

# BETHLEHEM SPEAKS

*by Rochelle Pennington*



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**BETHLEHEM SPEAKS**

**By Rochelle Pennington**

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**SCRIPTURE READER**

*(one or as many as six readers)*

**MARY**

**JOSEPH**

**INNKEEPER'S WIFE**

**ANGEL**

**SHEPHERD**

**WISE MAN**

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## *PRODUCTION NOTES*

*Bethlehem Speaks* lasts approximately thirty-five minutes, allowing it to easily be incorporated into a Sunday morning worship service or Christmas service and still have time for the offertory, prayers, and a pastoral message. It includes twelve adult (or older child) reading parts, or as few as seven total parts, if one person reads all of the Scriptures from the pulpit.

Rehearsal is minimal, since the characters do not interact with one another.

Following each congregational hymn (allowing for audience participation in singing traditional carols), one of the characters proceeds to the center altar area and delivers his or her lines after the Gospel is presented. As each character completes his or her individual *Bethlehem Speaks* narration, he or she then takes a place in the manger area. Slowly the picture of Bethlehem is unfolded — first Mary goes to the manger area after reading her part, then Joseph, then the Innkeeper’s Wife, then the Angel, the Shepherd, and last of all, the Wise Man.

The poses for the tableau are Mary and Joseph sitting on short stools beside the manger (or sitting on the floor in some hay); the Innkeeper’s Wife off to the side with her hand on her heart, looking upward in awe of God and his events (we are not told in the drama that she went to see the baby Jesus); the Angel behind and above the Holy Family (perhaps standing on a stepstool behind the stable with arms outstretched or, if a stable is not used, simply standing behind the Family on a small stool to add extra height, as if looking down from the heavens); the Shepherd near the manger, looking down upon the Christ child (since his reading speaks of “getting there” to the manger in Bethlehem), and the Wise Man, kneeling in adoration as he presents a gift to the Christ child.

The only prop required is the wise man’s gift, which may be an ornately decorated box (perhaps spray-painted gold with fake jewels glued on and glitter accents).

The costumes should be the traditional biblical robes, headpieces, and sandals — the “standards” used from year to year in most congregations.

The “manger area” may be as simple as an area of the stage designated for the still life tableau pose of the drama participants, or a more realistic depiction with a wooden shelter as a stable backdrop, as used in the original production. It is simply designed: open in the front, boards on the sides and back, and a flat roof with hay glued on it in places. A manger with hay and a doll in it may be placed in front of the stable.

**PROGRAM SUMMARY**

**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: *What Child is This?***

Scripture Reader #1 — Luke 1:26-35, 37-38

Mary's Reflection

**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: *Joy to the World***

Scripture Reader #2 — Matthew 1:18-24

Joseph's Reflection

**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: *O Little Town of Bethlehem***

Scripture Reader #3 — Luke 2:1, 3-7

Innkeeper's Wife's Reflection

**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: *Angels from the  
Realms of Glory***

Scripture Reader #4 — Luke 2:8-14

Angel's Reflection

**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: *Go Tell it on the Mountain***

Scripture Reader #5 — Luke 2:15-18

Shepherd's Reflection

**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: *We Three Kings***

Scripture Reader #6 — Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11

Wise Man's Reflection

1 **CONGREGATIONAL HYMN:** “What Child is This?”  
 2 (*SCRIPTURE READER stands at the pulpit.*)

3 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,  
 4 chapter one, verses twenty-six through thirty-five and  
 5 thirty-seven to thirty-eight. In the sixth month, God sent  
 6 the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a  
 7 virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a  
 8 descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The  
 9 angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are  
 10 highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

11 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered  
 12 what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said  
 13 to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor  
 14 with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son,  
 15 and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great  
 16 and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord  
 17 God will give him the throne of his father David, and he  
 18 will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom  
 19 will never end.”

20 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am  
 21 a virgin?”

22 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon  
 23 you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow  
 24 you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of  
 25 God. For nothing is impossible with God.”

26 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be  
 27 to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.  
 28 (*SCRIPTURE READER steps aside as MARY enters and*  
 29 *speaks at the pulpit.*)

30 **MARY:** “What child is this?” my heart wondered as I listened  
 31 to the angel’s words. Yes, I wondered ... there were  
 32 questions. How could a child be born from my womb?  
 33 How could this be? For you see, I was a virgin.

34 Then tenderly, so tenderly, answers and assurances  
 35 came as the angel spoke to me of my Son — a Son I

1 would name Jesus — but not only *my* Son, *God's* Son.

2 Can you imagine? The God of all creation would be  
3 knit into flesh within me — his Spirit descending upon  
4 me to make this conception possible.

5 I *knew* the Scriptures of old. I *knew* the prophet Isaiah  
6 foretold long ago a virgin would conceive and give birth  
7 to God's Son, the promised Messiah. But *to me?* I was the  
8 prophesied virgin of Scripture?

9 Since time began, the world had been waiting —  
10 waiting and watching for the coming of the One who  
11 would deliver mankind. And here, in this moment of  
12 time, fulfillment unfolded. I had been chosen.

13 Realizing this honor to bear the Christ, my questions  
14 faded and an answer remained: May it be to me as you  
15 have said.

16 Yes ... yes. (*Pause*) I would be the mother of God.  
17 (*MARY crosses to the manger area and sits beside the manger,*  
18 *holding the pose.*)

19  
20 **CONGREGATIONAL HYMN:** "Joy to the World"  
21 (*SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.*)  
22

23 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of  
24 Matthew, chapter one, verses eighteen through twenty-  
25 four: This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about:  
26 His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph,  
27 but before they came together, she was found to be with  
28 child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her  
29 husband was a righteous man and did not want to  
30 expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce  
31 her quietly.

32 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord  
33 appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of  
34 David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,  
35 because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

1 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him  
2 the name Jesus, because he will save his people from  
3 their sins.”

4 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said  
5 through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and  
6 will give birth to a son ...”

7 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the  
8 Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his  
9 wife. (*SCRIPTURE READER steps aside as Joseph takes the*  
10 *pulpit.*)

11 JOSEPH: “Joy to the world, the Lord has come,” and so the  
12 carol sings.

13 You would think *joy* would be the appropriate  
14 reaction to the arrival of the King of Kings, wouldn't  
15 you?

16 But when the long-awaited Messiah had finally come,  
17 joy was the furthest thing from *my* mind. Confusion  
18 was more like it. You see, the girl I was getting married  
19 to, Mary, sat me down and told me the Lord had come  
20 — had come in the person of a baby growing within her  
21 — a baby we were to name Jesus. Joy? Hardly.

22 How could I possibly go through with my marriage  
23 to Mary? She was pregnant! Not only that, but she told  
24 me she had never been with any man! She claimed she  
25 was still a virgin! I was confused.

26 As much as I loved Mary, I couldn't marry her. This  
27 strange talk of angels and a divine pregnancy was just  
28 too much to take. I wanted to believe her, but how  
29 could I?

30 I made up my mind to leave her. It was settled. Or  
31 so I thought. But God had other plans.

32 It was then that a heavenly angel appeared to me  
33 and confirmed everything my Mary, my beloved Mary,  
34 had said. This time I listened. I listened and believed.

35 And so I took Mary as my wife, and then joy did

1           abound as we waited together for the birth of God.  
 2           *(JOSEPH crosses to the manger area and sits at the manger*  
 3           *across from Mary, holding the position.)*

4

5           **CONGREGATIONAL HYMN:** “O Little Town of Bethlehem”  
 6           *(SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.)*

7

8           **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,  
 9           chapter two, verses one, and three through seven: In  
 10          those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a  
 11          census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And  
 12          everyone went to his own town to register.

13          So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth  
 14          in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David,  
 15          because he belonged to the house and line of David. He  
 16          went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to  
 17          be married to him and was expecting a child. While  
 18          they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,  
 19          and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped  
 20          him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because  
 21          there was no room for them in the inn. *(SCRIPTURE*  
 22          *READER steps back as INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters and*  
 23          *speaks from the pulpit.)*

24          **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** “O little town of Bethlehem,” how  
 25          could you have known that the Son of God was to be  
 26          born within your midst that holy night? How could *any*  
 27          of us have known?

28          People had come from afar to register for the tax  
 29          census. All day long the knocking on our big wooden  
 30          door continued. And all day long we had made room  
 31          for the weary travelers within.

32          But now night had fallen and our inn was full. Not  
 33          one bed remained.

34          It was then, with darkness all around, that another  
 35          knock came — insistent and desperate. My husband

1           awakened and rolled from beside me to see who could  
2           possibly be seeking shelter at that late hour.

3           I could hear the old door swing open and a man's  
4           voice enter in pleading lodging. "Please, please, can  
5           you make room for us?"

6           My husband told the traveler what he had to: We  
7           were full. He was sorry, but there was simply no room  
8           in our inn.

9           It was then, from where I lay, I heard another sound.  
10          A moan. A deep moan from a woman. I knew this  
11          sound. I had borne enough children to know this was  
12          the sound of a woman in labor. In a moment I was  
13          beside my husband at the door, looking out into the  
14          dark streets.

15          And then I saw her — bent over and sitting on the  
16          back of a donkey.

17          We had to find a place for this young couple. This  
18          woman was surely to give birth this very night.

19          By lantern, we led them to our stable. It was all we  
20          had to offer.

21          Her child *was* born that night — there in the hay. In  
22          a place such as this, a lowly and filthy animal stable,  
23          greatly resembling the sinful human hearts he had  
24          come to cleanse, Jesus entered humanity. That was the  
25          baby's name: Jesus. We learned this from the shepherds  
26          who showed up later that night. And what a story they  
27          told! The heavens above them opened and angels  
28          appeared to announce the birth of God's Son. "Go to  
29          Bethlehem," the angels proclaimed, "and you will find  
30          the Child lying in a manger."

31          In a manger. *Our* manger ... because there was no  
32          room for him in the inn. (*The INNKEEPER'S WIFE*  
33          *crosses to the manger area and stands off to one side with*  
34          *her hand on her heart, looking upward in awe, and freezes.*)

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**CONGREGATIONAL HYMN:** “Angels from the Realms of  
Glory” (*SCRIPTURE READER stands at the pulpit.*)

**SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,  
chapter two, verses eight through fourteen: And there  
were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping  
watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord  
appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone  
around them, and they were terrified. But the angel  
said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news  
of great joy that will be for all the people. 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.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host  
appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men  
on whom his favor rests.” (*SCRIPTURE READER steps  
away as ANGEL enters and stands at the pulpit.*)

**ANGEL:** “From the realms of glory” we had come —  
multitudes of us — to announce the birth of God’s Son.  
Good news of great joy!

What a sight it must have been! There under the  
night sky, a veil had been pushed back to reveal  
heaven to earth.

And the witnesses to this heavenly glory were lowly  
shepherds.

Funny, isn’t it, how God exalts the lowest of the low?  
It is the humble, not the proud, who find favor with the  
Almighty. And here, on the hillsides of Bethlehem that  
night, favor shone on some shepherds.

Who would have thought? The King of Kings had  
been born and the throne of God directed us to herald  
the news not in palaces, nor to the powerful or

1 political, but in the middle of the night, in the middle  
 2 of a field, to a group of people who didn't even measure  
 3 up to middle class in the eyes of society.

4 He had come. The Savior of the world had come.  
 5 Hear the message: "I bring you good news of great joy  
 6 that will be for *all* the people." Although the shepherds  
 7 received our words, the message was for *all* people.

8 Our herald in the night sky is *your* message. For unto  
 9 you — you personally — you (*Point*) and you (*Point*) and  
 10 you (*Point*) — the Savior is come. He is the Christ, and  
 11 he is the Lord. *The ANGEL crosses to the manger area and*  
 12 *stands on a stool, above and behind the Holy Family.)*

13

14 **CONGREGATIONAL HYMN:** "Go Tell it on the Mountain"  
 15 (*SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.*)

16

17 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,  
 18 chapter two, verses fifteen through eighteen: When the  
 19 angels had left them and gone into heaven, the  
 20 shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem  
 21 and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord  
 22 has told us about."

23 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and  
 24 the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had  
 25 seen him, they spread the word concerning what had  
 26 been told them about this child, and all who heard it  
 27 were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.  
 28 (*SCRIPTURE READER steps aside as SHEPHERD enters*  
 29 *and takes the pulpit.*)

30 **SHEPHERD:** We went out and "told it on the mountains,"  
 31 and in the valleys and on the hillsides, but first we told  
 32 it in Bethlehem.

33 Told what? Told *who*: Jesus the Christ had come. The  
 34 Son of God was among us.

35 Said who? Well, the angels. Hundreds of them — no,



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