

This play is based on Douay Scripture and the works of St. Ephraim. It takes about 12 minutes to perform, but could be fleshed-out as a, say, half-hour Christmas program by adding music to the beginning or the end. It could be performed in one of two ways: by children alone, or by adults narrating and performing the speaking aspects of the roles while children (or adults) perform the actions or act in the manner of tableaux vivants. By having adults doing the speaking offstage, no memorization would be necessary, and the quality of the play would likely be better while still affording children the opportunity to participate (and be adorable!). The non-speaking roles of the ox and ass could be filled by props.

A Nativity Play

Characters:

Choir dressed as angels
Narrator
Gabriel the Archangel
Mary
Joseph
Shepherd 1
Shepherd 2
Shepherd 3

Ox (non-speaking)
Ass (non-speaking)
King Gaspar
King Melchior
King Balthasar

Scene 1: The Annunciation

Setting: The stage is dark. The choir, offstage, sings the opening notes to Gounod's "Ave Maria": the opening instrumental is heard followed by just the words "Ave Maria," with the last syllable of Our Lady's name held and growing softer until it fades. As it fades, rose incense is burned in a few places in the theater, and a spotlight comes up and focuses on Our Lady, who sits in a garden, reading Old Testament Scripture.

Narrator: And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Another light comes up, focusing on Gabriel. Mary is startled.

Gabriel: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

Mary: What manner of salutation is this?

Gabriel: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God! Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the

Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Mary: How shall this be done, because I know not man?

Gabriel: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Mary: [first looking humbly downward, then looking Heavenward and opening her arms] Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.

As Mary speaks the words above, a very, very bright and direct spotlight shines on her from above, and fine gold glitter is delicately sprinkled down (a small, very quiet, hidden circle of fans on the floor around where gravity would pull the glitter would make the glitter dance above her). As this is happening, half of the choir sings a long, angelic-sounding chord, one that blends in pitch-wise to the beginning notes of "Veni, Veni Emmanuel." They hold this chord as an ison, like an organ playing in the background. The lights fade down, and the other half of the choir fades in to singing a few verses of "Veni, Veni Emmanuel," preferably in Latin," while the ison note is still being sung (an organ or a recording thereof could replace the ison note). As they're singing, the stage is re-set to resemble a field with. Musky and grassy sticks of incense are lit offstage in a few places in the theater. After a number of verses appropriate enough to make the stage changes, the lights come up to reveal shepherds with their sheep. The narrator speaks:

Scene 2: The Shepherds

Narrator: And it came to pass, that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrolling was first made by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child.

And it came to pass, that when they were there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds watching, and keeping the night watches over their flock.

An angel (a choir member) suddenly appear (high above the shepherds, if possible) and is spotlighted. The shepherds gasp, fall to their knees, and cover their eyes.

Angel: Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For, this day, is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will!

The rest of the choir appears as angels and they all sing some form of the Gloria, such as the beginning of the Gloria in Beethoven's Missa Solemnis, or "Angels We Have Heard on High" while the shepherds watch and listen, astounded. When the choir finishes:

Shepherds: Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us!

The shepherds exit and the lights go down. The stage is re-set to show the nativity scene while the choir begins singing enough verses of "Puer Natus in Bethlehem" (or "Silent Night") to cover the re-setting of the stage. Then the lights come up to reveal the Holy Family, the ox and ass, the shepherds (one holding a sheep), and an angel of the Lord either above it all or kneeling. From the manger, under the Baby Jesus, shines a light such that the manger is the brightest thing on stage. The narrator speaks:

Scene 3: The Nativity

Narrator: And they came with haste; and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child. And all that heard, wondered; and at those things that were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.

Mary: I shall not be jealous, my Son, that You are with me, and also with all men. Be God to him that confesses You, and be Lord to him that serves You, and be Brother to him that loves You, that You may gain all! When You dwelled in me, You also dwelled out of me, and when I brought You forth openly, Your hidden might was not removed from me. You are within me, and You are without me, O You that makes Your Mother amazed.

Shepherds: We come laden with the best gifts of our flock: sweet milk, clean flesh, befitting praise! We give Joseph the flesh, Mary the milk, and the Son the praise! We bring a suckling lamb to the Paschal Lamb, a first-born to the First-born, a sacrifice to the Sacrifice, a lamb of time to the Lamb of Truth.

Narrator: Blessed be that Child, Who gladdened Bethlehem today! Blessed be the Babe Who made manhood young again today!

Praise to the Fountain from Whom all graces flow! Praise be to Him Who made void the Sabbath by fulfilling it!

Praise, too, to Him Who rebuked the leprosy and it remained not, Whom the fever saw and fled!

Praise to the Merciful, Who bore our toil! Glory to His coming, which quickened the sons of men! Glory to Him, Who came to us by His first-born!

Glory to the Silence, that spoke by His Voice. Glory to the One on high, Who was seen by His Day-spring!

Glory to that Hidden One, Whose Son was made manifest! Glory to that Living One, Whose Son was made to die!

Glory to that Great One, Whose Son descended and was small!

Glory to that Hidden One, Who even with the mind cannot be felt at all by them that pry into Him; but by His graciousness was felt by the hand of man! The Nature that could not be touched, by His hands was bound and tied, by His feet was pierced and lifted up. Himself of His own will He embodied for them

that took Him.

Blessed be He Whom free will crucified, because He let it: blessed be He Whom the wood also did bear, because He allowed it.

Blessed be He Whom the grave bound, that had thereby a limit set it.

Blessed be He Whose own will brought Him to the Womb and Birth, to arms and to increase in stature. Blessed He whose changes purchased life for human nature.

Blessed He Who sealed our soul, and adorned it and espoused it to Himself. Blessed He Who made our Body a tabernacle for His unseen Nature.

Blessed He Who by our tongue interpreted His secret things.

Let us praise that Voice whose glory is hymned with our lute, and His virtue with our harp. The Gentiles have assembled and have come to hear His strains.

*A bright star appear above, and the choir begins to sing "We Three Kings of Orient Are."
Frankincense and myrhh incense is lit offstage in a few areas of the theater. The magi enter,
bearing gold, frankincense, and myrhh.*

Narrator: When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying:

Kings: Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to adore Him.

Melchior: The star declared again to us that your Son is He that shall keep the diadem!

Gaspar: The star taught us that His Birth is exalted above the world and above all beings is your Son, and is Son of God!

Balthasar: The star proclaimed that the Lord of the Highest is He Who is born, and over the stars of light your Son is ruler, and unless He commands they rise not!

All: Let the Church sing with rejoicing! Glory in the Birth of the Highest by Whom the world above and the world below are illumined! Blessed be He in Whose Birth all are made glad!

The sound of pealing bells is heard, and the choir sings "Angels We Have Heard on High" if it hadn't been sung earlier in scene 2, or "Joy To the World."

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