

# God's Extravagant Love

*An Advent Program by Barbara Nelson  
From Building the City of God: One Body, One Spirit  
Mennonite Women*

## Advance Preparation

You will need four dramatists plus a worship leader, song leader, and pianist (or other musician). Angel costumes may be as simple as flowing robes, but each character should have a sign with her name. Have ready paperwhite bulbs to give to each attender; you may also wish to distribute printed instructions for planting the bulbs. Blooming paperwhites and other white flowers may be used as table centerpieces or for a display.

## Program

**Leader:** We gather to once again celebrate Christ's birth, a season many of us look forward to each year, yet also a holiday that can become routine. To us, the arrival of Jesus is a foregone conclusion. Today I invite you to reflect on Christ's birth as God's remarkable choice, an act of extravagant love for people of all time. Let us begin with prayer:

Gracious One, be with us now as we remember and honor  
your astonishing act of love in the gift of your son, Jesus Christ.  
May your Spirit be reborn in each of our hearts this day. Amen.

Sing HWB 172 "O come, O come, Immanuel." The pianist may continue playing softly as the worship leader speaks.

**Leader:** Since the moment of creation, humankind has continually found itself outside of God's will. Time and time again, disobedience led people to spurn God's love, making them the object of God's wrath. The book of Malachi marks the beginning of what is known as the "silent years": a time in which God, seemingly having grown weary of human rebellion, no longer speaks to the people through prophets. During this time the children of God bitterly suffered the consequences of their disobedience. Nearly 400 years pass (*Grace enters and gazes into the audience*), and as we begin our story, heaven brims with expectation as God prepares to end this long silence. (*Hope enters.*)

**Hope:** (*Placing her arm around Grace's shoulders*) Are you worried?

**Grace:** No, not worried—just wondering. (*Fear enters hurriedly, followed by Judgment.*)

**Fear:** Well, I most definitely am worried.

**Judgment:** It's not you who should be worried. It's those humans. They are the ones who should be shaking in their boots.

**Fear:** What do you think God is planning?

**Judgment:** Isn't it obvious? God's going to destroy the whole lot of them and it serves them right.

**Hope:** Don't say that!

**Judgment:** But it's true.

**Grace:** You don't know whether that's true or not!

**Judgment:** What other options are there? Look at them! (*Points out at the audience*) God has given them ample opportunity to get their act together, yet they continue in their rebellion! Faithless and disobedient from the very beginning and even until now.

**Grace:** Human . . . is what they are and God knows that.

**Judgment:** Yes, and that has never stopped God from doing what was necessary in the past, has it? Remember the flood? So grieved was God by the wickedness of these *humans* that he destroyed them all.

**Grace:** Not all of them. Think of Noah and his family. God spared them and provided the ark as a place of refuge.

**Hope:** That's right.

**Judgment:** True enough.

**Fear:** Do you think God is planning another flood?!

**Hope:** (*Comforting Fear*) God promised never to do that again. Remember the rainbow?

**Fear:** Oh, that's right. No more floods.

**Judgment:** What about Sodom and Gomorrah, the epitome of evil. Humankind at its vilest. You remember what God did there, don't you?

**Fear:** (*Closes eyes and covers her ears*) I remember. Fire fell from the sky.

**Judgment:** That's right—and because of their rebellion, God destroyed them all.

**Grace:** Not all. Even then God brought out Lot and his wife.

**Judgment:** His wife? The woman ended up a pillar of salt!

**Grace:** But God tried. He didn't just destroy them all.

**Hope:** God saved those he could. He tried.

**Judgment:** And in all of God's trying, what has changed? (*Looks at the audience*) Look at them. Most of them act as though there were no God. They go about their living barely acknowledging God's presence. They call right wrong and wrong right. They are consumed by their own desires. Selfishness, greed, and lust have become their gods. Compromise marks even many of those who call themselves by God's name. Yet you expect God to save them. (*Pause*) I say they are beyond saving.

**Hope:** Not all of them . . . .

**Grace:** And for those . . . there is still hope.

**Judgment:** Hope? (*Laughs*) It appears to me that is something people no longer have. Judgment is all I see remaining.

**Grace:** Then that is because you are not looking through the eyes of God. (*Gestures at the audience*) God loves them! In spite of their countless flaws, God loves them, and God will not abandon those who love him.

**Judgment:** Even love has its limits.

**Grace:** True. (*Pause*) But it has limits nobody can measure. (*Pianist begins to softly play "O come, all ye faithful." Angels look at one another, realizing the time has come for God to do whatever it is he has planned.*) This is it.

**Judgment:** *(To Grace)* Now we will see how much God loves humankind. *(All of the angels except Fear move to the center of the performing area and gaze at a point behind the audience. Fear is absolutely fretful, closing her eyes, covering her head, and cowering behind the other angels.)*

**Fear:** Well . . . what's happening? What did God do? *(The angels look surprised and are speechless.)* Locusts? Hail? Fire? What? *(Fear opens her eyes and is bewildered by the expression of the other angels)* What did God do?

**Hope:** He sent . . .

**All:** *(pause)* A baby.

**Fear:** A baby?

**Grace:** Not just any baby. The Messiah. The Savior! *(Music is played louder and the angels invite the audience to join them in a verse of "O come, all ye faithful.")*

As a group sing HWB 208 "Love came down at Christmas" and/or HWB 182 "Oh, how shall I receive thee."

**Leader:** At this time I invite you to spend a few minutes in quiet reflection and prayer. Have you experienced times when someone showed you love when you expected judgment? Or when you received God's grace instead of condemnation? Amidst the celebration of this season, are you kept from feeling God's love by things hidden deep in your heart that you believe God cannot forgive? In the silence, offer these things up to God and open your heart to God's loving touch.

Allow 5-10 minutes of meditation, during which soft music is played. The worship leader coordinates distribution of the paperwhite bulbs, possibly by passing them around in a basket.

**Leader:** As a symbol of God's extravagant love, please accept this gift of a paperwhite bulb—a small, white flower with a strong, wonderful scent. In coming days, plant it. May its fragrance remind you of the gift of Jesus Christ. In closing, let us pray together.

**All:** O God, we thank you for all your marvelous gifts,  
and especially the gift of Jesus, your son.  
Give us the grace to show mercy as you showed mercy to us.  
As you forgave, may we forgive.  
As you loved, may we love.  
Blessed be your name for ever and ever. Amen.

Sing HWB 201 "Hark! the herald angels sing."