is sung responsively when the door is opened; following the Song, the Readers speak.

READER: Some who knock at our door seeking refuge have not escaped by choice or their own intention. They may have been taken by force or exiled by their own government. They must find a home where they are, for better or worse.

READER: My name is George. My grandparents were brought to this country by ship, a slave ship from the west coast of Africa. I live on a plantation in South Carolina and work in the fields. I am leaving tonight to escape to the North where I hope I can be a free man. I'll begin my secret journey north, traveling at night and following the stars. If I'm found, I'll be hanged. But, I hear there are white folks who are friends who will help me along the way. I hope so. I don't want to be hanged. I want my children's children to remember me.

READER: My name is James. I am known as one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. When I was five, I watched my uncle get shot by soldiers who invaded my village. I joined 26,000 other boys who fled from the civil war that had come to our villages. We walked across the desert for hundreds of miles. The older boys carried me when I couldn't walk any farther. We finally got to Ethiopia, and spent a number of years in the camp, but then had to leave. We walked back across Sudan and found refuge in Kenya. Thousands of us died, but 3,600 of us survived and came to the United States to make a home.

READER: Come with us, Travelers! We will continue to search for la Posada of God's promised realm of freedom from bondage and exile.

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing, "The First Nowell," TNCH 139.

Fifth Posada: Finding Refuge from Disaster and Disease

The ritual is repeated: Mary and Joseph knock on the door; The Posada Song is sung responsively when the door is opened; following the Song, the Readers speak.

READER: Some of us travel seeking a new home because our homes have been devastated by natural disasters: floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, drought, famine, and disease.

READER: My name is Rose. I'm from the St. Bernard Parish of New Orleans. I watched the hurricane waters of Katrina flood up the side of my house, and I was evacuated from my roof. I lived for 5 months in a donated hotel room far from my home. I have to go home now, but I don't have a home to go to.

READER: My name is Moustafa. I am from Zambia. I am now 12 years old and taking care of 10 children younger than me. We live in my grandmother's house, who is 78 and dying. We are not real brothers and sisters, but we are now. We have all watched one or both of our parents die of AIDS. Now we are orphans and taking care of each other. I am the oldest, so they look to me. I ask my grandmother, but she is weak and cannot help me. I wonder if there is no one who can help me make a home for my new brothers and sisters. Some days it seems like there are no adults left.

READER: Come with us, Travelers! We will continue to search for la Posada of God's promised realm of health and a true home.

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing, "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," TNCH 131.

Sixth Posada: In Search of Basic Sustenance and a Better Life

The ritual is repeated: Mary and Joseph knock on the door; The Posada Song is sung responsively when the door is opened; following the Song, the Readers speak.

READER: Many who find themselves seeking to make a new life do so because the economic conditions of their homeland have become unbearable. They may have heard enticing stories of better conditions elsewhere, or the promise of jobs. We become immigrants in hopes of making a better life for our families, lives we see others having. Why not us? Sometimes we must make extreme sacrifices.

READER: My name is Carlos, I come from southern Mexico. There are no real jobs in our village, and my family is desperate. My family and neighbors all saved what little money we had so that I could pay for a guide to get me across the border into the United States. There, I was told I would be able to find a job and begin sending money back to my village. I was able to travel to the north and go to the border. The guides told me their price to take me across the border. It was all we had. I gave it to them. They told me it was a two or three hour walk in the desert. They lied. My group wandered in the desert lost for three days after the guides abandoned us. Two people died when they wandered away from us in search of water. The rest of us were dying of thirst and our feet were torn to pieces by the rocks. The Border Patrol found us and took us back to Mexico. Now I am wondering what to do. I can't go home. My village is depending on me to find a job in the United States. They've spent everything to get me this far. But I don't want to get lost in the desert again. But, maybe I'll try one more time when my feet heal. Some *Americanos* yelled at us to follow legal procedures, but they don't understand that it is impossible. I tried in my village for three years to get a visa. I couldn't get one. My children just got hungrier. I don't know what else to do.

READER: My name is Maricela. My parents came to the United States from Nicaragua when I was just a baby. My country was dangerous with violent revolution, and very poor. That was a long time ago. We had no documents. I don't remember Nicaragua, and I have no family there. My parents are afraid now. They said if we get discovered with no immigration papers, I may get sent back to Nicaragua. I used to feel like I belonged here in the United States; this was my home...but now I don't feel like I have a home anywhere. I don't even speak Spanish!

READER: Come with us, Travelers! We will continue to search for la Posada of God's promised realm where all can find safety, sustenance, and sanctuary!

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing "Away in a Manger," TNCH 124.

Seventh Posada: In Search of Spiritual Belonging and Acceptance

The ritual is repeated: Mary and Joseph knock on the door; The Posada Song is sung responsively when the door is opened; following the Song, the Readers speak.

READER: Some of us are not searching for a new geographic home, but are desperately in need of a safe and healthy spiritual home. We are spiritual refugees and immigrants, seeking acceptance after enduring prejudice and violations of our basic human rights. We may be seeking a safe haven from those who have abused us in the past with their rigid, intolerant religiosity. We seek simply to be welcomed for who we are...just as we are. Is there such a place?

READER: My name is Jeffrey. My parents raised me as a Christian. We went to church every Sunday; I went to Sunday School and was confirmed. I loved Jesus and believed that Jesus loved me. But, I was always a little different. During high school I struggled with depression and that led to escaping my feelings through experimenting with all kinds of things including drugs. I was hurt and angry at the world, and the world was angry at me. I left home to find myself. I was sure my parents hated me. I hated me. I was falling in love with people I wasn't supposed to love, at least in that way. I knew there was something wrong with me. I was a sinner, and God hates sinners. My church didn't want me around unless I was sorry and changed my life. I asked God to help me, but God wouldn't. I tried to pretend I was the person everyone wanted me to be, but my depression returned, and I attempted suicide. My parents told me I wasn't welcome in their home anymore. Is there any place that will accept me? Is there any place that will help me to accept myself? Will God ever accept me...or is God's love just a lie?

READER: My name is Helen. I am Jeffrey's mother. I have always believed in God's love and forgiveness. But now my home is empty and I told my only son he is not welcome here. I turned him away from my love for what he says he is. Am I doing God's will, or am I making a mistake? My heart aches and wants to run and throw my arms around him and tell him it doesn't matter, I want him to be happy. But I don't want to go against God. Does God want me to reject my gay son? My church has always taught me that the Bible says that what Jeffrey does is a sin and an abomination. But now, my house and my heart are empty. What shall I do?

READER: Is there no place of refuge? Is there no inn to lay our heads for the night? Is there no place where we can enter and welcome? Come with us, Travelers! We will continue to search for la Posada of God's promised realm of true love and grace!

The group leaves once again and travels the path. They may sing "Jesus, Our Brother, Strong and Good," TNCH 138.

Final Posada: You are Welcome Here!

This Posada would best be the sanctuary. The ritual is repeated: Mary and Joseph knock on the door; the complete Posada Song is sung responsively when the door is opened; following the Song, the Readers speak.

TRAVELERS: (Begin)

1. From our long, long journey
Very weary are we!
We are seeking shelter
For our rest and safety.
2. Who will give us lodging?
We are travelers weary,
So very, very tired
Trudging roads so dreary.
3. We can only ask you
In your heart to trust us.
Just give us a corner,
We won't make a great fuss.
4. We are in such great need!
Oh, see my beloved spouse
Is to have a baby!
Let her rest in your house.
5. Surely know you're God's hands!
Surely know you're God's feet!
What you have to offer
Is the thing that we need.
6. Yes! Your gift is welcome!
It is just what we need!
We are Mary and Joseph
Travelers from far off.
7. Do you know who we are?
Do you know our faces?
We are wanderers, homeless,
In all times and places.
8. We have come to your town
to your shores and nation.
Many doors are shut tight,
Few will now let us in.

HOSTS: (Reply)

- Who arrives at our door
On this stormy night?
Who comes pounding rudely
Giving us such fright?
- Who asks us for lodging?
We can't answer such fuss.
You could be a robber
Come to steal, or hurt us.
- There's no vacant corner
No place we can rent you.
Fields are free and plenty
Stay out there and make do.
- There's no room at our inn,
No bed we can offer.
Know that we are sorry,
God won't let her suffer.
- All we have to offer
Is a tiny stable
Surely you don't want that...
But—use it if you're able.
- Can it be as you say?
Can it really be true?
Mary, Holy Mother?
Joseph, can it be you?
- You are every refugee,
And the immigrants too.
Seeking rest and safety
Where no one will harm you.
- Who will leave Christ outside?
Who will turn Christ away?
Holy Child, be born to us,
Welcome and with us stay!

9. **UNISON:** (May be repeated)
Open every door wide!
Open up and welcome!
Holy Family—come in, In this place, you're now home!

Everyone is welcomed into the last Posada, the sanctuary.

LEADER: Let us join in prayer.

Holy God of the wandering pilgrims, the refugees and immigrants of the world, those seeking safety and refuge, those searching for a better life for themselves and their families, those hoping to taste God's grace in the midst of judgment, intolerance, cruelty, and violence, we pray for room at the Inn. We pray that we might see the faces of Mary and Joseph in each stranger we encounter. We pray that we greet them as we would greet ones who would bear Christ to us. For every weary traveler during this holy season, we pray for a place to rest. For every person who finds themselves homeless and fearful, we pray for shelter. For every man, woman and child fleeing from the terrors of war or persecution, we pray for safe refuge. For every lost soul seeking a glimpse of God's grace, we pray for open doors, outstretched arms, and extravagant welcome! In the name of Christ Jesus, we pray! Amen.

Closing Song: "Sing A Different Song," TNCH 150

If this celebration is held on Christmas Eve, the congregation may continue with a Christmas Eve worship service. If it is held during another time, Las Posadas ends with a festive time of food and fellowship. The breaking of a piñata by the children can be included.

Las Posadas was written by the Rev. Barbara Doerrer-Peacock, Co-Pastor at South Mountain Community Church, Phoenix, Arizona.

TNCH refers to hymns or resources from *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995). Similar resources may be found in other hymnals.

The Posadas song is adapted, and used with permission, from *Las Posadas: An Hispanic Christmas Celebration* by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith. NY: Holiday House Publishers, 1999.

Some of the stories have been inspired by *Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ*, Volumes 1 and 2, edited by Barbara Brown Zikmund. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1987.



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