

Christmas Pageant Tradition Continues

In 1922 our church building was 12 years old, the system of pew rentals had just been abolished, and the new pastor, Ernest Fremont Tittle, was starting to make quite a name for himself. And the tradition of an annual Christmas pageant was just beginning.

The original script, written by a church member (who later became a religious drama professor), came straight from scripture passages on the Christmas story. For years, the pastor served as narrator and the cast was silent, pantomiming their roles.

High school students played the large roles—Mary and the Angel of the Annunciation were much coveted parts. Younger children's participation was limited to being a cherub or singing in a choir. Very young children were invited to carry a red carnation to Baby Jesus in the manger. And Baby Jesus was a real baby — provided there was an appropriately aged infant with willing parents.

In the First Church pageant's heyday – the early 1960's – the



Above: Fourth grader Grace in the role of Mary in the 2010 Christmas Pageant. The 89th First Church pageant is Sunday, Dec. 11, at 1:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. Photo by Judith Campbell.

cast numbered 350, including six children's, youth, and adult choirs. The list of music directors, dramatic directors, costume designers, makeup artists, lighting directors, and stage managers goes on for a page.

Documents in a pageant archive file suggest the effort and care that went into producing the pageant. One sheet charts the height of each high school girls

playing an angel – and places them on stage according to height. In 1954, one angel reported that the experimental construction of her wings – with a new material called aluminum – made them much lighter. Other notes copiously suggest improvements for the next year – more glitter on the halos; darker foundation on the wise men; angels need to move more slowly; tell the sheep to be quiet.

Pageant Tradition Continues

Continued from page 1

The climax of the Christmas pageant in the 1960's came at the end of the performance, when the cast, holding battery-operated candles, formed a large cross up and down the main floor of the sanctuary. The cast was carefully instructed *not* to turn the candles on until the appointed time, and then to turn them off in exactly 30 seconds. The head stage manager in 1961 (still a member of our congregation today) justified the strict energy conservation, noting in his report that the batteries cost a precious \$62.

Stories of the Christmas pageant at First Church go on and on. Programs from 50 years ago include family names that continue on our membership roll: Bailey, Kline, Perry, Rockey, Webber. Certainly there are many more from other years.

What has changed about the pageant since 1922? Mary, Joseph, and others have gotten a lot younger. Now all pageant participants are four year olds through sixth graders. While the music still comes from traditional Christmas carols, there are no more adult choirs or adult soloists. The pageant still relies on the hard work of many volunteers.

This year's pageant is directed by Jennifer and Paul Soderblom. David Castillo and Lara Korneychuk serve as the music directors. The cast has been rehearsing on Sunday mornings since Nov. 20.

What hasn't changed? The magic of the Christmas story as told by children. Catch it Sunday, Dec. 11 at 1:00 p.m. in the sanctuary.



First grade angels in the 2010 Christmas Pageant. Photo by Judith Campbell.