



Kronicle

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DECK THE MALLS

"When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem

and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'" Luke 2:15

For ten years of my early adulthood, I worked at JCPenney, creating displays and dressing mannequins. Oh, the stories I could tell! Retail can be a zoo, but there are three important lessons that JCPenney taught me: 1. There are no problems, only opportunities. 2. Management status can make the nicest people into tyrants. 3. Christmas starts in October.

No, really, I can remember being dressed up as a leopard (yes, they encouraged us to dress up for Halloween) standing at the top of a ladder hanging garland and stringing a billion tiny lights. Over the years, this date has moved up earlier and earlier! The Hallmark stores put out their collector's ornaments in July!

But being instilled with JCPenney thinking, I don't look at this as a problem, but as an opportunity! It reminds me to plan early for my kids choir Christmas activities. The Christmas season is a great opportunity to get the kids outside the walls of your church building, and out into the fallen world that needs to hear good tidings of great joy! I'm talking about more than Christmas parties, festive decorations and plates of cookies; I'm talking about caroling.

Caroling has become a lost art form in some parts of the country, which saddens me greatly. I grew up caroling with my mom and brother and groups of people from church. The cookies and hot chocolate alone were worth braving the cold, and the greatest memories of High School were the caroling trips with the Madrigal Choir. So it seemed only natural to introduce caroling to my choir kids! It was a shock to find out that this new generation had not even *HEARD* of caroling! When I told my first group of choir kids we were going caroling, they looked at me like I had three heads. I explained what it was, and told them it was going to be awesome, and to trust me on this... And then I said a silent prayer, hoping that they would enjoy it!

So on a chilly December afternoon, I had the kids all meet, with permission slips and chaperones in tow, at a central location on the main street of our small town, and we strolled up the street, stopping to carol wherever anyone would listen. I brought a boom box with the music tracks, and played some of the kids favorite Christmas songs they had been working on, as they sang out in the open air, with full choreography – almost like a flash mob. After singing at the first location, the kids were hooked! They loved seeing the enchanted expressions of the people who stopped for a few minutes to listen. And although a handful of people bustled by without a second glance, and a few others stared with open contempt, it did not hinder the joy we all got out of spreading the gospel through this ancient art.

One of our favorite places to sing was in front of the Post Office (if anyone ever needed tidings of comfort and joy)! We also sang in front of Starbucks, Jack-in-the-Box, Burger King, Connie's Tropical Fish Store... Well, you get the idea. Some people offered us money, others free fries, and several of them were recording us on their smart phones. We worked our way up the street until we reached our church (which is conveniently located at the end of the street). And there we had a pizza party, complete with cookies and hot chocolate. This became an annual event which the whole group looked forward to all year.

Even if you have not "planned ahead" for this, I encourage you to try this with your kids choir. Make sure you have enough adults for security, and permission slips signed by all parents, and choose a safe neighborhood or street to sing. Or better yet, an outdoor or indoor shopping mall is a great place to find frantic shoppers who desperately need to take a minute to remember what the season is really about.

Looking for carols to sing? Our Christmas musicals are full of great songs and medleys which are perfect for caroling. Feel like it's too late to learn a whole musical this year? Teach a few songs for caroling this year, and put the full musical together next year! Check out our website for audio clips and free previews. And let's Deck the Malls with Christmas "Declarations"...declaring the good news about our AWESOME SAVIOR!



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