

AWAY FROM THE MANGER: THE MUSICAL

Music, Lyrics, and Additional Dialogue

by Sally Beske

Based on the Play by Elizabeth M. Tepp



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Away
from the
Manger:
the Musical

**A Christmas musical about
those who missed the Nativity**

music, lyrics and additional dialogue by Sally Beske

based on the play by Elizabeth M. Topp

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

NARRATOR

Teen or adult.

SHEPHERDS

Four to eight men (and women) of few words.

Solos included for one or two shepherds.

WISE MEN

Three intellectual types.

STARS

As many as available; giggly and shy.

Good parts for children. Solo included for one star.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

A very busy housewife. She sings a solo.

BARN ANIMALS

Four to eight. Can include cows, pigs, chickens, etc.

Also good for children.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This delightful story was first published as a play. Churches of all denominations nationwide have so enjoyed its simple but profound message that we have developed this musical version. It, like the original play, is designed to be flexible and easy to produce. Congregations should feel free to adapt the musical to suit their own needs.

Synopsis

We're all familiar with the group of people and animals that visited the manger in Bethlehem. This musical is a humorous introduction to some folks who didn't go. Through lively songs and dialog, we're introduced to a group of shepherds who didn't go because it wasn't in their job description, to a group of wise men who were busy attending a conference on "Celestial Signs That Will Indicate the Birth of the Messiah," to some Stars that were too shy to shine, to the Innkeeper's Wife who was busy with holiday preparations, and to her Barn Animals, who didn't think they were good enough. The audience is challenged to examine its reasons for staying "away from the manger" at Christmas.

Music

The new music for *Away from the Manger* highlights the humor of the play and enhances the fun. The five songs are written in unison. They may be quickly learned by both adults and children and encompass a comfortable range that is easy to sing. A piano accompaniment is all that is required. Any additional instruments may be added at the discretion of the director.

"Shepherds Forever," a song of misguided but fierce determination, provides an opportunity for two brief solos that could easily be handled by the "ham" of the adult choir or even the shyest child (usually the one most in need of a little esteem building). In "Lowly Animals," little ones get to moo, oink, and squeak as they proclaim their lowliness in this song of irony. "Wife on the Run" is sure to be a highlight of your performance as the Innkeeper's Wife soloist belts out her frustrations to the

laughter and sympathy of every woman in the audience. “Here Is a Star,” a solo for that precocious little kid in every children’s choir, is sure to touch even the most difficult audience. The musical ends with the rousing beat of “Come to the Manger” sung by the complete company as they invite all present to be a part of the birth of Jesus.

Casting and Rehearsals

The most difficult parts are the Innkeeper’s Wife and the Wise Men. Youth group members (middle or high school age) are ideal for these parts, or they may be played by adults. The easiest parts are the Stars, which are well suited for children in the early elementary grades. The parts of the Barn Animals and Shepherds are of intermediate difficulty, and are suited for students in the late elementary grades.

A child with good reading skills and a loud voice should be cast as the Narrator. Due to the vocabulary used, this child will probably be middle school age or older. The Narrator’s part may be shared by two or more children if desired, or you may want to ask an adult to read the Narrator’s part.

The musical is designed so that most of the rehearsals can be done in small groups. We found it convenient to cast the play so that each group of characters (e.g., the Stars) was made up of members of the same Sunday school class. The individual parts and songs may then be rehearsed as part of the regular Sunday school time. The whole cast should rehearse together in costume on one or two occasions just before the performance.

Costumes, Props and Character Notes

Costuming is very flexible; elaborate costumes are not required. Some suggestions for costuming and notes about the individual characters are listed below.

SHEPHERDS — Old sheets or fabric samples tied with sashes or ropes make effective shepherds’ costumes. The shepherds’ job descriptions may be written on plain paper and rolled to look like scrolls.

WISE MEN — Costumes may be any convenient long robes; floor-length choir robes were used with success. The wise men will find it easier to memorize their parts if they notice that they always speak in the same order.

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STARS — The costumes may be large five-pointed stars cut out of very stiff poster board and fastened securely to flat wooden slats made for stirring paint. These may be decorated with shiny metallic papers and tinsel streamers. If time permits, the children may want to help decorate their stars.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE — This part may be interpreted in a variety of ways, from a "traditional" housewife wearing her house-cleaning clothes to a working woman wearing a power suit. The Innkeeper's Wife should feel free to improvise. She needs four shopping bags containing: 1. Presents, 2. A turkey, 3. The trimmings (stuffing, cranberry sauce, etc.) and 4. Christmas decorations (tinsel, a wreath, etc.).

BARN ANIMALS — May wear ears or headpieces representing cows, pigs, chickens, and other barnyard residents. Many toy and novelty shops sell plastic noses for different types of animals.

NARRATOR(S) — One or more children may share the job of reading the Narrator's part. The part need not be memorized; the Narrator(s) may stand behind a podium and read directly from the script. A special costume is not necessary.

SONGS

(In order of appearance)

1. Shepherds Forever — Shepherds, solos
2. Wife on the Run — Innkeeper's Wife
3. Lowly Animals — Barn Animals
4. Here Is a Star — Stars, solo
5. Come to the Manger — Company

1 (AT RISE: The NARRATOR is On-stage alone, standing
 2 behind a podium. The NARRATOR stays in this position
 3 throughout the performance, and may read his/her part.)

4 **NARRATOR:** Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, a baby
 5 named Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem. I'm
 6 sure you've all heard quite a bit about Jesus' birth
 7 before. You know that there were shepherds, and wise
 8 men, and stars, and barn animals around when he was
 9 born. That's quite a list, but there really weren't many
 10 there when you think about it. You'd think that the
 11 whole world would have shown up for the birth of its
 12 Savior.

13 We hear a lot about the people and animals that went
 14 to the manger. Let's find out about the ones that stayed
 15 away. (SHEPHERDS enter as a group down one of the aisles
 16 of the church. One of them is carrying a scroll — their "union
 17 contract." They are chewing on pieces of straw or grass.
 18 NARRATOR calls to the SHEPHERDS.)

19 Hello over there! (No response from the SHEPHERDS,
 20 who continue chewing on their straw) Er, um, pardon me,
 21 folks ... (Still no response) Nice day, isn't it? (No response.
 22 NARRATOR thinks for a minute, then yells:) Yo! You guys!
 23 (SHEPHERDS turn immediately toward the NARRATOR, but
 24 say nothing.) Say, aren't you people shepherds?

25 **SHEPHERDS:** Yep.

26 **NARRATOR:** So, did you go to Bethlehem to see the baby?

27 **SHEPHERDS:** Nope.

28 **NARRATOR:** But I thought there were supposed to be
 29 shepherds there. That must have been some other
 30 shepherds.

31 **SHEPHERDS:** Yep.

32 **NARRATOR:** Well, why didn't all of you go? (The SHEPHERD
 33 with the union contract stands up and starts to walk over to the
 34 NARRATOR.) What's that? (The SHEPHERD hands him the
 35 union contract. It's rolled up to look like a scroll. The
 36 NARRATOR unrolls it.) A union contract?

37 **SHEPHERDS:** Yep.

38 **NARRATOR:** Let me see what it says ... (Clearing his throat

1 *loudly before reading*) A-hem! Shepherds' Union Local
 2 Number 404 — Minimum acceptable working
 3 conditions. Article Five: No shepherd of union Local 404
 4 shall be required under any circumstances to venture
 5 more than one hour's distance from his (*Or her*) usual
 6 “field abiding.” The aforementioned shepherd may
 7 venture further if he (*Or she*) so chooses, but only if the
 8 weather isn't cold, the sheep aren't sick, and he (*Or she*)
 9 really feels like it. (*Putting the scroll aside*) Let me see if
 10 I've got this straight ... You didn't go to see the baby
 11 because it's not in your job description, is that right?

12 SHEPHERDS: Yep.

13 NARRATOR: You guys don't take many risks, do you?

14 SHEPHERDS: (*Pleased with themselves*) Nope.

15 NARRATOR: Guess you never get hurt that way. But you
 16 missed out on a really big event ...

17

18

19 SONG: Shepherds Forever

20

21 (*Music begins for “Shepherds Forever.” One of the*
 22 *SHEPHERDS sings solo.*)

23 SHEPHERD: He must think we're like Little Bo Peep,
 24 Irresponsible with our sheep.

25 ALL SHEPHERDS: This is a noble profession and we've got
 26 our rules.

27 SHEPHERD: I think he's taking us for fools!

28 ALL SHEPHERDS: Our contract makes it very clear,
 29 We are going to stay right here.

30 We take our agreement quite literally,

31 'Cause we never take a risk, never disagree,

32 Keep outsiders out, love and loyalty,

33 Brotherhood, common good, safety.

34

35 Never take a risk, never disagree,

36 Keep outsiders out, love and loyalty.

37 Shepherds forever we will be.

38 We will be.

(Following the song, the SHEPHERDS stand up and start to wander back down the aisle, chewing on their pieces of straw.)

NARRATOR: Where are you going? I wanted to ask you a few more questions. (A SHEPHERD walks back and hands the NARRATOR another scroll. NARRATOR opens the scroll and reads.) Article Six: No shepherd of Union Local 404 shall be required under any circumstances to answer a lot of nosey questions from a complete stranger. A couple of questions, maybe. But not too many. (Rolling up the scroll) Guess they missed seeing the baby because they didn't want to change their routine. I guess we're all afraid to change sometimes. (The WISE MEN come up the aisle, chattering among themselves about theories and things like that.) Are you the three wise men?

WISE MAN 1: Yes, indeed we are.

WISE MAN 2: Absolutely.

WISE MAN 3: No question about it.

NARRATOR: You must be the ones who went to see the baby in Bethlehem. And you brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh, right?

WISE MAN 1: Well, actually we were a bit tied up that day ...

NARRATOR: Tied up?

WISE MAN 2: Yes. You see, there was a very important scholarly conference that we absolutely had to attend.

WISEMAN 3: Yes, yes, terribly important, terribly important ...

WISE MAN 1: Wouldn't have missed it, really. It was certainly an intellectual milestone.

NARRATOR: What was the conference about?

WISE MAN 2: I can't say that I remember exactly ... but it was a very important conference.

WISE MAN 3: (To WISE MAN 1) Say, what was that conference about, anyway?

WISE MAN 1: Hmmmm ... let me see ... Oh! I remember now! The exact title of the conference was "Celestial Signs That Will Indicate the Birth of the Messiah: Theoretical and Technical Aspects."

- 1 WISE MAN 2 and WISE MAN 3: (*Excitedly, not necessarily in*
 2 *unison*) Yes, that was it! Exactly! Good of you to
 3 remember!
- 4 NARRATOR: "Celestial Signs ..." Does that mean stars and
 5 things like that?
- 6 WISE MAN 1: Yes, exactly. You're a well-educated child.
- 7 NARRATOR: So you must have spent a lot of time looking
 8 through telescopes ...
- 9 WISE MAN 2: Well, no, actually. The conference was inside.
 10 There weren't even windows in the meeting rooms.
 11 That made it easier to see the slides.
- 12 WISE MAN 3: We were quite busy the whole week. I didn't
 13 get a chance to go outside at all.
- 14 WISE MAN 1: Nor did I.
- 15 WISE MAN 2: Nor I.
- 16 NARRATOR: Then you didn't see the star?
- 17 WISE MEN: (*ALL together*) What star?
- 18 NARRATOR: The huge star up in the sky. Some other wise
 19 men followed it to a manger in Bethlehem. They say
 20 they saw the Christ child.
- 21 WISE MAN 1: Nonsense! The "star-directed" theory has never
 22 been proven!
- 23 WISE MAN 2: Very scanty evidence, very scanty evidence ...
- 24 WISE MAN 3: Are you sure it wasn't a rainbow? Many of the
 25 more influential wise men are convinced that the sign
 26 will be a rainbow.
- 27 WISE MAN 1: The star theory is definitely out. The rainbow
 28 theory is much more credible.
- 29 WISE MAN 2: I personally favor the lightning bolt theory. So
 30 dramatic!
- 31 NARRATOR: But you missed the baby!
- 32 WISE MAN 3: Couldn't have been the right baby. The star
 33 theory is out.
- 34 WISE MAN 1: Absolutely not.
- 35 WISE MAN 2: Couldn't be. (*The WISE MEN begin to exit down the*
 36 *aisle. As they go, they continue to discuss their favorite theories.*)
- 37 WISE MAN 3: (*To the other WISE MEN, ignoring the NARRATOR*)
 38 Yes, the lightning bolt theory is interesting. I was

- 1 discussing that with a friend just the other day ...
- 2 **WISE MAN 1:** Let's not forget the meteor shower theory.
- 3 **WISE MAN 2:** Ah, the meteor shower theory! A bit overrated,
- 4 if you ask me ...
- 5 **WISE MAN 3:** Too vague.
- 6 **WISE MAN 1:** Indeed. *(The WISE MEN continue their discussions*
- 7 *until they've left the sanctuary.)*
- 8 **NARRATOR:** Well, it seems that these wise men were too
- 9 preoccupied with their theories to notice the coming of
- 10 the Christ child. Ideas can get in the way sometimes,
- 11 especially if you really like them. Speaking of stars, I'll
- 12 bet you didn't know that the star over the manger was
- 13 actually supposed to be a whole bunch of stars of all
- 14 different sizes. Kind of like a fireworks display. But
- 15 some of the stars chickened out at the last minute. That
- 16 looks like them over there. *(The STARS enter down the*
- 17 *aisle. They are very shy. They are giggling and whispering to*
- 18 *each other. Some of them are hiding their faces behind their*
- 19 *hands.)* You are some of the best looking stars I've ever
- 20 seen ... but then I've never really seen a star up close
- 21 before. *(The STARS giggle and whisper to each other.)* You
- 22 must be young stars ... that's why you're so bright. *(The*
- 23 *STARS giggle and whisper some more.)* So, did you stars
- 24 shine for the baby in Bethlehem? *(The STARS shake their*
- 25 *heads.)* Were you sick that day? *(The STARS shake their*
- 26 *heads.)* Did your mom and dad make you stay home? *(The*
- 27 *STARS shake their heads.)* Did you fall from the sky? *(The*
- 28 *STARS shake their heads.)* Was it too cold out for stars?
- 29 *(The STARS shake their heads.)* Do you have to stay inside
- 30 at night? *(The STARS shake their heads.)* Well, then, why
- 31 didn't you shine for the baby in Bethlehem?
- 32 **STARS:** *(In a soft voice, in unison)* Because we're too shy.
- 33 **NARRATOR:** Could you say that a little louder?
- 34 **STARS:** *(In a very loud and very unshy voice, in unison)* Because
- 35 we're too shy!
- 36 **NARRATOR:** Oh, I see. *(The STARS sit down, watching the action*
- 37 *from the side.)* Well, I guess we know why the stars didn't
- 38 go ... they were too shy. *(The INNKEEPER'S WIFE comes*

1 *running down the aisle. She's carrying shopping bags that are*
 2 *filled with Christmas presents and Christmas decorations. She*
 3 *is a housewife caught in the grip of the last-minute Christmas*
 4 *rush. She is a very busy and very overworked person.)*

5 **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** *(Dropping all her packages in the middle of*
 6 *the stage area and talking to herself)* **Whew! I never thought**
 7 **I'd get out of those shops alive! I have never in my**
 8 **whole life seen so many people!**

9 **NARRATOR:** Pardon me, but it seems like you've had a very
 10 busy day.

11 **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Busy! Busy! Honey, when you're an
 12 innkeeper's wife, you're always busy. But you're right,
 13 today was especially bad.

14 **NARRATOR:** Why is that?

15 **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** There's just a lot to do, that's why. I've
 16 had to buy gifts for all the relatives — his family and
 17 mine. *(Pulling gifts out of the shopping bags and throwing*
 18 *them around)* **I've had to buy this turkey** *(Pulling a turkey*
 19 *out of a bag)* **and all the stuff that goes with it** *(Pulling*
 20 *stuffing, cranberry sauce, etc. out of a bag)* **and all these**
 21 **decorations.** *(Pulling tinsel and wreaths and things like that*
 22 *out of another bag)* **And of course that's not the end of it!**
 23 **Oh, no! Now I have to wrap all these presents** *(Kicking*
 24 *the pile of presents)* **and clean and stuff this bird** *(Kicking*
 25 *the turkey)* **and put up all these dumb decorations! On**
 26 **top of that, we've got an inn that's crammed to**
 27 **overflowing with the holiday travel crowd. Busy?**
 28 *(Sitting down exhausted)* **Honey, right now I've got a**
 29 **busyness degree.**

30 **NARRATOR:** So you and your husband run this inn, is that
 31 right?

32 **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** *(Still exhausted)* Yeah, that's right.

33 **NARRATOR:** It was very nice of him to let that pregnant
 34 woman stay in the barn.

35 **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** *(Very alert now — wondering what her*
 36 *husband did this time)* **There's a pregnant woman in the**
 37 **barn?!**

38 **NARRATOR:** Well, not anymore. She's had the baby.

1 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (*Exasperated*) Oh, brother!

2 NARRATOR: Maybe you could go out and see it sometime ...

3 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (*Losing her temper and pointing her finger*
4 *at the NARRATOR*) Now you listen here, buster. I have
5 got way too much to do to spend time koo-chee-koo-ing
6 some little baby!

7 NARRATOR: But this is a special baby!

8 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (*Still angry*) Buster, they're all special.
9 Is that baby going to help me with all this work?

10 NARRATOR: (*Unsure of the answer to that question*) Well ...

11 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (*Interrupting*) Of course not. (*Ending the*
12 *discussion*) It's the holiday season, and I have no time to
13 spend with that baby.
14

15

16 SONG: Wife on the Run

17

18 (*Music begins for "Wife on the Run." INNKEEPER'S WIFE*
19 *sings solo.*)

20 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I've got two thousand loads of laundry,
21 Pies to bake, calls to make,
22 My dishes are piling high.
23 I've got forty thousand relatives dropping in like rain from
24 the sky.

25 And they're all bringing their children,

26 Thousands of kids to keep from harm.

27 And now there's a pregnant lady giving birth in the barn.
28

29 Well, I've got to get to market (*Or name of local supermarket*)

30 And get more shopping done.

31 There are thirty thousand presents left to wrap,

32 I've got to run.

33 No time to see that baby or check in on that new mom.

34 My gosh, I must be crazy, there's so much I've got to get done.
35

36 I've got two thousand loads of laundry,

37 Pies to bake, calls to make,

38 My dishes are piling high.

1 I've got forty thousand relatives dropping in like rain from
 2 the sky.
 3 And they're all bringing their children,
 4 Thousands of kids to keep from harm.
 5 And now there's a pregnant lady giving birth in the barn.

6

7 *(Following the song, INNKEEPER'S WIFE begins putting all*
 8 *her purchases back in their bags.)*

9

10 **NARRATOR:** Are you leaving?

11 **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** *(Gathering up her bags and her composure)*

12 Yes. I have work to do. *(The INNKEEPER'S WIFE strides*
 13 *purposefully back down the aisle, a woman with a mission.)*

14 **NARRATOR:** *(To the audience)* Kind of interesting, isn't it?
 15 She's got the Messiah in her back yard, and she hasn't
 16 got time to go see him. Some other barn animals will get
 17 closer to Jesus than she will. *(The BARN ANIMALS walk*
 18 *in down the aisle. They don't like themselves very much.*
 19 *NARRATOR to the audience)* Some of her barn animals ...
 20 but not *all* of them. *(To the BARN ANIMALS)* So you were
 21 right there in the barn when the baby Jesus was born!

22 **BARN ANIMALS:** *(Sounding a little bit like a "Moo")* No.

23 **NARRATOR:** You weren't inside the barn at all?

24 **BARN ANIMALS:** No.

25 **NARRATOR:** Do you always have to stay outside?

26 **BARN ANIMALS:** No.

27 **NARRATOR:** Why didn't you go inside to see the baby?

28 **BARN ANIMALS:** We're not good enough to see the baby.

29 **NARRATOR:** But some of the other animals went inside.

30 **BARN ANIMALS:** We're not good enough to see the baby.

31 **NARRATOR:** Nobody's good enough to see that baby. But
 32 some went to see him anyway.

33 **BARN ANIMALS:** We're not good enough to see the baby.

34 **NARRATOR:** But you don't have to be good! The baby was
 35 born because none of us are good!

36

37

38

BARN ANIMALS: We're only lowly animals,
With a moo and an oink and a squeak.
We sleep and eat our vegetables
With a moo and an oink and a squeak.

Not dreamers or thinkers or someone renowned,
To see the Christ child would be much too profound.
We dirty animals humbly lie down,
Not fit for this King,
Not his robe or his crown.

We're only lowly animals,
With a moo and an oink and a squeak.

BARN ANIMALS: (*Repeating again and again*) We're not good enough to see the baby. We're not good enough to see the baby. We're not good enough to see the baby. We're not good enough to see the baby. We're not ...

NARRATOR: *(To the audience)* I guess you get the picture. The barn animals just didn't think they were good enough to see the Christ child. So many stayed away ... the shepherds, the wise men, *(STARS start to giggle and stir, pushing the solo STAR forward)* even the innkeeper's wife! But what is this?

STARS: (*Speaking all at once, continuing to push the solo STAR to the front*) **Go on! You can do it! We're all behind you!**
(*Etc.*)

NARRATOR: Could it be? Has one of the stars found some courage?



*Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:
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