

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE
A CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

by Rachel Olson



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'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE

A pageant/story for many children

by Rachel Olson

CAST
(Speaking parts)

READER 1, 2
ANGEL 1, 2, 3, 4
GABRIEL
PERSON 1, 2, 3
INNKEEPER
SHEPHERD 1, 2, 3, 4
JOSEPH
BALTHAZAR
MELCHIOR
CASPAR
SERVANT
HEROD
PRIEST 1, 2
MARY

PRODUCTION NOTES

This service uses the structure of a familiar poem to tell the story of Jesus' birth and the meaning of salvation. Through the story, the audience sees the angels preparing for the birth, understands the troubles of the innkeeper, hears the message with the shepherds, reads the minds of Mary and Joseph, and experiences the excitement of the wise men and the anger of Herod.

This is an extremely versatile service which can be adapted to any size group. The entire Sunday school and audience participates through singing while the cast of characters can range from as few as 16 (parts doubled) to as many as 30 by dividing lines for angels, shepherds, townspeople, or servants. Parts vary in length from one line to short paragraphs so that many age levels and abilities may be included.

PROPS

Prepare an oversized book with "Twas the Night Before" on the front for Readers 1 and 2. This can be made from stiff cardboard and covered with foil wrap. You will also need a manger, scrolls for the angel and wise men, and three gifts for the servant of the wise men.

COSTUMES

Costumes can be made from sheets or other material. The tinsel halos and cardboard wings that the youngest participants wear as "little angels" can be a project for their moms or an older Sunday school class.

MUSIC

Song titles included are only suggestions. The last page lists the publisher and addresses for those selections which may not be familiar. Please feel free to substitute songs of your choosing.

PLAYING TIME

Forty-five minutes to one hour, depending on number of songs included, and length of Christmas message.

- 1 **PROCESSIONAL:** "O Come All Ye Faithful" (*By congregation*)
 2 (*Students enter during the song. READERS 1 and 2 take their*
 3 *places on chairs positioned Downstage. They hold the oversized*
 4 *storybook with a playbook hidden behind it.*)
- 5 **READER 1:** Welcome, fellow Christians, and a blessed
 6 Christmas to each of you. My name is _____,
 7 **READER 2:** And I'm _____. We're here to tell you
 8 a story. From the title of the service, you may be familiar
 9 with one version of this poem.
- 10 **READER 1:** But we have a version you may not have heard
 11 before. Settle back in your seats while we tell you the
 12 story . . .
- 13 **BOTH READERS:** 'Twas the Night Before! (*READERS open*
 14 *the book.*)
- 15 **READER 1:** 'Twas the night before Christ's birth and far
 16 above earth
 17 The angels were ready to announce Jesus' birth.
 18 (*ANGELS appear adjusting their gowns, checking halos and*
 19 *talking.*)
- 20 **ANGEL 1:** Tonight's the night!
 21 **ANGEL 2:** God has finally decided to send Jesus down to
 22 earth.
- 23 **ANGEL 3:** The plan is unfolding and Mary and Joseph seem
 24 anxious for his arrival. She's a brave girl. So full of
 25 faith.
- 26 **ANGEL 4:** Say, Gabriel, you've been down there before. What
 27 will the people do when they see us?
- 28 **GABRIEL:** At first they'll be very frightened, but when they
 29 realize God has sent us, they'll listen and believe.
- 30 **ANGEL 1:** Who shall we announce this birth to first?
- 31 **GABRIEL:** Let's see. (*Gets out a scroll, unrolls it and reads.*) Our
 32 assignment is to go to the hills outside of Bethlehem to
 33 a group of shepherds.
- 34 **ANGEL 2:** Shepherds? Shouldn't we be announcing the birth
 35 of God's Son to important people?

- 1 **GABRIEL:** It is God's wish for us to tell the humble first. After
 2 all, the birth is just the beginning of the plan.
- 3 **ANGEL 3:** By the time the important part happens, everyone
 4 will know about him.
- 5 **ANGEL 4:** God knows best. We'd better get the other angels
 6 and head for earth.
- 7 **ANGEL 1:** Lead on, Gabriel. *(The ANGELS go to the door and*
 8 *lead in the "LITTLE ANGELS" — the younger children wearing*
 9 *tinsel halos and cardboard wings. They will sing at this time.)*
- 10 **GABRIEL:** This way, little angels. *(Leads them to the front of*
 11 *church to sing. Other ANGELS take their places with individual*
 12 *classes who will speak later in the play.)*
- 13 **SONGS:** *(Nursery/preschool/kindergarten departments)* Possible
 14 selections: "In a Little Stable," "Away in a Manger."
 15 *(After song, children go to their assigned seats.)*
- 16 **READER 2:** The people in Bethlehem, a very small town
 17 Were just getting ready to lay themselves down.
 18 *(TOWNSPEOPLE and INNKEEPER enter and position*
 19 *themselves in the front.)*
- 20 **PERSON 1:** Have you *ever* seen so many people in town?
- 21 **PERSON 2:** This tax census from the Romans is really
 22 causing a lot of headaches.
- 23 **PERSON 3:** I never knew I had so many relatives. We have
 24 twenty-one extra people at our house!
- 25 **INNKEEPER:** You think you've got problems. My place is so
 26 full, I've had to turn people away. Why, just a little while
 27 ago, a young couple from up north pleaded with me to let
 28 them stay in my stable.
- 29 **PERSON 1:** Did you?
- 30 **INNKEEPER:** Yes, but I felt so bad. The wife is expecting her
 31 baby any time now.
- 32 **PERSON 2:** I suppose it was better than sleeping in the
 33 street.
- 34 **PERSON 3:** It's awfully dark. I'd better be getting home.
- 35 **PERSON 2:** Me, too. Good night everyone.

1 **PERSON 1: 'Night, brothers.**

2 *(Three people leave. Only the INNKEEPER remains.)*

3 **INNKEEPER: Good night.** *(Turns to walk away, then stops.)* **Maybe**

4 **I should check on that couple. No, they'll be all right.** *(He*
5 *exits.)*

6 **SONG:** "O Little Town of Bethlehem" *(By congregation and students.)*

7 *(SHEPHERDS enter during the last verse of song and take their*
8 *places in the front.)*

9 **READER 1: And out on the hillside, while watching their**
10 **sheep**

11 **A group of young shepherds were falling asleep.**

12 *(SHEPHERDS act as though starting to sleep.)*

13 **READER 2: When suddenly out of the sky came a light**

14 **And an angel appeared making everything bright!**

15 **He said to the shepherds,**

16 *(GABRIEL appears during the reading and stands near the*
17 *SHEPHERDS.)*

18 **GABRIEL: "Peace! Have no fear**

19 **For the news I have brought is for all men to hear."**

20 **ANGEL 1 and 1st GRADE: A baby is born, this night is his birth**

21 **And he's come to save all of the people on earth.**

22 **ANGEL 2 and 2nd GRADE: In Bethlehem town you will find**
23 **this dear child**

24 **With Joseph and Mary, his mother so mild.**

25 **ANGEL 3 and 3rd GRADE: Sharing a manger with oxen and**
26 **sheep**

27 **Nestled in blankets, the babe, sound asleep.**

28 **ANGEL 4 and 4th GRADE: Good news we bring you this**
29 **wonderful night**

30 **Christ Jesus has come, so run to the site.**

31 **ALL ANGELS and CLASSES: Glory to God in the highest we**
32 **sing**

33 **The Savior is here, Christ Jesus our King!**

34 *(All ANGELS leave but SHEPHERDS stay. Grades 1, 2, and 3*
35 *go to front to sing.)*

- 1 **SONGS:** (*Grades 1, 2, and 3*) Possible selections: "Gentle Mary
 2 Laid Her Child," "Ring the Bells."
 3 (*Classes return to assigned seating — SHEPHERDS*)
- 4 **SHEPHERD 1:** A vision from Yahweh. Bless his name!
- 5 **SHEPHERD 2:** We must do as the angels said. The promise
 6 handed down from old has been fulfilled.
- 7 **SHEPHERD 3:** Let us go and look for the stable where the
 8 baby is lying.
- 9 **SHEPHERD 4:** The Lord will take care of the sheep. Let's
 10 hurry. (*SHEPHERDS all leave front of church and go over to*
 11 *the side area where a manger has been placed. MARY, JOSEPH,*
 12 *and "BABY JESUS" enter and take their places while the*
 13 *READERS talk.*)
- 14 **READER 1:** So after the angels delivered the news
 15 The shepherds went searching with no time to lose!
- 16 **READER 2:** And just as the angels had told them aloud
 17 They found Jesus with Mary and Joseph, so proud.
- 18 **SHEPHERD 1:** Is this the Messiah that the angels spoke of?
- 19 **JOSEPH:** Please, come nearer. Our Savior has finally come.
- 20 **SHEPHERD 3:** We are only poor shepherds, but we offer
 21 our love.
 22 (*SHEPHERDS 1 and 3 bow. SHEPHERDS 2 and 4 talk to each*
 23 *other.*)
- 24 **SHEPHERD 2:** We are the first, but soon everyone will hear
 25 of this baby.
- 26 **SHEPHERD 4:** God has given us the long-awaited promise.
 27 Praise God.
 28 (*They bow down next to other SHEPHERDS. JOSEPH goes to*
 29 *center and talks to the congregation.*)
- 30 **JOSEPH:** What a night! Many months ago an angel also came
 31 to me with strange news. The woman I had chosen to
 32 marry would become the mother of God's Son. When my
 33 parents told me about the promised one, I never dreamed
 34 that someday my wife would give birth to that promise.
 35 It is hard to understand. But as I look at Mary and Jesus,

1 I feel so humble, yet so proud that God chose us. (*He*
2 *rejoins the scene.*)

3 **READER 1:** The shepherds returned, praising God for his Son
4 (*SHEPHERDS leave at this point.*)

5 They told many folks about this precious one.
6 But Mary was different, she kept in her heart
7 All the wondrous events of which she was part.
8 (*MARY comes to Center Stage.*)

9 **MARY:** When I was first told that God had chosen me, I was
10 scared. Why, among all the women in the world, was I
11 chosen for this great honor? Would I be able to carry out
12 this task? So many things have happened. Wonderful
13 things that I shall never forget. The birth being
14 announced by angels. The birth of *my* child, and
15 *everyone's* Savior. I am proud of Jesus, but I also
16 remember the Scriptures of old that say this Savior must
17 suffer and die for our sins.

18 It's been a strange and marvelous night. (*She returns*
19 *and then JOSEPH, MARY, and the BABY leave the stage.*)

20 **SONGS:** (*Grades 4, 5, and 6 sing.*) Possible selections: "What Child
21 Is This," "Mary, Mary, (What You Gonna Name That Baby?),"
22 "With a Star That Bright."
23 (*WISE MEN take their places as the 4th, 5th, 6th graders return*
24 *to their assigned seating.*)

25 **READER 2:** Now wise men who lived in a land far away
26 Saw a star burning like the sun in the day.
27 They questioned and wondered what this light could
28 mean

29 For a star of this brilliance had *never* been seen.

30 **BALTHAZAR:** None of the history charts reveal any type of
31 star like this before.

32 **MELCHIOR:** It must signify something very important.
33 Possibly something that will change the whole world.

34 **CASPAR:** A ruler perhaps? A great and powerful king that
35 will change the course of his people? (*A SERVANT enters*

1 *carrying a large scroll.)*

2 **SERVANT:** Here is the book of the prophecies from the
3 Israelites.

4 **BALTHAZAR:** *(Looks at the scroll.)* The Israelites spoke of a
5 promised Messiah. Could this be his star?

6 **MELCHIOR:** He is very great. The books speak of him many
7 times.

8 **CASPAR:** It must be. Let us take some gifts and seek him.
9 *(SERVANT enters again with the gifts.)*

10 **SERVANT:** Here are your gifts — gold, frankincense, and
11 myrrh. *(WISE MEN take gifts and all leave including the*
12 *SERVANT. HEROD enters to Front Center.)*

13 **READER 1:** They traveled in search of the child whom they
14 knew

15 Would grow up to serve as the King of the Jews.

16 **READER 2:** They looked in Jerusalem for the Christ Child
17 But the news of a new King made Herod go wild!

18 **HEROD:** A new king of the Jews. Ridiculous! I, the great Herod,
19 am the only King of the Jews and I intend to stay that way!
20 *(He claps his hands and one or two priests enter.)* Where do the
21 books say this new Messiah was born?

22 **PRIEST 1:** In Judea, sire. A small town named Bethlehem.

23 **PRIEST 2:** It goes on to say that a ruler will come out of
24 Bethlehem to save God's people.

25 **HEROD:** Bethlehem? That's not far from here. When? When
26 did this birth happen?

27 **PRIEST 1:** As near as I can calculate from what the visitors
28 said, it was perhaps a year or two ago.

29 **HEROD:** Fine. Then what I shall do is kill all the boys born in
30 Bethlehem that are two years old and younger. No one
31 threatens Herod. *I will be king!* *(HEROD and PRIESTS*
32 *leave.)*

33 **SONG:** "The Star Proclaims the King Is Here." *(Congregation and*
34 *students. Verses may be divided up with groups singing*
35 *individual verses.)*



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