

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

by Pauline E. Spray



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The Christmas Story

As told in Scripture, pantomime and song



PAULINE E. SPRAY

All Scripture is taken from the King James Version.

INTRODUCTION

As a former pastor's wife, it was often up to me to "put on" the Christmas program. Therefore, necessity moved me to arrange the following play for ease of preparation and production.

Directing the children was one thing. Lost pieces and poorly attended practices were frustrating. But working with adults on larger productions was something else! (I'll always remember a script propped up in the manger where it could be read by an actor who hadn't learned his lines.)

That's why I wondered, "How can I put together a program with a minimum of work, sweat, and tears and still have it turn out like a Christmas program should?" Then I hit upon the idea of creating one that could be presented with a minimum of hair-pulling, and one that would never grow old with the telling.

Since this production leaves room for much variation, it can be used in small or large churches and made as simple or complex as one's resources allow.

The characters range from the young to the older members of your congregation. People from all age groups may be involved.

Again, this program allows for great elasticity and variety. It can be prepared in a short time with a minimum of practice, as there are no lines to learn. Getting well-organized before starting is probably the greatest task.

The scenery may be as simple or elaborate as one chooses. A dark backdrop may be used for the entire eight scenes, but it should be embellished with stars for outdoor scenes. For the interior scenes, paper windows or other background could be quickly attached to the backdrop. A bare stage would also suffice.

If desired, you may create animals out of large sheets of plywood. (Remember to affix standards to the backs for safe standing if you use this idea.) Camels, donkeys, cows, and sheep add to the settings.

The only electrical lighting necessary for effectiveness is an illuminated star. However, a spotlight focusing attention on each character, and revolving colored lights playing on the scenes enhance the beauty of the eight easily assembled settings. The more lighting, the better.

The footnotes are helpful if you prefer to use another version of the Bible.

My prayer is that God will bless your audience and performers through this presentation.

—*Pauline E. Spray*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

READER — *It's very important to choose a person who has a strong voice and reads well. He or she may dress in a choir robe and read from a scroll backed by gold foil.*

ISAIAH — *White hair and beard. Dressed in tunic, robe, girdle and headpiece, if desired.*

MICAH — *Dressed similar to Isaiah.*

JOSEPH — *Dressed like the men of biblical times — inner and outer garments and girdle.*

MARY — *Teenage girl. Dressed in blue outer garment with a white scarf over her head and shoulders.*

CHRIST CHILD — *A large doll may be used to represent the baby Jesus. Scene eight requires a young child.*

ELISABETH — *Dressed in same style as Mary, according to the style of biblical times — inner and outer garments and girdle.*

HOST OF ANGELS — *Dressed in white, wearing halos and wings.*

GABRIEL — *A man dressed like the angels in white with larger wings.*

THREE WISE MEN — *Dressed in long, brightly colored robes and turbans, to which sequins or fake jewels are attached.*

SHEPHERDS — *Any number of young boys, dressed in rough garments. Headdresses are squares of white cloth, tied with pieces of rope or cloth.*

CHOIR — *May be robed or not. They could be dressed in biblical robes.*

SUGGESTIONS FOR COSTUMES

Three garments were commonly worn by both sexes in Bible times — an inner garment or tunic, an outer garment, and a girdle. Everyone wore sandals. Both men and women wore the same kind of inner garments, which could be either ankle or knee length. To make these tunics easily and inexpensively, you may use T-shirts and lengthen them by sewing pieces of cloth to the hemlines.

The man's outer garment was a square or oblong strip of heavier material. It was from 80 to 120 inches wide, held tightly to the body by a girdle. Colored or striped sheets, blankets, or spreads should work well for these outer garments. Donated sheets can be dyed black, red, green and yellow, the favorite colors of the Jews. Red, especially, was popular among the Hebrews.

The girdles were belts or bands of cloth or leather worn around the waist.

Besides the inner garment, women also wore an outer garment which differed somewhat from the men's in that it was edged with a border or fringe and covered the feet. Like the men's, it, too, was secured by a girdle. The lower edge of the outer garment could be tucked into the girdle and used as an apron or carryall. Sometimes the women wore veils.

Both men and women wore jewelry — bracelets, rings, chains and necklaces. Garage sales are good places to pick up old jewelry inexpensively.

Hebrew men trimmed their beards carefully. Headdresses were worn occasionally. Turbans or squares of cloth, folded so three corners hang down on the shoulders and back and are held in place by strips of cloth or pieces of rope or cord, are suggested.

Ragged robes will do for the shepherds, or they can wear costumes, made of clean burlap bags, over their inner garments.

To make these outer garments, open the bags and sew up three sides, leaving openings for arms and neck.

Squares of cloth torn from old sheets can be used for their head-pieces, which may be held in place with pieces of rope or strips of cloth.

“Sheep” heads, with openings for little faces to peer through, may be made out of cardboard for the children.

Robes for the wise men can be made by sewing pairs of regular-width draperies together. If the neck is too large, take tucks between the pleats. Bright hues will add color to the scenery.

The men may or may not wear beards. Purchase beards at costume stores, or sew cotton batting to cloth and color with dye unless, in Isaiah and Micah’s cases, you choose to leave them white.

Halos are easily made out of wire. Make two circles and connect them with four- to five-inch wire lengths so the one circle stands above the hair. Cover it with gold tinsel. The other circle fits on the head.

For a more detailed description of men’s and women’s dress during Bible times, see *Costuming the Christmas and Easter Play* by Alice M. Staeheli, Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 1988, or *Daily Life in Bible Times* by Packer, Tenny and White, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980. Other books are also available.

These are only a few costume suggestions, but I hope they prove helpful when you present this biblical account of the Christmas story.

PROPERTIES

Writing quill
Large book or scroll
Lectern
Large water pot
Clay pots for interior scenes
Carpenter tools
Stools or low-backed chairs
Loom, or, if not available, an embroidery project
Manger
Crooks for shepherds
Gifts for three kings — packages, chests, or
ornamental vases
Lighted star

SUGGESTED SONGS

These songs may be sung entirely by a choir, ensemble groups, or even the congregation. If your church is blessed with a lot of musical talent, soloists and instrumentalists may also be used. The songs may be found in hymnals of all denominations. You may substitute appropriate contemporary songs if desired.

1. "Angels, From the Realms of Glory"
2. "O Come, All Ye Faithful"
3. "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"
4. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"
5. "Holy, Holy, Holy"
6. "Away in a Manger"
7. "What Child Is This"
8. "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks"
9. "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"
10. "Silent Night"
11. "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
12. "Go, Tell It on the Mountain"
13. "O Holy Night"
14. "We Three Kings"
15. "Joy to the World"
16. "O Worship the King"

SEQUENCE OF SCENES

Scene One — The Promise of the Prophets

Scene Two — Gabriel's Announcement to Mary

Scene Three — Gabriel's Announcement to Joseph

Scene Four — Mary's Visit to Elisabeth

Scene Five — Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus in the Stable

Scene Six — The Shepherds on the Hillside

Scene Seven — The Shepherds Visit the Baby Jesus

Scene Eight — The Visit of the Wise Men

(If convenient, this sequence list of scenes could be printed in the church bulletin booklet.)

Scene One

The Promise of the Prophets

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(Stage is simply furnished with a lectern Center Stage holding a large opened book or scroll and writing quill. READER is at his/her lectern which has been placed off to one side. If possible, a trumpet fanfare is a stirring way to open the program.)

SONG: Angels, From the Realms of Glory

READER: Hear ye! Hear ye the word of the Lord! The first prophecy concerning Jesus was made in the Garden of Eden when the Lord God told Satan, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”¹ *(ISAIAH enters and begins writing in a book or scroll until READER is finished.)*

Listen to the words of Isaiah: “The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”²

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”³ *(ISAIAH exits. MICAH enters and picks up the pen ISAIAH laid down. He begins writing.)*

Now give heed to Micah’s words: “But thou, Bethlehem . . . though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”⁴ *(MICAH exits. If a spotlight has been used, it is turned off.)*

SONG: Oh Come, All Ye Faithful (verses one and three)

1 *(Lectern is removed.)*

2

3

Scene Two

4

Gabriel's Announcement to Mary

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6 *(Scene opens near MARY's home in Nazareth. Carrying a clay*
 7 *pot to be filled with water, she enters from the right and stops*
 8 *to look heavenward in a worshipful mood. The angel, GABRIEL,*
 9 *appears and a spotlight, if available, is turned on him. MARY*
 10 *quickly sets down the water pot and listens in awe.)*

11 **READER:** "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent
 12 from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

13 "To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was
 14 Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was
 15 Mary."⁵ *(MARY shields her eyes with her hand as she looks at*
 16 *GABRIEL with fear and trembling.)*

17 "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou
 18 that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art
 19 thou among women.

20 "And when she saw him, she was troubled at his
 21 saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation
 22 this should be.

23 "And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for
 24 thou hast found favor with God.

25 "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and
 26 bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

27 "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the
 28 Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne
 29 of his father David:

30 "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
 31 and of his kingdom there shall be no end."⁶

32 "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be,
 33 seeing I know not a man?

34 "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy
 35 Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest

1 shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing
2 which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

3 “And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also
4 conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month
5 with her, who was called barren.

6 “For with God nothing shall be impossible.

7 “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord;
8 be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel
9 departed from her.” *(GABRIEL exits and spotlight, if*
10 *available, is turned on MARY, who clasps her hands to her heart,*
11 *looks upward and drops to her knees. She holds this pose a*
12 *moment, then exits.)*

13 **Scene Three**

14 **Gabriel’s Announcement to Joseph**

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16
17 *(The scene opens with JOSEPH lying on a raised pallet or leaning*
18 *against the wall of his carpenter shop, dozing sleepily. His tools*
19 *are in evidence here and there.)*

20 **READER:** “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise:
21 When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before
22 they came together, she was found with child of the Holy
23 Ghost.

24 “Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and
25 not willing to make her a public example, was minded to
26 put her away privily.” *(GABRIEL enters stage. A spotlight,*
27 *if available, is turned on him.)*

28 “But while he thought on these things, behold, the
29 angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying,
30 Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary
31 thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy
32 Ghost.

33 “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call
34 his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their
35 sins.” *(GABRIEL exits and spotlight is turned off.)*

1 **SONG:** Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

2 **READER:** “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled
3 which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,
4 “Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring
5 forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which
6 being interpreted is, God with us.”¹⁰

7 **SONG:** O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

8 (*JOSEPH awakens. He sits up and rubs his eyes in*
9 *astonishment.*)

10 **READER:** “Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the
11 angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his
12 wife:

13 “And knew her not till she had brought forth her
14 firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.”¹¹ (*JOSEPH*
15 *exits while lights are off and platform is prepared for next scene.*)

16

17

Scene Four

18

Mary's Visit to Elisabeth

19

20 (*The scene takes place in ELISABETH's simply furnished home.*
21 *ELISABETH is working at some household task as MARY*
22 *enters. She rises, goes quickly to MARY, and they embrace.*)

23 **READER:** “And Mary arose in those days, and went into the
24 hill country with haste, into a city of Judah;

25 “And entered into the house of Zechariah, and
26 saluted Elisabeth.

27 “And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the
28 salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and
29 Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost;

30 “And she spake out with a loud voice, and said,
31 Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit
32 of thy womb.”¹² (*MARY clasps hands in attitude of worship.*
33 *ELISABETH stands with bowed head.*)

34 **SONG:** Holy, Holy, Holy (verses one and two)

35 **READER:** “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

1 **And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath**
 2 **regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold,**
 3 **from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For**
 4 **he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy**
 5 **is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from**
 6 **generation to generation.”**¹³ (*MARY and ELISABETH exit*
 7 *while lights are out.*)

8

9

Scene Five

10

Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus in the Stable

11

12 (*The scene opens in the stable with MARY and JOSEPH*
 13 *watching the baby as he lies sleeping.*)

14

SONG: Away in a Manger

15

READER: “**And it came to pass in those days, that there went**
 16 **out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world**
 17 **should be taxed.**

18

“And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was
 19 **governor of Syria.**

20

“And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

21

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the
 22 **city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which**
 23 **is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and**
 24 **lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused**
 25 **wife, being great with child.**

26

“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days
 27 **were accomplished that she should be delivered.**

28

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and
 29 **wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a**
 30 **manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”**¹⁴

31

SONG: What Child Is This (verses one and two)

32

(*JOSEPH and MARY exit while lights are turned out.*)

33

34

Scene Six

35

The Shepherds on the Hillside



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by Pauline E. Spray.

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