

# DECK THE HALLS

*by Gail Gaymer Martin*



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

---

# Copyright Notice

---

**CAUTION:** Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

**RIGHTS RESERVED:** All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

**PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS:** All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Christian Publishers. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Christian Publishers. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

**AUTHOR CREDIT:** All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

**PUBLISHER CREDIT:** Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: *Produced by special arrangement with Christian Publishers.*

**COPYING:** Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Christian Publishers.

# Deck the Halls

An Advent  
“Hanging of the Greens”  
Celebration

by Gail Gaymer Martin

***PARTICIPANTS***

**SCRIPTURE READERS**

(One Scripture reader or as many as seven may be used.)

**READERS**

(One reader or as many as seven may be used.)

**DECORATORS**

(As needed)

**CHOIR**

(Optional)

## *PREFACE*

Advent is a time of preparation and waiting, a time for adorning our homes and hearts in expectation and celebration of Jesus' birth. Christians throughout the world decorate their homes and churches in preparation for the festive family gatherings and church pageants and services that characterize the Christmas season.

So that today's Christians understand the meaning of Advent and its traditions, this "hanging the greens" service for the first Sunday of Advent focuses on the symbols of Christmas. These holiday decorations renew the customs of Christians in centuries past. The script shares the origin and meaning of each symbol as it touches our lives today. By shedding light on our Advent traditions, we also shed light on God's gracious gift to his children, the birth of the babe born in Bethlehem so many years ago.

## INTRODUCTION

In preparation for Christmas, this book contains a complete worship service celebrating the Advent “hanging of the greens.” Included in this book are the script to be used by the participants in the service, a list of the pre-planning activities and three appendices which include additional music options, an optional section for decorating the tree and an optional gift-giving portion of the service.

The service has been written to incorporate congregational involvement, with opportunities for individuals or families to participate. Clergy will open the service with a call to worship, then the origin and symbol explanations. The responsive readings and congregational prayer will need to be reprinted in your bulletin so the congregation can participate. Depending on your church’s style, decorations may be included in your bulletin.

The “hanging of the greens” is a symbolic service of preparation for Christmas. The congregation has two options with this worship format. First, they may decorate the worship space beforehand and add the final elements during the service. The second option is to begin the decorating during the worship service and complete it following the service. If a congregation does not include all of the ornamentations mentioned in the service, worship planners may easily omit that portion of the service.

One or more readers may present the origin and symbols portion of the service. The number of individuals needed to hang the greens and decorate the tree will be the decision of each congregation.

All scripture is taken from the *New International Version of the Holy Bible*. Each of the Bible verses is annotated so other versions may be easily substituted if desired.

Hymns are suggested, but choir anthems may replace congregational singing. Additional musical selections and hymn choices are included in Appendix A.

Two options for this service are available. The first involves the ornaments used to decorate the Christmas tree. If the congregation wishes to adorn the tree with special symbols centering around Christ, such as Christments then Appendix B should be used in conjunction with *The Christment Tree Pattern Book Volumes 1 and 2*, published by Meriwether Publishing Ltd.

The second involves gift-giving. In this service, a charity collection is included, designated by the congregation. This may be in the form of such benevolence donations as monetary gifts, packages for needy families in the communities, or gloves, hats, and scarves for the homeless. If a donation is not preferred, then a gift may be presented to those in attendance in the form of a candy cane. The symbolism for this part of the service is found in Appendix C. If desired, both gift-giving portions may be presented.

## **PLANNING AND LOGISTICS**

Planning is necessary to prepare for a smooth, organized worship experience. Two types of preparation are necessary. First, have all the equipment on hand and arranged for easy access, as well as all of the locations marked for placement of the adornments. Second, the individuals and families who will be involved in the worship service need a quick rehearsal so they know when in the service they will be involved and what they must do. Below is a list of needs for each part of the service.

### **Advent Wreath and Candles**

Advent stand and wreath  
 3 purple or blue candles  
 1 pink candle  
 1 lighter

### **Evergreens**

Swags, wreaths, or pieces of roping easily hung during the service  
 Bows for ornamentation of the greens  
 Ladders

### **Poinsettias**

Poinsettia plants with foil wrap — quantity to be decided by individual congregations  
 Designated locations for plants pre-marked for placement  
*In many churches, poinsettias are paid for by congregational members as memorials, in honor or in thanksgiving with the dedication listed in the bulletin. These plants are either donated to the church or picked up after the service.*

### **Nativity Scene**

A large Nativity scene  
 A table to hold the display

### **Christmas Tree and Star**

Tree assembled with lights, star topper, and garland, if desired  
 Tree skirt in place  
 1 or 2 folding ladders readily available  
 3 adults: to assist in the placement of the ornaments  
 Ornaments arranged on a table in back of the congregation to be retrieved as needed

**Gift Giving**

Option A — A few gifts, wrapped or unwrapped, to be placed under the tree

Option B — Candy canes, placed in four to six baskets, in large enough quantity to provide one to each person. These may be distributed by the children of the congregation.

*Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ©. NIV©. Copyright ® 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.*

1           *(The SCRIPTURE READER[s] are positioned behind a*  
 2           *lectern and remain there throughout the service.)*

3    *Prelude*

4    *Call to Worship* (Jeremiah 33: 14-15)

5    **PASTOR:** The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I  
 6           will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of  
 7           Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at  
 8           that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from  
 9           David's line, he will do what is just and right in the  
 10          land.

11   *Hymn:* "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (Traditional)

12   *Responsive Reading:* Isaiah 11:1-6, 10

13   **PASTOR:** A shoot will come from the stump of Jesse, from  
 14          his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

15   **ALL:** The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of  
 16          wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and  
 17          of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the  
 18          Lord —

19   **PASTOR:** And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He  
 20          will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide  
 21          by what he hears with his ears;

22   **ALL:** But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with  
 23          justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
 24          He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with  
 25          the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

26   **PASTOR:** Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the  
 27          sash around his waist.

28   **ALL:** The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie  
 29          down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the  
 30          yearling together, and a little child will lead them.

31   **PASTOR:** In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a  
 32          banner for the peoples;

33   **ALL:** The nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will  
 34          be glorious.

35

## The Meaning of Advent

1  
2  
3 **PASTOR:** Advent is a time of preparation, a time of  
4 penance, and a time of waiting. As we make ready for  
5 Christ's coming, we prepare our homes with the  
6 symbols of Christmas, and we prepare our hearts by  
7 opening them to god's promise and by showing our  
8 repentance. Then, in awesome anticipation, we wait,  
9 focusing our homes and hearts on God's greatest gift to  
10 the world — his son, born as a tiny babe in a humble  
11 manger in Bethlehem. "For to us a child is born, to us  
12 a son is given, and the government will be on his  
13 shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,  
14 Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"  
15 (Isaiah 9:6).

16 Let us pray: Heavenly Father, as we decorate this  
17 building, adorn our hearts and minds with your love  
18 and peace. Help us to focus with joy on the true  
19 meaning of Christmas. May the hope, peace, and joy of  
20 this season clothe us in your bountiful grace and love  
21 as we witness to the world your gift of salvation  
22 through the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

23 **ALL:** Amen.

## The Advent Wreath

24  
25  
26  
27 **SCRIPTURE READER 1:** The people walking in darkness  
28 have seen a great light; on those living in the land of  
29 the shadow of death a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2).

### The Origin and Symbol of the Advent Wreath

30  
31  
32  
33 *(READER 1 steps forward to the Advent wreath which*  
34 *should be in direct view of the congregation.)*

35 **READER 1:** The origin of a burning wreath is found in the

1 traditions of pre-Christian Germanic people who  
2 burned the greens in the hope of spring following a  
3 long winter. In the sixteenth century throughout  
4 Germany, the Advent wreath became a traditional  
5 symbol for many Christians. The circle of evergreens,  
6 having no end and bearing four candles, reminds us of  
7 the eternal Christ, the light of the world. Each Sunday  
8 in Advent a new candle is lighted until all four glow on  
9 the fourth Sunday.

10 The three purple or blue candles represent the  
11 darkness of a sinful world. The pink candles represent  
12 the coming of the light. On the first Sunday of Advent,  
13 the first dark-hued candle represents hope, reminding  
14 us of God's promise that Christ is our hope and our  
15 salvation. On the second Sunday of Advent, the candle  
16 symbolizes peace, reminding us that Jesus is the  
17 "Prince of Peace." The third Advent candle represents  
18 joy, reminding us of the angel's message, "Do not be  
19 afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be  
20 for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior  
21 has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10  
22 -11). The pink Advent candle symbolizes love,  
23 reminding us, "For God so loved the world that he gave  
24 his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him  
25 shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

26 PASTOR: Let us join in prayer:

27 ALL: Heavenly Father, you have given us hope in the  
28 promise of your Son. Today, we pray that you guide us  
29 in our preparation for Christ's birth. As we light the  
30 first Advent candle, reminding us of the hope of our  
31 Salvation, fill our minds with peace and our hearts  
32 with joy. We thank you, Lord, for the gift of love you  
33 have given us in your Son. Amen. (*The first Advent*  
34 *candle is lighted by READER 1 or another assistant. They*  
35 *then are seated.*)

1 *Hymn: “Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella” (Traditional French)*

2

3

### Evergreens

4

5 **SCRIPTURE READER 2:** The righteous will flourish like  
6 a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon,  
7 planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in  
8 the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old  
9 age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, “The  
10 Lord is upright; he is my Rock ... ” (Psalm 92: 12-15).

11

12

### The Origin and Symbol of Evergreens

13

14 (*READER 2 steps forward with an ASSISTANT holding*  
15 *evergreen roping swag or a wreath.*)

16 **READER 2:** Hanging greenery goes back to ancient Rome.  
17 Evergreen roping and wreaths were hung in homes and  
18 on buildings as a sign of victory. Evergreens include  
19 not only fir, cedar and pine, but also ivy, holly and  
20 rosemary. Christians continued to follow the practice of  
21 hanging greens as a symbol of Jesus’ victory over  
22 death. Evergreens offer a variety of symbols and  
23 traditions. Holly has become a sign of Christ’s Passion.  
24 The prickly leaves suggest the crown of thorns and the  
25 red berries, the blood that Jesus shed for our sins. A  
26 legend says the rosemary shrub is fragrant because  
27 Mary laid the Christ child’s garments on its branches.  
28 In the Middle Ages, rosemary was spread on the floor  
29 of homes at Christmas, and as people walked on it, a  
30 pleasant aroma filled the air. The evergreen also serves  
31 as a symbol of eternal life — always green, always fresh  
32 and alive, everlasting. Thus the evergreen is a symbol  
33 of the eternal promise of salvation and the everlasting  
34 God. The hanging of the greens has become a tradition  
35 of preparation for Christmas. (*READER 2 sits.*)

1 *Responsive Reading:* Peter 1:23-25

2 **PASTOR:** For you have been born again, not of perishable  
3 seed, but of imperishable, through the living and  
4 enduring word of God.

5 **ALL:** For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like  
6 the flowers of the field.

7 **PASTOR:** The grass withers and the flowers fall.

8 **ALL:** But the word of the Lord stands forever.” (*Following*  
9 *the responsive reading, swags, roping, and/or wreath will be*  
10 *hung by individuals in predesignated areas during the*  
11 *hymn.*)

12 *Hymn:* “The Holly and the Ivy” (Old French Melody)

13

14 **Poinsettias**

15

16 **SCRIPTURE READER 3:** “Arise, shine, for your light has  
17 come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See,  
18 darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over  
19 the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory  
20 appears over you” (Isaiah 60:1-2).

21

22 **The Origin and Symbol of the Poinsettia**

23

24 (*READER 3 comes forward with an ASSISTANT or a*  
25 *number of individuals holding poinsettias.*)

26 **READER 3:** The poinsettia is known in Central America as  
27 the “Flower of the Holy Night.” This blossom is a newer  
28 Christmas tradition beginning in the early nineteenth  
29 century when Dr. Joel Poinsett, our first ambassador to  
30 Mexico, introduced it to the United States. Its star  
31 shape reminds us of the Bethlehem star. Two legends  
32 have evolved from this flower. The first explains its  
33 origin. A little boy, having nothing to give the baby  
34 Jesus, prayed, and as he did, the flower grew at his  
35 feet. He picked the blossom and gave it to the Christ

1 child. The second legend tells us that the poinsettia was  
 2 white, representing the purity of Christ, but when  
 3 Jesus died on the cross, the blossom changed to blood  
 4 red. So the star-shaped poinsettia reminds us of the  
 5 holy night pointing us toward Good Friday. (*READER 3*  
 6 *sits.*)

7 *Responsive Reading:* Isaiah 35: 1-2

8 **PASTOR:** The desert and the parched land will be glad;

9 **ALL:** The wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

10 **PASTOR:** Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;

11 **ALL:** It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. (*During or*  
 12 *before the hymn or anthem, unindividuals will place the*  
 13 *poinsettias in the designated areas.*)

14 *Hymn:* "Lo, How a Rose Is Blooming" M. Praetorius Traditional

15

## 16 The Nativity Scene

17

18 (*READER 4 comes forward. A Nativity scene will be placed*  
 19 *in front of the worship area.*)

20 **SCRIPTURE READER 4:** When the angels had left them  
 21 and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one  
 22 another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that  
 23 has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So  
 24 they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the  
 25 baby, who was lying in the manger (Luke 2:15-16).

26

## 27 The Origin and Symbol of the Nativity Scene

28

29 **READER 4:** In the Middle Ages, when few people could  
 30 read and church services were in Latin, carved figures  
 31 were used to tell Bible stories, especially the story of  
 32 Jesus' birth, the Nativity. This scene bears many  
 33 names: Nativity scene, Christmas manger, manger  
 34 scene, and Crche, to name a few.

35 St. Francis of Assisi is given credit for popularizing



## The Origin and Symbol of the Christmas Tree

1  
2  
3 **READER 5:** In ancient times, trees and all nature were held  
4 in great reverence as a symbol of rebirth. During the  
5 season of Yule, trees were brought indoors and  
6 decorated as part of pagan worship. Because of this,  
7 trees were banned in many Christian churches until the  
8 church leaders studied the words of Isaiah 60:13, “The  
9 glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and  
10 the cypress together, to adorn the place of my  
11 sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet.”

12 Many legends have evolved about the Christmas tree.  
13 One of the oldest is said to have happened nearly one  
14 thousand years ago when St. Boniface, in protest to  
15 tree worshipers, cut down an oak tree, and to his  
16 amazement, a fir tree sprung from its roots. Another  
17 legend from the sixteenth century tells the story of  
18 Martin Luther, a German church reformer, who was  
19 inspired by the beauty of an evergreen tree lit by the  
20 stars on Christmas Eve. He cut down the tree, dragged  
21 it home, and lighted the limbs with candles to simulate  
22 the stars in the sky above Bethlehem.

23 But modern researchers believe the Christmas tree  
24 evolved from the Paradise tree which was part of the  
25 ancient “mystery plays” banned by the church in the  
26 fifteenth century. The Paradise tree, decorated with  
27 apples, told the story of Adam and Eve. No longer  
28 found in the church, people took the custom of the  
29 Paradise tree into their homes. During this same time,  
30 wooden Christmas pyramids were used on Christmas  
31 Eve, decorated with candles. In the late Middle Ages,  
32 glass bulbs and the Bethlehem star were added. These  
33 two customs seem the logical origin of our Christmas  
34 tree, reminding us of the tree on which Christ was  
35 crucified. It serves as a wonderful symbol of our



## Christmas Gifts

(READER 7 comes forward and displays one of the wrapped gifts.)

**SCRIPTURE READER 7:** When [the wise men] saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh (Matthew 2:10-11).

## The Origin and Symbol of Gift-Giving

**READER 7:** Gift-giving is an ancient practice. During the midwinter, giving gifts was practiced by the ancient German and Scandinavian tribes to celebrate Yule. St. Nicholas, born in Asia Minor, used his wealth to help the needy with unexpected gifts and many legends grew about him and his generosity.

The biblical account of the Magi bringing gifts to the Christ child may also have been the origin of Christmas gift-giving. Always, Christians embrace the birth of Jesus as God's most precious gift to humankind. Others look to Christ's unselfish and generous nature and believe that gift-giving is an attempt to emulate Jesus. During the Christmas season, most people become more generous and charitable.

An ancient legend might also be the motivation for Christmas generosity. The tale relates that on Christmas Eve the Christ child wanders the earth disguised as a beggar, seeking food and shelter. Any kindness or hospitality shown during this season is considered a gesture of love for Jesus. The Bible tells us. "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"

1 (Matthew 25:40). (*READER 7 sits.*)

2 **PASTOR:** During the hymn, let us reflect our love for  
3 Christ by showing our generosity for those in need  
4 as the Lord has done. Please bring your gifts  
5 forward and place them under the Christmas tree.

6 *Hymn:* “We Three Kings” (John H. Hopkins Jr.) (*During the*  
7 *singing of the hymn, individuals bring forward their*  
8 *gifts.*)

9 *The Closing*

10 *Responsive Reading:* Romans 13:11-12

11 **PASTOR:** The hour has come for you to wake up from  
12 your slumber,

13 **ALL:** Because our salvation is nearer now  
14 than when we first believed.

15 **PASTOR:** The night is nearly over; the day is almost  
16 here.

17 **ALL:** So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put  
18 on the armor of light.

19 *Benediction*

20 **PASTOR:** And now Lord, Creator of all there is—  
21 trees, flowers, and light — be with us through this  
22 Advent season as we wait with patience for the  
23 coming of the Christ child. As we have adorned  
24 this place of worship, let our hearts shine adorned  
25 with your everlasting light. We ask this in the name  
26 of Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem.

27 **ALL:** Amen.

28 *Closing Hymn:* “As with Gladness Men of Old” (Konrad  
29 Kocher)

30

31

32 *NOTE:* The numerals running vertically down the left  
33 margin of each page of dialogue are for the convenience  
34 of the director. With these, he/she may easily direct  
35 attention to a specific passage.



*Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:*

*DECK THE HALLS*

*by Gail Gaymer Martin.*

*For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script,  
please contact us at:*

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS LLC  
P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406  
Toll Free: 844-841-6387 - Fax 319-368-8011  
[customerservice@christianpub.com](mailto:customerservice@christianpub.com)