

Birth of the Savior

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. It requires two narrators, a mixed choir, a children’s chorus, and organist. It also has an epilogue intended to be read by the presiding bishopric member or pastor.

The original narration is scripturally based. Scripture references are included within the script.

The recommended hymns and carols are widely available in many hymnals. Two or more appropriate hymns are listed whenever the choir or congregation should sing. The director should choose just one hymn or anthem in each of these spots. The script indicates which hymns are included in the following music resources:

100CC—*100 Carols for Choirs*, ed. David Willcocks and John Rutter, Oxford University Press, 1987

CS—*Children’s Songbook*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989

LDS—*Hymns*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985

OBC—*Oxford Book of Carols*, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams, Martin Shaw, Oxford University Press, 1964

Depending on the length of the music selected by the director, the program is 35 – 40 minutes in length.

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Narrator 1

When God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, he sent them into a world of suffering and sin. But in his mercy, God promised that, some day, he would give them a savior who would offer salvation and a way back to his presence.

Generations passed, and the faithful ones among the children of Adam came to be known as the children of Israel. God told the children of Israel to watch for the birth of their savior. He told his prophet, "Behold, a maiden shall bring forth a son, whom she shall call Immanuel, which means God is with us" (Isaiah 7:14).

Many people remembered these words. They waited anxiously for God to deliver them from their suffering and to forgive the sins of the world.

In time, God kept his promise and sent the Messiah. This is the account, passed down through the ages, of the birth of the savior.

Congregation

"He Sent His Son," Michael Finlinson Moody (CS) ;
"Joy to the World," attr. George F. Handel (100CC, LDS);
"O Come, O Come Emmanuel," 15th-century French melody (100CC)

Narrator 2

Two thousand years ago, in a small village called Nazareth, in the part of Israel known as Galilee, there lived a maiden named Mary. She was young and simple, but her faith in God was strong and pure.

One day, God sent the angel Gabriel to visit Mary. The angel descended before her, surrounding her with a light as bright as the sun. He said, "Bless you, Mary, for you are favored among women. The Lord is with you." Mary was frightened by the angel, and wondered why he would greet her in such a way.

"Do not be afraid, Mary," said Gabriel. "God is pleased with you! Behold, a child will grow in your womb, and you will bear a son. You shall name him JESUS. He will be called the Son of God, and will reign over God's people forever."

Mary was amazed. "But how can this be?" she said. "I am not married. Without a husband, how can I have a child?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Ghost will come over you and cause the child to be conceived. Therefore the holy child that is born will be called the Son of God, because he will spring from the spirit of God." As if to answer any last doubt, the angel added, "For with God, nothing is impossible."

Mary quietly considered the angel's words. She meekly said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord. Let it happen to me as you have said."

And with that, the angel Gabriel went away from her.

(See Luke 1:26–38.)

Choir and children's chorus

"The Angel Gabriel from God," English traditional carol (100 CC, OBC);
"Angelus Ad Virginem (Gabriel to Mary Came)," 14th-century Irish carol (100CC, OBC);
"Es Ist Ein' Ros' Entsprungen (Lo, How a Rose e'er Blooming)," 14th-century German melody, harm. Michael Praetorius (100CC, OBC)

Narrator 2

Mary did not tell anyone about the angel's visit, or that a child grew within her, though she seemed to think of nothing else. She decided to visit another expectant mother, her cousin Elisabeth, who lived in the hills of Judah with her husband Zacharias.

Elisabeth was an older woman and had supposed she would never bear children. Yet she was a faithful woman and believed in God's power. To her delight, God had granted her a miracle and she was expecting to deliver a baby soon.

As Mary arrived at the house, she called out to her cousin. Elisabeth, hearing the voice, felt her baby kick in her womb and was filled with the Holy Ghost. She knew by the spirit what good news Mary brought with her. She greeted Mary warmly, and cried, "Blessed are you among women. And blessed is the fruit of your womb. I am honored that you would visit me, for you are to be the mother of my Lord. I was sure of it as soon as your greeting reached my ear and the child in my womb leaped for joy."

Mary was moved by the kindness and power God had shown to herself and Elisabeth. She sang: "My whole soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. He looked on me, his humble servant, and has done great things to me. Holy is his name; his mercy reaches from generation to generation. He has come to help his people Israel, for he has remembered his promise to our fathers."

(See Luke 1:39–55.)

Choir and children's chorus

"Ding Dong Merrily on High," 16th-century French melody (100CC);

"Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day," English traditional carol (100CC, OBC);

"The Cherry Tree Carol," English traditional carol (100CC, OBC)

Narrator 1

Mary stayed with Elisabeth for about three months, then returned to her own home. For Mary had been promised to a carpenter named Joseph. She was to be his wife.

However, before the wedding could take place, Joseph learned that Mary was already with child. Since Mary had not told him of the angel Gabriel's visit, he could only assume that another man had fathered her child.

Joseph was distressed as he considered what to do. Being a kind man, he wanted to spare Mary any public embarrassment. So he decided to break off their betrothal privately.

With thoughts of Mary in his mind, Joseph fell asleep. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph!" said the angel. "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child she carries was conceived of the Holy Ghost. She will give birth to a son, whom you shall name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel had told him. He accepted Mary as his wife and cared for her tenderly as the child grew within her month by month.

(See Matthew 1:18–25.)

Narrator 2

Now it happened that the emperor, Caesar Augustus, demanded that taxes be paid to the Roman empire. Every man in Israel was required to go to the town of his lineage to be counted.

Although Mary was now heavy with child, she took the journey with Joseph from Nazareth in Galilee to the city of David, also called Bethlehem. Many other people traveled to Bethlehem as well. By the time Mary and Joseph entered the gates of the town, the inn was full without a room to spare. However, they were offered shelter in a stable with the animals.

And so it was that Mary gave birth to her first child, a son, there in the stable. She wrapped him tightly in a light blanket and laid him in a manger. And Joseph named him Jesus.

(See Luke 2:1–7.)

Children’s chorus

“Away in a Manger,” melody by William J. Kirkpatrick, harm. Rosalee Elser (100CC, CS, LDS);
“Children’s Song of the Nativity,” English traditional (OBC);
“Once within a Lowly Stable,” Patty Smith Hill (CS);
“Personente Hodie (Sing Aloud on This Day),” German, 1360, arr. Gustav Holst (100CC, OBC)

Narrator 1

That night there were shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem, taking turns looking after their sheep. As they waited in the darkness, an angel of the Lord appeared, lighting the sky around them.

The angel said, “Do not be afraid, for I bring you good tidings of great joy for all people. This night in Bethlehem a child is born. He is the Savior, Christ the Lord. He is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lies in a manger. Go to him.”

Suddenly the angel was joined by a multitude of hosts from heaven, who sang: “Glory to God in the highest heaven; Peace on earth to all people of good will.” When they had ended their praises, the angels ascended to heaven.

The shepherds looked at one another in astonishment. They said to each other, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see the child whose birth the Lord has made known to us."

The shepherds hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby. They looked at him lying in the manger and knew that the angel's words were true.

The shepherds told other townspeople about the angels and the baby in the manger. They praised God for all they had heard and seen, and returned to their flocks in the field. Those who heard the shepherds' story wondered among themselves that such an incredible thing had happened.

In the midst of all that was said about her son, Mary was silent. She treasured the things the shepherds said and pondered them in her heart.

(See Luke 2:8–20.)

Choir

"The First Nowell," English traditional carol (100CC, OBC, LDS);

"Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," Felix Mendelssohn (100CC, LDS);

"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks," Yorkshire carol (100CC, OBC, LDS)

Narrator 2

Eight days after he was born, the baby was given the name Jesus, as the angel had instructed. Then, according to custom, Mary and Joseph took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord in the temple, and to make an offering.

In Jerusalem lived a man called Simeon, a good man who was devoted to God, who waited for the day that Israel would be consoled against her enemies. He was filled with the Holy Ghost, and by the Spirit had been promised that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah.

He was guided to the temple by the Holy Spirit on the day that Mary and Joseph arrived. When Mary, carrying her child, entered the temple, Simeon was already there and knew at once that the baby was the promised Savior.

Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God. "O Lord, now may your servant die in peace," he said, "for you have granted my heart's wish according to your will. With my own eyes I have seen the child who shall bring salvation to all people. He shall be a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and he shall be the glory of your people Israel." Then Simeon blessed the holy family.

Nearby, a very old woman overheard all that Simeon said. She was Anna, a widow and a prophetess, who served God in the temple day and night in fasting and prayers. "Thank the Lord," she said, coming forward to gaze on the baby. "I have seen the child Jesus who will redeem Jerusalem." In awe and joy, she turned to others in the temple and declared, "This is he, the Redeemer of Israel." To all who would listen throughout Jerusalem, she testified of the Christ child.

Mary and Joseph stood amazed at the marvelous things that were said about Jesus. When their offerings in the temple were complete, they left Jerusalem and took their baby home to Nazareth.

(See Luke 2:21–40.)

Choir

"Christmas Bells," A. Laurence Lyon (CS);
"Il Est Ne le Divin Enfant," French traditional carol (100CC);
"Puer Natus (A Boy Was Born in Bethlehem)," 16th-century German, harm. J.S. Bach (OBC);
"Puer Nobis (Unto Us a Son is Born)," Piae Cantiones, 1582 (100CC, OBC)

Narrator 1

Far, far away from Bethlehem, in a land in the East, three wise men studied the sky for signs from God. On the night that Jesus was born, they saw a new star in the heavens.

Being great scholars, having read the writings of the prophets, they recognized the sign. "A king has been born to the people of Israel," they exclaimed. "We must find and worship him."

Day after day the wise men traveled, following the star before them until it rested over the place where the child

was. They entered the humble home and saw the young child with Mary his mother.

The wise men fell to their knees and worshipped Jesus, for they knew him as the King of the Jews, not the son of a carpenter. They opened their treasures—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—and offered these gifts to the boy. They paid homage to Jesus. Then, with their purpose complete, the wise men departed for their own country.

(See Matthew 2:1–12.)

Choir	<p>“As with Gladness, Men of Old,” German chorale (100CC); “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” J.H. Hopkins (100CC, OBC); “With Wondering Awe,” Anon. (LDS)</p>
Narrator 1	<p>With the grace of God upon them, Mary and Joseph turned themselves to their holy duty. Over the years, the child Jesus grew wise and strong and gained favor with God and men.</p> <p>Thus the promise of the Almighty God was fulfilled.</p> <p>Thus the Savior was born unto the world.</p>
Narrator 2	<p>“Lo, this is the God for whom Israel waited to save them. This is our Lord; we are glad and rejoice in his salvation” (see Isaiah 25:9).</p>
Congregation	<p>“O Come All Ye Faithful,” attr. to John F. Wade (100CC, LDS); “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” English traditional carol (100CC, OBC); “Wexford Carol,” Irish traditional carol (100CC, OBC)</p>
Epilogue	<p>This is the birth of Jesus according to the revelations and the records of the prophets. Many more chapters detail his life, crucifixion, and resurrection.</p> <p>Yet not all of the prophecies about Jesus have been fulfilled. Today, as in ancient times, many people remember the promises foretold by the prophets. We wait anxiously for the Son of God to stand in the latter day upon the earth (Job 19:25), to come with the clouds of heaven and reign on the</p>

earth over his everlasting dominion (Daniel 7:13, 14 and D&C 76:63). We wait for the return of our king and Savior.

When he returns, what story will be recorded of his second coming? What characters will play a part in that chapter? Who will recognize and receive the Messiah? Will *we* recognize and receive him?

As we prepare for the return of Jesus Christ, let us follow the example of those people who recognized and received him at his birth:

May we be like Mary, pure and worthy to respond to God's call.

May we be like Elisabeth, patient in our afflictions and grateful for the miracles we are granted.

May we be like Joseph, compassionate in serving others.

May we be like the shepherds, eager to worship God and share our witness of Christ.

May we be like Simeon and Anna, filled with the Holy Ghost and devout in observing the gospel.

May we be like the three wise men, steadfast in seeking our Savior and generous with our offerings to him.

And may we come to be more like Jesus himself, more obedient and more perfect.

By doing this, may we be numbered among the righteous who will rise to greet Christ at his coming, and join the heavenly hosts in singing "Glory to God in the highest; Peace on earth to all people of good will."

Congregation

"Angels from the Realms of Glory (Angels We Have Heard on High)," French carol (100CC, OBC, LDS) ;
"Far, Far Away on Judea's Plain," John Menzies Macfarland (LDS);
"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day (Longfellow's Carol)," John Baptiste Calkin (LDS)