

Las Posadas

From the United Methodist Book of Worship:

(Copyright 1992 The United Methodist Publishing House, page 266)

"In the Hispanic tradition of Latin American countries, especially in Mexico, one of the oldest celebrations is Las Posadas. It was created by the Augustinian Father Diego de Soria about 1587 to introduce Christianity to the New World, and now it is revised by United Methodists Carlos Avendano, Raquel M. Martinez, and Roberto Escamilla. This celebration takes place during Advent, from December 16 through December 23, with a special service on December 24. It is a preparation for and anticipation of, the birth of the Savior, commemorating the nine months when Mary carried the infant Jesus in her womb and emphasizing his coming again and the need of all persons for repentance and God's mercy. Las Posadas is a Christian, biblical, and evangelistic service out of the Hispanic culture."

Las Posadas Adaptations Described Here

Often times the traditional tour described in the Book of Worship happens over 8 separate nights; each night the group travels to a different location. The Las Posadas service is usually arranged by contacting individual congregation members well ahead of time and asking them to include their homes on a Las Posadas tour. A specific liturgy is used at each location and often times each of the participants receive small acts of hospitality (hot chocolate, coffee, tamales, or other refreshments) from each participating host family.

We have adapted the concept so that this tour can be done on one night. Instead of having families host us we are sending our groups out to specific locations in the city with appropriate Scriptures, liturgies and questions for reflection. We are doing this with strong intentionality and with a purpose.

We recognize and love the deep joy that comes from the Las Posadas tour described in the UM Book of Worship and believe that is an excellent way to build fellowship within a congregation. However, we also recognize that many congregations are mono-cultural and perhaps mono-economic as well. And so we have constructed this tour of places that are special to our neighborhood as a way of living out the story of the Holy Family in a modern context. We are grateful for the work that has been done to revive the Las Posadas tradition and would strongly urge you to read the entire liturgy in the United Methodist Book of Worship. What you will find here is an adaptation of the idea suited to helping us all gain an understanding of what someone living in generational poverty in the City of Austin today might encounter if they were in circumstances similar to Holy Family's circumstances over 2,000 years ago.

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:22-38

Liturgy

One: Let us pray.

God all-powerful, grant that we may rid ourselves of the works of darkness, and that we may invest ourselves with the weapons of light in this life to which your Son, Jesus Christ, with great humility came to visit us; so that in the final day, when he returns in majestic glory to judge the living and the dead, we shall rise to eternal life through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen. (Book of Worship, 268)

Questions for Reflection:

1. If a teen-aged mother showed up at our church on a Sunday morning asking for us to bless their child would we be able to make room for that in our busy Sunday schedule?
2. Are we as brave as Mary? She dedicated her son to the LORD without reservation -- do we trust God that much? Do we live lives that tell our children that God and God's call is our most important priority?
3. In what ways does God help you and your church proclaim good news to the poor?

Jesus Presented at the Temple

Location 6: Your home church.

Instructions: You may want to make arrangements ahead of time to have a small reception at the church to end your Las Posadas adventure. In the tradition of Las Posadas you may want to have light refreshments.

Scripture

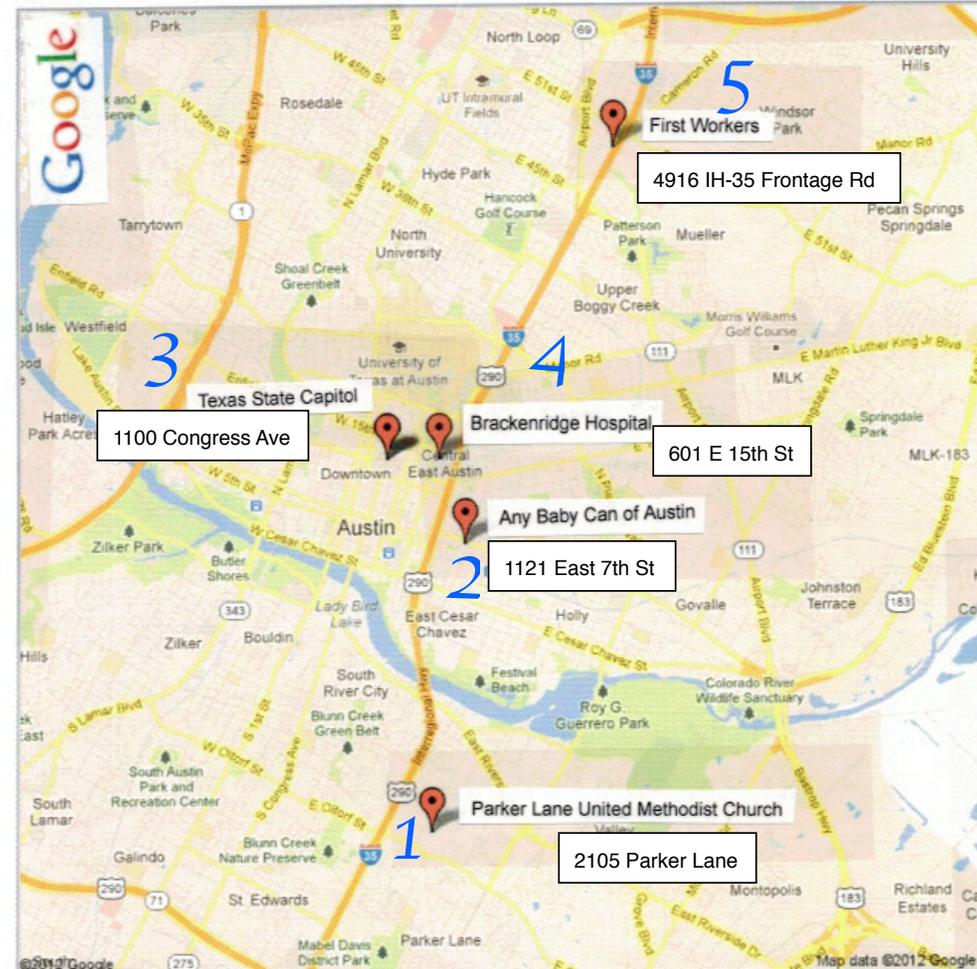
When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the LORD (as it is written in the law of the LORD, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the LORD”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the LORD, “a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the LORD’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Las Posadas Locations

The liturgy contained in the following pages leads you through a tour of the city. End the tour at your home church. **6**



Las Posadas Tour City of Austin

Birth Foretold

Location 1: Parker Lane United Methodist Church (2105 Parker Lane)
Children of Children: Portraits and Stories of Teenage Parents
by: Michael Nye
Sponsored by: Methodist Healthcare Ministries

Instructions: Go through the photo exhibit listening to the stories. It might take 20 or 30 minutes to complete the tour but the stories help us remember what it is like to be at the margins of society like Mary. Read the Scripture and Liturgy before you go through the exhibit. Reflect on the questions on the way to your next location.

Scripture

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent to God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

Many: If any of your kin fall into difficult and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear you God; let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. I am the LORD you God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God. (Leviticus 25:35-38)

One: How then do you call us to live?

Many: You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37, 39))

Questions for Reflection:

1. The shepherds of Jesus' day were poor. Many of them were hired hands who didn't own anything but worked for those that did. Who are the "leftover laborers" of our day?
2. The angels appeared not to the craftsmen or the lawyers of ancient Rome but to those that had no place and no power. Where would the angels appear today to announce the birth of the one that came to proclaim good news to the poor?
3. We are changed by relationships (and made for relationship). How could you work to be in relationship with someone radically different than you next year so that God might transform you?

Shepherds and Angels

Location 5: Day Labor First Workers (4916 IH 35 Frontage Road)
This is a difficult location to access -- think about that.

Instructions: Try not to pull into the lot because folks will think that you are needing help for the day. So park at an adjacent street.

Scripture

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the LORD stood before them, and the glory of the LORD shown around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the LORD. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was the the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,

praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the LORD has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Luke 2:8-16

Liturgy

One: Cain asked God "am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9)
And we cry out too -- are we responsible for our brothers?

Liturgy

One: We live in the in-between, the "now" and the "not yet." God's redemptive work has been initiated and yet it is not complete -- we see signs of hopelessness everywhere.

Many: The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, while no one understands.

(Isaiah 57:1)

One: We trust the God that works to bring all things together for good. (Romans 8:28)

Many: We grow weary from our many wanderings, but we do not say, "It is hopeless." We found our desire rekindled, and we do not weaken. (Isaiah 57:10)

Questions for Reflection:

1. How do we view teen-aged mothers in our culture?
2. What can we imagine those mothers are feeling?
3. In what ways did this photo exhibit help us to understand Mary's faithfulness in saying "yes" to God?

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Location 2: Any Baby Can (1121 East 7th St)
Founded by a Westlake UMC member, who was it's first executive director, Any Baby Can provides critical services to young mothers in our neighborhood. They are a friendly, welcoming support to many of the generationally poor in our city. They have partnered with other non-profits to provide classes such as "Play to Learn" to our neighborhood (some at Parker Lane UMC). This is one of the places that we go for support. Learn more at: anybabycan.org

Instructions: In their parking lot read the scripture and Liturgy. Then say a prayer for all of those that work for the good of young mothers who have few resources. Consider bringing a gift or thank you to the staff of Any Baby Can in the coming year.

Scripture

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the LORD.

Luke 1:39-45

One: Although you tell us that you are weary, we do not give lodging to strangers. We don't care what your name is; let us sleep. We are telling you that we will not let you enter. (Book of Worship, 267)

Many: He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. (John 1:10, 12)

One: Who are the children of God? (Book of Worship, 267)

Many: All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. (Romans 8:14)

Some Observations for Reflection & Prayer Assignments:

1. This is probably where Jesus would be born if he were born in Austin today. Likely he would not have insurance, nor would Mary have access to the beautiful birthing rooms that many of us have used. Pause and think about that a moment.
2. Pray for those who sit in waiting rooms endlessly and finally give up and go home -- still ill -- because they cannot miss work if they want their family to be okay.
3. Pray for those who consistently serve the underserved like Dr. Susan Dubois of the Auxanomen Clinic (see more at auxanomen.org)

Jesus' Birth

Location 4: Brackenridge Hospital (601 East 15th Street)

Instructions: Find a place to park -- perhaps in the parking garage.
Find your way into the hospital and read the scripture and liturgy.
Try not to disturb the people who are waiting to receive care.
Reflect on the questions on the way to your next location.

Scripture

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7

Liturgy

One: Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20)

Many: Who will give help to these pilgrims who are weary of traveling the roads? Who will help give lodging and care?

Liturgy

One: We see the faithful hospitality of Elizabeth as she welcomed Mary and we lament that we too often turn the poor away -- especially when they haven't followed society's rules.

Many: Ah, you who make unfair decrees, who write oppressive statues, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make orphans your prey! (Isaiah 10:1)

One: Help us to be your faithful people and to count you as God and Creator of us all. Help us to live our faith and provide hospitality to all people.

Many: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith, by itself, if it has no works is dead. (James 2:14-17)

Questions for Reflection:

1. We often turn our backs on folks who are struggling. It's hard to approach people with compassion and we are afraid of looking foolish. What does Any Baby Can do that we don't?
2. Texas residents are notorious for not giving generously to charity. Austin residents, in particular, seem to hang on to their money more than others. What would it look like if we made ourselves vulnerable to support others?
3. What did Elizabeth risk in welcoming Mary?

The Magnificat

Location 3: Capital Grounds (1100 Congress Avenue)
You may want to park between behind First UMC (between First and the State Capital).

Instructions: Get out of your car and go onto the grounds to read the scripture and liturgy out loud. We have chosen this location because it is beautiful. And because it is a good place to remember that Jesus' kingdom doesn't look anything like what we believe to be the most powerful people (whether we think that means those in office or those who make the most money).

Scripture

*And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the LORD,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and
to his descendants forever."
Luke 1:46-55*

Liturgy

One: LORD we worship in our churches faithfully and fellowship with those who worship regularly.

Many: What is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts...I cannot endure solemn assemblies with injustice. (Isaiah 1:11&13)

One: What do you want from us God?

Many: Cease to do evil learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:16-17)

Questions for Reflection:

1. What does it mean that Mary cried out in triumph even though she had no power?
2. What would it look like if we, like Mary, cried out in triumph at God's work in the world instead of being afraid or apathetic in the face of power we think to be unyielding?
3. Would we behave differently if we really believed that God's grace, power and love were the only things that mattered in this world?