

Visit to Bethlehem

By Doug Irving & Gary Randolph



Theme and Purpose

This is a different kind of Christmas drama. It is not a play or sketch. It is not a live nativity. It is more an interactive historical reenactment, like colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. This drama is designed to be performed multiple times with a small audience each time, inviting the audience to enter into the sights, scents, and feelings of the manger. By the way, the magi weren't at the manger; they came several weeks, months, or even more than a year later. But telescoping of events is common in drama, and magi are more or less expected in a nativity drama.

Cast list

Joseph
Mary
Baby - need two or three
Shepherd 1 (Kenneniah)
Shepherd 2 (Yochanon or Johanon or Jonathan)
Shepherd 3 (Jude)
Shepherd 4 (Simon)
Magi 1 (Caspar)
Magi 2 (Melchior)
Magi 3 (Balthasar)
Innkeeper
Other villagers (animal herders, travelers, basket maker, baker, soldier, etc.)

Approximate Running Time 10 minutes

Scene Description The manger.

Prop List Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh, blanket

Other Production Notes Construct a stable as realistic as possible. Fill room with bales of straw for guests to sit on. Separate the manger from where guests first enter with blankets as if Joseph had hung the blankets to ward off drafts.

Related Scriptures Matthew 2, Luke 2

Between performances and before their respective entrances, the shepherds and the magi roam the halls, interacting with guests using lines such as:

Magi: *(Magi split up these words)*

Can you tell us where we can find the one who has been born king of the Jews? We have been watching his star rising in the east. We have travelled far to honor him.

Shepherds: *(Shepherds split up these words and talk over each other)*

Praise God! The Savior, the Messiah has been born. Go see for yourself. It is just down that path. An angel told us all about it, and when we went it was just as the angel said! Go see. Go see.

As guests congregate prior to the reenactment, Innkeeper welcomes them. Innkeeper can ask them to move straw bales or perform other tasks. If you have a donkey, Innkeeper can ask them to feed the donkey.

Other Bethlehem villagers can be added: a basket maker, a baker, animal handlers, travelers, soldier and census taker, etc. Guests can interact with them in character while waiting for the next "performance."

Innkeeper:

More people. Guess you're here for the census like everyone else. I'm the innkeeper here, but I ran out of rooms a long time ago. But feel free to rest here awhile. Come on in. Come on in. Just don't complain about the Romans, okay? I don't need soldiers raiding the place. Come in and rest awhile.

After guests congregate and it is time for the reenactment to begin, Joseph hurriedly enters carrying a blanket.

Joseph: *(calling out)*

I'm back! I found a blanket! *(seeing the guests)*.
Oh, hello. *(trying to make his way through the guests)*. Excuse me, I... Excuse me.

Joseph disappears through the door or blanket curtain to hand Mary the blanket. Talks reassuringly to Mary in low tones. Joseph sticks his head back through to the guests.

Joseph:

You know... would you like to see something amazing? *(pulls back hanging blanket to reveal Mary and the baby)* Look! Gather around. I just have to tell you about this. Gather in close. We could use the body heat. And try to block the draft if you can. He's so... so little. And he's not just any baby. *(laughs to self)* I'm sure you've heard that before. But really. It all started when an angel appeared to Mary - a real angel... Well, Mary, you tell it better.

Mary: *(engaging the guests but with eyes returning often to the baby)*

Well... it was like any other day. I was drawing water at the well. When I turned around I saw an angel. *(looking to see if they believed her)* Really. The angel said, "You will give birth to a son, who will be the son of God, and you will name him Jesus." Me? A baby? I asked, "How can this be? I... do not have a husband." But I said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you have said." But I could hardly believe it...

Joseph: *(interrupting)*

I didn't believe it. *(He looks at Mary asking forgiveness)* I thought - well, I didn't know what to think. But then an angel came to me in a dream and said it was true. And who am I to argue with God and angels?

Mary:

But then just when we thought things were settling down and we were ready to welcome the baby, this decree came out from Rome.

Joseph:

A census and a tax. And she had to travel all the way from Nazareth in her ninth month! I sold what I had to get a donkey so at least she could ride. We joined a caravan for safety and company. But it was so hard on her - hot and dusty all day - bone cold every night.

Mary: *(looks at Joseph with love)*

He was so good, rubbing my back every night and sleeping close to keep me warm.

Joseph:

I counted the days until we would reach Bethlehem and find a room and a soft bed.

Mary:

But when we got here there were no rooms. *(looks toward the innkeeper)* There were no beds but this straw in a stable.

Joseph:

A stable. I'm supposed to care for the Son of God, and all I can provide is a stable? It still smells of the animals. A draft blows through the cracks. Huddle around. Help me keep him warm.

Mary:

"The Lord is with you," That's what the angel said to me. And now, look! He is with us. God has come to us all.

Shepherd 1: *(entering and calling back to the others)*

This way! Over here.

Shepherd 2: *(catching up and pushing way through the guests)*

Oh, please let us through.

Shepherds push through the guests and then drop on their knees in reverence all on one side of the manger.

Joseph:

I'm sorry. Is this your stable? The innkeeper said it was alright to be here.

Shepherd 3:

No, we were sent here.

Shepherd 1:

By an angel.

Shepherd 4:

A whole band of angels.

Mary and Joseph exchange looks.

Shepherd 1: *(standing and addressing the guests)*

We live in the fields with our flock. We were just settling down for the evening, and I had wrapped my cloak tight against the chill. I looked up at the stars, thinking about what God said to Abraham long ago, "Look at the heavens and count the stars for your offspring will be as numerous as the stars." And I thought, we are not that many. And we are ruled by Rome. And the light of these very stars are blocked by Herod's palace looming over us in the dark.

Shepherd 2: *(standing)*

Suddenly blazing in the sky was an angel. His skin was like a furnace. His eyes were like burning coals. I thought, this is God's judgment on us. This is our death. But the angel said...

Shepherd 3: *(standing)*

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Shepherd 4:

A savior! We need a savior from all the evil and injustice in the world.

Shepherd 1:

I wondered why an angel was telling us this news. Then he said, "This will be a sign to you: You will find the baby lying in a manger." I realized the angel meant for us to go. He told us to look in a manger in the stables of Bethlehem.

Shepherd 2:

Then, a great company of angels appeared in the sky, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men."

Shepherd 1: *(after a pause)*

And then they were gone. We stared at each other in the darkness. Then Jude *(indicating Shepherd 3)* stood and just began walking toward Bethlehem. So we followed. And as we went we started walking faster and faster.

Shepherd 4:

And running.

Joseph looks up and sees with surprise the magi who have quietly entered from the back.

Joseph:

Who are you?

Magi 1:

We have come from the east. We watch the stars, and the planets have aligned to tell us that a great king has been born in Judea. We traveled here to see this king so great that the very stars sing of his birth.

Magi 2:

We did not expect to find this king in a place such as...such as this *(looks askance at the stable and shepherds)*. But we followed the star, and it brought us here.

Joseph:

He is a king, but he is not born a king. Not like Herod or the great Caesar.

Magi 3:

The world has always had kings like Herod and Caesar. But the stars say this child will be a king like none other.

Shepherd 4:

That's what the angel said, too. The Messiah!

Magi 1:

Angel? What is this land where kings are born among livestock and angels speak to peasants?

Shepherd 2: *(maybe a little defensively)*

The God of Israel created the whole world and can speak to anyone in any way.

Magi 3:

Yes. He spoke to us through the stars though we are not of Israel. He brings *(sweeping his arm to include the guests)* all of us together to see this child.

Mary:

He is a king... and our savior... and the very Son of God. And not sent just to the life of palaces, but into our lives here.

Magi 2:

Listen, you must flee. We...we went first to King Herod.

Shepherds talk over each other while Joseph looks on alarmed.

Shepherd 1:

Herod!

Shepherd 3:

Herod won't like this.

Shepherd 2:

Were the Romans there?

Magi 3:

We thought to find a king we should look in a palace.

Magi 2:

Herod asked your priests where the Messiah would be born. They said Bethlehem. And Herod told us, "come back and tell me where you find him so *(pause)* I can worship him, too."

Shepherds: *(talking over each other)*

No! Don't go back. Herod can't find out.

Magi 3: *(gesturing reassurance)*

We won't. We won't go back to Herod. We were warned in a dream. We'll return another way. But Herod will come.

Magi 1:

So you must go.

Shepherd 3:

We all must go. Herod's soldiers could be on their way.

Joseph:

But we spent all we have travelling here and paying the tax. We have nothing until I can find work.

Each Magi reaches in his cloak and pulls out a gift.

Magi 1:

Here. Gold, Myrrh, Frankincense. Gifts for a king. Use them to protect this king.

Joseph: *(anxious to go)*

Mary.

Mary:

Yes. We must go. But not tonight. God - who has sent these riches to provide for us - sent these signs - sent this baby - He will protect us right here tonight while we rest.

Joseph: *(looking up at the guests)*

They do need to rest now. But thank you for coming.

Mary:

Yes, thank you so much. I was feeling so alone and spent. But your presence has encouraged and warmed me. Pray with us before you go.

The magi and shepherds kneel and silently pray, by their actions encouraging the guests to pray also. After a half minute or so, the magi and shepherds rise.

Magi 2:

May your God bless you wherever you go.

Shepherd 3:

Shalom. You carry the hope of us all.

Guests leave. If needed, Innkeeper can usher them out with a few words about giving them some rest.

Fade to black

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