

MOVEMENTS

Stand where you can be heard by the entire congregation, perhaps in the pulpit or at the lectern from which the lessons are read. A crib should already be placed in the chancel. Older children, who will bring the figures forward, should be standing with these figures at the back of the church as you begin.

The older children now bring forward the donkey, the cow and the sheep as all the people sing verse one of "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

After the hymn, resume telling the story.

The older children now bring forward Mary and Joseph as all the people sing verse one of the hymn "Once in Royal David's City."

After the hymn, resume telling the story.

WORDS

This night is like no other night. It is a time to dream and sing our way to Bethlehem. The children will show us how to go.

The little town we seek sits in the hill country some ten miles south of Jerusalem. For thousands of years the houses have gathered there on the hilltop like a family breaking bread. "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread."

In the center of the village is a small inn. On this night it is overflowing with people seeking sleep and a place to eat. Behind the inn is a dark stable. A gray donkey chews his barley and broken straw while a weary cow leans and rests after the day's plowing in the valley. A sheep nearby is nearly asleep.

All is still and quiet in the little town.

As night gathers, the last two travelers come slowly up the road. Look, there is a young woman about to be a mother. She is walking with her husband. They are Joseph and Mary from Nazareth! They have walked for six days to come to this city where King David was born, so long ago.

They have come, like so many others, because the Roman emperor wants to count each one, so he can take their money as a tax.

But it is late, and Mary is so weary. Where will they sleep? There is no room in the inn. They decide to sleep with the animals.

Stars brighten slowly in the sky. All creation holds its breath. Suddenly, from the stable, comes the cry of a newborn child! Mary gently wraps the baby in a blanket and lays him in the feed box that his father has filled with straw.

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One or some of the older girls now bring forward the baby Jesus as all the people sing verse one of the hymn "Away in a Manger."

After the hymn, resume telling the story.

The older children now bring forward the shepherds and the angel as all the people sing verse one of the hymn "While Shepherds Watched."

After the hymn, resume telling the story.

The older children now bring forward the three kings as all the people sing verse one of the hymn "We Three Kings."

After the hymn, resume telling the story.

WORDS

In the hills outside Bethlehem, shepherds watch their shadowy sheep. All at once, the dark is lost in light, and in the midst of the light is something even brighter: the faces of angels.

The fearful shepherds then hear music in the sky, and a voice says clearly, "Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by all people. Today in the City of David a Savior is born! He is Christ, the Lord."

Then more angels appear, a whole heavenly host of them, praising God and singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to all people, everywhere."

The shepherds run with joy across the fields to Bethlehem to the barn behind the inn. There they find the Holy Family and creep forward, overwhelmed with mystery, to find Nativity itself in the center of all that love.

Three camels plod up the road to Bethlehem. They have come from the East, far beyond the Arabian Desert, perhaps from as far as the Caspian Sea. The camels carry three kings, the wise ones, the Magi. They are following the wild star, the destiny they had never seen before, and they are following it, wherever it goes, to find the King its shining shows them.

The kings' journey ends in a new kind of king. Their restlessness rests at last. They fall to their knees and give him bright gold, sweet-smelling frankincense and bitter myrrh, brought so far with so much love.

MOVEMENTS

*All the children, some accompanied
by their parents, now bring forward
stars to place in and around the stable
as all the people sing verse one of the
hymn "Silent Night."*

WORDS

So now we all come, following the star, to find God-with-us. We come, as people have come all through the ages, to bring our own gifts to this Child, God's gift to us.

Come forward now. Bring your gifts of stars and of yourselves to place around the manger. Show us the way into the Mystery of Christmas, as we sing, for this night is holy and filled with overflowing silence.