

From our Churches

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Mission

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Come To Bethlehem

A Christmas Presentation
in pageantry, acting
and singing

• PREPARATION

Two Sundays Before:

The prophet Isaiah [*in authentic dress*], _____, reads from a scroll in church: Isaiah 7:1-14, Isaiah 9:7, Micah 5:2

One Sunday Before:

A fanfare precedes the entrance of a Roman soldier [*in authentic dress*], _____ into the church. He makes a decree that everyone must “come to Bethlehem” to take part in a census. He reads Luke 2:1-2 from a scroll and issues appropriate warnings, etc.

The Town of Bethlehem

The basement of the church is set up to look like a typical Jewish village. Booths of various kinds are all around the outside and in the centre of the room. A walkway of trees and lights leads one through the town. Our town of Bethlehem might include:

a) Beggars in the street [*intermediate boys*], collecting for a good cause:

b) Shepherds and sheep outside by a fire [*in the parking lot*]:

c) The Roman Centurion and his horse by the church’s front door:

d) The front foyer should have a few palm trees and a sign directing people towards Bethlehem [*the basement*] and the census taker. Others signs advertising the various shops might be fun [eg. “Eat at Able’s Bagel Shop”]

e) A census taker at the bottom of the steps who registers everyone and yet monitors the flow of people. [*We shouldn’t allow the basement to become too crowded*]. Each person signs the register and puts on a name tag:

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- f) There is a synagogue school for boys [*primary boys*]:
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- g) Young girls are gathered, singing and playing the draydel game, once every 10 or 15 minutes [*primary girls*]:
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- h) There is a bagel shop [*serving coffee and donuts, etc.*]:
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- i) A Quilt Shop: _____
- j) A Candle and Incense Shop: _____
- k) A Soap Shop: _____
- l) A Woodworking Shop: _____
- m) A Pottery Shop: _____
- n) A Basket Weaving Shop: _____
- o) A Bank: _____
- p) A Candy Shop [*with samples*]: _____
- q) A Wood Spinning "Factory": _____
- r) Wandering Minstrels: _____
- s) Bethlehem Theatre: A stage built for skits – one short skit every 10 minutes. Themes might have something to do with the oppression of the Romans [*poke fun at their big nose, etc.*]
- t) Other ideas: _____
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6:00 PM

People come to Bethlehem, register and enjoy the atmosphere. The Town Crier and trumpeter could make announcements and direct the crowds' attention to various areas. A general air of excitement through sound, sights and smells is to be created.

7:15 PM

The Town Crier calls everyone [*downstairs*] to find their place in the INN. Everyone goes upstairs of the re-enactment of the Luke 2 Christmas Story.

The Upstairs Room

The Set

Stage Right

The Stable – a covered area for animals to feed, is set up on the baptistery. Straw, a wooden manger, a pitch fork [*ancient style*], an old barrel, an old rope, etc. There will be a door inside the STABLE so Mary and Joseph can exit right into the storage area and enter the STABLE through the door.

Stage Centre Left

The Inn – with the semblance of stone walls, a window and a functional door. A few clay or brass water pots and a small tree are along the wall. The organ and piano will

be inside the INN. The door should swing open in a direction so that people cannot see inside the INN.

Stage up Centre Right

The Choir – representing the ANGELS, in their regular choir position. A row of small trees separates them from the main stage area.

Stage Down Centre

A bench and a few plants. This is the key area for stage activity.

Stage Far Left

• THE CAST

Mary--_____ a young, tired and very pregnant woman. She knows she is to bear the son of God who will reign over the house of David; the promised Messiah who will save the Jews. She is worried that the baby will be born while on this journey rather than at home, and she is frightened by this.

Joseph--_____ the husband of Mary. He is worried about his young wife who has traveled approximately 70 miles. They are expecting their first child, one whom the angel said was conceived by the Holy Ghost, but Joseph cannot find them any place to stay for the evening. He is tired and upset at the turn of events.

Innkeeper [Abraham] --_____ a quiet, God-fearing Jew who appears to be nagged by his wife. He studies the scriptures and believes the promise of the prophets. He realizes that Bethlehem will be the place where a great ruler will arise. [Micah 5:2]

Mareh--_____ the innkeeper's daughter.

Miriam--_____ an older and more mature girl. A friend of Mareh.

Sarah & Rachael --_____ two spinnny, teenage friends of Mareh.

Rueben --_____ a small young boy left in charge of father's sheep with his older brothers, Simon and Caleb. He heard the angels but is mostly worried about leaving the sheep unattended. He has doubts about wandering around Bethlehem for a baby in a manger. Rueben is also played by the narrator, an old man who looks back on the memory.

Simon--_____ older brother to Rueben. He is awed by the angels' visitation and is excited to find the Messiah. He is frustrated with his younger brother's complaining.

Caleb--_____ a young shepherd still in shock by the angel's appearance. He has secretly longed for the Messiah's coming and now is joyful to be a witness of this coming event.

Narrator--_____ One of the wisemen, played by the pastor. The narrator ties the story together with a good beginning and ending.

The Mayor of Bethlehem--_____, a somewhat greedy middle-aged man who is thrilled by all the revenue the census has brought to Bethlehem.

Centurion--_____, a soldier who is watching over the Bethlehem activity.

Scene 1

Keep the stage lights down low until the audience is seated. The organ and piano play appropriate selections – pieces not to be sung by the choir. Highlight the INN and the STABLE softly. The ushers, sound man and lighting technician should be dressed as Bethlehem citizens. Then the lights come up slowly [*approximately 7:15 pm*] and the stage area should become bustling with activity [*this should be rehearsed so that it looks natural—not everyone on stage at once*]. Most of the merchants and costumed people from the downstairs area should be returning home after a successful day of work. Perhaps a bagel seller could catch a few last minute customers [*“They’ll be stale tomorrow, so they’re going for half rice now.”*]. The basket weaver would wait for her friend at the bench. A couple could check into the INN. People pass from opposite sides of the church. Use all entrances and aisles in the church. Everyone is intimidated as the Roman centurion walks through the town. The choir enters from the back in two rows, holding candles, and surrounds the audience in the front and sides. All actor join the large semi-circle [*alternate choir members and actors*].

- **Everyone sings together** *Come to the Manger*

After the song, the organ plays and the choir moves to the loft as the actors exit [*some take their positions for the play and those no longer involved should be seated in reserved benches at the back of the church*].

As soon as things have settled down, the choir sings the first verse of:

Little Town of Bethlehem

The choir Ooooo’s on the 2nd verse as the Mayor of Bethlehem comes out on stage, excited over his town jumping with people, and all the money they are going to make. Rubbing his hands together he says:

Mayor: Ah, Bethlehem—City of David. What a wondrous day for Our Bethlehem. People are pouring in from everywhere! The streets are crowded, the merchants are selling, the visitors are buying. Shekels, shekels everywhere. It does a Mayor’s heart good to see Bethlehem so busy tonight [*as the Roman soldier crosses in front of him*]. Good evening, sir. It’s nice to have you in our town. How long will you be staying?

Centurion: Only as long as I absolutely have to. It smells around here [*keeps walking*].

Mayor: [*puzzled, sniffs the air*] Excuse me sir, I don’t smell anything. What do you smell?

Centurion: Jews! [*exits*]

- Mayor:** *[the mayor smells himself, and then, sarcastically and out of ear shot]. Excuse me for living! [does an overdone bow in the Roman's direction, pause]. One never would have thought that the simple decree by those Romans to "return to the place of your birth and be counted", would do so much for Bethlehem. But those Romans, thinking about them tonight will ruin the whole beautiful evening. I wonder what tomorrow will bring. [walks off stage left slowly] We'll see. [the Innkeeper comes outside to get a pot—found beside the wall]. Hello, Abraham. How's business at the INN?*
- Innkeeper:** Would you believe that we're full again tonight.
- Mayor:** I'm glad to hear it. We may as well take advantage of this Roman plague. Ha, ha. *[exits or takes a front row seat. Abraham goes into the INN and the choir sings]*
- **Choir** *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

SCENE 2

The young girls

As the choir Oooo's on the 2nd verse, the girls enter. Two girls come down each aisle from the back, talking to each other. *[Mareh with Sarah and Miriam with Racheh]* They carry baskets full of the goods they have purchased at the town market [fruit, clothing, pots, baskets, etc.]. They are giggling and excited about who and what they have seen. They call over to each other from one aisle to the other *[this should be improvised—but rehearsed to the point that it becomes routine]*. They arrive at Mareh's home, the INN, and spend a few minutes by the bench before saying goodbye.

- Miriam:** What did you get at the market today, Mareh?
- Mareh:** I bought some wonderful things! *[showing off a shawl she bought]* The shops are overflowing with special goods because of the decree. I've always wanted one of these. Like it?
- Miriam:** It looks good on you.
- Sarah:** *[has a basket of fruit and is munching on an apple]* It's nice. Never mind the market—did you see the boys!! That cute little brother of Haimy's was there with his family. They have returned all the way from Jerusalem.
- Rachael:** You call him cute? He's got camel hair if you ask me...
- Miriam:** Rachael & Sarah, if your mothers heard you talking this way, you'd be in a lot of trouble. Guess what. My father thinks something very special could happen soon. Here in Bethlehem, of all places *[stage whisper]*. I heard him talking quietly with mother about a prophecy.

Sarah: *[trying to make an intelligent contribution to the conversation]*. My grandfather was a member of the Sanhedrin.

Miriam: and?

Sarah: Well, he was.

Miriam: Good, Sarah, I'm glad. Anyways, a great event, as revealed by the Scriptures, is supposed to happen in Bethlehem.

Rachael: Like what, for example?

Mareh: A great person might be born here.

Miriam: Do you know about it?

Mareh: My father made me memorize the scripture verse *[trying to sound like a man]*. "But you, oh Bethlehem; though you are a small piddly little town; out of you will come one who will be ruler of all Israel."

Sarah: You're joking!

Mareh: Something like that.

Rachael: Well, they got the piddly part right.

Miriam: Just think of it—a great ruler from Bethlehem. Hard to believe, isn't it?

Martha: *[the innkeeper's wife, pokes her head out of the door]* Mareh, I thought I heard your voice. You are in big trouble, girl. Where...have...you...been?!

Mareh: Uh, oh. Is it late mother? I...I've been at the market and...and look...look what I bought you *[gives her new shawl to her mother]*.

Martha: For me? You got this for me? Oh, Mareh, it's beautiful *[as she exits to the INN]*. Oh, Abraham, look at what our darling daughter bought me.

[All the girls except Martha laugh and giggle loudly as they begin to walk down the steps and into the aisles calling back and fourth to each other.]

Sarah: That was fast thinking, Mareh. So much for your shawl.

Rachael: I didn't realize it was so late. I'd better hurry.

Sarah: I was supposed to make supper.

Miriam: It's too late for that. See you at Shabbat, everybody! Don't forget to wear your shawls *[laughs]*.

[They say farewell and Mareh waves goodbye, then hurries into the INN.]

- **Choir** *While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night*

SCENE 3

The Three Shepherds

They come in quickly, walking up the aisles saying “Hurry, hurry, we must find him!; Which way?; Will you hurry up?; We’d better get back to the sheep!; etc.

#1 Rueben: I don’t know about this.

#2 Simon: You worry wart. All you’ve been doing is complaining and grumbling. We’re tired of listening to you.

#3 Caleb: Right—after what we’ve seen—I can still hardly believe it—you have the nerve to complain.

Ruben: [to *Caleb*] But, you know Dad and what he will do to us when he finds out we’ve left our sheep.

Caleb: Did you see the light? You know, the one that made you fall over backwards?

Ruben: Yes, but...

Caleb: Did you hear the singing? Like millions of voices!?

Rueben: Yes, but...

Caleb: But what?! What...is...your...problem?

Rueben: I’m scared.

Caleb: Look, I’m afraid too, alright? To tell you the truth, I’m terrified, but not because of dad.

Simon: We left our sheep to follow the direction given to us by...by angels, right? By angels, Rueben! Who cares about dad right now. He would have left the sheep too!

Caleb: That’s right. Come on, we must continue looking! The angel said [*slowly and Simon joins in*], “You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Ruben: In a manger...you mean like in a barn?

Simon: That’s what he said. You heard it, yourself. Now let’s get moving.

Ruben: [*hesitates as they hurry off*] Dad’s going to kill us!

Simon: Who cares? [*Ruben hurries after them*]

• **Choir** *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

*How Should a King Come?
Joseph Came Walking to Bethlehem*

SCENE 4

Mary & Joseph

Perhaps played by the couple with the most recent baby. They enter on the last verse of *Joseph Came Walking*...and walk slowly up the centre aisle. Mary leans heavily on Joseph, trying to remain strong and positive [*unless we can find a donkey*]. They reach the stage and head for the INN.

Joseph: Mary, how do you feel?

Mary: I'm fine but a little tired. I just didn't realize how long a journey this was going to be.

Joseph: We need to find you a warm bed and quickly. Sit down here.

Mary: Joseph, I haven't told you yet, but I've been having contractions.

Joseph: Oh, no, not yet. Why didn't you tell me?

Mary: I wasn't sure and I didn't want to worry you. It's so crowded here...we've tried everywhere. Where will we stay?

Joseph: [*trying to reassure himself*] Now Mary, God has promised to provide for us. This is a small thing for him to do, right?

Mary: I'm trusting in God right now. [*Joseph sits with Mary and tries to comfort her*]

• **Choir** *No Room*

Joseph: Let's try the INN over there—maybe they have a last minute cancellation—perhaps they will have a little space.

SCENE 5

The INN

Joseph knocks at the door. The wife [*rather crabby and cross*] shouts back.

Wife: We're full. There's no room here.

[Joseph knocks again]

- Wife:** I'm coming, I'm coming, just hold on. [*she pokes here head out the door*] What is it? [*she's interrupted by a small girl pulling on her skirt--'Mama, Mama, tell him to stop chasing me!'*] Benjamin, I told you to stop...now, go to your bed. [*to Joseph*] Excuse me. [*inside*] Mareh, take care of your brother. Abraham, there's someone at the door! [*to Joseph*] He's coming...my husband. Benjamin, it's your bedtime. Now get going! [*goes inside*]
- Joseph:** [*to Mary*] She's probably had a very frustrating day. [*the Innkeeper arrives*] Oh, good evening, Sir.
- Innkeeper:** [*in a kindly manner*] Dear me, you too look like you could really use a room. I'm sorry, as my wife conveyed, we have no room left. [*Martha reappears*] What do you think, Martha, would Joshua's Inn have any vacancy?
- Martha:** All of the inns in town were full three hours ago. You should have arrived earlier.
- Joseph:** We've been walking from Nazareth [*the Innkeepers react*] – Mary is due to have a baby soon.
- Innkeeper:** Yes, I can see that...is she alright?
- Joseph:** We'll take anything. We are so...weary.
- Martha:** I'm afraid you're out of luck. People are sleeping in the streets. Understand?
- Innkeeper:** Martha, could you go see to the children? I'll be right in. [*she hesitates*] Martha! [*raises his voice slightly-she leaves*]
- Joseph:** In this whole city...nothing at all? [*Mary sits on the bench-despairing*]
- Innkeeper:** [*to Joseph, pulling his arm aside*] Listen, I'm embarrassed to even suggest this, but I have a small place out behind the INN.
- Martha:** [*from inside*] Not the stable, you can't put them in the stable. [*poking her head out the door*] Where will we put our cow?
- Innkeeper:** Martha!
- Martha:** Oh, for goodness sake, Abraham, I wasn't serious. You're not serious are you?
- Innkeeper:** It's a lowly stable, fit only for animals...not a wonderful place but it is warm and dry, and I've put in fresh hay. It will provide some protection for the night. It's all I have to offer. It's yours if you want it.

[Martha comes to the Innkeeper's side]

Joseph: But the stable...

Mary: The stable will be just fine. Thank you very much. *[she looks at Joseph and nods. They join hands. Joseph pulls Mary aside]*

Joseph: Mary...God's Son...born in a stable?

Mary: Joseph, dear, if we don't hurry up, he will be born right here!

[The Innkeeper whispers to Martha and she goes inside. Joseph turns to the Innkeeper]

Joseph: We are indeed grateful, please show us the way.

Mareh: *[comes out with Martha, carrying a jug of water and a blanket]* Here's some fresh water and a blanket. It's getting cold.

Mary: Thank you so much for your kindness. What's your name?

Mareh: I'm Mareh.

[Mareh shows Joseph and Mary to the manger. The exit stage right]

Innkeeper: Nice couple. I wish we could do more for them. Did you hear him say "God's Son"?

Martha: How does she know it's going to be a boy? She sounded so sure.

• **Choir** How Far Is It To Bethlehem
It Came Upon a Midnight Clear [ooh v. 1]

SCENE 6

The Manger

Mary and Joseph admire the baby, Jesus.

Mary: Oh Joseph, isn't it amazing. What a wondrous gift from God? I remember what the angel told me:

"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

[The shepherds stumble onto the stage at the bench. Some sit on the floor, some sit on the bench and some stand.]

Rueben: That's it, I'm through. Not another step! We've searched everywhere. By now our sheep have probably wandered all the way to Jerusalem.

Caleb: You're right Rueben. We're in trouble. Don't worry, we'll take the blame.

Rueben: You wouldn't listen.

Simon: But the Angel said that we would find the child in a manger. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people [*Caleb joins in*]. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Rueben: And how many mangers do you suppose there are in Bethlehem? 2,000? Every household has one. Anyways the Messiah, born in a barn? Think about it. [*they sit, depressed*]

• **Choir** [*Ooooh's*] *Away in a Manger*

[*After a few bars of the song, suddenly a child's cry—or tape—comes from the stable.*]

Caleb: Did you hear that?

Simon: Hear what? [*they turn towards the manger in slow realization*] Oh, no. I don't believe it.

Caleb: Oh, yes.

Simon: Well, come on! [*in amazement, they go to the stable*]

Joseph: Look Mary, we have visitors. Welcome. Please come in.

Caleb: Thank you.

Joseph: And what brings you here, boys? Can we help you?

Caleb: We've come to see the baby...the Christ child?

Simon: We were told to come here. By...by...

Mary: Yes?

Rueben: [*proudly*] By an angel! [*his brothers look at him incredulously*]

Mary: You were? Oh, Joseph, isn't this wonderful.

Simon: Do you believe us?

Joseph: Yes, we certainly do.

Mary: [*to Ruben*] What's your name?

Rueben: I'm Rueben

Mary: Come, take a look. [*the three shepherds close in to look at the child as Mary holds Him. Rueben reaches to touch the baby.*]

Simon: Don't touch, Rueben.

Mary: His name is Jesus

Caleb: [*repeats with awe*] Jesus.

Rueben: He's beautiful. I knew we would find him. I knew it all along. [*he gets a look from his brothers*]

[*The Innkeeper family joins in to see the great event and the choir sings*]

- **Choir** *Isn't He Beautiful?*
Christmas Calypso

SCENE 7

The Wiseman

[*The organ plays softly*]

Narrator: I wonder if Mary fully understood the power, the majesty and the authority that she cradled in her arms that first Christmas night? I wonder if she realized that when she caressed those tiny little hands and fingers, those were the same hands that had scooped out oceans and formed the rivers and mountains, and those little feet could have walked on stars; and those precious lips had spoken worlds into existence. Mary must have been overwhelmed with emotion when she kissed her newborn child [*Mary kisses Jesus*] – knowing that she was kissing the cheek of the everlasting God. And the baby boy she delivered that stary night would, one day, deliver her. Yes, Mary had a baby and through this willing servant of Jehovah, the world was given a Savior, a Wonderful Counselor, the Messiah, Emmanuel, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, our Lord, Jesus.

This baby grew and became a man. In His lifetime, He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never ha a family or owned a big house. He never traveled far from home...He did none of the things we usually associate with greatness.

Nearly twenty centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that have ever marched, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not effected the life of a person on this earth as much as that one solitary life.

At this time of year, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The wife men sought Him then...wise people are still seeking Him today...lives are being changed because of Him. Please consider how you might seek God's Son for yourself in a deeper way throughout this Christmas season.

- **Everyone sings together** *Joy To The World* [6/8 version]

SCENE 8

Wrap Up

Mayor: We invite you to stay...share a warm drink in our town of Bethlehem. Thank you for sharing this time with us and may God touch the hearts of each one of you during this Christmas season.

End Notes

Committees Needed for the Christmas Story

a) in the Sanctuary:

Drama Director—responsible for the practice and performance of the drama.

Lighting Technician—to design and obtain proper theatrical lighting for the stage [*should work closely with the Drama Director*] _____

Prop Person—who works closely with the Drama Director, obtains the needed props, keeps track of them and returns them after the program.

Makeup Coordinator—to head up a team of makeup artists for the actors

Sound Technician—to work with the music and drama leaders, and control the sound system. _____

Music Coordinator—responsible for the practice and performance of the music. [*the music and drama leaders should work closely together*]

Set Construction Coordinator—to head up a committee to construct the above staging, set it up and take it down. _____

b) for the Bethlehem Town in the basement:

Program Coordinator—works with Sunday School departments to delegate each part and see that they are preparing and clearly understand what they are to do.

Costumes & Props—makes sure all costumes and props are ready for the rehearsal and performances_____

Booth Coordinator—contacts prospective booth caretakers and presenters and confirms booth occupancy. Works with booth creators to define layout.

Creator of the Booths—heads up a committee to construct the booths of lumber and burlap

Creator of the Treed Walkway—heads up a committee to set up a lit, treed walkway with benches on either side_____

Parking Lot Scene Coordinator—heads up a committee to build a small sheep pen, find goats or sheep for it, build a fire in an enclosure of some sort, and appoint 2 or 3 shepherds to take care of the area._____

Front Lobby Coordinator—heads up a few people to decorate the lobby appropriately [see *suggestions above*]._____