

THE NATIVITY LIVE!

*by Juanita Bundt
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THE NATIVITY – LIVE!

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

KEVIN

*In charge of directing the play.
Has trouble keeping everyone focused.*

MIKE

Bored with the whole thing. He's been in the Christmas pageant every year since he was two. He hates being a shepherd, and he's set on dampening everyone else's mood.

KARI

Unlike Mike, she's never been in a Christmas pageant before and is excited and curious about the whole story.

ABIGAIL

Prides herself on knowing every detail of the Bible. Insists that the Nativity must conform exactly to the biblical narrative.

SUE

A super helpful, take-charge-and-get-things-done kind of girl. She and her crew set up the entire Nativity while the other characters argue about the details. She should always be arranging and organizing something and may even stop to try to help members of the audience as she enters and exits.

SUE'S CREW

MARY, JOSEPH, and an ANGEL

YOUNGER KIDS

As available to play wise men, shepherds and additional angels.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This short program is ideal for getting young teenagers and youth involved in helping to retell the Christmas story while setting up the traditional Nativity scene. As they do, they learn more of the complete story of Christ's coming, including Old Testament prophecies, and uncover some of the myths of the traditional story. They are also forced to rethink the message of Jesus' birth in a manger as it applies to their own lives (and attitudes). In addition to including several large roles for older kids, this script has several smaller nonspeaking roles for younger or less outgoing children. It is easy to stage, with few props and standard Christmas costumes.

This play should have the flavor of a youth meeting to plan the Christmas program, but should end up with a fully constructed Nativity complete with costumes. Although the play takes place during rehearsal, the most important and different quality of this Nativity play is the questions it raises concerning what the Bible really says about the traditional Nativity and where the Christmas story really begins. In order for this message to really come out, the characters will need to say their lines with clarity. They will be asking the who, what, why, when, and where of what happened on the night Jesus was born and also examining what is really in the Bible versus what is traditionally displayed.

"Sue's Crew" is comprised of extra youth group members or older elementary students who can help with the props by setting them in place. Sue will not be able to get everything moved by herself, though she should appear as if she is trying to. Be careful not to let her activity distract from or drown out the lines.

Although the play has a rushed feel to start with, because of the references to only twenty minutes to present the program and Sue's activity, that is the time frame they are planning for their Nativity, not the play. There should be pauses between some lines to let the thought sink in and to make it appear more natural, like a group of people talking and throwing out ideas.

The play can be adjusted to incorporate more students by forming a children's choir. They can stand or sit behind or surrounding the production area. The ones who will be in the Nativity scene can be dressed in their costumes and sit in the front row of pews

with easy access to the stage. The rest could be dressed as angels or similar to what the shepherds and wise men are wearing. This allows for everyone to have a part in the play.

The play can be lengthened by having the choir sing a couple Christmas carols at the beginning and the end, or you may separate the Bible passages by singing “Silent Night” and “Away in a Manger.” Another nice way to end the play might be to have the children sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus. If you choose this option, don’t forget the cake! It may be served after the program.

During rehearsal, the youth group could review their play while the choir practices their songs separately. This would require only a time or two of practice together. It would eliminate the long practice sessions with a lot of younger children standing around while the youth group perfects their lines.

If you have access to lighting equipment, the stage could be darkened and a spotlight beamed on the Nativity scene while the Scripture is being read. This would require some type of lighting for the reader — possibly a flashlight or small lamp off to the side.

Have fun. Remember that you are celebrating the Birth of Christ. Everything will not go perfectly no matter how much you rehearse. Love and laughter, and patience, are important ingredients in preparing any Christmas program.

PROPS

Bible with the appropriate passages marked.

All the pieces necessary to set up a traditional Nativity: manger and doll (or baby to play Jesus); plastic or stuffed cows, donkeys, and a camel, but no sheep; and a star. The star can be made by tracing its shape on cardboard and covering it with shiny gold paper. If desired, you can also construct a makeshift stable out of an old refrigerator box to set up behind the characters. Hay bales and other details may be added if you wish.

COSTUMES

Everyone may wear casual clothes like they might wear to a rehearsal. Kevin should look neat but average, Mike might be wearing sweats or an old T-shirt — something that says he doesn't care — and Abigail might be a bit dressed up, very neat and proper looking. For added effect, Sue can wear a headset with chin microphone and/or carry a clipboard or PDA, such as a PalmPilot. Bathrobes, headbands, and shepherds' crooks will be needed for the shepherds. Richer looking robes and crowns should be used for the wise men. A white dress and wings (if possible) are needed for the angel(s). Appropriate biblical costumes should be worn on Mary and Joseph. When the play begins, the children may be dressed in costume unless the script calls for them to get in costume as part of the play.

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1 **OPTIONAL PROCESSIONAL:** The lights are out or very dim.
 2 The children and youth may march in singing “O Come, All Ye
 3 Faithful.” If you have a small group, you may want to add some
 4 singers at a microphone or ask the congregation to join in for
 5 a nice full sound. Every third person should carry a flashlight
 6 so they can see as they process forward. Consider using all the
 7 aisles in your sanctuary as it is an efficient way to get everyone
 8 up front quickly and all are visible. After they reach the front,
 9 the actual play participants should leave the line and go to
 10 their places On-stage so they will be ready to begin when the
 11 song ends.

12

13 *(MIKE, ABIGAIL, KARI, and a few others are standing up*
 14 *front, milling around and talking as if waiting for rehearsal to*
 15 *begin. KEVIN stands near the center.)*

16 **KEVIN:** *(Checks his watch and tries to get everyone’s attention.)* All
 17 right everyone, settle down. We’re here to plan the
 18 Christmas program.

19 **MIKE:** *(Unenthusiastically)* Here we go again. The same old
 20 Nativity scene and Bible story we do every year. I bet
 21 I’m a shepherd again. I think I’ve been a shepherd since
 22 I was two! Shepherds are so dumb!

23 **KARI:** *(Impressed and excited)* You’ve really done this since
 24 you were two? This is my first time. Where do we start?

25 **KEVIN:** At the beginning, I guess.

26 **KARI:** You mean in Genesis? *(MIKE rolls his eyes and looks*
 27 *annoyed.)*

28 **KEVIN:** I meant the beginning of the Christmas story. In
 29 Matthew.

30 **ABIGAIL:** *(Kind of snotty)* Well, the promise of Jesus does
 31 begin in Genesis. After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden
 32 fruit — which, by the way, was not necessarily an apple —
 33 God said that the offspring of the serpent would strike
 34 the heel of Eve’s offspring, but he would crush it. That
 35 was the first prophecy about Christ. So if you really

1 want to start at the *beginning*, we should start there.
 2 (MIKE makes a face at ABIGAIL. She sticks out her tongue
 3 at him.)

4 **KEVIN:** True. But we only have twenty minutes. I don't think
 5 we can present the whole Bible in twenty minutes.

6 **ABIGAIL:** (*Sighs heavily.*) Well, we should at least start in
 7 Isaiah then. That's where Jesus' birth is prophesied —
 8 in chapter nine. I've got the whole chapter memorized.
 9 (*Begins reciting.*) "Nevertheless the dimness shall not be
 10 such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly
 11 afflicted the land of Zebulun and the Land of Naphtali
 12 (*NAF-tul-i*), and afterward did more grievously afflict
 13 her — (KJV).

14 **MIKE:** I don't think we have time to listen to you recite all
 15 that "dimness and vexation" junk.

16 **ABIGAIL:** It's not junk. It's the inspired Word of God!

17 **KARI:** (*Confused*) Who is Zebulun? Was he a character in *The*
 18 *Lord of the Rings* movies? (*ABIGAIL looks annoyed and*
 19 *shakes her head at KARI's ignorance.*)

20 **KEVIN:** Zebulun's a place in Israel. The important part comes
 21 in verse six when Isaiah declares, "For to us a child is
 22 born, to us a son is given." That child was Jesus, and he
 23 would bring peace and justice to the world forever.
 24 (*Turning to ABIGAIL*) You're right, Abby, that is an
 25 important part of the story. But this isn't Handel's
 26 *Messiah*. We don't have time to start our program in
 27 Isaiah.

28 **ABIGAIL:** (*Looks offended, crosses her arms, and says angrily as*
 29 *she moves off to the side to sulk.*) It's Abigail. You know —
 30 like David's wife?

31 **SUE:** (*Rushing down the aisle from the back of the church*
 32 *carrying an armload of props and costumes. She's out of breath*
 33 *and talking fast.*) Sorry I'm late, guys. I would have been
 34 here on time, but when I walked by the office, I saw
 35 Pastor _____ (*Insert the name of your pastor*)

1 sharpening his pencil and thought he might need some
2 help. Those pencil sharpeners can be tricky. And while
3 I was there, I noticed that the trash needed to be taken
4 out, the floor vacuumed, and the pictures straightened.
5 *(Takes a big breath and looks around.)* So where are we?

6 **KEVIN:** *(Slightly exasperated)* Still trying to decide where
7 to start.

8 **SUE:** Oh, that's no problem. We can start with Joseph and
9 Mary's arrival in Bethlehem. Let's see, I think that's in
10 Luke. *(Hands Bible to the closest person.)* Could you read
11 Luke 2:1-6 for us?

12 **READER:** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree
13 that a census should be taken of the entire Roman
14 world. *(This was the first census that took place while*
15 *Quirinius was governor of Syria.)* And everyone went to
16 his own town to register.

17 So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in
18 Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David,
19 because he belonged to the house and line of David. He
20 went up there to register with Mary, who was pledged to
21 be married to him and was expecting a child. While they
22 were there, the time came for the baby to be born ...

23 *(While the READER is delivering Luke 2:1-6, SUE grabs a couple*
24 *of other teens On-stage and dresses them up as JOSEPH and*
25 *MARY. The other teens can be sitting On-stage or in the first rows*
26 *of chairs. After the passage is read, she moves them into position.)*

27 **SUE:** *(Looking around)* Now, where'd my crew go? *(Whistles*
28 *shrilly or yells. Three or four of her CREW appear at the back*
29 *or side, carrying the rest of the props and costumes needed to*
30 *set up the Nativity. She rushes Off-stage to help them with their*
31 *loads.)*

32 **KEVIN:** Should we have an inn and an innkeeper?

33 **MIKE:** No. All Mary and Joseph do is knock on the door and
34 this mean man comes out and tells them there is no
35 room and they have to sleep in the stable. Everybody

1 **knows it's going to happen.**

2 **KARI:** *(Genuinely questioning)* **But was the man mean because he**
3 **had no room, or was he kind because he let them stay in**
4 **the stable? He didn't know they were coming. If he'd let**
5 **them stay, he would have had to kick someone else out!**

6 **ABIGAIL:** *(Stepping back to center)* **Look, guys, the Bible**
7 **doesn't even say there was an innkeeper, so I don't**
8 **think we should have one either. I mean, we do want to**
9 **remain faithful to the text, don't we?**

10 **MIKE:** *(Not really interested, but trying to pick a fight)* **Well,**
11 **obviously if there was an inn, there had to be an**
12 **innkeeper! *(They start squabbling.)***

13 **KEVIN:** **OK, guys, settle down. How 'bout we skip the**
14 **innkeeper and go right to baby Jesus? Let's see ... we'll**
15 **need some props. *(During these previous lines, SUE and her***
16 ***CREW have deposited their props on the stage and are***
17 ***arranging the manger, the preassembled stable, and the plastic***
18 ***animals except the sheep behind KEVIN, MIKE, ABIGAIL, and***
19 ***KEVIN is unaware of what SUE and her CREW have***
20 ***done.)* I think I saw a manger in the back room, and we**
21 **could make a stable from some old refrigerator boxes,**
22 **and we'll need ... *(Looks around and realizes that SUE has***
23 ***the whole thing set up behind him)* some sheep ... *(Trails***
24 ***off, aghast.)***

25 **SUE:** *(Quickly, stopping her work momentarily)* **Oh! I'm afraid we**
26 **don't have any plastic sheep, but I think I could get us**
27 **a live one. I know a farmer. I help him do chores every**
28 **morning before school. He's usually not up when I get**
29 **there, but —**

30 **MIKE:** **No way they'd let us bring in a live sheep. That'd be**
31 **too cool!**

32 **KARI:** *(Finds a camel.)* **Hey, I found this camel. Where do they**
33 **come in?**

34 **ABIGAIL:** **Nowhere, really. Most people assume that the**
35 **magi — that means wise men — rode them during their**

1 long trip to Bethlehem, but the Bible never mentions
2 them. And besides, the magi didn't come for at least two
3 years! *(During this speech, SUE pulls three younger KIDS from*
4 *the front row and hands them wise men costumes. She hands*
5 *MIKE a bathrobe and shepherd's staff. He looks disgusted.)*

6 **KEVIN:** *(Trying to be patient)* Yes, but we only have twenty
7 minutes, not two years, so we're going to have to make
8 everything happen at the same time.

9 **ABIGAIL:** *(Almost angrily)* Fine, but I'm going to be a wise
10 man, too. *(She grabs another wise man costume and starts*
11 *putting it on.)* We can't imply that there were only three
12 of them. The Bible never specifies how many there
13 were, you know. Only that they had three gifts! Which,
14 by the way, indicated very important things about the
15 Christ child. The gold meant that he was a king, the
16 frankincense symbolized his deity, and the myrrh was a
17 bitter herb representing his death!

18 **MIKE:** *(Jealously)* Well, if she gets to be a wise man, then I
19 should get to be one, too. I'm sick of being a stupid
20 shepherd. *(Throws down his shepherd's costume and kicks it.*
21 *SUE hurries across the stage and hands him a wise man*
22 *costume. He looks triumphant and sticks his tongue out at*
23 *ABIGAIL as he puts it on.)*

24 **KEVIN:** *(Resigned)* Fine. Whatever makes you happy. *(Then*
25 *looks around, amazed.)* Great! We've got Mary, Joseph,
26 and the wise men. Not the traditional order of things,
27 but oh well. Now we'll need some shepherds. *(As he's*
28 *saying this, SUE leads in a group of CHILDREN in shepherd's*
29 *costumes. KEVIN watches, astonished. To SUE after she*
30 *finishes arranging them)* Wow! You're amazing. How about
31 an angel? *(An ANGEL, played by a girl, pops up from*
32 *somewhere On-stage in full costume.)*

33 **ABIGAIL:** *(Stops fussing with her costume to exclaim indignantly.)*
34 Excuse me! The angel came to the shepherds in the
35 field, not in the stable.

1 **KEVIN:** (*Visibly annoyed now*) I told you, we're putting
 2 everything together because we don't have two years!
 3 This isn't a reenactment, for heaven's sake; it's just a
 4 *representation of what happened!*

5 **ABIGAIL:** Whoa! Don't get so upset. I just think we should
 6 try to do things as they really happened. Oh, and just so
 7 you know, all the angels in the Bible are boys, not girls.
 8 We just use girls because they're prettier. (*Directs a look*
 9 *at MIKE and fluffs her hair vainly. MIKE glares at her.*)

10 **KARI:** (*Has taken a Bible and sat down away from the commotion to*
 11 *read it. Interrupts thoughtfully.*) Why do you think God had
 12 Jesus be born in a manger with shepherds as friends? He
 13 was a king, so why wasn't he born in a palace?

14 **MIKE:** (*Importantly adjusting his crown*) What difference does
 15 it make? God does whatever he wants!

16 **KEVIN:** (*Looks at ABIGAIL.*) Abigail, since you seem to know
 17 so much, why don't you explain it?

18 **ABIGAIL:** (*Opens her mouth to say something, then realizes she*
 19 *doesn't know the answer and stops. Looks a little ashamed and*
 20 *mumbles.*) Um ... I guess I don't really know. (*MIKE starts*
 21 *laughing, but then KEVIN silences him with a look.*)

22 **KEVIN:** (*To KARI*) What do you think?

23 **KARI:** Well, I guess because he wanted everyone to know
 24 they were eligible for his love. Jesus came to help
 25 everyone, not just the important people, or the people
 26 who knew all the answers. (*Both MIKE and ABIGAIL*
 27 *pause to consider this.*)

28 **SUE:** (*Rushes to the stage, stops, and looks befuddled, as if*
 29 *something's missing. Then cries.*) Oh! The star! We forgot
 30 the star. To have the wise men, we must have the star.
 31 (*Rushes Off-stage, grabs a big star, and sets it in place. She*
 32 *moves the Nativity characters into place as needed to perfect*
 33 *their arrangement, then exits.*)

34 **KEVIN:** (*Stepping back to look at the Nativity scene they've*
 35 *constructed*) Well, I think that's about it. Everyone, stay

1 where you are. Kari, will you read the Bible stories to
2 see if we've missed anything? (*As KARI reads Luke 2:1-19*
3 *and Matthew 2:1-12, those in the Nativity scene stand or kneel*
4 *quietly, listening.*)

5 **KARI:** (Luke 2:1-19) In those days Caesar Augustus issued a
6 decree that a census should be taken of the entire
7 Roman world. (This was the first census that took place
8 while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone
9 went to his own town to register.

10 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in
11 Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David,
12 because he belonged to the house and line of David. He
13 went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to
14 be married to him and was expecting a child. While they
15 were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and
16 she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him
17 in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there
18 was no room for them in the inn.

19 And there were shepherds living out in the fields
20 nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel
21 of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord
22 shone around them, and they were terrified. But the
23 angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good
24 news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in
25 the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is
26 Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a
27 baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

28 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host
29 appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
30 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men
31 on whom his favor rests."

32 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,
33 the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to
34 Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which
35 the Lord has told us about."



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