

A King is Born in Bethlehem

A Christmas program for Sunday worship service

Although written specifically for LDS congregations, “Birth of the Savior” is a Christmas program appropriate for any Christian worship service. The text combines scripture-based narration and poetry. The program requires a narrator, two (or eight) poetry readers, a mixed choir, a youth chorus, and an organist/pianist.

The author has listed the music used in earlier performances of this program. These anthems and hymns are suggestions only and can be substituted by other appropriate music. Depending on what music is used, the program is 35 – 45 minutes in length.

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Women and youth

“Good Christians, All Rejoice,” arr. Buryl Red (2:35)

Narrator

Christmas celebrates the Baby of Bethlehem.

Since the beginning of time, the people of Israel waited for the birth of a special king. God promised to send a Messiah to rule them, to destroy their enemies, and to liberate them from bondage.

Ancient prophets said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the city of King David: “In thou Bethlehem shall be born a prince. Out of thee shall come the Messiah, who shall save my people Israel” (see JST Matthew 2:5–6).

In due time, the Messiah arrived, but not as royalty. In fact, his birth seemed quite common. He was born in a stable to the young wife of a carpenter who named him Jesus.

Congregation

“Once in David’s Royal City,” Hymn no. 205 (2:35)
v. 3 accompaniment arr. David Willcocks

Reader 1 (1)

“Before the Paling of the Stars” by Christina Rossetti

Before the paling of the stars,
Before the winter morn,
Before the earliest cockcrow,
Jesus Christ was born:
 Born in a stable,
 Cradled in a manger,
In the world His hands had made
 Born a stranger.

Priest and King lay fast asleep
 In Jerusalem,
Young and old lay fast asleep
 In crowded Bethlehem:
Saint and Angel, ox and ass,
 Kept a watch together
Before the Christmas daybreak
 In the winter weather.

Jesus on His Mother’s breast
 In the stable cold,
Spotless Lamb of God was He,
 Shepherd of the fold:
Let us kneel with Mary Maid,
 With Joseph bent and hoary,
With Saint and Angel, ox and ass,
To hail the King of Glory.

Choir

“Where Shepherds Lately Knelt,” Craig Courtney (3:45)

Reader 2 (2)

“A Christmas Folk-Song” by Lizette Woodworth Reese

The little Jesus came to town;
The wind blew up, the wind blew down:
Out in the street the wind was bold;
Now who would house Him from the cold?

Then opened wide a stable door,
Fair were the rushes on the floor;
The ox put forth a horned head;
“Come, little Lord, here make Thy bed.”

Up rose the sheep who were folded near;
"Thou Lamb of God, come, enter here."
He entered there to rush and reed,
Who was the Lamb of God indeed.

The little Jesus came to town;
With ox and sheep He laid Him down;
Peace to the byre, peace to the fold,
For that they housed Him from the cold!

Congregation "Silent Night," Hymn no. 204, unison, arr. Larry Beebe (2:45)

Narrator **Christmas honors the Savior of the world.**

During his lifetime, Jesus never traveled outside Palestine. He never ruled a nation, nor commanded an army. The scope of his service was a three-year ministry to the Jews in Galilee.

Yet Jesus was the Messiah. Through the Atonement, He conquered sin and redeemed all mankind throughout all generations.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

"[He came] unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin." (3 Nephi 9:21)

Congregation "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," Hymn no. 209 (1:45)
v. 2 accompaniment arr. David Willcocks

Youth chorus "Come, Lord Jesus," David Zabriskie (2:40)

Reader 1 (3) "There's a Song in the Air" by Josiah G. Holland

...There's a tumult of joy
O'er the wonderful birth,
For the Virgin's sweet Boy
Is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

In the light of that star
Lie the ages impearled;
And that song from afar
Has swept over the world.
Every heart is aflame, and the beautiful sing
In the homes of the nations that Jesus is King!...

Choir and congregation "With Wondering Awe," Hymn no. 210, arr. Larry Beebe (3:10)

Reader 2 (4) "Joy to the World" by Isaac Watts

Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
As far as sin is found, as far as sin is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love, and wonders of His love.

Choir and youth chorus "What Shall We Give?," arr. Mack Wilberg (6:00)

Narrator

Christmas expresses the Hope of our hearts.

At Christmas, we celebrate not just the birth of Jesus, but also the hope of our own spiritual rebirth. Christ's birthday is a reminder that our souls are renewed through his gospel. As we worship in his name, his Spirit sanctifies our souls and dwells in our hearts.

The Apostle Paul counseled, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts...let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:15, 16).

The psalms and hymns we share today express our desire to have Christ dwell with us:

O Holy child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us we pray;

Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!
("O Little Town of Bethlehem," by Phillips Brooks)

This Christmas season, let us open our hearts to our Lord and King. May Christ dwell in our hearts by faith. May we know the love of Christ. And may the word of Christ abide in us richly.

Congregation "O Little Town of Bethlehem," Hymn no. 208 (2:35)

Reader 1 (5) "A Christmas Carol" by Robert Herrick

The Darling of the world is come
And fit it is, we find a room
To welcome him.
The nobler part
Of all the house, here is the heart.

Reader 2 (6) "When Caesar Augustus" by author unknown

O Bethlehem, Bethlehem, welcome this stranger
That was born in a stable and laid in a manger;
For he is a physician to heal all our smarts--
Come welcome sweet Jesus, and lodge in our hearts.

Choir and youth chorus "Away in a Manger," arr. David Willcocks (2:45)

Reader 1 (7) "Ah! Dearest Jesus" by Martin Luther

Ah! dearest Jesus, Holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I too must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest ancient cradle-song—

Glory to God in highest Heaven
Who unto man His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad New Year to all the earth.

Reader 2 (8) "Let Every Heart Keep" by Phillips Brooks

Then let every heart keep
 Its Christmas within,
Christ's pity for sorrow,
 Christ's hatred for sin,
Christ's care for the weakest,
 Christ's courage for right,
Christ's dread for darkness,
 Christ's love of the light,
Everywhere, everywhere,
Christmas tonight!

Choir "O Come, Adore," arr. Patrick M. Liebergen (3:15)

Congregation "Far, Far Away on Judea's Plains," Hymn no. 212 (2:25)