

Come to Bethlehem

A nativity play with music

Although written specifically for LDS congregations, “Come to Bethlehem” is a nativity play appropriate for any Christian audience. It was written to complement a “night in Bethlehem” activity where guests dress in Biblical costumes and attend a traditional Israeli meal as if they were travelers in Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born.

The cast includes a Narrator, Mary, two angels, Joseph, three innkeepers, shepherds, townspeople, a mixed chorus, and a children’s chorus. Two options are suggested for each song; choose one, or substitute another song, wherever “mixed chorus” or “children’s chorus” is listed in the script. 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

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Narrator

(Spotlight on Narrator on stage in front of the curtain.)

Welcome to the Inn at Bethlehem. I trust you’ve enjoyed your meal and that your weary feet are rested from your journey. You’ve all paid your taxes, I presume. *(Nod and chuckle.)*

You have been fine guests. You remind me of some travelers who stayed here many, many years ago. Their story has been passed down in my family for generations. Let me tell you about their visit.

(Curtain rises and music begins. Narrator remains in place. All cast members sing as they move to their places on the floor in front of the stage. The star of Bethlehem is hung. The stable and manger are assembled on stage.)

Cast and choruses “The Nativity Song,” Patricia Kelsey Graham (CS), or
“Sussex Carol,” English traditional carol (100CC, OBC)

Narrator *(House lights down. A few stage lights on the Narrator.)* Long ago, in Nazareth lived a young woman named Mary. *(Spotlight on Mary on the floor to the far left of the stage. Narrator points to Mary.)* Mary was good and loved Heavenly Father.

One day an angel came to Mary. *(An angel stands facing Mary.)* The angel said, “Mary, God is pleased with you. You are going to have a baby boy. You should name him Jesus.”

Mary was very surprised, but she was willing to do as Heavenly Father wished. *(Mary bows her head, and the angel returns to the chorus on the floor to the right of the stage.)*

She married a man named Joseph. He promised to care for her and her unborn baby. *(Joseph walks to Mary’s side and stands with his arm around her.)* After many months, Mary and Joseph needed to come to Bethlehem — here — to pay their taxes. Mary was due to deliver her baby soon. *(Spotlight follows Mary and Joseph as they walk slowly past the shepherds toward three innkeepers stationed in front of the stage.)*

The journey was long. When Mary and Joseph arrived in this town, they were very tired. So they went to an inn. But there were many travelers in Bethlehem that night.

(Mary and Joseph approach the first innkeeper, who shakes her head.) The innkeeper said, “No room.” *(Mary and Joseph approach the second innkeeper.)* So they went to another inn. Again, there was no room. *(Mary and Joseph approach the third innkeeper.)*

They went to yet another inn, *(gesturing to the stage)* this inn, and asked to stay. A distant relative of mine — a kind, honest woman,

she was—told them there was no room in this inn. “But you can stay in my stable,” she said. “I’ll put down clean straw for you.”

(The third innkeeper leads Mary and Joseph to center stage where a manger and chair have been set, then returns to her place. Mary sits in the chair. Joseph stands behind the manger. Stage lights up.)

That night, Mary had her baby, a little boy, just as the angel had promised. She called his name Jesus. Mary wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him to sleep in the manger. *(Joseph picks up the baby from behind the manger and hands it to Mary, who cradles it in her arms.)*

Children’s chorus “Mary’s Lullaby,” words by Jan Underwood Pinborough, German folk tune, arr. Darwin Wolford (CS), or “Silent Night,” Franz Gruber (LDS, 100CC)

Narrator Meanwhile in the fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds were tending their sheep. *(Spotlight on the shepherds on the floor immediately to the left of stage.)* They saw a bright new star in the sky. *(Shepherds point to the star. Mixed chorus begins to hum a verse of their song as the narrator continues speaking.)* Then an angel appeared. The shepherds were frightened. *(Angel stands before the shepherds.)*

The angel said, “Do not be afraid. I have good news. Tonight the Savior is born in Bethlehem. You will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes, sleeping in a manger.”

Suddenly many angels came from heaven, praising God. *(Mixed chorus sings the chorus of their song.)*

Mixed chorus “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains,” John Menzies Macfarland (LDS), or “Angels from the Realms of Glory (Angels We Have Heard on High),” French carol (100CC, OBC, LDS)

Narrator Then the angels went away. *(Angel exits.)* The shepherds decided to come into town to see what had happened. *(Shepherds quickly climb onto the stable and arrange themselves around the manger, kneeling and worshipping.)* They came quickly and found Mary and Joseph in the stable and the baby lying in the manger. They knelt and worshipped him. *(Mary returns the baby to the manger.)*

Children’s chorus “Who Is the Child,” words by Mabel Jones Gabbot, music by Michael F. Moody (CS), or “Children’s Song of the Nativity,” English traditional (OBC)

Narrator	The shepherds told others about the angel and their visit to the baby. They praised God for all the things they had heard and seen. The townspeople were amazed. (<i>The innkeepers and townspeople join the shepherds at the manger.</i>)
Mixed chorus	“The First Nowell,” English traditional carol (100CC, OBC, LDS), or “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks,” Yorkshire carol (100CC, OBC, LDS)
Narrator	<p>(<i>Stage lights down. Spotlight on Narrator.</i>) Several days later, when Joseph had paid his taxes, the little family left Bethlehem. And that, my friends, is the story of Mary, Joseph, and the baby who came here so many years ago. It is quite amazing, isn’t it? It gives me goose bumps every time I tell it.</p> <p>(<i>Looks at the manger scene thoughtfully.</i>) ...Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord... (<i>Reverently.</i>) ...Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth, goodwill to men....</p> <p>(<i>Points to the manger.</i>) That baby grew up to be a great man. He did many remarkable things. But that’s another story.</p> <p>(<i>Turns to the audience.</i>) Oh, I am a thoughtless host! You would like to worship him also, yes? Then come to Bethlehem and sing as the angels. (<i>Narrator waves his arms, gesturing for the music to begin. House lights up.</i>)</p>
Congregational songs	<p>“Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,” Felix Mendelssohn, (100CC, LDS); “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” English traditional, harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams (100CC, OBC) or tune by Lewis H. Redner (LDS);</p> <p>“Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful,” attr. to John F. Wade (100CC, LDS)</p>
Narrator	(<i>House lights down. Spotlight on narrator.</i>) Such fine voices, my good travelers! I could sing until dawn. But I have so much to do in the morning. I hope you are comfortable and enjoy your stay in Bethlehem. I’ll expect you back again next year. Merry Christmas.
Cast and choruses	<p>“Have a Very Merry Christmas,” words by Mabel Jones Gabbot music by Michael F. Moody (CS), or</p> <p>“We Wish You a Merry Christmas,” English traditional carol (100CC)</p>