

LAS POSADAS

A Journey with Mary and Joseph



A Church-Wide Christmas Pageant



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 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. Songs are sung as the procession traverses the streets, often lit by farolitas (little lights), or luminarias. When the group arrives at a home, one of the travelers knocks at the door. The host family answers. At this point often the group 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.

Each evening culminates with traditional foods, candy, singing, and the breaking of a piñata. On Christmas Eve, the celebration is particularly festive, and ends with the Christmas Eve Mass or worship service. This is an opportunity to celebrate open doors and community.

How to Use This Resource

EMM is offering this resource as an invitation to congregations to relive the experience of Mary and Joseph as they traveled in search of hospitality and welcome. This adaptation of Las Posadas invites you to imagine the experiences of individuals currently seeking asylum or refugee status. How are we called to welcome our neighbors?

The stories we have created are composites and are not one actual person. If possible, you may also incorporate the personal story of someone in your congregation if they would like to share their experience of immigration.

It is up to each congregation how to format the service. Use this template as is or as a foundation on which to create a service that speaks to your unique community. You may also use this as a Sunday School unit or program for youth.

You may also reference Forward Movement's excellent resource (available in both English and Spanish) on [how to host La Posada](#).



Staging

- We recommend casting both older children and adults for the speaking roles. You will need a minimum of four readers, Mary, Joseph, and nine door knockers. People can assume multiple roles.
- Improvise as necessary depending on the space and doors you have accessible. Feel free to get creative and orchestrate the pageant in the way that makes the most sense for your congregation.
- An important element of the Posadas are the small candles or lanterns that illuminate the pilgrims. You may choose to use candles or battery-operated lanterns.
- For resources on how to sing The Posada song, you may reference these recordings from Forward Movement.
 - English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=220aQS9Wdko>
 - Español: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyTIRF7gvrEz>
- Keep costuming simple. One idea is to have Mary wear a shawl and Joseph wear a bathrobe.

Diverse Audiences

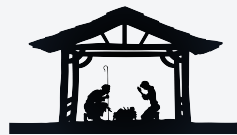
- Arrange to visit Latino congregations in your area that may be celebrating Las Posadas.
- For Sunday School groups, you may use Reader's Theater techniques with books from our list of works for children. The list is included in the resource section. Throughout Advent the children can work on creating stories that can be told when knocking on the door. The final presentation might be given for the parents or the entire church.
- For teens and young adults, consider having them research areas of the world that currently have refugee crises and write their own stories. The stories only need to be a paragraph and all begin with "My name is X and I am from."
- EMM has many book discussion guides available. Either before or after performing Las Posadas, we encourage you to use one of the kits for a book study.
 - For Lupe's story we suggest The Undocumented by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio. Adults are the audience for this work.
 - For Sarah's story you might consider The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After by Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil.
 - For Isabella's story The Far Away Brothers: Two Young Migrants and the Making of an American Life by Lauren Markham is a good match. The novel has been adapted for young adults.



How You Can Help

Episcopal Migration Ministries, the refugee resettlement and migration ministry of The Episcopal Church, has many ways for you to get involved in welcoming your newest neighbors.

- Learn what immigrant communities and congregations are in your area. How can you show hospitality and welcome to your immigrant neighbors?
- Neighbor to Neighbor (NtN): EMM directly trains and provides ongoing support to faith communities who serve as community sponsors for asylum seekers. Community sponsors welcome their new neighbors by offering friendship, fostering community connections, and providing practical support such as housing, assistance in accessing services and navigating the community, enrolling children in school, supporting adults in learning English and securing employment, and more. Learn more at episcopalmigrationministries.org/neighbor-toneighbor
- Donate to EMM: Show your support for our newest neighbors and make a gift to Episcopal Migration Ministries. Every gift ensures newcomers welcomed through EMM are given a solid foundation to begin again in safety and hope. Make a gift at episcopalmigrationministries.org/give.
- Join the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN): The EPPN is a grassroots network of Episcopalians dedicated to striving for justice and peace. Through the EPPN action center, you contact your member of Congress directly via email, participate in direct advocacy, and spread awareness in your community. Sign up here: <https://iam.ec/EPPN>.
- Join the Episcopal Asylum & Detention Ministry Network. EMM hosts an Asylum and Detention Ministry Network that meets virtually on the fourth Wednesday of every month. The Ministry Network's collaborative work and conversation focus on best practice-sharing in areas of direct service, organizing, advocacy actions, Christian formation and worship resources, and community education to protect asylum, promote humane and dignified alternatives to detention, and to support asylum seekers and those harmed by the immigration detention system. Register to attend meetings: <https://episcopalmigrationministries.org/ministrynetwork/>. All are welcome to attend.



- Learn more about the impact of migration and find ways to advocate:
 - Attend Leaving Home: Immigration Through the Eyes of Children, a three-day immersive retreat in Oro Valley, Arizona that is focused on the impact of migration on children and families and the ways in which we are called to welcome and engage community action. Learn more at <https://www.leavinghomeretreat.com/>
 - Read Migration with Dignity: A Legal and Policy Framework. "The Migration and with Dignity Framework focuses on the dignity of individuals: the framework stresses the importance of skill-building, practical knowledge, and protections essential for building peace." <https://bit.ly/migrationwithdignity>
 - Visit the border. The Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, which serves the El Paso, Texas region and Big Bend region, offers opportunities to visit the border. They offer pilgrimages that focus on service and learning. Enter a time of stories, history and our reality on our border. For more information, please contact Ana Reza, Bridge Chaplain at areza@dioceserg.org.

We would love to hear from you. Please share any adaptations you make to the pageant and/or any feedback you have about the program.

We give special thanks to the Hispanic/Latino Ministries of The Episcopal Church for their assistance with this offering.

Faithfully,
Episcopal Migration Ministries

Resources and Further Reading

We have compiled additional resources and articles you may wish to explore as you share refugee and immigrant stories.

Readers Theater Resources

- [How to Adapt a Script for Readers Theater](#)
- [Readers theater: A "how to" guide](#)

Further Reading

- [The Invisible Wall: Title 42 and its Impact on Haitian Migrants](#)
- [COP27: An opportunity to get serious about climate migration](#)



Picture Books about Crossing Borders

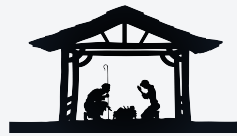
- My Shoes and I by René Colato Laínez.
- Let's Go See Papa! by Lawrence Schimel.
- La Frontera: My Journey with Papa by Deborah Mills and Alfredo Alva
- Two White Rabbits by Jairo Buitrago
- My Diary from Here to There by Amada Irma Pérez
- A Journey Toward Hope by Vactor Hinojosa and Coert Voorhees
- From North to South by René Colato Laínez
- Watch Me by Doyin Richards
- Where Will I Live? by Rosemary McCarney
- Luca's Bridge by Mariana Llanos
- Refugees and Migrants by Ceri Roberts and Hanana Kai
- Dreamers by Yuyi Morales
- Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote by Duncan Tonatiuh
- Going Home by Eve Bunting
- Waiting for Papa by René Colato Laínez

Books about Crossing Borders for older children and teenagers

- American Border Culture Dreamer: The Young Immigrant Experience from A to Z by Wendy Ewald
- Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan
- The Border by Steve Schafer

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 welcomed the birth of 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. As they walk, the group can sing verses of a Christmas Carol.

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)

In the name of heaven,
can you give us lodging?
My dear wife’s exhausted
after hours of walking.

Do not be so heartless!
Help us, we implore you.
God, who sees from heaven,
surely will reward you.

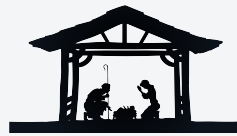
We have come from Nazareth,
walking all the way.
I am a poor woodworker.
Joseph is my name.

HOSTS: (Reply)

This is not an inn.
I don’t take in strangers.
You might be a robber.
I can’t risk that danger.

I cannot assist you.
Find someone who can.
Leave now, or I warn you,
you will wish you had.

Knowing what your name is
does not change my answer.
Go, and let me sleep.
Stop this useless banter.



READER: From the earliest ancestors of our faith, we have been a wandering people. Listen to this reading 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 descendants, 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.” The Hymnal 1982, p.56



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)

In the name of heaven,
can you give us lodging?
My dear wife's exhausted
after hours of walking.

Do not be so heartless!
Help us, we implore you.
God, who sees from heaven,
surely will reward you.

We have come from Nazareth,
walking all the way.
I am a poor woodworker.
Joseph is my name.

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.

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.

HOSTS: (Reply)

This is not an inn.
I don't take in strangers.
You might be a robber.
I can't risk that danger.

I cannot assist you.
Find someone who can.
Leave now, or I warn you,
you will wish you had.

Knowing what your name is
does not change my answer.
Go, and let me sleep.
Stop this useless banter.



READER: My name is Sarah. I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo. After my husband was killed, my children and I were forced to flee our home. We have been living in a refugee camp for seven years. My youngest children do not remember life outside of the camp. I worry for their education and what kind of future they will be able to have. We continue to wait to be resettled and hold on to hope that one day we will be allowed to come to the U.S. Until then, our life is restricted inside the walls of our tent, the market in the camp, and the designated area where my children can play ball. I want more for our life. I want my children to know something other than desperation and sadness. I want us to have a home.

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." The Hymnal 1982, p.81

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 Carlos. I left Venezuela with my wife and family. We are among the 6.1 million who have fled as a result of political turmoil, socio-economic instability and the continuing humanitarian crisis. We walked for miles across South and Central America and Mexico to reach the U.S. border. We believed we would be welcomed. But now I am told that if we walk or swim across the border, we will be immediately returned to Mexico under a pandemic rule known as Title 42. We are in a tent city in Juarez. Please let us in. We have no money and nowhere to go.



READER: My name is Abdul. I am from Afghanistan. I am one of the lucky ones who made it out of Afghanistan during the fall of Kabul. We were surrounded by chaos and I lost touch with members of my family. I will never forget the terror on the faces of the children, the desperation of so many people trying to escape, and the last words I ever spoke to my brother. I know I have this new chance at a life of safety, but I continue to live in fear for all those were not so lucky. I live in fear for my family that is still waiting in Afghanistan.

READER: Come with us, Traveler! 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, "O come, all ye faithful." The Hymnal 1982, p.83

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 Ahmed. I came to the U.S. in 2017 under the Special Immigrant Visa program. I had to leave my home in Afghanistan because of increasing threats to my family's safety. I served for five years with the U.S. military, providing interpretation and assisting with counter-terrorism measures. My association with the U.S. military made me a target for Afghan military forces by terrorist groups. I no longer felt safe sending my daughter to school, walking to the local grocery, or visiting with family members. We became hostages in our home. After several years of trying to come to the U.S., we were finally accepted. I have found a community here where I can offer my family a sense of security. I still long for home and all of the family members I had to leave behind.

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, The Angel Did Say" The Hymnal 1982, p.109



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 Isabela. I am from Honduras. My boyfriend fled to the United States several years ago when drought made it no longer possible for him to support me and our daughter on his family's farm. He first went to Tegucigalpa hoping to find work. What he found were gangs and violence. He paid a coyote and made the long journey to the United States because he knew if he stayed the gangs would kill him. For a while he sent us money, but the money stopped coming almost a year ago. I am desperate. There is no future here. I know I will have to take my chance and head to California where he is living. I am afraid. Our families are afraid. Why doesn't the rain come? Our people have farmed here for generations. It was a good life. Will no one help us?

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." The Hymnal 1982, p.89,90

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.



READER: My name is Samuel. My family and I were forced to leave our home in Haiti. It was no longer safe for us and I could no longer provide for my family. We endured a long journey to make it to the U.S. border. My young children, ages 1 and 4, were very ill from thirst and hunger. My wife could not stop crying. I felt helpless. I feared my children would die. I heard from others on the journey that there was food being passed out at the river. I took my oldest son to find food but we were trampled by a crowd of people being chased by Americans on horseback. My son started running and suffered a terrible fall. He injured his eye and I fear he will never regain his vision. It's been a year and my son is still suffering the emotional and physical trauma from that day.

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." The Hymnal 1982, p.101

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 Sam. I am a pastor from Nigeria. My faith made me a target in my home and I feared for my life. I came to the United States to seek asylum. I believed when I made it here I would finally feel safe. Instead, I was immediately taken into immigrant detention. I thought once I arrived and explained my situation I would be able to make a new life for myself. I was treated like a criminal and put in a facility that looked like a jail. I spent five years in detention, moved from one facility to another. I felt lonely and isolated. I am not a criminal but that's how America saw me from the time I arrived. It is only because of my faith in God, and my belief that I could serve others in detention, that I was able to make it through.



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 "Angels we have heard on high." The Hymnal 1982, p.96

Eighth Posada: In Search of Hope and Opportunity

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: In the search for safety and security, some children came to the U.S. with their families. Those children may have spent their lives growing up without any status. They are now adults trying to figure out how to navigate a lengthy and complicated immigration process to receive their American status.

READER: My name is Lupe. I am undocumented. Although I was born in Mexico, I do not remember it. My family has told me stories of my mother and my journey. How she fled her abusive husband, how we walked across the desert, and how we finally made it to the home of her sister in Washington state. What I do remember is my friends, my teachers, my teammates, pep assemblies, field trips, graduation, my time at university and my foundational belief that the poster in my sixth grade classroom that said. "Believe It and You Can Achieve It" was true. I love the United States and want to give back. Please open the door for a pathway to citizenship for me.

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 "Hark! the herald angels sing." The Hymnal 1982, p.87



Final Posada: You are Welcome Here!

This Posada would best be in the nave. 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)

In the name of heaven,
can you give us lodging?
My dear wife's exhausted
after hours of walking.

Do not be so heartless!
Help us, we implore you.
God, who sees from heaven,
surely will reward you.

We have come from Nazareth,
walking all the way.
I am a poor woodworker.
Joseph is my name.

Please, sir, all we ask
is one night of lodging
for the queen of heaven.
Can you offer nothing?

Truly, my wife Mary
is a queen most bless'd.
She will be the mother
of the Word made flesh.

HOSTS: (Reply)

This is not an inn.
I don't take in strangers.
You might be a robber.
I can't risk that danger.

I cannot assist you.
Find someone who can.
Leave now, or I warn you,
you will wish you had.

Knowing what your name is
does not change my answer.
Go, and let me sleep.
Stop this useless banter.

If your name is Joseph,
Mary there beside you,
You two we knew not:
Enter, good betide you!

Is that you, Saint Joseph?
And the Virgin, too?
I would have opened sooner
if I'd recognized you.

All: (Refrain/Coda)

Enter, enter, holy pilgrims, holy pilgrims.
Welcome to my humble home.
Though it's little I can offer, I can offer,
all I have, please call your own.

All: (Refrain/Coda)

Mary, Joseph, and our Savior, and our
Savior, what a joy to have you here!
We are honored to receive you,
to receive you.
May you stay through all the year!



Everyone is welcomed into the last Posada, the sanctuary.

LEADER: Let us join in prayer.

Christ, for whom there was no room in the inn,
give courage to all who are homeless;
in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Christ, who fled into Egypt,
give comfort to all refugees;
in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Christ, who fasted in the desert,
give relief to all who are starving;
in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Christ, who hung in agony on the cross,
give strength to all who suffer;
in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Lord of the Church
hear our prayer,
and make us one in heart and mind
to serve you with joy for ever. Amen.

Closing Song: " Joy to the world! the Lord is come"
The Hymnal 1982, p.87



Additional Closing Options:

We invite you to consider adding a festive closing to the service that may include the sharing of food, piñata game, and giving some symbol or souvenir of the theme of the day. This will of course depend on the possibilities of your respective community.

For a shared meal, a simple inviting phrase could be used such as:

Now that we have welcomed into our homes these holy pilgrims/migrants in whom we recognize the presence of God, I invite you to joyfully share the food we bless with the following words:

--- Here you may include spontaneous prayer from the host of the inn ----

If you choose to incorporate the piñata game, you may want to highlight its symbolism as a struggle (blows) against sin (7 peaks of the piñata). You may use the following words:

We put our faith in the certainty that through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, God gives us His greatest gift of love, for we have the certainty that all who believe in Him will have their sins forgiven and live for eternal life. With this in mind, let us break our piñata and share the food that today brings joy to our Advent night.