

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM

by Jane Boldenow



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.

**CHRISTMAS IN
BETHLEHEM**

By Jane Boldenow

CAST OF PARTICIPANTS

Pastor

Readers 1 to 9

Can be any age, eighth grade or up.

Nursery Class

Their part should be memorized.

Kindergarten Class

Their part should be memorized.

First Grade Class

If necessary they can read their part.

Second Grade Class

If necessary they can read their part.

Narrators 1 and 2

Junior high or high school students or adults.

Gabriel

Fourth grade or up to adults.

Mary and Joseph

Third grade or up to adults.

Shepherds 1 to 5

Sixth grade or up to adults.

Angels (2 or more)

Fourth grade or up to adults.

Three Wise Men

Third grade or up to adults.

King Herod

Third grade or up to adults.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This complete worship service program was designed to provide children of all ages a chance to participate in an all-family Christmas pageant.

There are parts for as many as 26 children, children and adults, or as few as 11 participants if parts are doubled or readers' parts are combined.

Costuming is recommended for the actors of The Nativity Story, The Shepherds' Dialogue, and The Story of the Wise Men.

The eight carols are for everyone to sing from the junior choir to the entire congregation.

No special props are needed except for the few listed. No special setting is required; the program may easily be staged in the chancel area of any church. If lighting effects are possible, they should be used, but they are not required.

All of the suggested carols are available in most church hymnals. No special arrangements are necessary.

All biblical quotations from the Authorized or King James Versions of *The Holy Bible* containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues with the former translations diligently compared and revised. Conformable to the edition of 1611.

SUGGESTED PROPS

Chairs for Mary and Joseph

Manger

Baby

Blanket

Chest for the gifts of the Wise Men
(with three boxes inside)

SUGGESTED COSTUMING

Nursery through Second Grade: No costuming except for optional “halo” for each child. (Gold garland cut and sewn into a ring and held in place with bobby pins.)

Mary, Joseph, Gabriel, Shepherds: Traditional biblical garments: sandals, head coverings, and robes or layered smocks drawn at waist with cord. Shepherd colors should be dark, typical of the poorer people of the day. Shepherds may carry staffs. Gabriel could be in a white robe.

Angels: White choir robes if available, and, for an extra dazzling touch, gold garland halos and garland sewn around edges of sleeves.

Herod: A king’s “crown” and a robe.

Wise Men: Brighter robes, of purple and deep reds, for example; crowns (easily made with aluminum foil wrapped around cardboard), gifts, beards and mustaches of fake fur if desired.

ORDER OF PROGRAM

1. Pastor: Announcements and Introduction
2. Old Testament Prophecies (Junior and senior high readers)
3. Processional: "O Come, All Ye Faithful" (Song 1)
(Congregation and children)
4. Group Poem: "The Shepherd and the Lamb"
(Nursery through second grade)
5. "O Come, Little Children" (Song 2)
(Nursery through second grade)
6. The Nativity Story
7. "Away in a Manger" (Song 3)
(Nursery through second grade)
8. (Optional) Flute Duet: Handel's "Pastoral Symphony"
9. Shepherds' Dialogue (Senior high or adults in costume)
10. "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (Song 4)
(Nursery through second grade)
11. "Angels We Have Heard on High" (Song 5)
(Shepherds, Angels, and Congregation)
12. "What Child Is This?" (Song 6)
(Angels, soloist optional)

 "Silent Night" (Song 7)
 (Verse 1: Congregation and children)
 (Verse 2: Special children's trio, optional)
 (Verse 3: Congregation and children)
- 13 The Story of the Wise Men
(Senior high or adults — readers and actors in costume)
14. "Joy to the World" (Song 8)
(Congregation and children)
15. Pastor: Closing Benediction

1 **ORGAN PRELUDE**

2 **PASTOR:** *(Announcements and introduction of program)*

3 **THE PROPHECIES**

4 *(Junior and Senior High Student Readers — Old Testament*
5 *Readings)*

6 **READER 1:** *(Psalms 148:1-5)* Praise ye the Lord! Praise ye
7 the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights.
8 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his
9 hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye
10 stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens and ye
11 waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the
12 name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were
13 created.

14 **READER 2:** *(Psalms 148:7-13)* Praise the Lord from the
15 earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow,
16 and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word;
17 Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars;
18 Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl;
19 Kings of the earth, and all people: princes, all judges of
20 the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and
21 children; let them praise the name of the Lord; for his
22 name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth
23 and heaven.

24 **READER 3:** *(Psalms 9:1, 2)* I will praise thee, O Lord, with
25 my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvelous
26 works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing
27 praise to thy name, O thou most High.

28 **PASTOR:** It is important to remember that Jesus was
29 familiar with the words of the Psalms, which we have
30 just heard, and that he could quote the Scriptures at
31 length. Jesus referred to these Scriptures and Old
32 Testament prophecies often in his preaching and spoke
33 of his being the fulfillment of the promised Christ. Let
34 us reflect on a few of these Old Testament prophecies,
35 from the book of Isaiah:

1 **READER 4:** (*Isaiah 7:14*) **Therefore the Lord himself shall**
 2 **give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and**
 3 **bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**

4 **READER 5:** (*Isaiah 9:2*) **The people that walked in darkness**
 5 **have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of**
 6 **the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.**

7 **READER 6:** (*Isaiah 11: 1, 2*) **And there shall come forth a rod**
 8 **out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out**
 9 **of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon**
 10 **him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit**
 11 **of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of**
 12 **the fear of the Lord.**

13 **READER 7:** (*Isaiah 40:11*) **He shall feed his flock like a**
 14 **shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and**
 15 **carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those**
 16 **that are with young.**

17 **READER 8:** (*Isaiah 42:1*) **Behold my servant, whom I uphold;**
 18 **mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my**
 19 **spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the**
 20 **Gentiles.**

21 **READER 9:** (*Isaiah 42:10*) **Sing unto the Lord a new song,**
 22 **and his praise from the end of the earth!**

23 **SONG 1:** *“O Come, All Ye Faithful”* (*Processional, with*
 24 *congregation; grades N, K, 1, 2: proceed to stage of*
 25 *sanctuary; grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: file into reserved pews while*
 26 *singing.*)

27 **GROUP POEM:** *“The Shepherd and the Lamb”* (*Grades N, K, 1, 2*)

28 **NURSERY:** (*From memory together*)

29 **Jesus, you’re my shepherd;**

30 **I’m your little lamb.**

31 **Use my life to serve you**

32 **In every way you can.**

33 **KINDERGARTEN:** (*From memory together*)

34 **Use my voice to praise you**

35 **To speak of God each day,**

1 When I'm playing with my friends
2 And when I kneel to pray.

3 **FIRST GRADE:** (*Reading together*)

4 Use my eyes to see you
5 Each morning as I rise;
6 To see the beauty of the sun
7 And stars that fill the skies.

8 **SECOND GRADE:** (*Reading together*)

9 Use my songs to sing to God
10 And his holy light,
11 As angels sang in Bethlehem
12 To shepherds in the night.

13 **ALL:** (*Memory or reading together*)

14 Use all of me, dear Jesus,
15 In every way you can —
16 My heart, my soul, my love, my life;
17 For I'm your little lamb.

18 **SONG 2:** "*O Come, Little Children*" (*Nursery through second*
19 *grade, verses 1, 2. After singing, children return to pews. See*
20 *page 13. MARY walks to Center Stage and sits; GABRIEL*
21 *waits at side and enters on cue from NARRATOR 1.)*

22 **THE NATIVITY STORY**

23 **NARRATOR 1:** St. Luke writes that during the time when
24 Herod was King of Judea, the angel Gabriel was sent
25 from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a
26 virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of
27 the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.
28 (*GABRIEL walks to position beside MARY.*) And the angel
29 came in unto her, and said:

30 **GABRIEL:** (*With upraised arms*) Hail, thou that art highly
31 favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among
32 women. Fear not, Mary: for thou hast favour with God.
33 Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring
34 forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be
35 great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.

1 **MARY:** Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me
2 according to thy word.

3 **NARRATOR 1:** And the angel departed from her. (*GABRIEL*
4 *leaves and MARY kneels.*)

5 **NARRATOR 2:** Mary's response to the angel's visit is a
6 poetic expression of faith, joy, and humility:

7 **MARY:** My soul doth magnify the Lord,
8 and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
9 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
10 For behold from henceforth all generations shall
11 call me blessed.

12 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
13 and holy is his name. (Luke 1:46-49)
14 (*MARY returns to her seat. JOSEPH enters on cue from*
15 *NARRATOR 1 and moves with MARY to manger at Stage*
16 *Right or Left.*)

17 **NARRATOR 1:** And it came to pass in those days, that there
18 went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the
19 world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, every
20 one into his own city. (*JOSEPH walks on and takes MARY*
21 *with him as they walk slowly to manger.*) And Joseph also
22 went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into
23 Judea, unto the City of David, which is called
24 Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of
25 David, to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being
26 great with child. And so it was, that, while they were
27 there, the days were accomplished that she should be
28 delivered. (*MARY turns, steps Offstage for a moment, then*
29 *returns with "baby" wrapped in a blanket. She places "baby"*
30 *into the manger.*) And she brought forth her first-born
31 son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid
32 him in a manger; because there was no room for them
33 in the inn.

34 **SONG 3:** "Away In a Manger" (*Grades N, K, 1, 2. After singing,*
35 *children return to pews.*)

1 **NARRATOR 2:** And there were in the same country
 2 shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over
 3 their flock by night.

4 **FLUTE SOLO OR DUET** (*optional*): (*Such as Handel's "Pastoral*
 5 *Symphony" [All, or Section B only.] SHEPHERD may pretend*
 6 *to play on recorder as music is played from "Backstage."*
 7 *SHEPHERDS gather Onstage or in raised altar area.)*

8

9 **SHEPHERDS' DIALOGUE**

10 **SHEPHERD 1:** Hello, my brethren. Good to see you. Let us
 11 talk and pass the time.

12 **SHEPHERD 2:** Yes. It is easy to watch our sheep on this
 13 bright night.

14 **SHEPHERD 3:** Look at the sky! It seems that all the stars
 15 in the heavens are shining as never before.

16 **SHEPHERD 4:** And we are the only people awake to see them.

17 **SHEPHERD 2:** What can we talk about tonight? There
 18 hasn't been much news from Bethlehem lately.

19 **SHEPHERD 5:** Nothing ever happens around Bethlehem.

20 **SHEPHERD 3:** Haven't you heard?

21 **SHEPHERD 5:** Heard what? There's nothing to hear. The
 22 city of Bethlehem sleeps and we alone are awake.
 23 (*Yawns.*) I could use a good night's sleep. (*Lies down,*
 24 *looks up at "sky."*)

25 **SHEPHERD 3:** You should see the city of Bethlehem! It's
 26 full of people!

27 **SHEPHERD 2:** Bethlehem? Full of people?

28 **SHEPHERD 5:** (*Musing, almost to himself*) Look there. Isn't
 29 that a bright star!

30 **SHEPHERD 3:** People are registering in Bethlehem for the
 31 Emperor's census. Why, there's hardly room to move in
 32 that town!

33 **SHEPHERD 2:** Well, what do you know? Something is
 34 happening in Bethlehem.

35 **SHEPHERD 5:** (*Still musing*) That is one bright star!

- 1 **SHEPHERD 4:** (*Yawns.*) I'm getting sleepy too. Let's talk
2 about something more interesting.
- 3 **SHEPHERD 1:** I read something interesting today.
- 4 **SHEPHERD 5:** You read too much, Ezra.
- 5 **SHEPHERD 4:** What did you read?
- 6 **SHEPHERD 1:** Well, you know how our Jewish ancestors
7 have been waiting so many centuries for the Messiah to
8 come?
- 9 **SHEPHERD 4:** Yes, of course.
- 10 **SHEPHERD 1:** (*Opens book.*) It says here that there were
11 fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and
12 fourteen generations from David to the exile in
13 Babylon, and fourteen generations from then until now.
- 14 **SHEPHERD 4:** So?
- 15 **SHEPHERD 1:** So, perhaps now is the time for something
16 great to happen again.
- 17 **SHEPHERD 5:** (*Sits up.*) And you think too much, Ezra. If
18 something great does happen, I'm sure we'll be the last
19 ones to hear about it out here in the middle of nowhere.
- 20 **SHEPHERD 1:** (*Reads from book.*)
21 Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
22 Thou art not the least among the princes of Judah:
23 For out of thee shall come a Governor,
24 That shall rule my people Israel.
- 25 **SHEPHERD 5:** Now what are you reading?
- 26 **SHEPHERD 1:** The Scriptures. They say that the Son of God
27 will be born in the City of David, which is Bethlehem.
- 28 **SHEPHERD 5:** Bethlehem? I tell you, if I were God, I would
29 choose a real city, like Jerusalem, for my son's birth.
30 Jerusalem puts Bethlehem to shame.
- 31 **SHEPHERD 2:** True, the marketplaces of Jerusalem are full
32 of gold and silver and exotic spices.
- 33 **SHEPHERD 3:** And the temples! They are fit for a king!
34 People have money in Jerusalem.
- 35 **SHEPHERD 5:** You know, when I was a boy, out in these

1 hills with my father, I used to dream that I would some
 2 day live in a big city, like Jerusalem, and do something
 3 with my life. But here I am, still just a shepherd in
 4 Bethlehem.

5 **SHEPHERD 1:** (*Reads again.*) He shall feed his flock like a
 6 shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his arms, and
 7 carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are
 8 with young. (*Closes book.*) If God's son is to be like a
 9 shepherd, why should we be ashamed?

10 **SHEPHERD 5:** Maybe you're right, Ezra. I complain too
 11 much. Perhaps God *will* look upon Bethlehem with
 12 favor some day.

13 **SONG 4: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"** (*Grades N, K, 1, 2. Verse*
 14 *1. Children stand and turn and sing from the pews. When*
 15 *the song is finished, GABRIEL and other ANGELS move to*
 16 *stage.*)

17 **NARRATOR 1:** And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon
 18 them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about
 19 them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said
 20 unto them:

21 **GABRIEL:** (*Stepping forward*) Fear not! For behold, I bring
 22 you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all
 23 people. For unto you is born this day in the City of
 24 David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this
 25 shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe
 26 wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

27 **NARRATOR 2:** And suddenly there was with the angels a
 28 multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and
 29 saying:

30 **ANGELS:** (*All speaking together*) Glory to God in the highest,
 31 and on earth peace, good will toward men.

32 **SONG 5: "Angels We Have Heard on High"** (*SHEPHERDS,*
 33 *ANGELS, and congregation. Or, Verse 1: SHEPHERDS*
 34 *[ANGELS join in refrain]; Verse 2: ANGELS; Verse 3:*
 35 *SHEPHERDS [ANGELS join in refrain].*)

1 **NARRATOR 1:** The shepherds found Mary and Joseph and
2 the baby lying in a manger. (*SHEPHERDS kneel.*)

3 **SONG 6:** “*What Child Is This?*” (*Verses 1, 3. ANGELS. Or,*
4 *soloist, and ANGELS join in refrain. SHEPHERDS and*
5 *ANGELS return to pews.*)

6 **NARRATOR 2:** The shepherds returned, glorifying and
7 praising God for all the things that they had heard and
8 seen, as it was told unto them.

9 **OFFERING and SONG 7:** “*Silent Night*” (*Children and*
10 *congregation, seated. Verse 1: Children and congregation;*
11 *Verse 2: Special children’s trio, optional; Verse 3: Children*
12 *and congregation.*)

13

14 **THE STORY OF THE WISE MEN**

15 **READER 1:** St. Matthew writes that when Jesus was born
16 in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king,
17 behold, (*Three WISE MEN proceed down aisle*) there came
18 wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is
19 he that is born the King of the Jews? For we have seen
20 his star in the east, and have come to worship him.”

21 **READER 2:** (*HEROD enters and stands before WISE MEN. He*
22 *listens to WISE MEN, then points to Bethlehem.*) When
23 Herod the king had heard these things, he was
24 troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. He demanded of
25 them to know where Christ would be born. And they
26 said unto him, “In Bethlehem of Judea.” And he sent
27 them to Bethlehem. (*HEROD points.*) “Go and search
28 diligently for the young child,” he said, “and when ye
29 have found him, bring me word again, that I may come
30 and worship him also.”

31 **READER 3:** When they had heard the king, they departed;
32 (*WISE MEN walk toward Bethlehem*) and lo, the star,
33 which they saw in the east, went before them, till it
34 came and stood over where the young child was. And
35 when they came to the stable, they saw the young child

1 with Mary his mother. They knelt down and worshiped
 2 him. Then they opened (*Each of the WISE MEN takes a*
 3 *box from a chest beside the manger. The gifts are given to*
 4 *JOSEPH and MARY*) their treasures and presented unto
 5 Mary and Joseph gifts; gold, and frankincense, and
 6 myrrh. (*Pause. WISE MEN leave manger and stand before*
 7 *audience.*)

8 **NARRATOR 1:** (*The WISE MEN turn and take two steps*
 9 *forward.*) As the wise men leave Jesus for their long
 10 journey home, the Christmas story of Bethlehem seems
 11 to come to a close. But the greatest news is yet to come.
 12 For as in Adam all must die, so in Jesus shall all be
 13 made alive. (*WISE MEN speak or read from where they*
 14 *stand.*)

15 **WISE MAN 1:** I had a dream last night. God told me that we
 16 must not tell King Herod where we found the baby
 17 Jesus.

18 **WISE MAN 2:** Then we will not travel through Jerusalem.

19 **WISE MAN 3:** But I'm worried. What if King Herod's
 20 soldiers find Jesus and harm him? It will be our fault
 21 for telling Herod about Jesus' birth.

22 **WISE MAN 1:** Do not worry. Some matters are in God's
 23 hands, and not in man's. If there is danger, God will
 24 warn Mary and Joseph, just as he warned us.

25 **WISE MAN 2:** Yes. Mary and Joseph will protect the baby
 26 Jesus with the help of God. They will even travel as far
 27 as Egypt if it will save the baby's life.

28 **WISE MAN 3:** I wonder what Jesus will be like when he is
 29 a grown man. Do you think he will actually talk to
 30 God, and share the power of God?

31 **WISE MAN 1:** I feel sure that Jesus will do great things. For
 32 "then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the
 33 ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man
 34 leap, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." (*Isaiah 35:*
 35 5, 6)

1 **WISE MAN 2:** This baby that we have just seen is God's
2 perfect word made flesh. And somehow, he will save us
3 from our sins.

4 **WISE MAN 3:** Let us return home now and proclaim with
5 joy to the world; for the Lord has come! (*The WISE MEN*
6 *lead children out of the sanctuary while singing. The*
7 *congregation sings with them.*)

8 **SONG 8:** "*Joy to the World*" (*At the end of the exit, the organist*
9 *or a solo singer can add descant to the final verse as a*
10 *dramatic ending.*)

11 **PASTOR:** (*Closing Benediction*)

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

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



Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM

by Jane Boldenow.

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

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-844-841-6387 - Fax (319) 368-8011

customerservice@christianpub.com